

WORKERS SOLIDARITY

Issue 3

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Welcome to another issue of *Workers Solidarity*, a publication of the Workers Solidarity Alliance.

On the following pages, please find a number of interesting articles about the on-going class struggle here in North America and around the world --- and the grassroots efforts to win these fights.

As well as covering events, some of our authors lay out concrete thoughts on how to build a radical new movement.

In addition to our original articles, we reprint a thought-provoking article written by the New York City based National Mobilization Against Sweatshops.

This article on workers centers provides an interesting analysis and observations, but creates an unnecessary divide. A divide between workers centers and, as WSA describes them, self-managed unions.

In his reply, Bert argues that self-managed unions and workers centers are complementary. A viewpoint we also share.

The article implies that the workers centers are the new, and ostensibly the only, way forward. The implication being that unionism, even a radical, self-managed unionism is outdated. While we may agree with the criticisms of a reformist "collective bargaining" style of trade unionism, we do not reject the concept of unionism. After all, it means working together, in union.

We do not make a division between unions vs. workers centers, but between rank and file,

controlled unions and workers centers opposed to centralized and bureaucratic unions and hierarchal workers centers.

Instead we promote a self-managed unionism as the most appropriate form in building a new labor movement. We would agree with the author's in that "this new labor movement be built on an independent way of thinking ... At the core of this new way of thinking is the self-organization of workers to fight for their needs independent of the needs and ideas of the corporations."

Our experiences have shown us that it is not the specific tactical or organizational form or name that we use. The key is whether or not the struggle and organization is controlled by the members. This is the fundamental question.

We hope these articles will both inspire and lead to an on-going discussion on how to build a self-managed and radical working class movement.



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Workers' Centers & the New Labor Movement

By NMASS

The international economy is going through a period of profound restructuring, and everywhere we look the organization of work and production is changing. With few exceptions, these changes have been a nightmare for working people. Hundreds of thousands of US workers have seen their jobs eliminated by new technology and the reorganization of production. Large manufacturing sites are being replaced by smaller, dispersed shops - among these a revitalized network of sweatshops that exploit immigrant labor in a growing, unregulated, underground economy.

The US labor force is being increasingly transformed into a contingency workforce; part-time, temporary and contract jobs now comprise a third of the workforce in the US and more than half of the new employment created each year. A disproportionate percentage of this workforce are women, people of color, and immigrants.

The lack of organized response to this process of economic and political restructuring has been as striking as its destructive impact. Today less than 12% of private sector workers are in unions and even management cooperation schemes and to employer sanctions against undocumented workers highlights the source of their failure to respond: the fact that they take their ideological lead from big business. Similarly, during the fight over NAFTA, unions lined up with one section of capital against another instead of siding with workers here and abroad.

Immigrant workers, workers of color and women workers, whose experiences have given them a deeper sense of what it means to be exploited, have naturally taken the lead among those seeking an independent way forward - and have thus more often been at the center of the workers' center phenomenon.

These workers' centers can be at the center of building a new labor movement because they provide a clear vision about the source of the recent attacks on workers and how to respond. And this new

labor movement built on an independent way of thinking should encompass not just the groups mentioned above but all workers. At the core of this new way of thinking is the self-organization of workers to fight for their needs independent of the needs and ideas of the corporations.

Workers' centers will play a major role in building the new labor movement. To advance this movement we need to come together and share with one another and with those interested in learning about this model, the lessons of our experience in building centers. Among their characteristics are:

Workers' centers are multi-trade: By organizing across trades and across industries - and organizing unemployed, underemployed, and never employed workers - workers' centers allow workers to strategize and mobilize around their common class interests. This multi-trade character allows them to go beyond collective bargaining struggles over particular interests to fight together around common economic, social and political issues.

Workers' centers link up workers where they work and where they live: Workers' centers organize workers as members of a community and as members of a class, not solely as employees in a single workplace or industry. This enables members to draw on their social power both where they work and where they live in fighting for their rights and furthermore enables them to gather together to analyze collectively how the two spheres are linked.

Workers' centers are fighting organizations: Workers' centers are organizations of struggle. They are not service providers, advocacy groups, or training centers - although they will use all these things in the course of their fight. They are places where workers can come together to educate themselves about the sources of their problems, to discuss what strategies and tactics to adopt, and to organize struggles around them.

Workers' centers are mass organizations with a democratic organizing process: Workers' centers are based on the philosophy that workers have the capacity to develop and lead their organizations, given the time, space and resources to develop their skills and analysis. Workers' centers are membership

mass organizations, as open as possible, which use a democratic internal process. They develop clear processes for decision-making and planning that demystify the organizing process and keeps control of the organization in the hands of its membership and out of the hands of an organizational elite.

Organizing not unionizing: The problem with unions is not just that some are bureaucratic, or fail to take up social issues, or fail to fight militantly enough for contracts. The problem is that unions limit themselves to fighting for improvements within the collective bargaining process itself.

Workers' centers are not unions of pre-union formations. They do not represent workers in collective bargaining. Centers sometimes support workers engaged in bargaining struggles, but as a step toward further organizing on a broader basis around broader goals.

There are those within the traditional union movement who seek to use workers' centers as a means toward the goal of unionization, who seek to take advantage of this new organizational form to promote their own institution's survival and with it the continuation (with some adjustments) of the essential premises and methods of US trade unionism. In contrast we view workers' centers as one way of building the new labor movement. We view unionization as a tactic, not as a strategy; we do not seek to promote the development of workers' centers to lay the groundwork for future expanded unionization. Rather we wish to organize workers into a new labor movement, one that goes beyond unionization and ruptures with the assumptions, methods and organizational forms of the past.

Combating racism, sexism and homophobia; building working class unity: Workers' centers have a commitment to creating specific resources and space for the development of special-oppressed groups as leaders at work and in their communities, and thus of centers themselves. Given where and how centers have sprung up this has already been the reality, but must continue to be so as centers spread to new communities throughout the class as a whole.

Workers' centers recognize the differences in culture and language among working people who have been discriminated against, and strive to allow space for the self-organization of these groups. At the same

time centers are committed to addressing class issues, promoting a working class identity and the creation of a working class culture of struggle and solidarity through the development of new values and social relations within the organization.

