



Speak Out Now

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May Day: There Is Power in the Working Class

In the 1880s, the United States was deeply unequal and divided. A few families owned the overwhelming bulk of U.S. wealth, and workers had to work up to 16 hours per day. Workers had no rights on the job, and often young children were working dangerous factory jobs. Anti-immigrant hatred was kicked up by politicians and bosses.

In response to such conditions, workers in the U.S. and around the world were organizing. In the 1880s, workers began to demand an eight-hour workday with the slogan: “eight hours for work, eight hours for sleep, eight hours for what we will!” This was a movement for better wages and time off. Many leaders of this movement were revolutionary socialists and anarchists. They believed that workers should win back their time, and that workers actually have the power to transform the entire system. They fought for an international working class revolution to create a world where no one lives off the exploitation of others, and where every person can live life to its fullest.

In 1886, May 1st was chosen as a national day of strikes to win the eight-hour day. 340,000 workers shut down 12,000 work places across the country, and many won reductions in the workday. A general strike was called in Chicago. After a few days of demonstrations, a bomb was thrown into a workers’ rally and, with no evidence against them, revolutionary leaders were charged with inciting violence. The violent repression by the capitalists could not stop workers’ organizing, and May 1st was chosen as International Workers’ Day to honor the power of workers’ struggles. May 1st remains a day that workers around the world demonstrate our power.

Today, we face many challenges similar to those that the working class faced in the 1880s. Record-breaking profits for capitalists are created by a highly exploited working class. Immigrants are vilified by bosses and politicians, but their work is necessary. Child labor is on the rise, with more children working in dangerous jobs! We have many reasons today to take inspiration from past working-class struggles.

2023 was a year of possibilities for the working class to organize, and the possibilities continue in 2024. Working people have organized: to form unions, as at Volkswagen and Starbucks, but also to strike and win better contracts, as in the auto industry and in Hollywood. Working people around the world are not silent on a wide range of political issues. Some have participated in the global movement to defend Palestine against Israel’s genocidal attack.

Around the world, workers have fought back against conditions on the job and social attacks from governments. Massive strikes in Quebec fought back against cuts to public budgets and inflation. In South Korea and Kenya, doctors have gone on strike. Four million workers in Bangladesh struck for higher wages. In France, there was a mass movement against a reform pushing back retirement by two years. In Argentina, hundreds of thousands demonstrated against a far-right government’s attempt to slash public services.

Prior to the collapse of the Key Bridge in Baltimore, workers had spoken up against hazardous practices in the shipping industry. Boeing workers spoke out against dangerous work conditions that have contributed to the numerous “accidents” wracking Boeing aircraft. Workers in other industries, such as healthcare and rail, have spoken out about unsafe conditions. It’s important that workers blow the whistle on risky practices. These all contain the possibility of organizing for better safety on the job and reducing the potential for disasters.

We must remind ourselves this May Day that workers have won much from our struggles: reduced work days, weekends, protections on the job, and safer living and working conditions. Workers do all the essential labor in society. When workers refuse to go along with the daily grind, we can wage a struggle that can win our demands. And, we must go beyond this. We can transform the entire society we live in. The liberation of us all will come when workers decide to organize ourselves to run society without the bosses and politicians.

Autoworkers Fight Back Against Decades of Concessions

In the fall of 2023, the United Auto Workers (UAW) fought Ford, General Motors, and Stellantis after 45 years of concessions. The strikes of 50,000 UAW members led to an immediate 11% wage increase, the end of the discriminatory two-tier wage system (which allowed the bosses to pay workers hired after 2008 significantly less than other workers), and a contract with a "cost-of-living" wage increase based on inflation.

This strike was a step in the right direction for workers organizing. The union bureaucracy only allowed some of the plants to strike even though workers across the union showed a desire to broaden the strike. Who knows how much they might have won if they had all gone out?

This strike was an inspiration to many, as it showed a glimpse of the power in the working class, should we choose to use it. The strike has sparked greater confidence in autoworkers across the U.S., with a new round of unionizing and organizing potentially on its way. The UAW strike showed us that when we fight, it's possible to win.

Our Lives vs. Their Profits

For 118 days last year, 11,500 writers of the Writers Guild of America (WGA) went on strike against poor compensation by streaming services, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to replace writers, and for job security and larger writers' teams. The strikers won increases to their minimum wage, pension and health benefits, and limits on the use of AI. In addition, 165,000 actors represented by SAG-AFTRA went on strike against Hollywood studios, winning gains on many of their demands. Many workers in other industries respected the writers' and actors' picket lines. Strikes like these can inspire solidarity among workers everywhere.



**WORKERS of the WORLD
UNITE!**

Workers in Solidarity with Palestine

Many workers across the U.S. have been horrified by the genocidal attack on Palestinians. Some have organized their opposition. Workers at Highland Hospital in Oakland, CA organized an action starting on World Children's Day, which lasted for weeks, to commemorate children killed in Gaza. They were persistent despite an attempt by the CEO to silence them. And that's just one example of many actions around the country, where healthcare workers held vigils and actions against Israel's bombing of hospitals in Gaza.

Most recently, Google workers, with a group called No Tech for Apartheid, staged sit-ins at Google's offices in New York and California. Despite police arrests and over 50 workers fired, the No Tech for Apartheid group says it will continue its efforts. While not a mass movement, these examples show the potential of workers to flex our political muscles.

A World to Win

This past year, we've seen workers fight back in the United States and around the world, with big strikes in France, Bangladesh, and Argentina.

We can demand wages that are more than livable. We can demand more time off from work to spend time with loved-ones, or simply to rest. We can demand guaranteed full employment with reasonable hours.

The fight for a better world doesn't stop with our unions, workplaces, or the latest contract. To achieve the basic things we need, we must address the existential crises the bosses have created. We must address the endless wars and rising militarization, the climate crisis and the forced migration of millions, and the continued threat of nuclear war.

To address these issues would require ending the entire system of capitalism, a system built on exploiting workers and the environment. Working people around the world can organize so that we no longer have to settle for bread crumbs from the bosses' table.

We live in the wealthiest country in the world, and it is our labor that has created all of this wealth. We aren't the ones who benefit from this. The super rich — the bosses of the big corporations and banks — keep the wealth and make all the decisions. Working people do the work that makes society run, and we can organize to unite our forces. When we do, we have enormous power to change things and make a better world.

We Need to Organize!

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