

Fight the right, smash the fascists

Building anti-racist resistance in the US today is imperative, write Iannis Delatolas and Clare Lemlich

The horrors of the Trump era seem to have no end. Family separations at the border, kids having to appear and defend themselves in front of judges, thousands of refugees and immigrants locked up in concentration camps in conditions not fit for human beings. Deaths due to malnutrition, lack of medication and medical care. Johana Medina Leon, a trans woman died last summer at an ICE detention center due to lack of healthcare. She was the second trans woman to die in ICE custody, but according to people on the ground, many others have gone unreported. Thousands of immigrant children say they have been sexually abused in detention centers.

Those detained are refugees escaping counties thrown into instability and violence due to US imperialism and intervention, such as Honduras under the watch of Obama and then Trump. Thousands are seeking refuge after escaping failing crops due to the lack of rainfall caused by climate change — the US being the world's largest contributor to this crisis.

Mainstream racism feeds the far right

Trump closing the border and his administration's barbaric reversal of the right to seek asylum virtually realizes the far right's agenda and comes close to dreams of neo-Nazis. It is well known that Trump has openly sided with the far right on several occasions. As the White House has given tacit support to the far right, we have seen an alarming rise in hate crimes and the number of hate groups in the US has reached over 1,020. All of this paves the way for the real fascists to gain more power. This is an extremely important and dangerous situation.

When Trump supporters chanted "build the wall" during the election, it was laying the groundwork for the fascists, who had, until recently, operated at the margins of the US political life. Trump has built on the racist, nationalist, and oppressive tenancies already present in US capitalism. He has horrifically increased the deadly and oppressive treatment of refugees and migrants to this country. But, despite his authoritarian tendencies, that does not mean that Trump himself is a fascist. We are not living under a fascist system. Still, the political climate he has created paves the way for a stronger fascist movement, but the

outcome of all this depends on how antiracists and antifascists and the left in general respond going forward.

Working class resistance

But we must not lose sight that the Trump era has also been characterized by fightbacks and resistance. Teachers' unions have won victories in one state after the other, including in "Trump country" and other traditionally "red states," galvanizing attention across the US. Now Chicago teachers are threatening to strike if their demands are not met.

We are also seeing this resistance in the ongoing United Auto Workers strike, which is part of the recent upsurge in workers' self-activity expanding into the private sector. In his campaign, Trump used nationalism and empty promises, tied especially to anti-Mexican racism, to win a razor-thin majority in the midwest, including winning votes from a minority of auto workers in those states. Now many are seeing through Trump's ruse.

Working people are black, brown, immigrant, and Muslim. The working class is diverse, which means it has a real and immediate

interest in fighting racism. Some working people certainly accept the racism created at the top by people like Trump, but this is counter to workers' actual interests. The rulers have a vested interest in trying to divide us — they will use racism, and even fascist street thugs, to divide us if we let them. They will attempt to destroy union and working class resistance.



United Against Racism and Fascism march in New York

Capitalism, labor and border control

The discussion around immigration, racism, and the spread of right wing ideas is often reduced to a question of ignorance or an irrational hatred toward foreigners. But it is important to understand the function of racism and borders within capitalism. Controlling migration serves an important ideological purpose: if working people accept these ideas, it binds us to our own ruling class — the very people who are defunding our schools, keeping our wages low, forcing us to pay spiraling healthcare premiums, and so on. Accepting anti-immigrant racism prevents us from extending solidarity to people overseas and makes it impossible to build international resistance to capitalism. Every working person in the US has more in common with the Mexican auto worker, the Chinese iPhone maker, and the Afghan refugee than with our own ruling class.

The ruling class is not opposed to immigration in general, but rather uses borders to shape and control the flow of labor into the US. Capitalism needs immigrants as a source of cheap labor and many employers rely on exploiting the vulnerability of undocumented workers. Agriculture and other sections of the economy — across the country, not just in the border states — would collapse without undocumented immigrants. From Manhattan restaurants to midwestern food processing to Oregon grape-picking to Florida construction industries rely on immigrant labor. Yet at the same time, Trump's ICE agents arrest, detain, and deport workers in an effort to instill fear and control immigrants.

Immigration controls are racist. The vast majority of people targeted by ICE are Latinx and Black. The Muslim Ban is an obvious recent example, but racism has been at the core of immigration control since before the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Racist border control is also a bipartisan issue, with Republicans and Democrats alike using different methods to exclude, detain, abuse, and deport.

