# Introduction: Mass Strikes Today and the Lessons of History

## By Eric Lerner

The victory of the Quebec student movement in 2012, described in Lev Lafayette's lead article in this issue of *Mass Strike,* is one of the very few clear-cut victories won in the past five year by a working class movement. In a period of crisis in which capitalisms' only program is to drive down the living standard of working people everywhere and roll back any gains made over the last 100 years, any victory that we win is crucial. First, it shows that victory is possible—a basic idea that years of defeats have caused many workers and students to doubt. An attempt to dramatically increase tuition across the province was unequivocally defeated, with no concession by the students. Second, the Quebec victory shows *how* we can win.

What happened in Quebec is an example of the *mass strike process,* a process first studied over a century ago by German revolutionary socialist Rosa Luxemburg. This issue of our magazine, which is named after this process, is devoted to understanding what mass strikes are and how they work—today and in the past.

### Mass Strikes Today

Luxemburg, who participated in the abortive 1905 Russian revolution in Poland, then part of the Russian Empire, returned to Germany and analyzed the lessons of the revolution in a pamphlet "The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions". The pamphlet is as timely today as when it was written, and should be required reading for anyone interested in the future of the workers' movement. (Available on the web at http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/index.htm)

Luxemburg argued that in a period where ordinary methods of struggle are defeated, because capital is unwilling, or unable, to yield concessions to workers, is instead requiring concessions from workers, in a period where a revolutionary transformation of society is needed for workers to move forward, the mass strike becomes the most crucial method of workers' activity. By mass strike she was not referring to the one-day general strikes that had been discussed in the movement (and which were to become common in Europe and elsewhere many decades later) or other anarchist notions of a universal general strike to end capitalism. Rather a mass strike occurred when a single struggle in a given locale becomes generalized, often seemingly spontaneously, and spreads into a growing strike movement, joining hundreds of thousands of workers and students, often unorganized in any union, into strikes of entire industries, or general strikes of cities or regions. Such mass strikes characterized the years before the 1905 revolution in Russia, as well as the revolutionary year itself. They were to recur in the Russian Revolution of '17, the German revolution of '18, in the US in 1934, in France in 1937. Nor were they to be limited to the first half of the century. Mass strikes following Luxemburg's description shook France in 1968, where ten million workers occupied factories, Italy in 1969 and most recently in France again in 1995. The mass strike process is central to the situation facing the working class today.

### Program as Preparation

Luxemburg showed that mass strikes were prepared by the educational work of socialist groups, who convinced workers of their *common* interests in a *program* that united political and economic demands.--in Russia this program included, the shortening of the work week, the need for freedom of organization, of press and assembly, the need for the overthrow of Czarism and a democratic republic and the need for organization of workers independent of employers. On the basis of this education, in repeated cases when workers in one industry or plant went on strike, they were able to appeal

against police attacks to workers in neighboring plants, often going in procession to the other plants. Led generally by the small minority of Social Democratic (socialist) workers, these plants then joined the strike around broader demands than those affecting a single factory. Luxemburg emphasized that, rather than separating the economic and political demands, the minimum program and the maximum goal, the mass strikes tended to unify them, showing to workers that only by changing society in fundamental terms could the immediate demands of higher pay and shorter hours be won.

In pre-revolutionary Russia, where union was illegal and weak, most participants in such mass strikes were "unorganized". Luxemburg generalized to argue that the essence of the mass strike process was unifying the organized and unorganized sectors of the class, bringing layers far beyond the union into motion, and in the process forming much larger and stronger organizations. Indeed, out of the Russian mass strikes arose large trade unions, which then, in turn, conducted local strikes over economic demands, winning many of them. The strength of the mass strike and the fear of its spread forced concessions from the employers that individual union action could never obtain. It was the *political* threat of the mass strike, the threat of an ever growing unity of the working class that elicited concessions from capitalists in order to stop the process.


*Workers march during the Russian Revolution of 1905*

Not only did trade union organizations emerge from the mass strikes. During 1905, the strike gave rise to a new form of organization -- the Workers' Council, or Soviets. These consisted of delegates elected from each of the factories involved in the strike. These bodies (in

some later strikes termed strike committees) institutionalized the unity of the working class, allowing the class in an entire city to collectively debate the issues of the day. Through the unifying experience of the mass strikes themselves and through the debates in the factories in the Soviets, the consciousness of hundreds of thousands of workers could be changed in a matter of days or weeks, as workers in a given factory began to see themselves as part of a single class with shared interests.

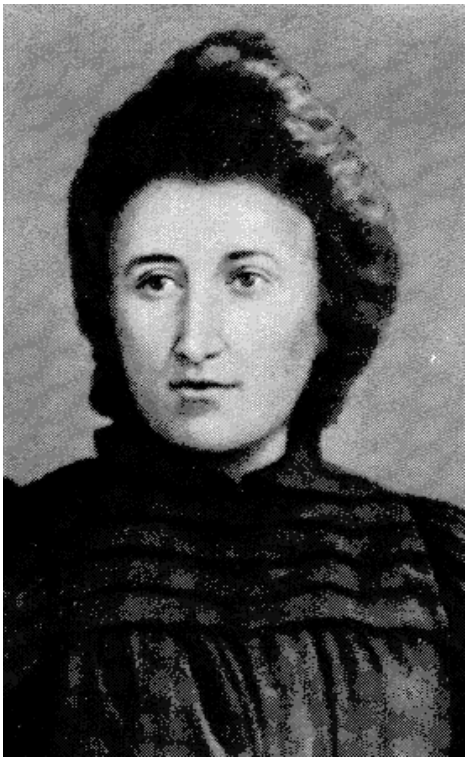
The Quebec student strike was an example of how critical this form of organization—the general assembly, strike committee or workers' council-- is in the development of a successful mass strike movement. As Lafayette's article shows, the students adopted an organization characterized by all-inclusiveness, democratic majority decisions, and most crucially, the election of delegates to higher bodes only for limited periods, generally a single meeting, and often with specific mandates. All-inclusiveness and majority rule guarantee that decisions truly reflect all those involved in the movement, while the election of delegates for extremely short terms, first instituted by the Paris Commune of 1870, ensure that no "leadership elite" separates itself off from the mass.

**Forms of Organization Critical**

The contrast of this form of organization with that of the Occupy movement, described in Jay Arena's article is striking. The elaborate rules and the anti-democratic 90%-agreement rules drove away the vast majority of the participants of the movement, handed power to a self-appointed and secretive leadership and prevented the movement from accomplishing concrete goals.

