

# AURORA



## The Real Fight is Yet to Come

Over the last year, the working class in the UK has been engaged in the largest strike wave in decades. There have been struggles on the railways, in hospitals, in schools and universities, at various bus companies around the country, as well as on oil rigs and refineries, among firefighters, workers in Amazon warehouses, and other sectors. Many of these strikes have been about pay, which has been stagnant for most since the financial crash of 2007/8. Since Covid and then the war in Ukraine, inflation has meant effective pay cuts for most workers. Among other grievances however, are concerns about reduced staffing, changes to shifts and under-investment in services – in short, worsening conditions for both workers and service users, whether they are passengers on the railways, school or university students, or patients in hospital.

This strike wave culminated on 1 February when workers – primarily in transport, education and healthcare – walked out in a day of action that saw more than half a million on strike. But by turning the day of action into the highpoint (read endpoint) the unions have consolidated their role of limiting its impact through separation and isolation. Instead of gathering workers to fight together in a class-wide movement, the unions even split workers in the same workplace from fighting together.

### Different Sectors, Same Struggle!

In the schools, the NEU and Unison have been at loggerheads. Unison (which traditionally organises support staff, but not teachers) brought a grievance last year against the NEU (a new union formed by amalgamating the NUT and ATL) for breaching agreements on which unions are recognised as negotiating for different grades of staff. The TUC has backed Unison in this action. On the railways, unions and management have combined to split the workforce and the disputes. The unions have settled with National Rail, and the RMT has announced the suspension of actions on London Underground, but strikes on the local operating companies continue; this means that some workers are continuing one- or two-day actions while others return to work. TSSA, ASLEF and the RMT have not acted in concert, but instead each worked to bring the strikes under control. In hospitals, nurses, junior doctors, ambulance staff and even consultants were threatening strike action and staged some one-day strikes. But when the RCN decided that nurses should return to work, and the ambulance workers also stopped their actions, the strike movement – and any moves towards unifying the strikes – faded away. The junior doctors are still in dispute but most of their fellow workers have gone back to work.

There have been a few success stories. In Birmingham, there was an all-out strike by bus workers that secured an inflation-beating deal in four days. This success was partly owed to the workers being in a strong position – there is a general shortage of staff in transportation at the moment – but also to the unity and militancy of the workers. There was almost total support for the strike and workers were able to demonstrate that they were serious about the action – not a one-day strike but a total stoppage of normal services until the management folded. But stories such as this are few and far between. Most of the strikes, controlled by the various union bureaucracies, have limped on to unsatisfactory conclusions. Below-inflation pay 'rises' and almost no safety or staffing concerns addressed mean a deterioration in all our living standards. At the same time the bosses are pocketing millions as we are forced to pay the consequences of their crisis-ridden system.

### The Bosses' Offensive is Gathering Momentum

The strikes of the last year have only emboldened the ruling class. They have rushed to introduce new laws that outlaw industrial action in key sectors. And with record numbers now at food banks and more people pushed into absolute poverty

they are now trying to blame inflation on us! When we try to fight back we are told we'll only make inflation worse. At the same time, no one really expects to win much (hence no pressure on the unions who can call off strikes without creating massive anger). Asking for crumbs is asking for more penury – the solution has to be to put an end to the profits system.

It is only a matter of time before the world capitalist economy suffers another financial crash. The knock-on effects of the bankruptcy of China's two biggest property companies are already being felt internationally. Like in 2007/8 we wage workers are going to find ourselves in another ball game and we'll have to stand together and fight as one, regardless of union allegiances. Even now we can challenge the attacks on living and working conditions by doing more than holding a union banner. The more workers can see beyond their own personal predicament or workplace struggle, the more we are likely to succeed. An organisation advocating revolution to the working class is a vital part of that struggle. If you agree, we urge you to join us in working towards a new society where human well-being, not profit, is the motive force.