The human cost of borders

Thousands of people trying to cross into the US have been dying in the desert long before Trump's wall. The legislation that sealed the border near places like San Diego and South Texas went into effect in 1995 under Bill Clinton. These were major crossing points near urban centers. "Operation Gatekeeper", "Operation Safeguard" and "Operation Hold The Line" were conscious policies where everyone involved in drafting these knew all too well that forcing immigrants to cross through the desert in remote places would cause thousands of deaths due to extreme heat and

dehydration. Today these kinds of "deterrence" policies are used all over the world. They do not stop people from crossing borders when they want or need to, they just make migration more dangerous. The number of deaths as a result in the US is unclear, but is estimated in the tens of thousands.

Similar horrors are created by the "Fortress Europe" strategies of the European Union and Frontex (The European Border and Coast Guard Agency), where immigrants are left to drown while crossing the Aegean and the Mediterranean. This year alone 1,071 migrants have drowned trying to cross the sea into Europe. In Australia the government uses inhumane detention camps in the Pacific to deter refugees from seeking asylum there. These kinds of closed borders, racist policies and nationalist scapegoating have played into the hands of the racist right and embolden fascists across the world. In Europe parties with fascist members and allies have won electoral victories over the last few years, but broad anti-racist and anti-fascist campaigns have beat them back in many places. This is a lesson for the US.

Despite the nightmare we are living through, we live in a country where the majority of people are anti-racists or can be won to anti-racist positions. In a recent poll 65% said they were against the family separations. Most people in the US are horrified by the concentration camps and the rise of fascism and the far right. This is reflected to varying degrees in demonstrations against Trump since his inauguration. When Trump imposed the Muslim Ban, in a show of tremendous solidarity, thousands of people went to the airports to protest and demand those detained by ICE officers be released. We saw the

possibilities for anti-racist, anti-fascist movements in the days after the murder of Heather Heyer in Charlottesville, when 50,000 took to the streets of Boston (and thousands in other cities) to say “no to hate,” while Trump tried to normalize the fascism by claiming that there were “bad people on both sides.”

We need a mass movement

The rise of Trump, racism and the far-right pose an ongoing threat to millions of people.

We need to strengthen all the movements against the horrors of our time, including against racist

policies and rhetoric coming from the top of society, as well as from the emboldened far right and fascist groups.

In Marx21 we believe that the fight against racism and fascism are deeply intertwined. Our members have been involved in efforts like United Against Racism and Fascism in New York. In Southern California our members work in immigrant rights coalitions, including the Coalition to Close the Concentration Camps, which is coordinating a national weekend of action in October. We will continue to strengthen this

coalition work and believe that more efforts like these are needed around the country.

We invite anyone who agrees with this perspective to join us and our partners to build united fronts against racism and fascism. A broad, coordinated national movement is capable of shutting down the concentration camps, abolishing ICE, drowning out racism, and stomping out the fascist threat.

Iannis Delatolas and Clare Lemlich

UAW strikes at General Motors

“Despite news of an impending deal, the 50,000-strong GM strike may continue for a while. Although a hardship, this may be good news for the workers,” writes Eric Fred

Latest negotiations

A letter from UAW Vice President Terry Dittes to members on Wednesday stated “all unsettled proposals are now at the Main Table and have been presented to General Motors,” which indicated subcommittee work was concluded and talks had entered final phase. But no details on these ‘proposals’ were given. Then late on Thursday UAW spokesperson Brian Rothenberg told the press “on the major issues, we still have work to do.” Unfortunately, so far workers have had to rely on press reports, as both GM and the union are keeping a lid on negotiations. But on Thursday two people familiar with the talks anonymously told the Detroit Free Press that the UAW and GM are far apart on several key issues, and it could be a week or more before a tentative agreement is reached to submit to the membership. UAW

leadership has instructed regional directors to meet with the leaders of union locals over the next few days to finally brief them on the talks.

The strikers, out since Monday September 16, have closed 55 GM sites around the country and the strike is costing the company an estimated \$100 million a day.



UAW members in Arlington, TX

The strikers’ demands include pay, health care, and job security. But the biggest sticking points seem to

be issues around the hated two-tier wage and benefit system, and demands for ‘a defined path to permanent seniority’ for temporary workers. The status of temporary workers was the top request among union members when surveyed by leadership last year.

