

AURORA



Capitalist Crisis: Survival of the Richest

Months of soaring inflation and stalling wages are the latest effects of the crisis inherent to the capitalist system. The ruling class' attacks on our living and working conditions are just one more attempt to make us pay for it. As winter approaches, the havoc wreaked by the failures of the system show no signs of letting up.

Workers Getting the Worst of a Bad Lot

The rise in the prices of basic food and drink items has been steady and unrelenting. In the 12 months leading up to September 2022 they have increased by 14.6% – the sharpest since 1980 – with every single month seeing a new increase. In the same period, the cost of motor fuel rose by 26.5%, while transport costs rose by 10.9%. Water, energy and housing-related costs rose by 20.2% – although “luckily”, we could be set to save untold amounts on gas and electric costs over winter when, according to the National Grid, the supply of energy could fall short of demand by up to a sixth, meaning potential “managed blackouts” in January and February.

As more households face the choice to “eat or heat” over the winter, already over 90% of food banks report an increase in the need for their services since the start of the year. Homelessness is set to continue its exponential rise (having increased by 19% in the first three months of 2022 alone). As costs of goods, rent and



bills rise for businesses too, the bosses will continue to shift the brunt of the consequences onto the shoulders of workers. Scrimping on health and safety, forcing workers to come to work sick with debilitating and contagious illnesses to make up the numbers of deliberately understaffed workforces, and knowingly putting lives at risk by greenlighting unsafe products.

The effects of the bosses' flagrant recklessness with our health and safety both at home and at work are not hard to predict. Vicious cycles of infection and reinfection with Covid as well as flu and other seasonal illnesses, the overwhelming of hospitals, and the soaring rates of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and

suicide that are bound to accompany increased instability, debt, and financial hardship paint a very bleak picture indeed for the winter ahead.

The ruling class have suggested that we put on jumpers and take shorter showers, that actually we can eat food with mould on it, that if you're depressed it's “ok to talk”, and that in fact a good blackout might be just the thing we need to teach us some gratitude for the luxury of when the lights do come on. Meanwhile they fight amongst themselves for the privilege of steering their sinking ship. But as a class we are becoming ever-increasingly aware that what we need is not a new captain with new insulting “solutions” that keep their order intact.

A Crisis with a History

The so-called ‘cost of living crisis’ is not simply due to rising inflation. The pandemic and the war in Ukraine have only unravelled a crisis decades in the making. Through technological advances, outsourcing, deskilling, and austerity the ruling class has been able to continue squeezing profits out of the working class. But ever since the 1970s we have been on a downward spiral, with whole sectors of production and jobs dismantled and wages as a percentage of GDP dropping. Investment in ‘the real economy’ gave way to financial speculation based on ever-more ingenious ways of multiplying fictitious capital, especially ‘slicing and dicing’ mortgage loans. The crash of 2007/8 did for a few big financial names but without state intervention, homelessness and joblessness would have been worse than after the 1929 stock market crash. As it was, a whole generation of workers had their eyes opened: they had been told capitalism and crashes were a thing of the past. In fact it was only a sign of things to come. Now, already up to our ears in debt and working in precarious jobs with no future worth thinking about, we are facing the longest recession since records began.

Over the last fifty years workers' resistance to the capitalist crisis has been largely on defensive grounds, each time ultimately thwarted by the bosses and their state. Will this time be different?

Class Struggle is Back on the Agenda!

The capitalist crisis is intensifying and with it come the inevitable attacks on the working class. Cost of living and fuel protests have broken out in more than 90 countries already and the UK is no exception here. Nearly 2 million workers (one in sixteen) are expected to be balloted for strike action in the coming months. The struggle for wages to keep up with inflation is on. Even before the pandemic, which killed more than 200,000 in the UK, finally eased up, and the Covid-19 restrictions were lifted in February 2022, the first signs of the coming resistance were making their appearance.

