

FUND NHS NOT TORY CRONY CONTRACTS



HEATHER RAWLING
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

The Tories clapped for the NHS. Heroes, they said. The NHS is safe in our hands, they said. Liars!

Instead, Boris Johnson and co have been busy giving lucrative private contracts to their friends and family.

£10 billion in contracts has been awarded by government

departments to private companies, without competition, during the pandemic.

For example, Debbie White, former chief executive of the infamous Interserve, and an executive of Sodexo, was awarded an exclusive contract worth £280,000 to co-ordinate a network of testing centres across the UK. It reeks of cronyism.

In addition, £100 million has been spent by the government on consultants, and £12 billion has been paid out on test-and-trace which hasn't delivered.

That money could have been given directly to the NHS to expand services and resources to fight the pandemic. And to give all workers

in the NHS the 15% pay rise that nurses have been fighting for.

Our money has been directed away from our health service into the private bank accounts of big business. We pay for the NHS through our taxes. Our parents and grandparents also gave their money and worked to build the NHS. They gave us something to be proud of.

However successive governments have undermined the NHS by starving it of funds.

Giving contracts to private companies threatens the foundations of the NHS and the running down of services.

It's alright for the rich, they can afford private medicine, but we can't.

Many workers are only one or two pay cheques away from destitution. If you're not one of the rich, then your health relies on a free national health service that is properly funded and resourced.

Yet the NHS can barely cope in a 'normal' winter, let alone during a pandemic and a mass vaccination programme. It's not unusual to see queues of ambulances waiting to deliver patients to A&E. Long waiting lists mean that people have died waiting for treatment and operations. Getting an appointment with your GP is difficult, to say the least.

But what do the Tories and big business care? They only care about themselves and their profits.

The Socialist Party says:

- Scrap all private contracts
- All privatised parts of the NHS should be brought back into a fully funded and nationalised NHS and social care sector
- An immediate 15% pay rise for all health and care staff, including those in privatised sectors. A minimum wage of £12 an hour - £15 in London
- End private profiteering. Nationalise the pharmaceutical companies and integrate them into the NHS
- A socialist NHS - democratically run by elected and accountable committees, including service workers and users



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

COVID VACCINES ONLY FIRST STEP

Fight job losses, austerity and 'virus' of capitalism

JON DALE

HEALTH WORKER AND SECRETARY UNITE UNION
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE HEALTH BRANCH
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Covid-19 vaccines in record-breaking times have raised millions of people's hopes that life will return to normal next year. But speed has also made many worry that corners are being cut in the race to get the virus - and the economy - under control. It's certainly incredible that several vaccines are almost ready for use in under a year. It normally takes ten years to reach this stage!

But the question should be, 'why does vaccine development usually take so long?'

Partly this speed is due to powerful computers shortening development stages and data analysis. But much time is normally spent raising finance for each stage of research. Neither pharmaceutical companies nor governments are willing to commit money upfront when there's no guarantee of success. 'Success' for the companies means profits.

\$13 billion of public money has gone to just six of the 58 Covid-19 vaccines now being clinically trialled. An army of scientists, doctors, engineers and laboratories in universities and industry around the world has been mobilised for Covid-19 vaccine research.

Why haven't similar efforts already conquered malaria, TB and other infectious diseases that kill millions each year? These mostly occur in the poorest parts of the world. There is no scope for big profits. That's why the pharmaceutical industry neglected vaccine research for decades.

Three Covid-19 vaccines have now been tested in stage three trials. About 45,000 people have received one of them. Common unwanted

effects would show up by now. Rare complications might still be identified but, as the numbers in hospital and the number of people dying from coronavirus show, the current risk of serious illness or death from Covid-19 is much higher.

If any vaccine is later shown to be linked to a rare unwanted outcome, anyone affected should be fully compensated for loss of pay, extra care and other losses. This should be for as long as needed, without long legal battles.

There are still unanswered questions. Are the vaccines effective in young children? Does Oxford/Astra Zeneca's vaccine produce 90% success if half the dose is used first - as was done in a group of under 55-year olds - or nearer 62% - if that group was discounted?

Vaccine study designs and results should be fully open to expert inspection from the trade union movement. There should be no commercial confidentiality. It's public money that has funded most of the research.

It's significant that after the testing fiasco even this vehemently pro-market Tory government has not trusted the private sector with the vaccination programme, drafting in the armed forces to support the NHS rather than giving the contract to Deloitte and other private companies.

But while people are desperate to restart 'normal' life - meeting family, socialising with friends, going to a football match, pub or cinema - vaccines won't repair the terrible damage from years of austerity and a new economic downturn.

As the immediate threat of infection starts to fall in coming months, trade unions, students and the unemployed must organise to fight job losses, attacks on working conditions, and austerity, and defeat the 'virus' of capitalism.



Priority for the first batches of Covid-19 vaccines must go to those with greatest need - the elderly, clinically extremely vulnerable and the health and care staff in close contact with them. Pfizer BioNTech's vaccine has to be stored at -70C. It is difficult to deliver outside hospital or large vaccination centres, but these are difficult or impossible for many of those in need to get to.

Urgent recruitment of vaccinators, drivers, carers and administrators could provide a mobile service to care homes, local centres and homes of the housebound. They would take just a few vaccines at a time on each trip.

Healthcare workers who have left the NHS because of impossible workloads and low pay, and tens of thousands of workers who have lost their jobs, could be recruited. They should be paid at least £15 an hour, not the £11.20 now offered to those signing up to work in vaccination centres.

Manufacturing billions of doses of the vaccines is a mammoth task. Already there are signs of the difficulties involved. On 3 December, the Wall Street Journal claimed Pfizer/BioNTech suddenly scaled back distribution targets for their vaccine this month. They intended to make 100 million doses but now say it will be 50 million.

A Pfizer spokesman said the "scale-up of the raw material supply chain took longer than expected."

This refers to the tiny oily droplets that transport the active ingredients into the body's cells. These 'lipid nanoparticles' are a highly specialised ingredient, with suppliers previously geared to much smaller output than is now required.

Pfizer/BioNTech buys these from the Canadian company Acuitas, which only recently appeared to have just 40 employees and an annual revenue of \$6.3 million.

In 2017, Acuitas was in a legal battle with another company, Arbutus, over intellectual property rights. Arbutus has also been in dispute with Moderna this year (see 'Covid, vaccines, big pharma and the need for socialism' at socialistparty.org.uk). A 2017 investor report wrote that Arbutus had "made a strategic decision to move fully into Hepatitis B vaccine... the move was predominantly because their financial backers wanted them to be focused in one area."

The German company CureVac's vaccine is also supplied by Acuitas. It is now undergoing advanced phase two trials and could come on stream in the next few months.

Democratic socialist planning is urgently needed, with scientists, technologists and workers' organisations co-operating together instead of decisions taken by and in the interests of "financial backers". That means bringing all the big pharmaceutical corporations into public ownership, only compensating shareholders in genuine need.



Should Corbyn stand for London Mayor?

Time to build a challenge to pro-austerity politicians at the ballot box



Opposition was distinctly muted from Starmer's New Labour to the Tories' public sector pay freeze. Shadow Chancellor Anneliese Dodds opposed pain for the working class today - arguing that the pay freeze would "take a sledgehammer to consumer confidence", but did not argue for a pay rise. What's more, she was all in favour of pain tomorrow, stating that there will have to be higher taxes and spending cuts in the future if interest rates rise.

Jeremy Corbyn, by contrast, spoke in the House of Commons to point out that civil servants, for example, have lost 19% of their wages over the last decade, and he demanded a 10% pay increase for all public sector workers.

This is a small concrete example of what the workers' movement lost when Corbyn was replaced by Starmer and his team's uniform chorus of support for the interests of the capitalist class.

Corbyn was speaking as an independent MP, having had the Labour whip withdrawn by Starmer. This has been accompanied by swathes of Constituency Labour Parties and many individual members being suspended for defending Corbyn.

As the Bakers' Union (BFAWU) has pointed out, during the pandemic "rather than oppose the government, Labour have backed them all the way" with only the "illusion of a challenge". Left feeling "further away from having a political voice than ever", the Bakers' Union is consulting its membership on whether to remain affiliated to Labour.

The Communication Workers' Union (CWU) has also publicly expressed its "concerns over the current direction of Labour" and has agreed to "further consider the implications" on their "ongoing political work".

Discussions on disaffiliation will not themselves, however, solve the problem of working-class political representation. Nor will combating Starmer only within the confines of

the Labour Party. In the midst of a dire economic crisis, working-class people need better than Dodd's 'austerity later' policies.

It is welcome that at a recent meeting of the London Transport Regional Council of the RMT, a resolution was passed on fighting the looming attacks on London Transport workers' jobs, pay, and conditions. This included preparing for industrial action, and considering backing that up by supporting "an alternative candidate" for London mayor "on a no-cuts programme. This could be an RMT member or another bona fide anti-cuts candidate."

