



TIME TO TAKE BACK CONTROL IN EDUCATION

Editorial

September 2021 echoed that of 2020, as schools opened and Covid cases have begun to rise. Pupils are beginning to miss school, and no additional measures are being put in place to control the spread.

It seems that the government has learned nothing from the experience of the last year, being slow to act and ignoring the advice of teaching unions and medical professionals alike.

Pupils at risk

The risk of Covid spreading in schools is real, despite the rhetoric around the decreased impact on young people and the beginning of vaccinations for 12-15 year olds. Staff, in particular those who are vulnerable, are rightly scared, but the prospect of a child's life being permanently yet avoidably scarred is terrifying.

The BMJ reported that over the last 2 months 2300 children were hospitalised due to Covid, whilst 34,000 are estimated to be living with long Covid. Being faced with possible death or a lifetime of impaired senses, respiratory capacity or brain function, when safety measures could have protected pupils, is unacceptable.

What is the government's answer to handling the spread of Covid in schools? To give us carbon dioxide monitors, so we are not just aware of the lack of ventilation in our classrooms or the dangerous levels of covid-laced breath in the air- we can track it.

Consequently, this year's cohort of ITTs have been told it is too dangerous to attend in-person lectures, but are expected in school classrooms nevertheless. If it is not safe to attend a lecture, what is it about schools that makes them so much safer?

The answer of course is that they are not. As seen in Scottish schools, which opened up on the 18th August, cases soared with weekly infections for 18 and 19-year-olds rising fivefold. This



is compared to the national average where the case rate only doubled. English schools that opened earlier have similarly seen cases soar leading to the hot spot in Leicester where pupils returned on August 23rd.

Clearly there need to be more robust safety measures in schools to keep pupils and education staff safe. But this would cost money that the government does not control. They need workers back in work, so pupils and staff must return to school. It is the same old story of profit taking precedence over lives.

Pay freeze and teacher exodus

Amid growing safety fears there is the added insult of the pay freeze. Last year we endured not just longer hours than ever before, fear and anxiety, illness and isolation but a barrage of hate and vitriol from sections of the media about our laziness whilst we were teaching both online and in person with the children of other key workers and the vulnerable.

And what is our thanks? Effectively - a pay cut. This will compound the retention crisis; a recent report graphically showed

that 43% of teachers intend to leave the profession in the next 4 years.

And no wonder with ever increasing workloads, the persistent threat of Covid, the failure of the government to appoint an even slightly capable Minister for Education to support schools through the quagmire of difficulties, and now loss of pay.

Yet we are not the only so-called-essential workers facing this affront - all public sector workers are facing a pay-freeze, NHS staff have been offered a paltry 3% and UCU held indicative ballots to re-start their fight to save their pensions just last month. Everywhere, workers' conditions are worsening.

The excuse is that the economy, as a consequence of Brexit and the pandemic, cannot afford to pay those most essential to its continuation. The truth is that the money does exist but it is not in the hands of the government or workers - it is in the pockets of the big business owners, and business is booming. At one end of the scale, the poorest in society are being stripped of an essential £20 a week in Universal Credit, whilst the top 10% of

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earnings gained on average £50,000 each throughout the pandemic.

Each one of those parasites could pay the universal credit uplift for 48 people a year on that unearned windfall alone. And think of the use we could put it to in education! In short, it is the system that is at fault and it is the system we must fight.

Broken system

As if any more evidence was needed that the current system cannot provide a basic decent standard of living, we must also consider the plethora of additional difficulties pupils are facing upon their return to the classroom.

From the recent OFSTED report detailing the 'normalisation' of sexual harassment in schools, to increasing need for mental health support and ever lengthening wait times to access it, and the as yet unknown expectations for the 2022 exams, our learners are returning with higher needs and less support than ever before.

Furthermore, the NAHT's recent poll showed 97% of headteachers being forced to cut provision for SEND pupils last year. The future the current government and the capitalist system are able to offer young people is bleak, to say the least.

The class struggle is sharpening. Workers are beginning to move into action. And they are looking for a fighting leadership that can point the way forward.

Unions fighting back

But there is some hope. Sharon Graham's earthquake victory for the left in Unite last year was a sign of things to come elsewhere. Her radical campaign to build up the union and fight for workers' rights inspired the rank and file who are disillusioned in the traditional 'left' leadership who have failed to deliver, and want real change.

Capitalism is plunging deeper into crisis. The class struggle is sharpening. Workers are beginning to move into action. And they are looking for a fighting leadership that can point the way forward.

