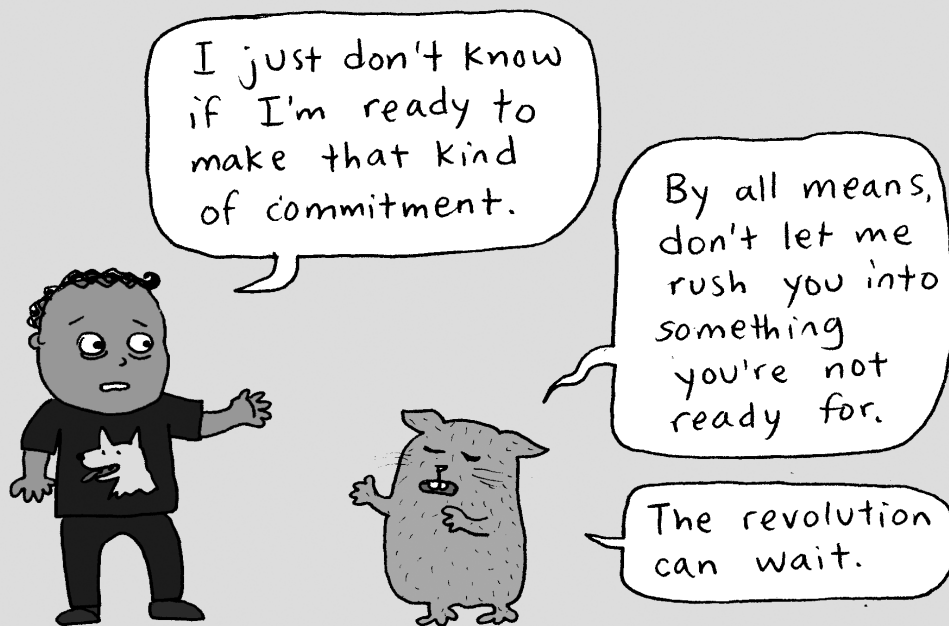


Solidarity Discussion Bulletin

2015 Series #3

April 2015

Q: When will you join the struggle?



- ☐ I'll pencil you in for sometime next fall.
- ☐ After this show.
- ☐ When I can see the flames from my bedroom window.

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Call to the Fifteenth Solidarity National Convention

The Fifteenth National Convention has been convened by the Solidarity National Committee to take place at North Park University in Chicago, Illinois **Friday, July 24 through Sunday, July 26, 2015**. The convention will open on Friday, July 24 and will be preceded by a Solidarity summer school from Wednesday, July 22 through a portion of Friday, July 24.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CONVENTION

The Convention Planning Committee, which includes the Political Committee, is in general charge of the organization of this Convention and will publish a detailed agenda around the following general themes in subsequent pre-convention discussion bulletins:

Nature of the Period

Assessing the Movements of Resistance, the State of Solidarity and Establishing Goals for the Next Period

Reviewing Our Policy around Gendered Violence

I. Work meetings: Established Solidarity working groups and commissions will be afforded time to meet during the course of the convention. The convention planning committee is responsible for organizing these meetings, which can include existing groups and groups in formation. A listing of working group and commission meetings will be made available to the membership in advance of the convention.

II. Caucus Meetings

1. Women's Caucus
2. Youth Caucus
3. People of Color Caucus
4. Queer Caucus

Note: This list represents those caucuses and fractions that have traditionally established meeting times at our conventions; it is open to additions. Other caucuses may be formed in the course of the pre-convention discussion relating to matters specific to the political discussion undertaken by the convention. Such declared caucuses will be provided time to meet during the Convention if requested. If requested, ally meetings will also be organized to meet at the same time as caucus meetings of oppressed communities.

LEADERSHIP SELECTION

At its March meeting the National Committee adopted the following: Motion: we will form a Nominating Committee (consisting of Alex F., Debby P. and Nick D.) to solicit and confirm nominations for the leadership. This Committee for now is tasked only to confirm a list of nominations, not to develop or propose a slate unless requested by further NC decision.

The 2015 Nominating Committee was urged by the National Committee to pay particular attention to continuing the process of a transition to newer and younger generations of Solidarity leaders. Nominations/motivations can be presented to the conveners of this committee. Nominations received and confirmed by this NC Nominating Commission will be released to the membership no later than **July 6, 2015**. Nominations remain open until the vote for the new NC is conducted on the convention floor.

Article VII of the Solidarity Constitution states clearly that: *"The nominating process is completely open: any member or group of members within the organization may present nominations for the NC at any time up to the vote at the Convention. Nominations to the Nominations Commission should come from branches, work fractions and commissions, and the Nominations Commission should consider these nominations in negotiating and adopting its slate. Political tendencies will have the right of division and proportional representation if they so choose."*

THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE AND THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE

Guided by the National Committee, the Convention Planning Committee will take overall responsibility for the preparation of the Convention: organization of pre-convention discussion; development of the proposed agenda; the drafting of proposed Convention rules; publicizing the Convention and issuing national invitations to other organizations; setting up Convention facilities and coordinating the necessary finances. Solidarity's current leadership bodies and the Convention Planning Committee will be dissolved at the opening session of the Convention. A new National Committee will be elected at the Convention.

PRECONVENTION DISCUSSION

The Pre-Convention Discussion Bulletin

In order to make our discussion uniformly accessible in a timely manner, the Solidarity pre-convention discussion will be conducted electronically via the listserv open to all members and formal sympathizers. (The publication of a hard copy DB mailed to branches and at-largers during the pre-convention period was suspended several years ago in favor of this electronic means of discussion.) For this convention, formal discussion submissions will be batched and compiled into pdf format and sent electronically via the Solidarity discussion list. Absolute deadline for DB submissions that will be emailed to all members is **Wednesday, July 15, 2015**.

The online Discussion Bulletin is open to all contributions authored by members of Solidarity. All resolutions, articles, comments, questions, motions, amendments, counter-resolutions will be circulated to the membership via our listserv. The listserv address is members@solidarity-us.org. The 15-page limit per individual submission that prevailed in the printed, hard copy Solidarity Discussion Bulletin shall prevail in the electronic pre-convention series. The Solidarity member listserv encourages questions, spontaneous discussion, informal cross-dialogue and give and take that may or may not be formal submissions to the DB "on the record" for the formal consideration of the convention. **Therefore all formal submissions to the DB must be marked "for the DB" in the subject line of the email.**

Public Availability of Our Pre-Convention Discussion

At its March 30, 2015 meeting, the Convention Planning Committee confirmed a method for making our pre-convention discussion available publicly on our website. All the pdf discussion bulletins will be made available on our website. (Authors can request that their submission to the discussion bulletin remain internal to our organization only). In addition, the Convention Planning Committee will decide on selected substantive articles and documents that will be placed in the webzine section of our site as well as associated social media.

Printed Record of Submissions

For delegates' reference at the convention itself, a compilation of all documents, discussion articles, amendments, motions and proposals formally submitted to the consideration of the convention during the pre-convention period will be printed and distributed to all those attending the convention. The absolute deadline for submissions to be included in this printed compilation is **Friday, July 17, 2015**. The Presiding Committee at the convention has among its charges ensuring that actionable motions and proposals received after that date are duplicated and distributed at the convention.

2. Oral Discussion

Branches and local areas are encouraged to organize oral discussion on the major documents for the Convention. These discussions can and should be open to people who are not yet members or sympathizers of Solidarity. Regional pre-convention meetings are strongly encouraged. The Solidarity Convention Planning Committee is charged with supporting and helping to organize oral discussion in our organization.

REPRESENTATION

This National Convention is called on the basis of one person, one vote. All members of Solidarity who have paid their convention assessment and are current in their dues carry one vote, which they will cast at the Convention if they are in attendance. All members in good financial standing unable to attend the Convention may hand their proxy vote to any other member planning to attend the Convention and eligible to vote.

Convention voting will thus be conducted on a weighted vote basis, with attending members casting anywhere from one vote, their own, up to five votes representing their own and four proxies they have been given. No more than four proxies can be carried by any one attending member.

The Solidarity National Committee voted to establish **Friday, May 1, 2015 (May Day)**, as the date for eligibility to cast a decisive vote at this Convention. All members joining after this date will be accorded a consultative and not a decisive vote.

At its founding, Solidarity established a category of sympathizer which carries with it a formal monthly financial commitment to the organization and the right to receive all internal materials. Along with new members joining after May 1, 2015, all formal sympathizers will be accorded a consultative vote at the Convention. Consultative votes cannot be proxied and must be cast in person by attending sympathizers.

The Convention may decide to record both decisive and consultative votes cast. All members attending the Convention have speaking rights. Speaking will be organized in rounds and speakers selected by the chair from the body of members present with no regard as to how many proxy votes a person may be casting. Attendees with consultative votes will be called on to speak only after all those with a decisive vote who wish to do so have spoken on any given round.

CONVENTION ASSESSMENT AND FINANCIAL ELIGIBILITY

A mandatory Convention assessment of \$40/\$20 hardship is levied to cover costs involved in holding of the Convention. Payment of this assessment is required of every member, whether or not the person plans to attend the convention.

