FARE STRIKE!

San Francisco 2005

First-Hand Accounts

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Second Printing

Labor and materials stolen from bosses and capitalists as much as we could get away with.

INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet contains first-hand accounts of several San Francisco Fare Strike participants. Through this self-critique, incorporating a diversity of opinions, we hope to be better equipped should we attempt a fare strike again. We wanted to leave a record of our experiences organizing and participating in the strike to inform future struggles.

While coming from several different radical perspectives what united us in our collective effort were some basic principles:

* First among them was seeing the fare strike as a form of **class struggle.** We approached drivers, fellow riders, operators of other transit systems and others as working class people with whom we share common interests.

* Second, we did not see our struggle as being limited either locally or regionally. The system we are struggling against cannot be defeated in San Francisco alone.

* Third, the solidarity between transit operators and riders could not be limited only to transportation, but must extend to all areas of our lives that are defined and fragmented by the social relations of capital. Our common interests transcend work and the buses we take to get there.

* Fourth, since a fare strike had never been attempted in San Francisco before, it was important to be **tactically imaginative** and **aggressive.**

* Finally, our efforts were wholly **self-organized.** They would be unmediated by any agency or representation outside of ourselves. We rejected the spectacular capitalist media, politicians, professional activist groups, vanguards, or any other institution seeking to manage our efforts. We believed that the act of participating in the fare strike would be a radicalizing experience in itself. Our struggle was not carried out according to a plan set out in some book or theory. In the middle of the fight, we learn how we must fight.

ACCOUNT 1 : GH

> In Cleveland, in 1944, streetcar workers threatened to refuse to collect fares in order to win a pay increase--the City Council gave in before they actually used the tactic…This type of action would in most cases have to be taken outside the union, since few union bureaucrats would use such a clearly class-directed tactic, and thus of necessity the workers would have to organize this themselves.
>
> *-Root & Branch*

BUILD UP TO FARE STRIKE

I got involved in the Fare Strike in February of 2005 when news started hitting the media announcing that Muni[1] was going to try to make up for a $57 million budget deficit by raising fares, cutting back or even eliminating bus runs, and laying off drivers. The changes would go into effect on September 1st. I attended most of the various meetings and events of the different factions opposing the fare hike/service cuts/layoffs and by April I was part of the teams that were going out for the morning and evening commutes to flyer and talk with drivers and riders, announcing the upcoming Fare Strike. On my own, I also did this every day to and from work during my commute from the Richmond District to the Financial District.

In early May 2005 a couple of us attended a meeting of AC Transit[2] drivers and riders in Oakland who were organizing to oppose threatened fare hikes and service reductions there too. At our invitation, an AC Transit Driver and an East Bay rider from that meeting came to San Francisco the next day for the second town hall meeting in our fight against Muni, where two Muni drivers were also present. We had hoped for an extension of our struggles to all regional transit systems, especially as AC Transit, BART[3] and SamTrans[4] workers all had union contracts expiring on June 30. Golden Gate Transit[5] had already made drastic cuts affecting drivers and riders. We also met with the radical faction of Muni drivers, called the Drivers' Action Committee (DAC), and were even able to include a BART train operator and a station agent, both militants, in a joint meeting of DAC and Muni riders in late June. On June 15 DAC issued a solidarity statement saying they would refuse to "scab" on the operators of other transit systems, should they strike. In 1994 and 1999 during BART strikes, Muni management tried to run "BART Strike Shuttles" but the rank-and-file workers of Muni refused to be strikebreakers and forced their union leadership to honor a "Solidarity Pact." (BART workers had announced a strike on June 30, 2005; all three transit systems settled without strikes). We had hoped to draw on this spirit of working class solidarity throughout the Fare Strike so that it might expand beyond San Francisco.

At the end of June I participated in the Industrial Workers of the World Centenary Conference in Chicago where I was part of a workshop called "Worker Organizing Beyond the Workplace" together with three organizers from the Midwest Unrest group who were part of the "Fight or Walk" campaign against the Chicago Transit Authority. In the workshop we talked about our rider-based fare strikes, or the "threat thereof," and we shared lessons learned from our experiences and gave updates on the direction of our current struggles. While attended by only a dozen people, the workshop included a couple of people from Baltimore who were facing nearly identical cutbacks in transit under the guise of a budget crisis. Across North America, public services are getting cut back as capital privatizes and shifts the costs onto the working class.

The Chicago "Fight or Walk" fare strike had succeeded in December 2004 through a combination of their organizing and luck; their efforts forced politicians at the state level to come up with enough money to stave off the fare hikes for six months. The Midwest Unrest people discussed the strengths and weaknesses of their campaign. They encouraged us to ally ourselves with other radicals as they presently were doing with a half a dozen other working class-based groups. In the workshop, I described how in San Francisco we were starting to do that with various groups of senior and disabled riders, homeless organizations, the Chinese Progressive Association and the Day Labor Program[6], which is made up of mostly Latin American immigrant workers. The latter two groups helped with the transla-

tions of our literature into Chinese and Spanish. One of us translated the flyer into Korean. Ideally, we would have emulated Muni's own multilingual literature which is translated into the above languages, as well as Japanese, Russian and Vietnamese. One weakness of our effort was not being able to draw in more working class collaborators from those communities who spoke those languages.

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The MUNI FARE STRIKE Continues!

STOP THE SERVICE CUTS!
REVERSE THE FARE HIKE!

On September 24, Muni cut service on many lines, including the 14-Mission, the 38-Geary, and the 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 31, 35, 36, 37, 41, 43, 47, 49, 52, 54, 66, 67 and 82.

On September 1, Muni raised the adult fare from $1.25 to $1.50. This was the second fare increase in three years, and more are planned. Muni also raised the youth, senior and disabled fare from 35¢ to 50¢, and raised the weekly pass from $12 to $15.

PAY MORE TO WAIT LONGER? NO WAY!

SINCE SEPTEMBER 1, MANY MUNI RIDERS HAVE BEEN ON FARE STRIKE TO PROTEST THE SERVICE CUTS AND THE FARE HIKE.

In a fare strike, passengers ride the bus just like always, but do not pay the fare. When you get on the bus, just don't pay. Many drivers are sympathetic and won't give you any problem. (If you get a ticket call us. Our lawyers will defend you.)

Fare strikes have stopped service cuts and fare hikes in other cities, including Chicago and Los Angeles. Working class people, students, seniors and the disabled depend on MUNI. Together, we can stop the service cuts and reverse the fare hike.

MUNI FARE STRIKE -- (415) 648-1904 -- www.MuniFareStrike.net -- MuniFareStrike@yahoo.com

La HUELGA de PASAJEROS de MUNI CONTINÚA!

BASTA YA de RECORTES de SERVICIO y el AUMENTO de TARIFAS!

El 24 de Septiembre, Muni cortó el servicio de muchas líneas, inclusive el 14-Mission, el 38-Geary, y el 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 31, 35, 36, 37, 41, 43, 47, 49, 52, 54, 66, 67 y 82.

El 1 de Septiembre, Muni aumentó la tarifa de adultos de $1.25 a $1.50. Esto fue el segundo aumento en tres años, y se planea aún más. También Muni aumentó la tarifa de jóvenes, mayores de edad, y deshabilitados de 35¢ a 50¢, y aumentó el pase semanal de $12 a $15.

PAGAR MAS PARA ESPERAR MAS? CLARO QUE NO!

DESDE EL 1 DE SEPTIEMBRE, MUCHOS PASAJEROS DE MUNI ESTAN EN HUELGA PARA PROTESTAR LOS RECORTES DE SERVICIO Y EL AUMENTO DE TARIFAS.

En una huelga de pasajeros, los pasajeros toman el autobús como siempre, pero no pagan la tarifa. Cuando Ud. se sube el autobús, no pague la tarifa. Muchos choferes se solidarizan con nosotros y no le van a molestar. (Nuestros abogados representarán a cualquier persona que recibe una multa.)

Las huelgas de pasajeros acabaron con los recortes de servicio y aumentos de tarifa en otras ciudades. Gente de clase trabajadora, estudiantes, mayores de edad y deshabilitados dependen del Muni. Juntos podemos parar los recortes de servicio y hacer que anulen el aumento de tarifa.

MUNI FARE STRIKE -- (415) 648-1904 -- www.MuniFareStrike.net -- MuniFareStrike@yahoo.com

On the streets of San Francisco we were getting an overwhelmingly positive response to our public presence throughout the spring and into the summer. In early July 2005 three of us were handing out flyers in the Haight-Ashbury district around 8:30 a.m. and we flyered a long line of riders waiting for-and then getting on-the 71-Haight-Noriega bus headed downtown. As usual, about 90% of the people who talked with us were enthusiastically supportive. Everyone was loading onto the bus and we started to walk up the street. Suddenly the bus driver stopped right next to us, opened the door and motioned us to step onto the bus where we handed him a flyer. He scanned it, told us that it was "right on" and that he completely supported what we were doing. It created a contagion of optimism that made us feel that we were going to be able to pull off a Fare Strike.

Also early in July I tried to pass a flyer to a middle-aged Filipina around 8:30 a.m. as she was waiting for a downtown-bound 14-Mission bus at the 16th St. BART plaza. She politely refused and when I asked whether she knew about the fare hikes, she brightened up and said that she had gotten the flyer the other day-from me-and she had taken it to work, photocopied it, and put those copies in all of her co-workers' boxes. I thought "BRAVO!, this is how the idea of a strike is going to spread and draw in more people!"

We were putting flyers and stickers everywhere we could, such as laundromats, libraries, community bulletin boards, utility polls, pay phones, etc. In the middle of July, as I was taping up flyers on bus shelters in the Richmond District, a young couple stopped, looked at a flyer and kept saying "CRAP!!!" I thought they were either yuppies or some kind of right-wingers, but they turned around, smiled at me and thanked me for putting up the flyer and asked for a handful to give to their friends.

On the night before the Fare Strike we held a work party at one of our apartments, like we had done a couple times in the preceding weeks. It was attended by about a dozen people, including two guests from Midwest Unrest who had been part of the successful fare strike in Chicago in 2004. They helped

us in making signs and banners in English, Spanish and Chinese. Their knowledge was invaluable as they shared their experiences in Chicago, which was useful as we were planning the logistics for our Fare Strike the next day.

FARE STRIKE IS ON

On the first day of the Fare Strike, September 1, 2005, my team of six (including one Chinese, one Korean and one non-native Spanish speaker) went to our post at Divisadero and Geary at 7:30 a.m., where we had a steady flow of 38-Geary buses, one of the busiest lines in the city, as well as a less frequent cross flow of the 24-Divisadero. One high point was a driver who saw me stickering over the long Muni warnings on the glass of the back doors about not using the back door. He came out of the bus and I was expecting a tongue lashing for vandalizing his bus, but he motioned me forward and asked me to put stickers on the front door. I was floored. Later that afternoon I saw the same bus at Market & 4th, changed to a 9-San Bruno and at the opposite end of town, with the stickers still on the front door.

