



# AURORA

Bulletin of the  
Communist Workers' Organisation

affiliate of the Internationalist  
Communist Tendency

No 31 July 2014

## Public Sector Workers Strike

# Time to Go Beyond Rituals

On July 10 the government faces the biggest "day of action" since it came to power. Perhaps as many as 1.4 million of us are striking that day.

Teaching assistants, refuse collectors, teachers, home helps, social workers, catering workers, environmental health officers and many more are set to join the walkout, along with local government workers in Unison, GMB and Unite. The PCS's ballot gave a 73 percent yes vote for the strike. The firefighters' are also joining it. The FBU has announced a further 8 days of continuous strikes from July 14.

### Enough is Enough

People working in all these sectors have had enough. Ever since the financial crash of 2008 the ruling class have cleverly shifted the blame away from themselves and onto us. We've had the biggest drop in wages since the 1880's and working people everywhere have been made to pay through longer hours and greater pressure at work, and through a declining standard of living with higher bills (the average gas bill has gone up 57% since 2010 and food banks are increasing to help people make ends meet, with one in five people now officially living in poverty in the UK).

Then there have been cuts in pensions. While there's been a howl of protest on the one hand against bankers' bonuses being cut, it's seen as acceptable for public sector workers to have their pensions robbed. The state has dipped into

pension pots for years to cover the effects of the crisis, then it blamed people for living too long. As a result you might work harder (and for much longer) to pay your pension, but these days you won't be guaranteed any decent standard of living when you retire. Firefighters who retire before they 60 are now due to lose half their pension. One and a half million pensioners in the UK live in poverty (though according to the National Pensions Convention it's about 4 million). In any case all agree the number is rising.

Then there's the cuts. By 2015/16 the Coalition will have taken £11.3 billion from local government funds in England alone. There are far more to come (so far only 40% of scheduled cuts have been made). And there's no sign Labour will be any different. Ed Balls has announced that they will accept the budget limits set by the coalition. Miliband plans to end unemployment benefits for most 18-21 year olds and replace them with means-tested payments dependent on training. Labour will carry on the same old policy of cutting here and there, attacking the most vulnerable first, all under the assumption that somehow people on benefits are getting something for nothing. In fact tax evasion is ten times benefit fraud but there's no campaign against tax cheats. Only 300 people are working on them at the HRMC. And all this is happening at a time of increasing unemployment, especially amongst the young.

Old or young, vulnerable or sick, working or not working, we're all

expected to pay for this crisis.

Add to this the freezes in public sector pay. Public sector workers have been suffering a pay freeze since 2010 which has reduced incomes by 15-25%. Let's be clear about why we face freezes at all. The financial mess left by the economic crash in '08 was 'nationalised' when the state decided to bail the banks out. This state debt is now being paid for by all of us one way or another with public sector workers being especially badly hit. The people we trust to educate our kids, keep our areas clean and safe, even save our lives, they're the ones now being asked to shoulder the burden of the crash. And it's working. Some £737 million has been cut as a result of capping public sector pay rises to 1 percent in the last two years alone. So at a time when the five richest families in the UK have more than 12 million of the poorest, many in the public sector are working long, hard hours and facing real hardship, some struggling to feed their families.

The strikes on July 10 are signs that people have had enough. As usual the results of some of the ballots have already been dismissed by the government. The PCS ballot, according to a cabinet spokesperson, wasn't supported by enough PCS members, though they'd spin the same figures as landslide majorities in their own elections. In fact only two thirds voted in the last election, and who voted for the Coalition? Given the pressures people are under, losing a day's pay on the strike can't have been an easy decision to make, which makes it all the more

important that this isn't seen as an end in itself. Another strike is planned for September 20, and the TUC have called another protest in October but one day strikes with accompanying demonstration are empty rituals which can be easily tolerated or ignored by the state.

### We Cannot Play by Their Rules

In fact as long as we fight within the legality of the rules made by our enemies we cannot win. This Government is already calling for a 50% majority of all a union's members before a strike is legal. On those terms no government would ever get elected. The ruling elite know this and they aim to make sure no strike ever gets called. The answer is to ignore their strike-breaking laws and this also means going beyond the unions. They are bound to the system and its legality. Their officials depend for their existence on maintaining that legality. In fact the main aim of the unions in these strikes is to get a Labour Government back into power. But as we have already shown a Labour Government will be no better for working people.

