

# LUXEMBURG

GESELLSCHAFTSANALYSE UND LINKE PRAXIS

CRITICAL SOCIAL ANALYSIS AND LEFT PRAXIS

TASOS KORONAKIS | BERND RIEXINGER | NIK THEODORE **SAMPLE**



## **IMPRESSUM**

Luxemburg. Gesellschaftsanalyse und linke Praxis

4 issues per year

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VSA: Verlag

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# EDITORIAL

## RE:ORGANIZE

The movements of the Indignados in Spain, Greece and other places, Occupy Wall Street and the 99 % reflect their demands in the way they are organized: participatory, horizontal, »real democracy«. They can be heard as a wakening call for left parties, unions and other traditional organizations, that – especially in Germany and Europe – have not yet come up with new organizational forms. They often fail to address the gap in representation that was created when the social democrats embarked on the neoliberal project and wages and work standards started their downward spiral. What would be new, democratic forms of leadership we would have to incorporate in our organizations or even build up from scratch, what can we learn from Occupy Wall Street (going into the hoods), how can the left parties work together with new movements and build what Gramsci called a »societal party«; what new forms of strike and class struggle are evolving?

Luxemburg is the journal of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. We provide social and political analyses for a democratic, pluralist and global left. Rosa Luxemburg's optimistic attitude toward the possibility of social transformation together with her intellectual skepticism serves as a guideline for our work. Our goal is to support cooperation and partnerships for strategic interventions and to create possibilities to learn from each other's experiences in a global perspective. We organize debates between the German Left Party and social movements from all over the world. Our work addresses trade unionists, feminists, environmental activists and altermundialistas. The journal is dedicated to the vision of a socialist and democratic transformation.

The list of contributing authors includes, among others, Ai-Jen Poo, Franco »Bifo« Berardi, Walden Bello, Patrick Bond, Nicola Bullard, Barbara Epstein, Bill Fletcher, Gregor Gysi, David Harvey, Chantal Mouffe, Eva Illouz, Edgardo Lander, Catherine Lutz, João Pedro Stédile, Hilary Wainwright, Sean Sweeny, Mimmo Porcaro, Rick Wolff, Judith Butler.

For this sample copy, we compiled a selection of articles by Bernd Riexinger (head of service-union Ver.di in Stuttgart, and spokesperson of the party Die Linke in Baden-Württemberg, Southern Germany), Nik Theodore (Director of the Center for Urban Economic Development and an Associate Professor in the Department of Urban Planning and Policy, Univ. Chicago), Tasos Koronakis (Member of the party leadership of Synspismos, Greece).

# »BEING PART OF THE MOVEMENT«

## THE LEFT-WING PARTY IN SYNTAGMA SQUARE

### TASOS KORONAKIS

The situation in Greece can only be described as a depression. Now, *after* the movements that occupied the public squares the people are exhausted and the fear of what comes next hangs over our heads. Every other month new spending cuts and policies are decided upon and each time they are presented as the »final« cuts. The school year started, but there are no books. The school libraries are closed. Most universities are occupied by their students to protest the new university law which submits the universities to the forces of the market. There are less and less beds in the hospitals, everything must be paid individually; there is no public health service anymore. The spending cuts affect the pensions, psychiatric services, even the translation support for the hearing impaired was abolished. Everything is becoming privatized: water, electricity, airports – everything gets sold. A new tax on houses was introduced to be paid with the electricity bills; anybody who does not pay is taken off the grid. Only in the police sector was

the budget increased – 900,000 Euros were spent on tear gas.

Since April 2010 we went through big moments of social movements and big moments of depression. People stand up and fight, people go home and cry. For a left wing party<sup>1</sup> this is a difficult situation. What can we demand? What shall we demand? If depression is the predominant feeling in politics it is difficult to talk about solutions and alternatives.

I would like to explain our strategy adapted from the *indignados*. The movement originated in Northern Africa and was developed during the »Spanish Revolution«. In Spain they showed a Banner: »Greeks, wake up!« From this arose a feeling that something needs to be done. A group on Facebook called: «We are not a union, not a party, we are indignant and we are coming together at Syntagma Square. Join us!« After 1 hour 100,000 users »liked« it, after three hours 400,000, after 5 hours it was closed down due to an overflow of traffic. 20,000 people answered the call. They held an assembly and discussed demands. Everything you can imagine was demanded: »We have to abolish money«, »we have to redistribute the money to the people«, »we demand the following measures of the government...«, »we demand the abolishment of the government« – and everybody was there. What can a left-wing party do in this situation? Who are these people? Is this progressive? Is this leftist?

