

# REVOLUTIONARY TRANSIT WORKER

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## Budget Wars and Class War

For the length of the Obama administration, Democrats and Republicans have been engaged in an intense running battle over the federal budget. The fight has been a messy one that has caused problems for the American ruling class in conducting its political and economic business. There are real differences. But both major parties agree that attacks on the masses, conducted in part through the budgetary process, must proceed. In fact, the disagreements themselves have created opportunities to pursue the capitalist offensive against workers, poor, oppressed and even large sections of the middle class.

### THE “SEQUESTER”

We are now living under the terms of federal budget cuts that started on March 1—the so-called “sequestration.” Under the arrangement, \$85 billion in spending cuts are scheduled for this year, with \$1.2 trillion in scheduled cuts spread over the next ten years. Most affected is “discretionary spending,” which includes military as well as civilian items. The fact that a large portion of the cuts concern military spending should not fool union members that it is jobs and services for workers and their allies that are the real targets. Sequestration means furloughs for tens of thousands of Federal employees, such as those working for the IRS and the Department of Education, and cuts in services at airports, spending on education and health services for poor families. But so-called “entitlement” programs, notably Medicare, are also being slashed.

The Sequestration was not supposed to happen. It was originally conceived as a set of measures considered so obnoxious to both sides—the military cuts to Republicans, the cuts to services and programs to the Democrats—that both would consider a compromise as better. It may be surprising that a lot of Republican politicians are prepared to accept cuts in the military, but there are cold reasons for this. After all, the U.S. is winding down its military interventions in the Mideast that have become increasingly unpopular even to the Republican base; the immediate need to grow the military beyond its current level of international supremacy does not seem necessary and can be ramped up when a changed world situation makes it so. Better instead to fire more drones and find more foreign hired hands to do imperialism’s dirty work abroad, particularly if it allows more of an opening for attacks on the masses here.

But even if unintended, and despite the fact that it could and may already have hurt the economy in significant ways as predicted by capitalist economists, the sequestration has proven useful to ruling class aims. The chatter over the last year and a half to fix the budget, heightened by the possibility of sequester as well as the “fiscal cliff” drama, has gotten many workers to expect that programs like Medicare and Social Security will have to take some hits—and thus tamped down their potential militancy. And the cuts taking place now are establishing momentum for a “new normal” of diminished social programs.

The sequester has been one of a series of budget milestones. It was preceded by the “fiscal cliff” deal at the beginning of the

year. The LRP and *RTW* correctly described this as a makeshift arrangement that was a setup for more attacks in the near future. A more recent agreement to prevent a shutdown of the government allowed for some flexibility in how the cuts would be dispersed in specific areas but otherwise reinforced the March 1 cuts. President Obama then issued a proposed annual budget that was intended as an alternative to the sequester. But this alternative, while asking for a smidgen of new taxes for the rich, also included proposed cuts in Social Security (by changing the Cost of Living Formula to a “chained” Consumer Price Index) and in Medicare. It is unlikely that this budget would pass in Congress, and of course cannot reverse events and situations that have already taken place. More important, with the proposal to axe social programs it represents on its own terms an attack on the masses.

### THE “GOOD COPS” DEMOCRATS

The role of President Obama and the congressional Democrats in the budget fights is fresh evidence of our long-standing claim that the Democratic Party is an enemy of the working class. Yes, the bulk of the Republicans in Congress are more open about the pursuit of their immediate interests and more hostile to their own state restricting how they exploit and oppress the masses and how they even cheat each other: they generally oppose even measly attempts at closing tax loopholes for the rich. But the Democrats are in on leading the attacks.

The fiscal cliff deal was made when government spending and therefore budget cuts weren’t on the immediate agenda and at a time when mass sentiment for a serious tax on the rich was strong and helped carry the Democrats to victory in the elections. But in a situation in which real concessions to mass sentiment could be pressed, the Democrats wrangled only piddling tax increases on income for the rich, combined with a corporate tax break.

With his proposed budget, President Obama showed that he was serious when he said he is willing “to take on the problem where it exists, on entitlements, and do some things that my own party doesn’t like.” And in fact, most of his party is ready to go along for the ride. Their willingness to accept cuts in social programs was a critical element in the sequester itself taking place. What Obama and other Democratic politicians wanted in return was some increases in taxes on the wealthy (beyond some in the “fiscal cliff” agreement) that are minor compared to decades of massive tax cuts for the rich. His budget proposal is the latest in a series of similar overtures and plans since he won the 2008 election. They would mean added sources of revenue, but more important a political cover for the attacks on the social programs.

