

INTERNATIONAL TROTSKYIST

Journal of Humanist Workers for Revolutionary Socialism

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***FOR A WORKERS' AND PEASANTS'
GOVERNMENT IN SYRIA***

***SOUTH AFRICA'S
CLASS STRUGGLE EXPLODES***

***CHICAGO TEACHERS
AND "OUR WALMART":
CASE STUDIES IN THE US CLASS STRUGGLE***

***ON THE 2012 SPLIT IN HWRS:
POLITICS AND METHOD***

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Where We Stand

Humanist Workers for Revolutionary Socialism (HWRS) is a revolutionary communist organization. We stand for revolutionary socialism because we base our program and policies on the dialectical materialist method, on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, on the documents of the first four congresses of the Third (Communist) International, and on the Transitional Program of the Fourth International. We term ourselves “humanists” because we also believe that in order for a socialist revolution to succeed, workers must transform ourselves and our psyches, transcending and overcoming the alienation we suffer under capitalism, at the same time that we attempt to transform our society.

We believe that capitalism is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit. We are for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the abolition of capitalism. We are for its replacement by socialist production planned to satisfy human needs. Only the socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state can achieve this goal. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and organized into workers’ councils and workers’ militias, can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and workers’ democracy. We also believe that only a socialist revolution and a planned economy can make the changes in our production and use of energy that are essential to prevent, or at least mitigate, catastrophic climate change and other environmental degradation.

There is no peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism. Neither the Democratic Party nor any section of it is a genuine friend of labor. It is a bourgeois party through and through. It is never permissible to give the Democratic Party electoral support, even critically, no matter how left they strive to appear. The misnamed Communist Parties that existed during the Cold War era were really Stalinist parties, reformist in program and practice. Their origin was the bureaucracy that ruled after 1927 in the USSR. Their strategy of alliance with the bourgeoisie (the popular front) inflicted terrible defeats on the working class worldwide. The restoration of capitalism by the Stalinist bureaucracy was a logical conclusion of the Stalinist strategy.

Capitalism has been restored in the Soviet Union and most other countries that were workers’ states. In the few remaining workers’ states, Stalinist bureaucracies rule over the working class. Capitalism has ceased to exist but the workers do not hold political power. To open the road to socialism, a political revolution to sweep away bureaucratic tyranny is needed. Nevertheless, as revolutionary socialists, we unconditionally defend these states against the attacks of imperialism and against internal capitalist restoration in order to defend postcapitalist property relations.

The building of a fighting workers’ party is an urgent task for the American workers’ movement. Such a party must grow out of the struggles of US workers, and base itself firmly on a revitalized and democratized trade union movement and on other organizations of the working class and its oppressed sections. In helping to build such a party, revolutionaries must argue for it to adopt a Trotskyist transitional program, although we will work in any genuinely independent working class party that develops.

Within the trade unions, we fight for the rank and file to oust the reformist and pro-Democratic Party bureaucrats, and to democratize the unions and win them to a revolutionary action program based on a system of transitional demands which serve as a bridge between today’s struggles and the socialist revolution. Central to this is the fight for workers’ control of production. In order to fulfill these goals, we will fight for a rank-and-file movement based on the principle of breaking with the Democrats and building a labor party. We are for the unions running independent labor candidates against the Democratic Party as a part of this strategy. We are for the building of

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For a Workers' and Peasants' Government in Syria

The civil war in Syria continues relentlessly, as tens of thousands are added to the huge toll of those killed already. A year and a half after the mass demonstrations against the Assad regime, the nature of the war has clearly begun to change. It is no longer primarily an uprising against a hated dictatorship as it started in 2011. The opposition is divided as ever. But its main factions are undoubtedly linked to Western imperialism.

The Assad regime is connected to the Chinese and Russian imperialist bloc. There is no doubt about this. The regime is supported by, and is receiving weapons from, that imperialist bloc. We are for the defeat of the Assad regime and its imperialist supporters by a genuinely anti-imperialist and working class united front. But we cannot forget that Western imperialism is behind the main military opposition to the regime, led by the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The FSA is linked politically to the Syrian National Council (SNC)—the exiled bourgeoisie that cries out for help and weapons from the West.

Why Syria Is So Important to Imperialism

Behind the massacres and the atrocities committed by both sides hide critical rival imperialist interests. The US has had major setbacks, which are directly and indirectly linked to the Arab Spring. In Libya, the Western imperialists have a puppet regime which is very weak, as it cannot control the tribal militias. In Egypt, which is the most important country in the Middle East, the Muslim regime is now snubbing the US. The president of Egypt, Morsi, decided to target China as his first country to visit. China has already invested more than \$500 million in Egypt, and during Morsi's visit, the two

countries signed additional contracts for large scale investment to improve Egypt's infrastructure. Egypt is by no means in the pocket of the Chinese. Egypt could easily switch to the US side, since US imperialism is still the main financial backer of Egypt. But China is clearly competing with the US for the spot of the favorite imperialist country in Egypt. Another big setback for Western imperialism is Iraq. Iraq dumped US imperialism after its troops left, and now Iraq is playing on the side of the Russia-China-Iran trio.

Thus, the United States is in no shape to invade Iran. Yet the US must have a new version of the Shah of Iran to maintain its oil interests in the Middle East. To survive as the most powerful imperialist force in the Middle East, the United States must install a puppet regime in Syria to counter its setbacks in the Middle East. By conquering Syria, the United States will create a buffer between Iraq and Iran (who support the China-Russia bloc), significantly decreasing the strength of the Chinese-Russian bloc in the Middle East. Thus, Western imperialism needs to weaken Iran to the point that it could be invaded or won to the West via a "pro-democracy" victory. This is essentially what is behind the Western imperialists' strategy.

A report published in March 2012 by a US think tank, the Institute for the Study of War, put it this way: "American objectives in Syria are to hasten the fall of the Assad regime; to contain the regional spillover generated by the ongoing conflict; and to gain influence over the state and armed forces that emerge in Assad's wake. [¶] Therefore, the United States must consider developing relations with critical elements of Syria's armed opposition movement

in order to achieve shared objectives, and to manage the consequences should the Assad regime fall or the conflict protract.” [1]

So, together with the economic blockade against Iran, the US bet on the SFA and the SNC to overthrow Assad as it prepares to weaken and overthrow the regime in Iran. But the US is doing the above with one hand tied behind its back. It cannot as of yet arm the rebellion openly after losing Iraq and while Egypt is tilting towards the China-Russia bloc. Openly arming the opposition in Syria would push Iraq and Egypt further into the arms of Russia and China.

Another big reason for the US’s restraint is the strong anti-imperialist sentiment that has been growing since the Arab Spring. For now, the United States is using CIA and US army personnel based in Turkey to train the rebels. As reported by the *New York Times*:

C.I.A. officers are operating secretly in southern Turkey, helping allies decide which Syrian opposition fighters across the border will receive arms to fight the Syrian government, according to American officials and Arab intelligence officers. [¶] The weapons, including automatic rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, ammunition and some antitank weapons, are being funneled mostly across the Turkish border by way of a shadowy network of intermediaries including Syria’s Muslim Brotherhood and paid for by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the officials said. [¶] ‘C.I.A. officers are there and they are trying to make new sources and recruit people,’ said one Arab intelligence official who is briefed regularly by American counterparts. [¶] ... Turkish Army vehicles delivered antitank weaponry to the border, where it was then smuggled into Syria. ... The United States, these activists said, was consulted about these weapons transfers.

“The rebels are starting to crack the code on how to take out tanks,” said Joseph Holliday, a former United States Army intelligence officer in Afghanistan who is now a researcher tracking the Free Syrian Army for the Institute for

the Study of War in Washington. [¶] The Syrian National Council, the main opposition group in exile, has recently begun trying to organize the scattered, localized units that all fight under the name of the Free Syrian Army into a more cohesive force. [¶] About 10 military coordinating councils in provinces across the country are now sharing tactics and other information. [2]

In September, *Asia Times* reported that: “members of the BND [Bundesnachrichtendienst—Germany’s foreign intelligence agency] stationed on ships near the Syrian and Lebanese coast and at the NATO base near Adana collect intelligence on the movement of Syrian government troops and share this information with the forces of the Free Syrian Army. The same applies to agents of the British intelligence service based in Cyprus and also to the activities of US intelligence agents and spy satellites.” [3]

In an interview for the *Atlantic* in March 2012, a reporter asked Obama what his administration could do to “accelerate a transition to a peaceful and stable and representative Syrian government.” Obama responded, “Well, nothing that I can tell you, because your classified clearance isn’t good enough.” [4] Former CIA officer Philip Giraldi provided a hint at what Obama is hiding when he revealed in December 2011 that “unmarked NATO planes were delivering weapons and militiamen from Libya to Turkish air-bases near the Free Syrian Army (FSA) headquarters in Iskanderum. British and French special forces were training FSA recruits, while CIA officers and U.S. special forces provided the FSA with communications equipment and intelligence.” [5] Although (unsurprisingly) the mainstream press has not reported it, there is considerable evidence that the CIA is training fighters in Libya and sending them to Syria. [6] In addition, the FSA has received weapons from Saudi Arabia and Qatar—weapons that the donors originally got from the United States!

Now, Secretary of State Clinton is gathering factions of the FSA and SNC in Qatar, to select from among them the best opportunists willing

to serve the interests Western imperialism in Syria. The uprising that was started by the masses via mass demonstrations and armed neighborhood militias is absent to a large degree these days. Units of the FSA are to a large degree in control of the military opposition to Assad. The FSA now consist of units like the Jundullah Battalion, which is a unit of the Free Syrian Army filled with Sunni Muslim fundamentalists. [7] There are other battalions in the FSA that are based on Sunni Muslims, as well as jihadists who come from different Arab countries.

The masses and their leaders from FSA may be blinded by religious ideology. But as materialists we need to uncover the material interests behind the religious ideology. The monarchies in Saudi Arabia and Qatar are based on Sunni ideology. Yet the conflict between this religious ideology and that of the Shiites who dominate in Iran is not the main reason for the rivalry between Iran and the Saudi Arabia-Qatar faction. The desire of the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula for a direct oil pipeline to Europe is an important factor behind these rulers' involvement in Syria, and their rivalry with Iraq and Iran. Qatar once proposed to build a pipeline from its giant gas fields through Syria to Turkey, to be connected with other pipelines that deliver gas to Europe. [8] This must have something to do with why these monarchies are willing to finance the entire imperialist war campaign in Syria! [9]



The complex connection between the imperialist war drive and religion in Syria was neatly explained by Haytham Manna of the left-leaning National Coordinating Body for Democratic Change (NCB) (a Syrian opposition group formed in June 2011), whose July 29, 2012 interview with the French newspaper *L'Humanité* is quoted extensively in the *AlterNet* piece referenced earlier. Manna explained that the money for the armed struggle came from the Salafis, an ultra-conservative, militant Islamist sect: "This 'Salafization' of some of the military groups has plunged us into civil war. On one side, there is fear of extremism in a moderate society where 26 religious and ethnic groups coexist. Foreign intervention, whether it's official or not, has favored an Islamist ideological trend to the detriment of democratic and secular forces. It's also favored acts of vengeance and political assassination on a sectarian basis. These acts are manipulated and influenced by non-Syrian jihadist movements that are starting to find a place in the country and who coordinate with the Islamist armed groups." [10]

In short, the Syrian uprising has transformed from a popular uprising into primarily a proxy war that exploits religious sectarianism. On one side, there is Assad and his Russian-Chinese imperialist backers, and on the other side, we see the FSA-SNC, who exploit religious intolerance and are backed by Western imperialism. One of the problems that has arisen from this is that the religious units inside the FSA cannot really be controlled by the imperialists. Hence, the conference in Qatar in which Clinton and company will try to pick only trusted factions to receive weapons.

The Masses Begin to Break from the FSA

As the army of the Syrian bourgeois nationalists, the FSA is incapable of winning the civil war without full backing and armaments from imperialism. Because it consists of undisciplined nationalist units, it is committing the same kind of atrocities committed by the regime. At the beginning of the Syrian civil war, the masses who escaped to Turkey and Jordan were fleeing the

atrocities committed by the regime. Now, as of November 2012, the refugees leaving Syria are doing so because they fear and hate both sides. The FSA is conducting itself as an occupying army in the towns and the cities, and the exhausted workers and peasants are openly expressing their disenchantment with the FSA. There are reports of units of the FSA shooting people for minor incidents, and of FSA soldiers firing shots into the air to get to the front of bread lines. After discovering some of Assad's soldiers in a milk factory, for example, a unit of the FSA blew up the entire factory, an act that could only result in depriving babies and children of milk. [11]

In light of acts like this, it is not surprising that the working class activists who started the mass demonstrations for secular democracy in 2011 have lost faith in the ability or intent of the FSA to bring about such democracy. Many have started to believe that the FSA is at best a lesser evil compared to the Assad regime.

Given these circumstances, NATO is becoming nervous. In the absence of credible puppets in Syria, there have been ongoing discussions within NATO and the United States about instituting a no-fly zone. Since direct invasion is out of the question for now, a no-fly

zone is the most effective way for the Western imperialists to meddle in Syria. In addition, Turkey got permission from NATO to install Patriot missiles on the border between Turkey and Syria, thus allowing the FSA to consolidate its forces in that area without worrying about Assad's airplanes bombing them.

The Problems with the Opportunistic Left

The Left in the developed world has been divided over the issue of Syria in predictable ways. The easiest left camp to criticize and denounce is the Stalinist camp, which supports the brutal Assad dictatorship. Many Stalinists are still loyal to mother Russia, and they shamelessly stand behind the Assad regime, which has put its fate in the hands of Russia (as it has been doing for decades) and China. These imperialist powers must hold on to Syria to protect their interests in the Middle East. If they lose Syria, they are likely to lose Iraq and Iran. This would be a serious defeat to the China-Russia imperialist bloc. Thus, the Stalinists' "defense" of the Assad regime boils down to defense of a Bonapartist bourgeois dictatorship and its imperialist allies.

A more common opportunistic error of the left involves the military (and at times



Turkish armoured personnel carriers on the Turkish-Syrian border, October 2012

Reuters

political) tailing of the “Democratic” Syrian bourgeoisie and its local armed forces, such as the FSA. The opportunistic leftists who choose this position see the replacement of Assad by the liberal bourgeoisie as the lesser evil solution to the civil war in Syria. Many cynical centrists such as CR, leading comrade of the CWG-USA, use this kind of tailing to conceal their Menshevik, two-stage concept of revolution. These cynics ignore the obvious alliance between the bourgeois agents in the Syrian opposition and imperialism. The bourgeois imperialist agents include the FSA, which includes many ex-Assad generals and lieutenants, as well as the SNC, which is tied hand and foot to Western imperialism. The opportunists in the Left say that as long as the rebels get weapons, it doesn’t matter where they get their weapons from—including imperialism. They ignore the ABC of Marxism and history: the fundamental understanding that imperialism *always* attaches *conditions* to the receipt of its weapons. Imperialism always demands that the factions who receive weapons from them must subordinate themselves politically to the imperialists, by representing imperialism’s political and economic interests. In other words, these agents always betray the popular revolution and aspirations of the masses.