Fighting to reverse givebacks

In 2007, with GM pleading hardship, auto workers were made to accept a whole series of givebacks, from a 4-year wage freeze to the ending of cost of living wage increases. Their pensions were turned into 401k, thereby relying on the volatility of the stock market. Most damaging was the introduction of a two-tier system and the use of temporary workers to fill in for absences, instead of the old practice of having permanent full time union members on call.

This meant that temps, though themselves union members, and often working side by side with permanent workers, were now receiving half the pay and far fewer benefits. A full 7-10% of the GM workforce in any given year were employed as temps — about 4,100 workers in 2018 alone. Ford and Fiat/Chrysler also show similar numbers.

Even the permanent workforce was divided into two-tiers. After 2007 a newly hired worker, called ‘in progression,’ made about \$17 an hour, with the possibility of going up to \$28 an hour after eight years. On the other hand, a ‘legacy worker’ hired before that could earn between \$28 and \$33 an hour.

These conditions were made even worse by the practice of ‘whipsawing.’ Auto plants, with the cooperation of their union locals, were forced to bid to become the site of new production — in effect, pitting one plant against the other in a race to the bottom. For instance, Orion Assembly in Michigan (which produces the electric Chevy Bolt and other new vehicles) operates under a ‘Competitive Operating Agreement’ that allows a 60-40 split, 60% traditional workers making about \$30 an hour and 40% workers making about half that.

It is no wonder then that GM has seen record profits since 2015, including \$10.8 billion in 2018 and \$11.9 billion in 2017. In 2017, GM’s CEO was handsomely rewarded with close to \$22 million in compensation. Yet the sacrifices GM workers made over a decade ago have not been reversed, and new hired and temp workers are still making significantly less than colleagues doing the same job.

It is therefore a tribute to the solidarity of the GM workers to see how united they have stood so far, in spite of the way management tried to sow divisions among them. The consequences of the 2007 concessions are now obvious to everyone, and the solid strike is particularly fueled by the desire of workers’ in all the different grades to do away with the separate tiers.

GM losing \$100 million a day GM, with Wall Street analysts looking over their shoulder, is hell bent to maintain this exploitation and profit margin, and is even looking to increase the percentage of lower paid temps. But they are being dragged to the negotiating table by this solid strike costing the company an estimated \$100 million worth of lost production a day, or \$25 million a day in profits.

Despite the backlog of inventory at dealerships GM built up before the strike, some of the popular models are running low. Auto analyst Joe Langley estimated the corporation could lose about 70,000 vehicles in a two-week strike. Overall, union workers have shut down 33 manufacturing plants in nine states and 22 parts distribution warehouses.

‘Just in time’ delivery, a style of small-batch manufacturing developed by Toyota in the 1970s, creates another weak link in service departments and repair shops. With the closure of GM parts distribution warehouses, car owners needing collision and recall repairs may find the needed parts are not available. One analysis of search data also found consumer interest in GM has cooled since news of the strike.

Strikers must be ready to vote no

These pressures are forcing GM to the table, and the strike is holding solid despite the union entering

into the strike without an adequate pre-strike contract campaign or communication of demands.

If a deal is reached, the union will take the agreement to the GM-UAW council, which includes local union officials, and then bring it to members for a vote. This sometimes takes up to two weeks. But UAW sources have indicated that they may keep strikers out until the deal is either ratified or rejected, in which case the process would be expedited.

Many workers on the picket lines have been vocal in wanting all workers on the same job to be on the same pay scale. Marvin at the GM parts distribution center in Rancho Cucamonga, California told Marx21 “everybody should be paid the same; we all do the same work, no reason for newer workers to be treated unequally. We want job security.”

A new contract should bring part-time and full-time temps, and workers in subsystems and contracted out services done in GM plants, into full status. A deal that grants a raise and retained health benefits, but leaves sections of the workforce out to dry should be turned down by the members — no matter how the union leadership tried to spin it. Four years ago Fiat/Chrysler workers sent negotiators back to the table and won improvements in this issue after rejecting the initial deal, setting a precedent that rank and file auto workers don’t need to accept bad deals and can demand their representatives go back to the table for more concessions from the bosses.

Paradoxically, the fact that some in the union leadership had recently been indicted on corruption charges, and prosecutors have openly alleged that a convicted ex-Fiat Chrysler vice president was bribing UAW leaders in order to influence the bargaining process,

might strengthen the union's negotiating stance now.



