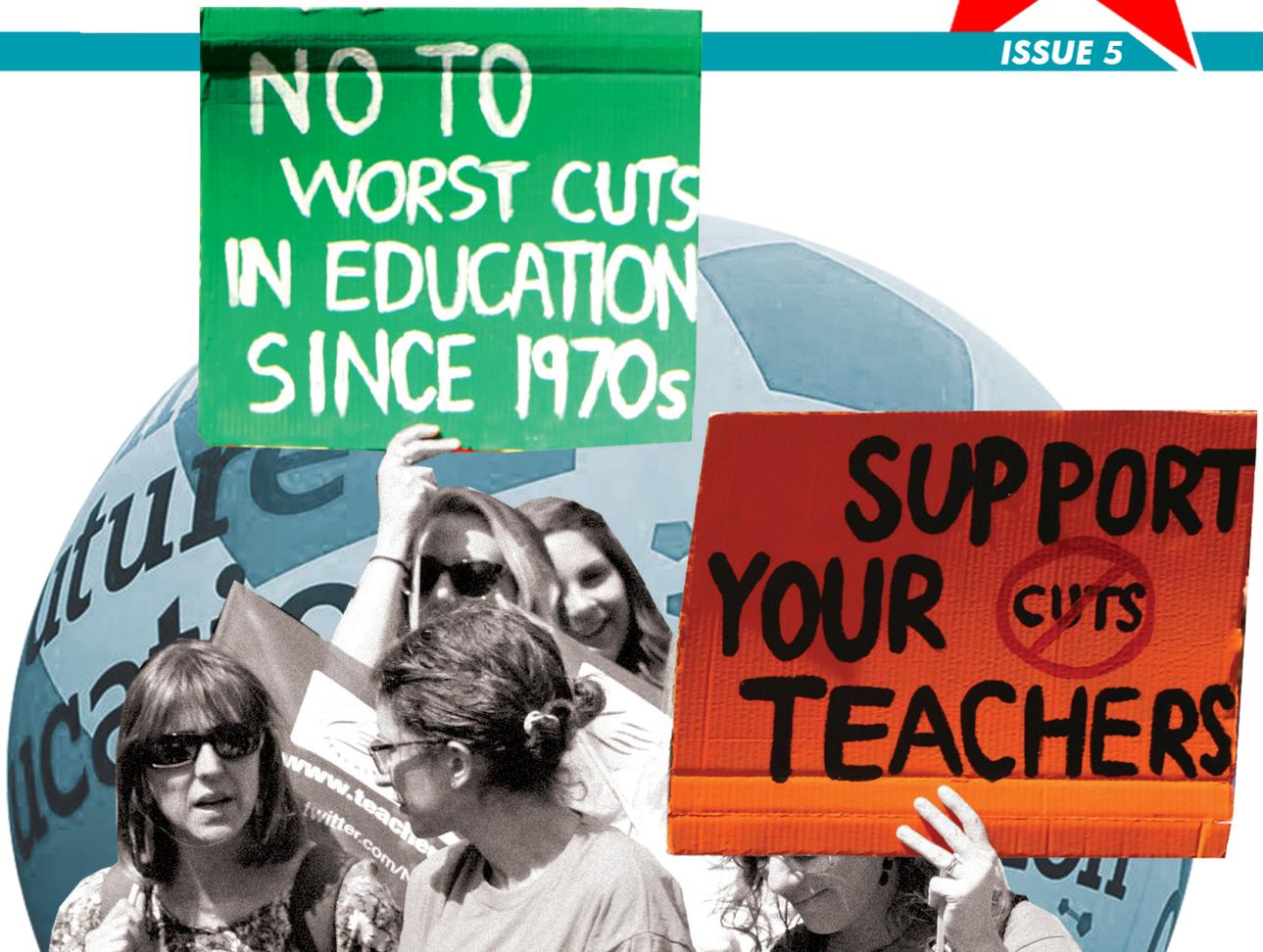


NEU SOCIALIST APPEAL SUPPORTERS



ISSUE 5



UNITE THE STRUGGLES TO TOPPLE THE TORIES VICTORY TO THE TEACHERS!

