

£1/£2 solidarity price

Issue 1089
4-10 June 2020



socialistparty.org.uk

the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**

Tories knocked back on schools opening

STAND FIRM FOR

WORKPLACE SAFETY

School staff and parents show the way

■ No return to work until safety can be guaranteed ■ Workers' and trade union control of workplace safety

Martin Powell-Davies
Teacher, NEU member, and
Socialist Party national committee

Faced with parental distrust and organised trade union opposition, the Tories' plans to implement a wider, phased return of children into England's primary schools from 1 June have run into widespread resistance.

With decisions varying widely from area to area - and even from school to school - it's difficult to judge exactly how far the government has been pushed back. It's certainly been by a long way.

When even the compliant BBC News reports there's been a "mixed picture on turnout", it's safe to conclude that the plans to widen opening to all nursery, reception, Year One and Year Six pupils have failed to materialise in most schools as yet. Government "ambition" to go further and bring all primary year groups back before the summer holidays seems even less likely to be achieved.

Responding to union warnings about the risks to public health, dozens of local authorities issued statements raising concerns about government plans. Some, although nowhere near enough, went further and gave clear advice that wider

opening should not be implemented at this stage.

Tory-controlled Lancashire County Council's statement summed up why their own government's proposals are so reckless: "The test and trace programme is not at a state of readiness to respond to Covid-19 community-setting outbreaks in a timely manner... Furthermore, we are not confident that adjustments to the current measures of the lockdown policy will not risk a second peak of infections locally."

Chorus of concerns

As the clock ticked down to 1 June, the chorus of concerns from public health experts grew louder. Even members of the government's own Sage committee broke ranks. For example, Jeremy Farrar, director of the Wellcome Trust, tweeted: "Covid-19 spreading too fast to lift lockdown in England... TTI [test, track, isolate]

has to be in place, fully working, capable dealing any surge immediately, locally responsive, rapid results and infection rates have to be lower." But this is, of course, exactly what the trade unions, led by the National Education Union (NEU), have been saying for weeks.

Under mounting pressure, some schools have opted to only open to fewer additional pupils than the government wanted for now. Others have decided to delay wider opening entirely for at least a week or two while they consider the health risks - and the level of opposition - further.

Even where schools did open, if press surveys were correct, perhaps half of parents will have opted, where they could, to keep their children at home for now. That will be particularly the case in places where local parents have organised campaigns to back up the unions' slogan of "not until it's safe".

But it has been the opposition of the school staff unions, led by the National Education Union, that has been key to pushing the Tories back. By insisting that schools can't be safe for wider opening until our public health-based 'five tests' are met, the pressure has been put on the government to deliver on its responsibilities, rather than expecting schools to somehow muddle through.

Where local union branches and school workplace reps have organised with the most determination, the opposition has been the greatest. They were working solidly throughout the half-term week up to 1 June speaking to members, organising meetings, lobbying heads and councillors. Where this has been done effectively, hardly any primary schools opened more widely on 1 June.

▶▶▶ Continued on p4

the Socialist

formerly Militant

Issue 1089
4-10 June 2020

DO YOU HAVE NEWS FOR US?

The Socialist is written, read, sold and bought by ordinary workers, trade unionists, young people and Socialist Party supporters. We want you to write for the Socialist.

Send us reports of your workplace and community campaigns, short letters on working-class issues, or ideas for other articles.

CONTACT US

editors@socialistparty.org.uk
020 8988 8777 - ask for the editors

DEADLINES

Friday before publication, or Monday morning for urgent news, unless otherwise agreed with the editors.

The Socialist goes to press on a Tuesday night. We publish online on Wednesday and in print on Thursday.

SUBSCRIBE TO THE SOCIALIST

for weekly working-class news, socialist analysis and fighting strategy
socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe

E-sub direct debit just £2.50 a month
Paper sub £4.50, or £6.50 including
Socialism Today magazine

Socialism: the podcast

weekly on all podcast platforms

facebook.com/CWISocialistParty

SOCIALIST PARTY

The Socialist is the weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party, the England and Wales section of the Committee for a Workers' International

socialistparty.org.uk
socialistworld.net



Join the fightback
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS
socialistparty.org.uk/join

Help fund the fightback
DONATE TODAY

socialistparty.org.uk/donate

OUR TEAM

Editor of the Socialist

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

Editorial staff

Dave Carr Scott Jones

James Ivens Ian Pattison

Circulation

Chris Newby

Editor of socialistparty.org.uk

Judy Beishon

ISSN 1366-9621

Registered as a newspaper
at the Post Office

Printed by Reach Printing Services
Published by Socialist Publications
PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

Militant issue 1: October 1964
The Socialist issue 1: 7 February 1997

"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

Covid and economic crisis

Battered Tories face divisions and growing anger



WHAT WE THINK

Just six months ago Johnson swanned into office with the biggest Tory parliamentary majority since 1987. The Socialist, in our special edition produced the day after the general election, pointed out that, "the seeming strength of Johnson's government will be shattered by coming events."

We went on to explain that Maggie Thatcher's 1987 election victory was followed within months by "the campaign of mass non-payment against the poll tax, led by Militant, now the Socialist Party" which forced Thatcher's resignation in 1990.

We explained that, "today the Tory Party is far weaker than it was then. It is bitterly divided, and Johnson has only been able to win by distancing himself from his own party, using populist rhetoric to falsely claim he is standing up for 'the people'. This was a 'snapshot', a very ephemeral result, with even Johnson having to acknowledge workers had only lent him their votes."

Uprising

Even at the start of the Covid lockdown, this would have seem far-fetched to many, with Johnson riding high in the polls, and a widespread mood to unite behind the government's strategy to deal with the virus. Two months on and the world is transformed. Many of the elements fuelling the gigantic uprising convulsing the US are also present here.

The consequences of years of austerity have been laid bare by the pandemic. It is not a coincidence that the major world powers with the highest death rates - Britain and the US - are also the countries with the highest levels of poverty and inequality, where neoliberal capitalist policies have gone furthest.

As in the US, the death rates from the virus are highest in the poorest areas, often with large concentrations of workers from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background. The devastating economic crisis is already devastating the lives of millions of working-class people. Every section of the working class



Massive protests have erupted across the US and the world to condemn the murder of George Floyd (see pages 8, 9 and 16). Thousands marched through central London to the US embassy on 31 May photo Isai Priya

is affected, but those who are in the most precarious work will suffer most. That includes many BAME workers, and also the young. It is estimated that a third of 18-24 year olds have already lost their jobs or have been furloughed.

As a result of its woeful handling of the pandemic, support for the government has been on the slide for weeks, but the Cummings affair has marked a qualitative change. Lockdown, it has turned out, doesn't apply to the elite! Johnson's wholehearted defence of the breaking of the lockdown rules by his special advisor, Dominic Cummings, has enraged the population.

In an inept attempt to defend Cummings, Charles Walker, vice-chair of the Tory backbench 1922 committee, actually expressed the fears of the capitalist class of the rage that will develop against their system: "If people are very angry at the actions of Dominic Cummings, then that anger is only a harbinger of the greater rage to come when the forthcoming recession, or heaven forbid depression, starts to bite."

The problem for the capitalist class, however, is that the Cummings affair is a new demonstration of the dysfunctional character of the Tory party, and how weak and unreliable a tool it is for defending their interests when the rage 'starts to bite'. Traditionally, when an unelected political advisor becomes a subject of controversy, they are

sacked or resign in short order. Only enormous arrogance can have led Johnson to imagine that he could defy the norms, and that the result of Cummings telling his tall tale in an hour-long press conference would be to convince, rather than enrage, the population.

In an inept attempt to defend Cummings, Charles Walker, vice-chair of the Tory backbench 1922 committee, actually expressed the fears of the capitalist class of the rage that will develop against their system: "If people are very angry at the actions of Dominic Cummings, then that anger is only a harbinger of the greater rage to come when the forthcoming recession, or heaven forbid depression, starts to bite."

The problem for the capitalist class, however, is that the Cummings affair is a new demonstration of the dysfunctional character of the Tory party, and how weak and unreliable a tool it is for defending their interests when the rage 'starts to bite'. Traditionally, when an unelected political advisor becomes a subject of controversy, they are

sacked or resign in short order. Only enormous arrogance can have led Johnson to imagine that he could defy the norms, and that the result of Cummings telling his tall tale in an hour-long press conference would be to convince, rather than enrage, the population.

ly criticised Cummings - reflecting the avalanche of complaints they have had from their constituents. Whatever happens now, Johnson's reputation has suffered a battering in the eyes of the majority of the population.

Not normal

That Johnson was allowed to go ahead with such a plan reflects that this is not a 'normal' Tory government, subject to the control of party grandees, and - through them - the capitalist class. As the Economist magazine put it, "if the leadership of the Conservative party were still determined by the magic circle of establishment grandees who ruled it in the 1950s, rather than the 150,000 or so Daily Telegraph readers who make up the party's membership, [Johnson] would still be lounging on the backbenches."

Johnson is a right-wing populist, elected as leader by the shrinking and aged membership of the Tory Party. He won the general election



photo Cancillería Argentina

by posing as standing for the 'little people against the elite' - a lie that has now been clearly shattered.

The party he leads has a shallow social base and is in a state of disintegration, with many deeply divided factions, reflecting at base the crisis of British capitalism. Post-general election, the cracks were briefly papered over, but they never went away.

Now, faced with the worst economic crisis for their system since the 1930s, the fissures are bound to reopen as debate rages on how to deal with insoluble problems. These include mass unemployment, major corporations only propped up by government money, spiralling state debts, and - above all - the mass movements that will develop in opposition to the misery created by capitalism.

The scale of the current crisis means that one issue - responsible for warfare in the Tory party over decades - has been temporarily hidden. Brexit, however, is now going to come back to the fore. This issue

clearly demonstrates Johnson's unreliability for the capitalist class. The working-class vote for Brexit four years ago was, at base, a cry of rage against capitalist austerity. However, given the absence of a mass force putting a socialist, internationalist case for Brexit, the vacuum was partly filled by the nationalist 'little Englanders', not least the pro-Brexit wing of the Tory party. The majority of the capitalist class, however, would have preferred to remain in the EU as the best means to maximise their profits.

Even when Johnson won the general election with the slogan 'get Brexit done', big sections of the capitalist elite still hoped that he would use his mandate to negotiate a deal which kept Britain closely aligned to the EU. Those hopes are now fading. Johnson is currently insistent that the transition period will not be extended beyond the end of 2020, making negotiating any comprehensive deal highly unlikely, and any deal at all difficult. This month will see another

round of talks, followed by the 1 July deadline for extending the transition period. The gap between the two sides is huge. For the EU, the room to make concessions to Johnson is more limited than ever.

The current world economic crisis has massively increased the centrifugal forces in the EU, threatening to fracture it altogether, and making it very dangerous to bend too far to the demands of the only country to have already gone.

It is not excluded Johnson could be forced to ask for an extension even after the 1 July deadline. Despite the legal obstacles of doing so requiring a new treaty, the institutions of the EU would be likely to try and assist in order to prevent Britain crashing out of the EU economic area onto World Trade Organisation terms. Nonetheless, the possibility of Britain and the EU not reaching an agreement is growing.