This two stage Menshevism, which can express itself in many ways, was mercilessly criticized by Trotsky when he outlined the theory of the Permanent Revolution and counterposed it against Stalinism and Menshevism: “The ties between Kerenskyism and imperialism were indisputable. One can go even still further back and point out that the Russian bourgeoisie “dethroned” Nicholas II with the blessings of British and French imperialism. Not only did Miliukov-Kerensky support the war waged by Lloyd George-Poincaré, but Lloyd George and Poincaré also supported Miliukov’s and Kerensky’s revolution first against the Czar, and later against the workers and peasants. This is absolutely beyond dispute.” [12]

It is simple and clear: genuine revolutionaries do not support any military or political bloc with the treacherous liberal bourgeoisie, or even petty bourgeoisie, in a

semi-colony, particularly when this bourgeoisie is allied with imperialism. Most popular uprisings, as we have seen in Egypt and Libya and in the Arab Spring in general, have ended up supporting the interests of an imperialist faction. It does not matter if President Morsi of Egypt ends up in the rear-end of US imperialism or Chinese imperialism. The so-called democratic institutions in Egypt subordinate the interests of the workers and peasants (by which we mean agricultural workers) to one or the other imperialist faction.

Only the working class, with a revolutionary party at its head, can unify the working class with the broader masses. There are no two stages in the historical process, with the first stage being the bourgeois revolution (the liberal bourgeoisie triumphs against Assad), and the second stage being the workers’ revolution. The working class, with its revolutionary leadership must *combine* the democratic or popular stage of the revolution with the proletarian socialist stage. This means that only the dictatorship of the proletariat, under the leadership of a Bolshevik party, could result in a progressive end to the Arab Spring. This is what the centrist Trotskyists like to forget.

We would like to remind every thinking socialist of this ABC of the Permanent Revolution as outlined by Trotsky:

2. With regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of the permanent revolution signifies that the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving *democracy and national emancipation* is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses.
3. Not only the agrarian, but also the national question assigns to the peasantry – the overwhelming majority of the population in backward countries – an exceptional place in the democratic revolution. Without an alliance of the proletariat with the peasantry the tasks of the democratic revolution cannot be solved, nor even seriously posed. But the

alliance of these two classes can be realized in no other way than through an irreconcilable struggle against the influence of the national-liberal bourgeoisie.

4. No matter what the first episodic stages of the revolution may be in the individual countries, the realization of the revolutionary alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry is conceivable only under the political leadership of the proletariat vanguard, organized in the Communist Party. This in turn means that the victory of the democratic revolution is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat which bases itself upon the alliance with the peasantry and solves first of all the tasks of the democratic revolution. [13]

We do not need to go very far from our home base to find opportunistic centrists and reformists who desperately tail the Syrian bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, in the form of FSA-SNC, as it gathers in Qatar, waiting for Clinton to select the best puppets for Western imperialism. The comrades of the CWG in New Zealand (CWG-NZ), who made a hasty and cowardly split from HWRS **without an honest discussion of their political differences**, constitute a pink dot at the rear-end of the Qatar gathering. This is what the CWG-NZ wrote on its *Redrave* blog: “It is necessary to be ‘anti-imperialist’ in strategy but able to modify this in concrete circumstances to the ‘tactic’ of a limited united front with imperialism. Both ‘knee jerk’ anti-imperialists and ‘humanitarian’ anti-imperialists have a problem because they cannot differentiate between ‘strategy’ and ‘tactics.’ ” [14] As Dave B. from the CWG-NZ added, in a comment on HWRS’s Facebook page: “It is important to distinguish here between the reactionary motives of imperialism in any military bloc, and the progressive use of any imperialist aid. What makes this aid progressive has nothing to do with imperialism and everything to do with its use by the revolutionary movement.”

Here is our response to these “communists,” posted on our Facebook page on October 28, 2012, under the title “Centrists Alliance with

Western imperialism”:

Dave B from the CWG in New Zealand keeps [up the] opportunistic tradition of Workers Power. In the 1990s we fought against Workers Power call for imperialist aid for poor Lithuania that was collaborating with US imperialism to restore capitalism in the Soviet Union. Today, the CWG endorses a united front with the [Syrian Free] Army. The Syrian Free Army is a proxy army for western imperialism. It works directly with NATO command in Turkey. The Syrian Free Army receives weapons from Saudi Arabia and other countries that are associated with western imperialism. Assad’s army is a proxy army for Russia and China. While the war in Syria started as a popular uprising against a hated dictatorship, now, because the popular uprising failed to overthrow the regime, the war has become more of a critical war between two imperialist blocs for the control of the Middle East and in particular [over] Iran (which is critical for the control of the Middle East and South West Asia).

This does not mean that all military units that fight Assad are linked to Western imperialism. We support the [military bloc with] genuine anti imperialist fighters, and we don’t care where they get their weapons. What’s important is that the anti-Assad fighters are also anti-imperialist. There is a significant difference between receiving weapons from murky sources with imperialist connection and being subordinated militarily and politically to imperialism. It is a crime, however, to advocate some sort of a united front with imperialism. But this is precisely what the CWG IS ADVOCATING. [¶] ... [¶] The CWG uses Trotsky for the defense of their united front with imperialism. Trotsky wrote that the European workers should allow weapons to go to the anti colonial fighters in Ethiopia who were fighting Italian imperialism. Trotsky was not proposing any sort of a united front with imperialism. He was



US Secretary of State Clinton meets with Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan. Turkey and the US are discussing the possibility of a no-fly zone over Syria.

AFP

criticism would use such a term as “*tacit ‘united front’ with imperialism.*” We wish to remind our centrist former comrades that even the Stalinists did not call for a tacit united front with imperialism in regard to the colonial struggle against imperialism. Openly calling for any bloc or a united front with imperialism was too much even for the Stalinists. Instead, the Stalinists called for a united front against imperialism which was dominated by the so-called anti-imperialist bourgeoisie. This by itself was a terrible betrayal under the watching eyes of Trotsky, who observed how the bourgeois nationalist forces were massacring the workers and peasants under the leadership of the Stalinists. Can you imagine Trotsky’s reaction to any

just telling some sectarians that there was no reason to object if weapons for the Anti imperialist fighters were coming from imperialist sources.

At the end the profound Marxist Dave from the CWG calls on imperialism to provide [aid] for the anti Assad fighters. So, the CWG is for a united front with imperialism fully financed and supplied by imperialism. What can we say? This is a fine opportunism that defines Stalinism not Trotskyism. ...

Workers [P]ower wrote the same rubbish when they justified their call for imperialist aid for the Baltic States in the late 80s. We thought that Dave and the CWG broke from the opportunistic method of [W]orkers [P]ower. What we see is that after the CWG broke from HWRS they returned to their mother ship ([W]orkers [P]ower[’s]) tradition.

In an attempt to justify the CWG-NZ’s blatant opportunism, Dave B responded to this post as follows: “... as in Trotsky’s example, in not stopping imperialist arms going to the colonial struggle, workers are forming a tacit ‘united front’ with imperialism.”

This is centrist confusion. Only centrists defending themselves against revolutionary

suggestion of a bloc with imperialism during the anti-colonial struggle?

It is unprincipled to have even a “tacit” united front with imperialism in order to receive weapons, because, as we already wrote, if one wants to receive weapons from imperialism, one *must become a political puppet* of imperialism. Getting illegally smuggled weapons from workers in the imperialist countries or the semi-colonies is another matter, but that has nothing to do with any bloc, tacit or not, with imperialism.

Basic Revolutionary Tactics, Method, and Program for the Syrian Conflict

The truth is that from abroad one cannot get reliable information with regard to the exact alignment of forces. Certain aspects of the popular uprising still remain. Some forces and fighting units, particularly in the cities, understand the danger from Western imperialism. Revolutionaries should ally themselves with these anti-imperialist fighters. Within such forces, we should fight for Soldiers’ Councils to connect with Workers’ and Peasants’ Councils in the cities (again, by “peasants” we mean agricultural workers).

In general, we reject any military front or bloc with forces that are allied with imperialism, such as the FSA. The Marxist

method correctly calls for revolutionary defeatism with regard to the FSA and all other pro-imperialist forces. This does not mean that no revolutionary work is possible within units of the pro-imperialist FSA. We would fight for Soldiers' Committees within the FSA that would overthrow the commanders and lieutenants and replace them with committed anti-imperialist leaders. Revolutionaries should fight to link a new anti-imperialist leadership within these Soldiers' Committees to Workers' Councils in the cities. In this way, it would be possible to develop powerful Councils of Workers, Soldiers, and Peasants that could devote their military and organizing power to fighting not only against the Assad regime and its Russian and Chinese imperialist backers, but also against Western imperialism.

The Soldiers' Councils should overthrow the

top brass the way the American soldiers tried to do in Vietnam, through fragging, insubordination, and refusal to fight. In the cities and the towns, we must fight for Workers' and Peasants' Councils to take an independent position in opposition to both sides. Workers and peasants, acting together, have the power to decide all questions of production and distribution during a war, and take total control of the war economy. As the Soldiers' Councils worked to smash the bourgeois FSA army, they could connect with the Workers' and Peasants' Councils to establish a network of Councils of Soldiers, Workers, and Peasants in opposition to the Assad regime, and in effect establish dual power.

From the experience of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, we know that Councils of Workers,

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Soldiers, and Peasants can prevail only by overthrowing the Assad regime with arms in hand. In such councils, revolutionaries must fight for a Workers' and Peasants' Government led by the working class, in effect establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is the only progressive way to end the Syrian civil war. Any other way will mean either that the Assad regime will prevail through the policy of the iron fist, or Syria will have a bourgeois government selected by Western imperialism. The masses in Syria should have no illusions that a Western imperialist puppet regime will do anything other than smashing any resistance from the working class, the vanguard of the youth, and the soldiers.

The masses are ready for to break with the bourgeois FSA and SNC. The only thing that is missing is a revolutionary leadership to fight for Councils of Workers, Soldiers, and

Peasants. The formation of a revolutionary leadership is not a magical process. Many centrists and reformists believe that such a leadership can develop spontaneously over the course of the war. Unfortunately this is not the case. A long process of many years is needed to build such a revolutionary leadership, and it cannot take root in Syria without building it internationally.

We hope that the massive amount of blood that has been spilled in Syria will not be in vain. The lessons from the civil war in Syria once again show the correctness of the permanent revolution. Only a Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Government led by a Bolshevik party can resolve the democratic tasks of the Syrian revolution. No faction of the bourgeoisie can do anything but betray these tasks and soak the revolution with the blood of the Syrian workers and peasants.

Clarification on Libya

In *International Trotskyist* (New Series), Volume 1, Issue 4 (pp. 26-28), we published a "Supplemental Resolution on Libya" adopted by HWRS on January 15, 2012. Since then, we have determined that this resolution incorporated an error, which we would now like to correct.

In point 2 of the resolution (pp. 26-27), we wrote that: "During the early stages of the inter-imperialist phase of the war, when NATO had just started to bomb Libya, it would have been suicide for the forces of the popular uprising to fight against both Gaddafi's army and Western imperialism simultaneously. So during that period, while communists would have continued to put forward our anti-imperialist and transitional demands, on a military level we would have supported the militias in putting their emphasis on defeating Gaddafi and his loyalists."

In retrospect, this passage should have put equal emphasis on the revolutionary defeatist position in regard to *both sides*: Gaddafi's army and Western imperialism. This means that under no circumstances could we ally ourselves with the Eastern militias which were centered in Benghazi, because these militias became puppets for imperialism against Libya. The duty of revolutionaries was defend Libya against imperialism and its internal puppets. Thus, it was equally important to smash the Gaddafi regime and the Western imperialist allies in Libya, particularly when Western imperialism was bombing Libya and coordinating its attacks with its Eastern puppets.

Whether it was necessary to put the emphasis on defeating Gaddafi and his loyalists first was a purely military tactical question. The answer would depend on the strength of the revolutionary forces in relationship to the overall military situation, and on their abilities to fight simultaneously on both fronts. To our knowledge, there were few revolutionary forces in Libya. Thus, speaking as we were from abroad, the correct position was to call for revolutionary defeatism on both sides. In practical terms, of the many militias in Libya; most supported either the TNC or Gaddafi. What few revolutionary forces existed should have allied themselves militarily with any anti-imperialist militias that were also anti-Gaddafi, advocating revolutionary defeatism in regard to both Gaddafi and the TNC.

The full text of the original resolution can be viewed online at:

http://www.humanistsforrevolutionarysocialism.org/Publications/IT4_Spring_12_web.pdf

South Africa's Class Struggle Explodes

The bloody massacre of 34 striking platinum miners in Marikana on August 16, 2012 clearly reveals that while the old apartheid regime has been dismantled, the brutal exploitation and repression of the South African workers continues. Even today, over 80% of South Africa's land is still owned by the white minority. The August killings, reminiscent of the infamous 1960 Sharpeville massacre, were carried out by the South African police armed with semi-automatic rifles – under direct orders of the African National Congress (ANC) tripartite government led by Jacob Zuma.

The massacre, together with the militant and determined resistance of the miners, has uncovered the stench of the bourgeois transformation and naked capitalist exploitation of the so-called Tripartite Alliance of the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP), and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). The ANC butchers alibi themselves and justify the murder and persecution of striking miners by referencing the “National Democratic Revolution.” They say that South Africa needs capitalism and its brutal exploitation and oppression as stage one of the “two-stage revolution.” As the popular-frontist SACP prattles about a “Two-Stage Revolution” and a “Colonialism of a Special Type,” the shameless apologists of the ANC promote these false dogmas to suggest the workers and oppressed need to be patient and endure this capitalist “process” for the sake of the ANC and its “alliance” remaining intact. Meanwhile, the capitalist system that exploits the workers and farmers also remains totally intact.

South Africa's Popular Front

The “Tripartite Alliance” is supposedly the ANC/SACP/COSATU government. In neo-

colonial reality, however, it is in fact an *alliance of the bourgeois-nationalist ANC with the white capitalist class*. The ANC provides the black front men and women to administer the “post apartheid” capitalist state apparatus, which protects the capitalists' profits.

Leonard Gentle, director of the International Labor Research and Information Group, observes that: “... from the viewpoint of peace and productivity they [i.e., the institutions of South Africa's industrial relations] certainly did their job. Strikes have shown a steady decline since 1995 with only 2010, the year of public sector strikes showing an increase in the number of strikes and days lost ...” Gentle also reports that “[t]he average weekly working hours have gone up from 44 hours to 45 hours ...” As Gentle goes on to explain:

The whole system presumed a scenario whereby Big Business would get the benefits of labour flexibility, industrial peace and skilled labour and Big Labour would get skills, job security, higher wages and a seat at the table of all labour market institutions. [¶] But neither the state nor Big Business kept their side of the bargain. Whereas the LRA [Labor Relations Act], the SETAs [Sector Education Training Authorities] and NEDLAC [National Economic Development and Labor Council] were unveiled during the period of the RDP [Redevelopment Program], the government unveiled GEAR [Growth, Employment and Redistribution] and its neo-liberal prescriptions without any considerations of its Big Labour “partner”. And Big Business, instead of seeking beneficiation and skilled labour, took the gap. At least the biggest South

African monopolies did – unbundled, financialised and then jumped ship to London, New York and Melbourne. Making money via releasing “share holder value” on global stock markets was so much more profitable than extending employment and promoting skills, let alone hanging out with its “social partners” in NEDLAC. [¶] That left COSATU with nowhere else to go. After responding with anger in the early days of GEAR, the federation has more recently been happy to slag off the betrayals of its tripartite partner, the ANC, *while its leaders, organizers and even shop stewards rake in the money involved* in attending NEDLAC, SETAs, and the myriad other tripartite and centralised bargaining fora. (Our emphasis.)

Gentle concludes: “[F]rom the side of ordinary working class people the system has been a disaster on every score.”[1] However, the “Gravy Trainers” get their “pieces of gold”! Subsidized with relatively nice crumbs for attending captive talk-shops, while the union members and the people are ground down and forced to scrounge due to unemployment, under-employment or super-exploitive employment.