The Quebec student movement won the support of wide layers of the working class who were not students. However, the movement itself did not spread to workplaces. In the past, the most powerful mass strikes did spread to factories and offices. It was the unity of the entire working class, organized simultaneously in the workplace and in the community that gave this mass strikes such enormous power. In this issue, we summarize briefly two historical examples of such mass strike moments—the 1934 city-wide general strikes in the United States and the 1968 General Strike in France.

Finally, in all these mass movements, the



*Rosa Luxemburg*

issue of program—demands—is as crucial as that of organization. Only a movement that clearly states the interest of a wide section of the entire working class can hope to mobilize the support needed for a mass strike. As Arena writes, in the struggle within Occupy, a key demand was that of Jobs for All—a massive direct government employment program. We here republish some basic descriptions of that demand, which is still crucial in 2013 both in the US and around the world.

Clearly the discussion of what demands, what program, is crucial to unifying the working class, or what foundations can be laid for the outbreak of future mass strikes, is far from over. No broad mass movement for a set of demands of the working class now exists anywhere in the world. But we can build on the Quebec student victory to further that discussion and, when opportunities arise, to fight for the implementation of the organization and programs needed for future victories

# Quebec Students Show the Way to Win in Le Printemps Érable ("The Maple Spring")

## By Lev Lafayette

On September 5, 2012, after nine months of a general strike by students and their supporters, Le Conseil exécutif du Québec ("the Québec cabinet"), declared a freeze on tuition fee increases, abandoning a huge tuition boost the Quebec government had announced in March 2011. This decision did not come from the benevolence of the new cabinet, led by Pauline Marois of Parti Québécois. Nor did it just come from the simple fact of a large number of people engaged in protest over time. In a period where victories such as these are less common, it is necessary to understand what happened in Québec that was different, so that lessons can be learned and perhaps replicated.

The campaign began with the proposal by the cabinet, by Jean Charest of the Parti libéral du Québec, to raise tuition fees by almost 75% between 2012 and 2017, or over 125% from the relaxation of tuition fees from 2007. Students responded quickly, organized by over a decade of previous mobilizations and strikes, including a two-month student strike in 2005. By August, an organization that had emerged from those struggles in 2001, the Association for Student Union Solidarity, had begun organizing for an unlimited student strike across the whole province. The Association, whose initials in French, ASSé, (pronounced ah-say) are a pun on the French word for "enough!", is the anti-capitalist and independent federation of student organizations, in contrast to the other two the FEUQ and FECQ, who are both tied to the Parti Quebecois political party and to the major trade unions.

### Real Democratic Organization

The Association insisted that all decisions be taken within its affiliated groups by general assemblies of all students, voting by simple majority, not by officers elected for long terms. When providence wide meeting were held, the assemblies elected recallable delegates for that meeting, often with specific mandates as to how to vote on some issues, the same form of organization that has repeatedly arisen in mass strikes. From the start, they raised a demand that went well beyond just opposing the tuition hike—they demanded free tuition for all—an improvement in the situation, not just the lack of deterioration, and a demand that would benefit the whole working class, not just the present students.

By the fall, all three student federations had agreed on a National Day of Action scheduled for November 10th, 2011. In a huge success, 30,000 students march in Montreal and half the students in Quebec go on a one-day strike. Out of this majo0r mobilization, the Assocation launched a "large collation", CLASSE, to allow local student groups to affiliate with ASSé even if they were also affiliated with the other two federations. But they insisted that member groups use the same assembly-based decision-making process.

### Building the Strike

As momentum grew for an unlimited general strike, the assemblies adopted a "floor" as a tactic to mobilize support before actually walking out. Individual assemblies, based for example in one department would vote to strike, but agreed that they would only actually walk out if at least 2,000 other students at the same school vot4ed to strike in other assemblies. This prevented the most active groups from becoming isolated with premature action.

Social science students at the Université Laval went strike on February 13, 2012, followed by some at Université du Québec à Montréal. Over the next two months, the number of striking students rose to at least 180,000, with over 200,000 attending a single protest on March 22.

It was quite clear by this stage the protest had reached major proportions. Certainly, it also had dramatic moments. Around one hundred student protesters were arrested on March 20, after demonstrators blocked a bridge with concrete blocks. On May 6, protesters were attacked when outsiders (and possibly agents provocateurs) started throwing projectiles into the crowd. In the reaction that followed, and with clashes between the police and protesters, ten were injured, and two seriously, one losing an eye and another suffering a skull fracture.

**Force to negotiate**

Picket lines were set up everywhere, but for the most part adopted the tactic of blocking only faculty, who in general supported the strike, and letting non-striking students through. This avoided, of the most part, fights among students but prevented classes from taking place.

Forced to the negotiating table, the government made appeals to the students and their allies. They claimed that Québec students were already paying very low tuition fees relative to other provinces (Ontario, the highest, is at an average $6,640 per year compared to Québec's $2,519). They claimed that the fee increases were necessary to properly fund tuition costs. They offered to extend the transition period of the increases from five to seven years. These proposals were rejected by the students, but the government in turn rejected the proposals by the students for other sources of finance, specifically a tax on the banks. The government attempted to split the students by excluding CLASSE from the negotiations, but the other two federations refused to participate unless CLASSE was included. On May 14 the Education Minister and Deputy Premier, Line Beauchamp, resigned and was replaced by Michelle Courchesne in both positions.


*"Student strike, people's struggle". Students and workers march together in Montreal in 2012.*

Whilst bringing a conservative deputy premier and minister to the point of resignation may be considered a victory, the greater point here was ideological. The student advocates

successfully argued, in the public if not always to the government, that an educated population has benefits as well as some individual benefits and therefore requires substantial initial public investment to bring future gains. Thus the sector requires significant subsidies. However because authoritative education standards are required, a monopolistic situation arises where, left to pure market forces, overcharging would become inevitable as would inequalities of access .The result is that tuition fees become a matter of public choice resource allocation and equity; the students argued that even the total funding of Québec's universities (c$400 million) was less than half of the tax cuts introduced by the government in 2007, primarily for the wealthy.

This is just a partial illustration of a wider problem. Governments, nominally democratic, around the world are engaging in a starvation of public wealth by removing elements of redistributive social justice from their finances. Tax cuts for the wealthy, followed by austerity budgets targeting social welfare, are a form of class warfare and one which benefits the wealthiest members of the capitalist and landlord classes. In the late 2000s the Ontario government proudly proclaimed that it has delivered twelve billion in tax cuts over a mere three years; in British Colombia there was a 25% reduction in income tax, off-set by a new sales tax, again giving a massive advantage to the already well-off. As an example for minor contrast, in Australia the federal government has tripled the tax-free threshold, providing significant benefits for the lowest income earners, whilst increasing income from a levy on mining resources and carbon emissions.

