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Internationalist Notes

Broadsheet of the Internationalist Workers' Group

LABOR DAY 2025: THREE ATTACKS ON THE WORKING CLASS, ONE WAY FORWARD

The time since last year's Labor Day has shown that capitalism continues down its death march. This year, Klasbatalo and the Internationalist Workers Group reflect on three attacks launched by the bosses in the last 12 months and prospects for workers in Canada and the US. None of these attacks have emerged out of the ether - they are the convulsions of a dying system. Although the situation may seem dire, anti-deportation protests, refusals, and the inevitability of more strikes to come emphasize the need to keep fighting, and for a concrete political orientation to guide the class forward.



The Capitalist State vs. The Workers

The first attack is the unprecedented legal machinery developed by capital in the past year. In Canada, we have seen strikes, led by unions and ultimately dead-ended, which included port workers on both sides of the continent, in addition to rail and postal workers. These rattled beleaguered supply chains, and therefore drew the ire of the bosses in the headlines as being particularly 'selfish'. Unlike most strikes which tend to result in meager settlements, forms of 'negotiating down' through union arbitration, the Labour Minister was set in to force arbitration. What makes this unusual is that the bosses are historically content to let unions have their slice of the pie in exchange for pacifying workers. These attacks on the Canadian working class form a blueprint for capitalists across the world, not least in the United States. For instance, the Trump administration has unleashed a salvo of attacks at workers in the same vein. Although less socially liberal than Prime Minister Carney, Trump's actions are signs of converging interests by the capitalists to increase attacks on workers. There are the famous cuts headed by his (former) cheerleader, Musk, resulting in thousands of federal layoffs. In addition, Trump has reconstituted the National Labor Relations Board leadership in a long-term bid to make striking more perilous and to give the bosses more power. Even though the primary targets are unions, the knock-on effects include greater scrutiny against any form of labour action, including banning the use of work emails for labour organizing. This is in addition to various cuts against hazard pay, a promise to freeze the minimum wage through executive order, as well as the degradation of at-home careworker minimum pay. Combined with the Big Beautiful Bill, which hacks at welfare like a butcher's knife, the message is clear; American workers pay tribute to their masters, while unions incompetently fight to defend their own turf in protracted legal battles 'for workers'. The effect is the impoverishment and disorientation of the whole class, with reindustrialization being the sweet promise of more gruelling work. In the US, as in Canada, Carney and Trump agree to crack the whip.

From this, we highlight two important lessons. The first is the reality that unions are part of the capitalist state and will fold under pressure. This lesson alone is something that has been known for over a century since the unions agreed to 'no strike' clauses in the service of nationalism. The second is that the capitalist state is escalating their policing of the class as part of a general crackdown in preparation for war. This is the real push behind Bill 89 in Quebec, which enables the provincial government to leverage the 'public good 'in ruling a strike illegal. So long as such attacks stay on the terrain of union legal battles, the working class will sustain loss after loss. Insofar as further strikes continue popping up, workers need to be ready for this 'new normal', and must fight against the preparation for war and the legal means enabling it. In doing so, workers need a concrete political orientation beyond immediate defences and economic disputes. This is why the historical objective remains the abolition of capital, spearheaded by an internationalist party of the working class. It is the pursuit of this goal that alone can lead to real leverage from the workers against capitalists. This can never be achieved if workers on the picket hold onto the illusion that unions and the capitalist state can substitute for real class struggle.

