

**With Covid infections doubling every week, 86% of doctors expect a second peak in the next six months. But the Tories' 'world-beating' test-and-trace system is in total chaos.**

All over the country people with Covid symptoms are complaining about not being able to get a test. These include many doctors who, interviewed by the Doctors' Association UK, called the system an "utter shambles". GPs, like many other people, have been spending hours on the website trying to get a slot only to be eventually told to travel to a testing centre hundreds of miles away.

Operations are being cancelled because health workers are having to self-isolate, not knowing if they have the virus or not. Children are being sent home from school because teachers have symptoms and can't get tests (see p11). There have been no tests to be had in Bolton and other Covid hotspots.

If you're lucky enough to get a test, results are often delayed. Inadequate laboratory testing has created a backlog of at least 185,000 swabs, meaning that some have had to be sent to Germany and Italy for processing. And as for tracing - as many as 30% of contacts are not being found.

### Blame

The Tories have pushed for us to go back to work, for the schools to open, for us to eat out and shop, then they try and blame young people and workers for their own cock-ups (see p2).

They complain that people are not isolating when they have the virus or have been in contact with someone who has. What they don't mention is that many isolating workers are expected to survive on just £95.85 a week statutory sick pay, which is just not possible. Two million are not even entitled to that.

Any worker expected to isolate should be on full pay. As should anyone who has to be at home because children are not able to go to school or childcare is not available because of Covid.

The idea that the system is not coping because too many people who don't have symptoms are demanding tests, as Matt Hancock declared, is ridiculous. Many scientists have said that it should be possible to carry out 10 million tests a day. But the Tories' test-and-trace system has been a disaster from day one - first due to

underfunding and flirting with 'herd immunity', and then made worse by a system that has prioritised giving profitable contracts to the Tories' big-business friends.

With Covid-19 cases rising, and the cold and flu season not far away, the whole system is, in the words of the chair of Independent Sage, on a "knife edge".

Emergency action is needed. In addition to ensuring that isolating workers are fully paid, the profit

motive must be entirely removed from the test-and-trace system. This must be fully funded and incorporated into the existing public health infrastructure, democratically run by committees involving the workers in the sector.

As Rob Williams, chair of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), said at the virtual lobby of the annual meeting of the Trades Union Congress: "We are fighting for our lives and our livelihoods" (see

p7). As well as fighting for safety at work, a co-ordinated trade union fight against job losses is needed.

700,000 jobs have been destroyed since the lockdown began. Now the Tories are scrapping the job retention scheme at the end of October, and the redundancy notices are already starting to be issued. The NSSN is calling on the TUC to organise a day of demonstrations and protests in every town and city on Saturday 24 October to demand the

furlough scheme be continued and upgraded. The main mobilising demand for this should be 'Work or full pay'.

We cannot trust the Tories to protect our lives or our jobs. We can only rely on our strength as workers and young people to fight for safety, jobs, decent pay and working conditions, and a socialist future.

● **More on Covid - p2, 3, 10**  
● **24 October protests - for updates see shopstewards.net**

## Covid testing chaos

## Mass job losses

# OUR LIVES

## AND

# LIVELIHOODS

# AT STAKE

## Protest on 24 October



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

Covid-19 lockdown in Birmingham Blame politicians, not workers and young people

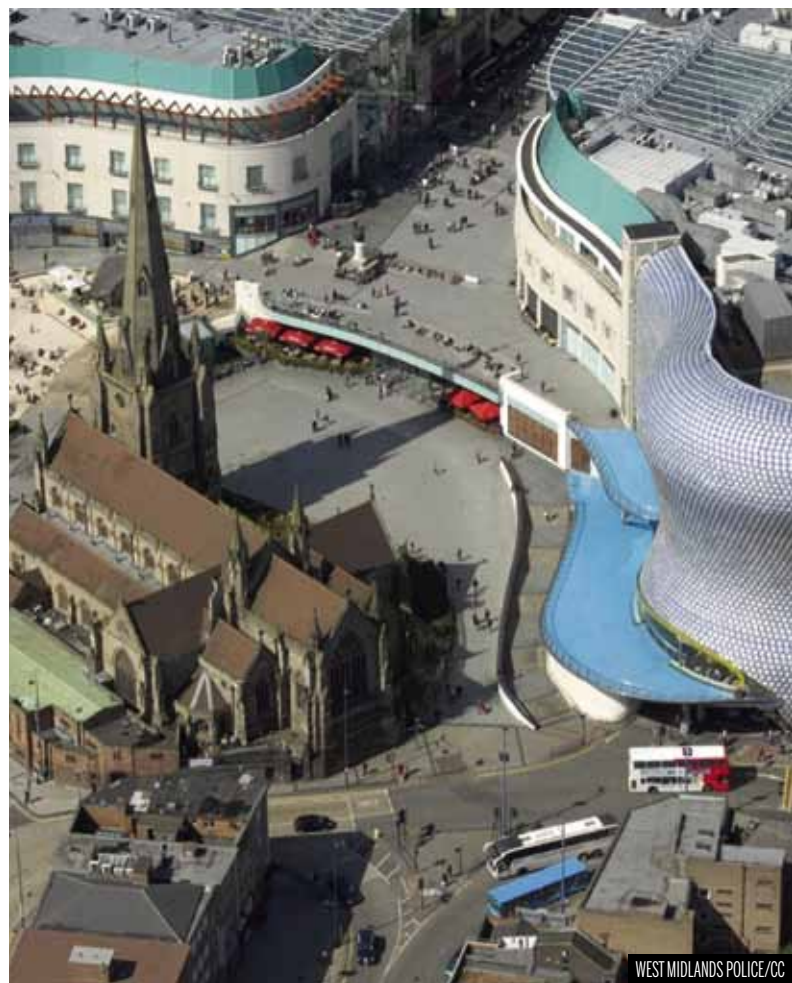
CLIVE WALDER BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

1.6 million people in Birmingham, Solihull and the Black Country were banned on 16 September from visiting or hosting people indoors or in private gardens unless they are already in a support bubble.

All of the most affected places have large amounts of overcrowded housing where social distancing is impossible. They also have large numbers of precarious workers who worked throughout the pandemic because they are too scared to speak out against unhealthy working conditions and poverty. Birmingham has some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country.

Despite this, the local Labour politicians who collaborated with Matt Hancock on this decision parrot Tory propaganda. Blairite Birmingham Council leader Ian Ward said data showed "the infection rate has risen mainly due to social interactions, particularly private household gatherings."

Tory West Midlands mayor Andy Street says that workplaces and commercial premises that are allowed to remain open have been prepared in a Covid-safe way and have been examined for safe return. Yet Birmingham Council has just announced that a restaurant has had enforcement



action taken against it for not having a reliable and trustworthy test-and-trace system.

The Tories are trying to regain lost political support because of their disastrous handling of the pandemic by transferring the blame to young people and fostering division between generations.

Young people won't accept this blame lightly. Many can see the contradictions in being allowed to see your friends in the pub but not in their house, or the assumption that all workplaces and commercial premises are Covid-safe but their houses aren't.

The difficulties in enforcing the restrictions, and impossibility of verifying membership of a support bubble, make a high degree of non-compliance likely. So does the fact that the politicians making these decisions are the same people who treat working-class people with contempt by cutting public services rather than standing up to the Tories.

We shouldn't just hope that this will hole the Tories below the water line, but should energetically campaign for the pandemic response to be democratically controlled by local authorities and the NHS, for workers to have the final say on when a workplace is safe, and for genuine community control on any restrictions of movement.

Bosses' pandemic profit bonanza

£378bn payout due to shareholders in 25 most profitable firms

32 of the world's biggest corporations are in line to make an extra \$109 billion profit under 2020's pandemic conditions, says Oxfam. The 'S&P 500' US stock market index hit an all-time high of 3,581 points on 2 September, while recession and unemployment punish millions of workers.

The 25 most profitable global firms could pay over \$378 billion in dividends this year - equivalent to 124% of profits. Chemicals giant BASF took £1 billion in emergency loans from the British government - and plans to pay shareholders over £3 billion!

Meanwhile, Oxfam reports the pandemic fallout could push half a billion people into poverty. 400 million jobs have gone already, and the ILO reckons 430 million small enterprises are under threat. One 63-year-old manager made redundant by his restaurant even resorted to handing out CVs at Leeds railway station.

400m jobs lost to Covid so far

Privatised testing and treatment fiasco

The government is looking to hand £10 billion to private hospitals to fill in for overwhelmed NHS services over the next four years. Why not cut out the middleman and just fund the NHS? And how will Tory plans to axe Public Health England help the problem?

Aside from the wasteful drain of profit extraction, how can we even trust the private sector? Healthcare regulators in England and Scotland declined to publish care home death tolls because this would "likely prejudice the commercial interests of care providers!"

Johnson's welcome (but belated and secret) mass testing proposal, 'Operation Moonshot', would cost £100 billion. No doubt the Tories will try to hand this to private bosses too.

Meanwhile, swab tests can miss 30 to 50% of infections, finds Cambridge University. And even the paltry number of tests administered so far was subject to "an adjustment" last month - the government had overstated the figures by, oh, 1,308,071.

£10bn contracts the government is handing to private hospitals

'Covid marshalls' must be accountable to communities

JOSH ASKER SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

The Tory government has announced that it will be introducing 'Covid marshalls' to try to enforce new restrictions. But typically for Johnson and his cronies, this is all without funding or any clear instructions.

After watching those on the front line work throughout the peak of the virus with inadequate PPE. After being told to get back to the office using rammed trains and buses. After watching government advisors themselves flout lockdown restrictions. Is it any wonder that the government is finding it hard to get people to follow guidance?

Ultimately these marshalls have no legal powers, but it is still important to deal with how they will be made accountable. At the service of the government they could be used, for example, to harass and try to prevent socially distanced protests and campaigns.

That's why it's important that roles like these are made democratically accountable to communities in which they work and the wider working class, and that the marshalls themselves are organised in a trade union.

They could be used to harass socially distanced protests and campaigns

controlled and carried out by local authorities.

They will be expected to do this with no extra funding and with many councils facing financial crises already. It is likely that marshalls will be existing staff or volunteers, raising the question of whether adequate training and support will be provided.

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Sketch: The rule of six - some guidance from your government

From Monday 14 September, people in England will be banned from being part of social gatherings of more than six people. Please be aware that this is a 'rule' and not a 'law' - as we all know, laws can be broken, whereas rules must be obeyed.