Evans Ramokga, a strike committee member at Amplats, describes the hellish conditions of workers in post-apartheid South Africa: “I earned about R 4 500 a month. I used to live in a mining hostel provided by the company but quickly decided it wasn’t worth it as living in a shack allows you to earn extra money. [¶] When you stay in the hostel, the mine takes away R1700 from your wage. Even though the hostel provided ‘decent’ facilities, with six people sharing one toilet and one shower, I never got to eat a full meal as the dining hours only served the night shifters who could eat during the day.”[2]

Patrick Bond, director of the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, asks and answers a pertinent question: “How much has the ANC been seduced by big business? ... The party was never pure, with rot evident to those in the know. As one example of the old guard’s ways, in the late 1990s, defence minister Joe Modise apparently arranged for large parts of the hugely expensive arms deal to benefit himself and allies via straight bribery. Mandela and Finance Minister Trevor Manuel looked the other way. [¶] ... [¶] Mandela too, was showered with a small financial fortune by friendly tycoons after release from 27 years of prison in 1990, sufficient to soon amass a \$10



South African riot police stand over the bodies of striking miners massacred by government forces at the Lonmin mine in Marikana in July 2012

AP photo

million asset base, as revealed in his ugly divorce proceedings with Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.”[3]

A \$10 million asset base for Nelson Mandela! Corruption channeling wealth to ANCers and their cronies! Is this what Thabo Mbeki had in mind when he took over from Mandela in 1999, saying “we must strive to create and strengthen a black capitalist class”?

The Blood-Stained Two Stage Theory

But black skin doesn't affect the capitalist practice of unbridled greed and corruption. Whites still own 87% of the land. 18 years after apartheid's supposed demise, the masses barely subsist, many feeling that the conditions are now worse than ever! The only visible change is the amount of former “comrades” now cruising the roads in sleek, new BMW's, amassing small and large fortunes – depending on your pecking order or acumen for avarice. This naked avarice getting rich off the masses is justified by the traitorous sell-out and captive leaders of the SACP and COSATU, explaining to the impoverished and displaced people the virtue of waiting for the stages of the “two-stage revolution” to play out. That these “two-stage revolutions” and “popular fronts” have led to devastation, disaster, and counter-revolution has been tragically proven by history.

During the 1917 Russian Revolution the Bolsheviks led by Lenin and Trotsky swept the two-stage theory away, along with the Kerensky “Provisional Government” of the frightened bourgeoisie, and traitorous bourgeois workers parties (the Mensheviks). Lenin returned to Russia in April calling for “all power to the Soviets.” Lenin de facto called for skipping the two-stage revolution. Lenin's *April Theses* re-oriented and theoretically re-armed the revolutionary party of the Bolsheviks to step over the so-called fake “democratic” stage and establish the Soviet of Workers, Soldiers and Peasant Deputies (workers' council), effectively overthrowing the coalition “Provisional Government” and establishing a workers' government with actual workers' power. Thus, the October revolution historically proved the bankruptcy of the two-stage revolution.

But the dead theory of the two-stage revolution was revived by Joseph Stalin. In 1925 he instructed the young, but vibrant and growing Chinese Communist Party to enter the *Kuomintang* (KMT), a (left) bourgeois nationalist party in colonial China that supposedly was anti-imperialist. China was in revolutionary foment, with a new and very militant working class. But instead of opposing imperialism, the KMT used the CCP's authority and members to help them break strikes and stop peasant land seizures, from 1925 to 1927. The Left Opposition (our progenitors) opposed this disastrous turn – to no avail. In April 1927, Chiang Kai-shek, leader maximo of the KMT, unleashed a counter-revolutionary mass murder hunt of CCP members and worker militants in Shanghai, killing thousands of workers. The CCP had to flee the cities, far from the KMT's murderous clutches. It was precisely for this reason that Mao Tse-Tung embarked on the “Long March.”

Class collaboration with the above myriad of Popular Fronts ended with catastrophic devastation. The two-stage revolution policy is responsible for most of our historic defeats, and for too many millions of graves of brave comrades, dead because of a dead policy and program. No to the Stalinist theory of “stages”! Yes to Permanent Revolution of Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks!

General Strike: Black Capitalism's Greatest Fear

It is essential to view the ANC/SACP history through the lens and science of historical materialism. After a life of resistance and decades in prison we have seen many dedicated ANC members who selflessly sacrificed for years under the apartheid regime, became transformed into a thieving array of capitalist front men, Nelson Mandela included. How is this possible?

The program of the ANC/SACP does not stand for the power of the working people, which means socialism and equality for all. To achieve socialism the workers need first to take power. The road to socialism will require the vehicle of a revolutionary party. A party that has a program that can unite the workers

councils and all the self-organizations of the communities, farm workers, women, – all those oppressed by capital – into a movement that begins the preparation to engage the struggle for a workers government. The revolutionary intentions and program of this party must be plainly stated to avoid the confusion brought on by the ANC/SACP fakers.

A revolutionary program with a transitional method and transitional demands creates a bridge between the present consciousness of the working class in the objective necessity for the socialist revolution, as it spotlights and directs the proletarian movement towards power. This method that was fully developed and polished by Leon Trotsky in 1938 is employable in South Africa, today. A truly transitional program needs to be developed and applied to the tasks and challenges facing the South African workers today. We need to fight for nationalization under workers' control, and for a workers' government that will expropriate the banks and return the land to the black farmers and agricultural workers. Expropriations, land seizures, battles, defense and offense efforts and tactics must be coordinated and centralized. This can ultimately only be implemented by a revolutionary party that fights for a true transitional, revolutionary program.

The strike that took place at Marikana and led to the killing and injury of 78 miners, and 260 arrests, was for a minimum wage of 12,500 Rand (about \$9 an hour), in a region containing 80% of the world's platinum – and where the workers live in shantytowns without paved streets or reliable electricity. These barbaric living conditions, which are typical of the vast majority of South Africa's workers, are the bitter fruits of the ANC program of class-collaboration with the white minority.

Shortly after the strike, Frans Baleni and Lesiba Seshoka, two leading bureaucrats of the NUM, came out in support of the actions of the South African Police, blaming the deaths on the Marikana strikers themselves and the rival Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) for organizing the wildcat.

The NUM bureaucrats didn't hesitate to call for government repression against the AMCU, while making sure to assure the capitalists and imperialists not to worry because their investment portfolios were safe from "renegade workers." Even more ominously, just days before the massacre, Baleni had openly and publicly encouraged the police to shoot at the strikers, referring to them as armed thugs waging an illegal strike.

In response to the cowardly union bureaucracy, the workers must continue to



Demonstrators wave placards during a site inspection by the judicial commission of inquiry at Lonmin's Marikana mine

Reuters file photo



Striking miners at Longmin in Marikana conduct a mass protest march in October 2012

Reuters

build and spread rank and file strike committees in the mines, and especially strategic sectors of industry. A critical task for the rank and file workers is to organize armed self defense guards, based upon and organized by the united working class committees to drive out the police and security guards from the communities. Ultimately the workers need to build workers' militias to enforce an indefinite general strike.

Growing numbers of workers in South Africa are losing confidence in COSATU. We provide here some discussions about that from an article in the *Daily Maverick*:

A friendly lady who was with her young children began talking to me about her support of the strike. She lives on one of

the surrounding grape farms but told me that R60 (per day) is too low a salary – that they were continuing their strike until they got their demand of R150. While she had positive things to say about Cosatu, she was not aware that Cosatu had triumphantly announced the end of the strike the previous day. [¶] ... [¶] Talking to more people around Shoprite, I noticed that all of them were somehow economically connected to the strike. A group of taxi owners and drivers, for instance explained that since most of the community was on strike they were without customers. One driver remarked that they had to support the strike because they are “part of the same

community.” While they felt Cosatu was fighting for their rights as a community, this group was ambivalent about the announcement that the strike was over. [¶] Another striker I found nearby, nicknamed Forest, said he would strike for as long as it took to get R150 per day. He said he hadn’t seen Cosatu for a while and didn’t know about the announcement, though he assured me that not even Cosatu could get him to suspend his strike.

I then connected with a strike leader named Monwabisi who brought me to his community of Ekuphumuleli. Driving there, we had to use an alternative route as the direct road was being blacked by police. He explained that even though the minimum wage is R70 a day, many farmers illegally pay their farmworkers as little as R60. [¶] On the farm where he works, Keurboschkloof, they get paid relatively more than other farmworkers in De Doorns. He noted that it was also the only farm where workers had joined the Food and Allied Workers Union (Fawu), a Cosatu affiliate. But he explained why Cosatu and other unions had such little involvement in the strike: “The people, most of them don’t know unions. Or the farmers dismiss you if you want to join the unions”. [¶] While he supports Fawu and Cosatu and is willing to suspend the strike, he also said that farmworkers don’t trust Bawasu, Coastu or the government in general and said they would not stop striking. Monwabisi reserved the biggest criticism for Bawasu, which he claimed is helping labor brokers bring in temporary workers to break the strike ... [4]

Another sign of the workers’ dissatisfaction has been the decision of many of the miners in Rustenburg to resign from the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and join the smaller but more militant AMCU. This has especially been the case for the lower paid miners. The scale of the desertion of workers from the NUM can be seen in the fact that on October 1, Impala Platinum contacted the union stating that it no longer had a sufficient number of

members to be recognized at the company’s Rustenburg mine.

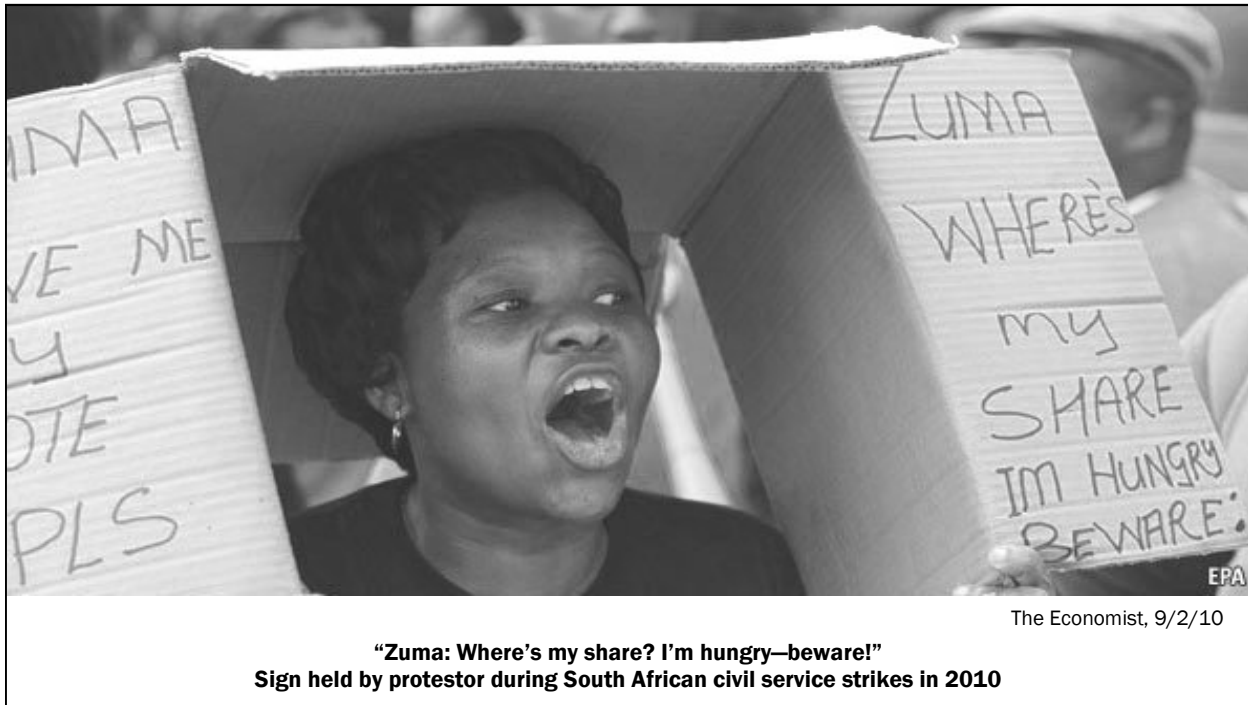
And at Rustenberg Angloplat, Leonard Gentle describes how: “... Angloplat declares, a month ago, that it dismissed 12,000 workers. Then it says that they can return but by their imposed deadline. Then it meets with the NUM and Solidarity, where they sign an agreement for a return to work. But still they can’t get back to full production and they can’t bring in scabs. The workers simply say ‘the strike committee speaks for us’ and defy Angloplat.”[5]

While it can weaken the struggle of the miners to organize more than one union in their industry, if they conclude that they can wage a more effective struggle outside the NUM, we defend their right to join the AMCU, and we defend the AMCU against the attacks by the NUM bureaucracy and ANC government. But as long as a sizeable minority or majority of miners decide to remain in the NUM, the struggle to oust the pro-capitalist NUM bureaucrats should continue to be waged. The waves of wildcat strikes that have taken place against Lonmin in Marikana, Implats and Anglo-American Platinum in Rustenberg, many of which organized and led by strike committees, are signs of growing mass dissatisfaction of the workers with the super-exploitative American, European and Chinese corporations – and the rich, pro-capitalist, sell-out bureaucrats who lead the NUM and COSATU.

A Program for Victory for South Africa’s Workers

The workers’ organizations must break from the ANC and begin the process of gathering the workers and their allies in the countryside to organize and consolidate their forces. The workers need to build for massive regional general strikes and other actions aimed at bringing down the rule of capital – including the stinking parasites of the capitalist, unworthy ANC.

The ANC’s captive bureaucratized workers organizations, SACP & COSATU, add their weight to the already unbearable burden of “post apartheid” capitalist and imperialist exploitation. The SACP/COSATU leadership



**“Zuma: Where’s my share? I’m hungry—beware!”
Sign held by protestor during South African civil service strikes in 2010**

has to be swept away, and the workers need to take over their union organizations and break them from the death grip of the ANC.

The SACP is clearly in crisis. Its Stalinist leadership supports the repression of the miners and the suppression of other strikes by the ANC government. But the rank-and-file workers who are involved in the strikes will support the miners. This develops an historical opportunity to expose the betrayal of the Stalinist leadership, and prepare the conditions for the rank-and-file to break from Stalinism. Such an exposure can be prepared with the slogan: SACP members, demand from the party leadership to break with the government!

There is also the Democratic Left Front (DLF). The DLF claims to have significant influence within AMCU. It uses the traditional Social Democratic method of betrayal, that is, the minimum maximum program. The main slogans of the DLF are: Forward to a Living Wage for All Workers; Forward to Socialism! In other words the DLF calls for economic reforms now and socialism in the far future. This is typical social democracy that concentrates only on economic demands as it leaves the political fight for power by the working class for another generation of workers! The DLF sounds like they think the solution is an enlightened and

humane capitalism.

The DLF have forgotten the *basics* of Marxism. The class struggle in South Africa is exploding quickly. The situation can quickly develop towards a pre-revolutionary situation. In such a situation a revolutionary party needs to organize the workers to take power. How can the DLF pretend that all that is realizable is R12,000-R20,000 and stronger democratic unions and laws when the class struggle is intensifying quickly?

What we need is to build for a general strike led by the overwhelming black working class majority. We need to defend such a general strike by organizing massive and formidable defense guards to protect the strike against the police of the ANC, the Stalinist bureaucracy of the SACP, and the goons hired by the leaders of COSATU.

