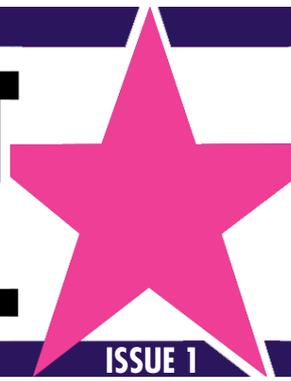


SOCIALIST APPEAL



UCU BULLETIN

ISSUE 1

ESCALATE THE ACTION TO DEFEAT MARKETISATION!

Editorial

We publish this bulletin at a time when workers in Britain are facing a cost-of-living catastrophe. Energy bills are set to soar and inflation is skyrocketing.

It is in this context the Universities and College Union (UCU) is fighting for a living wage, job security, equal rights for all, shorter working hours, and a decent pension. Given the stakes, it is vital we win. In our view this means adopting a more militant strategy.

Mobilise for Strike Dates

On 27th January, the Higher Education Committee (HEC) of UCU announced ten strike days, stretched over three weeks: 14-18 February; 21-22 February; and 28 February-2 March 2022. General Secretary Jo Grady, also announced "rolling regional action" on the Four Fights dispute for the remainder of the strike mandate, which runs out in May 2022.

Members' tireless Get-The-Vote-Out campaigns for rebalots over Christmas means 12 more branches will be joining the strike. This means 68 branches will be striking including some of the largest in the union.

Combined with the National Union of Students' "walk out" on March 2nd, the scale of action hitting higher education could be enormous. With students effectively striking as well this could help significantly shift the balance of forces in our favour. What's more, some Higher Education Unison branches have won local mandates for industrial action which

will be coordinated with UCU strike dates.

Both of these factors provide the opportunity to shutdown campuses in some areas. UCU members and branches must therefore really mobilise and make the most of these strikes.

This remains true, even in light of the compromise solution to the pensions dispute proposed by the UCU leadership – described by USS as "viable and implementable".

It's crucial turnout for these strikes is still high as USS are now in the process of consulting employers about UCU's proposal, and this consultation runs until February 18th. USS would not be considering this proposal if it wasn't for the threat of strike action, so it's important pressure is kept up.

However, under this compromise, staff will still have to pay higher contributions while the valuation of the scheme - the main issue being contested - remains unresolved. Even if UCU, UUK, and USS reach an agreement, it must only be viewed as a temporary solution to allow breathing space to fight on in the near future.

It will also be vital that, in event of an agreement, the union leadership continues to support and escalate the Four Fights campaign.

Militancy Needed

However, as things stand our union's strategy does not match the seriousness of the situation. There has not been a departure from the inadequate actions of recent years. In fact in some respects, the leadership are indicating a possible retreat.

Many members feel the action announced is a repetition of past

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mistakes. An escalating strike pattern took employers by surprise in 2018. But by now they have learnt to drag out negotiations until the mandate runs out, as in 2019 and 2020. There is little to suggest it would be different this time around.

The current proposal is also to possibly rebalot branches again to extend the mandate into the assessment period, if this strike action fails.

To extend the strike mandate into the assessment period would be a massive step forward. But rather than framing it in advance as for a possible marking boycott in which only a few members can take part, the union should plan to rebalot with the vocal aim of further strike action. This would increase the pressure on the bosses.

Plus, banking on the “next mandate” without using the current one effectively does not send a message of confidence. The stakes are high. Rather than spreading 10 days of action over 3 weeks, the UCU leadership should adopt a militant strategy with maximum immediate impact.

We support using additional tactics alongside strike action such as marking boycotts. But many employers have already threatened a full deduction of pay for marking boycotts. Why should members be expected to withhold only part of their labour, if they are to be treated as if they withheld all of it?

Moreover, for precarious workers in marking support, a marking boycott effectively means strike action!

The stakes are high. 10 days of action over 3 weeks is a step forward

from December’s action. But the UCU leadership should instead adopt a militant strategy with maximum immediate impact.

