

15% NOW

UNIONS MUST FIGHT FOR NHS PAY RISE

MAGGIE FRICKER
NHS WORKER, SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

NHS workers need a pay rise now. And we need our unions to launch a real fight for it.

I've been at my hospital trust for over 20 years and I'm proud to call myself a health worker. Every day I see workmates witness trauma and tragedy and keep going.

Many of my colleagues are young and just starting out - they are newly qualified, new to post, or new to the country. They have the pressures of learning a new job and making a good impression at work, while trying to find affordable accommodation and pay the bills.

At the best of times it's a struggle. But in the last months, health workers have been hit square in the face with this life-changing pandemic.

The responsibility on so many of our shoulders has taken its toll, and the scares are very real. Workers in our communities have shown their appreciation - they have clapped us, and at times they have fed us.

Proud

We've continued coming to work - despite the fear, the inadequate PPE, the long hours and the constantly changing rules. I could not be more proud of those I work with - but we are not angels.

We are angry at the stupidity of this government, and the greed and incompetence of the private hospitals and contractors we have to work with. So it's time for us to turn that anger into action.

Our union leaders are well aware that we are bitter over the poor pay deal they made three years ago, which this year left us with a below-inflation pay rise. It's high time for them to listen to the grassroots. Put a figure on it - demand 15% now!

We need to make our voices heard, take to the streets, be seen, and support the day of action on Saturday 12 September. But this is only the beginning of this struggle.

It's very clear the Tories are not listening. If we want decent pay and conditions and full funding, NHS workers need to take strike action. I believe we are ready for it.

We must now demand the health unions organise a strike ballot. It's time we hit the Tories back. If we back down on this fight, it will be a green light to speed up the wholesale sell-off of what remains of the services we hold dear.

The Socialist Party demands:

- 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. Scrap zero-hour contracts immediately
- Reverse all privatisation and PFI debts. For a fully nationalised and publicly funded NHS and social care sector, with full collective bargaining and national terms and conditions
- Reinstate student bursaries, and scrap all tuition fees and debts
- Scrap immigration fees charging NHS trusts and care homes to employ essential workers
- A socialist NHS - democratically run by elected and accountable committees, including service workers and users
- We can't trust pro-privatisation, pro-austerity, anti-working-class politicians. Fight for the building of a new, mass workers' party!

I will be campaigning for Unison to call mass action for fully funded pay rises now. I have proposed to the union's health service group executive that they should be considering a 15% pay claim. The leadership should also be calling the other health unions to try to agree a joint claim. And Unison should instruct branches to start preparing the ground for a strike ballot to win the claim. NHS workers have had enough, and need their union to lead the fight!

HUGO PIERRE
UNISON NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL (PERSONAL CAPACITY) AND SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER



the Socialist

formerly Militant

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

NSSN rally: Workers must not pay the price of Covid

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) is holding its annual rally on the eve of TUC congress. This year, because of Covid, the rally will be held via Zoom and shared live on Facebook. Leaders of national unions will be speaking, and there will also be an open mic, giving a platform to workers and reps in disputes and on the frontline.

NSSN CHAIR ROB WILLIAMS TOLD**THE SOCIALIST:**

"TUC congress has never been more important. Workers are fighting for our lives and livelihoods. We need workers' control over workplaces to make sure that they are safe. And increasingly, we are fighting to stop the hurricane of redundancies and confront the bosses who use the threat of job losses to try and smash our pay, terms and conditions, and pensions.



For details see shopstewards.net

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

Now there is talk that the Tories are looking to freeze the national living wage, which is already too low and has unacceptable age restrictions.

More than ever, the TUC needs to be a council of war, where the class lines are drawn - workers won't pay the price for this crisis. We must send a clear message of defiance to the employers and their Tory government, which in turn will give confidence to workers that the unions will fight. We've already seen that workers join unions when the need to be organised is clear and a fighting lead is given.

The NSSN is calling on the TUC congress to organise a day of demonstrations and protests in every town and city on Saturday 24 October to demand the furlough scheme - scheduled to end a week later - is continued and upgraded: we say 'work or full pay!'

The mood to fight is increasing as Covid strips bare the class inequalities in society.

We've already seen the incredible Black Lives Matter movement fill the streets. On 12 September there will be more protests to demand a 15% pay rise for workers in the NHS and

care sectors, and we call on our supporters to join them.

Just weeks ago, thousands of students forced the Tories to U-turn over A-level results - one of 13 retreats by Johnson's government! (see p4)

What could 6½ million workers, organised in the trade unions achieve if there was a fighting programme? Help us send that message by joining our rally."

NSSN TUC Rally - 1pm, Sunday 13 September Facebook event

- Union leaders so far confirmed as speaking at the event are: Sarah Woolley, general secretary BFAWU, Amy Murphy Usdaw president (personal capacity), Mick Lynch RMT transport union assistant general secretary, Dave Ward Communication Workers Union general secretary
- Join Zoom Meeting: Meeting ID: 822 0003 8334 and passcode: 739809



Callous Tories threaten not to uprate the minimum wage

'We're all in it together' chirped Boris Johnson at the start of lockdown - which is presumably why he's considering not uprating the paltry minimum wage next April, because the bosses say they can't afford it!

This hypocrite cannot be allowed to go unchallenged. As furlough payments come to an end, employers are already slashing wages, axing jobs and cutting hours to protect their profits.

The trade unions must step up to the plate and fight for a real minimum wage. That means demanding £12 an hour and £15 an hour in high-cost London now, and organising action to achieve it.

**Workers slam Tory proposal**

"At the height of the pandemic crisis the Tories praised low-paid workers for keeping the country going. Yet the Tories now tell us the minimum wage won't be uprated this April. They aren't prepared to give us a wage to survive on. Instead they want workers to pay for the crisis not the bosses."

MICHELLE FRANCIS

LOW PAID WORKER, SOUTHAMPTON

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

editors@socialistparty.org.uk

"Ministers are considering slamming the 'emergency brake' on uprating the minimum wage.

Overworked and underpaid, it's us who have been on the front line since before the pandemic. Now we're told we must accept a further decay in our conditions.

As a low-paid warehouse worker, I've seen co-workers fall ill, with lip service paid to health and safety, hazard pay removed early... There are no excuses, other than greed for these attacks on the working class to continue."

LOW-PAID WORKER

NUNEATON

Covid-19 outbreaks

Safety is being overridden in drive to bolster the economy

JONATHAN FLUXMAN AND JON DALE
DOCTORS IN UNITE UNION

Even as cases of Covid-19 infections are rising dramatically, the Tories are desperately trying to get workers back to their workplaces and spending money in city centres.

But workplace outbreaks of Covid-19 keep occurring. Abattoirs and meat packers in Scotland, Wales and Yorkshire, cake and sandwich makers in Newark and Northampton, sweatshop garment factories in Leicester and elsewhere, have been hit. Big workplace outbreaks have occurred in other countries too.

The common feature is workers in close proximity to each other, breathing the same air for hours. It is increasingly clear that working conditions are largely responsible for these outbreaks. Virus spread between workers outside the factory and in local communities plays only a small part.

Workers blamed

The timing, circumstances and pattern of the outbreaks points to them being typical 'super-spreader events', caused by airborne spread of the virus within the same enclosed indoor space of the factory. Infection rapidly passes from one or two individuals to many other workers.

Employers and some public health officials have been quick to blame workers for sharing cars and homes. The evidence shows that actions of workers themselves play only a minor role in these outbreaks.

Greencore claimed all its sites "have wide-ranging social-distancing measures, stringent hygiene procedures and regular temperature checking in place". Yet nearly 300 people working at its Northampton factory were still infected.

The spread of Covid-19 in indoor spaces is extremely difficult to



prevent entirely. There is, in reality, no such thing as a 'Covid-safe' workplace or school - unless transmission in the community is eliminated. The rate of community transmission will determine what happens in our workplaces and schools, so a national 'Zero Covid' strategy is essential.

Trade unions should make indoor spaces safer by ensuring employers enact hygiene measures, distancing, wearing masks and proper ventilation. Ventilation has been neglected in government guidance.

The Health and Safety Executive, Food Standards Authority and other regulatory authorities should be ensuring this is done properly. But they have been hardly heard during the whole of the Covid-19 pandemic. Years of austerity cuts and the Tories' "bonfire of red tape," slashing even the mildest restrictions on profit-makers, have left them enfeebled and unable to meet the needs of this crisis.

Now schools, colleges and universities are returning. Workers can only rely on their own organisation and need their unions to demand:

- Employers recognise airborne spread as a Covid-19 risk and take action to assess and minimise risk.
- Improved ventilation and airflow, installation of filtering devices, and use of face masks to reduce the infection risk, alongside other safety measures against Covid-19.
- Trade union supervision and control of workplace safety.
- Weekly surveillance testing on site of all workers, including management, in addition to easily accessible testing for anyone with symptoms or in contact with Covid-19.
- All workers forced to take time off due to having Covid-19 or having been in contact with it should receive full pay while isolating. No one should have to work while awaiting test results.

- **For more information:** doctorsinunite.com/2020/09/02/the-role-of-airborne-spread-in-factory-outbreaks-of-covid-19/
- **Reaction to Caerphilly lockdown see page 5**
- **Schools' Covid crisis - see pages 8-9**

Under the microscope

• Overwhelmed

As the Tory government opens up schools and workplaces to benefit employers, Covid-19 infections are spiralling upwards.

Worryingly, analysis by the Guardian says that a worst-case scenario of high levels of infection, along with normal winter pressures on hospitals, would leave many NHS trusts in England overwhelmed by patients.

But even with lower levels of infection, a majority of trusts (60%)

could reach patient capacity, with seven trusts being completely overwhelmed.

• Poverty and Covid

A leaked report from soon-to-be axed Public Health England confirmed that widespread poverty, poor housing and large BAME communities in the north of the country meant that Covid-19 never really disappeared from the North West, North, Yorkshire and the Humber and East Midlands.

• Disneyland

Health secretary Matt Hancock continues to project his fantasy that the deeply flawed Covid-19 privatised testing system is a 'world beater'.

Tell that to the people told to drive 450 miles to Inverness for a test! Even Boris Johnson's eminence grise, Dominic Cummings, only had to drive 25 miles to test his eyesight.

But even people tested locally have complained that they haven't received the results.

The testing crisis reflects the undermining of public health laboratories and local NHS health facilities by the Tory government, in favour of profit-making corporations with no experience in delivering public health services.



WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

Our demands include...

