

Work and Workplace Organising

A Workers Solidarity Movement Position Paper

Workers Solidarity Movement

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Work and the Workplace

1. The workplace remains the location where many of us are likely to spend much of our adult lives. We are dependent on the wage we earn for food, housing and all our basic and complex needs.
2. The workplace is anywhere where we do work. For many people this means turning up to work shifts for a business, i.e the capitalist workplace
3. However, for many people the home is their workplace, and for others it is one of their main workplaces. This domestic work, such as cooking, cleaning, and care work such as tending to infirm relatives and child rearing, is mostly done by women and goes unpaid and unrecognised as 'real work' in capitalist patriarchal society. However, it is fundamental to sustaining ourselves and reproducing human society and it deserves to be paid. Workplace struggle should include the demand for a wage for domestic work at present and ultimately achieve a free and fair division of all socially necessary labour.
4. We recognise that the strike is not limited to the capitalist workplace but also involves the 'social strike' for example in the sphere of reproductive labour (such as domestic work) and continued functioning of the city.
5. Many of us experience work as a place where we have very limited control over what we do and when we do it, never mind what is produced. As individual workers we often have little or no choice other than obeying the legal and, for the more marginalised of us, even illegal instructions of our boss.

Workplace Struggle — Unions

1. Yet workers are not powerless. Without our work nothing is produced. Some of us have some power because our skills are rare but most of us are replaceable and therefore our only power is that obtained through collective struggle.
2. Over time the organisation of collective struggle resulted in the formation of organisations that continued to exist between such struggles in the hope of building power and solidarity over time. These organisations are unions and have and continue to exist in many forms.
3. A workplace with a union is one where it is generally possible to openly agitate with our fellow workers, including the ability to hold assemblies of all the unionised workers. This possibility is the greatest ongoing potential of union organisation and the reason why we remain members of unions that are otherwise problematic.
4. The unions we want are those where all the power is found at the base, i.e. all power lies at meetings of all unionised workers. All levels of the union above this should be mandated and recalled by the base. Any paid staff of such a union should be organisers, specialists or administrators answerable to the membership without any other decision making power.

5. We recognise there is a contradiction between the above perfect union form and the unions that now exist. This is not simply resolved by the declaration of a union of this type. Our goal is to create mass unions of this type. There is not a single correct path to that goal, rather it depends on the specific circumstance of each workplace and sector but broadly the paths pursued can include — the fight for reform within a union, breaking most of the membership of a union in a particular workplace away, the formation of a new union in a workplace through recruiting many members.

WSM Members and Unions

1. All WSM members are expected to join a union if one organises in their workplace and to look for opportunities to agitate for such organisation when one does not yet exist.
2. All WSM members are required to respect picket lines and other forms of union action.
3. In organised workplaces WSM members are expected to attend union meetings and encouraged to take on unpaid, mandated and recallable roles, particularly at the base level of union representative and shop steward. They are encouraged to take available trainings.
4. WSM members can only run for paid office in a union as part of a broader rank & file campaign to take control of the union and that campaign includes a plan to make such a role accountable and recallable if it is not already so.
5. As we recognise a need for some unions to hire more paid organisers, we leave open the possibility of becoming a paid organiser as an exception, but since the compatibility of that position with our politics depends on the specifics of the union, whether or not someone can do this is a matter for discussion and ratification by the wider membership (at branch).

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*Passed by National Conference, July 2017. This paper sits under the WSM's Anarchism, Oppression
& Exploitation and Class and Exploitation position papers. It doesn't repeat the material to be
found in those papers.*

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