This means undertaking all-out, indefinite strike action and calling on sister unions in the education sector, and beyond, to organise in support of our struggle.

No to Decoupling!

The HEC’s proposal also effectively “decouples” the USS dispute from the Four Fights.

Seven of the announced strike days have been allocated to the USS dispute, the intention being to put pressure on crucial meetings with USS representatives in February. Meanwhile, only five days of strike action have been allocated to Four Fights. The leadership has also taken a tone of cautious pessimism around the issues of the Four Fights.

As we have argued previously, deteriorating pensions and working conditions have a common cause - marketisation. Moves to decouple the disputes sends the message USS is the union’s priority over working conditions, dividing our ranks. It also ignores the democratic will of the membership who have voted for a united struggle repeatedly.

Details of the leadership’s proposal for “rolling regional action” (not discussed either in branch delegate meetings or at the HEC) have also not been released. If the leadership keeps its plans secret, how are members supposed to participate in deciding the strategy?

Rather than organising curated online rallies or dismissing the views of members, the union should organise the sort of meetings which were at the heart of the strikes in 2018.

This should start at the branch level with Emergency General Meetings to discuss and debate the way forward.

UCU Marxists also support the call of the CoronaContract campaign for an urgent national meeting of branch delegates where the course of the disputes and demands could be democratically decided – openly and fairly. Such a body must be sovereign, not consultative.

Towards a sector-wide strike

We are not alone in resisting deteriorating working conditions. Across the education sector, workers are fighting back. With local action from Unison, NEU strikes breaking out at academy trusts, and planned student protests in solidarity with UCU, the potential is there for a sector-wide strike.

Such sector-wide coordinated action would fundamentally challenge the marketisation of education and provide an example for the rest of the labour movement.

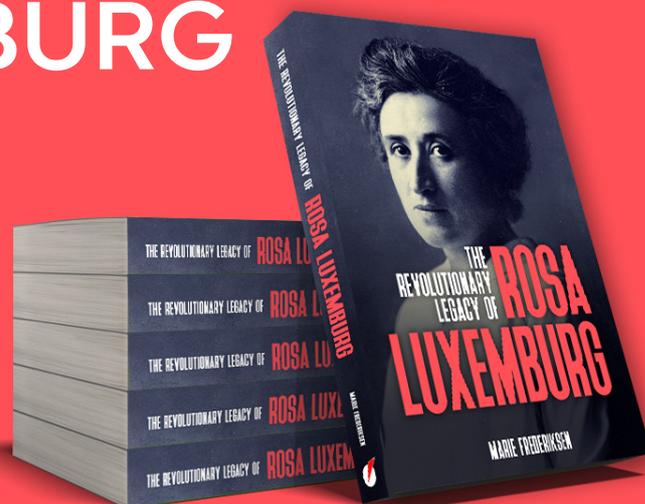
To realise this potential, UCU must first change course. This must start with rank-and-file members mobilising to defend a united struggle and pushing for immediate escalation.

The determination amongst members is clearly there. With a militant programme and strategy – a battle plan for victory – we can win.

- No to decoupling – for a united struggle!
- For co-ordinated action across the education sector!
- For staff-student solidarity!
- For an all-out, indefinite strike! ■

THE REVOLUTIONARY LEGACY OF ROSA LUXEMBURG

SCAN HERE



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With the left controlling the NEC in Unison, and Paul Holmes as president, united and coordinated action is possible not only between the two biggest unions in Britain, Unite and Unison, but across the movement, as advocated by the PCS leadership over the last two decades.

Class collaboration

However, there is still an entrenched conservatism in the movement. The right wing within the trade unions reflect the pressures and interests of the ruling class. Their philosophy is open class collaboration, an attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable class contradictions in society. Their model is 'business unionism', to create a cosy relationship with the bosses.

The lack of fighting spirit permeates the right-wing trade union leaders. This is because they see no alternative to capitalism, and view their role as working within the system.

The General Council of the TUC, as the elected leadership of the trade unions, should in theory function as a general staff of the labour movement in

the struggle against the bosses. Instead it seeks agreements and cooperation with the Tory government.

