



WHERE WE STAND

The Workers Solidarity Alliance was founded in November 1984. This statement expresses our shared political perspective. **Where We Stand** was approved by the members of the WSA in April 2008. If you agree with this statement, join us!

ANTI-CAPITALISM

Capitalism is a system of oppression. A small class of capitalists owns the companies, production equipment, apartment buildings, and other economic assets. This puts them in control of our work and of the whole society. The working class is forced to rent our working abilities to the capitalists in order to live. The capitalists' relentless drive for profits means they will speed up work, pollute the environment, or ignore unsafe conditions if it will help them make more profit.

The capitalists' efforts to control our work and govern society led to the creation of a third class — the managers and elite professionals who staff the hierarchies of the corporations and the state. The subordination of the working class to the capitalist and bureaucratic classes is a system of oppression because it denies us control over our lives and subordinates life to the capitalist search for profit.

The ability of the elite classes to exploit our labor and dominate us has been limited throughout the history of capitalism by revolts and mass struggles of ordinary people. The working class can liberate itself through the development of self-managed mass movements that develop through the class struggle. We thus advocate a strategy for social change “from below,” based on mass participation, direct democracy, collective direct action and self-managed mass organizations.

The State

The modern state is controlled by hierarchies of managers and elite professionals, and politicians drawn from the capitalist and bureaucratic classes. The top-down armed bodies provide the state's ultimate power.

These hierarchies separate the state from authentic popular control. This enables the

state to govern society in the interests of dominating classes. The armed violence of the state is the last line of defense of the elite classes.

To maintain its ability to govern, the system needs to retain legitimacy in the eyes of the population. During periods of upheaval or severe class conflict, the state may offer concessions to the oppressed. This is the origin of the “social wage” — Medicare, welfare benefits, affordable housing subsidies, public transit subsidies, and so on. The revolutions and worker rebellions of the early 20th century led to the various “welfare states” in the core capitalist countries.

Although we support struggles for reforms, how changes are fought for makes a difference. We oppose a strategy for social change centered on elections and lobbying because it focuses on political leaders gaining power in the state rather than building mass movements and collective struggle. Because the state is an institution of class domination, there is little hope for the liberation of the working class through the capture of the state

by a political party.

By building on the state, state socialism tends to empower the bureaucratic class. In the so-called “Communist” countries, such as the old Soviet Union, China and Cuba, a new dominating class emerged — political functionaries, industrial managers, elite planners, and military leaders. The capitalists were expropriated but the working class remained a subordinated and exploited class.

Anti-imperialism

Capitalism has always been based on imperialism. Imperialism is a system where the elite classes in some nations use their superior economic and military power to dominate and exploit the people and resources of other countries. The elite classes of the dominant capitalist powers suck wealth out of the less powerful countries through debt, corporate investment, and unequal power in trade.

Modern imperialism is based on the division of the world into competing territorial states. The competition of states generates the arms race and war. We support popular struggles against both military and economic expressions of imperialism.

In countries resisting invasion or domination by the major capitalist powers we support movements of workers and peasants in these countries, not their local states or local elites. We oppose the U.S. embargo against Cuba, but we do not support the bureaucratic ruling class that runs the island.

In situations where a “national liberation movement” aims to oust a pro-imperialist leadership in a country or fight an occupation, we support mass movements of workers and peasants in their struggle but not the state-building project of a “national liberation” political party. Real self-determination of working people requires the development of self-managed unions and popular organizations that exercise independence in relation to boss groups.

Imperialism can only be brought to an end by

a social transformation throughout the planet which eliminates the system of competing states and exploitative class systems. The human species needs to evolve a new form of world association that respects the autonomy and differences of all communities or ethnic groups while allowing for democratic decision-making, rooted in grassroots institutions such as delegate congresses, to resolve global problems.

Internationalism

The support of the American federal state and corporations for authoritarianism and anti-labor repression in the third world undermines the bargaining power of workers in the USA. The threat of relocation to Mexico or elsewhere has been used to extract concessions on wages and working conditions. The imperialist role of the U.S. federal state is a bi-partisan affair, supported solidly over the years by Democrats as well as Republicans. This imperialist role is against

the interests of workers in the USA as well as other countries. A common struggle with workers in other countries strengthens our fight against the bosses in the USA.