**The crack-down defied**

The next few days after the inauguration of the new education minister sharpened the debate. Clearly in no mood for further negotiations the government passed "Bill 78" on May 18, an emergency law which seriously restricted public protest and especially that at universities. This barred all public protests of more than 50 people and levied enormous fines of $1,000 to $5,000 for individuals and $25,000 to $125,000 per day for unions or student organizations. Unsurprisingly, the bill had the support of Conseil du patronat du Québec (Quebec Council of Employers), if there was any doubt in whose interests the government was acting on. The labor unions complied with the law. But voting through the assemblies, CLASSE announced publically it would defy the law. Now the issue had expanded beyond one of student protests over tuition fee increases and had become an issue of freedom of assembly and expression.

**The movement expands**

This was immediately followed by protests and conflict, with scores of demonstrators arrested in Montréal, police firing rubber bullet and using tear-gas, whereas some protesters responded with projectiles and Molotov cocktails. Students organized marches every night, increasingly joined by non-student residents and with up to 250,000 participating, large enough to overwhelm the police. On May 22 some 400,000 people marched in Montreal, correctly referred by organizers as "The single biggest act of civil disobedience in Canadian history." Within days, the law was successfully defied on a mass scale, spreading the student strike into a general protest of the working class.

Already sympathetic to the student's protests, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) described the law as "violating fundamental freedoms of association, assembly, and expression", with its president calling it "a terrible act of mass repression", with even the government's own agency for human rights (CDPDJ) engaging in serious criticism, along with the bar association and specialist academics. A Laval University law professor, Louis-Philippe Lampron commented, "Read it. Stunned. Can’t believe that a democratic government can adopt such a law." One remarkable and illustrative effect of the changing debate was that the protests against Bill 78 included many of those who actually supported tuition fee increases, witnessed by the wearing cloth squares of varying colors to express their position.

With protests continuing, documents leaked from the Parti libéral du Québec suggested that an early general election would be called on August 4 to take place on September 4. This

proved to be accurate, with the protests, Bill 78, and the tuition fee increases taking a prominent role in the campaign. With over forty percent of eligible voters not turning out, and notoriously higher among young voters, the political landscape was facing for a potential shake-up. Dogged by protests throughout the campaign, the Parti libéral du Québec languished in the polls, but with much of its vote share being taken by the Coalition Avenir Québec, a centre-right party which supported Bill 78 and the tuition fee increase. "The law [raising the fees] is there and laws are to be obeyed", party leader François Legault said.

As it turned out, Parti Québécois gained a plurality in the election with 54 seats, a gain in seats (+7) even with a decline in their vote (31.95%, -3.22%). For the conservatives, the Liberal's won 50 seats (-14), with significant decline in their vote (31.20%, -10.88%), almost entirely taken up by CAQ, as expected (19 seats, up 10, 27.05%, up +10.68%). From the left, Québec Solidaire gained a seat and increased their vote by over a third (6.03%, +2.25%). In Laval-des-Rapides, former student movement leader Léo Bureau-Blouin defeated a government cabinet minister as a Parti Québécois candidate.

**Victory—and lessons learned**

In a press conference the following morning after the election, the new premier Pauline Marois declared the tuition fee increases and Bill 78 were abolished and that an education summit would be held to discuss funding options for the university sector. While tuition was not eliminated, the result was a tremendous victory for the student strike—one of the rare examples in the past few years of an austerity measure being decisively defeated by mass protests.

Important lessons from these enormously successful events can be discerned for future political actions. First, was the effectiveness of mass industrial action. Protest itself against the tuition fee hikes would have been utterly insufficient, even of a larger scale, would have been insufficient to generate the sort of effects these events have had. Nor were one-days strikes like that of November 10 enough by themselves, useful as they were for further organizing. But by launching an unlimited general strike, and sticking to it for nine months, the students set in motion an open-ended ever-growing mobilization that scared the government.


*The fight for free education goes on*

Second, the student movement won the ideological argument by arguing that the relative advantage of Québec students was an example to be emulated and expanded for the purpose of accessibility, that there were alternative means of raising public income instead of austerity measures and that tuition needed to be abolished, not raised. This was a necessary, but certainly not sufficient, part of the campaign. Third, the mass movements showed no fear in protesting when demonstrations were made illegal, acting on a principle that an unjust law is not worthy of following. Fourth, the mass assemblies, mobilizing the whole students and acting on majority vote prevented both bureaucratic leaderships and determined minorities from derailing the movement. Finally, the mass democratic organizations eschewed sectarianism when the political debate expanded. When Bill 78 was introduced the possibility of limiting protests to those who opposed the fee hikes was certainly there; but the leadership was wise enough to realize that a wider number of people supported freedom of assembly regardless of their actual position on tuition fees. These lessons must be remembered as the government is forced to the negotiating table.

# Occupy Wall Street: Anarchism, Luxemburgism, and the Struggle for Demands

## By Jay Arena

***Self-criticism, cruel, unsparing criticism . . . is life and breadth for the proletarian movement.*** Rosa Luxemburg

In September of 2011 the mass strike winds, that began months earlier in Tunisia and then spread throughout North Africa, the Middle East, Greece, and Spain, reached the United States in the form of the "Occupy movement". In this article I provide a critique of the political, organizational, and ideological obstacles *within* the movement's flagship New York City outpost—Occupy Wall Street (OWS)—that prevented a widening and deepening of what Rosa Luxemburg called a "mass strike process". That is, based on my experience as an OWS activist, I identify obstacles to bringing in larger swaths of the working class into a movement making increasingly radicalized economic and political demands on the ruling class and winning concessions based on that power.

**Origins of OWS**

The specific origins of OWS, as has been widely reported, began with a call by the editor of the anti-consumerist satirical magazine "Adbusters" in the summer of 2011 to replicate Egypt's Tahir square in the US by literally "occupying Wall Street". The idea caught on. On September 17th, after weeks of planning, mainly young anarchists set up an occupation in Lower Manhattan's Zuccotti Park after the police blocked the initial site of Wall Street. Over the next few weeks the encampment grew, with the daily general assembly (GA) drawing hundreds of participants. Consistent with OWS's "horizontal" organizing philosophy, the basic organizational building bloc that incorporated activists into the movement were the bottom-up, self-organized, "working groups". Some were related to maintaining the encampment (food, sanitation etc) and running the GA (facilitation), while a whole host of others emerged based on the interests of those attracted to OWS.

