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the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**

WORKERS' SAFETY BEFORE BOSSES' PROFITS

- PPE and testing for all
- No return to work unless safety can be guaranteed
- Workers' and trade union control of workplace safety
- Socialist planning not capitalist market chaos



Rob Williams
Socialist Party industrial organiser

In the space of one week, the trade union movement is marking two of its most important annual days - International Workers' Memorial Day on 28 April, and May Day on 1 May. Coming as they do during the coronavirus pandemic, they are particularly poignant and relevant.

Tragically, too many workers have died already. Over 120 workers in the NHS and the social care sector have died: killed in many cases by a scandalous lack of PPE, the result of years of austerity and privatisation carried out by successive Tory and New Labour governments.

All frontline and essential workers must have the PPE they need to do their work as safely as possible. They should not be left to individually decide whether or not it is safe to work, but have the collective support of their union behind them.

And now this government, and their friends in big business, are trying to build momentum to push other 'non-essential' workers back to work.

But we have no confidence that the bosses and their political representatives can be trusted with our safety. Profit is their number one priority - in normal times and during emergencies such as this.

Look at the construction companies forcing workers back to the sites. Building luxury apartments isn't 'essential work'!

We have to decide when it's safe to return to work. We need workers' and trade union control over workplace safety. If a workplace isn't safe, it must be closed, and workers sent home on full pay until it is.

If management tell workers that they want us to come back to work, we must only return when we and our unions are convinced it is safe to do so.

A union and workers' risk assessment must be carried out. There must be adequate PPE available; sufficient hand sanitisers and wash-room facilities; thorough workplace cleaning carried out on a regular basis; a workplace layout and staff capacity that allows for safe social distancing; regular testing; and any other measures considered necessary to guarantee workers' safety.

If management doesn't accept these

demands, workers must discuss what to do next, including deciding collectively to refuse to work in an unsafe workplace. Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 provides for the protection of workers if they decide not to work in an unsafe environment.

But we also know that Tory anti-union laws can be used against us. So the best protection, as always, is for workers and their unions to act together. This is what postal workers, fire-fighters and now Jobcentre staff have done to defend their safety.

Workers have won historic victories on the back of collective struggle. Our pay, pensions and conditions, and the very right to be organised in a trade union, were secured as a result of our struggles and those of workers who came before us.

May Day this year must be a platform to send out a clear message: collective workers' and trade union action is our life-saver.

■ See also pages 4, 5 and 7



International Workers' Day 2020:

16 page May Day greetings pull out
130 years of May Day in Britain
May Day 2020 protests

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

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

Dispatches from the front: PPE chaos goes on

Furious about deceit over expired PPE

I just found out that the 'FFP3' mask I've been wearing expired in 2012. The other boxes supposedly expired in May 2019. They actually expired in 2016, but stickers have been put over that with 2019. I am furious.

An NHS nurse

Major shortage of gowns as supply chaos continues

Although the South West has not been under the same pressure regarding Covid-19, there is still a crisis in provision of PPE. Most trusts only plan three or four days in advance, reflecting both the lack of equipment and the fragmented distribution system.

In particular, there is a major shortage of protective gowns, a situation that could have serious consequences for the safety of staff. It's clear that the chaotic response to this

crisis, and the years of underinvestment in the NHS, combined with privatisation, have led to the unnecessary deaths of many health workers.

An NHS porter

Health staff not to blame for spread of Covid-19

There is much talk in NHS trusts about patients catching Covid in hospital, and how staff must keep up social distancing, handwashing and so on. The implication is that it's staff's fault it's spreading!

This is a real kick in the teeth for staff, but hospital authorities are terrified they are going to get sued at the end of this. We must put the blame where it lies.

Our local trust has made Herculean efforts to make sure we have the right kit and we are safe, repeatedly sending out emails and updates on keeping staff safe, and not doing procedures without full PPE.

Capitalism is only interested in providing healthcare so the bosses have a workforce able to work to produce a profit. The Tories are their representatives in government - they aren't 'protecting' the NHS, they are trying to protect themselves against revolution.

That's why they allowed the NHS in the first place after World War Two. Workers were angry and wanted change. It's going to be the same after the pandemic subsides.

An NHS health professional

Shifting advice on PPE and pressure to return to work

In our trust we've seen changes in advice on when to use gowns. The other week, the staff were told to wear them for certain procedures, but now all of a sudden gowns are not required.

A lot of staff just feel they have to go along with it. Reps have told staff

not to carry out examinations if they don't feel safe. Some staff are buying their own gowns.

Other staff, in the private sector, having been sent home for 12 weeks, are having telephone occupational health risk assessments and being asked to return to work. It is often difficult to socially distance in a hospital environment, and having been initially risk-assessed as being vulnerable, the assessment suddenly changes.

Understandably, these members of staff are very worried. They have the 'choice' of taking remaining holiday, or unpaid leave, or returning to work in a precarious work situation.

In Brighton, staff have plenty of PPE and not so many cases. But staff work 12.5-hour shifts with three breaks of 30 mins. It's exhausting and uncomfortable. Wearing the full PPE, you can't have a drink of water for those hours in the get-up.

An NHS imaging worker

Private firm causes weeks of delay to free school meal vouchers: bring it back in-house!

Lindsey Morgan

Leicester Socialist Party



photo Peter O'Connor/C

I rely on free school meal vouchers to feed my daughter. They were due Monday 20 April and didn't arrive until that Thursday.

The Department for Education has a national scheme, using the global private company Edenred, which is supposed to supply free school meal vouchers to low-income families during the coronavirus crisis to feed our children. Some 1.3 million children are entitled to these vouchers.

Instead, some families are having to wait weeks before they get a code emailed to them. Then they have to wait up to an hour online to redeem it on the Edenred website. Only then will they be sent a voucher - up to 24 hours later.

Teachers up and down the country have been contacted by exasperated parents, many of whom have gone without food themselves, to find out why they haven't been emailed their e-codes. Teachers trying to chase this up with Edenred have faced a website plagued

with technical issues and a helpline which puts them on lengthy holds.

My own wait for vouchers was infuriating, but fortunately my home was stocked with enough food for four days. Others have faced waits of over a month, with a close family friend not receiving vouchers for two primary school-aged children until four weeks after they were due.

They were advised by their children's school that there wasn't any more they could do, and it was an issue with Edenred. Some teachers

were only able to access the Edenred website after staying up till gone one in the morning when the site had less traffic.

As many as 800,000 pupils are waiting on at least one weekly voucher, according to industry magazine Schools Week. With the codes issued weekly, parents are having to face this hassle every single week.

It means trekking children to the supermarket each week, because the codes can't be used for online shopping. This also means lugging it back on the bus, with kids, for many

low-income families without a car.

The scheme is not fit for purpose. It has resulted in hunger and further deprivation for some of the most vulnerable. The foodbanks are stretched to breaking point, with families unable to access enough food through these too.

Yet again a private company, meant to be providing a service for vulnerable people, has failed to do its job - while still getting a handsome government contract payout. This service should be taken out of the hands of this parasitical company.

The government should instead arrange for local authorities to make sure children get the food they need. In fact, councils should step in and fill the gap immediately, using reserves and borrowing powers, and bill the government.

The school meals service should no longer be run by private companies, now or after the Covid-19 crisis. It must be brought back in-house, into local public ownership, and under the democratic control of workers and service users. Enough with private companies taking our money and screwing things up!

