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We've done one day strikes, token demonstrations and rallies

What Now?

There's no doubt workers need a pay rise. If the economic recovery meant change for the better, then the working class should at least be clawing back the losses of recent years. Pay deals are now supposedly above inflation, but in real terms most people's earnings are falling. For public sector workers at the hard end of the government's 'deficit reduction' programme this is no surprise. Overall public sector workers' real pay has dropped by 15-20 per cent since 2010 and, like everyone else, this is as pensions are lowered whilst contributions are upped and people (like fire fighters) are being told they'll just have to keep working for longer.

Already in July this year thousands joined a TUC sponsored day of action in London to protest against a 2 year pay freeze being followed by a derisory 1% pay 'rise'. To add insult to injury, the government has since back-tracked on even the nominal 1% rise for many NHS workers, including some of the lowest paid. That makes for a lot of very angry people who are clearly not content with a Saturday march with their union banners in the streets of London, Glasgow or Belfast. In the week running up to the 18th October demo tens of thousands of workers in the public sector are set to show their anger and go on strike ... on three different days. Or at least they were. As we go to press the three biggest council workers' unions: Unison, Unite and the GMB, have suddenly called off their strike. So much for 'Unite the resistance'!

Why No All-Out Strike?

At once the strength and weakness of the modern union machine is apparent. On the one hand the TUC professional organisers (salaries paid out of membership dues) have been able to impress on shop stewards and militant workers that 'action days' culminating in a national demo are the way towards regaining a better life. Angry and increasingly desperate workers who want to do more than pay their union dues by direct debit are engaged in these campaigns. Yet, we have not had

even one all-out strike. The last minute cancellation of solidarity action is a glaring example of the REAL role the unions play today. They aim to control and contain the class struggle and undermine any potential for a wider movement which goes beyond the ritual shadow boxing.

On the evidence of the last four years – since Osborne first wielded his axe in October 2010 – the TUC's action days have led workers round in circles to no effect. Osborne originally announced that up to 500,000 public sector jobs were due to be cut by 2014-15. According to a study commissioned by the GMB union last year 631,000 public sector jobs had already been lost by the end of March 2013. Not only have the unions completely failed to halt the programme of job cuts, the government is now even more confident it can face down the occasional TUC day of action and has speeded up the cuts programme. According to the same GMB report the Office for Budget Responsibility is now aiming to have cut a further 400,000 jobs by the general election, some time in 2015.

As for the relentless attacks on social services and welfare rights over the past four years, it is now very clear that the aim of the game is to dismantle what's left of the universal welfare system that was put in place after World War Two. Countless campaigns and local struggles have proved unable to stem the multi-pronged attack. It has brought widespread harassment and anxiety, misery and impoverishment, as well as premature and unnecessary deaths to a widening range of vulnerable people. Given the closures, cutbacks and job losses that hospitals and ambulance services are already enduring, nobody can seriously believe Labour or Tory assurances that the NHS is 'ring-fenced' from all this.

The Real Threat

This brings us to the wider situation which we have to face up to. This is not really about the budget deficit; it's about the growing threat

capitalism's profitability crisis poses to working class chances of a civilised existence. As a matter of fact, in the 1950s UK national debt was a much higher percentage of GDP than it is today. The key difference between then and now is that the overall rate of profit was much higher and with it the rate of GDP growth. So gradually the debt to GDP ratio fell even as government borrowing went up and it was easy for the state to finance its interest payments. All that changed with the onset of capitalism's world crisis way back in the 1970s. In the face of at least 17% inflation it was Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, who famously admitted:

We used to think that you could spend your way out of a recession and increase employment by cutting taxes and boosting government spending. I tell you in all candour that that option no longer exists...