Remember that while the virus can count - you don't. It is very important not to think too much about keeping yourself and the people you care about safe - we certainly don't!

Just concentrate on following the very simple and clear rules that we have set out for you. Although they are only rules, they have the force of law, and unless you follow them you may be fined and even arrested.

Young people

This is a very worrying time for young people. We would like to reassure them that there is no reason to obey the rule of six while at school. Similarly, the wearing of masks and social distancing are not necessary from the time you get on the school bus in the morning until the time you get off on the way home.

Other than that, you must comply with the new rule. It may be helpful to think of it as a law that can be broken in limited and specific ways that suit us, your government.

Young people have an extra responsibility to obey the rule of six in any setting, indoors or out, where fun might be involved. As a guideline, if you aren't at school or work, then any breach of the rule will probably kill your gran. If you are in a classroom, a school corridor, or serving drinks or food to people richer than you are, there is nothing to worry about.

Workers

Older people of working age should think about the new rules in a similar way. If you are required to gather in groups of more than six by someone more important than you - your employer, for instance - then it will be perfectly safe. In the same way, using overcrowded public transport or queuing for fast food as part of your normal working day is perfectly safe.

While you are on your own time, however, you must limit your social interactions to groups of six or less. To assist you in complying with these requirements we have created a new criminal offence of 'mingling', the details of which will be explained in due course. Feel free to inform on anyone you suspect of illegal mingling by dialling 101.

Exit strategy

Please be assured that some of the finest financial minds in Britain are working round the clock on this crisis. It will not last forever. When it comes to spending public money to incentivise the private sector to come up with new ways of dealing with this public health emergency - the sky is literally the limit.

We are not just talking about the old, boring technologies and public agencies that have been shown to work, but innovative new providers



As a guideline, if you aren't at school or work, then any breach of the rule will probably kill your gran. If you are in class, or serving drinks or food to people richer than you are, there is nothing to worry about

and technologies that do not yet exist. We have plans to unveil a viable time-travel technology in March 2021 which will allow us to offer a vaccine in late 2019, under licence from a private corporation that will make trillions and generate a world-beating UK corporation, albeit one registered in Belize.

In the meantime: shut up, do as you're told, and think of England. THANKS TO DAVE MURRAY, ESSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

Stop press: Our readers will be pleased to learn that the government has exempted grouse shooting and hunting from the rule of six.

Socialist Party

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.

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

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# JOHNSON'S BRINKMANSHIP OVER EU DEAL DEEPENS CAPITALIST SPLITS

STEVE SCORE  
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

**W**hen no less than three former Tory prime ministers line up to attack Johnson's government, when the Justice Secretary says - while supporting the proposed government legislation - he would resign if it is actually fully implemented, you know it's a crisis!

Splits in the Tories over the Brexit strategy have burst out into the open again after months of news headlines dominated by Covid. But more than that, Johnson's brinkmanship has caused panic in the ruling class.

The latest 'Internal Market Bill' has passed its first vote in the Commons. 30 Tory MPs abstained, two voting against, and many are threatening to support amendments to take out clauses they see as reneging on the Brexit withdrawal agreement made with the EU, and 'breaking international law'.

This is against the backdrop of a looming deadline in negotiations between the government and the EU over future trading relationships. The transition period is due to end on 31 December when Britain will be fully out of the EU. But the treaty needs to be agreed before that date in order for it to be implemented by the end of the year.

Johnson has set an early deadline of 15 October, while the EU suggests the end of October. If no agreement is reached, then a chaotic 'no deal' Brexit under World Trade Organisation (WTO) terms could result. This

is of course in the context of the severe economic crisis triggered by Covid-19.

As part of the withdrawal agreement, a complicated attempted compromise was made to try to square the circle to prevent a potential 'hard border' between the North (outside the EU) and South of Ireland (inside the EU). A hard border under capitalism could have devastating political as well as economic consequences.

Under the withdrawal agreement, the North would effectively stay in the EU's single market and adhere to EU standards on goods, while the rest of the UK would not. But the North would be in the UK's 'customs territory'. So goods that travelled from Britain to Northern Ireland that weren't intended to go to the South would theoretically have no tariffs or different standards (for example on health and safety) imposed on them.

However, negotiations on which goods are to be treated as 'at risk' of entering the South from the North are continuing. If these fail, all goods would be seen as 'at risk', and potentially the hard border would be in the Irish Sea.

Part of the Internal Market Bill now being debated would allow the government to rip up this part of the agreement. Other aspects of the bill could potentially allow the government to impose lowering of food safety standards (allowing chlorinated chicken for example) on all parts of the UK - increasing the mood for independence in Scotland, for example.

Johnson claims these measures

are a "safety net" in case no deal is made with the EU, but there is a huge amount of uncertainty over whether the negotiations will end with agreement. Like previous Tory leaders, he is under pressure from the two wings of his own party as well as the capitalist ruling class. That is what both Labour and Tory former prime ministers' attacks on him were about.

The majority of the ruling class was opposed to Brexit, but was forced to accept the referendum vote, when millions of working-class people used it to vent their anger against austerity and out-of-touch politicians. The current Labour leadership also reflects this position.



**Johnson is under pressure from the two wings of his own party as well as the capitalist ruling class**

'Plan B' was to get a deal that was as near to the EU as possible. For the likes of Tony Blair to talk about the sanctity of 'international law' when it suited the US and British ruling class to ignore it over the Iraq war, is utter hypocrisy. However, the ruling class does have real concerns over its reputation in future trade negotiations with other countries.

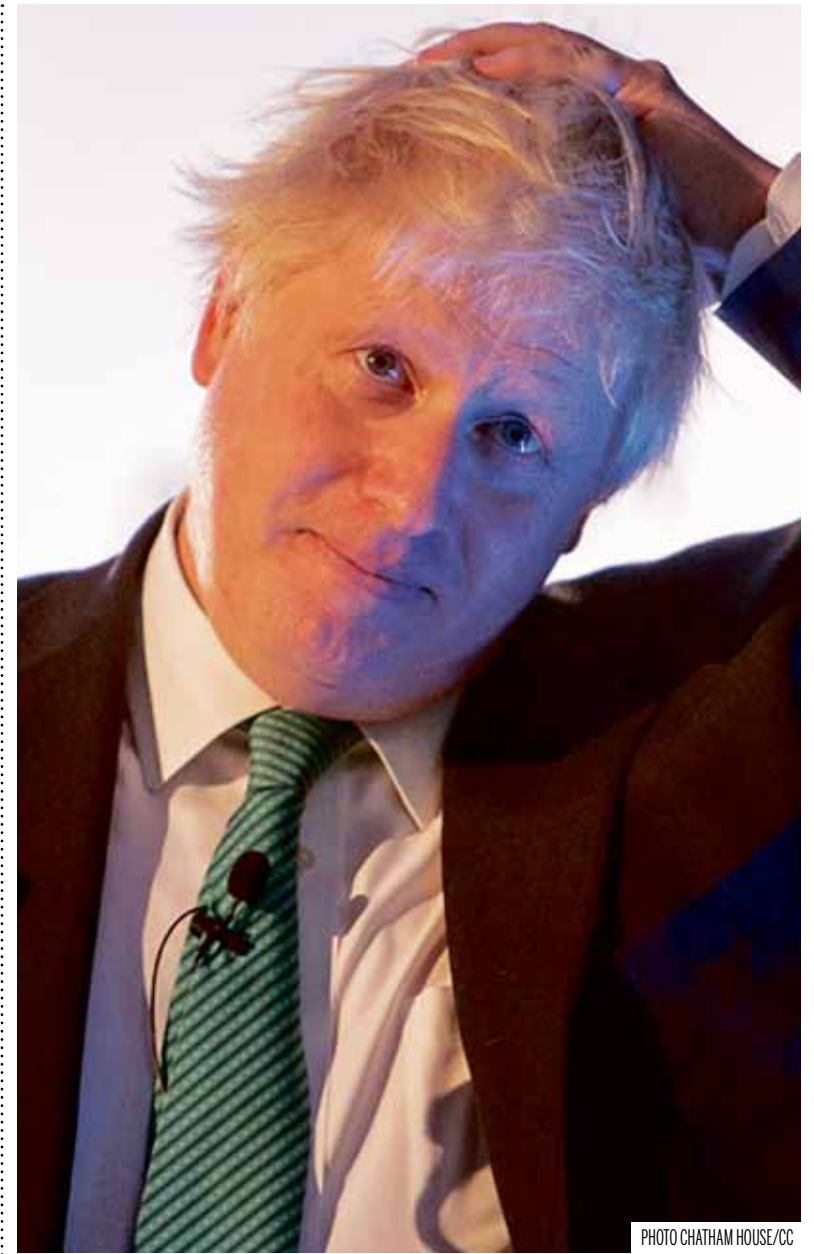


PHOTO CHATHAM HOUSE/CC

A number of industry bosses say a no-deal Brexit would devastate jobs. Car manufacturers say it would mean an extra £100 billion in losses over five years, on top of a similar amount resulting from the Covid-triggered economic crisis.

The Socialist Party has always supported a socialist Brexit that would include the nationalisation of all big companies threatening redundancies as part of a democratic socialist

economy. We have opposed the bosses' EU with a genuine socialist internationalism.

Whether it ends up with a negotiated Brexit deal or exit on WTO terms, under the Tories and under capitalism neither will be in the interests of working-class people. It will need a working-class mass movement led by trade union action to defend jobs, living standards and safety standards.

## Capitalist profit and the race to develop a Covid vaccine

JON DALE  
SECRETARY UNITE NOTTS HEALTH BRANCH

Governments around the world failed to protect people from Covid-19. Now they are desperately looking to vaccine development. Mass vaccination seems the best way to end the nightmare of further waves of infection, repeated lockdowns, and continuing blocks on many normal activities.

Vaccines have been responsible for tremendous advances. Polio, common in Britain until the 1950s, has finally been eradicated throughout the world. But there has never been a vaccine against a coronavirus.

When SARS (a coronavirus similar to Covid-19) spread rapidly in 2003, vaccine research pushed ahead. But after that pandemic eased, prospects for a profitable vaccine faded. Pharmaceutical corporations cut their research. Had they continued,

a vaccine for Covid-19 might now be closer.

Initial results of a Russian vaccine, Sputnik V, were announced last month. It is being given to medical staff, although so far the results on only 76 healthy people have been published. In China, a vaccine has been given to soldiers. Not to be outdone, Trump wants to announce a US vaccine before November's election. Operation Warp Speed is doling out billions of taxpayers' dollars to pharmaceutical corporations to try and get there.