"We are guided by the science in everything we do" - Boris Johnson

... But who guides the science?

Correction

■ In the print edition of the article 'A revolutionary life - and the relevance of Lenin's ideas to today's working-class struggles' in issue 1083, there was an editorial error.

The sentence beginning "All of these movements, which unlike 1917 did

not succeed in overthrowing capitalism", which was a reference to a series of post-war revolutionary movements, should have read: "All of these movements, which unlike 1917 did not succeed in establishing genuine socialism". Our apologies to our readers and the author, Nick Chaffey.

May Day 2020: join the protests - wear red, bring flags and banners

This issue of the Socialist covers International Workers' Day, Friday 1 May 2020. May Day is always an important event in the calendar of the workers' movement. It is doubly so this year, as capitalism descends into Covid chaos and workers battle for safe conditions and full income.

The Socialist is backing the campaign launched by trade unionists

in Nipsa, Northern Ireland's largest union, to demonstrate workers' solidarity in struggle this May Day.

Alongside the National Shop Stewards Network (see p5), we are suggesting to workers still going in that they make red flags and bring trade union banners to work on Friday 1 May. Whether or not you can do that - and even if you're sitting at home - you can wear red. Don't for-

get to share photos on social media.

Red is the traditional colour of the international workers' and socialist movement, after France's 1848 Revolution and later the Paris Commune adopted it. The colour represents the blood of those killed in the struggles for workers' rights and socialism - poignant today as thousands die for want of PPE and testing during the pandemic.

Another record-breaking year for May Day greetings

As is traditional, the Socialist also carries May Day greetings from throughout the workers' movement in this issue.

Alongside messages from sister organisations and supporters around the world, we are printing over 100 expressions of solidarity from workers, trade

union branches and others in England and Wales. And it's another record-breaker! We set a financial record in 2019, with £8,200 raised to support the Socialist and its ideas. We are proud to report over £8,900 raised in 2020 - under far more difficult conditions.

May Day's roots in the 19th century were the united global struggle for an eight-hour day. Today, workers around the world are united in fighting for PPE, testing, full income and fully funded healthcare.
See our 16-page pull-out!

International May Day rally and reports from the CWI

This year, Socialist Party Scotland is hosting an online May Day international rally. Hear speakers from around the world in the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), the international organisation the Socialist Party is affiliated to.

Tune in on Facebook from 6 to 8pm on Friday 1 May. Visit facebook.com/SocialistPartyScotland or facebook.com/CWISocialistParty to watch.

The CWI is also posting regular updates from our sections around the world. These articles analyse the failings of capitalism, exposed by the coronavirus pandemic.

They report on working-class struggles to secure safe working conditions, health coverage and food security. And they show how CWI sections are advancing socialist programmes to deal both with this immediate crisis and a post-coronavirus world. See socialistworld.net.

Coronavirus crisis finance appeal

£19,828 raised - 79% of target



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Please indicate your donation is for the 'coronavirus appeal'

better health and safety measures, against layoffs, for adequate staffing levels, etc.

Our 'fighting coronavirus workers' charter' (see p12) outlines a programme to combat the virus and protect workers' living conditions.

When the health crisis subsides, we must be ready for the stormy events ahead and the need to arm workers' movements with a socialist programme - one which puts the health and needs of humanity before the profits of a few.

Inevitably, during the crisis we have not been able to sell the Socialist and raise funds in the ways we normally would. We therefore urgently appeal to all our viewers to donate to our special coronavirus appeal.

£30 raised for the Socialist during Thursday claps

On a recent night of morale-boosting clapping for key workers I decided it was time to inject a sorely needed dose of political reality.

North Shields is a community familiar with the Socialist Party, and associates us with a commitment to the NHS through relentless campaigning to save North Tyneside walk-in centres. So it

came as no surprise that, in the moments leading up to the clapping, residents and visitors to our street snapped up the Socialist Party's Workers' Charter.

Then, unsolicited, the donations began to pour in. Over £30 was contributed within a matter of minutes.

It isn't enough to carry on with the display without emphasising that we refuse



WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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



Our demands include...

PUBLIC SERVICES

■ No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.

■ No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.

■ Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.

■ Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!

■ A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors! ■ Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

WORK AND INCOME

■ Trade union struggle for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £12 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage of at least £15. 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.

■ Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.

■ A 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

ENVIRONMENT

■ Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and un-recycled waste.

■ Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.

■ A democratically planned, low-fare, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

RIGHTS

■ Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.

■ Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.

■ Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.

■ For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.

■ For the right to vote at 16.

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

■ No to imperialist wars and occupations.

■ Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.

■ A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.

■ No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!

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Socialist Party members in PCS

On 24 April, civil servants at Paisley Jobcentre held an outdoors union meeting following an outbreak of Covid-19 in their office.

More than twenty civil servants, whose numbers have already been drastically reduced by the need for colleagues with underlying health conditions to stay home, met and voted to agree that their office was not safe to work in.

Among their concerns was the lack of information provided about the coronavirus outbreak, the failure of social distancing in the office, the inability of anyone in a position of authority to explain exactly what kind of cleaning had been carried out once the outbreak had been identified, and the generally poor standard of cleaning observed.

Privatised

Cleaning in the Department for Work and Pensions has been privatised to corporate giant Interserve, which has millions of pounds worth of public sector contracts - including building the NHS Nightingale Hospital in Birmingham. Yet its staff are poorly paid and are rarely allocated sufficient hours to clean a building.

At Paisley, Jobcentre staff reported that cleaners regularly have to borrow appropriate cleaning materials.

Reps from the PCS trade union, which represents thousands of civil servants and contracted-out staff, attended the site to support members and to lead the meeting.

After the vote that the site was not safe, members stayed out of the building for several hours while they waited for the union's national negotiators to get a deal out of senior managers.

National managers, however, were unwilling to budge. They insisted, despite the concerns raised by staff at the site, and by health and safety reps about the quality of any cleaning, that a thorough clean had been conducted and that staff should return to work.

A compromise was eventually reached that allowed staff to go home - for which they applauded the work of the union.



A previous PCS protest in Scotland against pay freezes photo Socialist Party Scotland

Postal jobs at risk

As we go to press, the postal executive of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) is meeting following Royal Mail's announcement that letters will only be delivered Monday to Friday, not Saturday. Parcels and packets will be delivered only on Saturdays.

Royal Mail says this is temporary because of the pandemic, but the danger is that if it doesn't revert to normal afterwards, 27,000 jobs could be at risk. See socialistparty.org.uk and the next issue of the Socialist for more.

Civil servants in Paisley protest after Covid outbreak

Importantly, reps and members attending the outdoors meeting were able to keep socially distant. Police visited the protest and agreed that it should carry on.

This undermines the view of some in the union that face-to-face activities should not be carried out during the pandemic.

Without face-to-face work, with

suitable safeguards, staff would simply have gone into what they considered to be an unsafe office.

Multiple civil service offices are reporting the same concerns. One of the key elements is that suitable social distancing reduces the number of people an office can hold.

Reports suggest this is being glossed over, and that staff are

being told that where they are sitting is safe and socially distant, even when it isn't. This reinforces the need for a roadmap that would see the maximum number of civil servants working from home.

Socialist Party members in PCS participate in the Broad Left Network, a group of activists aimed at rebuilding the union's democracy

and forging serious campaigns that can win for members.