Immigration and the Working Class fightback

The second major attack is on immigrant workers. In Canada, the US, and around the world, brutal attacks against migrant workers have multiplied. Carney's Liberal government has continued Trudeau's policies to reduce immigration after inviting millions during Covid to resuscitate declining capitalist profits. It is little wonder that the United Nations have since condemned migrant workers' treatment in Canada as being analogous to slavery. In the US, ICE and the DHS' raids have continuously been used to strike fear in migrant workers who already have no protections. In addition, we have seen an unprecedented crackdown on international students. In the US, these attacks preceded Trump's administration, such as in the targeting of Chinese students and condemning them as national security threats, setting the precedent for revoking student visas for participating in Gaza protests. Not confined to the Trump administration, Canada has also reduced the amount of international students by 48%, under particular pressure in some provinces such as Quebec, who see them as visa "freeloaders." These attacks have been bipartisan and are dressed up as defending national interest and democracy. Bosses everywhere have become more bold in their attacks, with growing xenophobia accompanying the war narrative. Imperialist capitalism threatens the entire world to ride off the rails, as mass slaughter becomes the only remaining solution for a weary capitalist class.

Growing repression against migrant workers and students has to be opposed by the working class as a whole, for the working class. An attack on a foreigner is an attack on a native; it all serves to discipline an already heavily-exploited working class for war. It is therefore encouraging that workers in the US showed great courage and a burgeoning sense of class consciousness by organizing neighborhood and workplace group chats to warn and mobilize against attempted deportations and to set up demonstrations. In addition, workers in the heavily-targeted hospitality industry had strikes which put forward political demands to stop the brutal raids. However, lacking a concrete political orientation, this self-defence can only go so far. Like the attacks on recent strikes, the surge of action by the class remains disorientated and fragmented, showing a need to grow the flame into real proletarian power. This state of shakiness is how workers' actions are being crushed with the full brutality of the much hated Los Angeles police department and county sheriffs, stifling their combativity. The real defense is an organisational offensive.

When trade wars turn to generalized wars

The third attack is the ongoing march towards generalized war. Trump's administration has led to a total upheaval of the liberal order, and has consequently sharpened tensions between allies and rivals alike. At the NATO summit in Kananaskis, fault lines within the imperialist bloc comprising the two North American member states ruptured further. On the one side, the American bourgeoisie is reconsidering their efforts to underwrite the treaty. On the other, the Canadian bourgeoisie still identifies their interests in maintaining their position in this postwar order. Where Trump seeks to compel wider rearmament with the threat of withdrawal, Canada seeks to present itself as a reliable resource pool to European capital with a shared interest in mutual defense, amounting in all cases to a call to rearmament that foreshadows the slaughter of the working class. As defense budgets soar in America to absorb superfluous productive capacity in the form of armored vehicles that Pentagon officials insist they have no use for, Canadian defense contractors answer calls from Europe to join military development projects in arrangements never dreamed of in feverish pulp novels.

Between Trump's blustering over the annexation of Canada and the Canadian call (alongside Europe) to recognize a Palestinian state, the U.S.-Canadian partnership is being battered. 'Anti-imperialists' of all varieties; Stalinist, Trotskyist, etc. may mistakenly see this divergence as some potential wedge in major capitalist nations to exploit in favour of their preferred nationalism'. In truth, there is no permanent peace, no 'just wars', no righteous nationalisms, because imperialism is a feature of capitalism, not of individual states. Take the war in Gaza for instance. While Hamas has bit off more than it can chew from its assault on October 7th, the famine in the Gaza strip is not the outgrowth of Israel as a uniquely illiberal nation, but an example of what capitalists are capable of. This is why the Israeli stock exchange is booming even as war fatigue sets in. The short term 'heat' is worth the long term gains from rebuilding the wasteland Netanyahu has created, while keeping his domestic and foreign adversaries busy. While 'liberal' leaders such as Carney, Starmer, and Macron may call out the worst excesses of Netanyahu's genocidal campaign, it is primarily a vehicle for leverage against a 'bad' United States administration. In addition, the Palestinian Authority is more than eager to become this new leader of a Palestinian state, an opportunity which can only be exploited under the abject conditions in the Gaza strip. Even if a ceasefire were to be hacked out overnight, the structural incentives for conflict remain, as they are rooted in competition between nation states, that is, national capitals. Meanwhile, Trump's yo-yo negotiations with Russia highlight that the war in Ukraine will continue for as long as it needs to, determined principally by the utility it has for Russian and Ukrainian capitalists, with both having irredentist demands that can never be satisfied outside of total attrition. Even the 'historic' deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan guarantees that the latter will become a US staging ground for further attacks into Iran, and that the former is to collapse to civil war under greater calls for ethnic revanchism, fuelled by Russian support to regain its Caucasian foothold. No matter the situation, capitalists all converge on one objective; wars will be waged no matter what.

