

UNITE MARXISTS

Issue One

Bulletin by supporters of the International Marxist Tendency within Unite

GRAHAM VICTORY SHOWS APPETITE FOR UPHEAVAL IN THE UNIONS

Our Unite Correspondent

Sharon Graham, the left-wing 'underdog' in the Unite general secretary contest, has secured a welcome victory, defeating the right-wing candidate, Gerard Coyne, to become the leader of Britain's second largest union.

This win is a major blow to the establishment and the so-called 'moderates' in the labour movement, who were hoping that their candidate – right-winger Coyne – could squeeze through the middle in this three-horse race.

Graham's success was possible thanks to her campaign's strong support amongst grassroots Unite members – particularly those in rank-and-file groups in sectors such as construction.

Her victory will give confidence to workers moving into struggle, with her pledge to use Unite's muscle to fight all the way to defend jobs, pay, and conditions.

With Unison, the country's biggest union, also moving to the left recently, it is clear that an upheaval is beginning to take place inside the trade unions.

Along with other left-led trade unions – such as PCS, CWU, FBU, and BFAWU – the new left leaderships in Unite and Unison must prepare for the big battles ahead, on the basis of a united approach and a fighting programme.

Left success

Following early indicators of a Graham win, the final results were announced today, confirming her victory.

Graham received 37.7% of the vote, with second place going to Steve Turner, who had been the bookies favourite until yesterday. Turner and Coyne gained 33.8% and 28.5% respectively, on a turnout of approximately 12%.

These results must be seen, above all, as a huge victory for the left, with Graham and Turner gaining over two-thirds of the vote, and with Coyne trailing in third place. This reveals the radical mood amongst union activists, who are facing attacks across the board.

Graham positioned herself as the grassroots choice. She previously headed up the union's organisation department, where she proved her credentials in supporting workers' struggles, playing a key role in victories such as the Bromley library strike and the



recent Manchester bus drivers' fight against 'fire and rehire'.

It was this proven track record – along with her support for rank-and-file union activists in battles such as the BESNA dispute, the sparks' struggle against deskilling, and the anti-blacklist campaign – that helped to differentiate her from the other candidates in the eyes of ordinary members.

Striking a chord

Graham's more radical campaign pushed Steve Turner into second place.

Although on the left, Turner positioned himself as the 'pragmatist'; someone who could negotiate with the bosses, the Tories, and the Labour right wing in order to secure a better deal for workers.

He was very much seen as the 'continuity' candidate, with the explicit backing of outgoing general secretary Len McCluskey.

Turner's compromising attitude did not fundamentally change throughout his campaign, even after Beckett – who had run on a promise to fight militantly on both the industrial and political fronts – stepped aside and encouraged members to vote for Turner.

Graham's 'workplace not Westminster' campaign, by contrast, clearly struck a chord with ordinary Unite members: firstly, with promises to fight over immediate issues such as jobs and wages; and secondly, by tapping into the disgust towards Keir Starmer and the Labour right wing, who

have spent more time attacking the left than attacking the Tories.

While we welcome Sharon's victory, we should nevertheless avoid complacency in future elections. There was a real danger in this election that the left vote could have been split, allowing the right wing candidate to win.

That was the case with the recent Unison general secretary election, which robbed the left of victory. In future, the left must ensure a single left candidate, committed to a fighting programme in defence of the working class.

Political struggle

Having secured the Unite general secretary position, Graham will be thrown in at the deep end when it comes to defending workers, given the sharp crisis of capitalism.

Union members are already engaged in battles across industry, and in the public sector: from bus drivers to bin workers to British Airways; from the NHS to local government. And this is before the deluge of austerity and attacks hits.

In the face of this coming tsunami, the union leaders will face a stark choice: fight or capitulate. Having run on a commitment to protect jobs, pay, and conditions, expectations will be raised amongst members, who will demand that Graham delivers on her promises.

The only way to fight back against the bosses is on the basis of mobilisation,

organisation, and action around a bold militant programme.