Editorial

Around 300,000 teachers – organised in the National Education Union (NEU) – are set to strike across 23,400 schools for multiple days in February and March, fighting for a fully-funded, above-inflation pay rise.

Amongst NEU members in England, 90.4% voted Yes, on a turnout of 53.3%. Similar numbers were achieved in Wales.

While the struggle is formally about pay, conditions for teachers and students have

also sharply declined. A decade of Tory cuts to local services, falling real wages, the lingering impact of COVID, and diminishing school budgets have all led to an acute staff retention crisis.

According to one recent report, two in three teachers have considered leaving the profession in the past year. 75% report that they are stressed, with half regularly experiencing insomnia. And no wonder: the average teacher works 54 hours a week.

Stress, workload, poor recruitment, and high turnaround of staff are now in a

self-fulfilling downward spiral, which feeds off systemic underfunding.

This has been further exacerbated by academisation, which has created a layer of fat-cat CEOs at the top, who do nothing but draw six-figure salaries.

Support workers

The Tories' proposed austerity budget asks schools to either burn through their savings in order to pay staff and heat classrooms, or to start swinging the axe when it comes to jobs.

(continues from previous page)

Almost half of all head teachers have reported that these plans will lead to staff cuts, including teaching assistants (TAs) and teachers, further degrading education.

When it comes to cuts, it is always the most vulnerable who are the first to suffer.

Over the past decade, TAs have seen their responsibilities go from setting up the classroom and providing small group support, to effectively acting as unqualified teachers.

Alongside teaching assistants, Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) – employed on the same poverty wages – have been used to fill the gaps left behind by cuts and closures of Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision.

LSAs teach children with intensive needs. Yet they receive extremely limited training, resources, or support. SEN students still in mainstream education, meanwhile, are often seen as little more than cash cows for unscrupulous profiteers.

TAs and LSAs are the poorest paid education workers. And due to shrinking school budgets, they will be the first to face the chop.

In the NEU's recent ballot, support staff in England have organised alongside teachers to fight back against the government's attacks on education and pay. 84.1% voted Yes to strike action, but unfortunately the ballot fell just short of the anti-union threshold, with a 46.5% turnout.

This result is partially due to the divisive antics of the right-wing Unison leaders and bureaucracy, who have been hindering attempts by the NEU to organise support staff on a firmer basis.

Education unions

The NEU has shown applaudable militancy, demonstrating that a political campaign aimed at raising workers' sights succeeds.

By contrast, some leaders in NASUWT act like workers can be turned on and off like a tap. Consequently, after years of holding back members from taking action, when asked to strike on this occasion, only 42% turned out to vote in the union's ballot.

The NEU, meanwhile, has energised huge layers of the membership – mobilising activists by linking the strike ballot and pay campaign to the burning need for a wider transformation of education.

By raising the sights of teachers in this way, the NEU has succeeded in smashing through the Tories' anti-union barriers.

The NASUWT must take these lessons on board, if it is to successfully reballoon and bring even more education workers onto the frontlines of Britain's growing strike wave.

Coordinated action

The NEU has announced a number of strike days over the next couple of months. But the 'day of action' on 1 February will be of particular importance.

Hundreds of thousands of teachers will be coordinating action with PCS, who are mobilising 100,000 of their members in the civil service in protest against the Tories' proposed anti-strike laws, and to continue their struggle over pay, jobs, and conditions.

They will be joined by 70,000 UCU members in higher education, and train drivers organised in the RMT and ASLEF, making this the most significant united strike action for over a decade, since the 2011 public sector pensions dispute.

This joint action will give a major impetus not just to the education unions and other workers in the public sector, but to the entire labour movement.

Education workers in Ontario, Canada, recently faced a similar situation, with the right-wing government attempting to ban their strike over pay. In the end, only the threat of a province-wide general strike was enough to force the ruling class to retreat. TUC leaders – take note!

Where next?

Across the board – from nurses and ambulance drivers in the NHS, through to teachers and lecturers in education – workers have indicated that they are ready to fight. And unions such as NEU, PCS, and RMT have shown the way forward, taking steps to coordinate action.

Unfortunately, however, it often feels that the TUC are not leading from the front, but running to catch-up and hold back workers.

