



# **GREATER TORONTO WORKERS' ASSEMBLY**

## **Discussion Bulletin**

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# The GTWA: Political Instrument or Movementist Coalition?

By Louis Theodore

Perhaps the most important division in the Greater Toronto Workers' Assembly is not a political division as such, but a division as to the very nature of the Workers' Assembly project. These divisions have existed since the founding of the project and can be summed up, ideal-typically, as a division between [1] the view that sees the Assembly as a network or coalition, and [2] the view that sees the Assembly as a nascent political instrument.<sup>1</sup> Both approaches see the Left in a position of unprecedented weakness and defeat, but they offer different responses as to how to get out of the miasma. I will argue here for the second approach for the following reasons. The first is that, with the weakness of the Left, relying on the same horizontalist and pluralist approach that has characterized organizing for the last quarter century seems futile, if not defeatist. The second is that, far from being "authoritarian," a structured political instrument can be *far more democratic* than an approach that unites diverse movements with their informal leaderships based often on social milieus. The third is that structuring our movements can provide for the accountability that will allow for different tendencies to deliberate and synthesize various approaches. To truly take advantage of the strength and cadre of the diverse organizations and independent activists of the Left requires a body in which approaches can be deliberated, and then collectively decided upon, subject of course to constant rethinking and reformulating. Finally, and underlying my entire argument, I will posit that calling for a political instrument is based on a reading of the conjuncture that differs from the "movementist" approach in that it speaks to a skepticism towards spontaneity humbled by a cognizance of the dangers inherent in hyper-centralization.

The "movementist" approach to the GTWA seems to treat it as an organization in which the various left

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<sup>1</sup> Political Instruments, a concept that primarily is inspired by the works of thinkers such as Michael Lebowitz, Marta Harnecker and Istvan Meszaros, are not political parties in the sense of 20<sup>th</sup> century communist or social democratic parties, nor are they organizations that drop the pretension of being a revolutionary vanguard. They are vanguards without being "vanguardist" or, more properly, "democratic centralist" without being "bureaucratic centralist." Political instruments are accountable to social and labour movements, but also acknowledge that movements, whether workers' movements or broader social movements, need coordination and leadership that in turn is coordinated and led by the movements in a structured and democratic organization. See for example Harnecker, M. "Ideas for the Struggle" <http://www.socialistproject.ca/documents/struggle.pdf>

groups gain support for their own projects and coordinate collaborative actions in a sort of mass front. A correlate to this standpoint is that the Workers' Assembly is one of many organizations on the Toronto Left, existing alongside organization X, Y and Z. This viewpoint sees the constitution of a structured political instrument, a revolutionary body, as premature, and sees the role of socialist organizing as building and working with social movements that will, in time, attain a certain level of political development whilst remaining autonomous. Yet operating beneath the surface of this approach seems to be a lack of confidence in a concrete political program that can unite our movements, which paradoxically becomes an implicit political program in that does indeed have its own political line, as it were, and an implicit assumption that this line will eventually be adopted, but not yet. In place of developing a collective politics, what is offered is a Left pluralism.

This Left pluralism is a healthy antidote to 20<sup>th</sup> century authoritarian socialism. Particularly important elements of this approach are an acceptance of the virtue of some types of anarchist thought, an insistence on an anti-racist, feminist and queer-positive approach, in contrast to much old-fashioned Marxism-Leninism that dismissed such questions and labeled anarchism "infantile". Yet even anarchists, at their most successful, created structured organizations such as during the Spanish Civil War in which socialists and anarcho-syndicalists formed workers' **assemblies** that were anything but horizontalist. Indeed, to quote Marx and Engels' greatest contemporary, Joseph Dietzgen, "while anarchists may have many mad and brainless individualists in their ranks, socialists have an abundance of cowards. For this reason I care about the one as much as the other. The majority of both camps are in need of education, and this will bring a reconciliation in time."