The pressure exerted by Broad Left Network supporters was absolutely crucial to this initial, local victory; they had confidence in members to act and to win. This victory will be followed up by inspections designed to keep staff safe.

Irish police use Covid-19 emergency powers to disperse Dublin shop workers' protest

Ciarán McKenna
Committee for a Workers' International Ireland

In the main, there is support among the working class for the lockdown measures in Ireland. Workers recognise the imperative of defeating Covid-19, and that this will often necessitate severe constraints on daily life.

Social distancing is now an accepted fact of life for hundreds of millions of working people across the world.

In some countries, the lockdown has brought increased powers to police forces to enforce compliance.

In France, Italy and Spain, thousands have been fined for breaching the respective lockdowns in these countries.

Marxists do not support increased repressive powers for the capitalist state. The vast majority of people will follow sensible health advice without the state needing to acquire wide-ranging and extensive coercive powers.

Regardless of the seemingly reasonable grounds for introducing them, like presently to stop the spread of Covid-19, these powers can always be used to suppress workers and trade unions. We oppose the erosion of the right of workers to organise, including the

democratic functioning of trade unions. An example of an attack on those rights was seen in Dublin on 21 April.

The high street shop chain Debenhams laid off its entire workforce in Ireland during March. Instead of paying redundancy at six-weeks' pay for each year of service, Debenhams expected the Irish government to pay statutory redundancy, which is a paltry two-weeks' pay per year of service. Many of the workers have decades of service with Debenhams and its predecessor Roches Stores.

The workers organised a small protest outside Debenhams stores across Ireland. These protests were

respectful of the social-distancing requirements.

Incredibly, in Dublin the Gardaí (Irish police) saw fit to use their emergency powers to disperse the Debenhams workers. The Gardaí said that the workers' travel to the protest was not "necessary" under the terms of the Covid-19 legislation.

Meanwhile, a completely vexatious High Court hearing by two far-right politicians, taking place not a thousand metres away from the Debenhams protest, saw over a hundred of their supporters congregating, and drew no police intervention.

The Covid-19 crisis is being used

by the capitalist class to lay off workers and shut down businesses. Workers are fully within their rights to mobilise to defend themselves.

As the Debenhams workers' have shown, protests can be made that observe the necessary social distancing, while still highlighting workers' concerns.

The trade union movement must show bosses and the Irish government that there will be no tolerance of the use of repressive laws to stop workers defending their jobs and livelihoods.

What happened in Dublin serves as a warning to the whole labour movement, both in Ireland and internationally.

Workers fighting to defend safety and livelihoods

NSSN national meeting a huge success

Over 200 members and reps from many different trade unions came together on Zoom on Sunday 26 April to discuss the impact of the coronavirus crisis on workers. Organised by the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), the meeting highlighted how workers are organising to defend safety and livelihoods during the corona crisis.

Rob Williams, NSSN national chair, opened by stating: "Our attitude is that workers should have no dilution of their pay and conditions, they should have full pay if they are unable to work. Workers cannot pay the price for this pandemic further down the road." "Workers must have control of workplace safety."

Lack of PPE

The lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was consistently raised in the meeting. Over 120 health and social care workers have died since this crisis began, and also many transport workers. Health worker Roger Davey, a member of Unison union, described how the fragmentation of the NHS had resulted in an inability to plan.

Shaun from Reel News reported that to mark International Workers' Memorial Day on 28 April, health workers at St. Thomas and Guy's Hospital had agreed to go beyond the one-minute silence called by unions and stay out for three minutes in a socially distanced rally, calling for PPE for all key workers, and for all non-essential work to be shut down for the day.

Moe, a London bus driver and member of the Unite union, highlighted that bus driver deaths were completely avoidable. Thanks to a rank-and-file campaign, which Moe was instrumental in organis-

'Remember the dead and fight for the living' - protests for International Workers' Memorial Day in Southampton hospital...



ing, workers won measures to seal off the front doors and cut the risk of infection to bus drivers. As a result, travel on London buses is now largely free.

Many reported that workers were organising walkouts using section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996. Mick Joyce, shop steward in the engineering industry, and currently running for the Unite executive committee, said: "We stood our guys down for two days, and on the third day we had our company come

crying to us and say 'you're right it is unsafe.' It emboldened our members having the company come to us." "We have a lot of engineers furloughed and they're on 100% pay."

Mick explained how workers had drawn up a seven-point safety assessment plan to put to management, starting from when workers' left home to go to work. If workers are in work, there should be daily reports on safety to the health and management team.

Martin Powell-Davies of the Na-



...and the NSSN meeting

day week with five days' pay and concessions on safety; workers at Newham waste services obtaining £24-a-day hazard pay. The union didn't just quote section 44 and leave it up to members, said Kas, but made the union position clear.

Bea, a University and College Union (UCU) activist in Southampton, described how, as a zero-hour contract worker, she had to fight "tooth and nail" for herself and other precarious university staff to be guaranteed payment of their wages until the end of the academic year.

Capitalists profit

Members of Usdaw, the retail and distribution union, reported that retail bosses were disregarding social-distancing measures to maximise sales which had cost members' lives. Supermarkets saw an extra £2 billion in sales in March alone. Tesco saved £585 million due to business rates relief. The money is there to pay supermarket workers a wage that reflects their status as key workers, which can be won if fought for by the membership.

This May Day the NSSN will be supporting the campaign to wave red flags and wear red to celebrate International Workers' Day. Patrick Mulholland from the Nipsa public service union in Northern Ireland explained how the campaign was initiated there after the Irish Trade Union Congress cancelled the normal May Day celebrations. He also spoke about how the Gardaí (Irish police) were used against Debenhams' workers protesting, observing social distancing, against redundancies in the south of Ireland (see page 4).

Closing the meeting Rob Williams emphasised the need for collective action, concluding that "the time to fight is now."

Woolwich ferry - workers secure 100% furlough agreement

Unite union member

Unite union has negotiated a 100% furlough agreement with Briggs Marine, the contractor who currently runs the Woolwich Ferry. The health emergency has meant a drastically reduced service.

This comes at the same time as

the alarm being raised by London Mayor Sadiq Khan regarding the financial position of the client Transport for London (TfL). However, even before the health emergency, TfL faced similar financial pressures to those faced by local authorities as a result of reduced funding from central government.

This calls for the same response as that required by local authorities - a

campaign, including trade unions and service users demanding that central government provides the funds to run services.

Unite members on the ferry have a fighting tradition - including strike action to protect the safety of workers, to oppose sexual harassment, to oppose racism, and to demand decent pay and conditions.

Lately campaigns were accompanied by a demand for the service to be taken back in-house which has now been agreed. The removal from the system of the need to make profit is the single best way to achieve savings.

This fighting tradition will have put the work force in the best possible position to secure a 100% furlough agreement.

ISS workers' pay victory

Cleaning staff at Lewisham Hospital who have taken strike action over unpaid wages have won.

Workers first downed tools in February after private contractor ISS failed to pay numerous staff members due to an "administrative error".

ISS has now made the wage payments in full - with backpay - which brings the cleaners' hourly rate of pay up to £10.55 an hour.

SHOULD THE SOCIALIST STILL BE PRODUCED DURING THE CORONA CRISIS?