Johnson undoubtedly hopes that the negative economic consequences of his approach to Brexit will be lost in the greater crisis of British capitalism. In reality, however, it would further exacerbate the crisis, possibly dramatically. The major world powers are reacting to the crisis by increasing trade barriers. Britain - a second-rate power outside the EU with no significant trade deals - is bound to be badly squeezed as a result.

Despite the change in the parliamentary Tory party, there are still more than 130 Tory MPs who supported remain in the referendum. The majority of the capitalist class will be exerting huge pressure on them to try to force the Tory party to change course. Given the growing unpopularity of Johnson, they may also see opportunities to replace him with a more reliable Tory leader.

Elite look to Starmer Labour

At the same time, with their Tory 'first team' in such a mess, and anger growing against the government, the capitalist elite will also be looking for a safe second team to act in their interests if the Tories are forced out.

Keir Starmer's election as Labour leader marks a big step forward for the capitalist class in that regard. The Labour NEC's endorsement of Starmer's choice for general secretary is a further tightening of the grip of the pro-capitalist wing of the party. David Evans is an open Blairite who dedicated himself to undermining the role of the unions when he was an assistant general secretary of the party in the late 1990s (see p 14).

The working-class majority are therefore facing an unprecedented assault on their lives and living standards with no mass political voice representing them. Already - in the few months of the Covid crisis - trade union membership has soared as workers have looked to collective organisation as the best means to defend their interests.

As the economic, social and political crisis of capitalism develops, it is also urgent that the working class starts to build a mass party that fights against the Tory government and the capitalist system it defends, and demands a democratic socialist alternative that can meet the needs of all.



WHAT WE STAND FOR

The Socialist Party fights for socialism - a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also oppose every cut, fighting in our day-to-day campaigning for every possible improvement for working-class people. The organised working class has the potential power to stop the cuts and transform society.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) which organises across the world.

Our demands include...

PUBLIC SERVICES

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.
- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

WORK AND INCOME

- Trade union struggle for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £12 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage of at least £15 an hour. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings. Scrap zero-hour contracts.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.

DONATE
socialistparty.org.uk/donate
to help fund the fightback

SUBSCRIBE
socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe
weekly newspaper: the Socialist
monthly magazine: Socialism Today
Socialism - the podcast: on all platforms
facebook.com/CWISocialistParty

- Scrap Universal Credit. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
- A 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

ENVIRONMENT

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and un-recycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low-fare, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

RIGHTS

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.
- For the right to vote at 16.

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

- For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!

Do you agree? Join the fightback!
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join
or call 020 8988 8777
or text your name and postcode to
07761 818 206
to find out more today!



Schools...

...no going back until it's safe



Leicester school student Bethany Morgan-Smith



photo USAF/Linda LaBonte Britt/CC



photo USAF/Linda LaBonte Britt/CC

Stand firm for school safety

Continued from front

While the pupil return has been slowed, the overall picture is uneven. The Tories hope that numbers will increase further and resistance falls away. However, that means overcoming the opposition of staff in the best organised schools, including those in the secondary sector who aren't due to start a phased wider opening until 15 June.

The next two weeks in this battle are going to be critical. Some primary schools, and some in the trade unions too, hope that delaying wider opening until 8 or 15 June will give time for testing and tracing to be properly embedded.

However, the government's record throughout this crisis can give no school employee or parent any confidence that the NEU's 'five tests' will be met anytime soon. The confusing messaging over easing the lockdown means that, instead of falling, infection rates may start to rise again.

National testing and tracing plans still appear to be in chaos. There has certainly been no sign of school staff being given access to "regular testing" as the NEU demands. The government itself admits that social distancing is impossible to maintain with younger children. The virus will spread between them. Regular workplace screening, including to those without symptoms, will at least give staff some reassurance that they are not bringing it home to their families.

NEU members must insist that all the other union 'tests' need to be met too. A guarantee that staff who are concerned about their vulnerability, and those living with vulnerable relatives, can continue to work from home is a significant part of those tests. This is particularly a concern for many Black Asian and Minority Ethnic staff.

The united demand has to remain that a wider return is "unsafe until the tests are fully met".

But schools are going to be under increasing pressure to submit to Tory plans, even though that threatens the serious danger of a

'second wave' of the virus. In order to protect themselves, and their school communities, it is inevitable that more staff are going to have to assert their health and safety rights under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act. Already, where staff have threatened that they will apply those rights together, employers have been forced to reconsider their plans.

The NEU website has been updated with advice explaining both the legal responsibilities on employers and the rights of employees faced with a 'serious and imminent danger' to either leave, or refuse to return to, an unsafe workplace. It also contains model letters to send to headteachers, based on the 'five tests' and union checklists, for staff to sign together, asserting those rights. That information needs to be disseminated and discussed as widely and as quickly as possible.

Union strength, backed up by parental opposition, has already had an effect. For the safety of our colleagues and our school communities, let's stay strong and insist that safety has to come first.

■ Newham: victories school by school as council abdicates responsibility

In almost every primary in Newham, east London, staff voted against increased school attendance and did not go in on Monday 1 June.

The full scale of resistance isn't always visible. It's only reception, Year One and Year Six that the government is trying to send back in, so only that section of teachers and learning support assistants (LSAs) is having to disobey right now.

There is a lesson here for other struggles, like Sats boycotts. Where you've only got one year group having to say no to something, they can feel they're out on a limb, and so need special support.

Lots of new members are learning the power of the union. We've got great new reps and assistant secretaries coming forward out of this in Newham. They're the future of the union.

We need to get to governors and parents. One school did a survey and found only 15% of parents were willing to send their children back. Let's organise to tell the heads to stop reopening.

And Newham's Labour mayor, Rokhsana Fiaz, put out a statement saying she agrees with the NEU's five tests. But it also says it's down to individual heads and governing bodies as to whether the schools open.

That is simply unacceptable. Newham has the highest Covid-19 death rate in the country. How dare this Labour council abdicate its duty?

We are resisting school by school because the council hasn't made a blanket statement not to reopen. There are lots of little victories, but - for now - they are partial victories.

Where schools have insisted on opening on 1 June, the Newham branch of the National Education Union (NEU) has sent 'Section 44' letters to the heads. But many schools, under pressure from the union and from parents, have at least agreed to delay partial reopening.

Most of the heads are saying we're not opening - till 8 June, or

15 June, or 22 June. But it can't be about arbitrary dates. It has to be about when it's safe. I don't believe half the heads want to open - but if left alone under government pressure, they will.

I had one school that was planning to open on 8 June, but the head met us, and agreed she's not opening before 15 June. And she's not saying she is opening on 15 June - it depends whether it's safe. That was a complete turnaround.

A lot of heads are demanding their staff go into school for inset days, to 'get ready' for when it's 'safe'. Now, that's a psychological thing. Get 'em in, and once they're in, they're in.

But even the government's (very strange) rules say now, six people can meet, outside. Schools might have a hundred staff! You can't have them all in. And what for? You can have your meetings online!

One head wondered how she is supposed to 'get ready'. Well, support the caretakers and cleaners to do their jobs, with PPE and safe distancing. But the teachers and LSAs are not employed to get the place ready. She has now agreed this until Newham NEU says it's safe.

One head met the NEU and Unison union reps on 1 June and shouted at them, saying she's not accepting any collective response. She wanted each staff member to phone her individually and tell her if they're coming in.

The reps stood firm and said we are collective, and we're telling you people aren't going in, and that's all we're going to say. The governors were against reopening too. Then the head phoned me and told me she is not going to open next week.

It's a battle of wills. But the reps are very positive, and staff are holding the line, refusing to go in.

Louise Cuffaro
Secretary, NEU Newham

■ Coventry: Trade union organisation pays off

Building a strong union base in Coventry with many new reps and activists, sharing ideas and supporting each other, has paid off!

From a position where many schools in the city had indicated they were looking at a phased re-

turn to school for some year groups in primary from the 2 June, at the time of writing the vast majority of schools remain only open to key workers and vulnerable children.

Unfortunately, our local authority did not take a city-wide position to delay.

Online meetings and regular mailings to members from the local National Education Union (NEU) branch, with very clear messages about union advice, have helped to give confidence to members to challenge schools.

We have been clear to our members: if they feel in imminent danger they have every right to refuse to go in and be protected by Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act. Working with other unions has not always been straightforward but joint work where possible has been successful.

No stone was left unturned. We wrote to chairs of governors warning them of their responsibilities, and challenged the local authority and academy leads.

Working over the weekend to tackle some of the more belligerent school managements was also required, as well as working with reps.

Firm positions on health and safety, and working toward solid risk assessments, have helped to secure a delay. And they have also ensured safer environments for the future - for our members and pupils and, in turn, our communities.

The government has been bombarding schools with advice which changes regularly: it has been an utter disgrace. The pressure that head teachers have been put under has meant that many were relieved they have had extra time to put in place more secure plans.

What has been clear throughout the last couple of months is how important it is to fight for the strengthening of local authorities, where all schools are accountable and under democratic control, ending the chaotic system we have at present.

It's not over yet. There will be more battles to win, but Coventry NEU is in a good, strong place to face those challenges. We gained at least another week for schools which, given the scale of what we face, has been really positive. But

as the science keeps unfolding, we must keep holding the line that there should be no going back until it's safe!

Nicky Downes and Jane Nellist
Coventry NEU (both personal capacity)

■ Safety First! Victory in Leicester schools

The very low attendance figures at schools in Leicester are despite the reckless return pushed by the Tory government for the 1 June. Many schools had already postponed starting dates, and this is a small victory. But we need to continue to campaign for no return until it's safe.

There is still no proper contact tracing in place, and so far none of the National Education Union's (NEU) five tests have been met.

Parents across the country got organised and formed groups to bolster the confidence of teachers, and show that parents share their concerns. In Leicester, our Safety First campaign now has over 100 members, consisting of local parents and education workers.

We are continuing to build our network to ready ourselves for the fights to come. These will include battles around secondary schools opening, and especially if teachers start needing to withdraw their labour due to health and safety, or if schools are forced to close again due to further Covid outbreaks.

It is vital that we continue to resist the demonisation of teachers, in particular the NEU, by the government and right-wing media, by forging even stronger links between parents and the trade union movement. One method of doing this could be that parents who are trade unionists move motions in solidarity with the NEU in their union branches.

Our campaign is also proposing a car cavalcade protest to the local trade union council to show our support, and protest at the unnecessary risk to the health of our communities.

The fight continues. No return until it's safe. We've pushed them. We can push them further!

Lindsey Morgan
Leicester Socialist Party

Solidarity from a secondary school teacher

Sending solidarity to all those teachers and parents who are using their well-founded 'instincts' to defy the government's reckless back to school decision.

