



Get Rid of the Lot of Them!

Working Class Future Depends on Getting Rid of Capitalism not just the Tories

Capitalism is in the middle of the biggest crisis it has seen since the 1930s. As well as facing economic bankruptcy there is no better evidence of its political bankruptcy than the carefully orchestrated party conferences that pass most of us by every autumn. Ed Miliband treated us to the bullshit of 'sustainable capitalism'. Now we have the prospect of the richest and most complacent party of all issuing sound bites to 'assure the markets' that UK debt is under control whilst pretending that this key issue for capitalist profit-making is what the rest of us should be worried about.

The crisis that is out in the open everywhere has been building up for decades. Under governments of the left and right, all around the globe, the working class is becoming ever less well off, with more and more of us falling into the stagnant pit of low wages, unemployment, poverty and despair. Meanwhile the wealth of the elite doubles and triples, protected by government bailouts we are supposed to pay.

But the drunken orgy of the rich has ended in a global disaster of a colossal scale, with even the governing politicians admitting that "we now face a crisis that is the economic equivalent of war" (Vince Cable). Trouble is, it's we who weren't invited to the party who are expected to suffer the hangover. About a million young people are rotting without a job, education or prospect of a future. Child poverty is massively up. In the UK *Save the Children* says the number living in 'extreme poverty' due to the increased cost of fuel, food and energy has risen to 1.6 million, with 290,000 in London alone.

At the same time, youths are rioting out of frustration as the working class here and everywhere are ever more cheated in terms of wages, benefits, healthcare, education and the whole gamut of social services. Yet the rich have never been better off. Up to date figures that embarrass the well-off tend to be hard to come by, but in the UK: *the poorest tenth of the population now have, between them, 1.3% of the country's total income and the second poorest tenth have 4%. In contrast, the richest tenth have 31% and the second richest tenth have 15%. The income of the richest tenth is more than the income of all those on below-average incomes (i.e. the bottom five tenths) combined.* <http://www.poverty.org.uk/09/index.shtml>. This is before the present ferocious cuts which will only make things worse, no matter what the political lackeys of the rich may try to spin to pretend that we are all in this together.

Parliament is democracy for the rich

Our pain and their gross wealth and power, a social disaster which can only deepen, depends on us the working

class accepting that the system has to be saved and if it means sacrificing our own and future generations, so be it. It's not only the Tories who stand for capitalist profit-making. **All** the parliamentary parties subscribe to the capitalist system that inevitably produced this disaster; they all prescribe the same dose of mass misery, however packaged, to preserve the system whereby a wealthy few live on the basis of the value created by wage labour. Judging by the growing number of people who don't vote at all in general elections we don't need to spell out the fact that voting in a set of politicians for four or five years while the system of money-making and profit-chasing relentlessly carries on does not bring any substantial change.

It is ironical then that many who consider themselves to be anti-capitalist and who are keen to see a working class fightback should limit their message to getting the present Government out. Without saying so, there is still the tired old belief that somehow Labour is 'better' than the Tories. And if it isn't, at least we can put pressure on Labour through the unions. There is absolutely nothing anti-capitalist about this. The unions are an integral part of the capitalist set-up and it is not surprising that their membership has declined dramatically in recent years because their role is to put the lid on the class struggle whenever they can and prevent it from posing anything like a threat to the system.

The Alternative is Anti-Capitalism

Long story short, it's been getting worse for years. The entire system is guilty and whichever party you vote for will be obliged to inflict anti-working class policies because they are all capitalist parties. *Tories Out* only means *Labour In*. There is an alternative. Capitalism must be put down. It's the only humane thing to do. It cannot be done through Unions and Parliament. The need to forge our own weapons of struggle is growing urgently necessary. In the process the basis for a higher form of democracy, workers' democracy based on mass assemblies with instantly re-callable delegates, will show there is an alternative to capitalist parliaments. Unlike a capitalist election this will not happen overnight. In the long run we have to create a political movement to argue inside the workers' assemblies for the overthrow of capitalism. This can never be done by a parliamentary party. Only a political organisation fighting for the communist programme can point the way towards a new world order. A world where money and the profits system no longer exists so no-one can enrich themselves from the labour of others, where hunger and poverty no longer exist because everyone takes part in directly deciding on the needs of the world community of "freely associated producers".

Solidarity and the Sparks

In the run up to the strike ballots on pensions by public sector workers the press have tried to divide public and private sector (or “productive”) workers. Private employers have spent the last twenty years plundering the pension pots of their workers and now they think it is time for the state to do the same. So they run stories about how “privileged” some of the lowest paid workers in Britain will be if they get a miserly pension. This is divide and rule and an attempt to undermine a collective fightback against the cuts. In fact the private employers take their lead from the state. Wages and working conditions are blatantly under attack.

