

The Decline of the Labour Movement:

A Socialist Perspective

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I. Introduction

This chapter examines the gradual yet unmistakable decline of the Canadian labour movement over the past thirty years, arguing that its persistent malaise is due, above all, to the dominant influence of ideological perspectives that have long proven to be dead-ends for labour and obstacles to human progress.

Despite significant changes in the contours of global capitalism since the onset of the neoliberal era, Canada's labour officialdoms have maintained an essentially pro-capitalist and liberal-reformist outlook, one that has left organized labour severely handicapped in the face of an aggressive drive by the capitalist class to force working people to pay an ever-mounting bill to "save the system." Unfortunately, these leaderships – both within the unions and the New Democratic Party (NDP) – have been challenged altogether inadequately by the self-identified socialist left in Canada. At a time when capital is moving boldly to restructure class relations in response to the worst system-wide crisis of world capitalism since the 1930s, we argue that it is urgent for socialists to develop an orientation to organized labour that is based on a fully Marxist assessment of capitalism's manifest incapacity to chart a progressive path forward, and which builds on the major lessons of the international socialist and communist movements over the past century.

Capital's new class strategy, in response to the global slump precipitated by the financial crisis of 2007-08, has both national peculiarities and international dimensions. Almost everywhere, however, the capitalist class has chosen to redouble its commitment to a neoliberal policy of profit maximization, intensified exploitation, privatization, and cutbacks to popular social programs. Canada has been no exception in this respect. The failure of the labour movement to respond to capital's offensive in a resolute way has only emboldened the capitalist class to intensify its anti-labour offensive.

An effective labour counter-offensive, in our opinion, will require the emergence of significant political forces prepared to wage a determined fight for the fundamental programmatic positions of Marxist socialism. In light of the diverse meanings and confusions attached to the term "socialism" in contemporary political discourse, it is perhaps appropriate for us to begin with a clear statement of the specifically Marxist-socialist conception to which we adhere, one offered recently by Smith and Dumont:

As a body of ideas and as a movement toward a society beyond capitalism, Marxist socialism stands for the dissolution of capitalist private property, collective ownership of the means of production and distribution, a democratically planned economy, and the replacement of antagonistic social relations of exploitation, competition and domination with relations of equality, cooperation and solidarity: a classless, communist society. From the Marxist perspective, socialism is not merely an ethical ideal: it is the only fully rational response to the intensifying contradictions of the capitalist world order.... Marx's most important contribution to socialist theory was his insight that the working class is the sole historical actor with the consistent objective interest, structural location and social power to replace capitalism with socialism, and that this class must organize itself as an *independent political force* to achieve that goal. ¹

We recognize of course that this programmatic vision, and the urgent need for a class-struggle workers' party to fight for it, are very remote from the day-to-day thinking of the great majority of working-class people in Canada. Socialist class consciousness has never been widespread in this country. What's more, thirty years of ascendant neoliberalism, the collapse of Soviet-bloc "socialism," the subsequent discrediting of the socialist idea in the eyes of millions, and the effective demobilization of the labour movement by leaderships increasingly committed to collaborating with rather than confronting capital – all of this has contributed to a significant *regression* in working-class consciousness. Nevertheless, the elementary responsibility of Marxist socialists remains to "speak the truth to the masses no matter how bitter it may be."² And the simple truth is that twenty-first century capitalism has nothing to offer working people but a menu of despair.

II. The Decline of Canadian Labour, 1975-2012

The Canadian labour movement reached the peak of its power and influence in the 1970s after two decades of struggles for a "better deal" for working people in a context of fairly robust economic growth. The cataclysm of World War II had created favorable conditions for high levels of profitability and capital accumulation in the post-war period. Meanwhile, the attraction exerted by the "actually existing socialisms" of the Soviet bloc placed considerable pressure on corporations and governments in the capitalist West to make significant concessions to their well-organized and powerful labour movements. The capitalist rulers were determined not only to cast Soviet-style Communism in the worst possible light, but also to convince working people in the West that real improvements in their living standards could be achieved within capitalism.

In Canada, the policy of the capitalist class in response to the Cold War and a perceived threat of a left-wing takeover of the unions involved an implied social contract to respect workers' collective bargaining rights so long as "moderate" labour leaders repudiated the more radical aims espoused by the labour movement's leftist militants. In exchange for its cooperation in purging the movement of such elements (a purge that was less thorough in Canada than in the United States), the labour leadership was rewarded with a recognition by capital and the state that had previously eluded it. With this "capital-labour accord," the stage was set for a series of hard-fought battles – and real victories – by organized labour that nevertheless rarely transgressed the boundaries of legality or posed the question of working-class political power.³

Business Unionism, Stagflation and the Profitability Crisis of the 1970s

The ideology and ethos of business unionism became thoroughly entrenched by the early 1950s. The "approved" role of the labour movement was to bargain for improvements in the terms and conditions of the sale of labour-power of wage-earners fortunate enough to be unionized, and to intervene in the political arena only in ways that reinforced the legitimacy of capitalist parliamentary democracy and its "rule of law." The unwavering message of the labour bureaucracy was that "bread and butter unionism" combined with a parliamentary struggle for limited social reforms (ideally through the CCF/NDP but also through pressure on the bourgeois Liberal and Conservative parties) would lead to the best of all possible worlds.

The stagflation and profitability crisis of the 1970s marked a crucial turning point in the fortunes of organized labour. In 1975, the rate of return on capital investment in Canada reached its lowest point of the post-war era. Faced with sluggish growth and soaring inflation, capital and the various branches of the capitalist state responded with an aggressive anti-labour offensive. The post-war capital-labour accord unraveled as strike-breaking legislation and wage controls were introduced.

Under pressure from a militant base that was influenced to an increasing degree by the left-wing radicalism of the period (above all in Québec and British Columbia), labour leaders tried to reassure the ranks that these attacks would be held at bay. But no serious fight-back was ever organized – not against the draconian strikebreaking legislation of the British Columbia NDP government in October 1975, which initiated the capitalist state's onslaught against organized labour by ordering back to work over 60,000 striking forest workers, supermarket employees, rail workers and truck drivers, and not against the Liberal federal government's wage-control policy announced less than a week later, which effectively repealed workers' rights to fight for wage increases outside the policy's guidelines. Even in Québec, where labour militancy had merged with a rising tide of Québécois nationalism to create a radicalized workers' movement highly receptive to socialist ideas, the militant struggles of the early 1970s – culminating in the near-insurrectionary mobilizations of 1972's Common Front – gave way to a period of bureaucratically enforced quiescence, abetted in some significant measure by workers' illusions in the *indépendantiste* Parti Québécois (PQ) government, elected for the first time in 1976. As capitalists and the state signaled their intention to make the working class pay for the economic crisis, the officials of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), the Québec Federation of Labour (FTQ), the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN, of Québec) and the major industrial and public-sector unions refused to lead or countenance any strikes that defied the federal government's "anti-inflation program." While a few protests were organized to allow rank and file militants to blow off steam, calls for a defensive general strike against the wage-control policy were rebuffed by the labour brass.

