

May Day 2022: The map of the class struggle vs. the map of war

Eric London
3 May 2022

This is the report delivered by Eric London to the 2022 International May Day Online Rally held on May 1. London is a writer for the WSWs and a leading member of the Socialist Equality Party (US). To view all speeches, visit wsws.org/mayday.

This is a map of the war in Ukraine. The imperialist powers' best trained generals, foreign policy experts, and intelligence analysts have spent years hunched over this map, plotting offensives, positioning soldiers, gaming the enemy's response and preparing public opinion with lies that turn the world on its head.

But *this* is the map of the class struggle. It shows that a mass movement of historically unprecedented proportions is developing across the world. And this movement, depicted in this map, shows that the working class can stop world war and carry out the socialist transformation of the world.

Each pin on this map is a strike that has taken place in the nine weeks since Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine.

Here are the strikes at the world's ports, each a critical chokepoint for international sea shipping. Purple marks the strikes by rail workers. Black denotes the strikes at many of the world's busiest airports. Each brown pin is a strike of bus, truck, waste collection or delivery drivers.

Orange indicates a strike of garment workers. Dark green pins are strikes by nurses. Light green shows strikes by oil and gas workers and blue shows strikes by teachers and university faculty while grey depicts strikes by food production workers. Finally, yellow marks places where national strikes or mass protests have exploded over the rapidly rising cost of living, greatly exacerbated by US/NATO sanctions which they call humanitarian but which are throwing hundreds of millions to the brink of starvation.

Each of these pins represents the tremendous courage and determination of the working class in struggle.

Take the school teachers in the city of Nyala in South Darfur, Sudan, who all walked out in March the day after police attempted to burst into a classroom to arrest students who had participated in food protests that are spreading throughout the country. When teachers blocked the way to protect their pupils, police beat them and publicly humiliated three teachers. The demonstrations that followed in the working class were "massive and unprecedented," according to local radio. Teachers closed the schools and all the banks for good measure. The courage of the teachers in Nyala spurred a renewed wave of national strikes and mass protests across the country against the military dictatorship and the

unbearable cost of living.

Workers are sacrificing their lives and freedoms in the fight for a better world as they confront the capitalist state, its police, militaries and courts. In Sri Lanka, Chaminda Lakshan, a 40-year-old husband and father, was shot and killed by police at a demonstration over fuel and food prices. Six workers and young people have been killed in protests in Peru; over 90 in Sudan.

Thousands of striking workers have been arrested in recent weeks for no crime at all. Such is justice in the capitalist courts of every country. In Maharashtra India, 118 bus drivers participating in a strike of 70,000 workers face criminal charges of "rioting" simply for protesting at the home of a politician responsible for privatizing bus lines.

What does this map tell us about the character of this emerging movement and the strategy that is required to meet workers' demands?

The strikes and mass protests give a powerful sense of the character of the international working class in the 21st century and its striving for unity. This growing movement is breaking down all artificial divisions of race, religion and ethnicity used by the ruling classes to divide workers against each other. In Vietnam, electronics workers demanded a bonus for the Tet holiday to cover rising food prices while textile workers in Bangladesh struck for a bonus on Ramadan.

Oil workers in Iraq and Iran engaged in simultaneous strikes separated by several miles of territory over which their fathers were sent by the governments to kill each other only 35 years ago. Indian teachers in Punjab and Pakistani teachers in next-door Lahore share the same strike demands even though each of those governments has nuclear missiles aimed at the other's population centers. Sinhala and Tamil workers are demonstrating side-by-side against the Rajapakse government in Sri Lanka.

Most importantly, strikes are growing in the centers of world imperialism, especially in the United States and Britain, where the governments' extreme recklessness in war is a desperate attempt to divert the class struggle toward an external enemy.

The strike movement also demonstrates the immense power workers occupy amid fragile global supply chains.

