

Aurora

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There is an Alternative – It is Anti-Capitalist

On June 30 800,000 public sector workers will be on strike. For most it will be the first time they have done so in their lives. Many will attend rallies and demonstrations or picket lines. At the rallies, union leaders will tell them that “there is an alternative” to the cuts. There is, but not the one they are trying to sell ...

The Crisis

The first thing we have to recognise is that we are not just in a financial crisis. This is not a crisis caused only by “greedy bankers”. Although the financiers are to blame for the speculation and bad loans of the last 20 years or so the crisis is older than that. Ever since 1971, when the post-war boom came to a final end, the system has stagnated. Workers have paid the price for this – real wages today are lower than in 1973 (and that’s official). But this has not been enough to revive capital accumulation. Although more profits have been squeezed out of an increasingly exploited workforce they have not been enough to revive the global economy. The massive transfer of production to places like China (where wages are miniscule) and financial speculation have proved to be no “solutions”. The financial speculation came to a halt in 2007-8 when, as we had predicted for a decade, the fantasy of increasing debt finally hit the buffers.

To stop the system melting down completely governments all over the planet bailed out the financial sharks. They had no choice. A banking collapse would have cut off the revenue streams created by financial bodies which redirect the world’s wealth to the richest countries. In Britain the government put up £850 million to “save the banks”. And what are the same financial institutions doing today? They are insisting that government debt (mostly due to the bailout of banks) should be reduced or else they will cut its credit rating. This will massively increase the interest the state has to pay on its debt. Their solution is therefore more cuts and

more attacks on a working class which has already suffered enough. Insane? Certainly maddening!

This is Class War

As the tables below demonstrate (if you don’t accept the evidence in front of your own eyes!) the cuts fall heaviest on the working class. Many proposed cuts have not yet kicked in (some will be next year, some in 2016 and beyond). Already, across the UK almost 1 in 4 households have no-one in full time work. Part-time, casual and temporary work have replaced full-time jobs. Wage freezes and cuts in the public and private sectors have further reduced purchasing power. Inflation is above the official 4% and rising, especially in the basics (food and fuel) which working class families mainly spend on.

And surprise, surprise, profits have risen. *The Financial Times* (the bosses’ business paper) explained why in September 2010 when they wrote, there has been “a big shift from labour to capital”. And it shows. Executive pay has never been higher, the demand for luxury goods has increased enormously and bankers’ bonuses are back to where they were before the 2007-8 financial meltdown. The rich are richer now in relation to the working class than at any time since 1914. Capitalists used to justify their disgusting wealth as the reward for “taking risks”. This was always a bit of a myth since most capitalists depended on inherited wealth, and one success story hid a hundred failures. Under modern capitalist conditions it is a downright lie. There is no longer such a thing as “moral hazard” when you can ruin the lives of millions (pensioners, housebuyers, workers etc) when the state bails you out for your errors. The current insanity demonstrates the irrationality of modern capitalism. It is a system in decline but it will carry on causing misery so long as we accept it.

The capitalists know it, which is why they are already on the offensive in this class war. The

first step was the announcement of the cuts in our health, education and social services. And no sooner did the NUT, ATL and CPS announce that the result of their strike ballots was an overwhelming vote in favour of strikes (albeit on relatively low turnouts) than the bloodhounds of the capitalist press were unleashed. Led by the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun* they questioned the validity of the ballots (almost as low as the support for the current coalition government!) but also consciously tried to divide workers in the state and private sectors. They told us that state workers were “privileged” because they still had a guaranteed pension to look forward to whilst the “wealth creators” in the private sector didn’t. What they failed to say was that this was because the private sector bosses had ripped off their employees for years by raiding their pension funds to keep companies afloat and by ending final salary schemes across the board. Now they want all workers to be either dead before they qualify for a pension or live only a little while after retiring.

Then Vince Cable weighed in by telling the GMB conference that any concerted strike action against these attacks would lead to new legislation against strikes (very “liberal” of him). And all this at a time when the government’s own figures show that the number of days lost through strikes is at an all-time low. This cannot be brushed aside. We have not yet really begun to fight back. Currently there are good reasons for this. Most important of all is the fear factor. Those who have a job fear losing it as the chances of finding a new one are slim. Second, there is the ever-diminishing hope that the worst of the crisis may be over. Many are not yet aware that more cuts will kick in next year and even beyond. Living with the cuts is already a reality for many but the sustained misery which this is producing has some way to run. When experience of what capitalism is doing to us becomes more widespread then the question of how to fight back will be on the agenda once again.