The bankrupt Labour government was obliged to beg for a loan from the IMF which in turn demanded government spending cuts and a reduction of the budget deficit. Unemployment rocketed. Keynesianism was out of the window. In came 'Thatcherism' and 'Reaganism' dedicated to cutting state spending and opening up national economies to monopoly capital under the banner of the 'free market'. At the same time the industrial working class was devastated as industries were privatised. New technology replaced tens of thousands of workers and globalisation accelerated as capital moved to areas with cheaper labour power to boost falling profit rates. Decades on and several financial bubbles later, capitalism is still grappling with the same crisis only now its options have narrowed and the situation is much more dangerous. The world financial crash of 2007/8 was a game changer. It exposed the extent to which capitalism was relying on paper profits accruing from financial speculation. Central banks were forced to take on the financial sector's losses, buying up worthless assets under 'quantitative easing' programmes in

order to maintain confidence in otherwise totally devalued currencies. But even though central banks and monetary authorities have tried to sweep the debt under the carpet the threat of another crash remains, or rather is growing. In September a report for the International Centre for Monetary and Banking Studies observed "Contrary to widely held beliefs, the world has not yet begun to delever [reduce debt] and the global debt to GDP ratio is still growing, breaking new highs." In other words, it's only a matter of time before the next global financial crash.

Meanwhile, the merciless competition to drive down wages and the general cost of labour power continues. Far from clawing back something of what we have lost, the present 'recovery' is based on the growth of low paid, insecure, increasingly part-time jobs often based on zero hour contracts. Unemployment is still well over 6 per cent of the workforce while this year "Britons' wages have fallen in cash terms for the first time since 2009..." [Financial Times 13.8.14]

Capitalism's Obscene Crisis

This is not only about workers in Britain. Ever since the crisis began in the 1970s workers in all the supposedly advanced states have been receiving a smaller and smaller share of the national pie as the prospect of finding a job and wages and conditions of work steadily deteriorate. Capitalism is losing its civilised veneer as the consequences of growing inequality impact on society. At one end we see 3.8 million children living in extreme poverty, a growing number of food banks, the resurgence of Victorian diseases stemming from malnutrition, including rickets, TB and scarlet fever. On the other we read that the rich continue to get richer. There is now a record number of 2,325 billionaires in the world with combined wealth of \$7.3 trillion. This is 4.5 times the combined income of the 3.5 billion people who make up the poorest half of the world's population!

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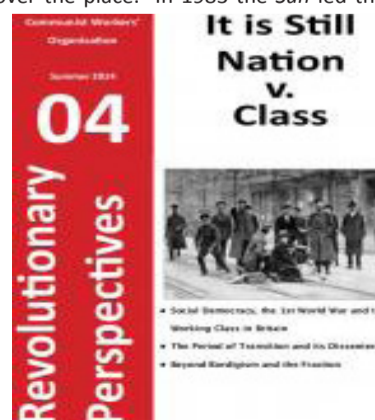
"The Only War Worth Fighting is the Class War"¹

This year's commemorations of the hundredth anniversary of the start of the First World War are very different from 50 years ago. In 1964 we lived under the shadow of a bipolar nuclear world. Two years earlier the Cuban Missile Crisis had brought humanity to the edge of annihilation. War and nationalist gestures were largely regarded as obscene. It was the era of the "protest song", of CND, and the most famous take on the First World War then was "Oh What a Lovely War", a musical satire taking the piss out of the ruling class.

Nation against Class

Fifty years on the scenario is different. The post war economic boom of the fifties and sixties is over. We live under a system in serious economic and social crisis. And as the crisis has deepened nationalism and nationalist propaganda have increased. In the

UK the Falkland War was a major turning point. Suddenly union flags appeared not only on public buildings but in gardens, businesses and houses all over the place. In 1983 the Sun led the rise in



ingoism. When railworkers went on strike on a day when Falklands troops returned it threatened "Call off the rail strike or we'll call an airstrike".

