

Class War World-Wide

MHB

2021

a review of

Workers' Inquiry and Global Class Struggle: Strategies, Tactics, Objectives, Robert Ovetz, Editor. Pluto Press 2020

"There's not a Hand in this town, Sir, man, woman, or child, but has one ultimate object in life. That object is, to be fed on turtle soup and venison with a gold spoon. Now, they're not a-going—none of 'em—ever to be fed on turtle soup and venison with a gold spoon."

—Mr. Bounderby, a wealthy manufacturer of Coketown, from Dickens' *Hard Times*

In many countries during the past year and a half, there have been walkouts and wildcat strikes, especially in wholesale and retail delivery and service industries such as stores and restaurants.

Pay Day Report, [<https://paydayreport.com>] a crowd-funded online independent labor news publication, recorded more than 1,300 strikes in the U.S. from the beginning of the pandemic to July 2021. This is the largest strike wave since 1946.

In places where repression of labor protests has been brutally severe, workers are finding new ways to express discontent. For instance, many workers in China are exhausted, and are now resisting by working less, refusing overtime, and asserting their willingness to forego some consumer items in order to have time to themselves.

For anarchists interested in understanding the processes occurring, *Workers' Inquiry and Global Class Struggle*, edited by Robert Ovetz, provides overviews of conditions on the job and in daily life in several different parts of the world, along with descriptions of labor battles and related activism.

Chapters cover struggles in Argentina, Turkey, Italy, Mexico, the United Kingdom, China, South Africa, India, as well as the United States. The challenges and strategies developed by miners, transportation workers and teachers, among others, are analyzed. A few chapters include explicit reference to anarchist participation and perspectives.

The book also outlines similarities and differences across regions, and hints at the potentials hidden in some of the social struggles that have extended outside workplaces, such as anti-police brutality, student, and neighborhood protests.

In the Introduction, Ovetz explains that workers' inquiries are part of a tradition of investigations "into the current organization of capital and the working class, the make up of their forces, and the struggle of each to assert its power over the other." The understanding is that through such inquiries workers and sympathetic intellectuals can analyze forms of self-organization and cooperation, and identify possibilities for spreading these strategies and tactics more widely. They also might be more able to anticipate capitalists' responses and have a better chance of resisting them when they do come.

In the long run, for going beyond the current context of struggles between workers and capitalists, a broader resistance to capitalism and the state is vital. But in the short term, this kind of investigation definitely gives ideas for workers to gain some much needed improvements on the job and in their lives.

MHB is a survivor of production and service worker exploitation and an outspoken advocate for grassroots opposition to both.

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