Fighting Back

One day strikes and mass demonstrations alone will change nothing. Union leaders like Dave Prentis (Unison) are enthusiastic about them as they admit openly because they give them “leverage” to bring the government back to “negotiations” over pensions. But what is there to negotiate? Details at most (retire at 67 or later?). The fact is that one day strikes and ritual demonstrations which march us from A to B just to listen to empty speeches from fatuous figures of the Left are not going to change anything. And unions also divide rather than unite us. Why, for example are the Unison workers not striking with their state sector colleagues on June 30? Unison’s low paid workers may not have higher pension contributions to come but they will have to

wait until 66 before retiring. And when the TUC talks of a “real alternative” they mean a return of New Labour. As recent history makes clear the difference between Labour and the Coalition is just a matter of detail. Labour too relied on financial speculation and Labour too always seeks to “please the markets” (i.e. the financial institutions). Not one capitalist faction can answer our needs because all support cuts in the name of capitalist stability. This is why a fight against the cuts also has to be a fight against the entire capitalist system which spawns them.

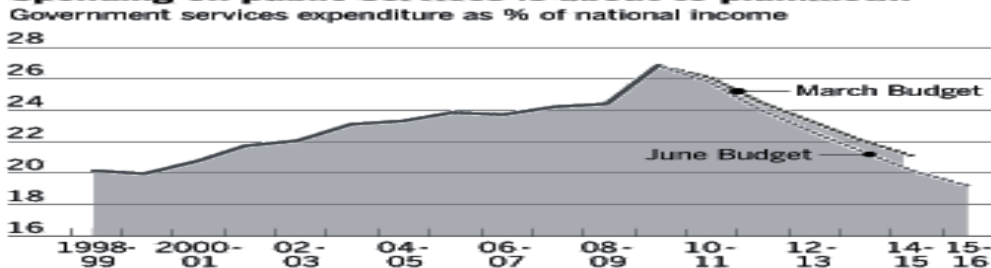
There is no short-term quick fix here. Our fight will be a long one. June 30 is not an end but might just be the beginning of the fightback. In any case the working class have to see that the case for an alternative to capitalism is glaring.

However an effective fight can only be waged when we take the struggle into our own hands. That means more than the odd day of protest or a carefully managed procession stewarded by the unions and the police. It means organising across workplace, trade union, and any other artificial boundary which prevents workers uniting as a class. Organising from the bottom. Organising without regard to capitalism’s rules and regulations but simply on the basis of working class democracy: committees of elected and immediately recallable delegates. At some point it will mean challenging the basis of capitalism itself: the wages system, production for profit, money and financial speculation. It will mean replacing it with a rational organisation of society where everyone will be involved in defining and deciding how to directly meet society’s needs. Some call it “socialism”, others “libertarian communism” but whatever label you give it this has nothing in common with the totalitarian Stalinist monster that was the old USSR.

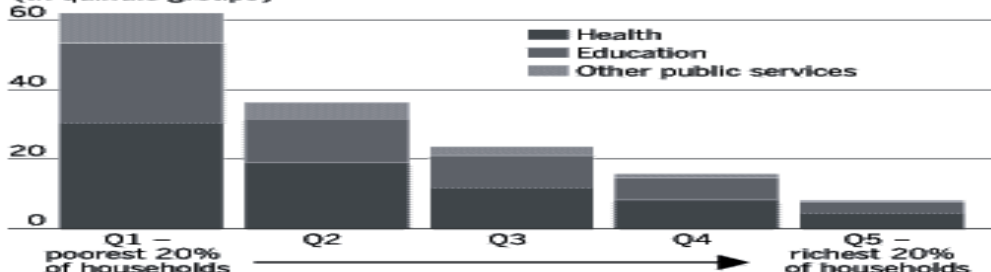
It is a system based on a society producing for human needs, and controlling social development in a peaceful world without class divisions, without millionaires and starving millions. A world which is organised according to the motto *from each according to their ability; to each according to their need*.

This is our alternative and it will have to be fought for politically. This is why we are in favour of a world wide communist party which will coordinate our scattered struggles and challenge the capitalist power structure everywhere. This is not a party of government (we have no “leaders”) to put yet another set of exploiters in charge but a fighting party which leads the onslaught on capital. We are committed to finding ways to work with other like-minded working class organisations in order to reach the wider working class. If you agree with our vision help to turn it into reality by joining us!

Spending on public services is about to plummet...



...but poorer households rely more on such services...



And elsewhere...

Global resistance has to be based on working class struggle

“The crisis is capitalism”

The movement of young Spaniards, the “indignados” (angry ones), started on 15 May (hence the name “15-M”). Its ranks have quickly swelled, attracting tens of thousands of people onto the streets, and even going beyond national borders.