Instead of organising a mass campaign of coordinated strikes and protests, the TUC leaders have made vague announcements about a 'day of action', which the left-led unions have then correctly filled with their own militant content.

And rather than calling for the trade union movement to break the Tories' anti-union shackles, by defying their repressive laws, the TUC is attempting to plead with the government for a negotiated truce and compromise.

This is no time for hesitation or timidity. All these struggles need to be united into a mass movement capable of kicking the Tories out.

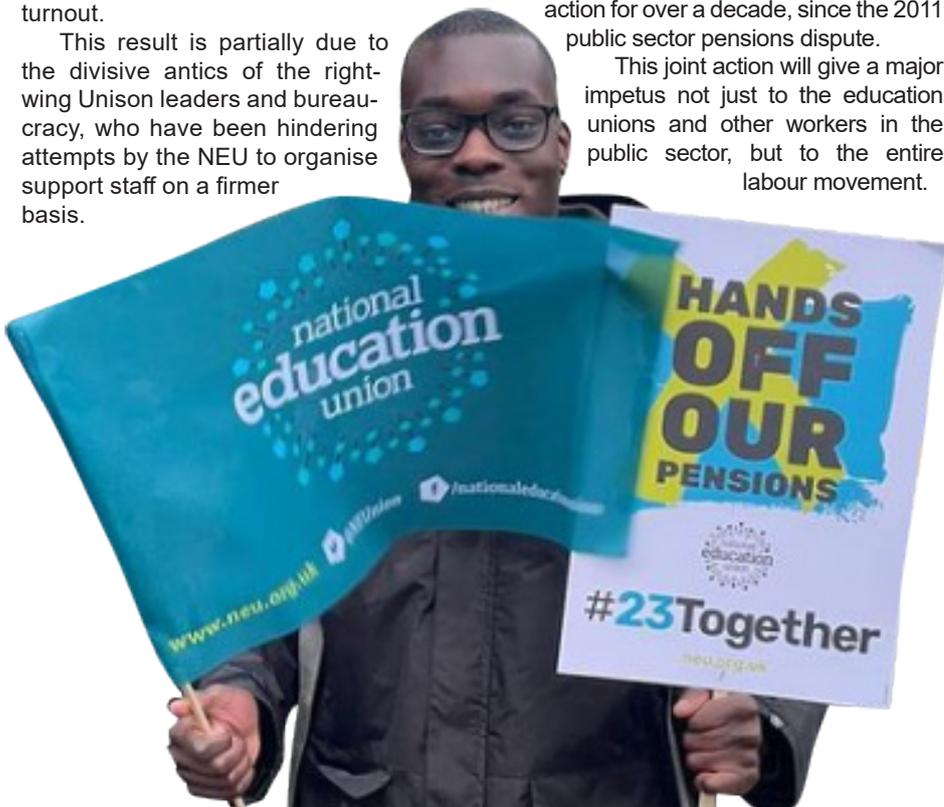
Workers should rely on their own strength. Cross-union committees of action must be formed at a rank-and-file level, bringing together activists in every workplace to coordinate strikes locally, in order to have the maximum impact.

This should be linked to building for a public-sector-wide strike, as part of a mass campaign of rolling action across the trade unions.

The aim must be to bring down this tottering Tory government; end the attacks on education and other public services; and sweep away the whole capitalist system that lies at the root of austerity and inflation.

We demand:

- A fully-funded pay rise, linked to inflation with a sliding (rising) scale of wages!
- A mass recruitment drive, led by the unions, to massively increase staffing levels and reduce workloads for all teachers!
- Kick the bosses and corporations out of education! Staff, not businesses, should run our schools!
- Coordinate strike action through cross-union rank-and-file committees! Join up the strikes from top to bottom!
- Fund education through expropriation! Make the billionaires and bankers pay for this crisis! ■



WHO DECIDES TEACHERS' PAY?

Alex Randall

Nottingham NEU

(personal capacity)

With multiple public sector unions now on strike over pay and unions withdrawing from the “independent” pay review bodies, we republish this updated article on what Independent Pay Review Bodies actually represent.

Having now smashed the Tory anti-union threshold, the NEU will be taking its teachers out on strike in defence of their pay and conditions.

Initially the government offered a 3% increase last year, but facing pressure from the unions this was generously increased - to a whole 5%!

