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the Socialist

Issue 1098

20 August - 2 September 2020

formerly **Militant**



STUDENTS 2



TORIES 0

PROTESTS WORK!

Now fight for a decent future for all young people

THEO SHARIEFF
YOUNG SOCIALISTS NATIONAL ORGANISER

Protests and anger by school students have forced the Tories into a humiliating double U-turn over A-level and GCSE grade moderation.

The retreat arrived like the slow collapse of a set of dominoes - starting in Scotland, then Northern Ireland, Wales, and ending with England.

Coronavirus has exposed the class divide in the education system. Students are told all their lives that

exam results are down to individual performance and hard work alone.

But the whole fiasco around A-levels and GCSE grades has proven the opposite. The moderating downwards of A-level grades disproportionately affected working-class students. The algorithm used to moderate these grades was largely based on the previous historic attainment of schools - hitting underfunded comprehensive school students far harder than students who attended elite and private schools.

Despite this obvious class bias, students are drilled through incredibly high-pressured exam factories, and told that their individual performance will determine their life chances and future prospects for years to come.

The U-turn we've won from the government is a massive victory, which can only be chalked up to the

protests and action organised by young people. But alone it will not be enough to guarantee a decent future for young working-class people.

For young people, the fight is not over - it has only just begun. Even after the results U-turn, many students have already missed out on the courses or universities that they would have liked to study in. Some BTEC students haven't even been given any results whatsoever.

The only solution to this chaos, where for many students attending university is still uncertain, is for a massive programme of government investment in the universities. This should give every student who wants to study access to a high-quality course of their own choosing.

And while they're at it, they should scrap tuition fees and debts, and reverse all privatisation and marketisation on campuses as well!

Thanks to years of Tory policies of privatisation in higher education there is a major funding crisis in the universities. But off the campuses, what future does capitalism offer students and young people?

Mass youth unemployment is looming on the horizon. There has been a total collapse in decent training and apprenticeship schemes for young people. Wherever students go next after results day, they are going to encounter a system in crisis - and a Tory government which is trying to make young people and workers pay for that crisis.

That's why Young Socialists say we need to continue the fight - for a massive government programme of socially useful job creation and real training for school leavers, and for fully funded high-quality university, college and sixth-form courses, linked to providing every

working-class young person with a decent future.

Get involved with Young Socialists and Socialist Students if you want to get organised and fight for our futures!

Don't fail the class of Covid!

- Fully fund an expansion of courses. Give every student their choice. Invest in a high-quality education for all - scrap tuition fees, cancel student debt, and reverse the marketisation of universities
- Real jobs and training for school leavers
- Make the super-rich pay for the crisis. Take the banks and biggest businesses into democratic public ownership to fund decent education, jobs and training for young people
- Read our full 'socialist charter for young people' at socialistparty.org.uk

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the**Socialist**

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DO YOU HAVE NEWS FOR US?

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

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

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

Karl Marx

STUDENT PROTESTS FORCE GOVERNMENT RETREAT



Students protest against the government's unjust downgrading of A-level results on the Young Socialists demo outside Downing Street, Saturday 15 August YOUNG SOCIALISTS

Reports from just some of the campaign actions which the Socialist Party and Young Socialists took part in...

● London

Around 100 students joined the Young Socialists protest outside Downing Street on 15 August. Whenever speakers compared this government's failure of a generation to its bail-outs for big business, they got a huge cheer.

One student who told us about her downgrades added it wasn't just about her. This was an attack on all working-class young people.

Deji, a young worker and Socialist Party member from Birmingham, said: "There's no reason why a student in Eton should get boosted while a student in Peckham gets their marks downgraded. It's class warfare in the classroom." Amnon, a computer programmer, explained the problem with algorithms: "Computers can't think. They are programmed by humans. Garbage in, garbage out."

Students also mentioned the mental health crisis, as vital support services have been axed. Young Socialists pointed out that many working-class people grow up in

overcrowded houses, and libraries have been closed by both Tory and Labour councils. So where exactly are young people meant to go to study?

Finally, Young Socialists warned that even if protests win a U-turn on exams - as they now have - the education system is still not fit for purpose. It's been privatised and marketised by both Labour and Tory governments.

HELEN PATTISON

● Coventry

Sidney Stringer Academy is a school in Coventry, the city where the exam regulator Ofqual is based. This year, 60% of teacher-predicted grades at Sidney Stringer were marked down by Ofqual's algorithm.

The head, teachers and students jointly held a protest to call on the government and Ofqual to address this. Roughly 150 people attended and heard stories of students who've seen all of their predicted grades marked down, some by two grades.

● Cardiff

Over 200 angry school students, parents and teachers gathered outside the Welsh Senedd (parliament).

● Hull

There was engagement with Young Socialists campaign stalls across Yorkshire from young people wanting to stop the unfair downgrading of results. One student in Hull explained many of her friends had been disappointed by their results and were uncertain whether they would be able to go to university. We cannot allow working-class youth to bear the brunt of Covid-19, and will continue to fight for a better education system.

JULIA LOUW

● Nuneaton

Our young members were out on results day, 13 August, fighting against capitalist politicians and uni bosses stealing the future of working-class youth. Don't fail the class of Covid! Fight for public ownership and socialist planning of education, jobs, housing and health!

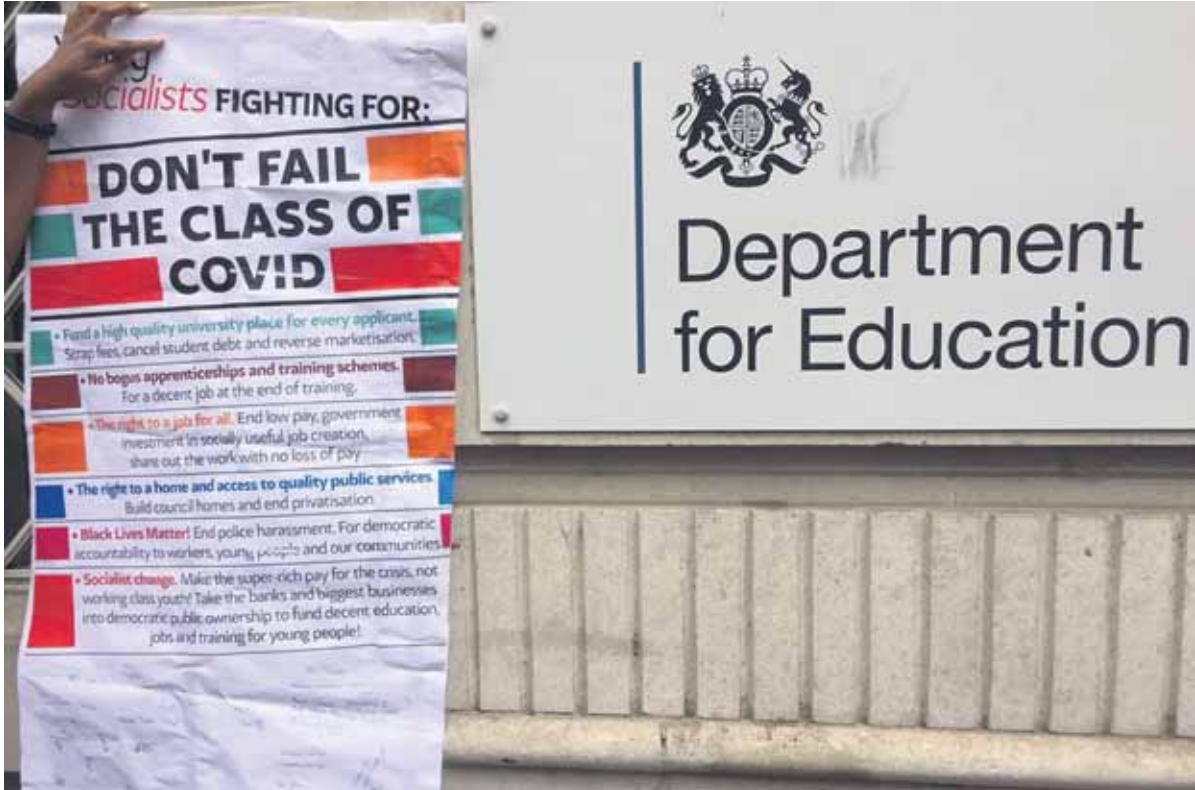
● Swansea

Strong support from students and the public for our campaign stall on 14 August against the scandal of A-level results.

● Liverpool

Such an energetic protest. The working-class students were rightly very angry with the Tories. They questioned the education system and why their postcode meant they couldn't aim to get to high-achieving universities. Our Young Socialists stall had such a great reception.

BHARATHI SUBA



Young Socialists pin their demands to the Department for Education in Whitehall, Saturday 15 August YOUNG SOCIALISTS



London YOUNG SOCIALISTS



Nuneaton YOUNG SOCIALISTS



Glasgow YOUNG SOCIALISTS - YOUNG WORKERS RIGHTS CAMPAIGN

“As a working-class student, I already faced struggles”

JOSH FIELDS
BTEC STUDENT, SOUTH YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

While A-level students were dealing with downgrading, I and many of my peers were yet to even receive our BTEC grades! This delay not only adds mental stress, but means if we receive marked-down grades we might not have enough time to appeal before university deadlines.

As a working-class student, I already faced struggles. I had to rely on a poorly financed bursary system that barely covers food and travel on



I had to take a year off education before attending college to work full-time just to put myself through supposedly free education

a week-to-week basis. I had to take a year off education before attending college to work full-time just to put myself through supposedly free education.

No A-level students were expecting the severe downgrading that occurred. Grades had been predicted on what the tutors expected, yet many students received much under this.

But most private schools and colleges were hardly affected by these grade cuts. The places hit hardest were in working-class areas.



WHAT WE STAND FOR

- T**he 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...
- Scrap Universal Credit. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
 - Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
 - A 35-hour week with no loss of pay.
 - ENVIRONMENT**
 - Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and un-recycled waste.
 - Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
 - A democratically planned, low-fare, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.
 - RIGHTS**
 - Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
 - Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
 - Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
 - For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.
 - For the right to vote at 16.
 - MASS WORKERS' PARTY**
 - For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
 - SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM**
 - No to imperialist wars and occupations.
 - Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
 - A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
 - No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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SEPTEMBER SCHOOL RETURN MUST BE SAFE FOR ALL WORKERS AND STUDENTS

LOUISE CUFFARO

NEWHAM NATIONAL EDUCATION UNION BRANCH
SECRETARY AND TEACHER (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

After six months the Tory government has still not been able to provide an efficient and smooth-running test, track, trace and isolation system for Covid-19 cases in all localities. This underpins the lack of confidence, and real fears that education staff, their unions and parents have for a safe return to state schools in September.