Class collaboration has a long history going back to the middle of the 19th century, with Model Unionism following the defeat of Chartism. This was the period of imperialist expansion and the growth of super-profits, which were used by the capitalists to buy off sections of the working class. It is viewed by the right wing as a recipe for 'industrial peace', and a panacea for all ills.

When capitalism was in its heyday, it could afford to grant reforms and therefore strike action could quite quickly lead to winning important concessions from the bosses. But that is not the situation today.

Prepare for battle

In this epoch of crisis and the death agony of capitalism, there are great challenges facing the working class. It would be a grave mistake to think that it can be 'business as usual', or to follow how things operated in the past.

Given the severity of the crisis, it will require the mobilisation of the whole movement to stop this bosses' offensive in its tracks. However, while individual

battles can be won, in order to stop cuts and privatisation overall, action must be generalised and coordinated.

The struggle over day-to-day problems must be linked in a transitional manner to the public ownership of the major monopolies, banks and insurance companies, under democratic workers' control and management. This revolutionary aspiration was, and in many cases remains, enshrined in the constitutions of the trade unions.

The new period we have entered will set the scene for revolutionary convulsions in Britain as elsewhere. The shift to the left in a number of important trade unions in Britain is a harbinger of what is to come. A new generation of activists will come to the fore seeking to change society, and in so doing they will fight to take back control of the trade unions, organisations which were built by the working class to fight the bosses.

The conditions are now emerging where the old right-wing trade union leadership can be removed in preparation for a new period of class struggle. In this way the trade unions will be able to step up to the mark and play an active part in fighting for socialism and the overthrow of capitalism. ■

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The advertisement features a man in a brown beanie and glasses holding a copy of Socialist Appeal magazine. The magazine cover has the headline 'LABOUR MUST FIGHT TO TRANSFER POWER TO THE WORKERS!' and 'NO LOW PAY'. To the right, a tablet displays the digital version of the magazine with the headline 'CORONAVIRUS EXPOSES CLASS DIVIDE' and images of a person in a blue protective suit and a group of people. The background is a light beige color with red and black text and graphics.

DEFEND SHEFFIELD ARCHAEOLOGY DEPARTMENT!

Luke Boulby

The Archaeology department at the University of Sheffield, once world-renowned for its academic reputation, has been recently under threat of closure by university management.

The department itself has suffered from massive cuts to its budget, cutting staff from nearly 30 in the early 2000s, to around 10 permanent staff today. A review process, which has taken place over a number of years, has concluded that the department was no longer 'sustainable' and thus should be reorganised, or closed altogether.

The three options discussed by the University Executive Board (UEB) for the department were: option 1 – reinvest into the department and bringing on more staff, option 2 – break up the department and merge certain specialisms with other departments, or option 3 – close the department. The UEB, shutting out members of staff from the actual decision making, voted in favour of the compromise of option 2.

This amounts to closing of the department in all but name as each specialism broken off, will inevitably be unsustainable by itself, and thus be closed quietly in future.

Anger at this decision was widespread, with academics across the country and internationally condemning the decision. A petition was also launched shortly after the review was revealed which amassed around 40,000 signatures in just over a week. Sheffield UCU also voted unanimously in favour of local strike action to defend the closure of the department. This local dispute is part of the UCU strike action taking place over the weeks of February.

No plans have been put forward in regard to how this decision will be implemented or what it would even look like. Redundancies are also on the table for those staff whose specialisms are not retained. Evidentiary information relating to the board's decision has been withheld from both staff and students due to 'GDPR'. Minutes of meetings with students, used to prop up the decision, have even been destroyed by management to cover their tracks.



The whole closure of the department does not appear to be backed up by any sound reasoning, even with regards to the university's narrow financial aims.

This supposed evidence of 'unsustainability' which management states is the reason for considering the department's closure, amounts to questionable statistics published by the university - with sections redacted.

Even by these incomplete figures, the department was projected to break even by the same year this decision was taken, and to continue gaining revenue in the coming years.