United Electrical joins a picket in CA

As Sean Crawford, auto worker at GM's Flint assembly plant told *Labor Notes* before the strike began, "I think we can win something... the UAW could be looking to get back concessions to show they're not as corrupt as the membership currently suspects." As Marick Masters, director of labor at Wayne State University, told the *Detroit Free Press*, now any "tentative agreement they negotiate will have to be good enough to sell itself... The (UAW) leadership will not be able to sell an agreement that the membership will ratify, because they will not have confidence in the leaders." In fact, workers can never assume that deals offered from secret negotiations were the best that could have been reached. Not all union leaders are corrupt, but all live in a strata removed from the workers, get accustomed to negotiating with bosses, and are not subject to the conditions of the shop floor. Their interests are not the same as the workers or the bosses, which means they can be pushed either way, within limits. "The workers are going to stick up for each other and will stick up for the autoworkers as a union," added Masters, "They're smart enough to separate the current leaders from

the union and its role in helping them."

Solidarity on the picket and beyond

Picket lines have been determined, with striking workers on a roster joined by others showing support. Marvin reported "we've been getting a lot of solidarity," citing National Nurses United and UAW locals at Ford and Chrysler on picket lines and Teamsters stopping deliveries. There are many stories around the country like that of the free pizza delivered to the picket line by Marco's Pizzeria in Wentzville, Missouri. They are now ordering extra dough to do so again, should the strike continue. One of the owners comes from a family of union printers, and a young worker there is the son of a striking GM worker. In Flint, Michigan a barber is offering weekly free haircuts on the picket lines for as long as the strike goes on.

UAW Local 163's union hall, half an hour from downtown Detroit, is filled with food and products donated by the community for strikers feeling the pinch. The local Shell gas station has delivered pizza, doughnuts, and ice. IBEW Local 17 in Southfield donated slabs of ribs and other meats to feed the strikers. UAW members working for non-GM firms (like Local 600 of Ford's Rouge plant) have been walking the picket lines every day. There, and at sites across the country, retired workers are showing up to walk the picket lines. Significantly too, the Teamsters union has pledged to honor picket lines, and is not delivering new vehicles to showrooms.

Unfortunately, at GM's request, a court in Tennessee has granted a temporary restraining order to prevent UAW members picketing outside its Spring Hill Assembly

plant from blocking the entrance, among other alleged 'unlawful conduct.' 11 strikers were arrested last week.

In Silao, Mexico, five GM workers were fired for refusing to work overtime — in support of the US strikers. Silao auto-worker Carlos Marquez told his US counterparts, "We are organizing to collaborate for the success of your efforts by not permitting overtime work at General Motors Mexico — because this hurts your movement and benefits your bosses who are the same as ours. Your struggle and problems are those of every GM worker in every part of the world." Some of the fired workers are demanding their jobs back — a demand the UAW should take up. Along with the workers in Silao, others at plants in Brazil, Canada, and South Korea have sent messages of solidarity to striking GM workers here. In South Korea, in the first full strike against GM since they acquired Daewoo Motors in 2002, a series of 6 hour walk outs is continuing. Wages, job security, and the treatment of "precarious" [temp] workers are issues there as well. No GM plants have been run by scabs during either strike.

A victory for GM workers is a victory for all

If you are in a union, take a regular collection among your workmates, propose that the union make a donation from its own budget, see if your union can pass a resolution or share a statement supporting the GM workers or take a solidarity photo to send them, and try to organize a contingent to visit to a local picket line together with union members from your workplace. *Labor Notes* has posted a list of GM picket lines by state here.

Even if you don't have much union experience or aren't a union member, the UAW has called for a 'Solidarity Sunday' each week, where many supporters from the public join the picket lines. Show support by bringing snacks, find out if there are specific things you can do to support your local picket, ask what their demands are, discuss how they are building the strike, and share lessons from

previous strikes. Such visits can help build confidence, solidify ideas and strategy, and encourage self-organization at the rank and file level.

The UAW will use the final contract agreed at GM as a template for talks with the other two US car makers, meaning that this fight impacts auto workers

everywhere. Raising the conditions of the part time workers at GM will be an inspiration to low-paid part time workers throughout the country, including the so-called 'gig economy.' And the example of solidarity will be a victory for us all.