One US company, Inovio, has grown from a stock market valuation of \$500 million at the start of the year to \$3 billion. It has never produced a successful vaccine, but claims to be able to do so.

However, Inovio is now in a legal battle with another company VGX. Inovio claims VGX is denying it technology needed to develop its vaccine.

VGX has counterclaimed that Inovio is stealing trade secrets. "Even if it's successful in developing a vaccine," says stock market analyst Vince Martin, "it may lose potential profits by getting to approval later than bulls hoped - and later than faster rivals." (Investor Place 10 September)

### Testing

Meanwhile, Chinese pharmaceutical company CanSino and Canada's National Research Council (NRC) joint project was delayed. CanSino held up shipments of trial supplies. This followed the arrest of Huawei's chief finance officer in Canada after pressure from the US government. NRC is now collaborating with Russian company Petrovax Pharma.

No vaccines have yet gone through full trials to test effective infection prevention without significant side-effects. The Oxford University/Astra-Zeneca trial was paused for a week

after one of the 18,000 people who have had the vaccine so far reportedly developed transverse myelitis. About 300 people develop this in the UK each year.

Inadequate safety testing of vaccines could damage public support for vaccination, not only against Covid-19 but in general. But the smell of big profits, along with pressure from governments anxious to regain support, increases pressure to take short cuts.

"One or more drugmakers with Covid-19 vaccines in development could make a fortune very soon. The global market for vaccines against the novel coronavirus could reach \$20 billion next year," wrote one stock market analyst.

The pharmaceutical industry across the world needs to be in public ownership and democratically planned to meet the needs of the world's population. Financial

interests of shareholders, political interests of government leaders, vaccine nationalism and 'vaccine diplomacy' are no way to decide research priorities or how to carry them out.

Nationalisation under workers' control of the pharmaceutical industry must include the manufacturing plants needed to produce billions of doses.

Free health services are needed to give them to everyone - not just those who can pay, but many countries do not have universal health care. Logistic support including refrigeration is needed to distribute vaccines everywhere. These don't exist in many less developed countries.

If Covid-19 remains in just one remote region of the world, its return across the globe remains a threat. Capitalism is the problem, not the solution. We need workers' governments and democratic socialist planning across the planet.



# NATIONAL SHOP STEWARDS NETWORK LOBBYING FOR A LEAD FROM THE TUC

TOM BALDWIN  
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

For the last decade the National Shop Stewards' Network (NSSN) has brought together trade union activists to lobby the TUC congress each year and push for militant action against austerity. This year the TUC was forced to become virtual and so was the NSSN lobby.

Not being able to meet in person did not diminish the importance of lobbying for a lead to be given by the tops of the trade union movement. Introducing the meeting, NSSN national chair Rob Williams explained this was, in fact, the most important TUC in living memory. In the face of the Covid capitalist crisis workers are having to fight for their livelihoods and for their lives.

Workers had to get organised at the start of the crisis to defend health and safety in the workplace, often forcing improvements from bosses. That task has not gone away. The basic right of workers not to have their lives put at risk must be fought for as the Tories try to rush an unsafe return to work and education, and bosses prioritise profits.

On top of this is the struggle to protect jobs in the face of closures and job cuts. Unchecked, unemployment could hit five million by the end of

the year and will become a defining issue for our class. Riding on the back of this wave of job losses come greedy bosses, using the threat of redundancy to try and take an axe to workers' pay and conditions. They will try to stop workers' organising and crush any resistance to this onslaught. The meeting heard from workers who'd been victimised at work for trade union activity.

This shows the bosses are still afraid of trade unions and the power of workers. Unfortunately, some union leaders underestimate the power we have when we stand together, or are themselves afraid to unleash it. Meeting the coming tsunami of attacks on jobs and conditions without the will to fight back would be devastating. The NSSN can help turn the tide by organising rank and file trade unionists.

Rob Williams called for this year's TUC to be a council of war. Unions needs to draw clear, class lines and make clear that workers will not pay for this crisis. Rob pointed to the weakness of the Tory government who have made 13 U-turns, such as the hurried retreat on the A-level algorithm, dropped at the first sign of students beginning to protest.

That is just a small glimpse of what could be achieved by the trade union movement - 6.5million members strong and growing. If given a fighting

lead they could be unstoppable and draw in millions more workers who are currently unorganised.

Workers won't be able to defend themselves without a struggle. To be most effective this must utilise the power workers have as the creators of profits for the bosses by having industrial action at its heart.

We must be as steadfast in defending our class as the capitalists are ruthless in attacking it. We are strongest when we're united, the unions need to coordinate claims and action.

The NSSN rally called on the TUC to organise protests against unemployment across the country on 24 October, the week before the government's furlough scheme is due to end. We will be demanding employment or full pay for those who cannot be found jobs. Workers shouldn't tolerate cuts to pay and conditions to pay for the crisis.

Companies that are cutting jobs should be nationalised. Many speakers raised the need for socialist public ownership as an alternative to capitalism in crisis. RMT transport union national executive member Jared Wood said: "If capitalism cannot maintain jobs and conditions then we cannot maintain capitalism." He pointed to the demand for socialism in his and other unions' constitutions.



Lobbying the TUC in Brighton in 2019 PHOTO MARY FINCH

## Union leaders call for workers' unity and industrial militancy



Tower Hamlets council workers on strike

The themes of vital importance of this year's TUC, of the need for unity and industrial militancy from the unions, and the need for an alternative to the rotten capitalist profit system ran through the whole meeting.

They were taken up by the speakers representing four of the unions affiliated to the NSSN: the bakers' union BFAWU, Communication Workers Union (CWU), RMT and general union Unite, plus Amy Murphy, president of the shop workers union Usdaw, speaking in a personal capacity.

The meeting also heard contributors from the floor. A number were engaged in workplace disputes including victimised Unison rep in Hull Tony Smith (see page 10), a striking National Union of Journalists member, an NHS worker fighting for a 15% pay rise (see back page) and a teacher speaking on the Covid crisis in schools.

New BFAWU general secretary Sarah Woolley said the bakers' union was a long-term supporter of the NSSN and that relationship would continue under her leadership. She also spoke about the campaign against scandalously low statutory sick pay. The payment of just £95 a week means workers are being penalised for doing the right thing and self-isolating.

CWU general secretary Dave Ward urged unions to take confidence from victories on Covid safety and to

cooperate in the "fight for new standard of living and a new economy - founded on the principles of equality, universalism and collectivism."

Amy Murphy spoke about the worsening crisis on the high street and the fight to save retail jobs. She raised the example of the Irish Debenhams workers who are occupying their workplaces in protest at closure and layoffs. This method of struggle may need to be repeated by other groups of workers. Amy also spoke about the sacking and reinstatement campaign of Usdaw rep Richie Venton (see page 10).

RMT senior assistant general secretary Steve Hedley spoke about the disgraceful actions of Tower Hamlets Labour council who are sacking workers and taking them back on worse conditions. He said he hoped the TUC congress would give a fighting lead, but if that doesn't happen, there needs to be a "coalition of the willing" of unions who will take coordinated action to defend living standards.

Unite assistant general secretary

Howard Beckett spoke about the struggle in British Airways where management is using the same tactics as Tower Hamlets council to try and slash pay. This is despite making £1.92 billion profit last year! Action by ground staff has already given the company pause for thought.

He spoke of the scandal of companies taking taxpayer subsidies while attacking their workers and still paying dividends to shareholders. He said we should not talk of the inevitability of redundancies but fight them with the threat of coordinated, mass industrial action.

The rally was an inspiration, but we were left in no doubt that fighting words must be turned into action. The NSSN can play a key role in making that happen. We support all workers in struggle and push for the most powerful possible fightback. As Sarah Woolley said: "To all of you that are fighting injustice - keep going! United we are stronger. We are the 99%, don't ever forget that."

• Watch the rally in full and affiliate to the NSSN at [shopstewards.net](http://shopstewards.net)

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# ANGRY HEALTH WORKERS DEMAND 15% NOW!

## Unions must organise ballot for national strike action

On Saturday 12 September, in many towns and cities across England, protests were organised by NHS workers, furious with the Johnson government's refusal to award them a pay rise. Several Socialist Party members - health workers and others - spoke at the rallies. Below are extracts from a number of these speeches. Many fellow trade unionists and Socialist Party members assisted in building the protests, unfortunately in the absence of a lead from the national trade unions. The overwhelming demand among protesters was for a 15% pay rise now (see reports opposite). Socialist party members called for the unions to unite and launch a campaign to mobilise workers to achieve a decent pay rise for all. This must involve campaigning for and winning a national pay ballot for strike action. They also pointed out that this divided Tory government can be beaten if the unions' leaderships are willing to organise against it.

### 'Mobilise the members for national industrial action'

"I'm attending today's health workers pay demo in a personal capacity because unfortunately my union, Unison, and other national trade unions, haven't backed this protest. That's very disappointing, because all of the unions should now be mobilising their members on demos like this and at hospitals all around the country, to make sure there is a movement to win this pay claim.



Hugo Pierre

There are a number of discussions about what the rate should be. On the demo today the majority want '15% now'.

We've seen a number of trade unions submit their particular pay claims. Unison, for example, has submitted a claim for an immediate rise of £2,000 a year - which is not the 15% which people are demanding. Nonetheless, if all the health workers' unions agree a pay claim, then what is the next step?

Unison's leadership for example, in submitting its claim, says it is now up to the government to respond.

This passive approach is unacceptable. Rather, it's what our union members do that'll force the government to pay up. So we need to mobilise the membership in demos, days of action, and so on, but our health

worker branches also need to be preparing for a national strike ballot. I'm certain that such a campaign would beat the anti-union ballot vote threshold and secure a yes vote.

And once they've won that and they start to take action, we must demand that the TUC gives full solidarity action, and make sure that's given throughout the trade union movement.

Most of the unions have seen a rise in membership during this pandemic. Well, we must not just sit on that, but ensure those new members are activated to secure the wages and conditions we urgently need."

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

### 'We can beat this divided government'

"I'd like to bring a message of solidarity from Unite members in Barts health trust, the largest NHS trust in England.

We've experienced attacks on pay and conditions, resulting from privatisation, over a number of years. Indeed, as outsourced workers we've had to take strike action on three occasions to win some semblance of parity with members still directly employed by the NHS.

