

# FIGHT FOR OUR LIVELIHOODS... FIGHT FOR OUR LIVES!



PHOTO PAUL MATSSON

**TOM BALDWIN**  
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

**T**he Covid capitalist crisis is hitting the working class hard from all sides. We face a tsunami of job cuts and attacks on living standards. At the same time, many of us still in work are now being pushed back into unsafe workplaces. We've got to fight for our livelihoods, and fight for our lives.

The number of people on Universal Credit has already doubled in the six months to June. The furlough scheme, covering nine million workers, is due to end in October.

This will be a cliff edge resulting in many more job losses. If there's a second wave of the virus, then unemployment could hit five million by the end of the year - that's one in seven workers.

The workers' movement must fight to defend every job. This includes being prepared

to occupy workplaces to prevent closures and lay-offs.

We can have no trust in big business or its politicians to protect workers. For them, concern for the economy is only a concern for profits, not for our livelihoods.

That's what's behind Johnson's new push for an end to home working and a full return to schools in September. This is when the virus is still widespread and test-and-trace systems are still woefully inadequate.

It is another reckless move by a government that cares only for its rich mates.

## Safety measures

In fact, many workers have never been able to work from home. Many were placed in dangerous situations, often without the PPE and social distancing measures needed to reduce risk.

It was workers who fought for safety measures to be implemented, and to close

workplaces that weren't immediately essential, like construction sites. In some places this was achieved by threatened or actual walkouts.

So how do we square the circle between protecting jobs and ensuring any return to work is managed safely? Capitalism, which prioritises profit, has no solution to either.

Commercial secrecy means some firms are pleading poverty and throwing workers out on the scrapheap while sitting on huge cash piles. Others are using the cover of corona to tear up workers' contracts, sacking them and taking some back on worse terms and conditions (see p2-3). We must open their books to the scrutiny of trade unions.

Workplaces must come under the democratic control of workers, starting with health and safety. That way, plans for safe working would be made by those who know the workplaces best - those who will otherwise be put at risk. Trade unions should fight for this.

And nationalisation is the way to save work. The Tories have shown they're willing to intervene to rescue profits; why not jobs? Trade unions should fight for this too.

Ultimately, socialist nationalisation of the big businesses that dominate the economy is the only way of ensuring that workers come first.

This would allow democratic economic planning to share out the work available without loss of pay. The resources of society could be used to create socially useful work for those otherwise facing unemployment, with decent pay and conditions.

Covid-19 has come at a great human cost, magnified many times by the inherently unequal capitalist system. The economic crisis will only cause further misery - unless we struggle to defend ourselves.

We aren't expendable pawns in the bosses' insatiable drive for profits. We must fight for socialist change.



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

# HUGELY SIGNIFICANT TOWER HAMLETS COUNCIL WORKERS' STRIKE CONTINUES

ISAI PRIYA  
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

“We have been the key workers during the pandemic, but now the Labour-led council is sacking and reappointing all of us on worse terms and conditions. They are attacking us at the earliest opportunity”. These were the words of a striking social worker on the Albert Jacob House picket line.

The strike by members of public service union Unison working for Tower Hamlets council has huge national significance. A victory would give a boost of confidence to other workers facing similar conditions (see box).

So far there have been two three-day strikes, the first major strikes nationally since the easing of the lockdown. Further dates for strike action are yet to be announced.

The picket lines have been safe, with masks, hand sanitiser, and maintaining social distancing. The mood among strikers has been determined and confident.

On all six different sites, workers have received a lot of support and solidarity from people walking or driving past - with loud tooting and cheers from passing buses, bikes and cars.

**Labour**  
This is yet another strike against a Labour-led council. A striker at the car pound pointed out that Unison is affiliated to the Labour Party, and nominated Keir Starmer as leader. They said that Unison should stop giving money to the Labour Party until the dispute is resolved. The money should instead be used to support the workers during the dispute.

**Hugo Pierre**, who is a member of the Socialist Party, and on Unison's national executive council, is standing as a candidate for general secretary of the union (see opposite page). Hugo got the loudest cheer at the picket line when, speaking in a personal capacity, he said that if Labour councillors are not going to stand up and fight, they should stand down and let those that will take their place.

Instead of attacking workers' pay and conditions and cutting services, Tower Hamlets council should use its reserves and borrowing powers to stop austerity, as part of launching a mass trade union campaign to demand that the government nationally pays up the money that is needed locally.

Socialist Party members have attended the picket lines and raised money from the trade union movement for the strike fund. A solidarity



PHOTO HUGO PIERRE

motion was passed at Waltham Forest Trade Union Council, calling out the anti-working class methods of Tower Hamlets Labour councillors. If this move goes unchallenged, then it will be used by other councils - and employers more generally - to attack workers' pay, jobs and rights.

Local government workers cannot be left to fight council by council. Unison's leadership needs to set out a national strategy to support the Tower Hamlets action and prepare other councils to fight if necessary.

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The outrageous tactics used by Tower Hamlets council - firing the whole workforce and then rehiring them on worse terms and conditions - are increasingly being used by other employers.

In a previous article in the Socialist, we detailed the same method being used by construction equipment manufacturer JCB to cut up to 1,500 jobs.

British Airways plans a similar approach, with almost every BA employee threatened with redundancy, with one-third facing the axe, and the remainder rehired on contracts containing huge drops in salary and working conditions. 40,000 BA staff face the prospect of losing their jobs, or signing contracts on worse terms and conditions.

British Gas owner Centrica issued 20,000 workers with a legal notice to sign a new contract or face a wave of redundancies. The new

terms will make it easier for the employer to sack workers in the future.

The 'fire and rehire' strategy also threatens more than 8,000 Sheffield University staff, as part of the cost-cutting measure by the university.

Workers should not be punished for the pandemic. The trade union movement has to prepare the fightback to save jobs and workers' terms and conditions. There needs to be urgent co-ordinated action by the unions to organise a national fighting strategy to defend workers.

This means raising the demand of opening the books, for democratic workers' and union oversight of where the money is spent. The vast profits of the companies should be used to pay workers and save their jobs, rather than to pay dividends to speculators or fat cheques for management. In cases where the company is placed into administration, we call on the government to nationalise to save jobs.

## Hugo Pierre for Unison general secretary For a fighting, democratic general secretary, on a workers' wage!

The worst-kept secret in public sector union Unison is finally out. Right-wing general secretary Dave Prentis has announced that he doesn't intend to stand in the next general secretary election and will leave office.

He leaves a legacy of failures. He has not led any serious national fight against the decimation of local government, mass privatisation of public services, and endemic low pay - all brutally exposed in the coronavirus pandemic.

In order to cover up his failings, and to silence any opposition, Prentis also embarked on witch-hunts and attacks on democracy in the union. Members now have an opportunity to reclaim their union with a fighting and democratic leader.

While no candidates have formally announced yet, it looks like two from within the bureaucracy will try and inherit his crown, both of whom have not once challenged or opposed his regime, and deserve no support.

In stark contrast, the Socialist Party's Hugo Pierre, a local government worker and current elected member of the national executive council, is looking to be the candidate of the left.

Hugo has already faced elections in ballots of the entire membership, having successfully won and held his

national black members' seat on a number of occasions.

Hugo has pledged to stand on a fighting and democratic programme capable of taking on the Tories, and has said he will not take the £138,000 a year salary, instead pledging to only take an average worker's wage if elected.



### Hugo's programme

- We won't pay for the Covid-19 crisis!
- Local authorities: a national fight for £10 billion funding - fight all cuts and demand Labour councillors don't vote for cuts
- For a renationalised NHS and social care sector with full collective bargaining and national terms and conditions
- Reverse all education privatisation. Academies back to local authorities. Full funding for further and higher education
- For a real fight on public sector pay to reverse the 'austerity years' pay cuts - for a £15-an-hour minimum wage
- Fight for jobs and homes, not racism. Black lives matter!
- Not a penny of members' money to Labour representatives who back cuts, privatisation or austerity
- For genuine members' control of our union, with the election of union officials
- For a trade union fight to end environmental catastrophe
- A pledge not to take the £138,000-a-year salary. but live on a worker's wage

# SOCIALISM

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## 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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THEM...

● **77% of the richest families have actually increased their wealth during the crisis**, reports UBS. 93 of 121 super-rich family offices, with an average net worth of \$1.6 billion, had met or exceeded their investment return targets.

● **83 multimillionaires have issued an open letter calling for permanent tax increases... on them.** 'Millionaires for Humanity' states that "the problems caused by, and revealed by, Covid-19 can't be solved with charity, no matter how generous. Government leaders must take the responsibility for raising the funds we need and spending them fairly... Tax us. Tax us. Tax us... It is the only choice."

Coordinated government response is indeed more effective than piecemeal charity response. But taxation is not "the only choice." Their obscene wealth, and the system which produced it, could be taken out of their hands entirely.

● **Hackers associated with the Russian state are trying to steal British universities' Covid-19 vaccine research secrets**, says the National Cyber Security Centre. Data privacy is an important issue - but why is information on efforts to cure a killer pandemic secret in the first place?

... AND US

● **Child hospital admissions for malnutrition doubled in the first half of 2020** compared to same period in 2019, according to Freedom of Information requests in the Guardian. Nearly 2,500 under-16 cases were reported across 150 hospitals in England, including 915 in Cambridge, 704 in Southampton, and 656 each in east London and Newcastle.

● **Household income has suffered the biggest hit since the 1970s oil crisis**, finds the Resolution Foundation's Living Standards Audit. The 4.5% drop from May 2019 to May 2020 compares to 2.7% during 2009-10 following the Great Recession, and 5.1% during 1974-75 at the height of 'stagflation'. Hours worked fell 17% in the year to May 2020.

● **Household income had not grown for three years when the pandemic hit Britain**, the Living Standards Audit also reports. Incomes for the poorest tenth were equivalent to the early 2000s. Meanwhile, stopping meagre Universal Credit increases from April will cost more than six million households upwards of £1,000.

● **Unemployment could rocket from 3.9% to 14.8% during a second wave in Britain**, says the OECD. Even without one, unemployment could hit 11.7%, almost level with its 1984 peak of 11.9%. The estimates for year's end compare with Germany's 5.6% with a second wave or 5.0% without, and Spain's 20.1% with or 19.2% without.

● **The privately run NHS test-and-trace call centre in Motherwell, Scotland has suffered a coronavirus outbreak.** You couldn't make it up. Fight for workers' control of workplace health and safety!

● **Heat and humidity so extreme that humans cannot live and work could affect 1.2 billion people by 2100**, says a study in Environmental Research Letters. The projections assume current greenhouse emissions. And this year's record-breaking Siberian heatwave was made 600 times more likely by global warming, says a World Weather Attribution study.

# Mandatory masks in shops law: workers must not pay the price

RYAN ALDRED

SECRETARY, USDAW UNION PLYMOUTH AND DISTRICT GENERAL BRANCH (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Face masks are mandatory in shops in England from Friday 24 July, following a similar move in Scotland two weeks prior. As has become the norm, government guidance and action is confused, contradictory, late, and fundamentally flawed.