Eligibility to vote is determined by the payment of the Convention assessment as well as being in good financial standing. The Solidarity Constitution defines that as follows: *"Failure to pay dues for a continuous period of three months will result in loss of the right to vote. Failure to pay dues for a continuous period of one year will result in forfeiture of membership in the organization."* (Article XI.)

All members whose dues are paid through **May 2015** are eligible to vote or give their proxy to eligible members. All members are encouraged to bring themselves up to date in this pre-convention period at the normal rates to which they have committed. Members whose eligibility has lapsed due to non-payment of dues of less than a year can, if absolutely financially necessary, regain voting rights through a system of debt reduction to be operated in branches and twigs by the comrade responsible for finances. Such members will be able to pay a minimum of \$15.00 per month for each and every month they are in arrears up to May 2015. Dues payment at the regularly pledged rate would resume for May 2015 and beyond. Those who have constitutionally forfeited their membership in the organization can reapply for membership before May 1, 2015, or otherwise request to attend the Convention as an observer.

Proxy votes carried by those in attendance will be validated through voting eligibility lists provided by the branch treasurers and the national office. No proxied votes will be honored in cases where financial eligibility requirements have not been met.

A registration fee of \$40/\$20 hardship will be charged at the Convention itself. This registration fee will be waived for all who have already paid the Convention assessment. Members paying the registration fee at the Convention who have not yet paid their assessment will be accorded their vote, provided they are in good dues standing.

Collection of the Convention assessment will be done in two ways: 1.) in branches and at-large clusters, treasurers will collect and record payments and forward money and records to the National Office; 2.) in areas where such a local structure is not yet in place, the Solidarity National Office will centrally collect the assessments from these members. To help simplify the credentials procedure necessary to validate voting eligibility at the Convention, branches and at-large areas should collect and send in Convention assessments and dues eligibility lists no later than **July 10, 2015**. Money from Convention assessments will be used to cover the costs of renting Convention meeting facilities, building the convention and establish a travel fund to help members attend the Convention.

Faraway branches, twigs and at-large members may withhold one month's normal sustainer that would otherwise be sent to the National Office. This one month's sustainer would constitute a travel subsidy for members who cannot fully afford to attend the convention. Geographically distant branches for which airfare is above average should contact the Political Committee to activate the withholding of a month's average sustainer should this be needed to assist getting branch members to the convention. In the case of branches, the funds will be allocated by the branches themselves. In the case of twigs and at-large members, the National Office should be informed that one month's dues for a given member is being utilized to attend the Convention so that appropriate credit can be given in our dues accounting system.

PRESIDING COMMITTEE

The elected Solidarity leadership and the broader 2015 Convention Planning Committee, which is responsible for organizing the Convention, will dissolve at the first Convention session. It will submit to the first session a proposal for a presiding committee, which will oversee the smooth running of the Convention. The Presiding Committee will present the Convention with a set of proposed procedural rules to be adopted. It will collect and deliberate all proposals for changes in procedure or in the agenda, ensure that the Convention is being minuted and that amendments and other items submitted to Convention vote are properly circulated and placed before the body.

The Presiding Committee plays a traditional procedural role in determining distinctions between substantive and stylistic amendments to the major documents before the Convention as outlined below in the section entitled "Convention Voting."

CONVENTION VOTING

The Convention Planning Committee is urging that any Convention votes taken on major documents be framed as approving or disapproving the general approach embodied in the key preparatory Convention documents including work plans. Amendments of style, fact, or amplification, correction of omission, etc., which do not challenge the general thrust of the main documents, should be submitted to the Convention Presiding Committee. The Presiding Committee will then ensure that they are discussed with the drafters of the documents. This procedure will help to avoid consuming valuable Convention floor time voting on stylistic or amplifying contributions. The Presiding Committee will be the body that helps to determine, along with those making the submissions and the drafters of the documents, what constitutes a substantive versus stylistic amendment in cases where this is not automatically evident.

All motions formulated during the convention for convention vote will be submitted in writing to the Presiding Committee, which has the responsibility for duplication and distribution to the body as a whole and for slotting these motions onto the agenda in a logical and orderly manner.

OBSERVERS

The Solidarity Political Committee will issue all invitations to national organizations and the radical press to observe the Convention. The Convention Planning Committee will submit an agenda proposal on greetings to be heard from observers. All suggestions for invitations to national organizations and nationally prominent individuals should be forwarded to the Solidarity National Office. Other than members of national political organizations, branches and local units of Solidarity have the full and final say on whom to invite to the Convention from their regions. A broad-ranging campaign to interest and invite people is encouraged. No prior agreement with past or present Solidarity documents or statements is necessary in determining whether an invitation to observe the Convention should be issued. These determinations are left to the good sense of members in the local areas. Our guidelines should be to invite people who are friends of Solidarity or interested in learning more about our organization, its political outlook and projects.

Fighting Right to Work in Wisconsin

Feb 25th, 2015

The following report was prepared by Keith M. and draws on reports by Mike M and Bill B, all from Milwaukee Solidarity.

As most reading this are aware, leaders of the Republican party majority in the Wisconsin state assembly recently signaled their intention to introduce right to work legislation. For the past two years Governor Scott Walker who along with the Republican majority passed ACT 10 abolishing collective bargaining for public employees in early 2011, has claimed he would not seek RTW legislation and would even oppose it. Walker has now publically declared that he will sign the bill if passed. Looks a lot like how RTW came about in Indiana and Michigan. Interestingly the pro-big business daily Journal-Sentinel published an editorial questioning the value of such legislation and a critical news article featuring quotes by Wisconsin employers opposed to RTW in part due to fears that RTW will force them and not the unions to run apprenticeship programs.

On Monday, February 23, three members of Milwaukee Solidarity were among the 250 -300 protestors rallying in low digit temperatures in a down town Milwaukee park to protest the impending RTW legislation. The rally was organized over the weekend through a new Facebook group, Defeat "Right to Work" in Wisconsin: <https://www.facebook.com/defeatrighttowork> . It was chaired by a member of Teamsters Local 344.

Angela Walker who ran for Milwaukee County Sheriff as an independent socialist candidate last fall, was the first speaker representing Wisconsin Jobs Now. Nate Hamilton, brother of Dontre Hamilton a thirty-three year old African American man murdered by a white Milwaukee cop last April spoke as did the state head of the USW, a UAW representative, the head of the Teacher's union, Christine Neumann-Ortiz of Voces de la Frontera, and a co-chair of the Milwaukee Graduate Teaching Assistants Association. The Milwaukee Greens were also endorsers of the action. The rally was to be a prelude of sorts for demonstrations planned for Tuesday and Wednesday at the Capitol in Madison. There was also talk of Madison demonstrations this weekend. There was scattered mention of strikes but this does not seem to be seriously considered by any union leader. The leaders of most state-wide unions have declared their intention to organize labor protests but several have publically declared that passage of the legislation is inevitable.

On Tuesday, approximately 3000 rallied in the Capitol, some testifying in hearings about the deleterious effects that RTW will have on Wisconsin workers and their families. Most were members of the building trades and

manufacturing unions: Machinists, Boilermakers, Steelworkers, Laborers, Teamsters, Autoworkers. A rally lasted a little less than one hour featuring militant speeches from these unions. But there was no picketing, or marching around capitol as in 2011 nor were there attempts to occupy the capitol building. Around 6:30 the majority Republican committee charged with moving the legislation to the full body suddenly maneuvered to push the bill on faster than anticipated-certainly to head off weekend protests. In 2011 house Democrats left the state for nearby northern Illinois to deprive the Republican majority of the necessary quorum required by the state constitution for all budget-related legislative votes.

This maneuver gave the protest movement time to develop as it retarded passage of the bill. For over six weeks nearly daily protests drew tens of thousands of protestors-on several occasions over 100,000- to the streets surrounding the Capitol building. But it looks like this time the pro-RTW forces in the state house and senate will have a chance to vote on the bill by next week which will certainly affect the prospects for building the type of large sustained, and determined mobilizations we saw in 2011.

The following is a brief addendum to the above report.

The Tuesday rally against RTW on February 24 was followed by another rally on Wednesday, the 25th the day the state Senate passed the right to work bill with only one Republican defection-a former building trade union member. All other Republicans voted for the measures and all Democrats against. 2,000-3,000 demonstrated both of those days. On Saturday, February 28, 10,000 demonstrated in Madison including union delegations from Illinois and Minnesota. As expected, the heavily Republican dominated House passed the bill on Friday, March 6 and Governor Walker is expected to sign the bill early in the week beginning March 9 making Wisconsin, the country's most industrialized state which has had a higher-than average union density rate, the 25th RTW state in the US. Excepted from this legislation are police and fire unions.

This has occurred as Walker and his Republican majority plan an aggressive assault against the University of Wisconsin system through a proposed \$300 million dollar cut to the system which will be voted on later this spring.

Sections of the First Draft of a Nature of the Period Document

I'm submitting these items as contributions for pre-convention discussion. They were solicited and drafted for a "Nature of the Period" convention document commissioned last fall by the National Committee. Following a discussion at the in-person March 14-15 NC, the overall document has been reconceived to be somewhat more synthetic and concise. That drafting process is now underway. While material from these pieces may be incorporated in the final document, or included as appendices, for the present moment I believe they stand on their own as substantive educational contributions. – David F.

