

The Communist Party

publication of the International Communist Party NUMBER 44 July 2022 | 50¢ 50p 0,50€

THE BOURGEOIS ATTACK ON ABORTION IN THE US THE ONLY DEFENSE IS WORLD REVOLUTION!

The US Supreme Court's decision is an act of war by the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie against the entire working class, disguised under the deceitful concept of democracy. It is a reaction to the tumultuous and ever changing nature of capitalist society, riddled with the constant fear that production will grind to a halt. Veiled by the facade of "traditional family values", its real motivation lies in the falling rate of profit and increased cost of wages caused by the labor shortage and by rising commodity prices.

The proletariat's ability to get abortions comes under fire when capitalism enters its moribund and crisis-ridden phase. We stand in the midst of a prolonged crisis of overproduction that has been ongoing since 2008. The entire system of world capitalism is artificially propped up by the central banks. World capitalism is hurtling us towards collapse and a third world war. And what will the bourgeoisie need then if not more flesh to sacrifice before the altar of profit?

To the capitalist class, the workers are nothing but a supply of labor power, to be exploited for as much profit as possible. The whole question of birth control is reduced to the inhuman and despotic calculations of supply and demand!

And this is what they call "freedom"! It is their class freedom, the democratic dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. It is their freedom to exploit and destroy, to break down the proletariat by overwork and then send them to the slaughter.

Communists have always supported abortion. The Paris Commune of 1871, the first victory of the world proletariat, guaranteed

access to abortion along with other sexual and reproductive rights. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 gave Russia the freest system of abortion access in history, which the Communist International promised to give to the whole world. Abortion was freely available in healthcare settings for all Soviet citizens from 1920 to 1936. In that year, the tide of Stalinist counter-revolution, which killed the world revolution and brought capitalism back to Russian soil, reinstated the ban on abortion along with other restrictions on sexual freedom dating to the tsarist period. The reason was a brutal program of unlimited capital accumulation (yet today's Stalinists, still pretending to be communists, cry crocodile tears over restrictions on abortion!).

Compare the status of abortion in the Paris Commune and Bolshevik Russia to the bourgeois dictatorship that now prevails in every corner of the globe: abortion access is tenuous; it is often restricted to the wealthy if not banned altogether; where abortion is available there is ignorance and stigma surrounding it. This is the nature of abortion under the bourgeois regime, which treats reproductive freedom as only a means to the ultimate end of higher profits!

For the bourgeois opposition to abortion, the aim is clear. Forced pregnancy will further immiserate the proletariat, promote gender inequality, and ensure a larger supply of young workers to be exploited in the future. And the conservatives call this the "right to life"!

For the faction of the bourgeoisie that "supports" abortion, this "freedom" is only a means to exploit

a greater part of the proletariat, to plunge working women more completely into the hell of the workplace.

For the liberals and the petty-bourgeois left, the specter of abortion restrictions is also an effective tool to fool the proletariat into participating in their democratic illusions. The Supreme Court's decision shows how little their promises have meant in practice. We see that the entire bourgeois abortion scheme serves to keep the proletariat in chains, making it entirely dependent on the will of the propertied class.

Those who have sought to secure political rights within the existing bourgeois regime through voting, etc. – a program characteristic of the liberal and faux-socialist activism that has prevailed since *Roe v. Wade* – could not stop today's decision, and will never be able to protect the ability for workers to get abortions in the future. Communists recognize that the concept of human rights is a sham perpetuated by the bourgeoisie to subordinate the workers under the yoke of national unity. It is pointless to ask for favors from a State which only exists to oppress us!

Now is the time for militant class action, not voting or petitions. Fight for the unity of action of the working class against the capitalist order! Throw out the collaborationist union bureaucracies which hold you back! Defend your class interests through uncompromising class struggle!

**Only communism can guarantee reproductive and sexual freedom!
Long live the international proletarian revolution!**

WHAT DISTINGUISHES OUR PARTY

The line running from Marx to Lenin to the foundation of the Third International and the birth of the Communist Party of Italy in Leghorn (Livorno) 1921, and from there to the struggle of the Italian Communist Left against the degeneration in Moscow and to the rejection of popular fronts and coalition of resistance groups – The tough work of restoring the revolutionary doctrine and the party organ, in contact with the working class, outside the realm of personal politics and electoralist manoeuvres

The Proletariat in Sri Lanka Fights Against the Bourgeois State but Is Still Lacking authentic independent class organs

Since March of this year, Sri Lanka has been embroiled in the worst crisis since independence in 1948, with most of the population, the petit-bourgeoisie and the proletariat, locked in an increasingly violent struggle against the police, the army, and the ruling nepotistic Rajapaksa family.

But the real culprit of the crisis lies beyond these “figureheads” – the replacement of State leaders, the installment of a “people power” government (eternal watchword of much of the opportunist bourgeois left in the region) composed of all the parties, and any number of reforms cannot even begin to touch the real fundamental cause of the crisis, a capitalism which has entered its agonic decadent phase.

As such, only the revolutionary action of the proletariat, overthrowing the bourgeois State and installing its own dictatorship, can solve the problems caused by capitalism. But despite this, the proletariat has remained remarkably passive in the movement, giving it an overwhelmingly middle-class, petit-bourgeois character.

Why is there a Crisis in Sri Lanka?

Bourgeois economists and the opportunist opposition call the crisis “a result of mismanagement”, as if the crisis is not the consequence of the inherent contradictions of capitalism, but rather, merely the mismanagement of the capitalist economy. They point to the fact that Sri Lanka is a twin deficits economy, i.e. that its national expenditure exceeds its national income, and that it has an inadequate amount of tradeable goods.

