

# RALLY, COMRADES!

THE VOICE OF THE LEAGUE OF REVOLUTIONARIES FOR A NEW AMERICA

## Michigan: Race and the Drive to Dismantle Democracy

Michigan was once a behemoth power house of industrial production. Detroit (the Big Three automakers), Flint (General Motors) and Benton Harbor (Whirlpool), for example, symbolized this massive expansion with the auto industry at its heart. From the 1930's thru the post World War II period huge industrial complexes like the Ford Rouge plant employed up to 100,000 workers at one time. The organizing drives establishing unions ensured that workers got decent wages and benefits, lifting the standard of living for all workers.

The introduction of robotics and electronics that started in the early 1970's would change everything. Today these bustling cities are hardly recognizable. These majority African American cities now find themselves in the throes of poverty, high unemployment, homelessness, and record breaking foreclosures. Too many face a day-to-day struggle to survive, a far cry from the promised land they once knew. Just last year, Michigan had 400,000 manufacturing jobs, a whopping 46% below the last peak in 2000. The minority population, chronic unemployment and poverty were the "low hanging fruit" that inspired the frontal assault on democracy. Enter the Emergency Financial Manager (EFM) law.

In 1990, the Emergency Financial Manager law was enacted. Governors dispatched EFMs to cities or school districts to take over their finances. While it was undemocratic on its face, its powers were limited. Claiming a new law was needed to give managers new "tools," Governor Snyder signed PA4 into law in 2011, giving the EFM breathtaking powers. Snyder's bill empowered the manager to displace local elected officials and usurp their power. In the case of school districts, local school boards including the Superintendents, are no longer in charge. The new and improved managers under PA4 could void union contracts, sell off public assets (including water rights, public parks and beaches, libraries, hospitals, airport authorities, etc.) and privatize city services.

The managers are paid out of the local budgets of the financially strapped cities or school districts to which they are sent. In Flint, the manager makes \$170,000 plus expenses: more than the now marginalized mayor made. Currently, there are five cities and three school districts under fiscal martial law. All but one has a majority Black population. During the hearings leading to the law's passage, citizens primarily from Detroit and Pontiac along with some union supporters testified at the legislative hearings trying to stop what was to become the most vicious assault on democracy in the country. These Black elected officials and community leaders gave impassioned speeches about their right to vote being destroyed via these managers. Many harkened back to the Civil Rights movement

in the South where voting was prohibited and illegal for Blacks.

Shortly after the signing of the bill in March of 2011, Michigan Forward, a Detroit advocacy group, launched a petition drive to put the measure on the ballot for repeal. They were joined by Stand Up for Democracy with the support of AFSCME. During the course of the struggle the corporate raiders decided to prime the pump for EFM takeover by, among other things, painting it Black. They knew exactly what they were doing. The fix was in. These cities were broke and needed the "tools" for "fiscal responsibility."

Corporate media went into full gear. Major newspapers around the state endorsed the measure. Jack Lessenberry, a columnist for *Metro Times*, a weekly Detroit area newspaper, wrote that fiscal problems were the result of "corruption in local government" and "years and years of criminal behavior and utter irresponsibility on the part of politicians who ran Detroit." A reporter from a Kalamazoo newspaper editorialized that Benton Harbor needed an EFM because the city government was "dysfunctional." The blogosphere and talk radio were the shock troops spewing vile racist rants "...people who could not handle the finances of their municipalities or district in charge, whether they are just too timid to handle the situation or, too foolish to recognize the problem or simply corrupt..." or "The law protects the taxpayers of Michigan from people who are too dumb to do the right thing."

The stripping of democracy in these cities compelled one minister to call Michigan the "new Mississippi." A scathing report commissioned by Congressman John Conyers of Detroit by the House Judiciary Committee on the EFM law reported that with the prospect of Detroit being brought in, over half of the African-American population in Michigan is deprived of local democracy. It concluded that among other things, the law probably violates the Voting Rights Act. Early in the life of PA4 Allen Park, a small predominate white community asked the State for an EFM to come in and were told NO. (They now have one.)

### NOT IN OUR TOWN, NOT IN OUR STATE

Shortly after the signing of the law (March 19, 2011), the state set up training sessions for potential dictators. Shamelessly called SWAT teams, at least four to five hundred candidates passed through the classes. Obviously, dictatorship was poised to spread throughout the state, not just "dysfunctional Black" cities.

The petition drive to repeal the law was launched in June of 2011 and petitions were submitted in February of 2012. After a series of bogus challenges along the way, the ballot initiative to overturn PA4 was finally

approved for the November 2012 ballot. Both the petition drive and the ballot initiative campaign opened up new opportunities to the cause.

The takeover of primarily Black cities and school districts to ensnare the entire state was not lost on outraged citizens from around the state. Cities, townships, and small rural towns began to ask for petitions. Occupy groups joined in. They learned how the EFM secured the seizure of Jean Klock Park in Benton Harbor, a cherished public park on the shores of Lake Michigan deeded to the citizens, turning it into a golf course for the elites. With hundreds of thousands of miles of Michigan shoreline around the state at risk via dictatorship, citizens groups sprang into action. Local activists held forums, demonstrations, radio and TV interviews, spoke at churches, staged sit-ins and even staged street theatre to overturn the law. Democrats and Green Party supporters were joined by a network of Republicans.

No one is untouched by the breathtaking power grab authored and bankrolled by the ruling class here in Michigan. Dick DeVos (the former CEO of Amway) and the notorious Koch Brothers had their fingerprints all over the offensive. Shortly after the *New York Times Magazine* covered the story of Benton Harbor and its Emergency Manager model to save "distressed cities," one analyst quipped "maybe Greece needs an Emergency Manager."