From that point on, the trade union leadership in Canada began to define a new role for itself: to not just promote the illusion that working people could prosper in a profit-driven, capitalist society, but to act more and more openly as the guardians of the capitalist order within the labour movement. The end of capitalism's post-war expansion and the intensifying contradictions of the system demanded that these "labour lieutenants of the capitalist class" assume a new duty on behalf of capital: to convince workers of the need for "restraint" and sometimes major concessions to capital, even as the capitalist state moved ever more decisively to curtail hard-won trade union freedoms.

After 1975, strike-breaking legislation became a routine matter for governments both federally and provincially, and the state expanded the roster of jobs defined as essential. At the same time, employers became much more likely to recruit replacement (scab) workers during strikes and lockouts. Actions to restrict or suspend workers' rights, originally used only in exceptional circumstances, become standard practice. And all of this was made possible by the labour bureaucracy's willingness to place respect for capitalist "law and order" – back-to-work legislation, bans on secondary boycotts, strike-breaking court injunctions, and so on – ahead of the principles and tactics that had built the labour movement: worker solidarity, impenetrable

picket lines and militant defiance of the anti-labour machinations of capitalists, governments and courts.

Declining Living Standards

The upshot to this story is by now well known. Since the 1970s, real wages have stagnated or declined for most of the Canadian workforce. While unionized workers have made some real, episodic gains in wages and benefits, these have been offset by layoffs and downsizing – and, since the onset of the Great Recession in 2008, many past gains have been eroded or reversed. Meanwhile, non-unionized workers and the precariously employed have fared still worse, as minimum wage levels have failed to keep up with increases in the cost of living and the social safety net has become increasingly threadbare. Today, working-class households are contributing more labour to the economy than they did in the 1970s, while receiving less remuneration and enduring increased levels of taxation (via regressive sales taxes and government service fees). Cuts in education and health care spending have also contributed to a general decline in working-class living standards and quality of life.

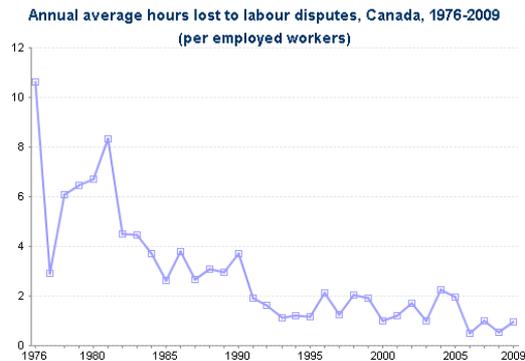
The typical Canadian worker, faced with falling after-tax wages and a scaled-down “welfare state,” has relied more and more on credit to plug the gap between wages and expenses. Average household debt doubled from about \$20,000 in 2001 to over \$40,000 in 2009. Furthermore, high unemployment and underemployment levels have become intractable, and an official unemployment rate of seven percent or more is now considered normal. Growing numbers of workers are consigned to dead-end, part-time employment, and forced to work two or even three jobs (often at minimum wage) in order to make ends meet.⁴ While a “union advantage” remains in terms of higher wages and superior benefits, this advantage has diminished markedly with the recent gutting of pension plans and the introduction in several industries, most notably auto, of two-tier pay schemes that require new hires to accept drastically lower wage rates.

Union Density and the Decline of Labour Militancy

Despite the success of capital’s anti-labour offensive in the second half of the 1970s, successful union organizing efforts continued into the 1980s. Union density – the percentage of the non-agricultural workforce that is unionized – peaked in the early 1980s at over 37%. Since then, however, there has been a gradual but steady decline to about 31% (in 2009) – and to just 17% in the private sector.⁵ The drop has been precipitous in the manufacturing and extraction industries. Only a unionization rate of approximately 70% in the public sector prevented a much bigger decline in overall unionization levels.⁶

If strikes and lockouts are viewed as indicators of worker militancy (and of workers’ resolve to defend themselves and effect positive change), then we can say that militancy peaked in the 1970s and went into steep decline after the early 1980s (see Chart 1). Waning militancy was caused by three interrelated factors: 1) the growth of unemployment during and after a series of severe recessions (those of 1981-82, 1990-92, and 2008-09) and the downsizing of unionized workforces in several key industries resulting from automation on the one hand and the relocation of production to lower-wage regions on the other; 2) the determined suppression of rank-and-file militancy by the trade union bureaucracy; and 3) the sustained assault on trade union rights by federal and provincial governments.

Chart 1



Source: <http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=14>

Trade union leaders and their apologists insist that militant struggle by workers to resist the depredations of the past 35 years was impossible given the ability of firms to play the “global relocation” card as they bargained with an increasingly insecure workforce and the constraints imposed by ever-more restrictive labour legislation. While reflecting a profound and unwarranted defeatism, this argument contains an important element of truth insofar as it points to the need for the labour movement to develop a *political perspective* for implementing a “pro-labour agenda” rather than relying on militant skirmishes in what Marx once called the “guerrilla warfare” of unions against specific capitalist enterprises. However, the labour bureaucrats’ argument in no way recognizes the need for organized labour to adopt a class-against-class, socialist and internationalist perspective. Rather, it promotes the idea that the *sine qua non* for labour’s advance must be the election of NDP (or even Liberal) governments that will resist the “excesses” of neoliberalism and counter the “corporate agenda” (without challenging the capitalist system). For the labour reformists, only a change in the political complexion of the federal parliament, the provincial legislatures and the courts can “alter the relationship of forces” in such a way as to create a climate favorable to labour’s forward march. And only a judicious division of labour between the movement’s parliamentary/political and workplace/union wings can bring this about.⁷

This brings us to the question of the New Democratic Party – long touted as labour’s “political arm” by the union bureaucracy and as the lodestar of “independent working class political action” by much of Canada’s radical left.