We stayed at Divisadero and Geary for a few hours just handing out flyers but realized our greatest effectiveness would be in riding buses, which we did once we left there and arrived in the Mission District. Then throughout the morning and into the afternoon four of us fare striked our way onto about fifteen buses and only one driver refused to allow us onto the bus without paying (I was part of the same team as Lee; see his essay).

Around 4:30 p.m. the two of us remaining from our earlier team went to 4th & Market Streets, the location of the planned second Fare Strike convergence. It was the biggest Muni enforcement circus we had seen all day. So we headed down the block to Market and Kearny which did not really build up crowds like at 4th. We just started surfing buses for free and flyering on them from there into Chinatown. We had patched two signs together into a new one that read "Fare Strike" in English, "No Muni Fare Today" in Spanish and "Riders Don't Pay - Drivers Don't Collect" in Chinese. At the bus stops it became a powerful magnet for enthusiastically supportive Chinese people. We got on and off the bus going in the same direction several times and then walked up from Columbus to Stockton into the heart of the Chinese community.

It was totally amazing. Wherever we went with the sign people came up and thanked us and asked for a copy from the pile of flyers in our hands. We got stopped in front of a crowded fruit and vegetable grocery and could not leave because so many people were coming up to us. Finally, after giving out what seemed like a hundred flyers in a matter of minutes, we got on the buses again. We went a block, got off and it happened all over again. And then we did it again...and again.

At another crowded bus stop, a pleasant middle-aged Chinese woman of moderate English ability kept saying that it sounded like a good idea to fare strike, but the driver would not let us do it. We assured her that she could, but she and the crowd of others hanging on our every word didn't believe us. So we got in front of the line of people piling onto the bus, got on and told the driver we were on fare strike and then just kept walking down the aisle handing out flyers. The middle-aged woman followed, with some high school girls in tow and others behind them, and everyone was beside themselves with

delight, completely giddy with satisfaction of having gotten on for free. We got off soon after and asked them to show others how to do it. It was a magical experience seeing people empower themselves.

By then we were going through the Stockton Tunnel and got out before Union Square. Still, people would see the sign and ask for a flyer and then thank us. Our day ended up back at 4th and Market and we felt that Day One of the Fare Strike had been a success. But the Fare Strike did not stop there.

This is my e-mail post from September 14th, a full two weeks into the Fare Strike:

> O.K., the other day my fare striking partner and I were scoring-in the sports sense-about 40%…But today, another partner and I were hitting 100%. Not that there weren't problems, but EVERY bus we got on-which was over 10-was by fare striking. And just like Day One, we got in several mini-forums, about what Muni's doing, going on in the buses. And if that wasn't inspiring enough, we went to a meeting of all the major fare strike groups tonight in the Haight, where one of the Mission Day Labor team told a story [translated from Spanish to English by one of his fellow Day Laborers] about surfing buses all day today along Mission, from Geneva to Duboce, and many drivers actually held their hands over the fare box and REFUSED to accept fares. Better still, one of those drivers stopped his bus, stood up and lectured the riders [in Spanish] about how non-payment was what was going to change things. So I thought: "sure, they're doing that in the Mission" in an abstract sense, but when the Day Laborers and I transferred [in the Lower Haight District] from the 7-Haight to the 22-Fillmore, I went first and said "Fare Strike," gave the receptive driver a flyer and kept walking-and flyering-down the aisle. When I reached the crowd at the back door, one of the Day Laborers had caught up to me, tapped me on the shoulder, and pointed back to the fare box, which was covered by the driver's fluorescent yellow official Muni vest. For once, I was giddy with delight. Then I realized most of the bus riders were giddy with delight too, they didn't necessarily need a flyer, but were happy to discuss why they thought the fare strike was a great idea!…I think a new tactic is to start in the Mission with supportive drivers and surf the buses outward, spreading the fare strike in solidarity with the drivers.

A week later I spent a whole day in the Mission with the Day Laborers, starting at the 24th Street BART plaza. I flyered with them, but more importantly we fare striked onto buses and surfed back and forth to the 16th Street BART station for hours, never having a problem getting on for free. On that day I saw one Muni driver with a piece of paper taped over the fare box and another who draped his jacket over the fare box. The Day Laborers claimed many more drivers were doing the same. Most of these drivers were Latino and the Day Laborers said that were some of the Spanish speaking drivers that they had developed a rapport with. Sadly, that day was the last time I saw this solidarity from the drivers.

CONCLUSION

In mid-October a month and a half after the beginning of the Fare Strike, while getting coffee at the De Young Museum café, a cashier noticed my "Fare Strike" button and said she liked it. We started talking about the Fare Strike and she said she tried it several times, but that drivers would not allow her on without paying. She said she still supported the idea of the strike though. This turned out to be one our greatest limitations: that some people took the risk and tried to fare strike, but were not in communication with other potential fare strikers, so they did not have the coordinated mass support to make them confident enough to persevere to actually get on without paying-which, once done, can be contagious and from our experience leads one to continue doing so for as long as possible. Along with never having developed a sustained coordination with the drivers, especially the radical faction the Drivers' Action Committee, the Fare Strike reached its limits by the third week. This was despite the fact that up to then tens of thousands of Muni riders had been radicalized during the Fare Strike by riding for free, often with the active support of drivers. The Fare Strike had its greatest strength in the Spanish-speaking parts of the city, as well as Chinatown on the first day; it was almost non-existent in

other neighborhoods. Next time we have to take all these things into account beforehand, learn from our mistakes, and use these lessons to pick up where we left off.

NOTES

1. San Francisco Municipal Railway was created in 1909 as the first public transit system in the U.S.
2. Alameda Contra Costa Transit District operates in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties, which lie directly across the Bay and east of San Francisco.
3. Bay Area Rapid Transit District runs modern-style subway and elevated trains in San Francisco, Alameda, Contra Costa and San Mateo counties.
4. San Mateo County Transit District operates in the only county bordering San Francisco, lying due south.
5. Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District operates three transportation systems in Marin and Sonoma Counties, which lie due north from San Francisco across the Golden Gate Bridge.
6. We worked closely with three core organizers from the Day Labor Program; they were from Mexico, Guatemala and Peru. All three had experience in militant transit strikes and struggles in their home countries and were able to bring their knowledge to the Fare Strike. In many ways, they were the backbone of the strike and were responsible for the strike lasting for as long as it did.

WORK CITED

Root & Branch, eds., Preface to "The Seattle General Strike," *Root & Branch: The Rise of the Workers Movements* (Greenwich, CN: Fawcett Publications, 1975), 209.

ACCOUNT 2 : Joshua Alperin

I was greeted by four motorcycle cops at 7:00 in the morning occupying the site where we held the press conference on the northeast corner. They were accompanied by a trio of really eager Muni goons trying to shout me down.

Instead of hanging the banners and placards, I set my stuff down inside the bus stop and started handing out flyers. My strategy was to get up right at the door when the bus arrived, greet the drivers and remind them of the strike while I attempted to escort people onto the bus for free.

Out of about eight full bus loads that I approached early on, I would say that more than half of the people without fast passes were getting on for free.

This came to an abrupt end when two paddywagons of pigs showed up with an entire team of Muni suits. The cops pulled me away from my post at the door of the bus saying I was obstructing something-or-other while the goons and suits took over the front of the line to enforce fare payment with a stick.

Gerry and some press from SF State arrived at about this time as more cops arrived and the whole thing became an absurd police state. We continued flyering as more people from social strike and other friends began to show up.

With Mo from Social Strike, I began giving out transfers which became a quick success. People were coming up to me from all sides trying to get the mock transfers and using them to ride. The cops quickly zoomed in on the this and tried to accost Mo and take his transfers. Mo defended himself honorably claiming that it was not counterfeit or illegal in any way. He challenged them to try to stop him and they were left dumbfounded.

Within moments they moved toward me, telling me I was detained and to give them my information. They created a ring of about 7 or 8 cops around me while I created a ruckus with a hundred or so folks milling around and waiting for the bus. They eventually gave me a verbal warning after talking to headquarters for a while.

This is a bit of a ramble, I'll hit the highlights.

An entire group of riders heading up 24th was totally receptive to the fare strike. While talk-

ing with people and flyering, two older Latina women started talking and yelling things against the fare hike. One thing they started to say was, "no fare increase, we need a wage increase". Nine out of Ten people were getting really riled up and the buses were coming really late. The bus arrived while the suits were off somewhere in a huddle. People started to get on and the driver, who was a huge man, got pissed off, stood up and told people to come back. We started talking him down with numerous riders while everyone just filed in and took their seats for free. The driver was mainly scared and perplexed. His tensions from the morning had hit a boiling point, the drivers were all on center stage. Though we had made every effort to talk with as many drivers as possible before and during strike day 1, many felt the strain of being trapped between angry riders and the heavy management and police surveillance.

On the flip side, another driver on Mission coming from 16th St. stopped at the light, honked his horn, yelled out and then for all to see (including pigs and suits) held up a piece of paper with the New Fare $1.50 logo and ripped it to shreds.

Two women and one of their sons began to flyer and motivate others not to pay. They played really pivotal roles in setting the tenor for the entire morning. They drew numerous people in and gave a whole new feel to our efforts. One of these women assisted another woman who boarded without paying. The driver stopped the bus and said he wouldn't move until she paid. She finally got up and paid "everything she had" and went back. Since she couldn't make the new fare the driver remained planted while numerous people talked and pleaded with him. She eventually got off the bus, but not before attracting numerous people to idea of not paying. At this time I handed her and everyone else a mock transfer and they successfully got boarded the next bus.

Another woman with two kids got on the bus without paying and stayed put until a hidden fare inspector came out of the darkness and took them off the bus and cited them. The press swarmed in on this one and the brave woman adamantly stated that she had no plans to pay the fare increase.

ACCOUNT 3 : Lin

(a fare striker whose first language is Chinese. Some grammar was corrected but the content was not changed)

Fare strikes, what an adventure for me. I did not think we failed with the strikes at all but that the climate was not in place for success at that time. I was glad that I participated in the fare strikes and stood up for what I believe rather than silently accepting what I disagreed with.

It was a shiny afternoon in a laundry mat in the Richmond District. A strange and unbelievable flyer caught my eyes after I dumped a load of my clothes into washing machine. "…fare strikes…do not pay bus fares…" I was very suspicious after reading it. How could you get on the bus without paying

anything and not get in any trouble? So I wrote to the e-mail address left on the flyer. None of the following events were ones that I expected to be involved with.

Gifford was the person who replied to me with a detailed message regarding the motivation behind the fare strikes. I agreed with it and decided to do my part. I made a Chinese logo on some placards, went onto Geary Blvd, 16th, and Mission Streets, to call for fare strikes and got on the buses to remind public about the strikes on Strike Day One. All these activities were already described by other activists, so I am going to skip this part. However, I had some observations on this entire event.