Brief Notes on Imperialism and Middle East Meltdown

[This overview was drafted by David F with considerable help from members of the Middle East Working Group and other comrades.]

The spreading chaos in the Middle East today presents the most extreme examples of a core reality: *Imperialism creates problems for which it has no solutions.*

Indeed, for at least the past century the imperialist scramble for political control and oil has always been at the root of crises and tragedies in the Middle East, not only by direct invasion but by the installation and maintenance of dictatorships, manipulation of sectarian divisions, and sponsorship of settler-colonialism (the Israeli state). (For an overview of this history, see Yassamine Mather's ATC article "From Sykes-Picot to 'Islamic State,'" <http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/4288>.)

Today's situation, for the most part, reflects unintended consequences of imperial meddling rather than control and "stability." This can be seen in its horrific manifestations from the meltdown of the state in Libya and Yemen to the overwhelming nightmares in Syria and Iraq, to chaos in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the case of Syria, the destruction of society by both the Assad regime and ISIS, the genocidal massacres of minority religious and ethnic communities, the mass dislocation of refugees with nowhere to go or anywhere to return, and the loss of priceless cultural legacies, are probably irreparable.

The drive of the Israeli state to crush all Palestinian national aspirations -- no matter how accommodating and moderate the Palestinian leadership becomes -- is also an important feature of the current situation, although this particular phenomenon of course is not "unintended" but rather sponsored and financed by the United States despite severe U.S. frictions with the Israeli regime over Iran.

In each of these situations, of course, including the Egyptian counterrevolution against the hopes of the Arab Spring, internal social forces are centrally involved which require concrete and expert analysis. The purpose of these brief notes, however, is to point to the role of imperial intervention, particularly by the U.S. hegemon, which has never failed to make bad situations even more desperate. A relentless drive for "stability" produces the opposite, in increasingly grotesque forms. It's also important to look at how these crises feed back into the peculiarities of U.S. domestic political culture.

There has been one critically important and tragic success for U.S. policy -- the crushing of the revolutionary upheaval and brief democratic opening in Egypt. The reconstruction of the presidentialist dictatorship under al-Sisi -- even more brutal than the old Mubarak regime, precisely because the scale of the mass movement required more murderous repression -- was certainly preferable for Washington than the victorious spread of the Arab Spring.

It must be admitted that much of the international left failed to grasp the ominous significance of the overthrow of the Morsi government, not by the mass movement but by the military as it restored the power of the Egyptian "deep state." Following the gunning down of many hundreds, perhaps thousands of Muslim Brotherhood supporters (in their majority these were urban poor and working people), leading activists of the 2011 anti-Mubarak movement have been incarcerated or assassinated, with no end in sight. Further, the al-Sisi regime in declaring Hamas to be "terrorist" is proving itself a loyal assistant in the Israeli-U.S. campaign to strangle Gaza.

Even this strategic success, however, carries implications for the meltdown in the region as the crushing of Egyptian democracy accelerates the emergence of violent *jihadi* militancy not only inside Egypt but its extension through the Sunni Arab world, when no other resistance seems to exist. We will venture a few brief and general observations on the broader regional crisis.

1) The disasters that U.S. policies have helped create over the past two decades haven't been expressions of ascending U.S. power over this period, but generally products and accelerants of its overall decline. By this we don't mean that a stronger imperial rival is emerging, especially given the relative health of the U.S. economy relative to the crises in Europe and Russia. Rather, we're referring to the end of the appearance that the United States was capable of unilaterally dictating events.

2) The U.S. emerged from the 1991 Gulf War, followed by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with a triumphant sense of overwhelming power and global mission. At the time, parts of the international left also foresaw a lengthy period of overwhelming and unchallenged American supremacy. This was illusory, as the day of the "global hyperpower" could only be temporary.

The rise of post-Maoist China was in its early stage, with western investment expanding in the wake of the regime's success in crushing the Tiananmen democratic movement. The post-Soviet Russian Federation would not be a permanent basket case. (The opportunistic expansion of NATO to the former Soviet satellite countries contributed greatly to the present carnage in Ukraine, but that issue is beyond the scope of these notes. Today, beyond the immediate fate of Ukraine, is the question of whether this conflict will extend to a severe rupture of the economic and financial ties that mutually bind the West and former USSR, in which case the consequences may be beyond rational calculation.)

Most important, the defeats of Arab nationalism and the left would not lead to the neoliberal "democratic transformation" of Washington's fantasies but to the growth of Islamist forces, reactionary and often murderous – with which imperialism has also been prepared to ally when it served some short-term purpose.

3) While the image of permanent U.S. supremacy was always a mirage, its decline was rapidly accelerated by ruinous policy choices -- motivated in part by the ideologically-driven myth of "the new American century." The most egregious, of course, was the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq – a criminal enterprise, fraudulently motivated, arrogantly conceived and stupidly implemented, with the most appalling consequences for Iraq, where the direct death toll is estimated somewhere between 150,000 and half a million, for its neighbors, and for thousands of U.S. troops who have returned home physically broken or as walking human time bombs (22 U.S. veterans and military personnel commit suicide every day). Predictably, the regional beneficiary of the removal of one official U.S. enemy, Saddam Hussein, was another, the regime in Iran.

4) The U.S. debacle in Iraq generated antiwar sentiment and popular anger, which – along with the 2007-08 financial meltdown, of course – greatly contributed to the election of president Barack Obama. Once in office, the Obama presidency faced the stark choice between sharply breaking from the George W. Bush war doctrine, or inheriting it. As on other issues (immigration, economic stimulus, health care, etc.) Obama attempted to "split the difference" with results that have predictably become quagmires.

a) In attempting to extricate from Iraq, the U.S. relied upon the sectarian regime of Nouri al-Malik until and even well after it had become obviously unsustainable, and has now returned U.S. troops in the guise of advisors. The re-insertion of tens of thousands of "boots on the ground" of course would be absolutely unviable in terms of both U.S. politics and the Iraqi reality. To re-stabilize Iraq now requires that the United States somehow ally with mutually hostile forces -- Iranian-backed Shia militias, Sunni tribes, and Kurdish *peshmerga* forces – all at the same time.

b) The promise to close Guantanamo prison camp stalled out -- due in part to the president's unwillingness to confront the Republican right wing -- resulting in a series of well-publicized outrages, a permanent well-deserved blot on the United States' international standing, and priceless

recruitment propaganda for al-Qaeda and its ISIS offspring. Indeed, the rise of ISIS in all its naked and hideous barbarity is the ultimate expression of the "clash of barbarisms" that Gilbert Achcar identified in the wake of the 9-11 attacks.

c) With the option of ground invasions forestalled, the president turned to the expedients of air power and remote-control drone warfare. In Libya, U.S./NATO bombing became the air force of the anti-Qaddafi insurgency. The consequence was the toppling and assassination of Qaddafi – but without the construction of a coherent political front or agreement among competing insurgent forces. The resulting fragmentation of power, internal hemorrhaging and the flow of weapons to ISIS and to regional Islamist armed groups in neighboring African states including Mali and Nigeria, marks a tragic outcome of what began as a promising popular uprising in the context of the Arab Spring.

d) In Yemen, U.S. drone strikes in the name of counter-terrorism -- accompanied by U.S. complicity in bankrupt political maneuverings by successive Yemeni presidents – have produced massive popular anger, accelerating the decomposition of the regime and the onset of now-imminent civil war. The Houthi uprising and seizure of Sanaa rebellion has expanded Iran's political influence and inflamed the hostility of Sunni Arab kingdoms, at a time when U.S. policy depends on cooperation with both.

5) In the process, the Obama administration has essentially solidified, as now established practice, what began as extralegal improvisations by the Bush-Cheney gang. These entail targeted assassinations, including the murder of U.S. citizens; secret military operations without oversight; vicious prosecution of whistleblowers and journalists who speak with them; total surveillance of ordinary people's phone and computer records; ethnic and religious profiling of Arab and Muslim communities. The overall human and civil rights record of the Obama presidency has been disastrous, except on LGBT rights which is a separate issue. (For some discussion on the interconnections of war and police abuse in the USA, see Solidarity's statement "From Ferguson to CIA Torture Cells" at <http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/4319>.)

6) It is hardly necessary here to detail here the central role of U.S. policy and intelligence services in enabling the ascendancy of the most reactionary, fanatical and brutal forces in the Islamic world – the seventy-year U.S. partnership with the Saudi monarchy, backing of the Zia ul-Haq dictatorship that brought "blasphemy" laws to Pakistan, financing of Afghan forces that became al-Qaeda and ultimately the Taliban, and on and on.

7) In its actions toward Palestine and the Israeli state, the United States has performed the remarkable, perhaps unprecedented trick of actively sabotaging its own stated policy: calling repeatedly for a "two-state solution," while obstructing every initiative of the conservative and accommodationist Palestinian national leadership to move toward international recognition of statehood in some form (whether that goal itself is feasible is a separate question).

The act of the Republican Congressional leadership inviting Netanyahu, a foreign head of government, without even informing the White House is stunning even by the standards of the present U.S. politics of the long knives. The longstanding pretext in the United States that “politics stop at the water’s edge” has always been a lie, of course, but rarely has it been so transparently disregarded.