Of course - and as the unions have pointed out - with inflation remaining in double-digits, in real terms this is effectively a large pay cut.

Facing this attack on conditions, alongside massive workloads, teachers and education staff are faced with little choice but to strike.

Recommendations and “rises”

This pay ‘rise’ was made on the recommendation of the School Teachers Review Body (the STRB). This ‘independent’ body produces the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document each year, setting out recommendations to the government on how much teachers should be paid.

So who sits on this body and gets to determine teachers' living standards and working conditions? Is it the teachers themselves? Representatives from the teacher's unions?

Of course not. The current body is chaired by the director of a real estate company, and the rest of its membership is a similar mix of CEOs and corporate types, all from or closely tied to big business.

In other words it is big business that gets to decide how teachers are paid, with teachers getting no say. Of course the STRB are not expected to make the same sacrifices. While proposing pay cuts for teachers, they are generously rewarded for their time. For the 25 days they work they are paid £300 a day, amounting to £7500.

This shows the supposed ‘independence’ of this body for the sham it is. What this really means is that it is independent from the workers!



The Tory government at the head of the state ultimately acts in the interest of big business, and a so-called ‘Labour’ government led by Keir Starmer would be little better, as Starmer has shown again and again he is a loyal servant of the same people.

The state

We are told the state, which the STRB is part of, is a neutral arbiter fairly representing the interests of all. But this clearly exposes the real situation.

This is just one instance of the general picture we are seeing in the current crisis. Inflation skyrockets and workers wages are pushed down across the board all while corporate profits continue to skyrocket.

The capitalist class is making the workers pay for the crisis of capitalism, all while they get ever richer. And in order to ensure this remains stable, the state steps in to “manage” the expectations of workers in the hopes of keeping them compliant.

The Tory government at the head of the state ultimately acts in the interest of big business, and a so-called ‘Labour’ government led by Keir Starmer would be little better, as Starmer has shown again and again he is a loyal servant of the same people.

Workers' control

So long as teachers' pay is left in their hands to decide, teachers will remain at the mercy of big business.

The state is, as Lenin said, ‘bound by a thousand threads’ to the capitalist class. The capitalist class needs to push down workers wages to keep their huge profits, and the Tory government is more than happy to oblige.

Instead of the bosses earning thousands for deciding to cut teachers' pay, the bosses should be the ones to pay for a fully funded education system - and more! - through the nationalisation of the top 100 monopolies.

However, to get to that point workers' confidence, including that of teachers and education staff, must be built up. They must see clearly the strength they possess - and that can only come about if they flex their muscles. A strong showing in this strike is therefore vital. ■

LESSONS FROM THE CANADIAN EDUCATION STRIKE

Maurice Gagnon

On Sunday 30th October 2022, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) announced an Ontario-wide education strike involving 55,000 workers for the following Friday.

The Conservative government, led by Doug Ford, responded immediately. They turned to the courts, rendering the workers' strike illegal and imposing an austerity contract.

Rather than crushing the dispute, however, Ford's government soon found themselves forced into a humiliating U-turn. But what led to this and what lessons does it hold for education workers in Britain?

Austerity and Cuts

Over the past decade, education workers have sustained 11% wage cuts from Liberal and Conservative wage restraints, now compounded by 8.1% inflation. CUPE were demanding \$3.25 an hour (around 11%) over three years to recoup lost wages.

Instead, Education Minister Stephen Lecce tabled back-to-work legislation and forced through a contract capping wages at 2.5%. To add insult to injury, sick pay, previously processed by the employer, was made the responsibility of employees.

Finally, the notwithstanding clause the Ontario government introduced was meant to prevent any possibility of legal challenge by unions or workers. Lecce's notwithstanding clause left the union leadership with two choices; to either accept an austerity contract or organise an illegal strike to protect their workers.

The day before the strike, in a final desperate attempt to avoid the fight, the union leadership broke their commitment to open negotiation with its members and halved wage demands to around 6%. The government refused the deal outright and ruled out future negotiations.

All Out

It was only at this point that the leadership committed to organising an illegal strike on Friday 4th November 2022. This categorically shows the importance of involving workers at every level of decision making during disputes.