What better way could there be to build the campaign against cuts to London Transport, and austerity in general, than Jeremy Corbyn standing as an RMT-backed candidate?

Back in 2000, Ken Livingstone stood as an independent and won. Unfortunately, he used that victory to win his own case to be reinstated in Blair's Labour, rather than to build a political force to represent working-class Londoners. On the contrary, he went on to call on workers to cross RMT picket lines.

A Corbyn mayoral candidacy, however - backed by a slate of trade unionists, socialists, and community campaigners on an anti-cuts platform - could have a dramatic effect on combating Starmer, inspiring and rallying all those previously enthused by Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party.

Even if this isn't possible, a candidate standing for London mayor under the banner of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), as part of a widespread challenge across England, Wales and Scotland, would be an important step forward. TUSC, whose participants include the RMT and the Socialist Party, has pledged to provide a banner under which the maximum possible number of candidates can oppose cuts and austerity in the May 2021 elections.



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 (CWU) 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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HIGH STREET JOBS, SAFETY AND PAY: WE HAVE TO FIGHT

Hospitality: Understaffed and underpaid, now it's got worse

Bar worker **John Williams**, a Socialist Party member in Cardiff, spoke at a protest to oppose the pay freeze in the public and private sector on 5 December (see page 10). Here is part of his speech.

Hospitality has been one of the worst effected industries during the Covid pandemic.

There were over 30,000 job losses at the beginning of the crisis. Many weren't eligible for furlough. Hours were cut drastically and people were sent home early as demand plummeted

Then we had Boris Johnson and First Minister for Wales Mark Drakeford playing with our lives. They refused to shut down pubs - a breeding zone for Covid - despite the farce of Boris Johnson advising people not to go to the pubs, only because he wanted to protect his mates in insurance in London.

Many hospitality employers refused to use their £75 billion profits to cover lost workers' wages or top up the 20% when we had furlough, despite us being the ones who make them their money.

We've had empty promises. The UK and Welsh governments make 'bold' announcements pretending they care about workers safety, when in reality they just want to maximise profits.

Dangerous

The previous 10pm curfew was dangerous and counterproductive in fighting the virus. The queues were longer and there were more gatherings. We were even more overworked and understaffed.

You get the odd customer who just wants to cause trouble or doesn't believe in the virus, but the overwhelming majority of people genuinely want to follow the rules for the benefit of themselves and others.

But the rules, and especially the rules of who you can meet in a pub, make absolutely no sense, and they keep changing. And how can people remember it all if they've got alcohol in their system?

Bar workers aren't against a 6pm curfew. What we are against is our living standards not being protected, and the hospitality industry decimated.

A hotel in Manchester had over 1,000 job applications for one job.

But they still expect 30 in normal times.

It's incredibly frustrating that hospitality isn't being protected. Whenever we're out of this mess, demand will probably pick up extremely quickly.

But the short-sightedness of the UK and Welsh governments is taking that opportunity away. The mood in my workplace is pessimistic, that things are going to get worse, we will be poorer.

We are tired of the likes of Keir Starmer refusing to say if he will back workers and unions over big bosses on concerns of safety. We are tired of Mark Drakeford not guaranteeing 100% pay, or failing to threaten nationalisation of job-cutting businesses.

Do boycotts work?

Some call for boycotts of pub chains that should have treated their workers better. But workers are exploited everywhere.

How is boycotting particular places, meaning less hours and less money for the workers, going to help? Support unionising instead.

Being understaffed, underpaid, and having no control of the rota, etc, were always issues in hospitality. But they have now come to the fore as the Covid crisis is exposing the entire rotten capitalist society.

We have concerns for our safety at work, with security not always on. Some pub workers have caught Covid from customers.

The public sector pay freeze has nothing to do with protecting the 'public finances'. It's a deliberate political strategy. It suits the Tories if different groups of workers blame each other, to distract us from the real enemy, which is them.

Since March, over 100,000 people have joined a union. 45,000 have joined my union Unite. Unite has launched 'a new deal for hospitality workers', supporting 100% pay, in work or not.

Hospitality workers are now becoming local organisers. In London, Glasgow, and Cardiff, there are WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages.

It doesn't matter how we organise, but we must organise. There is always one more person at work we could speak to, one more leaflet we could give out, and one more meeting.



PHILAFRENZY/CC

Shop worker: I'm burnt out

I'm an assistant manager in a high street chain in Mike Ashley's ever-expanding empire. Nothing could prepare us for the carnage the Tories have perpetrated at the end of lockdown.

We got a mere taster in the four days prior to lockdown. Customers flooded into stores in the days between the announcement of lockdown and its implementation.

During the lockdown itself, I drew the short straw in my store. I had to come in for what was supposed to be two days for click and collect.

Yet, within 24 hours of me agreeing to do the two days, it jumped twice - first to six days, then three out of the four weeks of lockdown.

I was burnt out. But in the three days prior to us opening, a skeleton crew, including myself, was tasked with preparing the store for reopening.

What did that mean? Three of us miserably failed to catch up on a month of price changes and merchandising, with the phone constantly ringing.

Gargantuan deliveries of stock and

click and collect kept rolling in as head office tried to restock us with a backlog of new releases, having already missed a month's worth of trade over the peak period.

When we finally reopened on 2 December, even with a full complement of staff, we were utterly overrun and overwhelmed. Thankfully, our store, which has a pretty good union density, was able to firmly keep to our customer limit. We've remained consistently at capacity, all day every day, since reopening.

Other shops, without a union presence, have been a free-for-all. Customer limits have either been inflated or thrown out completely, as bosses prioritise sales over safety.

Everybody in my store expects there to be a third lockdown after Christmas. The tier system goes out the window - households mix indoors as they climb over each other to snap up deals, with bosses watching from the comfort of an office out the back, away from the madding crowd.

Everyone is overworked and pressured to take on more hours. Nobody

can afford to go off sick with the paltry statutory sick pay after a month at only 80% pay.

The threat of redundancies is looming. It's a depressing walk home, after an exhausting day, seeing more shutters go down for good, and more high street names vanishing.

The Tories have only made it worse. The companies that can't afford to open 24 hours won't, and the ones that can will super-exploit and bully staff into working longer hours for little more than the minimum wage.

We need workers' control and management of health and safety, because the bosses can't be trusted to put us before their bottom line. We need at least a £12-an-hour minimum wage.

Our non-essential workplace should not have been open. We should not have subjected ourselves to frankly dangerous conditions.

We need full sick pay from day one and 100% of our pay when furloughed. We can't afford a 20% cut on a minimum wage and nobody can afford to live on £95.85 a week.

We need a multi-union campaign against snowballing redundancies with the call for public ownership. The high street isn't sustainable under the chaos of capitalism, we need a socialist plan.



PAUL MATTISON

Supermarkets: They called us 'key workers', but wages stayed same while safety got worse

BERNARD DAVIES
SUPERMARKET WORKER

During the first lockdown, we were considered 'key workers'. But our wages remain unchanged.

Some received limited one-off bonuses, others nothing. Our workplaces were unsafe.

Bosses eventually put in place measures required by the government. Most retailers seemed to get the idea that it would be wise to look after their key workers.

Customer numbers were limited to ensure two-metre social distancing. Screens were erected, sanitiser provided and, more recently, face coverings.

Then the age-old motivator, profit, returned with a vengeance. Taking

the government's lead, employers exploited the loopholes, and put staff under greater pressure.

We had to use holiday entitlement to cover isolation. Disciplinary and sanctions for absence were reintroduced. Many were related to anxiety brought on by working in an increasingly unsafe environment.

Most retail workers accept December will be busy. Yet, to increase sales and make even further profit, some retailers will be opening even longer hours, putting staff at increased risk of contracting the virus.

Debenhams and Arcadia have exploited their employees over many years, and are now looking to cut and run. They should be made to open their books to trade union inspection, in preparation for nationalisation.

Supermarkets return bailout - it should have gone directly to workers

USDAW REP AT A TESCO WAREHOUSE

Supermarket giants Sainsbury's, Aldi, Asda, Tesco and Morrisons are repaying £1.7 billion in business rates relief granted by the government during the pandemic.

During the pandemic, pre-existing class lines have been highlighted and frontline workers' belts have been tightened. Nowhere is this more true than in the wage packets of retail and distribution workers.

The dominant supermarket chains have yet to deliver consistent hazard pay or a living wage. But Tesco, for example, has paid out millions in dividends to shareholders.

This £1.7 billion could and should

be used to keep workers who are furloughed or have to isolate on 100% pay. But we have to fight for it.

As a rep for retail workers' union Usdaw, working in a distribution warehouse, I have witnessed first-hand co-workers collapsing from exhaustion, heard about co-workers suffering with Covid, seen agency workers being forced to come onsite with symptoms or risk missing rent.

