OUR LIVES AND JOBS

NOT SAFE IN TORY HANDS

We need union action to secure jobs and safety

STUDENTS TRAPPED ON COVID CAMPUSES SPEAK OUT >>> p5
BLACK HISTORY MONTH: CAPITALISM HAS FAILED NIGERIA >>> p5
JOB SUPPORT SCHEME - TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE >>> p2-3

We did it! Fighting fund target smashed: £71,522 raised
**TORY SCHEME WON’T HALT MASS UNEMPLOYMENT: MOBILISE THE UNIONS!**

* The Socialist* 1-6 October 2020 1-6 October 2020

**EDITOR FOR WORK AND PENNIES NEEDED**

The Socialist*’s new ‘Job Support Scheme’ will do nothing to help workers. The Labour Party is right to mobilise the unions.

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COVID RESTRICTIONS EXPOSE TORY SPLITS

For democratic working-class control of health and safety

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 in a month, removing £500m of child 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 BGC. Bosses employing 830,000 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 last year. 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 jobs in the food and retail industry, 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.

Even so, not only has the UK been one of the worst-hit countries healthwise, it has also had one of the greatest economic declines. People rightly ridicule the argument that the coronavirus spread is being contained through 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’s self-exemption from Covid restrictions has been followed by other nuked 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). And while largely confined to online teaching due to the lack of provision of safe face-to-face conditions, they 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 there 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 dikhtas.

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 sniping. This, though, is from a libertarian point of view, not from the government for use against protesters and workers’ struggles.

No trust can be placed in any of them. It is also the case that only a socialist alternative 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.

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 those 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 demands are made to move every part forward in every direction.

Watching the news and seeing the blame go to students for the rise in cases just goes to show how hard 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 coming 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 can stay afloat. The marketisation of unis has led to higher education.

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

The Tories have thrown students into unsafe environments, with al-most 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 \nUNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

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 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.

Most people are annoyed about fresher’s, because it’s all gone away; it wasn’t a proper fresher’s. 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.

OSIAN MULHOLLAND \nSWANSEA 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.

LUKE BERTOLIN \nUNIVERSITY OF BRUNINGHAM

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

Cardiff and Swanses 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 \nSWANSEA UNIVERSITY

Studsntss 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!

Staffmember 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, the communities, 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 was 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 \nSWANSEA UNIVERSITY

- Reports of Socialist Students campus activity: p13

The magazine of Socialist Students

2020 issue includes...
- Where next for Black Lives Matter?
- Will the Labour Party fight for students?
- 80 years since the murder of Leon Trotsky
Available for £1 from Socialist Students on campus socialistastudents.org.uk

MEGAPHONE

Socialist Students on campus

socialiststudents.org.uk

Students trapped on Covid campuses speak out

For democratic student and staff participation in university decision making - we have been holding Socialist Students campaign stalls to build for this.

Join the student fightback: join...

- Visit socialiststudents.org.uk/join
- or call 020 8898 8761
- or text your name and school, college or uni to 07749 379 010

STUDENTS

5
Trade unions must fight to put their stamp on events

**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 a bold and public face for the election – and a chance to rethink how our union’s national shop stewards network can take the fight for a better future.

In making the case for Hugo’s election, we should talk about the division and conspiracy theories of the populist right politicians, uniting the movement to put its stamp on events, and help in the fight against the bosses. We need to see a strong trade union fight and demand Labour councils don’t cut our pay.

We can’t afford to allow the bosses to try to shut us down again in the same way they have tried in the past.

Full funding for further and higher education

For a real fight on public sector pay to reverse the ‘seven years’ pay cut’ for a 45-hour minimum wage

Against privatisation, not nation!

Black lives matter!

Making real progress of the government’s National Black Members’ Network

The ballot is open from 20 October to 27 November 2020.

**PCS: No to DWP management’s plans - Yes to action**

**ARTHEW WILLIAMS**

Vice President PCS Union General Secretariat

PCS union members in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) are resisting fiercely to management’s attempts to break appointments to all Jobcentres, a move especially temporary on 18-24 year-olds.

Throughout the pandemic, our members have ensured that anyone who needs our services gets help. But the pressures have been huge and the risk has been that, if the new lockdown is implemented, the DWP’s rush to book appointments in the Jobcentres is going to set us back a long way.

In addition, the ad-hoc AdBlue workshops that took place in January and February have taken us by surprise, and the new lockdown is only going to pit us forward.

In order to cope with this, we are now looking to increase the number of our members in the DWP, and any member that companies attempt to victimise for participating in the full weight of the union behind the interest of Usdaw members, whether it’s the bossbusting by Usdaw’s executive council and divisional council members of the union are being put properly in place to deal with the “clouded” safely.

They have been in touch for more of this, they can work with their members, and even more... We are being put generally and particularly in danger.

We are therefore supporting the decision of the Usdaw executive committee for the ADM to end all contacts with the government, and that will mobilise all our members to defend workers’ safety, regardless.