Just for the record, I am a secondary teacher of a 'non-core' subject so it is unlikely that anybody is going to ask me to go back to school. But just in case anybody assumes that I am sat here twiddling my thumbs - at the moment this is what my week looks like:

1. Setting online assignment for nine classes
2. Checking the previous assignments done by these classes
3. Doing pastoral well-being phone calls to 22 17-year-olds and their families
4. Marking about 40 A-level essays
5. 'Attending' a number of Zoom meetings with colleagues
6. Recording some podcasts for distance learning

7. Making lesson resources to be used online

8. Emailing parents and students who are understandably struggling to keep up with distance learning.

9. Having finished the complex process of working out teacher assessments for GCSE and A-level - now planning how we are going to resume the normal curriculum again in September

10. And one day this week actually going in to school to look after vulnerable students and the children of keyworkers

I am probably spending as much time working as I would be if I was in school. And because the structure of my students and their parents' days has gone to pieces I am receiving email queries pretty much all around the clock.

I'm not asking for sympathy because this only just represents doing the job I am paid for, like every

other teacher in the country. But I wanted to make it clear that our working days are not spent sipping cold beer and having BBQs in the garden.

I didn't become a teacher because I wanted to stare at a laptop for hours everyday - or because I wanted to work in a call centre. For my own mental health I can't wait to get back into a classroom before I put a fist through my laptop.

However, like a significant number of the government's scientific advisors, and knowing kids and the school environment, I think any decision to return to school before the R is lower; track and test is in place; social distancing is possible; and PPE is available is... premature and reckless.

That's all - the bell's just gone and break-time is over.
A secondary school teacher, North London

Parents, teachers and students stand together

I am a school student, and although I am not directly affected as I am in year nine, I worry about the safety of those who are. Children in primary schools do not understand germs. They will happily cough and sneeze, and wipe their noses on their hands, and touch things.

Children in foundation will not socially distance. A child will want to hold their teacher's hand and play with their friends that they haven't seen in months. How can you tell a four or five year old to not touch things and people? It's just not realistic!

We also have to question the quality of the education when both the students and staff are in this anxiety-inducing situation. Kids and

teachers will be too scared to work, learn and teach, feeling anxious that they will get it and pass it onto their parents, grandparents or sick siblings. The images of schools in France where children sit in crosses in boxes is so sad.

The government has said "we owe it to children to reopen schools". This is completely hypocritical and manipulative when all my generation has known is austerity. When they have cut our mental health services and schools, and tripled tuition fees.

The Tories have done nothing to make young people's lives better. They are just making it worse.

They are reopening schools wider simply due to the economy and the capitalists losing money. The

government should be making sure every parent who has to look after children is fully supported financially and telling employers that they can't force parents into work before schools can reopen safely.

Schools in France and South Korea have had to close again because of an increase in coronavirus cases. Students and teachers should be able to feel safe and secure when going back into their work environment.

We should all come together parents, teachers and students and stand together against the unsafe reopening of schools.

Bethany Morgan Smith
Leicester school student and Socialist Party member

Basingstoke campaign for safety

I am a local mum concerned with the wider opening of schools in Basingstoke, so I decided to set up a campaign group. I have also set up a petition to present to the Hampshire National Education Union and given an interview in our local paper.

I have written to my daughter's school about my concerns, and I must admit that the information they have provided is very well thought through, and they are doing

what they can to minimise risk.

However, even with their plans, it is not possible to open the school fully as there simply isn't enough space, resources and staff to maintain social distancing, hygiene measures, and keep each group to a maximum of 15. There is no mention of tracking, testing and tracing or using PPE.

I am against the wider opening of schools here, not least as Basingstoke has the highest rate of Cov-

id-19 infection in Hampshire, and has seen 700 Covid-related deaths.

Mayola Demmenie
Basingstoke Socialist Party

■ See socialistparty.org.uk for the Socialist Party's workers' charter - for discussion and debate in workplaces and communities - so that we can organise to defend our health, safety and rights during the coronavirus crisis.

Reject the university employers' offer on pay, workload and casualisation

UCU 'four fights' picket line in East London before lockdown
photo East London Socialist Party



Socialist Party members in UCU

Over the last 12 months, University and College Union (UCU) members have undertaken a determined struggle in the 'four fights' dispute, taking 22 days of strike action over pay, casualisation, workload and pay inequality. The most recent offer tabled by the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) fails to move on key demands.

But the UCU leadership is encouraging acceptance of the offer, capitulating to university management in the hope it can save jobs in the wake of the higher education funding crisis.

We reject the offer put forward by UCEA. It fails to make any movement on the current 1.8% pay offer, even though the value of higher education pay has been eroded by 20% in the last decade. Next-to-no progress has been made on workload, the 'expectations' set out on equal pay are essentially driven by legal frameworks, and the casualisation 'expectation' provides get-out-clauses for employers.

The offer does not bind university management to these 'expectations' and instead puts pressure back on local branches to implement and negotiate the key terms of the offer. Many activists rightly believe that accepting the offer in its current form is an abandonment of the most casualised members of the union.

Yet, the UCU leadership is telling members that we cannot achieve a better offer, leading members down a path of retreat and, ultimately, betrayal, at a time when we need a fighting leadership more than ever.

They also proposed an outrageous and unnecessary timescale (five working days!) for branch consultation which left no time for democratic decision making at

branch level.

As previously reported in the Socialist, the higher education sector faces a major funding shortage due to anticipated falls in student numbers this September. Many members are understandably concerned about job losses arising from this crisis, questioning the strategy and timing for rebalancing in the 'four fights' dispute, previously scheduled for this month.

The fight against Covid-19 related attacks on university workers will not be advanced by accepting an unacceptable offer, on the 'four fights' - these issues will only be exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis, particularly job insecurity and a higher workload.

Socialist Party members call for a rejection of the offer and demand that members are given an opportunity for a democratic discussion over the rebalancing strategy, in light of the changes in our sector's situation. We call for a higher education sector conference to determine the next steps in the dispute.

We say a rebalancing should be coordinated with other campus trade unions: cross-union action is needed to defend jobs and higher education. The unions should immediately launch a campaign in defence of the sector, targeting not only the university employers but, crucially, the government. The funding crisis concretely poses the need for the renationalisation of our sector - the running of universities as a public service - and demonstrates the unsustainability of a university system based on fee-paying.

Socialist Party members in UCU stand for the scrapping of fees, bringing universities under public ownership and under democratic control of staff and students.

See full article at socialistparty.org.uk

Fight continues for safety on London buses

Moe London bus driver (personal capacity) and Socialist Party member

Transport for London (TfL) has announced that the front doors on London buses were being reopened on several routes. In April, to help protect drivers from infection, union reps on London buses won an agreement that the front bus doors would remain closed and free travel would be implemented.

Now, a study by University College London has 'established' that doors are safe to reopen.

Many drivers think that doors are being reopened because TfL wants to collect revenue. Unions must not fall under pressure to reopen doors because of revenue. Collection of revenue must never be the priority. We must make sure that cabs are sealed off.

Unite union correctly gave power to its health and safety reps at every garage to ensure buses are sealed off before leaving the depot on 30 May. But it failed due to poor planning, and companies let out buses regardless. Many reps weren't working on 30 May, and some reps didn't know about it. That's why it's important to demand more health and safety reps - it can't be right to have just one rep who may find it difficult to attend a union course.

We have been arguing for more health and safety reps to attend courses as soon as elected. Often reps are prevented by bosses from attending, but Unite must stand up and ensure every rep gets to a course within three months. On the buses workplace reps are usually also health and safety reps.

On 30 May, some buses left the depot with different types of designs to seal the bus cabs, not all agreeing to the union's rule that it must not

have a gap of more than 5mm. Some plastic materials were flimsy and melted from the hot weather, and fell off. In order to have one design we must have one publicly owned bus service, where workers' democratic control and management will ensure safety.

Simultaneously, the bus capacity was reduced. Drivers are now able to skip stops, but drivers had to wait for this safety measure to be confirmed as management previously told drivers not to do so. But some drivers did it regardless because they felt that the virus can pass through if they had too many passengers.

To ensure safety for drivers and passengers across all the network, we demand a London-wide safety agreement from Unite. This should be on the basis of a meeting of convenors, reps and health and safety reps looking at the scientific evidence, including the risk assessments of union reps.

Equity union general secretary election: vote for Paul Fleming, fight for action

Socialist Party members in Equity

Equity, the union for performing arts professionals, is about to elect a new general secretary - amid an existential crisis for parts of the industry. There are two candidates for the top job - Paul Fleming and Simon Curtis. Paul Fleming has earned a reputation as a dynamic and hard-working negotiator with an eye for detail. He told a national hustings on 20 May that "what being a trades unionist is, is fundamental respect for forensic processes."

His manifesto includes detailed goals for more public funding and improved work-life balance in the industry. There are also good proposals for the union, like increased branch funds and freedoms for branch campaigning, that would open up more space for workplace organising and left activism. Local councils have accounted for around half of public arts

funding. Paul is a Labour councillor in Southwark, south London. However, when asked if he would back councillors proposing no-cuts budgets (see p12) if elected general secretary, Paul told a branch hustings on 27 May: "110%, as an initial go-to."

Simon Curtis has told more than one hustings that "my priorities are evolution, not revolution" - but evolution towards what is not clear. Paul's programme seems to us the best starting point. We do have some friendly differences of opinion, however.

On a 'universal basic income' for artists, for example - we are absolutely in favour of more income support for practitioners. But there are problems with UBI which need further discussion (see 'Universal Basic Income: not a solution to insecurity and poverty under capitalism' at socialistparty.org.uk).

We would instead propose that public money funds higher wages, living unemployment benefits,

and cheap or free rehearsal and performance facilities. This and other radical policies are outlined in Equity's 'Performance for All' policy document.

Equity has a culture of accepting the existing framework in the industry and negotiating over the details. To his credit, though, Paul has explicitly cited the pandemic disruption as an opportunity to change some of that framework. We also agree with him on this.

But the fundamental change we want to see is the union mobilised to shape that new framework, including by broaching industrial action if necessary, rather than relying on external forces.

We encourage all Equity members to vote for Paul Fleming for general secretary. Ballot papers will arrive from 1 June and must be returned for 8 July.

More on candidates' records - read the full article at socialistparty.org.uk

"Test, trace, isolate, support" - the Tories' scheme fails on all counts

An NHS contact tracer

I checked my emails late on 27 May and was surprised to see one from the NHS. The new test and trace system was going 'live' - not 1 June as expected, but 8am the next day!

Starting four days early would be cause for celebration if a well-planned scheme was smoothly rolled out. But this scheme seems to have been devised in a panic - "from a standing start in a few weeks" said Matt Hancock in his video message to contact tracers. Why weren't preparations made long before?

Our training materials are mostly dry and repetitive documents (with many typing errors, showing the rush to get them out). We haven't had opportunities to practise mock calls.

My biggest problem has been trying to set up a 'virtual' call centre at home with Amazon, Sitel and other software. After many hours,

struggling to follow instructions with multiple personal identifications and passwords, I still hadn't got it.

So the 28 May launch took place without me. Then I heard another tracer on the radio describing exactly the same problems. Since then I've read many others are in the same situation. 7,000 of us have been recruited with clinical backgrounds, not for our IT experience.