Social Democracy and the NDP

The new party that emerged from the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in 1961 was formed to bring organized labour more centrally into what had been a predominantly petty-bourgeois social democratic formation, one with deep roots in British Fabianism, Christian

socialism and prairie populism. In a general sense the NDP was modeled on the trade-union based British Labour Party. Individual unions and the English Canadian labour federations established well-defined organizational links with the party, providing the labour officialdom with formal representation and a distinct role in policy formation. In return, the party counted on the unions for massive financial support and other strategic resources (such as canvassers for election campaigns).

The central role played by unions in the formation of the NDP defined it as a “social-democratic labour party.” It was, and remains, what Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin called a “bourgeois workers’ party” – a party centrally based on the working class and its organizations but with an opportunist and fundamentally pro-capitalist program and leadership. In the 1960s and 1970s, under the leadership of T.C. Douglas, David Lewis and Ed Broadbent, the federal party accepted the “democratic socialist” label with some alacrity, although the “social-democratic” designation came to be preferred over time. The NDP’s association with the birth of Medicare, as well as the role of CCF and NDP governments in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and British Columbia in establishing non-profit, public auto insurance corporations, helped to define its distinctive profile as a party working for “the little guy” in opposition to “the status quo” and what Lewis called the “corporate welfare bums.”

Initially, at least, some of the more left-wing New Democrats spoke vaguely of socialism as a long-term goal of the party (as did the party constitution), but policy platforms were always focused on the expansion of public health care and other social services, the reduction of poverty, and the extension of labour, women’s and minority rights *within the capitalist framework*. As the mainstream political pendulum swung to the right, however, so did NDP policy. And as it registered successes in forming provincial governments in Western Canada, and ultimately in Ontario and Nova Scotia, the party displayed a growing appetite to demonstrate that it was ready and able to be a “business-friendly” steward of the capitalist economy and the public purse. As was the case with other social-democratic parties internationally, the differences between the NDP and what Douglas had called “the old line parties” progressively narrowed. Today’s NDP leaders are now loath to refer to the plight of “workers” or the struggles of organized labour, preferring to profess solidarity with “families” and devotion to the interests of “Canadians.”

Was this drift to the right inevitable? Those who argue that it wasn’t sometimes cite the experience of the NDP’s Waffle caucus in the early 1970s, a left-reformist formation whose 1969 manifesto called for an “independent socialist Canada” and whose leadership candidate, James Laxer, put up a strong challenge to David Lewis in the federal leadership race of 1971. But a serious examination of the Waffle reveals that its program and strategy were totally inadequate to reversing the rightward trajectory of the NDP.⁸ Indeed, the left-nationalism that it pioneered morphed into an important mainstay of Canadian labour reformism as capitalism entered the neoliberal era.

As economic inequality and unemployment grew with the ascendance of monetarist and neoliberal policies, the labour reformists were determined to deflect the attention of their working-class base from the intensifying crisis tendencies of capitalism by emphasizing the need for “Canadians” to unite against a host of *external* threats: U.S.-based unions willing to sacrifice “Canadian jobs” as a deindustrialization process beset the American rust belt in the early 1980s;

the 1989 Free Trade Agreement with the United States; and, above all, the North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994, which brought semi-colonial Mexico into the free-trade pact between Canada and the U.S. The free-trade agreements became especially convenient nationalist scapegoats for the dismal performance of the Canadian economy in the 1990s. As successive Conservative and Liberal governments pursued anti-labour austerity, the labour reformists blamed the economic malaise on the erosion of Canada's "sovereignty," thereby "absolving *capitalism* of the responsibility for the hardships that the [early 1990s] recession visited upon Canadian working people."⁹

Over time, the three pillars of the NDP's social-democratic reformism – overt class collaboration, economic nationalism and faith in the class neutrality of the "democratic" capitalist state – have become increasingly visible as its one-time pretenses to "democratic socialism" and to "independent working-class political action" have been discarded. More often than not, the political practice flowing from these "principles" has been in accord with the outlook of the trade union bureaucracy. But that practice has also led to occasional conflicts between the "parliamentary" and "workplace" wings of Canadian labour reformism.

The Bitter Fruit of Labour Reformism

NDP politicians and union bureaucrats never tire of lauding the historic accomplishments of organized labour. Yet most of those accomplishments – a trend toward rising real wages and improved benefits for unionized workers, Medicare, public auto-insurance programs and some other crown corporations in three Western provinces, pro-worker health and safety legislation – pre-date the watershed year of 1975. Against that relatively meager ledger, it's crucial to examine some of the labour leadership's major failures and overt betrayals of working-class interests since then:

- As previously noted, in October 1975, the NDP government of British Columbia broke a strike wave involving 60,000 workers, paving the way for Pierre Trudeau's introduction of country-wide wage controls a week later. The B.C. Federation of Labour refused to mount any serious opposition to the strike-breaking legislation and endorsed the NDP a couple of months later in a provincial election which the party ended up losing.
- In response to the federal Liberal government's anti-inflation (wage-control) program of 1975, the leaders of the union movement in English Canada and Québec alike limited their opposition to grumbling and non-disruptive protests. Calls for a limited general strike to break the wage controls, while popular in the ranks, were rebuffed by the top labour bureaucrats. (A one-day general strike, under the firm control of the labour centrals, was organized a year later, primarily in order to dissipate militancy and allow the ranks to blow off steam.)
- In the fall of 1975, the Québec Federation of Labour adopted a formal policy of "tactical support" for the bourgeois-nationalist Parti Québécois. Henceforth, the leaders of all three of the largest trade union bodies resisted calls for the creation of a labour party in Québec even as the PQ dropped its pro-labor pretenses. The socialist rhetoric of many of the union leaders in the early 1970s was abandoned in favour of a nationalist appeal to workers to make common cause with the PQ to achieve Québec independence. Labour

leaders who went to jail in defiance of anti-union injunctions and railed against capitalism in the early 1970s became involved with a venture-capitalist Solidarity Fund in the 1980s that enriched union coffers through investments in non-unionized enterprises.