### CAPITALISTS CANNOT RULE, WORKERS CANNOT FIGHT IN OLD WAY

The use of race, particularly African Americans, to satisfy the needs of capitalism is as old as the day the first slave set foot on North American soil, from slavery to welfare reform (color it Black), to voter suppression (color it Black and Brown) to the Emergency Dictator Law. When the measure was defeated on Election Day (All but six of 83 counties said NO), the people rejoiced and the bondholders panicked. Since the managers ensured they got paid, the threat of cities turning to

bankruptcy could spark investor losses.

The electronic revolution is ushering in a "Brave New World" of corporate rule where civil rights, union rights and civil liberties are becoming obstacles to advance capitalism. The fight against PA4 was not only a civil rights issue or a labor issue but signaled a new round of class battle that put democracy itself on the line.

To say that Michigan Governor Rick Snyder is a new type of Governor is an understatement. He has defied the will of the people and signed a new Dictator Bill with minor tweaks. (He also set 80 years of labor history on its heels, signing "Right to Work" legislation. Organized labor is part of Michigan's DNA).

But the combatants in the war to fight dictatorship are likewise a new type of fighter. Local spontaneous organizations arose creating blogs, websites, and other independent networks to win the fight. The scattered groupings were loosely held together and were not organizationally connected under one umbrella. The usual suspects, organized labor, (with the exception of AFSCME who was totally engaged throughout), the Democratic Party establishment and to some extent, the traditional Civil Rights organizations played a supporting role at best in this fight.

Political correctness and morality were not the drivers of the debate here. White workers weren't about to risk handing over their democracy on the pretext of those "incompetents" in the Black cities, and many resented attempts by the state to engage in the "race-baiting." Further, the notion of dictatorship as a solution to the fiscal crisis, regardless of color, on its face was soundly rejected. Majority Black populated cities where the struggle began are becoming aware of what Nelson Peery so powerfully wrote in *The Future Is Up To Us*, "...the leaders of the Black masses cannot raise one single demand that is not in the interests of the poor of all colors, and against the interest of the wealthy no matter their color..."

Class war is breaking out on a new foundation and the fascist offensive has taught us that the people of Michigan have shown that they are up for the challenge.

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# Inside: American Dream Betrayed

In 2008, President Obama ignited the compassionate soul of the American people who dared to hope and dream with him that he could bring us a better world for all. Although the four years of his Presidency have shown his superb ability to further and protect the interests of corporate America rather than the American people, Obama was re-elected in 2012 with overwhelming support from hopeful Americans, especially African Americans, Latinos and youth voters.

The article, "Latino and Black Unity" describes the significance of this Black and Latino vote: "Blacks and Latinos were objectively moving along the same lines — a common demand for health care, for decent housing, for education for their children, for jobs and a way out of poverty. Revolutionaries can rest upon this objective unity to develop the subjective unity of class." This unity strengthens the working class fight for change.

The article, "Michigan: Race and the Drive to Dismantle Democracy" describes the forms of fascism in store for communities of workers replaced by robots in production jobs and now impoverished. The attack taking place first against Black communities has ignited workers of all colors in response. "Further, the notion of dictatorship as a solution to the fiscal crisis, regardless of color, on its face was soundly rejected. Majority Black populated cities where the struggle began are becoming aware that what Nelson Peery so powerfully wrote in *The Future Is Up To Us*, '...the leaders of the Black masses cannot raise one single demand that is not in the interests of the poor of all colors, and against the interest of the wealthy no matter their color...'" As we go to press, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder has announced he will

appoint an Emergency Financial Manager for the city of Detroit.

The article "The Emancipation Proclamation" illustrates "the on going debate about Abraham Lincoln, the Proclamation and the cause and conduct of the Civil war is more than a debate about history. It is an important part of the "Culture War" that marks the rise of fascism."

The article "International Women's Day" honors the leading role of women in the struggle for a better world, noting that the technological changes "find women struggling harder than ever, an integral part of a new class which increasingly faces a life of destitution. The struggle of women today is for all that the material changes in society make possible — the reorganization of society where the fruits of society are enjoyed equally by all."

Obama's State of the Union offered empty promises of a thriving American middle class, with emphasis on economic growth through free enterprise. While the words are flowery the real practical consequences dash the American dream on the shoals of corporate welfare.

Offering no assistance for the millions of impoverished and unemployed workers, in Orwellian language he presented his intention to cut Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid as a benefit to the American people. In a bald-face lie, he called the rising cost of health care for an aging population the biggest driver of long-term debt. War and the military spending have always been the greatest cause of government debt.

The article, "Social Insurance Must Serve All the People" shows the profit driven medical industry and insurance companies, not government programs, are the cause of

exorbitant cost of health care. The safety net of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid are in danger, as Obama trumpets the Affordable Care Act, written by and benefiting insurance companies. Our desire for health care for all, long fought for as a human right, has been transformed into programs that enrich the medical care industry and insurance companies.

The article "Cooperatives and Communism" describes the history and current context of cooperatives in American society. It states that "every cooperative must become a school for learning the history, values, economics, and future of our movement. Regardless of economic success or failure, those cooperatives that teach their members self-worth and class consciousness are on the road to victory. With political consciousness, workers can advance even where their cooperatives fail or become compromised. Every cooperative has to become part of the larger political movement, not only to defend its very existence, but to build the fully cooperative society to which we all aspire."

When all the flowery rhetoric is stripped away, Obama's State of the Union speech promised that government would do nothing to sustain and support the American people in need and reassured the corporate leaders that their interests would be served by imposing severe austerity programs directed at the most vulnerable in society and enforced by increasingly fascist means. Defeat of this rising fascism requires a revolutionary response from the American people with the vision of a society that will do away with corporations and private property and will benefit all the people.