Sri Lanka has been in a precarious state for years now. Ever since the civil war ended in 2009, not only was the Tamil minority brutally oppressed, but the State was fully capable of using the insurgency to ensure a state of constant repression, of enacting “disappearances”, and having the ruling Rajapaksa family capable of all the worst corruption and nepotism with its policies of personal patronage and of fueling racial and ethnic tensions in order to keep its control over the population, showing the bourgeois and counter-revolutionary nature of nationalism.

The Rajapaksa family, typical of semi-colonial ruling cliques, simply effected large tax cuts in typical profiteering fashion, which led to gigantic budget deficit increases. This was coupled with an extremely rapidly increasing debt, which more than doubled between 2010 and 2020. Sri Lanka is due to pay 4 billion dollars to debtors by the end of the year. This was largely the result of Chinese imperialism which engulfed the semi-colonial country in one of its by now well known debt traps, best exemplified by the Hambantota port.

There is also the gigantic food crisis in

the country, massively exacerbated by the leap to organic farming, a result of a capitalist adventure that sought out a revaluation of agricultural capital which led to the abandonment of crops. Sri Lankans have called this a “man-made disaster”. Food inflation, hovering around 30% or so at the moment, is only looking worse.

The Bourgeois Government's Militaristic Response to COVID

The rage of the people in Sri Lanka did not come out of nowhere: at the beginning of 2021, the government deployed more than 20,000 soldiers in schools, instituting a military curfew. This was ostensibly a “COVID lockdown”, a COVID lockdown which mysteriously was never followed with sanitary measures. The fact that this militaristic response was only an excuse to quell class struggle became clear when the “mask came off”, so to say, and the government dissolved parliament in March and called legislative elections to consolidate its power.

According to a UNICEF study, while this happened, urban household income fell by 37%, rural household income fell by 30%, and plantation sector household income fell by 23%. And this was while the leaders of the government spent exorbitant amounts of money on its petty luxuries!

It should be noted that the bourgeois leftist “opposition”, including the leadership of the regime unions and the Tamil nationalist leaders, wholly supported this militarization as well as the government's choice to send the workers back into the meat-grinder of the workplace, leading to countless deaths, all in the name of the “reconstruction of the national economy”, the watchword of opportunism since the end of the second imperialist world war. It's clear that the bourgeois opposition does not defend the independent interests of the workers, but rather that they are wholly integrated in the State machinery that they supposedly oppose.

But notable, the workers of Sri Lanka did not take this lying down: in response to these measures, many workers did not show up for work, including teachers and railway workers, and from the first day of deconfinement, the garment workers went on strike, as did oil workers and, a little earlier, the coconut plantation workers.

By November, teachers had been on strike for 4 months against militarization of school and for their own working conditions, and in the same month, the

now infamous rise in gas prices made shortages a problem for the whole of the population. The railroad workers' strikes intensified and in December, the health workers joined in, with large strikes in almost 1,500 facilities over various regions.

Right before the protests started in March this year, in February there was a strike wave in over 500 health facilities, and the government cracked down on it with a ban on strikes. The workers replied with new strikes in March over and above the government decrees.

Between March and April, we saw the eruption of the protests, at first very small but quickly increasing in size, with inflation and shortages threatening outright famine and starvation due to the imperialist conflict in Ukraine.

Imperialist War anywhere affects the proletariat everywhere

Major imperialist conflicts do not just bring death and suffering for the soldiers that are thrown into the meat grinder of combat, or the workers of the combating countries that have their conditions rapidly impoverished and whose struggle for essential needs are brutally crushed by the bourgeois State under the pretext of “saving the fatherland”, the watchword of war repression.

The economy of the imperialist epoch is wholly connected, and as such a major imperialist conflict will produce shock-waves everywhere else. The Ukraine conflict has already led to major gas shortages in the US and Europe, is tied to imminent famines in the semi-colonial countries with poor food-production, and Sri Lanka is no different.

The Ukrainian war has resulted with Sri Lanka being hit with massive oil import costs and a gigantic dip in tourism revenue (a very important part of the economy), worsening the fuel shortage even further, making black outs be as long as 7 hours per day. Prices at gas stations have surged almost 50% as a result of the conflict, which, of course, has increased the struggle.

The solution of the bourgeois State has been to turn to the IMF, i.e. to imperialism. This might save the bourgeoisie – it will not save the Sri Lankan people from misery and impoverishment. Only the independent class struggle of the proletariat can save the world from the slaughter of imperialism and the immiseration it brings.

Where Is The

Proletariat In All This?

But the Sri Lankan proletariat, despite its previous struggles having paralyzed the country and shown themselves capable of putting the government on the ropes, has not taken the lead in the current uprising, unlike how it did in the Kazakhstan insurrection earlier this year.

The vanguard in the movement is the peasantry and the now impoverished petit-bourgeoisie which has seen all its dreams of a comfortable middle-class existence completely evaporated, with workers merely tagging along with the confused and contradictory slogans and demands of this amorphous inter-class rage.

The responsible for this are, above all, the regime union leaders: for nearly a month, there was no response at all to the movement, to the terrible conditions that crushed the proletariat even worse than they did the petit-bourgeoisie. The workers were simply told to continue back to work, until finally, in April 28, a whole month after this explosion of class struggle, a coalition of 1,000 trade unions finally authorized a “general strike”, which was to merely last one day!

The strike saw massive adhesion, showing that the workers are more than willing and wanting to fight for their needs. But this fight can only conclude with the proletarian uprising, the taking of power from the bourgeoisie, and there is nothing that the leaders of the regime union, organic successors to the old corporatist fascist regime unions, fear more.

