Refuse to be slaves: defend the right to strike!

With Scotland's teachers holding a one day strike on 10/11 January followed by a rolling series of one day strikes thereafter, and Scotland's NHS workers discussing launching strike action following rejection of the inadequate Scottish government-backed pay offer, the strike wave in Scotland and across the UK state shows no signs of abating.
Ongoing disputes and further strikes across the UK are still affecting the rail industry, Royal Mail, civil servants, the university sector and many other industries. The Tory UK government response to the cost-of-living crisis afflicting workers is to publish a Bill at Westminster this week to restrict trade union rights even further.
ecosocialist.scot is republishing below an important analysis and call for action across Scotland from the Scottish Socialist Party's Workplace Organiser, Richie Venton, as a contribution to the sort of fightback we urgently need in Scotland.

Refuse to be slaves: defend the right to strike!

By Richie Venton, Scottish Socialist Party Workplace Organiser

The Tories are hellbent on turning workers into slaves. They are rushing through legislation on so-called Minimum Service Levels that would effectively ban the right to strike for countless workers, and drastically undermine the effectiveness of any attempts by any workers to stand up for themselves against pay cuts, job losses, slashed working conditions, dangerous safety levels, and decimation of public services.

Under their long-trumpeted new laws, the Tories would empower

employers with the weapon of naming workers who must go to work during any strike action, even after their union has gone through the entire rigmarole of postal ballots, outrageous voting thresholds and 14 days' notice of strike action to make the strike legal. Any named worker would face potential dismissal from their job if they declined to come into work on strike days, after being handpicked by the employer – with no legal protection from unfair dismissal, which workers currently enjoy for the first 12 weeks of a strike. And unions could be sued unless they obeyed the employer-imposed minimum staffing levels on strike days.

A Human Right

The right to strike is a fundamental human right, one that separates the wage-slaves of capitalism from the literal slaves of the ancient slave empires of Rome, Greece and others. It's a right enshrined in the European Human Rights Commission, ILO and other international bodies. The human right to withdraw your labour, rather than being chained to the demands of profiteering employers.

It's the difference between being able to take collective, agreed industrial action to stop the relentless assaults on jobs, pay, workplace health and safety, and indeed the quality of services provided to the public – or abject capitulation to the profit-crazed attacks by big business and austerity-driven governments.

The British government has been quick to condemn SOME regimes abroad as dictatorships when they outlaw the right to strike – unless they happen to be their allies in world exploitation! They are now poised to imitate the actions of the worst dictatorships.

Tories Threaten Minimum Safety – not Strikers!

When the smiling snake Grant Shapps – Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy – appears on TV reassuring viewers this is all about protecting 'Minimum Safety Levels', he is indulging in his customary, deceitful, barefaced lies. The same creature cried crocodile tears and muttered faux outrage at the on-the-spot sacking and replacement of 800 ferry workers by the gangster capitalists of P&O Ferries last March – and then helped his Tory government rush through emergency legislation that now allows any employer to do fundamentally the same thing: replace strikers with agency workers.

Back in his days as Tory Mayor of London, Boris Johnson pioneered the call for a ban on strikes in transport – because workers on London Underground dared defend themselves and the vital service to the city's economy they provide.

Last year, when railway workers were (and are) to the fore in

fighting back against over a decade of pay cuts and vicious assaults on safety standards for the travelling public, the chorus of demands for de facto strike bans on transport grew louder in the Tory ranks and their hired assassins in the right-wing media. We repeatedly warned at the time that if they got away with this against railway workers – under the guise of Minimum Service Levels legislation – they would inevitably extend their assault on the right to strike to other sectors. It didn't take long for that warning to be totally vindicated. As ambulance workers, NHS staff, border security civil service staff and teachers strike in defence of themselves and their services – and firefighters ballot to follow suit – the Tories' legislation proposes to include all of the above, plus workers in nuclear decommissioning.