## EDITORIAL POLICY

**Rally:** to bring back together and put in a state of order, as retreating troops [to return to attack]

**Comrade:** a person with whom one is allied in a struggle or cause

*Rally, Comrades!* is the political paper of the League of Revolutionaries for a New America. In this period of growing motion and developing polarization, *Rally, Comrades!* provides a strategic outlook for the revolutionaries by indicating and illuminating the line of march of the revolutionary process. It presents a pole of scientific clarity, examines and analyzes the real problems of the revolutionary movement, and draws political conclusions for the tasks of revolutionaries at each stage of development in order to prepare for future stages. It is a vehicle to reach out and communicate with revolutionaries both within the League and outside of the League to engage them in debate and discussion and to provide a forum for these discussions. Articles represent the position and policies of the League of Revolutionaries for a New America.

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## League of Revolutionaries for a New America WHAT WE STAND FOR

Tens of thousands of socially conscious people declare themselves revolutionaries in opposition to the degenerating social and economic conditions. The League's mission is to unite these scattered revolutionaries on the basis of the demands of the new class, to educate and win them over to the cooperative, communist resolution of the problem.

The demands of this new impoverished class for food, housing, education, health care and an opportunity to contribute to society are summed up as the demand for a co-operative society. For the first time an objective communist economic class is forming to become the foundation for a communist political movement. A new fascist state form, the naked rule of corporate power, is arising to oppose this motion.

Society must take over these corporations or these corporations will take over society. The new class must have political power to achieve these goals. In the

effort to achieve this political power the League supports all political organizations and sections of society that fight against the growing poverty, social and ecological destruction, fascism and war.

Nothing can be accomplished until the American people hold a vision of where they want to go and what they want to be. Creating and imbuing them with such vision is the overriding task of revolutionaries and the foundation of our organization.

Destruction of the ecology, the threat of nuclear war and the looming pandemics are calling the very existence of the human race into question. The battle is class struggle. The war is for the existence of humanity.

We in the League face the future with confidence. We call upon all revolutionaries to abandon sectarian differences, to unite around the practical demands of the new class and to secure that imperiled future.

# The Emancipation Proclamation

America celebrated the 150th year of the Emancipation Proclamation with wide-spread debate on the historical foundation and significance of the Declaration. The debate is important. At its root lies understanding the role of Lincoln who, proscribed by his oath of office, remained the moral spokesperson of the nation. The role of the radical and conservative Abolitionists, the Army, the border slave states, the political consciousness of the citizens of the Union and, most important, the slaves and Freedmen — all played a role in the timing and significance of the Proclamation.

Confederate President Jefferson Davis, was an example of these officers. He believed in slavery and passionately hated the slave. He was responsible for the re-enslavement or death of over a thousand refugee slaves. Yet, he fought well under General U.S. Grant in the West and under General William T. Sherman in the “March to the Sea,” as well as in the campaign in South Carolina.

The vast majority of the volunteers and later those drafted into the Union army were deeply infected with the racism taught in church and schools that the Africans were an inferior race and condemned by God to serve the white. If there were any official

as an act of desperation it would embolden his opposition. If seen as an expression of strength and confidence it would strengthen his hand. The bloody battle of Antietam gave him the opportunity. The Confederates committed their maximum strength to that fight and were defeated. The Union still had vast reserves of manpower and finances. Both Lincoln and Confederate President Jefferson Davis understood the turning point had been reached. Karl Marx summed up the situation, “Antietam has decided the fate of the War.”

Five days after Antietam, Lincoln issued the Preliminary Proclamation giving the Confederates an opportunity to return to the Union with slavery. He has been attacked for this, but it was a masterful political checkmate. Lincoln was well aware that Davis and the Confederacy planned, with the help of France and England, to set up a slave empire from Panama to the Ohio River. Their refusal to return to the Union on the basis of pre-war conditions made it clear that their intent was to destroy this “last best hope of mankind.” This put an end to any talk about “a war between the States.”

It was now clear to the world that this was a war between Freedom and Slavery. The European interventionists were disarmed. The final Proclamation was issued. If Antietam was a military turning point, the Proclamation was its political reflection. The destruction of slavery became a war aim. The War of the Rebellion became a vast social revolution ending with the greatest expropriation of private property in history as \$4,000,000,000 in slave property was transferred to the ex-slaves themselves.

What was the immediate effect of the Proclamation? On the positive side, about 20,000 slaves were immediately freed. Nearly 200,000 mostly ex-slaves joined the Union Army, tilting the war in the favor of the Union. The Army became an instrument of liberation and freed slaves as they advanced into

Confederate territory. The number of escaping slaves became a torrent. A Confederate general in North Carolina complained they were losing a million dollars a month in fugitives. Most importantly, the Proclamation opened the door for the outlawing of slavery throughout the country.

On the negative side, some army units rebelled at the Proclamation. Northern Democrats were infuriated and the ranks of the Copperheads grew rapidly. Pro-slavery, white supremacy forces consolidated in the North, but it was clear that a majority had been won over to the motto of “For Union and Liberty.”

There was a real possibility that should Lincoln lose the coming election the Peace Democrats would reverse all the steps of emancipation. Lincoln based his election campaign on passing a constitutional amendment outlawing slavery everywhere in the country. He lost the vital state of New York and New York City, among others, although he won the election of 1864. Relying on his majority in the sitting congress, Lincoln pressed for passage of the amendment and Congress sent it to the state legislatures. Enough states ratified it by December 6, 1865 and it became the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, freeing the remaining 40,000 slaves in Kentucky and 1,000 in Delaware.