At least the Sun got one thing right. The enemy of the working class is nationalism. And the enemy of nationalism is a working class fighting for its own interests – which are the interests of the bulk of humanity. The perfect ideology for the capitalists to divide workers everywhere is an appeal to the nation. In the leading capitalist states nationalist propaganda has been refined over time. In 1914 Kitchener just had to put on a poster "For King and Country" and that was enough. Millions volunteered to fight without knowing why. This is why the First World War is often condemned today as pointless, "a bad war" whilst the Second World War is seen as a "People's War" against fascism and therefore "good". Not so. Both were imperialist wars. The

only difference was that by the Second the capitalist class had got more sophisticated at disguising the real purpose of war. The Second World War was only a "People's War" (for "people" read "nation") because the working class all over the world had already been defeated both physically and, more importantly, ideologically by the mid 1920s.

Workers Against Imperialist War

It should not be forgotten too that it was the working class which brought the First World War to an end. Despite the fact that millions had gone off enthusiastically to fight in 1914 (expecting to be "home by Christmas") by 1916 the war had revealed its true nature. Not just the millions killed on the fronts but the "collateral damage" of civilian massacres (e.g. Armenian Christians), economic

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What Now? (continued)

[Report by UBS 18.9.14] Meanwhile – as a sign of the depth of capitalism’s profitability crisis – more and more non-financial companies are holding on to their cash. This year the top thousand of them are sitting on \$3.5 trillion because it is “unattractive to invest”. There are a few crumbs of comfort for some capitalist firms. Rising income inequality is proving a boost for those who can get in on the global luxury goods market. A Deloitte business survey “considers the more promising markets to include Colombia, Mexico, Philippines, and much of sub-Saharan Africa – where Ermenegildo Zegna, Hugo Boss, and MAC have been at the vanguard of opening stores.” [Financial Times survey on The Business of Luxury, 12.5.14] These are not isolated examples. They indicate the degenerate state of world capitalism today. As the UN appeals for \$1bn to contain the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, trillions of dollars are being hoarded by companies whilst others are more concerned about the threat to their luxury markets in places where most people are so poor that a deadly epidemic could be contained by simple measures such as buckets of bleach.

Once we see the wider context of our struggles it is obvious that we are facing much more than a cost-cutting government unfairly targeting the working class. Unfairness is intrinsic to capitalism. There is nothing more unfair than the profit capitalists make by selling the product of workers’ labour. The trade unions and Labour would have us believe that capitalism can be made to work in the interests of everybody. The fundamental absurdity of this



“Workers in all the supposedly advanced states have been receiving a smaller and smaller share of the national pie.” Protesters against poverty, insecurity and unemployment during European Central Bank meeting in Naples, October 2nd.

was not so apparent during the boom years which followed the war. The rate of profit was high enough to allow a steady increase in workers’ direct wages as well as the indirect reward of a health and social welfare system. Today, despite the electronic and digital revolution, new technology has not offset the fall in the rate of profit and capitalism – when it is investing in production at all – is resorting more and more to driving down wages to try and improve profitability. After decades of worsening crisis the capitalists’ room for manoeuvre has narrowed and they cannot afford to let up on their war against the working class. There is no longer any room for the illusion that our interests are best served by the union rep negotiating a deal behind closed doors. Instead we have to recognise that:

Our Unity is Our Strength

The unions of course would say that they are the means for workers to unify. But when it comes to the workplace workers are divided up

by various union allegiances, not to mention that many workers are not in unions at all. Any serious struggle must start from encouraging the participation of everyone in the whole workplace. But this is just the beginning. The aim must be to extend the struggle as widely as possible: beyond any single workplace, beyond industry and category boundaries, where possible to include local communities and with the perspective that each local struggle is part of a wider international struggle against the world capitalist class. At every step the key must be to hold regular mass assemblies run on the basis of direct democracy – i.e. where delegates have to explain their actions and if need be can be immediately recalled by the meeting as a whole. This perspective alone would ensure that even when workers are obliged to retreat in the immediate battle there are valuable lessons learned about how to fight next time. Beyond, this it is not our task to lay down a blueprint for how the working class must fight. What is essential however, once the working class struggle really gets going, is for an international political organisation of the working class with a programme which articulates the lessons from a long history of working class struggles and points the way towards our ultimate goal: A world that is rid of capitalism, wage slavery and wars and instead is based on the free association of the people who do the work, where “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all”. This is the real meaning of communism. It is a far more realistic goal than the utopian idea that rotten monopoly-finance capitalism can be directed to meet the needs of the world’s working class.

