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European clouds, British storm British bankruptcy with uncontrolled inflation and explosive social protest The risk of a serious energy-humanitarian crisis

Despite the triumphalist war discourse of London, the European Union and NATO, the most relegated European social sectors – that is, those who bear the fundamental weight of the energy, food and social crisis – are beginning to win the streets in defense of their survival.



Blow by blow, crisis in crisis. Britain in shock is confronted with inflation never before seen in the last 40 years. The health system is going haywire. Social anger grows and is expressed in mass strikes in essential sectors.

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The English medico-social system on the edge of the -precipice. Photo HNS

A bleak panorama that leads some social actors to reflect on what could be the outbreak of a real humanitarian crisis, just in a few months. The giant [NHS Federation](#), a reference body in the health sector, came out in recent days with the tip plugs in front of the misgovernment still led by the beheaded Boris Johnson. He urged him to act imminently to control rising energy costs. It states that if it does not take urgent action, there is a risk of "a public health emergency".

A las puertas de una crisis humanitaria

On the third Friday in August, the Federation that gathers, supports and speaks on behalf of the entire health system in England, Wales and Northern Ireland sounded the alarm. The figures show that, should no additional social measures be taken, "energy poverty rates in the UK will reach 54% from October and at least 66% from January." Affecting, especially, more than 80% of large families, single parents and retired couples.

In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, energy poverty status is defined as the situation of allocating more than 10% of a household's average income to pay the energy bill. According to official calculations, by January next year the price of energy would reach 4,266 pounds sterling (1libra = 1.18 dollar). The current average salary in Britain hovers around £31,285. Just a year ago, in March 2021, the maximum price for energy was £1,200 per year.

It's not usual for the NHS to pitch with the harshness it's doing. And no one can detract from those words given their close contact with everyday reality and the crisis below. The Federation brings together 1.5 million employees who care for more than 1 million

patients a day. "We promote collaboration and work in society as the key to improving the health of the population, providing high-quality care and reducing health inequalities," insist the spokespersons of this main government interlocutor.



The popular sectors of Great Britain are the most threatened by the crisis. Photo NHS.

For the Federation, living in energy poverty will have an impact on "a drastic increase in respiratory conditions, malnutrition and even hospital admissions of children." He argues that vulnerable seniors living in winter conditions are also at particular risk for heart attacks, strokes and falls. Tensions, depressions and psycho-mental illnesses will increase along with this crisis.

In that context, the £400 cost-of-living reimbursement promised by the Government, to be paid in instalments, will fail to offset the dramatic blow in energy prices. "This will push more than two-thirds of UK households into energy poverty, exacerbating health inequalities that have already widened during the pandemic," the Federation said. Economic analysts are already beginning to predict the economic recession in the medium term.

Crisis of misrule

Various actors from the political opposition, trade unions and civil society have been pointing out in recent weeks the responsibility of Prime Minister Boris Johnson in this increasingly complex situation.

August has been a month of strikes and social mobilizations multiplied in different sectors, each with its own demands, but with the common denominator of demanding adjustment of wages to cushion the uncontrolled increase in the prices of basic products and services.

On August 22, France Inter suggestively titled one of its [analyses "Strikes and Thatcherism Back in Britain."](#) In it, he emphasized that "it is the first time in 30 or even 40 years that there are strikes in some sectors, such as railway, underground and port." London was paralyzed last weekend {August 20 and 21} and this situation is expected to be repeated. Postal workers anticipate going on strike as do journalists' unions.



Manifestación sindical de los trabajadores del transporte durante las recientes huelgas en Gran Bretaña. Foto France 24.

Si bien British Airways llegó a última hora a un acuerdo salarial que evita lo peor a la vuelta de las vacaciones de los británicos, los profesores y los trabajadores de la sanidad amenazan con lanzarse en una huelga masiva. El 23 de agosto, el sitio WEB de [Le Monde](#), informaba de la movilización social en Gran Bretaña: “trabajadores ferroviarios, estibadores, abogados... Cada día, más o menos, el país se enfrenta a un nuevo movimiento de ira” .



