

Truckers, healthcare workers and others mobilize as class struggle grows across North America

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Strikes and protests by workers have spread across North America in recent weeks, driven by the impossible cost of living and mounting conflict with the corrupt trade union apparatus. The movement in the United States, Mexico and Canada is part of a broader upsurge that is also sweeping Europe, where mass demonstrations have toppled governments or brought them to the brink. The class struggle is developing as an internationally unified process.

In every country, workers confront the need to fight for their independence from the capitalist parties and trade union bureaucracy which serves management. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) encourages and is spearheading the formation of rank-and-file committees in workplaces, giving this movement an international perspective, strategy and organization.

On Thursday, workers from the Mexican Social Security Institute carried out their latest series of demonstrations against a sellout contract from the SNTSS union, which includes a pathetic 2.9 percent increase in base pay. Workers are also fighting against inadequate staffing and supplies, with nurses in Campeche reporting buying materials themselves. The union attempted to pass a statute disciplining workers for speaking, which workers ignored when they stormed the union headquarters on October 1.

In September, Mexican drivers used WhatsApp to prepare a blockade of US border crossings after mass visa revocations by the Trump administration threatened their ability to work. US drivers, principally owner-operators, parked their rigs on October 1 to protest soaring diesel and insurance costs and low freight rates. The action's scale remains uncertain, but drivers organized themselves through social media while the Teamsters and the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association refused to support the action.

At National Steel Car in Hamilton, Ontario, 1,200 railcar workers have been on strike since August 12 after rejecting a contract brought by the United Steelworkers (USW). They are demanding the abolition of piecework, which helped create the conditions for three deaths between 2020 and 2022. USW officials abandoned that demand and proposed helping

management set the rates instead.

The NSC Workers Rank-and-File Committee is fighting against this betrayal and to build support for the strike beyond the plant, including among 23,000 USW members in the US steel industry who are being kept on the job on rolling contract extensions after their last deal originally expired September 1. Cleveland-Cliffs is demanding healthcare concessions in the US while announcing layoffs threatening up to 500 jobs in Hamilton.

Nearly 9,000 Stellantis workers will vote on October 17-18 to authorize a strike after being kept on the job by the Unifor union for weeks after their contract expired on September 20. Unifor has declared an "impasse" over Stellantis' plans to close the Brampton, Ontario assembly plant, wiping out 2,200 jobs, and threats to cut jobs in Etobicoke and Windsor.

In Saskatchewan, 14,000 healthcare workers voted 99 percent for strike action in September after four and a half years without a wage increase. In Manitoba, 350 Dynacare laboratory workers struck for pay closer to their public-sector counterparts. The union-backed New Democratic Party government obtained a back-to-work order within hours, and union officials instructed workers to dismantle their picket lines.

In the US, 1,200 Bradford White water-heater workers in Michigan struck on September 16 after twice rejecting contracts by 96 percent. The United Auto Workers (UAW) has left them isolated while management operates the plant with strikebreakers. More than 1,300 Encore casino and hotel workers have been on strike for five weeks in Boston. United Airlines maintenance technicians rejected a second Teamsters-backed agreement containing outsourcing concessions and no retroactive pay. At farm equipment manufacturer John Deere, 10,000 workers rejected a proposed contract extension, seeking to reverse layoffs and concessions. Nearly 1,000 Duquesne Light utility workers in Pittsburgh struck over staffing, safety and job security.

In September, workers at Smithfield's Monmouth, Illinois plant, led primarily by African immigrants, walked out after maintenance worker Patou Mpinda was killed on the job.

Workers also protested Tyson's abrupt closure of its nearby Joslin plant, eliminating 2,500 jobs. The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) signed a shutdown agreement requiring officials to oppose actions interfering with the closure and order workers to stop.

The fact that the working class is moving into struggle across national boundaries, in most cases against massive transnational corporations, exposes the lie of "America First" and its equivalents in Canada and other countries. Workers can define their interests only on the basis of internationalism and a struggle against the capitalist class in every country.