The on-going debate about Lincoln, the Proclamation and the cause and conduct of the Civil war is more than a debate about history. It is an important part of the “Culture War” that marks the rise of fascism. An example is Hank Williams Jr’s openly racist, pro-slavery recently re-released “country music ‘hit’” that begins with “If the South would’ve won we’d a’ had it made.” The falsification of history, the glorification of the Confederate Army and its culture, the belittling of the democratic current in our history are things serious revolutionaries must pay attention to. The role of Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation is at the heart of this debate.

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Most of the discussions of the Proclamation and necessarily of Lincoln have been quite subjective and disregard the fundamentals of serious evaluation. Those fundamentals include an assessment of the general situation — the major forces at play, the choices that were available, and an estimate of the consequences of those choices.

The overwhelming and often disregarded reality of the fight for emancipation was, the slaves could not be freed without the defeat of the Confederacy. Bringing about that defeat was a delicate and complex process. First, the border states had to be kept within the Union. Maryland and Delaware could be contained, but if Missouri and especially Kentucky were to join the Confederacy there was no way for the Union to defeat them. In a September 1861 letter to Orville Browning, Lincoln wrote, “I think to lose Kentucky is nearly the same as to lose the whole game. ... We would as well consent to separation at once, including the surrender of the capital.”

Kentucky was officially neutral at the beginning of the war, but after a failed invasion by the Confederates the state legislature petitioned the Union for assistance, and thereafter came under Union control. Maintaining that control required adherence to the law protecting slavery, including the despised Fugitive Slave Law in the slave holding, but Union states. Lincoln as President was sworn to uphold the law, and any deviation would bring impeachment, Kentucky joining the Confederacy, defeat of the Union and the end to any hope of emancipation.

Secondly, the Union had to raise an army loyal to the government. West Point was a Southern institution and many of the senior and seasoned officers were loyal to the Confederacy. The Commanding General of the Union Army, George McClellan, and many of his officers were pro-Union, pro-slavery and did not want to damage the South. Union General Jeff Davis of Indiana, nephew of the

pronouncement that the war was to destroy slavery, it was clear that the majority would throw down their arms and go home.

The war had to be fought with the Army at hand. Any political changes in the aims of the war had to rest firmly on changes in the military and legal situation. Lincoln was pushed to the left by a growing number of officers, soldiers and abolitionists demanding emancipation. He was attacked from the right by the growing consolidation of peace Democrats and conservative Republicans in Congress, the Copperheads and pro-Southern senior officers led by General McClellan. The border states demanded he stand still. The status of runaway slaves was even more confused. Democratic generals returned them to their masters. Abolitionist generals tried to set them free.

The break came when Congress passed the Confiscation Act of 1861. This Act allowed for the confiscation of any property, including slaves being used to support the rebellion. The Act was bitterly opposed but passed in the House 60-48 and in the Senate 24-11. Oddly, the Act did not set the slaves free. They became the property of the government. Many border state commanders and Democrats continued to return escaped slaves to their masters. After another bitter fight, on March 13th, 1862, Congress passed an act prohibiting the military from sending escaped slaves back to their masters. Another incremental step along the path to emancipation was taken. The cautious step by step march to Emancipation finally pulled in the border states and the army, isolated the Copperheads from the War Democrats, polarized a public still opposed to emancipation and laid the foundation for the next historic step.

Lincoln had written the Emancipation Proclamation and showed it to his cabinet in July of 1862. He hesitated to present the Proclamation because the war was not going well for the Union. If the Proclamation were seen

## *‘We must disenthral ourselves’*

We can succeed only by concert. It is not “can any of us imagine better?” but, “can we all do better?” The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise — with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthral ourselves, and then we shall save our country.

Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this administration, will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation. We say we are for the Union. The world will not forget that we say this. We know how to save the Union. The world knows we do know how to save it. We — even we here — hold the power, and bear the responsibility. In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free — honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth. Other means may succeed; this could not fail. The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just — a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless.

*Abraham Lincoln  
Annual Message to Congress  
December 1, 1862*

# Social Insurance Must Serve All the People

There has been a heart felt yearning for a just system of health care for most of the 20th century. The 21st century holds a vision for a health care delivery system where everyone has access to equal, quality, comprehensive health care services based on need and not on ability to pay, citizenship status or other barriers erected to protect the interests of private health care corporations and insurance companies.

From preventive care, healing and education to sophisticated surgery and beneficial medications, we have the capacity. The knowledge, technology and resources now available can only be secured through a guarantee that the new class of dispossessed, the retired and vulnerable workers are never again abandoned, marginalized or sacrificed in pursuit of a false promise of health care for all!

ruling class amasses its wealth is changing. The corporate State loots public programs as ever more workers are thrown into poverty by loss of jobs.

## POLITICAL HISTORY OF SOCIAL INSURANCE

Social Security and Medicare were financed as part of the cost of production of the worker and directly deducted from wages as a payroll tax. The Social Security Act of 1935 was the result of a massive struggle of millions who marched and demanded relief as the working class resisted the crushing weight of industrial capitalism's crisis of overproduction, the Great Depression. Brutal force, accompanied by red-baiting and its cousin, "race-baiting," was used to physically and ideologically attack the demands for an egalitarian social insurance. Social Security initial-

of a ruling class coalition of Dixiecrats, the American Medical Association, and business trade unionism, attempts to expand Medicare to all were defeated.

The next 20 years fueled the growth of a predominantly private health care delivery system funded by trade union negotiated commercial insurance deals and the social insurances of Medicaid and Medicare. Medicaid is increasingly becoming the essential form of health insurance for greater numbers of unemployed and underemployed workers and is under the most intense attack. Its value to the capitalists is the many ways it can be corporatized.

