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#NHS Pay15

**manifesto
for the crisis:
class against class**

Manifesto for the Crisis: Class Against Class

Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist)
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Manifesto for the Crisis: Class Against Class

Various authors, 2023

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Front cover photo: NHS workers on strike for a pay rise and in defence of the service. Back photo: Tanks in Ukraine fly fascist flags.

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1. Manifesto for the crisis¹

What do workers need to understand if they are to solve their problems for good?

Following the pandemic, the whole world is finding itself in a situation of economic chaos. The living standards of working people are falling precipitously almost everywhere in the world. Countries such as Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Ghana are already bankrupt and unable to purchase essentials needed by their populations – medicine, food and energy especially.

In Britain, things are also very bad, though not as bad as they are in most countries of the world. Prices have gone through the roof, and wages are in no way keeping up with this rampant inflation. The government is reducing expenditure on public services in order to reduce its borrowing requirements and to service existing loans, while simultaneously increasing taxation on the working population.

At the same time, it is spending outrageous amounts on armaments, on supporting war in Ukraine against Russia, and on various military provocations around the globe.

Nor is it yet prepared to impose a wealth tax on the multibillionaires (the bourgeoisie of the world) who are actually still

enriching themselves to the tune of several billions a year while ordinary people (the proletariat) are being systematically pushed lower and lower into poverty and destitution.

1. Capitalism creates crisis and war

What must now surely be obvious is that the economic system that dominates the world (capitalism) is absolutely *not fit for purpose*. Despite the human ability to produce more and more with less and less effort, the vast majority of people are suffering a drastic fall in their living standards – and all because the capitalist mode of production has a fundamental design flaw that periodically causes it to stall simply because it has produced infinitely more than the impoverished people (and governments on their behalf) can afford to buy.

In these periods of crisis, people go without because they have produced too much, the markets are flooded, and the capitalists can't make a profit, so living standards plunge as the capitalists try to rescue themselves at the expense of the working masses.

So desperate is this situation that the leading imperialist countries are driven to war, desperately trying to secure advantages they can no longer hope to gain by peaceful means.

This is why the USA, with the backing of European countries through the Nato alliance, has been threatening Russia in order to be able to dominate its vast territory and resources, moving huge amounts of weaponry into Ukraine and nurturing a fascist movement in the country to use against the Russian people; and it is why Russia has been fighting back.

The bill for all the armaments and weaponry being supplied by Britain to the Ukrainian fascists is presented for payment to the British taxpayer, while the billionaire owners of the armaments industry get ever richer.

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Similar aggressive moves are being made by Nato against China, moving us ever closer towards a conflagration over the Chinese province of Taiwan that will again cost a fortune in treasure and in lives.

The aggression against Russia and China, both of which are in possession of very advanced weaponry that they have independently developed, in both cases purely for the purpose of defending themselves against Nato expansionist ambition rather than for purposes of aggression against anyone else, risks plunging the world into a third world war – a war that will not leave North America and Europe unscathed but runs a very real risk of the kind of damage being inflicted on our cities, towns and infrastructure that North America and Europe have unleashed on defenceless countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Yugoslavia, Yemen, Congo, etc.

We could soon be seeing our historical buildings smashed to smithereens, our supplies of water, electricity and gas destroyed, our sewers blown up. Is that what we want?

Clearly not, but how do we stop it?

2. Workers need socialism

Once we understand that the real cause of the problem is the unavailability of ever-worsening economic crises and war for as long as capitalism continues to be the economic system that dominates the world, then the solution becomes obvious.

When it is further understood that this economic system remains in use *despite* its lethal flaws because there is a tiny minority of billionaires in the world who benefit from it, whose private wealth and control over the world's means of production and financial system provide them with the leverage to dictate terms to governments (whether 'democratically' elected or not), we cannot but realise that this tiny minority of people

have to be dispossessed and overthrown.

Only in this way will we be able to get rid of the capitalist system and replace it with a system of rational planning, enabling us to use the means of production to meet the needs of the people who do the producing.

Because of the vast wealth at their command, this tiny minority of billionaires have at their disposal a massive propaganda machine (media, school syllabuses, academia, etc), along with armies of bureaucrats and government officials – to say nothing of the means of coercing people by violence to submit to their requirements through deployment of the army, the police and the judicial system.

It is clearly going to be no easy task to dislodge this entrenched class of rulers so that we can establish public ownership of the means of production and central planning for the benefit of the producers in place of the blind turmoil of the market. We can see from the way they conduct their wars for domination elsewhere that the resistance unleashed by the billionaire class (the bourgeoisie) against the risen workers will be massive, cruel, unprincipled and inhuman.

Nevertheless, it is the destiny of the working class (ie, everybody who depends for a decent livelihood on getting and keeping a job) to overcome the violence of the state machine wielded by and on behalf of the super-rich and to set up their own working-class (proletarian) state to ensure that an economic system is installed to replace capitalism – a socialist economic system that is not geared to private profit but to the ever-greater satisfaction of the rising needs of the people.

3. Didn't socialism fail?

The Soviet working class and peasantry established a socialist state in 1917, which it was able to do because it rallied behind

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the leadership of the Communist party. After the socialist state was established, the powerful capitalists of the world moved heaven and earth to try to smash it – by military intervention first and then by economic sanctions, via massive assistance to dissidents to sabotage and destroy, and then through world war.

All steps taken by the working-class state to defend itself against these attacks were portrayed in all the world bourgeois propaganda media as vicious totalitarianism. This was done to give the workers of the world the idea that, terrible though their conditions may be under capitalism, communism would be even worse.

Nevertheless, when the capitalist world was enveloped in the Great Depression of the 1930s, which spread utter misery and want throughout the working-class population of all capitalist countries, the Soviet economy was going from strength to strength, with full employment, guaranteed housing and pensions, and a high level of education and healthcare provision available to all.

This is what communists are trying to achieve. However, unless millions of people actively support them, communists by themselves can achieve nothing. Moreover, in imperialist countries such as Britain, whose finance kings are extracting extraordinarily large amounts of profit from the oppressed countries by lending them money they can never repay at high rates of interest, the ruling class has been able to afford to buy off proletarian revolution (revolution by the oppressed and exploited) by making such concessions as offering free education and healthcare, alongside a minimum level of welfare and pensions.

As a result, they have made the lot of the working-class masses in the imperialist heartlands more bearable, while at the same time deluging them with anticommunist propaganda to impart the illusion that there is no point in going through all the trauma and chaos of a revolution because any communist

state that emerged would be even worse than the worst that capitalism can provide.

In addition, the first socialist country, the Soviet Union, succumbed to the pressures put on it by the enemies of working-class power. She had during the second world war lost twenty-seven million people, a disproportionate number of whom would have been among the best of the country's communists, bound as they must always be to take the lead in fighting the forces of darkness.

Some people whose Soviet education had enabled them to rise to leading and responsible positions in society began to envy the ostentatious wealth that their social counterparts in capitalist countries were able to accumulate. Young people who had only ever known a socialist society began to resent the restrictions that the USSR's hostile environment forced it to maintain.

In the ideologically weakened Communist party, these tendencies made themselves felt to the point that the party leadership was able, in the name of 'bringing Marxism-Leninism up to date', to unleash a plan of gradually restoring capitalism. It did this by gradually restoring the capitalist marketplace in place of central planning, and by allowing profitability once more to become the decisive factor in determining what goods and services should be produced, and how and to whom they should be distributed.

As this supposedly 'socialist' market took over, the power of the popular masses to influence production and distribution decisions through representation on the various local, regional and all-union planning bodies was gradually eroded. Alongside stagnation in the living standards of the people, this produced the kind of cynicism among the masses that is typical in capitalist countries – except that, since it was all happening in the name of 'Marxism-Leninism' and 'communism', the people's disillusion came to be aimed at communism itself.

It was in these circumstances that the working class was ousted from power in the Soviet Union, with millions, including those who may even have supported the overthrow of socialism, nevertheless finding themselves jobless or demoted, thrown out of their homes, and bereft of any form of social security.

Elderly people trying to sell their few possessions in order to survive became a common sight. Russian prostitutes became a phenomenon all over the world, especially in tourist destinations. Life expectancy plummeted by ten years and chaos reigned as the country's vast wealth, built up by generations of Soviet workers, was plundered by western corporations, and the previously people-centred economy was subjected to the naked rule of the market in a barbaric onslaught that western economists described as 'shock therapy'.

Eventually, under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin, a stop was put to the worst of the rot, and workers were able to derive some benefit at least from the high price of Russian oil, gas and other commodities. The working class has still not, however, regained state power, or been able to restore socialism.

4. Who can make the change we need – and how?

It seems as though it ought to be easy for the masses of humanity to rid itself of a defective economic system that only really benefits 0.1 percent (or less) of the population. But if it were easy in reality, then it would have already happened.

Angry people often riot in protest at the inhuman demands made of them and the outrageous injustices committed against them, but their riots rarely bring about any improvement in the situation – or, at least, none that is long-lasting. Those who lead the riots are forced to pay a heavy price in terms of prison

sentences and ongoing punishment thereafter, while the real perpetrators of crimes against the people are left to gloat and wag a sorrowful finger at those who dared rise against them.

For people's rage and anger to bring about the changes that are needed to free society from the irrationalities of capitalism, what is needed is a leadership body, the Communist party, that knows both what needs to be achieved and what needs to be done in order to achieve it; and that party needs to have the trust of the people so that they are willing to follow its lead.

If we look around the capitalist world today, and particularly if we look at the situation in Britain, one is hard put to identify any communist movement that inspires any confidence in its ability to lead a revolution to put an end to capitalism and establish a socialist planned economy.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the communist movement can only be described as being in a sorry mess, stacked up with self-identifying 'communists' who have actually given up on proletarian revolution and have resigned themselves to pleading with the capitalists and their governments that they should try to be a bit less mean. Because they do tend to have a smattering of Marxist understanding, the leaders of these parties realise that the major problems in the world are caused by the persistent reign of capitalism, which they are generally happy to denounce, but they feel totally helpless to *do* anything other than beg – and they pass on that helplessness to the working people at large.

It follows that what the communist movement needs is *revitalisation*. To start with, those who are already in the movement need to study the setbacks it has received – in particular, though by no means exclusively, the collapse of the Soviet Union – in order to understand what mistakes were made and how those mistakes can be avoided in the future.

It is essential to grasp the fact that in no way do those defeats signify that Marxism-Leninism is at fault, but that they are uni-

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versally the result of *departures* from Marxism-Leninism.

Workers must regain confidence in their ultimate destination: a society where a centralised planned economy has replaced capitalism and where production is not for profit but for the maximum satisfaction of the needs of the masses, be those needs physical (eg, food, clothing, shelter and medical provision), cultural (eg, education, research, sport, literature, art and music), or spiritual (eg, entertainment, social meaning and encouragement to aim high).

They must break with their infatuation with bourgeois elections and remember that the only point of participating in such exercises is to *expose their fraudulent nature* in practice in the eyes of those whom our rulers seek to deceive.

They must recall again Marx's watchword to the effect that workers must move on from merely demanding higher wages, and should be demanding that the wages system (capitalism) be brought to an end altogether.

All energetic class-conscious workers need to devote time and energy to building and strengthening a worthy communist party. No more sitting around in organisations wedded to parliamentarism and the election of left-leaning MPs who devote themselves to parroting the lies that the bourgeoisie tells about the states where the working class took power in the past under the leadership of its communist party.

We in the CPGB-ML believe that our party is a real Marxist-Leninist party that is worth joining and supporting, which offers Marxist-Leninist training to everybody who wants to make themselves fit to serve the people.

At the present time, our party is not strong enough to offer effective leadership to a revolutionary movement of the masses, but, given the vicious blows that the bourgeoisie is preparing to deliver to workers' living standards, as well as their accelerating preparations for World War Three against Russia and China, it is urgent that anybody who can should add their weight to

improving our ability to reach the people.

We urgently need greater forces that are capable of spreading the understanding that the workers *do* have the power to overturn the rule of the 0.1 percent and to install an economic system capable of providing for their needs.

*Don't sit on your hands; don't fiddle while Rome burns!
Your class needs you; the future of humanity needs you!
Step forward and help make history!*

Ella Rule

London, September 2022

2. What really causes inflation?²

It is the right and the duty of workers to demand a bigger share of the wealth their own labour has created.

