

A Capitalist Disaster

Class, Race and Hurricane Sandy

Major disasters, whether “natural” or man-made in origin, serve as an x-ray of the societies in which they occur, laying bare the social contradictions that run like seismological fault lines through them. Hurricane Sandy, which battered a large swath of the Northeastern Seaboard of the U.S. this past October 29 is a stark example. Eight million people were left without electrical power and tens of thousands were trapped in New York City public housing without light, heat, water, elevators or telephones to communicate with the outside. For some in lower Manhattan the nightmare lasted for days, but weeks later thousands in hard-hit areas of Brooklyn, Queens and Long Island are still living precariously as winter comes on.

From the Galveston hurricane of 1900, which wiped out the Texas boom town, and the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 to the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, Hurricane Katrina which devastated the poor black neighborhoods of New Orleans in 2005 and the 2010 earthquake which flattened the vast slums of Haiti’s capital, thousands, tens of thousands and even hundreds of thousands of people died due to criminal lack of preparations, shoddy construction and dangerous location ultimately caused by an economic system of production for private profit. Who died and who lived was greatly influenced by class and race, with the poor and oppressed jammed into precarious structures in hazardous areas.

Of the many iconic photos of Sandy’s aftermath – Seaside Heights, NJ awash, Point Pleasant, Queens smoldering following a fire that destroyed over 100 homes, the tunnels into Manhattan submerged –



Thousands of subway workers labored round the clock to restore service, but transit bosses docked pay for those who couldn’t get to work when the system was shut down.

one stands out for its stark symbolism. A picture taken by a Reuters photographer shows the Manhattan skyline as a dark silhouette due to power outages, with the exception of a single skyscraper – the global headquarters

of financial vampire Goldman Sachs seems to have every light in the building on. As Lower Manhattan residents trudged through pitch-black streets with flashlights, the first priority of the government was to get Wall

Street up and running. Mayor Michael Bloomberg rang the opening bell of the New York Stock Exchange two days later, while nearby Chinatown was in the dark for *continued on page 17*

Oppose Obama/Romney, Break with Democrats and Republicans

No Choice for Workers in Capitalist Election Shell Game

Build a Revolutionary Workers Party

In the November U.S. elections, Democrat Obama beat Republican Romney by 51% to 47%, belying public opinion polls which had forecast a neck-and-neck race. The Democrats’ margin was mainly due to support from industrial workers in the Midwest and a heavy turnout of black and Latino voters. But although labor leaders are crowing “we won in November” and Latino groups are predicting that Obama will finally produce immigration reform, the election was no victory for working people.

On the contrary, Democrats and Republicans are now negotiating a bipartisan ruling-class attack, using the manufactured deadline of December 31 for a budget deficit reduction deal. However the horse-trading turns out, the partner parties of American capitalism are set to slash over one trillion dollars from social programs over the next decade.

Meanwhile, Republican right-wingers and Tea Party populists are on an anti-labor rampage. This came to a head in Michigan, traditionally a union bulwark, where a lame-duck legislature rammed through a “right-to-work” law aimed at undercutting unions’ ability to collect dues. Although several thousand union supporters demonstrated against

this anti-labor “sneak attack,” the union leaders spent their time closeted with the Republican governor and vowing revenge at the polls by electing more Democrats. This is the same formula that led to a disastrous defeat in Wisconsin.

What the union misleaders did not do is undertake strike action to shut down the auto plants, schools, transportation and state government. A statewide strike of public and private sector workers was called for, but that would require a revolt against the labor bureaucracy which is beholden to the Democrats and the capitalist system.

We print here our article put out on the eve of the election:

NOVEMBER 5 –The world’s attention is focused on the American presidential election pitting Republican Mitt Romney against Democratic president Barack Obama. The reason is obvious: people around the globe are well aware that a shift in policies of the United States can have a major impact on them. The U.S. population can’t escape the election hype, with the airwaves saturated with campaign ads and the ubiquitous message that “your vote counts.” But the idea that millions of poor, working-class and middle-class voters can determine the fate of the country is an illusion, a cynical hoax. In deciding who should be commander in *continued on page 2*

No Choice...

continued from page 1

chief and what the policies of U.S. imperialism should be, it is the capitalist ruling class that sets the terms. The political leaders do their bidding, getting the best elections their money can buy.

The most basic fact about the 2012 U.S. elections is that they are taking place in Year Five of a worldwide economic depression that is not going away any time soon. To be sure, the titans of Wall Street high finance and owners of giant corporations are raking in record profits (\$1.8 trillion dollars in 2011). But for the workers who produce all the goods and services – and the wealth appropriated by the owners of capital – there has been no recovery. Real wages (adjusted for inflation) fell by 2% last year. Meanwhile, mass unemployment persists: more than 23 million people who want to work can't find a job. The Obama campaign made much of a supposed drop of the unemployment rate in September, but the entire decrease was made up of workers who had been out of work so long that statisticians eliminated them from the workforce. The actual jobless rate, according to official stats, is over 15%, double the reported rate.

Profits up, wages down and persistent mass unemployment: that is the state of the American economy today. Yet the campaign debate consists of phony dueling over who is tougher on "terrorism," or about the health insurance plan dubbed "Obamacare," whose pro-business provisions both support. Then in the last week before the election, Hurricane Sandy pummeled a giant swath of the Northeast, producing over 100 deaths and leaving at its height some 20 million people without electricity. More than a million homes still lack heat and light as the temperatures drop. Such a destructive storm had long been predicted due to climate change, and measures proposed to deal with it. But the profit-hungry capitalists and their government did nothing, and now tens of thousands are homeless as a result. A socialist planned economy is needed to adequately prepare for and cope with such events.

Internationally, the imperialists go from one war to the next, at a monstrous cost in human lives. Over a decade in Afghanistan, by far the longest war in U.S. history; then invasion and eight-year occupation of Iraq; in 2011, laying waste to Libya; tomorrow it will be Syria. And after that, Iran and a thermonuclear conflagration? Meanwhile, throughout the capitalist world, workers and their trade unions are under attack. In the United States, teachers and public sector workers have been targeted, not only by conservative Republicans but also by liberal Democrats. They are required to pay

more for health insurance, job security is out the window, the retirement age is raised while pensions are converted into stocks and wiped out when the market crashes. With workers' wages stagnant for the last 40 years, new hires have seen their pay cut in half and millions of young people can't find any work at all. But none of this is an election issue.

There has been plenty of protest. In Europe there have been waves of workers mobilizations against "austerity": millions striking and marching in the streets of France in 2010 against attacks on pensions; general strikes in Greece throughout 2011 and 2012 against huge wage cuts and layoffs dictated by the eurobankers; in Spain, Portugal and Italy, repeated mass protests against similar "labor reforms" to benefit the capitalists who set off the economic crisis. In the U.S. there was an unprecedented explosion of working-class protest in Wisconsin last year with over 100,000 unionists marching again and again against the elimination of bargaining rights and tens of thousands occupying the state capitol for weeks. West Coast longshore workers took militant action against a scab employer, and Chicago teachers struck against President Obama's former top aide, now mayor Rahm Emanuel. Not a word about this in the election campaigns.

Unemployed youth and workers in North Africa in early 2011 sparked mass protests from Tunis to Cairo and toppled U.S.-backed regimes that had been in power for decades. This in turn inspired middle-class youth who formed the *indignados* (outraged) movement and occupied central squares in Spain and Portugal in May. In the fall, the Occupy Wall Street movement swept the United States, mushrooming to over 1,000 occupations. It was said that "OWS" had "changed the conversation" in the U.S., and for a few months pundits in the press and talking heads on television discussed the growing income disparity, corporate political power and bankers' bonuses. But none of that protest, nothing of the workers' struggles, not even the empty populist rhetoric of Occupy is reflected in the election campaigns. Forget about the "99%," when Romney lambasted 47% of the population as moochers, Obama barely mentioned it.

The electoral battle is between two multi-millionaires who are proposing to manage the affairs of capital. *Their* issues are over how exactly to wage the capitalist war on the workers or which country to invade next – not something to be discussed openly before the population which has the vote and is under the illusion that it gets to decide. So instead the electoral

"debate" is about personalities and trivia. Yet the labor bureaucracy ties the workers to the capitalist parties that are screwing us. The working class needs to *oust the bureaucrats, break with the Democrats and build a workers party*, not mainly to run in rigged bourgeois elections, but a revolutionary party to champion the cause of all the victims of capitalism and lead the class struggle forward to a fight for power. *Our* issues – racism, oppression of women, attacks on immigrants, poverty, economic depression, imperialist war – can only be solved by expropriating the capitalist class and launching the socialist revolution which is key to liberation for all.

Obama Governs for Wall Street and the Pentagon

The key to capitalist elections is money, always has been back to the dawn of the republic, and always will be until the arrogant bourgeois rulers are brought down¹. This year campaign expenditures will total over \$6 billion – including a billion each for Obama and Romney, another billion by "Super-PAC" lobbies and \$3 billion for Congressional and Senate races – making it the most expensive election in history. While the media concentrate on polls showing a neck-and-neck horse race, political professionals are tracking the cash-on-hand totals and multi-million-dollar TV ad buys. These require big bucks from giant corporations and wealthy donors, so that it is virtually guaranteed that the winner (and the loser) will be beholden to Wall Street. So long as capital rules, victory and its spoils will go to those who defend its interests – which in the U.S. includes both Democrats and Republicans, as well as minor "third parties" that come and go. Elections are a really good bet for the bosses: heads they win, tails we lose.

Barack Obama was elected in 2008 on a wave of enthusiasm after eight years of the widely despised George Bush II, outrage over racist treatment of the poor and black victims of Hurricane Katrina, and weariness of years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq. Youth and African American voters flocked to the polls on promises of "hope" and "change." While many on the left caved in to his popularity, the Internationalist Group called for revolutionary opposition to Obama from the outset. We noted that the election of the first African American president in U.S. history "reflected a considerable social change in this country founded on chattel slavery," but it "has not changed the system of imperialist capitalism one iota" ("Obama Presidency: U.S. Imperial-

¹ Contrary to the belief in the Occupy movement that the corrupt influence of private money on public policy began when the Supreme Court ruled in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010) that corporations have the rights of persons when it comes to campaign donations, American politics has been beset by bribery, graft, extortion, patronage, nepotism, cronyism, kickbacks and robbery since the "Founding Fathers" wrote "We the People" at the head of the U.S. Constitution. Check out the Hayes-Tilden election and rotten Compromise of 1877, which put an end to the only democratic interlude in U.S. history (albeit a regionally limited one), the period of Radical Reconstruction following the Civil War and the abolition of slavery. When Northern plutocracy and Southern plantocracy combined, democracy and black rights were sacrificed. However, the capitalist government serves capital not just because particular politicians are bought, but because that is the function and purpose of the state power in bourgeois society.

ism Tries a Makeover," *The Internationalist* No. 28, March-April 2009). Politically, Obama did not represent the black poor but the filthy rich of Wall Street. In May 2007, long before a single person voted for him in a primary, Goldman Sachs hosted a private dinner to showcase Obama. Firm executives gave \$1 million to his candidacy, more than any other donor.

Soon the hope turned to disappointment as Obama continued the policies of his predecessor. The obscene "bailout" of Wall Street continued and even escalated, pouring almost \$30 trillion into the banks. In order to rescue bankrupt auto companies, auto workers' wages, pensions and job security were slashed. The torture prison at Guantánamo remained open. While U.S. troops were eventually withdrawn from Iraq, the war in Afghanistan sharply escalated, with no end in sight. After being caught flat-footed by the 2011 uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, Washington dropped its aging autocrats and allied with reactionary Islamists to topple the maverick Muammar Qaddafi in Libya. And following the elections Obama and his secretary of state Hillary Clinton would like to do the same against the Assad regime in Syria.

In the U.S., racist repression and attacks continued unabated in the Obama administration. The vigilante murder of Trayvon Martin in Florida, coming a few months after the execution of Troy Davis in Georgia – a blatant legal lynching – touched off massive outrage. But as black Democrats sought to turn this into a campaign for gun control and support for Obama's reelection, the protests petered out. "Stop and frisk" practices of police in New York City (where almost 700,000 are searched without cause every year), Philadelphia (over 250,000 stops a year) and elsewhere treat young black and Latino men as criminals. Yet in Philly, black Democratic mayor Michael Nutter has pushed the illegal searches, and in NYC Democratic city councilmen only call to modify the racial profiling policies, not ban them.

Despite his promises of immigration reform, Barack Obama dramatically increased the number of deportations of undocumented immigrants to a quota of 400,000 a year. Many deportees are housed in huge concentration camps, separated from their U.S.-born children, who are often stolen from them by the government. Obama made a play for the Latino vote with his program for deferred action on deportation of some undocumented immigrant youth, granting a two-year waiver allowing them to go to school and work. Almost 180,000 applied within two months after the program opened. This will certainly win Obama Latino votes, but it won't help immigrants get legal status. It is not a path to citizenship or even residency, it only lasts two years, a Republican president could repeal it, and in most cases it gives ICE immigration cops information they didn't have about the whereabouts and status of the youths and their parents.²

Things are so bad that one of Republican Romney's main campaign pitches is that he can produce the "change" that Obama couldn't. The Democrats, meanwhile, are basically trying to arm-twist voters into pulling the lever or pushing the touch screen for Obama on the grounds that a Romney

² See "The Empty Election Promises of 'Mr. Deportations' Obama," *The Internationalist* supplement, Summer 2012; and "Deportation Elections 2012: For a Revolutionary Workers Party!" *The Internationalist* supplement, May 2012.

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The Internationalist

A Journal of Revolutionary Marxism
for the Reforging of the Fourth International

Publication of the Internationalist Group,
section of the League for the Fourth International

EDITORIAL BOARD: Jan Norden (editor), Abram Negrete, Mark Lazarus, Marjorie Salzburg

The Internationalist (ISSN 1091-2843) is published bimonthly, skipping July-August, by Mundial Publications, P.O. Box 3321, Church Street Station, New York, NY 10008, U.S.A.
Telephone: (212) 460-0983 Fax: (212) 614-8711 E-mail: internationalistgroup@msn.com
Subscriptions: US\$10 for five issues.

Special Issue



November-December 2012





No More Wisconsins! Rather than fight the union-busters head-on with class struggle, the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy ties workers to the bosses' Democratic Party, with disastrous results. Above: Internationalist Group at July 17 solidarity rally with locked-out Con Ed workers in New York.

win would be a lot worse. An ugly racist backlash against a black man in the White House has fueled much of the anti-Obama virulence, particularly in the South. But the hatred against is more intense than the support for him from liberal Democrats and even many blacks, given Obama's record over the past four years. For this reason, pundits have raised that Obama could even lose the popular vote but win in the Electoral College, or that a tie vote in that anti-democratic body could throw the election to the Republican-dominated House of Representatives, or once again to the Supreme Court. The election aftermath could be even dirtier and more contested than in 2000.

Needed: a Revolutionary Workers Party to Wage Class War

Whoever wins, what will happen following the election is already in the works. Under last year's bipartisan "deficit-reduction" deal, across-the-board cuts totaling \$1.2 trillion over nine years will take effect after December 31, with social programs slashed by 8% to 9% on average. While the Democrats

say they're for ending the Bush-era tax cuts on the wealthy, Obama declared during the debates that he was in favor of lowering the corporate tax rate. There will also likely be an escalation of U.S. intervention in Syria. Hillary Clinton has called a conclave this week in the Arabian/Persian Gulf oil sheikdom of Qatar to put together a "democratic" coalition of imperialist flunkies that Washington can control. Once they have that, the Pentagon could start sending in heavy weapons. This would transform what has been a communal civil war, in which proletarian revolutionaries are for the defeat of both sides, into a direct imperialist attack, in which communists defend Assad's Syria against the U.S., NATO and their puppets.

While there are differences between the Democratic and Republican partner parties of American capitalism, such as over the scope of government intervention in the economy, they are from a common class standpoint of the bourgeoisie against the working class. When the Obama government intervenes to "rescue" an industry it is to prop up the bosses by intensifying the exploitation of the workers. When the Democrats funnel money to education,

through their "Race to the Top" program, it is on the condition of introducing union-busting "reforms" such as "merit pay," teacher evaluations based on student test scores, gutting teachers' job tenure, and advancing the privatization of public education through "charter schools." If the Republicans regain the White House, they could appoint Supreme Court justices who would undo *Roe v. Wade* which established women's right to abortion. Yet instead of openly defending this right, the Democratic liberals have repeatedly ceded to right-wing bigots seeking to undermine it piecemeal.

Liberals, labor bureaucrats and "mainstream" civil rights leaders are, as usual, calling to support Democrat Obama with the standard appeal that Republican Romney is worse. But no bourgeois party or politician is a "lesser evil" from the standpoint of the working class: they all are part and parcel of the capitalist war on the exploited and oppressed. In fact, precisely because of the support of the labor fakers and black misleaders, Obama has often been *more* effective in pushing through anti-labor policies. We must fight against the attacks on working people and on the rights of women, gays, African Americans and immigrants, as well as on semi-colonial countries. But this struggle cannot be carried out by supporting the parties and candidates representing the interests of capital. These attacks must be fought through *class* struggle. Barack Obama is no defender of the black poor, nor is Hillary Clinton a champion of oppressed women: they are representatives of the imperialist bourgeoisie, warmongers and mass murderers.³

The experience of Wisconsin should drive home the urgent need to fight for working-class independence. During February and March 2011, union-centered mobilizations kept up for three weeks, with tens of thousands of workers marching around the Capitol in Madison and thousands occupying it. They were determined to defeat the union-busting bill of Republican governor Scott Walker to eliminate collective bargaining rights for public employees. There was serious discussion of a general strike by workers for the first time in the U.S. in

65 years; the local union federation voiced support, how-to guides were distributed. Yet in the end, the bureaucrats buckled and instead called to support a recall effort against Walker and Republican senators – in effect, calling to vote for Democrats. But the Democrats and bureaucrats had agreed to all the cutbacks the Republicans demanded, and in the end, after a year-long effort, the recall effort failed. Obama didn't intervene, fearful that he could be tagged a partisan of "class war."

Lesson of Wisconsin: allying with Democrats spells defeat. Republicans accuse Democrats of waging class war whenever they even hint at policies that might cost the filthy rich a few dollars of their ill-gotten gains. In fact, as multi-billionaire Warren Buffet famously remarked, "there's class warfare, all right. But it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning." Back in the 1970s, the populist writer Gore Vidal, who died last summer, wrote: "There is only one party in the United States, the Property Party ... and it has two right wings: Republican and Democrat." To wage and *win* the class war against the bipartisan capitalist assault, we must first fight for the *political independence of the working class from all wings of the bourgeoisie*. This is as true in the United States as in South Africa, where black workers are being murdered by the African National Congress government they saw as their own. That means, first of all, driving out the labor bureaucracy that serves as a transmission belt for the capitalist ruling class. *So long as the exploited vote for the parties and politicians of the exploiters, we cannot win.*

What's required to replace the pro-capitalist bureaucrats is a leadership that fights to build a workers party, not some kind of electoral labor party but one based on a program of revolutionary class struggle. We need a party that fights for democratic rights including *free abortion on demand, free high-quality socialized medicine, free public education for all* at every level, and *full citizenship rights for all immigrants*. But that is not enough. The working class needs a party that has a real answer to mass unemployment, raising transitional demands such as a *sliding scale of working hours* to provide jobs for all; a party that is prepared to organize *workers defense guards* and *labor/black mobilizations against racist attacks*; a party that fights to *defeat* the military adventures of "its own" rulers through *workers strikes against imperialist war*. In short, we need a party that has the program and determination to bring down the capitalist system of racism, poverty and war, fighting for *international socialist revolution*.

Always pushing a "lesser evil" on an ever more right-wing basis, the respectable labor and civil rights leaders, tailed by the reformist left, have helped shift the mainstream of U.S. politics further and further to the right over the past decades. They are impervious to the lessons of experience, no matter how much the Democratic Party attacks labor and the oppressed, because their very job is to help the capitalist class subjugate the working people. Building the nucleus of a revolutionary workers party, as the Internationalist Group seeks to do, is the most crucial step towards breaking this cycle where capital always comes out on top, no matter which of its spokesmen gets the nod this time around. ■

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Leon Trotsky in Mexican exile, Coyoacán, 1940.

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February 2012

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³ "Barack Obama's Global Assassination Bureau," on page 5 of this issue.

For International Workers Action to Defeat Israeli Assault/Occupation!

Zionist Mass Murderers Strike Again:

Defend Gaza!

NOVEMBER 17 – As soon as the U.S. elections were over, the Zionist Israeli government launched a rain of death against the beleaguered Palestinian population of Gaza. The killing of the military leader of Hamas was accompanied by a full-scale barrage of indiscriminate aerial bombing. So far, the death toll in the tiny Gaza strip is over 30, including nine children killed by the supposed “pinpoint” bombardment. Tens of thousands of Israeli reservists have been called up and a ground assault may well be imminent. Meanwhile, U.S. imperialism stands fully behind the Israeli militarists, while threatening Syria. *Gaza must not stand alone! Class-conscious workers should mobilize their power in concrete action to defend the Palestinian people and defeat the Zionist militarists and their imperialist backers.*

If U.S. president Barack Obama began his re-election campaign with the murder of Osama bin Laden (see “Barack Obama’s Global Assassination Bureau,” *The Internationalist*, November 2012), Israeli premier Benjamin Netanyahu launched his campaign for the January 2013 elections by the terrorist assassination of Ahmed al-Jabari. Jabari was the head of the al-Qassam Brigades, the military arm of Hamas, the governing Islamist party of Gaza. Israeli leaders and the pro-Zionist imperialist media pretend that the attack on Gaza was in response to rockets from Gaza aimed at Israel. This is an absurd pretext, since rockets have killed a grand total of 13 people over the last four years, less than the number of fatalities in an average week of Israeli traffic accidents. Rather, the serial murderer Netanyahu, who is responsible for killing thousands of civilians, prefers to run for reelection with bombs dropping and Palestinians dying.

But the blood-drenched premier is hardly the only Israeli politician who classifies as a war criminal. His partner in crime is war minister Ehud Barak, the former leader of the “Labor” opposition, who ran Israel’s 2009 Operation Cast Lead that slaughtered upwards of 1,400 residents of the Gaza. And the current leader of the Zionist capitalist “Labor” Party, Shelly Yachimovich, hasn’t uttered a word against the murderous attack on Gaza, nor against the expansion of settlements in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank. All Israeli capitalist politicians are responsible for this latest crime of Zionist militarism. In contrast, there have been demonstrations of several hundred protesters in Tel Aviv and Haifa against the Israeli attacks. They have faced bloodthirsty fascistic counterdemonstrators calling for the extermination of Arabs, leftists and homosexuals.

In Egypt, while the Cairo masses denounce the Israeli attacks, the Islamist leaders now in office are proposing a long-term ceasefire with Israel. The proposal is being prepared by Morsi together with Turkish premier Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the emir of Qatar and Hamas leader Khaled Meshal. This is same gang of Islamist capitalist leaders who have joined with U.S. imperialism in trying to patch together a pro-imperialist puppet government to prepare the way for a full-scale U.S./NATO attack on

U.S./NATO Imperialists, Israeli Zionists and Arab Islamists: Hands Off Syria!

Defend the Palestinian People – For an Arab/Hebrew Workers State in a Socialist Federation of the Near East

Syria. And while the Zionists bomb Gaza, the Egyptian government keeps the Palestinian population there imprisoned behind barbed wire and steel barriers.

Some leftists, such as Egypt’s Revolutionary Socialists (who notoriously supported the Muslim Brotherhood candidate Morsi on the second round of the presidential election earlier this year) have said the government should be “cutting all ties with the Zionist enemy, abolishing the Camp David agreement, deploying the Egyptian army in Sinai and permanently reopening the Rafah crossing” (*Socialist Worker* (U.K.), 17 November). Genuinely revolutionary communists are absolutely for opening the gates to the Gaza Strip, but the idea that the Egyptian government would undertake military action to defend the Palestinians is deeply false. Under nationalist leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt ruled Gaza with an iron hand, and ever since it has cooperated with the Israeli occupation and starvation blockade. However, *Egyptian workers and youth* could march on the Gaza border, cut off Egyptian supplies of gas to Israel, and block U.S. and Israeli ships from the Suez Canal.

The Israeli warmongers are always ready to use the genocidal Nazi Holocaust against Jews in Europe as an excuse for their latest murderous rampage. Yet the Zionist militarists have a racist mentality that in many ways reflects that of the anti-Semitic German (and other) fascists, only directed against another Semitic people, the Arabs. In promising to repeat the attacks on Gaza, Israeli army leaders talk of “cutting the grass,” by periodically mowing down those who resist Zionist occupation. The rocket attacks by Hamas, Islamic jihad and others are ineffective and counterproductive, but they are often greeted by desperate Palestinians filled with justifiable rage against the Israeli starvation blockade. While giving no political support to the reactionary Islamists, or to the Palestinian Authority which has become a puppet of the Israeli occupiers, any socialist opponent of Zionism must stand for military defense of Gaza and all the Occupied Territories.