Commitment to political education, leadership development, and liberation: Workers' Centers are committed to fighting for long-term changes that will enable workers to have genuine economic, political and social power. This commitment to fundamental change goes side by side with the commitment to developing a mass organization and broad community base. Thus workers' centers seek to implement an organizing model which will raise workers' consciousness and present opportunities for them to develop as leaders and commit themselves to the liberation of workers from exploitation and oppression.

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Grassroots Unions & Workers Centers Are Complementary

By Bert

Yes, there is something positive about being a workers center, just like the NMASS article said, true. A downside is that workers centers are not able to change conditions in whole industries, or change conditions long term, because they did not get power on the job, where most power is. This is because most workers came to our workers center after they were already fired, to see if they could get some justice. So we fought for the past,--back wages--but did not establish a presence in the shops to effect permanent change for the future. I used to joke that we are a "union of the fired" .

This was evident in the MiniMax boycott where the 6 workers won back pay and the changes they demanded in the shop but could not win reinstatement and so we had no mechanism to enforce the changes (sick days, OT pay, etc). This began to change when whole groups of workers, still on the job, began to come to the workers center,

wanting to make a change and ready to stand up. It was a natural fit between workers center--as a community place for them to come to, and where they also receive help with other problems as workers in a community such as English classes, legal help, improving their kids schools, etc, ---and union, in this case the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), so as they fought for back wages, they also organized to demand changes on the job. So in that experience it has not been that workers centers are the future and unions are the past, but how they complement each other and are both necessary forms of workers fighting organization. If they are controlled by the workers and not foundations, or bosses, or new bureaucrats or specialists than that's okay.

So I say, rather than workers centers being better than unions, the key question is, who are running them? Rank and file workers need to run them if they are to be fighting organizations of the workers. That is the new labor movement, not the particular forms in my opinion.

Bert is an activist in both a workers center and a union organizing campaign in Brooklyn, NY

Opposition Movement in Los Angeles Transit Union

By Tom Wetzel

The Los Angeles MTA operates a vast transit network throughout Los Angeles County, with 16 bus divisions and four subway and light rail lines. There are about 5,000 bus and train operators in the UTU. The widespread de-industrialization and closing of unionized industrial plants in Los Angeles in the '70s and '80s has left the MTA's transit operation as one of the few places where African-American workers can get a job that has good pay and benefits. A decade ago about half the drivers were African-American. In recent years Latino drivers have become almost as numerous as the black drivers. There are also still some drivers of European descent, as well as Persians, southeast Asians, and other ethnic groups, reflecting the cosmopolitan character of Los Angeles.

The pay and benefits at MTA, and the union's check on management power, are the product of a long

history of struggle and sacrifice by Los Angeles transit workers. They dragged themselves out of poverty through their own efforts.

Prior to World War II, transit operator was a low-wage job in Los Angeles, and workers who dared to "talk union" were at risk of being fired. The two main private transit companies in Los Angeles in the early 20th century - predecessors of the present-day MTA - had been owned by Henry Huntington. Huntington was the Mr. Moneybags who financed the anti-union "open shop" movement in Los Angeles. This movement had emerged in 1903 as a challenge to the AFL unions. Huntington's management on the Los Angeles transit system was virulently anti-union. Strikes in 1919 and 1934 were broken by hiring permanent replacements. Finally, in 1942, taking advantage of a war-time labor shortage, the AFL Amalgamated Bus and Streetcar Workers Union (predecessor of the present-day Amalgamated Transit Union - ATU) defeated the Huntington management in a strike. This strike won the first union contract.

The two main predecessor companies of MTA were acquired by the government in 1958. This led to a jurisdictional agreement between the AFL Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen and the ATU. BRT got the drivers and ATU got the mechanics. In 1970 BRT absorbed a number of smaller "railroad brotherhoods" and changed its name to United Transportation Union.

Management continually probes the unions for weakness - trying to get more part-timers, two-tier wage systems, contract out lines to private companies, or weaken driver protections in other ways. The transit workers have been able to fend off most of these attacks through their willingness to stand together and fight. Since 1960 there have been ten Los Angeles transit strikes. In recent years the MTA management has been squeezing the drivers to get out more service. Drivers used to have 15 to 20 minutes of layover time at the end of their runs. Now the layover is down to only 6 to 10 minutes - not enough time to relax, eat, and go to the toilet.

In the 1980s Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley - a liberal African-American Democrat and former cop - and right-wing County Supervisor Pete Schabarum cooperated in a major attack on the union. A large

part of the transit network in eastern Los Angeles County was subcontracted to a private firm, Foothill Transit. But, as UTU drivers tell me, UTU never made the attempt to organize the Foothill drivers, to fight for parity with drivers at RTD (the predecessor of MTA). UTU rolled over. Eventually Teamster union apparatchiks began collecting dues from the Foothill Transit drivers. But Foothill pay levels are still way below UTU drivers at MTA. As long as Foothill Transit remains a low-wage sinkhole in the realm of Los Angeles public transit, it is a threat to the other transit workers.

The current chieftain at the UTU in Los Angeles is James Williams, General Chairman of the UTU Board of Adjustment -- the MTA-wide UTU committee. He draws a CEO-level salary, over \$300,000 a year. Williams is an African-American man of humble origins who moved from Louisiana to Los Angeles in the 1960s and began driving a bus for the RTD. Williams was groomed for his current job by Earl Clark, the chieftain of the UTU in the RTD era. The local presidents also make fat salaries. Rick Ortega, president of UTU local 1607, receives \$120,000 - almost two and half times what a full-time driver makes without overtime.

Oppositionists in Local 1607 tell me they believe that Williams and Ortega probably got into being union leaders out of a sincere desire to help their fellow drivers, many years ago. As they got used to receiving huge salaries and no longer face the daily stress of driving a bus, they became "lazy," the activists believe. The problem is, the UTU type of union institution is a "system"; it tends to shape the people who get involved in it. The union is now the leaders' personal fiefdom.

Until recently, Local 1607 activists say, Mr. Ortega would get around opposition at meetings by arbitrarily declaring the meeting "adjourned" without a vote. This would end the meeting. The members were ignorant of their rights, activists say, and were intimidated by the union leadership who surround themselves with a small circle of cronies. Over the years Ortega had learned various tricks for prosecuting grievances. "But he doesn't teach the members anything so they will be dependent on him," one driver told me. Activists want the union to teach members how to file grievances and deal with

grievance hearings.

