

Go Against the Tide: Lessons from Ongoing Workplace Mobilization

2018-04-05 00:42:22 -0400

Comrades in Mass Proletariat have been organizing in a few proletarian workplaces in the greater Boston area for over a year. In this document we will share a few key lessons learned from this experience. Other comrades around the country are setting off on a similar path to ours, and we hope that summarizing these lessons can clarify the stakes of the present moment and help advance related work.

In over a year of workplace organizing we have experienced successes and setbacks. A worker's publication, regular meetings with coworkers, and a principled and careful approach to finding ways to organize a broad section of the workforce have been key to advancing the struggle at one site. At another, the organizing failed to advance beyond basic discussions. Positive movement there was repeatedly thwarted primarily because comrades at that workplace were unable to overcome their anti-people attitudes and ideas.

It is crucial for revolutionaries to fuse with the masses. This task can only be accomplished by those who work to make revolutionary gains by struggling to develop mass organized resistance. This also entails working to resolve contradictions among the people which prevent or inhibit the development of organized resistance and of a revolutionary movement. In doing this work, revolutionaries cannot rely principally on pre-existing experience or identity, such as one's national or class background. Some of the people involved in this effort were already working at proletarian jobs when we began. Others had experience organizing on the job before. But regardless of prior experience, taking a revolutionary approach to workplace organizing rendered pre-existing identities and experiences secondary to the significant new hurdles that we needed to overcome in order to make gains in difficult and new situations. No one is born a revolutionary. Instead, the outlook needs to be forged through collective struggle among the people.

In line with the lessons of the Chinese Revolution, we have seen in our own experience that just a few comrades working in close collaboration—and anchored in principled struggle over revolutionary history and theory—have been essential to furthering developments in local struggles as well as advancing the struggle

for principled unity of revolutionaries on a larger scale. Although we are far from forming a revolutionary party capable of coordinating nation-wide revolutionary work, there is an essential need for local work to advance us towards this goal. Coordination between revolutionaries in different cities is essential to accomplish this aim as well.

Our efforts in proletarian workplaces and our internal struggle over the way forward has been key to advancing political unity among the masses, and to advancing our development as an organization. The level of struggle and political developments at these workplaces has also led to influxes into our organization. These struggles have allowed us to assess people's seriousness about revolutionary politics in theory and practice.

In terms of neighborhood work, meetings at people's houses and at local hangouts have been essential to expand conversations, and to break down barriers to political involvement that people face because of contradictions within their families and personal lives. The creation and circulation of a revolutionary worker's publication, anchored in ongoing workers' struggles—but also incorporating broader lessons from revolutionary history—has been essential to successes thus far. The publication has provided a platform for ongoing debate, and for reporting on resistance at the site of production, at the city level, and at the national level. Through this publication we have also been able to share ideas with a large number of coworkers, and further the development of an embryonic form of the mass line.

Workplace Organizing

At the workplace where our organizing efforts ultimately led to the development of a revolutionary worker's organization, it became clear early on that struggling against internal opportunism was key to making advances. Just one pair of comrades initially got jobs at the site, but a principled approach allowed the situation to open up in a number of ways. By prioritizing struggle on key questions, and by focusing on the need to build deep links among coworkers, these two comrades were able to spark organizational and political developments which have had a lasting effect. Critical reflection on past errors, and work to rectify these errors in practice, has been essential to making these advances.

One lesson learned is that action cannot be deferred until people are definitively "on board" with the need for ongoing collective struggle and discussion. Instead, revolutionaries have to seize on outrages in workplace when they inevitably emerge, and work to clarify to workers the need for organized resistance through creative actions and protests. This was learned the hard way. When a major change to a policy at the job resulted in widespread anger among workers, a few workers brought up the idea of posting a petition in response to the changes. However at the time, these workers saw the struggle as something that could be resolved with a stroke of a pen, and were not willing to meet-up beyond

such a preliminary action. Seeing the need for ongoing struggle, comrades were concerned that for forward movement, more workers would need to be willing to discuss issues together beyond semi-random greetings and the occasional mutual venting of frustration.

