

SOCIALIST APPEAL



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UNISON LOCAL GOVERNMENT PAY CAMPAIGN TIME FOR UNITED ACTION!

Unison Socialist

Appeal supporters

From 23 May, hundreds of thousands of local government Unison members in England, Wales, and the North of Ireland are being balloted over whether to accept or reject the employers' offer of a £1,924 flat rate pay increase.

Importantly, the union is calling on members to reject this offer.

With other unions in local government also likely to vote for strike action, and other public sector workers – such as teachers, civil servants, and junior doctors – all still in dispute, the potential exists for a mass united strike movement in councils and across the public sector.

Unison members can play an important part in this struggle, provided

our union mobilises activists to get the vote out.

We say: Vote to strike! Unite and fight! Mobilise to kick out the Tories and end austerity!

Rising militancy

In something of a departure from previous pay campaigns, Unison's National Joint Council (NJC) committee agreed not to begin with an indicative ballot, but to instead move straight to a strike ballot.

This might seem surprising, given recent history. Last year's pay campaign, for example, dragged on for months, losing momentum and eventually running into the sand following a strike ballot conducted over the winter holidays.

The NJC's decision, however, is symptomatic of a number of important factors.

For one thing, and perhaps most significantly, the temperature in the trade union movement is rising. Wave after wave of industrial action has been hitting the employers.

This is happening not just across the public sector, but increasingly in the private sector also, where Unite in particular has won significant victories.

Cost of living

The cost-of-living crisis affects all of us. Figures from consumer group *Which?* suggest that average food inflation is now topping 17%. The prices of some 'value' items in supermarkets are going up by 25% or even 50%.

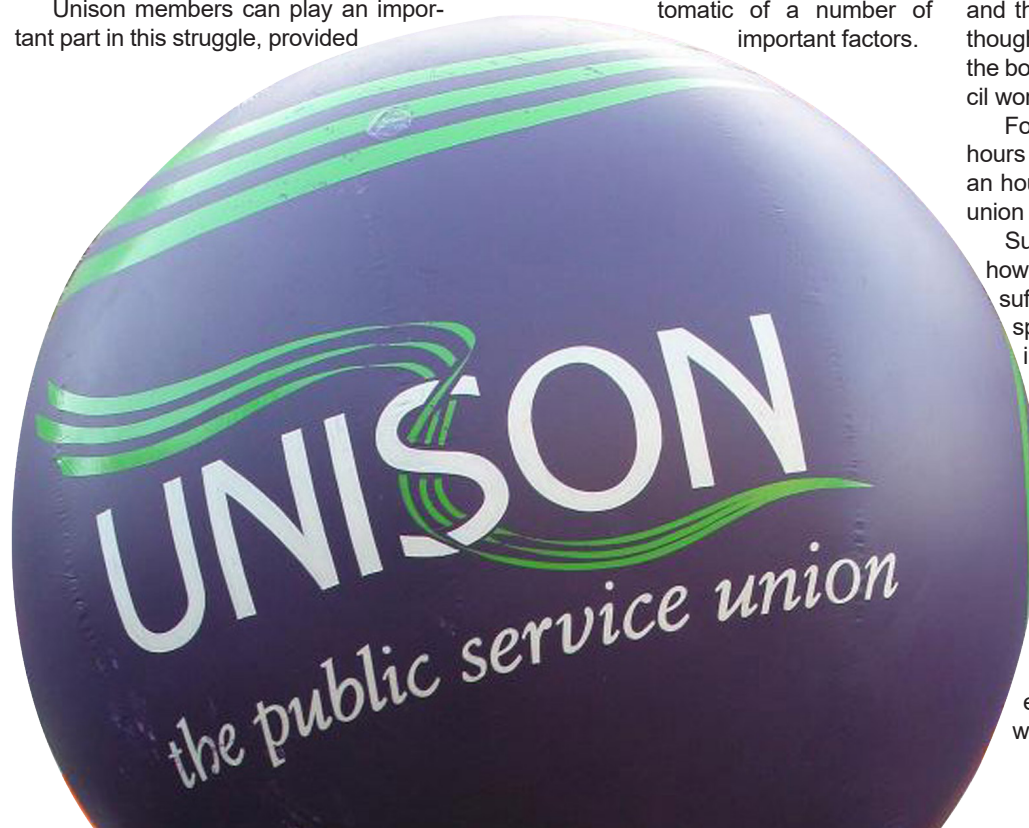
It's probable that the Local Government Association, the Welsh Government, and the employers in the North of Ireland thought that a flat offer of £1,924 across the board would be enough to satisfy council workers.