The union had done nothing to develop the knowledge that drivers would need to participate effectively in the union. To empower their fellow drivers, activists in Local 1607 began by distributing leaflets explaining how the members can use Roberts' Rules of Order to defend their democratic rights in union meetings. Now, if Mr. Ortega tries to stop a meeting by declaring it adjourned, members respond by telling him: "You have to take a vote to adjourn a meeting. If you want to leave, that's fine. We'll continue the meeting without you."



A union where a leader can keep members in the dark and intimidate them is a recipe for a kleptocracy. Here's an example: At the time of the last strike in 2003 union members came to believe that Mr. Ortega had been pocketing \$7,500 a month in dues owed to the international union. He'd been telling the international union certain drivers were sick and were therefore exempt from dues. When these drivers tried to collect their \$600 strike pay during the walkout, the international told them they weren't supposed to get strike pay because they were listed as out on sick leave. In fact they had been working. One of the things the members of Local 1607 have been fighting for now is an open accounting of the use of union funds.

In addition to the salary James Williams receives, dissidents allege that he has taken hundreds of thousands of dollars of union funds without authorization to defend himself against sexual harassment complaints of female drivers. At the end of the last strike in 2003, activists tell me that the meeting to vote on the proposed contract was poorly advertised among the UTU membership, with only 200 of the 5,000 drivers showing up. No copy of the proposed contract was provided. Mr. Williams insisted they vote on the contract after describing the

alleged contents for about 15 minutes. He claimed that the contract contained no loss of benefits. But workers later discovered that in fact the contract included a cut in health benefits, with a new requirement for \$50 copays.

Theft of union funds are not peculiar to this local in the UTU. The two international presidents of the UTU before the current president are currently serving time in prison for embezzlement of union funds.

Challenging James Williams is no easy task, however. UTU at MTA is divided into five locals. This is a bureaucrat-entrenchment device. Drivers would normally have contact with the colleagues in their own operating division and local. Special effort would be needed to develop contacts across locals. This creates a speed bump against the spread of a rank-and-file movement that might challenge the leadership. Williams is not elected directly by the UTU members, but is selected by the Board of Adjustment, which is made up of the five local presidents.

Oppositionists in Local 1607 have a vision or program for union reform. First, they'd like to see the union funds that currently go to huge salaries put into the strike fund. They want any paid positions limited to the pay rate of a driver. Second, they advocate term limits - a maximum of six years in a row in office - to avoid the syndrome of domination by entrenched chiefs. For officers who are paid, term limits will force them to go back to driving a bus after a certain period. If the officers know they're going to go back to the stressful job of driving a bus once again, that will be a motivation to fight harder for their colleagues. Third, the oppositionists want a system of elected shop stewards in the operating divisions so that the drivers can more readily defend themselves on the job. Finally, activists in Local 1607 also put forward a vision of a "solidarity movement" that would link MTA drivers with other transportation workers in the Los Angeles area - port truckers, line-haul truck drivers, taxi drivers, and bus drivers at the suburban "munis" and private contract operations like Foothill and Laidlaw(8).

Activists in Local 1607 are also sympathetic to the idea of a driver/rider alliance to fight MTA

management. "I like [the Bus Riders Union]," a leading UTU activist told me. "They want what we want." He doesn't understand why the UTU leadership has not tried to develop a better relationship with the BRU.

The undemocratic power that an unelected general chairman wields at the MTA UTU is derived from the UTU international constitution. Gaining control of an international union convention to change this would be no easy task. I think it would be easier to decertify UTU. In fact, it's hard to see how the "solidarity movement" the UTU activists talk about could come about except through the formation of a new, independent transportation workers union.

Post Mortem on the San Francisco Fare Strike

by Tom Wetzel

In September, 2005 several thousand riders of Muni - San Francisco's city-owned transit system - participated in a mass fare strike, to fight service cuts, layoffs, and the second fare hike in two years. More than five dozen people were actively involved in the organizing. The last action connected with the fare strike was a November 10th protest march, initiated by the organized day laborers. Only about 50 people participated in this march. The disappointing turnout marked an end to the fare strike, which failed to force any concessions from the local government leaders.

Let's step back for a moment and ask ourselves, What principles should we use in organizing?

For those of us who aim at a transformation of society, based on a self-organized working class movement that creates a post-capitalist society based on self-management and empowerment of workers, a major question that we face is: How can a movement of this kind come into being? Part of the reason that we support active participation of ordinary people in struggles, and creation of mass organizations run directly by their rank-and-file participants, is that we see this as a means to activating people and creating the kinds of movements that can change the society.

The present social order is able to reproduce itself from year to year because of the impacts on people's psyches of the kinds of actions that people are forced to take on. Doing work that is acquiescent to bosses, being subject to all kinds of controls on our lives, tends to generate in

people habits of going along, of acceptance of the existing arrangement. That's because people will tend to develop the habits of mind that enable them to best "fit" in with the social circumstances they see no way to change. Changing those habits is not going to happen over night. So, how is this existing consciousness going to change?

The more widespread the level of solidarity and action, the greater the power working people will have. The greater the power being exhibited visibly in actions, the greater the impact on the self-confidence and consciousness of the working class. The greater the sense of power ordinary people have, the more likely people will be willing to entertain ideas of major changes.

On the other hand, the more invisible such action in support of each other is, the more people will be inclined to believe "You're on your own" in dealing with the dominating structures and institutions, the more people will feel that radical ideas are "unrealistic."

The degree of change ordinary people can bring about depends upon how widespread and how deep-seated is the willingness for action within the general population, against the dominant structures. That is, it depends upon the level of class consciousness that exists at a particular time.

But all collective actions, if they become visible and activate and motivate people, can contribute to raising consciousness and developing the willingness to fight in the future.

The Muni fare strike was -- and could only be -- a fight for a small change in the terms of our exploitation and subordination under the present system. To be a fight for us all, to enhance the sense of solidarity, it was essential that it be a fight for the interests of the mass of ordinary folks who depend on Muni. Some anarchists say that it is sufficient if a few of them are able to continue to engage, quietly, in fare evasion. But this viewpoint is individualistic; it doesn't take into account the importance of a visible mass movement that aims to defeat the austerity measures that have their harshest impact on the those with the least income.