As a result of this government's unwillingness to take the necessary precautions early enough to tell people to stay at home, many areas of deprivation such as Newham in east London were massively hit, disproportionately affecting the BAME community.

In Newham there have been promises of a soon-to-be-trialled track and trace mobile phone app. Despite this, in Newham and elsewhere, education unions must lead the call for track and trace to be brought into the hands of the local authority and public health bodies so that regular testing is available for school staff and pupils.

Tracking and tracing should be carried out by local staff door-to-door who know the area and communities they serve. And all school staff who are employed by catering and cleaning companies, without sick pay and so on, must be brought in-house to ensure they can isolate with full pay as necessary.

Since education minister Gavin Williamson's declaration in July, that all staff and students (primary and secondary) will return in September, government spokespersons and the media have repeatedly stated that children don't catch the virus, transmit the virus and don't carry the same load of virus as adults!

However, scientific reports show that while children can be asymptomatic, or only mildly infected, they can transmit the virus, and over-eleven-year-olds carry similar loads as adults.

Also, schools are not just full of pupils - they are full of teachers, support staff, administration staff, cleaners, caretakers, catering staff, visiting social workers, educational psychologists and other specialists meeting the needs of

various pupils. In fact, schools provide the very conditions in which transmission of Covid-19 can rapidly spread in large groups of people in enclosed spaces, in forced close proximity for long periods of time! Not to mention that all those adults and pupils then return home to their families.

From March until June teachers and support staff continued to work in schools on a rota to look after vulnerable and keyworker children in small groups. Then in June, with promises of a world-leading track and trace system to be up and running within a month, Boris Johnson announced three and four year groups would return to school in June.

The majority of primary and secondary pupils continued to be at home, and school staff continued to provide work on the schools' websites and/or in packages sent home to pupils. Education staff never stopped working, the schools never closed and the 'world-class' track and trace system never materialised from the private companies who made millions out of the contract.

School outbreaks

During those last few weeks of the summer term there were no large outbreaks in the primary schools but this was because the National Education Union reps and members, despite the lack of track and trace system, ensured they rigorously questioned and checked their schools' risk assessments.

They insisted on the rights of vulnerable staff (those with underlying medical conditions, BAME staff and those shielding others) to be able to continue to work from home; they fought for PPE where close contact personal interventions would be necessary with very young children; and they lobbied for year groups to return gradually, over a period of weeks, in small groups or bubbles of 10-15 pupils, with one or two adults who stayed in the same classroom at all times.

This enabled socially distanced seating, meals in their classrooms and playtimes outside staggered so that bubbles did not mix. The importance of social distancing was paramount as, generally speaking, adults in schools were not provided or encouraged to wear masks.



Schools provide the very conditions in which transmission of Covid-19 can rapidly spread in large groups of people in enclosed spaces, in forced close proximity for long periods of time!

However, in September social distancing as a measure to mitigate against the spread of Covid-19 in schools will simply not be possible to guarantee if we follow the government dictat. Bubbles will increase in size to include all classes in a year group. In a four-form entry primary school of 30 pupils per class, this means bubbles of 120 pupils.

In secondary schools, a year group bubble could be as many as, or more than, 300 pupils, plus all the adults they come into contact with in different lessons and break times! There is nowhere else in society where that number of people would be allowed to come together and interact at mealtimes with no PPE and guaranteed space to social distance.

The concerns expressed by Johnson, and backed up by Labour leader Keir Starmer, over the priority for children to be back in school 'for the sake of their education and to bridge the gap of inequality', ring even more hollow and hypocritical in the wake of the downgrading of state school pupils' A-level results, while private schools results have been largely upgraded!

The virus has not gone. It is the same virus that has killed approximately 50,000 in the UK and possibly more. We have no vaccine, and the government should be planning for ongoing local closures of schools for the foreseeable future in the event of positive Covid cases in schools. That means providing laptops and WiFi to all pupils, and prioritising funding to local authorities to ensure local track and trace systems are fully functioning and fit for local purposes.

So once again the National Education Union and other education unions must lead the call for safety first in schools for September. A more gradual return of year groups and smaller classes, which will allow social distancing and more attention per pupil (as at Eton and Harrow).

As a matter of urgency, many National Education Union districts and branches, reps and members across the UK will be holding a day of action on Friday 21 August to highlight the union's demands and the urgent need to unite and fight for a fully funded and resourced state education system which is safe, and works for working-class young people.

Worried parents stuck between a rock and a hard place

LINDSEY MORGAN
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY AND
LEICESTER SAFETY FIRST

Boris Johnson has argued that it is 'our moral duty' to ensure all pupils go back to school in September. The irony of Boris talking about morals after the anxiety his government has caused A-level and GCSE students, working-class youth generally, and the monumental amount of stress the Tories have caused through austerity, is overwhelming.

Nevertheless, since the start of May, a parent group called 'Safety First: parents, carers, students and school staff together' has been fighting a broad campaign, fighting for school safety in Leicester and the surrounding county supporting the National Education Union locally.

Our parent-led campaign has petitioned the local authority; aired our concerns on BBC Radio Leicester; written letters to the city mayor (who dismissed our concerns); organised a protest for 21 August as part of a national day of action; advised education workers of their legal rights, and much more, to fight for the safety of education workers, students, and the wider community.

Incredibly difficult

Lockdown has been incredibly difficult for swathes of working-class parents who have had to try and balance work with home educating, or by trying to get hold of overpriced childcare, or even trying to manage their own mental health and the worries of their children. Many will feel that they have no other choice but to send their children back or face unemployment and the stress that goes with that.

There are also many parents who have had to shield (or their children have) who are now expected to send them back in just two weeks' time under the threat of fines and potential imprisonment. The current plan of the government, and Labour, is for all of these students to be forced back into full-time school before it is safe.

A building body of research has shown that teenage children transmit the virus as well as adults and that the virus isn't only spread through surfaces but breath. We still do not have a vaccine. Combine this with poorly ventilated classrooms, no PPE for teachers and students, no social distancing

and the general cramped conditions of many schools, and it is a potential disaster.

Parents who are worried about this are finding their voice. By linking parent campaigns with not only the education unions but also the wider trade union movement we can make sure it really is safety first before the schools open.

As a single mum, who doesn't have the option of sharing childcare, it is an incredibly stressful situation. And many, many parents are feeling this too. My daughter is due to go into year ten and wants to get on with her GCSEs but is also worried about her health, my health, and the health of her teachers.

The Socialist Party in Education has drew up a set of demands (see opposite) which mitigate the risk and develop the National Education Union's five tests. This includes a demand for students to go in on a rota basis to enable blended learning. By reducing class sizes you lessen the risk for all in the school environment, but also enable shielders to not take risks to their lives, and parents who need to work can.

They have also asked for face masks to be used by over-elevens with a transparent panel to enable lip-reading. These should be provided for workers and students. Physical resources, including books, IT resources, and so on, should also be provided. Of course, the government would definitely agree to this; being as they care so much for vulnerable children!

The atrocious threat of fines should also be removed. If this isn't done at government level, heads (who can authorise absences), should look to their colleagues for support in not implementing fines, and take local authorities on.

The Labour council in Leicester, just as it doesn't resist cuts, also refuses to resist the government on fines, despite the city being recently forced into local lockdown and a still too-high infection rate. It was able to resist the Tories when it came to getting businesses open though!

Over a decade of austerity, plus the Covid crisis, has made many working-class parents ill. While our children are unlikely to get seriously ill, we have a wide range of illnesses linked to poverty and malnutrition, and full-time full return increases our chances of catching Covid; a virus which disproportionately kills us, the working class.

The U-turn over A-level and GCSE results has shown to a huge layer of young people that protest works. By uniting these youth with parents and unions fighting for school safety, we can land another blow on this awful government.

But we shouldn't stop there. We need to fight for a socialist education system where no-one's post-code can work against them; the socialist transformation of society where the workers themselves have control over their health and safety, and an end to this inept government.

Socialist Party in Education demands:

Smaller class sizes to allow adequate physical distancing

Schools should reopen at the start of term with no classes larger than 15 school students.

Wider opening should only be considered when the evidence of the effects of school opening on infection rates confirms that it is safe to do so.

Full consultation with parents and unions over rotas - no fines, protect those most at risk

Arrangements for home learning to be produced in consultation with parents and carers to meet priority needs as much as possible.

Books and IT resources must be made available to those who need them. There must be no fines on those who opt for their children to learn at home.

Agreement with unions must guarantee that those staff who are, or who live with others at greater risk, can fulfil their duties by working from home.

Face coverings

Schools can't be treated differently from other indoor environments. Staff and school students over the age of eleven should wear face coverings while indoors. Staff should be given transparent coverings if needed for facial expression.

Safety first when there are local outbreaks

Where a case is identified within a school, staff and students within that 'bubble' must be closed to allow self-isolation; where there are two or more cases within 14 days, the whole school will close.

Where local infection rates exceed the internationally recognised threshold of 50 new cases per 100,000 over seven days, schools should close to all but priority children.

Community test and trace systems that work, full pay if you need to isolate

We need a reliable community-based testing and tracing system, run through local council, NHS and GP services, not private profiteers.

All who have to isolate should be supported on full pay.

Weekly onsite testing of staff to be provided, and for children whose parents request it too.

But this government will not listen unless forced to do so.

That's why parents and staff must demand they support and fund schools to open safely.

We call on school unions to use their collective strength to:

- Prepare for a national strike ballot to allow action to be taken if safety remains at risk.
- Support members acting together to assert their legal rights not to work in an unsafe workplace under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, which provides for the protection of workers if they decide not to work in an unsafe environment.

Join the fightback

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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to find out more about joining us today!



300 Covid cases at Northampton food plant - management to blame not the workers!



SEAMUS SMYTH
NORTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Nearly 300 new Covid-19 cases have been detected in Greencore Food Distribution in Northampton in just one week. The distribution outlet provides packaged sandwiches for supermarkets such as Marks and Spencer, Tesco, Asda and Waitrose. With company profits of £35 million since April this year - and an overall revenue of over £700 million, not to mention an 'emergency Covid loan' given by the government - it's hard to justify the company's stingy acts on staff furlough pay, £95.60 a week sick pay and proper safety precautions. Northampton Tory council's director of health Lucy Wightman stated in an interview with the Northampton Chronicle that the outbreak in Greencore was not the fault of the management, that the safety structure "wasn't to blame", and that she sees that "there are no concerns

about the operational management of Greencore". Instead, she blames the workers and how they live. Greencore workers have expressed their disgust with these accusations, many of whom are Eastern European and have been forced to live in cramped housing, travel by bus and work through illness to get by. Leader of the Tory council Jonathan Nunn also lets management off the hook, blaming the staff. But in reality, the lack of PPE and social distancing in the workplace means management are the real culprits. It is scandalous to blame 2,100 staff over the lack of PPE, bullying management, poor pay and awful cramped working conditions. It is no coincidence that working-class communities in Northampton are overwhelmingly suffering the brunt of the Covid crisis. Workers must not pay for the Covid crisis - in jobs or lives. This is a clear case of putting profits before safety.