The victories for Sharon Graham in Unite and for left-wing NEC members in Unison are an indication of the real mood amongst the working class; a reflection of the volatility within society, and its impact on consciousness. Unite, Unison, the NEU and other left unions need to link up to

forge a genuine united front to defend our members.

The power in the unions is in our collective strength - it is time we started to wield it. If we want to bring about an end to the suffering of our pupils, the struggles of the staff and secure an education system that is fit for purpose and safeguarded for generations to come, we need to fight against the system that prioritises profit above all else.

This will therefore mean developing our political sharpness, and the best tool for that is Marxism.

The urgent task at hand is to build up our strength as a trend - inside the unions, on the streets, and amongst workers and youth - to prepare for the titanic events that lie ahead. The working class is beginning to move. We must urgently bring Marxist ideas to the movement to ensure its future success. ■

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TEACHERS DESERVE A PAY RISE!

By Tom Soud

Much as they did after 2008, the working class are being forced to bail out the bankers and the bosses. Energy bills double as tax rises eat away at the disposable income that remains.

A young teacher just starting their career now faces an effective tax rate of 43%, whilst the billionaires and the politicians that represent them squirrel their money in Caribbean tax havens. Real pay for teachers is now almost 20% lower than in 2010.

The Institute of Fiscal Studies dubs this "The long squeeze on teachers' pay". We call it a slap in the face to education workers, and ultimately an abandonment of any pretence of a meritocratic society.

Rather than properly funding education by increasing pay, bringing on more staff and reducing workload, the government instead resorted to bureaucratic manoeuvres with the ECF which simply delays fully qualified status. Rather than improving working conditions to convince teachers to stay, the government simply makes it harder to leave.

Performance-Related Pay

Such strategies harmonise with the government's policy of Performance Related Pay (PRP). Bought in under the mantra of accountability, PRP has become a Sword of Damocles hanging over the heads of classroom teachers.

According to research by the NEU, 96% of teachers refused pay progression were given no forewarning, despite the supposed claim by the government of a policy of "no surprises". Of the minority who were told, half were given no support by the senior leadership team (SLT) to improve their practice.

The NEU's surveys clearly reveal why: 13% of teachers denied PRP were explicitly told that budget issues were the deciding factor. Rather than improving accountability, PRP intentionally divides classroom teachers against SLT.

It renders equality in education virtually impossible, with black men almost 5 times more likely to be denied progression. It has also contributed to the exodus of teachers. According to the figures, 40% of classroom teachers and 25% of leaders have considered leaving directly due to PRP.



Burnout

Teaching quality has never been more important. Yet experienced teachers are being driven out en masse. Vacancy rates are 3 times their 2011 level, as secondary school attendance numbers are set to increase by 10%. Underfunded academy chains rely on non-qualified teachers (NQTs) in penny-pinching exercises.

Teachers are being burnt out due to high work, high stress and little reward. A government which is not willing to properly pay teachers shows its disdain for high quality education. It shows that it prioritises the profits of big business over the education of young people.

We now stand on the threshold of the 11th year of worsening conditions. The pay freeze will push many to the edge. If the government cannot be convinced, then it must be forced to give us what we need. In January 2020, the action of the NEU forced schools to remain closed in unsafe conditions. Once again we must be prepared to act

Vote Yes!

In this context, the NEU is campaigning for an 8% pay increase in order to begin rectifying the levels lost since 2010. If enough members complete the pay survey in January, the union will move to

balloting for strike action. The fight has begun, and we must throw ourselves into it with our full force.

We cannot allow ourselves to fight these battles alone, either. The NEU leadership must be at the forefront of transforming the TUC into a fighting vehicle of the working class, and must argue for coordinated action with our sister unions in order to ensure the maximum chance of success.

Our problems across the sector are fundamentally linked to the same cause, the capitalist system going into crisis. We must therefore fight together to solve them. In order to demonstrate our power, this coordination must extend to a one-day public sector general strike.

Such an action would shake the rickety foundations the Tories stand on, expose the real lack of support their policy of cuts and job losses enjoys in society, and galvanise workers everywhere by showing that a real fightback is possible.

The NEU must lead the way in this effort. In doing so, it can and will inspire other unions to follow suit. Pupils deserve decent education, teachers deserve decent pay, and more than anything else this government and the capitalist system it stands for deserves to be kicked into the dustbin of history. ■



NATIONAL TEACHERS' STRIKE AS RELENTLESS CLASS STRUGGLE ROCKS IRAN

This article was originally published on Marxist.com the website of the International Marxist Tendency describing the revolutionary actions of the teachers' union in Iran. We publish this extract for our readers demonstrating the enormous potential of teachers in the 21st century Labour movement and the power of the working class as a whole and the need for revolutionary leadership.