Yet the reconciliation Dietzgen spoke of, as a Marxist working with anarchists in the 1880s, has not come to fruition yet. We all need more education. Yet it does need to be said that there are very few Marxists left who don't see the virtue of working with anarchists, but with some caveats, there are many anarchists who will only work with Marxists in a sort of "anything goes" way, refusing to move beyond approaches that may have been appropriate in the heady early days of the Global Justice movement. These approaches and networks found themselves lost in the different context that developed in the George W. Bush era, but have found a new lease on life in the last few years, yet the tragedy of their failure to adapt to qualitatively different conjunctures must not be repeated as farce. The

horizontalism that has characterized the Left, the “retreat from class” and valorization of youth and students, has actually been a contributing factor to the ongoing defeats suffered by the Left in the last half century. In place of coalition politics, a structured political instrument seems to be the only agency in which the collective forces of the Left can coalesce and eventually build a revolutionary alternative, not merely to the conjunctural forms of appearance of capitalist social relations (Ford, Hudak et al.) but to develop our popular capacities to actually overturn these relations.

Yet the mere suggestion of creating a structured political instrument evokes knee-jerk responses that such a project would be “authoritarian” and that criticisms of other approaches are “sectarian.”<sup>2</sup> I will submit, however, that a structured political instrument is, in a practical sense, far more democratic than a movementist approach. While the latter relies on informal social networks and friendship as leadership, the former relies on democratically deliberated policies, leadership and campaigns. There is a real danger, within and beyond the Assembly, of having informal networks and groups of friends acting as “powers behind the throne,” and indeed this danger cuts across all fractions of the Greater Toronto Workers’ Assembly. Of course, this can not be entirely eliminated, but having an elected coordinating committee mandated to make programmatic appeals to the general assembly, which, once adopted, can become policy, is – in practice – an antidote against social networks acting as informal caucuses. A response to this is that the very idea of having a collective policy based on the votes of the majority of the members of the general assembly is itself undemocratic as it demands of those who differ with the adopted approach to “fall into line.” Yet one can respond to this critique in a twofold sense. The first reply is that it is far more undemocratic to push for organizational inertia than it is to ask those who lose a vote to work, within the GTWA, according to the democratically expressed will of the membership. The second reply is that there is nothing stopping those who disagree with the approaches adopted by the General Assembly to agitate and pass motions overturning what they disagree with, and in turn, to continue to work with their own organizations. Many of the most solid organizers in the GTWA have been openly critical of the direction of the organization; yet have stayed firmly within the project, even taking on leadership roles in some important campaigns. Others have instead attempted to build other projects with a less ambitious scope, turning back to the Assembly when support is needed. The first of these two approaches seems more principled.

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<sup>2</sup> The Workers’ Assembly must aspire to be non-sectarian, and indeed, it has not lived up to that aspiration. With that said, it often seems to be the case that some will not engage with critiques of their position, instead labeling such critiques “sectarian,” thus silencing any deliberative discussion.

This goes to perhaps the most important reason why the GTWA must develop as a political instrument. Assembly members come from a variety of different traditions of socialism, anarchism and anti-capitalism, radical trade unions, anti-poverty, migrant justice, and a whole bevy of other traditions. Some of us see the Assembly – aside perhaps from our union local – as our predominant political space. Others work within the Assembly alongside other organizations and still others primarily see the Assembly as a space for recruitment and mobilization. In a political instrument, these latter two options would allow for these organizations to not only still exist, but thrive with an institutional background that is not a mere networking coalition, but a space in which connections can be made on a practical as well as theoretical level. Many people who politically came of age in the last quarter century – myself included – never joined any socialist organizations as we felt that there was no inherent contradiction, let’s say, between ideas of “Socialism from below,” Maoist conceptions of the “Mass Line,” and anarchist/left-communist ideas of workers’ councils/assemblies. Yet many organizations are stuck with one or another of these approaches, to a point of perhaps non-dogmatic dogmatism, to coin a phrase. Would it not be better to attempt, on a theoretical and practical level, to develop a new politics, a new operationalization of what Jodi Dean has recently called “the Communist Horizon.” This is what Marx called the unity of the diverse. The simple way of putting this is that there is no reason why any left organizing should be happening outside of the Greater Toronto Workers’ Assembly as a coordinating body that encourages membership initiative and respects the autonomy of other organizations, hoping that these other organizations eventually formally dissolve into the Assembly. The aim would be not merely to have representatives in every organization, but to be like the IWW, Communist and Trotskyist parties of the thirties which acted as “infrastructures of dissent,” to use Alan Sears’ term. This infrastructure, as noted, through general assemblies and community councils, would act as a deliberative and legislative body on the activities of the entire municipal Left, to share skills and prevent, for example, the peculiarity of having two May Day marches.