Not only is the savage Israeli assault *not* a response to rocket launchings from Gaza, it may have been intended to undercut negotiations for an extended ceasefire. As revealed in an article by Gershon Baskin (“Israel’s Shortsighted Assassination,” *New York Times*, 17 November), the slain al-Qassem Brigades leader Jabari had received a draft ceasefire proposal, drawn up by Baskin and the Hamas deputy foreign minister and supported by “key

Hamas leaders,” including detailed provisions for the Gaza government to enforce a ban on rocket launchings. Such an agreement would have turned Hamas into a joint client of Egypt and Israel. Yet even that would not satisfy Zionist leaders who are bent on war.

The present assault on Gaza is only the prelude to a wider conflagration in the Middle East. In the days before the assassination of Jabari, the Israeli military shelled Syria from the occupied Golan Heights. Meanwhile, the Zionists are chomping at the bit to attack Iran, supposedly to destroy its nuclear facilities. Israel has hundreds of nuclear weapons, and is prepared to use them on civilian populations, while Iran has none. The real threat to (non-existent) peace in the region is Israel, which has launched war after war. And while politically opposing the mullah regime in Tehran (as well as the Islamist-led opposition), we insist that Iran has every right to develop nuclear weapons against the very real military threats it faces from Israel and the United States. We call as well for the exploited and oppressed throughout the region to join with workers and opponents of imperialism everywhere to demand that U.S./NATO imperialists get out of the Middle East.

Over the last year and a half, most of the left has supported a supposed “Arab Spring” and “revolutions” in Tunisia and Egypt. Yet while the dictators were toppled, the dictatorships remain. Today “moderate” Islamist rulers sit atop military-based regimes allied with the imperialists. And Libya, after a horrendous bloodbath, has become a NATO protectorate run by competing gangs of Islamist terrorists. Now the opportunist leftists are pulling the same sham they did over Libya, claiming to oppose Western intervention while supporting Syrian “rebels” who are begging for Western arms. The Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International demand: **U.S./NATO imperialists, hands off Syria.** And while not advocating an on-going boycott of all things Israeli or divestment, which are (fruitless) attempts at engineering imperialist pressure on Israel, we call today (as we

did at the time of the June 2010 Israeli attack on the Gaza aid flotilla, see “Oakland Picket Blocks Israeli Ship,” *The Internationalist* No. 31, Summer 2010) for *workers action to defeat the Zionist assault*, particularly a labor boycott of transport to and from Israel.

As we wrote of the last major Israeli attack on Gaza:

“The first task today must be to defend the Palestinian people against the Israeli occupier and oppressor. Recognizing the Palestinian right to self-determination and to a Palestinian state, proletarian internationalists also recognize the right to existence and national self-determination of the Hebrew-speaking population while opposing a religion-based, ethnically exclusive regime such as Zionist Israel – a state founded on the basis of stealing the Palestinians’ lands and expelling the people – which is inherently oppressive to the non-Jewish population and Arabs in particular.

“The Trotskyists of the League for the Fourth International stand for an Arab-Hebrew workers state in a socialist federation of the Near East.”

–“Zionist Mass Murder: Break the Siege, Defend Gaza!” *The Internationalist* No. 28, March-April 2009

We seek to build a common Trotskyist party in all of Palestine as we fight in the United States to break with the Democratic and Republican parties of capital, to form a revolutionary workers party. Above all, it is necessary to mobilize the working class to defeat marauding U.S. imperialism, without whose backing the kill-crazed Zionist rulers of Israel would never be able to get away with mass murder the way they have for decades. **Smash imperialism and Zionism through international socialist revolution!** ■



IG at November 15 protest outside Israeli mission to the U.N. in NYC against Zionist attack on Gaza.

The Internationalist

Oppose Democrat/Republican Drive to Police-State Rule

Barack Obama's Global Assassination Bureau

Over the May Day 2011 weekend, when a Navy SEAL commando hit squad killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan while NATO warplanes bombed a residential compound in Tripoli, Libya attempting to murder Muammar Qaddafi, we commented that "Barack Obama's 2012 Reelection Campaign Has Begun" (see U.S./NATO Murder, Inc., *The Internationalist* No. 33, Summer 2011). A widely publicized picture showed the U.S. president, Vice-President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, intelligence chiefs and military brass, eyes glued to a screen watching the assassination of the head of Al Qaeda (the World Islamic Front) in real time. The gang of war criminals in the White House Situation Room all wanted to be in on the kill.

Sure enough, 15 months later at this year's Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina, Obama surrogates like Biden and Senator John Kerry whipped up the crowd to a kill-crazed frenzy, reveling in the execution of the Al Qaeda leader. As Glenn Greenwald commented in the London *Guardian* (7 September), "Almost every time Bin Laden's scalp was paraded around on its pike – all thanks to the warrior spirit and unflinching courage of our commander-in-chief – the crowd of progressives, liberals and party faithful erupted into a prolonged 'USA. USA' chant." And in the final debate with Mitt Romney on foreign policy, Obama essentially accused the Republican of being a wimp for saying in 2008 that the U.S. should ask Pakistan's permission before launching the hit.

Bin Laden, the son of a Yemeni-Arabian construction magnate and former U.S. ally in the CIA-backed "holy war" against Soviet "infidels" in Afghanistan, was named the mastermind behind the 11 September 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, responsible for the deaths of some 2,600 civilians in that act of indiscriminate terror. Republican president Bush declared that he wanted UBL (the Pentagon/CIA acronym) "dead or alive," preferably the former. Since then, and particularly under the administration of Democrat Obama, it is now reported that the U.S. has assassinated over 3,000 individuals in "targeted killings" by pilotless "drone" aircraft. That's on top of the million-plus dead in the first three years of the Iraq war (2003-2006) and tens of thousands of civilians killed in a decade of war in Afghanistan, often by "precision" air strikes. But in U.S. "warspeak," non-combatants killed are written off as "collateral damage."

The Obama administration justifies its assassination program by claiming that it is much more focused on killing "bad guys." How many civilian have been killed in drone strikes is unknown, since the U.S. refuses to release information about who and how many it guns down from the skies. For what its worth, all such murders (whether of "good guys" or bad) are illegal under so-called "international law" and in violation of executive orders issued by Republican presidents Ford and Reagan – not

that this ever put a dent in U.S. assassination programs. At most they just outsourced them to friendly dictators, such as under the U.S.-linked Operation Condor in Latin America which "terminated" upwards of 60,000 leftists and even the rare constitutionalist officer who got in the way of CIA coup plans.

Recently, the *Washington Post* (23-25 October) published a three-part special report on "The Permanent War" which began: "Over the past two years, the Obama administration has been secretly developing a new blueprint for pursuing terrorists, a next-generation targeting list called the

'disposition matrix'." Moreover, aside from strikes in Pakistan, which are the province of the CIA, *President Obama himself personally authorizes the inclusion of each individual on this kill list*, including American citizens. The Geneva Conventions on war, due process under the U.S. Constitution? Forget it. Once, back in 2008, the former liberal professor of constitutional law objected to waterboarding as torture. Now as commander in chief of U.S. imperialism, Obama is playing god, meting out what he considers "justice," deciding who lives and who shall die.

According to the *New York Times* (29 May), the lists submitted for approval by the president included a 17-year-old girl. And in September 2011, after a U.S. missile killed U.S. Muslim cleric Anwar al-Awlaki and another American from North Carolina (labeled an "Al Qaeda propagandist"), two weeks later a drone strike by the Pentagon's Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) killed Awlaki's 16-year-old son. Asked by reporters to justify this wanton killing, a top Obama campaign official, former White House press secretary Robert Gibbs chillingly replied that Abdulrahman Awlaki should have "had a more responsible father" (*The Atlantic*, 24 October)! In the name of the "war on terror," the president of the United States (POTUS) is running a global terrorist "assassination bureau" that is murdering children.

The ghoulish terminology (kill lists are a "disposition matrix," targets are "nominated," missile strikes launched from Predator and Reaper drones are "kinetic action," etc.) suggest the "newspeak" of Big Brother's tyrannical regime in George Orwell's novel *1984* or the sci-fi movie *The Matrix* and its sequels. In fact, the military researchers are already "working on software that ultimately could allow drones to work autonomously to hunt, target and kill enemy



In on the kill: terror war criminals in White House Situation Room groove on Navy SEAL execution of Osama bin Laden, 3 May 2011.

forces," reported the *Washington Post* (19 September 2011). The White House insists its drone killing program is legal, based on memos by Justice Department lawyers. But just as the Bush administration refused to release secret memos which gave the green light to waterboarding torture, the Obama administration refuses to release its legal briefs authorizing assassination.

The recent *Washington Post* special report detailed the rationale and workings of the matrix. It is a database that was put together by the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) to merge the separate kill lists of the CIA and JSOC, both of which run drone assassination programs. From being a spy outfit in the anti-Soviet Cold War that engaged in skullduggery and "dirty tricks," up to and including "termination with extreme prejudice," the Central Intelligence Agency has increasingly become a paramilitary force. JSOC, in turn, acts independently of the Pentagon chain of command, answerable directly to the White House, hence its nickname of the "President's Army." The matrix is constantly updated by the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) to include new "nominations" when "high priority" targets are taken out.

Nominations to add to the assassination roster are discussed at a weekly conclave of top security officials, known as "Terror Tuesday" meetings. The recommendations are then presented to the president, who (as the 29 May *Times* article put it) usually "approves lethal action without handwringing." The updated kill lists are then passed down to a global network of bases from which drones operate. Missile strikes against targets in Pakistan (334, almost all after Obama's 2008 election) are launched from Afghanistan. Strikes in Yemen are carried out from a secret CIA base in Saudi Arabia and a JSOC base in the tiny African statelet of Djibouti, just across the Red Sea, which

also handles Somalia. New secret bases have been set up in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, Burkina Faso and Mauritania under the U.S. Africa Command.

This global assassination bureau operating on "executive authority" goes hand in hand with assaults on civil liberties inside the United States. Capping the ubiquitous expansion of security and surveillance measures in the wake of 9/11, the defense authorization act passed by Congress and signed by Obama last December lets the president hold "covered persons," including U.S. citizens, in military prisons indefinitely. Under the elastic definition of what constitutes support to "terrorism," this could include anyone from Islamic charities to leftist anarchists picked up in FBI raids in Seattle and Portland in May. These are all facets of a drive toward militarized police-state rule to enforce U.S. imperialist hegemony. And anyone who thinks Democrat Barack Obama is the "lesser evil" here compared to Republican Mitt Romney isn't paying attention.

One might think that the investigative journalism reports delving into the secret program of killer drones would have greatly upset an administration that has, more than any other in U.S. history, gone after reporters and whistle-blowers with a vengeance in order to stop leaks. But no, the Democrats positively revel in the revelations, showing their commander as a tough guy, not "soft on terrorism." No indeed, for the leading terror masters in the world are to be found not in caves in Afghanistan and Yemen, but in the White House Situation Room as they groove on "kinetic action" to take out the latest "nominees" on their "disposition matrix." To oppose the march to police-state rule, we say: Oppose Obama/Romney – break with the Democrats, Republicans and all capitalist parties – build a workers party to fight for socialist revolution. ■

It's Showdown Time on the Portland Docks

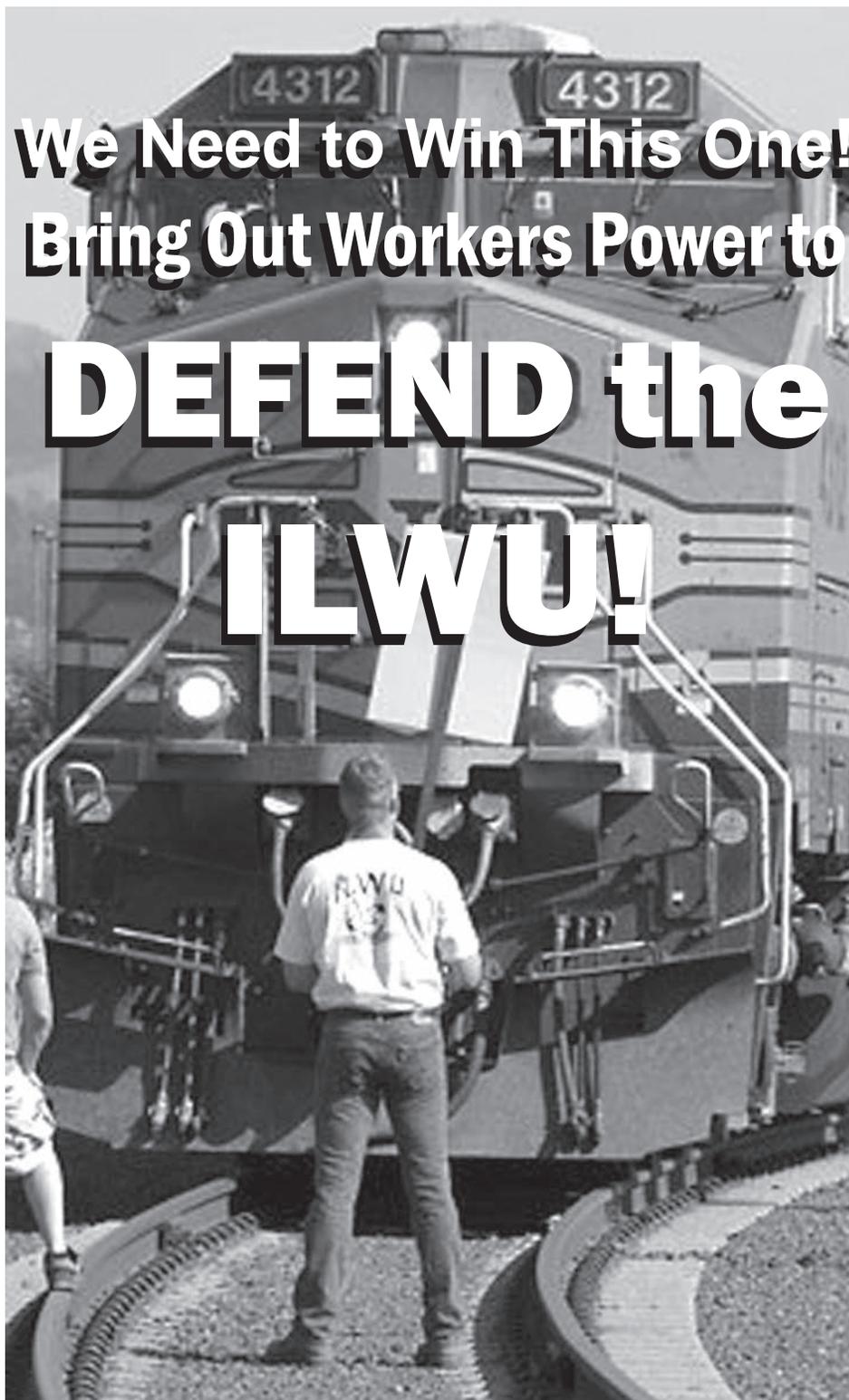
NOVEMBER 29 – The global grain cartel, made up of some of the world's biggest, greediest and most secretive monopolies, is gorging on record profits while hunger stalks millions of poor and working people. Now these profiteers are gunning for the hard-won gains of the working class. Their target is the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, and ground zero is the Portland docks. On November 29, the Northwest Grainhandlers Agreement between the ILWU and the agribusiness/shipping cartels expired. This is a showdown. **All working people must come to the defense of the ILWU.**

A headline in the *International Business Times* (4 September) put it starkly: "Big Grain Companies Reap Profits As Global Food Prices Soar And Poor Go Hungry." The big four – Archer Daniels Midland, Bunge, Cargill and Louis Dreyfus, collectively known as the "ABCDs" – control up to 90 percent of the world's grain trade, and they are making money hand over fist. Now they want to increase their bloated profits by destroying job protections, bargaining rights and safety conditions of the workers whose labor they exploit.

The employers are demanding huge givebacks from the ILWU, and they are preparing to use force to do so. The grain companies could impose their contract, or declare a lockout of union workers at any time. A strikebreaking "contractor," J.R. Gettier Associates, has set up shop in Vancouver, WA for the last two months. Gettier, says the *Portland Business Journal* (28 November) "specializes in providing replacement labor and security measures during labor strikes," i.e., *scabs and thugs*. A new access road, "Scab Alley," has been built into the Port of Portland's Terminal 5. Don't think they won't try to use it.

So here you have giant conglomerates, who are starving millions and forcing you to pay \$4 and more for a box of cereal by jacking up prices with their monopoly power. Naturally these price gougers are defended by the bosses' press and the bosses' government. Under attack is the strongest union on the West Coast, which has been in the forefront of labor's struggles for decades. On May Day 2008 the ILWU shut down all 29 Pacific Coast ports to stop the war on Iraq and Afghanistan. In this fight, WE HAVE A SIDE. The whole labor movement must prepare now for militant action to DEFEND OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN THE ILWU!

Workers have the power, but we must use it, or lose it. Last week a picket by



Don Ryan/AP

ILWU pickets block grain train to scab EGT terminal, 7 September 2011. Labor's gotta play hardball to win!

SEIU port workers shut down the Oakland docks. Right now, the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, California – the largest in the U.S. – are shut down by a strike of office and clerical workers (OCU) Local 63 of the ILWU. Ten container terminals are paralyzed as ILWU members refuse to cross picket lines. After months of stonewalling,

the employers suddenly announce they are ready to talk. But the retail store kingpins are calling on President Barack Obama to intervene. Despite the election rhetoric, Democrats are no friends of labor: Obama represents Wall Street, not working people and hard-pressed African Americans. Next up is the Pacific Northwest, with four of the

nation's biggest grain ports located in the Portland area.

The employers smell blood. They want to impose the terms of the concessionary contract at the new EGT grain terminal in Longview, WA. Last year, militant struggle by the ILWU ranks blocked mile-long grain trains and mobilized over 800 union members from up and down the coast to "storm" the scab terminal. The threat of more powerful workers mobilizations, with support from Occupy activists, brought the EGT bosses to the bargaining table. But an eleventh-hour deal struck between top ILWU bureaucrats and EGT resulted in a sellout that undermined the hiring hall, allowed for non-union construction, control-room, clerk and tugboat jobs, and wrote the "slave labor" Taft-Hartley law into the contract.

Many on the left and some Occupy activists hailed the EGT contract as a victory. Dead wrong. *The Internationalist* (11 February) warned that "the union leadership made significant concessions in the bargaining. This could set the stage for future battles as other shippers demand similar terms." Exactly that is what's happening now. If the grain bosses are able to impose the rotten EGT terms, *it will be a serious blow to the rights and living standards of all workers, union and unorganized*. Crucially, East and Gulf Coast dockworkers in the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA), whose contract has been extended to December 29, should mobilize together with workers on the West Coast. In case of a lockout, all U.S. ports should be struck, and there should be solidarity action around the globe.

This is class war: there are no neutrals here. The grain bosses have billions of dollars in their war chests. On their side stand the capitalist state, the media, the courts, the cops and their private armies of scab-herding security guards. Obama's Coast Guard has announced that it will patrol the Columbia River in defense of the shippers, as it did at EGT in January. The grain merchants and the Wall Street bankers, backed up by the Democratic and Republican parties that rule this country on their behalf, think they can walk all over the millions of working people who are seeing our wages shrink, our jobs disappear and our homes foreclosed as the government ratchets up its endless wars, racist police-state repression and mass deportations of immigrants.

But without our labor, the billionaire bosses wouldn't have a dime. If the labor movement comes to the aid of the ILWU along with the poor and oppressed African American, Asian and Latino populations, together we can bring the arrogant "ABCD" bosses to their knees!

Unions should prepare *now* to stand with the ILWU in building *mass picket lines that scabs won't dare to cross*. This effort should be broadened to include non-union workers like the port truckers, and organizations representing all those oppressed by the rule of the billionaires – from neighborhoods fighting foreclosures to students fighting tuition hikes.

The Internationalist Group, a labor-socialist organization, is taking part in the efforts to mobilize solid support for the ILWU in their struggle with the grain bosses. We believe in the ILWU slogan, "**an injury to one is an injury to all.**" And that means real solidarity, not just in words but in deeds. Join with us, with your co-workers, friends and neighbors to **defend the ILWU. THEIR FIGHT IS OUR FIGHT.** ■

Don't Fall for the Mediation Trap!

Mobilize for a Nationwide ILWU-ILA Port Strike

DECEMBER 12 – On Saturday, December 8, the Pacific Northwest Grainhandlers consortium and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union agreed to accept federal mediation. This is a trap. Federal "mediators" work for the bosses' government, which under Democrat Obama already has the Coast Guard patrolling the Columbia River. It's there to prevent strike pickets, as it did last January in the struggle against EGT union-busting in Longview, WA. A Taft-Hartley injunction, like Republican Bush imposed during the PMA lockout in 2002 could be next.

The grain shippers are seeking to

eliminate scores of job protection clauses of the contract and are demanding "the exclusive right to take any and all action" they want to order around the workforce. There is nothing to mediate. Any contract that accepts ANY of these givebacks would be a sellout. In fact, the grain cartel is wallowing in record profits. The ILWU negotiators must not give in to pressure from the bosses and their government, as the International did at EGT, negotiating a concessionary contract that set the stage for the current battle.

The future of the union is at stake. Only a full-scale mobilization of the ILWU's power can throw back the capitalist war on labor. On

Monday, the International Longshoremen's Association voted to authorize a strike on the East and Gulf coasts, which the *Journal of Commerce* (10 December) says is "all but inevitable" come December 29. The real answer to the PMA and PNG bosses is a **coordinated ILWU-ILA strike shutting down all U.S. ports.**

The labor bureaucracy's "strategy" of relying on the Democratic Party is a recipe for disaster. We saw it last year in Wisconsin and now in Michigan. We need to break with the capitalist Democrats and start now building a class-struggle workers party to fight for a workers government.

Rip Up the Sellout Contract – Mobilize to Stop Layoffs, Racist School Closures

Chicago Teachers: Strike Was Huge, Settlement Sucks

Break with the Democrats – Build a Class-Struggle Workers Party!

After the article below was published, the CTU membership approved the contract. However, more than 4,300 (21%) voted against the sellout deal. The CTU leadership endorsed Democrat Obama for reelection.

CHICAGO/NEW YORK, September 23 – The strike by 30,000 teachers and school personnel in the country's third-largest school district electrified educators and union militants across the U.S. The walkout by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) was its first in a quarter century. It was also the first strike nationally against the teacher union-bashing corporate education "reforms" pushed by both Republicans and Democrats, from the White House and Congress on down to the state house and city hall. Teachers struck against the policies of Wall Street candidate Barack Obama and stood up to his former chief of staff, Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel. The strike was solid from the beginning on Monday, September 10 to the end on September 18. Strikers mobilized in the thousands and had huge support from parents and the 350,000 students affected.

The outcome, however, is something else entirely. The reform leadership of the CTU agreed to a contract that caved in to mayor "Rahmbo" and the education de-formers on every key point, selling out vital union gains while preparing the way for mass firings and the loss of hundreds, possibly several thousand teachers' jobs. The union membership should **turn down this giveback contract** in the voting, currently scheduled for October 2. Chicago teachers need to prepare now to **strike the entire school system** next time (charters included) and to mobilize supporters to **shut down the Loop to stop the mass layoffs and school closings** which are coming very soon. And with the November elections looming, militants should call on the CTU to **break with Obama and the Democrats** who are currently spearheading the bipartisan, *capitalist* war on teachers unions and public education.

Showdown in Chicago

The strike was prepared by a year-long campaign of mobilization by the CTU. A state law (SB7) was passed last year (with the complicity of Illinois labor leaders, including CTU's Karen Lewis) which among other anti-union provisions sought to make strikes well-nigh impossible. It required lengthy fact-finding, mediation, "cooling-off" periods and in particular that 75% of the *entire bargaining unit* approve a strike. This hurdle, the Democratic legislators figured, couldn't be overcome. But after lengthy preparation, last June 90% of the CTU membership participated in a strike authorization vote and 98.46% voted to strike – an amazing show of determination, fueled by the bully boy mayor's strong-arm tactics. Emanuel's ripping up of a scheduled 4% pay raise and imposing a longer school day with not a dime in increased wages enraged teachers.

In the run-up to the strike authorization vote and over the summer, the CTU repeatedly hit the street, beginning with a march of over 10,000 in October 2011 at the height of the Occupy movement, continuing through May Day and the mass protests against the NATO summit in Chicago in May 2012 right up to the start of the strike. The experience of joining with tens of thousands marching in a sea of CTU red shirts gave a sense of union power. Strikingly, a large number of marchers were younger teachers in their 20s and 30s who around the country have been more interested in curriculum and "making a difference" in the lives of their students than in pensions and wages. The CTU's emphasis that it was fighting for better education and not just over dollars and cents appealed to them. Yet this was in no way reflected in the contract.

The strike instantly became the focal point of the national battle over public education. While the right-wing Republican governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker, provoked a massive outpouring of labor protest last year by removing bargaining rights of public workers, this time around the Democrats are leading the charge. Under a 2010 law passed by the Democratic-dominated Illinois legislature to qualify for funds under Obama's "Race to the Top," teacher evaluations were to be based in good part on student test scores. In 2011, SB7, passed as an "alternative" to the Wisconsin bill, said school districts could impose a longer school day while layoffs according to teacher evals instead of seniority were mandated, paving the way for a management push to get rid of older, higher-paid teachers.