We say workers must not have to cover the cost of this law. Supermarkets are introducing 'hygiene stations' on a wide scale. We need a similar approach with masks. If they are to be mandatory, they must be freely available.

Police are unlikely to have the resources or inclination to respond effectively to consumers not wearing masks. In France earlier this month, a bus driver was beaten to death by two passengers who refused to accept the mask rule.

Tory failures

So it's right that Paddy Lillis, general secretary of shop workers' union Usdaw, has said that workers mustn't be left to enforce the new legislation. He has also called for other measures limiting customer numbers, ensuring screens are in place, and that hygiene stations do not lapse once masks are mandatory. But Lillis is wrong to look to the bosses and the Tories to protect workers.

Matt Hancock, Tory health secretary, announced the mask rules on 14 July. This four-month delay following lockdown measures was despite evidence already pointing to masks helping prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Covid-19 deaths among retail workers are 75% higher than average in men, and 60% higher in women, says Hancock. Yet the government unnecessarily delayed implementation, putting shop workers and the



public at increased risk. Moreover, it has rejected requiring masks in offices and other indoor areas.

So what's the rationale? In Hancock's own words: "There is also evidence that face coverings increase confidence in people to shop." So this is nothing to do with protecting workers' safety, and everything to do with tending to bosses' profit margins.

Local flare-ups and the lockdown in Leicester have also forced the government's hand. A second national lockdown would be a serious blow to this weak Tory government's battered prestige, as well as directly harming the bosses' profits.

Workers' control

Socialist Party members in Usdaw have argued consistently for health and safety measures to be strictly implemented since March, when the scale of the pandemic became clear. We propose that workers organise workplace health and safety committees.

As bosses try to return to 'business as usual', the unions must run a co-ordinated campaign to defend and strengthen health and safety measures - under the control of workers. Where bosses break or bend safety rules, reps should be instilled with the confidence to challenge them and take action, including walkouts under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996.

Building shop stewards' committees would help this. This is an opportunity for unions to push for workers ourselves to have greater control in workplaces.

The Tories have had to consult with the unions in developing guidance. They begrudgingly recognise the power that the unions, representing millions of workers, still hold. It is vital that this power be wielded to ensure that workers' safety is put firmly before bosses' profits.

# Tories using pandemic to privatise NHS more

JON DALE

SECRETARY, UNITE UNION NOTTINGHAMSHIRE HEALTH BRANCH

Another £3 billion for the NHS to prepare for the coming winter, said the Tory government. NHS England had actually said it needed £10 billion.

And who decides where the money is spent? Is it raising low-paid health workers' pay and providing vitally needed jobs - or pumped to profit-seeking business?

In April, Chancellor Rishi Sunak said the NHS and vital public services would get "whatever they need." His July statement promised £15 billion for NHS PPE. These huge sums of money can sound impressive, even if too late for many who have become ill or died.

But at every step, the Tories have

looked to channel public money to private business. Since the privatisation of NHS Logistics - by Tony Blair's 'New Labour' government - buying, stockpiling and distribution of supplies has been disorganised and run for profit.

In April, £350 million was awarded to private companies to procure PPE. Pestfix, a pest control company with just 16 employees, was awarded a £108 million contract to supply surgical gowns.

It turned out there had been an error - the contract was only for £32 million of gowns. Because of Pestfix's lack of assets, the government had to give it a deposit worth 75% of the value of the contract. Why couldn't the NHS place its own contract?

Another £18 million contract went to Aventis Solutions, a company

reporting three employees and net assets of just £322 in June 2019.

These and other contracts were placed without tendering or competition. So much for the Tories' oft-repeated claims that the competitive capitalist market is more efficient than public services!

Governments have squeezed public services since the 1980s so they no longer have the people or facilities to

cope with normal demands, let alone a pandemic.

Immediate restoration of past cuts is needed. All private contracts should be open to inspection by workers and trade unions, and brought back in-house. Privatised and outsourced NHS and other public services must be renationalised, under the democratic control of workers and service users.

## SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

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# Huawei: what's behind Johnson's latest u-turn?

IAIN DALTON

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

Boris Johnson has made a u-turn on Huawei's 5G internet technology - announcing a ban on new use from 31 December, and a total phase-out by 2027.

Previously, Johnson had supported the Chinese telecom giant's products - albeit limited to 35% of 'non-core' parts of the UK's 5G network. (See 'Johnson's Huawei internet deal underlines world trade tensions', 29 January at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk).)

Donald Trump took to Twitter to boast of his role in having "convinced many countries," including the UK, to ban Huawei. Oliver Dowden, the secretary of state for digital, culture, media and sport, acknowledged that Trump's block on Huawei using US-manufactured components had changed the situation.

Pressure has been exerted by British capitalism's allies in the 'Five Eyes' international intelligence network, such as the US and Australia - which Johnson wants to strike quick trade deals with following Brexit.

World polarisation

Behind Johnson's decision is world capitalism's growing polarisation into competing blocs, with the two main trends led by the US and China. Smaller capitalist powers, especially declining British capitalism, are having a difficult time trying to navigate a middle position between the two.

Substantial sections of the Tory party have opposed deepening Chinese investment in strategic sectors of the British economy.

The most hard-line fringe elements of the Tory party imagine they can recapture British capitalism's lost



5G internet could enable billions of pounds of economic activity PHOTO MICHAEL COGHLAN/CC

imperial past. But opposition also includes Tory establishment grandees like Chris Patten, former party chair and governor of Hong Kong, who had been urging a change of attitude towards China.

The 'China Research Group' was formed by mostly backbench Tories in April. It is somewhat modelled in the image of the right-wing Brexiteer 'European Research Group' - but contains substantial numbers of more establishment Tories too.

For example, Damien Green, Theresa May's former number two. His concerns link to unease about the role of the Chinese state in Chinese companies, security of British strategic assets, and being out of step with Five Eyes allies.

After this victory on Huawei, the China Research Group has already announced its next target: China's involvement with the nuclear industry, another strategic sector.

Capitalist consequences

But u-turns like this will have consequences for the capitalists and their politicians. China is British capitalism's third-largest trading partner, after the EU and US, accounting for 5% of all trade. And Dowden has suggested the ban will delay the introduction of 5G by two to three years - at an extra cost of £2 billion.

Increased tensions put British firms with significant trading relations with China in a more difficult position too, as the most likely to face any Chinese retaliation. British banks Standard Chartered and HSBC make half and two-thirds of their profits respectively in Hong Kong and China.

Both have decided to support the draconian new Hong Kong security law which gives the

dictatorial Chinese state more powers to intervene there. Meanwhile, Johnson's (hypocritical) response has been to extend citizenship rights to many Hong Kong people, and move to suspend the UK's extradition treaty with Hong Kong.

It is not just British capitalism that faces difficult decisions around this issue. Angela Merkel, German chancellor, has to come to a decision on Huawei's 5G involvement in the autumn. Her Christian Democrats are split on the issue like the Tories here. However, Germany is already more integrated with China, both in regards to telecom technology and trade more generally.

Wishful thinking?

Some capitalist commentators have latched onto the lengthy implementation dates as preparation for a possible further u-turn if Trump is forced out of office in the forthcoming presidential election.

As the Financial Times comments: "Some in Washington are privately concerned that the UK move to set a December deadline was chosen in the hope that Joe Biden, the Democratic presidential nominee, would beat Mr Trump in the November election and take a softer stance on Huawei."

But it would be wishful thinking on the part of British capitalism to imagine there is any way Biden can have the US, the biggest but declining imperial power, avoid confrontation with the rising competition from China.

As we commented back in January: "What the saga shows is that there is no plain sailing for the Tory government trying to navigate the trading seas post-Brexit in an increasingly volatile period for world relations."

# Luton Council sunk by airport investment: fight for funding, not speculation!

MARK PICKERSGILL

STEVENAGE SOCIALIST PARTY

Labour-controlled Luton agreed drastic cuts to services at a full council meeting on 14 July. These are a direct result of a dramatic decline in dividend payments from the Bedfordshire borough's commercial interests.

This includes a £37 million shortfall from a drop in Luton Airport revenue during the Covid-19 lockdown. The council receives more from trading and investments, including the airport, than it does from council tax. Passenger numbers at Luton Airport are not expected to return to normal until 2023.

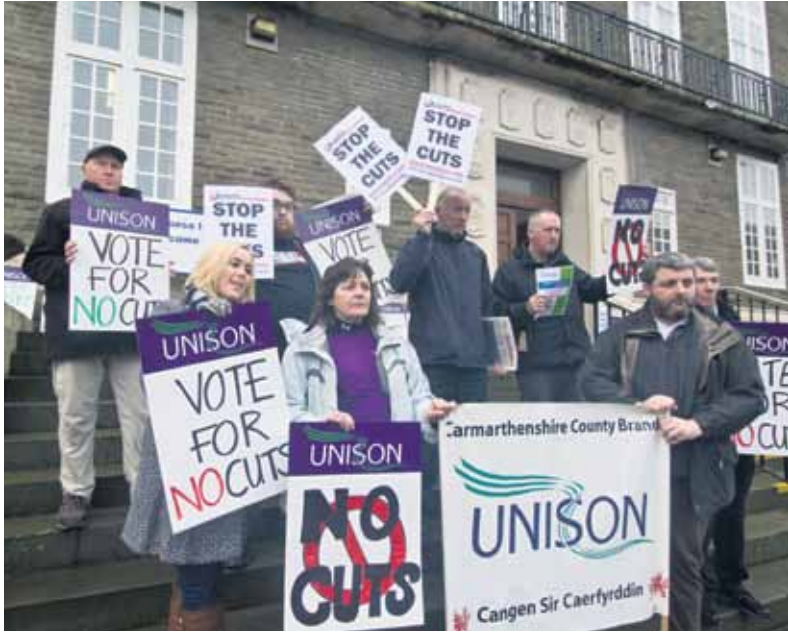
Luton Council has the country's second-highest proportion of income from commercial investments - after the City of London, home to the capital's finance district.

But more and more councils have

attempted to offset the fall in central government funding by gambling on commercial investments. The National Audit Office reported in February - before the lockdown - that many local authorities were badly exposed in the event of a recession or property crash.

Luton's cuts include scrapping the council-run school meals service, outsourcing it to private companies and individual schools, putting up to 365 jobs at risk. There will be cuts in travel concessions, children's centres, youth services, and reduced funding for social care and mental health services.

There will be reductions in the council tax support scheme, affecting many low-paid workers. And with a council tax increase not ruled out on top, these measures will have a profound impact on the wellbeing of many working-class and vulnerable people.



