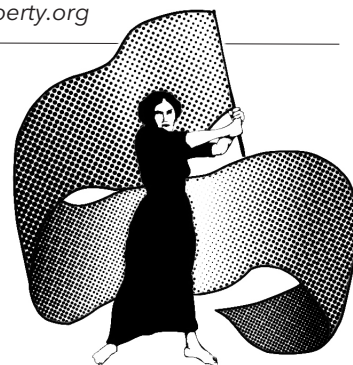


December full of strikes



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Almost every day in the month of December will see workers somewhere in Britain on strike. Many of those days will see widespread action across several sectors. Some days will see rail workers, postal workers, nurses, civil servants, bus drivers, and others striking at the same time.

There are increasing opportunities to begin uniting the strikes in a meaningful way, calling joint rallies and, most importantly, building cross-union strike committees, linked to local Trades Councils, to provide forums for ongoing rank-and-file discussion and coordination.

Trades Councils in Southwark, Lambeth, and Islington in London have taken steps in this direction, organising meetings with rank-and-file speakers from various strikes to discuss the disputes. In Southwark and Lambeth, local "Solidarity Groups" have also emerged, backed by the Trades Councils, which coordinate mobilisation to support picket lines. Building ongoing organisation out of local rallies is vital. Although ad hoc committees and solidarity groups cannot take decisions that will immediately affect the direction of any strike, they can be spaces where workers discuss and develop strategies that they can then take up and fight for within the democratic structures of their respective unions.

The strike wave continues to spread into private sector workplaces, and draw in out-sourced (privatised) workers in the current and former public sector. December will see strikes by privatised refuse workers in Wirral, food factory workers in Rochdale, out-sourced cleaners and security guards on the railways, Arrow XL delivery drivers, Greene King brewery workers, and others. ■

Open bargaining

Some other recent developments in the strike wave signal dangers. The leadership of the Communication Workers Union is urging its members in BT, who have struck several times, to accept a £1,500 flat-rate pay increase for 2022-23. This is exactly the same amount as BT imposed for 2021-22, triggering the CWU's dispute. Although many BT workers had informally pushed 10 percent as a minimum pay demand, the dispute had no official, concrete demand around pay. The lack of a specific demand gives union officials too much leeway to determine when strikes should be suspended and offers recommended.

On ScotRail, RMT members have accepted a below-inflation pay offer tied to changes to terms and conditions. Even the vague, non-specific demand RMT normally makes in pay disputes – for a "substantial above-inflation pay rise" has not been met. But RMT leaders are now trumpeting the deal as an example of what is possible when employers "behave

reasonably".

Although the immediate changes ScotRail wants to make are less drastic than those proposed by Network Rail and the other Train Operating Companies against whom RMT is fighting its national dispute, tying a pay increase to any worsening of terms and conditions sets a troubling precedent.

The practice of "open bargaining", relatively common in the US labour movement but almost unheard of in Britain, provides one model for ensuring the voice of the strike itself is heard at the negotiating table. Failing this, we can seek to replicate the action taken by striking UCU members on 30 November, who marched to the building where negotiations were taking place and demonstrated outside – apparently in defiance of the wishes of some national officials.

Contrary to the conservative orthodoxy of some sections of the labour movement, negotiations can and should take place whilst strikes are happening: action does not have to be suspended "to allow talks to take place".

It is direct action by workers that is the mechanism for winning change. ■



Solidarity to save the NHS!

The pay battle now opening in the National Health Service is central for two reasons.

It involves many workers. The NHS, with 1.6 million workers, is by far the largest employer in the UK, and one of the largest in the world.

It is inseparable from the battle to rescue and restore the NHS as a public service freely available to all.

Cuts in real pay, increasing job stress, and almost three years of extra stress from Covid, have left the NHS with 130,000 jobs unfilled in England alone. It is 12% short of nurses, 7% short of doctors).

Those shortages have combined with similar but worse shortfalls in social care (165,000 workers short) and underinvestment in buildings and equipment to create ballooning waiting lists for everything considered non-emergency.

Long waits are now routine even for emergency care: ambulances park outside hospitals waiting to get patients admitted, and are often unavailable to go to emergencies.

The call for decent pay for NHS and care workers, for repair of NHS budgets, and for reversing privatisation within the NHS, concerns not only NHS and careworkers, but the whole working class. ■



@workersliberty

The rich hold the resources

The government says there are no resources to pay NHS workers more. But top bosses' pay has gone up 23% in 2022. The "luxury goods" market (ultra-expensive watches, jewellery, clothes, etc. expanded about 20% in the first half of 2022.

Next year the government will spend £100 billion (almost as much as the total NHS England budget) on debt service for big capitalist operators who hold government bonds (IOUs). It is spending £6.5 billion on bailing out the failed energy retailer Bulb, and £60 billion to April 2023 in a form of household energy-bill relief weak in helping the worst-off but which secures vast profits (maybe £170 billion next year) for the

varied hundreds of firms in the energy industry.

