THE TRADE UNION CO-ORDINATING GROUP

Fair Pay Now!

Let's Strike Back Together

Introduction by John McDonnell MP

Over recent months, union after union have balloted their members on industrial action over issues that are critically important to working people, from pay to pensions and working conditions.

The response from most trade union members has been firm support for action to confront these issues.

After 12 years of pay freezes and pay cuts, attacks on pensions and the spreading imposition of insecure work, people really do believe that enough is enough.

What has pushed many people over the edge is that, whilst inflation has let rip, employers are trying to impose pay deals that don't match inflation and are, in reality, pay cuts.

Whilst workers are expected to accept pay cuts, Chief Executives and company directors continue to take home exorbitant salaries, and profits are used to generate massive pay-outs for shareholders.

Alongside this, the Government is threatening another round of austerity on a scale potentially matching and surpassing the austerity programme of 2010.

We now face the prospect of tens of thousands of public-sector job losses and cuts in funding to the already hard-pressed schools, councils, health service and the Government departments we rely on to support our communities.

Conservative Government ministers know that people are not willing to stand by and take this treatment anymore and that people are increasingly willing to push back, especially as trade unionists campaigning and taking strike action.

That's why the Government is threatening to introduce legislation to undermine the

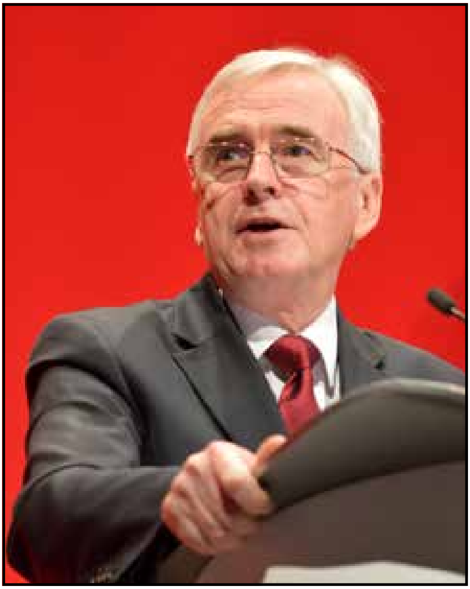

photo: Rwendland

right to strike.

The ability of a worker to withdraw their labour is a fundamental human right and must be protected.

Across the trade union movement, consensus is building to oppose this extreme attack on our civil liberties.

Unions have recognised that it is critically important that they work together – not only in the face of these attacks on wages and terms of employment but also on this threat to basic employment rights.

Coordinated action by a number of unions is emerging as a powerful strategy to strengthen individual union action and press forward common demands.

The traditional trade union slogan "Unity is Strength" is being demonstrated in practice, and in dispute after dispute victories are being won by workers taking action and standing firm.

The latest wave of union activity is taking the trade union movement beyond securing immediate victories and on to mobilising whole communities in campaigning for change in our society.

Trade unions are posing the question, how is it in the fifth-richest country in the world we have over 14 million people living in poverty including 5 million children in poverty – with over two-thirds of these children living in households where someone is in work?

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In recent independent reports from the United Nations, investigators have identified 2 million people living in destitution – that is without the basics to sustain a bare minimum of existence.

Another recent report published by the University of Glasgow confirmed that there were over 330,000 excess deaths in the UK as a result of austerity.

The reports from many of our teachers that their pupils are coming to school hungry have been confirmed by recent studies identifying 2 million children hungry in our country.

Trade unions are challenging the economic ideas that have dominated Government thinking for decades and that have produced this appalling state of affairs.

These ideas, labelled neoliberalism or trickle-down economics, have proved to be a disastrous failed experiment.

The argument by neoliberal governments like our own that, if you cut the taxes of the corporations and the rich, somehow wealth will trickle down to the rest of society has never held water.

Part of this economic illiteracy has been the undermining of trade union rights to create a so-called flexible labour market, the deregulation of our banks and the privatisation of our public services.

All have contributed to creating a grotesquely unequal society of low pay and exploitative insecure work, whilst the City of London became a casino and our public services have been used to line the pockets of the privatisers.

Trade unions have taken up the challenge to show that there is an alternative and that we can create a society that eliminates poverty and provides decent wages, pensions and working conditions and the high-quality public services we need.

