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the Socialist

Issue 1103

1-6 October 2020

formerly **Militant**

OUR LIVES AND JOBS



We need union action to secure jobs and safety

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LITTLE, TOO LATE >>> p2-3**

PHOTO NICKOLAY ROMENSKY

 **We did it! Fighting fund target smashed: £71,522 raised**

theSocialist

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

TORY SCHEME WON'T HALT MASS UNEMPLOYMENT: MOBILISE THE UNIONS!



Job Support Scheme - too little, too late

● Workers are 'disposable'

I was working with an agency. I started in April. I was doing about 30 hours a week with them, so regular work. As soon as Covid hit, I was let go with immediate effect.

They didn't offer me any sort of compensation. So from there I had to apply for benefits. Since then, I've tried to contact the agency, but they say they no longer require anybody's services.

A lot of the workers I worked alongside, they've been in the company for 15 years, give or take, full-time. A lot of them were let go as well.

It's frustrating. With a zero-hour contract - it's just so unfair. They just let you go. You give so much of your time, and then, because of the contract, they don't owe you anything.

When I messaged my manager, he was like, 'there's nothing I can do, sorry'. And that was it! I thought even if I was on a zero-hour contract I might be entitled to something. I tried to call a few times and his phone was off.

I live at home. But there's so many other people who have been working for the company for years. They've got kids, they've got a house, they've got bills to pay. They were just left with nothing. They go straight to Job-seeker's Allowance.

The Covid situation has highlighted a lot of problems. One of them is zero-hour contracts. It's not stable. There's so many people on zero-hour contracts.

The furlough scheme did nothing to help me. The new 'job support scheme' will do nothing to help me.

I was really loyal to that agency. Any time they called me - 'can you do this, can you do that, can you come an extra hour, can you cover this shift' - I'm like yeah, sure, no problem. But as soon as this happens - 'oh sorry, we can't help you.'

It's just like I'm disposable. What's the point?

AN AGENCY WORKER IN LONDON

● There is nothing to protect us

I work for an events company. The events industry has been decimated by the pandemic. I have always been employed on fixed-term contracts - to give my employer the flexibility of being able to increase or decrease its workforce. So I don't have any job security.

The company had kept us on and topped us up to our full salary. In October they're going to cut the four members of staff on fixed-term contracts - four out of thirty-something, so it amounts to quite a large amount of work.

We were told a couple of months ago that this might happen. But when the government announced that it wouldn't be extending the furlough scheme, or doing anything helpful, we received emails. As far as our employer's concerned, it made absolutely no difference, because business has not picked up.

The four of us are the most junior members of staff. We're on the lowest salaries. I do the books, so I know that I earn the least! And we are the first people to go.

Because we are on short-term contracts, there is no redundancy. There's nothing to protect us. We just will not be employed, with no fallback at all, by 1 November.

The Tories' attitude has been very typically blinkered. It shows little understanding of the precariousness of many, many jobs, especially in the service industries. The people who hold those jobs are more likely to be vulnerable, more likely to be young people, trying to keep a foot in the door.

I've had an email saying an administration job received over 900 applications. I work in the arts - we've seen the Tate Galleries and Southbank Centre have got rid of a whole layer of people. All of those jobs have already been outsourced on much lower wages.

The Tories must have realised that unemployment is going to reach astronomic levels in my age

bracket at the end of October! We need to extend the furlough scheme. We need to increase the benefits roll-out.

Benefits need to be easier to get. We can't sit in queues of 70,000 or 80,000 applicants, which is the situation some of my friends are facing. I've had friends denied benefits because of a glitch in the system, which means they've gone four weeks without any money at all.

It's a really disgusting state of affairs. The Tories couldn't even extend their pseudo-sympathy for six months.

ELLEN KENYON PEERS

● Scrambling for jobs

I currently work for a charity organising physical events, and was put on furlough when the scheme was announced. Throughout the scheme we had reassurances that we would be fine.

As it got closer to the end of the scheme and we weren't being brought back into the office, that was a bad sign. As we were due to return from furlough, a new 'Covid-proof' restructure was announced, and a number of positions have been made redundant.

Sunak's announcement comes too late. Organisations have already made their redundancy plans in anticipation of the end of the furlough

A DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS WORKER

The Tories' new 'Job Support Scheme' will do nothing to save jobs. It should be renamed the 'job scrapping scheme'.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak announced the launch of the Job Support Scheme on Thursday 24 September 2020. It launches on 1 November, and will replace the Job Retention Scheme, commonly known as furlough.

Introduced alongside the initial Covid-19 lockdown in April, furlough paid workers 80% of their salary to remain at home throughout. The total cost of furlough will be around £60 billion, according to the Office for Budget Responsibility in June. Tory backbenchers have already begun panicking about paying workers to 'do nothing'.

The new Job Support Scheme would introduce a steeper wage cut for workers - if employers even take it up. Compared to furlough, the new scheme requires a larger contribution from employers. This will speed the process of bosses making workers redundant, particularly in low-paid jobs.

In theory, workers covered by the scheme would work part-time.

Part of their wage would be paid by their employer, including paying for some hours not worked. The government would pay a small contribution (22%); the remainder would not be paid at all (23%).

Tories have lauded this as workers "making a contribution" to the scheme, by accepting a significant pay cut. To be covered at all, a worker has to be in a 'viable' job - so sectors which have not yet reopened would not be covered.

Ineffective

But it won't work. Sunak himself has said that it "can't save every job." One Barclays economist went further: "I don't even think anyone will take it up."

Sunak announced the scheme outside 11 Downing Street with Frances O'Grady, the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress, on one side of him, and Dame Carolyn Fairbairn, director-general of the bosses' Confederation of British Industry, on the other!

Meanwhile, the Starmer-led counter-revolution in the Labour Party continues apace. Shadow Chancellor Anneliese Dodds has argued that training workers will cure unemployment. All the training in the world will be wasted unless there are jobs to go to.

The Socialist Party demands:

- **Unions must fight to defend all jobs under threat**
- **Retain and extend the furlough scheme. Work or full pay**
- **Invest in free training and apprenticeships on full pay. With a decent, guaranteed job at the end**
- **Increase benefits in line with the minimum wage - no delay in payment**
- **A minimum wage of £12 an hour as a step towards £15 an hour**

scheme. My employer has stated that it is not going to be changing plans.

The new announcements seem to be putting faith in companies actually caring about their employees, and not just making decisions on the basis of how best to make money. It feels like the government's main motivation has been to delay redundancies and to make itself appear less accountable for mass unemployment.

I have been put in a position where my co-workers are scrambling to get whatever role they can get. Some of my colleagues have made financial commitments in renewing tenancies, mortgage payments and now find themselves in situations where they cannot afford to pay the bills.

It's not just the service sector that is affected. I work in the charity sector and I feel like the next wave of redundancies is affecting the rest of the economy too. Redundancies are now permeating into companies that are functioning, but making redundancies in anticipation of a second wave.

HANNAH JONES

● Employers have already made the decision to let staff go

I am an office administrator at an office in Battersea. I have been on furlough since March and have just been let go today. My furlough payments are going to come to an end.

As a result, I am going to be forced to claim Universal Credit but have just found out that it takes five



weeks for the first payment to come through. I will have to go a month without any income.

The job market looks bleak, especially for admin jobs, as companies are looking to downsize.

I was hoping that my company would leave me on furlough until I was able to find another job. The reason I have been given for receiving my P45 is that the company did not

These ills are created by the renewed global crisis of capitalism. Instead, Labour should argue for massive state intervention to save and create jobs, and nationalisation of employers which threaten redundancies.

Many of the job losses are in retail and hospitality. Premier Inn owner Whitbread has announced 6,000 redundancies. Yet already the Department for Work and Pensions, which oversees unemployment benefits, has been working with hospitality and retail employers to develop new "sector-based work academies" - essentially unpaid work in the same areas!

Unions must fight

This is the only 'training' that the bosses will offer unless there is a significant fightback by the trade unions. Workers are very worried about their future prospects, even where they currently have a job. The fight continues to force the unions to shoulder their responsibilities.

Union leaders must fight to defend every job that's under threat, to ensure safe workplaces, and demand protection for every worker's income.

It is not too late to fight for retention of the furlough scheme, with 100% pay. The Tories have shown the money is there and have made repeated U-turns under pressure (see p6).

Only a mobilised trade union movement, willing to utilise strikes and demonstrations, can wrest this from the teeth of the capitalists and their Tory lapdogs.

No more photos with Tories - build the fightback instead!



WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

Our demands include...

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

WORK AND INCOME

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

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

RIGHTS

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

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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Under the microscope

• **Low-paid workers can claim a pitiful £500 for compulsory two-week self-isolation** from 28 September. Four million will be eligible - but who can afford to self-isolate for £200 less than the minimum wage? Meanwhile, those who can't afford to skip work could face Tory fines of up to £10,000!

• **Six million poor UK households could be £1,000 a year worse off from April**, calculates the Resolution Foundation. Without a fightback, Rishi Sunak will end his furlough scheme and modest boosts to tax credits and Universal Credit - with ruinous consequences.

• **Covid-19 infections at UK food factories could be many times higher than official figures**, reports investment consultancy Pirc. Bosses employing 430,000 workers have apparently filed just 47 infection notifications, none lethal. Pirc dug up at least 1,461 infections and six deaths.

• **The wait for coronavirus test results is actually getting longer.** Only 28% of results from testing centres in England came back within 24 hours in the week to 16 September, says NHS Test and Trace. Some took over three days. In Wales, the privatised 'Lighthouse Labs' only managed to process 4.4% of tests in the week to 23 September - down from 10%, says NHS Wales.

• **22% of people in Britain say they are unlikely to get a Covid vaccination** if it becomes available, finds UCL. The Tories have utilised scientific figureheads as cover for their blatant anti-worker agenda, while rushing through profit-first research and development. No wonder trust is so low.