The only alternative for this system is to continue its attacks. They won't go away on their own and we can't rely on the same tired old tactics to fight back. 1.4 million from different sectors out on strike is a start, but it shouldn't be the end. We need to prepare ourselves for more effective action. By this we mean all-out strikes not ritual one day actions. And all out strikes need to go beyond sectors and workplaces. They

have to include as many workers as possible in both the public and private sectors. It should equally certainly include workers outside the unions, including those on short-term and/or zero-hour contracts, and the rest of the "semi-employed" sector.

Isolated strikes lead to defeat and victimisation but mass action allows us to defend each other. Unified action, linked across sectors and with strike committees elected by mass open assemblies of all workers, a bit like the "plenums" which Bosnian workers set up earlier this year are the kind of things we need to organise for a real struggle. Mass strikes need to be linked with resistance in our communities organised by working class people in the workplaces and local communities. We don't need platforms of windbags calling themselves Peoples Assemblies (whose ambition is restricted to putting pressure on the Labour Party). Real assemblies organised class-wide are essential for a real defensive struggle. Those assemblies also give us a glimpse of the organisations we need to establish a system based on need not profit.

After years of workers' retreat it is going to take some time before more people see this but there is already palpable and growing class anger. And the more they attack us, the less we have to lose in an all-out fight, first to defend ourselves, and then to end the system which has created so much misery.

## "Inclusive Capitalism"? The Bosses Really are Worried!

In the last week in May a conference of the great, and not so good, of the world capitalist system assembled at the opulent Mansion House in London. Their topic was "inclusive capitalism". The final speech was made by the Governor of the Bank of England. As security staff "inclusively" prevented the uninvited from getting in, he told an audience, which included Bill Clinton, Christine Lagarde and Lawrence Summers (former US Treasury Secretary), that he worried that

*"unchecked market fundamentalism can devour the social capital essential for the long term dynamism of capital itself".*

Mr Carney is no Marxist but he has articulated what Marx predicted capitalism would always tend to do. Due to the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall insufficient profit is being produced in the system to meet the needs of capital. Capitalists try to compensate by either expelling workers from production or cutting

workers' wages. Since all profits are created by the exploitation of workers, expelling workers from production decreases the pool of profit, and in the longer term it makes the global crisis worse. Cutting wages restricts workers consumption and so restricts the market for consumption goods which in the short term makes the crisis worse. This is the reason for the periodic crises which engulfs the system. Today we are experiencing another and it will not go away until capital is devalued. Those in favour of

"inclusive capitalism" (an oxymoron if ever there was one) recognise the same thing as Keynes in the 1930s. He

*"acknowledged Marx's economic predictions without acknowledging Marx himself, and represented, in its essentials and in bourgeois terms, a kind of weaker repetition of the Marxian critique; and its purpose was to arrest capitalism's decline and prevent its collapse."* (Mattick Marx and Keynes p.26)

This is now what the more nervous capitalists are worried about. They want a new Keynesianism and have turned to those like Thomas Piketty, who have marvellously "discovered" that capitalism tends to inequality, and made them into best sellers. They are not alone. The unions and social democrats here have as ever called for more government spending. Even Tory Chancellor George Osborne realises that the decline in workers' ability to exist is a bit of an economic problem (continued over page)

# Their First World War Commemorations and Ours

One hundred years ago this month the First World War broke out. It began with the assassination of an Austrian archduke in Sarajevo on June 28 but it took a month for the Habsburg Empire to invade Serbia. Within days all the powers of Europe (except Italy) were at war. The assassination at Sarajevo may have provided the spark but it did not cause the war.

## An Imperialist War

We have had hundreds of capitalist commentaries on the start of the war already. When they are not, like Paxman, blaming Germany for attacking “democratic Britain” (where the vast majority of the working class did not have a vote) they are saying that the causes of war are “too complex to understand”. That is because they look only at the individual actors and not the real forces driving their actions. They cannot see the wood for the trees. And “the wood” was the imperialist rivalries that drove them all to make the decisions that led to war. Britain, for example, wanted to destroy a German navy that threatened the Empire “on which the sun never set”. The invasion of Belgium was the excuse they needed to declare war on August 4. And an excuse it was. “Brave little Belgium” was no innocent victim here. It was an imperialist power in its own right. The torturing and maiming by amputation of the people of the Congo delivered up cheap rubber for British manufacturing.

We can though agree with ruling class commentators on one thing. The war that broke out in 1914 defined a new era for capitalism. The era of global economy was now announced. It set in train a process towards greater integration of the world economy. It was the start of the era of imperialism. It changed the world forever and ended any notion that capitalism was the best of all possible systems. “Progressive wars” were things of the past. Now capitalism needed war in order to maintain its process of accumulation.

