



Unity!

THE FIGHT OF OUR LIVES

ANDY BAIN
STRIKE BILL

A SUCCESSFUL CHALLENGE to the Tory government's Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act at the International Labour Organisation is an important first step in what will be a tough campaign to protect and extend workers rights.

When the European TUC points out that existing anti-union laws make it harder for working people in Britain to take strike action than in any other Western European country they give voice to an implicit criticism of the Blair and Brown governments who failed – despite promises – to repeal Thatcher's raft of anti union laws.

When Paul Nowak said workers' rights would be a major factor at the next general election, and that while the Tories' priority was to attack working people, Labour had pledged to give workers more rights he should be focussing more on Westminster Labour's retreat from earlier commitments.

Protection from unfair dismissal from day one of employment and the banning of fire and rehire and zero-hours contracts are fine and a repeal of the Strikes Act, if it makes it to the statute books are a good thing in themselves but we need a more comprehensive body of employment and trade union rights that would overturn the advantages the decades of Tory and New Labour legislation that gives employers and the state great advantages.

The Strikes Act breaks new ground in making scabbing a legal duty on workers and forces striking workers to cross their own picket lines in key public services and the provision of the act can easily be extended into other sectors. .

With government ministers able to dictate a "minimum level of service" we are facing a forced labour regime.

Failure to comply will enable the government to prosecute and bankrupt trade unions for exercising fundamental human rights enshrined in our country's international treaties.

While it is the case that unions defeated the government in the High Court

over the unlawful use of agency workers during strikes we should be wary of relying exclusively on appeals to the court system where the odds are stacked against us.

It is not simply, as Paul Nowak said, that the new laws are designed to increase conflict at work, not resolve it but rather that they are there to increase the power of employers and the state. Class conflict already exists and it is intensifying as the capitalist system enters a deepening crisis.

A clear recognition is needed that defeating these latest anti-working class laws will entail a qualitative change in the way we organise and fight.

This necessarily will need to include mass action in defiance of the law backed by united solidarity action with every group of workers who come in conflict with employers who use the law and the state agencies and legal system that implement it. This is a task that will require a full spectrum approach uniting national unions and local trades councils.

ANDY BAIN IS THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S INDUSTRIAL ORGANISER.

On strike with 250 million workers and farmers

Three years ago India experienced the biggest strike in history. Over 250 million workers and farmers, along with student, women's, and civil society groups, took action to be joined within days by farmers occupying New Delhi. The strike took place on India's Constitution Day, commemorating the 1949 constitution, and came in response to an unprecedented attack on workers' rights and farmers' protections by the right-wing government of prime minister Narendra Modi.

The strike united India's trade unions despite their competing global links.

OVERLEAF: Read how the crisis in the Western-orientated International Trade Union Confederation can give our TUC an opportunity to restore global trade union unity lost in the Cold War.

WORKING CLASS DEMOCRACY AT WORK

ROB GRIFFITHS
COMMUNIST

THIS NOVEMBER communists from every part of Britain will be meeting to discuss the our collective experience of the last two years of mounting class struggle.

Our party congress will hear first hand accounts from dozens of militants in every trade union and from our guests from ruling parties in socialist countries and sister parties throughout the world.

The discussion will be set in the context of a comprehensive main resolution prepared by the Communist Party's leadership.

My article in Monday's *Morning Star* sets out the main contours of discussion and the line of march for our campaigning in the period ahead and the main resolution can be found in the September issue of *Unity!* available at www.comunistparty.org.uk



Our congress meets during an exciting period of growth and renewal for our party. The political issues comrades will be debating are fundamental, not just for our party, but also for Britain's labour and progressive movement and the international Communist movement as a whole.

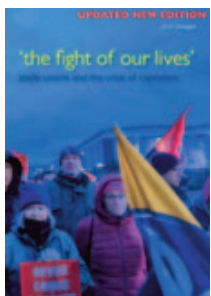
Our party gives effect to the working class organisational principle based on the widest possible discussion followed by complete unity in carrying out collective decisions.

For the next eight weeks, until delegates and observers gather, I urge you to follow the party across the social channels, Facebook, 'X', Instagram and Youtube for Congress updates. We have commissioned twenty features on all key subjects, from comrades in the thick of the action and the battle of ideas. There will be video interviews and regular features in the *Morning Star*.

The discussion is wide open. Everyone, Communist Party members or not is welcome to join the debate on terms of mutual respect and class unity.

