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Autumn Bulletin 2021

BUILD FOR COP26: SOCIALIST CHANGE NOT CLIMATE CHANGE!

From 31st October to 12th November, the 26th United Nations Climate Change “Conference of the Parties”, known as COP26, will meet in Glasgow.

Pressure is growing on world leaders to take decisive action on climate change. A generation of school students, participating in “climate strike” walkouts from school, have already made their voices heard.

In almost every trade union in the UK, motions have been debated at national Conferences which commit the unions to fighting for a “just transition”. This means a shift away from a carbon-emitting economy in a way that protects working class people from job losses, and higher prices and taxes.

Threat to profits

But let’s be clear, the capitalist class see the climate crisis not as a threat to the planet but as a threat to their profits. A number of large polluters – energy companies, corporations reliant upon global supply chains and banks – have taken to sponsoring COP26, to ensure that they can pose as concerned whilst making sure their profits are protected by governments.

Working class people have no such privileged access to these leaders. Only by mobilising workers across the UK – and across the world – will we ensure that our voice is the loudest, so that bosses and politicians are left in no doubt that the burden of de-carbonising the economy should be borne by the wealthiest.

Workers must be mobilised, and

given the confidence to strike and occupy factories threatened with closure, to demand nationalisation and to demand that the government drastically scales up its investment in the future zero carbon economy.

The twin demands of reducing carbon emissions and a green recovery that protects jobs are universal. The school students who took strike action in 2019 are finishing school and looking around for jobs. Their options are limited. There is scope for a massive campaign that unites workers and students.

Workers – and their organisations, the trade unions – must take the lead.

PCS must hold the employer to account for all agreed targets in law, it also must demand bargaining talks with the Cabinet Office and the employers to implement conference policy to work with trade unions and allies that support a whole economy approach to tackling climate change and Just Transition to build an alternative transition strategy.

PCS must also work with young people, including combative campaigns with a proven track record, such as Youth Fight For Jobs.

Young workers and students want jobs. They want rights at work. They are absolutely fed up with a capitalist system which has no answer to climate change except an unending series of international junkets in Kyoto, Paris, Copenhagen, now Glasgow. Their lived experience is of their future being endlessly threatened, wages undermined, jobs casualised, pensions evaporated. A socialist approach to these issues unites workers and students.

All of these issues – defending jobs, defending local services, making every workplace as green as possible – are relevant in every community across the country. Achieving them is not just compatible with the demand for a zero-carbon economy - they are dependent upon each other.

Cop 26 gives an opportunity for a huge mobilisation that has the potential to be felt in every corner of the world to demand action to save the planet.

We must mobilise now.



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National Insurance Hike - Tories Heap Cost of Crisis on Workers & Pensioners

Whenever the working class ask for some respite from austerity and cuts, we are continually told 'there is no magic money tree.'

But as every crisis shows, there is a 'magic money tree' if capitalists need to save their economic system.

The health and economic crisis of the Covid pandemic has seen an unprecedented injection of money, with the overriding priority to maintain the profit-driven economy. Working-class lives have been lost as inept policies have stacked up to supposedly deal with Covid.

We have also seen naked cronyism and corruption. What sort of system is it where, faced with millions of deaths and a pandemic, Johnson and the Tories say, 'Oh good, my friends and I can make loads of money'.

To make matters worse there is no effective opposition from the Labour Party or the TUC and most union leaders. Scandalously, Labour actually abstained on the vote to deny pensioners the increases due to them this year.

In 2020, millionaire Tory Chancellor Rishi Sunak, made it clear that the bill for the Covid crisis would be placed on the working class. The first instalments of the bill are already being presented.

The Tories promised in the 2019 General Election to 'fix social care'. The 'fix'? To increase National Insurance for ordinary workers by 1.25% to raise £36 billion.

But the first call on this money will be to help the NHS catch up with the over 5.5 million waiting list for non-covid treatment (and is less than Serco was given for the inadequate Track and Trace system).

The Health and Social Care Bill, far from signalling a 'fix,' opens up the NHS to further privatisation and does not address the low pay, cost and scandals of privatised social care and the role of Private Equity firms in the care sector.

The government should be using the enormous wealth salted away by big corporations and the super-rich for the benefit of society as a whole.

The Sunday Times rich list, published in May, showed that in the first year of the Covid crisis, UK billionaires' wealth increased from £490.7 billion to £597.2 billion.

This £106.5 billion increase and ongoing proper taxation of the super-rich, could pay for a fully funded social care system free at the point of use. It would go a long way towards provide proper pensions and a lower pension age. Fund the National Health Service with plenty to spare for council services, school, public transport and everything else society needs.