Unions Already Provide 'Life-and-Limb' Cover

The Tories' claim that these laws are to protect Minimum Safety Levels is rampant hypocrisy and downright lies. Unions

in key sectors have for years agreed and organised ‘life-and-limb cover’ when they plan strike action. Over recent decades, I’ve discussed with umpteen groups of workers in the likes of council services and the NHS who are taking or preparing strike action, who not only explain they are busy organising, through their unions, for ’emergency cover’ or ‘life-and-limb cover’, but add that in many instances the slaughter of staffing levels actually means they are putting more staff on duty during this exercise than would be there on a normal working day!

And that’s before the eruption of the current, life-threatening levels of understaffing in the NHS, social care, fire and rescue and other vital services. That’s before the Tories succeed in driving train companies into imposing Driver Only Operated trains across the board, or slash rail maintenance by at least 43%, as they want to do right now in return for below-inflation pay offers. It’s the Tories and their pals in the boardrooms who threaten ‘minimum safety levels’, not strikers. In fact, many of the strikes, such as on the railways and NHS, are precisely in defence of safety levels.

Tories’ NHS Cuts Threaten Lives

When Schapps et all trot out the lie that their new anti-strike laws are to prevent people having to wait for an ambulance, which planet does he think we all live on? Before any strikes by ambulance workers – or other NHS staff – people have been suffering life-threatening delays, due to decades of conscious refusal to invest in the NHS, with bed cuts, staffing level crises, exacerbated by drastic pay cuts and crucifying overwork and burnout. In fact, one of the main drivers behind strike action by ambulance workers is the daily crisis of understaffing and chaos caused by the impact of austerity on our hospitals – well before Covid added a further twist to the spiralling NHS crisis, of which the government themselves are the chief architects.

No doubt Grant Schapps has – like his boss, Rishi Sunak – a gold-plated private health scheme, so he won’t be worried about the delays in treatment of the sick, made daily worse by his regime.

Their new, even more vicious anti-strike laws will do nothing to avert that crisis, and by undermining workers’ ability to resist their austerity cuts will actually make things worse in the frontline services the Tories want to spearhead their de facto strike ban within.

Class War on Democracy

Britain already has the most repressive anti-union, anti-working-class legislation in the entire western world. Laws that were especially ushered in by the hated Maggie Thatcher Tories in the 1980s but retained absolutely by 13 years of New Labour governments; made even worse since by Tory and Tory-LibDem regimes; now being drastically added to by the current, unelected Tory government, presided over by the 222nd richest person in Britain, Rishi Sunak.

In their mission to crush workers' pay and conditions to turbocharge profits, the Tories want to destroy the collective power of organised workers by breaking the unions. They must not succeed.

The Tories have embarked on their escalated war on the working class because they've had a fright, with currently a million workers either taking strike action or having already balloted to do so.

For decades, the employers and their political puppets got away with murder, with the help of defeatist union leaders who told us there was nothing we could do to resist. Now workers have begun to rise off their knees and fight back, the British ruling class are unleashing their customary class brutality. They must not succeed in their war on democracy, workers' rights, pay, jobs and services.

Defeat Divide-and-Conquer Tactics

The employers and government are desperate to divide and conquer workers. They hope – in vain – to whip up 'the public' against strikers, to paint themselves as the saviours of public safety through these laws. But who are the public? It's the railway workers, posties, teachers, university staff, civil service staff, coffin makers and a host of others who have had enough and are striking back.

That widespread solidarity across multiple sectors of the working class is the chief weapon of defence against the attempt to convert workers into slaves. The TUC has threatened legal action against the government's plans. Fine, explore any avenues of self-defence. But it's a dangerous myth to think legal action is the main, let alone only form of resistance. Legal challenges have sometimes been useful, but the most fundamental means of defence of the right to strike is… to strike back, together!

Bring Out a Million Strikers – Together!

