Prairie Struggle
Combative Unionism
Waging Class War Within Labour

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Position paper on Combative Unionism by Prairie Struggle
Anarchist Communist Organization of the Prairies

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direct democratic structures, combativity, autonomy and solidarity demonstrates clearly why we as anarchists should use this method within various struggles. There is no doubt that many, if not most strains of anarchist theory advocate as such, nor is there much doubt that many comrades organize with these same principles and find much familiarity with them. Our position is not one of inventing the wheel, but rather drawing conclusions from decades of revolutionary struggle within the labour movement, and putting them into practice.

Towards democratic, combative, and autonomous labour and social movements!

Prairie Struggle Organization

Adopted during the summer congress of juin 2013

Our deepest appreciation goes out to all the comrades in the WSA, Common Cause, the IWW and comrades from Montreal who took the time to critic and edit our paper.

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but rather to argue principles that we, as revolutionaries, should recognize for their potential to radicalize, and proliferate revolutionary ideals meaningfully to all in our communities. As anarchists, we are an active minority within our workplaces, schools and neighborhoods. However, it is not enough that we as individuals put our efforts into legitimate social struggles. In order to be effective in the various areas of struggle, we see the organization as a place for anarchists to organize the active minority with the objective to radicalize mass movements and popular struggles where they exist, or agitate for the creation of such popular movements. In doing so we have the potential to combat authoritarianism and reformist tendencies giving way to the maximum political potential of revolutionary anarchist-communist ideas within the working class. We believe combative unionism gives us the political and organizational platform to do so and this is why we strongly believe that the revolutionary left should adopt Combative unionism as its model to organize through the use of the mobilization committee as its structure. We see the principles of combative unionism as being very close to anarchism if not being anarchist theory to start with.

We believe these principle can be adapted in many more places than the shop floor or union halls. The principles of combative unionism give us a structure and ideology from which we can start organizing effectively in many situations.

Organizing under the principles of direct democracy, combativity, autonomy and solidarity bring about the necessary framework needed to lead battles within our respective communities. From antifascist organizations, cop watch's, anti-gentrification committees, immigrant rights networks, neighborhood defense committees and many more, mobilization committees working under these principles can initiate struggles beyond the shop floors on issues that may not be related to labour at all.

Though this cannot be called combative unionism, its adaptation within different contexts of the principles advocated here such as

cies, and authoritative leadership. This is not without need to exercise the struggle for leadership as a strategy in pushing authoritarians, bureaucrats and reformists away from control over the union's institutions. In an established combative union, this leadership acts as described above, merely as a tool to execute the decisions of the membership, and this is not to be stigmatized and opposed as many do. On the contrary, democratic leadership should be shared and held accountable. In business unions with militants actively mobilizing towards combative strategies, this level of engagement is next to useless. The constitution and bylaws that give power to bureaucrats, reformists, and national/international affiliations are still in place, and they will use tools afforded to them to isolate radical executive members. This is why we only advocate fighting for leadership in an already combative union, to sustain its democratic nature. In business unions, some militants may advocate this strategy as an act of desperation. This isn't necessarily a useless strategy. However, when these documents cannot be challenged from the membership level, and when a well organized, radicalized membership is being successfully oppressed by those wielding institutionalized power, the solution may be found with more ease in separating the radical membership from the union altogether, and building a new organization. This is where we see intersectionality between combative unionism, and revolutionary unionism.

IX: CONCLUSION:

WE ARE NOT INVENTING THE WHEEL.

Prairie Struggle Organization is not a vanguard, nor is it a party. We believe the role of anarchists, but also all those identifying as revolutionaries within the workplace is not to "lead" the workers towards revolution. We recognize that a successful revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. The intention of this paper is not to theorize the path of every workplace struggle,

I. INTRODUCTION

As anarchists, we at the Prairie Struggle Organization have dedicated much time and effort to agitation within the working class and its labour organizations. Despite our various efforts, wins, losses and relationships created we still find ourselves questioning the most effective method to agitate on the shop floors, within schools and in our communities.

Within the broader radical left it has been discussed many times by various organizations and non-affiliates, whether or not the labour movement can be an area to work towards positive change. Some have been very critical to the point of negating the usefulness "if any" of unions. Others have been completely uncritical, underlining every victory, and attacking any who voice critique regarding unions and the labour movement. We see this debate as jaded and in certain instances un-reconcilable. While acknowledging this debate exists, **for us the question is not one of support for unions within this system, but one of *tactics* and what can be done under these conditions to promote revolutionary change. The question is not *if* we should be involved within the labor movement, but *how*?**

In bringing forward insights that aim to make us more effective in reaching our goals as revolutionaries, here we lay the basis of our position paper. "Combative Unionism" illustrates a specific strategy that should be applied within the labour movement.

