

INTERNATIONAL TROTSKYIST

Journal of Humanist Workers for Revolutionary Socialism

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NO IMPERIALIST INTERVENTION IN SYRIA!

***MICHIGAN'S "RIGHT TO WORK" LAW:
A HISTORIC BLOW TO LABOR***

***EGYPTIAN WORKERS:
BRING DOWN THE POST-COUP REGIME!***

THE BART STRIKE THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN

CRISIS IN SOUTHERN EUROPE AND TURKEY

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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

EDITORIAL

No Imperialist Intervention in Syria! No Support for Assad, the FSA, or the Islamist Rebel Factions!

In the chemical attack in Syria on August 21, 2013, more than 1,400 people were killed, including over 400 children. The Obama administration initially used the attack as an excuse for preparing a military intervention in Syria. This now appears to be off the table. Nonetheless, we denounce any U.S. military action, from the land, sea, or air, as an imperialist attempt to annex Syria as a colony or semi-colony of the U.S. After losing Iraq as a U.S. sphere of influence, the U.S. needs Syria desperately as a buffer against Iraq and Iran, which are aligned with the Russia-China bloc. In short, U.S. imperialism is losing its position as the top imperialist dog in the Middle East, and it desperately wants to reassert its power.

Even though the U.S. won the military aspects of the war in Iraq, the U.S. has de facto lost its control of that country. Now, there is a regime in Iraq that is linked to Russia and China, the bloc of imperialists that is contesting the U.S.'s position as the leading imperialist power. If Assad remains in power in Syria, Russia and China will consolidate the advantage they gained from the U.S. losing Iraq. In other words, the U.S. is losing its grip on the Middle East, as the unchallenged imperialist power in the region, while the Russia-China bloc is getting stronger at the expense of the U.S.

The Waning Power of U.S. Imperialism

Obama's more recent wavering in regard to military action only reflects the decline of U.S. imperialism. Indeed, U.S. power has declined to the point that other Western imperialist powers (with the exception of France) do not

see the advantage in following the U.S.'s lead. Russia is now the speaker for international "stability"! Putin correctly claims that the U.S.'s wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, combined with U.S. intervention in Syria, will only encourage Islamic forces to take power and "destabilize" the Middle East. We must add, of course, that the forces of Islam represent the reactionary, counterrevolutionary aspect of the Arab Spring and the Syrian civil war.

The total lack of public and Congressional support for a military strike mirrors the lack of international support for the military strikes. It all reflects the decline of U.S. imperialism and the rise of China and Russia as imperialist powers. The fact that Russia was able to torpedo U.S. intervention so easily by pouncing on Secretary Kerry's suggestion that the UN take control of Syria's chemical weapons stock only illustrates Obama's weakness, and Obama's ensuing hesitation exposes the decline of the U.S. as the sole imperialist policeman.

How deeply the U.S.'s power has declined was acknowledged by the more intelligent U.S. bourgeois press. As the New York Times wrote:

[S]uddenly Mr. Putin has eclipsed Mr. Obama as the world leader driving the agenda in the Syria crisis. He is offering a potential, if still highly uncertain, alternative to what he has vocally criticized as America's militarism and reasserted Russian interests in a region where it had been marginalized since the collapse of the Soviet Union. [¶] Although circumstances could shift yet again, Mr. Putin appears to have achieved several objectives, largely at Washington's expense. He has handed a diplomatic lifeline to his longtime ally in Syria, President Bashar al-Assad, who

not long ago appeared at risk of losing power and who President Obama twice said must step down. He has stopped Mr. Obama from going around the United Nations Security Council, where Russia holds a veto, to assert American priorities unilaterally.”

(<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/world/europe/as-obama-pauses-action-putin-takes-center-stage.html>)

We don't know who perpetrated the chemical attack. We did not believe the lies we were told about Saddam's "WMD" before the U.S. invaded Iraq, and we do not believe the lies that come from Washington today as supposed "proof" that Assad was behind the attack. What we do know is that the U.S. (i.e., the CIA) and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) are better candidates for this than Assad, because Assad could not gain any advantage from carrying out the attack, while the FSA had a lot to gain—as evidenced by the statement of FSA spokesperson Louay al-Moqdad on August 28, 2013, that "The possible military strike against the Syrian regime will be strong and we will take advantage of it to topple Assad." (<http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2013/08/31/18742429.php>) In any event, as long as the U.S. is weak and hesitating, the fragments of the FSA, who are allied with U.S. imperialism, cannot make gains from the chemical attack.

No Support for Either Side!

We are against any support for the FSA, because the FSA is an ally of U.S. imperialism and because their victory will only replace Assad with another capitalist government that works against the Syrian masses on behalf of U.S. imperialism. We are also against the many Islamic militias that want to turn Syria back to the barbaric era of the Middle Ages by having the country governed by Islamic Sharia law. It goes without saying that we are equally against a victory for Assad, who is not only a brutal dictator, but also a client of Russia and China, the rising imperialist bloc whose only interest is to exploit the oppressed masses in the Middle East for the sake of oil and cheap labor.

We do, however, critically support the Kurdish struggle for independence, and their right to win and take land for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state, free from oppressive laws and actions tailored specifically against Kurds. This is in accord with our support for Lenin's position on the right of self-determination for oppressed nations. (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/self-det/>)

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**EGYPTIAN WORKERS:
Bring Down the Post-Coup Regime!
No Reliance on the Muslim Brotherhood or the NSF!
Only the Revolutionary Struggle for Socialism
Can Defend and Extend the Gains of the Arab Spring!**

A Coup or a Revolution?

With the military overthrow of President Mohammad Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood government on July 3, 2013, in a coup led by the head of the armed forces, General Abdul Fatah Al-Sisi, a new chapter in the Egyptian Arab Spring uprisings was written. The military coup was a turning point in the most tumultuous year in Egypt's modern history, which included mass strikes and mobilizations of millions of workers, peasants and youth throughout Egypt.

Following three days of the huge protests—surpassing even those that originally brought down the dictator Mubarak—the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces arrested Morsi (Egypt's first bourgeois-democratic elected President) and forcibly removed him from power; shut down all pro-Islamist media and TV stations; suspended the existing constitution and mandated that a new one be drafted; and appointed Chief Justice Adly Mansour (a former crony of Mubarak) as interim President. Mohamed ElBaradei, the former head of the United Nation's nuclear watchdog and leader of the National Salvation Front (NSF), Egypt's liberal opposition, was appointed interim Vice President for foreign affairs. (ElBaradei subsequently resigned as Vice President in protest over the military's massacres of Morsi supporters in August 2013.) One of Egypt's leading trade union bureaucrats, Kamal Abu Eita, the president of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions, was appointed Minister of Manpower.

By mid-August 2013, over two hundred of Morsi's supporters had been arrested, and over one thousand had been killed by the Egyptian military, including at least 400 protesters at two Muslim Brotherhood camps in Cairo—some of them heavily armed. The army shot

and killed 50 supporters of Morsi in cold blood outside the barracks where he was held. Most of the left both inside and outside Egypt (including so-called "Trotskyists") have been singing the praises of the "military-assisted" "second Egyptian revolution." In reality, the coup d'état was led by Mubarak's former military leaders with the aim of using the military toppling of the widely despised Muslim Brotherhood government as an excuse to give the military the power of a ruthless dictatorship. Today, as the working class resistance to the dictatorship increases, the military dictators are ready to attack the working class and oppressed in the same way they attacked the Muslim Brotherhood!

The liberals and the left supported the coup. The pro-coup youth movement Tamarrud (Arabic for "Rebellion"), which was supported by the liberal NSF opposition, came into being in May 2013. Behind the scenes, Tamarrud worked closely with the military. By the end of June, Tamarrud had collected 22 million signatures against Morsi, and also successfully mobilized millions of Egyptians in massive anti-Morsi demonstrations in every major city of Egypt. (In a post-coup press release, the leader of Tamarrud was photographed side by side with Al-Sisi, Mansour and ElBaradei.) The enormous scale of the anti-Morsi demonstrations provided the pretext for the military to oust Morsi under the guise of carrying out the will of the people.

An objective assessment of the coup reveals that the Egyptian military, in alliance with powerful elements of the old Mubarak regime (the "fulool") and ably assisted by the liberal opposition, replaced the reactionary regime of the Muslim Brotherhood with a reactionary Bonapartist puppet regime dominated by fulool



AP/Egyptian State Television

Coup leader Lt. Gen. Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi, center, flanked by Mohamed ElBaradei, far left, Tamarrud leader Mahmoud Badr, second left and Coptic Pope Tawadros II, second from right, as shown on Egyptian State Television Wednesday, July 3, 2013

and other counterrevolutionary elements (the so-called “deep state”). The military was able to pull this off to some extent by manipulating the flag-waving jubilant nationalism of the Egyptian populace, thereby strengthening the already existing illusions of the masses in the armed forces and their commanding officers—most of all the arch-reactionary General Al-Sisi. The radicalized anti-Morsi working class was under the illusion that the military is “above” classes. This illusion, which the military used to consolidate its bloody coup, can be traced to the secular traditions of the Nasser era. It is already beginning to crumble as we go to press. The most recent anti-military demonstrations, in late August, have included many anti-Muslim Brotherhood workers who see the reactionary anti-democratic and anti-working class face of the coup.