In order to manifest itself as a political instrument, influential forces within the Assembly, from a variety of currents, should consider developing means of communication in order to exert a sort of discipline, to use an unfashionable phrase, on their popular bases. For example, more and more members of the Assembly, when speaking at events, meetings or Assemblies, no longer – in Assembly spaces – identify as coming from organization X, Y or Z, they instead identify as members of the Assembly (and perhaps their union local). This deceptively simple step of projecting the Assembly as a hegemonic body within the Left will

foster both a sense of loyalty and a sense that disagreements and critiques can be heard more effectively within a context of working within the Assembly itself, building towards something greater than the sum of its parts.

The broad point being made here has to do with an analysis of the conjuncture, of the crisis of capitalism and the uneven and combined recoveries, the growth of the Left in some places, like Quebec or Nepal, and the weakness in others. We need to look at the victories, limited as they may be – the formation of a broad left political instrument in Quebec, a Communist Prime Minister of what was only a few years back a monarchy – and ask ourselves what they did, and how it applies to our context. What the cadre of Quebec Solidaire, or the Nepalese Maoists did is that they went to people where they were, but in turn, weren't afraid to lead them. They allowed a multiplicity of tendencies to co-exist, but they attempted to, and are continuing to attempt to synthesize them. Most importantly, while they, like other revolutionaries and radicals, have seen some virtue in spontaneity, they have found that it is insufficient. Perhaps one can explain the movementist approach to seeing capitalist crisis as having an

automaticity of its own, and what is needed are movements that can take charge as the crisis becomes insurmountable. Yet this, it would seem, is not how capitalist crisis works, as it is defined as much, if not more, by its countertendencies. The purpose of an anti-capitalist political instrument, then, should not merely be to combat capitalism when it doesn't work, but to combat capitalism when it *does* work. It is no accident that, in advanced capitalist countries, the Left has grown at times of relative economic prosperity, not crisis. The implication of this point is not that we need to have our own recipe for economic prosperity (though Fernando Gapasin and Bill Fletcher's idea for Workers' Assemblies does involve industrial cooperatives). Rather it is that we need to actually fight capitalism and transform and replace the state, not wait for it to spontaneously fall apart by its own contradictions, as movements spontaneously develop out of its ashes.

The Workers' Assembly can go in this direction, or it can splinter, be one of many niche organizations, as the broad Left liquidates into social movements, small socialist sects and the NDP. It seems that the former option will provide a far more effective fightback than fragmentation and social democracy.

## **The United Front Strategy: An Evaluation of the GTWA and a Vision for the Public Sector Campaign**

By Paul Gray

In these heightened times of fast-paced politics, accusations abound that the GTWA is 'glacial': 'Sure, the GTWA talks the talk, but it is too slow to walk the walk. In trying to please everyone, they please no one.' This, I think, owes to the heterogeneous composition of a revolutionary association that houses diverse and often contradictory traditions. Strategy—eminently concerned with the *specific* issue, the *particular* action, the *precise* opportunity—is difficult when maintaining a dynamic balance between a variety of traditions and tactics. Attempting to hastily reconcile these tensions by choosing a single struggle around a single issue using a single tactic will shatter the GTWA into its various tendencies. While it is often admitted that our progress is sluggish, our events a seemingly endless cycle of 'good starts' and 'promising beginnings,' the sentiment remains that it is better to work together than to return to the comfort of obscurity.