In this position paper we hope to contribute to the relevant work and theoretical development that has been done or is already underway. We salute our comrades within the revolutionary left that are active in undermining bureaucratic control over working class power.

II. THE REVOLUTIONARY LEFT: MARGINAL OR NOT?

Throughout the last 50 years in North America, despite a very active minority within labour such as the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World), WSA (Workers Solidarity Alliance), elements of NEFAC (North Eastern Federation of Anarchist Communists), and other elements within the broader revolutionary left, a majority of the left has moved away from organized labour and into campaigns regarding the more marginalized segments of our society.

The focus of these efforts touch on homelessness, unemployment, women's rights, queer and trans rights, racism, migrant rights and an endless list of other various oppressions/struggles, the majority of which having been abandoned by the contemporary labour movement. We feel these struggles should be taken up by revolutionaries and their organizations. When leading the battle of ideas in an effort to encourage working class control, every opportunity should be taken when it comes to defending all segments of the working class.

Historically, the revolutionary left has always played an important role within the labour movement and put forward a program of Bread, Roses and Revolution lead by the working class. So why are important segments of our movements today choosing marginality, which holds many limits, instead of finding ways to agitate within the broader working class and building solidarity by addressing root causes of all our struggles? The answer to this question is long and complex.

Tactically, it has been easier to organize within smaller segments and communities among the more marginalized. When viewed from a short-term perspective, outreach within communities that are more oppressed due to precarious conditions caused by homelessness, joblessness or citizenship status (to only name a few) are fruitful grounds for organizing because in some respects they are

reaucracy and reinvigorating a membership that no longer feels compelled to denounce and fight union elites. This is why combative unionism must be initiated with recognition that this is a long and delicate process of exposing internal class antagonisms and bureaucratic control, and that it will likely encounter many barriers, and defeats.

Principle #7. Bread , roses and revolution

It is important that the objectives of the committee be realistic and in touch with the union base. Radicalization can happen through propaganda, but most often happens through struggle for better conditions. This is why we see combative unionism through a process of bread, roses and revolution. We believe that the mobilization committees should strive for the amelioration of everyday working conditions and through the process of struggle and radicalization, place the foundations for a new tomorrow. Thus, progress made through the mobilization committees must build victories upon victories, and adapt to defeats to meet the membership's level of demand, rather than expect them to meet yours. Organizing on these directly democratic principles fosters this process, and ensures struggle is personalized rather than implemented from above. As a result, members gain an increased stake in the radicalization process, and are more likely to participate in the union, and in actions. Admittedly, while a prescription that instructs how this process unfolds in necessarily elusive, the central tenet is that through involvement and struggle under the conditions we and our co-workers face, class antagonisms become increasingly visible, and when complemented by engagement with radical forms of organizing creates the potential for increased actualizations of revolutionary ideas, and social movement.

THE QUESTION OF FIGHTING FOR LEADERSHIP?

Combative unionism is an engagement that must be prepared to withstand powerful opposition, not only to create a situation of combative unionism, but also to sustain its existence. In a combative union, the aim is to combat resurgence of powerful bureaucra-

otage and the destruction of property do not harm anyone physically and therefore are not violent methods of action. This does not mean that we advocate the use of these militant tactics every step of the way. These tactics must be used when pragmatic and must be supported by the majority of the union membership.

Principle #4. Autonomy

As a class, we have our own interests. To defend these interests and the union from outside influences, we oppose any collaboration with the state or political parties and declare without compromise our autonomy from them. Despite the existence of political parties that are left wing and may embody many of the union's ideals and demands, we advocate that the union needs no one to represent its own interests.

Complete autonomy from the state and its institutions assures, to an extent, that no outside interest may interfere with the union's efforts. This does not mean that we oppose initiatives for unions to cooperate and mobilize together with in the same national organization. We believe that federalism is a decisive aspect of how effective a labour movement is, but see this federalism under directly democratic, anarchist lines.

Principle #5. The mobilization committee and working groups

It is obvious that storming the gates of our unions with these 7 points will not achieve any positive reaction from the union leaders, bureaucracy nor likely many of our fellow workers. The mobilization committee becomes the militant wing of the union where the active minority assembles, coordinates and plans its campaigns against those who oppose combative unionism and wish to keep control of the union. By organizing outside the union structure, the active minority use these 7 principles to organize within the membership so that the rank and file can progressively gain control of their union, and defend the interest of the rank and file.