It's a society based upon a fair distribution of the wealth that workers create, secured by the exercise of trade union rights, where our public services are paid for by a fair tax system and our economy is managed to respond to people's needs rather than obscene profiteering.

In addition to industrial campaigns, trade unions are increasingly allying themselves to the multitude of community campaigns – from housing, race, disabilities, discrimination against women and misogyny, to the climate emergency.

Working-class people are once again now looking to the trade union movement to defend them and to lead the way to a new and better future.

Just as the cost-of-living crisis began to escalate, the Tory Government launched an attack on rail workers' pay.

The government has exploited the economic disruption of the pandemic and the restructure of the privatised railways to make spurious claims that staff costs are a problem. Choosing to ignore the leakage of £500 million in profits from the railway, the Government has zeroed in on rail workers' pay and conditions, looking to finish the job that Sir Roy McNulty's report began in 2011 by driving down spending on staffing in the name of "productivity".

Workers employed by Network Rail have been told there will be an open-ended pay freeze from April 2021 onwards. Members in most Train Operating Companies (TOCs) received no pay rise in the 2020 pay round and then, from 30 January 2021, the Government wrote to the TOCs telling them there was "no budget" to increase wages for their workers.

The imposition of the pay freeze in the context of sharply rising inflation in 2021

"Cleaners and other outsourced staff have been pushed to the very brink of immiseration"

and '22 has eroded rail workers' earning power significantly. Network Rail has implemented a pay freeze for one year since the end of the last two-year deal in 2021. The Retail Price Index has seen price inflation of 12.3% in the year to September 2022. This has massively eaten into the earning power of rail workers.

Contrary to the distortions being perpetuated by the Tory Government, rail workers' median salaries are between £33,000 and £38,000 a year, depending on whose measure you use, and the majority of rail workers earn between £20,000 and £31,000. Train guards, for example, have a median salary of £31,000, station staff £24,000, maintenance workers and ticket office workers £29,000 and cleaners around £22,000 – and they're the lucky ones who aren't outsourced and paid around £9.50 to £9.90 an hour.

At the time they were balloted in March 2022, someone on a salary of £30,000 in 2021 would have seen their salary lose around £5,000 in value over the course of the pay freeze. RMT has calculated that rail cleaners on the National Minimum Wage have seen their annual earnings lose £844 in value in the last 12 months, even with the uplift in April this year.

Cleaners and other outsourced staff have been pushed to the very brink of immiseration. Even before the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, these cleaners lived on tight margins, with 63% reporting that they sometimes or regularly struggle to get by on what they earn.

Coupled with the multi-faceted attack on jobs, the growing cost-of living crisis and the erosion of earning power explains the massive mandates for strike action achieved in the national rail ballots. This economic context also explains the unprecedented levels of support that RMT has received on the picket lines and in public opinion polls.

RMT is also about to begin balloting cleaners on contracts across the country as part of a new national campaign to win a better deal for these desperately low-paid workers.

photo: D Jones SE NEU (flickr)

Teachers and other educators have been hit hard by the cost-of-living crisis. Many educators are being driven into poverty, forced to use food banks, and rationing fuel. Already exhausted by excessive workloads, some teachers are so desperate to make ends meet that they are taking on second and even third jobs. Thousands of highly skilled, dedicated educators have to rely on food banks and benefits.

Energy, food and fuel prices have rocketed this year. But instead of protecting teachers in the midst of the worst cost-of-living crisis for decades, the Government is imposing huge real-terms pay cuts on them to add to the pay cuts already inflicted since 2010. The Government's paltry pay increases for teachers are being more than wiped out by inflation, adding to the problems faced by teachers and other educators.

Soaring inflation means that the Government's proposed increase of just 5% for most teachers in England is in reality a huge real-terms cut to their pay. This comes on top of real-terms pay cuts already suffered by teachers even before the impact of this year's surge in inflation. Teachers in England saw the real value of their pay against Retail Prices Index (RPI) inflation cut by around a fifth between 2010 and 2021. On the basis of RPI in August 2022, the Government's pay cut this year will be even bigger than the pay cut resulting from the teacher pay freeze in 2021.

Pay cuts not only expose teachers and other educators to severe cost-of-living problems, they also damage education. Years of severe pay cuts and excessive workload have already hit teacher recruitment and retention hard. The Government has consistently missed its recruitment targets. More and more experienced teachers are leaving the profession. This damages education and damages the life chances of children.