Much of the failure for a mass fightback against the attacks by the working class has been a reliance on the Democrats as a “lesser evil” if not an actual force for good, and much of the blame for that goes to the leaders of unions and Black and immigrant organizations. None of them organized militant demonstrations against the attacks, let alone strikes. These leaders have

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# Budget Wars

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traditionally depended on workers voting, not fighting, and they have ceaselessly skilled for the Democrats.

## THE NEED FOR REVOLUTION

There is indeed a real budget crisis, which is a reflection of the long-term decay in American capitalism and the success of the ruling class in paring its donations to the system that runs in its interests. It is a strong indication how the capitalist system has become a brake on progress, and how the capitalist class is a worthless gang of parasites that threaten the financial stability of their own system through their raw greed. The fact that any of them can complain about desperately poor and hard working people getting "handouts" from the government only demonstrates their deep wells of cynicism.

Transit workers know through their own experiences the importance to income and public services held by public service jobs. It is clear even in surveys run by the mass media that the clear majority of workers and poor want their social programs protected. But the ruling class "answer" to the crisis of its own system is to deliver cruel and serious blows to social programs and a productive public sector when the need for them by the masses has never been greater.

A response is needed to this outrage, a defense of our rights and interests. But to be a serious defense, it cannot allowed to be a mere cover for supporting the Democrats and their "lesser evil" version of attacks. No more cuts in jobs and services! Hands off Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid! For one, we must demand that the organizations of workers and oppressed, in par-

ticular the trade unions in spite of their rotten leaderships, mobilize their ranks and other workers and allies through escalating protests, campaigns, strike actions.

As of now, workers have generally been too discouraged to be actively fighting back. But with furloughs of federal workers ready to kick in, the cuts in general and the obvious sense of unfairness and viciousness behind them, and a clear desire by the masses to protect their dwindling position, a positive response to mobilization is certainly possible. The forces will gather for a huge explosion of working class anger and desires, even with the resistance of the leadership that now stand over it.

In a changed political atmosphere, revolutionists must be prepared to intervene in mass struggles, learn from them, and provide direction. As revolutionists, RTW supporters will be ready to advance bold demands on this government for services, jobs and that are based on what the masses need, not what the capitalists are prepared to cede to us (and even less what they are prepared to take away). Demands like a vast Public Works project and Jobs for All. While such demands may not yet gain an enthusiastic, mass audience, the time is coming when they will.

The capitalist state can be made under mass pressure to implement such measures. To be sure, the victories will be temporary and the gains limited – never to the extent to truly satisfy mass needs for economic security. But the struggle for such under capitalism will convince a critical portion of workers that they need to overthrow the capitalist state and economic system and construct a superior alternative. That will require socialist revolution and the creation of a workers state. And that requires the creation of a revolutionary leadership among workers youth and oppressed peoples that we have committed ourselves to build.★

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- Mass Murder of Bangladesh Workers
- Bolivian Workers' Struggle
- Down with the Repressive "Immigration Reform" Bill!

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# Greek workers fight massive attacks

The economic crisis of 2008 shook the world. All over, the capitalists began a campaign to make the workers and the poor pay for the billions that went to bail out the banks and financial sector. In the U.S., there has been little sustained working-class fightback. It's easy to feel like it will always stay this way - loss after loss, with no response. But if we look at the rest of the world, we see that this isn't true: the economic crisis has led to powerful responses, even revolutions, by the masses in places like Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Greece, Bulgaria and beyond. Mass protests have broken out in Greece's neighbor and long-time rival, Turkey, covering a wide scope of grievances against the regime of Prime Minister Erdogan. Greece is a particularly important example, since the workers there have valiantly fought against the brutal austerity campaign that has decimated their standard of living. Unfortunately, their union leaders and the existing political parties have corralled them into a losing strategy, and they have been unable to stop the onslaught. By looking at what's going on in Greece, we can learn a great deal about the class struggle: how workers can organize and fight back, what holds workers back from winning, and what it will take to win. What the capitalist system does to Greek workers today – it will try to do to better-off workers in the U.S. tomorrow.

## ECONOMIC CRISIS TAKEN OUT ON WORKERS

Greece was hit harder by the economic crisis than most countries. The media have tried to demonize Greek workers as feeders at the public trough. But just as when they try to blame transit workers for the MTA's financial problems, the capitalist media is trying to scapegoat others for the bankruptcy of the system.