First, riders and the public were not well informed about the fare strike and, most importantly, the whole scenario behind it. When I called and informed my friends or talked to people on the streets about fare strikes, an extremely high percentage of people did not know about it. Second, a lot of them did not necessarily support the strike until I explained that we were going to pay more for less service, plus the Muni administrator at the top actually received a salary increase. So it was important that the public knew about the fare strikes and why they should not pay more. Most people thought the same way I did when I first saw the fare strike flyer in the laundry mat. However, I believe when people know more about it and take action, more silent lambs will join to say no on the fare increase without fears. I was actually chickening out a little bit when getting on the first free ride with my strike group at 16th street on Strike Day One, so imagine how the general public would feel when we asked them to do this.

I also felt that elderly Russians in the Richmond District had the most potential of any group to stand by fare strikes…if they knew about it at all. Any elderly Russians I talked to at the bus stops strongly disagreed with the fare increase, and they all actually took action. They withheld their bus pass to Muni drivers to say no on the fare increase. I felt immediately that they were a strong-minded group who were not afraid of speaking their minds. Some other elderly Russians, however, spoke limited English which I could not explain the fare strikes to them at all. It was a pity that I did not have a Russian flyer at the time. There are so many elderly Russians taking the #38 bus line on Geary Blvd. If we had worked on Russian flyers and media, I thought we could have cracked the #38 bus line.

Finally, I want to say again that I am glad I participated in the fare strike even though we have not succeeded yet. A woman I talked to during the fare strike said to me, " I totally agree with you and this whole fare strike thing. I hope your group succeed on the fare strike but I will not take action since it's too embarrassing, not paying bus fares. I'm just going to see how your fare strike works." I realized that there was still lots of work to be done.

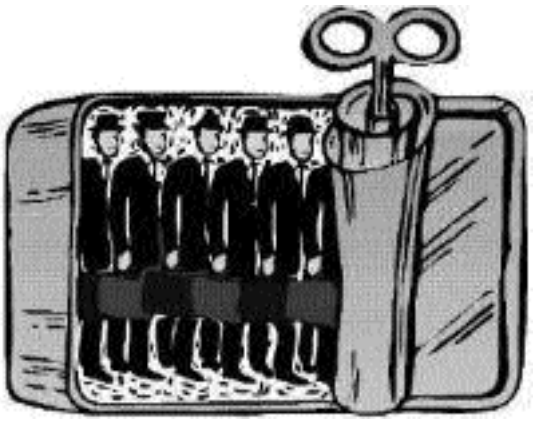
ACCOUNT 4 : Lee

Riding Free: Exemplary Action vs. Visibility

The first day of the fare strike my group started out, on Geary and Divisadero, giving flyers to riders boarding the morning buses. We had a banner and picket signs. We were very visible, but ineffectual. This felt rather discouraging and pointless before long: advocating a refusal to pay, without ourselves taking this risk, seemed to appear hypocritical. We had attracted the Muni enforcers and cops big time, so we decided to walk a few blocks and board a bus without paying, somewhere else. But a few minutes later, as we were just walking, several police cars caught up with us and we were questioned, absurdly. All the attention we had garnered was now working against us.

Later, a few of us walked a stop or two away from the hot spot of strike agitation at 16th and Mission, and just boarded buses, announcing that we were on fare strike to the driver, and it became obvious this was the thing to do. The passengers in the front would hear us talking to the driver, and often word would spread to the back of the bus before we could walk there with our flyers. Very few drivers gave us any flack about it at all. With the few that were adamant about paying the fare, we just backed off and waited for the next bus. On the whole, drivers seemed more in favor of the fare strike

than riders. We boarded many buses, just riding for a few stops and then catching another. Five days later, I went out with one other person and did the same. Between the two days, I got 25 free bus rides, and only 4 or 5 of the drivers weren't cool about it. I live in the East Bay and almost never ride Muni.



So I just came over a few times to help out and participate in the strike. Obviously we were coming up against the titanic inertia of peoples' habitual everyday life, going along, obeying the rules, paying to get hauled to and from the workplace mainly. We did not succeed even in beating back this little "speed-up" in that exploitation process. One might ask: was this a complete waste of time? No, it wasn't. Objectively, just getting the idea of a fare strike out there may set the stage for future social struggle. Subjectively, some of us caught a hint of exhilaration, riding all over the city, talking with all sorts of people. There were many good conversations with other riders and drivers. Several riders were inspired to join us. We spread solidarity. We trespassed into realms of expanded social possibility, and found new allies everywhere. Overcoming my own fears about refusing to pay, developing ways of being intransigent in this refusal yet sensitive and communicative with drivers, and then encouraging other riders, was a fun and interesting challenge in itself. What if this had been made a major focus of fare strike agitators? We spent a lot of time and energy getting caught up in street-corner spectacles, as my group did in the beginning. Maybe, in this way, we had a role in fostering separation between "organizers" and "organized," which held us back from winning this struggle.

As I wrote to my cohorts on day six of the strike:

> It seems like bus riders sympathetic to the strike are feeling pretty defeated, and many drivers aren't clear if the fare strike is ongoing and for real, or if we're just shirking as individuals at this point. In my opinion, however, this thing still totally has the potential to spread and win, beating back the fare hike and service cuts, but there will need to be some kind of magic to shift peoples' morale...It is the riders' lack of confidence rather than the drivers' fare enforcement that would make us lose. Even many of the people who have been most involved in the fare strike campaign are still afraid to actually try and board a bus. Ideally we should be able to rapidly overcome this amongst ourselves, and spread whatever confidence and methods we can develop far and wide...Even a general breakdown in discipline and winning this thing is not out of our reach, despite the current flagging of expectations. Perhaps it would take us a week or so to build up to that, if we steadily increased the number of people who can and will ride and flier.

This didn't happen, so we will never know. But it was my feeling at the time and I see no reason to abandon this view. We can also speculate a little based on history: from what I have heard of the successful fare strike in Chicago in 2004, the simple exemplary action of riding free and passing out flyers was the main activity of strike organizers once the strike began.

ACCOUNT 5 : Sally A. Frye

I was out in the streets on September 1, 2005 for about 12 hours, riding buses and being at the stops. I spent a lot of time at 24th and Mission and, later in different neighborhoods, but particularly downtown San Francisco where I was until the evening. My identification in all of this was as a rider foremost (25 years riding Muni), but I have been an anarchist (or libertarian socialist if you prefer) for 30 years. I was also a very active member of the Fare Strike Committee, a group that was linked to the Day Laborers

who were very active in this and other fare strikes, and the Fare Strike Committee collaborated to some extent with Social Strike.

Early on, I made the decision that I would ride many buses while fare striking in addition to being at various planned Muni bus stops, and later in the afternoon would be at a busy downtown area for the p.m. hours. I wanted the process of boarding and riding buses and withholding payment - with an explanation as to why as one boards - to be an important and integral part of the fare strike and spoke of this tactic actively with my comrades. This in addition to us having a supportive, agitational presence at the various designated stops throughout the city. We had researched the lines and mapped out the best stops to be at. Even with our spare numbers, we had very good planning, with many meetings, and we made a definite impact.

A few others agreed with me that riding the buses was very important. To tell riders not to pay on and after September 1st without riding ourselves would be irrational. The risk not being shared is a problem, but, also, playing out the classic separation between leftists and "the people" was something I did not want. Riding the buses, there were incredible opportunities to connect with people, riding and fare striking alone or with others. A spiel about why one was fare striking when boarding was something that could be done, or not. When I brought the issue of riding buses at one of the Social Strike Committee meetings before the fare strike, I was puzzled that there was not much validation of my viewpoint and one individual, incredibly, said, "That'd be too risky."

I should say at this point that stickers and other things to give out produced by Social Strike were, for the most part, quite good. I especially liked the upbeat mini leaflet with the smiling driver, with "instructions" of how to do the fare strike, being sure to treat the driver well - a very important point. These materials began as more treatise-like, and this evolved into the smaller form that made its point quickly to people striding by.

September 1st was a tumultuous day. When I was in the Mission in the morning of September 1st, I nearly got arrested, "showing" a fare strike by going through a stationary bus to face a cop at the back door. One of the Fare Strike members got arrested (twice), and several riders were hassled, yelled at, and even arrested. Some of the security people were quite aggressive. One said horrible things to people boarding the bus. Some verbal fights erupted. Despite the difficulties, some riders showed surprising enthusiasm. The strongest attitudes were those in the Mission District (where I happen to live). I met two really great women there, one Latino and one black, also from the neighborhood, who were very active in flyering, talking with people, and they had just jumped right into it spontaneously. I was able to fare strike more than half the time. "I won't move the bus unless you pay!", was just one reaction, and another was, "Go on through - it's fine with me!"

On September 1st, Muni security workers and San Francisco Police were ubiquitous and they sometimes displayed quite ugly behavior. They had slapped signs on the backs of the buses saying not to enter, but many riders tried to defy this edict. Some of the security forces were definitely "goon"-like. The presence of the vested Muni "security people" and Muni cops was a testament to how seriously they took the fare strikers. We fare strikers were seemingly viewed as a significant threat.

There was a sense of expectation associated with, but going beyond, the mere withholding of fares. There was a sense of taking over our city, with our buses and the process of transit itself, with the drivers and riders potentially becoming comrades, and riders actually watching one another's backs. We supported the drivers, and many of the messages on the banners showed this. Many of us talked with them one-on-one through the day and for weeks beforehand. My reading of the drivers' attitudes was that some were hostile to the fare strike, a smattering were positive, and most were neutral (or, it was hard to tell).

I was very impressed that several riders not affiliated with any strike group took part. I know it took chutzpah to do this. I can vouch for this - I was quite nervous the first time I did it. Nevertheless, all sorts of people withheld their bus fares as a strong statement, and verbalized their approval to us, and each other. Some people we spoke to when flyering said defeatist things and said it would do no good to do any of this. Some joined in with us as if they had been ready all along to protest. This led

me to the obvious thought that some of this is just below the surface and can come bubbling up if the conditions are right.

I thought it was important to be down-to-earth, real, and unpretentious, with as little differentiation between regular people and members of these groups as possible, yet be as uncompromising and radical as possible, with a strong class-consciousness and a comprehensive critique of capitalist society. Leninist, or even Trotskyite, leftist groups, held no interest for me, or groups with the very limited hegemony of progressive politics. Though at times problematic, I did also want an open attitude along with the radicalism and acceptance of other ways among those involved.

After September 1st, for as long as a month or more afterwards, we had single, two-person, and group boardings of buses while fare striking. This had the risk, especially without the support of others in the public, of looking indulgent, especially if we are not clear about our messages and why we are doing it. I witnessed only a smattering of fare strike activity after September 1st.

I attended the MTA meeting over that autumn, during which David Binder presented the results of the employee and ridership surveys. The guards at City Hall found my leaflets and asked that I not distribute them at this meeting. The meeting was mostly called and attended by Muni higher-ups, with a member or two of the public. When it was my turn to speak (three speakers from the public in all), I mentioned how many buses were out of commission (in disrepair) and spoke against the cuts, layoffs, and negative changes they were implementing. Particularly galling is the fact that the Muni board does not respond to whomever comes up to the podium.

