

Report to the SEP (US) Eighth National Congress

The Socialist Equality Party's fight to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, 2022-2024

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We are publishing here the report to the Eighth Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (US) given by Tom Hall. The congress was held from August 4 to August 9, 2024. It unanimously adopted two resolutions, "The 2024 US elections and the tasks of the Socialist Equality Party" and "Free Bogdan Syrotiuk!"

The subject of my speech today is a review of the party's interventions in the class struggle over the past two years. My report will trace the main elements of our intervention through a review of some of the most critical struggles—although the party's intervention in the auto industry will be dealt with separately in a report by Comrade Jerry White.

It is no exaggeration to say that the last four years, and the period since the 2022 Congress in particular, have seen one the biggest developments of the Trotskyist movement's influence in the working class in history. A central element of this has been the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. Its presence has grown enormously, with committees being formed in the course of major struggles not just in the United States, but in every country where the International Committee is active.

But the ruling class is not responding to the growing threat of revolution sitting down. American capitalism is waging a single unified struggle on a world scale, in which the goal of conquering its strategic rivals Russia, China and Iran are seamlessly integrated with attacks on the working class both in the United States and throughout the world.

It is only within this context that the labor policy of the Biden administration can be understood. As we have repeatedly explained, Biden is seeking to capitalize on the relations that already long existed between the bureaucracy, the state and corporate management to develop a corporatist alliance for war against US imperialism's enemies both abroad and at home. Biden summed this up very well in July, when he referred to the AFL-CIO as his "domestic NATO."

Review of the 2022 Congress

It would be a mistake to underestimate the ruthlessness of the bourgeoisie, especially in times where its rule is most threatened. But to see in the present situation only the machinations of Washington, and to see the ruling class as a monolithic, all-powerful bloc, would be a profoundly dangerous error. The same processes that have driven the ruling class to the brink are also driving the working class to socialist revolution.

At our last Congress, comrade ~~Eric~~ Eric London gave reviewing the different characteristics of the world situation that make possible the emergence of a mass revolutionary socialist movement in the working class. In the interest of time I won't quote at length from his speech, but London referred to four basic elements. They were:

- First, the enormous growth in the size and international connections of the working class, which has become the absolute majority of the world population for the first time in history.
- Second, the growing opposition to social inequality among workers, who have become politically radicalized as they have met with official hostility and repression, giving rise to so-called "omnibus protests."
- Third, the declining social weight of the trade union apparatus, and the emergence of the internet and communication mediums outside of their control.
- And fourth, the inevitable opposition to the wave of global austerity, driven by massive government debt accumulation, reaching its crescendo in the aftermath of the bailouts at the start of the pandemic.

How did we anticipate that the class struggle would unfold from 2022 to 2024? We explained in our Congress resolution on the IWA-RFC:

27. Objective conditions are ripe for the revolutionary political awakening of the American working class as part of the growing movement of the global working class ... the solution to the crisis of American society will not come through the sclerotic two-party system, but by building a mass working class movement against it. But whether this movement achieves its revolutionary potential depends on the activity of the SEP.

On the specific role of the IWA-RFC within this, we explained:

9. While the IWA-RFC is not a replacement for the revolutionary party, it is also not merely an instrument of conventional trade union struggles. Its aim is to facilitate the development of a movement out of the control of the corporate-state AFL-CIO apparatus and unleash the tremendous social power of the American working class ...

10. ...The development of an insurrectionary movement against the AFL-CIO will necessarily raise historical and political questions. The SEP must strive to introduce the lessons of the historical experiences of the international working class into these

struggles in order to raise the political and cultural level of the class as a whole and create conditions for the development of socialist consciousness.

The past two years have entirely confirmed this perspective. But this “confirmation” is not simply the result of a passive contemplation of an external world which, left to its own devices, has proven us “correct.”