We need public services run for need, not for profit. This means bringing health, care and other services into public ownership to be democratically run by workers and service users, as part of a wider socialist planned economy. It means making the rich pay for the crisis.

Tories Cut Universal Credit

On 6th October Universal Credit will be cut by £20 per week, or around £1,040 per year plunging millions of low paid workers and the unemployed into further hardship.

DWP Minister Therese Coffey demonstrated the extent of Tory callous indifference by claiming that this could be offset by an extra couple of hours' paid work.

In fact it would take up to 9 hours for an average worker to recoup the amount lost. For every £1 earned in work, the government subtract 63p from benefits. For a young worker earning the minimum wage of £6.56 per hour, it would take even more than 9 hours to recover this loss.

Prior to Covid-19, around 3 million people claimed Universal Credit, of whom around 1 million were in work. Currently around 6 million people are claiming Universal Credit, of whom 2 million are in work meaning

the uplift costs around £6 billion. The government wants rid of this additional cost and at the same time wants poverty to force people into work.

If there were decent jobs to go to there would be no need to use a threat of poverty. In reality, despite the wage rises seen in sectors as a result of labour shortages, the capitalist response to the pandemic has been the proliferation of low wage jobs which you can't make ends meet on.

Socialist Party members call for a national minimum wage of £15 per hour, alongside a universal welfare system that protects the rights of claimants and which does not involve sanctions. We want the £20 uplift retained but more besides.

Attacks on the benefit system have been constant over the last decade.

The Socialist Party is part of TUSC, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, an anti-cuts electoral alliance with the RMT transport union and others.

www.tusc.org.uk

**TUSC
AGAINST
CUTS**

At the same time, utility prices and other costs have been skyrocketing.

In this context, token opposition and fine words from the great and the good, about the impact of removing the £20 uplift to UC seems almost to mock the desperate situation many working class families will find themselves in.

To push back the attempt at eroding working class living standards, we need fighting, democratic trade unions with socialist policies – and we call on all workers, in work and unemployed, to get into their union and demand better!

Covid-19 - Our Safety is Paramount

Every decision the Tories have made over the past 18 months has been in the interests of big business and not people.

Their reckless haste to pretend that life can get back to normal is placing workers at risk.

In many of the areas where PCS organises, managers have been forced to take a more careful approach to bringing workers back into the workplace - especially as members have shown they can work productively and effectively from home.

However, there is a growing move to get workers more used to being back in the workplace - the thin end of the wedge - in areas where there has been a lack of clear opposition from PCS to doing this.

PCS should be giving a clear lead that all work needs to be delivered safely by members working from home to eliminate risk. The only exceptions should be where there is a genuine need for work to be done in the workplace or it is the safest place

for the member to work. But all these instances should only be with union agreement. Workers' safety must be paramount.

Tory government propaganda tries to put on the back burner the responsibility all employers have to protect their workforce and the public who use the services. But the consequences of putting workers at risk remain severe not only from contracting covid-19 but also the potential to get long-covid.

Like many areas of the public sector during the pandemic the enforcement of these duties by the HSE is underfunded and under-resourced. Putting even more pressure on the union to fight for our workplaces to be safe.

There is a complete lack of a coherent national PCS campaign to challenge the government and protect members from a premature return to the workplace. This failure of leadership is mirrored in groups such as DWP, also controlled by Left Unity.

PCS is failing to properly utilise

health and safety legislation on serious and imminent danger. Just providing members with a long explanation of what their rights are and blaming individuals for not utilising this advice, is not giving a genuine lead. It poses no effective challenge to employers.

We need to give a collective response to health and safety threats.

Every opportunity should be taken to mobilise the collective strength of our union to stop the Tories' drive to return to the workplace and unsafe conditions.

The Socialist Party participates in the Broad Left Network, which brings together socialists and activists with experience at all levels of PCS, campaigning for a fighting, democratic union.

**Get involved:
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pcsbln.wordpress.com**

DVLA - A Dispute That Can and Must Be Won

The dispute at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) over COVID safety is now 6 months old - although no industrial action has taken place since the end of August.

A consultative ballot for continuing with the campaign concluded on 3rd September. The results have not been made public. However branch officers have indicated that a majority voted in favour of continuing with industrial action. It is said that preparations are being made for a possible statutory ballot although this has not been announced at time of writing.

The positive vote in the consultative ballot shows the resilience and determination of members at DVLA. It also shows that the safety issue has not gone away. Over 800 staff have

now contracted the virus at some point, which amounts to almost 1 in 7 of the workforce - far higher than in the general population.

Management continue to deploy aggressive tactics, with reports of members being questioned as to why their Covid apps were turned on in work and even vulnerable staff being contacted to return to the workplace.