In this the GTWA aspires to that spirit of democracy immortalized in Pericles' funeral oration:

'We decide or debate, carefully and in person, all matters of policy, holding, not that words and deeds go ill together, but that acts are

foredoomed to failure when undertaken undiscussed.'

Although our discussions have been many and our actions few and measured, this relation between *lexis* and *praxis*, deliberation and action, is crucial if we are to develop a coherent politics appropriate for the challenges of the twenty-first century.

In order for this process to work, however, it must occur in open and democratic spaces. For too long the expression of personal opinion and strategic conviction has taken place in the time between meetings and in the corridors between meeting spaces. When I observe a cluster of cells quietly accusing the New Socialist Group of 'proto-anarchism' while another separate cluster of cells inconspicuously derides the Socialist Project of 'being-to-the-right-of-Lenin', I fear for the whole petri dish. If we are to develop a more cohesive culture, we must realize that developing a politics of a new type is an experiment within which the scientists are themselves the subject-matter.

The only way to thaw this glacier is by exposing the fast-frozen ideas of our various traditions to the sunlight

of critical scrutiny. This includes debates over the ideas and strategies of past revolutionary leaders and movements. In this spirit, I think it is crucial that we think of the GTWA in general and the Public Sector Campaign (PSC) in particular as potential revitalizations of the united front strategy.

In 1921, the Russian Revolution was mired in civil war, failed revolutionary upsurges in both Germany and Italy meant an ebb of revolutionary fervour in Western Europe, and most importantly, WWI had split the united world socialist movement into the widely discredited pro-war social democratic parties of the Second International, the 'centrists' allied to the Vienna Union in the 'Two-and-a-Half-International', and the anti-war, revolutionary minority of the Third or Communist International. Realizing that the majority of workers were committed to reformist social democracy, the leaders of the Comintern devised the united front as the tactic that would overcome these obstacles to united working class action.

The united front tactic has two essential elements. The first element, which can be characterized as *interdependence*, is Communist workers struggling alongside reformist workers:

The united front tactic is simply an initiative whereby the Communists propose to join with all workers belonging to other parties and groups and all unaligned workers in a common struggle to defend the immediate interests of the working class against the bourgeoisie. Every action, for even the most trivial everyday demand, can lead to revolutionary awareness and revolutionary education; it is the experience of struggle that will convince workers of the inevitability of revolution and the historic importance of Communism.<sup>3</sup>

The second element, which can be characterized as *independence*, is maintaining the autonomy of the Communist Parties amidst the interdependence of mutual struggle:

Any attempt by the Second International to interpret the united front as an organisational fusion of all the 'workers' parties' must of course be categorically repudiated.

The existence of independent Communist Parties and their complete freedom of action in relation to the bourgeoisie and counter-revolutionary

social democracy is the most important historical achievement of the proletariat.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the united front strategy creates a dynamic interplay between independence and interdependence.

By making appeals for a unified working class movement directly to rank-and-file workers, the Communists attempted to circumvent the leaderships of the various workers' organizations who, seeking to protect their fiefdoms from outside influence, conducted their limited struggles in uncompromising isolation. Nevertheless, these calls for unity cannot fall on deaf ears. If workers are not persuaded by calls for a unified working class movement, there is no mutual struggle between Communists and reformists; there is no transformation of reformists into revolutionaries; there is no united front. If successful, the united front creates the conditions wherein Communist workers can actively connect the immediate, minimal demands of reformist workers to the ultimate, maximal demands of conquering state power with a workers' government.

The character of these reforms is subject to constant struggle within the united front. Communists impress upon workers that it is not only the demands that count but also the ways in which they are fought for. Bureaucratic and juridical ways of pursuing demands demobilize workers once the battle for these reforms is won or lost. Spurning 'proper' political methods, a militant united front provides the opportunity to build the political capacities of workers, mobilize broad social forces, and create relationships that continue beyond specific demands.