What We Stand For:

A global society where 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. This can only be created through the activity of millions of human beings. It will rid us of the capitalist offspring of poverty, hunger, oppression and war. We call it communism but it has nothing in common with 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 is not a government in waiting. It does not rule but it will lead and guide the struggle for a new world. We by no means claim to be that party, only one of the elements which will come together in its formation. As the working class is faced with the consequences of a crumbling capitalist system it will have to unite and confront capitalist power. We aim 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.

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“The Only War Worth Fighting is the Class War”

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hardship and disease all took their toll. In 1914 only a few “mad” revolutionaries called for the working class to turn the imperialist war into class war.

Foremost amongst these were the Bolsheviks in Russia. Eventually this call had an echo. When the bread ration was cut to 2oz a day in Petrograd in February 1917 women workers from the factories went on strike. In their demonstrations they did not just demand bread but also “Down with the War”. This launched a revolutionary wave which not only brought about the October Revolution but led to strike waves and risings across Europe. The October Revolution had been a big blow to Russia’s Entente allies in Britain and France, but it was to the Central Powers of Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire that the revolutionary wave moved next. The German General Staff had told the Kaiser the war was lost in August 1918. Strikes against the war had already broken out across the Austro-Hungarian territories in October, ending the Habsburg Empire. The war finally ended in November when German sailors in Kiel and Wilhelmshaven mutinied, fraternised with the local population and set up workers’ and soldiers’ councils on the Russian model.

Antifascism and Imperialism

Europe (and beyond) was in turmoil for the next few years, but thanks to the influence of the pro-imperialist Social Democratic parties within the working class the capitalists recovered control everywhere, except the former Russian Empire. There the isolated working class succumbed to counter-revolution in a different and more damaging way. The eventual victory of Stalinism led to the imprisonment and death of hundreds of thousands of class conscious workers. Equally bad was the fact that the USSR was now passed off as a “workers’ state”. The defeat of the working class revolutionary wave was devastating. In the defeated countries the capitalists turned to the imperialist ideology of fascism to keep in control of their wealth. And once the post-war boom (The “Roaring Twenties”) collapsed in 1929 into a new Depression, the way was once again open to war.

In the defeated powers nationalism (in Fascist garb)

still worked. In the victorious powers nationalism had largely been discredited by the First World War. Here the trick for the capitalist class was to find an ideology to mobilise the proletariat. They found it in anti-fascism. None of the powers that formed the Allies were particularly anti-fascist. All did, or tried to do, deals with the Fascist regimes (including the USA). Britain and France tried to incite Hitler to attack the USSR first. The USSR came up with the Popular Front government idea to try to form anti-fascist alliances in the West. It worked and conned workers into fighting in wars that were not their own. One of the biggest victims of this was the Spanish working class. Their anarchist leaders decided in 1936 to suspend social revolution in favour of “anti-fascism” and defence of the capitalist Spanish Republic. The result was the massacre of hundreds of thousands of revolutionary workers, first by Stalinists, and then by Franco.

No-one was more cynical as an “antifascist” than Stalin. In 1939, to the consternation of Stalinists everywhere, he suddenly abandoned anti-fascism in order to sign the Nazi-Soviet Pact². This agreement dismembered Poland and the Baltic States. It restored to the USSR much of what had been lost of the old Tsarist Empire. Stalin’s war would never be an “anti-fascist” one. Its rallying cry was “defend the Great Russian Motherland”.

What eventually brought the Allies together was a common fight for their separate imperialist interests. The Nazi search for *lebensraum* eventually threatened them all. This was not a war for democracy (in Stalin’s USSR?!) but the slogan was enough to mobilise millions to die for imperialist interests.