The shantytowns are where the miners live. They are situated right next to the mines where the miners work. Thus, we need to organize defense guards not only for the strikes in the mines, but also for the shantytowns that are attacked by the ANC and the police. The community defense guards should be linked to the workplaces throughout South Africa! This is how to conduct a general strike that can win.

To win we also need to be on the lookout and expose demagogues like the expelled ANC Youth League leader and populist, Julius Malema. Despite his obscene wealth, Malema has gained popular support among the striking miners, and the workers and youth of South Africa with his left wing demagogy and his call for the nationalization of the mines. To some extent, this populist faker is cynically exploiting the internal disputes within the NUM, COSATU and the tripartite alliance around the question of nationalization. Following his expulsion from the ANC Youth League and his factional fight inside the ANC, Malema is also trying to further his own career – and add to his already enormous wealth.

In calling for the nationalization of the mines, Malema avoids the critical question of nationalization under workers' control. Instead he refers to clauses in the ANC's original 1955 program, The Freedom Charter, which declared that: "The mineral wealth beneath the soil ... shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole." [6] But despite his attempts to fool the workers with this left wing rhetoric, Malema's goal is not to empower or support the working class (including the miners) in any way. Quite the contrary. His goal is to avert the deepening of the crisis in the ANC and the Tripartite Alliance by co-opting the most radicalized workers.

Malema's other goal is to empower South Africa's black elite by shifting the wealth from the white mine owners to the tripartite state and increase the wealth of the black elite (including smaller black mine owners) through the ANC's Black Economic Empowerment Program (BEE). There is a fundamental difference between pro-capitalist nationalization, in which the elite members of the Tripartite Alliance use the state to steal wealth produced by the workers in the nationalized industry, and nationalized industry *run by the workers themselves*, in which workers share the wealth that they produce.

In contrast to the demagogues of the ANC and the bureaucrats of the Stalinist SACP, revolutionary Trotskyists call for the nationalization of all mines and factories, without compensation to the capitalists, and under full workers' control!

- Down with the Popular Front ANC-SACP-COSATU government! For a workers government, based on workers councils and militias, with a program to expropriate the capitalist class and to smash the bourgeois state apparatus!
- Build strike committees in all mines! For a national strike in all mines! For the occupation of the mines to increase the pressure!
- For the formation of armed self-defense committees to drive out the police forces from the miners' communities!
- Prepare for a nation-wide general strike for a living wage for all workers in South Africa!
- For the nationalization of the mines and the rest of the industries without compensation and under workers control!
- Distribute all land owned by the white (and black) elite to the farmers and agricultural workers!
- For an international solidarity campaign with the South African miners' strike!
- Throw out the existing leadership of COSATU! Force COSATU to break with the Tripartite Alliance and the ANC government! SACP members, demand from the party leadership to break with the government!
- Prepare for a general strike to overthrow the popular front capitalist government.
- For a workers government, dominated by the black majority, run democratically by the working class as the first stage in building genuine socialism.

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Chicago Teachers and “OUR Walmart”:

The organized labor movement in the United States has been losing ground in the private sector over the last several decades, with the percentage of unionized workers steadily shrinking. Manufacturing jobs, traditionally a union stronghold, disappeared as US companies moved plants overseas or into historically anti-union regions in the South and Southwest. Meanwhile, corporate employers' quest for higher profits has led to increased reliance on hard-to-organize temporary workers, and rampant abuse of the “independent contractor” label to preclude collective bargaining and avoid payroll taxes and minimum wage standards. At first, public sector employees appeared to be able to buck this trend to some extent. More recently, however, government budgets have suffered devastating cuts due to the ripple effect of the collapsing US economy; the right-wing anti-tax movement; and the neoliberal privatization agenda. Now, public sector employers are as motivated as those in the profit sector to cut their labor costs. They are demanding that public employee unions agree to austerity measures such as furloughs, layoffs, benefit cutbacks, and wage freezes. If the unions try to resist, they threaten to privatize schools, prisons, and other public services, and even to abolish public employees' union rights altogether. It was measures such as these that triggered the Wisconsin state capitol occupation in the spring of 2011.

Faced with these realities, some elements of the labor bureaucracy – motivated by the need to maintain their dues base, if nothing else – have begun to try to increase private sector membership by organizing the retail and service industries. At the same time, public sector unions are waking up to the fact that making campaign contributions to supposedly union-friendly politicians does not protect their workers from wage cuts, furloughs, and layoffs.

In this article, we examine two recent developments in the US labor movement: in the public sector, the Chicago teachers' strike of September 2012, and in the private sector, the ongoing effort to organize Walmart's retail and warehouse workers, including the Black Friday strike set to occur just as this issue of *International Trotskyist* goes to press. These two efforts exemplify recent reformist attempts to overcome some of the traditional shortcomings of the US labor movement. Their record so far is not promising. The lesson we draw is that far more radical change is needed in order to transform US organized labor into a movement that can bring about the fundamental, lasting political, social, and economic change that workers and their families desperately need.

The Chicago Teachers' Strike

Background

The Chicago public school system (CPS) is typical in many ways of modern inner city school districts. The student body is 92% students of color, and 86% low income. Despite these demographics, the number of Black teachers was reduced from 45% in 1995 to 19% by 2012 because of school closings and high employee turnover in schools located in Black communities. Test scores are low. The number of counselors and school psychologists is woefully inadequate given the stressful and often violent conditions the students face in

their daily lives. The entire system lacks adequate resources, and the school buildings are old and outmoded. For example, even though many schools have adopted a year-round schedule, the classrooms lack air conditioning, forcing students and teachers to swelter in unbearable heat during the summer sessions.[1]

But in addition to the problems of any modern inner city school district, CPS has problems uniquely its own. The mayor of Chicago, former Obama administration bigwig Rahm Emanuel, has set his sights on his city's

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school system. He is relying on his hand-picked school board to turn CPS into a demonstration site for the neoliberal agenda of privatizing schools and busting teachers' unions – a drive spearheaded by none other than former CPS chief Arne Duncan, Obama's Education Secretary.

Until recently, the bureaucracy of the Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU) adhered to the all-too-common US model of top-down control, sellout negotiating tactics, and little or no benefit for the teachers in exchange for their dues. By 2012, almost three decades had elapsed since the union had last taken strike action. In 2008, however, Black chemistry teacher Karen Lewis began pulling together a rank-and-file caucus with the goal of replacing the do-nothing bureaucracy.

Over the next two years, Lewis's caucus, which called itself the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE), "rose to power on a platform of pushing back against privatization of public schools and the aggressive education reform efforts introduced by ... Arne Duncan."^[2] By 2010, CORE had garnered enough support to elect Lewis to the presidency of the union, and replace its leadership with activists drawn directly from the classroom. Lewis's second-in-command, CTU vice president Jesse Sharkey, is a member of the pseudo-Trotskyist International Socialist Organization (ISO).

The Buildup to the Strike

During 2011, under Lewis's leadership, "CTU ... joined forces with members of Chicago's Occupy movement to stage protests, rallies and school sit-ins to call attention to inequities in the public school system. In December [2011], CTU and Occupy members took command of a school board meeting with an orchestrated protest as the district was considering a rash of school closings, and several protesters were forcibly removed."^[3]

In the fall of 2011, the new CTU leadership began negotiating with CPS, as the existing contract was set to expire in June 2012. At the start of the negotiations, Lewis's team "demand [ed] a nearly 30 percent salary increase over two years, largely for working a significantly longer school day." One member of the negotiating team, school social worker Susan Hickey, credited CTU's growing activism with giving the union "muscle" at the bargaining table.^[4]

CPS responded to CTU's demand by offering only a 2 percent raise. By May 2012, the two sides had reached an impasse, and were unable to reach agreement even with the assistance of a mediator. A legally-mandated fact-finding process began in early May. In early June, the union began conducting a strike authorization vote. Due to a state law enacted as part of the ongoing neoliberal attack on public employees, the CTU had to secure the votes of at least 75% of its members to authorize a strike. By June 11, Lewis's team had achieved that threshold. Ultimately, some 98% of members who voted supported the strike.

In mid-June, the factfinding report was released. Both sides immediately rejected its recommendations. The CTU's 800-member house of delegates "unanimously voted down the ... report," even though it "recommended teacher raises of 15 to 20 percent in the first year and 35.74 percent at the end of a four-year contract." Although pleased with the finding that teachers were entitled to raises and higher pay for longer school days, the CTU said it still wanted to "push for a deal that gives members greater job security and a say in how the longer school day plays out next year," and was disappointed that "the report did not address recall policies for tenured teachers who are laid off, class sizes and other workplace issues." Predictably, CPS officials complained that the school district could not possibly afford raises of the magnitude suggested in the report, and

threatened to lay off teachers and increase class sizes if CTU pushed for more than the 8 percent raise CPS was then offering.[5]

When no agreement was reached by July 1, 2012, CTU members had to confront the prospect of starting the school year without a contract. In August, the CTU house of delegates voted to give Lewis the authority to call a strike on 10 days' notice. A week later, Lewis gave official notice that the CTU would strike, but without specifying a date.

The Strike Itself

September 4, the Tuesday after Labor Day, marked the start of the school year for most CPS students. The following Monday, the strike began. Picket lines were organized at every school, staffed by teachers clothed in CTU's signature bright red. Only a handful of teachers crossed, and not one school was able to remain open for classes.

From the outset, the strike enjoyed broad support not only within the CTU itself, but also among parents and students, and in the greater community. Polls showed that two thirds of parents were on the teachers' side. Parents joined the teachers' picket lines, and supported them with food and beverages. Drivers honked in support as they passed groups of striking teachers. A rally downtown on Monday afternoon drew tens of thousands of

supporters, making it seem as though a flood tide of red-clad teachers, activists, and community members had surged into the heart of Chicago. Support continued high through most of the strike.

In preparation for the walkout, Mayor Emanuel had set up some schools as drop-off centers, where students would be supervised and fed lunch by untrained, unscreened CPS administrative staff working as scabs. Parents largely shunned this warehousing setup, and chose to stay home with their children, bring them along to picket lines and rallies, or send them to "strike camps" set up by community groups such as the Girl Scouts. As one parent later put it on her blog, "The whole city of Chicago has stepped up to make sure our children have fun, enriching places to be while our teachers take the time to take care of business and let their voices be heard on the picket lines. [¶] We fully believe the teachers have our kids' best interest at heart, and we encourage them to stand their ground as many days as necessary." [6]

The Upshot: A Sellout Contract

Even after the teachers walked out, negotiations between the CTU and CPS continued. By Friday September 14, a tentative deal had been struck. But some members of the negotiating team were dissatisfied, and by the



Tens of thousands of Chicagoans attended a rally downtown in support of the teachers' strike

Chicago Magazine

time the union's house of delegates met on Sunday, some were calling Lewis and Sharkey "sellouts" due to the concessions they had pressured the bargaining team to accept. The delegates, including some identifying as socialists, were also concerned that they were not being given enough time to review the details of the proposed contract. Bolstered by this controversy, the delegates insisted on continuing the strike while they reviewed the tentative agreement.

The following day, Monday September 17, Mayor Emanuel sued the union, seeking a court injunction requiring the teachers to return to work. Emanuel's attempt to get an immediate hearing on his injunction request was rejected by the court in favor of a hearing the following Wednesday. But the damage was done the minute the suit was filed; with it came the threat of a court order that could send Lewis and Sharkey to jail if the workers stayed on the picket lines. Emanuel and his team also indicated that if the rank-and-file did not approve the terms of the September 14 tentative agreement, CPS would take the offer off the table and the parties would be back to square one. Under this pressure, the so-called militant leaders caved in and called for a return to work, even though the tentative contract had not yet been formally approved.[7]

Browbeaten by Lewis and Sharkey's capitulation to Emanuel's threat of force, the delegates approved the contract on Tuesday September 18, and the leadership sent the teachers back to their classrooms on Wednesday. With the strike momentum gone and schools back in session, the rank-and-file teachers had little choice but to ratify the contract.

And so the struggle that had begun with such fanfare and promise ended with an outright betrayal. To be sure, the CTU won a few concessions. The CTU "managed to hold the line on health insurance increases, and protect seniority pay increases and raises for additional education that the school system wanted to limit or eliminate." The CTU also resisted the institution of a merit pay system, and held the weight given to student test scores in teacher evaluations down to the minimum 30% required by state law, rather than the 45% CPS wanted.[8]

But the concessions embodied in the contract far outweigh these few gains. Lewis herself admitted it is an "austerity contract." [9] The contract provides for only token raises: 3% in the first year, and 2% in years two and three.[10] "The new contract ... cuts in half the number of months laid-off teachers will be eligible for full pay as substitute teachers. Health care benefits are also undermined, and there is no protection for pensions—which are being targeted by Emanuel next." [11]

Untenured teachers gained no job protection, and even tenured teachers became vulnerable to being fired on the basis of evaluations in which student test scores play a major role, despite the undeniable fact that student test scores correlate far more with family and neighborhood demographics than with teacher effectiveness. Worse still, these misleading evaluations will have a major effect on layoffs. "[W]hen a school cuts teachers, teachers in the bottom evaluation category will be the first to go, followed by new teachers who have not yet been rated." [12]

It is understandable that the teachers felt they had no choice but to accept the 30% weight for test scores required by state law. The truth remains that the entire system of "merit" evaluations is a way for CPS to bust the union by giving activist teachers low evaluations, and then firing them. CPS's goal in making evaluations the key to job retention is to winnow the ranks, ousting the most militant teachers and retaining only those who are antiunion and obedient. All intelligent teachers look upon this kind of evaluation program with disgust.

Basing evaluations so heavily on test scores is also a way to pressure teachers to focus on "teaching to the test" in order to keep their jobs. This supports the bosses' scheme to use high-stakes standardized testing as a way to transform children into robots trained to mechanically absorb and regurgitate data, instead of becoming thinking human beings capable of asking intelligent questions and making independent judgments. Capitalism wants the public education system to produce obedient workers who accept what they are told, and have only the bare minimum of academic skills needed to enable them to follow

Mario Cardenas, *Socialist Worker*

Teachers drew community support by emphasizing that they were fighting for better schools, not just higher salaries.

directions. Knowing these truths, the union should have rejected the entire teacher evaluation program, and continued the strike as long as necessary to force CPS to back down.

In response to the CTU's demand for recall rights, CPS agreed only to an empty promise to consider laid-off teachers for 50% of any vacancies, and to retain them in the recall eligibility pool for an additional five months if the 50% target was not met. In the event of school consolidations, the contract does not allow laid-off teachers from closed schools to transfer to their former students' new school unless a vacancy within their credential is created by the consolidation.

In short, the CTU contract was far from the triumph of "social movement unionism" that some union cheerleaders have held it out to be. [13] The degree of community support that the union enjoyed should have given its leadership

the gumption to call Emanuel's injunction bluff, and stay out until they had achieved victory. By going back to work instead, the union lost the chance to hold its ground on the very issues it had relied upon to build community support: school closures, class sizes, and privatization.

The contract left these crucial issues unresolved, referring them to committees or ignoring them altogether.[14] Meanwhile, in October, Emanuel hired a new CPS chief to further his privatization agenda: Barbara Byrd-Bennett. At least according to one CPS parent, while Bennett was running the school district in Detroit, she was "responsible for the charterization of the public schools and busting the Detroit Federation of Teachers." [15]

In early November, the CTU organized a sit-in in the mayor's office to protest Emanuel's school closure plans.[16] But it is strikes, not sit-ins, that *command* the attention of the bosses. By going back to work in September without forcing a resolution of the key political issues posed by the struggle, the union robbed itself of the chance to use the strike – the working class's ultimate weapon – to force Emanuel and his neoliberal allies to back down for once and for all.