## The Drive to World War

June marked the beginning of the spring counteroffensive in Ukraine. The preliminary results are in: at most a few dozen square kilometres of strategically insignificant territory have been exchanged for perhaps tens of thousands of human lives. With each passing day, the entire operation resembles the senseless slaughter of the First World War ever more closely.

Even so, our politicians and media attempt to "reassure" us that victory is within grasp – that is, so long as "we" continue to supply the Ukrainian army with the latest and greatest "lethal aid". To that end, Ukraine's western allies have been continually pushing the envelope, delivering ever more advanced and destructive weapons to the battlefield. July saw the deployment of controversial US-made cluster munitions, and there is every indication that a consignment of F-16 fighter jets will arrive in August.

Plainly, the main results of these "humanitarian" interventions will be a prolongation of the war, the maximisation of human suffering, and inflamed tensions between NATO and Russia. For its part, Russia has been more than happy to play into this spiral of escalation, with both Putin and Medvedev repeatedly and brazenly threatening the use of nuclear weapons in the event of direct NATO intervention. Meanwhile, the Wagner Group, exiled to Belarus after its bizarre mutiny in June, has set the Polish government on high alert. An additional

10,000 soldiers of the Polish army – on track to becoming the largest in the EU – have been rushed to the Belarusian border.

### Militarisation of the Sahel and the South China Sea

Whilst the Russia-Ukraine conflict continues to dominate the headlines, it's far from the only sign of the drive to generalised war. The end of July saw a successful coup in Niger. This follows similar military power grabs in Chad, Mali, and Burkina Faso, all of which took place in the last two years. The latest coup immediately provoked the threat of invasion from the pro-Western Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In response, the Burkinabe and Malian juntas pledged to aid in the defence of Niger. At the time of writing, the promised invasion has not yet materialised, but the situation is extremely precarious.

Almost the entirety of the Sahel is now under the control of military juntas, which seem to be aligning into an anti-ECOWAS bloc with the encouragement of the Russian government. Russia, which has already established a military foothold in the region through the Wagner Group, gave a significant boost to its African charm offensive at the recent Russia-Africa Summit in St. Petersburg, promising six of the continent's poorest countries 50,000 tonnes of free grain and debt forgiveness to the tune of 23 billion USD. It seems unlikely that the West will allow further

regional realignment without a fight – after all, France and the US have soldiers stationed in Niger, and Niger's uranium mines supply 20% of the uranium for French nuclear power stations.

Meanwhile, there is no sign of de-escalation in the South China Sea. The past five years have seen the US and Chinese governments adopting increasingly belligerent attitudes over the Taiwanese question, with both sides conducting massive drills and war games in anticipation of an invasion from the mainland. Unlike Ukraine, where NATO has been able to outsource the immediate responsibility for killing and dying to locals, a war over Taiwan would almost certainly involve the active participation of US military personnel in combat roles from day one; as a result, escalation into a worldwide conflict could be rapid.

### Against the False Promise of Pacifism

At first glance, the drive to generalised war can seem inexplicable. Humanity only stands to lose from it, and yet we seem to be inching towards it every day. However, it is not the result of pure madness, or pig-headed politicians and generals making the wrong choices. There is an inescapable force, rooted in the search for greater profits which drives the international capitalist system into crises that cannot be resolved through peaceful means. So long as we live in this system, in which antagonistic states clash to defend the particular interests of their own national capitals, we will continue to see bloody

conflicts paid for by people with no skin in the game; namely, the global working class.

History has shown again and again that effective opposition to imperialist wars cannot take the form of simple pacifism. Following the working class in Russia who had taken power into their own hands in 1917, the revolutionary uprising of the working class in Germany finally brought an end to the First World War. It was the threat of revolution and civil war that caused the powers of Europe to finally halt the slaughter to save their own necks. But ultimately, capitalism survived the day. Barely one generation later, the working class was once again massacred by the tens of millions in the cataclysm of the Second World War.