The day of the strike resulted in the total shutdown of Ontario's education system; 10,000 workers marched out onto the picket lines across the province protesting against the ongoing attacks on the right to strike. Their courage and determination was magnificent.

Feeling the strength of the workers, the president of CUPE Ontario, Fred Hahn, and Laura Walton, president of Ontario Schools Board Council of Unions, called for an indefinite strike.

Meanwhile, the actions of Doug Ford's government and the response of CUPE workers had an electric effect across the labour movement.

According to polls 68% of parents opposed the government and 48% of residents were in favour of an illegal strike to settle the dispute. This figure was considerably higher across unionised workers, amounting to 65% of private sector and 70% of public sector workers.

Over the weekend, amidst heated union discussions, news broke of a general strike planned for the following Monday by

the Ontario trade unions. This proved the tipping point; the Ford government knew it couldn't face down a united movement of Ontario's workers.

Go All the Way!

Ford hastily called a press briefing, and introduced a humiliating U-turn in exchange for CUPE workers' return to work. It cannot be overstated that this unprecedented move from the government would not have been possible without the threat of a general mobilisation in the province.

Unfortunately, this magnificent victory was not seized upon by the CUPE leaders. Instead of demanding the full wage increase their members had faced down the law for, they buckled and accepted a rotten deal instead.

This demonstrates the vital role that leadership plays in workers' struggle. The magnificent strength of the working class was graphically demonstrated, but without determined leaders armed with a proper perspective for struggle, the potential of the strike was leached away.

Opportunities to beat anti-worker legislation don't come often, and they must be seized with both hands when they arrive. What is needed is a bold, decisive leadership willing to go all the way, and a programme of action to unite workers around. What is needed, in short, are the ideas and methods of Marxism.

This will not be the end of the struggle in Ontario. The CUPE workers have shown they can fight. We must take their lessons on board; if our movement stands united under a determined leadership, then we can beat our own anti-union laws. ■

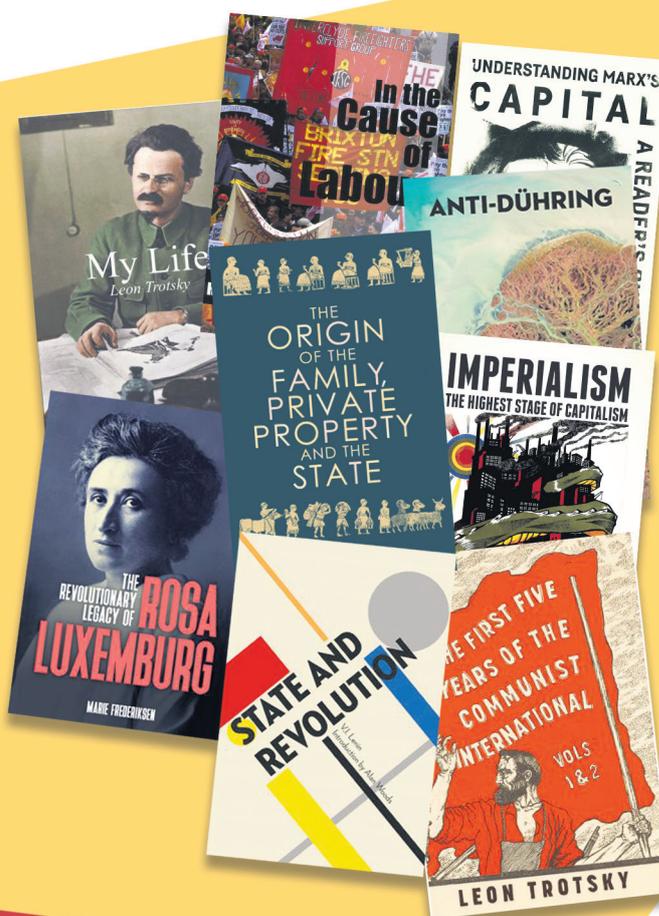


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TEACHER RETENTION



MAKE THE BOSSES PAY!

Tom Soud

Birmingham NEU

(personal capacity)

Rishi Sunak has announced plans to make maths compulsory until the age of 18, citing the benefits to Britain of doing so. He might want to check his sums, though. When it comes to the staff needed to carry this policy out, teacher retention numbers just don't add up.

