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the Socialist

Issue 1107

29 October - 4 November 2020

formerly **Militant**

DON'T LET TORIES STARVE OUR KIDS

Big business got billions

Fight for what we need

Free holiday school meals
for all children who need them

Work or full pay
Maintain and extend
the furlough scheme

No reduction in Universal Credit
No delay in payments.
Increase benefits in line with the minimum wage

Minimum wage of £12 an hour
as a step to £15

Stop local authority cuts
For a mass campaign involving
trade unions and local
communities to demand from
the Tories the money needed
to fund local services

LINDSEY MORGAN

PARENT AND SCHOOL MEALS CAMPAIGNER, LEICESTER

Tory MP Brendan Clarke-Smith said he wants parents to “take some responsibility for their children”. We live in a system that makes it incredibly difficult for parents to look after their kids. The idea that people want handouts from the government is a lie.

Parents want to be able to provide for their kids without having to ask for help. If it's about “taking responsibility”, put us in a position where we have the money and resources to do that!

The vast majority of people receiving benefits are in work. Clarke-Smith says he wants “more action to tackle the real causes of child poverty”. We need a minimum wage of at least £12 an hour with benefits raised to match, and an end to zero-hour contracts to “tackle the real causes” of low pay and insecure work.

Children aren't to blame for whatever their family circumstances are, and whether their parents have the money. All of the services to make it that bit easier to be able to support our kids - mental health support, youth clubs, drug and alcohol support, and breakfast clubs - the Tories have cut them too.

As for what Clarke-Smith calls “nationalising children”. We don't expect the government to act out of kindness. But we sure as hell are going to fight for the government to provide the money to feed our kids.



WHAT WE THINK

“You know what some people call us: the nasty party,” said Theresa May to the Tory party conference in 2002.

The vote against school-holiday free meals in England brought their cruelty into full view.

The coronavirus crisis is raging on. Thousands of children are suffering as parents lose income and jobs. And Boris Johnson and Co repulsively chose to snub the meals campaign led by footballer Marcus Rashford.

Children's commissioner for England, Anne Longfield, likened the debate to the depiction of hunger in the 19th century Dickens novel *Oliver Twist*. Others added that at least *Oliver Twist* was given a first serving of food - even that's being withheld by today's callous Tories.

Tory MP Ben Bradley summed up the right-wing ideology behind their abhorrent stance, calling a vote for free holiday school meals a promise to “roll out a huge expansion of long-term state dependency to millions, when a large [percentage] of those on [free school meals] are not impoverished and don't want or need it.”

All this is in the face of plenty of warnings of increasing hardship. In June, a food strategy report commissioned by cabinet minister Michael Gove said: “The wave of unemployment now rushing towards us is likely to create a sharp rise in food insecurity and outright hunger.”

Yet only five Tory MPs broke ranks to vote against their leadership's ruthless stance, while a number of others merely expressed discomfort or regret.

▶▶ CONTINUED ON P2

Discuss the fightback at

SOCIALISM 2020

ONLINE FORUM

20-23 November

see p9 and socialism2020.net

FIGHTING FOR AN NHS PAY RISE AND FULL FUNDING ▶▶ p5,7

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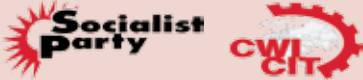
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."

Karl Marx

Tories' school meals outrage

Mass fight needed to win the support we need

**WHAT WE THINK**

▶▶ CONTINUED FROM FRONT

We have to admit that we have misunderstood the mood of the country here", said Tory MP Bernard Jenkin. "I think the government will probably have to think again on that, particularly if there's going to be more votes in the House of Commons".

They realise that a few tens of millions of pounds on meal vouchers would only be a small addition to the £210 billion spent by the government during the pandemic so far, and not worth more backlash.

Chancellor Sunak was compelled, under pressure, to change course three times and increase the winter support package being offered to businesses and some workers. Like then, the government may make some kind of climbdown on the meals issue - as it did before, under pressure from Rashford's campaign, in the summer.

This time, instead of vouchers, it is considering some inadequate additional funding to local authorities. This is despite initially claiming that £63 million 'extra' already given to councils to help people in hardship is enough, along with a paltry increase in Universal Credit.

The Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland administrations have introduced their own extensions to free school meals. And around 80 councils in England have created various stop-gap food measures for the half-term break. However, the limited extent of these measures illustrates yet again the burning need for Labour councils to enter into a battle with the government for a level of resources that can really meet people's needs.

The £63 million cited by government ministers, even if it is increased a bit, is a drop in the ocean in local authorities' pandemic-related spending needs, especially after nearly £16 billion in funds were snatched from them over the last decade. Even funding to councils for public health has been viciously cut.

In delaying the imposition of tier three restrictions in Greater Manchester to argue for more money, Labour metro-mayor Andy Burnham displayed a glimpse of departure from the longstanding pattern of local Labour leaders delivering



CC/AMANDAMILLSUSDCDP

government funding 'restraints' without any significant resistance.

But the scale and depth of the shortfalls is such, that attempting a firm negotiating stance with the government will not by itself enable basic protection for wages, jobs and services. It only gained Greater Manchester a highly insufficient £5 million over the government's initial gambit - £1.78 for every resident.

Mobilise a mass campaign

Nevertheless, even the limited stand taken by Burnham attracted widespread interest, and raised the idea of whether Labour councils could go further, as the Socialist Party has called on them to do for many years. The funding demands must be backed up by mobilising a mass campaign to force the government's hand, as the Militant-led Liverpool council did in the 1980s.

In London, rather than turning to such a path of defiance, Sadiq Khan has threatened to reduce transport services as a response to the government's refusal to provide the crisis funding needed.

The UK has the highest number of Covid deaths in Europe. Added to this, a recent study by investment bank Credit Suisse found that household wealth in Britain has fallen more than in any other large economy, with young workers, women, and people from minority backgrounds, among the worst hit.

This massive assault on lives and

livelihoods requires a similarly massive response from the workers' movement: starting with drawing a line against workers being made to pay for the crisis, and a drive to remove the weak and divided Tory government. The latest poll on its response to the pandemic showed approval at a record low of 29%.

For as long as this government is in office, it will seek to extract every last drop of private profit for its big business backers - including through promoting 'public service' firms like Serco. The corrupt self-interest at the top is brazen; Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick, for instance, had boasted about 'helping to secure' £25 million for his own constituency, Newark, from a pool of money meant to go only to the most deprived areas, a category that Newark wasn't in.

Councillors must take a stand

Any mayor or set of councillors who decide to take a real stand against inflicting more austerity would attract massive support from the working class in their area, enough to give their stand real muscle. A local conference could be organised, for democratic discussion between workers, trade unionists, students and others in the community, on what resources must be fought for to respond fully to the health crisis and to defend living standards.

While the campaign is being built, borrowing powers should be used

to deliver needs-based budgets. Linking together with other fighting councils would lead to an opposition movement of millions. Likewise, the trade union leaders have the potential to mobilise the millions of trade union members, by demonstrating that workers' interests can be protected through strength in unity and struggle.

A recent declaration, initiated by the Unite union and signed by around 125 labour and trade union movement figureheads, called for "a comprehensive financial package of support to protect jobs and incomes, in the way France, Germany, Spain and others are doing, including an extension of the job retention scheme with 80% wage support ... increasing the level of statutory sick pay, and enabling all to claim it, and equipping our public services with the resources they need".

The capitalist governments in France, Germany and Spain are giving nowhere near enough protection to jobs and incomes, and those three countries presently have a higher unemployment rate than Britain.

Another shortcoming is that 100% wage support is needed, not 80%. But crucial for even achieving what is outlined in this declaration would be a determined fight on a mass scale.

Anger towards the government across workplaces, local communities and education institutions has been growing; there will not be a shortage of willingness to fight back.



Tory 'Starve a Kid to Save a Quid' scheme

The 322 Tory MPs who voted against extending free school meals are on base salaries of £81,932 a year - before ministerial bonuses, expenses, and other income.

A full-time worker on the over-25 minimum wage earns around £17,000 a year. Those forced to claim Universal Credit receive up to £5,000

a year to live on, plus around £3,000 a year for each child.

Almost a million people have signed a petition to withdraw MPs' meal subsidies. Commons menus from 2019 show steak and chips for under a tenner, or a jacket potato for less than a quid.

Over 950,000 had signed as the

Socialist went to press. A similar number had signed Marcus Rashford's petition to parliament to extend free school meals into the holidays.

Pubs and restaurants across Britain are barring their MPs for voting against free school meals extension. One pub in Rishi Sunak's constituency has banned him for life.



Boots launches £120, 12-minute Covid test

One hundred and twenty pounds for a test with Boots. Boots, which is still avoiding millions in tax every year. Boots, which charged the NHS £2,000 per pot of hand cream.

Why can't the technology behind a 12-minute test be made available to all of us? For free?

We need all aspects of healthcare out of the hands of these vultures! Workers could run a nationalised pharmaceutical industry on the basis of need and not this extortionate profit.

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Under the microscope

● **12 million adults are struggling with bills** - an extra two million since the pandemic hit in February, says the Financial Conduct Authority. 31% of UK households have lost income. 25 to 34-year-olds are the most likely to have had a change in employment. Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers are the most likely to have lost hours.

● **Six million small businesses, representing 16.6 million jobs, are at risk of going under** due to the pandemic, finds King's Business School. Two-thirds of small firms only expect trading to worsen, according

to a Federation of Small Businesses poll.

● **Chinese financial tech firm Ant Group expects to raise a record-breaking \$34 billion** when it floats on the stock market for the first time in November. Ant boss Jack Ma - who founded the last record-breaker, Alibaba - is worth \$61 billion, estimates Bloomberg.