The military did not simply shoot at armed Morsi supporters; rather, they brutally shot into crowds of unarmed demonstrators, killing hundreds. Examples include the unprovoked massacre of 50 Morsi supporters protesting

near the location of his house arrest, and a bloody slaughter of Morsi supporters on August 14 at the Muslim Brotherhood camps in Nasr City and the University of Cairo. It goes without saying that we condemn such wholesale killing of political demonstrators. On the other hand, revolutionaries cannot politically or militarily side with the Muslim Brotherhood against the Egyptian junta. This includes forming any kind of united front with the Brotherhood against the military, as the Austrian-based RCIT have proposed. Such a “united front” would be, in reality, a reactionary popular front, and would represent a historic betrayal of the working class. The Muslim Brotherhood is an Islamist, anti-communist, slavishly pro-capitalist movement whose goal is to create a state based on Sharia law and the Koran (as in Afghanistan) to suppress the working class and peasantry—ultimately on behalf of imperialism.

We also denounce the Muslim Brotherhood for carrying out scapegoating attacks on the non-Muslim minorities of Egypt—especially the

Coptic Christians, who make up 10% of Egypt's population and whose churches have been burnt down and followers murdered. During Morsi's presidency, the Muslim Brotherhood also carried out sexual assaults and other horrific misogynistic attacks on women protesters in order to intimidate them and keep them away from the mass demonstrations. The escalation of Muslim Brotherhood attacks on Copts and other minorities after the coup was intended to have the same effect. In other words, the armed thugs of the Muslim Brotherhood were acting as the first wave of stormtroopers of the counterrevolution whose tasks are the establishment of an oppressive Muslim state. The Muslim Brotherhood is fighting the military not in order to bring back "democracy," but in order to establish an oppressive state similar to the one in Iran.

We support the mass demonstrations against the Muslim Brotherhood that took place before the coup. But the task of the working class was to overthrow the Muslim Brotherhood government in its own revolutionary name, as an independent force. The fact that the working class has instead become a tail of the reactionary military elite is the result of a crime by the liberals and the left who told the workers that the military brass is on the workers' side.

As a result of the coup, Egypt is at a dangerous political crossroads, with the possibility of a full-scale civil war erupting between the Bonapartist regime and the army on one side, and the armed opposition of the Muslim Brotherhood on the other. It must be emphasized that should a civil war erupt between the reactionary Muslim Brotherhood and the military—which are ultimately both forces for counterrevolution—revolutionaries cannot take a side. Instead, we would call on the workers to wage their own independent class war, and to overthrow both reactionary capitalist camps in the name of the workers' revolution and socialism.

In a July 14 article in *Counterpunch*, Joseph Massad, a professor at Columbia University who teaches Arab politics, clarified the counterrevolutionary features of the military coup in these words:

The Mubarakist bourgeoisie, as is increasingly being revealed in the international press, fabricated an energy crisis causing massive shortages in fuel and electricity, which miraculously disappeared upon Mursi's removal from power. ... The army coup, which the leftists, among others, support, was not a coup by middle rank socially conscious anti-imperialist army officers supported by progressive anti-capitalist forces [as in 1952—ed.] but rather by top army generals who receive a hefty sum of U.S. imperial assistance annually, and who have always been the protectors of Mubarak and his bourgeoisie. ... What is clear for now, however, with the massive increase of police and army repression. ... Egypt is now ruled by an army whose top leadership was appointed and served under Mubarak, and is presided over by a judge appointed by Mubarak, and is policed by the same police used by Mubarak, People are free to call it a coup or nor, but what Egypt has now is Mubarakism without Mubarak.

(www.counterpunch.org/2013/07/12/the-struggle-for-egypt/)

So, in reality, the coup brought the Mubarak regime—minus Mubarak—back to power. A major aim of the coup is to stop the radicalization of the workers. In the last two years the country has been in an almost constant state of mobilization against the government and against the political and economic attacks on the working class. One of the gains won by the workers after the toppling of Mubarak was the increase in the number of strikes and political mobilization of the working class that took place in Egypt. The aim of the coup was to stop this.

Undoubtedly, one reason why much of the left, including the centrist/Trotskyist left, was unable to distinguish between a setback and a gain for the Egyptian working class, was the powerful, unprecedented scale of the anti-Morsi mobilizations, which numbered on the order of millions and took place in every city in Egypt. Left organizations tend to be impressionistic, that is, to be impressed by phenomena such as the mass mobilization of the workers against

the Muslim Brotherhood, to the point of tailing the illusions of the workers—including their patriotic, nationalist illusions that the military is fighting for Egypt and is “above” classes and class ideology. Thus, the left argued that what took place was not a full scale military coup, but a “liberation” from an oppressive government.

An article in the *Wall Street Journal* on July 19, 2013 revealed how deep the collaboration ran between the liberal Egyptian left and the military:

In the months before the military ousted President Mohammed Morsi, Egypt’s top generals met regularly with senior aides to opposition leaders, often at the Navy Officers’ Club nestled on the Nile. The message: If the opposition could put enough protesters in the streets, the military would step in—and forcibly remove the president. “It was a simple question the opposition put to the military,” said Ahmed Samih, who is close to several opposition attendees. “Will you be with us again?” The military said it would. Others familiar with the meetings described them similarly. By June 30, millions of Egyptians took to the streets, calling for Mr. Morsi to go. Three days later, the military unseated him.

(<http://online.wsj.com/public/page/archive-2013-7-19.html>)

The Revolutionary Socialists (RS) in Egypt, a right-centrist, borderline reformist organization linked to the British Cliffite Socialist Workers Party (and, until 2012, to the International Socialist Organization in the U.S.) actively participated in the pro-coup coalition Tamarrud, and thereby supported the Egyptian military before and during the coup. Amazingly, just one year before, the RS had endorsed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in the 2012 presidential elections! However, what truly underlined the unprincipled, opportunist tailing by the RS was their unqualified support for the military coup—which they depicted as the “historic beginning of a new wave of the Egyptian revolution, the largest wave since January 2011.”

(<http://socialistworker.org/2013/06/27/>)

Although the RS were members of the pro-military Tamarrud coalition before the coup, the RS at least had the sense to break with Tamarrud, and withdraw their support for the military, when the army began massacring Morsi supporters after the military took power. Sadly, the right-wing centrist/Trotskyist group International Marxist Tendency (IMT), a split-off from the British Militant Tendency led by Alan Woods, proved to be even more opportunistic than the RS. In an early July article entitled “The Second Egyptian Revolution,” the IMT denied that the military takeover was a coup, and instead characterized it as “a genuine popular insurrection” and “the most unprecedented popular uprising in history”! (www.marxist.com/second-egyptian-revolution.htm) The IMT even claimed that the decision to oust Morsi was forced on the military by the masses, when the reality is that the military was itching to retake state power, and used the mass anti-Morsi movement as an excuse. History will likely judge the IMT’s position on this issue as another betrayal of revolutionary Trotskyism.

What Led Up to the Coup d’Etat

Every Egyptian president (and government) since Nasser has been little more than a “democratic” façade for the 450,000-strong military that for the last 60 years has ruled Egypt with an iron fist from behind the scenes. Far from being “above classes,” the military is the servant of the capitalist class. Indeed, since the Nasser era, the military has *become* the center of the capitalist class to a large degree. Because the military brass consists of a big chunk of the bourgeoisie, the military needs “stability” in defense of its own economic interests. It is estimated that 30-40% of the Egyptian economy (tourism, banking, oil, etc.) is controlled by the military. Since the Arab Spring in 2011, these sectors of the economy have been in a worsening crisis, and the tourism industry is on the verge of collapse.

The military, working through the judiciary and the bureaucracy, made sure that Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood had very little control of the Egyptian state apparatus. Morsi’s Muslim Brotherhood was the best organized and largest political organization in Egypt,

with the support of 25% of Egypt's population, mostly in the rural areas and among the poorer sections of the proletariat and peasantry. But because of the military, Morsi was not able to control the security forces, the police, the judiciary, or the bureaucracy, which were all staffed by the fulool. For instance, in mid-June, Morsi made a public statement implying that he supported military intervention in Syria, to support the jihadists fighting Assad. Apparently, this statement crossed a "national security red line" for the Egyptian military. The army rebuked Morsi for this statement the next day, stating that its only role was to guard Egypt's borders.

Not only did Morsi fail miserably to restore order to Egypt for the capitalist class and for imperialism—he threatened to use his nominal power to curtail the military's economic activity. This is ultimately why he was ousted by Al-Sisi and the military.

For its part, despite its routine posturing about "democracy," the imperialist bourgeoisie did not find the coup an unwelcome development. The July 4, 2013 issue of the *Wall Street Journal*, an important mouthpiece of the U.S. ruling class, went so far as to call on the Egyptian military regime to follow the example of Chile's brutal dictator Pinochet in 1973: "Egyptians would be lucky if their new ruling generals turn out to be in the mold of Chile's Augusto Pinochet, who took power amid chaos but hired free-market reformers and midwived a transition to democracy."

(<http://online.wsj.com/public/page/archive-2013-7-4.html>)

Israel—one of the closest allies of the Egyptian military—was elated by news of the coup d'état. The U.S. vacillated, sometimes publically critical of the coup, and other times supporting it. In reality the U.S. supported the coup as much as Israel. The military in Egypt has been the most important ally (together with Israel) of U.S. imperialism in the Middle East. The U.S. is happy that its old reliable ally is back in firm control of Egypt.

However, there was a reason for Obama's original "neutrality" on the coup. If he had admitted that a coup had actually taken place, this would automatically have triggered a law terminating the annual U.S. funding of \$1.3

billion to the Egyptian military (second only to Israel as a recipient of U.S. financial support). Not a problem for Egypt, however, because within days of the coup, the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council—Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.)—suddenly donated \$12 billion in funding to the military. The Gulf States had always been allies of long time dictator Hosni Mubarak and his regime (now represented by the fulool). In fact, there were reports that the Gulf monarchies, together with the military in Egypt, withdrew billions of dollars from the economy in order to stir unrest against the Morsi regime, thereby helping to foment the popular discontent that allowed the military to stage a coup.