Teacher recruitment has been in crisis for a decade. It took a global pandemic for the DfE to finally hit its target in September 2020. But the triumph was short lived, as in autumn only 59% of 21,000 trainees the DfE had hoped to recruit actually joined the ranks of the UK's teachers.

Broken down on a subject-by-subject level, the numbers are startling. 44% of science teachers, 34% of MFL teachers and only 17% of necessary physics teachers were recruited. To quote the head of ASCLL "this is nothing short of a catastrophe".

Those who are recruited don't last long, either. Already a third of the teachers who gained QTS in the 2010s have left the profession. The 2020s are not looking much better, as 13% of those teachers who qualified since 2019 are already gone.

Overwork

Workload, stress and pay are consuming staff left, right and centre. Three quarters of school staff report being stressed and a third have symptoms indicative of depression. The result is burnout and demoralisation for staff, and poorer teaching for kids.

Whilst the bosses' press pins the blame on 'lazy' teachers, the truth is that the average teacher works a staggering 54 hours a week - a significant chunk of which they are not paid for at all.

Those who hope to find respite by moving up the career ladder, meanwhile, are in for a nasty shock. 87% of SLT report poor mental health, and 60% of heads have considered leaving the profession entirely due to workload and stress.

Covid, inflation, cuts, academisation, political instability and the resulting complete collapse of morale have left the entire education sector in crisis. A third of teachers are already actively looking for a new profession.

A systemic crisis

A decent education system requires investment. However, the past decades have seen precisely the opposite occur, as successive governments have sought to restore the profitability and competitiveness of British capitalism through swingeing cuts to public services.

In particular, this has hammered the education sector. Sunak's much-vaunted extra £2.3bn for schools only represents a 3% increase in real per pupil funding compared to that which was given in 2010.

In order to try and get around this shortfall, schools have been forced to increase both workloads and class sizes. And in terms of funding, academisation has been pushed as the answer.

In reality, academisation worsens conditions, breaks unions and concentrates power in the hands of CEOs. Real cuts to teachers' pay are inflicted year after year under the cover of the supposedly independent School Teacher Review Body (STRB).

To try and deal with the blockages, the Department for Education has simply introduced pre-planned lessons, draconian work routines and an Orwellian obsession with consistency and observation. As a result, today's classrooms feel less like a place of education and more like an assembly line on the factory floor.

Socialist solutions

Reading the STRB's report, it is clear that the Tories have no solutions whatsoever for our problems. Neither can we expect much help from Starmer's Labour. They have made clear that they will carry out similar cuts to the Tories, although they will of course feel very bad about it as they do so.

The wealth to solve the problems of education exists in society, whatever the mouthpieces of the ruling class say. The problem is that it's in the hands of a small few, who've taken it by exploiting the labour of the majority. You only need to look at the staggering amounts of money and resources the big banks sit on to know that.

By nationalising the finance-houses and monopolies that control this wealth and putting it to work, we could end the retention crisis; employ more staff; cut working hours in half and complete a thousand other unsolved tasks facing the education sector.

That is the potential of a socialist society, one which does not place profit above proper education. That is what we're fighting for. Join us! ■



THE 1926 GENERAL STRIKE



NINE DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD

Socialist Appeal

With the resurgence of the industrial struggle in Britain, the question of a general strike is once again being discussed within the labour movement. This article, originally published in Socialist Appeal in May 2019, looks at the last (and only) time Britain experienced a general strike in 1926, and the lessons for activists today.

Beginning on 3 May 1926, a General Strike swept Britain. Lasting for nine days, the strike showed the enormous power and solidarity of the working class.

The situation that gave rise to the strike had been prepared for years in advance. British capitalism had emerged from the First World War considerably weakened. Rather than investing in advanced machinery to compete with the USA and Germany, the British ruling class responded by attacking wages and conditions.

Miners in particular were expected to accept a 13% reduction in their wages, whilst working an extra hour each day. Feeling the pressure from below, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) responded by threatening the government with a general strike.

Government mobilises...

The government retreated temporarily, in order to prepare for an all-out struggle. This involved preparing a scab army by the name of the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (OMS), composed of fascists and other right-wing scum. After nine months of preparations, the government went on the offensive.