The movement has three big issues:

1 | The first one is democracy, *real* democracy. But can this democracy be an answer to the gap in existing forms of democracy; to the empty, systemic democracy? To the crisis of represen-

tation? With the term »real democracy« people demand representation in politics. They have the impression nobody advocates for them.

2 | The second big issue is social justice. They say simple things: »Many people who are in politics took money and claim that we spent it together, but we didn't spend it together, somebody took it. The people responsible for looting our pension, for privatizing the electrical services, for selling out the water must go to prison!«

3 | The third issue: »We are exhausted stop the spending cuts.«

These three issues are combined with good things – mass participation, solidarity, peaceful gathering – and with bad things: extreme rightwing, nationalist proposals, anti-political culture. What must the left do? Our answer was: We are part of the movement from the very start. The most important reason why people took it to the streets is that their lives have been affected by neoliberal politics in increasingly devastating ways. That is why they resist and say: »enough is enough«. This is a good entry point to conversation with people on what is happening in the world. The first step to entering this common struggle is to go to the squares together and say »I cannot take more cuts«. The square is of great historical importance in the Greek community, the squares were the first step towards a shared, general answer. Now, for the first time after many years, a common struggle has been attempted. The left must be present there. In the left, three different approaches dominate the ways to deal with the new movements, each of which is problematic in different ways.

Occupy  
Washington,  
DC – Martin  
Luther King, Bob  
Jagendorf



The first one consists of proposing their own program to the protesters: »We have the solution for everything. We have the blueprint for socialism, justice and democracy and have to convince the people of our solutions.«

The second one is not to go to the squares at all and to reject the movement because there are people there with whom we do not want to collaborate: »We cannot control them and we don't know what they'll do after ten days, maybe they'll ruin our reputation.«

The third strategy is going to the squares and reiterate and endorse everything that the people demand: »Yes, we have to raise the Greek flag on the square. We have to put into practice everything that you demand.« This is opportunistic politics.

In contrast, we have to bring what we learned in the last years from the movements critical of globalization. We need a general, open discussion on the relationship between movement and party.

1 | We need to be part of the movement with our ideas. Not necessarily with our banners, but with our visions. We need to convey our understanding of what is going on in the world and in Europe; how the financial crisis is dealt with and how this produces a new »human« crisis, a crisis of labor, a crisis of unemployment.

2 | We participate with our bodies in the movement. We do not represent thousands of people who stayed at home, we represent ourselves.

3 | We go to the squares and contribute our positions which are connected to our conceptual approaches, our »ideology«, but which could also produce new coalitions and new possibilities to act.

4 | We attempt to make new connections possible between grassroots politics and organized politics.

5 | We attempt to bring in our agenda and react to the mass media with our values.

6 | We have to produce hope against the fear that emerged from the politics of the ruling elites, The people lost their property, work, pensions and their self-esteem; we have to find solutions for that.

7 | Eventually, we as the left have to overcome ourselves, overcome our history: we come from the history of the left, from the struggles of the 1970s. Now we have to lead the struggles which will produce the future left, the future of society. We have to find a way to make socialism a real idea, a real path to democracy, justice and social security. This does not take place somewhere up in the clouds, but down here in the squares.

### **DO NOT START WITH THE SOLUTIONS, START WITH THE PROBLEMS**

When the movement began there was no organization, no organizers. For the first time the extreme right and the left encountered each other in the square. How did we deal with this? First of all, the left decided to hold our previously planned anti-racist festival not parallel to the movement as scheduled, but to instead change its location to the square. We brought this suggestion forward as a proposal



Nawal El Saadawi,  
Occupy London  
22.11.2011  
wheelzwheeler  
① ② ③

to the assembly and it was adopted: »Yes, we have to advocate immigrants' rights.« We organized a cricket tournament of Pakistani immigrants in exactly the spot where the extremists normally gathered. When they returned to »their« spot on the square, they found Pakistanis playing cricket directly in front of the Greek parliament. They were not accustomed to this. This is but one of many examples of how we included the squares into our strategies. That is why it is so important to be present at the square and part of the movement – it is easy to complain from the outside that nationalist thought finds its way into the movement. It is more difficult enter the assembly and pull it towards the progressive side from within.