As the cost of living soars, public services fall apart and anger grows apace in the working class, the government is blaming, in equal measure, the workers (for daring to try and hold back the steep decline in their wages) and Vladimir Putin (for daring to resist Nato aggression).

Tory party chairman Nadhim Zahawi has managed to blame both Putin *and* the British working class at the same time, declaring that nurses should call off their strikes and abandon their pay demands because their action risked playing into the hands of the Russian president, who allegedly 'wants to fuel inflation' in the west. According to this fantastical logic, NHS workers have chosen the 'wrong time' to strike over poverty pay because a pay rise will 'increase inflation' and 'help Vladimir Putin divide the west'.

No doubt if the strikes were called off, those kids who don't get school shoes, or dinner, or a warm place to sleep, would perfectly understand that they ought to suffer in the interests of maintaining the status quo for their parents' exploiters. No

doubt our academy CEOs are already preparing the assemblies: 'Why we're lucky to have British exploiters keeping us hungry and not that evil monster Putin.'

We can't help noticing that there is never any suggestion that negative economic effects might arise from the inflation-busting pay deals and bonuses that CEOs and various mandarins of the ruling class regularly award themselves. Indeed, these flunkys have been piling up their wealth to record levels throughout the crisis while expecting workers to accept the drastic real-terms wage cuts that inflation has caused.

1. Money-printing

The reality that capitalist economists and politicians are keen to hide is that the biggest reason for the growth of inflation has been endless money-printing, which went up to a whole new level during the banking crisis of 2008, and has continued at an elevated rate ever since.

As the capitalists scramble to help their staggering system lurch from crisis to crisis, they have been bailing out one monopoly-dominated section of the economy after another, each one considered 'too big to fail' – or just next in line for a hand-out. (See, for example, the 'Covid' stock market bail-out of 2020, and the almost limitless subsidies given to the pharmaceutical monopolies under cover of the health crisis.)

As the capitalist economic crisis deepens, equally enormous handouts are making their way into the coffers of the energy companies (by way of the 'price cap' mechanism) and the arms manufacturers (by way of the British government's unlimited commitment to the USA's proxy war on Russia in Ukraine).

2. Just in time means no contingency plan

Another factor fuelling inflation has been the disruption in supply lines caused when the capitalist 'efficiency' of 'just in time' met the hard reality of closed factories and ports during the pandemic.

The just-in-time system so much favoured by capitalist economic gurus is so finely tuned to optimise profit at every stage in production that it can't easily withstand even a single day's strike at a single factory, or a single adverse weather event, or a single stranded container ship.

The chaos created by a succession of such 'freak' events, occurring in many places around the world and often simultaneously, led to disruptions in the supply of parts and finished goods that are still causing chaos and inflation two years later.

The profitable (for the monopolies) practice of abolishing all contingency planning and all warehouse space turned out to be extremely expensive for humanity at large as this total lack of resilience meant that neither supermarkets nor consumers were in a position to do anything about sudden shortages (and rampant speculation) in essential goods like nappies and baby formula.

3. Monopoly price gouging

Another cause of high prices is good old-fashioned price gouging, which is always indulged in by monopolies that are in a position to get away with it. Prices are set artificially high to maximise profits, often as a result of a secret arrangement between the few big companies that between them control a particular area of economic activity.

Capitalist economists make much of the system's ability to bring prices down, and indeed it does, as a result of the battle of competition, the economies of scale that come from mass production, and the utilisation of the cheapest possible labour. But if big capitalists find themselves in a position where they can keep prices higher, they will most certainly take it.

It is noticeable, for example, that it only takes the *rumour* of a *potential, future* disruption in the oil supply for prices at the pumps or on the meter to go up. And if there is later a small 'correction' in the other direction, the price never seems to go back to where it was before. The line over time for such monopoly-controlled essentials only seems to go upwards – and at a rate far higher than wages can keep pace with.

4. Economic warfare backfiring

And then, of course, there are the sanctions. The imperialist countries have been using their control of world trading mechanisms to starve all independent-minded countries (North Korea, Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Venezuela etc) into submission for decades, but the steady ratcheting up of this blunt weapon against Russia and China in the last decade has forced both countries to take serious steps to protect themselves.

In the process, they have not only made their own economies more diverse, self-sufficient and resilient, but they have created a framework that allows other countries to join them and do the same. *The weapon that was supposed to ensure US domination forever has actually accelerated the process of the decline of imperialist global supremacy.*

When Russia finally (after decades of provocations and broken promises, and eight years of trying to implement the internationally-agreed peace process in eastern Ukraine) responded to the proxy war being waged against it in February 2022, the

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west launched a massive sanctions war, which it confidently asserted would bring Russia to its knees in a matter of weeks, collapsing its economy, starving its people onto the streets, and toppling the hated government of President Vladimir Putin.

The result, our leaders were sure, would be the installation of a stooge regime in the Kremlin, the break-up of Russia into seven or eight manageable chunks, and an orgy of unfettered looting of Russia's people and resources – just like the one that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and which the rise of a nationalist government and the renationalisation of key resources in Russia so rudely brought to a halt.

When Russia failed to collapse as predicted, the sanctions began to hurt those who were wielding them far more than they were hurting Russia itself. While Russia found new markets for export commodities such as oil, gas, minerals, wheat and fertiliser, the absolute dependence of western industries on these materials was starkly revealed.

How many workers in Europe had understood before May 2022 that Germany's industrial strength rested on the provision of low-cost oil from the Urals? How many understood the fact that the very engines and refineries that power Europe's economies are built around the specific features of this particular grade of oil, and that no 'alternative source' can easily replace it?

5. Who caused the war in Ukraine – and who is being asked to pay?

So yes, a certain amount of the inflation that Britons are currently experiencing has been caused by the economic war against Russia, which has had the effect of disrupting supply and boosting prices. But it's quite a stretch to blame the intended *victim* of Nato's aggression for the inflationary conse-

quences of Nato's war!

Whilst we are encouraged to dwell on such propositions as the notion that 'every one percent raise in pay for NHS workers costs the country seven hundred million pounds', nobody is invited to marvel at the cost in blood or treasure of the latest in hi-tech killing machines destined for the Ukraine meatgrinder.

The brilliant example being set by rail workers, posties, health workers and others is a red rag to the Tories and an uncomfortable reminder to the imperialist Labour party that the working class has not gone away.

Shadow health secretary Wes Streeting has been quite happy to put the boot into the BMA, accusing the doctors' representative body of promoting a 'something for nothing' culture in the NHS and whingeing that in spite of Labour's (alleged) 'commitment' to more staff, these ingrates remain 'so hostile to the idea that with more staff must come better standards for patients'. How better standards are supposed to be achieved in departments that are understaffed precisely because pay and working conditions are so bad, Mr Streeting didn't explain.

As for Labour leader Keir Starmer, he announced in a radio interview that the pay rise nurses are fighting for (nineteen percent, that is, five percent over the official RPI at that moment and a long way short of compensating for the real-terms pay cut health workers have suffered over the last fifteen years) is 'more than could be afforded'.

No parliamentarian of any political stripe would dream of breaking with the holy consensus: blame greedy workers and evil Russian dictators, and don't talk about the capitalist crisis or the class war.

The truth is that with their system in deep crisis, our rulers have only two ways out: pass as much of the burden of the crisis onto the poor as possible, and search ruthlessly and relentlessly around the globe for ways to make a profit.

That might be by cutting wages to raise profits margins. It

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might be by putting the poorest workers with no choice onto prepay meters and wringing a few more quid out of them that way. It might be by privatising services like healthcare and education so that the public purse can be rinsed for private profit.

Or it might be by driving to war against any and every corner of the world where maximum profit-taking is curbed by some independent-minded people who have the temerity to think it's up to them how the resources in their lands are used and who should benefit from their wealth.

Either way, it is the workers who pay, and the poorest who pay the most.

Karl Marx proved long ago that it's not high wages that cause inflation. *What higher wages ultimately do is reduce profit margins and the dividends that are paid out to the parasite class.* While the system of capitalist production for profit remains, it's a *fundamental right and duty* of the working class to organise and to demand a bigger share of the wealth that its own labour has created.

Ultimately, of course, we need to recognise the truth of Marx's revelation that workers' problems can only really be solved when we drop the demand for 'fair wages' and take up the demand for an 'end to the wages system': that is, for an end to the system of workers' collective enslavement to the capitalist class, whose joy rests upon our misery, and whose wealth is built upon our poverty.

Giles Shorter and Joti Brar

Bristol, January 2023

3. Workers in struggle during the crisis

1. Minimum Service Bill is the latest salvo in the class war against workers³

No cooperation with union-busting anti-strike laws!

The TUC one-day rally against the new anti-strike law, whilst welcome in itself, fell woefully short of giving any kind of a lead to a working class that has been for so long starved of socialist leadership.

The harmless-sounding Minimum Service Bill currently being pushed through Parliament is in fact an outright declaration of war against the working class, aimed at stripping workers of the right to withdraw their labour and go on strike.

For four decades the trade unions have seen the rights of organised labour undermined by wave after wave of hostile laws. Banning sympathy strikes, narrowing the scope for mounting picket lines, imposing ever more restrictions on the

conduct of strike ballots, including the arbitrary institution of minimum turn-out thresholds, and a myriad other pettifogging constraints upon the legal right to withdraw labour – all these impudent encroachments on the right to strike have in practice been tolerated by an ever more submissive labour movement.

There has been much grumbling about the unfairness of these laws, various legal challenges to their implementation, and periodic half-hearted 'campaigns' to ditch the union-busting laws.

What has never been seen from the TUC, however, is a readiness to mobilise workers to use their organised power to confront the state, not just symbolically, in fiery speeches, but in action, *by collectively breaking these unjust laws and making it impossible for the union-busters to prevail.*

Instead, most trade unions, with a few honourable exceptions, have submitted meekly to being neutered, getting side-tracked into promoting discount insurance schemes and the like for their members whilst continuing to fund an imperialist Labour party that stands unashamedly on the side of the bosses.

This abject failure of trade union bureaucrats to fight for workers' fundamental rights, always excused by the wisdom of 'keeping your powder dry' in readiness for the 'real fight' to come, and jealously guarding the union's finances for some (always far off in the future) 'rainy day'.

Well, the rainy day has come, but it is capitalism, not the unions, that has seized the initiative and started a real fight against workers' few remaining rights. It is impelled to do this in order to make workers bear the burden of the inflationary cost of living crisis for which they bear no responsibility whatsoever.

The Minimum Service Bill step by step demolishes every last vestige of the right to strike, the one and only way that wage-slaves can collectively exercise their power within capitalist society.

The bill gives the government unlimited authority to set minimum service levels for six public services: the NHS, the fire

brigade, education, transport, the decommissioning of nuclear installations, and border controls.

Unions representing these key workers will have no say in the matter, leaving the government with a *carte blanche* to decide what 'minimum service level' actually is in any particular case. Affected workers who refuse to come into work will be sacked.

And as reward for forty years of passivity in the face of capitalist aggression, it will be the unions themselves that will be ordered to whip workers into line and break their own strikes in order to comply with the new rules.

The government will serve a 'work notice', laying down what the minimum service will be and which workers must be compelled to work. Next, the union itself is mandated to ensure that workers comply with the notice, identifying which workers must come into work and break the strike.

If the union refuses to act as an agent of the government in this way, it can be sued and risk a fine or sequestration of its funds.

This anti-strike bill is not remotely to do with 'protecting the public'. Indeed, it undermines existing 'life and limb' arrangements already agreed to by unions to minimise real harm to the public.

It is everything to do with a coordinated attack on the right to strike, a key part of the campaign to make workers pay for the inflationary crisis by real-terms pay cuts, soaring prices and gutted public services.

This latest attack on the working class needs to be resisted, not just by one-day rallies, legal challenges and TUC declarations, but by *an active campaign of non-cooperation with the new law in practice*, making it impossible for the law to function.

Unions worth their salt should refuse to carry out the government's strike-breaking 'work orders', instead instructing members to stand by the decision to go on strike.

Conversely, if workers find that their existing leaders are col-

laborating with the class enemy, let such renegades be ousted and replaced by others who measure up to the needs of the hour.

No cooperation with union-busting anti-strike laws!

