

SOCIALIST APPEAL



NEU BULLETIN

ISSUE 3



COST OF LIVING CRISIS PREPARE FOR CLASS STRUGGLE!

Editorial

After 14 years of uninterrupted crisis, the capitalist system can offer us nothing but further attacks. War, protectionism, and corruption are endemic. For ordinary workers, life is becoming harder by the day.

As we go to print, the cost-of-living crisis threatens to plunge millions into poverty. Meanwhile, oil and gas companies celebrate luxurious profits.

In response, workers are turning sharply to the industrial field. Trade union membership has been on the rise for the past five years in a row, as has the number of days lost to strike action.

And this is only a prelude. When combined with record inflation and our ever-spiralling workload, teachers are right on the front lines of the struggle to come.

Attacks in the media

Out of fear of the strength of our union, the government has responded with a media smear campaign against the profession.

New political impartiality guidance – which in reality is a crackdown on criticisms of the British Empire and discussion of movements such as Black Lives Matter – is clearly an attack on teachers' professionalism.

This is propaganda from the government aimed to distract from the cost-of-living crisis. It is an effort to smear teachers as 'corrupting' children by giving them access to information about the world they live in and the events they see all around them.

This was clearly seen in the backlash over the internationalist position taken by the union on the conflict in Ukraine.

A flurry of attacks from the gutter press led to the statement being withdrawn, in effect allowing the establishment to dictate what our union's position should be.

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These attacks will only intensify as the crisis bites deeper. The government is determined to prevent explosions from below. But they are like King Canute trying to turn back the tide.

The pay survey

To harness the anger in the union, however, a proper perspective is needed. Sadly, this was lacking in the campaign around the pay survey.

Despite showing that 75% of respondents were in favour of strike action, the campaign has stalled due to low turnout. Clearly, this is a serious issue. But why was turnout so low?

There were several factors that led to this outcome. One was outreach. Where there was a rep to make the case to branches and members more directly, turnout was as high as 80-90%. However, where there was no rep, turnout was much lower.

Rather than focusing all forces to the point of attack, dozens of emails on different and unrelated struggles were sent, clogging people's inboxes and confusing them as to the union's priorities.

The January issue of *Educate* was symptomatic of the campaign as a whole. It dedicated just two out of fifty pages to the pay survey, failing to even place it on the front cover.

Ultimately, it is capitalism that is at fault. This system is unable to provide decent working conditions for teachers, and therefore learning conditions for young people.

Struggle

Worsening pay marches hand in hand with increasing workload. Some in the union drag their feet on this question, citing academisation and the consequential disparity in workplace conditions as barriers that are too high to be overcome.

But the victorious teachers' strike in Minneapolis, USA, shows the way forward. Their demands include smaller class sizes, more resources for students, and higher wages.

These demands are connecting across disparate conditions and are rapidly spreading, with local districts in Chicago and California coming out on strike too.

A fighting leadership – one that reflects the demands of the workers – can overcome these difficulties by generalising the struggle.

This is as true in the UK as it is anywhere else in the world.

Fight back

Ultimately, it is capitalism that is at fault. This system is unable to provide decent working conditions for teachers, and therefore learning conditions for young people. And we must be clear in saying so.

Our fightback starts by taking action over pay and conditions. In doing this, the potential exists to connect our struggle with the struggles of workers everywhere.

Action within the NEU must be used as a starting point towards united public sector action, including a one-day public sector strike, in order to demonstrate our strength and force this Tory government from power.

When we are united, the strength of the working class can completely transform society. To unite it, a fighting leadership that mobilises our members around a bold socialist programme is needed.

That is what we – Socialist Appeal supporters within the NEU – are fighting for. We urge you to join us in this task. ■

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The advertisement features a man in a brown beanie and glasses holding a copy of Socialist Appeal magazine. The magazine cover has the headline 'LABOUR MUST FIGHT TO TRANSFER POWER TO THE WORKERS!' and 'NO LOW PAY'. To the right, a tablet displays the digital version of the magazine with the headline 'CORONAVIRUS EXPOSES CLASS DIVIDE' and images of people wearing masks and a man in a suit. The background is a light beige color with red and black text and graphics.

WHERE NEXT FOR THE PAY CAMPAIGN?

By Natasha Sorrell

The conditions for workers across Britain are getting worse and worse. In every sector, hours are lengthening, pay is falling, and precarity is increasing.

