

Programme for NHS strikes:

- High wages
- Quality healthcare
- Women's liberation!

The NHS has been gutted and bled dry. The entire system is collapsing and access to even the most basic care is on the line. For the working class in Britain, this is literally a life-and-death question. The strikes by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), Unite and other NHS unions are certainly about wages, but also much more. The very survival of a publicly funded healthcare service is at stake.

This reality is widely recognised. The question is: *what to do?* Every single politician swears up and down that they are entirely committed to “saving the NHS”. To count on them is to count on an arsonist to put out a fire. The Tories have ground the NHS down and are now slamming the door on nurses’ modest wage demands. As for Labour, Starmer promises to go back to the legacy of...Tony Blair, the very man who opened the doors wide for the private sector in healthcare. The SNP, Lib Dems and Greens offer nothing better. Clearly the politicians don’t have the answer.

Social progress comes from one place in this reactionary kingdom: the struggles of the working class. Clearly the unions are central to “saving the NHS”. On the other hand, for 40 years the unions have utterly failed to put a stop to the destruction of the NHS and the erosion of living standards. The fault lies not with the unions themselves but with the disastrous course followed by



Striking nurses at University College London Hospital, 18 January.

Workers Hammer

the union leadership. Instead of building unions as tools of struggle which can defend the basic needs of workers, unions in this country have been hollowed out and are wielded as pathetic public relations tools.

This is apparent in the strategy currently being pursued by the RCN. After almost a century of opposing strikes, allowing its members to be worked to the bone and the state of the NHS to become disastrous, the RCN has called a few strike days. Their

objective is to “force the government to stop and listen to what the health care workforce is asking for” (*RCN Magazines*, 16 October 2020). All well and good, but a few spread-out strike days will not “force” the government to do anything. In fact, while the government hasn’t budged, the RCN cut its pay demands in half, from 19 to 10 per cent after only two strike days.

The government will not be made to “recognise” the true worth of NHS workers

through media attention. What has happened to the NHS is not some misguided policy but a decades-long campaign to destroy the greatest working-class gain in this country. This will not be reversed without a real fight and certainly not by having illusions in goodwill from Westminster.

Every nurse knows that to treat a patient one must first have a correct diagnosis of the ailment. The RCN correctly identifies low wages as an important factor in the crisis of the NHS. However, low wages are only a symptom of a broader problem. The real cause of the NHS crisis is the general degradation of social and economic conditions in Britain and Northern Ireland. In the last 40 years working conditions, public services and the condition of women have all been ground down by constant attacks. Nothing expresses this reality better than the collapsing NHS—a showcase of miserable working conditions, crumbling services and the brutal treatment of women in this country.

To save the NHS and reverse the general decline in living standards, it is necessary to broaden the struggle and get at the root of the crisis. Towards this *Workers Hammer* advocates that strikes in the NHS be organised around the struggle for: *high wages, quality healthcare, women's liberation*. These questions cannot be divided

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NHS...

(continued from page 1)

into separate boxes but will either go forward or fall back together. To advance, they must all be fought for *together* by the *entire* working class. But none of the NHS unions are pursuing such a strategy, focusing instead on narrow demands divorced from the broader social questions at stake. The question of women's oppression in particular is ignored or given token mention. *This will not do*. Yes, it is bread we fight for, but we must fight for roses too.

Women as workers

What does women's liberation have to do with the crisis in the NHS? Everything in fact. The question of women's oppression is intertwined with every aspect of the NHS. First and most obviously, it relates to the status of women as workers. The NHS workforce is overwhelmingly female, and the NHS is by far the largest employer of women in Britain. It is no coincidence that NHS employees make generally much less than those in male-dominated jobs of similar qualification.

A large reason behind this pay gap is

that the government exploits the social conditioning of women as "caregivers" to demand greater sacrifices than in male-dominated professions. In the name of "saving lives" and "caring for patients", nurses and other NHS staff are asked to put their own well-being aside. This moral blackmail was ramped up to an extreme during the pandemic. Now, the same method is being used to try to discredit and demoralise the strikes. Nurses and ambulance workers are accused of killing people by striking for better working conditions. This demagoguery must be decisively rejected if any progress is to be made in the NHS.

Far from doing this during the pandemic, the NHS unions totally submitted to the government's blackmail, giving it free rein to press workers to the breaking point. In return they received nothing but clapping. In the current strike, the RCN has had to oppose some of the very arguments it peddled during the pandemic. It has argued that the nurses strikes are necessary to save the NHS and that it is the crumbling system which is killing working people. This is entirely correct. Why then is the struggle so minimal and halfhearted?

Clearly the NHS unions are still on the back foot, conciliating the argument that it is morally wrong for them to cause dis-

ruption. It is time to go on the offensive. The selflessness and social consciousness so strong among NHS workers—and women in particular—need to be unleashed in the fight for better healthcare and wages for all. The bottom line is that the NHS will collapse and many more working people will die if the working class as a whole doesn't take a stand. The more determined and decisive the struggle, the more support will be won from working people and the more healthcare will be improved.

Public services and the family

Women's oppression in the NHS goes deeper than inferior wages. Being an overwhelmingly female workforce means that most NHS workers face a second shift at home of childcare, housework and care for the elderly. These tasks fall disproportionately on women, making the question of public services all the more important for them. The provision of free healthcare, public education, care homes—these are all modest but very real steps towards taking "caring" out of the private sphere of the family and into the social sphere. Improving the quality and availability of public services directly alleviates the burden of domestic work on women. Conversely, cuts to public services and the absence of affordable childcare only increase the strain.

While the state of public services has a particular impact on working women, it profoundly impacts the well-being of working men as well. Far from dividing workers along sexual lines, making women's emancipation a centrepiece of the struggle for the NHS has the potential to unite the working class on a much stronger basis than simple economic demands. For example, workers in male-dominated sectors like rail will be much more likely to ally with nurses for better healthcare and reducing the burden of household chores than over wage demands.

Indeed, the condition of women directly relates to the general level of social progress. The early socialist Charles Fourier explained back in 1808 how:

"Social progress and changes of historical period are brought about as a result of the progress of women towards liberty; and the decline of social orders is brought about as a result of the diminution of the liberty of women."

"Other events influence these political vicissitudes, but there is no other cause

which produces such rapid social progress or decline as a change in the condition of women."

—*The theory of the four movements*

The struggle for the advancement of women is not only an entirely just cause but also a lever that can lift all of society. The fight for a quality NHS and better public services demonstrates this clearly.

Healthcare and capitalism

In order to obtain quality healthcare for all, it is essential to understand what obstacles stand in the way. At bottom it is the very nature of the capitalist economy which drags down and limits the quality of healthcare. When Britain was a manufacturing power, its ruling class had a certain interest in providing a rudimentary degree of education and healthcare. This was not out of charity but because of the pressure from a strong working class, as well as the need for an effective industrial workforce and able-bodied soldiers. As the economy was turned more and more towards purely speculative and parasitical activities in finance and high-end services and the working class was decimated, the need to maintain semi-decent healthcare and educational standards for the mass of the population has receded.

Today more and more of the economy relies on a thin layer of highly trained technocrats and specialists. This has meant that education, healthcare and social housing for the general public have all become "wasteful" expenses in the eyes of the capitalists. These services simply do not contribute enough to "productivity" to warrant meaningful investment. As public services



Government blackmailed population into accepting reactionary lockdowns, criminally supported by trade union leaders. Unions should have called the shots, not the government.

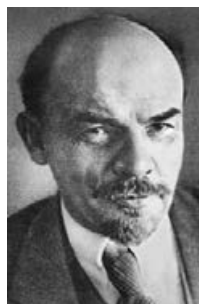
Communism and women's liberation

The following is an excerpt from the Theses for work among women adopted by the 1921 Third Congress of the Communist International, as translated in Spartacist (English edition) no 62, Spring 2011.

By placing before the Communist Parties of the West and the East the immediate task of strengthening the work of the party among the female proletariat, the Third Congress of the Communist International at the same time points out to the women workers of the whole



TROTSKY



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world that their liberation from age-old injustice, enslavement and inequality can be realized *only through the victory of communism*. What communism gives to women can by no means be provided by the bourgeois women's movement. As long as the rule of capital and private property exists in the capitalist countries, the liberation of woman from dependency on her husband can go no further than the right to dispose of her own property, her own earnings, and the right to decide equally with her husband the fate of their children.

The most decisive efforts of the feminists—the extension of women's suffrage under the rule of bourgeois parliamentarism—do not solve the problem of the actual equality of women, especially of the non-propertied classes. This can be seen in the experience of women workers in all capitalist countries where in recent years the bourgeoisie has granted the formal equality of the sexes. Suffrage does not eliminate the primary cause of women's enslavement in the family and society. Given the economic dependence of the proletarian woman on her capitalist master and her breadwinner husband, and in the absence of broad protection in making provision for mother and child and socialized education and care of children, replacing indissoluble marriage with civil marriage in capitalist states does not make the woman equal in marital relations and does not provide a key to resolving the problem of the relation between the sexes.

Not formal, superficial, but actual equality of women can be realized only under communism when women, together with all members of the laboring class, become the co-owners of the means of production and distribution, participate in managing them and bear their work responsibilities on the same basis as all members of toiling society. In other words, it is possible only by overthrowing the system of the exploitation of man's labor by man under capitalist production and by organizing the communist form of economy.

