

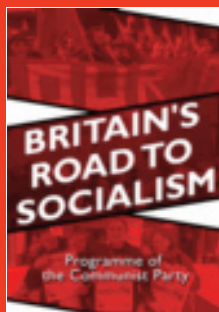
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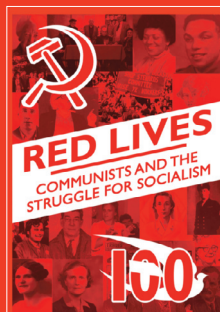
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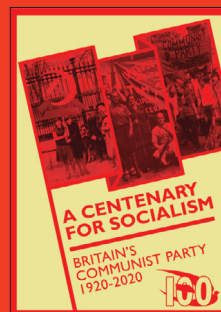
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trade unions and the crisis of capitalism

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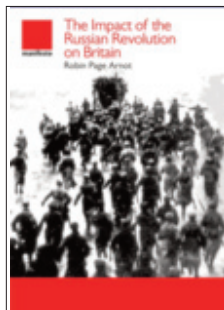
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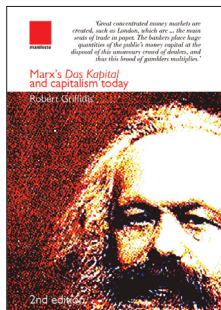
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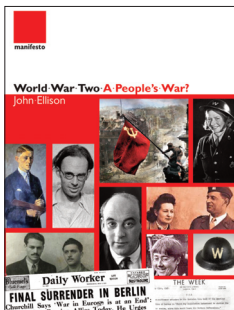
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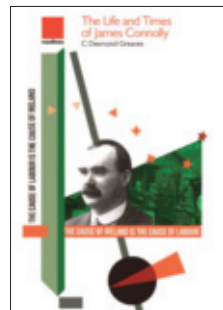
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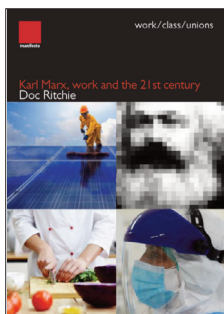
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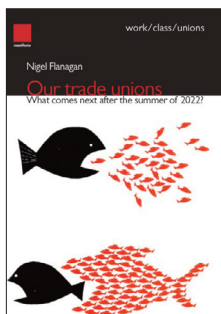
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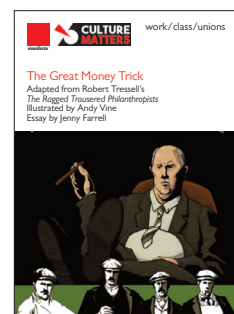
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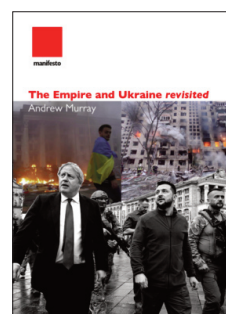
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Introduction

The peoples of Britain and the world face growing and desperate challenges. International capitalism lurches from crisis to crisis, each reinforcing the impact of those that came before.

Financial crash, bank bailouts, austerity, economic stagnation, climate chaos, pandemic, imperialist war, inflation, energy and food poverty amidst rampant profiteering and price gouging by capitalist monopolies: each of these crises is rooted in deeper chaotic and destructive tendencies of capitalism, amplified around the world by powerful industrial and financial transnational corporations (TNCs) that dominate global economic relations.

The domination of vital aspects of the British economy by the financial markets, banks and other financial institutions has been promoted by all British governments for decades. All kinds of commercial contracts – public and private sector, personal, household, corporate – have been turned into financial products for speculation and fraud in a process best described as 'financialisation'. Banks, investment funds and insurance companies make eye-watering profits, ramping up prices as the Bank of England tries to control inflation by raising interest rates.

In Britain, the ruling class has escalated its offensive against the living standards of working people and their families. As the period of pandemic lockdown between March 2020 and December 2021 came to an end, publicly funded furlough schemes tapered off and employers sought to drive down workers' wages and degrade terms and conditions. Their tactics have included the use of mass 'fire and rehire' or, in the case of P&O, 'fire and replace'.

These attacks have been compounded by the effects of soaring inflation and sharply rising central bank interest rates, which erode the already low value of workers' wages in Britain. Behind the inflationary surge lie the interests of monopoly corporations in the energy, utility and food sectors. These corporations exploit their monopoly power as 'market-makers', passing on price rises, to transfer yet more wealth up the financial pyramid, transforming it into shareholder dividends or share buybacks as corporations shuffle profits into tax havens.

The class nature of the crisis is increasingly apparent. While working-class families watch the cost of living rise far beyond their wages, the super-rich become even richer. City bonuses in 2022 once again broke all records: in the financial and insurance sector bonuses grew by 27.9% in the year to June 2022, while average wages grew by 4.2% during the

same period. £6bn was paid out in City bonuses in March 2022 alone.

In this crisis, trade unions are propelled to the forefront of class conflict, compelled by the plight of the workers who are their members to lead a fightback, or to fade into irrelevance. Union resistance began growing, from the early battles against 'fire and rehire' in 2020 into the wave of wage and conditions struggles rising from 2021 to 2023.