Huelguistas delante la estación Victoria de Londres el pasado 20 de agosto. Foto WSWS. Al mismo tiempo, las alternativas políticas se ven complicadas por la disputa de liderazgo entre las tropas conservadoras en busca del sucesor-a de Johnson para septiembre. Los dos principales candidatos, Liz Truss y Rishi Sunak, quienes intensifican el debate desde una perspectiva meramente de poder, parecen estar ajenos a un país amenazado de derrumbe.

Como lo señalaba a la prensa Gordon Brown, que fuera primer ministro laborista durante la crisis financiera de 2008, el país se enfrentaba a una «bomba de tiempo económica» si no diseña, ahora, un plan para el difícil invierno que se avecina. Los laboristas hablan de Johnson como de “gobierno zombi” que ya se ha retirado.

El LegalToday, publicación destinada a los profesionales de derecho, en un artículo publicado en su sitio WEB en la segunda semana de agosto, titulaba “El vacío político del Reino Unido amenaza con una crisis económica más profunda”.



Los trenes ingleses paralizados por la huelga. Foto-RTS.

Inflación descontrolada

Una de las causas y ejemplo de la compleja crisis actual: la explosión inflacionaria. Según la Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas (ONS, por sus siglas en inglés), el índice de precios al consumo (IPC) del Reino Unido subió un 10,1 % en julio — frente al 9,4% del mes anterior—, y se situaba en agosto en el nivel más alto en más de 40 años, cuando alcanzó un 10,4%, en febrero de 1982.

Según la cadena televisiva [France 24](#), unos de los rubros que presionó para empujar la inflación a dos dígitos fue el de los alimentos. Se registró un incremento de 2,3% entre junio y julio, el más alto a nivel mensual de los últimos 21 años. «Los precios de los alimentos aumentaron notablemente, en particular los productos de panadería, lácteos, carnes y verduras», indicó Grant Fitzner, economista jefe de la ONS, citado por el medio francés.

No obstante, para algunos expertos, lo peor está por venir. El Banco de Inglaterra prevé un incremento en el precio del gas para el mes de octubre, que, sumado a la presente crisis, podría empujar al Reino Unido a una recesión prolongada. Diversas fuentes proyectan que la inflación podría llegar entonces a un 13%. Teniendo en cuenta que los precios de la energía se mantendrán altos, el banco central reconoce que el país enfrenta su mayor caída en los niveles de vida desde que comenzaron los registros en la década de 1960.

According to France24, real wages today are at the lowest level on record, so if the figures prove anything, it is that wages are not driving inflation (...) On the other hand, paradoxically, since the pandemic, the top 350 companies listed on the FTSE (the benchmark stock index of the London Stock Exchange) have experienced a 43% increase in profits. The analysis concludes: the UK is suffering from a crisis of speculation, when will anything be done about it?"

Although even less shocking than the British, [inflation in the eurozone](#) also continues to soar to reach all-time highs. It reached 8.9% in July, higher than the 8.6% in June, 8.1% in May and 7.4% in April. Europeans continue to see energy and food prices soaring, due, in large part, to the consequences of the Russo-Ukrainian war. And the real problems of gas and fuel supply from Russia. The preliminary estimate published on 29th July by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, is the highest since the start of eurozone records in 1997.

European clouds. British storm. Britain pays the price for an isolationist Brexit, for the pandemic with profound consequences and now, for a war on the continent itself. Despite the triumphalist war discourse of London, the European Union and NATO, the most relegated European social sectors – that is, those who bear the fundamental weight of the energy, food and social crisis – are beginning to win the streets in defense of their survival.



Picket strike in Leeds. Photo: WSWS

Sergio Ferrari, from Bern, Switzerland to La Pluma, September 1, 2022

Edited by [María Piedad Ossaba](#)

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