When I phoned the helpline I found the reason many of us couldn't complete the software installations was we hadn't been sent everything we needed. Five days later I'm still waiting! It now looks like the end of June before the scheme is fully operating.

Yet the government is pressing ahead towards ending the lockdown. The number of new cases is falling but still around 2,000 a day. These are just those confirmed with tests.

Thousands of people will be contacts of these new cases. Some

will catch the virus and spread it to others before feeling unwell themselves.

A contact tracing scheme is vital to bring Covid-19 under control in the absence of vaccines or treatment. If it's to be effective, however, testing must be easily accessible for everyone with symptoms and anyone at risk. Results need to be quickly available. GPs and local public health departments should be informed.

Those testing positive should trust their information will remain confidential so they willingly name their recent close contacts. Contacts should be traced, given advice to isolate for up to 14 days, and fully supported to do this. Full pay while off work is essential. The measly £95.85 a week statutory sick pay will force many to ignore stay-at-home advice.

Successful contact tracing depends on people who feel fine agreeing to go back into isolation while the rest of us are out of lockdown. They are asked to show solidarity to stop the virus spreading. The government must show solidarity in return, with full financial and practical support.

Employers must agree to hold jobs open and not pressure workers to continue working. Trade unions should make sure this doesn't happen.

Test, trace, isolate, support - the Tories' scheme fails on all counts. Tens of thousands could die as a result as a new wave of infection develops. But Serco, Sitel, Amazon and other companies will still be making money from it.



Furlough: It's said 'we are all in the same boat' - we are not

A furloughed worker

The hospitality industry has been downsized. For some, the furlough scheme came too late and workers were already cut, or businesses had shut their doors for good. We are seeing the fallout of a system of exploited workers on precarious zero-hour and agency contracts for cheap, minimal rights-protected labour.

Many who have been severed from their source of income are sleeping rough, especially in London, and a disproportionate amount of those are non-UK citizens. I am one of the lucky ones.

For those of us in the industry who are still living under a roof, most of us are renters with little to no savings. Although, through furlough, pay has been docked by 20%, we are expected to pay our rent in full. The flow of money is heading one way, syphoned from our pockets and into the hands of the landlords, many of whom sit back as though its business as normal.

Early in May, the Institute for Public Policy Research published a paper titled 'Who wins and who

pays?', which predicts that 45% of the money from Sunak's furlough scheme will go to landlords. This epitomises what Karl Marx evokes when he describes capitalism as 'vampire-like'.

Mortgage holders are safe, renters have been left in the lurch. Labour's five-point plan for renters during the coronavirus crisis is tepid at best. On rent waiving, shadow housing minister Thangam Debbonaire called rent cancellations "un-Labour" and "really regressive".

Debbonaire's argument was predicated on the concern for the economy, and a concern for bankrupting landlords, rather than the poor people who live in these homes. She basically said that even if you signed a bad contract, then tough, because it is still legally binding. This has the putrid flavour of the age-old capitalist argument that owning property is a human right, and takes precedence over the very human right to sleep with a roof over your head.

It's said that 'we are all in the same boat'. We are not. When we open back up, due to social distancing, venues will shrink capacity and space significantly. This means businesses will be floating on shallow

water and it is uncertain how much buoyancy they will have with staff who have stayed on. There is no safety or security on this sinking ship.

SUBSCRIBE TO THE SOCIALIST
New e-sub only £2.50!



For weekly working-class news, socialist analysis and fighting strategy
Subscribe by direct debit and choose from a range of free books!

socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe
or call 020 8988 8777

e-sub £2.50 a month, paper sub £4.50, or £6.50 including Socialism Today
or make cheques payable to Socialist Publications,
PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD
(3 months £20, 6 for £35, 12 for £60)

Hospital closed following rampant spread of Covid-19

Roger Davey Somerset Socialist Party

The decision by the main acute hospital in Western-super-Mare to stop admitting patients due to a dramatic spike in Covid-19 cases, clearly illustrates the dangers of easing lockdown.

The Western General Hospital has reported a sharp increase in Covid-19 among patients which, according to a leaked source, has also triggered an outbreak among staff.

This clearly shows the inadequate PPE provision throughout the NHS which leaves health workers totally exposed to any upturn in the coronavirus infection rate.

It has also meant that all other health services in the hospital have been stopped, including accident and emergency. This reflects what has been happening throughout the

country, with the result that treatment is being deferred, and many illnesses are going undetected.

Unsurprisingly, the government is now planning to greatly expand the use of private beds in order to cope with the backlog, even though many NHS beds are empty at the moment! It's clear that the Tories and the private health companies see Covid-19 as an opportunity to further privatise the NHS.

The situation in the Western General clearly shows that a national spread to general wards, and has also triggered an outbreak among staff.

Trade Unions must build solidarity across every sector in order to save lives. That movement can then move on to fight for a society that puts the interests of working people, before that of big business profits.

SOCIALISM: THE PODCAST

The weekly Marxist analysis podcast from the Socialist Party
Listen and subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Overcast, and all major podcast platforms, as well as socialistparty.org.uk



USA - another cop killing of unarmed black man sparks widespread protests

UPRISING OF THE OPPRESSED

Tens of thousands of protesters have taken to the streets of dozens of US cities - and internationally - following the brutal murder in Minneapolis of unarmed black man George Floyd by a white cop.

Only after this anger erupted did local prosecutors charge sacked policeman Derek Chauvin with third-degree murder and manslaughter.

The uprisings by oppressed communities, including many young people, is more intense and widespread than protests following the killing of black 18-year-old Michael Brown by a white cop in Ferguson in 2014. Indeed, commentators have likened today's protests to the uprisings which occurred after the assassination of black civil rights leader Martin Luther King in 1968.

To many Americans, nothing has changed since 2014 to address racism and discrimination in law enforcement, and the broader system of governance. The current outpouring of anger over systemic racism has now morphed into an inchoate movement against the widening and persistent inequality and oppression, exacerbated by the pandemic, inherent in the capitalist system.

Jai Chavis and **Nicholas Wurst** from the Independent Socialist Group (US) - co-thinkers of the Socialist Party in England and Wales - explain in the following article why the political establishment and the profit system it represents cannot end racism and exploitation, and why building a powerful working-class movement with socialist policies is the only way forward.

On 25 May, police in Minneapolis choked George Floyd, an unarmed black man, who subsequently died. His death was disturbingly reminiscent of the NYPD killing of Eric Garner in 2014. A released video recorded by bystanders shows Floyd repeatedly pleading, "I can't breathe", as officer Derek Chauvin crushes his neck for nearly ten minutes.

Floyd's death ignited days of major protests in Minneapolis, which, at the time of writing, are continuing. Police escalated the conflict by firing rubber bullets, flashbangs, and tear gas to disperse initially peaceful protesters. Trump tweeted in favour of the military firing on protesters stating: "When the looting starts, the shooting starts".

This violent response to unarmed protesters stands in stark contrast to the hands-off and non-confrontational pattern of police response to heavily armed and predominantly white 'reopen' protesters.

Chauvin is not an isolated 'bad apple' - he is part of a corrupt and racist system. And the Democratic Party politicians who run Minneapolis

have failed to take meaningful action against police brutality and mass incarceration, for years.

Democratic Vice-Presidential hopeful, Amy Klobuchar, was the chief prosecutor of Hennepin County - which includes Minneapolis - for an eight-year period. During her tenure, she failed to press criminal charges against any of the officers involved in 29 civilian deaths, and instead chose to prioritise a 'tough-on-crime' stance to shore up support among more conservative Minneapolis residents.

George Floyd's death comes after recent high-profile killings of black people by police and right-wing forces. Breonna Taylor, an unarmed black woman and Emergency Medical Technician, was shot dead in Kentucky on 13 March by police who entered her apartment in a 'no-knock' raid.

Ahmaud Arbery, an unarmed black man, was killed while jogging in Georgia on 23 February by two white men, one of whom was a former cop. This murder was swept under the rug for over two months until video evidence of the lynching came to light.

After the acquittal of George

Zimmerman, who shot dead black teenager Trayvon Martin in 2012, a movement under the hashtag Black Lives Matter (BLM) emerged on social media.

BLM became nationally relevant, with an active on-the-ground presence after the 2014 killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner sparked huge protests and riots calling for an end to police brutality and racist policing. A national network was formed. But without a common programme or organisational structures for discussing and debating, the movement died down by 2017.

Civil rights and BLM

It is crucial that BLM, or any new banners that may emerge in the current moment, apply the lessons of the civil rights movement and BLM's own recent history.

The 1960s civil rights movement made the crucial mistake of relying on the Democratic Party, turning the movement in the streets - which won huge gains - into a surge in the polls that elected Democrats to power.

These same Democrats later betrayed the movement. This experience led both Martin Luther



State oppression and class inequalities, exacerbated by the pandemic, have led to an explosion of anger in US cities photo FibonacciBlue/CC

King jnr and radical black nationalist Malcolm X to the conclusion that fighting against racism requires fighting against capitalism.

Today, most major cities, including city police departments and district attorney offices, are controlled by Democrats, whose racial justice rhetoric is often contradicted by their actions in office.

Many leading Democratic Party politicians have histories of racist policy making. Hillary Clinton was an architect of the 1994 crime bill that expanded racist policing and facilitated modern mass incarceration. Presidential hopeful, Biden, actively opposed desegregation of schools and was an ardent supporter of Clinton's 1994 crime bill.

During his eight years as president, Barack Obama failed to put forward

any meaningful reforms to the criminal justice system. Despite all of this, elements of BLM still endorsed Hillary Clinton in 2016.

The racist policies implemented by the Democratic Party set the stage for the 'tough on crime' rhetoric that Trump relies on today to support his racist policies and shore up his conservative base. Trump and the Republicans have set a racist tone in their propaganda, and by pushing mass incarceration, police brutality, and anti-immigrant racism through expanding brutal ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) raids, and mass imprisoning of immigrants.

Both parties use appeals to racism - more or less well-concealed - to play on, and play up, the racial fears of many white voters. In reality, racism doesn't benefit white workers. The

capitalists secure their huge profits by convincing working class people to fight among themselves, whether through racism, sexism, or any other form of bigotry.

By blaming white, black, immigrant, male, or female workers for each other's problems, the capitalists can continue to exploit us, drive down wages, privatise public services, and lower living standards.

As Malcom X famously declared: "You can't have capitalism without racism." Capitalism is a system built off the backs of slaves and the genocide of indigenous peoples. It will not end racism of its own accord. We need a new party run by and for working people, free of corporate influence, that can dedicate itself to fighting against all forms of bigotry, and against capitalist exploitation.

Such a party could help build a fighting anti-racist movement out of the recent protests.

To win, the movement must put forward a bold programme that challenges the racist foundations of capitalism, and unites the working class by fighting for the gains we all need: a living minimum wage, affordable housing, universal healthcare, an end to discrimination and violence.

It needs democratic structures where members can debate, decide, and hold the movement and its representatives accountable. The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) has taken steps in the right direction by putting forward a concrete programme. But without challenging the profit system, any gains won by M4BL will be rolled back by the capitalists. The struggle against systemic racism

can only be won for good by fighting for a new socialist world.

