

Mutiny

Three Deadly Crises, One Cause Destroy Capitalism!

The war in Ukraine, the Covid-19 pandemic, devastation of the environment and climate disaster, all of these things are the product of capitalism. They are not 'natural disasters' but the outcome of the contradictions of a crumbling social system (mode of production) which has long lost its benefit to humanity. Unless capitalism is destroyed it will destroy us all. Never has the need to go beyond capitalism to a higher system of production been more urgent.

The Ukraine war

The war in Ukraine is the beginning of a new and more dangerous phase of imperialist confrontation. The battleground is moving to the rich capitalist heartlands and the United States, with its imperialist top dog position threatened by the rise of China, is using its economic and military might to control its allies (the EU) and weaken the potential of a China/Russia alliance. As in all wars today, the working class has nothing to gain on either side. Russian oligarchs or Ukrainian oligarchs, what difference does it make to those of us whose life is constricted by the necessity to work for a wage in a global economic crisis? Talk of "peoples' rights", "democracy", "the fight against Nazism", are grotesque propaganda to justify the very high cost of the war, that will be passed on to the millions of people who take part in it. The Ukrainian proletariat, the population under the bombs, are victims; so too are the conscripts, sons of the Russian proletariat sent to kill and be killed for the sake of "their" land. In strict economic terms too, it is always the working class who pays and will pay the costs of war. Not only in Ukraine, Russia, and Europe but also in wider regions of the world, workers are already being hit by wheat speculation and bread price rises.

The imperialist issues behind the Ukraine conflict are clear. By extending NATO to Russian borders and looking to integrate Ukraine and Georgia into the alliance, US imperialism is encircling Russia to the point of being able to park its missiles on Russia's doorstep. Further, the US has armed Ukraine and trained its army to the degree where it is able to retake the separatist Donbas region; a region which has strategic economic resources such as iron, coal and industry. The revamped Ukrainian army would also be able to threaten Crimea which contains Russia's main naval base on the Black Sea. Ukraine has more or less become a de facto member of NATO. Biden boasts that \$650 million in arms were supplied to Ukraine before the Russian invasion and now \$1.35 billion more has been promised. These threats pushed Russian imperialism to strike before Ukraine was integrated into NATO. As the ruler of a former "super-power", Putin is obsessed with making Russia great again. This, therefore, is more serious than wars in the Middle East or ex-Yugoslavia and has the potential of escalating to a global conflict in which, as Putin reminds

us, nuclear weapons could be used.

In the longer term both Russia and China aim to secure their own economic interests by overthrowing US global hegemony. Based on the international role of the dollar the US is able to impose savage economic sanctions against both countries. Russia's demand that its gas and oil exports now be paid for in roubles and its link of the rouble to gold are an attempt to strike back. This is economic war. For its part the US is determined to use military means to defend its global hegemony, regardless of the cost. Such a clash of interests inevitably leads to imperialist war.

Precursors of global war

On the one hand, the pressure of the war has forced the EU to fall in behind the US and to agree to rearm. On the other, the invasion and the economic sanctions imposed have thrown Russia into the arms of China. At the same time civilian suffering, the millions of desperate refugees and Russian atrocities are being claimed as the fruit of dictatorship. Meanwhile the atrocities being committed by the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion in the Donbas are quietly ignored in the same way as US war crimes in Iraq and elsewhere pass unmentioned. The message that western so-called democracy is worth defending against the dictatorships of Russia and China, and is worth dying for, is being trumpeted loud and clear. What we are seeing is both the beginnings of the alignment of states into blocs for a future global war and also the projection of the ideology for mobilisation of workers as cannon fodder in such a war.

However, the root cause of this war drive is capitalism's long-running economic crisis and the continuing inability of the capitalist class to solve it. To date, the system has not recovered from the 2008 financial system implosion. This crisis was, in turn, the result of a longer, deeper crisis caused by the tendency of the rate of profit to fall fueling financial speculation. This pumped up the values of property, financial assets and commodities causing the bubble which exploded in 2008. Despite the decade of austerity which was supposed to put things right, the system was on the cusp of another crisis when the Covid-19 pandemic struck. Once again the response of the capitalist class was to use the central banks to unleash a flood of monetary credit into the financial system. Again, almost none of this has gone into productive investment. Instead it has again been used for speculation, storing up the same problems which led to the collapse of 2008. While the pandemic has made the economic crisis significantly worse, it has also been used to camouflage the underlying problems and to persuade the working class that even more sacrifices are needed to get their lives back on an even keel.

