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AURORA

Unite the Strikes



On the first of February, 2023, over 500,000 workers walked out in what was the biggest strike day for over a decade. On pickets and rallies across the country, teachers, university lecturers, civil servants, and train drivers all made the same calls for better pay, higher staffing, and an end to the looting of public services by the government. This is just the beginning of a strike wave which has been gaining pace over the course of last year as increases in energy price and inflation have destroyed the living standards of working people. This is a struggle which has extended to nurses, paramedics, ambulance drivers, firefighters and others. It is becoming rare for there to be a single day where there is not some strike or other action being taken by workers against the dire conditions they are being forced into. But, despite the popularity of these actions and the growing realisation by all working people of their necessity, official unions only offer limited co-operation with each other, drastically reducing the strength of these struggles and dooming them to failure. This is all despite the attempts by the government to impose anti-strike legislation, requiring 'minimum service levels' on strike days and criminalising any protest which they deem to be 'disruptive'.

In response, the government maintains that a 'wage-price spiral' would be caused by any pay increase, thus deepening inflation, in spite of the fact that the inflation crisis has happened following decades of stagnating wages; conversely,

the Bank of England points to energy price rises from the war in Ukraine and supply chain issues caused by COVID-19 as the predominant causes. The Office for National Statistics shows public sector pay is growing around 7% below the rate of inflation, meaning a huge real-terms pay cut for workers already beginning to rely on food banks and credit. Any worker who has seen their energy, food and housing costs skyrocket knows that the argument that this crisis is caused by their lavish lifestyles is rubbish. In response to this, the international capitalist class is striving to ensure this remains a crisis for the working class to endure alone. The situation is even worse here than in other G7 countries as every problem becomes compounded by our government's staggering incompetence and corruption. This is the reality behind the ridiculous farce where prime ministers are changed every few months, policies are picked up and dropped with ease, and huge sums of public money disappear without trace yet prices still rise and wages still fall.

The International Monetary Fund has predicted that the UK will be the only major economy to shrink this year, even trailing behind a war-stricken and sanctioned Russia. UK workers will be paying more tax, hundreds of thousands of jobs will be lost, and overall household incomes are predicted, by the Office for Budget Responsibility, to fall by a further 7%, the biggest drop in living standards since their records began. Make no

mistake, when the government asks you to be 'realistic' with your demands for a fair wage, they are asking you to take the entirety of the hit for the economic crisis; their first and last resort is always to extract as much wealth as they can from the working class. It is no coincidence that energy companies are sending thugs to break into houses and install prepayment meters while their profits last year doubled to just under \$200bn. We live in a world where the richest 1% have taken two thirds of all new wealth created since 2020. This is not some temporary irrationality that we just need to wait out. It shows the most fundamental truth of the capitalist system: that it is simply a means of unceasingly generating as much revenue and profit as is possible and that in periods of crisis, when growth stalls and creditors panic, there is no human need or standard of life that cannot be sacrificed in the pursuit of capital.

Fortunately, the strikes show no sign of stopping. They are an expression of the immense power that working people have, that they are sole creators of value in society and through withdrawing their labour they demonstrate that nothing can function without them. Only by recognising that capitalist society offers them nothing but increasing exploitation and ruinous conditions of life on behalf of a parasitic class can they direct their efforts to destroy this murderous system and build a new one in which they alone plan production for their collective needs and not individual

profit. However, the current union framework offers no such perspective. By agitating nearly exclusively for wage increases and splintering the class amongst each industry and sector, allowing themselves to be constrained by anti-strike legislation and making bureaucratic manoeuvres behind their members' backs they prevent the workers from becoming a genuinely revolutionary class for itself and discovering the necessary political forms it needs to fight back in this intensifying class war. When the experience of waiting in an A&E corridor for hours to receive help, sending your children to a run-down school where the supplies are bought by teachers out of their own pocket or having to choose between heating or food are becoming commonplace, it is time for us to reach out to workers in other industries, workers who share the same daily struggles that we do of low wages, high workloads and poor services. We need to form connections, that can be the basis of a united, autonomous fightback of the working class organised from below through independent strike committees and workers' councils, forming the basis of a revolutionary party. This is the only way to resist and ultimately overthrow the system that deprives us not only for the majority of our lives to the drudgery of exploited labour but, for more and more people, even basic standards of life.