**nationalshop
stewardsnetwork**
For details see shopstewards.net

**NSSN TUC
online rally
1pm Sunday
13 September**

PCS union: Vote Yes in DWP ballot! Reject longer opening hours

KATRINE WILLIAMS
VICE-PRESIDENT PCS DWP GROUP
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

PCS members in all the Department for Work and Pension's (DWP) Jobcentres and 21 Universal Credit service centres must vote Yes in the ballot which starts 17 August. This will give a very clear message to management, to stop their plans to open workplaces until 8pm, to open on Saturdays, and to bring back conditionality. The threat to open these workplaces into the evenings and all Saturdays shows no regard for PCS union members who have worked flat out to deliver services to the public in the pandemic and ensure the massive influx of people making claims for benefit have all received payments. We have achieved this with only 60% of our members in the workplace, and our members at home have had to put up with delays and issues getting the kit to work from a government department that was the worst prepared with IT equipment for their workforce. All adding extra pressure on our members delivering services. We have seen the fiasco of rolling out the reopening of Jobcentres to meet the 'Tory ministers' aim of

making things look like they are getting back to normal, but with scant regard for the health and safety of our members. There is no reason why we could not continue to provide the bulk of our support remotely over the phone or digitally, which would help keep our members and the public safe. The plans to open Jobcentres later, and on Saturdays, are even more flawed, putting everyone further at risk. But they also harm the services that can be provided during the peak working times during the week. During the pandemic there has been flexibility to concentrate the opening hours to the public at normal office hours, so that we can focus the limited resources and staffing to when there is the most demand for support. This has helped our members deal with the issues caused by the pandemic, allow them to juggle their personal issues, and deal with limited public transport. This should continue, as we are far from out of the woods in dealing with the impact of coronavirus. The concept of having the potential to have opening hours until 7.30pm or on Saturdays was to have the flexibility, if required, to offer services to the public who need support

from the DWP but would struggle to access these services during normal business hours from 9am-5pm. The collective agreement is clear that operating hours should be directly related to demand from the public, and not just implemented for the sake of it. With the economy in recession, and large numbers of jobs at risk, the vast bulk of the demand from the public will remain during the day. Any move to stretch our members' working patterns to cover longer working days and Saturday opening will damage the services to the public when they are most needed. With such a difficult economic climate, the focus should still be on supporting the public, and we remain opposed to the return to conditionality. The priorities of paying benefit and supporting the public whilst keeping our members safe must remain. Management can be made to back off. This will require a huge turnout and Yes vote. Branches and reps have the key role in talking to members to encourage them to demonstrate their opposition collectively to management's plans by voting Yes. Management's plans are unsafe, unnecessary and unacceptable.

SOCIALISM

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AN NHS CONTACT TRACER

After wasting months, with Covid cases rising in more areas, the government has been forced to partly retreat from its failing centralised and privately run Track and Trace scheme in England. It will now be more "locally targeted". The Tories were determined to use the pandemic to push their privatisation goals. Leaked emails show outsourcing company Serco was approached in January to provide a contact-tracing service, later being awarded an initial £108 million contract. Serco's Chief Executive is Rupert Soames, Winston Churchill's grandson - an old-Etonian and Bullingdon Club member like Boris Johnson and David Cameron. Soames wrote that, if successful, Serco's contact tracing "will go a long way in cementing the position of the private sector companies in the public sector supply chain." It has been disastrously unsuccessful! National call centres run by Serco and US-owned Sitel reached only 56% of contacts of Covid cases in the first week of August. At least 80% must isolate to control virus spread. Call centre staff have been sitting for hours, with no cases to follow up. I'm an NHS contact tracer, and I'm meant to follow up more complex cases, and those the Serco/Sitel call centres failed to reach. But it's the same remote telephone-based system. I've also had very few calls in ten weeks (and very few shifts available to book on a zero-hour contract). Calls from the 0300 number often go unanswered or go to voicemail. Asking someone with a positive test who they have been in contact with is just part of what is needed. Their contacts must be followed up and asked to isolate for fourteen days.



Tory track and trace failure

A gaping hole in the government's scheme is the lack of support for cases and contacts. Full pay with jobs held open must be guaranteed. Otherwise workers on zero-hour contracts or fearing redundancy will feel they can't afford isolation. Those testing positive will be reluctant to isolate themselves or give contact details for fellow workers or family members who can't afford to lose pay. Anyone living in small or crowded homes can't isolate from others. Empty hotel rooms and student halls of residence should be used to provide alternative accommodation during isolation if needed, along with food, other supplies, and medical and social support. The Tories have allocated £10 billion for their privately run track and trace scheme - more than 100 times Public Health England's £90 million pre-Covid annual infectious diseases budget. Serco, Sitel, Amazon and all other profit-seeking corporations need replacing by well-funded public health services. These local authority services were drastically run down during years of austerity. Even so, they report much better response rates than the privatised system. They need to be urgently ramped up and coordinated with local NHS-run Covid test centres and GPs - something private companies have failed to do. Local contact tracers, who know their area and the people who live and work there, are much more likely to be trusted than a remote call centre-based system. Serco, Sitel and NHS Professionals workers in the existing scheme should be offered retraining and jobs in a publicly run and locally based service. Labour councils should be immediately building these teams up, demanding the money the government has showered on Serco and other profiteers.

Support the Tower Hamlets council workers, vote for Hugo Pierre!

Hugo Pierre (pictured second left), a Socialist Party member, candidate for Unison general secretary, and a local resident in Tower Hamlets, supported council workers in the east London borough, on strike against council plans to sack them and re-engage them on worse terms and conditions. The workers were taking their ninth day of strike action against the right-wing Labour mayor, John Biggs, who is forcing through the changes to long-standing agreements with the council's trade unions. The workers now have to reballoon for further action. Hugo is currently seeking Unison branch nominations and is standing on this programme:

- 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



We can't take any more cuts

Hampshire

Tory-run Hampshire County Council has cut £480 million from public services since 2008. It wants to cut an extra £80m by 2021. The pandemic cost the council £21.6 million more than they got in government grants. It will want more cuts. £43 million could go from social care, 120 jobs in substance misuse, disability services and the youth offending team. Eight of Hampshire's 45 libraries are set to close, putting 50 jobs at risk. All remaining libraries will have their hours reduced by 20% on average. Four community libraries will lose their council funding and be run entirely by volunteers. How many of these would be able to stay open? The cuts affect the poorest the hardest. Hampshire Unison union must mount a campaign to save the libraries and other services. Services have already been severely cut, and austerity is not over for local government. Councils need to demand the return of funding which has been withheld by the government, so they can set a budget that meets the needs of the people and restore our lost services. JANE WARD

Nottingham

Nottingham City Council, where Labour has 50 out of 55 councillors, has asked for voluntary redundancies, and announced further job and service cuts. Like other councils, it is considering cutting everything except statutory services and threatening another emergency budget in October. The council has salami sliced cuts since 2010, while getting involved in commercial ventures, including investing in property in other cities. None of the Labour councillors have voted against this. We call on Labour councillors that want to stand up for the working class, to vote against the cuts when they come up in October, and start building a campaign to defend services now.

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80th anniversary of Leon Trotsky's assassination

A REVOLUTIONARY WHOSE IDEAS AND METHODS RETAIN THEIR VALIDITY

On 21 August 1940, the revolutionary socialist, Leon Trotsky, was murdered by a Stalinist agent. Along with Lenin, Trotsky had been the foremost leader of the October 1917 socialist revolution in Russia. When the Stalin-led counterrevolution destroyed that revolution and crippled the international communist movement, Trotsky set about reconstructing the forces of genuine Marxism. That legacy has been taken up by the Socialist Party and is explained in a new book published by the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) - the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated. Below, we publish extracts from the book's introduction written by **Tony Saunois**, secretary of the CWI.

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the assassination of Leon Trotsky by Ramón Mercader, a secret police agent under Joseph Stalin's dictatorship in the Soviet Union.

The Stalinists hoped that the assassination of Trotsky would also bury the ideas he defended. You can kill a human being but not the ideas the person advocated.

Today, representatives of capitalism and their agents on the right wing of the workers' movement have tried to dismiss Trotsky and his ideas as irrelevant. This is usually accompanied with a bucketful of distortion, slander and bile. Yet they have failed to bury his ideas.

What Trotsky stood for, and his analytical and programmatic methods, are even more relevant today. In this era of profound capitalist crisis they are destined to win even greater support.

Like all of the great Marxist leaders - Marx, Engels and Lenin - Trotsky was not an abstract theoretician. He was also an inspirational fighter and activist in the revolutionary movement who tested out his ideas and programme in the fires of revolution and counterrevolution. The immense sacrifices made for the ideas he defended and in the building of a new socialist world, are something today's revolutionaries can only aspire to.

Born Lev Davidovich Bronstein on 7 November 1879 in Yanovka, Ukraine, Trotsky moved to Nikolayev to complete his schooling in 1896. Here he was rapidly drawn into the underground socialist circles and introduced to Marxism.

In January 1898, after two years of committed political activity, he was arrested for the first time and spent four-and-a-half years in exile in Siberia, enduring brutally harsh conditions. He escaped in 1902 using a false passport, adopting the name Leon Trotsky which he used for the rest of his life.

In Paris he met his second wife Natalia Sedova who was active in Lenin's Iskra group, and had two sons with her, Lev and Sergei.

Eventually making his way to London, he first met Lenin there and worked with him and others on the

paper, Iskra - 'The Spark'. This opened a period of intense ideological struggle and debate over ideas, methods and programme.

Initially, the sharp political and theoretical divide that was to develop between Lenin's Bolshevik 'hard' faction and the reformist Menshevik 'softs' in the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP) was not fully clear. The extent and differences over programme and tactics took time to emerge.

Trotsky wrongly, like others at the time, attempted to facilitate the coming together of the two factions which brought him into conflict with Lenin.