At a job with hundreds of workers, where people were routinely publicly fired for things as small as questioning a supervisor, there was fear that without concrete organizational developments among the workers a public petition could backfire. There was concern that it could result in quick firings and demoralization among emerging activists, leading to setbacks that could wipe out months of organizing efforts. The pressure to not act at times appeared overwhelming, in a situation without organized resistance, especially at a job where the idea of a workers' union seemed like a pipe-dream to many. It really was an uphill battle, where almost everyone on the job was pushing against actions that could lead to the development of a concrete organization of workers. This tendency was not limited to pro-management workers, but was also common among the majority of workers who expressed interest in some sort of struggle at the workplace. Faced with this climate, our comrades were affected by this outlook as well. While they worked to meet up and continue ongoing discussion with many workers, they did not seize the time and organize acts of resistance to this initial major policy change.

Some months later, another opening arose in the form of a major health issue in the facility. The company refused to address the situation and lied about it, angering and frustrating a lot of people. Some workers were forced to pay for expensive hospital stays, and others had to choose between being exposed to unsafe conditions and missing work and thereby risk being fired for not meeting a quota for hours worked in a given week. Those who had to leave because of the health hazard were instructed by management to not tell others about the issue. At this point, comrades realized that they needed to play a leading role in organizing concrete acts of resistance, especially given the lack of a history of collective struggle at this workplace. Many people were very frustrated with how the company was treating them, and the callous logic of the company was widely discussed. However, the lack of a clear example of a pro-people worker's organization meant that many at the job were unsure of how to proceed. By carefully working first with progressive coworkers, an initial group was able to spur on dozens of others to sign and post a public petition in response to these conditions. This was a big step.

Secondarily, fears that management would be able to quickly seize the initiative and crush the rebellion were overblown. While the lack of a workers' organization was a problem, this lack was also an asset because management was woefully unprepared to respond to rebellion in the workplace. The company made a series of tactical and even legal errors in its efforts to nip the movement in the bud. We cannot rely on the enemy's incompetence, but when mistakes are made we should be ready to take advantage of them. In this case, the company's lack of a clear understanding of the legal and practical realities of the

situation provided key openings to further clarify the situation to coworkers.

The worker's organization before this point had focused on building links with coworkers, by coordinating months of lunch meet-ups, bbqs, and ad-hoc at work debates about current events and company policies. This groundwork formed the foundation for more militant action later, but without organized resistance the need to be more than just "woke friends" was not always clear to people. The petition and subsequent protest clarified this to a great degree.

After missing the boat in organizing resistance—whether in the form of a petition or other acts of defiance—to the initial policy change discussed above, comrades were able to seize the initiative when tensions over health abuses erupted. They were able to do this because collective discussions with workers and comrades allowed them to properly assess earlier failures and clarify the way forward. Through outright resistance on the job, work stoppages, public struggles with supervisors, and public petitions and protests, new friends were gained and a more consolidated worker's organization was formed.

Without a few key acts of public resistance—such as the petition and public reports posted by the worker's organization breaking down management's lies—conversations about organized resistance would likely have sounded somewhat abstract and "pie-in-the-sky" to many on the job. Public acts created the basis to unify workers in action, many of whom previously did not see the basis to meet up or discuss political issues in an organized fashion.

The need for cadre to take the lead in organizing resistance in this phase of struggle did not mean that workers were "happy" with management beforehand. Workers regularly defied oppressive management techniques, including policies that limited when they could take breaks, and rules that objectively made the productive process more cumbersome, but which were designed to keep workers on a tight leash. However, spare the demonstration of proletarian organization, such forms of individual defiance both were contained within and actually reinforced an outlook of bourgeois individualism.

Many workers—in particular those of oppressed nationalities—were supportive of the idea of militancy and of the need for change. However, without organized rebellion, this mostly was expressed on social media, such as posting remarks in solidarity with the latest victims of police brutality, or in individual acts of rebellion. When the petition and related posters and fliers went up, the situation shifted. Workers who had previously felt nervous or unsure of themselves took steps forward, taking up new forms of resistance on the job, while some others who previously engaged in individual defiance didn't come forward to further collective resistance. In the absence of examples of organized resistance it is not clear how people will respond, and it is not possible to precisely determine—based on activity in the *absence* of such organization—who will take an active role in supporting organized acts of resistance.