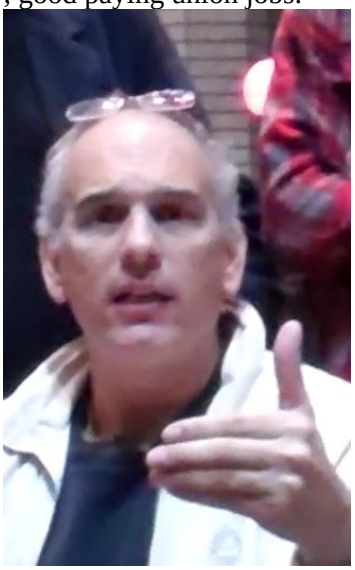
In late September International Luxemburgist Network activist Eric Lerner made an intervention at the nightly GA announcing he was organizing a "demands working group" (DWG). Yes, what about demands? A major strength of OWS was the class analysis employed to understand American society. As opposed to the fragmented identity politics model promoted by foundation-funded, non-governmental organizations that dominate so much of what passes for the US Left, OWS framed the struggle in class terms: the 1% ruling class of billionaires and millionaires against the 99%. But it was still unclear what the 99% wanted from the 1%.

The editors of Adbusters and others had raised the broad theme of "getting money out of politics," in addition to specific, reformist demands, such as reinstituting the Glass-Steagall Act, a New Deal era regulation separating investment and commercial banking that the Clinton administration abrogated over a decade earlier. On September 29 the OWS general assembly did approve a "Declaration of the Occupation of New York City" which stated that they were against "corporate forces" for the various economic, environmental, and social crises they had created for the 99%. Yet, OWS was still not clear about what it was *for*. The DWG aimed to raise that question and give the movement as a whole an opportunity to answer.

**Power Concedes Nothing Without A Demand**

At the first several DWG meetings attendees listed demands they wanted the movement to adopt. These ranged from broad to more specific ones, including ending all US wars, establishing universal public pensions rather than private ones, free transit, repealing laws attacking civil liberties, such as the Patriot Act, higher taxes on the rich, a mass public works

program, repudiating federal and household debt, to "getting money out of politics". After the second meeting, we grouped the laundry list of demands into four categories—jobs, debt, rights, and reforming the electoral system. After taking a vote, using a "modified consensus" rule of 75% approval—rather than the 90% level used at the GA—we agreed to focus, for now, on the jobs issue. The group concretized the "Jobs For All" (JFA) demand into a call for the federal government to create a mass, direct-government-employment public works program, open for all workers, including immigrants and the formerly incarcerated. To finance the program, the demand called for ending all US wars and taxing the wealth and income of the rich to create 25 million new, good paying union jobs.



*Author Jay Arena speaks at Demands Working Group Meeting*

Why was the demand of "jobs-for-all through-public-works" considered by many DWG activists so important for advancing the movement? Backers of JFA argued that for the movement to advance, to really be a movement of the 99% or at least a broad section of the working class, we had to make clear what we were demanding, what we were fighting *for*. Demands would distinguish us from the Democrats—the graveyard of mass movement in the US—and provide an aim and purpose for the movement. The question for OWS, therefore, was not if the movement makes demands, but rather what kind of demands. As Rosa Luxemburg argues in her pamphlet *The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions*, the mass strike is not a one-time event that trade union or left parties can simply call forth; the mass strike is not something that can be "'decided' at pleasure . . . a kind of pocketknife . . . ready for any emergency." At the same time, as she wrote in her analysis of the 1903-1905 mass strike process in Russia, one crucial way revolutionaries can advance a mass strike *process* is by intervening with "lively agitation for the *extension* of demands".

In contrast to Luxemburg, some within DWG were emphatic about adopting tepid demands, such as reinstating Glass-Steagall, or various formulations of campaign finance reform that they saw as palatable to the "99%", i.e. the Democratic Party. Even some socialists objected. Stephanie Luce, who has been involved in several tepid "living wage" campaigns with ACORN, argued, in the January 2012 edition of *Against the Current*, that OWS should not make demands, including JFA, since the left always ends end up compromising. Contradictorily, she argued that OWS had put forward and won its greatest demand of winning the right to protest through "claiming a public space for the public." She went on to explain that "the beauty of Occupy Wall Street is that it's pushed me into a new space where I have been asked to be patient and trusting, and where I focus more on process and less on immediate outcomes." This all sounded like the anarchist vision of creating an alternative utopian community, as I explain below.

In contrast, the JFA supporters argued that staying within the political confines of what the Democrats found permissible—either implicitly by making no demands or overtly by drawing from ones advocated by Democratic Party allied groups—would ensure we would never become a mass movement that would challenge the 1%. Instead, we needed to raise a demand, like JFA, that concretely addresses and connects with the broad and pressing needs of the working class, including the most oppressed sections among immigrants and the formerly incarnated. Through such a "transformative demand" as JFA, the OWS would give a wide section of the 99% a material stake in the movement, thus encouraging broader participation that would create the power to, at least in the short term,

extract concessions from the ruling class and advance the movement.

**Demanding No Demands**

The leaders of the supposedly leaderless OWS were not swayed. They were, for the most part, adamant opponents of the OWS making *any* demands on the 1%, although their opposition efforts were often conducted behind the scenes, rather than in open debate. Why was such an elemental issue as raising demands, which has been central to every major social movement in the US, so adamantly opposed by this influential layer? We have to examine the ideology that informed the initial organizers of OWS. Although Adbusters had first initiated the call for the action, anthropologist and anarchist theoretician David Graeber came to have the most important ideological influence over the leaders of this supposedly leaderless movement.

Graeber, who had been involved in the summer meetings that laid the groundwork for the occupation, argued the lack of demands was OWS's greatest strength. He advocated a movement that does "not seek to pressure the government to institute reforms . . . [or] to seize state power . . . " Demands by the movement on the 1% and the state were simply "appeals to the authorities to act differently." Instead the movement's goal, consistent with a long strain of American utopianism, should be on constructing a new society in the shell of the old. Through claiming space, such as the encampment at Zuccotti, and the creation of alternative ways of organizing society, the movement was making its most radical challenge to the 1%. The practice of occupation, therefore, *is* the revolution. In other words, "we are our demands," as went the anarchist refrain.