• **30,000 excess deaths have occurred in people's private residences** since the pandemic was declared, says the ONS. 10,000 of these occurred since June, well after the first peak. Fears of overrun hospitals - and policies which sacrifice the elderly - are to blame.

• **Black, Asian and minority ethnic people in the UK are over twice as likely to have lost paid work** during the crisis, finds the IPPR. They are also around twice as likely to struggle with bills.

• **The pandemic and depression could thrust a further 100 million people globally into 'extreme poverty' this year**, reckons the World Bank. Last year there were 630 million in this category - surviving on under \$1.90 a day (at 2011 prices).

• **Covid-19's official global death toll has surpassed one million**, says Johns Hopkins University. "If anything, the numbers currently reported probably represent an underestimate," said an emergencies expert for the World Health Organisation.

COVID RESTRICTIONS EXPOSE TORY SPLITS

For democratic working-class control of health and safety



WHAT WE THINK

While government ministers warn of an exponential rise of the coronavirus, the same magnitude of rise could be applied to the level of anger against them over their handling of the pandemic.

An overwhelming majority of people have shown willingness to accept restrictions, tests, etc, to help reduce the spread of Covid. However, restrictions can become increasingly tiresome, especially after hope of them ending. But much more intolerable is the Johnson government's abysmal failure on every aspect of countering the pandemic.

Track and trace, testing, local 'lockdowns', schools and universities restarting, lack of financial support for people isolating - all have further exposed the chaos and ineptitude at the top. They have also exposed the government's central motive of trying to safeguard big business and profit-making, rather than prioritising people's health.

Even so, not only has the UK been one of the worst-hit countries health-wise, it has also had one of the greatest economic declines.

People rightly ridicule the argument that the coronavirus spread is being driven by social mixing, and not in schools, workplaces or on public transport. Confidence in the government's actions is evaporating as fast as its zigzags take place: there was a gap of only a few weeks between workers being urged to return to their workplaces and then told not to, and between the 'eat out to help out' scheme and the 10pm curfew.

Class divide

The exposure in May of Johnson's advisor Dominic Cummings' self-exemption from Covid restrictions has been followed by other naked class or status-based exemptions, such as for grouse shooting. Parliament's bars were initially not subjected to the 10pm curfew until a public outcry forced a reversal.

Meanwhile, students are presently at the sharp end, with many facing prison-like conditions and still expected to pay financially for their nightmare experience (see p 5). Also, while largely confined to online teaching due to the lack of provision of safe face-to-face conditions, they



PAUL MATTHEWSON

are not discouraged from doing their jobs in the food and retail industry, unless they've had isolation imposed.

The Tory party's members, MPs and donors realise that outrage is developing and are lashing out at Johnson. The Guardian's political editor commented: "The scale of discontent in the Tory party is extraordinary for a government with a thumping majority, so early in its term, and in the teeth of a national crisis".

But they are widely divided over what to advocate, with some wanting tighter anti-Covid measures and others cheering chancellor Sunak's message that "lives can no longer be put on hold". Sunak received the highest rating in a poll of Tory party members, showing which wing most of them are falling behind.

At the same time, a number of Tory MPs from different viewpoints have been rebelling against "government exercising draconian powers, without parliamentary scrutiny in advance", as Tory MP Steve Baker put it, laying bare the domineering nature of the Johnson leadership - a small cabal dishing out diktats.

Many of them are also uneasy about the newly introduced draconian penalties, increased state powers and encouragement by health minister Matt Hancock of a culture of snooping. This, though, is from a libertarian point of view, not from that of the workers' movement, which must assess all the rules from a working-class standpoint and fight against all unacceptable measures.

Socialist alternative

The movement also has to warn against powers being held in reserve by the government for use against protesters and workers' struggles.

No trust can be placed in any of the democracy-feigning Tory MPs, or other pro-capitalist parliamentary politicians, to make decisions in the interests of ordinary people.

As the Socialist has argued throughout the pandemic, trade unions and working people need to fight for the right to be able to check, assess and control all special measures - at workplace, campus, community, regional and national level. This is the only way to make sure that

restrictions and other steps are only used to safeguard the health and other interests of working-class and middle-class people.

The majority in society could only have confidence in restrictions decided on by their own democratically controlled representatives - the only people who could be trusted to put people's interests before profit.

Every organisation involved in implementing Covid-related measures should be publicly owned and democratically controlled. However, beyond that, building support for a full socialist programme - and a mass workers' party to implement it - is necessary to protect and develop the living standards of all.

It is also the case that only a socialist society, with public ownership of the major companies that effectively control the economy, would be able to resource and take effective preventative measures against future pandemics.

It would then be possible to take early enough action to stop a pandemic like this one from gaining hold and spreading.

● Expensive online courses in ghost towns

Going to university right now feels like walking into a trap made of fire, surrounded by circling sharks, as alarms blare off in every direction.

Watching the news and seeing the blame go to students for the rise in cases just goes to show how afraid the capitalist class is of young people today. They want to scapegoat us, as we have shown that when we are angry, we fight back - and right now we have every reason to be angry!

Most students are frustrated that our uni experience has been narrowed down to an eye-wateringly expensive online course while the whole uni has become a ghost town. The pressure is 'well, you're here now' - and you'll be unable to get your money back if you go back to your parents anyway.

Students are only allowed to socialise within our household 'bubble', and not mix with other households. While meeting the flatmates, there is a silent anxiety about cabin fever come another lockdown. Walking past the hundreds of pointless student union banners promising two-for-one cocktails at this night, or 10% off at that pizza company, is just a reminder.

This trap was laid by the university vice-chancellors, and their friends who own major businesses and student accommodation, so that they can stay afloat. The marketisation of unis has led to higher education becoming yet another thread in the capitalist spider-web.

But a spider-web is only strong when every part is intact. If one thread breaks, the rest can start to fail too. It really shows how precarious the capitalist system is.

The Tories have thrown students into unsafe environments, with almost no access to facilities, then pointed the blame at us for infection rates, with only debt, unemployment or lifelong servitude for us to look forward to. All for a buffering screen on Zoom.

MICHELLE FRANCIS
BANGOR UNIVERSITY

● Bosses trapped us here to boost economy

It was obvious from the start that we wouldn't be able to access any teaching in the campuses. But they still made all the students move to Swansea and pay for accommodation.

They said, 'we have in-person

Students trapped on Covid campuses speak out



PHOTO VPEREMEN/CC

seminars.' Then it turned into 'in-person study groups'. Now, with local lockdown in Swansea, that's almost definitely not going to happen either. Everything's online and could have been done from home.

The local lockdown in Wales began - suspiciously - in every area in South Wales, excluding Swansea and Cardiff, where the two main universities are. The day after the final load of students moved in, we went into local lockdown, so we couldn't leave.

I think you can make a pretty good inference. Students are a big part of the economy in Swansea and Cardiff. When you walk round either city you're surrounded by students.

So they wanted to get all the students in, and then trap us here. One boy in my halls got quite lucky; he dropped out the day before local lockdown.

But everything we're doing now we could have been doing from home. Literally everything's online. I've been to campus once, and that was just to look around. I haven't been to any learning. I'm not even sure if we're allowed to go there now.

There's two campuses at this uni, and one's in a different lockdown area to the other. So two-thirds of the halls can't go to that campus at all, but half the people in those halls have to go to that campus to do any learning. It's just an absolute mess.

Mostly people are annoyed about freshers, because it's all gone away; it wasn't a proper freshers. Security are cracking down in the halls, going after people that are organising gatherings.

We're in massive Covid 'bubbles'. Anyone that's in your block is in your Covid bubble. So there's, like, 70 people in my block, and we're all in one

massive household. We can go anywhere together, but can't mingle with anyone else - literally even across the street that we share all the same facilities with.

People are annoyed about the money as well. Nine grand to essentially sit on the Open University. Which would have been fine if I'd enrolled in the Open University and was paying three grand, but I'm paying three times that. And the fact we have to pay for accommodation.

My halls doesn't have any confirmed cases, but that could change very quickly. When that happens, we could end up the same as Glasgow and Manchester Met, all having to stay inside. And at that point, you might see rent strikes.

OISIN MULHOLLAND
SWANSEA UNIVERSITY

● No plan, no transparency, no safety

We are worried about safety. I know people who are avoiding moving into their student residences as they feel like at any moment there will be a lockdown. We have seen events in Scotland, where it's as if students are imprisoned in their halls.

Universities should not be pursuing a return to campus at any cost, and without a plan. Bosses need to be more transparent about their decision-making, and clearer in their communications.

Students are not allowed to go out to pubs or to meet our friends; all we can do is to sit in our rooms

and brood. Socialist Students has been holding socially distanced street meetings and is starting to campaign.

LLUIS BERTOLIN
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

● Tory education, A-level scandal, clearing - now this

Cardiff and Swansea went into lockdown the day before term starts. People don't know what is going on, what they are and are not allowed to do. Communication from the university has been poor.

Part of our campus is within the local lockdown area and part of it is outside. I can only feel for those first-year students who find themselves in this situation, and in an unfamiliar city.

Lots of this year's new students have gone through education under Michael Gove's 'reforms', have taken part in the A-level protests, have ended up at their third or fourth choice university through clearing - and now this.

The university bosses wanted to open up university because they see students as commodities and want our money. We need free education and an end to marketisation. I can see a mass youth movement developing - we have been holding Socialist Students campaign stalls to build for this.

CHARLIE WELLS
SWANSEA UNIVERSITY

● Read more at socialistparty.org.uk

Socialist Students demands:

- Government-funded refunds for tuition fees - this year and every year! The Tories have shown the money is there. Cancel all student debt - fight for free education and living grants for all
- End the rent rip-off
- No trust in vice-chancellors! For democratic student and staff oversight of campus safety, including testing
- No cuts to courses, jobs or staff pay
- Smash capitalism - fight for socialism!