Rahm Emanuel was a particular focus of the strikers' ire. Emanuel gained a reputation as an attack dog for the Obama administration when he ran White House operations. As he rammed through the bill to "rescue" auto companies after the 2008 financial crash while slashing United Auto Workers' wages and benefits, Emanuel notoriously exclaimed "f--k the UAW." In Chicago he focused on attacking the CTU even before taking office. Even the big business press concedes that he provoked tensions by disrespecting teachers, one of the few unionized workforces that is predominantly women. "King Rahm" is trampling on their rights in order to close public schools, open privately operated charter schools, eliminate seniority job protection and tie teachers' pay to student test scores.



Striking Chicago teachers rally in Union Park on September 15.

His real crime is not foul-mouthed epithets but that he is imposing the "business model" of education "reform" program pushed by the entire ruling class.

On the outbreak of the strike, Class Struggle Education Workers (CSEW), an opposition group in New York City teacher unions which is politically supported by the Internationalist Group (IG), participated in an NYC solidarity demo and issued a September 11 leaflet calling to "Mobilize the Power of NYC Labor in Solidarity with the Chicago Teachers Strike." As the battle deepened, a CSEW supporter traveled to Chicago to show solidarity and report back on this crucial struggle. While both U.S. education unions – the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA) – are wedded to the Democratic Party and going all-out to re-elect Obama, and the CTU leadership has kept mum about the White House connection, the CSEW called to "Break labor's ties to the capitalist Democratic Party, which – as all can see in Chicago today – is leading the assault on the teachers and students of this country."

In Chicago on the first day of the walkout teachers were joined by students and parents on picket lines throughout the city. Opinion polls showed parents of public school students solidly (66%) backing the union. Daily pickets in every neighborhood were followed by big demos downtown. On Saturday, September 15, after a week on strike, thousands filled the Near West Side Union Park to show their determination and solidarity, only to hear a bevy of Democratic "elected officials" mouth empty support. But while Emanuel and CTU president Karen Lewis were talking "compromise" and "fine-tuning" a contract, and as the media went all-out to stampede strikers back to work,

the union ranks threw a wrench in the works. On Sunday, when given a bare outline of a tentative agreement, the CTU House of Delegates shocked the mayor and union tops by voting, 350 to 220, to continue the strike. The *Chicago Tribune* (17 September) reported:

"At one point, Lewis asked: 'Are we going back to school?' Delegates shouted back 'No!' Afterward, some union leaders were seen in tears, exhausted."

Faced with this rank-and-file revolt, the union leadership tried to put a positive spin on it, saying the membership just needed more time to study the agreement, and didn't trust the mayor. On Friday, CTU president Lewis had declared she was "very comfortable" with the proposed settlement. Now she said, "This is not a good deal by any stretch of the imagination." But instead of going back to the negotiating table, the union tops pushed the same rotten deal on the membership on Tuesday, hoping that by then fear of losing public support (on top of Emanuel's request for a court injunction) would wear down opposition. On the picket line at Lane Technical High School on Monday, when members voiced concern that school closings could lead to hundreds of layoffs, the captain responded that this was not a "contract issue." (So make it one!) At another school, a delegate quoted CTU vice president Jesse Sharkey as saying "if you don't get money, go for power." "I'm not feeling the power in this contract," she said.

At the September 18 delegate meeting, Sharkey went on about Chicago labor history while financial secretary Kristine Mayle parsed a 188-page copy of the contract at length. Yet delegates were only given a bare-bones 16-page summary. And according to an account in *Substance News* by long-time teacher union activist George Schmidt, after

all the CTU tops' talk of union democracy, "with more than 70 delegates lined up at four microphones" to speak, "questions had barely begun" when a motion was raised to suspend the walkout and "the strike, picketing, and job actions will cease." In a voice vote, which Lewis described as "like 98 percent to 2" (but others said "about 10 percent" voted to continue), the strike was called off. As delegates streamed out, the assembled media horde instantly broadcast that the strike was history.

What "Victory"?!

The next day, the press trumpeted the mayor's claim that the contract settlement "means a new day and a new direction for the Chicago public schools." Emanuel's supporters saturated the air waves with a TV ad of him touting the deal as a victory, saying that now principals will have the "freedom" to hire the teachers they want, and student test scores would be used in evaluating teachers. The million-dollar ad buy was paid for by an outfit called Education Reform Now that is funded by the notorious Democrats for Education Reform, a group of Wall Street hedge fund operators who are investing in charter schools. At the same time, CTU president Lewis was showcased by Amy Goodman on Democracy Now, basking in "her new status as a union rock star," as the *Chicago Sun-Times* (20 September) put it in an interview. Lewis declared the strike a "real victory," while saying that class size was "non-permissible" as a collective bargaining issue, and using student scores on high-stakes tests was "something the law requires now."

Supporters of the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE), which since June 2010 has led the CTU, also claimed victory. The International Socialist Organization (ISO), whose supporters – including CTU vice president Sharkey – are prominent in CORE, declared the outcome "A victory for solidarity and struggle" (*Socialist Worker*, 19 September). The ISO quoted CTU staff coordinator Jackson Potter saying "Some elements of the contract weren't entirely what we wanted on the economic issues, but we won some important non-economic improvements." Education theorist Diane Ravitch declared on her blog, "Regardless of the terms of the contract, the teachers won." In New York, supporters the Movement of Rank and File Educators (MORE), modeled on Chicago CORE, were euphoric in their praise, highlighting a clause against bullying by principals and requirements that textbooks be ready by the first week of class. Important as these issues are, this is all dancing around the huge givebacks and gaping holes in the contract.

- The agreement says nothing at all about school closings, on the grounds that this is supposedly not legally subject to collective bargaining. The union could simply demand that there be no school closings, law or no law, but it has not done this, only promising to protest next spring when they expect closures to be announced. School closures will particularly affect teachers in impoverished black neighborhoods of Southside Chicago. Moreover, while 27 percent of Chicago school teachers are black, they make up almost 50 percent of those teachers laid off in the past due to school closings.

- When schools in Chicago are closed, consolidated, reconstituted or suffer a drop in enrollment, until now teachers who have lost their positions have been placed in a reassigned teacher pool and paid for ten months, after which they are officially laid-off and their employment terminated. Under the new contract, this period has

UFT Censors Opposition to Obama Endorsement

On October 17, the Delegate Assembly of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) in New York City was scheduled to vote on election endorsements. The leadership had a motion calling to vote for Democrat Barack Obama for president. Randi Weingarten, national president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) came in for the occasion and spoke at length to explain why teachers should vote for a candidate who has been at the forefront of the attacks on teachers unions.

Marjorie Stamberg, a delegate from District 79 and a supporter of Class Struggle Education Workers (CSEW), distributed a resolution (see below) calling to repudiate the national AFT endorsement of Obama and for "no vote for Democrats, Republicans or any party or politician representing the interests of capital against the working class, poor and oppressed."

However, when Stamberg sought to present the resolution for a vote, the chair refused to let her read the motion or even to summarize it, claiming this censorship was according to Robert's Rules of Order. When she responded, "I understand from this that there will be no criticism of Obama allowed at this meeting," UFT vice president Michael Mendel became irate and the bureaucracy's Unity Caucus voted to prevent the motion from coming to the floor.

Then when the leadership's pro-Obama motion was presented, Stamberg attempted to speak against it. Again she was refused the right to speak, leading to further exchanges over the rules. A Unity hack called the question, debate was cut off without hearing any opposition, and the motion was voted up.

Not only did the union leadership ram through an endorsement of a president who has aggressively pushed the agenda of corporate education "reform" and privatization of

been reduced to five months. This is a major concession, not required by any law.

- Under the previous (2007-2012) contract, any layoffs would have to be by seniority. Under the new agreement, teachers to be laid off will start with those rated unsatisfactory, then subs and "probationary" teachers, then teachers rated satisfactory, and then the rest of tenured teachers. On Democracy Now, a supporter of the contract said this was "kind of reinventing seniority." In reality, under those terms seniority becomes largely a fiction.

- While teachers in closing schools supposedly have the right to "follow their students" to new schools "to the extent a vacancy exists," (a) the CPS only has to hire 50% of teachers in new schools from laid-off teachers, (b) principals are only required to consider those teachers rated "proficient/excellent" or "superior"; (c) most of the new schools to be opened will be charter schools, which are not required to hire laid-off union teachers; and (d) if anywhere near the threatened 100-200 schools are closed, so many teachers will be laid off that only a small fraction will be rehired.

- The union leadership claims that under the new teacher evaluation plan they agreed to, only 30 percent of the evaluation will be based on student test scores, and that they don't have any choice since it is dictated by Illinois state law. This claim is repeated by Ravitch ("State law required the test score evaluation"). This key argument in support

schools, none of the union reform groups in the UFT even attempted to oppose this capitalist politician, indicating that on basic issues their policies do not fundamentally differ from those of the leadership. The labor bureaucracy chains workers politically to the bosses' parties, and union reformers go along, underlining the need for a class-struggle opposition.

The CSEW motion is reproduced here:

RESOLUTION ON 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

And Einstein's Definition of Insanity*

WHEREAS, it is self-destructive to continually endorse Democratic Party politicians (and Republicans) who are attacking teachers and seeking to gut our unions; and

WHEREAS, Mayor Rahm Emanuel declared war on the Chicago Teacher Union even before taking office; and

WHEREAS, the Democratic mayor has sought to institute "merit pay," teacher evaluation based on student test scores, the closure of over a hundred schools and their replacement by privately run non-union charter schools, which Chicago teachers valiantly resisted in their recent strike; and

WHEREAS, these policies would lead to the layoff of hundreds if not thousands of teachers and deprive our students, particularly those from poor, African American, Latino and Asian families of a quality public education; and

WHEREAS, in his vendetta against teachers unions, Mayor Emanuel was carrying out the policies of Democratic president Barack Obama and his education "czar" Arne Duncan; and

WHEREAS, the Democratic Obama administration's program of "Race to the Top" is the continuation of the destructive "No Child Left Behind" policies of the Re-

publican Bush administration; and

WHEREAS, in 2010 President Obama praised the firing of the entire teaching staff of Central Falls, Rhode Island by a vindictive and corrupt school board, as well as the firing of hundreds of teachers in Kansas City, Missouri; and

WHEREAS, Democrat Obama had and has no significant differences on education policy with Republican teacher-basher McCain in 2008 or with Republican labor-hater Romney in 2012, backing the corporate "reform" agenda to regiment education in the interests of big business; and

WHEREAS, Democrats and Republicans have joined in wars for global imperial domination against Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, while waging class war on working people here, deporting 400,000 immigrants a year, presiding over racist police violence, racial profiling of African-American and Latino youth ("stop and frisk") and wholesale dismantling of civil liberties; and

WHEREAS, the Working Families Party is nothing but a shill for the Democrats; and

WHEREAS, the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association have called for the reelection of President Obama, the man who bailed out Wall Street and seeks to privatize public education;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that in defense of union rights, public education and the political independence of labor the United Federation of Teachers hereby repudiates the national AFT endorsement of Obama and calls for no vote for Democrats, Republicans or any party or politician representing the interests of capital against the working class, poor and oppressed.

*Not $E=mc^2$ but "Doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results."

of the contract is *false*, on several counts: see "Did You Know...? Teacher Evaluations and Illinois Law" for details.¹

- On class size, current CPS policy permits classes of up to 31 students in upper grades. These levels greatly exceed those in private schools, such as the University of Chicago Lab School where Emanuel sends his kids (and Obama sent his) in which classes are no larger than 18 students. But even the CPS levels are notoriously unenforced. High school classes have soared over 35 students, and some kindergarten classes have up to 43 children. Instead of demanding sharply lower class sizes and limits with teeth, the new contract just includes a paltry increase in funds for the powerless committee supposed to oversee this issue.
- The medical insurance has been modified to include an extremely intrusive "wellness" program involving elaborate and frequent testing. While in plans in other cities participants may get a \$50 rebate for opting in, in Chicago school personnel must opt out, at a staggering cost of \$600 per family member. This is a truly totalitarian provision.

- The day after classes resumed, it was suddenly announced that the notoriously underfunded teachers' pension fund "could collapse within a few years" (*New York Times*, 20 September). Whose fault is that?

¹ Available on the Internet at <http://www.internationalist.org/chicagoteachersstrike1209.html#illinoislaw>

Chicago Public Schools has failed to make its annual payments to the pension fund since 1995, in many years paying in nothing at all, while teachers have continued to contribute. Moreover, *school personnel in Chicago are not covered by Social Security*, so the pension is all that most retirees have to live on other than savings. And all deferred pay programs (key to teachers saving for retirement) will be ended next year.

- A main argument of CORE supporters and the CTU leadership in defense of the contract is that they managed to stave off "merit pay" and preserve their salary "lanes" and "steps" (based on educational achievement and length of service). This is important, since "pay for performance" based on student test scores is a central element of Obama's "Plunge to the Bottom" education policies, a subject the union leaders prefer to sidestep. *However*, the CPS negotiators dropped that demand following the huge strike authorization vote, well before the walkout. And while the CPS earlier offered a total salary raise of 16%, this has now been reduced to 7% over three years, less than the rate of inflation, with no additional pay for the additional days and hours added onto the school year. This "deal" is really a *pay cut*.

Money, or the alleged lack of it, was not the issue in Chicago, and never is. The supposed \$650 million "budget shortfall" is totally phony. For starters, every year the city takes in around half a billion dollars in Tax Increment

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Workers Must Rely on their Own Power, Not Capitalist Parties

Fast Food Workers Need a Whopping Raise And a Fighting Union!

DECEMBER 5 – Last week, some 200 workers carried out a first-ever strike at New York City outlets of McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Domino's Pizza. The activities culminated in a march and rally outside the McDonald's in Times Square. Demonstrators chanted, "We can't survive on \$7.25," the minimum hourly wage in New York.

This was the kick-off of a campaign for a \$15 an hour wage. Currently in New York City, food service workers make an average of \$8.90 an hour, which works out to \$18,000 a year for a full-time worker – the official poverty line for a family of three. Except there are very few full-time workers in quick service restaurants, since managers give employees less than 40 hours work a week in order to avoid paying benefits. And in fast food, with its high turn-over of workers, most make close to the minimum wage. No one can live on that kind of money without government assistance, like food stamps.

Food service workers need one hell of a pay raise.

The fast food giants make billions by super-exploiting workers, paying them

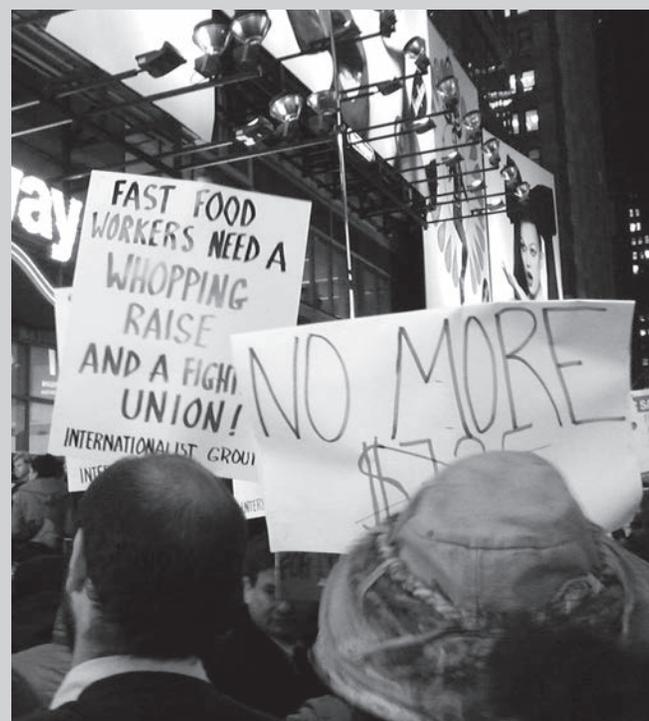
less than even the bare minimum needed to maintain a family. The bosses argue that these are "entry-level jobs" requiring no skills or education – which is no justification for keeping workers in poverty. But, in fact, the stereotype of "hamburger flippers" as college students earning a few extra dollars is a myth. Two-thirds of food service workers are women, average age 32.

The November 29 strike and the \$15-an-hour campaign in NYC are spearheaded by fastfoodforward.org, backed by New York Communities for Change (NYCC), a "non-governmental organization" (NGO) close to the Democratic Party; "99 Pickets" and other spinoffs of Occupy Wall Street; and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Their strategy is to make a splash in the media, while working closely with capitalist politicians. In announcing their campaign they lined up the several Democratic mayoral hopefuls to support it.

The organizers called last week's action a "flash strike," like a "flash mob" that comes together on the spur of the moment through social media. They figure they can get around the labyrinth of labor laws by organizing associations rather than unions.

Fast food workers are certainly not going to be unionized by the losing tactics the labor bureaucracy has relied on for years. But they won't win by relying on legal gimmicks, favorable media coverage and "support" from Democratic elected officials.

Organizing fast food workers to win a huge wage increase will take militant union action with solid support among the workers, such as in the recent victory at the Hot and Crusty bakery which won a union hiring hall. This must be backed up by concrete action by New York labor. And it will mean defying the bosses' anti-labor laws. Such class-struggle union action requires total independence from the capitalist parties and politicians.



Internationalist photo

Only by relying on our own strength can we defeat the powerful forces of capital, from the Wall Street bankers, to Democrat Obama in the White House and Cuomo in the New York state house.

Break with the Democrats – We Need A Revolutionary Workers Party For A Class-Struggle Fight Against Poverty Wages!

On July 24, a rally was held in Union Square in Manhattan to demand an increase to the legal minimum wage to \$8.50 an hour (in New York it is currently \$7.25) and to index the wage to inflation. The coalition of labor unions and non-profit organizations "United NY" branded the event a "Workers Rising Day of Action," along with rallies in a number of cities around the country. The stated purpose was to pressure Congress and state legislatures, while the organizers used it as an election-year event to build support for the Democrats.

Over 100,000 workers in New York City earn the minimum wage or less. Even at \$8.50 an hour, they would still be way below the poverty level. Statewide, 1.6 million New York workers earn less than \$10 an hour, which has been billed as a "living wage." It isn't. Do the math: just to get above the poverty line (\$26,000 a year for a family of four), a full-time worker would have to make \$12.50 an hour. And that doesn't begin to cover the cost of living in a city where the median rent works out to \$14,000 a year. To even begin to get out of poverty, they would have to more than double the minimum wage. And that's just for starters.

Yes, working people in this country need a whopping big raise ... and free quality health care, education and childcare, decent pensions and all the rest. But no amount of

begging the multimillionaires in Congress is going to get it. They and the bankers and corporate execs they represent grow obscenely rich off of the misery of millions of wage slaves. It is way past time for those who create all the wealth to use our collective power as a class to rip it out of the hands of the capitalists who profit from our labor. Without the daily toil of millions of low wage workers, there would be no food to eat, no clothes to wear, children, infants and the elderly would be abandoned, and cities like New York would collapse into a crisis of sanitation and public health.

Many of the workers who are paid under \$10 per hour are classified as "part time." This is an accounting trick for the benefit of the employers, since low-wage workers must often hold down two or three such jobs. Instead of one boss having to pay benefits and overtime, the low-wage worker must spend her own money rushing from one job to the



Fast food workers rally outside McDonald's in Manhattan during one-day strike, November 29.

next to put in a workweek of anything from 40 to 80 hours. Moreover, 60% of low-wage workers in New York are women, two-thirds are immigrants and four-fifths are Hispanic, black or Asian. This struggle goes way beyond dollars and cents, it's against brutal exploitation and social oppression.

Low-wage workers together with the rest of the working class have the power to shake the foundations of the capitalist edi-

ifice. But to do so, we have to raise a program and prepare for the kind of struggle that will take. A union movement that really is "ready to rumble" would not only demand that the minimum wage be more than doubled, it would organize huge mass pickets of hundreds and thousands to surround and shut down any company that pays less until the workers have a union contract and are paid

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Michael Nagler/New York Times

“Black Friday” Strike Actions, Protests at Stores Across U.S.

Walmart Walkouts Show Potential for Class Struggle

The following Internationalist Group leaflet was distributed at “Black Friday” protests at Walmart stores.

Walmart, the Arkansas-based commercial empire founded by Sam Walton, is the largest private employer in the United States (with 1.3 million employees), Mexico (175,000), Latin America (325,000) and the world, with a total of over 2 million “associates” around the globe. It is also almost completely non-union, and that’s no accident. Walmart management has been found guilty of systematically keeping women and racial minorities in low-paying positions, locking night-shift workers in its stores, bribing governments, exposing workers to serious health hazards, paying less than the minimum wage and keeping workers in part-time positions to avoid paying for health care. Walmart workers complain of endless abuse, and are unable to make ends meet without food stamps and Medicaid for their children. Now on “Black Friday,” November 23, the day after Thanksgiving and the biggest shopping day of the year, protests have been called at up to 1,000 Walmart facilities around the U.S. Supporters of labor rights should join in.

The stage has been set by unprecedented actions this fall when Walmart workers walked off the job in several states beginning in September in Illinois and Southern California. In early October, walkouts hit 28 stores in 12 states. Then on November 15

workers struck at a warehouse in Pico Rivera, California, in Seattle, Washington and Dallas, Texas. The strikers threw down the gauntlet to Walmart, challenging the long-held belief that Walmart is too powerful (or “too evil”) to organize. But in doing so, workers have also challenged the hidebound labor movement, which so far has failed miserably to unionize the retail giant. Instead of doing the hard work of signing up workers and showing they are prepared to defy anti-labor laws, the unions (notably the United Food and Commercial Workers) have relied on consumer boycotts and legislation seeking to keep the low-wage chain out of key metropolitan centers.

Such softball tactics are doomed to fail in the long run. **Labor’s gotta play hardball to win.** Walmart can be unionized – it just can’t be done playing by the bosses’ rules. Virtually every effective tactic of workers’ struggle has been declared illegal. That just means that workers have to stand up to cops



Protest by Walmart strikers and supporters at Pico Rivera, California, October 4.

and courts as well as a vicious anti-union company. Rather than being an unbeatable monolith, Walmart is a fluid chain of distribution centers and outlets, whose “just-in-time” distribution system depends heavily on the work of just a few employees to make the gears turn. A disruption at one part of the system has consequences throughout the whole. Rather than concentrating our efforts on boycotting Walmart in favor of other companies who also exploit their workers, the unprecedented strikes carried out by warehouse and retail workers so far have shown that the power to bring Walmart to its knees lies with the workers themselves.

“Every strike reminds the capitalists that it is the workers and not they who are the real masters—the workers who are more and more loudly proclaiming their rights. Every strike reminds the workers that their position is not hopeless, that they are not alone.”

—V.I. Lenin, “On Strikes” (1899)

The recent, first-ever strikes against Walmart in the U.S. were only partial stoppages, which rather than shutting down whole shops slowed things down considerably. Yet they have had a significant impact on Walmart ... and the conventional wisdom of labor officialdom. They have broken through the logic that Walmart is too tough to organize, the excuse used by union bureaucrats to justify their policy of lobbying politicians rather than organizing workers. Although workers who participated in the walkouts are backed by unions, they aren’t recognized by management. Their work stoppages therefore fall outside the many legal snares that workers with contracts often face. UFCW has lately changed its tune regarding Walmart, urging workers to organize their own store actions and walkouts through the Organization United for Respect at Walmart (OUR Walmart) campaign. **But organized labor has never used its muscle to shut down Walmart.**

The walkouts demonstrated also how sections of seemingly unconnected workers can quickly act in concert with each

other. Warehouse workers near Riverside, California sparked a wave of rebellion among Walmart workers when they walked off the job to protest working conditions in early September. Limber Herrera, a warehouse worker in Riverside describes her workplace, “So many of my coworkers are living in pain because of the pressure to work fast or lose our jobs. We often breathe a thick black dust that gives us nosebleeds and headaches. We want Walmart to take responsibility and fix these bad working conditions” (Warehouse Workers United, 9 August). In early September, in what came to be known as the “WalMarch,” dozens of workers who are supporters of WWU marched for six days from San Bernardino County to downtown Los Angeles demanding that their employer address working conditions and safety.

The workplace action quickly spread. Warehouse workers in Elwood, IL backed by the United Electrical Workers (UE), struck retail giant Walmart’s largest distribution center on September 15. They demanded better working conditions and an end to wage theft on the part of Walmart contractor, Roadlink. The Walmart strikers spoke at strike rallies of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), which pointed out that the Walmart foundation supports the privatization of schools. The warehouse workers complained of erratic work hours, low pay and unsafe working conditions, where they are often asked to hand lift extreme loads and work without shin guards or proper masks. Like many Walmart workers, the warehouse staff don’t work directly for Walmart, but are hired instead through subcontractors. The strike ended after two weeks, with Roadlink promising to end all retaliation against employees who speak out. However, recent reports are that the intimidation tactics have continued.

But the Riverside and Elwood workers lit a spark that inspired solidarity strikes at several Walmarts in several states in the weeks that followed. Under the leadership of OUR Walmart and backed by UFCW, a

For Real Solidarity with Bangladesh Workers



Thousands of garment workers marched in Dhaka, Bangladesh November 26 demanding justice for the victims of horrendous fire at plant supplying Walmart, Sears and other U.S. and international retailers.