From this point of view, I believe that the key thing in the strike should have been to focus on generalizing and extending participation. To do this, it is necessary, among other things, to avoid setting some arbitrary ideological litmus test that someone had to pass to be welcomed as a participant.

Organizing for the strike began in March, 2005, when the impending fare hike was announced by the Muni bureaucrats. The anarchists who formed Muni Social

Strike were not interested in trying to organize a broad membership organization, a union of Muni riders. They were focused on the strike as an action, but also as an opportunity for putting forth their own anti-capitalist ideology.

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The phrase "social strike" was originally coined in the '70s to refer to a job action by transit workers in Turin, Italy. Rather than strike to pursue their beefs with management, they continued to run the transit vehicles but refused to collect fares. Because there was widespread working class opposition to high fares, this action developed solidarity and support within the community. This type of action differs from simply a consumer strike because of the crucial role played by the workers. The Muni Social Strike group wanted to create this kind of worker/rider alliance. To this end, they concentrated their work in the first several months on outreach to the drivers.

After the fare strike got underway with the fare hike in September, a number of the anarchists in Social Strike did begin to more seriously consider the idea of a mass membership organization. However, some of them insisted this had to be a joint organization of workers and riders. An alliance between riders and workers is essential, but a handful of (mostly white) revolutionaries who don't work for Muni can't organize the (overwhelmingly African-American, Latino and Asian) transit workers. The workers need to have their own movement. The problems they deal with on the job are not the same as the problems faced by the riders.

The recent victory in Atlanta shows the potential for a rider/worker alliance. In that case, a proposed 25 cent fare increase was defeated by an alliance of a Transit Riders Union (initiated by the local Jobs for Justice chapter) and the transit workers union.

A very assertive "left-communist" in Social Strike was particularly opposed to the formation of a mass organization. He tended to view Social Strike as a kind of

vanguard to give direction to the struggle without mass participation in decision-making. Although Social Strike did eventually do some outreach to community groups, this left-communist's constant patter of insults directed at everyone who disagreed with him tended to discourage outreach to other groups and drove away potential participants. Indeed, it was this individual's obnoxious behavior that led to the formation of another group, Muni Fare Strike.

Some activists tended to emphasize things like wall posters and stickers. This has its place but there is really no substitute for one-on-one organizing, which leads to conversations and new contacts. To its credit, the Muni Fare Strike group recognized the need to do one-on-one organizing of the riders, through leafleting to ordinary folks on the street. On the other hand, Muni Social Strike's emphasis on direct outreach to the drivers eventually led to a mutually supportive relationship with the Drivers' Action Committee - a dissident group in the drivers' union.

Muni Social Strike did put forward the idea of organizing "town hall meetings" which were to be the means of gaining mass participation. However, these meetings were poorly advertised and attended mainly by the same milieu of anarchists who started Social Strike, with the addition of a few Leninists, and a handful of African-American bus drivers from the Drivers Action Committee.

I think that if the organizers had begun early on doing tabling at major bus stops, to gain membership in a rider organization, they could perhaps have brought in a lot of ordinary folks outside the circuits of anarchist or radical left activism. These people could then have helped to spread the action to others. Part of the reason we want to reach out beyond the already existing radical activist circles is that we want to activate more ordinary working folks; we want to get more people involved, get them thinking about changing things, learning about how to do this. But to do that you have to create an environment where people who don't already have some 100% revolutionary perspective can feel comfortable being themselves and participating, not intimidated. It's hard to do this if some blowhard is constantly insulting people who don't subscribe to his hyper-alienated outlook.

Muni Fare Strike was more successful in doing outreach to community groups, and speakers from many groups spoke at the press conferences they organized. The most important extension of the struggle came about because Muni Fare Strike persuaded the participants in the Day Laborers' Program, mainly Mexican immigrants, to take over organizing among the Spanish-speaking immigrant population. They became the backbone of the organizing in the Mission District, which was a stronghold of support

for the fare strike.

Some of the anarchists in Social Strike told me they were dubious about a Muni riders' union because of the likelihood it would be "reformist," embroiled in pressuring the city officials, and electoral politics. Here I gather they are thinking about the current level of consciousness within the general working class population.

But we can't have it both ways. Either we want to organize working people to fight and to control their struggles and learn and grow in the process, or not. If the numbers of people who have a 100% revolutionary anti-capitalist perspective are small in numbers now, we cannot expand that movement if we limit decision-making to only the revolutionaries.

The fare strike organizing could have been used as the way to build a mass riders' organization. If that had been done, then today there might be an on-going organization to continue the struggle. Instead, little was left behind after the fare protest subsided.

Workers of the Skies Unite!

Looking back At the N.W. Airlines Strike

by Kdog

NorthStar Anarchist Collective & Twin Cities IWW (personal capacity)

In August 2005 the mechanics and cleaners at Northwest Airlines (NWA), the world's fourth largest passenger airline went out on strike. The workers were rejecting the company's final offer of massive concessions, including 53% job cuts, 26% wage reductions and sharp cuts to their benefits and pensions.

This battle is in response to a new round of attacks by the old large industrial corporations, such as the Airlines and Automakers against their heavily unionized and relatively better-off workers. Out-sourcing (reducing unionization), and sharp scaling back of pay, benefits, and pensions are the general thrust, part of their drive to make US workers more "competitive" with the rest of the world. The enormous power and prestige these brand name corporations have means these attacks set the tone and establish the trend for all class relations in the US. as the necessary norm for doing business in the global market.

Today's unions for the most part accept the logic of the capitalist market and are completely out of practice of any kind of militant struggle. This poses the question how are workers going to be able to resist these attacks, and how are we as revolutionary anarchists and class partisans going to be able to best aid our sisters and brothers given

our extremely limited size, resources, and influence?
Let's look at this strike and try and draw out some lessons so far.

AMFA

The mechanics, cleaners and custodians at NWA are represented by AMFA, the Airline Mechanics Fraternal Association, a sort of do-it-yourself craft union that for years barely existed at the margins of the industry. Up thru the nineties, the mechanics at Northwest were represented along with the baggage handlers and ticket agents by the International Association of Machinists (IAM). But sick of continuous concessionary contracts negotiated by the IAM, and confident in the leverage created by their skill-set the mechanics along with the cleaners and custodians struck out on their own becoming the first major work group from one of the big airlines to affiliate with AMFA.



