While Trump and Netanyahu threaten the world at UN, class struggle grows on every continent

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As the representatives of the capitalist nation-states gathered at the United Nations this week to plot escalating war, another force was making itself felt in a growing movement of the working class on every continent.

The 81st General Assembly was a festival of militarism and reaction. Donald Trump threatened to "annihilate" Iran, claimed Venezuela's oil—"to the victor belong the spoils"—and "permanent control" over Greenland, and declared that "communism will never be coming to America." Zelensky demanded escalation of the war against nuclear-armed Russia. Two days later, Netanyahu celebrated Israel's wars and assassinations across the Middle East, denounced delegations that walked out as "moral cowards" and called for the overthrow of the Iranian government.

At the same time, the working class—united internationally by global production—is beginning to assert itself. Within this movement, there is a growing striving for unity across national boundaries.

Earlier this month, some 300 Mexican truck drivers shut the commercial crossing between Mexicali and Calexico in protest against the Trump administration's revocation of more than 25,000 visas held by binational truckers, roughly a fifth of the workforce. The blockade spread to the crossing between San Luis Río Colorado and Yuma, Arizona. The action was organized through a WhatsApp group of more than 1,000 drivers. On the other side of the border, calls are circulating among American truckers for a work stoppage on October 1, principally over the cost of diesel, now above $6.50 a gallon.

Elsewhere in North America, National Steel Car workers in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada are entering the seventh week of a strike centered on wages, safety and a piece-work system that claimed the lives of three workers. Members of the 14,000-strong Saskatchewan health care unit voted 99 percent for job action after years without a wage increase.

At United Airlines, maintenance technicians in the US rejected a Teamsters-backed contract last week by 53.5 percent, with more than 9,000 workers casting ballots, the second rejection in two years. Musicians of the Cleveland Orchestra struck Friday for the second time in the orchestra's history over pay that has fallen behind inflation. At Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, 2,986 nurses voted Thursday to authorize an open-ended strike, with only 215 voting against.

In Argentina, more than 350 organizations called the September 19 "Marcha de la Bronca" against the Milei government's austerity program, bringing tens of thousands into the Plaza de Mayo as an International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission arrived in Buenos Aires. The protest demands included wage and pension increases, a ban on layoffs, repeal of the labor reform, non-payment of the foreign debt and a break with the IMF. The organizers called for coordination "from below" in workplaces, schools, universities and hospitals and demanded a general strike from the CGT and CTA labor federations, which refused to endorse the march.

Kenyan transport workers struck this week over fuel prices; Hyundai workers in South Korea prepared a full-day strike; 15,000 Estonian teachers walked out on September 22. Fuel-price protests have swept Syria, where the largest demonstrations since the fall of Assad followed a 40 percent increase in the price of diesel. They have also taken place in Guatemala, the Philippines and France.

War concentrates all of the conditions that are fueling social protests and class struggle. It sends energy costs rising throughout the world economy, drives up interest rates, accelerates attacks on public spending and requires the reorganization of industry for military production. It poses in the sharpest form the impossibility of resolving the conditions facing workers within national boundaries.

Germany is preparing nearly €152 billion in military and war-related spending for 2027—a 57 percent increase in a single year. This comes as its auto industry sheds jobs, 142,500 since 2018, more than 42,000 of them in the twelve

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months to June, and the government imposes sweeping social cuts. In the United States, Trump is demanding a $1.5 trillion military budget while the administration cancels Affordable Care Act coverage for 760,000 people and eliminates food stamps for more than 5 million people.

The wars themselves are driven by the struggle for markets, raw materials and supply chains, and the attempt to overcome an impossible economic situation and mountains of unsustainable debt through seizure and robbery. The same ruling classes that wage this struggle abroad impose layoffs, austerity and intensified exploitation on workers at home.

In these parallel processes of imperialist war and class struggle, the trade union bureaucracy is siding with war. After decades of imposing sellouts and integrating itself with management and the capitalist parties, the union apparatus is being drawn directly into the economic and political mobilization for war and seeks integration into the national capitalist state and its military strategy.

At the UAW's Michigan Community Action Program conference last week, Shawn Fain and DSA-backed Senate candidate Abdul El-Sayed attacked Trump from the right for saying Chinese automakers could build US plants, invoking "American jobs" and "national security." In Germany, IG Metall is backing the conversion of auto plants facing closure into arms production; its deputy chairman, Jürgen Kerner, has said the union's concern is to be involved "from the outset" in the transition.

The basic lie promoted by the bureaucracy is that the capitalists and the workers in each country are united by a "national" interest. In reality, production has integrated workers internationally to an extent without precedent, while the organizations claiming to represent them help play off workers in one country against their class brothers and sisters in another. Mexican workers are told that American workers are their competitors; American workers are told that their jobs depend on tariffs against workers abroad.

The organizations of the pseudo-left work deliberately to disorient the leftward movement of the working class, defending nationalism and the capitalist state in a course that increasingly brings them into alliance with the extreme right. Bernie Sanders appeared on the same stage as former Trump adviser Steve Bannon on September 15 at the "Pro-Human Assembly" on artificial intelligence. New York Mayor Mamdani hosted Trump at Gracie Mansion the day before Trump threatened to "annihilate" Iran at the UN. Mamdani disavowed having "encouraged" protests against Netanyahu and presided over the arrest of more than 100 demonstrators by the NYPD as Netanyahu spoke.

But while these forces work to hold back the working class, its objective power, transformed by decades of globalized production, has never been greater.

The growing recognition of the need for unity across national boundaries and independent organization found conscious expression on September 20, when workers from the United States, Canada, Mexico and Norway participated in an online meeting with Mack Trucks worker and UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman.

The meeting, "For rank-and-file power and the international unity of the working class," was co-sponsored by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees and brought together speakers from rank-and-file committees in North America and Europe to discuss a global strategy against layoffs, trade war, militarism and dictatorship. Participants included a striking National Steel Car worker, a worker at the Volkswagen subsidiary MAN in Norway, a General Motors worker from Silao, Mexico, and autoworkers and postal workers in the United States.

Such a meeting is the initial and still limited form of a movement whose objective foundations are immense. In his opening report to the Ninth Congress of the Socialist Equality Party, David North wrote that global production has stretched "the factory ... across the planet," while "the global labor force now numbers some three-and-a-half billion human beings, the largest social force ever assembled in history."

He concluded: "A social force of three-and-a-half billion, concentrated in the cities, bound together by the most integrated productive apparatus ever created, and confronted simultaneously with world war, dictatorship and social immiseration, is not being assembled by history for a protest. It is being assembled for the most thorough social transformation ever undertaken: the world socialist revolution."

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) fights to give this movement conscious and independent organizational form through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. The IWA-RFC was founded in 2021 to transfer power from the bureaucracies to workers themselves by linking rank-and-file committees across workplaces, industries and national borders, freeing the working class from the fetters of the union apparatus and the capitalist parties. The highest expression of this struggle is the recruitment and training of the most class conscious workers as Marxists in the sections of the ICFI.

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