But what also brought the Gulf States together after the coup was their hatred of the Muslim Brotherhood, because the Muslim Brotherhood had inspired the creation of similar movements in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region, and these in turn posed a serious threat to the Gulf's monarchies. The crisis of the oil companies in Egypt, and Morsi's support for the Islamic jihadists in Syria, further alienated these Islamic monarchies from the Muslim Brotherhood. By the winter of 2012, the Gulf States, led by the head of Saudi intelligence, Prince Bandar Bin Sultan, and working closely with the Egyptian military and U.S. intelligence, had formulated a plan to overthrow Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood government.

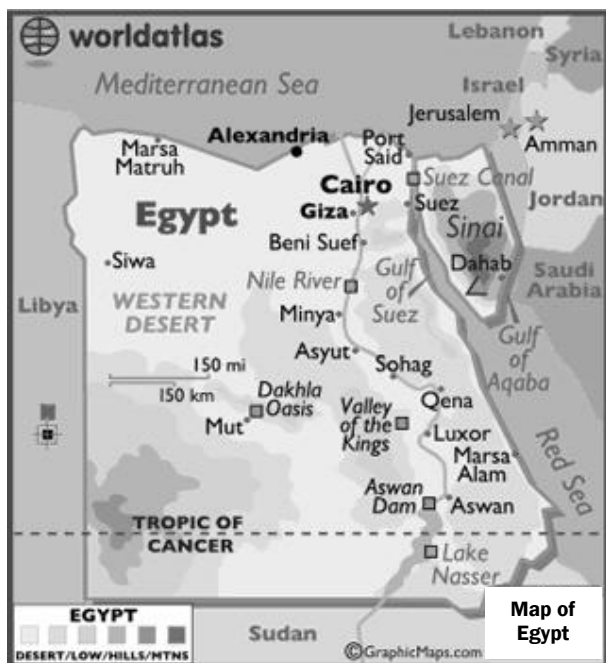
How Morsi Failed the Egyptian Military

A number of incidents began to turn the Egyptian military against Morsi between the winter of 2012 and the summer of 2013. Because many of the judges that made up the Egyptian judiciary had strong ties to the fulool and the security forces, Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood never understood the vital importance of developing a good working relationship with them. In fact, Morsi seriously began to turn the judiciary against his government when he attempted to implement a lower mandatory judges' retirement age. Morsi alienated the judiciary by doing this, just as he had alienated the military months before by forcing Mohamed Tantawi, Al-Sisi's

predecessor, into retirement. As a result, the judiciary dissolved the lower house of parliament a few months after its election, on technical grounds. It almost succeeded in doing the same thing to the Constitutional Constituent Assembly, responsible for writing Egypt's new constitution. This was also because the judiciary, the bureaucracy and the military were angered at Morsi's insistence that the constitution be based on Islamic Sharia law and the Koran.

The judiciary attempted to sabotage Morsi's Islamist constitution, because it understood that the constitution represented an attempt to challenge the power of military and the fulool, to give the Muslim Brotherhood much greater authority, and—ultimately—to turn Egypt into an Islamic theocracy. These actions by the judiciary caused Morsi to overstep his bounds and issue his ill-fated constitutional decree in November 2012, making all of his political decisions immune to judicial review. As ElBaradei pointed out in a November 26, 2012 interview with the German newspaper *Der Spiegel*: “Morsi grabbed full power for himself. Not even the Pharaohs had so much authority, to say nothing of his predecessor Hosni Mubarak.”

(<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/spiegel-speaks-with-elbaradei-on-the-situation-in-egypt-a-869309.html>)



This transparently dictatorial power grab by Morsi proved to be a turning point in his presidency. To many people it appeared (correctly from our point of view) that he was attempting to seize power for the Muslim Brotherhood, while totally disregarding the rights of the secular and non-Islamist majority, the organized working class, women, Coptic Christians and other oppressed minorities. In doing so, Morsi alienated the judiciary; mobilized the massive protests against the Brotherhood; galvanized the liberal opposition (the NSF) led by Mohammed ElBaradei; and provided the first spark to ignite the anti-Morsi coalition that would become known as Tamarrud. It also damaged Morsi's credibility in the eyes of the Egyptian military, and proved to be the first nail in his coffin. However, more nails were to follow.

In line with Morsi's lack of support in the judiciary was his inability to win the loyalty of Egypt's security forces and police. Another watershed moment for him occurred in March 2013, when the economy went into such severe crisis that the security forces and police held widespread strikes and occupations to demand better work conditions, equipment and benefits. Morsi was not able to develop a good working relationship with the police forces, and because of the strikes, he had to repeatedly call in the military instead to control the mass demonstrations and strikes organized by the masses against his Muslim Brotherhood government. This was not taken kindly by the military, which would eventually need the support of the masses to overthrow the Muslim Brotherhood's regime.

The Working Class Led The Uprising Against Morsi

Between the time of Morsi's ill-fated constitutional decree in November 2012, and the founding of the pro-coup coalition Tamarrud in May 2013, the Egyptian working class was in a state of regular mobilization against the Morsi government, the Egyptian capitalist class, and the collapsing capitalist system in Egypt. The collapse of the Egyptian economy is starkly confirmed by the statistics: 40% of Egyptians now live on less than \$2 a day; 25% of the youth are unemployed;



Massive anti-Morsi demonstration in Tahrir Square, Cairo, November 27, 2012 (Reuters)

inflation is over 8%; and tourism—a vital part of Egypt’s economy—has dropped by a staggering 20%. At the same time, foreign currency reserves have fallen from a relatively “secure” level of \$36 billion in 2011 to a dangerously low level of \$13.5 billion in 2013. Because large currency reserves are required to import oil and fuel into Egypt, the resulting fuel shortages increased agricultural transportation costs, and wheat production in Egypt has been seriously impacted. As a result of the prolonged fuel shortages, food prices in Egypt have dramatically increased during the last year.

Between June 2012 and June 2013, over 8,000 strikes took place in Egypt. The uprisings by the working class and youth during this period were some of the most deep-seated and far reaching of the upheavals in the Middle East since the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011. This is not only because Egypt has the most experienced and militant working class in the

Arab world. It is also because, as one of the most important countries in the Middle East to imperialism, Egypt by necessity has always needed a relatively well-developed infrastructure and a relatively well-educated and organized working class. A vital part of Egypt’s infrastructure, the Suez Canal, links the Mediterranean to the Red Sea and provides easy passage for European and U.S. oil tankers. Egypt’s Suez Canal, as well as its border with Israel, mean that the U.S. will ultimately always defend Egypt’s ruling class, and of course the Egyptian military that forms its core.

The working class upheavals came to a head in January 2013 when an uprising with an insurrectionary character took place in the cities near the Suez Canal. A large-scale general strike was organized in the Canal cities of Port Said, Suez and Ismailiya, seriously threatening the operations of the Suez Canal—a vital artery for warships, oil and E.U./U.S.

commerce. Almost 40,000 workers at 29 factories in the Suez Canal area went on strike, with the key city of Port Said brought to a halt. Government and court employees, teachers, students and utility workers also joined the strike actions and blocked the railways and entrances to the city of Port Said.

One other factor which fueled the insurrectionary uprising in Port Said, and spread it to the other Canal-area cities, was the sentencing to death by the reactionary judiciary of 21 fans of Port Said's football (soccer) club. These fans were wrongly accused of the murder of 74 "Ultras" (Cairo football fans) a year earlier, an event that was broadcast on national TV and shown to have been orchestrated by the interim military government and the police. In fact the murders took place exactly one year to the day that the heroic Cairo Ultras defeated the police-backed forces in the 2012 "Battle of the Camel" in Tahrir Square.

Extraordinary events took place in Port Said. The working class de facto took power and forced the police to barricade themselves in their stations to save their lives. To our knowledge, Port Said was the only city in Egypt where the workers and youth not only temporarily took over the city, but also asked the "neutral" rank-and-file soldiers to join them. Unfortunately, this political takeover by the workers and youth was confined to Port Said, and their appeal to the rank-and-file soldiers was not taken up, as it should have been, by the workers in the rest of Egypt. This element of the uprising, which was lacking elsewhere, was critical for transformation of the uprising into a workers' revolution. But the left and the liberals advocated support for the coup undertaken by the military brass, thereby encouraging the workers to abandon their struggle for *independent* revolutionary action. This is why supporting the coup is a historical betrayal of the working class and the Arab Spring.

Make the Egyptian Revolution Permanent!

"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. ... [¶] ... The dictatorship of the proletariat which has risen to power as the leader of the democratic revolution is inevitably and very quickly confronted with tasks, the fulfillment of which is bound up with deep inroads into the rights of bourgeois property. The democratic revolution grows over directly into the socialist revolution and thereby becomes a *permanent* revolution."

(Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/tpr/pr10>)

The Egyptian working class is faced with the necessity of accomplishing the national and democratic tasks of the bourgeois revolution. This can only be done through a workers' state in Egypt. But in turn, the precondition to take the revolutionary process to this stage is, to begin with, the complete independence of the working class and its organizations from all the capitalist forces (e.g., the NSF) and the military; and secondly, the building of a mass revolutionary party, capable of leading the masses to create democratic organs of workers' power. The driving force of the Egyptian uprisings has been the working class, supported by the youth and the unemployed. The spontaneous organizations of workers and youth who organized the uprising must be linked with the union rank and file organizations to create workers' councils.

Workers' militias are also needed to defend the independent trade unions, the striking factories, and the struggling workers and their allies against attacks by the military regime and the Muslim Brotherhood. Such militias are essential also to defend women workers and protestors against physical and sexual assault by these reactionary forces, so that they can fully participate in the struggle without intimidation. Without the involvement of women, no revolution in Egypt can succeed.