Debate with Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the PCS civil servants' union

On 7 April Mark Serwotka wrote to Hannah Sell, general secretary of the Socialist Party, asking for an assurance that the Socialist would not be sold outside PCS-organised workplaces during the coronavirus emergency.

Hannah Sell replied, emphasising how seriously the Socialist Party takes complying with social-distancing measures. She also raised points about the important role of the Socialist during the crisis and the need for the workers' movement to continue to organise independently in defence of workers' interests.

We are publishing the correspondence, as it raises important issues for the whole workers' movement.

As has been reported in the Socialist, more than five million workers are still in the workplace. They are often facing dangerous working conditions, including in the civil service.

More and more workers have had to get organised to fight for proper PPE and social-distancing measures. At the same time, millions have been laid off or suffered income cuts.

The trade unions must not rely on the Tory government or big business - whose priority is

defence of the capitalist system - to defend the health and well-being of the working-class majority.

The Socialist, in our Workers' Charter (see 'Coronavirus: A Workers' Charter' at socialistparty.org.uk), and elsewhere, has consistently outlined a programme which, if it was taken up by the trade union leaders, would lay the basis for an effective struggle in workers' interests.

The Socialist also carries reports from those struggles which are taking place, often written by the workers' who are leading them. It is vital we continue to do so. If you agree, please contribute to our special coronavirus appeal (see p2).

7 April 2020

Dear Ms Sell

I have been contacted by PCS reps in Jubilee House in Stratford, London, a DWP and HMRC workplace, to express their dismay that on 31 March, in the midst of the coronavirus emergency, your organisation set up a stall by the entrance to the building and your members sold the Socialist newspaper and distributed leaflets to staff by hand.

The matter has been discussed by the PCS Senior Officers Committee. It was agreed that the Socialist Party's dangerous disregard for our members and their families' health and safety is disgraceful and unacceptable. It has not only increased the risk posed by the virus to PCS members at this terrible, tragic time, but also potentially exacerbated the pressure on NHS staff.

Setting up a stall, paper selling and leafleting are extremely hazardous contraventions of the government's guidelines on social distancing and restricting activity outside the home to essential matters in order to suppress the transmission of the virus. PCS is highly critical of the inadequate way the government has dealt with this crisis and of the measures taken by the Civil Service as an employer to safeguard its staff. We are engaged in hard negotiations with the Cabinet Office on a daily basis to try to ensure protection for our members. Nevertheless, the government's guidelines must be followed as the least that can be done to safeguard our communities. It's not enough, but it will save lives in this situation. Whatever your organisation's political stance towards the government, it is utterly irresponsible that your members should flaunt those guidelines.

On behalf of the PCS Senior Officers Committee and the PCS reps in Jubilee House, I am writing to demand that you provide an assurance that this behaviour will not be repeated.

Yours sincerely,
Mark Serwotka



The Socialist Party stall outside Jubilee House, Stratford, east London on 30 March 2020. It clearly shows the table at some distance from the office entrance opposite

9 April 2020

Dear Mark,

I am writing in response to your letter of 7 April 2020 which complains about a Socialist Party stall outside Jubilee House, Stratford, London, a DWP and HMRC workplace, which took place on Monday 30 March, 2020. The letter also raises broader points about the role of labour and trade union activists during these difficult times.

The Socialist Party takes the health and safety of all workers very seriously, and the stall you refer to strictly complied with the government's social-distancing guidelines, as do all Socialist Party actions. As you know, the government's guidelines allow the buying and selling of newspapers.

Copies of the Socialist newspaper and of our Coronavirus Workers' Charter were placed on a table which was more than two metres from both the entrance to the workplace and the Socialist Party members present. This meant that workers were free to go into work and, if they chose, take Socialist Party material, while maintaining social distancing at all times.

The Socialist Party members present also wore protective gloves. Those taking material were no more endangered than people buying newspapers from those newsagents, kiosks and shops that are properly carrying out social-distancing measures.

It is also pertinent that both the Jubilee House security staff, and police officers who were questioning travellers entering the nearby Stratford interchange station, witnessed the stall, and made no complaint whatsoever. More importantly, it received a friendly response from Jubilee House workers, with no complaints made at the time. If, however, PCS reps had concerns we are of course very happy to discuss those with them.

But your complaint seems to be of a broader character than just the issue of compliance with social-distancing measures. The Socialist, unlike the capitalist press, plays an important role in aiding workers who are fighting to defend themselves during this difficult time. The issue available at the stall you refer to included reports on the RMT's fight for safety for tube workers, plus reports of hospital cleaners, supermarket workers, care workers and food distribution workers, all fighting for improved health and safety.

These reports of workers on the frontline fighting back, which are not generally found in the pages of the capitalist press, would have been of interest to civil servants, who told us they were facing unsafe conditions. We hope that you are not suggesting that the socialist press should face greater restrictions than those placed on media that do not have the interests of workers at their heart.

This links to a wider point about the role of the workers' movement during the pandemic. You rightly point to the "inadequate way the government has dealt with this crisis". One consequence of this, is that millions of workers, including 29% of civil servants, are continuing to have to travel outside of their homes to work, often facing unsafe conditions when they arrive. In our view, the workers' movement has a vital role to play in fighting to ensure workers' safety, including organising walkouts when necessary.

But we do not draw the conclusion from this, as you put it in your recent video message on PCS discussions with the government, that trade unions should "park" their members' demands until the corona crisis is over. Such an approach is predicated on the mistaken assumption that the government is acting in the interests of society as a whole during this time of crisis.

As PCS members know all too well, successive Tory governments have systematically attacked the pay and conditions of civil servants and other workers. The leopard has not now - because we are in a crisis - changed its spots. The Tories continue to act in the best interests of the capitalist elite.

The workers' movement therefore needs to organise independently to fight for the interests of the working class - not least on the crucial issues of health and safety, and testing. This is essential in order to minimise the tragic loss of workers' lives during this crisis, which is not the Tory government's priority. If it was, it would be providing 100% pay for all workers, taking adequate measures to ensure the safety of workers in government offices, nationalising the pharmaceutical industry in order to harness its power to fight the virus, and countless other measures that are included in our Workers' Charter.

If you would like to discuss these issues further we are happy to do so. In the meantime, we assure you that we will continue to take the health and safety of all workers extremely seriously, including adherence to social-distancing measures and that, wherever workers are fighting on these or other issues, we will be actively supporting them.

Yours in solidarity,
Hannah Sell



photo Paul Mattsson

16 April 2020

Dear Ms Sell,

I wrote to you on 7 April to express serious concerns that had been raised by PCS reps in Jubilee House in Stratford about your members' unacceptable actions in setting up a stall with literature outside their building in the midst of the coronavirus outbreak and lockdown. I am astonished that your reply of 9 April simply dismisses those concerns and fails to address our demand that you do not repeat such activities.

Your letter indicates that you have fundamentally misunderstood the guidelines in place for mitigating the spread of the virus and keeping people safe. Your statement that "the government's guidelines allow the buying and selling of newspapers" could be regarded as ridiculous if this were not such a serious demonstration of your failure to understand the basis of our reps' concerns.

Your members' presence outside the building and their interaction with staff was unnecessary. It increased the risk to those staff of catching the virus. The government's guidelines are that people, including your members, should stay at home. As I said in my previous letter, whilst PCS is highly critical of the government's response to the crisis, following these simple rules will mean that fewer people will contract Covid-19 and fewer people will die than if they are not followed. You seem to have misunderstood this basic point or you have chosen to ignore it.