Generally we should support industrial, not craft unionism. There were also some conservative reasons why the mechanics at NWA went to AMFA. But it should not be a surprise to us that in the absence of any clear class pole - like the IWW of old for instance - workers will try and find something, anything, that gives them some independence from the business as usual of the mainstream unions. In the same way that the P-9 meatpackers of Austin, MN in the '80's grasped onto Ray Rogers' "Corporate Campaign", the mechanics at NWA grabbed onto AMFA.

AMFA its self is a bit of a trip. Headquartered not in Washington, New York, or Detroit but in a small town in New Hampshire. Run out of a law firm, and headed up by a crusty old airline mechanic called O.V. Delle-Femine, AMFA is not your typical U.S. union. While AMFA regrettably relies on lawyers for its negotiations, it has no real bureaucracy to speak of. It's small number of officers are either still working or fresh from the shop floor.

Rather than being a layered hierarchy of useless and interfering bureaucrats, AMFA had if anything a problem

going the other way. A kind of "Tyranny of Structurelessness". There was little internal organization to the strike, meaning every problem, question, and opportunity was thrust to the new local president. There was never any effective democratic procedure for running the strike, like weekly mass meetings and/or an elected strike council of delegates to discuss and implement strategy. Folks were very much winging it.

But I never saw any bureaucratic interference or undemocratic methods used to silence or police the strikers. In fact it was amazing how little "cushion" separated the negotiators from the active core of the strike. One example: a few weeks into the strike, the AMFA negotiators were discussing bringing back a new, worse NWA offer to the membership to vote on. When some of the more active strikers herd about this they were livid and began personally calling the AMFA national leadership and negotiators on their cell phones and demanding that this not happen. At one point a pissed off steward started physically threatening the negotiating team, while others used less violent but still firm reasoning. The negotiators were forced to pull the idea. It is unthinkable to think of local rank & file activists and officers being able to effect national negotiations like that in the Teamsters, UAW, or IAM for instance.

AFL-CIO Treachery

AMFA is not affiliated to the AFL-CIO. Apparently still smarting from the workers exodus from the IAM, the federation did all it could to undermine AMFA during the strike. The AFL actually sent a letter to every metro labor council in the country ordering the unions to refuse any support to AMFA. This had a very chilling effect on solidarity efforts. In concrete terms it meant that even raising simple motions for a donation at your local union's meeting would be opposed by most union officials. It meant that no wider mobilizations of official labor solidarity would be possible. It created a huge obstacle to reaching the constituency that would be most naturally supportive of AMFA's struggle.

Of course this exile from the House of Labor, also gave a certain openness to the struggle that would not have existed otherwise. Many rank and file AMFA workers were not only acutely aware of the "corporate" enemy, but also had a pretty sophisticated understanding of the problems with the labor "movement". With no AFL-CIO support there was not the usual bureaucratic control of the grassroots, the legalism, and electoralism. We found thru the IWW that we were able to easily (suprisingly easily) enter into pretty serious strategic discussions with Local 33's officers and activist core,

make proposals and plan some significant action.

Direct Action

NWA is headquartered in Minneapolis-St. Paul, and its largest hub is at the Twin Cities international airport. AMFA's largest base, Local 33, is in the Twin Cities. From the beginning of the strike, Twin Cities anarchists have been in solidarity. During the first days of the strike, members of Northstar Anarchist Collective did three banner drops over one of the main interstates going out to the airport. Most of our activity has been as members of the newly formed Twin Cities IWW.

Our perspective, which we continually tried to hit home, at the solidarity committee meetings, at the unofficial action group meetings, and at rallies and the picket line was simple: "What will it take to win this strike?"

It seemed to us that the strike had to impede NWA's ability to operate, it had to start hurting the company. It had to spread to the others sectors of workers at the airports, especially the Flight Attendants (The PFAA, an AMFA-like independent union that split from the Teamsters) and Baggage Handlers and Ticket Agents (IAM). It had to become an issue of concern and attention for working people generally. It had to create a crisis for the larger capitalist class beyond the NWA board and large stockholders.

Within the Solidarity Committee, an informal action group (made up of mechanics, revolutionary unionists, and a few other radical supporters), and among individuals there was no real disagreement with this view. But there were serious questions and concerns about whether and how this was possible. Our ideas about direct action meshed with some of the strikers though, and we were able to pull off some important actions. Three significant direct actions were organized jointly by revolutionary unionists and an informal mechanics action group. The first action served as a kind of test. More than 50 workers (mostly AMFA members) picketed a hotel where scabs were being put up and moved on to hotel property feeling out the reaction of the scabs, security and police. To follow that up we announced to the media and the union's membership that we were going to picket the homes of NWA CEO and Board members. Our group chartered three school buses but shortly before moving out from the launching area/Strike HQ announced to each full bus of 80 plus strikers and supporters that the buses were instead going to three of the hotels where NWA was putting up scabs, in order to blockade the buses NWA chartered for their PM shift. This idea was greeted enthusiastically and we were

off. The ruse worked. Vance security and local police were waiting for us at CEO Chuck Steenland's home. At each hotel serious confrontations developed with the scab buses, delaying their movement for a couple hours.

At one hotel location, a scab bus mysteriously developed a flat tire, making a perfect backdrop for an impromptu press conference featuring Local 33 officers and activist flight attendants and baggage handlers who were supporting AMFA. Shortly before police announced they would make mass arrests we retreated as planned.

The shift had been delayed and NWA was confronted with a security hole it hadn't planned for. Direct Action was on the agenda as the way forward, and dozens of workers had played a part in planning and carrying out the most audacious labor action in the Twin Cities in years. The press would have to adjust from its comfortable story-line of the union's defeat. And in an end around the AFL-CIO's stonewall, trade unionists and their supporters would see the strike's energy and action on TV and the front page. . . Except this was also the day after Hurricane Katrina hit and the reality of that situation would wipe nearly everything else out of public discussion and consciousness.

A couple weeks later, following a rally at the Strike Headquarters the same group of us organized and motivated for a car caravan to drive over to the main gate at the airport where the scabs were brought in. Over 200 cars ended up participating - totally jamming up the service road that the scab buses would use. A couple of our cars ended up having "engine trouble" causing the police to make two arrests and tow out two vehicles. Again a shift was delayed, NWA was caught unprepared tactically, and spirits soared.