The Obama administration’s own record in the face of Israeli settlement expansion, violent aggression and military intransigence has been one of political and moral collapse, for which it has been rewarded with the open contempt of the Netanyahu government, and the amazing spectacle of 500+ members of the United States Congress jumping up and down in rapturous applause of a foreign leader openly ridiculing U.S. policy and the president.

Solidarity and the rest of the left must defend and actively participate in the most powerful grassroots expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people and their right of self-determination: the growing BDS (boycott/divestment/sanctions) movement demanding the end of the Israeli occupation, dismantling of the structures of discrimination inside Israel, and establishing the Palestinian Right of Return.

8) The linchpin of the Obama administration’s attempt to salvage its Middle East strategy today must be a *successful negotiation with Iran over nuclear development*. It must attempt to accomplish this in the face of the Israeli and Republican drive, supported by many Democrats, for tighter sanctions – and a road to war. In these negotiations, the administration must work in partnership with the Russians even as tensions over Ukraine are reaching an explosive point. It must treat Iran both as an official adversary *and* as a necessary partner in Iraq and in any hope of a solution in the Syrian catastrophe. Iran, for its part, also needs an agreement to save its oil-dependent and sanctions-crippled economy from collapse.

9) The impact of these crises on U.S. political culture has been generally degrading. To be sure, there is no war psychosis. Falling prices of oil and gasoline, to which

Americans are acutely attuned with our lengthy commutes and automobile addictions, have taken the edge off the concept that we have to control “our” Middle East oil. But while the U.S. public is bitterly cynical over the results of the Iraq war and certainly hostile to new adventures -- the ravings of revived necons and Hillary Clinton’s warlike rumblings notwithstanding -- it is not really possible to rebuild a mass antiwar movement in circumstances where the official enemy, the “Islamic State,” is such an unspeakable horror.

The spectacles of journalist beheadings, the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre, and rumors of terrorist plotting have certainly enhanced the ambient level of Islamophobia -- although clearly *not* nearly to the levels visible in some European countries. What does uniquely exist in the United States is a high level of Christian fundamentalism, which views events in the Middle East through the lens of Biblical end-time prophecy and exerts a powerful distorting influence on political debate, especially in the Republican party.

In its final two years, the fading Obama presidency appears almost certain to be drawn into the quagmires from which it had promised to extricate the country. Americans will become increasingly weary and sick of the whole mess as it drags on without visible progress or markers of success. In any case, people may find the images of the tragedies “over there” disturbing, but without much relevance for their own lives with gas under \$2.00 a gallon and the economic gloom of the Great Recession very slowly lifting.

The Obama legacy will include the militarization of the U.S. border and urban police forces (greatly assisted by Israeli expertise in these methods), institutionalized legitimacy of drone warfare and assassinations, massive security oversight of the population, and permanent states of war, much of them half-hidden, from Pakistan to North Africa. The presidency that was supposed to clean up the mess that George W. Bush made has mostly served to confirm what the left has known but is sometimes tempted to forget: There is hardly any situation so appalling, so destructive, so catastrophic in human and political terms that “our own” imperialist government can’t find a way to make it worse.

A Brief and Partial Overview: Latin America’s Leftward Movement Facing Reverses

[The following section was drafted by Dan LaB and slightly edited by David F. The diplomatic opening between Cuba and the United States will be briefly discussed elsewhere in this document.]

After the end of the military dictatorships that ruled in several South and Central American countries from the mid-1960s to the 1980s, Latin America became a source of inspiration for the left around the world as several nations elected leftist governments. Brazil’s metalworkers led the fight to end the dictatorship then and went on to create a new labor federation (CUT), established the Movement of the Landless (MST), and the Workers Party (PT) which eventually brought Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva to the presidency.

In Venezuela the Caracazo food riots of 1989 signaled the beginning of the end for the corrupt partnership there

between Democratic Action and the Christian Democratic Party (COPEI). Hugo Chávez, a leftist officer in the Venezuelan Army, led a failed coup attempt in 1992 but seven years later was elected president.

In Argentina, following the economic crisis and debacle of the presidency of Carlos Menem, Néstor Kirchner, also a member of the Peronist Partido Justicialista, was elected president in 2003 and adopted a leftist position. He was succeeded in 2007 by his wife Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.

In Bolivia Evo Morales, an indigenous leader of coca farmers and leader of MAS (Movement Toward Socialism),

was elected to power in 2006. In this period from the 1980s to the 2000s, other nations such as Uruguay and Ecuador also overturned conservative governments and elected leftists to office.

All of these governments came to power on waves of popular protest and strikes, opposed the neoliberal agenda, in some cases called themselves socialists, and all adopted social welfare programs, while a few also came into conflict with the International Monetary Fund. Several established close relations with Cuba and some also found themselves at odds with the United States. Latin America appeared to many to be a great ship steaming toward what Hugo Chávez called “Twenty-First Century Socialism.”

Today, the leftward movement of Latin America has stalled and in some cases has been reversed. While the circumstances in each nation are distinct, one can say that in general the leftward movement was halted because of the protracted economic crisis of 2008, the fall in world oil and other commodity prices, and the general rightward motion of politics on a world scale, though the failure of governments in virtually all of these countries to democratically represent the working people for whom they claimed to speak also played a role. We look here briefly at the state of the left in Brazil and Venezuela, and mention our neighbor Mexico.

Brazil

In Brazil, once elected to office but without a base in the congress, Lula (2003-2011) and the Workers Party entered into relationships with conservative parties and politicians and began to make secret monthly payments in exchange for their votes for his programs. Lula and the PT also used the government to support the interests of the bankers and the construction industry as well as supporting agribusiness.

The strategy appeared to work: With the price of oil and agricultural commodities rising, Lula’s administration oversaw an economic boom. At the same time he expanded existing social programs such as the *bolsa família* that provided economic assistance to poor families to keep their children in school, and there were affirmative action programs for the poor Afro-Brazilian families. The combination of continued neoliberalism plus social reforms has been called “social liberalism.”

In addition to changing domestic policies, Lula also worked to create a new bloc of developing nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa or BRICS) to gain more leverage in dealing with governments and financiers in Europe, Japan, and the United States.

Lula’s handpicked successor Dilma Rousseff became president in January 2011, just as the economy began to decline and social opposition from both left and right began to grow. The June Days of 2013 began as protests over the cost of public transportation but became an enormous protest movement (8.5 million people out Brazil’s 200 million participated in them) directly against the PT government, mostly from the left, but also including groups on the right.

Rousseff won reelection in 2014 — as did a number of far rightwing legislators — and once the election was behind her, turned even more sharply to the right, leading to widespread disaffection. Today the left in Brazil is sharply diminished in size and influence. In 2003, Lula’s ruling caucus had expelled his left wing critics from the Workers Party. They went on to create the Party of Socialism and Liberation. PSOL improved its standing in the most recent elections, though it remains one of a few small parties; and the labor movement is divided into several rival groups. The prospects at the moment are not favorable for the left.

Venezuela

Despite attempts by the United States government and domestic opponents to overthrow his government, Chávez was reelected to the presidency four times in fair elections, as well as overturning a coup against him and winning approval of a new constitution. Chávez, proclaiming a Bolivarian Revolution and a new “socialism for the twenty-first century,” used Venezuela’s oil revenues to create or to expand public housing, education and health programs.

While Chávez’s government managed the already nationalized petroleum industry and nationalized some other industries, the majority of Venezuela’s economy has remained in the hands of national and foreign capital. In an attempt to strengthen his government, in 2008 Chávez created the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUC), bringing together some, but not all, of the country’s left parties. He also attempted to make the National Union of Workers (UNT) the dominant union federation, but unions on the right and some on the left both refused to join.

Working with Fidel Castro of Cuba, Chávez took the lead in establishing Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), a kind of union of Latin American nations, but most Central and South American nations did not join. Chávez, who was seriously ill in 2012, appointed Nicolás Maduro to be vice-president and when Chávez died in March of 2013 Maduro became interim president and was elected president in April, defeating conservative opposition candidate Henrique Capriles by only 1.5 percent of the vote. Since his election his government, severely affected by the drop in world oil prices, has been in an extended political crisis. It is a cruel irony that so much of the hope for “twenty-first century socialism” depends on high fossil fuel prices (not only in Venezuela but also, for example, Ecuador).

Maduro’s government, foreseeing an economic recession, must cut its budget. With the economy shrinking, the country may well return to poverty. There have already been protests over the lack of food and food prices, two former Chávista military officials (Yoel Acosta Chirinos and Carlos Guyón) have criticized Maduro for the repression of recent protests in which 43 have died.

Most recently, the government alleges there was a military coup plot led by an air force general and other officers. While the facts of this remain very murky, the entire situation suggests a severe economic, social, and political crisis that could lead to dramatic changes in Venezuela. We demand, of course, that U.S. imperialism keep its

bloody “Hands Off Venezuela” – without blinding ourselves to the reality that popular confidence in the Maduro government has been severely shaken and that it might well lose the coming election.

In short, although for quite different reasons, we find the leftist projects in both Brazil and Venezuela in serious difficulty and facing real prospects of defeat.