Esaias Yavari

This month has seen a relentless series of over 230 strikes and protests in Iran. The most prominent of these was a two-day teachers' strike on 11-13 December, involving tens of thousands of teachers in hundreds of cities across the country. The regime responded by arresting over 200 teachers and trade unionists.

Meanwhile, sporadic strikes continue among miners, with workers of the Sangun copper mines in Varzaqan county organising an occupation after months of broken promises from the bosses.

Since the beginning of the autumn, termly employed teachers have organised at least six national protests. These developed spontaneously, with demands such as a living wage, full-time contracts,

COVID-19 safety measures, and quality free education for all.

Eventually, these protests united behind the Coordination Council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Union confederation, which organised rank-file teachers and the most radical trade unionists, including activists from a number of regime-led trade unions, under a common programme of demands.

Ignored by the government, which instead has presented an austerity budget for the upcoming year, the coordination council called for a strike during the next session of parliament. Slogans at their rallies and picket lines included: "the teacher is awake and hates discrimination", and: "A living wage, striking, assembly and organisation are unalienable rights!"

Immediately, 43 workers' organisations made statements in solidarity with the teachers. The regime, which previously tolerated the Coordination Council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Unions, quickly cracked down on them, arresting leading figures, with over 100 confirmed arrests during the strike, on charges of disturbing civil order.

This only emboldened the teachers further, with the coordinating council calling to extend the strike to 13 December. The

teachers heeded the call. In Isfahan alone, over 10,000 teachers participated in a rally, with slogans of: "The imprisoned teacher should be released", and: "The teachers' place is not in prison." In Teheran, thousands of teachers rallying outside parliament were confronted by security forces, with the protesters chanting: "dishonourable, dishonourable, dishonourable!"

The regime is rightly fearful of the coordinating council. The recent strike was the best-organised national strike since the new outbreak of the class struggle in 2018. Unlike the national oil workers' strike in July-August 2021, which spread spontaneously, the teachers' coordinating council campaigned to win over teachers across the country, including those from regime-led workers' organisations.

These methods are the way forward for the burgeoning Iranian labour movement. Future struggles must encompass the whole working class, directed against the regime, to be successful. In isolation, the regime can always sabotage independent workers' organisations and arrest leading trade unionists.

While the coordinating council consistently claims that they aren't political,

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and that political demands don't belong at their rallies, this makes no difference to the Islamic Republic. As far as the regime is concerned, the economic struggle alone is an existential threat.

Bankruptcy

For the past three years, the Islamic Republic has faced an unprecedented wave of strikes, protests and even three uprisings. Moreover, the July 2021 presidential elections were met with a massive boycott. All this shows the revolutionary mood rapidly developing in society.

But the movement faces an obstacle: the lack of bold leadership. The regime has also used the lack of leadership to sow confusion among the workers, especially via the regime-led workers' organisations.

However, the regime is also backed into a corner by US-led sanctions, with negotiations seemingly going nowhere. Appeals to national unity and Islam have long ceased to have any effect. The regime likewise cannot continue printing money to fund its budget deficit, with inflation already at over 60 percent.

The Iranian masses have already been pushed to the brink of starvation. Even according to official figures, two-thirds of the population lives under the poverty line.

It is necessary for the working class to also prepare politically and build its organisations. The national teachers' strike is just the beginning. The regime's new offensive threatens national uprisings, and even a general strike in the near future.

Workers' organisation

The four major uprisings since 2018 have all failed. The latest, beginning in August in Khuzestan, was crushed despite massive support across the country.

The regime is fully aware that it is nearly completely discredited and only remains in power through suppression and the lack of a working-class leadership. In part, this lack of leadership was inevitable after more than 40 years of dictatorship, but independent workers' organisations and campaigns have already rapidly developed across the country.

The evolution of the teachers' protests into a national movement led by the Coordination Council of Iranian Teachers, as well as the rejection of the regime-led labour organisation by oil workers in Khuzestan, are enormous steps forward. While these developments are important in the present situation, in order to fulfil any economic demands, a political struggle is needed, encompassing the whole working class, directed against the regime.

Already, discontent is simmering across the country. For this revolutionary potential in Iran to be realised, it is necessary to forge a leadership from the separate strikes and protests across the country into national mass movement, basing itself on a general programme of demands.