(In separate anonymous actions, there were reports of metal spike caltrops being spread on that same service road to the airport utilized for transporting scabs. and of a couple scabs being beat up at the hotels they were being put up in by the Corporation.)

There was however no easy consensus on the next step forward. AMFA had been overconfident in their ability to shut down the airline simply by withdrawing their labor. NWA had seen that coming though, and many believe actually wanted the confrontation. While almost no AMFA folks crossed in the first couple months, the company kept the planes flying by hiring and training scabs and using management around the clock. The FAA and the local "liberal" media conspired to suppress the gross safety violations and a couple of near misses that resulted.

We were not able to find a way to create momentum towards more action, involving broader groups of airline workers and others. There was lots of discussions of what it would take to actually shut down the airport for a day - the kind of action that would create a huge amount of attention for the strike and pressure on the other unions to support it - but no plan emerged that seemed realistic.

As the strike dragged on - now entering it's 6th month - more AMFA workers, including many of the strike's active core that we had worked with, started peeling away to go find work elsewhere, move out of state, or just plain move on. Despite the dismal scene, AMFA workers in December voted to reject yet another, worse final offer from NWA. There will be no face-saving way out here. Heads held high, the NWA mechanics and cleaners have had to absorb a major blow. The company now must absorb bankruptcy, the other unions the shame of having stood by and watched. We, who supported and fought alongside the striking workers, need to absorb the lessons.

Some Lessons for Anarchists

1. There clearly is an offensive by the bosses aimed at what have been the best working-class jobs. (See Delphi, GM, Ford, Delta, Northwest . . .) The aim is to force US workers to compete with workers internationally on a much lower playing field.
2. These attacks will generate resistance. Since the mainstream unions are not oriented toward militant struggle, the workers, will by necessity have to seek additional and/or other vehicles to organize struggle.
3. The traditional anarchist and syndicalist methods of direct action and horizontal organization, as well as agitation for expanded Mass Strikes or even General Strikes will be immediately useful to the workers in this situation. Proposals for these tactics may find a much more receptive audience than we are used to. Many workers will be quite skillful at organizing and implementing these tactics. We will have as much to learn as to teach.
4. These type of actions have the potential to escalate and will be met by repression. We have a responsibility to help prepare for the consequences, and plan for the next steps. Individual direct actions can be reduced to "stunts", if not part of a broader strategy. Police brutality, arrests, and corporate law suits against the union can have a chilling effect if folks aren't prepared.

5. Despite the potential radicalization among these sectors, it is not automatic that it will go wholly in a libertarian direction. Indeed there is a wide opening for authoritarian and even fascist politics among this sector (made up largely of the formerly best paid and mostly white and male workers). Anti-immigration, economic protectionism and general U.S.nationalism will have to be countered in creative and practical ways.

6. There is a need for an organized focal point which is consistent with revolutionary anarchist / syndicalist ideas and action that can relate to and help develop this resistance. Perhaps now is the time that members of the various existing revolutionary anarchist / syndicalist organizations, members of Anti-Racist Action and individual anarchist militants begin such a discussion.

Immokalee Farmworkers Continue Fight for Justice

By Mitch

After winning two major victories against Taco Bell and McDonalds, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) has continued their struggle for farmworker justice by now taking on Burger King.

The CIW is a membership-run farm worker coalition based in Immokalee, Florida. The W.S.A. has been an ally of CIW for a number of years now.

According to the CIW: "Fast-food giants like Burger King play an active role in creating the unconscionable conditions in Florida's tomato fields. These massive chains are able to pool the buying power of tens of thousands of restaurants and leverage that enormous power to demand ever-lower prices from their tomato suppliers. This in turn puts a strong downward pressure on farmworker wages, as tomato suppliers squeeze their diminishing profits from their workers through ever-lower wages in order to meet the volume discounts demanded by their fast-food clients. As such, farmworker poverty feeds fast-food profits."

One of the CIW's slogan is "Consciousness + Commitment = Change". The CIW is asking our readers, your friends and families to help create

consciousness in your community about the conditions in the fields and the important changes being made through the CIW's Campaign for Fair Food.

CIW has a number of informative materials for screening and educational materials for distribution. You can screen a DVD about the CIW at <http://www.ciw-online.org/about.html>.

We urge all of our readers to become active in helping the Immokalee farmworkers fight for justice and become involved in their grassroots campaigns.

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Coalmining in Appalachia: A Century of Class Struggle

By Gordon Simmons

Beginning in the late 1800's, local political elites, in combination with financial speculators, effected the wholesale acquisition of mineral rights throughout the Appalachian region. The resulting coal industry was characterized by absentee ownership, as well as a cyclical demand that persists to this day.

Early coal production was labor-intensive, and exhausted the available labor market of the local population that was pressed into wage labor, many for the first time. African American migrants from the agrarian South and European immigrants were brought in to supply the growing need for workers.

From its inception, the United Mine Workers union rejected the racial and nativist approaches that had been commonplace in the craft oriented AFL. And, given the economic, political, and social domination that coal companies exercised in the Appalachian region, the UMW became the principal vehicle by which that domination was challenged. The struggle for unionization in West Virginia was bitter, protracted, and violent, and culminated in the defeat

of organized workers at the Battle of Blair Mountain in 1921.

When the UMW did return in force to the southern coalfields, it was in the wake of the New Deal, and the union was no longer the expression of workers' autonomy it had once been. Now the union was an organization firmly under the autocratic regime of John L. Lewis. Lewis set about to broker the terms and conditions for the mechanization of coal production. At his death, control of the union was passed to Tony Boyle, who became ever more flagrant in corruption and sweetheart deals.

UMWA STRIKE AGAINST INJUNCTIONS

U.M.W.A. LOCAL UNION 1759, CEDAR COAL COMPANY, HAS A FEDERAL INJUNCTION AGAINST THEM. THEY ARE BEING FINED \$50,000 AND \$25,000 A DAY FOR STRIKING.

WE ARE SICK AND TIRED OF THE FEDERAL COURTS TAKING THE SIDE OF THE COAL OPERATORS. HUNDREDS OF LOCALS ALL THROUGHOUT THE COAL FIELDS KNOW HOW UNJUST THE USE OF FEDERAL INJUNCTIONS ARE.

ALL U.M.W.A. MINERS ARE ASKED TO STRIKE TO STOP THE INJUNCTIONS AND TO END ALL FINES AND SENTENCES.