I wanted us to keep meeting with one another and to keep the momentum going, and include the new individuals we met along the way, and to brainstorm about ways of protesting that could go beyond just withholding payment. The fare strike committee had a couple meetings attending attended by a few people. There was a press conference with various coalition groups (progressives, rather than radicals), including the Coalition for Transit Justice. The presence of progressive hangers-on was problematic in my view, as I've already said.

That the Fare strike had a concrete effect on the Muni revenues is undisputed. The revenue loss is one unmistakable fact that makes Muni sit up and take notice. The obvious message is not to cut service integral to our own survival in our dependence on public transit. You can bet they have this on their agenda. They do not want it attached to any wider issues. The layers of security personnel that greeted the fare evaders shows that the evasion was deemed important and was framed as something to be "fought" by the powers-that-be. Various community groups, especially the Day Laborers' Association, wholeheartedly hurled themselves into this activity and many believed in fare striking passionately.

The fare strike overflowed out of its frame and brought capitalistic inequalities into the spotlight. For that reason, it was a success. Even though the activities were around the issue of mass transit, what we said and wrote and did all were organized around class terms and I believe went beyond just one issue. We know that we are capable of contesting the city bureaucracy, and could again. It put in greater relief the power relationships in the town and cities, and what it is to overcome the daily humiliations and misery by taking power in the city that we actually in fact run ourselves.

ACCOUNT 6 : JZ

I considered it important that we were trying to encourage a mass action among people with whom we did not work or otherwise share any strong prior affinity besides our being mass transit riders and most likely being fed up with poor service and increasing fares. We also wanted to align our efforts with the concerns of drivers, who were getting screwed by Muni's phaseout policies and increased productivity demands. The only way for a fare strike to succeed was through mass participation (ideally with the drivers' support), not just because it required numbers for Muni to feel a hit, but because the

political/social goal was a widespread refusal to pay that would take on a life of its own and demand more than just a return to the previous fares and service level.

Talking to thousands of people in the weeks preceding the fare strike, I think people in our group put out a radical analysis of the purpose of mass transit in the city, how necessary it was to move people back and forth to their jobs so that downtown companies turn profits, and that the companies and the politicians think its perfectly normal to burden us with the cost. People by and large agreed with these ideas in my experience. We specifically avoided any notion that we were "leaders" of this action, and instead explained that our interest was in inspiring collective activity that would be immediate and clear in its demonstration of direct action, rather than being filtered through the channels of city politics or voting booths.

Just assessing our efforts according to our original intention helps point out some of the important problems we had:

-Few people were drawn into organizing aside from our core crew, and so we did not have enough people to adequately cover the city with propaganda, conversations, etc

-We did not coordinate with drivers enough, for different reasons, many of which were largely out of our control at the time

-We did not coordinate enough with the anarchist action folks until a few weeks before the strike there were differences in our approach to organizing the fare strike, and one problematic individual made collaboration very difficult

-The rhetorical focus should have been on fighting service cuts from the start, with fares and lay offs/phaseouts both being a corollary to this

That said, it was a pretty impressive result for a few months of somewhat sporadic organizing by a couple dozen people at most. The different stories I have heard from the day of the fare strike and my own personal interactions with people leading up to that day indicated a willingness by large numbers of people to disregard legal norms and proprieties, to push back against one of the numerous clampdowns we experience. The intuitive logic of direct action seemed sensible and even enjoyable to most riders I encountered. I think it was mostly to our credit that we didn't overemphasize our own anti-capitalist analysis in the flyers. It's something that, even when done well in a flyer or poster, can weaken propaganda in its appeals to activity on the level of theoretical analysis rather than on everyone's daily experience. The conversations I had with hundreds of people in the preceding months proved to be a much better avenue for discussing radical ideas with riders, whereas the flyers were useful for laying out basic information. Our intention was to kick something off that we believed had the potential to radicalize people through their active participation.

I felt that openly supporting drivers was something that should have happened more in our flyers, not just to add it to a checklist of grievances, but because the inclinations of riders leaned a bit towards contempt for drivers rather than making connections of service cuts with layoffs, etc. In the absence of coherent class politics, this kind of shit flourishes. There's no shortage of examples of retrograde politics of race/nation/consumer identity coming to the fore after a period in which radical class politics have been defeated.

Unfortunately, we learned about the layoff/phaseout situation late, that drivers were threatened with job cuts and then these threats amounted to nothing. A scare tactic by Muni management to get some leverage with the union, who appeared all too willing to accommodate them in order to protect senior drivers at the expense of new ones. While there may not have been outright layoffs, there was the policy of encouraging early retirement and not replacing retired workers. Shedding jobs is accomplished by attrition rather than layoffs. Either way, it amounts to both service cuts and speedups, and

this is the crux of how drivers and riders ought to perceive themselves as inseparable in their interests. We should have understood this better and talked about it more with both riders and drivers and in our flyers.

I was at the Balboa BART station, an area that received very little flyering in the months prior to the fare strike, mostly due to our limited numbers. It was clear that many riders had never heard of the fare strike, and while many expressed interest that morning, there was not as much participation here as in other places around the city. To be fair, an important reason for this lack of action was the presence of many police and Muni Transportation Agency (MTA) agents, in addition to the recently hired bus goons. The MTA employees would chat with many of the drivers as they waited at the stops, and under those circumstances drivers who may have looked the other way at fare strikers or even encouraged the action were hostile to it that morning and made it clear that everyone was paying on their bus.

The police for their part promised to arrest anyone passing out the "fare strike" bus passes. Their presence practically assured the compliance of most people and the weakness of the strike at Balboa Park. Most people are not going to risk a ticket or worse to fight a quarter fare increase. That's the insidious nature of a gradual tightening of the screws in society: not much seems worth the effort, relative to the possible repercussions, of noncompliance. At the same time, many people we talked to saw the reduction of services, coupled with the fare increase, as intolerable. But plant a few representatives of the state at bus stations and a potentially organized mass of people becomes a fragmented crowd of isolated individuals unwilling to be the first or only one to put their asses on the line. I kept hoping the presence of the police would backfire, and that people would get really pissed about the money spent on the bus goons instead of for services, but this happened only to a small degree. All said and done, we did not spend enough time out at Balboa station and if we had who can say what would have occurred with that intimidating police presence.

Were drivers willing to lose their jobs over this, especially since rider concerns were not adequately related to those of drivers? I tried to get on a bus up by UCSF a few days after the initial fare strike day and was shocked at how antagonistic the driver became when I said I was striking. Then I looked to the back of the bus and saw two MTA employees watching the whole affair. What the hell can a driver do under those circumstances? And who knows what drivers are told about undercover surveillance on the buses. I know there were a lot of drivers that actively supported the fare strike in the preceding months and a lot of riders that engaged in direct action, but I personally saw many of the strategies that weakened the fare strike, the things we need to somehow counter next time.

ACCOUNT 7 : Gerry Jamin

I think the recent Muni fare strike did not take off for several reasons, some more historical and others more tactical. Perhaps it's obvious that if we had had the enthusiastic support of a large number of drivers the strike would have been much more successful. There did not seem to be much driver support. I went to one meeting with some members of the Drivers' Action Committee (including Victor Grayson)-who had more of a stake in a grassroots protest because they were facing discipline from the union-during which a couple of the drivers opposed the idea of a fare strike while supporting some symbolic action like a blockade of a Muni garage. I later heard that one of these drivers, at least, let many fare strikers onto his bus during and after the first day of the fare strike.

Union representatives allowed us into a meeting and even allowed us to drop off 1500 fare strike flyers at a bus barn, but we have little indication that they actually made them available to the drivers. (Though some actually said they got flyers "at work," which we assume to be the barns) I think that if the drivers knew about the strike it was mainly through our persistent flyering efforts. Perhaps the sign-up system Muni implemented, which guaranteed more hours to senior drivers while short-shifting more recent hires, was enough to sap what little momentum there was among them in support of a joint rider/driver action.

I imagine that more recent hires are more likely to be worried about losing their jobs and also more likely to heed the advice of senior drivers. But while my experience with non-participating drivers cut across all age categories, I cannot be sure of their level of experience with Muni. Many drivers had an accommodating attitude because they did not see it as their job to enforce payment of fare. This was helpful but it was not enough to ease peoples worries about getting popped by a fare inspector (who, as everyone knows, were out in droves for at least the whole first week of the strike). Would it have been possible to approach the fare inspectors too? Probably not during the strike but perhaps if they had been contacted before being pitted against us. Most of the inspectors working during the strike were temps, making $12 an hour and no benefits. Could we have cultivated some solidarity with them based on their temporary, use-and-discard status? Could we have better familiarized them with drivers' grievances, since as temp workers they probably were unaware? It's entirely possible that approaching such a group, sort of an auxiliary police force, would have been useless. But we might have tried something with them, a written appeal perhaps. Or more calculated public confrontations with them or their boss.

Of course many people did honor the strike and did not pay their fare. But since riders who habitually bought fast passes were not affected by the fare increase, the number of potential (cash-paying) fare strikers was too limited to provide the crucial momentum needed for such an action to really catch on. Muni's tactic of delaying the planned service cuts until several weeks after the fare hike was apparently enough to blunt what might otherwise have been a much larger wave of indignation.

Most people don't seem to be very receptive to the idea that public transportation should be free, although most people do readily recognize the injustices contained in Muni's funding allocations, including high administrative salaries and service expansion that benefits newly gentrifying neighborhoods at the expense of traditionally working class ones. Perhaps these kinds of capitalist priorities should have been exposed more forcefully. Perhaps also a condensed history of public transit struggles would have been a good thing to have handy, something concrete pointing to the potential collective power of bus riders as people who make the city function.

There was not enough effort to reach out to African-American bus riders, a serious fault since such a large portion of both riders and drivers are black. Grassroots African-American community organizations and their contacts with drivers might have helped spread the strike, and if they could or would not then the entire strategy of doing a fare strike would need to be re-examined. This points to the nature of the fare-strike movement in general which I feel was comprised more of experienced activists-though bus-riding activists- than of long-time Muni riders. (At least one fare strike activist I saw at meetings I found overbearing in his militant insistence on a job action by the drivers and from the expressions on some of the drivers faces they did too.) Of course this is not a problem to be solved easily.