Only communism will create the conditions under which the natural function of women—motherhood—will not come into conflict with their social responsibilities and interfere with their creative work for the benefit of the collective. On the contrary, communism will enable the development of a well-rounded, healthy and harmonious individual, closely and inseparably bonded with the tasks and life of the toilers collective. Communism must be the goal of all women who fight for the liberation of women and the recognition of all their rights.

However, communism is also the ultimate goal of the entire proletariat. Therefore, the struggle of working women for this common goal must, in the interest of both sides, be waged jointly and inseparably.

— Communist International, "Theses on methods and forms of work of the Communist parties among women" (1921)

WORKERS HAMMER



Marxist newspaper of the Spartacist League/Britain
section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)

For a voluntary federation of workers republics in the British Isles!
For a Socialist United States of Europe, united on a voluntary basis!

EDITOR: Vincent David • MANAGING EDITOR: R Braxton
PRODUCTION MANAGER: Elizabeth Jones • CIRCULATION MANAGER: Mick Connor

Special thanks to Joe Sol in the production of *Workers Hammer's* first colour issue.

Spartacist Publications, PO Box 42886, London N19 5WY • Email: workershammer@btconnect.com
Subscriptions: £3 for 4 issues, Europe outside Britain & Ireland £5, overseas airmail £7

Opinions expressed in signed articles do not necessarily express the editorial viewpoint.
The closing date for news in this issue is 28 January 2023.
Printed by Reach Printing Services (trade union) ISSN 0267-8721

receive less funding and the general welfare of the population is degraded, the strain on the public healthcare system becomes untenable. This is the reason for the NHS crisis. It is caused not by a heartless “ideology” or “greed” but by the fundamental interests of the ruling class. This understanding has to be at the centre of the struggle for better healthcare and better working conditions.

Lesson of the pandemic: NHS workers should call the shots

Looking back at the pandemic through this lens leads to clear conclusions. It was *criminal* for the entire labour movement—the Labour Party, unions and left—to support the lockdowns. This meant leaving full control of health and working conditions in the hands of the demented Boris Johnson government, which obviously could not have cared less about protecting the working class in the pandemic.

Instead, what was needed was a determined struggle by the labour movement to take matters into its own hands. The working class should have fought for all social resources to be mobilised to respond to the emergency. New hospitals, care homes and other health facilities should have been built urgently. The housing stock should have been redistributed to ease overcrowding and unsanitary living conditions. NHS wages and staffing levels should have been doubled. These are only a few examples of basic measures which should and could have been taken to address the pandemic. They would also have had a beneficial long-term effect on the health of the population and the state of the healthcare system.

The obstacle to taking any of these measures is the fact that most resources are in the private hands of a small number of families. Requisitioning the assets of the capitalists (and royals) is obviously a big red line for a government whose entire purpose is to defend the interests of those very people. So instead, it shut everything down, pumped money into the pockets of Tory donors and squeezed NHS workers to the breaking point. The RCN and other NHS unions entirely bought into the national unity, “We’re all in this together” propaganda, submitting to the government. Rather than fighting for improved social and working conditions, they begged for more lockdowns. The outcome of these policies is clear. It was a catastrophe during the pandemic and it pushed the NHS into the shambles it is today.

The lesson should be just as clear. Leaving healthcare in the hands of a capitalist government can only lead to disaster. Healthcare workers should be in charge of running healthcare. A first basic step towards this would be for unions to push back against the ever-encroaching bureaucratic intrusions and fight for union control of health and safety. Ultimately the whole system should be run by workers from top to bottom.

The road to women’s liberation

The fundamental problem with the strategy pursued by the RCN and other NHS unions is that it does not start from the understanding that quality healthcare for all and capitalism are incompatible. Of course, unions must start from today’s struggles and consciousness. But they must use the everyday battles to educate workers in the irreconcilable nature of the conflict. Far from doing this, the NHS unions peddle illusions that the capitalists and their government can be made to see the light and be reasonable. Such fairy tales undermine even the



VAAP

Above: Women’s demonstration in Petrograd, 19 March 1917. Banner says: “As long as the woman is a slave, there can’t be freedom—long live women’s equality.” Right: Soviet poster from 1920: “What the October Revolution gave to women workers and peasants.” Woman points to library, cafeteria, workers’ club, school for adults and “house for mother and child”.



International Institute of Social History

most minimal fights for better wages and working conditions. Instead of well-planned and determined struggles, they lead to half measures, compromise and capitulation.

Whether it is working conditions, public services or the status of women, it is crucial to understand that incremental and constant progress is impossible within capitalism. The NHS itself, while a crucial gain, was not a step towards socialism. It was part of the measures taken to shore up collapsing British imperialism after WWII. Attlee and arch-reactionary Churchill broadly agreed on such measures at the time. Since then, the NHS has been under constant attack. As the whole social fabric of the country is hollowed out by the ruling class, the only prospect for the future under capitalism is decline and misery.

In contrast, a workers government which would expropriate the capitalist class would be able to take immediate and long-term measures to increase the quantity and quality of public services. With productive forces used rationally and planned on an international level, more and more of the burden which today rests on the family can be taken on by society as a whole: cooking, cleaning, healthcare, education, child-rearing. As this progresses, the social role of the family will gradually wither away and with it the oppression of women.

Trade unionism and women’s oppression

The crisis in this country is crushing working people in every aspect of their lives. The ruling class is in perpetual crisis and social stability is rapidly eroding. The biggest hurdle to the liberation of the working class and the emancipation of women is certainly *not* the stability of the system. The road to socialism is blocked first and foremost by the absence of a working-class party that fights for socialism.

The current leadership of the workers movement is composed of the utterly pro-capitalist Labour Party and an occasionally militant-talking pro-capitalist union bureaucracy. To break the stranglehold of these traitors, it is necessary to show how their actions undermine the working class at every point and show that *another road is possible*. This is the key task for socialists today. But far from doing this, the rest of the socialist left talks about Marxism and revolution only to then support various

non-revolutionary leaderships of the working class (see article page four).

This problem of leadership is highlighted very clearly in relation to the question of women’s oppression and the NHS strikes. Take *Socialist Appeal* for example. They frequently write about women’s oppression. They recently wrote about the disgusting cover-up of a serial police rapist by the Met. They also write articles about the need for socialism to emancipate women. But when it comes to the NHS strikes—which impact women in every way—*none* of their articles *so much as mention* the question of women’s oppression, much less advocate that the unions fight for women’s liberation. The same could be said of any other socialist paper.

What explains this apparent contradiction? It comes from a disease identified by Lenin as economism. In Britain it is better known as trade unionism. At bottom this programme limits the aim of trade union struggle to improving the immediate economic conditions of the working class and preaches socialism for the future. When it comes to addressing the oppression of other groups—women, ethnic minorities, immigrants, Travellers etc—economism limits itself to denouncing injustice and again...

preaching socialism for the future.

This programme in all its iterations is entirely compatible with the current trade union bureaucracy, whether right-wing or left-wing. What is rejected is the struggle for a socialist leadership *today* which not only champions the cause of *all* the oppressed but aims to put an *end* to their oppression by overthrowing capitalism. Economism does not lead to gradual improvement but to betrayal by the pro-capitalist bureaucracy and obviously no progress at all towards socialism.

For the trade union bureaucracy and fake socialists, advocating women’s liberation in the context of the NHS strikes would be “divisive” because some workers (and certainly the bureaucrats) think it is too radical. Fighting for black, Asian and immigrant liberation, which is also absolutely central in the NHS, would also for the same reason be considered “divisive”. Similarly, it was to avoid “division” that when the Queen died, avowedly “republican” union leaders cancelled strikes and the RCN suspended its strike ballot (see page seven). In fact, it is economism which divides the workers movement.

The ruling class constantly bombards
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Spartacist League public meeting

To save the NHS – Fight for women’s liberation!

Saturday, 18 March, 2pm

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Tories on life support... union tops won't pull the plug

As Britain keeps sinking deeper into crisis, growing numbers of workers have engaged in strike actions at a level unseen in decades. Since the summer, every passing month has witnessed new layers of workers, fed up with unbearable conditions, joining the strike wave, notably with NHS strikes starting in December and the recent announcement of upcoming strikes by hundreds of thousands of teachers. As the crisis deepens, the need to fight is dire. However, no one on the left and in the trade unions seems keen to confront the inconvenient, 10,000-pound elephant in the room. That is, that despite tremendous potential and months of hard struggle, not a single union has achieved significant gains. The Tories are on life support and while the strikes might annoy them, they have not forced them to concede anything. Something is off in the British workers movement, and anyone wishing to advance its cause better get to the bottom of this.

What has happened since September is that the strike wave might still be growing in sheer numbers, but it has stopped growing in force and impetus—like a wave that keeps extending horizontally but whose strength and reach remains the same. It washes the shore right up to the government's feet but leaves them dry.

Yet not that long ago, the Tory government was up to its neck in the water, engulfed by crisis after crisis. With the downfall of Boris Johnson followed by the debacle of Liz Truss, the government was in a catastrophe of its own making. But since then, Sunak has had the space to bring back a semblance of stability. For sure his position is precarious. He sits atop a party riddled with factions, all wishing to cut each other's throats, and he is at the helm of a country in complete shambles. But so far, he remains standing, despite the multiplicity of strikes. In fact, Sunak seems more worried about his own party than the trade unions.