Trotsky's autobiography - 'My Life' - reveals his ingrained honesty in recognising the mistake he made at this time. He harboured the false hope that the Mensheviks, under the hammer blow of events, could be shifted to the left.

But he also explains why this mistake was made and that when he "came to Lenin" the second time, he did so with a full understanding of the issues and with total conviction.

Others, who merely repeated the phrases of Lenin without understanding them, were exposed in Lenin's absence and after his death, when they capitulated to Stalin and his regime, proving themselves incapable of independent thought.

Debates and tactics

This honest appreciation of differences and a willingness to recognise a mistake was to be revealed in a series of debates and discussions in the Bolsheviks, and between Lenin and Trotsky during the revolution and after they had taken power.

The debates on tactics during the civil war, peace negotiations at Brest-Litovsk in 1918, the New Economic Policy, the role of the trade unions during the period of 'war communism', and other vital questions, refute the false claims of capitalist commentators and historians that Bolshevism, and the Soviet regime in the period immediately following the revolution, were simply bywords for a 'Leninist dictatorship', where no debate or dissent was tolerated.

Having broken connections with both the Bolsheviks and the



What Trotsky stood for, and his analytical and programmatic methods, are even more relevant today. In this era of profound capitalist crisis they are destined to win even greater support

Mensheviks following the 1903 RSDLP congress, Trotsky found his way back to Russia in time for the 1905 revolution and immediately threw himself into the struggle.

He was elected Chairman of the Soviet (council or assembly) of Workers' Deputies. The forming of the soviet was a decisive step by the St Petersburg workers. These democratic organisations of the working class became the decisive organs of struggle and the basis for the new workers state which was formed after the revolution in October 1917.

While Trotsky realised the importance of the soviet, some of the leading Bolsheviks present in the country at the time did not recognise the crucial importance of this new form of workers organisation. They saw this new organisation as a threat to the party. It took Lenin's arrival to correct this sectarian mistake.

It is important that Marxists do not have a fetish about the forms of organisation that can emerge during revolutionary upsurges. Trotsky recognised the crucial role of the soviet and the Soviet regime in the period immediately following the revolution, were simply bywords for a 'Leninist dictatorship', where no debate or dissent was tolerated.

Having broken connections with both the Bolsheviks and the

advocated the formation of workers' committees or 'juntas'.

The defeat of the 1905 revolution saw Trotsky arrested and thrown into exile, once again in Siberia. It was there, incarcerated, that he wrote one of his most important works, based, in part, on the experience of the 1905 revolution - 'The Permanent Revolution'.

In it, Trotsky clarified the question of the character of the revolution in countries such as pre-revolutionary Russia, where capitalism existed side-by-side with elements of feudalism, and where the tasks of the 'bourgeois-democratic' revolution - the development of industry, solving the land question, unification of the nation, and establishment of a bourgeois parliamentary system - had not been completed.

Moreover, for the socialist revolution to survive, the workers' state in Russia would need to rapidly link up with the working class in the more industrialised capitalist countries carrying out socialist revolutions.

Permanent revolution today

These ideas of the 'permanent revolution' were confirmed later in the October 1917 revolution. The ideas developed by Trotsky on this question clarified Lenin's position on the character of the revolution and which class was to lead it.

Trotsky's 'permanent revolution' is crucial for an understanding of the class struggle in the neocolonial world of Asia, Africa and Latin America today, where an even more favourable situation exists for the development of the socialist revolution

in these continents than when Trotsky developed his ideas.

The outbreak of World War One in 1914 saw the capitulation of the leaderships of the mass workers' parties throughout Europe to national chauvinism, and support for their respective national capitalist class.

Only a tiny minority of revolutionary Marxists was able to resist this pressure and maintain a principled working-class internationalist stance, including Lenin and Trotsky.

With the outbreak of the Russian revolution in February 1917 - a confirmation of the permanent revolution - Trotsky returned, with difficulty, to Russia via Canada in May 1917.

Lenin arrived from his own exile in April and proclaimed his 'April Theses', which clearly set out the character of the revolution and the need for the working class to take power, giving no trust to the capitalist provisional government which had been established. It took a major struggle inside the Bolsheviks by Lenin to convince the party of the correctness of this position.

The 'July Days' saw a premature working-class uprising in St Petersburg, followed by repression from Kerensky's government against the Bolsheviks. Trotsky was arrested and Lenin forced into hiding.

It was during this period that Trotsky joined the Bolsheviks and was

elected to its central committee, reflecting the authority and standing he had, despite not formally being a member until this point.

Released from prison in September he was immediately elected chair of the Petrograd Soviet and then led the Military Revolutionary Committee, which was to play the crucial role in organising the insurrection and bringing the working class to power in October (November in the new calendar).

The future success of the Russian revolution depended on the working class in the industrialised countries of Germany, Britain, France and elsewhere casting off their own capitalist class and linking together with the Russian workers to begin building socialism.

However, the delay in the international revolution after the October revolution meant that it was necessary to take a series of emergency steps to win time and hold onto power in Russia.

Trotsky played a crucial role in this. He constructed the Red Army from nothing to combat the 21 armies of imperialism and the counterrevolutionary 'Whites' sent to try and crush the revolution.

At one point the revolution hung by a thread. The battle to recapture Kazan, east of Moscow, was a

crucial turning point. Trotsky's role in rebuilding the fifth army regiment and transforming it into a fighting unit was decisive. Even today, Trotsky's achievement in building the Red Army to win the civil war and defeat the armies of imperialism is legendary.

1924 was the decisive turning point in revolutionary Russia, marked by Lenin's death. The isolation of the revolution, years of economic devastation caused by the civil war and imperialist intervention, and the loss of thousands of the most committed Bolsheviks in the civil war, all laid the basis for the emergence of a political counterrevolution and the eventual formation of a ruthless bureaucratic regime which Trotsky and the Left Opposition fought against.

Bureaucratic degeneration

The adoption of the reactionary idea of 'socialism in one country', and through it the abandonment of the ideals and aspirations of the October revolution, was the theoretical expression of this bureaucratic caste headed by Stalin. Eventually it would reduce the Communist International from being the world party of the socialist revolution into loyal border guards for the Stalinised Soviet Union.

For this process to be completed, it was necessary to drive out and crush those who continued to defend the ideals of October, in particular Leon Trotsky and his supporters. A campaign to denigrate Trotsky and 'Trotskyism' was unleashed.

Lenin was aware of the dangers present in the bureaucratic degeneration of the new regime, and prior to his death he had proposed a pact with Trotsky to oppose Stalin and fight the growing bureaucratisation. However, he was struck down by a second stroke before this could be enacted.

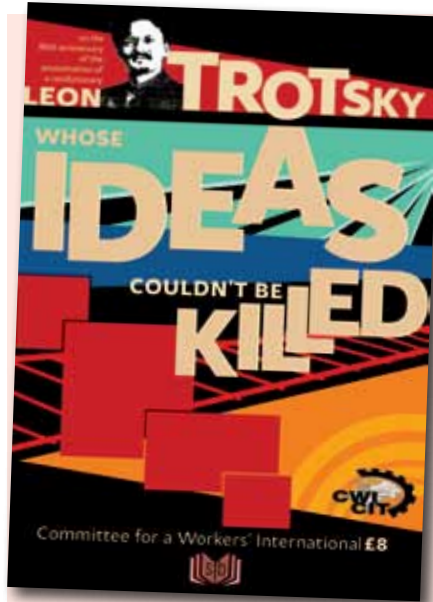
As Trotsky put it in 'My Life': 'A regime was established that was nothing less than a dictatorship of the apparatus over the party. In other words, the party was ceasing to be a party'.

By 1925 Trotsky had been removed from his duties as People's Commissar of War and increasingly sidelined. The reactionary idea of 'socialism in one country' was having disastrous consequences internationally; in particular, the derailment of the Chinese revolution (1927-29).

Stalin drove Trotsky into internal exile in 1927. Yet even that was not enough, so desperate was Stalin to remove the 'Trotskyist' challenge to his regime. Thousands of supporters of Trotsky and the 'Left Opposition' were to be imprisoned and executed.

Trotsky was banished from the Soviet Union in 1929. Driven into exile, he was left "on the planet without a visa" when country after country refused him entry.

Eventually, the left populist government of Lázaro Cárdenas granted Trotsky and his wife Natalia shelter



• **New book on Trotsky's life and ideas from the Committee for a Workers' International, published by Socialist Books, and available through Left Books**

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in Mexico. Even this was not enough for Stalin, who enacted the murder of Trotsky's sons Lev, who was active in the Left Opposition, and Sergei, who remained in the Soviet Union and was not active in politics.

In Mexico, Trotsky continued his revolutionary work. In some ways what he regarded as his most important work of preparing to rebuild the Marxist movement.

The coming to power of Hitler in Germany in 1933, due to Stalin's fatal policies imposed on the Communist International, led Trotsky to conclude that reforming the communist parties was now impossible and that a new revolutionary international had to be built.

For this reason he took the step of founding the 'Fourth International' and published its key document, the 'Transitional Programme'. This document retains its crucial importance in the global capitalist crisis unfolding today.

In 1937 he published 'Revolution Betrayed', which analysed for the first time the new phenomenon of the Stalinist bureaucratic regime in the Soviet Union.

Between 1936 and 1938 Stalin

unleashed his vicious show trials, particularly directed against the Left Opposition. Thousands were rounded up, tortured and executed.

From Mexico, Trotsky painstakingly worked to defend his political and theoretical ideas and to build a new international organisation.

He participated in a political struggle that took place among Trotskyists in the USA, which centred on the class character of the Soviet Union, questions on Marxism, and the orientation of the party towards the organised working class. This has many lessons for the work of revolutionaries today.

In this renewed period of capitalist crisis, the ideas and methods defended by Trotsky will resonate in a way that they have not done in recent decades.

A study of Trotsky's ideas and methods is an essential political weapon for a new generation of revolutionary socialists fighting for socialism as the only future for humankind.

To assist workers and young people with that, the CWI is publishing this work on the 80th anniversary of Trotsky's assassination.

80 years since the murder of Leon Trotsky
Can they kill his ideas?

- **Join the online rally on Sunday 23 August, 2pm**
- **Register for information to attend on socialistworld.net**



Committee for a Workers' International rally



JAMES IVENS

George Orwell first conceived of “exposing” what he called “the Soviet myth” with “a story that could be easily understood by almost anyone” in 1937. He had narrowly escaped Stalinism’s murderous repression of his fellow revolutionaries in the dying days of the Spanish Civil War.

The result, published on 17 August 1945, was ‘Animal Farm: A Fairy Story’. Orwell had finished it in February 1944, but no publisher wanted to touch it while British capitalism was still allied with Stalinism during World War Two.

