



AURORA

Bulletin of the
Communist Workers' Organisation
affiliate of the Internationalist
Communist Tendency

No 25

October 2012

A Future that Works is One Without Capitalism

Cuts, Cuts And More Cuts: The War Without End

Here, as everywhere the bosses and their state are ferociously attacking our ability to live in remotely acceptable conditions. Wages are being frozen or reduced, benefits are being slashed with tens of thousands being declared ineligible, pensions are being postponed and reduced, local facilities such as libraries and community centres are disappearing while charges for those that remain are soaring. At the same time costs of basics continue to rise at an alarming rate. All this is wrapped up in the word "austerity". Working class people are beginning to experience levels of deprivation not felt for generations.

So far only 40% of the original seven-year planned cuts have been introduced. By the government's own admission, the vast

back on benefits no matter what the social cost or, for that matter, the financial cost. The Universal Credit scheme is estimated at £3.1bn to set up, £2.5bn a year to run and will handle £50bn in welfare payments. Last year, Whitehall officials put the plan at the top of their warning list of projects that could fail and threaten the coalition. (We should remind ourselves here that the coalition doesn't have a great track record when it comes to dodgy schemes; the government's largest welfare-to-work provider, A4E is currently under police investigation for fraud).

Nick Clegg knows that further cuts before the next election will lose them votes. The Conservatives are divided between the millionaires who want to cut benefits, like Ian Duncan Smith, and those who believe boosting public spending on the infrastructure will boost growth (including those who, in the desperate hope that building home extensions would somehow

kick start the economy, backed the relaxation of planning regulations, as though that would make any difference to the £20.8bn deficit). Labour in the meantime are pushing out all the usual phrases about finding 'strong, credible policies' to get the country out of the mess it's in. So far those

unemployment benefits at a time when unemployment and underemployment are escalating. And for those still in work, wage freezes and more deductions from take home pay. (The latest being the obligatory enrolment of low paid workers into the National Employment Savings Trust (NEST) which is being brought in under the radar and means an automatic 1% pay cut.) All this garbage is being thrown at us simply to keep alive a capitalist system which can only mean misery for the vast majority. Whichever party is in power the effects of this crisis will last for generations. Capitalism can't do what the TUC says, it can't become a more equal system because it is incapable of providing us with any future that doesn't involve increasing attacks on our living and working conditions, growing unemployment, under-employment and poverty. It's failing as a society but it is ordinary working class people and their families who are paying for

that failure.

As far as the fight-back for workers is concerned, the unions can't and won't think beyond token marches, one-day strikes, or campaigns limited to this or that sector, all of which give you a feeling you've done something but ultimately leave you isolated. The only alternative is to get together and organise independently. Whether on the estates, in the workplaces or in the Job Centres and benefit offices we need to find ways to resist. Any meaningful fight backs will be by ourselves, for ourselves. Above all, we need to steer clear of those "false friends" of the 'Labour movement'. Once we learn to stand on our own two feet then the way will be open for the only real way to fight the cuts which is for the whole working class to fight the system that's caused them. §

It's a Fact

13 million people live below the poverty line in the UK. Every day people in the UK go hungry for reasons ranging from redundancy to receiving an unexpected bill on a low income.... In 2011-12 foodbanks fed 128,687 people nationwide, 100% more than the previous year. Rising costs of food and fuel combined with static income, high unemployment and changes to benefits are causing more and more people to come to foodbanks for help.

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majority of day-to-day spending cutbacks are yet to come. And that's not counting the extra £10 or £11 billion of cuts that would be required this year alone as 'slowing economic growth' has reduced government tax revenues. Be in no doubt though that the Coalition are busy working up various schemes, many of which will hit the poorest hardest. In Cameron's recent Cabinet reshuffle Ian Duncan Smith refused to leave his post as Work and Pensions Secretary, so devoted is he to pushing through his plans for Universal Credit. This will bring six different benefits together into one single payment and is due to be launched next year. If it goes ahead as planned over 1 million part time, low paid workers will lose the income support that is supposed to guarantee them a living wage. People on benefits with a spare bedroom are likely to find themselves out of their homes. Benefit payments will no longer rise in response to sky high prices while claimants will be paid every month rather than every two weeks, apparently to replicate what happens in the workplace. But since these are benefits and not wages, thousands of families could be plunged into serious debt as a result.

policies are pointing in the direction of public sector pay freezes and 'zero-based spending,' at the very least continuing the cuts implemented by the Coalition.