Meanwhile, the pressure on working people keeps increasing. The cost-of-living crisis is destroying the standard of living of the working and middle classes at an extremely rapid pace. The NHS is collapsing before everyone's eyes, together with



Alamy photos



Kirsty Pargeter/Dreamstime.com

other public services. Worries about the future are compounded by a growing sentiment that the fabric of the country is disintegrating. These are the powerful forces that have compelled the trade unions into motion after decades of drowsiness and pushed the union leaders into action. But what action? The trade union tops, from the RMT to the CWU to the RCN, have organised their strikes isolated from one another and limited to a few single days at a time. The strikes are organised in such a way as to cause minimal disruption, *not* to provoke a major crisis for the government and force it to capitulate. Every new union entering the wave does it on this impotent model.

As a result, the government and the trade unions are in a bind, a “phoney war” in which neither side is moving decisively against the other. One can picture a leaky

raft, heading towards a storm brewing on the horizon. The government and the trade union tops sit on opposing ends, with no one steering. But neither is going for the paddle, both worried that any sudden movement would capsize the whole thing.

The government is under pressure to do something, but it is too weak to make a real move to crush the unions. It is mainly seeking to gain time and hoping that, somehow, their situation will get better. Sunak is trying to pass a new draconian anti-union law, and as sinister and dangerous as this is, he is mainly testing the waters to see what the reaction from his own party and from the trade unions will be.

As for the trade union leaders, they are pursuing the same endless strategy of single-day strikes, doing just enough not to be accused of inaction by their members while fully aware that this will not put the bosses and their government up against the wall. The TUC has announced a day of action on 1 February in protest against the proposed anti-union law, and while some unions like the NEU will strike, this promises to be another parade that will not fundamentally alter the situation. Instead of mounting a real fightback to smash the law, the trade union tops have placed their hopes in the courts and waiting for a Labour government to repeal it.

Meanwhile, the Labour Party is waiting on the sidelines. They are opposing both sides, hoping that no one makes a sudden move, that the cruise to the next election will not be too rocky and that when they get thrown the hot potato of government, things will be less bleak. Sir Keir Starmer

might claim to be an atheist, but he is living on a prayer.

So, what needs to be done? For anyone who can think, it is obvious that this “phoney war” cannot last forever. The international instability and the worsening situation of the country constantly raise the stakes and the pressure on both the union leaders and the government. Something, somewhere, must break. The question is: who will rock the boat first?

If one thing is certain, it is that sooner or later the ruling class must try to take back the initiative and shatter the status quo. British capitalism is falling behind and needs some drastic measures to stay afloat. The international situation is also extremely unstable, and Britain's position in it is very weak. Another major economic shock will be devastating.

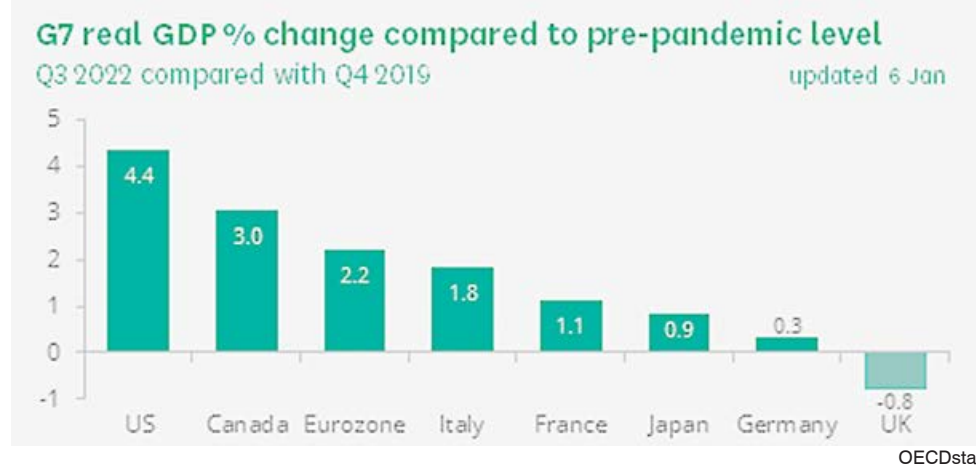
To a certain degree, it is obvious what the workers movement must do. To start to resolve the crisis in the interests of the whole working class, *it must move first*. The number of strikes shows that workers are ready to fight. The government is weak, divided and discredited. A little kick is all this anti-working-class cartel needs to fall. A bold offensive against the government would be the best way to ensure the maximum concessions *now*. It would shift the whole balance in favour of the working class and bring it to the fore as the decisive factor in society. That would open a whole new realm of possibilities, including to expose how the Labour Party tops—both right and left—are enemies of the working class.

What is preventing this is precisely the current leadership of the trade unions, which is terrified of doing anything that could further destabilise the already shaky situation. In a nutshell, the union tops' impotent methods flow from their *refusal* to challenge British capitalism, whose decomposition has been accelerated by the current world crisis.

British capitalism: a sinking ship

To have a correct orientation in this crisis, workers must understand its root cause. All the liberals, Labourites and even “socialists” are pointing in the same direction: “twelve years of Tory rule”. It is obvious that the Tories have done everything they could to bleed the country dry. But to point to them as *the* source of the problem is in fact a deception which disarms the workers movement. Its immediate purpose is to help bring back a Labour government. It conveniently disappears that it was 13 years of Labour rule, with austerity, privatisations and attacks against the working class that paved the way for “twelve years of Tory rule”.

More fundamentally, that notion conceals the real source of the crisis and the fundamental problem: British capitalism's continuous decline on the world scene for some 150 years. This is the central problem which any government, Tory or Labour, is



Britain's economy has worst GDP performance among G7 countries.

always confronted with. It is impossible to make any sense of the current situation and of the recent political, economic and social crises unless one sees them from the standpoint of the world situation and Britain's continuously declining position in it. It is only from this viewpoint that one can get a clear picture of the situation and foresee its development.

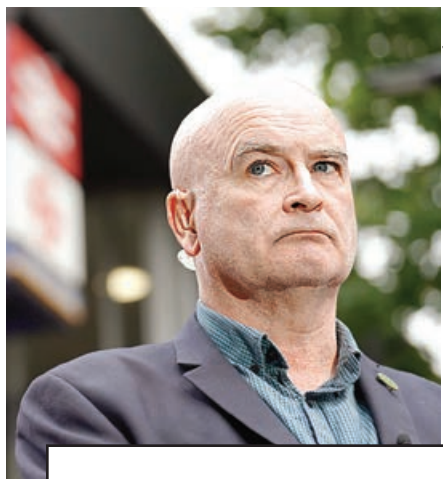
Increasingly unable to compete with the US and with other European powers, Britain was elbowed out of its position as the dominant world power at the turn of the last century and went on to lose its empire after the Second World War. The liquidation of Britain's industrial base, the massive privatisations and the crushing of the trade unions, for which Thatcher is famous, were all aimed at slowing Britain's decline. The result has been the devastation of whole regions, from the Midlands to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, for the good of London speculators, rentiers and bankers. This is now what most of the British capitalist class consists of.

The parasitic finance-based, "coupon-clipper" character of the British bourgeoisie makes it particularly vulnerable to international economic shocks. The 2008 crisis hit Britain exceptionally hard, which in turn led Labour and the Tories to undertake savage austerity and massive bailouts to barely keep the economy afloat. With an economy based on finance, a hollowed-out industrial base and dependent on imports, the result has been years of low growth, low investment, extremely low productivity and an explosion of the public debt, causing Britain to steadily fall back behind its European competitors.

Brexit was yet another failed attempt by a wing of the ruling class to strengthen Britain's position in the world. From the standpoint of working people, it was entirely correct to vote "leave" and stick it to the EU bosses and the liberal establishment. Corbyn's campaign for "remain" was a total betrayal from which he never recovered. But in the absence of a working-class pole which could have used the governmental crises to struggle against the EU, against British imperialism and against all wings of the ruling class—both pro- and anti-EU—any Brexit deal was bound to worsen working people's conditions.

With all these underlying issues, the combined shocks of the pandemic followed by the Ukraine war came as devastating blows. Among the G7, Britain is the only country whose economy is still smaller than in early 2020, and it also faces the worst economic forecast, with double-digit inflation and a dramatic squeeze in living standards. This all threatens to pull the country down to the level of Spain or Poland.

As a result, Britain has entered a period of protracted crisis and struggle. The current state of British capitalism is not tenable. The capitalists know it and won't let the country slip to a third-rate status without doing something. They need to find ways to stimulate growth, productivity and investment, which can be done only in two ways. The first is to increase Britain's share of the pillage of Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe. Since Britain ceased to play an independent role on the world scene long ago, its ability to do this depends entirely on its good relations with the real master of the world: the US. This explains in large part why, since the start of the Ukraine war, the British ruling class has been the most rabidly pro-Ukraine, pro-NATO and warmongering of all. By being more Catholic than the Pope, Brit-



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"We're not trying to bring down the government."

—Mick Lynch
Left Foot Forward, 6 January

ain's rulers hope that the US might throw them a bone.

The second way is to further drive down the standard of living of the British working class and of the lower sections of the middle class, who might not be able to enjoy a "first world lifestyle" for very long. Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng's September mini-budget was a first, stillborn attempt to do this. They sought to do two things at the same time: massive tax cuts and a massive increase in spending, partly in the hope of satisfying all wings of the Tories. The effect was akin to slamming down the accelerator *and* the brake at the same time, infuriating everyone and spurring the financial markets to throw them out of the driver's seat.

Thus, fewer options are open to the ruling class. Their preferred tool is always a strong Tory government, but this is unlikely for now. The alternative is a Labour government which could co-opt the trade union bureaucracy and undertake the task of attacking the working class, doing what the Tories are unable to do now. Starmer has positioned himself to be this candidate by crushing any whiff of Corbynism in his party and making clear his government will be staunchly anti-worker and pro-business. With this picture in mind, it becomes

clearer that blaming "twelve years of Tory rule" and pushing the notion that Labour would be a "lesser evil" simply amounts to leading workers to the slaughter through the gate the capitalist enemy is showing them.

