

Workers are the Engines of the Economy

There are No Essential Service Workers, All Workers are Essential for the System

A spectre is haunting the capitalist world, this time it is not communism but its pre-cursors, workers' strikes. There are strikes everywhere in the capitalist world – US, UK, Germany, South Korea, Italy, France, etc., for living wages and better working conditions.

During the pandemic, working class across all sectors worked so hard to the point of exhaustion, to the point of burn-out. Apart from hailing them as heroes, there is no change in their wages while the Capitalist wealth ballooned throughout 2020 : the wealth of United States billionaires rose 70 percent during the pandemic, from \$3 trillion to \$5 trillion. In 19 months Elon Musk's wealth rose by 751%. The John Deere, CEO gave himself a 160 percent raise – and shareholders a 17 percent raise on dividends. In India, in the last 20 months Adani's wealth increased by 1808% while that of Ambani by 250%.

When the working class sought a wage hike, they got a stern No. They found that they don't have a strong voice and that most of them are unorganised. Unions represents just 11 percent of the work force and only 6 percent in the private sector. Also Unionisation is not an easy task in USA. The worker exhausted to the brink of collapse felt it easier to resign to get relief from the stress. Thus came **The Great Resignation**. In just two months more than 8.5 million (85 lakh) left their jobs because of the terrible working conditions and meagre pay. And among them women workers made a record number. Even workers from among the most unionised sectors, nursing and teaching are also resigning, because most of the union leadership has colluded with the employers and are not in a position to help the workers.

What unions in the capitalist world failed to teach the working class, the economic conditions did! The years of neoliberal policies exacerbated by the pandemic did!

It brought an ideological shifts among working-class people and the young. The working class found themselves at the "center stage" and has found

increased leverage and consciousness. They learnt that **there are no essential services workers, but that all workers are essential to this system and infact they are the engines of the economy.** They learnt that '*There Is An Alternative*', to this unequal, exploitative capitalist system and that alternative is socialism.

They also found that most of the present union leaders are the agents of capitalism within the working class and play a central role in reducing the militancy of workers.

Also, in this '*Land of the free*', USA, workers don't have the freedom to start a Union. They have to go for elections to decide on whether to have Union or not. So, in Companies where there are no unions, workers are organising for getting unions, in companies where they have, they are calling for strikes to have living wages and better working conditions.

Across the US, airport workers, Miners, healthcare workers, carpenters, symphony workers, and more have all gone on strike in the past month. Unionization efforts are under way even in museums and cultural institutions across US.

Striketober to Strikes Giving

From September to November, workers at more than 25 companies have either called for strikes or protests.

Workers at **Warrior Met** are on strike since Eight months to restore the pay, benefits, and schedules they had before their previous employer, Walter Energy, declared bankruptcy and auctioned off its assets in 2016. It cost the company \$ 6.9 million, yet the company didt heed because it reaped huge profits because of sanctions on China.

The strike by the **60,000 members of IATSE**, a union of the entertainment industry, would have become the largest strike of Striketober. But it was averted by undemocratic union leadership. While 98 percent of workers supported a strike, the union leadership agreed to a tentative agreement (TA) the day before the strike. The TA does not address the workers' most important demands, including ending the practice of 14-16 hour days with little turnaround time between shifts. The TA was ratified in an **Electoral College-style vote** in which the majority voted against ratification but still it passed anyway because of the special 'delegate' voting power of the union leaders.

Unionisation efforts in Companies like Amazon and Starbucks are heavily blockaded. Amazon used intimidation, police, law and even Courts. Starbucks even sent senior executives like CEO as a normal worker from other States to vilify and hamper Unionisation efforts.

Corporates, with the help of governments, often try to conduct vote for unionization in a single stretch in all of their campuses which will be a huge disadvantage for the workers.

9000 Workers of Starbucks succeeded in securing a vote on unionisation in 3 units while other stores are also pitching for unionisation.