As union resistance mounted, so Tory ministers threatened increased restrictions on unions' ability to call strike action, tightening the legal cage in which we operate. In the words of Tory Business Secretary, Grant Shapps, they plan to complete Thatcher's 'unfinished business'.

In this short pamphlet, the Communist Party offers perspectives on the urgent priorities for the left in the trade union movement and the need for greater left organisation. What is the left doing now to offer leadership to workers in the latest crisis of capitalism? What are our key demands and how best can we organise to achieve them?



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I The fight of our lives: The escalating class struggle

The capitalist class attacks

In February 2023, the Office for National Statistics reported that 843,000 working days were lost to strike action in December 2022, the highest in a single in Britain since the public sector pensions strike of 2011. In 2022, more working days were lost to strikes than in any year since 1989. Workers are on the move. Union after union has balloted for strike action and, in the context of some of the most draconian anti-union laws in Europe, union after union has smashed legal thresholds designed to defeat strike ballots. The Royal College of Nursing has conducted strike action for the first time in its history. Generations with no experience of strikes have had a crash course in collective action. Union leaders talk about 'class struggle' in the mainstream media and win public support. Even 12 months ago this seemed unlikely. What lies behind this wave of collective workplace struggle?

Undoubtedly the sharp spike in prices of everyday goods and utility

bills was a disaster for working people, but this cost-of-living crisis was not sent by God or even decreed by Vladimir Putin. In reality, the cost-of-living crisis is a ruthless, multi-faceted attempt by big business and finance capital to restore their profits and dividends at the expense of working people's livelihoods after the Covid pandemic, reinforced by the actions of a Tory government using the state apparatus to help them. Working people have been thrown into collective action as a response to the actions of big capital and its political representatives.

Class struggles are a constant and inescapable feature of capitalist society, both in the workplace and wider society. But there are also phases of acute struggle where the ruling class launches more or less conscious attacks on workers, economically in the workplace and politically through government pay and economic policies. The Thatcher governments represented an obvious example in recent history, as did more recently, the 'austerity' programme unleashed by a Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010, which led to a decade of wage stagnation.

The latest acute phase of this ruling class offensive began as advanced economies like Britain's began to unlock after the Covid pandemic. The largest monopoly companies used the economic disruption of lockdown as a justification for attacks on workers' pay and conditions, to increase their profits and dividend payments to their finance capitalist owners.

Starting with British Airways Cargo Division in December 2020, swiftly followed by British Gas (Centrica) in January 2021, a series of employers sought to dismiss and re-employ their workers on inferior pay and conditions in a process known as 'fire and rehire'. In March 2022 P&O Ferries went even further with 'fire and replace', illegally dismissing their entire workforce of 600 seafarers on collective contracts of employment to replace them with agency workers flown in from some of the lowest wage economies in the world. The replacement agency workers were not only paid at rates around a quarter of the workers they replaced but were also contracted to arduous 12-hour shifts, living on board the vessels they worked for up to 17 weeks at a time.

Within weeks, Royal Mail launched a vicious attack on its workers' collective conditions of employment, as private rail monopolies and publicly owned Network Rail used government bailouts as an excuse to seek to retrench jobs, working conditions and pay rates across the rail sector. The Tory government mandated pay restraint across the public sector, seeking to hold down the pay of millions of local government workers, civil servants, teachers, and health and university staff.

Pay restraint turned into rapidly falling real-terms pay as inflation took off during 2022. This inflation itself was rooted in monopolies' drive to

maximise profits and shareholder dividends. As economies emerged from the disruptions of Covid and the war in Ukraine began, monopolies in oil, gas and logistics took advantage of rising demand to ramp up prices and profits. Obscene profits are now being recorded by oil companies like BP and Shell (who doubled their profits in 2022 to £55bn), as well as parasitic energy distribution companies and financial speculators who gambled on sharp movements in commodity prices. These costs have been passed on to other companies who have sought to recoup them from consumers through price rises and wage cuts.

Price inflation hurt workers' pay packets but it also hurts finance capital asset values by devaluing money, so it wasn't long before the Bank of England – which represents finance capital in the state apparatus – weighed in by hiking interest rates. This aims to depress demand in the economy by creating more unemployment, weakening workers' bargaining power and beating down expectations of wage rises. This is all the more important for employers when labour shortages in hospitality, catering, health and other sectors have strengthened the hand of workers and their unions.

Interest rate rises may not do much to tackle inflation, whose roots lie deep in the capitalist economy, but they are good for business profits, good for finance capitalists – and very bad for workers and their families, entangled in webs of credit and debt and facing yet higher mortgage and rent increases.

The workers' response

The net result of this multifaceted class offensive has been a massive attack on living standards and a sharpening of class struggle in workplaces. Workers have been compelled to struggle. In gathering waves, they have pushed unions into demanding cost-of-living pay claims and defensive campaigns aimed at preserving jobs and hard-won working conditions.

This began with Unite, GMB and other unions attempting to stop 'fire and rehire' in early 2021. It escalated in 2022 when industrial unions RMT and CWU, with effective national collective bargaining arrangements, pursued pay demands to defend their members from attacks on jobs and conditions. Workers in rail, post, telecoms and docks took strike action during the summer of 2022 which, coupled with employer intransigence, kept disputes live until other unions joined.

