

Pay sellouts show rank and file must take the lead

The trade union leaders' strategy of short strikes followed by weeks and months of negotiations has nowhere succeeded in winning real above-inflation pay deals—let alone restored a decade of public sector pay cuts. Our unions need a new leadership and a strategy to win. To do that, the rank and file must organise.

THE COST of living crisis is not easing. Food costs nearly 20% more than it did last year. The withdrawal of government subsidies means energy bills will remain at record levels this winter. The chronic housing shortage means rents and mortgages are rising at their steepest rate for a decade.

Core inflation—prices excluding fuel, food and housing—continues to rise, now standing at 6.8%. The government's answer is to increase interest rates. As they climb to 5% and higher, banks will withdraw credit and companies will start to collapse, throwing hundreds of thousands out of work. The Chancellor Jeremy Hunt says a recession in the UK 'would be a price worth paying' to bring inflation down.

In the face of the biggest attack on living standards in a generation, the leaders of the trade unions have failed dismally to prevent the government and bosses imposing below-inflation pay cuts on millions of workers.

For all their supposed "negotiating" skills, every single one of the deals the leaderships have recommended members accept amounts to workers agreeing a real-terms pay cut, and often changes to working conditions and job cuts into the bargain. Not so much collective bargaining as collective givebacks.

The obvious failure of the unions' strategy is generating widespread anger in the workplace. This amounts to an acute crisis of leadership and applies as much to "left-wing" leaders who promised but failed to deliver coordinated action and escalation as it does to right wing leaders.

From the teachers to the nurses, members have rejected sellout deals and demanded further action. Now the CWU is too scared to put their scandalous agreement with Royal Mail to their members.

Our message is clear. If the union leaders won't change their strategy, we must change our union leaders. In the short term, we need to reject the rotten deals they are recommending.

Rank and file

Rejecting the deals is only the first step. If it only leads to a few more months of on-off protest strikes, then the same offers, slightly repackaged, will come back to us. The union leaders and the bosses will then hope that demoralisation amongst members will cause many to reluctantly accept the cuts.

Various organisations have called rank and file conferences to debate an alternative strategy. What should it be? Workers Power believes that the rank and file must organise strike committees and demand

control of the strikes. Rank and file trade unionists must elect representatives from these strike committees to sit in on all negotiations and have the power of veto over what is proposed and what is agreed. They know whether we can live on reduced rations or not, far more than the highly paid officials who will not lose a penny.

Workers should control when strikes are called, how long they last and when they are called off. We must move from one or two day protest actions to all-out strikes which have the power to bring bosses and ministers to their knees.

If we coordinate our strikes, the political pressure will force the Tories to find the money to settle these disputes on our terms. It is now up to the rank and file to take up this idea and put it into practice, creating councils of action in every town and borough with delegates from union branches and the community, capable of supporting strikers, up to and including delivering solidarity strike action.

However this strike wave ends, it will not be the end of the bosses' offensive: more pay cuts, more intensive working conditions and more laws to outlaw our strikes and victimise our activists are on the way.

That is why we fight to transform the unions, so that next time we start our struggles with stronger and more democratic unions. We must replace our bureaucratic leaders with genuine representatives of the rank and file, answerable to and recallable by the membership and willing to mount serious resistance to the bosses.

Prices, bills and rents—up. Wages—down. It's a rip-off!

THE LATEST inflation figure of 10.1% surprised many economists. It won't have surprised many workers—except that it wasn't higher.

The *Mirror* reported on the day of the announcement, 'Struggling households are now faced with shocking food prices, with cheese 49% more expensive than a year ago, eggs up 28%, sugar 33% and a white sliced loaf 20%.'

'Last month,' The *Mirror* concludes, we 'paid 19% more on a weekly shop, the highest [rise] since 1977'.

The other main driver of inflation is energy. According to government statistics (ONS) electricity rose by 66.7% last year and gas by an astronomical 129.4%.

Because working class families spend a far higher percentage of their income on fuel and food, for us inflation is much higher than 10%. But this is deliberately obscured by the fog of official statistics.

Yet Jeremy Hunt has the nerve to say that rising wages were a 'significant' factor driving inflation. He claims the average wage rise of 6.9% is 'inflationary'.

How can it be when pay is lagging multiple percentage points behind the headline inflation figure? And that's before you even start to look at the real rise in the cost of living for working class families.

It shows the nurses and teachers were absolutely right to reject this Chancellor's insult of an offer—less than 10% over two years! After a decade of real falling wages, nothing less than a real cost of living pay rise is 'affordable'. Add to this the shortfall of over 40,000 nurses in the NHS and anyone can see that nurses' (and junior doctors') pay is a major factor in the deliberate running down of the NHS.

The bosses' plan

Forcing down real wages is what lies behind the Tories' push to get over-50s back into work and the recently announced benefits sanctions to force the unemployed and single mums back into the labour market. Not because there's any

decent jobs out there, but to increase competition for work so that trade unionists will be afraid to put in for increases that make up for inflation.

The capitalists' other tool to combat inflation is for the Bank of England to keep raising interest rates. This makes borrowing more expensive. But millions of us are trapped in debts we cannot easily get out of—on credit cards, mortgages, etc. Even renters will face increases as landlords put up their rents to pay off their mortgages.

Although the rate of price increases will likely slow, if energy prices come down, they will remain historically high, if the Bank of England increases interest rates to 5% and keeps them there for a long time.

It is at this point that economists predict indebted companies will start to fail, as the banks refuse to roll over their debts. That means closures and job cuts—unless there's a fightback.

Strikes

This makes the strikes all the more important to win. Two or even three year deals that tie in our best organised and most combative unions to falling real wages would be a disaster.

It is up to rank and file workers, like those behind the successful NHS Workers Say NO campaign, to organise resistance to the union leaders' sell-out deals. Those currently balloting to strike must vote for action, so we can build the momentum up again.

But this time—in the second wave of strikes—we must force the union leaders to escalate the action, up to all-out indefinite strikes if necessary. We should demand they coordinate their strikes, their demos and their slogans. We must aim to bust the Tories' economic policy to pieces.

We demand:

- Real pay rises for all.
- Instead of two-year deals, our pay should rise monthly to keep up with prices.
- No job cuts or closures—occupy to stop the bosses removing their assets.

workers power

What we stand for

Behind the Tories and their billionaire 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 a socialist revolution to replace this system 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 break the resistance of 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 potential 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.

We fight for a working class unity and a revolutionary party based on a programme of action:

- A living wage, pension and social security for all, indexed to inflation.
- Controls on prices, rents and bills.
- Workers' control over all strikes and negotiations. For a rank and file movement to dissolve the bureaucracy and create fighting, democratic unions.
- Women's liberation: social provision of childcare and domestic labour. Full reproductive rights on demand.
- No platform for fascists. Workers' unity against racist police and bosses.
- Open borders: equal rights for all migrants and refugees from day one.
- No to war: Britain out of Nato. For national liberation against imperialism.
- A workers' government based on and accountable to councils of workers' delegates.
- Expropriate the fortunes of the rich to fund public services and a just transition.
- Nationalisation under workers' control of the major banks, transport, utilities, public services, manufacturing.
- A revolutionary party, united with socialists across the world in a new world party of socialist revolution—a Fifth International.

If you want to fight for socialism, international solidarity and revolution, join Workers Power today.