It is only through the decision of the party to act upon the possibilities that exist that it has been possible to prove the correctness of our evaluation by fighting to change the course of events. Nothing which the party has achieved over the past two years was simply “fated” to happen. At a certain point, the party identified the possibilities that existed, organized a response through the party cadre, and hard work was carried out.

If there is one thing which we must learn from our work these past two years, it is the critical role of the conscious factor of the party as a decisive part of the objective situation.

The struggle of railroad workers

One of the most important struggles of the party in the past two years was its intervention into the struggle by 120,000 railroad workers.

From the beginning, the railroad struggle was a fight against the government. Rail workers are under the Railway Labor Act, whose aim is to all but ban strikes in the railroad and airline industries. In January of 2022, a federal judge issued a court injunction against BNSF workers, preventing them from striking against the new Hi Viz policy. He justified his ruling on the so-called “national interest.”

The role of the union bureaucracy was to help enforce what Debs once called “government-by-injunction.” Even after the near-unanimous strike vote after the summer, the rail unions actually appealed to Biden to appoint a Presidential Emergency Board to help impose a settlement. They claimed to workers that government mediation would force the railroads to give up key concessions.

In the end, the exact opposite happened. As it had literally hundreds of times before, the PEB issued recommendations that sided with the railroads on virtually every issue. Workers did not even get sick leave under the proposed settlement.

This produced an eruption of rank-and-file anger. But we did not simply act as cheerleaders for this anger. We sought to educate the working class on fundamental issues.

During the PEB hearings, lawyers for the railroads made the highly provocative claim that, though the industry is among the most profitable in the country, workers are not entitled to a share of that value because, as they put it, “capital investment and risk are the reasons for their profits, not any contributions from labor.”

The party used this as an opportunity to explain scientifically the origins of surplus value in the exploitation of the working class, and on that basis the need for a socialist program. In a major article, we reviewed what Marx wrote on the subject in *Capital Volume 1*.

That article concluded by pointing in particular to the social implications of the trillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street in 2020:

[T]hat [value] still needs to be paid for through a massive ramping up of exploitation of workers.

As bad as things have gotten for workers in the US and worldwide over the past four decades, the law of surplus value

compels the capitalist class to make it much worse, reducing workers to the level of industrial slaves...This is to be supplemented through a renewed upsurge of imperial plunder, forcibly acquiring new markets and sources of raw materials at the expense of its chief rivals Russia and China.

...Railroaders must draw the necessary conclusions. They are not just locked in a fight for “fair wages” against particularly greedy railroad corporations, but against the capitalist system of exploitation itself. The railroads themselves, in both words and in action, are proving this to be true.

In October, the WSWS also published an important profile of Eugene Debs, written by comrade Tom Mackaman. It sought to educate railroad workers about their own history, including not only the explosive battles of the late 19th and early 20th century but also the central role which the socialist movement has always played in the struggle of railroad workers.

The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee

On September 1, with the assistance of the party, railroaders founded the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee. The committee’s founding statement is a significant programmatic document. It explained the purpose of the committee in the following terms:

[The committee] will be a means of communication for working out strategy and joint actions outside of the control or the prying eyes of scab union bureaucrats and corporate stoolpigeons, and of appealing for the widest possible support from workers across the country and around the world. This will put us in the most powerful possible position to defeat any attempts at injunctions, management retaliation and other strikebreaking measures.

In particular, the RWRFC raised as a central demand a national strike in accordance with the near-unanimous strike vote. It emphasized that workers must force the issue by organizing themselves to impose their will, and not wait on the bureaucracy which was deliberately blocking a strike.

From the beginning, the committee sought to draw out the political character of the struggle:

Union officials will no doubt attempt to scare us by saying that Congress will intervene against a strike. It is certainly true that Congress will try to issue an injunction. But that only exposes the complete bankruptcy of the unions’ orientation towards the government, the Democratic Party and the Biden administration ...

[Instead,] We must appeal for support from the dockworkers, the refinery workers, the tens of millions of workers around the country who are fighting against the same things as us.