One million workers are already either striking on (mostly) separate dates or have live ballots to do so. Alongside the appropriate tactics in each union or industry – with full input to decisions by shop stewards and conveners – the unions embracing these million members should urgently name the day for at least a partial general strike of one million workers, around their common demands on pay, jobs, conditions, services – and in opposition to this attempt to ban strikes. Better still, and simultaneously, the union leaderships – starting with those already engaged in action, putting relentless pressure on the timid TUC – should name the date for a full-scale 24-hour general strike of the entire seven million trade unionists in the UK, including over 600,000 in Scotland.

With proper preparation in workplaces and communities – mass meetings, public meetings, rallies, street activity, media, etc – this could win massive support, including amongst people currently not in a union, not in a job.

Defending basic democratic rights, opposing measures that amount to modern slavery, would find powerful resonance amongst millions of working-class and young people.

Call Mass Scottish Demo and 24-hour General Strike

That is perhaps even more so in Scotland. We never voted in this Tory government – and never have given the Tories a majority since 1955.

The STUC and individual union Scottish leaderships should urgently draw up plans, including a mass Demo at the Scottish parliament, welcoming the SNP government's stated opposition to these new Tory laws, but calling on the Holyrood government to declare its outright refusal – in advance – of ever implementing these anti-strike laws in Scotland, in either the sectors they directly or indirectly employ workers, and outlawing them in contracts they hold with private employers.

Such a Demo – with such an aim – would also add pressure on the Scottish government to end its public sector pay cap and cough up the funds for decent pay for teachers, NHS staff and others currently in dispute. It could pound the Holyrood politicians with demands to defy Tory cuts and instead demand back some of the £5billion stolen off Scotland by Westminster since 2010, to avert the looming carnage in areas like local government.

Combining union demands on pay and conditions with defence of the basic democratic right to strike – through determined action – is the best and only guarantee of success.

Time is short. Prolonged legal wrangling in mostly hostile Courts is not the means to defend the working class. A mass Scottish Demo, and proper preparations for combined strike action – on the same day by all those currently striking and

on an urgently named date for a complete 24-hour general strike – are the routes we need to travel.

Refuse to be slaves! Strike together, march together, win together!

[Republished from Scottish Socialist Party 6 January 2023]

Corrected 9 January 2023 to indicate ONE million workers across the UK with strike mandates, not two; and that EIS strikes are 10/11 January (10 primary, 11 secondary)

Statement: The rich make us pay for their profits! Let's

mobilize against the rise in the cost of living

The following statement on the cost-of-living crisis across Europe has been prepared by sections of the Fourth International and is signed by ecosocialist.scot.

The rich make us pay for their profits! Let’s mobilize against the rise in the cost of living

For several months now, strike movements and popular mobilizations have been developing in Europe – both inside and outside the European Union – to resist the explosion in the cost of living.

The price of energy, food, rents, transport has increased over the past two years in all countries, aggravating the living conditions of the working classes already under heavy attack in recent years by precariousness, job cuts with Covid and a fall in real wages and benefits.

After inflation in the EU-27 and the UK of respectively 2.6% and 2.5% in 2021, in August 2022, the CPI year-on-year inflation rates reached at 10.5% and 9.9%, with 12.0% and 13.1% for food, 37.5% and 32.0% for fuels (44.6% and 48.8% in 15 months), (sources STATISTA and ONS). Electricity prices began to rise last autumn across Europe, with gas prices exploding during the same period (well before the Russian military invaded Ukraine), tripling over a year in Germany and the Netherlands, while energy prices doubled for households in Britain. In the all-Ireland energy market, prices have risen across the board, north and south, including in the important cost of heating oil, with government interventions stalled in the north by the collapse of political institutions and the

ongoing impact of Brexit.