It is not enough, however, for the unions to limit themselves to the industrial struggle, as Graham suggests. The working class also needs a clear political alternative to the Tories – and this means fighting to remove the rotten Labour right wing.

There is no Chinese wall separating the industrial and political struggles. We want a fighting trade union movement, but we also want a real socialist Labour Party. Both go hand in hand.

The task still remains to clear out the Blairites from the Labour Party. And the affiliated trade unions should not forsake their responsibility in this regard.

You can try to avoid engaging in political struggle, but politics will eventually come knocking at the door.

Unite, for example, represents workers in the public sector, including various outsourced workers delivering services such as refuse collection for local councils. In many instances, it is right-wing Labour councillors who are engaging in fire-and-rehire practices; or who are handing out contracts to bullies such as Serco.

In these cases, workers – and the Unite

officials who represent them – will find themselves coming into conflict with Tories and Labour right-wingers, who must be actively replaced with class fighters.

Similarly, Unite is the main union in most industrial sectors. And many workplaces in these industries – from steel, to shipbuilding, to car manufacturing – are under threat of closure, as British capitalism reels in the face of Brexit, economic slump, and long-term decline.

The only solution for defending workers and their jobs in these industries is nationalisation and workers' control, as part of a social economic plan. But clearly neither a Tory government nor a Blairite Labour one will call for such a demand.

The political struggle is therefore not a "secondary issue", as Graham suggests, but an essential question for workers looking to fight back against the bosses and the Tories. And Unite, with its significant weight inside the labour movement, has an important role to play in this process.

Earthquakes ahead

Capitalism is plunging deeper into crisis. The class struggle is sharpening. The battle lines are being drawn.

Faced with the bosses' offensive, workers are beginning to move into action. And they are looking for a fighting leadership that can point the way forward.

The victories for Sharon Graham in Unite and for left-wing NEC members in Unison are an indication of the real mood amongst the working class; a reflection of the volatility within society, and its impact on consciousness.

The challenges are massive. Unite and Unison must therefore link up with the other left unions to forge a genuine united front to defend the working class. There has never been a more vital task.

These recent changes at the top of Britain's two largest unions are also only the beginning; a harbinger of far greater transformations to come; early tremors, signalling the earthquakes that will shake the trade unions and the labour movement from top to bottom.

In the process, they will become key weapons in the struggle to change society.

The urgent task at hand is to build the forces of Marxism – inside the unions, on the streets, and amongst workers and youth – to prepare for these titanic events that lie ahead.

GKN DISPUTE IN FLORENCE ITALIAN WORKERS ARE FIGHTING BACK!

Roberto Sarti

Workers at the GKN plant in Florence have waged a militant battle to defend their jobs, occupying the factory and organising mass action. Their bold struggle provides inspiration and valuable lessons for fighting GKN workers in Britain.

As we reported recently, workers at the GKN Automotive plant in Birmingham are fighting to save their jobs, in the face of threats by owners Melrose to shut down and asset-strip the factory.

Having balloted and won a huge mandate for industrial action, the GKN workers – organised by Unite – were set to undertake an indefinite, all-out strike. This was enough to bring the bosses back to the negotiating table, with strike plans put on pause for the time being.

Nevertheless, the threat of closure still hangs over the workers' heads. The workers clearly cannot have any trust in Melrose's representatives. After all, the investment firm's priority is to deliver profits to their shareholders, not to protect employees' jobs and livelihoods.

The GKN workers must therefore remain vigilant. This means using the suspension of the strike to prepare for potential future action, in the likely case that the bosses present a rotten deal, or no deal at all.

As part of this, rank-and-file committees of action should be formed, to help build support for any strike – not only on the site, amongst workers, but in the wider community and across the labour movement also.

Importantly, any settlement negotiated between management and the union must be put to the vote amongst Unite members at GKN before being signed-off. And both GKN and Melrose must open up their books to the union and its membership, so that workers themselves can review the accounts and see where the money is going.

In this struggle, GKN workers in Britain can take inspiration from their brothers and sisters in Italy, where workers at the GKN plant in Florence have waged a militant battle to defend their jobs against the same ruthless Melrose vultures.