Trade unionists fighting council cuts before the pandemic PHOTO SWANSEA AND WEST WALES SP

Labour councillor Andy Malcolm, who holds the borough's finance portfolio, commented that "the coronavirus has broken our defences against austerity." But Labour councils offered no defence against austerity even before this. Councils including Luton have passed on the Tories' cuts without a fightback, resulting in job losses, while selling off valuable assets and indulging in property investments.

Malcolm adds that "the government hasn't provided sufficient support, despite our repeated requests since March and the 10,000 strong petition signed by the people of Luton." But rather than just pleading with the Tories or sending off petitions, Labour councils should be defending these jobs and services.

Competing for a limited pool of business investors, and throwing money at market ventures instead of jobs and services, were never going to solve the problem. This is doubly true during an economic downturn.

The Socialist Party demands that Labour councils pass no-cuts budgets by using financial reserves and borrowing powers. But this is just the start - above all what is needed is a mass campaign involving the unions and local community to fight for the needed funding from the Tory government.



The Socialist Party has written to the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) proposing that discussions begin on contesting the various elections scheduled for May 2021.

The biggest component organisation of TUSC, the RMT transport workers' union, is considering its response. The Socialist Party's proposal, set out in the letter printed below, was sent at the end of June - just before Keir Starmer's sacking of Rebecca Long-Bailey, which only confirmed the arguments made.

The Socialist Party is writing to our partners in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition to propose that the current suspension of TUSC electoral activity is lifted for the various elections scheduled for May 2021.

These contests will include elections to the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Senedd, the Greater London Authority (mayor and assembly), and English county councils; and the Metropolitan borough, district council, and city and Metro-mayor elections, postponed from this year.

As you will recall the TUSC national steering committee decided at the end of 2018 that it would no longer authorise candidates to stand under the TUSC name until further notice.

TUSC, founded in 2010, had already recalibrated its electoral activity under Jeremy Corbyn's Labour leadership.

It pursued a rigorously selective approach so that candidates could only stand against councillors and others who were continuing to implement austerity policies locally, and it did not contest the 2017 general election (and, obviously, 2019) at all.

But events have moved on, and the Socialist Party believes that we now need to revisit the 2018 decision and be prepared to authorise candidates for next year's contests.

### Changed situation

TUSC's founding goal of helping to establish mass working-class socialist political representation could potentially have been realised through the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn.

This would have been possible if fundamental changes to the party's political basis and organisation inherited from Tony Blair's New Labour had been carried through.

But the political and organisational legacy of New Labour was not, unfortunately, sufficiently expunged.

On the contrary, under Keir Starmer, it is being revived. This can be seen in the early policy retreats by the new leadership, but also in the appointment as the new party general secretary of a former assistant general secretary from the time of Tony Blair, who led the changes made then to weaken the role of the unions within the party. Once again working-class voters face being effectively disenfranchised.

# TIME TO RELAUNCH THE TRADE UNIONIST AND SOCIALIST COALITION



PHOTO PAUL MATTHEWSON

Against the background of the deep economic and social crisis triggered by the Covid pandemic this will have serious consequences for workers and our communities.

### Scotland, and other opportunities

The vacuum of political representation is particularly acute in Scotland, where Labour continued to haemorrhage working-class support even under Corbyn's leadership of the party at Westminster.

This will only be exacerbated by Scottish Labour's recent confirmation that it will oppose a second independence referendum in next May's elections.

Our co-thinkers, Socialist Party Scotland, are firmly in favour of enabling Scottish TUSC to stand in 2021. The additional member seats system used in these elections provides a particular opportunity for working-class socialist voices standing for the right to independence to win representation in the Scottish Parliament.

It is also true that the electoral systems that will apply in some of the other contests taking place next May are favourable for a working-class electoral challenge.

The supplementary vote system

for the London Mayor election, for example, means that voters could support a trade unionist and socialist candidate against Sadiq Khan, but then use their second preference vote against the Tories.

With the Transport for London funding crisis unresolved, along with the other issues facing working-class Londoners, the case for TUSC candidates to inject the arguments for a fighting alternative into next May's GLA elections is a powerful one.

Additionally, the elections postponed from 2020 include a number of councils in the so-called 'Red Wall', whose acquiescence to ten years of austerity was an important factor in the general election results in these areas.

Presenting TUSC's clear anti-cuts alternative will be important here, even if it cannot fully fill the vacuum. And another postponed election is for the mayor of Liverpool, which TUSC has contested on the two previous occasions, winning 4,950 votes in 2016 (a 5.1% share) and both times coming in ahead of the Tories.

While the exact scope of next year's electoral activity will need to be discussed, one thing is clear: the central function set out for TUSC at its foundation - to enable fighters in

the unions and our communities, and from different socialist organisations, to combine together electorally so that pro-capitalist politicians implementing anti-working class policies are not left unchallenged at the ballot box - is once again coming into its own.

### How to proceed?

In order to properly prepare for next year's elections, an in-principle decision on whether or not TUSC will resume authorising candidates is a necessary first step.

This would then enable a number of issues to be properly discussed between the TUSC partners and efforts made to expand the coalition, in particular within the trade unions.

Issues to address would include updating the TUSC election platform for the post-Covid era, reviewing procedures for approving candidates, and how a revived TUSC can function locally.

To this end we request that an early meeting of the TUSC national steering committee is convened - either virtually or socially distanced - to discuss our proposal.

Yours comradely,  
**Hannah Sell,**  
**Socialist Party general secretary**

## The role of TUSC



The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, an electoral alliance of trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists co-founded by the late Bob Crow, the Socialist Party, and others, was set up in 2010.

The RMT transport workers' union has been officially represented on the TUSC steering committee since 2012.

The resolution agreed at that year's RMT annual general meeting, which established the union's formal participation within TUSC, supported the coalition as potentially "providing a nucleus" within the trade unions for "the hard, long-term task of rebuilding political representation for working-class people and communities".

TUSC was never presented as being a mass electoral alternative to Blairite Labour politicians, certainly not as its finished expression, or as a substitute for the trade unions establishing a new workers' party.

The 375,000 votes won by TUSC candidates since its foundation, in some cases forced right-wing Labour candidates to 'look over their left shoulder'. But they have been only a modest hint of what could be achieved if even just the left-led unions took a serious lead.

For the Socialist Party, the significance of TUSC lay in its potential as a catalyst in the unions, both in the structures and below, for the idea of working-class political representation.

And in fact, TUSC saw a greater level of trade union leadership and involvement than any other left-of-Labour electoral formation, involving at various times not only the RMT, but leading officials from the PCS civil servants union, the National Union of Teachers, the Fire Brigades Union, and the Prison Officers Association.

TUSC's other great strength is its federal character, with agreed core election policies, but with participating organisations, including the Socialist Party, retaining the freedom to campaign independently - a united front, marching separately but striking together at the ballot box. A number of anti-cuts rebel Labour councillors were also attracted to TUSC on this basis.

Corbyn's unanticipated Labour leadership victory in 2015 changed the situation from the time of TUSC's formation. But now the situation has changed again, and the question of how to push forward the struggle for working-class representation on a socialist programme is starkly posed.

Whether or not TUSC can be relaunched on the same basis as it existed prior to its suspension of electoral activity in 2018, the TUSC model remains as an example of how that struggle can be conducted.

## Nationalise Tata Steel to save jobs

ALEC THRIVES

SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

Media reports that Tata Steel in Port Talbot is considering shutting down its two blast furnaces, and replacing them with 'greener' electric arc furnaces, which would require far less workers, have provoked anger and panic among the workforce, steel unions, and local politicians.

Electric arc furnaces would basically turn the works into a steel recycling plant rather than the primary steel-making operation (using basic raw materials and converting iron ore and coking coal into steel) which now exists.

Inevitably, many of the 4,000 jobs would be under threat if this cost-saving project is given the green light, which would devastate the already battered economies of Port Talbot, the Valleys and surrounding areas.

As to be expected, the damage of big job losses to one of the poorest communities in the UK is of secondary importance to Tata and the Tories, whose primary concern is shareholders' profits.

This proposal has nothing to do with Tata's newly found 'green' credentials, but is all about securing central and Welsh government loans and grants to offset the

losses of decreased demand for steel in the UK and internationally.

Getting their hands on taxpayers' money, yet again, means that Tata has to sign up to the government's 'Project Bush' scheme which makes any cash incentives reliant on companies reducing their carbon emissions.

Moving to electric arc furnaces would partially fulfil that requirement, but would also drastically cut Tata Steel's wage bill by throwing steelworkers onto the unemployment scrapheap with next to no chance of finding alternative employment.

Since the battle to save jobs and pensions in 2016-17, steelworkers have been served up with further job cuts, as well as attacks on pensions and conditions. The promises to 'keep the furnaces firing' and further investment are starting to look even shallower.

In assisting the struggles of the steelworkers four years ago, the Socialist Party and the National Shop Stewards Network pointed out that 'the only secure future for the plant is nationalisation of steel under democratic workers' control and management'. This is the only way to protect jobs and the environment.

That central demand back in 2016-17 to 'nationalise Tata to save steel' must be urgently put back on the agenda in preparation for the struggle ahead!



## Online rally: Fight the London transport funding cuts!

NORTH LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

London is the only economically developed capital in which public transport is not funded by government grants. The pandemic has accelerated its funding crisis, and, at the behest of government, the mayor Sadiq Khan is increasing fares and cutting travel concessions and work to make the service accessible.

Government representatives have been installed on the board, and accountants KPMG are reviewing the organisation. Transport workers who risked their lives during the crisis will now be faced with attacks to their jobs, terms and conditions. So much for thanking keyworkers.

The RMT rail union has initiated a campaign to fight for a decent and affordable transport system for Londoners. At a highly successful online launch rally they were joined by youth and disability campaigners, and the other transport unions Aslef, TSSA and Unite.

For the RMT, Steve Hedley outlined the impact of the £4 billion funding shortfall. He called for maximum unity, and a campaign including industrial action. He called out the lack of a public fightback from Sadiq Khan.



Youth speaker Oisín Mulholland brought home the impact on young people of withdrawing the zip card, which allows young people to travel for free or at a discounted rate. He explained how young people would not be able to go to central London and enjoy London.

Paula Peters, from Unite Community and the disabled people's group DPAC, showed the impact of the cuts on disabled people, and called for transport in London to be renationalised. Concessionary travel has been attacked, and work to make stations accessible has been halted.

Some union speakers sought to defend the London mayor's role. Clearly this will be an issue to debate during the campaign. Steve Hedley made the pointed suggestion that the campaign could support Sadiq Khan in the way he supported Jeremy Corbyn. Khan consistently worked against Jeremy Corbyn when he led the party, and greeted the news of the Tory victory at the last election with the comment that voters "got it right."

However, speakers expressed a widespread commitment to campaign and to prepare industrial action.

Unite's regional secretary Peter Kavanagh pointed out that there has been an increase of 15,000 members into the union since the pandemic started in the London and Eastern region of Unite alone. Workers are looking to their unions to defend themselves.

Socialists and campaigners will seek to develop a wide-ranging campaign based in trade unions and communities.