It also explained the committee was part of the IWA-RFC and stressed the international character of the struggle:

More and more, workers are fighting in defiance of

governments. In Sri Lanka, protests by hundreds of thousands of workers against the cost of living forced the resignation of that country's president. Washington is terrified of our struggle because they know it could usher in a similar movement in the United States.

The strength of the committee was that it was the only tendency active among railroad workers with a correct orientation and perspective. This critical factor was provided by the party, which sought at all points to give conscious articulation to the spontaneous strivings of railroaders.

The party and the RWRFC were the primary factor in the initial defeat of the contracts patterned after the PEB. This created a crisis not only for the bureaucrats but for the government, which intervened directly to get a deal done before the September 15 strike deadline.

That morning, Biden and union and railroad negotiators slapped each other on the back in a press conference in the White House Rose Garden for a job well done. They could hardly imagine that in a few weeks workers would defeat the attempt to impose a settlement through the smokescreen of "collective bargaining."

From that point onward, with the provisions of the RLA having expired, the union bureaucracy became the principal means through which the bourgeoisie blocked strike action. The committee's work in this period concentrated on preparing workers for a rebellion that would launch a strike in defiance of the bureaucracy, creating the best possible conditions for them to defeat an anti-strike injunction.

The work of the committee also involved exposures of violations of workers' democratic rights, including ballot stuffing by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the National Conference of Firemen and Oilers. The RWRFC conducted a survey of IBEW members which provided empirical evidence that a huge section of the membership had been denied the right to vote on the contract.

To galvanize opposition and fight for their program, RWRFC members organized a series of informational pickets at major railyards, including in Kansas City, Lincoln, Nebraska and Baltimore.

The committee also hosted large-scale online meetings. In spite of the fact that these were held on short notice in response to breaking developments, they attracted hundreds of railroaders, including one meeting with 500 in attendance on the eve of the strike deadline.

In the close of that meeting, comrade David North gave a crucial explanation of rank-and-file committees which sought to connect this initiative with the revolutionary and democratic traditions of the United States.

Comparing the rank-and-file committees to the Committees of Correspondence founded by the colonists in the American Revolution, he said:

Out of this there emerged the Continental Congress, which was a new form of organization, to bring together people living across a vast territory to organize their resistance to the power of the Crown, so that they could inform themselves and formulate their own policy.

You have huge power if you know how to use it ... but what you first of all have to do is, in every work location, set up an alternative structure so that when you get the word that you've been sold out, that's not the end of the story. [You must create the means to] overrule, counteract, countermand the decision of apparatchiks who are serving your enemies.

The bureaucracy treated the work of the committee with extreme

seriousness. At the national convention for the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, which is a part of the Teamsters union, Sean O'Brien gave a nervous speech demanding that workers stop "complaining" to "outsiders" and to keep their grievances "at the dinner table"—i.e., under the internal control of the bureaucracy.

Tony Cardwell, the president of the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employes, which is also a part of the Teamsters, issued a statement denouncing "anonymous fringe groups" with "dangerous ideas of unsanctioned work stoppages."

The committee responded powerfully to this statement with an open letter:

You accuse the RWRFC of being a "fringe" group. You are the fringe, Mr. Cardwell, not us. We have voted to strike and to reject your garbage contracts. We, the workers, outnumber you 1,000 to 1. The RWRFC was formed to give voice and organization to railroad workers against the attempts to bureaucratically silence us ...

Mr. Cardwell, on behalf of our 120,000 coworkers, we give you the following instructions: If you are not willing to abide by the will of the membership, then get out of the way.

In the end, the bureaucracy was able to buy enough time for Biden and Congress to pass a strike ban at the end of November. But for the bourgeoisie, this was a pyrrhic victory. It nakedly exposed the self-serving claims of the White House to be the most "pro-labor administration in US history," and the entire framework of labor control upon which the government's real policy rested.