Workers' militias will become critical if the conflict between the military and the Islamists erupts into full-scale civil war. They will also be needed to unite the spontaneous

neighborhood organizations and the strikers in the factories with the soldiers who break ranks and come over to the revolution. One of the key tasks of the Egyptian revolution is to win over the rank and file of the military, which can open the armories to the workers. The rank and file of the military and the working class must unite! Soldiers who are conscripted workers play a critical role in a workers' revolution. The military can be defeated only when the soldiers join the revolution and fight

to overthrow the echelons of officers that are linked to the ruling class and imperialism. This is ABC for a successful revolution. This strategy makes it possible to build armed militias of workers and soldiers. Ultimately, that is the only way the Egyptian revolution can be defended and can go on the offensive in its own name. The workers' councils, soldiers' councils, and councils of the students and the unemployed are embryonic organs of dual power and the future Egyptian workers' state.

- **For an indefinite political general strike to bring down the Bonapartist Al-Sisi dictatorship and its Mansour puppet regime, with the aim of taking power into the hands of the workers and peasants!**
- **For independent soldiers' councils that topple the military brass and arm the workers and the oppressed!**
- **Disband the army into soldiers' and workers' militias! Replace the officer corps with elected officers!**
- **All workers' organizations must break with the liberal National Salvation Front and its popular front with the Bonapartist regime! For independent secular trade unions free of the bourgeois state!**
- **Begin the task of building workers' and soldiers' councils, the soviets of the Egyptian workers state!**
- **Nationalize the major industries and banks under workers' control! Repudiate all debts to the IMF and the imperialist banks!**
- **Bread for all, a public works program for the unemployed, and land to the peasants and poor farmers! For a sliding scale of wages and a sliding scale of hours to combat the scourge of unemployment and high prices!**
- **Solidarity with the Palestinian workers in their struggle against the Zionist state—tool of imperialism! An end to all collaboration by Egypt with the Zionist state!**
- **For a workers' state of Egypt! For a secular, socialist federation of the Middle East!**

Southern Europe and Turkey: Mediterranean States in Crisis

Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Turkey: the names evoke images of sundrenched landscapes bedecked with olive trees, vineyards, and the archeological remains of Greco-Roman civilization. But in the wake of the economic meltdown of 2008, a new commonality has developed among the countries of southern Europe and the northern Mediterranean: wave after wave of mass popular protest against austerity, budget cuts, and political repression.

The economic situation in these countries is grave. Unemployment is high, government-provided social services have been cut to the bone or dispensed with altogether, and the standard of living of ordinary working people is declining rapidly. That these developments have triggered mass protests is not surprising, but so far, these protests have met with little or no success. In this article, we briefly highlight the economic conditions in this region, and consider the tasks and program that the workers' movement must adopt in order to wage an effective struggle against the forces of exploitation and oppression.

Spain

Spain has long had one of the weakest economies in Europe, and it was deeply affected by the real estate bubble that lay at the heart of the global economic crisis of 2008. Many Spaniards—more than 80%—own their own homes, having been encouraged by the government to buy into the housing market during the 1960s and 1970s. Many of these homes are encumbered by long-term mortgages, usually at variable interest rates. For this reason, when the housing bubble burst, Spain was one of the countries most severely affected. The current market value of homes fell precipitously, but their owners still had to pay the full amount of the original mortgages—even after they had lost the home itself to foreclosure.

As in the US, banking regulators in Spain ignored widespread speculation by banks in the

real estate market during the bubble. To make matters worse, Spain has no domestic fossil fuel sources, forcing it to rely exclusively on imports. This makes Spain's economy extremely vulnerable to fluctuations in the global oil markets.

After the real estate bubble burst in 2008, the Spanish government initially tried to bail out the banks, but when the economy failed to recover, Spain was forced to appeal for help to the so-called "Troika" (the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Central Bank, and the European Commission). The Troika provided some assistance, but in return, demanded that Spain implement austerity measures. As a result, Spain attacked the standard of living of its working class by cutting government spending, freezing public employees' pay, reducing unemployment benefits, and raising its value added tax (similar to a sales tax).

In the wake of the crisis, the unemployment rate soared, particularly among young people. As of June 2012, about 51 percent of Spaniards under age 25—1.5 million youth—were unemployed (although this number includes students and stay-at-home parents who would not be in the labor market even if jobs were available). By April 2013, the overall official unemployment level in Spain was above 25%. Because of Spain's particular employment laws and practices, most workers' wages cannot easily be reduced. This is progressive, but ironically, it encourages employers to implement layoffs and hiring freezes to reduce

their labor costs, thus exacerbating the unemployment problem.

Spanish workers are surviving by relying on the wages of one or two adults to provide for the needs of a multigenerational extended family group, and by participating in an unofficial underground economy. But many young people cannot afford to finish their education, and others are being forced to leave the country in order to find work.

Portugal

Portugal, like Spain, has long been one of the weakest links in the European economy. To make matters worse, between 2000 and 2008, when some other countries were experiencing a boom, Portugal's low-wage industries, such as textiles, hemorrhaged jobs due to outsourcing to even lower-wage labor pools overseas. As a result, Portugal was one of the first economies in the Eurozone to suffer from the global economic crisis of 2008. By the summer of 2010, Portugal had to ask the European Union and the IMF for a huge bailout package to stabilize its public finances.

As a condition of the aid it needed, Portugal was forced to accept requirements that it "reform" its labor laws to reduce workers' rights. It took steps to raise the retirement age from 65 to 66; force public employees to put in an extra hour every workday; lower the minimum wage; reduce overtime pay in the public sector; cut pensions and health care; and institute a "voluntary" layoff program that threatens to do away with the jobs of five percent of its public employees.

These austerity measures, unsurprisingly, have resulted in an even deeper recession than its lenders expected. Unemployment is high, and young people cannot find jobs and are forced to live with their parents. In some cases, entire multi-generational families are living on the pensions of one or two retired seniors – pensions that have been reduced or frozen, and were insufficient to support a decent standard of living to begin with.

In early July 2013, it became clear that Portugal's lenders were not satisfied and were pressing for even greater austerity. As of late July, the resulting political crisis had not been fully resolved, but the president was still

resisting some parties' call for new elections. Meanwhile, Portugal faces another imminent crisis: it will need to sell billions of euros worth of new bonds in the next two years in order to refinance its maturing debt. This may prove to be impossible, in light of the rating of Portugal's government bonds as "junk." If the debt cannot be refinanced, the Troika may offer another bailout, but this would likely come with even more austerity strings attached.

Italy

Italy's situation is similar to that in Spain and Portugal. As of September 2011, Italy's national debt was some 1.9 trillion euros (about \$2.7 trillion), or 120 percent of gross domestic product—second only to Greece among Eurozone countries.

Starting in mid-2011, as a result of the financial crisis, Italy bowed to the demands of the European Central Bank by trimming government spending by billions of euros, with a devastating impact on critical services as local transportation and welfare. Italy also took such measures as raising its value added tax, freezing public employees' pay, raising the retirement age, boosting gasoline prices, raising income taxes on those earning higher salaries, and delaying the payment of certain retirement benefits. It also cut back on unemployment benefits, while at the same time relaxing labor laws to make it easier for companies to fire their workers.

By mid-2013, Italy remained stuck in its longest recession since quarterly records began in 1970. Jobless rates approached record highs, with some 38 percent of youth unemployed. Italians showed their anger by massing in the streets, but sporadic protests and one-day strikes had done nothing to deter the government from continuing its austerity measures.

Greece

The Greek economy has been suffering a severe crisis since the 2008 meltdown. Greece's main industries are shipping and tourism, both of which are highly vulnerable to economic downturns. In April 2010, the Greek government requested a massive loan from the European Union and the International



Monetary Fund. As a result, Greece's sovereign debt was downgraded to the status of junk bonds, resulting in near panic on the part of investors.

Since then, in exchange for repeated bailouts, the Troika has forced Greece to implement "austerity"—the neoliberal euphemism for brutal government attacks on the standard of living of working people and the poor. Greece has already cut its minimum wage, curtailed workers' rights, and privatized state assets. On top of this, it recently announced plans to lay off 15,000 government workers by the end of 2014.

These austerity measures have not managed to reduce Greece's deficit significantly, but they have been catastrophic for the standard of living of its population. Greece's unemployment rate of 27 percent vies with that of Spain as the highest in Europe. Young people, even those with good educations, cannot find jobs; about 60 percent of would-be workers under the age of 25 are unemployed. More than a third of the population fell below the poverty line as of 2012.

Workers who have been laid off are unable to find new jobs, and cannot afford to feed their families. Homelessness has increased by an

estimated 25 percent. In April 2013, the *New York Times* reported that over 26 percent of Greek households have an "economically weak diet," and an estimated 10 percent of children suffer from "food insecurity"—the constant threat of having nothing to eat. Some children are so hungry that they have stooped to picking through their school trash cans for leftover food. Tellingly, a medical school professor and public health expert opined that "When it comes to food insecurity, Greece has now fallen to the level of some African countries."

Disturbingly, the crisis has resulted in a resurgence of right-wing elements, including outright fascists. The neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party sent 18 representatives to the 300-member Greek Parliament in the most recent elections, and its popularity has risen to the point where it may command as much as 15 percent of the vote in next year's local elections. From among the usual fascist targets – leftists, Jews, immigrants, and the LGBT community – Golden Dawn has selected immigrants as its primary (though not sole) scapegoat. It courts adherents by distributing food parcels "for Greeks only" to the tune of the Nazi anthem, while its supporters, on an almost daily basis, carry out brutal physical attacks on workers

from Pakistan, Egypt, and other countries in Asia and Africa.