- In response to rising sovereigntist sentiment in Québec, the English Canadian trade unions and the NDP have frequently adapted themselves to anti-Québec chauvinism even while paying occasional lip service to the right of the Québécois to self-determination. A major consequence of the rise of nationalism in the English Canadian labour movement was resistance to the decentralization of the Canadian state and the promotion of the federal government as the primary vehicle for progressive social change. As leftists in English Canada and Québec identified themselves with the rising nationalist tides in their respective societies, they became unable to define a common program of struggle for the labour movement on a pan-Canadian scale. Such a program needed to recognize that neither the federal government nor Québec's provincial government, as key components of the Canadian capitalist state, could be relied upon to promote working-class interests.
- In British Columbia in 1983, Solidarity, a coalition of labour unions, leftists and community groups, mobilized against the Social Credit government in response to the latter's aggressive attacks on labour rights and social spending. Escalating, often illegal, strikes multiplied, accompanied by huge demonstrations in the streets, leading to growing sentiment in the labour movement for a general strike to oust the government. The thrust toward a general strike was ultimately thwarted by senior bureaucrats of the BC Federation of Labour, effectively derailing the most significant mass mobilization against the capitalist offensive of the 1980s.¹⁰
- In 1985, the Canadian division of the United Auto Workers (UAW) broke away from its U.S.-based parent to form the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW). Presenting themselves as a progressive alternative to the staid and ultra-bureaucratic UAW leadership, Bob White and his acolytes soon demonstrated that the CAW's major goal was to get a better deal for Canadian workers at the expense of their beleaguered (and largely African-American) counterparts in Michigan. Investment by the Big Three automakers poured into Ontario and Québec as they sought to lower labour costs by taking advantage of a weak Canadian dollar and Canada's publicly-financed health insurance system. The stage was set for a fragmentation of workers' struggles in the most internationally integrated industry in North America. Instead of campaigning for a program of international solidarity and class-struggle unionism throughout the North American auto industry (including Mexico), the "social unionists" of the CAW bureaucracy helped pave the way for the huge concessions to the auto bosses made by the CAW and the UAW alike following the financial crisis of 2008.
- In 1990, after several years of supporting a Liberal government in an informal legislative coalition, the NDP formed a government in Ontario for the first time. Under the leadership of Bob Rae, the NDP introduced public-housing and job-creations programs, allowed (non-migrant) agricultural workers to organize collectively (but not to strike!), and passed pay and employment equity legislation. But it also reneged on its popular campaign promise to bring public auto insurance to Ontario, claiming that, under the terms of the Free Trade Agreement, the province would risk reprisals from American-

based insurance companies. In 1993 Rae introduced his so-called Social Contract as a means to reduce the provincial deficit in the wake of the severe recession of 1990-92. This *diktat* involved the unilateral re-opening of public-sector collective agreements to reduce wages and salaries – a fundamental assault on the principle of free collective bargaining. Thousands resigned from the party and many unions vowed to defeat the government in the next election. The wounded relationship between the NDP and organized labour in Ontario would take many years to heal.

- With little positive to show for its time in office, the Ontario NDP went down to severe defeat in 1995, having paved the way for a resurgent Conservative party led by the right-wing zealot Mike Harris. Harris's blend of neo-conservative and neoliberal policies encompassed cuts to healthcare, education and social programs, union-busting workfare schemes, layoffs to thousands of provincial employees, and the curtailing of union rights. Tax cuts to business and middle-income earners were paid for through vicious reductions in social assistance to single mothers on welfare and other victims of poverty. In reaction to Harris' right-wing offensive, an Ontario version of B.C.'s Solidarity movement emerged. The "Days of Action" were a series of one-day political strikes held between 1995 and 1998 to protest Harris's "Common Sense Revolution" and bring the Tory government to heel. Initiated mainly by the CAW and the public-sector unions and coordinated with a variety of community groups, the first two of these events were organized in London and Hamilton. Both succeeded in shutting down all but essential services. Much to the surprise of the union brass, more than one hundred thousand people demonstrated in Hamilton on February 23, 1996, suggesting the possibility that the movement could escape the control of the labour officialdom. With the obvious intention of winding the movement down, the labour tops selected two smaller centers, Kitchener and Peterborough, for what they hoped would be the last of the protests. But Harris was unyielding and offered the labour leaders precisely nothing in return for a cessation of the protests. Angry and insulted, the labour leaders decided to target Toronto for yet another demonstration of organized labour's might. The Toronto days of action shut down the city's transit system on Friday, October 25 and was followed up the next day by a march on the provincial legislature involving a quarter of a million protesters. Fueled by the militancy of Ontario public sector workers, popular sentiment and momentum were building toward a province-wide general strike. But instead of preparing such an offensive, the CAW and the public-sector union brass responded by calling for more city-wide shutdowns. In the end, the anti-Harris movement petered out as successively smaller days of action were organized in such lightly populated and/or relatively remote centers as St. Catharines, Kingston, North Bay and Thunder Bay. Thanks to the combined efforts of "social unionists" like Buzz Hargrove and "business unionists" like OFL chief Gord Wilson, the Ontario Days of Action – which had begun as one of the most promising fight-backs against neoliberalism anywhere in the world – ended with a whimper.
- Since the early 1970s, the NDP, with the full support of the trade union bureaucracy, has had a consistent record of openness to forming informal and even formal coalitions with Canada's major capitalist parties. In the early 1970s, David Lewis's NDP entered a parliamentary "corridor coalition" with the minority government of Trudeau's Liberal Party. In 2008, the federal NDP caucus entered into a formal agreement with the Liberals

to defeat Harper's government and to form a coalition government with the backing of the Bloc Québécois. It has now been at least forty years since the NDP has presented itself as a clear pole of independent working-class political action in an election and just as long since it has distinguished itself from the parties of big business on any policy issue (either domestic or foreign) involving a clear, class-based principle.

- Between 1989 and 1991, the labour reformists joined hands with capitalist politicians in celebrating the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet bloc countries, “forgetting” that many of the gains made by the Western working classes in the post-war period had been won “in the shadow of actually existing socialism.” With the disappearance of these bureaucratized workers’ states, the ideological agents of capital stepped up their propaganda campaign to convince the working-class masses that “no alternative” to capitalism is possible – a campaign that was soon joined by mainstream social democrats in Canada as elsewhere.
- In the federal election campaigns of 2006, 2008 and 2011, the NDP, under the leadership of Jack Layton, ran on the most right-wing platforms in its history, embracing much of the neoliberal package (“no tax increases,” “tough on crime”) and with no mention of socialism or even social democracy. Even though the 2011 platform contained nothing about strengthening labour rights in Canada, the cohort of 103 NDP MPs elected in the May election included many activists from the CAW and the various provincial teachers’ unions.
- Even as the NDP distances itself from the unions and downplays its nominally pro-labour platform under the new leadership of former Quebec Liberal Thomas Mulcair, an organic relationship with organized labour persists –but one perhaps that reveals less about the NDP than about the comatose state of the unions. The NDP continues its steady movement to the right – not in opposition to the trade union bureaucracy, but hand in hand with it.

