

# JACKDAW

REVOLUTIONARY CLASS STRUGGLE NEWS

**BACK OUT ON  
THE STREETS!**

ISSUE N° 13 FREE

## **CLASS ANGER CLASS STRUGGLE CLASS UNITY!**

The discontent in British society is moving from simmering to boiling as more workers go into action, either in official strikes or in unofficial wildcat strikes.



The conditions created by Brexit and then by the Covid lockdown pushed workers to agitate around pay demands. This situation was further aggravated by the war in Ukraine, with scarcity of foodstuffs and raw materials causing price rises and a willingness by capitalists to take advantage of this.

Inflation is now running at 13% and rising. Employers are offering pay offers of between 2 and 5% often after years of pay freezes in some sectors. In other words many workers are facing what in fact is a pay cut.

The Bank of England responded by pushing up the base rate by 0.5% which is the highest increase since 1995. This will mean that more and more people will not be able to keep up with their mortgage payments.

As a result of this situation, more and more workers have taken to industrial action over this summer. This includes workers organised in the rail unions, in RMT, ASLEF and the TSSA. Forty thousand RMT members went out on strike for two days in the week ending August 21st, and were joined in London by London Underground and London Overground workers and by bus workers in West London working for the London United bus company, as well as some rail workers in the TSSA. Train drivers in ASLEF have also taken strike actions across Britain.

Elsewhere, around 2,000 workers organised in the Unite union went on strike at Felixstowe, the largest container port in

Britain from August 21st to August 29th. Approximately 50% of the UK's container traffic comes in through Felixstowe. This will undoubtedly have a drastic effect on the supply of food and raw materials, already in a parlous state.

### **Wildcat**

On Wednesday, August 24th, many wildcat strikes broke out at construction sites and refineries.

On Friday August 26th, 115,000 Royal Mail workers in the CWU union went out on a one day strike, and were joined by 2,000 workers in the Post Office Crown Office who started a two day strike. This was followed on Tuesday August 30th by a strike by 40,000 BT and Openreach workers, and by Post Office administration and supply chain workers.

On August 31st workers at Royal Mail, BT and Openreach went out on strike simultaneously, involving 150,000 workers. The strikes previewed by Royal Mail workers on 8th and 9th September were sabotaged by the union leadership, who used the pretext of the death of the Queen to call them off. Similarly, the RMT leadership used the same pretext to cancel further railworkers strikes.

Bus workers working for the Arriva bus company have continued industrial action in north west England and in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Hertfordshire, as

well as in north London, Kent and Essex.

Hundreds of workers at the Grange-mouth oil refinery in Scotland went out on a wildcat strike. Amazon workers went out on wildcat strikes too. In Bristol they went on strike and organised a sit-in at the BRS1 centre. On the same day Amazon workers went on wildcat strike at Rugeley. Workers also walked out on the same day at the BHX1 Site in Rugeley. Earlier wildcats took place at Amazon centres in Coventry and Tilbury and at Swindon. Amazon workers at fulfilment centres in Dartford, Tilbury, Belvedere, Hemel Hempstead, Chesterfield and Rugeley operated slowdowns in work last week, refusing to pick more than one package an hour.

Workers in the Unite union at Dundee University went on continuous strike from August 25th whilst workers at the AQA exam board took part in a series of strikes. Bin workers throughout Scotland are also

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# Wildcat Strikes: a very basic introduction

## A number of wildcat strikes broke out in the UK during August.

The wave of wildcat action kicked off at Cranswick Continental Foods in Pilsforth. Next, wildcat strikes broke out at several Amazon warehouses including Tilbury, Rugeley, Coventry, Bristol, Dartford, Coalville, Belvedere, Hemel Hempstead and Chesterfield. There were also more wildcat strikes at Grangemouth oil refinery. Chemical plant workers also took wildcat action at several sites across Teesside and at Humber Refinery in North Lincolnshire as well as at Valero refinery in Milford Haven. Train drivers at Avanti West Coast brought some services to a halt by refusing shifts.

## But what makes a strike 'wildcat'?

Wildcat strikes are a form of autonomous direct action. 'Autonomous' because they are not officially sanctioned by and are likely to be outside of the control of the unions and left-wing political parties. 'Direct' because they short circuit the mediating and representative role of the trade unions. As the recent wildcat strikes spread like wildfire, media outlets were keen to describe the danger to businesses.

*Share Talk* website wrote: "Businesses cannot plan for wildcat strikes, making it difficult to manage them. These strikes are dangerous for employees who abandon the legal protections granted to them in collective bargaining."

*The Evening Standard* asked: "What is a wildcat strike?" Wildcat strikes don't have the permission of their union, and workers don't go through the typical process a union does when arranging industrial action, which sometimes challenges their union's authority."

*Computer Weekly* stated: "Amazon workers also have staged wildcat strikes (meaning they were conducted without the involvement or support of a union) in Rugeley, Coventry, Swindon, Rugby, Doncaster, Bristol, Dartford, Belvedere, Hemel Hempstead and Chesterfield."

A couple of dictionary definitions of wildcat strikes are:

*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*: "Wildcat strike: a strike that is started by a group of workers without the approval of their union."