Organizing the signing and posting of the petition and follow-up statements required confronting a persistent culture of disposability. People were regularly

fired for even very slight signs of rebellion against supervisors, and in such an environment many were very afraid of losing their jobs. Care was taken to post and distribute notices in a way that did not expose key activists. In such an environment, supervisors try to keep workers in place through the use of petty discipline and networks of pro-management elements among the rank-and-file. Because of this, people have a lot of practice evading supervisors, and have learned the hard way who can be trusted. This knowledge was key to getting the petition signed and posted. Meetings also had to occur in locations that would not be easily found by pro-management lackeys, several of whom began to tail workers leaving the job.

In response to the posting of the petition and militant notices by the workers' organization, the company took immediate action. They first tried to contain the problem by cultivating pro-management turncoats among workers and by calling company wide meetings intended to intimidate workers overall. In these group meetings, management claimed that the outrages exposed by the workers' organization were made-up, and that the posting of notices by the workers' organization was "not the right way to go about things." Instead, they encouraged workers to come to them one-on-one with "concerns." The company also used the group meetings to identify individual workers for interrogation by management. When many in the workplace saw through these tactics, the company escalated by calling more individuals one-by-one into meetings with management in a further attempt to intimidate workers and to identify lead "trouble makers."

These are fairly standard intimidation tactics. Meetings in which several managers would question a single worker were an attempt to isolate and break the unity that workers were developing. Anticipating that the company would use such tactics, comrades briefed workers on the possibility of being interrogated, and recommended that they refuse to speak and instead demand that the company hold an open meeting on the petition with everyone who signed it. In this way, worker activists were able to better prepare people before they were interrogated.

To keep pace with all these developments, daily after-work meetings were held to discuss the situation with coworkers. Lies and misinformation from the company were dispelled daily with new posters in the break-room, and workers took the lead in explaining the situation to others and drawing more people in to sign the petition. Many started to stand up to their supervisors in new ways, demanding answers as to why the issues highlighted in the petition had not yet been addressed. Management at the company responded halfheartedly, with every manager telling people different things. Discussing all of these developments with workers, at after-work meetings and during breaks was key to understanding the situation more clearly. People became even more outraged when they realized that managers were all saying different things. Historically the company had relied on various management techniques, including dividing the workforce into various teams, and strongly discouraging socialization between teams, to

keep workers isolated and ignorant of the daily outrages essential to the overall operation of such a company. Workers were often unaware that others around them had been fired, harassed by a manager, and/or were sick from health hazards at the job. However, the posting of the petition and the related organized resistance broke through this culture of isolation. This exposed the systematic duplicity of the company and its lackeys.

At this point, it became clear that the company was going to try to fire whoever they felt was responsible for the petition and for the subsequent protests. Through discussions with coworkers a plan was formulated to respond with a workplace shutdown if someone was fired. Arriving at this plan itself was a struggle, with some workers advocating a more liberal approach. While these people had been active in the struggle to this point, they also held certain petty-bourgeois ideas, including the belief that we could appeal to some of the “more just” members of management and win them over to our side. Instead of relying on the masses of people to make change, these workers hoped that the existing authorities in the company would have a “change of heart.” However, through principled struggle, comrades were able to solidify plans for a shutdown.

When the company did try to fire one worker, comrades took the lead in shutting down the workplace. At first it was just a few people who took quick action according to the previously agreed plan to shutdown the machinery of the operation. Some of those who had earlier suggested appealing to management, ultimately did not join these efforts, and one even advocated that others not join either. Some also hesitated at the moment because of past criminal records and associated fears of reprisals from the company and the state. Despite these obstacles, comrades and a few other workers were able to lead a successful shutdown, with more and more workers joining after the initial shock had passed. This collective action was able to force the company to shutdown for the day and prevented them from firing anyone for the petition or for the shutdown.