Today we are confronted with the compromised position of defending an increasingly weakened Medicare and a largely corporatized Medicaid. Securing a safety net for some calls for a strategy to win health care for all; this requires a class united in its own interest, stripped of false ideological divisions that cripple unity.

## AFFORDABLE CARE ACT: BOON TO PRIVATE INSURANCE

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) is not universal health care, nor a step towards that end. It is private health insurance in the age of electronic production. Supposedly aimed at addressing a severe lack of health care coverage, it was forged from a bipartisan agreement to target future "deficit spending" on health care while maintaining the health care industry for capital investment.

ACA still leaves at least 26 million uninsured, including roughly 11 million immigrants. The undocumented, just like the farm laborer and domestic workers before them, are an integral part of our working class, and they are excluded (except in emergency) from private or public insurance by ACA, setting the healthcare floor at zero and threatening the health security of the whole working class. Most other Americans will join the chronically underinsured with increasing out-of-pocket costs and no relief from medical debt-related personal bankruptcies, which will inevitably increase.

While social insurance of the industrial age is under attack for being public, the ACA is a blatant prop for corporate health care. The ACA mandated that every uninsured person buy private health insurance. The lowest priced insurance will only cover about 60% of billed health care costs and still cost about \$5000 a year for an individual. The ACA is another excuse for corporations to drop employment-based health insurance.

Further, there are provisions to publicly subsidize private insurance purchases for some based on income. These market places for private insurance purchases are to be established by state or federally arranged insurance exchanges, "dealerships" for buying private health insurance. In effect, the State will take our money to bolster the private insurance industry. It is integral to a major restructuring of health care, boosting the financial and political power of private insurance.

Government is used to guarantee that insurance companies have fully morphed into giant tools for investment capital.

The Supreme Court ruling on ACA undermining state requirements for Medicaid expansion sets a legal precedent for limiting the federal government's ability to alter other federally financed programs administered at the state level. To date, almost every Southern state has declined to expand Medicaid. The erosion of the United Auto Workers' union Voluntary Employee Benefit Association (VEBA) agreements is a harbinger of what is to come even for organized labor.

## THE FIGHT WE FACE

The crisis of America's social insurances is a political crisis, a class struggle over the resources of society. Ruling class ideology, never in the interests of the working class, no longer has any material base in a society that increasingly produces goods and services without human labor. The so-called "deserving" worker is fast becoming "undeserving" as more and more human labor is replaced by electronic production.

The fiscal cliff propaganda and resulting bipartisan actions were aimed at terrorizing us into accepting a "shared sacrifice" based in a ridiculous notion of scarcity in this land of abundance. Our class is being forced to buy private health insurance and defend an increasingly weakened public corporatized health insurance system that excludes the undocumented, is unequal and inadequate to meet recipients' needs. This is no "grand bargain."

We can no longer accept a definition of social necessity determined by private ownership of our collective public wealth. The Democratic and Republican parties are offering a bipartisan solution that decimates Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid in exchange for a paltry income tax increase on the "rich," leaving investment capital without any requirement of social responsibility.

The Occupy movement, "Strike the Debt" activities, and struggles from New Orleans to Wisconsin, Chicago, and Michigan have put a serious dent in notions of a class neutral society. They can become strong levers for conscious class unity. As revolutionaries, we proceed from the reality that transformation to a free cooperative, publicly owned and administered health system will be fought out in the battle to capture and nationalize our fractured resources. We are at the dawn of a new society. Whether it will be based on the common ownership of the vast resources, products, and technologies of the 21st century and shared for the public good, or whether it will be hoarded, distorted and collapsed into the wealth of a few is up to a class that cannot live with a system based on private ownership of the social wealth. We have a world to win!

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Victory today means distribution of necessities like retirement security and health care based on the needs of a new class of workers that has no ties to capital.

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Restricted by the interests of industrial capitalism the publicly funded social insurance programs of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, though militantly fought for by labor and social movements, have been structured primarily to serve the needs of capitalism and only in very temporary and limited ways the needs of our class. Paid for out of workers' paychecks, these insurances were guaranteed by the State as part of the contract between labor and capital.

Signaling the fracturing of this contract, the "fiscal cliff" agreements postponed many budget decisions until March 1, and locked in elements of the Bush tax cuts. More austerity measures are anticipated, robbing the working class of any publicly funded and administered insurance while setting the basis for further privatization.

Even as the movement fights to protect what's left of our hard fought reforms, it is time our class moves beyond the outmoded social insurance framework, not because the working class is losing its fight against corporate control, but because it has to go further in order to win. The replacement of human labor by robotics and technology is transforming society and washing away the limited and temporary victories secured in 1935 and 1965. Victory today means distribution of necessities like retirement security and health care, based on the needs of a new class of workers that has no ties to capital.

The underlying cause of the crisis is the transformation of production based on industrial labor to an increasingly labor-less electronics base. Capitalism's goal of maximum profit has not changed, but the way the

ly excluded domestic and farm labor, largely populated by African Americans and Latino workers. These exclusions underscored the power of states' rights and its dominant ideology of white supremacy that has been used to handcuff working class unity.

The power of Southern political hegemony and the demand for states' rights are seen in Medicaid's structure and funding. Some 30 years after the passage of Social Security, Medicaid was a compromise with the Southern states. Medicaid implementation began in 1966, but it wasn't until 1970 that Southern states accepted the 2:1 federal match for Medicaid funds. Meant as an adjunct support for an unemployed but potential labor force, Medicaid requires a combination of federal and state funding. It was inadequate and unequal from the start with Southern states limiting funding to the bare minimum. Medicaid funding was also used to pay for unethical and radical social policy, such as the dangerous and discredited use of Norplant, primarily foisted on young women of color as a not-so-disguised form of population control.