Two-tier wage systems is a system in which new hires will have lower pay scale and lesser benefits. Capitalism has resorted to this method whenever it is in crisis since the 1980's. This system worked for Capitalism when the unemployment rate is high. This was employed even during the Great Recession of 2007. It helps employers divide the work force and neutralise the Unions. Through the pandemic, the working class saw the true colours of this system.

1400 workers at the **Kellogg's** cereal plants are on strike against the proposed two-tier wage system. At the farm equipment maker **John Deere**, where this system is already in place more than 10,000 workers are on strike demanding a better deal for all workers. Workers in the hospital chain **Kaiser Permanente**, and the parcel giant **UPS**, are up in arms against this system.

In Kaiser Permanente. 60,000 nurses and healthcare workers went on a sympathy strike to support the 700 stationary and biomedical engineers who have been striking for months for better pay.

In the two-tire wage system, how much hard one works, he can never reach the level of a person who joined before him. This busted another myth of Capitalism that 'Any one can reach any heights'.

'Make Amazon Pay'

With the growing profits in the Amazon, its workers saw increased shifts - three 12-hour overnight shifts to five 11-hour shifts, increased bullying - monitor even times off and work rate with apps. Though Amazon has been succeeding in preventing unionisation efforts, though workers 'failed', they are moving forward.

Strikesgiving This Black Friday (Day after Thanksgiving day-Nov 26), a coalition of unions, nongovernmental organizations, and grassroots groups joined under the name of **Make Amazon Pay** is staging a day of strikes and protests targeting Amazon across twenty countries from UK to Bangladesh, demanding the company pay a living wage, taxes, and compensation for its environmental impact.

Strike Wave and Ideological Shift of Workers

In 2018, the U.S. working class started a strike wave. Teachers organized illegal strikes in Republican party states, followed by strikes in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Oakland, as well as strikes by General Motors and Stop and Shop workers. It was the biggest wave of strike activity since the 1980s.

In 2021 there have been 194 strikes, the most in the past five years. These strikes, however, include fewer workers than in 2019, 2018, and even 2016. Since the 2018 strike wave Corporates increased their onslaught on Unions and Unionisation efforts. They are using every method to further weaken the Unions and union leaders. This speaks about the less number of strikers. But things are changing. More and more workers are joining the unionisation efforts. Also there is an ideological shift among the workers and the general public. Today, among workers aged less than 30 years, 76 percent want to join a union. Among the general population, support is at 65 percent. This is a sharp contrast with the low of 48 percent support during the Great Recession. The young are no longer buying the idea that ‘Capitalism works’ and are showing an inclination towards socialism.

Strikes 2016-2021			
Year	Total Strikes	Major Strikes	Strikers
2021	194	16	73,320
2020	66	9	41,747
2019	89	24	432,484
2018	76	26	533,528
2017	98	10	45,941
2016	99	20	115,050

South Korea

South Korea ranks third in highest annual working hours and as of 2015 it was third in workplace deaths among member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Over 40 percent of all workers are considered “irregular workers.” As in the U.S., many of these irregular workers labour in the gig economy, beholden to tech giants’ apps. The average household debt is almost double their annual income. Sixty-four chaebols (business families) claim 84 percent of the GDP, yet provide only 10 percent of jobs.

In South Korea companies have the freedom to legally contest laws unfavourable them, but workers don’t have the freedom to demand living wages.

Early in the year, cleaning staff for LG Twin Towers (the company’s skyscraper headquarters) camped outside the company building for 136 days in the coldest winter months to protest layoffs and exploitative workplace conditions. The company inhumanly poured cold water in the protesters’ tents at the thick of the night to thwart them from protesting.

On October 20, at least half a million workers in South Korea—from across the construction, transportation, service, and other sectors—walked off their jobs in a one-day general strike. The strike will be followed by mass demonstrations in

urban centers and rural farmlands, culminating in a national all-people's mobilization in January 2022.

The 3 basic demands among the 15 include:

1. Abolish "irregular work" (part-time, temporary or contract labor with little or no benefits) and extend labor protections to all workers;
2. Give workers power in economic restructuring decisions during times of crisis;
3. Nationalize key industries and socialize basic services like education and housing.