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

WORK AND INCOME

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

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

RIGHTS

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

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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U-turn Tories' splits are growing



WHAT WE THINK

This government is “the blind leading the blind”. It has to stop making “stuff up now on the hoof”. It cannot continue to say “one thing on Monday, changing its mind on Tuesday, something different presented on Wednesday. It’s just not acceptable.” These were not the comments of the Labour front bench, but of leading Tory MPs.

They reflect the growing frustration at the government’s woeful handling of the pandemic, and their fears that the resulting mass discontent could be transformed into mass action, particularly in response to a new Covid peak.

Nine months ago Johnson walked into Downing Street triumphant, having won the biggest Tory majority since 1987. In our post-election special, printed the morning after Johnson’s victory, the Socialist was a lone voice when we pointed out that “the seeming strength of Johnson’s government will be shattered by coming events”, and that the Tory Party “is bitterly divided, and Johnson has only been able to win by distancing himself from his own party, using populist rhetoric to falsely claim he is standing up for ‘the people.’”

From fissures to chasms

Today the fissures have reopened between different wings of the Tory Party and could quickly become chasms. Johnson’s premiership, and even the Tory government, could be under threat in short order.

For the millions of people facing job losses, eviction, and cuts in pay and conditions there is an important conclusion to draw from the growing splits in the ruling party. As the A-level students have shown, this government is weak and can be defeated.

If the leaders of the trade union movement were to take clear action - starting with mass protests against the ending of the furlough demanding work or full pay - they could land a decisive blow against this government for the rich.

Johnson’s government, like all its Tory predecessors, is a viciously anti-working class, pro-capitalist administration. That does not mean, however, that Johnson and his inner circle act in the interests of the majority of the capitalist class, still less fully under its control.

The cull of senior civil servants, including permanent secretaries that have been dismissed or pushed out this year, is one indication that Johnson does not accept the normal checks and balances which act to constrain governments within a framework in the interests of British capitalism. On the contrary, he is a ‘Poundland Trump’ relying on populist posturing on a right-wing nationalist basis.

Johnson’s approach is being writ



This government is weak and can be defeated



PHOTO MOHAMMAD HASSANZADEH/CC

large in his Brexit negotiation tactics. No Tory-negotiated Brexit would defend the interests of the working class.

However, by declaring that a trade deal must be agreed by 15 October, while simultaneously threatening to rip up parts of the withdrawal agreement dealing with Northern Ireland, Johnson is signalling that his government is willing to walk away without agreeing any deal with the EU.

For the EU, the room to make concessions to Johnson is more limited than ever. The world economic crisis has massively ramped up the pressures on the bosses’ club, threatening to fracture it altogether, and making it very dangerous to bend too far to the demands of the only country to have already left.

While it is possible that Johnson intends to retreat from his hardline posturing - hoping in vain that it would be unnoticed under cover of his chest beating - the stance he is taking is therefore alarming for British capitalism.

The overwhelming majority of Britain’s capitalists would have preferred to remain in the EU. The - at root - mass expression of working-class anger that led to the defeat of remain in the referendum made that impossible. They have therefore been manoeuvring for the closest possible alignment as the best means of defending their profits.

In any circumstances, significant economic and political disruption would result from Johnson taking Britain out of the EU on World Trade Organisation (WTO) terms, with the resulting introduction of hard borders and new tariffs, and the consequences for Ireland in particular.

Against the background of multiple problems - the likely new Covid surge, the deepest economic contraction since at least the 1930s, the rise in support for Scottish independence, and the highest-ever non-wartime state debt - Johnson’s approach is highly reckless for British capitalism. The slump in sterling that has taken place over recent days

could be dwarfed in the event of a WTO-terms Brexit.

If Johnson maintains his current stance, the more traditional wing of the Tory Party, including ex-prime minister Theresa May and others, could act to try and remove him, backed by wide sections of the capitalist class. Despite the change in the character of the parliamentary Tory Party, there are still more than 130 MPs who voted remain in the referendum.

On the other side, of course, if Johnson retreats from his current hardline posturing, he will be accused of betrayal by the most pro-Brexit Tory MPs and a large swathe of the Tory members. In either scenario, a schism in the Tory Party so deep that it can no longer govern as a majority government is possible.

Nor are the Brexit negotiations the only issue which could fuel warfare in the Tory Party in the coming weeks. The Covid crisis has already battered Johnson’s authority in the parliamentary Tory Party. A new peak, and a few more U-turns, could destroy it altogether.

At the same time, divisions are already developing on what to do about the state debt. In the short term, British capitalism may, like other major economies, be able to live with large public debts.

However, against the background of a Brexit crisis, this is not guaranteed. Hence Chancellor Sunak pleading with the new intake from the last general election, the so-called ‘red wall’ Tory MPs, that if the Tories abandoned their “position as the party of sound finance...what is the difference between us and Labour?”

Tax rises

In response, they are reported to have made clear their opposition to any tax rises which affect ‘working families’. This does not reflect any genuine sympathy with their constituents, but a visceral fear that they could lose their seats.

At bottom, the multiple developing splits in the Tory Party - once the most successful capitalist party on the planet - reflect the crisis of British capitalism, which offers no way forward for working-class people, whether in or out of the EU.

As the 2019 parliamentary crisis resurges, there is one comfort for the capitalist class - they have succeeded in removing Jeremy Corbyn and replacing him with a Labour leader who they consider reliable.

There is nothing they can do, however, about the underlying causes of Corbyn’s rise including the deeply felt anger of the majority at the consequences of a decade of Tory capitalist austerity. This has been enormously fuelled, first by the Covid crisis, and now by the deepening economic disaster facing millions.

In the coming period, struggles to defend jobs and living conditions can finish off this Tory government. They can also create possibilities for building a mass party that fights for the socialist transformation of society in Britain, and also on a European and international basis.



A schism in the Tory Party is possible, so deep that it can no longer govern. Struggle can finish off them off

CAERPHILLY LOCKDOWN PUTS PROFITS BEFORE SAFETY

DAVE REID
SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

The Welsh government has imposed a lockdown on Caerphilly county as the number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 has risen above 50 per 100,000. Nobody will be able to enter or leave Caerphilly borough without "a reasonable excuse", and nobody will be allowed to enter anyone else's home.

Welsh health minister, Vaughan Gething, said: "I can't overstate the seriousness of the situation that we are in." But he's demanding that the lockdown is only aimed at people's private lives - pubs, restaurants, bars, and, crucially, schools, remain open.

Caerphilly workers are barred from visiting their parents' house but can travel to work, inside and outside the borough, as normal. One worker commented: "Don't go to other people's houses - make sure you only see them when five pints under down the local!"

The spread of the virus in Caerphilly's schools is a particular concern. Teachers are worried that they are facing hundreds of school students a day as the virus spreads through the community. As one teacher commented: "It's almost as though they consider us expendable".

Campaign group 'Parents For Safety First' had called for Welsh education minister Kirsty Williams to pause the schools reopening as cases were increasing, but the schools



Chartist statue, Blackwood, Caerphilly PHOTO JEREMY BOLLWELL/CC

are continuing to open to more and more pupils.

Caerphilly council must ensure that council workers are able to provide services safely, with PPE

provided to all workers who need it, and care homes protected.

• For more on safety and schools - see pages 8-9

XR blockade: Don't let the Tories criminalise protest



Student climate change strike 2019 PHOTO PAUL MATTHEWSON

The billionaire-owned UK newspapers, along with Prime Minister Boris Johnson, decried the blockade by Extinction Rebellion (XR) environmental activists outside a number of printing presses last weekend. The action delayed printing and distribution of the climate-change-sceptic Telegraph, the Murdoch-owned

Times, and the right-wing Daily Mail, among others.

Johnson, Home Secretary Priti Patel, and Labour leader Keir Starmer all said it was an attack on 'a free press' and 'democracy' - as if the ownership of major newspapers by a handful of billionaire bigots is in any sense 'free' or 'democratic'.

The Tory government has consistently failed to tackle the current health and environmental emergency, for instance over illegal levels of air pollution causing tens of thousands of excess deaths in the UK each year. None of the delayed newspapers have campaigned to prosecute Johnson and his ministers over this outrage.

XR protesters have been charged with obstruction and had stringent bail conditions imposed on them. Patel has threatened to further restrict the freedom to protest by designating XR a criminal gang, opening up the activists to lengthy jail sentences.

Although XR fails to engage with trade unionists to discuss tactics and strategy in fighting climate change, etc, many sacked print workers and journalists were also accused of 'curtailing press freedom', when they organised mass picketing outside Murdoch's News International plant in Wapping in 1986, and also at scab employer Eddie Shah's Stockport Messenger plant at Warrington in 1983.

Any moves to criminalise climate change protests must be fought.



PHOTO ITALIAN ARMY/CC

Video game developer attacks Black Lives Matter

ISAAC MASKILL-WATTS
DERBY SOCIALIST PARTY

Just two months ago, French video game giant Ubisoft joined the hollow chorus of corporations exclaiming that black lives matter. But its latest mobile game under a flagship franchise, Tom Clancy's Elite Squad, features a thinly veiled attack on the Black Lives Matter movement.

In the introduction to the game, we are greeted with a scene stating that an organisation called Umbra "has emerged to take advantage of escalating civil unrest," promoting an "egalitarian utopia." This is cover for its desire to build a "new world order" using terrorist attacks to generate more chaos, and "weaken governments" by hacking social media to discredit world leaders.

Just in these few snippets, we can see Ubisoft making a clear and distinct link between recent protests and terrorist actions, and even linking it to (mostly right-wing) conspiracy theories.

However, this did not link them clearly enough for Ubisoft! The logo of the villainous organisation is the black solidarity fist used by the workers' movement and black liberation groups.

The player's mission is to operate

an elite squad of assassins, authorised by world leaders to work outside the law, to "put an end to Umbra's campaign of chaos."

Since its release, Elite Squad has faced a significant backlash online. Ubisoft has agreed to remove the solidarity fist from the introduction of the game. But this still leaves the rest of the parallels drawn between anti-racist and anti-capitalist protests, and shady terrorist groups.

The major players in the industry feel they can publish games like this with little to no accountability to the world outside of the gaming sphere. We've known for a long time, for example, that these companies overwork their staff, sometimes with 100-hour work weeks before a game is due to launch, referred to as 'crunch'.

Staff are underpaid for their time, while chief executives are among some of the highest-paid. Mobile games in particular use underhanded tactics, including gambling mechanisms, to squeeze ever more money from vulnerable players, sometimes even children.