Amongst the various banners in the Puerta del Sol in the centre of Madrid a large black one stood out proclaiming “**The crisis is capitalism**”. This summed up in a nutshell the common cause behind the various mass movements which have convulsed the world this year. Starting with Tunisia last December, a wave of resistance to the economic and social hopelessness which capitalism has imposed on the young has swept the world. In Spain as in so many of these countries the unemployment of those under 25 is 44%. In Egypt and Tunisia it is worse and even in Italy it is only lower because of the massive amount of casual, part-time temporary workers (the “precarini”).

This is not a situation which has arisen suddenly. The young unemployed have been told for years that they need to get educated to get a job but now they have the highest qualifications no-one will employ them at the level to which they trained. From Morocco to Madrid the response has brought thousands onto the streets. Algeria, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain have all seen demonstrations and strikes, with little ripples elsewhere in the Middle East. But the “Arab spring” has turned into a warm European summer since May 15 with the indignados in Spain being copied by a similar movement in Italy (“Italian Revolution – Real Democracy Now”). These mobilisations have been largely spontaneous and built through word of mouth and social networking pages rather than through party manifestos.

At the same time the struggle in Greece looks like becoming really serious now that the Parliament is on its way to passing the new austerity measures demanded by the IMF and EU. Not only did 50,000 occupy Syntagma Square in Athens last week calling for resistance to the cuts but workers in the Greek power industry are now starting a rolling 48 hour strike programme set to last until June 28 (when the final vote on the austerity package takes place). This may not amount to much but it is a step forward from all the separate one day strikes of last year which were largely ineffectual. 10 power plants have already closed and power cuts are forecast. With such resistance it is no wonder that the capitalist class are now talking of a Greek default. If the workers don't give in the Greek ruling class will be left with no other option (a “managed default” is already being prepared although it won't be called that). But that's their problem not ours. Either way the workers will be under attack. At least in struggling they are beginning to find a collective class response which can prepare the way for a real alternative vision of the kind of world we want to live in.

Chinese migrant workers struggle

Meanwhile in the new “workshop of the world” all is not rosy for capitalist exploiters. The last two years have seen massive waves of strikes in different factories and industries as Chinese workers have begun to resist producing huge profits for starvation wages. As Rahul Jacobs reported in the *Financial Times*

Numbers associated with China are usually big. Even so, a Beijing academic's recent estimate of the number of “incidents” – an official euphemism for strikes, protests and riots – at 180,000 last year, double the number five years ago, is huge. It works out at 493 a day. That might seem implausibly high even for a country of more than 1bn citizens, but not in the past few days.

In the southern town of Zengcheng, usually better known for its production of blue jeans, migrant workers rioted over the weekend after security staff manhandled a pregnant 20-year-old street hawker. On Monday the focus was in the eastern city of

Yangxunqiao, where workers seeking compensation for lead poisoning were prevented by riot police from boarding buses to go and petition higher authorities. In the central province of Hubei last week protesters pelted police with eggs and bottles after the death in custody of a popular anti-corruption official.

Responding to a wave of strikes in southern China last year, Beijing said it intended to double the minimum wage over the next five years. Buying off strikers is child's play, however, compared with dealing with ever larger numbers of people who believe Chinese society to be manifestly unjust.

With inflation rising rapidly the take home pay of workers is falling hence the number of strikes. However the situation is worse than that. Chinese migrant workers who are the backbone of production in China's five coastal provinces, which make up its manufacturing heartland, clashed with police for three consecutive nights this month outside the southern city of Guangzhou. According to the BBC, about 1,000 protesters set fire to cars and damaged government buildings near the city. Police reportedly fired tear gas and deployed armoured vehicles. The protests were said to have begun over the alleged mistreatment of a pregnant migrant worker by security guards. Bricks and bottles were thrown at police, windows were smashed, and police vehicles were overturned. At least 25 people have been arrested but the state is not having much luck getting information. It is now dangling the bribe of a residency permit or *hukou* (without which migrants cannot get health or welfare assistance) plus a \$1545 reward for information leading to the arrest of those who took part. For years the Chinese Communist Party has been trying to deal with these strikes and riots as “local issues” by sacking corrupt CP officials or sending in the Army. The current scale of them however, and the fact that some workers (such as those at Honda last year – see “Chinese Workers Show their Class” in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 54) are beginning to link in struggle, make this an increasingly difficult act to maintain. With growth in China slowing they may have less room for manoeuvre in the future ...

