

“Labour, Conservative, they’re all friends”: UK workers speak on cost-of-living crisis as inflation surges to over 11 percent

Our reporters
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Millions of workers in Britain are unable to afford to live as the cost of living surges. This week a Sky News survey found that 27 percent of Britons aged 16-75 “skipped meals” in April. Sixty-five percent sought to reduce costs by not turning on their heating.

Speaking before the Treasury Committee at the House of Commons on Monday on the danger of rising inflation, then at an already 30-year high of seven percent, Bank of England Governor Andrew Bailey said there was a “risk of a further energy price shock”. He continued, “And then, the one which I might sound rather apocalyptic about, is food... It is a major worry for this country and a major worry for the developing world.”

Within 48 hours it was announced that the lower CPI measure of inflation had shot up a further 2 percent to 9 percent in the month from March to April, to its highest level in 40 years. The RPI measure of inflation rose from 9 percent to 11.1 percent.

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to workers in two cities in England, Salford and Sheffield, about the worsening impact of the cost-of-living crisis on their lives.

Salford

At Salford Precinct, Shaba, a 29-year-old shopworker, said, “Since COVID, prices have risen and people like myself have to work extra hours, sometimes 70 hours a week, to pay bills and provide for the family. People like me, under 30, can get depression. Mental health problems are linked to livelihood. People who can’t provide for the family get depressed. Even if wages go up, everything else you buy goes up.

“It’s killing young people. It’s not easy to survive in the 21st century, it feels like World War Two when our

grandparents were struggling.”

Shaba agreed with the WSWWS poster which read, “Unite Ukrainian, Russian and British workers.” He said, “I’m glad you’re not throwing Russian workers under the bus. Your concept is amazing, because you’re trying to bring people together. The general public shouldn’t be accused of war crimes. When there was slavery, it didn’t mean the people did the crimes.”

Ian, who works for an international delivery firm, told our reporters, “Everything is going up. We’re due a pay rise, but our wage rise isn’t going to match the cost-of-living rise. We’re struggling with gas and electricity, food, gas, the list of things going up is endless. Me and my wife have to turn the gas and electricity off religiously.

“My newspaper’s gone to £2 on a Sunday. We tried for PIP [Personal Independence Payment benefit] support for people with a health condition. I’m going deaf, but were turned down. I only get £280 for 25 hours work. We are going to pay for the war [in Ukraine], another thing from taxpayers’ money.”

Tommy Nightingale, a young worker, said, “My theory about politics is Labour, Conservative, they’re all friends, they’re all working for the big companies and don’t give a damn about the working class. I think the food crisis, inflation is caused by the government. It costs £5 a day to get to work, that’s £25 a week! The government are gangsters. We need to bring it down!”

Pensioner **Enid Wall**, 72, was out shopping with her daughter. She asked, “How is anyone going to live? I’m disabled, I have heart failure, I’ve had four heart attacks. I have to be careful in winter; I’m very vulnerable. But we can’t put the radiators on. You’ve got to watch the lights, and how many times you put the kettle on. It’s all wrong, cutting down on everything!

“He’s [Prime Minister Boris Johnson] having the time of his life. He’s never had to live on £30 a week. We’re looking for reduced items in the shops. We shouldn’t have

to be using food banks.”

On the comments by Conservative MP Lee Anderson who said workers should budget better and learn to cook properly, so as to be able to prepare a meal for 30 pence, Enid said, “That’s disgusting. No wonder people are topping themselves.”

Wayne, a worker, said, “I’ve got less money in my pocket for gas and electric and the fuel, less money in general. You can see the impact on food prices that have gone up. It’s had an impact on the family.”

“Ever since the Conservatives got in people have had to go to food banks. I’m a socialist and I don’t agree with that.

“The other day me and my wife went out shopping and outside ASDA in Farnworth there were people who work at food banks asking shoppers to buy food to donate. This is happening in 21st century Britain.

“The rich are alright, they’re not bothered. They say that there is help out there, but if there was then people wouldn’t be struggling.”

Asked what he thought the solution was, Wayne answered, “Tax the rich, the big energy companies, things like that. We should tax these multinational companies, but this isn’t implemented because the rich wouldn’t be rich then would they? We’d all be equal then, wouldn’t we? And they don’t want that. They wouldn’t have their platform to look down at the rest of us. It doesn’t take a mathematician to work this out. Someone worked out that if they just used 0.05 percent of their profits, or wealth, we could eradicate poverty, but they won’t do that.”

Sheffield

In Sheffield the WSWS spoke to **Elaine**, a mother from the Darnall area. She said, “The recent increase in the cost of living is impacting a lot of people, those who aren’t working, and those who are working that could previously afford to get by. My husband works as a cleaner, we scrimp and save to get by.

“What the Conservative government is doing is unbelievable. Food banks need to be there for the people who can’t afford food because costs are going sky-high. The Tories are wrong, these food banks are there for people who need to feed their kids, especially for big families. How can you feed them without enough money coming in?

“It affects the most vulnerable first, such as those with mental health issues and old people who need support. They can’t afford enough food on their pensions, there’s nothing there for them.

“My daughter received the £20 boost to Universal Credit during the pandemic, and they’ve scrapped it. She’s a cleaner too. That £20 went a long way for her. She’s in her thirties and still lives at home. She can’t afford to get a house. You can’t save for a deposit when you can barely keep up with the bills.

Elaine, who has lived in the city for two decades, added, “I saw a homeless girl in her twenties laid asleep outside the Meadowhall shopping centre because she couldn’t get anywhere to live. That’s the result of what all these governments have done.

“This reality doesn’t affect people in the government because they’ve got money, and they don’t realise how it affects everyone else. They’re all looking out for each other.

“The parties during lockdown showed their dishonesty. We were told to lock down, while they were boozing! That’s what gets me mad. It’s one rule for them, and a different rule for us. It’s the same with big business. They set the rules up—why don’t they abide by them? It should be one rule for everybody.

“Johnson needs to be out of power. They’re all garbage, get them out. It doesn’t matter if they’re Conservative, Labour, Green, whatever party, they make promises before elections, and then they break them—so I’ve stopped voting. They should answer to us, not the super-rich.

“The growing gap between the rich and poor needs to be stopped. We need to fight back. How this should be done is a tricky question. I just want the government to stop lying to us and get somebody in who’ll tell the truth.

“Jeremy Corbyn was just as bad when he led the Labour Party. These politicians are all friends, even if they deny it and claim to be fighting each other. They’re all for each other. We don’t need Labour or Conservative leaders, let us run the country how we need to without them.”



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