I will not respond to your statements about the union's campaigns and our demands concerning civil servants' pay and conditions. These are matters for our union, not an external organisation such as yours, and are determined through our democratic processes. Your comments are irrelevant to the question of our members' safety.

You have not responded to our demand that you do not repeat these unsafe activities that are increasing the risk to PCS members posed by the virus. PCS reps in Jubilee House have expressed serious concerns to us and it is a matter of the utmost importance that you do not engage in such actions again.

Yours sincerely
Mark Serwotka

21 April 2020

Dear Mark,

We have received your latest letter (16 April) regarding your complaint about a Socialist Party stall outside Jubilee House, Stratford, London, a DWP and HMRC workplace, which took place on Monday 30 March, 2020. We are not sure what more we can add to our original response.

As we explained, far from "simply dismissing" workers' concerns that social distancing guidelines are adhered to, all Socialist Party actions, including the stall that you refer to, strictly comply with them. We also stated that if, however, PCS reps still "had concerns we are of course very happy to discuss those with them".

We made the point to you that "the government's guidelines allow the buying and selling of newspapers". This applies equally to sellers of socialist newspapers as it does to vendors of other, capitalist publications - provided that social-distancing protocols are properly carried out. But the fact that you dismiss this can only lead to the unfortunate conclusion that you do, indeed, believe that the working-class, socialist press should face greater restrictions than those placed on media that do not have the interests of workers at their heart.

And if that is so for the workers' press, then what are the implications for workers' independent organisation generally, including the ability of PCS members and reps to organise on behalf of their fellow workers? Should they too face greater restrictions on their activity than the employers? Obviously not, in our opinion.

Clearly, there are profoundly different views between us on these vital questions of how the labour and trade union movement should operate in these extremely challenging times, which it is in the interests of the movement to discuss out.

Consequently, we believe it would be useful for the movement for us to publish this correspondence on our website and in the pages of The Socialist.

Yours in solidarity,
Hannah Sell

Adding demands to the weekly claps



Protesting at Whipps Cross



Posting in Lambeth



Clapping in Gateshead



Support from cars in Newham

■ Gateshead: Chanting

Another excellent response on our street.

Lots out clapping, taxis tooting their horns, bagpipes playing and a bit of chanting - "PPE for all

frontline workers," "mass testing for all" and "save our NHS".

Elaine Brunskill

■ London: Protest

We had a car cavalcade from to Whipps Cross hospital to support

the workers, clapping and sounding sirens. At Newham hospital we also responded to the call for protests.

Going viral

Socialist comments and letters on the corona crisis

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

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

financial year - nearly five times the amount raised by NHS charities in the same period.

For providing universal healthcare and the dedication of its staff, the NHS generates huge amounts of goodwill among the working class. But we can't rely on goodwill and charity to keep our hospitals running.

Nick Hart
Black Country

■ Price hikes

The Times reports prices at online supermarket Ocado have jumped 16% during the lockdown. Although Ocado may be the worst offender, it is not the only one.

The Times revealed Sainsbury's and Asda are 3% dearer. Millions of workers have suffered a fall in wages or no income.

Profiteering is nothing more than helping the customers according to Ocado: "Like all supermarkets, we removed a number of promotions [price discounts] to encourage customers to shop in a responsible way."

The Times concludes that the Competition and Markets Authority has "received 21,000 complaints about unfair price rises", but only "written to 187 companies about their prices."

John Merrell
Leicester

■ Richard Branson's advice

"Loss-making and inefficient airlines should go to the wall... the government should not intervene to stop companies going bust" - Richard Branson on British Airways in 2009.

He now suggests that we should bail out his company, with the 'quid pro quo' that he pays the taxes he owes. What errant rubbish! Ordinary people don't get to choose when to pay or avoid taxes.

Instead of taking Branson's advice from 2009, or the weak approach of allowing him to buy his way out of the crisis (he has the money to, he put up an island as collateral), we should take the company into democratic public ownership.

Save the jobs and allow committees of workers, trade unions, environmental campaigners and service users to make

the necessary changes to the company to improve terms and conditions for workers and help tackle the catastrophic climate crisis.

Carl Harper
Peterborough

■ It's never the right time

A divisional (regional full-time) officer spoke at our union branch about the extra billions supermarkets had made due to panic buying. The officer mocked the British Retail Consortium for saying that now was "not the right time" to be arguing for a wage increase.

A union member working in Morrison's raised that something needed to be done about Morrison's flouting Sunday trading laws using the cover of coronavirus. The response by the divisional officer, and I kid you not, was that "now was not the right time to make a stand."

As laughable as this response is, workers know that they cannot wait for "the right time" to organise, because there never will be a "right time" for the bosses.

An Usdaw shop workers' union member

■ Kier Starmer

Sir Kier doing a great job on his socialist distancing.
Harry Smith
Liverpool

Get some fire in your belly. Thousands have died and thousands more will perish due to Tory covid policies. Evoking the 'national effort' and lightly rapping the government over the knuckles for being "too slow" isn't opposition.

Niall Mulholland
Newham, London

■ Let them drink bleach

Marie Antoinette is supposed to have told workers on the eve of the French Revolution to "let them eat cake". 200 years later, Trump is telling workers to "go and drink Domestos".

It demonstrates the absolute bankruptcy and desperation of capitalism. It shows only two class interests are at

stake - the ruling class and their lust for profits, and the working class, the rest of us.

Covid-19 has revealed every failing and misery of a system dedicated to profit. From this disaster the ideas of democratic socialism will grow.

Future generations will tell the incredible story of a guy called Trump who used to tell his workers to drink bleach!

Dave Bartlett
Cardiff

■ Tories attack trans rights

Equalities Minister Liz Truss has hinted that some rights could be stripped from trans people, especially youth. The Socialist Party submitted a response to the online consultation on reforming the Gender Recognition Act - calling for the right to gender self-identity and an end to austerity, so the needs of all can be met.

Since the consultation, the Tories have been silent on the issue while continuing to starve the NHS of vital resources to deliver healthcare for trans people alongside everyone else.

Now Truss has stated her three priorities are: protecting single-sex spaces, making sure trans adults can live their lives 'whilst maintaining the proper checks and balances', and protecting under-18s from 'irreversible' decisions. These 'priorities' are utterly hypocritical.

Women's refugees need protection from the Tories, rather than trans people in need of services. Refugees have lost a quarter of their funding since 2010, forcing an estimated 44% of domestic violence victims to sofa-surf.

Many trans adults are on waiting lists of several years for just their first appointment at underfunded gender identity clinics. Trans people face discrimination and abuse, with severe effects on mental health.

The Tories have an appalling record on LGBT+ rights - or at least the rights that cost the Treasury anything. These 'priorities' confirm they will do nothing serious to support trans people.

Three priorities that trans people need are self-identity, an end to austerity, and high quality healthcare under workers' control.

Adam Harmsworth
Coventry

■ Tory propaganda has consequences

This morning (27 April) there's much more traffic than there has been during the lockdown.

The media has been full of stories about how we are getting on top of the virus. I think they want workers to individually decide to go back to work.

Not having any money, they are desperate to earn again. It gets the government off the hook.

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) had many great examples at its meeting of how workers have fought for and won better health and safety conditions (see page 5).