For teachers, as with all public sector workers, the situation is becoming desperate. Since 2010, teachers have faced a 17% real terms pay cut – and that's without factoring in the current cost-of-living crisis set to hammer us.

Survey for action

Over the past month, teachers in the National Education Union (NEU) have been completing a survey to see if members would be in favour of taking strike action to demand an 8% pay rise for all teaching staff.

The results show that over three quarters of those who completed the survey were in favour of action. Clearly, there is a mood to fight amongst members.

With the Tory anti-trade union laws to contend with, however, a turnout of 28% is disappointingly low, given that the minimum turnout required to strike is 50%.

Regardless, this should not be seen as the end of the matter. Many barriers exist that prevent teacher engagement in such surveys. The very conditions that we must fight against – including over-work – are to blame.

Teachers under strain

Teachers everywhere are buckling under mountains of work. We are heavily focused on just getting through it all and doing our best for the students.

But tolerance for these poor conditions will not last forever. Teachers, like all other workers, will increasingly come under the strain of the cost-of-living catastrophe.

Studies conducted throughout last year show that 1-in-3 teachers plan on leaving the profession in the next three years. Meanwhile, last year, 1-in-6 – the highest figure on record – quit after just 12 months.

The mass exodus from education is driven by long hours, excessive workloads, low pay, and even lower respect. And as more teachers leave, the worse conditions get.



Organisational barriers

In this context, first appearances are very important. Issuing a survey rather than an indicative ballot for action likely gave many members the wrong impression as to what the union intended.

For many, the idea of a survey is simply to test the waters about pay conditions, rather than providing a serious effort to organise a fightback.

It is enough to contrast the NEU's survey results with those of the ballot by the Educational Institute Scotland (EIS), where 98% of a 52% turnout voted in favour of rejecting the 2% pay offer, to see the difference that could have been made.

This was not helped by the lack of visibility that the survey received. Despite frequent personal communication from activists and officials within the union, there was very little by way of a public campaign.

Teachers are already atomised and isolated in their profession, especially with COVID measures still in place.

To unite teachers, every method must be engaged.

Importantly, a public campaign could have served to raise the sights of teachers – linking this struggle to the struggle

of other workers, such as health workers' fight for a 15% pay rise.

Unite and fight

Teachers striking over pay can only be a first step in fighting for better conditions in schools. We need to set our sights beyond the classroom walls, and unite across the public sector. Our fight is one and the same.

A teachers' strike over pay should be the first step in flexing our muscles. This could build momentum towards united public sector action, which is increasingly vital if we are to reverse the damage being done in the name of restoring the bosses' profits.

Teachers know what is needed to deliver high quality education for all. But we are restricted by inadequate funding and the profit motive. Society is awash with money. Billionaires doubled their wealth this year, and are set to continue doing so.

Our class made this wealth, and it should be ours for the taking. But to use it for the benefit of all we need to start organising here and now.

A proper ballot process is inevitable. And with this, we need a full mobilisation to ensure a thumping 'Yes' vote. ■

FIGHT SCHOOL CUTS IN ARIZONA!

This article was originally published on socialistrevolution.org, the website of our comrades in the American section of the International Marxist Tendency.

Josh B.

In January, Arizona's governor threatened to pull \$1.15 billion worth of education funding from the entire state if the legislature didn't raise the Aggregate Expenditure Limit known as "AEL." The AEL is a cap on education spending based on the aggregate expenditure of Arizona's school districts. Conveniently for the ruling class, this does not apply to private and charter schools and only affects public schools. This would have been a disaster for many districts. Some schools may not have been able to remain open, leaving significant portions of the working class with no access to education for their children, especially in rural areas.

While the AEL is peculiar to Arizona, there are many such spending limits on public education throughout the United States. This puts educational funding squarely in the hands of the capitalist politicians in state and local governments. This gives the likes of Arizona Governor Doug Ducey a Sword of Damocles to hang over teachers' heads. This is all the more cynical when we consider that a Republican-controlled state House, Senate, and executive branch threatened to cut funding to schools if they didn't raise a funding cap they themselves control and have shown little desire to increase. In the end, the Senate and House passed resolutions to bypass the AEL altogether.

