

## STRIKES OFFER HOPE

Against a background of war, deepening climate crisis, crumbling public services, poor quality housing and soaring prices, the increase in strikes to levels not seen since 1989 offers hope. The strikes are driven by inflation, labour shortages, grievances accumulated over decades of union passivity, the inspiration of strikes and unions in the news, and a lack of illusions that waiting for Starmer's Labour Party will solve our problems.

Photo: Steve Eason



Most strikes are winning at least something, and a few - particularly in smaller bargaining units affected by labour shortages - are beating inflation. But in too many cases disputes are dragging on with no clear plan to win or are settling for real-terms pay cuts despite public support. We still need a big, visible win.

Despite rapid growth in areas where unions took action, overall union membership fell significantly in 2022 - particularly among women in the private sector. It's been great to see new groups of workers joining the fight, with RCN nurses taking their first strikes in England and Wales and GMB Amazon workers building on last year's wildcat strikes. But most workers aren't organised and aren't striking.

### Organise, escalate, coordinate!

We need to spread union organisation and action across more of the working class. Even in unionised workplaces, organisation is often in a shocking state. We can't recover from decades of passivity and partnership overnight. Unfortunately, unions are already over-stretched supporting existing members going into struggle. So no army of paid organisers is going to rebuild working-class organisation. We have to do it ourselves with whatever help we can get.

Some big victories would be even more inspiring than the strikes. In many of the larger strikes the level of action called has simply not been enough to win. One factor is leaders' fear that workers are unwilling to take sustained action where strikes are too big to enable much strike pay. We risk a Catch-22 where workers can't afford to take enough action to win, but see little point in action too timid to win. Escalation often gets better results at less cost than long low-intensity disputes. We need solidarity to enable escalation. Solidarity isn't charity - giving solidarity makes us stronger. For more on how strikers and supporters can help, see [www.rs21.org.uk/solidarity](http://www.rs21.org.uk/solidarity)

Coordinating strikes is always worthwhile, but it is vital in disputes where the government is blocking settlement. Joint action is much more likely to defeat the government than piecemeal opposition. When we do strike together, joint rallies, marches and other actions increase the benefits.

# TORY DIVISION TORY REPRESSION

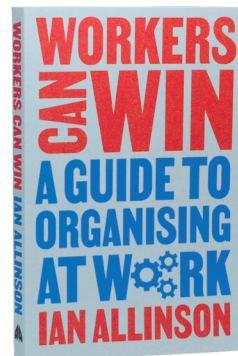
The Tories have no answers to our problems. Indeed they so divided and chaotic they don't even have answers for their own. Instead, they are falling back on two traditional responses to resistance - division and repression.

The Tories are using 'culture-wars' to try to divide us. The treatment of migrants and trans people is appalling and the whole movement needs to stand in solidarity with them and others who are targeted, including those on benefits and racialised people including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

Anti-union legislation already makes effective strike action unlawful for some workers, such as in construction where subcontracting, bogus self-employment and high labour turnover make balloting almost impossible. The Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill threatens to make more workers to choose between their strikes being effective or lawful. It's great to hear some union leaders talking of defiance. But when they comply with the existing legislation and anti-union laws work by threatening the funds that pay their wages, we can't rely on General Secretaries to lead defiance. Until more workers strike outside these unjust laws, leaders won't be confident that they will get the support to make defiance succeed.

Rank-and-file workers need to organise independently of paid officials so that we can take the action we need to, with or without their backing, so that we can put pressure on them, and so that we can coordinate action even when they fear this might reduce their control over disputes.

The anti-union legislation doesn't stand alone - it comes alongside yet more restrictions on protest, particularly targeting environmentalists and anti-racists but affecting everyone. We need solidarity against state repression - from day-to-day police violence to restrictions on our right to strike.



 PLUTO PRESS

Discount copies of *Workers Can Win! A Guide to Organising At Work* are available from the rs21 stall or via our website.



**SAT 29 JULY  
MANCHESTER**

rs21 is one of many organisations backing the Troublemakers At Work conference which will bring together workers who have won improvements at work, taken strike action, and transformed weak unions into a strong voice for workers - and those who want to.

We can inspire and learn from each other and build lasting rank-and-file networks to help us win.

More info and tickets via [troublemakersat.work](http://troublemakersat.work)

## How to get involved with rs21:

- You can become a member at [rs21.org.uk/join](http://rs21.org.uk/join)
- Follow us on social media - links and addresses are below.
- Subscribe to our newsletter at [rs21.org.uk/subscribe](http://rs21.org.uk/subscribe)
- Our meetings are free and open to all. [rs21.org.uk/events](http://rs21.org.uk/events)