The working class must learn the lessons of history. We need to get politically organised for our own agenda which, far from fighting each other, is no less than taking power into our own hands and ending the next World War before it can begin!

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# Capitalism Reaches its Boiling Point

COP 28 is only a few months away and without a shadow of a doubt it will produce nothing but hollow promises and vague slogans of change, continuing the historical failure of previous conferences.

6 July 2023 saw the global average surface temperature reaching 17.08°C, making it the hottest July day ever recorded. Yet the record was not just broken on a single day; nearly the entire month of July was hotter than the previous record of 16.8°C – making July the world's hottest month on record overall. Based upon current trends, it is estimated global temperatures will breach the 1.5°C limit by 2027, above which millions more will be at risk of deadly heat waves and famine. The sole driving motivation of capitalism is to grow its profits as rapidly as possible and any death and misery brought by this is simply the cost of doing business. The vague hopes expressed at these conferences have no answers to the fact that, as shown time and time again, our little lives mean nothing in the face of capital expansion.

More terrifying still in this record-shattering period of the summer were the sea surface temperatures. On 4 August, sea surface temperatures hit 20.96°C, breaking the previous record from 2016. Such an unprecedented jump has not been seen in recent history; yet, this newly

found record will likely be surpassed just as easily next year, and every year to follow as long as the capitalist mode of production continues to pursue business-as-usual.

## A Catastrophe for Humanity and Nature

An increase of 1°C in sea temperature would cause a rise of 2.3 metres in sea levels, putting millions more at risk of displacement. And already as it stands 1.2 billion people are predicted to be forced to migrate by 2050 due to climate change and natural disasters.

Floods alone have accounted for over 5,600 deaths just within the EU in the last 40 years, and flooding will continue due to the effect sea surface temperature increases have in increasing rainfall and storms. This however is just the start of the catastrophe that humanity faces. Estimates suggest 1.81 billion people worldwide are currently at risk of flooding.

And the climate crisis does not only affect human society, for the nature around us that we depend upon and that depends upon us is facing tremendous peril. Another study showed rising sea levels could cause over 10,000 islands rich in biodiversity to become swamped. Many of these islands contain much of the

world's plants and wildlife in proportion to the area they take up. For example, the Overseas Territories of France account for only 0.08% of the Earth's surface but contain 1.4% of plants, 3% of molluscs, 2% of fish, 0.6% of birds, etc. These islands are irreplaceable, yet are all at risk of the climate crisis which capitalism will not allow to be combatted; nature and wildlife not on just these islands but around the world, just like us, is in great peril.

We could write volumes talking of the heat waves that caused huge issues and shutdowns in Iran this year, the estimated 2 million deaths globally due to extreme weather over the past 50 years, the increased wildfires in parts of the US, Canada, Europe and Asia that cause further destruction to both humanity and nature, the possible million species that will all go extinct in the coming decades, and so on. This never-ending list is but a testament to the danger the planet finds itself in. If these trends continue – and we all know that, with capitalism's inherent tendencies to put profit above all, they will – the situation is bound to only get worse.

## The Working Class at the Centre of the Storm

Don't think that everyone will suffer

equally; the ruling class have the means to escape the worst of this crisis. The ones who will bear the full brunt of the ecological crisis are none other than the working class and the rural poor. But if the unbearable weight of such a system and its consequences lies heavy atop our shoulders, so too does our power to change it. It is time enough to throw off those shackles and consign this system to the wayside of history, to embark upon a new path towards a society in which humanity has truly reconciled its relationship with nature and other humans, a communist society.



# Class Unity: Our Answer to Divide and Rule

The working class consists of all those who are forced to sell their labour-power in order to survive. Whether currently in or out of work, whether engaged in mental or manual labour, we are the class that owns no capital yet through our labour we produce the goods and provide the services that make up the economic life of the world. Today we make up the majority of the world's population. Workers come from all walks of life, we exist right across the divides of ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, ability and disability, culture and subculture. And we have a common condition (exploitation) and a common interest: putting an end to a system that is rotten to the core.