To pay for the bailout deals, German and other European capitalist powers are demanding that Greece cut government programs for poor people and workers. You worked for decades and built up a pension? That money's going to the banks now.

Official unemployment is over one out of four and less than 2/3 get any kind of unemployment benefits. Now hundreds of thousands of people rely every day on soup kitchens or other charity just to eat. It's now common to see retired, elderly people going through the garbage just to survive.

## WORKERS FIGHT BACK

Workers fought back with strikes and general strikes. In just two years, Greece had 17 time-limited general strikes, including three two-day long strikes.

These strikes were powerful shows of force by the workers, but they did not stop a single austerity law or program on a national level. The union leaders and existing political parties who claim to stand for the workers limited these struggles in advance, and the government knew that. These misleaders make a show of fighting yet never take action that could win. They want the workers to blow off steam. This has angered the ranks who increasingly demand an indefinite general strike – for workers to all go out together, until they win.

Local strikes have often been more militant than the national strikes. This indicates the possibilities of a stronger struggle if workers organize to challenge or replace the union and party leaders on a national level. For instance, workers at a steel plant near Athens struck for nine-months and only lost after a vicious police assault.

Also, Athens subway workers went on strike early this year.

They paralyzed the capital and showed some of the real power of the working class. They struck for nine days and declared they would strike till they won. After 9 days, the government declared the strike illegal, threatening jail sentences up to five years and sent in riot cops to break the strike. In response, 2,500 bus and trolley workers began a four-day solidarity strike. Public power workers also organized a 24-hour solidarity strike. The government threatened to jail them all as well and their union leaders sent them back to work. They said it was hopeless to strike against the law – as if police batons could've powered the city and run the subway with all the workers in jail. More and more workers were showing their willingness to stand in solidarity and take the fight to another level but they lacked the independent organization to carry it through.

## THE NEED FOR A POLITICAL SOLUTION - A REVOLUTIONARY WORKERS' PARTY

The defeated subway strike in Athens can teach us many lessons. First, it shows the real power that workers have if they are organized and committed. Workers make this society run. We deliver and transport all the goods. We provide all the transportation and critical services. Without us, capitalist society stops. But the Athens strike shows us that striking and militant unionism is not enough to allow workers to win. It is not just us against the bosses: the bosses have their state behind them, and if threatened, the capitalists will call on the full power of the state to protect their 'right' to make profit by exploiting and oppressing the working class. When Athens stopped, the capitalist state stepped in against the workers. This has always happened when the workers began to get the upper hand in their battle with the capitalists.

Moreover, there must be a class solidarity that extends beyond national boundaries. The Greek capitalists themselves are carrying out dictates of European capitalist powers. Workers must counter with international support and actions. This certainly means support from workers in the European powers of

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## Contact us!

What do you think of this issue of RTW?  
What should be in the next issue?

How can we work together to take our  
struggles forward today and prepare for the  
battles of tomorrow?

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RTW website:

[www.lrp-cofi.org/TWU100/RTW/](http://www.lrp-cofi.org/TWU100/RTW/)

email: [lrpcofi@earthlink.net](mailto:lrpcofi@earthlink.net)

phone: (212) 330-9017

# Mass Murder of Bangladesh Workers

In capitalism's long and ugly history of abuse and disregard for the lives of the workers who make the system run, the building collapse in Savar, Bangladesh that killed nearly 1200 textile workers on April 24 is a horrific milestone. This tragedy stands out for the sheer numbers of casualties, the profound neglect of the workers' health and safety and for what it says about the workings of the "globalization" of capitalist production. This was a mass murder, and one where the perpetrators, like the victims, are many.

The horror was set up by the construction of a building, Rana Plaza, that defied even minimal safety codes: four floors had been illegally added and the owner, Mohammed Sohel Rana, allowed the five factories inside to install heavy machinery that the floors were not designed to support. Even Rana's engineer declared it unsafe – the walls were cracking the day before the collapse! And yet Rana and the factory managers ordered their employees to work.

Rana is a leader of the governing political party, the Awami League, and used his connections to erect the building despite its violations. Mass outrage was so great that the Bangladeshi government was obliged to arrest the fleeing owner and factory managers. But the guilt hardly ends with these bottom feeders in the "globalization" chain. Left untouched in their plush corporate offices in North America and Europe are the heads of the international retailers who contract out their work to the Ranas of the third world – in this case including Wal-Mart and Benetton.