This was a huge victory in the struggle. It demonstrated the ability to take a collective stand against oppression and exploitation, and showed that through this action it is possible to stop authorities from crushing resistance. However, given that the shutdown took many workers by surprise—the plan was formulated among a relatively small group—it was also necessary to clarify to them the reasons for militant actions, lest these workers be won over by the lies spread by the company and its lackeys. Comrades subsequently worked hard to grow and consolidate the worker’s organization, which was particularly challenging given the frequency with which workers were and are fired at the job. Despite these challenges, there have been ongoing advances since, especially in the form of new workers coming forward in the struggle in the wake of the petition and subsequent shutdown.

Oppression and Resistance at the Workplace

“The masses are drawn into the movement, participate vigorously in it, value it highly and display heroism, self-sacrifice, perseverance and devotion to the great cause only if it makes for improving the economic condition of those who work. Nor can it be otherwise, for the living conditions of the workers in “ordinary” times are incredibly hard. As it strives to improve its living conditions, the working class also progresses morally, intellectually and politically, becomes more capable of achieving its great emancipatory aims.”

-Lenin, *Economic and Political Strikes*

The workplace in question is a hotbed of white supremacy and patriarchy. Managers and their lackeys often take on openly racist attitudes, and routinely sexually harass workers. These managers are often some of the most direct oppressors that workers face in their daily lives. There have been several managers—the majority of whom are white—who have called their non-white workers their slaves. When workers complained about these racist remarks, the company defended the managers. Even nominally progressive managers—for example those from a petty-bourgeois background who often express some form of liberal identity politics—regularly promote anti-people ideas, and often treat the workers they oversee as potential prey in sexual games.

This reality contributed to the initial hesitancy to create a more public form of resistance to the above mentioned policy changes and economic attacks on the workers. Given the centrality of white supremacy and patriarchy in the workplace, comrades assumed that it would be important to get people to take organized action against these forms of oppression. Comrades tried to develop such resistance through agitating around the various incidents occurring on the job and by exposing acts of resistance—past and present—against related forms of oppression more broadly. As such, our comrades’ assessment was that public resistance which only opposed the company’s recent economic attacks on workers—and did not address other issues experienced on the job and in larger society—would be too narrow in scope to unite a significant number of workers. However, just because people were not initially willing to organize against these issues did not mean that comrades should have neglected organizing acts of resistance against cut-backs in benefits and against unsafe conditions.

While the hesitancy to go forward with mobilization centered around the initial company policy change was primarily due to over-estimating the repressive strength and ability of the company, it was also related to the comrades’ assumption that people would need to be *united in action* from the get-go around more than just the immediate practical-economic resistance to the capitalists. This assumption was incorrect.

The organized struggle of the working class in this country is at a very low level right now, and it has been decades since the U.S. has seen a genuinely revo-

lutionary organization capable of transforming even a local situation, such as one within a workplace. What's more, while the crisis of capitalist-imperialism has begun to deepen, many of the masses still hold on to the hope of a better life within the confines of the present social order. Given these conditions, it should come as no surprise that many workers will be hesitant to engage in more overtly political resistance without first learning to collectively struggle to improve their immediate conditions. Of course, there will be situations in which workers are willing to engage in organized political resistance from the beginning, and revolutionaries should unite with and promote that work. However, such instances are few and far between in the U.S. at present.

As revolutionaries, we must work to simultaneously develop practical-economic resistance among the proletariat and develop the basis for political resistance. This requires us to consistently flesh out the relationship between practical-economic resistance and the larger struggle against the white-supremacist capitalist class in the U.S. We must also work to clarify the need for political organization beyond the immediacy of the workplace, organization capable of addressing the root issues of oppression and exploitation. Clarity on the relationship between struggles at the point of production and the larger struggles in society is essential to revolutionary advances. Without it, victories in workplace struggles will amount to little more than trade-unionism, which is itself predicated on giving up on revolutionary struggles to transform society.