Principle #6. Winning support, taking back the union

The mobilization committee's task within the union is no small one. Taking back our unions involves fighting an entrenched bu-

highly vulnerable and mobilize to fight for basic means of living and dignity. Other aspects of marginality are close to anarchism because they reflect a less urgent, but more lifestyle, discontented culture associated with anarchism (punk, dumpster diving, diy and zine culture etc.).

If we look at the long-term effects of such strategies, we can see that these tactics and ideas have produced positive results within the marginal sectors of the working class but in some respects only act to alienate the movement from our own class. Like oppositional lifestyle cultures, the concern becomes that organizing on marginal lines reinforces new binaries on the same lines of those they wish to abolish. Organizing to fight with the marginal is a goal, but not when these efforts result in redefining who is excluded, and especially not when these results act to exclude and/or reject the working class, a class within which the marginal are members, and is historically excluded and dispossessed. Unlike lifestyle cultures (that alienate by their sheer contrast to modernity), this form of alienation is dangerous because it commonly acts to remove these struggles from working class terrain, and acts to demobilize rather than organize. While in some instances this is successful, the revolutionary potential of this strategy isn't tested.

1. Prairie Struggle Organization understands that no revolution can or will occur without organizing huge segments of the workforce into a combative labour movement because ultimately, the ruling class gains its power through the wealth and privilege extracted from our labour. The overthrow of this system will ultimately rely on removing the source of their power, which is capital generated through our exploitation. In saluting the efforts of our sisters and brothers that are involved within the various struggles mentioned above, we argue for the fundamental necessity to fight all oppressions. However, we stress the importance that revolutionaries need to make every attempt to agitate and mobilize the broader workforce despite the degree of marginalization or how un-

marginal, un-receptive and unpopular they are among the left.

III. SYNDICALISM, AND ITS CORE PRINCIPLES

Here we offer a brief look at the CGT (General Confederation of Labour) in France which is one of the founders of syndicalism in order to understand the core principles of this theory and some of their union counterparts.

Before the arrival of syndicalism and the CGT in France, it is important to acknowledge that associations of workers of the same trade have existed since the Middle Ages. For the most part their purpose was to negotiate wages and working conditions; they resembled mutual aid organizations more then unions. Being banned by the Le Chapelier Law in 1791, which was later kept in the Napoleonic Code, these Workers' associations continued to exist underground and it was only in 1864 that they were permitted to come out as a tolerated body. In 1884 they were legalized.

In 1895 various trade unions and other workers' organizations joined together to form the CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail or General Confederation of Labour) which in 1902 declared its objective to be "the disappearance of the wage system and employers". In 1906, the CGT adopted at its congress in Amiens its core principles and points of unity. We have underlined core points from the "Charte d'Amiens"[1] below (in a modern translation). We feel these points are paramount to the creation of a combative labour movement today:

"The General Confederation of Labour unites, independent of all political groupings, all workers who recognize the struggle to be carried on for the abolition of the wages system [. . .]"

[1] C.G.T "**Congrès d'Amiens sur les rapports entre entre les Syndicats et**

To bring sense and focus to our organizational efforts within labour, we organize with a working class orientation and make this the glue that binds our efforts. This also is used to identify class enemies within labour and society as a whole. If struggle changes everything, it is due in part to exposing class antagonisms. These antagonisms are what foster the ability to plant the seeds of radicalization.

Principle #2. Direct democratic structures

In order to facilitate the proper development of militancy and participation, we organize under the model of direct democracy and radically oppose representative democracy. It should be made clear that the objective is to give full decision making power to the general assembly and that executive powers are revocable at any time by the assembly. This empowerment through the general assembly is ground for experimentation and development for the basis of a new world.

Principle #3. Combative tactics

In opposition to reliance only on bargaining, we adopt militant combative tactics to win struggles as prescribed in the context of a continued escalation of tactics. Our ultimate weapon is the general strike.

If a tactic is effective, but not illegal, we believe it is only a matter of time until new laws are put in place to limit the effects of our tactics. In this view, we understand that the current laws are there to service the ruling class and their interests, and can be changed to serve this purpose. With this realization, we advocate when practical, the breaking of these laws and injunctions in order to make our tactics effective.

The question of violence is always a pivotal point when it comes to combative unionism and public opinion. The tactics we advocate come from the perspective of defending the rights of the workers and their legitimate strikes and actions. If these are under attack by the state and its apparatus of repression, we advocate when possible the use of self-defence. Tactics such as economic blockades, sab-

mobilizing within non-combative unions along side the combative unions during strikes and actions. The mobilization committee is key in undermining the bureaucracy and moderates who has hold on the union. They wage a war upon the apparatus of disinformation and expose the corruption and co-option taking place. It prepares the terrain for an eventual takeover of the union by its membership.