● **Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) doctors face racial discrimination when applying for more senior roles**, says the Royal College of Physicians. 29% of white candidates receive offers after their first shortlisting, compared with 12% of BAME candidates. On average, black doctors earn over £9,000 less, and black nurses around £2,000 less, according to

a 2018 study in the British Medical Journal.

● **Donald Trump's chief of staff has openly declared that "we're not going to control the pandemic."** When CNN journalists asked Mark Meadows why the Trump government would not try to contain it, he responded: "Because it is a contagious virus." Er... there you go!

● **Big tech firms in the US are dodging up to \$2.8 billion a year of taxes** in poorer countries, reckons ActionAid International. These estimates for Facebook, Microsoft and Google parent Alphabet could pay for almost two million nurses in just three years in 20 developing economies. Nationalise the tax dodgers!

Grenfell watch: landlord's £800,000 saving

A director of Grenfell Tower's landlord company told the public inquiry he "had forgotten" about a secret meeting with builders discussing how to shave £800,000 off refurb costs. Lawyers for the landlord even wrote in 2014, cautioning that the builders' bid seemed "abnormally low."

Peter Maddison admitted he

didn't ask why the lethal 'aluminium-composite material' cladding was £300,000 cheaper, or whether it complied with fire safety laws. Building contractor Rydon supposedly did not discuss the issue with the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation.

There were 72 confirmed deaths in the 2017 inferno.



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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Mayor and government compete to attack London transport: fight for no cuts!

JARED WOOD
RMT UNION NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - LONDON TRANSPORT REPRESENTATIVE (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

At the time of writing, Transport for London (TfL) workers - and London passengers and car users - are caught in a war of words between London's Labour mayor and the Tory central government.

The reality facing us seems to be that while the two protagonists will dispute responsibility, they could both settle on a strategy that makes attacks on TfL workers' jobs and conditions, and broader attacks on London's working class to boot.

The funding gap that TfL is facing due to a collapse in fare revenues is huge. Tube use is still only 34% of pre-Covid levels, and bus use is about 50%.

The model of funding TfL through fare revenues alone, withdrawing government subsidy, was always going to fail. But with the Covid impact, TfL faces immediate technical bankruptcy.

The London mayor, Sadiq Khan, has called for the government to provide £4.9 billion in subsidy to take TfL up to April 2022, the end of the next financial year.

The government has demanded TfL extend the 'Congestion Charge' for drivers, and remove free travel from children and pensioners. Tories on the London Assembly have also called for attacks on TfL workers' pensions and travel rights.

Transport union RMT will resist any attacks on TfL workers, and opposes any increase in fares or additional taxes or charges on the people of London.

The way to fill the TfL funding gap

RMT is discussing a response to the current crisis, involving both industrial action and a political campaign



is to restore government support. If TfL received anything like the government subsidy that helps run the New York Subway or Paris Metro, the funding crisis would be resolved already.

Khan has backed this call for additional funding, with the threat that if the government does not provide it he will issue a 'Section 114' notice - effectively declaring TfL bankrupt - and set about shutting down services.

To carry this out would be an appalling position. The Greater London Authority has borrowing powers and reserves that it could harness to avoid cuts. While this would bring it into conflict with the Department for Transport, it would enable it to mobilise a public campaign to force the government to support TfL.

In response to Khan's threat, the government has threatened to take control of TfL away from the London mayor and run it directly, in order to impose its own cuts.

RMT is discussing a response to the current crisis involving both industrial action and a political campaign across London. We already have a position of accepting no cuts, and working with other unions and TfL service users to fight for full government funding.

The shareholders of the privatised train-operating companies have already been bailed out by the government. They've been funded to give them a profitable return on the level of usage they would have expected were it not for Covid. Dividends continue to be paid out by these firms.

We cannot accept another bail-out for the rich while essential workers - who have kept services running throughout the Covid pandemic - pay with their jobs and conditions, and the wider working class is asked to top up the bosses' profits with yet more cuts and charges.

How can passengers and car users fight back?

LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

● Ending free travel

Free 'Zip' Oyster travel for under-18s has been under threat from Tory and Labour cuts for some time already. Austerity also restricted free travel on over-60 Oysters to journeys after 9am only.

The leaked Tory report now proposes ending all this free travel. There are over two million Londoners aged 18 or under, and over 1.3 million aged 60 or over, according to 2016 estimates by the Office for National Statistics.

The sheer scale of these attacks on passengers or car users would necessitate a generalised response. A first step would be a call on trade union, school student and pensioner organisations to build for a mass demonstration demanding non-implementation.



● Political challenge

With both Starmer's Labour and the Tories bent on finding some way to make the working class pay for the TfL crisis, the RMT is also right to consider a political response. The union's national executive committee agreed this summer that the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) should recommence electoral challenges to politicians of any party who attack the working class.

Socialist Party branches around the country are writing to local RMT and other union branches, as well as community campaigners, to suggest forming local TUSC committees to prepare such challenges. This year's London mayoral and assembly elections, delayed to 2021, will be an important forum for discussing the fightback the capital's working class needs.



NHS England's £1bn winter shortfall: we need union action, not platitudes!

MAGGIE FRICKER
NHS WORKER, SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

So, there's a shortfall of over £1 billion in funding for the NHS in England; so say health officials to the Guardian. If NHS bosses and Westminster politicians could see what things are really like in our hospitals, they'd realise we're a lot more hard up than that!

Labour politicians say there's been ten years of acute underfunding, staff shortages and bed cuts. But the cuts and crazy privatisation go back much further than that - including their own years in power.

We were told by Chancellor Rishi Sunak back in March that the NHS would get "whatever resources it needs" to get us through the pandemic. The Tories' speech writers must have been working overtime for all the clever, meaningless sound-bites they produced.

We are not 'in it together'. MPs have had their big pay rise and extra resources to work from home. We've had no real pay rise, and any new money has been stolen from somewhere else in the service.

It reminds me of my grandmother saving money in jars on the mantelpiece and then having to hide when the rent man came because that

money had gone to put food on the table.

We have stolen from the jars named 'hip replacement', 'new heart valve', 'breast screening' and so on, dealing with the onslaught of coronavirus.

In the last couple of months, we've been trying to catch up on so-called 'routine' surgery. But this catch-up drive is now meeting head on the second wave of the pandemic.



We have stolen from the jars named 'hip replacement', 'new heart valve', 'breast screening' and so on, dealing with the onslaught of coronavirus

Every year we are fearful as we move towards winter. Last year took a herculean effort to cope with every 'Code Black', every closed or overwhelmed A&E, every bed closure. And that was without Covid.

We feel we have nothing more to give. We are tired. Depression

and stress levels are at record levels among health workers and many would leave if they could afford to.

This is no way to run a health service - billions are siphoned off by big business through private suppliers, leeches who bleed the service dry. We need a massive injection of cash to keep vital services going while we treat increasing numbers suffering from Covid-19.

And as for the tiny handful who've managed to climb the greasy pole - who refuse to lead a fightback while collecting big fat salaries as MPs or union leaders - we don't need your platitudes. Of course you feel 'we're all in it together' with the Tories!

If you aren't prepared to lead us into struggle to fight for decent resources and pay, move over for someone who will. We need leaders who will fight - like Hugo Pierre, standing for general secretary of public service union Unison (see page 6). We need coordinated industrial action for a 15% pay rise, and a fully funded, publicly owned NHS.

Fighting cuts and workers' control in the workplace are sessions at socialism2020.net Online forum 20-23 November



BAME Covid deaths due to capitalist inequality, confirms government

DEJI OLAYINKA
SOUTH EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Increased Covid-19 infection and death rates among ethnic minorities in Britain are mainly driven by social and economic factors, such as occupation, deprivation and where we live. So says the government's own Race Disparity Unit, confirming what the Socialist Party has argued from the start.

Government scientist Dr Raghib Ali confirmed the evidence "doesn't suggest there's any genetic explanation." However, he also said: "I don't think structural racism is a reasonable explanation."

This is because "it misses the very large number of non-ethnic minority groups, so whites basically, who also live in deprived areas and overcrowded housing and with high risk occupations." It is absolutely true that conditions must be improved for the whole working class. But it is also true that these socioeconomic factors disproportionately affect black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) workers.

Capitalist commentators are clinging onto this as a dismissal of structural racism. But as the Socialist Party previously explained, it's precisely these factors that show class inequality, the fundamental problem, is reinforced by capitalism's

structural racism. (See 'Black and Asian Covid-19 deaths: an indictment of capitalist inequality' at socialistparty.org.uk.)

This new report follows studies showing death rates are up to three times as high for BAME people. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) suggested that almost 60,000 more coronavirus deaths could have occurred in England and Wales if more white people had faced the same risks.



Ending the excess risk for BAME people means ending the appalling working and living conditions

Even when all known factors are accounted for, there is still an unexplained increased risk for certain ethnic groups. This may be due to factors the ONS does not cover, such as asylum seekers and refugees having to share bathroom facilities with multiple other families in hostels.

The main response from the government has been to introduce a new 'Community Champions' scheme,

with part of the funding used to "enhance existing communication strategies." This is just another insulting attempt at misdirection by the government.

Rather than use the funding to solve the identified problems, they are rolling out policies that suggest BAME people have somehow failed to receive or understand the same warnings as our white counterparts!

Instead, the government should start with policies like those suggested, in response to the report, by the British Medical Association council chair: "To offer adequate funding that encourages individuals to be tested and to self-isolate if infected, given evidence that many feel that financial loss acts as a deterrent to do so."

