

# AURORA



## “Year of the Squeeze”: The Working Class Pays for the Crisis

While the Tory government gets embroiled in another political crisis of its own making, life gets harder for the rest of us. The picture was already bleak in 2021, when in November inflation rose to 5.1%, its highest rate in a decade. The price of certain goods was already skyrocketing, most notably fuel. The average price of petrol soared by 29.5%, while the average gas bill rose by 12%. These figures are unfortunately set to go from bad to worse, with inflation largely predicted at a further rise of 6%. The gas price cap is also set to be removed, which many experts fear could lead to a further price hike of up to 50%. Also in the pipeline are rises in council tax and national insurance, while personal income tax allowance will remain the same. The capitalist think tank Resolution Foundation has predicted that these measures will cost the average family around £1,200 this year. And to top it all off, after repeated reassurance that free lateral flow tests would not be scrapped, it now looks like they will be scrapped at the end of June (whether this latest U-turn is a deliberate attempt to confuse and mislead us or just another blunder due to sheer incompetence is anyone's guess).

In light of the rising cost of just about everything, not to mention the conditions we have had to endure throughout the pandemic, and what with the infamous labour shortage so widely lamented in the capitalist press, you might think that at least a long overdue pay rise would be on



the cards. But although the 6.6% rise in minimum wage looks good on paper, it continues to trail behind the rate of inflation. So in a word, we are set to become worse off as a class, not better.

### It's Still Class vs. Class

But of course, this “year of the squeeze” will not be squeezing everyone equally. While the capitalist press will continue to tell us that we are “all in this together”, the ruling class it represents continue to dine out on the fruits of our labour

while insisting that we “tighten our belts” in these times of “universal hardship”. Research by the High Pay Centre indicates that in only a week the average top company director had already ‘earned’ more than the average annual earnings of a full-time worker in the UK (i.e. by around 9am on Friday 7 January). Meanwhile, though most FTSE100 firms have yet to report their CEO pay for 2021, over half of those who have done so have reported increases. The scandal here is not

merely one of sheer proportion, though that alone is obviously shocking enough. The truly galling part is where those vast amounts of money come from. Their profits are derived entirely from the appropriation of the product of our labour. The whole capitalist system is based on the fact that the money we each spend the whole year earning for ourselves is but a fraction of what we make for the bosses (and indeed, let's not kid ourselves, it's the smallest fraction they can get away with giving back to us to keep us coming to work, be that the legal minimum wage, or the natural minimum set by the limits of what we're willing to put up with). So when we're told by the capitalist press that 2022 is set to be the “year of the squeeze”, we must always remember who's squeezing whom.

### The Capitalist Crisis

But the bosses' system plunges deeper into a crisis of its own creation, and so squeeze us they must. If, over 160 years ago, the ruling class could be compared to a “sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells”, this insight has only become truer with each day that has passed since. Yet again, their only solution is to stretch the working class to breaking point in every direction. That, or a massive devaluation of capital, such as through world war, which could restart a new cycle of accumulation at the cost of untold destruction of human life and material resources.

And so it is that fighting back against their constant attacks on our pay, conditions and standards of living becomes more necessary by the hour. Whatever the political persuasion of the clown the bosses put in charge, we cannot expect them to act in any interests but their own; that is, against ours. Our power to fight back lies in our own hands as a class, and it is down to us to express it through our own organs, be they strike committees, neighbourhood assemblies and ultimately workers' councils. We cannot afford to put this power into the hands of politicians and union bureaucrats, however much they pretend to be on our side.

## The Ruling Class Has No Solution to the Climate Crisis



The COP26 conference in Glasgow last November proved to be another predictable failure to address the climate crisis. The pledges to limit greenhouse gas emissions, in order to keep the temperature rise to no more than 1.5 degrees as explained within the proposed Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), are a complete fantasy. According to the 2021 Emissions Gap

Report, the current plans within the NDCs will, at best, limit temperature rise to a catastrophic 2.5 degrees. The COP26's biggest failure is yet another empty request of nations to put forward viable greenhouse emission schemes to limit temperature increases to the 1.5 degree goal set by the Paris Climate Conference 7 years ago. Both the current rate of increase and the historic trend

suggest this will not happen, but the insufficient NDCs that came out of the Glasgow conference are the final proof that the issue is still not being tackled seriously.

Hence the question arises as to why exactly these conferences, and capitalist society as whole, are fundamentally unable to find viable solutions to the climate crisis. Put simply, their solutions are intrinsically limited to the framework of capital. Any real solutions will either be swept aside due to their incompatibility with capitalist society and its tendency of continued profits and growth in favour of plans that do align with such tendencies. Any “solutions” that are adopted, will have to continue to generate profits and growth which will ultimately lead them back to the very position that necessitated such “solutions” in the first place. Whether the ruling class actively knows this, or not, is besides the point.