Mexico

Shortly after taking office on December 1, 2012, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto created the Pact for Mexico that brought together all of the major parties: his own Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the conservative National Action Party (PAN), and the left-of-center Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). Even before he took office, he and the PRI working closely with the PAN passed a Labor Reform Law strengthening the hand of employers, and after his election he pushed through an Education Reform Law intended to weaken the teachers union, and an Energy Reform Law to permit greater private participation in the state-owned petroleum company. Peña Nieto appeared to be the Mexican president most successful in moving along the neoliberal agenda since Carlos Salinas (1988-1994).

Things changed dramatically when on September 26, 2014 police and gangsters in the city of Iguala, Guerrero killed six, wounded 25, and forcibly disappeared 43 students. The disappearance of the Ayotzinapa Teachers College students led to violent demonstrations by teachers, students, and community members in Guerrero, as well as to large protests in Mexico City and throughout the country. At about the same time, the media revealed that the President and his wife Angélica Rivera, as well as Secretary of Finance Luis Videgaray Caso, were living in homes they had acquired through their connections to companies that contract with the government.

Meanwhile, with the economy slowing and oil prices falling, the President's political prospects continued to deteriorate. The combination of the violent repression in Iguala, the appearance of corruption at the highest levels in government, and the stagnant economy, led to widespread disaffection from the president, his party, and the government.

Yet Mexico has no left capable of providing leadership on a mass scale at this time. The Movement for National Regeneration Party (MORENA), led by Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the leading politician on the left, is focused on elections and on putting him in the presidency in 2018. The many small left parties, clandestine guerrilla groups, and self-defense committees do not have the authority or the mass following to play a leadership role. While the National Coordinating Committee (la CNTE) of the Mexican Teachers Union (el SNTE) has led many of the street protests over the Iguala killings, it is largely fighting for its own interests and does not have a political program for the nation.

Bishop Raúl Vera of the Catholic Church and some left groups have called for a “constituent assembly” to lay the

ground for refounding the country and the writing of a new constitution, though so far there is no mass following for this proposal. The Mexican government seems likely to ride out the storm.

While we don't have the space here to discuss the other Latin American countries, we can say that some versions of the trends pointed out here in these three cases tend to exist. The Latin American governments of all stripes find themselves pressed by the power of the great capitalist centers in the United States and Europe and by the economic crisis. At the same time, within those nations, capital is reasserting its political and economic power over the working class, the farmers and peasants, and over the indigenous and the poor. We are at a stage in Latin America calling again for the defense of what was gained in the past two decades, and the rebuilding of left and working class movements.

Indigenous Movements

The six hundred different indigenous peoples of Latin America who number 40 million people or 12.7 percent of the continent's total population; in rural areas indigenous overall make up 40 percent of the population. The countries with the largest indigenous populations are Mexico with 15.7 million or 14.9 percent of the nation's total population; Guatemala, 6 million or 60 percent of the country's total population; Peru approximately 3 and 4 million people estimated to make up between 30 to 45 percent of the population; and Bolivia, 2.8 million or 41 percent of the total population.

Historically these peoples, conquered between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, often lost their land to the conquerors, were denied political and civil rights until the twentieth century, suffered slavery or widespread debt peonage until quite recently (ended between the early and mid-twentieth century), and suffered social exclusion, discrimination, and sometimes violent attacks by government or private parties. Their repeated rebellions over 500 years were violently suppressed.

Indigenous peoples have since 1960s and particularly since the initiation of the neoliberal era in the 1980s been under tremendous pressure from a variety of new threats: modernization of agriculture, industrial development, and urbanization; changes in property laws; political parties that ignored, neglected or abused them; corporate or government developments such as oil drilling, the building of golf courses or the construction of dams; soil erosion, falling water tables, deforestation, and climate change that affects traditional ways of life; and, finally, the growth of drug trafficking, violent gangs, and extremely high levels of violence including kidnapping and murder.

Such conditions, made worse by U.S.-sponsored counterrevolutionary wars and “free trade” agreements, have accelerated the flight of refugees to the U.S. border where they face detention in brutal “privatized” prisons, and summary deportation.

Indigenous peoples in Latin America organized social movements and made progress from the 1980s until the

2000s. The United Nations adopted of International Labor Organization Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, adopted in 1989, established the first international standard for protecting such peoples' rights. The Chiapas Rebellion of January 1, 1994 led by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) inspired indigenous movements from Alaska and the Hudson Bay to Tierra del Fuego. The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) organized several uprisings, some of which succeeded in alliance with others in bringing down government, even if they did not in the end get the government they wanted. The indigenous movement's greatest achievement was the election of Evo Morales, an indigenous socialist, to the presidency of Bolivia in 2006.

Despite its successes, the indigenous movement now finds itself frustrated by a number of developments. Even Latin America's left governments often misunderstood, neglected, or continued policies detrimental to the indigenous populations. During his second term Evo Morales found himself besieged by protests from the very indigenous communities that had elected him because of his support for highway construction that would have transformed indigenous communities.

In Mexico, while the Zapatistas continue to organized both national and indigenous conferences, they — along with the rest of the left — have been unable to stop the government's neoliberal economic program, end government corruption, or reduce the extreme levels of violence. Guatemala, the country with the highest percentage of indigenous peoples, has been overwhelmed by a combination of gang violence and military and police abuse while hundreds of human rights defenders have been threatened or attacked and 523 trade unionists have been killed in the last six years. No wonder that only 1.6% of the workers are union members.

Yet despite these conditions, the indigenous continue to organize. In Guatemala, for example, indigenous people threatened by multinational corporations, the development of new mining ventures and power plants, have organized a *Resistance Front in Defense of Natural Resources and the Rights of Peoples*, a movement for a movement for autonomy, and a new political party. Such movements continue throughout all of Latin America but, since the indigenous are usually a small minority of the population, their progress depends on the building of strong left and movements in the society at large.

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Nature of the Period- Labor

[The following draft was produced by Meredith S and Donna C at the request of the Labor Commission.]

In the United States as globally, the neoliberal ruling class offensive is devastating the working class. Trade unions, weakened by relentless attacks and by their own political and organizational shortcomings, have failed to mount effective resistance to the ruling class agenda. The spread of “right-to-work” to northern industrial states like Indiana, Michigan and now Wisconsin is a profound shock to an organized labor movement in deep decline.

Union density in the U.S. has fallen to historic lows. While the labor bureaucracy experiments with new approaches to reversing the decline in membership, most union officials will not consider initiatives that would fundamentally transform the relationship of rank and file members to their unions. The small U.S. labor left and the even smaller revolutionary Left have thus far failed to coalesce around a meaningful strategy to break out of their isolation or to take full advantage of the organizing opportunities that have arisen.

Yet there are glimmers of hope. In the period since the financial crisis we have seen the sporadic emergence of more determined, bottom-up campaigns and struggles. We have seen that, even in a period of retreat, militant campaigns that pose broad class demands can resonate widely. And we have seen growing recognition in the still-too-small activist layer of the working class that the traditional bureaucratic approaches are a dead end. While we do not want to overstate the positives, we nonetheless believe that they point to the potential for the development of politically independent formations of a class movement, capable of offering meaningful resistance to capitalist austerity — if the Left can intervene effectively.

Socialists must address the following realities in any attempt to develop a relevant strategic perspective today:

- **The impacts of the ruling class offensive on the structure of the working class and the daily life of workers.** The U.S. working class has been restructured toward low wage, precarious, non-union work, whether in the service sector, manufacturing or logistics.
- **The decline of official union structures and the weakness of rank and file organization.** Union density and strength in the private sector has sharply declined, partly as a result of capital's aggressive re-organization of the geography of production, both domestically and internationally. Public sector unions, where density remains much higher, are under attack. Teachers and health care workers, who make up a larger share of unionized workers, are now at the center of key defensive struggles. With rare exceptions such as the Chicago teachers' strike and the attempts to decertify the trustee SEIU-UHW by tens of thousands of healthcare workers in California, we are not seeing militant worker uprisings tied to rank-and-file revolts within the unions. And too often, unions are relying on class collaboration (“labor

management partnership”) to preserve their positions in some industries and organize in others.

- **The broad ruling class assault on the legacy of Twentieth Century working class struggle.** We are witnessing a sustained assault on collective bargaining, the social safety net, pensions and health insurance, indeed all of the mechanisms that protect workers from the raw discipline of capitalist labor markets. And corporate capital is invading sectors like healthcare provision and public education, once the province of government and nonprofits. Governments at every level have joined the employer assault by implementing austerity policies.

- **The new youth-driven movements emerging outside of formal union structures and separate from the socialist Left.** As demonstrated most dramatically by Occupy, younger militants are alienated from politics and the “system,” but also from unions, the socialist left, and even the idea of making demands on the capitalist state.

- **The “new” forms of worker organizing with tenuous connections to official union structures.** While sometimes compromised by their dependence on the labor bureaucracy, the rise of “alt-labor” groups such as non-majority unions and worker centers, and the emergence of militant movements of immigrant workers and youth, indicate the need and the potential for worker organizing that breaks with dependence on the state and traditional organizational forms. In the right-to-work South, especially, necessity has given rise to valuable experiments which should be developed further.