VIII. COMBATIVE UNIONISM:

PRAIRIE STRUGGLE'S POSITION ON WAGING CLASS WAR WITHIN LABOUR

We believe that our organizations should aim to revolutionize the existing labour movement in the same manner that our comrades in the student movement have done and are currently doing. If the workplaces, neighbourhoods and schools are battlegrounds in the class war, so too are union halls. Unions and the broader labour movement reflect all elements we find within society, including class antagonism. Prairie Struggle Organization believes that the unions and the labour movement should not be spared in the battle of ideas to win over the working class to revolutionary politics and we stress that this cannot be done outside of it. Nestor Mahkno once said: "It is necessary to never forget that if trade unionism does not find in libertarian communist theory a support in opportune times it will turn, whether we like it or not, to the ideology of a political statist party." It is safe to assume that this is well underway and that much work is needed to empower the working class within labour.

Prairie Struggle Organization adopts Combative unionism as its organizational model within labour and social movements. Its adaptation of combative unionism is the following:

Principle #1. A movement by and for the working class

"Congress considers this declaration to be a recognition of the class struggle which, on the economic field, places the workers in revolt against all forms of exploitation and oppression, material and moral, carried out by the capitalist class against the working class."

"Regarding day-to-day needs. Trade Unionism pursues the co-ordination of the efforts of the workers, the increase of the workers' welfare through the realization of immediate amelioration, such as the shortening of working hours, wage increases, etc."

But this is only one aspect of its task. Trade Unionism is preparing complete emancipation, which can only be realized by the expropriation of the capitalist class. It favours as a means to this end the general strike and considers that the trade union, now a unit of resistance, will in the future be the unit of production and distribution, the basis of social re-organization.

"Congress declares that this two-fold task, for day-to-day life and for the future, arises from the actual position of wage-earners, which forces the working class and imposes on all workers, whatever their opinion and political and philosophical views, the duty to belong to the basic organization, the trade union. Therefore, so far as individual members are concerned, Congress declares complete freedom for every Trade Unionist to participate, outside of the trade organization, in any forms of struggle in accordance with his political or philosophical views, confining itself only to asking him, in return, not to introduce into the trade union the opinions, which he professes outside it."

Anarchists were also involved in the elaboration of what we have come to know as Anarcho-Syndicalism. Here we find many similarities in Rocker's Anarcho-Syndicalism despite being worded differently:

the trade union, the syndicate, is the unified organisation of labour and has for its purpose the defence of the interests of the producers in the existing society and the preparing for and the

practical carrying out of the reconstruction of social life after the pattern of Socialism. It has, therefore, a double purpose:

1. As the fighting organization of the workers against the employers to enforce the demands of the workers for the safeguarding and raising of their standard of living;

2. As the school for the intellectual training of the workers to make them acquainted with the technical management of production and economic life in general, so that when the revolutionary situation arises they will be capable of taking the socio-economic organism into their own hands and remaking it according to Socialist principles[2].

From these historic examples, Prairie Struggle Organization draws the following conclusions:

1. ***Business unions and Combative unions are organizations based on the class interests of the workers. They come to existence by the need of workers to organize on class lines and advance their own interests in opposition to those of the bosses[3].***

2. ***Unions can perform a dual role. One of mobilising workers for day-to-day issues; and, secondly, providing the democratic organisational structure through which workers can seize and self-manage the means of production in the building of a new world.***

les Partis politiques". 1906. Retrived on March 29th, 2013 from marxists.org/francais/cgt/works/1906/10/cgt_amiens.htm

[2] Rocker. R. *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism.* 1949 Retrieved on April 1, 2013 from http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/rudolf-rocker-anarchism-and-anarcho-syndicalism

[3] Berkman A. *What is Communist Anarchism?* 1929. Retrieved on April 1, 2013 from http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/alexander-berkman-what-is-

the contradiction between direct action and electoralism. The former running counter to principles of representative rule while the other reinforces it.

VII. MOBILIZATION COMMITTEES AND THEIR KEY ROLE IN THE CREATION OF COMBATIVE UNIONS

Combative unions have a multitude of committees and working groups to facilitate the everyday work of the unions, but in universities, colleges and workplaces where there is no combative union, these mobilization committees are what combative unionists use to undermine the bureaucracy and lobbyist unions.

These mobilization committees organize outside the current union structures knowing fully that the business unions they face exist to oppose any radical change to business as usual.

