

Johnson sets out class war agenda as UK “summer of discontent” strike wave takes shape

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UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has set out a class war offensive against millions of workers suffering an unprecedented decline in their living standards. The working class must respond to the Tory offensive by launching a counter-offensive, transforming a series of strikes and disputes already billed as a “summer of discontent” into a conscious political challenge to the Conservative government.

For more than six months, the Labour Party and the media have insisted that workers focus on the possible removal of Johnson as prime minister as a means of supposedly instituting a new period of “responsible” government. All the while, the trade unions have done all they can to suppress growing demands for industrial action in favour of similar appeals for leniency from the government.

This comes to a head on June 18, when the Trades Union Congress (TUC) holds a national “We Demand Better” demonstration. The TUC is calling for vague measures such as “a real pay rise for every worker and a real living wage for all” to be implemented by “a government that listens and acts to support working people.” This is meant to indicate the future prospect of a Labour government. But Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has made clear his unanimity with the Tories on all key issues, while confining himself to appeals to Tory backbenchers to “show leadership” and remove Johnson.

On June 6, a no confidence vote was finally moved against Johnson within the Conservative party, which Johnson narrowly won after 41 percent of Tory MPs voted against him. This was predictably met with a fresh wave of media speculation on whether Tory rules will be changed so a second no confidence vote can be put.

Meanwhile, Johnson continues to head a government of political psychopaths that want him to either step up his

ongoing offensive against British workers and the UK’s key role in the NATO-proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, or move aside for someone better equipped to do so.

Johnson is doing all he can to convince his MP’s that he is still the man for the job. In a keynote speech June 9 at Blackpool, he threw red meat to the Tory wolves biting at his heels. His was a pledge to wage war in Ukraine at no matter what cost, and to take on and defeat the developing strike movement in the working class and realise the Thatcherite nirvana of a deregulated and brutally exploitative economy that Brexit was meant to deliver.

Lie was piled upon lie, as Johnson claimed that his “let the bodies pile high in their thousands” government had protected the British people and had “got through the far greater challenge of COVID” before “progress was brutally interrupted on 24th of February, when Putin decided on his disastrous and unprovoked war in Ukraine.”

He warned that high prices would continue for oil, gas, grain, feed and fertiliser. But no price was too high for winning a war against Russia. There must be no ceasefire, no “bad peace”—“we must continue to support the Ukrainians... for as long as it takes.”

The price for war and recession must be paid by the working class: “If wages continually chase the increase in prices, then we risk a wage-price spiral...” Instead, there must be tax cuts reversing “the fiscal meteorite of COVID”, combined with “supply side reforms” to cut government spending and “costs for business”. The “era of phenomenal corporate welfare” must be replaced by economic deregulation, including “opening freeports around the country” and measures to “turbo-charge” the City of London.

This slash and burn agenda, he stressed, demanded the

sacking of 91,000 civil servants and ruthless attacks on railworkers, including the wholesale closure of “fully manned ticket offices... across the transport network.”

Johnson’s sole “populist” measure was an insane scheme to extend Thatcher’s “right to buy” policy for tenants of council houses and housing association properties to those on welfare, who could use Housing Support to pay mortgages and “turn benefits to bricks.” If implemented, this would eviscerate all that remains of social housing.

Lindsay Judge, research director at the Resolution Foundation, noted of this fantasy, “More than four in five families on means-tested benefits have no savings at all and high cost of living pressures,” and would be unable to take up any possible access to lower mortgage down payments.

Johnson’s toxic stew of policies did not satisfy the venal appetites of his Tory critics. The next day, former Brexit minister Lord David Frost insisted in the *Daily Telegraph* that Johnson’s salvaging his premiership depended on reversing tax increases, future cuts, announcing “a Brexit Opportunities Bill that sunsets large swathes of EU legislation”, eliminating “most UK tariffs immediately” and drawing up a “10-year Conservative plan to restore the viability of the British state, based on freedom and individual liberty not collectivism.”

The struggle against Johnson and the Tory government cannot be waged through parliamentary manoeuvre, but only through class struggle. The main target of Tory hatred is the planned strike by more than 40,000 members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union on June 21, 23 and 25. The train drivers union ASLEF has sat on demands for national action by its members, this week urging them to abandon a long-running dispute with ScotRail in return for a miserly 5 percent pay rise. But it was forced to announce strikes on Greater Anglia trains June 23, Hull Trains June 26, and on Croydon Tramlink on June 28, 29, July 13 and 14. The white-collar rail union TSSA is to ballot for strike action at Avanti West Coast, while Unite has said 1,000 of its members will strike on the London Underground June 21.

In addition, 115,000 members of the Communication Workers Union working for Royal Mail will be balloted for industrial action June 15, together with 40,000 CWU members at BT. Post office staff employed at 114 UK state-owned Crown Post Offices struck on June 4 over pay. Hundreds of check-in and ground staff at Heathrow Airport are balloting to strike for the return of a 10 percent pandemic pay cut. Nurses are threatening to strike

in Scotland. And in the autumn, 1.4 million local government workers could strike over poverty pay.

The accumulation of disputes testifies to the fact that workers stand on the edge of a social disaster. Millions cannot afford to heat their homes, fuel their cars or even feed their families.

That so many are struggling is the political responsibility of the Labour Party, which functions as a de facto coalition partner of the Tories, and of trade unions that have presided over the systematic undermining of workers’ living standards over decades.

Today, the TUC can only obliquely refer to the Labour Party because it knows that Labour will step forward ever more openly as the opponent of any fight against the government and the employers. This week, Lisa Nandy, the right-wing shadow levelling-up secretary, disingenuously expressed sympathy for rail workers “really struggling to make ends meet.” Even this was too much for Labour leader Starmer, whose spokesman reassured big business, “We’ve been clear that the strikes shouldn’t go ahead. Nobody wants to see industrial action that is disruptive.”

Workers must also understand that in the trade union bureaucracy they confront an industrial police force desperate to prevent the limited strikes they have finally been forced to call from taking place, and which will sell them out at the earliest opportunity at the smallest possible cost to the ruling class.

Should they not succeed, then ministers, train operating companies and Network Rail will launch a strike-breaking operation that must be fought and defeated. The government has reiterated its intention to introduce minimum service standards on the railways as soon as possible aimed at preventing any effective strike impacting on industries and services deemed essential to the functioning of the national economy.

Preparation for taking on the Tories must therefore proceed through the formation of rank-and-file committees independent of the pro-business trade unions that can unify and organise the emerging struggles of workers, and through the building of the Socialist Equality Party to replace the rotting political corpse of the Labour Party.



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