Sheffield UCU's calculations based on the redacted data, also reveal that the department was not in any financial trouble - even suggesting that the university would lose money if the department was to close.

The whole closure of the department does not appear to be backed up by any sound reasoning, even with regards to the university's narrow financial aims.

The decision therefore seems based on other financial and political aims. Politically, the department is highly unionised, and militant, therefore to remove this department, or split up the department, will help take away established union reps.

The grander financial reason, with the ever growing marketisation of education, is that the money spent on the department could be moved into other departments which generate greater profits for the university. For example those departments which bring in lucrative international funding, or those courses where more international students apply to, providing £50,000 more in tuition fees per student in comparison to a home student.

This decision, alongside the restructuring of the School of Languages and Culture, has revealed the necessity of democratic accountability of the management board who are a law unto themselves. Many of their members also sit on the Senate, and the Council, preventing any ability to reverse the decision through these structures. Thereby making any decision by management a rubber-stamping exercise through these various bodies.

The only way for workers and students to prevent this decision, and many more in the future, is to organise and take democratic control over the university, so that the university is run by and for the benefit of those who work and study there. ■

Letters

Socialist Appeal
International Marxist
Tendency

WHY I FIGHT: CAPITALISM AND EDUCATION

Calum MacDonald

From the 1st to the 3rd of December I joined thousands of other University and College Union (UCU) members on strike for fair pay and pensions. Students and workers stood together in defence of their education and their profession against the profit-driven calculations of the University bosses.

An email was sent to all University of Edinburgh staff from Human Resources, in which the University justified their position, saying the pay offer made by the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (between 1.5% and 3.6%) was “at the limit of affordability”.

These claims are hugely hypocritical, considering the apparently “sustainable” 6-figure CEO salaries that senior management receive. The upper echelons yet again show their true colours – they are a part of the capitalist class, to whom education is just another business opportunity. Extracting profit from the labour of lecturers, researchers and other university workers is their priority, and they handsomely reward the Principals and Vice Chancellors for a job well done.

Like many other career researchers in the UK, I have first-hand experience of decreasing effective pay, cuts to our pensions, increasing casualisation, workloads, etc. There is increased pressure to produce results and take on new responsibilities, while it becomes increasingly hard to secure long-term stable employment. Many in the sector are becoming demoralised, dropping out and seeking higher wages that can be found in the private sector.

At the start of my career, when working on my PhD, I witnessed for the first time how staff are treated by the University bosses. After my university earned huge publicity, due its involvement in a Nobel Prize discovery, multi-million pound research grants and an influx of fee-paying students. The workers, however, were offered a tiny 1% nominal pay rise: which was a real-terms cut of 13% since 2008.

The resulting strike action on pay in 2013 was my first real awakening to how workers are taken for granted, and first experience with the battle – my first “School of War”, as Engels wrote – between workers and management. On long days standing on the picket lines, solidarity from students, allied workers and other unions keeps you going. A

real sense of class consciousness is built.

Strikes, wrote Engels, “are the military school of the workingmen, in which they prepare themselves for the great struggle which cannot be avoided... As schools of war, the unions are unexcelled.”

Nowadays, the extraction of money from students has become the main aim: from tuition fees to extortionate halls and private accommodation, increases in the cost of food and drink on campus to the cost of books, the list goes on. The respect and appreciation shown by the University to its workers has been abysmal, with decades-long declines in working conditions and near-constant industrial disputes. All the while the University spends billions on construction projects to boost their investment portfolio.

This is the result of capitalist domination over higher education, and the marketisation of universities and other institutions. Once, access to university was a hard-won cultural conquest of the working class, now it has been transformed into another factory for exploiting the working class.

University staff will strike again in 2022 over conditions of employment, but ultimately it is a struggle for the future of students and staff, and free higher education for all.

The bourgeoisie justify their system by saying: if you work hard, contribute towards society and innovation, you will be paid accordingly. But this is one of the most fundamental lies told about capitalism. Ask anyone working in the NHS and they’ll tell you the same.