While fully supporting members at DVLA and the campaign of industrial action, Socialist Party members in PCS are clear that the Left Unity leadership of PCS could have handled things far better.

The leadership should have taken decisive action by collective use of S44 back in December/January when the outbreak occurred rather than

wait until March to ballot with action only commencing in April.

The leadership should have escalated to include all DVLA members in sustained action. It was the threat of such action that led to an offer in May that was subsequently vetoed at ministerial level. However, this action was never carried out and has not been revived since.

The leadership should have taken measures to stop the forced return to the workplace now taking place by deploying collective S44 notices.

The dispute can be won. It is now essential to obtain a resounding YES vote in a further statutory ballot to renew the strike mandate and escalate the industrial action.

With Covid cases rising rapidly again in the community, this important dispute must be won. It will safeguard the health and safety of members in DVLA and serve as a warning to management elsewhere.



WHERE IS THE 2021 NATIONAL PAY CAMPAIGN?

Two recent pay deals show the union's leadership has abandoned the national pay campaign.

These deals in HMRC (Revenue & Customs) and MOJ (Justice) have common features. They are 3 year deals and trade conditions for pay. Both were supported by the national and group leaderships even though in each case the annual pay increase is way below the union's national pay claim of 10%.

The HMRC and MOJ deals, which we opposed, were accepted in membership ballots. But given no national campaign on pay as an alternative this is no surprise.

And this is the point. There was and is no national pay campaign.

Although badly damaged by the failure to win statutory strike ballots in 2018 and 2019 the national campaign could be said at the time to be alive if not well.

In 2020 Senior Officers and the Left Unity NEC majority withdrew ("parked") the union's 10% pay claim. This gesture towards national unity at the onset of the pandemic - opposed alone by Broad Left Network NEC members - was contemptuously thrown back in their faces by the government in reiterating its pay restrictions.

In response the NEC reinstated the 10% claim. But the damage was done. The 2020 national campaign was buried bar the launching of a petition.

Fast forward to 2021. Faced with further Tory pay restrictions Mark Serwotka informed the NEC that he had told the Cabinet Office deals could still be done and instanced the HMRC cash for conditions deal.

We are now in October. Where is the 2021 pay campaign?. Where is the fight back against Tory pay

restrictions?. The answer is that concession bargaining (selling conditions for pay) is in reality what the Democratic Alliance (Left Unity/Democrats) leadership stands for.

With the abandonment of the national pay campaign Groups have been left isolated to fend for themselves as best they can.

The union's 10% pay claim is modest when set against what we have lost over the years, the NI increases and rising inflation. NHS workers have rejected the government's pay policies. So should we.

- **No to Tory pay restrictions**
- **No to concession bargaining**
- **Yes to a national campaign to secure the union's 10% pay claim**
- **Yes to joint action with those public sector unions prepared to fight for pay justice!**

YOUTH FIGHT FOR JOBS

The Youth Fight for Jobs campaign has called for a day of action on 9th October in support of its demands:

- against job cuts
- for real training and apprenticeship schemes
- for the right to a job for all
- to make the 1% pay for a decent future with well paying jobs

These demands will resonate with our members, in particular the many PCS members facing a £20 cut in universal credit from 6th October.

This Tory attack hits everyone whether in or out of work and comes on top of the looming hike in energy costs and national insurance.

The trade union movement must unite around demands for quality jobs on decent pay. After slogging our guts out to provide services throughout the pandemic this has brought low pay and lack of staff into sharp perspective across the public sector.

Many of the staff recruited into the civil service are on casual or fixed

term appointments. Agency staff are also used to fill staff shortfalls. All short term stop-gap solutions as the Tories won't address staffing problems.

The DWP has recruited an extra 13,500 work coaches in Jobcentres to help the huge numbers of unemployed. However, most of these are on fixed term or casual contracts.

The DWP must demand of management that they make these jobs permanent and launch a campaign amongst members in support of this demand.

The DWP is unprepared to deal with the influx of new claims when the job retention scheme ends. With 1.9m workers still furloughed in sectors still hugely impacted by the pandemic, big numbers will need to claim benefits to survive.

It is essential PCS works closely with organisations fighting for claimants and workers' rights to build a mass campaign against this Tory offensive.

The relaunch of Youth Fight for Jobs with the day of action on 9th October provides an ideal opportunity to campaign together on the issues facing young workers in our ranks, other workplaces and on the dole, and crucially fight for a future.

There are demonstrations taking place in many towns and cities and if YFFJ has not been in touch locally then PCS branches can contact the campaign here:

youthfightforjobs.com