Such a programme would include common economic demands such as: the reversal of all austerity measures; living wages and pensions that increase with inflation; an extensive programme of public works to repair and develop the country's crumbling infrastructure; the renationalisation of all privatised companies under workers' control; and the introduction of workers' control throughout the state-owned economy.

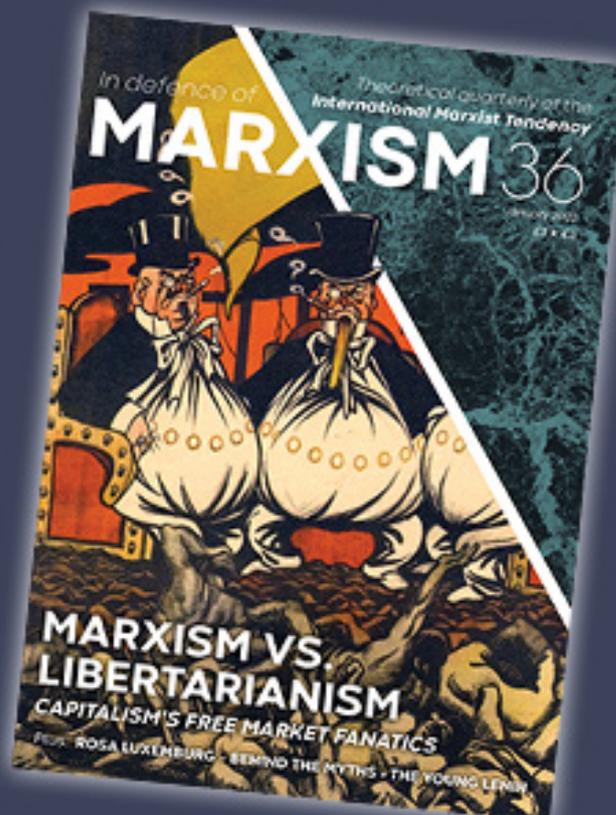
It must also include political demands, including the right to strike, protest and assemble, as well as a call to abolish the Islamic Republic.

Until a national leadership develops that is capable of prosecuting the struggle for this programme, the strikes and protests will either die out, be lulled by empty promises, or be crushed by repression, only to return larger and more emboldened at a later date.

Only once a national leadership for the future Iranian revolution is formed can Iranian capitalism and its regime, the Islamic Republic, be brought down! ■

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TRAINEE TEACHERS AT RISK

By Olive Ruadh

As schools push their way through the winter months, there is a huge, largely ignored problem bubbling away under the surface.

The third cohort of trainee teachers are now facing possible disruption yet again with the spread of omicron - but you'd never know it. The government and schools are seemingly burying their heads in the sand, pretending that the problem of long COVID and transmission amongst young people doesn't exist.

Many of us are excited to go into schools and start our in-person training, but we can see the obvious contradiction that the universities we pay extortionate fees to are proceeding with online teaching because of fears over COVID safety.

Shambles

They claim this is because two years of experience has guaranteed a high-quality level of online teaching. This is all while encouraging us to throw ourselves headfirst into schools. Many of us rightly fear how possible illness and isolation could affect our training and whether appropriate contingency and mitigations are in place.

UCL is the largest provider of initial teacher training and has moved most of its teaching online for its cohort of PGCE primary and secondary students. But this does little to ease fears. While at school, trainees are not being told to test, not being encouraged to get vaccinated or made aware of cases in schools.

Instead of properly planning and mitigating the government has instead allowed record numbers to begin ITE courses this year. Precarity in the graduate job markets, which has only been exhibited by the COVID and Brexit crises, has meant universities and training providers have been inundated with applications.

Retention

In 2020, more than 21,000 graduates had applied to teacher training programmes, a rise of 65% in the last five years. Some have hailed this as a positive step forward in filling teaching vacancies and making up for 'lost time' in students' education.

But the solution to low retention in the education sector is not recruitment alone, but to retain teachers through adequate training and support in their careers.



This is what will not only keep teachers in the profession but also allow teachers to make headway addressing gaps in education caused by the last two years.

The NEU general secretary has rightly pointed that most of this new intake will be gone in five years if nothing is done about 'Desperately high workload, excessive accountability, the pernicious impact of Ofsted, pay freezes and underfunding of schools.'

Many of us are excited to embark on our ITT, but we are without any guarantees we will receive a comparable level of training to previous years due to the likely disruption resulting from COVID-19 and the need to account for the attainment gap amongst pupils.

But we also have other problems to contend with. The government is also trying to push forward with ITT consolation as they plan to reaccredit all teacher training providers by September 2022. Under the plans, universities would have to go through a re-accreditation process to continue training teachers, while stricter controls would also be imposed on universities' freedom to decide their own course content.