In light of all this, two things in particular need to be emphasised. The first is that the economic crisis has

reached a point at which our leaders are running out of purely economic options to mitigate its effects. Instead they are prepared to openly resort to a major war in the heart of Europe to defend their economic interests – a war prepared moreover in broad daylight with no attempt to disguise it. War is thus the result of capitalism's contradictions. It is the legitimate child of capitalism. The second is that this war is also a war against the working class. The short term aim is to get us to accept further sacrifices. If wage cuts can be justified as necessary sacrifices for war then profitability can be increased. The longer term aim is to prepare us for world war, the ultimate solution to capitalism's problem of profitability, and to mobilise us as cannon fodder. Never since World War 2 has our response to capitalism's war plans, "No War but the Class War", been more vital. The struggle is class against class. We must not give our support to either side in this war. Neither Russia nor NATO!

We pay the price

The working class has been in retreat for decades, and has consequently been paying the costs of the crisis by having its living standards reduced while productivity rates are increased (though still not enough to offset falling profit rates due to the rising organic composition of capital). This has been the strategy of "our" rulers worldwide. Since the first phase of the crisis, which started in the early 1970s with the decoupling of the dollar to gold, our share of the value our labour produces has been dramatically reduced. In the G20 countries this share has, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), decreased from about 65% to 55%, a decrease of 15%. In the US, for example, the purchasing power of wages has been static since the early 1970s while labour productivity has increased by a factor of almost 3! It's a similar story in other countries. The Asian Development Bank calculates that for 115 countries, in the period from the mid-1970s to today, workers' share of the value they produce has fallen from 55% to 45%. The ILO also reports that 266 million workers globally are paid below the minimum wage in their countries. This represents 15% of all labour globally. There are, of course, millions of workers who suffer even worse conditions but don't appear in these figures because they are ignored by national statistics. Precarious working, zero hours contracts, "fire-and-rehire", significant inflation outpacing wage increases and unemployment all amount to a vicious attack on our living standards. The effects of the Ukraine war will make all this worse. Inflation, caused by massively increasing energy and food costs, will shoot up, and this will be significantly worse for low income countries.

From Resistance to Revolution

Collectively the working class has the

potential power to finish off the capitalist system itself before it destroys much of life on earth. Any effective fightback must start from the workplace. Despite the fact that capitalism has been restructured via globalisation and the exploitation of cheaper labour power wherever it can find it worldwide, there are signs that the passivity of the working class may be ending. We have seen strikes in the service industries in core capitalist countries, strikes and mass protests in South America and South Asia and strikes taking a communist direction in Iran. Also there have been reports of workers in various countries refusing to handle war materials destined for the Ukraine war. These struggles have, however, remained isolated and generally controlled by the trade unions which have a vested interest in maintaining the wages system. To be effective a fightback needs to generalise itself and be controlled by workers themselves via strike committees and mass assemblies. Above all, what is really necessary is that the working class in general takes up its own political cause, and links the struggles against the economic effects of the system to the system of capitalism itself and hence to the need to overthrow it. As Marx said, "*Revolution in general — the overthrow of the existing ruling power and the dissolution of existing social relationships — is a political act. Without revolution, socialism cannot develop.*" (1844)

A communist world

What we must create is a higher form of production aimed at satisfying human need, not profit. The means of production must become common property, production must be organised collectively by workers' councils. This will allow classes to be abolished and states and money to become unnecessary. The watchword of such a system will be:

"from each according to their ability, to each according to their need."

To achieve this we need to construct an international political organisation which fights for this and has a programme for achieving it. Such an organisation will serve as a guide and point a direction of march for future struggles. We stand in the tradition of the Communist Left, which early on fought nationalism and imperialism in defending revolutionary Marxism against capitalism whatever its form, even if presented in the guise of socialism. In the middle of the Second World War, our comrades of the PCInt (Internationalist Communist Party) called on workers, on both sides, "to desert the war", and fight for their own aims. Our aim today is to contribute to a new International, anchored in the working class of today, preparing for the struggles to come. We call on all those who can identify with this perspective to enter into contact and discussion with us.

Internationalist Communist Tendency

“If we can show them, we're capable of anything”: The 1972 Québec General Strike

The growing militancy of the North American working class demands a serious examination of past revolts against the domination of workers by the wage system and capital. Fifty years ago, the workers of Québec, placed in an impossible position on the eve of the global economic crisis of the 70s, found strength in unity and self-organization. The 1972 Québec General Strike went beyond prior labour struggles in both extent (over 300,000 workers directly participated) and character; the Québec workers acted in class independence to take strike action, held mass assemblies, and set the political agenda. Although the Québec working class was effectively demobilized by the “Common Front” union troika, the kernel was planted for workers today: the independence of the working class from capitalist organs such as unions and the state provides the basis for effective, generalized struggle against the capitalist class and its transformation into a revolutionary force.