When "Britannia ruled the waves", it could easily prop up its system with the gigantic resources plundered from its worldwide empire. Fast-forward to the end of the Second World War, and Britain had declined to such a level that it had to liquidate its empire and borrow huge sums from the US to bail out its economy through massive state intervention. This was the real content of the "socialism" of the Attlee government, so dear to all left Labourites. Since then, British imperialism has mortgaged the whole house for the benefit of the City and US-dominated finance capital. Each new convulsion of British imperialism in decline only makes more dire the need to rid the earth of the British capitalist class. This is the historical task of the British working class that it must carry out for its own sake, for the sake of all the oppressed peoples and for the sake of humanity itself.

Only the expropriation of the parasitic capitalist class of rentiers and speculators and their replacement with the rule of the working class can solve the crisis of this country in a progressive direction. To boost productivity and growth and to provide decent jobs to millions requires wielding the resources of the country in a planned, collectivised economy. To raise the standard of living requires eliminating all speculation, price-gouging and sky-rocketing rents and seizing the properties of all big landowners. To provide good health and social services requires seizing huge amounts of wealth. To strike a blow at the whole international system of imperialist oppression, which breeds only plunder and wars, the financial parasites of the City must be expropriated. It is obviously not a matter of a few bills to be voted in the ruling class's Parliament that we are speaking of, but of *workers running the country*.

To advance in this direction, the decisive element is *leadership*. The capitalist enemy is already at work. The ridiculous and sinister carnival that is the Tory Party internal struggles represents the ruling class trying to find a way out. As the situation worsens, their solutions will only become more reactionary. The working class must

engage now in its own process of selecting a determined and capable leadership which can break the status quo in its favour and carry its interests forward. As the bourgeoisie dreams of another "Iron Lady", there is only one tool strong enough to match this, tested and proven in the land of Russia, 1917: a Bolshevik party.

Trade unions and the bureaucracy

If the Tories are on life support, and a little kick is all they need to make them go, why then are the current union leaders refusing to deliver the blow? This is a valid question that all workers should pose to their union leaders, but they can only expect lame excuses in response. The reason lies in the nature of the trade union bureaucracy.

The eruption of any major crisis always brings to the fore leaders forged by the preceding period. The last three decades have been marked by the extreme weakness and continuing decline of the trade unions, over which the shadow of the crushing of the miners strike loomed. It is in this school that people like Mick Lynch (RMT), Sharon Graham (Unite), Dave Ward (CWU), Pat Cullen (RCN) and others currently leading the unions were trained. Anyone who thinks they are the ones pushing the current strike wave is looking at things upside down. It is the powerful forces coming from the working-class base of the unions which are lifting these utterly inadequate people to the top of the wave and forcing them into action.

At the opening of a new period of shocks and crisis which calls for bold and decisive actions, they are leading the strikes with all the conservative baggage and losing methods of the past period. They are acting not as a motor force but as a brake on the class struggle.

Generally, their political worldview is a mix of traditional Labourite politics and Blairite social liberalism. Parliament reigns supreme in political matters. Strikes are not weapons in the class struggle but are simply one element in the slow and gradual process of "good policy-making" guided by "common sense". They are no fans of Starmer, but they will still vote for him because what else can they do? The

continued on page 8

"Socialist" lawyers for union bureaucrats



"For a moment the rising tide of class struggle in Britain was interrupted by the period of mourning following the death of Queen Elizabeth...."

"It was clearly valid for the leadership of the RMT and CWU to postpone the strikes by a couple of weeks, given that they were one or two-day strikes which would not be made less effective by a short delay."

—*Socialism Today*,
4 October 2022

SOCIALIST APPEAL

"Under Sharon Graham's leadership, Unite has helped secure many important victories for workers. This militant approach must now be spread throughout the union...."

"We need to ensure that we build on our wins and grow our union by electing an EC that shares Sharon's vision for Unite."

—*Socialist Appeal*, 11 January

Morning Star

"Since unions have risen to the challenge, building strike-ready workplaces and honing their communications and organising tactics, the Tories want to go one further, with a planned minimum service law...."

—*Morning Star*, 23 December 2022



Workers Hammer

Queen croaks

Revolutionaries protest, reformists prostrate

The following leaflet was issued on 22 September 2022.

The Spartacist League is proud to say that on the day of Elizabeth II's funeral, we successfully organised the *only* demonstration against the monarchy in London. Over 100 people responded to our call. A small number, certainly, but every single person who was there knew that to simply show up required swimming hard against the stream, braving potential threats of arrest and attack by monarchists. While all so-called socialist and Republican organisations stayed home, paying the ultimate homage to Her Majesty, those who came can proudly say that they took a stand, defiantly chanting, "Down with the monarchy!"—in Windrush Square, Brixton. Our modest demonstration was the only organised outlet for the growing disgust at the depravity of the British monarchy and the crimes of British imperialism.

Speeches at the demonstration included one by a Greek comrade denouncing the reactionary role of British imperialism in subordinating Greece. A US comrade motivated the need for a third American revolution to sweep

away US imperialism and racial oppression, invoking the first revolution against British rule and the second against slavery. A statement from a Québec comrade was read denouncing the British monarchy as "the cornerstone of Québec's national oppression". Greetings from our comrades in South Africa stressed that "with the blessing of 'God and the monarchy', racist colonialist pigs like Cecil Rhodes carved up southern Africa, dispossessing the native peoples of their land and dividing them according to the needs of Britain's rulers".

Our main speaker denounced "the monarchy and the United Kingdom" as "a prison for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland's Catholics" and King Charles III as the "colonel-in-chief of the brutal Parachute Regiment that shot and killed 14 people on Bloody Sunday in Derry in 1972". She hammered on the urgency of workers opposing the monarchy, taking power and running the country.

Crucially, we directed our fire at the trade union leaders and Labour lefts who claim to stand against the monarchy and for the working class but who disgustingly

mourned the Queen, with abject eulogies or by criminally cancelling strikes. One of the most popular chants at the demo was "Starmer, Corbyn, TUC: crawling to the monarchy!"

We do note one who did not crawl: Steve Hedley, formerly a leader of the RMT. While he could not attend, we appreciated the message he sent us, despite our political differences. His message, read at the rally, called the TUC "boot lickers" for cancelling strikes and noted, "When the Labour Party and much of the so called revolutionary left and even so called republicans acquiesced by their silence a small band of rebels kept the flag flying."

A few rebels also took a stand in Cardiff and Edinburgh. But in London, the fact that only we and a small number of bravehearts came out is a condemnation of the British left. The Queen's funeral was one of the largest gatherings of capitalist masters, imperialist overlords and crowned heads ever seen. All these criminals covered in blood descended on London from the four corners of the earth to pay their respects to the British monarchy—the embodiment of one of the most brutal and reactionary empires in all human history. It was crucial to take a stand against this carnival of reaction.

But the rest of the "socialist" groups not only *did nothing*, they *boycotted our demonstration*. We invited left groups and MPs in London and beyond and none of them even dared to re-tweet our call. This from people who always accuse *us* of being sectarians.

One argument we have heard to justify this abstinence was that while all socialists supposedly oppose the monarchy, the cost-of-living crisis was more important. What a pathetic excuse! One has to be wilfully blind not to see that it is precisely the trade union leaders' bowing to the Crown which poured cold water on workers' struggle. The task of socialists is precisely to make clear the connection between the destruction of the standard of living of working

people and the domination of a parasitic ruling class—best embodied by the royal family. Sweeping away this rot is the only way to solve the current crisis.

Those "socialists" who refuse to take a stand against the monarchy under the pretext that it is less of a priority than the price of energy will never achieve anything for the working class. Even fighting for the most modest reforms requires hard, militant class struggle. As our rally speaker insisted: "A leadership that is too spineless to oppose the monarchy will never have the backbone to confront the ruling class of this country."

But the real reason why groups like the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Appeal, the Socialist Party and other supposed "revolutionaries" boycotted our demonstration is not found in faulty logic but in the syphilitic chain of Labourism. All these groups have spent the last months building the authority and credentials of trade union tops like Mick Lynch, Sharon Graham and Dave Ward. They have spent years building good relations with left-Labourite MPs like Sultana or Corbyn, boosting their authority among workers. They think this is what "socialist" work consists of. The last thing they want is to destroy all this by calling the left Labourites' bowing to the Queen by its right name: *betrayal*. Doing so would instantly make them outcasts in "respectable" Labourite circles and most likely split their organisations. To take such a stand was precisely what was posed in joining our demonstration.

The death of the Queen, just like the other major events of recent years, was a test for those who claim to be fighting for socialism. On one side were those who fought and took a stand against the bourgeoisie, their monarch, their royalist media and their servants in the ranks of the workers movement. On the other side were those who bowed to Crown and Capital and made all sorts of excuses for doing so. Those of us who were in Brixton on 19 September know which side we are on. ■

WORKERS HAMMER

Marxist newspaper of the Spartacist League

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Down with the monarchy!

The following is an abridged form of the speech by Eibhlin McDonald for the Spartacist League at our anti-monarchy protest in London on 19 September 2022.

I'm very pleased that you've all come out today in defiance of the repression that has been directed at people protesting against the monarchy. For over a week, we've had a barrage of disgusting royalist propaganda shoved down our throats. The slightest signs of dissent have been repressed.