The April tragedy was not an isolated case. Only last November, a fire at the Nazreen Fashion factory, another Bangladesh garment factory, completely destroyed the building and incinerated at least 112 workers. And on May 16, another factory collapse, this time in Cambodia, killed several workers,

Such calamities are not just the result of corruption and greed. They are above all the unavoidable product of the system of imperialist super-exploitation, in which gilded corporations like Walmart and Apple farm out production to lowest-cost suppliers. They hire subcontractors, allowing them very narrow profit margins, and thereby forcing them to run their factories ruthlessly. The corporate bosses make fortunes squeezing the local contractors to produce goods as cheaply as possible, knowing they will in turn pay starvation wages while running operations on the cheap.

Backed by imperialism internationally, local bosses super-exploit their workers at rates less than one-tenth of what U.S. workers get on average, and cut back on all expenses, including health and safety measures. The Bangladeshi government brutally represses unions. Organizers are banned from the factories and are targeted for arrest, torture and even murder. It is no accident that the garment industry has flocked to Bangladesh in the last ten years, where the wages are the lowest in the world and the safety enforcement notoriously weak and corrupt.

Predictably, in the aftermath of this tragedy the retailers have distanced themselves from responsibility. And predictably, they are doing as little as possible to address the glaring lack of safety in the hell-holes from which they reap enormous profits. Some retailers are signing on to the idea of conducting their own safety inspections, making some repairs and chipping in pocket change for safety upgrades. Some refuse to even agree to that. Leading the resistance is, to no surprise, Wal-Mart, the scourge of militant workers in this country.

Shortly after the Rana Plaza disaster, Disney announced that it was terminating all its contracts in Bangladesh. This move is designed purely for public consumption. Moving investments around Bangladesh won't prevent the same results from occurring in other countries, since the investing companies will demand equally low costs wherever they turn. Shutting down operations in Bangladesh would only further victimize the three million garment workers there, who would then be plunged into unemployment.

For decades many liberal organizations have drawn attention to the conditions endured by unskilled factory workers creating products consumed in the advanced countries. For several decades, thousands of people in the richer countries signed on to campaigns to reform the global garment industry so that they could buy low-priced goods without guilt. There are numerous business-supported agencies that are supposed to conduct audits of the factories that supply their clients. The underlying purpose of these "initiatives" is to provide a paper cover for the businesses that subscribe to them.

In the wake of the April 24 Rana Plaza building collapse, thousands of Bangladeshi workers demonstrated, demanding the arrests of the owners of the building. After the November fire, thousands of workers similarly protested, even burning down several factory buildings in protest. These events show there is a huge potential for mass action in solidarity with the mostly women workers, among the most vulnerable in the workforce. Women in exploited countries are especially oppressed by lack of job skills

## Check Out RTW Discussion Group

*Revolutionary Transit Worker* has always felt that our newsletter should be a conversation starter, not the end of the political discussion. We also believe that one of the biggest problems we have as workers is that we are isolated from each other by the conditions of our jobs – as well as by weak and traitorous union leaders who have no qualms about pitting worker against worker to maintain their grip on power and their cushy positions.

We believe that the building of a discussion group in our union would be a small but important step forward in attempting to overcome the disunity and isolation even the most militant workers currently feel. Of course we will be presenting our revolutionary socialist views, but we welcome and solicit the opinions of all involved.

If you are interested in participating in such a discussion, please contact us by email at [lrpcofi@earthlink.net](mailto:lrpcofi@earthlink.net) and let us know when you are available. We look forward to talking with you soon!

and employment opportunities. Historical experience has demonstrated numerous times that once aroused by their class interests, women workers are frequently in the front lines among the most fiercely determined class fighters. The first Russian revolution, in 1905, was triggered by a mass strike of women textile workers in Tsarist-ruled Poland.

Today, as the capitalist crisis continues, bringing depression to several European countries and ever-spreading super-exploitation in the “global South,” mass rebellions will grow more common. The job of revolutionaries is to show workers that the

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Germany and France, but most immediately it means solidarity with other workers in the Balkan countries of Europe and in Turkey. It is no easy task; the bosses are skilled at playing on historical conflict to keep the workers divided. But it is necessary.

For all this, workers need a political solution. By this, we don't mean that workers need to play the rigged game of supporting the capitalist parties and their politicians - far from it. Instead, we mean that workers can't simply protest, strike and use unions - in the end, workers must conquer the state and create our own state, a workers' state, as opposed to forever fighting a state owned and run in the interests of our bosses.