Ending the excess risk for BAME people means ending the appalling working and living conditions that can affect anyone in the working class. As a start, the unions must lead a fight for work or full pay, full funding and public ownership of the health and care sector, and democratic workers' and community control of health and safety measures.

Black Lives Matter and fighting racism is one of the themes at socialism2020.net Online forum 20-23 November



UCU members vote to strike to defend jobs



University and College Union (UCU) members at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh have voted in favour of strike action to protect 130 jobs currently under threat. In total, 77% of those who voted backed strike action on a turnout of 66%. The branch activists are meeting to determine the next actions for the dispute. The ballot result gives confidence to other UCU branches entering into local disputes over both jobs and safety in UK universities and colleges, as well as other workers seeking to fight job losses imposed by management.

BEA GARDNER

Unite union protests Walsall engineering firm's pay cuts



Unite the Union organised a demonstration outside Chamberlain and Hill Castings, an engineering firm in Walsall, on 22 October.

The company is proposing huge pay cuts which could result in some workers losing £200 a week when the government's Job Retention Scheme ends on 31 October. The workers are rightly very angry, and Unite is in the process of organising an industrial action ballot.

The callousness of the company is shown by its point-blank refusal

to accept Unite's counter proposals, which would achieve the same level of savings.

The demonstration was supported by Walsall Trades Union Council, Walsall Unite Community branch and the Socialist Party. The local paper also covered the event.

One of the workers speaking at the end of the demo promised much larger protests if the company doesn't back down.

CLIVE WALDER

BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

Three weeks of strike action at Rolls-Royce

Workers at the Rolls-Royce factory at Barnoldswick in Lancashire are set to take three weeks of strike action beginning in November, as part of the campaign led by Unite.

In August, Rolls-Royce announced that it was intent on offshoring the production of its Trent Engine blades, which are made at Barnoldswick to a factory in Singapore, with the loss of 350 workers.

Earlier in October, members of Unite returned a 94% 'yes' vote in favour of industrial action.

Unite has delayed issuing strike dates to give Rolls-Royce a final chance to cancel its offshoring proposals or ensure that Barnoldswick remains viable by introducing similar work and employment levels, and to settle the dispute over compulsory redundancies.

But with no such commitments forthcoming, strike action has been called.

The strike action will begin on Friday 6 November and end on Friday 27 November.

Royal Mail: No more behind closed doors talks - CWU must take fight to the bosses

GARY CLARK
CWU SCOTLAND NO.2 BRANCH SECRETARY
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The Communication Workers' Union (CWU) are in vital talks with senior Royal Mail management which could decide the future of the 500-year-old institution of Royal Mail and what type of company it will be post-Covid.

The strength of the CWU forced Royal Mail CEO Rico Back out, which was seen as a victory for the CWU, but as we pointed out, we still had a dispute with management on our hands, and a live industrial action ballot.

The CWU leadership made a mistake by allowing the ballot to run out, and an extension should have been demanded before entering negotiations with Royal Mail.

The ballot has now run its time limit; negotiations are ongoing, and have been held in a format of strict confidence, which has caused frustration among our membership. All negotiations should be held in full view of the members. The membership has seen no difference in management since Rico Back was removed. It remains the same and every day is a battle in the workplace.

Leaks

There have been leaks around what Royal Mail is offering in the current talks, and how they want the future of Royal Mail doesn't look good. Royal Mail views the future of the CWU as only representing the membership on personnel issues.

Royal Mail want to be able to do

anything they want as a business. In negotiations with the CWU, it is looking for a reduction of CWU reps and officials by 25%, a clear attack on how we represent the membership and how a trade union operates.

The union must now reach out to the members and prepare them for another ballot. No more behind closed doors talks, everything should be up front and open to the membership, as Royal Mail clearly, even after Rico Back was removed, still wants to smash the union.

We must now get back onto a war footing and prepare again for a battle with management. We demand renationalisation of Royal Mail to take it out of the hands of the likes of Rico Back and run it under democratic workers' control.



PHOTO PAUL MATTESSON

Fight Leeds Labour council's massive cuts

MICHAEL JOHNSON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Leeds Labour-run council has announced plans for massive cuts in services and jobs across the city in the coming months and year, on the basis of pressures on the council due to Covid-19.

In September alone, the council made plans for cuts of around £32.6 million, with a reduction in jobs of almost 530 full-time staff. And now, a month later, there are proposals for further cuts amounting to nearly £8 million and 88.7 full-time equivalent roles on top of September's plans.

These most recent proposals include closures of two care homes and one day centre. This is a shocking attack on some of the most vulnerable people in the city, at a time when they are already dealing with the impact of Covid on their care, and carers who have been putting their lives at risk throughout the crisis.

The closure of these services will ultimately serve no purpose other than forcing residents and staff into private care homes, with

no guarantee on the quality of the service.

In addition, at a time when Labour MPs are joining a chorus of criticism of the Tories' suggestions that people working in the arts retrain, Leeds council is proposing major cuts to arts and leisure throughout the city, including reductions in grants to theatres and stopping public events like Christmas lights.

Recommendations for increased fees for bulky waste collections are made, something that will mainly be a penalty for those who don't drive or have access to a car, typically the poorest and most vulnerable.

To add insult to injury, among other proposals is a second increase in as many months in fees for bereavement services!

Following these proposals becoming public GMB, the union representing a number of the workers impacted, particularly workers in the care homes and day services, put out a statement rightly calling the proposals "unforgivable and a total kick in the teeth," and making clear they do not accept them and "will be

campaigning at all levels to stop any closures."

This campaign should be joined by the other local government unions in particular, alongside the wider trade union movement, to send the message that these cuts are not only wrong but unnecessary.

Cuts due to Covid, passed on by Labour councils on behalf of the Tories, can be fought. If Labour councillors aren't prepared to take up this fight, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is prepared to put forward an anti-austerity socialist programme at next year's elections.

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to find out more today!

Why I am backing Hugo Pierre for Unison general secretary

AN NHS WORKER AND UNISON MEMBER
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

We need change! Change at work, change in how we are dealing with the Covid pandemic, change in the political system that gives millions of pounds to cronies of the cabinet while millions of people struggle on reduced incomes, not knowing if they will have a job next week, next month or next year.

We need change in our trade unions too. Currently the general secretary of Unison is paid around £138,000 a year. It is obscene that a union leader representing mainly low-paid workers should be given a lifestyle most of us can only dream of - out of our membership money! How can someone on £138,000 understand the struggles of low-paid members?

That's why I am voting for Hugo Pierre to be the next general secretary of Unison. Hugo is different. He isn't in this for the positions or the perks. If Hugo is elected he will stay on his current salary, and donate the rest (well over £100,000 a year) to Unison members' campaigns, strike funds and welfare.

Missing in action

When the government announced no pay rise for the vast majority of NHS staff, where was the Unison national leadership? Missing in action, as they have been through much of the pandemic.

Where were they when the grassroots pay campaign began, expressing the burning anger of NHS workers? At first nowhere, then they spent their time arguing over exactly what pay rise should be demanded, and telling branches not to support the campaign with Unison resources.

They totally missed the point, which was that a movement was happening in front of their eyes that they could have supported, in the interests of members. The anger over NHS pay is enormous.

Reps who have been around for years say they are getting a much more enthusiastic response campaigning on pay than ever before. This is a huge opportunity to take the fight to the government, but Dave Prentis, the current Unison general secretary, and the people around him have been so slow to respond that they risk waiting till the mood of anger passes.

As we go headlong into the second wave of Covid-19, with staff who are still traumatised and exhausted from the first one, how will the public, who clapped for carers and the NHS so enthusiastically, react to a government refusing to give a penny more to the NHS workers who are risking their lives to keep the NHS going?

A proper pay rise for NHS staff can be won. The Tories are unpopular and divided. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has become well known for his U-turns. A determined fight by the unions could add a U-turn on NHS pay.

Hugo is the only candidate with a serious strategy to win a proper pay rise for all NHS staff. He has supported the grassroots NHS pay campaign from the start, and has pledged that, under his leadership, branches will

"The anger over NHS pay is enormous. Hugo has a strategy to win"



HUGO (CENTRE) PROTESTING ALONGSIDE NHS WORKERS FOR A 15% PAY RISE PHOTO ISAI PRIYA

not be left to fight alone. He is campaigning for national action, including a national ballot for industrial action. He is fighting for a minimum wage of £15 an hour, which would help lift millions out of poverty, inside and outside the NHS.

His call for paid union officials to be elected, instead of appointed, would be a huge change for the better.

Hugo would lead the fight to renationalise our NHS. The privatisation

of testing and tracing has been a disaster. Millions of pounds of public money have been handed over to private companies like Serco, who have failed time and again to provide proper test and trace services.

Hugo is fighting for all privatisation to be reversed, the scrapping of private finance initiatives in the NHS, and all NHS services to be run publicly. Huge numbers of NHS staff are employed by private companies, on worse terms and conditions. Private

companies charge huge amounts for this, and in the long run are more expensive than providing the services publicly, because with them their profits always come first.

Unison has 1.4 million members. Thousands have joined during the pandemic because they understand that their best chance of protecting themselves is to be in a union. They are right - if we fight for the unions to back them. Hugo is campaigning for health and safety reps to decide whether it is safe to work, and full pay for any worker who cannot work due to Covid restrictions.

Hugo works in education, in Camden Council. He fully supported the National Education Union (NEU) campaign to only reopen schools when it was safe to do so, with real safety measures in place and the NEU's five tests passed. He knows how to work with other unions, and with service users, to build campaigns that can win.