We in the Spartacist League decided enough is enough: we called this protest so that the royalist carnival of reaction would not go unopposed. And we invited all socialists and anti-monarchists to join us today. As the heads of state from around the world gather in Westminster to honour Elizabeth II, here in Brixton we remember the hideous crimes of British imperialism during her reign: Queen Elizabeth lorded it over the remnants of the brutal British Empire from Africa to Asia and beyond. Her Majesty's governments were responsible for the slaughter of the Mau Mau in Kenya. They were heavily involved in the bombing and devastation of Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. Her army was sent to Northern Ireland to keep the Catholic population down; King Charles III happens to be colonel-in-chief of the Parachute Regiment that gunned down 14 Catholic protesters in Derry in 1972.

The Spartacist League sent representatives to a protest in Belfast organised by a small Republican socialist group just under a week ago. We were glad to see that the King's visit to Wales was protested, but not surprised, because the monarchy and the so-called United Kingdom is a prison for Scotland, Wales and the Catholics of Northern Ireland. And of course it oppresses the working class of England too. Her Maj-

esty's government under Margaret Thatcher smashed the miners and devastated whole areas, a policy which was continued by successive Labour governments.

Among those workers in Britain who hate the monarchy are many whose parents and grandparents originated from the Indian subcontinent. Lord Louis Mountbatten, the dearly beloved great uncle of King Charles III, was responsible for the bloody partition of India. The British Empire set Hindu, Sikh and Muslim against each other and partition unleashed a hideous mass slaughter as well as one of the largest forced population transfers in history. As regards Britain's black population, Her Majesty's police apply the same shoot-to-kill policy as the British Army did in Northern Ireland. The most recent victim is Chris Kaba, a young black man gunned down two weeks ago by the Metropolitan Police—whose logo happens to be the insignia of Elizabeth Regina.

In the Spartacist League we understand that racial oppression is rooted in the capitalist system and in British imperialism itself. It is enforced by the state, which cannot be reformed. We do not believe in reform or defunding of the police. We think that the working class needs to set up its own state which will be run according to the interests of the working class. We say: *Down with the monarchy and the United Kingdom! For workers republics on both sides of the Irish sea!*

Many of you here today already know the crimes of British imperialism only too well. The question is, what to do about it? Take a look around this country, it's in a shambles. The international economic crisis is hitting Britain much harder than any other developed country. There's massive inflation, looming recession, the NHS crisis, the housing situation; nothing works

in the country. As communists, *we have a solution.* The entire system in this country is rotten and it must go! *It must be torn down!* But why has this not happened? For that matter, why does Britain still have a monarchy, an institution that belongs in feudal times? The central problem is one of leadership. The workers today are led by people who bow down to the Crown and to the capitalist class.

The Labour Party, under Sir Keir Starmer, outdid the Tories in royalist grovelling. And it wasn't just Starmer. He was backed to the hilt by the Labour left MPs who supposedly stand for socialism and the working class. Jeremy Corbyn, Zarah Sultana, Diane Abbott are all in mourning for the Queen. The working class has demonstrated that they are willing to fight and there desperately needs to be a fight against the huge assault on their living standards. Over the summer there have been strikes in rail, the docks and the post office. But the very minute the Queen croaked, Mick Lynch of the RMT and Dave Ward of the CWU cancelled the strikes. Why? So they could join this obscene outpouring of patriotism and national unity alongside the capitalist rulers. What did it mean to cancel those strikes? It sent out a clear message that the struggle of the working class against starvation wages must take second place to the need for all classes to stand united and swear loyalty to the monarchy, to the system of class privilege and exploitation.

You don't need to be a socialist to oppose the monarchy. But if you refuse to oppose the monarchy *now*, when it counts, you're no socialist. And in this country which famously has "57 varieties" of socialist groups, the Spartacist League is the *only* one that called a demonstration against the monarchy in London. Other groups have no problem saying they're against the mon-

archy when it carries no consequences. But right now, when it counts, they're nowhere to be seen.

The trade union bureaucrats will tell you that they had no choice but to do what they did because if they were to oppose the monarchy it would divide the working class. Of course there's royalist sentiment within the working class, but it is totally against workers' own class interests. The union bureaucrats are simply defending their own refusal to take a stand against the monarchy. They are also making sure that any royalist sentiment that does exist within the working class is unchallenged and unopposed. Another aspect of the trade union and Labour leaders' bowing before the monarchy is that those sections of the working class who hate the monarchy and British imperialism are excluded, ignored and silenced. They are told to shut up in the name of unity. What kind of unity is that? It's unity with the ruling class. As I said, it's in the direct interest of the *entire* working class to fight against monarchism wherever you find it.

We in the Spartacist League say that what's needed is a socialist campaign which aims to put the working class in power. For that there needs to be a new, revolutionary leadership, one which connects the day-to-day struggles of the working class to the struggle against capitalism as a whole. The bottom line is: a leadership that is too spineless to oppose the monarchy will never find the backbone to confront the ruling class of this country, much less bring it down. And that is what's needed. So, to conclude, we must fight in the trade unions and the workers organisations for revolutionary leadership. A leadership which opposes the monarchy, British imperialism, racial oppression and the entire rule of the British capitalist class. ■

Labour lefts, union leaders bend the knee



By the way, Alex Gordon, Communist Party executive committee member, is president of the RMT executive.

Life support...

(continued from page 5)

idea of a decisive showdown between the trade unions and the government is something they hate like the plague. Such a confrontation would mean defying the anti-union laws, confronting the full force of the state and losing all respectability in Labour Party circles. Any move in this direction would threaten to unleash forces that would soon overwhelm them, and their entire careers have been built on refusing to engage in anything of the sort. The recent months have amply demonstrated this.

Back in August, the strike wave was rising together with political turmoil, exemplified by both the downfall of Boris Johnson and the widely popular but impotent Enough is Enough campaign. Then, suddenly, the Queen died and Lynch, Ward & Co immediately cancelled all strike actions. Apart from breaking the whole momentum of the summer, this signalled clearly to the ruling class that their loyalties were first and foremost to King and Country, not to the working class.

Then came the downfall of Liz Truss, which showed the depth of crisis in the ruling class. That this bunch of lunatics were overthrown by the financial markets and Truss's own backbenchers and *not* by a mass upsurge of working-class struggle is a total condemnation of the leadership of the working class. The enemy was at its weakest and the union tops did nothing. As Starmer rose in the polls and looked certain to form the next government, they pulled the plug on the Enough is Enough campaign, which now exists only as an empty shell on social media. All these events are key to understanding the current stage of the struggle. The union tops sent clear signals to the ruling class that they would carry the strikes *in a framework totally compatible with the stability of British capitalism*.

So, what is holding back British society is not the conservatism of its ruling class—they ceased to play a progressive role long ago—but the conservatism of the leaders of the workers movement. It is this straitjacket which is holding back a



Vintage Space/Alamy

1926 General Strike was betrayed by TUC leadership. Then, as now, what's needed is revolutionary leadership.

real struggle by the working class for its immediate interests and thus holding back the only force which can solve the crisis of British society in a progressive direction. The task of socialists is to forge militant caucuses in the unions to wage the struggle against these bureaucrats and replace them, not with a more leftist version of the same thing but with a leadership that will *win* the class struggle. That is, a leadership which will organise the coming battles with the understanding that the oppressed class must topple the oppressor. Only in this way can the workers movement be victorious.

“Socialist” lawyers for the bureaucracy

As ironic as it might be, the most immediate obstacle to organising a struggle inside the trade unions and building a socialist leadership of the workers movement is in fact...all the other socialist groups. The Communist Party, the Socialist Party (SP), the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), Socialist Appeal etc either openly hail the current treacherous, anti-socialist bureaucrats or hope to pressure them through appeals while basing their entire strategy on leaving their leadership intact.

Socialist Appeal and the Socialist Party are craven in their support to a wing of the bureaucracy. They are both openly

campaigning for Sharon Graham in Unite, uncritically hailing her “fighting stance” (SP’s *The Socialist*, 11 January) and “vision for Unite” (*Socialist Appeal*, 11 January), and their press contains nothing but praise for Mick Lynch. For them, the strike wave has been an uninterrupted, incremental line of success and the differences they might have with the union leaders are over tactical considerations—when to strike, what to do on 1 February etc. Their newspapers might call on a weekly basis to “kick out the Tories” but they are propping up union bureaucrats who are *opposed* to doing precisely that! Mick Lynch has been crystal clear multiple times on this matter, saying: “We’re not trying to bring down the government” (leftfootforward.org, 6 January).

The SWP appears to be the most critical of the union tops. They too talk about “socialism” and even “revolution” but their policy in the trade unions is based on explicitly rejecting a fight for the unions to be led by socialists! They write: “There is also a battle inside the strikes about what strategy to adopt. We are seeing inspiring strikes under wholly inadequate leadership” (*Socialist Worker*, 13 December 2022). So far, this is a good diagnosis of the problem. What does the SWP propose to do? The same article gives their standard answer: “Rank and file workers need to organise

their own initiatives, and to push their leaders into more action.” So, the SWP knows that the leadership is “wholly inadequate” but wilfully refuses to fight to *replace* it! If a tool is “wholly inadequate” to perform a task, any good worker knows that they need a *different* tool, and that applying “more pressure” is often how one gets injured. Same goes in politics. The SWP’s strategy is a capitulation to the trade union bureaucracy and a bankrupt programme ensuring that the unions will *never* be led by socialist workers!