The government refuses to tax wealth, or to tax capital gains at the same rate as wage income.

There are plenty of resources. The question is, who will get them?

This whole wave of strikes is a class battle. In the backwash from the Covid lockdowns, will the profiteer class be able further to squeeze and stretch the working class, and pauperise public services?

Or will the working class be able to forge a new solidarity, sustaining the worse-off, defending and levelling up job conditions, restoring public services, remaking ourselves as a power capable of pushing back the profiteers? ■



Strikes

Since 20 Oct: Quorn factory workers in Billingham (Unite) on indefinite strike

Since 14 Nov: Workers at Jacob's Bakery factory in Aintree (GMB) on indefinite strike

5-9 Dec: Greene King brewery workers (Unite) strike

5-10 Dec: Wirral council refuse workers (Unite) strike

5-10 Dec: Mizkan Euro food factory workers (Unite) strike

5-18 Dec: Workers at housing charity Shelter (Unite) strike

7-8 Dec: Secondary school teachers in Scotland (SSTA and NASUWT) strike

8 Dec: Arrow XL delivery drivers (Unite) strike

8-9 Dec: Bus drivers at Metroline garages in London (Unite) strike

8-10 Dec: Teachers at Truro and Penwith College (UCU and NEU) strike

9 and 11 Dec: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike

9-10 Dec: Bus drivers at six Abellio garages in south/west London (Unite) strike

12 Dec: Northern Ireland health workers strike

12-16 Dec: Mizkan Euro food factory workers in Rochdale (Unite) strike

From 13 Dec, various dates through Dec and Jan: Rolling action by Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency and Rural Payments Agency workers (PCS) - details bit.ly/pcs-firstwave

13-14 Dec: Workers at various mainline Train Operating Companies (RMT) strike

13-14 Dec: Workers at Avanti West Coast (TSSA) strike

13-15 Dec: Network Rail workers (RMT) strike

14-15 Dec: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike

15 Dec: Nurses (RCN) strike

15-16 Dec: Bus drivers at Metroline garages in London (Unite) strike

16-17 Dec: Bus drivers at six Abellio garages in s/w London (Unite) strike

16-17 Dec: Workers at various mainline TOCs (RMT) strike

16-17 Dec: Workers at Avanti West Coast (TSSA) strike

16-18 Dec: Network Rail workers (RMT) strike

16 and 18 Dec: Eurostar security guards (RMT) strike

17 Dec: Rail workers at Network Rail and several TOCs (TSSA) strike

20 Dec: Nurses (RCN) strike

21 Dec: Ambulance workers and some hospital workers (Liverpool) strike (GMB, Unite, Unison)

22-23 Dec: Eurostar security guards (RMT) strike

22-23 Dec: Rail cleaners (RMT) strike

23-24 Dec: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike

24-27 Dec: Network rail strike (RMT)

28 Dec: Ambulance workers strike (GMB)

31 Dec: Rail cleaners (RMT) strike

3-4 Jan: Workers at various mainline TOCs (RMT) strike

3-5 Jan: Network Rail workers (RMT) strike

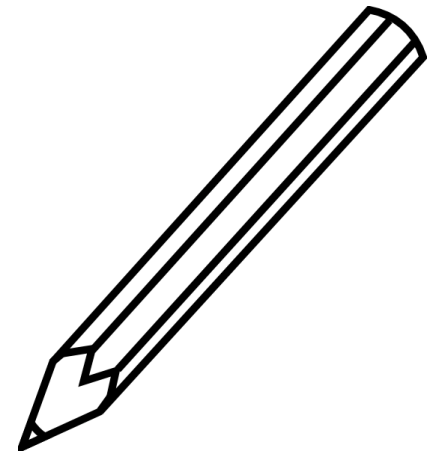
6-7 Jan: Workers at various mainline TOCs (RMT) strike

6-8 Jan: Network Rail workers (RMT) strike

10-12 Jan: Teachers at Truro and Penwith College (UCU and NEU) strike

11-12 Jan: Teachers on the Isle of Man (NASUWT) strike

15-16 Feb: Teachers on the Isle of Man (NASUWT) strike



Ballots

Until 8 Dec: London Underground workers (RMT) re-ballot in their dispute over jobs, pensions, and conditions

Until 16 Dec: Amazon warehouse workers in Coventry ballot (GMB)

5 Dec-23 Jan: Firefighters (FBU) ballot for action over pay

Until 9 Jan: Teachers (NASUWT) ballot for action over pay

From 9 Jan: Junior doctors (BMA) ballot for action over pay

Until 13 Jan: Teachers and school support staff (NEU) ballot

About Workers' Liberty

We are a socialist group active in the labour movement and in campaigns in Britain, fighting for a revolutionary alternative to capitalism and Stalinism based on common ownership and workers' democracy.

To find out more about our ideas and activity visit workersliberty.org, email awl@workersliberty.org, or phone 020 7394 8923. ■