Analysis

The CTU's CORE caucus leadership did some things right. The overwhelming support the strike drew from teachers and the community could not have been achieved if CORE had not both strengthened the CTU's internal organizing and supported an active outreach effort. This is an important lesson, particularly for public workers. If the community views a public employee strike as purely economic in its goals, it is easy for capitalist politicians and corporate-owned news media to label the strikers as spoiled, greedy petty bureaucrats who just want more of the public's tax dollars in their pockets. By focusing its message on its efforts to improve conditions in the schools and foster a better education for all students, the CTU was able to cultivate a positive public perception of the motivations of the strikers.

Ironically, however, it was this very outreach effort that gave Mayor Emanuel an

excuse to try to shut the strike down through court action. Emanuel and CPS management tried to paint the strike as illegal because CTU's demands went beyond wages and benefits to address issues such as layoff and recall policies, teacher evaluations, class sizes, and the length of the school day and year – issues Emanuel said were “deemed by state law to be non-strikable.”

This Illinois state law is typical of federal and state labor regulations throughout the US, designed to put public workers in just the bind in which CTU found itself. The bosses know that if striking public workers focus on economic issues only, the corporate propaganda machine can easily paint them as greedy, and undercut public support for their struggle. To prevent public workers from trying to counter this by transforming their job actions into political strikes, the bosses' laws are set up to allow them to label the strike illegal and use their court system to try to shut it down.

Since the end of the CTU strike, Lewis and Sharkey have come under justifiable criticism from some socialist organizations[17] for their role in forcing the membership to accept a sell-out contract. But the more significant issue is the failure of the CTU leadership, including Lewis and Sharkey, to highlight the fact that the attacks on the CTU were the brainchild of officials from the supposedly “friend of Labor” Democratic Party. As long as organized labor remains firmly in the pocket of the Democrats, and fails to adopt a transitional program that challenges the assumptions of the capitalist system, it remains vulnerable to the kind of political arm-twisting and manipulation to which Lewis, Sharkey, and their colleagues succumbed at the hands of Obama administration flunky Rahm Emanuel.

The sellout of the CTU strike has broad ramifications for the entire working class. Before the strike, the teachers and other public sector unions were suffering from setbacks and union busting, as government budgets shrank due to the massive deficit accrued by US capitalism in its struggle against the rising economic dominance of China. Republican and Democratic governments – including the Obama administration – have placed the burden of the resulting budget deficits squarely

on the back of the working class, and more specifically on the back of workers in public sector unions, especially teachers.

The working class was looking to the Chicago strike to fight back and reverse the attacks. The community support enlisted by the CTU gave it a unique opportunity to stand up to the bosses' Democratic Party flunkies, expose their betrayal of the workers who voted them into office, and challenge the working class's acceptance of the Democrats as the lesser evil party. A victory in Chicago could have inspired militant, community-supported strikes throughout the country against cuts in school and social services budgets, and attacks on public workers. Instead, the CTU leadership capitulated, and, as the saying goes, snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. Every betrayal like this generates further demoralization and passivity.

Instead of accepting Lewis and Sharkey's capitulation, the CTU rank-and-file should have kept the strike going, even if the courts declared it illegal. The CTU should have demanded not just a better contract, but teacher, parent and community control over all matters in regard to schools and education, and the elimination of union-busting charter schools. The CTU also should have called for a general strike, in Chicago and statewide, against the austerities imposed on workers by the Obama administration. In other words, the only way out was to broaden the strike, defy and smash the labor laws used to limit and defeat strikes, and transform the CTU strike into a broad political strike against the plutocracy and its attacks on the working class.

The conditions for doing this were ripe. The strike enjoyed massive solidarity among the working class in Chicago. That city has a large impoverished Black and Latino population that is suffering dramatically from Emanuel's attacks on the schools, including school closures, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of resources. By continuing to focus on these issues, the CTU could have put itself in a position to draw on the Black and Latino communities to support its picket lines, keep the schools closed, and broaden the scope of the strike.

The state undoubtedly would have responded by trying to break the strike by

invoking anti-union laws to get court injunctions, and then mounting a brutal police attack against the picket lines if the strikers continued to defy the state. The agenda for the strike could then have been broadened to include organizing workers' defense guards against both union busting and police brutality. The links between the CTU and the union movement, and the oppressed Black and Latino communities, would have strengthened based on their joint actions in struggle against police brutality and state repression.

A class struggle strategy like this is the only way to fight back against the attacks we are facing. If we continue to accept defeats like the CTU leadership's capitulation, the bosses will only renew their attacks. Now Obama and his butchers are planning to implement further attacks on schools and social services as the so-called "fiscal cliff" approaches. As the *New York Times* has warned, if the "Republicans in Congress and Mr. Obama cannot agree on a resolution for the country's looming debt crisis, the automatic budget cuts and tax increases that will kick in next year could spawn another round of belt-tightening at public schools already battered by the recession and its aftermath. [¶] If the government is unable to

come to a resolution, federal education programs for elementary and high schools would lose a little over \$2 billion – or close to 8 percent of the current budget – starting next fall, according to the Office of Management and Budget and the Education Department." [18] In short, the working class must fight back or it will be devastated by the twin parties of the bourgeoisie.

When workers in the US first built the labor movement in the early decades of the 20th century, they were willing to fight back against strikebreaking cops. Many suffered imprisonment, beatings, and even murder at the hands of the state in support of their cause. This is what it takes to achieve victory in the class struggle. To fight back against the renewed attacks that are happening now, striking workers must follow the example set by our forebears in the early years of the labor movement. Rank and file strike committees must organize disciplined, armed workers' defense guards to protect our picket lines and our communities. We must be willing to confront the bosses' government, and we must be prepared to risk police repression and jail if necessary. Only such a level of militancy will enable workers to succeed in our struggle.

The "OUR Walmart" Organizing Effort

Background

Private sector labor unions in the US have been slow to wake up to the threat they face from the loss of manufacturing jobs, the globalization of the economy, and the ramifications of the neoliberal political agenda. While these unions clung to their traditional view of their primary constituency as large, stable workforces in manufacturing and other skilled labor industries, mega-corporations like Walmart were rapidly transforming US workers from proletariat to "precariat" – a term coined by UK economist Guy Standing to refer to the increasing millions around the globe who work in temporary and/or part-time, low-skilled, low wage jobs with no security, benefits, or prospects for advancement. [19]

As the flagship of mega-retailers and the largest private employer in the world, Walmart has used every trick in the unfair labor practice book to successfully resist all efforts to organize its retail workforce. [20] Because Walmart's "associates" have not had the benefit of any collective voice, Walmart has been able to force them to accept low wages, part-time hours, unpredictable schedules, unsafe working conditions, and health care plans that are unaffordable even for those few who qualify. Walmart is notorious (though not alone among "big box" retailers) for paying its 1.4 million workers so poorly that many of them are forced to rely on food stamps and other forms of government assistance. [21] As unemployment has risen, replacement workers have become

easier and easier to find, giving Walmart the green light to fire anyone who tries to speak up about the company's outrageous treatment.

As Walmart opened more and more "superstores" that included full-service groceries, the traditional grocery chains that employ members of the United Food & Commercial Workers (UFCW) began to plead poverty at the bargaining table, complaining that they could not compete with Walmart's low prices. Eventually, the UFCW, which is the leading union for retail workers in the food industry, was forced to intervene. The union tried to mount conventional organizing efforts, but soon realized that they were doomed to defeat, due to Walmart's no-holds-barred approach to defeating unionization drives.

Perceiving a need to make an end run around the federal labor laws that have facilitated Walmart's anti-union successes, the UFCW belatedly adopted new strategies starting in 2003. Its first tactic was to try to "build a movement" based on a public relations campaign and a word-of-mouth system of informal contact between union members and the staff at their local Walmart store.[22] Not surprisingly, this feeble effort produced no visible results.

The "OUR Walmart" Campaign

Recently, however, the UFCW has tried a creative new approach. Rather than trying to get Walmart workers to vote to designate the union as their official collective bargaining representative – an effort that can easily be stymied by a determined employer – the union helped to found and finance an legally independent body which workers can join as individuals, for a mere \$5 per month, without Walmart even knowing about it.

The new organization is called Organization United for Respect, popularly known as "OUR Walmart" (OURW). OURW's stated goals are so modest as to be totally inadequate: "a minimum of \$25,000 a year pay for all workers in retail stores and the distribution network; quality, affordable health care; a national community benefits agreement; Walmart's signature on a global labor union agreement to recognize workers' right to organize; and the company's commitment to a legally binding

global responsible contractor policy." [23] \$25,000 per year?! That is nowhere near enough to live on in many areas of the US. But even these meek demands fly in the face of Walmart's historical approach of minimizing labor costs by treating its workers – like the products it sells – as easily replaced commodities, to be procured as cheaply as possible.

A parallel effort involving warehouse workers in Walmart's distribution chain, whose employers may technically be independent corporations, is called Warehouse Workers United (WWU). WWU started as a general warehouse organizing project in southern California, backed by the union federation Change to Win. When the sponsors realized how much influence Walmart-contracted warehouses had on wages and working conditions throughout the area, however, they changed their focus to concentrate specifically on Walmart.[24]

To get the OURW campaign off the ground, the UFCW sent hundreds of its members door-to-door to encourage Walmart employees to join. And the effort does appear to be gaining in popularity among Walmart workers. In its first year, OURW grew from a group of 100 workers to many thousands, in hundreds of stores across 43 states.

Besides its door-to-door effort, OURW is using the tools of modern technology to gain support. It has a website, of course, but also a YouTube channel, a separate website for non-Walmart employees who support the effort, and corresponding Facebook pages and Twitter accounts, all sporting OURW's vivid green signature color and logo.[25] Clearly, however, these high-tech tools alone will not enable OURW to catalyze any major change in the wages and working conditions of the Walmart rank-and-file. Only concerted direct action by Walmart workers themselves can force the company to pay any heed to their demands.

Buildup to Black Friday 2012

In June 2011, after several months of quiet preparation and discreet organizing, OURW "went public," [26] and began its on-the-ground efforts. In early June, "nearly 100 Associates representing thousands of OUR Walmart

members from across the United States came to the Walmart Home Office in Bentonville, Ark., and presented a Declaration of Respect to Walmart executive management.” The declaration itself is a pitiful plea worthy of Oliver Twist. (“Please, Sir, I want some more.”) It calls on Walmart to “listen” to its workers, “respect the individual,” disseminate and follow its own employment policies, pay workers at least \$13 per hour, and ensure that workers make enough not to need food stamps or other welfare benefits. \$13 per hour?! At that rate, a family of four with one full-time income is still eligible for food stamps!

In October of the same year, “the Making Change at Walmart group, which helps support OUR Walmart, hosted a panel discussion of Walmart workers and managers to provide critical perspectives to stock analysts in town from New York and Europe for meetings with Walmart executives the following day.” When asked what they planned to do short of mounting a store-by-store strike, however, the panelists had no answer.[27]

Besides waging its public relations campaign, OUR Walmart began using the legal system against the notorious employer. It has “helped workers file over 20 lawsuits against the retailer for unfair or unlawful labor

practices, including switching workers’ shifts without their knowledge, reducing hours, and unwarranted disciplinary actions.”[28] Of course, this kind of individual action, even if successful in helping individual workers, does nothing to change the obscene super-exploitation of the mass of Walmart’s retail staff nationwide.

Finally, in the fall of 2012, OURW and WWU began to undertake more militant actions. In September, dozens of warehouse workers in Walmart’s southern California hub walked off their jobs and went on a six-day protest “pilgrimage.” Then, in October, their example was followed by a group of more than 70 workers at multiple stores in the Los Angeles area, who were soon joined by workers in a dozen other cities.[29] In the same month, a group of workers held a protest outside the annual investors meeting at Walmart headquarters in Arkansas.

Not surprisingly, Walmart responded to these actions by retaliating severely against workers who become known to the company as OURW members. OURW’s Facebook page is rife with tales of woe from workers who have been fired for speaking up, or have seen their colleagues face the same fate. Retaliation against workers who take collective action



Black Friday protest signs

Reuters



A Black Friday protest in the suburbs of Washington, DC drew a sizeable crowd

against their employer is illegal under federal law, but that has never stopped Walmart. Not surprisingly, the Obama administration has so far done nothing to protect Walmart workers from such mistreatment.

Winter Is Coming: Black Friday

Building on these actions, OUR Walmart decided to undertake a major gamble: shutting down Walmart stores nationwide, through a combined walkout and supporting consumer boycott, on the Friday after Thanksgiving – the biggest consumer shopping day of the year in the US, commonly known as Black Friday.

This was an ambitious and unprecedented effort. There are roughly 4,000 Walmart stores in the US. No union could send an organizing team to all of them at once. Instead, UFCW and OURW counted on the workers themselves to organize and lead the strikes. Using Facebook, Twitter, and the Internet, OURW publicized its intended actions widely; recruited workers to participate; and solicited community support. It even “crowd-sourced” its strike fund, asking supporters to “sponsor” striking workers by contributing to the purchase of grocery store gift cards for Walmart workers who stayed off the job on

Black Friday. Organizations ranging from various offshoots of the Occupy movement to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference signed on to support the effort.

The company responded with “an aggressive campaign by the company to discourage workers from striking, including mandatory ‘captive audience’ meetings, alleged threats, and public declarations that the strikes aren’t legal and strikers could face ‘consequences.’ ”[30] It also made an unsuccessful last-minute move to get the NLRB to issue an injunction against the actions,[31] and tried to bribe employees to show up for their shifts by offering them special discounts. [32] In addition, “Walmart spokesman David Tovar ... warned on CBS Evening News of the possible consequences for employees walking off their scheduled shifts. ‘If associates are scheduled to work on Black Friday, we expect them to show up and to do their job. And if they don’t, depending on the circumstances, there could be consequences,’ he said.”[33] OURW promptly complained to the NLRB (also unsuccessfully, so far) that this constituted an illegal threat to retaliate against workers for participating in concerted employee action.[34]

The Black Friday job actions actually began

on Thanksgiving Day, thanks to decisions by Walmart, Target, and other major retailers to get a jump on the Black Friday consumer binge by starting their sale events on Thursday evening. The earliest strike may have been in Miami, Florida, where thirty workers from three area stores joined over 100 supporters for a Thanksgiving evening rally at around 7:30pm.[35]

During the course of the day on Friday, protestors conducted Occupy-style “mic checks” and “flash mobs” inside an undetermined number of Walmart stores. The protestors in Secaucus, New Jersey and San Leandro, California were accompanied by brass

marching bands. However, although at times entertaining, the Black Friday actions generally were not even remotely militant, with the exception of a sit-down protest that briefly blocked a street in Paramount, a suburb of Los Angeles, resulting in nine arrests. Workers did not try to block entrances or bar shoppers from entering the stores. In fact, representatives of OURW and the unions actively discouraged protestors from even approaching customers to try to persuade them to shop elsewhere.