The one way forward.

It is clear that the capitalist order is on a sinister path. The working class is assaulted directly and indirectly through the crushing of wages and various forms of welfare, social guarantees, etc. It signals the trajectory of the capitalist class as whole - the workers must be ready to accept sacrifices now and be made to toe the line so that when the day comes, they will march to the front. Immigrant workers are the first to be deported and detained en masse to tighten the pool of workers and to guarantee precarity for profits. However, far from falling to pessimism or delusion, the working class remains the only one poised to fight these myriad evils. The protests and riots in LA demonstrated that the class can summon inordinate combativity. That will to fight presents an opportunity unlike any other, though it must be channeled into a concrete political direction through the formation of a party. In addition, mounting refusals from workers in Russia, Ukraine, Israel, Gaza, etc. to fight for imperialist slaughter demonstrates that the more capitalists push, the more workers push back. Far from archaic, the examples of the Kiel and Petrograd sailors' mutinies show that even the greatest wars can be ground to a halt by the efforts of devoted militants. To succeed,

workers cannot hold onto the illusion that unions or nations can come to their salvation. These are not weapons or contingencies, but rust upon the real sword of the working class; self-organization. Workers must organize outside of unions, across borders, and against war, wherever possible, to refuse the sacrifices demanded of them. When workers struggle on the basis of their own strength, whether through strike committees, mass assemblies, or even workers' councils, their fight becomes political. The capitalist hydra has been struck once in the past, in the example set by the Russian Revolution, but the heroic task was stifled, as in the epics, with the capitalists growing back the limbs they had once lost. It is for this reason that the future party of the working class must form and strike boldly through the heart of the beast.

THE WORKING CLASS NEEDS REVOLUTION NOT REFORM

It is becoming clear to the whole working class that the bourgeois political parties do not act in our interests and have never worked for our benefit, that the class distinctions in our society cannot be remedied by reform or redistribution of power among members of the ruling class. Only by our class taking independent action can we fight against the attacks on our living standards and war, fighting for a society based on needs rather than profits.

Recent Democrat Faults and Failures

> "We're capitalists, and that's just the way it is."
> -Nancy Pelosi

The Democratic party has continually demonstrated that it is contrary to their interests to combat the direct attacks on the working class by Trump and the Republicans. During the Biden administration, the Democrats displayed the mutual agreement of the whole ruling class in favor of immigration crackdowns, state sanctioned genocide in Gaza, repression of oppositional voices, and an overall antagonistic relationship with the working class. All of these policies, either begun or expanded by the Biden administration, are now being continued under Trump's administration with varying degrees of escalation. Now Democrats oppose the severity and heavy handedness of the Trump administration, but never the actual policies themselves!

By weakly challenging the Trump administration's methods and not the policy, the Democrats curry support for themselves as the new "law and order" party. For example, during the LA protests, Governor Newsom claimed that "the federal takeover of the California National Guard was 'not because there is a shortage of law enforcement, but because [Republicans] want a spectacle.' He then urged protesters not to give them one, calling for "peaceful demonstrations". In the same breath that Newsom supports opposition to Trump's policy he is sure, with all his political succor, to threaten protesters with the LAPD in the event that opposition to Trump gets outside of Democrat control.

