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USA

# Strike and more strikes driven by technological change

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### **We appear to be in strike season, with hundreds of thousands of workers either on strike or threatening to strike to protect their jobs and for higher pay.**

Hollywood was hit first when 11,500 writers walked out on May 2. Some 60,000 actors followed on July 4. UPS workers, 340,000 of them, have voted to strike if they don't have a new and improved contract by July 31. And the 140,000 autoworkers have similarly voted to strike the industry if they don't get a better contract by September 15. Meanwhile, small, short walkouts are taking place at Amazon facilities by workers trying to organize the logistics giant.

What's behind all of these strikes and threats to strike? Driving the rising class conflict is the continuing technological transformation of American industry as computer surveillance, GPS, robots, and artificial intelligence play an ever-larger role. At the same time, the unions' demands remain the fundamental demands of workers for the last 250 years: job security and above all higher wages.

Technology, given a boost by the COVID pandemic, has transformed both the movie industry and package delivery. In the movie industry, online streaming began twenty years ago and was a growing force but became dominant during the pandemic. Movie studios created streaming services and streaming services made more movies. The changes altered work arrangements so that writers lost money and often got no royalties for the reruns of the films they had written. At the same time, artificial intelligence (AI) threatened to replace writers, actors, and other professionals in the business.

In package delivery, COVID led consumers to avoid stores and buy online. UPS and Amazon depend on hundreds of thousands of men and women moving boxes in warehouses who, as described by one UPS worker, are "work like mules." Treated like mules but monitored by computers. And every day, there are more and more robots running through the warehouses bringing and taking boxes from the human mules. UPS drivers on the street are surveilled by the Global Positioning System (GPS) as the company assesses their productivity.

A Teamsters union strike at UPS would affect the entire U.S. economy, interrupting parts deliveries to workplaces and product deliveries to customers. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce has called upon President Joe Biden to intervene in the strike. The Teamsters president told him to keep out. Biden says he will not get involved, "I believe in unions."

The auto industry is also in the throes of yet another wave of technological transformation. The introduction of robots into the plants has already eliminated tens of thousands of jobs over the last several decades. But now the union faces an even greater challenge as the government and the corporations work together because of the role of CO2 in producing global warming to replace the petroleum burning internal combustion engine with electronic vehicles (EVs).

Not only will the EV auto assembly plants require fewer workers, but the U.S. government is giving billions to U.S. and foreign corporations to create the new electric battery plants necessary for the EVs, but without requiring that the plants be unionized and pay union wages. "Why is Joe Biden's administration facilitating this corporate greed with taxpayer money?" asked Shawn Fain, the United Auto Workers' new president.

Aggravating the situation in all of these industries is the avarice of corporations. As Fran Drescher, the president of SAG-AFTRA, said, **"We are the victims here....How they plead poverty, that they're losing money left and right when giving hundreds of millions of dollars to their CEOs. It is disgusting. Shame on them. She's**

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right:”Robert Iger of Disney, \$27 million; David Zaslav, Warner Brothers, \$39.3; Carol Tomé of UPS, \$18.9; Mary Barras of GM, \$28.9; Jim Farley of Ford, \$22.8.

The technological transformations taking place demonstrate the need for class-wide program of democratic control of new technology by unions and the workers who use them.

*PS:*

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