In autumn 2022, they were joined by UCU's vote in the university sector, the PCS civil servants and a historic vote by the Royal College of Nursing to take strike action. Ambulance workers and paramedics organised by Unite, GMB and UNISON voted for action in November

2022 and in January 2023 the NEU won a significant ballot, with teachers voting massively in favour of strike action.

Capital's responses have varied. Some private sector logistics and transport firms where unions have membership in strategic areas have backed off from fire and rehire, or agreed to pay settlements with Unite and GMB. In other firms, where the structural power of organised labour is weaker, workers endured massive attacks from management teams determined to break their unions, as with GMB at British Gas and CWU at Royal Mail. Rail firms have held out against sustained action from the RMT and ASLEF, safe in the knowledge that they are being subsidised by a government to force through changes and defeat a militant union that calls for renationalisation of the rail industry.

But the greed and incompetence of the train operating companies has already resulted in three franchised services reverting to the public sector, while the Labour government in Cardiff has effectively nationalised local rail services in Wales and the borders.

In health, education and the civil service, the Tory government took the line of resisting any settlements that disrupt their public sector pay policy, hiding behind the facade of "independent" pay review bodies. They have ratcheted up state repression of unions and collective bargaining with a Strikes (Minimum Levels) Bill. This is the latest stage in the complete erasure of free collective bargaining in Britain, aimed at removing the right to strike for workers in six sectors where unions are strong (health, fire and rescue, education, transport, border security and nuclear decommissioning) who will be forced to cross their own picket lines to deliver 'critical services' during lawful strike action.

The remaking of the British working class?

RMT union leader Mick Lynch has claimed the current strike wave shows that 'the working class is back'. Is he right? At least partly, yes.

As we explain later in this pamphlet, unions are key vehicles of working-class organisation. For as long as capitalism has existed, workers have been driven to collectivise in defence of their wages, jobs and working conditions and they wage a class struggle at the point of production, in the workplace.

But as Marxists understand, workers only develop the full consciousness not only in themselves as a class when they recognise their interest not in winning temporary battles over wages or conditions, but in changing the structures of power in the economy as a whole. Similarly, workers' political consciousness only develops a class dimension when they grasp the need to challenge not just this or that government, but the

organised power of the capitalist class as exercised through the state. What we are seeing now is the germinal growth of trade union consciousness, a willingness to fight employers and some growth of class feeling and understanding. Whether this can develop into a broader class consciousness is what is at stake.

This is a massive opportunity to rebuild the power of the organised working class in Britain.

What is to be done now?

Strike waves rise, peak and ebb and as we've seen above. Although the ruling class offensive continues, the exact content of disputes changes over time. Economically, the exact conditions that have thrown millions of workers into struggle are likely to evolve. After the next General Election, the movement may be faced with a Labour government itself under massive extra-parliamentary pressure from big business and finance capital to maintain a public sector pay freeze and dilute reforms to trade union law, or even to apply the latest Tory anti-union laws.

The key strategic objective for the trade union movement must be to emerge from this current wave of disputes and go into the next ones with greater class unity, fighting capacity and class consciousness. Flowing from this are some key aims:

Win the disputes: This may sound obvious, but unions must come through these disputes demonstrating their basic value to millions of workers who have never taken collective action before. That means paying attention to members' views, using strikes to maximum effect and resisting adventurist or opportunist calls for 'all-out', or 'indefinite' action, likely to shatter unity and lead to defeats and demoralisation. Coordination and mass action with focussed trade union joint activity should be encouraged. Ritualistic calls for a general strike should be treated with caution.

Build the struggle against the anti-trade union laws: The Tories' new anti-trade union laws build on the existing apparatus of legal repression of free collective bargaining and will pose yet another barrier to unions organising and taking effective collective action. Activists in every union should build mass understanding of the need to struggle against these laws, to impede their passage into law, but more importantly to make them inoperable once they are on the statute books, and to demand their repeal within the first 100 days of a Labour government.

Build greater class unity across the trade unions: This means coordinating strike action to ensure waves of high-profile, high-impact action. More important than fetishising the general strike is the need to build greater class unity in multi-union workplace environments. In recent ambulance workers' strikes, for example, three general unions were involved. This could mean forming Reps or Combine committees to coordinate work across unions and counter damaging effects of union competition and division.

Build wider working-class unity: the labour movement must unite itself, but must also put itself at the head of a wider struggle to unite the whole class. Too many communities and regional economies have little contact with the labour movement anymore. Unions need to plant their flags in the working class again, supporting those seeking to organise working people in defence of their living standards, whether at work or in their communities. The Communist Party has called on the left in local communities to form a united front around local councils of action. These can combine the forces of trades councils, People's Assemblies and the many local campaigns around housing, energy, food and local services into a force that unites our class at local level and deepens its consciousness of the need to fight the class attack. The trade union movement needs to be active in promoting and supporting this kind of local organisation.

Deepen class consciousness: Class consciousness emerges from a growing understanding of the need for systemic change that tackles the entrenched economic and political power of big business and recognises the importance of an active working class in driving change that goes beyond a single dispute or change of government. A Labour government would be a step forward. But it will need an active working class movement engaged in struggle to deliver any change at all. This would have been true even had there been a Corbyn-led Labour government that tried to pose an economic alternative. How much more true will this be in the case of a Starmer-led government that is predisposed to bend to the will of the City and big business?