The losing strategy of the union tops is becoming more and more obvious to militant workers, and the next period will see left-wing motion developing inside the trade unions, pushing against the old bureaucratic apparatus. The open bloc of all “socialist” groups with the current union bureaucracy is thus criminal, providing a useful left cover for these very bureaucrats and obstructing the necessary process of renewing the unions’ leadership on a fundamentally different basis.

Any serious revolutionary who is a member of one of the current various “socialist” groups must struggle in their own ranks, starting by asking the simple question: How can we call ourselves socialists if we support people who are hell bent on propping up the stability of the British ruling class? That very question touches the nub of the problem.

The great Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky, almost 100 years ago, posed this very problem in a different situation, but his insight reads like it was written yesterday. The year before the TUC leaders sold out the 1926 General Strike, Trotsky wrote:

“The contradictions undermining British society will inevitably intensify. We do not intend to predict the exact tempo of this process, but it will be measurable in terms of years, or in terms of five years at the most; certainly not in decades. This general prospect requires us to ask above all the question: will a Communist Party be built in Britain in time with the strength and the links with the masses to be able to draw out at the right moment all the necessary practical conclusions from the sharpening crisis? It is in *this* question that Great Britain’s fate is today contained.”

— *Where is Britain going?* (1925) ■

NHS...

(continued from page 3)

the working class with all sorts of prejudices with the specific purpose of setting workers against each other and keeping them loyal to the capitalists. For socialists to water down their programme in the face of backward consciousness means trampling on the interests of the most oppressed in society, presenting the fight for their liberation as “divisive”. This fosters identity politics among the oppressed, who rightly feel betrayed or left out, further drives reactionary social polarisations and divides workers. Only if the struggles of *all the oppressed* are united under a *common socialist banner* can the workers of the world overcome the myriad divisions fostered by the ruling class.

This perspective is antithetical to every other left organisation in Britain. However, we hope to be proven wrong in this regard and would be glad if other socialist groups join us in fighting for the NHS unions and the entire labour movement to inscribe on their banners: *For women’s liberation!* ■

To save the NHS, fight for women’s liberation!

- **One union for all healthcare workers! For a joint strike offensive.**
- **50 per cent pay rise, wages pegged to inflation.**
- **No mandatory overtime. Mass hiring under union control. Scrap agency work and zero-hours contracts. Permanent jobs for temp workers.**
- **Down with racist discrimination. Full citizenship rights for all immigrants.**
- **Socialise household duties. For 24-hour childcare, dining rooms and laundry services paid for by the state—available in the workplace and neighbourhoods.**
- **Scrap the NHS debt. Nationalise the private healthcare sector.**
- **Build new healthcare infrastructure, schools and low-cost, quality housing. Seize the estates of the monarchy and the church to pay for it!**
- **Establish a planned economy to reindustrialise Britain. Expropriate the City of London!**
- **Dump the bureaucrats! For a class-struggle leadership of the unions and a revolutionary workers party.**
- **For workers governments on both sides of the Irish Sea!**

Greece...

(continued from page 12)

concessions for working people *right now* as the crisis hits. When the working class shuts down factories, transport, ports etc, it paralyses not only production but also the government, posing the question of who is in charge in the workplace and the country: the workers or the bosses. A general strike draws in all sectors in the country and mobilises the oppressed layers of the petty bourgeoisie along with the majority of the proletariat, actively counterposing them to the bourgeoisie and its state.

But although the need is great and conditions are ripe, no general offensive is being organised. Why? Because it's a question of revolutionary programme and leadership. A revolutionary programme is a precondition even for the struggle for reforms. But the KKE's programme is as much an obstacle to that struggle as it is to the realisation of a workers revolution. It is reformist on fundamental questions: on the state, on emancipation from imperialist enslavement, on common struggle of Greek and Turkish workers etc. It is urgently necessary to replace the workers' existing leadership with leaders whose programme for the immediate betterment of the masses' living conditions is an integral part of a broader strategy to bring the working class to power.

For the national liberation of Greece

In a country raped by the imperialists, no fight to improve the masses' living conditions is possible without a programme to link that struggle to the fight against imperialist subjugation. The KKE's programme is an obstacle to that perspective since, for them, it is opportunist to recognise the fact that Greece is not imperialist but a country subjugated by imperialism. Accordingly, the struggle for national emancipation — which has to be at the centre of the revolutionary programme — is also opportunism, because it lets the local bourgeoisie off the hook. The KKE writes:

“On a political level, this opportunist conception of imperialism leads the workers movement onto pernicious paths of class conciliation, as a political tail on the bourgeoisie. It essentially exonerates the bourgeoisies of the less powerful countries of monopoly capitalism, which tend to appear also as victims of foreign monopolistic groups. It shifts the class dividing line from inside the country to outside (to the ‘managers’, to the IMF, to the Germans etc).”

— “Lenin's theory of imperialism and its distortions”, *Kommunistiki Epitheorisi* no 2 (2017)

The KKE creates a false dilemma, counterposing the struggle against imperialist subjugation to the struggle to overthrow the national bourgeoisie. The revolutionary struggle to break the imperialist yoke does not weaken but rather strengthens the political differentiation of classes. The local bourgeoisie has a solid rearguard behind it in imperialism, which will always help it with money and arms against the workers. Everything the oppressed and exploited masses do to stand on their feet inevitably pushes the national bourgeoisie into an open bloc with the imperialists. To fight against imperialism, one must *necessarily* fight against the national bourgeoisie.

The KKE believes that the struggle against imperialist subjugation leads to conciliating the Greek bourgeoisie. This is indeed a danger in the absence of a revolutionary programme against imperialism.



Life

Bitter fruit of betrayal. As Germans withdrew from Athens in 1944, KKE hailed entry of British troops in service of Stalin's alliance with Churchill and Roosevelt (left). British troops in Athens (right) suppressed proletarian uprising in December.



Associated Press

That is what happened in the 1940s when the Stalinists formed a popular front in the name of fighting fascism, collaborating with the Greek bourgeoisie as well as with the “progressive” imperialists (British and American) (see “Greece 1940s: A Revolution Betrayed”, *Spartacist* [English edition] no 64, Summer 2014). Indeed, the programme of class conciliation must be rejected, but the way to do that is not by refusing to fight against imperialist enslavement.

The KKE says that the struggle against the imperialists “shifts the class dividing line from inside the country to outside (to the ‘managers’, to the IMF, to the Germans etc)”. In other words...if the workers fight in the first place mainly against the IMF and the German bourgeoisie, that is opportunism. With this reasoning and the argument that “*capitalism in Greece is in its imperialist stage of development, in an intermediate position in the international imperialist system*”, they deny that the whole country is *nationally* oppressed by the imperialists. They disappear the dominant role of foreign finance capital in Greece as a subjugated country. Their argument rejects the struggle for *national* and *class* liberation. Let's see how the struggle for basic needs is tied to the struggle against imperialism. The KKE calls for “cancelling the debt of worker's-people's households and for professionals”, “abolition of the property tax on worker's-people's households” and “abolition of debts to banks and the tax office” (*Panergatiki* no 15, September 2022).

We agree. But how will that happen and who will do it? A workers or a bourgeois government? The KKE doesn't tell us, so we'll answer for them. Can the debts be cancelled without the expropriation of the banks by the proletariat? No. In order to cancel the debts we must violate the interests of the imperialists, the banks and the local ruling class, who have burdened the masses with an enormous national debt. It is the task of revolutionaries to fight to *cancel* the debts and *expropriate* the banks. *Abolish business and banking secrecy—open the books!* Banks in the hands of the workers will have no interest in paying the debt by means of which the imperialists have sucked the blood of the Greek people. Does that mean we need to take power? Yes. Only a revolutionary workers government fighting against *all* the oppressors can apply this programme. However, this can only be realised by a revolutionary party which puts national and class emancipation

at the centre of its programme.

The KKE also calls:

“To use all the modern possibilities of production, technology and science to satisfy the workers'-people's needs. The precondition is that energy, food, basic goods are not produced as commodities under the control of large business groups but become social property; that scientific, centralised planning is developed with the toilers, the people, at the helm of power.”

— “No delay! Combative common action with the KKE everywhere so that the people become a protagonist”, *kke.gr* (7 October 2022)

No objection. But how do we get from where we are today to using all the modern possibilities to satisfy working people's

in 2015. It is important to draw the lessons of 2015 so that workers understand that the KKE's mistakes were not simply theoretical but have terrible consequences in real life. Class-conscious workers must understand that the KKE's programme cannot be reformed and that the working class needs a new leadership.

The lessons of 2015

In 2015, after years of brutal austerity when the proletariat was fighting tooth and nail, the country reached a turning point. To divert the anger and struggles of the masses into safer channels, Syriza, then the ruling party, tried to deceive workers that it could champion the struggle against imperialist subjugation. Indeed, there were

British fighter jet over RAF base in Akrotiri, Cyprus (2010). British bases in Cyprus serve as springboard for US-British intervention in the region.

Luis Holden/Crown Copyright



needs so that these become “social property”, and how will the people be “at the helm of power”? That remains a mystery. Here we have two banks of a river but with no bridge to link them. The KKE walks on the path of social democracy, dividing its programme into a minimum programme limited to reforms in the framework of capitalism, as in the strike, and a maximum programme of “scientific, centralised planning...with the toilers, the people, at the helm of power” relegated to a foggy, indeterminate future.