The battle ongoing within academia is yet more clear evidence of a system that does not value the workers and is only interested in what will generate short-term profits for the capitalists. ■



BOOK REVIEW

NO SHORTCUTS: ORGANISING FOR POWER

By Elena Simon

Based on Jane McAlevey's book "No Shortcuts – Organising for Power in the New Gilded Age", UCU and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation are organizing the third Strike School. The first was held in 2020 and connected seven thousand activists around the world - 400 from UCU alone.

The main argument in No Shortcuts is this: the Labour movement needs to relearn how to be serious in organising workers and serious about winning for them. To do this, McAlevey digs into the history of US socialist organizing of the Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO) in the 1930s and draws lessons from contemporary successful strikes.

Learning from History

Its aim to learn from success and the best traditions of the Labour movement makes No Shortcuts a largely enjoyable and helpful read. Although her instructions sound a bit mechanical at times, they undoubtedly serve to demystify "how" to organise: it is the mundane actions of having conversations, approaching people you would not ordinarily, and defending your point even if the conversation turns uncomfortable. Arguably these tasks are not "sexy", but they are necessary. Jane McAlevey gives clear instructions and even provides a conversation guide to practice. Organising is not a talent, given to the fortunate, it is a skill that can be learned, taught and is thriving where there is a will to persist.

Her advice is based on the understanding that workers who join a union are not automatically hardened class fighters. She expertly draws out the lessons from successful strikes such as the Chicago Teachers, or the workers at the pork factory at Smithfield's Food and in doing so demonstrates the flaws and weaknesses in the New Labour mobilising approach and its leaders.

"Mobilising" focuses on negotiations in boardroom meetings and symbolic forms of protest which replaced strikes as "outdated". Those include picture campaigns, boycotts, narrow legal actions, and brand damage or public shaming. These actions have proven ineffective, because they are focused on union professionals and a minimum of engagement from the rank and file. As a tactic to win, so McAlevey says, New Labour "mobilising" is entirely unsuitable and played a major role in the decline of unions, and working conditions.

A Winning Strategy

Strikes are always a high-risk action for workers and are a last resort (p.15). They are also the most effective tactic if they are built for correctly and within a winning strategy. No Shortcuts is addressed at those who want to jump over the necessary part which she calls "deep organising".

This approach democratises unions, engages a large proportion of the rank and file and walks the talk. Thus, rather than a union made up of members and their leadership engaged in symbolic action, McAlevey envisions a union of organisers who are building for power and transform the unions into fighting ones.

"organic leaders" and at least try to win them over. Even more important is the stress she lays on the goal to win: without the goal, there can be no strategy. And if the leadership does not believe in winning, it will be a hard struggle for the rank and file to exchange that leadership with one that does, stretching the limited resources of the working class even further.

Political Perspectives

The organisers McAlevey learns from, stood out because they were openly socialist, aimed to unite the whole of the working class, and not only put forward demands on pay, but demands that increased the rights of workers.

The industrial struggle and the political struggle cannot be divided: the working class cannot rely on institutions that have been established to oppress it.

A winning strategy, says McAlevey, starts with a rational analysis of the power relations in which a union is operating and the goal to win. While her "leader identification" process seems depoliticised, she makes a point about trying to win over people who do not already agree with you but hold a lot of clout in their workplace. Thus, rather than writing them off, she encourages to seek conversations with

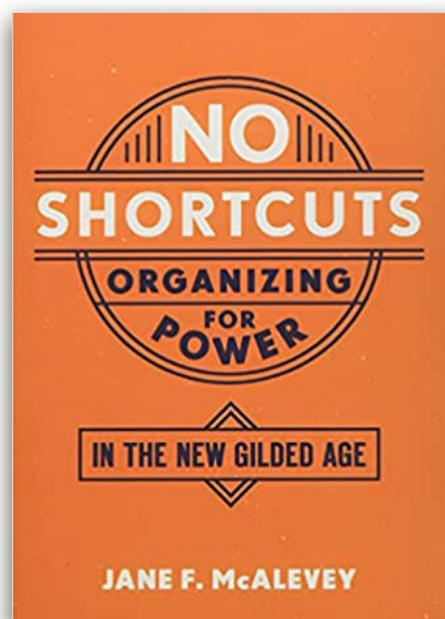
In fact, many of them aimed to not only win a campaign in a workplace, but to put an end to the capitalist system as a whole. As much as skillful organising and the dedication of those workers were important; in her historical analysis McAlevey omits the experience of the first successful workers' revolution and the demands of the Bolsheviks which served as inspiration for those organisers.