Strikes and Protests

In January there were strikes by scaffolders calling for better pay. In February there were strikes over pensions at schools and universities, and small protests about the cost of living and the desperate situation in the NHS. In March, the London Tube strike began over threats to jobs and pensions, and there were protests in support of sacked P&O workers. April saw strikes by oil refinery workers over an insulting pay offer. In May, postal workers went on strike as they had their wages frozen for the previous year, followed by a wave of wildcat strikes. Refuse collectors in Welwyn Hatfield, construction workers in Hull, offshore oil

workers in the North Sea, workers at a food plant in Bury, all took matters into their own hands and did not wait to go through the official process. In June, there were more strikes in the Royal Mail, a barristers' strike against stagnant fees and, of course, railway strikes.

At this point the establishment media began to warn of “class war” and ran a vitriolic campaign to discredit striking workers. In July, BT workers started their strikes, the first nationwide action at the company in 35 years. There were also strikes on the buses, and further action in the Royal Mail and on the railways. In August, council workers went on strike, and there was another wave of wildcat action, this time by Amazon workers at various sites, and contract workers, including scaffolders and maintenance workers, at various refineries and chemical plants. In September, offshore oil workers in the North Sea, despite condemnation from both the unions and the employers, went on strike again, organised by their own strike committee. That month there were also strikes by dockers at Felixstowe and Liverpool ports (with impressive 24hr pickets). Finally, October saw the continuation of many of the previously mentioned strikes, and the resignation of Liz Truss as her government collapsed following the unveiling of the disastrous

mini-budget for the rich. And more is yet to come this winter, as rising energy bills truly hit home.

Workers Can Pose their Own Alternative

Appeals to the capitalist state to resolve this crisis are bound to end up in disillusionment. All over the world the ruling class parties, whether left or right wing, are out of ideas – the political chaos in the UK is not unique, it is only a symptom of a system in freefall. The ruling class has only two things on offer: more attacks on workers to boost their profits and, ultimately, war. Dreams of a return to the past, of decent wages and welfare of the post-war boom, are in the current crisis just that, dreams. So what is to be done?

The current resistance is an important starting point. But if we let the ruling class isolate us sector by sector, workplace by workplace, we will lose. The offensive of the bosses, who have money and the law on their side, calls for thinking outside the box. We can already see examples of that. When unions in the North Sea were reluctant to take action, workers set up their own strike committee to lead the way. When ships were rerouted from Liverpool to break the strike, dockers in Southampton refused to handle them. It is this kind of self-organisation and solidarity

that can level the playing field and act beyond the limiting framework of the unions (which, as we saw during the Queen's funeral, can suspend our actions without even consulting the membership). On picket lines across the country the chant “the workers united will never be defeated” is resonating, but it needs to become more than a slogan. And if looking to the government to save us is a dead-end, then workers need their own political alternative. Without such a vision, we are looking at a future of gradual immiseration on a planet of collapsing societies and ecosystems. We believe that only in a world without classes, states, money, and borders, can economic crises, wars, and climate disasters be averted. To that end, we are building a political organisation fit for the task, a reference point for the global working class. If workers play by the rules (set up by the bosses) or delegate their power away (to parliamentary parties) this better future can never come.

Now available:



Workers in Iran Show the Way

The most recent wave of protests and strikes in Iran are the continuation of more than a decade of struggles. Though the working class in Iran faces many obstacles, as the events take on an international dimension, they could potentially begin a spark that ignites a wider working class movement beyond just Iran.

A Response to the Capitalist Crisis

In Iran, the economic crisis has for decades been a regular feature of life for the workers, and has worsened with the COVID pandemic which left thousands dead or permanently affected for the rest of their lives due to the negligence of the Iranian state. Nearly a quarter of the Iranian population is now in extreme poverty and with higher inflation this already devastated population struggles to afford even basic necessities like food and water. This has all culminated in a large number of struggles over the past few years, starting with the Haft Tappeh workers and their strikes, followed by teachers, oil workers and petrochemical workers. Many more are going on strike

due to simply not being paid for months on end, all in the context of rising costs of living.