While the Communist tradition is rife with strategic errors—some with horrific consequences—the united front remains a crucial strategy for contemporary revolutionary politics. Indeed, the Free and Accessible Transit campaign (FAAT) has initiated something akin to a united front strategy. By forming alliances with groups whose modest goals do not extend much further than free fare on smog days, the FAAT can consistently relate inaccessible transit to the general de-funding of all public services while also persuading these groups toward the maximal demand of free and accessible transit, itself a minimal demand in relation to the de-commodification of all public goods. Nevertheless, adapting the united front to the unique nature of the GTWA requires transforming the meanings of both 'independence' and 'interdependence'. We begin first with 'independence'.

Amidst the failures of Never-Existing-Socialism and the widespread defeat and fragmentation of revolutionary social forces in the twentieth century, there emerged a widespread sentiment on the radical left that

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<sup>3</sup> 'Theses on Comintern Tactics', Fourth Congress of the Comintern:  
<http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/4th-congress/tactics.htm>

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

sectarianism will necessarily consign us to obscurity. For this reason, diverse radical tendencies formed the GTWA on the basis of *non-sectarian independence*. Consequently, the basis of affiliation to the GTWA is not a positive conception of revolution, such as Communism as distinct from Social Democracy, but a *negative* notion of revolution, namely, *anti-capitalism*. By coming together around what we are against, the GTWA provides the foundation for the gradual determination of what we are for.

This is the unique character of 'independence' embodied by the GTWA. We are independent from other revolutionary organizations on the basis of our non-sectarianism; we are independent from reformist organizations on the basis of our anti-capitalism. This is crucial for understanding the specific nature of 'interdependence' in our united front strategy.

The leaders of the Comintern envisioned 'interdependence' as a relation between Communists and reformist workers. We, on the other hand, are not a homogenous entity. Thus, alongside the traditional united front, wherein reformist workers are persuaded towards revolutionary politics, there exists a united front *within* the GTWA, wherein diverse revolutionary traditions persuade each other towards *particular forms* of revolutionary politics. This, the *internal* united front, occurs because contending visions of revolutionary activity and the post-capitalist society dwell within our revolutionary association.

This is why it is crucial that the GTWA choose political projects that unify the otherwise fragmented sections of the working class. This is the animus behind FAAT: because inaccessible transit adversely affects a diverse array of workers (urban and suburban, commuters and transit-users, racialized, gendered, and disabled), this campaign appeals to different traditions within the GTWA and thereby provides an opportunity for their reconciliation. Campaigns such as these create an active relation between the internal united front, where different revolutionary traditions struggle alongside each other within the GTWA, and the external united front, where GTWA members struggle alongside reformist workers through and beyond the GTWA. Ongoing political discussions within the GTWA produce the tactics implemented in our campaigns, the merits and pitfalls of which are soberly assessed through a constant process of evaluation and adaptation. This constant unfolding of *lexis* and *praxis*, of deliberation and action, is why the GTWA has often appeared 'glacial'.

Like FAAT, the PSC must implement a united front strategy, but on a much larger scale. There are, however, tensions arising within the PSC analogous to those in the broader fight against austerity. The PSC is beset on either side by two contending social forces. On the one hand, members of the GTWA have formed

the Stop the Cuts (STC) campaign. That this coalition was formed outside of the GTWA indicates the extent to which many, even within our own domain, are not yet convinced by the Assembly project. On the other hand, there is the Labour Council that, because we do not have enough of a presence, is largely unaware of our politics. Both tendencies are subject to the same limitations that confronted us during the G20 protests. On the one hand, the absence of centralization in coalitional politics makes difficult the sustaining of political relationships beyond single events. On the other hand, the bureaucratic centralization typical of traditional collective bargaining ensures that it often fails to link union struggles with broader class struggles. Furthermore, both tendencies have been overly-dependent on rallies that, frankly, are too easy to ignore. Resistance must be disruptive and the most effective form of disruption remains the cessation of labour. But, poor people's and immigrant movements, when isolated from the labour movement, rarely have the strike option and must therefore resort to other forms of direct action that are easy to criminalize and crush. Conversely, the labour movement, dependent on sectional bargaining, is disconnected from communities and broader class issues, making it easy to mobilize public sentiment against strikes.