### The Capitalist Framework

All across the world we can find examples which serve to highlight why capitalist states are

unable to provide any real meaningful solutions to the climate crisis: they exist to uphold capitalist property and ensure the continued accumulation of capital.

The suggestion of electric batteries replacing internal combustion engines within cars is one of them. Initially this idea was a way to move away from the increased greenhouse gas emissions that were a result of combustion engines and fossil fuels. Yet however many cars and other machines that rely on fossil fuels are changed to the electric alternative, the way in which it is done still requires massive amounts of rapid resource extraction needed from already vulnerable places of the world, which brings up similar issues regarding greenhouse gas emissions. Metal resource extraction itself made up 26% of global carbon emissions in 2019 and is likely to increase as more precious metals are required for such a transition.

Another example is the EU – which sees sustainable development as one of its core principles – undermining its own targets by the continued support for many of the driving forces of climate change. Subsidies under the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) are easily abused by fishing companies, which along with other fishing policies are one of the core reasons that EU deadlines to reduce overfishing are continually missed. Fossil fuel subsidies are given to already massive polluting sectors such as the transport sector, which gets nearly 50 billion euros each year whilst 2 billion euros a year to support coal power plants. The

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# Against Conspiracy Theories, For a Working Class Response to the Pandemic!

The Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly revealed the sleaze and corruption of the ruling classes. In the UK, the Tories have handed out PPE contracts worth billions of pounds to their mates, and repeatedly violated their own lockdown rules in a clear illustration of “one rule for them and another rule for us”. The pandemic has also served as an opportunity to beef up the powers of the state. Various bills clamping down on the right to protest, free speech, freedom of movement, and even the right to live in the country are currently being debated and/or introduced. And it does not help that the government’s response to the pandemic has from the beginning been full of contradictory twists and turns. From “herd immunity”, through “stay at home, save lives”, to “eat out to help out”, official advice has been nothing if not confusing.

If before the pandemic public trust in the government was already at its lowest levels in decades, recent events have done little to upset this trend. Little surprise then that gradually as the pandemic unfolded various conspiracy theories have gained traction among sectors of the population. Some believe the pandemic was planned to create a “new world order” or that the virus is just a hoax, others that 5G is the source of the virus, or that there is some “miracle cure” out there. The beauty of such theories is that they take what may be legitimate fears and concerns, and, by drawing a line between “believers” and “non-believers”, establish a framework based on emotional responses. Whatever the specific claims, such conspiracy theories serve to undermine otherwise basic health measures (washing hands, wearing masks, getting vaccinated, etc.) and provide fertile ground for reactionary tendencies to exploit those fears and concerns.

But let us take a step back here.

## A Materialist Approach

From the beginning of the pandemic we have argued that the virus is a natural consequence of the capitalist mode of production. The characteristic features of this mode of production is wage labour and capital accumulation. This pandemic is not the first of its kind, and it will not be the last. We live in societies where there is no harmony between humanity and nature, where profit is the primary motive of production. Cramped living conditions, poverty and poor health, all promote the spread of viruses. Already stripped-down health services then become easily overwhelmed, leading to more unnecessary deaths. Governments, which represent the alienated power of the few over the many, then try to paper over the cracks, to make up for previous oversights (such as ignoring decades of scientific

advice and not taking outbreaks of viral diseases in “some far off lands” seriously enough).

The ruling and the working classes do not have the same interests. The exploitation of workers is essential for the creation of profit. For this, we have to be able to sell our labour-power to our bosses, day in, day out. The ruling class has to guarantee the conditions of our survival even if just the bare minimum, as otherwise their whole financial and commercial world collapses. This explains two things simultaneously: why the ruling class has introduced vaccines, lockdowns and covid passes to reduce the spread of the virus (i.e. to preserve their workforce), and why at the same time they have been all too eager to get us back to work (i.e. to safeguard their flow of profit). This is a contradiction which lies at the heart of all the twists and turns of government policy.



**A Collective Response to a Collective Problem**

Of course, as workers it is also in our interest to remain alive. Estimates of the death toll from Covid-19 range from 5 to 20 million worldwide. Vaccines, while not a “miracle cure” either, are statistically proven to decrease hospitalisations. Masks and social distancing, while again not a complete guarantee against catching or spreading Covid-19, are statistically proven to reduce transmission. To protect our workmates, our families and friends, the immunocompromised and the elderly, it is our social responsibility to take all the precautions we can to stop the spread of the virus. Does this mean the class struggle is suspended for the duration of the pandemic? Far from it!

