

# MASS WORKING CLASS ORGANISATION NEEDED TO FIGHT ENERGY BILL POVERTY

- **Coordinate the strikes**
- **Nationalise energy**
- **Starmer doesn't fight for us. Build a new workers' party**
- **Fight for a socialist alternative – join the Socialist Party**

Millions are looking towards the winter with fear - dreading unaffordable energy bills. This remains the case despite the freezing of the energy price cap – the bills are already too high and pay, pensions and benefits are too low. Meanwhile, the obscenely huge energy companies' profits are at historic levels.

**Soaring poverty and suffering is not inevitable. Mass workers' action can change the course of events.**

The strike wave shows the potential power of workers to fight back and change things. Correctly, the trade union leaders are being looked to in the fight against inflation poverty – and they can provide a lead in the fight against energy bill poverty too.

Under Truss, the Tories remain a government of crisis. They are deeply split – in fact the only thing they can agree on is that the working class should take the hit for the crisis. But that isn't necessarily easy for them – their weakness makes them susceptible to pressure.

Under pressure, Liz 'no-handouts' Truss has been forced to intervene on the energy bills. More is likely to be spent on this intervention than on any single measure taken during the pandemic. But it will not solve the cost-of-living crisis.


In reality this is another massive transfer of wealth - from the public purse to the energy companies. But it shows that money can be found when the Tories feel they have no choice but to act – so let's build that pressure.


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The growing strike wave has huge widespread support. The pay strikes show a way forward in the fight against poverty. In the last year, for example, 63,000 Unite members have gone into disputes winning over £50 million in pay increases. Everyone needs to fight for a pay rise.

All the potential is there to build a mass movement that can force the government back. The trade union leaders must use their authority to offer the leadership necessary to turn the potential into the building of a millions-strong movement that fights inflation poverty.

If the national strikes on the railways, Royal Mail and BT were coordinated with the localised disputes, up to a quarter of a million workers could be involved. This would have a huge effect on the confidence of public sector workers, Amazon workers and all the others looking to join the action.

The TUC has called a lobby of parliament on Wednesday 19 October against the cost-of-living crisis. It has begun to publicise it - but the plan still seems to be a small targeted lobby of MPs. Instead what is needed is a serious campaign to make the day a mass march on Parliament. Let's flood the streets of London with workers, both those in dispute and those looking to take action, and everyone who is angry at the cost-of-living crisis.

Such a call to march with a programme that includes: inflation-proofed pay rises, pensions and benefits; a £15 an hour minimum wage with no exemptions; rent caps, a programme of council house building and of home insulation; nationalisation of energy, water, rail, mail; and a socialist alternative to capitalist exploitation and poverty would inspire millions to join the fight against the cost-of-living crisis.

One advantage the defenders of capitalism have is that the working class, stepping up the fight in the workplaces, does not yet have a political voice to represent our interests in parliament and the councils. Keir Starmer's Labour doesn't back the strikes and dropped Corbyn's call for nationalisation.

Nationalising the energy industry would mean that the bosses' hoarded cash could be put to use investing in green alternatives, for example. Unlike Labour's bailing out of the banks, socialist nationalisation, under democratic workers' control as part of a socialist, internationalist plan of production, could end fuel poverty immediately. It could massively cut energy bills, with costs absorbed into government spending.

Nationalisation would need to be implemented without compensation being paid to fat-cat shareholders, only to those who could prove their need. And it doesn't have to be a long process - 51 years ago a Tory government was forced to step in and nationalise Rolls Royce within 24 hours. This Tory government is even weaker and less able to defend the rotten capitalist system as its crisis grows.

With a general election looming, building a new workers' party that stands firm in the interests of the working class is an urgent part of the fight against inflation poverty. A new workers' party would also provide a forum for the discussion needed on tactics for the movement.

One pressing question which must be discussed is tactics for defeating the price cap and keeping families warm and fed. There is a growing mood for direct action - including from the tens of thousands who have signed up to pledge to cancel their energy direct debits on 1 October. How could it be otherwise? Bill non-payment is on the cards because millions face inability to pay.

While there are many lessons for building mass movements today, mass organised non-payment of the poll tax is not directly comparable to non-payment of energy bills. For example, the poll tax victory was the result of a four-year campaign. Furthermore, not paying the poll tax did not carry the danger of being unable to heat your home or cook.

The difference between the context of these two campaigns points to how the price hikes can be defeated. Today, the Tories are weak and workers' mass struggle is growing. If a lead is given by the trade union leaders or even by Corbyn, the whole cost-of-living crisis could start to be turned around.

The community mobilisation and picketing involved in the poll tax's 'bailiff busting' tactic is very relevant to fighting the imposition of smart metres. Preparation for that can begin now - including building up contact lists of people who are willing to both attend resistance events and to mobilise members of their unions, neighbours, and respective organisations, etc.

Councils could also step in - if there are councillors prepared to fight. Local anti-poverty solidarity networks of trade unions and campaigners could combine their strikes, protests and bailiff resistance with proposing emergency council 'people's budgets', which could include expanding school meal provision, breakfast clubs, opening up municipal buildings to youth clubs to relieve pressure to heat homes, making warm-home grants available to prevent arrears, programmes of home insulation, etc. If Labour councillors oppose such budgets, the necessity of workers and campaigners standing as election candidates is obvious.

This debate on how families can be protected against the ravages of for-profit energy provision poses the question of how society is run. With profits rising alongside poverty, the question of provision of energy for need, not profit, is posed.

The fight against fuel and inflation poverty is the fight for a socialist world, in Britain starting with the nationalisation of the 150 major corporations that dominate the economy, which would give the working class the basis on which to start to plan how everyone can have a decent life.

**If you agree, join the Socialist Party!**