● Sign the RMT's online petition at [rmtlondoncalling.org.uk](https://rmtlondoncalling.org.uk)

## United Left general secretary hustings shows widest debate needed for left in Unite

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN UNITE

United Left, a faction in the general trade union Unite, has announced the result of its hustings and online vote on 18 July for its candidate for the next Unite general secretary election. This election is not scheduled to take place until early 2022, but may happen next year.

Steve Turner defeated fellow assistant general secretary Howard Beckett by 370 votes to 367.

A number of United Left supporters have complained about not being included in the online ballot, and we understand that it is possible that the outcome could be challenged.

The hustings brought to the surface clear differences between the two candidates on a number of issues, particularly the approach the union should take to Labour after Keir Starmer's victory over the Corbyn left, both locally at council level and nationally.

Howard rightly pointed to his record in Birmingham, when he played a leading role in the binworkers' dispute against the right-wing Labour council.

He also promised that if elected as leader, the union would challenge Starmer's moving Labour to

the right, and warned: "He won't be able to take Unite and our money for granted."

In contrast, Steve made it clear that he was totally opposed to this approach, saying that a general secretary "isn't an attack dog but a deal-maker".

Unfortunately, the impression was given that under his leadership, Unite would accept that the left had been defeated, and not sufficiently challenge Starmer and the service-cutting Labour councils and mayors.

Prior to the hustings, Socialist Party members in United Left argued that the process had many flaws, and was far too rushed to select a candidate for an election that hasn't actually been called, and could be at least twelve months away.

Unfortunately, it has not been the broad and inclusive debate and discussion that is needed within the left of the union, particularly with workers facing such an historical crisis.

The candidates' 500-word programmes, that were supposed to be made available to United Left supporters, never materialised.

We are seeing the beginnings of what could be a hurricane of redundancies and closures, as well as at least £10 billion of public sector cuts.

This requires much more debate, not less.

Socialist Party members voted for Howard Beckett in the United Left ballot. But we believe that the events of 18 July must be the beginning, not the end, of the discussion about the industrial and political programme needed for the union in the stormy period we are entering.

This needs to go beyond the United Left and include others who are seen by an important layer of fighting reps and officers as legitimate left candidates, such as Sharon Graham, an executive officer who leads organising and leverage.

The Socialist Party believes that this approach is essential to re-arm the left in Unite for the stark challenges that face members and reps.



## Debenhams: Fighting closures and redundancies in the UK and sending solidarity to Ireland

On 17 July protests were held in London, Leeds, Bradford, Plymouth and Glasgow, organised by Usdaw members and supported by activists from the wider trade union movement.

Protesters sent solidarity to Irish Debenhams workers fighting for decent redundancy pay after the company put the entire store network into administration, and against the 12 (and possibly more) store closures and over a thousand jobs being cut in the UK.

Socialist Party member and Usdaw president Amy Murphy attended the London protest and spoke in a personal capacity. See the video at [facebook.com/usdawactivist](https://facebook.com/usdawactivist)

## Continue the fight to protect safety

CONNOR O'FARRELL  
WAREHOUSE WORKER

As lockdown eases, workers' rights must be defended. Employers have been attacking the health and safety measures won by members and their reps. Employers have raised the number of people allowed in shops causing serious concerns about worker and consumer safety, whereas other sectors are still shut until the 25 July.



for our safety at work, in terms of action it has been the glaring opposite.

Staggered shift ends have been eroded, but the majority of workers continue to take action themselves against the greed of our bosses, and down tools ten minutes before finishing time to allow distancing at the clock-out machines.

Workers, including myself, have been disciplined for adhering to some distancing guidelines, targets have been reintroduced, and agency workers continue to be threatened with losing their jobs if they do not hit or exceed them.

This for-profit agenda has resulted in three known Covid-19 cases, and the tragic death of an agency worker in my depot. We need a union that fights to defend our safety and jobs, terms and conditions.





Who would have thought that the answer to homelessness would be so simple as to give everyone a home!

JACK JEFFREY  
HOMELESSNESS WORKER AND UNITE UNION REP

The government often claims to have housed 90% of homeless people during the pandemic through the ‘Everybody In’ scheme. Working for a homeless service in Westminster, I know this to be a lie. The chaotic response by national government, and the culture created by years of its ‘hostile environment’ for migrants, meant many of those with immigration issues were wrongly turned away by local authorities. In addition, anyone who became homeless during lockdown has found normal services restricted, day centres closed, and only some of the soup runs and food drops still operating.

### Everybody in... for how long?

Despite this, the ‘Everybody In’ project has helped many rough sleepers access accommodation. For many of my clients, it has enabled them to engage with physical and mental health services, tackle substance abuse, and start to practise self-care. Who would have thought that the answer to homelessness would be so simple as to give everyone a home! When this hotel scheme finishes, people will need continuing support and accommodation, or we risk losing these hard-won gains in their lives. To do this, we have to first properly fund support services. Homelessness services are funded mostly through local government, and have been hit badly during austerity, losing nearly £1 billion a year in funding since 2010. This has led to a loss of 9,000 supported bed spaces, and an 18% cut in ‘floating’ support services to help people maintain their tenancies. This is against a backdrop of rising homelessness - with an increase in rough sleeping of 169% since 2010.



### Renters need (real) payment holidays

Any attempt to deal with homelessness also needs to address our broken housing system, which embeds insecurity into people’s lives. Private rental sector eviction has become the main cause of homelessness since 2012, overtaking relationship breakdown. This is due to the combination of increasing precariousness in employment, including through zero-hour contracts and the gig economy, together with the housing crisis. Without radical change the problem is only likely to get worse. In an effort to stop a wave of homelessness, the government placed an official stay on all evictions until 23 August. But all this has done is postpone the crisis - and never mind slum landlords who ignore the law. Research by Generation Rent found private sector arrears have more than tripled from 4% to 13% during the pandemic. The government was quick to announce temporary mortgage ‘holidays’ for homeowners - which in this case means deferring repayments rather than cancelling them. Mortgage payments are finite and you own the house at the end - rent payments are indefinite with no claim on ownership. So private renters need a real payment holiday, with their rents written off for the period they can’t afford, to avoid being pushed over a cliff edge. This has already happened in Ithaca, a city in New York State in the US, which voted to cancel rent arrears accrued during the pandemic. Compensation will be provided to small landlords or those in financial need, with large profitable landlords expected to take the burden. Under Jeremy Corbyn, Labour had a similar policy. However, Keir Starmer quickly changed this to forcing renters to pay back any arrears within two years. This does nothing to address renters’ loss of income, or delay the eviction process. Research by ‘Open Labour’, a soft-left pressure group, found such a policy would increase rents for those in arrears by around 12%. With the Office for National Statistics reporting rents hitting record highs in June, it seems unlikely already-stretched private renters will be able to make this up.



### Housing associations: help or hindrance?

The majority of housing associations have their origins in the state’s failure to deal with repeated housing crises through Britain’s history. With vast reserves of around £4 billion, you might think they could play a key role in solving homelessness. Unfortunately, this doesn’t seem to be the case. Although it is harder to evict people in social housing, it isn’t through associations’ lack of trying. More than half of all eviction notices are served by social landlords. Shamefully, in April, in the midst of the pandemic, housing associations raised rents by an average of 2.7%. They now behave like private companies, searching for profit, not organisations that care about their tenants. This is also reflected in their executive pay packets. There is no way chief executives like London and Quadrant’s David Montague - on a salary of £335,704 - can identify with the life of normal tenants. Any answer to the housing crisis involves moving away from the precarious private rented sector. However, we cannot trust housing associations to deliver this. Social housing should be accountable and run for the interest of its tenants. This structure already exists in local authorities - which despite years of making attacks on their own council housing stock, still manage around one million households.

### Local authorities must fight back

Subject to a modicum of democratic control, councils also possess the power to build the 340,000 new homes a year - which is what the National Housing Federation states is needed to solve the housing crisis. With the right to set local planning policy, and the ability to compulsory-purchase land, councils are also one of Britain’s biggest landowners. A Freedom of Information request by ‘Who owns England’ found local authorities in England alone own around 1.3 million acres of land. For perspective, London - a city of around nine million - takes up around 390,000 acres. They can and should requisition many of the 500,000 homes currently sitting empty in the UK. And they can enforce quality controls for private landlords, and help establish democratic rent caps in the private sector. Shelter estimates local authorities spend £1 billion a year on often poor-quality temporary accommodation. As foreign student numbers are estimated to collapse, and many study from home, couldn’t empty student housing be requisitioned to provide emergency accommodation? And it will be many years before tourist, student and business travel return. Could not some of the hotels currently being used be turned permanently into hostels to address the need for supported housing?



### Set no-cuts budgets and fight for the funds!

Councils have all the tools to solve the crisis. They only lack the resources to do so. The Tories have repeatedly shown they don’t care throughout the pandemic. Labour still has control of many local councils in the UK. Rather than building homes working-class people can’t afford, such as the Meridian Water development in Enfield, north London, they could be the example of how to move forward. Councils face a net shortfall of at least £6 billion this year, and eight out of ten are facing local authorities’ version of bankruptcy, research by the Centre for Progressive Policy has found. But while extra spending on services during the Covid-19 crisis has exacerbated this, councils have spent a decade dutifully carrying out the Tories’ cuts. Rather than sinking without a fight, councillors need to stand up and refuse to make ordinary people pay for this government’s austerity drive: set no-cuts, needs budgets to address the housing crisis! Action like this was taken by Liverpool’s Labour council - led by Militant, the forerunner of the Socialist Party - when it refused to implement Tory austerity in the 1980s. From 1984 to 1987, the city built 5,000 quality new homes. Liverpool Council did this by asking the city’s working class what housing it wanted, then building them, and leading workers in mass demonstrations and strikes to win more funding from Westminster to cover the costs. Today, councils have huge reserves and borrowing powers they could use to fund immediate social needs alongside launching a similar campaign for more funding from central government. Councillors must commit to this fight - or step aside for working-class fighters who will.



Councils possess the power to build the 340,000 new homes a year - which is what the National Housing Federation states is needed to solve the housing crisis



### Private renters organise to fight

The Socialist spoke to **Andrea Gilbert**, a housing and homelessness activist who is co-founder of her local branch of the London Renters Union, in Putney, south-west London.

- **What was the impact of coronavirus on private renters?** It’s been horrific, as many people - especially those in low-paid sectors like hospitality - lost their jobs. Even those who have managed to keep their job have often been furloughed. When you’re struggling to survive each month, to suddenly lose 20% of your wages is a big hit. Lots of people I know have had to use food banks for the first time just to feed their families.
- **It feels like the pandemic has exposed inequalities in housing** This is so true. If you look at the statistics, those most affected by coronavirus have overwhelmingly been from the working class and ethnic minorities. This is because they are more likely to live in overcrowded, poorly ventilated, low-quality accommodation. These are also the groups that have lost out the most over Wandsworth Council’s attempts at regeneration. Local projects in Roehampton and Winstanley were meant to help deprived areas, but have ended up just forcing local people out. The projects average only 23% social housing, and the properties for sale are way out of reach of local people. A two-bed property in the Roehampton regeneration starts at £600,000!
- **Has the government done anything to help private renters during the pandemic?** Nothing beyond pausing evictions. It feels like the whole system is set up to subsidise landlords. They’ve agreed to allow mortgage holders to pause their repayments but have done nothing to help renters.