The advent of the Cold War made satires of the Soviet Union acceptable - even necessary - to the establishment. In fact, in 1950, the year Orwell died, Britain’s Foreign Office adapted Animal Farm into counter-revolutionary newspaper cartoons in Burma and Brazil. He would likely have been horrified.

The 1954 animated feature was funded by the CIA. And reflecting the collapse of Stalinism, the 1999 TV film inverted Animal Farm’s message entirely, ending with a restoration of capitalism under fairy-tale ‘nice’ farm owners. But what does Orwell’s fable actually say about revolution?

Animalist revolution

The working animals of “the Manor Farm” in England suffer enormous hardship at the hands of their drunken, bullying ruler, the farmer Mr Jones. The respected elder boar, Old Major - a composite of authoritative Marxist theoreticians - explains their woes are caused by human exploitation.

Decadent human mismanagement provokes a spontaneous uprising for fodder. Patient explanation of the tenets of “Animalism” by the intelligent pigs has allowed “the Rebellion” to blossom from it - an insurrectionary seizure of the farm. Its leaders are the visionary Snowball, representing Leon Trotsky, and the brutish Napoleon - Joseph Stalin.

The animals abolish all the old inequalities and barbarities. But little by little, their revolutionary principles are diluted, then betrayed. The novella leaves the working animals, hungry and brutalised once more, looking “from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which.”

As a satire of one of history’s greatest treacheries, it still packs a punch. Each injustice is made all the more stinging by the innocent style of a children’s story. The poignancy of the final betrayal of Boxer, the Rebellion’s most self-sacrificing workhorse, is almost unbearable.

The excesses and absurdity of the Stalinist bureaucracy are often hilarious. And Orwell’s recurrent theme of political falsification (which reaches its apex in his next novel, ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four’) even receives its own character, in the pigs’ propagandist, Squealer.

Animal Farm is remarkable for how many parallels with real episodes and ideas it crams into its short word count. But that’s not to say Orwell exercises no licence. Many key events and figures appear out of order, conflated, or without their proper context.

Some of this is inevitable and necessary in an allegory, of course. The trouble comes - as Orwell himself might have warned - when events are

75 years since the publication of Animal Farm



The revolutionary animals confront Jones, dictatorial proprietor of the Manor Farm, in the 1954 Halas and Batchelor film

FROM ‘TWO LEGS BAD’ TO ‘TWO LEGS BETTER’

recast to suit ideas, rather than vice versa.

Orwell explained in a letter in December 1946: “I meant that that kind of revolution (violent conspiratorial revolution, led by unconsciously power-hungry people) can only lead to a change of masters... I think the whole process was foreseeable... from the very nature of the Bolshevik Party.” It is worth considering these accusations in turn.

First, violence. Orwell himself wrote in his 1941 manifesto for revolution in Britain, ‘The Lion and the Unicorn’, that “revolution does not mean red flags and street fighting, it means a fundamental shift of power. Whether it happens with or without bloodshed is largely an accident of time and place.”

In fact, diligent organisation and overwhelming social weight can counter the power of “accident.” This is why the October 1917 Petrograd insurrection was almost bloodless.

But the workers and masses, grasping for a way out of war, poverty and oppression, did face violent opposition from the old elite both before and after. Orwell understood the need to fight back in those circumstances, having done so in Catalonia. Second, conspiracy. The Russian revolution was a mass movement, not some palace coup. The Bolsheviks came to lead it by arguing openly for their ideas, including in the workers’ councils elected from below to coordinate that mass movement - the ‘soviets’.

Orwell mixes praise for workers’

potential for power and democratic debate with some ambivalence about their capacity to control events. The animals do hold mass meetings to decide policy, but in practice are always subordinate to the clever pigs.

Despite their power, therefore, Animal Farm quite wrongly depicts the workers as just too dense to resist Napoleon’s abuses. “Several of them would have protested if they could have found the right arguments,” Orwell means this as a warning, but it’s hard not to feel some pessimism behind it too.

Third, that political degeneration was “foreseeable” in the “unconsciously power-hungry... Bolshevik Party.” This is Orwell’s fundamental error, running throughout Animal Farm.

Stalinism’s roots

It suggests that Stalinism was inherent from the start due to some ‘original sin’ in the psychology of Bolshevism. On the contrary, Lenin, Trotsky and thousands of worker Bolsheviks fought - to the death in many cases - against encroaching bureaucracy and for workers’ democracy.

But from the off, Animal Farm’s pigs lust for power and material privilege - Snowball included. Orwell’s 1946 letter also states that “the turning-point of the story was supposed to be when the pigs kept the milk and apples for themselves.” This was during a time of peace and plenty on the farm.

In fact, bureaucratic privileges only developed over time and under conditions of war-torn scarcity. The

best revolutionaries, including Lenin and Trotsky, consistently stood for abolishing privileges of office.

So what does explain the political decay of the Russian revolution? The landlords and capitalists had proven unable to bring Russia’s economy and society fully into the 20th century. They dragged things back still further with years of imperialist war and then civil war. And the defeat of revolutions in industrialised Europe left the fledgling workers’ state without help.

As Trotsky explained in ‘The Revolution Betrayed’: “When there are enough goods in a store, the purchasers can come whenever they want to... When the lines are very long, it is necessary to appoint a policeman to keep order. Such is the starting point of the power of the Soviet bureaucracy.”

Marxists analyse the material and social forces that drive epic conflicts of politics and ideas. Orwell too often reduced these conflicts to psychological defects and personality clashes, as if ideas exist independently of the outside world.

Nonetheless, he does sketch some of the fundamental differences between Trotskyism and Stalinism - albeit, unavoidably, in caricature. When Animal Farm is threatened by a new invasion, Napoleon’s proposal is to “procure firearms.” Snowball wants to “stir up rebellion among the animals on the other farms.”

Trotsky never denied the need for armed defence. He had organised the Red Army. But what Orwell

depicts here is Bolshevism’s consistent internationalist outlook. Lenin and Trotsky explained that whatever the setbacks, this was the only way to complete the socialist revolution - and make it permanent.

But the demoralising defeat of the first workers’ revolutions beyond Russia led to hesitant outlooks among other Bolshevik leaders, such as Stalin. This process culminated in the notorious theory of ‘socialism in one country’, a complete reversal of Lenin and Trotsky’s politics.

At the same time, “the animals formed themselves into two factions under the slogans ‘Vote for Snowball and the three-day week’ and ‘Vote for Napoleon and the full manger.’” But why?

The Bolshevik government had its roots among industrial workers. But Russia’s working class was overwhelmed in numbers by the peasantry, which sometimes had different economic needs and interests.

Trotsky’s supporters saw developing industry - Animal Farm’s windmill - as the way to satisfy the peasants’ needs and raise the general standard of living. This was in anticipation of economic and social support from revolutions in advanced capitalist countries.

But the bureaucracy crystallising around Stalin, short-sighted and conservative, again resorted to stopgaps, placating top peasants by letting them keep more and more wealth. This short-termism led to political zigzags later.

Orwell’s moral

George Orwell was an astute observer of human personalities and politics. His works, however, tend to conceive of social class simply as upper, middle, and lower, without further distinction. Nor does Animal Farm hint at more organic, conflicting social trends. Political differences seem merely the whims of rival party intellectuals.

So if Orwell contends the Bolshevik Party was the problem, what was the alternative? Only the existence of an organised leadership, ready to fight to the end, with roots in the working animals, could achieve what it did. Uprisings convulse surrounding farms after the Rebellion, but they fail. Perhaps they wanted for Animalist parties to channel outbursts of rebellious spirit into animals taking power.

But despite the capitalists’ distortions, Orwell still stood for workers’ revolution. The animals do experience huge benefits after chasing out their exploiters. “I meant the moral to be that revolutions only effect a radical improvement when the masses are alert and know how to chuck out their leaders as soon as the latter have done their job.”

It is wrong to conclude that leaders, or parties, or revolution itself is the problem - the issue is democratic workers’ control. Orwell was right then, and is right now, that an active and critical working class is the best safeguard against socialist degeneration.

● *‘Animal Farm’ by George Orwell: £8.99 from leftbooks.co.uk*

Further reading

● *‘70 years since the publication of Nineteen Eighty-Four: “But if there was hope, it lay in the proles” at socialistparty.org.uk*
 ● *‘Leon Trotsky’s struggle against Stalinism’ at socialistparty.org.uk*
 ● *‘The Revolution Betrayed’ by Leon Trotsky: £10.99 from leftbooks.co.uk*

Tory planning deregulation: a charter for building profitable slums

PAUL KERSHAW
NORTH LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Under the slogan 'build, build, build', the Tories have announced that the old system of urban planning is to be scrapped. This is supposed to make it easier to build homes. In fact, it will be easier to build profitable slums.

Tory party funders will celebrate, but for the over one million households on council housing waiting lists, the prospect of a decent home is more distant. Those living on council estates face an increasingly uncertain future.

The government claims that red tape is holding back builders from providing much needed homes. But 90% of applications for planning permission are approved in England.

Consent has been granted for between 800,000 and one million new houses that remain unbuilt. Builders sit on land until the most profitable moment to build on it. They construct slowly; if they built as fast as possible 'oversupply' would reduce prices.

It is not the planning system that stops more affordable homes being built; it is the profit-maximising housebuilders, and the lack of grant-funded social house building.

Developers can make a killing simply by getting 'planning permission.' Land values can increase 275 times over once a developer gets permission.

Since 1947, when the Labour government set up the current planning system, there have been attempts to capture some 'planning gain' for the state. For example, in recent years much of the small amount of social housing produced has resulted from

'Section 106' planning agreements squeezing more affordable homes from developers, rather than through grant funding as in the past.

This is a hopelessly inadequate 'crumbs-off-the-table' way of providing social rented housing. In the financial year to April 2019, just 6,287 new social rent homes were delivered, while 23,740 were sold or demolished.

But the abolition of Section 106 in the new system and its replacement by a weaker regime means no crumbs!

Poor quality

A new system of zones, and a nationally set 'community infrastructure levy' (CIL), which already seems to have exceptions and room for loopholes, will replace the current system. In a zone designated for 'growth', outline permission would be automatically granted for the type of development set out in the plan.

Council estates could be designated as areas for 'growth', and then be vulnerable to comprehensive redevelopment without democratic input from the community.

Developers have long been circling social housing estates in the hope of making a killing. Around 131,000 tenants and leaseholders have been displaced by council estate demolition in London since 1997.

