

The global class struggle in 2019

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The year 2019 is beginning with a wave of strikes, demonstrations and other manifestations of class struggle around the world.

In France, the “yellow vest” protests are entering their 10th week, with at least 85,000 demonstrating throughout the country this past weekend, the second straight week in which the number of protesters increased. The yellow vests have been joined by “red pen” protests of teachers over stagnant pay and terrible conditions in public schools.

In India, tens of millions of workers participated in a two-day strike last week against the right-wing policies of the Hindu supremacist BJP government of Narendra Modi. Miners, manufacturing workers, transport workers, government workers and many others took part in one of the largest strikes in history.

In Mexico, strikes and plant occupations are spreading through the “maquiladora” factories, centered on a wildcat strike by 70,000 workers from 45 factories in the town of Matamoros, just across the border from Brownsville, Texas. Workers have called for a general strike beginning today.

In the United States, 33,000 teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the second largest district in the country, began a strike on Monday, while thousands of teachers and their supporters have participated in demonstrations in the Northern California city of Oakland against attacks on public education.

Reports in the media warn of another “educator spring” following the strikes and demonstrations in West Virginia, Arizona, Oklahoma and other states last year, but this time in states controlled by the Democratic Party. The anger of teachers—supported by students and workers—coincides with the growing opposition of 800,000 furloughed or unpaid federal workers amidst a government shutdown that is entering its 25th day today.

Other expressions of working-class opposition include a strike by security workers in German airports that disrupted air traffic throughout Europe yesterday; a strike by 3,700 doctors in New Zealand, which followed protests and a 24-hour strike by nurses last year; spreading strikes among gold and platinum miners in South Africa; and mass protests in Zimbabwe against a sharp increase in fuel prices.

These developments already confirm the analysis that was made by the WSWS in its statement of January 3, “The Strategy of International Class Struggle and the Political Fight Against Capitalist Reaction in 2019.”

“The initial expressions of social unrest in 2018 would continue into the New Year,” the WSWS wrote. “Repressed and dismissed for so long, the working class is beginning to assert its own independent interests. The outbreak of mass social struggles in France, in the US and internationally signals the beginning of a new revolutionary period.”

Marxists study the class struggle as an objective process, the form and character of which arises out of the nature of capitalist society. There is a logic to the development of the class struggle, and a conscious understanding of this logic is necessary to orient the practice of the socialist movement and the advanced layers of the working class.

Several aspects of the class struggle have become increasingly clear over the past year.

First, the class struggle is developing as an international process. The globalization of capitalist production has integrated the world economy to an extraordinary degree, tying together the fate of every country. It is not just business transactions that have been globalized, but the class struggle itself—in both content and form. Workers, exploited by the same corporations, also have at their disposal unprecedented methods of global communication through the proliferation of access to the internet.

Second, the growth of working-class struggle is taking the form of a rebellion against the existing trade unions and organizations, which for four decades have worked to suppress all opposition to the policies of the capitalist ruling elite.

In Mexico, the strikes are of an insurrectionary character, with workers posting statements on social media denouncing the trade unions for stealing their money. In France, the durability of the yellow vest protests is due to the fact that they developed independently of and in opposition to the trade unions and their affiliated political organizations. In the United States, the teachers' unions, led by individuals whose incomes place them in the top five or even one percent of the population, did everything they could to prevent a strike in Los Angeles and are now doing everything they can to isolate it, repeating the role they played during the teachers struggles last year.

The growing insurgency of workers *against* the unions refutes all those who have claimed that they remain “working class organizations.”

Third, what is motivating these struggles is not merely one or another workplace issue. They are animated by deep and growing anger over the massive growth of social inequality and are coming into increasingly direct conflict with the capitalist system itself. The logic of these struggles, therefore, is bringing workers into conflict with the entire political apparatus of the ruling class.

Finally, and of the greatest significance, the growth of the class struggle is exploding all the anti-Marxist theories of the intellectual and political representatives of the affluent middle class, which deny the revolutionary role of the working class and the centrality of class divisions in capitalist society, in favor of the politics of race and gender. The most recent of these are the writings of Chantal Mouffe, the ideological mentor of Syriza in Greece and other pseudo-left parties, proposing a “left populism” based on nationalism and the explicit rejection of those who “attribute an ontological [i.e., objectively existing] privilege to the working class.”

What are the conclusions that must be drawn by the working class?

First, the development of the class struggle requires the formation of independent organizations—rank-and-file factory and action committees—to coordinate and

unify every separate manifestation of opposition, within each country and internationally.

Important initiatives were taken at the end of last year to form such independent organizations—the establishment of a Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees by auto workers and other workers in the US, and the establishment of an action committee to organize the struggle of Sri Lankan plantation workers in Sri Lanka. These initiatives, which emerged under the leadership of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), must be extended and developed.

Second, the establishment of new organizations of struggle must be connected to the building of a revolutionary political leadership in the working class—the ICFI and its national sections, the Socialist Equality Parties. The growth of the class struggle is an objective process, but its development into a revolutionary movement against capitalism requires the intervention of the revolutionary party, to impart to the workers the necessary subjective consciousness of the objective struggles in which they themselves are engaged.

Not only the growth of the class struggle, but its specific form, has been anticipated by the ICFI. “Theoretically and in practice,” the January 3 statement explains, “the ICFI has established that it is the sole revolutionary political party of the international working class and the sole representative of genuine Marxism.”

The growth of the class struggle in 2019, driven by the intersection of objective developments with the intervention of the revolutionary party, will acquire an ever more openly socialist, internationalist and revolutionary form.



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