## Two Tactics of the Capitalist Class

Since the dawn of capitalism, when wage-labour became the dominant relation of production, the capitalist class has used various propaganda tricks to divide us. Like any ruler, they prefer to have us, their subjects, fight among ourselves and focus on the electoral game rather than on the real enemy: the system which exploits us. Resentment towards others is a common response to your needs not being met, and capitalism is not interested in fulfilling those needs, except where it can make a profit. The politicians and bosses of a more conservative or reactionary persuasion feed this resentment, by stirring up prejudices old and new, by convincing us that we should blame our neighbours or workmates for the misery we experience in our lives, because in one way or another they may be different from us. In such a way, racism became a justification for slavery and colonialism, sexism legitimised the oppression of women, while nationalism, that most potent form of identity politics, provides the pretext for imperialist wars.

Of course, the capitalist class, in order to protect its interests, does not just have the stick, it also has the carrot. The politicians and bosses of a more liberal or reformist persuasion have embraced the rights of workers, women, migrants, black people,

LGBT people, and so on, as a way to make all feel included and protected by the system. This has been useful to ensure a degree of social stability within democratic regimes. However, while certain forms of oppression may have been undermined this way, the most such inclusion can offer us within the framework of capitalism is simply equal exploitation on the one hand and the equal opportunity to exploit on the other. And, particularly in times of crisis when the system seems threatened, all these rights can be swept away since it is the capitalist class which ultimately writes the law according to their own needs.

Ironically, the limits of gaining representation within capitalist society, so desired by the left of capital, are well demonstrated by the various Conservative Party cabinets of recent years. These have been relatively diverse, both in terms of sexuality and ethnicity; Sunak even being the UK's first non-white prime minister. Yet it has not stopped his government from scapegoating migrants, fear-mongering about trans people, stoking opposition to environmental policies, and rallying for war against Russia and China. The Labour Party, His Majesty's Most Loyal Opposition, is quite happy to play along in an attempt to win over marginal constituencies.

Whichever tactic the ruling class adopts, the politicians and bosses are laughing all the way to the bank (whether the bank in question happens to be adorned by a Pride flag, the Union Jack, or both!). Workers who get entangled in the culture wars and identity politics of the right and left of capital become foot-soldiers of the system. A system that, aside from daily exploitation, seems to offer us only a future of oppression, economic crises, imperialist wars, environmental destruction, and health disasters.

## Working Class Response to the Electoral Trap

It is particularly in the run up to elections that different factions of the

capitalist class unleash their ideological arsenal in order to win enough votes to earn their place at the trough. The UK's ruling class parties are already testing out their propaganda, playing off the identities of their voter base. What gets lost in the picture is that this is purely a contest for who will be the custodian of the British capitalist state for the next five years. Behind all the culture war mystifications, designed to excite the electorate, are hidden the real interests of every capitalist state: the accumulation of capital.

As individuals we can reject all the options on the ballot paper. But as a class we can, and must, do more than that. We have to build a movement that can provide an alternative to the hell capitalism is taking us into. The only real alternative is a stateless, classless, moneyless society based on humanity collectively producing and distributing the products of our labour for the satisfaction of our needs. A society which could put an end to war,

exploitation, and oppression, and change our relationship with nature. But for such a society to come about, we need a "self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority" (Marx). Only such a movement could overthrow capitalism and lay the foundations of a new world. Only the world's working class, united, can do this.

To make this happen the working class needs its own international political organisation (not another parliamentary farce!), which we have to start building now, and its own political and economic bodies, which will have to emerge from the class struggle as a break from the institutions of the old society. If you agree with the urgent need to frame all the social, political and economic questions facing humanity in a completely different way to that of the right and left of capital, then get in touch.

## 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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