The NEU is campaigning for a fully funded, above-inflation pay rise for teachers, and for effective action on pay for other educators. This is needed to address the urgent cost-of-living crisis facing teachers and other educators, and to ensure that we value, recruit and retain the educators we need.

The Prison Service Pay Review Body (PSPRB) was established under statute in 2001 to examine and report on matters relating to the rates of pay and allowances to be applied in the public-sector prison services in England and Wales, and in Northern Ireland.

The PSPRB was set up by the Government as a compensatory mechanism for the loss of the right to take industrial action of any form. This was reinforced in the 336th report of the International Labour Organisation in 2005, in which the Government gave a clear and unequivocal commitment to depart from the PSPRB's recommendations only in "exceptional circumstances" and agreed that such recommendations would be complied with in practice.

Unfortunately, the Secretary of State has the power to restrict – and has repeatedly restricted – the remit of the PSPRB. The PSPRB took their own legal advice in 2020 to confirm they were legally precluded from making a recommendation on a headline pay award that year. They and the POA consider this restriction to be incompatible with the role of an independent pay review body and a compensatory mechanism.

The table opposite shows inflation, as measured by CPI and RPI, compared to the restricted recommendations made for pay by the PSPRB for the majority of officer grades since its introduction.

It can be clearly seen that prison staff pay has lagged behind inflation in almost every year shown in this table. The advent of austerity under the Conservative Government from 2010 to 2014 left uniformed staff pay to stagnate.

Many other public-sector staff suffered through these difficult times as Government policy hit wages hard. Prison staff, due to the restrictions placed on their trade union and their individual human rights, simply had to endure years of hardship and a dwindling quality of life. After the refusal for two years to accept the PSPRB's key recommendation of a £3,000 pay rise for staff on new "Fair and Sustainable" contracts, the Government has finally relented – in the face of Judicial Review and political campaigning by the POA – and this will benefit a significant part of the workforce.

In July 2022 the PSPRB's latest recommendations were published by Government. Despite predictions that inflation would rise above 10% later in the year, this report did nothing to address the problems that our members face. The recommendations for many amounted to another real-terms pay cut, which they are having difficulty surviving on – with some sleeping in cars as fuel prices increase or calling in sick as they could not afford to travel to work. Car-sharing schemes have been put forward by employers to mitigate against this.

During the pandemic, those working within Criminal Justice were supported by clapping – but there was no acknowledgement or recognition of the invaluable work in terms of pay. Prison staff are not receiving the wage they are entitled to, taking into account the daily risks and responsibilities of the role they undertake in keeping the public safe.

The POA believe the Government are treating our members with disdain. POA members work in one of the most hostile environments in Western Europe due to high levels of violence and the numbers of prisoners locked up – many of whom have

“Government workers having to access food banks to feed their families is unacceptable”

long-term mental health conditions. The recommendations are not enough to make up for the last 21 years of constant cuts to pay by Government after Government.

The establishment of food banks in prisons and hospital trusts where our members work – due to the fact that salaries do not meet the basic costs of living – is unacceptable. The increase in the number of food banks to 4,000 – half of which are run by independent organisations who themselves are finding it difficult to meet demand, the remainder by the Trussell Trust – is an indictment of Government pay policy.

Government workers having to access food banks to feed their families is unacceptable. The added pressure of increasing fuel bills, food, childcare and accommodation costs on prison staff are going to make the recent pay rise redundant, with our members being worse off in 12 months despite the increase.

	CPI	RPI	PSPRB
2001	1.2	1.8	n/a
2002	1.3	1.7	6
2003	1.4	2.9	2.8
2004	1.3	3.0	2.4
2005	2.1	2.8	2.4
2006	2.3	3.2	1.6
2007	2.3	4.3	2.5
2008	3.6	4.0	2.2
2009	2.2	-.05	1.8
2010	3.3	4.6	1
2011	4.5	5.2	0
2012	2.8	3.2	0
2013	2.6	3.0	0
2014	1.5	2.4	1
2015	0.0	1.0	1.8
2016	0.7	1.8	1
2017	2.7	3.6	2.25
2018	2.5	3.3	2.75
2019	1.8	2.6	3
2020	0.9	1.5	2.5
2021	2.6	4.1	0

No one should go without food in the sixth-richest country in the world – yet shamefully too many food workers are struggling to earn enough to purchase the very food they produce. We have members who are working extra shifts at McDonalds so that they have access to a free meal whilst on shift, otherwise they would be going without food, and others who have anonymously admitted to us they are stealing food from work/canteens as they are so hungry.