I take part in today's pay struggle, yes as a trade union activist and as a socialist, as someone who wants to see a fundamentally different economy and society (applause). Not a rigged capitalist system where our NHS has a trustworthy logo behind which lurk parasitic privatised corporations who daily strip the dignity of health workers and erode this service.

I'm pleased to report that the London and Eastern regional Unite health leadership agreed this week to support 15% or a £3,000 increase pay claim. The national Unite health body has endorsed this, but we've still got a job of work to do to unite in struggle the 14 trade unions which make up the staff side in the NHS.

Our actions today count. We can build a movement that can transform the mood of workers and take

on this weak, divided Tory government. Let's make them do another U-turn. Let's build this momentum for change. Let's unite and force this government to give us our due claim.

Moreover, I also believe it is the historical mission of the trade unions to be part of a movement to transform society along democratic socialist lines.

Solidarity brothers and sisters!"

**LEN HOCKEY**  
SECRETARY UNITE HEALTH WORKERS BRANCH, BARTS NHS TRUST



Len Hockey

### 'Where's our money tree?'

"I'm Blythe, I work in the NHS and I'm a Socialist Party member.

During this Covid crisis the government has praised "key workers". Going outside to clap on Thursdays, putting up rainbows...We've seen it all

Yet it means nothing when you look at how NHS workers, care workers, and many others have been treated.

This government has cut our real pay over many years. Some workers have lost 20% since 2010. They've underfunded the NHS. They've

continued with the bosses' privatisation agenda.

And then there's the betrayal over the nursing bursary

My post-graduate training is fully funded by the NHS. Without it I wouldn't be able to do my job. So how can the government expect to fill our staffing crisis when they require people to get in tens of thousands of pounds worth of debt that they will be paying off for the rest of their lives - never mind going without pay in order to study?

15% now for all NHS workers is

a modest claim. MPs are getting a £10,000 'work from home' bonus, when we got nothing.

We have seen during this crisis the government finding vast sums of money - hundreds of billions of pounds - to keep big business afloat and to protect its own interests. Yet we're told "there's no money tree" for wages and services.

Systematic underfunding has led to significant staff and equipment shortages that is putting our NHS under threat.

But the government would rather

find a way to make money out of the NHS instead.

You cannot make money from health without putting profit before people. As an NHS worker and a socialist that goes against my fundamental values.

- Reinstate student bursaries and scrap tuition fees!
- 15% pay increase for NHS workers!
- Fully fund our NHS services!
- The unions to call mass meetings of staff to prepare and organise this battle!"



Healthworkers and supporters marching in Bristol (above) and nurses on the London protest (below)



# NHS PROTESTS ROUND-UP

## Brighton

Over 200 health workers and supporters marched through the main high street stopping all the traffic.

While the demo was smaller than last time, with fewer health workers - possibly because of the imminent further Covid restrictions - the mood was buoyant. Passers-by cheered us on and happily snapped up the Socialist Party leaflets.

Halfway through the demo it stopped for a minute's silence for the health workers who had died during the pandemic.

There is increasing demand from the workers for unity across all the unions, not only on the pay claim, but also for a fighting strategy. Noticeably, it was only the GMB trade union which mobilised for the demo, with no presence from other health unions.

GLENN KELLY

## London

There was a steely determination on the London NHS demo. At Oxford Circus, passers-by were hugely supportive of the demand for a 15% pay rise.

Lots of protesters signed the Young Socialists petition demanding the Trades Union Congress (TUC) take action on mass youth unemployment, which is on the horizon. We need the TUC to organise a 'council of war' to make sure young people don't pay for the Covid crisis with their futures.

It sparked lots of discussion about the type of trade union leadership needed to win a 15% pay rise in the NHS, and the struggles facing working-class people.

**HELEN PATTISON**  
(Barts health worker speech - see opposite page)

## Lincoln

Civil service union PCS member Nick Parker, and Mel Kerr, Lincolnshire chair of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), worked hard to push the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to build for a city centre protest.

Unfortunately, despite protests being exempt from the ban on gatherings of six or more, the TUC pulled out.

However, the Socialist Party decided we had to make a stand, and made sure the protest went ahead. Safety was a key priority.

Mel Kerr, the RCN rep who spoke at the protest had this to say about the event: "I felt the day went very well, especially considering only 48 hours prior we thought it had been cancelled! So many thanks to Lincolnshire Socialists for pushing this through and making it a success. We had a fantastic number of signatures on the petition... However, for any future events to have the biggest impact possible, we really need to see a bigger turnout... to make the public and government



PHOTO MIKE LUFF

realise how serious we are about our demands".

**JACOB CORR**  
(Lincoln health worker speech - see opposite page)

## Bristol

Outside Bristol's City Council building, several NHS workers spoke of their experiences, highlighting how 'overwhelmed, overworked and exhausted' they all felt. The protesters then marched through the city centre, attracting large crowds of onlookers who eagerly took Socialist Party leaflets. The general atmosphere was one of anger but also positivity as to what workers can achieve if we all work together.

In the second round of speeches, Socialist Party member Roger Thomas brought solidarity from the Bristol Trades Council, and linked the struggles faced by NHS staff to the broader attacks and austerity forced upon all public sector workers.

He ended by demanding that we "get rid of this rotten Tory government". This received warm applause.

**AMY SAGE**  
These closures will leave already vulnerable residents in a very unsettled situation, which could have a detrimental impact on their health. And the overworked and underpaid care workers would be made redundant.

The closures need to be halted immediately, and services brought in-house and run by the local council.

Unfortunately, with recent announcements by Mayor Joe Anderson, threatening to put Liverpool back into lockdown, the much publicised NHS march was

called off. Instead, there was a successful online NHS pay claim rally. There were great contributions from many inspiring frontline workers and allied health workers. Socialist Party speakers demanded to 'make our trade unions fight for us'.

We encouraged the attendees to start building the fightback by attending the National Shop Stewards Network lobby of the TUC, demanding that workers don't pay the price for the crisis.

The boss-friendly Tory government was attacked for refusing health workers their just pay claim.

However, Labour is no real alternative to the Tories. In Liverpool, the austerity-supporting Labour council is threatening the closure of council-funded and privately leased Brushwood and Millvina care homes, following the failure of the private care provider.

Scandalously, the homes were built by the council as a financial investment, not to run them.

Anderson, who opened the homes just a year ago, is refusing to bring the care homes in-house, saying the council can't afford to because of government cuts.

These closures will leave already vulnerable residents in a very unsettled situation, which could have a detrimental impact on their health. And the overworked and underpaid care workers would be made redundant.

The closures need to be halted immediately, and services brought in-house and run by the local council.

BHARATHI SUBA



SHOBHAN FRIEL  
CHARITY WORKER

Since the coronavirus pandemic hit Britain hard in March, national and local government have tried to pass their responsibilities onto the 'third sector' - charities and NGOs - to handle the fallout on vulnerable people.

In the initial lockdown stage, it became immediately clear that safe access to food and medication was going to be a serious challenge to large numbers of people. The entire population was instructed to stay home wherever possible, but those over 70 or with any underlying health conditions were told not to go out, even to collect essential supplies.

How, then, were those without nearby family and friends going to get food and medicine? The Tories took several steps to address this. Almost all of them involved charities, volunteers and community groups. The government has taken as little direct responsibility for provision of essential supplies as possible, and none of its steps have been able to meet the ongoing need.

As we now face the prospect of a second wave and the possibility of a second lockdown of sorts, the food crisis has only deepened. Months of furloughed workers and rising unemployment have meant a corresponding increase in demand on food banks.

Those who were vulnerable to Covid-19 in March are not any less vulnerable now. Going into crowded supermarkets presents a very real threat to their safety.

To fully understand the role of the third sector in the coronavirus crisis, we have to look right back to the beginning of lockdown. With confusion around the government's 'stay at home' message, the Tories introduced three key measures for accessing essential supplies.

### Emergency measures

First, Health Secretary Matt Hancock made a sensational announcement: a call to arms for healthy people who wanted to help fight this virus. The government asked for 250,000 volunteers for the NHS. These volunteers would be tasked with collecting and delivering shopping, prescriptions and food parcels to vulnerable people.

In response to Hancock's call, more than 750,000 volunteered. They were to be activated via an app, through which community figures such as GPs, social workers and charity workers could find local volunteers and send them tasks for vulnerable people in the area.

This could have been an efficient stopgap in an emergency. The app finds a volunteer local to the vulnerable person, who can deliver supplies. But a large part of the crisis was the need for food parcel delivery. The NHS volunteers were essentially a shopping and delivery service and did not have any access to food parcels.

They were well-intentioned of course, but not trained or accountable. They would not necessarily have known how to get access to food parcels. They could be contacted by a vulnerable person in need of urgent help, and be faced with the choice of doing nothing or paying for food themselves. This is to say nothing of other complex needs.

Despite billions upon billions found to bail out big business - following decades of swingeing cuts to council jobs and services - there was no move

towards hiring, training and paying people to carry out these essential tasks either. However, the idea did at least show the government accepted the need for a planned, coordinated response - and had the potential to organise one.

Second, the NHS was to make a list of those people considered "clinically extremely vulnerable." That's those with serious respiratory illnesses, who have been recently treated for cancer, or had a recent organ transplant.

In March, the NHS advised 1.5 million people to stay at home. The 900,000 most vulnerable received a letter explaining that they needed to stay inside for 12 weeks, and they could receive food parcels.

This is by far the most direct action taken to address access to essential supplies by the government to date. It was at conception a centrally organised plan, utilising data held by the NHS, to ensure those in most need of support received it quickly. It gives a glimmer of insight into what even a Conservative government is capable of if the stakes are high enough.

But there were immense flaws in this scheme. It was limited, and in many cases failed to reach even the relatively small number who had been identified as extremely vulnerable.

It was never clearly explained to the public, and the only way to get a list of who did and did not qualify was to go to the government website and fill in an online application. For many people over 70, this is not a realistic prospect.

In addition, the government food parcel scheme ended in July, entirely without warning. This was either a suggestion that those individuals are now safe to get supplies for themselves, or a direct decision to hand all responsibility for even the most acutely vulnerable to the third sector. But those 1.5 million people had not become less vulnerable, nor has any other support system replaced the food parcels.

Third, the government assured the public that older and vulnerable people would get priority for online shopping and deliveries. What the Tories did not say was that this would be left entirely to supermarkets to organise themselves, and that they would have no accountability whatsoever.