The Communist Party will prioritise the fight to build this working-class unity and consciousness. In the unions our cadres will fight for this and our initiatives will promote this struggle.

2: Trade unions, capitalism and the fight for socialism

Trade unions are products of the economic relations of capitalism. They are defensive organisations of workers, thrown together by the experience of exploitation in the workplace, in society and through the labour process. From the earliest days of capitalism, trade unions came into existence as workers fought to limit the length of the working day, prevent attempts to cut their wages and stop employers sacking workers and replacing them at lower rates of pay.

For Marxists, unions are of central importance in the unavoidable conflict between the two main classes in capitalist society – between the class which owns most of industry and commerce and the class whose labour is essential for our economy and society to function. The unions are schools of struggle, as Marx and Engels put it: places where workers come together and learn to fight collectively, realising the value of active struggle in the process. In the process of resisting their employers' attacks, workers come to see the need to challenge not only capital's control of work and industry, but also the organised political power of the capitalist class expressed through the state.

This fight against the state becomes more necessary and more urgent as capitalism develops. Over the 20th century, capitalist states responded to crises and working class demands by intervening more directly and extensively in the economy to (1) moderate the damaging effects of capital's innate drive to maximise profit and (2) regulate relations between capital and labour. As they did so, the connections between industrial, economic and political policies became obvious. Governments took control of some key industries, established welfare and education systems and endeavoured to regulate the economy through incomes, taxation and monetary policies. These state instruments became new arenas of combat between unions and big business. Governments and the state could be used to attack unions, or they could be won away from big business control.

But the precondition of any attempt to challenge big business control of state power was that workers fight for their economic and democratic rights through their trade union and political organisations. Workers who will not do this are unlikely ever to understand the deeper need to strive for state power or to develop the confidence to do so.

The history of the labour movement, however, is not a straight line. It moves in zigzags, now forward, now sideways, now back again. This is because capitalism is not just exploitative, it is also a chaotic, competitive and anarchic system. Businesses grow, eat each other up, destroy their

competitors and monopolise whole areas of the economy, throwing workers out of jobs. New technology is constantly used to cut wage costs and drive up profits, and whole industries are consigned to the history books. Capital seeks out cheap labour to replace what it sees as too expensive, drawing on its own 'reserve army' of the unemployed or finding new sources of labour from other countries.

These are not accidents of history, but deep tendencies always at work within capitalism and they mean that the world of work is always changing, always in motion. Working classes are made and remade by capitalism. Their defensive organisations must also be made and remade too, if there is to be any chance of forging a fighting working class. In many ways, that is what is happening in Britain today.

Trade unions in Britain today

Union organisation grew in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, retreated in the 1920s and '30s, advanced again in the post-war period up to 1979 and then endured a long backward movement as the trade unions were thrown into disarray by (1) the mutually reinforcing forces of business, government and the state under Margaret Thatcher and (2) a rapidly changing economic base that saw whole industries and their union organisations disappear.

Unions have found regeneration difficult since the era of Thatcher's frontal assault. There are several reasons for this.

Unions have been hampered by the disappearance of whole industries (manufacturing, textiles, mines, printing), the growth of new service industries with workplaces that are much harder to organise and, critically, by anti-trade union laws that make organisation and effective collective action more difficult.

In the era of financialisation and monopoly dominance of key economic sectors, transnational corporations (TNCs) demand high profits and their aggressive pricing policies force firms in their supply chains to suppress labour costs, so that employers resist union organisation and collective bargaining even harder.

Trade union leaderships and the Trades Union Congress have been slow to adapt their structures and outlooks to new industries and to open themselves up to new generations of workers who have lost the habit or tradition of being in unions. They have failed, sometimes for understandable reasons, to take risks that move them beyond their established bases of membership.

In response to the industrial defeats, state repression and the decline of collective bargaining that characterised the Thatcher years, some

unions moved toward a defensive 'social partnership' strategy, blunting unions' effectiveness and contributing to their stagnation.

Consequently, union membership in Britain has fallen from its high point of 13 million in the late 1970s (although recent years have seen modest recoveries), becoming overly concentrated in the public sector. Only 13% of private sector workers in Britain are trade union members.

Nevertheless, the logic of capitalist exploitation is relentless and as Britain languishes in a cost-of-living crisis, unions are propelled into action at the forefront of working-class struggle. And once again, a Tory government – the naked political expression of big business interests – is seeking to use the power of the state against unions, bringing in new laws to allow the use of agency workers to break strikes and legislating to erode the right to strike entirely in 'critical services'.

Our task now is to ensure that unions have the leadership, activists and strategies to fight and win these new battles for jobs and wages, and to reach out beyond trade union strongholds in public services to organise the wider working class in service, retail, and hospitality industries, for example. We must rouse the labour movement and the wider working class to oppose the state repression and destruction of basic civil liberties by the Tory government.

The role of the Communist Party

The Communist Party is a revolutionary party. It aims to play a leading role in helping the working class to leave capitalism behind once and for all – to build a better, more advanced, more productive, socialist society that ensures the free development of all people.