You are urged to write to the letters to the *Morning Star* and *Unity!*

ROB GRIFFITHS IS GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY



▲ *The fight of our lives: Trade unions and the crisis of capitalism* is the Communist Party's latest pamphlet written by a team of trade union activists and academics it offer an analysis of the system's crisis and the way forward for the working class and trade unions. £2 or £1 unemployed.



TIME FOR CHANGE IN THE GLOBAL UNIONS

NICK WRIGHT
GLOBAL UNIONS

WE ARE DUE to hear from Luc Triangle, the new general secretary of the International Trade Union Congress.

He will get a warm welcome and we wish him well in his work. But make no mistake he has his work cut out.

His predecessor was unceremoniously sacked in the first fallout from a financial and political scandal that started in the European Parliament and reached into the heart of the international trade union movement.

Qatar lies at the centre of the scandal with the attention that football's World Cup brought to that state's notoriously exploitative and repressive labour system.

Former MEP – and before that leading Italian trade unionist – Pier Antonio Panzeri, is under investigation as the figure allegedly behind the *rete di influenza* (network of influence) that channelled corrupt funds to European Union and international trade union figures.

Both Panzeri and his associate EU functionary Francesco Giorgi are “co-operating” with the Brussels prosecutors.

Panzeri was jailed and Giorgi tagged while his partner at the centre of the scandal, Greek Socialist & Democrats MEP Eva Kaili, has been released from prison but remains under constraints on her movement.

Large sums of money were found at the apartment they shared.

Meanwhile Panzeri is singing like the proverbial prison canary and reportedly told Belgian prosecutors that suspect funding found its way to finance the campaign to elect General Confederation of Italian Labour (CGIL) leader Susan Camusso to the 2018 presidency of the International Trade Union Confederation.

Panzeri is quoted as saying: “Previously, we had identified a figure of €600,000 ... which was given to me [by the Algerian] in a purse and is a good part of the money found in my house. Then I learned that only €50,000 was enough. I therefore had €500,000 left which I kept.”

Eventually the general council of the International Trade Union Confederation dumped its general secretary Luca Visentini, saying that, following the report of its special commission set up to investigate the allegations against him, he no longer had their confidence.

Visentini confessed to receiving €50,000 from Fight Impunity, a Brussels-based NGO run by Panzeri, for his election campaign to succeed Susan Camusso as ITUC general secretary.

Some of this money found its way through the ITUC machinery and the commission report says: “... we also found serious deficiencies in the decision by deputy general secretary (DGS) Owen Tudor to accept this cash contribution to the ITUC.”

In the wake of this Luc Triangle has the task of resolving ITUC's deep crisis of legitimacy.

The depth of the crisis was illustrated by former general secretary of the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas Victor Baez. He is also a former deputy general secretary

of the International Trade Union Confederation from 2018 until last year when he resigned in protest.

He accused another former ITUC general secretary, Sharan Burrow, of an “absolute power insanity” that “came back to haunt us all and fingered Burrow as the force behind Visentini's election as ITUC general secretary.

Rather than putting the organisation's difficulties down simply to corruption, he laid waste to the “concentration of power in one person, weak processes of checks and balances, bendy rules, insufficient transparency and, more importantly, the lack of real democracy in decision-making.”

He wrote: “In 2018, in the aftermath of the ITUC congress in Copenhagen, many unionists insisted that I should become part of the elected leadership of the confederation as its deputy general secretary.

“The elections that year resulted in two opposing blocks of affiliates that threatened to tear the organisation apart. As I was on the losing side, the rationale was that my presence would mend some of those differences.

“After a strong initial reluctance I ended up accepting the proposal based on the promises of transparency and internal democracy in the hope of making my contribution to the labour movement.”

He went on: “The constitution of the ITUC sets out its managing structure, with an elected leadership group, as well as the general council and the executive bureau for a continuous oversight — with a congress every four years as its supreme authority. At least that is the theory. The practice was that the general secretary from 2010 to 2022, Sharan Burrow, amassed a tremendous amount of power to herself.”

Baez levels serious objection to the ITUC's flip-flop over labour conditions in Qatar, noting that the position changed in less than four years with Burrow shifting from considering the Gulf state a “country without a conscience” to promote it as a place where “workers can achieve justice.”

Baez says: “By sidelining the deputy leaders and the council, the general secretary was given free rein to rule however she wanted. Sadly, the unrestricted power made her slowly drift towards the glamorous VIP meeting rooms of the super-rich.

“Perhaps seduced by the PR machine of the world's elite and corporations, she accepted becoming the co-chair of the World Economic Forum several times and joined the board of the B-Team — a group founded by English tycoon, Richard Branson, seen by some environmentalists as mere business propaganda.”

