

Hundreds of thousands demand strike action in the US

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The American news media and political establishment are singularly obsessed with the degrading spectacle surrounding the Senate confirmation of Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh. The issue is dominating every newspaper and broadcast channel and was the sole subject on the Sunday morning network news shows.

A fundamental aim of the Democrats' focus on the sexual allegations against Kavanaugh, as the WSWS has explained, is to hijack popular opposition to the Trump administration and subordinate it to the Democrats' own reactionary agenda of war, censorship and social inequality. This requires the endless promotion of the lie that race and gender, not class, are the central divisions in American society.

The goal is to somehow divert attention from and cover up social and political reality, which is characterized above all by the growth of class tensions and conflict, in the US and around the world. A decade after the crash of 2008, which was used by the ruling class in the US and internationally to carry out a historic transfer of wealth from the working class to the rich, workers are engaging in a series of strikes and mass protests over basic class issues.

Last week, major cities in Argentina were brought to a standstill as workers launched their fourth general strike against the right-wing government of Mauricio Macri and austerity measures demanded by the IMF. On Thursday and Friday, thousands of pilots and cabin crew in six European countries carried out a coordinated 24-hour strike against Ryanair. Over 30,000 workers in Finland are scheduled to strike Tuesday to oppose government plans to facilitate the layoff of workers.

Workers in Nigeria conducted a four-day strike ending Sunday, which shut down schools and public transport and threatened to spread to the oil industry before the unions called it off. The workers demanded an increase in the monthly minimum wage from the current 18,000 naira (US\$49) to between 45,000 and 65,000 naira (US \$124-\$179).

In the United States, after a decade of falling real wages,

rising medical costs and the proliferation of precarious employment, hundreds of thousands of workers are pressing for strike action, while thousands are engaged in ongoing strikes.

In Chicago, more than 4,000 hotel workers are continuing their strike, which began on September 7, to demand better wages and year-round health care. The walkout is continuing at 11 hotels after the UNITE HERE union announced a settlement with Hilton on Sunday. Another 8,000 workers authorized strikes at Marriott International, the world's largest hotel chain, in Waikiki and Maui in Hawaii, and San Francisco, Boston, Detroit and other cities.

Warehouse workers and truck drivers are set to start a three-day strike at ports in Los Angeles and Long Beach, California Monday to demand their transition to full-time status instead of remaining "independent contractors" forced to pay for their own medical insurance, fuel costs and truck payments and repairs.

More than 30,000 steelworkers at US Steel and ArcelorMittal in Indiana, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Alabama and other states have unanimously voted to strike against demands for sweeping concessions, including on wages and health benefits, by the highly profitable steel companies.

A quarter-million UPS workers, who already voted overwhelmingly to strike, are scheduled to finish voting this week on a widely hated labor agreement signed by the Teamsters union, which maintains poverty wages for part-time workers and extends lower-paid, part-time status to a new class of delivery truck drivers.

The United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) has agreed to mediation after 33,000 teachers and support staff in the nation's second largest school district voted to authorize a strike. The action follows a wave of teacher strikes in the state of Washington and the statewide strikes earlier this year in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky and other states.

Seven thousand registered nurses at 15 hospitals affiliated with Hospital Corporation of America (HCA Healthcare)

have voted overwhelmingly to strike facilities in Florida, Missouri, Kansas, Texas and Nevada to demand higher staffing levels and better wages. Nurses' aides, respiratory therapists and other patient care workers at University of California facilities will vote October 9 and 10 to strike over subcontracting of work and other issues. Over the weekend, the University of Michigan Professional Nurses Council announced it reached a deal for a new agreement after 4,000 nurses voted by 94 percent to strike.

Seven thousand Fiat Chrysler workers at the company's Kokomo, Indiana transmission plants voted 10 weeks ago to strike over 200 unresolved grievances involving health and safety. The United Auto Workers has kept the workers on the job, with Local 685 President Rick Ward declaring, "There is no expiration date on the strike vote."

For workers, the strike votes express a growing militancy and determination to fight. On the part of the unions, the votes are a way of letting off steam and smothering opposition. Far from leading any struggles, the unions are seeking to divert this growing opposition behind the Democratic Party, based on the fraudulent claim that the Democrats will address workers' concerns over plunging living standards and the gutting of health care, pensions and social programs.

American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten, a leading figure on the Democratic National Committee, has declared that the union's intention is to "turn the walkouts into walk-ins to the voting booth" this November. The main slogan of the AFT and the National Education Association as they were selling out the teachers' strikes earlier this year was "Remember in November."

This week, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) is calling a bogus "strike" by cooks, cashiers, janitors and airline workers at several airports across the country. While these workers face real issues—poverty wages, part-time status, the lack of health care—the SEIU is turning these events into a get-out-the-vote canvassing effort for the Democrats in so-called battleground states like Florida and Wisconsin.

This follows small protests earlier this month at McDonald's headquarters in Chicago organized by the union-aligned "Fight for \$15" campaign, which urged fast food workers to look to the unions, the Democratic Party and the deeply reactionary #MeToo campaign to address real concerns over sexual harassment and other abuses on the job.

The corporatist and anti-working class unions claim that it is possible for workers and young people to fight the Trump administration by backing the Democrats. They all hope that workers will forget that it was the eight years of the Obama administration—which oversaw endless wars, a fall in real

income and the largest transfer of wealth to the rich in US history—that paved the way for Trump in the first place.

The Democratic Party and its coterie of ex-CIA agents and military candidates are opposing Trump on the most right-wing, militarist basis possible. In the nearly two years since Trump was elected, the Democrats, representing dominant sections of the military-intelligence apparatus, have sought to focus opposition on the unsubstantiated claims of "Russian meddling," which are being repeated in relation to the midterm elections. The Democrats have used the #MeToo campaign and the Kavanaugh hearings to mobilize broader support among sections of the upper-middle class around issues of gender and racial identity, while creating the conditions for undermining due process and further eroding democratic rights.

The interests of the working class must not be subordinated to either faction of the ruling class. The development of class conflict, rooted in the objective crisis of the capitalist system, requires the formation of new organizations of struggle—rank-and-file factory, workplace and neighborhood committees—independent of the unions, to unite all sections of the working class in a common fight against the corporations and their political representatives.

This must be connected to the development of an independent political movement of the working class, in opposition to the Democrats and Republicans, on the basis of a socialist, revolutionary and internationalist program.

Despite the efforts of the unions to put a "progressive" face on the Democratic Party, the growth of the class struggle will rapidly expose it for what it is: a capitalist and pro-war party. This will only accelerate the political radicalization of workers and young people and their support for a genuine socialist alternative, fought for by the Socialist Equality Party.



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