On Saturday, November 24, a deadly fire broke out in the Tazreen garment factory outside Dakha, Bangladesh, killing some 125 workers. The factory had been repeatedly cited by inspectors for safety violations. Although Walmart initially tried to claim it had no connection to the factory, clothes and documents found in the factory prove that several of its suppliers were manufacturing garments there for Walmart, as well as other international retail chains including Sears and H&M, as well as clothing lines including Tommy Hilfiger.

The National Garment Workers Union of Bangladesh has supported protests by Walmart workers in the United States. Supporters of labor rights in the U.S. must show active support for the struggles of Bangladesh garment workers rather than seeking to block imports from Bangladesh by cancelling its trade preferences, as the AFL-CIO is doing – a protectionist policy masquerading as labor “solidarity.” Similar policies in the 1990s all but destroyed the Haitian clothing industry and with it a large section of the Haitian working class. ■

group of 200 supporters disrupted Walmart's annual investors meeting in Bentonville Arkansas. The workers have given Walmart a deadline: meet our demands for better pay and working conditions and stop all retaliation against workers who participate in workplace organizing, or there will be a strike on Black Friday, November 22-23. Walmart has now retaliated by lodging a complaint against the UFCW with the National Labor Relations Board and threatening to sue the union. Meanwhile, Walmart "associates" have been ordered to report for work as early as 3 p.m. on Thanksgiving Day, provoking angry complaints from workers who intend to spend the traditional holiday with their families.

Hardnosed Walmart execs won't stand idly by as they lose millions in potential profits, and they won't stop at lawsuits if their past actions are any indication of future actions. Their labor practices traditionally include bare-knuckle intimidation, firings, and in the most successful organizing situations, mass layoffs and store closures. The first Walmart store to be unionized in North America was in Jonquière, in northern Québec in 2004. We traveled there to report the story (see "Attention Wal-Mart Workers: Union Victory in Quebec," *The Internationalist* No. 20, January-February 2005). But the multinational retail chain retaliated by shutting the store. With Walmart facing a cross-country campaign, they may resort to new and even more ruthless efforts to squash any efforts to organize or unionize their stores. Workers will need the support of labor and community allies if they intend to bring down the behemoth.

In the face of mass unemployment, capitalists figure workers will be so desperate to hold onto a job, no matter how poorly paid, that they will be too afraid to unionize. But desperation can also produce militancy. It's happened before. In January-February 1937, auto workers occupied the Fisher Body No. 1 plant in Flint, Michigan. Running off the cops and facing down National Guard machine guns, the sit-down strike won after five weeks. This electrified labor. In March, 110 women workers sat down at the Woolworth 5-and-10 chain store in Detroit, protesting against nickel-and-dime wages. Women workers at the Woolworth store in New York's Union Square followed suit. Within seven days, as union leaders threatened to call a national strike, the company gave in to the strikers' demands. What was key was the example of militant action by the Flint auto workers, the enthusiastic support of unions, and refusal to be intimidated by the bosses' laws. Naturally, two years later the Supreme Court ruled sit-down strikes illegal.

As Black Friday 2012 approaches, activists in a number of cities are planning solidarity actions. But consumer boycotts almost never work (the claim that the United Farm Workers won with the grape boycott is a myth), because they fail to mobilize labor's power. A real strike would aim at Walmart's supply chain, and would require solid mass pickets that no one dares cross. Walmart workers can't do that on their own, but a serious mobilization of unions can. If hundreds of unionists are on the lines, Teamsters and even many non-union truckers would honor the picket lines. These are the kind of tactics necessary to challenge the corporate monster. What's effective in stopping the chain from bleeding communities dry is not "withholding our dollar" from the store, but "withholding our labor" from the shop floor.

Just Another Ballot Line for the Democrats

Working Families Party: Putting Lipstick on a Pig

We Need a Workers Party That Fights for a Workers Government

PORTLAND, OR – The Working Families Party, in spite of what its name implies, is no more than a tool used by politicians and union bureaucrats to bolster support for the Democrats. What it does is offer another ballot line for Democratic candidates: hardly an alternative. It lures union members into voting for Democratic Party even though they've been repeatedly screwed by it, while giving right-wing union bureaucrats cover for supporting a capitalist party and trying to make the whole process look more appealing. In construction, there's a term to describe slapping a coat of paint on a dilapidated building in order to hide its rotten structure and bad plumbing: it's called "putting lipstick on a pig." However you dress up Democratic politicians, no amount of make-up or ballot listings will change it, they're still the same pigs who preside over drone strikes, the racist death penalty and countless attacks on unions.

The Oregon Working Families Party is modeled on its namesake in New York. While dismissing "third party" candidates like the Greens as "spoilers" and "divisive," it promotes "fusion voting," in which more than one party can nominate the same candidate. In practice, this means voting for certain Democratic candidates on the OWFP ballot line, and papering over differences on key issues. Claiming to be in favor of healthcare and workplace rights, the OWFP avoids the entire question of abortion and never even mentions birth control. The right to control pregnancies isn't just a health issue for women, but an issue of workplace rights considering the cost and time off work required to carry a pregnancy to term. It would appear that the OWFP only cares about health and rights for the male half of Oregon's workforce. In fact, it is bowing to right-wing anti-abortion pressure just like its parent, the Democratic Party, does.

But that requires a willingness to defy cops, courts and capitalist politicians, Democrats and Republicans alike, to whom the sellout labor bureaucracy is beholden.

The fight to organize the unorganized has always been a watchword of revolutionaries in the labor movement. Today that task is as urgent as it has ever been, but neither "normal" trade-union or liberal pressure tactics can fulfill it. What is required is genuine class-struggle unionism, the potential for which is shown by the recent victory of immigrant workers at the Hot and Crusty bakery/restaurant in New York City. "If you play by the bosses' rules, you're bound to lose," read workers' signs during 55 days on the picket line. The struggle culminated in an inspiring labor victory with a groundbreaking contract that includes a union hiring hall, virtually unprecedented in the "restaurant sweatshops" staffed by hundreds of thousands of super-exploited immigrants. Having participated intensively in this struggle, the Internationalist Group has stressed that the Hot and Crusty victory

What we need as union members instead of a new gimmick to pretend that the Democrats are "pro-labor," is a fighting opposition from within the union ranks to drive out the bureaucracy and break with all capitalist parties. Last year in New York, a supporter of Class Struggle Education Workers put forward a resolution in the Professional Staff Congress (AFT, representing faculty and staff at the City University of New York) opposing affiliation to the WFP and calling for a class-struggle workers party. The New York WFP nominated Barack Obama and Joe Biden, meaning support for mass deportations, imperialist war and occupation, and more cuts to public education. One of their cross-nominees, Democrat Tim Bishop in NY Congressional District 1, voted last year for S990, to extend the USA PATRIOT Act, which is a frontal assault on civil liberties. Bishop also voted for a bill that would have allowed U.S. troops in Libya. A certified warmonger if ever there was one, and a WFP endorsee.

Of their 47 nominees in Oregon, the WFP is supporting mostly Democrats, with at least two of their candidates being listed on the ballot as Democrat, Republican and Working Families. Democrat Suzanne Bonamici, endorsed by the WFP for Congressional District 1, voted in favor of SB 767 expanding "virtual" charter schools (based largely on an online curriculum), accelerating the privatization of public schools, and contributing to the attacks on teachers unions. Democrat Peter DeFazio, cross nominee for Congressional District 4, voted for House Joint Resolution 2 for a "balanced budget" amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The failed amendment would make deficit spending unconstitutional except for during wartime, writing into the Constitution simultaneous massive cuts to social services and unlimited funding for

could spark major new struggles in the area and beyond (see "Hot and Crusty Workers Win with Groundbreaking Contract," on page 13 of this issue).

Only by fighting to build a class-struggle opposition in the ranks of labor, together with the support of other workers and the oppressed, will it be possible to shatter the stranglehold of the "labor lieutenants of capital." Old-style business unionism and even reformist "social justice unionism" won't work in these times of all-sided capitalist attack on working people. ***Life on the Walmart plantation is hell.*** What's needed is to break the chains that bind wage slaves to the modern slave masters, to ***build a workers party to fight for a workers government.*** Solidarity, one section of workers defending another and recognizing that our interests are the same, isn't just a nice idea: it's the only possible way in which workers at Walmart, or anywhere else, can fight back effectively and win. Courageous actions by Walmart workers can lead the way forward, and demonstrate that what it takes to win is class struggle. ■

U.S. global imperialism. The WFP-endorsed candidate for Congressional District 2, Democrat Joyce Segers owned a medical billing company where she directly profited from the private healthcare industry the WFP claims to be against.

By "cross nominating" candidates of another ruling-class party, the WFP perpetuates the lie that the working class can somehow benefit through supporting the bosses' politicians. Ignoring social issues and focusing solely on electoral strategy, the WFP gives cover to Democrats and others who never have and never will stand up for workers. The Oregon Working Families Party Platform doesn't once mention oppression or exploitation, and even avoids using the word class. It supports the bourgeois electoral system, and the "change" it talks of to be handed from on high rather than won by the workers through their collective action. They promise a bigger piece of the pie, and instead support capitalist parties that offer nothing but grief and exploitation, while claiming to be "friends of labor." But working people don't need "pie in the sky, bye and bye," as the syndicalist Wobblies used to say.

The Working Families Party is not any kind of workers party, it's not really a party at all but an appendage of the Democrats. The WFP today recalls the American Labor Party in the 1930s and '40s that enabled workers to vote for the Democrats while holding their noses (because it stank so much). Every once in a while there have been attempts to form a supposedly independent "labor party" in the U.S., generally an electoral vehicle on the model of the British Labour Party. The stillborn "U.S. Labor Party" was the latest version. It was the creature of a handful of union bureaucrats (particularly Tony Mazzocchi of OCAW) and unions (ILWU, UMW, California Nurses) upset about the rightward shift of the Democratic Party. It waved the flag while pushing protectionist policies against foreign labor and refusing to call for full rights for undocumented immigrants. It shared the pro-capitalist outlook of the labor bureaucracy as a whole.

To build a real workers party that can lead the class struggle it's necessary to break with all the capitalist parties, the Democrats first and foremost. And to do that, we have to drive out the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy, which is tied to the Democrats by an umbilical cord. The party we need is one that fights the sellout misleaders of labor who have done nothing to stop the destruction of the unions. As Karl Marx said in an 1871 speech to the International Working Men's Association in London, "our politics must be working-class politics. The workers' party must never be the tagtail of any bourgeois party; it must be independent and have its goal and its own policy." We need a workers party that fights on behalf of all those exploited and oppressed by capitalism, and for a workers government. Pinning a "labor" tail on the Democratic donkey won't do. ■

Police of Popular-Front Government Slaughter Dozens of Workers

South Africa:

Bloody Mine Massacre Unmasks

ANC Neo-Apartheid Regime

AUGUST 29 – It was, by far, the bloodiest massacre of black people in South Africa since the end of the apartheid regime of institutionalized white supremacy. The images recalled the horror of Sharpeville (1960) and Soweto (1976) – only this time it was a black president and ministers who presided over the slaughter of striking miners. The capitalist government of the African National Congress (ANC) and its “partners” of the South African Communist Party (SACP), backed by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), acting on behalf of one of the world’s top mining companies, sought to police the workers and put a violent end to their walkout.

On August 16, an elite force of hundreds of South African cops opened fire on workers of the Lonmin mine in Marikana with automatic rifles, using live ammunition at point-blank range. Three dozen strikers were killed, another 80 or so seriously injured and 259 arrested in the assault. Although the murderous police claimed to be acting in self-defense, many of the miners were shot in the back and in the head. After the shooting was over, police posed for photographs with guns pointed at the dead like big game hunters standing over their prey, or U.S. troops grotesquely displaying their kill in Afghanistan. It was cold-blooded mass murder in the service of capital.

The carnage was systematically prepared, and the shoot-to-kill orders came from the top, from the cabinet of ANC president Jacob Zuma. This bloodbath will likely mark the turning point where significant sectors of the non-white masses lost their illusions in rulers who have traded on their liberation credentials for the last 18 years. Far from presiding over a “post-apartheid”



South African police pose with guns drawn over their victims. Then the ANC authorities charged the victims with murder under a law from the apartheid regime.

South Africa, the popular-front Tripartite Alliance of the ANC, SACP and Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has instituted a *neo-apartheid capitalist regime*, still subjugating the impoverished black working people in the interests of the same capitalist masters.

Meanwhile, over 250 Lonmin workers are still being held in jail, grotesquely charged with the murder of their comrades

killed by the police! Company management has declared that they will not be allowed back, even as it issues one ultimatum after another ordering strikers to return to work – to no avail. The 28,000 workers of the world’s richest platinum mine, owned by the London-based conglomerate, are refusing to go back until their demand is met to raise their wages from a miserable take-home pay of 4,000 rand (US\$480) to R12,500 (US\$1,500) a month. *Workers everywhere should mobilize in solidarity with the South African miners, calling for victory to the strike, cops get out, drop the charges and reinstate all the strikers!*

Popular-Front Bloodbath

The 3,000 rock-drill operators at Marikana began the walkout on August 10, demanding a tripling of their wages which leave them mired in poverty in makeshift shacks while some workers still live in hostels. The walkout was promptly declared “illegal” by the capitalist courts, and several thousand police were quickly dispatched

to the area. The strikers camped out on a hill near the shantytown where some live, well away from company property. The cops surrounded them and brought in the infamous *nyala* or “hippo” armored vehicles which were the terror of anti-apartheid demonstrators.

The bourgeois press has sought to portray the miners’ struggle as a dispute between two unions, a “bloody turf war” (*Sowetan*, 27 August) of the Mineworkers and the “breakaway” Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU). Lonmin workers complain that the once-militant NUM has become too cozy with the employers and some now support the AMCU. No wonder. On Wednesday, August 15, a convoy including NUM president Senzeni Zokwana arrived at the site and parked in the cop laager. Entering a police *nyala* which drove to within loudspeaker range of the workers, Zokwana told the workers to go back. The crowd refused to listen, and when they called on him to get out and speak with them directly, Zokwana fled.

AMCU president Vusimuzi Mathunjwa showed up a few minutes later and addressed the strikers. While he got a warm reception, his appeal for the strikers to disperse – citing the threat of police violence – so he could negotiate their demands with management was also turned down. Up to 3,000 camouflage-wearing riot-control police surrounded the strikers and cordoned them off with barbed wire. The miners had

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Miners in Marikana before the August 16 slaughter. Police claimed they had to fire their automatic rifles in “self defense,” against workers armed with sticks.

Alon Skyy/The Times of Johannesburg

Reuters

Immigrant Workers Achieve a Solid Labor Victory Including Union Hiring Hall!

Hot and Crusty Workers Win With Groundbreaking Contract

After months of struggle and 55 days on the picket line, immigrant workers at the Hot and Crusty bakery/restaurant on Manhattan's Upper East Side have made big news for the workers movement. A solid union victory – including a union hiring hall and benefits virtually unheard of in the industry – has come through a fight that captured the attention of labor activists throughout the city and beyond. Dramatic ups and downs marked the campaign from the start, but the workers' determination to “seguir hasta las últimas consecuencias” – to stick it out, come what may – was crucial to winning this battle. The inspiring outcome has the potential to spark further, wide-ranging efforts to organize low-wage immigrant workers throughout the food industry in New York City, “the restaurant capital of the world.”

On October 23 the Hot and Crusty Workers Association (HCWA) signed a contract with new owners of the 63rd Street restaurant. A union press statement notes that the workers “will return to the job under a new collective bargaining agreement that provides for union recognition and a union hiring hall, paid vacation and sick time, wage increases,” as well as seniority and a grievance procedure. Having won advances that set a new precedent for foreign-born restaurant workers, organizers “are eager to build on this momentum,” stated the Laundry Workers Center (LWC). The Hot and Crusty workers, mainly immigrants from Mexico and Ecuador, invited the New York-based activist group to help them build the campaign, which they launched in late 2011 in response to years of abuse from the former owners of the lucrative East Side locale.

“We Will Go Through to the End”

As reported by *The Internationalist* (“Hot and Crusty Workers Show the Way,” 8 September 2012), the unionization campaign emerged from the workers' resistance to conditions all too typical of workplaces in New York and around the country in which employers pay immigrants less than the legal minimum wage, deny them all benefits, oblige them work when sick or injured on the job, and threaten to fire them if they protest. Fed up with abuse and workweeks in some cases of 60 hours or more and even up to 72 hours without overtime pay, Hot and Crusty employees got no response when they called the New York State Labor Department. With aid from the LWC and the Eisner & Mirer labor law firm, they sued the company, eventually winning back pay, and undertook a carefully planned campaign to build a union.

Deploying a panoply of dirty tricks from the anti-labor playbook, the company hired a union-busting consultant (a former labor bureaucrat who found greener pastures working directly for the other side), brazenly bought off a worker who had initially

helped launch the campaign (promising him a share in the profits), threatened to call the “Migra” immigration cops, and tried to pad the lists of those eligible to vote on union recognition by bringing in relatives and “reliable” former employees. To the bosses' surprise, however, the HCWA won hands-down when representation elections were held in May.

Yet rather than negotiate, the former owners closed the shop on August 31, leading to an hours-long protest occupation by Occupy Wall Street supporters, six of whom were arrested for their solidarity action. The workers then set up a picket line, organized in two shifts from eight every morning to eight at night, and were joined by supporters, notably adjunct faculty and students from nearby Hunter College, where Class Struggle Education Workers activists won early support for the cause from the faculty/staff union, the Professional Staff Congress-CUNY. (The PSC chapter organized an on-campus solidarity event on October 3 to help build solidarity for the union brothers and sisters at Hot and Crusty.)

A dramatic turn came on September 8: at a rally of union supporters HCWA spokesman Mahoma López announced that prospective new owners had signed a tentative accord agreeing to union recognition and a



October 25, Day 55 on the picket line. “We did it!” “Our struggle is for all workers.”

union hiring hall. This was “a groundbreaking and potentially historic step forward,” we wrote, while stressing, as López and other workers noted, that “the struggle is not over.” Indeed, yet another turn in the situation came a week later when the workers were told that the building's owners were refusing to sign a lease that would permit the restaurant's reopening. “Feels like a roller coaster,” one union supporter said – but the workers went right back on the picket line. Soon enough, an anti-union restaurant chain made a foray aimed at exploiting the situation, but withdrew in a hurry when faced with determined opposition from union

supporters and solidarity activists.

As days turned into weeks, it was clear that persistence was key; no flash in the pan, the struggle required the hard core of union supporters sticking to their guns, showing they would not be starved into submission, while working to mobilize solidarity from broader sectors of the labor movement. As an Internationalist supporter in the supermarket workers union noted – and as attested by a long chain of defeated organizing efforts in the New York food industry – winning union rights would be far easier “were it not for the union bureaucracy, whose torpid complacency is an expression of their acceptance of second-class status for immigrant workers.”

Determined efforts were made to expand support, and on October 18 a “Labor/Immigrant Rights Rally” in solidarity with the Hot and Crusty workers drew a hundred enthusiastic participants, including representatives and activists from some of the city's largest unions. These included subway and bus workers (TWU Local 100), Verizon phone workers (CWA Local 1101) and power workers from Con Ed, city workers from AFSCME DC 37, the predominantly immigrant Laborers Local 78 and Jornaleros (day laborers), supermarket and restaurant workers (UFCW, UNITE-HERE, ROC-NY), teachers (UFT, PSC-CUNY), and others. As Virgilio Aran of the Laundry Workers Center told the rally, “This is an example to all workers in New York City, and to every union. Even though we are winning, we are going to continue organizing workers in laundries and in restaurants” (see “NYC Unions Back Hot and Crusty Workers at Labor/Immigrant Rights Solidarity Rally,” 19 October).



Determination on the picket line, September 25. Sign called for unity of workers, with new languages being added as the struggle continued.

The daily picket continued – with no strike fund, yet the workers held firm. Getting the word out at other restaurants and pizza parlors, they faced intimidation tactics from police, who took photos, demanded to see ID, and at one point made up a supposed “law” against putting picket signs on cardboard tubes (!). After two weeks on the line, voices from the bosses’ camp grew louder in insisting that it was time for the workers to call it quits – but they didn’t buckle. In the second week of October, an attempt was made to stampede them back to work without the union hiring hall. Firmly rejecting this, the workers voted once again to continue the struggle. This reaffirmation of their hard-edged resolve marked a crucial moment in the campaign. “We felt it was all or nothing for us,” one recalls; “we vowed we would go through to the end.”

And after 55 days on the picket line, they won! On October 25, news of the contract’s signing reached the corner of 63rd Street, as workers held up signs reading “We Did It!” Symbolic of the impact, a cacophony of horn-honking ensued as truck and cab drivers saw the signs and signaled their approval. For the working class of New York, this small group of immigrant workers had made some big news indeed. As the message of this victory spreads, it has the potential to spark major new struggles.

Class and Race in the City

Manhattan’s posh Upper East Side might seem an unlikely scene for a hard-fought union struggle, yet it provides a telling microcosm of class and race in the city. Passing the picket line on the sidewalk every day, black Caribbean nannies pushed white babies in strollers; Latino UPS men and Chinese laundry workers rushed to make deliveries; an elderly Italian shoe repair man stopped by every day to share some *pan dulce* (Mexican pastry); a young African American messenger came up to say “we need a union where I work” and ask how he could set about starting one. Dozens of Mexican “delivery boys” (in reality men up to 50 years old) paused when bicycling past at the picket.

At first they simply looked it over from a distance, but as the weeks went by increasing numbers ventured over to talk about how bad things are at their own

Message from International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Activist Jack Heyman

October 30, 2012

To the Hot and Crusty Workers Association, NYC:

Union brothers and sisters,

From the docks of Oakland we send you greetings of workers solidarity – and congratulations for the struggle you have waged. Winning union recognition, a union hiring hall and a first union contract, you’ve continued on the proud, historic path of class struggle in this country and show the way for other militant workers’ victories.

They tried to stop you, but they couldn’t: that is the fresh lesson of workers solidarity that you have given. Standing strong on the picket line for 55 days, you stood up to attempts to intimidate you, wear you down, demoralize you or starve you out. You didn’t have a strike fund, but you had something even more important: perseverance and the determination to win a solid union victory. It was this that brought out over 15 of New York’s most important unions to back your fight in last Thursday’s [October 18] Labor/Immigrant Rights Rally in Solidarity with

the Hot and Crusty Workers.

As mentioned in the message I sent eight weeks ago, West Coast longshore workers won the union hiring hall through the 1934 general strike and battles in which police killed three of our union brothers. In the fight for workers power, we learned the hard way that the government, courts and cops are on the bosses’ side. But our side has something even more powerful: the fact that without our labor, nothing moves and we can bring it all to a halt when we organize to use our power as a class. And in that fight, who does or does not have “papers” matters not one damn bit – “¡La lucha obrera no tiene fronteras!” Or put another way: Asian, Latin, black and white – Workers of the world, unite!

Your example can and must spread. Your stunning victory will inspire others to fight. Organize the unorganized – full rights for all immigrants – let’s build on this victory! – Jack Heyman, ILWU longshore organizer of the 2008 May Day strike against the war and chair of the Transport Workers Solidarity Committee

workplaces. Since Second Avenue is a major thoroughfare – for countless delivery and repair vehicles as well as cabs and the MTA – hundreds of truck, bus, van and cab drivers saw the picket each day, and many of them made a point of honking in solidarity. (One young Hunter adjunct who came often to the picket line observed that the enormous trucks using their air horns to blast this message of solidarity could help dispel armchair academics’ hot air about the alleged “disappearance” of the working class.)

Innumerable neighborhood workers – and a good number of residents – had encouraging words for the Hot and Crusty pickets, and hundreds stopped at the picket table to sign petitions or drop bills into the donation canister. Yet some upper-crust denizens tried hard to demoralize the workers, who had to endure haughty ladies and gentlemen railing against unions or yelling “Get a job!” As picket-line stalwart Margarito López recalls, “Every day they kept asking us, ‘What are you still doing here?’” The restaurant was “closed forever, you’re never going back,” others lectured the workers. Enraged by a picket sign reading “Honk to Support Workers Rights at Hot & Crusty,” one local yuppie assaulted the comrade holding the placard, ripping it to pieces while shrieking threats and abuse.

Worse still were the bigots who vituperated against “illegal immigrants” (though as one union supporter noted, “they don’t ask for your papers when they come in to buy a danish – just when you start fighting for

your rights”). Here a glimpse of multiracial workers power was instructive. For several weeks, a crew of workers from Con Ed, as well as specialized contractors, was at the corner of 63rd repairing underground gas and electric lines. One morning a well-dressed white man began screaming anti-immigrant epithets at Hot and Crusty workers on the picket line. Two Afro-Caribbean road crew workers suddenly appeared with a large metal crowbar and started fiddling with a manhole cover right next to the bigot, who promptly turned tail. Approached by a union supporter who thanked them for their quiet but effective solidarity, one said, “yeah, that guy was an asshole” – “a racist asshole,” his coworker agreed, adding: “We’re all immigrants here when you get down to it.”