Medicare and Medicaid came on the heels of the powerful Civil Rights movement as an amendment to the Social Security Act but with very different policy frames. Medicare was designed mainly for those aged who had contributed through payroll taxes during their working years. The disabled were added later. Medicare was to be a precursor for government national health insurance for all, not just those over 65. Because of the divide enforced by the states' rights policy articulated in Medicaid, and the powerful attack dogs

# Latino and Black Unity

One of the important outcomes of the presidential elections was the emergence of Black and Latino objective unity. This Black and Latino unity was not a conscious effort. That is, Latinos and Blacks did not say “Let’s unite and vote for Obama.” But by voting for Obama, however, Blacks and Latinos were *objectively* moving along the same lines — a common demand for health care, for decent housing, for education for their children, for jobs and a way out of poverty. Revolutionaries can rest upon this objective unity to develop the subjective unity of class.

This Black and Latino unity is not the same as the slogan put forth by the Communist Party USA calling for “Black and Brown Unite and Fight!” That slogan was ideological and based on color and ethnicity and not on class. It is based only on common social oppression and not on the common exploitation as labor. Everyone is going to come at the Blacks and Latinos based on their ethnicity and their special interests. The revolutionaries’ tactic will have to be to expand and solidify the objective unity of Blacks and Latinos, but based on class.

This unity is important and advantageous to the revolutionary process because if revolutionaries propagandize these two groups on the basis of class, it will strengthen the working class fight for change. Revolutionaries start with this unity and propagandize about class interests. This unity has to be seen within the context of the line of march of the revolutionary process.

## 2012 ELECTIONS

Blacks and Latinos turned out in record numbers on November 6 and voted for President Obama by broad margins. They tipped the balance in at least three swing states and secured their position as an organized force in American politics with the power

he had promised. But at the end many Latinos were more afraid of Mitt Romney’s policies on immigration of “self-deportation”. Of course, the deferred action policy which Obama issued June 15 of last year helped him with the Latino vote.

It’s important to point out that Latinos are not a homogeneous group. They are divided by economic interests and stratified by nationality, i.e. Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Chileans, Cubans and so forth. Yet, Latinos are no different than other workers, and the main issue for Latinos is the economy or jobs. The second issue of importance is immigration reform. In exit polls conducted by ImpreMedia and Latino Decisions, immigration was a major factor in the decision-making process. A majority of those polled said they knew an undocumented immigrant.

The 2012 elections revealed a stark problem for Republicans. “Clearly, when you look at African American and Latino voters, they went overwhelmingly for the president,” observed Iowa Republican strategist John Steinman. “And that’s certainly a gap that’s going to require a lot of attention from Republicans.” In addition, women voters favored Obama by 55%; three out of five voters between the age of 18 and 29 voted for Obama, and Obama got about 70% of the Asian vote.

## STRATEGY AND TACTICS

Strategic and tactical considerations in any battle need to be taken by both sides, the capitalists and workers, as well as within both sides, among the capitalists and among the workers. What must be asked is “If I move this piece on the chessboard what will be the consequences and what am I willing to lose?” Revolutionaries must determine what is happening in the real world at any given time, in any given situation, that can provide an opening to develop the consciousness of the class.

The two main parties appeal to and attempt to control different sections of the workers, but their primary purpose is the same — to channel the political grievances and allegiances behind the program of the capitalist class. Where they differ is tactics. The Democratic Party’s tactic will be to preserve and expand the unity of the Latinos and Blacks. The Republican Party’s tactic will be to break that unity by going after a sector of the Latino vote. The Republicans know that they don’t stand a chance with the Blacks so they won’t even try. Both parties will ground their efforts in the ethnic card and special interests.

Jobs and immigration reform are the two

# International Women’s Day – March 8, 2013

The seeds of the battle for the emancipation of women were sown in the fight for the abolition of slavery and the emancipation of millions held in bondage. Women like Sojourner Truth and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were the face of an expanding freedom struggle for the liberation of all humanity, and who exemplified the leading role of women in that battle.

The post-Civil war period was a time of great upheaval as the country was transformed from a society based in agriculture to an industrial behemoth. In 1908 more than 15,000 women marched through the streets of New York City demanding higher wages and shorter hours as well as voting rights. Later, in 1911, the world watched in horror as the “Triangle Fire” took the lives of more than 140 working women in New York, and International Women’s Day honors their memory today.

In 1917 women in Russia led a strike for “Bread and Peace” which ultimately led to the abdication of the Czar. International Women’s Day is now celebrated in countries all over the world.

Today, in the wake of another time of great upheaval, new technological advances find women struggling harder than ever, an integral part of a new class which increasingly faces a life of destitution. The struggle of women today is for all that the material changes in society make possible — the reorganization of society where the fruits of society are enjoyed equally by all.

We are moving forward toward a revolutionary transformation of society, and once again, “only with the women.” We celebrate International Women’s Day not only to honor the heroism of the past, but the promise of the future.

main issues that will be used to drive a wedge between Latinos and Blacks. The workers can’t live without jobs and the capitalists can’t deliver jobs with an economy based on electronic production. The workers’ goal is to have a good life with enough food, housing, health care and education to live that life. Jobs are the means to that goal.

Revolutionaries have to propagandize based on class. They have to anticipate and blunt the Republican party’s tactic to divide Latinos and Blacks based on their “own specific agendas.” There are enough misleaders in both camps of Latinos and Blacks who will attempt to break this unity.