A recent report published by the government showed that office-to-housing conversions under 'Permitted Development Rights', a system recently introduced by the Tories, delivers "worse quality residential environments than planning permission conversions in relation to a number



The Tories' plans would make the profit-driven housing crisis even worse DEREK VOLLER/CC



If land was nationalised it would be possible to rapidly build high-quality homes

of factors widely linked to the health, well-being and quality of life of future occupiers."

Its analysis found that just 22.1% of the homes delivered meet national space standards. The response? New legislation coming in from 1 September gives more flexibility to developers - hardly 'evidence based' policy responding to the lessons of the pandemic!

Even an all-party parliamentary select committee on housing noted that the coronavirus pandemic "has exposed our broken housing system". Families in overcrowded homes faced "worse health outcomes", and private renters were struggling to meet costs. Aware of the social crisis brewing, and slightly more far sighted than the government, it argues for a large social housing programme which would boost jobs and the economy.

But the current government is craven in its support for the property lobby. Housing minister Robert Jenrick recently moved to save Tory donor, former porn mogul and Daily Express owner Richard Desmond millions of pounds by overruling Tower Hamlets Council's demands for a community levy.

In the past, Labour favoured nationalising development land, but did not actually act on this. If land was nationalised to end speculation, along with the banks and the big builders, it would be possible to rapidly build the high-quality homes that the pandemic has shown are urgently needed. Instead of unemployment figures rocketing, workers could be put to work ending the housing emergency.

Nottingham: oppose the far right and attempts to divide us

Jobs, homes and services - not racism

NOTTINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

A far-right group, the British Street Commandos (BSC), and a group under the slogan Justice for All, including participants with far-right links, are proposing to hold an event in Nottingham on Saturday 22 August.

The two groups claim to be for all, but are divisive and far-right-led or influenced. The BSC is using the slogan "All Lives Matter".

The other group is calling its march and motorbike ride with publicity mentioning veteran mental health and children's wellbeing. However, the organiser appears to be linked to the DFLA (the so-called Democratic Football Lads Alliance), and the far-right Yorkshire Patriots say they are coming.

Socialist Party members have been instrumental in the decision of the local trades union council to call a

counter-protest to show our opposition. We want to stop the far right rallying in Nottingham.

The far right tries to create divisions among working-class people. In the past they have used the lie, for example, that child grooming is mainly down to 'Asian gangs.'

Some workers, alienated by the Tory government and Nottingham Labour council cuts in services and jobs, could be taken in by these divisive organisations.

That is why we have pushed for the material produced to publicise the counter-protest to include the slogan on the trades union council banner of "jobs and homes, not racism", and "unity is strength".

Covid-19 has shown the results of cuts and privatisation. Nottingham City Council is now going for 500 voluntary redundancies and over 150 job cuts on top of the estimated 1,000



jobs or more that have gone in in the past years. The anti-racist movement needs to deal with this issue.

Trade unions and socialists stand for workers' rights and an end to all exploitation. We support the inspiring Black Lives Matter movement. We supported the council trade unions' protest against cuts on Wednesday 19 August in the Market Square.

The rich and powerful use anything they can to divide and weaken working people.

Racist and far-right movements strengthen big business by trying to divide working-class communities. They must be stopped, and a powerful movement built to end racism and the system that breeds it.

Big business and the super-rich should pay for the crisis - not workers, their families and young people.

Build a united struggle for jobs, homes and a future for all, and for a socialist alternative to poverty, racism and the crisis of capitalism.

Councillors who identify as on the left should vote against the current

Labour council leaderships' plans and put forward a budget that meets local needs.

They should work with the trade unions and residents to defend jobs and services, and to build a mass campaign for all Covid-19 losses to be paid by the government, and for the government grant to be restored to pre-2010 level.

No trust in pro-big business parties - for a new mass workers' party to represent the interests of the 99% not the 1%.

● Nottinghamshire, Mansfield and Nottingham Trades Union Council protest against racism

● Saturday 22 August, Market Square, Nottingham

● Assemble from 10.30am

● The event organisers are calling for the protest to be socially distanced, and for attendees to wear face masks

● Please do not attend if you are worried about your health or that of anyone you are in contact with

Leeds: Little London residents are celebrating



Little London PHOTO MTAYLOR848/CC

Tenants and residents in Little London, an inner-city, Leeds council estate, are celebrating. Private developer Engie has just withdrawn its application to build an 18-storey monster block of unaffordable flats on a valued green space, locally known as the Mound.

Little London is a densely populated. Poverty and overcrowding are rife. So when this application was first announced, nearly two years ago, local people were furious.

Loads of people came to public campaign meetings and talked about the lack of local amenities and safe

spaces for their children to play. They also expressed concern at the loss of over 50 mature trees - a disgrace in a city that has declared a 'climate emergency.'

It took much hard work to get the developers to back down. Even after having the application thrown out last August, the developers attempted to bypass local democracy by appealing to the government's Planning Inspectorate.

Without a concerted campaign involving meetings, protests, petitions and lobbying, this development would almost certainly have gone

ahead. Having beaten back the developers, we are determined to turn this victory into a beginning, not an end.

Plans are now in place to use this site for food growing initiatives and outdoor learning projects for local children. We hope that the networks established throughout this campaign will be used to strengthen local tenant and resident organisation, so that solidarity can build around community issues in the future.

STEVE SKINNER
LITTLE LONDON TENANTS AND RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION CHAIR

● Sheffield: Support Sue

The Socialist Party joined the protest in support of Sue on 7 August. It was organised by Acorn housing campaign against rogue landlord John Francis, owner of appropriately named Crapper & Haigh letting agency.

Sue, a care worker, has been a private tenant with them for 13 years. She's had to 'live' in appalling conditions, mould and damp in the bathroom, and without repairs being done.

Five years ago, after changing jobs, she missed one month's rent. She has been charged £1-a-day extra for as long as she's been in arrears, now totalling over £3,000.

Sue, supported by around 35 Acorn members, went to visit Mr Francis and gave him one week to cancel Sue's debts and allow her to end the tenancy with good references. If not, Acorn will be back.

● Brighton: Another luxury development

Another luxury housing development being built while thousands languish on the housing waiting list, pay huge rents for inadequate accommodation or literally sleep on the streets. The Socialist Party supported the Acorn demo against it on 14 August.

The Green-led council should use their reserves and borrowing powers to build council houses. And the Labour Party should demand the same.

GLENN KELLY

To push change we need to be organised - why we joined the Socialist Party

Two new members in Stoke say why they joined.

I joined the Socialist Party looking for a real alternative to combat austerity, racism and erosion of workers' rights.

After seeing the attacks from the media on Jeremy Corbyn and the defeat of the left wing of the Labour Party, I realised to push for change I needed to take part in an organisation that engages with local people, takes an active role in the community, and continues to push socialist ideals.

Seeing the Socialist Party out supporting Black Lives Matter really convinced me to join, and I'm looking forward to being more active politically.

LAUREN

I thought long and hard about joining the Socialist Party, as I was unsure where to go after Jeremy Corbyn. My decision to join came after seeing that the Socialist Party holds the same principles.

I've been putting the Socialist Party in all the Jeremy Corbyn groups I'm in and letting them know we are an alternative to the right-wing Labour Party. I am trying to get more to join us.

NORA KNIGHT

● West London

The Socialist Party participated in a Black Lives Matter rally on Shepherd's Bush Green on 8 August. We started off with an open mic, followed by an eight-minute kneel for George Floyd, then a march around the green, and finally speakers at the end.

Some speakers focused on

awareness and recognition, calling for diversity training and teaching children about racism. When the Socialist Party was allowed to speak, we raised the link between racism and capitalism.

We made it clear that racism will not be defeated just by raising awareness or getting sympathy from big business. The only way to begin to defeat racism is for us to get organised in our workplaces through trade

Black Lives Matter: This generation is willing to stand up and fight

unions, and in our communities, and replace the racist capitalist system with socialism.

● Brighton

Sussex Live quoted Socialist Party member Glenn Kelly at the 15 August

protest: "This is the fourth Black Lives Matter demonstration I have attended in as many months, and still over 1,000 black and white mainly youth march together showing their determination to fight for justice and against racism.

"In light of the onslaught that is to come on education, jobs and the right

to a home, a new generation is showing that it is willing to stand up and fight.

"It's time for the trade unions to unite with the youth to defend the lives of all working-class people facing attack under a system that cares more about profit than it does about people."

Yorkshire: Celebrating the life and ideas of Leon Trotsky

Yorkshire Socialist Party held a political education meeting on Zoom on the ideas of Leon Trotsky, and the relevance and influence of his work today.

Over 40 members and non-members attended. Tessa Warrington,

Socialist Party national committee, introduced the discussion on the 80th anniversary of Trotsky's murder by an agent of Joseph Stalin.

Three morning workshops followed, focusing on some of the most

fundamental work by the Russian revolutionary - the transitional programme, the theory of permanent revolution, and betrayal of the revolution under Stalin. Three afternoon workshops looked into Marxist ideas today - the need for a new workers' party, fighting racism and the far right, and the state.

In between these workshops,

Yorkshire Socialist Party organiser, Iain Dalton, gave an insightful introduction to the life and contribution of Pat Wall. Pat was Labour MP for Bradford North between 1987 to 1990, a Militant member, predecessor of the Socialist Party.

A committed fighter for the working class, this was a fitting tribute on

the 30th anniversary of Pat's death. This event demonstrated the determination of the Socialist Party to educate our members, both new and old.

HEIDI GRIFFIN
HULL SOCIALIST PARTY

● See our main article on Leon Trotsky on pages 8-9.

● The Socialist: Back to weekly soon

The Socialist is in our summer schedule. This gives our editors a chance to take a well-deserved summer break. Our normal weekly schedule will resume for the next issue on 3 September. Don't worry, you won't miss out. You can still read socialist news, campaigns and analysis at socialist-party.org.uk and socialistworld.net.

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● Your donations help us campaign

PETE MASON
SOCIALIST PARTY FINANCE ORGANISER

Your donations help us campaign on the vital issues facing working people. On 8 August, NHS workers were protesting all around the country, infuriated that many are not receiving decent pay

increases this year (see opposite page).

They welcomed our backing for their 15% pay rise demand. Joe Fathallah from Cardiff East Socialist Party sent us in £32: "From the nurses' pay protest. People were giving me fivers and tenners for the Socialist."

£80 came in the last week for our coronavirus appeal, including £40 from the Black Country. If you haven't donated yet, now is the time. Go to socialistparty.org.uk/donate

and put 'coronavirus appeal' in the comments.