● Staff member speaks out: we warned this would happen

The outbreaks starting to take hold on university campuses and the dreadful position students have now been forced into has been firmly on the minds of all those who work in universities since the summer.

We followed the stats in the US when their campuses reopened. We looked at the latest evidence about the spread of coronavirus in small spaces. We thought about all those who commute onto campus each day, how students work part-time jobs in the community, and how impossible it would be to contain any outbreak.

The employers and government ignored all of our concerns. They even laughed at us at times. They told us that we don't care about students or their mental health. That we were being difficult.

Now what we had argued would happen is being realised, there is no joy in being right. Rather, it is hugely demoralising for it to have ended up like this. It is a defeat that we have not been able to establish genuinely safe campuses.

But, it is important to remember that it was not inevitable. The government and bosses must take the blame and be held responsible for their actions. So many measures could have been taken to avoid this.

Even now, we should not just accept that all students will get Covid-19 and be isolated all year away from loved ones. In the face of overwhelming evidence that campuses are not Covid-secure, students have still been arriving.

BEA GARDNER
UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE UNION REP (PERSONAL CAPACITY), UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

- Reports of Socialist Students campus activity: p13

MEGAPHONE

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Socialist Students
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- Where next for Black Lives Matter?
- Will the Labour Party fight for students?
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Trade unions must fight to put their stamp on events

ROB WILLIAMS

SOCIALIST PARTY INDUSTRIAL ORGANISER

"We need a call to arms. That's why I call on everyone to write to the press and lobby their MPs". This was the 'clarion call' of Trades Union Congress general secretary Frances O'Grady at the recent online TUC congress to force the Tories to extend the job retention furlough scheme beyond its planned end at the end of October.

This was before Boris Johnson was forced to bring in new contradictory lockdown measures as infections rise ahead of winter. This second wave takes place when workers are already reeling from the threat to their lives and livelihoods as redundancies start to mount.

Congress should have been a council of war to put the whole trade union movement on a war footing behind the clear message that workers will not pay for this crisis. There can't be a rerun of the first wave, when many union leaders capitulated to the 'national unity' mood that was cranked up by the Tory government and their media, the bosses, and Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer.

But the signs aren't good. Instead of a call to arms, a week later O'Grady was virtually arm in arm with Tory chancellor Sunak and the head of bosses' union the CBI when the Job Support Scheme was announced.

'All in this together?'

Ask the British Airways workers if 'we are all in this together' Management sacked 12,000 of them and used brutal 'fire and rehire' methods against the rest to impose attacks on their contracts. This now appears to be the Covid weapon of choice for the employers, with it being rolled out for British Gas to Go Ahead buses as well as, scandalously, Labour Tower Hamlets council, forcing Union members to strike. This offensive is increasingly being spearheaded by the victimisation of union reps and members.

Back in March and April, as the pandemic struck, union leaderships stood down disputes. This inability to stand up against national unity, and the stark reality of unsafe workplaces and economic crisis is the root cause of a whole series of crises that have broken out in what seems to be union after union in the last few months.

On the surface, these internal struggles, splits and divisions appear to be mere personal antagonisms. But they are caused by the union leaders being mired in pessimism that it's not possible for workers to fight given the economic carnage.

The defeat of Corbynism has seemingly shut off the political front for them, although many, including from the left, have adopted the 'lesser evilism' of giving uncritical support to Keir Starmer, despite him shifting Labour to the right.

But it's not impossible to fight. Actually, while the union leaders' initial reaction was to lay down their arms in the 'national interest', there have been firstly a whole number of unofficial actions as workers fought



TOWER HAMLETS WORKERS STRIKING AGAINST 'FIRE AND REHIRE' PLANS

to make their workplaces safe, and then official strikes to resist the attacks on jobs and pay, terms and conditions.

It was the threat of a strike ballot in British Airways by over a thousand Unite members in a socially distanced mass meeting that forced management to return to the negotiating table. PCS members, out indefinitely at the Tate galleries in London have taken over 40 days of strike action, while Unison rehab workers in the north west of England and GMB members in Brighton are both striking for ten days further action in their respective disputes.

It is vital that this action be backed by the demand that companies should be taken into public ownership to save workers' jobs.

There is a totally different mood now to when the pandemic first struck. The incompetence and hypocrisy of the Tories, summed up by Cummins's breaking lockdown restrictions without any comeback, has stripped bare the class inequalities in society and built a furious mood.

This was the basis for the mass Black Lives Matter movement, and the NHS pay protests, which were organised by rank-and-file health and

care workers because of the absence of the union leaders. However, the pressure of this has forced the NHS unions to table pay claims up to the 15% demanded on the marches. The new lockdown is only going to fuel this mood.

In addition, the student A-levels rebellion forced the Tories to U-turn in a mounting number of retreats. The National Shop Stewards Network called on the TUC and the unions to organise a day of protest on Saturday 24 October to demand that the government continues the job retention scheme but on the basis of 'work or full pay'.

If properly organised and built for, raising the need for co-ordinated industrial action, a trade union protest could still lever huge pressure on the Tories to fully retreat. They may have had to bend because of the new restrictions and economic threats, but this is the opportunity for the union movement to put its stamp on events, and give confidence to workers that it's possible to fight and win.

This is crucial to cut across the division and conspiracy theories of the populist right politicians, uniting workers against the real class enemy, the Tories and the bosses.

Get all the latest union news...



UNISON: HUGO PIERRE IS ON THE BALLOT - VOTE FOR A FIGHTING SOCIALIST!

Hugo Pierre, a Socialist Party member and candidate for Unison general secretary, is on the ballot paper for the election after receiving the nomination of 31 branches across the country and the different sectors Unison organises.

Hugo is also endorsed by the union's National Black Members' Committee.

The ballot will run from 28 October to 27 November 2020.

Hugo is standing on the following programme:

- We won't pay for the Covid-19 crisis!
- Local authorities: a national fight for £10 billion funding - fight all cuts and demand Labour councillors don't vote for cuts
- For a renationalised NHS and social care sector with full collective bargaining and national terms and conditions
- Reverse all education privatisation. Academies back to local authorities

- Full funding for further and higher education
- For a real fight on public sector pay to reverse the 'austerity years' pay cuts - for a £15-an-hour minimum wage
- Fight for jobs and homes, not racism. Black lives matter!
- Not a penny of members' money to Labour representatives who back cuts, privatisation or austerity
- For genuine members' control of our union, with the election of union officials
- For a trade union fight to end environmental catastrophe
- A pledge not to take the £138,000-a-year salary. but live on a worker's wage

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

PCS: No to DWP management's plans - Yes to action



PHOTO HELEN COBAIN



HUGO PIERRE

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

PCS union members in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) are reacting furiously to management's rush to book appointments in all the Jobcentres, a move especially targeted at 18-to-24 year olds.

Throughout the pandemic, our members have ensured that anyone who needs our services gets help. But the priority has been delivering services safely and, in the main, this has been done over the phone or digitally, keeping both the public and our members safe.

We can continue doing this and focus on providing quality services, whereas management want to drag the public into Jobcentres for just a ten-minute appointment for no good reason.

With the soaring rate of Covid-19 cases, and more and more towns and cities going into local lockdowns, it is reckless to make claimants travel across communities into Jobcentres for an interview that could be done over the phone.

And help could be directed by our experienced members to those who most need the support rather than the stats-driven approach that is being proposed.

The plans are nothing to do with helping the public but all to do with government's and bosses' offensive against workers during the recession trying to make the working class pay for the pandemic.

Management has failed to comply with the duty to consult over the review of the Jobcentre risk assessments for this major change in services. This is making our offices even more dangerous, as the measures are not being put properly in place to deal with the increased callers safely.

But they have bitten off more than they can chew as they have enraged our members, and even many site managers are resisting the attempts to put the public and our members in danger.

Members are attending car-park meetings and frustrating the attempts to bring loads of claimants into our workplaces. We will not be restricted by management instructions not to tell claimants that attending the interview in a Jobcentre is voluntary.

Following the 77% consultative Yes vote supporting the union's campaign to oppose the expansion of services and the opening hours of the sites, Broad Left Network supporters are demanding bold action to stop management's dangerous plans.

The DWP group executive must follow through now with a statutory ballot for strike action and action short of strike action of all the members impacted to stop the extension of services and opening hours.

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Usdaw elections: Defend members' right to participate

IAIN DALTON

USDAW BROAD LEFT CHAIR

During the Covid-19 pandemic, members of Usdaw, the shop and distribution workers' union, have been hit hard. The non-food retail sector was particularly affected by the recession that was developing prior to Covid and which has now been accelerated by it.

125,000 jobs have been lost in the retail sector in 2020, with 13,867 shops permanently closing. The crisis in retail, with knock-on consequences in distribution and manufacturing where Usdaw also organises, is a factor in the significant drops which have taken place in the number of union members and of union reps.

The pandemic has also contributed towards completely disorganising the union. Union offices have been shut, officials have been working from home, and many reps feel that they have been left to fend for themselves.

Substantial numbers of Usdaw branches have not been meeting at all during the pandemic - despite the availability of Zoom. During lockdown, no guidance has been produced from General Secretary Paddy

Lillis to assist branch secretaries to effectively resume branch meetings.

This was the backdrop to the scheduled elections for president, executive council and divisional councils in Usdaw. And yet Lillis still pushed for the elections to go ahead, regardless.

This was opposed by the Usdaw Broad Left. We want to elect a fighting union leadership that will stand up to the bosses in the industry and the government, and that will mobilise members to defend workers' safety, jobs and conditions. But to proceed with elections as things stand would lead to a democratic deficit with only part of the union being able to take part fully in the nomination process.