Secondly, in such a big movement, it is important to start by talking about the problems, not by talking about the solutions. We cannot go to the assembly and say »socialism is the solution«. That is the conclusion, the end. To come to the conclusion, you first have to look at the problems. From there the demands are developed – of the government, the EU etc. Based on the demands you have to develop actions, formulate programs, and then those programs need to be brought into Parliament. The connection between the left in Parliament – but not in the system – and the left on the street needs to be established consciously. From there a left program can arise with alternative solutions for the people on the streets and in the struggles. This is the right methodology; in it there can be no shortcuts. We cannot say: »The people on the square are right wing« or »They are not leftist enough, therefore I do not participate.« And we cannot start off by discussing the alternative.

We had a big assembly with 10,000 people who discussed democracy. Around us stood 5,000 police officers who the government claimed were protecting democracy. Democracy for whom? Do the 10,000 people in the assembly protect democracy or do the officers?

This is a good symbol for what happens in Syntagma Square. The process continued until day zero, when Memorandum II was voted on. Right now Memorandum III or IV are being prepared. We can only confront this with the unity of all anti-Memorandum forces; all the anti-government forces of the left and the progressive.

Since 1994, Pasok developed from left-wing social democracy to its current position in

which the vice president declared that democracy was not the solution because the people were not well-versed enough and could potentially make the wrong decision. »We know, what needs to be decided, they don't, and that's why we don't let them vote.« This process is not a specific phenomenon to Greece – as the propaganda of the lazy Greeks would like us to believe – it is neoliberal governance and an empowerment of the dominion of the state.

We have to develop forms of mass civil disobedience – we simply cannot afford to pay the new taxes. If 10,000 people did not pay it, perhaps they will be taken off the grid. But if one or two million people refused to do so, nobody could cut them off their services. Greece would be consumed in darkness.

Many people together can create a new hope for the Greek working-class. As individuals, however, we cannot achieve anything. Individuals are the first victims of the spending cuts: women, old citizens, youth. To fend off this devastation, the individuals must be protected collectively. This is the challenge the left must adopt.

*Translated from German by Tashy Endres*

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1 This refers to the Greek left wing party Synaspismos (Coalition of the left, the movements and of ecology). The author is a member of its executive committee and is responsible for their mass mobilizations and organizing. This article is based on his presentation at the »Transformative Organizing« conference of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation September 22nd – 24th 2011. (editorial note)

Picture: © Daniel Kolasinski, [www.dfkphotography.co.uk](http://www.dfkphotography.co.uk)



# THE NEW CULTURE OF STRIKES

## PRACTICAL EXAMPLES FROM STUTT GART

### BERND RIEXINGER

Germany is the industrialized country which, after Switzerland, boasts the fewest strike days anywhere in the world, which has largely to do with the near absence of big strikes in the industrial sector. The picture is quite different in the service and public sectors: In 2005/2006 there was a nine-week strike in Baden-Württemberg – somewhat shorter in other federal states – against an increase in working time; there were long strikes in retail against deterioration of the industry-wide collective agreement (2006/2007); and the labour struggle of employees in the social and educational service sectors (2008) for better pay and health protection. In 2009, for the first time in years or even decades, employees of the security industry struck. In 2010 there was the labour struggle in retail – in the first place in Baden-Württemberg – as well as the labour struggle of employees in public local transportation, which is continuing at the time of this writing, also in Baden-Württemberg, and the strike at Berlin's

Charité clinic. This wave also includes the labour struggle of cleaning personnel a few years ago, led by IG BAU, the 14-week strike of Telekom employees in 2007 and the five-day strike of the same group in 2010. For length and strike culture, the most recent strike of editors and journalists will also go down in history.

### **NEW OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS ARE EMERGING**

Alongside the classic occupational groups – workers in public service, bus and tram drivers, etc. – it is striking that new occupational groups are appearing on the scene and by no means taking a back seat. They principally involve women employees who make up the overwhelming majority in the educational professions and in retail. In both groups young employees – and in retail young employees with an immigrant background – are taking on growing importance.

Even in the current labour struggle in public local transport, alongside the most powerful striking group of bus and tram drivers, it is the repair and assembly shop employees and the overwhelmingly female employees of the Clients and Service Centre as well as ticket-control services, who have taken action. For strategic reasons it is those in ticket-control services who have chalked up the most strike days: by their walking out passengers continued to be served, while the revenues of the transport company were reduced. This strike strategy succeeded and gave the groups concerned greater self-confidence.