But why is there no bridge? The KKE is incapable of building a bridge between the necessary struggle now and the struggle for revolution because its programme is opposed to the fight for national liberation. The KKE's programme leads to capitulation as much to the imperialists as to the national bourgeoisie, as was shown

many illusions that Syriza would get a better deal with the EU and that it would fight against the imperialists.

In 2015 Syriza held a referendum on EU-dictated austerity, hoping for a “yes” vote. That would have been the best outcome for Syriza and the EU, handing them a *mandate* to devastate the proletariat. For revolutionaries, opposition to imperialism is not simply a question of tactics but a question of *principle*. Our task was to expose the fact that Syriza was incapable of leading a fight against the imperialists and to show the masses that only a proletarian leadership can bring about their emancipation. The *only* revolutionary position on the referendum was “no”, with *no* support to the government. The KKE leadership criminally refused to take a position against the imperialists and called on workers to spoil

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Greece...

(continued from page 9)

their ballots, thus aiding the “yes” vote. The victory of the “no” vote was a loud and clear message that the imperialist parasites could go to hell, and it came about *despite* and *against* the KKE, which weakened the struggle against imperialism.

The referendum result showed that the masses were determined to fight. In the face of the result and massive protests, Syriza prime minister Alexis Tsipras turned white. His imperialist bosses said: “You have won, but Greece has lost.” The masses had been deceived before the referendum. But following the “no” vote, its overturning by Germany and Syriza’s sell-out, the government was weakened and exposed. What was posed was an *open* confrontation with the imperialists and the local bourgeoisie.

The role of revolutionaries was to provide a revolutionary pole to transform the rage of the masses into a revolutionary situation. The working class had to be organised to fight. We said “ENOUGH!” and organised a campaign with precisely that perspective. We directed agitation towards unions and left organisations and fought to build workers action committees linking the struggle against imperialist subjugation with the overthrow of *all* the oppressors and the formation of a workers government. We did our duty while the KKE and the left literally went on holiday. They criminally refused to take up our call and to set the masses in struggle, bringing about an enormous defeat for the workers. The KKE leadership, with its dominant role in the workers movement, has the greatest responsibility. It clearly did not want to lead the workers in a struggle against the euro and the EU when it was posed concretely, thus rescuing the local capitalists at the same time.

To justify its position, the KKE claims to this day that voting down the austerity package drawn up by the Troika (IMF, EU and European Central Bank) was equivalent to an indirect vote for Syriza’s own austerity package and, by extension, support for its government. This position sounds orthodox in that it apparently opposes both the bourgeoisie and the imperialists. However, the Stalinists fall into ultraleftism. This arises from the KKE’s position that Greece is an imperialist country and leads to a betrayal of the struggle for national liberation. The KKE’s position that the fight against imperialist subjugation is counterposed to the fight against the



Athens, June 2015: Thousands protest in leadup to referendum on EU starvation plan. Despite massive “no” vote, Syriza sold out to imperialists. Left: Trotskyist Group of Greece said, “Enough!”, called on workers to repudiate sell-out to imperialists and fight for workers rule.

national bourgeoisie leads inevitably, as shown in 2015, to capitulation to both the imperialists and the bourgeoisie. *Break with the treacherous leadership of the KKE! For the reforging of the Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution!*

For common class struggle of Turkish and Greek workers!

It is important for the working class to understand that in every serious struggle it undertakes, the capitalists will attempt to divert such struggle by whipping up chauvinism against Turkey. For workers to be able to fight for their interests, it is essential to combat chauvinism with a programme that will unite Greek and Turkish working people.

The war in Ukraine has exacerbated tensions between the Greek and Turkish bourgeoisies, who fight over who will get a bigger slice of the pie, from natural gas to competing claims on the islands. Constant threats from both sides are daily news. The goals of both bourgeoisies are reactionary. Using national unity, they set workers against each other in order to advance their own interests. For the working class of each country it is criminal to take the side of one of the two capitalist classes.

The imperialists turn one country against the other in order to ensure their dominance in the region. Greece and Turkey are both brutally oppressed by the imperialists,

against whom the workers have a *common interest* in fighting. The only way for workers to satisfy their needs for cheap gas, electricity etc is to seize natural resources from the claws of the oppressors through class unity against both the imperialists and their own bourgeoisies. The revolutionary unity of Turkish and Greek workers would be an enormous blow against imperialist domination in the region and would also advance the struggle for revolution in the imperialist centres. This can only happen with a programme for proletarian power.

The greatest obstacle to this perspective is the KKE, which imbues the proletariat with anti-Turkish chauvinism, chaining it to the national bourgeoisie and deceiving it as to who its real enemy is. The KKE writes that national unity is a trap and that the workers and the bourgeoisie have opposing interests. Indeed! But let’s look at what the KKE’s real position is. For many years they have moaned that successive Greek governments have accepted the framework of “co-dominance” (joint control) with Turkey and that:

“Greece has accepted, in the framework of exploratory meetings with Turkey, not to unilaterally expand its territorial waters in some places that disturb Turkey and to maintain them at six rather than the 12 nautical miles which they are entitled to according to Maritime Law.”

—“The Greek government on the Aegean— It has accepted the framework of co-dominance”, *Rizospastis* (10 August 2011)

Expansion of territorial waters and exploitation of energy sources by the Greek capitalists at the expense of Turkey is *against* the interests of the working class. The KKE openly upholds the aims of the Greek bourgeoisie against Turkey regarding exploitation of natural resources in the Aegean and the southeast Mediterranean. In its efforts to further advance the interests of the Greek capitalists, it criticises various governments for not *sufficiently* defending Greece’s territorial and sovereign rights against Turkey. All of its left rhetoric against national unity is exposed as a lie and is used to cover its support to the ruling class. The only ones who are going to exploit the hydrocarbons are the imperialists, against both countries. In addition, the KKE’s defence of the international law of the sea—a law of the imperialists—is criminal. It means defending the imperialist status quo in the region.

The KKE rails against New Democracy [ND, current ruling party]:

“Of course the government silences what the maps it presents ‘shout out’. In other words, *the unacceptable claims of the Turkish bourgeoisie in the framework of its bartering with the Greek bourgeoisie, which are being ‘built up’ step by step, reinforced by ‘allies and partners’, constantly pushed to the ‘negotiating’ table with the goal of Euro-Atlantic cohesion in the Eastern Mediterranean area, at whose altar Greek and Cypriot sovereign rights are sacrificed.*”

—“Erdogan urges Greece to ‘Come to your senses and demilitarise the islands’, in the presence of Americans and French”, *Rizospastis* (10 June 2022)

The KKE talks about “unacceptable claims of the Turkish bourgeoisie”. What about the claims of the Greek bourgeoisie? Are these not unacceptable? We Trotskyists have a straight answer: they are reactionary. In addition, the KKE’s opposition to NATO/EU is based on the imperialists supporting the aims of the Turkish bourgeoisie, ie they’re not on the side of Greece! While it’s true that the imperialists threaten the national sovereignty of Greece, the KKE’s opposition to NATO/EU is not based on the fact that they rape the country but rather that they weaken the Greek bourgeoisie’s position against Turkey. And of course the Stalinists refuse to recognise that Turkey’s national sovereignty is *also* sacrificed under imperialism.

The KKE uses the masses’ powerful anti-imperialist sentiment, their yearning for peace and a better life and exploits their just hatred of the humiliation imposed by the imperialists for decades, all in order to divert their anger towards Turkey. The KKE’s appeals that the imperialists represent a threat to sovereignty, its calls to close NATO bases and for Greece to exit NATO are used as a working-class cover for its cowardly call on the Greek bourgeoisie to adopt the KKE’s programme as a better defence of Greek capitalism against Turkey, outside of the imperialist NATO/EU alliances. The KKE pushes an alternative policy for the Greek capitalists that would better serve their interests.

The KKE divides the proletariat of both countries and thus impedes the struggle against imperialism. The workers of both countries need a leadership that instils class unity: Greek workers will not be emancipated if they do not fight the oppression of



Spartacist no 67,
August 2022
An organ of
revolutionary Marxism
£2 (56 pages)
Order from/pay to:
Spartacist Publications
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their class brothers in Turkey and vice versa. **Down with the EU and NATO! Greece/Turkey out of NATO! Close all imperialist bases in Greece, Turkey and the Balkans! Out of the EU/Euro! For the Soviet United States of Europe, united on a voluntary basis!**

State and revolution: Leninism v Stalinism

For the workers to win substantive reforms, they will need to **confront the capitalist state**. The ruling class will give nothing to the toilers unless it fears that it's in danger of losing everything. In a general strike the bourgeoisie and its state will strike back, mobilising strikebreakers, police, fascists, even the army. The workers must be able to defend themselves. The KKE is an obstacle to that because its programme is based on collaboration with the state; it administers the bourgeois state in the city of Patra and supports the police. In a *Rizospastis* article headlined, "The police should support the KKE, which is their most valuable supporter in their struggle" (16-17 March 2019), they boast that a cop said:

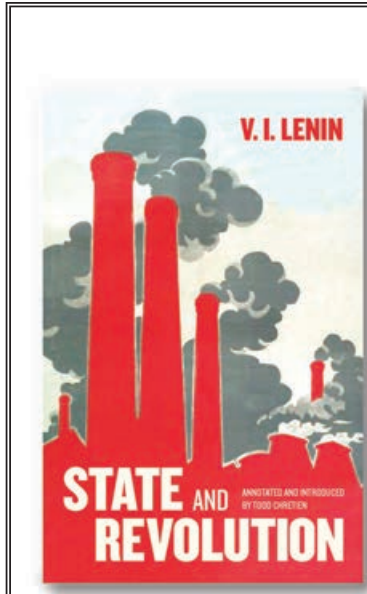
"The KKE is our valuable supporter, in order for active and retired police officers to organise our own resistance for our just demands through our associations and our fellowship with the workers'-people's movement.