Yet, by this very statement, Newsom demonstrates a lack of understanding shared by the entire Democratic Party. The protests in LA, and subsequent sympathy demonstrations, highlight the working class' ability to react to continuing repression outside of the Democratic or Republican parties. From the faintness of their opposition, the consistency of their policies, the repression of working-class activity, there is no distinction left to be made between the bourgeois political parties outside their respective methods and tactics. The problem is not simply that Democrats are using us to further their agenda, not that their platform is not radical enough, but that they take the political struggle out of the workers' hands and sabotage our chances of building an independent class movement.

The Democrats are themselves, above all, capitalists. Their party represents a conglomeration of capitalist interests that invest in both the party activities and the campaigns of candidates. Democrats refuse to meet so many of the workers' demands because the interest of their class is directly opposed to the interest of ours. The Democrats opt to redirect our outrage to dead ends because if they didn't we might strike at the heart of their power over us. How often is class action terminated on the rocks of bourgeois leadership? When Democrats encourage "oppositional" protests, and we heed their call, we remain subservient to capital by participating in the charade of democracy. If an effective opposition is to be made against our oppression, the working class must oppose all of the ruling class, not just one or another subsection under the direction of another.

Bourgeois "Solutions" to Working Class Problems

After progressive candidate Zohran Mamdani's successful primary in the New York City mayoral race, progressive Democrats, and several groups on the left have made arguments that cracks are forming in the Democrat establishment. However, Mamdani's program would actually maintain the Democrat status-quo while relieving pressure on the bourgeoisie from the overburdened NYC working-class by passing reforms that falsely appear to improve capitalist conditions. The progressive platform only guarantees leadership of production to members of the bourgeoisie that use unions and government agencies to act on behalf of the ruling class interests as a whole.

While these labor unions and government regulators claim to serve working class interests, they actually benefit from redirecting the workers away from class action that furthers our needs. Unions are bound by a thousand threads to the capitalist state and the company. Not only do they depend legally on the boss and NLRB, but in these times of crisis, they actively negotiate against the workers by enforcing losses on them. This translates to the direct struggle. As one labor leader once claimed, "no one wants to walk the picket line." So often the unions call off strikes prematurely in order to reach a hasty settlement which returns the strikers back to work so the union can continue the status quo. By delegating away their power, the working class allows union representatives to overrule their original demands in favor of what is allowed by the capitalists who employ them. The same is true of government regulation agencies which act even more outside of the working class, merely enforcing legislation written by bourgeois representatives. Such policy only attempts to convince the working class of the effectiveness of bourgeois rule so that we might not take the struggle into our own hands.

Perhaps one of Mamdani's most radical reform propositions is the establishment of "a network of city-owned grocery stores focused on keeping prices low, not making a profit". However, the relationship between workers and their work place would remain fundamentally unaltered by such a change of hands. Mamdani tries to justify these government stores by claiming that, "without having to pay rent or property taxes, they will reduce overhead and pass on savings to shoppers. They will buy and sell at wholesale prices, centralize warehousing and distribution, and partner with local neighborhoods on products and sourcing". But then, is this not the same process by which private capitalists accumulate wealth and resources in ever greater scale, demand a continuing reduction in their cost of production year over year, and strive violently to produce cheaper and cheaper goods against their competition even in the event of a temporary loss in profits?

Were a growth in the concentration of capital ever capable of freeing the working class, would it not have been free decades ago? Why now, in the hands of the state, would the same productive relations suddenly benefit the working class? The reality is that Mamdani's state grocery stores come in the face of an already massive decline in profit in that sector of the economy resulting from Covid-19 lockdowns, the ever rising operational cost of massive supermarket enterprises, and competition with online stores like Amazon. By state-ifying failing stores, the government is able to eat huge losses and reorganize the workplace to achieve maximum profitability and competitiveness. These more efficient stores can then be privatized and sold off to investors who will reap the benefits of new profits, and the reduced cost of groceries for the working class will be undercut by an intensification in the labor process and inflationary cuts to real wages.