The anti-union laws were brought in by the Tories, and kept as law by the last Labour government. They can be scrapped and buried by a consistent and fighting approach by the unions to defend workers' rights.

Super-rich tax evasion costs 34 million nurses worldwide



DAVE GORTON
CHESTERFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

£320 billion is lost annually to corporate tax abuse and private tax evasion, the equivalent of nearly 34 million nurses' salaries, according to the Tax Justice Network.

Poorer countries are most affected, with tax losses amounting to 52% of their combined public health budgets. It's still the equivalent of 8% of public health money lost to tax havens in richer countries.

Multinational corporations move \$1.38 trillion profits out of the countries where they were generated into havens yearly. Global offshore financial wealth reached \$11 trillion in 2018.

It is the rich countries, and their dependencies, who allow abuse to flourish. British overseas territory, the Cayman Islands, tops the list for tax losses - followed by the UK itself, Netherlands, Luxembourg and the US. The Cayman Islands has more registered businesses than residents.

The UK, and what the Tax Justice Network report calls its "spider's web", is responsible for 37.4% of world tax losses.

It's no surprise big business and the world's richest individuals are fiddling to a huge extent. The question is what should be done about it.

Sadly, the Tax Justice Network doesn't have answers, relying on self-regulation as the solution. For self-regulation to work, those currently profiteering would need to be convinced they were in the wrong! This challenges the whole ethos of capitalism - a system based on the accumulation of private profit.

The executive coordinator at the Global Alliance for Tax Justice starts to 'get' this: "Failure to deliver meaningful reforms... makes it clear the task was impossible for a club of rich countries."

His solution - get the United Nations (UN) to deal with it - completely misunderstands the role of the UN in defending that capitalist club.

Socialists support measures like wealth taxes. Tackling tax evasion means removing the system which allows the accumulation of such obscene private wealth in the first place - the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement with a socialist society.

In the shorter term it means nationalising those responsible for the exploitation. This will become a key demand in building new mass workers' parties around the world.

Reinstate sacked Unite London bus rep Judith Katera



Judith, a longstanding Unite union rep and activist in Battersea bus garage in south London, has been dismissed by employer Abellio. Judith is adamant that false allegations are being made against her. Judith and Moe Muhsin Manir, the rep at Walworth garage in the same company, feel that they are both being targeted.

In October, Judith was facing a disciplinary meeting and possible dismissal. A solidarity protest was organised and then postponed because the disciplinary process wasn't completed. However, she has now

discovered that the company sacked her on 4 December without actually informing her! Just a few weeks before Christmas, Judith is dismissed with no income.

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) sends support and solidarity to Judith, her members and her union Unite and pledges to do everything we can to get her reinstated. The NSSN will keep our supporters and affiliates fully informed of developments and any protests and action that are called. Stop union busting!

NATIONAL SHOP STEWARDS NETWORK

South London council workers vote to strike



Greenwich Council housing maintenance staff have returned a thumping 97% 'yes' vote for strike action in a ballot over plans to slash wages by up to £20,000. Last year, we formed a committee representing every department and pushed our membership density to over 90%. Now, that committee is driving the branch from strength to strength - grassroots organising and trade unionism in action.

Make no mistake, refuse work-ers, maintenance workers and the other key workers who kept us going through this pandemic are not going to carry the can for this crisis. For the past 40 years we've been told the country is 'broke'. Wages have stagnated for ordinary people, while those at the top are raking it in. We're putting the marker down - enough is enough.

GREENWICH UNITE MEMBER

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HMRC pay talks PCS needs to organise members now

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN PCS

Revenue and Customs (HMRC) management's business case for pay linked to contract changes has been agreed by the Treasury. This would be a multi-year deal, so, if accepted, HMRC staff would not be part of the public sector pay freeze. But this would be on the basis of detrimental changes to hard won terms and conditions - which isn't a pay rise.

The talks were announced to great fanfare on 27 July. Management said that it would take a few weeks to finalise talks with unions. In fact it appears talks could go on until 2021.

Over the last decade, members have seen real-terms pay cuts, while paying more for their pension. Changes to tax on pensions have caused members' net pay to stagnate. In order to recover the position in pay, members shouldn't be expected to accept detrimental changes to terms and conditions.

The talks have been taking place behind closed doors, with only the negotiators knowing what is being discussed. Socialist Party members in HMRC have consistently argued that union negotiators should resist the pressure of talks behind closed doors, designed to exclude members from the process so the pressure of tens of thousands of members can't be mobilised during negotiations.

This makes it difficult to consult with members and to organise a response when the final terms of a deal

are on the table. What is dangerous for our union, PCS, is when the employer's desire to reduce member participation becomes mirrored in the attitudes of the union's leadership, as with the national union's supposed pay campaign. This has degenerated to the point that member participation amounts to signing and sharing a petition. This can hardly be described as a national campaign to fight for a decent pay rise.

If the Revenue and Customs PCS group executive thinks members should reject HMRC's offer, members must be kept involved at every stage, so they understand why the deal on offer is a bad one and reject it in a ballot.

Socialist Party members have argued for the following:

- Fight for the national PCS pay claim - fully funded 10% pay rise with a minimum underpin of £2,400. No detrimental changes to terms and conditions
- That the full group executive committee is kept informed by union negotiators of the talks with HMRC, and decides the PCS response at each stage, keeping members informed
- The group executive should commit now to a ballot of all members on the final offer, and negotiate with HMRC to make paid time available to all staff to attend PCS-organised meetings on the talks and the final offer
- Support branches to call a series of meetings of members and

non-members, whether the meetings are conducted in offices, or virtually, or both. The meetings will be to discuss the terms of the offer, seek feedback from members and, when the offer is finalised, to encourage members to vote in the ballot

• Support branches in contacting all members to ensure that PCS holds up-to-date contact information for all members, so we are ballot-ready. This to include discussions with the general secretary's office to ensure that the full-time resources of the union group office and regional offices are made available to support branch activities

The national leadership of PCS has tied itself in knots over the prospect of members accepting the pay offer from HMRC, and this was before the announcement of the pay freeze. The national executive committee fear is that accepting the pay offer will mean HMRC is no longer part of the national campaign on pay.

Putting aside the fact a petition is not a campaign, full support should be given by the national union to help HMRC members win a pay rise without detrimental changes to terms and conditions, as a step towards all members of the union getting the full demand of 10%. This means engaging with members on the talks now, rather than keeping members in the dark until it's too late to organise. Campaigning on pay alone is not the way forward. There are many attacks on our members we need to build a fightback against!



Previous HMRC strike ELAINE BRUNSKILL

RMT general secretary election Vote for Steve Hedley



Steve Hedley (centre) speaking at an RMT picket line PAUL MATTSSON

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN RMT

The upcoming general secretary election is an opportunity for RMT transport union members to change the direction of our trade union.

Our members are facing attacks on jobs, pay and conditions on a scale not seen in recent times, as the government and employers try to make the working class pay for the Covid crisis.

While the national executive committee is now committed to a no-redundancy policy, the role of the general secretary is central in leading the battle to defend members' interests.

Socialist Party members in the RMT think that there needs to be a single left candidate who stands on a programme which includes:

- Defending the union's policy on redundancies and attacks on pay and pensions. Bring the whole public transport network into public ownership
- No Transport for London cuts. Organise joint industrial action. Call on London Mayor Sadiq Khan to refuse to pass on Tory budget cuts
- Defend lay member democracy. For the general secretary to be accountable to the national executive committee
- Approach other unions inside and outside Labour to resist Keir Starmer by calling a conference for a political vehicle for workers
- Maintain involvement with the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) to ensure a political challenge at next year's elections

We believe that Steve Hedley, currently senior assistant general secretary, more closely reflects this approach than any other candidate. Steve has consistently argued against the idea of 'national unity', which is, in effect, unity with the class enemy, and has a record of campaigning against cuts. Since being elected as a senior assistant general secretary, Steve has continued to take the wage

he received as a regional organiser, and is pledging to remain on the same salary if elected as general secretary, which is similar to a train driver or technical officer. Steve has always donated a part of his salary back to the union's dispute fund.

There have been many calls from across the RMT for 'unity' in our union following the public disagreements and attacks on the national executive committee from outgoing general secretary Mick Cash over the summer. We would agree that unity is important, but even more important are the ideas which that unity is based upon. A militant programme based on mobilising the membership and organising industrial action is the absolute minimum required for the RMT to be able to deliver for the membership in the current situation. Unity based on appeasement and compromise with the right wing can only result in defeat and demoralisation.

The other left general secretary candidates, Gordon Martin and John Leach, are both outstanding trade unionists who have always supported a fighting approach to trade unionism. We urge them, together with Steve, to discuss whether it is still possible to unite around one left candidate. Gordon and John are less well-known outside of Scotland and London respectively. Steve has a far higher profile across the union as a whole, and stands the best chance of winning.