But only the working class, at the core of an alliance of anti-monopoly forces, organised and conscious, can achieve this historic task. And that class must be built and rebuilt – must build and rebuild itself through class struggle. The trade union movement is a crucial part of the organised working class. The Communists work to (1) help the working class to organise, (2) unite workers on the broadest possible basis and (3) fight for working-class interests. The Communists also argue for the next step, which is to turn trade union consciousness into revolutionary political consciousness, to challenge the economic and political state power of the ruling class. We do so based on a clear, sober and honest analysis of each situation and its possibilities.

Within the unions, this means that:

★ Communists start our analysis of each situation by looking at the world as it is, not as we want it to be. Only on this basis can we assess the possibilities and priorities of the moment.

- ★ Communists fight to help unions win their immediate battles – whether for wages, jobs or better working conditions. This is critical to building the fighting confidence and experience of class struggle as a precondition for building class consciousness.
- ★ Communists work to win an understanding of the need to turn the fight for wages and conditions into a fight for control of whole industries. Breaking the grip of big business over their workplaces is essential just to defend the gains workers make.
- ★ Communists aim to win greater unity in the organised working class and an understanding of workers' common interests confronting the power of big business and the capitalist state.
- ★ Communists also work to win an understanding of the need for the trade union movement to strengthen its political arm. Workers and workplaces are directly affected by employment law and by government economic policies that affect workers' wages, prices of commodities, ownership of industries and services, public spending on health, education, housing, welfare, the military and so on. Government policies and laws of the state affect workers every day. Politics cannot be ignored.
- ★ Communists fight to win support in the organised working class for an alternative economic and political strategy that can challenge big business control of the economy and improve the lives of working people as the first step to challenging capitalist state power.

This is what the Communist Party works for, but how does it do this?

The history of Communists organising in the unions

Communists have historically worked in trade unions to build left organisations that can exercise influence at all levels of the union and win leadership positions. Around the time of the founding of the Communist Party in 1920, Communists and other Marxists worked in the wartime Shop Stewards movement and through 'Councils of Action' formed to oppose British imperialism's war of intervention in Soviet Russia.

In the 1920s, Communists built the National Minority Movement to unite and mobilise the militant left in the trade unions. In the 1930s, it built 'rank-and-file' and workplace organisation, while in the post-war period Communists worked to build 'Broad Lefts' in the unions. From the 1960s, in response to growing attempts to control trade unions using state power, legal restrictions and incomes policies, the CP helped build the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions as a mass, cross-industry body rooted in workplace organisation. It aimed to win

the whole trade union movement, including union leaderships and the TUC, to a strategy of militant action against wage controls and anti-union laws.

These bodies sought to build unity on the left wherever possible, to marginalise right-wing trade union leaders and win wider understanding among workers of the need for militancy.

Broad Lefts based their programmes on immediate demands rooted in union members' immediate concerns and sought to lead and win battles on these issues to build confidence, unity and experience of struggle. They resisted adventurism, or impossible demands that served only to divide workers and weaken their organisations. Instead, these Broad Lefts sought to build a broader understanding of the need for deeper change based on advances already won, or the need for militant defensive battles and political action as the state increasingly intervened against workers.

Unlike many later 'rank-and-file' movements, these Broad Lefts saw no intrinsic conflict of interest between union leaders or bureaucracies and union members. Rather, they recognised the need both for rank-and-file organising and also to win leadership positions for the left in trade unions as a dialectical process of building and sustaining pressure, winning power and achieving change.

In the 1970s, possibly the high point of organisation and Communist Party influence in the trade union movement in post-war Britain, the Broad Lefts, which united CP members with left-wing Labour Party members and other socialists, exercised significant influence in inflicting industrial defeats on the ruling class. They built on these victories to maximise the challenge to the political power of the Conservative government. They also built broad labour movement support for an Alternative Economic Strategy.

This laid the basis for the defeat of the Tories and the election of a Labour government in 1974. Regrettably, after scrapping wage controls and council-house rent increases, expanding workers' rights and nationalising some key industries, union leaders signed a 'Social Contract' and agreed to pay restraint. Bowing to City and big business pressure, the Labour government then cut public spending programmes and imposed an incomes policy which divided and fatally weakened the labour movement. Almost alone, the CP continued to argue for free collective bargaining, wealth taxes and higher public investment.



3: Organising the working class: What is to be done?

In Part I we have looked at what must be done immediately to win the current wave of disputes, stressing the need to build working-class organisation and deepen class consciousness. In the second part we looked at why trade unions are vital to the fight for socialism and how the Communist Party has historically worked to build union and class organisation.

During and beyond these immediate strikes, the labour movement must rebuild and emerge stronger and better organised with a deeper class consciousness. What are the key immediate issues around which workers must be organised? What are the priority battles for the left in the unions? How does the trade union movement play its part in organising the wider class?

Immediate organising issues

Fighting for wage increases: The fight for better wages is now an urgent and pressing issue facing unions. They must stop the employer and government offensive to drive down living standards permanently. Coordination of these actions wherever possible can strengthen workers' demands for higher wages, but the priority must be to win actual battles for real-terms wage increases and build momentum that enables cumulative and general advances in wage bargaining.

Defending existing jobs and fighting for better ones: Major employers are using the multiple crises enveloping the capitalist economy, deploying new technology to scrap jobs and intensify and de-skill labour. Creating higher unemployment and forcing more workers into the gig economy will be used to weaken workers' bargaining power. Precarious and casual employment was already endemic in Britain's labour market. The fight to defend existing jobs, returning gig jobs to full-time contracts and winning better conditions is a vital part of a strategy to rebuild trade union organisation in the world of work, particularly in the private sector where backward practices proliferate.