To conquer the state with a socialist revolution, workers will need organization, a plan, and independence from the bosses' political system. This means that workers must organize themselves into a revolutionary workers' party - a party that might run in elections, but whose explicit goal is always to overthrow capitalism with a socialist revolution and institute a worker-run system. This party must be politically independent of the capitalist class and their parties. If a workers' party enters a political alliance or electoral block with a capitalist party, no matter how radical that capitalist party claims to be, the bosses' interests will, in the end, dominate the alliance and drive the workers away from our goal of overthrowing capitalism. Make no mistake, the final goal of a revolutionary workers' party is the end of capitalism, and thus is antithetical to the interests of the capitalists - no political alliance is possible. The only way to insure that we reach our goals is for us to form independent parties and independent organizations. This doesn't mean that we won't march alongside capitalist parties or groupings during a protest - say against the war or against austerity - but this is a very different thing from forming a lasting political alliance.

### THE LEFT PARTIES IN GREECE

At this time, the major union federations in Greece are connected to the Greek Socialist (PASOK) and Communist (KKE) parties. These parties may have radical or Marxist sounding names, but in truth they are mainstream capitalist parties that have accepted the economic reality that massive attacks on workers are necessary to save Greek capitalism. In fact, PASOK has been part of the ruling coalition that enacted austerity measures. The union leaders tied to these parties have, as we said before, kept their workers in a trap of time-limited strikes that the bosses can weather without trouble. More and more workers are becoming frustrated with this strategy and with their leaders. A revolutionary workers' party, speaking the truth about the need to overthrow capitalism, could spark a fire among the Greek workers - winning millions over to the cause of socialist revolution.

However, the Greek workers don't have such a party yet -

problem is not just the local bosses and the international corporations, but the entire imperialist system of capitalism.

In a just world, the workers through their own political system would determine and dispense justice for not only the Ranas but also the owners of Wal-Mart and other international profiteers. The angry demonstrations of workers can be a step towards realizing that goal, through a mass international workers' movement to counter capitalism's “race to the bottom” operations and a spur to building an international revolutionary workers' leadership. ★

they are forced to contend with a choice of various misleaders. The most important of these is SYRIZA - a 'coalition of the radical left' under the lead of Alex Tsipras. With its militant sounding rhetoric and activist agenda, SYRIZA has been growing rapidly - attracting the attention of the masses of workers and oppressed. In fact, in the June elections, SYRIZA came in second out of over 7 parties. However, as is usual with parties like SYRIZA, as it gained popularity and got closer to actual power, they diluted their program and moderated their positions. Now SYRIZA accepts the framework of EU mandated austerity for the Greek working class: they simply want to cut a better deal. This tells the workers that it is impossible to fight off austerity completely, so they might as well get used to it. It is natural for workers to put parties such as SYRIZA to the test, and it is up to revolutionaries who see its true nature to participate in this process. It is vital that the Greek workers navigate past the trap of SYRIZA and realize that what we need working class party dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism.

### RISE OF GOLDEN DAWN

The instability of Greek society and the fight-to-lose strategy of the union leaders has allowed a fascist party, Golden Dawn, to grow stronger. Like the Nazis did in Germany, they spout anti-corporate and anti-bank rhetoric which can appeal to those hurt by the economic crisis, but their real plan is to scapegoat and kill immigrants and other workers, who are victims of the same crisis. In the last three years Golden Dawn went from 0.5% of the vote to over 7%, receiving 50% of police officers' votes - which shows the folly of calling on the police to stop these criminals' attacks. They represent the kind of threat workers everywhere will face if that don't provide an alternate way forward out of the crisis. Supporting the rights of immigrants in particular must be a counter by the working class to fascist racism.

### THE ROAD AHEAD

The more intense and desperate struggles facing the workers in Greece can help clarify some of the issues we face here. We need more militant struggles - from strikes to occupations. But militancy alone will not be enough. We must also build a political leadership that is based on our interests, not on maintaining the capitalist system.

We think the experience of struggle here and around the world will show that capitalism needs austerity, repression and division of the masses to survive. That means to win and keep our most basic demands, we need a socialist revolution to overthrow capitalism and reorganize the economy. Workers here, in Greece and elsewhere who already see the need for revolution and to build a leadership that can take our struggles forward today must work together to build the revolutionary party of the working class we so desperately need. ★

## Walmart

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spoke out to change terrible working conditions, workers were suspended, demoted and even fired. They spied on us and bullied us, all because we are fighting for dignity,” said Linber Herrera, a warehouse worker for four years, who like others is employed by a temporary labor agency named Warestaff and works for a Walmart subcontractor named NFI. (For more information on this struggle, please check out this website: <http://www.warehouseworkersunited.org/southern-california-warehouse-workers-on-strike/>.)