Eric Fred

Interview with a GM striker

On Monday September 23 as the GM strike entered its second week, Marx21 members Kyle Chun and Wonil Kim went to visit the picket line at a GM parts distribution center employing 60 workers in Rancho Cucamonga, California. The picket was held by five workers of all ages who were in high spirits and determined to stay out until their demands are met. We spoke with Marvin, a GM worker and UAW veteran of 35 years about the strike's progress.

KC: So how is bargaining going?

Marvin: Bargaining is going very slow. The union's bargaining in good faith, but the company keeps making low-ball offers, offers that are frankly embarrassing. They insist on a 2% wage growth that doesn't even keep up with inflation, whereas we used to get at least 3% on previous contracts. They offered to rehire workers at the Lordstown, Ohio plant at \$17.50 an hour. Those folks used to be paid \$24-28 an hour. That's just insulting. Aside from dangling a \$8,000 signing bonus, they aren't budging on any of our key demands. I think this is turning into a long-term battle, much as I'd like it to be otherwise.

KC: What would you say a new contract should include at the minimum?

Marvin: We just want a fair deal for everyone. GM's made \$35 billion in profits since the end of the recession. We shouldn't have to

pay for our healthcare. We want a fair pension for retirees. Everybody should be paid the same: we all do the same work, no reason for newer workers to be treated unequally. We want job security. We are going to stay out here until those demands are met.

KC: Are people ready for a long-term strike? Is the strike holding strong?

Marvin: Yes. We old-timers are in it for the long haul. The longest strike I've seen lasted 67 days — that was in 1970 [*which ended in victory for UAW – KC*]. This is probably going to be the last contract for me, but I'm also doing it for the young ones. The younger workers used to take the benefits we get for granted. Now they are getting a life lesson on the importance of the union. Because nothing has ever been won without the union fighting for it. See how the company dropped them off healthcare just like that? That's how much the company actually

values its employees. The millennials are learning to fight for their rights. I call it on-the-job training. And they are standing strong.

KC: What about all the other plants across the country? Do you stay in touch with them?

Marvin: Yes we do. They are all solidly out.

KC: GM's made the unusual move of dropping strikers from their healthcare coverage. How's that affecting people?

Marvin: It's not unusual for them to cut off healthcare during a strike. What's unusual is that this time, they did it right from the start instead of waiting until the end of the month covered by the expiring contract. UAW has stepped in to provide coverage for about 90% of members. But that still doesn't include dental and vision.

KC: What else do you think GM might do? Are you concerned they'll try to send in replacement workers?

Marvin: Not for now. Managers are trying to do our work, without much success. There are about 50 to 60 trailers idling in there, still waiting to be loaded. GM's got to pay each trucker \$500 per day for each day they have to wait in excess of 3 days.



Bernie Sanders at GM picket in Detroit, MI

WK: Is the union making community outreach efforts? What kind of solidarity are you getting?

Marvin: Oh, we've been getting a lot of solidarity. The National Nurses United is helping to picket the distribution center at Fontana, the UAW locals at Ford and

Chrysler are also offering support, even Joe Biden and Elizabeth Warren walked our picket lines out there in the East... The truckers we are blocking and even the police are sympathetic to some extent. The public mood has definitely changed from the last time we were on strike. *[As if to underscore the point, virtually every truck passing by the picketed gate honked in support, as well as a good many motorists – KC]*

KC: How would you compare this strike to the one in 2007?

Marvin: Well we've already lasted longer, didn't we? One difference is that the union's tactics are less aggressive this time. We're not throwing drivers off their trucks when they cross our pickets. Instead we block them for just 20 minutes, because if we hold them up any longer that's against the law. We are playing it real nice and gentle.

KC: Do you think maybe you would get more aggressive going forward?

Marvin: I'll tell you when things will get really aggressive: it's if come next week, people don't see their September paycheck in the mail. That's when people are going to get really mad.

WK: How do you feel about the way your fight is being portrayed in the media?

Marvin: Some are saying we get overpaid, at \$60 an hour. That's not true. You can only get that figure if you include healthcare and other benefits, plus seniority. And healthcare is a real necessity. The jobs we do, building a car every 52 seconds, breakdown our bodies, and injuries like carpal tunnel syndrome build up over time. I'm lucky to have lasted 35 years on the job, but most can barely last 30 years.