III. Labour Reformism: A Marxist Critique

In the spring of 2011, as the confrontation between organized labour and Wisconsin’s union-busting Republican governor Scott Walker captured public attention, CAW president Ken Lewenza contributed an opinion piece to the *Financial Post* explaining his vision of the indispensable role of unions in contemporary capitalist society:

[Unions] push both employers and governments to act with a measure of fairness in the labour market, promoting equality, inclusion and hope. No society without free and vibrant unions is truly democratic. And no economy without widespread collective bargaining has ever attained truly mass prosperity.

Imagine if the Scott Walkers of the world had their way, and unions were somehow banned altogether. The non-union workers at the local fast food outlet would still be making minimum wage, with no benefits, no security, and no pension. But a crucial,

constructive channel through which their hopes and frustrations could be directed, has now have been closed off. Who knows where and how the simmering fury of exploited, poor people would then bubble up?¹¹

In this revealing appeal to the “business community,” Lewenza spelled out clearly and unmistakably the *class-collaborationist* essence of the labour reformism espoused by the leaders of Canada’s unions. Lewenza’s message: *Unions contribute to the stability of capitalist society – without them all hell might break loose! Accordingly, capitalist employers and unions must work together to achieve a “truly democratic” society.* Who can believe that the Canadian labour movement can revive itself so long as it remains in the grip of such pro-capitalist ideas? Yet it would be foolishly naive to regard the bureaucratic conservatism of the labour officialdom as springing simply from mistaken ideas. The commitment of labour’s misleaders to such views must be given a satisfactory *materialist* explanation.

In an article exploring the limits of the “social unionism” once espoused by the CAW leadership, we have previously outlined the principal material factors that contribute to the emergence of conservative union bureaucracies within the organized labour movement, along with some of the major consequences of that bureaucratization:

At bottom, the bureaucratization of the labour movement is a product of three factors: the need for a functional division of labour and a cadre of full-time leaders and staff members within trade unions once these organizations have established themselves as on-going apparatuses commanding significant material resources; the ability of capital and the state to transform the full-time leaders of trade union organizations into “labour lieutenants” of the capitalist order, both through the cultivation of a labour aristocracy enjoying significant material privileges in relation to the mass of workers and through the institutionalization of a state-sanctioned collective-bargaining process which legally obliges union officials to contain workers’ struggles within prescribed limits; and, finally, a “dialectic of partial conquests,” which predisposes the labour movement as a whole to reject or retreat from more radical goals in order to avoid any confrontations with capital and the state that might jeopardize previously won gains.

Together these factors tend to continually reproduce conditions conducive to “bourgeois trade union consciousness” – an ‘economistic’ outlook which limits workers’ struggles to an incremental improvement in the terms and conditions of the sale of labour-power within the framework of capitalism. The corollary to this in the parliamentary-electoral arena is an “independent working-class political practice” whose ostensible purpose is to exert pressure on the capitalist state apparatus to safeguard workers’ rights and to implement pro-labour policies (without encroaching upon the fundamental prerogatives of capital).¹²

In reiterating this analysis and critiquing the bureaucratic leadership of Canada’s labour movement, our intention is not to vilify or to impugn the commitment of the many well-meaning full-time and part-time union activists who occupy a variety of positions within the bureaucratic structures of organized labour. It is undoubtedly true that many of these activists have a more well-developed class consciousness than many rank and file union members. But it is also true

that the militancy of the rank and file, at certain times and in particular situations, has often been constrained by the conservative impulses, routinism and reformist political conceptions that permeate those structures at virtually every level – and most of all at the top levels. To be sure, the spontaneous militancy of workers, in angry reaction to particularly egregious provocations by the bosses and the state, can sometimes result in ill-conceived adventures with unfortunate consequences (although these have been exceptionally rare in recent years). Even so, such militancy can also engender opportunities for ordinary workers to acquire experiences that can lead to rapid leaps in class consciousness. For Marxists, the latter consideration decisively outweighs the former one – for only a qualitative growth in socialist class consciousness, impossible in the absence of significant social struggles, can safeguard the long-term interests of the working class and of humanity as a whole.

The point that bears emphasizing here is that the problem of bureaucratic conservatism can only be addressed through a determined *political* struggle, one informed by an adequate theoretical understanding of the class struggle under capitalism. Socialists need to criticize the bureaucratic leaderships of labour *primarily for their political and ideological commitments*, and not merely for their material privileges, their undemocratic practices, or their lack of commitment to workers' interests in particular times and places.

Pro-Capitalist Ideology versus Marxism

The basic premise of mainstream trade unionism and labour reformism in general is that capitalism is an essentially rational system in which, potentially at least, the interests of capital and labour can be reconciled. On this view, no good reason exists to think that the capitalist system should be unable to promote rising popular prosperity so long as labour productivity is improving. All that is needed to secure steadily improving living standards are sustained efforts to rein in corporate greed, protect the economic interests of the national community, and humanize capitalism through enlightened government regulation of the economy, the expansion of the public sector, the implementation of a progressive tax system and (perhaps, in some circumstances) the nationalization of specific industries. Unions contribute to such an outcome by defending the interests of particular sectors of the workforce through collective bargaining, supporting progressive-egalitarian and economic-nationalist policies in the political arena, and promoting the democratization of a state apparatus that is seen as “standing above” classes and as devoted, above all else, to a trans-class national interest.

These notions, which are deeply rooted in capitalist ideology and in Keynesian liberalism in particular, have been contradicted time and again by historical experience. Over the past two hundred years, the world capitalist economy has experienced some two dozen cyclical economic crises as well as numerous region-specific economic contractions that have inflicted untold hardships on billions of working people. Over the past century, the intensifying contradictions and crisis tendencies of world capitalism have yielded three serious global economic slumps, two devastating world wars, dozens of bloody regional conflicts, chronic underdevelopment across wide swaths of the Global South, severe and potentially catastrophic ecological crises, and the squandering of enormous economic resources on military expenditures, advertising and other wasteful activities. Over the past forty years, the living standards of the bottom 80 to 90 percent of wage and salary earners in even the most advanced capitalist countries have seen an appreciable decline, despite high and continuously rising levels of labour productivity. Over the

same period, a rapidly expanding global “surplus population” – that now represents well over a third of the world’s population – has been condemned to a remorseless cycle of dispossession, unemployment, underemployment and starvation.

