

Bail Out the PEOPLE Movement

FIGHTBACK CONFERENCE

Draft Working Paper

Realizing the Fightback—Some Perspective and Plans

*The following was adopted at the Jan. 17
Fightback Conference in NYC.
It is a work in progress.*

In many ways, the U.S.-financed genocidal siege of Gaza that many of us have been demonstrating against in recent weeks is a harbinger of the widening war against the workers and oppressed peoples of the planet that is sure to intensify this year. In 2009, more and more lives are going to be devastated by the biggest global economic crisis since the depression of the 1930s.

This crisis is the challenge of a lifetime for those of us who have made a commitment to fighting for the rights of people. What we do or fail to do will prove decisive in the coming battle over whose interests in society shall prevail.

The election of the first African-American president, Barack Obama, realizes a measure of Dr. Martin Luther King's dream. But depression-level joblessness, evictions and foreclosures made worse by cutbacks, war, bigotry and racism are not a dream but a nightmare. This is a time of many contradictions. Many people feel that the new president will bring progressive change but at the same time, there are Black youth being summarily executed by police; Proposition 8; new attacks on reproductive justice; one of the biggest bigots presiding over the inauguration

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ceremony, the prospects of a widening war in Afghanistan and much more.

Part of the legacy of Dr. King is the understanding that no election or president—however historical and inspiring—can be a substitute for a mass movement in the struggle against war or for social and economic rights. There are signs that the workers understand this.

This past December the bankers and bosses got hit with a one-two punch. The workers at the Republic Windows and Doors Factory in Chicago occupied their plant to win some measure of their rights. One day after the workers victory

in Chicago, the Smithfield meat processing workers in Tar Heel, North Carolina finally won their right to a union after a long and bitter struggle. These battles are part of the first chapter of the Fightback that must and will grow. How can we help the development of the Fightback?

There can be no honest discussion about fighting without posing the inevitable question—Is it not time to terminate the capitalist system that appears only capable of trapping the people of the world in a nightmare of endless chaos, violence, misery, suffering, inequality, oppression, environmental destruction and

other crises all in the interests of the super rich? How can this question not become the burning question as the absurd rules of capitalism mandate that no effort can be spared to bailout the barons of capitalist finance even while much of the population is pushed into life-threatening poverty? No doubt this unavoidable question will be an essential and welcome part of our discussion during the conference. Even if the question is not openly addressed, it will be the subtext of our deliberations.

However, though its direction is most definitely radical, it is not the intention of this document to unite conference participants around a comprehensive ideological position. Nor does it attempt to analyze the capitalist crisis, or address many issues of importance to all of us. This document is a framework for planning action.

The question this working document poses is more limited. In order to actually do something meaningful about the crisis in the coming weeks and months, can we unite ourselves and other forces around some understanding of what is most important at this moment along with an evolving, flexible plan of action?

High on the list of the important things to understand is that:

- Ultimately there must be a Fightback that is proportional in size, scope, organization and militancy to the threat that the crisis poses to the social conditions of the working class. Such a Fightback is not possible without perspective and plan for the mass organization of working and poor people on a scale unprecedented since the defining labor battles of the 1930s.
- The Fightback movement must be prepared to utilize a wide range of tactics in the struggle including mass mobilizations, demonstrations, direct actions, sit-ins, occupations, strikes, boycotts, encampments and most importantly, organizing.

- As part and parcel of the Fightback struggle, the level of political and class consciousness of an expanding percentage of the working class must grow qualitatively in order for the Fightback to continue and grow. It's going to take a high level of consciousness for the Fightback to defend itself against efforts from the other side of the class barricade to derail it. And it's going to take a high level of consciousness to forge solidarity in the large, complex, multi-national working class in the U.S., much of which has experienced mostly fragmentation in recent history.
- The Fightback is set back when racism is not pushed back. The Fightback is set back when trade unions don't come to the defense of immigrant workers who are being dragged out the work place in chains and bused to jails, left to languish there. Solidarity that transcends all geographical boundaries, local and international, will be the key to the success of the Fightback.

Moving Forward: Challenging Obama's Stimulus Plan

There are potentially two overlapping yet distinct motives behind the incoming administration's "stimulus" proposal. One motive is to jump start the economy by infusing another \$800 billion dollars, 40 percent of it is tax breaks primarily for corporations, along with some limited extension of unemployment benefits.

The stimulus plan also provides for some aid to states and a large part of the stimulus budget is supposed to be allotted to various projects. Ninety percent of these projects are to be administered by the private sector. The stated goal of the stimulus plan is to either save or create between three and four million jobs over the next two years or three years. This won't make much of a dent in the rising

unemployment rate and it won't jumpstart the economy.