Joe Biden addresses strikers in Kansas City

KC: Thank you so much for your time

Kyle Chun and Wonil Kim

Students and workers strike for climate action

While the clean-up from Hurricane Dorian's devastation is still underway in the Bahamas, world leaders are set to meet in New York during the last week of September to discuss plans for meeting climate goals. Fed up with

their inability to solve the world's climate crisis, students and workers across the globe are hitting back with school walk-outs and strikes.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres is calling upon leaders to come with "concrete, realistic plans to enhance their nationally determined contributions by 2020, in line with reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 45 per cent over

the next decade, and to net zero emissions by 2050.”

The “Climate Action Summit” is meeting in the context of near total failure of countries to live up to their climate commitments. The earth’s nations have failed to live up to the objectives they set for themselves in Paris in 2015. Carbon-dioxide emissions continue to rise, and investment into renewables has stagnated over the past few years.

This failure to make headway on the issue is in contradiction with the increasingly dire assessments climate scientists have shared over the past year. Last October the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change published a report which estimated that in order to keep warming under 1.5 degrees Celsius — a threshold beyond which lies unthinkable consequences to human and nonhuman life — the world must reduce its carbon emissions by 45% percent by 2030. This past May the UN Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services published a report compiling data from 15,000 scientific and government sources and found that at least a million species are currently threatened with extinction due to human activity. Negative human impact can be felt in 75% of terrestrial and 66% of aquatic ecosystems.

Grassroots movements show the way forward

Faced with governments and an economic system which are unwilling or unable to make policy that matches our dire reality, social movements have taken to the streets to demand meaningful change. The Climate Action Summit has become a focal point for this activism, with

environmental groups planning actions throughout the week.

The summit is bookended by two strikes, one on September 20th, three days before the summit, and the other on the 27th. The strike on the 20th has grown out of Fridays for Future, the movement of student strikes which has swept the world since last August. This movement was founded by Swedish sixteen-year-old Greta Thunberg, who began skipping school last year to protest government inaction on climate change. Greta’s trip across the Atlantic by boat and her arrival in New York has been the object of media attention over the past few weeks.

The September 20th strike is a broad united front around the issue of climate, with a variety of organizations involved in the actions including Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, People’s Climate Movement, and 350.org. United Against Racism and Fascism, the campaign against the threat of encroaching fascism in New York, has sponsored and will be marching with the Brazilian anti-Bolsonaro contingent, drawing connections between these two evils. Building a strong anti-racist movement now is a crucial part of tackling climate

change, since we can expect more refugees coming to the US as extreme weather forces people from their homes.

This movement is led largely by students and young people, but major labor organizations are backing the actions. The Trade Union Conference of Britain, which represents all the major unions in the country has voted unanimously to support this action with a 30-minute work stoppage, drawing attention to workers non-compliance with current climate policy. Workers at Amazon in Seattle have also announced an act of solidarity, saying they will walk out at 11:30 on September 20th in protest of what they see as their companies inaction in the context of their climate impact. Hundreds of maritime workers in Australia will strike alongside students on the day.

Coming after the close of the Climate Action Summit is the international organization Earth Strike’s call for an international strike on Friday September 27th. Earth Strike’s demands include cutting carbon emissions by 50% by 2030 and achieving net zero by 2050, international and binding commitments to halt the destruction of rainforests and other wildlife habitats, and to hold corporations accountable for the greenhouse gases they produce.

Earth Strike articulates that until “the world’s governments and businesses are held accountable to the people, we are refusing to participate in the system that fills their pockets.”

While the organization does not have any illusions about achieving a full general strike on their first attempt, they intend to use the September 27th action as a springboard, raising awareness of their movement and building



workers' confidence, eventually making larger actions possible.



Student strikers in New York

Student and worker power

These strikes mark a desperately needed turning point for the environment movement. Rather than focusing on eco-conscious consumer choices, the strikes are raising the general understanding in society about who is responsible for carbon emissions. A group of 100 companies are responsible for producing and selling almost three quarters of the world's fossil fuels. It is industry and outsized consumption by the 1% that is most responsible for climate

change, not regular people eating meat or forced to drive cars to work through lack of public transport.

Coming together to strike back against the climate catastrophe is a strategic way to use our collective power as students and workers. The growing pressure for some kind of Green New Deal — a jobs program which would mobilize large sections of the economy toward building a more environmentally sustainable society — can feed into this movement. SEIU 1199 will have a contingent on the September 20th climate demonstration in New York. The fact that major unions around the world are backing the strike illustrates the possibilities for a climate movement that can win the things we need: 100% renewable energy and a future on this planet.

