

Britain, France, Italy, Germany, Portugal, United States...
Economic attacks are raining down everywhere
Everywhere, the working class is struggling
Everywhere, the bourgeoisie divides us
How can we fight together in a massive
united movement?

In Britain since June the cry has echoed from strike to strike:

“Enough is enough!”

This massive movement, dubbed the “Summer of Anger”, has become the Autumn of Anger, and then the Winter of Anger.

The wave of strikes in the UK is a symbol of workers’ combativity that is developing all over the world:

- In **Spain**, where doctors and paediatricians in the Madrid area went on strike at the end of November, as did the airline and rail sectors in December. Further strikes in the health sector are planned for January in many regions.

- In **Germany**, where soaring prices are causing employers to fear the consequences of an unprecedented energy crisis. The large metal and electrical industries underwent a series of slowdowns in November.

- In **Italy**, a strike by air traffic controllers in mid-October was added to that of EasyJet pilots. The government even had to ban all strikes on public holidays.

- In **Belgium**, where national strikes were called on 9 November and 16 December.

- In **Greece**, where a demonstration in Athens in November brought together tens of thousands of workers from the private sector, shouting “The cost of living is unbearable”.

- In **France**, where, in recent months, there have been successive strikes in public transport and hospitals

- In **Portugal**, where workers are demanding a minimum wage of 800 euros, compared to the current 705. On 18 November, the civil service was on strike. In December, there were strikes across the transport sector.

- In the **United States**, the House of Representatives intervened to break an industrial dispute and avoid a rail freight strike. In January, thousands of nurses struck in New York.

The list would be endless because, in reality, there is everywhere a multitude of small strikes, isolated from each other, in different businesses and in the public sector. Because everywhere, in every country, in every sector, living and working conditions are deteriorating, everywhere there are soaring prices and poverty wages, everywhere there is precariousness and flexibility, everywhere there are hellish work rates and not enough workers, everywhere there is a terrible deterioration in housing conditions, particularly for young people.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, hospitals have become the symbol of this daily reality for all workers: being understaffed and overexploited, to the point of exhaustion, for a wage that can no longer pay the bills.

The extended wave of strikes that has since June been hitting the UK, a country where the proletariat seemed resigned to its fate since the Thatcher years, expresses a real break, a change of attitude within the working class, not only in the UK, but internationally. These struggles show that in the face of the deepening crisis, the exploited are no longer prepared to be pushed around.

With inflation at over 11% and the announcement of an austerity

budget by the Sunak government, there have been strikes in almost every sector: Transport (trains, buses, tube, airports) and health, Royal Mail postal workers, civil servants in Defra, Amazon employees, school workers in Scotland, North Sea oil workers... The scale of the mobilisation of health workers has not been seen in this country for over a century! And teachers are expected to strike from February.

In France, the government has also decided to impose a new “reform” making the legal age of retirement later. The aim is simple: to save money by squeezing the working class like a lemon, all the way to the cemetery. In concrete terms, it will mean working old, sick, exhausted or leaving with a reduced and miserable pension. Often, moreover, redundancy will cut the knot in this dilemma before the fateful age.

The attacks on our living conditions will not stop. The global economic crisis will continue to worsen. In order to get by in the international arena of the market and competition, every bourgeoisie in every country will impose increasingly unbearable living and working conditions on the working class, invoking “solidarity with Ukraine” or “the future of the national economy”.

This is even more true with the development of the war economy. An increasing proportion of labour and other resources is directed to the war economy. In Ukraine, but also in Ethiopia, Yemen, Syria, Mali, Niger, Congo, etc., this means bombs, bullets and death! Elsewhere, it means fear, inflation and accelerated work rates. Every government is calling for “sacrifices”!

Faced with a capitalist system which plunges humanity into misery and war, into competition and division, it is up to the working class (wage-earners in all sectors, in all nations, unemployed or working, with or without qualifications, working or retired...) to put forward another perspective. By refusing these “sacrifices”, by developing a massive united struggle, it can show that another world is possible.

Divided, we are weak
Divided, we lose

For months, in all countries and in all sectors, there have been strikes. But they have been isolated from each other. Everyone in their own strike, in their own factory, their depot, their business, their part of the public sector. There is no real link between these struggles, even when it would be just a matter of crossing the street for the strikers from the hospital to meet those from the school or the supermarket opposite. Sometimes this division borders on the ridiculous when, in the same business, strikes are divided by corporation, or team, or unit. You have to imagine office workers on strike at different times to technical staff, or those on the first floor on strike on their own without any connection to those on the second floor. Sometimes this is what actually happens!

The dispersal of strikes, locking everyone in their own corner, plays the game of the bourgeoisie - it weakens us, reduces us to impotence, it exhausts us and leads us to defeat.

That's why the bourgeoisie puts so much energy into maintaining it. In all countries, the same strategy: governments divide. They pretend to support this or that sector to better attack the others. They highlight one sector, or even one company, by making promises that they will never keep, in order to conceal the onslaught of attacks that is taking place everywhere else. In order to better divide, they provide limited support to one group and reduce the rights of all the others. Branch by branch and company by company negotiations are the rule everywhere.