Economic interdependence and global capitalist power mean that a revolution that can liberate the working class from capitalist oppression needs to spread across national borders. An international movement is needed to defeat the bosses.

As internationalists, we advocate solidarity between workers in different countries, and the development of a trans-national unionism that can coordinate struggles across borders. As such, we encourage actions by workers in the USA to support worker freedoms and worker actions in other countries. We advocate the building of links between workers across borders, especially links with independent unions, autonomous mass popular organizations, and workers organizations who are close to our perspective.

We support efforts within the unions to break the American labor movement from any

alliances with the U.S. State Department or other agents of American corporations abroad. The labor movement in the USA must not be used as a tool of corporate profiteering and imperialist austerity in other countries.

Anti-racism

In the history of capitalism, racism has always been linked with the class system. Modern racism was developed to justify the enslavement of black people and the seizure of the lands of the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas. People of non-European origin were labeled “inferior” to justify worse treatment.

Our subordination to employers generates a constant struggle over control of our work and the division of the economic pie we produce. Discrimination creates resentments and divisions. By setting groups against each other, racism weakens our class power. All working people lose from this, including the

white working class.

Racism isn't just ideology or overt prejudice but also exists as a pattern of relative advantage or disadvantage. Racist patterns in society push people of color to the bottom. Thus struggles often have both a class and a race dimension, such as struggles against police brutality or against gentrification and evictions or struggles against anti-immigrant attacks.

We oppose racism in all its forms.

Groups that are subject to a particular form of oppression, on the basis of race or gender or nationality, will have concerns that arise from that. This is why we support autonomous social movements of specific communities. Through a process of dialogue, the specific concerns of oppressed communities can be brought into a common working class movement. The aim should be for the spirit and aspirations of groups subject to specific forms of oppression to be a part of the overall working class movement, and expressed in the life and aims of unions and other mass organizations. Incorporating the aspirations

of oppressed communities benefits the working class as a whole. Greater unity makes for a stronger movement, and a stronger working class can make gains that benefit everyone.

Anti-sexism

Inequality between men and women existed long before capitalism. As capitalism developed, the ability of women to earn a living outside the home was restricted. These restrictions on the entry of women into the larger economy made women dependent on men. The restricted opportunities for women in the labor market also made it easier for employers to pay women lower wages. Patriarchal capitalism has benefited from the free labor of women in the home, raising the next generation and caring for male wage-earners. Married women who work for wages are still burdened with the "double work day."

Society's lack of support for the raising of

children is part of the pressure that forces women into the role of primary child-raiser. Being the primary care-giver puts women at an economic disadvantage. Poverty among single mothers also affects their children. We believe that the larger society needs to provide more collective support for the raising of the next generation, such as providing free, quality child care and generous parental leaves for both men and women.

Like racism, sexism is a source of division in the working class. When people assume that men have primary responsibility for earning an income and women have primary responsibility children and maintaining the home, the struggles of women as workers, and wage equality for women, will be regarded as less important than the struggles of male wage-earners.

The struggle for the liberation of women is part of the struggle for a free and egalitarian society.

Because most women are part of the working class, the liberation of women won't be

complete without liberation from the class system. Nonetheless, women can make gains through struggles within the existing society, as women and as members of the working class. As with other specific groups within the working class, we support autonomous organization of women.

Queer Liberation

Patriarchal capitalist society holds most people to rigid gender roles and types of sexuality. These expectations breed homophobia and transphobia, sow divisions in the working class, and limit the possibilities for all people to have fulfilling lives.

Because oppression based on sexuality and gender is distinct from class oppression, though linked to it, we support autonomous organization to end these forms of oppression. We also urge worker and community organizations to support the struggles of people who are oppressed on the basis of gender identity and consensual

sexual relationships.

We seek a social environment where people are not trapped by oppressive social norms but are free to develop sexual expressions, gender identities, and relationships that are right for them.

Unionism

The working class does not develop the capacity to liberate itself overnight. Through a more or less protracted process, the working class can break through fatalism and longstanding habits of going along with hierarchy, overcome internal divisions (such as along lines of race or gender), and develop the skills and self-confidence, solidarity, and organizational strength needed to mount a fundamental challenge to the dominating classes.