Karl Marx, capitalism’s most trenchant critic and the founder of modern scientific socialism, was quite willing to concede that capitalism had played an objectively progressive, indeed revolutionary, role in developing humanity’s productive forces. Unlike the ideologues of capitalism, however, Marx predicted that these productive forces would become increasingly incompatible with the antagonistic social relations of capitalist society – that the capitalist imperative to subordinate economic life to private profit and to the “logic” of a competitive nation-state system would negate capitalism’s progressive role. The accumulation of capital and the contradictions inherent to that process would entail a massive growth of poverty at one pole of an increasingly globalized class system and obscene wealth at the other. The rise in labour productivity brought about by on-going technical innovation would not, in any enduring way, secure a better life for the working class majority, but would, on the contrary, lead to recurrent economic crises and ultimately to the immiseration of that majority.

It is this ugly and grotesquely irrational side of capitalist development that is studiously ignored by even the most “left-liberal” defenders of the capitalist system, including the great majority of labour leaders who claim to speak on behalf of working people and against the “excesses” of the corporate elites. Little wonder, then, that the pro-capitalist labour bureaucracy chooses to reject or ignore Marx’s critical analysis of the capitalist mode of production.

At the heart of that analysis is what Marx called the “law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall” (LTRPF), a law which suggests a relationship between profitability, productivity and economic crisis that is, at first blush, strikingly non-obvious:

The barriers to the capitalist mode of production shows themselves as follows: 1) in the way that the development of *labour productivity* involves a law, in the form of the falling rate of profit, that at a certain point confronts this development itself in a most hostile way and has constantly to be overcome *by way of crises*; 2) in the way that it is the appropriation of unpaid labour in general ... that determines the expansion and contraction of production, instead of the proportion between production and social needs, the needs of socially developed human beings.¹³ [Emphasis added]

Capitalism is not fundamentally concerned with raising labour productivity in order to meet human needs or to reduce the burden of toil shouldered by workers. Rather it is about maximizing wealth in the class-antagonistic form of surplus-value (profit of enterprise, rent and interest). Surplus-value can only arise through the *exploitation* of wage-labour by capital – “the appropriation of unpaid labour.” Thus, the system as a whole is decisively geared to perpetuating the domination and serving the interests of the capitalist class – a tiny fraction of the population that owns and controls the major means of production, distribution and exchange.¹⁴

The working-class majority of the population is employed, for the most part, to create or help realize the value that is embodied in marketed goods and services (commodities) and that finds expression in profits and wages. But economic growth is regulated by the average rate of profit, and this is defined by the relationship of capitalist income (surplus-value) to capitalist investment

(the value of capital stock). Surplus-value, along with the new value embodied in the wages of productive workers, can only be created by living labour; and yet the antagonistic social relations of capitalism – the competition between capitalist firms and the conflict between capitalists and wage labourers – militate in favour of labour-displacing technological innovation at the level of individual enterprises. The result is a rise in “the organic composition of capital.” The unintended consequence of this productivity-enhancing innovation is a relative, economy-wide decline in the role of living labour in production – which nevertheless remains the sole “input” with the capacity to create new value. As the pool of social surplus-value shrinks relative to the investment of the social capital as a whole, the average rate of profit falls.

The drive of individual capitalists to reduce costs and improve productivity (with the aims of maximizing profits and surviving the challenges of inter-capitalist competition) must lead to a long-term declining rate of return on capitalist investment – to a crisis of profitability for the capitalist class as a whole. To arrest this decline, capitalists resort to harsh measures aimed at ratcheting up the rate of exploitation of working people and by increasing productivity in ways that rely less on technical innovation and considerably more on intensifying the labour process, lowering real wages and cutting back on social services that form elements of what is sometimes called the social wage.

Numerous studies, including one by Smith and Taylor for Canada,¹⁵ have confirmed that the performance of the advanced capitalist economies since World War II has conformed closely to Marx’s theoretical expectations. Labour-displacing technological innovation has elevated the organic composition of capital and depressed the rate of profit. In response, the capitalist class has sought to raise national rates of profit by forcing workers to pay the medical bills of its ailing system, by promoting “financialization” and the proliferation of “fictitious capital,” and by shifting investment and some of the effects of the profitability crisis to other countries or regions.¹⁶

A perspective informed by Marx’s analysis could have afforded the labour movement, in Canada and elsewhere, with the opportunity to take the offensive politically in the midst of the profitability crisis of the 1970s – to argue that “the barrier to capital is capital itself” and that the malaise of the system resulted from its own inherent irrationality.¹⁷ But the aversion of the labour leadership to Marxist theory and politics, and its commitment to liberal-Keynesian palliatives and nationalist economic policies, foreclosed such a possibility. Today, in the midst of a global slump that has its deepest roots in the persistent profitability problems of productive capital, the struggle for the theoretical and programmatic heritage of Marxist socialism within the organized labour movement has become more urgent than ever.

IV. Socialism and the Unions, Yesterday and Today

Historically, socialists have been divided in their view of unions and their relationship to the struggle for a socialist society.¹⁸ One of the ways in which Marx and Engels distinguished their own scientific, class-struggle socialism from other socialist currents (Owenite utopian socialism, Proudhonist mutualism, etc.) was by insisting that socialists had to support and involve themselves in workers’ struggles for better wages and working conditions even when these struggles were led by trade unionists who opposed socialism. At the same time, they saw the trade unions as organizations in which socialists could educate the working class about its

historic mission to end the rule of capital. It was precisely in an address on the Paris Commune to the International Workingmen's Association (which included many Liberal British trade unionists) that Marx defined the goal of the modern labour movement as the "smashing" of the capitalist state and the establishment of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" – a workers' state striving toward a global classless society.

In Germany, Marx's followers were directly involved in establishing some of the earliest trade unions. While always insisting that they should be open to all workers, regardless of their political commitments, the Marxists nevertheless sought the affiliation of as many unions as possible to the social-democratic workers' party. A "division of labour" was established between the unions and the party – but it was nevertheless taken for granted that socialists had a responsibility to educate the union ranks in the fundamental ideas of socialism.