Capitalism Cannot Be Made Fair

The sudden rise in prices, combined with decades of attacks on wages, have not only produced a surge in strikes, they have also produced new activist-reformist campaigns. The Don't Pay campaign, launched last June, is one. It calls for capitalism to lower energy prices via state action and its activist methods – demonstrations and a non-payment 'strike' – are familiar to anyone who has encountered the capitalist left in the last 20 years.

However capitalism's cost of living crisis is just an aspect of the system's general crisis of profitability. For the capitalist class the solution to its profitability crisis is reducing the share of the social product going to the working class and increasing that going to capital. Don't Pay aims only to make this a fair division via a 'fair' price cap. They tell us "It's not about never paying bills again." This is just a reformist demand for 'fair' exploitation, the repetition of the trade-unionists' slogan "a fair day's pay for a fair day's work." Ultimately this amounts to support for capitalism.

The reformist Holy Trinity – activism, trade unionism and parliamentarianism – has been joined by the Enough is Enough campaign. Its 5 demands are "a real pay rise," cheaper and nationalised energy, using state welfare programs to limit food poverty and homelessness, and – of course – taxing the rich. They talk of "rights", "national disgrace", "government duty", "patriotic gestures" and complain about the "super-rich" and "big businesses." Like Don't Pay this is again an attempt to make

capitalism fair. If only the rich were taxed, state spending redistributed and different politicians (Labour) were in control, the system could be made fair. But this system, based on exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class, can never be made fair, and the entire ruling class and their political parties, including Labour, are committed to this.

The Don't Pay campaign has frequently likened itself to the successful 1989-93 poll tax non-payment movement. But this movement targeted an unpopular "politically imposed tax" which was intended to shift the payment for local government onto the shoulders of the working class. It was a tax aimed directly at the working class. Non-payment included workers mobilising locally to stop the bailiffs seizing property of those refusing to pay. The cost-of-living crisis is a consequence of the laws of the market. Don't Pay demands taxation of energy companies and state use of tax revenues to keep energy prices down. However, energy companies can avoid taxes by declaring their profits wherever tax is low and instead of taxing them the state is granting them subsidies. When they go bankrupt, as in the case of 29 energy companies including Bulb, the state sells them on and passes their debts to the taxpayer. Any price capping by the state, will be paid for by further taxing the working class, together with cutting spending on welfare, state benefits and the social wage.

Millions of people fail to pay their energy bills every year because they can't afford to pay. Before the autumn of 2022 there were £2.1 billion unpaid bills. However, the energy companies have long-established legal and illegal tactics to deal with non-payment. Don't Pay themselves admit that those with prepayment meters cannot withhold payment (their power would just shut off) and the first port-of-call for the energy companies faced with nonpayment is to install a prepayment meter. The campaign could only have worked if combined with real community opposition to the installation of prepayment meters and struggles by workers in the energy sectors to provide free gas and electricity to vulnerable households. That this is a possibility was shown by workers in France, who recently provided free energy to low income households, schools, sports centres and universities in pursuit of their fight against the increase in pension age. But this is not something which can be conjured out of thin air by a small group of well-meaning activists. It requires a serious step up in the class struggle.

Don't Pay has failed to gain its "1 million pledges" to not pay which it aimed for by 1 October 2022. It received less than a fifth of its goal by that date. Whether the strike even went ahead on the new date, 1 December (still without 1 million pledges), is unclear – most of all to its participants.

The only real immediate answer the working class has to capital's cost-of-living crisis is to take the struggle into our own

hands. Self-organisation from below, rather than dependence on union officials and activists to fight our battles for us. The fight must be taken to capital's other flank, the terrible wages the capitalist class offers, and the general assault they are waging to drive them yet lower. The strike wave throughout autumn and winter is already the largest in 30 years. But by promoting reformist activism the "Don't Pay" and Enough is Enough campaigns undermine any linkage between the struggle for better wages and conditions, which in the long term will always be taken back by the capitalist class, and the need to end the wages system and class society which means the overthrow of capitalism. They further undermine the urgent work for workers to develop their political organs and to go on the offensive to create a communist society.

The working class offensive is the only real solution. A united class fightback, with mass strikes controlled by workers themselves through coordinated strike committees is the only way a halt to the attacks we are facing can be achieved.