With the labour movement swinging to the left after the coming to power of the Tories in 1924, the General Council of the TUC was under enormous pressure to act. Workers in all industries correctly saw the miners struggle as their struggle. If the miners were defeated, others would be soon to follow.

On 1 May 1926, the decision to strike was carried by 3,653,527 votes to 49,911

votes at the TUC. Then on 3 May, millions of workers responded to the call to strike, in some cases against the advice of their own trade union leaders.

The TUC leaders, believing that they would reach a settlement with the government, had made no preparations for the strike. To their surprise, and to the shock of the ruling class, workers showed their magnificent capacity to improvise and organise from below.

...Workers respond

Trades Councils in every area formed Councils of Action and strike committees. Nothing could happen without the permission of the working class.

As the strike developed more and more into a struggle against the state, the Councils of Action developed increasingly into organs of self-government. In reality they were the embryos of workers' power.

Militant demonstrations took place in all the main towns and cities. Clashes with the police were commonplace, and thousands of workers were arrested and imprisoned.

Despite attempts to intimidate workers, the strike was unstoppable. More and more workers came out each day, including even unorganised workers.

Millions of workers put short shrift to the resistance of the ruling class. The General Council of the TUC were terrified of the revolutionary implications of the strike, such as the workers' strength.



Betrayal

A general strike inevitably poses the question of power. Either it will lead to the conquest of power by the working class, or a severe defeat for the workers.

Since even the "Lefts" on the General Council lacked any perspective of taking power and overthrowing capitalism, they rejected the political nature of the strike. They did everything they could to "compromise" with the government, i.e. restore order for the capitalists.

Behind the scenes, the General Council completely capitulated to the government, accepting a reduction in the miners' wages, with no guarantees against victimisation.

This news came as a complete shock to the workers, who could feel the enormous power they wielded during the strike. In response to the sell-out, the railwaymen, dockers, engineers, and other sections renewed the strike, in order to prevent it from ending as a complete rout.

Faced with this growing anger, the government announced that the employers must take back the workers without victimisation.

Role of leadership

With the back of the strike broken by its own leadership, workers returned to work in one section after another. The miners held out for another few months but eventually were starved back to work.

Ultimately, the potential existed for the working class to begin the socialist transformation of society. This potential was squandered by the tops of the trade union and labour movement, who consciously led the strike to defeat.

The lessons from this episode are clear: the working class when organised is the most powerful force in society and can bring it to a standstill. But without a revolutionary leadership, it will not achieve victory. Now more than ever, our task is to prepare in advance and build such a revolutionary leadership. That is what Socialist Appeal is seeking to build today. ■

NEU MARXISTS' CHARTER FOR EDUCATION

Teachers and support staff have had to deal with long hours, low pay and chronic overwork for decades in order to deliver the best education possible to the learners in our care. When the pandemic was at its height, we were "key workers." Yet we are the first to be attacked as 'lazy' or 'greedy' for pointing these problems out.

The need to end overwork and guarantee better pay are just two symptoms of the chronic underfunding of education. This has come about because the capitalists and their representatives in Parliament are trying to pass the cost of their system's crisis onto the shoulders of the working class, including education staff.

This cannot be allowed to continue. We believe that only a thoroughgoing socialist programme can end the crushing conditions that staff members face in their workplaces and the degradation of education standards for students. And this means organising to replace capitalism itself with a society in which we are truly in control.

We demand:

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

WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN US

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

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

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

Our tendency therefore stresses the need to educate and train our members in Marxist theory and the struggles of the working class. This gives us considerable advantages. First and foremost, Marxist theory is a guide to action, a guide to the class struggle.

As isolated individuals we can do very little. However, organised together

we can achieve a considerable amount. Organisation allows us to concentrate our forces to much greater effect. Based on correct policies and perspectives, we can intervene effectively in the class struggle.

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

The leadership of the Labour Party is now in the grip of the right wing, who serve the interests of capitalism. This revival is due to the weakness of the left to act decisively, which in turn is a reflection of the weakness of reformism.

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

But the crisis of capitalism is posing massive challenges in front of the working

class. We will fight shoulder to shoulder with those prepared to fight. In doing so, we will point to the future needs of the movement.

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