Furthermore, even if any or all of Mamdani's policies could be achieved by his administration, the union-built housing projects would only benefit the small section of the working class which have access to union membership and work for companies with government contracts, while the housing crisis and the suffering of the other members of the working class goes unaddressed. Government grocery stores would be limited by the financial constraints of the US government, which itself sustains its position of power through inflation and tax burdens on the working class. This principle of limitations is what defines any reformist platform. In order for any of Mamdani's platform to be implemented in the first place, he first has to get elected and second has to get buy-in from the rest of the bourgeois political structure, introducing even more potential for a watering down of any meagre amount of working class interest. More importantly, all of his solutions rely upon the continuation of the pre-existing capitalist state structure.

Conclusion: Self Activity over Delegation

Not only do band-aid solutions not work, but the root of the issue lies in the capitalist system as such. The United States government exists to support the interests of the capitalist class, to protect their investments and expand their margins of profit. Each politician is either themselves a capitalist or a representative of one or another huge moneyed interest who funds, supports, and dictates their campaign. A change in capitalism's "implementation" is not only incapable of changing working class conditions but rather is explicitly against our interests. Progressive policy is not "better" for the working class than conservative policy; the two are unique expressions of the same capitalist rule. Just as Republicans pit the working class against itself over immigration status to secure rising profits from reduced wages, progressives state-ify and regulate away inefficiencies in order to intensify the extraction of profit from the working class. Such "progress" is a step sideways for the bourgeoisie and yet another a step backwards for the working class. Rather than allowing these political parties to continue to exploit us in our own name, the working class ought to reject the miserable leadership of the capitalists and seek to forward our own class interests. So long as the working class is led by the agents of capital, in the state or in the unions, the crisis of capitalist war, exploitation, and oppression will continue unhampered by decorative political red tape.

The distinctions between the working class and the capitalist class can not be reconciled; they must be overthrown. The interests of those wage laborers who work in order to survive are directly opposed to the class which employs that same labor power to fill their own pockets with greater and greater profits. While the working class fights for survival through strikes and labor action, the fight still remains on defensive ground against ever increasing exploitation. The bourgeois interests in the unions and political parties, who largely take over leadership of this battle, always stop short of achieving victory for the working class due to the fact that they act on behalf of an opposing class interest. If the class war is to be won, it can not be through marginal, progressive, and relative betterment of the working class. Each such measure merely sidesteps the problem, the working class must seize political power for themselves and throw off the system of wage labor which conditions their oppression!

To this end, workers must go beyond the union-led strike, the reformist platform, and national borders. By forming committees of workers within the workplace which direct labor action themselves, rather than delegating power to the unions, we can put forward our own class interests in its entirety and without compromise. Self-organized associations of workers in all industries are essential to bringing about a class-wide offensive against bourgeois political power and uniting with our working class comrades across the world to fight the global imperialist powers of capital. Ultimately, the working class under its own leadership through an international communist party will finally be able to throw off the chains of the capitalist mode of production, which relies upon profits and exploitation, to create a new international society based upon the production of our needs instead.

Who We Are

"The IWG stands for a global society where production is for need and not profit (and is therefore sustainable), where the state, national frontiers and money have been abolished, where collective power is exercised through class-wide organizations like workers' councils. This has to mean the active, daily participation of the majority aiming for the interests of all. Only then can the world be rid of the capitalist offspring of poverty, hunger, oppression and war: we call it communism but this vision has nothing in common with Stalinist state capitalism and the old USSR.

In order to get there we are working to create a world working class political organization - a 'party' for want of a better word - not a government in waiting but a guide in the struggle for a new world. We by no means claim to be that party but we do aim to be one of the elements which will need to come together in its formation. As the working class, the majority of the world's population, is more and more faced with the consequences of a crumbling capitalist system, it will have to unite and overthrow the capitalist system and its bloody imperialist appetites."

The Internationalist Workers' Group is the US affiliate of the Internationalist Communist Tendency.

For more information about our organization and answers to frequently asked questions: https://www.leftcom.org/en/about-us

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