Only a new system of production, where production is organised for human need and classes and wage labour are abolished once and for all, will finally end this struggle against capitalist exploitation. The working class alone, having overthrown the capitalist class and leading society through their workers' councils, can build this. Forget the reformist dead end of making capitalism better; we have a world to win!

Ukraine War – No to Imperialist War, Yes to Class War!

February saw the first anniversary of the Ukraine war - a year of massive destruction and massive loss of workers' lives. As the front lines move back and forth, the US and its NATO allies escalate the supply of deadly weapons to Ukraine. Following the artillery, rockets, and Russian tanks from ex-Warsaw Pact countries, it was announced in January that hundreds of Western tanks and longer range rockets would be supplied together with 300 so-called contractors embedded with the Ukrainian army to service and repair this equipment – echoing Vietnam. Supplying tanks crossed a supposed red line. The next red line is fighter jets but almost immediately after supplying the tanks there was talk of sending F16 fighter jets. One red line after another is just being crossed as Ukraine demands more. Ukraine's deputy foreign minister has even asked for submarines to sink the Russian Black Sea fleet! It's clear we are on an escalation treadmill which could, if the Ukrainian army collapses, lead to the direct involvement of NATO troops and an open war with NATO.

There is now not even any pretence that the war is between Ukraine and Russia with NATO merely helping Ukraine; the German foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, made it clear that this is a proxy war of NATO against Russia when she casually announced, to the council of Europe, that "We are fighting a war against Russia." The truth is that the war is imperialist on both sides. On the NATO side, the US ultimately wants to split up the Russian Federation into smaller republics in order to loot their resources and exploit their workers, while on the Russian side, the aim is to secure the riches of the Donbas and secure territory to protect itself against these

aims of the US. In either case, it is the working class of both countries being asked – and often forced – into fighting and dying for these imperialist goals. For the US, China is the key adversary and the Ukraine war is just a warm-up, with its medium term aim being to weaken Russia so it will not be able to assist China in a future conflict. The formation of military alliances with China's neighbours and the belligerent statements from US military and politicians make this clear. US General Minihan, for example, said the US would be at war with China by 2025; other generals have said 2027 but the message is clear and the flashpoint is Taiwan.

This war expresses the crisis the whole capitalist system finds itself in. Declining global profit rates intensify the need for competition between rival nations, which

expresses itself as a scramble for more spheres of investment, raw materials and more readily exploitable workers. When the world has been fully divided up between the imperial powers, they can no longer find these things without a new division of the world. War becomes the only option available. Already, the race for raw materials has led us to the brink of climate collapse, now the crisis of the system has become so acute that our leaders are prepared to wage a barbaric war in the heart of Europe, risking an escalation into a global conflict and even discussing the use nuclear weapons.

The only way to end this conflict and the slide to global war is to destroy its cause, the global capitalist system. Only the international working class is able to do this because of its position as an exploited class

on whose labour the whole system depends. This can only be achieved through the conquest of political power from the parasitic classes that exploit our labour in peace and march us into our graves in their wars. By depriving the ruling classes of their property, and with it their political strength, and seizing the means to directly shape our own lives, we can transform ourselves from an exploited class, existing only as wage slaves to create profit, into a real human community that produces to meet the needs of each and for whom war would be a relic of the past. Already our rulers are linking their attacks on our wages and living conditions to the war. They tell us we must tighten belts and accept sacrifices because of the war, but the war is being fought for their profits with arms they supply and money they provide, with over \$120bn flowing into Ukraine from 28 combined countries. We need to refuse any economic sacrifices for their wars. Instead, workers all over the world need to step up the economic struggle for our interests.

The war is not worth a drop of workers' blood. In imperialist war there are no good sides or lesser evils. Any political support for either side, no matter how qualified, is support for imperialism; it represents abandoning the interests of the working class and supporting those of the capitalists and the crossing of class barricades. The imperialist war must be turned into a class war. For the workers on the front this means fraternisation with enemy soldiers and mutiny, and for the workers at home this means strike action and sabotage against their nation's war effort. Refuse to play a part in this imperialist plunder! No war but the class war!



The Migration Crisis stems from the Crisis of Capitalism

The UN Refugee Agency estimates that there are now a record 100 million displaced people in the world. Climate change projections suggest that they will be joined by another 200 million by 2050. This exponential increase is a product of the barbarism of crisis-ridden capitalism which generates war, poverty and an increasingly degraded environment in many parts of the world where human life is no longer sustainable.