On September 15, 2012, likely inspired by these earlier struggles, 38 warehouse workers in Ellwood, Illinois launched a pivotal battle in the struggle against Walmart by going on strike at Walmart’s most strategically important distribution center. The huge complex they worked in receives 70 percent of Walmart’s imports and feeds smaller distribution centers around the Midwest and Canada to stock the shelves of Walmart stores. They were organizing with United Electrical, an independent union.

These workers went on strike protesting similarly terrible working conditions such as extreme temperatures, being forced to inhale dust and chemical residues, and lift thousands of boxes weighing up to 250 lbs unaided. Injuries were common at this distribution center as was discrimination against women and illegal retaliation against workers who speak up for better treatment.

The strike started when a group of 31 workers delivered a petition to management demanding an end to the unsafe conditions, a guarantee of regular working hours and a living wage. Management’s response was to suspend all of the workers from their jobs in retaliation for the petition and a lawsuit they had filed against Walmart and Roadlink, a subcontractor for Walmart who was their direct employer. The strike was called in response to this retaliation. Its solid picket lines, organization, and union and community support forced management to close the warehouse for more than 24 hours during the first week of the strike, costing Walmart millions of dollars and temporarily crippling their supply chain.

As a result of their 21 day strike, these workers returned to work on October 6, having won their principal demand for an end to illegal retaliation against workers protesting poor conditions. They won the re-instatement of every worker illegally disciplined and they returned to work with full back pay for their time on the picket line! Transit workers, who despite having a

recognized union have seen their own hard-won rights and interests increasingly subject to attack by vicious bosses, can appreciate the significance of this victory. Rarely in recent years has a union stood its ground against the bosses and won, much less a relatively small group of workers lacking union protection. The warehouse workers managed a victory out of courage, determination, shrewd use of their strategic position and the open or silent support of co-workers and many others. (For more information on this struggle, please check out the following websites: <http://www.labornotes.org/2012/10/walmart-warehouse-strikers-return-work-full-back-pay/>.)

These workers learned in the course of their struggle and the struggle of other workers that they were all facing the same conditions of exploitation and the same common enemy: Walmart’s profit-hungry bosses. They publicized these conditions far and wide and, while their grievances were focused on immediate conditions, made efforts to unite with other workers facing similar conditions. Their actions and reach-out were largely responsible for a subsequent day of protests and walkouts across the U.S. affecting over 1000 Walmart retail stores in at least 46 states.

But there are certainly limitations to the victories. For one, the demands won largely centered on fending off company retaliation for protesting conditions, not on making a big dent on the conditions themselves (though they did make gains there as well). There is greater ferment among Walmart workers, but it is hard to know how great this is. And while these struggles were supported by unions and other workers’ organizations, they were not at the level that union recognition was even on the table.

In short, it is going to take a far deeper struggle to extract serious concessions from even one resistant corporation. We are confident that the struggles of Walmart workers, as with other workers, will come to take on that character; the most important thing about these recent fights is how they will inspire and contribute to that fight. But in part because of the limited scope of these recent fights, it is difficult to assess through what sort of particular channels these struggles are likely to go. How central will union recognition battles be, for example?

One thing is certain; whatever paths this struggle follows, to have anything beyond modest success will require a break from the calm, legalistic, piece-by-piece approach the labor leadership follows when it is pursuing such struggles at all. And while fights in specific locations may start these bigger fights, it is clear that such struggles must spread deep, wide and quickly to have any chance at serious successes. And it certainly can never be won by a strategy of lobbying and voting for the capitalist parties, which includes the Democrats who under Barack Obama’s leadership are carrying out with the Republicans the attacks that are forcing workers and poor people across the world to pay for an economic crisis created by Wall Street parasites!