*Cambridge Dictionary*: "Wildcat strike: a sudden strike (= act of refusing to work as a protest) without any warning by the workers and often without the official support of the unions."

But council communist Anton Pannekoek outlined the reason that anarchist communists and libertarian communists emphasise the subversive potential of wildcat strikes: "In the wildcat strikes, we may see the beginnings of a new practical orientation of the working class, a new tactic, the method of direct action. They represent the only actual rebellion of man against the deadening suppressing weight of world-dominating capital."

Wildcat strikes are a form of direct action and the anarchist Emile Pouget explained the significance for revolutionaries of this tactic of militant working class action: "Direct Action is a notion of such clarity, of such self-evident transparency, that merely to speak the words defines and explains them. It means that the working class, in constant rebellion against the existing state of affairs, expects nothing from outside people, powers or forces, but rather creates its own conditions of struggle and looks to itself for its means of action."

As a form of autonomous action, wildcat strikes have the potential to go beyond the narrow framework of trade unionism. Anarchist communists and other communist revolutionaries offer criticisms of the limitations of trade unions.

William Morris, the author of *News from Nowhere* and *Lectures on Socialism*, wrote in 1885 that: Trade unions [do not]

"represent the whole class of workers as working men but rather are charged with the office of keeping the human part of the capitalists' machinery in good working order and freeing it from any grit of discontent".

In a similar observation to William Morris, council communist Cajo Brendel described the role of unions: "The undeniable fact that from the very first day of their existence unions have had the task of mediating between capitalists and workers, mediating of course in order to extinguish the flames of conflict between the two parties, not to kindle the fire by pouring oil into it, mediating in order to stabilize the antagonistic relationship of workers and capitalists, not to destroy it."

The wildcats in the UK have been in mostly, though not entirely, in workplaces where there are either no unions or they are unrecognised. The GMB union is taking credit for at least some of the Amazon actions, but they are, for the most part, self-organised. What is important about these wildcat strikes is that they show what workers can do for themselves. If they can be extended and spread then they can overcome isolation and being picked off.

## Useful texts and pamphlets:

*Goodbye to the Unions!* – A Controversy About Autonomous Class Struggle in Great Britain  
libcom.org/article/goodbye-unions-controversy-about-autonomous-class-struggle-great-britain

Emile Pouget. *Direct Action*  
libcom.org/article/direct-action-emile-pouget  
Henri Simon. *France Winter 1986-87: The Railways Strike*  
libcom.org/article/france-winter-1986-87-railways-strike-henri-simon

# Can't Pay, Won't Pay: A Blast from the Past

## The 'Self reduction' movement in Italy 1974

In 1974 Italy saw massive price increases in transportation, electricity, phone bills, health care and housing with some increases exceeding 50 per cent.

In the summer and autumn of 1974 there were huge price hikes in bus fares.

The first demonstrations amongst workers were spontaneous and unorganised with demonstrators blocking bus routes. But soon a campaign of refusal to pay the new higher fares was organised. Instead, workers developed a collective system of paying the bus fares but only at the old lower rate.

In July 1974, the Italian State attempted to impose a massive increase in the price of electricity. The electricity unions declared that they would refuse to turn off the elec-

tricity in the apartment buildings practicing 'self-reduction', in other words refusing to pay.

Electricity workers were also ready to warn the tenants so that they could mobilise to prevent electricity from being turned off in the homes of those refusing to pay the new high rate. A campaign of mass non-payment of the new higher rates was organised. Instead bills were only paid at a lower rate.

## Poll Tax Rebellion

In 1989 in the UK, the Poll Tax was introduced by Margaret Thatcher's government.

But a mass working class movement which involved 17 million people resisted the new tax. This resistance included, mass non-payment, militant demonstrations, blockading of court cases, resistance to bailiffs and serious riots breaking out until the Poll Tax was destroyed.



These two brief examples of historic resistance to price rises show how we can organise ourselves outside of the control of the political parties. We do not need the leadership of the Leninist organisations or the dead-end reformism of the capitalist Labour Party for us to take direct action against prices increase imposed on us by the capitalists and the State.

# University and College Workers Ready for Action

**University and College Union (UCU) ballot for industrial action over pay, working conditions and pension cuts is open and activists in the union are busy getting the vote out (GTVO) after a preparatory 'week of anger' (which most members may not have noticed).**

One change from UCU's recent strategy has been to ballot on an aggregate basis. UCU along with Unite, Unison, GMB and the Education Institute of Scotland (EIS), rejected a 3% pay offer, which was imposed in August. They are demanding a pay uplift of 12% or Retail Price Index (RPI) plus 2%. They are also calling for an end to

insecure work practices (including zero hours contracts), and action on workloads; a chronic problem for many workers in Higher Education. Unison Scotland have called strikes over pay in four universities beginning in September and Unison branches in some English and Welsh institutions are balloting for action. Unite have held consultative ballots which have returned strong rejection of the pay 'offer'. The EIS also opened a consultative ballot in August.

Consultative ballots, beloved of the trade unions, generally serve to slow down the process and hold back the momentum.