Even today, online delivery slots are difficult to find, even for those who do have access to the internet. Supermarket phone lines were overwhelmed.

And the government did not mention that the only way to receive a high-priority slot - if you were even able to reach a supermarket on the phone - was to be on the NHS extremely vulnerable list. There are almost nine million over-70s alone in the UK. A maximum of 1.5 million people were on the list.

Essentially, isolated older people without nearby family had almost no options for safely accessing essential supplies, and none of the government support options could reach them. Many would have had no choice but to contact their GP or social worker - who could, theoretically, contact an NHS volunteer in turn to deliver their essential needs.

### Charities swamped

Through April, before the NHS app went live, charities were swamped with panicked and confused older and vulnerable people. Why were they not receiving food parcels? How did they get food shopping if they could not go outside?

# COVID AND THE THIRD SECTOR: PUBLIC PLANNING, NOT CHARITY STOPGAPS



Like businesses, charities have running costs and income streams which are threatened by the pandemic. They also have targets which need to be met in order to maintain public grant funding.

In response to the lockdown, commissioning bodies across the country allowed charities to change their output to meet the emergency needs of the pandemic. Charities began setting up temporary food and shopping services, hoping to only need to bridge the gap until the NHS volunteers were activated.

As with all of this government's pandemic measures, the reality of the

NHS app did not tally with the press hype.

Of 750,000 applications, NHS Volunteer Responders accepted 600,000 volunteers. A month into its existence, the scheme had only logged 100,000 tasks. Clearly the majority of this phenomenal willingness to help was going unused.

The chief executive for Volunteering Matters, which helped coordinate the plan, said: "It's not that volunteers aren't wanted or needed. The reality is that the numbers of people has outweighed the need."

That's a nice thought. It would be great to imagine that so few people



**The government has shown the potential for a coordinated, fully funded, public effort to protect vulnerable people - but refused to deliver it**

found themselves needing help getting essential supplies that were not already covered by government 'support'. Unfortunately, it was simply not the case.

### Mismatched demand

In the same time span that the NHS volunteers delivered to tens of thousands of people, several thousand informal community 'mutual aid' groups had linked up millions of local social media users. The demand was there.

The NHS volunteers were unable to respond because there was no organisation beyond the app itself. No one was given clear information as to

how to get help from the willing NHS volunteers.

Government spending on just the first six months of this crisis is £210 billion according to the National Audit Office. Unemployment has skyrocketed to around three million people judging by benefit claims alone, and is set to rise again as the furlough scheme comes to an end in October.

The same need which faced vulnerable people in March remains today, only now all of the funding has been pulled back. Charities, just like businesses, are trying to return to normal.

This is not a criticism of workers

and volunteers in the third sector. Many charities, especially local charities and voluntary community groups, are simply trying to answer a very real need unanswered by the private sector and state.

The NHS volunteers signed up because they sincerely wanted to do something to help. Local food banks appear because people in the area are going hungry. Homeless charities exist because homeless people exist. The vast majority of people who work for charities are just trying to do a job.

It's the government's use of the voluntary sector which is cynical. The NHS volunteers announcement was a box-ticking exercise. A way to appear to be taking decisive action, and supporting the people on the front lines, without cost - exactly like clapping for the NHS.

The Tories did not take the time or supply the resources necessary to organise properly. Even just ensuring there was a simple access point for people in need would have ensured that the 600,000 volunteers could actually be used and vulnerable people would have got the support they needed.

There has never been a time in our lifetimes when a publicly organised, planned and funded effort has been more clearly needed. We needed to know exactly how many people were in any category which required shielding, and to have one, accessible, and clear way for them to receive essential supplies.

### Planning needed

A planned response, employing workers made jobless or who could not work in lockdown, with jobs protected and with no loss of pay, could have met that demand. It would have got people what they needed and the long-term economic damage to workers would have been significantly lessened.

Instead, the government instructed people to seek help from friends and family first, then local charity and community groups, before the state. In response, people volunteered and charities continued delivering essential supplies, each working in their own local bubble; no coordination or long-term plan, and no government accountability of any kind.

There was little or no coordination with local government either, which has the local knowledge to make the scheme work. Some councils set up local schemes, but up and down the country councils have refused to stand up to Tory cuts for a decade. Rather than at last launching a fight for the resources they need, councils also established underfunded and uncoordinated structures.

And what say did volunteers, service users, or indeed workers in the sector, have over how the scheme operated? Their input could have prevented many of these problems. As well as central and local coordination and full public funding, the most effective system would be controlled democratically by workers and service users.

Charities try to treat symptoms. They do not address causes, or they attempt to do so in an 'apolitical' and hence partial way.

Capitalist governments, in effect, commandeer well-intentioned charitable organisations and make them part of their anti-worker system, like they have done with food banks. This saves governments money - money which comes disproportionately from

the instinctive solidarity of workers and the poor - and yet massive cuts to jobs and services continue.

There is absolutely a place for volunteering in society. Organised volunteering for a specific cause is often vital to change. But under capitalism, the third sector - which at its top end can often include ruthless chief executives on bloated salaries - is also used as a cover for the social negligence of the state.

Even the welfare state was not conceived as a way of stopping the cause of social problems, but as a safety net. It was meant to ensure that health-care, education and some basic needs were considered the responsibility of the state, not the individual.

Charities can act as a cover for local and national government abdicating that responsibility, but with even less accountability. The support offered by a charity is not considered anybody's guaranteed right to receive. And charity bosses are not subject to any kind of public election.

Socialists say all people have a right to access food, medicine, essential supplies, and a safe and decent standard of living. In a time of profound crisis, the government has shown the potential for a coordinated, fully funded, public effort to protect vulnerable people.

The Tories have refused to deliver it, or even ensure the most fundamental needs can be reliably met. They fear what this could suggest to people about how society might be organised differently. So with a second wave on the horizon, the Tories are only drawing back even further from direct intervention, while the need increases and grows ever more complex.

### Fight for resources

Huge numbers of vulnerable people have self-isolated for more than five months. There is a growing mental health crisis alongside material needs. Unless there is a fight for more resources, this too will be answered by voluntary organisations or not at all, because there will be no other options. Food banks will find ways to meet the growing demand or some of those in need will go hungry.

Charity and volunteering may mask the failings of government, but of course working-class people instinctively want to help. It is ironic that the same capitalist politicians who rely on this reality to cover their shortcomings insist that self-interest is what motivates people, and that we are fundamentally too greedy for socialism. The disconnect between the government's promises on volunteering and the real experience of workers, volunteers and service users may actually expose the situation all the more.

The coronavirus pandemic has given us a glimpse of the state's capability to organise. In just a few days, it was able to promise a nationwide furlough scheme, with business grants, loans and bailouts. At the beginning of the crisis, it was able to offer shelter to every homeless person in the country.

Now more than ever, we have seen that both the money and the means exist to meet the basic needs of all. The unions should demand that the government and councils take full responsibility for provision, and create secure, well-paid and fully funded public jobs to do it. But more than that, the holes and inefficiency of the private and third sectors, and the capitalist politicians and state, make the case for socialism.

**A Morrisons food parcel for a week**  
PHILAFRENZ/CC



### London bus drivers begin strike ballot over remote sign on dispute

London bus drivers employed by Metroline are to be balloted for industrial action in a dispute over the company's proposals to introduce a new remote sign on system.

Metroline operates in North and West London, and around 16% of all bus drivers in London work for the company.

Remote sign on means drivers do not report to a depot to start work, but meet their bus and begin work at an alternative location such as a bus stop. Remote sign on forces drivers to start work away from the depot, reducing costs and boosting the company's profits.

But there is no benefit to passengers, and in fact, remote sign on could well cause disruption to services used by the hundreds of thousands of people who use buses every day to get to work and school.

Anger about Metroline's proposals was highlighted by a consultative ballot at both its companies in London. Unite members at Metroline West recorded a 99% Yes vote, while the figure for Metroline Travel was 97.8%.

Ballot papers will be sent from 18 September and the ballot will close on 26 October with strikes across London in November should the members vote in favour of industrial action.

### Ireland: Debenham's occupier speaks out

SEÁN POWNEY, DEBENHAM'S WORKER

Three Debenham's strikers, shop steward, Jane Crowe, Doreen Keegan, and myself, were arrested along with members of Militant Left (CWI Ireland) and other left organisations in Dublin on 8 September, following an occupation of the Debenham's flagship store.

We were arrested, held in individual cells, and then released. Our union, Mandate, expressed its sympathy and understanding for the action, which is welcome. Other strikers gathered outside the Garda (police) station until we were released. We then held a rally and marched to the Dáil (Irish parliament building) to demand justice for Debenham's workers.

The occupations are the latest step in a struggle that has been going on for over 150 days. At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in Ireland, while most shops on the high street closed, Debenham's stores around the country remained open.

We continued to work with little or no PPE and in unsafe conditions until the store finally shut for what we were promised would be a short time. A few weeks later, I and 954 of my colleagues received an email to say we no longer had a job and that Debenham's would be leaving Ireland...

● Read the full article at [socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)

### Reinstate Richie Venton

Hundreds of trade unionists have signed an open letter to Ikea demanding sacked Usdaw union rep Richie Venton is reinstated. He was sacked in July for fighting cuts to sick pay.

The letter has been signed by the general secretary of the food workers' union BFAWU as well as representatives of PCS, Unison, Unite, RMT, GMB, FBU, CWU, TSSA, EIS, Aslef, NUJ, Bectu, Prospect and Usdaw.

● See more at [reinstaterichieventon.com](http://reinstaterichieventon.com) and [socialistpartyScotland.org.uk](http://socialistpartyScotland.org.uk)

# PCS members in DWP reject unsafe extension of hours

KATRINE WILLIAMS

VICE-PRESIDENT, PCS DWP GROUP  
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

With 77% voting Yes, members have given a very clear message that they are opposed to extending operating hours at Jobcentres and Universal Credit service centres until 8pm on weekdays, and to Saturdays. There are three months before the changes take place, and this gives plenty of opportunity to build on this clear result and campaign to stop the changes.

There was an over-reliance in the ballot on remote contact with members using phone banking and emails. This must now be addressed in order to build up support for a strike ballot to stop the changes.

There was agreement at the DWP group executive that it would support branches to organise local activities, including socially distanced workplace meetings, but little was actually done to encourage this.

This can be addressed by giving a clear lead to branches to get stuck in to all the issues our members are facing, and tackling the poor approach from management in dealing with the increasing workloads in the department.