The pandemic has exacerbated the ongoing capitalist crisis. And as always, it is the working class that is forced to pay for it. Rising prices of essential goods and services, wage cuts, lay-offs, restructuring, etc. The working class needs to defend its own interests. Early on in the pandemic, we saw workers across the world demanding PPE, for safe systems to be put in place, and for non-

essential work to be stopped, struggles best summed up under the slogan: “we don’t want to die for your profits!” In the USA, workers recently demanded improvements to their working conditions in the biggest wave of strikes there in decades. In Iran, oil workers organised in their own independent “coordinating councils” have for months waged an inspiring battle against their bosses (and in response to deaths of workmates from Covid-19, they demanded that all workers be vaccinated). In Kazakhstan, workers have responded to a sudden increase in gas prices by walking off their jobs and holding mass assemblies. Even in the UK we have seen some signs of revival, even if the working class is still reeling from the defeats of the past and struggles to escape from the straitjacket of the trade unions that prevent a wider fightback.

And this is the issue for what comes next. Not only do we have to reject the petty bourgeois small minded individualism of the anti-lockdown and anti-vax movements who have nothing to offer us (except a “return to normality”, that is, to the uninterrupted production of profit which, particularly during a pandemic, is a threat to the health of those both inside and outside the workplace). As the pandemic shows more signs of coming under control, we also have to step up our collective resistance to new attacks which the system will make on our lives. Capitalism is already plunging humanity into something worse than barbarism. Already a quarter of the world’s population is subject to “food insecurity” whilst millions more are forced to flee wars and economic collapse with many then meeting a miserable end trying to breach the fortresses of the heartlands of the system. The fight against capitalism is not just about fighting in our workplaces (although it is a start) but also uniting beyond them. Capitalism may be suffering multiple crises but it will take a revolution across the world to halt its bloody career. And for this the workers of the world, the only truly collective class, need to come together in a revolutionary political movement which rejects both the false state capitalist models of the past masquerading as communism and the futile reformist activism of the left of capital today. Capitalism may collapse but it will be followed by something infinitely worse unless we can create a political movement which will be both international and internationalist to unite the one class capable of creating a new world without exploitation, imperialist war, national frontiers and environmental degradation. We have both a world to save – and to win.

## No Solution to Capitalism's Climate Crisis (from page 1)

EU’s continued support of climate intensive sectors can also be seen in its large support of the livestock farms across Europe, which get 25 billion euros every year. This contributes large amounts of greenhouse gas emissions, accounting for 17% of EU’s total emissions, which match, or even surpass, many of the emissions caused by cars that are directly reliant on fossil fuels.

The capitalist state, just like the ruling class that it ultimately is an organ of, has no interest in upsetting the foundations on which it has been built.

### Is There No Alternative?

Looking for solutions to the climate crisis, some may point to the Green Party, Extinction Rebellion or various “Green New Deal” proposals. But the issue is not that the capitalist state is currently acting in this manner due to having a “bad batch” of politicians in power, as something that can simply be put in different hands and then provide a radically different outcome. Rather this growing climate crisis is the perfect product of capitalist society as a whole. Many different sets of politicians, parties and governments have come and gone over the past few decades yet fundamentally nothing has changed in regards to the climate crisis. The capitalist state cannot be reformed or moulded into anything else other than a tool for upholding capitalist society and exploitation of humans and nature from which its wealth stems.

The capitalist state needs to be smashed and not just replaced with another ruling clique (as Stalinists and others have done in the past), but rather one in which the working class has seized political and economic power to then embark upon dismantling capitalism and hence the very basis from which it was born, resulting in a society in which human need, not profit, is the guiding motive. One in which humanity is able to fully realise its relationship with nature without the shackles of alienation that are present within capitalist society. As Marx put it in his 1844 Manuscripts, “This communism ... is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man [sic] and nature and between man and man – the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution.”

In this society and within the process by which we get there are the real solutions to climate change. Otherwise we are staring at a future of economic crises, climate disasters, pandemics and all out imperialist wars.

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## What We Stand For

**Aurora** is published by the Communist Workers' Organisation (CWO).

The CWO stands 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 collective power is exercised through class-wide organisations like workers' councils. This has to mean the active, daily participation of the majority aiming for the interests of all. Only then can the world be rid of the capitalist offspring of poverty, hunger, oppression and war: we call it communism but this vision has nothing in common with Stalinist state capitalism and the old USSR.

In order to get there we are working to create a world working class political organisation – a ‘party’ for want of a better word – not a government in waiting but a guide in the struggle for a new world. We by no means claim to be that party but we do aim to be one of the elements which will need to 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.

We are not in competition with other organisations but seek 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.

Email: [uk@leftcom.org](mailto:uk@leftcom.org)  
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