

# The strike wave in the United States heralds a new stage in the global class struggle

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13 October 2021

At midnight on Wednesday, more than 10,000 John Deere agricultural equipment workers launched a strike in states throughout the US Midwest. While the United Auto Workers is still conspiring with corporate management to strangle the strike, it has no credibility with the rank and file. Last week, Deere workers rejected a concessions contract brought back by the UAW by over 90 percent.

The rebellion of Deere workers is a major escalation of the strike movement that is sweeping across the United States: 500 distillery workers in Kentucky went on strike on September 11; 2,000 hospital workers in Buffalo, New York have been on strike since October 1; 1,400 Kellogg's cereal workers in Michigan, Nebraska, Pennsylvania and Tennessee walked out on October 5; and 2,000 Frontier telecom workers in California struck on October 6. More than 1,000 Warrior Met coal miners in Northern Alabama have been on strike since April.

A series of more localized walkouts and protests indicate the breadth and depth of working class militancy: a walkout Tuesday morning of 185 workers at 28 group homes and day programs in Connecticut over poverty-level wages and benefits; sickouts to demand pay raises by dozens of school bus drivers in Bullitt County, Kentucky and Calvert County, Maryland this week; a two-day strike last week by 400 health care workers at McKenzie-Willamette Medical Center in Oregon; and a five-day strike last week of 350 health care workers in Antioch, California over staff shortages and working conditions.

Tens of thousands of workers in other industries have approved strike action by overwhelming numbers, including 60,000 TV and film production workers in California who are set to strike beginning Sunday night; more than 40,000 Kaiser Permanente nurses and health care workers who have nearly unanimously authorized strike action across the West Coast; and 3,500 Dana Inc. auto parts workers. The Deere strike will encourage Dana workers to go out, as they have been working without a contract after massively repudiating a UAW-backed contract last month.

Fueling the opposition of workers is accelerating inflation for consumer goods and services, which means a steady and sharp decline in the real wages of workers.

Over the past 15 years, global central banks have provided limitless resources to bail out the banks and markets. The US

Federal Reserve has increased its balance sheet from less than \$1 trillion before the 2008 financial crash to nearly \$8.5 trillion today by essentially printing money to buy up financial assets. This includes an increase of nearly \$4 trillion since the beginning of the pandemic.

The reckless and inflationary measures employed by the ruling class to bail out corporations and banks facing collapse in 2008, which have been compounded by the CARES Act enacted by Congress last year, have created an unsustainable financial bubble. Corporations have amassed more than \$11 trillion in debt, built up as interest rates were reduced to zero and the Fed launched its buying spree. Everything that has been handed over to the rich must now be extracted through intensified exploitation of the working class.

The artificial inflation of financial assets and the wealth of the ruling class is now pouring into every section of the economy.

The U.S. Labor Department reported yesterday that the consumer price index rose by 5.4 percent from a year earlier. Energy prices are surging globally, including a 64 percent increase in the price of crude oil so far this year and a doubling of natural gas prices over the past six months, both to seven-year highs. The U.S. Energy Information Administration said yesterday that it expects that households will see their heating bills increase by between 30 and 54 percent this winter over last.

More broadly, expressed in the eruption of class struggle is anger that has built up over four decades of relentless assaults on living standards and the corresponding growth of staggering levels of social inequality. The already colossal wealth of US billionaires increased by \$1.8 trillion during the pandemic to \$4.8 trillion as of August of this year.

There is nothing that frightens the corporate and financial oligarchy more than social resistance in the working class within the United States. It has not forgotten the long history of militant labor struggles that characterized class relations in the U.S.

To undermine and suppress the class struggle, the ruling class employs every weapon in its arsenal. For decades, it has relied upon the pro-corporate unions to police the working class. In the aftermath of the betrayal of the PATCO strike in 1981, the unions have transformed themselves into nothing more than

appendages of the corporations.