The driving force of this inflation is found in the stock market speculation on raw materials since the recovery in demand since the height of the Covid pandemic, in the context of an oligopolistic market. The catastrophic climate situation in recent months, drought and heat, explicit consequences of climate change, have worsened this situation, as of course the invasion of Ukraine by Putin's army. Global oil supply is set to tighten, intensifying concerns over soaring inflation after the OPEC+ group of nations (including Russia), faced with falling prices, announced at the beginning of September its largest supply cut since 2020. The move comes ahead of European Union embargoes on Russian energy over the Ukraine war. Speculation on energy prices and an explosion of profits distributed to the shareholders of large companies have resulted. Underlying all this, there is an epochal reduction in the availability of fossil fuels.

Marginal rates of profit have risen, not only in large transport, energy and pharmaceutical companies. Profits in 2021 have been historic. In an unprecedented move, the five largest French banks generated more than €31 billion in profits in 2021. Spain's Santander recorded €8.1 billion in net income, Italy's Intesa San Paolo €4.2 billion and Germany's Deutsche Bank €3.4 billion. Volkswagen's operating margin almost doubled to €20 billion. In the first half of 2022, Shell (Netherlands) leads the way with profits of $20.6 billion, followed by BP (UK) with $21.5 billion and TotalEnergies (France) with $14.7 billion.

These few examples of dazzling enrichment, which is also accompanied by the personal enrichment of the propertied class, especially by distribution of dividends and increase of shares value, contrast with the low wage and benefit rises, the drastic loss of purchase power and labour rights, which have increased the impoverishment of the popular classes. The unequal distribution of wealth worsened during the beginning

of the Covid years. This inequality has sharpened even more, particularly for women, young people, the racialized working classes, disabled people, and those populations living in the most deprived areas. A study predicts that by the end of the year 80% of households in the UK will be in energy poverty and a further explosion of energy prices is anticipated in 2023.

In this period, neoliberal governments have stepped up tax measures in favour of corporations, cut social spending and significantly increased military budgets – with the concomitant impact on inflation – further worsening the living conditions of the most precarious. The Ukraine war is instrumentalized by reactionary forces, multinational firms and imperialist powers to push their own agenda, arguing that all military budgets are aimed at helping Ukrainian resistance, which is obviously false. Solidarity against the Putin invasion does not prevent fighting against neoliberal and imperialist agendas and austerity policies directed against the working classes.

Governments at different levels (national, regional, local) have introduced support aid systems, energy price ceilings or transport packages, so the weight of inflation on popular classes is uneven depending on the state, but these systems are temporary and do not make up for the increase in the cost of living.

Material conditions, including the interminable wait for the next pay or benefit cheque, have become the essential concern for the vast majority of the working class. Energy, food, housing costs are essential for everyone and these costs are all increasing to unbearable levels

Such a situation is intolerable.

Many struggles have taken place in recent months:

Across the UK state there has been a significant increase in national strikes since the spring despite the most repressive

anti-strike laws in Europe – particularly in transport, on the post, in telecoms and in several major ports. A significant vote has just been won for strikes by university lecturers, while schoolteachers and health workers are also balloting. On the other hand, there have been signs of fragmentation of action on the rail and mail by the leaderships of those unions. There is a significant level of public support for the strikes that are taking place. This is combined with political action especially around the right to food and the right to housing. A six months' rent freeze has been imposed across Scotland by the devolved government there.

At the same time, we have seen the development of a movement to boycott the payment of energy bills with "Don't Pay UK" across Britain and in Italy, especially in Naples. In Germany, the demonstrations on the left have so far been limited to the oppositional left and some trade unions. This weakness is due mostly to the fact that the leadership of the big industrial unions, the chemical workers union and the metal workers union, are embedded in a tripartite structure which is proposing relief measures for the population. The far right tries to profit from the huge price increases with demonstrations that outnumber those of the left. Huge demonstration occurred in the Czech Republic on 3 October. Several days of strikes called by the trade unions, demonstrations against the high cost of living have taken place or are scheduled (in France 29 Sept, 16 and 18 October, 21 September and 9 November in Belgium). In France, strikes developed around the oil refineries, with workers on strike for four weeks.