Branches can support members by challenging any instances where management have ignored the safeguards in the collective agreement to take into account personal and caring issues, and have instead put pressure on members to agree inappropriate working patterns.

The risk assessment process is also a key opportunity to challenge the safety of extending operating hours at site level. There are many reasons why it is unsafe for sites to be open late or on Saturdays. These include



the area the workplace is in, lack of public transport, and issues with safe staffing levels being achievable across the times the office is open.

Risks are also increased to the public where there are plans to open Jobcentres for the extended hours. If management chooses to ignore the health and safety risks, this can be campaigned on and challenged involving members.

The DWP has been shown to have breached health and safety legislation following the inspection of government building Quarry House in Leeds. This gives additional ammunition and confidence to our reps to challenge unsafe working conditions.

Stretching the existing staff more thinly over a longer working week does not improve services. In fact, it makes it more difficult for the public to access help and support as they cannot get through during the day when the phone lines are busiest.

The focus should be on maximising the support and services when people need them during the day. PCS can run a strong campaign fighting to defend services to the public and delivering services in the safest possible way.

In a recession, the focus of the DWP needs to be on paying benefits and supporting people to deal with the increasingly difficult economic situation. PCS highlighted the chronic understaffing in the DWP and demanded 20,000 extra staff last year before the pandemic. Far more staff are now needed to address the huge influx of claims and still-increasing workloads.

There is a real opportunity to work jointly with claimant organisations and other unions to demand a complete overhaul of the benefits system. There is a growing momentum to reject going back to how things were before the pandemic. We need a fully funded and fully staffed system with benefit levels that address the needs of those claiming. At the same time as challenging bosses who are attempting to make workers' pay for the pandemic.

## Reinstate Tony Smith



As we go to press, sacked Unison rep Tony Smith in Hull has attended his appeal hearing, accompanied by supporters fighting for his reinstatement (above). 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. See next week's issue for the outcome of his appeal.

## Tate workers on indefinite strike



Workers on indefinite strike at the Tate gallery in London marched alongside other arts and culture workers on 12 September against job losses in the sector. Tate workers are facing 313 redundancies as management blames falling customer numbers because of Covid-19. The growing lines of visitors after Tate reopened shows how short-sighted this is. Send messages of support to [culture@pcs.org.uk](mailto:culture@pcs.org.uk)



# DISPATCHES FROM THE FRONT: SCHOOLS NEED COVID TESTS!

A PRIMARY HEADTEACHER AND NEU MEMBER

**A**s the headteacher of a large primary school in the south of England, I am used to working long hours with a certain amount of stress and a lot of job satisfaction. Since the Covid pandemic things have become increasingly challenging.

My day starts at 8am with sorting out staffing. Last week I had staff off every day - not because they had Covid, but because someone they were living with had symptoms so needed a test. This is where the problems begin.

Staff were offered appointments in Scotland, Telford, Bristol, the Isle of Wight, Weymouth and Portsmouth. Staff sent their availability to the website, applying as many as nine times to try to get a test, each time having to start again as the website kept crashing.

This has been repeated for parents who are trying to get tests for someone in their family, so the children have to miss school until the parents manage to get a test. This is infuriating!

I had staff off all week, unnecessarily, because they couldn't get a test. Every head I've spoken to has had the same problem.

We have been given ten tests by the government, only to be used on families who cannot get to a test centre. These will go very quickly if things continue as they are.

Teacher cover is very difficult and will get very costly. This is just not good enough. To expect me to run a school when we just cannot get tests is impossible.

Once I have made sure there is a qualified adult in front of every class, I have to start the process of safely getting children into school. We start at 8.40am and it takes until 9.30am. Ensuring that 700 children and parents get into school safely is no mean feat!

The first day of term was carnage

## A day in the life of a Covid headteacher



PEYMAN HAMIDIPOOR/SNN.IR/CC

as no one really knew where they were going or what was happening, despite us sending videos to parents and preparing them in the best way that we could. The one-way system means there are queues everywhere, and ensuring social distancing in the queues is virtually impossible, despite everyone trying very hard.

Parents are not used to dropping their children and going straight away. This is challenging for some of



**I had staff off all week, unnecessarily, because they couldn't get a test**

them who are used to social contact in the school playground.

The children have been amazing and have settled back into school very well. Classrooms look very different, with all of the tables facing the front, and no book corner or soft furnishings. Things have improved as the week has progressed and we are all slowly getting used to the 'new normal'.

At this point I have a couple of

hours to do all the other things that need doing. Visiting every class and connecting with children and adults; writing the school improvement plan; meeting staff and reviewing procedures; talking to parents; child protection work; reassuring staff who are understandably anxious; working on how to reduce our budget deficit when costs have gone up and income down due to Covid; checking up on pupil attendance, and so on.

Lunchtime begins at 11.45am and finishes at 1.15pm. Myself and my deputies sterilise tables between year group bubble sittings, as I have no extra staff available to do this, and have no money to employ extra staff.

Each year group has half an hour in the dinner hall and half an hour in their outside bubble space. We are lucky enough to have two halls, and both are needed in order for us to keep the year group bubbles as separate as possible. If we have a positive case, bubbles will have to go home, so we try to reduce contact between bubbles as much as possible.

I then have just over an hour to do some work before we have to start dismissing the children from the school - between 2.50pm and 3.30pm! This is tricky as we have to ensure all the children are dismissed safely, and it is the second time in the day that parents have to queue. Again, this has got quicker as the week has progressed.

At 3.30pm we have a daily briefing about what has worked well and what changes we need to make. I then meet with my staff or senior team. At 6pm I arrive home feeling very tired.

I have a break for an hour or so, and then answer the 100-plus emails I have received that day. By 9pm I am falling asleep on the sofa and stagger to bed to try to get enough energy to do it all again the next day.

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## ● We are down to two English teachers, possibly one

As I write this we are down to two teachers in the English department, and possibly will only have one left by the start of the next week.

Two of us have symptomatic children so we have to isolate until they've been tested. One has a niece who tested positive so she has to isolate her whole family for 14 days after close contact with her. The poor woman only started working with us on 1 September.

Students are in 'base rooms' and teachers are rotating around the

school to minimise movement on the site. This means that cover work must be left in the correct classrooms all over the school, rather than stuck to the desk in one room like it used to be.

So if I'm a head of department, I might be printing off, photocopying and leaving cover work in 20 different rooms on any given morning - all of this has to be done before the school day begins. If the head of department is isolating, the school expects the remaining teachers to sort all of this out. By Monday, all of this could fall upon one teacher.

And I should mention that we have to sanitise before and after we touch anything, including paper. That's 40 pumps of sanitiser before 8.15am.

A SECONDARY ENGLISH TEACHER AND NEU REP

## ● New normal: more cases, no tests

Cases are arising in more and more schools, including mine. It's almost impossible to get a test, online or otherwise - despite being 'priority'.

Staff are getting ill, students are getting ill. No recognition from the government of the situation in schools after only a few weeks.

What we need:

- Regular testing now!
- Rapid expansion of online resources and computer equipment available to students!
- Stop battering our students with exam stress and attendance targets!

A TEACHER AND NEU HEALTH AND SAFETY REP

## ● Our school's OK - but the guidance and funding isn't

We're fortunate at our place. The senior leadership team has been proactive and put a lot in place, and kept staff in the loop - myself as union rep in particular. I have approached them with suggestions to amend certain things, which have been well received.

The risk assessment is well thought out, follows guidance, and is tailored to suit the school. All vulnerable staff have a personal risk assessment which they were included in.

Bubbles are clearly defined and

adhered to, cleaning is regular and consistent.

The failings come from a lack of clarity in guidance from the government and what is essentially a disregard for the concept of social distancing, plus a lack of funding to support already decimated school budgets.

Like I say, despite these problems, and being in one of the most deprived areas in the country, we've been fortunate so far - but many schools are not as well equipped to put as much in place as we have.

I won't say it's all been without issues. The wider reopening saw me having to raise a number of issues on behalf of members - this wasn't well received, but it got the changes needed.

A PRIMARY TEACHER AND NEU REP



# SOCIALISM

ONLINE SOCIALIST FORUM OF DISCUSSION & DEBATE OVER FOUR DAYS

20-23 November 2020  
www.socialism2020.net

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

Socialism 2020 will address the key challenges confronting the working class and young people as we fight for our lives and livelihoods amidst the Covid and capitalist crises.

The workshops will include both an introduction and time for those attending to contribute, argue, if they wish, and ask questions.

Racism must be countered whenever it emerges. Black Lives Matter showed enormous courage - but also posed questions of how to smash racism. Socialism 2020 will address this from a number of angles. Why is police racism so persistent and how can it be stopped? What is the nature of the far-right threat today and how can it be defeated? Why did Malcolm X come to the conclusion that you can't have capitalism without racism?

Capitalism is in crisis. That's clear. But what is the alternative? Socialism 2020 will look at the world situation - especially after the US elections. Do we face a new 1930s-style Great Depression? Can capitalism recover?

How do we organise and fight back? Covid showed the need for workers to organise to defend health and safety in the workplace - which cannot be left to the bosses. We will also look at the political situation after Corbyn - in which Starmer's Labour makes the building of a new working-class political voice necessary.

Marxism says that philosophers have interpreted the world - but the point is to change it! Three workshops will explore some of the key texts of Marxism: the Communist Manifesto; Socialism Utopian and Scientific; and The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State. 80 years after the murder of another giant of Marxism, Leon Trotsky, we explore his contribution too.

Socialism 2020 is for everyone to discuss how can the movements being built today become powerful enough to change the world?

Socialism 2020 is dedicated to discussion and debate on the socialist ideas needed to transform the world. Get your ticket today!

# Covid generation says 'fund our future'

## ● Southampton

As part of the Young Socialists national day of action, we brought an open letter onto the streets of Southampton on 12 September. The letter protests council plans to spend £200 million becoming landlords of shops and offices, while leaving the working class without a safety net during this crisis.

Young people in Southampton demanded that the Labour council act to fund the future of the 'Covid generation'. We face the effects of ten years of austerity, low rates of pay, and poor job and housing security.

Our demands include investing in thousands of apprenticeships, paying workers £15 an hour or more, as agreed by trade unions, improving infrastructure, and a mass programme of council house building.

Our open letter was signed by people along the high street. Young people especially felt strongly about the issues we raised.