Immigration, for example is a key issue for Latinos. Already, Democrats are offering immigration reform that will lead to citizenship for the millions of undocumented, while Republicans are also putting forth a kind of immigration reform. But in order not to be alienated from their constituency, Republicans are talking about piecemeal immigration reform that will lead only to legalization and not citizenship. Legalization and citizenship are two different things. Legalization can mean a work permit, bracero-type programs, and legal residency but not citizenship. The Republicans are also putting forward politicians they hope will appeal to Latinos on the basis of ethnicity. Marco Rubio, for example, is playing a central role in Republican immigration reform proposals and there is talk about him being the Republican Party presidential candidate in 2016.

Jobs and immigration reform are tightly wrapped around each other. It is jobs that drive immigration. The capitalist class, particularly the Republican Party, will take advantage of the competition for jobs to attack any effort for citizenship of the undocumented

immigrant, and will propagandize the Black workers against the Latinos.

## VISION OF A NEW SOCIETY

How do we stop the class from fighting along national struggles?

We have to stop the ruling class from setting up the political terrain. When the ruling class propaganda machine talks about ethnicity and special interests, revolutionary propagandists need to talk about class but without ignoring the historical oppression of these two groups. Here lies the art of politics. If revolutionaries do not do this then both groups will end up fighting each other for the crumbs dispensed by the capitalist class. Revolutionaries wage a fight for human rights and equality for everyone.

Revolutionaries have to propagandize for a different type of society, a cooperative society. We have to raise the issue of a new society where work does not have to mean the back-breaking labor and dangerous jobs of the past; a society where everyone can have what they need to lead a decent and cultured life. We have to talk about how with the political power to utilize the potential of the new technology workers can achieve their goal of a good life for themselves and their families.

*Report of the LRNA Standing Committee, December 2012.*

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The revolutionaries’ tactic will have to be to expand and solidify the objective unity of Blacks and Latinos, but based on class.

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to move the national elections. Obama won 71% - 75% of their vote. The strong turnout among Latinos lifted them to 10% of the American electorate. 93% of Blacks, or nine out of ten, solidly voted for Obama. They represent 13% of the electorate. By all accounts, the Latino and Black vote brought Obama victory.

This is not to say that Latinos and Blacks are happy with the Obama administration. Unemployment plagues the Black community with 15% official unemployment and 25% among Black youth nationally and even higher in some cities. Many Latinos were upset because Obama did not deliver on immigration reform during his first administration as

# Communism and Cooperatives

As the economy collapses there has been a growing motion in sections of the housing and anti-poverty movements to embrace cooperatives — community land trusts, housing co-ops, urban farming, and cooperative enterprises. Each of these is a powerful expression of resistance to the corporate stranglehold on our economic life. In fact, they are part of a tradition of resistance to capitalism that goes back over 200 years.

American cooperatives have historically been of two kinds. One was made up of the spontaneous efforts of ex-slaves, workers, and/or farmers to survive in the course of escape, unemployment, strikes, lock-outs, or monopoly oppression. The other consisted of conscious “communalist” attempts to build intentional communities or demonstration projects for religious or ideological reasons. In reality, however, these two types of cooperatives have always deeply influenced each other. Members have moved from one kind of cooperative to the other, and frequently the lines between the two have been blurred.

Cooperatives are similar to trade unions, centers of organization and resistance to the evils of the system. Like unions, they in themselves are not the answer, because as long as corporations control the state, cooperatives will only be permitted on the economic margins, and will never be able to address the poverty of the majority. They also suffer from relentless political attack, as most dramatically manifested recently in the suppression of the cooperative Occupy encampments.

However, like unions, cooperatives are indispensable “schools of communism” where workers not only learn management and organization, but where revolutionaries can teach the economic and political truths necessary to advance the movement. The success or failure of the cooperative movement depends on what the consciousness revolutionaries can bring to it and on its level of politicization.

## WHAT IS A COOPERATIVE?

A fully cooperative or communist society is the age-old vision of humanity: one in which all the means of production and social product are owned by the society as a whole and distributed according to need. The original Native American communities were fully cooperative in this sense, where private property, commodities, and the concept of a market were completely unknown. A cooperative within a larger capitalist society is different. The dictionary defines it as “an enterprise or organization owned by and operated for the benefit of those using its services.”

As John Curl explains in *All the People*, cooperatives in America are much more widespread than commonly believed:

“In 2008 more than 120 million people in the United States are members of 48,000 cooperatives, about 40 percent of the population. Some 3400 farmer-owned cooperatives market about 30 percent of all American farm products today. More than 6400 housing cooperatives provide homes for more than one

million households. Two million homes get service from two hundred and seventy telephone cooperatives. Nearly 1000 rural electric cooperatives provide power to 36 million people. Over 50,000 independent small businesses belong to 250 purchasing cooperatives for group buying and shared services. Over 10.5 million people belong to ESOPs (Employee Stock Ownership Plans) in 9650 plans, with over \$675 billion in assets. Eighty-four million Americans belong to credit unions. Numerous small collectives running not-for-profit activities, and other small cooperatives fly below the statistical radar. *Communities Directory* lists over 900 intentional cooperative communities. But in 2008, there were only approximately 300 worker cooperative businesses in the United States.”

The earliest American cooperatives included libraries, volunteer firefighters, benevolent societies, mutual insurance companies, and cooperative warehouses and stores. Spontaneous “strikers’ cooperatives” were organized against employers as early as 1768.