According to the report of a militant Russian trade union on the matter:

- On April 28, the All Ceylon United Teachers Union brought 240,000 teachers and 16,000 school principals to the streets
- On April 28, employees of 18 public and private banks joined the strike
- On May 6, 40 unions affiliated with The Railway Trade Union Alliance joined the strikes and halted train traffic in the country for 24 hours
- Members of the Emigration and Immigration Workers Alliance stopped high-ranking officials from entering and leaving the country at airports

The strikers demanded the immediate resignation of the president and prime minister and the formation of a coalition government from all political parties. These demands were supported by 98% of the participants in a poll carried out by the Daily Mirror. Sepala Liyanage, general secretary of the All-Ceylon Transport Workers Union, said that all employees were invited to join the strike to form a people's government.

It is clear that the regime unions are not leading the proletariat out to fight for its own needs, but rather using the working class for its own politicking, to replace the bourgeois government whose militarization they had previously supported with another, “leftist” bourgeois government which will

be unable to do anything about the crisis, will be just as repressive but perhaps might be better at fooling the struggling Sri Lankan people.

As such, it is of vital importance for the Sri Lankan working class to develop its own organs of combative economic class struggle – militant trade unions – which will attempt to organize as many workers as possible, which will attempt to strike alongside the workers in the regime unions towards a general strike led by the proletarian front of action.

The remarkable endurance of the struggle

The struggle has been going on for months now, and the protesters have not backed down a bit: they have fought the police, they have fought a state of siege and they have fought the army. Declaring itself strictly peaceful at first, the protesters have shown incredible resistance against attempts of violence repressions by the government, assaulting soldiers, police and even attempting to break into the president's house.

After a harsh crackdown in May 9, where the government cynically used members of the lumpenproletariat as “pro-government protesters” to form a mob which violently assaulted the protesters, the mob was fought off by workers, peasant and petit-bourgeoisie. The movement did not back down afterwards, but continues. It might now know that, in the future, such pacifist illusions will not be enough to win.

What is certain, ultimately, is that at the moment, the movement is still controlled by the middle-classes, with workers being mostly passive and following the regime trade unions, and as such, unless workers take the leadership of the movement, it will not reach the same heights as the uprising in Kazakhstan.

However, as has been noted, there is a remarkable amount of non-partisanship in the protesters, with many of the protesters having no affiliation to any of the bourgeois parties, with all of the “opposition” parties failing to control the movement to its own ends and the leadership thus remaining decentralized and independent. The rejection of all bourgeois parties, in any case, is a positive factor that bodes well for future developments.

It is clear that the Sri Lankan working class must form its own organs of class struggle so that, when caught in such crisis, as well as the general bone-crushing grind of capitalism in “peaceful” times, it can defend itself and take the revolutionary offensive when the situation presents for it presents itself. It must form independent militant trade unions for economic struggles and it is necessary to militate in the revolutionary party of the proletariat, the international communist party, for political movements. We see, right before our very eyes, a situation where the solution to a grave economic problem can only be political: the overthrow of the bourgeoisie.

FRIDAY 20 MAY STRIKE AGAINST THE WAR!

This is the party leaflet distributed by our comrades in Rome, Florence, Genoa, Turin and Milan.

The national and general strike promoted by all the basic trade unions is an important first step towards organizing the struggle of the working class against the imperialist war.

This war is being fought today by proxy in Ukraine, just as war was fought before in Iraq, the Balkans, Afghanistan, Syria, and – in the ever nearer future – as it will be in all countries if we the working class, the only ones who can, do not prevent it.

This strike is important because it is the first national action promoted by workers' organizations that breaks with the climate of social disciplining [social distancing?], imposed by the bourgeois regime in Italy and in all countries, in order to impose a war on the workers, flooding them with nationalist, patriotic, militarist, partisan, and “resistance” ideologies.

This strike is an action against the new world imperialist war that the bourgeois regimes are preparing before our eyes, with which they want to save the profits of industry and finance, that is, their social privilege and political domination, at the cost of millions of lives.

This strike is important because it is being carried out while the regime unions (CGIL, CISL, UIL) keep the workers immobile, without directing our instinctive rejection of the war towards any unified action of struggle.

But more so, this strike is important because – in spite of the hesitations, the tactics of stalling, and the opportunistic wait-and-see attitude of the different leaderships – all the basic trade unions have finally joined in unity. It can and must be the first step of a united campaign – with demonstrations and assemblies inside and outside the workplace – for the construction of a real general strike against the war, which extends the unity of action to the whole of militant trade unionism, involving also the groups of combative workers still framed in the unions of the regime (CGIL, CISL, UIL) and the militant areas within the CGIL.

Finally, this strike is important because it can and must set an example for workers in all countries to do the same and to aim for an international strike against war.

The victims of the current war are the workers in Ukraine and the Ukrainian and Russian soldiers forced to fight – to kill and be killed – by their respective imperialist regimes and fronts. But the war is also affecting workers around the world, with rising prices and military spending.

In order to curb the rise in the price of grain, the bourgeois government of India – a country of 1.4 billion inhabitants – has blocked grain exports. This will exacerbate

the rise in their price on the international market. Already powerful uprisings are taking place in Sri Lanka and Iran. Worsening living conditions will sweep over workers around the world like an avalanche in the coming months.

The working class will suffer this while the war makes enormous profits for industrialists and financiers. In Italy the biggest groups – Eni, Leonardo, Fincantieri – make enormous profits and they are all state-owned. The Italian bourgeois state is the first to profit from the war!

That is why the workers must prepare to fight in defense of their living conditions, to prevent the costs of the bourgeois war from being put on the working class. To resist paying the ultimate price is for the workers the first act of their defeatism in the bourgeois war, that is, their refusal to fight, the only means of preventing them from paying for it at the price of their lives.