Fighting record

Hugo has a fighting record on preventing school closures, defending members, saving jobs, winning better pay and conditions for workers, fighting racism, prejudice and division. He has been endorsed in his campaign to be general secretary of Unison by the union's black members' committee. One of Hugo's supporters, until his untimely death from Covid recently, was Raph Parkinson - the first to be elected to Unison's reserved black members' seat on the union's national executive council.

Hugo is campaigning for Unison to stop giving members' money to support Labour candidates who back cuts, privatisation or austerity, and to only support council or parliamentary candidates who put Unison policies into action.

Where I live, Labour councillors are making Unison members redundant and cutting the services local people rely on. I agree with Hugo - if members of Unison (and other unions) want to stand against them on a pledge to implement Unison policies of opposing cuts and protecting public services, they should get the backing of our union.

Trade unions were set up by people like Hugo - class fighters and socialists who fight for the working class. He understands the power workers have to change society for the better. He is one of us.

When workers are deciding whether or not to go on strike, or to declare they are not willing to work until proper safety measures are put in place, they are often risking their jobs as well as losing vital pay. They need to know they have a union leader who will back them, and fight alongside them. Unison members now have a chance to elect a general secretary like that - vote Hugo Pierre!

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'. These articles are produced without the authorisation of Hugo Pierre, in order to comply with these requirements.

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FOOD AND A CAPITALIST BREXIT: NO TRUST IN TORY DEALS!

No Tory-negotiated trade deals will defend the interests of the working class. However, as Prime Minister Boris Johnson plays hard ball in the eleventh-hour negotiations on what will replace Britain's current arrangements with the European Union (EU), it's possible Britain will end up trading on World Trade Organisation (WTO) terms. What will such a capitalist Brexit mean in relation to food supply, prices, quality, production and employment?

DAVE CARR

The Brexit transition period, which maintains alignment with the EU over trade and tariffs, will end on 31 December 2020. Without an agreement, and with an acrimonious breakdown of the talks, the first thing that could happen is a snarling up of the food supply chains as lorry drivers try to negotiate a passage through customs border checks. The movement of livestock would also slow to a crawl as veterinary inspections take place at border crossings.

This could rapidly lead to empty supermarket shelves, since 80% of imported food sold in the UK comes from the EU. And with the short shelf life of fresh produce, panic buying could then ensue, as we saw during the first weeks of the Covid-19 lockdown.

Tesco boss John Allen said: "We can't rule out the possibility that if there is dislocation at the ports of entry to the UK there will be some shortages of some items of fresh food, at least for a time." By "a time" he means "a few months".

This border chaos and food shortages could worsen the UK economy's deepest recession in living memory. And if that causes the exchange rate of the pound against other currencies to slide, then the price of imported food will rise.

Bloomberg, a finance media company, predicts that supermarket prices will rise in the coming months "as food supplies get gummelled by a triple whammy of Brexit, Covid-19 and weather-struck harvests".

Food poverty already affects nearly eight million people in Britain, and is growing under the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic - as highlighted by the furore over the Tories'

refusal to provide free school meals to needy families over the autumn school break. It is likely to increase still further (see front page).

A temporary schedule of tariffs (import duties) published by the government back in May, set about 85% of EU food imports subject to tariffs of more than 5%. The British Retail Consortium predicts that without a free trade deal with the EU in place by 1 January, EU food imports would face average tariffs of 20%.

The Tory government put this 'UK Global Tariff' in place to force the leaders of the 27 member states to capitulate. But what if they don't?

Steep price rises and food shortages combined could lead to social unrest, including looting and rioting.

Civil unrest

Of course, such a chaotic scenario is dismissed by the government as 'irresponsible scaremongering'. But its own official Operation Yellowhammer papers from 2019 spoke of the police preparing for the possibility of civil unrest.

And in September this year, Martin Hewitt, chairman of the National Police Chiefs' Council, said: "EU exit will be happening on 31 December and planning for that is starting to ramp back up."

Tory hardline Brexiteers counter that slashing import duties to zero will actually reduce the prices of some imports. However, even the Johnson government has balked over this idea as it would expose UK farmers to fierce global competition, which includes food products produced much cheaper, partly due to lower animal welfare standards.

Interestingly, in the government's Agricultural Bill, that recently passed its third reading in the Commons, the government threw out a Lords'

amendment that would have codified in law that all foodstuffs must comply with domestic animal welfare standards.

The reason for this refusal is because Johnson is desperate to secure a trade and tariffs deal with the US. But Trump's administration has made it clear that any such deal is contingent upon allowing potentially unsafe food products - such as chlorine-washed chicken carcasses and growth hormone-injected beef - into the UK market.

Johnson is engaged with a game of brinkmanship with his EU counterparts. He is hoping that the EU leaders will blink first and accept a favourable free trade deal with the UK.

However, if this fails, the EU could impose high 'third country' tariffs on UK agriculture exports, currently worth £13 billion a year. This would cripple UK sheep farmers, for example.

And without an EU-UK trade deal, imports into the UK economy will revert to World Trade Organisation 'non-discriminatory' rules. So if the UK government continues to allow EU imports at zero-tariffs, it will be obliged to allow these rules to apply to other non-EU countries. And while this will keep consumer prices low, UK agribusiness will be adversely affected.

Anticipating this disastrous consequence of an exit on WTO terms from the EU, the UK government, as previously mentioned, has made arrangements for a 'temporary tariffs schedule' lasting one year. This would allow the majority of imports to be tariff-free but with higher tariffs applied to beef and lamb imports.

On top of all this mess is the government's Fisheries Bill, which passed through the Commons in October. Its main provision will be to end access of EU fishing fleets to British waters. Currently, EU fleets have access to 60%. This was a concession made decades ago by the Tories to gain British entry into the EEC (as the EU was then known).

Apart from a possible confrontation between British and French fishing crews post-Brexit, the government defeated an amendment to the Bill to protect these waters from overfishing by super-trawlers.

Already, 97% of Britain's supposedly protected coastal marine parks have been wrecked by dredgers and sea-bottom trawlers. Super-trawlers will still be allowed access to the marine parks as long as they don't bottom trawl!



PHOTO CHATHAM HOUSE/CC



Protesters in Tory MP Liam Fox's constituency rail against 'frankenfood' imports, which would be permitted under a US-UK free trade deal
PHOTO JESS HURO/GLOBAL JUSTICE NOW/CC

Health, workers and environment

Tory Brexiteers often cite Canada's free trade deals as a template for a US-UK deal. However, such a deal could have serious negative implications for public health.

In 1989, Canada struck a free trade deal with the US. Five years later, Canada removed its 5% import tariff on high-fructose corn syrup products, which are typically found in breakfast cereals, icecream, soft drinks, etc.

According to the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, a rise in obesity levels, and associated illnesses such as diabetes since the 1990s, can be partly attributed to this deal.

Consumer, medical, and environmental organisations, the National Farmers Union, and even celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, pointed out the dangerous health implications ahead of the government's Agricultural Bill - but to no avail.

However, it's not only imports of cheaper high sugar, fat and salt foods that would fill our supermarket shelves under a free-trade deal with the US (not that the British retail industry has done very much to source healthy foods). Many food products from the US, and elsewhere, contain traces of pesticides currently banned in the UK.

Donald Trump's chief trade negotiator made it clear that any deal with the UK must allow in American food products containing trace residues of pesticides and other agricultural chemicals.

Even the right-wing Mail on Sunday pointed out that 70 pesticides currently banned in the UK are used on US farms. Such pesticides are widely used in neocolonial countries and, according to Greenpeace, are

responsible for a staggering 200,000 deaths a year.

And even if Democratic Party candidate Joe Biden wins the race to the White House, it's clear that this capitalist establishment figure would push US agribusiness interests in any future US/UK trade deal.

Another issue is the abuse of antibiotics in US pig farms. There, the antibiotic Carbadox - banned in the EU since 1998 - is commonly used to increase the weight of pigs. Such antibiotic overuse in agriculture is resulting in these medicines becoming less effective in treating infections in humans.

Of course, no one should be under any illusions that pesticide use, along with other adverse practices, on Britain's mega-farms - operating under EU rules - are environmentally better. A recent DEFRA report showed that water quality of Britain's lakes and rivers has collapsed in the last five years due to agricultural run-offs of pesticides and animal slurry.

Migrant workers

But wouldn't breaking with the current trade arrangements with the EU provide an opportunity for British agriculture becoming more self-sufficient?

At present, 61% of all the food eaten is produced in the country. Apart from the time lag in bringing more land into use - assuming farmers are willing or able to invest - there remains the problem of labour supply. The Covid-19 pandemic restrictions on the movement of labour within Europe has already highlighted the dependency of migrant workers on UK farms.

The Tories obliged agribusiness by

abolishing the Agricultural Wages Board in 2013, which set minimum wage rates. The effect has been to make UK farms almost wholly reliant on migrant workers. As the recent failure to create a British 'land army' during the Covid-19 pandemic shows, UK farms would have to significantly increase wages to attract a new domestic workforce. But that would shrink the industry's profit margins making UK farms uncompetitive in world markets.

However, there shouldn't be any illusions in the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). CAP, in short, means handing over large sums of public money to farmers, often to overproduce. It results in an average family of four having to pay over £15 a week extra in food bills. The annual income of an EU dairy cow exceeds that of half the world's human population!

Of course, the bulk of these subsidies goes to mega-farms and not marginal farmers. It also means dumping the surplus products on neocolonial countries, thereby undermining domestic farming which can't compete.