The pseudo-left, especially Bernie Sanders and the Democratic Socialists of America, totally exposed themselves. They were crucial in the parliamentary maneuvering to rapidly secure the strike ban, and Ocasio-Cortez and other DSA members of Congress even cast votes in favor of the ban itself. This produced an immense crisis within that organization, intensified by our relentless analysis of the significance of the vote from the standpoint of their class politics.

The most advanced sections of the railroaders went through this experience consciously because of the party's intervention.

In the aftermath of the strike ban, the party continued its work in the rail industry. Only a few months later, in February 2023, the derailment and toxic chemical spill in East Palestine, Ohio exposed the horrible state of rail infrastructure, driven by relentless cost-cutting. This was a social crime that directly flowed from the ban on the strike, in which safety would have been a key issue.

Meanwhile, the Democratic Party could hardly conceal its total indifference, with Biden visiting the town only a full year later. Meanwhile, the party made a significant intervention, including numerous visits to the town itself and interviews with residents.

The counter-offensive of the bourgeoisie

By the end of 2022, the ruling class launched a counter-offensive against the growing class struggle. A significant turning point was the decision by the Federal Reserve to ramp up interest rates, which rose from near-zero at the start of 2022 to over 5 percent by May of 2023.

This was consciously patterned after the "Volcker Shock" of the late 1970s, which deliberately sparked a manufacturing recession in the name of fighting a so-called "wage-price spiral"—in reality, to weaponize mass

unemployment against the growth of strikes in opposition to the impact of high inflation.

The reverse side of this monetary policy was the corporatist alliance of the union bureaucracy with the White House in order to block strikes and impose sellouts. By the end of 2022, wage growth for nonunion workers actually outpaced that of workers in the trade unions.

These policies began to yield “fruit” in mass layoffs, which accelerated over the course of 2023. According to monthly figures by outplacement firm Challenger, Gray and Christmas, the pace of layoffs reached its highest levels since the Great Recession, and more than one million cuts have been announced since the start of last year.

The attack on workers moved hand-in-hand with the war-time policies of US imperialism. During the rail struggle of 2022, the contract for more than 20,000 West Coast dockworkers also expired.

Emphasizing the key “national security” implications of the docks, Biden spoke about the talks that summer from the deck of the USS Iowa, a World War II-era battleship moored in the port of Los Angeles. The International Longshore and Warehouse Union kept dockworkers on the job without a contract for more than a year, deliberately isolating them first from rail, and then UPS workers.

When workers began to defy this de-facto injunction through wildcat actions, the ILWU responded by rapidly springing a contract on workers. This deal was brokered with the crucial assistance of acting Labor Secretary Julie Su, who took over after the departure of previous Labor Secretary Marty Walsh, a former union bureaucrat and ex-mayor of Boston.

The struggle at UPS

The Teamsters bureaucracy and union General President Sean O’Brien played a key role in the government’s response to the railroad struggle in 2022. The following year, they conducted extensive maneuvers to head off a strike at UPS by 340,000 workers. This followed a strategy that was worked out years in advance after the last contract was rammed through in 2018 despite a majority “no” vote.

Conscious of the immense rank-and-file anger over this betrayal, a section of the bureaucracy elevated O’Brien, a career bureaucrat and notorious thug, as a so-called “reform” candidate in the 2021 union election. The pseudo-left played a key role in this operation, with Teamsters for a Democratic Union whitewashing his record and entering into his new administration as part of his slate.

As a matter of fact, O’Brien was “elected” in a vote marred by the lowest turnout in the history of the Teamsters, at around 15 percent. In fact, it was the lowest turnout in a union election in US history until the 9 percent turnout in the UAW election the following year.

At UPS, the Teamsters bureaucracy claimed to be conducting a “strike ready campaign,” so that it could present the agreement that it already worked out with management as the product of rank-and-file pressure.