- **The new and broader forms of struggle emerging tentatively around the country.** While the state of working class consciousness and organization is weak and defensive, we have seen that militant resistance to austerity, organized from below and framed around broad class-wide demands, can inspire renewed working class activity, raise consciousness, and even begin to win concrete victories.

In our view, these developments signal the need—and the potential — to put classwide movements and organizational forms at the center of a renewed perspective on revolutionary socialist labor work. The challenge we face is that, given the depth of capitalist restructuring, the political successes of neoliberalism, and the present relationship of forces, the narrow sectoral approach to unionism that remains dominant today has left unionized workers increasingly isolated from the broad working class, and unable to defend past gains, let alone make advances.

Under these conditions, the labor movement can only build power by championing the working class as a whole — by posing its demands within a larger sociopolitical context, fighting for universal reform goals (e.g. single-payer health

care, expanded public education, livable wages), developing member self-activity, and forging genuine alliances with workers and working class organizations outside of the unions.

As the debate rages about how to revive Labor, we should be clear that the primary path forward is through rank and file struggles that consciously link the workplace and sectoral demands of union members to the needs of the entire working class

We must retain our fundamental commitment to working class self-activity, develop a more politicized approach to union reform struggles, and place greater emphasis on work in broad class formations and among the unorganized working class. In order to clarify the kind of shift we are proposing, we want to take stock of those dynamics that we believe led to a narrowing of Left work in labor over an extended period dominated largely by defensive struggles.

In our view, the turn away from broader political and social questions left socialists unprepared to think about how to apply the Rank and File Strategy in settings external to union reform work — in relation to the problems of the broader unorganized working class, and particularly specially oppressed groups within the class; and in relation to contexts such as organizing drives and community organizing. With fewer workers in unions, these gaps in our thinking and acting now become even more problematic.

The Rank and File Strategy, with its core principle of working-class self-organization, was expressly intended to counter the tendency of unions under capitalism to pursue narrow, sectoral aims under the domination of a self-reproducing labor bureaucracy. The objective has always been to develop the capacity of the militant minority within the working class to overcome the limitations of the labor bureaucracy — not only to fight specific employers, but also to develop the unions as fighters for the whole class.

Today we need a renewed socialist labor strategy, rooted in a broader, more political iteration of the rank and file perspective; one that recognizes the impact of the defeats we have endured and responds to emerging realities on the ground. We need to join our commitment to working class self-organization at the point of production with a broad, class-struggle, social justice unionism perspective in order to build the power we need to lay the basis for more transformational anti-capitalist political projects.

We need trained organizers (in public and private sector workplaces, in union staff and leadership, and in the community) who understand how to build more effective working class organizations through struggles that place shop floor battles in the context of broader social demands.

Outline of a Renewed Strategic Perspective on Left Labor Work

The ruling class took advantage of the financial crisis and its aftermath to intensify austerity in every arena of social life, from the statehouse to the schoolhouse to the shop floor. In response, workers and working class

organizations, including some rank and file caucuses and local unions, have begun to experiment with new strategies and tactics.

Some of the campaigns and struggles which have emerged out of this conjuncture reflect a new openness to the posing of classwide demands. Others reveal a significant, but primarily tactical, shift toward community mobilization and coalition-building by more traditional officials and reformers, including the AFL-CIO and Change to Win and some of their affiliate unions. Progressive elements of the labor bureaucracy have shown a willingness to engage the vast unorganized working class — but not to disturb the rank and file's passivity with respect to official union structures. At their best, these campaigns and struggles combine mass militancy with demands and forms of organization that link class struggle in the workplace with the community and begin to bridge the divide between “economic” and “political” struggles.

The most advanced efforts in this direction are building direct links between activists in different industries and consolidating Left activism in various communities. The most promising formations include formal or ad hoc coalitions of rank and file activists, progressive union officials, worker centers, immigrant rights groups, community organizations rooted in communities of color, environmentalists, and socialists; they project a transformative vision, at least implicitly anti-capitalist; and they do effective organizing around meaningful and concrete demands ranging from healthcare, to contract fights, environmental justice, educational justice, and immigrant rights.

We believe it is these broader movements and organizational forms that will provide the primary basis for struggles that can shift the relation of forces in the coming period and provide openings for the development of a socialist current within the activist layer of the working class. In assessing what is possible in this period, we have taken note of a range of campaigns and struggles that we think can point toward a path forward.

- — Occupy revealed mass opposition to the inequities of the economic and political system and rising political consciousness — though these developments remained relatively inchoate and insufficiently organized.
- — The Chicago Teachers Union contract campaign and strike was framed as a broad, anti-racist community struggle against the corporate agenda for public education and for the educational needs of students. And the CTU leadership, bolstered by a militant and politically conscious reform movement, took concrete steps to insure that the union's membership took ownership of the struggle and remained mobilized, both in the workplace and in the streets.
- — Movements like the Moral Mondays campaign against austerity in North Carolina point to the potential power of coalitions united around a multi-issue, class-based, and anti-racist agenda.

- The Fight for \$15 and the effort to organize Walmart workers reveal opportunities for resistance within the broad, unorganized working class — despite the limitations of the SEIU's corporate campaign strategy and the UFCW's failure to mobilize its own members for the Walmart campaign or for broader resistance to the employer offensive in retail.
- The emerging national student movement in higher education against skyrocketing student debt and for increased funding for public colleges and universities has received significant support from higher ed unions and formed the basis of multi-issue coalitions (e.g. ReFund California).
- The electoral victories of socialist Kshama Sawant in Seattle, and of the late Chokwe Lumumba in Jackson, Mississippi, though rooted in particular local conditions, reflect the potential for radical movements to make use of the electoral arena to build power bases across the country.

Our intent in identifying these efforts is not to hold up them up as conclusive models for what unions and community

groups should be doing to build power for the working class, but rather to highlight the valuable opportunities for socialist organizing reflected in recent attempts to mobilize workers and communities.

While it is important to highlight what is new and positive, it is equally necessary to be realistic about present conditions. Notwithstanding the positive developments discussed above, we have yet to see the emergence of transformative, bottom up, classwide struggles that challenge austerity at its core and provide a clear working class political alternative.

Developing the full potential of the various campaigns, struggles and organizational initiatives emerging out of this period will require effective and democratic interventions by the Left, which is still too small and disorganized. So our tasks are twofold: (1) determining what kind of Left interventions are possible and required to radicalize and politicize these movements into transformative class-wide struggles, and (2) building a Labor Left capable of making such interventions.

Contribution of the EcoSocialist Working Group

The last two years saw tremendous growth and radicalization of the climate justice movement globally, but most critically in the United States and Canada, where opposition to fracking as well as the production and shipment of coal and tar sands oil accelerated. Broad coalitions, often backboned by indigenous communities and farmers, continued to delay construction of the Keystone Pipeline. Students confronted university officials with demands to divest fossil fuel stock. Unions began to discuss the right of workers and communities to live in a healthy environment. All this activity was reflected in the massive September 21st People's Climate March of 400,000 in NYC, which was augmented by 2646 solidarity events in 162 countries. In the November 2014 U.S. elections four anti-fracking referendums were passed — despite well-funded opposition. Under pressure, New York State Governor Cuomo was forced to ban fracking.

Communities across the United States — particularly in African-American and indigenous areas — have long fought against the pollution of coal-fired plants and incinerators. Because these polluted industries are most often built in communities of color, these local struggles combine the fight for a healthy environment and the fight against racism. This environmental justice movement has provided a model (See EJ principles: <http://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html>) for communities struggling to protect their water, air and land. However they face relentless pressure from the fossil fuel industry, which plans to move ahead with increased conventional drilling, fracking, pipeline construction, transport of these fuels by rail and expansion of ports for exporting these resources -- and politicians line up to make it all happen.

However a few U.S. cities have moved ahead with plans for a carbon free environment (zero burning of fossil fuels).

Attacked by Investor Owned Electric Companies, financiers and the fossil fuel industry, these cities are carrying out the retrofitting of buildings for efficient energy and the conversion of plants — many municipally owned -- to solar and wind energy. This illustrates that it is lack of political will, not lack of knowledge, that stands in our way.

While the recent drop in global oil prices has resulted in shelving a few of the more costly projects, and layoffs have begun, the fossil fuel industry regards it as a mere pause. How much this will result in consolidating the industry remains unknown, but it will create turmoil in the global financial infrastructure.

Meanwhile scientific data keeps rolling in:

- To avoid catastrophic climate change, 80% of the proven coal, oil and gas reserves must remain in the ground
- Injection wells from fluids from fracking are increasing earthquake activity in Oklahoma, Ohio and Texas
- Melting ice sheets at the poles and other mountainous regions across the globe are both the consequence of climate change and a cause of the warming and rising of oceans and threatening island nations and those who live along the coast
- Droughts and wildfires are increasing, especially in the Western United States and Australia
- Forests (major carbon sequesters) are being destroyed across the globe
- Species diversity has decreased 50% globally in the last 40 years

A recent study estimates that climate-driven changes in evaporation, precipitation and run-off will result in a 40% increase in the number of people worldwide who will suffer

'absolute' water scarcity, disproportionately affecting the already vulnerable.