Even the work stoppage itself took the weakest and most individualistic possible form. Individual workers were free to choose whether or not to participate, and those who stayed off



**This may look like a picket line, but it is not.
Workers and customers were free to enter the store unimpeded.**

the job to protest did not even pretend to form anything more than informational picket lines, and did not make any effort whatsoever to prevent their colleagues from going to work. Thus, whatever OURW's Black Friday actions may have been, they *were not strikes*, even under the most stretched interpretation of the word. OURW is flat out lying to the workers when it uses the term "strike" to describe these protests. This is the same lie told by the Occupy movement on November 2, 2011, when it used the term "General Strike" to describe what was actually nothing more than a large demonstration by workers who took a vacation day or called in sick. Workers should know the truth about what it takes to conduct a real strike and make it effective: serious picket lines that mean *don't cross!*

At the end of the day, OURW was not sure exactly how many actions had taken place, explaining that it "had commitments from employees and community supporters to stage some type of action at more than 1,000 stores," but that it would "take some time to know exactly what's happening" because of the "open-source" nature of the strike. Reports indicated, however, that there had been at least 1,000 job actions, ranging across 46 states and varying in size from only a few workers to over a thousand people. OURW acknowledged that many of the protestors were community supporters rather than actual Walmart workers. Walmart said it was only aware of "a few dozen" protests, which it claimed had not affected sales or staff absences.[36]

Analysis

In the aftermath, OURW was at pains to make clear that its Black Friday campaign was only the beginning, not the climax, of its efforts to change Walmart's employment practices. We hope OURW is correct that workers will be emboldened by seeing their colleagues summon the courage to protest, and enjoy the support of the community for doing so. But the Black Friday campaign is likely to generate as much or more anti-worker retaliation than results, and OURW has not revealed any plan to support workers who may fall victim to the suppression of worker dissent for which Walmart is notorious.

And, of course, Walmart itself is not the end of the story. Walmart may be the largest and most aggressive of the big box retailers, but it is still just one among many. Large chain retailers industry-wide have taken advantage of employer-friendly labor laws and the passivity and cowardice of the established union bureaucracies to engage in a "race to the bottom" where wages and benefits are concerned.[37]

There is no way that workers can win without taking on the entire industry. To do so – or even to take any meaningful action against one employer – workers must be prepared to take far more militant collective action than OURW has so far been willing to sponsor. Workers' struggles are not won with public relations campaigns, Facebook pages, and flash mobs. Workers' struggles can only be won through massive, extended, militant strike activity that forces the employer to capitulate by *shutting down the employer's business* until the workers' demands are met.

Conclusion

The CTU strike and the OURW/WWU effort have elements in common, which have some potential to contribute to re-energizing the US labor movement. Both the CTU, and to an even greater extent OURW and WWU, emphasized *empowering individual workers* to take initiative and leadership, instead of relying exclusively on top-down organizing led by a small cadre of bureaucrats. This is important. Workers cannot and will not commit their energy and talent to the tasks facing them as a class unless and until they understand the need for *collective* struggle, and play an active role in planning and carrying out labor actions.

Still, as is shown by the defeat of the CTU strike and the failure of the Walmart effort to accomplish any change in the company's behavior and attitude, more emphasis on worker empowerment and community support are not enough to carry any working class struggle to victory. Our view of the next steps needed is set out in the flyer we distributed at Walmart Black Friday actions in the San Francisco Bay Area, the text of which is reprinted on the next two pages of *International Trotskyist*.

For an Indefinite Strike to Unionize Walmart and Shut It Down!

We all know that Walmart mistreats and exploits its retail “associates,” along with the workers in its supply and distribution chain. And so far, Walmart has gotten away with that, by using every trick in the book (including shutting down stores) to prevent its workers from joining a union. But asking for “respect” and a “fair wage” will do nothing to change the labor practices of this huge employer. Walmart’s entire business model is built around cutting costs to the bone. Keeping workers’ salaries and benefits as low as possible is an essential part of this strategy, and the company will not give that up easily.

Corporations like Walmart should not have free rein to accumulate wealth and power. A successful struggle against Walmart would not just benefit Walmart workers. It could start to reverse the downward slide of US workers’ wages and benefits that has been happening steadily since the 1970s. We workers need to remember that there is one thing we have that the corporate bosses still need from us: our labor. The most effective weapon we have in our struggle for a better standard of living is our ability to refuse to allow big business to profit from our labor—that is, **to go on strike**.

By building for today’s Black Friday strike, the rank-and-file workers of OUR Walmart and Warehouse Workers United have taken a small step toward changing things for the better. Many brave retail and warehouse workers have stuck their necks out to walk off the job in the last few months, and to organize their coworkers to join them on Black Friday. These workers deserve our praise and our wholehearted support.

Unfortunately, today’s action is more likely to bring retaliation against the main organizers than it is to bring any real change in Walmart’s practices. The organizers of OUR Walmart will tell you—correctly—that retaliation against workers for concerted labor action is illegal, even when the workers do not have a union. But if only some of the workers strike, and they stay out only for a day or two, Walmart can and will fire them no matter what the law says. The company will then tie the fired workers up in legal proceedings for months or years before they get back their jobs and lost income—if that ever happens. Meanwhile, the promise of possible future victory in an illegal retaliation claim will not put food on the table or pay the rent.

How to Win the Struggle

The only way to stop Walmart from retaliating against strikers, and win the struggle for decent wages and working conditions, is to build for and then carry out an indefinite, company-wide strike by the entire Walmart workforce nationwide. The strike must be backed up by militant picket lines in front of every store, so that Walmart’s entire business grinds to a halt nationwide. The strike must also have massive community support, so that the striking workers and their families do not have to bear the brunt of the struggle alone. This means more than just moral support and cheering at public rallies. It means food banks, day care centers, housing support, and **solidarity strikes**. **The full resources of organized labor must be brought to bear on Walmart**, in order to make an example of it by forcing it to pay workers a living wage, provide health care and other benefits, and guarantee full time employment to workers who want it.

In other words, in order to win, we need a **massive, indefinite strike**, supported by workers in all unions (as well as unorganized and unemployed workers) who join together to defend and assist the strikers. The Walmart bosses will fight back by getting an injunction and sending cops to break up the picket lines. The corporate establishment will also attack solidarity strikes using the bosses’ repressive anti-labor laws, such as Taft-Hartley, which are designed to keep workers from taking collective action across union lines.

To prepare for that, we need to mobilize union workers, alongside militants from the oppressed Black and Latino communities, to form disciplined, armed defense guards against attacks on strikers by cops, scabs, and other agents of the bosses. Massive mobilizations of organized and unorganized workers, together union supporters among students and unemployed youth, have the collective power to defend a strike, and to defy and **smash** Taft-Hartley and all other anti-union laws.

- **Start now to build for an indefinite, nationwide strike of all Walmart workers** to force Walmart to pay union wages and benefits, and to provide full-time work under decent conditions!
- **For massive solidarity strikes** to defend the right of Walmart workers to organize!
- **For workers’ defense guards** drawn from labor and the Black and Latino communities to protect picket lines and defend the strikers and the communities against police attack!

Building for a General Strike

Ultimately, to change the way things are run in this country, we need to change the system altogether. The first step in that direction is to build a nationwide movement for an **indefinite general strike**—a walkout by all workers, in all occupations and workplaces, that does not end until its demands are met. Such a movement can only

be built by rank-and-file union militants and their allies in the Black and Brown community. It could start with local and/or short-term general strikes, but with the goal of building toward an indefinite nationwide general strike.

There have been no real general strikes in the United States since 1946. Why? Since the end of World War II, the leaders of our unions have become more and more cowardly and obedient to big business. Instead of organizing workers to defend themselves through mass action, they count on Democratic Party politicians and the bosses' court system. The unions that helped start OUR Walmart and WWU are no exception. They are using creative and novel organizing tactics, but their demand for "respect" is weak, vague, and limited. And when Walmart strikes back, they have no plan to defend us beyond counting on the bosses' legal system.

Attacks on workers have intensified in the face of the economic crisis, but the union tops are trying to put a lid on our militancy. The Chicago Teachers' Union folded their strike after only a week. When Wisconsin's workers tried to fight back against their governor's union-busting by occupying the state capitol in the spring of 2011, the union leadership told them to "put down the placards and pick up the clipboards" for a Democratic Party sponsored recall campaign. This is a dead-end strategy that leaves resolution of the crisis in the hands of the bosses' institutions and the politicians in the capitalists' twin puppet parties.

The Democrats could not even deliver the Employee Free Choice Act, and have not hesitated to join in the current wave of attacks on public workers. **Reliance on the Democratic Party is not the answer. We need to build militant rank-and-file caucuses in every union** to defy this passivity and rebuild our unions as fighting organs of class struggle, so that we can create a nationwide general strike movement rooted in popular/worker/labor assemblies.

Class conscious vanguard workers must build unity between labor and the oppressed! To protect our class and our communities against attack by the corporate state and its brutal thugs—the police, the ICE, and the quasi-fascist militias—we need to **form labor/black/brown self-defense guards**: a trained, armed, disciplined force we can count on to be on our side.

We must unite rank-and-file workers across unions to build militant caucuses with a leadership that is not afraid to defy and SMASH Taft-Hartley!

We need to fight for:

- **Jobs for everyone! Full employment at prevailing union rates for all** who are willing and able to work! When there is not enough work, the available work should be shared at 30 hours work for 40 hours pay.
- **No layoffs! No concessions!** When the bosses lay off workers or demand we "share the pain," workers should go on strike and occupy their workplaces. If the bosses try to close down the business, workers should take it over and run it under their own control.
- **No reliance on the bosses' courts for justice!** Form workers' tribunals to arrest and try racist killer cops and vigilante thugs!
- **Quality free universal health care** at no charge from prenatal to the grave, under workers' control!
- **End attacks on undocumented workers!** The demand for "full citizenship rights for all immigrant workers and their families" unites the most oppressed workers with the rest of the class. End the ICE (La Migra) raids! Free all detained undocumented workers! Full employment rights for all workers! Let workers choose where to work by demanding that all workers who do the same work get the same contract, same wages, and same working conditions, regardless of country!
- **Free all political prisoners!** Free Mumia Abu-Jamal, Leonard Peltier, Lynne Stewart, and Bradley Manning! Destroy the prison-industrial complex that is used to enslave Black and Brown youth!
- **Nationalize all failing industries under workers' control and without compensation!** Nationalize finance capital, the big banks, and all major corporations, and run them under the control of democratic workers' assemblies.
- **Overthrow capitalism!** Build a workers' party democratically led by rank-and-file workers and the Black and Brown communities, and institute a workers' government to organize production for human needs, not profit!

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(Continued on page 48)

On the 2012 Split in HWRS: Politics and Method

Editor's Note: As we announced on our website in July, HWRS suffered a split in the late spring of 2012. Our former international partners in the Liaison Committee—that is, the CWG of New Zealand (CWG-NZ) and the RWG of Zimbabwe—chose to break their affiliation with HWRS, and remain with the faction that split, which has taken the name Communist Workers Group (US) (CWG-US). We are reprinting here an analysis, previously published on our website, of the political differences underlying the split by Comrade DW of HWRS. This is followed by a second document that has not been previously published: our final letter to the CWG-NZ critiquing their decision to affiliate with what is now the CWG-US, which we sent to them in mid-September 2012. As this issue of *International Trotskyist* goes to press in late November, we have not yet received any response to that letter. For other documents regarding the split, please click [>HERE<](#) .

On the Political Differences Underlying the HWRS Split *Analysis by DW, July 4, 2012*

Since the June 2012 split in HWRS, our organization has been the target of accusations that the split was unprincipled because it was about tactical issues, i.e., about giving critical support to Syriza in the June 2012 Greek elections. In answer to these accusations, we ask comrades to remember that the split was not our choice. We wanted to resolve the differences with CR and DC through serious political discussions. The medium of the pre-Congress discussions that were in progress at the time would have been a perfect way to hammer out the differences and avoid a premature split.

But comrades CR and DC wanted to split without any discussion at all. They ignored the HWRS members's pleas to engage in a substantive political discussion of the issues. Instead, they resorted to bureaucratic maneuvers such as unilaterally declaring DW to be an "outsider," refusing to meet with him, and threatening the members with expulsion if they continued to hold political discussions with him. Eventually, the membership told CR and DC that their high-handedness would not be tolerated any further, stating that "in light of the recent actions of the members of the EC,

... we no longer recognize these individuals as members of HWRS, and will not so recognize them unless and until they agree to engage in a substantive political discussion with the organization, in a good faith effort to resolve the political differences." CR and DC refused this invitation, and since then, have essentially declared themselves to be an external faction of HWRS called HWRS(EC).

Thus, the conclusion that the majority of HWRS split immaturely over tactical differences is unfair. CR and DC deserted the organization before the discussion had begun. What more could the majority have done to stop this premature split from occurring?

If the only difference between the EC and the majority had been about giving critical support to Syriza, this would have been a premature split, because by itself, giving critical support to Social Democracy is only a tactical issue. This remains the case even when giving critical support to a *particular* Social Democratic formation is a right deviation. Yet when examining the political issues underlying the split, one cannot view them in isolation. If the rest of the differences also involve right deviations on the part of the EC, a consistent

picture of right deviationism begins to emerge, and the difference on Syriza can then be viewed as part of a political pattern. In this way, the tactical difference is recast as a symptom of underlying principled differences, in which the Greek question is only one link in the chain.

Work in the unions

One of the HWRS majority's principal differences with DC and CR involves how to do work in the unions. Is this an irreconcilable principled difference? The answer is yes. The EC, under the leadership of CR, made fundamental errors on the union question.

The first error was the choice of CR to enter into an opportunistic electoral slate of candidates for union office who opposed the bureaucracy in CR's union, CAPS (California Association of Professional Scientists), without first discussing with the membership the political views of the other slate candidates. CR presented his participation in the slate to HWRS's members as a *fait accompli*. In so doing, CR avoided any discussion regarding whether it is politically principled to run for union office as part of a slate that includes workers who are not anti-capitalist, and support a bourgeois imperialist party such as the Democratic Party. One of the candidates on CR's slate in CAPS publicly announced, in his candidate statement for the union election, that he *supported* anti-union positions taken by Democratic Party politicians. Later, the same person expressed openly anti-communist political views. (For more details, see HWRS' letter to the Liaison Committee dated June 25, 2012.)

How did a member of our organization end up sharing a union slate with an open Democrat and anti-communist? Under CR's leadership, HWRS had lapsed into a Menshevik mode of functioning in which members were allowed to do whatever political work they wanted, without first holding a democratic discussion with the membership. This, by itself, is a sign of an underlying irreconcilable difference of principle. It expresses CR's desire for an organization in which he was not subject to any discipline of the majority. In essence, therefore, it is about the same difference that Lenin had with

Mensheviks regarding whether a members are subject to the discipline of the Party (Bolshevism), or can do what they like without caring whether the majority agrees (Menshevism).

The other side of the coin with regard to this undemocratic functioning came to light after the HWRS majority began to criticize the opportunistic aspects of his work in the union. When challenged on his unilateral decisions with regard to his union work, CR reverted to a Stalinist-like effort to impose a top-down, repressive regime on HWRS's internal life. CR's bureaucratic behavior in this regard is dialectically connected to the difference between Bolshevism and Menshevism. As we know, before Lenin's return to Russia in April 1917, the majority in the Bolshevik Party capitulated to Menshevism. Many of these capitulating Bolsheviks later became part of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Ultimately, then, the dispute is about what kind of party we need to build; it is about the struggle of Lenin for a democratic centralist party. Under true democratic centralism, the members cannot simply do what they like to do—because this is not the proletarian way but the way of the petty bourgeois—but at the same time, the leadership is accountable to the membership, and cannot unilaterally change the party's substantive political positions without an open, democratic discussion. In the end, therefore, these aspects of the political differences underlying the split reflect CR's deep-seated petty bourgeois and individualist method of functioning—that is, his Menshevism.