### **NEW CULTURE OF STRIKES AND DEMOCRATISATION OF THE STRIKE**

Ver.di's Stuttgart district is one of the country's most strike-intensive districts. Some of the

labour struggles, such as the struggle for the industry-wide collective agreement in retail or the strike against the introduction of the 40-hour week in the public sector, were substantially decided here. Without the length and intensity of the strikes in the Stuttgart region, wage agreements could hardly have been achieved. For this it was crucial that a new strike culture emerged from the kind of preparation and the way these labour struggles were carried out. The strikes were democratized and brought to the level of the employees. From the very beginning they were associated with regular public actions and collective strike assemblies, in which further steps were decided by *all* strikers. In this way a democratic and militant strike culture arose, which made it possible to conduct the strikes more intensively and for a longer period than elsewhere. Our thesis is that this way of carrying out strikes can be generalized and that the balance of forces can be positively influenced in favour of ver.di. We would like to illustrate this by two examples: the strikes in retail and in the social and educational services sector.

### **THE EXAMPLE OF RETAIL**

While in the public sector the volunteer strike leadership constituted the core of active strikers, in retail it was the district bargaining committee. To facilitate a rank-and-file-based wage policy, these committees were early on anchored in Baden-Württemberg's collective agreement. In the committee, on the district level, there are the representatives of the plants (especially of the striking plants), and they decide in common with the full-time representatives on how to proceed and on strike strategy. On December



31, 2005 the employers association announced their withdrawal from the industry-wide collective agreement in all retail collective bargaining sectors. Their aim was to abolish the supplements for late opening times (after 6:30 pm), night shifts (8:00 pm to 6:00 am), overtime and Saturday, Sunday and holiday work. For a full-time saleswoman that would have meant salary losses of 120 to 150 Euros a month. The employers association tied this attack to the salary and stipend reviews of spring 2006: They would only put out an offer for wage and stipend raises if ver.di negotiated the abolition of the supplements. Ver.di refused, the negotiations collapsed and ver.di was forced to organise strikes.

Up to this point, strikes in retail were as a rule one-day work stoppages. Often people

were happy if the strikers came as quickly as possible from the workplace entrance to union headquarters and parts of them did not get pulled into the shops by the managers. There were exceptions, as in the Mannheim district, which already managed at the time of the HBV (Commerce, Bank and Insurance Sector Workers Union) to conduct strikes for one to two weeks. In this labour struggle these boundaries were completely broken through. Single enterprises (especially H&M and ZARA) struck for the whole duration of the conflict, which lasted more than 20 weeks.

The wage conflict stretched over 15 months and came in August 2007 to a successful conclusion. Already in its preparatory phase many public actions (with few employees) were organized in Stuttgart's Königsstraße. These were essentially sandwich-board actions, which nevertheless captured a great deal of public attention. As a climax, a torch-light procession was carried out with ca. 200 employees to symbolize late and night work.

These activities contributed to improving the basis for strike activities. If hitherto ca. 10 to 12 enterprises in the Stuttgart district were ready and poised to strike – especially Kaufhof, Karstadt, some markets of Real, Kaufland/Handelshof as well as a few Baumarkts –, by the end of the struggle there were 40. A decisive factor in the dynamic of this labour struggle was the work teams of the five H&M branches on Stuttgart's Königsstraße (Stuttgart's main shopping avenue) and the employees of ZARA. Most employees are young, female, many of them with an immigration background. The factory councils have a similar composition and



Both pictures:  
Occupy Köln,  
Stefan Ostler  
① ② ③

are overwhelmingly militant. It is also interesting that it was possible to pull into the struggle the majority of students employed as so-called hourly workers. They showed distinctly less fear than the employees in the rather traditional enterprises and were determined to strike until they achieved a result. In so doing they introduced new forms of strike: for hours at a time they gathered in front of the customer entrances, walked in a circle so that the customers did not go in and developed a substantial repertoire of patter and songs to speak and sing. All together they moved along the Königsstraße from branch to branch. For the first time there was a strike during the Christmas business season, which had long been an unfulfillable wish of the militant ver.di secretaries.

It was crucial that the other enterprises were pulled in. They even found this form of active strike and the many actions to be fun. Public squares were thus »conquered«. Demonstrations are completely banned on the Königsstraße. However, it was possible successfully to assert, against the position of the authorities and of the police, that what was involved here was strikes and not demonstrations. And so for months the main shopping street was characterised by strikers and assemblies in front of the customers entrances, without the police intervening. The demonstrations and rallies were also extended to the neighbouring towns of the county around Stuttgart, so that even they saw not just strikes but public demonstrations.