Another omission is an explanation of the real nature of the state and its institutions. Without including this in her power analysis, McAlevey slides into reformist demands, such as better industry regulators.

While she highlights anti-trade union laws and the oppression of labour in particular through murder, imprisonment and union busting, McAlevey never touches the fact that the state is an expression of capitalist power, there to preserve it and to protect its basis: private property.

It is for this reason that the industrial struggle and the political struggle cannot be divided: the working class cannot rely on institutions that have been established to oppress it.

It is for this reason that what workers win, the capitalists will be able to snatch away again. Thus, the struggle for better working conditions needs to go hand in hand with the struggle for a different social system. The winning strategy we need is revolution. ■



WHAT WE STAND FOR

The COVID-19 crisis, and the economic crisis that has accompanied it, are both expressions of a deeper general crisis of the capitalist system. Bold measures are required, and only a clear socialist programme can offer a way forward.

We must have no faith in the Tories or their hangers-on, whose worship of the market has brought the country to its knees.

- No trust or confidence in the Tories and their big business backers! Instead of attacking the left, Labour must provide genuine opposition to this shambolic Tory government.
- Support workers in the fight to put lives before profits!

The bosses and their craven political representatives have shown that they will always prioritise profits over lives. We demand socialist measures to protect workers, and put health before wealth:

- For a fully publicly-owned and free health service, under workers' control and management. Reverse all privatisation and outsourcing. All health and care services must be nationalised without compensation, and integrated into the NHS
- Nationalise the pharmaceutical companies – without compensation – in order to ensure that vaccines are produced rapidly and made freely available to all worldwide.

- Reverse the austerity inflicted upon public services.
- Workplace safety should be in the hands of workers' committees and the trade unions. Proper health and safety measures must be implemented, with adequate PPE provided for all workers. The costs for this must be paid by the bosses.
- To fight job cuts and the threat of mass unemployment, work should be shared out without any loss of pay, in order to lower the hours of the working week
- Fight for the real emancipation of women. Remove all barriers to women working: provide free nurseries, after-school childcare, and care for the elderly. End all forms of discrimination; equal pay for work of equal value.
- Scrap tuition fees and rents, and replace these with free education and full maintenance grants for all. Put staff in control in schools and universities.
- The financial resources required to fight the crisis must not come from increased taxes of more austerity, but through the nationalisation of the banks and finance houses. Rather than a 'wealth tax', we call for the expropriation of the monopolies
- Instead of building up the national debt through government borrowing, the money needed should be obtained entirely from expropriating the

accumulated profits of big business

- If the bosses say they can't afford to pay for workers' wages, we say: open up the books! Let workers and their unions see the accounts! If firms plead bankruptcy, they should not be bailed out, but nationalise under workers control
- No austerity! The working class must not pay for this crisis
- For the trade unions and Labour Party to organise a mass struggle to bring down this criminal Tory government. Organise the unorganised!

It is clear that the market has failed and capitalism is in deep crisis. The anarchy of capitalism prevents the planning of society's resources, in Britain and internationally.

We therefore stand for the nationalisation of the 100 biggest monopolies, banks, utilities, landlords and so on under workers' control and management, and without compensation. On this basis, the economy can be democratically planned in the interests of the majority, and not for the super profits of a few.

A Socialist Federation of Britain should be linked to a Socialist United States of Europe and a World Socialist federation in order to plan resources internationally for the benefit of all. This would put an end to the barbarism of capitalism and allow humanity to begin solving the urgent issues of climate change, disease, and poverty that face society and our planet. ■

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. ■