The STC and Labour Council have called separate actions on September 26<sup>th</sup>. This continues a tendency illustrated most poetically by the simultaneous and separate Labour Day [May 1] marches:

'The Workers! Divided! We'll Meet Together Later!'

There are significant portions of the GTWA that are sympathetic to one or the other tendency, and privileging one over the other will shatter the GTWA into its constituent traditions. This is why it is crucial that we make the GTWA the site of strategic discussion, the nexus between these and other separate tendencies, lest the lack of discussion, debate, deliberation, and decision result in isolated and conflicting actions. Only in the heat of fiery debate do these perspectives become malleable and blend to form a panoramic window. In its absence, they harden into shards that never quite fit together, and thus distort reality.

A crucial lesson must be drawn from the Days of Action. While this innovative series of one-day general strikes created good relationships between unions and communities, these relationships were not sustained over the long term. This is reminiscent of the first STC meeting where an activist asked, 'Why are we just beginning this now? Why isn't there already something in place?' Amidst the G20 protests, many of us pondered the absence of an association capable of coordinating resistance into a coherent, long-term working class movement. Now we have one. The GTWA *is* that organization.

In the short term, the PSC should, on September 26<sup>th</sup>, attempt to connect various Labour Council locals to the neighbourhood committees formed during the break-out groups at STC's September 10<sup>th</sup> rally. These connections will depend on where the various locals deliver services, and where their workplaces and meeting halls are located. For example, the PSC and Flying Squad could try to connect recently locked-out IATSE workers, whose local and workplace are on Adelaide and Front, with a downtown neighbourhood committee. In the long term, we need to penetrate workers' institutions such as Labour Council, not by appealing to unsympathetic leaders, but by appealing directly to rank-and-file workers. They are the ones who can put pressure on their leaderships. They are the ones who can assume leadership in the fight against austerity. Combined, these can provide the basis for a united front.

In the foreseeable future, we are successful to the extent that workers and their institutions increasingly orient their activities towards the GTWA. By this criterion, we have a lot of work to do.

No doubt many of you disagree with much that is expressed here. I hope so: it is a sure sign of a vibrant organization. I hope that you express your critiques in the under-utilized pages of the IDB and in our open meetings, rather than the discreet channels of listservs.

Although much of this essay has been gleaned from various conversations within the GTWA, the errors are mine. Parts of this essay came from an earlier, unpublished piece.

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## **Public Sector Campaign Strategy Proposal** By Paul Gray

We are set to have an important political discussion at the next Public Sector Campaign (PSC) meeting. A broad-ranging political discussion is often more concrete if one or more proposals are on the table. The following is a vision for the PSC.

#### Prefatory considerations:

- We need to implement a united front strategy (for a fuller explanation, see my submission to this month's IDB, [above]); our recent participation in the planning meeting for the Sept. 26<sup>th</sup> Labour Council rally indicates the shortcomings of limiting our politics to interactions with labour leaders; that we will not have a significant impact on the Sept. 26<sup>th</sup> rally and others like it is not only due to a lack of time and participation, but also the character of our participation so far; specifically, we need to circumvent unsympathetic labour leaders by interacting directly with rank-and-file workers
- This is a long-term process, i.e. not mere months and years, but decades and centuries; it will require concerted cadre-development; our planning should reflect this

#### Action #1: Membership Survey

- With some success, the MFO [Membership, Finance, and Outreach Committee] recently conducted a partial membership survey; it's major failing was that it did not have enough volunteers and therefore did not cover the entire membership; in the future, similar endeavours will need at least 10 committed volunteers with our current membership numbers
- The PSC will solicit on the general membership list members with expertise in statistical collection and analysis
- The PSC, in conjunction with the MFO and volunteer-statisticians, will conduct a membership survey that determines our members' affiliations with other workers' organizations, including unions, workers' associations, and political organizations (this will also include members who want a unionization drive at their un-unionized workplace)
- Survey questions will include how often members attend meetings, what positions they have, whether or not they would like to be a WA

representative in their organizations, what role they would ultimately like to play in their organizations, what skills they will need to make an impact, and how they would evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the organization and its activities