Joint caucuses and slates with pro-capitalist workers

Communists cannot build a caucus with workers who, while they support internal union democracy, at the same time support a ruling class party whose politicians carry out anti-union policies. It is a matter of principle not to build such a caucus. Yet CR and DC, his cohort on the EC, stated clearly again and again in their documents on the CAPS work and on Contacts (available on HWRS's website) that it is not only permissible, but important to join and build union caucuses with Democratic

Party supporters. The EC apparently believes that it is acceptable for a communist to run for union office on a slate with an avowed anti-communist, based solely on a shared viewpoint in favor of democracy within the union.

Comrades should know what this political method in the unions brings at the end. An example of this is Arnold Miller, who in the 1970s ran as a “democratic and anti bureaucratic” candidate in the UMW (miners’ union). It turned out that after being elected, Miller became a typical bureaucrat who betrayed the miners. Miller’s betrayals in several rounds of contract negotiations started the decline of a demoralized union.

It is just as much a principle not to run a slate in the unions with supporters of the Democratic Party as it is not to support the Democratic Party in the general elections. There are great differences between public elections in a bourgeois democracy and internal elections in unions, which are workers’ organizations. Nonetheless, just as a Democratic Party politician attacks the working class after getting elected with union support, a pro-Democratic Party union member who runs as a “rank-and-file candidate” (such as Miller) transforms into a bureaucrat once in office, and betrays the workers. In both cases, the workers’ support for a Democrat reflects their illusions in a party of the capitalist class—illusions that communists should combat, not accommodate.

HWRs has always had a principled difference with the American SWP on this question. The SWP supports pro-capitalist union candidates who promise democratic reforms if elected to union office. The SWP supported Miller, for example. During the period that led up to the split in HWRs, the EC consisted of two members who cut their political teeth in the SWP. These comrades, CR and DC, apparently have never broken with the SWP’s politics regarding work in the unions. They implemented the SWP’s politics in connection with CR’s work in CAPS. Then, when they got caught, they implemented the other side of the SWP’s politics: the ruthless bureaucratic regime of Jack Barnes.

Suing the union in the bosses’ courts

Another principled difference on the union question between the former EC members and the HWRs majority was whether it is acceptable to resort to the bosses’ courts when challenging undemocratic actions by the union bureaucracy. When communists join with pro-capitalist workers in a union caucus, they are under heavy pressure to make use of the courts in their struggles against the presiding bureaucrats. But appealing to the bosses’ courts creates or reinforces the workers’ illusions that they can rely on the mechanisms of bourgeois democracy to protect their rights.

These illusions arise because under certain conditions, the courts sometimes take actions that support the struggles of rank-and-file union members. What communists must make clear to the workers, however, is that this will inevitably change when the class struggle intensifies. During critical periods of intense class struggle, the bosses will rely on the courts to bust the unions or to control them through injunctions and similar measures. This is why it is a principled question not to go to the bosses’ courts to resolve the internal affairs in the unions.

In CR’s case, when CAPS refused to hold membership meetings in violation of its own bylaws, and again after CR and his pro-Democratic supporter were expelled from their union after losing the election, they complained to the California Public Employee Relations Board (PERB). PERB, like the federal NLRB, is an administrative body, not a court, but it plays essentially the same role in the bosses’ system for controlling the unions. Thus, it is wrong to ask PERB or similar bodies to resolve disputes within the unions. By doing so, we are encouraging the bosses to intervene in internal union affairs.

CR attempted to justify his actions by arguing that CAPS is not really a true union, because its affairs are managed by a private, profit-making corporation. Nonetheless, CR should not have resorted to the bosses’ mechanisms for resolving disputes involving workers’ organizations. As we explained above, going to a body like PERB, just like going to a court, promotes the illusion that the bosses’ dispute resolution mechanisms have a

legitimate role to play in the internal affairs of workers' organizations.

This kind of opportunism is also a workerist deviation. By this we mean that CR capitulated to the backward consciousness of the workers in American unions, and in particular to the consciousness of the relatively privileged workers (the so-called labor aristocracy) who belong to CAPS and its sibling union, PEGC (Professional Engineers in California Government), which is managed by the same private corporation. The members of these two unions represent the cream of the labor aristocracy: government-employed scientists and engineers. These workers identify as "professionals," not as members of the working class, and tend to have even more illusions in the system than other workers. When the class struggle ebbs, aristocratic workers' consciousness reflects the infiltration of the ideology of capitalism into the working class. This puts enormous pressure on revolutionaries who work with these workers. In the last analysis, CR capitulated to the backward consciousness of the labor aristocracy. Hence his fundamental error regarding the appropriate method for revolutionary work in the unions.

Other differences: electoral support, gangs, and united front work

We will explain only briefly the rest of the deep-rooted political differences between the HWRS majority and CR that ultimately led to the split. As will be seen, there is a consistent political thread connecting the previous differences with those that arose during the 2012 pre-Congress discussion. In the end, the split was caused by the trajectory of CR's faction toward right-wing centrism.

HWRS began functioning as an organization in late 2008. Around that time, CR argued unsuccessfully that HWRS should give critical electoral support to the Peace and Freedom Party (PFP). The PFP is a petty-bourgeois party based primarily on white "progressives" in California, most of whom would vote for the Democratic Party, or run for office as Democrats, if the PFP were not an option. The PFP has no support in the working class, and is far from being a workers' party. It amounts to a

bloc, primarily electoral in nature, among reformist, social democratic, and right centrist organizations. It exists mostly to give petty-bourgeois "progressives" the option to cast a protest vote against Democratic candidates who are too far right for their taste.

In June 2009, HWRS published an article entitled "The Problem of Critical Support for Bourgeois Workers' Parties (available on the HWRS website), which laid out the HWRS method on that issue. The discussion in that article makes clear that it would be wrong to give the PFP critical support, even if there is some socialist-appearing content in the PFP's program, because the PFP is not based on the working class, and the working class does not have illusions in it. Real workers basically ignore it, and thus there is nothing to expose. CR's position on critical support for PFP was at odds with the HWRS method, as set forth in the article. His later position favoring critical support for Syriza expressed a similar deviation to the right.

The second longstanding difference between CR and the HWRS majority emerged in 2010, during a dispute on how revolutionaries should relate to gangs in the Black communities. CR was a one-comrade minority in this discussion. CR's position was to call for defense guards in the Black community to fight against the gangs. In defense of his position, CR wrote that "Workers self defense guards will find themselves locked in battle to the death with the gangsters and mafia of all continents."

One problem with CR's position is that such a "battle to the death" would do nothing but cause terrible bloodshed in communities that are already suffering deeply from the violence brought on by poverty and oppression. Many more workers and youth would die, and the gangs, which are disciplined and well-armed, would not be weakened. Worse, the police would use the battles between the defense guards and the gangs as an excuse for an increased presence in the communities, leading to an increase police brutality and repression. Thus, CR's position is not just wrong, but basically reactionary. This is why the difference with CR on gangs is an important principled difference.

During the argument with CR on this issue, a comrade from the majority explained HWRS's alternative position this way: "The consciousness of the workers in the oppressed community is decisive if we want to elaborate demands and a program that is a bridge between the present day consciousness and the full revolutionary program. Instead of denouncing all the gangs, we need to create a bridge to the youth and workers in the gangs because we know that when the working class will rise and fight they will join the revolution not the counterrevolution. History shows this clearly."

We know this to be true. When the Rodney King rebellion took place, many members of the Bloods and the Crips, the two leading Black gangs in Los Angeles, abandoned the fight between their gangs and joined the rebellion against police brutality. It is true that the truce between the Bloods and the Crips was in the end only temporary. But in the absence of a revolutionary leadership during the rebellion, the truce could only be temporary. It was the same for the rebellion as a whole: due to the lack of a revolutionary leadership, the community's resistance dissipated, and police brutality returned to the community. But the lesson is still clear: gang members are keenly aware of police repression in their communities, and this consciousness provides an opening to enlist them in the workers' struggle against the state.

The conduct of CR and DC after they deserted HWRS also illuminates the principled differences that led to their departure. Since abandoning HWRS, they have started calling themselves "HWRS(EC)" (a name obviously intended to perpetuate confusion between the two organizations). It is clear to us that HWRS (EC) is a centrist grouplet. In typical centrist fashion, it is already zigzagging between opportunism and a sectarianism, based on the subjectivity of the individuals involved rather than objective reality and the needs of the workers and the oppressed.

Shortly before the split, HWRS became involved in a coalition supporting Denika Chatman, the mother of Kenneth Harding Jr., a young Black man killed by San Francisco police in 2011 for not paying his fare on Muni,

San Francisco's public transit. Ms. Chatman is trying to build a workers' action against Muni to commemorate the anniversary of her son's death and raise public consciousness about police killings. The coalition working with her, in which HWRS and CR are both still participating, is called the Ad Hoc Committee For a MUNI Shut Down on July 16 (AHC).

At a post-split meeting of the AHC to plan the action that will take place in San Francisco on July 16, CR demanded that the coalition adopt his entire two-sided flyer containing a laundry list of demands, including ones related to university students, budget cuts, and other areas not related directly to the action at hand. CR's proposed flyer may have been a good piece of anti-capitalist propaganda, but his request that it be accepted in its entirety, including its long laundry list of demands, was the method of a subjective sectarian who does not take into account the present consciousness of the workers.

What appears to have motivated CR to adopt this tactic was the subjectivity of the centrist who is more concerned with proving that his opponent is wrong than with employing the objectively correct tactics for a given situation. By promoting his laundry list flyer, CR sought to "expose" his opponent (HWRS) as "opportunist" based on HWRS's advocacy of a more limited set of demands. But the purpose of the AHC is to build a united front action by Muni workers and the black community against police brutality. Such a united front action does not need to, and should not, adopt most of the Transitional Program. Rather, it needs to focus on concrete proposals such as the need to build Labor, Black and Brown defense guards against the cops, and on the link between that and the need to build for an indefinite political general strike movement. Developing such a united front is by itself a revolutionary achievement. Demanding the arming of the unions and the oppressed communities against the police can only challenge the entire capitalist system, and raises the question who is in control of the state.

Insisting on a laundry list of demands when attempting to start such a united front is sectarian. All the people at the meeting,

including Ms. Chatman, rejected CR's draft flyer with its laundry list of demands. Instead, the meeting accepted HWRS's points of unity for this specific action, and adopted a flyer with this language: "Organize Working Class, Black and Brown Defense Guards Against Police Brutality; Labor, Black and Brown—Drive the Cops Out of Town; Down with 'Stop and Frisk'; Down with Union-Busting Prop. G; Free MUNI For All Youth; Build a Movement for an Indefinite General Strike, Against the Attacks on the Unions and the Brown and Black Communities."

These are concrete demands for a specific action based on the need to create a bridge between the present consciousness of the masses (and in particular the consciousness of the oppressed communities and the labor movement) and the need to overthrow capitalism. This is how the transitional program's method is implemented under concrete conditions. Against this revolutionary program and method, CR presented the abstract sectarian method of trying to impose a laundry list program on a united front built around a specific action.

Conclusion

In this document, we have showed how the differences between CR and DC and the HWRS majority are about principles not just tactics. But even more importantly, we have explained how the different elements of CR and DC's differences with the HWRS majority, when taken as a whole, add up to paint a picture of political centrism. By centrism, we mean that CR and DC oscillate between reformism and revolutionary Marxism, and correspondingly zigzag between opportunism and sectarianism.

The conduct of CR and DC presents an example of how centrists abandon principles of revolutionary Marxists under the alien pressure of the ruling class. This pressure resulted in the compromises typical of centrism. The centrist method, which we counterpose to the Marxist method, is the method of the petty bourgeois who occupy the middle social ground between the proletariat and the capitalists, and, correspondingly, the middle political ground between revolutionary Marxism and reformism. This fundamental difference of method exemplifies the principled differences that separate HWRS from its ex-comrades, CR and DC.

Letter to the Liaison Committee *September 15, 2012*

To our former Liaison Committee comrades in the CWG-NZ:

We are writing in response to the letter to HWRS, signed by your comrades DB and AS, which we received on July 8. We are in fundamental disagreement with your view that the split in HWRS was unnecessary. You acknowledged in your letter that you were not in possession, at the time you wrote the letter, of all of the documents and correspondence leading up to the split. What you *failed* to acknowledge, but your letter makes clear, is that you have accepted everything former HWRS comrades CR and DC have told you in regard to the split as absolute fact, while giving the statements of the HWRS majority no

credence whatsoever, and making no effort to investigate the other side of the story. As a result, the view of the split articulated in your July 8 letter reflects a one-sided, subjective perspective. This approach is not worthy of anyone who calls themselves a Marxist and a dialectical materialist.

The CWG-NZ did not exchange a single email with the HWRS membership during the factional fight. Your comrade DB attempted to write us seriously only once, on June 27. In that email, DB told DW to "rest assured we are not splitting from HWRS," and promised that the CWG-NZ would "play a responsible role in trying to understand why things are falling apart at this point." It is now apparent, based

on your July 8 letter, that the CWG-NZ has not lived up to its word in either respect.

Your July 8 letter ends with the statement that “the HWRS factions need to get back around a table with at least comradely respect,” followed by the threat that “failure to take this step will mean CWG[-NZ] ending its relations in the Liaison Committee with the ‘majority’ faction.” But as DB knew full well before this letter was written, the CR-DC faction (then the EC, now the CWG-USA) consistently refused to talk to the HWRS majority *at all* (much less with “comradely respect”) during the factional fight. Rather, CR and DC imposed draconian preconditions on their willingness to engage in any such discussions—conditions that could only have been set by self-appointed bureaucrats acting in accordance with the Stalinist tradition. That is, they insisted that before they would engage in any political discussion, (1) DW had to withdraw his accusation of slander against them, not merely pending the Congress (as he offered to do), but permanently and in total; and (2) SH and CD (the two HWRS members whose legitimacy CR and DC recognized) had to “dissociate” themselves from the charge.

The CWG-NZ has been well aware, all along, that CR and DC imposed these preconditions for discussions, thereby avoiding having to appear before the HWRS membership to defend their actions. Despite this, the CWG-NZ threatened to split with HWRS if its members did not enter into discussions with CR and DC, and has by now obviously done so. This course of conduct makes the CWG-NZ, in effect, an accomplice after the fact to CR and DC’s unacceptable and bureaucratic behavior.

Your July 8 letter also falls short of objectivity in that it fails even to note, much less criticize, the fact that CR and DC threatened HWRS members SH and CD with expulsion if they continued to engage in political discussions with DW. CR and DC based this threat on their position (as stated in an email from CR on June 14) that “it is not outside the EC’s authority to direct full members not to meet for political discussions with non-members who launch attacks on the organization[’s] leadership.” The CWG-NZ’s

July 8 letter accepts CR and DC’s position on this point without question, even though the EC’s self-conferred “authority” had no legitimate basis either in HWRS’s internal tradition or in general Leninist principles, and their characterization of DW as a “non-member” who had “launched an attack” on the leadership flies in the face of the facts.

In this regard, we note that while DW did send an email resigning from the organization in February 2012, he implicitly retracted that resignation by returning to participation in the organization later in the spring, to the extent his health permitted. Neither CR nor DC raised any objection to his doing so. On April 29, DW submitted a document for pre-Congress discussion. Again, CR and DC accepted this, never claiming that DW was an “outsider” who was not entitled to participate in the pre-Congress discussion. Instead, in mid-May, CR and DC submitted responses to DW’s document, and although these responses were sharply critical of DW, they never intimated that he was not a member of HWRS. Indeed, the first time CR and DC took the position that DW was an “outsider” vis-a-vis HWRS was on June 8, after they received the June 4 letter criticizing them for their bureaucratic behavior.