The one demand the anarchist leadership could agree on was demanding that OWS not make any on the 1% and their state. They took action to enforce their edict. Adherents of the "no demands" demand disrupted DWG meetings by using OWS meeting rules to create endless delays. For example, under OWS protocol people could raise "blocks" if they had a "grave moral objection" to any proposed action, allowing them to state their objections and call for a vote to defeat the objectionable proposal. The "no-demands" faction stretched the "moral objection" definition so far that it was invoked repeatedly to prevent DWG from accomplishing anything.

As the movement for demands gained steamed, despite the tactics described above, elements of the anarchist OWS leadership stepped up their disruption. On October 21, a day before a planned teach-in on the Jobs for All demand, and two days before a DWG gathering at Tompkins Square Park to decide whether to take the JFA demand before the GA for adoption, opponents struck back. The unelected activists that controlled the OWS's semi-official website, "occupywall street.org", discarded their sacred "consensus decision making" and unilaterally put out a message on their homepage attacking DWG. They claimed, erroneously, that the DWG had told the New York Times that the JFA demand was made by the OWS rather than simply one of its working groups. Based on this patently false charge, and others, including that the group had not been approved by the general assembly and was not following "consensus" meeting rules, the web masters removed the DWG from the online forum discussion list that was allotted to each working group. Only after strenuous protest to the website, and the GA, was a retraction made and DWG restored to the list of the OWS working groups on the website.

Nonetheless, the "no demands" militants were not done. A few weeks later Patrick Bruner, a member of the collective that controlled the website, and several of his co-thinkers disrupted a DWG meeting accusing the group of being illegitimate and demanding that the group disband! Infamously, another ardent opponent of demands from the OWS anarchist inner circle declared at a JFA forum that "only terrorists make demands." She followed this gem with the false claim that that OWS was on record as rejecting demands and therefore DWG had no right to even debate the issue.

**Going to the GA**

The first attempt to bring the JFA demand before the GA was on October 30. By this time the GA was still drawing crowds of several hundred—although less than the nearly thousand that attended in the first few weeks. On that

frigid autumn evening Cecily McMillan and Eric Vandaventer, representing DWG, read the demand and fielded questions. After struggling through scores of contentious meetings to decide on the demand and wording, and battling those that wanted to prevent JFA from ever being discussed, it was electrifying for myself and other DWG activists to actually see it coming up for debate and, hopefully, a vote. In addition, to DWG members, other working groups and local community organizations that had endorsed the demand, such as the Newark, New Jersey-based Peoples Organization for Progress, sent delegations to speak in favor and vote on the demand. Unfortunately, the GA meeting structure and procedures—contrary to the claims of the expert anarchist "facilitators"—worked to undermine, rather than facilitate democratic participation and advantaged those that wanted to block any action being taken.

The conservative and anti-democratic biases of the GA structure were manifested in various ways. For example, after the reading of the demand, the next sections of the process were reserved for those that had objections to the proposal—clarifying questions, followed by "concerns", amendments, and of course "blocks" could be raised at any time. Simply presenting the JFA demand—which was preceded by a two hour wait before the item came up on the agenda--- and taking a few "clarifying questions" took a full hour. Thus, the many supporters that had come to speak in support of the proposal were never given an opportunity after some three hours of waiting in the cold. In general, the long drawn-out meetings and elaborate processes were a significant barrier for participation by working class people. Unlike the young anarchists who lived at the encampment—when they weren't at hotels paid for by the flood of donations that came in during the first few months—working class people did not have the time to spend hours waiting through tedious meetings or to study and decipher the confusing meeting rituals used by OWS to conduct their affairs.

A further anti-democratic barrier was the 90%, "modified" consensus vote margin required to pass any measure. As one DWG activist remarked, not even the anti-democratic US Senate requires such high a percent to close filibusters. Furthering privileging the "anti-demands faction" was that many of the hard core anti-demands faction were part of the encampment and had an almost a guaranteed veto over the measure under the 90% rule.

The DWG did make another visit in November to the GA, but the group was again thwarted, because of the anti-democratic process, from taking a vote on JFA. Finally, in late December, after the winter cold had sent it, and the police had cleared the permanent encampment at Zuccottii—a political vulnerability in part created by OWS's Graeberian focus on the encampment, rather than establishing a political strategy to reach the broader working class—the JFA did come up for a vote. With approximately sixty people in attendance, the proposal received over 60% of the votes, but because it did not reach the 90% threshold the JFA was not adopted by what at that time was a rapidly retreating movement.

**Lessons from OWS**

The appearance of OWS in the fall of 2011 was a breadth of fresh air. Three years into the global economic crisis, and several months after the AFL-CIO union bureaucracy's betrayal of the Wisconsin insurgency, OWS filled a huge political vacuum. Nonetheless, OWS's hybrid anarchist/American-utopian ideology, combined with anti-democratic operating principles, created serious obstacles to mounting a real fight back. These limitations, operating as they were at the movement's flagship outpost, also had a debilitating effect on other sections of the movement. Nonetheless, while the potential of OWS was not realized, the conditions that have helped produce the latest wave of mass strikes are intensifying rather than abating. In the face of a half-decade-long global slump, the only "solution" ruling classes around the globe have is ever more savage attacks on the working class, with Greece simply being the most advanced. Therefore, what can be ensured is that the mass strike "hydra" will once again emerge in the US, as is happening around the globe. The challenge for socialists in the US is to learn the lessons of OWS so that the next upsurge can make advances toward socialism, and away from the road to barbarism we are now on.

# Two Historical Examples of Mass Strikes

## (Summaries by Eric Lerner)

# Mass Strikes in the US in 1934

While it is uncomfortable for the business unionists who still lead the United State's unions to admit it, the present-day industrial unions emerged in the '30's out of an illegal mass strike process, led by revolutionary socialists. In the 1920's and in the first years of the Depression, the American Federation of Labor craft unions had shriveled as unemployment soared and conventional strikes became suicidal, just as similar conditions of high unemployment today, similar conservative union leaderships, has led to similar shriveling of union strength. With wages plummeting, and a quarter of the population out of work, radical opposition to business unions grew, organized in large part by workers in the Communist party, the Socialist party and in small Trotskyist organizations. These leftists sought to organize among both unemployed and unorganized layers, as well as within the shrunken unions.

**Unemployed Aid Strikers**

In 1933, the bottoming out of the Depression and a slight upswing in employment started to break the demoralization of the workers. At the same time, the election of Roosevelt and the promulgation of a very weak, but psychological important, protection for union organizations in Roosevelt's National Recovery Act, began to revive hopes among broad layers of workers that the deadly alliance between government and employers was cracking. But it was not until the mass strikes of 1934 that a real labor upsurge began.

