Britain’s TUC launches farcical campaign for £15 an hour minimum wage by 2030

Laura Tiernan
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On Wednesday afternoon, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) proclaimed with great fanfare that it would make an “announcement TONIGHT 10:30PM”, advising on Facebook and Twitter “STAY TUNED” in glowing neon font.

Safe to say, the TUC’s trailed announcement passed unnoticed by tens of millions of workers. Its complacent pronouncements have long been a matter of complete indifference to those who have experienced decades of betrayals rubberstamped by Britain’s trade union federation.

For several hours though, speculation among left-wing followers of the TUC’s social media accounts ran hot. A Twitter poll posted by a Rail, Maritime and Transport union member asked, “Do you think the announcement is for a General strike?” with 58 percent of 3,904 respondents voting “yes”.

Comments included: “This had better be an announcement of a general strike. You lot need to get up and fight for us”, “Nothing less than an announcement for a General strike will do. No half measures! Blow that whistle!!” Another, invoking the TUC’s refusal to call a general strike in support of striking miners in 1984-85 wrote: “Anything other than a general strike and it's the miners all over again”.

Amid the most devastating cost-of-living crisis since the 1930s that has fuelled a wave of strikes, such comments reflect widespread sentiments in the working class for a general strike to oust the Tories, “General strike beginning the day Truss enters No10?” asked one, a reference to Liz Truss who is expected to replace Boris Johnson as prime minister next month.

Others demanded the TUC end its support for Labour, with comments including, “General strike and defund the red Tories please”, “De-fund the Shadow Tory Party” and “Let's get all of these blue and red Tories back from the Maldives..... GENERAL STRIKE!!” and “Please all unions disaffiliate from the Labour Party under [Sir Keir] Starmer. Why don't you use your power.”

To describe such comments as wishful thinking is generous, but the pseudo-left Socialist Party’s intervention was politically mendacious. The Socialist Party, an organisation dedicated to bolstering the grip of the trade union bureaucracy, tweeted, “Tell the TUC that you want to see workers out on STRIKE TOGETHER”.

It called on workers to “Rally with Sharon Graham [General Secretary of Unite], Mick Whelan [General Secretary of ASLEF] and more” at a public event called by its National Shop Stewards Network titled, “Strike Together, Coordinate the Action” being staged during the TUC Congress at the Brighton Conference Centre venue. Its listed speakers are the same officials working to suppress and divide industrial action and block a general strike.

At 10.30 pm, the TUC’s social media team put their followers out of suspense, with the announcement: “BREAKING… We’ve just launched our campaign for a £15 an hour minimum wage”. TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady (annual salary package £167, 229) retweeted the demand, “It’s time to put an end to low-pay Britain”.

This was bad enough, but on closer inspection the TUC’s call was for a raise in the minimum wage to £15 only by 2030. This would be achieved by setting “a new minimum wage ‘bite’ target at 75 per cent of median hourly pay” by “the end of the decade”. The TUC politely suggested, “The Low Pay Commission should be tasked with progressing the minimum wage to this higher target based on prevailing economic circumstances.”

On social media the response was scathing. “Min wage of £15 per hour – BY 2030? That’s exactly like something weasel Starmer would come up with, to let bosses off the hook – is that it? You don’t want to piss off Amazon, Starbucks?” Another wrote, “Won't bother in future”, and “underwhelmed”, with someone else pointing out, “The way inflation is going—still bound to be a pay cut.”

The TUC’s announcement reveals an organisation deeply hostile to the working class, and indifferent to the social distress gripping millions. Last week National Health Service (NHS) chiefs warned thousands will die this autumn and winter from fuel poverty in what it described as a looming “humanitarian crisis”. Average annual energy bills

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will rise to £3,576 from October 1, likely nearly doubling to £6,552 in April 2023.

The TUC's £15 minimum wage by 2030 is a slap in the face that will do nothing to address this emergency.

Inflation, at a 40-year high of 12.3 percent (RPI)—fuelled by energy companies' profiteering from NATO's proxy-war against Russia—and is predicted to reach 21 percent by early next year. In the three months to June, workers suffered a pay slump of 4.1 percent. This follows the longest period of wage suppression in 200 years. More than a decade on from the global financial crisis, workers are earning £88 a month less in real terms than they did in 2008. Similar indices could be cited internationally.

More than two million workers are forced to survive on the National Minimum Wage for adults of £9.50 per hour (£361 per week before tax), £6.83 for 18–20-year-olds, and £4.81 for under-18s and apprentices. By the time the TUC's higher £15 minimum wage is introduced in 2030, it will amount to a real terms pay-cut as it is dwarfed by inflation.

Yet for the *Guardian*, the voice of desiccated English liberalism, the TUC's announcement was a masterstroke. Its online edition led with the headline, "Minimum wage should be increased to £15 an hour as soon as possible, says TUC", alongside a separate article, "TUC picks opportune moment to call for rise in minimum wage". Martin Kettle, the newspaper's associate editor and columnist, described £15 as an "ambitious target".

Neither Kettle, nor his fellow *Guardian* writers would be willing to submit to such an "ambitious" hourly rate now, let alone in 2030. Their real concern was made clear in the newspaper's editorial, "The Guardian view on raising the minimum wage: winning the fight for £15 an hour", which warned, "Britain may be as close now to a general strike as it has ever been. To resolve industrial tensions means thinking big."

It concluded, "Sir Keir [Starmer] won't stand on a picket line to show solidarity. But Labour should express its affinity with working people in clear policy terms, by backing a higher minimum wage."

The *Guardian*'s promotion of the TUC proposal is driven by fear. They are ransacking their cupboards, searching for something—anything—to throw to the angry hordes below. They view the trade unions as a bulwark against the class struggle and are eager to promote the TUC's pitiful announcement, urging Starmer to embrace it.

The Socialist Party's own campaign for a £15 minimum wage, in alliance with the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union, dovetails with these efforts. Their demand for "£15 Now" is being used to encourage young workers to join trade unions, portraying these pro-company organisations as vehicles for working class struggle, and concealing their role as chief enforcer of decades of savage austerity and wage suppression. The SP's pathetic appeals to the TUC and its shameless promotion of officials such as Graham and Whelan are aimed at bolstering the bureaucracy against an insurgent working class, no less than the *Guardian*'s wretched efforts.

A general strike is brewing. Mass social distress meets a government and Labour opposition impervious to suffering and determined to inflict the full brunt of the capitalist crisis on workers' backs. Political sociopath Boris Johnson, on his way to greener pastures, declares that workers must accept "economic pain" as the blood price for NATO's escalating war in Ukraine. His likely replacement Liz Truss pledges her willingness to press the nuclear button even at the cost of global annihilation.

A general strike is necessary to bring down the Tory government, defeat its class war offensive and break the grip of the financial oligarchy over economic and social life. But such a fight, winning support from workers worldwide, can be organised only through a merciless struggle against the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy.

Rank-and-file committees must be organised in every workplace, led by trusted militants, to lead the fight for a general strike, advancing policies to address the social needs of the working class, including immediate nationalisation of the energy companies under workers' control.

The call must be raised for a general election to break the right-wing conspiracy between Labour and the Tories and to take forward the fight for a mass socialist party of the working class. Workers and young people who agree with this struggle should join the Socialist Equality Party.

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