Heather Rawling
Leicester

■ I don't believe the lies

I'm fed up with the slick speeches on TV every night from callous government members and their toady advisors.

On Newsnight, carers visiting elderly people said disposable masks are used for two weeks. Two weeks!

Tory MP Tobias Elmwood arrogantly says he would continue to work under these circumstances - I don't believe him.

And I don't believe any of this rotten Tory government. If capitalism cannot

provide a safe environment for carers and other frontline workers, then we can't afford capitalism.

Elaine Brunskill
Newcastle

■ Charities and NHS

Charities affiliated to hospitals and other NHS bodies have renewed appeals for donations during the corona crisis. Efforts made by ordinary workers, such as World War Two veteran Tom Moore, to raise sponsorship should be applauded.

Extra money to fund healthcare is welcome. Even before the epidemic, many hospitals were already running at or close to capacity.

However, why, when most of us pay tax and national insurance, is it necessary for workers to dip into their pockets further to give the NHS a fighting chance of coping with the virus? The 1% are hoarding obscene wealth.

It's estimated that big business and wealthy individuals in the UK dodge £112 billion in tax annually - just £3 billion less than the budget for NHS services in England last year.

A good number of these 'tax shirkers' are the same companies and shareholders charging the NHS through the nose. The interest payments on debts owed by NHS trusts from the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) totalled £2.2 billion in the last

Schools: No return without a national union agreement that guarantees safety!

National Education Union (NEU) members have put forward the following model motion at meetings on opposing the reopening of schools unless safe.

This District/Branch/School Meeting/Committee:

- 1) Welcomes the huge support for the NEU petition opposing any reopening of schools until it is safe to do so.
- 2) Recognises the pressures on school communities that both school closures and the more general lockdown are causing, especially for the most disadvantaged and the families of keyworkers. However, we also recognise that schools are places where there is a significant risk of transmission of Covid-19. In demanding a safe return for staff, we are therefore also ensuring that we are prioritising the health of our school communities too.
- 3) Opposes leaving the responsibility for decisions about a safe return solely down to union negotiations with individual schools or employers. While the detailed application would need to also be worked out at these levels, the NEU should make clear that no NEU member should return to work until and unless there is a clear national union agreement that guarantees a safe return for all our members, in all schools and settings.
- 4) Believes that a national agreement must:
 - a) Ensure World Health Organization



recommendations are being followed before any return begins. These require infection to be first down to a level where transmission is under control and that sufficient capacity for testing and contact

tracing is in place. b) Ensure that there is guaranteed provision for regular repeat testing of school staff and for prompt tracing and isolation of contacts, including immediate re-closure of

- schools, on full pay, if required to ensure isolation occurs.
- c) Reduces risks by ensuring that student numbers attending on any day will remain substantially reduced until it is certain that Covid-19 transmission has remained under control.
 - d) Also include requirements on other key provisions including: prior training for staff; PPE; provision for staff in high-risk categories; the provision of regular sufficient cleaning; safety on transport; counselling; specific risk assessments in each workplace; funding to recruit additional staff required as well as correcting any unequal treatment suffered by supply staff.
 - e) Make clear that there will be no requirement on staff to work during the summer holidays. Instead, additional funding should be provided for fully funded free summer playscheme provision.
 - 5) Calls on the union to put any draft agreement out to consultation to districts and then agreement by a full online meeting of the NEU national executive.
 - 6) Further calls on the union to make clear that, should any attempt be made to open schools without such an agreement, the union will support members in not returning to work in line with relevant employment law and health and safety legislation.
- Download the full version of the motion from <https://bit.ly/2VFv0cD>

Unions must organise throughout crisis

The coronavirus pandemic throws up its own unique problems and challenges which cannot wait until after the lockdown has ended. Workers are being subjected to unfair and unsafe conditions now, and it is simply unacceptable for union leaders to put things off.

Plymouth and district general Usdaw branch has made use of Zoom and met on 22 April to ensure that members can still come together. It is clear the union is needed to defend against the lack of PPE as well as the disregard of social-distancing guidelines by management in many stores.

There is no reason why union members can't meet by making use of apps like Zoom.

If key workers are expected to work as normal, why can't we also organise in a trade union as normal? Where this isn't already taking place, workers should demand that branches find ways to overcome the lockdown so that union branches aren't effectively suspended at a time when they are vitally important to struggle.

It needs to be made clear to bosses that workers will not abide profits being put before workers' health and safety; dangerous conditions should be met with walkouts. Likewise, it needs to be made abundantly clear to union leaders that inaction will not be tolerated. This is especially so with thousands of new members looking to the unions to step up and fight to defend, and indeed advance workers' rights and conditions.

Ryan Aldred, Usdaw Plymouth and district general branch secretary (personal capacity)

From the frontline: B&M Bargains management puts profit before safety

A B&M Bargains worker

The attitude of B&M Bargains management has been 'business as usual'. Some staff are furloughed, often in stores in shopping centres which have closed anyway, and some admin staff. But most are still working, with the company's attitude being that we can pick up sales from competitors while they are closed.

B&M management is using the argument that we are key workers because we sell food, but it's a minority of what we usually sell, and in my store we're selling even less than usual at the moment. Instead, most of the people coming in are in the garden, DIY and paint aisles.

In the rush to sell as much as possible, health and safety is going out the window. We've had cages blocking fire exits so people can restock quicker. The cleaner in store had to self-isolate, yet for days no-one replaced her. Our till screens are next to useless. They are free standing



photo Hugh Venables/CC

but they keep falling and hitting the cashiers on the head. It's been reported to management but nothing is being done.

Easter weekend was the worst period. We had a policy of only allowing 20 people in the store at a time, then it went up to 30, 35, 40 and then 120 at a time! Management told us they were letting in "only how many we feel safe" - I think they really wanted to make as much money as possible. To cap it all, we had a regional manager in on Good Friday. Was he concerned about our

safety? No, he was more bothered about stock on the paint aisle!

It's only through the union, Usdaw that we've managed to win 10% hazard pay for those still working, but only from 29 March on old wage rates. We've also managed to get the company to agree to furlough staff, with letters telling them to 'shield' on 80% pay instead of just sick pay.

With a low union density at the moment, and just nine union reps across the country, we need more B&M Bargains workers to join Usdaw and get organised.

Waltham Forest trade unions discuss the fight for PPE and workplace safety

Nancy Taaffe
Waltham Forest Socialist Party

In organising a meeting on PPE and workplace safety, Waltham Forest Trade Union Council showed the role of these bodies in drawing together workers in struggle, strengthening solidarity, and helping clarify the tasks for the labour movement through discussion.

Hundreds of small - and not so small - victories are being won in workplaces through workplace organisation and collective action all over the country.

Our trade union council meeting was organised so we could hear about some of those victories and to look at how the whole trade union movement can benefit from discussing them and perhaps emulating them.

There were seven panel speakers at the Zoom webinar discussion.

Len Hockey from Barts Healthcare Unite union branch, Esme Choonara, a GMB member and paramedic, Max McGee, Usdaw union rep at a Tesco warehouse, Moe, a London bus driver from Unite, Katharine Lindenberg from the National Education Union and Rob Williams from the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN).

And Jared Wood, explained the fight on London Underground, emphasising that in this crisis we also have to raise the big picture - the failure of capitalism and the need to fight for socialism.