On April 12, 1934, workers at the AutoLite parts plant in Toledo, Ohio struck after management refused to negotiate with their newly organized union, Federal Labor Union Local 18384. As was routine then (and is again now), the company hired scabs and strikebreakers to maintain production. But then something different happened. Unemployed workers started mass picketing in support of the strikers, rather than crossing the lines to take their jobs. The unemployed were organized by the Lucas County Unemployed League, a group dedicated to organizing the unemployed to help labor. It had been set up by members of a small Trotskyist group, the American Workers' Party, led by A.J. Muste.

Immediately the company got an injunction against the local and the League, limiting pickets to 25 per gate. The local complied, but the League served notice that it would defy the injunction. On May 21, League Leader Luis Budenz led a mass of 1,000, calling for peaceful mass picketing and smashing the injunction. The next day the crowd grew to 4,000. The following day it was 6,500, and then 10,000. On Wednesday, May 23rd, the sheriff arrested Budenz and four other picketers. Massive battles between police and ,later, the Nantional Guard, and the mass picketers followed. With the battle at a standstill, the state government, fearing a further spread of the struggle, told AutoLite that it must stop reduction for the duration of the strike, and the company agreed. After weeks of negotiations, the company gave in, recognizing the union, granting a pay raise and rehiring all strikers.

*Workers, employed and unemployed, battle police in Toledo, 1934*

Just ten days before the battle in Toledo climaxed, on May 15, Teamster Local 574 struck the Minneapolis trucking industry. The local was led by Ray Dunne, a member of the Communist League of America, another Trotskyist organization. Every night mass rallies of from 2,000 to 20,000 were held, mobilizing not just strikers, but workers and unemployed from the whole city. Again huge battles of police and mass picketers broke out leading to a total rout of the police. The union took control of the streets of Minneapolis, even directing traffic, and panicked cops fled. It was against this background of labor news that the Toledo battle was fought two days later. A temporary truce was negotiated in Minneapolis, with the union suspending the strike and the employers reemploying the strikers. Both sides prepared for further war.

While labor battles were flaring in the mid West, the West Coast was in the grip of a longshoreman's strike -- ports from Seattle to San Diego were shut on May 8 by an International Longshoremen's Association strike for a union hiring hall and recognition. They were joined by the maritime unions. Two months into the strike, on July 5, the employers, with a newly formed trucking company, tried to break the picket lines with the help of massed police. A general battle broke out in downtown San Francisco. The picket lines were broken and the next day the port was occupied by the National Guard.

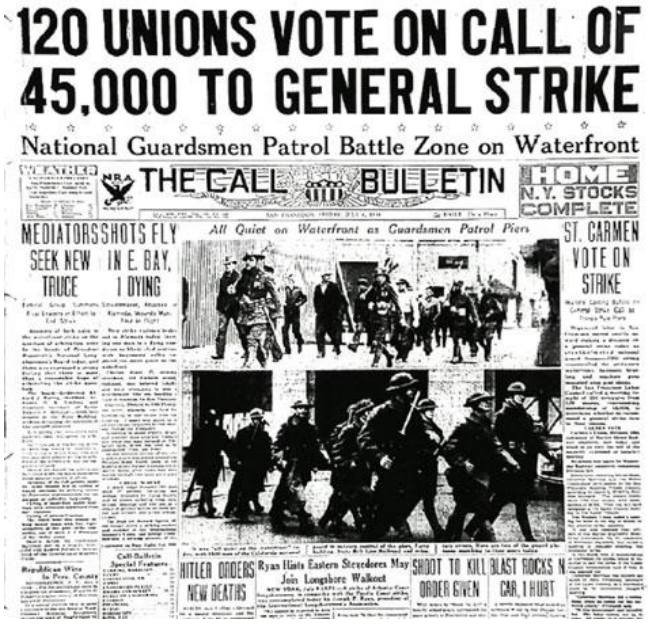
**General Strike in San Francisco**

In response, the Joint Maritime Strike Committee appealed for a general strike. Although the Central Labor Council declined to issue a call, individual unions began to respond. On July 9, a massive funeral march was held for the slain strikers. A huge wave of support for the Longshoremen swept the city, yet most of the union leaders urged their members not to join a general strike, which was, in any case, illegal. But at meeting after meeting workers swept aside these objections and voted to strike. Teamsters, construction workers, and dozens of

other unions voted to strike, beginning July 12. Under intense pressure from the base, on July 13 the Central Labor Council voted a general strike. For four days from Monday July 16 through July 19th, San Francisco was shut tight by a general strike. On Thursday, the employers agreed to arbitrate outside differences, including the hiring hall, and reluctantly the ILA went along, ending the general strike. After several months of arbitration and further negotiation, the union won a complete victory: recognition and the union hiring hall.

The same day the general strike in San Francisco began, the teamsters in Minneapolis resumed their strike. On July 20, one day after the end of the general strike, there was another pitched battle in Minneapolis, ending with two slain strikers and seventy two injured. Again there was a mass procession of 100,000 workers. And again, the National Guard was called in, this time by Farmer-Labor Governor Olson. . Guerrilla war raged in Minneapolis. Faced with the prospect of an open ended battle, and mindful of recent events in San Francisco, Olson forbade further truck shipments except for necessities , On August 21, the employers, stripped for government protection, capitulated.

In four months, American labor had won three major victories. Their tactics were defiance of injunctions, mass picketing, self-defense squads, organizing of the unorganized and unemployed and the general strike. It was


120 UNIONS VOTE ON CALL OF 45,000 TO GENERAL STRIKE

National Guardsmen Patrol Battle Zone on Waterfront

THE CALL BULLETIN

HOME N.Y. STOCKS COMPLETE

MEDIATORS SEEK NEW TRUCE

SHOTS FLY IN E. BAY, 1 DYING

All Quiet on Waterfront as Guardsmen Patrol Piers

ST. CARMEN VOTE ON STRIKE

HITLER ORDERS NEW DEATHS

Ryan Hints Eastern Stevedores May Join Longshore Walkout

SHOOT TO KILL ORDER GIVEN

BLAST ROCKS N CAR, 1 HURT

on this basis that the previously unassailable alliance of government and employer, the strength of the National Guard, was broken. Ultimately politicians knew that further application of armed might would lead to only further spread of the conflict and further unity of labor.