Fighting for equality: Capitalism has long used oppression and discrimination on grounds of people's sex, race, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity or religion to maximise exploitation and divide the workforce. In the same way, every crisis of capitalism enlarges the burden of oppression as super-profits are extracted based on structural inequalities in society. Trade unions must place themselves at the forefront of movements for solidarity with those who face structural sexism, racism and other oppressions. The drive for greater equality is an essential part of our agenda to build greater class unity and tackle structures that support and enable oppression and super-exploitation.

Strengthening health and safety at work: The Covid crisis illuminated the weakened state of health, safety and welfare in the workplace, worsened by years of deregulation, lack of enforcement and weakened collective bargaining coverage. Intensification of work, longer hours and rising levels of exploitation create stress and danger in many workplaces. Unions played a key role in mitigating the worst abuses in many workplaces during the pandemic and must continue to build on this. Health and safety is an important area where unions should maximise the gains to be made from using existing legislation.

There would be little argument across the trade union movement that these are important struggles. But Communists and others on the left must be fully engaged with organising and leading in these struggles, because our authority to speak on the deeper political issues and make the wider connections to workers arises from the determination with which we organise and fight on these more basic essential issues.

Widening and deepening the struggle

Broad lefts have a key role to play in widening and deepening struggles

over immediate issues and key wider objectives into deeper challenges to both the capitalist class and government offensive and to the capitalist system as a whole. Below are key wider campaigns that can unite workers in campaigns that pose a wider challenge to capital's ability to dictate terms to the working class through the economy and state:

Rebuilding and enhancing public services: As well as seeking wage increases, union Broad Lefts need to engage with the fight to rebuild and extend public services. This means resisting further corporate control of education, health and other services, but also turning the tide on their advance across all public services. The fight to rebuild public services and put them back under public ownership, restoring them as universal services, free to use, must be linked with industrial battles within the public services and with the wider fight for better working-class living standards. These campaigns must be fought both politically and through grassroots public and community campaigns, by unions linking up with and helping to build working-class organisation and articulating community demands for public services. With the Labour Party in retreat from its Corbyn-era manifesto commitments to nationalisation, waging this battle throughout the labour movement becomes even more important.

Sectoral collective bargaining: Unions will only be able to turn the benefits of successful collective bargaining and industrial action at company level into generalised wage rises by winning collective bargaining within each sector as a whole. This battle can be fought on two fronts: industrially, by confronting employers in turn with enough concentrated pressure to force concessions, pushing them towards a preference for collective bargaining and agreements at national level in each economic sector; and politically, through fighting for support within the Labour Party for the substance of its 2019 General Election manifesto, which proposed a new Industrial Relations Bill, based on the IER's *Manifesto for Labour Law*.

Fighting for trade union freedom: The Tory government's response to the growing wave of trade union militancy has been to ratchet up legal restrictions, criminalise more strike action and even threaten the strike pay of trade union members taking industrial action. The response to this cannot be to sit tight and hope for a Labour government to reverse these laws. The lessons of history are that where mass action takes place on a wide enough and sustained basis, anti-trade union laws can be turned back. Where it does not, they remain in place and generate

defeatism. So we need to build a campaign of sustained mass struggle, possibly waged over years, combining different tactics to make these laws inoperable, building mass pressure also for legislation that widens trade union freedoms and repeals all Tory anti-trade union legislation.

Challenging big business control and power: Wherever we look around the world, the responsibility for people's plight lies with big business – the financial, industrial and service monopolies that dominate our economies and pressure governments to gear the policies of the state to their needs. The various crises that have swept through the international capitalist economy in recent years demonstrate this clearly: Beginning in 2008, the international financial exposed the role of bankers and so-called 'investors', who speculate with over-inflated and often complex financial products, creating a meltdown in the international capitalist economy, then demand massive bailouts from governments and central banks only to recapitalise themselves and return to the same profiteering. In Britain, £1,300 billion was made available to finance capitalists through loans, subsidies and asset purchases.

The neoliberal policy of austerity was unleashed by governments, the European Union and the International Monetary Fund on workers, leading to a decade of falling wages, privatisation of public assets, labour 'flexibility' and cuts in public spending. In Britain, corporate profits rose sharply as they benefited from the creation of newly privatised assets such as Royal Mail and student loan debt, as well as from the unprecedented supply of state-backed credit (another form of 'fictitious capital') in the form of 'Quantitative Easing' by the Bank of England.

Corporations have latched onto new technology, using ICT, robotics, machine learning, Artificial Intelligence, etc. to design new ways to throw workers on the scrapheap and intensify work processes, while a new generation of tech monopolies have emerged to dominate and close down these markets to new entrants.

Covid-19 exposed the anti-social, anti-worker essence of big business once again. Like other states whose public services had been run down and degraded by decades of neoliberal privatisations, Britain struggled more than most to cope with the effects of the pandemic. Big business turned this public health crisis into yet another opportunity to win government contracts and secure corporate welfare through bailouts and state-funded furlough schemes. Big companies then launched massive attacks on workers' pay and conditions as Covid restrictions eased, seeking to drive down the cost of labour and maximise their dividend payouts.