In all countries workers are oppressed by the regimes of the capitalist class, even in those that have usurped the name "socialist" – China, Vietnam, North Korea, Venezuela, Cuba – and in the so-called democratic ones too. The workers have nothing to defend in capitalism, including democracy which serves only to mask the dictatorial regime of capital. We have no homeland to defend (as Marxism has shown us since the Communist Manifesto of 1848). Rather, we must conquer political power in our international revolution, following the watchword: "Proletarians of all countries unite!"

After the strike

The general strike "against the war and the war economy" - as the day of struggle was titled by the promoting trade unions – was a small but rightful action of condemnation of the war on the part of the working class, in fact represented in Italy exclusively by the militant unionism.

It is, in fact, the only one currently organised by trade unions in Europe, which makes it even more important and an example to workers and class unionism in all countries.

It couldn't be a real general strike – that is, a mobilization of the great masses of workers capable of blocking production and the circulation of goods and services – because of the weakness of trade unionism and the inertia of decades of imposed passivity of the working masses.

This conflict – although still an imperialist war by proxy, like those of the more or less recent past in Iraq, the Balkans, Afghanistan, Syria – marks a decisive step forward towards a third world conflict, in which the imperialist powers will confront each other directly, involving the workers of all the countries of the world.

This terrible prospect is carefully concealed from the workers by the political regimes of the ruling class, with

the aim of making them arrive at the war unprepared, under the illusion until the day before that it cannot happen. In this action the bourgeoisie is assisted, in a vital way for it, by the trade unions of the regime (in Italy CGIL, CISL and UIL) which keep the working class immobile, lulling them into the illusion that nothing so serious can really come.

Instead, the economic effects which the war is producing, and which have already begun to affect workers, are still developing and will come to fully unfold in the coming months.

Secondly, the propaganda of the Italian bourgeois regime, siding with U.S. imperialism, strives to make the workers believe that the aggressor of the moment – in this case Russian imperialism – is to blame for the war, thus remaining on the surface of the problem, by not seeing in this conflict a clash between imperialisms, which is being fought today on Ukrainian territory, at the expense of that population, and by hiding the fact that the war is ripening from the depths of the contradictions of the capitalist economy and is not provoked by the state which first decides to take military action.

This erroneous conviction is also supported among the workers by the bourgeois left and by opportunism, who share the ruling class's false ideology about the possible peaceful coexistence between states, according to which the natural course of capitalism would be that of peace, sanctioned by rules of coexistence between countries, which only backward policies and foolish men would interrupt. So, to "prevent war" it would be necessary to fight it, and to win those countries where such policies prevailed.

This erroneous belief is shared by all those who take one side in the war between capitalist states, whether anti-American or anti-Russian: it would always be only one state or one front of states that would be the cause of the war, not capitalism itself.

Finally, a third element which today holds back the workers from joining an anti-war strike is the lie, spread by all the bourgeois and opportunists, of its supposed weakness as a class in social contention, and particularly in the face of such a great problem.

Having said this, indeed precisely because of this, it was and is necessary and proper on the part of militant Unions to promote trade union action against the imperialist war, to combat all these factors that leave the workers defenseless against its maturing and advancing, and to give strength to the instinctive rejection of the war by the working class, following that part of it which has already matured the awareness of the seriousness of this war, of how the real aggressor is not the state under attack, but the whole international working class and how only its struggle can prevent or stop the imperialist war.

The fact that all grassroots unionism finally resolved to join the day of strike and mobilization was therefore a very

positive result.

However, in the run-up to the strike, in addition to the difficulties mentioned above, which were already onerous in themselves, there were the shortcomings produced by the opportunism of the leaderships of the grassroots unions.

The first public action to prepare the strike was the national assembly held in Milan on April 9, sponsored by CUB, SGB, ADL Varese, USI CIT, Unicobas. In it, the SI Cobas had declared support for the strike, but not the USB and not even the Cobas Confederation. The lack of unity by rank and file unions in joining the strike had repercussions on its preparation.

Moreover, from that assembly came the decision to hold united demonstrations on May Day, focusing on propaganda for the May 20 strike. But in Milan, the city where grassroots unionism is able to mobilize the most workers, the SI Cobas leadership had its members march in a demonstration separate from those of the other grassroots unions. As well, the SI Cobas leadership never participated in the various meetings held to prepare for the strike.

On the other hand, at these meetings one of our comrades, speaking on behalf of the Coordinamento Lavoratori Autoconvocati (Cla), argued for the need to draft a public and formal letter of invitation to all the bodies of militant unionism that had not yet joined the strike. So not only the grassroots unions – such as USB, Confederazione Cobas, Adl Cobas and others – but also the militant wings of the CGIL – "Riconquistiamo tutto", "Le giornate di marzo" and "Democrazia e lavoro" – and the former GKN Factory Collective. This action had no formal but an eminently practical meaning. It would have served as an argument to lead the battle for membership within the unions that had not yet joined. But most of the leaders of the unions promoting the strike spoke out against it.

The adhesion of the USB finally arrived, but only on May 6. That of the Cobas Confederation on May 11. On May 15, the opposition area in CGIL "Reconquistiamo tutto" issued a statement of support for the strike.

These divisions and delayed accessions did not allow adequate preparation for the strike, serious, determined and united.

Considering these elements – both the objective ones and those resulting from the opportunism of the trade union leadership - it was an appreciable result the realization of the small unitary marches held in various cities – Rome, Florence, Genoa, Milan, Venice – confirmation of the conviction and determination of those trade union militants and workers who feel the need to oppose the imperialist war.

Now the action to be carried out within the militant trade union movement is to fight so that all the trade union organizations that participated in this first day of mobilization against the war start a path for the serious and united construction of a real general strike for the

first weeks after the summer, with demonstrations and assemblies inside and outside the workplace, which will broaden the unity of action of militant trade unionism beyond the perimeter of grassroots trade unionism, involving groups of combative workers still framed in the regime's unions and the militant areas in CGIL, and allowing a wider participation of workers, members and non-members of trade unions.