Need and Potential for Class-Struggle Organizing

That the Hot and Crusty struggle fired the imagination and hopes of many, while enraging others across the class divide, is due in good part to the way it drew attention to the *enormous potential for wide-ranging, militant organizing among immigrant workers in New York and beyond*. Super-exploited, doubly and triply oppressed and largely disenfranchised, these workers – mere raw material for exploitation from the standpoint of the ruling class – could be sparked into struggle by even a localized victory. The potential for a massive campaign to organize the unorganized is underscored by other efforts by low-wage workers that overlapped with the events at Hot and Crusty. A successful organizing drive by car wash workers in the Bronx and Queens made headlines in the *New York Times* – while unprecedented protest/strike actions have broken out at the notorious Wal-Mart chain.

With an estimated 165,000 workers in its food service sector, New York City is home to fifteen thousand eating and drinking establishments, generating fabulous profits. (Revenues for 2010 were projected at over \$15 billion.) The secret to success in “the restaurant capital of the

world” – from the corner pizza parlor to the latest food-blog phenomenon, on up to the Michelin/Zagat stratosphere – is super-exploited immigrant labor. *Seventy percent* of NYC restaurant workers are immigrants, drawn from a very wide range of countries throughout the world, at least 40 percent of whom are undocumented. It is to these workers that the most dangerous, ill-paid and dirty tasks are assigned: toting endless heavy crates up and down the stairs to dank cellars; cutting, slicing and dicing meat and vegetables; handling super-heated pizza ovens, saucepans and sprayers; washing dishes and jockeying delivery bikes through heavy traffic. Injuries are commonplace, but like paid vacations, sick days are virtually unheard of – less than 10 per cent of the restaurant workforce has them.¹

The industry’s demographics highlight the potential impact of the victory at Hot and Crusty. Like the workers there, a strikingly large proportion of New York food workers come from Puebla, Guerrero, Tlaxcala and other Mexican states ravaged by the North American Free Trade Agreement. Signed in 1994 under Democrat Bill Clinton, NAFTA drove millions from predominantly peasant regions *p’al Norte* as migrant proletarians. One result is New York’s large Mexican-origin population, which grew almost 58% from 2000 to 2007 alone, and is presently estimated at close to 300,000. Also relatively recent, large-scale immigration from places like Bangladesh, Ecuador and West Africa links up with large populations from the Caribbean, China, India/Pakistan, Eastern Europe and elsewhere in a city where *37 percent* of the population (roughly 3 million out of 8 million-plus) consists of immigrants, concentrated in the working class (46 percent of the labor force), particularly in the low-wage sector.²

Facing arrogant employers used to having their way in a business where brutal abuse and starvation wages are the norm, a strategy based on the logic of class struggle offers the only real hope of success. While capitalist politicians and media spew xenophobia against immigrant workers, “condescending saviors” of various descriptions approach them like helpless victims, or a passing *cause célèbre* for liberal do-gooders. For revolutionary Marxists, in contrast, the growing immigrant sector of the U.S. working class forms a vital human bridge to some of the most volatile parts of the planet, while enriching the workers movement here with experience from around the world. Relying on the workers’ struggle, unchained from its subjugation to Democrats and Republicans, class-struggle unionism can reverse the pattern of labor retreat. With an impact far beyond one New York restaurant, the Hot and Crusty workers’ victory illustrates the potential for a militant workers movement.

Calling for *full citizenship rights for all immigrants* in the struggle for socialist

¹ Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York and New York City Restaurant Industry Coalition, *Beyond the Kitchen Door: Pervasive Inequality in New York City’s Thriving Restaurant Industry* (January 2005); Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, “NYC’s Immigrant Restaurant Workers Get Information and Resources” (25 February 2011).

² CUNY Center for Latin American, Caribbean & Latino Studies, “Mexicans in New York City, 2007: An Update” (December 2008); Fiscal Policy Institute, *Working for a Better Life: A Profile of Immigrants in the New York State Economy* (November 2007).

Labor/Immigrant Rights Rally

Solidarity with the Hot & Crusty Workers!

Thursday Oct. 18

4:00-6:00 p.m. E. 63rd St. & 2nd Ave. in Manhattan

Immigrant workers at the Hot and Crusty restaurant have made headlines and inspired many by standing up to starvation wages. Organizing their own union, the Hot and Crusty Workers Association, they won representation elections in May. But rather than negotiate seriously, the owners shut the store on August 31st. After almost 50 days on the picket line the workers are now being pressured to return to work without the real union protections they have been fighting for. Determined to win a solid victory for all, facing powerful interests invested in super-exploiting immigrant labor throughout NYC, the Hot and Crusty workers need real solidarity now more than ever. Enough of the attacks on workers and their rights. Let's win this one!



For more information, contact Virgilio Aran 347-394-8350 virgilio@lwcu.org, or H&C Workers Solidarity Committee 917-520-5368

Rally initiated by: Hot and Crusty Workers Association, Laundry Workers Center, Hot and Crusty Workers Solidarity Committee

Endorsers include (list in formation): AELLA (Association of Latino and Latin American Students, CUNY Graduate Center); Batay Ovirvive Solidarity Network; Maimmer Berberena; Brandworkers International; Class Struggle Education Workers; DC 37 Retirees Association; Prof. Johanna Fernandez, Baruch College; Food Chain Workers Alliance; Jessica Hernandez-Speer, UFT teacher; Jack Heyman (ILWU Local 10 [retired]), chairman, Transport Workers Solidarity Committee; Hunter College chapter executive committee, Professional Staff Congress-CUNY; International Group/CUNY Internationalist Clubs; La Fuente; Labor for Palestine; Felkai Mamdouh; May 1st Coalition for Labor and Immigration Rights; Nasot@is lib's Pobres; New York City Labor Against the War; New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCORE); Occupy Wall Street Immigrant Justice Working Group; Occupy Wall Street Labor Outreach Committee; Organization of Staff Analysts; Marjorie Stenberg (UFT delegate); CSEW; Restaurant Opportunity Center-New York; Strand Bookstore Rank-and-File; Students United for a Free CUNY; The Newspaper Guild of New York-CWA Local 31003; Victor Toro; Transport Workers Union Local 100; United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1500; Christine Williams (executive board member, TWU Local 100*); Workers Power

*organizational affiliation for identification purposes only

Labor Donated

“We Need to Win Independence of the Workers Movement”

From remarks by Sándor John (Hot and Crusty Workers Solidarity Committee, Internationalist Group) at October 18 solidarity rally:

What do we need in the labor movement in this city and in this country? In the first place, we need to understand that the struggle is to mobilize the power of the working class, all of the working class – Asian, Latin, black and white. We don’t give a damn whether you have immigration papers, we’re all part of the same working class. That understanding needs to be the basis for revitalizing a fighting labor movement.

Number 2: We need to mobilize this power, the kind of power that shut the city down with the TWU strike in 2005; the kind of power that could have been mobilized to defeat Con Ed in their lockout; the kind of power, a taste of which was shown in the actual strike – not the settlement – of the Chicago Teachers Union, to actually not play by the bosses’ rules. One of the slogans that we have out here on this picket line is “Jugar con reglas del patrón es segura perdición,” which means if you play by the bosses’ rules, you’re doomed to lose.

Number 3: We need to revive the militant tactics that built the unions in the first place: the mass picket lines, the occupations, the sit-down strikes, the secondary boycotts.

And Number 4, to do all of that, we need to win the independence of the workers movement, independent of all the bosses’ parties. The real struggle is the class struggle, the struggle to win freedom for the working class, full citizenship rights for immigrants, liberation for women, defending the rights of gays and lesbians, striking down the PATRIOT Act, striking down the racist wall that divides the workers in Mexico from the workers here. We need full equality for all, and that means the working class taking power. ¡Obreros al poder! Victory to the Hot and Crusty workers!

revolution, since our inception the Internationalist Group has been virtually unique on the left in systematically winning workers from this dynamic sector, to become cadres in building the nucleus of a genuinely internationalist and revolutionary workers party. This helps explain an aspect of the Hot and Crusty campaign that observers often noted but did not always “get”: the role of the relatively small, Trotskyist IG, not just as daily picket line participants but also (for example) as organizers of labor and student support in the struggle for a solid union victory.

At the same time, the Hot and Crusty campaign has been an important experience for our organization’s supporters, who combined their picket duty with intensive study of lessons from past struggles, such as the organizing campaigns described in *Teamster Rebellion*, Farrell Dobbs’ classic account of the Trotskyist-led Minneapolis strikes of 1934 that helped pave the way for the explosive rise of mass industrial unions in the midst of the Great Depression. Linking these lessons to today’s struggles is an

example of how the revolutionary party helps serve as “the memory of the working class.”

Given the divide-and-conquer tactics used by bosses everywhere, immigrant worker activists of the Internationalist Group also emphasized the need to counteract national/ethnic divisions (notably between Latinos and Asians). Prominently featured at the picket line was an LWC placard reading “Workers united,” with the word *workers* in Arabic, Chinese, English, Filipino, French, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. IG activists laid particular stress on the inseparable connection between immigrant rights and the fight for black liberation through socialist revolution in this deeply racist country that was founded on chattel slavery. The need for proletarian opposition to capitalist politicians of every variety was a point our comrades emphasized during innumerable discussions over past weeks, dominated as they were by elections in the U.S. as well as Mexico. Just after the Hot and Crusty win came Hurricane Sandy, with HCWA and LWC members participating in relief efforts in some of the worst-hit areas. The storm’s ravages showed anew just how deadly are the grotesque inequalities of class and race. “It is really shocking how people were just abandoned, in a country we’re always told is the center of the ‘First World’,” one Hot and Crusty worker remarked after spending the day clearing rubble in Far Rockaway.

“A Struggle for All the Workers”

“*Nuestra lucha es para todos los trabajadores*” (Our struggle is for all the workers). Inviting others to join the fight, this slogan from placards at the 55-day picket line expressed a sentiment often voiced by the Hot and Crusty workers. Commenting on the settlement, Mahoma López said: “The workers are feeling really excited about this news because this is more than just a contract for us. We are putting an example out there for other workers.... We want others to take this victory to their own workplaces so we can make change in this country.”

At a meeting where the union victory was discussed, HCWA activists said the fight had changed them forever, and spoke of their proud belief that others will be inspired by their example. “We stood up, we fought and won this battle, but the workers struggle is a war that will continue,” one older worker observed. With one after another powerfully describing the meaning of the campaign, long-time Hot and Crusty dishwasher Margarito López summed up:

“Despite everything that happened to us in this fight, we remained there [on the picket line] and never gave up. And so long as workers are being exploited, we have to be there with them, to support them, in line with our ideals.... We always said that we could win this struggle, but only if we stayed united. Every worker must become conscious of our common struggle, and of how we must push it forward together. The fight does not stop here, because all of the companies want to keep on exploiting us all. This is the moment for the workers to wake up, to cast off the darkness they keep us in, because as workers and as immigrants, our rights will never come as some kind of gift from any boss. We won a contract because we stuck it out, and we are going to continue in the struggle.” ■

South Africa...

continued from page 12

already been shot at days earlier, allegedly by NUM snipers, with several killed. Two police and two security guards were also killed, which the media blamed on the strikers and the NUM leaders pinned on the “upstart” union. In any case, class-conscious workers shed no tears for these professional repressors.

On Thursday, August 16 Lonmin management issued a “final ultimatum” ordering the strikers back to work. Workers demanded instead that the police leave the area. A police spokesman announced that this was “D-day” and that they had “no option but to disperse them [strikers] by force.” AMCU leader Mathunjwa begged workers to leave saying the police were set to kill, but when they wouldn’t he took up the miners’ vow, “We’re going nowhere. If need be, we’re prepared to die here” (*Mail & Guardian*, 17 August). Police advanced on the hill where the strikers were gathered, firing tear gas and then using a water cannon, but the combative workers kept singing struggle songs and waving machete-like pangas. The police then opened up with their heavy artillery and soon the field near the Wonderkop squatters settlement was littered with bodies. Police “hippos” drove over wounded workers. The *Sowetan* (17 August) reported:

“A defiant mineworker, who was lying on the ground bleeding from a gunshot wound, kept on swearing at the police and urged them to finish him off, saying ‘kill us to please *abelungu* (whites)’.”

The cop rampage was premeditated mass murder, yet what was the response? After a couple of days, Zuma issued an “even-handed” statement that “killing” was “unacceptable.” Three different “inquiries” have been instituted, but police authorities are unapologetic. They claim the first shots were from the strikers, although only police bullets have been found. National police commissioner Riah Phiyega claimed that the 423 police on the front line were “forced to utilize maximum force to defend themselves” from the “militant group” brandishing “dangerous weapons” (spears, sticks, pangas, knives). A few days later, she told police, “Don’t be sorry about what happened.” Yet while the strikers took 112 casualties, between dead and wounded, only one cop was slightly injured.

Even more grotesque was the response of the NUM and SACP leaders. Before the massacre, Mineworkers general secretary Frans Baleni had egged the police on, referring to earlier killings by cops and asking “In this case they don’t act?” After the shooting, the NUM blamed the AMCU for awakening unwarranted hopes. The Communist Party, whose new national chairman is the very same NUM president Senzeni Zokwana, issued an even more vile and scurrilous statement claiming that the police slaughter was a “barbaric act co-ordinated and deliberately organized by AMCU leader Mr. Mathunjwa and Steve Kholekile,” and calling for the immediate arrest of Mathunjwa and Kholekile! It also called on a presidential commission to investigate the “violent nature and anarchy associated with AMCU wherever it establishes itself,” and for amendments to the Labour Relations Act to make it more difficult to found new unions (SACP North West Statement, 17 August).

The NUM and SACP tops are acting as scab-herders, strikebreakers and instigators

of police murder of workers. But while the scope of the massacre has shaken ANC-ruled South Africa to its foundation, this treacherous action by labor “statesmen” and self-proclaimed “communists” is hardly new. Such deadly backstabbing is the ultimate recourse of all manner of reformists when the capitalist system they support is at risk. In particular, it is the deadly face of the *popular front*, in which workers organizations (parties, unions) are chained to a political alliance with a section of the bourgeois ruling class, acting as a roadblock to revolution or militant class struggle. One need only look at Spain in the 1930s where under the popular-front government (including the anarchists), the Stalinist Communist Party spearheaded murderous repression of the left and workers in the name of combating Trotskyism – that is, the spectre of proletarian revolution.

Black Capitalist “Economic Empowerment” = Poverty for Black Workers

“We thought the person we voted for would have come with our brothers who have been arrested.”

–Miner Xolani Ndzuza, among those protesting the visit by South Africa’s ANC president Jacob Zuma, quoted in “Marikana: The New War,” *Sowetan*, 23 August

The Marikana mine massacre has acted as a spotlight, throwing into sharp relief the brutal reality of capitalist South Africa under the administration of the African National Congress and its SACP “younger brother” (as ANC deputy chairman Kgalema Motlanthe put it at a gala fundraiser in Durban during the party’s 13th national congress last month). As has been the case of anti-colonial movements elsewhere in Africa, the petty-bourgeois nationalists have become bourgeois nationalists upon taking power. In South Africa they became junior partners in the existing capitalist class based on the white-supremacist apartheid order. While the color of faces in government changed, the fundamental structure of South African capitalism did not. And the SACP, which long ago became a leading component of the ANC, signed on as advisors, administrators and most importantly *enforcers* of this neo-apartheid regime.

No matter who gave the order to open fire on the strikers, the murderous action of the police at Marikana was the logical consequence of the policies of the ANC/SACP/COSATU Tripartite Alliance. It was President Zuma, a former SACP political bureau member, who pushed for militarizing the South African Police Service in the name of “fighting crime.” In 2009, police commissioner “general” Bheki Cele called on police to “shoot to kill” criminals. Deputy police minister Fikile Mbalula likewise urged cops to “shoot the bastards,” saying “innocent people are going to die” in explaining away the police murder of a three-year-old child. And the police have done just that, with over 1,700 civilians reportedly dying as a result of police action or in police custody in 2010. This finally led to an outcry about police brutality when cops beat Andries Tatane, a teacher, to death during a protest last year. But it hasn’t stopped the killing spree.

Meanwhile, under the watchword of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), some of the top figures in the ANC (and the SACP/ANC-led unions) have struck it rich, turning into multimillionaires and front men for major imperialist corporations. Under the



Laughing all the way to the bank. Cyril Ramaphosa and many other ANC leaders have become a dependent black sector of the South African bourgeoisie. The founder of National Union of Mineworkers is now a mining magnate, member of the board of Lonmin. Photo from profile of wealthiest Africans in Forbes magazine, “the capitalist tool.”

South African version of “crony capitalism,” many of the smaller fry have become “tenderpreneurs,” setting up companies that live off of tenders (contracts) to supply outsourced services to the government and state-owned enterprises (often eliminating union jobs) in the name of “local procurement.” SACPers get to be junior ministers (general secretary Blade Nzimande is minister of higher education, deputy gensec Jeremy Cronin is deputy minister of public works) or trade-union leaders, like Zokwana, whose job is to keep the workers in line.

Notably, Cyril Ramaphosa, who started out as the founding leader of the National Union of Mineworkers and built it into South Africa’s largest and most powerful union, has gone on to greener pastures. After becoming head of the ANC in 1991, he led its negotiations with the ruling Afrikaner National Party, chaired the constitutional assembly and was an important figure in the ANC-Nats unity government which took office in 1994 under Nelson Mandela as South African president. After losing out in the race to replace Mandela, Ramaphosa went into the private sector, founding the Shanduka Group (newsprint, mining, Coca-Cola, McDonald’s), becoming chairman of the Bidvest Group (food services and distribution) and a *director and stockholder of Lonmin Plc*, the very company he once fought against when it was Lonrho Plc under apartheid.

Ramaphosa is hardly alone. Another ANC leader (and former member of its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe), Tokyo Sexwale, currently minister of human settlements, founded Mvelaphanda Holdings which is South Africa’s third biggest diamond mining company. All of these outfits are beneficiaries of the BEE program to create black capitalist subsidiaries of imperialist capital. But the Ramaphosas and Sexwales are not the only ones on the gravy train. Last year, NUM general secretary Frans Baleni awarded himself a 40% raise, raking in R1.4 million (US\$166,000) annually, while the striking miners at Lonmin, who Baleni ordered to end their strike, toil underground in extremely dangerous conditions for less than US\$6,000 a year.

And the miners are far from the lowest

paid group in South Africa. The numbers of migrant laborers without any rights have increased under neo-apartheid. By virtually every measure, South Africa along with Brazil are the two most unequal major countries in the world. Significantly, both are presided over by popular-front capitalist governments which rest on powerful labor movements (that must be kept in check at all costs) while assiduously following the free-market “neo-liberal” economic policies dictated by Wall Street, Washington and the international bankers’ cartels. And the inequality is not color-blind: among the poorest one-fifth of the South African population, 70% are unemployed and over 95% are black, according to a recent study by the World Bank (*South Africa Economic Update*, July 2012).

Thus the Marikana strike is not just a wage dispute. It is a revolt by the impoverished black working people against a black capitalist regime that claimed to represent them while the leaders enriched themselves shamelessly. The struggle at Lonmin follows a six-week strike by miners at Impala Platinum (Implat) at the beginning of the year, also directed against the NUM tops. And the mine wars come amid a wave of roiling protests in the urban “townships” against inadequate or non-existent government delivery of services (the “toilet wars”). Rail lines and highways have been blocked from Kayelitsha outside Cape Town, where the business-led Democratic Alliance governs, to the ANC-governed Eastern Cape (East London, Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown) and Gauteng (Metropolitan Johannesburg, including Soweto) provinces. This revolt of the poor contains the seeds of revolution.

Marikana Revolt: Seeds of Revolution

The downtrodden black, coloured (mixed-race) and Indian working people placed their hopes in Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress to overcome the brutal oppression and repression of apartheid. For many, the Marikana massacre may well lead to the realization that the ANC regime backed by the SACP and COSATU unions is in fact *their enemy* and a tool of continued white capitalist rule. For supporters of the South African Communist Party and others on the left who tailed after and promoted the illusions of the masses in the petty-bourgeois nationalists, the bloodbath dramatically exposes the bankruptcy of their Stalinist/Menshevik policy of “revolution in stages.” What resulted was not “liberation” from white colonial domination but the renewal and strengthening of South African capitalism with the addition of a subordinate black sector, centered on the ANC leadership, which now joins in extracting superprofits from black labor.

In the case of some renegades from Trotskyism, notably the U.S. Socialist Workers Party (SWP) of Jack Barnes, the policy of political support to Mandela’s ANC was a key element in their explicitly renouncing *permanent revolution* in the mid-1980s. Barnes’ 1985 article on “The Coming Revolution in South Africa” (*New Internationalist*, Fall 1985) flatly declared the goal to be a “bourgeois democratic revolution” and “not an anticapitalist revolution.” Like the SACP, the U.S. SWP called for a “national democratic revolution.” But rather than “open[ing] the road to the transition to an anticapitalist revolution”

For a South African Internationalist Trotskyist Group

While the bulk of the South African left has long ago submitted to the discipline of the Tripartite Alliance, there are several small groups who call for a break from the neo-apartheid regime. In an August 18 article on the Marikana massacre, the Workers International Vanguard League (WIVL) correctly calls to kick out the NUM leaders and occupy the mines, but combines transitional demands with utopian reformist appeals to arrest the police, Lonmin board of directors and other mine owners. In a second (August 26) article, on the ANC-SACP government’s commission of inquiry, the WIVL asks: “*Why are the police, their commanders and Lonmin management not put in jail and then further investigation done?*” The answer, for revolutionary Marxists, is that the police and the entire state apparatus exist to defend the interests of capitalists like Lonmin management. But that is not stated. To pretend that the present capitalist state could be pressured into such steps contradicts the Marxist understanding of the class nature of the state and can only build illusions among the masses.

In an August 23 statement on “The Lonmin Massacre,” the Spartacist South Africa (SSA) group calls for workers

self-defense (curiously, since in Mexico the Grupo Espartaquista has denounced the Grupo Internacionalista as adventurist for doing the same) and has on-again, off-again called for a black-centered workers government. But the SSA only presents isolated demands while ignoring others that are urgently called for in the present struggle, such as occupation of the mines and imposing workers control. The absence of a full-fledged program of transitional demands reflects the claim by the SSA’s parent group, the International Communist League, which has stumbled from one internal crisis and line change to another, that the key thesis of Trotsky’s Transitional Program has become outdated because of a supposed qualitative regression in workers’ consciousness. Yet as Marikana shows, the workers are ready to fight. The present crisis in South Africa is proof positive that the crisis of humanity, today as three-quarters of a century ago, is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership.

The League for the Fourth International is not present in South Africa today, but we urge those militants who would fight for authentic Trotskyism to join with us in building a South African section on the program of permanent revolution.

sometime in the indefinite future, the establishment of the ANC regime only masked the continuation of a *neo-apartheid* system based on the superexploitation of black workers. The Marikana massacre by the ANC government on behalf of Lonmin with ANCer Ramaphosa on its board of directors is Exhibit A.

The genuine liberation of the oppressed black African and coloured working people from grinding poverty and deprivation of effective democratic rights can only come about through Leon Trotsky’s perspective of permanent revolution. As we wrote about a debate in the SACP and the South African left in the mid-1990s:

“While the elaborate *legal* structure of grand and petty apartheid has been dismantled – passbooks, the Group Areas act which banished millions to barren ‘bantustans’ and townships, the ban on mixed marriages, etc. – the underlying economic structure remains. *White supremacy is vital to South African capitalism, and can only be eliminated through socialist revolution.*”

–“In Defense of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat,” *The Internationalist* No. 3, September-October 1997

Moreover, a class-struggle response to the bloodbath sharply poses the urgency of a program challenging the racist rule of capital, as laid out in Trotsky’s 1938 Transitional Program. For a start there is the crying need for *workers defense guards* to protect strikers. We join the family members of Marikana workers in demanding *cops get out!* And while SACPers include top leaders of the POPCRU police union, Trotskyists insist that the police are not workers but the armed fist of the capitalist ruling class. We say, *Cops and security guards out of the unions!*

Today the Randlords continue to subjugate black workers as in the heyday of apartheid slavery. Former ANC Youth

League president Julius Malema played on this, showing up in Marikana demanding that the mines be nationalized. While his supporters wore red T-shirts proclaiming “Capitalism sucks,” Malema is actually a populist bourgeois politician who “is looking for a massive bailout for his friends who own unprofitable mines” (Ayanda Kota in the *San Francisco Bay View*, 18 August). In contrast to the reformist slogan of nationalization, proletarian revolutionaries are for *expropriation of the mines without compensation*. And class-conscious miners should call for workers committees to *open the books* of the mining conglomerates (which loot South Africa with their notorious “transfer pricing”) while seeking to *occupy the mines* and impose *workers control* and *workers safety committees* with the power to shut down the mines to prevent deadly accidents.