The meeting agreed to carefully test out the potential to show trade union solidarity with the health workers with a trades council car cavalcade through the hospital at 8pm when the staff are clapping to show support for action for PPE and workplace safety.

■ See full article online at socialistparty.org.uk

130 Years of May Day in Britain: Fight for workers' rights more relevant than ever

Iain Dalton

Overworked, underpaid, struggling to afford the basics - this is true of the situation facing many 'key workers' that the Covid-19 lockdown has so clearly demonstrated society is dependent on. This was also the situation facing many workers 130 years ago, when the first May Day marches took place to celebrate International Workers' Day.

At that time, trade unions were mostly based among skilled 'craft' workers. These 'aristocrats of labour' found political expression by riding on the coat-tails of the capitalist Liberal Party. As industrialisation developed, however, unskilled sections of workers arose in industry. But the attitude of most craft trade union leaders was that such workers simply couldn't be organised, and would be a drain on their strike funds.

It was in this period that International Workers' Day originated. It started in the US, where strikes took place in May 1886 for the eight-hour day, with strikers often facing repression from the police. In 1889, the newly founded Socialist International called for protests and strikes demanding the eight-hour day to take place on or near 1 May 1890.

In Britain, socialists like Eleanor Marx pioneered the May Day marches, seeking to build a coalition between the socialist groups and the wider working class, including the craft unions.

'New unions'

Eleanor Marx, along with socialists like the Leeds-based Tom Maguire, as well as workers like Tom Mann, Ben Tillett and Will Thorne, who had passed through the ranks of socialist organisations, also helped to organise mass strikes, and build the 'new unions' organising unskilled workers, who were suffering horrendous working conditions.

Despite attempts by the craft unions to split the 1890 London May Day demonstration, around 100,000 turned out. 90% of those attending crowded the platforms organised by Eleanor Marx and the new unions. Karl Marx's collaborator, Friedrich Engels, was on one of these platforms and later commented: "And I hold it to be the most important and magnificent in the entire May Day celebration that on May 4, 1890, the English proletariat, rousing itself from forty years' winter sleep, rejoined the movement of its class."

The new unions and socialists also demonstrated in Leeds, through the newly established Yorkshire Labour Council. The previous year, they had successfully organised a strike over pay by several thousand building labourers. Now they were in the run up to what Engels called 'The Battle



photo Senan

of Leeds'. This was the tremendous strike of gas workers in defence of the concessions - eight-hour day, paid holidays, time and a half for overtime - wrested from the council who owned the gas works in Leeds.

The Leeds Mercury reported that 30-40,000 attended the Leeds demonstration. The Yorkshire Post reported the march was so large that the speakers at the rally were delayed by an hour so that the whole march could reach the rally.

The resolution, passed from both of the platforms set up at the rally stated: "This meeting rejoices in the universal action taken by the

workmen of the civilised world with respect to the necessity of an eight hours working day, and regards it hopefully as the first step towards the abolition of national and industrial war, the overthrow of race hatreds between the working classes, and the final emancipation of labour."

But as well as the immediate industrial issue of the eight-hour day, political issues were raised too. In her speech at the London demonstration, Eleanor Marx said: "We must kick these Liberal and Radical members out if they refuse to support our programme. I am speaking this afternoon not only as a trade

unionist, but as a socialist.

"Socialists believe that the eight hours' day is the first and most immediate step to be taken, and we aim at a time when there will no longer be one class supporting two others, but the unemployed both at the top and at the bottom of society will be got rid of."

This was to be the music of the future. Just one month later, during the gas strike, Liberal councillors used the town hall to shelter and entertain strike breakers. The following year, during the Manningham Mills dispute, the Liberal-controlled watch committee allowed the police to be used to break up their demonstrations, and the poor law guardians refused strikers relief.

Those strikes were the impetus for the formation of the Independent Labour Party in Bradford in 1893. Further battles, including the 1897-8 engineers' lockout, began to push the Trades Union Congress to support the formation of the Labour Representation Committee, precursor of the Labour Party.

Struggles today

130 years on, these struggles continue. During the Covid-19 crisis, Keir Starmer, newly-elected leader of the Labour Party, seems to be even keener than some government ministers to represent the desire of big business to defend their profits and force workers back into potentially unsafe workplaces. The question of independent working-class political representation is back on the agenda.

Workers have won concessions to improve their conditions over the years. But experience has shown that, in a capitalist system, these concessions can be taken back in the drive for profit. In the current crisis, workers are having to work in unsafe working conditions due to lack of PPE, or the greed of construction bosses who refuse to furlough workers.

The threat of lay-offs and redundancies hangs over many workers whose workplaces have shut. Many only take home the 80% furlough pay, and others have been forced to use up annual leave.

To ensure adequate safety protection, workers need to organise and take control in their own workplaces. The steps in this direction, through action by London bus workers and postal workers, for example, shows what can be done (see page 4).

But to permanently achieve the aims of the pioneers of May Day - not just an eight-hour day and decent pay and conditions but a society that meets all the needs of ordinary people - we need to go further and fight to bring the major companies and finance institutions into public ownership under democratic workers' control and management.

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Lessons from history

NO RETURN TO THE 1930s: WORLD WAR TWO AND 'A LAND FIT FOR HEROES'

In the fourth article in our series 'war, global crises and working-class struggle', Socialist Party national committee member **Tom Baldwin** shows how working-class expectations were transformed by World War Two and the impact this had on the initial post-war period.

World War Two saw both civilians and soldiers exposed to the horrors of total war. When it was over there was a determination not to return to the horrors of poverty that had characterised the 1930s.

Pay had been low and incomes often insecure. Dockers could be hired for just half a day at a time. Working-class people in cities had to contend with slum housing conditions and rapacious landlords. Wartime rationing had actually improved the diet of a lot of workers who couldn't afford nutritious food. These conditions, combined with the cost of private healthcare, meant that ill health was rife.

After the sacrifices of the previous six years, however, things would not be allowed to go back to the way they were before. Having won the war, workers would now win the peace. Returning soldiers echoed the demand that followed the First World War - a land fit for heroes. The elements of planning and state direction of production that had been used to support the war effort had given a glimpse of what was possible if the economy was planned for the benefit of ordinary people.

The 1945 general election saw a landslide victory for Labour, sweep-

ing to power on a programme of radical reforms. The wartime coalition government was dissolved and the election took place just two months after victory over the Nazis was declared, while the war with Japan was still continuing.

Myths have subsequently been built up about Churchill being 'the Greatest Briton', yet his Conservative Party were unceremoniously dumped at the first possible opportunity. His strong public support during the crisis of war didn't translate into peacetime.

Labour's manifesto was influenced by the 1942 Beveridge report, which had identified five giant evils - Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness. The proposed solution was the building of the welfare state, providing social security from cradle to grave.

NHS founded

Its centrepiece was the NHS, established under the Labour left-winger Nye Bevan. This ensured, for the first time, that everyone had access to public health care, free at the point of use.

Publicly owned council housing was built. Key sections of the economy were also nationalised. These included coal and other energy production, railways, the Bank of England, and the iron and steel industries. Around a fifth of the economy was taken into public hands.

Labour's manifesto declared it to be "a socialist party, and proud of it." Upon the opening of the new parliament, Labour MPs sang the socialist anthem *The Red Flag*, much to the dismay of their Tory counterparts. Yet for the more right-wing Labour Party leaders, these reforms were not to be a stepping stone towards socialism. On the contrary, they were necessary measures to protect the capitalist system.



Labour's Nye Bevan speaking to one of the first patients to be cared for under the newly founded National Health Service. photo University of Liverpool/CC

State investment was needed to help rebuild from the devastation of war. The industries that were taken into public ownership had mainly been failing.

Nationalisation was used to shore up these vital props of the capitalist economy. Just as had been the case with the war economy, even capitalist politicians were forced to recognise that their preferred system of the unplanned, private 'free market' was not the best way of delivering what was needed.

Moreover, the government was pushed into action by pressure from below. During the war, workers had acted collectively to protect one another. This including breaking into tube stations to force their opening as air raid shelters, an action led by Trotskyists.

These lessons were not forgotten with the end of the Blitz. Workers' struggles placed demands upon the new government. For example, homeless families occupied former army bases and empty hotels, compelling mass house building.

Labour's leadership was driven to act by events, carrying out left-wing policies that many of them disagreed with.

Just a year before the election, right-winger Herbert Morrison had showed his disdain for expanding public ownership. He took aside the mover of the successful resolution for nationalisations at Labour's conference, saying: "That was a good speech you made, but you realise, don't you, that you've lost us the general election?"

The Labour right may have been slow to grasp the public desire for

change, but that desire actually went even further than the reforms carried out by the 1945 government. Despite the huge swing to Labour, the Communist Party still won a seat from them in East London.

The shift in workers' outlook was by no means limited to Britain. A revolutionary mood swept Europe. Having driven out the Nazis, resistance movements began demanding socialist change. There were waves of strikes, and the control of some factories was taken by workers' committees, even in the formerly fascist countries.

Limitations of Labour

Labour's leadership conceded far-reaching reforms in order to prevent revolution. They ensured the reforms remained within certain limits. Nationalised industries were not controlled by workers but by the former heads of private firms. The 20% of the economy that was in public ownership was dictated to by the 80% that wasn't.

Because they remained within a capitalist framework, the reforms have been chipped away and reversed over the succeeding years. This began as early as 1951 with the introduction of charges for dentists and opticians. Nye Bevan walked out of the cabinet in protest, spelling the beginning of the end of the post-war Labour government.

The NHS is now an underfunded and fragmented patchwork of public and for-profit providers, leaving it in a weakened state to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic.

While the current crisis is of a very different nature, there are

some parallels with the World War Two situation. Boris Johnson clearly thinks he's Churchill, appealing to a 'Blitz spirit'. This is largely mythical, rich and poor weren't 'all in it together' during the war and aren't today.

Johnson may find himself facing the same fate as his hero. Unfortunately, Labour, shifting to the right under Keir Starmer, is not putting forward any kind of alternative.

Nevertheless, coronavirus is laying bare the weaknesses and inequities of capitalism. Beveridge's five evils resurfaced in the period of austerity capitalism. Working-class people today have no desire to go back to the way things were either.

We demand a world fit for heroes. Today's heroes aren't returning from war, they're saving lives in our hospitals, they're transporting food, collecting bins and staffing supermarket checkouts.

These and other key workers are keeping society running through the crisis. They're doing so without sufficient protective equipment and often for poverty wages.

Billionaire bosses are not on the list of key workers, they play no useful role in society. It is workers that make and deliver everything of value, even in ordinary times. The capitalists are no more than parasites, profiting from the labour of others.

The Socialist Party fights for every possible improvement for the working class, but we don't just want a society where we're taken better care of. We want a socialist world where our class gets the full fruits of its labour. Workers make society run - we must run society.



Labour prime minister Clement Attlee (right) with foreign secretary Ernest Bevin. The 1945 Labour government was pushed by the working class to enact a whole series of radical social and economic measures

CORONAVIRUS A WORKERS' CHARTER



Income, jobs and workplace safety

- Full pay for all workers. Workers, especially those on low pay, can't afford to lose 20% of their income. Any worker who has to self-isolate or cannot go to work should receive full pay from day one and not be forced to take annual leave. Pay should be paid directly to the worker not via the employer
- Increase benefits to the level of the national minimum wage. No delay in the payment of benefits
- Increase the minimum wage immediately to at least £12 an hour, £15 in London
- Workers asked to work from home must be supplied with adequate equipment, and performance monitoring should be scrapped
- Workers who follow health advice to be absent from work to avoid potential spread should be excluded from any attendance-management procedures
- Trade unions to establish an all-union health and safety committee in every workplace to agree joint actions required to guarantee safety
- No return to work unless adequate safety measures are agreed with trade unions and the workforce
- 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

NHS and social care

- Emergency increase in funding for the NHS and for social care
- Adequate personal protection for all frontline workers
- NHS to take over all private healthcare facilities and staff.

■ PPE for all NHS and frontline staff ■ Tests and full pay for all ■ Take over private health and other necessary facilities and industries. Not a penny to the profiteers ■ Socialist planning not capitalist chaos

This charter is for discussion and debate in workplaces and communities so that we can organise to defend our health, safety and rights during the crisis. Get in touch if you would like to join a Socialist Party online meeting.

Government should take over other industries and convert production where necessary, under the democratic control of workers in those industries and in the wider workforce, to guarantee the supply of PPE, medical equipment and testing. Not a penny to the profiteers

- Emergency training of NHS staff to deal with the coronavirus crisis
- Immediate 10% wage rise for all NHS staff and social care workers
- Resources to be mobilised from government and big-business sources so that free, accessible testing with rapid results is available for all frontline staff, workers interacting with the public, patients transferred into social care and anyone with flu or cold-like symptoms. Requisition all private testing and analysis facilities. Massively increase the number of contact tracers
- Reverse privatisation in the NHS, remove the privateers and cancel all the billions of pounds in annual PFI payments. End profit in social care and bring it into the public sector under democratic working-class oversight
- 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 take on more workers in essential services. Resources to protect workers, patients, and service users
- Councils to coordinate local distribution of food, medicines and other supplies to the needy and vulnerable with the democratic oversight of trade union and community organisations. Scrap existing cuts budgets. Demand that the government nationally finance all additional spending necessary to deal with the coronavirus crisis, as well as releasing the resources to reverse a decade of austerity
- 24-hour, adequately staffed, local authority helplines for vulnerable and elderly people forced to self-isolate
- Workload demands must be reduced and time made available to prioritise protecting the health, safety and welfare of staff and service users
- Quality childcare for vulnerable families and children of essential workers, under the democratic control of education and care

workers, with adequate protection for all. No delay in food vouchers for children normally in receipt of free school meals. Vouchers must reflect the real costs of providing a nutritious daily meal

- Nobody should lose their home because of coronavirus. Mortgage, rent and council tax payments should be waived for the duration of the crisis and arrears written off. Democratically controlled local authority hardship funds for landlords in genuine need
- Councils to use their powers to take over empty homes to house the homeless, those in inadequate housing and those fleeing domestic violence. Hotels to be used to provide emergency accommodation
- Funding for 24 hour helplines and increased spending on refuges and safe emergency accommodation for victims of domestic violence
- No action to be taken for non-payment of utilities. Free broadband for all

Trade union and workers' action

- 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 over any government or private sector emergency measures taken to contain the virus

■ No erosion of workers' right to organise, including the democratic functioning of trade unions and parties

- No profiteering. Prices to be controlled by democratically elected committees of workers and consumers

■ 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