Capitalism is prepared to use every means to undermine opposition to the profit system. This includes the exploitative, multibillion-dollar video game industry.

Grenfell fire inquiry stops victims attending

Grenfell Tower residents have been denied the right to attend the restarting inquiry into the causes of the June 2017 fire which resulted in 72 deaths. The reason given is concerns over spreading coronavirus.

But surviving residents slammed the move saying it was "madness" given that people can eat and drink out without a mask but can't attend the inquiry.

The Tower had been refurbished by the Tory council on the cheap with highly combustible cladding, and fire barriers which were badly installed. The contractors are also suspected of cutting corners to save money. Tenants concerns about safety were ignored.

SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

September issue includes...

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- Unity or bust? Will Covid crisis make or break the EU?
- Poll tax revisited

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Covid-19 pandemic increases financial pressures on Welsh local government



MARK EVANS
UNISON CARMARTHENSHIRE BRANCH SECRETARY
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

A report from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) finance subgroup paints a bleak picture for the future of local government and the important services it provides in Wales.

The report includes a survey by the WLGA of all 21 local authorities in Wales and the estimated impact the Covid-19 crisis will have on council's income and expenditure. The report also examines Covid-19 announcements made by the Tory central government that could result in consequential funding allocations for Wales, and finally the pressure facing services in Wales "beyond the current crisis into the next financial year 2021-22".

The Welsh Government to date has supplied funds to local authorities for income loss and increased expenditure as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. These funds are allocated through a claims process. However, the report states that "the funding to date has been significant and helpful but further unfunded pressures are likely to occur as communities return to normal levels of activity".

Even before any further Tory cuts, the report predicts there could be a funding shortfall of between £83 million and £475 million for local authorities in Wales. If the shortfall is anywhere near the top figure, some local authorities "will be facing irretrievable financial positions", code for effectively being bankrupt.

All this before significant future pressures for funding in social care and in schools and education are considered.

What does the WLGA propose to deal with this crisis? Local authorities need to engage in transformative change, adopt new operating models and reprioritise services. This is code for cuts and for local authorities to outsource services.

While the WLGA claims that the 'relative stability of local authority finances in Wales' compared to England has been assisted by partnership between the Welsh Government and councils in Wales, it then admits that local authorities in Wales are facing unprecedented pressure. They forget to mention that the Labour Welsh government passed on previous Tory cuts with barely a whimper, and Labour councillors have seen their role as administrating these cuts.

Many councils in Wales are in a precarious financial situation, and some are tottering on the edge of a cliff waiting for the next wave of Tory cuts to send them crashing into the sea.

The Socialist Party has consistently argued for councils to set legal, no-cuts budgets and for councils, trade unions and anti-cuts campaigns to come together to fight all cuts. It is vital that this happens urgently. The U-turns this Tory government has already made shows it can be defeated. But we need councillors and trade union leaders who are prepared to lead coordinated mass action. If they won't stand up and fight, they should step aside for those that will.

Nottingham City Council: The (mis) adventures of Robin Hood Energy

CLARE WILKINS
NOTTINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

The 'not-for-profit' energy company set up by Nottingham's Labour council has collapsed with the loss of 250 jobs. The council, which has spent £95.6 million on Robin Hood Energy, recently wrote off a loan of £24 million that was made to try to keep it afloat. The council is expected to lose at least a further £38.1 million over the collapse.

The council originally stated that it sold the company to Centrica/British Gas. The latter has said that it has only bought the customer base of 112,000, and any monies paid to the council depend on customers transferring to it. Robin Hood Energy was the energy 'provider' for 12 other council companies and another not-for-profit company, so the impact is much wider than Nottingham.

The council recently announced up to 650 more job cuts and further cuts to services. It is in the midst of drawing up an emergency budget that threatens more cuts and has even threatened a Section 144 notice

to provide minimum statutory services only.

The GMB union is arguing for better redundancy terms but is not fighting job losses. The unions should be demanding redeployment of all workers to other council jobs, no job losses in the council, no cuts to services, and reinstatement of previous cuts.

Apologising to Robin Hood Energy staff who were losing their jobs, council leader David Mellon said that resignations of councillors on its board was "not the right direction to take", because "you can't expect councillors to be experts on running a fuel business".

This begs the question why a council carrying out cuts when it should be providing services thought that it should venture into running an energy company.

The gas supply was privatised in 1986 by the Thatcher government. Between 1990 and 1995 the National Grid, that provides all the country's electricity and the regional electricity boards was sold off.

Now, while there is still in reality

one gas supply and one grid supplying electricity, 69% of gas and 70% of electricity are supplied by the 'Big Six' energy companies. A false market has been created by giving licences to small companies to 'provide' energy. There are around 60 of these, including Robin Hood Energy.

The answer to this privatisation madness is to renationalise energy production and supply under democratic worker, customer and community control.

Labour councillors should be demanding this, and not thinking they can enter this false market by setting up an energy company. They should not be running other commercial ventures in other cities and carrying out cuts to public services and jobs.

The collapse of Robin Hood Energy shows that Labour councils playing the capitalist game with council tax payers' money does not work. No-cuts budgets, demanding restoration of funding for previous cuts and the Covid crisis, and a socialist programme for energy provision and public services is the only answer.



Hull: Defend Tony Smith!

Trade unionists will be outraged by the dismissal of Tony Smith at an FCC company disciplinary hearing. His appeal hearing is on 15 September.

Tony is a Unison union activist and was sacked for 'gross misconduct', but in reality he has been victimised for trade union activities.

All of Tony's fellow drivers at the FCC waste disposal plant at Wilmington agreed that Tony made a correct health and safety call, but this was ignored in a blatant stitch up by management. Tony led the successful

strike two years ago which won sick pay rights for 2,500 FCC workers up and down the country.

Hull Trade Union Council will be protesting outside the site and we will be trying to organise more extensive action to coincide with Tony's appeal.

Please send messages of support to Tony Smith c/o Hull City Unison, Town Hall Chambers, 39 Alfred Street, Hull, HU1 2AG or email via info@unisonhull.org.uk

MIKE WHALE
CHAIR, HULL TRADE UNION COUNCIL

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Fight Amazon's anti-union spies

A GMB UNION REP

Amazon is spying on its 'flex' drivers in dozens of Facebook groups in the US, the UK, and Spain, according to the Vice Media Group. Flex drivers are the workers who deliver the items to your door.

The issue first came to light after Amazon posted it was hiring two intelligence analysts to track organising efforts within the company. One of the listings said the company needed an analyst that can keep an eye on sensitive and confidential topics "including labour organising threats against the company". While the two listings mentioned other threats, they focused mainly on organised labour, which was mentioned several times.

Amazon has since said the wording of the listings was not an "accurate description of the role" and had since been corrected, although these new versions cannot be found.

Vice say they have proof that shows

Amazon is systematically monitoring, categorising and analysing the nominally closed social media pages utilised by their flex drivers. They are independent contractors who deliver packages and groceries for Amazon and Whole Foods using their own vehicles.

They do not receive health care benefits, sick pay, overtime pay, or other compensation or benefits guaranteed to Amazon employees. Amazon also relies on contracted workers employed by small companies known as delivery service partners to deliver packages.

Closed Facebook groups have been used by gig workers who work for a wide swathe of companies to organise workers and strikes across vast disjointed workforces.

It is vital that workers are organised in trade unions that fight for democratic rights which include the right to be active in your union free from company and police spies, subversion and blacklisting.

SOCIALISM: THE PODCAST 

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PHOTOS DOORANTELO/CC

Big corporations spying on their workforce is nothing new. In the UK, in 1919, an organisation called the Economic League was set up. The League's running costs were funded by contributions from various companies.

According to the Labour Research Department, the League had an income of £266,000 in 1968 (equivalent of £4,600,000 in 2020). These contributions came from 154 known companies, with 21 known banks and financial institutions contributing as much as the 47 known manufacturing companies.

This organisation eventually broke up in 1993 after blacklisting thousands of workers in these thousands. A descendant of the League, the Consulting Association, similarly blacklisted thousands of building workers.

As a union rep in the 1980s I was told personally by my HR manager that he could sack me and ensure I never worked again.

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Ireland: Debenham's workers occupy stores



Debenham's workers in Ireland occupied the Dublin (above) and Cork stores in protest at the derisory redundancy settlement offered.

The occupation on 8 September marked 150 days of protests and campaigning by the workers, sacked when the company closed all its Irish stores, resulting in 1,000 job losses.

Disgracefully, some of the workers and supporters were arrested in

Dublin before pressure forced their release.

The workers' union Mandate negotiated the settlement. Workers were to be balloted, but many say the settlement is not enough.

The shop steward at the Cork store, Valerie Conlon, says: "Four weeks redundancy per year of service is a very modest demand, but the offer that was made fell far short of it. Instead of providing two weeks per year of

service on top of the statutory minimum, the offer provides for an extra one day's pay per year of service. That is a real insult."

Debenham's are also closing stores and laying off workers in the UK, and weekly protests by workers have been ongoing in Manchester, with solidarity actions elsewhere.

• For more on the dispute see usdawactivist.wordpress.com for more

Reinstate Richie Venton

Trade unionists held a solidarity demo outside of Ikea Braehead in Glasgow, demanding the reinstatement of sacked Usdaw rep Richie Venton, and the reinstatement of sick workers' wages.

Representatives from the University and College Union, Communication Workers Union, transport union RMT, Unison, teachers' union EIS, the GMB, and others attended.

Workers spoke to shoppers on their way into the store, who shared their anger and disgust at the way Ikea have treated trade union organisers in their store - and at the way in which the company has attacked wages for sick workers during the pandemic.

• See more at reinstaterichieventon.com and socialistpartyscotland.org.uk



Dispatches from the front: schools bedlam - where are the unions?

● Lockdown but still no testing in Caerphilly

When we returned to work in Caerphilly, despite the headteacher's best efforts, lack of routine testing was causing huge anxiety among staff. Students weren't in yet - but we knew that, within a few days of reopening, there would be 33 different students in front of us every hour. We were advised to wear masks but the local authority won't go further and make it mandatory, so we can't even enforce it.

Caerphilly's infection rate was rising fast. Even with PPE and social distancing among staff (but not students, because we don't have the room), housing up to a thousand people on a single school site was never going to be safe without testing.

Now we're in local lockdown. Yet the schools are open, and there is still no sign of routine tests or even temperatures being taken at the gates. If there are two or more confirmed infections in a single year group, that entire year will have to isolate for two weeks. But everyone else will carry on attending despite the likelihood of year groups mixing outside school.