And what about the TUC? How is it going to protect workers against the onslaught on their living and working conditions, the worst for generations? Brendan Barber, TUC general secretary is calling for more state spending. He points to the post-war period as an example of how the state spent it's way out of austerity. What he misses is the fact that the post-war boom didn't immediately follow the misery of the 1930's. The misery of the second world war came first, the deaths of millions and the mass destruction of machinery and equipment, all had to happen before capitalism could revive itself and its profits.

Can't Pay, Won't Pay

Meanwhile most of us continue to live under the cloud of cuts to come; cuts to the needy (half a million more disabled people are to lose their benefits); cuts to the NHS, education and local councils (where over 100,000 jobs are under threat); cuts to pensions and

The scheme shows where the government's priorities are. They're determined to cut

South Africa

This is Class War

Occupy Wall St and Los Indignados may have raised the banner of anti-capitalism in the West but for the last 2 months South African workers have reminded us what real class war is about. The Marikana Massacre of 34 miners shot by the police has unleashed a wave of (mainly) wildcat strikes. These began in the Rustenburg platinum mines of Anglo American then spread to gold, diamond, coal, chrome and iron ore mines. These were followed by a wildcat at Toyota in Durban as well as a "protected" i.e. legal strike of lorry drivers which is drawing in rail and port workers. Over 150,000 workers are involved.

ANC – A Capital Organisation

For 15 years before the fall of apartheid we argued that the struggle for freedom had to be a class struggle. The ANC specifically opposed this. As Mandela himself said in 1964:

The ANC has never at any period of its history advocated a revolutionary change in the economic structure of the country, nor has it, to the best of my recollection, ever condemned capitalist society.

No wonder then that our prediction that the ANC would be invited by the white ruling class to save the system came true. No wonder that Anglo American were one of the first companies to support the ANC. Since then there has been a natural transition for anti-apartheid figures (like Cyril Ramaphosa the former head of the

miners' union) into the boardrooms. After 18 years in power the ANC has produced a situation where, according to its own calculations, 9% of the capital of mining corporations is in the hands of black capitalists. The consequences for the working class have been dire.

40% of the working age population are unemployed. This represents 6 million workers, 2.8 million of whom are between 18 and 24

The urban underclass, surviving on welfare payments, has increased from 2.5 million in 1996 to 12 million in 2006

7 out of 10 black children grow up in poverty

50% of the population live below the poverty line (£30 a month)

Life expectancy has decreased from 65 years in 1994 to 53 years in 2009

Unions Against the Working Class

South African mining companies made good profits in recent years from selling their commodities. But the collapse of the speculative bubble has hit the real global economy and profit margins are down. At the same time, after two decades of near double digit inflation the workers are demanding a share of the wealth they created in appalling conditions. Following eighteen years of union collusion with state continued over

Unions and the Labour Movement: The Enemy Within

It's now well over two years since George Osborne took up the axe that Labour left him and announced his "unavoidable budget" of £11bn of spending cuts and a public sector wage freeze. The TUC then waited until local councils (many dominated by Labour stalwarts) had voted in 'unavoidable' cuts before its 'March for the Alternative' in March last year which attracted 2-3 million people. Since then the TUC has helped to slice and dice workers' resistance as literally hundreds of local battles are turned into 'campaigns' involving all and sundry and more or less isolated one from another. Most glaring was last November's one day strike which the TUC limited to a single issue (pensions) within a single sector (public employees). Two days later Unilever workers in the private sector were striking on their own over exactly the same issue! There are endless examples of unions pulling the plug and generally dividing workers section by section. (The TUC's recent policy of having workers 'march' in their union bibs and colours to emphasise their sectional loyalty is worthy of the old Stalinist parades in Eastern Europe or China.)