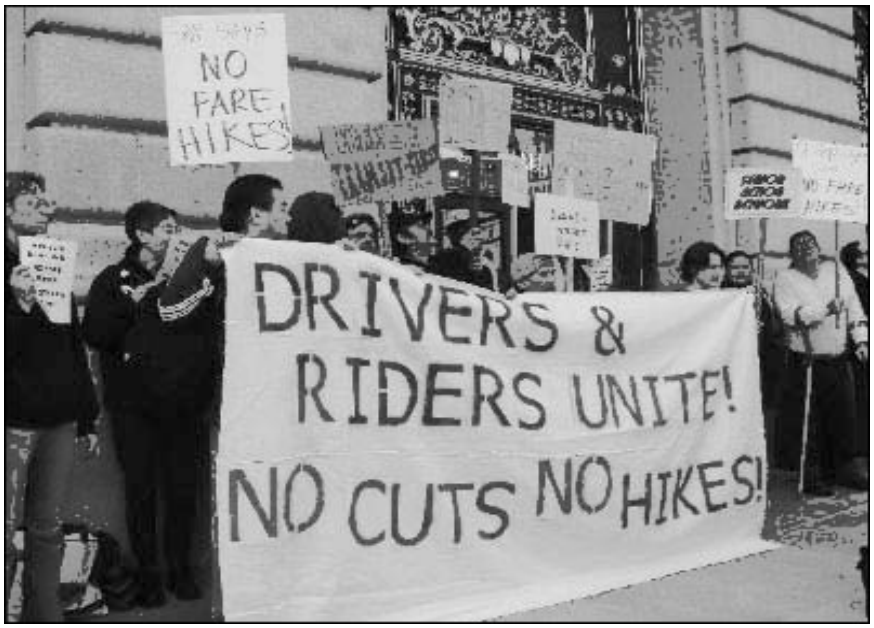
I think the most positive thing about the strike was the conversations on the street that it provoked about why and for whom this city is run the way it is run. People were very upset and many of them made larger connections to gentrification, corporate welfare, etc. Many riders I spoke to supported the idea of a fare strike even if they were not ready to risk getting a fine for doing it. (Some people suggested a campaign to get free Muni passes for workers which is sort of bureaucratic but would accomplish the same goal.) And even the thumbs-up type support from many of the drivers is a good sign. There was definitely a certain vibe the first few days of the strike that riders were well aware of, an awareness of something was going on that was city-wide. This is why I feel a campaign that can

pull the city together around a basic issue like transportation costs is worthwhile even if it produces no immediate gain.

ACCOUNT 8 : Dave Carr

I was attending both SF State and City College when I found out about the Fare Strike group through two friends at State, whom I would describe as anti-capitalists. Other strikers I met through City College, through the Anarchist Library there. Even though the Fare Strike group was my entry point into this action, I worked equally with two friends more associated both with Anarchist Action, and with the Social Strike. I never came under anyone's command and I was never tied to any leader. I agitated with people from City College on that campus, talking to people and handing out hundreds of fliers. I also handed out hundreds of fliers around the city with friends from the Fare Strike group during the early morning bus riding rush hours.

Any claims that Fare Strike concentrated on reformist march's to City Hall are rubbish as that one march was organized by the Day Laborers (one of the most effective groups of the strike) two months after the strike started and not intended to be a plea for reform, but a wrap up. The (anarchist) Social Strike web site was a great source of articles, including some history on previous fare strikes, and I had referred most of the people I spoke to it over the month leading up to the strike. I met Chris and Ian from Social Strike through the Fare Strike meetings in the Mission. If it wasn't for those meetings, I might not have hooked up with people at the Anarchist Library for SF City College agitating, nor would I have met anyone in Anarchist Action at that point. At the Fare Strike meetings, any "leadership" roles were split evenly among Fare Strike, Social Strike and, to a lesser degree, contributors who might not have considered themselves members of any group.



On the first day of the strike I started at the Balboa station (near City College) at around 7am. There was no one there except me and some riders. I was scared to do anything at first. I started talking to some people and giving out some of "ride free" fake transfers. Some of the Fare Strike people had incorporated that Social Strike prop into what we were doing. I was then joined by three friends from Fare Strike. One of us was in constant contact with the drivers as each bus pulled up. This person is one of the Fare Strike people who had met with Muni drivers at the various bus barns, and had been riding for weeks talking to drivers about the strike. When the police showed up I used it as an opportunity to scream about their role in opposing the will of the people to protect the status quo business/State interests. About thirty police, three vans, a truck, and camera toting police filming us were present. This stop is a main Muni station so all the suits were coming out of the office, even tearing down one of our signs, which was written in Chinese. The crowd was on our side, and a small 70 year old Chinese woman chased that guy screaming at him to give back the sign, which he didn't do.

People were generally supportive throughout the day. The Muni drivers at that Balboa station on the other hand seemed very afraid for their jobs. We were disappointed that none of them were participat-

ing, given that there had been a lot of support from drivers leading up to the strike.

The situation in the Mission was totally different. My classmate, who was reporting on the Fare Strike for the SF State paper the Xpress, told me that the Mission had been "going off" that morning. This was largely due to the Day Laborers. They were the only "waged" workers of the Strike, meaning they were getting paid for their participation in their capacity as Day Laborers (all of us participants are wage slaves). The Day Laborer program, though not inherently "revolutionary", is a progressive force for immigrant workers in SF. From their web site: "Formed in 1990 by a group of immigrant workers, together with community allies, who envisioned a space where laborers could unite to find temporary work to support themselves and their families. The program is committed to connecting workers to jobs with dignity, safety, and a just wage, and to providing employers with high-quality work performance." In other words, it helps protect the most vulnerable and hook them into our wage slave system, the alternative to which may be getting deported or not working. It was the Day Laborers who were one of the most vital forces of the whole strike effort! They connected with the Spanish speaking residents and the drivers in the Mission district, which was probably the strongest showing for participation in the strike. Jose and the others were great to work with, really nice, and dedicated. Many of the Day Laborers were excited about the concept of the strike having already done fare strikes in their countries of birth. A friend from Fare Strike, who is fluent in Spanish, also really did a great job in the Mission, aggressively helping crowds get on the buses, and communicating with drivers. The Mission was probably the strong point of the whole action. Entire busloads of people got on with drivers totally ignoring the fare. With the combined work of the Fare Strike, The Social Strike, and the Day Laborers, as well as other community groups who came on board, and most importantly the riders, there were many successes that day.

Overall, the strike was a partial success. I saw hundreds of people participating and talked to people all day. Thousands more witnessed the strike, and most seemed cautiously or strongly in support, with a minority either being against it or neutral. Those who argued against it usually defended raising fares on the riders, claiming that it was senseless to challenge the government on the issue, since Muni was already so good, and since we pay less than in other cities like New York. It struck me that one can always argue that things are worse elsewhere rather than acting on principle and making public transportation truly affordable or free everywhere.

Often times we were learning as we went. The tactic of riding the bus (free of course) to talk to riders inside the buses arose spontaneously for some, while others had already been doing this. Many people had thought being stationary at the bus stops would be the most effective tactic, but it became evident that getting on the buses, riding a short distance and talking to everyone interested was a great thing to do. Then, a person or team doing this would get off, and double back on a bus going the other way, doing the same outreach to riders. It was always the riders' own decision on whether to participate or not. I was merely letting them know it was happening, and giving background and the rationale I saw for doing it.

I was at three main locations that day. I started at the bus stop above the Balboa /Muni/BART station, then went on the 16th and Mission area, and ended up on Fourth and Market, and then up and down Market wherever the cops were not. Although they did catch up with us a few times, as with the 2003 antiwar protests, it was easy to walk away from where the police were, as they have a much more involved process to go anywhere on their own initiative. By the time I got to 16th and then Market later, the police and green vested Muni security presence was extremely strong, making it a lot harder for people to participate.

The main organizational flaw we made was not being sure we all knew what was going to be happening on day two. While many continued striking, I could not find anyone on day two, so my participation ended after day one, aside from a few rallies later on.

There were elements of the low income and minority communities that saw the whole Fare Strike as "ghetto" and did not want to be associated with any political effort aimed at challenging the fare increase. Some youths laughed at us and said they wanted a fare increase, or that only poor people

ride the bus and so on. It seems to me this has to do with a desire to be identified as successful people rather than poor victims, and I for one can't blame them, even if I (a Puerto Rican living in the Tenderloin district at that time), see a lack of class consciousness in such a view.

The support for the strike was overwhelming. This did not usually translate into taking part. One reason for this was the massive police and Muni security intimidation. It is also hard to walk up to someone and say "Hi, here's the issue, now participate in civil disobedience." This did happen, especially the mission where people were aware of the strike and how to do it, but it never became prevalent citywide. Despite our efforts, we had not reached enough people with the message before the first strike day. The bus pass issue was big too, as passes did not go up in price. People think the fare hike "doesn't effect them" if they have a pass, but the pass price rose by about 30% two years ago. That's a massive increase. Also, fares have risen from 15 cents to $1.50 in the last 18 years, a one thousand percent increase. But to many people it's "just a quarter."

ACCOUNT 9 : Tom Wetzel*

On the morning of September 1st, the fare strike groups concentrated most of their people at about eight major nodes in the Muni bus network, with banners, strike placards, bullhorns and leaflets. About half of these nodes were on the Mission-Van Ness corridor. Two of these sites were 16th and Mission and 24th and Mission in the Mission District's "main street" -- retail center -- the heart of San Francisco's Latino community. With over 85,000 rides on a typical weekday, Mission-Van Ness is one of the world's busiest bus operations. During the last two weeks of organizing, the day laborers had gotten involved in the fare strike campaign and had taken over the tabling and leafleting on Mission Street and other areas in the city with large numbers of Spanish-speaking immigrants. Support for the fare strike was particularly strong in the Mission District.

Muni targeted the Mission District for a heavy show of force on September 1st. When I got to 16th and Mission at 8AM, there were about 20 cops, virtually the entire Muni fare inspector force, and a squad of Muni "security assistants" -- temporarily employed young people outfitted in bright green vests. Paunchy middle-aged Muni bosses had gotten out of their offices and were overseeing the operation. Gerardo, one of the day laborers, told me he had coaxed several crowds of passengers to get on buses for free before the cops arrived.

In recent years Muni has had a practice and policy of permitting pass and transfer holders to enter the buses through the rear doors. However, in the last couple days before the fare strike, Muni applied stickers with a large red "Stop" sign to the back doors, with instructions to use the front door. This had the effect of slowing down bus service. The main job of the security assistants was to herd passengers away from the rear doors. This led to an incident at 16th and Mission where a female security assistant illegally grabbed a man by his pants as he was entering through the rear door, resulting in a physical altercation. The passenger was hauled off the bus and taken to jail, charged with assault.

Fare strike advocates distributed about 8,000 leaflets with the demands of the fare strike but in the shape and graphic style of a Muni bus transfer, and reproduced on the same flimsy newsprint. These transfer-shaped leaflets were very popular with riders. They felt more comfortable with something they could flash to the drivers.

The police claimed this was illegal counterfeiting but fare strike advocates claimed it was merely a leaflet, and therefore constitutionally protected free speech. At 24th and Mission, Moe, a lawyer with the fare strike legal team, smiled at the cops and challenged them to issue him a citation for passing out the transfer-shaped leaflets. Faced with a lawyer, the police backed down. Eventually a Muni fare inspector wrote Moe a citation.

Attitudes of drivers during the fare strike varied. Some drivers were playing by the Muni management game plan, refusing to move the bus if people didn't pay. But this seemed to be a small minority. As some Muni drivers told us, the union contract only requires the drivers to tell people what the

fare is. In one incident, when an activist announced he was on fare strike, the driver said "The fare is $1.50. You know the rules." She then stared straight ahead, smiling as he moved into the bus without paying. On another occasion, when a group of people got on the bus with money in their hands, ready to pay, the driver told them "Why pay? Today is the fare strike." In my own experience, only one out of six drivers have demanded that I pay since the beginning of the fare strike.