The CAP has also been blamed for encouraging environmentally damaging intensive farming. Its commitment to guarantee prices makes it economically worthwhile to use all available land, with the aid of chemicals, to grow more crops.

The current EU proposals to reform the CAP have been derided as 'greenwash' by many environmental groups, who point to the policy amendments maintaining direct farming subsidies, along with deregulation and dismantling environmental checks.



Free trade v protectionism

The 'food question' under Brexit has brought into sharp relief the historic struggle within capitalism between advocates of protectionism and free trade.

For socialists, however, they are two sides of the same system of capitalist exploitation. Neither protectionism nor free trade under capitalism can guarantee sustainable agriculture, with plentiful wholesome food, produced by non-exploited labour. That would require the coming to power of a workers' government.

The Socialist Party supported a vote to leave the EU in the 2016 referendum. We called for a socialist Brexit which would mean ripping up the EU bosses' club neoliberal rules, not in order to create the more isolated and

even more exploitative neoliberal vision of the Tory right, but to begin to fight for a socialist society.

As the Socialist has previously explained: "For socialists it does not matter so much where production is situated in a global economy but it is a question of which class in society controls production."

The only way workers can properly protect themselves against the volatility and instability of the capitalist economy is ultimately, through taking over the means of production, distribution and exchange and for the economy to be democratically owned and controlled by the working class in a socialist plan of production."

See 'World economy: Trade wars and protectionism', February 2006, on socialistparty.org.uk

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COVID, CAPITALIST CRISIS AND THE FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM

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Confirmed speakers include:

- HANNAH SELL** Socialist Party general secretary
- PETER TAAFFE** Socialist Party political secretary
- BEA GARDNER** student activist
- HUGO PIERRE** Unison NEC member (personal capacity)
- ISAI PRIYA** Socialist Party black and asian members organiser
- HELEN PATTISON** rally chair

FOR UPDATES, TICKETS, INFO:
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Shortages and panic buying could ensue without an EU trade agreement PHOTO D. CARR

Solidarity with the movement in Nigeria

● Birmingham

The organisers of the Birmingham protest against Nigeria's notorious Special Anti-Robbery Squad (Sars) police units emphasised that the event was peaceful, with no "attacks on anybody's character". However, when the mic was opened, the anger burst out.

One after another, Nigerian workers vented their rage at the brutality of the Nigerian state. The crowd of 200 demanded the violent and militarised Sars police unit be disbanded, and loudly sang 'Solidarity Forever'.

I spoke to deliver a message of solidarity on behalf of the Socialist Party, warmly welcomed by the crowd. I said it was a disgrace that the Nigeria government is failing to provide the very basics of life for the majority, given the immense natural resources and human talent possessed by Nigeria.

A spontaneous chant of "Buhari out" began after I demanded the resignation of President Mohammed Buhari.

TED WOODLEY

● Leeds

"We've started this, and there's no going back", remarked one speaker at the 24 October protest.

60 joined the protest, organised by the Nigerian Student Society at Leeds University. There were placards against police violence, to dismantle Sars and Swat police units, and against Buhari.

There was huge anger at the police massacre at Lekki bridge, and Buhari's attempts to deny the incident ever happened. The anger extended far beyond this particular issue, which is the straw that broke the camel's back.

We reproduced the text of a leaflet distributed by our sister party - Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) - on the streets of Nigeria.

One of the rally speakers read out the demands being raised by the Youth Rights Campaign - launched by DSM - giving their own explanation as to why each one was vital.

IAIN DALTON

● Northampton

Over 100 people turned up to the Northampton demo on 24 October.

One of the organisers took some of the Socialist Party leaflets and handed them out to the other organisers. The organisers called for the police killings to end, and to bring down the Buhari government.

When people saw what we had to say, they were coming over asking for our leaflets. The 100 leaflets we printed ran out. Even when we ran out, demonstrators came looking for more.

After we mentioned that there was an article about Nigeria in our paper, the Socialist, ten people bought a copy. And we've already contacted

the six people we met interested in joining the Socialist Party.

SEAMUS SMYTH

● London - Protesters detail murderous corruption

The fury was palpable at the protest in central London on 21 October.

One protester told me she had lost three sisters in Nigeria, citing police banditry and unsafe roads. She sent her nephew an iPhone when he got into university. But this resulted in a high-speed chase by Sars officers - down broken, unmaintained roads - to steal it.

Many police officers outside the brutal Sars/Swat force endure appalling conditions. Another protester told me that Nigerian police can sleep in one-room accommodation with families of five.

There is a barely functioning electric grid, and police stations can't even afford petrol for their generators all of the time. Members of the public wishing to give statements have to buy their own pens and paper.

JAMES IVENS

● London - five protests in a week

Protesters in London on 23 October blamed the rich in Nigeria and elsewhere for Nigeria's poverty and lack of basic services. One protester said: "Imagine having to fight for your life from birth."

Despite the Covid risk, the police wanted us to be tightly packed together on the pavement. But the protest spread out onto the street in front of the Nigerian High Commission, then marched to Downing Street.

Another protester, Naomi, said: "It's time for them to give power to the people."

Naomi was also angry about free school meals (see front page) and organised a protest on that issue. "Children deserve to eat, but the government does not care. Boris is prioritising his friends and himself."

IAN PATTISON

● Liverpool

Many of the 100 in attendance had family or friends in Lagos, where protestors peacefully sitting and singing the national anthem were butchered.

NEILL DUNNE

● *More on Nigeria, including an interview with a protester, on page 15 and back*

Failing capitalism and resistance in Nigeria - one of the sessions at socialism2020.net
Online forum 20-23 November



Birmingham: 'Refund our fees' protests

Locked out, but we still marched to campus

TOM GREEN
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST STUDENTS

After growing discontent among students and staff, Birmingham Socialist Students called a march on 21 October. Students arriving in Birmingham were met with an almost immediate reduction of contact hours, restricted library access, and extremely limited contact with university representatives.

Faced with these restrictions, and

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having to isolate for 14 days with inadequate support, the mood on campus was one of dissatisfaction. For weeks students have taken the brunt of the Tory blame game, in spite of the government's disastrous and neglectful handling of the pandemic that only serves the interests of the profiteers.

So Socialist Students announced a protest - demanding student fees are refunded and for free education in general - and campaigning for two weeks to ensure a strong turnout began. Students leafleted in areas with large student populations - halls of residence, the local high street, surrounding residential areas, and spaces around campus.

Campus chaos: a crisis made by capitalism - one of the sessions at socialism2020.net
Online forum 20-23 November

Waltham Forest Save Our Square:

Mass outside meeting draws up battle plan



LINDA TAAFFE
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

A breath of fresh air. After being huddled over a computer in endless Zoom discussions for nine months, it was great to be outside again in the town square, doing what the Socialist Party has been doing for five years: campaigning to stop corporate greed disfiguring our town square with monster blocks of totally unaffordable flats.

In February 2018, one of our first mass activities was an occupation-demo in the square involving

hundreds and hundreds of people. On 24 October, 100 people responded to the call from the Save Our Square campaign, alarmed at the council's new juggernaut plans, with a minuscule number of flats for council tenants.

Last year, Waltham Forest council partially stepped back and agreed to save the avenue of beautiful lime trees, due for demolition in the redevelopment.

Next year, the plans would have run out of time, and been wiped off the books. Victory was so close. With the Covid crisis, these

We placed posters along the main roads every few days. And students kept a strong social media presence with regular Facebook updates. Our protest gained traction, and an article from the Birmingham Tab student website boosted exposure.

On the day of the demonstration, 80 protestors came to the student university entrance. But peaceful protestors were locked out by security, so we took an alternate route to campus.

Online youth rally says: We won't pay with our futures

THEO SHARIEFF
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL YOUTH ORGANISER

Over 80 students and young workers attended the Socialist Students and Young Socialists online rally on 25 October. The main theme running through the rally was the abject failure of capitalism to provide young people with a decent future, and why the fight for our future is the fight for a socialist alternative to capitalism.

"We're paying £9,000 a year to get lied to, locked in and go insane with little to no mental health support and zero financial support", explained Michelle Francis, Bangor University Socialist Students

Michelle reflected the anger of students, lied to about what was waiting for them on campus. On the basis of bold campaigning for free education, Socialist Students at Bangor is a growing force.

Bea Gardner, Southampton University and College Union (UCU), put the case for staff and student unity to fight for democratic oversight of health and safety measures on campus to curb the spread of the virus.

Attendees also got a taste of Socialist Students international links. The Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) in Nigeria gave solidarity greetings. DSM is participating in the mass youth movement against police brutality and for an end to the hated and corrupt Buhari regime (see solidarity protests in Britain opposite and an interview with activists on pages 15-16).

It isn't only on campus that the futures of young people are under attack. Alex Hutchinson, Hull Trades Union Council, spoke about the Young Socialist campaign for trade union action to fight against the youth unemployment crisis.



Alex explained that if the bosses were putting up a fight to make young people pay for the crisis, then young people need to get organised and fight to make the 1% pay instead.

Firms threatening redundancies should be nationalised, and have their financial books opened to inspection by the workers, to save jobs. We need to fight for a mass

programme of government investment in socially useful job creation.

Deji Olay, Black Lives Matter (BLM) activist, pointed to the massive explosion of working-class anger in the streets against police brutality and racism - proof that young people are up for a fightback. All the class inequality in society was magnified by the pandemic.

Deji said Young Socialists wants to help democratically organise the BLM movement and popularise socialist policies to end racism and all oppression - intrinsic parts of capitalism.

