

# **FIGHT TO WIN: A STRATEGY FOR WORKING PEOPLE**

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**W**orking people are under attack as never before. Wage-tiers are being imposed on workers to divide the generations; many younger workers scarcely make subsistence wages, while retirees' pensions and health care are under being undermined. Families are being forced into bankruptcy by medical bills, while millions more are forced to go without medical insurance or adequate care. Huge numbers of blue-collar and white collar jobs are being outsourced overseas, never to return. Teachers and students in our public schools are under unremitting attack by corporate-driven education reforms, while a college education is increasingly priced out of reach of working families. The government is robbing us of Constitutional freedoms in the name of "the war on terror," while the society becomes more unequal and undemocratic. Meanwhile the government sends our young men and women to a war based on lies and turns Iraq into a slaughterhouse, causing untold suffering to innocent people.

Seldom in our history has the future looked so grim for working people. We need a strategy, a plan to defend ourselves from the corporate and government onslaught and a way to turn the country around.

## **BETRAYED BY OUR "FRIENDS"**

One thing in the situation is clear: the institutions on which working people have depended in the past have utterly failed to defend them.

The Democratic Party has eagerly supported the war in Iraq, the Patriot Act, gigantic arms budgets, savage cuts in social programs, shifting tax burdens onto working people, NAFTA and now CAFTA, outsourcing jobs, attacking public education, rewriting bankruptcy laws to benefit credit card companies.

The role of the Democratic Party has not been to defend workers but to divide and demobilize them, persuading them to rely on politicians rather than building a movement using their own collective strength.

The AFL-CIO has worked with corporations to undermine workers, sabotaging strikes from PATCO and Hormel to Caterpillar, Accuride, and the Southern California grocery workers. It has replaced shop-floor worker solidarity with worker-against-worker Company Teams. It supports the war-makers in DC and channels workers into the Democratic Party scam.

The problem with the unions, as with the Democratic Party, is not that they are weak but that they are on the wrong side. They have become tools of management, designed to suck the power from workers and keep them under control.

This is not a new development. Thousands of working people gave their sweat and blood to build the first industrial unions in the U.S. Once the CIO unions were established, however, the leaders changed from militant organizers to contract administrators working with management to ensure production. To gain greater control of the members, union officials discouraged membership participation and undermined shop-floor solidarity. Union officials turned from organizing workers against the company to managing workers for the company.

The unions are now intertwined with the corporations whose profitability and power they promote. In the competitive marketplace of global capitalism, the unions role is to help pit workers against each other in the race to the bottom. There is no other role that unions tied to capitalism can play.

Meanwhile most working people, blue-collar and white-collar, employed and unemployed, remain unorganized and largely defenseless.

The Democratic Party and the unions are part of the problem. We cannot rely on them and we cannot change them. We have to go around them, to create institutions that we control to fight for the values, the livelihoods, the future of working people.

## **THE STRENGTH OF WORKING PEOPLE**

The power of working people never really came from union structures and officialdom in the first place. Workers' power has always come from the friendships and solidarity and commitment of the workers themselves. This solidarity has long been under attack from company and union alike in the form of "Teamwork," "competitiveness," "two-tier wage scales," and a dozen other schemes to pit worker against worker. In spite of these attacks on their relationships, however, there are still millions of good people on our jobs who believe in solidarity and who support their fellow workers. There are millions who stand up to the boss, who resist speed-up and job-loading, who refuse overtime when there are people without work, who are there when friends need a helping hand or sympathetic ear.

Working class solidarity is still there in our workplaces, in our families, in our communities—in all the relationships by which working people, whether blue collar or white, have always sustained themselves in the face of attacks by the powerful. It is the greatest weapon that we have. It is time that we reclaim our solidarity and put it to use.

Solidarity is the basis of strength. People fight back when they feel strong. They feel strong only when they feel connected to other people who share their goals.

The key strategy of the ruling class is to chip away at our connections with each other, to divide us, weaken us, make us feel alone. This paper is about reconnecting workers with each other, in order to rebuild the strength that we have lost and to gain a whole new level of workers power.

The first step in building effective resistance to the companies, the unions, and the government is to build strong solidarity connections. We should connect good people within our plants, within our hospitals and offices and schools, and from plant to plant and school to school; we should connect the struggles, from the smallest to the largest, which go on everyday; we should promote job fights and solidarity on the shop floor, from plant to plant, from industry to industry, and from country to country; and we should challenge the capitalist business system which underlies the attacks on ordinary people.