But this only means that another budget fight is guaranteed—we can expect another showdown sometime after the midterm elections. This constant state of worry and panic over education spending is, ultimately, an example of the ruling class's ultimate goal: maintaining a two-tiered educational system where the wealthy have full and uninhibited access to education while the working class is left to constantly defend against crippling budget cuts and reductions of service.

In situations like this, it can seem hopeless. Is the only way out of the swamp to hope for the good graces of one of the ruling-class parties to "come to the rescue?" Not at all! On the basis of class independence and militant struggle, the working class can fight back and win against the capitalists and their politicians. Even in an



ostensibly conservative state like Arizona, a unified coalition of teachers—both within the state and outside of it—proved that another way is possible to ensure full funding of our public school system.

"Red for Ed"

In the spring of 2018, over 50,000 Arizona teachers came out as part of the broader "Red for Ed" movement. Like other teacher's unions and strike actions around the nation, they demanded higher wages, safer working conditions, and a return to full educational funding commensurate with pre-2008 levels for Pre-K through twelfth grade. The movement represented a qualitative shift in class consciousness as teachers from all over the country came together and made demands as a coordinated block.

Red for Ed proved that even in so-called "red" states like Arizona and West Virginia, the ruling class can do little to stop a wave of working-class struggle when our class interests and forces are brought to bear.

With the walkout led by Arizona Educators United (AEU) at the heart of the strike, Arizona's educational system ground to a halt. Before the strike, the legislature was openly hostile and unwilling to negotiate. Suddenly, it was forced to respond to the crisis of its own making. As in many places across the country, Arizona's ruling class offered striking teachers a modest concession.

Dubbed "20 by 2020," the plan was to raise teachers' salaries by 20% by 2020. Of course, for this to happen, "20 by 2020" would need to be passed by both the state House and Senate. Nonetheless, AEU accepted these concessions—even before formal approval by the legislature—and the strike ended after one week.

The limits of concessions

While "20 by 2020" was better than anything that had been offered previously, in the end, it would serve as an example of how concessions provided by the ruling class are both limited in scope and duration—they give with one hand only what they can take back with the other in the future.

Immediately, the governor used trickery and obfuscation to boost numbers and pretend like they were doing something while, in reality, doing very little. While he did increase teacher's pay, it included a raise already given in FY2018 to bring the total raise in FY2019 to "10%." They would then increase teachers' pay by 5% for the next two years. But how were they going to raise revenue to return to pre-2008 levels? Teachers would have to work to get Prop. 208 passed to raise taxes to recover revenue. What resulted was a lengthy battle to stop Prop. 208 in its tracks, and the proposition was eventually deemed unconstitutional by the Arizona Supreme Court in August of 2021.

In other words, "20 by 2020" was never fully enacted, and the ruling class had no intention of ever doing so. And once rampant inflation is accounted for, the gains of Red for Ed have been wiped out. This is what happens when the rank-and-file teachers have not been mobilised, and the union leaders place their faith in electoralism and capitalist political parties. Even if the Democrats in Arizona had won the Senate and House, we would have likely seen a similar result.

The pandemic has weighed especially heavily on teachers and students. It is unclear whether either the union leadership or

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the rank and file have the will to organise a coordinated fightback at this time. Mass struggles such as the one in 2018 consume lots of energy, and it can take some time for the head of steam to build up again. But this much is clear: if the anticipated cuts come to pass, the working class will suffer greatly. Layoffs will result in many wage earners losing their jobs, including teachers, support, and maintenance staff. Students will have less or no access to needed educational materials and safe schools. Parents will lose an essential tool for helping to raise their children. And yet another generation of children will be kept in artificial ignorance to serve as an easy to exploit layer of the working class begging for scraps from the ruling class.

But history wastes nothing, and it is only a matter of time before teachers and the broader working class are ready to enter into mass struggle once again. Given the crisis of the system, we have no alternative.

Militant class struggle!

When teachers are ready to fight back, they will be armed with valuable experience and lessons from previous battles like Red for Ed and Prop. 208. However, to truly be successful in struggle, we need a farsighted leadership that does not have illusions in the capitalists' political parties.

What teachers and other education workers can attain depends on their unity and the strength of their forces, along with parents, students, and the rest of the labor movement.

The leadership of the teachers' unions should demand full and immediate funding for all public schools with additional increases tied to inflation. They should insist that the 20% raise be based on 2018 wages, with full adjustments for inflation on top of that.