Private renters need a real payment holiday, with their rents written off for the period they can’t afford, to avoid being pushed over a cliff edge

- **What have you been campaigning for in the London Renters Union?** We have been campaigning for cancelling rent and arrears accrued due to coronavirus. We’ve also been resisting evictions and exposing landlords who refuse to do basic maintenance and repairs.
- **What can be done to improve the private rented sector?** Longer, fixed tenancies, and more legal protection for renters would help, but as long as we have a system based on profit we’ll struggle to make big changes. I think the only real way to solve this would be a mass campaign of building social housing. Everyone should have a secure tenancy at an affordable rent. Housing should be a right, not a privilege, and no one should have to face homelessness because of poverty. Unfortunately, this government doesn’t seem interested, and I don’t have much hope in the current leadership of the Labour Party. So it’s going to be us who have to organise to change things!

### Domestic violence: victims need homes and services now

AMY COUSENS  
BRADFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

Austerity measures have cut off roads of support and means to escape. Austerity is directly responsible for women’s deaths. And as soon as the lockdown started, domestic violence rates soared. During the first month of lockdown, three times more women were murdered by their partners than in the same month in 2019. One woman, Victoria Woodhall, was stabbed to death, in broad daylight, in her street, in front of her children, by her husband. 26 women and girls have been murdered since the start of lockdown, and counting. In Doncaster, four women were murdered in less than a month. Domestic violence organisations entered this crisis with a lack of bed spaces and severely declining funds. Last year, 60% of applications to refugees had to be refused due to lack of space. Wuhan in China saw a tripling of domestic violence cases in its first month of lockdown. So the government and councils must have known this was coming, and did nothing. 262 refuge bed spaces are currently closed, because the organisations have not been given extra funds to put measures in place to ensure they can open safely. During the lockdown, the government has announced a variety of figures promised to domestic violence organisations to support their work. Initially the Tories announced a figure of £37 million, but the New York Times reported on 2 July that between them, the various organisations had received just £1.1 million of this. The Tories are happy to provide handouts to big business costing the public purse billions, but will not ensure the safety of women’s lives. A mass campaign is needed to win back the money taken from our refugees, and to ensure that women and all domestic violence victims have the means and accommodation they need to be safe. Reverse all cuts to domestic violence services - and wider council services. Social work, adult education and language services, among others, can all be crucial in helping women escape abusive relationships. Living wages and benefits and free education at all levels are also important to guarantee independence. And most of all, victims need somewhere to escape to. Councils should seize empty homes now, and embark on a mass programme of council house building. Private accommodation must be subject to democratic rent caps and fully enforced quality standards.



● Bristol statue

Is anybody else perplexed by the behaviour of Bristol’s Labour mayor, Marvin Rees? For four years he took no action about the statue of slave trader Colston. But as soon as a statue of a black protester is put up, it’s removed within hours.

Rees is an elected mayor, so has a lot of power. Even if it was a council decision to keep Colston’s statue up, he took no proposals there.

ROGER BANNISTER  
LIVERPOOL

Marvin Rees confirmed it was his decision to remove the statue, on the grounds that no official application was made to erect it. He said that the whole issue was distracting from the ‘great’ regeneration (gentrification) projects.

He claims to be a supporter of the new Black Lives Matter statue, but in practice never did anything to remove the slave owner from his plinth. He’s an opportunist imposing massive cuts.

DOMENICO HILL  
BRISTOL

● US imperialism

Alison Hill’s article on the 1975 Australia coup (see ‘Palace letters show the monarchy is a weapon for capitalism’ at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)) provided a very good political argument for socialists to use when calling for the abolition of the monarchy.

Alison is correct regarding the ruling class being worried about the power of a mobilised labour movement. There was another incident which also undermined the activities of imperialism.

The CIA operated a listening station in the outbreak on land leased from the Australian government. Then prime minister Gough Whitlam threatened not to renew the lease, which held out the prospect of the station having to close, disrupting surveillance in the entire Asian Pacific region, including China.

That magnified his danger to imperialism, and pushed the intricate veneer of governmental stalemate used to justify this constitutional coup.

CLIVE WALDER  
BIRMINGHAM

● Unsafe and legal

Fire doors used in Grenfell are still the main doors used in many council high rises. The excuse? They met regulations when they were installed and so are still legal.

Councils are not prepared to spend the money to make council properties safe - and that’s backed up by the law. It just shows that the law is no measure of what is safe or right, and in creating a new society that meets the needs of all, many unjust laws will have to be broken.

AMY COUSENS  
BRADFORD

● Football is fans not owners

What’s happened at Hull City is the reality of football under capitalism - millionaire owners with no check on their arrogance and wants. Clubs



DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

- Send your news, views and criticism, in not more than 150 words, to [editors@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:editors@socialistparty.org.uk) - or if you’re not online, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT
- We reserve the right to shorten letters. For legal reasons, we need your full name, address and phone number - but confidentiality will be respected if requested

THE SOCIALIST INBOX



The statue of Black Lives Matter protester Jen Reid before it was removed by Bristol’s Labour council  
photo Andrew Richards/CC

become about the egos of those running them.

It’s mad to think that City have gone from the Premier League and Europe to this sorry state of affairs. Clubs are not their owners, they’re a community asset, they’re the focal point for thousands of people, and to see the heart ripped out of City is difficult to watch.

Solidarity to all Hull City fans. #AllamOut  
MATT WHALE  
HULL

● Lockdown nuclear Armageddon

“I can’t abandon that tool [lockdown] any more than I would abandon a nuclear deterrent. But it is like a nuclear deterrent, I certainly don’t want to use it. And nor do I think we will be in that position again,” wrote Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

Has Johnson thought through this

analogy? A nuclear deterrent is presumably meant to dissuade foreign powers not to attack Britain. Having a lockdown in reserve is not going to deter a virus.

Back in March, during the pandemic, Boris did, eventually, deploy the ‘nuclear option’ in order to prevent hundreds of thousands of deaths. Unfortunately for the PM, that pesky coronavirus hasn’t gone away and, now that the lockdown has been lifted, is making a comeback.

And this resurgence is not being contained by Johnson’s ‘world beating’ track and trace weapon. Yet without an effective test, trace and isolation system, the Academy of Medical Sciences speculates that a second wave of the pandemic this winter could result in 120,000 excess deaths in hospitals alone.

So despite the hopes of the PM that the country won’t experience a pandemic again, the likelihood, given this government’s lamentable record, is that Johnson is going to have to press the nuclear button.

SIMON CARTER  
NEWHAM, LONDON



Wasp Network photo Netflix

Film: Wasp Network  
Exciting Cuban spy thriller exposes US-sponsored terrorism

SCOTT JONES  
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Action-packed and exciting, Wasp Network is a spy thriller that tells the story of the ‘Cuban Five’. Set in 1990s Havana and Miami, both cities are brought colourfully into your home via Netflix. The tale of several Cuban intelligence officers, their families, and the world of Miami’s Cuban émigré community, is told.

The story of how Cuba battled right-wing, US-sponsored terrorist groups in Miami during the 90s is little-known, so a film about it is very welcome.

Following the Cuban revolution which kicked out capitalism, the capitalists themselves - the super-rich, mobsters, casino owners and supporters of overthrown Cuban dictator Batista - largely took up residence in Miami.

And this resurgence is not being contained by Johnson’s ‘world beating’ track and trace weapon. Yet without an effective test, trace and isolation system, the Academy of Medical Sciences speculates that a second wave of the pandemic this winter could result in 120,000 excess deaths in hospitals alone.

Although Cuba was not a socialist regime, the revolution led to huge social gains for the people of Cuba, especially in healthcare and education, and inspired widespread international support among the working class and poor.

The groups based in Miami infamously failed in their ‘invasion’ of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, and thereafter turned to terrorist methods to undermine the Cuban regime. The groups claimed they were fighting for democracy in Cuba, and were

humanitarian organisations helping refugees. But as well as the terrorism they were involved in the drugs trade. As one character says: “You never know where the fight for a ‘free’ Cuba ends and drug smuggling begins.”

Cuba came to rely more and more on tourism, and it is this industry which the terrorists target, with scenes showing them blowing up hotels and firing guns at resorts. Like all intelligence agents, the Cubans working in Miami are duplicitous, and there are consequences for those around them. Amid all the action, there are some emotional scenes showing the impact on the families of the Cuban agents.

But they did thwart 20 terrorist attacks before being discovered by the FBI and arrested for ‘spying against the United States’, facing many years behind bars.

The film, refreshingly, attacks the US for its role and the brutal economic embargo it imposed against Cuba in the 1960s. But it also doesn’t sugar-coat the reality in 90s Cuba - austerity in place following the collapse of economic support from the Soviet Union, exacerbating the US embargo, and the top-down bureaucratic character of the Cuban regime.

A good film that shows the dangers capitalism poses to Cuba and the need to fight for genuine socialism.

● Wasp Network is available now on Netflix

Wales arts cuts: Save every job



Jason Camilleri (left) with other protesters photo Mariam Kasmish

As live performances are cancelled, there could be a jobs meltdown in the whole theatre and arts sector unless the government steps in. Under pressure, the UK government announced a £1.5 billion subsidy, but that has not been used to defend jobs.

In Wales, the Drakeford government has given £59 million to the arts, but without any strings requiring employers to protect jobs. Without a fight, management at the Wales Millennium Centre will cut 250 jobs.

Jason Camilleri, a Wales Millennium Centre worker, helped organise a protest outside the Welsh Senedd (parliament) against job cuts in museums, arts and venues on 18 July.

redundancies already taking place, announcements around the rescue package have been slow and fraught with confusion.

The idea of a union supporting an entire workforce within an organisation does not seem to exist. There are specific unions for performers, but the industry is so much more than that. The key is immediate action for the industry to become unionised, and a concerted effort must be made to ensure that this happens.

The current emergency needs action. There are no guarantees that any job is safe as a result of this fund. And there is no word from the Welsh Government on whether it intends to use this fund to protect livelihoods.

If you are waiting on the announcement before you speak up, the opportunity may be lost, along with thousands of jobs. The time is now.

● Reads Jason’s full comment at [socialistpartywales.org.uk](http://socialistpartywales.org.uk)

● Israel: Nurses strike and win

Angry demonstrations have broken out all over Israel, composed of new young activists.

After the first angry demonstrations, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced a new plan to distribute economic aid to people. He is acting under pressure to try to save himself from the anger of the people.

Netanyahu is afraid. The whole right-wing regime is afraid.