In 1902, Lenin waged a famous struggle within the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) against the so-called Economists who argued that socialists should confine their agitation among workers to simple trade union demands, while offering political support to bourgeois-liberal efforts to reform the absolutist state. Workers, it was assumed, could achieve a "social-democratic consciousness" as a spontaneous by-product of their trade union struggles. Against this, Lenin argued that the "history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness," while the "theory of socialism" had been developed by "the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals." For Lenin, this didn't mean that workers were incapable of assimilating or adding to this theoretical legacy as they joined the ranks of the socialist movement; but it did mean that the struggle to fuse the ideas of Marxist socialism with the actually existing workers' organizations had to be an on-going one. In the absence of such a struggle, the workers' movement would inevitably fall under the sway of bourgeois ideology.

As Lenin waged his battles with the labour-reformists within the RSDLP, the Polish-born Marxist Rosa Luxemburg was waging a parallel struggle for a revolutionary Marxist perspective within the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). Prior to 1914, she did so on two main fronts: by opposing the attempts of Eduard Bernstein and his fellow "revisionists" to win the party to a perspective that essentially repudiated socialism as its "final goal" and by challenging the well-established "division of labour" between the party and the unions which was leading the union leaderships to reject any "mass strike" tactic that could pose the question of workers' power. Luxemburg's insistence against Bernstein and the revisionist union leaders that the struggle for reform (the amelioration of the conditions of the working masses within capitalism) was merely the *means* of the socialist movement but that its *goal* had to remain *social revolution* anticipated her later break with the "minimum-maximum" programmatic dichotomy of the SPD – a break enunciated in 1919 in her speech to the founding convention of the Communist Party of Germany. There she insisted that the new party was "opposed to the separation of the immediate and so-called minimal demands formulated for the political and economic struggle, from the socialist goal regarded as the maximal program."¹⁹

World War I brought about the definitive split in the social-democratic Second International between the nationalist reformists and the revolutionary internationalists. By conducting an uncompromising struggle against "social patriotism" (the support extended to the war efforts of their "own" bourgeoisies by most of Europe's mass social-democratic parties) and subsequently

leading the world's first successful workers' revolution in Russia in October 1917, Lenin was transformed from a revolutionary social democrat into the founder of the Communist International (CI).

The first four congresses of the CI elaborated a strategic and programmatic orientation that involved the transformation of the unions into organs of revolutionary struggle. A special wing of the movement – the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) – was established to coordinate the trade union work of the CI's national sections. The second congress of the CI (held in 1920) stipulated that:

Every party that desires to belong to the Communist International must carry on systematic and persistent communist work in the trade unions, in workers' and industrial councils, in the cooperative societies, and in other mass organizations. Within these organizations it is necessary to create communist groups, which by means of practical and stubborn work must win over the trade unions, etc., for the cause of communism.²⁰

The third congress in 1921 spelled out the general programmatic content of the communists' work in the unions: "In place of the minimum programme of the centrists and reformists, the Communist International offers a struggle for the concrete demands of the proletariat which, in their totality, challenge the power of the bourgeoisie, organize the proletariat and mark out the different stages of the struggle for its dictatorship."²¹ The fourth congress in 1922 passed a resolution declaring that the (not-yet-written) program of the Comintern should include "transitional demands."²²

In North America, this perspective was implemented by the Trade Union Education League (TUEL), an organization that united communist trade union activists in the United States and Canada. For a few years, the TUEL and other RILU affiliates in Europe carried out exemplary work within the existing unions on the basis of a nascent transitional program.²³ By the mid-1920s, however, the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet state and the CI effectively brought an end to these promising initiatives. Henceforth, the national sections of the CI were subordinated to Stalin's national-reformist policy of building "socialism in one country." The Communist parties were transformed into mere facilitators of this utterly anti-Marxist project, and their trade union practice reverted to the "minimum-maximum" approach of the classical social democracy.

However, the idea of a transitional program survived and was further developed by Leon Trotsky in the 1930s. One of the central leaders of Russia's October Revolution and of the CI in its early years, Trotsky had been expelled from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1928 for his opposition to Stalin's policies and sent into exile a year later. For the next decade, until his assassination at the hand of a Stalinist agent in 1940, he carried out a tireless struggle against Stalin's bureaucratic oligarchy and its counter-revolutionary influence on the international communist movement.²⁴ In 1938, he launched the Fourth International (FI) as the legitimate successor to the first four (Bolshevik-Leninist) congresses of the Communist International. Although small and lacking much influence in the mass labour movements of their respective countries on the eve of World War II, the national sections of the FI were armed by Trotsky with a manifesto that, for the first time in the history of the Marxist movement, spelled out in some detail the content of a transitional socialist program for communist work in the trade unions. In an unfinished article on "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay," he wrote:

In the epoch of imperialist decay the trade unions can be really independent [of the bourgeoisie and the capitalist state] only to the extent that they are conscious of being, in action, the organs of proletarian revolution. In this sense, the program of transitional demands adopted at the last congress of the Fourth International is not only the program for the activity of the party but in its fundamental features it is the program for activity of the trade unions.²⁵

With this statement, Trotsky reaffirmed what had been the common understanding of revolutionary socialists from the time of Marx and Engels: trade unions had to be seen as instruments in the struggle for a socialist society, and not ends in themselves. The primary task of socialists working within them is not to promote mindless, sectoral militancy but to carry out a determined *political struggle* for a program that anticipates the social and political content of a workers' state and the early phases of socialist construction – a program that intersects the defensive struggles of workers under capitalism but also projects solutions that involve confronting and dismantling the economic, political and military power of the capitalist class and its state.

To accomplish this important task today, revolutionary socialists must have the perspective of building class-struggle *caucuses* within the unions that are explicitly committed to popularizing a *system* of transitional demands. These demands would necessarily include a sliding scale of wages and hours (to fight inflation and unemployment), the expropriation of industry and the banks without compensation, workers' control of production, workers' defense guards, and, finally, a workers' government. The *exemplary* activity of such caucuses in carrying out both independent work as well as united-front work with leftward-moving forces around specific issues (such as organizing the unorganized, winning full citizenship rights for migrant workers, or organizing labour political strikes against imperialist wars²⁶) is really the only way that a class-struggle socialist current can begin to challenge the pro-capitalist bureaucracy and eventually win the ranks of the broader labour movement to the theory and program of Marxist socialism.²⁷

Notes

¹ Murray E.G. Smith and Joshua Dumont, "Socialist Strategy, Yesterday and Today: Notes on Classical Marxism and the Contemporary Radical Left" in Henry Veltmeyer, ed. *21st Century Socialism: Reinventing the Project* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2011), 120-121.