Explosion of anger

The recent riots are an explosion of anger at all of the problems and violence that people of colour face. The edges of this anger have been sharpened by the disproportionate impact of the recent economic and health crisis.

While riots are not an effective response to oppression, Martin Luther King described their nature well: "I think that we've got to see that a riot is the language of the unheard. And, what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the economic plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been

- Curfews in 15 cities.
- National guard deployed in 12 states. Donald Trump says he'll deploy the military to quell demonstrations.
- Trump blames left-wingers for violence, calls protesters "thugs" and threatens to unleash "vicious dogs" and use "ominous weapons" against them.
- Also, Trump also threateningly invoked the phrase: "When the looting starts, the shooting starts" - which originated from reactionary Miami police chief Walter Headley in the 1960s.
- Police indiscriminately fired tear gas and rubber bullets at largely peaceful protests. Cops deliberately drive SUVs into crowd of peaceful New York City demonstrators. Thousands of demonstrators have been arrested and reporters targeted and attacked and by police. Minneapolis Latino residents who barricaded their neighbourhoods against looting have also been attacked by police.
- Meanwhile, a small number of police have expressed support for the demonstrations with some even joining the protests!

met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, equality, and humanity".

The outrage displayed in these riots can be organised into a powerful movement if given structure and a programme to unite behind. Looting and vandalism undercut the movement and are used to justify violent responses from the capitalists and police.

But the capitalist class is guilty of a far greater crime: controlling access to basic needs for profit!

With an organised movement, involving the unions and a workers' party, we can redistribute housing, food, and basic needs by nationalising key industries and fully funding social programmes.

The pandemic has put on full display the fact that workers are 'essential' in making society run. This means we also have the power to shut down capitalism and rebuild a society that puts people's wellbeing before profits.

The first step is to involve the organised working class in anti-racist struggle. Unionised workers should pass resolutions in support of the movement - as ATU local 1005 has done in Minneapolis - and organise anti-racist protests, rallies, occupations, and strikes.

People of all races who are seriously prepared to support the struggle against racism should be included in the organising and planning of the anti-racist movement.

The *Independent Socialist Group* demands:

- Charge all officers involved in the death of George Floyd, for murder.
- End racial profiling and "stop and frisk" policies, and fire racist police officers.
- Community control of the police through democratically elected committees of workers and community members, with hiring and firing power, the ability to review and create policy, and authority to conduct independent investigations into cases of police misconduct.
- Demilitarise the police. Stop



wasting public funds on military technology and weaponry for police departments. Invest instead in affordable housing, universal healthcare, public transit, public schools, green jobs, and other social programmes and services.

The *Independent Socialist Group* calls for:

- An organised anti-racist movement, and a fighting programme to sustain the struggle against police brutality and other forms of systemic racism. For democratic structures to discuss and debate strategy and tactics.
- Coordination with and involvement of unions in anti-racist struggles. Solidarity against racism and all forms of oppression must be a key point of struggle for the whole workers' movement!
- Organisation of coordinated protests, occupations, and strikes, defending against police aggression when necessary, but avoiding ineffective looting and vandalism. We should give our anger at the systemic violence committed by the police an organised and effective expression based on the best tactics that encourage maximum participation.
- Unity of workers of all races in the struggle against capitalism and the racist inequality and violence that the system was founded upon. For international solidarity against discrimination and imperialism, and for socialist solidarity!

PCS pay claim: Vital work unrecognised

Since 2010 the pay of PCS members has been cut in real terms by over 20%. Each year the government-capped pay increases have fallen below rising prices.

PCS represents civil and public servants working for central and devolved governments, as well as private sector workers on government contracts. In 2020, the union's pay claim was agreed at the January national executive committee (NEC) meeting was for a 10% (or £1,200 underpin) pay increase. Also included were other issues such as pensions, the civil service redundancy scheme and office closures.

Within weeks of the NEC agreeing the claim, a PCS senior officers meeting watered down the pay demand to "an above inflation increase". This unmandated 'interim' claim went to the employer days before a February meeting of the NEC, which was faced with a fait accompli.

The so-called justification for this conciliatory move - welcomed by the employer as "constructive" - was the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Broad Left Network supporters (which Socialist Party member are a part of) on the NEC rejected this conciliatory gesture, and the arguments for it. We pointed out that PCS members are frontline key workers in dealing with the effects of the pandemic, getting badly needed financial relief to workers and their families. We argued that now was the time for the union to press its case, and for the government to recognise our members' importance.

Despite their warm words of praise for the union's leadership, the government's response to the union's scaled down demands was slow in coming, predictable, and a massive kick in the teeth. Settlements, they said, would only be allowed between 1.5% and 2.5%. Less than inflation which is at 2.6%.

So we are now back to square one. At the recent NEC meeting the original claim was reinstated. But with no campaign in the intervening period, and no real national campaign going forward, there is a risk of a further year's pay stagnation.

A motion put to the NEC by Broad Left Network supporters called for a campaign of opposition to the government's pay remit (cap), leading to a consultative ballot for industrial action, and raised the possibility of a statutory strike ballot. This motion was not allowed to be debated.

There is a real sense that the 2020 national campaign is being kicked into the long grass. This cannot be allowed to happen. Groups and reps will rightly criticise the NEC majority's handling of this year's pay campaign. But the need is to keep up the pressure for a national campaign which will deliver a fully funded, decent, well deserved and overdue pay increase for our members.

Dave Sample
PCS national executive committee member (personal capacity)

photo Kolforn/CC



Coordinated union struggle needed to save jobs and nationalise JCB

John Smith
JCB worker

Digger company JCB has recently announced redundancies and proposed other changes to our terms and conditions that it insists are necessary due to the impact of Covid-19.

Out of just over 6,000 UK workers across several sites, 500 agency workers will lose their jobs, with most receiving no compensation, and up to 950 full-time staff face compulsory redundancy.

JCB CEO Graeme Macdonald pointed to falling sales and the need to ensure JCB survives the crisis. The plan to build 100,000 machines across the UK has been halved.

JCB staff are actively discouraged from being union members and, as a result, are not organised and have no recognition agreement with the company. This has left them vulnerable and unable to have a coordinated approach to fighting redundancies. It also weakens the ability of all JCB workers to oppose the job losses and other attacks on our terms and conditions.

The GMB union that represents shop-floor workers entered negotiations with the company with the aim to mitigate the redundancies.

The outcome that was agreed will be voted on in a ballot of all

shop-floor workers. The proposals form a short-term agreement for six months that will then be reviewed, and possibly extended for a further period.

Pay cuts

They include cuts to some shift premiums from 33% of our basic rate to 20%. Any hours worked between 6am to 11pm that previously could have included a shift premium will now be worked at flat rate. Any overtime previously paid at time and a half will now be time and 20%. Sunday overtime, previously at double time, is now time and a half.

There will also be a banked hours system introduced. JCB in return said it will pay us our weekly 39 contracted hours throughout the agreement, and where we work shorter than that in any given week we will have to make it up at some point in the future when things improve.

The company says this will mitigate the need for redundancies and insist that during the agreement there will be no shop-floor redundancies. Despite this promise, redundancies have not been ruled out altogether.

There are mixed feelings about the proposals. Many say that if it saves their jobs and those of their workmates then it is a price worth paying in the short term. Others say

why should we pay the price of this crisis at all? It is not our fault, and they feel we will still lose jobs as well as the cuts in terms and conditions.

The terms and conditions were won over many years, and some members fear they will be lost permanently, despite the temporary agreement.

JCB has said that if the proposals are accepted, they will also offer early retirement packages to anyone over the age of 55 on the shop floor. They are hoping this will be taken up by enough workers to ensure forced redundancies are not required at all.

Not safe

The majority of JCB workers have been furloughed since 18 March, but a slow return to work started recently. JCB has put in many measures to ensure safe working, but many are insufficient to guarantee safety. Locker rooms are crowded at start and finish times. Toilet facilities are the same, social distancing is not controlled. Many workers are fearful of returning.

JCB has made record profits for many years, and made £477 million this year. It is owned by Lord Anthony Bamford. Anthony is second on the West Midlands rich list worth £4.8 billion, up from £4.5 billion last year. So why is there any need to make redundancies or cut terms

and conditions of the workforce?

The money is there to safeguard our futures during this crisis. Bamford is a Tory Lord and is one of the Tory party's biggest donors.

JCB workers, along with other workers in manufacturing such as Rolls-Royce, Aston Martin and many more, face devastating job losses of highly skilled, well-paid jobs. This will have an enormous knock-on effect for other workers in the supply chain.

Unions like Unite and GMB have to organise and take a lead in fighting all cuts to jobs and conditions. Unions have seen a big increase in new members looking for protection during this crisis. A coordinated struggle would inspire workers to fight to save jobs through strike action and, if need be, factory occupations.

We say open up the books to trade union inspection. Let's see where all the money has gone. Nationalise any company threatening redundancies under democratic workers' control and management. In many cases, production can be diversified to produce more socially useful products. Recently, this has been shown to be easily possible in many cases.

This will then form the basis for a socialist planned economy that will meet the full needs of the majority in society.

Nick Chaffey
Socialist Party national committee

As the economic implications of Coronavirus emerge, Tory chancellor Rishi Sunak has proposed Project Birch. This is a plan to bail out 'strategic' companies which could involve 'as a last resort' buying shares in those companies.

Forced to shut down the economy to contain the spread of coronavirus, the previously neoliberal, free-market Tory juggernaut spectacularly hit reverse and shifted to massive state intervention to prop up the economy - effectively nationalising the wage bill of 8.5 million workers, costing £15 billion.

Despite talk of a recovery as lockdown ends, each capitalist is looking ahead to a serious recession in the economy, already in the making, and taking measures to protect its wealth, profits and position in the market. What that means is mass redundancies, already announced at P&O ferries, British Airways (BA) and other companies. With less demand for products and services, workers are seen as 'unnecessary labour' that can be thrown out of work as the easiest way to cut costs.

Some of the first to announce mass redundancies have been in the transport sector, with 12,000 in BA and 1,100 in P&O. Others from part of the supply chain are following closely behind, such as Rolls Royce, which manufactures airline engines, announcing 9,000 job cuts. The car industry, already in trouble, produced just 197 cars in April, down 99.7%, and is calling for government assistance.

Job loss wave

On a capitalist basis, as one company falls and lay-offs increase, others follow like a wave of dominoes. Where will it stop? Large manufacturers and employers making mass job losses will have a big knock-on effect on the supply chain, devastating local working-class communities.

At this stage, the Tories have quietly implemented partial nationalisation, notably underwriting all private passenger rail franchises. But these are considered short-term measures, to protect capitalism in the immediate situation. In the future, the Tories hope these shares will be sold off cheaply, and companies returned to the private sector.

In the meantime, the crisis will be used to justify cost-cutting, not in the boardrooms but on the shop floor, in cuts to jobs and pay.