We therefore support the decision by Usdaw's executive council to overturn the recommendations of Paddy Lillis and postpone the elections by a year.

Concerns have been raised that with elections suspended, Usdaw's Annual Delegate Meeting (ADM) will not be able to go ahead. However, the timetable for ADM would not usually be set at this time, and the only elections which would affect it, those for the standing orders committee which oversees ADM, while

usually held alongside the others, are not subject to the same rules as the delayed elections.

Given the changed situation in retail over the last year, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, plans should be put in place by the executive committee for the ADM to go ahead in as 'normal' a fashion as possible, ideally in person as usual, including holding it slightly later in the year if this facilitates it.

Under Lillis' watch, even executive council members of the union are being victimised by companies - such is the case with executive council member for Scotland and Glasgow Ikea rep Richie Venton (see below), who Lillis has so far failed to even publicly support. So what hope is there for other reps feeling confident the union's officials have their back?

Fully restarting the union's democratic structures is not just an organisational task, but also a political one. This starts with putting forward a strategy for reps and activists to defend the interests of Usdaw members, whether in retail, distribution or any other sector the union organises in, and throwing the full weight of the union behind any member that companies attempt to victimise for doing just that.



Security at Ikea manhandled and shoved peaceful protesters, including Socialist Party members and the Blacklist Support Group, out of Ikea's Tottenham store on 24 September. They were demanding the reinstatement of sacked Usdaw shop steward Richie Venton.

Richie was sacked by Ikea for fighting against plans to cut sick pay in the Glasgow store during the pandemic.

- See the video at facebook.com/ReelNews



STILL CRAWLING AT 60: CAPITALISM HAS FAILED NIGERIA

PELUOLA ADEWALE
DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST MOVEMENT
(DSM - CWI IN NIGERIA)

It will be 60 years on 1 October since Nigeria got its flag independence from Britain during the decolonisation process of Africa. Faced with increasing demands for independence throughout its African colonies, British imperialism moved to hand over the reins of power in Nigeria to the local elite, rather than risk its rule being challenged by a radical liberation movement.

Much before the exit of British imperialism, the country had been billed as having a great future, given its huge human and material resources. But Nigeria has not lived up to its potential. Rather, it is a capitalist paradox - mass misery in the midst of huge resources.

Nigeria is Africa's biggest economy and its largest crude oil producer, yet it wears the toga of 'poverty capital of the world'. Just under half of its population - roughly, 102 million Nigerians out of over 206 million - live in what is described as 'extreme poverty'; the highest number of any country.

The country is a poster boy of the failure of capitalism in a neocolonial country whose ruling elite is backward, corrupt, and prebendalist, ie pursues a system of political patronage.

As soon as it got self-governing powers in 1960, the ruling elite did not waste time demonstrating its utter incapacity to govern, not only in the interest of the working class but also in the long-term interest of capitalism itself.

Soon after independence, intra-class conflicts within the new capitalist elite descended into chaos. This paved the way for the 1966 military coup - the very first military incursion - which nearly ended Nigeria's existence.

War and coups

A three-year civil war broke out from 1967 to 1970 over the decision of eastern Nigeria to secede, over claims of persecution, and form a new nation called Biafra. Over two million Igbos were reportedly killed in that war - mostly women and children, who died from starvation.

From 1966, military coups were a feature of Nigeria, with the last military regime leaving in 1999 after prolonged struggles by the working masses.

Initially, after independence there were attempts, often state-backed, to develop industries, but over time these were abandoned. Partly this was the result of the constrictive imperialist-dominated world economy, but also the 'get rich quick' opportunity that oil and gas extraction provided. Increasingly, the bulk of the Nigerian ruling class took to living off and looting the income from fuel exports.

Today, in all human development indices, Nigeria's record is appalling. It has the largest number of out-of-school children in the world. It also ranks among the countries with the highest maternal and under-five deaths in the world.

These are a result of poor funding of education and health care, especially since the introduction of austerity under the Structural Adjustment Programme in 1986 - something that has continued with the neoliberal capitalist programme of successive governments since the return to civil rule in 1999.

Before the adoption of neoliberal capitalism in the late 1980s, successive Nigerian governments were committed to providing public education, health care and housing, as well as public investment in the economy, although not to the level of what was obtained in south east Asian countries. Pressure from the working masses on the ruling class for social and economic improvements played an important role, and concessions were won in the oil boom years.



In Nigeria, the scale of economic inequality has reached extreme levels, and it finds expression in the daily struggles of the majority of the population... Oxfam report

This came to an end following the combination of a more unstable, polarised world economy, and the weakness, and eventual collapse, of the Soviet Union and other Stalinist 'deformed workers' states. Their collapse helped global capitalism shake off the fear of a rival social system, based on a nationalised, not capitalist economy.

While these countries were not socialist, but run by dictatorial elites, their existence as a counterweight to capitalism forced the ruling capitalist classes on occasion to grant concessions in spending on social services. However, since the 1980s, and especially since the 1990s following the collapse of Stalinism, capitalism has gone on the offensive globally, but with more devastating effect on the conditions of working people in developing countries like Nigeria.

This is deepening economic inequality. For instance, the charity Oxfam, in a 2017 report, reveals that "over the past 40 years, the gap between the rich and the poor has been growing in developed and developing countries alike.

In 2015, just 62 people had as much wealth as the poorest half of humanity, and the richest 1% owned more wealth than the rest of the world combined."

Oxfam added: "In Nigeria, the scale of economic inequality has reached extreme levels, and it finds expression in the daily struggles of the majority of the population in the face of accumulation of obscene amounts of wealth by a small number of individuals."

It continued: "While more than 112 million people were living in poverty in 2010, the richest Nigerian man will take 42 years to spend all of his wealth at \$1 million per day."

Huge inequality

Earlier in 2004, the World Bank had even been forced to admit in a report that only 1% of Nigerians appropriate 80% of the oil and gas wealth. Nigeria's economy is essentially about oil and gas, as it accounts for about 85% of government revenue and over 90% of foreign exchange.

This explains why the economic crisis in Nigeria is not principally as a result of the fact that the rate of population growth is outstripping growth of the economy, which has an impact, but that of wealth inequality.

For instance, in the 2000s the economy was growing at the rate of 5% to 7%, well above the population growth rate of 2%. But according to Oxfam, "the share of people living below the national poverty line over that period, increased from 69 million in 2004 to 112 million in 2010, equivalent to 69% of the population". Now that the capitalist 'good times' are over, the future looks even worse.

The inequality and general economic crisis have created material conditions for the escalation of insecurity in forms of banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery, the Boko Haram insurgency, etc. It also accentuates ethno-religious conflicts associated with unresolved national questions.

The capitalist ruling elite and reactionary forces regularly exploit the country's fault lines to appeal to ethnic sentiments for their self-serving agenda, something which is made easily possible in the absence of a bold, militant and socialist leadership of the labour movement, which could unite the working masses to fight back against constant capitalist attacks.

Capitalism has to be defeated in Nigeria before the wealth of the country can be freed for the benefit of workers and the poor, and also to resolve the national question.

In the 1980s the trade unions adopted, on paper, socialist objectives which reflected the mood in the country. But this was not seriously campaigned on.

Today, the majority of the working masses have not yet drawn socialist conclusions, despite the monumental failure of capitalism. This is both a consequence of class consciousness being



Socialist Party of Nigeria left party, formed by the DSM (above) and DSM members campaigning in Lagos (below) PHOTOS DSM



thrown back internationally in the last 30 years, and partly because the alternative programme of socialism and socialist analysis of Nigeria's crisis has not reached a mass audience.

A key factor in this is the absence, up to now, of a mass working peoples' party capable of reaching the widest layers of the people, as well as the lack of a fighting socialist labour leadership with an alternative programme to capitalism.

Notwithstanding this political weakness, such was the anger of the working class, and many others, that Nigeria saw nine widely-supported general strikes between 2000 and 2012 - the last having many of the characteristics of a broad national rebellion.

However, the largely pro-capitalist trade union leaders sought to avoid calling for action and limit any action that they were forced to call (see article opposite). The result was, for a period of time, a downturn in workers' struggle; a badly prepared general strike in May 2016 failed.

Government attacks

But now, the monumental failure of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) and President Buhari - who many had huge illusions in when he ascended to power in 2015 - has had a big impact.

This government has afflicted the working masses with a series of economic attacks, like the latest hike in fuel price and electricity tariffs, as done by past governments.

One result is a further erosion in the masses' trust in the capitalist ruling elite. This has been reflected in the abysmally low turnouts in elections, especially the 2019 poll in which Buhari was reelected.

The class struggle may intensify and escalate in the coming months given the rising global crisis of capitalism, accentuated by the coronavirus pandemic, and the increasing attacks by the capitalist government. If this transpires, the working masses will begin to search for an alternative, for a way out.

This would, in turn, create the basis for a rise in socialist consciousness and for the forces of Marxism to grow. But if this does not happen, there is the prospect of an increase in civil breakdowns, ethno-religious conflicts and a trampling on democratic rights amid economic and social chaos.

Unlike 2012, when Nigeria recorded its biggest general strike and mass protest since the advent of civil rule (and when there was no mass working-class party), at present there is the Socialist Party of Nigeria (SPN) formed by the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM - CWI in Nigeria), in alliance with other forces, that can intervene with a bold socialist alternative in any mass struggle.

This is why we have called on trade unions, socialists and activists to join the SPN and build it into a mass party.

Nigerian labour leaders postpone general strike at last minute

• Widespread anger over acceptance of government's main arguments

A visible wave of anger and disappointment from labour activists and those wanting to defend living standards swept Nigeria as news came out that the country's trade union leaders had, at the last minute 'suspended', a general strike due to begin on 28 September.