More recently, Golden Dawn has resorted to the bourgeois court system in an attempt to silence one of its chief critics, Savas Michael-Matsas, Secretary-General of the self-identified Trotskyist EEK (Workers' Revolutionary Party). His "crime"? Being an official of a party that used the slogan "smash fascism" in a leaflet calling for mass demonstrations in defense of immigrants. HWRS has political differences with the EEK, but needless to say, we defend Michael-Matsas unconditionally against this persecution.

Cyprus

The small island of Cyprus has an offshore banking industry disproportionate to its size. Fallout from the fiscal crisis in Greece affected the Cypriot economy heavily. Cypriot banks had invested heavily in Greek private sector debt, and were severely destabilized when the Greek economy crashed. In September 2011, all major credit rating agencies drastically downgraded Cyprus's public debt.

By June 2012, Cyprus was in desperate need of a bailout. Over the summer, the government negotiated with the Troika over the terms, which were announced in late November. They included cuts in public worker salaries; reductions in social benefits and pensions; an increase in the amount charged to patients for public health care services; and increased taxes. In order to secure the amount of bailout money needed, the Cypriot government threatened to confiscate a percentage of all savings accounts. A mass public outcry resulted, and in March 2013, the Cypriot Parliament rejected the deal. Instead, Cyprus and the Troika agreed to close one bank, but the Troika insisted that Cyprus recapitalize its financial sector, bring down its budget deficit, and privatize state assets.

Turkey

Turkey has historically been a focus of the interface between the Islamic and Judeo-Christian worlds. In keeping with that history, the protests surrounding Gezi Park in Istanbul in the spring of 2013 were in some sense a confluence of the ripple effects from Arab

Spring, the anti-austerity protests in southern Europe, and the Occupy movement in the United States.

Superficially, the occupation of Gezi Park was triggered by the announcement of a plan to turn the park—an isolated green oasis of public space in the bustling heart of Istanbul—into a privately owned shopping mall. But the brutal response to the protest by the reactionary Turkish government hit a nerve with certain segments of Turkey's population.

Turkey has not joined the European Union, and its economy is in better shape than those of the southern Eurozone countries. Nonetheless, Turkey is not without its own sources of internal tension. Urban, secular, westernized Turks were already chafing under the Erdogan government's efforts to enforce Islamic strictures on public behavior, such as the ban on alcohol and the requirement that women cover their heads. Ethnic and religious minorities such as the Kurds and Alawites have long suffered from the oppression and discrimination that is endemic in capitalist societies. And, in an ominous sign for the future of Turkish workers, the Erdogan regime has also begun to implement neoliberal economic measures such as privatization of state assets.

In the wake of the initial battles between police and protestors in central Istanbul, Turkish workers and youth organized protests throughout the country. As we go to press, sporadic clashes continue. But the regime of Erdogan's AKP party has regained the upper hand for now. Even if the protests succeed in saving Gezi Park, it is unlikely that they will result in any lasting, fundamental change in Turkey's economic and political situation. Moreover, in the current globalized world, Turkey's economy is deeply intertwined with the economies of the United States and Europe. The relative economic stability that Turkey has experienced in the last decade or so will not last long if those countries cannot pull themselves out of their current slump.

Analysis

As the countries of southern Europe and the northern Mediterranean suffer the brunt of the aftermath of the global economic collapse of



Protestors in Taksim Square, Istanbul, Turkey overturning a police car in June 2013

(from The Independent)

2008, workers are having to pay the price of the latest capitalist crisis. In countries where organized workers had previously pressured the government into providing benefits such as strong labor laws and social safety nets, these gains have been rescinded in the name of the neoliberal policies of “austerity” and “fiscal responsibility”—code words for attacks on workers and their standard of living.

In response, the working class in the region has fought back, but only in the most feeble fashion – through electoral politics, one-day general strikes, street protests by groups such as the Indignados in Spain, and the occasional occupation of public space. All efforts to mount a meaningful struggle against the neoliberal agenda have been sidetracked by union bureaucrats and social democrats.

For example, in Greece in June 2013, the leadership of the GSEE (the main private sector trade union confederation) discussed how to respond to the government’s controversial shutdown of ERT, the national public broadcasting network. The bureaucracy rejected a proposal by the president of the electricity workers’ union, Nikos Fotopoulos, for an all-out general strike expressly aimed at bringing down the government. Instead, they

decided just to call for yet another demonstration. The trade union fraction of SYRIZA, the centrist left coalition party, also refused to endorse Fotopoulos’s proposal, proposing only a one-day general strike, and declining to call for workers to overthrow the government.

Some on the Left may hail European workers’ signs of resistance, however sporadic and fruitless, as the seeds of an incipient pre-revolutionary situation. This is a dangerous illusion. Unless and until workers organize around a program to overthrow capitalism, pledge themselves to that effort without reservation, and raise up a leadership capable of mobilizing the masses to make the necessary commitment to the struggle, all efforts to fight back against austerity, neoliberalism, and global corporate tyranny are doomed to failure.

As the events of the past few years have repeatedly demonstrated—not only in the northern Mediterranean region, but also in North Africa, the United States, and elsewhere—any mass mobilization that is not armed with the right program and leadership will not be capable of achieving its goals. On the contrary, if such mobilizations accomplish anything, it is to trigger violent repression,

even on the part of governments nominally controlled by social democrats. Worse yet, the resulting atmosphere of violence and instability can backlash, garnering support for far-right parties like the French National Front and Greece's Golden Dawn from backwards elements of the workers and petty bourgeoisie.

The lessons to be learned here are not new, but they are more important now than ever. If workers do not organize to mount an *effective* struggle to replace the capitalist system with a democratically planned economy, the present situation will worsen to the point of unprecedented catastrophe. Over the next several decades, capitalism's inevitable periodic economic crises will be exacerbated by the intensification of climate change. The global supply of food, water, and arable land will be increasingly strained. At the same time, the human population will continue to multiply, its growth exacerbated in some regions by reactionary ideologies that deny women control over their own fertility. Meanwhile, a tiny fraction of humankind will decisively consolidate its stranglehold on the world's

wealth, leaving the masses to face starvation, disease, poverty, and despair. These developments will inevitably destabilize the global political situation, leading to civil and international wars, and possibly to the total collapse of civilization as we now know it.

To stave off this potential catastrophe, workers need more than mass protests, symbolic occupations of public spaces, and one-day general strikes. We need more than appeals for "fairness" and token reforms. We need a dedicated, disciplined leadership capable of mobilizing the working class, together with its allies among the students, petty bourgeoisie, and rural poor, into an organized party united behind a program of transitional demands. Such demands should be tailored to the particular situation in each country and region at a particular time, but they must directly confront the profit-based capitalist system, and draw inspiration from the vision of a world in which the means of production are owned and controlled by the working class, and used for the benefit of all rather than the profit of a few.

- **No to austerity! For massive public works programs to provide jobs for all who are able to work!**
- **No bailouts for banks or failing industries! Nationalize the financial system and the means of production without compensation and under workers' control!**
- **No political support for pro-capitalist "liberals" and "reformists"! Liberalism and social democracy have nothing to offer the working class but defeat!**
- **No support for union leaderships that divert and defuse the workers' energy through pointless symbolic strikes! For militant rank-and-file committees to organize indefinite general strikes in every country and region!**
- **No to fascism, racism, immigrant-bashing, homophobia, and assaults on women's equal rights! No to all forms of oppression! For solidarity between workers and the oppressed around the globe!**
- **No to pacifism and non-violence! Arm the workers and form workers' militias to defend immigrants, minorities, women, and all workers against attacks by police, fascists, and the military! Rank-and-file soldiers: Defy orders to attack your fellow workers, and instead, join their struggle and provide them with military training and weapons!**
- **Only the arming of the workers and the success of the socialist revolution can resolve the crisis in Europe permanently! For a united Socialist Federation of Europe!**

Michigan's "Right to Work" Law: A Historic Blow to the Labor Movement

On December 11, 2012, Michigan, the historic center of the U.S. labor movement and birthplace of the CIO, became the 24th "right to work" state in the United States after two bills, one dealing with public workers and the other private workers, were pushed through its state legislature and signed into law by Governor Rick Snyder. Thousands demonstrated outside the State Capitol as he signed the legislation, which ultimately went into effect on March 28, 2013. The passage of a "right to work" law in Michigan is one of the latest and most severe defeats, both in real and symbolic terms, in the ongoing assault that has been gutting the labor movement for decades.

The Assault on Organized Labor

The opening salvo of this assault is commonly viewed as having been the defeat of the PATCO strike in 1981, in which then U.S. president Ronald Reagan, a former president of the Screen Actors Guild, threatened to fire approximately 13,000 air traffic controllers who had gone out on strike in violation of federal law, and then proceeded to fire the 11,345 who refused to return to work. (See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Professional_Air_Traffic_Controllers_Organization_\(1968\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Professional_Air_Traffic_Controllers_Organization_(1968))) That was certainly a turning point in U.S. labor relations, which accelerated the pace of union busting in both the private and public sectors.

By 2012, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, union membership in the U.S. was down to 11.3%, with workers in the public sector unionized at a rate of 35.9%, (making them a prime target of the bourgeois right), and union membership in the private sector at only 6.6%. (<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm>). Thus, the percentage of the U.S. represented by unions has been on a steady decline since a peak of around 33% in the mid-1950s (<http://www.motherjones.com/>

[politics/2011/06/speedup-americans-working-harder-charts](http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2011/06/speedup-americans-working-harder-charts)). Meanwhile, real incomes have been on a steady decline since the early 1970s, while corporate profits have never been higher.