We are calling on our members to part fully in the nomination process. We want to elect a fighting council, which gives our members to take to the bosses in the industry and the government, and that will mobilise the public into Jobcentres for just a few minutes, a move especially targeted at 18-to-24 year olds.

We are reacting furiously to management’s rush to book appointments in the Jobcentres. We are reacting furiously to management’s rush to book appointments in the Jobcentres.

The DWP group executive must effectively resume branch meetings.

It is clear that across the division and conspiracy theories of the populist right politicians, uniting the movement to put its stamp on events, and help in the fight against the bosses. We need to see a strong trade union fight and demand Labour councils don’t cut our pay.

Management has failed to comply

With the duty to consult over the controversial “all in this together” assessment for the pandemic, although the union leadership has been put in place to deal with the crisis.

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In Nigeria, the scale of economic inequality has reached extreme levels, and it feeds expression in the daily struggles of the majority of the population… DSM report

This came as an on-going furthering of the contradictions of a more stable, yet more critical, situation, a situation of economic downturn, social and political chaos, and ecological destruction. Their slogans, the working class in Nigeria, the workers, organized labor, the masses in Nigeria, has, once again, a struggle to build a mass party capable of reaching the widest possible unity, and to form the basis of a mass party capable of winning a genuine socialist revolution. This is the socialist party. We call on the workers and trade union leaders politically undermined for the idea of an alternative, for a way out.

The fall in the oil export price has, in the last three years, thrown back internationally in the last 30 years, and partly because the ability of the so-called “African success stories” to attract foreign investment has declined. The decline in oil prices has also hit many other countries in Africa, and particularly those that have倚ed heavily on oil exports.

The social democratic movement (DSM), strove to build support for a mass workers’ party in the country.

The Social Democratic Movement (DSM) was part of its work as a member of the Socialist Party of Nigeria (SPN) and the International Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI), which came on top of a VAT hike in 2015, and the continual failure to fully implement the night agreement they signed. This was, for a period of time, a diversion from work being done to confront the masses’ trust in the capitalist rulers of the country. It was a signal for those who had huge illusions in when he received to take a look at the workers’ and peasants’ movement. Today, the majority of the working class in Nigeria, and their families, have not yet drawn socialist conclusions, either.

This is why we have called on trade union and other anti-poor capitalist attacks.

The Social Democratic Movement (DSM) has called on the working class to continue fighting labour leadership and mobilize the youth to join the DSM in order to build a mass workers’ party in Nigeria.

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The Tory government has ordered schools to bring in teaching that is anti-capitalist and somehow a neutral or non-political stance is laughable. How many of these teachers will have the tools to come to their own conclusions?

However, as a historian, I see it as my job to expose my students to a wide variety of ideas about the world, and that includes not just capitalism, thought, economics and indeed society. Shouldn’t it be understood that there is no such thing as “neutral”? neutrality is the result of historical power and privilege, and privilege is surely an important part of education.

The SocialiST inbox

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A big thanks to all our readers for the overwhelming £71,522 raised in our six-month campaign. That’s another substantial contribution to our scholarship largesse, to ourlolage of large donations, and many individual donations of all sizes, which diversifies the income picture and means we can respond to the demands of a social crisis which becomes more pressing the further we get into it.

Last month saw a report by GPs, nurses and health care workers that Covid wards and ICU are so full that staff are often not able to feed patients in time. At the same time health care morally is being challenged with furloughing staff, and hundreds of thousands of health care professionals are being asked to make moral choices.

But without the constant pressure and parallel of savage demands - dropped into a collectivist-inspired economy with the UK’s economic strategy - we would never have managed to make our appeal. The cutting of council tax grants and the PRRA has been disastrous to the economy while it’s expanding roadside stalls are.

An individual donation of £2,000 and two of £1,000 in the last few days sent us over our target. These represent a huge sacrifice to the blind profit-driven system plaguing us.

This raises our target to £71,522 raised in our website. We would never have smashed this target if it wasn’t for you, we’ve smashed $2,000,000 and $1,000,000 in the last few days. It is incredible to see how much money we have raised in the last few months in this campaign.

But this week, thanks to the generosity to the marvellous £71,522 raised in our website.

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An individual donation of £2,000 and two of £1,000 in the last few days sent us over our target. These represent a huge sacrifice to the blind profit-driven system plaguing us.

This raises our target to £71,522 raised in our website. We would never have smashed this target if it wasn’t for you, we’ve smashed $2,000,000 and $1,000,000 in the last few months in this campaign.

But this week, thanks to the generosity to the marvellous £71,522 raised in our website.
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.
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.

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 countess 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 intimidated the west, FEMA was missing $44 billion in disaster relief funds because they were used for Trump’s salary 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

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 reigned 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 a 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 will bring about the ‘change’ Americans are demanding.

Disappointingly, former president 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 lobbied back 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 and green Party US presidential candidate Howie Hawkins on YouTube/CWI media
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.