

For the Political Organization of the Working Class

This statement by the Maoist Communist Group was published and posted on the walls of the occupied New School cafeteria during the May 2018 worker's struggle. This piece was written to clarify our positions regarding various false ideas that circulated during the occupation, which were amplified by the publication of a dishonest opinion piece in the New School Free Press. We welcomed response posters by other organizations and individuals. We believe that in order to advance the struggle to victory we must engage in great debates and an open exchange of ideas.

*Our view is that only through democratic ideological struggle can we reinforce the camp of the people against the class enemy. This is what communists have meant, beginning with Marx, by the **dictatorship of the proletariat**, the transitional state between class society and communism, a society without classes or a state. The dictatorship of the proletariat is not a dictatorship over the proletariat and the people, but **the widest democracy for the proletariat and the people, and dictatorship over the class enemies who want to restore the old system**. And this is precisely how we thought that the cafeteria worker's struggle should be conducted. For only a vigorous democracy for the popular forces of students, workers, and outside supporters allowed the camp of struggle to dictate the workers' demands to the enemy, to impose a victorious resolution on the university administration and its allies.*

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1. On the Trade Union in the Concrete Situation at the New School

Make no mistake about it: the communists in the camp of struggle are **fighting for the workers to be rehired with a contract**, that is, **as unionized workers**.

However, the trade union was unable to prevent the layoffs. ***It was only the occupation, called by communists and joined by the mass of students, which forced both the administration and the union to commit to negotiations for a contract.*** The union's activity for the past two months was restricted to ineffective and half-hearted actions: petitioning the administration, distributing leaflets, contacting bourgeois politicians. A strike was ruled out from day one, due to the 'no strike' clause in the union contract. A unionized shop that cannot strike is like an army unit without weapons.

The negotiations are a limited site of struggle where the union and the administration engage in legal bargaining and the workers are present only symbolically, the students remaining an external source of pressure. On May 7, the UNITE HERE union and the New School president issued a **joint statement to students calling off the occupation without even letting the workers know**. One worker was threatened with termination by the university for having engaged in actions with militants from the occupation.

The timing of the administration action is no coincidence. The announcement comes in the face of the graduate student employee strike. The New School is desperate to make it appear that the worker struggle is resolved in order to **separate** the two struggles, to prevent the cafeteria workers and the graduate student employees from joining and concentrating their forces and efforts. The workers we talked to want to continue the occupation until their demands are met. This betrayal by the union demonstrates clear as day the utter contempt and mistrust the union has for the workers and students alike.

The proletarian line in the current situation is NOT that the workers should abandon their union, but rather that the workers should take up active leadership over their struggle. The students should be acting as rear supports, and the workers should be directing the camp of struggle: discussing demands among themselves, formulating objectives and a plan of combat.

In opposition to the proletarian line, the bourgeois line relegates the workers to a passive, merely decorative role: the students leading the occupation, the union leading contract negotiations, and the workers leading *nothing*. This bourgeois line is a negation of the capacity of the workers to constitute themselves as a social force, with their own perspective and ideas, both in this struggle and in the broader political project of socialist revolution.

While the negotiation excludes the workers and students, the occupation – where workers and students discuss, debate, and plan – has the potential for building organizations in which workers and students can speak for themselves and independently organize their own struggles.

2. On Trade Unionism in General

The betrayal and powerlessness of the union in the concrete situation of the cafeteria workers points to a broader problem: the source of the weakness of labor in its antagonistic struggle with capital is the **political weakness** of the working class in society as a whole.

This is why we hold that the principal task at the present moment is the transformation of the working class as a social class, defined by the economic contradiction labor-capital, into a *proletariat*, a class in the political sense, organized in its Party, the counterpart of the organization of the bourgeoisie in the state. The working class as a social class is enclosed in the narrow confines of the workplace, defined in its opposition to the boss. But socialism is not simply the result of revolts against bosses, achieved by the weapon of the strike: it is the fruit of a revolution against the bourgeois state, a protracted process that takes place beyond the workplace. A revolution requires a Party and broad class alliances, a united front.

If the bourgeois state is the enemy of the proletariat in the revolution, its friends comprise various social forces – women, oppressed nations, students – to which trade unionism is **blind**. For trade unionism, workers must be solely concerned with themselves as workers, full stop, and let the union lead that struggle. Trade unionism does not, for example, concern itself with the emancipation of women, or equality and self-determination for oppressed nations – which in the US includes the Black nation, the Puerto Rican nation, the Lakota Sioux, the Hawaiian nation, and so forth. In this way, trade unionism promotes weakness: workers should not even lead themselves, much less organize themselves as the leading core of the **whole people**.

For communists, the struggle against capitalism necessarily includes struggles against women's oppression and misogyny, national oppression and racism, as well as the struggle against the social division of labor, and particularly the division between manual and intellectual labor.

Trade unions today are not revolutionary, or even part of the class struggle in the political sense that Marx and Engels gave to it in the *Communist Manifesto*. In the first stage of capitalism, the fierce struggle to win the right to unionize allowed the working class to assert its revolutionary initiative, its need and capacity for organization against the resistance of the bourgeois state. But as Engels pointed out, by the end of the 19th century, trade unionism became a mechanism internal to capitalism, in no way taking a position against bourgeois class rule.

While this is the **general tendency**, there has been a history of revolutionary trade unionism that have allowed workers to develop their revolutionary subjective power: for example, the revolutionary trade unionist opposition to the 'socialists' of the Second International who betrayed the working class by supporting their states in WWI, or the automobile workers who gave birth to the UAW through the Flint Sit-Down Strike of 1936-37.

In general, however, trade unionism serves to fulfill the economic demands of workers, urging the working class to follow only its immediate interests and not struggle for complete emancipation. Trade unionism says

that politics is not an affair of the working class – that there must be a wall separating economic demands from the question of the state.

In contrast, communists hold that while there is a general need for worker organizations against capitalist exploitation, such organizations must in no way be cut off from the question of power and the state – from politics. In addition to economic interests, workers also have a common class interest in the socialist revolution, which gives birth to a transitional society that leads to communism, a society without classes or a state. It is impossible, however, to achieve the socialist revolution unless the proletariat wages a political struggle, which today means embarking on the long process of building a Party in the mass movement.

The task of the Party is to organize the class struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie in relation to the question of state power. This is a long-term task that can only be fulfilled in stages, and over a long period of time.

In class society, there will always be sharp struggles, both big (Ferguson, Occupy Wall St) and small (such as the current struggle at the New School). But without a Party, the bourgeoisie can weather any and every storm and emerge unscathed. What is needed to destroy the bourgeoisie is a proletarian *political* organization, a headquarters of knowledge and war, through which the proletariat can lead the mass of working people to smash the bourgeois state.