While many expected that such a step was possible - the union leaders have acted similarly before - what was especially shocking was the late night agreement they signed. This fundamentally accepted the government's argument that there was no alternative to increases in the prices of fuel and electricity, measures which came on top of a VAT hike and the continual failure to fully implement last year's rise in the legal minimum wage.

In Benin City and Ibadan, trade unionists and others rapidly took to the streets to protest at the national leaders' decision. In other cities there were stormy meetings of activists.

Like many countries, Nigeria has been hit hard by the world economic crisis. It is now in its second recession in four years. Officially, unemployment is now over 27%,

while just 14.7 million of Nigeria's 40 million 15-34 years old eligible to work are employed.

The fall in the oil export price has hit it hard. Between January and May, Nigeria's government spent 72% of its income just on debt service.

With inflation rising, especially food prices, increases in VAT, electricity and fuel prices created such anger that the two trade union centres, the NLC and TUC, were forced to call an 'indefinite' general strike. However, most of the leaders were not serious about this, hardly anything was done. The NLC gave just \$260 towards strike mobilisation in Lagos, a city of over 21 million!

Activists, including members of the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM), strove to build support for the strike from below and argue for a clear programme and strategy to win its demands.

(See material on the DSM website www.socialistnigeria.org).

Below are extracts from a statement issued by the Socialist Party of Nigeria, the party initiated by the DSM as part of its work to help build a mass workers' party in the country.

"The Socialist Party of Nigeria (SPN) joins workers and the poor masses in condemning the calling off of the strike action and mass protest without achieving its purpose, by the leaderships of both Nigeria Labour Congress and Trade Union Congress. We reject the agreement signed between the labour leadership and the Federal government which accepted the capitalists' argument that Nigeria's "dire financial circumstances" meant the "inevitability of deregulation".

In agreeing to this the labour leadership politically undermined the movement's opposition to subsidy cuts, price and tax hikes, plus delays in minimum wage implementation.

Regardless of the position of the labour leadership, we call on workers, youth and the poor masses to continue to organize to resist the hike in fuel prices, hike in electricity tariffs and other anti-poor capitalist attacks.

Therefore, we call on workers and trade union activists to agitate for a fighting labour leadership and

truly democratically run labour organisation that leads the working people to resist anti-poor capitalist policies and to fight for better working conditions.

We also call on trade unions, pro-masses organisations, socialists, activists, the working masses and youth to join the SPN in order to build it as a mass working people's political party on a socialist programme."

● **Abiodun Bamigboye**
Acting National Chairperson
● **Chinedu Bosah**
National Secretary





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THE SOCIALIST INBOX

● Tories tell schools not to use anti-capitalist material

The Tory government has ordered schools in England not to use material in teaching that is anti-capitalist, which they class as an “extreme political stance”.

On the one hand, this is very concerning. An authoritarian attempt to increase control over education and the ideas that young minds can encounter.

Teachers should not push their political beliefs on students - we are there to guide and give students the tools to come to their own conclusions.

However, as a history teacher it is my job to expose my students to a wide variety of ideas about the world, and that includes anti-capitalist thought, events and individuals. Should I just pretend that since the industrial revolution there has been no opposition to capitalism?

The idea that being pro-capitalist is somehow a neutral or non-political stance is laughable. How many millions die each year from avoidable starvation or disease while the super-rich grow ever more wealthy? That seems pretty political to me.

On the other hand, this shows how scared the ruling class are about the possibility of socialism. The fact that they feel the need to pass laws like this shows deep insecurity.

More people than ever are questioning the way society is run, and that wouldn't change even if I started every lesson with a prayer to Richard Branson! It's not 'loony-left teachers' that are making young people increasingly turn to the ideas of socialism, it's the obvious inadequacy of the failing capitalist system.

A HISTORY TEACHER

● Overseas Operations Bill should be opposed

On Thursday 24 September, three Labour MPs - Nadia Whittome (Nottingham North), Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) and Olivia Blake (Sheffield Hallam), were removed from their parliamentary positions. This was directly after they, along with 15 other Labour MPs, including former leader Jeremy Corbyn, voted against the Overseas Operations Bill.

Labour MPs had been ordered to abstain on the vote by current leader Kier Starmer.

All three of the MPs are left-leaning Corbyn hopefuls, elected last year on the more social-democratic programme he offered. This move underlines the Labour Party's growing authoritarianism and abandonment of the working class under its current leadership.

The bill itself is controversial for several reasons. Firstly, it offers potential protection to service people from being prosecuted for acts committed while on active duty. We should recall the huge numbers of unlawful detentions that occurred during the aftermath of the Iraq war. Giving cover to individuals is a way of hiding systemic injustice: if a soldier is prosecuted, it threatens to reveal the dark, cruel underbelly of the capitalist, imperialist system.

But prosecutions should reach much higher - to the commanders who overlook or endorse these acts, and to the capitalist politicians who sanction 'whatever means necessary' in pursuit of their ambitions.

However, the problems with the bill go far deeper than this. Despite being dubbed 'the Veterans' bill', it actually reduces the support that veterans are able to access - creating a six-year limit on claims for conditions like PTSD. That only benefits the MoD.

Soldiers are not heroes. Neither are they monsters. They are people,

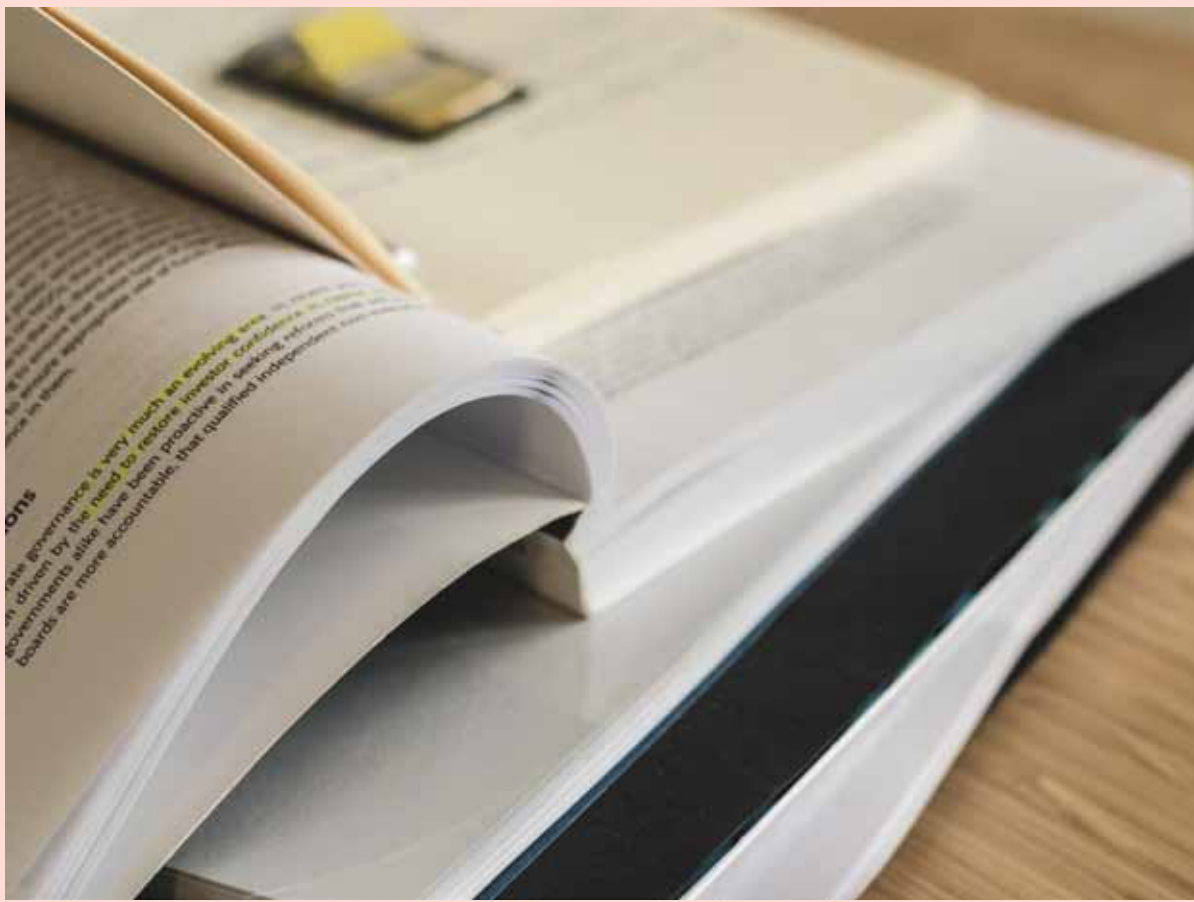


PHOTO PAUL MATTSSON/CC

often put into brutal situations. They should be held to account, yes - but when a government who treats them like disposable tools fails them, we should not turn our back on them.

This bill was never fit for purpose and these MPs were right in their decision to vote against it.

PIXEL MOORE
NOTTINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

● Capitalism or the planet

I'm a 19-year-old university student who has always been an advocate for helping the climate and looking after our world. However, it is only in the last year or so that I've really noticed how much capitalism - and all the processes involved within such a

system - really exaggerates our ecological crisis.

During lockdown we saw countless reports of cleaner air, healthier rivers, and an increase in the number of insects.

There has also been a halt in movement, consumerism and production. Of course, the capitalist system wants a large sum of products for the smallest price, which causes huge unethical and non-environmental companies to become extremely popular.

Primark, for example, is one of the largest fast fashion stores in the UK. A recent study stated how the colouring and bleaching of our clothes is very chemically intensive. This process becomes increasingly more damaging when it comes to the cheapest possible option, as the more artificial our clothes are, the less likely they are to decompose.