This is all very confusing and frustrating for those who are seeking to resist. Aren't the unions supposed to defend workers' interests? After all, despite declining membership, they are still the only organisations which can claim to be mass workers bodies with millions of members. And everyone knows that the worst firms in Britain, from Asda to Eddie Stobart, have no-union policies in order to impose their own miserable rates of pay and conditions. What's more since the financial bubble burst the mainstream press has been full of worries about the unions returning 'the country' to "the winter of discontent" of thirty odd years ago or to the "old-fashioned" workers against bosses "confrontations" of the 1980s, epitomised by the legendary miners' strike. The press of the far Left say the opposite: if only workers today would emulate the struggles of the Seventies and Eighties then that would put paid to 'Tory Cuts' and 'Greedy Bankers'. They forget that the outcome of all these union-led battles was a resounding defeat with the working class decimated, restructured on flexible pay for precarious work in a service dominated economy where a growing portion of working class youth joined too-old-to-change workers from a previous epoch on benefits. The extent of the tragedy was hidden by the financial bubble: the piling up of personal debt and the illusion that ever-increasing house prices would provide for old age.

During those years the unions reinvented themselves. The weakened remains of some of the old craft unions amalgamated or were absorbed into the umbrella bodies we

know today. In keeping with the idea that 'confrontational' struggle was a thing of the past the unions have developed a variety of approaches to maintain their position, leeching off the workers whose subscriptions keep a multi-layered bureaucracy in jobs. They have found their place in offering social and welfare perks as state-run provision has been reduced. Likewise, they have worked out "sweetheart" money-off deals with capitalist firms such as insurance companies and lawyers to reassure their members about the benefits of sticking with the union. In short, for the most part the trades unions are an accepted part of modern capitalism, acting as a cross between insurance companies and political pressure groups. By offering a career structure and paths to salaries that most of their members can only dream of many once honest (or not-so honest) militants are seduced away from the workplace altogether.

TUC Job Alert

(Nice one if you can get it!). With a weekly jobs bulletin, the TUC is a significant employer. These are just a couple of examples. Whose side are they really on?

TUC Regional Secretary (North West)
Issued: 26 Sep 2012
Salary/Hours: Grade 9, £48,841 per annum rising incrementally to £50,814 per annum. Full Time.
Location: Based in Regional Office in Liverpool L3 9NG.
Closing date: 15 Oct 2012 12:00

National Negotiating Official (2 posts) - NASUWT
Issued: 20 Sep 2012
Salary/Hours: £55,565 p.a. Full time.
Location: Birmingham.

But the reason the trades unions retain their place in the social order is because they are useful to the bosses and the capitalist state in general. The mutual respect was clearly shown as a whole panoply of laws was introduced from 1969 onward (Labour—Old Labour) Industrial Relations Act, so-called 'In Place of Strife' prescribing registration and legal restrictions on the unions. Trade union controlled strikes are now entirely run within a legal framework involving compulsory time-wasting ballots and making solidarity activities and effective

But as the ANC Government cuts interests rates so that the rand declines further (there is a world trade war going on and lower currency means you sell more) what capitalism might give today will go tomorrow. The workers have won much without much organisation but for how long? The key issue today is the world economy.

Everywhere capitalism offers only more misery. The real issue is not to squeeze crumbs from the system but to alter the system itself. This requires not only a class-wide movement but a clear political programme which does not just deal with one country but the world capitalist system. It is a long road we have to travel but the formation of an international political organisation to put forward that programme inside the working class is paramount. That programme must aim to get rid of capital, money, national borders, wars and ecological calamity. The alternative is more massacres and a descent into barbarism. Marikana miners have made a start. It has to be built upon.

picketing illegal. What should be a threat to the bosses is turned into an empty ritual and the same thing would apply if a TUC-organised general strike ever went beyond a Congress resolution for coordinated action "including the consideration and practicalities" of a general strike. Of course, these legal restrictions only further show that if workers want to struggle effectively "wildcat" strikes are massively more useful than the manoeuvres of the unions.

Here though the unions so often prove their worth for the bosses. Take last year's battle of building site electricians when the leading construction companies suddenly announced they were no longer keeping to the established wage agreement and thought they would impose a pay scale with much lower wages. Rank and file militants from Unite immediately decide to organise a fight and did not wait for the union negotiating machinery to trundle into play. They organised flying pickets, instant walk-outs, as well as public meetings outside of union control to gather support and publicity. In the end the bosses backed down, even if only for the time being. Undaunted though Len McCluskey, General Secretary of Unite and member of the Coalition of Resistance, now claims the struggle as a shining example of how a rank and file movement can be linked to the official union. In other words, a possible breakaway, more difficult for the bosses to deal with, has been diverted back into the TUC safety valve.