## **MORE STRIKING ENTERPRISES**

In this way the number of striking enterprises was almost quadrupled and the strike's duration was notably extended. New enterprises – like Schlecker, new Kauflands, H&M branches in adjacent counties – were added and could be drawn into the labour struggle, and traditional enterprises could increase their strike intensity. In so doing it was well understood that the strikers in some branches would even be in the minority, but that it was important that they accumulate strike experience. In the end more than 30 plants were ready to go on strike without time limits. After three weeks the employers backed down, although the strike activities in other federal states had notably receded and many had made their peace with the lack of a collective agreement. The last strike day ended in a big festival in Stuttgart. The new contract was celebrated. In the 2009 and 2011 wage conflicts this experience could be built upon and strike participation in part broadened still more. However, the new contracts were not celebrated but sharply criticised (see below).

## **STRIKE ASSEMBLY: A PLACE FOR MOBILISATION AND DECISION**

Important spaces for mobilisation and democratisation of strikes are the strike assemblies. As a rule they take place daily. Exceptions are the so-called silent strikes, for example on weekends or on bridging days (long weekends), if recovery phases are deemed desirable. At these assemblies, there is mobilisation as well as discussion and decisions taken about further steps. Anyone can take the floor. It is important that there are regular reports on strikes in the

plants, delivered as a rule by factory councils. The full-time union officials have a mobilising as well as a moderating role. They are part of the strike and push things forward. This only succeeds if they have the trust of the strikers. Due to the varying power of mobilisation there are always conflicts and contradictions. Those who prefer to strike immediately and without limits come up against hesitating colleagues or simply those whose conditions are not as good. This has to be dealt with and brought to a conclusion that does not put a brake on the former and at the same time includes the latter. This has mostly turned out to be quite feasible. The strike, and strike planning, thus becomes the business of all strikers. This reinforces people's strength for the struggle, their commitment and their identification with the union.

## **THE EXAMPLE OF THE SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES**

Already in the 2006 strike educators played an important role. Alongside garbage collection, other worker sectors and the employees in clinics, they were the most important pillar of the labour struggle. However, this role was largely limited to Stuttgart. In the rural districts the readiness to strike was markedly less. In the area of social and educational services most employees feel they are underpaid for the quality of their work. This feeling is all the more valid that through the introduction of the TVÖD (Wage Agreement for Public Services – replacing the BAT) a considerable gap has arisen between younger education workers and those whose conditions were established by the BAT (Federal Employees Wage Agreement –

in effect up to 2005/2006). Added to this is a good labour-market-policy situation advantageous for union wage demands. This was seized on by ver.di, which conducted its own wage struggle for better pay (pay scale classification). For their demand for a healthcare protection wage agreement, ver.di was released from their pledge not to engage in industrial action. This demand took on its own additional weight.

In Stuttgart, in the run-up to the labour struggle, union-organized staff councils and union delegations paid visits to all educational institutions and informed the employees about the demands. For the first time, union secretaries visited numerous educational institutions in rural districts (Böblingen, Ludwigsburg and Rems-Murr). This turned out to be a good move: Strike participation was not only high in the state capital as expected but also for the first time in rural counties. Employees struck in county seats, but also in some smaller towns and communities, just as intensively as their colleagues in Stuttgart. Thus in the course of the strike there were public rallies not only in Stuttgart but in all district capitals. The Stuttgart colleagues went out to these small towns and contributed to making the demonstrations and rallies in some towns become the among the largest in recent history.

A strike culture similar to that in retail developed – regular strike assemblies, constant public actions, which were shaped in the most lively and imaginative ways. This was coupled with good media work. In this way the education workers and, with less participation, the social workers, braved out a strike that totalled seven weeks (spread over ca. three months).

This is remarkable, since the pressure from many parents and partly from the media was powerful. The employees would have struck further, if there had not been a federal-wide result that they rejected.

### **STRIKE GOOD, OUTCOME RATHER MEAGRE?**

The results of negotiations in the social and educational services were rejected by the overwhelming majority in Stuttgart. Measured against the demands they were too meagre, even if there were some advances especially for the younger workers. Crucial, however, was the fact that, in contrast to many other districts, it would have been possible in Stuttgart to continue the strike. Similar in retail: Here too the results of the last two wage negotiations were rejected by the majority, as was also the method by which the decisions were taken. More democracy and participation of the strikers in the final phases was and still is demanded.

We see in the various wage struggles a growing gap between geographically different mobilisation capacities in ver.di. In Stuttgart's retail sector, for example, there was more striking than in all of North Rhine-Westphalia. The situation was the same in the recent strike of editors and journalists. This problem has to be dealt with, if the employees in the strike strongholds are not eventually to become frustrated. Therefore that Ver.di work at generalising the methods of successful strikes. It is completely possible to extend principles and procedures for a progressive strike culture to the whole organization.