Though the struggles must reject the leadership and policies of the Democrats and Republicans, they will definitely have to assume a political form, in particular by making class-wide demands on the government. This is clear from some of the particular situations of workers at Walmart and its satellite



*Mass rally for Roadlink strike.*

companies. Most Walmart workers are paid such low wages that they are forced to apply for some form of public assistance, the very programs which Obama and the Republicans are on their way to savaging through their budget wrangles. The leading role of immigrant workers in the Walmart struggle makes clear the connection of the fight against Walmart and the fight for immigrant rights in the U.S. But instead of building on their powerful actions, the union federations are helping the ruling class repress immigrant workers (see [http://lrp-cofi.org/statements/mayday\\_2013.html](http://lrp-cofi.org/statements/mayday_2013.html)). More generally, the corporations are less able (and less willing than ever on their own) to grant serious concessions on an "economic," company by company level; and they are more structured on that level to resist than before. More than in previous mass upsurges (like the rise of industrial unions in the 1930s), workers and allies will have to take their mass fight to the political field. Demands like Jobs for All at a living wage must become mass demands on the government to address the misery of unemployment and low wages felt by the working class as a whole.

We think the experience of fighting for such demands will show that capitalism cannot be reformed but must be overthrown to win and keep our most basic demands. Through joint struggle with workers in today's fights, we aim to build a revolutionary leadership of workers dedicated to the creation of a truly human and just future.★

## Contract

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- When the youth of East Flatbush rebelled against police brutality, he attended a rally calling for more powers for the cops and courts (see <http://lrp-cofi.org/TWU100/RTW/kiman-igrayrtw.html>).

- He had no problem making a sellout side deal behind closed doors for new hires to pay up to 4 times more in pension deductions, all to help Gov. Cuomo pay some of NYS's \$40+ billion in debt payments to Wall Street parasites!

This Tier 6 pension deal was cut while every other state union was facing the same massive concession demands from Cuomo using the threat of massive layoffs to force them to agree to his outrageous demands.

Cutting such a sellout deal with Cuomo meant not only abandoning our own members but also abandoning the rest of the working class!

While Samuelson and company have been busy selling massive givebacks as "significant victories", the ruling class has been busy scapegoating transit workers for the MTA's economic crisis and setting us up for a contract full of givebacks and zeroes.

The bosses and bankers understand that they must use their power and resources to enforce their will upon the working class and poor. They understand that this is the only way to maintain their profits in this era of capitalist crisis and decay.

The bosses fight for their profits and their interests, while our union leaders do not fight for ours. They do not raise demands that could unite us with other workers, because they fundamentally do not want a united class fightback.

Such a class-wide fight would raise workers' expectations and threaten their comfortable positions as brokers of our labor power to the bosses.

In the face of a brutal and one-sided class war, that has been very successful at driving down wages, shredding jobs and social services, the union bureaucracy's response has been to wave the white flag of surrender with only the barest pretense of building

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a united fight against these attacks.

Consider how Democratic Governor Cuomo laid out in detail that he would proceed to attack all public unions after being elected. The union leaders took no action to stop his attacks. Most helped him win office.

Actions speak louder than words: whatever nice things the union leaders may say, their deeds have sent the message to the workers and poor that no fight back is possible and that the best we can do is to vote for the "lesser evil" and hope for a better day.

Local 100's leaders would have transit workers believe that we can win a good contract with no struggle to defend our class and its interests.

The entire history of our union and all unions proves that this is a lie. The TWU's ability to win a good contract depends upon our ability to build a united struggle with the rest of the working class and poor to fight for what we need and not what the bosses sick and decaying system can afford.

This kind of struggle would show the bosses the power we have when we unite and fight as a class and scare them into some real gains.

More importantly, it would show ourselves and other workers the power we have as a class when we unite and fight for our interests. This would go a long way to overcoming the feelings of isolation and cynicism that currently dominate the consciousness of our class.

It would give courage to workers here and elsewhere facing even more vicious attacks. It would also help show a vision of a different future for our class than the one the bosses and their sick system have in store for all of us.

Transit workers need to build not just a new leadership for our union-but to help build a new leadership for our whole class. We think such a leadership must be a revolutionary party leadership.

Through such a struggle we will begin to see the power we have to create a world that is really fit for human beings, a socialist world, directed to meet human need and not private profit.★

# Why there is no news about the contract

As shop stewards and known union militants, we get asked all the time: "What's up with the contract?" This question represents a growing sense of anxiety among many transit workers about the lack of any information from the union leadership about the contract "fight". This question deserves a real answer from our union leaders, but all we get from Samuelson and company is empty rhetoric.

We wish that we could tell our brothers and sisters that the TWU leadership was mobilizing transit workers and all workers to fight for jobs, for greater funding for mass transit and a program of public works to meet the needs of the working class and poor—a fight in the interests of all those hurt by the economic crisis.