**The process of mass strikes**

The mass strikes of '34 followed the broad pattern Luxemburg had described --small groups of radical socialist convincing workers of their common interests, the unification of organized, unorganized and unemployed workers, the successful defiance of anti-labor law, and the building of permanent organizations and the wining of concessions by the political threat of the mass strike's growing unity. In was in the wake of the 1934 mass strikes that the Federal Government, with the Wagner Act, moved to get out of the open alliance with employers in strikes. By codifying the ways in which labor could organize, the Wagner Act sought to channel the increasingly radicalized labor movement into a legal framework. Without the strike of '34, it would never have been passed. But now, fearful of the new labor upsurge, the Federal government was ready to make major concessions, making it easier to organize unions.

# The French General Strike of 1968

The largest mass strike in history was the French General Strike of 1968 It was this event that signaled the complete transformation of the labor situation in the world. In 1967, the French government, under Charels DeGaulle, had taken the offensive against both workers and students. A series of ordinances were passed which would cut back unemployment compensation, gut social security benefits, restrict union rights and activities and massively contract the public university system, which at that time did not come near providing enough places for all those qualified. Throughout early '68, worker and student agitation against the ordinances and the Fouchet educational "reforms" increased. In the case of the students, the protests were spearheaded by small Trotskyist and anarchist organizations, as well as by the far broader Union of Students, the UNEF.

**Repression is met with spreading strikes**

The government, intent on implementing the reforms, met the protest with repression, repeatedly calling in the police and the detested National Guard, the CRS, to disperse student demonstrations. In late March, the entire campus of Nanterre University had been closed by the government following student protests. Student leaders went to the Sorbonne in Paris to gather support. In May 3, several Trotskyist groups organized a protest against the repression in Nantern at Sorbonne. The administration called police onto the campus, leading to a pitched battle with 600 students arrested and hundreds more injured. Within three weeks the movement sparked by this incident would engulf the entire nation in a general strike. Such is the speed of mass strikes in modern conditions. To protest the attack on Sorbonne, the UNEF called for a student strike and a demonstration in Paris on May 6. Twenty thousand students turned out, only to be attacked by the CRS. This time students responded by erecting street barricades. Despite the resistance of the French Communist Party which labeled the students "insignificant groupuscles" and attempted to prevent worker support, the movement began to grow, and the UNEF appealed openly for broad labor support. Workers and leaders near the base responded, seeing the links between the student battle against the reformers and their battles against the ordinance. Such links were strengthened by leaflets from the Trotskyist groups.

In the following weeks, there were a growing series of demonstrations and clashes with the police, climaxing in a bloody attack by the police on May 12. On May 13th, under intense pressure from rank and file workers, the communist led CGT, joined by the two other labor federations, called a one day general strike of protest against the repression and a demonstration in Paris. The response was overwhelming -- one million workers, students and others paraded in Paris, the largest demonstration ever there. Under the protection of this massive demonstration, students occupied Sorbonne. The following day, workers at the big Sud Aviation aircraft plant in Nantes, went on strike, occupying their factory. But now the demands were no longer merely defensive, protesting the repression. Now they were to overturn the ordinances, revoking the Fouchet plan for the universities, to reduce the workweek from 48 to 40 hours with no reduction in pay, a massive increase in the minimum wage to 1,000 F per month, increases in vacation, a reduction in the retirement age. The working class had passed to the offensive.

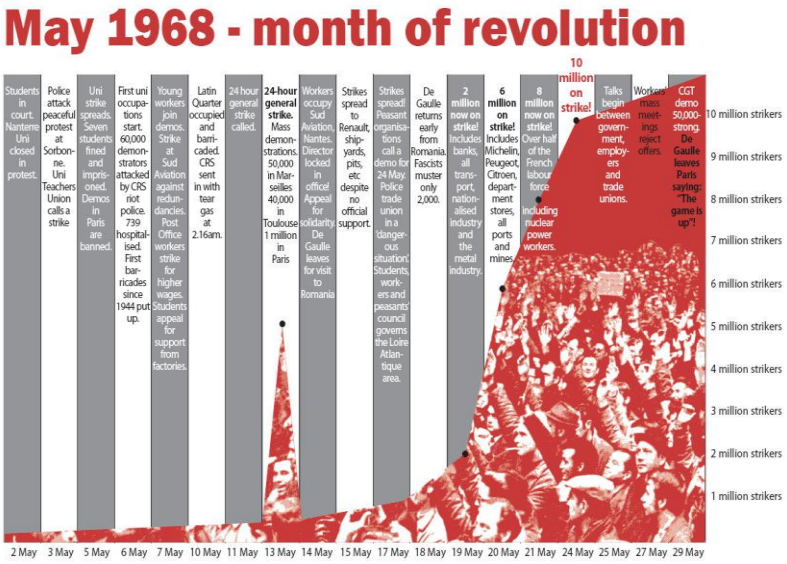
Now the strike advanced with giant strides. First in aerospace and metalworking, and then in all industry, plant after plant went on strike and was occupied by the workers, bedecked with red banners. Within four days of Sud Aviation's first action, one million workers were on strike, occupying their plants. Within six days, there were seven million strikers, within eight days, 10 million strikers. The strike was total in manufacturing, but it spread well beyond -- the schools were shut, the trains had stopped, Paris was paralyzed as the subways and busses and cabs ceased to operate, shops and department stores closed, all but the most essential services stopped.

Throughout France, workers took over their places of work; everywhere there were red banners, and the echoing strains of the International. To the economic demands were now added political demands -- DeGaulle Resign, Popular Government, Workers Power. In many of the plants, the workers began to expect that the strike would lead to a peaceful socialist revolution, that the plants they occupied would soon belong to the working class.

*General assembly of workers at the occupied Renault plant, May, 1968*

The next week, with the general strike full, with more than half the total French working force on strike, with the peasants supporting the strikers, the fate of France hung in the balance. The most critical question was who was running the general strike? The strike had emerged from below, not on the call of the Communist and Socialist leaders of the main union federations. But only the federations were organized on a national scale, so as the strike grew, they immediately assumed the right to negotiate with the government on behalf of the strikers. Yet the federation leaders, Communists as well as Socialists, were not in the least interested in either a socialist revolution nor even in pressing the government very hard. The PCF in France, as elsewhere, had long since assumed the role of the old social democracy, supporting socialism in rhetoric, while dealing "in a business like way" with capital, and defended in practice capitalist rule and policies.

For the workers to gain control at the national level of their own strikes, they needed to form a national strike committee. Throughout France elected strike committees sprang up on the factory level, and even in some areas on a city wide level, similar to the Soviets of the early Russian Revolution. Left groups and union militants gathered during the growth of the strike and while it was at its peak, for the formation of a National Strike Committee, which could in truth speak for the strikers. But these efforts were not successful. At root the cause was, on the one hand, the extreme weakness of the leftists, mainly Trotskyist organizations, which numbered in the hundreds, and on the other the residual trust most workers still had in the union leadership, a trust rooted in the gains of the post war period and




in the lingering prestige the Communists had from the days of the resistance.