*Translated from German by Eric Canepa*

# THE EVERYDAY VIOLENCE OF NEOLIBERAL URBANISM

**AN INTERVIEW WITH  
NIK THEODORE BY DAVID HUGILL  
AND PETER BROGAN**

*A central feature of the efforts to build a new left in North America has been urban centred struggles and organizations. You and your colleagues Jamie Peck and Neil Brenner have insisted on using the language of »neoliberalism« when so many others have begun to pronounce its death. What lies behind this choice?*

Maybe the answer is, to paraphrase what Habermas said about modernity: yes neoliberalism is dead; dead but dominant. One of our positions has been that there hasn't been another ideological project to emerge as of yet that has sufficient weight to fundamentally challenge neoliberal tenets. And while neoliberalism has ceased to be generative of new policy ideas – we have seen a discrediting of neoliberal statecraft – at the same time neoliberalized forms of relations between places and individuals have worked there way into the operating system of capitalist globalization. And so, while neoliberalism ceases to have any new ideas about how to contend

with crisis, because the operating system has been so fundamentally neoliberalized, a single financial crisis isn't going to bring down the totality lock, stock and barrel.

*Many of us have become accustomed to understanding neoliberalism as a primarily destructive project but you've stressed that neoliberalization is a process of creative destruction. What does the creative side of neoliberalism look like?*

If we look at neoliberal urbanism – which has been a focal point of a lot of our work – we see a number of state strategies that are quite »productive« in terms of generating new or reworked forms of urban policy. So there is a creative side, if you will, to neoliberal restructuring. We can look at certain policy arenas and see what we mean. While we might have had the »end of welfare as we knew it« in the United States – a rolling back of welfare entitlement – we had a simultaneous rolling forward of workfare strategies and state surveillance of the poor.

In housing markets, where we've seen the razing of public housing developments, we've seen a rolling out of voucher systems and marketized/privatized systems of housing provision. Neoliberal urbanism and neoliberal statecraft haven't only been about dismantling inherited regulatory landscapes from a previous era; they have been about rolling forward a set of marketized, market-disciplinary forms of regulation and control. And that is seeping into evermore spheres of everyday life. That is the generative face of neoliberalism. That is its roll-out face to use Jamie and Adam [Peck and Tickell's] language. That is the creative face of neoliberalization.

In the case of the immigrant day laborers who gather in public spaces to search for work in the construction and landscaping industries, there are fundamental changes that are occurring in US labor markets and many workers' rights organizations found themselves facing similar challenges. Policy challenges, challenges from anti-immigrant forces, the erosion of labor standards, and other difficulties at the local level. Rather than trying to solve all these problems individually, why not get together and learn from each other collectively, to test each other's ideas, and to develop a broader-based strategy that gets beyond the local particularities of the situation and tries to move organizing and policy at a larger scale?

There are times when folks need to join together to mobilize to push or contest immigration policies at the federal level, for example, or to pressure government enforcement agencies to aggressively pursue unscrupulous employers who are engaging in wage theft. There are times when workers and other leaders need to band together to support each other's efforts. In Arizona right now, for example – where we are seeing very punitive immigration policy – the National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON) has mobilized its national network and allied with other networks like RTTC to put organizers on the ground in Arizona.

This sends the message that »your fight is our fight«, and it serves notice to policymakers in the state that people are watching and holding them into account for their actions and their policy decisions. When it is necessary to scale-up for fights that extend beyond the

local, these national networks have been able to mobilize in response to the challenges.

There are breaking points and opportunities, whether we seize them or not. They are around us. I think the point is to have a political analysis that has deep roots in grassroots, base-building organizing, and then the capacity to mobilize that base. What this means is for organizations to develop a shared analysis so that we can identify and exploit the breaking points that exist for progressive social change. I think the 2008 financial crisis was a missed opportunity politically for the left, a missed opportunity for progressive forces.

I don't think that the left seized upon it in a way that was needed. There was an opportunity to change the terms of the debate and to escape the straightjacket of neoliberal policy reforms, but I fear rather than doing that, we are winding up with deeper austerity measures and business-as-usual politics. I think Hurricane Katrina was another missed opportunity, and the right was faster than the left to mobilize in the face of catastrophe. It seems that no catastrophe is too great to prevent the right from manipulating it for their own advantage: in the case of Katrina conservatives used that moment to push through massive privatization initiatives and to try to gut prevailing-wage laws for government-funded revitalization efforts; in the case of the terrorist attacks on September 11th, they sought to bar airport security personnel from unionizing; and today in Wisconsin and elsewhere they are using state budget difficulties to remove the right of public employees to collectively bargain. Maybe there is something

noble about the left's restraint in not jumping on individual and community hardship to advance a political agenda. But we need to understand that crises are breaking points, days of reckoning, decision points. We have to have the analysis and the mobilization ready so that we can change the debate for the long term benefit of the cities in which we live.