We handed out leaflets and used our loudspeaker. Many gave us their email address and expressed a desire to become involved in our campaigns.

The government has shown itself capable of spending billions to save big business. More and more young people are becoming concerned about the toxic system we live in.

It is an important time to fight for jobs and for the future. Southampton Young Socialists are planning more campaigns - on council housing and ending homelessness.

IMOGEN PHILLIPS

## ● Wolves

The Tories and the capitalist media want to blame young people for the continued spread of coronavirus. In reality, young people are the worst affected by the crisis in job and pay cuts, overcrowded housing and denied education opportunities.

The Socialist Party was out on 12 September in Wolverhampton supporting the Young Socialists campaign to demand a future - calling on the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to urgently organise struggle across the generations for decent jobs and education for young people.

NICK HART



## Why I joined the Socialist Party - Tories and Blairites only care about corporate greed

I joined the Socialist Party and cancelled my Labour Party membership following the class battle in the Labour Party, between left and right. The pro-capitalist right wing deliberately sabotaged Jeremy Corbyn's leadership and the progressive manifestos of the last two elections.

Like many, I joined Labour because of the drive back towards socialism, moving away from the Blairite years that saw the party achieve some of its worst results under Brown and Miliband.

However, the move to the right under Starmer is self-destruction. It

provides little alternative to the Conservative Party, whose interests are completely shaped by destructive, corporate greed.

The media are hellbent on attacking anyone who dares questions the status quo. An alternative is needed.

As a young person growing up in Tory Britain, it is crystal clear that it will not cater for us. The country being shaped and manipulated before us is a corporate paradise. Rewards are reaped by corporations who underpay and overcharge, all while avoiding tax.

Youth are punished with

extortionate tuition fees, growing rent, substandard living conditions, and a working environment with decreasing workers' rights. This will be exacerbated by a toxic trade deal with the US.

I firmly believe that the Socialist Party is the alternative. In the few weeks I have been a member, weekly meetings have given us the opportunity to discuss many issues that are currently being ignored.

Join the Socialist Party and get organised politically so that we can counter the destructive measures being put in place currently, and start building socialism in Britain. A society that protects the environment, a society all of us can inherit and maintain for future generations, where public interest is made a priority.

RICHARD CHAVES-SANDERSON  
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

## Coventry: Scrap 'profit before people' hospital parking charges

The Socialist Party campaign to scrap hospital parking charges continues. The majority of people who signed our petition on 5 September were NHS staff or relatives.

A parent, whose daughter had chemotherapy, said they have been fighting for a whole year to get back parking payments they are entitled to. Private companies make millions of pounds profit off car parks, and are trying to keep money cancer patients and family had to pay in order to use the hospital.

The mum of a hospital worker said her daughter had free parking taken

off her when she changed job within the hospital. A healthcare assistant took one of our 'fight to end low pay' leaflets - when the free parking ended, she and her co-workers felt the financial pressure again.

The dad of a nurse signed the petition, but also took the time to chat to us as a construction worker dismayed at the serious lack of Covid protection across some sites in Coventry. Health workers need decent pay, our NHS should not be subject to PFI profiteers, our workplaces - offices, hospitals and building sites - can and should be safe.

We have a constant bitter fight for those basics under capitalism. The Socialist Party fights with all workers now. But we want a future without capitalism, where we don't have to fight.

ADAM HARMSWORTH  
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

## Two weeks to donate: We need your help

We need to raise £2,750 a week to hit our new target by 1 October. With government credibility crumbling, a socialist voice is needed.

"Keep fighting comrades! I need a genuine socialist alternative", wrote

Anthony from Swindon with a donation of £2.50. A Leeds watch party of the National Shop Stewards Network rally (see page 5) before the Trades Union Congress raised £45.

Thanks goes to Siobhain in

Smethwick for her donation of £175 to our coronavirus appeal. As Covid cases rocket up, this is a vital appeal - we ask all our supporters to give generously.

We received £130 from five supporters in Staines. Another £10 came from Max with the message "Solidarity!"

But where possible we are out on the streets, keeping to social-distancing rules. Carlisle members sent us £108, £53 was raised on their iZettle card payment machine. These inexpensive, one-touch card readers are a vital part of every fundraising campaign - even more so now, as payments can safely be made at a distance.

Can we raise £5,500 in the last two weeks before 1 October? Every donation counts, large or small. Let's make it another record.

PETE MASON  
SOCIALIST PARTY FINANCE ORGANISER

● Go to socialistparty.org.uk/donate

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

"reverse all privatisation - yes agree with that", "socialism - yes! Definitely agree with that." Hopefully after we meet up with him later, he'll agree to join us.

If capitalism can't afford a decent NHS, then we can't afford capitalism.  
ELAINE BRUNSKILL

## ● Newcastle

At our socially distanced Socialist Party campaign stall on 12 September, more people were prepared to stop and discuss with us. Even those who passed by gave a friendly nod.

There's anger at the Tories. One fella said they clap nurses, but give them diddly squat when it comes to decent pay (see pages 4-5).

Another bloke looked at our petition and read out: "15% pay rise for all NHS staff - yes agree with that",

## ● Waltham Cross

The first Socialist Party campaign stall in the town in years.

Working-class people - young and old - were united by one thing. They were disgusted that Boris Johnson was refusing NHS workers a pay rise. And supported our demand for a 15% rise.

Nine people bought a copy of the Socialist and donated £40 to our Fighting Fund so that we can keep campaigning.  
IAN PATTISON

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

SATURDAY NIGHT MAIN RALLY 6-8PM

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





HANNAH SELL  
SOCIALIST PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY

This is not, and could not be, a neutral telling of the years when Jeremy Corbyn led the Labour Party. The two journalists who wrote the book - Gabriel Pogrund, Whitehall correspondent for the Sunday Times, and Patrick Maguire, political reporter for the Times in Westminster - have their own negative views on Corbyn, reflected in the book.

Nonetheless, it is not a crude hatchet job, but reports masses of detail about the actions of both sides of the civil war that raged in the Labour Party over five years.

Many of these are irrelevant. Does anyone actually care what the pro-capitalist grouping around Chuka Umunna ate and drank while they were planning to split from Labour and launch the failed Independent Group?

They are also often unattributed, with many anonymous quotes which cannot be verified. They overwhelmingly deal with events inside the 'Westminster bubble' of parliament and the Labour Party headquarters.

Leaders of unions are only fleetingly mentioned. The struggles and concerns of rank-and-file trade unionists, or the wider working class, do not feature at all.

### Blairites and establishment

Nonetheless, the book confirms what the Socialist consistently pointed to - the relentless drive by the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party, backed by the capitalist establishment, to defeat Corbyn. All other issues were secondary.

At arch-Blairite Peter Mandelson's infamous garden parties, despite divisions between the majority of pro-EU right-wing Labour MPs and a minority from pro-Brexit seats who took a different view: "All of Mandelson's guests longed for the day that Corbyn was no longer leader of the Labour Party, regardless of whether the sweet release came inside of the EU or out."

That does not mean that there was unanimity on how to gain 'sweet release'. Both Mandelson and Tony Blair saw Tom Watson as the figurehead of the struggle against Corbyn.

But, whereas Mandelson wanted to continue a longer-term fight inside the Labour Party, Blair "developed a view, which he held very strongly, and very deeply, that the Labour Party was finished - that it was irrecoverable."

Mandelson and Watson still hoped to prevent Corbyn consolidating his position. Hence Watson calling Umunna's split a "premature conclusion".

The book describes how Watson and Mandelson set up a caucus within the PLP - "a party within a party" - to organise against Corbyn. Mandelson and Watson are among those who in the 1980s expelled supporters of the Socialist Party, then Militant, for allegedly being a "party within a party". But for them, if you are arguing for capitalist rather than socialist ideas, doing so is not only acceptable but heroic.

The capitalist programme of all of those who plotted against Corbyn is also openly acknowledged in the book. Umunna's split stood for "a market economy, a rules-based international order, and remain". No wonder it disappeared without trace.

# Book: Left Out - the inside story of Labour under Corbyn

## Retreat and hesitation could not beat relentless right wing

Blair insisted they needed a programme, but it is very difficult to build deep-felt popular support for a programme that is fundamentally defending the status quo of capitalist inequality and austerity.

Keir Starmer will find this out against the background of a new phase of economic crisis. The advantage of 'not being Johnson' will soon shatter if he comes to power and attempts to implement a programme in the interests of capitalism.

The way in which the Labour right cynically used allegations of antisemitism is also clearly revealed by the book. For example, Watson saw the hatchet-job Panorama programme "as a blunt instrument with which to smash" Corbyn.

"Watson invited MPs to circumvent Southside [Labour Party HQ] and submit claims to antisemitism and bullying to him. His next job was to expose them publicly and tarnish them irrevocably."

How much clearer could it be that this had nothing to do with genuine concerns about antisemitism and everything to do with a cynical attempt to "smash" Corbyn?

The book also describes the role played by Keir Starmer, now Labour leader. As shadow Brexit secretary he bided his time, pushing the leadership towards supporting a second referendum, and opposing those, including Corbyn, who wanted to call Johnson's bluff and clearly campaign for a general election during the Brexit deadlock.

### Behind scenes

Starmer publicly kept his distance from the open saboteurs, but behind the scenes met arch-Blairite Tom Baldwin once a week to discuss tactics.

Unfortunately, Left Out not only confirms the intransigence and determination of all the pro-capitalist anti-Corbynites. It also vividly describes the hesitation and retreats of Corbyn and his supporters.

It confirms what appeared to be the case, that Corbyn often had better instincts than many of his advisors. For example, one of his best speeches on Brexit - which the book says was a factor in convincing the nascent Independent Group to split - where he pointed to how a worker in Tottenham and a worker in Mansfield may have voted differently in the referendum but faced all the same problems, was one of the few written entirely by him and not an aide.

A significant section of Corbyn's immediate circle understood that for working-class voters who had supported Brexit, it would be seen as betrayal not to - as they had in 2017 - promise to respect the referendum result.

One shadow cabinet minister is quoted as saying Labour's 'tests' on



**Keir Starmer met arch-Blairite Tom Baldwin once a week to discuss tactics**



CHATHAM HOUSE/CC

Brexit "were crap. They were unsellable in my constituency. We want the same rights in the labour market as we've got already? What does that mean? People voted against Europe because they think work is shit."

Howard Beckett, Labour national executive committee member from Unite, is quoted as saying: "The working class voted leave. Listen to the working class." Unite's left leadership is correctly credited with being central to preventing a complete rush to support remain.