If the more than eight trillion dollars that the government has either given to or made available to the big banks in order to bribe them to invest money into the economy hasn't worked, neither will the hundreds of billions of dollars more that the government is planning to fork over to the banks. The big banks are going to sit on all the money they've been given until the crisis is over. The problem is that the economic crisis is only getting worse and may never be over.

The other potential motive for big government expenditures during a time of grave economic crisis like during the 1930s is the motive that's of most interest to us. That motive is fear of workers rebelling. At the point that mass anger, organization and struggle has reached the critical point, stimulating the economy takes a back seat to trying to stop a revolution.

The government and the class interests that it represents have reasons for doing whatever it does; so should the working class. In the context of this economic crisis, it is not in the interests of the poor and working people to wait around jobless, homeless and starving for the big banks to decide that it's profitable to start up the economy and create jobs. The only rationale that reflects the interests of the working class is to demand that their interests come first before fixing the capitalist economy. Thus, government programs should not have as their objective "stimulating" a crisis ridden economy, but rather protecting people from such a disastrous economy by insuring that social needs come first.

There's only one sure way for the people to force the government to put their interests before profits, and that's to put the fear of rebellion in their hearts through mass, militant struggle.

An Outline for the Fightback in Three Phases

One way of looking at our task in the coming months is to break up the rest of the year in three phases based on anticipating how the political, economic and social situation might evolve and how this might affect both the preparation and conditions for the fight back. Of course speculation about what may happen in the future and how that will affect the Fightback is at best schematic and useful only as an outline to measure real developments against.

Phase One: Establishing a fightback program

From now through the spring, there will be a great deal of focus on the negotiations between the incoming administration, Congress and Wall St over the details of the stimulus proposal as well as how the remaining \$350 billion left over from the \$700 billion Wall St. bailout money will be used.

As the politicians, bankers and corporate media dominate and distort the crisis and most importantly, keep the masses out of the decision-making process, some will wait to see to what extent any of the measures that the branches of government ultimately agree to alleviate the worsening social crisis.

During this time, the Fightback's priorities would be to plan activities and strategies that establish a people first, programmatic alternative to the government's stimulus proposal including:

- Opening up the first stage is a national unemployed people's organizing campaign, together with the effort to recruit an army of volunteer organizers;
- Establishing as broad of a coalition as possible around organizing for mass mobilizations across the country (and the world) on May 1st--International Workers Day--around a program that is centered on the struggle of immigrant workers rights, but broadens the program to include the demand for

jobs or income and all of the other issues and demands that reflect the needs of the workers and the poor, including opposition to the wars and;

- Organizing mobilizations around dates such as the anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., or International Women's Day, will help build the fight back.

Phase Two: May Day—a possible turning point in the fightback

As bad as things are today, by mid-to-late spring, unemployment, and foreclosures will be immeasurably worse. It will become evident that the stimulus legislation is not going to have any effect on the crisis. More people will become desperate, angry and ready to stop waiting and start fighting.

If we have done whatever was necessary to forge the kind of alliances and do the kind of grassroots mass organizing around May Day mobilizations, it's possible that the May 1st mobilizations could be the beginning of the second phase. If we have raised the organizational level of the Fightback and attracted a wider mass base amongst the various sectors of the working class, conditions may be ripe to project more ambitious mobilizations and struggles after May 1st.

Phase Three: March on Washington, D.C. for Jobs Convening a People's Assembly

With worsening social conditions, the summer is not likely to be quiet. The combination of the economic crisis and police repression--which is epidemic and deadly all year round but tends to peak during the summer--could spark rebellions that spread beyond the locality of an incident that provoked the rebellion. The late spring and summer could be a time of intensive organizing and planning for a mass march on Washington, D.C. for jobs and other demands.

If there is wide enough agreement, the convening of a National People's Assembly in Washington, D.C. in the fall in conjunction with others could help consolidate the base and work of the Fightback, become the meeting where everything is assessed and where the direction and next course of action is set.

Proposed Campaigns

- Mobilizations
- Draft Fightback Program

1. Campaigns

A. Organizing the unemployed on a mass basis

The time has come to launch a national campaign to organize the unemployed as part of the fight for jobs or an income. Every sector of the working class is vital to the Fightback. Mass organizing of the rapidly swelling ranks of the unemployed must be central to a fightback strategy. As the economic crisis deepens, more and more of the crisis will be defined by the depression-level unemployment rate and the fight for jobs or income. Even Wall St. economists now admit that the real unemployment rate is about 14 percent. The unemployment rate for African Americans is twice as high and even higher for young Black people. There may already be as many as 20 million unemployed workers looking for jobs. At the frenzied and accelerating pace that workers are being laid off, by late spring there may be a million layoffs a month for the rest of the year. The unemployment crisis makes every other crisis worse. If you lose your job, you are more likely to lose your home, healthcare, childcare, pension, ability to go to school, and other social necessities. Massive unemployment also tends to strengthen the position of employers against employed workers and union organizing campaigns. No challenge is more urgent than laying the basis for organizing the unemployed. It will take time, commitment, and hard work but it can be done. The first step is to establish an un-

employed workers organizing campaign.