Paid for by UMW Members, Combined Miners
Robert Nelson, Chairman

UMWA paid ad, Charleston Gazette, July 22, 1976.

In the 1970's, rank and file insurgency, fueled by outrage over the murder of activists, safety issues, and Black Lung, and coalescing around Miners for Democracy, overthrew the Boyle regime. The coal industry responded by renewing its efforts against the UMW. Today, nearly 90% of domestic coal production is nonunion.

Events and conditions leading up to and following Sago prove that things have remained the same in some important respects. The only interest of the coal industry is in maintaining control over production and the resultant profits. The state and federal governments remain political vehicles of coal interests. The only reliable source for coal miners' health and safety are the workers themselves, and their interests can only be realized by their seizure of control of the productive process. And they remain powerless to wrest that control from the owners with anything short of their collective self-organization.

So! So! So! Solidarité **Alternative unionism in Montreal**

By the Workers Solidarity Network

The Workers Solidarity Network is a labour association based in Montreal. We came to existence in May of 2005 and have since been involved in various activities including direct action case work, strike solidarity and union drives.

Broadly, you could say that we try to promote solidarity within the labour movement. We want to prove to ourselves and workers in general that it's possible to fight the bosses with or without an established union.

Fundamentally, we think that what's needed is to make a list of demands and grievances and act upon them collectively. This can be done in a traditional union framework or in non-conventional frameworks that some struggles require.

We want to popularise what we call "un syndicalisme de combat", which translates to solidarity unionism or class-struggle unionism in English. The basis of "le syndicalisme de combat" for us is to establish tangible rank n' file power before entering into a conflict with the bosses. We think it is no use to strike or to take significant action against the boss when the struggle is not led by the rank n' file. What's needed is active participation by all workers and an understanding that true labour power comes from there and not from the bosses negotiations table or the offices of the union bureaucracy.

We don't pretend to be more important than we are. And we don't want to take the place of existing unions. Usually what we propose is double membership, both within an established and legal union and within the Workers Solidarity Network. We believe trade unions and the current the labour movement can be radicalized from within, so we don't see the need to establish a more leftist/syndicalist union that would out-see the business and reformist unions. However, we do think it is important for radical workers and the non-unionized to have a specific point of convergence in the movement, that's why we formed the Workers Solidarity Network!

We think it's putting your head into the sand to see unionism as only an "economic struggle". There's a great deal of politics that go on within unions and radicals activists will be confronted against more moderate and even conservative members within their unions and the broader movement. Without specifically declaring itself

anarcho-syndicalist, the WSN is inspired by those politics and is certainly ready to defend the principles of direct democracy and direct action when faced with conservative elements of the movement. Different political tendencies are represented in our group (social democratic, marxist, anarchist). While remaining united under the banner of class-struggle unionism, we try not to shy away from internal political debates.

The Workers Solidarity Network came out of a long process of supporting strikes and discussions on how unions can become more democratic and combative and how, we as working people, can actually start winning some fights against the bosses after a few decades of defeats. When we first founded the network in February 2005 (before that discussions were had amongst smaller groups of labour activists), we set the goals of adopting a platform and a constitution, producing a pocket-sized pamphlet on basic rights, studying the labour code and publicly launching the network on Mayday.

Grève à l'Hotel Omni
**PIQUETAGE DE
SOLIDARITÉ**



Samedi 24 sept. 14h
Statue Norman Bethune
Métro Guy (sortie Guy)

Réseau de Solidarité des Travailleuses-eurs
rst.wsn@gmail.com, 859-9092

Strike at Hotel Omni
**SOLIDARITY
PICKET!**



Saturday Sept 24th, 2pm
Meet at : Norman Bethune Statue
Guy Metro (Guy exit)

Workers Solidarity Network
rst.wsn@gmail.com, 859-9092

Over time and during the course of our practical work, we hope to more clearly define our positions on revolutionary unionism, our relationship to the mainstream labour movement and decide between remaining a solidarity network or becoming an "actual union" that would independently represent its members in shops.

We would like to end this by thanking the Workers Solidarity Alliance for giving us the opportunity to have our network be known in their publication.

Notre solidarité est sans frontières!

"A fighting union!"

Workers Solidarity Network
rst.wsn@gmail.com, 514-859-9092

Book Reviews

Solidarity for Sale: How Corruption Destroyed the Labor Movement & Undermined America's Promise by Robert Fitch, *Public Affairs Books*, cloth, \$28.50

Not since Louis Adamic's classic book, *Dynamite*, has there been an attempt to thoroughly understand corruption in American unions. Fitch is not just out to revise labor history, but also to explain the debates in the stagnating AFL-CIO and its recent split. The upshot is a scathing critique of the sort of exclusive territorialism spawned by the AFL craft unionism. The principal result is entrenched bureaucracy. Whether the resulting structure is mobbed up or not, it easily settles into a version of a protection racket. Radicals and other reformers who enter into the higher ranks are inevitably coopted. Despite the author's social democratic sympathies, workers interested in genuinely transforming the labor movement will find a lot of ammo here.

Reviewed by Gordon Simmons

Poor Workers' Unions, by Vanessa Tait, *South End Press*, paper, \$20

"Poor Workers' Unions: Rebuilding Labor from Below" by Vanessa Tait. What Tait refers to as poor workers' unions are organizations that have generally been thought of as marginal to the labor movement, including unions of low-wage workers and community-based organizations that have fought for workplace rights, wages, and benefits. These organizations have developed into unions, worked in harmony with unions, and struggled against unions. They include civil rights, women's rights, welfare rights, and community organizations, as reform movements within unions and as independent self-managing unions. What distinguishes poor workers' unions, as Tait has described them, is not just the organizing of those earning low or no wages, but also a focus on social justice and direct-action – capturing the best characteristics of the radical American labor movement when it was developing. A must read for those interested in building a self-managed and self-directing workers' movement.



THE GLOBAL SCENE

International Solidarity Conference

Anarcho-syndicalists and revolutionary unionists from all over the world met in Paris from April 28 to May 1 2007 for the third International Solidarity Conference. Following the conferences of San Francisco (i99) and Essen, Germany (i02), the I-07 took place with the goal of starting to build links between different organizations and unite workers of different countries, to struggle and take action through organizing international solidarity. I-07 was organized by the French National Confederation of Labor (CNT-F, independent).

