

WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO FIGHT THE CUTS?

A Statement from New York Solidarity

A Socialist, Feminist and Anti-Racist Organization

www.nysolidarity.org ★ www.solidarity-us.org



WE WON PUBLIC SERVICES THROUGH STRUGGLE...

Feb. 1965 Successful welfare strike by recipients and workers raises benefit levels & decreases caseloads

Oct. 1969 Black and Puerto Rican students **take over City College**, helping win open admissions to CUNY

July 1970 600 Young Lords members and supporters who **occupy Lincoln Hospital** win new facility and expanded services

June 2010 1,000 public school students **walk out of class**, helping stop proposed cuts to student MetroCards

AND NOW THEY WANT TO CUT THEM!

TODAY Human Resources Administration **eliminates rental assistance** for domestic violence survivors.

TODAY CUNY targeted for **\$84 million in cuts**, raising tuition and cutting student loan subsidies

TODAY Public Hospitals plans **elimination of over 4,000 jobs** through 2014 (approx. 1,000 / year)

TODAY MTA: Overall **15% cut to the transit system budget** this year, including over 3,400 jobs

Why the Cuts?

Republican and Democratic politicians claim that cuts to public services are necessary because of the recession. However, they have been cutting funding for health, education and social welfare for more than thirty years.

Yes, the recession has decreased tax revenues to federal, city and state governments. But public services could be maintained and even expanded if we restored tax rates on corporations and the wealthy to the levels they were just 30 years ago.

The public services facing the axe today—like limits on class size or subsidized mass transit and public colleges—were not free gifts to the public. Like Social Security and Medicare, they were the results of massive and militant grassroots struggles, mainly during the Great Depression of the 1930s and the Civil Rights revolution of the 1960s.

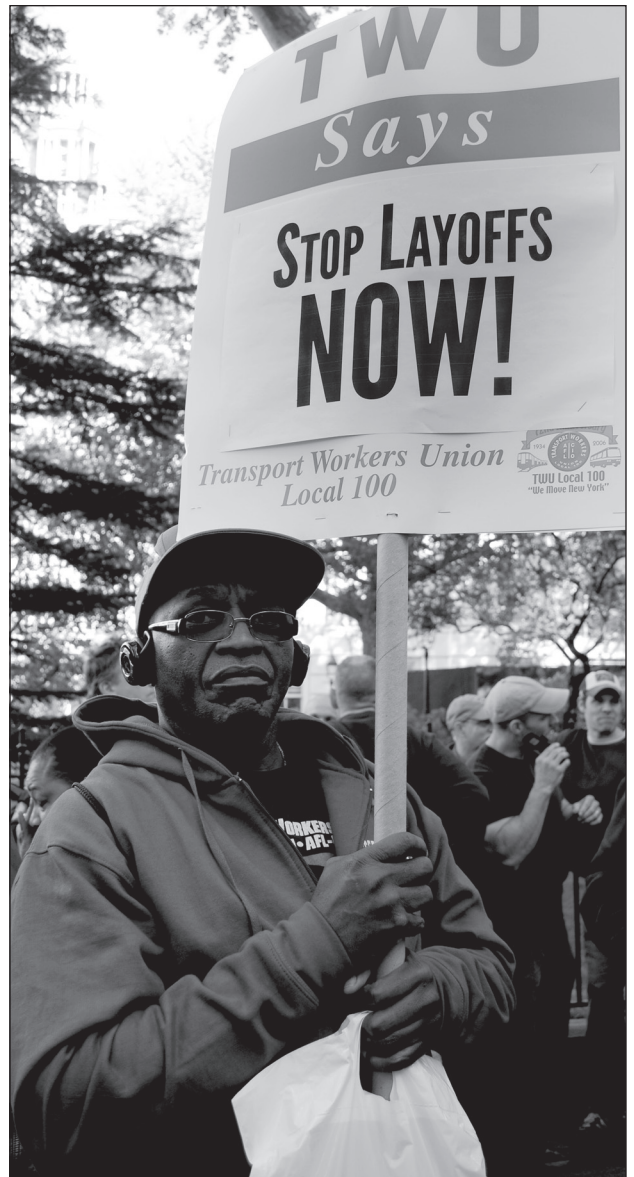
During those decades of upheaval, millions of workers—men and women, employed and unemployed—students and people of color, took direct action to improve their lives. When necessary, they violated unjust or repressive laws. They shut down “business as usual,” all over the United States, through occupations of government offices, schools and workplaces, by general strikes, and massive civil disobedience in the streets. Over time, employers and politicians gave ground, out of fear for their profits and their power.

For decades afterwards, these gains were untouched, for fear of reigniting the firestorm that produced them. Then, in the mid-seventies, financial institutions, employers and politicians resumed the offensive. In NYC, for example, they froze the wages of public workers, raised the subway fare, and ended free tuition in the City University. When the unions and communities failed to mount an effective fightback, the attack on the public sector picked up steam.

After 30 years of retreat, most unions—whether at private companies or in the public sector—seem incapable of taking the offensive. Most leaders of public sector unions are more interested in maintaining “access” to pro-corporate politicians of both parties than in mobilizing their members. They mainly rely on lobbying and electing unreliable “friends of labor” to office.

For their part, most union members have little confidence in their ability to take the initiative and win a fight with their bosses. This has to change and the few fights that do take place provide hope that members will gain the confidence and build the organizations they need to win. In the process, some existing union officers will respond to the pressure from the rank and file and new leaders will emerge as new struggles are built from below.

The massive social upheavals of the 1930s and 1960s were not sudden or spontaneous. They followed decades of slow, patient organizing. The groundwork was laid mainly by socialists, communists and other leftists, who worked with rank and file workers and community activists of every political viewpoint. What most of these ground breakers shared was an inspiring vision of a radical break with the oppression of the past.



Building a Fightback Against the Cuts Today

Today, to fulfill such a vision, we have to start with defensive actions that can get people into motion after decades of defeats and setbacks. In Chicago, community members and teachers recently occupied a school to prevent the city from closing it. In L.A., cuts to education prompted walkouts, arrests, and a hunger strike. Closer to home, community and union activists mobilized to save free transportation on the buses and subways for students traveling to or from school. Struggles over funding for public schools and CUNY, to restore bus service, and prevent layoffs continue.

These first steps can be difficult for an isolated individual. As members of Solidarity, a socialist, feminist and anti-racist national organization, we work together and with others to launch such projects. Whether in public or private sector unions, as public school teachers, transit workers, college professors, Teamsters, communications workers, student activists in CUNY, or community activists, we are active in building such networks. We invite you to find out more about us on our websites, and to contact us so we can share experiences and strategies to rebuild a mass movement to fight the cuts.

Solidarity is a socialist, feminist and anti-racist organization based throughout the U.S.

For more information about Solidarity and our activities, check out the national website at www.solidarity-us.org—and our NY branch website, www.nysolidarity.org—and email us at nyc@solidarity-us.org with any questions you have about this leaflet or getting involved.