RMT needs a general secretary who will give confidence to members and mobilise the whole union in the fight to defend jobs, pay and conditions, as the bosses look to make us pay for the costs of Covid and the inability of their economic system to cope with it.

Steve can provide this leadership, and should therefore get our branch nominations and number one preferences. We also urge members to use their second and third preference votes for John Leach and Gordon Martin, in either order.

Vote number one for Steve Hedley.

RMT needs a general secretary who will give members confidence and mobilise the whole union to defend jobs, pay and conditions

Further education workers win pay rise in Wales - fight in England continues

A FURTHER EDUCATION WORKER WALES

Workers in further education in Wales have won a long overdue pay increase. This will mean we are not left behind by the pay rise that was announced for school teachers in the summer.

The University and College Union (UCU) negotiated with employers' organisation ColegauCymru to ensure that vital support staff, who help ensure the smooth running of important things like exams, were also properly rewarded. This solidarity between different types of workers, can demonstrate that all working people should fight for decent pay and conditions, and we in the education sector must show solidarity with our comrades who are currently demonstrating against the unjust and unreasonable Tory public sector pay freeze.

Further education colleges across the UK provide an essential service for young, working-class people. They are places where those who have faced too many barriers along the traditional academic routes, can find a fresh start or a second chance.

However, the pressure of planning, preparing for assessing successful vocational courses, as well as providing learners from a range of backgrounds (all with individual learning and support needs), often leaves further education workers feeling inadequate and completely burned out. It is right that the work we do is recognised as just as vital, challenging, and hazardous in the current Covid-19 crisis, as the work of our colleagues in schools.

Workers across the education sector must unite to show that we will no longer accept unfair pay and conditions. We won't accept that hours of marking and planning at home, in the evenings and at weekends, are just part of the job, and we won't accept wages that are just enough to get by on.

We want our students to succeed, and they are, because staff are willing to put their own health and wellbeing at risk. Never has this been clearer than during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Overwork and underpay cannot continue in school, in further education, or in higher education, which is why workers need to have a say in the running of our institutions of education, to ensure that they are excellent places to work and excellent places to learn. Fighting trade unions with a strong and united membership are essential if we are going to make this happen.



UCU MEMBER ENGLAND

Further education workers in England have been offered a pitiful 1% pay rise despite a £400 million increase in college funding this year. A decade of Tory austerity has left the further education sector with 24,000 less teachers. Those still working have seen their pay decline by 30% in real terms, with a pay gap between schoolteacher and college lecturers now over £9,000 a year.

By campaigning, further education workers contributed to the sector receiving a £224 million increase in base rate funding last year, as part of a £400 million increase in funding from central government. The further education unions claim they had assurances from college leaders that staff would be prioritised if funding increased for the sector.

The 1% pay award is a painful reminder to workers that the interests of management are not the same as our own. The unions must fight for what members need, not rely on backroom deals with the bosses.

The news about the pay offer in England comes at the same time as further education workers in Wales have won an increase of 8.48% on starting salaries. The pay rise will play an important role in closing the gap between education worker pay, which is also high in Wales.

The pay offer in Wales is partially the result of devolved powers, as the Welsh government placed a requirement that pay parity with schools would be a priority for colleges receiving additional funding.

Socialist Party members in further education reject the 1% offer and call for the opening up of the books for inspection by trade unions. The unions are launching a campaign demanding transparency of further education finances, to show where the increased funding has gone, which we support.

No worker should pay for the Covid crisis, and we must resist any attempts to divide workers from different sectors and across the nations.

All education workers have seen attacks to their pay and conditions from a decade of austerity. And a united campaign of all education workers from schools, colleges and universities is an essential next step to demand the necessary resources for us all.



No worker should pay for the Covid crisis and we must resist any attempts to divide workers from different sectors and across the nations



RIGHT POPULISM AFTER TRUMP

ROBERT BECHERT

COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

Trump's election defeat, but with a significantly increased vote, has sharply posed the question of what happens next?

It is not simply about who will be the next US President. The fact that Trump's former close ally, US attorney general Barr, took the step of announcing that there was no evidence of any voting fraud that would have changed the outcome of November's election, shows that the decisive sections of the US ruling class will prevent Trump trying somehow to hang on inside the White House.

A key question is what Trump will do next? Make no mistake, Trump hopes to build upon his 74 million-plus vote. Immediately, Trump is striving to consolidate and expand his base. In the month after the election, he has raised \$207.5 million, a large part of which is going towards new political campaigning.

If, as reported, Trump soon announces his intention to run again in 2024, the campaigning will step up and continue. He will aim to exploit disappointment with Biden, as Trump did with the results of the Obama presidency.

Real threat

Despite his clownish aspects, Trump's policies pose real threats to working people, the environment and more. While cynically claiming to have done more for black Americans than anyone, with the "possible exception" of Lincoln, in the presidential debate he refused to condemn white supremacists and told the far-right Proud Boys militia to "stand back and stand by."

And while more serious representatives of the ruling class attempted to limit the unnecessary, from the point of view of capitalism, steps he wanted to make, they were not always successful.

Trump's post-election statement that he would send "the military in" if there was a repeat of last summer's protests after George Floyd's murder was an example of the threat that could be posed.

But Trump is not simply an isolated individual who has taken over the top of the Republican Party. There is a minority in the US ruling class that wants to go onto the offensive right now, fearful both of the relative decline of US imperialism, especially vis-a-vis China, and the growing support for socialist ideas within the US. There also are elements like Amazon owner Bezos, who is both anti-Trump and viciously anti-union.

While Trump really started his political career with support for the 'birther' campaign that Obama was not legally entitled to be president, he also deepened the Republican anti-socialist campaigning.

This built up during the Obama presidency claiming that the Democrats, a party based upon huge big business funding, were somehow



Every step Trump has taken since the election has been not simply aimed at defending his legacy and his claim that he really won, but more fundamentally aiming to ensure his movement continues



Although Trump lost the presidential election, Trumpism hasn't gone away PHOTO GAGE SKIDMORE/CC

'socialists', something that spurred the current interest in, and general support for, socialism within the US.

Now Trump continually pushes this further, recently arguing in Georgia that the Democrats want "to go into a communistic form of government".

Every step Trump has taken since the election has been not simply aimed at defending his legacy and his claim that he really won, but, more fundamentally, aiming to ensure his movement continues. It is absolutely clear that, whatever happens to Trump personally, his type of right populism is not going to simply fade away.

It is rooted in the objective conditions in the US; the fall in average living standards, the loss of jobs and decline of some areas, the growing alienation of many from what are perceived as the elite and, above all, the absence of a powerful workers' movement fighting both for immediate improvements and a clear socialist alternative.

Clearly, this is not just a US phenomenon. Trump's election gave a boost to similar right-populist figures and movements internationally, like Bolsonaro in Brazil and Duterte in the

Philippines. Certainly, Trump's defeat is a warning sign to such leaders, but one election defeat does not mean an end to such movements.

Other countries, such as Austria, Belgium and France, have seen right-populist or far-right parties suffer election losses, but have then recovered. In Italy, since the 1990s, we have seen a succession of such parties rise, fall back and then, to some extent, being replaced by a newer formation, most recently the Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy).

In Hungary, the xenophobic far right Fidesz party, led by prime minister Victor Orban, has consolidated its authoritarian grip on the state since being first elected in 2010. There has also been the more recent election in Poland of the right-wing, clerical nationalist, Law and Justice party (PiS).

A striking feature of Trump's rise has been the inability of 'liberals' to counter the rise in his support. Indeed, their attacks have sometimes consolidated his support. One of the most infamous and well known examples was Hilary Clinton's denunciation of "half" Trump's supporters as a "basket of deplorables".

Of course, it's true that among

Trump's base there are those who are, as Clinton said, "racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic"; but this does not explain how Trump tapped into a vein of support that allowed him to take control of the Republicans and, after four years in office, increase his vote by over eleven million, including record numbers of people of colour voting Republican.

Political polarisation

The political polarisation in the US gave both Trump and Biden record votes in November; while Trump scored nearly 74.2 million, the Democratic vote rose by 15.4 million to over 81.2 million.

Trump's exploitation of the widespread alienation and rejection of the old elite, summed up as the Washington 'swamp', was rooted in the experiences and disappointments of the Clinton, Bush and Obama's presidencies. All were seen to fundamentally favour the rich, often carrying out, directly or indirectly, policies which harmed or did not improve workers' living standards.

Trump sought to exploit, and twist, real issues which the Democrats had no fundamental answer to. Trump



Generally, right populism exploits the natural anger that arises in class society against the rule of an elite

was seen by a section as standing up to the elite, not being intimidated but speaking bluntly and directly, offering a vision of a better future - "Make America Great Again" - and defending the 'nation' - "America First".

Of course, he pandered to and gathered support from prejudiced layers but, as Bernie Sanders occasionally showed, it was possible to appeal on economic and social issues to some of those drawn towards Trump. The tragedy was that Sanders' conscious strategy to work within the Democratic Party, and ultimately support Hillary Clinton in 2016, and now Biden, was not at all attractive to those pro-Trump layers who were open to him.