This strategy of making connections requires

creating a new kind of organization. The new organization must:

- be independent of the unions;
- build solidarity across plants, across industries, across races and genders, across employed and unemployed, across generations, across borders;

- not try to change the unions, not run candidates for office, not negotiate contracts, not urge the un-

ions to act but take action itself;

- fight to win the class war.

This organization should aim in the short term to unite working people in their workplaces and communities to resist corporate power and the grip of capitalism on their lives. In the long term it should aim to defeat capitalist power and create a true democracy based on equality and solidarity. (In the following pages we describe this new kind of organization in greater detail.)

To see the possibility of a way out of our long history of defeat, we need a new philosophy, a new way of seeing the world; in particular, we need a new way of looking at ourselves and each other, to realize that we are capable of these world-shaking things.

In the following pages we will describe this new way of seeing the world and how it leads to a winning strategy. We hope also to show that this new philosophy is really just common sense.

## WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

Every great movement has behind it a Big Idea, a powerful vision that unites people from many different backgrounds in spite of their minor differences and inspires them for battle.

New Democracy has a Big Idea that we consider to be the starting point of a new kind of movement. We don't claim that this idea is new, but that its importance has often been overlooked.

*The basis for a new and better world lives in the values of ordinary working people.*

The Big Idea is simply that the people who do the productive labor of society—who mine its coal, build its cars, care for its sick, teach its children—have goals and values which fundamentally conflict with the goals and values of the class of people who control the society and reap the rewards of this labor, and that people struggle to achieve their goals in every area of their lives—with their co-workers, their husbands and wives and children, their friends and neighbors, their patients and students. These goals taken together constitute a different vision of what human life should be, a different idea of what it means to be a human being, from the vision of the ruling elite of war-makers and Wall Street financiers. The basis for a new and better world lives in the values of ordinary working people.

This may be a very different way of looking at society from the usual one, but we think it is also pretty commonsensical. This understanding of people is also what makes us think we can change the world.

Here's what we mean. The capitalist system we live in is the most powerful social system in human history. (By capitalism, we mean a social system where goods are produced for profit rather than for their usefulness for people). Its basic principle is competition, the dynamic of dog-eat-dog. The logic of capitalism is that this world should be a loveless and savage place; we should all be trying to screw each other all the time. But you can look around and see that this is not so. You can see that most people, in important parts of their lives—with their wife or husband or children, their friends or co-workers—struggle against the culture of competition and inequality to create relationships based on love and trust and solidarity. Most people try to shape the little piece of the world that they think they can control into a better world.

This struggle often may not get very far: capitalism has devastating effects on people. But to the extent that people have any positive relationships in their lives, they have created them by a struggle against capitalist culture. This means that most people

are already engaged in a struggle against capitalism. People's everyday lives have revolutionary meaning. Only the revolutionary transformation of society can fulfill the aspirations of the great majority of people. The "silent majority" wants a new world.

When people see how much others share their values, their idea of how much of the world they can change grows. When they gain enough confidence, they build movements. When people's faith in each other grows large enough, they make revolutions.

The crucial factor for people to succeed in creating a better world is to be aware that they—not

political or business elites or union leaders—are the source of the good in society, and that other people share their goal of creating a new society. To succeed in their struggle, they need to be aware of its real significance.

An old slogan of the labor move-

ment—not heard much anymore, unfortunately—was, "Labor Creates All Wealth." This is true on many levels. Workers through their labor don't just create the material bases of human life. Ordinary people, whether blue collar or white, whether working in a mine or school or laboratory, in their daily struggle to provide for their families, to create loving and committed relationships with each other, to stand up for their own values in the face of the selfish values of the powerful, to do what they see as the right thing, produce not only material wealth but also the positive, life-supporting and life-affirming values in society.

The people who create the good in this society are capable of producing a new and better one. The great and respected "leaders" at the pinnacle of our society—the Presidents and Congressmen and corporate and party leaders and AFL-CIO hacks — are obstacles to our success.

### **SOLIDARITY VALUES**

The struggle in the workplace is part of a class war throughout society over what values will shape it,

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what goals it will pursue, and who will control it.

On one side stand corporate leaders, government officials, and the masters of great wealth. They value inequality, competition, and dictatorial control. They slash wages, ship jobs overseas, pit worker against worker in bloody wars to control us.