Historical Background

The Great Depression in the 1930s brought about a state of social unrest that carried the potential to overturn the capitalist system as a whole. Capitalism was in a severe state of crisis, and the threat of a social upheaval against capitalism (or of the rise of fascism) was a very real possibility because of the widespread mass struggles of the workers. As a result, a vast array of social and public works programs known as the "New Deal" were put into effect by the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration to stop the social unrest. These sweeping changes were permissible to the ruling capitalist class only because of the threat that massive public unrest posed to American capitalism. For them it was a bitter pill, but preferable to the alternative.

The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) was passed in 1935 as part of the New Deal. It formally legitimized the increasingly militant

(and in many cases illegal) labor union movement, and brought it under government regulation with establishment of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which, among other functions, would step in to mediate labor disputes.

The NLRA grants the right to unionize in the private sector, but it has exceptions for domestic workers, agricultural workers, independent contractors, and others. Some of these groups can organize under other legislation, at least in certain states, but the rest are left twisting in the wind. Moreover, the NLRB, the body tasked with administering the system established by the NLRA, is an obstacle to workers' struggle to organize and protect their rights, more often than it is an aid.

What "Right to Work" Laws Mean

"Right to work" is an option for state legislatures that was created by a provision in a post-NLRA piece of federal legislation, the Labor Management Relations Act of 1947, better known as "Taft-Hartley." In a *non*-"right to work" state, a worker in a unionized workplace who opts out of union membership is still required to pay a fee to the union for services such as collective bargaining, representation in labor disputes, etc. Because workers have to pay this fee in any event, their motivation to opt out of union membership is very small.

Under "right to work" legislation, in contrast, workers who opt not to join a union that represents their coworkers have no obligation to pay any fee whatsoever to the union. This gives workers in unionized workplaces an added incentive not to join the union, because they can still take advantage of the union's services—contract negotiations first and foremost—without having to make any payment whatsoever in exchange. "Right-to-work" legislation can even go so far as to permit a non-union-member, non-fee-paying worker to sue the union for inadequate representation in grievances!

The Impact of Taft-Hartley

Taft-Hartley, the federal law that allows states to adopt "right to work" laws, was passed by Congress in 1947 as a result of mass

struggles and strikes after World War Two. Roosevelt's successor, Harry S. Truman, vetoed the bill, but his veto was overridden by a Republican Congress.

Taft-Hartley remains the single most crippling piece of anti-union legislation on the books today. In addition to allowing states to pass "right to work" laws, Taft-Hartley also prohibits wildcat strikes, sympathy strikes, political strikes, secondary picketing, secondary boycotts, and monetary contributions from union dues money to federal political campaigns.

Labor's ability to fight back as a cohesive force, or even a political one at all, is severely crippled by the restrictions set by Taft-Hartley. Thus the abolition of Taft-Hartley needs to be central to any attempt to reignite the labor movement and rescue it from the slow road to extinction down which it is currently being led by its leadership. Just as unions were only legalized when it became impossible to stop them, Taft-Hartley will only be repealed when it is no longer possible to enforce it. Victories will not be won in the ballot box, but on the street.

This will require rank-and-file mobilizations independent from the direction of union bureaucrats, who would direct our efforts toward ballot initiatives and the Democratic Party. These independent mobilizations to smash Taft-Hartley must be also aimed at throwing the pro-capitalist bureaucracy out of the unions. If this is not possible, new organs of the working class must be developed to smash Taft-Hartley. This is a political necessity, if workers want to reverse the current historical trend towards the defeat of the unions.

The Cowardice of the Bureaucracy

The leadership of the United Auto Workers (UAW), the most powerful union in Michigan, reacted to the passage of the state's "right to work" law by throwing its support behind the Democrats in the upcoming 2014 elections. This is like asking the person who is robbing you to rescue you.

The UAW was established in the 1930s through massive, sometimes violent, and ultimately victorious class struggle. (See http://www.humanistsforrevolutionarysocialism.org/IT_Archive/Labor's_Next_Chance_cover.html.)



**Union members demonstrating against passage of the Michigan “right to work” law, December 11, 2012.
This should have been a general strike, not just a demonstration!**

AP Photo

The giant American working class was awakened by this historic victory. For this reason, the capitulation of the UAW bureaucracy in accepting Michigan’s transformation into a “right to work” state without even lifting a finger, much less calling for strikes or any other militant mass action, symbolizes the end of American unions as real class struggle organs. As the unions’ strength of numbers has fallen to a historical low, the workers are now left exposed and defenseless when the capitalists and their government kick their open wounds. Today, wage slaves in America helplessly and hopelessly see their standard of living decline to the level that their brothers and sisters suffer in the semi-colonial world.

The left in the U.S. has by and large ignored this historical defeat, both in general and in its most recent manifestation, the adoption of a “right to work” law in Michigan. But in its own way, the blow to the American labor movement caused by the evisceration of the unions is

comparable to the defeat of the German workers in the 1930s, when social democracy accepted the rise of German fascism to power without shooting a single bullet against the fascists. What is amazing is that the labor movement is so demoralized and beaten that the American capitalists have been able to defeat it without being forced to rely on fascism to do so. The collaboration between Obama, the Republicans, and the union bureaucracy was enough!

The Need for New Organs of Struggle

Trotsky wrote, shortly before his death, that the unions cannot maintain forever their contradictory character of being workers’ organizations with a pro-capitalist leadership.

[T]he trade unions in the present epoch cannot simply be the organs of democracy as they were in the epoch of free capitalism and they cannot any longer remain politically neutral, that is, limit themselves to serving the daily

needs of the working class. They cannot any longer be anarchistic, i.e. ignore the decisive influence of the state on the life of peoples and classes. They can no longer be reformist, because the objective conditions leave no room for any serious and lasting reforms. The trade unions of our time can either serve as secondary instruments of imperialist capitalism for the subordination and disciplining of workers and for obstructing the revolution, or, on the contrary, the trade unions can become the instruments of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat.

(<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1940/xx/tu.htm>)

Trotsky's prediction that if the unions remained meek economic instruments of the working class, they would end up "serv[ing] as secondary instruments of imperialist capitalism for the subordination and disciplining of workers and for obstructing the revolution" is precisely the process that has taken place in the U.S. (and other areas in the world) in the 70 years since Trotsky died. This process is now finished; the historical defeat of the American labor movement is a done deal. American unions are basically useless as organs for political struggle on behalf of the working class, and even as organs for economic struggle, they have lost most of their effectiveness.

This process began in earnest by the mid- to late 1970s, and the smashing of PATCO in 1980 was the turning point. By the time the recession/depression of 2008 hit the U.S., the unions were already half dead, and when the capitalists and their parties used the crisis as an excuse to launch a crushing assault on workers, the unions were helpless to defend them. Many unions, especially in the government sector, were smashed or considerably weakened throughout the country by layoffs and massive budget cuts. Strikes and resistance were kept to a minimum, even while the attacks expanded steadily, including the adoption of "right to work" laws and other anti-union measures in historically strong union states.

The last resistance took place in Wisconsin in 2011, when the state legislature considered

(and ultimately adopted) a measure limiting the collective bargaining rights of public employees. The mass spontaneous resistance in Wisconsin, which is a very pro-union state, was broken by the union bureaucracy, which channeled the mass resistance into petitions and support for the Democrats. These criminal capitulations signaled the end of the unions as organs that pretend to be a class struggle organs. By the time the bourgeoisie pointed its guns at the UAW and other auto worker unions in Michigan, the workers were so demoralized that only a few protests were carried out. They did not last very long, and were only a pale shadow of the mass mobilizations that had taken place in Wisconsin before the workers were betrayed.

By now, American workers are docile and demoralized. They behave like a class that has suffered a historical defeat. In the San Francisco Bay Area, for example, the workers are considered to be some of the most militant in the country. But this year, when union contracts expired at BART and other public transit agencies, the bureaucracy refused to wage a general transit strike. The BART workers went on strike briefly, but the other transit workers did not join them, and their unions soon told them to return to work. (See pages 28-32.) Since then, transit workers have stayed on the job, either without a contract or with a lousy one, because their union leadership caved in to anti-labor laws and government-mandated "cooling off" periods.

The working class in the U.S. has accepted more than a 50% cut in its standard of living since the 1980s. This shows that the working class cannot limit itself to mere economic struggles. To fight back, the working class must take on a *political* struggle against capitalism, linking purely economic issues to political ones such as racism, police brutality, and imperialist attacks on our brothers and sisters around the world, as well as the capitalist-induced climate change that is devastating the entire planet and threatening the very existence of the human race.

Given the current state of unions in the U.S., it has become clear that new organs of working class struggle must be built. The unions, as Trotsky predicted have, become

complete company unions that subordinate the workers to the capitalist state. But until new organs are built, revolutionaries must continue to do work in the existing unions. Doing otherwise means abandoning the working class. For now revolutionaries need to continue with the current tactics and strategy in the unions. Yet we know that if and when the class struggle explodes, if the unions try to hold back the workers, new workers' struggle instruments will arise, possibly on the ashes of the de facto half-dead unions.

Michigan's "Right to Work" Law as a Historic Defeat

In this article, we have characterized the passage of a "right to work" law in Michigan as a historical defeat. Some on the left may question this characterization. According to the "wisdom" of the "orthodox" Trotskyist left, historical defeats only happens when a counterrevolution violently crushes the working class. A classic example of this is the triumph of fascism, such as in the case of Chile.