There are many things still open regarding Biden's presidency, but it is clear that from the start it will be under pressure from events and a polarised US.

Given Democrats' failure to even maintain the size of their majority in the House of Representatives and the open question over the outcome of the Georgia special Senate elections in early January, Biden may be faced by a Republican-controlled Senate from the outset.

Even if Biden is able to pass proposals through the Senate, there will be the potential opposition from the strengthened right-wing Supreme Court majority. This could stymie Biden's room to act, but even without this, it is clear that Biden's policies will be rooted in capitalism.

Disappointment

While that is not to say that the Democrats could not be pushed by events and pressure to try to undertake wider reforms, the likelihood is that they will disappoint again and thereby create opportunities both for the development of independent labour politics and renewed scope for right populism.

Generally, right populism exploits the natural anger that arises in class society against the rule of an elite, while seeking to turn this resentment away from developing into a class-conscious socialist opposition to the ruling class and capitalism itself.

Despite occasional propaganda that they are 'on the side' of 'ordinary, hard-working people' and they 'defend' the family, etc, at root, the right-populist leaders are pro-capitalist and anti-socialist.

Practically, they twist and distort anger at what are often real issues away from the fundamental causes and towards scapegoats, eg the 'lazy' unemployed, minorities, against foreign capitalism or businesses owned by ethnic or religious minorities.

Such tactics are not confined to right-populist or far-right parties. All pro-capitalist parties need an element of populism in order to gather mass support; after all, the capitalists themselves are a tiny minority of society. Even dictatorships and totalitarian regimes can deploy populist slogans alongside nationalism.

Against this, the pro-capitalist



At best these liberals want to improve capitalist society when the root cause of the current popular disenchantment is capitalism in a period of crisis



Protesters in London on one of many anti-Trump protests PHOTO PAUL MATTSOON

liberal critique of populism, while taking up some of the prejudices that right populism displays, fundamentally cuts no ice. This is because, with bourgeois liberals supporting capitalism, they have no answer to popular resentment that society is 'not fair', 'loaded' against 'ordinary folks' and ruled by the rich.

At best, these liberals want to improve capitalist society, when the root cause of the current popular disenchantment is capitalism in a period of crisis.

Of course, right populism can also base itself on, and tap into, conservative and religious traditions and prejudices, nationalism and racism; all elements used at different times by ruling classes to maintain their rule.

Right populism's growth since the 1980s has generally been a reflection of the failures and decline of the traditional 'left', significantly seen first in France and then rapidly in 1990s Italy.

In Belgium, the Flemish nationalist and anti-migrant Vlaams Blok (today the Vlaams Belang) began to significantly grow electorally in 1988, around the same time that the Haider-led Freedom Party did the same in Austria.

In both cases, well organised and deep-rooted social democratic parties had degenerated into almost completely pro-capitalist parties tainted with corruption and clientelism.

Since then, as the CWI has explained, this deepened with the further experience of the pro-capitalist police, often including austerity, of social democratic and 'socialist' parties in government.

The 1990s and after saw the additional effect of the collapse of the

Soviet Union which gave capitalist forces the opportunity to launch an ideological offensive to say that this 'proved' that 'socialism' had failed. Even though the Soviet Union and other similar countries had not been socialist, because there was rule by a totalitarian elite and no genuine workers' democracy, their collapse provided the occasion for a further right turn by many former social democratic, socialist and communist parties, and by many trade union leaders

Role of workers' parties

As long as there remains an absence or weakness of a genuinely socialist workers' movement, there will be scope for right populism, independently of what happens to individual right-populist parties or leaders, especially in times of deep capitalist crises, which we are experiencing today.

The challenge remains of how to deal with right populism, particularly as it can use its demagogic slogans to make inroads into some sections of the working class.

The key is the building, or rebuilding, of a combative, democratically run workers' movement that shows in practice that it is serious in struggling for better lives. This is currently missing in the US, with many union leaders involved in forms of 'business unionism', and often being utterly corrupt, as seen in the recent embezzlement convictions and jailing of former national United Auto Workers union leaders.

But Trump's period in office also saw a strikewave of teachers and education workers across the country,

sometimes organised by the rank and file, many of which won some concessions.

The deepening issues within capitalist society, of widening inequality, job losses, cuts to public services, environmental concerns, and discrimination and oppressive policing of minorities, etc, are provoking opposition and fightbacks, albeit sometimes inchoate in organisation and programme at this stage.

Thus in the US, and echoed in many other countries, there were massive anti-Trump protests following his 2016 election win. There has also been the spontaneous eruption of the Black Lives Matter movement. And BLM was preceded by the tremendous global school strikes over destructive climate change.

In addition, notwithstanding Covid restrictions, there have been strikes and mass demonstrations in Brazil against Bolsonaro, general strikes against Modi in India (see page 15), and huge pro-abortion rights protests against the PiS in Poland, to name a few. These show the potential for undermining right populism.

Only by taking and fighting on the concrete issues facing the working class, minorities, the especially oppressed, and sections of the middle class, will it be possible to answer in practice the right populists.

Building movements, based around working-class unity and solidarity, is the way in which internationally support can be built for parties of the working class that will lead the struggle for a socialist transformation to end the never-ending turmoil of capitalism, and the damage it does to humanity and the world.



As long as there remains an absence or weakness of a genuinely socialist workers' movement, there will be scope for right populism

Tenants and workers unite to take on landlords



NICK AUVACHE
UNITE HOUSING WORKERS BRANCH

Unite members, together with tenants and housing activists, gathered outside the HQ of 'One Housing' last Friday to protest against the unfair treatment this anti-social housing association gives out to its workers and tenants.

The protest was called by Social Housing Action Campaign (SHAC), an organisation which brings together tenants and workers. Over recent weeks and months, both tenants and Unite have been in constant battle with this housing association. Incredibly, it has prevented health and safety reps from undertaking workplace visits to make sure that those workplaces are safe, and it has consistently undermined the in-house teams by employing contractors.

It has also refused to speak to tenants and leaseholders about their numerous problems, and given inaccurate reports to the local Labour MP to hide their lack of progress with repairs.

A One Housing Group tenant spoke at the protest, and brought with her

a three-foot piece of lead which had fallen from the roof of a block of flats owned by the landlord. Problems relating to this matter had originally been reported to 'One Housing' two years earlier, but it had failed to act. When she contacted SHAC for help with campaigning about this, we successfully forced the landlord to act immediately.

Tenants recognised this as a victory for collective organising, with one saying: "Thank you very much to SHAC! When we as tenants and residents go to 'One Housing', they ignore us. When we join forces and link with SHAC, we get immediate results!"

The protest reported this victory as well as announcing that the first health and safety site visit was taking place at the same time as the protest. These two small victories show what can be achieved when tenants and workers link up. We know that there are many other outstanding issues, but this will give us the confidence to go further. SHAC is a necessary and growing force amongst housing activists and workers. This protest shows why.

'Oxford, Cut the Rent!' campaign kicks off

ADAM POWELL-DAVIES
OXFORD SOCIALIST STUDENTS

At the start of November, students at the University of Oxford launched a rent strike campaign amid growing anger towards the blatant lies, landlordism, and overall indifference shown by university management throughout this coronavirus pandemic.

The 'Oxford, Cut the Rent!' campaign mirrors demands made by student-led rent strikes elsewhere in the UK, calling for a 30% reduction in rent for this academic year, the waiving of penalties, immediate cancellation of contracts for all students wishing to move out of university accommodation, and increased medical and mental health support for students.

The Oxford campaign is organised by a democratic committee comprising members of various left student groups, including Socialist Students, and currently has student representatives from across more than half the university's constituent colleges.

The success of the Manchester

University rent strike last month in securing a four-week rent cut has inspired students across the country, and similar campaigns are now underway in at least twenty UK universities - the largest university rent strike action seen in over forty years. Socialist Students supports all current and future rent strike campaigns, and absolutely encourages any gains that can be made via the collective action of young people.

However, as socialists we argue for a programme that goes beyond the short-termism of a one-time rent reduction, to ultimately call for a fully publicly funded higher education system, operated under the democratic control of staff and students. As part of that, we argue for students to receive a genuine living grant, with rent capped at 25% of this.

We know that the wealth exists in society to support this kind of education system; but this wealth must first be taken off the 1% and re-allocated under democratic workers' oversight in order to guarantee the educational needs of all.

Socialist Students argues that we

must look beyond the coronavirus, to the faults of British capitalism and years of marketisation within higher education, to identify the root cause of all the issues raised within rent strike campaigns this year.

These campaigns rightly highlight the mental health crisis, extortionate tuition fees, and disproportionately high accommodation costs that have faced students this term. However, these problems predate the pandemic and are the natural result of a higher education system in which universities secure private funding by exploiting staff and students while cutting jobs and services.