By organizing outside the union, the mobilization committee is used to unite the grassroots of their institution under the principles of combative unionism. Class oriented, they bring about the social glue needed to rally for the base under a program of free and accessible education for all (in the student movement). Democratic means of organizing assures everyone involved an equal standing within the group, laying the basis for radical change within the unions. Combativity breaks with the usual attitudes of unions that now more frequently resemble social clubs and political parties than organizations that fight to defend student and worker rights. Lastly, autonomy takes away ground from political parties to recruit and co-opt the union, making the union fertile ground for radicalization.

The mobilization committees attack union bureaucracy little by little. They mobilize the grassroots for general assemblies, putting in place an alternative media, proposing changes to the union constitutions in order to make the executives more accountable and

pushes their demands by shutting down educational institutions and occupying them, and the general strike uses direct action outside these institutions to disrupt business as usual within the city to add pressure to negotiations. While they are not always successful in shutting down these institutions, and in other actions, mass mobilization, direct action and the general strike increases the potential to win student demands.

Typically, the intensity of actions is decided by involved members of the unions through mobilization committees. They are led by a principle or tactic called the "intensification of the methods of actions". Most campaigns and general strikes start with symbolic actions, protests, national days of strike and as the negotiations lead to an impasse, these one-day strikes and actions turn to general strikes, economic blockades and occupations. This escalation continues until the movement wins their demands or loses momentum.

4 - ***Autonomy***. Participatory democracy leads to its logical conclusion through Autonomy. While not universally adopted by all combative unionists outside of the student movement, the members within the student movements (and many outside of it) control these unions and in order for this to materialize they practice complete autonomy from the state and its political parties. They see no point in participating in any state apparatus or political party when their nature is the defense of the ruling class. In order not to be co-opted for electoral goals, they practice autonomy from right wing and left wing political parties alike. Even though some of these parties incorporate portions of the student demands, these unions understand that these political parties will eventually compromise on their positions for their own gains. Regardless of this principle, electoral parties still make attempts to co-op these unions under a guise of aid, and have potential to compel members towards this slippery slope. While some social democratic advocates within these unions defend the idea that there is something to gain by allying with political parties, at the heart of combative unionism lies

IV. STYLES OF UNIONISM

Prairie Struggle makes the distinction between four different kinds of union organizations. From the evolution of mutual aid groups, to the development of revolutionary unions that preceded the contemporary labour movement, the following styles of unionism are relevant today.

LOBBY UNIONS: THE DOMESTIC ENEMY

Even though Syndicalism has shaped modern unionism, in a huge way this does not mean that unions are impenetrable and cannot be co-opted to serve the ruling class. Even with state repression and law at the disposal of those who own the means of production and profit from the exploitation of the working class, there is no better tool to render unions ineffective than unions themselves. These Trojan horses carry with in their belly the effective tools of exploitation.

Lobby unions, despite having no official ideology aside from being unions for those who don't wish to be unionized, are characterized by the idea that within capitalism, no one exploits anyone. The belief within these unions is that society is based on the foundation of justice and democracy, which translate to the legal and just exchange of services for a honest days work[4].

Lobby unions serve the ruling class as a way to stimulate sedition and artificial separation within the working class under the pretext that our struggle is one of the same between two radical antagonisms. The primary role is to stop the advance of business and combative unions so that collective agreements serve the interest of boss'. More often associated with reactionary political forces, these unions favor social peace and in times of conflicts, systematic repression. Among many, we find within the ranks of lobby unions the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC), The Specialty

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[4] Piotte. JM. *Le Syndicalisme de Combat.* 1977, Pg, 27.

and Temporary Employers Union (STEU), and the Syndicat Quebecois de la Construction (SQC) to only name a few.

It is needless to say that we do not consider lobby unions as an area that revolutionaries should invest any time in. These unions are unfit to sport the title of "union" being as they do not exist to defend workers. They are the enemy within and should be dealt with extreme hostility.

BUSINESS UNIONS

CHAINS FOR COMPROMISE

The major difference between lobby unions and business unions is that the second was born within the working class for the defense of the working class. Despite their rich history of often being sparked by syndicalist tendencies, these unions have now become complacent.

Business unions, despite having roots in working class organizing, rely on a network of legal and bureaucratic channels . The effect has been the rise of a bureaucratic class within these unions that handles all or most aspects of the day to day functioning of the union. While these bureaucrats have often worked on the shop floor, and rose within the labour movement through active participation, their total removal from members affected by their decisions often leads to a lack of risk taking, and a lot of compromise with the bosses at the expense of the workers.

The legal nature of these unions means that the fundamental tools used for self-defence by the working class, such as strikes and other job actions, are now subject to legal overview by contracts and by government.