But the CGT and the other Federation leaders were about to massively betray that trust. On May 27, they reached a tentative agreement with the French government to end the strike. The government granted some concessions -- a 600 Franc per month minimum wage, a general wage increase of 10%, to both state and private workers. But the key issues of the strike, the ordinance of the Fouchet plant, the decrease in hours, all went unresolved, to say nothing of the political demands for DeGaulle's resignation. The general agreements were greeted with mass opposition by workers, but it was not unified on a national scale, and the CGT leaders worked to isolate the strikers, cutting off plants from each other. At this critical point, with the strike wavering between its base and the Federation head, DeGaulle took the offensive, announcing on May 30 that the key issues, which he defined as "participation by workers" a form of worker management cooperation, would be decided by a referendum. But far more ominously, the same day paratroop divisions were reported to be moving towards Paris. The threat of civil war hung over France.

This was the critical junction for the General strike. To move forward, the strike would have to create its own leadership at a national level, repudiate the General accords and prepare to defend itself against the paratroopers. With the strike entering a second week, the strikers would have to begin to take control of essential services, themselves organizing the provisions of food and other necessities as did, in fact, begin to happen in some cities. But in the face of the opposition of both the government and the Union Federation leaders, this task proved impossible. The union leaders went from plant to plant arguing that each one was isolated, urging a return to work. In the end, plant after plant voted to resume work and within a week, the general strike was ended.

While the strike did not win most of its principle demands, and merely shook but didn't shatter capitalist rule in France, it represented a huge victory for the entire world working class. It won substantial concessions immediately, so the workers self confidence was strengthened, and it demonstrated that the mass unity of the working class was possible in the present day, not only in the past. The force of the strike, the threat of a revolution, frightened capitalists not only in France, but globally. In France, employers and government alike staged a long retreat dealing out repeated concessions to avoid a repeat of May '68. In the following five years, in response to repeated strikes, French hours of work did indeed fall, dropping by about 2 hours a week, and a further two hours by 1977. Real wages rose sharply, increasing by nearly a third from 1967 to 1973. The ordinances and the Fouchet plan were in fact quietly scrapped not long after the strike. Indeed, to quell student unrest, the university system was substantially expanded, eliminating, to a large degree, the two-tiered educational system of France.

# JOBS FOR ALL, FREE PUBLIC SERVICES FOR ALL

## A National Recovery Plan

Dignified Work at a Living Wage for everyone who wants a Job

We demand the federal government create a democratically-controlled public works and public service program, with direct government employment, to generate 25 million new jobs at a living wage. The new jobs will be to build the facilities and provide the services to create **free** quality public services needed to meet the needs of the 99%, including in **education (through university), child care, healthcare (single payer), housing, transportation, and clean energy**. The program will be financed by:

**Taxing the wealth and income of the corporations and wealthiest 1% through a system of progressive taxation**,

and by **ending all U.S. wars and occupations and redirecting those military expenditures to meet human needs**

Employment in the program will be open to all, **including all immigrants and persons formerly incarcerated**, and workers will have the right to unionize and to strike. Training will be provided to guarantee access to all jobs.

**WHY DO WE DEMAND JOBS FOR ALL?**

***A Grim Reality:*** *Young workers, jobless and without a future. Older workers, unemployed for good. Workers of all ages haunted by unemployment and stagnating wages. Poverty and insecurity rising Human needs neglected. The earth endangered.*

***It Need Not Be****: All who want work have a right to jobs that pay decent wages, assure healthy living and allow time for leisure and family. Good jobs for all can meet human needs for adequate public transportation, affordable housing, sufficient child and elder care and can be environmentally sustainable. A better tomorrow begins by ending unemployment and providing useful work for all.*

**Why do we need 25 million more jobs at good union wages?** Since 2008, an average of about 25 million people have been without work or forced to work part-time. Millions who do work earn poverty level wages (U.S. government data).

**Does the Federal Government Need to Create *All* 25 Million Jobs?** No. When unemployed workers get jobs, they have more money to spend that, in turn, creates jobs for other workers. Reducing work time could also create more jobs. But direct government employment needs to supply about half the 25 million.

**How Can We Get 25 Million More Jobs?** The U.S government can launch job programs that hire millions of the unemployed. The Jobs for All demand is for DIRECT government employment—the money goes directly to the workers as government employees. It is not filtered through contractors who take most of the money. Direct employment is what our government did in the 1930s when it put millions of people to work doing useful jobs that made a lasting contribution to our country—building roads, bridges, schools, libraries, housing, parks and creating art, plays and much more. Over six years the Works Progress Administration (WPA) employed nearly **eight million people** –in a country with less than half our present population.

**Can We Afford to Create Millions of Jobs?** Actually, we can't afford *not* to create jobs! Unemployment is responsible for more than half of current federal deficits: fewer people and businesses pay taxes and more people need government benefits. Because we lose the goods and services that unemployed workers and idle plants could have produced, and as a result the

economy shrinks by trillions of dollars. Start-up costs can be financed by ending all wars, eliminating unnecessary defense spending, rescinding tax cuts on the rich that have reduced revenues by trillions of dollars, and taxing the wealth of the wealthy to force them to pay back what they have taken from us. Initially, such a program would cost $1.5 trillion a year in net government outlays. But, just for example, a 5% annual tax on the wealth—stocks and bonds—of families with more than $2 million in assets (basically the 1%), could raise $1.2 trillion a year by itself. Ending America's many wars would free up at least another $0.4 trillion.


*Jobs for ALL contingent, May 1 2012 March, New York City*

**Who Gets the Jobs?** Jobs for All means jobs for *everyone* who wants one. *All* includes, for example, new college grads unable to find work, unemployed computer experts, factory workers whose jobs have been shipped overseas and laid-off state and local government workers. It also means people particularly disadvantaged in the labor market-- such as persons with disabilities, formerly incarcerated persons, undocumented immigrants and minorities subject to racial discrimination. In demanding jobs for all, we demand the removal of all barriers to employment.

**What is a "democratically-run program?** Workers and their communities must have democratic input into how the program works at all levels of government. How this will be done will evolve in the course of fighting for and building the Jobs for All program.

**Sources of Additional Information**

National Jobs for All Coalition, www.njfac.org; www,jobscampaign.org

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