When we ran a survey last year, food-sector workers told us that their households have run out of food at times during the pandemic – and many more have been worried that they too could find themselves in that position, suggesting that the problem could be even bigger were there to be the slightest change in pay, cost of living or welfare.

The survey (of which the report can be found at https://www.bfawu.org/campaign/right-to-food) was run in 2021, before the cost-of-living issue became a crisis – and we know that, should we run the survey again, the results would be much worse as the position we find ourselves in is all the more bleak.

For some workers in the food industry, meals are at times provided by friends and family, while others have relied on food banks despite working to provide food for the nation.

As the largest independent trade union in the food sector in the British Isles, BFAWU has fought for our members for over 175 years. Workers not being paid enough to feed themselves and their families should be consigned to history. As the country emerges from this pandemic and returns to some normality, we must leave behind the Dickensian experiences of workers going without enough food.

Food workers' wages have not kept up with the increase to the cost of living for years, and especially over the last 12 months, yet the price of food products has continued to rise, so it's not correct to say that an increase in food workers' wages would directly result in an increase in the price of the products they make. The rising costs of raw ingredients, the impact of the rise in energy bills, the war in Ukraine, Brexit and other costs also impact the businesses our members work for and therefore the price of products.

Many food workers are on low pay and, in some areas of the industry, precarious contracts. There are many zero-hours and part-time contracts in our industry and workers can go from being needed regularly on full-time hours to being dropped to minimal hours – and therefore wages – when demand drops outside of seasonal peaks, leaving them struggling to continue to pay the bills.

We know that hunger in the UK is not a new problem and that Tory austerity policies have fuelled the rise of "food bank Britain" as living costs soar whilst pay has been cut and the social security safety net has been dismantled.

The past two years of dealing with the pandemic have brought into the public domain the hidden daily struggles of many people. Although the true scale of the issue is not definitively known, we do know that it is rising at an alarming rate and that more and more working people are reliant on food charities to feed themselves and their families.

Some of the findings of our Right to Food survey that we ran last year are shocking:

• 40 percent of respondents have eaten less than they thought they should have during the pandemic due to a lack of money;

• 19 percent told us that there had been a time during the pandemic where their household had run out of food due to a lack of money;

• Over 35 percent said they had gone without enough food to make sure others in the house could be fed properly;

• And one in five relied on food from a friend or relative to provide meals.

In reality, our report highlights the shameful truth of food poverty in the food industry, which may be an indicator as to why there are still tens of thousands of vacancies across the industry. People don't want to work in a sector that pushes them into poverty because the pay of the shop-floor workers is a fraction of the amount that is paid out to shareholders and CEOs.

Napo has spoken to members who are extremely anxious about the increase in the cost of living. Despite having recently agreed a multi-year pay deal, many members did so simply because they cannot afford to strike, rather than believing that the well-below-inflation pay offer was good enough.

At Napo's AGM in October we heard of members already struggling to manage financially. Below are some examples of how probation staff are affected:

1. We have a member who was about to forego life-saving cancer treatment as she was going on to half pay due to the length of time she has had off sick. She is a single mum who was worried sick about how she would pay her mortgage, fuel bills and food for her children.

2. We are representing a member who is on long-term illness awaiting an operation constantly postponed due to the Covid backlog. She is now considering selling her home and moving to a smaller property as she can't see how she is going to be able to continue paying her mortgage and other bills while waiting a new date for her operation.

3. We have younger female members, especially in their thirties, stopping their pension contributions due to childcare cost increases.

4. We have had reports of the office foodbanks – that are usually reserved for people who are homeless – being depleted as staff are now having to access them.

5. We have members who are having to seek support from environmental and housing officers for homelessness, evictions and massive increase in rents.

This situation is unprecedented in the probation service. Concerns come from staff across pay bands. With the additional stress of worrying about how to feed your family and heat your house, we are deeply concerned that this will further impact on our members' mental health while they are already dealing with a workloads and staffing crisis.

It also reduces the organisation's – and the individual's – resilience and will likely be reflected in higher levels of sick-related absence. In turn, this will have a direct impact on how the service manages people on probation and the risks they pose to the public.