Jon Dale from Mansfield got £9 from a thankful regular reader who he was unable to visit with the Socialist during lockdown. We appeal to all our readers to get a subscription to the Socialist. An e-subscription is now available - see box.

Thanks to Joao who gave £5: "For a better and fairer world." And to Matt from south west London, who gave £40 with the message: "Afraid I can't afford too much at the moment."

Large or small, all are welcome. In fact, the over £800 we raised in Fighting Fund last week was all from similar small donations.

NHS workers demand decent pay - 15% for all now

● Bristol

Hundreds took to the streets. An NHS nurse asked the government: "How can you do this to us after what we did for you?"

The protest, organised by NHS workers themselves, called for a 15% pay raise, the reversal of privatisation and outsourcing, and the integration of health and social care. The placards highlighted the hypocrisy of the Tories, who applauded NHS staff every week, then proceeded to 'carve' them out of pay rises.

Socialist Party member Sheila Caffrey spoke on behalf of Bristol Trade Union Council, the body that brings together the unions in the city: "Your fight is our fight. If we fight together, we will win."

AMY SAGE

● Liverpool

Such enthusiasm and appreciation for the Socialist Party's ideas at the NHS fair pay demo, no doubt on that. Placards got 'booked' as they were being made.

Speeches from Socialist Party members got applause after applause. We sold many of our Socialist papers, and our leaflets were widely received.

What the Socialist Party has been saying is more widely understood. This can be seen with the bold 15% demand as opposed to the union leaders' demand.

Now, more than ever, people recognise the need for a new independent workers' party. We met NHS workers and young people very interested in joining the Socialist Party.

BHARATHI SUBA

● London

Socialist Party members marched, socially distanced, with a thousand nurses and other health workers. The marchers were lively, chanting and full of energy.

The turnout was great. However, it could have been a lot greater if the march had been better publicised by the trade unions. NHS staff deserve to be represented by unions with a leadership up to the task. As one young NHS worker put it: "I'd like to know why my union isn't calling these protests?"

The workers' demand is simple: a 15% pay rise. The Socialist Party was there to support this, and to fight for the rise to be immediate, including for privatised sectors like care and cleaning.

These workers have kept our health and care system going in the face of the pandemic. We will campaign for rightfully angry health workers who,



Merthyr

as they put it, "cannot pay the bills with claps".

50 protesters bought a copy of the Socialist.

THEA EVERETT

● Leeds

"Claps don't pay our bills" and "nurses are for life, not just for pandemics" were among the slogans on homemade placards at the 250-strong demonstration in Leeds.

If it weren't for the local lockdowns

in some parts of West Yorkshire, and the recent spikes of Covid in a few areas of Leeds, the turnout would have been even bigger. Some protesters had booked an hour's annual leave in their working day to come out from the hospital to participate.

Apart from Leeds Trade Union Council (TUC), which organised stewarding for the demo, and a few other activists, the trade unions who represent these workers were absent. Unison, the largest public sector union, advised branches against attending!

However, the organisers, Anthony and Gem, rightly encouraged workers to join a union and become active in it to fight for the 15% pay rise. Socialist Party members Tanis Belsham-Wray, Leeds TUC secretary, and Adrian O'Malley, Unison secretary at Mid Yorkshire NHS Trust, spoke and echoed the organisers' call.

Socialist Party member Alex Brown is the secretary of the NHS Digital branch for government workers' union PCS. He raised how union activists and communities came together to save the Glenfield hospital

unit in Leicester and the walk-in centre in Sheffield.

The Socialist Party played a key role in both campaigns. Alex said that the same approach should be used to build support for any necessary industrial action to win a pay rise.

The raucous reception to Alex's speech was also reflected in the interest shown in the Socialist Party's material. Almost every attendee took one of our leaflets and 25 of them bought a copy of the Socialist, including one for a tenner.

IAIN DALTON

● Cardiff

Over 500 angry nurses, other NHS staff and supporters gathered outside the Wales Millennium Centre to march to the Senedd, despite the leaderships of Unison and the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) doing nothing to build for the event.

There was a clear mood to fight years of real-terms pay cuts, and the UK and Welsh governments' chronic mishandling of the Covid-19 crisis.

Speakers at the rally included Socialist Party members Beth Webster, a nurse on the front line of the pandemic, and Katrine Williams brought solidarity from Cardiff Trade Union Council.

● Swansea

Instead of heading to the sun-drenched Gower coast, 500 protesters turned out in Swansea. Alongside rank and file nurses, five Socialist Party members addressed the rally - including one of our youngest and one of our oldest members.

There was loud applause for our demand that the health unions, in particular the Unison leadership, should officially take up this fight now, instead of boycotting and undermining these magnificent, spontaneous protests. "The fight is just beginning" was the rallying call from the Swansea organisers.

See more reports at socialistparty.org.uk.

A socialist programme for the NHS:

- An immediate 15% pay rise for all health and care staff, including those in privatised sectors
- Minimum wage of £12 an hour - £15 in London
- Reverse all privatisation. Scrap the Private Finance Initiative and cancel all PFI debt
- Bring all outsourced workers and services in-house on a permanent contract
- A fully publicly funded NHS and care system, free at the point of use. Scrap prescription charges in England, dental and all other health charges
- Nationalise private healthcare, care homes, the medical supply industry and the pharmaceutical companies - integrate them into the NHS
- Reinstate student bursaries and scrap tuition fees
- A socialist NHS - democratically run by elected and accountable committees, including service workers and users

REVOLUTIONARY MOOD IN LEBANON FOLLOWING HORRIFIC EXPLOSION

Only a united working class movement for socialism can solve the acute crisis



Damage to shops and apartments in Beirut after the massive explosion in the city's port on 4 August. Many other areas of the capital were reduced to rubble PHOTO ANCHAL VOHRA-VOA/CC

JUDY BEISHON
SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

In the face of daily furious protests on the streets, one by one Lebanon's government ministers resigned, until the whole cabinet resigned on 10 August, knowing it had no authority to continue. It had only lasted seven months, after the previous government was also brought down by a massive protest movement.

This current round of struggle is spurred on by an enormous additional reason to pursue the goal of fundamental change - the devastating explosion on 4 August that brought terrible loss of life, widespread injuries, and significant damage to around half of Beirut.

It was reported that there was little celebration at the fall of the government, as Lebanon's working people know that in itself it won't change anything. Many of the same ministers remain in place in a 'caretaker' capacity. The same political elite - part and parcel of the ruling class - remains in place, pulling the strings over and above the government.

The protesters see that situation clearly, and therefore demand "all

“” Loans from the international finance institutions will come in tandem with an insistence on more austerity measures for ordinary people

must go - that means all", including the multimillionaire president, Michel Aoun, and the speaker of parliament Nabih Berri, both octogenarians who were among the sectarian leaders in the 1975-90 civil war.

Documents have been revealed since the explosion which show they both received warnings about the danger of the explosive material being stored in the port. It has been reported that an initial investigation into the explosion is to be spearheaded by a judge who is a relative of Berri, showing that endemic corruption, nepotism and attempts at self-preservation continue at the top.

The prime minister who resigned, Hassan Diab, placed the blame for the explosion and the economic crisis on the corruption that he admitted "is rooted in every part of the state", and accused the 'political class' above him of trying to make scapegoats of his cabinet.

No doubt he and his colleagues have, in part, been pawns of the elite. They were put in place as a 'technocratic' government in an attempt to cover up the blatant corruption and self-interest of those above them in power. Diab was a university professor before being shunted into the

political arena. Nevertheless, they have been complicit with the ruling class in upholding what is a completely rotten, degenerating capitalist system.

The parliament reconvened on 13 August - its first session since the explosion - to carry out the legal requirement of ratifying a two-week state of emergency that had been imposed.

Rotten ruling class

No one believes that this drastic law is about dealing with the emergency of the immense damage caused by the blast, not least because it has mainly been volunteers from among ordinary people who have engaged in the clear-up process, not the authorities.

Rather, it is aimed at giving increased, special powers to the military to use against the outraged protesters - powers to use curfews, ban public gatherings, censor the media, and place civilians in front of military tribunals, among other draconian measures.

That legislation indicates the extreme weakness at the top, not any strength. The authority of the political representatives of the ruling class has crumbled and they are immersed

“” The level of anger is seen in the effigies and invocations of the political representatives of the elite hanging from gallows!

in chaos, with no agreement on how to govern. Some propose early elections, others fiercely oppose them. Aoun has the power to simply appoint a new cabinet without elections taking place.

Others tout the idea of a 'national unity' government of all the parties, or some kind of emergency transition government. There could be another attempt to create a government of hands that appear to be 'clean' - of technocrats rather than people directly from the completely discredited political parties.

But the Lebanese people have already experienced that kind of rule over the last seven months. Knowing that, capitalist strategists have in desperation even mooted the idea of bringing back the former prime minister Saad Hariri, who was ousted by last autumn's protest movement.

Neither the ruling class as a whole nor any of its competing factions can produce a replacement government that could possibly deliver what the population is crying out for: an end to the economic crisis, poverty and hunger; and now, those responsible for the port explosion to face trial and justice.

Establishment figureheads will



Protests demanding the removal of Lebanon's rotten ruling elite started in 2019 PHOTO SHAHEN BOOKS/CC

no doubt use the dire state of the economy as a stick to try to ward the movement off from turning on the capitalist system itself. They will argue that new loans won't be obtained unless a new pro-capitalist government is installed.

But loans from the international finance institutions will come in tandem with an insistence on more austerity measures for ordinary people - that's being made clear. So saving capitalism with loans as one of the aims would only be for the benefit of the super-rich, not everyone else.

The Financial Times gave a warning to the Lebanese capitalists when it wrote in an editorial: "The ruling elites must finally realise their own futures are at stake. As the country edges ever closer to being a failed state, Lebanese hopelessness is exploding into rage" (12 August).

This appeal for "discussions on political and electoral reform" is an attempt both to prevent revolution and to restore a new version of the 'old' Lebanon, which once was a relatively stable base for imperialism in an Arab Middle Eastern country.

Also fearing that working people in Lebanon will take matters into their own hands, the spokespeople of western capitalist powers have been hypocritically chorusing for an end to the corruption that is deep-rooted in the Lebanese regime.

Under Lebanese capitalism, the incredibly wealthy ruling elite use the confessional system imposed at the end of the civil war to profit by having their own spheres of influence.

Meanwhile, ambassadors from the US and France have landed in Beirut to try to influence how friendly the next government will be towards western imperialist interests. They have no more capability of formulating a path that could satisfy the protest movement than does Lebanon's elite.