A program of transitional demands would include the call for a *shorter work-week with no loss in pay*, in order to fight mass unemployment, which particularly affects South African youth; along with demands for *free, 24-hour day care* to relieve the burdens on working women; *full citizenship for all immigrants*, to provide legal rights for the millions of workers from Lesotho, Mozambique and elsewhere in the region; and other demands pointing to the need for international socialist revolution. To this end, a fight must be waged within COSATU to *oust the sellout bureaucracy* and forge a class-struggle leadership of labor. Given the degree of union subordination to the ANC regime, splits cannot be ruled out. But above all it is necessary to *break labor from the nationalist popular front* and build an internationalist, Leninist-Trotskyist, revolutionary workers party to fight for a *black-centered workers government in a socialist federation of southern Africa*. ■



It's not about priorities but class interests. (Left) NYC mayor Bloomberg opens New York Stock Exchange 36 hours after Hurricane Sandy struck. (Right) Generators of the Federal Emergency Management Agency at staging point, Fort Indiantown Gap, PA. FEMA had 400 generators in position on the East Coast, but three days after Hurricane Sandy hit none were deployed in New York City.

Sandy...

continued from page 1

a week. Meanwhile, residents of low-lying poor neighborhoods and housing projects waited weeks for electricity, heat and in many cases water.

The devastation of Hurricane Sandy was magnified as it hit the economic and media center of world capitalism, New York City. It became fashionable in the bourgeois media, after the obligatory reference to the role played by climate change in creating this superstorm and a tip of the hat to Charles Dickens, to note in a vague populist way that post-Sandy NYC was a “tale of two cities,” starkly divided between the rich and the rest before, during and after. With millions subjected to deprivation and fear while the lights blazed in Manhattan from Midtown north, it was all too true. On the affluent Upper East Side it was party time, as residents ordered in lavish spreads from high-end food museums. Meanwhile, thousands walked for miles daily from the darkened netherworld to the land of light north of 40th Street. Those who couldn't get out – including the elderly, disabled, residents of high-rise public housing and tens of thousands in coastal areas of Brooklyn and Queens – were stranded in their dark, cold abodes, many without food, water and medicines. And soon the temperature began to drop.

Sandy was quickly labeled “Frankenstorm,” yet the wind and rain were weaker than Irene, which hit Brooklyn last year. The far greater destruction and casualties (130 dead in the U.S., over 100 in Haiti) were primarily due to the failure and refusal of an arrogant ruling class to carry out measures to prepare for such a storm, and “malign neglect” toward its impoverished victims. Following Irene, proposals had been made by official commissions to carry out a number of measures, some costly (sea walls and flood gates) and others less so (sealing off tunnels, subway entrances and gratings in likely affected areas; elevating public housing boilers and electrical equipment). But nothing was done. Sandy was yet again an “unnatural disaster” like so many in the past decade, whether attributable to global warming or not (i.e., hurricanes, tsunamis and earthquakes). Warnings were ignored and the death toll multiplied by capitalist-induced chaos: skimping on infrastructure and not only callous indifference towards those affected by it but even a deliberate desire to remove “unwanted” populations.

Take the medical system. Five New York City hospitals (NYU Langone, Bellevue, the Veterans Affairs, Beekman Downtown and Coney Island) had to be evacuated

and several are still closed. City officials kept most of them open at first because of the cost of evacuating, but power systems failed and basements were flooded within the first hour. As elevators were knocked out at Bellevue, hospital personnel performed heroically. A bucket brigade carried fuel up 13 floors to backup generators, and when those failed they ferried hundreds of patients down in plastic sleds, sometimes hand-pumping oxygen as they went. Under FEMA standards hospitals are supposed to hold out for four days with backup power, but NYU and Bellevue didn't even make it through Day 2. Moreover, New York is supposed to have a “surge” capacity of 4,000 beds for 8 million people in an emergency. But with all the hospital closures (over 160 closed in recent years, only 60 left) it has nowhere near that. Now emergency rooms and surgery wards around the city are overflowing with beds in the hallways and lobbies.

The devastating consequences of Hurricane Sandy hit what the *New York Times* daintily refers to as “pockets of misery” – overwhelmingly neighborhoods of black, Latino and immigrant working people, such as the Russian community in south Brooklyn. This is one more reflection of the “one-sided class war” being waged by the masters of capital against those they mercilessly exploit. Going forward, the captains of Wall Street, the corporate CEOs and the bourgeois politicians who represent their interests – epitomized by Mayor Bloomberg, the wealthiest person in the city – fully intend to ensure that any reconstruction occurs on their terms and that, as with the costs of the world depression they set off, the burden for this is placed on the shoulders of the working class. Unless they are stopped, that is. And that requires an effort to raise consciousness that beyond immediate relief what's needed is to mobilize those who produce the fabulous profits in a struggle for state power, for socialist revolution to sweep away the capitalist rulers and their system of production for profit and institute a system in which instead production is to fill human needs.

The “Let Them Eat Cake” Mayor

Given that this disaster struck during a hard-fought presidential campaign, it was clear that the Democratic administration of Barack Obama would avoid the appearance of cruel, deliberate obstructionism and outright incompetence displayed by George W. Bush and his minions during Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Generous promises of financial aid were made, deals were struck with Republicans Bloomberg and New

Jersey governor Chris Christie. But what New Yorkers in hard-hit areas noticed most in the first days was mainly the absence of a government presence (or even of official aid organizations like the Red Cross) on the ground in terms of actual relief. For all the hype about uniformed “first responders,” the fact is that with thousands of lives at risk, this vital work was left to private volunteer efforts such as People's Relief in Coney Island, and in Red Hook and the Rockaways sections of the Occupy movement that Mayor Bloomberg's uniformed thugs had driven off the streets. It is now confirmed that this was a conscious decision by city authorities, no doubt attracted by the fact that they could get all this volunteer labor for free. But there was more to it than that.

Bloomberg ran true to form, advising New Yorkers: “Have a sandwich out of the fridge. Sit back, and watch the television” (*New York Times*, 29 October). Maybe in a town house on East 79th Street but not in the projects in Red Hook where they didn't have power for the TV (or the fridge). Even Bloomberg's fall-back option of reading a “good book” was not very practical for those suffering in the dark. It was like during the December 2010 blizzard when he said that city residents should relax and maybe take in a Broadway show. He then compounded his Marie Antoinette moment by trying to maintain the New York City Marathon in the face of mounting public indignation. The run would have started in Staten Island where corpses were still being uncovered and shut down the Verrazano Narrows bridge during a transportation crisis provoked by flooded tunnels. What's more, there were dozens of huge generators as well as heaters, blankets, jackets, food and 50,000 bottles of water in Central Park for the finish of the race. City workers complained but when the right-wing, racist *New York Post* (2 November) lambasted this “Abuse of Power,” he finally caved. Even after the Marathon was cancelled, the equipment did not end up at the projects.

The mayor initially did not want the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) butting into “his” city. Since the FEMA is primarily a coordination office for relief efforts and financial aid, this primarily meant the National Guard as actual manpower. Where the Guard was deployed, for example in Long Beach, Long Island, next door to the Rockaways, it was not to aid victims but to lock down the town (as an Internationalist Group comrade who is a tow-truck driver reported from the scene). Replying to Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz's panicky call for the Guard to “deter criminal activity,” Bloom-

berg declared, “The NYPD is the only people we want on the street with guns.” After all, as Bloomberg put it last November, “I have my own army in the NYPD, which is the seventh biggest army in the world.” So both Markowitz and Bloomberg spread the racist scenario reminiscent of Katrina, according to which white people “find” but black people “loot” groceries and other desperately needed supplies; they only differ on whose guns should be deployed.

A key issue was the vicious neglect of the housing projects. The billionaire mayor dismissed all complaints. On November 9, he declared: “By tonight or tomorrow, every one of their buildings will have electricity and by early next week they will all have heat,” adding we now “do not have to worry about” these people. In fact, not until *nine days* after Bloomberg stopped “worrying” (but doing nothing) about project residents were heat and hot water restored to all New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) buildings. Even more offensive was NYC deputy mayor Howard Wolfson, who blamed housing project residents for their woes because they didn't leave when the city issued an evacuation order ... and cut off electricity and heat even before the hurricane hit. Our “expectation and goal is people would leave these buildings” said Hillary Clinton's former chief of staff. So why didn't they leave? Some were disabled, unable to walk down 19 flights of stairs; others were worried that their homes would be ransacked, as happened after Hurricane Irene. And many, it turned out, didn't speak English.

So thanks a bunch for your “worry,” Mayor Bloomberg. When he tried for a photo-op by visiting the Rockaways on November 3, he got the angry non-welcome he so richly deserved.

In the War Zones

Bloggers who did relief work in particularly devastated areas such as the Rockaways, Coney Island and Red Hook report occasionally seeing the National Guard distribute food and water, but more often than not either standing around “guarding” intersections and buildings – or detaining black youth as suspected “looters.” Joe Nocera, a business columnist at the *New York Times* (9 November), similarly recounted:

“Although there were police officers everywhere, the hard work of getting Far Rockaway residents help had, once again, fallen to volunteers.... You would think that FEMA, with all its expertise, would be coordinating the relief effort. But you would be wrong. When I asked one FEMA official what his workers were doing, he said they were mainly trying to make sure that residents applied for



Day laborers from El Centro del Inmigrante distribute aid, Midland Beach, Staten Island, November 6. FEMA refuses to aid undocumented immigrants. We say: distribute aid to everyone, no questions asked.

assistance.”

That would be “legal” residents, of course, as those lacking the required documents are not eligible for relief. Even though day laborers from El Centro del Inmigrante in Port Richmond, Staten Island were among the first to respond in the aftermath of the storm, and workers from the Hot and Crusty bakery in Manhattan (who after almost two months on the picket line won a contract with a union hiring hall) volunteered in Far Rockaway, they themselves would not be eligible for official aid.

The *Amsterdam News* (6 December) reported, “As FEMA officials, National Guard and other storm rescue teams made their way around devastated neighborhoods, immigration groups say that many undocumented residents have remained hidden, not getting the help they need.” For those who are not citizens or have “qualified alien” status – in other words the vast majority of the *more than half a million undocumented immigrants* in New York City – the only “relief” they got after Sandy was that the ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) cops said they were only conducting “limited street enforcement operations” ... for now. But soon they would be back to normal, filling their quota of 400,000 deportations a year. Aid should be provided to one and all, no questions asked, but this is not the way capitalism works. Revolutionary Marxists demand not only that everyone be given needed assistance, but that there be *full citizenship rights for all immigrants* – a simple democratic right that it will take a socialist revolution to achieve.

The issue of the state was starkly posed in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. Communists would not stand in the way of troops actually providing aid, but this is definitely not their principal activity – not in New Orleans, not in New York and certainly not in Haiti, where U.S. troops carried out a colonial occupation. Nor is there any great distinction between the police, National Guard and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), which is, after all, a branch of the Department of Homeland Security, where it is in charge of prison camps in case of a “national emergency.” This did not deter sections of the Occupy movement from fraternizing with the forces of bourgeois repression. On November 10, Occupy Sandy organized a meeting in Red Hook together with representatives of the National Guard, the Bloomberg administration, and the NYPD. The right-wing *New York Post* (6 December) even gushed that “A surprising

alliance of cops and activists in Red Hook pulverized crime....” Despite mass arrests, a large part of Occupy still thinks Bloomberg’s killer cops are among the “99%”.

The Return of Occupy: “Do It Yourself” Disaster Relief?

If the story of New Orleans in the aftermath of Katrina was vicious racist repression, the story of post-Sandy New York was how non-existent official support was supplanted by private volunteer efforts. Even semi-governmental disaster relief organizations like the American Red Cross did little for days and turned away volunteers. Occupy Wall Street in particular, re-baptized “Occupy Sandy,” took up the slack from the bourgeois state, distributing water, food and aid, and cleaning up rubble. This earned praise from much of the bourgeois media (“Occupy Sandy: A Movement Moves to Relief,” *New York Times*, 11 November). Meanwhile, a whole range of reformist left groups, from Workers World to the International Socialist Organization, followed Occupy’s lead. As a consequence, while volunteers were kept hanging out in Red Hook waiting for something to do, there were almost no protests against the criminal negligence of NYC authorities. City officials were more than happy to let Occupy do the heavy lifting.

Showing solidarity, helping others in the wake of such catastrophes is elemental, and Occupy’s efforts were praiseworthy. But some have argued that the political message was “revolutionary.” An Occupy supporter posted a piece on the internet site Firedoglake on 12 November, insisting “Occupy Sandy Does Not Signify Occupy Wall Street Has Found ‘New Purpose’.” The writer argues: “What Occupy is doing with its relief effort is revolutionary. The establishment expects disaster relief to be apolitical. But, being helped by an organizer from Occupy Sandy undoubtedly introduces or reminds residents of economic and social issues of justice and equality that remain pervasive in communities.” Perhaps to some small degree, but mainly the message is that Occupy cares. Many star entertainers put in a shift or two, and even vampire squid Lloyd Blankfein, CEO of Goldman Sachs, did a stint out in the Rockaways. Of course, that was just a PR stunt while Occupy activists worked their butts off. But far from finding this threatening, Bloomberg & Co. cynically used the volunteers’ efforts.

The situation in NYC now is hardly like that after the Mexican earthquake of

1985, in which tens of thousands of Mexico City working people who were left homeless organized independently of and against the government whose soldiers prevented them from rescuing their neighbors and relatives. Even in that case, the various self-proclaimed socialist groups that took charge of the organizations of those affected by the quake turned them into agencies for channeling government welfare funds, thus squandering an opportunity for revolutionary *class* mobilization. Ultimately, due to the absence of an independent working-class alternative, the wave of discontent and unrest over the long-ruling PRI-government’s criminal response to the earthquake was diverted into the popular-front electoral opposition around longtime PRI leader Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (see our article, “Mexico 1985: From the Earthquake to the Popular Front,” *The Internationalist* No. 20, January-February 2005).

The Occupy Sandy response, while positive, had a liberal middle-class quality to it, including using an Amazon “wedding registry” to get specific donations. But the “community support” undertaken by Occupy can only slightly ameliorate things in a desperate situation, and isn’t an alternative to action by the state. It cannot provide emergency generators and external boilers, pump out flooded subway lines or replace salt-encrusted electrical equipment. “Mutual aid” of the sort held up as a model by liberals and semi-anarchists within Occupy is a mirror image of the claptrap about “self-help” spewed by right-wing Tea Party populists. And it certainly can’t prevent future catastrophes like Sandy, which will require large-scale investment, which the government will not undertake unless the capitalists see it in their interests – and if so, it will be to protect Wall Street, not Red Hook or the Rockaways. What’s posed is the need to struggle for a revolutionary *workers government* that can marshal society’s resources in the collective interest rather than for private profit.

Focal Point: NYC Housing Projects

The need to go beyond disaster relief to revolutionary struggle against the capitalist state is highlighted by the horrendous mistreatment of tens of thousands of residents of New York City’s housing projects, which were left in the cold and dark for weeks by arrogant city officials. In a November 1 posting, Marjorie Stamberg of Class Struggle Education Workers noted:

“Having been to housing projects in New Orleans, post-Katrina, where authorities were trying to force residents out by cutting off essential services, what’s happening in Red Hook, post Sandy, has an eerie familiarity....

“To get the people in the Red Hook NYCHA projects to leave, the city gratuitously turned off their electricity, water and gas before the storm – this was not a result of Sandy but a deliberate attempt to force them out. Many decided to stay anyway as they needed to protect their property and did not have family or friends in other places.”

Even right-wing reactionaries could see the parallels to what happened in New Orleans housing projects. A *Huffington Post* (9 November) article quoted Howard Husock of the Manhattan Institute, a conservative “free market” think tank, calling this “a slow-motion Katrina for public housing residents.” Of course, Husock’s preference would be to privatize the projects, which is probably what

the Bloomberg administration would like to do as well – or else blow them up, like city governments, both Republican and Democrat, have done across the country. But that could be problematical in NYC, which depends on low-wage labor, so instead city officials have adopted a policy of deliberate neglect.

As everyone who went out to volunteer in Red Hook, Coney Island or the Rockaways noted, and even the bourgeois media reported, the government was almost nowhere to be seen aiding residents. (In fact, when a nor’easter storm hit a few days after Sandy, FEMA and the Red Cross simply left.) The elderly and infirm were trapped for days in the high-rise towers without light, heat or elevators. On November 6, a 101-year old woman in Knickerbocker Houses on Manhattan’s Lower East Side died in her freezing cold apartment. There was no door-to-door check on the well-being of residents of Red Hook Houses until more than two weeks after the hurricane. It took the NYCHA three weeks to get to Coney Island. When the city finally got around to sending out mobile medical vans, children and babies with bronchitis and other respiratory diseases were given some antibiotics or a prescription (to be filled where?) then sent back into the cold.

Where were the large generators which should have rolled up at the projects on Day One? FEMA had prepositioned “400 industrial-size power generators ready to help the East Coast,” but in New York City “not a single FEMA generator has been deployed” (*Wall Street Journal*, 2 November). Where were the soup kitchens, the heating centers? Why couldn’t they hook up outside power and heat to the first couple floors of the projects and give everyone somewhere warm to sit and have a meal? The Housing Authority’s excuse is it had more than 400 buildings housing almost 80,000 residents that lost power. That raises the question of why so much public housing was located in low-lying areas vulnerable to the sea. The answer to that is Robert Moses, who built projects on cheap land formerly occupied by slums or shuttered industries. In terms of the immediate crisis, in a society with a collectivized economy, the whole population would be organized to take care of emergencies like Sandy. One need only look at how Cuba deals with annual hurricanes of far greater ferocity with very little loss of life. But under capitalism, the poor are left to fend for themselves.

The criminal neglect left many wondering if there were not an agenda there – using a disaster to close down public housing, relocate the people and turn the buildings into condominiums. Certainly there is a lot of gentrifying going on around Red Hook, with chi-chi restaurants (as well as Ikea and Fairway Foods) only a few blocks from the impoverished projects. You could almost smell the real estate speculation. Bloomberg’s first comment after the storm was that 40,000 people would have to be relocated, half from public housing. Why? The people were still living in the buildings. After getting a lot of blowback, the mayor reduced this number to 10,000 or less. But whether or not the ultimate intent was to empty the buildings, subsequent reporting makes clear that the failure to deliver aid was deliberate. An article in the *New York Times* (10 December) noted, “Again and again, city officials publicly predicted that the crisis in public housing was on the verge of being resolved, contributing to a perception at City Hall that there was no need to mobilize an extensive effort to provide medical care.”

With the Bloomberg administration's focus on cost-cutting and outsourcing, the *Times* article noted that the city contacted "a half-dozen nonprofit groups to conduct a formal canvass of high-rise buildings in the flood zone." But since they weren't NYCHA personnel they couldn't get access to many buildings. Getting outside lighting towers into Red Hook took eleven days. The *Daily News* (11 November) reported that at Red Hook Houses the Authority let water sit in the basements for days, corroding wires, and finally started pumping water out with a garden hose. A rental boiler had arrived but was not hooked up. NYCHA chairman John B. Rhea said more were "on order," but it would take several days to "power up." Noting that volunteer groups like People's Relief and Occupy Sandy "appeared to be better organized than the city," the *Times* investigative report quoted Nazli Parvizi, the NYC Commissioner for Community Affairs, saying that "she felt effective in a supporting role. The volunteers were doing a good job, she said, and 'I wasn't here to change that narrative'."

The *Times* noted that "A 2009 report by

the city drafted in response to Hurricane Katrina recommended that the authority elevate certain critical pieces of equipment stored in its basements, renovations that were never done." Nor were there standby contracts to quickly procure pumps, generators, boilers and other equipment in an emergency. But what the *Times* article didn't mention is that *the New York City Housing Authority is sitting on almost one billion dollars in federal funds earmarked for improving decaying facilities*, and has been for years. The *Daily News* (1 August) published a scathing article exposing this outrage:

"They earn close to \$200,000 a year, ride in city-owned cars, live in tony Manhattan apartments — and are sitting on hundreds of millions of dollars intended to benefit low income New York families.

"The New York City Housing Authority and its board members have failed to spend nearly \$1 billion that it has been hoarding since 2009 to make life more livable for the 400,000 residents of its 334 developments, the *Daily News* has learned.

"The money from the federal government is supposed to repair leaky roofs, broken elevators, moldy walls and busted playground equipment in the authority's crumbling properties."

Nearly half a billion of the unspent dollars have been sitting in the NYCHA accounts for at least two years, the article reported, and \$233 million since 2009. Bloomberg and Rhea refused to respond to the *Daily News* exposé in August, and they're still stonewalling.

So why hasn't the money been used? Because *the policy of the Bloomberg administration is to run public housing into the ground*. The Housing Authority is administered in the same way the billionaire mayor tries to run the schools: with highly paid Wall Street execs who know nothing about the public agencies they preside over and whose task is to make them fail and provide an opening for private capital. In the same mold as former magazine publisher Cathy Black, whom Bloomberg named schools chancellor although she had never set foot in a public school, NYCHA chief John Rhea was the former managing director for investment banking for Lehman Brothers. When Lehman went bankrupt, largely due to its investment banking practices, Rhea became available and fellow Wall Streeter Bloomberg snapped him up. His priority was to cut the \$50 million annual operating deficit. In pursuing this, Rhea set off an exodus of experienced

managers and has come up with a plan to carve up green spaces and lease them to private businesses to set up shops or parking lots. Fixing elevators, elevating electrical equipment and boilers? Fuggedaboutit is the city's response.

It Will Take a Socialist Revolution

The failures and abuses of New York City's response to Hurricane Sandy are legion. Asked about the 11,000 prisoners in the huge Riker's Island jail, Bloomberg replied that there was no possibility of their escaping. What he was actually being asked was whether they might be drowned, a question he ignored since there were no plans to evacuate it. The restoration of power and the fact that most public transportation started running again after a few days were mainly due to the tireless efforts of subway, rail and electrical workers. Yet Con Ed workers were locked out this summer by a profit-hungry management out to gut their health plan, while the MTA docked hundreds of transit workers' pay for supposedly being "missing" when they couldn't get to work during and after the storm. At union initiative, thousands of teachers volunteered at relief centers on election day, November 6, but the DOE demanded that any who didn't show up three days after the storm, when there was still no subway service and schools were closed, "prove" they couldn't get there.

Beyond the wanton vindictiveness of city rulers, Hurricane Sandy highlighted the inability of capitalism (and particularly the American "free market" variety) to plan and produce to fulfill human needs. In recent decades there has been a considerable deterioration of infrastructure in the United States, with collapsing bridges (Minneapolis 2007), periodic large-scale power blackouts (1965, 1977, 2003 just in the Northeast U.S.), recurrent river flooding (Mississippi, Missouri and Red River of the North in 2011 alone), leading to vast suffering and human tragedy due to inadequate preparation, maintenance or preventive measures. In impoverished and semi-colonial capitalist countries, where human life is judged to be cheaper by the capitalist exploiters, the losses due to lack of safety measures are even greater, as in Mexican mine disasters and the recent factory fires in Pakistan and Bangladesh, in which hundreds of workers died. When the focus is constantly on jacking up profits, spending large sums to prepare for predictable disasters is deemed a threat to the bottom line and stock market prices.

In the case of Sandy, while the storm itself may have come about due to a particular conjunction of natural events, the devastation it left in its wake was a man-made disaster waiting to happen. Most of the damage in New York City was caused by the storm surge, which was made more destructive by the rising sea level that scientists concur is due to climate change. A massive (652-page) official report on *Responding to Climate Change in New York State* last year included a section on dangers to transportation by Dr. Klaus Jacob of Columbia University who noted that a surge only a foot higher than that in 2011's Hurricane Irene could flood the subway tunnels and potentially shut down mass transportation into Manhattan for a month (*New York Times*, 11 September). Less than a year later, Sandy produced surges of up to 17 feet, and sure enough, all the southern Manhattan subway tunnels were flooded as well as the Midtown railroad tunnels. Thanks to the dedicated

subway workers, it took far less time than feared to pump them out and restore service, but still the disruption was enormous.

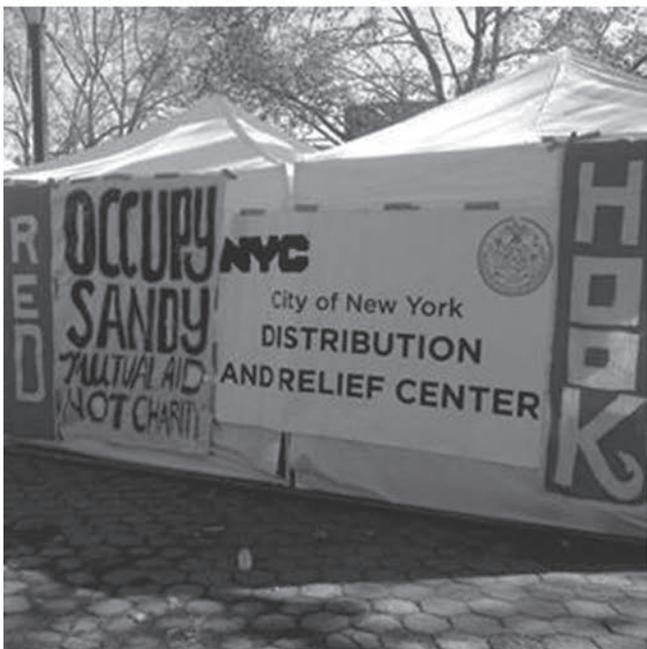
What is striking is that all of this has been studied exhaustively by climate scientists, engineers and others and preventive measures proposed, but virtually nothing has been done about it. Tunnel flooding and subway shutdowns could be prevented at relatively small cost. Watertight doors to the subway tunnels and stations and sealing gratings in the flood zones and simple measures like raising the threshold of entrances (walking up a few stairs before descending) would largely do the job. But that would require spending a few tens of millions of dollars, which the Metropolitan Transit Authority has refused to do because it is paying over \$2 billion a year to Wall Street banks. Con Edison estimated that installing submersible switches and elevating high-voltage transformers above ground level would cost \$250 million or so, which it considered prohibitive. Yet as we noted last summer, Con Ed "made over \$1 billion in net profit last year, and a 15% a year return on capital over the last decade and a half!" ("Bring Out Workers Power to Knock Out the Lockout," *Internationalist* leaflet, July 2012).