Giles Shorter

Bristol, January 2023

2. TUC directs its members' anger into more meaningless busywork⁴

An email campaign to reverse anti-union laws? Really?

The right to strike is the only meaningful right that workers can have under the capitalist system. And, since no gain is ever permanent under conditions of permanent class war, it has had to be defended many times in the last two centuries.

With the new legislation about to be passed by our rulers, the array of anti-union legislation in Britain will put workers here in an even worse position to try to defend their pay and conditions – a situation compounded by legislation that effectively outlaws protesting as well. Even the imperialist NGO Human Rights Watch has been moved to complain!

On 18 January, the TUC organised an online meeting via its front organisation Megaphone, an umbrella group that brings together more than forty-eight unions across Britain, representing five and a half million members.

Workers were called on to 'help stop these anti-strike laws'

and egged on via bombastic hyperbole ('amazing!', 'electric!') to 'take action' and 'play your part' . . . to do what exactly? To join a general strike? To fill the streets? Surround Downing Street? Organise and change the system?

No. To send an email, yes, an email to their local MP demanding they 'stop the bill in its tracks'. The meeting organisers reported (also via email) that the 'immediate action on the call' they had organised had led two hundred and twenty people (out of five and a half million members) 'taking action'! Yes, that's two hundred and twenty emails to MPs in the hope that they might just forget for a moment that they serve the ruling class and vote against their bosses' interests.

The same email reported excitedly:

MPs will be voting on these new laws in the coming weeks, and we know that many are undecided about whether they will support these laws or not. In fact, some Tory MPs are beginning to waver and have started to voice concerns about the bill.

We can't help but wonder where the TUC gets its information. When did loyal servants of the ruling class – Labour or Tory – ever show a working-class conscience? Yet now we are to believe that, as a result of feeling the 'pressure' from a few emails, like Pinocchio under the admonishments of Jiminy Cricket, the noses of our good parliamentarians have stopped growing and they have discovered their hearts.

Now they are ready to give up on decades of careerism and vote unselfishly for the interests of the working class. Now they will stop helping the capitalists try to escape their crisis by passing the burden onto the backs of the poor. Now they want to defend workers' most fundamental right within the capitalist system – the right to use their collective power to defend themselves against harsh conditions and unliveable pay.

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Pull the other one, it's got bells on it.

Megaphone exhorts its members to 'reach MPs urgently to ensure they act', assuring them that MPs are 'most likely to listen to their own constituents'. So, the quicker we act, the quicker they will come to their senses and transform themselves into Real Boys.

Well, that sounds logical at a certain level. But, wait, haven't we been here before?

Why should we imagine our rulers and their loyal henchmen are about to listen to us, the downtrodden, the poor, the underprivileged now, when they never have before? Did they listen when we said No to nukes? (Did they spend less on deploying their nuclear arsenal and more on education and healthcare?)

Did they listen when we said No to Nato, or to the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya or Syria? Did they listen when there were outcries about racist and corrupt policing? Did they listen when we voted for Brexit? Are they listening to us on Ukraine? We could go on . . .

We in the Communist party certainly do not want this anti-strike bill. But does the strategy of 'bombarding' MPs with emails make any real, substantial difference? Isn't it in fact just a ploy to keep people busy doing nothing? To keep us thinking that Parliament is our only hope of salvation? To make us believe that we have no power to affect anything by our own actions?

What kind of message is that for a mass trade union organisation to send? Whatever happened to 'Class against class'?

The TUC could not furnish any better proof that it is as much a part of the establishment it claims to oppose as are the MPs themselves.

Its leaders do not really represent the working-class masses; they never have and never will. If they were representative of the working class of this country, they would be calling for people to organise; to use their collective power to *demand im-*

mediate action to save workers from hunger and fuel poverty; to guarantee workers a decent living and decent homes.

They would be bringing their members not in hundreds to their computers but in hundreds of thousands onto the streets: to surround Parliament and Downing Street; to obstruct the City of London; to close down Nato's bases; to take over the lying media outlets that help our rulers wage their relentless class war against the workers.

They wouldn't be diverting people's attention to an email campaign that can achieve nothing but the demobilisation of our class, *the deepening of our apathy and cynicism*.

They would also be bringing workers' attention to the need for a complete change of system, from anarchic and inhumane capitalism to rational, human-centred socialism; the need for a system in which workers can take charge of their own destinies and plan production to meet their needs.

Emails will not solve our problems. Only meaningful mass organisation that harnesses the power of the working class can achieve anything we need, from immediate reforms to lighten the burden we carry within the capitalist system, to the total overthrow of that system and its replacement with a planned economy.

This is our call to action: Join us today. Organise.

Eduardo Salgado and Joti Brar

London, January 2023

3. Support our nurses' struggle for decent pay⁵

It is not our hard-pressed medical staff who are greedy, but the privateers who are pushing down their wages in the interests of profit.

Way beyond breaking point, nurses across the NHS have finally voted to take strike action. The last time they had a real-terms pay increase was back in 2010, since when pay settlements have fallen further and further behind inflation.

Throughout that time, many have descended into poverty, as is evidenced by the fact that over a quarter of NHS trusts are now running food banks for their staff. Most nurses can no longer afford childcare or travel costs and are opting for longer, more dangerous shifts to try to balance their books. Such has been the decline in real pay that today one in three nurses cannot afford to heat their homes or feed their families.

Clearly, something has to change. Now nurses are demanding a 17.6 percent pay rise to set against this devastating decline, raising wages by five percent over official inflation (and let us not forget that real inflation is considerably higher than official statistics suggest, and is highest on the goods most relied upon by the poorest). This would by no means make good all that has been lost, but it would go some way to addressing the poverty crisis now besetting our nurses.

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt sheds crocodile tears and admits that there are 'massive pressures in the NHS, with doctors, nurses

on the frontline under unbearable pressure', but at the same time says that the service receives a lot of money and 'we need to do everything we can to find efficiencies'.

He forgets to mention that most of the funding directed at the bottomless bucket marked 'NHS' is actually being siphoned off as profits by the private sector; it is not paying doctors, nurses and cleaners, improving staffing levels or maintaining buildings. Nor does this efficiency-lover mention that the most efficient way to rescue the NHS would be to renationalise it, kicking out the privateers and running the service for the public good, not for private greed.

Not for nothing does tiny socialist Cuba run a more effective health service (more consistent outcomes, higher life expectancy, lower infant mortality) than that of the mighty United States of America for less than a quarter of the cost.

Instead, Hunt tells the nurses off for failing 'to recognise a difficult truth: that if we gave everyone inflation-proof pay rises, inflation would stay, we wouldn't bring down inflation, and that's why I'm not pretending there aren't some difficult decisions'.

In reality, inflation is not caused by workers seeking to preserve the value of their pay, but by capitalist governments printing money to postpone the economic collapse of their own system of capitalist production for profit. It is further exacerbated by monopoly price gouging (witness today's energy market).

Since the breaking up and privatising agenda laid out by our rulers in the 1980s has been followed religiously by Tories, LibDems and Labour governments alike, we can't expect a solution via Parliament. The only use Labour has made of its 'pro-NHS' credentials has been to take over and subvert the energies of various protest groups into channels that are entirely futile as far as actually saving the NHS is concerned.

The working class needs a decent health service, properly funded and staffed, whose employees are decently paid and supported in performing their essential roles.

Full support to the just struggle of Britain's nurses!

Giles Shorter

Bristol, November 2022

4. Support our teachers; save our schools⁶

It is not only their present ability to exist that Britain's teachers are fighting for, but our children's future.

The present teachers' strike is not just about fair pay. It is about the future of education in Britain. Essentially, it is a question of *class against class*.

The capitalist crisis and the inflation crisis it has spawned are a vicious assault on working peoples' lives, and teachers are right to fight back. As the people tasked with helping children to open their wings and fly, teachers cannot tolerate being forced to crawl.

In today's conditions of crisis and war, when our ruling class prefers to spend millions on arms for Ukraine rather than on providing funds for pupils with special needs, and where our trade union and democratic rights to strike are coming under a sustained attack, workers need to stand together and demand the reconstruction of their unions on the basis of a truly class-conscious defence of pay and conditions.

We must oppose the forces of defeatism, capitulation and submission. We must prepare ourselves for a prolonged and multifaceted struggle.

We must demand:

- The reversal of all privatisation and academisation in our schools and universities.
- The scrapping of Ofsted inspections and arbitrary measurements and hierarchies; let every school be facilitated in providing the best to its children!
- A meaningful increase in wages that not only compensates for rampant inflation but also reflects teachers' vital status in society.
- The scrapping of agency contracts and a return to secure employment for all teaching and support staff.
- The abolition of management structures aimed at coercing pupils and teachers alike into subservience to privatised business requirements.
- The restitution of trust and training so that teachers can once more be respected as the leaders of their classrooms.
- The provision of truly free education for all, away from any entanglement with the market, in service to needs of our children and our class.

We believe in an educational system that is centred on the deeply humanist teaching relationship between student and teacher.

We oppose capitalist undermining of education, of transforming our schools into business units, complete with a bureaucratic hierarchy of managers whose job is to implement government policy and to create a mechanism of surveillance and authoritarian control within each school, manipulating and bullying teachers and promoting a 'customer relations' attitude towards parents rather than treating them as respected collaborators in the care and development of society's most precious asset – the next generation.

We oppose all repressive measures against our teachers'

right to strike. We condemn those managers who are serving the ruling class by intimidating teachers out of joining a union, forcing them to keep schools open, and encouraging students to cross their teachers' picket lines.

Teachers have every right to protest against conformity and submission to the enforcement of business priorities in schools, which are trampling on the interests of pupils, staff and society at large in the interests of profit-taking. We condemn those 'school leaders' who are taking the ruling class's bribes of executive bonuses and career 'success' in order to enforce this anti-child agenda.

Frontline teachers are in a very different situation from the administrative officers who receive CEO-level salaries in return for implementing the government's privatisation policies – policies that are adversely affecting not only the public and free character of education in Britain, but also pressing hard upon the working lives and conditions of our teachers.

Like so many other workers in Britain, our teachers have been subject to an incredibly rapid impoverishment over the last fifteen years of austerity, which has drastically shrunk their incomes, and this is now being severely exacerbated by galloping inflation.

But why are we being asked to pay this price? It is not the workers who are responsible for inflation, but the capitalists, who have been printing money to try to paper over the cracks of their economic crisis. In the process, they have become richer still, while the working class has been asked to pay the bill many times over.

As privatisation accelerates, the burden of teachers' workloads is becoming unbearable, while in the hierarchy of the contemporary capitalist school, classroom teachers now find themselves at the bottom. At the top are the financial director-managers, whose role is to extract profits by opening the school to business activities and the 'free' market.

These managers spend their time looking for sources of funding and ways to save money – and if that means keeping our classrooms without heating in order to balance their books, nobody seems to care!

Ofsted inspections enforce a parallel set of hierarchies, placing some schools at the top and others at the bottom. Schools with a majority of better-off students tend to achieve good school results, 'innovative practices' in finding resources, and success in attracting 'customers'.

Schools with a majority of poorer students and greater educational needs are left to their own devices to survive in the jungle of market competition, trying to get 'bums on seats' in order to secure funding. Educational priorities are everywhere overwhelmed by the priorities of business.

Schools in poor and immigrant areas are turned into cheap training warehouses for a future workforce of exploited proletarians. They focus purely on functional skills instead of on providing a rounded education; on narrow training rather than on developing general knowledge. The omnipresence of Microsoft and Google apps is killing the last vestiges of creative and fulfilling connection between teachers and their students.

As a result, teachers are leaving the profession in droves. Too many are succumbing to severe burnout, buckling under the intolerable pressures of endless bureaucracy and corporate-style meetings, of trying to do their jobs in a poisonous environment where their role and their dignity alike are undermined and undervalued.

It is not difficult to understand why so many teachers are so stressed and are losing all connection to the joy of teaching. Why instead of being enthusiastic, they feel physically and mentally drained.

Like our overburdened health workers, they are daily picking up the pieces of a broken system, staggering under the weight of the endless bombardment of extracurricular tasks, bureau-

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cratic burdens and impossible responsibilities, which spread stress, uncertainty and anxiety.

Documents, instructions, circulars, ministerial decisions, new legislation and a daily downpour of new responsibilities are turning our teachers into unpaid computer scientists, nurses, doctors and psychologists, and driving them to the point of exhaustion.