The above-mentioned Financial Times editorial summed up their paralysis, by saying: "The sectarian-based political system designed to keep the peace between the country's myriad sects and religions has over decades institutionalised the powers of warlords and political dynasties, while embedding a culture of cronyism and corruption.

Ultimately, that system requires a complete overhaul if Lebanon's ills are to be addressed. That is a vastly complex - and nearly impossible - task. It would be unrealistic at this stage to expect powerful political factions to simply step aside, or for Hezbollah, the militant group that supported the outgoing government, to give up its arms".

It is true that the "powerful political factions" won't simply step aside. They will have to be removed. Carrying out that task can be done by a mass, united working-class-based

movement, but only if it is well-organised and prepared for it, and only if it is armed politically with an alternative way of organising society.

“” For a successful transformation of power to the majority, the organisation by the working class of its own non-sectarian political party is needed

The only alternative that would involve taking power out of the hands of the elite minority and placing it in the hands of the majority, to create a society in the interests of the majority, is socialism. This is because the very essence of socialism is public ownership and workers' control and management of all the main sectors of the economy, together with democratically decided planning of all the resources in society.

Under Lebanese capitalism, the incredibly wealthy ruling elite use the confessional system imposed at the end of the civil war to profit by having their own spheres of influence.

Under the 1942 constitution, agreed under French rule, set the rules that the prime minister has to be a Sunni Muslim, the president a Christian, the speaker of parliament a Shia Muslim, and there are many more sectarian rules and criteria.

If a capitalist-controlled constituent assembly is placed on the agenda, with the idea of rewriting the country's constitution, the sectarian leaders from the different religious and ethnic blocs would try to maintain a carve-up of power between themselves. This could lead to another terrible outbreak of war, if they at some stage decide to continue a conflict of interests by military means.

Given its location, Lebanon is immediately affected by events in Syria and Israel, and regional rivalries, including the currently growing tensions in the eastern Mediterranean between Turkey and a developing Greek-French alliance.

In any case, there is no distribution of power between them that could end the corrupt, inept rule of the ruling layer. The underlying, central problem is capitalism itself - a system that causes division, racism and conflict, in the interests of capital accumulation for those at the top.

As long as it exists, minority groups

- of which there are many in Lebanon - will fear being discriminated against, and in fact all subsections of the population, however large, will fear that, because crisis-ridden capitalism can't offer decent living standards to either the working class or the middle layers - professional workers, small business owners, etc.

So it is essential that non-sectarian grassroots unity, which has been a feature of the protest movement so far, is continued and built on further. The movement has made clear that it has no confidence in any of the capitalist politicians in the sectarian parties that make up the present governing system.

There is no shortage of determination and courage among the protesters - once again battling daily against heavy repression, including tear gas, and attempting to storm state institutions.

The level of anger is seen in the effigies and invocations of the political representatives of the elite hanging from gallows. "Prepare the gallows because our anger doesn't end in one day," has been one of the messages doing the rounds on social media!

The way forward

For a successful transformation of power to the majority, the organisation by the working class of its own non-sectarian political party is needed. This would be able to discuss out and arm itself with a political programme in its own interests as a class.

The election of action committees in workplaces and local communities across Beirut to organise basic aid and support for people following the explosion, would be a start to developing democratic workers' organisations, acting independently of pro-capitalist bodies.

They would be able to link together on a city-wide basis, to form a democratically-organised form of workers' council in Beirut, which could be repeated in other towns and cities across the country.

And rather than any kind of capitalist constituent assembly, a revolutionary constituent assembly must be demanded and fought for - where delegates from working people can democratically decide to remove the present political and economic system and create a new government of workers' representatives, fully accountable to those who elect them.

People in Lebanon are suffering terribly from the effects of multiple crises. The end to this situation lies in their own hands; and it is only a matter of time before they move to carry out the revolutionary events they so urgently need, supported by workers internationally.

Mass protests and strikes rock Belarus

EDMUND SCHLUESSEL
SOCIALISTINEN VAHITOETO (CWI IN FINLAND)

Unprecedented numbers have been out on protests across Belarus, with reports of 200,000 demonstrating in the capital Minsk on Sunday 16 August. Mass strikes have continued at major workplaces, like Belarus Potash, and the truck manufacturer, BelAZ. These workers have been joined by journalists from the Belarusian state media declaring they are unwilling to continue lying on behalf of the regime.

There have been reports of increasing numbers of police and other state forces resigning, and making public their refusal to obey orders to attack demonstrators.

The mass protests and strikes were sparked by President Aleksandr Lukashenko declaring himself the winner over Sviatlana Tikhonovskaya in a presidential vote widely considered as being totally rigged. This has come in the context of a failing economy and collapsing confidence in Lukashenko's thirty-year-old regime.

There has been terrible repression, with protestors beaten, arrested, and hauled away by OMON special police, held for a few days and then released. There have been deaths. Yet, despite this, the mass demonstrations have taken on a 'carnival' atmosphere. So many strikers and demonstrators say "fear has gone". As happened in Tunisia and Egypt during the 'Arab Spring', this state brutality can arouse yet more anger.

While rumours abound that Lukashenko is preparing to seek asylum in Russia, rumours also circulate of an intervention by Russian troops. However, the scale of the popular uprising makes any such intervention much riskier for Vladimir Putin, potentially inflaming the mass protests against Putin himself developing in Russia.

Tikhonovskaya's immediate demand for a rerun of the election could gain popularity. While a simple rerun would only pit pro-capitalist candidates against one another, Lukashenko being forced into granting that concession would be a concrete symbolic victory for workers that could fan the flames of a full-scale revolution.

Widely acclaimed as the winning candidate, Tikhonovskaya, who has fled to Lithuania following gruesome threats to her children and her imprisoned husband, initially called on protesters to go home in the face of brutal police attacks. But as the demonstrations have swollen into what appears to be an unstoppable force, her running mate, Maria Kolesnikova, holds out hope of Tikhonovskaya being brought back to occupy the presidency.

Russian state media has taken the attitude that Lukashenko's departure is a matter of time. Capitalist bosses in the EU regard Belarus in the same manner in which they preyed upon Ukraine - as another business 'opportunity'. The country has resources they can exploit, including cheap

labour. European powers, the US, and China, all have an interest in what happens in this geopolitically important state. Without a socialist alternative emerging from the mass movement the country risks becoming a pawn in the struggles between the larger economic powers.

These are crucial days for the Belarusian working class in getting rid of the rule of a dictator and of the oligarchs who have acquired state industries to accumulate profit for themselves. Nearly 50% of Belarusian industry is still in state hands, but control should be taken out of the hands of bureaucrats by workers in the industries. There should be no illusions that privatisation would lead to more efficient, better-paying industry.

The resignations from the police and state security forces have, so far, been individual acts, weakening the state but not signifying a situation of dual power, from which the working class could take over running society.

But as workers put their stamp on events, through bringing the country to a halt and winning over the middle layers in society, many of whom are already actively involved in protests, they will need democratically elected workplace and neighbourhood committees to link up locally, regionally and nationally. These workers' 'councils' could be transformed from being instruments for conducting the struggle into the democratically elected bodies for implementing workers' majority rule.

A revolutionary constituent assembly would be the best way of drawing up a new way of running society with democratically elected representatives and proposals coming from political representatives of workers themselves. A full programme of democratic rights, along with the nationalisation of all large private industry under a democratically controlled plan of production, distribution and exchange is necessary.

Immediately, what is needed is a fighting organisation, a party of workers and a leadership with a revolutionary socialist outlook to coordinate the present mass movement. This would advocate representatives of committees and councils across Belarus through which workers could set themselves the task of arranging a defence force against Lukashenko's OMON and other state forces sent against them.

The fight for a coordinated, independent, socialist answer to the crisis of Belarusian capitalism should be accompanied by an appeal to the workers of Russia and elsewhere to follow their example and link up their struggles.

The bravery of Belarusians in taking to the streets and downing tools cannot be doubted. All those who see it will urge: "Trust that bravery; trust the power. Take the next step towards revolution!"

● For full article see socialistworld.net

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the Socialist

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NHS PAY UNIONS MUST TAKE FIGHT TO U-TURN TORIES



PHOTOS PAUL MATTSOON

SUE POWELL
GLOUCESTERSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

The nurses praised by Boris Johnson for staying with him for 48 hours in April “when things could have gone either way”, might have hoped his gratitude would lead to improved conditions, an end to PPE shortages, and better pay.

Johnson joined the clapping for carers, celebrated 72 years of the NHS, while Chancellor Sunak said: “These past months underlined what we always knew: our public sector workers make a vital contribution to our country and we can

rely on them.” But nurses’ pay has fallen an average 8% in real terms since 2010.

Shortly before lockdown, Tory MPs voted against proposals to raise nurses’ pay. Despite the sacrifices - 540 health workers dead and staff enduring months of anxiety and lack of PPE, and separation from loved ones - the Tories will not budge.

The pay rise announced for 900,000 public sector workers of 2-3.1% for teachers, doctors, police, armed forces, and so on, does not extend to nurses who are tied to an existing 2018 wage deal. Adding insult to injury, care minister Helen

Whately confirmed the financial package for student nurses, due this autumn, will not be updated. Having suffered under Tory negligence and contempt, nurses get empty praise - and they’re furious.

Kick in the teeth

If the pandemic increased public appreciation of the NHS, the government has delivered a kick in the teeth.

The dedication and ‘saintly’ status of the NHS has been exploited for too long. Health sector unions and professional organisations have launched a campaign to demand pay talks “out of respect for the

dedicated NHS staff who have battled Covid-19”. This does not reflect the anger of their members who are demanding a 15% increase.

The current ‘Agenda for Change’ deal, agreed in 2018, was already unpopular. When the Royal College of Nurses signed, one member said “they shouldn’t have trusted the government, they’ve just gone for the deal and been screwed over”.

Nurses are saying it is no wonder the NHS loses so many staff when it “double-crosses the ones they have got on a pay deal.”

The NHS is 40,000 nurses short. Continued pressures on the service, and the backlog of operations

and appointments due to the pandemic, are being used as a ruse for NHS England to launch the biggest-ever outsourcing of clinical services worth £10 billion over four years.

Cuts and closures are back on the agenda. The school exam U-turn will encourage others, and the beleaguered Tories can expect a fight: there have already been at least 30 demonstrations on pay. The battle lines are drawn. Will the union leaders, who failed to act during the junior doctors’ strike in 2016, respond?

NHS workers deserve more than fine words and it goes beyond pay, the NHS itself is at stake.

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A SOCIALIST RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CRISIS
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WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY’S MAIN DEMANDS
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