On a capitalist basis this policy solves nothing. On the contrary, it makes matters worse, further reducing demand, and adding to the downward spiral of economic recession. On top of the piles of debt that already act like a heavy coat on a drowning man, the prospect of a longer-lasting global depression places the future of tens of millions of workers, and especially young people, on the line.

Workers returning from the war in 1945 said 'no return to the 30s'. Many workers will now be wondering if we are going to see a return to the

Protect every job Nationalise don't subsidise



photo Judy Beishon

1980s-style mass unemployment of Thatcherism, and are preparing to resist.

We call for an end to economic secrecy: companies should be forced to 'open the books' to trade union scrutiny to see where the profits have gone.

We say: "don't subsidise, nationalise". We need socialist policies to avert an economic crisis. If the government is going to invest public money, those industries should be run in the public interest, under democratic workers' control, as part of a plan of production to meet the needs of society, not producing for the profits of a few.

On a socialist basis, nationalising the transport infrastructure, air, road, rail and bus would mean a rational, integrated transport policy, protecting jobs and pay, and the environment.

It would mean protecting the industrial supply chain, through nationalising Rolls Royce, Honda and any others threatening job cuts. It would mean linking up with the universities to research and invest in developing environmentally sustainable transportation for the future.

What could be applied to transport could work for every field of the economy. A policy of socialist nationalisation, linked to a national plan of production, would go hand in hand with policies to nationalise the banks and the 100 big corporations that dominate 80% of the economy. These measures would ensure workers themselves could democratically direct the development of the economy.

Reverse austerity

Rather than falling into a new economic depression, leading to another lost generation, we could then reverse the previous decade of austerity by resourcing a mass public works programme to rebuild society. Council-run care homes for the elderly, affordable council housing for all, leisure centres, youth clubs, new schools and hospitals could be funded with the vast hoards of cash lying idle in the bank accounts of the big corporations. It is estimated the top 100 or so companies currently hold £750 billion in cash reserves.

On the basis of democratic control and workers' management, not only could we protect jobs, industries

and services, but truly make them efficient by investing in new technology that could vastly increase productivity, through robotics and 3D printing, for example.

On a capitalist basis this leads to mass unemployment, misery and wasted human resources. But on a socialist basis the benefits would be socialised, leading to a shorter working week with no loss of pay, allowing workers to play a full role in the day-to-day running of a new society.

As the capitalist crisis unfolds, we face a vital task of linking up with organised workers in the trade unions looking to fight back, and providing a socialist programme to protect jobs and transform the economy.

Trade union leaders have echoed the idea of some state intervention as a means to protect jobs and industry. But experience will quickly prove the limitations of such policies in terms of government funding and ending the economic downturn.

Workers will see that subsidies don't protect jobs or wages, just boardroom pay and perks, and look for more effective policies to fight

for. It is inevitable that some will take action in the form of strikes and factory or workplace occupations. These struggles will rapidly transform the unions, pushing leaders to the left, or replacing them from below by those who are prepared to fight.

Unions transformed

We are on the brink of a new era of workplace struggle that will transform the trade unions from top to bottom. The Socialist Party will seek to actively assist this process, developing broad lefts where they exist, or establishing new militant rank-and-file organisations that can offer real leadership to the working class.

Out of these struggles it will be much clearer who is on our side, as the capitalists and their state use all the anti-trade union legislation to try and obstruct an effective fightback. Many workers will see the need not just for industrial action, but also a political voice that can win support for their struggles and advance a revolutionary programme and strategy for a new socialist society run on entirely different lines to the capitalist profit system.

Josh Asker
Socialist Party national committee

COUNCIL FINANCE DISASTER: SET EMERGENCY NO-CUTS BUDGETS AND FIGHT FOR FUNDS!



Fighting council cuts
photo Carmarthenshire Socialist Party

Local authorities in Britain are tasked with meeting local social needs arising from the coronavirus pandemic and its economic consequences. They have never been in a worse position to do so.

Already ravaged by over ten years of austerity, they now face even bleaker financial challenges - unless there is a fightback.

The effects of this crisis, as always, will be felt most by the working class and most vulnerable in our society. This will throw into even sharper relief the failure of the capitalist system to in any way care for those most in need.

Expecting an increase in demands on social care, Boris Johnson's government used the Coronavirus Act in March to reduce the statutory obligations of councils towards vulnerable adults and children. This was clearly an anticipation of services being unable to cope.

Councils such as Sunderland, Middlesbrough, Birmingham and Warwickshire are among those to have taken measures which mean they will not be obliged to carry out assessments of individuals' or carers' needs, or produce detailed care plans.

Over a decade of cuts and privatisation in the care sector has led to the devastating impact of the virus in care homes. Over 20,000 residents and over 100 care workers have died so far in the pandemic.

More than 1,000 care providers in UK now compete to make profit by caring for vulnerable elderly people. The consequences include low wages, poor conditions, lack of PPE and insufficient cleaning.

A fully funded, nationalised care sector, run democratically by workers, residents, and local authorities, would be far better placed to respond in the interests of resident and staff safety.

Failed strategies

Warnings from the local government associations in England and Wales about impending financial crises have forced central government to pledge an extra £3.2 billion in funding. But this is not even enough to cover the immediate demands of the pandemic. A Labour Party report has outlined that local authorities are facing a £10 billion black hole.

On top of that loom the effects of a longer-term recession, bringing increasing demands for public services and benefits, and decreasing revenue.

Following the last recession in 2008-09, successive governments set a path towards removing any funding that councils receive from central government in the form of the 'revenue support grant'. To date, this amounts to the theft of £16 billion from local authorities, and ultimately from working-class communities.

This has led councils to cut jobs and services while seeking to generate all of their own income, largely through council tax and business rates - rather than fighting to get the stolen billions back from the government. Many councils have

introduced or increased charges for some services.

And many councils have tried to fill some of the gap through high-risk capital spending - borrowing money to invest in commercial property. Local authorities have spent £6.6 billion for this purpose in the three years since 2017-18, the National Audit Office (NAO) reports.

The NAO warned in February that this leaves councils vulnerable to recession. In fact, all of the measures taken by councils trying to partly fill the huge gap in funding have left them vulnerable to an economic downturn.

Local businesses will struggle to pay their business rates. Increasing numbers of workers will be unable to afford council tax, or find themselves forced to claim Universal Credit, reducing their liability. Charged-for services can expect a reduction in demand. And who will now pay to buy or rent councils' commercial property investments?

This is not to mention councils' decimation of their own services, which in the past could have

mitigated some of the worst social consequences of poverty.

Local authorities are responsible for a substantial proportion of public spending. They hold the potential for some localised planning of state funding.

Government at a national level has demonstrated its complete inability to respond to the Covid-19 crisis. Local government is one area in which Labour councils particularly could have demonstrated in practice how to prioritise workers' health rather than bosses' profits.

Socialist approach

In April, Southampton Socialist Party wrote to the leader of Southampton City Council, outlining some elements of that approach. We suggested the council take up a political campaign for more funding from the government, for all workers in the city to receive full pay, and to demand democratic trade union oversight of safety at work and the spending of council resources.

The Labour council could be organising with trade unions to

subject all workplaces in the city to regular inspection for safe working practices and sufficient PPE. The city has already seen bus workers organised in transport union RMT refuse to take buses out without safe and adequate cleaning.

And with schools being asked to open to increasing numbers of children, risking an acceleration of the spread of the virus, Labour councils should stand behind school unions like the NEU and Unison.

A number of local authorities have already announced they will not support schools increasing capacity on 1 June. The rest must also announce the schools should not reopen! And these announcements should be linked to campaigns led by school union groups and parents to demand that any return to school must only be on the basis of safe conditions, both nationally and locally, agreed by the workers and parents (see p4-5).

Councils have always been an arena in which socialists could go some way towards demonstrating what our programme means in practice. Liverpool City Council was

able to do this under the influence of Militant (predecessor of the Socialist Party) in the 1980s.

By spearheading a political campaign of the working class and trade unions, Liverpool's Labour council was able to win £30 million from Thatcher's Tory government. The city created jobs and built thousands of council homes, plus parks, schools and leisure centres.

The current crisis in local government was never inevitable. Labour councils have been working hand-in-glove with Tory governments in implementing austerity.

The Socialist Party has been consistent in campaigning for councils to set no-cuts budgets, that councils should "take the Liverpool road"! It has always been feasible for councils to stop all cuts and invest in services, and use their reserves and borrowing powers.

This would have created the space for individual councils to technically produce 'balanced budgets'. These anti-austerity budgets could then be used to build public support for a campaign to win back the money

from the government, and to coordinate with the other Labour councils around the country.

This is the approach called for by a notable few Labour councillors - such as Southampton's "rebel councillors," Keith Morrell and Don Thomas, who were kicked out of the Labour group for opposing cuts. They moved an alternative budget in 2013 with these proposals. They were subsequently re-elected as anti-cuts independents on the basis of support for their militant stand.

Workers' representation

The election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour party in 2015 inspired thousands with his anti-austerity message. But he and his shadow chancellor, John McDonnell, made a mistake by giving Labour councils the go-ahead to continue making cuts.

This was just one way in which Labour's right wing was able to undermine Corbyn. While he was speaking out against the cuts, his own party was carrying them out.

As the Socialist Party argued, the Labour leadership around Corbyn should have made councillors and council policy democratically accountable to its anti-austerity membership, and replaced the right-wing cutters with anti-austerity fighters.

The need for working-class, socialist fighters in the council chamber remains. The effects of the pandemic and economic crisis will demonstrate even more starkly than before why services cut over the last decade need to be restored.

Labour councils need to mobilise all of their resources to protect workers, and also to assist trade unions in building a mass movement for full funding for council services - and bringing outsourced areas, like the care sector, back in-house. This means using council powers to invest in working-class communities, and mobilising those workers to fight for the money from the government, ultimately making the rich pay for their own crisis.

Council budgets set in the first few months of 2020 are now likely to need tearing up and starting again. Labour councils should use the opportunity to set new, emergency budgets - anti-austerity budgets - as soon as possible.

These budgets should come from open, democratic local conferences, with the participation of workers, their trade unions, and the local community. They should be used to put forward what is required to keep communities safe in the pandemic and after, as well as to restore services. Most importantly, this could be a step in the process of mobilising people to fight for the return of the stolen billions.

But if Labour councillors are unwilling to put up a fight, then they should step aside for those who will. They can expect to face mass grassroots opposition.

We say to those campaigners and trade unionists that they should prepare to stand independently in council elections next May. This would start to show what working-class fighters can achieve when they adopt a socialist programme, campaigning for our jobs, services and communities.

Going viral

Socialist comments and letters during the coronavirus crisis

The Covid-19 pandemic is a world social crisis which touches every aspect of life. The iniquities and failings of the capitalist system are being exposed, and workers and communities are organising in response.

Send us your comments, reports, anecdotes and thoughts, in not more than 200 words (we reserve the right to shorten letters), to editors@socialistparty.org.uk.



George Floyd

The horrific, brutal, racist murders of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery add more fuel to those elements of a civil war situation developing in US society. There is huge class polarisation and anger, amid economic depression, which the ruling class will seek to undermine and divert through repression and whipping up poisonous division.