The memory of past struggle has largely been forgotten and rewritten, and new efforts at developing a revolutionary movement of the working-class are still in their infancy. We have much work in front of us, and the proletariat must itself learn through struggle, through both advances and setbacks.

Through discussion, study, and a critical assessment of prior mistakes, it became clear to comrades that providing leadership to the practical-economic struggle—that is the struggle over working conditions—was the primary means by which to unify workers *at this site* in organized struggle. The fact that many workers at this location were willing to unify in opposition to health hazards on the job was significant. As stated, in other workplaces there may be an immediate basis for unifying working in action around larger political issues, and if that opportunity exists, revolutionaries should act upon it. However, at this particular workplace, organizing practical-economic resistance provided the context for comrades to agitate around larger political issues, and to engage with workers on larger theoretical issues, including the need for revolution.

Had comrades talked about the opposition to cutbacks and workplace health hazards only in economic terms—as bureaucratic unions largely do—this would have been an economist deviation. By instead working tirelessly to expose the connections of oppression in the workplace to the white-supremacist imperialist U.S. state, comrades were able to catalyze further resistance. Many workers were already eager to discuss the basis to transform the larger society. By highlighting the connections between this objective and particular outrages—such as abuse at work, as well as the many instances of police brutality and

summary executions of Black people near and far—comrades were able to raise the level of unity of those in the struggle, and demonstrate a basis for linking up the struggle at the workplace with other struggles around the city and the country.

The Worker's Newsletter

The development and mass distribution of a workers' newsletter has been a key way to both dispel the lies spread by the company and to consolidate the workers' organization. Prior to the posting of the petition, comrades had developed this newsletter with a few coworkers. It was initially a way to agitate against injustices in the workplace, and provide a platform for coworkers to share ideas in written form. Given the need for secrecy in a highly repressive workplace, it was initially only distributed to a small subsection of the workforce. However, the public resistance and subsequent shutdown transformed the situation and created the basis for a mass distribution of the newsletter.

At present the newsletter is regularly distributed to several hundred coworkers across a few workplaces run by the company. This has allowed for mass exposure of the daily outrages in the workplace which would otherwise be swept under the rug by the company, through their use of cutting-edge management tactics designed to keep workers isolated. The newsletter has also provided a platform for workers to express their ideas and share their experiences with others. Comrades have also made an effort to use the publication to link up the particularity of the workplace struggle with the larger struggle to break all chains. This has been done through articles which expose the inherent injustices of the U.S. state at home and abroad, the legacy of white supremacy in this country, the experiences and lessons of past revolutionary struggles in this country, and national and international developments.

The success of the newsletter has been contingent upon comrades' ability to understand key questions that coworkers face. Through consistent and regular conversations with many at the job they have been able to share debates among workers with a wider audience. Comrades have also tailored articles to address central questions, and popularized correct ideas about the various dynamics at work and in larger society.

Writing, editing, and distributing this biweekly newsletter has also assisted the development of the workers' organization. Struggles over the direction and content of the newsletter have solidified the organization and required those involved to adopt a more methodical approach to daily political work. These have included wrestling over what topics to highlight in the publication, different ways to express ideas, ways to relate key discussions in person with other workers with coverage in the paper, and how to coordinate production and distribution of the publication in an efficient way. These various questions have all related closely with discussions about how to handle contradictions among the people.

Thus far, one major obstacle to furthering collective struggle has been the confusion of many workers over the nature and objectives of the struggle. Some have argued that it does not make sense to join or continue the struggle because there are relatively worse managers and work situations out there. In some cases, workers even take this logic to the extreme, and advocate sucking up to management as the only way to survive. In order to combat this logic, the comrades have worked to clarify the relationship of the workplace struggle to larger contradictions in U.S. society and the world. This has included articles and discussions which emphasize the relationship between oppression at the workplace and the larger bourgeois dictatorship over the people. There has also been a focus on clarifying that there are many ways to get involved in the struggle and that the workers' organization is flexible in its ability to handle different contradictions among the people, including the burden of child-care. The success of this approach is directly related to understanding that contradictions among the people—including anti-people attitudes—reflect objective realities and cannot be overcome by telling people to “listen up.” Instead, the newsletter has been a key way to clarify that through unity in struggle, the people are better able to handle these questions.