This drew heavily from the playbook of the late union consultant Jane MacAlevey, a former SEIU organizer who enjoyed the closest ties to *Labor Notes* and the DSA, and occupied a teacher position at the UCLA Labor Studies program. More will have to be written on her role in the near future. But the basic concept that she stressed was the need to create mechanisms for the appearance of democratic involvement by the rank-and-file, without giving them any actual control over the process.

For example, MacAlevey advocated what she called “contract campaigns,” which was adopted by the Teamsters, in which union staffers would fan out into the rank-and-file with petitions, surveys, “practice pickets,” etc. She also advocated “open bargaining sessions” where

workers could sit in on talks, but only under the tight discipline of the bureaucracy. When the sensitive nature of the talks made even this impractical, the Teamsters adopted a modified version through “rank-and-file” bargaining team members, in reality handpicked low-level local officials and workers with close ties to the apparatus.

The SEP worked systematically to expose these maneuvers. Over the summer, we helped to found the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee. In its founding statement, it explained:

Everything indicates that despite the public rhetoric, we are dealing with the same old Teamsters bureaucracy which violates our rights and enforces sellouts. The only response must be to organize ourselves—not to “support” the bargaining committee and to cheerlead for them, but to enforce our democratic will, and position ourselves to countermand the inevitable sellout.

The committee raised demands to enforce real workers’ control over the talks, including full transparency over negotiations, the establishment of rank-and-file demands that must be met and preparations by workers themselves for a strike which the Teamsters had no intention of actually calling.

When it was finally announced, the contract fell far short of workers’ demands. Part-time starting pay would increase to only \$21 per hour and remain flat for most of the contract. The company pledged only a few thousand full-time jobs and would freeze pension contributions in much of the country. A promise for air conditioning only applied to new vehicles when the company keeps them operating for decades.

The UPS RFC campaigned vigorously against the contract, but it stressed a “no” vote was not enough. As one statement explained:

But the bureaucrats will not see the light and come up with something better if we vote down the contract. They’ll try to make us vote again, or worse, go to Biden to get an injunction. Therefore, the “no” vote must be the starting point for the rank-and-file to build alternative structures outside the control of the bureaucracy, to transfer power to the rank-and-file where it belongs.

This distinguished the committee from other groupings attempting to build a second edition of TDU, including Teamsters Mobilize, which was founded with the support of TDU historian Joe Allen and local officials. These groupings, incorporating some ex-TDU members dissatisfied by the endorsement of O’Brien, claimed that a “no” vote would send a message to the bureaucracy it would have to respect. Their function was to act as a second line of defense under conditions in which TDU itself was beginning to fall apart.

The bureaucracy and the pseudo-left recognized the WSWS and the UPS RFC as the chief threat. One particularly revealing comment in *Newsweek* attacked the WSWS as the “intellectual-industrial complex” and “armchair activists” who were threatening the contract’s ratification and calling on workers to “do away with their union.” The author, Jill Dunson, presented herself as a part-time UPS worker, but in reality was one of the so-called “rank-and-file” members of the national bargaining committee.

When we demanded the chance to respond, *Newsweek* obliged. The response which I wrote on behalf of the WSWS answered these slanders. Crucially, we closed by defending our socialist politics, explaining that “workers are growing receptive to it” while the bureaucracy’s hostility to

socialism expressed their defense of inequality.

The decision to publish our reply, by any objective journalistic standard, was amply justified. But it was remarkable because it was in contrast to the long-standing policy in the corporate press to refuse to acknowledge the WSWS.

This did not mean that *Newsweek* had suddenly embraced socialism or ceased to be a corporate media outlet. But it was a clear recognition that the party was speaking for very powerful social tendencies, which the bourgeoisie itself could ignore only at their own peril.

The UPS contract was ratified under dubious circumstances, with workers suspecting widespread fraud. In fact, the whole vote was fraudulent because the Teamsters concealed the fact that the deal gave a green light to long-planned layoffs.