Demands around working-class community control of the police and justice against racism should be explicitly linked to a united fight against the common misery of job losses, lack of access to healthcare and social security, food poverty, and homelessness and evictions.

For all the unions' current weaknesses, organised labour - where all workers can organise together in struggle - can play the key role. A fundamental break with the two-party system is needed, with a mass campaign for a workers' party. These are the most effective methods of battling the racist Trump administration and the US ruling class.

Matt Dobson
Glasgow, Scotland

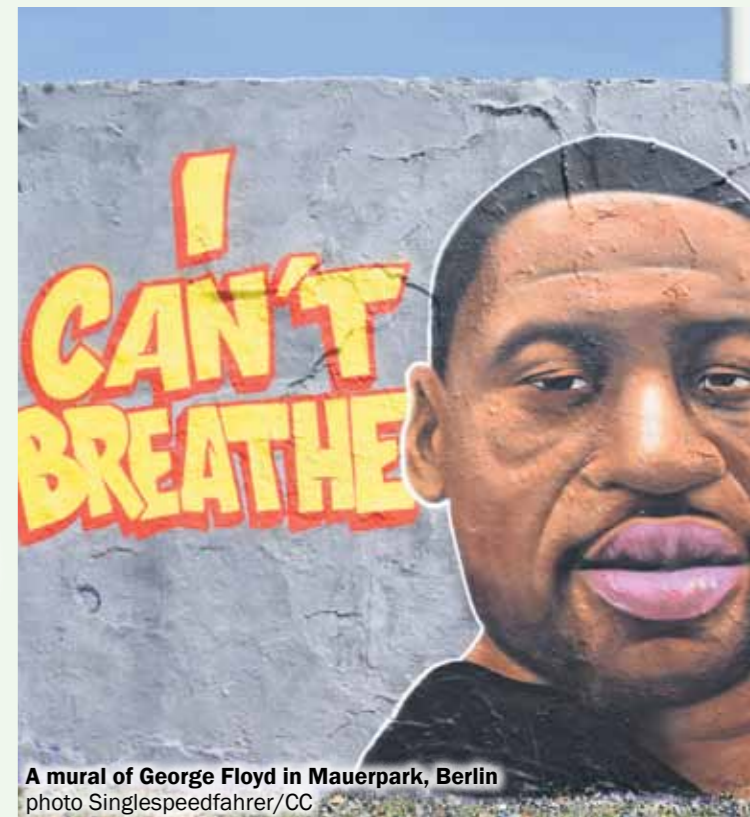
The US is a tinderbox: on top of huge poverty, there's a yawning wealth gap, and now mass joblessness among a generation which has been thrown out of precarious working contracts by the Covid shutdown. Then there's the increasingly authoritarian and anti-democratic course of President Trump.

The video capture of the racist murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police only set light to the tinderbox. President Trump appears content to fan the flames, and has repeatedly indicated his willingness to send in the National Guard. The Democrats, themselves complicit in racist government for decades, are largely absent from the field.

This moment is pregnant with dark possibilities. We must stand in solidarity with all those who are putting themselves in the line of fire in the fight to end racism and poverty, and for fundamental change.

Donal O'Cofaigh
Enniskillen, Northern Ireland

What's happening in the US is what happens when you throw a match on top of decades of racist police brutality, poverty, austerity, and a succession of presidents



A mural of George Floyd in Mauerpark, Berlin
photo Singlespeedfahrer/CC

Food riots

Apparently, my paternal grandparents were in the Birkenhead riots. These were the food riots that emerged out of the mass unemployment of the 1930s. The working class didn't just accept what was meted out to them by diseased capitalism.

'Idle Hands, Clenched Fists' by Stephen F Kelly depicts the fightback. When you think about the mass youth unemployment that could emerge in post-Covid times, we need to make sure that we fight for work that pays and gives working-class communities dignity and pride.

Riots are not the methods of Trotskyists. However, when communities do rise up and don't accept their fate, it is better than just acquiescing and accepting never-ending poverty. We shouldn't accept another decade of austerity, poverty and want. Join the Socialist Party, and fight for a world without hunger.

Nancy Taaffe
Walthamstow, east London

Heather Rawling
Saddington, Leicestershire

School reopening
The Tories trying to open up the schools to more children, and two weeks later open up more shops and businesses, is designed to act like a pincer movement on working-class parents. Their bosses will put pressure on them to send their children back to school. They will lose their furlough pay, potentially. School staff and parents must collectively stand together to resist the Tory plans. Lives in our communities depend on our success. There is a huge tidal wave of support. Stick together. Collectively we can keep our communities safe.

Pandemic doesn't stop Socialist Party educating organisers: northern meeting

Jeremy Davidson
Hull Socialist Party

From campaigning to keep the schools closed until safety can be guaranteed, to battling job losses and demanding proper PPE for essential workers, Socialist Party members have been hard at work during this crisis in fighting for the working class! 75 members from across the Yorkshire, Northern, North West and East Midlands regions attended the Socialist Party's first online, cross-regional branch organisers' school

Help fund the fightback
DONATE TODAY

visit socialistparty.org.uk/donate

or call 020 8988 8777

or make cheques payable to Socialist Party, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD



on 31 May. The meeting raised over £700 for the fighting fund.

It was also attended by members from our US co-thinkers, the Independent Socialist Group. They gave a report on their work in the recent protests which have gripped the US following the brutal police murder of George Floyd.

Overall, the event was a great success and positively received by all who attended. The current situation does not deter the Socialist Party from efforts to educate and organise our members, and the important political work continues!

Join the fightback
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join or call 020 8988 8777 or text your name and postcode to 07761 818 206 to find out more about joining us today



Blairite general secretary elected

STARMER'S TAKEOVER OF LABOUR PARTY CONSOLIDATED

A North London Labour Party member

Former Blair aide David Evans was elected Labour Party general secretary at an NEC meeting on 26 May. Evans was an assistant general secretary under Blair from 1999-2001. He wrote a report in 1999 which proposed a radical overhaul of the party to isolate and marginalise the trade unions.

As general secretary, Evans leads the Labour Party apparatus. When Corbyn was leader of the party, the apparatus under Iain McNicol was used to undermine his leadership and sabotage the party's 2017 election campaign. Conferences were rigged by the suspension of large numbers of left-wing delegates, and constituencies such as Wallasey were suspended when Blairite MPs were challenged by the membership.

The left did not challenge the edicts of the LP Regional Offices and slavishly followed their directives. During the final two years of Corbyn's leadership, the general secretary position was held by Corbyn-supporting Jennie Formby. But she failed to stop the use of disciplinary measures to police the left, or to purge the predominantly Blairite machine.

David Evans' appointment consolidates Starmer's takeover of the Labour Party. Any attempts by left members to organise and challenge the leadership of the right will once again be met with suspensions of individuals and, if they consider it necessary, of entire CLPs.

Many Corbyn-supporting Labour Party members tore up their membership cards when Starmer was elected leader. But others have

called on left members to 'stay and fight'.

The problem is that the left refused to fight even when they had the upper hand in 2015-2019 - failed to introduce mandatory reselection of MPs, failed to purge the Parliamentary Labour Party, the austerity-implementing councillors, and the Blairite apparatus.

Now that the Blairites are firmly in the driving seat, it will be much harder for the left to organise a fight, even if they show a willingness.

In April, under the guise of ensuring Covid safety, the Labour Party regional directors banned all ward and Constituency Labour Party (CLP) general committee meetings. Even online meetings were banned on the pretext that these were not authorised by the rule book.

This move effectively suspended the entire membership of the party and every CLP in the country, allowing Starmer's policy of "constructive engagement" with the Boris Johnson's government to go unchallenged by the members. This was not met by any kind of resistance by the Labour Party left.

In an article he wrote for Huffington Post in 2014, David Evans argued that class politics itself had come to an end. But class struggle is not over. The coronavirus crisis has exposed the rottenness of neoliberalism and the capitalist market. It has shown the need for working people to organise to defend their safety and their rights.

While trade unions have been flooded by new members, the Labour Party has been Awol. The Labour Party under Starmer and Evans will not be leading the battle to defend the class interests of working people. The working class will need to build a new party to act as its political voice.

Socialism Today special issue



Jeremy Corbyn receiving the adulation of the crowd at the 2017 Durham Miners' Gala photo Paul Mattsson

LESSONS FROM THE CORBYN EXPERIENCE

reelected with an increased majority.

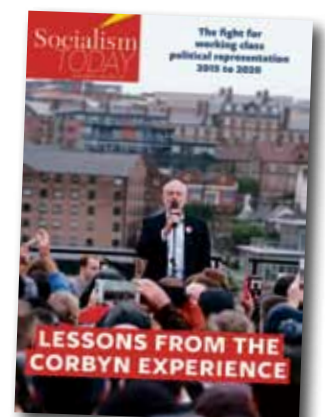
Socialism Today pointed out the need to use that position of strength to push through democratic reforms and reinstate socialists expelled from the party. Instead, right wingers who had betrayed Corbyn and the aspirations of members were brought back into the shadow cabinet!

In the week following the 2017 general election, the Socialist pointed out that "the right's control of the Labour Party machine led to outright sabotage of the election campaign", a judgement fully vindicated in the recently leaked dossier on The Work of the Labour Party's Governance and Legal Unit. Despite this, Labour made electoral progress in that election.

As Hannah Sell writes in her introduction to the special issue of Socialism Today, "the lives of billions have been turned upside down by the coronavirus crisis." Just as the financial crash had an impact on working-class politics, so will this crisis.

Already we have seen a move into the unions. But it is no surprise that we have not seen a parallel move into Labour.

Yet, as Hannah explains, "While the working class lacks vital tools for the new era, the experiences of the last decade - not least the lessons of the Corbyn experiment - mean it enters this crisis better prepared than it was when facing the post-2008 'great recession'." This special issue of Socialism Today will be an invaluable part of the preparation for building tools that are so desperately needed, including a new mass workers' party.



Essential reading for socialists

An Enfield Labour Party member

In his recent announcement that he was standing down as leader of Momentum, Jon Lansman claimed that "hundreds of thousands of socialists" have "transformed Labour into a people-powered mass movement", and that "the party was brought back to its roots".

In a recently published special issue of Socialism Today on the Corbyn experience, Hannah Sell points out that "unfortunately none of these things are true."

Serious socialists will want a more sober analysis of the Corbyn period than Lansman's!

In this collection of articles drawn from each stage of the Corbyn experience, the necessary tasks for socialists are set out, and likely future developments mapped out. The warnings turn out to be timely and all too accurate. Had they been acted on, things would have turned out very differently.

The analysis is essential reading for socialists seeking to find a way forward now.

The positive impact of Corbyn's election is fully recorded: changing the terms of debate, reintroducing discussion of nationalisation, and the 'S' word - socialism - brought back into the mainstream.

The authors set these developments in an international context, as the financial crash reverberated around the world, from the so-called 'Arab spring', to the growth of left movements, including Bernie Sanders in the US and Syriza in Greece.

From the start, Socialism Today warned that the right would fight to maintain control of the Labour machine and to regain their ascendancy.