By occupying the factory and organising mass action across the city, the Florentine workers have also halted the bosses' asset-stripping plans...for now. (See below for a full detailed report and analysis of the Florence GKN struggle.)

This provides valuable lessons for the Birmingham GKN workers – and for workers everywhere: militancy pays.

As long as these factories remain in the hands of the capitalists, however, the workers' jobs will never be truly safe.

The central demand must therefore be for nationalisation and workers' control, so that these important industrial resources and skills can be put to use for the good of society, and not to line the pockets of the fat cats.

Earlier this year, on 9 July 2021, 422 workers at the Campi Bisenzio GKN plant near Florence received a text message. It came from the British multinational's management, communicating that the workers were immediately and collectively dismissed.

The plant is not in crisis, however. There is a market for the production of drive shafts and other components for the

automotive sector, which the plant is capable of producing. So why the sackings?

The answer is found in the fact that Melrose Industries PLC bought up GKN in 2018. If you look at the firm's website, they say that: "Melrose buys good manufacturing businesses with strong fundamentals whose performance can be improved."

So they themselves admit that GKN is a "good manufacturing business". But Melrose don't limit themselves to "improving performance". As they themselves explain:

"Melrose finances its acquisitions using a low level of leverage, improves the businesses by a mixture of significant investment and changed management focus, sells them and returns the proceeds to shareholders."

In plain English, this means that Melrose is planning on asset-stripping the plant in Florence: cutting human resources – i.e. sacking the workforce – and relocating production elsewhere, where labour costs are lower, in order to maximise profits; or as they say, "return the proceeds to shareholders".

Up to the end of 2020, the Melrose group boasted of having returned £4.7 billion to shareholders since the company was founded. In all this, they have had not the slightest concern for the hundreds of families who suffer significantly when factories close and workers lose their jobs.

Mood of anger

Melrose has also found a friend in the Italian government, and in particular with Prime Minister Draghi, the former governor of the European Central Bank.

When the pandemic hit Italy, millions of workers were at risk of losing their jobs. There was a very angry and militant mood among workers across the country. This was particularly evident among engineering workers.

Under this pressure, the then-Conte government introduced a freeze on sackings. The bosses reluctantly had to accept this. Later, however, Draghi came to their rescue.

The Melrose multinational group was helped by the new Draghi government, which came into office in February 2021. Within just a few months, on 30 June, it removed the freeze on sackings, which had been in force since March 2020 when the COVID emergency began.

What we have here is an example of 'the bosses order, and the Draghi government obeys and carries it out'. This has been the situation in Italy for the last few months.



Mass mobilisation

The case of GKN is not an isolated one. We have seen the same thing being repeated at Whirlpool, Timken, Gianetti Ruote, Elica, Blutec, and Riello, which are just a few of the factories facing imminent closure.

The bosses have encountered a problem, however: workers everywhere have been fighting back against the closures. And the fightback at the GKN plant in Florence and at the Whirlpool plant in Naples has been particularly militant.

The GKN workers were concerned that strike action alone would not be enough. They feared that the new owners would organise for the machinery to be taken out of the factory. So the workers took the decision to occupy the plant.

Within a few days of the announcement of the sackings at GKN, there was a Florence-wide general strike, along with a demonstration of over 10,000 people, which filled the Santa Croce square in the city.

Two weeks later, a large demonstration, with similar numbers, marched through the industrial and working-class neighbourhoods around the factory.

August is usually a month in which very little happens in Italy, as it is the traditional holiday period. In spite of this, the struggle did not stop, and around 5,000 people flooded the streets of Florence city centre on 11 August (the day of the liberation of Florence from Nazi occupation in 1944) in solidarity with the GKN struggle.

The GKN shop stewards and the factory action committee (the core of

the most active workers) have been very good at mobilising the support of the city and the suburbs. Their slogan 'Insorgiamo' (Rise up) has become very popular, and not only in Florence.

The final deadline for the implementation of the sackings, 22 September, was rapidly approaching. Management was determined to push ahead with its decision. The government, meanwhile, was making vague promises. And the union leaders had utterly failed to promote a united front of all the factories in crisis.