FOR THE CLASS UNION

Longshore

On the West Coast of the United States, tension is rising between port workers and their employers. The International Longshore and Warehouse Union, representing the workers, is posed to call a massive strike if talks break down—over 15,500 workers across 29 ports could stop work.

Roughly 350,000,000 tons of cargo, valued at several hundreds of billions of dollars, pass through West Coast ports annually. Disrupting such a massive flow of commodities for just five days could cost firms across the national economy \$2 billion, according to a report from the University of Maryland. A strike would also aggravate the ongoing supply chain crisis, stoking popular discontent and putting immense pressure on the federal government. The supply chain crisis gives the ILWU a great deal of leverage, but the union probably also fears public backlash for contributing to rising prices and shortages.

The current contract is set to expire on July 1. Negotiations began on May 10 but were suspended from May 20 to June 1 at the request of the ILWU. The Pacific Maritime Association is representing the 72 port operators, shipping companies, and stevedore companies employing ILWU port workers on the West Coast.

ILWU's bargaining priorities were set by delegates of the rank-and-file at a union caucus in February. Resolutions in that regard revolved around safety, wages, benefits, and technology. The ongoing automation of ports around the globe is an especially hot issue. The union opposes automation because of the job losses it could cause.

The PMA, on the other hand, has stated on its website that one of its guiding principles in negotiations is automating its ports to handle cargo growth. They also claim that automation will not reduce employment for port workers. But obviously, the point of automation is to increase the amount of cargo handled per unit labor cost, which means greater exploitation of the labor regardless of reassignment, retraining, and cargo growth. Moreover, in 2014, the Port of Los Angeles acknowledged that an

automation project at one of its terminals could eliminate up to 600 jobs, or half the workforce.

ILWU's reputation as a militant union is likely an important reason behind PMA's drive for automation. Having suffered the effects of major work-stoppages in the past, it's no secret that the employers would be less at the mercy of their employees if their ports were automated. But automation is also a natural and inevitable consequence of competition, constantly pushing for increases in labor productivity, and the development of science and technology. Such modernization can and should be slowed down for the sake of the workers, but it cannot be stopped or undone anymore than the arrow of time can be reversed. So, the struggle for job security must also include the struggle for wages for the unemployed.

Another crucial aspect of the dispute between port workers and their employers is the ability of companies to reroute cargo through different ports. West Coast ports already lost a not insignificant part of their market share to their Gulf Coast and East Coast competitors as importers responded to overflows associated with the pandemic. Canadian and Mexican ports as well as air transport are currently too expensive to compete, but conditions may change relatively quickly, especially with labor unrest. To overcome these obstacles, port workers on the American West Coast will need to unify with port workers on the Gulf Coast and the East Coast, in Mexico and Canada, and with DHL, UPS, and FedEx workers responsible for air freight.

Amazon

In our last issue, we wrote about Amazon Labor Union, an independent, rank-and-file union created by current and former Amazon employees. The occasion was the union's certification at the Amazon Fulfillment Center JFK 8 in Staten Island, New York. (It is worth noting that that facility's management has since been fired and replaced, ostensibly because of their failure to prevent unionization.) Our party considered this event a small but important step forward for the entire working class.

Although other unions have tried to organize Amazon workers, none had yet obtained recognition by the National Labor Relations Board. For example, the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union organized a drive at an Amazon facility in Bessemer, Alabama. Workers rejected the union in an election last year. Afterwards, the RWDSU successfully appealed for a revote, in which the workers again rejected the union according to an initial tally. (However, several hundred ballots are contested, and the official result is pending a decision by the NLRB.)

So, what made the difference?

Three things seem to distinguish ALU from its counterparts:

1 Direct contact and relations with Amazon workers.

2 Advancement of specific demands based on Amazon workers' interests.

3 Organization of labor actions by the rank-and-file even without recognition (like the 2020 COVID-19 walkout at JFK8, written about previously).

We believe these points played a significant role in ALU's certification. Of course, we cannot confirm this belief without talking to the Amazon workers who voted for unionization. (We hope to establish contact with a few such workers at the upcoming Labor Notes conference. Perhaps we will return to and settle this question in a later issue of our periodical.)

Since that election, ALU has focused on two goals: organizing other Amazon warehouses in New York and obtaining a first contract for its membership.

First and foremost, ALU sought to repeat itself in a certification vote at the Amazon Sort Center LDJ5, another facility only a few hundred feet away from JFK8. Well, the votes are now in. Workers at the Amazon Sort Center LDJ5 in Staten Island, New York elected not to join ALU by a final count of 618 to 380, with a turnout of about 62%.

It is crucial not to be demoralized by this apparent setback. Instead, it is our party's duty to analyze what happened, to determine the causes of this unpleasant effect. Towards that end, we will evaluate the situation at LDJ5 as compared to that of JFK8 regarding the three points listed above.

1 There are hints that contact between ALU and Amazon workers at LDJ5 is less developed than it was at JFK8.

1.a The predominance of part-time employment over full-time employment means the average LDJ5 employee is less interested in unionization.

1.b Most of ALU's organizers are employed at JFK8, not LDJ5.

1.c The attention of ALU now seems more divided between winning the support of Amazon workers and winning the support of leftist political groups, national union leadership, and the media.

2 The demands are mostly the same as before, apart from the demand for Amazon to convert part-time workers into full-time workers, which is well-suited to the situation at LDJ5.

3 There were no labor actions at LDJ5 equivalent to the walkout at JFK8 two years ago.

Of course, Amazon is partially responsible for the outcome too, due to its union-busting practices. But such practices can be overcome, as they were at JFK8. Our party is convinced that if the proletariat moves as a class and takes the right steps, then the bourgeoisie will be so utterly helpless before it that any fight it puts up will be to no avail.

