

United States Workers Strike and Leave Jobs in the Millions in Response to the Economic Crisis

Despite the claim of a labor shortage and financial distress, labor is demanding greater returns as toilers

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Workers in the United States are reaching a boiling point with their bosses due to the impact of the pandemic and the failure of the government to provide adequate assistance to the majority proletarian population.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began during the early months of 2020, over 20 million people lost their jobs as factories, schools, public sector institutions and service-oriented businesses closed across the country.

Reports indicate that in excess of 200,000 small and medium-sized enterprises were forced to end operations permanently. People out of work with youth at home had to seek online education programs for students which in many cases were not feasible as a result of the lack of available internet connectivity and teachers.

Ruling class propaganda for several months has attacked the pandemic relief measures provided to working people. Employers accused the government of paying people not to work and as a result many firms were closing because they could not find workers.

Yet no consideration was given in these arguments to the social impact of hundreds of thousands of deaths from the coronavirus along with the millions sickened and suffering long term medical consequences. Healthcare insurance for workers in the U.S. are largely determined by employment and possible retirement benefits. In addition, with the astronomical costs of childcare coupled with the dislocation in K-12 educational systems, millions of working families have been incapable of resuming the same activities engaged in prior to March 2020.

Therefore, it is not surprising that organized labor is demanding a far greater return on their work. They want recognition of the economic and social crises gripping the U.S. while numerous multinational corporations have increased their profit margins since the advent of

the pandemic. Extended and enhanced unemployment payments have been discontinued by the federal government. Although there were rumors and news reports of a possible fourth stimulus check, it appears that another round of assistance to working and poor households will not be forthcoming.



Bloomberg, an important journal reporting on the interests and concerns of Wall Street, has keenly observed the shifting mood among the working class. The news outlet covers trends within business as well as labor serving as a barometer for the ruling class in their assessments related to policy development and advocacy.

In an article published on October 27, [Bloomberg stresses that](#):

“American workers—the ones involuntarily benched during the pandemic and the ones who labored through it at great risk so others could stay fed or entertained or alive—are now doing their best to be impossible to ignore. Private-sector union members are authorizing strikes at a rate rarely seen in modern America, with more than 100,000 workers recently threatening or mounting work stoppages in health care, higher education, telecommunications, transportation, television, mining, manufacturing, music, metals, oil, carpentry, whiskey, and cereal. The internet dubbed October #Striketober.”

More than 10,000 John Deere workers went out on strike October 21 representing the largest industrial action in the agricultural machinery sector in over three decades. Kellogg’s corporation was struck by thousands of workers who have remained off the job for several weeks. Nabisco workers recently ended a three-week walkout.

There was a last-minute tentative deal on October 23 which averted a strike among 60,000 film and television workers. These threatened and actual strike activities reflect a heightened level of class consciousness among the working class. A Gallup poll conducted in September indicated that U.S. support for unionization reached its highest level since 1965, as 68% of workers stated they approved of labor unions.

In regard to unorganized workers, they too have been expressing dissatisfaction with the terms of their employment. This same Bloomberg report notes: “Nonunion workers are voting with their feet as well, fueling a labor market reckoning that’s become known as the Great Resignation. On Oct. 12 the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that an unprecedented 2.9% of the entire workforce, some 4.3 million people, quit their jobs in the month of August, even as the government was confirming it would nuke extra jobless benefits in hopes of forcing people to work.”

Strikes Could Have Long Term Implications for the Health and Welfare of the Working Class

As the world system becomes more integrated and interdependent, disruptions to production and supply chains in one geo-political region has a profound effect on the entire globe. During the early phase of the coronavirus pandemic in the U.S., there were acute shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) since a considerable amount of the manufacturing of these commodities was done in the People’s Republic of China.

Although the former administration of President Donald Trump routinely condemned China and imposed tariffs on imports, the U.S. government, corporate retail outlets and private medical systems were forced to purchase PPE and other products from Beijing. Various consumer goods including household items and food began to fly off the shelves after March 2020 creating scarcity for millions.

The lack of income partially due to the bureaucratic delays in processing jobless benefits for tens of millions of workers beginning in the first quarter of 2020 resulted in significant food deficits. Thousands showed up at distribution centers across the U.S. to obtain donated food in desperate attempts to avoid severe malnutrition and hunger. Significant percentages of households reported not having enough food to meet their daily and weekly needs.

A report by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) indicates that the burgeoning problem of food deficits eased after the CARES Act was implemented under Trump in 2020 and the American Rescue Plan (ARP) enacted in the first few months of the administration of current President Joe Biden during 2021. However, since the discontinuation of most of the benefits for working adults, only the child tax credit payments to families have served to provide relief to struggling households.