In an effort to minimise movement around the school, students are staying in their 'bubbles' in one room and teachers are rotating around the site. This is all very well, but it means those young people will be stuck in the same room for hours every day with only two short breaks. (Staff have to accompany them on these breaks to ensure they don't mix with other bubbles.)

The school doesn't feel it's safe opening the canteen, so is relying on council food parcels to get our most deprived students through the day. This means no hot meal.

We have been told that students can't sing or perform in groups for music and drama lessons. The PE staff are very anxious about carrying out lessons safely. We can't mark books in case of cross-contamination so we are frantically trying to find a way around that.

Students can't discuss in groups or even in pairs; classrooms have been laid out so that they face forward at all times; this is clearly not going to be an acceptable environment for learning. It's barely humane, but the school doesn't have much choice when the unions aren't demanding tests.

If there were effective testing in place, then this level of disruption wouldn't be necessary and we could aim for some level of 'normality'. We are all increasingly worried about our students falling behind and also about our own kids' education, but without proper testing, a second wave and more deaths are sadly inevitable as soon as schools reopen.

Our unions are failing us by refusing to fight for our safety and that of our students. I'm secondary and I teach English; I am also the NEU rep. I'll be contacting the local NEU branch and the Cardiff union office to demand they put pressure on Caerphilly council to protect staff and students more effectively.

As I write this we already have two confirmed cases among students, and

another two in parents whose children were in school. We are just being told that if we came into contact with those students, but didn't get closer than two metres, we are 'fine.'

If they had routine tests each week then we could just get on with it. This nonsense will just lead to closures all over again.

A SECONDARY ENGLISH TEACHER AND NEU REP

● Despite strict precautions, three cases already

Despite the best efforts of the school, there have already been three cases of Covid in my workplace - one staff member and two students.

Students are organised into bubbles, all using masks and regularly sanitising their hands. Social distancing has been implemented as far as is possible.

The mood among staff is a confused mixture of relief to be back teaching, and panicked anxiety about the seemingly inevitable spread of the virus. There is a lot of anger directed at the government and Public Health England.

The instructions from PHE have been very limited, with only a small group of students and staff isolating despite the positive cases. Staff are calling for regular testing of staff and students, only to be told by the council there are not enough resources to do this.

Staff are being stretched thin having to cover self-isolating colleagues. Schools are opening but in an unsafe and unsustainable way.

A SECONDARY ENGLISH TEACHER

● No real precautions in 'parallel universe' college

Sheila Caffrey's front-page article in the last issue of the Socialist (see 'Tory schools chaos - unions must fight for safety' at socialistparty.org.uk) described exactly the situation in my college.

We have been open for nearly three weeks now: it's like entering a parallel universe where Covid-19 does not exist. Some staff and students are wearing face masks and visors, but there has been no direction from the senior managers. Staff are still working as they did before the outbreak of the virus, sharing offices and classrooms.

The notion of 'bubbles' is just there to give some credence to the idea that the government has come up with something that will prevent the spread of the virus. In reality, students mix freely in corridors; there are no one-way systems for managing student movement around the college; there are hand sanitisers around the college but it's up to individuals whether they choose to use them.

Although the NEU is increasing its membership in the college, staff need to gain further confidence against a bullying headteacher.

The college is still waiting for an

order of PPE; specialist staff have said they aren't prepared to put their own health and safety in jeopardy if they are asked to clean students who have soiled themselves. They will use emergency PPE supplies provided by the local authority, while they wait for the order to come through.

A COLLEGE NEU REP

● Unacceptable mixed messages on isolation and PPE

The main thing is that the protocol as to what will happen when a person - staff or student - gets sick in a bubble, and then another person gets sick, is really not clear.

The Department for Education seems to be expecting primary schools to isolate bubbles, but however bad it gets the school stays open. Whereas in secondary, there seems to be guidance that as transmission goes up, there will be part-time schooling, half the year group at a time. But it's all just up in the air and not clear.

A lot of people are concerned about the fact that the schools are told they have the final say. Some schools are saying 'here's the masks, here's the visors; wear them moving around school, but not in class'; other schools are saying 'no face masks'.

It's just a complete mixed message. It's not acceptable. PPE has to be a factor, especially when you can't social-distance.

We're also very concerned about vulnerable staff. There are heads who have taken the line that 'the government says it's safe so you must come to work'. Whereas we say that if you were shielding because you're older or have an underlying condition - that hasn't gone away, those risks are still there. You should be able to work from home if you need to.

Another thing we're battling on right now is reduced breaks. While that might be something that has to happen during Covid, if staff agree to only half an hour's dinner, that must be a clear half an hour - not impinged on either side by escorting students to and from break.

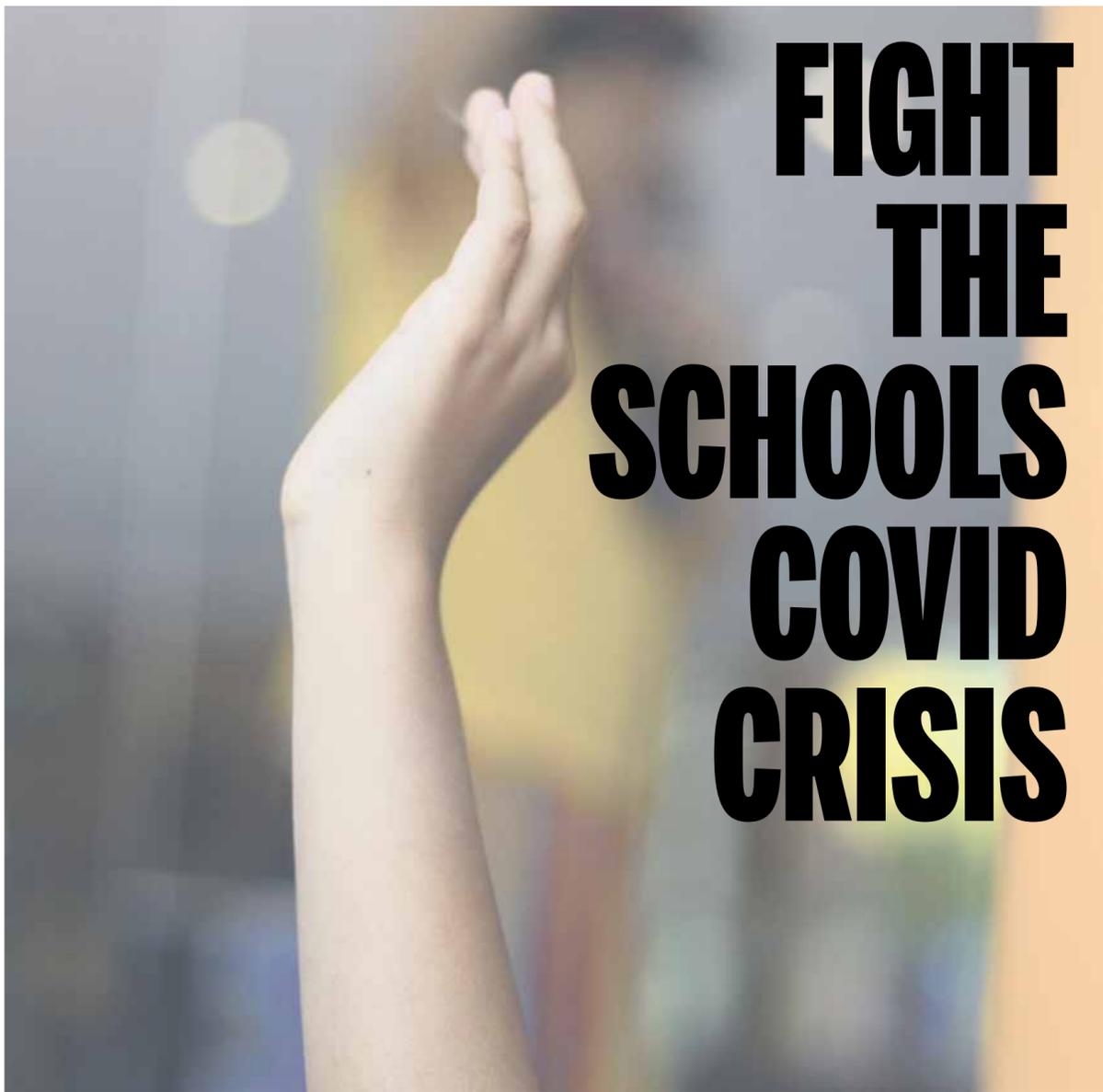
A PRIMARY TEACHER AND NEU BRANCH SECRETARY

● 'Ridiculous fragmentation of approach'

Schools in our part of the country are still due to open as I write this. Not much to report yet - other than the ridiculous fragmentation of approach leaving us to deal with separate risk assessments from 19 different academy trusts, plus the local authority.

That's what happens when we devolve the question of 'is it safe?' to individual places rather than stand firm collectively. We are lucky that most employers seem so far to have been reasonable and sensible... in this area.

A COMPUTER SCIENCE TEACHER AND NEU DISTRICT SECRETARY



Socialist Party demands for school safety

Testing, PPE and workload cases had fallen in most areas, but the infection rate is already starting to rise sharply. 'Bubbles' will inevitably leak, whether that's around the school or when friends and siblings meet outside it. Unions must demand:

- Immediate, comprehensive testing in schools where outbreaks have been reported
- Weekly, on-site testing of staff in all schools to provide real reassurance and clarity about infection risks
- All who have to isolate must be supported on full pay
- A reliable, community-based testing and tracing system, run through local council and NHS services, not private profiteers
- Hand-washing or sanitising and face coverings should be the rule - but this will not be sufficient to overcome lack of social distancing

- Union groups should also resist any pressure to increase workload, for example from longer days or extra duties

Safety first when cases occur 'Health protection' (HP) teams are under political pressure to keep schools open. Unions must:

- Insist on full and open discussion of risks and precautions
- As NEU guidance says, escalate action when there is "failure to send home all who are in same group / shared a classroom or otherwise had close contact with positive case, whether or not advised by HP team"
- Escalation could include refusal to attend an unsafe workplace under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996
- **If there are two or more cases within 14 days - classed as an 'outbreak':**
- The whole school should close to allow a full clean and test-and-trace of the school community
- **An infection rate exceeding 20 new cases per 100,000 over seven days already triggers quarantine requirements for international travel. In local areas, this rate should trigger the following measures in schools:**
- Return to 'blended learning' - part

school, part home - with no classes larger than 15

- Detailed national guidance, full government funding and resources for blended learning
- Consultation with staff and parents over 'priority rotas' - reducing physical attendance of students where possible
- **During local lockdowns, or if the local rate exceeds 50 new cases per 100,000 over seven days:**
- Only priority students should attend school in person

Together we're stronger: coordinate and escalate!