In France, the announcement of the pension reform, which will affect the entire working class, is accompanied by a deafening media "debate" on the unfairness of the reform for this or that section of the population. It should be made fairer by acknowledging the particular qualifications of apprentices, certain manual workers, women... Always the same trap!

Workers must take the struggle into their own hands

Why is there this division? Is it only government propaganda and manoeuvres that succeed in dividing us in this way, keeping the strikes and struggles of the working class separate from each other?

The feeling that we are all in the same boat is growing. The idea that a massive united struggle with widespread solidarity can change the balance of forces between the classes is becoming clearer. So why do we see divisions between workers over many months in every country and in every sector?

In the UK, striking workers traditionally picket outside their place of work. For several months, organised pickets have not been far apart, sometimes taking place only a day apart, sometimes struggles have happened at the same time but with the pickets separated by a few hundred metres but with no attempt to link up together. All on strike, but stranded on the picket line. Without fighting this dispersion, without developing a real unity in the struggle, this could exhaust our fighting spirit. In recent weeks the deadlock and the danger that this situation presents has become more evident. Those workers who have been on 'rolling strikes' over the last six months could now be feeling weary and powerless.

However, on several picket lines we have visited, workers expressed to us their feeling of being involved in a much broader struggle than just with their employer, their department, their sector. There is a growing sense of needing to struggle together.

But for months, in all countries, in all sectors, it is the unions that have been organising all these fragmented struggles. The unions decide the strategy that divides and isolates, and advocates that negotiations take place branch by branch, sector by sector. The unions choose to set out specific demands and the unions warn, above all, that "we will dilute our own struggle if we make common demands".

And yet, the unions have become aware that anger is growing, that it risks overflowing and breaking the barriers that they have built between and within the private sector and public sector. They know that the idea of "a common struggle" is maturing inside the class.

That's why, for example in the UK, unions are starting to talk about joint actions across sectors, which they had been very careful to avoid until now, and the words "unity" and "solidarity" are beginning to appear in their speeches. They won't stop dividing workers, but in order to continue to do so, they are taking up the concerns of the class. In this way they keep control over the direction of struggles.

In France, faced with an attack on the class with the announcement of the pension reforms, the unions displayed their unity and their resolve; they called for big street demonstrations and for engagement with the government. They have demanded that this reform must not pass, that millions of people must reject it.

So much for the rhetoric and the promises. But what is the reality? To explain this, we only need to recall the movement that fought against Macron's pension reform bill of 2019-2020. Faced with the rise in combativity and the growth of solidarity across the generations, the unions

used this same strategy, advocating the "convergence of struggles", creating an illusory unitary movement, where demonstrators were called by sector and by company, not all mixed in together, but one behind the other. The trade union banners and the union stewards divided the marchers by sector, by company and by plant. Above all, there were no discussions and no meetings. The message at the end: "Disperse with your usual co-workers and go home, until the next time". The sound system was on full blast to make sure that workers couldn't hear each other because what really makes the bourgeoisie tremble is when workers take their struggles into their own hands, when they organise themselves, when they start to meet up, to debate... to become a class in struggle!

In the UK and in France, as elsewhere, to affect the balance of forces that will enable us to resist the constant attacks on our living and working conditions, which tomorrow will become even more violent, we must, wherever we can, come together to debate and put forward those methods of struggle that unify and strengthen the working class and have allowed it, at certain moments in its history, to shake the bourgeoisie and its system:

- in the search to broaden support and solidarity beyond the workplace, the company, the institution, the sector of activity, indeed city, region and country;
- in workers' self organisation of the struggle, particularly through general assemblies, without surrendering control to the so-called struggle "specialists", the unions, and to their organisation;
- through the widest possible discussion on the general needs of the struggle, on the lessons to be learned from past struggles and also from their defeats, because there will be defeats ahead, but the greatest defeat arises from not reacting to the attacks. The entry into struggle is the first victory of the exploited.

In 1985, under Thatcher, British miners fought for a whole year, with immense courage and determination, but the forces of the state and the unions isolated them and they were rendered powerless and locked in their sector; their defeat was one for the whole working class. We must learn from our mistakes. It is vital that the weaknesses that have undermined the working class for decades, and that have marked a succession of defeats, are now overcome, specifically the trap of corporatism and the illusion that trade unions are working class organs. The self organisation of the struggle, its broad unity and solidarity, are indispensable ingredients in the preparation of tomorrow's struggles!

For this, we must recognise ourselves as members of the one same class, a class united by its solidarity in struggle: the working class. Today's struggles are indispensable not only in defending ourselves against attacks but also in recovering our class identity on a global scale, preparing the eventual overthrow of this bankrupt system that is synonymous with deprivation and disasters of all kinds.

Capitalism has no solution: either to the destruction of the planet, nor to continual war, nor to unemployment, nor to precariousness of work, nor to pauperisation. Only the struggle of the world working class supported by all the oppressed and exploited of the world can open the way to an alternative, that of communism.

The strikes in the UK and the demonstrations in France, are a call to struggle for proletarians across the world.

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See en.internationalism.org for details of public meeting to discuss the questions in this leaflet:

Saturday 11 February at 2 pm
Lucas Arms, 245A Grays Inn Rd,
London WC1X 8QY

Or online meetings Sat 28 Jan 11am or
Sun 29 Jan 5pm

en.internationalism.org