The economy would grind to a halt without our work. This is the source of the collective power of the working class. Large-scale

solidarity such as general strikes builds in the working class a sense of our ability to change the society. Self-management of unions and other mass organizations develops in the members a sense of confidence in our abilities and of our capacity for running things ourselves. Widespread self-management of mass movements sets the stage for self-management of society.

After World War II, control of the American unions by a hierarchical structure of paid officers and staff became entrenched. Unions limited their focus to narrow economic issues, and routine bargaining, sector by sector. The general strikes and pitched battles of the years before World War 2 were a fading memory. The labor bureaucracy's monopolization of relations with the employers tended to make the members dependent on them. Workers came increasingly to regard the union as an external service agency. There was less emphasis on the workers' own action "in union" with each other.

The paid hierarchies are allergic to militant

action, wanting to minimize legal and financial risks to the union organization that is the basis of their career. They work to contain workers' struggles within the framework of longstanding relationships with the employers. National unions may impose a dictatorship called a trusteeship on local unions that pursue a more independent and militant course.

To have a labor movement that can be more effective as a fighting force today, and develop the potential to replace capitalism with economic self-management, a different kind of unionism needs to be developed.

The type of unionism that we advocate is self-managed by the members, works to spread solidarity and link up with workers in other countries, encourages mass participation, fights against all forms of inequality and discrimination, and rejects any idea of "partnership" or "common interests" with the bosses.

To transform the American labor movement, we support efforts to build new self-managed unions independent of the AFL-CIO and

Change to Win unions in situations where this makes strategic sense. At the same time, we cannot hope to play a role in many workers struggles, to put forth our ideas and our program, if we remain aloof and abstain from them simply because many of them take place within the AFL-CIO or Change to Win unions. So long as workers struggles are organized through these unions, we participate in those unions and their struggles.

We also support the building of autonomous rank-and-file movements in the AFL-CIO and Change to Win unions, independent of the bureaucracy. The sort of rank-and-file opposition movements that we support should not aim at merely electing a different leadership, but should aim at changing the union into a social movement based on mass participation and member control.

For unions to be self-managing, this starts with the importance of the general meetings of the members to make decisions. To prevent the organization becoming dependent on a small number of people, executive committee posts should have term limits. This needs to

be combined with a systematic approach to training members in all the tasks needed in running a union.

Full-time paid officials no longer suffer the daily indignities of subordination to the bosses. The often high salaries of union bureaucrats in the USA separate union officials from the conditions of life of union members and encourages officials to look at the union as their personal ticket out of the working class. We believe that the number of paid officials in the labor movement should be kept to a minimum. Local unions should avoid paid officers as much as possible. If workers feel that a paid officer is needed in a particular case, their pay should be limited to the average wage level of the workers. Half-time paid officers are better than full-time because at least the person still works under the bosses part of the time.

Genuine self-management of a union goes beyond the formal structure and also depends on active participation and education of members.

Community Organizing

The class struggle is not limited to the workplace but also spreads out into the broader community, in areas like housing, gentrification, transportation, pollution, welfare rights, police brutality. To challenge the dominating classes in society, the working class needs a movement that can address these struggles and the issues of the day. We support the development of mass self-managed organizations in the community such as tenant organizations or transit rider unions.

Developing links between labor organizations and grassroots organizations rooted in working class communities and communities of color is a way to strengthen struggles in both areas, and prefigures the sort of working class alliance that is needed to fundamentally challenge the dominating classes for control of the society.

Workers centers are a type of community-

based worker organization that has provided a grassroots alternative for workers in recent years. As with other labor organizations, we support worker control of worker centers and oppose top-down control by a paid hierarchy.

Working class communities can also develop various types of member-controlled, democratic economic institutions such as worker cooperatives, housing cooperatives, and community land trusts. Worker cooperatives can be used to provide jobs, provide services the movement needs, and illustrate the possibility of a society based on self-management. At the same time, the potential of worker cooperatives is limited by competitive pressures in an economy dominated by the big capitalist companies. Forming worker cooperatives is a useful tactic, but we don't see this as a strategy that can liberate the working class from the class system.