*I wanted to ask you about the central place that many of these organizations – like the Right to the City Alliance (RTTC) and NDLO – have placed not only on education but also on research, within their structures. How are they developing research strategies and using research in their organizing? And also, how do you see your role as a scholar-activist doing research in collaboration with these groups?*

A lot of those organizations have a strong current of popular education that runs through their very core. They value leadership development and a de-stabilization of some of the traditional hierarchies between teacher and student, organizer and member, and so on. They are very comfortable unsettling those hierarchies, and they see this as fundamental to their work. If you look at the elements of popular education that they draw on, for example, you will see that they view education as a process of social transformation. It is part of consciousness-raising and leadership development. It is bringing to the surface some of the deep structural problems that affect the lives of members and their communities.

But they also politicize certain aspects of urban life that have often been naturalized, such as the idea that the poor should be displaced to make way for »development« or that immigrant



»Bail-out the people, not the banks!«  
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workers shouldn't expect to receive fair wages and decent treatment on the job. So, to understand that inequality is *produced*, that poverty is *produced* means that they can be the site of struggle and that urban development agendas and labor-market practices can be vital arenas for political projects aimed at progressive social change. There is a sense of moving together as a collectivity – not some vanguard leadership that then has a bunch of followers- but actually an organization of people moving together in a process of learning, reflecting and moving strategically informed social change.

I think that runs through the day laborer worker centers, it runs through the Right to the City organizations, and a lot of the »new« urban social movements that seem to be emerging in

the United States. This works well with the Centre for Urban Economic Development where I am director because I think one of our missions is to democratize the research process.

Every organization is in a constant process of planning and research, so let's not view research as something that happens »over there« in the Ivory Tower but instead let's understand that research is something that is done by these organizations as strategic actors within urban environments and policy arenas. Let's become involved in analytically and methodologically rigorous research projects, but this time let's do it from the point of view of the community and these organizations – from the point of view of the research questions *they* value and think are important.

Let's turn the tables and see these places, not as some sort of urban laboratory where experiments are conducted on research subjects, but as sites of strategic thinking and analysis.

It is to demystify the research process. To demystify and democratize this process and say »you as organizers, you as community residents or low-wage workers can be the researchers and investigators.« I think this works very nicely with a popular education ethos, which says that we are going to learn and bring to the surface elements of the urban condition in the work of social transformation. We are going to be involved in the production of knowledge. Some of those organizations have taken it a step further and have said »we want to ›own‹ our issue.«

We as workers, we as community residents, want to be viewed as experts on our issue. I mean really, who could tell you more about labor market precariousness than a day laborer? How do you tell an unauthorized immigrant about the effects of immigration policy? How do you tell a domestic worker what it means to be a domestic worker? They know more about these experiences than anyone else. Yet their knowledge is systematically and pervasively ignored, undervalued and dismissed. What we need to do is to help these organizations achieve the status so that their knowledge is valorized.

Not in an uncritical way. It's not that they don't need to be challenged. They need to be challenged as well. But we need to see this as a leveling of the playing field on both sides, if we want to call these sides – the academy and the community – need to mutually challenge each other, to make sure that we have the best

analysis that's possible. I think this is part of a democratization of research, part of a democratization of knowledge and a part of respecting the knowledge that comes from lived experience and that comes from the grassroots.

I'll give you a quick example. There is a growing wage theft movement in the United States, and we've seen an increase in organizing, policymaking and research around the issue of the nonpayment of wages by unscrupulous employers. In Los Angeles, these efforts are being led at the community level by a coalition of day laborers, carwash worker, janitors, taxi drivers, and others. Policy groups and elected officials have been drafting legislation to strengthen laws and enforcement, but workers are facing various forms of retaliation when they try to exercise their rights.

A committee of worker leaders from across these occupations are directly involved in writing legislation that brings to the table concrete ways in which employers are evading the law, as well as ways in which they are retaliating against workers. Sometimes it involves really cheap, sneaky tactics. For example, in the carwash industry where the CLEAN campaign is organizing workers, employers are required under law to read aloud the provisions of a recent labor-standards law as a way to increase transparency and accountability.