Lastly, many union bureaucrats have extensive ties to political parties and governments. Prominent relationships include that between business unions and the Democratic Party in the U.S, and the New Democratic Party in Canada. The effect is that organizing

[5] *Ibid*; 28,

*2 – **Democracy**.* The idea of combative unionism is that a union is "run by its members. For its members", meaning that the use of a bottom up structure that is directly democratic through the general assembly of the union as its decision making apparatus and a militant rejection of representative democracy.

Within unions affiliated to L'ASSE, the executive boards only implement the decisions of the assemblies and run the everyday operations of the unions. All executive positions are on a voluntary basis and are elected by its general assembly. These unions are militant in making a statement to limit the bureaucracy within the union by organizing members into the various union structures. L'ASSÉ only has one paid employee (secretary), and when negotiations are underway, delegates have clear mandate or positions to defend but have no authority to accept any compromise.

In order to stimulate member participation and keep members informed on all aspects of the unions, alternative and autonomous methods such as leaflets, newspapers, websites, posters and social media are used on a grand scale. In contrast to lobbyist student associations (like the Canadian Federation of Students) that spend most of their comparatively large budgets on PR campaigns and salaries, these combative unions operate at a similar capacity using a lot less financial resources.

*3 – **Combativity**.* Their militant tactics come from the understanding that the state is not a neutral institution where the whole of society has equal representation. They understand the state's role is the defense of business interests and finance. From this realization they see that the state is at the service of capitalism and that the laws confining their methods of action are also developed to protect capitalism and capitalist interests. The actions used by these militants, therefore, are not decided by the legality of the actions, but rather how effective they are in forcing the hand of the state to accept their demands.

Their main weapon is the general strike to force the state(or employer) into accepting their demands. The student movement

fully. It must be integrated within a program that holds the tools to fight recuperation, appeasement and repressions.

VI. COMBATIVE UNIONISM:

ITS CORE PRINCIPLES

Here we point to the core principles of combative unions using the student movement to draw out the relevant positions. It should be noted that while we use the Quebec student movement to draw out these points, most of these principles are also found in those practicing combative unionism within labour unions, and the workplace. If these principles do not already exist in the workplace context, part of the task for these militant workers is to create them.

1 - Working class orientation. These organizations are again oriented on the principles of class despite sometimes organizing within non-homogenous sectors of society containing both rich and poor. In the student movement, the emphasis on class derives from the "charter of student syndicalism" or later known as the "Charte de Grenoble". In 1946, the National Union of French Students, or UNEF by its French acronym, adopted this founding document which defined the student as a young intellectual worker.

Article 4: "As a worker, the student has a right to work and rest in the best of conditions and in material independence, both personal and social, guaranteed by the free exercise of syndicalist rights."

Article 7: "As an intellectual, the student has a responsibility – to seek out, propagate and defend Truth which entails sharing and advancing culture as well as drawing the meaning of history – to defend liberty against all oppression, which constitutes, for the intellectual, his most sacred mission"[7].

[7] Raza. J "The history of the Quebec student movement and combative unionism". 2012. Retrived on April 1, 2012 from http://www.anarkismo.net/article/24361

often looks a lot more like a partisan campaign than an attempt to mobilize workers for gains.

Business unions can be characterized by the principle of "le partage du gateau" or the sharing of the cake with the boss[5]. They don't develop class antagonisms, but they do offer services that represent workers and space to fight for better gains and protection in the workplace.

THE YELLOW PROLETARIAT?

The revolutionary potential that was present in the early history of the North American labour movement has been largely supplanted by the compromising positions of the business unions. Stemming back to the early 1900s, we saw a new political direction arising. Rather than engaging in class antagonisms, and adopting politics that are anti-capitalist and syndicalist in nature, these new groups and their affiliates were aligning their interests with political parties, and failing to focus sufficiently on shop floor organizing.

This strategy has paid off for the business unions - some have managed to secure their status through the development of specific laws mandating the conduct of unions in all matters, including the strike, dues deduction, organizing, and contract enforcement. This legal direction enveloped unions into the pro-capitalist and oppressive framework of the state, making both the bureaucratic centralism of the unions and the new political strategies they adopted permanent and the dominant paradigm.

This strategy that focuses more on political allegiances rather than shop floor organizing has weakened the status of unions within their legal framework. The establishment of a bureaucratic class of permanent workers within the unions themselves is much to blame. The effect is they now function to coordinate the legalization of worker struggles, and the pacification of grassroots militancy. Further, because these bureaucrats effectively have a monopoly on the day to day functions of the union, they perceive themselves as having more experience and knowledge than the

workers on the shop floor. The result has been detachment from the struggles as well.