The more widespread the level of solidarity and action, the greater the power working people will have. The greater the power being exhibited visibly in actions, the greater the impact on the self-confidence and consciousness of the working class. The greater the sense of power ordinary people have, the more likely people will be willing to entertain ideas of more major changes. The more invisible such action in support of each other is, the more people will be inclined to believe "You're on your own" in dealing with the dominating structures and institutions, the more people will feel that radical ideas are "unrealistic."

The degree of change ordinary people can bring about depends upon how widespread and how deep-seated the willingness is for action within the general population, against the dominant structures. That is, it depends upon the level of class consciousness that exists at a particular time. But all such actions, if they become visible and activate and motivate people, can contribute to raising consciousness and developing the willingness to fight in the future.

The Muni fare strike was -- and could only be -- a fight for a small change in the terms of our exploitation and subordination under the present system. To be a fight for us all, to enhance the sense of solidarity, it was essential that it be a fight for the interests of the mass of ordinary folks who depend on Muni. The corporate media parroted the Muni management party line in downplaying the fare strike. The S.F. Chronicle claimed they did a "random check" on a number of lines and found "only a handful" of fare strike participants. On a transit system that handles over 700,000 rides every weekday, a handful in a small sample translates into a significant number of people.

*Tom Wetzel's full analysis of the Fare Strike can be found online at the following locations:
"Post mortem on the San Francisco Fare Strike, 2005" on Libcom:
http://libcom.org/library/post-mortem-on-the-san-francisco-fare-strike-2005-tom-wetzel
"San Francisco Transit Fight" from *Z Magazine's* website:
http://zmagsite.zmag.org/Nov2005/wetzel1105.html

ACCOUNT 10 : Social Strike Website Post

(At the end of the second week of the fare strike, it continued to be effective with some)

September 12: I ride the Line 5 from Divisadero and McAllister into work downtown, which worked pretty well before the fare hike. Now it takes maybe 1/2 an hour for a bus to come, even if two, three, even four buses pass going in the opposite direction! Monday morning I finally cracked. Why should we have to pay more money for less service? So I told the ten or so people waiting that I didn't plan on paying, it's just not right, and if they shared my feelings then we could support one another. When the bus came, I said good morning to the driver and walked onto the standing-room only bus. The driver called after me, "Miss! Miss!" and I said, sorry but I'm not paying, I'm on FARE STRIKE!" He didn't say anything else, and several people walked on after me without paying without him saying anything to them either. When I finally got to the back of the bus, I saw several more people had jumped through the back. Amazingly, some people paid! I can't decide if that's funny or sad.

COLLECTIVE CONCLUSION

We conceived of the fare strike as a starting point for a much larger struggle, an action that held the potential to recast transit as something that could truly serve working class needs. As it is now, a transfer of wealth is taking place where we are increasingly being burdened with the costs of a system that profits the ruling class, San Francisco's downtown business elite. Our organizing efforts came from this perspective, of seeing transit as a crucial element of class struggle; for us as riders it is a struggle outside the workplace that takes place on the terrain of everyday life. For drivers, it is a class-based fight against the speed-up and increasing stress and misery of their job. We hoped our reciprocal solidarity would in turn support their fight against exploitation. In our wildest dreams of success, it would be a step towards *expropriating the expropriators* by taking over transit and gaining more control of our lives. But a successful fare strike (reversing fare hikes, service cuts, and driver layoffs) was still our primary goal and it clearly resonated with the overwhelming majority of drivers and riders we had face-to-face interactions with in the build up to September 1.

There were a few glaring weaknesses in our ability to launch an enduring Fare Strike. One was the fact that the price of a Muni Fast Pass was not raised. For those who could afford $45 for the monthly pass, the inconvenience of reduced service was not a strong enough incentive to participate in the Fare Strike. Since our organizing efforts were not clear enough in encouraging a boycott of the Fast Pass, a large segment of Muni riders were left out. Additionally, many of the streetcar lines serve the more conservative parts of the western part of the city, where many Fast Pass users are homeowners who commute to work downtown. From our interactions with them, many were adamantly opposed to the Fare Strike.

The next problem was the lack of enough foreign language literature, or organizers who speak those languages. The exception to this was our Spanish language efforts in the Mission District and adjoining neighborhoods to the south. We had sufficient Chinese language literature, but not enough active organizers from that community. We often met Russian-speaking sympathizers who strongly suggested that we put things in their language. Census data reports that 112 languages are spoken in the greater San Francisco metropolitan area and only 60% of San Franciscans speak "only English" at home. All this points to our flaw in not addressing the language needs of non-native speaking Muni riders.

And the last, perhaps most serious, problem was the inability to coordinate our efforts with the employees of Muni, especially the Drivers' Action Committee (DAC), in any sustained way. We had begun promisingly when the DAC sent a couple of drivers to all three town hall meetings. On June 17 two DAC members were quoted in the *San Francisco Examiner* calling for a "wildcat" strike on Muni for June 30, to coincide with the expiration of the BART worker's contract. Soon after, a half dozen of us from the two main fare strike groups met with half a dozen from DAC, as well as two BART workers in a café next to the Potrero Muni bus barn, to attempt to make plans for coordinating the Fare Strike. But we did not have unanimity because not all drivers agreed with our tactics. By the end of June, the two militants from DAC were thrown out of the union and fined heavily for violating union bylaws for calling for the wildcat strike. Some of us went in solidarity to support them during their hearing at the union hall. One of the drivers, Victor Grayson, was a former Black Panther who had been coming to the town hall meetings. The union's punishment had a dampening effect and we never met the DAC as a group again. All along, one person from the Social Strike faction maintained almost exclusive contact with DAC and was extremely guarded in permitting interaction between drivers and fare strike organizers, to the point of preventing all but one or two other organizers from going to DAC meetings. This centralism and vanguardism and was probably the single greatest factor in thwarting the building up of solidarity between drivers and riders, a crucial element for a successful fare strike.

From our research and through contacting radicals around North America and throughout the world, we could not find any detailed accounts of a fare strike, of the type we were attempting in San Francisco in 2005, that lasted longer than one day. We stand to be corrected, though. The celebrated

example of "self-reduction of prices" movement in Turin, Italy in August, 1974 actually involved activists combating the increase in fares by setting up tables near the bus terminal and selling unofficial weekly passes at the old, or "reduced," price. A delegation then marched in protest to the regional bureau of transportation offices and within a few days their pressure rescinded the fare hikes. None of the examples we were aware of were successful because of sustained working class solidarity between riders and drivers where there was an absolute refusal to pay the fares on the bus, train or ticket booth. Yet that was what we were striving for and we knew the difficulty of the challenge of doing what had only been suggested before, at least here in San Francisco. We knew that to succeed our Fare Strike would have to persevere beyond the first day and would have to go on indefinitely.

Unfortunately, we did not have a definite plan for extending the Fare Strike beyond the first day. We should have taken into account that the general consciousness of political activity in the United States is geared towards instant gratification, like one-day marches or protest events, where everyone goes home afterward to see themselves on the evening news. What was needed, and did not happen beyond a small core of fare strikers and some riders, was a sustained effort that could have grown to the point that it pressured Muni to back down. The first day looked very promising, but the next day it was hard to coordinate those who still wanted to be involved; it was impossible to draw more people in because there was no visible presence of the Fare Strike on the street. One inspiring exception was the ongoing Fare Strike along the transit corridors spreading outward from the Mission District, carried on mostly by the Spanish-speaking working class for nearly a month. Should we attempt a Fare Strike again, this is the model we would learn from; we would need to build on the strengths and analyze and remedy the weaknesses. Another fare strike would be the continuation of the many small victories we all helped catalyze in 2005.

Tens of thousands of riders refused to pay, rejecting the increasing the commodification of transit, often without even realizing the radical implications of what they were doing. The tactic of riding for free, using services while making our demands terrified the Muni bureaucracy because it was so non-negotiable. We like to think that, after such an action, whose potential could be seen by so many riders and drivers, simple protest will now seem weak in comparison. It is not likely to be replaced by another, less direct form of political expression after so many riders and drivers witnessed these possibilities, becoming aware that with greater participation it could have brought Muni to its knees. Hopefully, the consciousness that was raised in this fight will explode even more powerfully in the next struggle.

APPENDIX

Historical Precedents

> No pre-established schema, no ritual that holds good at all times, shows it the path that it must travel. Historical experience is its only teacher; its *Via Dolorosa* to self-liberation is covered not only with immeasurable suffering, but with countless mistakes. The goal of its journey, its final liberation, depends upon the proletariat, on whether it understands that it must learn from its own mistakes.
>
> -Rosa Luxemburg, *Crisis of Social Democracy*

The history of class struggle has advanced in dialectical relationship with the development of techniques to produce, circulate and accumulate capital; our account concerns transportation's role in this process, whether for getting our bodies to work as the commodity *labor power*, as the movement of goods and services to the far corners of the planet to reach markets, or as investments in transportation infrastructure that benefit landowners from enhanced ground-rents. The following historical

sketch touches on those developments, as well as attempts of working people to oppose them by taking the class war on the offensive.

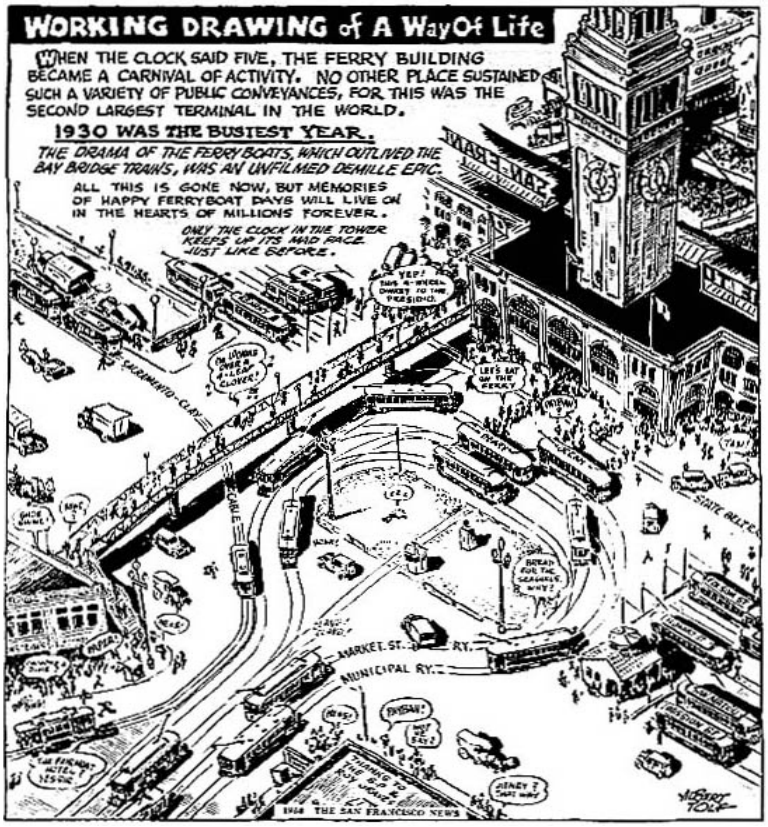
In North America battles around transportation have been among the bloodiest. The fiercest episode was the pitched battles of the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 that brought the U.S. the closest it has ever come to a nationwide general strike. The crushing of the Pullman Strike on the railroads in 1894 saw the state's first effective use of court-issued injunctions to contain and break strikes.