On the other side stand working people, who believe in equality, solidarity, and control from below. Every time workers slow down, or refuse overtime, or support each other on or off the job, or work to benefit of other people, or create supportive relationships with family and friends, they are resisting capitalist power and expressing their belief in the anti-capitalist values of equality and solidarity.

This struggle over what values should shape society is part of the very fabric of life.

### **THE MEANING OF CLASS STRUGGLE**

The behavior of workers in strike after strike makes clear that, while wages or working conditions are usually the occasions for strikes and other working class struggle, the real meaning of class struggle goes much deeper and leads workers to make sacrifices all out of proportion to any economic gain they might possibly achieve.

Look, for example, at the Detroit newspaper strike. The economically rational thing for each individual involved in that strike would have been to scab, and in fact a number of workers did cross the picket line. The motivations of the people who remained on strike obviously went far deeper than personal gain. They were willing to sacrifice their own and their families' comfort and security for over a year because they felt that their most fundamental values and beliefs about who they are and what human life should be like were at stake.

New Democracy wrote in an Open Letter to the strikers:

Your strike is not only a battle over a contract but part of a war between working people and owners everywhere. It is a war

over what moral vision should shape our lives and our society: the capitalist values of greed and selfishness and inequality and competition, or the working class values of solidarity and equality and commitment to future generations.

**The most intimate acts of personal kindness and the most public acts of class war are on a continuum of struggle by working people to shape the world with working class values of equality and solidarity and democracy.**

This strike may have seemed to be just a struggle for a better contract. In fact it was implicitly revolutionary, a struggle over what values should shape society. This is why the strikers were willing to sacrifice so

much.

Strikes and other collective forms of struggle are just the most obvious and public forms of a class struggle which is being waged every day in every shop and office and in every other place where human beings interact. The most intimate acts of personal kindness and the most public acts of class war are on a continuum of struggle by working people to shape the world with working class values of equality and solidarity and democracy. At stake in this war is not just a division of the wealth of society. At stake is the shape and meaning of human life.

The stakes in the class war are deeply felt by working people but rarely articulated. A critical part of capitalist strategy in suppressing working people is to define the struggle in society as merely one of special interests "dividing the pie." Capitalists hope in this way to get us to feel that "other people's troubles don't concern me"—the opposite of the working class belief that "An injury to one is an injury to all."

How do labor reformers describe the stakes in the class war? Since activists almost never talk openly about the class war, it is difficult to answer that question. But it is fair to say that labor reformers have generally gone along with the game plan of the capitalists. They never say that capitalism is the enemy, and they never say that much more is at stake in a strike than the obvious contract issues. They aren't in the habit of looking beyond the obvious issues to ask what's really motivating the

strikers.

Instead they minimize workers' goals rather than maximizing them. They say that workers "just want their fair share." In so doing they agree with the capitalists that the class war is just about money. They fail to express the nobility and heroism of people's struggles. They never get to the living, human heart of the matter.

The future of our children and the direction of our society depend on the outcome of the class war. Will our society be one of increasing inequality and desperation, where the greediest prosper and many working people are crushed? Or will it be one in which people support each other and work freely together to build a better world?

A movement which explains the real issues in the class war can reach into the deepest recesses of people's feelings and their most powerful motivations. Such a movement will be able to reach an extraordinarily wide range of people, not limited by our workplace or gender or the color of our collars or the color of our skin, or even by the flags our rulers use to divide us. Such a movement can reach deep enough to unite all working people in a struggle to achieve our most profound goals as human beings. The more revolutionary the movement, the more popular and powerful it will be.

### NAMING THE ENEMY

We live in an economic and social system which has powerful effects on every aspect of our lives. It determines who holds power in our society, what jobs or education or health care are available to us and our children, or whether our future will be shaped by peace or war. And yet any discussion of the capitalist system is out of bounds, except to say, "God bless our capitalist system" or to identify capitalism with democracy.

We have allowed the enemy that surrounds us on all sides and assaults us everyday to hide in plain sight. Capitalism is a system whose principles are

competition, inequality, and anti-democracy, in which every human value, every decent relationship, every hope for the future is under assault.

Like Communism, capitalism is thoroughly anti-human. The profound problems society faces cannot be solved without getting rid of capitalism.