Firefighters and emergency control staff are preparing for strike action in the face of rampant inflation and a derisory pay offer made by fire employers. The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) is gearing up for a sustained campaign, with firefighters angered that they are expected once more to pay the price for Westminster's economic and political failings.

Firefighters, along with other workers in the public and private sectors, are facing the worst increase in our cost of living for a generation. With inflation figures at 10% and expected to rise during the coming months, firefighters face another significant real-terms pay cut. This comes after more than a decade of austerity, where firefighters were expected to do more but still get less.

The FBU represents the vast majority of wholetime, retained and control firefighters across the UK. The union engages with fire employers through the UK-wide National Joint Council (NJC), one of the last collective bargaining arrangements on pay and conditions.

On 27 June, fire employers made a pay offer to the FBU of only 2 percent. The FBU regarded the offer as an insult to firefighters. It will mean a massive pay cut over the next year, with double-digit inflation predicted by the Bank of England and other official bodies.

During the pandemic, firefighters were applauded as key workers, maintaining the regular emergency response to fires, floods and other incidents while also providing additional support to communities and vulnerable people affected by Covid-19. After those tough years, such an offer is an outrage.

FBU reps consulted members in the weeks following the 2 percent pay offer. Firefighters expressed universal disgust at the offer, particularly in light of the arduous work carried out during the summer heatwave.

On 4 October, following a sustained campaign by the FBU, fire employers made an offer of 5 percent. However they were clear that, despite requests made directly to the Home Office, the Government had refused to fund the new offer and that it would have to come from existing fire service budgets. The FBU executive council has put the new offer to members but is recommending rejection as it would still represent a significant pay cut.

The context for firefighters' pay also matters. After the nine-week 1977 firefighters' strike, the pay of firefighters and emergency control staff was governed by a pay formula linked to the upper quartile of earnings. Although the FBU has had to defend it staunchly from attack, the formula ensured decent pay for two decades, until the turn of the century.

Firefighters' fought another pay battle in 2002-03. Fire employers agreed another formula for the first years after the strike. This was abandoned at the time of the financial crash in 2008. Firefighters then faced two years where the fire employers made no pay offer, meaning no pay rises at all. Then the Government imposed its 1% annual pay cap, further hitting firefighters' living standards.

Although pay offers improved after the cap was lifted, firefighters had faced a significant real-terms cut. The FBU commissioned Incomes Data Research

photo: christopherpaul (flickr)

(IDR) to assess the trends in firefighters' pay. IDR found that, since 2009, using the CPI measure of inflation used by central Government, firefighters had lost around £4,000 – a 12 percent real-terms cut over that period.

Firefighters also face wider attacks. In May 2022, the Government launched its White Paper on "fire reform". Ministers threatened to instigate a review of the NJC, with the Chief Fire Inspector in England advocating a pay review body instead of the existing collective bargaining arrangements.

Ministers also want to impose new roles on firefighters, with no money offered in return. Ministers want to give chief fire officers a free hand to make firefighters do any work, irrespective of safety and training. After savage cuts, reducing the frontline workface by a fifth, firefighters already face pressure to widen their role maps without any compensation, made to ride under-crewed fire engines, change their shift patterns and other attacks on conditions.

The FBU's message is very clear. Either firefighters prepare for strike action or it will be 5 percent this year with the potential for more frontline cuts to follow. Fire employers and ministers will only offer something better in the face of a united and resolute workforce prepared to take strike action.

The FBU is clear that this action is about need, not greed. The union cannot stand aside while firefighters and emergency control staff face worse living standards now and for the years ahead.

Matt Wrack, FBU General Secretary, said: "Taking strike action is always a last resort. But our employers are increasingly leaving us with no choice. And there is huge anger among firefighters at falling pay. The ball is now in the fire service employers' court. It is not too late for them to make a much better pay offer for consideration by our members."

A new member survey by Equity, the performing arts and entertainment trade union, has revealed how performers and creative workers are struggling to survive due to the cost-of-living crisis – with the majority expected to struggle to meet essential costs and many considering leaving the profession.

Equity is made up of more than 47,000 performers and creative workers, united in the fight for fair terms and conditions in the workplace. We are actors, singers, dancers, designers, directors, stage managers, puppeteers, comedians, voice artists and variety performers.