These struggles are being driven by the turn toward war and dictatorship. The war against Iran has driven up fuel costs, pushing truckers toward bankruptcy and raising the cost of transporting food and other necessities. Trump reportedly plans to resume bombing Iran after the midterms, while another aircraft carrier and thousands of Marines are being sent to the region. Europe is approaching the brink of nuclear war. Moscow has warned of nuclear retaliation against a NATO blockade of Kaliningrad while NATO continues to expand the war in Ukraine. The turn toward repression, spearheaded by attacks on immigrants, is directed against all resistance on the home front.

This drive for conquest grows out of a desperate search by capitalism for new sources of surplus value in order to stabilize a global economy and financial system teetering on the brink of disaster. US federal debt passed \$40 trillion in August, while the yields on US treasury bonds have surged above 5.3 percent despite Treasury buybacks intended to steady the market. While this finds its most extreme form in the United States, every major imperialist power is facing similar problems.

Paying for world war requires massive attacks on the working class. Trump's proposed \$1.5 trillion military budget for 2027, alongside cuts to Medicaid and food assistance, commits society's resources to this offensive. Across Europe, rearmament is being financed through social cuts; Germany plans nearly €152 billion in military and war-related spending in 2027, the largest budget since World War II.

War is itself part of a global war on the working class, aimed at vastly increasing the rate of exploitation through mass layoffs, wage stagnation and new technologies used to eliminate whole sections of the workforce. US employers announced 573,195 job cuts through September. Average hourly pay rose just five cents that month. Google, Amazon, Microsoft and Meta plan \$745 billion in capital spending this year, largely for AI infrastructure which the ruling class hopes to use to eliminate whole sections of the workforce.

This is the ruling class's response to the crisis of the capitalist system. But the same crisis is driving the emergence of the working class on a world scale, posing with ever increasing sharpness the question of power: which class will control production and organize society, and in whose interests?

This movement is challenging the stability of capitalist governments across Europe. In Spain, the Socialist Party-Sumar government collapsed amid mass protests against housing costs. French strikes and student protests have taken place against education cuts and repression as the government finances rearmament. Italian strikes over living costs and Portuguese public-sector and healthcare struggles are developing, as well as German youth protests against the threatened reintroduction of conscription.

But the capitalists are able to rely on the old organizations to disrupt this upsurge and prevent a break with the established parties. Above all, this includes the trade union bureaucracy, whose partnerships with management commit them to preserving corporate profitability and the competitiveness of "their" national industry. The UAW backs Trump's tariff war, while Mexico's state-controlled "charro" unions and their "independent" rivals likewise subordinate workers to the capitalist government and national competitiveness. Spain's UGT and CCOO have refused demands for a general strike, as have their counterparts in France.

Workers need organizations which they genuinely control, preparing joint actions and uniting with coworkers across the world. The IWA-RFC is fighting to build these organizations, and the growing response to it expresses workers' efforts to take their struggles out of the hands of the apparatus.

New US postal rank-and-file committees in southern Pennsylvania and St. Paul, Minnesota are linked through the national USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee to organize a common fight against privatization and job cuts.

Will Lehman's socialist campaign for president of the UAW, on a program of abolishing the bureaucracy and transferring power to the rank and file, has met with a powerful response. His October 4 meeting with the IWA-RFC brought together Canadian railcar workers, Mexican GM workers and US auto, rail and postal workers.

Above all, the global upsurge poses the struggle for workers' power, leading to the expropriation of the oligarchy, the abolition of capitalist exploitation and the international organization of production to meet social needs. The Socialist Equality Parties, sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International, fight to construct this leadership within the developing movement. Workers should build rank-and-file committees, extend the IWA-RFC and join the SEP to organize the international socialist movement against capitalism, war and dictatorship.



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