Attacks on living conditions will worsen further in the coming months, particularly with the planned increase in contracts and energy prices, and the end of measures which partially cushioned their impact.

In Italy, Germany, the Czech Republic, France, we see different political currents with different

motivations attempting to divert popular classes' anger away from the capitalists responsible for this crisis and moreover refusing concrete measures to be taken immediately to protect and improve the level and conditions of life for the poorest and most precarious part of the population. At the time when the far right is seeking to exploit this situation, it is our responsibility to seek to organize the broadest class, social and political fronts to impose social demands, the requisition of the wealth produced and the organization of public services for the benefit of the popular classes by aiming at capitalist profits. We particularly want to see the whole movement devoting resources to organizing and supporting the most precarious.

In these mobilizations, we stand for:

• Increase in wages and benefits at least in line with inflation, with particular protection for those on low incomes, and "uberized workers", who are de facto employees of capitalist groups

• For automatic increases to keep pace with inflation – a sliding scale of wages and benefits with real measures of inflation determined by organized workers and benefit recipients themselves.

• Abolition of gender inequality at work; give effect to the principle of equal pay for men and women for work of equal value

• Access to free childcare for any child that needs it

• Abolition of VAT on food and energy and reduction and freeze of rents and prices of basic necessities

• Increase of effective tax rate on wealth and profit

• Free local and regional transport, growth of public transport systems

• Free power and heating corresponding to people’s basic needs

• Energy, banking and transport companies, to be socialized under democratic control by workers and users

• Audit of the public debt with citizen participation leading to the cancellation of the illegitimate debt as a way of finding more room for an increase in social spending and in the struggle against the ecological crisis.

• Massive investment into renewable energy, no new fossil fuels – for the decommissioning of nuclear.

At a time when ultraliberal governments are developing, attacking democratic rights, including in alliance with neo-fascist forces as in Sweden or Italy, it is vital that the anti-capitalist forces, the workers’ movement as a whole, develop an emergency plan against the high cost of living and inflation to support all the already existing popular mobilizations and develop them while fighting attempts by the far right to exploit popular anger.

16 November 2022

Signatures

Belgium: -SAP-Antikapitalisten / Gauche anticapitaliste

England and Wales: – Anticapitalist Resistance

France: – Ensemble ! (Mouvement pour une Alternative de Gauche et Ecologiste)

– NPA (Nouveau parti anticapitaliste)

Germany: – ISO (Internationale Sozialistische Organisation)

Greece: – TPT (Fourth International Programmatic Tendency) & Magazine “4” – Greek section of FI

Italy : – Sinistra Anticpapialista

Norway: – FIN (Fourth International in Norway, Forbundet Internasjonalen)

Portugal : – SPQI : collective of FI activists

-Toupeira Vermelha: collective of FI activists

Scotland: – ecosocialist.scot

Spanish State: – Anticapitalistas

Sweden : – Socialistik Politik

Switzerland : – BFS/MPS (Bewegung für den Sozialismus/mouvement pour le socialisme/movimento per il socialismo)

– solidaritéS

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Rising Clyde – latest issue of Scottish Climate Show on "Power To The People!"

The latest issue of Rising Clyde, the Scottish Climate Show hosted by Iain Bruce, is now available on YouTube via the Independence Live video service.

In this episode, Iain presents activists from the new campaign

on the cost of fuel – Power to the People, which is setting up groups across Scotland including in Glasgow.