Margaret Thatcher claimed Tony Blair and the creation of New Labour as her "greatest achievement". Policy and structural changes, such as the weakening of the collective voice of the unions, and a series of constitutional changes undermin-

ing party democracy, served to trench New Labour.

In 1995, Tony Blair was able to remove Clause 4, part 4, of the party constitution which encapsulated aspirations for socialist change. The "common ownership of the means of production" was out, replaced by praise of the dynamic "enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition".

The Corbyn insurgency threatened a major achievement of the ruling class; the stakes were high. To consolidate the position of the left, the Corbyn leadership would need to clearly recognise it was fighting to overturn a major gain for capitalism.

The left Guardian writer, Owen Hatherley, recently argued that Labour has been damaged by its role in local government. He pointed to the extremely limited impact of a Corbynista council such as Haringey in London.

Council cuts

Socialism Today reprints an article written by Clive Heemskerck in 2016, warning that the early tacit support from the new leadership for Labour councils implementing cuts would damage Labour.

The failure to take an anti-austerity stand in local government did not win any friends on the right, but undermined the verbal anti-austerity message being presented nationally.

Warnings of a plot to depose Corbyn were publicly dismissed by the leadership when it should have been preparing members. In June 2016, Labour MPs organised a vote of no-confidence in Jeremy Corbyn, securing a 172 to 40 majority.

The ensuing campaign led to Corbyn taking an anti-austerity message to a wide audience. His initial election was not the result of internal debates in Labour, but was the product of the fact that new layers could easily join up and have a direct vote for that message.

Again, the campaign got a big response and Corbyn was actually

TAKE OUT AN E-SUBSCRIPTION TO SOCIALISM TODAY AND THE SOCIALIST

More and more people are searching out socialist ideas, and a strategy to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic and the global recession. We want to make Socialism Today as widely available as possible.



Following the success in the take-up for the e-version of the Socialist, we are now offering Socialism Today in an e-format.

The monthly subscription rate for the e-Socialism Today will be £2.50, while a joint rate for the e-Socialism Today and e-Socialist will be £4.00.



socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe

or call 020 8988 8777

■ £3 - socialismtoday.org or take out an e-sub - see advert opposite

FOOTBALL IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS - RECLAIM OUR GAME!

Football played a part in spreading the pandemic. Northern Italy was the ground zero for coronavirus in Europe, and then Spain became the second most infected country after Italy. The Spanish authorities were caught off guard as they thought they would have a few more weeks to prepare for the virus as they don't share a land border with Italy. However, the spread of the virus across the continent was escalated by the Uefa Champions League.

In the Round of 16, Italian side Atalanta were drawn against the Spanish side Valencia, with the first leg played in Italy on 19 February and the second leg in Spain on 10 March. Atalanta are from the small city of Bergamo, in the northern Lombardy region, and due to their home ground capacity, their home match was played in Milan. Bergamo was the worst-hit city in Italy.

At the end of March 2020 around 4,178 people had died in Lombardy, out of a total of over 6,820 in Italy. The mayor of the city stated that "40,000 Bergamo inhabitants went to Milan to watch the game. Others watched it from their homes, in families, in groups, at the bar", which helped to spread the virus. Valencia announced soon after the match that 35% of their team and staff had tested positive for coronavirus, following the trip to Milan.

A spike in coronavirus cases in Liverpool is also suspected to be linked to the Champions League fixtures between Liverpool and Atletico Madrid - in Spain on 18 February and in Britain on 11 March. Matthew Ashton, Liverpool's public health director, has said that the latter fixture should not have been played.

One of the fans that attended the match said "there were queues and groups everywhere. Pubs were packed, friends greeted each other with the customary contact, fans gathered in condensed queues and stood or sat together in close proximity... The celebrations that night were very physical, shared experiences".

From the start of March, there was a lot of concern among the general public and the media about the spread of coronavirus, and whether or not mass gatherings should still take place. Many countries across Europe had already announced the cancellation of mass gatherings and put in place restrictions on how many people could gather in public places. For instance, in France the Champions League fixture between Paris Saint-Germain against German side Borussia Dortmund was played behind closed doors.

There were calls on the English Premier League to cancel all football, even though the British government had not implemented any restrictions on gatherings. The Liverpool match was played on a Wednesday, and by that Friday, 13 March, the Premier

The English Premier League will return on 17 June behind closed doors, following its resumption in Germany. Fans who have been missing the 'beautiful game' for the last two months will be looking forward to the restart, but also recognise the potential problems posed, and the motives of some club owners, TV companies and football authorities to resume. Former Aston Villa and Bulgaria player Stilyian Petrov is among those to claim it puts "wealth before health". **Helena Byrne** looks at football during the pandemic and what sort of game we should fight for.

League and all other football had been suspended.

However, this measure wasn't taken simply because of concern for the health and wellbeing of match-going fans. It was taken after the Arsenal head coach and some players tested positive soon after their tie with Greek side Olympiacos at the end of February.

During this period the government was using 'herd immunity' as its strategy. It wasn't until 16 March that Boris Johnson announced that people should work from home if possible and social distance. It took another week before Johnson announced an actual lockdown.

Furlough and players' pay

With the lockdown there was a huge rise in unemployment, and the government was forced to announce the furlough scheme to help businesses

pay wages while they weren't working. By the end of March, Premier League clubs Tottenham, Liverpool, Newcastle, Bournemouth and Norwich, had announced that they would furlough non-playing staff.

There was huge pushback from fans when their clubs announced they would use this scheme as they generate huge profits every year. Liverpool and Tottenham were forced to reverse the decision following pressure from fans. But lower league clubs have to use this scheme to survive as they depend on gate receipts to run the club.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock was asked why Premier League clubs could use this scheme while most players in those teams receive huge wages. Hancock responded with "the first thing they can do is make a contribution, take a pay cut and play their part". He kept pushing this in most media interviews for

weeks after, and it was repeated by other government figures.

However, he didn't call on UK tax exiles and big businesses which are using furlough schemes to "play their part". Wayne Rooney rightly criticised Hancock saying: "How the past few days have played out is a disgrace. First Matt Hancock said that Premier League players should take a pay cut. He was supposed to be giving the nation the latest on the biggest crisis we've faced in our lifetimes. Why was the pay of footballers even in his head? Was he desperate to divert attention from his government's handling of this pandemic?"

Footballers were an easy target, even though only a small percentage of players earn huge salaries, and they generally come from working-class backgrounds. The players' union, the PFA, said its members were resolved to play their part, but warned that a projected 30% salary reduction

would cost the country £200 million in lost tax receipts. Premier League players responded by setting up the #PlayersTogether fund to support NHS charities.

During this crisis, the government has tried to shift blame for successive funding cuts to the NHS onto ordinary people, and in this case footballers, by turning it into a charity rather than a national health service that should be properly funded through central government funds rather than donations from the public.

Women's football

Unlike the men's Premier League, the Women's Super League has been cancelled. Professional female players have always had a precarious set up. The pandemic has highlighted the wealth gap between men's and women's leagues, as many of the top female players don't have gym equipment at home to keep training. There are fears that when football resumes, it will set back the development of women's football.

The English Football Association is pushing for women's clubs to be affiliated with a men's side. But Sunderland is the one example of how this went wrong as, when a men's club faces financial pressure, the women's team is usually the first thing to go. Already there have been some women's clubs disbanded during the pandemic.

How football should be run

Socialist Party member and trade unionist, John Reid, outlined in his publication, *Reclaim the Game*, a socialist alternative to the way football is currently run.

The pandemic has brought home once again to football fans at the vast majority of clubs up and down the country the constant insecurity that comes with the poor financial health of our clubs.

But there is no lack of money in football. The next three years of Premier League broadcast rights have been sold for over £4.5 billion, not including international TV rights and sponsorship. This of course plays a part in the Premier League's drive to restart, while some lower leagues have been cancelled.

This money should be used to keep clubs afloat who rely heavily on gate receipts, as well as to invest in grassroots football and facilities owned by us.

Clubs should be collectively owned, and run by delegates elected from the supporters, from the players and employees' unions, and from the local community. This should be emulated in the ruling bodies of the game too.

Supporters have a common cause to reclaim our game. We want football that we can afford to watch, football that we run, and facilities that we own!

■ *'Reclaim the Game' - a socialist programme for football by John Reid - available from www.leftbooks.co.uk*



photo Werner100359/CC

Mass protests over murder of George Floyd

FIGHT RACISM AND CLASS INEQUALITY

FIGHT CAPITALISM!



photo Isai Priya

“Young people of all colours and nationalities are saying ‘we’ve had enough of racism, injustice, discrimination, poverty and bad conditions’. It’s the profit system which has cemented racism into its foundations. Therefore, the only way to end racism for good is to fight to end capitalism and for a socialist society. And the only force in society that can make that change is a united working class.”

April Ashley (Unison union national executive council black members seat, personal capacity, and Socialist Party BAME group)

“Covid-19 has exposed the inequality of US capitalism in the way the virus has disproportionately killed black and poor people - an indictment of the richest country on the planet. As Malcolm X once said: “You can’t have capitalism without racism”. We have to protest on the streets and reclaim them from the racist police. But we must also come together to plan how we end capitalism and fight for socialism.”

Hugo Pierre (Unison union national executive council, personal capacity, and Socialist Party BAME group and national committee)

Helen Pattison
London Socialist Party

Following the killing on 25 May of unarmed black man George Floyd by Minneapolis police, there has been an outpouring of anger against systemic racism and widening inequalities in the USA.

It was only after widespread anger erupted that one of the sacked police officers involved in the killing was charged, sending a message to many that justice will have to be fought for.

The US protests have spread internationally, with thousands marching through central

London to the US embassy on 31 May (above), and more protests being planned throughout the UK.

In US cities, peaceful protesters have been fired on by police and National Guard using rubber bullets, tear gas and flashbangs, in an attempt to make people disperse. None of this has deterred protests from taking place.

Donald Trump has also addressed these anti-racism protesters very differently to the recent gun-toting, right-wing, mainly white, “re-open” protests opposing lockdowns to control the spread of coronavirus. Then, Trump called on this right-wing armed rabble to “liberate” states controlled by his political opponents. Now, he tweets in favour of the military fir-

ing on the anti-racism protesters who he describes as “thugs”.

In the middle of this pandemic, with people adhering to strict lockdowns imposed by states to save people’s lives, it is stark that a black man would then be killed in the street by police.

As the health and economic crisis deepens, it’s the poorest, working-class areas which are hit hardest, along with the chance of any sort of decent future.

A new wave of struggle could grow out of these protests. Such a movement would need to take up both the issue of justice for those killed at the hands of police and the wider issues of poverty, inequality and oppression.

Already there are the beginnings of solidarity actions by trade unionists in the US - there have even been reports of some police refusing to curtail protests! All this should be built on.

By forging a united working-class movement with a fighting socialist programme, it will be possible to challenge the rotten system of capitalism in which racism, oppression and exploitation are rooted.

■ **Fighting racism and capitalism in the USA - see pages 8&9**

ISSN 1366-9621