During the Covid pandemic, the wealthiest 650 billionaires in the USA

increased their wealth from \$3,400 billion to \$4,600 billion. Britain's 177 billionaires have seen their wealth – much of it stashed in tax havens around the world – grow from £491 billion to £653 billion, as child poverty multiplied and millions more households face fuel poverty.

Monopoly businesses have driven imperialism's military build-ups and wars in Europe, the Middle East and Asia, exploiting the disruptions to global markets caused by the pandemic and using their market position to extract monopoly super-profits at our expense.

Big business is powerful, but it is also vulnerable to challenges by broad mass alliances based on the organised working class.

An alternative economic and political strategy:

The need for a new deal for workers and a challenge to big business dominance is obvious. Broad Lefts in trade unions can work to deepen this understanding and build support for an alternative economic and political strategy. The Communist Party is clear that there is no political strategy within capitalism that can make the capitalist system work in the interest of the working class. The laws and tendencies of capital function as surely as ever to generate economic and environmental crisis, social inequality and oppression, monopoly, expansion, militarism and imperialist war. Only by building socialism through the working class and its allies winning state power can we abolish the laws of capitalism that threaten our planet and our future.

However, we must also demand urgent changes now that will improve working-class living standards, make significant inroads into the power of big business and build the power of the working class to overcome the inevitable capitalist resistance. The basis of such an alternative economic and political strategy exists in the Communist Party's programme, *Britain's Road to Socialism* (2020). The programme mapped out by Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party leadership between 2017 and 2019 also contains important elements of such a strategy.

Any alternative programme must be more than one for building a militant mass movement and winning the election of a left-wing government. It must also promote a set of demands understood and supported by the mass organisations of the working class and the people generally. Only in this way can a government elected to deliver such a programme be held to its commitments. This understanding and support can only be built through the experience of collective battles over the immediate issues facing the working class.

Key internal issues for Broad Left organisations

The issues identified above are some of the most important facing Broad

Left organisations, essential for exercising their leadership role in the trade union movement, mobilising and organising members and building a stronger, more class-conscious movement. But Broad Left organisations will have to wage organisational battles within and across unions to deliver this. Some of the key ones are identified below:

Coordinating and building effective collective action

One of the most important tactical questions for Broad Lefts is how to ensure that unions take effective industrial action that brings masses of people into activity, thereby building their confidence. The practical difficulties of coordinating strike action across disputes with different employers and different collective bargaining timetables are considerable, especially given Britain's anti-trade union laws bequeathed by successive governments over the past 40 years, and even more so with the 2023 attack on workers' rights.

Generalised strike action should always be on the table, but rather than attempting to create 'set-piece' days of action, it may be preferable to work to generalise active wage disputes onto the biggest mass basis possible, giving them a coherent unified identity in which workers can see themselves as part of a united, if decentralised, drive to win a victory against the cost-of-living (or 'cost-of-capitalism') crisis. Successive waves of action taken on a mass basis by a diversity of workers can act just as strongly to develop class consciousness as single set-piece strike days which, of necessity, have to move at the pace of the slowest. Union Broad Lefts could look to coordinate 'waves' of action embracing multiple workplaces across the economy over a sustained period, using the same slogans and demands where appropriate and highlighting successes along the way to build fighting confidence.

Uniting rank-and-file and official structures

As we saw above, unlike many later 'rank-and-file' movements, Broad Lefts saw no inherent conflict of interest between union staff and leaders and union members that impedes the development of class consciousness. Rather, they recognise the need both for rank-and-file organising and for winning leadership positions for the left in trade unions as a dialectical process of building and sustaining pressure, winning power and achieving change.

Although the need to win class-conscious officials and lay representatives at all levels is vital in driving change in trade unions, Broad Lefts must be more than mere electoral machines. Broad lefts must seek to build union membership and political consciousness among

rank-and-file trade union activists. This means being rooted in workplaces and union branches, listening to and engaging with workers in day-to-day battles and striving to be useful as union reps, shop stewards and branch officers among grassroots union members.

Building union unity

The labour movement must find ways of overcoming damaging and futile inter-union rivalries. This new period of class struggle demands that trade unions find ways of sharing resources and reaching out to unionise workers across vast areas of the economy currently untouched by trade unions. This means creating greater levels of 'industrial unionism', whether this is expressed within general unions or across and between unions through the creation of industrial reps' combines.

The Communication Workers Union's New Deal for Workers sets out a joint campaigning agenda that has much in common with the ideas set out above and stresses the importance of unions cooperating at national and sectoral levels. The left should actively support the New Deal for Workers and encourage unions to think about new ways of jointly resourcing, recruiting and organising in 'greenfield' areas, particularly in the private sector. Broad Lefts also have a job to do creating collectives that can build union power locally. In some locations, this will be through trades councils. In others, it may need locally rooted campaigns like Sheffield Needs a Pay Rise or initiatives like Organise Now!

Building class unity

Broad Lefts should also work to ensure that unions are active in building wider class unity at national and local levels. This means actively supporting and promoting unity among movements and campaigns that have sprung up in defence of working people's living standards such as the People's Assembly and a multitude of local campaigns. The Communist Party has called on those on the left in their communities to form a united front around local councils of action. These can combine the forces of trades councils, People's Assemblies and the many local campaign groups into forces that unite our class at local level and deepen its consciousness of the need to fight the ruling class attack.