For a local authority worker on 37 hours a week, this amounts to an extra £1 an hour – incidentally, the same figure the union accepted last year.

Such a pay rise falls far short of inflation, however. And with lower-paid workers suffering the most from higher prices, spending a greater proportion of their income on food and fuel, the situation is even worse than it appears at first glance.

Unite and GMB, the other unions representing workers in local government, have already held indicative ballots that have soundly rejected this offer. And many of these council workers are based in schools, where teachers are also waging a determined struggle.

This mood almost certainly exists amongst Unison members as well, presenting the opportunity for a



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united fight across local authorities. There is everything to play for.

Fomenting division

The recent pay ballots in the NHS show what is at stake. There, RCN members decisively rejected a below-inflation pay offer, while Unison accepted it.

Subsequently, reports have surfaced of a significant layer of our members in health joining the RCN or Unite in protest at Unison's position.

Similarly, Unison members in schools have reportedly joined the NEU so that they can unite with teachers on their picket lines. This has led to Unison lodging a divisive and distracting complaint with the TUC against the NEU, who they accuse of 'poaching' members.

All of these antics by the Unison bureaucracy have played right into the hands of the employers, by fomenting division in healthcare and education workplaces – precisely at a time when workers require maximum unity against the bosses and the Tories.

Under pressure

The Unison leadership in local government, in particular the NJC Committee and the full-time officials, have therefore come to a crucial juncture.

A union leadership that is unable to win a successful strike ballot, let alone win reforms, has nothing to offer workers at a time when they are looking for action to defend their living standards.

This is especially the case when there are other unions in the same sector that are proving that they *can* win ballots, such as Unite.

The employers will not feel any pressure to deal with an organisation they see as toothless. Nor will internal pressure let up for the union bureaucracy.

The union leaders are therefore caught between a rock and a hard place: between intransigent employers looking to impose cuts upon workers, and a membership that cannot accept any more attacks on their pay and conditions.

Members are clearly becoming restless towards the bankrupt status quo. In turn, a growing layer is looking to fight for real change within the union itself.

As such, the bureaucracy is being driven into a corner of its own making. Either they must actually organise a struggle; or they will be forced aside and replaced by fighting leaders who will.

This explains the sudden – but welcome – rush towards an outright strike ballot in the local government sector of the union.

Mobilisation and militancy

The ballot closes in England and Wales on 4 July. The recent NEC election results give us a picture of how things stand.

Despite the left-wing grouping around Time for Real Change narrowly losing control of the NEC, there is still much to fight for – especially as the right have failed to gain a clear majority of their own.

In order to regroup and press forward, the left must learn the lessons of the last two years. The battle to transform Unison cannot be won solely from high office, where the bureaucracy is at its strongest.

To really change Unison into a fighting, democratic union and to drive forward a new, militant approach to strike action, the members must be brought directly into the struggle and not left watching on the sidelines.

To galvanise them, the need to transform Unison should be linked to a fighting socialist programme to address the problems facing our members.

We need the reversal of all cuts and privatisation in public services. We need an

end to low pay, and a guarantee that our wages won't be undermined by inflation. We need a sliding scale of wages, so that when prices go up, our wages rise by at least as much.

There has been a huge increase in industrial action over the last year, with one sector after another taking action over pay and conditions. Notably, we have seen the example of RCN members rejecting the rotten deal that their leaders brokered with NHS employers.

This illustrates a break with the recent past, reflecting an increasingly militant shift in the consciousness of workers. In the teeth of capitalism's crises, workers are coming to see that if you want change, then you have to fight for it.