As we go to publication, the 50,000 United Auto Workers at

General Motors just began a strike over pay and conditions. If their struggle in the auto industry could be linked up with the student climate strike, it would be a huge step forward for the movement. Workers in carbon-intensive industries have the power to shut production down and demand well-paid, secure, and unionized jobs in a green economy, where major industries are nationalized rather than held in private hands. These were some of the demands from Belfast shipyard workers last month.

Other strategies may provide small improvements to our civilization's relation to nature, but only an approach in which workers exercise their power to build a society which values people and nature over profit has the power to build a world which could justifiably be called sustainable.

Thomas Hummel

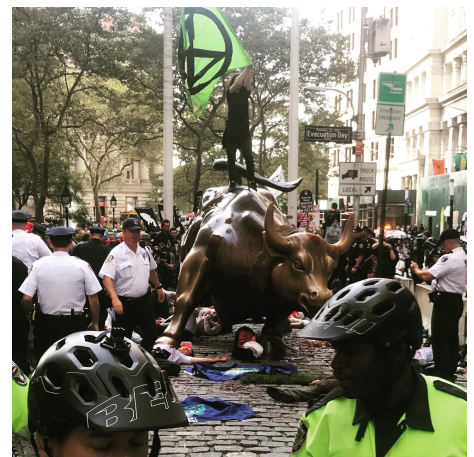
A view from inside the Extinction Rebellion

Thomas Hummel reports from on the ground at the Extinction Rebellion in New York. All images are his own.

October 7 marked the beginning of the "Extinction Rebellion's" week of revolt. Activists around the world put their bodies on the line to draw attention to government inaction and capitalism's culpability in the ongoing climate crisis. The movement has arisen in response to mounting evidence, especially over the past year, that the depth and timetable of the crisis is much worse than originally thought. The escalation of tactics comes as a reaction to a

global system which is not only failing to dig ourselves out of the hole our rulers have dug us into, but in fact continues to still dig us deeper.

The global rebellion hit 60 cities worldwide, with over 700 participants arrested on the first day. In New York City, where I took part in the events, Extinction Rebellion activists first met at Battery Park at the southern tip of the island. Hundreds of people



converged, carrying signs with the names of murdered environmental activists and holding cut-out tombstones with pictures of animals approaching their extinction. Activists dressed as skeletons danced to a slow beat played on a snare drum. People dressed in funeral attire and carried black coffins painted with white letters reading “Our Future.”



As the march moved north, the first two stops for direct action made a clear connection between the environmental crisis and capitalism. First, the Wall Street Bull — as clear a symbol of American capitalism as can be — was covered in fake blood while activists covered in the same fake blood staged a “die-in” beneath the bull. A woman climbed atop the bull and waved the flag of the

movement. Marching further north, activists staged another die-in outside of the stock exchange. According to Noah, a protestor still covered in fake blood that I spoke to after this action, the group chose this spot to draw attention to the fact that “capital is guilty in the climate crisis.” The group then moved on and blocked the intersection of Pine Street and Broadway Avenue, with roughly 50 members of the group lying down in front of a double decker tourist bus, clogging up traffic for the better part of an hour.

The saturation of books, articles, and media about the deadly and immediate impacts of the climate crisis can produce a certain amount of emotional numbness. Most people are aware of the stakes we face, but we rarely feel that we can do anything about it. On Monday, as I stood atop a fire hydrant on Broadway, shouting at the top of my lungs and watching friends and comrades being dragged away by the police, I was overcome with the feeling that a better world is possible. That this movement filled me with this feeling is a testament to its power.

The Extinction Rebellion is helping channel the immense amount of spontaneous anger most people feel about the environmental crisis we are facing.

We must do everything we can to develop our understanding of capitalism’s relationship to nature, to strengthen our strategies, refine our targets, and build a mass movement so that we can realize the better world that Extinction Rebellion is proving is possible through its actions.

Thomas Hummel



Marx21 is a network of revolutionary socialists across the United States. We stand in the tradition of socialism from below: the idea that workers can only emancipate ourselves through our own struggles. Marx21 is connected with other like-minded socialist groups around the world in the International Socialist Tendency. Visit our website to learn more and get involved.