Nurses took strike action on 20 July. Some unions said that during the coronavirus crisis we should not strike.

I said it would be wrong to refrain from striking because of the pandemic. On the contrary, we must strike because of the pandemic.

To win this battle against Covid, we need more nurses. The strike was called off after a day when the government agreed to fund over 3,000 new health workers.

Social workers have been on strike for weeks. The government has refused to pay the pennies needed to settle this strike.

The situation in social care is a catastrophe. The social workers have a fighting leader, Inbal Hermeni.

But we have serious problems with the rotten leadership of the Histadrut union federation. Histadrut has not lifted a finger to help the social workers.

Some Histadrut bureaucrats draw salaries of 60,000 shekels (£13,800) a month out of members subs, but are refusing to fight. My hope is that this wave of struggle will aid the process of replacing them.

ELI YOSSEF  
WORKERS COMMITTEE OF ANCILLARY STAFF, ISRAEL

● Bristol trans rights protest

Hundreds gathered on College Green on 18 July to protest against the government’s most recent proposed attack on the rights of trans people.

The Tories propose dropping

reform to the Gender Recognition Act, which would have allowed trans people to self-identify and made it easier to change their legal gender.

The protest was static, with attendees socially distancing, most wearing masks.

A few people got up to speak, highlighting the discrimination and abuse they had faced and calling for

the recognition that trans rights are human rights.

Socialist Party members joined the protest, handing out leaflets supporting the right of self-identification and for trans rights more generally.

Most attendees were keen to read our leaflet and learn more about our demands.

AMY SAGE  
BRISTOL NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY



photo Timothy Young/USA/CC

I joined the Socialist Party to fight back

Since the coronavirus crisis started, managers at the Sainsbury’s where I work have gone on the offensive, handing out disciplinary investigations like confetti. So I joined the Socialist Party in order to fight back

In the short time that I’ve been a member, I’ve been given advice on how to: 1) Defend colleagues in disciplinary meetings; 2) set up a Unite union branch at the store where I work; and 3) get elected as a shop steward.

On all of these counts I am already making some progress. In a disciplinary investigation, I represented a fellow Unite member who was on a final written warning, and potentially facing dismissal.

By following advice that had been given to me by Roger Bannister and Dave Walsh - both Socialist Party members and experienced trade unionists - I was able to defend my colleague so that the investigation against him was completely dropped.

This success is small in the grand scheme of things. But it is important to the person whose job was protected. And it has helped in growing the budding Unite branch at my workplace.

This small victory would not have been possible without the help and advice I’d received from Socialist Party members. I hope it is the first of many victories.

SAINSBURY’S WORKER  
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

● Over 1,000 sign open letter defending Maxine Peake

An open letter opposing false allegations of antisemitism against actor and Equity union member Maxine Peake has attracted 1,021 signatories (see ‘Trade unionists stand in solidarity with Maxine Peake’ at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)).

Keir Starmer used the smear to oust Rebecca Long-Bailey from Labour’s shadow cabinet (see ‘Workers need a new mass party to defend their interests’ at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)).

This was followed by attempts on Maxine’s career, including de facto calls for her blacklisting in the Sun and Daily Mail.

The letter’s signatories represent

members of at least 24 trade unions, all in a personal capacity. This includes Equity and sister performing arts unions Bectu and the Musicians’ Union. Hundreds of trade unionists from across all sectors, from nurses and bus drivers to lecturers and film-makers, also gave support.

As well as the Socialist, weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party, the open letter was sent to a dozen media and campaign organisations, including the Independent, the Stage, the Guardian, the Times, Socialist Worker and the Morning Star. At the time of writing, only the Socialist Party has published it.

- Read the open letter in full: see ‘Open letter: trade unionists and artists stand with Maxine Peake’ at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)
- To view the full list of signatories, contact James Ivens on [james.iven@gmail.com](mailto:james.iven@gmail.com)

● Getting the Socialist over the summer

The Socialist is now entering our summer schedule. This will give our editors a chance to take a well-deserved summer break.

The next issue of the Socialist will arrive with you on 6 August and then

fortnightly until 3 September when the normal weekly schedule will resume.

Don’t worry, you won’t miss out over the summer. You can still read socialist news, campaigns and analysis at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk) and [socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net).

● Subscribe to the Socialist at [socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe](http://socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe)



# SAVING THE MUSIC INDUSTRY FROM PANDEMIC AND AUSTERITY

NICK BROOK  
RECORD LABEL WORKER  
AND BLACK COUNTRY SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

“90% of UK venues and festivals face closure” warned a report from the Music Venue Trust in June. Like many other service industries, the live music business has been left on a cliff edge by the onset of Covid-19 and cancellation of events throughout the prime spring and summer period.

Most of the musicians and other workers in live music who put their labour into generating the industry's £1.1 billion annual turnover have been left in a precarious situation. With many of us in the original 'gig economy' carrying out a variety of one-off and irregular jobs to earn a living, accessing financial support has been difficult. There are anxious waits to receive grants for the self-employed from central government and national arts councils.

Belatedly, the government has announced a £1.6 billion rescue package for the entire culture sector. This is welcome, although it is not clear how much of this funding will make its way to the small arts organisations and arts workers who most need it.

And really, the sector needed this kind of additional funding even before venues closed and box office takings collapsed. In reality, far more will be necessary as social distancing and reduced incomes continue to hit audience numbers and other sources of money.

### Fewer jobs

As any professional musician will tell you, the job might have its enjoyable sides, but it is work all the same. For the jobbing musician it's still possible to scratch out a living, though this has been getting harder for several years due to the number of potential gigs drying up.

During the 2010s, 35% of dedicated live music venues shut their doors. Many were victim to rising rents, and property developers reasoning their locations could be more profitable if converted into overpriced flats.

Further difficulties have been created by an increasing share of major venues becoming concentrated in the hands of a small number of large entertainment conglomerates, in particular Live Nation.

As well as controlling several large music festivals, Live Nation has a majority share of medium-to-large venues in the UK through ownership of Academy Music Group. It has a virtual monopoly in cities such as Birmingham, where it operates both the Academy on Bristol Street and the Institute in Digbeth.

At the more genteel end of the spectrum, local authority and

not-for-profit arts centres and theatres previously provided a network for more niche genres such as folk and jazz. They were also the only places in many small towns with a stage, proper PA system, and lights.

Since 2010 in particular, councils passing on government cuts, and reductions to other public funding, have meant that many have either had to close, or take a more 'commercial' approach in programming. Touring musicians are forced to absorb much more of the overhead costs and financial risk of performances.

### Poverty pay

Having secured a gig, there's the question of pay. The average musician earns £9,000 less than the median annual wage.

As of 2020, the Musicians' Union-recommended rate for a pub or club gig of up to three hours, including breaks, is £128. Even this is more aspiration than the going rate, with around half of that being the norm for many.

If £60 sounds like good pay for standing on a stage and playing for a bit, consider a typical working day for a musician. Travelling to a gig for two hours, setting up for an hour, playing for three hours, then another two hours of packing down and travelling home, sometime after midnight.

Never mind putting on a show and giving a good performance no matter whether you're under the weather, just broke up with your partner, or are just having an off day.

And even that fee is only per gig. It doesn't account for the hours of solo practice needed to reach and stay at a professional level, let alone rehearsals with bandmates, time writing material, and purchasing and maintaining professional-quality instruments and gear.

Alongside musicians, at any gig from The Dog and Duck through to Wembley Stadium there are others working to make the performance possible - from bouncers to sound engineers to bar staff.

In the case of arena shows, thousands of people pay £50-plus per ticket. The small army of workers required to set up and staff the venue can be paid reasonably. The band and crew can be properly fed and accommodated, and pay the rent back home. The promoter and management can take a cut. Everyone walks away in profit.

But when planning a tour playing to crowds of a few hundred a night, the numbers stack up much less comfortably. That's even with a slimmed-down road crew of one person fulfilling the roles of van driver, roadie, and agony aunt!

And the further down the food chain you go, the more likely the band themselves are going to have to personally take on the financial risks



An increasing share of major venues have become concentrated in the hands of a small number of large entertainment conglomerates

from gigs. They'll receive a percentage of ticket sales after promotional and overhead costs.

With income from live performance drying up - possibly for the remainder of 2020, or even beyond - record sales and streaming have been placed in the spotlight. Only modest amounts are earned, even by relatively successful musicians. A debate has kicked off on social media under the #BrokenRecord and #FixStreaming hashtags.

### Alternative income

For the first 15 years of this millennium, the recorded music industry seemed to be in terminal decline. This was put down to the internet allowing people to download music for free through 'pirate' sites. Just over ten years ago, Spotify and other streaming services emerged as the 'saviour' of the record business - growing to around 60% of industry revenues worldwide today.

Streaming services generate steady

revenue through advertising and subscription payments. They were therefore able to agree deals with the big labels and publishers who control the rights to your favourite tunes, to pay them a set amount based on the number of plays.

These deals were negotiated on a label-by-label basis. That meant the four majors - now three due to EMI's collapse - were able to negotiate better rates, plus big shareholdings in the case of Spotify. This was due to owning the best-known songs by the best-known artists. Smaller labels had to fight over the scraps.

The major streaming services pay between £3 and £6 to the label controlling a given song per 1,000 plays. This provides a steady income from hits that manage to get into the tens of millions of plays.

In true 'rentier' capitalist style, streaming also favours major labels for controlling classic songs from years or decades ago. Songs that are perennially popular, or enjoy a resurgence

thanks to being featured on film or TV, or when a star dies, and so on.

However, for artists working in specialist genres that by and large aren't going to be million-streamers, the picture is less rosy. Pre-streaming they would have made a large portion of their CD sales direct to fans at gigs, paying back the debt to their label, and earning ready money on top. Now this source of income has tailed off, thanks to their fanbase streaming their music, but not at a big enough volume to make a significant dent in their overdraft.

And despite the ongoing shift away from selling physical CDs, cassettes and records, and the rolling out of streaming services to more and more countries across the globe, the balance sheet of many streaming companies looks sketchy at best.

Spotify is the market leader. Unlike Apple, Google and Amazon's music offers, it's the only major service that doesn't have a large, profitable parent company to piggyback on.

Spotify is yet to make an annual profit more than a decade after launching. In this respect, it is similar to many other 'platform' companies that have been stock market darlings, from Netflix to WeWork to Uber.

And like other platform companies, the shift from physical to digital consumption is a classic example of how capitalism uses new technology to reduce the overall amount it pays to workers in any sector.

In the days before the internet took off, to get a piece of music from the studio into consumers' homes would take pressing plants to manufacture the CDs or vinyl, then distribution networks of drivers and warehouses, on to the staff in record shops. Streaming has eliminated the need for these labour costs, while AI has replaced much of the admin required in administering royalties.