Fragmentation and isolation has led to conflicting messages and dangerous practices. Unions must:

- Demand central government set clearer national guidelines and standards for safety
- Demand local authorities do the same for their areas
- Demand investment in school facilities to allow schools to remain open safely - extra classrooms, and employing all supply teachers to allow smaller classes
- Demand funding for laptops and broadband access for all students, to allow blended learning

- Reassert a unified national stand on schools safety, starting with the NEU's 'Five Tests' for school opening: low case count, national parameters for social distancing and PPE, regular testing for all staff and students, whole-school testing and isolation strategy, and home-working for vulnerable staff, students and families
- **Staff and parents under the most pressure are those who feel themselves, or relatives, to be at greater risk of serious outcomes. Individuals must not be left to fight alone:**
- The NEU demanded that "vulnerable staff, and staff who live with vulnerable people, must work from home" - if a school refuses, the whole union group should say management has failed to account for overall risk
- **The best way to protect safety is to act together. If school workers feel safety is at risk:**
- Meet as a union group to agree your demands for a safe workplace
- Contact your branch to support you in escalating action - a ballot for strike action or union backing for 'Section 44'
- Write to your national executive members calling on the national union to back the above demands

School student speaks out: people are at each other's throats

A YEAR 10 STUDENT

At school there's no social distancing. In the corridors it's really busy. We're in whole-year 'bubbles' - so my Year 10 bubble, we only see our year. But there's no social distancing, and the teachers can't social-distance around us.

They're always near us. There's not a teacher area and a student area. At our tables - there's no gap between us either.

I got mad when Matt Hancock on the news was saying 'social-distance so you don't pass it onto your grand-parents'. It was patronising - there's no way for us to social-distance anyway!

The atmosphere is so pressured. All the teachers are stressed, they're always running everywhere, they always look really angry.

Almost none of them have PPE, just a couple of people in the science department. There's not regular hand-washing. They don't tell us to wash our hands and the kids don't use the sanitisers.

So everyone makes out like it's a big joke. Some kids will be spitting on each other. Students who wear their masks will get some people being horrible to them about it, saying 'why



The pressure is getting to teachers and students - I'm always seeing kids crying in corridors

are you wearing a mask, you look like a proper weirdo.'

It's such a hostile environment, with so many people at each other's throats because of the stress.

And it's a lot going back into school with everything at once, you know? I was so stressed on the first day. Every-one's so close to each other. In the corridors people are pushing and shoving. There is no way of social-distancing. It's sad.

I have anxiety. I had one-to-ones with a counsellor at my school. But even though there's no social distancing anywhere else, they've completely stopped because of the coronavirus. We used to have a place where you could go if you were upset, talk to

each other, talk to a teacher. Now there's nothing.

The support network for a lot of students who have mental health issues has completely broken down. A lot of kids have come back from a really difficult lockdown. There's a lot of problems they have to deal with at home. They have nothing.

The pressure is getting to teachers and students. I'm always seeing kids crying in corridors, and kids with marks on their arms - all sorts. Waiting lists for therapy places are two years. When you're not getting that support in school... it's real. Really bad.

I think there should be 'blended learning'. I don't think all the kids coming back at once is the right thing to do. I think it should be maybe a couple of days a week in school so there's only a couple of year groups in at once and there can be social distancing. It would also reduce the stress of going from nothing to everything.

I also think there shouldn't be a stigma on students and teachers wearing masks. At my school, one teacher even told a student off for wearing a mask in class. People should be allowed to if they want to. Really it should be compulsory, unless you're exempt. Then no one would stand out.

Virus or fines? Working-class parents in impossible position

LINDSEY MORGAN
LEICESTER SAFETY FIRST CAMPAIGN
AND SOCIALIST PARTY

We're still campaigning. Our main thrust at the moment is that there must be no threat of fines for non-attendance, especially for shielding parents and children. All you're trying to do is keep your family safe.

Socialist Party members in education are demanding a 'priority rota' system for student attendance, and we support that. That way, parents who have to get into work could still send children in, but it lowers the amount of students there, mitigating some of the risk. Parents who do have to stay at home should have their job protected and receive full pay.

One of the big problems is that many state school buildings are so cramped that you can't social-distance. So when the Tories are saying 'social-distance where possible', they can do that very easily in Eton and Harrow. They've got small class sizes; massive rooms and grounds. But in schools like my daughter's, there's no chance.

A friend of mine has a son in the same year at school. She's got COPD and severe asthma and is always in and out of the hospital. They also live with her elderly mother. But she's been told any absences are 'unauthorised' anyway. It's just horrific.

We've been trying to support each

other as parents. Some parents are saying we're going to take the fine and pay the fine. But the problem is that a lot of working-class parents don't have that option.

If there was a mass campaign not to pay the fines, then people could feel confident not sending their kids in. But right now there's not the numbers there.

I'm a single parent. If I was to get ill, who looks after my child? But on the other hand, if I'm imprisoned for non-payment of fines, who looks after my child? Parents have been put in an absolutely terrible position.

Of course, a lot of parents are happy for their kids to go back. It has been really hard. The online resources have been hit and miss as well, so a lot of students just haven't engaged with the online learning. With furlough winding down, a lot of parents don't have the time for home-learning anyway.

And one of the things that concerns me is that my daughter is in secondary school. At what point does she stop being a child and start being a young adult in terms of how the virus affects her? So we're having to weigh up all these things.

But why can't we just have blended learning? Students would go in a couple of days a week, have that time with a teacher, that bit of structure and routine, but in smaller, safer groups.

But they're not doing that, because the situation in April to June was that

poor students didn't have their own devices or access to broadband. The government could make the necessary resources available, but it's not willing.

Meanwhile, students have been told by the government, by the news, by everyone, that they've got nothing to worry about, they're 'virtually immune'. But teenagers are more intelligent than they're given credit for, and their mood could change as hospitalisation figures in wider society go up.

We had a hybrid demonstration, part socially distanced outside city hall, part on Zoom. That was part of a day of action called by the Education Solidarity Network, the broad left group in the National Education Union (NEU).

Teachers are in a terrible position. One came up to us on a Socialist Party campaign stall, and he said 'we can't even ballot for a strike, what can we do, we just feel helpless'. The NEU nationally doesn't even seem to be willing to back its members walking out on health and safety grounds using 'Section 44'.

So the leadership of the NEU isn't doing enough to fight for its members. Everything's being done on a school-by-school basis. What that means is that different schools have very different interpretations of the Department for Education guidance, and teachers and schools are left to deal with the problems in isolation.

GLENN KELLY
FORMER UNISON NEC MEMBER

A CRITICAL ELECTION FOR UNISON GENERAL SECRETARY

The Covid pandemic has exposed what decades of underfunding, cuts and privatisation have done to our public services. It has also revealed the failure of many trade union leaders to respond to the crisis: none more so than in the main public services union, Unison.

While Unison members were literally giving their lives daily to save others in the NHS, care homes, councils and schools, and local reps were battling with the employers on the ground, the leadership hunkered down and hid.

In addition, during the crisis the mostly unelected officialdom shut down what democracy existed in the union. So while some unions initially recognised the need to organise - the education workers' union NEU for example, held Zoom meetings of thousands of reps and a meeting of 20,000 union members at one point - Unison refused to call meetings to debate and plan its strategy, and even threatened disciplinary action against activists who sought to organise.

The consequences of this failure are already being felt. The pandemic starkly revealed who were the real heroines and heroes who kept us alive and the economy moving. Yet two million council workers are now to have a meagre 2.75% pay increase imposed on them, with no fight, and a million health workers are being told that there can be no more money for them.

The Unison leadership has squandered this opportunity, and failed to support attempts by members and activists to organise a fight in the health services. It has even called on branches not to support the NHS pay protests currently taking place.

There is no doubt that the government will seek to maintain the squeeze on the public sector, with councils, colleges and NHS bodies already preparing the next round of attacks on jobs and conditions.

Failures

The failures of the present union leadership make the question of the current general secretary election to replace the incumbent Dave Prentis an even more important one.

Presently there are five candidates in the election, including Socialist Party member Hugo Pierre. Two of the candidates are current unelected assistant general secretaries - Christina McAnea and Roger McKenzie - who have been part of the Prentis machine for over a decade.

During that time, neither has demonstrated the slightest opposition to the Prentis regime, despite what they are asserting now when looking for votes. In fact, they have been open supporters of 'team Dave' in his election campaigns.

Neither have spoken out about the disgraceful witch-hunts against socialists in the union, even when they have been proven unlawful, such as in the case of the 'Unison Four' Socialist Party members in 2011.

When interference by full-time London Region officials in the 2015 general secretary contest was exposed, neither of them spoke out. Roger McKenzie, who was part of team Dave's election campaign, was seen by Prentis as a safe pair of hands to act as the investigating officer in

helping to cover up and limit the damage to just one official! They may now claim that they couldn't speak out as they were paid officials, but what faith can members have in those prepared to sit and watch such injustice and say nothing? To steal a line from the BLM demos 'silence is compliance'.

Neither of these candidates has a plan or programme to address the crisis that members face. Neither has a strategy for taking on the government or councils, other than the failed one of leaving branches to fight alone, left isolated to be picked off one by one.

Neither has any plan or strategy for dealing with a Labour Party that is happy to take £3 million of Unison members' money each year, while

still attacking their jobs, wages and conditions; as in Tower Hamlets, where the Labour council has sacked the entire workforce to impose cuts to its terms and conditions.

Neither of them has any programme to establish genuine democracy in the union so that the members and not unelected full-time officials call the shots.

Compare that to the programme of Hugo Pierre:

- Hugo is refusing to take the £138,000 a year general secretary salary, and would live on the council worker's wage he currently receives.
- He is calling for the election of full-time officials of the union to ensure they are accountable to the members and can be removed by them.
- He is demanding Labour and SNP

councils set no-cuts needs budgets and refuse to implement Tory cuts.

- He is saying that not a penny of Unison members' money should go to Labour politicians who attack our members' jobs, pay and conditions. And, if Labour councillors won't stand up for us, we should use our money to back candidates that will.

- He is demanding the union leads a national fight on cuts, pay and privatisation, with national ballots for industrial action, rather than leaving branches to fight alone. What's the point of boasting of having a union 1.3 million strong if we don't use its collective strength?