Imperialist War Today

And today in Ukraine the justification for the (unannounced) Russian invasion is once again to oppose “fascism”. Although fascist elements are involved with Kiev the dominant idea is for Ukrainian capitalists to get into the EU zone of influence. In reality Russian nationalists are no better than the “fascists” they condemn. The terror and misery that both sides have launched upon the citizens of Eastern Ukraine makes such labels meaningless. What we are seeing are two regimes trying to divide the workers of the Ukraine through nationalism (Russian or Ukrainian). There are signs that they are not always successful but it is sad to see so-called socialists, anarchists and other self-

proclaimed revolutionaries there acting as recruiting sergeants for anti-working class agendas. It seems they have learned nothing from the experience of 1914 or 1939. We have to stand for the autonomy of the working class. Marx wrote “Workers have no country”. The capitalists own the means of production in every country and every country goes to war to protect its own property. Workers have no stake in this but they are the victims of wars as we can see just by looking across the planet.

In Syria, Iraq, Gaza, Afghanistan, Pakistan, South Sudan, Congo, Central Africa, and Nigeria just to mention the most obvious, war is devastating the lives of the populations. In an imperialist world these wars do not arise spontaneously or by accident (although “the law of unintended consequences” means that some surrogates (like the Taliban or IS) get out of control of the imperialist sponsoring power). Imperialist wars are the product of a struggle for control of the wealth of the planet and it is no accident that the number of wars is increasing.

Capitalism is in a deep crisis. The post-war settlement of Bretton Woods collapsed years ago and the bursting of the speculative bubble in 2007 means our capitalist masters are floundering for a solution. We are at the end of a cycle of accumulation and only a massive devaluation of capital can restart it. At the moment devaluing working class wages (variable capital) is their main strategy but even this will not be enough to kickstart the economy and they know it. In the twentieth century the ultimate devaluation came via war as in 1914-18 and 1939-45. The First World War did not do such a great job at devaluation so the Roaring Twenties did not last long, but the 1945 situation was different. After 6 years of massive destruction we had the longest boom in capitalist history. It is now a distant memory.

War or Revolution

Increasing international tensions from the EU borders to the South China Sea via the mayhem of the Middle East prove that imperialist imperatives never go away. After a century of domination the relative decline of the US is a recipe for more tension. At the end of the Second World War a victorious US government laid down the marker for the “American century”. This was that US GDP should equal some 45% of global purchasing power. That figure has now fallen to 19.2%. And when a rising power like China feels it is being thwarted by

the former great powers the scope for negotiation narrows. Already the US has responded to the more aggressive policy of Beijing in the South China Sea with its “Asian pivot” which seeks to reinforce its Asian allies (especially Japan and the Philippines). The consequence of this has been to spark off an arms race in the region. The lesson of history from the period leading up to the First World War was that arms races only end in war and those wars are often started by big powers supporting their little power allies when the stakes are high. We are not there yet but the preparations have already begun.

The only alternative to capitalism’s “final solution” is working class revolution. This seems at first sight to be even further off. After decades of restructuring and the fragmentation of the old working class organisations of every description in the traditional capitalist states, a great deal of our historic memory as a class has been lost. However today there are 3.2 billion workers around the world. We can see from China to South Africa that they are not a mere sociological category. They are fighting against the drive to exploit them more and more. This exploitation is at the heart of capitalist treatment of its wage slaves. It is also the reason that the class struggle never goes away. We need to step up our fight for a society without nations, borders, states, wars, and exploitation. Our war is the class war!

Notes

1 Title taken from the graffiti of one of the 16 gaoled at Richmond Castle in 1916. He wrote this on his prison cell wall.

2 For more on this see <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2014-09-17/75-years-since-the-soviet-invasion-of-poland-the-nightmare-of-imperialist>. This article is only a rough outline of our views which can be found in many more articles on our website.