Yet, alongside these events, the death of Mahsa Amini at the hands of the authorities has launched the most serious threat to the regime yet. This brutal attack on an innocent woman was the last straw for an Iranian working class subjected to repression by the Iranian state and its "Revolutionary" Guard and police force. Since the birth of the Islamic regime in the late 1970s, anyone deemed a risk to the Iranian state has been jailed, tortured, imprisoned or simply executed, including many communists. This continues to this day. Yet these actions have not stopped the Iranian working class, who continue to strike, protest and march. However, there is an ocean of pitfalls that the Iranian working class needs to watch out for and avoid.

False Friends

Various capitalist groups both outside and within Iran have their own agendas, and see both the crisis and the working

class response as an opportunity for their own gain. This is nothing new in Iran: in 1979 it was Khomeini who took advantage of the economic crisis and the mass movement to bring about the downfall of the Shah, and then, once political power was secured, crushed any and all working class movements that did not fall in line, mimicking the same tactics as the ruling class before him. Hence we can see a similar situation happening again in Iran today, as the economic crisis and its consequences have pushed the Iranian working class to a breaking point and they have begun to move. Meanwhile, the ruling classes of Western nations and their allies have begun to call for regime change, even flying the Iranian flag with the monarchist lion on it, this symbol of the pre-1979 government. Western imperialism will support today's struggles against the regime but Iranian workers should not forget it trained the Shah's brutal police SAVAK to crush them in the past. And whatever force the major imperialist powers support, whether monarchist or Mojahedin or whatever, they are nothing

more than vultures waiting for their next meal. The reality is that Iran's economic crisis and social issues will never be resolved by any regime change that seeks to keep capitalism intact, it is only the working class movement which can bring real change. Workers have already shown their potential in many sectors, headed by the stubborn resistance of the Haft Tappeh workers and the oil workers who have rediscovered their assemblies and shuras (councils) from the immediate post-1979 period. These can not only organise resistance but can become the basis of a new working class society. They could even become an inspiration to the rest of the world working class.

But for now workers everywhere need to express their solidarity to those workers in Iran who are struggling for an independent working class perspective. Ultimately workers everywhere will have to come together in an international movement and then create an international system which, once and for all, can get rid of the exploitation and oppression that plagues us on a daily basis within capitalism.

War in Ukraine: The Other Attack on the Working Class

The blue and yellow flags may now be tattered and torn, and the war in Ukraine may now make only fleeting headlines on UK news networks, but the violence rages on, as does Western support for Ukraine. Given the nature of the Kremlin regime which murders Russian journalists and dissidents, and given the brutality of the invasion, it is an easy sell. It is however a mistake to just see this war in isolation. Behind the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation lies a much bigger conflict – that for imperialist control of the planet. The war in Ukraine is only the precursor of a wider war to come. The US has been sending billions of dollars in aid to Ukraine against Russia, whilst at the same time stepping up its propaganda and military manoeuvres against ... China. China has made no secret of its ambitions – replacing the US at the top of the world order by 2049 is the goal. The war in Ukraine is thus just the start of a process which will lead sooner or later to yet more war and destruction. That is why we are:

Against Imperialism East and West!

This war, like those in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, etc., is another proxy war, but one closer to the centres of imperialist power in Moscow, Brussels and Washington. It is no accident that it comes at a time of global economic crisis. As economic options narrow, imperialist tensions are rising so no-one even pretends any more that international problems (including climate change) can be solved by negotiation. The consequence is that a hard divide is developing in the global order. Russia, China and Iran may all have their own imperialist agendas but the US has driven them to make common cause.