We wish that we could tell our fellow workers that the TWU was lobbying its real allies, the working class and poor around this country and the world — not the Democratic and Republican politicians, whose interest is to serve the capitalist bosses and their class interests.

We wish we could tell transit workers that the union was appealing to the class interest of our real allies in a fight to stop Wall Street from making the working class and poor pay for a crisis the bosses created.

But to say so would be to lie to our working class brothers and sisters. As revolutionary socialist workers we could never do that.

We want to help clarify the class consciousness of our brothers and sisters, to encourage them to join us in leading a struggle

to unite our class in a fight for its interests.

John Samuelson and his crew of demoralized and cynical union misleaders have shown no such principles when it comes to lying to our class! It's almost like second nature to them now.

Consider:

- When the two largest state unions (CSEA and PEF) faced massive concession demands, Samuelson told the union leaders he was with them if they would fight the concessions. But after the Public Employees' Federation (PEF) voted down the concessions, what did he do to help the PEF members' resist concessions? He went along with the pro-concession leadership and offered the ranks no help from Local 100 in doing whatever it took for them to win.

- When SEIU Local 32BJ commercial building workers faced massive concessions from management, he mobilized Local 100 to — collect canned goods. Charity not solidarity!

- When the ATU bus strikers were sent back to work in defeat by his buddy ATU President Larry Hanley, his lips were sealed. He could have said that the deal was a fraud and that Local 100 would stand with the workers no matter how hard the bosses attacked — or how fast their union leaders caved (see [www.lrp-cofi.org/TWU100/RTW/nycschoolbusstrike\\_022713.html](http://www.lrp-cofi.org/TWU100/RTW/nycschoolbusstrike_022713.html)).

- He proposed no struggle against the layoffs and wage cuts of 700 Access-a-Ride workers — Local 100's own members. He said he put some lawyers on the case.

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## Lessons of the Walmart Struggle

A very important struggle is taking place between Walmart and its hundreds of thousands of direct or indirect employees. The retail giant has been the vanguard of capitalist hostility to workers' rights and interests. Without benefit of union recognition, these workers are organizing and publicizing a nationwide fight-back against Walmart's low-wage exploitation and unsafe working conditions. Their fight is an inspiration and cause for support of all other workers, including TWU members.

The retail and warehouse workers who make the company tick are in an important position in the economy and a strategic position within the class struggle generally. The key fights recently have involved workers for Walmart's vast supply chain rather than at Walmart itself—which makes Walmart no less involved in the grievances the workers have been addressing. As the largest retailer in the world, Walmart dictates the standards of operations in the logistics and distribution industry. It has made a science out of squeezing suppliers — the results of which are now seen in the deaths of hundreds in workplace disasters in Bangladesh. This not only creates super-profits for Walmart's bosses, but also provides a great

incentive and ability for other employers to lower wages across the global economy.

The workers involved in the recent struggles are within Walmart's own line of operation. But the company and others like it deliberately utilize separate firms in part to grind out the workers while appearing to be separate from the responsibility. This game has not been lost on the workers, but Walmart has most often ignored attempts by workers to meet and address the inhumane and illegal conditions in its contracted warehouses.

The first struggle in the recent wave of workers' actions started in June of 2012. Eight Mexican guest workers at C.J.'s Seafood, a Louisiana crawfish company which was a supplier for Walmart's Sam's Club, walked off the job to protest low wages and horrible, unsafe working conditions. These included being locked into the plant, being forced to work up to 24 consecutive hours, being paid less than half the minimum wage, threats of beatings to make them work faster and threats of deportation if they protested.

These workers contacted the National Guest Worker's Alliance. Through their collective action, they forced Walmart to cut off the supplier and to pay them

\$248,000 in back wages and fines. Three of the worker leaders of this struggle won visas to stay in the country, which they planned to use to organize with other workers in Walmart's supply chain.

The next major battle in the Walmart supply chain took place on September 14, 2012, when a group of three dozen immigrant warehouse workers in California led a 15-day strike protesting unsafe working conditions. These workers are part of a workforce of over 85,000 in warehouses in Southern California's "Inland Empire," unloading merchandise from shipping containers that enter through the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach and loading it onto trucks destined for retail stores like Walmart. They were organizing with the SEIU-dominated Change to Win federation.

The working conditions they faced included inadequate access to clean water and working under scorching heat that reaches well over 100 degrees with little access to basic health-care, regular breaks or properly functioning equipment. They were also facing disgustingly low wages of around \$8 per hour, making about \$250 a week or \$12,000 per year. Workplace injury was also very common. "When we

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