One member told Equity: "I don't eat and my health has declined. I've even turned the gas off to my own home at stopcock as I can't afford it. I sold my TV as I can't afford a TV license. I don't live, I exist."

- 60% of respondents anticipate difficulty in meeting essential costs (e.g. housing, rent, food, childcare, utility bills) due to the cost-of-living crisis.
- 47% have already experienced difficulties in meeting essential costs during the period 2021-22.
- 33% have seen their level of personal debt increase in the last year.
- 41% feel negative about their prospects for work in the entertainment industry over the next 12 months (24% feel positive).
- 19% anticipate having to leave the entertainment industry due to the cost-of-living crisis (36% do not anticipate this, 46% are not sure).

Alongside these shocking findings, new analysis carried out by Equity of Government data shows that Black people and young people have already left the profession in droves following the devastating impact of Covid-19. Comparing DCMS workforce estimates for January 2019 to December 2019 and October 2020 to September 2021, Equity found that:

- The number of young people (aged 16-24) working in music, performing and visual arts has fallen by 19% (compared with a 14% increase for people aged 55-64).
- The number of Black / African / Caribbean / Black British people working in music, performing and visual arts has fallen by 39% (compared with a 9% fall of White people).

Equity is demanding that the Government does more to shield its members and the creative workforce from the debilitating impacts of the cost-of-living crisis. Ahead of crucial pay negotiations, Equity is also calling on employers, producers and engagers in the performing arts and entertainment industry to address urgently the harmful impacts of the crisis by improving pay and conditions in order to protect the sustainability and diversity of the workforce.

Paul W Fleming, Equity General Secretary, said: "Our survey findings confirm that the cost-of-living crisis is a workforce crisis. This weekend Equity and all trade unions are demanding better – and we are clear about what better looks like. It's trade unions freed from red tape and able to help workers get better pay and dignity in every workplace. It's the Government stepping up to end austerity, to use taxpayer money to tackle the cost of living, support the creative industries to fully recover from the pandemic and fund public services. Equity's members are tired of being told to be resilient – it's time to collectively resist. Equity's members deserve better from their Government. We demand it."

Key workers in the road transport, distribution and logistics industry continue their vital role, including ensuring that medical supplies are delivered, businesses can continue operating and our supermarkets are fully stocked. But many professional lorry drivers feel more like second-class citizens than key workers – and this feeling is being compounded by the cost-of-living crisis.

While, in some sectors of the profession, professional drivers have secured double-digit percentage wage increases over the past year in order that employers might retain their services, in many instances this has not necessarily led to a feeling of being "better off". Workers and their families are incredibly anxious by the major cost-of-living crisis gripping the nation.

"What is also required is a recognition by professional drivers that, in order to improve terms and conditions of employment, it is imperative to organise into a collective under the banner of trade unionism"

With the average cost of a tank of petrol exceeding £100, costs at the till creeping up with each weekly shop and rising interest rates, many of our key workers are being forced to choose between giving up a meal or heating their home.

At a recruitment exercise at a company in the South Midlands, at least two URTU members indicated that they were looking for employment nearer to their home as the cost of fuel to get to and from work had more than wiped out any increase in net wage they had received from their employer. They simply could not keep up with the increase in fuel prices.

There is a general shortage of professional drivers in the UK. Our industry seems oblivious to the fact that very few individuals view professional driving as a long-term commitment to the profession. This shortage will inevitably continue until there are dramatic improvements to pay and working conditions throughout the industry and recognition of the vital contribution that the road transport industry – and professional drivers in particular – make to the nation's economy.

Our members are suffering from a lack of suitable facilities for professional drivers. The lack of access to toilets, washing facilities and somewhere to sit and have a meal away from their cab cannot be allowed to continue considering the vital work that our members are carrying out on behalf of our country. Older drivers are also leaving the profession due to factors including excessive medical costs.

What is also required is a recognition by professional drivers that, in order to improve terms and conditions of employment, it is imperative to organise into a collective under the banner of trade unionism. We are united with all the TUCG unions in calling for maximum solidarity and practical action to ensure that we deliver the systemic change necessary to protect our lives and livelihoods together with those of generations to come.

NUJ members report the news – they seldom make headlines – but in September 2022 reports of low-paid journalists joining food bank queues in Bristol stopped readers in their tracks.