A growing number of grass root militants are sickened by all this. But the answer is not to form new unions, much less attempt to resurrect the 'Old Labour Movement'. Any union, once established, has the job of negotiating with the bosses on behalf of its members. This is in the midst of the worst capitalist crisis since the 1930s. Despite all the good intentions of the new union it will come up against the reality of the capitalist crisis and the conflicting interests of the bosses who, faced with declining profits and shrinking markets, are desperately looking for ways to reduce costs and increase 'productivity'. (Wage rates, shifts and work patterns, jobs?) ? New unions, old unions, one big syndicalist union, every union must come up against the glaring fact that the interests of the bosses and the interests of the workforce are entirely opposed.

Likewise the notion that a return to Old Labour (in our view this is impossible) would be a 'good thing' should be knocked on the head. There was nothing socialist about the Old Labour Party. It's famous Clause Four was based on the convenient myth that nationalisation equals socialisation and that this is a step towards full-blown socialism. For decades the myth that state capitalism is

the same as socialism dominated working class consciousness. At least with the likes of Miliband that myth is laid to rest. There is no ambiguity either about New Labour's identity. Just like Old Labour, it is staunchly nationalistic. Miliband's claim to the "One Nation" motto of Disraeli, the 19th century Tory, only highlights what Labour is about: defending this increasingly class-divided society by pretending that a few tax tweaks at the top (echelons) will make the rest of us accept whatever is thrown at us.

So, the question remains,

'How to Resist?'

The instincts of the rank and filers are right. We need fighting organisations run by workers themselves. That means mass meetings which elect and control recallable delegates. We need to unite our struggles across the apparent divisions between us – one workplace against another, public sector versus private sector, manual and technical workers, male and female, national and racial divisions etc. Ultimately it means recognising that we are in a 'them and us' situation. In today's situation whatever economic gains we win one day are taken back the next. The only real way to build momentum is for the movement to adopt political aims. Either they force us to our knees or we set our sights on a better way of organising the world. There are no recipes about exactly how this will be achieved. The practical obstacles can only be recognised and overcome in the process of the struggle itself.

Even so, without a clear political purpose, without taking on board the lessons of the past, the spontaneous movement will drown in a sea of confusion and capitalist reaction. In other words, the question of overthrowing capitalist power, the direction of society has to be addressed. We can't get away from it, the onus is on today's political militants to reach an agreement on the basis of what has to become an increasingly practical communist POLITICAL programme.

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South Africa continued

and management the workers of Marikana whose working and living conditions are "pure hell" took matters into their own hands. In doing so they have come up against the combined forces of capital, the state, and their "own" union federation, COSATU. They now face massacre (death toll now over 50), lock-outs, media lies, sackings and false promises but still the strikes keep on spreading. At the time of writing union leaders, in league with the management, are trying to persuade workers to come back to work (like gangsters they offer "protection" from sacking!) and allow them to negotiate their working conditions. But the management, in the face of falling profits during a global recession, are already preparing to pull their capital out.

Victory?

Some have declared the 22% wage rise at Marikana or the 4.5% wage rise (inflation is currently 5.5%) at Toyota as a victory. Compared with the past who can deny it?

What We Stand For

The Communist Workers' Organisation is the British affiliate of the Internationalist Communist Tendency (formerly the IBRP). Our Italian sister group, the Internationalist Communist Party, was formed in 1943 as the only organisation to oppose all sides in the Second World War in the name of working class autonomy. Today we have groups of comrades in several countries round the world.

We stand for a global society in which production is for need and not profit (and is therefore sustainable), where the state, national frontiers and money have been abolished, where power is exercised through class-wide organisations like workers councils. It is a society which can only be created through the activity of millions of human beings. Only such a society can rid us of the capitalist offspring of poverty, hunger, oppression and war: We call it communism but it has nothing in common with the Stalinist state capitalism of the old USSR.

In order to get there we are working to create a world proletarian political organisation: a 'party' for want of a better word. This organisation is not a government in waiting. It does not rule but it does lead and guide the struggle for a new world. The ICT by no means claims to be that party but only one of the elements which will come together in its formation. As the working class is more and more faced with the consequences of a crumbling capitalist system it will have to unite and confront capitalist power. The ICT is not in competition with other genuinely working class organisations but seeks to unite on a clearly agreed political programme to prepare the way for the majority of the world's population, the exploited of the earth, to overthrow the capitalist system and its bloody imperialist appetites.