Within a few weeks, workers began reporting that entire shifts were being laid off at UPS warehouses. Only the UPS RFC and the WSWS sought to inform workers about what was happening, warning that these were not merely seasonal cuts as the Teamsters claimed, but a comprehensive attack on jobs utilizing automation as a key weapon.

In January of this year, the UPS RFC published a statement, "Automation jobs bloodbath is underway at UPS: Seven facts workers need to know." It explained that the company was already opening automated facilities with the potential to eliminate 80 percent of the company's warehouse workers.

This was later confirmed by UPS itself in an investors meeting in March, where it rolled out its "Network of the Future" initiative which aimed to close or automate 200 facilities.

In response, the UPS RFC called, not for the abolition of new labor-saving technologies, but for workers' control over production so that these technologies can be used to ease the burden of work and improve workers' quality of life. A statement in April called for the efficiencies realized by automation to be used to reduce working hours with no loss in pay, to hire part-timers at full-time positions, improve health and safety and reduce the retirement age.

Through this response, the party began to lay out, in popular outline, the socialist system of work. It connected these demands with a demand for public ownership of UPS, under the democratic control of the working class.

The struggle at the Post Office

Many similar issues have emerged in the ongoing struggle at the US Postal Service. Under a new "Delivering for America" restructuring program, the USPS aims to close thousands of local post offices and eliminate a minimum of 60,000 jobs. Management is using new pay formulas to slash wages for rural letter carriers by tens of thousands of dollars. City carriers are under the thumb of invasive new monitoring systems, and automation similar to that at UPS is being introduced in a redesign of the postal network. The eventual aim is to privatize the post office entirely, a policy objective of the bourgeoisie going all the way back to Richard Nixon.

We have had an enormous response among postal workers to our coverage, which led to the formation of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee last September. One of its key statements was a detailed explanation of the Delivering for America Program, whose real aims were being concealed by the union bureaucracy.

The party's intervention in the post office has been, in an overt form, an international struggle. National post offices are being slashed all over the world, and the party has helped form rank-and-file committees among postal workers in Canada, Germany, Britain and Australia. The work of

the postal committee in the US has developed in close consultation with these committees, including through the sending of international delegates to committee meetings to explain the global character of the attack on postal jobs.

The war in Gaza and the working class

In October, Israel launched its genocidal war in Gaza, which rapidly produced an explosion of protests worldwide.

The response of the bureaucracy to the mass anti-war demonstrations was total hostility. This has a deeper cause in the social function of the bureaucracy itself. As Trotsky observed in the Transitional Program in 1938:

In periods of acute class struggle, the leading bodies of the trade unions aim to become masters of the mass movement in order to render it harmless ... In times of war or revolution, when the bourgeoisie is plunged into exceptional difficulties, trade union leaders usually become bourgeois ministers.

Comrade Jerry White's report will deal more in-depth with the response of the bureaucracy to the anti-war movement and its political function in general. Here I will confine myself to saying that, broadly speaking, the bureaucracy has sought to smother opposition with toothless "ceasefire" resolutions, combined with ironclad support for "Genocide Joe." Biden's declaration last month that the AFL-CIO was his "domestic NATO" was an accurate and precise summation of the actual relation of the bureaucracy to US imperialism.

By the spring, massive police crackdowns on college campuses, conducted with bipartisan support, provoked even larger demonstrations. The party was confronted with the issue of how we should respond. It was simply not enough to comment on events from the outside. The critical question was: What must the response of the working class to the eruption of campus protests be?

A May 1 statement of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees was an important step forward. It called for workers to organize:

Demonstrations, mass meetings and delegations of workers to campus protests must be organized, culminating in a nationwide and international strike to force an end to the assault on the basic right to free speech.

The working class, the statement explained, is the decisive social force upon which the fight against war must be based. It continued:

Students have taken a courageous stand. But their actions anticipate an even more powerful movement in the working class. The issues they have raised cannot be resolved on the campuses, but rather in the factories, warehouses, railroads and docks.