As journalists at Reach PLC prepared for nationwide strike action that would ultimately deliver significant increases for the lowest-paid workers in the company, the NUJ placed a sharp focus on low pay in an industry where high profile and perceived social status often obscures the harsh reality faced by many journalists.

The cost-of-living crisis is not just another story, it is a reality for many journalists, including those on freelance contracts, at regional titles and in companies without collective trade union agreements.

High inflation and eye-watering energy bill increases have been exacerbated by pay stagnation in many companies in an industry already in turmoil. The mantra "never waste a crisis" has been ruthlessly deployed in some quarters.

Journalists have told the NUJ they are concerned about how they can afford necessities and pay their bills. One member stated that "miserly pay deals in recent years" meant a decent pay award was required to allow them to manage in the current crisis. Other comments reflected people's worries about how they will afford a food shop and that "the rise in inflation and utility bills is unprecedented and we need a proper pay rise to mitigate these additional costs."

Soon after the coronavirus pandemic, some titles closed offices and required an increase in the amount of time staff spent working from home. This has meant the payment of higher energy bills amid a cost-of-living crisis and has added an extra burden on to journalists managing costs.

One member told us: "Working from home combined with increased energy bills has left me more out of pocket than commuting to an office daily ever did – to the point of struggling to afford basics, like a decent food shop."

The reality is that this is not an isolated experience but, sadly, one that other journalists are facing. Employers must recognise and address the financial impact an increase in home working is having on employees and take action to avoid the loss of experienced and new, passionate journalists who may leave the profession.

Current financial hardship has members considering their long-term aims, with one young journalist stating: "I find it hard to believe I will be able to save for things such as a mortgage, etc. during these difficult financial times." The NUJ continues to engage with employers to seek pay deals that attempt to address pay inequalities, and secure meaningful rises that put money in members' pockets.

While the cost of living crisis may be relatively new, historic minimal or no pay increases at some organisations has meant its impact has been compounded for some.

NUJ members have demonstrated their willingness to achieve decent and fair pay awards by exercising their right to vote in industrial action ballots held by the union.

Members at Reach PLC voted to take part in strike action and demonstrated their collective power to achieve change.

In September, the union agreed a pay deal resulting in above-inflation increases

photo: fishbelfast (flickr)

for over 700 journalists, including at the Daily Mirror and Daily Express. Recognising entrenched issues on career progression, the revised pay offer also includes minimum salaries for several job categories to lay a baseline for a transparent group-wide progression structure.

The union's newly launched Freelance Fact Pack provides essential guidance to help members – and our calls to employers to provide sufficient support to freelances during the crisis continues.

As journalists find ways to manage, investment in skills and training should continue to be at the top of employers' agenda. Some members have told the union they may need to consider a second job to supplement their income and manage bills.

Journalists play an important role in informing the public and holding the powerful to account. Their reporting through quality journalism upholds democracy and it's time for fair reward and recognition of all those in the industry.

The NUJ will continue to oppose any attack on trade unions and the right of workplaces to improve collective bargaining and members unionising to defend and improve their pay, terms and conditions.

The motto of the International Federation of Journalists declares: "There can be no press freedom if journalists exist in conditions of corruption, poverty or fear."

Poverty and the fear of not being able to make ends meet is a challenge many of those writing about the financial crisis know too well.

In September 2022, UCU members began the biggest ever strike action in further education, with staff at dozens of colleges walking out. College teachers were insulted with a 2.5% pay offer in a context of their wages already having fallen behind inflation by 35% since the financial crisis. We aren't having it anymore.

University staff have had enough, too. Enough of the deep pay cuts, the relentless attacks on pensions, and the endemic precarious employment practices that have defined the past decade in higher education. Enough of our demands for the bare minimum being ignored by millionaire university bosses. That's why we are in the midst of an unprecedented national university strike ballot, which closes later this month.

In the lead-up to the opening of our ballot of 150 universities across the UK – and since – it has become clear that something very special is happening in our union. In fact, it feels like a historic shift. As workers across the movement draw strength from one another's fights, UCU members are rising like never before to take back what is theirs.

Our members in English colleges have delivered incredible picket lines since action began in September. Thanks to excellent organising, some colleges have sought to make improved offers. Others, however, face the prospect of further disruption.