As such at a time when many trainees are simply trying to focus on their own development and academic staff look to support students, their time and energies are being misdirected to this end. As such The University of Cambridge, The University of Oxford and UCL has

warned it will stop training teachers if the Government pushes ahead with "flawed" reforms to initial teacher training.

Militancy needed!

In reality, this has little to do with ensuring the quality of teachers but instead geared towards the Tories narrow vision for curriculum and to lower standards in general so vacancies can be filled more quickly.

The union should engage more with these issues and trainees more generally. Their experiences garner little attention despite the fact they are being relied upon to support the transition to post-pandemic learning. These problems will not be solved by blind optimism or by existing teachers providing the level of training needed. What is needed is for the union to take a stand and organise trainee teachers with a view to taking strike action.

We are not apathetic to the situation around us, and many trainee teachers want to fight. If they are shown how, they won't just stop this government in its tracks; the confidence and skills they gain in the class struggle will show them the need to fight for socialism too.

It is only on the basis of socialist planning we can reorganise education to properly support students and workers physical and mental well-being as well as ensure high-quality education for students and proper training and development of teachers. ■

NEWHAM COLLEGE STRIKE VICTORY TO THE TEACHERS!

Nelson Wan

On the 8th and 9th December National Education Union (NEU) members at Newham Sixth Form College in Plaistow went on strike to protest the unfair and unacceptable conditions that the college management are subjecting their staff to.

The staff feel that they haven't been managed well for a number of years, and have had no choice but to go on the offensive.

The issues include a culture of bullying, and also the massive increases in workload (assessed and graded work) for both staff and students. Some teachers were given around 150 students' targets to set in four days, including the weekend.

No to academisation

In addition, the college management are actively 'exploring the option' of forming a multi-academy trust, which is not what the staff want.

A striking NEU member said the following:

"We categorically do not want the college to become an academy. We'd be happy if the college and the governing body made a statement to that effect. We are a community college and we're very inclusive, our courses are open for absolutely everybody."

"This is not the model of academisation. Academies are more selective, they take away from that inclusive principle that the college was founded upon."

The striking staff were also keen to point out that the teachers and staff were also on strike for the sake of the students. Reference was made to the arbitrary increases in workload having a clear impact on students' mental health and self-esteem.

The academy system is simply a way of sneaking in privatisation of the education system. Rather than improving the education system, all the evidence points towards academies underperforming when compared to schools.

Turning Newham College – which is located in an overwhelmingly working class area – into an academy would be disastrous for the students as well as the teachers and staff.

In relation to the question of student and teacher solidarity, the NEU member stated clearly:



"We do regret having to take this action and disrupt education, but we feel like it's for the long-term benefit of the students and users of the college."

Solidarity between teachers and students is essential to the victory of the strike. Students and other supporters should join their teachers on the picket lines to put pressure on the college management.

In February last year Bromley Library workers won a hard-fought struggle against their private employer who was using similar bullying tactics to demoralise and 'break' the union staff, in their drive to cut 40 jobs.

The workers stood firm however, calling upon local groups and sister unions to support them, and ultimately won out after eight months of action. This was partially down to the magnificent solidarity shown to them by local groups. Students can very capably play this role during a school strike, and every effort must be made to convince them of the need to do so.

Joint struggle

Ultimately, a free, high quality education system that is fully funded and staffed is only possible under a socialist plan of production, in which all the key areas of the economy – the big monopolies and the banks – are expropriated and brought under democratic workers' control.

The first step towards this is the teaching unions to ballot for further industrial action in defence of members at

Newham and beyond, and to appeal for support from other public sector unions across the country.

This way, a common struggle against austerity can be built, culminating in a one-day public sector general strike. The NEU is currently beginning a national consultation on further strikes, in order to fight for an eight per cent increase across all pay scales.

Students in schools and colleges across the country should mobilise in support of their striking teachers. Open meetings of staff and students should be held to discuss a common programme of struggle.

The struggle of the teaching unions needs to be linked with the students' struggle for free education. This way, mass support can be built for the strike and we can ultimately win!

We call for:

The full acceptance of the NEU demands and an immediate reduction in the unmanageable workload of staff and students.

An immediate end to bullying and intimidation from the college management!

No to academisation and privatisation of education!

A campaign to vote for the 8% pay rise demand from the NEU national leadership, and to mobilise for national strike action in coordination with public sector unions to achieve this. ■

NEU Marxists' Charter for Education

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

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

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

We demand:

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

WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN US

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