In this case, we believe the right steps are: (i) committing the maximum of available resources to recruiting LDJ5 workers to the movement, reallocating precious time and energy away from non-proletarian politics and media towards more fruitful endeavors; (ii) planning and executing a workplace action at LDJ5, advancing demands specific to that facility—perhaps conversion of part-time workers into full-time workers upon request.

What's next for ALU? The battle at LDJ5 is not yet over. ALU has verbally committed to continuing campaigning at LDJ5, presumably to file for another election at some point in the future. Similar campaigns are also taking place at other warehouses in New York. Meanwhile, negotiations with Amazon for a first contract for ALU members have yet to begin. The NLRB granted Amazon a hearing for its objections to the election at JFK8, which has greatly delayed first contract negotiations. In our last article on ALU, we printed some of their demands, which will probably be brought up by the union at negotiations when they finally start.

Amazon is likely to adamantly oppose these demands and take a very tough approach to negotiation in general, in the hopes of discouraging other Amazon workers from unionizing. To earn a decent contract and persuade other Amazon workers to join ALU by way of example, the union must lay the groundwork for waging and generalizing class struggles and refuse to shrink away when the opportunity for struggle presents itself. We will conclude by referring the reader to the advice our party offered to ALU in our last issue.

John Deere

In *The Communist Party*, no. 37, we wrote about the 10,000 workers at John Deere, a manufacturing company that specializes in agricultural machinery, who voted by a massive margin to strike last fall. Since then, the workers voted to end the strike and accept a contract which includes a 10% wage increase in the first year. On the one hand, this story demonstrates the power of the proletariat to win concessions from the bourgeoisie through its self-movement. But it is a simplification of the actual events. Omitted are the all-important divisions on the side of the workers, whose resolution is the key to the future of the labor movement.

The workers at Deere are represented by United Auto Workers. UAW's modus operandi has long been offering concessions from the workers in exchange for job security from the company. This strategy is perceived as both natural and necessary by the union. Indeed, auto workers in the United States had achieved a high standard of wages and working conditions through class struggle,

especially in the first half of the twentieth century. Further, the post-World War II economic boom for a long time enabled the bourgeoisie to grant concessions to the proletariat—on the condition that they forfeit their class weapons and commit to industrial peace—without excessively curbing their own profits. Now, that once remarkable growth is increasingly disappearing, so profit margins are becoming thinner and thinner. Companies are therefore more jealously protective of their profits, less willing to share wealth with their employees—for the not unfounded fear of being put out of business by competition. At the same time, with improvements in communication and the industrialization of developing countries, it is easier for companies to relocate production away from combative workers to any place where labor is cheaper and more docile. Hence UAW, like many other unions, has adopted the approach of doing its best to keep the employer happy to at least prevent American factories from closing. Consequently, wages and working conditions have gradually declined, adding up to significant losses for the workers in recent decades. Most of the workers who make up the rank-and-file of such unions have understandably, though often begrudgingly, accepted this arrangement as the lesser of two evils.

After initial negotiations with Deere, UAW brought a contract proposal featuring a reduction of retirement benefits for new hires before the rank-and-file for a vote and recommended approval. Breaking with recent history, the membership rejected the proposal and chose to strike for better terms—against the wishes of the union. The creation of a new tier of workers was the subject of much complaint. Many workers also demanded an end to the already existing two-tier system, which gives different employees different pay and benefits depending on the year in which they were hired. Moreover, severe inflation fueled by the pandemic and the supply chain crisis led many workers to call for greater wage increases.

Over the course of the strike, UAW brought two more contract proposals before the rank-and-file for approval by vote. Both times, the union pressured its members to accept the proposal, believing that if the strike continued, Deere's offer would worsen, and they might move production elsewhere. While the second proposal was rejected, the third (only a slight improvement on the previous version) was approved. The strike resulted in the aforementioned 10% raise for employees to counter inflation, but the two-tier system and the new retirement plan remained in place.

That was over six months ago. Recently, Deere announced a plan to move all cab production from its plant in Waterloo, Iowa to a plant in Mexico by 2024. Although new projects are expected to replace cab production in Waterloo, it is

unclear whether the company will lay off any workers and, in any case, we are skeptical that workers will not have to make any sacrifices. A local UAW official gave Deere the benefit of the doubt in a comment to the media, assuming that no jobs will be eliminated, but said he has not yet spoken to the company.

In a way, UAW's fears have been confirmed by this announcement. True—Deere has no obligation to meet the needs of its employees. On the contrary, its sole and binding obligation to deliver profits to its shareholders automatically pits the company against its employees, who are nothing more than business expenses to be minimized in the eyes of capital.

However, the stance of UAW and other collaborationist unions is based on a one-sided appropriation of the truth. When workers make demands that the bourgeoisie will not voluntarily meet, they unconsciously allude to the antagonism between the worker and the capitalist, warning workers of the consequences of asking for too much and provoking thereby their enemy. But by calling for workers to submit to company interests as a matter of principle—to effectively renounce their own interests whenever they come in conflict with capital—they deny that antagonism, contributing to the progressive immiseration of the working class.

To appropriate the truth as a whole entails rejecting both the notion of workers being satisfied with submission to capital and the notion of capital being peacefully persuaded to meet workers' needs as equally illusory and dangerous. Reconciliation between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is impossible, regardless of how the classes move relative to each other.

Since our party takes the point of view of the proletariat, we are thus led to conclude that relentless class struggle culminating in the suppression of the bourgeoisie is inevitable. The outcome of the battle at Deere has not yet been decided, but if the strike leads to layoffs, that cannot be pinned on the fact that workers fought for their own interests. (What did you expect?) The real problem is that the workers were restrained in that fight, unable to go beyond half-measures or overcome self-sabotage.