- He is defending the right of the people of Scotland to a second independence referendum.

Aside from Hugo, the only other lay candidate in the election is Labour Party member Paul Holmes. He stood in 2010 and came last with 28,114 votes, well behind Socialist Party member Roger Bannister's 42,651 votes (despite Holmes receiving more nominations). Unlike Hugo Pierre, Paul Holmes has never stood in and won an all-members' ballot across all sectors of the union. Hugo currently holds a black members' seat on the NEC in which all 1.3 million members get to vote.

When the general secretary election was first mooted and discussed among the left, the Socialist Party said that the most important thing was to agree the programme and strategy required to transform Unison into a democratic and fighting union. On that basis, it would be possible to agree a single left candidate.

'UnisonAction'

Discussions took place in the left grouping 'UnisonAction' (UA). UA was initiated by the Socialist Party five years ago in an attempt to build a fighting broad left organisation with widespread support in the rank and file. Unfortunately, it has not developed in this direction, and has been hampered from doing so by many of those who are now supporting Paul Holmes.

Hugo indicated to UA that he wanted to stand over a year ago and drafted his full programme for debate. Unfortunately, Paul Holmes did not contribute to that debate nor put forward a single policy position that he believed the left should stand on. In fact, in the course of over a year's discussion, Paul did not once even indicate he wanted to stand.

It was only when Glen Williams (chair of the local government executive) withdrew his name as a prospective candidate for the left, that some Labour Party members and the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) panicked and desperately sought another candidate - with some demanding it had to be a Labour Party member and resigning from their positions in the UA (in a move to stand regardless, outside of the UA).

In reality, the issue of Labour Party membership was a diversion. Hugo had been a Labour Party member until his expulsion for his role in the poll tax non-payment campaign in 1990, and had been refused readmission in 2016 by right-wing Labour general secretary Iain McNicol.

Unfortunately, the central question for the small group of lefts involved in the discussion was to find an 'anyone but the Socialist Party' candidate. Incredibly, they had taken the same approach in five previous Unison general secretary elections,

despite the Socialist Party candidate Roger Bannister beating their choice every single time!

So Paul Holmes was once again pushed forward despite his weaknesses as a candidate. These include the serious complication of him currently being suspended by his Labour council employer and the union for allegations of bullying and harassment, with those making them including female stewards in his branch. This was even accepted by the SWP, who had publicly described them in the Socialist Worker newspaper as "allegations of bullying, that should be taken seriously and investigated".

The Socialist Party is well aware of how the right-wing union officialdom can use allegations against left activists to conduct a witch-hunt, and will oppose any attempt to do so. However, these are serious allegations and need to be treated as such.

In these circumstances it is irresponsible to put Paul Holmes forward as a left candidate. There is a real risk in the election that we could be left with no rank-and-file candidate if Hugo Pierre does not get onto the ballot paper.

Some on the left are claiming that as the UA has voted to back Paul Holmes, Hugo should accept that and withdraw from the election. This makes the mistake of not understanding what the UA currently is, and assuming there was a genuine democratic process.

The decision was taken at a meeting of less than 40 activists. Not a single regional group of UA supporters met before the vote to discuss, let alone seek to mandate those who claimed to be regional representatives. In reality, there is now only one functioning regional group of UA supporters, which is led by Socialist Party members.

Programme

Paul Holmes's programme is also weak. While some demands are better than those put forward by the full-time officials standing, it falls far short of what is necessary to transform the union.

He does not support Hugo's demand for Labour and SNP councils to set needs budgets and to refuse to implement Tory cuts.

He does not support Hugo's call for the union to withhold funding from Labour politicians attacking our members and use our union funds to back candidates who support us.

He has not put forward any strategy to fight the cuts in the councils on an all-union basis, confronting the idea that you can't have a national strike against cuts.

He has not put forward a strategy for defending our members in the health service and in our schools.

Only Hugo Pierre has the programme needed to arm Unison members for this challenging period when jobs and conditions are on the line.

- Rules introduced by the Prentis leadership to clamp down on democratic debate in the union mean that candidates for union elections cannot 'invite or accept' support 'in money or kind' from any entity which 'is not provided for in Unison rules'. This article has been produced without the authorisation of any of the candidates mentioned in it, in order to comply with these requirements.



Hugo Pierre (second left) supporting Tower Hamlets council workers on strike

SOCIALISM

ONLINE SOCIALIST FORUM OF DISCUSSION & DEBATE OVER FOUR DAYS 20-23 November 2020

www.socialism2020.net

2020

SATURDAY 21 NOVEMBER

Themes	Smash Racism	World in crisis	After Corbyn	Covid lessons	Socialist programme	What is socialism?
11am-1pm	Lessons of the Black Panthers	World economy - is a 1930s style depression inevitable?	How can a mass working class political voice be built?	Workers' control in the workplace	Friedrich Engels - are his ideas relevant for women's liberation?	Is Cuba socialist?
2-4pm	Police racism - how do we end it?	New world order: China and the US	Labour councils: a potential counter-power to the Tories?	Climate chaos - action needed but how?	Can the music industry be saved from covid and capitalism?	Is the working class still the agent of socialist change?

SUNDAY 22 NOVEMBER

Themes	Smash Racism	Trotskyism	Broken Britain	Exit from crisis	Ideas of the CWI
11am-1pm	Revolt or reform - how was slavery abolished?	Revolution Betrayed: what happened in the USSR?	Where is Britain going?	Can Keynesianism save capitalism?	Legacy of the collapse of Stalinism
2-4pm	Privilege and oppression? ideas to smash racism	How do we get from here to socialism?	What now for the fight against austerity?	Is fascism on the cards?	Lessons for today of the new left formations
5-7pm	How do we defeat the far right?	Do we still need a theory of Permanent Revolution?	Is Scotland on the road to independence?	Can green tech and AI save the system?	Poll Tax - how a mass movement won

MONDAY 23 NOVEMBER

Themes	End oppression	Marxism today	International
11am-1pm	Is Pride political? How can LGBT+ liberation be won?	Reading the Communist Manifesto	The US after the elections
2-4pm	Are women going back to the 1950s?	Reading Socialism: Utopian and Scientific	Belarus and the crisis in the former Soviet states

FRIDAY NIGHT INTRODUCTION RALLY 20 NOV 5-7PM Speakers to be confirmed

SATURDAY NIGHT MAIN RALLY 6-8PM

Go online phone 020 8988 8777 for info, agenda and tickets

BACK AT WORK! TUSC TO STAND IN ELECTIONS AGAIN AGAINST PRO-AUSTERITY POLITICIANS

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) national steering committee, meeting on 2 September, has agreed to resume standing candidates in elections, starting in the contests scheduled for next May.

TUSC was established in 2010 to enable trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists from different parties and none, to stand against pro-austerity establishment politicians under a common banner and an agreed platform of core policies. Within that framework hundreds of TUSC-authorized candidates had stood in elections, polling over 375,000 votes between them - until 2018.

TUSC had already recalibrated its electoral activity after the unexpected but warmly welcomed victory of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader in 2015.

It did not contest the general elections fought under his leadership and, for other contests, pursued a rigorously selective approach so that TUSC candidates could only stand against candidates who opposed Jeremy and were continuing to implement austerity policies locally.

In 2018 the steering committee decided to suspend all electoral activity until further notice. But now, at its meeting 2 September, it recognised that the changed situation required a changed response.

Representatives from the biggest component organisation of TUSC, the RMT transport workers' union,



PHOTO PAUL MATTSSON

reported to the meeting that the union's national executive committee had debated the matter over the summer.

They had agreed that, "in the new

conditions of a Starmer leadership and the continued implementation of austerity cuts by many Labour-led authorities, we believe it is correct for TUSC to lift its suspension of

electoral activity". And that is what the steering committee agreed.

Against the background of the deep economic and social crisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, it was time

to ensure that politicians from whatever party who try to pass the Covid crisis costs onto the working class face the possibility of a challenge at the ballot box. TUSC is back at work!

TUSC letter to trade union national executive committee members

The TUSC steering committee also discussed how to broaden support in the trade unions for TUSC and the goal of re-establishing working-class political representation. The following letter is being sent as widely as possible to trade union national executive committee members

Dear comrade,

I am writing to invite you to consider joining the national steering committee of the recently relaunched Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

As you may recall, TUSC was set up in 2010, co-funded amongst others by the late Bob Crow, with trade unionists at its core (a brief history is available at tusc.org.uk/txt/429.pdf).

Our founding aim was to help in the process of re-establishing a political voice for the working class given, at that point, the transformation of the Labour Party into Tony Blair's New Labour and its role in implementing the austerity unleashed by the 2007-8 financial crash.

As our name says, we are a coalition, and all of the component elements of TUSC have played their part alongside other campaigners in the struggles of the last decade against attacks on jobs, services and conditions - in the workplace, in our communities, and in the trade unions.

But we have also been prepared to stand in elections where necessary, believing that to leave politicians who are carrying out cuts unchallenged at the ballot box, is to voluntarily give up a weapon that could be used in the anti-austerity struggle.

This is particularly so in local government, in which councillors are the direct employers and providers of local services. In this situation, to positively decide not to have an anti-austerity candidate standing when cuts are being made would be to give an effective vote of confidence to the local authority's policies.

Selective stands

The background to TUSC's activity changed dramatically when Jeremy Corbyn, my fellow comrade on the Labour backbenches in the 1980s, was unexpectedly elected as leader against the overwhelming opposition of the capitalist establishment.

This was a development which every component of TUSC

wholeheartedly supported - the RMT, for example, officially represented on the TUSC steering committee since 2012, was the second biggest donor to both of Jeremy's leadership campaigns, in 2015 and 2016, behind only the 1.4 million-member Unite union.

Although, as we warned, 'New Labour' supporters remained entrenched in particular in the Parliamentary Labour Party and council Labour groups, here was an opportunity to re-establish working-class socialist political representation on a mass basis.

In response, TUSC recalibrated its electoral activity, not standing in either the 2017 or 2019 general elections. We only contested local elections on a strictly selective basis, against councillors who opposed Jeremy and who were continuing to implement austerity policies in the council chamber, until suspending all electoral activity in 2018.

But now, with Sir Keir Starmer's leadership of the Labour Party, the situation has changed once again. The opportunities for achieving working-class political representation within the Labour framework

created by Jeremy's leadership have receded, against the background of the deep economic and social crisis triggered by the Covid pandemic.

Consequently, the TUSC steering committee has agreed to resume standing candidates in future elections, although still with due regard to particular circumstances, and to seek to broaden participation in the steering committee from the trade unions especially. Hence this invitation to you.

How TUSC functions

Alongside the official representatives of the RMT, the TUSC national steering committee has also included at various points national officers or national executive committee members of other unions - from the PCS civil servants union, the National Union of Teachers, the Fire Brigades Union, and the Prison Officers Association.

While the latter have participated in a personal capacity, where there has been a group of TUSC supporters on a national executive, they have had the provision to select individual executive members from the group



ERIC SEGAL SPEAKING AT THE RALLY IN DOVER PHOTO NICK CHAFFEY

Dover: Solidarity with refugees

Applause and cheers for socialist ideas to unite working class

KENT SOCIALIST PARTY

Trade unionists, anti-racism and refugee rights campaigners rallied in Market Square on 5 September in

Dover to show solidarity with refugees, fleeing war and persecution, who have faced vile racist abuse from Tories and the far right in recent weeks.

Kent county council Tory leader Roger Gough had said: "Increased numbers arriving, particularly during lockdown... put an inevitable strain on Kent's finite social care resources."

Eric Segal, secretary of South East Kent Trade Union Council (TUC) and Socialist Party member, answered this when he spoke at the rally: "The cuts didn't happen because handfuls of people crossed the channel fleeing from war, poverty and starvation. Austerity cuts began under Tory and Labour administrations, because capitalism doesn't want and can't afford to keep our services."

"Those cuts are set to continue

unless we fight back. Councillor Gough was responsible for gleefully shutting down Pent Valley school in Folkstone.

"A-level students showed that when you fight back you can win. We need to build a socialist alternative to capitalism and mount an electoral challenge to councillors, whatever the colour of their rosette, who intend to carry out council cuts in next year's elections.

"Any attempt to overhaul the asylum system must be linked to the fight against austerity, with a campaign for jobs, homes and services for all."

Eric's bold and clear message was interrupted with applause and cheers. After he finished speaking, he was thanked by many there.

A large number of young people joined the rally from all over Kent. Many signed the Socialist Party petition and supported our message: Don't blame asylum seekers for Tory cuts.

Later in the day a small group of

far-right racists tried to block the main road into the port to promote their divisive message. As the economic crisis worsens, these racist views must be combated politically. Union leaders, backed up with mass mobilisations, can show a clear alternative to those who fear losing their jobs, like the 600 sacked P&O workers in Dover.

The response to Eric's final words - "a world without passports and persecution is only possible if we create a socialist world" - shows what is possible. The Socialist Party will work with all those who seek to build a democratic, mass, working-class, anti-racist movement - including standing anti-cuts candidates across Kent.

Those who bought the Socialist and signed up for more information are an encouraging sign that many others will join us in the months ahead.

• See 'Don't blame asylum seekers for Tory cuts' at socialistparty.org.uk

Black Lives Matter: Socialist alternative to racist capitalism



NEWPORT PHOTO RHYNS DAVIES

Newport

Black Lives Matter (BLM) held a demo in Newport calling for justice for Jacob Blake, shot seven times in the back by police in Wisconsin, and Mercy Baguma, a Ugandan asylum seeker who was found dead in her Glasgow flat alongside her one-year-old malnourished son.

The first speaker was Socialist Party member Mariam Kamish. Andrew, one of the local BLM organisers, approached her and said: "I've seen you speak at all the demos. Would you like to speak today?" and he namechecked the Socialist Party during his speeches.

Cammilla Mngaza - mother of Syianda Mngaza, serving a four-year jail sentence for defending herself from a racist attack by five people - detailed an account of the attack and their horrific ordeal since Syianda's imprisonment. Cammilla's passion and determination were inspirational and infectious.

Several other young speakers all identified the capitalist system as the root cause of the institutional racism and systemic injustice they are protesting against. Many of the BLM organisers called for working-class unity.

The turnout was relatively small, 80

at the high point, but this had no negative effect on the mood, anger, and optimism. We ensured our Socialist Party placards were well distributed and prominent in the crowd, which was predominantly working-class black, white and Asian youth.

We stayed behind after the speeches to talk to attendees that wanted to know more about the Socialist Party and socialism.

RHYNS DAVIES

Newcastle

There was another Black Lives Matter protest in Newcastle at Grey's Monument on 5 September. At least 100 people wanted to fight back against systemic racism.

We heard from many prominent anti-racist campaigners, and our own Socialist Party members got up to speak and advocate a socialist solution to the racist capitalist society.

Many of the attendees were young and looking for answers to a seemingly insurmountable problem. But our ideas are cutting through.

Many protesters are interested in socialism and demands that provide hope for the whole working class and the next generation.

DANIEL GILMORE

Big push to hit finance target

PETE MASON

SOCIALIST PARTY FINANCE ORGANISER

Socialist Party campaigns on the streets of England and Wales, on safety in schools, welfare payments after coronavirus, and defending the NHS, have met with enthusiastic support.

We raised £1,570 for our vital funds last week alone, helping us to put our socialist message across. York Socialist Party raised £40 on their campaign stalls, as did Birmingham. Carlisle raised £55.

Our Fighting Fund campaign now stands at £61,474, with only three weeks to go to reach the target of £68,750. Let's make a big push to hit the target.

Members and supporters find many ways to raise funds. £66 came

in from donations for homemade facemasks, thanks to Lynn from Devon.

Paul in Staines is still raising money from his marathon attempt, with another £10. Nick in the Black Country raised £60 selling second-hand books.

We also received many donations direct from the public. £10 from Linda in Ipswich, sent with the message: "Hope it helps". It certainly does.

Donations large and small are very welcome. Thanks to Sue Atkins for £50 with the simple message: "Solidarity".

Finally thanks to David Maples from Lambeth for £100 for our coronavirus appeal. If you haven't donated yet, there's still time.

• socialistparty.org.uk/donate

BELARUS: MASS OPPOSITION CONTINUES TO DEFY REPRESSION BY LUKASHENKO'S REGIME



Anti-Lukashenko protesters marching in the capital Minsk to denounce the fraudulent 9 August election PHOTO HOMOTROX/CC

CLARE DOYLE
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

For the fourth Sunday in succession, on September 6 there were mass protests across Belarus. Up to 100,000 people poured onto the streets of Minsk, confronting water cannon, armoured vehicles, and riot police wielding batons.

The titanic mass struggle in Belarus against the dictatorship of Alexander Lukashenko has elements of a revolutionary situation against a reactionary regime, but lacks a working-class leadership to carry the struggle through to a conclusion. The man dubbed 'the last dictator in Europe' is opposed by very disparate elements, united only in their opposition to him remaining as president after the fraudulent elections of 9 August.

Demonstrators at Sunday's protest shouted 'Ychadi!' ('Get out!') - as the workers had done when Lukashenko visited the Minsk Wheel Tractor plant on 17 August.

Hundreds have been arrested and detained, some tortured. Hundreds more have been badly injured, some 'disappeared', and at least four have died.

Many, including opposition bloggers, political figures and a strike organiser at Grodno Azat, have fled abroad. Anatoly Bokun, leader of the strike committee at Belaruskali potash factory - the country's top cash-earner - was detained by police. Journalists have had their credentials withdrawn and some have been ordered to leave the country.

Maria Kolesnikova is the latest prominent oppositionist to be snatched off a street in Minsk by masked men. It's reported that the authorities tried to expel her to neighbouring Ukraine, but she tore up her passport and was refused entry at the border crossing.

Two weeks ago Lukashenko, seen brandishing a Kalashnikov, declared he would have to be killed before there was any rerun of the presidential election.

Last week, a split in the self-appointed opposition Coordination Council was evident. Supporters of jailed presidential candidate - the wealthy banker Babariko - announced the formation of a new political party called 'Together' and suggested a new election should go ahead with the hated Lukashenko still on the list of candidates.

This has already been rejected by the 'defeated' opposition candidate, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, as a distraction.

The movement

Like all mass protest movements that explode onto the scene of history, especially against dictatorial rule, this one has seen a heroic defiance of the powers-that-be and a clear determination to scrap the old order.

The calm and determined demonstrations of the women in white in the early days pushed the Lukashenko regime onto the back foot. His denigrating comments about women only served to make them more determined to get rid of him!

The defiant walkouts of tens of thousands of industrial workers show the potential for a fight to the finish.

Even after Lukashenko's threats of mass sackings and the closure of whole factories, workers have engaged in 'Italian (spontaneous) strikes', like that at the massive Belaruskali potash enterprise, or go-slows. Lizaveta Merliak, who is trying to build an independent trade union organisation, said that at one of the state-run mining companies, for example: "Work has slowed down to 10% of normal speed. It is partly done by following safety procedures more closely..."

It is not only industrial workers who are up in arms. Radio and TV workers have refused to put out the lies of the Lukashenko regime.

The entry of students into the battle, as the academic year began, presented a new challenge to the regime. Hundreds were arrested on 1 September and some badly beaten inside prison.

Clear programme

Uncertainty and confusion about what is needed in this situation comes down to the absence of combative workers' organisations - in the workplace and in society. Life in Belarus, as part of the USSR under Stalin and in the post-Stalin era, had been without any element of the democratic right to independently organise, or of workers' involvement in running industry and society.

The trade unions, especially in the state-owned factories and mineral-extracting enterprises, are predominantly those of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus - the state-run unions of the past that have traditionally concerned themselves with arranging holidays and health care for employees. In recent years they have been in conflict with the government over issues such as living standards and union interference.

Some independent unions have been established, but without a coherent policy of building their forces on the shop floor in industry and conducting campaigns of action to improve pay and conditions.

Mostly, they, like the Coordination Council, favour neoliberal policies and widespread privatisation. Belarusian society is a strange left-over from the era of Stalinism. As the USSR broke up in the early 1990s, Belarus retained a large element of state ownership of major industries, transport, banks and mineral extraction.

As long as the Belarusian economy was going forward, Lukashenko's

authoritarianism was tolerated. But the economy slowed, unemployment increased, the pension age was put up, and Lukashenko ignored the dangers of the coronavirus, saying it could be combated with vodka, saunas and hard work!

Protests began to develop well before the presidential election. Demonstrators lined roads waving slippers to get rid of 'the cockroach', as Lukashenko is known. Now, Sunday demonstrations have spread across the country to the major cities - Brest, Vitebsk and Grodno.

The mass walk-outs of industrial workers and the call for a general strike have brought home the strength of hostility towards Lukashenko. A coordinating committee of workers' representatives to

organise strike action was formed but almost as quickly disappeared.