But many record deals are still factoring them in to give artists a meagre royalty rate. And even then, only once the cost of making the album,

£60

common pay for a full day's work for gigging musicians

£1.1bn

annual turnover of the music industry

plus any advance paid to the artist when they first signed their deal, has been repaid in full.

In response to this, many artists are moving to 'label services' deals. The artist shoulders the upfront costs of making an album, then the label helps release and promote it, on the basis of shared risk and reward, and the artist retaining full ownership of the recordings.

But the ready money and name recognition to make this work favours established acts. It makes it harder for performers from a working-class background in particular to launch their careers.

There is still teaching, of course. It's true that the majority of full-time musicians do some form of teaching, either contracted to an educational body or independently, to provide a reliable source of income.

However, over the last decade, local authority music services responsible for providing teaching in schools have been semi-privatised and starved of funding. Meanwhile, many schools are taking music out of the curriculum in response to the Tories' stultifying focus on 'core' subjects.

There is a new income source: crowdfunding. In recent years, crowdfunding around a specific album release, or in the form of ongoing subscriptions, has provided a useful income stream for many bands and performers. It is less dependent on traditional gatekeepers.

However, it isn't without risks. Musicians and fans are forced to place their trust in platforms that, like a lot of tech start-ups, operate on a shaky financial model. In 2019, crowdfunding site Pledgemusic went bankrupt, leaving many artists and fans alike out of pocket.

More crucially, successful crowdfunding needs an artist to have existing fans willing to buy into the music. It is difficult or impossible for those just starting out.

So could a 'universal basic income' targeted at musicians allow us the time and freedom to create?

In a market economy, blanket payments to artists would be taken into account by engagers and publishers, and much or all of the gain would end up offset by cuts to rates or extra charges. Capitalist governments would also not be willing to take the money for it from their big business mates, so would set it at unliveable rates and use it to cut benefits even further.

Nonetheless, an element of income support existed in the 2000s with the 'New Deal for Musicians'. Unemployed musicians could get a top-up to their dole money for access to recording and rehearsal studios.

### Socialist programme

But rather than paying musicians to sit at home waiting for the phone to ring, a much better approach would be to fund abundant opportunities to create and perform, paid at a living rate. Our aim should be full employment for all workers, including all musicians who are able to perform to a professional standard.

In education, for example, every child should have the opportunity - like private school students have for many years - to learn a musical instrument, whether that's classical oboe, rock guitar, or electronic music software.

And for those musicians who prefer not to teach, public funds could

make other opportunities available, such as free performances in shopping centres, libraries, and workplace canteens to bring music to the masses.

These two schemes could provide a basic level of income for musicians, with the opportunity to take enough hours to add up to a full-time job - or mix and match with recording, touring, and non-musical work.

Music, and the arts more generally, will only survive the coronavirus pandemic in any kind of healthy state if there is massive public investment. The Tories have poured hundreds of billions into airlines and other sectors. Arts workers and venues need bailouts too.

Any shortfall in income - due to the lockdown, and social distancing when venues reopen - must be underwritten by public funds. Subsidise the maintenance of existing programming, and reverse austerity to expand funding to all parts of the arts.

A permanent subsidy to the shortfall between income from tickets and refreshment, and core production costs, would allow small venues to take more risks in programming. And restoring funding to local councils and other public bodies, under the democratic oversight of workers, audiences and artists, could support more diverse local projects, and cheap or free rehearsal and performance facilities.

Nationalising the banks and finance sector would provide more than enough resources to pay for these schemes and a general reversal of austerity. The giant record labels, as well as monopoly venue chains like Live Nation, should also be nationalised under democratic workers' control and management.

As part of a democratic, socialist plan for the economy, the state could then advance loans, cheap or interest-free, for the upfront costs of all levels of recording and performance project. This would be unlike conventional recording deals today, where the major labels act as inefficient money-lenders, and demand a large slice of future earnings once the original debt is paid back.

Streaming is a thorny question for a lot of musicians. However, technology isn't inherently good or bad - the question is which class controls it.

To make streaming work for musicians and songwriters, a first step would be to nationalise the 40-plus streaming platforms, to prevent duplication delivering an essentially identical product, with the savings in overheads passed on to creators. Democratic control by artists, audiences and the trade union movement could level the playing field for smaller acts.

And in the ongoing debates about the state of the music business, there's an elephant in the room. The biggest challenge to the music industry over the last 30 years isn't the rise of the internet, or other forms of entertainment. Rather it's the fact that the average worker now has less disposable income and free time.

One of the biggest positive changes for those working in music under socialism would be decent pay and a reduced working week for all. This would allow working-class people to go to more gigs, explore new bands and producers, purchase merchandise, and enjoy the flowering of culture that follows any revolutionary movement.



Rather than paying musicians to sit at home waiting for the phone to ring, much better to fund abundant opportunities to create, perform and teach



# 100 years since the foundation of the Communist Party of Great Britain

## How a revolutionary party was forged out of workers' struggles and the experience of the Russian revolution



The October 1917 Russian revolution (Lenin speaking, Trotsky on podium steps) served as the launch pad to build a new revolutionary socialist international

ROSS SAUNDERS  
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

World War One - the result of capitalist nations' rivalry - led to the slaughter, on an industrial scale, of the working classes internationally. This barbarism was answered by the Russian revolution of October 1917, where a Marxist revolutionary party, led by Lenin and Trotsky, resulted in the Russian working class overthrowing capitalism.

The Bolsheviks, who led the revolution, renamed themselves the Communist Party, and formed a new Communist (Third) International - an organisation for world revolution. At its founding congress in March 1919, it appealed to all those who supported its methods to organise Communist Parties in their own countries.

The end of the war brought no relief for workers: British capitalism was in decline as a world power relative to the USA, and it could not re-expand to dominate world markets. Instead, it suffered a serious economic depression.

Unemployment by June 1921 reached 2 million, but the reformist trade union leaders revealed they were incapable of defending workers' living standards, backing no-strike agreements with the bosses during the war and betraying the coal miners on 'Black Friday', 5 April 1921.

Workers on the shop floor and their union stewards were increasingly acting on their own initiative.

All of the means by which the ruling class kept workers obedient to their demands were losing their grip, including the officialdom in the trade unions.

This went furthest on Clydeside in Scotland. In the industrialised area around Glasgow, the Clyde Workers Committee (CWC), chaired by worker militant Willie Gallagher, was set up in 1915 to coordinate strike action involving tens of thousands of workers in many factories. It quickly broadened its purpose beyond the workplace, however, organising rent strikes, anti-war activity and other political campaigns.

In January 1919, during a general strike in Glasgow, the government sent 10,000 troops and six tanks to crush the workers' action, but they only got away with it because Clydeside had risen alone.

Had a party like the Bolshevik party existed on a national scale, it could have fought to generalise the stand taken by the Clydesiders to take on and defeat the British capitalist class as a whole.

**CP founded**

On 31 July 1920, in the Cannon Street Hotel in London, delegates gathered at the founding conference of the Communist Party hoping to remedy that absence.

Conference unanimously agreed to support rule by workers' councils - the "soviet system" - and to support the defence of the workers' revolution from attack by capitalist forces.

But there was not agreement on every question, and the early years of the Communist Party (CP), in

contrast to the sterile, Stalinised CP of later years, had fierce debates

Delegates at the founding conference were split over whether communists should stand in elections and whether they should seek affiliation to the Labour Party.

**There was not agreement on every question, and the early years of the Communist Party (CP), in contrast to the sterile, Stalinised CP of later years, had fierce debates**

The motion to stand candidates in elections was won convincingly, delegates arguing that while workers participated in elections, communists should stand in them and use the platform thereby gained to build support for socialist ideas.

But the motion to affiliate to Labour barely passed, winning 100 votes to 85. The Labour Party of a century ago was very unlike the Labour Party of today: at its foundation, Labour was a federal body with a working-class activist base and democratic structures that permitted discussion and debate.

Lenin and Trotsky urged the small forces of the Communist Party to join Labour at that time - despite the Labour leadership being wedded to capitalism - providing they could keep their organisation intact, and retain full freedom to criticise the Labour leadership and campaign on an independent basis.

Lenin's book, 'Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder', had just been translated and probably swung the vote at the conference in favour. Communists, he said, should "from within parliament help the workers to see in practice the results of the government of [Labour leaders] Henderson and Snowden... To act otherwise, means to hamper the progress of the revolution".

The British Socialist Party (BSP) formed the backbone of the Communist Party at its foundation, but it would be radically transformed in the years ahead.

It had campaigned against the war and had wholeheartedly supported the Bolshevik revolution. In 1918 its headquarters were twice raided by police and thousands of pamphlets by Lenin seized.

The Socialist Labour Party (SLP) had also taken part in unity discussions. In its ranks were many courageous and determined fighters, but its leadership was riddled with sectarian methods.

It banned its activists from taking office in trade unions in case they were corrupted by contact with the bureaucracy, and it was hostile to affiliation to the Labour Party and to working in united fronts in general.

When the SLP withdrew from



By 1925 delegates at a conference of the National Minority Movement, which the party had set up the year before, represented 750,000 unionised workers

discussions about forming a united Communist Party, leading figures, including Arthur MacManus and Tom Bell from the Clyde Workers' Committee, split from the SLP in order to join the new party.

They were joined at the conference by the South Wales Socialist Societies, branches of the Independent Labour Party, and representatives of union stewards' and workers' committees. The SLP leadership refused to correct their sectarian mistake, and quickly withered to nothing as the Communist Party attracted all the most determined elements in the socialist and workers' movement.

The process of gathering the forces of the Communist Party was not complete, however. In particular, the Workers' Socialist Federation (WSF) was outside, having followed the SLP out the door. If anything, the political ideas of WSF leaders like Sylvia Pankhurst were even more ultra-left than the SLP. But Pankhurst, won over by Lenin during a visit to Russia, as well as Willie Gallagher, Harry Pollitt, and others, were convinced to join the Communist Party at its second Congress in January 1921.

The 1920 conference of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) was persuaded by right-wing Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald not to affiliate to the CP, but almost a third of conference delegates disagreed, and by 1921 several hundred members left the ILP to join the CP.

**Democratic centralism**

The CP claimed 5,000 members at its foundation, but the real figure was probably much less, and it was more like a federation than a party run according to the 'democratic centralism' (full debate internally, full unity in action) that had made the Bolsheviks so effective.

According to Bob Stewart, the CP's first national organiser, the idea of a centralised party was "the hardest nut to crack". The Communist International's executive committee discussed with leading members of its British section the organisational challenges it faced. A plan to reorganise the party from top to bottom was drawn up and discussed thoroughly throughout the organisation.

The aim was to apply the lessons learned by the Bolsheviks in Russia to British conditions and prepare the party for a rapid transformation into a mass force with significant influence in the workers' movement.

There was fierce debate about the new methods, but the results could not be ignored. In 1924 membership increased by a third - from 3,000 to 4,000 members. A year later membership was up to 5,000.