Fighting leadership

It is vital that we link our struggles together, and strive for the maximum unity. There is clearly the potential for a mass campaign of coordinated action across the public sector, with teachers, civil servants, NHS staff, and other council workers all mobilising.

Striking NEU members in schools are the natural allies of local authority workers, not our rivals. The same is true for nurses in the RCN and PCS members in the civil service.

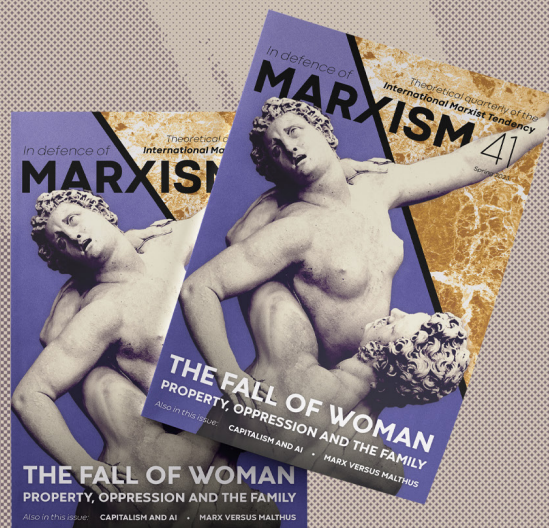
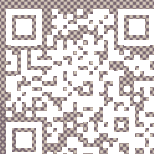
Given its size and weight in the trade union movement, Unison has a responsibility to play a leading role in this. With united, militant action, we could stop the Tories and their austerity agenda in its tracks.

Unison could be a powerful weapon in the hands of its members, and for the whole labour movement, provided it has a fighting leadership, armed with a clear class perspective and a bold socialist programme.

This is what the Marxists in Unison are attempting to build. We invite you to join us in this task. ■

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FRANCE

MACRON'S PYRRHIC VICTORY

Jérôme Métellus

Révolution France

Even if Macron did not really obtain the 'appeasement' he was hoping for, he can conclude that, on the pension reform, he has undoubtedly won the battle, at least temporarily. However, from the point of view of the French bourgeoisie, it is a Pyrrhic victory.

In a few months, Macron has clearly reinforced the pure hatred that he arouses in the mass of the population.

In the absence of majority support in the National Assembly on the pension reform, the government had to deploy two articles of the Constitution – 47.1, then 49.3 – to bypass a debate and the vote by the deputies.

All of this took place under the watchful and indignant gaze of millions of young people and workers, who rightly conclude that French 'democracy' is an utter farce.

When not just this or that government official, but all 'democratic' institutions are discredited to this extent, the ruling class walks a thin tightrope. In 2018 and 2019, the *gilets jaunes* movement gave a glimpse of the explosive consequences of such a situation.

The impasse of the regime

All things being equal, the bourgeoisie would normally want to cash in on the pension reform, while putting pressure on Macron to dissolve the National Assembly, in the hope of restoring a semblance of democratic veneer through new elections.

However, the depth of the political crisis is such that early legislative elections could aggravate the crisis, instead of alleviating it. Indeed, what kind of parliamentary majority could emerge from them? A coalition of Macron's *La République En Marche* and the fractured Republicans seems very unlikely.

Meanwhile, the prospect of an absolute majority for the NUPES is not supported by the ruling class. It urgently needs drastic counter-reforms and cannot depend on NUPES to carry them out.

There remains the possibility of a coalition government with Le Pen's National Rally: a formulation much like the current Italian government. But such a formation would infuriate large layers of the youth



Image: Emmanuel Macron, Twitter

and the working class, even if it could win electorally.

In short, the era of "political alternation", when right and "left" succeeded each other in power, is over and will not return. The crisis of French capitalism has caused this to break down. And this crisis is very far from over.

The revolutionary alternative

For us, to put a definitive end to the economic and social crisis, it is necessary to bring the workers to power, to expropriate the big bourgeoisie and to reorganise society on a socialist basis.

A growing number of young people and workers are beginning to draw this conclusion, even if they do not always have a clear idea of the way and means to achieve it.