Strikes and solidarity

The working class in Italy is making its voice heard again. And while it is true that we are not yet seeing a generalised movement, we can see that below the surface there is enormous anger that could explode at any moment. What is holding it back, for now, is the lack of a fighting trade union leadership.

In spite of this total lack of leadership from the national union leaders, however, on 18 September a huge demonstration of at least 25,000 workers and youth flooded Florence city centre yet again. It was a very lively and militant demonstration – probably one of the biggest we have seen anywhere in Italy since the end of lockdown.

Militant slogans were chanted throughout the march, calling for strike action and solidarity. As the demonstration filed past, there was tremendous applause from people on the balconies of their flats looking down. Militant class struggle stamped its mark on the day, in one of the most famous tourist cities in

the world.

At the end of the demonstration, in one of the final speeches, one of the leaders of the shop stewards' committee made an appeal to the CGIL [General Confederation of Italian Workers – the equivalent of the TUC in Italy] to unite the various disputes and call for a general strike. The audience answered with a huge ovation.

Militancy pays

What followed shows that all-out, militant workers' action pays off. The workers at the plant have been piling on the pressure and spreading their influence among the wider population.

On Monday, 20 September, this forced the judges to decree that Melrose was guilty of anti-union behaviour, violating article 28 of the Workers' Statute – a law passed back in 1970 that gives workers' a certain degree of protection against unjustified sackings.

This was a clear victory for workers at GKN in Florence, and it has boosted the morale of the striking workers.

The judge's ruling, however, does not resolve the matter once and for all. Whilst he has halted the sackings – for now – at the same time he reaffirmed the right of the company to close the plant, simply pointing out that the closure and consequent sackings had to be negotiated with the unions.

Again, we see how the law is not the same for everyone – in the final analysis, it defends the interests of the bosses.

Blank cheque

The union leaders have made an appeal to the government to intervene in the dispute. But the government is not impartial. Draghi has stated clearly that, in order to come out of the crisis, some factories (the 'weakest'; the 'less competitive') will have to be closed.

The unions are asking the government to introduce a law to prevent relocations. Orlando, the Minister of Labour, is about to submit a bill to parliament requesting that multinationals that wish to make redundancies give at least six months notice so that negotiations can take place, and to give the company time to rethink its plans or find a new buyer.

There are, of course, no penalties or fines for those companies who relocate anyway, and no demands for the return of any government loans these companies may have received in the past.

Right from the very beginning, the union leadership has given Draghi a



blank cheque, and the workers have so far paid the price for this.

It is self-evident that, of its own free will, the government will not make any real concessions to the workers. Every victory must be imposed by militant strike action. There is no other way of forcing the capitalists to stay and keep factories open, if they think it is no longer profitable.

Workers' control

The only real answer to the present situation is for nationalisation under workers' control – starting with GKN, and then adding all the other factories facing closure.

Nationalisation is the only way of defending industrial assets and jobs; and workers' control is the only guarantee that the factory will not be run in the interests of profit.

The workers of the factories under attack need to promote a coordinating action committee, with the aim of organising a national meeting of worker representatives from the companies in crisis, with a clear programme.

Such a coordinating committee would also have the task of controlling the union officials involved in the negotiations, and making sure they abide by the demands of the workforce as a whole. Too many times we have seen very militant and courageous strikes literally betrayed by the union leaders who have signed off on rotten, watered-down agreements, or who have simply bent to the pressures of the bosses.

The union leaders nationally must take on their responsibility and call now

for a general strike to defend jobs and stop factory closures. The judge's decision has provided some time – but this time must not be wasted. The immense and widespread solidarity that exists among the wider working class towards the GKN workers must be used in a major showdown with the Melrose Fund.

We have now also heard of the latest developments in Britain, where Melrose is planning to close down the GKN Automotive plant in Birmingham, leaving over 500 workers without a job.

The workers of GKN in Florence and in Birmingham are facing the same ruthless boss: Melrose. They share the same interests. What is needed is coordinated strike action to stop the bosses from destroying the lives of hundreds of workers in both Italy and Britain.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HEALTHCARE TIME TO STRIKE BACK!