As a student from a low-income, working-class background, I know how tempting cheap clothes are and that it is the only option for many! However, we can try charity shops or secondhand stores such as Depop or Vinted when buying new clothes and discarding old ones.

There are many more processes that have led to the rise in carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide that contribute to climate change.

Many people feel insignificant. The system brainwashes us into thinking this is the only way and, in the words of Margaret Thatcher, there is no other choice. But we are not powerless. We can use our power to object, protest and make our voices heard!

We can either save capitalism or the planet, but we cannot save both.

ALICE WILLIS
CAERPHILLY SOCIALIST PARTY

● Private care homes put profit before people

The privately run care home my wife and daughter work at stopped having visitors to see residents the week before lockdown happened on 23 March. However, the care home owners' response with PPE and testing was quite abysmal.

At the start of lockdown, staff were given the option to wear face masks, but were encouraged not to as they were in short supply at the time.

PPE was made compulsory for all staff at the start of April. But Covid-19 testing was only made

available to staff and their families in mid-April.

Since the beginning of September, staff have been tested once a week and residents once a month. Fortunately, so far, there have been no cases of Covid in the home, but other care homes in Worcester haven't been so lucky.

During lockdown, visitors could see their relatives at the home via a glass door and an intercom system. Garden visits began again in July, with visitors being temperature tested and questions asked about their general health. As of last week, visits are back to lockdown door visits.

The home has 49 beds. Once during lockdown they had seven empty beds, so they cut staff, meaning that the company were putting profit before the residents. And, of course, as

the beds filled up again they didn't take on any more staff.

This time of year, with flu, chest infections, the pandemic, and lack of staff, I fear the worst. Staff morale is at an all-time low. Visits from the care home bosses are putting management at the home under pressure to keep the beds full. Staff work 12-hour shifts, with two-and-a-half-hour breaks. But this could be shortened if a resident falls or a member of staff needs a hand.

The home charges its 'service users' - the vulnerable - over £700 to live there. The majority of the staff genuinely love their job, and the people they look after. But it's profit over people, profit over peoples lives.

CALVIN FOWLER
WORCESTERSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY.



PHOTO SARAGILSOO/CC

● Starmer's smoke and mirrors

Keir Starmer's first conference speech as leader repeated the age-old myth of 'national interest'.

That completely ignores the vast division in Britain today! We all know there is a world of difference between the opportunities and protections made available to the rich elite, and the way in which working-class people have been exploited and sacrificed.

Starmer avoided detail or any sort of reasoning. Instead, he opted for emotive subjects, themes like family values and constant clichés about decency and fairness.

While the speech did land a few jabs on Boris Johnson's record in government, they were very weak! He

is critical of the government's record, but simply will not speak out against the ideology and private interests which underpins every move the Tories have made. In other words, he won't speak out against capitalism and all the failures that come with it.

Instead of programme points or any substance, Starmer developed his speech into a patriotic ramble, talking about making Britain 'the best country to grow up in, and the best country to grow old in'.

There is a significant amount of mistrust and anger in society right now, and much of it is not aimed in the right direction. With that in mind, it is highly irresponsible for a Labour leader to use borderline-jingoistic slogans, aimed at grasping on to a sense of 'Britishness' that has never existed!

We know Covid has hit Britain hard because of the deliberate

underfunding of services, because of disastrous sell-offs, and because of the conditions which constantly force workers into precarious situations. These are all symptoms of capitalism. We have no use for knighted individuals who want to use the smoke and mirrors of patriotism to mask the underlying cause of hardships! We need a real opposition to the establishment, we need a party for the workers!

ALEX BROWN
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

● Ukraine miners' battle

Since 3 September, Ukrainian metal ore miners have been staging an heroic strike for improved pay and

conditions. They have occupied the mines to prevent the bosses replacing them or using scabs to try and break the strike.

The mine bosses have already been forced to concede 10-25% pay rises.

90% of the Ukrainian mines were privatised when the Soviet Union collapsed and are now run by billionaire oligarchs. The wealth and privilege of the mining oligarchs is backed up by the Ukrainian state which is happy to give the mine owners stimulus packages (i.e. funding) while not appearing to care a jot about mine safety and the standard of living of the mine workers.

The mine workers have put forward a four-point programme of demands which include an immediate and adequate wage increase, sacking the mine managers who have allowed the mines to deteriorate to an unsafe state, lowering the pension age for miners and improved health and safety regulations.

The mine owners have used every tactic to try and defeat the strikers. This has included physical threats to the families, including children of the strike leaders.

Letters of protest can be sent to local Ukrainian embassies and via the emails below:

- info@kvpu.org.ua
- international-dep@kvpu.org.ua
- profikr@i.ua
- With copies to CWI@worldsoc.co.uk

MICK WHALE
HULL

● Trans rights

The government has dropped its plans for gender self-identity. The

only change is that the existing process will be cheaper. But the existing process is absolutely not good enough for trans people.

Legal gender change demands a 'diagnosis' as well as living as your acquired gender for over two years. An obscure panel decides if you have been doing this.

Some trans people are rejected by this panel and then have to reapply, paying costs each time. Some doctors will not give that medical 'diagnosis' either, meaning the person then has to find another doctor. The BMA has declared its support for self-identity, saying that someone's gender is not related to medical diagnosis.

It's clear that reform of the Gender Recognition Act, and greater freedom and safety for trans people, will not be achieved in parliament by appealing to the goodwill and reason of the Tory party. Only pressure from below will do that.

We need protests and support from the trade unions and workers' organisations which can unite workers and have the potential power to challenge the government and fight for rights and resources for all.

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY

● Doing time

In the UK prisoners know where their next meal is coming from, get clean bedding and clothing, and don't have to pay rent for their prison cells.

It seems universities aren't treating their prisoners, sorry students, as well!

ELAINE BRUNSKILL
GATESHEAD



PHOTO JAN TRUTER/CC



£71,522 raised: Thank you, we've smashed our target again



A big thanks to all our readers for the marvellous £71,522 raised in our six-month campaign. That's another target smashed thanks to some magnificent large donations, and many thousands of small ones.

Six months of lockdown and a disastrous dive in the economy only drove our supporters to raise more money to fight for a socialist alternative to the blind profit-driven system plaguing us.

Leaked reports suggest that the Labour Party is sacking staff once furlough ends to save costs, while the Socialist Party is raising record amounts due to enthusiasm for socialism.

An individual donation of £2,000 and two of £1,000 in the last few days sent us soaring over our target. These represent a huge sacrifice for the cause of socialism. We received seven donations of £1,000 or more during the six-month campaign.

But without the countless pennies and pounds of smaller donations - dropped into a collecting tin, collected on iZettle or donated via our website - we would never have reached our target. The average amount paid in by supporters in the last six months was £20.

It is impossible to mention them all. But this week, thanks go to Birmingham members for £26.33 from a campaign stall in Kings Heath for a 15% pay rise for NHS staff. And £27 collected from regular readers in Nottingham, sent in by Gary Freeman.

Thanks to three donations of £10 from Devon because of mask-making by Lynn. Nancy sent us £40: "£20 is thanks to Mary for upholstering an old chair of mine."

The deadline for donations in this campaign is midnight on 30 September. Any money raised last minute, you have until midnight on 1 October to send it in.

Fund the fightback
DONATE TODAY

- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/donate or call **020 8988 8777**
- or make cheques payable to Socialist Party, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

Selling the Socialist

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

Coventry

In two hours, 140 people signed the Socialist Party petition to scrap hospital parking charges - more than one person signing every minute. Thanks

Derby

On 19 September, one satisfied



Why I joined the Socialist Party: Labour moved right and left me behind

BLYTHE BUTTERY
LINCOLN SOCIALIST PARTY

I considered myself a socialist long before I joined the Socialist Party. Socialism embodies my values - equality, compassion and justice.

But I come from a family of Labour supporters, and had always thought Labour shared my views. Seeing Jeremy Corbyn lead the Labour Party convinced me more of this than ever.

But that changed with Labour's treatment of Jeremy Corbyn. Labour was moving towards the centre and leaving me behind as it went.

I felt very disillusioned. I couldn't see anyone representing people like me. It was a very lonely place to be.

I considered the Greens, a left-wing option presented in the media. Their positions on funding the NHS, the environment, tuition fees and tax were what I wanted to support.

But this was what I had seen in Labour. The Greens didn't provide a rationale for why they would be any different.

Labour want to appeal to top earners who don't want to pay more tax, big business who don't want to be nationalised, and landlords. Those who think it is acceptable for individuals to profit from the work and needs of many - capitalism.

Labour wasn't going to fight these individuals or the 'structure' that supports them, but rather seek compromise. There is no compromise between capitalism and my values.

The only party offering an actual uncompromising solution is the Socialist Party. Since joining I have found people who share my values.

I have also learned so much about politics, and changed many of my own positions. I feel reinvigorated to fight for what I believe in, and I enjoy being educated and challenged.

I have a new lens to view the world and feel more sure of what the solutions need to be.

Newham: Closed and evicted

Disgracefully, Coolfin Road community centre Newham, east London was closed and allowed to fall into a state of disrepair. Now the 100% Labour-run council aims to evict squatters and demolish the building. There's a desperate housing need in Newham, one of the poorest and most overcrowded boroughs in the country.

How many genuinely affordable council homes is the council constructing? How many empty properties is the council turning into social housing? You can probably guess the ball-park figure.

NIALL MULHOLLAND
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY



Birmingham

The first street meeting of Socialist Students at the University of Birmingham was great. Students came together to discuss, plan and organise to fight the mountain of issues facing them and young workers - extortionate tuition fees and lifelong debt; contact time and use of facilities stripped to the bone; overpriced and overcrowded accommodation; low pay and insecure work.

Students concluded that they have no choice but to get organised and fight back. We're launching an 'open the books' campaign to see where the money from the uni is really being spent - huge vice-chancellor salaries and vanity projects.