The Biden administration in particular sees strengthening the corporatist institutions as a strategic imperative of the ruling class. In response to the supply chain crisis, Biden announced yesterday an agreement forged between the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Teamsters and AFL-CIO unions to open US ports 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the remainder of the year.

However, the utilization of the services of the unions is becoming increasingly ineffective, as evidenced by the repeated and massive repudiation by workers of contracts dictated by the unions, including at Volvo Trucks in the summer, at Dana Inc. last month and at John Deere last week.

The eruption of class struggle is profoundly disconcerting to affluent sections of the middle class, who understand that their relative prosperity is tied to massive corporate profits and the inflation of Wall Street share values. The fear felt by these layers of the impact of class struggle on their economic interests and social position finds ideological and political expression in the relentless promotion of racial, gender and other forms of identity politics.

As in the 1920s and 1930s, growing sections of the ruling class—losing confidence in the ability of traditional democratic institutions to contain class conflict—are beginning to seriously consider a fascistic “solution” to the crisis of capitalist society. Trump’s rants against “radical socialists [who] are taking over our country,” as he declared at a rally in Iowa on Saturday, are currently the most overt and dangerous expression of this tendency. Nine months after the fascistic insurrection of January 6, which was aimed at overturning the results of the elections and establishing a personalist dictatorship, Trump’s position as the head of the Republican Party has only been strengthened.

Finally, as with the outbreak of World War I in 1914 and World War II in 1939, the capitalist class tends to view military conflict as a means of artificially “uniting” a society riven by unbridgeable social divisions. The unrelenting anti-China propaganda—centered on the brazen lie that the virus that causes COVID-19 was manufactured in a lab in Wuhan—is aimed at creating the disoriented and even pathological social psychology necessary for the launching of a war.

The dangers that confront the working class should not be underestimated. But an even greater mistake, from the standpoint of the formulation of socialist strategy, would be to underestimate the immense social power of the working class. The American working class is part of an international class whose collective power is now greater than at any point in history.

Capitalism is globally integrated, and therefore all significant struggles of workers acquire an international character. In fact, the strike movement in the US is itself part of a global working class upsurge that extends from metal workers in South Africa to health care workers in Sri Lanka, transportation workers in

Germany and auto parts workers in Turkey—to cite only a small number of ongoing struggles.

Moreover, the developing strike movement is unfolding under conditions in which the incompatibility of capitalism with the most basic human needs is being starkly exposed. Over the past 18 months, workers in the US and throughout the world have lived through the horror of the COVID-19 pandemic. The refusal of government officials to take the necessary measures to save lives has led to the deaths of nearly 750,000 people in the United States, and nearly five million people throughout the world.

The eruption of working class opposition is an objective process. However, immense challenges of organization and perspective emerge. The Socialist Equality Party and its co-thinkers and sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International have anticipated and responded to the growth of the class struggle with the strategy and organization necessary for the success of the struggles of the working class.

In May, the International Committee of the Fourth International and the Socialist Equality Party initiated the formation of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). We wrote at the time that the IWA-RFC “will work to develop the framework for new forms of independent, democratic and militant rank-and-file organizations of workers in factories, schools and workplaces on an international scale.”

This initiative is being taken up by workers who have formed rank-and-file committees at Volvo Trucks, at Dana and now at John Deere. Educators and parents have formed rank-and-file committees to oppose the unsafe reopening of schools. A critical element of this campaign has been the efforts of the *World Socialist Web Site* to enlist the support of scientists to educate the working class and explain why the end of the pandemic requires a mass struggle, conducted on a global scale, for the elimination and eradication of COVID-19.

The development of a coordinated network of rank-and-file committees throughout the world depends on the building of a Marxist-Trotskyist leadership in the working class. The critical task of socialists is to actively intervene in every manifestation of working class opposition, to connect the struggle against inequality and exploitation to a fight against the pandemic, the growing danger of world war, the threat of dictatorship and the global capitalist system.



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