What seems certain is that, if a vote for strike action is achieved by any or all of the unions, there is no guarantee that the action will be co-ordinated and once again we will see picket lines being crossed with union support and action that is invariably less effective. In many universities, whilst the UCU branches can reach the 50% threshold, it is not by large percentages and the union, despite being the only one representing higher grades in England and Wales, is not strong enough to stop the bulk of teaching, except in a minority of cases. Technicians, maintenance, cleaning and security staff, however, have the power to seriously disrupt business as usual or at least contribute, in conjunction with UCU members, to big problems for the employers.

And this is why it is crucial that education workers (with the support where possible of students) co-operate across union boundaries and establish rank and file action committees open to all who are ready to fight. It is only through widening and escalating the struggle and by workers taking and keeping control at a grassroots level that we can win and establish the basis for united struggles in the future. The struggle must be managed from below!



For more information about the anarchist communist education workers see **Zero for Conduct**: [educationworker.wordpress.com](http://educationworker.wordpress.com)



## Anarchist Communist Group

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### WHO WE ARE...

The Anarchist Communist Group (ACG) is a revolutionary anarchist communist organisation which is dedicated to seeking a complete transformation of society, and the creation of anarchist communism.

This will mean the working class overthrowing capitalism, abolishing the State, getting rid of exploitation, hierarchies and oppressions, and halting the destruction of the environment. To do this, we believe it is important to be organised.

We are committed to building an effective organisation that works towards the common goal of anarchist communism, in cooperation with other working class organisations and in grass roots campaigns.

We strive to base all our current actions on the principles that will be the basis of the future society: mutual aid, solidarity, collective responsibility, individual freedom and autonomy, free association and federalism.

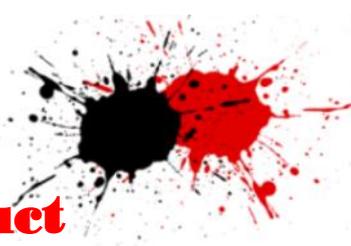
If you want to join the ACG, then look first at our **Aims & Principles** on our website

[www.anarchistcommunism.org](http://www.anarchistcommunism.org)

You can also drop us a line at

[info@anarchistcommunism.org](mailto:info@anarchistcommunism.org)

## Zero For Conduct



Rebel Education Worker Soapbox

[educationworker.wordpress.com](http://educationworker.wordpress.com)

## Health Workers United

For working class independent action

[healthworkersunited.wordpress.com](http://healthworkersunited.wordpress.com)



## Class anger, class struggle, class unity!

(from front page)

came out on strike, whilst oil and gas workers on the North Sea rigs also went out on wildcat strikes.

These waves of militancy have alarmed the boss class. They know that the summer of strikes will be followed by increasing industrial action in the autumn. The Truss government has threatened to introduce more guardless trains and strike bans for the transport sector. As for Keir Starmer and the Labour Party, they too are horrified by this wave of militancy. They are intent on attempting to prove to the bosses that they are the most competent party to deal with working class militancy as they have done before.

What is needed is for workers to make sure that they come out on strike at the same time. This should be accompanied by rallies and demonstrations in local areas. Pensioners, the unemployed and youth (school students and college students) should support the strikes and reinforce picket lines, rallies and demonstrations. Local solidarity committees should be created in neighbourhoods, involving both striking workers, pensioners, unemployed and students.

We cannot trust the union leaders to carry out a successful outcome to these strikes, even the most radical sounding of them like Sharon Graham and Mick Lynch. The latter, despite his previous criticisms of the Starmer leadership, was ready to endorse Starmer by saying "I want him to be prime minister. That's what we've got. He must win. We've got to push him and persuade him to get into a position where he's in the front rank with you, all of you."

But Starmer has already made his position clear. He is opposed to strikes and to any meaningful action by workers. He is our enemy. The union leaders are desperately trying to stop workers breaking with Labour. We know that Labour has consistently throughout its history opposed itself to strikes by workers. In the coming months Labour will stand side by side with the Tories in denouncing these

strike waves. As for the union leaders, they will attempt to sabotage any meaningful action. We as workers must resist and develop our own grassroots organisations, not just in the workplaces but in the neighbourhoods.

The coming autumn and winter will perhaps be hotter than the so called Summer of Discontent. The strikes have been triggered by wages signally failing to keep up with inflation, meaning a massive wage cut for many workers. Rising food, petrol and energy prices have added to the situation. Gas and electricity prices rose by 54% on April 1<sup>st</sup> and are due to rise again by 78% on October 1<sup>st</sup>.

This strike wave is the biggest for a long time. The defeats inflicted on our class, the working class, during the 1980s led to a massive decline in militancy, not just here but around the world. Now this period of retreat seems to be over. The ruling class in the UK and around the world is intent on making our class suffer, whilst at the same time they increase their military spending. Whilst they are doing this they are calling us to make sacrifices. We should not fall for this or for the myth of national unity being peddled during Operation London Bridge. It is time to create our own independent organisations, based on mass assemblies and mandated and recallable delegates. We must learn from the defeats of the 1980s onwards, and as an urgent imperative create a mass autonomous grassroots movement.



Image by Clifford Harper