In February 1923, the party's paper



Workers' support rally at Hyde Park in London during the 1926 general strike

was renamed 'The Weekly Worker' and overhauled. In an eight-week campaign, circulation went from 19,000 to 51,000 copies. By the end of October 1924, sales had increased to 100,000.

It wasn't just better organisation that had won the Communist Party more influence: it was also the adoption of a broadly correct approach to existing mass organisations of the working class.

Labour's leaders had refused to permit the CP to affiliate. Nevertheless, the CP offered to build a united workers' front with the Labour Party, withdrawing at the 1923 election all its candidates who faced a Labour opponent.

Several of the candidates they did stand won the backing of local Labour parties and two Communists were elected to parliament. This assisted the CP to broadcast its criticism of the minority Labour government - elected in January 1924 and led by Ramsay MacDonald with Liberal support - for what Trotsky summed up as "cowardice before the big bourgeoisie".

Trotsky had called on MacDonald to lay down a bold socialist programme in parliament before the capitalists, to "take their lands, mines and railways, and nationalise their banks", and say to the capitalist politicians in parliament "accept it or I'll drive you out".

Instead, the Labour government did not halt the fall in workers' living standards and the Tories were returned at the next election nine months later.

The Communist Party, which had travelled along with workers as they went through the experience of Labour's failure, grew in membership and support.

The same approach won the CP advances in the trade unions. Rather than set up rival 'red' unions, CP members organised the militant left inside existing unions. The party thereby won support for the militant programme of demands it put forward in the battles confronting miners, engineers, dockers, railway workers and the unemployed.

By 1925, delegates at a conference of the National Minority Movement (NMM), which the party had set up the year before, represented 750,000 unionised workers.

Karl Radek of the Communist International said: "For the first time in history, the British Communists have been given an opportunity to transform themselves into a mass party."

It is a tragedy for the workers' movement in Britain and internationally that on the cusp of this breakthrough, and with a revolutionary situation impending in the 1926 general strike, all of this potential was squandered as a result of the political degeneration of the Communist International under a Stalinised leadership.

Nevertheless, the heroic early years of the Communist Party of Great Britain stand as lessons for all revolutionaries who aspire to building a force to abolish capitalism and build a socialist society.

### Further reading on [socialistparty.org.uk](https://socialistparty.org.uk)

- How the catastrophe of WW1 sparked revolution
- 1918: revolution ends World War One - and shakes the capitalist world
- John Maclean - revolutionary fighter of the working class
- A history of the first four socialist international organisations
- The Rise and Fall of the Communist International

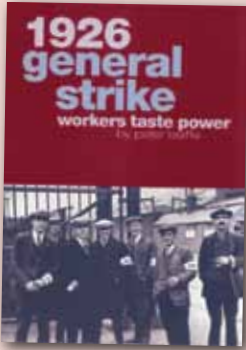
### Books available from [leftbooks.co.uk](https://leftbooks.co.uk)

**1926 General Strike: Workers taste power** by Peter Taaffe - £8.50 including postage.

- Take out a direct debit subscription to the Socialist, and get the 1926 General Strike book for free! - [socialistparty.org.uk/](https://socialistparty.org.uk/) publications
- E-book version £3.75

**Left-wing communism - an infantile disorder** by VI Lenin. £8 including postage

- Card payments 020 8988 8777



# Iran: International workers' solidarity needed

## State repression has not stopped a renewed wave of protests and strikes



An independent workers movement is key to overthrowing the regime and capitalism photo ARMIN KARAMI/CC

LUKAS ZÖBELEIN  
SOZIALISTISCHE ORGANISATION SOLIDARITÄT  
(CWI GERMANY)

A brief attempt to intimidate the thousands of Haft Tappeh sugar cane workers who have been on strike since 14 June (see 'Haft Tappeh sugar cane factory workers return to strike action' on [socialistworld.net](https://socialistworld.net)) was pushed back when four strikers who had been arrested after attending a protest in the city of Shush on 14 July were released the following day.

The local governor had hoped to use these arrests as a way to force the Haft Tappeh workers to negotiate, but this did not work. The strikers continued with their regular protests and threatened to intensify them.

This struggle is particularly significant because of the wide range of the Haft Tappeh workers' demands, including payment of back wages, reinstatement of sacked workers, and renationalisation of the privatised company.

In a previous strike at the end of 2018, there were calls by Haft Tappeh workers that a renationalised company should be "managed by a workers' council and based on collective decision-making".

The struggles of these workers, and others, are a key to building a genuine independent workers' movement that can both overthrow the dictatorial regime and also fight for a socialist alternative to capitalism.

The release of these four strikers shows both the divisions and weaknesses in the regime. Facing an economic crisis, a renewed upsurge in Covid-19 infections, and a new wave of protests, the regime is both weak and divided.

The combination of the fall in oil prices, the world economic crisis, and the Trump regime's economic sanctions, is hitting Iran hard. Last month, the Iranian rial was trading at 130,000 to one US dollar; at the beginning of July the figure was 230,000!

Amidst the deepening economic

and social crisis, a renewed wave of protests and strikes has begun in many areas. Recently, there have been protests in Tehran, Behbahan, Esfahan, Shiraz and other cities.

The regime is reacting with both repression and concessions. Some sections of the state believe that the protests can be simply crushed. While the arrested Haft Tappeh workers were quickly released, another Haft Tappeh striker was sentenced on 16 July to 222 lashes for "insulting officials" and "publishing lies and slander". The day after the Behbahan demonstration, the regime said it would deal "decisively" with further protests.

This zigzagging was also seen when, on 15 July, the regime suggested that it might allow an appeal against the previous day's Supreme Court decision to uphold the executions of three young men - Amirhosein Moradi, 25, Saeed Tamjidi, 27, and Mohammad Rajabi, 27 - who had participated in the nationwide uprising last November against an increase in fuel prices. On 19 July the Iranian judiciary ordered a retrial for the three.

The threat of their execution produced a wave of opposition in Iran, supported internationally. Protests on the streets were seen in different places. On the morning of 15 July, the hashtag #DontExecute (in Farsi) was the most tweeted in Iran, with maybe five million posts, despite government attempts to disrupt the internet.

Seeing an opportunity to attack the Iran regime, US president Donald Trump tweeted on 15 July: "Executing these three people sends a terrible signal to the world and should not be done! #StopExecutionsInIran".

Trump, of course, ignored the executions of oppositionists already carried out, or threatened,

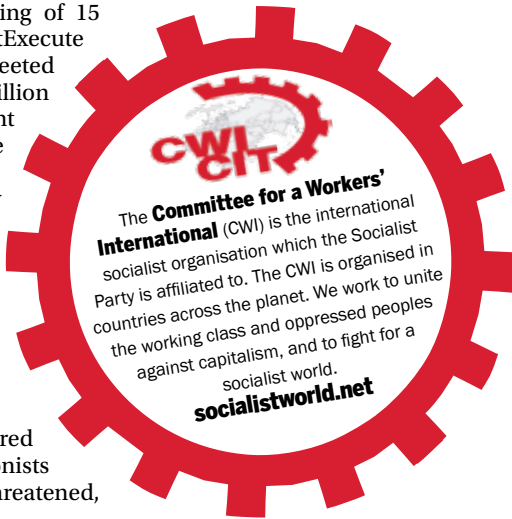
by his friends running the dictatorial Saudi and Bahraini regimes. This shows why no trust at all can be put in capitalist leaders like Trump. They have no principles apart from defending the profits, interests and power of their own ruling classes.

But the Iranian regime will not simply give up. As part of its repression it executed, on 14 July, two Kurdish men who had been convicted in 2015 of planting a bomb at a military parade in Mahabad in 2010, something they denied, saying that their 'confessions' had been forced under torture.

The labour movement internationally must defend democratic rights and support working people in struggle.

Trade unionists and others worldwide must demand the release of political prisoners in Iran, an end to repression and the organise activities in solidarity with the protests of the Haft Tappeh and other strikers.

- Further reading on [socialistparty.org.uk](https://socialistparty.org.uk)
- Renewed protests shake Iranian leaders
- 40 years since the Iranian revolution: Learning the lessons for today's new working-class struggles





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# the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**

# FIGHT FOR THE NHS

- Full funding and public ownership needed
- Union action on pay: France shows the way!

ROGER DAVEY

CHAIR, UNISON UNION WILTSHIRE AND AVON HEALTH BRANCH (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

To put it in context, the annual budget of NHS England is £134 billion. Management requested an extra £10 billion. The Tory government has pledged just £3 billion.

This is clearly inadequate in dealing with the huge problems now facing the health service. In fact, not only is it a pathetic amount, but much of it will inevitably be absorbed by the profit-hungry private sector.

Meanwhile, NHS workers are pushed to the limit. Even before the coronavirus outbreak, tens of thousands were working eleven or more unpaid extra hours each week!

Overall, hundreds of thousands - 56% of those surveyed - were working at least some additional weekly hours without compensation, according to the NHS Staff Survey. It's certainly more now.

Of course, the NHS has long been in deep trouble after years of austerity and privatisation. There is a chronic shortage of beds, staff and resources. If you combine that with massive cuts to social care and public health, it's clear the NHS was in no fit state to deal with the pandemic.

The consequence is that - although the NHS just about coped with the impact of Covid-19, thanks mainly to the dedication of health workers - the impact on care generally has been catastrophic.

For instance, waiting lists have increased from 4.5 million to eight million since April! The Royal College of Surgeons has said it would take five years to deal with the backlog.

The stark fact is that because of the relentless attacks on the NHS by successive governments, people in their thousands have died and will continue to die unnecessarily.

And not surprisingly, the Tory government is also using Covid to accelerate the privatisation of the NHS. We are continuing to see contracts going to private hospitals to deal with 'elective' care while NHS beds remain empty.

In fact, the Tories are awarding contracts to just about anybody, as long as it's not the NHS, regardless of fitness for the job. A £108 million contract for procurement of PPE has been awarded to a family-run pest control company with just 16 employees!

If the Tories have shown little regard for the NHS as a public service, this also applies to its staff. The recent pay rise excludes many health workers.

In France, thanks to a magnificent, militant campaign, health workers have won an extra €8 billion to fund pay rises! We need to do the same here.

It's only through trade union-led struggle, including industrial action, that we can secure a significant pay rise, full staffing, and decent conditions for workers.

And it's only through that struggle, linked to political action, that we can establish a fully funded, publicly owned and democratically controlled NHS.



**"The news that nurses aren't getting a pay rise is an absolute disgrace. I don't begrudge any worker, and especially fellow key workers, getting more pay. But Tory ministers 'clapped' for all the NHS - yet we're now not worth a pay rise. Sickening! The unions should be organising now for a pay rise worthy of the work put in by nurses and all workers"**

**- Matt, NHS nurse**

PHOTO MARY FINCH

**A SOCIALIST RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CRISIS**  
▶▶▶ [socialistparty.org.uk/coronavirus](https://socialistparty.org.uk/coronavirus)

**WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS**  
▶▶▶ see column on p3