San Francisco rose as a city with the Gold Rush of '49. As it grew, its development was limited by its many hills, although many hills were leveled downtown. This was also rectified with the cable car, beginning in 1873. It was built, not to serve human needs, but because real estate value depends on relative location, which is transformed by improvements in transportation. Landlords stood to gain because these investments enhance land value, based on proximity to transport. By the late 1870s:

> Vast acreages of San Francisco real estate could be developed simply because there was adequate transportation, provided there were sufficient investors to finance the construction of a street railway line. An 1887 study showed that real estate values within 200 feet of a cable car line jumped anywhere from 14 percent to 40 percent a year after commencement of service. That in itself was an incentive to invest in an urban railway.[1]

Transit has not only developed the physical layout of the city in ways that reflect class divisions, but has also clearly cleaved allegiances during labor strife along class lines. The most extreme example was the open class war during the 1907 Streetcar Strike against the ruthless owner of San Francisco's United Railroads (URR), the robber baron Patrick Calhoun. It lasted from May 5 to November 5 and resulted in 31 deaths, 25 of whom were passengers, and more than 1100 were injured, 900 of whom were passengers. The strikers were defeated in the deadliest transit battle in U.S. history.

The defeat of the URR Strike, at a time when San Francisco was the most highly unionized city in the U.S., if not the world, was a crushing blow. The ripple effect carried over to other attacks on the working class, including the frame-up and twenty-two year jailing of streetcar union organizer Tom Mooney in 1916 and another defeat of URR workers in 1917. But the strength of the working class and anger at the anti-worker offensive had other repercussions: "In December, 1909, after years of accidents on the URR and popular disgust with Calhoun's strikebreaking and bribe-giving ways finally turned the tide. San Franciscans authorized over $2 million worth of bonds to purchase and build the first publicly owned streetcar line in the nation."[2] It is still called the San Francisco Municipal Railway (Muni); today it is the system of buses, streetcars and cable cars.



This was the time of the "Roar of the Four" down Market Street; it was filled with four tracks in both directions, twenty-one lines rushing down it in all. At its base, there were three loops at the Ferry Building alone, which could handle 290 cars an hour. Until the 1930s as many as 50,000 people a day arrived from the suburbs across the Bay by ferry. These types of transit were still highly profitable for the capitalists who invested in them, as well as land owners and speculators who wanted

to enhance accessibility and thereby raise the value of their holdings. Yet there was a definite class and race bias to the way transit lines were laid out. Since it was more profitable to extend lines to areas where land and housing developments catered to the wealthy, neighborhoods of the poor, working class or non-white people were neglected. The class distinction of earlier times is still discernible today in the patterns of how the city was built up and how commercial districts are located around what used to be called "streetcar suburbs."

But the working class was finding new ways to fight back for control of the city. An excellent example was the Seattle General Strike of 1919 where the rank-and-file run General Strike Committee was able to operate the city, while keeping the ruling class and agents of the state at bay with the solidarity of nearly all working people. Examples like these informed our own efforts in the 2005 Fare Strike; the Council Communist group Root & Branch introduced first-hand accounts from that strike, showing that:

> …the idea of strikers providing partial services presented here can be useful not only in general but in more limited strikes. Such tactics can help to keep non-striking workers (i.e. workers outside the striking plant, industry, or service) on the side of the strikers and at the same time hit the capitalists more directly. For example, in the 1970 postal strike, letter carriers promised to deliver welfare checks even while on strike. In Cleveland, in 1944, streetcar workers threatened to refuse to collect fares in order to win a pay increase-the City Council gave in before they actually used the tactic…This type of action would in most cases have to be taken outside the union, since few union bureaucrats would use such a clearly class-directed tactic, and thus of necessity the workers would have to organize this them selves.[3]

The eighty-one-day West Coast Maritime Strike in 1934 culminated in a general strike that paralyzed San Francisco for four days. It extended to Oakland too, which was shut down just as tight.

> The East Bay's street car system and the Key System ferries halted operations… employers were especially upset when the Key System's employees' strike resolution called for the employees "and the workers of the community to take over the transportation system for working people." St. Sure [the negotiator representing the interests of the ruling class] said he and several businessmen, "frightened" by the prospect of "an actual class struggle," had asked Governor Merriam to send the National Guard into Oakland.[4]

Twelve years later, in the same city, transit not only played a vital role but was the spark kicking off the 1946 Oakland General Strike. Cops were scabherding goods into two struck department stores and streetcar and bus operators from the Key Route System refused to cross the police cordon, considering it a picket line. Stranded commuters began organizing block-by-block and within 24 hours it was a community-wide strike involving over 100,000 workers. The general strike lasted fifty-four hours and remained strong as long as transit workers stayed out in solidarity.

There were six city-wide general strikes in 1946, as well as there being more strikes, strikers and hours lost to production than in any year before or since. The ruling class was on the defensive and had to respond. A corporate executive said, immediately after World War II, "…labor militancy had influenced decisions by businesses in respect to the location of new plants…Generally, large aggregations of labor in one big plant are more subject to outside disrupting influences, and have less happy relations with management than in smaller [suburban] plants."[5]

The post-World War II strike wave in 1945 and 1946 was the greatest period of labor unrest in U.S. history; it was caused by major shortages in housing, unemployment and prices for common goods that were drastically outstripping wages. Capital responded with the world's greatest boom of commodification: the Marshall Plan to restore and expand the world market for American goods; suburban building of single family detached homes and rising homeownership (usually with racist covenants excluding non-whites); mass consumerism, with a plethora of goods from household appliance to the

private automobile. All this was made further possible in 1956 with the birth of the federal highway system, the biggest public works project in U.S. history up to that time, which made the car the dominant form of transportation in this country. Its original rationale, though, was for efficient military deployment in the case of internal insurrection or foreign invasion. It came about as the Cold War propelled the U.S. economy forward with military-industrial expansion and war, albeit small ones in remote places. Where and how we live and our mobility within our communities, with global significance, was changed forever.

Rise of the Automobile & Suburbanization

> In Detroit the chairman of the rapid transit commission himself spoke of the automobile as "the magic carpet of transportation for all mankind."[6]

Within two years of the 1946 general strike the tracks of the Key Route System in Oakland were being pulled up and replaced by buses, having been bought up by National City Lines (NCL) in a national campaign to eliminate mass rail transit.

> The electric streetcar systems might have survived the impersonal forces of the marketplace, if only because the trolley was as efficient as any alternative form of intracity movement. But the automobile industry did not leave the existence of competitive forms of travel to chance. Beginning in the 1926 and continuing for the next thirty years, General Motors operated a subsidiary corporation [NCL] to buy nearly bankrupt streetcar systems and to substitute rubber-tire vehicles for the rail cars…by 1950 General Motors had been involved in the replacement of more than one hundred streetcar operations-including those of Los Angeles, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Salt Lake City [and New York City]-with GM-manufactured buses [as well as the products of Firestone Tire, Standard Oil of California and Phillips Petroleum]."[7]

San Francisco was different because the city charter called for complete municipal ownership of utilities, but it was not until 1944 that a bond issue was successful and the Market Street Railway (MSR) was absorbed into Muni. This staved off the NCL from dismantling rail transit in San Francisco, but the rolling stock and trackage on MSR had not be update or improved. Muni used this as a rationale to eliminate lines serving working class neighborhoods, like the Mission, but invested in renovating streetcar lines serving wealthy parts of the city where there was a higher percentage of homeownership, like the Sunset District and neighborhoods west of Twin Peaks. Today they are still served by Muni streetcar lines K, L, M and N.

At the end of World War II Bay Area bureaucrats laid out plans for "a coordinated system of freeways, expressways, parkways, major and secondary thoroughfares; rail lines, bus subways…large scale downtown off-street parking facilities, and a revised city land-use programs as a framework for transportation."[8] By 1957, 200 miles of freeways had been completed, costing $75 million a year, in the nine Bay Area counties. Suburbs fanned out into formerly rural areas with the building of tract homes. Mammoth shopping malls, another product of the automobile era, sprang up with parking areas four to five times greater in size than the floor area of the mall buildings. But by 1955 a backlash had begun in San Francisco.

Automobile-based Development and its Discontents

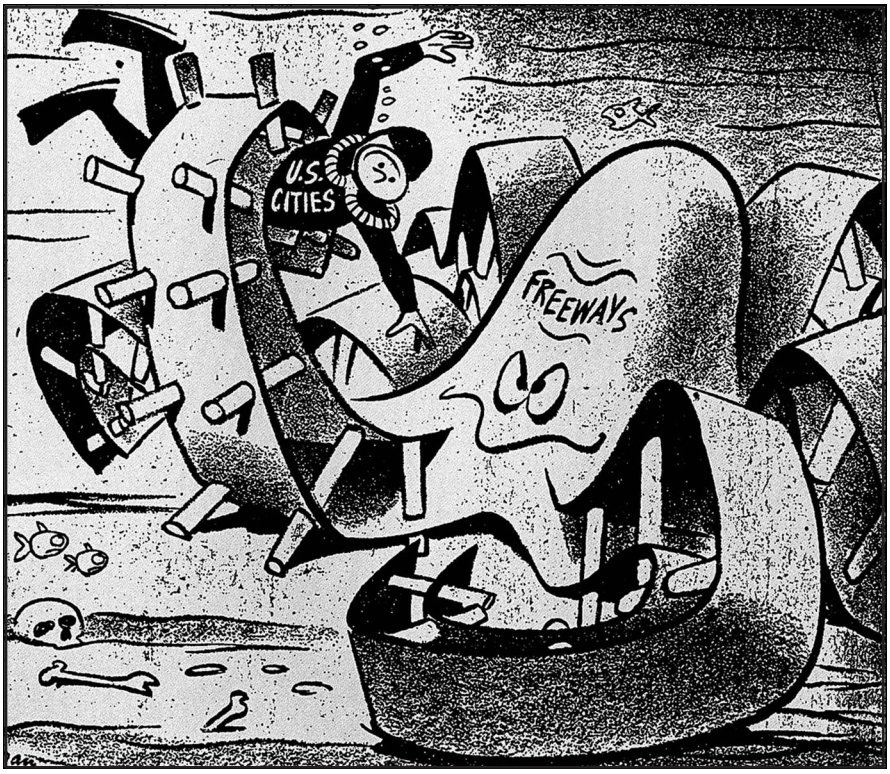
> From the automobiles to television, the goods that the spectacular system chooses to produce also serve as weapons for constantly reinforcing the conditions that engender "lonely crowds."[9]

Opposition to freeway construction began in earnest in 1955. With the completion of the Embarcadero Freeway in 1958, the "freeway revolt" reached full-steam. While not always clearly class struggle-based, it was definitely a rejection of the *commodity-logic* of the automobile. Thousands of people rallied against the freeway and its negative effects on social life and the physical environment, the alienating conditions that engender "lonely crowds." By 1959, city politicians in San Francisco had rejected seven of ten planned freeways and continued to reject more new ones in the ensuing years. San Francisco is the only city in the U.S. that has *lost* freeway miles since 1990.