So, what is to be done at Deere? A concerted war against the company on two fronts: labor actions in the American Midwest (there are still many important production lines running at the Waterloo plant) and in Mexico, with workers coordinating their efforts across national borders.

To enact this plan, combative rank-and-file workers in both locations will have to fight not only their employer, but also the unions which represent them whenever they hesitate to engage in struggle. In fact, transforming the unions from an instrument for restraining militant workers and channeling their energy into relatively harmless avenues into an

instrument for promoting militancy and attacking at the greatest vulnerabilities of the enemy class is by far the more important task.

Members should organize and pressure UAW leaders to commit to fighting for zero job cuts if Deere proceeds towards lowering staffing levels. They should also call for the UAW to establish contact with unions representing Mexican auto workers, and to set up meetings on the topic of moving production.

In pursuit of transforming the unions, workers should use all the means available to them, including but not limited to officially approved channels—attending and speaking at meetings, forming caucuses, campaigning to reform the union, etc. Different methods may be more effective in different conditions; the best option can only be determined experimentally. Militants should also organize independently of the union, in fractions inside the union that are not subordinate to the leadership, and which coordinate with similar fractions in other unions and with groups of non-union workers. For this coordination to work, it is important that these workers develop their own communication networks, anticipating attempts by opponents to undermine their movement.

Steel

On March 21, 500 oil workers at a refinery in Richmond, California went out on strike. Faced with severe inflation and an especially high cost of living in the Bay Area, the workers demanded greater wage increases. The low wage rate also led to employees overworking themselves, according to the strikers. Another issue raised by the workers was low staffing levels and excessively long hours of work. From the perspective of the proletariat, the labor shortage observed across the country is really a shortage of decent job offers. Raising wages and reducing working hours certainly wouldn't hurt Chevron's chances of finding additional labor for its facilities. The workers said that fatigue from overwork and a stretched-thin workforce constitute serious safety issues.

The workers at the Richmond refinery are represented by United Steelworkers. On February 25, USW reached a national agreement with the oil companies employing its members. This agreement laid the framework for some 200 different units, each with its own contract. Every unit still had to negotiate over local issues and ratify their own agreement. Chevron had 35 contracts up for renewal nationally, of which 34 were settled without dispute.

USW Local 5 was the exception. The union brought two tentative agreements before the rank-and-file for ratification, both of which were rejected by majority votes. During this time, rolling 24-hour extensions on the old contract were agreed to by both the company and the union. But after the second "no" vote, USW felt

obliged to cancel the extensions and notify Chevron of its intent to strike the next day.

The strike lasted ten weeks. Evidently, the long strike, during which workers had to survive on relatively low strike payments from the union, wore down their determination to obtain a better contract. Chevron handled the work-stoppage slightly better. Their website states that current and former Richmond employees had already been trained to take over the tasks of the strikers and keep the refinery running as part of a company contingency plan. So, Chevron did not need to halt production.

On May 28, the workers ratified a new agreement. The average annual wage increase in the contract is 3%, in accordance with the national agreement. The workers' demands for a higher raise were not met. We have not found any evidence that staffing levels or working hours will change, either.

We close this article with an outline of our party's perspective on the strike:

- Having a national agreement between oil workers and oil companies is potentially to the great advantage of the workers. Unfortunately, USW has not utilized it to its fullest extent. The present surge in inflation is a global phenomenon, and many American cities are already extremely expensive to live in. These issues therefore appeal to oil workers not only in Richmond, but at numerous facilities covered by the national agreement. Perhaps the union could keep open the possibility of striking at any unit until all of them approve their contracts. Then USW could have looked to extend the strike in Richmond to other bargaining units by at least making a proposal to do so and consulting its membership on the topic. Work-stoppages at multiple Chevron facilities would have put more pressure on the company to meet workers' demands.

- Increasing strike pay would also benefit the workers by enabling them to remain on strike for longer periods of time. To do this, the union may have to reallocate funds from other, less productive areas, such as salaries for union officials, lobbying, and unionization drives for the petty bourgeoisie.

More effective picketing would disrupt the company's ability to use replacement labor, which was key to its success in withstanding the strike. Put as many workers as possible in front of the facility's entrances to block anyone from entering, especially during shift changes. Draw on the support of other locals to put more bodies on the picket line. Healthcare workers from USW Local 7600 rallied with Chevron workers during the strike—why not ask them to join the picket line? When the company inevitably calls on the police and the courts to intervene, removing peaceful protestors by force, publicize the incident as much as possible and take the opportunity to tell broad swaths of the public your side of the story

and call on them for support. Advance political demands like expansion of the freedom to organize, strike, and protest.

MILITANT ACTION IN THE UK – RAIL WORKERS TAKE THE LEAD

The recent strike of railworkers belonging to the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union staggered across June 21, 23 and 25 involving more than 40 thousand workers across 15 different operating companies, sent shockwaves through the UK and rattled the bourgeois media. It is the largest strike action on the British railway network since 1989.

The strikes, over cuts in real wages, job cuts and changes to working practices, have heralded a wave of industrial disputes in several categories, especially in the public sector.

A quote from a railworker circulating online paints a clear picture of why they are striking:

“Three years ago we accepted a 0% pay rise, two years ago we accepted a 0% pay rise. But this year they came to us with a 0% pay rise plus over 2500 redundancies, changes to terms and conditions. An increase from 28 weeks of nights to 39 weeks of nights. An increase from 32 weekends worked to 39 weekends worked. Currently for a night shift we get time and a quarter, for a weekend turn we get time and a half. They wish to cut both of these to time and a tenth. So that's a 15% pay cut on every night shift and a 40% pay cut on every weekend turn. But they want us to work more of them. This is their modernisation they talk about. Not technology, we embrace technology and have seen more and more of it in recent years. They also wish to fire and re-hire the operative grades and bring them back under a new job title but on £9000 a year less. They also want them to use their own vehicles to get to work sites, this when fuel is at its highest. They will also be pooled when they are currently part of the team. The press are painting this to be about pay above all else. It is not. But now we've said sod them we are going to demand better. I wish everyone could see past the government controlled media smear.”