While some workers were initially confused on the nature and stake of the struggle—especially those who were not present the day of the shutdown—the newsletter has served as a key means to clarify things to them. It has also helped to expose the nature of the company and of the ongoing struggle to newly hired workers. While at this point, only a relatively small number of coworkers are willing to meet up outside of work, the vast majority are supportive of the struggle and regularly read the newsletter. Thus it has been a key means by which to advance the struggle in the wake of the petition and shutdown.

Combatting Lackeyism in Our Own Ranks

Upon the different forms of property, upon the social conditions of existence, rises an entire superstructure of distinct and peculiarly formed sentiments, illusions, modes of thought, and views of life. The entire class creates and forms them out of its material foundations and out of the corresponding social relations. The single individual, who derives them through tradition and upbringing, may imagine that they form the real motives and the starting point of his activity.

-Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

At another workplace comrades struggled to take steps forward to link up with workers beyond their immediate circle, and had difficulties uniting with proposals for resistance and rebellion from their coworkers. Forestalling these basic steps was justified through the bourgeois refrain of “there is not yet a basis to act” or “it can wait 'till tomorrow.” The willingness of these comrades to put

on a “militant face” during public rallies or in meetings with other comrades—while ultimately being unwilling to “step out of line” at work—was revealing of their overall political orientation. Their related hesitancy to cross existing social boundaries at work—which was necessary to further the struggle and develop organized resistance—ultimately revealed deep-seated anti-people attitudes.

Not all of these tendencies were immediately apparent, and some worked hard to hide their anti-people ideas from others. However, through principled discussion and struggle, it became clear that these comrades had fundamental disagreements with the approach of building deep links among the masses, beyond their existing social circles. While they nominally agreed with this line, in practice they repeatedly failed to take the necessary steps to carry it out.

Through regular study, criticism, and self-criticism we adopted the approach of “curing the illness to save the patient,” and struggled against these anti-people attitudes among our comrades. However, some comrades continuously displayed an unwillingness to transform, or even to discuss these issues in a straightforward manner. This indicated a real consolidation to an outlook representative of the anti-people section of the urban petty-bourgeoisie.

In this regard it should come as no surprise that the comrades in question came from a student background. While they were willing to work proletarian jobs, this in and of itself was not sufficient to overcome various oppressive ideas and outlooks instilled in them from their class-background. This attitude manifested in their tendency to form a narrow friend-group at work, instead of seeking to link up with the majority of their coworkers. Especially in a workplace with over 400 people, limiting discussion to a small circle of coworkers in one’s immediate vicinity fosters a subjective and arbitrary view of the dynamics of the productive process. It also limits one’s understanding and knowledge of the daily outrages that workers face at the hands of the company.

The successes mentioned above at the first workplace were only possible because comrades repeatedly went out of their way to talk to the majority of their coworkers and struggled daily against internal hesitancies and liberalisms. Unfortunately, comrades in this second workplace were unwilling to adopt a similar approach, and therefore were unable to advance the workers’ struggle in their location. Despite working for months at the job, they were unable to meet up with even one coworker outside of the workplace. This orientation and related errors among people who profess to be revolutionaries clarifies a lot about the current form and content of the many so-called revolutionary organizations in this country at present: Revolutionary in appearance, petty-bourgeois and anti-people in essence.

While the approach of struggling with these comrades over time with the goal of transformation was correct, we are now better at identifying signs of consolidation to an anti-Marxist orientation. In the end, we only have so much time each day, and the presence of such anti-people attitudes at meetings can detract from our ability to discuss and debate key issues. Therefore, we need

to be clear in distinguishing between potential friends of the people and those who are ultimately unwilling to adopt a pro-people orientation.

That such a struggle would take place within a revolutionary organization should come as no surprise. The reality is that such ideas are reflective of the social relations of class society. The ideas and attitudes of these comrades are one form that bourgeois ideology takes within the revolutionary movement, and as this ideology has its roots in class society, the struggle against it will continue until classes themselves disappear. Struggle against such tendencies is the life of a revolutionary organization. To claim otherwise, and to promote the idea that an organization can be completely purged of such ideas, is a fantasy and a negation of the need for two-line struggle—the essence of revisionism.