Unfortunately, they are not helped by the official leaders of the left and the trade union movement, who cling desperately to their worn-out reformism – at the very moment when this system threatens to plunge humanity into generalised barbarism.

Such is the central contradiction of the situation, in France as elsewhere.

Sophie Binet "theorises"

To get an idea of the level of confusion of the reformists, just listen to the interview given to Médiapart, on 10 May, by the new general secretary of the CGT, Sophie Binet. Note what she says about the major mobilisations of recent months.

In response to the journalist asking why the CGT has not also mobilised at the national level on the burning question of wages, Binet answers:

"Pensions and wages, it does not work at all the same. With wages, the first interlocutor is the boss, and therefore there are mobilisations in businesses, in the workplace, directly linked to wage negotiations. But a national, cross-sector movement on wages is much rarer and almost never seen."

Binet strives to cover her conservatism with a "theoretical" veil. But this 'major difference' between salaries and pensions is ridiculous. In creating such artificial divisions and treating them as iron laws, the leaders of the labour movement limit the potential of the struggle.

Broaden the struggle!

In fact, workers in a number of workplaces and sectors have already seized the opportunity to go on strike over wages and working conditions as well as pensions, such as the striking workers of the clothing company Vertbaudet!

Whatever the general secretary of the CGT thinks, major national struggles are on the agenda not only on the question of pensions, but also on all the problems that overwhelm the mass of exploited and oppressed people. We must prepare for it by sweeping away the conservative arguments that seek to limit the methods and scope of the fight.

In the end, our class will only be definitively victorious when it has expropriated the handful of giant parasites ruling this country, and reorganised society on socialist bases. ■

UNISON MARXISTS' CHARTER

Bold measures are required to deal with the cost-of-living crisis. Only a clear socialist programme can offer a way forward. We must have no faith in the Tories or their hangers-on, whose worship of the market has brought this country to its knees.

Neither can we have faith in Keir Starmer and the right-wing Labour leadership, who are taking the party back to Blairism and posing as a "safe pair of hands" for big business.

The capitalist system is in a complete impasse. It cannot be reformed. It must be overthrown.

The bosses and their craven political representatives have shown what their priorities are. They intend to fight for their class interests, tooth and nail. We must establish and fight for our own.

■ **For a fully-funded, 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 medicines and vaccines are produced rapidly, efficiently, and made freely available to all.**

■ **Reverse the cuts to local government! Give local authorities the power**

to cap rents at affordable levels. Ban evictions and cancel housing debt. For a mass programme to build a million council houses a year, paid for by nationalising the construction companies.

■ **A proper living wage must be provided to all workers of at least £15 an hour, linked to automatically rise with inflation so as to stop the erosion of pay. End all forms of discrimination; equal pay for equal work. This includes age discrimination, where young workers are forced to work for a fraction of the real minimum wage.**

■ **Repeal the anti-trade union laws. No to class compromise. All elected officials in the labour movement should be subject to the immediate right of recall by the members, and take the wage of an average member of their labour organisation.**

■ **If the bosses say they cannot 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! Reverse the cuts! The working class must not be made to pay for this crisis!**

■ **Ban evictions and cancel housing debts. Give local authorities the power to cap rents at affordable**

levels. Bring empty properties and the assets of the big landlords and management companies under public control.

■ **The financial resources required to fight the crisis must not come from increased taxes or more austerity cuts. Nationalise the banks under public ownership and control. Rather than a "wealth tax" we call for the total expropriation of these financial monopolies.**

■ **Nationalise the 100 biggest monopolies under workers' control and management, and without compensation to the capitalists. They have made plenty of cash at our expense already! On this basis the economy can be democratically planned in the interests of the majority, and not for the super-profits of a tiny few.**

This crisis does not just exist in Britain alone, but is felt internationally. A Socialist Federation of Britain should be linked to a World Socialist Federation, in order to plan resources internationally for the benefit of all. This would put an end to the brutality of capitalism and allow humanity to begin solving the urgent issues of climate change, disease, and poverty that face our planet.

If you agree with our programme here, get involved with Socialist Appeal in Unison and help us fight for a better, socialist world! ■

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 ■