While joining the fight for rent cuts as part of a growing national movement, Socialist Students offers a long-term programme for a completely different kind of higher education system. A publicly funded, socialist higher education system controlled by staff and students, and not the overpaid vice-chancellors and university executives who have continued to look after the bank balance, sacrificing our wellbeing this term.



York students determined to build for rent refunds and free education



IAIN DALTON
SOCIALIST PARTY YORKSHIRE

Students held a protest in York city centre against their ongoing treatment by the government and university management. The protest took place the first day lockdown was lifted on 2 December, with the support of trade unionists from York Trades Union Council. This was after an attempt to hold a protest at York St John's University campus the week before had been stopped by large numbers of police.

There was significant public support for the protest. One pensioner who passed just before the protest began, saw Socialist Students' placards demanding 'refund our fees' and commented "I completely

agree". Other people out shopping now stores had reopened came up to ask questions and take leaflets.

Anger among students has grown under lockdown at how university management and the government have lured them back to campus over the summer, with promises of a relatively normal student experience. The reality is that they have been told to attend so that halls rents and tuition fees could be collected to prop up the unsustainable higher education funding system.


Two weeks prior, at the University of York, around 75-100 students had held a protest demanding rent rebates, and now 200 students in halls are pledged to join a rent strike if this and other demands aren't met.

Maurice, a new Socialist Party

member and college student, spoke about how 'bubbles', designed to separate students in case of Covid outbreaks, were regularly collapsing. As students move around to different lessons they are regularly coming into contact with different 'bubbles', undermining staff and student safety.

With students being 'evacuated' from campuses ahead of Christmas, the next month will be relatively quiet for expressions of student anger. The next term will be a different matter. All those on the protest were determined to build for a bigger and more sustained movement in the new year.

Join the student fightback
JOIN socialist students
socialiststudents.org.uk/join



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

● Report on Tory party ‘hostile environment’ racism ignored

Try to imagine a situation where the publication of the Equalities & Human Rights Commission (EHRC) report on antisemitism in the Labour Party had brought forth no statement from the party leader or his predecessor, and the media provided minimal coverage.

Difficult to imagine? That was the Tory response to the EHRC report on the impact of the Home Office’s hostile environment immigration policy on the Windrush generation. No statement by Boris Johnson, Home Secretary Priti Patel, nor

Theresa May, prime minister when the impact of the hostile environment policy became publicly known and home secretary when the policy was implemented.

This wall of silence was not challenged by the capitalist media that gave the publication minimal coverage. There was also a suggestion of ‘news management’ as the report’s publication coincided with the government’s long-awaited spending review, including the announcement of a pay freeze for many public service workers.

This government policy clearly illustrates state racism, which was recently depicted in Steve McQueen’s film ‘Mangrove’ on BBC1, based on events in Notting Hill, west London, during the 1960s - the first decade after the arrival of the Windrush generation (See ‘Mangrove’ at socialist-party.org.uk).

JOHN MERRELL
LEICESTER



● Thank you for an excellent article

I would like to praise the article on Friedrich Engels in issue 1111 of the Socialist (See ‘Friedrich Engels: A revolutionary who played a pivotal role in the development of socialism’ at socialistparty.org.uk). I am studying for a history degree with the Open University and have previously analysed a text by Engels for an assignment. This article has provided me with a further in-depth understanding of his motivations and his partnership with Marx. I shall retain this article for future studies. Thank you Lenny for an excellent article.

A further point of relevance was the article on disabled people. I have just written an assignment on the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor and how they had to meet certain standards to qualify for relief. That was in the 16th century, nothing has changed much in over 400 years (See ‘Criptaes’ at socialistparty.org.uk).

MARY MEDD
COVENTRY

● Shocking poverty not hidden anymore

The item on the BBC ten o’clock news about poverty in Burnley was shocking. In the fifth richest country on the planet, people are living in the depths of degradation and horror. People from the church who were handing out food were mobbed and brought to tears.

It’s all going on now, often hidden

● Thatcher statue - forever is too soon

In Grantham the local council is spending £100,000 erecting a bronze statue of Thatcher. It’s seven years since she died, forever is too short a time to consider it’s appropriate to put up a statue to her. It is adding insult to injury to the working class.

CLARE WILKINS
NOTTINGHAM



● Dentist rip-off

What are they hiding? There’s a £1 billion cut to the railways, and I have been forced to take out a £2,000 loan for dental work. This is why I am a campaigner for the NHS. I was thinking that as I left a private dentist brushing past a Porsche and a £200,000 Bentley, who needs socialism?

MIKE MARX
SOUTHAMPTON

● Capitalism’s cure?

I have found a vaccine that will inoculate us all against poverty, hunger, homelessness and environmental degradation. It is explained inside the pages of this newspaper, it’s called socialism.

MARTIN REYNOLDS
WALTHAM FOREST

Obituary: Roger Priest

It is with great sadness that we announce the loss of our friend and comrade Roger Priest. Roger was born in the East End of London into a large catholic family. His father was an active socialist in the Labour Party and Roger followed in his traditions.

Roger became active in socialist politics after World War Two, becoming an active member in the Young Communist League and the Labour Party at the same time. He would proudly talk of the times he went canvassing with David Attenborough

and the people who were involved in socialist politics at the time, and was proud to be distributing leaflets that proclaimed socialism.

Roger had been evacuated to Chinnor, Oxfordshire during the war, and when he was conscripted continued to propagate the ideas of socialism, finding that while some of the officers would have it in for him, there were others who were sympathetic to these ideas.

Roger returned to the Chilterns and became father of the chapel (trade union branch secretary) at

Hazel, Watson and Viney, a large printing works that printed Reader’s Digest among other publications. Here he won ‘fish and chips Friday’ and terms and conditions that were the best in Buckinghamshire. On one occasion, he and the stewards won up to £3,000 in back pay, which he said was enough to buy a house in the area at that time.

Roger continued in the print trade and set up his own business; during the anti-poll tax campaign he printed thousands of leaflets. He was elected to the council for Labour, and also stood as a parliamentary candidate for Buckinghamshire.

Roger was always a man to speak his mind and a man of principle, with a firm belief in the ideas of socialism and the need for a socialist

economy. He had always been involved in the peace movement and was a strong advocate against war. When Tony Blair took the UK to war in Iraq, he resigned from the Labour Party but remained active in local politics and the fight to fully fund the NHS.

It was during an NHS meeting that Roger and I met. We agreed to set up ‘Bucks save our services’ and Roger agreed to join the Socialist Party, and never looked back. He stood as a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate in the local elections and was a proud member of the Socialist Party in his later years, making sure that his cars always went away with a copy of the Socialist and the knowledge that there was a local union branch for

them to get involved in. Despite his recent ill health and Covid, he was always asking about meetings and how the party was doing both nationally and internationally.

Roger was also active in the charitable sector, and set up many projects predominantly supporting young people. This was recognised with an MBE, a title he only used when he thought it would help get a young person a job or access to housing.

He leaves behind family and many friends and our thoughts are with them at this time. He will not be forgotten, and I will miss the many tales he had of his political life and the experiences that resulted from this.

STEVE BELL, FRIEND AND COMRADE
AYLESBURY SOCIALIST PARTY

TV review: Red, White and Blue

More than just diversity - we need democratic, working-class control of the police

DEJI OLAYINKA
SOUTH EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The BBC recently aired the film ‘Red, White and Blue’ from the Steve McQueen mini-series ‘Small Axe’. The film is based on the life of Leroy Logan, a biology graduate born and raised in Islington by his Jamaican parents. It follows the start of his mission to join the British police force and fight to change it from the inside.

The opening 20 minutes of the film are filled with problems of the 1980s that are still here today. It starts with Leroy as a young child in school uniform, standing outside of his school, patiently waiting for his father to pick him up from music lessons. As he waits two police officers stop and search him, asking for his instrument bag with the tired excuse of local burglaries by “young black lads like yourself”.

One of the most powerful scenes occurs soon after Logan begins his application to the police when his father is brutally attacked by two policemen as he tries to explain that he’s parked legally. After being hospitalised, his father faces several false charges including “assaulting an officer”.

While those early scenes of racism

and harassment by the police are terrible, the racist abuse that Leroy suffers throughout the film, and throughout his career, are truly demoralising and show the extent of his challenge. This ranged from the casual racism of his manager describing his local community as a “jungle”, to the direct racist bullying of officers graffitng “dirty nigger” onto his locker.

John Boyega expertly portrays the anger, frustration and loneliness experienced by black people facing racism at work. And, while today HR departments would claim to protect employees from such harassment, they can’t be relied upon to fight racism. Trade union leaders need to take up our demands and lead the fight against racism in the workplace.