Openings on a Larger Level

Through months of fairly acute struggle, we have been able to identify openings for revolutionary politics in this country. These openings are emerging in relation to larger contradictions within the U.S. state and capitalist-imperialism. It is incumbent upon us as revolutionaries to identify such openings and seize upon them. These include new attacks by the ruling class on the people, growing discontent with the petty-bourgeois leadership of mass struggles, sharpening national contradictions, and more.

One such opening that we have identified has been among progressive people¹ with some experience in workplace organizing. Some of these people have observed the bankruptcy of established union practices. Many of them have faced backlash from these organization when they made an effort to struggle for actual resistance and organization among the working class outside of the bureaucratic framework of established unions. Some also see “the writing on the wall” for the collapse of the corrupt and decayed union framework that exists in this country. Legislation that prevent unions from automatically collecting dues from workers’ payrolls in particular is a sign to many that the ruling class is attempting to demolish the existing union structure in this country.

Organizations such as the United Auto Workers (UAW) were born through militant organizing by communists in the 1920s and 30s, but in the decades since have been gutted, and transformed into vampire like vehicles for suturing worker organizing to the designs of the U.S. bourgeoisie. Now the ruling class thinks it can do away with these reformist organizations altogether. Some progressive people are alarmed by these efforts to eliminate even the limited benefits that these organizations provide to the remaining workers involved in them. The inability of these ossified organizations to respond intelligently to these new attacks has also exposed their political bankruptcy and incompetence.

¹We use the term “progressive” to refer to people fighting on some level for positive change, and not to refer to “liberals,” as it often does in the U.S.

Mainstream union “leaders” and the related revisionist-“Marxist” chieftains have responded to our efforts by trying to attach us to their elaborate webs of lackeyism and commandism. These groups and “leaders” are often directly connected to the Democratic Party, and the U.S. state’s NGO apparatus. As such we have found it essential to avoid these parasites while instead trying to work with progressive people who are interested in a genuine alternative to “left politics as usual.” There are people who are genuinely interested in conversations about our experiences in workplace organizing, and in adopting a similar approach.

A second opening has been in the sphere of media, where we have worked to identify progressive writers and journalists. While the bourgeois media provided some favorable coverage of some of our struggles, we have had more success linking up with those who have organized alternative publications that take a more class-conscious stand. Some of these people have supported the most militant aspects of our struggle in multiple ways. This tendency represents a real fracturing in the state’s ability to maintain a liberal and reformist consensus among its critics. These people can further the struggle on both local and national levels, especially through principled work by revolutionaries which can help to clarify who we are, what we are fighting for, and how we are fighting for it.

These are just a few examples of some of the political opening of the present moment. There are countless others. By relating these openings to our ongoing efforts at working-class organizing we have made advances, and demonstrated a revolutionary alternative to the existing status-quo of “left” politics to those outside these worker struggles. This in turn has been key to furthering the struggle at the job and expanding the horizon of the struggle beyond the point of production.

We hope that these lessons from the successes and failures—thus far—of this aspect of our work can help others who are organizing for revolution around the country. We also hope that this work can inspire those who are not yet organizing in a revolutionary manner to set out on a revolutionary path. Our experience has shown that working alongside the proletariat daily is key to developing both deep links with them and revolutionary politics among them. This country has lacked a genuine revolutionary organization for decades, and the level of organized mass resistance is very low at present.

By casting aside illusions and going among the masses we can transform a difficult and unfavorable situation into a favorable one. By refusing to sell-out to petty-bourgeois-led “left” groups and bureaucratic unions, we can sustain mass movements and refuse shallow “easy victories.” Through this work we can unleash the creative potential of the masses, overcome all difficulties, and advance toward revolution and communism. While it is not the only site of struggle that U.S. revolutionaries must engage in, the workplace will be an essential site of future advance.

Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win.

-MP