

Make 2014 a year of organizing the working class struggle!

Six years after the beginning of the Great Recession the stock market has reached its highest level ever. After-tax profits are more than 60 percent higher than in 2007, and the combined net worth of the world's billionaires has doubled since 2009.

But the poor have gotten poorer: Real manufacturing wages have fallen 3% since May 2009. The percentage of the U.S. working-age population with a job has fallen 4.6% since 2008, with the number of long-term unemployed, 4.1 million, now higher than during the official recession. The number of people receiving food stamps has jumped from 28.2 million in 2008 to 47.7 million last year, an increase of 70%. And due to racial discrimination, African Americans, other national minorities and immigrants have suffered the most.

Meanwhile: Much of Europe is back in recession, while the predicted growth for the rest of the continent won't decrease unemployment. Growth of the Chinese and other economies which have driven the global recovery for the rich has been slowing. The World Bank predicts only a 2.8% increase in U.S. GDP for 2014, i.e., another year of economic stagnation and mass privation. And the financial speculators have again built bubbles in the world economy which will burst at some point, like happened in 2007.

This terrible crisis for the people is being caused by the capitalist system of production--a system where the general tendency is for the rich to get richer while the poor get poorer, and a system whose internal contradictions inevitably explode into economic crises like that of today, crises in which the capitalists and their politicians fight to make the people further bear the burden.

The Democrats and Republicans vs the working class

In this situation, Obama and the Democrats have shown they're loyal servants of Wall Street and the rich, just as the Republicans are. That's why when they had large majorities in the Senate and House they handed \$trillions to the financial parasites, but *refused* to enact sweeping relief measures for the workers and poor. And today they use the excuse of Republican control of the House of Representatives to push through austerity measures labeled "necessary compromises." Thus, when people need food stamps the most, in November they united with the Republicans to cut \$5 billion from SNAP immediately, and

\$11 billion over three years. And House Democratic minority whip Hoyer now says he'll vote for another proposed cut of \$9 billion over 10 years, adding that this will likely pass the House with substantial Democratic support. Furthermore, in December the Democrats made a budget deal with the Republicans that cut off extended unemployment benefits to 1.3 million workers. Oh, they said don't worry, they would introduce a bill to extend emergency benefits again. But it turns out that Senate Majority Leader Reid now argues for reducing benefits from their old level, and promises that even this will be paid for by slashing other social spending--and that's in the Senate, not the Republican-controlled House.

Meanwhile, with the modest demand for a \$15 an hour minimum wage sweeping the country, what have Obama and the Democrats been doing? Well, before being elected Obama made promises, but with the Democrats controlling both houses of Congress he did absolutely nothing. Then, last January Obama said he wanted a \$9 an hour minimum wage. The leaders of the United Food and Commercial Workers union — which is trying to organize Walmart workers — praised Obama's empty and miserly talk, adding "\$9 an hour is not a perfect solution.... However it is certainly a great stride." (How "reasonable" of them! Never mind that even \$15 an hour is not close to being a living wage!) Now, this January Obama is saying he wants to raise the minimum to \$10.10 an hour. But after five years if he's actually serious *this time*, he knows he'll have to make compromises with the Republicans to get even that.

Organizing a class response

This shows why it's going to take a movement that the capitalists and their politicians are afraid is getting out of their control to shake any substantial concessions out of Washington. And there is no doubt that the workers and poor can rise to beat back capitalism's impoverishing tendencies. After all, when confronted with the great workers' upsurge of the 1930s, or the mass struggles and rebellions of the 1960s, the ruling class did make economic and political concessions that improved the lives of the people, and with their great wealth they can certainly do so again. Furthermore, the masses today do want to fight back: Workers and youths flocking to Occupy Wall Street protests showed they do. Mass support for efforts by fast-

food, Walmart and other low-wage workers to organize and fight back shows they do. The popularity of the \$15 an hour minimum wage demand shows they do. The elation of workers in all industries when Boeing machinists rejected the company's November concessions demands shows they do.

But moving forward remains difficult: Class consciousness is still low. The tradition of mass struggle has in large part been lost (the last big U.S. strike wave occurred in 1970-71, while, with the exception of certain revivals, the other progressive movements have also declined). There are not a lot of activists with experience in organizing. There has been great disorganization of the working class, with just 6.6% of private-sector workers even in class-collaborationist trade unions. Thus, activists are going to have to take matters into their own hands to accomplish a lot.

**Not just endless resistance,
but a liberating movement!**

For the working class to effectively resist the downward pressure of capitalism requires a struggle to unify its ranks by fighting against racial discrimination, against sexual discrimination, for full rights for immigrants, and against imperialist enslavement of the workers in other countries by the U.S. ruling class. And it's through building such a movement that the workers begin to transform themselves into a revolutionary class. Moreover, the struggles of today are immeasurably strengthened by the knowledge that the worker's movement is not just aimed at fighting the effects of capitalism, but also aimed at doing away with the cause of those effects—the capitalist system itself.

In the workplaces, schools and neighborhoods, and in all of the immediate struggles, we can all play a role in building such a liberating workers movement. Spread the spirit of resistance, and organize!

Lessons from the Boeing machinists' struggle

Raking in record profits, and sitting on a backlog of 4,777 orders for planes, in November Boeing launched a campaign to extort more: if the machinists did not submit to unprecedented concessions demands, and the State of Washington to its demands for more tax relief, Boeing would move production of the new 777X to a lower-wage area of the country.

So the corporate prostitutes of both political parties rushed to give Boeing \$8.7 billion in tax incentives plus state-funded training help, and on January 3 the machinists voted to accept a contract that does away with defined benefit pensions (which they won in 1947), raises workers' healthcare contributions, and under which starting pay for the bottom three pay grades will be at the state minimum wage at the end of the contract. Additionally, the workers are locked into this rotten contract for 10 years, while Boeing can still subcontract or outsource work under it!

This is a defeat for all workers, which the CEOs of other corporations will now try to outdo. More, the closeness of the acceptance vote — just 600 votes out of more than 23,000 votes cast — only highlights the need to draw lessons from it:

1) The Democrats are also corporate servants: Sen. Patty Murray mediated the secret talks between Boeing and the union; Gov. Inslee then called a special session of the state

legislature to give Boeing another handout; Murray, Inslee, and the entire political establishment did propaganda that the machinists had to bow to Boeing's demands.

2) The role of International Association of Machinists (IAM) leaders was also to help Boeing: They went behind the workers' backs and negotiated with the company, then tried to rush through a proposal the rank and file had little time to study and organize against. After that failed by a 2-1 margin in November, the International scheduled the next vote to occur when many workers would still be away on the holidays. Meanwhile, the District 751 leaders who had been split over recommending a yes or no vote in November, did organize against the second proposal. But in a move that sabotaged the fight by the rank and file, they closed comments on their website.

This shows why machinists and all workers need to get organized independent of and against the Democrats and trade union apparatuses. Indeed, for the next ten years Boeing workers are going to have to fight on many shop and plant issues that the labor bureaucrats won't fight on. But the screwing of the machinists is just part of the class offensive of the entire capitalist class. Thus, more than ever, Boeing workers should add their numbers to all of the progressive movements in society, and to building a truly independent movement of the working class.

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