Everyone deserves the best education, not just the wealthy few! It is not the job of the workers or the union leaders to provide funding for education, but they can point to the enormous wealth held by the richest few in Arizona and across the country. In places like Arizona, tying funding to property taxes and other regressive taxes like sales taxes should be abolished. Ultimately, the government in Arizona should get the resources for quality education for all from the ruling class. The wealthiest 1% of the US population own 44% of all the financial assets.

The government should also nationalise charter and private schools, fold them into the public school system and redistribute their ample resources to create a unified education system to be run democratically in the majority's interests.

There should be elected boards representing teachers, other school workers, parents, and student representatives at the

high school level. And if the capitalist parties and their government can't accomplish all of this, we need to fight for a class-independent party and workers' government that can.

While the immediate concern is the Republican regime of Doug Ducey, teachers in the other states are also facing similar attacks.

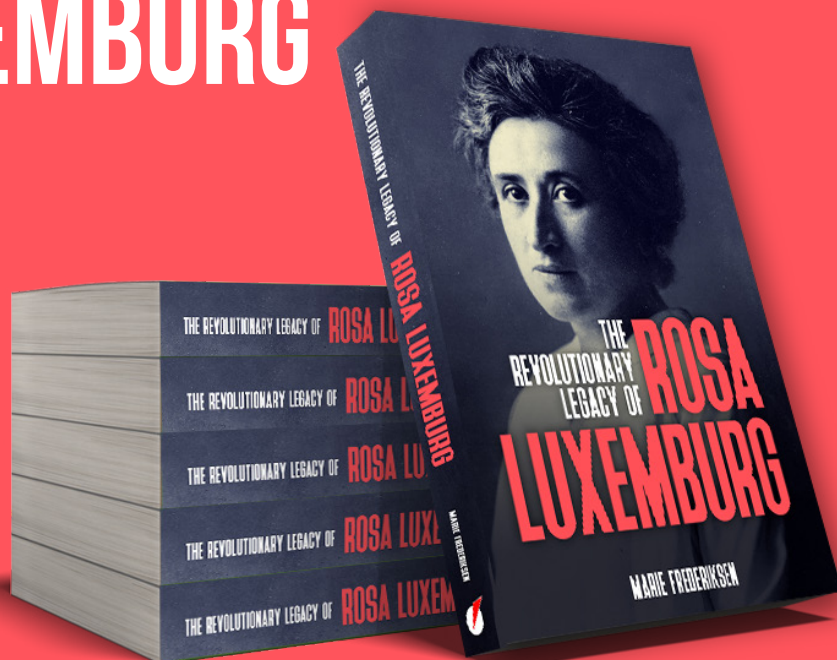
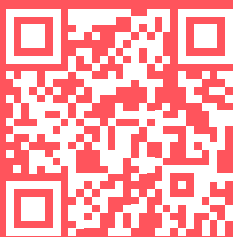
Education is a national issue, and the federal government should significantly increase funding for public schools everywhere. In this effort, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association should launch a national campaign to fully fund education. As we did in 2018, teachers need to band together at a national level, led by the NEA and AFT, to bring about the required changes to public education.

This is what the country's trade union leaders should be fighting for. On the basis of mass mobilizations and coordinated strike action, real victories are possible. But as long as we live under capitalism, we will never fully solve the problems and achieve real equality in the education system.

Ultimately, the fight to bring about a new high-quality, democratic and unified educational system will not be possible under the limits of capitalism. It must be tied to the need for a mass working-class socialist party and a workers' government, which can finally make quality, free, and universal education a reality. ■

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GDST EDUCATION WORKERS STRIKE BACK AGAINST BOSSES' ATTACKS

Olive Ruadh

The Girls Day School Trust (GDST) is a group of 23 independent fee-paying schools, which charges parents up to £6,772 a term. But despite being flush with cash, it is planning on withdrawing staff from the teachers' pension scheme (TPS). This could see them lose up to 20% off their pensions.

Worse yet, if workers do not agree to being withdrawn, they will be subjected to 'fire and rehire', forcing them onto lower contracts.

The TPS is available to all who work in state-funded schools. But many independent schools also opt in to attract staff.

However, Cheryl Giovanni, head of the GDST, has stated that the Department for Education increase in employer contributions by 43% is 'unsuitable' and 'unaffordable' for the trust going forward.