A separate dispute over pension reductions with TFL (Transport for London), the operator of the London underground tube system, ran on the first day of the other mentioned strikes adding fuel to the fire and made travel through London take 2-4 times as long across most of the day.

Train drivers, who are members of the ASLEF union, are also taking action against some employers. A one-day drivers' strike against Great Anglia took place on July 2, leading to the cancellation of 90% of services.

Despite the media trying to downplay the severity of the strikes, while simultaneously labelling the striking

workers as selfishly damaging the UK economy and people's day-to-day life, it was projected that at least £90 million worth of output loss from work absences would be recorded and there would be over £500 million of lost profits for the hospitality business from customers being unable to go out.

Predictably the current Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson has hit out at the strikers accusing them of being well paid drivers and telling travelers to try and get on with it while blaming the strikes on the opposing party support, with the transport secretary calling the strikes "reckless vandalism" and suggesting driverless trains are a more attractive option than striking workers.

Also very predictably the opposing "labour" party has been anything but supportive of the strikes with the leader Keir Starmer even going as far as to tell his MPs to stay away from pickets to "show leadership".

Not to be outdone by the anti-worker rhetoric of the more popular parties the liberal democrats had a member go on live TV and suggest the army could be brought in to deal with the strikes while saying this action could somehow be justified with the current cost of living crisis being faced, the health of the economy being protected and that "desperate times call for desperate measures" and "this isn't what the country needs right now".

The RMT secretary on air with this politician pointed out that this would constitute the government getting involved in strikebreaking and that taking this action would be "going to war with workers".

Despite the huge blow to the national economy the RMT officials appear to be looking for a compromise. General Secretary Mick Lynch announced that all cuts remain on the table along with worse contracts being introduced. He was quoted as saying that the companies "have taken an extremely hard line, we believe at the behest of the government in order to push through their agenda of £2 billion of cuts and what they call 'Workforce Reform'."

Moreover, the demand for a 7.1% pay increase, if obtained, would still represent a pay cut in real terms, with UK inflation already above 9% and set to rise further.

The government transport secretary has also been accused of wrecking negotiations by forbidding Network Rail, which is the main government-owned operator, to withdraw its letter threatening redundancy for thousands of workers.

Apart from the main RMT strikes, the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA), which represents white collar workers, announced that its members at Merseyrail had managed to secure a 7% pay increase.

Workers in other transport categories are already taking, or voting to take, strike action, notably: bus workers on Merseyside, TSSA workers in several regions and 500 BA check-in staff at Heathrow airport, who saw their pay cut by 10% during the pandemic.

Elsewhere, the Communication Workers Union announced that supply chain and admin workers would walk out on July 14, three days after 1,500 staff at Crown branches of the Post Office stage a 24-hour strike. Even barristers staged a one-day strike in June. These professionals have seen their pay and conditions severely worsen over recent years.

It is predicted that teachers and NHS staff will strike later in the year. Even the police in Scotland -who are forbidden strike action by law - recently voted to "withdraw goodwill", which in effect means an overtime ban.

The failure of the RMT regime union to capitalize on the concentrated efforts of workers across many different sectors show the necessity of building a true class union front and having a strategy aimed towards the unity of the entire working class against the capitalist state rather than entrusting negotiations to the corporatist maneuverings of RMT bureaucrats who, despite their class struggle rhetoric, will not be able to gain anything for the workers they supposedly represent.

THE MEDIA CIRCUS AND THE PERFORMING BEARS

Medvedev expresses a fanatical and warmongering nationalism. He glares at the "decadence of the West", ignoring that he also has at home - in Holy Mother Russia, which has reached its maximum state of bourgeois putrefaction - that very world which he claims to combat. The decadence, the degeneration belongs to every capitalism, though dishonestly justified by the heroic and patriotic values of every "culture" and "civilization".

The war mobilization is fueled, on both sides of the front, in a similar fashion: a nationalist leader, brutalized by the fanatical cult of the fatherland, makes paranoid claims to convince the Russians that the enemies want to destroy them. The shrewd echo of the media beyond the iron curtain repeats "the bear (medved in Russian) wants to kill all Westerners".

Even this propagandistic poison is the fruit of the collaboration of the capitalists of Russia and NATO to carry out their infamous war against the workers of every country.

The Communist Party - a monthly Issue 44 July 2022

The Communist Party is Printed and Produced by

Associazione La Sinistra Comunista - Casella Postale 1157 - 50121 Firenze - Italy

I.C.P. Editions - c/o 96 Bold Street - Liverpool L1 4HY - United Kingdom

C.L. Publishing - POB 14344 - Portland, OR 97214 - U.S.A.

international-communist-party.org

communications to: icparty@interncommparty.org

Life Of The Party

Party Meetings in the US -
Informal Meetings First Saturdays of the month

Minneapolis: Hard Times, 1821 Riverside Ave,- 3-5pm
Portland, OR: Neighbors Taproom 1306 E Burnside: 11am.
Pittsburgh: 61C Cafe 1839 Murray Ave. 4pm

Meetings also in:

Akron, Raleigh, Tampa, Yakima
to contact email: icparty@interncommparty.org.

CL Publishers

Printed books, periodicals and pamphlets both to order, download or to print at home are now available at clpublishers.com