In one wildcat strike last Friday in Amsterdam, a few dozen airport baggage workers at Schiphol Airport slowed international air travel when they gathered in the canteen, talked about their conditions and decided not to load bags. Within minutes of the start of this wildcat strike, the airport shut down and flights were

cancelled across Europe. The corporate media was horrified. Dutch newspapers were outraged, especially over the inconvenience to luxury vacationers. One melodramatic headline read, “Victims of the chaos at Schiphol” and quoted a wealthy vacationer: “We were looking forward to a Spanish terrace.” The class struggle demands great sacrifices indeed.

In many countries, strikes and protests are developing into insurrectionary struggles. Massive levels of social inequality, record corporate profits, the social and economic impact of a coronavirus pandemic that has unnecessarily killed 20 million people, have lit the fuse to a powder keg of global class tensions that cannot be extinguished. In Peru, which has suffered the highest number of per capita COVID-19 deaths, as well as in Sri Lanka and Sudan, the governments confront protests and strike movements that threaten to develop into revolutionary upsurges. In Iran and South Africa, strike waves are growing larger each day. In almost every country in the world, journalists and NGO directors nervously warn that their country will be the next domino to fall. Given that the devastating impact the war will have on global food and fertilizer supplies as the weeks go by, their prognoses will all be proven correct.

This global movement is developing over the heads of the trade unions, whose roots in the national state system make them a barrier, not a vehicle, for unlocking the power of this international movement. In not a single case have the unions actually *led* the workers into struggle, informed them of strikes by their international coworkers, or encouraged their strivings for equality.

The Turkish government reports 106 wildcat strikes took place there in the first two months of 2022, more than the total number of wildcats over the previous five years. In Vietnam the government says wildcat strikes increased 40 percent in the first three months of the year. A powerful wildcat movement is developing in Brazil, where the unions print pathetic little leaflets telling workers that it is not the right time to strike. In the US, the head of the Steelworkers union told the Biden administration they would ensure wages stay below inflation to help the US war effort against Russia.

This is the emerging movement of an international working class that has never before occupied such a powerful position under capitalism.

Since the end of the Second World War, the globalization of the world economy has raised up a working class comprised of billions and billions of people, interconnected by the process of production and working and living together in massive cities the likes of which human history has never seen. In the global South, an unprecedented migration has taken place from the countryside to the cities both north and south.

In 2008, for the first time in world history, a majority of the population lived in urban areas. And also for the first time, through the internet and social media, workers are able to communicate with a literally unlimited number of their fellow workers from the palm of their hands. The globalized world economy is pregnant with a socialist society that is ready to be born but is constrained by the nation-state system and private ownership of the means of production and held back by the capitalist parties and the nationalist trade unions.

The 2011 Arab Spring and the 2018-19 global protests show that no matter how courageous, no matter how much workers are willing to sacrifice, spontaneous anger is incapable, on its own, of addressing the burning social challenges workers confront all over the world. Appeals to the ruling class to change its ways will not pressure them to play nice—on the contrary such appeals only heighten the bourgeoisie’s sense of self-preservation. The capitalist class possesses hundreds of years of experience in cajoling, threatening, dividing, duping, promising and terrorizing the working class in order to break its resistance.

Rank-and-file committees are the form of organization needed to meet the needs of this growing movement. They are the historically necessary organ of international working class struggle in the world of the 21st century.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees is an international working class organization established by the International Committee at the May Day rally held one year ago to unite and provide support and leadership for the development of workers’ rank-and-file committees worldwide. The IWARFC’s purpose is to draw the different sections of the working class, all its heterogenous layers and component parts, into one unified movement, to help it unlock its tremendous social power, to encourage its organic striving for independence and unity, to introduce workers to the historical lessons of the class struggle, and to free them from the handcuffs of national trade unionism so they can extend their hands across industries and national boundaries to their fellow workers in a global struggle to take power out of the hands of the financial aristocracy and imperialist warmongers.

We are guided by the example set by Lenin and Trotsky in the Russian Revolution of 1917, which ended the First World War and marked the first stage in the struggle for revolution on a world scale. Like the Bolsheviks in 1917, we know that the workers do not begin these struggles as self-conscious socialists. But in the course of struggling side by side with them and proving ourselves as the best fighters, the International Committee and its cadre throughout the world will demonstrate our right to leadership to the working class, win them to socialism and change the course of history.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact