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Issue 1078
19-25 March 2020



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the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**

CORONAVIRUS

System in crisis

Workers must not pay the price!

- Full NHS funding now!
- Full pay from day one of isolation
- Fight for socialist planning to end capitalist chaos

“Many more families are going to lose loved ones before their time,” warns Boris Johnson, as coronavirus spreads.

In fact because of austerity, too many families have already ‘lost loved ones before their time.’

He never warned that a decade of Tory austerity would lead to an estimated 150,000 premature deaths in England alone... or that women in the poorest 10% of the country

would die an average 7.5 years younger than women in the wealthiest 10%. The poverty life expectancy gap for men is 9.3 years.

Now coronavirus Covid-19 shines a spotlight on public services the Tories have cut to the bone. Even the service now central to planning the response to this epidemic - Public Health - has suffered a £700 million cut since 2015. Skilled health workers’ jobs have disappeared.

Years of pay freeze or below-inflation pay rises, dangerously high workloads and bullying management policies drove many out of the NHS. There are 100,000 NHS staff vacancies, including 40,000 nursing posts. In the largely privatised social care sector there are 122,000 unfilled posts.

Tory abolition of health students’ bursaries and charging high tuition fees slashed recruitment. Chancellor Rishi Sunak’s budget announced a mere £5,000 bursary - less than the £8,000 before abolition - while the £9,000 a year fee stays.

Boris Johnson, when mayor of London in 2015 and confronted with a shortage of 10,000 nurses, arrogantly said, “You can afford to be a nurse and live in London.” What would he know about trying to survive, let alone raise a family, on a nurse’s wage?

When junior doctors were striking in 2016 to defend their working conditions and the service they provide, Johnson said they would “surely endanger the lives of patients.” Those

same doctors are now working under great pressure to keep on top of this growing crisis.

The coronavirus threat to patients’ lives has been magnified by the Tory drive to undermine all public services so that big business and the super-rich pay less tax and turn our services into privatised profit-generators.

It isn’t bankers, stockbrokers or property speculators who are needed in this crisis, but ambulance staff, porters, radiographers, cleaners, secretaries, laboratory workers and every other health worker. They are working incredibly hard, reorganising wards and hospitals while treating patients and trying to keep themselves and other patients infection-free.

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

Karl Marx

Capitalist crisis and the impact of Covid-19



WHAT WE THINK

Boris Johnson won the general election by trying to pose as a 'man of the people'. Despite the rhetoric, the first budget of his premiership - and his approach to the coronavirus - shows clearly that, like all Tory administrations, his is a government of the capitalist class, not the working-class majority.

The budget came against the background of a rapidly growing global health and economic crisis. The coronavirus can infect everyone from the richest to the poorest. But while the super-rich head off on their private jets to their disaster bunkers with a personal medical team, the rest of us can only self-isolate at home, with no prospect of even being tested for the virus or of being guaranteed pay while we miss work.



To tell people who have possible symptoms of the virus not to bother phoning 111, and to stop testing anyone who is not severely ill, is not based on science but on a lack of NHS resources

The measures announced by the Tories, in the budget, and subsequently, are utterly insufficient to effectively limit the spread of Covid-19, while protecting living standards. Even the World Health Organisation (WHO) has publicly doubted the Tories' approach, particularly on testing.

When he was mayor of London,

Johnson, asked who his favourite character was in the film Jaws, replied that it was the mayor, because he kept the beach open even while a giant shark was eating his electorate! In essence, this is his government's approach to the corona crisis.

They are prioritising trying to safeguard the capitalist economy rather than the health and living standards of the population. Neither their budget, nor the measures announced since, will succeed in doing either, however.

World economy

The virus is a major shock to the world economy which has laid bare its underlying weaknesses. Like the 2008 financial crash which triggered the last world economic crisis, the coronavirus is a 'swimming naked' moment when, as billionaire Warren Buffett once put it, the tide goes out and you find out who has been covering up their position.

12 years on from the 2008 crisis, none of the underlying problems in the world economy have been fixed and many have worsened - plenty of companies, banks and countries are 'swimming naked'.

Global debt has reached unprecedented levels, equal to \$86,000 for every person on the planet, almost three times the average per capita income.

Corporate debt has spiralled, much of it highly leveraged. By the end of 2019, total outstanding debt among corporations other than financial institutions had surged to a record \$13.5 trillion worldwide.

Now, as world stock markets plunge, there has been a flight to safer investments, leaving many heavily indebted companies in danger of collapse.

As the Financial Times put it in its editorial on 14 March, the policies of the last eleven years have "resulted in an asset price bubble and an inflated debt bubble that is now collapsing. Given that financial markets are roughly four times larger than the real economy's annual production, there is probably much more pain to come."

The International Monetary fund warned that an economic crisis



A long queue for toiletries and over-the-counter drugs in East Ham, London photo D Carr

only half as deep as 2008 would put nearly 40% of corporate debt at risk, potentially leading to mass bankruptcies and job losses.

Capitalist commentators generally assess that the banks are in a better state than before 2008. This is not entirely true, however. Italy's banks, in particular, remain very weak with a high percentage of bad loans. Now locked down, in the epicentre of the global pandemic, Italy is in a deep economic crisis.

For the European Union this is a Greek crisis Mark 2: but the Italian economy is far bigger than Greece's, now the third biggest in the EU. The crisis in Italy has the potential to stress the EU, and particularly the euro, to breaking point.

Back in 2008 the global capitalist powers cooperated in the face of their system's crisis. They could not prevent the deepest recession since the World War Two, but they were able to ameliorate the worst effects of the crisis, while, of course, this stored up the problems that the world economy is now facing, and offloaded the cost onto working-class people and the poorest in society via austerity.

The sickness of capitalism is summed up in the fact that, despite all the money that was pumped into the economy, levels of investment - vital to develop new science, technique and methods of production - have remained at a historically low level. In Britain, for example, companies' cash balances - about £750 billion - are a record 35% of GDP.

Today, the crisis comes after years of growing national tensions, as each national capitalist class fights for its own interests at the expense of its rivals.

The oil price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia, Trump's ban on EU travel to the US, and even the comments made by Christine Lagarde, head of the European Central Bank, that the bank is not "here to close spreads" between Italy and Germany, are all indications of the extreme difficulties for the capitalist classes to act in common on a glob-

al, or even an EU, level.

Desperately scrambling to avert disaster, capitalist governments and central banks around the world are nonetheless taking emergency action to pump money into the world economy on a piecemeal basis. That was the background to the Bank of England's cut in interest rates to 0.25% - only the second time they have been so low in the 325-year history of the bank - and the Tory government's budget which claimed it would do 'whatever it takes' to get through the coronavirus crisis.

Even before the coronavirus erupted, the British economy was heading towards recession, with 0% growth in the three months to the end of January 2020. Now the economic crisis is likely to be far more severe. The content of the budget shows, however, that the Tories have no interest in doing 'whatever it takes' to safeguard the interests of the majority.

Austerity lies

The capitalist media has declared that austerity is over because the Tories have ditched their mantra that government borrowing has to be slashed, which they have used to justify brutal cuts in the public sector for over a decade.

In one stroke they have confirmed that the supposed necessity of austerity was a lie - designed to ensure that it was decimated public services and reduced working-class living standards that paid for the rescue of their crisis-hit system.

Unfortunately, the coronavirus crisis will show the result of their policies in high relief. Britain has one of the lowest statutory sick pay levels in Europe. Millions of casual workers are not entitled to sick pay (whom the budget made no promise to assist). We have a brutal sanctions-driven benefit system, and an NHS which has suffered endless cuts, leaving it with the one of the lowest numbers of intensive care beds in Europe, and major staffing shortfalls.



If they think they can get away with it, the Tories might also use emergency legislation to prevent the effective functioning of the trade unions, including banning strikes

There can be no doubt that the decision to tell people who have possible symptoms of the virus not to bother phoning 111, and to stop testing anyone who is not severely ill, is not based on science but on a lack of NHS resources, and it goes directly against WHO advice.

Nor did the budget set out to start reversing the cuts that have taken place. The vast majority of the increase in spending promised by the government is for capital projects, mostly infrastructure. Day-to-day spending is a different story. NHS funding, as already announced by Theresa May, is to receive an extra £20 billion a year by 2023 - but this is less than the standard annual increases before the era of austerity.

In other words, it will not even prevent further cuts in real terms, never mind start making up for the savage cuts of the last decade. And the NHS is getting more than most other public services.

Even the most generous estimates in the capitalist press estimate that only a third of austerity would be reversed by 2024 if the budget is implemented. Local councils, for example, receive nothing.

Nonetheless, the budget once again demonstrated the tensions within the Tory Party. Both the last prime minister - Theresa May - and the last chancellor - Sajid Javid - responded in parliament to the

London, Bristol, the Birmingham metro area, Manchester and Liverpool, have not been put back to the autumn as recommended by the Electoral Commission, but postponed for a year. If they think they can get away with it, the Tories might also use emergency legislation to prevent the effective functioning of the trade unions, including banning strikes.

Collective workers' action, however, will be essential to fight for measures that maximise safety, in contrast to the corner cutting and profiteering which capitalism inevitably offers. In the coming weeks, this can include communities coming together to organise support for the vulnerable.

It will also be necessary for the workers' movement to combat private companies raking in profits via price hikes in essential goods and foods. Doing so will require the demand for price freezes, and where companies refuse to cooperate, nationalisation under democratic workers' control.

Bailouts

The role of the workers' movement is not limited to combatting the virus, however, as the economic virus of recession is also spreading. British Airways, for example, has already warned of mass lay-offs.

In the last economic crisis, the bankers were bailed out while the rest of us suffered the worst wage restraint in over a century. Not one banker was jailed for their part in the near collapse of Britain's financial system.

The only way to avoid a repeat performance is to fight for socialist policies. Any company threatening job losses should be forced to open its accounts to workers' scrutiny, with popular committees of workers, trade unionists and consumer groups examining where their profits have gone and what their financial situation really is.

That is only the start of what will be necessary to end the misery caused by capitalist crisis, however. In recent days, the economics minister of the conservative Christian Democratic Party in Germany has spoken of nationalising companies in difficulties, but only to save them before later privatisation. This is no lasting solution.

In the last economic crisis, the Socialist Party campaigned for the nationalisation of the banks and the major corporations that dominate the economy, under democratic workers' control and management, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need. Doing so would lay the basis for developing a democratic socialist plan of production to meet the needs of the majority, and in a way that safeguards the environment.

Fundamentally, it is as a result of the last economic crisis that the concept of socialism has begun to be repopularised globally, resulting in the support - particularly among the young - of politicians like Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders.

The events ahead are going to pose the necessity of going beyond general sympathy for socialism, and building mass parties with a programme to achieve it.



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.

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- 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.
- Scrap Universal Credit. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.

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- 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 and anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Fight for Labour to be transformed into such a party: deselect the Blairites.

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!

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Coronavirus housing emergency - suspend rent and mortgage payments, seize empty homes

David Maples

Housing worker and Unison rep (personal capacity)

It didn't take coronavirus to create a housing emergency, but it does create new issues. The Socialist has already called for workers to receive full pay and benefits.

Nobody should lose their home because of Covid-19. This means that lenders should be required to suspend mortgage payments, and landlords should be required to suspend rent payments, where necessary.

Housing benefit and Universal Credit claims should be paid in full, with requirements to re-verify information suspended. Housing benefit overpayments should be written off. The 'minimum income floor' should be scrapped for self-employed workers.

The court process for mortgage lenders and landlords seeking possession orders and evictions should also be suspended. The government should give extra funding for local councils to set up hardship funds

to compensate individual landlords who suffer genuine loss, and these should be democratically controlled by committees involving workers, unions and community groups.

These measures would also help to take pressure off frontline workers, and could contribute to reducing the need for face-to-face contact. Many councils and housing associations lack technology such as Skype or video conferencing, which should also be introduced.

Housing workers should not be torn between trying to help vulnerable households and protecting their own health.

A decade of austerity, and the lack of a fightback from Labour councils, has meant that many local authorities and housing associations have a smaller and older workforce - who will be vulnerable themselves.

And they are ill-prepared to deal with a crisis. This lack of preparedness was shown vividly with the failure to rehouse Grenfell residents in permanent accommodation.

In very cold weather, and some very hot weather, there is provision

to provide short-term accommodation for rough sleepers. This should be extended at least for the duration of the coronavirus crisis.

However, many rough sleepers are suspicious of short-term offers of accommodation. What they need is good-quality, genuinely affordable, permanent accommodation, with support to manage tenancies if necessary.

As with households in temporary accommodation, this could be done by taking over empty homes, as was suggested after the Grenfell disaster. Self-isolation is a pipe dream where households are already overcrowded.

Land and building firms should be nationalised to build good quality, affordable, environmentally sustainable housing to prevent this situation arising again - to meet the needs of people, rather than profits for a few.



'Health not profit' strike wave sweeps Italy

Chris Thomas

Italy is in lockdown in the fight against coronavirus. Bars, restaurants and shops are closed, with the exception of supermarkets, pharmacies and newsagents.

And yet, under pressure from the bosses' organisation Confindustria, workers are still expected to go to work elsewhere, often on overcrowded public transport. It is a clear case of putting profit before health.

But workers have responded with a rash of spontaneous strikes across Italy. At Fiat in Pomigliano, Toyota in Bologna, the shipyards in Liguria, and numerous other factories and workplaces, workers have taken strike action over health and safety.



In some cases, there has been a lack of protective equipment - such as at the Ilva steelworks in Puglia where workers are striking for ten days. In others, health and safety measures have not been implemented at all or have been totally inadequate.

The head of Confindustria in Lombardy has called the strikes "irresponsible" and accused workers of "exploiting" the coronavirus! However, action from below has forced the government to draw up a safety protocol together with the three main trade union federations.

But on its own this will not be enough. "What applies in the street must apply in the factory," has been one of the slogans of the strike wave.

Workers will need to continue to organise on the ground in the factories and workplaces, and strike if necessary, to make sure the bosses adhere to the protocol.

Nick Chaffey

Southampton Socialist Party

Councils must break austerity rules to fight coronavirus

As the Champagne flowed in the corporate entertainment boxes at Cheltenham Racecourse, austerity-hit councils were waking up to the frightening reality of Covid-19, and how to ensure the vulnerable will be safe and get the care they need.

All the cuts of the last decade are showing the weaknesses of the care system, particularly the impact on the poorest in working-class communities - unable to eat well, or isolated and unable to take care of themselves.

The welfare safety net which the working class fought so hard for has been shredded by cuts. When a crisis appears, we are left stranded.

Councils are in a key position to act rapidly to address the needs of our communities. Labour councils, in conjunction with the local trade unions, must establish an immediate battle plan for addressing those needs, and demand immediate government funding to resource them.

The most urgent tasks are for those with symptoms to be tested immediately, cared for, and quarantined to help prevent the spread of the virus. In conjunction with local NHS hospitals, clinics and GP surgeries, council care facilities should be set up for this purpose.

If the government won't do so, councils should move to requisition any needed private sector resources, including care homes, hospitals



photo Socialist Party Wales

and hotels. Would the Tories really dare to oppose councils taking such action in this crisis?

Staff shortages, particularly of skilled nursing and social care teams, are a result of a decade of austerity. Many leave the health service early due to the intolerable working conditions. Appealing for former staff to return will work best if linked to permanent funding to reverse austerity, privatisation, understaffing, and related problems.

It is more than likely schools will be closed. This will put enormous pressures on poor families who rely on free school meals. Suspend all school cuts. Councils must use their reserves and borrowing powers to set up emergency hardship funds - and demand that Westminster foots the bill.

The Tories have raised the prospect of thousands of volunteer students being rapidly trained to assist with this crisis. Surely the government and councils should also be turning to the 600,000 council workers made redundant in the last decade - from youth centres, Sure Start centres, schools and social services.

These workers know their local communities and could play a vital role in ensuring the needs of the vulnerable, children and their families are met.

Labour councils and the trade unions should use their platforms to coordinate the community response to this crisis - and lead a fight for the immediate resources needed, linked to reversing all cuts and privatisation.

Jacob Bilsky

Independent Socialist Group, United States

The coronavirus pandemic has laid bare the inadequacies of capitalism internationally, and the problems with private healthcare in the United States in particular.

After months of the corporate media blaming 'socialism' for food and consumer goods shortages in countries like Venezuela, workers in the US are faced with barren store shelves due to panic buying. We are forced to wait hours on end to contact private hospitals - only to find that we aren't eligible to receive Covid-19 testing or our insurance won't cover it.

This lack of available testing and delayed federal response have allowed the virus to fester in the country's major city centres. There are nearly 3,000 confirmed cases in 49 states, and likely many more untested affected individuals.

Meanwhile, the housing crisis, scarcity of paid sick leave, and lack of full-time employment at a living wage, force millions to go into work sick or risk missing rent and being evicted from their homes.

President Donald Trump finally declared a national state of emergency on 14 March. But a federal aid package of \$50 billion still awaits Senate approval, and will likely take even more time to be distributed to state governments.

While Congress and the Trump administration ignored the plight of working people, it only took hours

Coronavirus PCS union demands better deal for benefits claimants

A Jobcentre worker

The government has announced new support for benefits claimants who contract, or have to stay at home due to, Covid-19.

Initially the government planned to simply allow rearranging of Jobcentre appointments, as well as health assessments for parts of Universal Credit, employment support allowance (ESA), and personal independence payment (PIP).

Faced with the deepening coronavirus crisis, all non-essential Jobcentre appointments are now suspended until further notice, and all health assessments.

Claimants will not have to produce a 'fit note' from a GP, since most are asking patients not to attend their practice.

For existing claimants this will mean continuing to receive their current rate of benefit. For new claimants, a Universal Credit advance is payable for one month, and ESA from day one.

PIP is unlikely to be awarded

except in cases of terminal illness. This is unacceptable. We demand it be paid to all who need it on the basis of self-reporting.

The rest of the measures are positive, as they reduce the risk to the vulnerable. But they are also insufficient for the extent of the crisis.

Private sector employers are already shuttering businesses. This could mean tens of thousands of new benefit claims. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will have trouble handling that given its cuts of 40,000 jobs over the last ten years.

Moreover, claimants cannot afford to live on a Universal Credit payment worth between £251 and £319 a month. And the measures don't consider what happens when the crisis stretches beyond that first month.

Thousands and thousands of self-employed workers don't qualify for the paltry statutory sick payment of £94.25 a week. They will have to rely on Universal Credit or ESA.

Socialist Party members on the executive committee of civil

servants' union

PCS, which represents staff in DWP, successfully moved a resolution on the issue.

It instructs the union to approach management about protection for claimants who contract the disease or have to self-isolate, and those looking after dependents.

The motion demands statutory sick pay to be massively increased to the value of a living wage of £12 an hour, or £15 in London - payable immediately to all those working precariously, with money to be recouped from employers.

It also demands emergency recruitment into the civil service, and suspension of all redundancies, to administer the welfare system. The anger of DWP workers is palpable on the shop floor. A lead from the unions to pressure the government is vital, to protect the unity of workers, both employed and unemployed.



photo Mohsen Atayi/CC

United States: private healthcare exposed as Trump throws money at markets

photo Wagner T Cassimiro/CC



for the Federal Reserve to inject the debt markets with \$1.5 trillion in the hope of saving the profits of capitalist speculators. This sum - capable of paying off the entire nation's student loan debt - resulted in a mere 20 minutes of market growth, followed by further decline!

Capitalism and the political duopoly of the Democratic and Republican parties are to blame for the US's incompetent response to Covid-19. Both corporate parties have routinely cut funding for social services and blocked efforts at

universal healthcare. The Trump administration even sacked officials tasked with preventing pandemics.

As the pandemic runs its course, unions, workers and young people may have to fight for the necessary resources to manage it. And, we should prepare to enter a new period of struggle, including building a mass workers' party and fighting for socialist policies, to ensure access to healthcare and other necessities for all.

The Independent Socialist Group (the United States co-thinkers of the

Socialist Party) calls for:

- Testing and new vaccines and treatments for Covid-19 to be free and accessible to everyone when available
- Improved 'Medicare for all' as a step towards universal, publicly owned healthcare
- Taking big pharmaceutical companies and hospitals into democratic public ownership
- No lay-offs or evictions during the pandemic! We need a federal guarantee for paid sick leave and an immediate rent and mortgage freeze

Continued from front page

Private hospitals should be taken over for NHS use. Suitable hotels should also be taken over, at least for convalescence, as the shortage of trained staff limits their use as hospitals.

Health workers' mental health as well as that of the general public and those in isolation is under strain. Children are anxious, picking up on news often distorted through social media. Again, years of cuts to school budgets and mental health services mean services and support staff aren't there when needed.

Evidence from China shows children are least likely to be affected by serious coronavirus illness. However, teachers and other school staff may become ill and need time off work. If there aren't enough staff, schools should close, not combine classes. Education unions should make these decisions on a school-by-school basis.

Over-70-year-olds have been told to isolate themselves, potentially for months. This will increase depression, physical ill-health and other problems.

Community care is another vital service turned into a privatised industry, exploiting its low-paid workers and neglecting the real needs of its service users. How can anyone, allowed just 15 minutes a visit, take all the hygiene measures needed to prevent spread of infection?

As well as anxiety about a new virus for which there is no vaccine or treatment, many workers and small businesses are desperately anxious about their jobs and pay. The government should announce a

mortgage and rent holiday for anyone unable to work because of this crisis. Small landlords should be compensated, but big property companies and banks should bear the cost (see opposite page).

Workers must not pay the price of the coronavirus crisis. No worker should lose their job, be forced to take holidays or be laid off with loss of pay. All workers who have to self-isolate or are unable to work because of the crisis should receive full pay from day one.

We cannot trust the Tories, or the system they represent, to keep us safe or defend our interests. We need democratic working-class and community oversight of the measures that are taken to deal with the coronavirus crisis. Local communities are already self-organising to help the vulnerable. Workers' action will be necessary to enforce health and safety as in Italy (see opposite page).

This crisis has exposed the rottenness of the capitalist market system organised around competition and the pursuit of profit. It has shown the desperate need for a coordinated plan to organise the production and distribution of goods and services.

But the level of cooperation and planning needed to protect us when disasters hit, to guarantee us the basics in life and to safeguard the environment, will only be possible in a differently organised society - a socialist system based on public ownership of the major companies and financial institutions, under democratic working-class control and management.

This is what the Socialist Party is fighting for. Join us now!

Going viral



Socialist letters and comments on the coronavirus crisis

The Covid-19 pandemic is a world social crisis which touches every aspect of life. The entire capitalist system is being exposed, and workers and communities are organising to respond. Send us your comments, reports, anecdotes and thoughts, in not more than 200 words, to editors@socialistparty.org.uk.

■ Carers need PPE

My 98-year-old mother is housebound and relies on carers. She has 14 who come to the house to help in various ways throughout the week.

The government is recommending over-70s reduce contact with other people, but for my mother this is impossible. It's like Waterloo station at her home sometimes.

Concerned about the virus being transmitted, I spoke to the care agency, and they said they recommend workers wear masks, but haven't got any... and can't get any until November! What is the government doing about this?

A reader in Hackney, east London

■ Neighbourhoods organise demands

I went to a meeting of my Neighbourhood Watch-type group, which is normally attended only by people complaining about potholes and so on. This time we discussed a response to coronavirus and ended up with demands including the suspension of all rent and mortgage payments and utility bills, and requisitioning the big Tesco to distribute goods to the elderly and poor.

A Labour Party member Haringey, north London

■ Remote services unprepared

Stephen started with a high temperature on Saturday 7 March. At first we thought it was just a virus I'd had two weeks before. He dragged himself into work, feeling progressively worse.

I rang the 111 coronavirus helpline at day ten because there was no improvement. After a 20-minute wait, I spoke to an operator who said she would put a flag on the system for a nurse. If no nurse was available I would have to ring 111 again and select option 2.

No nurse was available, so I had to re-ring 111. The options you have to choose from to get to the correct queue are mind-boggling. The word "nurse" is not used once in the process.

I had to wait an hour and 20 minutes on hold. In this time the phone line goes silent constantly and you think you've been cut off. You also get very loud blasts of interference noise and the occasional "please hold the line, your call is important to us."

The 'nurse' (? - she didn't announce herself as one) spoke to me and then Stephen to establish his symptoms. We were then to wait for a call from a 'health technician'.

I had to contact work to say I wouldn't be in because I needed to look after my husband who has coronavirus symptoms. I was told I could work from home

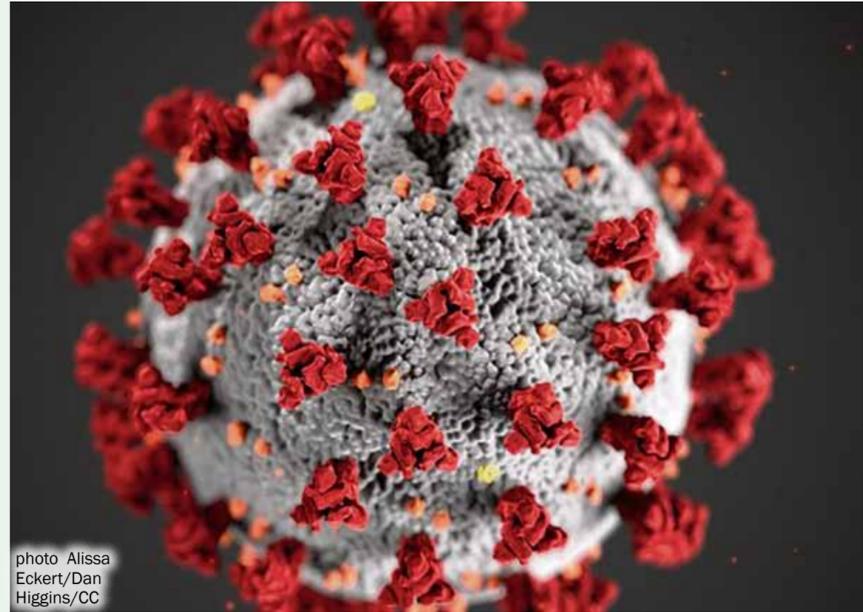


photo Alissa Eckert/Dan Higgins/CC

or put in leave. Told them I couldn't focus on work today but my sister would bring my laptop to me, so I could work from home the next day.

Sister contacted me to say they have no spare connecting cords to connect to a second screen, so I'm to work off one small screen. I've been raising for weeks at team meetings that we should have been testing working from home.

Wendy Minney Nottingham

■ Tories defend insurers

Years ago I used to work for an insurance broker, and I got to see a lot of what goes on from the inside. They are incredibly cosy with politicians. It's pretty clear that the reason the government hasn't shut down pubs, restaurants and so on is because if it did then they could claim on their insurance, and the Tories' pals in the city would be hit in the pocket.

It would be all of them as well, as they spread it around. Insurer 1 takes out a policy with insurer 2 against customers making a big claim, who in turn takes out a policy with insurer 3 against insurer 1 claiming, and so on. Amusingly, there was a time before the financial crash where this was getting to be such a mess that it was going around in loops and they ended up insuring themselves without realising! Oh, the efficiency of capitalism.

Probably, soon they'll have to bite the bullet and do it anyway in spite of the howls of rage from the City... which

makes me wonder if there could be another financial sector bailout coming. More people might see Johnson and his mates for what they really are - servants of big financial capital.

Joe Fathallah Cardiff, south Wales

■ Shoppers slam Johnson

I went to the local shops shortly after Boris Johnson's social distancing announcements. They were very busy and, very unusually, people were talking to each other. Very friendly but quite bitter about the government.

One comment was quite typical - Johnson's only changed his tune because people were so angry. When he was saying don't do anything till Easter and the problem will go away, he meant we will die and then he won't have to worry about us.

Paul Kershaw Enfield, north London

■ Patients turned away

My wife had a temperature of 37.2°C. I informed nursing staff at Hillingdon. We were escorted out of the building by security. No swabs, masks or tests available. Told to go home and self-isolate with me - who has emphysema and a chest infection.

Wally Kennedy Hillingdon, west London

day and loads of swimmers were eaten.

Bill Mullins Bermondsey, south London

■ Capitalist state intervention

The effect of the coronavirus on jobs, wages and industry could well mean the capitalist governments, against their wishes, will have no choice. They may have to implement aspects of the 'war economy' and elements of central state planning and direction, including requisitioning some private industries and converting production to deal with underfunded public health systems.

The workers' movement must act independently and campaign for workers' control and management, at all levels, as well as for a collective, 'socialised' response to the emergency - the most effective way to beat this virus, and to start fundamentally changing society.

Niall Mulholland Forest Gate, east London

■ Council workers speak

Sheffield City Council workers buying the Socialist said this:

>Coronavirus - it's going to expose the failings of capitalism

>Governments will fall over this

>Did you see the crowd in China shouting down government officials, chanting "liars"?

>We need a revolution in here as well, it's a dump

>No tissues, no hand sanitiser, all we've got is posters!

>We need to get the union health and safety rep onto it

Alistair Tice Sheffield, Yorkshire

■ Self-employed sick pay

Premier League footballers will still pick up their salaries while the game is suspended, but for members of my Socialist Party branch - like A who is a self-employed taxi driver, and B who is an industrial waste operative - not working means no money.

Where the hell is the Trade Union Congress's voice in demanding sick pay for every worker, irrespective of employment status, from day one of self-isolation?

A and B are not alone. Many will be forced to ignore official advice and carry on working. This is just one more reality of what the neoliberal market means for the working class.

Robin Clapp Bristol

■ Coronavirus class war

Remember in the early months of the Iraq occupation, when news filtered through that soldiers didn't have enough or the right equipment? Well, just after a few days, in the press we have NHS staff saying the same thing about the "war," as Boris called it, against the coronavirus.

It is a war, but what is the "national effort" when the rich can flee or get their tests in Harley Street; when Eton closes but schools in working-class areas stay open? The luxury food stores are jammed with online orders, but millions of workers face being thrown on the scrap heap.

We should be fighting a war - but for our interests, not theirs.

And there is a bit of an attitude going round that 'well, it only affects the elderly'. Surely an injury to one is an injury to all? We all, young and old, need to organise collectively in workplaces now and communities in the coming days, to stop an Italy here.

Matt Dobson Glasgow, Scotland

■ Profits v health

Boris is quoted in the Financial Times as saying in 2007 that the real hero of the film Jaws was the mayor who tried to keep the beaches open for business while the sheriff and the shark expert were telling him to shut down the town to save lives.

It explains a lot of his early coronavirus strategy. Keep everybody at work to save profits. In the end, the shark had a field

Coronavirus hospital worker Amazing response from staff - but worst still to come

Some parts of the hospital seem strangely normal. Like the orthopaedic wards - where we seem to have more than the usual number of hip and knee replacements taking place, perhaps in readiness for when these are deemed non-essential procedures.

Of course, everywhere is still very short of staff. But families are making visits, and patients are being treated and discharged.

In and around A&E, things are very different. Advice and procedures are changed, sometimes hourly, as the situation evolves. We have to set up 'clean' and 'dirty' areas as we attempt to isolate patients who may have Covid-19.

Personal protective equipment shortages mean we have to improvise when covering equipment and

protecting staff. We still have the same numbers of trauma-related injuries and other serious conditions, but now we have many patients walking in or arriving by ambulance with all the symptoms of the virus.

The response from staff is amazing as we support each other with understanding and humour, but the worst is still to come. I see young staff who are shellshocked and scared.

The hospital trust has promised that self-isolating won't count on sickness records and that vulnerable frontline staff can be redeployed to other areas. But make no mistake, we are also angry that cuts and 'rationalisation' over recent years makes us ill-equipped to deal with this crisis.

An NHS health professional



photo DFID



Protective equipment shortages and privatisation preparation must end

Most patients contact their local health centre where GPs, nurses and receptionists are striving to give good care and advice. The government must immediately provide the protective equipment they need. What has been sent out so far is completely inadequate. If health centre staff get infected there will be even more strain in the system.

The huge amount of work imposed by governments as part of their drive towards privatisation - Care Quality Commission reporting, key performance indicators, and so on - must be immediately suspended.

Increased phone and online consultation during the crisis must not be used as justification to give further contracts to private companies like Babylon's 'GP at Hand', that take on NHS patients and undermine the publicly owned primary care system that gives equal access to everyone.

Pandemic response shows plan to break up NHS must be scrapped

The NHS has responded to Covid-19 at a national level - unlike the chaotic response in the United States (see p4-5). This is because NHS England has not yet completed Chief Executive Simon Stevens' 'NHS Long Term Plan' to break up England's single, national health service into 44 US-style health corporations (so-called 'integrated care providers').

Each of these would have its own contract to provide all health services within its area - and could be run by different private companies. There would be no coordination

between them. These were to be in place by 2021. Any further moves towards them must now be scrapped immediately.

Covid-19 shows the vital need for a National Health Service that can be planned, and with no room for profiteers. It needs proper funding and democratic control by health workers, trade unions, patients' representatives - and a workers' government - if it is to respond adequately to future crises.

Branson demands bail-out - but asks staff to give up pay

Billionaire Richard Branson is demanding the government stump up £7.5 billion to stop his airline Virgin from crashing. At the same time, he has proposed to his 8,500 staff that they take eight weeks' unpaid leave, with deductions spread over six months.

Paying workers for those eight weeks would cost £34 million. Branson has a personal net worth of almost 100 times that, around £3.2 billion. As of last year, Virgin Trains had sucked over £300 million dividends from privatised rail franchisees. As of the year before, Virgin Care had siphoned off NHS contracts worth about £2 billion.

He's had enough! Forget £7.5 billion to return him to profit. Nationalise those planes, trains and clinics with zero compensation to Branson. Full pay, no lay-offs, and emergency mobilisation of resources to counter the corona!

Amazon bosses impose overtime

Amazon warehouse workers are being told to work overtime to tackle the huge demand the coronavirus crisis has created. The GMB union says that workers at least four different sites were informed that they

had to work "compulsory overtime" from 16 March. The union accused Amazon of putting "profit before safety".

One worker at Amazon's Dunfermline warehouse in Scotland says: "Staff in the 'inbound goods' department are having additional hours imposed. I think we have a compulsory overtime clause in our contract."

Amazon is forcing workers to work more at a time when the government is telling people to work from home. The GMB's national officer Mick Rix called the overtime reports "extremely concerning", and accused Amazon of "imposing its demands on workers without any regard for their safety".

It's one pandemic for them...

Private jet firms have reported a spike in enquiries from the super-rich seeking to escape the crisis. Chartering a car-sized plane from PrivateFly will set you back around £1,850 an hour. A minibus equivalent is £5,000 an hour.

And where are they going? Some to their private islands and country piles. But others to "disaster bunkers" in remote locations. The 55 "survival condo" units in one former US military compound sold for between \$1.5 million and \$4.5 million a pop.

Nationalise to save jobs

As we go to press, fashion and homewares chain Laura Ashley is going under with 2,700 jobs, citing the coronavirus. All 531 Carphone Warehouse outlets are to go under, with 2,900 jobs. Nationalise, nationalise, nationalise - to save the jobs, and our high streets!

■ **Compiled by Jon Dale, James Ivens and Scott Jones**

Coronavirus crisis



A WORKERS' CHARTER

- Fight for full funding for our NHS and public services
- No loss of pay, income or jobs for affected workers
- Make the fat cat bosses pay

National Health Service

- Emergency increase in funding for the NHS and social care
- Adequate protection for all frontline workers
- NHS to take over private healthcare facilities and staff, and any other private facilities necessary for care, quarantine, and supplies. No compensation to the private fat cats
- Emergency training of NHS staff to deal with the coronavirus crisis
- Resources to be made available so that anyone with flu or cold-like symptoms has the right to a free coronavirus test with results available within hours, as has been the case in South Korea and some other countries
- Increase production to meet the urgent need for more protective and medical equipment, including ventilators and virus testing. Convert production where necessary, under the democratic control of workers in those industries and in the wider workforce
- Reverse privatisation in the NHS, remove the privateers and suspend all PFI payments
- Nationalise the big pharmaceutical companies to guarantee research, production and supply of medicines, vaccines and treatments
- Suspend fees for overseas NHS patients - treat all patients for free without the need to register to control the spread. Scrap prescription charges

Public services and housing

- Emergency funding to provide resources to protect workers, patients, students and service users in the NHS, education, transport and public services
- Councils to coordinate a local response. Scrap existing cuts budgets. Councils to use reserves and borrowing powers to fund necessary jobs and services
- 24-hour helpline for vulnerable and elderly people forced to self-isolate. Community and trade union control over local distribution of food, medicines and other supplies
- Workload demands must be reduced and time made available to prioritise protecting the health, safety and welfare of staff and students/clients/patients
- No school to be expected to remain open unless they have staffing levels and sufficient cleaning, testing and hand-washing provision to control the spread of infection. No to any removal of statutory class size limits
- If schools close, all staff must receive full pay. Quality childcare for vulnerable families and children of essential workers must be organised under the democratic control of education and care workers, with adequate protection for all. Emergency local authority provision of meals to children normally in receipt of free school meals, under community and trade union control
- Nobody should lose their home because of coronavirus. Mortgage and rent payments should be suspended. Government funds for democratically controlled local authority hardship funds for landlords in genuine need
- Councils to take over empty homes to house the homeless and those in inadequate housing. Hotels to be used to provide emergency accommodation
- Funding for 24-hour helplines and emergency accommodation for victims of domestic violence
- No action to be taken for non-payment of utilities and broadband



Pay and benefits

- No worker to pay the price for controlling the spread of the virus. Any worker who has to self-isolate or is unable to work, should receive full pay and not be forced to take annual leave. This should include workers in receipt of in-work benefits such as Universal Credit, who should be paid their full benefits and receive no sanction. Workers who follow health advice to be absent from work to avoid potential spread should be excluded from any attendance-management procedures
- All workers should be entitled to full pay from day one of isolation, sickness or for care of vulnerable dependants for as long as it is needed
- Self-employed, agency, zero-hour-contract and gig economy workers required to self-isolate to be granted emergency benefits by the Department for Work and Pensions, at full pay, for the equivalent of at least a full working week of 37.5 hours, or more if they usually work longer
- Scraps the sanctions regime. Suspend the requirement for claimants to attend mandatory interviews and carry out job searches. Claimants should not be penalised for not being able to leave their homes and not being able to undertake labour-market activities because of lack of access to transport, internet, postal services, and so on
- No redundancies, lay-offs with loss of pay or imposed changes in working conditions in manufacturing, logistics or service industries because of the crisis. Open the books of any company threatening redundancies or closure to the inspection by the workforce and trade unions
- To defend workers' jobs and incomes, industries should be nationalised under democratic workers' control and management with compensation only on the basis of proven need. Government funding for local authorities to help small local and community businesses - hardship funds to be democratically controlled by a committee involving workers and community groups

Trade union and workers' action

- Trade unions to establish an all-union health and safety committee in every workplace to agree joint actions required to guarantee safety
- For the Trade Union Congress and the unions, the biggest voluntary national organisation with over six million members across the country, to prepare to lead national coordinated strike action to protect people should necessary health and safety measures not be taken
- Democratic trade union oversight of any government or private sector emergency measures taken to contain the virus, such as restrictions on public assemblies or strikes and supermarket supply rationing
- No profiteering. Prices to be controlled by democratically elected committees of workers and consumers
- No erosion of workers' right to organise, including the democratic functioning of trade unions and parties
- No trust in the Tories and other pro-capitalist politicians who are responsible for the crisis in the NHS and other public services to deal with the coronavirus crisis. For a mass workers' party, drawing together workers, young people, socialists and activists from workplaces and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting political alternative to the pro-big business parties
- The resources are there to deal with the crisis. Introduce an immediate 50% levy on the hoarded £750 billion lying idle in the bank accounts of big business
- The capitalist market system that prioritises profit and is based on competition cannot keep society safe. We need a democratic socialist plan of production and distribution to meet the needs of the majority in society
- Take into public ownership the banks, financial institutions and the top 150 companies that dominate the British economy and run them under the democratic control and management of working-class people so that we can make the decisions about what is needed. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need
- For international socialist cooperation

Coronavirus crisis

SOCIALIST PLANNING, NOT CAPITALIST CHAOS!

Martin Powell-Davies
Socialist Party national committee

A newly spreading virus is a danger that can befall any society. The question facing the world today, however, is what kind of society can best meet such a challenge. As the coronavirus pandemic spreads, capitalism is being exposed for its inability to do so.

Decaying British capitalism, personified in the inept leadership of Boris Johnson, is making an unwanted bid for global pre-eminence in incompetence in the face of this crisis.

Most seriously affected countries have adopted World Health Organisation recommended procedures of widespread testing of individuals and monitoring of social contacts of those with suspected exposure. Even then, as Italy has shown, health services can quickly become overwhelmed and the death toll mounts rapidly.

Testing

In Britain, things could become far worse even than Italy. Those feeling unwell are simply being advised to 'self-isolate' with testing only being carried out on those being hospitalised with serious symptoms. That leaves both individuals and public services without any clear idea of the real levels or geographical focus of Covid-19 infection.

Of course, widespread testing requires resources, but successive UK governments have run down the NHS over decades. Together, Public Health England and NHS laboratories have a capacity to carry out only 4,000 tests daily. That's totally inadequate given the scale of the crisis.

Hospitals and NHS staff are also criminally ill-equipped to treat infected patients. Doctors have complained of shortages of even the most basic necessities such as face visors and goggles to provide personal protection to medical staff.

Instead of expecting the NHS to make do with such scant resources, a minimum requirement should be to inject emergency expenditure alongside an expansion of laboratories to carry out wider testing.

But when the Tories announced that they were going to find what funding was needed to deal with the crisis, they weren't thinking of the plight of ordinary workers. No, they are looking to bailout big firms like Virgin who are suddenly facing a profit squeeze, not help workers being told they must take unpaid leave.

Neither do they want to spend anymore than they are forced to on schools, hospitals and social care pro-



The lack of a coherent and fully resourced plan under capitalism to tackle the coronavirus has created fear and panic buying among the public photo Mtaylor848

vision, despite the growing demands from communities hit by Covid-19.

Even where capitalist governments accept that they have little choice but to inject extra funding into health services, they still have to rely on the capitalist market to provide the goods.

However, pharmaceutical firms, private laboratories and equipment manufacturers aren't going to offer their services cheaply. Instead, they will look on the emergency demand as an opportunity to push up prices and profits.

The NHS in England only has around 4,000 critical care beds. More beds, together with other vitally needed capacity, remain available in private hospitals. Yes, private providers have been happy to go into negotiations with the government about how they can assist at this time of need - but, of course, only if the price is right.

Capitalism's inability to solve this crisis isn't just limited by private ownership for profit. Competition between different nation states also provides another critical barrier. Both issues are blocking the necessary urgency towards developing a vaccine that could provide a long-term solution to the global pandemic.

Research and development will

once again be hampered by the competing selfish interests of different global pharmaceutical firms.

Cuban biotech industries have, however, been able to produce anti-viral medicines that are already being trialled by Chinese doctors to judge their effect on patients infected by Covid-19. With all its limitations, the success in this field of Cuba's small and distorted but still state-directed economy, sharply exposes the failure of global capitalist corporations to put needs before profits.

Need not profit

The obscenity of capitalist production for profit, instead of need, is being mostly sharply exposed in the urgent need to massively expand the provision of ventilators. The death toll of the elderly in Italy has shown that these are vital to treat coronavirus patients.

The NHS only has access to about 5,000 of them. This is far less than is going to be needed very soon to meet the needs of both existing patients with other illnesses, and the impending explosion of new Covid-19 cases.

Tory health secretary Matt Hancock has been reduced to pleading with industry to help by converting their production lines to the manufacture

of ventilators. Rolls-Royce, JCB, Ford and Honda are reportedly just some of the firms in negotiations with the UK government.

Technique and engineering capabilities do not provide a barrier to producing the equipment needed. Private capitalist ownership does. Engineers have apparently been asked to draw up plans to produce ventilators, but the specialised firms that own the designs will need to be persuaded to give up their "intellectual property rights".

Instead of people's needs having to wait while profiteers strike their hard bargains, a socialist plan of production could quickly get the job done. It just requires matching the skills of engineers, working in conjunction with health professionals, with the resources of central government.

Yes, the private owners would object. But society should be run in the interests of the majority, not the few, especially at such a time of crisis. Instead of pleading with big business, the relevant firms should be nationalised to allow a unified plan of production.

Nationalisation should be with compensation only on the basis of proven need, for example to protect workers' pension funds. Neither

should initiative and creativity continue to be limited by maintaining top-down management methods. Nationalised firms should be run under the democratic control of workers in those industries, together with representatives of those in the wider workforce, health unions and patient groups.

Democratic workers' control and management would give a concrete form to the organisation that working-class communities will be building to support each other in this time of crisis. That will encompass battling to defend incomes and safe living and working conditions, helping to support the elderly and vulnerable, or even, as in Italy, singing from balcony to balcony to keep up community spirits!

Instead of being hampered by the selfish interests of a capitalist elite, workers would have the opportunity to control industry in the interests of the majority.

These firms should cooperate internationally with other similarly nationalised concerns to share research and development, and mutually plan the production and supply of vaccines, medicine and equipment. They could also offer assistance to nations without a well-developed economy and health service where, without such international solidarity, the impact of Covid-19 will be severe.

Such an emergency plan of production offers the best chance of resolving the coronavirus pandemic without it having too severe a global impact. But it would also offer a glimpse of how a global socialist plan of production could start to resolve all the other urgent threats to humanity, not least poverty and climate change.

Of course, capitalism would not allow such a world to be created without resisting socialist change. It will still try and use the distortion of Stalinism in the past in Russia and Eastern Europe to confuse workers with the spectre of supposedly socialist 'dictatorship'.

But it will become ever clearer that it is working people that are needed to keep society afloat - cleaners, delivery drivers, metalworkers, doctors and all the rest of us. However, we can do without the capitalist who just puts the barrier of profit in the way of what needs to be done.

The bitter experience of the greed and incapacity of capitalist leaders to deal with this crisis over the months ahead, and the more general economic crisis that will unfold alongside it, will have a lasting impact on workers' consciousness. Capitalism's failings will be brought home in stark fashion. The need to build a socialist future will become ever more apparent.

Action needed to protect shop workers and access to essential goods



photo Derek Harper

Scott Jones
Usdaw shop workers' union member (personal capacity)

As the coronavirus crisis deepens, shop workers are becoming another 'emergency service' to ensure people can still access food and other items.

Due to demand and shortages of some goods, supermarkets are under immense pressure, with workers on the frontline and shoppers worried about buying essentials.

Where necessary, more workers must be recruited to ensure goods reach stores and homes, and to support overworked staff.

Socialist Party members in Usdaw, the shop workers' trade union, are calling for companies

to agree rationing policies with the union nationally, but also allow leeway for union reps to agree local rationing policies with management where there are potential shortages in specific stores and areas.

There must be protection for workers in stores and delivery jobs:
■ **Workplace health and safety:** discussions should be had around what measures are being taken to protect staff from the spread of coronavirus such as workplace overcrowding, enhanced cleaning procedures and the right to a safe working environment, free of abuse and assault.
■ **Sick pay:** urgent negotiations should take place to ensure there is no economic incentive for staff to come into work ill. And there should be full pay for sickness leave from day one for workers who have to

self-isolate. Workers who self-isolate should be exempt from attendance management procedures.

■ **Staffing levels:** ensure there are no redundancies, lay-offs with loss of pay or imposed changes in working conditions due to supply issues or temporary workplace closures.
Shop workers must not pay the price for the coronavirus-related crisis in retail and can play a key role in the effective delivery and sale of essential goods.

Usdaw and other retail workers' unions should immediately convene democratic meetings of union reps from stores and distribution centres, alongside representatives of local shop customers.

The unions should demand a say in how the sale and distribution of goods is controlled, and consider direct action if the situation worsens.

Workers at Lewisham 'coronavirus' hospital walk out after not being paid

Cleaning, portering and catering staff at Lewisham Hospital, south London - where coronavirus cases have been treated - have walked out after private contractor ISS failed to pay the wages of the hospital workers.

Their union the GMB says: "Infected patients are now being admitted into the hospital, but the cleaners have downed tools because they haven't been paid. Furious workers stormed off the job during a row with the outsourcing company. Now ISS risks leaving wards uncleaned and meals not

being served if they can't settle the low-paid workers' wages."

The Socialist reported recently (see 'Homerton Hospital workers fight for sick pay' at socialistparty.org.uk) that staff at Homerton Hospital, east London, had compelled ISS to agree to pay workers their usual pay if they are forced to self-isolate to help stop the spread of coronavirus. This victory is part of an ongoing campaign to get permanent occupational sick pay.

This shows ISS can be pushed back and workers can win.

ISS staff, members of the PCS union, who are employed to clean tax offices at Bootle and Liverpool are taking 14 days of strike action over poor pay and conditions, and the refusal of ministers at HMRC to take the cleaning contract back

in-house. Workers in Birmingham are taking two days of action. PCS members employed by ISS at BEIS won their fight for better pay, terms and conditions, including the London Living Wage of £10.55 an hour after many months of strike action in 2019.

Bexley bin workers' strike over lack of hand sanitiser

Bin workers in Bexley, south London have had enough. Left with no hand sanitiser, yet having to collect everybody's rubbish amid the coronavirus crisis, they walked out on strike.

The workers are already balloting to strike over low wages and a bullying culture.
One worker said: "Due to a lack

of hand sanitiser in the depot the Bexley bin workers have contracted a bad case of BSE - Big Strike Energy. This is honestly one of the best union meetings I have ever attended.

"Over a 120 in attendance and a unanimous and militant determination to see this strike through."

Coronavirus - company putting us at risk

I work as a site assistant at a household waste and recycling centre. Last week we received an email from our employer saying "due to the coronavirus we should stay one meter away from any member of the public who is sneezing and wash our hands regularly".

My first reaction was they have lost the plot, or buried their heads in the sand. So I sent a number of questions to them. I'm still awaiting for a response, even though the situation has drastically changed.

1) Do we have to unload a car from someone who is sneezing as the contents of the car will be contaminated?
2) If we have to self-isolate, will we be paid?

3) If we self-isolate will this be on our record as a sickness incident? Three sicknesses in a 12-month rolling period leads to special measures, and potentially dismissal. If this is the fourth sickness in a 12 month period, will we be dismissed?
4) Can we stop opening black bags of rubbish to remove recyclables as these contain soiled waste and a lot of tissues, which is a health risk at any time but even more so now?

5) If the council decides to close the sites, will we be paid?

7) If schools are closed and employees have to stay at home to look after them will they be paid or forced to use holiday, unpaid leave or dismissed for not showing up for work?

8) What is the policy on agency staff who may come in when ill because they cannot afford not to or have to wait 6-8 weeks for a Universal Credit claim to be paid?

9) As our gloves are cut proof but not water proof will they provide us with better gloves?
I'm not holding my breath about them answering the points raised or paying us if the sites are closed. The problem with closing our sites is that rubbish will be stored at homes - a potential of health hazard - so our health will be put at risk in order to deal with it.

It is a real worry to me and my colleagues that we could go an extended period, through no fault of our own, without pay, in what is a job that has low pay to begin with.

Dave Moody, Bristol

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Determined St Mungo's homelessness workers strike for three days



St Mungo's strikers 'social distancing' picket line
photo Paul Kershaw

Paul Kershaw
Unite housing workers' branch

Last minute emails to staff calling on them to suspend strike action because of the coronavirus crisis provoked anger. Of course, workers are concerned about the crisis and the lack of a strategy from management for dealing with it, but they are not impressed with the attempt to weaponise the issue.

Senior managers were deployed to watch picket lines, and workers have been threatened about the consequences for them if they strike. Would it not have been better to concentrate on working with the union to ensure safety? Staff complain about a lack of basics, such

as sanitisers and washing facilities, well within management's control, as well as inability to get coronavirus tests for themselves and homeless clients.

Workers are striking because of their boss's decision to go back on an agreement limiting the number of lower-paid (and less well-trained) staff on duty in projects, as well as in opposition to a draconian approach to staff sickness and disciplinarys.

St Mungo's management spent huge sums of the charity's money on legal challenges and a questionable PR firm with which they discussed "eroding" the union. Strikers were pleased to welcome leading councillors from local authorities with big St Mungo's contracts to speak

at strike meetings. They expressed support for the strikers and shock at management's brutal tactics.

Unite the Union housing workers' branch works with a number of user groups, and strikers had support from 'Streets Kitchen', a campaign group offering solidarity and practical support for rough sleepers.

Along with Unite housing workers, they are campaigning for proper access to health facilities and shelter for all rough sleepers, including those with no access to public funds.

They call for full funding for the Mldmay hospital which needs an extra £5 million to run at full capacity for a year using its brand new facilities, and use of empty hotel and office space.

STOP PRESS

■ **Postal workers deliver massive strike vote and offer to become additional 'emergency service'**

Communication Workers Union (CWU) members in Royal Mail beat the anti-union laws for the third time in less than three years, delivering

a massive 94.5% yes vote for strike action, announced on 17 March.

In light of the coronavirus crisis however the CWU has said: "We will not be calling strike action at this point. Subject to Royal Mail prioritising the health and safety of our members, we want postal workers to become an additional emergency service in the UK."

"Postal workers are embedded in every community in the UK. It's time to utilise the company's unrivalled infrastructure and daily reach. With

this in mind we have called for Royal Mail Group to step back from their attacks in the workplace, imposing unagreed change and destroying the very morale now needed, and work with the union to enact our proposal.

"Postal workers stand ready but Royal Mail Group must play their part by agreeing our proposal and ensuring the very best standards of safety and support to its employees." See socialistparty.org.uk for updates

East London bin workers strike to get back unpaid holiday pay

Burning braziers and a mass picket shouting "scab, scab, scab". No, not news footage from the 1970s, this is east London in 2020. Just a mile and a half from the gleaming symbol of capitalism, Canary Wharf, Tower Hamlets refuse workers in Unite are fighting to get back unpaid holiday pay from their contracted-out employer Veolia.

The workers are furious because 150 are owed substantial arrears. Some are claiming over £10,000 is due them. This is as a result of the 2018 employment appeal tribunal ruling that voluntary overtime should be included in holiday pay in addition to standard contractual hours.

Workers voted overwhelmingly in favour of strike action with a 96.5% yes vote in the industrial action ballot with a 70% turnout.

They are angry that a small group have had claims settled, but the company are still holding out. Unite claims that the UK waste management division of Veolia generated revenues of nearly £1 billion in the first six months of 2019.

The refuse contract is actually being brought back in-house in a few weeks' time. While we clearly welcome this, it is scandalous that Tower Hamlets Labour council isn't insisting that this issue be resolved before it happens.

Unison national executive committee member Hugo Pierre visited the picket line, along with National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) chair Rob Williams. Rob spoke to strikers to give solidarity from the NSSN. He called on the council to intervene to ensure that every penny of unpaid holiday pay is returned to the workers. "Never again should services such as these be outsourced to these private companies again."

The workers ended their week of action with the news that the company had approached the union for talks. Understandably, while welcoming this development, they wanted to wait to see if Veolia were really serious about paying up. They have more strikes planned soon if they need to step up the action to get their money.

photo Hugo Pierre



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London tube workers ballot for strike action

Transport workers' union RMT is currently balloting 10,000 tube workers across London Underground for both strike action and action short of a strike. This is after more than a year of negotiations failed to produce an offer on pay that meets their demands. The ballot concludes on the 31 March.

RMT says it is angry and frustrated that over a year of talks

has still resulted in a stalemate, and has called on the London mayor, Blairite Sadiq Khan, and his Transport for London officials, to lift the cap on pay and allow a deal to be done that "fully recognises the enormous efforts of staff to keep London moving against a backdrop of overcrowding, creaking infrastructure and surging levels of violence and assaults".



Budget day



Mansfield photos Socialist Party

Selling the Socialist
Just some of the events where the Socialist newspaper was sold in the past week...

■ Wood Green, north London: No work, no pay

We had one of best campaign stalls for a long time in Wood Green, north London. Campaigning for more funding for the NHS to combat coronavirus, and for workers to receive full pay if they have to self-isolate or cannot go into work, we sold 34 copies of the Socialist.

One carer on a zero-hour contract, told us that because of coronavirus she is no longer able to accompany a disabled person as she normally does, so is not getting paid. Another young person said his mother, also on a zero-hour contract, worked on events in hotels but had no work because of cancellations.

These workers should be entitled to emergency benefits at full pay for the equivalent of the average national working week.

John Dolan

■ Mansfield: It's always us

Our Socialist Party stall was busy, campaigning to save children's speech and language therapy and mental health support for pregnant women from cuts. People say: "It's always us (the working class) that have cuts to our services, we're fed up with it."

We reply: "The only way to stop the cuts, is to build a campaign to fightback. Have you heard of Chatsworth Ward? It was saved because people fought to save it. If you fight you can win, if you don't fight you will always lose."

We sold 17 copies of the Socialist at our campaign stall, at West Notts College, and at a film showing of Sorry We Missed You. Paul Tooley-Okonkwo



Waltham Forest Socialist Party campaigning for rent control and council homes...



...and the successful campaign that saved Walthamstow town square photo Paul Mattsson

Stop gentrification of Lea Bridge

Labour council try to stop us meeting in our own area

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge
Waltham Forest Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is fighting for a plan in the interest of the working class in Waltham Forest - not the profiteer developers, housebuilders and landlords.

We attended a meeting of over 100 people organised by community campaigners and residents in one of the most deprived parts of the borough.

These communities recognise their interests are not the guiding force for the council when it comes to its plan - aka gentrification.

Unfortunately, the meeting was taken over by the council, namely Councillor Simon Miller. There was security on the door.

Instead of a call being put out and everyone who had concerns or interest being able to turn up, you had to go online and register for a ticket in order to have a say in your own area.

People recognised this was undemocratic and took matters into their own hands. Some stood outside offering tickets they'd booked precisely to make sure no one who turned up was turned away.

Instead of the council and the campaign both presenting their positions, and the meeting being allowed to discuss, debate and come to a conclusion, we were broken down into workshops.

Officials from the council sat at each table solemnly writing down what residents raised, but with no commitment to do anything. Issues ranged from air quality, to sewage, to lack of doctors surgeries, and places for young people.

Do we get a vote?

Socialist Party member Nancy Taaffe, chair of Save Our Square, asked that the meeting be allowed to vote on whether they accept the council plan or not. Why else come to a meeting if you can't have any impact?

She had to fight to do this. Councillor Miller was waving his finger in her face in an attempt to intimidate a campaigner who challenged the council - which did not work on Nancy.

Unfortunately, the local campaign organisers failed to recognise that not voting was a missed opportunity, shifting the balance away from their campaign. They postponed the opportunity to register

opposition to a future unknown date.

This Labour council is not concerned with genuine consultation - Save Our Square supporters have learned that only organised resistance can stop them.

We asked what mechanism existed for the community to change, and if necessary reject, this plan. The council would not answer.

They said the Tories and London mayor Sadiq Khan required every council to have a plan. Our question - why don't you do what residents want not what the Tories and the anti-Corbyn mayor want?

The Socialist Party approach was shared by the working-class people in the room. We most certainly do want a plan for these areas that have been neglected for decades. But not this plan.

The trade union council is bringing all the borough campaigns together. Some in the room acknowledged they had voted for Nancy as a socialist candidate in previous council elections, and we were able to start a conversation about the need for working-class fighters to challenge the council at the ballot box as well as through campaigns.

Tory student plot defeated at Cardiff uni



Cardiff Socialist Students supporting the UCU strike

Cardiff Socialist Students

Attempts to scrap the support that Cardiff University Student Union had given the University and College Union (UCU) strike were roundly defeated on 10 March when Tory students couldn't even get enough students to turn up to an 'emergency members' meeting' to debate their motion!

Last November the Student Union annual general meeting voted to support action by the UCU by a sizable margin. Lecturers and other university staff are fighting to

end precarious working conditions at the university. Despite the university claiming that they have no zero-hour contracts, some staff are teaching contracts that guarantee only two hours a year.

The university is also trying to cut pensions, and there are sizable gender and race pay gaps. As well as a workload issue that is destroying the lives of members of staff.

The Tory manoeuvre tried to cancel our democratically-agreed support by calling a vote when many students had gone home rather than cross picket lines trying to overturn the will of the students to stand in solidarity with the staff who

teach us.

But not only did it fail - it backfired!

Socialist Students, 'Cardiff Students Support the Strike' and other groups have been out campaigning for students to continue and step up their support. Lots of people are outraged by the Tory plot, and their passive support for lecturers and other university workers has turned into active support.

Joe Healy, from Cardiff Socialist Students and Students Support the Strike said: "It was pathetic, really. The Tories spent weeks trying to rally people to attend but it was obvious what was going to happen.

"Their petition calling the meeting was deliberately vaguely worded, and students have now realised that they were tricked into supporting a strike stance. Students are happy with the current position: we support our staff in their fight for better conditions for all of us.

"This isn't over, but we're prepared. We said in November and we'll say it again: this is a joint struggle: students and workers together, and we know that."

Nottingham uni occupation in solidarity with strike

The last day of the current University and College Union (UCU) strikes, 13 March, was the last day of the Nottingham University occupation in solidarity with them. The UCU was meeting with university bosses to discuss the strike demands that afternoon.

The current strike ballot has expired. The strikers are determined, weighing up what to do next

depending on the university's response to coronavirus, and the mood of the strikers.

Nottingham University is suspending all face-to-face classes to deal with coronavirus. But many students will not have any form of teaching - except through emails and the selective one or two office hours a week - while departments transition to online teaching.

Students have been supporting the picket lines and leafleting other students to support the lecturers. On the last day, students brought red roses for each of the pickets. A striker said students had provided food, coffee and other support during the strike.

Reece Lawton
Nottingham University
Socialist Students

Socialist Students speaking tour - students and workers unite to fightback

Theo Sharieff
Socialist Students
national organiser

The first week of the Socialist Students national speaking tour has been a massive success - bringing together students, workers and trade union members both on and off campus. The coronavirus crisis threatens to prompt university management to launch a new round of austerity attacks.

The meetings have featured wide-ranging discussion on how students and workers can fight further government cuts and defend students'

right to organise on campus. University campuses are in chaos, as a result of years of Tory driven cuts and marketisation.

Staff face spiralling workload and attacks on pay and pensions. Students face overcrowded lectures and libraries, extortionate rents, cuts and 'centralisation' of student services.

At Southampton University, the University and College Union (UCU) co-hosted one of its weekly teach outs alongside Socialist Students. We discussed building student solidarity with the campus strikes.

Swansea Trade Union Council

sponsored Socialist Students' meeting on campus. The branch secretary of public sector union Unison in Camarthenshire spoke about the importance of joining a trade union and the need to build a united student and worker fightback.

In Leeds, students gathered to hear speakers from Socialist Students the UCU and transport union RMT. The latter faces a huge battle against Tory attacks on the right of rail workers to strike.

These meetings are a very important opportunity for students and workers to discuss the ideas and methods necessary to defeat Tory austerity.



North London Socialist Party campaigning for full NHS funding and full pay for workers off sick - see report on opposite page

Help us fund the Socialist

The coronavirus is triggering a serious capitalist crisis. Millions of people are worrying about the prospects for their health, jobs and security.

It is more important than ever that the Socialist reaches as many workers and young people as possible.

In our pages you can read about workers fighting back, including - in Britain and internationally - those taking strike action to demand proper health and safety measures to combat the virus.

Our workers' charter for the coronavirus outlines a fighting programme for the current situation.

However, the developing crisis

also affects the production of the Socialist and other Socialist Party literature. Paper prices have already jumped up twice in a week! Please donate what you can to maximise how far our socialist ideas can reach in the coming turbulent weeks.

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	£ received	£ target	January to March 2020	Deadline: 1 April 2020
East Midlands	2,8914	1,850		156%
South West	2,770	1,800		154%
Southern & SE	3,238	2,350		138%
Northern	916	750		122%
Wales	2,777	2,300		121%
London	5,224	4,600		114%
North West	1,204	1,150		105%
Yorkshire	2,393	2,500		94%
West Midlands	2,172	2,600		84%
Eastern	910	1,200		76%
Other	5,764	3,850		150%
TOTAL	30,259	25,000		121%

South Africa: 60 years marking the Sharpeville Massacre

The beginnings of revolutionary working-class struggle against a brutal capitalist regime

Andy Bentley
Socialist Party national committee

On 21 March 1960, a peaceful protest took place in the black township of Sharpeville, South Africa, against hated 'pass laws'. In response, police shot dead 69 protesters and wounded 180 others. 60 years later the Sharpeville Massacre is remembered across the world.

The Sharpeville Massacre took place in a South Africa that denied even basic democratic rights and freedoms to those considered as "non-white" under an apartheid (racial segregation and discrimination) system.

White people, who made up just 15% of South Africa's population, stood at the top of society with their power and wealth, and owned 92% of the land.

An exclusively white electorate was represented by the National Party (NP) - which was reelected in 1948 and stayed in power until 1994. The NP passed laws to further entrench long-standing practices of segregation and racial oppression.

Black South Africans (80% of the population) were relegated to the very bottom. Apartheid laws restricted almost every aspect of their lives. The hated pass laws meant that the black population had to have their identity pass at all times. This gave the government strict control over the movement of black South Africans, restricting where they could work and live.

Fighting back

Many peaceful protests took place against the apartheid laws, including the pass laws. In March 1960, the Pan African Congress (PAC, a black-nationalist rival organisation that had split from the non-racial African National Congress - ANC) organised a peaceful protest in the black township of Sharpeville.

The aim was to march to the police station without their passes and ask to be arrested. As they chanted freedom songs and shouted "down with the passes" the police opened fire on the unarmed protesters without warning.

It was estimated that 700 bullets were fired with most protesters shot in the back. This slaughter was not accidental. Extra police had already been brought in, along with armoured vehicles and military jets flying overhead.

The use of brutal force demonstrated the potential military power of the apartheid capitalist regime. But at the same time it revealed the regime's fear of a revolutionary



A depiction of the aftermath of the Sharpeville shootings
photo and painting Godfrey Rubens/CC

uprising of the black South African working class.