Longer-term countermeasures would be more costly, such as constructing flood gates at the upper end of the East River (Throgs Neck Bridge), under the Verrazano Narrows Bridge and in the Arthur Kill, which might cost \$10 billion. Storm surge barriers and dikes would add more. But such constructions have been built in the Netherlands and London and are nearing completion in Venice, and the cost is far less than the estimated \$50 billion losses produced by Hurricane Sandy (to say nothing of the \$100+ billion annual bill for the Iraq/Afghanistan wars). The issue is not the money, but who gets it and whose class interests are served. Now that it may have dawned on the titans of finance that their own operations can be affected, some such measures may be forthcoming. But you can bet your last stock option that they won't be protecting the projects in Far Rockaway and Coney Island, and they would rather turn Red Hook into a tidal wetlands securing Wall Street (unless the real estate interests succeed in pushing the poor black and Latino residents out of the public housing there).

Then there is the matter of reconstruction, centered on housing. The sudden need to provide shelter for thousands of people threw a sharp spotlight on the question of homelessness in New York. Even before the hurricane hit, the city was sheltering "a record 47,000 women, men and children, in a system strained to the breaking point" (*New York Times*, 21 November). Unaffordable rents, foreclosures and evictions, poverty and continuing mass unemployment have produced a huge housing crisis, which the aftereffects of Sandy only exacerbated. It's not that there isn't available housing, or space to build: a citywide count by Picture the Homeless in collaboration with the Hunter College Center for Community Planning and Development, *Banking on Vacancy: Homelessness and Real Estate Speculation* (January 2012), identified some 3,500 vacant buildings that can house 70,000 people, and 2,500 empty lots which could be used to build housing for another 130,000, for a total of 200,000 people. In the past, great amounts of public housing have been built in New York City, but in this epoch of decaying capitalism, that is not in the cards. It will take a revolution to solve this crisis.

Faced with a catastrophe of this magni-

Photos: Adam Weiz [top]; DiceyTroop/Twitter [middle]; Kirby Desmarais/New York Post [bottom]



"Mutual Aid" with the NYPD? Top: Occupy Sandy organizer briefs men in U.S. military uniform in Brooklyn, November 10. Middle: meeting that night of Occupy Sandy, NYC mayor's office, New York Police Department and National Guard. Bottom: joint disaster relief center of Occupy Sandy and NYC mayor's office.



The issue is state power, and which class has it.

tude, a society in which resources are organized to fulfill urgent social needs would have no difficulty responding. The more than 20 million jobless in the United States (counting those who have been simply eliminated from the workforce by government statisticians in order to make unemployment stats look better) could be given jobs at union-scale wages building large quantities of new, high quality public housing, refurbishing and flood-proofing subways, constructing sea walls and the like. Not just in NYC but all along the devastated Jersey Shore. Power and telephone lines in densely populated Long Island can be put underground where they belong. Etc. But not under the system of production for profit and real estate monopolies. What's necessary, therefore, is to *fight for workers revolution*, to lay the basis for a rationally planned socialist economy that can fulfill these needs. And we can begin that fight by mobilizing the working class, the poor and their allies in a struggle for *transitional demands* which challenge the capitalist framework.

Communists fight for jobs for all, through a *shorter workweek with no loss in pay*. There should be a *massive program of public works* to rebuild New York and all the affected areas. Various social-democratic groups (Socialist Action, Socialist Alternative, International Socialist Organization and others) as well as centrist pseudo-communists like the Spartacist League and League for the Revolutionary Party raise such demands, as do some bourgeois liberals. But as the systematic victimization of housing project residents by the NYCHA and the perverse actions of MTA management show, even publicly owned entities are run according to the rules of the capitalist markets. The social democrats also call for "public ownership" and even "nationalization" of utilities and banks. But as shown by the performance of the Long Island Power Authority, state ownership under capitalism in no way means that such entities will be run in the interests of the working people they supposedly serve. That is why we insist that such programs must be under *workers control*, not by politely petitioning City Hall or the state legislature in Albany but by workers literally driving out management.

In the process, *workers commissions to open the books* can discover what the bosses have really been spending money on. Likewise, public housing should be run by *councils of tenants and workers*, who elect the necessary administrators. *Schools should be controlled by teachers, students,*

parents and workers – the ones actually involved in educating rather than agents of Wall Street. And as with any workers action such as a strike, we can assume that the owners of capital will seek to retaliate with their uniformed thugs and enforcers, from the police and National Guard to the armed forces. Occupy activists can chant all they want that cops are supposedly part of the "99%" but they will find out that the police are the *armed fist of the capitalist state*. In the face of this, it is necessary to organize *labor, black and immigrant self-defense* to defend against racist attacks and state repression. And the goal must be a *workers government*, which can expropriate the banks and all of capitalist industry and commerce, smash imperialism and spread the revolution internationally.

Social democrats and liberals whine about budget cuts to FEMA (the lead agency for internal class war) and yearn for the bourgeois state to step in and clean up the mess, as if it were a matter of reorienting budget expenditures from guns to butter. This is an illusion: it ain't going to happen as long as capital rules. Occupy radicals and anarchists dream of building a new society based on "mutual aid." But that won't get you generators, hospitals and massive housing construction. The question isn't gun control, as liberals are insisting after the horrific massacre by a deranged youth at a Connecticut school – it's who controls the guns. *The issue is not priorities but power – state power*. What it will take to right the wrongs and all the injustices laid bare by Sandy is nothing less than *socialist revolution*. (Ironically, as Lower Manhattanites trudged northwards to the land of light above 40th Street they were greeted by a huge billboard at Times Square for the TV series *Revolution* with the kicker "15 years after the blackout, power is everything.")

Out of calamities like Sandy can come some limited reforms, such as the building codes passed in the wake of the Great London Fire of 1666 and the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 – which were then promptly ignored by cost-cutting capitalist builders. And/or they can be used by imperialist rulers to carry out barbaric attacks on those they exploit and oppress. Examples: the racist police terror and "ethnic cleansing" driving the poor, black population out of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, and the "humanitarian" U.S. military occupation of Haiti after the January 2010 quake. Or the study of the 1871 Peshtigo, Wisconsin fire by Pentagon

planners in WWII seeking to reproduce conditions for a firestorm, knowledge they then used in dropping incendiary bombs on Dresden and Tokyo producing death tolls as high or higher than those of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

At the beginning of November, large parts of New York City were suddenly thrown back into an elemental struggle for survival, which some are still having to cope with weeks later. Thousands are still without electricity around the region. In a decaying U.S. capitalism increasingly oriented to naked financial parasitism, the choice between socialism and barbarism is not a catchphrase but bitter reality. Yet the black, Latino, Asian and white poor and working people, immigrants and U.S.-born alike, who live in the urban centers have the economic and social power not only to bring the rulers of U.S. capitalism to their knees, but to ultimately expropriate them and begin the necessary task of socialist reconstruction. For this to happen an internationalist revolutionary workers party must be built to lead the necessary revolution in this country and around the world. ■

Chicago...

continued from page 8

Financing, which is supposed to be earmarked for public works (like schools). Instead, city rulers hand over big bucks to private developers, like the \$5.2 million funneled to the Hyatt Hotel Corp. of billionaire Penny Pritzker, an Emanuel appointee to the School Board whose children go to the elite Lab School and who is a top financier of the Stand for Children outfit whose CEO Josh Edelman bragged about hoodwinking union leaders into backing the anti-union SB7 law. Or there is the \$70 million a year to put cops in the schools. Or the \$300+ million in public funds going to privately run charter schools. Liberal and reformist calls to "tax the rich" feed into the lie that there isn't enough money to go around. For imperialist wars, police repression or luxury skyboxes in stadiums, they find the dough. This issue is power, class power.

On vital issues of school closings, teacher evaluations, seniority, layoffs, class size, pensions and salaries, the contract negotiated by the CORE leadership either does nothing, or accepts huge cuts and givebacks of vital union rights. The CTU's emphasis on these issues was important in winning parent support, mobilizing younger teachers and countering ruling-class propaganda that the strike was just about "greedy" teachers only out for themselves. Yet none of these key issues were reflected in the settlement. While the CTU reform leadership claims to be fighting the privatization and teacher-bashing plan pushed by Washington and Wall Street, in fact they have caved in to the corporate education "reformers." The strike was a definite plus, but the terms they negotiated they are no better than those of mainline business unionists such as AFT president Randi Weingarten and her replacement at the head of the UFT, Michael Mulgrew.

And sometimes worse: in New York, teachers who lose their positions due to school closings are placed in an "Absent Teacher Reserve" (ATR) pool, that has at times swelled to over 2,000 teachers who are prevented from teaching. Class Struggle Education Workers has campaigned to demand that all ATRs be given positions, pointing out that this situation is used by right-wing forces to complain about "free-loading" union members. Still, in New York ATRs cannot be fired (so far). In Chicago,

under the deal agreed to by the CORE leadership, most teachers from closing schools will be out of a job in less than half a year. And while the AFT/UFT tops routinely capitulate to or even embrace the demands of the privatizers and corporatizers – then claiming "victory" when they only give up two-thirds of the givebacks being demanded – New York teachers still (for now) have seniority job protection.

The giveback contract negotiated by the CTU leadership is a sellout of the strike: it should be voted down. Those who proclaim this rotten deal a victory only show that they don't believe real victories are possible. Go back to the negotiating table to demand smaller class sizes; oppose racist school closures – no closing without a democratic vote of teachers, students, parents and workers affected; fully fund teachers' pensions and health care; uphold seniority, oppose all layoffs and teacher evaluations based on student scores on computer-graded exams. Elect a delegated strike/bargaining committee to carry out negotiations and examine the full text of any tentative agreement. If a new walkout is necessary, organize strike schools like the freedom schools during the civil rights struggle in the South.

Don't let our kids' education be held hostage by thugs with state power like Rahm Emanuel!

For Class-Struggle Unionism!

With this rotten settlement, the CORE leadership of the CTU and similar union opposition groups elsewhere have shown that they are not one whit better than the sellout leadership of the AFT and UFT, as well as the NEA. Both the union tops and would-be reformers are part of a union bureaucracy that serves as a transmission belt for the bosses, regimenting public education to serve the needs of capital. Right-wingers red-bait the ISO and other leftists in CORE as some kind of fire-breathing Bolsheviks. This is the kind of idiocy that comes from delusional Tea Partiers who say Obama is a card-carrying communist born in Kenya. The ISO are pale pink social democrats, nothing more. As one CORE founder remarked, these tame reformists play by the rules of the system: legal, economic and political. They may bring the union ranks into the streets to protest, and even strike on occasion, but they will not and cannot defeat the union-busters because they do not challenge, and ultimately they support, capitalism.

ISO/CORE supporters argue that the Chicago teachers *strike* will spawn more struggles against the education deformers, because it showed it is possible to fight back. Maybe, hopefully so. Wisconsin also showed it was possible to fight, and union members there fought hard, until they were sold out by a labor bureaucracy beholden to the Democrats. But at the same time, the Chicago *settlement* is likely to open the flood gates to the imposition of test-score-based teacher evals, elimination of seniority in layoffs, massive closing of schools, etc., since even the activists in Chicago couldn't stop them. As the *New York Times* (18 September) editorialized in telling teachers to vote for the settlement which the reformists hail, "If the members approve the contract, Chicago will move into the age of school reform." And that corporate/capitalist "reform" will be very, very bad for teachers, students and public education generally.

The Internationalist Group and CSEW have repeatedly noted that union "reform" caucuses such as CORE, MORE, etc. based on simple labor militancy and "union de-

mocracy” *cannot* defeat the onslaught by reactionary forces seeking to privatize as much of public education as they can and “reform” the remnants to serve corporate interests. (See “Lessons of Chicago CORE,” *The Internationalist* No. 33, Summer 2011.) As Leon Trotsky noted during the last big depression, in this imperialist epoch of capitalist decay, as the bourgeois rulers systematically rip past union gains, “apolitical,” reformist trade unionism is no longer possible. The reformist opposition groups in reality are vehicles to replace the present layer of calcified sellout bureaucrats with more activist union leaders who once in power will become part of the bureaucracy and will be constrained by capitalist legality and politics to toe the line laid out by the ruling class. Proof? The outcome of the Chicago teacher strike of 2012 is Exhibit A

The question of the Democratic Party is key, and one that CORE and its reformist pseudo-socialist supporters try to duck. They took refuge in the fact that Obama didn’t publicly endorse the Chicago mayor’s hard line stance against the union whereas Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney attacked the strike and his running mate Paul Ryan backed Emanuel. One sign in CTU strike demonstrations read, “Voted for Obama, Got Rahmney.” But Obama, Romney and Rahm Emanuel all have virtually identical policies on education, policies that come straight from the capitalist ruling class: from the heads of corporations like Microsoft and Wal-Mart, the Wall Street speculators who triggered the 2008 financial collapse, groups like the Business Roundtable and the National Center on Education and the Economy, which wants to end universal schooling at the tenth grade. These bosses want job training, not education.

Teacher union leaders are up to their necks in Democratic politics and deeply enmeshed in the machinations of U.S. imperialism: Randi Weingarten is an active member of the Democratic National Committee and board member of the International Democratic Institute, part of the National Endowment for Democracy, a notorious conduit for CIA subversion. But the leftists involved in reformist opposition groups at best don’t oppose Obama’s Democratic Party in their union work, and ally with those who actively support the ruling capitalist party. On Democracy Now, Lewis repeatedly refused to criticize the Democrats, and under CORE the CTU endorsed Democratic Illinois governor Pat Quinn, despite his backing for a devastating pension “reform” bill and support for privatizing public education. Not only did Karen Lewis support the union-busting SB7 bill, CTU, IFT and IEA leaders met secretly with the Democrats in preparing it.

Teacher activists seeking to defend public education are not just facing corrupt bureaucrats like Lewis’ predecessor at the helm of the CTU, Marilyn Stewart, or a bureaucratic machine like the “Unity Caucus” that runs the UFT in New York. The present union bureaucracy is a product of the post-World War II “red purge” of the unions at the beginning of the anti-Soviet Cold War. The AFT played a key role in overthrowing elected “progressive” capitalist governments from El Salvador to Salvador Allende’s Chile. The UFT was a main backer of the anti-Communist Polish nationalist Solidarność, the favorite “union” of Ronald Reagan, in promoting counterrevolution in East Europe. To fight the teacher union bashers and education defectors such as the billionaire hedge fund operators of Democrats

for Education Reform, it’s necessary to oust the bureaucrats, break with the Democrats and fight U.S. imperialism tooth and nail.

Equally important is the attitude toward “the law.” The CTU leadership says it can’t strike over school closings because by law that is not subject to collective bargaining. This is accepting the kind of limitations on union action that Governor Walker legislated in Wisconsin, where public sector unions were restricted to negotiating wages and hours. The law is an instrument of the capitalist ruling class to keep down those it exploits and oppresses. The actual content of the law depends on the balance of class forces in struggle. As the head of the PATCO air traffic controllers union noted during its 1981 strike, “The only illegal strike is an unsuccessful strike.” (Thanks to betrayal by the AFL-CIO bureaucracy, the PATCO strike lost.) Since the CTU managed to overcome the 75 percent strike authorization hurdle, no doubt we will soon see a bill to outlaw all teachers strikes in Illinois. In New York, under the state’s Taylor Law, any strike or job action by public sector workers is already illegal.

Does that mean teachers can’t strike? Not at all. The AFT/UFT and the rest of the labor bureaucracy hide behind such bans as they subjugate the unions to the capitalist laws. So do reformist oppositions, who in an act of class treachery often sue the unions in order to get into office. But class-struggle unionists oppose all interference by the bosses’ courts and government in union affairs, and say it is necessary to defy anti-labor laws. Ever since World War II, the U.S. ruling class has been intent on outlawing every effective form of labor struggle. This was the purpose of the Taft-Hartley Act (1947) and the Landrum-Griffin Act (1959). Any trade union leader who is not prepared to go to jail to defend the workers interests, who flinches in the face of cops, courts and capitalist politicians out of fear of losing their offices or having bank accounts seized or depleted by million-dollar-a-day fines, can only produce defeats.

Playing by the bosses’ rules is a losing game. Shred anti-labor laws by mass militant workers action!

In order to defeat the “reign of Rahm,” teachers will have to join with the oppressed population of black Chicago and Latino neighborhoods to *occupy closing schools*. Area unions including transit, rail and Teamsters should be called upon to join in *paralyzing the downtown Loop*, day after day, so that nothing moves. Can it be done? Certainly. The Republic Windows and Doors workers organized by the United Electrical Workers galvanized the U.S. working class with their December 2008 occupation of the Goose Island factory and warehouse. Was it legal? Hardly. Did the workers let that stop them? Hell no. The sit-down strikes that built the industrial unions in the 1930s were met with anti-strike injunctions and the National Guard, but the workers stood their ground. On May Day 2008, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union struck all 29 ports on the U.S. West Coast to stop the war on Iraq and Afghanistan. The maritime bosses charged them with violating the Taft-Hartley ban on secondary boycotts. But the union won, because the ranks showed they were prepared to mobilize their power.

Only class-struggle unionism that openly fights against capitalism can defeat the class war on workers and the oppressed. The unions were built by “reds” who relied on the working class not the employers and their government. The Democrats who pose

as “friends of labor” are in fact waging a war on working people here even as they pursue imperialist war from Afghanistan to Syria. In the upcoming elections, trade unionists, African American, Latino, Asian and white poor and working people should oppose both Democrat Obama and Republican Romney and all capitalist parties and candidates. Join in building a class-struggle workers party to fight for a workers government. ■

Poverty Wages...

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a decent union wage and benefits.

Working people and the poor should be mobilized in massive protests and strike actions to demand real measures against unemployment: **a 30-hour week for 40 hours pay, free 24-hour quality childcare available to all, abolition of tuition, open admissions and living stipends** for college students. Plus **full citizenship rights for all immigrants** so that the workers cannot be blackmailed and divided into “legal” and “illegal.” And **repeal all the anti-drug laws** and empty the prisons of all those jailed under those racist measures.

Rally organizers focused their attention on five “bad employers,” who certainly deserve the infamy. The Golden Farm supermarket in Kensington, Brooklyn, owned by Sonny Kim, pays workers as little as \$4.86 hour. Local 338 of the RWSDU/UFCW is attempting to organize workers at some of the smaller independent grocers and supermarkets, and joined the rally. But the labor bureaucrats are not about to wage a real fight against low wages. In fact, they help the bosses to enforce them. A few months ago, the same union leaders from Local 338 and other UFCW locals (1500 and 342 in NYC) strong-armed a sellout contract on their own members at A&P supermarkets (Pathmark, Waldbaum’s, Food Emporium, etc.) that lets the company hire part-timers at minimum wage, with *no raises for any union workers for five years!*

The UFCW bureaucrats not only gave A&P and its Wall Street owners five years of super-exploited labor with a union label, they gave Christian Haub, the ex-chairman of the board of this low-wage empire a “human rights award” in 2008 from the “Jewish Labor Committee” (a pro-Israel lobby headed by RWDSU president Stuart Appelbaum), and another award from the UFCW’s Northeast Political Action Committee for purchasing the Pathmark chain! Meanwhile, as a loyal operative of U.S. imperialism, Appelbaum is globetrotting on behalf of the “AFL-CIA’s” international operations, making sure Tunisian unions don’t get out of line.

SEIU 32BJ’s political director, Camille Rivera, is the executive director of United NY, the coalition sponsoring the July 24 rally. Yet late last year, the 32BJ leadership negotiated a new contract between the biggest NYC real estate owners and its 22,000 commercial building service workers in the region. This contract, celebrated by the real estate bosses as “most

favorable economic terms that the industry has negotiated in at least the past 40 years” lowered wages for new hires and undermined workers’ health benefits and job protections. Now these “labor statesmen,” who have negotiating giveback contracts for years, want to raise the minimum wage only to a level that is still a poverty wage.

The July 24 rally was really all about politics and getting out the vote in November. The unions either openly support the Democratic Party or do so through the “Working Families Party” (a ballot line for the Democrats). The WFP endorsed NY governor Andrew Cuomo even after he declared war on public-sector unions, their pensions and seniority rights. One of the “Dirty Five” employers is Con Edison, which has a top Cuomo advisor on its board. Protest organizers highlighted the fact that Toys-R-Us, another of their “Dirty Five,” is linked to Republican candidate Mitt Romney’s Bain Capital. They were sending the message that the labor fakers would go all-out campaigning for Barack Obama, the war criminal and union buster who in the 2008 election got more money from Wall Street than any presidential candidate in history.

Poverty in the U.S. has risen to levels not seen since the early 1960s, along with unemployment, hunger and homelessness. Workers from New York to Madrid and Athens are facing devastating attacks on pensions, health care and wages in the name of “austerity” while bank and corporate profits are at record levels. This is the normal workings of capitalism, in which the means of production are privately owned and operated for profit, requiring every capitalist owner to constantly seek to squeeze more out of the workers. This will not end until the workers expropriate capital internationally and establish the basis of a socialized, planned economy. Then we can finally get rid of poverty wages.

We need to oust the bureaucrats, break with the Democrats and all capitalist parties, and build a revolutionary workers party that emblazons on its banners not “\$8.50 an hour, maybe” but “*For a workers government and abolition of the wages system.*”

We in the Internationalist Group U.S. section of the League for the Fourth International, seek to build such a party. Join us! ■

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Hot & Crusty...

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representantes y activistas de algunas de las uniones más grandes de la ciudad. De entre éstas estuvieron los trabajadores del metro y de los autobuses (sección 100 de la TWU), telefonistas de Verizon (sección 1101 de la CWA) y electricistas de Con Ed, trabajadores municipales de la AFSCME DC 37, la sección 78 de los Laborers, predominantemente compuesto por inmigrantes, los Jornaleros, los trabajadores restauranteros (UFCW, UNITE-HERE, ROC-NY), y otros. Como dijo en la concentración Virgilio Aran del Laundry Workers Center, “éste es un ejemplo para todos los trabajadores de Nueva York y para todo sindicato. Aunque vamos ganando, seguiremos organizando a los trabajadores de las lavanderías y los restaurantes” (“Sindicatos neoyorquinos salen en apoyo de los trabajadores de Hot and Crusty”, 19 de octubre).

El piquete diario se mantuvo y, aunque no había fondo de huelga, los trabajadores siguieron firmes. Cuando llevaron su mensaje a otros restaurantes y pizzerías, enfrentaron tácticas intimidatorias por parte de la policía, quienes empezaron a tomarles fotos, a exigirles sus identificaciones y en un momento dado inventaron una “ley” que supuestamente prohibiría usar palos de cartón para llevar pancartas (¡!). Después de dos semanas en el piquete, las voces del campo patronal se hicieron cada vez más fuertes en su insistencia de que ya era hora de que los trabajadores se rindieran. Éstos, sin embargo, no se doblegaron. En la segunda semana de octubre se hizo el intento de amedrentar a los trabajadores a regresar al trabajo sin haber ganado el control sindical de la contratación. Rechazándolo firmemente, los trabajadores votaron una vez más a favor de continuar la lucha. Esta reafirmación de su dura determinación, marcó un momento crucial de la campaña. “Sentimos que para nosotros era todo o nada”, recuerda uno de ellos; “decidimos que seguiríamos hasta las últimas consecuencias.”

Y luego, tras 55 días en el piquete, ¡los trabajadores ganaron! El 25 de octubre se anunció en la esquina de la Calle 63 que la compañía y el sindicato habían firmado el contrato. Los trabajadores mostraban sus pancartas de *¡Lo hicimos!* Simbólica por su impacto, hubo una cacofonía de claxonazos cuando camioneros y taxistas vieron las pancartas y dejaron constancia de su apoyo. Para la clase obrera de Nueva York, este pequeño grupo de trabajadores inmigrantes ha hecho gran noticia. Al extenderse, el mensaje de su victoria tiene el potencial de desencadenar nuevas luchas.

Clase y raza en Nueva York

La acomodada zona del lado este de Manhattan donde se asienta Hot and Crusty podría parecer un escenario improbable para la realización de una dura lucha sindical. No obstante, constituye un elocuente microcosmos de las relaciones entre clases y razas en la ciudad. A diario pasaban por el piquete en la banqueta niñeras negras del Caribe, empujando en sus carriolas a niños blancos. Trabajadores latinoamericanos de UPS y trabajadores chinos de las lavanderías, pasaban corriendo para hacer sus entregas; un anciano zapatero italiano se detenía cada día para compartir con los trabajadores un poco de pan dulce; un joven mensajero afroamericano llegaba y decía “necesitamos una unión donde yo trabajo” y preguntaba



Virgilio Aran, del Laundry Workers Center

a los trabajadores qué había que hacer para comenzar la construcción de una. Decenas de “delivery boys” mexicanos (repartidores, que nada tienen de “muchachos” siendo que se trata de hombres de hasta 50 años de edad) se detenían en sus bicicletas cuando pasaban por el piquete.