Hurricane Katrina (2005) resulted in over 1800 deaths, affected 15 million people and caused \$128 billion in damages. Superstorm Sandy (2012) killed at least 286 people across the U.S. Atlantic seaboard, the Caribbean, and Canada, displacing thousands and costing \$70 billion. Typhoon Haiyan (2013), one of the strongest ever recorded, affected 11.8 million people and resulted in more than 6340 dead. Images of climate or extreme extraction events and lackluster government response graphically demonstrate that it is always the poorer parts of communities and nations which are left on their own as climate change takes its toll.

Accompanying this ferment, activity and data is an increasing certainty in the climate justice movement that the major barrier is the capitalist production system itself. Market solutions are inadequate to the twin crises of rising global inequality *and* climate change. Twenty years of failed UN negotiations by world government representatives, wholly captured by corporate interests, are both incapable and unwilling to address these crises. As Bolivia's president, Evo Morales, stated in his address to the most recent UN Summit on Climate Change (COP20) in Lima, Peru "Either we change global capitalist society or it will annihilate the world's peoples and nature itself."

This certainty is also reflected in the publication of two blockbusters about capitalism and its effects – Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* and Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*.

Inspired by the growth of this broader movement to stop fossil fuel industry projects, 350.org called for a demonstration against the Keystone Pipeline XL in Washington DC in February of 2013. Solidarity approached other socialist groups about organizing an ecosocialist contingent. The ISO responded enthusiastically and held a forum beforehand; other socialists marched as well. Out of that collaboration emerged a successful ecosocialist conference that resulted in the formation of System Change Not Climate Change (SCNCC). Still small, SCNCC, along with Global Climate Convergence, worked to organize the Convergence for Climate Conference in New York City the day before the 2014 People's Climate March. Attracting 2500 participants, the conference consisted of over 100 workshops and two plenaries. It reflected the growing and consciously anti-capitalist wing of the climate justice movement.

Although there is a substantial potential for a shift to renewable energy that is not being pursued (<https://web.stanford.edu/group/efmh/jacobson/Articles//sad1109Jaco5p.indd.pdf>), there are conflicting views about whether even the most aggressive move in this direction can sustain the same level of energy usage as the present fossil-fuel based economy (<http://www.greens.org/s-r/60/60-09.html>). In any case, ecosocialists see a fundamental transformation cannot occur under the present economic system. It's clear that capitalism as an economic and

political system has built itself on the exploitation of the majority of the world's people, creating massive inequality. As capitalism uses up finite resources, pollutes, and destroys what is necessary to sustain life it is on a collision course with the earth's eco-system. While defenders of the market maintain capitalism can solve the problems it creates, in fact its relentless drive to find new resources and new markets, expand production and increase profitability is the very source of the problem.

In the struggle to contain the effects of greenhouse gases, we need to acknowledge that globally three billion people lack clean water, food, housing and education. In any transformation we insist that their needs must be the priority. That is, an ecosocialist vision is, above all, an egalitarian vision.

As we struggle for democratic control of energy policies, a number of questions are posed: How can we break with the energy-hungry pace the developed nations have constructed for themselves? Cutting military production and other useless goods will be more or less easy, but in moving toward an egalitarian world what more might be required? How might we reorganize food production, transportation, distribution and the rebuilding of community life. Such a world would have less emphasis on goods and more emphasis on people's ability to create, learn and relax.

As ecosocialists active in the struggle to end capitalism's grip on humanity and the physical world in which we live, we see our immediate tasks as:

- Building a broad movement to confront the climate crisis humanity faces
- Grappling with the difficult programmatic challenges posed by the ecological crisis, including the question of whether and how to envision and work for a less energy-intensive life style in the industrialized world, and one that will enable three billion people access to decent lives
- Working in SCNCC (<http://systemchangenotclimatechange.org/>) to build a pole of attraction to an eco-socialist perspective that would include ending all subsidies to the fossil fuel industry, prioritizing collective and democratic decision-making in the transition to solar and wind energy, demanding a Superfund for workers when their jobs are shut down and until they can be retrained or retire, building mass transit, prioritizing local food production and shutting down the military industry
- Working to build Labor Network for Sustainability (<http://www.labor4sustainability.org/>) and the USLAW (<http://www.uslaboragainstawar.org/>), organizations that are educating unions and working people to climate change issues
- Recruiting people interested in an eco-socialist perspective to Solidarity

Racist Attacks and Struggles of Oppressed Nationalities and Racial Minorities

[The draft of this section is incomplete and awaits further contributions regarding immigration and the devastating social impact of mass incarceration. What follows here is largely contributed by Malik M in response to the initial outline of the document.]

Attacks on the rights of African Americans and other oppressed nationalities and racial minorities have accelerated during the administration of the first African American president, Barack Obama. This has coincided, of course, with the financial collapse, the Great Recession and the widening income gap in the slow recovery. The combined oppression and exploitation of nation minorities applies to working class African Americans and Latinos, Native Peoples, and Asian Americans.

Obama's response has been to peddle a myth that the historic progress won by the civil rights movement (ending legal segregation) meant an end to systemic national oppression. This disguises what the blows suffered by working class and poor Black communities truly are: the reality of combined national oppression and class exploitation.

Indeed, class divisions within the oppressed groups are at their greatest level in the history of the United States. Legal equality for national oppressed and racial minorities means that roughly the wealthiest 20 percent of each nationality and ethnic group have been able to assimilate into the elites that serve the ruling class.

Every social and economic statistic shows that the gap between working class whites and working class Blacks, Latinos, Native peoples and Asian Americans has also widened – even though almost all sectors of the working class have seen declines in real wages, job security and living conditions.

The origins of massive capital creation and wealth in the United States are based on slavery. The national oppression and superexploitation of freed slaves and other oppressed peoples continued, as successive generations and new immigrant groups were incorporated into a stratified economy. The end of legal segregation did not end this economic divide; only a radical transformation — the end of capitalism — can do so.

Police brutality and the workings of the criminal justice system naturally accompany the growth of inequality. The events in Ferguson and the refusal to indict the police killer of Michael Brown have thrown into relief the issues confronting Black America: police impunity, economic devastation, rampant racial profiling (Ferguson and similar municipalities finance themselves from the proceeds of DWB arrests), in addition to the catastrophic effects of mass incarceration.

The systematic and deliberate destruction of public education disproportionately affects communities of color, as well as poor people in general and of course teachers. The raft of voter suppression laws in strategic states, and the use of municipal bankruptcies and (especially in the Michigan case) Emergency Manager laws, negates the

democratic rights of those affected, the great majority of whom are people of color, and is intended to blunt the political impact of the United States' transition to a majority-nonwhite country.

The Growing Resistance

The positive side of U.S. social decline and crisis is the growth of resistance, much of it youth-led. A significant development has been the emergence of a number of new organizations and vibrant online publications (including immigrant rights groups, Organization for Black Struggle and Ferguson October, MXGM, Black Left Unity Network, Black Agenda Report and others).

The Black Lives Matter and Dreamers-led pro immigration movements are powerful examples of the oppressed taking the Lead in their battle for full equality, economic justice and an end to institutional racial discrimination. They reject waiting for the status quo to change and relying on the two major capitalist parties.

Native peoples have publically pressed for their rights. The push to end anti-Indian names of sports teams (e.g. Washington Redskins) is gaining wider support. Asian Americans (particularly Chinese, South Asian and Southeast Asian) have advanced their fight for equality and exposed the myth of the “model ethnic” group. Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indians face anti-Muslim hysteria -- even when they are not Moslems.

Arab Americans and Middle East immigrants are standing up to Islamophobia and challenging the “anti-terrorism” ideology that targets all Muslims and those who look Arab. The support for the family of the three young Muslims assassinated in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, is a significant change for the community.

Young Muslims are leading the push back to hate crimes against their community. While Black lives (especially male youth and adults) are valued less than whites, Brown lives also are valued less -- and Muslims are experiencing the same reality.

In struggles of national minorities the issue of race and racism will always take center stage. It's no surprise that African Americans must self-educate themselves about racist treatment by cops and employers. “Hands Up, Don't Shoot” is not a sign of submission or retreat, but of defiance.

African Americans and Latinos are standing up to the ruling class and its two parties with determination and daring. The dreamers showed the way as undocumented young people organize d mass marchers and rallies for full citizenship. Black youth in Ferguson and New York City did the same. Obama's executive action on deportation deferral – long overdue and grossly inadequate as it is – has put the

immigration struggle on the front burner of politics for the remainder of this administration, and probably longer. This above all is a testament to the courage and determination of young undocumented activists.

By delaying action (for opportunist electoral reasons) until the Republicans took complete control of Congress, the president has put at risk the lives and security of millions of families who are eligible to apply for relief from deportation. It is all the more important that the immigrant activist groups themselves take the lead – and get support from progressive-minded white people, including unionists.

The legacy of the Obama presidency is already two fold— opening the door for a resurgent racist white supremacist ideology that dominates the Republican Party to roll back civil rights victories and civil liberties; and at the same time, the rise of a new generation of radicalizing Black and Latino activists.