Thus, the CWG-NZ’s July 8 letter distorts the facts when it opines that DW’s submission of a pre-Congress document merely “indicate[d] that he was planning to return to membership” rather than constituting an act taken *as a member*. In any event, do the CWG-NZ comrades really believe it is legitimate to suddenly characterize a comrade as a “non-member” and “outsider,” and threaten to expel members for discussing politics with that comrade, when the comrade in question not only helped found the organization and was for a long time its acknowledged political leader, but also had recently submitted a document for pre-Congress discussion without drawing any objection from anyone based on his ostensible “outsider” status?

Your July 8 letter also implies that in opposing CR and DC’s release of a statement calling for critical support for Syriza, and in accusing them of behaving undemocratically in the course of producing that statement, DW acted entirely alone. In fact, as the CWG-NZ is

well aware, DW was joined in these actions by three other people—SH and CD (the two full HWRS members acknowledged as such by CR and DC), and EB, a former full member temporarily functioning as a sympathizer while on a leave of absence. More importantly, nowhere does the CWG-NZ's July 8 letter even acknowledge the possibility that these four comrades' accusation of bureaucratic behavior on the part of CR and DC in this regard was *valid*. Nor does it come to grips with the uncontroverted facts supporting the accusation that CR and DC acted improperly with regard to the Syriza article. These facts were set forth in the HWRS majority's June 4 letter to CR and DC, which, far from being an individual project of DW's, was written by SH after a group discussion, and was signed by CD and EB as well as DW.

The most basic requirement for anyone assessing a dispute who wants to even pretend to be unbiased and objective is that they must talk to both sides, not just one. Yet the comrades of the CWG-NZ have not asked a single member of HWRS a single question about the factional fight. If the CWG-NZ wished to be—or at least to appear—objective, it was obligated to investigate and find out what the rest of the HWRS membership had to say, instead of relying on the lies or half-truths that CR manufactured, but never had the guts to appear before HWRS's membership to defend.

For example, in the CWG-NZ's July 8 letter, they claim that CR's "reference to alienation as an explanation for the group[']s dysfunction" was "not a personal attack on DW," but instead an identification of a "problem all members shared ... as they had put up with DW's egoism for years and were therefore alienated co-dependents." Had the CWG-NZ asked the other HWRS members for their views on this point, they would have discovered that *not one of them* viewed themselves as "alienated co-dependents," or agreed with CR that DW had dominated HWRS in an egoistic manner. Instead, the CWG-NZ has accepted without question CR and DC's view that DW launched a political attack on them as a way of avoiding responsibility for his own alienated behavior.

Similarly, had the CWG-NZ conducted an objective investigation instead of blindly accepting CR and DC's views, they would have learned that *not one HWRS comrade* agrees with CR and DC's accusation that "DW dominated his partner SH and held back her development as a full member." They would also have learned that on June 9, SH submitted to everyone in HWRS a document entitled "On the Crisis in HWRS" which included her own refutation of that accusation.

In her June 9 document, SH wrote that CR's "Objective Necessity" document "was entirely inaccurate in attributing my focus on the logistics of party work to some supposed interference by DW with my political development, or unhealthy dynamic in our relationship. In fact, DW has consistently (though largely unsuccessfully) pressed me to develop politically and theoretically, and to become more involved in the substantive work of the organization. My focus on technical and administrative tasks ... has to do with the fact that there is a certain irreducible minimum of such work to be done, and I am usually the comrade best suited to carry it out, and sometimes the only comrade with the necessary skills to do so. ... [Thus,] most of my available time for political work ends up being devoted to logistical matters such as English editing, layout of flyers and publications, and website maintenance."

In addition, the CWG-NZ has not troubled itself to learn—and apparently has not been informed by CR or DC—that in the same June 9 document, SH urged everyone in the organization to "stop this nonsense and focus on what really matters." She went on to say: "It is ... imperative that we put our personal and interpersonal baggage aside, speak and listen to one another **in a comradely fashion and with open minds**. We do not need a further exchange of accusations and threats. We do not need to let our emotional reactions get in the way of our objectivity. What we do need is a **political discussion**, undertaken in good faith, about what is the best way to move the organization forward so that it can continue to make a meaningful contribution to the fight against capitalism and alienation." If the comrades of the CWG-NZ had bothered to investigate the

facts in a truly objective fashion, by communicating with the other HWRS members directly, they would have learned about this appeal by SH to her comrades. Would they then still maintain that it is the HWRS majority who bear the *sole* responsibility for the fact that the split occurred without any political discussion about the differences?

In short, after talking to DC and CR for months behind the back of the other HWRS members, DB and the comrades of the CWG-NZ appear to be taking the version of the facts endorsed by CR and DC as undisputable. From these distorted facts, DB and company have constructed an entirely subjective account of the factional fight, displaying zero capacity for objectivity. They have abandoned the basic rule, for discussions among Marxists and dialecticians, that political analysis must be based on objective, verified facts. We all should know that to “play a responsible role in trying to understand” this factional fight, the international leadership of the Liaison Committee in New Zealand would have had to study the facts after talking to *both* sides, rather than parroting without question the absurd claims made by CR and DC.

Moving from the more personal to the more political, we see the same pattern in the CWG-NZ leadership’s unquestioning adoption of CR and DC’s view that DW and the HWRS majority are sectarian abstentionists, and are opposed to involving the organization in mass work in the unions. In fact, neither DW or anyone else in HWRS holds such a position.

HWRS’s actual position is much more dialectical and nuanced. We do not object to mass work in principle. Rather, it is our view that because a tiny group like ourselves cannot do mass work on a regular and consistent basis, our choices about mass work must be made carefully in order to avoid succumbing to opportunism. In other words, the particular circumstances necessary for mass work stand in contradiction with the general development of our party at this stage, and that contradiction must be resolved on an ongoing basis through a conscious and deliberative dialectical analysis of each opportunity for mass work that presents itself.

Our willingness to engage in mass work is demonstrated by the fact that it was HWRS that led the successful shutdown of MUNI in San Francisco on July 16. We carried out this task as a form of exemplary work led by a very small propaganda group. We also gave leadership to other similar actions in the 1990’s. But we know that we cannot do this regularly, and we need to assess each situation carefully before plunging in.

In particular, we need to be very careful about choosing where we do our trade union work. A fake “union” like CAPS would be our last choice in this regard. The danger inherent in having one isolated comrade try to conduct union work in such a backward environment becomes apparent when one analyzes what occurred in the course of CR’s effort to do so.

Because of the dearth of other class struggle oriented workers in CAPS, CR succumbed to the temptation to enter into an unprincipled alliance with reformist Democrats in his union. The other two members of the “slate” with whom CR ran for internal union office are reformists at best, and one is an out-and-out supporter of the Democratic Party. As a result, CR’s slate did not even have a common program. CR’s own individual program was militant and anti-capitalist, but the candidate for treasurer with whom he was allied openly supported the Democratic Party’s union busting measures! In short, CR’s slate combined the programs of two classes, forming a sort of a popular front within the union.

Worse, the other members of HWRS did not find out about this until after the fact. CR did not discuss his slate members’ political platforms with the members of HWRS before or during the election, and although we believe he initially included the treasurer candidate’s electoral statement on his CAPS website, if so, he removed it sometime before the factional fight erupted. **CR has remained completely silent on this issue to date. The CWG-NZ also does not mention it in the July 8 letter.** The only thing that the CWG’s letter says about this, or about the other **political differences** we have identified as underlying the factional fight (beside Syriza), is that they are “minor.” The upshot is that the CWG-NZ has opportunistically evaded criticizing CR’s

alliance with a Democrat in his CAPS campaign by focusing instead on its fantasy that DW deliberately created a fuss about “minor” differences in order to split HWRS.

In criticizing HWRS as “sectarian” for allegedly abstaining from “mass work,” while remaining silent regarding CR’s opportunism in allying himself with a Democratic Party supporter in a union election, the CWG’s method is centrist to the core, and right centrist at that. There is nothing new in this. We have seen this kind of centrism many times in numerous groups that claim to be Trotskyist.

One problem with centrists like DB from the CWG-NZ and CR from the CWG-USA is that they have no idea what kind of work is appropriate to take on at different stages of a party’s growth. They seem to believe that a comrade can do as much “mass work” in an organization of 5 as in one of 500. What they do not appear to grasp is that when a tiny, relatively isolated organization tries to carry out “mass work,” this often results in opportunistic compromises arising from the perceived need, and external pressure, to form alliances with reformists, Democrats, and other non-Communists. This is exemplified by the experience of CR in his work in CAPS, which, as we have shown, ended up becoming unprincipled and opportunistic. Contrast this with the July 16 Muni shutdown led by HWRS and LBB, which was a principled exemplary action. So what right do these disgraced comrades have to criticize HWRS for its supposed “abstention” from mass work?

The CWG-NZ’s July 8 letter also falls short of objectivity when it writes that the difference between the HWRS majority and CR on the issue of gangs (among others) was “no more than would have been normal in any ... group.” In so doing, the CWG-NZ, in characteristic centrist fashion, has opportunistically written off as “minor” the issues identified in DW’s July 4 document on political differences, without actually addressing the principles underlying those differences.

The workers in the oppressed communities, and in particular the young Black comrades in Labor Black and Brown with whom HWRS has been working, would be appalled to learn that the CWG-NZ believes CR’s position on gangs

constitutes a “minor” difference with the position of HWRS. Building defense guards against gangs, as CR advocates, could only result in increasing the internecine bloodshed within the oppressed communities in which the gangs operate. This would give the cops the perfect excuse to enter the community to launch ever more brutal assaults on both the gang members and the defense guards indiscriminately.

In fact, in calling for the formation of workers’ defense guards against gangs, CR has sharply broken with Marxism and Bolshevism. The political underpinning of the concept of unleashing one group against another within the black and brown communities is a reactionary right-wing position of blaming the gang members themselves for their violent reaction to the brutal and oppressive conditions under which capitalism has forced them to live. This is why it is a matter of political principle, not a “minor difference.” **Since HWRS and CR would be on opposite sides militarily in any struggle between reactionary “defense guards” and gang members within the oppressed communities, it is clearly a principled difference.** Yet the CWG-NZ calls it a “minor” difference. We are not surprised. This is the kind of unprincipled reaction we expect from right-wing centrists.

Indeed, the CWG-NZ’s current subjective and unprincipled assessment of the split in HWRS is but the latest manifestation of a long-standing pattern on the part of the CWG-NZ’s leader DB, which we had hoped he had overcome when he joined with HWRS to form the Liaison Committee. Before then, DB had buried the CWG-NZ in the FLTI, the international headed by the LOI-CI (the Argentinian group headed by Munzer) for almost 10 years. During those years, DB and company accepted in silence Munzer’s centrism and bureaucratic methods. In defense of this silence, all DB had to say was the belated admission that “I think that it’s true that the LOI-CI was centrist when we met them.” The truth is that the CWG-NZ accepted Munzer’s brand of centrism, which never not really abandoned the Morenoites’ methods.

DB went so far as to defend Munzer’s strong -man regime, when he wrote: “Was the split in

2004 over Lucha Marxista evidence of unreconstructed Morenoism? Possibly, but in itself [it is (sic)] not sufficient. . . . Thus while excessive, the LOI-CI response calling the LM ‘Stalinists’ was not in itself evidence of unreconstructed Morenoism.” In reality, the 2004 split was nothing but evidence of unreconstructed Morenoism. Yet DB and company supported the bureaucratic suppression and expulsion of the Latin American comrades. There were no principled differences, but DB told us that remaining with the LOI-CI was a better choice because it is located in the semi colonies.

In effect, the CWG-NZ made a conscious choice in 2004 to remain in a centrist international and accept its bureaucratic maneuvering. This was opportunistic through and through. Now, DB and the CWG-NZ are repeating this pattern by accepting—and acting as apologists for—CR and DC’s bureaucratic centralist maneuvering in the course of the HWRS split.

This pattern of opportunistic centrism is also evident in the CWG-NZ’s method with regard to the Liaison Committee’s potential regroupment with the RCIT. One of the main reasons that the CWG-NZ is breaking with the HWRS is that the politics of the CWG-NZ are closer to the politics of the RCIT. The CWG-NZ has made a number of joint political declarations with the RCIT. This is why the CWG-NZ has not fought seriously against the RCIT’s support for capitalist restoration in the former Soviet Union. In the absence of a serious struggle against the RCIT’s historic support for capitalist restoration, it is

opportunistic to issue joint declarations. We predict that in the wake of the CWG-NZ’s split from HWRS, it will fuse sooner than later with the RCIT. Such a move will be the logical outcome of the history of centrism and opportunism of the CWG-NZ, and DB in particular.

In truth, the CWG-NZ has never really broken with the right-wing centrist politics of the Workers Power grouping from which it emerged. Like Workers Power and the RCIT, the CWG-NZ issued (and HWRS, under the leadership and pressure of CR and DC, signed on to, over objections by some HWRS members) an opportunistic call for “revolutionary” constituent assemblies in the Middle East during the Arab Spring, even though it was evident to any true Leninist that if constituent assemblies were convened, imperialism and the native bourgeoisie would employ them to consolidate and rebuild the oppressive machinery of the bourgeois state. The CWG-NZ’s centrist method is thus expressed in many areas: in its opportunistic support for Syriza; in its call for constituent assemblies in the Arab Spring; in its willingness to support bureaucratic suppression of internal opponents; and in its combinations and maneuvering with groups such as the FLTI and the RCIT.

For all of the reasons we have just explained, and in recognition of what has already become an accomplished fact, we are writing this letter to notify you formally that we are breaking off our relationship with the Liaison Committee, the CWG-NZ, and their centrist politics.

Sincerely, HWRS

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(Where We Stand, continued from page 4)

fighting organizations of the working class: factory committees, industrial unions, councils of action, and workers' councils.

We fight against the oppression that capitalist society inflicts on people because of their race, age, gender, national origin, or sexual orientation. We fight racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, and fascism. We are for the liberation of women by connecting working class women's issues and struggles to workers' struggles, not through an autonomous "all-class" feminist movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed, and believe that only socialist revolution can bring about real, lasting liberation, by freeing all humans from the alienation and stress imposed on us by capitalism. We oppose all immigration controls. We call upon the workers to give no quarter to racists and fascists, and to drive them out of our unions and communities. No platform for fascism! Revolutionary socialists are the first to form up workers' self-defense guards and stand shoulder to shoulder with the oppressed whenever the fascist vermin emerge from the sewers.

We support the struggles of oppressed nations against imperialism. We unconditionally support the struggles of liberation movements in the semicolonies who fight the US and its agents. However, our

support is critical and we politically oppose the nationalists (bourgeois and petty-bourgeois) who often lead the struggles of the oppressed nations. To their strategy we counterpose the method of dialectical materialism and the strategy of permanent revolution. That is, we believe the anti-imperialist struggle must be led by the working class with a program of socialist revolution and internationalism. In conflicts between imperialist countries and semicolonial countries, we are for the defeat of "our own" army and the victory of countries oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We fight against imperialist war, not with pacifist pleas, but with militant class struggle methods including forcibly disarming "our own" bosses.

HWRs disdains the centrism, opportunism, and sectarianism of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International. We strive to overcome, within ourselves and in our dealings with others, the alienated psychology that often results in substituting egocentric competitiveness for objective discussion and debate among the left and progressive movements. We combine the struggle for a reelaborated transitional program, adapted to the circumstances of the 21st century, with active involvement in the struggles of the working class, fighting for revolutionary leadership.

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