While the ruling class has always worked against unions and workers, in the past 10 years the legal and structural weaknesses union bureaucrats have exposed our unions to is mounting. The very existence of unions is under attack from the erosion of laws; what's more, interpretations of laws themselves are increasingly favouring employers over employees. Many union workers are detached from the politics of class antagonisms, if not from the union altogether, and strikebreakers are beginning to move into the realm of acceptance, instead of being labelled as the filthy scabs they are. Only when these changes have begun to attack union dues and the source of bureaucratic income and job security have they actually begun to acknowledge there is something wrong with their legal strategy.

Thus, we now see business unions engaging in more grass-roots strategies, such as the OurWalmart campaign, Fight for a Fair Economy, and the Fast Food Forward campaign. However, what must be noted is that these struggles are still bureaucratically controlled and directed. Therefore, moving forward with the realities this presents, Prairie Struggle Organization recognizes that we as revolutionaries need to take back these struggles from bureaucratic control rather than slip further into the collective coma that bureaucratic unionism has put us in. While it is wished that combative unionism would take hold in these unions, the current potential for this is slim. However, through radical organizing and engagement under the principles of combative unionism, we hold that confrontation and challenge to these bureaucratic orders from the 'shop floor' is a much needed step towards reinvigorating the base of these unions, the members. It is this process that will proliferate combative unionist ideas under the context of business unionism, and escalate antagonisms with the bureaucratic class to both expose and challenge their authority.

like to clarify that our critiques are not pointed at them, but comrades who strictly practice these pure traditions.

ALTERNATIVE INSTITUTIONS

Looking at the current state of the labour movement, it is hard for some to see opportunities in possibly turning the tables to fight effectively against corporatist, lobby-like unions. Facing this obstacle, parts of the movement that are still loyal to a certain form of involvement within labor focus on alternative labor institutions such as worker's centers, solidarity networks or revolutionary unions. Historically, the labour movement once put much energy into building more alternative institutions. Mutual aid functions were provided through workers' organizations that would create a network of cooperative institutions like schools, daycares, popular soup kitchens, homes for the aged, health and cultural centers, insurance plans, trade related education, housing, etc. We recognize that even though much of these services are provided for most workers (though unfortunately not those people without status or citizenship), revolutionaries should actively strive to build self-managed social services that are controlled by the workers themselves. We also understand that with the coming of age of Neoliberalism, these services have been greatly reduced due to budget cuts and austerity measures.

Prairie Struggle Organization is an advocate of a dual power strategy, otherwise known as Counter power, which mandates a seizure of power over services rendered by the state and subsequently contests the existing power structures of state and capitalism. We take a position in favour of creating worker owned and run services under capitalism, on the basis that the working class benefits from these services. We believe that such institutions and programs open up space for experimentation of a limited form of self-management under capitalism. However, we stress that alone this does not constitute a strategy for revolutionary change and the overthrow of capitalism. Its subjects do not substitute capitalism peace-

critique makes valid points, the solutions proposed by advocates of workers councils raise more questions than answers. While we agree with most critiques of the current labour movement put forward by these advocates, we don't agree the solutions to these problems can be found in pushing towards new forms of worker organizations that are aimed at radicalizing workers in trade wide networks. In theory, these solutions are extremely attractive, but the question that remains to be answered is how we organize rank and file workers towards this direction, and how these organizations themselves will differ from unions. Many advocates of the councils point to these organizations as a hotbed for radical organizers, but then the question that remains is, how will these radical council organizers avoid becoming yet another marginalized anti-capitalist ghetto? To sum up the argument, we view the dialectic of council communism as an interesting direction for the labour movement, and believe that at some point the position put forward in this paper intersects with some of these ideas; however, the question we are seeking to answer is not one of proposing alternatives, but a question of how we organize towards these alternatives meaningfully.

The current unions historically belong to the workers and many of its core members still see it that way. We argue that if workers are not capable or willing to fight for their own institutions in spite of faults, the creation or joining of a revolutionary labour movement is even more unlikely. We feel that confrontation within the current labour movement for more effective, combative and democratic means are what in the long run will establish a more revolutionary labour movement. With direct confrontation, and exposure of class antagonism within labour, radicalization is the outcome.