Background to 1972

In 1972, Québec workers faced deteriorating working conditions. The labour market, wherein Québec faced 20% higher unemployment as compared to the Canadian average, depressed wages as a means of securing higher rates of profit. Industries that relied on the labour of women particularly benefited from the fact that, on average, men were paid 60% more than their female counterparts.

Furthermore, the national question, especially pertaining to language, stratified the working class by paying French-speaking workers less and typically consigning them to the lower ranks of the army of labour. Anglophones were almost double the pay of monolingual francophones. This was a primary basis for the national question in Québec, especially as formulated by the workers themselves rather than the French-speaking capitalist class, who would rather have themselves exploiting Québec labour than Anglo-Canadian or American companies.

The Road to General Strike

In the lead-up to the strike, the unions’ actions betrayed a high degree of militancy by the workers they claimed to represent, with spontaneous displays of class solidarity in late 1971. After an extended lockout at the newspaper, La Presse, and ensuing union protests, the city of Montréal banned demonstrations on October 29th. In spite of this, 15,000 workers arrived the next day, leading to a bloody street battle against the police and resulting in one death.

In response to both the anger of Québec workers and the direct state suppression of the workers’ movement, the three leading unions of Québec, the FTQ, CEQ, and CSN (officially representing 215,000 workers) united ahead of public-sector contract negotiations and formed the Common Front. The union alliance, increasingly radicalized, announced a series of demands, including an 8% raise (to counteract inflation), a \$100 per week minimum wage, and equal pay irrespective of language, sector, or sex.

April, 1972

The Common Front’s immense popularity and trust amongst the workers by early 1972 enabled their launch of the first phase of the 1972 General Strike after failed negotiations,

beginning on April 11th and ending on the 22nd of the same month.

The strike, mass in scale (involving 200,000 public-sector workers), posed a direct threat to the continuity of capital accumulation in the province. From hospitals and schools to the staff of Hydro-Québec, workers ceased labour “essential” for the reproduction of the economy. A response from the provincial and federal governments was inevitable.

Just as the state ensured capitalists access to “essential workers” during the pandemic by outlawing strikes of Montréal port workers and American meatpackers, the Québec government prohibited the continuation of the General Strike, attacking first (on the 19th) over one hundred healthcare workers with arrests and heavy fines.

Two days later, Bill 19 was passed by the provincial government, placing an injunction on the strike at-large. The Common Front union leaders, Pépin, Charbonneau, and Laberge, initially campaigned for the continuation of the strike in spite of the injunction and called for a referendum on the mandate. However, despite the fact that a majority (60%) voted in favour of continuing their struggle, the union bureaucracy, perceiving themselves as weak, turned face and demanded the strikers return to work. The resulting confusion and fragmentation led to an effective end of the first phase of the general strike by the 22nd.

The about-face of the union leaders did not go unnoticed by Québec workers. For example, the workers of Sept-Iles, a mining city of Côte-Nord, sent a delegation to Québec City to address the union leaders, criticizing the decision to call off the strike as well as their structure of decision-making; saying that the “people doing the striking need to be the ones setting the tone.”

May, 1972

From the 9th of May onwards, it was the workers themselves setting the tone, since the Common Front was unable to continue the struggle. On the 7th, Charbonneau, president of the CEQ, estimated that the strike may recommence six months. Furthermore, the imposition of 1-year sentences on Laberge, Pepin, and Charbonneau for initially campaigning to continue the strike left the union structure without any offensive strength. Being good democrats, the three went to Québec City on the 9th and handed themselves in.

In direct contrast to this display of civic virtue, the workers of Québec viewed the detentions as absolutely unacceptable and as the prelude to further suppression. As one worker put it in the ensuing struggle, “They can't do this. If we let them, they can put us all in jail, anyone of us.”

As the Common Front leaders were on the way to Québec, the workers’ offensive began at the ports of Montréal and Québec City, when 2,000 longshoremen set up pickets in reaction to the news. The workers’ ranks rose quickly to over 300,000; unionized or not, in the large cities (such as Montréal, Québec City, and Sherbrooke) but also small industrial towns such as St. Jerome or Sept-Iles throughout the province.

Although the unions federated newspapers, sent communiques, and opened buildings for discussion, the workers took the initiative throughout the course of the May strike in the form of mass assemblies, the creation of strike committees, and the publishing of local political journals and newspapers. May saw Québec workers equipping themselves with tools that enabled them to act at their own behest.

Indeed, the strike itself was able to generalize solely due to the workers’ self-initiative: it was word of mouth,

illegal radio broadcasts, and solidarity actions that were the basis for their strength. The strike was able to expand since the struggle was carried out by workers as workers, rather than as members of this or that union.