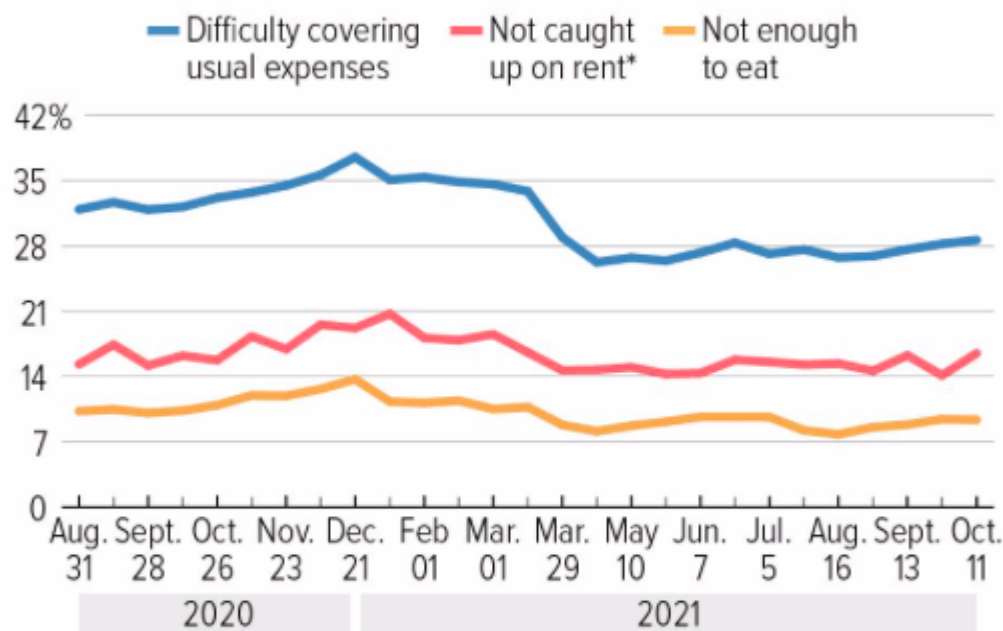
A [CBPP post](#) on its website under a research category called “COVID Hardship Watch” entitled: “Tracking the COVID-19 Economy’s Effects on Food, Housing, and Employment Hardships” says:

“Black and Latino adults were more than twice as likely as white adults to report that their household did not get enough to eat. 17 percent for Black adults and 16 percent for Latino adults, compared to 6 percent of white adults. Adults who identify as American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or as multiracial, taken together, were more than three times as likely than white adults to report that their household did not get enough to eat, at 19 percent.”

Finally, the emerging problems of the inability to pay mortgages and rents threatened to make millions more working people homeless. After many of the state moratoriums on evictions expired in late summer 2020, Trump allowed the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to impose a halt to ejecting people from their homes because it poses an extreme threat to public health, which could only prolong the pandemic.

Hardship Is Below December 2020 Peak, Yet Still Widespread

Share of adults



*Percent of adults in renter households.

Note: Dates shown are the last day of each 13-day data collection period. Data collection was paused between December 21, 2020 and January 6, 2021, between March 29 and April 14, 2021, and between July 5 and July 21, 2021. Percentages exclude individuals who did not respond to the question.

Source: CBPP analysis of Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey tables

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Associations representing property owners filed suit in federal court claiming that the moratorium on evictions went beyond the authority of the CDC. In late August, the U.S. Supreme Court sided with the landlords and in their ruling said that Congress would have to pass legislation to make the CDC orders lawful. Subsequently, the House of Representatives and the Senate have failed to act, placing the burden on local housing advocacy organizations to apply political pressure on municipalities and district courts to prevent evictions. Under the ARP, \$46 billion in rental assistance has been allocated. However, local governments and agencies do not have the necessary infrastructure in place to distribute the funds to working families who are delinquent in rent and utility payments. This, therefore, makes the case for the declaration of moratoriums on evictions by local and state governments along with the courts, until the COVID Emergency Relief Assistance funds (CERA) are exhausted.

The same CBPP research report emphasizes:

“The number of adult renters reporting to the Census Bureau that their household was not caught up on rent has fallen from a peak of 15 million people — 1 in 5 adult renters — in January 2021 but has remained above 10 million people — about 1 in 7 adult renters — since the end of March. These households, particularly those who have lost employment during the pandemic, may be accumulating debt from multiple months of back rent and late fees. Renters of color and families with children have consistently reported higher rates of rent hardship throughout 2020 and 2021.”

Consequently, the wave of strikes and mass resignations provides a ray of hope for the working class and oppressed peoples in the U.S. Under the present conditions of economic and social hardships, workers are rejecting the stagnation in wages, speed ups, forced overtime, the absence of adequate job benefits and the lack of employment security.

A political response is now needed to bring together the active workers, jobless and temporary employees to form organizations based upon their own economic interests. These mass groupings would be in a position to demand permanent guarantees related to jobs, incomes, housing, utility services, healthcare, education, public transportation and the other necessities of modern society.

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