As in our crisis-ridden NHS, we are witnessing an epidemic of 'quiet quitting' in the teaching profession, alongside an unprecedented wave of mental health issues, which cannot possibly be addressed by fatuous assemblies or 'wear yellow clothes' days. It is not a lack of colour that has brought about this avalanche of depression, but the weight of impossible expectations, lack of meaningful classroom support, abysmal salaries and drastically deteriorating working conditions.

We say:

- Another school is possible and we will fight for it.
- We will fight for the safeguarding of our children, which is at serious risk with every new staff redundancy in the name of saving costs.
- We will fight against every capitulation by trade union leaders.
- The children of the working class deserve a militant and class-conscious educational movement that will link its efforts to those of all other striking workers. It is not only our present that we are fighting for, but their future!

These battles must be fought, because they are necessary!

The movement is here, the movement is us! Join us!

Nina Kosta and Joti Brar

London and Bristol, March 2023

5. After the strikes, what then?⁷

As union leaders look for the exit, their members' anger is being directed towards yet another diversionary 'vote Labour' campaign.

The strike wave that began in June 2022, as desperate workers supported industrial action to protest against efforts to make them bear the brunt of the inflationary cost of living crisis, has been impressive in its scope and duration.

The Office of National Statistics reported that days lost through strike action were the highest in thirty years, with over 2.4 million working days lost to strikes in 2022.

On 1 February 2023, in a day of action called by the TUC, over half a million workers went out on strike, including rail workers, bus drivers, civil servants and teachers. The RMT transport union called its first national rail dispute since the privatisation of the railways and the Royal College of Nursing called the first strike in its existence.

For a time, it seemed as if the growing anger of workers as burden after burden was heaped on their backs would prove a powerful enough impetus to make them break free from the suffocating embrace of the Labour party and hit back at the system that was systematically impoverishing them.

When the TUC proved unequal to the task of giving leadership to the struggle, the RMT's Mick Lynch stepped into the breach, offering his own brand of militant trade unionism in a way that resonated not only with his own members but even with sec-

tions of the general public, who relished the sight of Lynch running rings around the gormless 'Good Morning Britain' crew and various other well-paid establishment hacks.

On an institutional level, the trade union-based Enough Is Enough campaign thrived for a while, drumming up support for a similar mix of militant trade unionism.

But then the RMT suspended its strike so that members could mull over a slightly improved (but still dreadful) pay deal, while the RCN called off nurses' strikes on just a vague promise of 'intensive talks'.

The strike wave is not yet over – as this was being written, the junior doctors had just concluded a three-day strike – but there is already a strong sense that union leaders are making a coordinated bid for the exit and calculating the most opportune moment to bail out, concerned not to achieve victory but to get just enough of a deal to be able to feed their members the standard line that this sell-out is 'the best that could be achieved'.

This is a travesty of leadership and a blatant dereliction of duty. The real desire and urgent need of workers to fight is being systematically sold down the river by the very people who are paid to lead that struggle.

And this despite the fact that many of the union members who are propelling the current actions are on breadline salaries that simply won't allow them to keep body and soul together without a pay rise that at least keeps up with inflation.

These leaders' routine insistence on pushing a 'compromise' that leaves their poorest members taking drastic real-terms pay cuts year on year is *class treachery pure and simple*.

Meanwhile, reports suggest that 'Enough Is Enough' meetings are attracting a dwindling clientele, mostly composed of paid union officials whose real goal is neither smashing wage slavery, nor even seriously bargaining to raise the price of labour-power, but solely getting everyone to vote Labour at the next

election.

The Trotskyist/revisionist lash-up of usual suspects behind the abject 'People's Assembly' is also pushing the 'evil Tories' mantra, calling on people to sign up and come along to local meetings in order to . . . you guessed it: 'Bring down the Tories'.

No possible benefit can come to the working class from accepting this diversionary advice. Labour and Tory alike serve the same master and follow the same agenda: *Save British imperialism, no matter what.*

Our advice to workers is quite the reverse: Break the link with Labour, rebuild a real fighting trade union movement in Britain, resume a determined struggle for decent pay and conditions, and take up the struggle for socialism – the only real way out of the downward spiral of poverty, economic crisis and war.

Trade unionist politics, even if properly and militantly conducted, are not able to offer a lasting way out of the fix workers are in. Only when we raise our horizon from the demand that capitalism treats its slaves a little better (a fair day's work for a fair day's pay) and fix instead on the revolutionary demand for a complete end to our wage slavery – in short, that we demand socialism – will we be able to secure enduring progress.

Giles Shorter

Bristol, March 2023

6. Strikes in France demonstrate the benefits and limits of trade union action⁸

Why are French workers being forced to endlessly fight the same battles?

i. A powerful example to British workers

The wave of strikes paralysing France should be an inspiration to trade unions in Britain, demonstrating how powerful workers can be when they organise themselves in defence of their class interests.

On 7 February 2023, France effectively ground to a halt. Three-quarters of national train services were shut down, roughly one in three air flights were cancelled, a quarter of civil servants went on strike and nearly two-thirds of primary schoolteachers did the same.

That day of coordinated action followed a string of separate one-day strikes in January, and was followed by the announcement that public transport workers, truck drivers and nuclear power technicians would turn up the pressure, rising from one-day strikes to indefinite rolling strikes.

The main focus of the strikes and demonstrations has been the latest attempt by President Emanuel Macron's government to extend the pension age from sixty-two to sixty-four. This is Macron's second serious stab at pension 'reform'. His first attempt in 2019 met with such massive resistance that he was forced to abandon the plan, using the Covid emergency to

spare his blushes.

Ever since the government of former president Jacques Mitterrand reduced the pensionable age to sixty in 1982, successive governments have fought to push it back up. At present, it stands at sixty-two.

ii. Every bourgeois democracy has its 'loopholes'

Having lost his parliamentary majority, and facing a rebellion from MPs, Macron decided to make use of a handy kink in the French constitution that enables the president to ignore the national assembly's decision and force the law onto the statute book anyway – thus sparking an all-out political crisis and huge social unrest.

With the intensification of strikes and working-class anger, trash has piled up high on many of the streets of Paris, while barricades have been burning nightly all over the country as the fight to reverse the president's foolhardy action continues.

While President Macron may have heralded his action as a show of authority and of his determination to rule, in reality he showed only that he expected to lose any parliamentary vote on the issue. Having stamped on the dragon's tail, the ensuing flames of revolt may be impossible to put out while he remains in office.

On many of the daily/nightly clashes, firefighters called out to douse the burning barricades have been standing down and removing their helmets in a symbolic gesture of solidarity with their fellow workers. On at least two occasions, some *gendarmes* took the same action.

Not that we would know anything about it in Britain, given our rulers' determination to say as little as possible about the French working class's militant action in the pages and on the airwaves of the mass media under their control.

iii. Class warfare growing stronger

For the moment it seems that the police in general are still following orders, but if they do buckle significantly and reach a position where Macron can no longer rely on their loyalty, he will have to hope that soldiers, if they are called in, will not also join a battle against a plan that affects them and all their families as badly as it does those protesting.

For Macron, there can be no surrender: he and his administration have everything staked on winning this battle to make the French working class pay for the current crisis of overproduction that is plaguing all the western 'democracies'. Not to mention their need to finance the country's total prostration before Nato's aggressive proxy war against Russia in Ukraine that is dragging the European states towards ruination as they strangle their own economies to do the bidding of US imperialism.

Since the protests started, there have been regular turnouts of millions of workers and students onto the streets of France. Following the forcing through of the pensions legislation, even the interior ministry admitted that more than a million people had protested across the country, including one hundred and nineteen thousand in the capital – a record since protests started in January.

The CGT union says that a total of three-and-a-half million people have marched across the country. There has been a limited national strike alongside many separate ongoing strikes in various industries, with transport and energy workers, teachers, dockers and public-sector workers (such as museum staff) taking action.

Trade unions have pointed out that the reform will particularly penalise low-income workers in manual jobs, who tend to start

their careers early, forcing them to work longer than graduates, who will be less affected by the changes.

As a result of the uprising, French colleges and universities are regularly closing as students, staff and sometimes both together, walk out for limited periods. In the end, pensions affect everyone, but they do, like everything else, affect the poorest the most.

In an attempt to reassert the government's authority, police have fired tear gas into crowds in Paris, Nantes and Lorient in the west, and Lille in the north, while water cannons have been used in several cities to batter workers whose crime is a determination not to be robbed by their government.

British journalist Lewis Goodall, covering the demonstrations in Paris for the *Guardian*, reported that police were 'on pretty brutal form' – stating that a member of his team had been targeted by police despite asserting they were press – and were also throwing stun grenades into the crowds with 'abandon'.

Thousands have been arrested, and injuries have mounted in numbers and severity. Unionised workers blockaded a major oil refinery in Normandy and another one in Fos-sur-Mer in the south of the country, while transport networks (including air traffic, internal and international) are being turned off and on by strikers across the country.

CNN reported the blocking of Terminal One at Paris's Charles de Gaulle airport by protesters. On 23 March, the doors of Bordeaux City Hall went up in flames and the British king had to postpone his visit to the country, which had been scheduled to include a stop-off at the aforementioned City Hall, as Macron's government admitted its inability to give him full protection.

The French masses when roused, do have a certain reputation for taking care of monarchs after all.

President Macron continues to insist that the law extending the age of retirement will come into force by the end of 2023. He compared the popular protests against his attack on all

working people in France to the storming of the US Capitol on 6 January 2021 in a statement that left his friends and foes alike staring open-mouthed and wondering about the state of his mental health.

Meanwhile, interior minister Gerald Darmanin was telling anyone who would listen that: 'There are thugs, often from the far-left, who want to bring down the state and kill police officers.'

iv. Finding a wider, socialist, vision is key to success

At the time of writing, Macron appeared to be holding on clearly hoping that rising prices, high inflation, fuel shortages etc would sap the workers' willingness to strike. While this bet might pay off, it is just as likely that those further attacks on workers' living standards will harden their resolve and lead them to step up their actions.

There is a desperate need now for a unified and genuine revolutionary leadership for the defiant French workers, whose stubbornness has brought them so far. We marvel at their continued struggle, wish them success and watch with interest, not just this struggle but the development of the political understanding that will surely develop from their situation and their splendid fightback.

In one sense, the vacillations and retreats of successive French governments on the pensions issue bear witness to the doggedness with which France's unions have resisted the capitalist efforts to intensify the terms of workers' exploitation. The militancy of French unions like the CGT puts most British unions to shame, and is much to be admired.

In another sense though, the sad fact that forty years after the Mitterand reform French workers find themselves still fighting the same battles, confirms the ultimate futility of limiting the class war to the struggle to improve the terms of wage-

slavery, and neglecting the historic task that confronts workers: the abolition of capitalism itself.

Until this system of production for profit is overthrown, every temporary reform conceded to workers under pressure can be watered down or reversed when the dust has settled and the ruling class has had time to regroup its forces.

Whilst the pensions battle is currently the specific focus of proletarian revolt in France, and deservedly so, it clearly indicates a much wider dissatisfaction with the capitalist order in crisis – a dissatisfaction that can only be fully addressed by fighting for socialism and the end of wage slavery.

Giles Shorter and Zane Carpenter

Bristol and Wakefield, April 2023

7. What can British and French workers learn from one another?⁹

French communists of the PRCF interview our party about the situation for workers in Britain.

i. What is the situation in Britain from the perspective of the social movement? What impact have the recent protest and strikes had? What is the influence of the Enough Is Enough campaign?

In the last year, Britain has seen the largest rise in strike action for thirty years. In 2022, 2.4 million working days were lost as

a result of strikes, and it seems likely that the number will be higher this year.

As in many other countries, workers are facing a huge inflation crisis, with enormous rises in energy costs (sixty-seven percent rise in electricity prices and one hundred and twenty-nine percent rise in gas prices in the last year alone) to add to the rapidly rising costs of rent, food, clothes and other necessities.

Grocery inflation is now at seventeen and a half percent compared to last year, and the prices of many staple goods needed by the poorest have risen the most. For example, a can of Heinz baked beans is seventy percent more expensive now than it was in 2019.