Look at the electricians’ strikes. These are the response to the 8 leading companies in construction cutting wages from £16 to £10.50 an hour by withdrawing from the Joint Industries Board (JIB). If the sparks don’t sign up by 7 December they are sacked. They quickly discovered that their union, Unite, intended to do nothing just as its predecessor had done nothing in 1999. Their response was to organise themselves. One worker (not a steward or official) posted in August on electriciansforums.co.uk

Now this is gonna affect EVERYONE whether your a cardie or subbie. The union has decided not to support us due to lack of members. NOW is the time for action because 6 months down the line we’re all going to be on £10.50 an hour or have no job. This goes for all other trades as well countrywide ... the only option we have at our disposal is our right to STRIKE.

A meeting at Conway Hall on 13 August 13 led to the formation of the Unite Construction Rank and File Group. The meeting heard that at Westfield 8,000 workers have been represented by one “appointed stooge” convenor and that the first thing they needed was “union democracy”. It then elected its own strike committee whilst calling on Unite to hold a ballot on striking alongside the public sector workers on 30 November. It did not wait for that. Rank and file action began in London and so far has spread to Newcastle, Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow & Edinburgh. The sparks have been holding mass rallies at construction sites and using tactics such as blockades, traffic disruption, walkouts and flash site occupations. Not only has this forced Unite to support some of the action but has led to one of the construction firms withdrawing its attack. The lesson is clear: united action organised by workers themselves is far more effective than ritual one day union stoppages. Many sparks still have illusions in their union but in practice what they are showing is that we are better off without them. We need fighting organisations run by the workers themselves. Across every sector we need to take control of our own struggles. We need mass meetings which elect and control recallable strike delegates. We need to unite our struggles and ultimately we need to recognise that we are at a “them and us” situation. Either they force us to our knees or we set our sights on a better way of organising the world.

The Communist Workers’ Organisation is part of the Internationalist Communist Tendency. We stand for a global society where production is for need and not profit, where the state, national frontiers and money have been abolished and power is exercised through class wide organisations like workers councils. Such a society can only be created through the activity of millions of human beings. We call it communism but it has nothing in common with the Stalinist state capitalism of the old USSR. In order to get there we are working to create a world proletarian party to politically unify workers against the power of the capitalist state. Not a party that is a government in waiting but a body which aims to give political leadership and a programmatic guide in the struggle for a new world. We are only one of the elements which seeks to participate in its formation. Why not join us in the fight?

And for the Unemployed... ... “The Work Programme”

The idea that claimants should work for their benefits was imported from America by the last Labour Government under the guise of the Flexible New Deal. Labour planned a further refinement, the ‘Work for Your benefit’ scheme. Naturally, the ConDems have picked up this nasty anti-claimant baton and have refined it as the Work Programme, pledging to throw £5 billion at the corporate vultures waiting to feed on our misfortune.

The Work Programme has nothing to do with helping us helping us ‘back into society’. Its aims are to cut the welfare budget, and to attack actual wages, providing cheap disciplined labour. Providers are free to do whatever they think necessary. The programme applies to people on JSA, IS, and IB who have been unemployed for six months, though some can be ‘fast tracked’, and sanctions, beginning at loss of all benefit for two weeks, progressing to 6 months, can be applied for ‘non-compliance’.

And to supplement the attacks of the Work Programme, the government have added the Mandatory Work Activity programme. Now claimants, within days of signing on, can:

- Be forced to work 30 hours per week for 4 weeks for their benefits - which means at £2.25 per hour.
- The 30 hours can cover 7 days a week, so they can be made to work weekends.
- Face up to 4 such ‘activities’ per year.
- Be sent to work unrelated to the claimant’s work goals, or their past experience or qualifications.
- Be ‘sanctioned’ (i.e. lose all benefits) for an INITIAL period of 13 weeks, rising to 6 months, for ‘non-compliance’ (e.g. lateness)
- Be able to appeal this only within a 5 day period (unlike the old 30 day system).

The decision to refer to an ‘activity’ will be at the discretion of the DWP adviser – who is subject to targets that have to be met. The pretence that any of this is anything to do with training or support has been stripped away. Claimants will have no right to withdraw their labour and no right to the National Minimum Wage.

The system we live under is irreversibly bankrupt but we don’t wish to join campaigns that argue that regulation, proper supervision, proper leadership, or proper taxation of the rich, can offer a solution to capitalism’s crisis. Underpinning such campaigns is the notion that capitalism can be made fair; we suggest that history shows that this is a fantasy. The ruling class is making itself richer and richer, while imposing ever worse austerity on workers and unemployed. Ideas of one-nation, or consensus, or ‘we’re all in this together’ are now dead, and they’re pulling up their draw-bridges. But the increasing arrogance of the rich, who show no sign of embarrassment as they appropriate increasing mountains of wealth for themselves while the vast majority of us suffer, is also a reflection of the fact that they think they have got us licked. They reckon they have broken working class resistance, solidarity, and community and turned us into atomised individuals who can be picked off at will. The attacks on us, which can only increase in the coming years, will give the lie to that reckoning, and take heart from the resistance that is beginning to be seen world-wide.

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