² Leon Trotsky, *The Transitional Program*, ed. International Bolshevik Tendency (London: Bolshevik Publications, 1998), 68.

³ A notable exception was the illegal postal strike of 1965, which not only resulted in the formation of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and the Letter Carriers Union of Canada but also paved the way for serious unionization efforts throughout the public sector. See Bryan Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (University of Toronto Press, 2009), Ch. 7 for a discussion of the wildcat strikes and "unruly" class struggle that marked the 1960s.

⁴ See Thom Workman, *If You're in My Way, I'm Walking: The Assault on Working People since 1970* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2009) for a very useful historical survey.

⁵ HRSDC, *Work – Unionization Rates* (Ottawa: HRSDC, 2011).

⁶ Statistics Canada, “Perspectives on Labour and Income.” Ottawa: Statistics Canada (2007).

⁷ The notion of a division of labour between the workers’ party and the unions, with the former concentrating on “political” (that is to say, electoral and parliamentary) questions and the latter on the partial, day-to-day concerns of workers, has always been fundamental to the social democratic perspective. In the “classical period” of pre-1914 Social Democracy, it went hand in hand with a strategic orientation that divided the socialist program into a program of “minimal demands” achievable within capitalism and a “maximum program” that projected the abolition of capitalism and the socialist transformation of society. Between these two programs, as Trotsky later pointed out, there existed no meaningful “bridge” – and this led to an increasingly opportunist and reform-oriented practice for both wings of the modern labour movement.

⁸ See Murray E.G. Smith, “Political Economy and the Canadian Working Class: Marxism or Nationalist Reformism?” *Labour/Le Travail* 46 (2000) for an extended Marxist critique of the Waffle.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 361.

¹⁰ See Bryan Palmer, *Solidarity: The Rise and Fall of an Opposition in British Columbia* (New Star Press, 1986) for a compelling description of these events and an incisive Marxist critique of the role of the trade union bureaucracy.

¹¹ Ken Lewenza, “Counterpoint: Fury of poor would erupt without unions,” *Financial Post*, April 8, 2011.

¹² Jonah Butovsky and Murray E.G. Smith, “Beyond Social Unionism: Farm Workers in Ontario and Some Lessons from Labour History,” *Labour/Le Travail* 59 (2007), 72-73.

On “the dialectic of partial conquests,” see Ernest Mandel, *Power and Money: A Marxist Theory of Bureaucracy* (London: Verso, 1992), 66-67.

¹³ Karl Marx, *Capital Volume Three* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981).

¹⁴ For more detailed expositions of Marx’s theories of surplus-value, capitalist exploitation and economic crisis, see Murray E.G. Smith, *Global Capitalism in Crisis: Karl Marx and the Decay of the Profit System* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2010).

¹⁵ Murray E.G. Smith and K.W. Taylor, “Profitability Crisis and the Erosion of Popular Prosperity: The Canadian Economy, 1947-1991,” *Studies in Political Economy* 49 (1996).

¹⁶ For the experience of the U.S. economy, see Murray E.G. Smith and Jonah Butovsky, “Profitability and the Roots of the Global Crisis: Marx’s ‘Law of the Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall’ and the U.S. Economy, 1950-2007,” *Historical Materialism*, forthcoming (2012). See also Simon Mohun, “Aggregate Capital Productivity in the U.S. Economy, 1964-2001,” *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 33 (2009).

¹⁷ See Smith, *Global Capitalism*.

¹⁸ Socialists have never been entirely united around the idea that they should support or work within the existing unions. Indeed anarcho-syndicalists, De Leon’s Socialist Labor Party, the communist “ultra-left” of the 1920s, council communists and more recently the nominal Trotskyists who publish the World Socialist Web Site have all been hostile to the established unions and rejected working within them. Against such a stance, Lenin argued that revolutionary socialists who refuse to work in the unions consign themselves to a self-imposed isolation. And

Trotsky added that such sectarianism should be seen as “opportunism standing in fear of itself.” For Lenin and Trotsky, labour reformists and ultra-left sectarians make the symmetrical error of *identifying* the unions with the union officialdoms.

¹⁹ Rosa Luxemburg, “Speech to the Founding Convention of the German Communist Party,” in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, ed. Mary Alice Waters (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 413.

²⁰ CI 1920 (Communist International), “Conditions of Admission to the Communist International,” in H. Gruber, ed. *International Communism in the Era of Lenin: A Documentary History* (New York: Anchor Press), 244.

²¹ CI 1921 (Communist International), “On Tactics,” in *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International* (London: Ink Links, 1980), 286.

²² See International Bolshevik Tendency, “Transitional Demands: From the Comintern to the Fourth International” in Trotsky, *The Transitional Program*, 209-10.

²³ For somewhat differing assessments of this experience, see Chris Knox, “Program for Power: Early Communist Work in the Trade Unions,” in Trotsky, *The Transitional Program*, Kim Moody, *The Rank and File Strategy: Building a Socialist Movement in the U.S.* (Solidarity Pamphlet, 2000); and Bryan Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890-1928* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

²⁴ On this history, see Murray E.G. Smith, “Revisiting Trotsky: Reflections on the Stalinist Debacle and Trotskyism as Alternative,” *Rethinking Marxism*, 9: 3 (1996-97).

²⁵ Leon Trotsky, *On the Trade Unions* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1969), 72.

²⁶ On May Day 2008, following an initiative by socialist union activist Jack Heyman, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union shut down every port on the U.S. west coast to protest the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The one-day shutdown demonstrated the potential power of organized labour to seriously challenge the neocolonial adventures of U.S. imperialism – and indeed global capitalism itself.

²⁷ For an elaboration of this argument, see Smith and Dumont, “Socialist Strategy” as well as Chris Knox, “Revolutionary Work in the American Labor Movement: 1920s to 1950s,” in Trotsky, *The Transitional Program*. See also Butovsky and Smith, “Beyond Social Unionism,” and the interview with Trotskyist union activist Howard Keylor reprinted in Trotsky, *The Transitional Program*.

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