- The data will be stored in a central database; the survey will be incorporated into membership applications so that data remains up-to-date
- Ultimately, the data will be sorted in order to determine a cadre of active members willing and well-placed to make strategic interventions in their political organizations; ultimately, this cadre will be conduits between the GTWA and other workers' organizations
- To be effective, cadre will

- (1) occupy strategic positions within these organizations;
- (2) provide the GTWA with first-hand assessments of their struggles and dynamics;
- (3) spread GTWA propaganda to their co-workers and peers;
- (4) mobilize co-workers and peers towards the politics espoused by the GTWA;
- (5) develop relations with GTWA cadre in other organizations;
- (6) develop GTWA committees within and between these organizations;
- (7) recruit promising co-workers and peers to the GTWA and its committees

These actions will be facilitated by three further actions:

#### Action #2: Cadre Workshops

- The PSC, in conjunction with the Internal Education committee, will develop a series of ongoing

workshops on cadre development, based on the needs established in the survey data; this could include workshops on union culture, radical tactics, public speaking, Canadian labour law, etc.

- Workshops will be held in different areas in order to accommodate different members and to expand the reach of the GTWA
- Workshops will be run at different levels based on the experience of the participants; this can range from introductory to advanced workshops

#### Action #3: Reinvigorating a Radical Pamphlet Culture

- The PSC, in conjunction with the Internal Education committee, will host workshops (and perhaps a coffeehouse) on the production of propaganda
- Propaganda will become an integral part of the PSC; the PSC will use the aforementioned workshops to recruit and develop a consistent group of writers and artists, with an eye to eventually striking a separate Publications Committee

#### Action #4: Recruitment and New-Member Orientation

- The PSC, in conjunction with the MFO, will develop a formal recruitment process and a cadre of liaisons whose task is introducing prospective members to the GTWA with a new-member orientation that is standardized but also permits the discretion and creativity of the liaisons
- Orientations will typically coincide with WA events such as coffeehouses and will include an explanation of the vision statement, brief history of the GTWA, and an interview process that helps to match new members with committees that suit their skills and interests



# Report from GTWA Flying Squad

## By Mick Sweetman

The GTWA flying squad played an active role this summer supporting workers and community activists in important class struggles in Toronto and nationally.

We joined CAW 2002 members at a pre-strike rally that marched loudly through Terminal 1 at Pearson Airport. Later, as the workers went on strike against Air Canada, Flying Squad members joined the workers on the picket lines before the CAW leadership recommended members return to work when the Federal government said they would pass “back-to-work” legislation.

The flying squad joined CUPW members on the picket lines of the South Central Letter Processing Plant (SCLPP) as the workers walked off the job at midnight in what was at that point a rotating strike. The Corporation responded by locking out the entire workforce nation-wide until the Federal government passed extremely regressive legislation ordering workers back to work. During the lockout the flying squad mobilized several times for picket support at SCLPP as well as support rallies. We also participated in the information leafleting about the strike to the general public, organized by the GTWA Public Sector Campaign Committee, at subway stations and door-to-door in the neighbourhood around the SCLPP. We were there on the last day of the lockout to see the first shifts of workers off as they returned to work and show them support as the struggle continues. Last but not least, shortly after the legislation passed we participated in a demonstration of labour and community activists at the constituency office of the Minister of Labour, Lisa Raitt in Milton, Ontario protesting the attack on collective bargaining. To see a short video clip from that protest see: <http://youtu.be/w10z1N3xs7w>

In addition to labour-oriented support we also mobilized support for a protest by the GTWA's Free and Accessible Transit Campaign and the Fair Fare Coalition calling for the TTC to offer free service on heat and smog alert days. Flying squad members were also present at a protest called by the Stop the Cuts coalition outside the notoriously neo-liberal consulting firm KPMG's Toronto headquarters after they released a series of reports commissioned by the Ford administration recommending hundreds of cuts to city services.