But not all cases have to be like this. The historical defeats that resulted in the restoration of capitalism the former workers' states did not happen via violent counterrevolutions, for the most part. Yet some Trotskyist groups, such as the Spartacist League (SL), maintain their ridiculous position that China must still be a workers' state, because no violent counterrevolution or fascist takeover has occurred there, as Trotsky predicted would need to occur in order to restore capitalism. In so holding, the SL treats the historical process and the dialectics as if they are made of rigid plywood. The historical defeat of the workers' state in China, and the restoration of capitalism there, is just as complete as it is in the former Yugoslavia, even though the latter underwent a violent counterrevolution and war, while China did not. Historical factors that Trotsky could not have predicted occurred in China, most of Eastern Europe and to a large extent in the Soviet Union itself. (See our analysis in "The Rise of Chinese Imperialism," http://www.humanistsforrevolutionarysocialism.org/Publications/China_Pamphlet.pdf.)

The truth is that political processes, like life

itself, often do not occur in textbook fashion. It is true that if American workers had been crushed by fascism, the process of revival of the class struggle would have been much more difficult than it is now. But due to the backwardness of the American working class and the character of the union bureaucracy, the bourgeoisie has not needed to raise the fascist fist. The salami approach of gradually attacking the workers' gains over a period of 40 years has been just as effective.

The Way Forward

By now, we have two generations of workers in the U.S. who have never participated in massive class struggles. Most do not even clearly understand the basic concept of "picket lines mean don't cross"—which needs to carry the implication that if you do try to cross them, you do not come out in one piece. Sadly, many workers do not understand the difference between real picket lines, which are a basic tool of the class struggle, and the toothless "informational picket lines" that have become a favorite way for the union bureaucracy and their masters in Washington to put on an act instead of waging a real class struggle.

Informational picket lines are symptoms of a docile and demoralized working class that has accepted a historical defeat. Their increasing use, coupled with the expansion of "right to work" states in the U.S., clearly illustrates that U.S. workers today are leaderless and defeated. It may take many years to change this, given that the current generations of workers only know about real anti-capitalist struggle through the history books, if at all. The nails recently put in the coffin of the class struggle in Wisconsin and Michigan will likely hold for years; **a whole new generation of fighters, capable of developing and implementing new methods of revolutionary class struggle, will have to develop to reverse the current state of defeat.**

The fact that a brutal dictatorship does not as of yet exist in the U.S. (although the U.S. is currently under a Bonapartist regime rather than a real bourgeois democracy) does give hope for the long term revival of the class struggle. While the labor movement is defeated, this does not mean that all sectors of the working class are

defeated. There is a large number of young workers, mostly in the black and brown communities, who are fed up and are willing to fight back. The recent wave of strikes and organizing efforts at fast food outlets is also a hopeful sign.

A massive fight-back by these workers and youth could turn the tables and catch the bourgeoisie, which is overconfident right now, off guard. The union bureaucracy and the left do their best to keep these workers

within the confines of toothless and demoralizing reformist protests. What is clear is that to overcome this period of defeats, would-be militant workers need a strong revolutionary party and a revolutionary transitional action program that can transform the current pathetic protests into revolutionary political actions by the working class. That is what it will take to reverse the current sad state of the class struggle in the U.S.

In short, the growing success of “right to work” laws and other attacks on workers cannot be stopped unless we build a revolutionary anti-capitalist movement that can smash Taft-Hartley via an all-out class war. The union movement was built at a time when unions were illegal, and their leaders defied the law to wage a real class struggle (albeit only to a certain extent). Similarly, if the working class is going to build instruments of real class struggle today, it will have to build them over Taft-Hartley’s trampled carcass.



Wisconsin union members and their allies demonstrated en masse in 2011, but could not stop the governor from gutting public workers’ right to collective bargaining. What if all these people had *gone on strike* instead of occupying the State Capitol?

AP Photo

The Cowardice of the Union Bureaucracy: The BART Strike That Didn't Happen

The contracts of the union workers at Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) expired at midnight on June 30, 2013. On July 1, the workers went out on strike, but after only a few days, the union leadership agreed to send them back to their jobs for 30 days while negotiations continued. The negotiations made little progress, however.

On Thursday August 1, BART workers and their allies held a rally in Oakland to demonstrate and galvanize public support for the planned resumption of the strike the following Monday, August 5. HWRs comrades attended that rally with our friends in Labor Black & Brown, a Bay Area organization that seeks to combat police brutality in the oppressed communities by forming alliances with labor for workers' self-defense. Our organizations produced and distributed a joint flyer, the text of which is reproduced on pages 30 through 32.

With the strike deadline looming, Governor Jerry Brown (a Democrat and supposed "friend of labor") appointed a team to report to him on the progress and status of the negotiations. As soon as Brown received the report, he went to court, and got the judge—who held a hearing on *Sunday* (August 4), an almost unheard-of accommodation—to issue an injunction preventing the workers from striking during a 60-day "cooling off" period.

The union bureaucrats promptly capitulated. On Monday, August 5, at a rally and press conference outside BART's Lake Merritt Station headquarters, the local bureaucrats leading the BART unions (ATU 1555, SEIU 1021 and AFSCME 3993), supported by their cohorts from the Bay Area Labor Councils, announced their unconditional surrender to the Governor's demand that the workers stay on the job during the "cooling off period." (See video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mI4kkeJQoEs>.)

This is a favorite dance the U.S. labor lieutenants perform with their capitalist

masters, calling off strikes and demobilizing the picket lines because of government injunctions. The labor movement can only hope to challenge this and similar injunctions, including those issued under the federal Taft-Hartley law, with mass pickets and revolutionary labor action. The working class can draw the strength to muster such actions from its members and allies in the Black and Brown working class communities, which must engage in a battle for survival with the ruling class, its out of control police, and the beatings, killings, and mass imprisonment they inflict daily on the oppressed communities.

At the start of the BART strike, the watchword was "Take Back Wisconsin!"—a reference to Wisconsin's passage of a law gutting the collective bargaining rights of state workers, which drew massive protests in early 2011. But at the August 5 press conference, Alameda Labor Council and SEIU honcho Josie Camacho made sure to change the script, stating: "This is a regional fight. It's a fight about maintaining *middle class jobs* and standards." And then she had the gall to add that "Workers don't want to go on strike!"

Is that right?! "Middle class"!? Where have these bureaucrats been since 2008, while the firestorms of takebacks that refinanced Wall Street has ravaged our standard of living? The rank-and-file BART workers have to *take control* of this fight—and of their destiny—*resume* the strike, and *transform* it into a *political* strike. Transit workers should join together to declare a strike movement that reaches out and appeals to the poor working class "public," especially the working class Black and Brown communities, where the need to battle on a daily basis against the brutality of the police and LaMigra/ICE are crying out for the muscle of labor intervention.

But right now, instead of defending the working class communities and seeking their support, the BART unions' leaders are making *no strike preparations* for the showdown at the

end of the court-ordered 60-day cooling off period. The unions' picket army has been demobilized—in accord with Jerry Brown's wishes, and with pie-card kisses. Months of preparation now lie in a shambles. If the so-called "leaders" don't organize for the coming strike, who will? The rank and file must pick up the pieces, and start putting together strike committees *now*, with *daily* meetings open to all union members and their allies. The committees must make concrete plans to mobilizing worker and community support so that BART workers can go back out on strike—and this time, *stay out* until their demands are met!

There are militant fighters in other unions and in the community who long to throw their lot in with the BART workers—not just to idly support them in principle, but to make an active commitment. The ATU, SEIU, and AFSCME officials have shown themselves to be a clique, collectively incapable of organizing a real fight against BART management and its backers in the government, the court system, and the plutocracy. The situation cries out for new leadership. That will occur only if the rank and file manifest their desire to fight to win by taking over the fight, and forging links *now* with allies in the other unions and in the Black and Brown workers' movement and the oppressed communities.

To win, BART workers *must* form an alliance with other transit workers, such as

those who work for San Francisco Muni and AC Transit. Such an alliance would have the power shut down the entire transportation system in the Bay Area, and force the ruling class to concede to all the BART workers' demands. But in order for such an alliance of unions to shut down the Bay Area, they need to be ready and willing to defy the state and its draconian anti-labor laws and injunctions. If the labor movement is to reverse the huge defeats it has suffered in the recent and not so recent past, *there is no other way to do it*.

And since waging a united political strike requires workers to be prepared for a political and even military confrontation with the armed -to-the-teeth capitalist state, the labor movement needs the support of the entire working class community. In particular, it needs to join forces with the Black and Brown working class communities. This means that the picket lines and strike committees of such a political strike should extend to the Black and Brown workers' communities to help them defend themselves against the police, as well as in their struggles around the many other issues arising from the oppressive institutional racism that the bourgeois state inflicts on their communities. This is what workers' defense guards are all about: they defend *both* the striking workers *and* the oppressed communities. In so doing, they pave the ground for the formation of workers' militias as the military arm of the working class as a whole.



Despite the militant language on the banner of the Transport Workers Solidarity Committee, shown here behind the podium at the August 1 BART solidarity rally in Oakland, the BART unions' leadership folded without a fight when Governor Brown got an injunction against the strike.