And one reason the war broke out in 1914, and not sooner or later, was the ruling class fear of the working class. The same crisis which impelled capitalism to imperialist war also produced a working class response. Since the beginning of the century there had been workers’ resistance to the driving down of wages and increasing poverty which many experienced. Anarcho-syndicalism, syndicalism and social democracy were on the rise in many countries where mass strikes were breaking out and threatening to overturn the social order. It nearly achieved it in Russia in 1905.

Certainly in Britain and Russia sections of the ruling class (Lloyd George for one) were reckoning that a war would put an end to this threat. They could mobilise the working class behind the national flag to fight for “King and Country”. Revolutionary socialists were confident though that they would not dare. After all in 1907 and 1912 the Second International had twice voted to respond to war by calling a general strike. In Germany the largest party in the world, the Social Democratic Party had signed up to this. But with the war crisis beckoning the leaders of German

Social Democracy informed the German Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg that they would “not leave the Fatherland in the lurch” in the event of war. This was one month before the war broke out. When it did the German Social Democrats voted war credits to the Kaiser. It remains the greatest betrayal in working class history. It still today separates real revolutionaries from Social Democrats of all types. But German social democracy was not alone in going over to the class enemy. In France the anarcho-syndicalist CGT decided to support the war and in Russia the venerable anarchist, Kropotkin came to the side of the Tsar in order to save “French civilisation” from the Hun. In the orgy of patriotism the working class blithely went off to slaughter one another. It was class war by another name and the capitalists won this round.

## Revolutionary Defeatism

But there was opposition to the war. From the beginning the Serbian, Bulgarian and above all Russian Bolshevik Party refused to go with the flow. For them pacifist opposition to imperialist war was no longer enough. Lenin recognised this first. The slogan of “turn the imperialist war into civil war” earned him ridicule in 1914 but it laid the basis for a revolutionary movement once the glamour of the idea of war was confronted by its grim reality. It is no accident that “Down with the war” was on the banners of the first strikers in Petrograd in 1917. And in the end it was working class revolution which brought about the end to the imperialist war. It started in Russia in 1917 but was in evidence almost everywhere from Red



**John Maclean - the first man to be gaoled under DORA.**

Clydeside to the factories of Turin and even to the Western Front where soldiers of different nations began to mutiny.

When the Bolsheviks came to power in November 1917 they published the secret treaties of the Entente showing what predatory aims. They also issued a Decree on Peace. This was not entirely symbolic. It was a challenge to the imperialist powers and an appeal to workers everywhere. The US President Woodrow Wilson met this challenge by issuing his Fourteen Points in January 1918 which promised “a just and lasting” settlement. But the imperialist warmongers fought on still.

It was only in November 1918 when the sailors of Kiel and Wilhelmshaven mutinied and joined with townsfolk to set up workers’ councils that the game was up for the German Empire. On November 9 the Kaiser abdicated and

two days later an armistice was signed. It did not end the war. It simply meant the full force of international imperialism could now be turned on Soviet Russia. And Soviet Russia, as everyone knew could only be saved by the German Revolution. Unfortunately the Spartakist Revolt broke out prematurely in January 1919 when (as Rosa Luxemburg so clearly knew) not enough had been done to prepare the working class for it. Once again the German Social Democratic Party came to the rescue of “the country”. The famous telephone call by Ebert the SDP leader gave the green light for the formation of the Freikorps (largely made up of returning German officers who came home with their fully armed men after the Armistice). The latter, a forerunner of the Nazis, were unleashed on the Communists. Their defeat, and with it the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht, was the end of the prospect of an early German revolution. It ultimately paved the way for the capitalist class internationally to survive the whole revolutionary wave that lasted for years after the war. They have never faced such a serious challenge from the working class since.

## Nation v. Class

But capitalist contradictions do not go away. The constant need to exploit the working class means that social peace may last for long periods but inevitably the working class is driven to respond to the attacks the system makes upon it. The ruling class everywhere is faced with a global crisis. Their response everywhere is to play the nationalist card. Where they cannot use sporting events like the Olympics or the World Cup they are using the anniversaries of events like the First World War to create their own nationalist narrative. The lies they are telling (such as the one about a war for democracy) are part of the same class war as in 1914. Nation versus class, the terms of the fight have not changed. And with the system in crisis we are once again seeing the build up of imperialist tensions. From the East of Europe across the Middle East and Central Asia to the South China Sea confrontations are on the increase. Wars that broke out decades ago are still being fought across the planet. Behind it all lies the drive to corner resources in an increasingly desperate capitalist world.

