Protests and strikes erupt against skyrocketing energy costs driven by US war against Iran

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16 September 2026

The consequences of the US-Israeli war against Iran, now in its seventh month, are erupting around the globe in the form of growing social outrage and strikes over rising energy prices and increasing costs of food and other necessities for billions of people.

News media in recent days have reported a series of demonstrations and strikes primarily in the developing countries of Asia and Latin America where taxi drivers and workers see no point in going to work when wages barely cover their fuel costs.

In Portugal, for example, drivers are honking horns and blocking roads in a slow drive to protest diesel prices which have reached a record high of more than $9 a gallon. Protests and strikes have also been reported in Syria, Guatemala, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

The impact of the war on world energy prices has been catastrophic for the working class. Brent crude oil, which hovered in the $65–$75 range before the war, surged to a peak of approximately $120 per barrel in late April before a brief, illusory lull following a ceasefire announcement in early May.

With the resumption of heavy US strikes on Iranian tankers in early September, prices surged back above $100. As of this writing, Brent crude is trading above $109 per barrel.

In the US, gasoline prices have risen approximately 39 percent since the war began on February 28. Diesel—the lifeblood of freight transport, agriculture and food distribution—hit an all-time average high of $6.31 per gallon on Wednesday. Jet fuel prices have followed a parallel trajectory, grounded low-cost airline routes and driven sharp increases in airfare and air transport of goods.

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has driven the price of pump gasoline up more than 50 percent globally, while the price of staples such as tomatoes has risen nearly 40 percent and global inflation has reached 3.8 percent, its highest level since 2023. Brown University researchers estimate the war has added $100 billion to US energy costs alone, or roughly $763 per household, with that total rising by approximately $1 million every two minutes.

The geopolitical and financial reverberations extend far beyond the Persian Gulf. Sana Jaffrey, a lecturer at the Australian National University who researches conflict and state-building in Asia, posed the central question confronting governments everywhere. “How much fiscal capacity does Asia or the developing world have in general to manage this geopolitical crisis?” she asked.

Speaking to the *New York Times* on Tuesday, Jaffrey said, “What happens to global financial markets when that capacity starts to run out?” She warned, “At some point, it’s going to become everyone’s problem.” For the working class around the world, that point has already arrived.

On February 28, 2026, the US and Israel launched a massive, unprovoked assault on Iran without a declaration of war or authorization from the US Congress or United Nations Security Council. The war began with the targeted killing of Iran’s head of state and an immediate campaign of strikes against military installations, government facilities and energy infrastructure across the country and the wider Persian Gulf region.

Within days, Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz—through which roughly 20 percent of all globally traded crude oil, equivalent to 17 to 21 million barrels per day, passes—and set off what the International Energy Agency (IEA) characterized as the “largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market.”

Attacks on energy infrastructure struck Gulf Cooperation Council countries, and by September 11, the East-West Crude Oil Pipeline in Saudi Arabia was shut down entirely. To these disruptions have now been added the closure of the Bab al-Mandab strait by the Houthis through their control of the coast and occupation of key islands in the Red Sea route to the Gulf of Aden.

The combined result of the war disaster has resulted in a disruption of 39 percent of global trade and 31 percent of global shipments, according to current estimates. Refineries from Kharg Island to Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province have been hit. The head of the IEA has described the consequences as "the greatest global energy security challenge in history."

The political consequences of these disruptions are now visible in streets and squares on every continent. Below is a partial accounting of the protests that have erupted in recent days, based on available reporting:

• **Syria:** The largest demonstrations since the fall of the Assad regime two years ago erupted after the government announced temporary price increases of up to 40 percent on gasoline, diesel, and other petroleum products. Protesters burned tires and cars in several cities, expressing fury at a transitional government that had promised reconstruction but is now presiding over energy collapse.

• **Guatemala:** Mass protests broke out as the latest surge in oil prices pushed costs beyond the reach of poor and working-class households. Demonstrators burned tires and vehicles, blockading major roads in what observers described as some of the most intense unrest the country has seen in years.

• **Portugal:** Drivers staged a series of slow-moving convoys on major roads, horns blaring in coordinated protest, after diesel reached a record high of more than €2.17 per liter—over $9 per gallon. The demonstrations, reminiscent of France's *gilets jaunes* (yellow vest) movement, are challenging the government of Prime Minister Luís Montenegro.

• **Indonesia:** Fuel shortages and long lines at petrol stations have disrupted transport and commerce. Strikes by taxi drivers and day laborers have spread across major cities as workers report that earnings no longer cover basic energy costs.

• **Pakistan:** Fuel queues stretching for miles have slowed economic activity in a country already under severe pressure from the International Monetary Fund. Protests against price increases have merged with broader anti-government demonstrations in Karachi and Lahore.

• **Philippines**: Energy shortfalls linked to the disruption of Gulf imports have triggered rolling blackouts and protests outside electricity utility offices. Workers in Manila's transport sector have staged work stoppages demanding fuel subsidies.

• **India:** Rising diesel and liquified petroleum gas (LPG) cooking fuel costs have led to demonstrations in multiple states, where opposition parties have organized rallies demanding price controls. The government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi faces mounting pressure as rural and urban poor are squeezed simultaneously.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has, from the first hours of the war, insisted that what is unfolding cannot be understood as the product of the personal pathology of Donald Trump. It is the manifestation of the historic crisis of US imperialism and the drive to overcome this crisis by imposing a new colonial redivision of the world's resources.

The seizure of Venezuelan oil, the assault on Iran, and the escalating confrontation with China are components of this process. They are fronts in a single global war being waged to reorganize the world under US hegemonic control and to crush any state that resists subordination to the dictates of Washington and Wall Street.

Iran was targeted because control of Middle Eastern energy resources is the key strategic lever in the broader conflict with China, which had been importing more than 70 percent of its daily oil consumption, with most of it coming from Iran.

As the WSWS warned immediately after February 28, 2026, "This war will not solve the internal social crisis of American society, nor will it reverse the protracted deterioration in the global position of US capitalism. All these contradictions, domestic and international, will be intensified. The war itself will inevitably escalate and engulf the entire planet."

These warnings have been proven correct. The contradictions of capitalism—between globalized production and the nation-state system, between the social character of production and private ownership of the means of production—cannot resolve themselves. They are moving in the direction of a revolutionary confrontation with the working class.

While these contradictions are deepening, driving the major powers toward a new worldwide conflagration, they are also producing a movement of the working class. The protests now erupting from Damascus to Dhaka to Lisbon are the first tremors of that revolutionary eruption and they will intensify. The task before the working class is to unify these struggles under the banner of socialist internationalism and a conscious program that unites workers across borders in opposition not only to this war or these energy prices, but to the entire capitalist system that has produced both.