

As the cost of living soars... 'WE ARE GOING TO FIGHT BACK'!

Cuts in public services, a widening wealth gap and declining living standards for the majority of working and middle class people could lead to an explosion of anger in Britain.

Recently, even Mervyn King, governor of the Bank of England, warned that the rise in the cost of living could become so great that workers will fight for pay increases.

Meanwhile, supermarket giant Asda reckons an average family saw their disposable income drop by 7.1%, or £13 a week, during April compared with the same month in 2010. Asda says soaring petrol prices and higher train fares mean families are now spending around 10% more on transport compared with 2010, with petrol prices 12.7% higher than in April last year.

Higher rents and heating costs have slashed families' budgets while wages are growing at only around half the level of inflation.

And a new report from the Resolution Foundation predicts that millions of low to middle income families face years of declining living standards and are seeing their chances of owning their own home disappear.

The report also shows that most people's earnings were flatlining well before the banking and financial meltdown in 2008. It says that income levels are expected to fall next year, only returning to 2001 levels in 2015. Meanwhile the 1,000 richest individuals in the UK saw their combined wealth rise last year by £60.2 billion to an unbelievable £396 billion.

With capitalism in crisis, workers can expect an unrelenting assault on their living standards. Only a resolute fightback by working class people, involving coordinated strike action, can reverse this offensive.

A local authority worker in London, a member of the Unison trade union, spoke to the Socialist about the financial pressures on workers and what can be done to protect living standards.

"A common refrain at work these days is 'I've never worked this hard and yet felt so poor'. I've got responsibilities, I've got a child to clothe and feed. I've got to find the money for school trips, etc.

When I go to the bank machine and look at my statement after I've just been paid, it's shocking to see what little I've got to live on for the rest of the month. This is at a time when the housing association is increasing my rent by £50 a month.

Today, management asked us to accept a 2% pay cut. And cuts in my enhanced pay for week-end working, which the council is pushing for, could result in me losing £1,000 a year.

In the last two months there has been a shocking realisation of just what the government's austerity measures really mean for my standard of living.

As a result there is a feeling of generalised anger developing amongst the people I work with and in my local community about working class people's shrinking living standards.

I think the argument of the government that there is no alternative to cuts and pay freezes



photo Paul Mattsson

The trade unions must build strike action following the 500,000 strong anti-cuts demo on 26 March

and that ordinary people should bear the brunt of the financial and economic crisis, is wearing thin. It hasn't escaped the attention of me and my fellow workers that we're getting poorer at a time when the rich are getting richer

and that we're meant to passively accept this situation. Well no way!

The trade unions must tap into this mood of anger and organise strike action now to fight these seemingly never ending attacks

on our living standards. It's entirely possible that the trade unions can build upon the mood that we saw on the massive 26 March TUC anti-cuts demo with united strike action over the rising cost of living."

What we stand for

The Socialist Party fights for socialist change – a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also fight, in our day-to-day campaigning, for every possible improvement for working-class people.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international.

The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a democratic, socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

Work and income

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £8 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards £10 an hour. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state

retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension. Reinstate the link with average earnings now.

- Reject 'Welfare to Work'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage.
- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

Public services

- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs – free at the point of use and under

democratic control. Kick out private contractors!

- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

Environment

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low fare, publicly-owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

Rights

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.

New workers' party

- For a new mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and anti-war campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Trade unions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party now and aid the building of a new workers' party!

Socialism and internationalism

- No to imperialist wars and occupations. Withdraw the troops immediately from Iraq and Afghanistan!
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and banks that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neo-liberal European Union! For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!