Workers' committees have been established in some factories. What's needed are representatives elected from the shop floor and subject to immediate recall if they go against the wishes of those who elected them.

In turn, in order to pursue a struggle against dictatorship and for a government of working people to be formed, these committees would need to elect representatives to go to a local and regional level.

Such organs of struggle could become the organs of rule for a genuine majority in society.

Fighters against the regime of Lukashenko, especially those who have the power to bring the country to a halt through downing tools, need

Strategic position

Belarus' location - so near to Russia and on the borders of the European Union - gives it particular geopolitical importance in world relations. Lukashenko's dealings with the European Union have not been easy. EU leaders have taken some relatively mild sanctions against him and his cronies - asset freezes and travel bans.

Lukashenko is confident of finding alternative routes for Belarus' exports and imports through Russia to the Baltic Sea. That would be a little more costly, he says, but he looks to his friend Vladimir Putin to allow special terms.

Putin's relations with the maverick Lukashenko, however, have not always been easy. Recent decreases in subsidised fuel and energy supplies have made things more difficult for him. Putin has indicated he is prepared to order Russian forces into Belarus, to confront opponents of Lukashenko's regime, but risks opposition at home and abroad for such a move.

Belarus is not Ukraine. Putin reclaiming Crimea and leaving troops in Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine had some popular support in Russia. There is no equivalent in Belarus of that national conflict, and no signs of ultra-right forces on the streets.

Russian troops being deployed in Belarus could lead to opposition within Russia, adding to unrest already seen on the streets of the country's Far East.

The Navalny poisoning affair is also a destabilising factor. Fighting on all fronts is not a good position, even for Putin.

Lukashenko recently hosted Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin. He also replaced his own chief of the KGB security service, probably under pressure from Moscow. Lukashenko was quoted as saying that Russia and Belarus had agreed on issues that they "could not agree earlier".

to link up through workplace and neighbourhood committees. They need to elect representatives to an all-Belarus 'Statchkom' (action committees) to organise coordinated general strike action and to elect representatives to give a lead to the movement.

A party based on the working class, with a leadership that sees socialism as the way forward, is missing. Lukashenko could be removed without one, but a new society of democratic workers' control and management is the only alternative to a transition to the market and harsh capitalist exploitation.

The way ahead

The battle for genuine democracy in Belarus is not over. Even if Lukashenko survives the challenge to his power of the recent weeks, things will indeed never be the same. Activists need to come together in a determined fight for basic democratic rights.

The fight is still on for free and open elections. The release of all political prisoners is a number one demand, as is the dropping of all charges against them and all those who have participated in demonstrations and strikes.

A campaign is needed to establish in Belarus the freedom of all parties and trade unions to organise without state interference. Freedom of assembly, of speech and of the media must be won.

The demand for a totally new democratic way of running society should include the proposal for the convening of a thoroughly representative constituent assembly. This would need to be made up of representatives from workplaces and neighbourhoods, linked up through elected spokespeople on a regional and national level - at first as a fighting body, and then as a truly representative, revolutionary government.

All the representatives would be accountable to those who elect them, subject to immediate recall and receiving no more than a worker's wage.

Workers' party

Workers and activists involved in the movement need to strive for an end to rule by a wealthy clique. The call for a workers' candidate for president would need to be accompanied by a programme of democratic public ownership of all the major means of production, distribution and exchange.

A workers' government would need to be thoroughly democratic, establishing workers' control and management, like that which existed in the early days after the victory of the October revolution in Russia.

An appeal to workers in neighbouring countries and beyond to follow suit immediately would be vital, especially in a country of only 9.5 million people.

A revolutionary socialist transformation in Belarus could indeed be a spark for spontaneous movements across the globe to forge parties with socialist programmes and leadership and link up internationally. This is the music of the future, but, hopefully, the not-too-distant future.

• This article can be read in full on socialistworld.net

STRIKE WAVE MARKS NEW STAGE IN REVIVAL OF IRANIAN WORKERS' MOVEMENT



Striking Haft Tappeh sugar cane workers on 2 August PHOTO MOHAMMED ANGHAR/FARSI NEWS AGENCY/CC

LUKAS ZÖBELEIN,
SOZIALISTISCHE ORGANISATION SOLIDARITÄT
(CWI GERMANY)

Since the beginning of August, Iran has seen more and more workers from different sectors follow the example of the Haft Tappeh sugar cane workers who went on strike on 14 June. These workers engaged in class struggle because it is part of the harsh normality for workers across Iran that they are cheated of their wages and social benefits.

At the peak of the industrial action, workers at more than 40 companies were on strike. This was a new stage in the emergence of an independent workers' movement in Iran, a process which has been developing since 2017.

On 12 August a solidarity declaration (see socialistworld.net) - initially signed by 50 trade union, student and other organisations in Iran - indicated the scale of support for this movement.

The Iranian government employed different tactics to answer this growing unrest, including repression, arrests and long prison sentences for worker activists.

Free jailed workers

Among those workers persecuted is Jafar Azimzadeh, chairman of the Free Union of Iranian Workers (FUJW). In this role, Azimzadeh supported workers all over the country who have been organising to fight for higher wages and better working conditions, as well as campaigning for these demands in the company that employs him. In the recent period a number of other FUJW leaders have been jailed.

Azimzadeh was recently sentenced to five years in prison for his trade union activity. From 17 August he went on hunger strike, despite the

fact that he has heart and lung disease from his last time in prison, and recently contracted coronavirus.

Azimzadeh was immediately transferred to Rajai Shahr prison. With this manoeuvre, the Iranian regime is depriving Azimzadeh of the health care he needs. It shows, once again, how brutally the regime deals with every form of resistance. It underlines how necessary it is to fight inside and outside Iran for the democratic right of Iranian workers to organise, and for the immediate release of all political prisoners in Iran.

Currently, the vanguard of this strike wave has been the Haft Tappeh workers, who have been on strike for over two months. For years, they have been building their collective strength, including developing solidarity networks among the local population living around their workplace, and who now provide them with food and other help.

On 30 August, after eleven weeks of struggle, the workers at Haft Tappeh ended their strike, although the workers who have lost their jobs are continuing their protests.

The workforce as a whole decided to give the government 15 days to meet all their demands. If this doesn't happen, they plan to occupy the privatised workplace and run it as a 'workers' council'.

This would definitely mean a new stage of escalation in the struggles. It could lead to a very hard confrontation with the Iranian regime and its apparatus of repression. A key question is what support such a step would get from other workers and young people who have been in opposition to the regime.

International solidarity would also be important from trade unions and the left. This is particularly important because western powers could hypocritically pretend to support the

workers as part of their work to establish a friendly regime in Iran.

The support which the Haft Tappeh workers have built is an example for workers in other sectors to follow. The creation of local, regional and national support or action committees, with real roots in the workplaces, would enable discussion and organisation of the struggles, and build solidarity with them.

Next steps?

The coordination of both struggles and solidarity activity is needed now. The question of what next steps are necessary has to be discussed.

Joint demonstrations of strikers in different regions (socially distanced because of coronavirus) would bring both strikers and supporters together. General strike action, possibly initially for 24 or 48 hours, on a regional basis, can be both a show of strength and a step towards the next stage of struggle.

When the strikes were increasing a few weeks ago, a call for national action could have got a real response. Even if, for now, such a call is not immediately on the table it can quickly return, as conditions change. Such collective action could both help win the workers' immediate demands and show that the working class is an independent force fighting for all the oppressed.

We previously reported the significance of the fact that the Haft Tappeh workers had demanded the renationalisation of their privatised enterprise, and its management by a workers' council, with decisions made collectively. Such demands boldly raise the question of who controls Iranian society.

These ideas pose the question

of the need for the working class to have its own party. Committees formed to support and organise struggle could become the basis of such a party, discussing how it could be formed and its initial programme. A workers' party would need to take up both democratic demands, like the right to organise and free elections, combined with economic and social demands.

Nationalisation and democratic workers' control over the economy, which the Haft Tappeh workers raised, would be a significant part of socialist policies to transform society. A party with such a socialist programme could unite the struggles of all workers, as well as the struggles of the social and environmental movements, and provide them with a clear path to break with oppression and capitalism.

• See also 'Renewed protests shake Iranian leaders' and '40 years since the Iranian revolution: Learning the lessons for today's new working-class struggles' at socialistparty.org.uk



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the Socialist

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Jobs, training, pay

WE WANT A FUTURE



Young Socialists day of action - 12 September

JEREMY DAVIDSON
HULL SOCIALIST PARTY

Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on global capitalism and exposed the flaws of the system.

In Britain, the already struggling economy has now entered recession, with a sharp rise in unemployment and economic downturn hitting the poorest. Mass job losses are taking place, and will be spurred on when the furlough scheme ends in October.

Some of the worst affected sectors are service, retail, and hospitality, where the workforce is dominated by young people. Unemployment

among 18-24 year olds could hit one million by the end of the year.

Following a decade of brutal austerity cuts - attacks on further education, a dwindling number of decent apprenticeships, lack of job security, and the rise of precarious employment - this crisis is a further blow to young people's futures.

The largest 100 companies in Britain have doubled their wealth in ten years. Now, the greedy fat cats are trying to protect their vast profits by making young, working-class people pay for this crisis. We need to fight back.

Young Socialists and Youth Fight for Jobs are campaigning for the Trade Union Congress (TUC) - representing six million workers - to

set up an emergency 'council of war' to plan how the unions can campaign to defend jobs.

The TUC should demand the government invest to create socially useful jobs on wages we can live on, and guarantee real training and apprenticeships for the skills young workers need, with a job at the end. Those schemes should be democratically controlled by the trade unions.

Young people have already taken action to fight injustice and demand a better future. The inspirational Black Lives Matter (BLM) protesters, which challenged systemic racism, were mainly youth. School and college students won an impressive victory, forcing the Tory government into a U-turn on exam results.

Find out about youth protests on and around 12 September

- youngsocialists.org.uk
- Instagram & Facebook: Young Socialists
- Email: youngsocialists@hotmail.co.uk
- Text JOIN plus your name and postcode to 07958 032 071

• **Young Socialists is also supporting NHS protests on 12 September (see front page) and the demands of the National Shop Stewards Network (see page 2)**

If the unions took a central role in fighting for young people's futures, the militancy and determination

of youth combined with the power of trade union organisation could succeed.

A SOCIALIST RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CRISIS
▶▶ socialistparty.org.uk/coronavirus

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