Spain

In Spain the unemployment rate is at 23.4%. Using this crisis the employers further cut the employee benefits, this all the while the corporate bosses reaped super profits. The electricity companies, commerce, retail and real estate companies have seen huge profits but hiked the prices to 30 year high to further drain the income of the workers. This forced the workers to resort to strikes.

22,000 Workers at the Cadiz metal works launched a powerful strike supported by almost all Unions. The left supported government has sent police squads to fire pepper spray, tear gas and rubber bullets at strikers, even deploying armored cars in the streets of Cádiz to terrorize the public. The government is trying to achieve through trade union treachery what it could not obtain by police violence.

Neither of the strike's main demands have been met. The unions have "agreed to the closure of the Airbus plant in Puerto Real" and just a 2% increase in wages against their demand of more than 6% (inflation is 6%).

Last week, the Workers' Commissions (CCOO) and General Workers Union (UGT) called off a strike of 115,000 meat workers across Spain scheduled to begin this Thursday. The unions signed a new collective agreement for the sector.

UK

UK also saw many strikes. 2,000 DHL logistics workers planned strikes, sanitation workers, pallet workers, underground train drivers, midwives are calling for strikes.

Germany

Nurses, educators and other public employees are currently protesting and striking for better wages and working conditions throughout Germany. School janitors and care workers also joined them.

In addition to educators and social service workers, the 2,000 or so participants in Berlin included forestry workers, librarians and employees of various district offices.

There is now a shortage of at least 100,000 nurses in German hospitals, and more and more nurses are suffering burn-out-under conditions where infection rates are exploding.

In the midst of the explosive fourth corona virus wave, state finance ministers are determined to relieve the burden on state coffers due to pandemic-related debt at the expense of workers. Has ended the designation of an “epidemic emergency of national scope.” It has decided against relaxing the debt ceiling and higher taxes for the rich and also wants to allocate many billions to the Bundeswehr (armed forces). This leaves not a cent for public service personnel, let alone for funding measures to address COVID-19.

As in the US, most prominent Unions of Germany like the public service union Verdi or the educator’s union GEW work as a B-Team to the ruling classes are always insisting of agreements and trying to water-down militant efforts of the workers.

But every offence by the government and counter-attack by the union leadership is making the workers more and more resilient. They are building rank and file committees.

Strategies to Divide Workers

Racist dog whistles were used to demonize low-income Black folks in order to bring down living standards for the entire working class, especially Black and Latinx people. At the Nissan unionization effort in Mississippi, not only was white-supremacist literature given out by anti-union organizers, but the bosses also provided small privileges to white workers in order to divide them. The result: no Nissan union in Mississippi. It’s a story replayed throughout U.S. history. And this not only results in the oppression and hyper-exploitation of working-class Black folks and other people of color, but it also drives down wages for all sectors of workers.

The Philosophy of the Proletariat-Marxism, is the need of the Hour

Workers everywhere are fighting against their exploitation by protesting and striking in various ways. They must see themselves as a class of all the oppressed and exploited workers, a class for itself, against the exploiting class, against the capitalists. It means standing for workers who also experience racism, sexism, transphobia, and other forms of oppression.

For the workers to become the vanguards of the working class Marxist world outlook must be adopted. Today’s global conditions highlight the need for theoretical and political efforts to ensure that this philosophy is available to them. Capitalism is the system that exploits the labour of the proletariat and builds the

empires of profits, while Imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism, it is moribund capitalism that plunders wealth and exploits labour on a global scale.

We are at a juncture where the world is recollecting the analysis made by Marx and Engels in demystifying the secrets about the surplus value appropriated by the capitalists from the labour, about the crisis that are inherent in the Capitalist system from its birth pangs, about the proletariat born out of this exploitative system, to expropriate the expropriators.

This is the juncture, the working class must constantly assert the correctness of Marxism's fundamental principles and expand.

This is the juncture where workers of the world Unite!