

As Trump escalates war on Iran, a strike wave spreads across the United States

International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees
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In the month since the US-Israeli war against Iran began, the United States has been shaken by an accelerating eruption of class struggle.

The ruling class is escalating war abroad while carrying out a jobs bloodbath and intensifying repression at home. Over the same period, significant strikes and strike threats have spread across healthcare, education, public services, manufacturing, food production and other sectors, even as the war fuels inflationary shocks and economic dislocation—struggles that the trade union apparatus is working to isolate and shut down.

In food processing, the most significant is at the JBS meatpacking plant in Greeley, Colorado. On March 16, roughly 3,800 workers—members of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) at one of the largest beef processing facilities in the country—walked out in the first strike at a US beef slaughterhouse since the 1980s. The overwhelming majority of workers are immigrants who have launched this fight in defiance of the broader rampage spearheaded by the Trump administration.

The UFCW apparatus has sought to corral the struggle within a pre-set timetable, declaring a self-imposed two-week limit that expires on Friday—an attempt to wear down workers and shut the strike down on the basis of vague promises that the company will “return to the negotiating table.”

Other conflicts include a strike by workers at AMPI Dairy in Paynesville, Minnesota, which began on March 21, and a strike by workers at the Welch’s plant in Grandview, Washington, which began on March 23, after workers overwhelmingly rejected the company’s “best offer.” Teamsters workers at B&G Foods in Stoughton, Wisconsin, have voted by a 98 percent margin this week to authorize strike action. Dining hall and food service workers at Arizona State University carried out a one-day strike on March 24 against Aramark, demanding major wage increases after voting by 99 percent for strike authorization when their contract expired last year.

In education, major battles are erupting at multiple levels. Most recently, faculty at New York University walked out this week to demand higher pay, job security and improved conditions. The United Auto Workers (UAW) bureaucracy moved to halt the strike after less than two days, “pausing” the strike before workers know what is in the agreement, let alone

vote on it. This followed the UAW’s threat to place the local at Columbia University under “receivership” if workers take strike action that includes “political” issues, such as the defense of democratic rights.

On March 11, workers at Portland Community College—Oregon’s largest community college, enrolling more than 50,000 students—launched the first strike in the history of any Oregon community college after authorizing action by 94 percent. The strike is now in its third week.

Across K–12 and higher education, the union apparatus has worked to keep a growing strike movement from exploding into a nationwide offensive. In Northern California, teacher strikes in Twin Rivers and Natomas—the first in their districts’ histories—were brought to an end through rapid settlements, while a four-day strike in San Francisco last month was used to vent anger and then channel it back into a deal that left the underlying crisis unresolved. In Los Angeles, United Teachers Los Angeles has announced an April 14 strike deadline for 68,000 workers, including classified workers in SEIU99.

Forty-eight thousand academic workers in the University of California system voted to authorize strike action in February, but earlier this month the United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 4811 announced a tentative agreement aimed at blocking a systemwide strike. Workers were kept on the job for nearly three weeks without a contract and then presented with a deal crafted behind closed doors.

In manufacturing, the most politically significant struggle is the strike at General Dynamics Bath Iron Works in Maine. More than 620 designers, clerks and technicians in the Bath Marine Draftsmen’s Association, UAW Local 3999 walked out this week after rejecting the shipyard’s proposed wage offer. These are the skilled workers without whom the Navy’s destroyers are designed and built. They confront not simply an “employer” but a major military contractor whose profits depend on the expansion of US war operations.

On March 24, workers at Freudenberg-NOK in Findlay, Ohio, members of UAW Local 1327, walked off the job in the first strike in the facility’s history. Freudenberg-NOK is a global manufacturer of sealing technologies integral to automotive and industrial supply chains, employing thousands in the United States.

In the wake of the concessions “pattern” contract pushed through by the United Steelworkers (USW) earlier this year—aimed at guaranteeing uninterrupted refinery output as Washington prepared its assault on Iran—BP has responded with outright strikebreaking measures, including the ongoing lockout of roughly 900 workers at its plant in Whiting, Indiana.

In healthcare and social services, major actions earlier this year—including the 41-day strike of 15,000 nurses across three New York City hospitals and the walkout of 31,000 Kaiser Permanente nurses and healthcare workers in California and Hawaii—have been followed by renewed confrontations, as healthcare systems intensify speedup, staffing cuts and cost-cutting even while claiming “there is no money” for safe care.

On March 18, roughly 2,400 Kaiser mental health therapists, psychologists, and social workers carried out a one-day strike across Northern California, joined by thousands of nurses in sympathy action.

In Ohio, 140 workers at the Lorain County Department of Job and Family Services—caseworkers, investigators and social service employees, members of UAW Local 2192—are in their fifth week on strike for better wages, benefits and working conditions. They administer essential programs and protections, from elder abuse investigations and home daycare inspections to SNAP (food stamps) and Medicaid support.

Taken together, these struggles—whatever the immediate issues at stake in each—express a common underlying reality: the response of workers to intensifying exploitation, staggering inequality, a corporate jobs bloodbath and the diversion of society’s resources into war.

These contradictions will be intensified sharply by the escalating war against Iran. The conflict is already driving price shocks for gas and other basic commodities, while the Trump administration prepares a major new escalation, including plans for a ground invasion and a further \$200 billion war funding request. Workers are being told there is “no money” for wages, staffing, schools, housing or healthcare, while unlimited sums are demanded for bombs, aircraft carriers and other instruments of destruction.

This expanding strike movement expresses the same underlying contradictions of capitalism that are erupting in imperialist barbarism. At the same time, the growth of working class struggle points to the objective means of stopping war, through the independent mobilization of the working class.

At every point, the trade union apparatus functions to block the development of this movement. It isolates strikes, enforces artificial deadlines, shuts down struggles with rushed votes and secret deals, and insists that workers remain confined within what the corporations and the state deem “acceptable.”

The strikes that have erupted are only a pale reflection of the depth of social anger accumulating in the working class, and they have tended to break out most sharply where the union apparatus has less direct day-to-day control. Beneath the surface there exists a powerful sentiment for broader, unified

action, including a general strike. But the central obstacle is the trade union apparatus: a layer of highly paid functionaries in the top 5 percent of income earners.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) encourages the development of independent rank-and-file committees in every workplace—democratically controlled organizations that can link up struggles across industries and national borders, defeat isolation, and organize unified action against layoffs, austerity, repression and war. The necessity of these organizations arises out of the logic of the struggles in which workers are engaged and the imperative of breaking free from the stranglehold of the trade union apparatus.

These committees must be built on an international basis. The working class in the United States is part of a global class, confronting the same corporate oligarchs and the same drive to nationalist war everywhere. The answer to the warmongering of the capitalist ruling elites is the international unity of workers, acting together across borders.

The emergence of such a movement immediately pits workers against the entire political system. The Democrats share Trump’s basic aims, including the war against Iran, and differ only over tactics and presentation. Their overriding concern is to prevent the explosive growth of social opposition from developing into a conscious movement from below that threatens the capitalist system itself.

But it is precisely the independent intervention of the working class—its “interference” in the course of events—that is the decisive factor. War, dictatorship and capitalist oppression will not be ended by appeals to those responsible but by the mobilization of the social power of workers to halt the war machine, resist repression, and unite struggles across workplaces and borders. The development of rank-and-file committees is the necessary basis for transforming mounting anger into an organized force, capable of opposing the drive to barbarism and opening a way forward for humanity.



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