## ROLE OF COOPERATIVES IN AMERICAN HISTORY

The conscious movement to build cooperative communities was introduced by Cornelius Blatchly, who teamed up with British socialist Robert Owen to build the New Harmony community on the Indiana frontier. It drew settlers primarily from urban workers displaced by the depression of the 1820s and unable to afford to establish individual farms or businesses of their own. New Harmony triggered a national discussion on cooperatives and inspired a series of abolitionist communities beginning in Nashoba, Tennessee. Many of these ultimately evolved into part of the infrastructure of the Underground Railroad. They also influenced the urban producers’ cooperatives organized by nineteenth century trade unions and the Farmers Alliance of the 1890s. Cooperatives were indispensable weapons in the life-and-death battles of both workers and farmers against the consolidation of the robber baron corporations.

Advances in mechanization made industrial cooperatives impossible in the twentieth century, with only scattered exceptions. However, the cooperative movement continued to grow in agriculture and among the poor, who learned to combine their social movement with basic cooperative survival tactics. IWW miners, California farmworkers, and 1932 Bonus marchers based their actions in organized encampments. To survive the depression, unemployed councils in the early 1930s organized “self-help cooperatives” with some 300,000 members in 37 states.

The New Deal actively promoted cooperatives and cooperative communities in agriculture, but used government grants to influence and control the cooperatives it funded. The cooperative movement receded during the post-World War Two economic expansion, except for various small religious communities, urban homesteaders, and poor people’s survival projects. One of the most important was the Federation of Southern Cooperatives.

It brought together some 130 co-ops of mainly rural African American families in the 1960s to defend their farmland, negotiate better prices for crops, and resist economic retaliation when they registered to vote.

By 2000, however, the economy had transformed completely. Automated technology in production created a vast and diverse new class of workers that was being discarded from the formal economy altogether: youth, undocumented, unemployed college graduates, paroled prisoners of the drug war, and temporary workers. Today they inhabit an underground economy that is a fertile foundation for a resurgence of cooperatives. Nothing expressed this more graphically than the overnight appearance of Occupy encampments in almost every major American city in 2011.

## LESSONS OF THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT

The original cooperative vision of Blatchly and Owen inspired over a century of cooperatives, but the decades of McCarthyism and police repression mean the social movement in America needs to rediscover this truth all over again. Cooperatives are an important step in overcoming the demoralization and disempowerment fostered by the enemy in our communities. They affirm the value and potential of human life. John Curl said in a recent interview that:

“People need to believe that social change is possible. If they think their only option is to exchange one oppressor for another, they will usually choose to accept their victimization and try to make the best of it. That is why counter institutions are so important, because they are *living demonstrations that better social relationships are possible and within our grasp*. They are possible because, besides the seeds of the oppressor within us, we also have the seeds of mutual liberation within us, the instincts of cooperation, of sharing, democracy, equality, extended family.”

Revolutionaries today are called to participate in the cooperative movement at every level and revive this vision. Cooperatives have limited economic and political impact, but their moral and intellectual influence is invaluable. Engaging people in a collective endeavor for survival prepares them for the political battles ahead. However, two centuries of painful lessons have to be carefully noted if we are to move forward.

The first is that cooperatives are fragile economic vehicles, caught between the danger of elimination by corporate competition and co-optation by the system. They almost universally suffer from a lack of capital that tends to either bankrupt them or else drive them into the arms of economic (or political) operatives who do not have their best interests at heart. The history of cooperatives taken over by outside investors and degenerating into ordinary capitalist companies is long and treacherous. Many cooperatives today have in fact become indistinguishable from capitalist corporations, especially in agribusiness, and others are gravely compromised by complex

ownership schemes and an array of loans, contracts, and partnerships that wed them to corporations.

Another lesson is that the quantitative growth of cooperatives themselves cannot lead to the elimination of wage slavery. Early cooperative enthusiasts envisioned a federation of “autonomous communes” that would draw off workers and ultimately replace the capitalist system with a “cooperative commonwealth.” The problem is that strictly economic enterprises cannot transform the property relations that allow the laws of the market to operate. Markets do not exist in a vacuum. They exist when they are imposed by the organized political power of the ruling class, and they will continue to dominate the economy until that power is dislodged.

Without political power, cooperatives lack the ability to make private property public and thereby abolish the market’s stranglehold over human economic activity. Politicization is also an immediate practical question. Without political coordination, our various cooperatives will end up competing with each other, and the separate branches of industrial, commercial, housing, and consumer cooperatives will pursue conflicting agendas.

The early visions of cooperative leaders crashed repeatedly against the economic fact that monopoly capital by definition does not tolerate competition. Over and over again they were crushed by price wars, rate-fixing, blacklists, and denials of credit. When economic measures failed they were attacked by fascist violence, as the Southern farmers’ movement was liquidated by Jim Crow. This history does not suggest that our cooperatives will lead to a peaceful “evolutionary reconstruction” of our society. All incremental trends today are toward greater polarization of wealth, not less. We will not be allowed to set up model communities “off the grid” that do not feed the corporations.

All these lessons point to one conclusion: cooperatives cannot succeed without political education and political organization. Up until now, cooperatives generally failed because capitalism was continually expanding and relentlessly ground them up in the process of its advance. What is different today is that capitalism itself is self-destructing. The advance of technology and “labor-less production” is making capitalist commodity circulation impossible. The possibility exists as never before to actually abolish capitalism and all forms of private property. But it cannot be done without a class that is conscious of its ability to do so.

Every cooperative must become a school for learning the history, values, economics, and future of our movement. Regardless of economic success or failure, those cooperatives that teach their members self-worth and class consciousness are on the road to victory. With political consciousness, workers can advance even where their cooperatives fail or become compromised. Every cooperative has to become part of the larger political movement, not only to defend its very existence, but to build the fully cooperative society to which we all aspire.