Al principio, sólo observaban desde lejos, pero conforme pasaron las semanas se fueron atreviendo en cada vez mayor cantidad a hablar acerca de las terribles condiciones prevalecientes en sus lugares de trabajo. Puesto que la Segunda Avenida es una importante vía pública—pues incontables vehículos de reparto y reparación pasan por ahí, lo mismo que taxis y autobuses—cientos de choferes de camiones, autobuses, vanes y taxis veían el piquete todos los días, y muchos de ellos hicieron sonar sus cláxones en solidaridad con los trabajadores. (Un joven profesor de Hunter College, quien participaba en el piquete con frecuencia, señaló que los enormes camiones que con poderosos bocinazos hicieron llegar su mensaje solidario también deberían disipar las vaporosas teorías de algunos académicos acerca de la supuesta “desaparición” de la clase obrera.)

Innumerables trabajadores del vecindario—y un buen número de residentes de la zona—daban a los trabajadores de Hot and Crusty en el piquete palabras de aliento. Cientos se detenían en la mesa del piquete para firmar declaraciones en solidaridad o depositar dinero en la canasta de donativos. Sin embargo, algunos moradores de clase alta intentaron pertinazmente desmoralizar a los trabajadores, que tenían que soportar damas y caballeros de la alta sociedad que despotricaban contra los sindicatos o les gritaban “¡busquen un empleo!” Como recordó Margarito López, un piquetero fiel, todos los días “había gente que decía, ‘¿Qué estás haciendo aquí?’” El restaurante fue “cerrado para siempre y ustedes no van a regresar”, sermoneaban otros a los trabajadores. Indignados por una pancarta que decía “Da un bocinazo para apoyar los derechos de los trabajadores de Hot and Crusty”, un yuppie local atacó al camarada que la sostenía, haciéndola pedazos mientras lanzaba frenéticamente amenazas e invectivas.

Peores aún eran los racistas que vituperaban contra los “inmigrantes ilegales” (aunque como señalaba uno de los partidarios del sindicato, “no te piden los papeles cuando vienen a comprar un pastel, sólo cuando

comienzas a luchar por tus derechos”). Fue muy aleccionadora una escena que ilustra el poder de la multirracial clase obrera. Durante varias semanas, un grupo de electricistas de Con Ed, lo mismo que contratistas especializados, estuvo en la esquina de la calle 63 para reparar líneas eléctricas y tuberías de gas subterráneas. Una mañana, un hombre blanco bien vestido comenzó a gritar epítetos antiinmigrantes contra los trabajadores de Hot and Crusty en el piquete. Dos trabajadores afrocaribeños aparecieron de repente con una enorme palanca metálica y empezaron a manejarla aparentando hacer algo

con la cubierta de una alcantarilla justo a un lado del racista, quien de inmediato huyó del lugar. Cuando un sindicalista les aproximó para agradecerles por su discreta pero efectiva acción de solidaridad, uno de ellos dijo “claro, ese tipo era un pendejo” — “un pendejo racista”, señaló su compañero de trabajo. Y añadió: “aquí todos somos inmigrantes a fin de cuentas”.

Necesidad y posibilidad de la organización combativa de los trabajadores

Que la lucha de Hot and Crusty despertara la imaginación y las esperanzas de muchos, y que al mismo tiempo irritara a otros al otro lado de la línea de clases, se debe en buena medida a que señaló *el enorme potencial para la organización amplia y combativa de los trabajadores inmigrantes en Nueva York y más allá*. Superexplotados, doble y triplemente oprimidos y privados de casi todo derecho, estos trabajadores—mera materia para la explotación desde el punto de vista de la clase dominante—pueden exaltarse con una chispa y entrar en lucha, inspirándose inclusive en una victoria localizada. El potencial para una masiva campaña para sindicalizar a los no sindicalizados es subrayado por otras luchas de trabajadores con sueldos bajos que han ocurrido al mismo tiempo que la de Hot and Crusty. Una exitosa campaña de sindicalización de los trabajadores de autolavados en el Bronx y Queens apareció en los titulares del *New York Times*, mientras estallaba una serie de huelgas y protestas sin precedentes en la cadena de mala fama Wal-Mart.

Con unos 165 mil trabajadores en el sector alimenticio, la ciudad de Nueva York alberga 15 mil establecimientos para comer y beber, lo que genera ganancias fabulosas. (Las ganancias de 2010 se calcularon en más de 15 mil millones de dólares.) El secreto del éxito en la “capital restaurantera del mundo”—desde las pizzerías de la esquina, pasando por el último fenómeno en los blogs de comida, hasta la estratósfera de las listas de Michelin/Zagat—es el superexplotado trabajo de los inmigrantes. Setenta por ciento de los trabajadores de los restaurantes de Nueva York son inmigrantes, provenientes de una gran variedad de países, y entre ellos un 40 por ciento, al menos, son indocumentados. Es a estos trabajadores que se asignan las tareas más peligrosas, sucias y peor pagadas: acarrear interminables cajones escaleras

“Necesitamos conquistar la independencia del movimiento obrero”

Extractos del discurso de Sándor John (del Comité de Solidaridad con los Trabajadores de Hot and Crusty y del Grupo Internacionalista) en el mitin del 18 de octubre.

¿Qué necesitamos en el movimiento obrero en esta ciudad y en este país? En primer lugar, necesitamos entender que la lucha radica en la movilización del poder de la clase obrera, de toda la clase obrera: de los trabajadores asiáticos, latinos, negros y blancos. Nos importa un bledo si alguien tiene papeles migratorios o no: todos somos parte de la misma clase obrera. Esta comprensión se requiere como base para revitalizar un combativo movimiento obrero.

En segundo lugar: necesitamos movilizar este poder, el tipo de poder que es capaz de paralizar la ciudad como en la huelga del TWU (sindicato de trabajadores del transporte público) de 2005; el tipo de poder que pudo haber sido movilizado para derrotar a los patronos de Con Ed en su lockout; el tipo de poder del que se dio una probadita en la huelga del sindicato de maestros de Chicago (aunque no en el contrato que se aceptó), para no jugar según las reglas patronales. Una de nuestras consignas en este piquete ha sido: “jugar con reglas del patrón es segura perdición”.

En tercer lugar: necesitamos revivir las tácticas de lucha de clases con las que se construyó originalmente los sindicatos: el piquete de masas, las ocupaciones, las huelgas, los boicots secundarios.

Y en cuarto lugar: para hacer todo esto necesitamos conquistar la independencia del movimiento obrero, la independencia con respecto a todos los partidos patronales. La verdadera lucha es la lucha de clases, la lucha para conquistar la libertad de la clase obrera, para conseguir plenos derechos de ciudadanía para todos los inmigrantes, la liberación de la mujer, la defensa de los derechos de gays y lesbianas; para derrotar la ley PATRIOT, para derribar el racista muro que divide a los trabajadores de México de los trabajadores de aquí. Necesitamos igualdad plena para todos, y eso supone que la clase obrera tome el poder. ¡Obreros al poder! ¡Victoria a los trabajadores de Hot and Crusty!

arriba y abajo en sótanos fríos y húmedos; cortar, picar y rebanar verduras y carne; manejar hornos y cacerolas súper calientes; lavar trastos y manejar bicicletas de reparto en medio del pesado tráfico. Las lesiones son comunes, pero las vacaciones pagadas y las licencias médicas son virtualmente inexistentes—menos del 10 por ciento de la fuerza de trabajo de los restaurantes cuenta con estas prestaciones.¹

La demografía de la industria subraya

¹ Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York and New York City Restaurant Industry Coalition, *Beyond the Kitchen Door: Pervasive Inequality in New York City's Thriving Restaurant Industry* (enero de 2005); Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, “NYC’s Immigrant Restaurant Workers Get Information and Resources” (25 de febrero de 2011).

Mensaje del activista de la unión de estibadores y trabajadores portuarios (ILWU), Jack Heyman

30 de octubre de 2012

A la Asociación de Trabajadores de Hot and Crusty, Ciudad de Nueva York

Compañeros y compañeras,

Desde los muelles de Oakland les enviamos un solidario saludo obrero y los felicitamos por la lucha que han librado. Al conquistar el reconocimiento de su unión, el control sindical de la contratación y un primer contrato colectivo, han seguido por la orgullosa e histórica senda de la lucha de clases en este país, y han mostrado el camino a otros militantes obreros hacia la victoria.

Los patrones intentaron detenerlos, pero no pudieron: ésta es la importante lección de solidaridad obrera que ustedes han dado. Al mantenerse con fuerza en la línea de piquete a lo largo de 55 días, ustedes resistieron los intentos de intimidarlos, de agotarlos, de desmoralizarlos, de rendirlos por hambre. Si bien carecían de un fondo de huelga, ustedes tenían algo aún más importante: perseverancia y determinación para conquistar una sólida victoria sindical. Fue esto lo que reunió a más de 15 de los más importantes sindicatos de Nueva York para respaldarlos en su lucha el jueves pasado [18 de octubre] en el mitin sindical y en defensa de los derechos de los inmigrantes en solidaridad con los trabajadores de Hot and Crusty.

Como señalé en el mensaje que les

envié hace ocho semanas, los trabajadores portuarios del Pacífico conseguimos la contratación sindical gracias a la huelga general de 1934 y a las batallas concomitantes en que la policía asesinó a tres de nuestros compañeros del sindicato. En la lucha por el poder obrero, aprendimos por el camino difícil que el gobierno, los tribunales y los policías están del lado de los patrones. Pero nuestro lado tiene algo aún más poderoso: el hecho de que sin nuestro trabajo nada se mueve y que, por lo tanto, podemos detenerlo todo cuando nos organizamos para usar nuestro poder como clase. Y en esa lucha, quién tiene “papeles” y quién no, no importa en lo absoluto. “¡La lucha obrera no tiene fronteras!” O para decirlo de otro modo: asiáticos, latinos, blancos y negros: obreros del mundo, ¡uníos!

El ejemplo que ustedes han dado debe conocerse en todos lados. Su impresionante victoria inspirará a otros para luchar. Hay que sindicalizar a los no sindicalizados. Plenos derechos para todos los inmigrantes. ¡Avancemos sobre la base de su victoria!

—Jack Heyman, militante de la ILWU, organizador de la huelga del Primero de Mayo de 2008 contra la guerra y presidente del Transport Workers Solidarity Committee (Comité de Solidaridad de los Trabajadores del Transporte)

el impacto potencial de la victoria de Hot and Crusty. Como los trabajadores de este restaurante, una proporción notablemente grande de los trabajadores neoyorquinos de la comida vienen de Puebla, Guerrero, Tlaxcala y otros estados mexicanos asolados por el Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte. Al entrar en vigor en 1994 durante el gobierno del presidente norteamericano Bill Clinton, el TLCAN echó *p’al norte* a millones de personas de las regiones predominantemente campesinas, como proletarios migrantes. Uno de sus resultados es la considerable población de Nueva York de origen mexicano, que tan sólo entre 2000 y 2007 creció en casi un 58 por ciento, y que se estima ronda actualmente las 300 mil personas. También, la relativamente reciente inmigración a gran escala de lugares como Bangladesh, Ecuador y África Occidental se liga con las grandes poblaciones provenientes del Caribe, China, India/Pakistán, Europa Oriental y otros lugares en una ciudad en la que el 37 por ciento de la población (unos tres de los ocho millones totales) es de inmigrantes, concentrados en la clase obrera (46 por ciento de la fuerza de trabajo), especialmente en el sector con los salarios más bajos.²

Frente a patrones arrogantes acostumbrados a salirse con la suya en un negocio en el que los brutales abusos y los salarios de hambre son la norma, una estrategia basada en la lógica de la lucha de clases ofrece la única esperanza real de éxito. Mientras que los políticos y los medios capitalistas vomitan xenofobia en contra de los trabajadores inmigrantes, “salvadores condescendientes” de diversas

² CUNY Center for Latin American, Caribbean & Latino Studies, “Mexicans in New York City, 2007: An Update” (diciembre de 2008); Fiscal Policy Institute, *Working for a Better Life: A Profile of Immigrants in the New York State Economy* (noviembre de 2007).

denominaciones se les aproximan a ellos, tratándolos como víctimas indefensas o como una pasajera causa célebre para los paternalistas liberales. Para los marxistas revolucionarios, en contraste, el creciente sector inmigrante de la clase obrera norteamericana forma un puente humano vital que conecta con algunas de las partes más volátiles del planeta, que simultáneamente enriquece al movimiento obrero local con la experiencia de distintas partes del globo. Al basarse en la lucha obrera, desencadenando a los trabajadores de su subordinación a demócratas y republicanos, el sindicalismo clasista puede revertir la pauta de retrocesos y concesiones del movimiento obrero. Con un impacto que va mucho más allá de un restaurante de Nueva York, la victoria de los trabajadores de Hot and Crusty ilustra el potencial que hay para conformar un movimiento obrero combativo.

Al reivindicar *plenos derechos de ciudadanía para todos los inmigrantes* en el marco de la lucha por la revolución socialista, el Grupo Internacionalista ha sido prácticamente único en la izquierda en sistemáticamente ganar trabajadores de este sector dinámico, que se han convertido en cuadros en la construcción del núcleo de un partido obrero genuinamente internacionalista y revolucionario. Esto ayuda a explicar un aspecto de la campaña de Hot and Crusty que los observadores han señalado con frecuencia, pero que no siempre han comprendido: el papel del Grupo Internacionalista, un grupo trotskista relativamente pequeño, cuyos militantes no sólo participaban diariamente en el piquete, sino también (por ejemplo) como organizadores de apoyo de trabajadores y estudiantes en la lucha por una sólida victoria sindical.

Al mismo tiempo, la campaña de Hot and Crusty ha sido una importante experiencia para los militantes y partidarios de nuestra organización, quienes combinaron

sus tareas en el piquete con un estudio intensivo de las lecciones de luchas del pasado, tales como las campañas de sindicalización descritas en *Rebelión Teamster*, el relato clásico de Farrell Dobbs de las huelgas de Minneapolis que los trotskistas dirigieron en 1934 y que contribuyeron a abrir la vía para el explosivo ascenso de los sindicatos industriales en el marco de la Gran Depresión. Vincular estas lecciones con las luchas actuales es un ejemplo de la manera en que el partido revolucionario funciona como “la memoria de la clase obrera”.

Dadas las tácticas de “dividir y vencer” empleadas por los patrones por doquier, los militantes obreros inmigrantes del Grupo Internacionalista también han enfatizado la necesidad de contrarrestar las divisiones nacionales y étnicas (notablemente entre latinos y asiáticos). De manera prominente, una pancarta del LWC desplegada en el piquete decía “Trabajadores unidos”, con la palabra “trabajadores” en árabe, chino, inglés, filipino, francés, hebreo, italiano, japonés, coreano, portugués, ruso, español y turco. Los militantes del GI enfatizaron en particular la conexión inseparable entre la lucha por los derechos de los inmigrantes y la lucha por la liberación de los negros mediante una revolución socialista en este país profundamente racista, fundado sobre la base de la esclavitud humana. La necesidad de una oposición proletaria a los políticos capitalistas de todo tipo fue un punto que nuestros camaradas enfatizaron durante innumerables discusiones a lo largo de las semanas pasadas, dominadas como lo estuvieron por las elecciones tanto en EE.UU. como en México. Justo después de la victoria de Hot and Crusty vino el huracán Sandy, tras el cual los trabajadores del HCWA y del LWC participaron en las acciones de ayuda en algunas de las zonas más fuertemente afectadas. Los destrozos causados por la tormenta mostraron nuevamente cuán mortíferas resultan las desigualdades de clase y raza. “Es realmente chocante la forma en que a la gente se les abandonó así nomás, en un país que siempre nos dicen que es el centro del ‘Primer Mundo’”, comentó un trabajador de Hot and Crusty después de pasar el día limpiando escombros en Far Rockaway, un barrio pobre en Queens.

“Nuestra lucha es para todos los trabajadores”

“*Nuestra lucha es para todos los trabajadores*”. Al invitar a otros a unirse a la lucha, esta consigna de las pancartas del piquete de 55 días enunciaba un sentimiento frecuentemente expresado por los trabajadores de Hot and Crusty. Al comentar sobre el acuerdo, Mahoma López dijo: “Los trabajadores están realmente emocionados por estas noticias porque se trata de algo más que de un contrato para nosotros. Estamos poniendo el ejemplo a otros trabajadores... Queremos que otros lleven esta victoria a sus propios lugares de trabajo de modo que podamos hacer un cambio en este país”.

En una reunión en la que se analizó la victoria del sindicato, los activistas del HCWA dijeron que la lucha los había cambiado para siempre, y comentaron orgullosamente que creían que otros van a inspirarse con su ejemplo. “Nos organizamos para resistir, luchamos y ganamos esta batalla, pero la lucha obrera es una guerra que va a continuar”, dijo un trabajador mayor. Después de que sus compañeros describieran uno tras otro el significado de la campaña, Margarito López, quien ha trabajado por muchos años como lavaplatos en Hot and Crusty, resumió:

“En contra de todas esas cosas que nos pasaron en este esfuerzo, nos mantuvimos allí [en la línea de piquete] y nunca aflojamos. Y mientras haya alguien que esté explotando a los trabajadores, tenemos que estar allí, tenemos que apoyarlos de acuerdo con nuestros ideales... Siempre se ha dicho que la lucha la podemos mantener y podemos ganar siempre y cuando nos mantengamos unidos. Y ojalá que cada trabajador se concientice de que tenemos una lucha, de que tenemos que empujar, de que la lucha no se termina aquí, porque todas las empresas nos quieren seguir explotando. Yo creo que ya es el momento de despertar y de salir de esa oscuridad en que nos mantienen, porque como trabajadores y como inmigrantes tenemos nuestros derechos que ningún patrón nos va a regalar... Ya está un contrato colectivo ya firmado, porque nos mantuvimos en la lucha; y esta lucha la vamos a continuar.” ■

The Internationalist



A Journal of Revolutionary Marxism for the Reforging of the Fourth International

Publication of the Internationalist Group, section of the League for the Fourth International

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Trabajadores inmigrantes logran una victoria sólida, ¡hasta con control sindical de la contratación!

Los trabajadores de Hot and Crusty triunfan con contrato que abre camino

Tras meses de lucha y 55 días en la línea de piquete, trabajadores inmigrantes de la panadería/restaurante Hot and Crusty de Manhattan se han hecho noticia para el movimiento obrero. Una sólida victoria sindical –que incluye el control sindical de la contratación y beneficios virtualmente inauditos en esta rama– ha resultado de una lucha que captó la atención de activistas sindicales en toda la ciudad y más allá. Pese a que desde el principio la campaña estuvo marcada por altibajos, la determinación de los trabajadores de “seguir hasta las últimas consecuencias” fue crucial para ganar la batalla. El resultado inspirador tiene el potencial de extender a otros ámbitos amplias campañas para organizar a trabajadores inmigrantes con salarios bajos en toda la industria alimenticia de Nueva York, la “capital restaurantera del mundo”.

El 23 de octubre, la Hot and Crusty Workers Association (HCWA – Asociación de Trabajadores de Hot and Crusty) firmó un contrato con los nuevos propietarios del restaurante ubicado en la calle 63. Un comunicado de prensa del sindicato señalaba que los trabajadores “regresarán al trabajo bajo un nuevo contrato colectivo que garantiza el reconocimiento del sindicato y la contratación sindical, vacaciones pagadas, licencias médicas y un incremento salarial”, así como derechos por antigüedad y un procedimiento de reclamaciones. Al conseguir estos logros que establecen un nuevo precedente para los trabajadores restauranteros oriundos de otros países, los organizadores “están ansiosos de aprovechar el ímpetu”, como señaló el Laundry Workers Center (LWC – Centro de Trabajadores de las Lavanderías). Los trabajadores de Hot and Crusty, en su mayoría inmigrantes provenientes de México y Ecuador, invitaron a este grupo neoyorquino de activistas para que les ayudara a organizar la campaña, que iniciaron a finales de 2011 en respuesta a años de abusos por parte de los dueños del lucrativo local ubicado en una de las zonas más acomodadas de Manhattan.

“Seguiremos hasta el final”

Como se informó en el volante de *El Internacionalista* (“Los trabajadores de Hot and Crusty muestran la vía”, 8 de septiembre de 2012), la campaña de sindicalización resultó de la resistencia de los trabajadores ante las acuciosas condiciones en los restaurantes de Nueva York y el resto del país, en virtud de las cuales los patrones pagan a los inmigrantes menos que el salario mínimo legal, negándoles cualquier prestación, obligándoles a trabajar aún si están enfermos o lastimados y amenazándolos con echarlos a la calle si protestan. Hartos de los abusos y de semanas laborales de 60 y hasta 72 horas sin el pago del tiempo extra, los trabajadores de Hot

and Crusty introdujeron una queja ante el departamento del trabajo del estado de Nueva York, sin que éste les diera respuesta alguna. Con la ayuda del LWC y del bufete de abogados laborales Eisner & Mirer, demandaron a la compañía, con lo que consiguieron al final salarios caídos, y planearon minuciosamente una campaña para construir un sindicato.

La compañía hizo gala de toda una serie de trucos y trampas tomados del repertorio antisindical al contratar a un asesor experto en la destrucción de uniones (otro burócrata sindical que encontró mayores beneficios al trabajar directamente para el otro lado). Se compró descaradamente a un trabajador que había ayudado al principio a organizar la campaña (prometiéndole una tajada de las ganancias), amenazó con llamar a la “migra” e intentó inflar la lista de los que podrían participar en una votación para lograr el reconocimiento sindical al incorporar a parientes y ex empleados “confiables”. Para sorpresa de los patrones, sin embargo, el HCWA ganó de calle cuando se realizaron las elecciones para la representación en mayo.

Sin embargo, en lugar de negociar, los ex patrones cerraron el local el 31 de agosto, lo que desembocó en una protesta y ocupación que duró varias horas por parte de activistas del movimiento Ocupar Wall Street, seis de los cuales fueron arrestados por este acto de solidaridad. Los trabajadores establecieron entonces un piquete, que se organizó en dos turnos desde las ocho de la mañana hasta las ocho de la noche cada día, y al que se sumaron diversos partidarios, especialmente profesores de asignatura y estudiantes del cercano plantel universitario de Hunter College, donde activistas del Class Struggle Education Workers (Trabajadores Clasistas de la Educación) pronto consiguieron apoyo para la lucha de la unión de profesores de la Universidad de la Ciudad de Nueva York, el Professional Staff Congress de CUNY. (La sección del PSC organizó un evento de solidaridad en el plantel el 3 de octubre para conseguir apoyo para la unión de los compañeros de Hot and Crusty.)

Un impactante viraje tuvo lugar el 8 de septiembre: en un mitin de partidarios del sindicato, su portavoz Mahoma López anunció que posibles nuevos dueños habían firmado un acuerdo tentativo en el que



Arriba: Hubo más de 15 uniones presentes entre el centenar de activistas en mitin de solidaridad con los trabajadores de Hot and Crusty, el 18 de octubre. Abajo: Mahoma López de la Hot and Crusty Workers Association anuncia en una conferencia de prensa del 16 de noviembre el triunfo sindical al ganar un contrato que incluye el control sindical de la contratación.

reconocían al sindicato y aceptaban la contratación sindical. Se trataba de un “impresionante paso hacia adelante, de significación potencialmente histórica”, como escribimos, subrayando al mismo tiempo que, como habían señalado López y otros trabajadores, la lucha no había terminado. De hecho, un nuevo cambio en la situación ocurrió una semana más tarde, cuando se dijo a los trabajadores que los propietarios del edificio se estaban rehusando a firmar un contrato que permitiría la reapertura del restaurante. “Se siente como en la montaña rusa”, dijo uno de los partidarios de la unión. No obstante, los trabajadores regresaron al piquete. Casi de inmediato, una cadena restaurantera antisindical intentó calar la situación, pero huyó en el acto al enfrentar una determinada oposición por parte de militantes sindicales y activistas solidarios.

Conforme pasaron los días y las semanas, resultó claro que la persistencia era clave; para librar la lucha hasta el final, era necesario que los partidarios más duros del sindicato se aferraran a sus posiciones para mostrar que no cederían ante el intento de derrotarlos, y trabajaran entretanto para conseguir la solidaridad de sectores más amplios del movimiento obrero. Como señaló un partidario del Grupo Internacionalista en



el sindicato de trabajadores de los supermercados –y como muestra la larga cadena de derrotas de los empeños para sindicalizar la industria alimenticia de Nueva York–, ganar derechos sindicales sería mucho más sencillo “si no fuera por la burocracia sindical, cuya letárgica autocomplacencia expresa que acepta el estatus de los trabajadores inmigrantes como gente de segunda clase”.

Los trabajadores emprendieron con determinación diversos esfuerzos para ampliar la red de apoyo, y el 18 de octubre se llevó a cabo una “manifestación por los derechos de los trabajadores y los inmigrantes” en solidaridad con la lucha de Hot and Crusty, que reunió a un centenar de participantes entusiastas, entre los que se encontraban

sigue en la página 22