

Students must join the cost of living rebellion

WORKERS POWER / 27 September 2022 / www.workerspower.uk

- No to fees -- for a living grant for all
- Cap rents at a truly affordable level
- Solidarity with workers -- for student strikes & direct action

We need a new student movement if young people are not to be saddled with insurmountable debts before they have even started to earn. University & College Union and Unison members are right to strike in order to defend their pay and conditions. Students need to support them -- and add their own demands and forms of action.

Students must join the cost of living rebellion

Thousands of students across Britain are facing an uphill struggle to make ends meet when they should be allowed to focus on their studies. But the new, unelected administration in Whitehall has done absolutely nothing to relieve the pressure students are under.

Maintenance grants are more difficult than ever to obtain, being linked to old, pre-inflationary figures, and are capped at £12,000, which is not enough to live on anywhere in the UK, let alone London.

Loans will now have to be repaid as soon as graduates get a job earning £27,000 a year, i.e. any graduate job, even on the lowest entry level. Interest rates are currently capped at 6.3% but, unlike wages and grants, are linked to inflation.

They were set at 12% in the summer and are likely to return to that level at the end of November. But even at 6.3%, that would mean £200 being added to a typical £45,000 loan every month – or an extra 9% tax on your pay packet.

Rents have rocketed due to greedy landlords; food is more expensive thanks to climate change (and our government is full of climate deniers!); gas and electricity, oil and petrol are all at record high prices, due to the

sanctions and counter-measures being hurled against each other by Russia and NATO.

We cannot afford to accept this.

Fight back

Hundreds of thousands of workers – on the railways, buses and tube, posties and telecoms engineers, lecturers and support staff at universities – are taking strike action to force the bosses and government to up their pay rates to match inflation.

Here at SOAS the UCU lecturers union is preparing to take strike action over pay, pensions, working and learning conditions and unequal treatment of ethnic minority and women staff. Unison also is on strike today against their paltry 3% pay offer.

All students should take solidarity action by respecting picket lines and joining them. Beyond this, SOAS students have a proud record of taking direct action in solidarity with others. Ad hoc meetings of activists should discuss what they can do to promote their lecturers and support staff against a management which has even tried to ban pickets!

Finally students have their own issues to fight around. Grants, not loans! Cap the rents at an affordable level! No cuts to courses or staffing levels!

Together we can beat Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng. Together we can win!

EAST VS WEST: WHAT MARXISTS HAVE TO SAY

In the last few years the world has become a more dangerous place. Even nuclear war is being talked about by world leaders as a distinct possibility.

The war in Ukraine is the latest example of an imperialist power invading a semicolonial country in order to increase its markets and position itself in a geopolitical conflict.

But the NATO powers and the EU are not without blame too. They are drawing down a new Iron Curtain across Europe, arming Russia's neighbours in preparation for war.

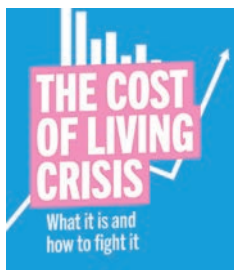
Come to Workers Power's public meeting to hear what Marxists have to say and join the discussion.

**7PM THURSDAY 6 OCTOBER
MARCHMONT COMMUNITY
CENTRE
62 MARCHMONT ST
LONDON WC1N 1AB**

Renationalise public transport

THE GOVERNMENT argues that the railway needs to be ‘modernised’. But many of their claims about ‘outdated’ working practices are in fact critical to safe railways — or a consequence of privatisation. The argument that the pandemic has dramatically reduced railway use is overstated. But in any case, tackling climate change, reducing pollution, and improving infrastructure for work and leisure requires expanding the railways and public transport — not their managed decline.

The Tories want to blame unions for the railways’ problems. But the government and rail bosses aren’t interested in modernisation if it hurt their profits. The railway is not run as a public service — it is run in the interest of private profit. And what goes for the railways goes for bus services too. The fight to defend jobs and conditions must go hand in hand with the fight to kick out the profiteers and return the railway to public ownership, run under the democratic control of workers and passengers, and funded by taxing the profits of Britain’s billionaires. ■



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Defend the right to strike

IN THE dying days of the Johnson government, a new law has been passed allowing bosses to break strikes by employing temporary agency staff. Business secretary Kwasi Kwarteng boasted, “This was a criminal offence. Now it’s an option for business.” Tory policy summed up in a tweet!