HWRS/LBB BART Strike Flyer (Aug. 1, 2013)

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

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

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

After four and a half days of a solid strike, BART workers should not have gone back to work. When the BART strike started, contracts had also just expired for union workers at the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD), the City of Oakland, and AC Transit. **All those unions should have gone on strike simultaneously when the BART**

workers went out. Even now, the ATU 192 workers at AC Transit, and the AFSCME 444 & 2019 workers at EBMUD, still have not settled their contracts. This gives the workers an opportunity to correct the tactical mistake made by the BART unions in returning to work before they had achieved the goals of their strike. To take advantage of that opportunity, AC Transit and EBMUD workers need to *walk out and strike in tandem and solidarity* when the BART workers strike, as is anticipated, starting on August 5. ***No Contract, No Work!***

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

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

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

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

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

cuts, reductions in public services, police brutality, and union-busting exemplified by the defeat of the struggle against the Wisconsin anti-union legislation in March, 2011. That’s what a political strike is all about. **Workers and their allies change the ground rules, acting by themselves and for themselves.**

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

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

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

Strike While the Iron is Hot

After all the dirty tricks, parliamentary sleight of hand, and divide-and-conquer nastiness that the capitalists have been beating us up with, it should be ABC to any union leader or any union radical that NOW is the time to take this opportunity and unite the rank-and-file to smack them back! Take back all the take-backs!

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Editorial on Syria—continued from page 6)

The Role of Climate Change

We can only fully understand the civil war in Syria in the context of climate change, which played a significant role in forcing the Arab masses to rise up against their oppressors. Back in March 2011, facing a severe shortage of wheat and bread, the starving masses took to the streets against Assad. By that time, Syria was already disintegrating as a state because of climate change.

The veteran bourgeois politician William R. Polk has perceptively explained how this process took place:

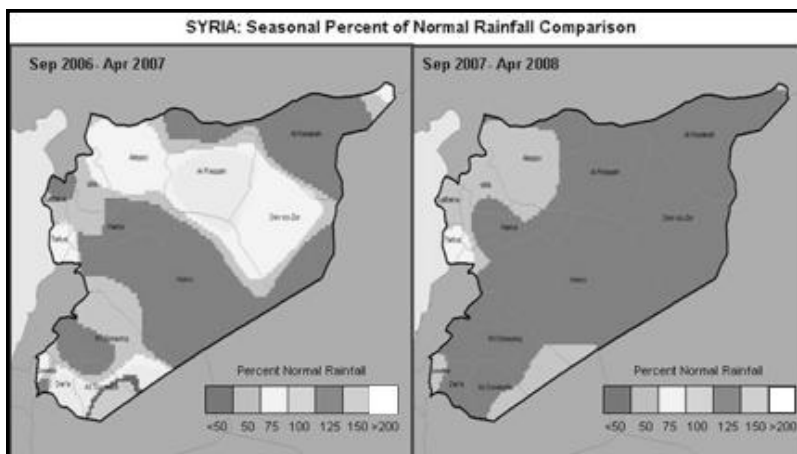
Syria has been convulsed by civil war since climate change came to Syria with a vengeance. Drought devastated the country from 2006 to 2011. Rainfall in most of the country fell below eight inches (20 cm) a year, the absolute minimum needed to sustain un-irrigated farming. Desperate for water, farmers began to tap aquifers with tens of thousands of new well[s]. But, as they did, the water table quickly dropped to a level below which their pumps could lift it.

In some areas, all agriculture ceased. In others crop failures reached 75%. And generally as much as 85% of livestock died of thirst or hunger. Hundreds of thousands of Syria’s farmers gave up, abandoned their farms and fled to the cities and towns in search of almost non-existent jobs and severely short food

supplies. Outside observers including UN experts estimated that between 2 and 3 million of Syria’s 10 million rural inhabitants were reduced to “extreme poverty.”

The domestic Syrian refugees immediately found that they had to compete not only with one another for scarce food, water and jobs, but also with the already existing foreign refugee population. Syria already was a refuge for quarter of a million Palestinians and about a hundred thousand people who had fled the war and occupation of Iraq. Formerly prosperous farmers were lucky to get jobs as hawkers or street sweepers. And in the desperation of the times, hostilities erupted among groups that were competing just to survive.

Survival was the key issue. The senior UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) representative in Syria turned to the USAID program for help. Terming the situation “a perfect storm,” in November 2008, he warned that Syria faced “social destruction.” He noted that the Syrian Minister of Agriculture had “stated publicly that [the] economic and social fallout from the drought was ‘beyond our capacity as a country to deal with.’” But, his appeal fell on deaf ears: the USAID director commented that “we question whether limited USG resources should be directed toward this appeal at this time.” (reported on November 26, 2008 in cable 08DAMASCUS847_a to Washington and “leaked” to Wikileaks)



The impact of climate change: Syria’s severe drought helped to spark the original popular uprising against Assad.

[Original color graphic from USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, Commodity Intelligence Report, May 9, 2008, reproduced in color in Polk article, modified here for better readability in grayscale.— Ed.]

Whether or not this was a wise decision, we now know that the Syrian government made the situation much worse by its next action. Lured by the high price of wheat on the world market, it sold its reserves. In 2006, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, it sold 1,500,000 metric tons or twice as much as in the previous year. The next year it had little left to export; in 2008 and for the rest of the drought years it had to import enough wheat to keep its citizens alive.

So tens of thousands of frightened, angry, hungry and impoverished former farmers flooded constituted [sic] a “tinder” that was ready to catch fire. The spark was struck on March 15, 2011 when a relatively small group gathered in the town of Daraa to protest against government failure to help them. Instead of meeting with the protestors and at least hearing their complaints, the government cracked down on them as subversives. The Assads, who had ruled the country since 1971, were not known for political openness or popular sensitivity. And their action backfired. Riots broke out all over the country[.] As they did, the Assads attempted to quell them with military force. They failed to do so and, as outside help—money from the Gulf states and Muslim “freedom fighters” from the rest of the world—poured into the country, the government lost control over 30% of the country’s rural areas and perhaps half of its population. By the spring of 2013, according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), upwards of 100,000 people had been killed in the fighting, perhaps 2 million have lost their homes and upwards of 2 million have fled abroad. Additionally, vast amounts of infrastructure, virtually whole cities like Aleppo, have been destroyed.

(<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/09/your-labor-day-syria-reader-part-2-william-polk/279255/>)

As the result of a civil war accompanied by droughts and famine, the working class in Syria has disintegrated, and remains without much access to the means of production. This makes it close to impossible for the workers to assert themselves as an independent working class force in the civil war. Thus, it was inevitable that reactionary Islamic and pro-imperialist forces would be in charge of the war against Assad, and are now killing not only combatants but also many civilians in the “liberated” zones.

As climate change intensifies, more weak states will fall apart, and more countries will be shattered into mini-states controlled by warlords and militias. What we see in Syria is somewhat similar to the situation in Somalia and Libya: the state as a centralized apparatus that manages to achieve “stability” for the sake of the capitalist class has fallen apart. The countries have been divided into multiple zones, each run by a de facto warlord who has carved out a piece of land and placed it under the control of forces loyal to him. The big losers in all of this are the masses and the working class. We see this in Syria, where the working class has lost its identity as such, while 100,000 people have died and millions of workers and peasants have been displaced, most likely permanently.

It may be hard to imagine, but in the fairly near future, civil wars like the one in Syria is could be sparked in the U.S., or for that matter, anywhere in the world. For example, if the intense drought in California keeps on going for a few more years, millions of people will be without water, and the Central Valley will be unable to sustain its role as the U.S.’s primary source of fruit and vegetables. For this among many other reasons, climate change is a very real global threat, which must be dealt with seriously. But the effort needed to stop climate change is completely inhibited by the profit motive of capitalism. Therefore, the only logical and sane solution is to build an international collective economy that is not based on profit. For this, we need a socialist revolution.

For Workers' Actions Against Imperialist War

Assad cannot be stopped by pro-imperialist forces (FSA), or by direct intervention by the U.S.. Only independent actions, or more exactly, a revolution by the working class, can topple Assad with progressive results. Sadly, though, this cannot happen now, because of the disintegration of the working class and the workers' displacement from the productive forces. The answer is not to replace the workers, who are the only power for social change, with the pro-imperialist FSA. Yet the opportunists in the left, such as the RCIT of Austria and the CWG in New Zealand and the U.S., still tightly tail the FSA.

If the U.S. were to strike Syria, we would advocate for the defeat of our own country. Political general strikes in the U.S. have the power to bring the U.S. war machine to a halt. We would encourage all the workers who work for the military to sabotage the war effort. As a concrete example, we would ask the longshore workers to refuse to touch ("hot cargo") any munitions or other supplies that are directed toward the war in Syria. While it is unlikely that such radical actions will take place, it is necessary to expound this type of perspective in order to defeat U.S. imperialism and capitalism worldwide.

The U.S.-Russia Deal—And the Future

As we go to press, it has just been announced that the U.S. and Russia have reached a "deal" under which Syria will destroy its chemical weapons, and the U.S. will not attack. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/15/world/middleeast/syria-talks.html>) Whether the agreement can be implemented remains a question, and the U.S. has not taken the possibility of military intervention entirely off the table. The outcome of Syria's civil war, and the fate of its population, remain uncertain. What is certain is that the role of the U.S. as the unquestioned enforcer for imperialist interests is in sharp decline.

In the coming years and decades, the repercussions of climate change will give rise to more and more situations like the civil war in Syria. Countless thousands, even millions, of innocent workers and farmers will fall victim to war, famine, and disease. It is too late to prevent climate change from causing this kind of catastrophe. The only effective way to minimize the damage is for workers worldwide to take power away from the capitalist class and transform the global economy, replacing the greed and chaos of the profit system with a democratically planned economy geared towards meeting the needs of humanity in an environmentally sustainable manner. **FOR**



Aerial view of the Zaatari refugee camp near the Jordanian-Syrian border, as of mid-July 2013. Tens of thousands of Syrians have fled their country to escape the civil war.

(MANDEL NGAN/AFP/Getty Images)

Getty

(Where We Stand, continued from page 4)

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 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 uncondi-

tionally 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.

If you are a class conscious
fighter against capitalism ...
if you are an internationalist ...
if you are a humanist ...
JOIN US!