As the union has rightfully highlighted, however, the revenue of the trust (which is available publicly) has been 'healthy'. In fact, fee increases have actually exceeded the schools' revenue lost to inflation.

This means the amount of money the trust has in reserves has increased year after year.

Bullying and betrayal

NEU Marxists from Socialist Appeal spoke to workers involved in this dispute. They pointed to the dismissive and 'bullying' behaviour of management:

"They termed this a 'consultation', but we feel it has been anything but. The

Section 188 Notices were issued in the autumn term, demonstrating to us staff that there was no sincere interest in discussing this issue. The period of 'consultation' was really intended to be a period of grieving for us and they hoped we would accept this decision as a fait accompli and just roll over.

"The tone of emails we have received from the CEO, Cheryl Giovannoni, has been bullying and borderline harassment. The tenor has been one of gaslighting – as if we cannot understand the simple numbers that we see before our eyes. According to the pension forecast models, almost all teachers, if not all, will be financially worse off under their 'flexible pension plan' – some staff to the tune of nearly 20%.

"The attitude of management overall has been dismissive, rude, condescending and patronising. They claim to 'fully understand the strength of feeling' and to 'respect their teachers' but if ever there was a case of actions speaking louder than words..." One way the GDST and other independent schools (which includes academies) cut costs and guarantee this surplus is by keeping staff wages low.

Legally these schools can operate outside the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD), and so are not legally obliged to pay staff the same as if they worked in a local authority school. This often means teachers working in the GDST earn less than colleagues working in local authority schools.

For a time, this state of affairs has been tolerated by teachers, albeit without

enthusiasm. But the plans to withdraw from the TPS have become the straw that broke the camel's back.

GDST prides itself on being a 'family' and 'community'. The hypocrisy of the trust's actions have therefore unsurprisingly not been lost on the teachers. As workers explained in talking to NEU Marxists:

"We are striking to stand up for ourselves and for our principles, the same way we try to teach the girls to do. We expect a signed and agreed contract to be honoured by our employer.

That is all we are asking for – nothing more, nothing less. Striking is the only voice and power that we teachers have and it is the only way we can persuade the trust to remain in the Teachers' Pension scheme."

One GDST teacher told us she was striking because she thought teachers needed "to tell the GDST that we need to stay in the TPS".

"We won't be able to retain our best teachers, we won't be able to recruit good new teachers."

The same sentiment has been expressed by other GDST teachers, stating that the plan to withdraw from TPS is "gutting" and workers feel "betrayed" as if a "rug has been swept from under our feet".

This is the first strike for many of these schools in their history, which demonstrates the depth of feeling on the picket lines – nothing short of abject betrayal.

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Workers mobilise

On 10 February, 1600 NEU and NASUWT members in GDST walked out, beginning six days of discontinuous strike action. Further strikes are planned for 23-24 February and 1-3 March.

At the moment, the mood is optimistic and the teachers are determined to fight. A thumping 95% of NEU members voted in favour of strike action, on a turnout of 84%.

Workers are not just responding to this infraction, but also to a steady decline in their standard of living over several years, with pay increases below inflation, including a pay freeze last academic year.

If they were to lose the Teachers' Pension Scheme as well, many of them would find their situations completely untenable.

Pickets were held up and down the country for the first day of the strike, with an additional rally held in Central London. Workers also marched on GDST head office. In doing so, they found themselves receiving much support from the local community and parents.

"Most of the contact on the subject has been supportive. Our sixth formers in particular are very supportive of our action and understand that we, in the words of one member of my tutor group, 'make or break the school!' They were the first to bring us teas, coffees, biscuits, cakes, brownies etc on the strike day before school started.

"Almost all conversations with parents on the day were positive and demonstrated support. Despite only really receiving one side of the argument via emails from the CEO, they seem to understand our position and that this is not the way to treat a staff body that you claim to respect and hope to retain in the long term."

For public control

Schools are not just facilities or buildings. While the GDST can boast state of the art facilities for students, it does not take away from the fact that it is teachers and support staff who make schools. As workers told us:

"The reason I am striking is for my students, so that they do not lose the amazing teachers they have. I do not believe the GDST will be able to maintain the quality of its teaching staff if we are not compensated at least as well as state school teachers..."

