

## Labor Rights are Human Rights, the NYC Labor Day Parade and the Left Labor Project

By Pat Fry



NYC's Labor Day parade on Sept 10 was an all day event with several thousand trade unionists marching up Fifth Avenue carrying signs "Standing up for Jobs" and "The Rich Must Pay their Fair Share." The transit workers' union sported t-shirts and buttons with "Workers Rights are Human Rights," while other contingents called for solidarity with CWA's Verizon workers and 32BJ SEIU's building services workers on strike. The US Labor Against the War distributed cost of war leaflets and SEIU Local 1199's Fight for a Fair Economy campaign was highlighted. The parade was also a good opportunity for members of the Left Labor Project to leaflet with sign-up cards for its newly adopted educational campaign – Labor Rights are Human Rights.

The Left Labor Project (LLP) was formed in early 2009 by socialist trade unionists and labor movement activists in NYC, who are either unaffiliated individuals or members of organizations that held non-sectarian positions in the all-important 2008 elections electing Barack Obama. In addition to CCDS, the socialist organizations that form the LLP are CPUSA, FRSO, and DSA. Other organizations, such as Organization for a Free Society, and the Colombian Trade Union Solidarity are also member organizations. LLP is the U.S. organizational representative on the Social Movements arm of the Bolivarian organization of ALBA, and works to strengthen other international relationships as well.

Over the last two years, a key organizational undertaking of LLP has been working to establish May Day rallies as official trade union-sponsored events in NYC. Originally developed out of LLP discussions, the idea was taken up by an organizing committee that officially represented many trade unions, immigrant rights organizations and community groups. The organizing committee had official LLP representation as well. It is this same approach that shapes LLP's latest undertaking – an educational campaign, "Labor Rights are Human Rights." After several educational discussions led by international labor rights lawyers, LLP developed an informational flyer, a model resolution and pledge card that were distributed widely at the September 10<sup>th</sup> Labor Day parade. Organized by an LLP Youth brigade, some 4,000 flyers got out and 80 LLP campaign cards signed. It is hoped



that this work will lead to an organizing committee sponsored officially by NY trade union locals and allied organizations.



Next month's LLP forum will feature Transit Workers Union Local 100 president, John Samuelson, who will discuss the complaint his union local has before the International Labor Organization against the U.S. government because of New York State's law prohibiting strikes in the public sector, named the Taylor Law. TWU Local 100's former president, Roger Toussaint, was imprisoned for a week in 2005 during his local's strike in defiance of the law. As a result the union was fined millions and stripped of its right to collect members' dues through payroll deduction. A decision on the complaint which the AFL-CIO nationally has joined is expected in the near future. The ILO ruled in favor of North Carolina State workers' unions that are prohibited by state law to collectively bargain.

Defense of collective bargaining has become a national campaign in the face of right wing Republican efforts to abolish it in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and elsewhere. Awareness that collective bargaining rights are human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Labor Organization and in international treaties signed by the U.S. (International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights) can be important tools in rallying the public to the side of unions. For more info, see the International Association of Democratic Lawyers: <http://www.iadllaw.org/>

At the September 16<sup>th</sup> meeting of the LLP, a leadership body was elected which includes CCDS leaders, Pat Fry as Recording Secretary and Anne Mitchell as CCDS organizational representative. Among others elected were LLP Coordinator Larry Moskowitz who is national organizer for the Working Families Party, Jim Perlstein, an officer of the Professional Staff Union which represents faculty of the City University of New York, Muata Green, an EMT worker and member of AFSCME District Council 37, Rhadames Rivera, Vice President of SEIU Local 1199, and Fitzroy Searles of LLP Youth who was an organizer of the One Nation rally last year in Washington DC.