The mobilization of the working class against war required a rebellion against the pro-war trade union bureaucracy. "Workers must not be

satisfied with dishonest ceasefire resolutions passed by union bureaucrats who support “Genocide Joe” Biden and other pro-war politicians,” the statement said. It called on workers “take over union meetings, or organize their own meetings, to demand that the unions sanction strikes.” If they refused to do so, the bureaucrats should be thrown out and replaced with leaders drawn from the shop floor.

The IWA-RFC statement anticipated the actual course of events. Only a few days later, the strike by University of California academic workers broke out. From the beginning, this took the form of a rebellion against the United Auto Workers bureaucracy, which devoted all of its efforts to limiting and sabotaging the struggle.

At first, the UAW tried to limit the strike to one campus out of ten in the UC system. But it was compelled to eventually call out five more campuses, under conditions where workers themselves made clear they were prepared to walk with or without UAW approval.

The strike marked the first entry of a significant section of the working class into the fight against war. These academic workers, and especially graduate students, constitute a proletarianized layer of the campus workforce, earning poverty wages and unable to pay rent.

From the beginning, the party encouraged and welcomed this rebellion. It fought for the expansion of the strike into the industrial working class, especially in the auto plants, where the UAW was deliberately concealing knowledge of the strike.

The UAW, meanwhile, tried to counter our fight for a class-based movement against war through the promotion of the politics of divestment. They raised so-called “demands” focused exclusively to campus administrations while downplaying and ignoring the role of the White House and even state and local democrats.

As comrade Joe explained at an online meeting held by the party:

[The] question of divestment itself, is, in fact, acceptable to the Democratic Party and the trade union apparatus, because it doesn't raise what are the fundamental questions.

The bourgeoisie eventually responded to the UAW's loss of control with an injunction against the strike. The bureaucracy welcomed this as an excuse to shut the strike down.

Drawing conclusions from this struggle, we wrote:

The chief lesson of the University of California strike is that the working class must become the basic force against war... But the importance of the working class for the fight against war is not just that it would increase the power of the movement by giving it the ability to shut down production. Rather, the struggle of the working class against capitalism is at the very center of the fight against war because war itself is a product of the crisis and breakdown of capitalism.

The crisis of democracy

Comrade Jerry will speak more on the relation of the party's intervention in the working class to the fight to defend democratic rights. But the basic orientation that we have stressed, particularly in the July 24 rally and in our election campaign, is that the only way to fight the drive towards dictatorship, fascism and world war is by mobilizing the working class in a fight against capitalism.

There are many reasons to believe that this will be met with a powerful response as the political crisis continues to unfold. Of course, this includes the response to the party's campaigns in the working class, the growing influence of rank-and-file committees, and the growing political radicalization among both workers and youth.

But this potential can also be seen within the crisis and disarray of the bourgeoisie itself. Biden wants to emulate the war-time alliance with the bureaucracy during World War II, known under the propaganda name of the “Arsenal of Democracy,” but the problem he confronts is that the relation of the bureaucrats of today to the workers is totally different than during the 1940s. They are hated by and totally distant from the workers they claim to represent.

The same can be said for the Democrats. There is no hint of a New Deal program on offer today. Instead, the entire ruling class is unanimous behind massive austerity measures, even triggering a manufacturing recession, at the same time that they are attempting to prepare the home front for war.

This is not a reason for complacency. The global and domestic contradictions of US imperialism form the objective basis for the growing turn towards dictatorship. This is expressed most openly by Trump, but proceeds across the whole official political spectrum.

The same contradictions, however, are also the objective basis for socialist revolution. As Trotsky observed:

[T]he laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus ... As time goes on, their desperate efforts to hold back the wheel of history will demonstrate more clearly to the masses that the crisis of the proletarian leadership, having become the crisis in mankind's culture, can be resolved only by the Fourth International.