For a Self-managed Society

To liberate itself from subordination to dominating classes, the working class must dismantle the hierarchical structures of the corporations and the state. The working class, through its own united action, must seize and manage directly the entire system of production, distribution and services.

Self-management must not be limited to the workplaces but must be extended throughout the society and to governance of public affairs. Self-management means that people control the decisions that affect them. The basic building blocks of a self-managed society would be assemblies of workers in workplaces and of residents in neighborhoods. These assemblies would be federated together throughout society.

The transformation of society that we seek isn't limited to breaking down the power of dominating classes. The revolution must also unravel the state, patriarchy, white

supremacy, and imperialism.

To replace capitalism, we do not support “market socialism” where workplaces are the collective private property of groups of workers. Market competition would pit workers against each other and lead to new privileges and the re-emergence of a class system. The land and means of production must become the common property of everyone in society.

The alternative to bureaucratic central planning and market exploitation is a system of grassroots social planning that begins with the participation of people where they live and work, and horizontal interaction between communities and the workplace organizations. Proposals that affect larger geographic areas or whole industries can be developed through congresses of delegates from the base assemblies.

Re-designing jobs and getting rid of dangerous or polluting technology will be priorities in a social transformation that aims at human liberation and environmental sustainability. Liberation from class domination means

systematically developing the potential of all working people, and dissolving the power of the bureaucratic hierarchies of professionals and managers. To ensure that everyone can effectively participate in decision-making, jobs need to be re-designed so that conceptual and decision-making tasks are integrated with the tasks of doing the physical work.

Self-emancipation of the working class requires that the working class gain power over society. But the working class can only actually exercise power by doing so collectively through institutions of popular self-management. A self-managing society needs a governance structure through which the people make and enforce the basic rules of the society and defend their social order. We envision regional and national congresses of delegates elected by the base assemblies that would have the basic power of making decisions about social rules and society-wide priorities. Proposals of the congresses that are particularly controversial or important should be referred back to the base assemblies for decision.

The hierarchical professional military should be replaced by an egalitarian people's militia. During the process of social transformation, we are opposed to any armed bodies that are not under the direct control of the working class mass organizations. The working class needs to make sure that when the dust settles there's not some hierarchical armed power that can be used by an elite to defend some new system of boss power.

Ecology

The ecological crisis of our time has its roots in the capitalist market. Companies only worry about things that have a market price. Corporations shift real human costs onto others when their pollution has ill effects on worker health, or working class neighborhoods or communities of color. Businesses pollute because they don't have to pay for the real costs to humanity from their pollution.

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We envision a world where common ownership of the earth, a socially controlled economy, and the direct democracy of communities acts as guardian of ecological sustainability.

Political Organization

We advocate the development of an anti-authoritarian political organization where membership is based on a shared political perspective. Without a shared perspective, disagreements on basic points can get in the way of joint activity and cooperation.

Political ideas and strategies need to be informed by practical experience. This means that the political organization needs to bring together activists who are rooted in working class communities and their mass organizations and struggles. Through our active presence we can learn from others.

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Through our participation and organizing activity, and the influence of our ideas, we can build a social base within the working class for our anti-authoritarian approach to social transformation.

Through organization activists can avoid isolation, participate in discussions with other activists who have different experiences, and get together for common political work. Through organization we can pool resources and sustain publications and other efforts to build a visible presence for our ideas.

We advocate an approach where activists work to spread widely within the rank and file of movements and mass organizations the self-confidence, knowledge, skills and opportunities for decision-making participation needed to make self-management an effective reality. We want mass organizations to be self-managing and we work for this aim in such organizations and to counteract bureaucratic or authoritarian tendencies.

We reject the Leninist theory of a “vanguard party” which seeks to manage the movement

for social change as a prelude to seizing state power. This approach fails to see the danger of concentrating decision-making and expertise into the hands of a few. The liberatory social transformation that we seek will not be brought about by a political party running a hierarchical state but through the creation of institutions of collective self-management by a working class mass movement. “The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the workers themselves.”

We do not claim to have the final “correct line” or all the answers.

