

The global rebellion of youth and workers and the war frenzy of the ruling class

WSWS Editorial Board
23 October 2026

Over the past week, mass protests and strikes have spread across Europe and internationally. In France, more than half a million people marched on October 17, as “yellow vests” protesting fuel prices joined high school students who have blockaded their schools for a month. On Wednesday, students, teachers and doctors marched in some 50 Greek cities. Protesters clashed with police in Milan, workers marched in Lisbon and Porto, Albanian students clashed with police, and Serbian students marched on Belgrade. Students and workers also took to the streets in Chile, India and Mexico. In Canada, over 9,000 autoworkers voted by 97 percent to authorize a strike against Stellantis.

These events are the sharpest expression to date of two movements emerging from the same crisis of world capitalism, bound together and opposed to each other. The ruling classes are escalating war on every front. Against them, a movement of social opposition is developing that is, at present, dominated by the youth. But the crisis that drives the bourgeoisie to war is drawing ever broader sections of the working class into struggle on a world scale. The eruption of imperialist war is producing the conditions for a revolutionary crisis that has only begun.

The war itself is a single, metastasizing global conflict. On Thursday, Trump said of Iran, “We’ve knocked the hell out of them, and we may do it a little bit further.” The *New York Times* reported the day before that Washington and Tel Aviv have drawn up plans for renewed strikes on Iran’s energy sites, nuclear facilities and missile arsenals after the November 3 midterm elections. Trump, who threatened at the United Nations last month to “annihilate the Islamic Republic,” has refused to rule out using the “mother of all bombs.”

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has

vowed to “break Iran’s murderous regime.” On Friday, after two Israeli soldiers were killed in an attack near Hebron, he ordered a cordon around the city and preparations for a full closure of the West Bank. He announced an army operation in the occupied territory “on a scale not seen since the Six-Day War.” The genocide in Gaza is being carried into the West Bank and prepared for Iran.

At the same time, the NATO powers are escalating their proxy war against Russia in Ukraine with extreme recklessness, and the danger of nuclear war has been normalized. When Moscow warned last month that it would use nuclear weapons to defend Kaliningrad against a NATO blockade, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte replied, “I don’t take this seriously.” When Trump waived most sanctions on Russia on October 16, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer attacked him from the right, accusing him of “giving the Russian economy life support.”

War abroad means war against the working class at home. Trump declared in April that with the country “fighting wars,” it was “not possible” to pay for day care, Medicaid and Medicare, and the White House has requested a \$1.5 trillion military budget, a 42 percent increase. The European powers are planning up to €800 billion in additional military spending, and the French government is demanding €54 billion in cuts to social services. Governments are demanding that workers bear the cost of war even as the financial oligarchy grows unimaginably richer. In just the past year, the wealth of the world’s ten richest people has surged by 40 percent.

The generation now in the streets has been told to accept overcrowded classrooms, unaffordable rents and precarious work so that social spending can go to the military, and now to prepare for conscription. Since the

French high school blockades began in mid-September, students in Belgium, Italy and Greece have taken up the same demands, housing protests have swept some 50 cities in Spain, and tens of thousands of German students have struck against conscription.

The eruption of social opposition is developing as a global process. Fuel prices driven up by the war against Iran have set off blockades and transport strikes in Guatemala, Honduras, Bolivia and the Philippines, and protests across Syria. Workers in Colombia recently held the first national strike against the new far-right government. University lecturers are on strike across Kenya, garment workers have blockaded highways in Bangladesh, and Indian police have detained thousands protesting the purge of voter rolls. Auto, steel, healthcare and hotel workers are entering into struggle across North America.

The movement will not remain confined to the youth. The objective forces that drove students into the streets are driving the working class into struggle, and the union bureaucracies are terrified. Their aim is to prevent the emergence of the working class as an independent force. The strikes they have called, for November 5 in France, November 11 in Spain and November 20 in Italy, are each a single day, weeks apart, within national borders, cut off from their class brothers and sisters and the youth protesters. But the bureaucracy is reacting to a process it did not create and cannot contain. Its delays and divisions measure the pressure building from below.

The ruling elites know what they are facing. Speaking of France on Tuesday, Trump said, "That was a full-on revolution, and it continues." He, Vice President JD Vance and Netanyahu have blamed the movement on immigrants and Islam. The governments are answering with escalating repression and police-state measures. France has imposed curfews in several major cities and banned demonstrations, and it is deploying soldiers to free police for confrontations with protesters. Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu has said he could declare a state of emergency "if necessary." Italy's fascist Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is sending 500 troops to Milan.

The far right is being cultivated as the instrument to suppress opposition to war and austerity. Since the start of 2025, it has come to power or entered government in the United States, Poland, the Czech Republic, Japan,

Chile, Peru, Colombia and Costa Rica. The neo-fascist National Rally leads the polls for next year's French presidential election, the Alternative for Germany and Austria's Freedom Party lead national polls, and the fascist AUR leads in Romania. The far-right Vox could enter government after Spain's November 29 election, and the fascistic Flávio Bolsonaro is running even with Lula in Sunday's Brazilian runoff.

In the founding program of the Fourth International in 1938, Leon Trotsky wrote, "Imperialist war is the continuation and sharpening of the predatory politics of the bourgeoisie. The struggle of the proletariat against war is the continuation and sharpening of its class struggle." In 1917, the February Revolution in Russia was not called into being by the Bolsheviks. It erupted out of the crisis produced by the war. What the Bolsheviks provided was the program and the conscious understanding through which the working class took power in October.

The class struggle today is likewise developing objectively, under the impact of war and social crisis. It is a basic precept of Marxism that the task of socialists is to make workers conscious of the objective logic of their own struggle and to prepare them for what is coming. That logic points to the need for committees of action in schools, workplaces and neighborhoods, independent of the capitalist parties and the union apparatus, that can break through the timetables and national boundaries set by the bureaucracies, unite across borders through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), and prepare a general strike against war, dictatorship and social devastation.

The demands of the youth and workers now in struggle, for decent schools, housing and wages and an end to conscription, cannot be won from governments pledged to their creditors and committed to war. They require the expropriation of the financial oligarchy and the transfer of power to the working class on the basis of an international socialist program.



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