A Local Authority worker

Last month, Unite, Unison, and GMB members in local government voted in consultative ballots to say whether they wanted to accept or reject the 1.75% pay increase offered by the National Employers.

This offer falls way short of the 10% uplift that Unite, GMB, and Unison are jointly demanding. The results are now in, and local government members have overwhelmingly voted to reject, with 81% of Unite members, 79% of Unison members, and 75% of GMB members voting not to accept the offer.

At the same time, and for the first time in decades, the prospect of a nurses' strike in England has taken a serious step forward.

The RCN – which currently represents around 500,000 nurses – saw an overwhelming majority of those who took part in their consultative ballot vote to reject the Tories' offer, with 92% of respondents voting against. 93% of voting members in GMB were also against the pay deal; in our own union, Unite's result saw 90% of the union's health members voting to reject, while 80% of Unison's members in the NHS also voted against the government.

These results demonstrate the frustration and anger amongst union members across the public sector towards the National Employers' insulting pay offer.

Throughout the pandemic, the government and employers paid lip service to 'key workers', commending staff for keeping public services running – and at times compromising their own safety to do so.

Yet now we have been rewarded with nothing less than a real-terms pay cut, with inflation currently standing at over 3%, and predictions that this could rise to 4% by the end of the year. For many workers, this is the final straw.

What next?

The unions involved in organising these two sectors are all now beginning to move to the next stage of the process. And all the unions have rightfully stated that they will work together moving forward.



However, there are already noises from some officials in each union about how low the turnout for each consultative vote was. It is true that each set of ballots saw only 20-30% of members voting, and it would of course be foolish to ignore that. These figures should not, however, be seen as an indication that the fight has been lost before it has even begun.

What is needed now is not excuses and pessimism, but a bold and determined campaign for a national ballot for strike action in each union, with the aim of smashing through the Tory-imposed turnout threshold.

To achieve this, the unions must prepare reps for the biggest campaign of their lives, in order to get the vote out.

As part of this, union leaders must make it clear that members aren't voting for mere symbolic action, but for an outright fight to gain what they deserve: the full 15% pay rise that health campaigners and unions are rightly demanding, and a proper pay rise in Local Government to match it.

United Action

The mood of anger in society is rising. And if these two groups of workers made a bold stand, other workers would undoubtedly join them in fighting back.

This presents a golden chance to call

for – and build towards – a one-day public sector strike, with a strong backbone of millions of union members in local government and the NHS.

It is clear, however, that the Tory government will not give in without resistance.

In the strikes by PCS members at the DVLA over safety and conditions earlier this year, for example, the Department of Transport showed that they were willing to dig their heels in and ride out the strike, rather than allow union members to set a militant example to other workers.

We can expect the same to happen if a local government or healthcare strike is set in motion.

Ultimately, therefore, if we want to win, we must be prepared to face down – and bring down – this criminal government as a united trade union movement. And this requires fighting unions, with fighting leadership, which are willing to unite and go all the way.

We cannot flinch from this fight. We must continue the transformation of our unions begun with the election of Sharon Graham and the new UNISON left NEC. That is the only way we'll win the working conditions and pay we've deserved for years.

BLACKLISTING INQUIRY ANNOUNCED IN UNITE FIGHT FOR WORKERS CONTROL!

A Unite Construction Worker

New Unite general secretary Sharon Graham was elected on a pledge to democratise the union – including a promise to investigate potential collusion between officials and blacklisting bosses. Grassroots members must fight for democratic control.

Unite members now have a new general secretary. As part of her campaign, Sharon Graham gave commitments in her manifesto to get back to the workplace and to put the membership first. Part of this was a pledge to hold a democracy review, focussing on the union's internal structures.

These commitments were backed by large swathes of the rank-and-file membership across all sectors in Unite, especially the construction sector.

By contrast, these promises will not sit comfortably with some of the well-paid careerists amongst the union's unelected full-time officials. Having a light shone on their past, recent, and present activities is most definitely not in their interest.