The new attack represents a serious tightening of what Tony Blair enthusiastically described as “the most restrictive anti-union laws in Europe.” As if this wasn’t enough, Tory leadership candidate Liz Truss has promised a further crackdown if she wins. Her proposals would institute minimum service levels on “critical national infrastructure”—effectively removing the right to strike for millions of workers in transport, energy, education, health and the post.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch described the changes as “the latest step in a clampdown on democratic dissent, which every trades unionist and democrat must oppose”.

Too right—but how? 12 trade unions have filed a legal challenge to the new law. We should use every means to overturn the changes—but we don’t have to wait for the bosses’ courts to decide.

We have to make the law unworkable through mass, militant and decisive action the minute it is resorted to. This means mounting mass pickets outside workplaces. Elected strike committees should organise stewarding of pickets to defend them from police harassment.

Skilled workers like engineers, train drivers or teachers are unlikely to be affected immediately. But cleaners, security guards, retail and hospitality workers are under threat. We need to be prepared to take solidarity action to help any section of workers targeted by this new law. Almost all effective trade union action—solidarity strikes, mass pickets, workplace voting—is outlawed. But enough is enough. If we all act together, they can’t arrest us all! ■

Strike to win: spread the action

WHILE THE government is enjoying a long summer holiday, workers are taking action to fight the cost of living crisis. While all this reflects a growing anger at the bosses and the Tories’ refusal to protect our living standards in a period of high and rising inflation, there is little sign of the strikes being coordinated.

Coordination

Mick Lynch of the RMT and Dave Ward of the CWU have both talked about the need to put in similar claims and set joint strike dates. But actions speak louder than words. We understand there are reasons for this. Some sections have only just finished their ballots; others are back in negotiations after previous action; and yet more have a set timetable of strikes.

However none of these reasons outweigh the need for the current wave of strikes to turn into a tsunami. If we keep striking on different days, making claims and settling for different amounts, then a few of us will win real pay rises, some of us will mitigate our losses, settling for 5–7%, and most of us will face years of poverty or even destitution.

By striking together we can dominate the news. Other workers, not in the frontline today, will demand their union ballots and join the strikers tomorrow.

Now is the time to pile in with wage demands and recruit

non-union workers into the movement.

Escalation

But coordination logically poses the question of escalation. If we want to make the strikes bigger so they can become a rallying point for every other group of workers, then we also need to make them decisive.

The bosses and the Tories know how to escalate their response to us. Royal Mail threw down the gauntlet by unilaterally tearing up posties’ terms and conditions, forcing the CWU to organise a fresh ballot. Liz Truss has escalated by calling for more anti-union laws.

When the class enemy ups the stakes, we have to respond in kind. All unions in dispute need to coordinate their strike dates from now on and if possible their claims too.

We need to strike to win. Every union needs to call sharply escalating strike action: three days in the first week; then a whole week; then indefinite.

Every trade unionist needs to demand their union ballots now so they can join the fight. Those who are not in a union should join and recruit their workmates too.

Strike committees should be elected and develop regional and national links to ensure strategy and negotiations are democratically controlled by the strikers themselves.

WHAT IS WORKERS POWER?

THIS BULLETIN is produced by the revolutionary communist organisation **WORKERS POWER**.

We support all workers in struggle against the bosses. We fight to turn every struggle into a conscious fight against the whole profit system. It is the system that is the problem, not just this or that boss or government.

Behind the Tories and their billionaire media backers lies the capitalist system. It is a system that puts millions on the dole, seeks to drive down wages and destroys the environment. It is a system that diverts attention from its crimes by bloody wars, and by dividing up the workers amongst themselves by promoting racism and sexism.

We want to destroy that system and replace it with one where production is guided by the needs

of the many, not the profits of the few. That means taking the wealth of society; the banks and the major firms, into the hands of the working class and drawing up a democratic plan of production under workers’ control.

To get this we have to smash the capitalist state; the police, courts, army and judiciary and replace it with a new kind of state based on democratically elected and accountable workers’ councils.

The working class has the power to do this. It is rediscovering its enormous power to defeat the bosses through strike action. We think that power should be used to smash capitalism and build a new kind of society without poverty, oppression and war.

If you agree with what we say—join us.