The majority of Corbyn's circle, however, wanted to move in the direction of supporting remain. On all issues they wanted at every stage to find a position that they hoped would pacify the Labour right, and beyond them the capitalist class.

Unfortunately, as was also clear from outside, it was shadow chancellor John McDonnell who usually led the retreat and attempts to compromise, often without first consulting

Corbyn. None of them, however, were prepared to give a consistent fighting lead, calling on those who supported Corbyn to fight to transform the Labour Party into a democratic workers' and socialist party.

The more intransigent the right, the more inclined to compromise the left became, which in turn gave the right more confidence they could win. The book describes how, following the departure of the Independent Group, "Corbyn would make major concessions in order to prevent any further defections."

He "announced that, unless its Brexit plan passed the Commons... Labour would support a second referendum. Outside of the Labour Party, the splitters appeared to have taken only a week to effect the shift they had wasted the best part of a year agitating for inside it."

Then the right were given a further boost by the suspension of left MP Chris Williamson - which to the right

"served as proof of a vital sentiment: dissent worked - especially when expressed in public." While it boosted the right, it also inevitably deepened the disillusionment among Corbyn supporters.

This book is a very frustrating read for all socialists who saw an opportunity in Corbyn's election as Labour leader to create a mass party that fought in the interests of the working-class majority

Not because it disproves that such an outcome was necessary or possible, but rather because its endless details confirm the ways in which the opportunity was squandered via retreats and hesitation.

However, without meaning to, it also drives home the lesson that trade unionists and socialists need to ensure future attempts are successful - albeit, after the defeat of Corbynism within the Labour framework, in a new party of the working class.



# EGYPT: SUPPORT FOR AL-SISI DWINDLES AS HIS REGIME INCREASES REPRESSION

DAVID JOHNSON,  
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

Popular support for Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's dictatorial regime is vanishing. Only 14% of adults took part in August's Senate election, despite polling stations staying open for two days, and voting being compulsory.

A list of non-voters has been sent for prosecution. Fines of up to LE500 (£24.50) can be issued; the equivalent of one week's legal minimum wage. But with 54 million people on this list, it is unlikely many will pay!

The Senate is a toothless 'advisory' body set up by al-Sisi, who appoints 100 of its 300 members. This election, like the regime as a whole, is reminiscent of the sham elections held under former President Hosni Mubarak, who was ousted by a mass uprising in February 2011.

## Dictatorship

Last year, al-Sisi engineered a change in the constitution to allow him to remain president until 2034, following the examples of Erdogan in Turkey and Xi Jinping in China. But the 2011 uprising remains a tremendous reminder of the power of mass movements to bring down dictators despite their armed state machines.

Brutal stamping down on the opposition is even worse under al-Sisi than under Mubarak.

Opponents are described and treated as "terrorists". On 25 August, el-Din Hassan, a prominent human rights activist, was sentenced to 15 years jail by the counter-terrorism court created in 2017.

Normal judicial processes do not apply in the court and there is no right of appeal. El-Din Hassan commented on Twitter and at UN human rights meetings about the justice system's failure to hold state officials accountable for widespread killings, torture, and disappearances

since al-Sisi took power in 2014. Bahai el-Din Hassan lives in exile, but thousands of other less well-known activists suffer in prison.

Critical journalists and TV presenters have been fired. Three young women TikTok 'influencers' with followings of up to 1.3 million were arrested. The regime is fearful of any possible avenues for public dissent.

During the coronavirus lockdown, many children flew kites. State authorities worried these could be used to fly banners or cameras, banning them in July. Hundreds of kites were confiscated in Alexandria and Cairo, and parents fined up to LE1000!

In September 2019, protests broke out on the streets after one disaffected Egyptian businessman living in Spain posted on Facebook his account of the corruption of Egyptian state officials. Everyone knows that corruption has continued since, despite the occasional example of a high-profile businessman linked to the Mubarak family being prosecuted.

Al-Sisi's regime rests on support from senior military officers. The armed forces have considerable business interests, which sometimes conflict with other sections of the capitalist class who were close to Hosni Mubarak and his sons.

The government approved just one private company to carry out paid-for Covid-19 testing - 'Prime Speed Medical' - in which Tamer Wagih is a major investor.

He was an executive of al-Sisi's 2014 election campaign and now chairs the university hospital council with links to the ministry of higher education, which indirectly oversees Prime Speed Medical's testing.

By the end of August, there had been almost 99,000 cases of Covid-19 and almost 5,400 deaths, according to official figures. These are almost certainly underestimates - Egypt's under-financed health services cannot test or treat all those who are

unable to pay for health care. Health workers who spoke out about PPE shortages have been threatened, and at least nine arrested between March and June.

## Cuts

While some of al-Sisi's cronies are making money from the pandemic, millions of low-paid public sector workers have had a 1% pay cut. Pensions were cut 0.5%. Electricity price subsidies have also been cut. Hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost in tourism-related industries.

Five-and-a-half million Egyptians work abroad. Many were furloughed or lost jobs and were unable to send money home to support their families.

In late August the regime started demolishing thousands of illegally built homes unless residents pay expensive fees. Tens of thousands of families face sudden homelessness, some after living in their homes over forty years.

Meanwhile, unused industrial land is to be exempted from real estate tax - a key business demand in recent years.

Egypt's huge state debt means the government aims to keep the budget deficit down to a level that allows it to borrow on international markets without sky-high interest rates. Foreign investors withdrew 50% of their Treasury bill holdings between February and March this year. International Monetary Fund loans, totalling US\$8 billion this year, come with conditions - more privatisation and public spending cuts.

Workers organising together to demand better pay and decent public services would threaten big business' profits and the foreign investment the government is desperate to retain.

Egypt's large and potentially powerful working class has been unable to make its voice heard, so



Egypt's autocratic president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi PHOTO SECURITYCONFERENCE.ORG/IMPRESSUM/CC

far, under al-Sisi's iron-fisted regime. But just as Mubarak found out, anger and resentment building below the surface can eventually erupt like a volcano. Despite the present dangers and difficulties, workers need to organise.

A key lesson of the 2011 uprising was that workers need their own political party so that the working class can act together, for their own interests, and draw behind it other poor and oppressed people.

Building a mass party under

conditions of military repression is extremely difficult, but activists can start to assemble the framework upon which such a party could rapidly develop when conditions change.

Discussion is vital to draw up the socialist programme necessary to make real and lasting change for Egypt's workers and youth and how to relate it to their issues of daily concern. Not only Egypt but the whole Middle East and North Africa desperately needs socialism and workers' democracy.

## Nigerian police repress peaceful anti-government protest



PHOTO SOCIALIST PARTY OF NIGERIA

On 10 September, Nigerian police arrested members of the Socialist Party of Nigeria and journalists.

The arrested SPN members were on a peaceful protest in Lagos to demand immediate reversal of the hike in electricity tariffs and fuel prices by the Buhari/APC government, and for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to respect the judgement of the Appeal Court by relisting SPN and other political parties.

The arrested included SPN National Secretary, Chinedu Bosah, National Youth Leader of the party, Hassan Taiwo Soweto, SPN National Executive member, Dagga Tolar, and about 15 others, including four

journalists with Galaxy TV, Sahara reporters, Premium Times and Objectv media.

Cameras and phones of the journalists were seized and destroyed while all arrested were physically brutalised.

However, an international solidarity campaign initiated by the Committee for a Workers' International, along with pressure from Nigerian labour movement activists, secured the release of the detainees. Also, all charges against them were dropped.





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# the Socialist

Issue 1101

17-23 September 2020

formerly **Militant**

## NHS workers say:

# “WE DESERVE A FAIR WAGE”



# 15% NOW



Kirsty Brewerton, an NHS clinical sister and activist in the ‘NHS Say No’ campaign, spoke about their fight for a 15% pay rise at the National Shop Stewards Network rally before the Trade Union Congress on 13 September (see page 5).

**O**ur campaign grew through years of frustration with politicians only using us and our profession to win votes and their promises as hollow as their Thursday claps. When it was announced that most nurses were not included in the latest public sector pay increases, they lit the torch. And an uprising

like I’ve not seen in my nursing career erupted - a reaction to the constant hammering from this Tory government.

What began as a Facebook group of incensed members has become a group of 85,000 members. We’ve marched and protested and the message is the same - 15% pay increase for all NHS workers.

The response from Matt Hancock and the government is to remind us of this scam they call a three-year pay deal. Which we should all apparently be grateful for. The manipulation of maths by this Tory government is astounding - always skewed to paint a picture to fit their rhetoric.

However, they are trying to manipulate the wrong workforce. We’re pretty good at numbers. If we fiddled the maths like they do, our

patients would pay the price. We are left disputing those in power regarding this supposed pay deal and it’s been eye-opening to see this blatant manipulation of facts.

The pay deal was skewed to be beneficial to newly qualified staff, those more experienced hardly felt an increase at all. This year it will be just 1.7% for most staff which is a long way off 15%. And it’s nowhere near in line with inflation.

Hancock conveniently left out that ministers have awarded themselves an eighth pay rise in a decade of austerity. And their Covid bonus of £10,000, plus thousands in expenses.

Following the pressure from NHS Say No, the unions have begun to align their campaigns. GMB is now calling for 15%, Unite too, RCN 12.5%, and Unison is asking for

£2,000 for each worker. While this is positive, it is not enough. We all need to be singing from the same hymn sheet and working together. This government cannot be given an excuse to manipulate the numbers.

We are so much stronger together. For a long time we felt disempowered, disillusioned and despondent. But we have proved that we do have a voice.

For years the NHS has been desecrated by the Tory government, slowly and slyly picked apart, chronically underfunded and undervalued.

The entire NHS workforce has proven that despite this, when faced with a global pandemic we can adapt and overcome.

Despite their failings, we battled on with inadequate PPE, risking our

lives to save others while procurement of essential equipment by corrupt contracts was procured purely through nepotism.

Mates’ rates where I’m from usually means you get a bargain rather than wasting billions on non-existent or useless products. Yet there is apparently no money left for a pay rise for NHS workers. The hypocrisy is unreal. Rather than investing in their mates hair-brained schemes - invest in the experts who have been doing the job for years.

Without us there is no NHS. We are already 100,000 members of staff short. For the skills and experience we need - we deserve a fair wage. Claps don’t pay the bills and our pay deal is a farce. Stand with us and fight for 15%.

• See also pages 6-7