Just days later, on 30 March, approximately 30,000 protesters marched in Cape Town to protest the shootings. South Africa's government became increasingly isolated internationally, but refused to abandon its policies of apartheid and racial discrimination.

A state of emergency was declared with around 2,000 people detained. On 8 April, both the ANC and PAC were banned and it became illegal to be a member of these organisations.



Nelson Mandela in later life

ANC leader Nelson Mandela, and others, concluded that an armed struggle (both the PAC and ANC formed military wings) was necessary to defeat apartheid.

Forerunners of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI - the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated) warned that an underground military struggle, although heroic, would not bring down a brutal capitalist apartheid government armed to the teeth.

In fact, it was the mass revolutionary uprising of black youth in the 1980s (preceded by the bloody Soweto school student uprising in 1976), and widespread industrial strike struggles - with the demand for socialism on their banners - that ultimately caused the fall of apartheid in the early 1990s, and the release of Nelson Mandela after 27 years in prison.

In reality, the white-dominated apartheid state was forced to carry out 'reforms from above' to prevent 'revolution from below'.

But the lack of an organised mass revolutionary socialist party based in the working class, allowed capitalism to continue, despite the fall of apartheid and the ANC taking power.

Instead, a Tripartite Alliance was formed in 1990 by the leaders of the ANC, South African Communist

Party and the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). The Alliance effectively held back the revolution and allowed capitalism to survive, post-apartheid.

The ANC had adopted the Freedom Charter in the 1950s, under pressure from the working class for a revolutionary change in society. The charter included nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy.

In the 1980s, the two million-strong Cosatu adopted the Freedom Charter under the banner of "Socialism means Freedom" and led a series of general strikes, which were a key factor in the collapse of apartheid.

However, when in power the ANC leaders, lacking a socialist alternative, became enthusiastically pro-capitalist. This was revealed through an aggressive programme of mass privatisations of public services such as electricity and water.

In the ANC's first five years of power 500,000 jobs disappeared in construction, engineering, textiles, mining and the public sector.

The radical features of the Freedom Charter, like nationalisation, were forgotten. Inevitably this led to a drastic fall in membership and rank-and-file activity, and an influx of careerists.

Many former ANC militants simply enriched themselves, like Cyril

Ramaphosa, the current president of South Africa. This former miners' union leader became a multimillionaire, multiple property owner, serving on the board of Lonmin, owners of the Marikana mine site (see below).

Sharpeville to Marikana

Under apartheid the police and armed forces were used to intimidate and gun down workers and youth taking protest action, as seen in Sharpeville and Soweto. Unfortunately for the black working class, the same methods were adopted by the ANC government, with its black capitalist elite in control.

In 2012, between 10 August and 20 September, 47 striking platinum miners were gunned down in Marikana, with another 78 injured. Like Sharpeville, most were shot in the back as they were running away.

Those black workers slaughtered at Sharpeville, Marikana, and many others in between, will always be remembered. The same brutal methods used under apartheid and the ANC regime to slaughter, if necessary, workers fighting for a decent future demonstrate in action the complete capitulation of the ANC leadership to capitalism.

Where next?

Capitalist 'experts' across the globe differ on how to solve the current world economic crisis but are in total agreement that capitalism is the god of profit and must remain at any cost.

Capitalism exists to make the privileged few even wealthier at the expense of the blood, sweat and tears of working-class people.

The task of abolishing capitalism and building a democratic socialist future can only be carried out by the mass of the working class, organised for struggle and armed with a socialist programme.

This is what the Marxist Workers Party - CWI in South Africa - is committed to building. Only this could guarantee no more Sharpevilles or Marikanas.

■ **Further reading:**
'The Soweto Uprising 1976' in Issue 101 (2006) of Socialism Today, the journal of the Socialist Party
See also: 'South Africa: Marikana massacre ignites the mass movement' Issue 162 (2012)

Both articles by Weizmann Hamilton (CWI, South Africa) and available online at socialismtoday.org

French local elections CWI candidate elected



photo James Ivens

Shortened statement from Gauche Révolutionnaire (CWI, France)

On 15 March, Leïla Messaoudi of Gauche Révolutionnaire (GR, the Socialist Party's sister organisation in France) was elected to the local council of Petit-Quevilly in the city of Rouen, where she has lived for 14 years and worked for 23 years. Leïla was elected with 338 votes (8.4% of the votes cast, on a low 32% turnout).

Controversially, the first round of local elections was held on the Sunday immediately following president Macron's and the French government's decree severely restricting the movements of the public, and closures of shops, businesses and public amenities.

Unsurprisingly, the overall turnout was historically low but this did not stop Macron's party being hammered in the polls. The second round scheduled for 22 March has been postponed until 21 June.

The electoral list 'Décidons (Let's decide) Petit-Quevilly', supported by France Insoumise ("France unbowed" - the party led by former left presidential candidate and current deputy in the National Assembly Jean-Luc Mélenchon) gathered 35 people and was created thanks to a campaign led by members of the local group of France Insoumise - that GR has been helping build for three years.

The list was created with trade unionists, workers and community activists, who supported and joined a campaign genuinely at the service of the rights of workers and ordinary people.

The campaign opposes, on a local scale, the consequences of President Macron's anti-working class policies. But it is also opposes those of the pro-capitalist (misnamed) 'Parti Socialiste' (Socialist Party, PS) majority which runs the Rouen area, and has been pushing similar

policies for 30 years.

Closure of public services like some public hospital services, abandoned and substandard social housing, destruction of green space for the profits of capitalist multinationals in the building industry... all these have had a great impact on the daily lives of the workers.

The health scandal - and the scandalous policies of the government and local elected officials after the fire at the Lubrizol chemical plant in Rouen last September - was one of the topics of the campaign.

Nationalisation under the control of the population and workers in dangerous factories was one of the demands of the list.

The list carried out a dynamic door-to-door campaign, participated in the latest day of strikes against the government's pensions attacks, and did a whole weekend of protests and actions on 7 and 8 March.

In the previous elections in 2014, the workers and the population had no other choice than a PS vote against the far-right National Front (FN). This time, thanks to our presence, the FN remained second but did not campaign and lost 10%, going from six to four seats.

This allowed the PS-Communist Party-Green list to be elected with a majority in the first round.

But now, a militant collective has been born in the city, ready to organise local struggles for the right to decent housing, for the cleaning-up of polluted areas, and for the reinstatement of public services that have been closed down or privatised in recent years.

Around "Décidons Petit-Quevilly", local resistance and solidarity are being organised in the face of all austerity policies, whether they come from Macron, or the PS majority. It also gives impetus to all those who understand the need for a mass political force against the capitalists, against the parties that serve them and against Macron.



The BBC TV series is weak, politically, but it still manages to invoke the wrath of the right-wing establishment media

TV and book: Noughts and Crosses

Ian Pattison gives the BBC TV series the thumbs down but recommends the original book

Noughts and Crosses is a world turned upside down. Hundreds of years ago Aprica (Africa) invaded Albion (Britain and Ireland).

Today in Albion, a black minority elite rule over the majority white population. They employ segregation, discrimination, police brutality and poverty. The 'noughts' are white people and the 'crosses' black.

Reviews in the Daily Mail and Sun said the show's anti-racist message is out of date and exaggerated. They're wrong. It's no surprise these right-wing establishment mouthpieces don't understand how to use larger-than-life alternative history to make a political point.

In reality, black people in Britain are twice as likely to be in poverty than white people. And 40 times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police.

In the TV series, one white character has been stopped by the police 300 times.

In the real world, the ruling class

and the working class are made up of different races. The former uses racism and other tools to keep the latter divided. Some of those nuances exist in Noughts and Crosses.

For example, a white dock worker asks for time off for a colleague from his white boss. He appeals for solidarity based on the colour of their skin, "you're one of us."

"One of us?!", the boss says, "which one of us has two cars, which one of us has a conservatory, I'm a businessman." So there are rich whites in Albion.

But no poor black people. Reversed, that's not how society is set up.

Comparison

Noughts and Crosses was originally a book. I read it when I was younger.

There are a few ways the plot benefits from a TV adaptation. It is interesting to see London dominated by African architecture and clothes. The white characters that are deferential to the ruling

class wear more African clothes.

But on TV, the magic and politics of the novel is lost.

In the book, initially you don't know what the characters look like. Only after a rant from a racist character, does the premise become clear. That device is missing in the adaptation.

The teenage protagonists are replaced with young adults. They're lovers from different races, their relationship is banned.

The consequence? A naive couple who grow up to despise the racism in society are replaced by stupid adults, wilfully ignorant of the prejudices around them.

The book plays a positive role. It makes you think society can change, that's there's a political solution to ending racism. But the TV incarnation replaces that with a random hope for love. The political conclusion is dropped.

All this serves to dampen and dilute what could be a useful tool to tell a vital message.

Constituent assembly demand and a revolutionary programme

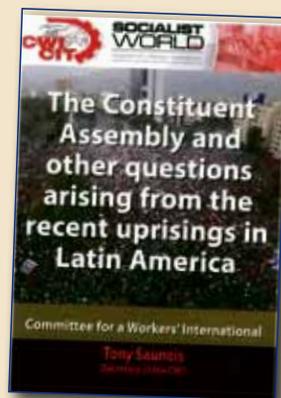
In the recent mass movements against austerity and the capitalist establishment in Chile, the demand for a constituent assembly has arisen. This demand has also surfaced in similar movements worldwide.

What is a constituent assembly and what role can it play in a struggle to transform society?

Tony Saunois, secretary of the CWI, who was in Chile last year, answers these questions.

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