"Teaching is a profession that should be valued and respected. It should attract high calibre graduates. It can only do that if the pay and benefits are good. I have met my obligations in my contract and do not believe it is fair that the trust gets to change the terms of my contract with no discussion. A 20-30% cut to my pension is not something I can ignore - my pension is my pay."

Simply stating that these pensions are 'unaffordable' is admitting you cannot run a school. That is the bottom line when it comes to GDST's pathetic excuses.

A school that cannot 'afford' to give teachers a decent pension is a school that is also happy to allow students' learning conditions to degrade in order to save a penny or two. This highlights why it is vital that the labour movement fight for an end to privatisation and academisation in education, with all schools - including private and free schools - brought back under local authority control.

Unite and fight

But these strikes are not just of significance for fee-paying schools. They are a lesson to all workers in the education sector: We cannot accept any degradation in conditions, as this is the capitalists' way of passing the costs of their crisis onto our shoulders.

If the GDST teachers lose this dispute, education employers in both the private and public sector will be more than happy to follow suit and attack the pay, pensions, and conditions of their own workforces. And this will not stop at the boundaries of the education sector. Workers across the public sector are facing similar attacks.

We must fight to defend our conditions across the board, and join with other workers to defend pay, conditions, and jobs across the whole public sector. United, we cannot be defeated.

Workers in the GDST have shown the way. The rest of the NEU and trade union movement must support them in every way possible. ■

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NEU Marxists' Charter for Education

In addition to the typically long hours and comparably low pay that teachers endure in order to deliver the best education possible to the learners in our care, we have worked throughout all lockdowns during the pandemic, putting ourselves at risk, and providing our own PPE the entire time. Yet teachers are the first to be attacked as 'lazy' for having a holiday or 'greedy' for asking for more pay.

Both the need for more time and better pay are just two symptoms of the chronic underfunding of education, which has led not only to worsening working conditions for education workers, but worsening learning conditions for pupils. Some schools are forced into closing early and others ask for money from parents simply in order to operate as normal. This needs to end.

We demand socialist measures to arm education workers and young people against the bosses and their political representatives, who will always prioritise profit before proper education, improving our working conditions, or even protecting our lives.

We demand:

- A broader curriculum developed by educators that allows an array of subjects and skills to be explored including restoring music, drama and more sports to the curriculum.
- Allow teachers the freedom to teach a curriculum that reflects the reality of history, oppression and exploitation rather than reflecting the narrow interests of the ruling class.
- An end to one size fits all high stakes testing and an exploration of alternative systems to measure progress and attainment that does not cause unnecessary stress to pupils
- A reduction in class sizes through investment in buildings and more workers to increase capacity and the quality of education we are able to deliver
- A fully funded training programme with grants to increase access to education roles thus increasing staffing levels
- An end to academisation and privatisation in education with all schools including private and free schools being brought back under local authority control
- For the immediate abolition of OFSTED. Local authorities must be run by democratically elected representatives with a full right of recall and for decisions about education to be made by educational professionals and trade unions, in conjunction with parents and learners organised under workers' committees
- For all school leaders to be democratically elected
- For workplace safety to be in the hands of the workers and their democratically elected H&S representatives including consultation on Covid safety measures in schools
- An absolute upper limit on the number of hours taught by all education staff with the remaining hours shared out to new staff without any loss of pay in order to achieve this
- An immediate increase in pay for all education workers who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic and are now facing a pay freeze
- Collective bargaining rights for all workers in schools and education settings including support staff, supply staff and any other workers involved in the delivery of education
- Fight for the emancipation of women (and parents) by removing barriers to work, providing free nurseries, after-school care, and care for the elderly as well as ensuring flexible working hours.
- End all forms of discrimination ensuring equal pay for work of equal value and equal opportunities to progress
- End performance related pay which unfairly discriminates against women, parents and people from BAME backgrounds
- An immediate return of the Education Maintenance Allowance to ensure all learners can access learning
- No to austerity! Young people and workers have suffered cuts enough, they must not be made to pay for this crisis. Make the bosses pay through nationalisation of the top 100 monopolies!
- End prioritising profit before pupils ensuring free access to education for all for life and an immediate increase in funding per pupil paid for through the expropriation of big business and the super rich
- For the organisation of a mass struggle to bring down this criminal Tory government and begin to build for the socialist transformation of society ■

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. ■