The short reports from students and young workers were a highlight of the meeting. From the A-level protests in the summer to refund our fees

protests now, Socialist Students and the Young Socialists have been to the fore organising the youth fightback.

There was enthusiasm to continue campaigning. Get out campaigning with us on our week of action - starting 26 October - to demand that our generation is not made to pay for this crisis with our education, our jobs or our futures.

Why I joined the Socialist Party - "I'm 15, and already I've lived through two global recessions and a pandemic"

LILY BOSSEY
CORNWALL SOCIALIST PARTY

When asked by a student what the first sign of a civilised society is, anthropologist Margaret Mead's answer was a healed thigh bone. Animals, Mead explained, don't help each other in the way that civilised humans might. When an animal breaks its leg, it dies. Yet at the beginning of

human society, people cared enough to stay with their sick and help them heal. Even the cavemen took better care of people than our current capitalist system!

I'm 15, and already I've lived through two global recessions and a global pandemic caused by the incompetence of the right-wing leaders who govern the corrupt capitalist system. I've seen unemployment and homelessness rates soar at the same time as exploitative bosses become billionaires. I've watched as unneeded cuts reduce ordinary working people's quality of life.

I was born into a world that's on fire, while people with all the money and power to fix it, simply ignore the issues staring them in the face. I want a world where I can grow up free from hate, inequality and oppression, where massive wealth isn't hoarded by the few to the detriment of the rest.

But when I tried looking to our

leaders for the answers, all I saw was them making the problem worse. After looking into my options, I settled on the conclusion that if we are to keep our humanity and civilisation, socialism is the only way forward.

We as humanity have one goal: to help others and ourselves to the best of our abilities. Our ancient ancestors knew this, but under capitalism, this is ignored. I'm obviously not advocating a return to the time before antibiotics and toilet paper.

But one simple truth can't be denied: under the capitalist system, our rulers refuse to do the one thing most intrinsic in every person, care for each other. We need to remember how, and that requires socialism.

Do you agree?
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS
socialistparty.org.uk/join

Bristol jobs protest: We want 100% pay

TOM BALDWIN
BRISTOL SOCIALIST PARTY

Bristol and Gloucester Unite Community held a rally for jobs in the centre of Bristol to protest against mass unemployment on 24 October. Speeches caught the attention of shoppers - one of those who stopped described it as "the most sense he'd heard all day."

We encouraged people who weren't in work to join Unite Community, but we stand with the rest of the trade union movement in fighting to save jobs.

The rally was a week before the Tories were set to end the furlough scheme. This will see a further spike in job cuts.

Furloughed workers face an uncertain future. They have suffered a 20% pay cut for months.

From November, fewer workers will get support, just two thirds of their wages, but still face the same rent and bills. We called on the government to keep a job retention scheme, supporting workers with 100% of pay.

Speakers at the protest highlighted the hypocrisy of MPs denying health workers a pay rise despite being in line for a £3,300 raise themselves. MPs voted to leave kids hungry over Christmas, but the fancy food they eat in parliament is subsidised by the taxpayer.

These politicians don't care about us, they stand with the bosses who are making redundancies and using mass unemployment to attack pay and conditions for those still in work.

Capitalism is run by these bosses who demand more and more from workers, then throw us on the scrapheap without a second thought when we're no longer profitable for them.

The workers' movement must fight for decent jobs for all, and not let mass unemployment divide our class, blight our communities and scar the future of a generation.

Jobs crisis: the fight for work or full pay - one of the sessions at socialism2020.net
Online forum 20-23 November

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

Send your news, views and criticism, in not more than 150 words, to editors@socialistparty.org.uk - or if you're not online, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

We reserve the right to shorten and edit letters. For legal reasons, we need your full name, address and phone number - but confidentiality will be respected if requested

THE SOCIALIST INBOX



PAULMATTSSON

● Callous and cruel Tories

Matt Hancock, with his sickly insincere smile, retorted that £63 million had been given to local councils, which could be used to help children over the holidays who get free school meals.

That's the same £63 million that government ministers say should be used for the multitude of extra services needed to fight this pandemic. It's all smoke and mirrors.

And of course, to us £63 million sounds a lot of money, but in terms of government spending it's loose change. Remember this government forked out £522 million for the 'Eat out to help out' scheme; some of that money would have been used to prop up Michelin star restaurants.

And £137 billion was used to bail out the banks after the crash of 2008. The money is always found to look after the interests of big business. Yet when it comes to ensuring children won't go hungry, Bojo and Co aren't prepared to fork out a measly £20 million.

I don't often get angry, but I'm angry at the callous indifference of this cruel Tory government. But it's not enough to be angry, we've got to be organised!

Socialism not barbarism!
ELAINE BRUNSKILL
NEWCASTLE

However, the welfare system was built by angry and insubordinate men and women, politicised after the war. No small part in their rage to change the philanthropic model, was the humiliation experienced by working-class families in the hungry 30s and its inadequacy.

The Tories have pinched our money and cut welfare to our people when they fall on hard times. Feed the hungry children.

Restore decent welfare provision so families can feed themselves.

Rights not charity. Socialism not barbarism!
NANCY TAARFF
WALTHAM FOREST

● Tea's on Tesco

Maybe all the parents who can't feed their kids in the holidays should be allowed to go to Tesco and get a load of food for free, since the Tories gave them half a billion in tax relief this year.

AMY COUSENS
BRADFORD

● Forced back to dangerous work

As a 62 years-old diabetic mini-cab driver, I isolated from 23 March on 80% earnings because of the obvious risk to myself. I thought that if I stayed away from work and got by on the 'self-employment income support scheme' (which was reduced to 70% after 3 months), then a 'track-and-trace' mobile app would get set up, at least informing me if I'd been in proximity of infected passengers. Now that the 70% is coming down to 20%, and facing mounting bills, I'm forced back to the second most dangerous occupation against my will. If I could wish away the next 3+ years and qualify for my pension, I would.

JONATHAN STANLEY
WALSALL

● Oppose congestion extension

Boris Johnson, when he first stood for London mayor, condemned any extension of the congestion charge as an intolerable outrage against motorists' liberty. Now the Tories want to extend the charging zone well out into the suburbs, to plug gaps in Transport for London funding, so that office workers can get into the central business districts.

With each passing day Johnson looks more useless. It's like watching several hundredweights of condemned meat stuffed into a suit, with Dominic Cummings' hand up the back as a ventriloquist, but he's transparently not even competent to crank out a voice-throwing act on the radio.

What will current mayor Sadiq Khan do to fight this government's attack on TfL? He might grumble, but shows no sign of mobilising a real campaign of opposition.

GREG RANDALL
SOUTH LONDON

● Profits or lives?

That's right you read correctly. Rishi Sunak specifically stating the Tories are happy to let people die in order to keep their big business pals making profits. The craven lack of any compassion for working-class people is exposed every day. But when they come out and straight up say it, this must be the time to take action. Time for unions to take a lead and say: "Our members must not be lambs to the slaughter." Time for workers to stand up against these pitiful creatures that worship and protect capitalism.

NEIL ADAMS
READING



CC/SHAUN_F

One rule for them, and another for us



CC/SECRETLONDON123

CHRIS FERNANDEZ
DERBY

A Tory election agent Diana Dianescu, has been found guilty of 16 offenses of deliberately misleading voters. She was sentenced to six months custody, suspended for a period of 18 months, and told to undertake 200 hours of community service. She had to pay £2,000 court costs. If you compare and contrast it to the way I was treated, it makes me sick and angry.

Dianescu posed as a representative of the Green Party, Labour Party, or as a council official, when knocking on doors in Hackney, east London in the 2018 local elections. She had acted as election agent for 29 Tory candidates. The judge, in a long speech condemning her behaviour, told Dianescu she had narrowly escaped a prison sentence as she did not represent "a future risk to the public."

Now contrast that to the way I was treated, when I was accused of 'misleading voters' into signing nomination papers in the 2016 council elections in Derby. My case covered eight candidates, it was my first ever offence, and I had no criminal record.

I was sixty when I was sentenced in February 2018. I had health problems with high blood pressure, and had been an out-patient at the memory clinic in the run up to the trial. I was sentenced to 15 months imprisonment, and found guilty to 12 out of 14 counts of misleading voters into signing the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate's nomination forms.

Political Sentencing

At the time, Clive Heemskerck, the TUSC national officer covered the trial and said: "In reality a 15 month prison sentence is totally disproportionate, even if the offences were

proven beyond doubt. But what is most disturbing about this case is that there was, in fact, plenty of doubt" (See 'Statement on the sentencing of the Derby TUSC agent' at tusc.org.uk).

In the run-up to the trial I had to pay nearly £5,000 in legal aid fees. I was sent to Nottingham prison and spent 12 weeks there, I did another five weeks in the open prison, and then I was released, but I was on a tag. To top it all, when I came out of prison, within a month I was presented with another legal bill, for nearly £8,500. TUSC launched an appeal and helped to raise half of that, we also received donations from friends. I was ordered to pay about £270 a month. We really struggled to pay, like we did with the legal aid, but we did.

So it was political sentencing. Like a friend of mine said, "it is one rule for them, and another for us."

Evicted students can fight back and win

HELEN PATTISON
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

On Monday 19 October, students in Paragon accommodation, west London, checked their emails and got a huge shock. They all had a notice of eviction, because the blocks had been deemed unsafe and a fire risk.

We spoke to one student, Joseph, living in the accommodation: "It was a big shock. I was trying to mentally prepare for drama school and suddenly we get this."

Students only moved in a month ago, but for over three years there have been safety concerns about the block. There is scaffolding round some of the buildings, which students believe is from previous work to make the buildings safer, but the company doing the work went bust, the scaffolding was left and the work was never completed.