Some tactics that may help:

- Calling local or national level “WE NEED JOBS” demonstrations. Another tactic that might be compelling to youth would be to organize demonstrations or other events under around the slogan “JOBS NOT JAILS”.
- Anything that is done, whether ambitious or modest in scope that helps to bring the unemployed out of isolation and helps to give them a voice would contribute to building this campaign.

B. A People’s Assembly

A grass roots people’s assembly movement has already been launched by progressive activists in the South, and the idea of people’s assemblies is being picked up by activists in other parts of the country. People’s assemblies can serve a number of needs in the Fightback including providing a public hearing for people to talk about the impact that the crisis is having on communities and what emergency measures are necessary to deal with the problems people are facing. Moreover, implicit in the concept of people’s assemblies is the realization that the legislative part of government--both at the local, state and national levels--have failed to represent the interests of poor and working people. This failure, particularly in a time of crisis, has made it necessary for people to form their own independent power structures for the purpose of determining what needs to be done in their interests as well as the plan of action necessary to fight for their interests. Right now, people’s assemblies are being organized on a local base. In the near future the Fightback may require the convening of a national people’s assembly perhaps in Washington D.C., possibly in conjunction with a national march for jobs.

C. Support and expand the Moratorium Now! campaign

Considering the unprecedented intervention that the government has made to rescue the financial system that created the housing crisis, it is incomprehensible that a simple moratorium on foreclosures and evictions has yet to be enacted. On

top of the millions of workers who have already lost their homes, as much as 25 percent of the population--including those who pay mortgages as well as those who pay rent--could be thrown out of their homes over the next two years. There’s has been a lot of debate over what to do about foreclosures and evictions in Washington D.C. There have been countless meetings between politicians and bankers about stemming the wave of foreclosures. Legislation has been passed, reports written, assistance programs set up, web pages set up all with the intent of stopping foreclosures.

All of these measures have two things in common; one, they all involve persuading bankers to find some ways to slow down the evictions instead of forcing them to stop evictions and two, none of these measures has put a dent in the head-spinning rate of foreclosures. The Moratorium Now! Campaign is fighting to force the government at every level to declare a moratorium on foreclosures and evictions. The Moratorium Now! movement is growing. It has already made significant inroads in Michigan, Maryland, California and other states. The moratorium movement must be strengthened and expanded. Some organizers are also beginning to demand that the sheriffs and marshals who carry out evictions be ordered by local governments not to carry out evictions. More and more, neighbors and activists are rallying to prevent bankers and police from carrying out evictions on the spot. This kind of grassroots, militant solidarity must and will grow and we should do everything to help it grow.

D. Solidarity with immigrant workers

The war on immigrant workers is a war on the working class. The motive behind the mass raids, jailings and deportations is not only to terrorize immigrant workers so as to make it easier to super-exploit their labor; it is also meant to divide workers. Dividing workers is one of the principal weapons that bosses employ, especially during hard times. The Fightback will be imperiled if it cannot in some meaningful way unite all sections of the working class and progressive forces

around the active defense of immigrant workers’ rights. This challenge must be an important part of our discussion.

E. Recruiting an army of volunteer organizers

The Fightback must recruit an army of volunteer organizers. Without an army of volunteer organizers, we will not be able to accomplish much. The Fightback needs both veteran activists with experience and skills as well as new people with the time and willingness to help. Most importantly, the Fightback needs volunteers who are able to work collectively, who are respectful of others and who are both capable and committed to interacting with working and poor people of all nationalities, genders, sexual orientations, abilities and ages in a manner that is patient, dignified, and devoid of negative presumptions.

2. Mobilizations

a. International Women’s Day

Sat., March 7 and March 8 (International Women’s Day)--Organize demonstrations, protests, speak-outs and other forms of actions focused on the impact of the economic and political crises on all poor and working-class women. These actions have the potential of winning more women to the ranks of the army of organizers as well as building for May Day 2009 and beyond.

b. Sat., March 21: March on the Pentagon

On the 6th Anniversary of Iraq War demand: U.S. Out of Iraq and Afghanistan! Stop the Siege of Gaza!

c. April 3 and 4: March on Wall St.— Jobs, Not War!

Anniversary of Dr. King’s assassination

d. May 1st— International Workers Day

e. Fall 2009: Mass March on Washington, D.C. for Jobs or Income now; A National People’s Assembly