On the other side, 2022 has been a good year for US imperialism. Not only has more than \$50 billion in US aid (mostly arms) given Ukraine the weaponry to roll back February's invasion but it has effectively ensured that its previously uncooperative European allies have now knuckled down under its leadership in NATO. The Alliance looked like falling apart only four years ago but now is expanding to further encircle Russia with the imminent accession of Sweden and Finland. The very thing that provoked the Kremlin's desperate gamble in invading Ukraine in the first place.

Western propaganda portrays defence of

Ukraine as "defence of democracy" but it is in fact the culmination of a three decades' long power struggle between the West and Russia. NATO troops, despite the repeated reassurances given by US administrations to Russia, have been standing on its borders for almost two decades. The accession of Ukraine to NATO and the EU would be the final blow for Russia. As we all now know, Ukraine is one of the breadbaskets of the world besides being a top supplier of key mineral resources, and provides a strategic access point between the East and West. In a time of such a huge capitalist crisis, the importance of clinging onto trade power and regional monopolies cannot be underestimated. The war is not just about Ukraine and Russia but about the material struggle between the ruling classes of the great powers for control of a planet which in the meantime is becoming a less and less sustainable place to live.

No War but the Class War

This war is being used to prepare us ideologically to support "our side" in the next war. We must not be conned by those who claim the fight is just about the liberation of Ukraine or an anti-fascist struggle (there are "fascists" on both sides) nor that we are simply defending our homes. Workers have no homeland and modern total war is imposed on us. Our only way to fight back is through a mass movement which refuses to fight the bosses' wars.

In Ukraine as elsewhere, workers on both sides are the principal victims. Neither Putin nor Zelensky care one bit for the working class lives lost. The warmongers fight for capital, whether in blue and yellow, or in white, blue and red. We oppose both sides, but not as pacifists. To end imperialist war we need to end the system that produces it which means stepping up the class war internationally in the face of a growing economic crisis.

The deeper capitalism sinks into crisis, the harder and tighter the bosses squeeze us. While they may fight amongst themselves over who gets to squeeze whose profit, we should fight only against them, as workers in Iran and Ecuador have been demonstrating. Even here in the UK, we are seeing more and more strikes. And whilst Russian and Ukrainian workers face conscription, an increasing number are



deserting the war thus giving a lead to others not only there but across the world.

We need to build on this and go further. The No War but the Class War (NWBCW) initiative serves as a "reference point for all who see the need for workers' struggle against both the economic attacks of capital and its descent into imperialist rivalry: those who hold no illusion of pacifism or the possibility of going through capitalist institutions to avert capitalism's imposition of barbarism. We instead recognise that the only adequate response to this is the independent working class struggle. The defensive struggles of our

class against capital's attacks must be transformed into a political offensive against the system of capitalism itself."

The fundamentals of NWBCW include opposition to all capitalisms, nationalisms and imperialism, including those of 'lesser evils' or nationalist causes; opposition to attacks that imperialist wars unleash on the working-class; support for an society in which production is for need and not for profit; and commitment to working-class struggle. NWBCW groups now exist, or are in the process of formation, across the world. Join us, spread the internationalist message!

What We Stand For

Aurora is published by the Communist Workers' Organisation (CWO).

The CWO stands for a global society where production is for need and not profit (and is therefore sustainable), where the state, national frontiers and money have been abolished, where collective power is exercised through class-wide organisations like workers' councils. This has to mean the active, daily participation of the majority aiming for the interests of all. Only then can the world be rid of the capitalist offspring of poverty, hunger, oppression and war: we call it communism but this vision has nothing in common with Stalinist state capitalism and the old USSR.

In order to get there we are working to create a world working class political organisation – a 'party' for want of a better word – not a government in waiting but a guide in the struggle for a new world. We by no means claim to be that party but we do aim to be one of the elements which will need to come together in its formation. As the working class is more and more faced with the consequences of a crumbling capitalist system it will have to unite and confront capitalist power.

We are not in competition with other organisations but seek to unite on a clearly agreed political programme to prepare the way for the majority of the world's population, the exploited of the earth, to overthrow the capitalist system and its bloody imperialist appetites.

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