In the period after World War II, the ruling class set its sights on areas of San Francisco that it saw as "blighted," meaning that they were ripe for a new round of accumulation. They took advantage of new laws for this purpose.

> These citizens [of the ruling class] had accepted the thesis that if the city was to survive, it would have to clear and rebuild the old, decayed areas and make them even more alluring than the suburbs. Through its department of city planning the city therefore mapped its blighted areas and made a pilot study of the possibilities of redeveloping the Western Addition-two years before Congress passed the Housing Act of 1949, providing for loans and grants to cities in clearing blighted areas and preparing such areas for resale or lease to private enterprise.[10]

The state was subsidizing sectors of the ruling class to bulldoze poor working class communities, usually people of color, for "urban renewal"--which was more accurately called "Negro removal." The working class low-rent hotels and apartments of South of Market were destroyed in massive clearance projects, as was the African-American Fillmore neighborhood and the Filipino Manilatown strip along Kearny Street with the I-Hotel at its heart. But people rose up and the wrecking ball was slowed and then stopped, in the Western Addition, and even prevented entirely in places like the Mission District in the late 1960s and early 70s through the efforts of community organizing. Gentrification often comes about with the collusion of banks and insurance company in red-lining, the manipulation of access to finances to allow redevelopment agencies to force residents out. When Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) built two stations in the mostly Latino, working class Mission District, it became ripe for redevelopment schemes and speculators, but active community groups kept them at bay and thwarted gentrification until the 1990s.



The new six mile "T-Third Street" Light Rail line, which cost $650 million, connects the Financial District with a 1,300-acre newly declared Redevelopment Zone in a predominately African-American Bayview/Hunter's Point. This, along with awarding the contract to build tract homes on the former Hunter's Point Naval shipyard to the modern day robber barons of the Lennar Corporation, is the latest round of racist gentrification in San Francisco. And again, transit is being used to enhance property values so that ruling class interests can displace the African-American working class and create a

favorable climate for investment.

Whatever quality of life that remains and makes San Francisco livable, it is attributable to the refusal of both the car and the bulldozer. San Francisco has 46.7 square miles (compare with Los Angeles' 465.9), a population of 739,426 (down 4.8% since 2000), a homeownership rate of 35% (the national average is 68%), and is the second most densely populated city in the U.S., making it heavily dependent on public transit. The city cannot expand because it is a peninsula, surrounded on three sides by water. In many ways San Francisco is an atypical American city because of the way it has resisted suburbanization of the urban core, yet it is a magnet for gentrifiers who "flip" the existing housing stock, or who lobby to be able to condominiumize existing housing in a speculative race for instant profit .

Bay Area Rapid Transit

> The function of the BART system is to carry suburban workers from Contra Costa, Alameda, and San Mateo Counties into the downtown center. Within San Francisco, BART has only four stations outside downtown and lacks service to vast areas of the city, including most of its lower-income population. Upper-income suburbs such as Orinda and Lafayette have BART stations; the city's low-income African American ghetto, Hunter Point, has none. The study [by sociologist J. Allen Whitt] … concludes: "BART was designed to serve…the preservation and growth of the central city and the protection of corporate investments there. The prime initiators and supporters of BART were the giant corporations located in San Francisco." [11]

The four-county BART system has its hub in downtown Oakland, but its main purpose is to connect San Francisco's Financial District and the suburbs creeping outward on the other side of the Bay and down the peninsula due south of the city. The latter is also served by Caltrain that goes south through San Jose, at the heart of Silicon Valley. Both have a ridership of mostly homeowners at the suburban periphery. Around 1980 BART realized its purpose, coinciding with the Manhattanization of the Financial District, when more non-San Franciscans worked downtown than residents of San Francisco. Ruling class elites actively pushed for this vertical development, which was met with a "skyscraper revolt" similar to the anti-freeway movement. It was partially successful, but was an uninspiring, defeatist struggle based on exerting reformist pressure on the city government that was almost entirely devoid of a class perspective. The physical terrain being struggled over had changed as well, dispersing into a massive urban/suburban conglomeration making it nearly impossible to bring together the "lonely crowds" in sufficient numbers to carry out mass struggle. The period of militant class-based battles, unifying through class consciousness and solidarity, had receded into the past and has largely disappeared from living memory.

Recent Class Struggle & Transit

A few of us organizing for the 2005 Fare Strike had been involved in the 1990s in propaganda efforts to reintroduce a class struggle perspective and to foment fare strikes on the Muni, as well as on BART. While covering the city with agit-prop posters, fliers and stickers which clearly had an anti-capitalist message, these efforts had about a half dozen participants and were never able to get off the ground. The closet we came to affecting real change was in 1993, when Muni announced the elimination of transfers. Just before the evening rush hour on the day this was to take effect we created a fake flier from the mayor, with four free one-day passes that could be torn off on each one, and worked our way up Market Street from the Financial District taping them up on the vertical surfaces of bus shelters. A Muni driver saw us giving out free passes, waved us onto her bus and said "Management never tells us about these things! Give me a bunch of those so I can give them to riders." People swarmed us and tore off the passes as quickly as we could put them up. At 5:00 p.m. the city had a press conference announcing the letter was a fraud, documented here (from the San Francisco Examiner, October 10,

1993):

> VIRTUAL UNREALITY: City Hall has been more unreal than normal lately. / First, there was the phony press release written on Mayor Jordan's letterhead about his alleged desire to help Muni riders survive the elimination of transfers. The release had counterfeit Muni passes attached and sported a fake mayoral signature. / Hizzoner wasn't amused. "You should not be fooled by this chicanery," he admonished in a stern, but real counter-press release.

The elimination of transfers, especially on a grid-based system like Muni, created so much chaos that within six months Muni had to reintroduce them. Our efforts had an effect exponentially greater than our very limited numbers, but we were never able to catalyze a mass-based, sustained fare strike that would truly put the working class on the offensive as in some of the following examples.

Our actions had been influenced by the "self-reduction of prices" movement in Italy throughout the 1970s. This in turn had been influenced by the ideas of *operaismo*, a radical "workerism" that rejected the institutional representation of class struggle through unions and parties and embodied working class self-activity. After major gains in wages and working conditions in the "Hot Autumn" of 1969, capital went on the counterattack with raises in living costs for social consumption, things like electricity and public transport; inflation was running at twenty-five percent. Some self-reduction actions in the Turin area had been against the 106 private interurban bus lines in the region. Workers taking the Turin-Pinerolo commuter bus in August 1974 discovered one Monday morning that the fares had been raised thirty percent.

> Workers set up tables near the bus terminal with signs all around saying, "Refuse fare increase!" But more importantly, they issued substitute weekly bus tickets, selling them at the old price (tickets are normally bought by commuting workers on Mondays)…After a few days of pressure, the [Regional] Bureau [of Transportation] ordered suspension of the fare increase.[12]

Unlike the self-reduction of prices in the Italian example where the old fare was paid or utility bills or rent was paid at a reduced amount, our action in 2005 was a "social strike" like the one attempted in Cleveland in 1944. These are strikes where services vital to the working class continue to be provided while no form of payment is collected. In the case of transit, buses or trains continue operating but riders pay no fare. The strike then takes on a wider class-based dynamic and the struggle is fought on a wider social terrain.

Another fare strike we learned from was the 1998 "No Seat, No Fare!" campaign by the Los Angeles Bus Riders Union (BRU). Starting in 1992, BRU has taken a reformist approach in demanding civil rights for poor, people of color and working class transit users. Their approach is a combination of lobbying, civil disobedience and direct action. Their fare strike attempted to expose the hypocrisy of grossly inefficient, overcrowded inner-city buses at the same time the transit agency was pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into commuter rail lines to serve a tiny percentage of suburbanites. BRU's month-long "No Seat, No Fare!" effort was carried on by their paid staff, 3,000 dues-paying members and 50,000 supporters who refused to pay fares whenever an overcrowded bus had no seats. They had a highly visible presence on buses, developed rapport with the drivers and succeeded in keeping fares from being raised for eight years and forced the transit authority to buy a fleet of new less-polluting buses. And the most lasting lesson we learned from BRU was to try to emulate their multilingual focus, with English, Korean and Spanish-speaking organizers and literature.

A Scandinavian fare strike network called Planka.nu, located in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Ostergotland and Helsinki are pushing for a somewhat unusual idea called "P-kassan," or freeriding. The transit systems in those cities work on the honor system and each person pays a small amount to the fund and if they get caught freeriding without a ticket, their fine is paid by the group. The idea is based on

solidarity and mutual protection. Their ultimate demand is for free public transportation, owned and controlled by the workers that use it.

Immediately preceding our Fare Strike agitation in 2005, the Midwest Unrest group successfully organized for a fare strike that pushed state-level politicians to come up with the money to prevent fare hikes on Chicago's CTA system in December 2004. Soon after that, in January of 2005 a Bus Riders Union in Vancouver, Canada attempted a fare strike that went on for one day. On the internet we learned of a spontaneous fare strike on the Auckland, New Zealand rail system in June 2005. We read extensively about the ongoing transit struggles involving boycotts of monthly passes that have been going on in Italy for the last several years. Through our interactions with people from Midwest Unrest and the written accounts from Vancouver, Auckland and Italy, we were able to learn many valuable lessons about how we could attempt to make our Fare Strike more successful. From all the accounts in this pamphlet, we hope someone reading it will find inspiration from our first-hand experiences to attempt a fare strike where they live.

Notes

1. Paul C. Trimble, *Railways of San Francisco* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), 7.
2. Michael Kazin , *Barons of Labor: The San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 191.
3. Root & Branch, eds., Root & Branch: *The Rise of the Workers' Movements* (Greenwich, CN: Fawcett Publications, 1975), 209.
4. David F. Selvin, *A Terrible Anger: The 1934 Waterfront and General Strikes in San Francisco* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 185.
5. George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 258-259.
6. Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 171.
7. Ibid., 170.
8. Nancy Olmstead, *The Ferry Building: Witness to a Century of Change 1898-1998* (Berkeley, CA: Heydey Books, 1998), 145.
9. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (London: Rebel Press, 2004), Trans. Ken Knabb, 15.
10. Mel Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area: A Metropolis Perspective* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 288.
11. Chester Hartman, *City for Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 7.
12. Bruno Ramirez, "Self-reduction of Prices in Italy," *Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War, 1973-1992* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1992), 186.