This inflation crisis came at a time when workers in Britain, especially in the public sector, have had real-terms pay cuts imposed every year since the economic crisis of 2008. Combined with huge cuts in public spending on everything from schools and hospitals to roads and public spaces, this 'austerity' programme was demanded in order to service loans that had been taken out by our government to prevent Britain's banks from collapsing.

Since workers' pay has been steadily cut over the last fifteen years, the inflation crisis has caused a further and very steep decline that has left many workers with pay packets that simply don't cover the basic necessities of life.

Living standards are sharply declining for all employed workers, but for those on benefits and for those workers at the bottom end of the pay scales in the health service, in teaching, on the railways etc, life is becoming insupportable. Single parents in these roles are increasingly unable to manage, turning to food banks and other emergency charitable organisations to try to feed their children.

This explains why those areas of the economy where union membership is still high (mainly transport and public sector,

with some utilities, logistics and communications) have all experienced a sharp uptick in strike action. Workers in all sectors are desperate for pay restitution; in sectors where union membership is still common, this is pushing the union leaders into reluctant action.

All the railway, health and teaching unions have been out on strike. So too have the postal workers, Amazon workers, dockers and civil servants. Even the traditionally very conservative Royal College of Nursing had to bow to pressure from its hard-pressed members, calling the first strike in its one-hundred-and-seven-year history.

Mick Lynch of the RMT (a railway union with a reputation for radicalism, since it broke its one-hundred-year connection to the Labour party in 2004) gained huge public support when he appeared on mainstream media standing up for the aims of the strikers and vigorously defending the right of workers to strike.

Lynch and other union leaders also led the formation of the Enough is Enough campaign, whose five-point programme demands a meaningful pay rise, a cut in energy bills, an end to food poverty, decent homes for all and higher taxes for the rich. Action on any of these points would be extremely popular.

Unfortunately, those who are in charge of these movements are not prepared to offer the kind of leadership that is needed at a time of severe economic crisis, where the ruling class is united in trying to pass the burden of the crisis onto the backs of the workers. Even the most militant of our trade union leaders (of whom there are very few in Britain) seem only to be interested in ending the strikes as quickly as possible.

None of them wants to show workers how to use their power to win even a basic battle for better wages. Every union has either settled, or tried to settle, for far less than the workers are demanding – and really need – in terms of pay, recommending ‘deals’ to their members that don’t cover even half of this year’s inflation, never mind making up for the last fifteen years of real

pay cuts.

At the same time, those running the 'Enough is Enough' campaign, after organising a couple of impressive opening rallies at which militant speeches were made to large crowds, have proven to be totally uninterested in mobilising workers to fight for their own programme. Instead, they are focusing the attention of their declining audiences and lacklustre meetings on asking workers to believe that voting Labour at the next election will bring about the changes they so desperately need.

ii. What is the position of the CPGB-ML on the situation in Britain?

As well as taking out loans to bail out the banks in 2008, our rulers resorted to a huge increase in money-printing. The prime minister of the time, Gordon Brown, was credited with an act of heroic genius for implementing this programme of what bourgeois economists called 'quantitative easing', but which was in reality a huge theft – a direct transfer of wealth from the poorest to the richest in our society.

As Karl Marx explained in *Capital*, money circulating in the economy reflects the value of the commodities in circulation. To print more money without increasing the value of goods in circulation simply means that each note or coin that circulates will be exchanged for a smaller amount of commodities – it will be worth less. The more money that is printed in this way, the more the currency is devalued. The effect may not be noticed straight away, but sooner or later this reality has to come into force.

The rulers of imperialist countries thought they had discovered a magic trick when the inevitable inflation crisis did not hit immediately. This feeling was reflected in the world of petty-bourgeois academia, too, with the invention and promotion

of the 'modern monetary theory' (known by its critics as the 'magic money tree').

What all these observers failed to realise was that the apparent ability of countries like Britain and the USA to print money without suffering adverse economic consequences was based not on some new rule of economics, but on the reality of their being imperialist countries. The fact that so much world trade is conducted in the currencies of a few dominant countries allows them to spread out and export the inflationary effect of their money-printing, and thus to water down and delay the inflationary effects in their home economies.

But this watering down and delaying, facilitated by their position as dominant imperial powers, could only last so long. And when the effects finally started to be noticed, the train was already racing at a runaway speed.

Our rulers got themselves out of their systemic crisis in 2008 by printing money. While the national debt skyrocketed and the people's pay and pensions lost their value, the banks were saved and asset and share prices ballooned. The rich became fabulously richer. Meanwhile, pay and pensions were steadily eroded.

When the next systemic crisis hit in 2020, our rulers masked its existence by declaring national lockdowns 'to respond to the health emergency' (although an effective health response would have been localised and would have taken place far earlier). In this way, they were able to camouflage the huge subsidies they paid to the monopoly corporations by calling it a 'Covid bailout' and also subsidising many workers to stay at home. The government once again took on more debt and the Bank of England once again printed huge sums of money, which once again inflated asset prices and devalued wages.

The disruptions in global supply chains caused by the Covid shutdowns exacerbated this inflationary spiral further by creating artificial shortages of many goods. They also showed

the fragility of capitalist 'efficiency', which has pushed for the removal of every piece of contingency planning ('just in time' delivery replacing warehousing, for example) in the interests of maximising profits.

We saw during Covid how this efficiency drive has left the poorest workers everywhere most at the mercy of shortages and price rises that arise whenever these globally spread supply lines are interrupted. Three years after the first Covid lockdowns, this fragile web of connections has still not stabilised, and many small businesses all over the world have ceased trading or gone bankrupt as a result.

With the launch of the imperialists' sanctions war against Russia in February 2022, the high inflation and steeply rising energy prices were shifted up to an even higher level, once more hitting the poorest workers everywhere the hardest. The imperialist plan to destroy Russia's economy by cutting it off from the world market spectacularly failed, but it did have the result of cutting Europe off from the cheap energy on which it has depended since the 1980s, leaving us with unpayable utility bills and uncompetitive industry.

With inflation rising rapidly, the Bank of England had officially declared a plan to end its money-printing programme, but the need to 'stand with Ukraine' led it to print more billions to pay for weapons, while the need to keep social peace led it to do the same in order to subsidise energy costs for individuals and for businesses. These open-ended subsidies have delivered huge bonanzas to the arms and energy monopolies while further reducing the purchasing power of the masses.

In such a situation, the performance of Britain's trade union leaders has been a grave betrayal. Instead of fighting for pay restitution and the rights of their members to live in dignity, they have been looking for the exit, repeating employers' (and Labour leader Keir Starmer's) assertion that to ask for better is 'unaffordable' (unreasonable) and trying to scare members

into accepting further real-terms pay cuts with assurances that these 'deals' are the 'best that can be achieved', and with dark threats that if the deals are rejected, the members will be sorry.

All the same, despite this lack of leadership, and despite the division of each profession into several unions that divide the workforces in each workplace and weaken their fighting spirit, the strikers are not doing as they are told. Nurses recently voted to reject a government pay offer despite huge pressure from their union leaders to accept.

It seems likely that at least some of those striking will continue their fight, therefore, but it's hard to see how much they can achieve with leaders who have made it abundantly clear they have no heart for the struggle and are anxious to come to terms with the employers.

Meanwhile, the Enough Is Enough campaign has dwindled from promising beginnings into yet another toothless and diversionary organisation whose main programme (like too many supposedly 'resistance' organisations before it) is to persuade workers to vote Labour at the next election.

The truth is that we have over a century of experience to tell us that the Labour party is a loyal servant of British imperialism, and plenty of more recent experience to show that the party's present leader Keir Starmer is an impeccably establishment figure (having previously served as head of the public prosecution service) whom the ruling class would be only too happy to instal as their next prime minister.

Two things have been made very clear by the experience of the last year. The first is that there is a great desire and willingness amongst workers to fight for pay restitution. The second is that the present trade union structures, institutionally tied to the Labour party and loyal to British imperialism, are completely unwilling and unable to lead this struggle.

The ruling class hopes very much that the union leaders will be successful in persuading their members to accept below-in-

flation offers of five percent with occasional one-off lump sums on top, and into giving up the fight to defend pay, pensions and public services (all of which are suffering crises of recruitment because of the terrible pay and conditions that now prevail everywhere). It is also doing what it can to sell the illusion that a Labour government will bring 'change' and workers should simply resign themselves to pay cuts, go home and wait for the next election.

Without new leadership, new unions, or both, it is hard to see whether the pressure from members will be able to overcome their own leaderships' resistance to leading a real fight for pay restitution and defence of public services. The present leaders have shown very clearly that their loyalty is to the system and not to the workers.

iii. What is your perspective on the ongoing war in Ukraine and the politics of the new Sunak government?

I would sum up our position on the war in Ukraine by saying that the conflict was started by the USA and Nato when they instigated a fascist coup in 2014, and that Russia was forced to intervene by the refusal of the western powers (France and Germany) to implement the terms of the peace treaty they guaranteed in Minsk in 2015, and refused to recognise the need for a new security framework in Europe that could guarantee peace for all and stop Nato's aggressive expansion to the east – an expansion that has been aimed at Russia for the last thirty years.

Russia's war, in our view, is a just and necessary war of national-liberation for the oppressed Russians in the east of what was formerly socialist Ukraine, and of self-defence against Nato, which is using the Ukrainian people as its proxy army in the hope of bringing down Russia's independent government.

When the imperialists use pseudo-Marxist academic phraseology like 'decolonisation', what they are really referring to is their long-time desire to break up Russia's vast territory and loot its huge mineral wealth.

As regards our latest prime minister, Rishi Sunak, he has shown himself to be another impeccable member of the establishment. He is ready to continue the war for as long as the British ruling class desires it, and ready also to start the process of reversing Brexit, which the ruling class never accepted, but which has taken some time for them to be able to start unpicking.

iv. How do the British people and working class see the social uprising in France?

The true extent of the uprising in France is kept hidden from the majority of British workers, just as the yellow vest protests were a few years ago. Our rulers do not allow meaningful coverage of your actions in their media because they are terrified that the example of French militancy might spread across the Channel and inspire workers in Britain to organise the same kind of action over here.

It is clear that workers in France are facing essentially the same problems as those we face in Britain: rising inflation, crippling energy costs, rapidly falling wages and pensions, constant rises in the pensionable age, cuts in public service provision of all kinds.

In Britain, our pay and services are in a worse state than in France precisely because we have not taken such spirited action in defence of them. From the great miners' strike of 1984/5 until today, very few meaningful attempts have been made to resist the ruling-class programme of dismantling the welfare state, and workers have in general been demoralised and re-

signed.

Those of us who are aware of the French uprising feel very inspired by your actions and hopeful of a positive outcome. While we understand that trade union action on its own cannot fix the deep crisis of the capitalist system, we do believe that such actions can be a great school for the workers.

The more the current actions spread and the longer they are prolonged, the greater will be the opportunities for communists to spread their influence and education, helping workers to expand their programme from a simple struggle with the government over pension reform to a broader one against the capitalist class as a whole, and an understanding that it is the capitalist system that is ultimately responsible for inflation, poverty, inequality, economic crisis and war.

In the meantime, the real experience of physically resisting the power of the state will be a great education for workers in understanding the true nature of the capitalist system and the class enemy, and all of this will provide important opportunities for communists to work and to extend their influence – which is an essential precondition for any successful class struggle to be waged.

v. Do you have a message you wish to send to the working class and the people's struggles in France?

We are greatly heartened and inspired by the fighting spirit of the French workers, and especially by those who combine the demands for decent pay and conditions with the demands that France should leave the imperialist Nato alliance and European Union bloc.

The French workers' enemy is not in Russia or China, but in Paris! The same bankers who want to break Russia into pieces in order to loot its mineral wealth and exploit its people want to

privatise French public services, reduce French wages and raise the age of French retirement.

It is instructive to note that even militant workers like the French find themselves condemned to fight the same battles over and over again. Advantages they had previously secured by struggle come under attack as soon as the ruling class feels itself strong enough to push back, and our positions are once again under fire.

We see that the best we can achieve by trade union action is, in general, and despite occasional advances, only to retreat less slowly than we would if we had no unions to fight within.

In order to secure real and lasting change, trade union action will not be enough. Ultimately, our struggle for decent pay and conditions, for the dignity of the working class, must be joined to the struggle to overthrow the rule of the bloodsucking exploiters and replace it with the rule of the working class – with a planned socialist economy.