The film did well to highlight the difficulties and battles of a young black officer entering a racist police



Trade union leaders need to take up our demands and lead the fight against racism in the workplace

culture, but it had very few scenes documenting the external impact of Leroy’s approach to changing the police. Despite being well known and liked by the older adults in his community, he struggled to engage with teenagers on his beat. Because, despite his soft approach, his uniform still represented for many a violent occupying force that oppressed working-class migrant communities.

One scene particularly exposed the historic divorce between the police and the ethnically diverse communities that they are meant to serve. PC Asif Kamali, an Asian officer who had similar hopes to Leroy, was conversing in Urdu to take statements from the victims of a crime. However, his superior officer stopped him and forced them to speak in English, despite the victim not being fluent. As is the case in many workplaces, the dictatorial chain of command stopped him from doing his job effectively. Asif didn’t last the whole film, between this and further racist abuse from colleagues, he lost hope that he could change the police and quit soon after.

In the open-ended final scene of the show, as Leroy also questioned whether he could really make a change, he shared with his father that



To totally eradicate racism from society, we would need to end the profit-driven capitalist system

he often thinks “the earth needs to be scorched, replanted, so something good will come of it”. In real life, he continued on his mission, and eleven years into his policing career, after the murder of Steven Lawrence and the release of the MacPherson report, Leroy set up the Black Police Association, which has particularly focused on increasing the recruitment and retention of black and ethnic minority police officers.

In a recent interview with Novara Media, Leroy was asked about this government’s strategy of “a changed complexion without changing anything about the culture.” In the context of the current and the previous Tory black, Asian and minority ethnic home secretaries, Leroy acknowledged how the state “bring in their own token individuals to be the messengers, even though they’re more

draconian.” That’s why the Socialist Party fights for representation for communities through local democratic control of the police. We argue for the formation of elected bodies of representatives, from local communities and trade unions, that have the power to appoint and dismiss chief constables and senior officers, and would be responsible for day-to-day policing policies, as well as weeding out any racist elements or fascist sympathisers within the police.

But to totally eradicate racism from society, we would need to end the profit-driven capitalist system that has fostered racism as a tool to divide working people and maintain its rule.

● *Red, White and Blue can be viewed on BBC iplayer*

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ENGELS AND THE ANSWER TO THE HOUSING QUESTION

In the third article in our series on Friedrich Engels, to commemorate the 200th anniversary of his birth, **Niall Mulholland** of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) reviews Engels' pamphlet, *The Housing Question*, and explains its relevance to today.

Engels published *The Housing Question* in 1872 as a contribution to debates about the appalling housing conditions facing the working class in Germany, Britain and elsewhere, and what should be done about it. Despite it being nearly 150 years old, Engels' trenchant work remains very relevant in many ways as we face the most acute housing crisis in decades.

The pamphlet is a collection of articles originally published in *Der Volksstaat* (The People's State), the main newspaper of the German Social Democratic Workers' Party. Engels polemicalises against Arthur Mülberger, a follower of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (a founder of anarchism), and Emil Sax, an Austrian bourgeois economist.

Engels explains the link between the housing crisis and capitalist industrialisation and urbanisation: "... masses of rural workers are suddenly drawn into the big towns, which develop into industrial centres... workers' dwellings are pulled down on a large scale. Hence the sudden housing shortage for the workers."

Engels goes on to explain that industrial growth drove up land values and housing rents.

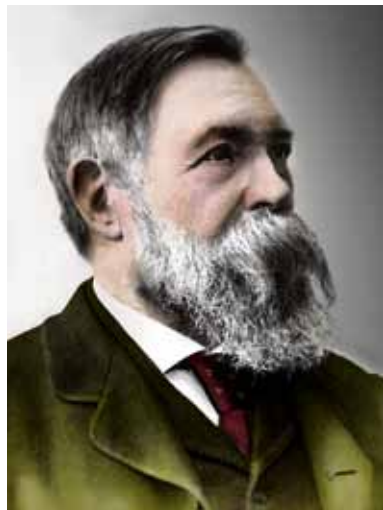
Likewise, in contemporary Britain, and internationally, severe housing shortages, overcrowding, insecure tenancies, and skyrocketing land values and rents have been a feature of the housing crisis.

Wages down, rent up

London has seen a 77% rise in rents in the last decade. Yet wages have stagnated and benefits have fallen sharply over the same timescale. The average benefit income of a family with children is £2,900 a year less than in 2011.

Tory Covid lockdown policies have compounded the crisis, causing sharp falls in workers' incomes and widespread job losses. According to the Joseph Rowntree Trust, in Britain, there are 1.3 million in the private housing sector and 1.2 million in the social rented sector who will struggle to pay their rent over the next three months. Around 350,000 face risk of eviction.

As well as addressing the general housing crisis, Engels sharply criticised Mülberger and Sax's analysis of the housing question and their



Friedrich Engels

'solutions.' Engels brings to the debate important aspects of the revolutionary theory of capitalism that he and Karl Marx developed. These include the differences between the tenant-landlord and worker-capitalist relationship, the nature of the capitalist state, distinctions between interest, rent, and profit, and the role of the working class in changing society.

Engels criticised the 'Proudhonist' moral appeal to 'eternal justice' to solve the ills of capitalism. Mülberger/Proudhon thought the solution to ending private landlordism was for each worker to own their own house through a 'fair payment' to the landlord for the actual cost of the house. By this system of mortgaging, tenants would eventually become homeowners. This would turn social relations on their head, Mülberger argued, as the "tenant is in the same position in relation to the house owner as the wage worker in relation to the capitalist".

Engels refuted this "totally untrue" argument. Rent does not involve the exploitation of labour power and the creation of new value, as seen in worker-capitalist relations. "The worker is always cheated of a part of the product of his labour, whether that labour is paid for by the capitalist below, above, or at its value. The tenant, on the other hand, is cheated only when he is compelled to pay for the dwelling above its value. It is, therefore, a complete misrepresentation of the relation between landlord and tenant to attempt to make it equivalent to the relation between worker and capitalist."

Sax's housing solution was based on capitalism, but like Proudhon his proposal was that each worker should own their own house. Sax advocated factory owners allocating land and resources to workers to build their own dwellings. By becoming homeowners, workers would become 'proprietors' and the class distinctions and conflicts with bosses would dissipate, Sax reasoned.

This is similar to Margaret Thatcher's propaganda just over 100 years



High rents and housing shortages are a feature of capitalism today

later. Her Tory government introduced mass council house sales, at big discounts to tenants. Rather than create the 'property-owning democracy' envisaged by Thatcher, the so-called 'right to buy' policy led to today's chronic lack of genuinely affordable housing. Private landlords bought up many of the three million former council homes, and they rent them out, often in poor condition, at extortionate rates.

For Engels, homeownership meant that "workers must shoulder heavy mortgage debts", and were forced to live in one place.

Mortgage prisoners

Today, millions of workers face job losses or big wage cuts, and are struggling to pay mortgages. There are also two million 'mortgage prisoners' - leaseholders whose buildings are fitted with external cladding and without a fire safety certificate so the banks and other mortgage providers refuse to lend to their would-be buyers. Many workers are also presented with huge bills, of up to £78,000, to replace the cladding on their homes.

For Engels, housing is one of the "secondary evils that result from the present capitalist mode of production." Under the profit system, Engels explains, housing is treated as a commodity rather than a right. Fundamental change is needed in social relations to solve the housing crisis, transforming individual ownership into collective ownership.

Engels describes how capitalism 'solves' the housing question in the same way it 'solves' the other problems it causes "...in such a way that the solution continually reproduces the question anew."

He refers to Eugene Georges Haussmann, the 'butcher of Paris', who directed work on the reconstruction

of Paris in 1853. Haussmann tore up Paris to create wide boulevards and a 'luxury city' for the rich, while the poor and workers were forced to the suburbs.

What we know today as 'gentrification' and "regeneration" - the poor and working class driven out of their communities to make way for big business developers - was hypocritically deemed 'considerations of public health and beautification' during Engels' time.

"The result is everywhere the same", he writes. "The scandalous alleys and lanes disappear to the accompaniment of lavish self-praise from the bourgeoisie on account of this tremendous success, but they appear again immediately somewhere else and often in the immediate neighbourhood."

Capitalism cannot solve the various crises of housing, Engels explains. Money (capital) flows to wherever the rate of profit is highest and leads to 'over-development' of cities or parts of cities. When capital becomes too concentrated and profits are squeezed, investment goes elsewhere. In recent years, big money flowed to cities like Manchester after decades of over-investment in parts of London.

Engels pointed out that many existing properties could be used in 1872 to house people: "One thing is certain: there are already in existence sufficient buildings for dwellings in the big towns to remedy immediately any real 'housing shortage', given rational utilisation of them."

There are over 600,000 vacant homes in the UK (around 225,000 vacant for six months). During the first Covid lockdown, the Tory government did what it previously said was impossible and housed 14,600 homeless people, albeit temporarily.