The activists are:

- Matt Kerr, Glasgow Labour Councillor for Cardonald ward
- Frances Curran, former Scottish Socialist Party Member of the Scottish Parliament and trade union activist
- Coll McCail, youth climate activist and member of Scottish Labour Executive representing young members

Watch the programme here:

Power to the People: Protest against energy price rises

Power to the People Glasgow has called a protest at the Headquarters of Scottish Power in Glasgow on Friday 12 August 4-6pm to oppose the huge rise in energy prices from 1 October 2022, due to be announced around that time:

Power to the People Glasgow social media links and information can be found here: https://linktr.ee/pttpglasgow

The Power to the People slogan comes from the Left in the European Parliament and the European Left Party who have a really informative video about the European Energy Market here:

While the UK left the European Energy Market with Brexit, energy prices in the UK are based on the European and global markets and are still influenced by supplies from the EEA/EU

(gas from Norway, electricity from France, the single energy market in Ireland).

Previous Issues

Previous Rising Clyde shows on Independence Live can be found here:

(1035) SHOW: Rising Clyde – YouTube

Glasgow Rallies against Cost of Living Crisis: 'Don't Piss on My Back and Tell Me It's Raining!'

Several hundred protesters – trade unionists, community activists and environmental campaigners – defied the wind and the rain to demonstrate in central Glasgow on Saturday 12th February. Their message, echoed in towns and cities throughout Britain, including other Scottish actions in Dundee and Edinburgh, was simple: despite the best efforts of the government, the corporations and the banks, working people won't pay for the crisis.

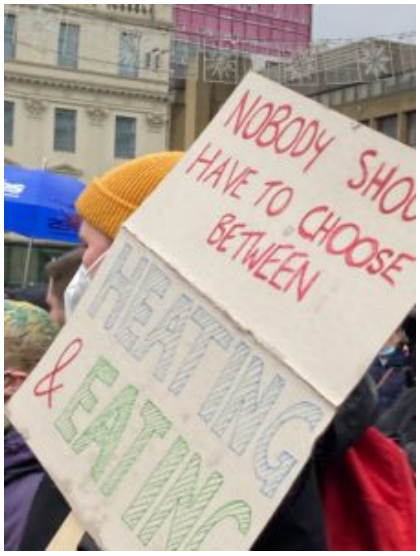
The event, called at only a few days notice, by the People's Assembly Against Austerity and supported by the Scottish Trades Union Congress, was addressed by a large number of speakers but the mood of the crowd was perhaps best summed up in the words of the first: *"Don't piss on my back and tell me it's raining!"*.

For years wages and benefits have stagnated whilst, more recently, working people have borne the brunt of the COVID outbreak. Now that prices are spiralling, and subjected to the most openly corrupt government in living memory, the same people who were hailed as heroes during the pandemic are now being told – by the governor of the Bank of England no less – that they must endure cuts in living standards for the sake of the 'economy'.

Numerous speakers highlighted the need for an alternative, to tax the rich and the big energy companies, and to take these and other utilities into public ownership. More importantly perhaps, was the acknowledgment that faced with a ruthless offensive by the ruling class, a united and militant fight back is required and that Saturday's events are just the beginning.

Speakers included: Roz Foyer General Secretary of the Scottish Trade Union Congress; trade unionists from Unison, Unite, RMT and PCS; parliamentarians included Mercedes Villalba Scottish Labour MSP from the Holyrood Parliament and Tommy Sheppard SNP MP at the Westminster Parliament. The intrepid ecosocialist.scot video camera and photography team braved the rain managing to catch a number of the speeches for our new YouTube channel and the pictures below.

The rain did not dampen spirits Pic I Gault



Glasgow plain speaking Pic I Gault

Roz Foyer, STUC General Secretary welcomes protestors Pic M Picken

The pro independence movement supported the

protest. Pic M Picken

The SNP Trade Union Group supported the protest Pic M Picken

Fridays for the Future Speaker talked about saving the planet. Pic M Picken

Unions were leading the protest. Pic M Picken

ExclusiveYou Tube Videos of the Protest:

ecosocialist. scot YouTube channel

Speeches from

- Roz Foyer (STUC)
- Shami Chakrabati (Labour)
- Mercedes Villalba MSP (Scottish Labour)
- Unison Glasgow City Council,
- Gordon Martin (RMT Scotland)