But the law didn't specify *when* these provisions had to be read aloud. So some carwash owners took to the practice of reading the provisions before the carwash had opened and after the carwash had closed, in effect nullifying the law. Based on their experiences and knowledge of industry practices, the workers

involved in the committee are able to bring their insights to bear on new laws and to significantly improve these laws by anticipating the ways in which unscrupulous employers might try to circumvent workers' rights legislation.

*You've talked about how movement strategies and histories of resistance often travel across borders and get taken up in new organizations. How have these transnational relationships been politically helpful?*

One of the fascinating developments – and I think it is a development that is going to be incredibly generative in years to come – is the way in which migrants to the US are bringing their own knowledge and language of social struggles, and their own repertoires of contention, to the US. As they join social movements they are able to inject these ideas into US organizing contexts. You don't just simply import – off the shelf – something from another country and deposit it into a US-based social movement. All of these ideas have to be worked with and adapted. But if you look at the various popular education methodologies that are being used, you see that these are mobile technologies that can be flexibly deployed in various contexts and locales when in the hands of skilled leaders.

Some of the key ideas around ways to understand precarious work, for example, around different organizing tactics, about using education itself as a vehicle for social change have built on the organizing ideas and analysis of migrant workers themselves. Of course, some of these ideas were in the United States already and I've talked to many popular educators who now live and work in the United

States and they were impressed to see some of the same currents in the civil rights movement with the freedom schools, the Highlander Center, and sites of democratic organizing.

So these currents existed in the United States, they existed in parts of Asia, they existed in parts of Africa, and what we are seeing is this productive melding of different traditions, and really, cross-cultural, cross-national learning, around organizing strategies. And if you look at some of the most vibrant organizing in the United States, both within the labor movement and outside of it, much of it involves migrant workers who are bringing, again, different repertoires of contention and different organizing styles to bear on the real-world realities that they are facing in the United States.

And I think the day laborer worker centers have been a real seed-bed of these ideas, and they have attracted organizers with deep histories of social struggle in their countries of origin. In the day labor context we are talking about people from countries such as El Salvador, Mexico, Ecuador, Korea and elsewhere who are bringing their experiences into productive tension with each other, to challenge each other, but all with the same purpose of driving organizing initiatives forward. This is quite a fascinating period right now.

*In the day labor context, how have organizers been able to bring these diverse traditions together when the competition on the street corner or at the hiring site can be so brutal?*

I think this operates at a number of different levels but at its core – from an organizing perspective – there is an openness, a predisposition to being open to new ideas, a pre-

disposition to an acceptance to be challenged, to have your conventions and norms unsettled by new ideas. I think this is an important part of day laborer organizing. But how do you work that out on the ground? Day laborers have faced a unique set of challenges that they have had to adapt to.

They have had to be creative about how they were going to deal with the barriers that exist in those segments of the labor market. So you have a situation in day labor where there are no social supports – or very little in the way of social supports- and so workers are out there competing on the corner for a limited supply of job opportunities. So just the everyday economic realities of that type of employment relationship place very real barriers between individuals.

At the same time, if they don't carry out solidaristic action there is going to be a race to the bottom in terms of wages and working conditions. So while they compete head to head for job opportunities, somehow they need to find a way to cooperate to defend labor standards. Somehow they need to collectively set minimum wage rates, collectively shun unscrupulous employers, collectively fight for their rights.

But on the corner you have people from a wide range of nationalities – different countries in Central and North America, different countries in Africa and Asia – so how do you get past the nationalistic barriers that may divide workers? You have on the one hand, the economic barriers that mean if you get a job, I may not, and then the national barriers that often keep us apart anyway. How do you, in other words, achieve international solidarity

on the street corner? The day labor organizers realize that they need to try and bridge that particular divide. They need to be able to build social solidarity at the front end so they are able to change or contest the violence of day labor employment arrangements on the back end.

So things that are part of everyday life: sport, play, theatre, humour – things that come not from the work world but from the life world- are often used as tools for learning and building a collective consciousness. For example, soccer is played very differently from one country to another but when you put together day laborers on the same soccer team and play against another team – you have workers from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Mexico – they have got to work out their stylistic differences on the pitch. Once they have begun to work out some of those differences they are able to see that they can work together, and when this cooperation is reinforced through other solidaristic activities, it has led to surprising organizing victories at informal hiring sites.

There are a lot of examples where organizers have used activities outside of the workplace to foster solidarity. This helps to remove some of the barriers that stand between people. These techniques, and others, are used to open up spaces of dialogue, spaces of organizing, and by adapting techniques that come from the life-world, they are a way to break open spaces of mutual understanding and the fostering of worker solidarity.

*This article was first published on MRzine,  
<http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org>*

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