Students weren't told about any of this beforehand. Joseph said he wouldn't have moved in if he had known about the problems. He made the point that the blocks didn't become dangerous in a day, why were they allowed to move in? Now students are frustrated and annoyed.

On Monday, students were told they were all moving to

accommodation in Wembley. On Tuesday, some people were moved. But on Wednesday it got paused, and now students will be scattered over six different sets of accommodation.

For new students juggling Covid restrictions, trying to stay safe, and starting new courses, it's been extremely difficult. Ultimately students just want to live in an affordable and safe environment. They want clarity on the financial support they will receive now they will have to commute to university.

Safe, affordable accommodation and free education are both possible for students to win. It will take getting organised and fighting back against university management, the rotten Tory government, and accommodation landlords. The funding model for universities is utterly broken. A housing crisis across the country has given the space for private companies to charge students over priced rent for tiny boxes, making a huge profit.

But students and communities can fight back. Many students are angry and demanding rent and fees refunds. Previous rent strikes by students and residents facing unaffordable rent increases have won. In east London, on the Butterfields estate, residents resisted eviction and rent increases. This shows that when we organise, we can win.



A-Levels protest MARKBEST

Books that inspired me: Germinal

ERIC SEGAL
KENT SOCIALIST PARTY

I sold the Militant newspaper at the entrance to Snowdown pit in Kent throughout the 1984/85 miners' strike, and until the pit's closure in 1987.

In 1987, a miner, face blackened from coal dust, who'd just finished his shift, walked past me, and waved a book, as grimy and black as his face. He called out to me: "Eric, have you read this book, 'Germinal'?" I scratched my head and said "No, who wrote it?" He replied "Emile Zola! Call yourself a bloody socialist!" He laughed and walked off to the shower block. I went home, bought, and read and re-read Germinal.

Germinal covers a fictional, brutal strike wave across a coal mining district in France around 1860 - inspired by a strike that Zola experienced. The title, 'Germinal', is the month of spring in the calendar introduced during the French Revolution, and used again during the Paris Commune of 1871. Zola was in Paris during the crushing of the Paris Commune.

The story follows Étienne Lantier, who arrives in the village of Montsou looking for work, after losing his job in a railway workshop in Lille following a fight with his boss. Étienne is a self-educated man who struggles to cope with alcohol-fuelled, violent rages. By chance, he is offered a menial labouring job at the pit, where he learns how to cope with the terrible working conditions underground.

Due to his industrial background, after a while, he is accepted by the miners.

First International

He is offered a room by Rasseneur, an ex-miner who now runs a bar in the village. Rasseneur is a moderate socialist, opposed to the ideas of Étienne and his support for Marx's First International. The crisis developing in the economy leads to discussions between Rasseneur, Étienne and Souvarine the anarchist, on how best to improve the miners' conditions. Running through the book are the threads of the ideological differences between Marx and Bakunin which led to the split in the First International.

The strike breaks out with Étienne taking a leading role, but Rasseneur and Souvarine refuse to support the strike. Without spreading to the other pits in the area, the strike drifts. One striker says: "How can we make the strike general if we don't force all the blokes to come out with us?"

Maigrat, who owned the village store, lived next to the wealthy mine owners. He had been an inspector at the pit before opening a store, built for him by the mine owners, and he is able to undercut the other stores, driving them out of business. The miners depend on the store for supplies to live and needed credit during the strike. Maigrat gives the female miners' wives, and their daughters credit for supplies in return for sex.

Starvation devastates the

community but the strikers stand firm until news spreads that the company is recruiting Belgian miners to scab. This is the final straw, and with the call for "bread, we need bread", the community unites against the bosses' attempt to break the strike. Thousands march on the pits to picket out the working miners and force the mines to close.

The women break away and march on the boss's grand house. Seeing Maigrat, they decide to take their revenge on the shopkeeper who tries to escape, but he falls and is killed. The women tear off his genitals and parade through the streets with them on the end of a stick.

Strike Breakers

The troops are called out to defend the scabs and open fire on the striking miners, breaking the strike. The miners are starved back to work, but in a final act of destruction, Souvarine, the anarchist, sabotages the shaft, flooding the pit.

Étienne, his confidence in the working class strengthened by his experiences, leaves the village after being offered a job in Paris as an organiser for the First International.

Germinal will touch your emotions, and Zola's last few words in the book will inspire you: "Men were springing forth, a black avenging army, germinating slowly in the furrows, growing towards the harvests of the next century, and their germination would soon overturn the earth."

● *Germinal*, Emile Zola, £8.99, Penguin

Bolivia elections: CRUSHING DEFEAT FOR THE RIGHT AS MAS SECURES LANDSLIDE VICTORY



"We are the people, we are MAS" PHOTO FERNANDA LE MARIE/CANCILLERIA DEL ECUADOR/CC

TONY SAUNOIS
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

On 18 October, delayed elections in Bolivia brought a stunning victory for the left-populist Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS). Its presidential candidate Luis Arce was swept into office with 54.4% of the vote.

This was a crushing defeat for the right and 'centre' parties representing the Bolivian ruling class. Carlos Mesa from the right wing received 31.5% of the votes and the fascist Fernando Camacho won 14.1%. The arch-reactionary former 'interim' president Jeanine Áñez saw a collapse of her support. She withdrew from the race following revelations of a sex scandal, which circulated on social media.

This election has major implications for Bolivia, and also contains important lessons for the working class internationally. The decisive defeat of the right in the election and the comeback scored by MAS illustrate the limits of reaction, which does not have a solid ideological base of support.

In many countries, electoral victories scored by right or even far-right parties have largely been a protest vote against the failure of previous governments to resolve the problems facing the working class and the poor.

Arce replaced Evo Morales as the MAS candidate. Morales had been ejected from power by a de-facto coup in 2019. He fled into exile, firstly to Mexico and then to Argentina, and was barred from standing in these elections.

Morales had changed the



Trump denounced Morales for unproven electoral fraud - an allegation which he is preparing to repeat in the US elections should he lose!

constitutional rules which prohibited him from seeking re-election, but he was accused of fraudulently winning the 2019 election by the Bolivian right, the Trump regime, and the Organisation of American States (OAS). They all enthusiastically welcomed the coup initiated by the right wing in Bolivia, which saw arch-reactionary Áñez sworn in as interim President.

Trump denounced Morales for unproven electoral fraud - an allegation which he is preparing to repeat in the US elections should he lose!

Morales had ruled for 14 years and presided over significant reforms, carried through on the basis of economic growth dubbed the "miracle". Overall poverty rates fell by 42% as big sections of the population were lifted out of poverty.

He was the first President from the indigenous community, which had suffered vicious discrimination by the white European ruling elite. Amerindians are approximately 55% of the population from 36 ethnic groups. 30% are 'mestizos' or mixed, and 15% white.

Under Morales, Bolivia was renamed a "plurinational Republic," which was enormously popular. The indigenous Wiphala flag was incorporated into the national flag and used at official ceremonies.

The economic boom was on the basis of high commodity prices, including gas exports. Bolivia has vast reserves of lithium, some of which Morales sold to China, which enraged the US and western imperialism, and was a key factor in the orchestrating of the coup in 2019.

Despite the reforms, Morales did not break with capitalism. For a time,

he presided over one of the most stable periods in the history of Bolivian capitalism.

At the same time, he used top-down bureaucratic methods to govern. As the economic boom slowed in recent years, living standards began to decline and dissatisfaction with his government grew.

The right, with the backing of Trump and the OAS, seized the moment and grabbed power. Rather than mobilise his supporters and call a general strike against the coup, Morales capitulated and fled the country, arguing that he wanted to avoid bloodshed.

Repression

However, pro-Morales protesters were gunned down by the police. The initially all-white cabinet was sworn in under a crucifix using a massive bible, as the Whiphala flag and all indigenous ceremonial symbols were removed.

Elections were twice postponed, provoking the calling of a massive general strike, which was then called off after the trade union leadership which reached an agreement with the reactionary government.

The new victory of MAS represents a significant and big defeat for the right, and also for US imperialism, which wanted MAS removed from power.

However, the crucial issue is what programme will Arce and the new MAS government adopt now?

Arce - an academic economist who studied at Warwick University in the UK - claims he started reading Marx at the age of 14. He says he has the same "ideological" position.

However, when finance minister under Morales, he was not on the left of the party but seen by the capitalists as a 'moderating' influence. The reforms he introduced were in a very different economic situation to that which Bolivia faces today.

A contraction of at least 6% in the economy is expected this year. As a warning to workers and the poor, Arce has already stated that, while he opposes public expenditure cuts, "some austerity measures will be necessary". He also pledges to govern for "all Bolivians" in the national interest.

The right will bide its time and prepare to strike further blows. If MAS fails to break with capitalism and introduce a democratic socialist plan of the economy, it will be compelled by capitalism to carry out attacks on the working class and the poor.

The task of building support for a socialist programme, and organisations of the working class that can implement it, is now facing the Bolivian working class and oppressed. A new chapter in the revolutionary traditions of the Bolivian working class has begun.



• Sessions on 'A world in crisis' and other international discussions, including 'The US after the elections' at socialism2020.net

Nigeria at a crossroads

What forces can bring fundamental change?

▶▶ CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE

This storm was brewing for some time. Even before Covid-19 hit, the country was in a severe social and economic crisis, alongside the Boko Haram insurgency and clashes between opposing ethnic and agricultural groups in central areas.