Lifting the lid

Just before the result of the general secretary's election, Unite announced an official blacklisting investigation. This would look into the alleged involvement of past or present union officers, who may have colluded with employers to blacklist union members working in the construction industry.

This independent investigation could prove to be a can of worms for these layers of the union.

This will particularly be the case in the construction sector of Unite, which is an amalgamation of previous unions' construction sectors (AEEU, Amicus, MSF, T&G, UCATT); and which has had some notoriously scabby officials over the years – many of whom are still employed by the current union to this day.

Class collaboration

In order to keep themselves insulated from the membership, these class-collaborating union officers will usually surround themselves with a buffer of members on regional and national committees, with these members holding positions such as 'convenors' to give them the sheen of legitimacy.

This is especially the case in the construction sector. There, these so-called 'convenors' are employed on very nice terms by either the construction project's client, such



as EDF; or by the main contractors – most usually proven blacklisters such as Skanska UK, Costain, Kier etc. This ensures they are tied to the bosses, hand-and-foot.

These so-called workers' representatives are almost never elected by the rank-and-file membership on sites – so there is no way for ordinary members to remove them once they've been appointed. For their services, they are paid a nice, juicy wage – one that resembles nothing in the union construction national agreement on that site; and far in excess of what lay members might ever earn.

Sinister setup

The situation gets even more sinister. For years, there have been numerous allegations of full-time union officers of this kind transferring sensitive information about the membership – including members' emails – from the union data server to private servers.

Given the amount of former full-time union officers now raking in fat salaries in the offices of the big construction companies, including firms that have been proven to be blacklisters, it doesn't take a genius to figure out why they might take such data and for what purpose.

Such a situation is a complete disgrace. It makes a mockery out of the union's claim to represent workers, and leaves good class fighters at the mercy of blacklisting bosses and greedy officials. Sharon Graham's commitment to both the democracy review and the blacklisting inquiry are therefore very welcome indeed.

Fight for control

We must make the most of this chance, however, to clean out our union ourselves.

Rank-and-file members must prepare for a struggle, as the people who stand to lose from their activities coming to light will do everything in their power to prevent exactly this from happening.

Front and centre of the new Unite democracy review, therefore, must be the following demands:

All full-time officers and officials must be elected – accountable to the members, not the bosses.

All union officers and officials to be paid the average skilled wage of the membership they represent.

The membership to have the right of recall and dismissal over officials, to guard against corruption.

These demands – putting rank-and-file members in control of the union – are the minimum required to put an end to collaboration with the bosses and the establishment, and to ensure that we have militant class fighters representing the Unite membership.

This must be linked to the struggle for workers' control in construction and industry, to end the scourge of blacklisting once and for all.

FIRE AND REHIRE: DEFEAT THE BOSSES' ATTACKS!

Nick Hallsworth,

Unite the Union (personal capacity)

Fire and rehire has become the watchword for an all-out offensive by the bosses' against workers. This heinous practice consists of employers telling their workers they will be dismissed if they do not sign on to new contracts, with significantly worse pay, terms, and conditions.

This is not a new phenomenon, however; it has been going on for years. In 2019, for example, Asda threatened 12,000 staff with a similar measure, in order to drive down their pay. In fact, this is nothing more than the old strategy of bosses' lockouts, dressed up in new attire for modern times.

Pushing for profits

The economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic has prompted a huge surge in such attacks. Employers whose profits have been badly hit have used it to make their workers shoulder the costs.

Even businesses who continue to function profitably, however, have greedily seized on the opportunity presented by the widespread insecurity of the pandemic to cut costs and raise profits.

Fire and rehire has been most prevalent in sectors hit hardest by the coronavirus crisis – especially hospitality, where high turnover, precarity, and low union density undermine workers' ability to stage an industrial response. Nevertheless, as the case of Tower Hamlets council shows, no group of workers is safe – even those in the public sector.

Every action has its reaction, however. These assaults have provoked a wave of strikes and industrial action in response. Many workers have decided that they can't – and won't – accept another blow to their standard of living, which has already been perilously degraded over the last decade.