Students and staff should democratically decide where resources are allocated. We think it should be on free education, subsidised housing and mental health services.

KRIS O'SULLIVAN

Southampton

Socialist Students is out campaigning at Southampton and Solent universities. Many students signed up and were eager to help out straightaway.

Students described the apprehension of arriving in halls knowing how outbreaks have spread in other cities. They also described anger at the exploitative landlords and the cost of student accommodation run by Southampton University, which is in the top ten most expensive in the UK.

Nine students came to our meet-and-greet session. We spoke about launching campaigns on student housing and mental health. Everyone pointed to the need to change the material conditions of students and not look for individual solutions.

Students took away posters to put up in their halls of residence and bought copies of Socialist Students' magazine Megaphone to discuss with other students.

Despite the limitations of no freshers' fair, we have had one of the strongest initial meetings to date which bodes well for an autumn of struggle.

BEA GARDNER

Wolves

We were out talking to students, on 26 September, about the socialist plan to make sure that students and young people don't pay for the Covid crisis.

Teaching has largely moved online

Apprehension about Covid - anger at fees, costs and exploitation



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BEA GARDNER

Wolves

We were out talking to students, on 26 September, about the socialist plan to make sure that students and young people don't pay for the Covid crisis.

Teaching has largely moved online

and campus social life is shut down, but students are still expected to pay £9,250 fees and thousands more in rent. There is no extra financial support to make up for the reduction in Saturday jobs or other costs.

NICK HART

UCL

We had masks, gloves, hand sanitiser and wipes plus lots and lots of Socialist Student leaflets.

Lots of the people who signed up to Socialist Students, and put their name to our petition to scrap tuition fees and fund education, also thanked us for being out campaigning. Many were pleased to see young people talking about socialism during these trying Covid times.

We spoke to students about Covid, abolishing tuition fees, homes for all, Black Lives Matter, climate change, and building a Socialist Students group at UCL.

IAN PATTISON

Students trapped on Covid campuses speak out - page 5

Join the student fightback: join...

- Visit socialiststudents.org.uk/join
- or call **020 8988 8761**
- or text your name and school, college or uni to **07749 379 010**

Campaign for new King George Hospital wing gets boost

Labour-led Redbridge council now supports the call for a new wing for King George Hospital. A petition for the new wing, organised by campaigners, got the necessary 1,500 signatures to bring it before Redbridge council.

But we've been campaigning to expand the hospital for years. Why did the council wait for the petition before supporting our demand? We must now make the council stick to this decision.

The council's Operational Director of Assurance asserted that bed blockers were the problem: "A number of people currently access care in a hospital setting when there is no clinical need", and that it "would seem premature" to support the proposal for a new wing. But this was overturned.

The A&E at King George has been under threat of closure for decades. Save King George A&E campaigners have marched the length of Ilford countless times, and publicly exposed the failings of the regional health authority.

The campaign forced the health board to guarantee to keep the A&E open and fully functional. A 'new' wing was built in 2007, the North East London Treatment Centre.

Campaigner Andy Walker says: "Thirteen years later, the north east London population has grown

Solidarity not charity Hull unions launch Unity Shop

Hull Trades Union Council launched its Unity Shop food bank initiative on 26 September. The trades council coordinates the unions in Hull.

Faced with poverty unseen for a generation, the trades council felt that it had to show solidarity to families struggling to put food on the table.

Millions of workers nationally, and thousands in our area, through no fault of their own, are facing a bleak future. The capitalist system has failed them.

Unity Shop provides solidarity, not charity, to those workers with food and other needs. Linked to this is a call to arms to fight to change the system that creates poverty in the first place.

The socially distanced launch was more low key than we had hoped, due to the restrictions of Covid. However, speeches from trades council officers - including Ken McCall and blacklisted activist Tony Smith, who have done most of the organising - were streamed and watched over 7,000 times. The highlight of the evening was Joe Solo's passionate singing and support.

Even before the formal launch, struggling families contacted Unity Shop for support. One mother had even blown up the launch picture in the Hull Daily Mail, to be able to read the telephone number of the shop.

MICK WHALE
HULL TRADES UNION COUNCIL CHAIR

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SMASH RACISM



- Lessons of the Black Panthers
- Police racism - how do we end it?
- Revolt or reform - how was slavery abolished?
- Privilege and oppression? Ideas to smash racism
- How do we defeat the far right?

MARXISM TODAY

- The Communist Manifesto
- Socialism - utopian and scientific
- Revolution Betrayed: what happened in the USSR
- How do we get from here to socialism?
- Is the working class still the agent of socialist change?
- Friedrich Engels - 200 years after his birth, are his ideas relevant to fighting sexism?

Fight BT redundancies

A COMMUNICATION WORKERS UNION (CWU) MEMBER

Workers who are employed by BT's Technology division face 190 compulsory redundancies in the biggest programme of compulsory redundancies ever proposed.

The CWU leadership unfortunately accepted that jobs would disappear, and tried to negotiate a 'job swap' arrangement where those selected for compulsory redundancy and didn't want to go could swap with workers in similar jobs who wanted voluntary redundancy.

A deal was almost in place when BT suddenly reduced the amount of severance pay 'job swappers' could get from a maximum of two years' salary to one. This is likely to drastically reduce the number of workers wishing to take voluntary redundancy.

The union made concessions during negotiations, allowing management discretion in assessing the suitability of job swaps and letting them stretch the definition of similar jobs.

BT is being completely vindictive; before the CWU's job swap proposal

it would have budgeted for paying the maximum level of redundancy pay. Now it has taken it away because it isn't in complete control of who will be made redundant. It is likely that BT wants to have the complete ability to select the most expensive and awkward workers for redundancy. The CWU's counter-proposal would have cost nothing.

Years of concession bargaining allowed BT to think that the union is weak enough to allow it its own way, and this is the natural consequence.

BT as a whole wants to rationalise its desk-based staff to just 30 locations - which will mean further large scale redundancies. This was unveiled before the Covid pandemic so it can't blame loss of revenue during Covid for this.

It is time to stop concession bargaining and rely on the members' strength and anger rather than the non-existent good nature of senior management.

All proposed redundancies should be met with an industrial action ballot and the widest possible mobilisation of the membership, and BT should be taken back into public ownership.

Peterborough CWU have massively voted for strike action

Postal workers in Peterborough have voted by 87.8% for strike action to win the reinstatement of a sacked colleague.

The postal worker was fired in July - action which the union argues both "breached" and "unreasonably applied" the company's conduct agreement.

Branch secretary Andy Beeby (CWU Eastern No5) says: "The ballot result shows the huge strength of feeling among members that this sacking was unfair and must be reconsidered."

"It's their view and the view of this union that the allegations laid against our member here do not warrant dismissal," he explained.

"In fact, in the case we made to management, our divisional rep Steve Butts cited 13 previous cases of comparable incidents which did not lead to summary dismissals."

Get all the latest union news

nationalshop
stewardsnetwork
NSSN bulletin: shopstewards.net

● Trump's tax

A self-declared dollar billionaire US president pays \$750 in federal income tax a year, whereas the average US worker pays \$8,196 a year in income taxes. Who says capitalism is unfair?

This disparity was revealed by the New York Times (NYT), which got hold of Donald Trump's tax returns. But as a rich US socialite once remarked: "It's only the little people who pay taxes". Indeed, the world's super-rich employ tax lawyers to minimise their tax bills, as do the giant corporations who continually shift their wealth - accumulated from the labour of the working class - from tax haven to tax haven.

That said, while the NYT report shows that the author of 'Trump: The Art of the Deal' has paid no income tax in ten of the last 15 years, it also reveals that he has been a complete capitalist failure with his investments.

A series of crashed business ventures has left him owing hundreds of millions of dollars which, while lowering his tax bill, has left Trump teetering on the brink of bankruptcy.



● Media jobs for the boys

Talk about putting the fox in charge of the hen house. Boris Johnson has demonstrated his political objectivity by considering appointing capitalist ideologues Paul Dacre - former Daily Mail editor and editor-in-chief of Associated Newspapers - to head media regulator Ofcom; and Charles Moore - former Daily Telegraph editor and biographer of Margaret Thatcher - to become chairman of the BBC.

Apparently, Johnson touted the Ofcom job to fellow Tory Dacre over drinks in Downing Street last February. The Sunday Times reported that Moore's BBC post is a "done deal".

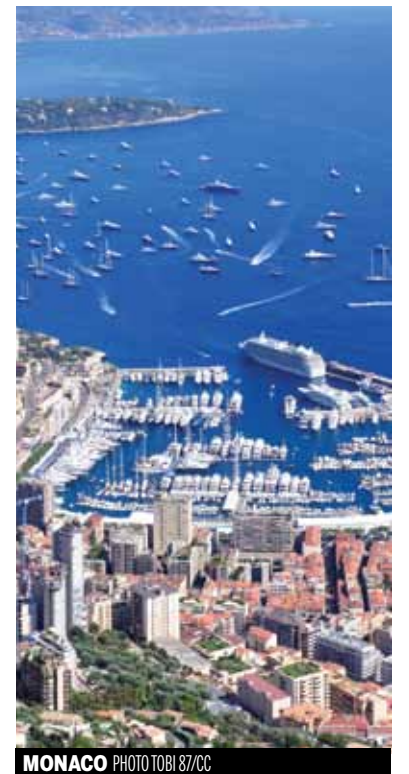
Expect an increased output of anti-trade union and anti-socialist propaganda programmes on the BBC, set in 1950s colonial Britain. Any complaints, feel free to raise them with Mr Dacre.

● Patriotic Ratcliffe

Sir James Ratcliffe - the anti-union billionaire of petrochemicals giant Ineos, who also happens to be the UK's richest person - continues to demonstrate what his version of a capitalist Brexit looks like.