The fall in oil prices was leading to Nigeria suffering its second recession in four years. Inflation is taking off; currently food prices are rising at nearly 17% annually. In addition, there is huge unemployment (the official rate is 27.1%, ie 21.7 million people), with no social benefits, and the resulting poverty is worsened by widespread underemployment and non-payment of wages in both the state and private sectors.

Mass disappointment

The result is mass disappointment with Buhari, who was elected in 2015 with a promise of change, and continuing anger at the elite. It is not accidental that in London, Nigerian #EndSARS protesters demonstrated outside the expensive downtown house owned by Tinubu, the "National Leader" of Buhari's All Progressives Congress (APC).

This explosive situation was one of the key factors why the trade union leaders called off the general strike scheduled to begin on 28 September. They feared starting a movement which they could not control.

While many activists were not surprised at the trade union leaders' actions, they have behaved in similar ways before. For many young

people it seemed to show that the union leaders were simply part of the system.

At the same time, there was deep hostility to politics. At first, the anti-SARS protesters were 'anti-political', refusing to let political speakers address the rallies. This included the widely known activist, but not socialist, Omoyele Sowore, who is currently being prosecuted for calling for "RevolutionNow" protests.

But as the #EndSARS protests developed there was a significant change. Political action was seen as being necessary and the idea of a youth party, one which broke with all the rottenness of the ruling parties and their satellites, gained support.

But just being young, or new, is not a political programme. The issue is one of programme, what a party or movement will do. That is the key if it is going to make a fundamental change.

Unfortunately, there are signs that at least some of those who have claimed leadership of the #EndSARS protests are supporters of capitalism, arguing that only corruption needs to be removed and then Nigeria will develop.

Seun Kuti, the very well-known activist musician and son of Fela Kuti, argued that the list of five demands put forward by those heading the #EndSARS protests were "elitist" as they did not seek to end oppression, when the divide was between the ruling class and the "common man".

The statement issued on 23 October by the 'Coalition of Protest Groups' was clearly orientating

mainly towards the 2023 elections, and said nothing about fighting poverty, oppression or corruption. Instead, it talked of representing "the different coalitions; from celebrities to activists, legal minds to strategists, journalists to entrepreneurs, etc." A list which significantly included "entrepreneurs", ie capitalists, but not labour, the working class and poor.

Such an approach does not deal with the fundamental questions facing Nigeria - namely the inability of capitalism to develop the country and the impact of repeated crises within world capitalism. And there is the danger that a few will use this movement as a stepping stone for their own personal advancement.

CWI in Nigeria

The Democratic Socialism Movement (CWI in Nigeria), along with others, launched the Socialist Party of Nigeria - a party that can begin to challenge the pro-capitalist parties and argue for the creation of a mass working peoples' party.

The repeated opportunities lost when labour leaders have refused to challenge the ruling class does not mean that the working class is weak. The 2012 general strike was an example of how labour and youth can spearhead a movement with the potential to carry through the socialist revolution that is required.

The #EndSARS movement has given a glimpse of what struggle can do. Its strength has forced the government to grant concessions, but it is clear that the ruling class has been simply looking for a breathing space.

Currently, with the movement ebbing, the government is starting to issue threats, and trying to prepare the way to use repression against protesters.

The challenge now is to resist any repression, consolidate the gains that have been won, discuss the lessons of both the #EndSARS movement and the aborted September general strike, while preparing for the inevitable future battles as oppression and poverty are resisted and the struggle to change society goes on.

"We need a leadership that comes from the movement"



Leicester protest, October 2020 PHOTO LEICESTER SP

Socialist Party organiser Tessa Warrington discussed the anti-SARS protests with a Nigerian student at De Montfort University, Leicester, who is co-organiser of the #EndSARS solidarity protest.

Why is this protest happening?

We are here in solidarity with our brothers and sisters at home in Nigeria. People came out onto the streets yesterday (21 October) after brutal state killings of peaceful protestors.

SARS is an extremely corrupt armed wing of the police. It targets young people - anyone with tattoos or an iPhone, who looks like they may have money. They march them to ATMs and demand they withdraw cash for them, sometimes in excess of 200,000 Naira (£400). They caught my brother and demanded my family pay 100,000 Naira. We negotiated less, but it was still not money we had to spare. I am afraid for my family right now.

SARS lock people up just because they can. They kill indiscriminately and throw away the bodies to hide the evidence. It is a reign of terror.

What has been the response of the Nigerian government?

The Lagos government suddenly introduced a 4pm curfew to try to stop the protests. There are little to no traffic management in Nigeria so it was impossible for workers to make the journey home by this time. If anything, it encouraged the protests, as it was seen as dismissal of the movement and a threat of more repression.

Then yesterday (21 October), the military, unprovoked, opened fire on protesters in Lagos doing nothing more than singing our national anthem and waving our flag!

There was also shooting into crowds

of protesters at the Lekki Tollgate the previous day. The military shut off the lights to intimidate and scare people. On October 23 Buhari himself said 51 civilians had been killed nationally. At least 78 are now dead and the number is rising. Sanwo-Olu, governor of Lagos state, tried to deny that the Lekki killings had happened, but the attacks were being live-streamed on Instagram!

The reality is that the government is hand in hand with SARS. It is clear that they take a cut of the extorted money; they cannot deny it. That is why SARS feel they can act with impunity. I have heard experiences from Nigerians back home of SARS officials saying 'I will kill you and nothing will happen.'

Not one member of the government has spoken out against these actions. This experience has completely disillusioned Nigerians with the corruption of our black leaders. They have treated us the same as any white oppressor would.

So what are the demands of the #EndSARS movement? Where does it go from here?

The demands of our movement began with the bare minimum - not to be killed! Now the anger is huge and the protests will not stop. This will undoubtedly lead to more state violence, but we want to show the world what is happening in Nigeria.

We need an end to SARS and Swat. We need total reform of the police from below. But we also want government officials, like President Buhari and Sanwo-Olu, who have been complicit in this state terror to resign. They are only concerned with money, with enriching themselves. We need a leadership that comes from the movement, from the youth and community and who know what our lives are like and stand with us.



PHOTO DSM (CWI NIGERIA)

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the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**

Nigeria protests shake regime

END THE ROTTEN CAPITALIST SYSTEM

Fight for a socialist future

ROBERT BECHERT
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS INTERNATIONAL (CWI)*

Nigeria has passed through nearly a month of turmoil. Footage of the hated Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) police unit casually killing a man and driving off with his car was the spark.

Years of frustration, disappointment, poverty, and anger exploded into a mighty mass movement, fundamentally undermining the regime of president Buhari, and putting into question the future of not just the current government system, but the very country itself.

This tremendous, inspiring youth movement had an electrifying impact on many parts of Nigeria.

This upsurge was in complete contrast to the leaders of the country's trade union movement who, just two weeks earlier, had called off a general strike at the last minute, and signed an agreement backing the government's austerity policies which the general strike was meant to oppose!

Officially, the country was meant to be in the middle of celebrations marking the 60th anniversary of independence from Britain. But what

really is there to celebrate? A recent Senate committee report said that it would take "41 years" for Nigeria to have a stable electricity supply! This, on its own, is an indictment of both the Nigerian ruling class and the capitalist system.

Looting, corruption and bribery are endemic as the country's oil and gas wealth is systematically stolen. Yes, the low-paid police and military intimidate and collect bribes at roadblocks, but the real corruption starts at the top. It is why the capitalist politicians fight expensive and desperate 'do or die' election campaigns, to get themselves into positions where they can loot one way or another.

Explosion of anger

The movement against SARS, and its replacement SWAT unit, brought to a head the simmering anger. But the 20 October shooting down of unarmed demonstrators at the Lekki Toll Gate on Lagos' Victoria Island provoked an explosion of outrage.

The subsequent violence was not the result of the initially peaceful protests. Rather, much of it is in response to the sometimes brutal attitude of the police to demonstrations, and, more fundamentally, to the state and ruling party sponsored attacks on the demonstrators.

In the same way that 'do or die'

politicians hire unemployed or criminal elements to attack rival parties and intimidate voters in elections, now they have been sponsoring attacks on the demonstrators and planting agent provocateurs, aiming to provoke confrontation, giving the authorities an excuse to act and profit from the chaos.

There are signs that some of these attacks had the backing of security forces. The BBC reported that "video evidence suggests that they were encouraged by police officers to target the demonstrators".

In an overwhelmingly young country, where two-thirds of young people are either unemployed or underemployed, there are those who can be hired to carry out such deeds.

But this violence has taken on a life of its own, with attacks in a third of Nigeria's 36 states on warehouses storing Covid-19 'food palliatives' - aid meant for distribution, but which has not been distributed over the past months.

The fact that some of this aid has rotted or been found in politicians' homes, did not help the government's claims that it was being stored in preparation for a second wave of Covid-19.

Significantly, it was not simply criminal elements looting these warehouses, the poor were as well;

something not surprising in a country where about half the population, over 100 million people, are described as living in "extreme poverty".

The Democratic Socialism Movement in Nigeria (CWI in Nigeria) has long argued that working people and the poor need their own party, which can fight for their interests and build a mass movement that puts into power a government to end the rule of capitalism and, with socialist measures, fundamentally change the country.

To assist and deepen the anti-SARS movement, DSM launched the Youth Rights Campaign (YRC), which has produced leaflets, organised successful meetings, and more. Show solidarity, email YRC: youth_rights@yahoo.com

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- Solidarity protests - page 10

*The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) - the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party in England and Wales is affiliated - see socialistworld.net

Failing capitalism and resistance in Nigeria - one of the sessions at socialism2020.net Online forum 20-23 November



DSM member on a protest in Lagos, Nigeria

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

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