The contradictions of American capitalism have become so extreme that they cannot be papered over by a shabby maneuver or dishonest phrases. Those forces which have functioned for so long to block the emergence of a revolutionary movement in the working class are being more and more discredited in the manner predicted by Trotsky.

In April, *Labor Notes* held its biennial conference in Chicago. On the surface, this conference appeared to take place from a position of unchallengeable strength. After all, *Labor Notes* essentially is in the leadership of many major unions through its sponsorship of so-called “reform” factions, including the UAW and the Teamsters.

Instead, it was a fiasco as soon as it started. Police arrested anti-genocide protesters during the opening speech by Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson, an ex-teachers union official centrally involved in the protest crackdowns. Teamsters President Sean O'Brien, a main speaker at the 2022 event, was present this year but did not speak, because of his increasingly open ties with Trump and the fascists. He literally fled the scene when a young attendee attempted to ask a critical question about the UPS layoffs.

While *Labor Notes* was busy trying to present itself as devoted to opposition to genocide, the conference ended with a speech by UAW president Shawn Fain that was a full-throated endorsement of World War III. Wearing a shirt with a photo of a bomber on it, Fain called on workers to make the same sacrifices they made during World War II. He ended, saying more than he intended, by holding up his personal copy of *Troublemakers Handbook*, which is essentially *Labor Notes*' bible, and credited the organization as a major influence on all of the UAW's policies.

The trajectory of O'Brien and the Teamsters deserves special attention because his appearance at the Republican National Convention has thrown

the pseudo-left into a crisis. This is the man they have held up as one of the greatest reformers in the history of the labor movement. Now it turns out they have spent years burnishing the credentials of an out-and-out fascist.

As they inevitably do, they have sought to shift responsibility from themselves to the workers. One recent comment in *Jacobin* attempted to explain the speech as O'Brien seeking to appeal to right-wing workers who support Trump. In fact, to the extent that the right wing is able to gain support among workers, this is entirely the responsibility of those forces who devote all of their energies to suppressing the political independence of the working class.

But their main concern is that O'Brien delivered his speech at the RNC and not the DNC. They totally supported his Hitlerite rantings against the rootless international elites with no loyalty to the United States, even presenting that as anti-capitalist.

A certain logic is being played out here. We have long observed that the bureaucracy's nationalism and anticommunism, its dependency on the state and fear of the working class, make it a natural base of support for fascism.

In "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay," Trotsky wrote of the organic need of the bureaucrats "to adapt themselves to the capitalist state and to contend for its cooperation..."

The labor bureaucrats do their level best in words and deeds to demonstrate to the "democratic" state how reliable and indispensable they are in peace-time and especially in time of war. By transforming the trade unions into organs of the state, fascism invents nothing new; it merely draws to their ultimate conclusion the tendencies inherent in imperialism.

Conclusions

In reviewing the party's work in the last two years, what conclusions can we draw?

First, objective social conditions, as well as the massive political and social crisis gripping the US and the world, are driving the working class into social struggle.

Second, the party, through its conscious intervention, which expresses the progressive possibilities inherent in the situation, has emerged as a political force. At the same time, our political enemies, while certainly not finished by any means, are being compromised, both through their own actions and by our own struggle for a genuinely independent program.

Third, the struggles of the working class, having initially broken out in many cases over workplace conditions and contract issues, are becoming radicalized and intersecting more and more powerfully with the political crisis. Through the work of the party, the working class can and must become a conscious, revolutionary political force.

What can we expect in the period immediately in front of us? There are major industrial struggles between now and the November election. There are the contracts for Boeing workers and East Coast dock workers that expire next month, as well as massive cuts in school districts in Chicago, Detroit and around the country.

We don't know exactly what will happen, but we should anticipate immense shocks, including the outbreak of new wars and a possible financial crisis, which will pose the need for the working class to intervene with its own program.



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