Promoting political and industrial education

Providing political and industrial education for union reps is key to

building strong unions. Some reps already have an informal education in union policies and procedures, employment and discrimination law and representation and negotiation skills. Where possible, union Broad Lefts can support the formal structures of trade union education to give it greater political and economic content and equip new generations of workplace leaders to better understand the power of capital and labour. Signposting trade union education courses such as those provided on-site and online through the Marx Memorial Library & Workers' School and the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) is an important resource that left organisations can access to assist with these educational tasks.

Understanding and analysing workplaces

It's easy to exaggerate the extent to which traditional workplaces have been transformed by financialised international capitalism. In hospitals, distribution warehouses and factories, workers are still concentrated in large numbers by their employers. And the expansion of TNCs is forging new links between collectives of workers across borders, connected by multinational production and supply chains. Yet, even here, new technologies are changing the ways people work and the jobs they do. Many workers are precariously employed in part-time jobs in hospitality and retail and many more are now dispersed and separated, working in tiny satellite companies, self-employed, or homeworking. Broad Lefts need to be at the forefront of setting out strategic choices for the trade union movement about where to organise and how to do it, reflecting the changing nature of workplaces, jobs and the employment market.

Promoting democracy

As democratic institutions are undermined by big businesses and right-wing governments, so trade unions remain bastions of democratic practice and vital schools of democratic participation. But their own internal democracy is often fragile. Turnouts in union elections are low, but participation in workplace or branch meetings can often be low too, leading to fragile representation and leadership at all levels. Union Broad

Lefts have a job to do, not just to hold officials to account - though this is vital - but to regenerate the internal democracy of our unions at every level. This includes building and revitalising equality structures and participation. The law imposing postal ballots on unions should be repealed to allow the option of workplace balloting, which often helps ensure greater participation in both discussion and voting. likely increase

member turn-out.

Working-class internationalism

The working class across England, Scotland and Wales is tied to the wider international working class through economic links that go back to the Industrial Revolution. Company structures and supply chains stretch across borders and continents, bringing the common interests of workers across huge stretches of the world into ever closer alignment. The activities of TNCs, backed in the age of imperialism by military and state apparatuses, are driving ever-increasing waves of migrations that are changing the composition of the working class in every country.

Trade unions face the need to organise a constantly changing and increasingly diverse workforce. Working classes in Britain, the US and Europe benefit in part – historically and today – from transfers of wealth from the developing world. Union Broad Lefts must deepen the internationalist perspectives of our unions to win an understanding of the connections between big business, capitalism and imperialist wars and of the potential for the working class of all lands to unite.

Some possible first steps:

If you're relatively new to the trade union movement or left organisations, you could consider the following first steps:

- ★ Find out whether Communist Party members are active in your union or your industry. You can contact CP headquarters if it's not clear. Are there people who read or know about the Morning Star?
- ★ Find out what left organisations exist already and identify their orientation and what they are doing.
- ★ Hold a meeting with other CP members or sympathetic fellow workers and discuss the issues raised in this pamphlet. Use it to assess what left organisation exists already. What should be your attitude to it?
- ★ Consider holding an educational meeting where you use this pamphlet and discuss how it applies to the struggles in your workplace.

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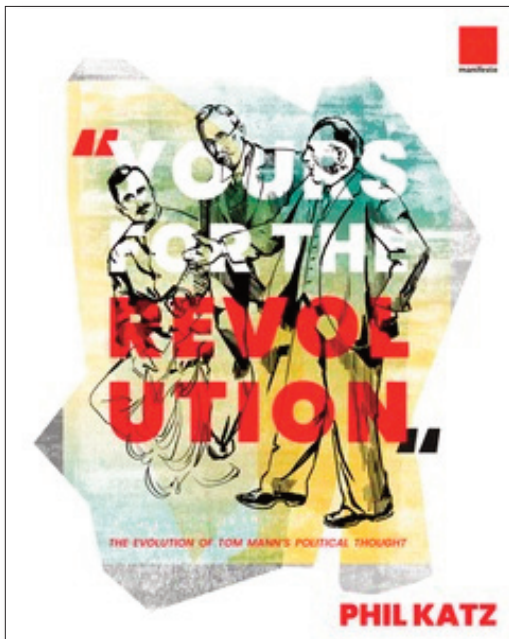
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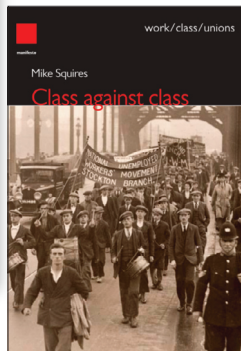
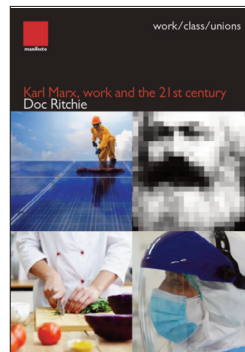
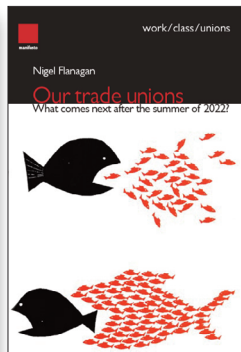
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