These criticisms — coming from an ITUC insider — highlight the damage done to the ITUC's reputation by corruption and the social partnership ideology which has historically had a strong grip on the organisation.

A participant at the critical ITUC council meeting that purged the leadership told me that this present crisis brings to a head long-standing political and organisational problems.

Another said in some ways it is very good news and provides an opportunity to reform the organisation and reorientate its politics more to the left.

The actual balance of forces at the

emergency meeting of the ITUC council was 57 to 12 for Visentini's dismissal.

The Latin American, African, Asian and Scandinavian unions in their majority endorsed the package of measures including the decision to sack Visentini with the East Europeans backing away from decisive action. Our own Paul Nowak attended and supported the dismissal.

The ITUC is the successor to the cold war-era International Confederation of Free Trade Unions set up in 1949 after a US intelligence-funded schism — aided by our very own TUC — split the World Federation of Trade Unions founded in 1945 in London in a spirit of anti-fascist unity.

In recent years the ICFTU merged with the Christian World Confederation of Labour to found ITUC.

The original World Federation of Trade Unions held its latest congress in Rome. Nearly 500 delegates came from 96 countries, with many more participating online.

The WFTU represents 110 million workers in 133 countries, many in the global South. And for the first time in half a century, there were participants from several US union organisations, as well as a leader of the newly formed Starbucks Workers Union.

While British trade unions have a long tradition of international solidarity and on the key questions of global justice, neocolonialism, racism and imperialism can often be found on the right side of history, there has been — at the level of TUC-affiliated unions — an almost wilful blindness to the global politics of the international trade union movement and the way the international bodies to which our unions are affiliated have found a comfortable niche in partnership with employers.

For a long time the TUC international department was regarded as an extension of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and this discreetly masked cold war arrangement has more recently fallen from favour.

It is clear, not least from the account given by Baez, that the ITUC is in deep crisis and that a resolution can only come about with a decisive shift in political orientation and a profound culture shift.

British unions need to take a more active role in the institutions of the the global trade union organisations. While there is a growing sense that the way in which both the international and European bodies operate needs reform, a wider political question is raised by the impact of the changes in the global configuration of forces.

The discredited notions of social partnership cannot be the guide to a new global trade unionism.

The British TUC, which hosted the founding conference but played a shameful role — under CIA, MI6 and Foreign Office direction — in splitting the international movement should play a constructive role in fostering International working class united action. Europe and North America are not the epicentre of trade unionism.

Capitalist globalisation has shifted much production away from the most developed capitalist countries and a new trade union movement is in the making in the Global South.

NICK WRIGHT IS EDITOR OF UNITY!



manifesto

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IN THE NEARLY three decades that Unity! has been published at the TUC September conference it has not hesitated to challenge union leaders when they are wrong and has championed individual delegates and delegations when they acted to impose their will.

The culture of the conference mitigates against clear decision making which is why a voice from the conference floor is essential.

The concentration of industrial sectors into fewer and bigger unions has narrowed the basis for discussion and concentrated the power to shape the agenda more in the hands of general secretaries.

The TUC's culture not infrequently tries to composite diametrically opposed motions thus giving 'the Office' the opportunity to fudge the issue.

Who can forget John Monks' discomfiture when he was slapped down by the chair and went on to see TUC equivocation on New Labour's PFI programme go down in flames.

The problem is always more pronounced when Labour is in government or an election is imminent when the tendency is to give the labour leadership the greatest room to manoeuvres.

We can give GMB's Gary Smith a fraternal pat on the back for voicing a clear position in support of the NATO proxy war in Ukraine as clearly as if had been written by Paul Mason himself.

Some people think Gary Smith is in favour of an unending supply of weapons to the Ukrainian regime because it keeps a proportion of his members in the arms industry in work.

This is an unworthy suggestion. When Gary Smith takes a right wing position on any issue he does so from straightforward conviction.

Normally Unity wouldn't bother to criticise an individual trade union leader. They are usually subject to some measure of collective decision making and anyway it is the arguments that count.

But Smith has turned a political discussion over the Ukraine war into an unprincipled attack on Stop the War leader Andrew Murray and he deserves to get as good as he gives.

Smith' tries make a link between the solidarity millions of workers gave the Spanish republic with the support the main capitalist states give to NATO's war effort.

Only a political imbecile would fail to note the that when five thousand British workers were mobilised by the Communist Party to defend Spanish democracy it was fascists they fought.

The arms Britain sends to Ukraine - where they do not enter Ukraine's notorious black market in military kit - they are likely assigned to the tattooed fascists of Ukraine's neo-nazi battalions. **GROUCHO**