Many of us understand that we are involved in a "class war"—the events of the

past few years have made this pretty clear—but we never name the enemy. We don't talk about capitalism or explain the nature of the capitalist system or show the relationship of particular companies like GM or Ford to the system as a whole. Instead we avoid naming the enemy, and come up with inadequate and misleading code words like "corporate greed." But just condemning "corporate greed" is a dangerous tactic, for it suggests that capitalism is OK—as long as it doesn't get too greedy.

How can we fight an enemy that we don't name? How can we help others to fight—to be clear on the scope and meaning of the conflict and on the tasks necessary to win—if we don't name the enemy? Just by naming the enemy we gain some measure of power over it.

Naming the enemy is the first step in defeating it. Only by naming the enemy can we spread an understanding of the fight to millions of other working people who will join the struggle and multiply our ranks. Only by naming the enemy can we have open and democratic discussion of what it will take to wage the fight.

Building a working class movement means helping each other understand everything that can be understood about the class war: who we are fighting, what is at stake, what are our goals, how do we achieve victory. No democratic movement can be built without this understanding. Any movement that conceals its views on these profound questions from the people it is seeking to reach is not democratic but is instead manipulating people.

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Corporate America and the AFL-CIO leadership for years have promoted the idea that, "What's good for General Motors (or Ford or IBM or Hormel) is good for the country." "Team-work" and "jointness" and "Total Quality Management" (TQM) are built on the idea that workers and companies have the same basic interests, and the role of the union is just to negotiate the details. Any position which does not attack capitalism and the capitalist class does not answer the argument that "Generous Motors" is the source of the good things in life and needs our cooperation to remain "competitive." It is impossible to defeat "the company team" unless we show that workers and capitalists have nothing in common and that capitalism is a system of exploitation which must be opposed.

Naming the class enemy is also crucial for overcoming the idea that working people are a "special interest." If the enemy is defined as just Hormel or Staley or the Detroit News, then the strikers can be attacked as a greedy "special interest" by a company "struggling to stay competitive."

People need to know that they are not alone in their fight. To declare that we are fighting the system is to begin to unite with the vast majority of people who are under attack by the same system and who want something better.

It's true that workers in some strikes during the past two decades have received tremendous support from other working people. But this support has been almost entirely limited to money and food to sustain the strikes. In no instance have the strikes spread to other companies or other sectors. Fighting one company at a time while the class enemy attacks the whole working class isolates and contains workers' struggles, so that one by one they go down to defeat.

To win the fight we have to spread it. To spread it, we have to declare that we are fighting not just this company or that but a capitalist ruling class.

If we don't name the enemy, then the ruling class certainly will. Who will it be? The people of Iraq? Iran? China?

Naming the capitalist class as the real enemy shows that change is possible. If we think that the

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enemy is "human nature" or "the tides of history" or "just the way things are," then we can't win. If instead we see that our problems stem from a small elite who have devised

a brutal and undemocratic system as a means to maintain their power, then we can see that there is nothing inevitable or permanent about capitalism. Once we identify the capitalist class as the enemy, we can imagine a world without them. We can imagine democracy.

### **THE LEGACY OF MARXISM**

The things we are proposing seem so obvious in a war—name the enemy, explain the stakes, expose the traitors, link up the good people, build solidarity, fight to win—that the question has to be asked, "Why aren't we doing these things now?"

While the answer to this question is complicated, there is one key factor that has had a profound influence on how we see the political possibilities of our situation. This factor has prevented our taking the steps we must to achieve our goals.

Labor activists by and large are still dominated by the legacy of Marxism. This legacy has two critical effects. One is that they hesitate to challenge capitalism openly for fear of being called socialists or Communists. (Some activists do in fact subscribe to these philosophies, which makes their situation doubly difficult.)

The other is that the Marxist legacy has left them with a low estimate of people. Even many labor activists who do not consider themselves Marxists are still much influenced by negative Marxist assumptions about people.

Let me explain. Marx aimed to create a "science of revolution" based on supposed laws of economics and history which operate independent of human intentions. To create his science, Marx accepted certain assumptions about human beings;

in particular, he accepted the capitalist idea that "each individual seeks *only* his particular interest" (Marx's emphasis). Marx believed that workers and capitalists have the same values and that, like capitalists, workers are motivated primarily by self-interest. He believed with the capitalists that history is driven by economic development, which in turn is driven by greed. Unlike the capitalists, however, Marx maintained that greed leads not to permanence but to revolution, as workers driven by economic desperation revolt against the system.