In an unbridled display of patriotism, he tore-up a deal with the Welsh government to build a 4X4 vehicle manufacturing plant in Bridgend and instead moved it to France. Ratcliffe then followed up his 'I'm backing Britain' commitment by decamping to Monaco, where he will become a 'non-dom', potentially saving him £4 billion a year.

Any suggestion that 'patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel' is simply socialist envy of a man whose estimated wealth has increased by £1.25 billion in this pandemic year.



MONACO PHOTO TOBI 87/CC



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TRUMP'S FAILURE OVER WESTERN US WILDFIRES

Scientists have recently confirmed that human-induced global warming has led to a worldwide increase in the frequency and intensity of fire weather, increasing the risks of wildfires, alongside poor land management practices. This coincides with the worst wildfires in 18 years to have hit California. **Jacob Aguillard**, of the Independent Socialist Group, USA - co-thinkers of the Socialist Party - reports on this disaster and Trump's failure to prepare for and respond to it.



PHOTO DARIA DEVYATKINA/CC

On 24 July, lightning sparked the first fires of what would become one of the worst wildfire seasons in US history. Two months later, almost 5,800,000 million acres have burned in California and the Pacific Northwest.

In the state of Oregon, half a million people have been given notice to evacuate or be prepared to leave at any moment.

Residents of California and Washington state are also facing a future where they have no homes, having to rebuild their lives from the homes of family members, hotel rooms, or homeless shelters.

The scale and suddenness of these disasters have been a shock to countless communities, but were no surprise to the leadership of the US Forest Service and California state fire agencies. The causes are known: in the preceding years, there had been a lack of controlled burns and clearing of fire fuel in the Western states.

And yet, as simple as the solution is, funds and resources have not been allocated to agencies that could have prevented this catastrophe.

On 14 September, President Trump had a briefing on the wildfires in which he congratulated himself on approving California's request for disaster status - making Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funds and services available - and remarked on how the combined forces of state and

federal governments have 230 people "fighting the August complex fire, and that's the largest fire in California." That's an insanely low number for the largest fires in California's history.

Since the fires started, only 30% of containment has been reached. According to Trump, there are 28,000 firefighters and first responders in the Pacific states handling the situation. But the results have been poor. Fire damage has been very costly and widespread due to the large conflagrations.

Missing funds

Furthermore, while Hurricanes Laura and Sally were flooding five coastal states, and wildfires immolated the west, FEMA was missing \$44 billion in disaster relief funds because they were used for Trump's paltry and inadequate Covid-19 response (the CARES act), and not replenished.

The decision to withdraw those funds was made after the Trump administration had been repeatedly warned that climate change was going to cause unprecedented damages from storms and fires.

In the US, disasters are not prepared for, and government responses are criminally slow because of a lack of investment, and also because disaster is viewed as profitable by the capitalist class.

Without disasters like Hurricane Katrina, the capitalist class would not have had the opportunity to replace the property of New Orleans'

residents with expensive condos, and the education system could not have been privatised using a charter school system.

As time goes on, disasters are only going to worsen, and many more regions will face similar fates to New Orleans and the American West.

Capitalism's reliance on short-term profit and infinite profit growth means that it will never meaningfully address climate change before it is far too late. This is why we can never trust any capitalist party, anywhere, to help fight climate change.

The only solution to capitalism's cycle of preventable disasters and tragedy is socialism. When working people have the power they will take care of themselves and each other, and not be subject to the profiteering of billionaires.

A socialist society would be able to coordinate on a global scale to combat climate change and prepare communities for natural disasters.

A socialist society would be able to break the power of the fossil fuel companies, take them under public ownership, and begin the necessary transition towards renewable energy.

A socialist society could plan and fund a socialist-green 'New Deal', putting millions back to work in good unionised jobs.

The working class must move society forward if we are to have a society at all!

• Full article on socialistworld.net



PHOTO MWP

Marxist Workers Party and Youth@Work members marched through eMbalenhle, Mpumalanga, South Africa, on 23 September calling for working-class unity to stop violence against women.

Our pamphlets called on the municipality to make funding and resources available to eMbalenhle for: free, accessible, secure and high-quality women's shelters for survivors of domestic abuse and rape; free, accessible, and high-quality sexual health and family planning services to allow women genuine choice over if, and when, to have children; free, accessible, secure and high-quality pre-school childcare and elderly care centres to relieve the domestic burden on women and allow women to work if they choose.

We also called on neighbouring communities to unite across South Africa to build a new countrywide socialist civic federation to campaign on all issues effecting working-class communities.

MARXIST WORKERS PARTY REPORTERS

US: Police escape justice over Breonna Taylor killing

The failure of a grand jury to charge police with the murder of Louisville black medical worker Breonna Taylor has reignited anti-racist protests in the USA and throughout the world.

Earlier, Formula One (F1) racing star Lewis Hamilton was reprimanded by the F1 governing board after posing in a T-shirt with the slogan: "Arrest the cops who killed Breonna Taylor".

Military forces have been deployed in Louisville, hundreds of demonstrators arrested, and a weekend citywide curfew imposed. Black Lives Matter (BLM) protesters were incensed when an extremely provocative far-right militia was allowed to march in the city.

'No-knock' entry

Breonna was shot dead last March, when police forced an entry into her flat using a 'no-knock' search warrant.

No-knock forced entry is a recipe for bloodshed. In Houston, Texas, in 2019, two people were killed and five police injured during a no-knock raid during a search for drugs. None were found, and police said the warrant was based on an officer's false information! No-knock has now been banned in Louisville, but not in the state of Kentucky.

Donald Trump has deliberately sympathised with police and far-right militias in order to promote his presidential campaign propaganda of restoring 'law and order' in Democrat-run cities. He is hoping to frighten voters into supporting him by claiming that victory in November's election of Democrat candidate Joe Biden would lead to 'violence and anarchy' in US cities.

Of course, Trump conveniently ignores that facts that BLM protests

have been overwhelmingly peaceful and that he has encouraged violent counter-protests.

Trump's language is taken straight out of Republican Richard - 'Tricky Dicky' - Nixon's 1968 'law and order' presidential campaign speeches, aimed at the 'silent majority'. Then, similar to today, US society was highly polarised, set against a backdrop of the assassination of Martin Luther King, and the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements.

However, the alternative capitalist party, the Democrats, not wanting to appear 'soft' on law and order, has been quick to clamp down on BLM protests and implement citywide curfews and mobilisations of the national guard, etc.

What's needed is a new working-class mass party, independent of the capitalist establishment, that can unite around a fighting programme to deliver economic, social, and racial justice by promoting socialist policies.

Disappointedly, former presidential hopeful and self-declared "democratic socialist", Senator Bernie Sanders, has now failed, on two occasions, to offer such an independent working-class alternative, and has instead lamely backed the establishment Democrats.

Nonetheless, the task of linking up BLM with organised labour to create such a new party remains firmly on the agenda, given the likelihood of new movements and struggles, whoever enters the White House after November.

• See socialistworld.net for more US reports and analysis

• Also, interview with labour activist and Green Party US presidential candidate Howie Hawkins on YouTube/CWI media

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the Socialist

Issue 1103

1-6 October 2020

formerly **Militant**

Underpaid, traumatised and leaving... **NHS WORKERS NEED 15% RISE AND FULL FUNDING**



RUTH BYRNE
NHS WORKER

As NHS staff face the second wave of Covid-19, we are also preparing another round of protests on 17 October calling for a pay rise.

Health and care staff put their lives on the line every day during the first wave of Covid-19, often with not enough or inadequate PPE. The rise we are asking for seems tiny when you think of the role workers played in holding the line.

The grassroots protests are calling for a 15% pay rise. Several unions are now calling for 15% or £3,000, whichever is higher. This should be just the start - most staff would need

further rises even to match the pay they received before the Con-Dem coalition started slashing public sector wages in 2010.

36% of nurses are thinking about leaving the NHS in the next year, mainly due to low pay and the way they were treated during the Covid-19 crisis, according to a survey by the Royal College of Nursing. Already, 28% of nurses and health visitors leave their posts within three years of starting, finds the King's Fund.

The failures of the government have turned the rush of health professionals who came back to help the NHS during the first wave into a flood in the other direction.

It's not like the government isn't

prepared to spend public money like water when it comes to handing out contracts to their friends in private companies. Notorious outsourcer Serco has received contracts for Covid-19 contact tracing worth up to £432 million, and for test centres worth £45 million.

According to doctors' union BMA, setting up Nightingale hospitals for three months cost around £350 million - yet they only treated around 100 patients.

Many NHS workers are furious that the testing service run so disastrously by Serco is allowed to brand itself as NHS. "It's not the NHS!" is a familiar cry.

Meanwhile, as Covid-19 cases increase, NHS labs are forced to

prioritise Covid-19 tests, which means other urgent tests cannot always be done. The difference between privatised services and the NHS is that the first duty of the NHS is to patients, not company profits.

Staff still feel traumatised by the first wave. Many felt utterly unprepared for it.

Whole hospitals were unrecognisable. Staff were redeployed from very different jobs straight into high-risk areas like intensive care. They speak of the helplessness they felt as the normal treatments didn't work, watching patients suffer and die. Many have also lost valued colleagues to the disease.

Time off sick for stress and anxiety-related issues soared by 37%

immediately after the height of the first wave. It is very frustrating seeing everything the government was warned about happening again.

The grassroots movement for a 15% pay rise has shown the huge anger and willingness to fight of NHS staff. It is absolutely crucial that the unions begin to harness that anger and determination, and actively prepare to call and coordinate strike action to demand a proper rise for all NHS staff.

This weak, divided government could be forced to U-turn on this as well. And this fight should be linked to calls for mass hiring and investment in NHS facilities, with all testing, health and care services brought fully into the public sector.

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

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