Capitalist Counter-attack

We don't want to exaggerate what is currently going on. There are huge problems in front of a global revival of working class consciousness. The first is that the ruling class will not give in quietly. Spanish and Greek youth have already had a taste of police violence in clearing the squares of peaceful occupations. In the Arab world real repression is already the order of the day. Tunisian youth still face state attacks for demanding that the system gets rid of all those identified with the old regime and for real reform. In Egypt the military junta who took over after Mubarak fell banned strikes as their very first act. In Bahrain those doctors who gave medical assistance to the protestors who were shot by the state have been arrested and tortured into confessing they used arms in the previous demonstrations. In Syria children have been tortured and killed for scrawling anti-regime graffiti. In all these cases our media is largely silent because behind these regimes stands their imperialist interests. Libya can be bombed “to protect civilians” as the great powers jostle for control of its oil but Syria, which is of little interest as it is not a big oil producer, is left to massacre its citizens, burn its villages with hardly a voice raised in criticism. And no one should talk about a trusted ally of the West as in Bahrain ... Even in Yemen the Saleh regime continues to get support as the Western power fear the consequences for their interests should he fall.

In the Arab world a further issue is that the myth that the coming of “democracy” will bring jobs is widely believed. They have concluded that the wealth of the West must be based on having an open society without corruption (they have not heard of MPs' expense scandals etc). What they don't see is that the wealth of the West is a result of an historic accident - it being the place where capitalism originated. The financial institutions of

the West still control the bulk of the world's trade and as such today redirect its revenues to the rich G8 countries. This is why the banks had to be bailed out. Western wealth has got nothing to do with “democracy” which has been adopted as the best means for capitalist rule in its own heartlands.

Democratic Myths

Indeed the myth of democracy is a far more potent weapon to preserve capitalism than all the forces of repression put together. The idea that by letting us vote for a [limited] number of capitalist parties once every 4 or so years means that we have some say in how capitalism works is a powerful one. It makes capitalism seem the best of all possible worlds. But a new insidious version of democratic capitalism can also be found in the current movements in Europe. In Spain and Italy the spontaneous movements to occupy the city squares were started by those who refused to accept unemployment and the capitalist crisis. At the start widespread discussions were the order of the day but very quickly these movements came to be dominated by a minority around the ATTAC group (of French origin) which campaigns for reforms of international capitalism (such as a tax on banks) under the guise of the slogan “Real Democracy Now!”. They are against “globalisation” (i.e. big capital) but not against the capitalist system as such. This group have tried to steer debate away from the question of the capitalist crisis to the question of the reform of “democracy” to make it more “equal” or “fair”. In fact the issue is the other way round. Without social equality no real “democracy” is possible. In a society of billionaires who control the mass media (and we are not just talking about the Berlusconi and the Murdochs) some “citizens” are “more equal than others” (Orwell). It was thus with some pleasure that we received the document of the Rome Labour Commission of the movement “Italian Revolution – Real Democracy Now” which also saw that the only real way forward to a real democracy was through the overthrow of the capitalist system by the exploited. They thus called for the real movement for “democracy” to be centred on the working class.

*As the Labour Commission of the Roman movement of the Italian Revolution we identify **the crisis** as the motor force of the movement of Spanish indignados and other European countries. This is demonstrated by the attacks on the living and working conditions of the working class carried out by governments of all shades, from Berlusconi to Zapatero. We therefore believe that the question of **labour** should be placed at the centre of the debate in the movement both in terms of analysis and action, because we think that without the expansion of the movement to all the exploited who pay for the crisis of the capitalist system of production the movement will have no real impact on society. [our emphases]*

And without the exploited withdrawing their labour to paralyse the system the movement on the streets will be powerless. It was noticeable that in Egypt the Army only got rid of Mubarak not because 800 people had died but because the Egyptian workers had finally decided to strike for their own demands. Only a threat to their property and the legal system which controls it will move the capitalist class.

And “labour” has to be at the heart of any real democracy because only the working class has the ability to get rid of exploitation and class society. This is the premise on which a real anti-capitalist movement will have to be built. There is a precedent. Real workers' democracy arose out of the strikes in Russia in 1905 when workers sent delegates to a central body to coordinate their actions better. This came to be known as the workers' council or “soviet”. This was a historical discovery and showed that workers could organise and run a mass society themselves. It was also a more direct democracy since it was made up of delegates who could be recalled immediately. They did not elect someone who could do what they liked for 4 or 5 years. There was no specialist class

of politicians. In 1917 they revived again and were at first the basis of a promising new society until other factors (not least the isolation of the Russian working class) led to their demise when they became adjuncts of a one party state. This does not diminish their original inspiration and any working class movement will have to base itself on that experience. As the current capitalist crisis is global, as the programmes of austerity become more savage the world working class will be called upon to rediscover not only its capacity for collective struggle, its consciousness of a better alternative but also the gains it made in the past.

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 around 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 party to politically unite workers against the power of the capitalist state. This party is not a government in waiting. It does not rule but it does lead and guide the struggle for a new world. We are also not that party but only one of the elements which seeks to participate in its formation. As the working class more and more confronts the consequences of a decaying capitalist system it will have to unite and confront the system. The ICT is not in competition with other genuinely working class organisations but seeks to unite with them and 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.

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