The flying squad organizing committee did hold one meeting previous to the CUPW strike where we discussed how we could best organize support for the workers. However, most of our activity was organized with very short notice and the volunteer section captains did a great job calling the flying squad membership when we were mobilizing.

It has been easier to mobilize the flying squad in the evenings and on weekends as many flying squad members work in the weekdays, and when the location is in Toronto and easily accessible by TTC.

The strongest mobilizations occurred when support was organized in conjunction with other GTWA committees such as the public sector and transit committees.

This confirms our conception that for any given mobilization the aim and challenge is for the GTWA flying squad to manifest a substantial presence of GTWA members and supporters, rallying when needed, rather than the action only of the smaller flying squad organizing committee.

In general, I think that the active and visible presence of the flying squad and other GTWA committees on picket lines and at demonstrations contributed greatly to raising the profile and respect of the GTWA in the labour and community movements. The GTWA banner appeared in a picture in the National Post from the Air Canada strike, the GTWA was mentioned by the national president of CUPW in a national bulletin for the support we organized, and a GTWA member was interviewed on City News TV when the postal workers returned to work.

While there has been a bit of a lull in flying squad activity recently, I see a lot of need for us to mobilize with labour and community organizations in the struggles that are happening and coming as the City, Provincial and Federal governments press ahead with their attacks on workers and public services. We go where the fight is.

To join the GTWA flying squad please email [gtwaflyingsquad@gmail.com](mailto:gtwaflyingsquad@gmail.com) or sign up at the next assembly.

## Call for Contributions to the September Bulletin

The GTWA's *Discussion Bulletin* is an open forum for members of the Workers' Assembly to discuss the Assembly and pressing practical questions facing radical activists in the Toronto area today. You may also be interesting in replying to the submissions circulated in this month's Bulletin, and respectful dialogue over political disagreements are also welcome in the Bulletin.

In fact, submissions are encouraged on any topic bearing on the Greater Toronto Workers' Assembly and the activism of its members.

Submissions to the Bulletin should meet the following criteria:

- Fewer than 2000 words
- Written in language that is accessible to non-academic audiences
- Pertaining to a topic or issue relevant to the Assembly
- Contains no inflammatory or libelous statements against Assembly members or constituent organizations
- Adheres to the Assembly's Policy on Harassment and Discrimination

The deadline for the next Bulletin is 20 September 2011 and submissions should be sent to [assembly.bulletin@gmail.com](mailto:assembly.bulletin@gmail.com). (The deadline for all issues of the Bulletin is the 20th of the month. Submissions received by the 20th will appear in the Bulletin published at the end of each month. Submissions after the 20<sup>th</sup> may still be included, time permitting.)

If you would like feedback on a first draft, or help with proofreading, etc., editorial volunteers are happy to provide such assistance and/or feedback, when time permits. (We would also welcome volunteers to help out with this.)

- ★ What is the significance for labour and social movement activists of the NDP 'successes' during the recent Federal election and the new majority for the Harper regime?
- ★ Can we draw any conclusions about the state of the Assembly from reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of its campaigns?
- ★ How best can we fight back against Rob Ford's agenda in Toronto?
- ★ Are there are lessons to be learned from the strengths and weaknesses of the early mobilizing against Mike Harris?
- ★ Are there aspects of the Assembly project that you feel need further clarification or practical development?
- ★ Are there lessons that need to be learned about how best to respond, or how not to respond, to state repression against activists, in light of the G20 crackdown?

These are just a few of the questions that we need to take up and discuss. If you have any thoughts to share on these or other questions facing activists today, please consider jotting down your thoughts and sending them in to our email address: [assembly.bulletin@gmail.com](mailto:assembly.bulletin@gmail.com)