We acknowledge that some who identify with revolutionary unionism or council communism already practice Combative unionism in the perspective of creating a revolutionary labour movement out of the old labour institutions. We would

COMBATIVE UNIONS, A STRATEGY THAT HITS CLOSE TO HOME

AT WORK:

Combative unions derive from the principle of "by the workers, for the workers". Whereas business unions favour bureaucracy, combative unions and their militants favour member participation and dedication. Based and regrouped on the parameters of class, these unions draw a clear line between them selves and the boss. Their tactics are often decided on the criteria of effectiveness and disregard unjust laws put in place to limit their struggles. From top down of its structure we find the General assembly, Committees and executives to ensure the respect of direct democracy. A very important point to note is the massive use of alternative & independent media to assure the distribution of information and theoretical development within the membership.

Looking more particularly at the history of combative unionism within the broader workforce in the 1960's and 1970's, we notice that outside the student movement in Québec, combative unionism was not practiced by one union but by militant revolutionaries within most of the major federations of labour such as the "Confédération des syndicats nationaux" (CSN), The "Corporation des enseignants du Québec"(CEQ or now known as the CSQ), and small elements with in the "Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec" (FTQ) like the Firestone workers who eventually joined up with the CSN. These militants actively strived for worker control within the federations and battle bureaucracy on a daily basis. While Combative unionism spawns from revolutionary intellectual circles, it had a hard time laying roots within the majority of the unionized working class mostly regrouped within the FTQ[6]. Despite these difficulties, revolutionaries still made sizable impacts on the positions of these federations. For example, in the 1970s the federations each released position papers taking clear anti-capitalist

[6] *Ibid; 121* [7]*Ibid; 23*

stances, a clear demonstration of the impact the revolutionary left had:

”Ne comptons que sur nos propres moyens” (We only count on our own means) - CSN

”L’État: un rouage de notre exploitation” (The state: A gear in the system of our exploitation) - FTQ

”L’école au service la classe dominante” (Schools at the service of the ruling class) - CEQ

Despite the appearance of combative unionism within the workforce and student movement around the same time, these two groups disagreed on one fundamental element. Though both agreed that in the short term unions need to fight for bread and roses issues, and that in the long term, the preparation of a better world; they did not agree on how to achieve the last. The workforce movement advanced the idea of the creation of a political force. This political force would find its place within the idea of a revolutionary working class electoral party[7]. The student movement on the other hand practiced complete autonomy from any political parties. Prairie Struggle takes the position that partisan engagement dilutes our struggle and therefore, we agree with the autonomy put forth by the student movement.

IN THE STUDENT MOVEMENT:

More recently in Canada we have seen one of the most powerful and combative social movements emerge out of Quebec within its student union movement. Spearheading this movement is l’Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante (ASSÉ). L’ ASSÉ was founded in February 2001 and is responsible for the 2005, failed 2007 and 2012 student general strikes. L’ASSÉ who subscribe to “syndicalism de combat” or combative unionism counts more than 70,000 members. From L’ANEEQ (National Association of Quebec Students) to the MDE (Democratic student movement), these organizations have been leading the Québec student movement always in a more syndicalist direction. L’ ASSÉ has inherited a rich history of student syndicalism that spans into the

1960’s and has led the push for a democratic, combative and autonomous union movement. Other organizations such as SUD Étudiant in the French student movement also subscribe to combative unionism (Syndicalisme de Lutte). The Quebec student movement has in the past been a focus of Prairie Struggle Organization, and we have appended a document detailing the movement produced by the key speaker of our Canada-wide tour on the 2012 general strike below. (http://www.prairiestruggle.org/news/history-quebec-student-movement-and-combative-unionism-tour-notes)

REVOLUTIONARY UNIONS, WORKERS COUNCILS AND ALTERNATIVES FOR THE MARGINALIZED

As we acknowledge in North America the existence and rich history of the IWW, we also notice Europe’s history and the existence of revolutionary unionism via the CNT/AIT and CGT among many others. This form of revolutionary unionism attacks bureaucracy and corporatism by its methods of organization, which is reflected in their revolutionary anti-capitalist, and anti-hierarchical stances and positions. We also recognize that these unions constitute a major amelioration of the current problems related to unions, and reiterate that we are an ally of these organizations and fight along side them in the struggle for worker control of unions.

Despite being close to most of our positions on unions and the labour movement, Prairie Struggle does not foresee any endorsement to this strategy in our own context. We disagree that the creation of such revolutionary unions from scratch in this current state of affairs of North America is the most effective direction. We share the need to establish a growing combative revolutionary union movement but disagree that this can happen outside the current labour movement and its unions. Our “ends” are the same but strategy is our point of disagreement.

Some advocates of workers’ councils point to the evolution of work, the rise of precarity, and the inability of business unions to effectively challenge capital as proof that these unions are no longer able to act on existing class antagonisms. While on the surface this