There is the potential to build a broad-based movement for full equality and against racist practices of the state. Socialists in particular actively support the new radicalism and must be active participants in each and every battle against national oppression and class exploitation

Report on Philadelphia Actions Around Mike Brown./Eric Garner Murders by Paul P., Philadelphia

Hello comrades,

I wasn't able to be on the call last week about the recent protests around Mike Brown and Eric Gardner. I figured I would send a report about what has been happening in Philly. My viewpoint is limited because I have not been to the most recent actions after the Eric Gardner decision came through. I went to the protest that was called for the night of the decision to not indict Darren Wilson. A few hundred people came out, mostly youth and very mixed racially. Just like many of the other demos people have described across the country, it was more energetic, spontaneous, and militant than most things that have gone on recently. After the planned march around the downtown area, we decided to keep it going and went to various other parts of the city. The whole thing wound up going on for about 5 hours and the crowd got larger as time went on. Not to overstate it, but people were generally more confrontational with the cops. This included many people beyond the white anarchists who are typically the ones doing that.

The next day there was another march that had been planned more in advance and was larger. Again, a lot of youth who I had never seen before and the spirit was militant. Since the Eric Gardner decision there has been another wave of actions. Die-ins were organized by students at Temple University and University of Penn, and also by Philadelphia high school students led by the Philadelphia Student Union. Several hundred people also attended a die-in last Sunday at the football stadium after an Eagles game.

The youth who have been some of the main activists in these actions were the same students who were organizing to get Dr. Anthony Monteiro reinstated last spring. For a long time Workers World (and Party for Socialism and Liberation more recently) have put themselves at the head of whatever anti-racist work goes on locally. The same thing has happened, except

now there are more people involved than normal. Although they have been controlling the logistics and "leading" many of these actions, they do not have the allegiance of these new young activists who are getting involved. A few of the students who worked on the campaign to reinstate Dr. Monteiro were recruited to PSL but no one else has joined beyond that. In the past, after some uptick in activity there are almost always competing "forums" on the issue by Workers World, the ISO, and PSL. Nothing ever amounts to them and it's on to the next thing. The same seems to be the case this time around, and it remains to be seen whether this movement will survive that kind of sectarianism or it will fizzle out.

There was a town hall meeting recently that was apparently very well attended, with another one coming up. Another thing to note is how the Philadelphia Student Union has been re-energized by all of this, staging many walk-outs and die-ins. They of course will be a crucial component of the fight for public education. As I've mentioned before, the new caucus in the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers has been slowly gaining steam in the last few months. The caucus is trying to make anti-racism a big part of its practice and identity, and many of the key activists have been involved with these anti-police brutality protests.

There seems to be a feeling among many that this movement is like another phase of Occupy, with no clear idea of where it might go next. I agree with many others that this has been significant for the energy and militancy it has brought, and the many youth who have been involved, even if it doesn't last much longer.

Although the protests have been more sizeable than things that have gone on very recently, at least in Philly there still has not been great depth in turn-out from the black community. I will try to keep everyone posted as things develop.

Solidarity Should Support a Single, Democratic and Secular Palestine

by Barry S. Bay Area

The “two-state solution” regarding Israel/Palestine was always a fraud, along with the “peace process” initiated with the Oslo Accords of almost a quarter century ago. It’s been a fraud in two ways.

One is that both Israel and the U.S. have always made clear that any Palestinian “state” would have no armed forces other than a police force. Israel, not Palestine, would control its borders, including with Jordan and Egypt. Moreover, it would not be allowed an independent foreign policy. It would be a Bantustan at best.

The other way it has been a fraud is that the slogan and the fake “peace process” has simply been a political cover for the Washington-backed Israeli systematic expansion into the West Bank, which has made any sort of a Palestinian state impossible.

What Israel and the U.S. want is the status quo. This status quo is not a static one, but one of continuous expansion of Israeli “settlements,” roads, checkpoints, wall etc. into the West Bank, all under the cover of a supposed “peace process” that drags on for decades while the reality on the ground belies it.

Netanyahu has now made it crystal clear that the “two-state solution” is dead in the water, even for those on the left who held out hope for it. Washington is annoyed, because its cover of endorsing the “peace process” while backing Israel’s aggressions in what are euphemistically called the “occupied territories” has been blown.

Noting that fact in an op-ed in the *New York Times*, the Palestinian executive director of the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation Yousef Munayyer writes: “Two years ago Secretary of State John Kerry declared that the maximum time left for a two-state solution was two years.... The two-state solution, which has seen more funerals than a reverend, exists today only as a talking point for self-interested, craven politicians to hide behind – not as a realistic basis for peace. *The old land-for-peace model must now be replaced with a rights-for-peace model. Palestinians must demand the right to live on their land, but also free movement, equal treatment under the law, due process, voting rights and freedom from discrimination* [my emphasis, BS].

The facts are that greater Israel has been a single state for many decades, encompassing all the land between the Mediterranean to the Jordan River, and between Syria and Egypt, including Gaza and the West Bank. The Israeli state guards these borders (with the sole exception being the Egyptian border with Gaza, guarded for Israel by the military dictatorship in Egypt) with its army, air force and war ships in the Mediterranean. These armed forces are the only ones existent within these borders, an obvious characteristic of a state. The “Green Line” does not define this state’s borders. Besides ruling over its real borders with its own armed forces, this single state also has a single

currency, a single government, a single system of laws, and one foreign policy. It has waged wars within and outside its real borders during the years of the “peace process.”

This single state is also an apartheid state, ruling over millions of people since 1967 (48 years!) who are denied citizenship and the rights Munayyer demands above (and others, such as the right to return of the Palestinian Diaspora). The West Bank is riddled with Jewish “settlements,” whose members (totaling one-half million and growing) are Israeli citizens who voted in the recent election. What’s left of the West Bank is crisscrossed by roads connecting the “settlements” with “green line” Israel and between themselves, and checkpoints guarded by Israeli troops. The Israeli armed forces go wherever they want among Palestinian towns and cities, arrest whomever they want, shoot protesters including children and in general are the ugly jack boots of occupation. They are aided in this through “security arrangements” whereby the Palestinian Authority functions to police the West Bank for Israel. In Gaza, Israel has imposed a blockade by land and sea, and every few years “mows the lawn” and wreaks mass destruction and murder. Food, water and shelter are scarce. Travel is highly restricted. Israel controls who can even enter Gaza from other countries.

Within the “green line” Palestinians are nominally Israeli citizens. But they are discriminated against economically and politically, as Netanyahu made clear in his election campaign rant in one of the West Bank “settlements.”

“One state” is already the reality. The question left open is will it continue to be an apartheid state or a democratic one for all the people who live there?

We should come out for the later option. More specifically, we should be for a democratic, secular Palestine. Democratic, in that all its peoples would be citizens, with full democratic rights, including the right to vote (One Person, One Vote!), to travel freely, be equal under the law, have due process, and be free from discrimination, as Munayyer says.

It would be secular, that is not a Jewish, Muslim or any other religious state. There would be freedom of religion for all. It would be inclusive of all peoples, including the Jewish and Palestinian peoples, Druze, and all its citizens.

Moshe Machovar, an anti-Zionist Jewish Israeli citizen, objects to this demand, claiming that there is no force in Israel to support such a state. While it is true that there is no mass movement at this time raising this demand, there is a mass constituency in Israel which has an objective interest in supporting such a state: The millions of Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and within the “green line.”

The millions in the Palestinian Diaspora also have a direct interest in such a state, and they have influence in the Arab countries.

Given the failure of the “two state” solution, plain for all Palestinians to see, we can expect in the next years more and more will come to embrace the fight for a democratic, secular Palestine. This is already happening in discussions among Palestinian thinkers, as can be seen in Munayyer’s column.

Moreover, the idea was originally adopted by Fateh when it was formed in the second half of the 1960s. In fact, it was the original Palestinian liberation movement which first popularized it. While Fateh degenerated, this is part of the movement’s memory, and can become an attractive force once again.

Palestinians raising this demand of a “rights for peace model,” as Munayyer puts it, would also begin the appeal to Israeli Jews who begin to recoil from the reality of a de facto if not formalized apartheid state. It exposes the fact that Israel is not a democracy for all its subjects, a reality that cuts across democratic sentiments of many Israeli Jews. A secular state would also appeal to many Israeli Jews, including women, who chaff under those Israeli laws that dictate religious rules.

Another aspect of raising the secular state demand is that it counters both anti-Semitism (Jew hatred) and

Islamophobia. This would be attractive to people worldwide, including in the U.S.

In the U.S., the “two-state, single democratic state” discussion has already begun among supporters of the BDS movement, as well as within Jewish groups opposed to Israeli crimes and wars. We should be part of that discussion.

The proposal for a democratic, secular state also undercuts Zionist propaganda. The *Times* printed a letter from a Zionist in response to Munayyer’s column. The response consisted of the tired refrain that it is the Palestinian’s fault that the “peace process” is going nowhere, *but did not answer Munayyer’s proposal at all*. Why? Because the Zionist are embarrassed to say they are against democracy. They fear above all Palestinians beginning to raise “One Person One Vote!”

There is only one argument the Zionists have against it. That is, to grant Palestinians citizenship would mean the end of the Jewish state.

This is also the real argument of Washington. Supporting a democratic, secular Palestine undercuts Washington’s continued financial, military and intelligence backing of the apartheid state. It is in the whole left’s interest here to do so.