

The international upsurge of working class struggle in 2019

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The first weeks of 2019 have been marked by a dramatic upsurge in the international class struggle. Workers' strikes and protests have broken out in virtually every region of the world. After decades in which the class struggle has been suppressed by the trade unions, the working class, the stirring giant of world politics, is beginning to find its feet.

North America

- On Monday, 5,600 teachers in Denver, Colorado struck for the first time in a quarter-century. The primary concern of teachers is winning significant salary increases so they can afford to live and work in one of the most expensive cities in the United States.

- Oakland, California teachers, who have been working without a contract for two years, have voted overwhelmingly to strike as soon as next week. West Virginia teachers, who sparked the ongoing wave of teachers' strikes by rebelling against their union and engaging in wildcat action, have authorized a strike or work action against pro-privatization legislation making its way through the state legislature.

- The strike movement of maquiladora workers which began in Matamoros, Mexico last month, when tens of thousands of workers walked off the job in defiance of their unions, is spreading along the US-Mexico border. Approximately 8,000 workers at 45 factories in neighboring Reynosa are demanding the same 20 percent pay increase and \$1,700 bonus won by their brothers and sisters in Matamoros.

Europe

- A 24-hour nationwide strike is set to begin at 10 p.m. tonight in Belgium. The strike will include postal workers, teachers, trash collection workers and hospital employees. Airport workers will also be on strike. The Charleroi-south Brussels airport will be completely closed. Brussels Airlines has cancelled 200 flights and diverted planes for 16,000 passengers to other airports, including Lille in the north of France. The national rail network will be running a minimum of trains.

- Yellow vest protesters held their 13th weekly mass

protest against social inequality across France on Saturday in defiance of the Macron government's "anti-hooligan" law recently passed by the National Assembly, which allows the police to unilaterally outlaw protests. Organizers estimate that 116,000 people marched throughout the country.

Asia and Oceania

- Over 200,000 government employees in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh walked off the job last Wednesday to demand the restoration of their old pension plan. The union group coordinating the strike has announced that today will be the final day of the walkout. This follows a two-day general strike against the policies of the Modi government involving tens of millions of workers across India and a mass walkout of teachers and public employees in Tamil Nadu state.

- Approximately 700 China Airlines pilots based in Taiwan have been on strike since Friday, resulting in the cancellation of at least 60 flights, including scheduled flights from Taipei to Hong Kong, Bangkok, Los Angeles, Manila and Tokyo. Among other demands, the pilots are seeking the addition of backup pilots on flights lasting longer than eight hours and the payment of a year-end bonus.

- Approximately 1,700 junior doctors in New Zealand began their third 48-hour strike in a month on Tuesday to oppose continued attacks on their working conditions. These attacks include demands to increase the number of consecutive days they can be forced to work to 12, while extending shifts beyond 16 hours. The doctors were joined by 1,000 midwives, who took part in a 12-hour protest strike to push for a wage increase above the rate of inflation.

Africa

- Fifteen thousand Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union members at the Sibanye-Stillwater gold mine in South Africa have been on strike since November over demands for a \$72 increase in monthly pay. The gold miners were joined by their fellow workers at Sibanye-Stillwater's platinum mines after 11 weeks on strike.

• Some 80,000 Zimbabwean teachers have been on strike for the last week. Their struggle was called off Monday by the Zimbabwe Teachers Union and the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe despite the government refusing to grant any of the teachers' demands, including pay increases that keep pace with inflation.

These opening shots of the year are a powerful verification of internationalism. Workers in one or another country are beginning to understand that their struggles are intimately interlinked. There is a growing commonality in the demands and struggles of workers motivated by ever growing levels of social inequality.

Last month, Matamoros workers marched to the US border and called on their American brothers and sisters to “wake up.” Many of them work for the same auto parts companies that exploit workers in the US, Canada and around the world. They produce parts that are assembled by workers in the US, Canada, Europe and other regions.

The wave of teachers' strikes in the US shows that American workers are, indeed, beginning to wake up. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics reported this month that the number of workers participating in strike action in 2018 reached a 32-year high.

As Leon Trotsky noted in 1930 at an earlier stage in the crisis of the world capitalist system, the completion of the socialist revolution on a national stage is impossible. “The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds on the international arena, and is completed on the world arena,” Trotsky explained.

As the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) explained as early as 1988, the class struggle today is international not just in content, but also in form.

The ICFI stressed as well that the resurgence of the class struggle would take the form of a rebellion against the old, bureaucratic and nationalist labor organizations. This is also being confirmed in the growing number of struggles—including teachers' walkouts in the US and the explosive struggle of the maquiladora workers in Mexico—that take the form of rank-and-file rebellions carried out independently of and against the trade unions.

These objective process found conscious expression in the demonstration on February 9 in Detroit against GM plant closings and layoffs in the US and Canada, which was organized by the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* and the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees.

The demonstration received greetings from representatives of auto parts workers in Matamoros, Mexico, tea plantation workers in Sri Lanka, framed-up Maruti Suzuki autoworkers in India, and metal workers in Turkey.

In a video addressed to the rally, striking workers in

Matamoros, Mexico, declared, “Solidarity with our friends in Detroit, Michigan in their struggle against mass layoffs! The workers of Matamoros are united with the workers of Michigan!”

These workers from different parts of the world recognize the common interests they share with American and Canadian workers and the importance for workers everywhere of developing the class struggle in the center of world capitalism—the United States.

However, workers still confront the brutal reality that there does not exist in any country a mass organization or mass party that responds to their organic striving for international unity. The unions and social democratic parties in every country are thoroughly rotten, basing themselves on a nationalist program and subordinating workers' needs to the demands of their “own” corporate elites and their bribed government officials.

In contrast to the nationalism pushed by the unions, Saturday's protest—which called on workers to establish rank-and-file factory and neighborhood committees independent of the unions to fight in defense of jobs and living standards—was based on the international unity of the working class and a revolutionary socialist program.

The only organization that gives conscious expression and fights to develop the international struggle of the working class is the ICFI and its national sections, the Socialist Equality Parties around the world.

Saturday's event was a confirmation the analysis made by the WSWS at the beginning of 2019, which stated that “the theoretical and political work of the International Committee is intersecting with the objective movement of the working class. Its critical-practical revolutionary activity is becoming an essential factor in the development and outcome of the revolutionary class struggle.”

The central task in the unification and liberation of the working class is the building of the ICFI as the world party of socialist revolution. This is the task to which class-conscious workers and youth must dedicate themselves.



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