We have every faith that the French will bring to the fore a leadership that understands this urgent necessity and is prepared to help the working people direct their powerful blows against the enemy's fortress, which is already being weakened by the fatal flaws within the system itself.

Joti Brar

Bristol, May 2023

4. Crisis and war

1. Paris Declaration: The rising tide of global war and the tasks of anti-imperialists¹⁰

Parties and organisations from around the world have come together to agree a common platform in opposition to the reckless war drive of the imperialist block, spearheaded by Nato in Ukraine.

We stand at a moment of grave peril for workers and oppressed peoples everywhere, in which the imperialist war drive is pushing us towards a third world war and a nuclear conflagration.

Even as Nato's aggression in Ukraine is failing both militarily and economically, the USA's desperation to save its hegemonic position in the world means it cannot back down, but is instead looking for ways to *expand and prolong* the war. In the face of all experience, it seems that the imperialists still hope they can find a way to wear down all resistance to their rule and come

out on top.

As a result, we face the prospect of the Ukraine war spilling over into neighbouring countries in Europe and central Asia – and also of the outbreak of hostilities in several other theatres further east. Recent US provocations in Taiwan, alongside its ceaseless ratcheting up of tensions with the DPRK and China on every front, make this all too clear.

At this moment of historic importance, we, the undersigned parties, agree that the following essential points should be made clear to the masses of the world, and should guide our antiwar and anti-imperialist work:

1. That the conflicts that have already or are threatening to break out are not isolated and local affairs, but are integral parts of the USA's drive to retain its global hegemony.

2. That the present war in Ukraine is not the result of 'Russian aggression' but of this western imperialist drive to war – in particular, the war drive of the USA.

3. That the war really began when the USA and its allies financed, armed and organised a fascist coup in Kiev in 2014, and that the Russian side, in its alliance with the peoples of the Donbass, is engaged in a *war of self-defence and national liberation* against imperialist attack.

4. That the war drives against China and the DPRK are also a result of imperialist aggression, and that, no matter who fires the first shot, if the threatened conflicts break out in Korea or Taiwan, those wars will likewise be wars of anti-imperialist self-defence and national liberation waged by the Korean and/or Chinese people.

5. That Russia and China's ability to defend themselves and others does not indicate expansionist ambitions or imperialist economics; it is based in decades of *planning for self-defence*, initiated by the socialist governments of the USSR and the PRC.

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6. That there is no economic data to justify characterising China or Russia as imperialist. These are countries that do not live by superexploiting or looting the world. They do not put other countries into military, technological or debt slavery. On the contrary, the beneficial terms of trade and the technological and military assistance they offer are giving smaller developing countries the chance to break out of imperialist enslavement.

7. That Russia and China are the targets of imperialist aggression because both by retaining their own independence, and by assisting other nations to gain theirs, they represent a serious threat to the imperialists' world hegemony.

8. That the growing alliance between Russia and China offers hope to the people of the world: hope of an alternative to US domination and imperialist superexploitation. A strong anti-imperialist camp is our peoples' best defence against the aggressive plans of the bloodthirsty Nato alliance – our best defence against the looming threat of nuclear war.

9. That antiwar activists must mobilise the masses in their countries for a campaign of *active non-cooperation* with the imperialist war effort aimed at sabotaging Nato's war machinery in every way possible. We must refuse to fight in or assist Nato's armies (direct or proxy). We must refuse to transport Nato's men and materiel. We must refuse to allow Nato's bases to operate unimpeded on our territories. We must refuse to manufacture or supply Nato's armaments and other vital equipment. We must refuse to broadcast, print or distribute imperialist propaganda lies; and refuse to cooperate with imperialist trade and sanctions wars.

10. That the accelerating war drive, economic crisis, hunger crisis, environmental crisis and more all make it abundantly clear that the need to remove the imperialist economic system is more urgent than ever.

11. That the slogans of true anti-imperialists in this time must be:

Defeat for the Nato-led imperialist alliance!

Victory to the resistance!

No cooperation with imperialist war!

2. The global capitalist system is teetering over the abyss¹¹

The drive towards World War Three is being impelled by the mother of all economic crises: a revolutionary crisis will be the result.

Comrades, I began my party's contribution to our conference in Caracas two months ago by saying that our event was taking place at a time of crucial importance for the world struggle against imperialism.

I said then that our struggle is becoming more significant every day, that people everywhere are being faced with the hard truth that they simply cannot obtain a secure supply of basic necessities under their present economic conditions – never mind being able to achieve for themselves the peaceful enjoyment of a useful and fulfilling life.

What was true two months ago is even truer today. The contradictions of the global capitalist-imperialist economic system are becoming deeper every day. The economic crisis is becoming ever more acute and problematical for the imperialist financiers, and as a result their drive to war is becoming ever more

desperate and urgent.

Since we last met, we have seen – those of us who pay attention to such things – the collapse of several important financial institutions in the heartlands of imperialism. Our rulers are desperate to hide from view this slow-motion (for now) collapse of their financial system, which is rotten to its core. They do not want us to understand that the banks are collapsing as a result of bad debt, which is itself a symptom of the deep and inescapable crisis of capitalist overproduction.

Information about these bank collapses has not been printed on the front pages of the popular press in the west. Each bank has been quietly bailed out by imperialist governments, while their chief economic spokesmen continue to reassure themselves and each other that everything is fine: nothing to see here.

Our rulers hope to avoid contagion and panic by guaranteeing every deposit in every bank, no matter how large the deposit or how insolvent the bank. *They have guaranteed unlimited support to every bank everywhere.*

How can they do this?

Only by printing the money required to bail out the banks.

In this way, the imperialists hope to avoid the social unrest that would arise from allowing the banks to collapse in an uncontrolled way.

And what will be the effect of this action?

That the social unrest that they are trying to avoid will simply be postponed for a little while, until the money-printing they are now indulging in has compounded the runaway inflation they have already produced by printing huge amounts of money over the last 15 years – in particular following crises in 2008, 2020 and 2022 – to bail out failing banks, rescue stock markets and subsidise monopolies.

The imperialists indulge this reckless response because it is in their nature to 'kick the can down the road'. Because they are

hoping that if they can postpone this social explosion, something will occur to rescue them in the meantime.

But what is this something?

The miracle they are awaiting is the longed-for destruction of the territorial integrity and economic and political independence of the great territories of Russia and China.

They want to repeat the orgy of looting that saved their failing system in the 1990s after the fall of the USSR and the European socialist countries.

But the imperialism of today is not the imperialism of 1991. Its economic foundation is infinitely weaker, its technological dominance is likewise coming to an end, and its social cohesion is being destroyed along with the destruction of the welfare provisions that were granted to its workers at home after 1945.

As a result, the imperialists' ability to dominate the world has been fatally undermined. Today, the US-led Nato imperialist bloc faces a rapidly growing and increasingly united anti-imperialist counterweight, whose united forces the USA and its allies, even with all their financial and military resources, simply do not have the power to defeat.

And the powers at the heart of that alliance – China, Russia and the DPRK – have made it absolutely clear that they will fight to defend themselves and are prepared for any war the imperialists might launch against them.

In Europe, this war has already begun. Comrades of the Platform are united in describing Russia's special military operation as a just and defensive war for the Russian people and a war of liberation for the antifascist population of the Donbass and other resistance regions of what was once the Soviet Socialist Republic of Ukraine.

We are united in opposing the imperialist propaganda – and those who repeat this propaganda within the working-class movement – about 'Russian aggression' and 'Russian imperialism'. Such an analysis, instead of enlightening people, relies on

the people's ignorance about the background and context to the war and reinforces bourgeois lies. It is profoundly ahistorical and anti-materialist.

We are likewise united in opposing the same imperialist propaganda – and all those who repeat it in our movement – about 'Chinese aggression' and 'Chinese imperialism'; or even about 'North Korean aggression' and 'North Korean expansionism'.

We understand, and pledge ourselves to do everything possible to bring this understanding to the people of our countries and to masses of the world, that China and the DPRK are targeted by the US-led imperialist bloc not as 'imperialist rivals' or even because they are socialist, but because they are independent states with governments that are effective in preventing the imperialist superexploitation of their people and resources.

Standing today in colonised Seoul, we see that we are in a city dominated by the obscene presence of the world's largest military base. That this 'south Korea' is a state entirely constructed by the power and under the diktat of US imperialism. That the national-liberation struggle of the Korean people has been frustrated; that the political and economic life of this territory has been subordinated; that the army and state forces here are under the complete control of the USA.

We cannot but remember the extreme historical injustice perpetrated against the Korean people. These are people who fought valiantly against Japanese imperialist occupation from 1910 to 1945; who emerged from the second world war on the side of the victors. The Japanese had been defeated by the Korean forces of national liberation when the Soviet soldiers of the Red Army arrived in the north of the country and the US army arrived in the south.

But whereas the people were allowed to freely organise and determine their future in the area under Soviet supervision, in the south it was quite otherwise. Despite their talk of being 'liberators', the US imperialists refused to leave at the agreed

time. Instead they stayed and set up a puppet regime, through which they continue to rule – only alternating between fascistic or ‘reformist’ frontmen as the times have demanded, and the better to fool the people.

The division of Korea into two parts – the occupation of the south, the brutal separation of families, the forcible rupture of ties between compatriots who have shared a common territory and culture for thousands of years – is a historical injustice that must be rectified.

United Korea would have the resources, the manpower, and the military, industrial and technological strength to be a social and economic powerhouse. Rather than allow such a strong and independent country to develop in east Asia, on the borders of both Russia and China, US imperialist interference has forced war, division and subjugation onto the Korean people.

But, in Korea as elsewhere, the contradictions of the capitalist economic crisis are becoming acute, and the conditions that will enable the people to bring an end to their humiliation at the hands of US imperialism are developing fast.

Not only are the economic and war crises manifesting with particular sharpness in your country, but the presence of the DPRK with its strong military in the north, and the existence of such a revolutionary force as the People’s Democracy Party in the south, create a high possibility that the war that the imperialists are working hard to provoke on your territory will result not only in the defeat of the imperialist forces, but in the rapid completion of your national-liberation struggle, the reunification of your divided country and the emergence of a strong and united Korea under revolutionary anti-imperialist leadership.

Comrades, with the war drive intensifying at an accelerating speed, communists and anti-imperialists everywhere must form the strongest possible union in order to ensure the sympathy and support of the masses for the wars of reunification and self-defence that are being forced onto China and the DPRK.

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I have been asked by some comrades why the Platform insists on creating so much work. Why so many conferences? Why so many actions? Why so many speeches and statements? Are we not just keeping ourselves busy?

No, comrades, we are not simply keeping ourselves busy to no purpose. The rapidly developing war situation, and the rotteness at the heart of much of what calls itself the world communist movement, impels our action.

We must travel to different parts of the world in order to draw as many parties as possible into unified action. At the same time as we bring our founding document, the Paris Declaration, to the attention of organisations and workers all over the world, we must also develop and refine our message to embrace the specific conditions in different regions and to reflect the rapidly developing world situation.

We must do everything in our power to strengthen the forces of socialism and anti-imperialism, whose fates are intertwined and who face a common enemy.

We must do everything possible to ensure that the coming battles are decisive, that the imperialist enemies of humanity are finally defeated, and that our people are at last able to progress towards true, socialist peace and civilisation.

Joti Brar

Seoul, May 2023

5. Programme of action

1. Urgent measures needed to address the crisis

With the economic situation worsening by the day, we must demand urgent measures to address the cost of living and stop the ongoing push to force ordinary people to bear the burden of a crisis that was not of their making.

We demand:

- The nationalisation of all utilities (without compensation) as well as of the monopoly producers, manufacturers and distributors of food so as to ensure a secure supply of all necessities at affordable prices, free from the vacillations and disruptions of the world market.
- The mass requisition and building of social housing and the introduction of a rent cap to address the housing crisis.

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- The complete renationalisation of every part of the NHS, including all its buildings and the pharmaceutical industry.
- That Britain must leave Nato, bring all troops and military contractors home, and end all aspects of British involvement in aggressive wars abroad.
- The lifting of the minimum wage to a level providing a decent family existence.
- The enacting of legislation to ensure that pay and benefit rises keep pace with real inflation.
- An end to currency devaluation through endless money printing.
- An end to the self-defeating sanctions war against Russia, which is fuelling both the energy and the inflation crises.
- An end to all subsidies to monopoly corporations and banks. Any business considered 'too big to fail' or 'necessary to the national economy' that cannot make an adequate profit out of ordinary operations should be nationalised without compensation and run according to a plan based on meeting the needs of the people.

