Class Struggle USA: Major strikes erupt nationwide

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The first month of 2026 has seen the eruption of major social struggles in the United States, beginning with the mass protests against dictatorship and ICE killings. Opposition is now increasingly taking on a class character, with the emergence of a developing strike movement.

On Monday, 6,400 San Francisco teachers walked out on strike. In a city where housing costs have been driven to unaffordable levels by the spending of tech billionaires, teachers are demanding wage increases, enforceable class-size limits and staffing levels and increased funding. They are striking as high school students—defying threats from school administrators, politicians and teachers' union bureaucrats—are walking out nationwide in opposition to the assault on immigrants.

In Los Angeles, tens of thousands of teachers have voted to authorize strike action over the same issues, while 40,000 graduate students across the University of California system are currently voting to authorize another strike.

Also on Monday, 4,000 pharmacy and laboratory workers joined the ongoing strike of 31,000 Kaiser Permanente nurses and other healthcare workers, now entering its third week, against profit-driven cuts to healthcare. It is significant that on the same day, the unions in New York moved to betray a month-long strike by 15,000 New York City nurses—precisely because of the potential emergence of a national movement by healthcare workers.

Growing militancy among refinery workers is fueling opposition to a new contract that falls far short of demands for higher wages and job security. Tens of thousands of workers at UPS, Amazon, in the auto industry and elsewhere are also fighting mass layoffs.

These struggles are being driven by inflation, the deterioration of living standards, the destruction of jobs and the broader rampage of the corporate and financial elite against all the rights of workers. The artificial suppression of organized resistance by the union bureaucracy has produced a situation in which decades of pent-up social tensions are now bursting into the open.

This movement must find new channels. The growing size and duration of strikes reflect the increasing difficulty the union apparatus faces in suppressing organized resistance, a role it has played for decades.

But the bureaucracy is doing everything it can to disrupt and isolate this resistance. Its six-figure salaries, billions in assets drawn from workers' dues and access to management and corporate politicians all depend on its ability to fulfill this function.

The compensation for Becky Pringle, the president of the National Education Association (NEA), the parent organization of the union on strike in California, is nearly $500,000. The president of the United Steelworkers (USW) David McCall brings in $250,000, and UAW President Shawn Fain is paid $270,000. These officials preside over apparatuses that control billions of dollars, used to finance an entire layer of bureaucrats whose interests are independent of and hostile to those of rank-and-file workers.

In response to the mass protests against ICE murder, the union bureaucrats opposed participation in a general strike in Minneapolis, cynically citing "no-strike" clauses that they themselves inserted into contracts. Their outlook was summed up by an injunction from teachers' union officials in San Diego, responding to growing support for action from rank-and-file teachers: "Obey now. Grieve later."

In California, the California Teachers Association (CTA) has kept most major districts on the job for months under the hypocritical slogan, "We Can't Wait." In New York City, the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) responded to the expansion of the Kaiser Strike by announcing a sellout agreement with none of the nurses' demands. They are holding snap ratification votes which would end the strike at three hospitals, while isolating nurses at one remaining hospital, New York-Presbyterian. The move has nurses "filled with rage," as one striker put it.

The United Steelworkers, which bragged in 2022 that the last contract fought inflation by depressing wage increases, is now attempting to ram through a national deal that would isolate workers at the BP refinery in Whiting, Indiana. The contract is also a war contract, sandwiched in between

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Trump's war to seize oil in Venezuela and the next war now being planned against Iran.

The bureaucracy is attempting to prevent any break from the stranglehold of the Democratic Party, which is more terrified of a mass movement than of fascism and which is implementing austerity at the local and state level.

In California, teachers directly confront the Democratic Party, which controls the government at the state and local levels. In New York, Governor Kathy Hochul responded to the nurses' strike by issuing emergency orders to help bring in scabs. The New York Police Department (NYPD), under the administration of so-called democratic socialist Mayor Zohran Mamdani, arrested more than a dozen striking nurses at a demonstration last week. The sellout contract was brokered by Mamdani and Biden's former Labor Secretary, Julie Su, whom Mamdani had appointed to his city administration.

In a speech Monday at the United Auto Workers so-called "Community Action Program" conference, in reality, a meet-and-greet for Democratic Party officials, union President Shawn Fain warned that "fascism is on our doorstep," declaring, "If you think it can't happen to you, you're fooling yourself. If you think that can't happen on a UAW picket line, you're crazy."

Yet he proposed no action. The words "general strike" arose only from a single shout from the audience. Instead, Fain pointed to the 2026 midterm elections—elections that Trump is openly preparing either to cancel or conduct at gunpoint—and to 2028, when the UAW's sellout contracts expire, promising vaguely that "we're going to do whatever the hell we have to do" more than two years from now, when it will be too late. His choice of words here quietly abandons earlier rhetoric about supporting a general strike even at that distant future.

Fain ominously declared, "We are not Democrats or Republicans," not to argue for a break with the two-party system but to signal the union's willingness to collaborate with open fascists as well as Democrats. The UAW is one of several unions cultivating ties with Trump, supporting his fascistic "America First" economic nationalism while preparing to endorse anti-immigrant, racist and right-wing populist figures such as Dan Osborn in Nebraska.

As the class struggle continues to grow, the bureaucracy will try ever more openly and shamelessly to sabotage it. Workers, therefore, need the means through which they can fight this sabotage, unite on a national and international scale and establish their political independence and initiative.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) urges workers to form a network of committees, composed of trusted shop-floor militants, to discuss strategy and prepare joint actions across industries, regional and national borders. The bureaucratic apparatus that exists to suppress the class struggle must be abolished, and power must be transferred to the shop floor. Such committees will give workers the power to oppose sellouts and override decisions that violate the will of the membership.

In New York City, for example, the New York Nurses Rank-and-File Committee is fighting for the expansion of the strike to all 15 NYSNA-represented facilities and the provision of strike pay so nurses can sustain the fight for safe staffing and livable wages. It is urging nurses to make an appeal to healthcare workers nationwide—at Kaiser and elsewhere—to link up with broader sections of the working class, not Democratic politicians.

At the same time, the IWA-RFC calls on oil refinery workers to reject the latest sellout national contract being pushed by the United Steelworkers, which isolates BP workers. They must not allow another war contract to be imposed under the pressure of escalating militarism and energy nationalism.

Rank-and-file committees should embrace the whole working class, not just those in unions, in order to prepare the ground for a general strike. They are based on a strategy of class struggle and the international unity of the working class regardless of nationality, race or immigration status. Committees must become organizing centers for working class opposition to immigration raids and other police-state measures in the workplaces and neighborhoods.

A mass movement is emerging. The outcome depends on whether workers break the grip of the union bureaucracy and intervene as an independent social force.

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