But working people in fact do not have the same values as capitalists. The class war is a struggle over different value systems and different ideas of how human beings should relate to each other. The values of solidarity and equality are not unmixed in working people's lives, and the farther one goes up the educational and career ladder, the more training and pressure there are to conform to competitive values. But whatever relationships of commitment, trust, and mutual support people have in their lives, they have created by a struggle against a capitalist culture which is profoundly hostile to them. Solidarity and equality are the bases of every working class struggle for a better world. These values do not drop from the sky, and they do not come from union officials or organizers or from "economic conditions." They are rooted in the social relations of the working class. It is only on the basis of working class values that working class movements can be formed.

The assumption that working people seek only their own self-interest has made the labor reform movement blind to the values which are central to people's lives and actions. Because labor activists for the most part are trained to believe that workers have only their own personal interests at heart, they don't raise large social goals that go beyond self-interest and call upon people's deepest values. Because they are convinced that people think with their bellies, they don't raise big ideas or tap into the huge reservoir of class understanding and experience that workers represent. The failure of the labor reform movement to name the enemy or explain the stakes in the class

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struggle or expose the AFL-CIO or fight to win—the failure, in short, to be a revolutionary movement—is deeply rooted in the negative view of working people which labor reformers have inherited from Marxism.

To build a movement of all working people, we have first to see working people with fresh understanding and respect. A new understanding of working people will open up a whole new world of revolutionary possibilities.

## **THE ORGANIZATION**

To build a real solidarity movement we need a new kind of organization.

1. The new organization must be independent of the unions. The unions separate workers by trade, by local, by industry, in a million different ways in top-down organizations. They do this for the purpose of control, a strategy as old as "divide and conquer." Real worker solidarity threatens union power. It cannot be built through union structures.
2. The new organization must build solidarity across plants, across industries, across employed and unemployed, across generations, across borders. A historic example of building solidarity was centered in Decatur, IL where Caterpillar workers began their own publication, "Kick the Cat," to build solidarity among the striking Cat plants throughout the Midwest and the country. KTC had an enormous effect on the years-long struggle. Its success lay in the fact that it went outside the union structure to put its hard-hitting expose of Caterpillar and the International UAW in the hands of UAW members at all the plants. (The irony is that one of the founders of KTC, Larry Solomon, was at the time the president of the Local 751. Larry found he had to bypass that structure to build solidarity.)

3. The new organization must not try to change the unions, not run candidates for office, not negotiate contracts, not urge the unions to act but take action itself. How much time and effort and how many good people have

been wasted trying to change the unions? The fact is that the unions can't be changed. Through labor law, structure, and the logic of business competition, they are part of the capitalist economy. No matter how principled and honest a union leader might be, there is no way he or she can avoid the forces of global competition and automation. Union elections and running candidates for office have poisonous effects on solidarity. Good people elected to union office get sucked into the pro-company culture of union officialdom, while union members who backed the successful candidate just grow more cynical about the possibility of change.

Calling on union leaders to act is futile and is based on a wrong idea of where members' power comes from. It is the members who have the real power, based on their solidarity. The only way to unleash that power is for them to take action themselves. The most important action to take initially is just to get organized—to start talking solidarity and linking up with people and recruiting them into the organization. The more people are linked up, the more ideas people will have about taking direct solidarity actions, such as slow-downs, work to rule, strikes, or other forms of building our strength.

4. The new organization must fight to win the class war. By openly declaring our goals to be victory in the class war, we will change the whole nature of the game. For the first time, we'll be able to put the capitalist class on the defensive. We'll be challenging everything about this brutal system that uses people up and spits them out.

Because labor reform movements are so obviously inadequate to the task of fighting the class enemy, the reformers fail to attract the massive numbers of working people who are disgusted with the direction of the unions and whose participation in a movement to create a new and powerful movement

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is essential if we are to win. Only a revolutionary appeal can engage people in the numbers and depth we need.

Our real power to build a new movement lies in the fact that most people share the dream of a better

world. The only way to realize this enormous potential power is by openly declaring our goals for a new world, so that together we can build a movement to achieve one.

We should build a movement that challenges the goals, plans, values, social vision and power of capitalism with the values and vision and power of working people, and that aims to destroy capitalist domination and establish society on a truly democratic basis. When millions of working people in their factories, their offices, their schools, their libraries, their hospitals, their mines, their universities understand that only the values and ideals of working people can offer a promising future to human society, then we will make a revolution.—

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