The weekend included discussions and debates in various union meetings (eg. 'Revolutionary syndicalism, anarchosyndicalism and institutions', 'Precarity at work'), branch meetings (building industry, education etc.) and thematic discussions (eg. 'Struggle against imperialism and neo-colonialism', 'Migration').

An open international meeting on April 30 brought hundreds of people together at Place de la reunion. Speakers from Siberia, Guinea, Atenco and Palestine reported on their current struggles. 'Le Choeur du Peuple' (the people's choir) performed songs from the Paris Commune and a song about the famous Ukrainian anarchist Nestor Makhno (he is buried just around the corner in the Père-Lachaise Cemetery).

The CNT-F organized a fantastic cultural program too with several concerts taking place over the weekend at the CNT's local and other places in Paris.

The International Workers Association

The Congress of the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers Association (international network of anarcho-syndicalist unions and organizations, such as the National Confederation of Labor (CNT) in Spain or Regional Workers Federation (FORA) in Argentina), took place in December 2006 in Manchester, United Kingdom. The Congress decided that the Secretariat of the IWA will be maintained, until the Brazil congress at

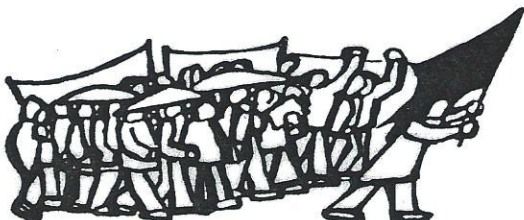
the end of 2008, by the Serbian section Union Confederation "Anarcho-Syndicalist initiative" (A.S.I.)

The first circular of the new Secretariat declared that, among other goals, one of the primary tasks is the "Strengthening of communicational and administrative infrastructure of the International". This will consist of using various electronic methods of communication and transfer to new electronic methods and extended usage of internet. This will result with speeding up of the exchange of information's and thus response time to urgent actions.

During the transition of administrative functions from Norway to Serbia, IWA Sections and Friends maintained their engagement in the struggle against the State and capitalism. Apart from a joint IWA campaign against unstable work, in which all IWA sections, from Spain to Serbia, and from Norway to UK participated in, during the last two weeks of April including the First of May demonstrations, different IWA sections were involved in their local struggles.

ASI's education union continued it's involvement in the massive student uprising against tuition fees. This resulted in several main Belgrade faculties being blocked for different periods, and a wake-up of the progressive segments of Serbian youth. CNT members in Spain continued their involvement in numerous conflicts, including the longstanding fight against the Mercadona food distributor. Members of the German Free Workers Union (FAU) were involved with struggle against the management of the large hospital near Hanover, while Czech members physically clashed with neo-nazis several times in period before, and on the First of May demonstrations.

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What Is the Workers Solidarity Alliance?

W.S.A. is an organization that believes in grassroots empowerment and strives for a future self-managed society. We organize around the following principles:

DIRECT DEMOCRACY - We advocate workers, tenant and community organizations where the membership has direct control, charting their own direction. This means that key decisions need to be made through assemblies of the members, through direct democracy, not by hierarchies of paid officials and professional staff. Delegates, representatives or shop stewards are directly answerable, accountable and serve at the discretion of the membership. They are also subject to immediate recall by a majority of the members.

DIRECT ACTION - This is not only the most effective action, but also the most empowering. Through direct action we retain control of our own struggle and avoid surrendering that control to so-called "experts" of often questionable loyalty.

SELF-MANAGEMENT - We wish to participate in the building of a society where all distinctions of class and privilege are eliminated. A new, self-managed society where the wealth we produce is shared equally and fairly by all. We do not think it is possible to build such a society by surrendering authority to any political party or politician. History has demonstrated that such parties, however good their stated intentions might be, often backslide and act in their own interests. We oppose any ruling elite. It is only through grassroots struggle that wealth and power can be fairly and equally shared by all. We therefore seek to create member-controlled organizations within the workplace and community. These organizations are the foundation upon which a society based on direct democracy, solidarity and self-management can be built.

Join Us!

W.S.A.

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San Francisco: Community Land Trust Promotes Housing Self-management

By Tom Wetzel

53 Columbus Avenue is a 21-unit apartment building on the edge of San Francisco's financial district. The tenants -- mainly low-income Chinese immigrants -- were locked in an anti-eviction struggle with City College of San Francisco for seven years. City College had bought the building with the aim of knocking it down for a new campus.

In November 2005 City College was concerned to get the voters of San Francisco to approve a \$200 million bond issue. This made City College politically vulnerable. A messy anti-eviction protest was the last thing City College wanted. This led to a negotiated settlement. On May 1st 2006, San Francisco Community Land Trust (SFCLT) became the owner of the building. The building was purchased with the aim of converting it into a tenant-owned housing cooperative, with restrictions that will maintain affordability of the housing in perpetuity. This SFCLT victory came on the heels of five years of organizing. With the backing of numerous community groups, SFCLT was also able to get the city council to set up a \$1 million seed fund last March, providing grant money to finance this and other coop conversions. Since the victory on Columbus Avenue, SFCLT has begun working with residents in a number of other buildings to do coop conversions.

SFCLT was formed to carry out a strategy of collectivizing rental buildings occupied by working class residents. The SFCLT program promotes self-management in two ways. First, the residents control the buildings, typically through some form of collective ownership. Secondly, the community land trust retains ownership of the land under the buildings. This enables the community to enforce resale restrictions on prices of apartments, preventing conversion to market-rate cooperatives -- a problem that has beset housing coops in New York City, San Francisco and other cities with "hot" real estate markets. As a democratic membership

organization, the community land trust is a vehicle to socialize ownership of the land independently of the government.

The working class community has an interest in keeping housing as inexpensive as possible. The community land trust approach uses ownership of the land under buildings as a way to ensure this. The residents have a ground lease that embodies permanent price restrictions and protects the community's social interest in the housing. In this sense, the community land trust is a counter-market strategy. At the same time, the membership of multiple resident-controlled buildings in the community land trust enables the land trust to act as a mutual aid organization, to provide guidance against problems such as being taken advantage of by unscrupulous property management companies or building contractors.

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Submissions of articles, cartoons and graphics are welcomed. Submissions should be either mailed or emailed to the addresses below. All signed articles do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the Workers Solidarity Alliance.

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