The expropriation of empty properties, along with a mass council house building programme, on the basis of quality, environmentally sustainable and genuinely affordable housing, are key demands of socialists today.

The *Housing Question* does not offer a comprehensive programme on housing, as Engels was primarily dealing with the nature of the housing crisis under capitalism. However, he emphasised that housing campaigns and reforms are based on class struggle.

Revolution from below

Mass council house building of the 20th century was a product of the strength of the labour and trade union movement, and the ruling class feared that if they did not concede such reforms social revolution could come from below. But the dismantling of council housing and the increased 'financialisation' of housing means solutions to the housing crisis are posed starkly again.

Socialists are to the forefront of struggling for every possible improvement in housing for workers. Militant, the forerunner of the Socialist Party, led the Liverpool City council struggle against the Thatcher government, which won significant concessions, such as the building of 5,400 council homes.

Comprehensively and permanently solving the 'housing question', however, can only be addressed through the socialist reorganisation of society.

"As long as the capitalist mode of production continues to exist," Engels explained, "it is folly to hope for an isolated solution to the housing question or of any other social question affecting the fate of the workers."

Malaysia: Massive capitalist exploitation of migrant workers exposed by Covid pandemic

YUVA BALAN

SOSIALIS ALTERNATIF (CWI MALAYSIA)

News of the spread of Covid-19 in factory hostels across Malaysia has come at a time when Malaysians are facing the highest number of infections since the start of the pandemic in early March this year.

The latest and most threatening Covid-19 infection cluster, that originated from the Top Glove factory migrant workers' dormitory in Meru, has now reached 5,000 cases and continues to increase every day.

As in Singapore in April this year, when thousands of migrant workers also contracted Covid-19, the current situation in Malaysia has exposed the poor living and working conditions of migrant workers throughout South East Asia.

Top Glove, the largest glove manufacturer in the world, gained tremendous profits when the Covid-19 pandemic increased global demand for latex gloves and PPE.

Huge profits

Consequently, Top Glove - with its 43 companies and nearly 30% share of world markets - increased its profits by more than four times this year, along with other giant companies such as Hartalega and Kossan Rubbers.

Furthermore, with the second and third wave of Covid-19 spreading worldwide, these companies are expected to continue to generate very high profits for the next few years.

Despite being able to make a lucrative profit each year, large companies like Top Glove have reportedly treated migrant workers like 'slave labour', with excessive working hours, low pay and poor protection against Covid.

These companies also constantly relinquish their responsibilities and allegedly use their influence within the government to violate any existing employee protection regulations. Not only Top Glove, but most of the factories in Malaysia, are indeed oppressing migrant workers without any supervision from the authorities or the government.

The Malaysian government and politicians, including the Human Resource Ministry, have repeatedly defended Top Glove on many occasions and downplayed all allegations against it.

Multiple documented cases of migrant worker mistreatment have led to the US authorities banning imports of Top Glove products. This forced Top Glove to agree to repay 136 million Malaysian ringgit (\$33.4 million) to workers who were forced to pay recruitment fees to secure their jobs (ie debt bondage).

However, despite the UK government saying it is committed to tackling "modern slavery in supply chains," Top Glove medical supplies have been stockpiled by the Department of Health and Social Care.

Top Glove owner Lim Wee Chai has never pleaded guilty or apologised,



PPE manufacturing companies like Top Glove have made huge profits off the backs of migrant workers

despite all the evidence made public regarding the mistreatment of workers in his factories. Instead, Lim was quoted as saying that the workers had been 'allowed' to work beyond the time limit at the urging of the workers themselves, and that their passports were confiscated as a "safeguarding" measure!



Despite being able to make a lucrative profit each year, large companies like Top Glove have reportedly treated migrant workers like 'slave labour'

Although the United States imposes restrictions on Top Glove, there is a sea of factories in South East Asia which are practicing blatant human slavery, many far worse than Top Glove.

Disclosures regarding the situation of migrant workers in hostels and workplaces in Malaysia also reveal the glaring shortcomings of the free market system that prioritises

investors and wealthy capitalists who ignore the interests of society in order to protect their personal profits.

While the working class and the common people are working hard on the front line to deal with the pandemic, the ruling class and capitalist politicians are preoccupied with rising profit rates and share-market value.

To this day, both employers and the government have not come up with any solution to find better accommodation for the millions of migrant workers who have to spend their lives in small, overcrowded rooms lacking basic facilities.

Conditions

Top Glove migrant workers are now confined to crowded dormitories as the government has imposed a lockdown of them. Workers from several hostels were reportedly forced to climb the perimeter fence and exit the factory premises, in secret, to buy necessities.

The working class, community organisations, and trade unions, should stand in solidarity with the migrant workers and demand a better solution from the government.

At the same time, the guilty employers must be strictly punished. Giant companies like Top Glove should be nationalised and run under democratic workers' control and management.

The working class must fight to replace the capitalist system as the only solution that can truly solve all the problems that society is facing. Such a socialist agenda begins with the struggles in the factories, the strengthening of the working-class leadership and by establishing solidarity with all working classes and the oppressed.



Mass protests against Macron's repressive draft law

Hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated across the streets of France, on 28 November against President Macron's latest repressive measures, in particular, his draft security bill.

This mass pressure has forced the national assembly and Elysee palace to rewrite the bill. The most contentious aspect of it was Article 24. It would have made it illegal and punishable by one year's imprisonment and a €45,000 fine to "circulate images" identifying police or military officers in the course of their duties. It amounted to allowing the police to beat people with impunity.

But it is the whole draft law that contains 32 articles, all of which strengthen the repressive arm of the police, which must go.

In the country of the 'rights of man', people have lost eyes, limbs or even their lives through repression while demonstrating against the government's policies.

As Gauche Revolutionnaire (CWI France) said in its leaflet: "Massive lay-offs, calamitous management of the health crisis, exhaustion of teachers, lack of resources in the health sector, the destruction of public services... there are plenty of reasons to revolt to put an end to this policy!"

"And Macron knows it; his only answer is always more repression because he fears mass struggle. So we need to mobilise a mass movement of workers and young people, united together, to put an end to this policy and the government."

● Read article in full on socialistworld.net

India: Millions join general strike

Despite the widespread repression under the blatantly right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led regime of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the all-India general strike on 26 November, involving more than 250 million workers, seems to have set the tone for the battles ahead.

Indian trade unions condemned the arrests of workers' and farmers' leaders across the country as they demonstrated together in one of the biggest ever nationwide general strikes.

Weeks earlier, ten trade unions, and others on the left, had called for an all-out general strike, mainly focusing on the repeal of anti-worker labour codes (see article by New Socialist Alternative - CWI India - on www.socialism.in) and the despicable anti-farmer agricultural laws hurriedly brought in by the BJP government.

Both public and private sector employees participated in the strike. The united front of over 250 farmers organisations, the All-India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee, extended support to the trade union strike, and the unions extended their support to the farmers' 'Chalo Delhi' (march to Delhi) mobilisation on 26 and 27 November.

● Read article in full on socialistworld.net

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LUXURY FOR SOME, POVERTY FOR THE REST OF US

LINDSEY MORGAN

LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Many of us won't have much to cheer about this Christmas. In 2020 we've lost people to a pandemic which is still hurting us. One-in-twenty young people are currently unemployed. More people are using foodbanks, often due to debt by having to repay Universal Credit (UC) advances. Twice as many people are now on UC than in March, and we still have a government that prioritises profits over safety.

But it's not been miserable for everyone. 614 billionaires in the US have grown their wealth since the start of the Covid crisis by a collective \$931 billion dollars. In the UK, 13,000 Arcadia retail workers have their jobs in the balance over Christmas while Philip Green tops up his tan on his £100 million super-yacht. Green's family also took a £1.2 billion dividend from the business, three times as much as the pension deficit.

The misery heaped on working-class people feels endless. Even with tiny household budgets for so many of us for this Christmas, we are still bombarded with calls to do the 'moral thing' and spend money in businesses. They want to save a system that has had very little interest in saving us this year.

Adverts litter TV programmes showing the capitalist vision of a perfect Christmas - huge meals, stacks of presents. And honestly, it hurts. Capitalism makes us feel like failures in so many ways; failing as parents for not being able to get them everything they want, failing as a valued member of society if we've lost our job, and often feeling like we've failed to keep our families safe when forced to work in unsafe environments.

Wages should be increased to a real living wage. Benefits need to be increased to a level which allows us to live, not just exist. And when bosses say they need to sack people they should prove it. Not only by opening the books to trade union inspection, but maybe selling their assets like yachts, luxury homes, and property portfolios. It's about time it came out of their pockets, not ours!

Any company still threatening mass job losses and closure should be taken into public ownership and a plan drawn up democratically involving representatives of workers in the company and the wider trade union movement to guarantee future employment.

But to guarantee everyone a decent future we need to replace this capitalist profit system that is geared to the needs of a super-rich minority, with a socialist society that can meet the needs of the many.



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