Instead, they are getting organised and fighting back.

We have seen victorious strikes take place among British Airways cargo handlers, Go North West bus drivers in Manchester, Metrolink buses in London, refuse workers for Thurrock Council, and at SPS Technologies in Leicester. And in Northamptonshire recently, Weetabix workers – subject to whopping pay cuts of £5000 per year – have begun their strike, with new Unite general secretary Sharon Graham personally visiting them on the picket line to offer her support.

Militancy pays

While only a minority of strikes have been able to overcome the attacks of the employers so far, these battles nevertheless provide important lessons in how to fight back against fire and rehire and defeat it for good. On the positive side, victories like those at BA and Go North West show that militancy pays.

It is vital that workplaces are organised, and that trade unions give their full support to workers in preparing for strike action. But we also need a militant, proactive strategy from across the trade union movement to tie together these struggles and push them to victory.

What is holding us back in the fight against fire and rehire is that each struggle is being fought in isolation, allowing employers to pick off different groups of workers one by one.

The Go North West Manchester bus strike, for example, was a welcome victory. However, the drivers were reportedly asked not to speak to workers at other companies' depots during the strike, for fear of falling foul of Tory anti-trade union laws. Unions must be willing to act decisively, and escalate the struggle where necessary.

British Gas workers in GMB ultimately went down to defeat in their battle against Centrica, for example, despite 43 days of heroic action.

If we had seen coordinated strike action with British Gas admin staff in Unison, both groups of workers could have come out with decisive victories under their belts. As it stands, this was a big missed opportunity.

Political struggle

Ultimately, the law is written by the capitalists and their lackeys at the top of the state precisely with the intention of weakening industrial action.

If we hope to win the battles ahead, our unions must go beyond the confines of the law and the limits set by the state, otherwise we will constantly be fighting the bosses with one hand tied behind our back. This is why the struggle against fire and rehire is both industrial and political.

Unite has launched a national campaign for legislation to ban fire and rehire, with backing from Labour MPs such as Barry Gardiner. This campaign should be supported with action as well as words. The only way such legislation will be passed is by mobilising all our forces in unified industrial action, including strikes.

In this, we will face opposition from both the Tories and the Blairites in the Labour Party – especially as the practice is being used by right-wing Labour councils against council workers!

Socialist programme

Ultimately, the trade union movement must be prepared to bring its ranks into a decisive struggle against the government and the whole rotten system that allows 'fire-and-rehire' tactics to be used in the first place.

This means ensuring the whole labour movement is united behind a bold socialist programme based on nationalising industry under workers' control – planning the economy for need, and not profit.

Only by ending the profit system and taking industry out of private hands can we end this brutal race to the bottom that the capitalists are imposing on the working class.



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UNITE★MARXISTS WHO ARE WE? and WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING FOR?

Unite Marxists consists of activists from the International Marxist Tendency (IMT), including supporters of Socialist Appeal and Revolution.

The IMT seeks to organise the most class-conscious workers and youth around a Marxist programme to change society.

We have no truck with the Tories or their hangers on, whose worship of the market has brought the country to its knees. They are the enemies of the working class.

We have no trust also in the Starmer leadership of the Labour Party, whose actions are destroying the party.

The bosses and their craven political representatives have shown that they will always prioritise profits over lives.

We demand socialist measures to protect workers, and put health before wealth.

- For a fully publicly-owned and free health service, under workers' control and management. Reverse all privatisation and outsourcing. All private health and care services must be nationalised without compensation, and integrated into the NHS.

- Nationalise the pharmaceutical companies – without compensation – in order to ensure that vaccines are produced rapidly and made freely available to all worldwide.

- Reverse the austerity inflicted upon public services. Launch a fully-funded training programme for doctors, nurses, paramedics, medical staff,

and carers, with decent pay and hours, to increase staffing levels across the board. New hospitals must be urgently built.

- Workplace safety should be in the hands of workers' committees and the trade unions. Proper health and safety measures must be implemented, with adequate PPE provided for all workers. The costs for this must be paid by the bosses.