There is no justification for college employers refusing to budge from their offensive 2.5% offer. The Department for Education has announced £1.6 billion in extra funding for further education and UCU estimates that colleges already have an additional £400 million that is available to spend on staff compared with 2019-20.

For our members in universities and colleges, the story is much the same: highly paid bosses refusing to use sectoral wealth to raise pay and protect pensions and working conditions.

This is all the more scandalous when it follows a UCU report that showed that the vast majority of college staff are financially insecure, impacting the mental health of more than eight in 10 – with many being forced to skip meals and restrict hot water use to save money. Seven in 10 said they will leave the sector unless pay and working conditions improve. The figures in higher education are much the same.

For our members in universities, the past decade and more has been brutal, with university bosses repeatedly attacking pensions and pay and stripping bare the decent terms and conditions that formed the basis of a career in a university. 90,000 university workers are employed on insecure contracts, while tens of thousands are breaking under shocking workloads and thousands struggle through a cost of living crisis.

University bosses have refused to budge to consider UCU's demands. With RPI inflation set to exceed 22%, their pay offer still stands at 3%. A needless 35% cut to the guaranteed retirement income of staff is yet to be revoked and benefits restored.

The intransigence of university bosses is all the more contemptible given they are not short of cash, individually or institutionally. UK universities generated a record sector-wide income of over £41 billion last year and are planning to splash £4.6 billion on white-elephant buildings and gratuitous vanity

photo: Simon Ingram (flickr)

projects. Meanwhile, vice chancellors take home £44 million in annual remuneration, with individual pay packets as high as £519,000. Likewise, college bosses take home hundreds of thousands each year while their staff earn poverty wages.

Wherever you look, it is clear that our post-16 education system has its priorities all wrong – and as a result is failing its students. Staff are the colleges, staff are the universities. It's about time those running the sectors realised that.

The civil service has rarely faced such a huge number of challenges in such a condensed period of time. That it coincides with the cost-of-living crisis just makes it more devastating for our members, whose pay, pensions and redundancy terms are under attack.

The Tories still want to cut taxes for the wealthy at the expense of public services, so we are gearing up for a big fight with whoever wins the leadership contest because we believe the civil service needs more resources, not less.

In our recent cost-of-living survey, we asked members what impact would the increase in the cost of energy likely have on them this winter?

13% said they are worried they won't be able to pay their bills, and an alarming 11% said they won't have the heating on at all this winter, while 17% say they will only have the heating on when necessary. For 18% of respondents there is no choice but to cut back on all but the essentials, and 11% said the huge rise in bills will cause them a considerable financial impact.

Many people responded to describe their bleak prospects, which makes it imperative that the new Prime Minister acts to give their own workers a decent pay rise so they can heat their homes and buy food this winter.

One member said they face stark choices: "It's going to be extremely difficult given the fact that sometimes having to choose between heating and food is difficult. My mother is bed-bound and the cold hurts her body due to the illnesses she has. Not being able to get the right care for my mother and I due to the cost of living is horrendous. No one would understand what another is going through unless they are experiencing the same thing and that's not the case most of the time. It is very difficult having to plan ahead for winter when I know it's going to be struggle."

Another said: "I work hybrid, but I think on really cold days I will have to come into the office instead as I won't be able to heat my home all day but like to keep heat for when my children finish school. But then the expense of petrol makes travelling to the office just as expensive. My son's childminder has gone up by £40 a month so I'm still worse off already even with the pay rise of around £20 a month."

"I'm finding myself having to put what money I can into savings for winter bills," said another struggling member. "This has had an effect on my social life were I'm essentially working to live. When my rent and bills have come out, I'm left with £150 to live on and buy food. I'm having to lend off my parents at 34 years of age. It's having a devastating effect on my mental health – most notably my anxiety as I'm unsure of how I'm going to keep this up."

We are determined to fight back. Our members provide vital public services, as was laid bare during a pandemic when the Government lauded them as heroes. A campaign of industrial action in those public services will remind the Government of our members' worth.

PCS has launched a national ballot for industrial action that closes this November, as members face an unprecedented cost-of-living crisis and the Government plans to cut 91,000 civil service jobs.

We are calling for a 10% pay rise, a Living Wage of at least £15 an hour, an immediate 2% cut in contributions that our members have overpaid to pensions since 2018, no further cuts to redundancy terms and a job security agreement, coupled with the resources desperately needed to deliver public services.