The market has proved itself to be totally unable to meet the needs of the people. The capitalists have shown themselves to be entirely unable to run their own system for the benefit of society.

Ultimately, only socialist science can make clear both the causes of and solutions to this crisis. We need to build a socialist organisation that can harness workers' power to create a rational society – not only to solve the problems that press on us so heavily and urgently today, but to build a bright and fulfilling future for ourselves and our children, free from the scourges of poverty, hunger, inequality, insecurity and war.

2. Defy the anti-trade union laws!¹²

It is time we turned the struggle for decent wages into a struggle for socialism.

The failure of wages to keep pace with galloping inflation, alongside insane hikes in rents, food prices and energy bills since 2008, and reaching unprecedented heights in recent months, have been driving desperate workers across the country onto picket lines for more than a year now.

For a time it seemed as if this spirit of widening resistance might grow roots, and that there was a chance that union leaders would be pressured by their members into overcoming such crippling divisions in the labour movement as multiple unions for the same jobs (three unions in the rail industry, twelve in the NHS), separate deals being cut in different regions etc, that so weaken the movement.

Rousing speeches from the RMT's Mick Lynch and others also raised hopes that the strike wave would endure and spread, uniting workers in their common struggle. Perhaps, who knows, we might even begin to move on from the fight for a 'fair day's pay' to the fight against the wages system (capitalist exploitation) itself.

Sadly, it seems these old divisions are not going to be so easily overcome. Rank opportunism and class-collaborationism have grown deep roots in the working-class movement, distilled in the imperialist Labour party and poisoning all working-class politics for more than a century. Even when the strike wave was

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at its height, the usual suspects were banging on about how our salvation would come with the election of a new Labour government.

Now, with the strike wave in decline, the collapse of the Tories in the local elections has been greeted by this gentry with an orgy of wishful thinking about a revival of Labour fortunes, all in the hopes of taking workers' minds off class struggle.

i. Nurses' leader reveals true nature of British unions

In a way, the most illuminating example of misleadership by a union bureaucracy came from a union that was not one of the big guns of the TUC, had never previously called a strike, and therefore lacked the opportunist experience of more seasoned players who know how to play the game.

This standard formula consists of talking a good enough game to win the trust of union members, judging when to rebrand a slightly less awful deal as a 'victory', and judicially combining a reputation for occasional militancy with the position of having both feet stuck firmly in the bog of Labour party social democracy.

Poor Pat Cullen of the Royal College of Nurses. At first it seemed that the nurses' struggle to win back some of what has been lost through 15 years of below-inflation pay deals – a fight that was enthusiastically supported by the public – was carrying all before it.

But Cullen almost from the outset was searching for the exit. Initially, the nurses demanded a pay rise of 19.2 percent, by way of partial compensation for a real-terms pay cut since 2010 that is officially acknowledged to have been at least twenty percent, but has, in reality, been far higher. Before a shot had even been fired, Cullen inexplicably distanced herself from this demand, casually declaring her willingness to meet the govern-

ment 'half way' at about ten percent.

After many more well-supported strikes and growing public fury at the boneheaded refusal to pay the nurses a decent wage, the government offered an insulting pay deal that amounted to a roughly five percent rise. Pat Cullen jumped at the deal and recommended acceptance by RCN members in fulsome terms and with a hefty dose of blackmail.

What happened next was that the nurses, who had had it up to here with being kicked around, rejected Cullen's advice and voted overwhelmingly to keep striking and get the job done. If nurses had never been on strike before, they certainly made up for it now.

The RCN, thwarted in its attempt to soft-soap the membership into accepting a shabby offer, now zigzagged between acting as a tool of the government and putting on a show of militancy. Cullen underwent a dizzying about-face, belatedly donning her militant mask again and announcing that strikes would carry on, vocally spurning the very offer she had so recently recommended to her members.

But sure enough, when the next push-back by the government came in the form of a pettifogging legal technicality, curtailing one of the strikes by four hours through the courts, Cullen once more snapped to attention, ordering the nurses to comply with the ruling and hastening to tell the world that they would not dream of breaking the (bourgeois, anti-union) law!

ii. Bowing down before the anti-union laws

Yet this is precisely what is most urgently needed if any workers are actually to win the pay rise they so desperately need. Strikers must refuse to confine their struggles within the bounds of a set of anti-trade union laws that were specifically designed to hamstring working-class power; they must do whatever is

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necessary to win, whether secondary action, flying pickets, wildcat walkouts or anything else, creating facts on the ground by independent class action.

We have no personal animus against Pat Cullen, and dwell on her case only because it exposes so clearly the limitations of trade-union politics when faced with a class war assault launched by capitalism to force down the workers' standard of living. The same class-collaborationist practice is just as rife across the rest of Britain's unions, only not always quite so crassly expressed.

In Cullen's case, the gear changes were so clunky that everyone could hear them and wince. The nurses, as all working people, deserve better leadership than this, and the grit and determination shown by their struggle makes it clear that, once even a fraction of that spirit is able to connect itself to scientific socialism, nothing will be able to hold them back.

As the global economic crisis of capitalism deepens at break-neck speed, as our rulers indulge in endless money-printing to prop up the failing banking system yet again, galloping inflation and a rampant war drive are only going to make an already dire situation infinitely worse for workers everywhere.

The sooner workers ditch their affiliation to organisations that are institutionally bound to the Labour party in particular, to social democracy in general, and to the capitalist system in toto, the sooner will we be able to mount a meaningful resistance to the war being waged against us, turning the tables on our rapacious rulers and their decadent and dying system.

Break the link with Labour!

Defy the anti-trade-union laws!

Turn the struggle for decent wages into a struggle for socialism!

Giles Shorter

Bristol, May 2023

3. Model motion: Break the link with Labour

This [conference]* condemns the Labour party's century-long history of prioritising the interests of Britain's imperialist ruling class over the interests of working-class people whom it constantly claims, but persistently fails, to represent.

Conference notes that the election of Labour governments has consistently proved to be a chimera as far as delivering benefits to working-class people in Britain is concerned. Many illegal wars, privatisations and other criminal, anti-worker measures have been enacted by Labour governments, or supported by Labour leaders on the opposition benches, and none have been repealed or reversed by the Labour party in office.

Conference therefore concludes that the insistent demand that members' struggles should be subordinated to the electoral agenda of the anti-worker Labour party is an unacceptable one-way street. Labour party subordination and anti-union laws have created a situation where unions enter every fight with both hands tied behind their backs.

Conference believes that our organisation's leaders and subscription fees must be freed up to act solely in the interests of our members and our class; no longer tied to a machinery that seeks to suppress workers' struggles for decent pay, pensions and working conditions.

Conference therefore resolves that the union will disaffiliate from the Labour party and refocus its efforts on pursuing a line that is in the interests of our members and independent of the control of the British ruling class.

* Change as required: eg, branch, meeting, union, etc.

4. Model motion: Defy the anti-trade union laws

This [conference] notes that, since the defeat of the heroic 1984/5 miners' strike, several rounds of anti-trade union legislation have been enacted in Britain, whose cumulative effect and specific aim has been to erode workers' ability to defend their pay, pensions and conditions of work to the point of non-existence.

Conference further notes that the right to withdraw their labour is *the only real right that working-class people possess* within the conditions of the capitalist economic system. Britain's anti-union laws, while officially leaving the 'right' to strike intact, have in reality created a situation in which it is impossible for workers' collective action to be successful.

Conference notes that while campaigns officially exist whose stated aim is to overturn these laws, these have to date been entirely ineffective. History shows that the only way to have unjust anti-worker laws overturned is via *mass non-cooperation*. If workers make the laws unworkable (as they did with the poll tax in 1990), the government will be left with no choice but to rescind them.

This conference believes that it was a serious mistake for trade unionists ever to accept the situation in which the capitalist class granted itself the right to oversee the running of working-class organisations. Our accounts, our rule books and our elections are our own business and no one else's.

Conference concludes that in order to exercise our right to take action in defence of pay and conditions, our only option is to defy en masse the laws that stop us from being successful,

whether these are laws prohibiting mass walkouts and secondary actions or laws stipulating state supervision of ballots and notice to employers. Every one of these laws is an attack on the rights of working-class people, and must be abolished by means of workers' collective action.

Conference resolves that from now on our reps and officials will run disputes in whichever way their members believe will be most effective.

Conference further resolves that reps and officials who continue to use anti-union legislation as an excuse for failing to represent the interests and follow the instructions of their members must be removed and replaced immediately.

5. Model motion: Urgent measures needed to address the cost of living crisis

This [conference] notes that rampant inflation in Britain, as elsewhere, has not been caused by workers, but by capitalists, specifically by the measures the financiers and their governments have been taking to try to conceal and escape from the deep crisis in the global capitalist economy. These include:

1. Huge and endless money-printing to bail out banks (2008, 2023) and corporations (2020), to provide seemingly bottomless subsidies to energy ('price cap') and armaments ('standing with Ukraine') corporations, to big pharma ('Covid') and privatised health ('waiting lists') companies, to education ('catching up') and transport monopolies, etc).

2. Supply chain disruptions that have afflicted global production processes since the pandemic, which highlighted just how exposed workers everywhere have become to the

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slightest shock, as profit-driven decisions have seen every bit of contingency planning abolished in the name of 'efficiency'.

3. Price gouging engaged in by monopoly corporations that are in a position to use the difficult situation to claim things are worse than they are and set prices artificially high (see record profits in the energy sector, for example, and the way that our government, which serves these corporations, robs the people by printing money and borrowing to subsidise price hikes rather than demanding that prices are brought down).

4. The sanctions war against Russia, which, having failed to bring down that country by collapsing its economy and creating regime-change conditions amongst the Russian people, has instead boomeranged back onto the aggressors, in particular onto the economies of western Europe, which have for many decades now relied on a steady flow of cheap Russian oil and gas to subsidise the cost of living and of industrial production.

Conference further notes that the hoary old myth that high wages produce inflation was disproved by Karl Marx 150 years ago, and is only repeated by today's economists in order to try and convince workers that we are wrong to fight for wage rises. But the plain fact is that wages do not ultimately affect inflation but *profits*. If wages rise, profits fall; if wages fall, profits rise. This is the simple truth our exploiters are desperate to hide from our view with all their ludicrous blather about an 'over-heated economy' and 'too much demand'.

Conference notes with concern the recent bank bail-outs in Switzerland and the USA, which make it clear that while the entire global banking system is imploding, our rulers are going to try to cover this up by printing money at an ever more reckless rate. This is nothing but robbery on a grand scale. With every piece of newly-minted currency (in whatever form) that does not reflect a physical increase in the national wealth, our wages, pensions and savings are being further devalued.

This in turn will transform the speeding train of inflation into a runaway train, and we can expect social explosions to result as wages continue to plummet in relation to prices.

Conference believes that the economic crisis of capitalism is being fought by our rulers as a ruthless class war, in which the monopolists are determined to pass the burden onto the backs of the poor and to preserve their system by any means necessary. That being so, it is both the right and the duty of workers to fight back. The economic crisis of capitalism was not of our making: why should our children go without food or our elderly without heat because the capitalists cannot find useful ways to continue making profits with the huge wealth they have amassed in their hands?

Conference therefore resolves to launch a mass campaign, canvassing other unions, social organisations and individuals to join us, to demand the following:

1. The nationalisation of all utilities (without compensation) as well as of the monopoly producers, manufacturers and distributors of food so as to ensure a secure supply of all necessities at affordable prices, free from the vacillations and disruptions of the world market.
2. The mass requisition and building of social housing and the introduction of a rent cap to address the housing crisis.
3. The complete renationalisation of every part of the NHS, including all its buildings and the pharmaceutical industry.
4. That Britain must leave Nato, bring all troops and military contractors home, and end all aspects of British involvement in aggressive wars abroad.
5. The lifting of the minimum wage to a level providing a decent family existence.
6. The enacting of legislation to ensure that pay and benefit rises keep pace with real inflation.

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7. An end to currency devaluation through endless money printing.