- For safe work or full pay on a living wage. Any future restrictions must be accompanied by measures to provide for workers affected by closures. This means 100% wage support for those furloughed, as well as full sick pay to those required to isolate.

- To fight job cuts and the threat of mass unemployment, work should be shared out without any loss of pay, in order to lower the hours of the working week.

- Fight for the real emancipation of women. Remove all barriers to women working: provide free nurseries, after-school childcare, and care for the elderly. End all forms of discrimination; equal pay for work of equal value.

- Scrap tuition fees and rents, and replace these with free education and full maintenance grants for all. Put staff in control in schools and universities.

- Ban evictions and

cancel housing debts. Give local authorities the power to cap rents at affordable levels. And bring empty properties and the assets of the big landlords and management companies under public control.

- Many small businesses are faced with bankruptcy, with banks resisting any extensions of credit. Many are squeezed not only by the banks, but by the big monopolies. By nationalising the banks we can supply these small businesses with the lifeline of guaranteed low-interest credit.

- The financial resources required to fight the crisis must not come from increased taxes or more austerity, but through the nationalisation of the banks and finance houses. Rather than a 'wealth tax', we call for the expropriation of the monopolies.

- Instead of building up the national debt through government borrowing, the money needed should be obtained entirely from expropriating the accumulated profits of big business.

- If the bosses say they can't afford to pay for workers' wages, we say: open up the books! Let the working class and the labour movement see the accounts! If firms plead bankruptcy, they should not be bailed out, but nationalised under workers' control.

- No to austerity! The working class must not pay for this crisis!

- For a mass campaign to bring down this criminal Tory government and do away with this rotten system.

It is clear that the market has failed and capitalism is in a deep crisis. The anarchy of capitalism prevents the planning of society's resources, in Britain and internationally.

- We therefore stand for the nationalisation of the 100 biggest monopolies, banks, and insurance companies – under workers' control and management – without compensation. They have stolen enough from us already. On this basis, the economy can be democratically planned in the interests of the majority, and not for the super profits of a few billionaires.

- A Socialist Federation of Britain should be linked to a Socialist United States of Europe and a World Socialist Federation, in order to plan resources internationally for the benefit of all. This would put an end to the barbarism of capitalism and allow humanity to begin solving the urgent issues of climate change, disease, and poverty that face society and our planet.

There is, however, a crisis of leadership in the labour movement. Those who have attempted to patch-up capitalism have been found wanting. It is therefore time to energetically build the forces of Marxism, which alone offer a real way out of this crisis. ■

WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN US

Marxists are class conscious fighters for socialism. As Marx explained, we should be regarded as the most resolute section of the working class.

Marxism arms us with a conscious understanding of society and the class struggle. Only by absorbing this outlook can we lay the foundation for the overthrow of capitalism.

For us, Marxism is the science of social revolution and therefore needs to be studied.

Our tendency therefore stresses the need to educate and train our members in Marxist theory and the struggles of the working class. This gives us considerable advantages.

First and foremost, Marxist theory is a guide to action, a guide to the class struggle.

As isolated individuals we can do very little. However, organised together we can achieve a considerable amount. Organisation allows us to concentrate our forces to much greater effect. Based on correct policies and perspectives, we can intervene effectively in the class struggle.

The present reformist leadership of the labour movement has led to one retreat after another. In practice they accept capitalism and its limits.

The leadership of the Labour Party is now in the grip of the right

wing, who serve the interests of capitalism. This revival is due to the weakness of the left to act decisively, which in turn is a reflection of the weakness of reformism.

Likewise, the reformist trade union leadership has failed to meet the challenges we face. They are lagging completely behind the objective situation. For them, it is simply 'business as usual'.

But the crisis of capitalism is posing massive challenges in front of the working class. We will fight shoulder to shoulder with those prepared to fight. In doing so, we will point to the future needs of the movement.

Our task is to provide the

necessary clarity for the struggle. Capitalism cannot be reformed; it needs to be consciously overthrown by the working class in Britain and internationally. That is why we are internationalists and proud to be part of the International Marxist Tendency. ■