A relatively small number of these migrants attempt to enter the EU, and an even smaller number try to come to Britain. Rishi Sunak has stated that dealing with migrants is one of his top five priorities, which include inflation and the NHS, and the apparent solution is to stop them coming. In this the UK is not so very different to most of the EU; the anti-migrant rhetoric, generated by politicians and much of the media, is virtually the same, whether the boats are coming from Libya to Italy or just across the Channel to the UK from France.

Ministers claim to have concern for genuine refugees and to want to save them from the dangers of crossing the sea in totally inadequate small boats operated by callous people-smuggling gangs who have a cynical disregard for human life. In that respect the politicians are very similar to the gangs as it is their callousness and hypocrisy in shutting down other routes that have forced migrants to risk dangerous sea crossings. Creating a 'hostile environment' to deter migrants has been government policy for years, and although the term was officially dropped, the reality is more hostile now than ever

before. Home Secretary Suella Braverman has adopted an even more virulently anti-migrant stance than her predecessors and has openly talked about her 'dream' to see plane loads of deported asylum seekers taking off for Rwanda.

Ramping up the anti-migrant rhetoric, Sunak is planning new legislation which could see all illegal entrants deported within days, without any opportunity to claim asylum or appeal against deportation. The overall number of asylum seekers coming to the UK still remains considerably lower than many other European countries. In 2021 (the last full year for which figures were published) Germany had the highest number with around 140,000 applicants followed by France with 103,000. The UK intake was around 50,000. Yet the British government and media frequently imply that the UK is carrying the main burden as other European countries are failing to pull their weight. This is not to suggest that the rest of Europe has a more liberal or humane attitude to migrants fleeing from war, persecution and destitution, because it does not. Anti-migrant rhetoric and policies are an EU-wide, and indeed a global phenomenon.

The UK's 'hostile environment' deterrent approach ensures that the life of a newly arrived asylum seeker is a life of uncertainty and misery. Asylum seekers are prevented from working whilst their applications are being considered. There are currently around 148,000 outstanding asylum applications in the system, meaning it can take up to several years for a decision to be made. Over 90% of applications made in 2021 have not yet received decisions. Being unable to work, applicants with no financial means of their own either have to rely on family support or survive in a twilight world of State 'support' amounting to £1.17 per day for those accommodated in hotels or £6.00 per day for those who are not. Lives are needlessly put on hold whilst the government bureaucracy slowly grinds on.

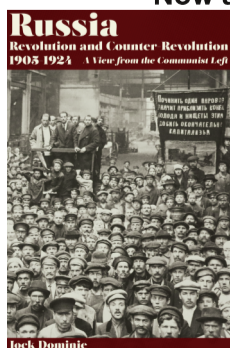
Contrast that with the situation for Ukrainian refugees. Since the start of the

war last February 104,000 Ukrainian refugees have been admitted under the sponsorship scheme plus a further 40,000 have been allowed to enter to stay with relatives. They are permitted to work and around 56% of those who have arrived have found jobs. Of course those fleeing war zones should be given a safe haven, but the hell hole of imperialist conflict which the Western powers and Russia have created in Ukraine is no worse than other war zones such as Syria where those fleeing have faced desperate struggles to enter into any European country. This preferential treatment reflects an underlying racism that has informed UK immigration policy ever since 1905 when the first immigration laws were introduced to stem the wave of Jewish migration from the Russian Empire. Perhaps more significantly, projecting the suffering of the Ukrainian people is a key element of Western propaganda in supporting a war which the West is as guilty as Russia in

provoking. Admitting Ukrainian refugees is intended to portray the (bogus) humanity of the West compared to Russian barbarism, and so justify Western involvement in the war.

Asylum, as defined by the Refugee Convention of 1951, and based on the provision of sanctuary to persecuted individuals, is now becoming increasingly irrelevant. In today's world it is mainly not the persecution of individuals that is driving mass migration, but the near total breakdown of the system in many parts of the world that is making life increasingly intolerable and unsustainable for those who need to live by selling their labour, i.e. the working class. We abhor the often callous treatment of migrants whose only crime is wanting to survive, but there will be no solution to mass migration until the underlying causes are addressed, and that requires getting rid of capitalism and the revolutionary transformation of society to create a socialist world.

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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.

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