In the smaller towns, the workers displayed a strong capacity to lead and take practical action against capital. In Sept-Iles, workers from various industries formed a strike committee that took control of the radio station (broadcasting union and local bulletins), stopped local air traffic, and set price controls. Sept-Iles set the model for other industry towns, and radio stations were seized in 21 other communities to broadcast news of the strike.

A worker from St. Jerome brought to the light the extreme confidence and bravery workers across the province exhibited: “What's our complaint? I guess the answer is that we're tired of being pushed around, and now, finally, we're pushing back. If we can show them, we're capable of anything.”

The workers’ independence, initiative, and militancy gained in the course of development of the general strike as a whole conditioned their resistance to capital as a united class. In May, the Québec workers stood at the vanguard of North American workers’ self-organization. However, the end of the May phase of the strike shows that even this degree of class struggle was insufficient.

The immediate cause of the resumption of the strike, the imprisonment of the Common Front leaders and their immense popularity amongst the workers, was also to be the cause of its end, despite the workers’ de facto independence. On the 14th, the Common Front issued a call to return to work, in order to strengthen their hand in negotiations (!). With hindsight, it is clear that these unions were indebted to the state and could not move beyond it. The workers, however, demobilized, and the strike was over for most workers by the 16th of May.

The Common Front leaders were released on the 20th in order to enforce social peace. They struck a deal involving very limited gains. The \$100 weekly minimum wage was secured, but, across the board, workers received around 5% wage augmentations (as opposed to the 8% they demanded) and workers’ pay equality was not even discussed. That the workers did not rise up again at this juncture attests to the clout the unions retained even as the workers’ practice superseded them.

Understanding the 1972 General Strike

That the unions played an instrumental role in the defeat of the strike in both phases, countermanding the mandate of the majority of the striking workers and duping them into ending the strike against their interests, demonstrates the separation of the unions (even at their most combative and radical) over and against the working class.

Not only did the unions stifle working class initiative during critical moments of the strike, but the ultimate role of the Common Front was to mediate the class struggle and arrive at compromise when it was at its highest pitch. The union is only possible when there is a boss to bargain with, and as such they cannot move beyond the boss.

Albeit brief, the workers were able to establish a class terrain of their own through mass meetings and strike committees. Such self-organization provided workers not only experience, activity, and strength through numbers, but also opened up new avenues of tactics.

In contrast to the unions’ sporadic cowardice in the face of strike injunctions, the Québec workers in May did not conceive of their actions as legal or illegal, at least not in any significant sense. They sensed an emergency and carried out according to their will, through their independent organizations, the measures necessary to build and extend their movement and press their demands.

For example, in May, the workers blockaded three bridges and bombed twice the metro system’s electrical station in order to enforce the strike. This tactical character of working class terrain is of vital importance, since, in 1972 just as much as 2020, the state reserves all right to restore bourgeois “order” when the working class asserts itself.

The independence and immediacy of the Québec workers’ action and organization also contradicted the unions with respect to national liberation. For the latter, an independent Québec was an absolute precondition for the development of the class struggle into socialism. In practice, the workers repudiated this position since they organized as a class independent from any national forces. The task they set before themselves is that of all workers in capitalism- the confrontation against imperialism and national oppression at their roots, the seizure of power by the workers and fundamental transformation of the social-economic fabric, i.e. communism.

The Québec workers’ reliance on the union was not substantial- they had proven to themselves that they did not need it. Yet, they relented to the union at the end of either phase of the General Strike. If a small minority of workers continued to strike, they were neither organized nor influential enough to pose a viable alternative.

Today, if we are to avoid the pitfalls of 1972, we need an organization that understands the course of the class struggle as a whole and promotes the independence of the entire working class. Workers need to know before and during the course of the crisis that only they can liberate themselves. The spontaneous self-defence of the working class must be united with a working class political organ, which unites the workers’ movement internationally to assault the common enemy of capital.



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What Does Klasbatalo Fight For?

We fight for the political independence of the working class, which means we reject all cross-class alliances with the capitalist class, including its left-wing. We believe the working class must fight on its own terrain: first, to defend itself against the bosses’ attacks; and, second, to achieve its ultimate task, that of establishing the world communist future which will rid the planet of exploitation, oppression, and war. It is towards this goal that we fight for the creation of the world communist party, whose purpose is to clarify the confusions among the class and to unify it towards its ultimate end; we believe this party to be the most potent weapon of our class. While we are for the party, we do not believe ourselves to be the party, nor do we believe that our organization alone will become it; rather, we see it as the product of both the wider class struggle, and of the real work of revolutionaries, of which we see ourselves as only one of many elements. We do not see this party as a government-in-waiting, for the emancipation of humanity depends on the active struggle of the whole working class, and this struggle cannot be replaced by the dictates of a minority.

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