8. An end to the self-defeating sanctions war against Russia, which is fuelling both the energy and the inflation crises.

9. An end to all subsidies to monopoly corporations and banks. Any business considered 'too big to fail' or 'necessary to the national economy' that cannot make an adequate profit out of ordinary operations should be nationalised without compensation and run according to a plan based on meeting the needs of the people.

Conference further resolves that these demands should be backed by mass action, strikes and non-cooperation until our demands are met.

6. Model motion: No cooperation with the imperialist drive to war

This [conference] notes Britain's continued involvement in the war in Ukraine and its drive towards war in China and Korea, and calls for the immediate recall of all British troops stationed abroad. Whether in eastern Europe, east Asia, Latin America, Africa or the middle east, these troops are not 'defending Britain', but are instead engaged in stirring up conflicts and destabilising governments that are not to the liking of British and US finance capital.

While the City of London's *financial elite* hope to benefit by joining arms with the US imperialists to seize the mineral wealth and superexploit the workers of Russia, China, Korea and elsewhere, this conference affirms that such wars are absolutely

against the interests of the vast majority of British workers.

Congress notes that in 2014, when a bloody coup d'état was carried out by the imperialist powers, led by the USA and enthusiastically assisted by Britain, to depose Ukraine's legally-elected government and replace it with their hand-picked fascist proxies, the new regime immediately showed its true colours by launching an all-out assault against trade unions and trade unionists, including a massacre where at least 48 (officially acknowledged) but likely *over 100 trade unionists and antifascist protestors were burned alive* in the trade union house of Odessa. The fascist regime followed this with an eight-year-long military assault, including non-stop bombardment of civilian targets, on the heavily industrialised, heavily unionised, Russian-speaking areas in the eastern Donbass region where a strong anti-coup and antifascist resistance movement had been successfully organised.

Congress further notes that the ensuing eight-year conflict in the Donbass was almost unreported in British media and unremarked by British politicians, although daily shelling of residential areas left 14,000 people dead, most of them civilians. Meanwhile, we now have confirmation from Angela Merkel and Francois Hollande themselves that the peace process they signed up to in Minsk was nothing but a subterfuge – a stalling mechanism aimed at 'buying time' for further arming and training Ukraine's military forces.

During these eight years, the growth of ultra-nationalist and Nazi-ideology-aligned organisations, already developed by US-funded organisations (to the tune of \$5bn) for two decades before 2014, went into overdrive. Small private fascist militias became private armies. New fascist militias arose, espousing openly Nazi ideology and heredity. These were all financed, armed and trained by the west, including by British instructors, and were absorbed into the ranks of the national army. Their stated goal was the ethnic cleansing of the majority of Russian

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speakers and the creation of a two-tier ethnic apartheid state in which Russian-speakers (who accounted for 30 percent of the population in the territory of the former Ukrainian Republic) were second-class citizens, where the Russian language was banned from public life, including education, where Russian literature and culture were likewise vilified, and where history was falsified to present the Red Army liberators of Europe in WW2 as criminals and the genocidal Nazi-affiliated Banderites of Ukraine as heroes.

Conference notes that the only possible reason for arming Ukraine to the teeth and inducting it into Nato is as a battering ram to be used against Russia. Many documents, whether from the German Third Reich of the 1930s or the CIA planners of the 1950s and beyond, show incontrovertibly that western imperialist powers, including Britain, have long held this ambition, doing everything in their power to foster and manipulate elements within Ukrainian society that will allow them to transform the country into a weapon in their drive to loot the resources and crush the resistance of Russia.

Conference further notes that the many attempts by Russia to find a peaceful means for coexistence with the imperialists in Europe were consistently rebuffed.

Precisely because of these developments it was obvious to all those who were paying attention that a conflict was unavoidable, that those in the west who planned this conflict had no intention of stopping, and that the conflict would not stop at the Donbass. The Communists of Russia, having seen exactly this, had been calling on President Putin to send in the Russian army since the beginning of the war in 2014.

Conference also notes that when Russia finally stepped in after eight years, the forces of Ukraine's army, by then fully trained and equipped by Nato, were massing huge numbers of troops and equipment on the borders of the Donbass, preparing for a large-scale offensive operation against the people of

Donetsk and Lugansk.

Taking all the above into account, it is clear that the special military operation was not launched 'out of the blue', but belatedly in response to real threats to Russia and Russian people, and as a result of both the intransigence of the western powers and the growing popular pressure for an intervention in Russia itself.

This conference notes with shame the role of of 'our own' British imperialist government as a key player in planning and perpetrating these heinous war crimes against the Ukrainian and Russian peoples, and the uncritical support given to these criminal efforts by almost every parliamentary politician, no matter what their party affiliation.

Conference also notes that many British workers have been browbeaten, by a compliant political and media establishment, into accepting Britain's role in the Ukraine war on entirely false premises that seek to paint Russia, rather than Anglo-American imperialism and its local fascistic proxies, as the aggressor. Thus the necessary ground was laid to send British and US military experts and operatives (*workers in uniform*) to do the bankers', oil magnates' and armament manufacturers' dirty work, to enact a regime of entirely-self-defeating sanctions against the Russian people (which have turned out to be far more damaging to British and European workers than to our Russian counterparts), and to justify a seemingly limitless stream of subsidies, amounting to uncounted billions of pounds, to British and US arms monopolies under cover of 'standing with Ukraine'.

Conference notes that while money-printing and sanctions 'for Ukraine' are fuelling an inflation crisis that is already rampant, our rulers continue to insist that it is 'unaffordable' to pay wages that keep pace with this inflation, even as they continue to send billions in subsidies to Ukraine.

Conference further notes that we are being similarly prepared

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to accept and cooperate with economic and proxy wars against both north Korea (the DPRK) and China (via Taiwan), whose effects we can expect to be even more catastrophic to the livelihoods of ordinary workers.

This conference believes that responsibility for the hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian lives lost and livelihoods destroyed since Russia was forced to enter the conflict in February 2022 lies wholly with the imperialists, who are directing the so-called 'government' in Kiev from behind the scenes.

Conference further believes that war fought to enforce subjection and servitude upon another nation is morally abhorrent; to fight and die in such a cause is demoralising, corrupting and meaningless. Moreover, when workers fight to defend the looting power of their 'own' imperialist rulers, they are sacrificing themselves in order to strengthen the very class enemy that keeps them poor and exploited.

Conference also believes that the possibilities of the imperialist war drive spilling over from proxy and sanctions wars into open confrontation between the world's largest and most powerful nuclear-armed military machines is an ever-present danger.

Conference realises that, although *individually* powerless, *collectively*, British workers do have the power to *stop British involvement in the war in Ukraine, and in the planned wars against Russia and China*, since the government and corporations cannot fight them without us.

This conference therefore resolves that:

1. It will be official union policy to organise mass resistance to cooperation with activity that in any way supports, directly or indirectly, the imperialist war effort of Britain, the USA or Nato; and that the union will render every support to any members victimised for taking this principled stand.

2. Members of [this union] will do all in their power to promote a movement of industrial, political and military non-cooperation

with all of imperialism's aggressive war preparations and activities among British working people.

This conference declares that it will from now on be official union policy to organise mass resistance to cooperation with any activity that in any way supports, directly or indirectly, the imperialist war effort of Britain, the USA or Nato; and that the union will render every support to any members victimised for taking this principled stand.

Specifically, Conference will make policy that all members of [this union] will:

- Refuse to make or move any materiel to be used by the armed forces in their aggressive operations abroad;
- Refuse to fight in or assist Nato's armies, whether they be direct or proxy forces;
- Refuse to make or transmit propaganda that justifies or whitewashes the criminal imperialist war drive;
- Refuse to assist in any way with the operation of US/Nato bases on British soil; and
- Refuse to cooperate with or facilitate in any way the implementation of economic sanctions aimed at punishing the workers of other countries for choosing governments of whom the imperialists do not approve and cannot control.

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NOTES

- 1 This article was originally published in Lalkar, September 2022. p7
- 2 This article was originally published in Proletarian, February 2023. p17
- 3 This article was originally published in Proletarian, February 2023. p24
- 4 This article was originally published in Proletarian, February 2023. p27
- 5 This article was originally published as a leaflet in November 2022. p31
- 6 This article was originally published as a leaflet in March 2023. p33
- 7 This article was originally published in Proletarian, April 2023. p38
- 8 This article was originally published as two separate pieces in Proletarian of April 2023 and Lalkar of May 2023. p41
- 9 This interview was given to the Pôle de Renaissance Communiste en France and published in French on the Initiative Communiste website on 22 May 2023. It was reproduced in Spanish on the Nueva Revolución website on 25 May 2023. p46
- 10 The Paris Declaration is the founding document of the World Anti-imperialist Platform, which was launched in Paris on 15 September 2022 in response to the growing crisis and evident division in the world socialist and anti-imperialist movement.

This historic document was signed by our party and thirteen other organisations on that date and remains open to genuinely anti-imperialist parties and organisations all over the world. At the time of printing (June 2023), thirty-three organisations have signed the declaration, and the Platform

MANIFESTO FOR THE CRISIS

has held four international conferences: Paris (October 2022), Belgrade (December 2022), Caracas (March 2023) and Seoul (May 2023). It also organises regular simultaneous mass actions in cities around the world.

The Platform has tasked itself with bringing much-needed theoretical clarity to the question of imperialism, and with organising as many forces as possible from all over the world into a broad mass movement to oppose the war drive of the US-led imperialist block and support all efforts of the targeted nations to resist the imperialist onslaught.

In the process of this work, the Platform also hopes to create a new pole of attraction and basis for cooperation between revolutionary Marxist parties, as the world crisis of imperialism deepens, the war drive intensifies, the cost of living becomes increasingly unbearable and, as a result, revolutionary situations develop in many countries.

Ultimately, the only way out of the perpetual and downward spiral of economic crisis and war is socialism – this is the message that genuine peace activists must bring to the masses everywhere.

More information about the Platform can be found on its website: wap21.org, and on its news site Platform News: wapnews.org, which is also available as a Telegram channel (Platform News). In May 2023, the Platform launched a monthly theoretical magazine. p57

- 11 This speech was delivered on behalf of our party at the fourth international conference of the World Anti-imperialist Platform in Seoul, south Korea, on 15 May 2023. p60
- 12 This article was originally published as a leaflet in May 2023. p68

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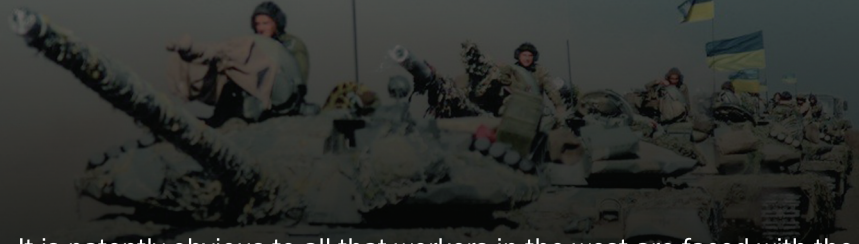
Eighth Congress of the CPGB-ML, 2018 (2021)

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R Brar, Britain's Road to Socialism? (2022)

Various, Manifesto for the Crisis (2023)

Contact the CPGB-ML for further copies and a list of publications.
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It is patently obvious to all that workers in the west are faced with the biggest fall in their living standards in since the second world war.

Decades of cuts and privatisation to our social services, from hospitals and schools to social care, libraries and community centres, have been accompanied by the steady attrition of pay, pensions and working conditions in almost every sector of the economy.

And now, this steady decline has come into collision with a rampant inflation crisis, so that huge numbers of workers who previously considered themselves to be in decently-paid jobs are finding themselves suddenly on the breadline, while those on benefits or minimum wages are increasingly having to choose between heating and eating, or finding themselves homeless and altogether unable to provide for themselves or their families.

How did this come about? What is at the root of the energy and inflation crises that are fueling the cost of living crisis in Britain and elsewhere?

Why do British trade unions seem so unable to lead a victorious struggle in conditions where the overwhelming majority of the population supports the fight for pay restitution and for the defence and restoration of our decimated public services?

Why is it that, in the midst of the worst economic crisis ever seen, we should also be seeing a rampant and seemingly insatiable drive to war by our rulers?

And what, in the midst of all this chaos, should we actually be *doing*?

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