"It supports us in organising our struggle together with the people against the consequences of the anti-people policy which hurts the police and the rest of the working people and daily makes the poor poorer."

We cannot imagine Lenin mobilising the working class in defence of the cops' "just" demands. Supporting their "struggle" means supporting better salaries, better weaponry for more effective repression of the workers movement. The KKE deceives the people with the lie that the cops are part of the workers movement and that they should fight together against capitalism. They present the police — who are the core of the state along with the army and the courts — not as the instrument of oppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie but as a force which can be used in the interests of the toilers against the "anti-people policy". This is the very definition of class collaboration! **"Our slogan must be: arming of the proletariat to defeat, expropriate and disarm the bourgeoisie"** (Lenin, *The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution*, September 1916 [emphasis ours]).

For Marxists it is clear that reforms cannot be won in collaboration with the police. **Cops, security guards, prison guards out of the unions, the workers movement and the KKE!** As Lenin said, "They Have Forgotten the Main Thing" (May 1917):

"Separated as it is from the people, forming a professional caste of men trained in the



Graphic based on photograph by N Alexeyev

Leaders of great October Revolution of 1917 fought intransigently against all opportunists to build an international revolutionary party as the precondition for world socialist revolution.



practice of violence upon the poor, men who receive somewhat higher pay and the privileges that go with authority (to say nothing of 'gratuities'), the police everywhere, in every republic, however democratic, where the bourgeoisie is in power, always remains the unyielding weapon, the chief support and protection of the bourgeoisie. No important radical reforms in favour of the working masses can be implemented through the police. That is objectively impossible."

The KKE also runs the state in Patra! And it does so in the only way it can be done: applying the state's repressive apparatus on a local level, using it against the workers. Just like Syriza, ND and other mayors, the KKE mayor organises the municipal police, hires and fires municipal employees, devises urban planning at the behest of capitalist investors etc. Let's also not forget that they imposed the lockdowns, suppressing and locking up thousands at home, implementing remote work, burdening women with an additional load at home etc. Patra KKE mayor Peletidis plays an even more pernicious role than mayors from bourgeois parties, sowing illusions that under a "communist" mayor the state can be reformed and can act to benefit the workers. Not only will everything stay as it is — private property, bourgeois democracy and the accompanying misery and high cost of living — but running the capitalist state even on a local level means defending all of this.

In regard to the 9 November strike, Peletidis said, "Together with the people we will not sacrifice our future; we will fight together, we will struggle, we will overthrow them" ("Decisive message of escalation in 9 November strike", 902.gr, 18 October 2022). How will that come to pass when the KKE itself constitutes a part of the capitalist state? The KKE has its feet on two boats. On the one hand it mobilises the workers, on the other it runs Patra, doing the dirty work of the central power. The fact that the KKE runs Patra demonstrates its programme for "people's power" **in practice**. As Rosa Luxemburg wrote:

"The character of a bourgeois government isn't determined by the personal character of its members, but by its organic function in bourgeois society... With the entry of a socialist into the government, and class domination continuing to exist, the bourgeois government doesn't transform itself into a socialist government, but a socialist transforms himself into a bourgeois minister..."

"While in parliament, or on the municipal council, we obtain useful reforms by combating the bourgeois government, while occupying a ministerial post we arrive at the

same reforms by supporting the bourgeois state. The entry of a socialist into a bourgeois government is not, as it is thought, a partial conquest of the bourgeois state by the socialists, but a partial conquest of the socialist party by the bourgeois state."

— "The Dreyfus Affair and the Millerand Case" (1899)

The KKE can answer us that Peletidis enacts measures for the working people and the poor in Patra. While we are for whatever improves workers' lives, this is still in the realm of "social policy": not only does it not call the capitalist system into question but, on the contrary, it reinforces the idea that we can have a more humane capitalism. Lenin denounced the petty-bourgeois opportunism of "municipal socialism", saying that "if the bourgeoisie allows, tolerates 'municipal socialism', it is because the latter does not touch the **foundations** of its rule... the **important** sources of its wealth", and that "they forget that so long as the bourgeoisie rules as a class it cannot allow any encroachments... upon the real **foundations** of its rule" ("The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution, 1905-1907", December 1907). In opposition to the KKE's hoax that the state can be reformed, the working people must be conscious that they cannot take over the existing state apparatus and wield it in their interests. It is necessary to smash the capitalist state and replace it with the dictatorship of the proletariat. That is the fundamental dividing line between reform and revolution.

The KKE's reformist programme is at the heart of why general strikes are carried out

in the form of parades. The lesson is that even the struggle for reforms has to be part of a revolutionary programme with the goal of a workers government under a revolutionary leadership.

We need a **real** general strike which will fight for:

- Decent homes for all through expropriation of the church's property and the luxury homes of the ruling class! Take back the homes stolen by the banks!
 - Division of existing work among all available hands with no loss in pay! Decent wages and pensions for all pegged to the cost of living!
 - Expropriation of the strategic branches of the economy without compensation: ports, shipyards, rail, transport, maritime industry, the state electricity supplier DEI!
 - Common struggle of Greek, Turkish, German and other workers against the EU/NATO imperialists!
 - For industrialisation of the country to create additional jobs!
 - For a free, quality healthcare system for all!
 - For workers control of food distribution and prices!
 - Cancel the debt! Down with the EU and the euro!
 - For the national liberation of Greece through socialist revolution!
- Fight with us to forge a party that Lenin and Trotsky would be proud of. ■

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Publication of the Trotskyist Group of Greece

O Bolevnikov no 7, December 2022

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Αρκετά με τις Ήττες!
Οι Εργάτες Χρειάζονται
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13 Νοεμβρίου - Ο μαρξισμός είναι η μόνη ιδεολογία που μπορεί να οδηγήσει στην υπέρβαση της καπιταλιστικής κοινωνίας. Για να πετύχουμε αυτό, χρειαζόμαστε μια προγραμματική κίνηση. Η προγραμματική κίνηση είναι η βάση για την επαναστατική δράση. Με την προγραμματική κίνηση, οι εργατολόγοι μπορούν να οργανώσουν την επαναστατική δράση. Η προγραμματική κίνηση είναι η βάση για την επαναστατική δράση. Με την προγραμματική κίνηση, οι εργατολόγοι μπορούν να οργανώσουν την επαναστατική δράση.

Για μια Κυβέρνηση Εργατών!

Greece: Enough defeats!

Workers need a programme for victory!

The following is translated from *O Bolshvikos no 7* (December 2022), published by the Trotskyist Group of Greece.

The imperialists along with the Greek ruling class have ransacked the country. Ever greater imperialist enslavement is paid for with the blood of working people: privatisation of ports and shipyards, factory closures; attacks on unions, on healthcare, on education and on union rights. Inflation is increasing the cost of basic goods and electricity. One crisis follows another: the crisis which began more than ten years ago; Germany's overturn of the result of the 2015 referendum on European Union austerity; Syriza's sell-out to the EU and the banks; the government's disastrous policies in the pandemic and in the Ukraine war; the current crisis. The masses have been impoverished, the lower layers of the petty bourgeoisie ruined. Their immediate needs on every question collide with the basic pillar of the capitalist system: private ownership of the means of production.

Struggle *now* is urgently needed to meet the needs of working people and to link that with the fight to liberate the country from imperialist subjugation and establish a workers government. The workers must take power into their hands, sweep away all the useless parasites and **run the country from top to bottom**. With the working class in charge and the profit motive cut out, the scourges of price gouging, unemployment and expensive housing



Athens, 9 November 2022: Construction workers march during 24-hour strike. Workers' interests are betrayed by reformist programme of their leaders.

can all be rapidly eliminated.

But why is it that—in a country where socialism is part of the everyday vocabulary of the whole left, where there is a mass Communist Party (KKE) and a proletariat that has fought like no other in Europe—not only has there not been a seizure of power but living conditions have got worse? This brings us to the nub of the problem. There

is a gigantic gulf between what the toilers need and the political solutions provided by the leadership of the KKE, as well as of the trade unions and the left.

What is to be done?

We need low-cost heating, free quality healthcare and education for all; jobs, decent pensions and wages. We just had a “general”

strike on 9 November. The strike showed two things: workers want to fight and the strike did not end in victory. Why? Workers deserve an answer. Trade union organisations GSEE, ADEDY and PAME called workers out on strike with important demands to benefit the lives of the working masses. What were some of those basic demands and what were the tasks posed for the proletariat? Was it in fact a general strike?

The KKE calls for “rent subsidy for workers'-people's households, students and small businesses, broadening the criteria for inclusion and an increase in the subsidy”, “no worker's or people's home without electricity, water or telephone”, “collective agreements and wage increases based on the increase in inflation” and “stable jobs with rights; no to unpaid overtime” (*Panergatiki* no 15, September 2022). We agree. But what did the KKE/PAME leaders do to prepare the general strike to win those demands? The workers' basic necessities cannot be won with routine trade union methods, a symbolic 24-hour strike that was essentially a parade and then back to work. Greece provides an example of how numerous strikes have brought only minimal results.

What is needed is an offensive by the entire working class against the bosses in the form of a **real** general strike, ie a political strike, an organised struggle with the aim of forcing the enemy to retreat. That would be guaranteed to wrest the most

continued on page 9

For national liberation! For a workers government!