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By Workers World Party
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Lessons from Lenin for International Workers Day

International Workers Day, also known as May Day, reminds us of an anecdote about the 1917 Russian Revolution regarding the working class.



At the time, the Bolshevik Party, trained and led by V.I. Lenin was in the process of seizing power. An anti-Bolshevik intellectual was arguing with a Bolshevik worker and bringing up all the complexities of running a government and of deserting Russia's allies in the great slaughter of World War I. "I see it this way," said the Bolshevik worker. "The bosses are on one side. We're on the other side. If we don't take power, they will."

The worker was right.

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Bosses, that is capitalists, are on one side. Workers are on the other side. When one side wins, the other loses. Lenin taught his party that lesson. Remember that on this upcoming day for the working class.

The capitalists and their paid propagandists insist that the working class doesn't count, won't lead revolutions and certainly can't run society. Those who possess wealth pay people to teach these lies, even as the capitalists run society into the chaos of economic meltdown, climate crisis, pandemic and war.

So who is the working class? Those who show up at a factory or a mine or a power plant and produce the goods or power, which the owner sells at a profit, are workers. Those who drive a train or a bus, or maintain it, or deliver mail or health care or education or entertainment or coffee are workers.

Those who survive only by selling their labor are workers, even in gig industries where it's hard to name your boss. But it doesn't end there. Sex workers, incarcerated workers and people with disabilities are in the working class, as are those who raise children or care for relatives without pay. Post globalization, the majority of the world's population are in the working class, including retired workers.

Right now in France, the bosses are trying to take away years of the workers' retirement pay. The workers, with most of the people supporting them, are fighting back. And they plan to make International Workers Day a day of class struggle.

Lenin, mentioned before, promoted the internationalism of the working class. All the world's capitalists want to see the French government crush this rebellion. And all workers in the world gain if the rebellion succeeds. The working class is international.

Unite all the struggles!

Then there is the question of war.

The U.S.-based capitalist class runs the country, controls the army, police, courts and propaganda machine. This class is waging a proxy war, using NATO, in Ukraine against Russia. This class threatens war with China over Taiwan. This ruling class, the enemy of

all workers, is waging economic war through sanctions against any countries and nations that demand sovereignty and independence.

As Lenin said before and during the great slaughter of World War I: “The enemy is at home.” Nowhere is that more significant than in the U.S. itself.

International Workers Day must be a day of combatting U.S. and NATO aggression. The enemy of workers in the U.S. is the U.S. ruling class.

Then there is the question of uniting the struggles at home.

There have been hints of an upsurge in working-class organizing the past few years. Strikes at hospitals and schools, including graduate students in universities, a near strike of freight train workers that the federal government repressed and drives to unionize the mass multinational, multigendered and mainly young workers at Amazon warehouses and Starbucks coffee houses.

Meanwhile all workers, even in the U.S. and Europe and Japan, have been hurt by inflation and frozen wages, while whatever social gains won from 1945-90 are being whittled down by globalization and an attack from the imperialist ruling class. It's beyond time to unite their struggles.

In the U.S., the defense of those targeted, especially young Black and Brown people like Ralph Yarl in Missouri, with racist attacks by white supremacists and the police — that's a working-class struggle. The fight to restore the right and access to abortion — that's a working-class struggle. The battle for decent housing, that's a working-class struggle. The defense of trans peoples' rights, under attack by bigots — that's a working-class struggle.

International Workers Day reminds the working class of all that. And Lenin reminds us that each battle must be taken as far as it can go.

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