In Britain the younger generation will not remember how the notions of flag flying and nationalism were derided before 1982. With the Falklands War we have seen an increase in jingoism, racism and the promotion of militarism. Charities are being founded like Help for Heroes (otherwise known as trained mercenary killers) and the Poppy Day has gone from being a minor charity to a national promotion which you oppose at your peril. Ironically the “commemoration” of the start of the First World War in the UK will take place in Glasgow at the end of the Commonwealth Games on August 4. It was in Glasgow, heart of Red Clydeside that John Maclean in August 1914 was the first man to make a speech calling for resistance to the war and in September 1915 he was also the first to be gaoled under DORA (Defence of the Realm Act) for his speeches against the war. Now that is what revolutionaries will be commemorating ...

## “Inclusive Capitalism”? (continued)

(the social consequences are of no interest to him) so is planning a (very modest) increase in the minimum wage. They are all however united in trying to save the system. But all of them forget that Keynes’ monetary theories were based on government’s spending money to create jobs at a time when spending had been cut. Today, since the speculative bubble burst in 2007, every state has had to prop up the financial system to save capitalism. They have literally been printing money (but only for the banks) via so-called “quantitative easing”. This means they are already saddled with too much sovereign debt to be able to take the road of piling up more debt. The only alternative they have therefore is to attack the working class all the harder in an equally vain attempt to solve the crisis.

And this is what worries our neo-Keynesian “inclusive capitalists”. They can see that the store of social strife is mounting up. In the EU and the US the working class’ share of income has fallen from 64% to 58% since 2009. This comes on top of a slow decline in real wages in the traditional capitalist countries since the current crisis of accumulation began in the 1970s. With the extra attacks on benefit cuts, cuts in the health service and the never ending saga of increasing the retirement age the surprise is not that some sections of the ruling class are worried. The real surprise is that the fightback is so muted.

There are many reasons for the lack of a fightback so far. In the first place there is never a mechanical reflex against worsening conditions. In real life people try to adjust and make do. They hope that austerity will soon end. Until they can no longer see a way out ... Second the attacks have not been against us all at the same time and in the same way. There is just now no poll tax issue to unite everyone. The victims of the bedroom tax, for example, largely see their problems as their own. And thirdly we have been in retreat as a class for so long that we have lost much of the class cohesion that we had in the past.

But as the *Financial Times* put it

*“Occupy Wall Street protestors have drifted away, the causes of their*

*protests have not”*

And they cannot. That is the nature of the system. And now we can see a class in the slow process of recomposition around the world. Precariousness of occupation and ever lower wages, the incapacity of the system to integrate millions of young people, the growing antagonism of those in public sector jobs and continuing austerity have led to riots, strikes and protests around the world. As yet these are localised (many are not even reported) but many are signs of hope for the future. The “red squares” student movement in Quebec in 2012, the “plenum” movement in Bosnia earlier this year which rejected all the attempts to drive nationalist wedges between the protestors, the almost 6 month platinum miners strike in South Africa (now replaced by a strike of 200,000 metalworkers) and the long running



series of strikes in China, Vietnam, Cambodia and Bangla Desh all demonstrate that the world working class is alive and fighting. What it yet lacks is coordination and cohesion. What it yet lacks is a programme and an international political organisation. However the rising level of class antagonism is creating new possibilities for the growth of revolutionary organisation.

The CWO, as the British affiliate of the Internationalist Communist Tendency aims to be part of that new movement and contribute to the formation of an international revolutionary political organisation based in the working class and of the working class. We appeal to all who share our vision of a better society to contact us, support us and join us. We will then really make the capitalists of the world, “inclusive” or otherwise, “tremble” at the prospect of proletarian revolution.

### Contact us:

email: [uk@leftcom.org](mailto:uk@leftcom.org)  
<http://www.leftcom.org>

CWO  
BM CWO  
LONDON  
WC1N 3XX

**The Communist Workers’ Organisation** was founded in 1975 and joined with the Internationalist Communist Party (Italy) to form the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party in 1983. Stemming from the Italian Left which had fought the degeneration of the Comintern in the 1920s as well as the process of “bolshevisation” (i.e. Stalinism) imposed on the individual communist parties, the Internationalist Communist Party was the only significant organisation to emerge in the Second World War (1943) condemning both sides as imperialist. In 2009, in recognition of the new elements that had joined the founding groups, the IBRP became the Internationalist Communist Tendency.

We are for the revolutionary party but we are not that Party. Nor are we the only basis for the party which will emerge from future workers’ struggles. Our aim is to be part of that process by participating in all the struggles of the class that we can with the aim of linking the immediate struggle of the class with its long term historic programme — communism.