

UNEMPLOYMENT AND COVID RISING



THE CRISIS IS NOT OVER

FIGHT FOR JOBS AND SAFETY

BERKAY KARTAV
SOUTH WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The beginning of a mass vaccination programme has raised hopes of an end to the Covid crisis.

But in their determination to put profits first, the Tories have mismanaged the health and jobs crisis from day one.

Working-class people and the poorest in society have paid the highest price with our lives and livelihoods, and the bill keeps going up.

The Tories have no plans to vaccinate against the huge job losses

and desperate rise in poverty that is already underway - and set to get worse.

Even the House of Lords economic affairs committee has said the government is "sleepwalking into an unemployment crisis".

More than one million jobs in hospitality and the retail sector are on the line, with many already losing their jobs before Christmas.

A dire situation exists, especially for young people who are entering the labour market. Youth unemployment is expected to reach its highest level since the mid-1980s.

Children are going to bed hungry,

two million families are destitute, and the Tories won't even commit to maintaining the £20-a-week increase in Universal Credit!

Rich get richer

The super-rich have got richer during the pandemic, while the burden of the crisis is offloaded onto the shoulders of working-class people.

'Thin deal' or 'no deal', the outcome of the Tories' Brexit trade negotiations with the EU will only add to the economic misery - and once again it will be workers and the poor who suffer the most.

The Lords' report echoes what the Socialist has been arguing for months - that job and training support measures, including the Kick-start scheme for young people, are completely inadequate.

We are fighting for a mass programme of government investment in socially useful job creation, with trade union rates of pay. We are fighting for free training schemes for skilled work, with a guaranteed job at the end.

We are campaigning for union leaders to lead a mass fightback to defend every single job, as well as to defend health and safety in

workplaces and schools (see page 3).

Companies that threaten redundancies or closures should open their books to workforce and trade union inspection. If companies genuinely cannot maintain jobs, then they must be nationalised under democratic workers' control to defend jobs and incomes.

But securing a decent future for all means also fighting to get rid of capitalism - a system based on an endless pursuit of profit - and replacing it with a socialist plan of production to reorganise society in the interest of the working-class majority.

the Socialist

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



Mass testing - we need trade union oversight and full pay for all

KATRINE WILLIAMS

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

The Tory government is ploughing enormous resources into mass testing, promising £100 billion for 'Operation Moonshot', equivalent to 70% of the usual annual NHS resource budget. The majority of funding is being funnelled into private companies carrying out the tests.

Mass testing, sufficiently accurate and used effectively, could be an important tool in the response to the pandemic. But how effective are the tests, and how does mass testing fit with the rest of the government's Covid strategy?

Having been trialled in Liverpool, the government's version of mass testing is being rolled out to further communities, including the possibility of workplace testing. So far, there has not been a proper evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme in Liverpool made public.

The lateral flow test used as part of the scheme needs a swab that

has been pushed up both nostrils from each individual. In the main, swabbing is done by the individuals themselves. Meanwhile, the testing process is being carried out by what the government call "experienced" staff, but who, in reality, have had just an hour's training by video.

Despite assertions about the accuracy of the test, the accuracy of results fall within a very wide range. In Liverpool, tests captured just 58% of those with Covid-19. Accuracy of testing is much higher when the samples are obtained, and the tests are done, by clinical experts. Accuracy rises to 79% when done by laboratory scientists.

The government and bosses want to use mass testing as a means to get workers back to work as soon as possible, cutting self-isolation times, and maintaining the fiction that workplaces are 'Covid secure'.

There is a danger that mass testing can give the illusion of safety

and false reassurance to those who test negative. All safety measures

including social distancing, face coverings, good ventilation and good hygiene continue to be vital for safety, and are often absent from workplaces.

Mass testing in Liverpool had a varying degree of take up. The lowest take up was in the poorest communities, where workers cannot afford to self-isolate because of the impact on their pay. Self-isolation is an effective way to stop the spread and must not be curtailed. All workers, including those on limited-hours contracts, must receive full pay and face no detriment from annual leave or sickness absence recording.

More accurate testing, carried out by trained professionals, as part of a publicly owned system, and under the democratic control of workers and the trade unions, could play a vital role in tackling the pandemic. But it also needs to be combined with full pay for those isolating, and resources provided to ensure all safety measures are carried out in our workplaces and communities.

The Socialist Party demands:

- Full funding to local authorities and NHS to deliver test, track, trace and protect
- Improve the testing of symptomatic people with full resourcing to public services so that individuals can get results promptly
- Testing in the workplace should focus on stopping the spread of Covid-19 by identifying those that need to self-isolate. Any testing must be carried out by clinical experts, with the oversight of workplace trade unions
- Mass testing to be part of the public sector. No more lining the pockets of big business
- Community screening of asymptomatic people should be properly piloted and systematically evaluated under trade union supervision
- For trade union struggle to demand what is needed to tackle Covid-19. For jobs, full pay, and health and safety at work

Welsh schools close for safety after union pressure

Belatedly, the Welsh government announced the closure of secondary schools in Wales, moving to online teaching one week before the end of term.

This was a last-minute reaction to rising cases in Welsh schools, and the fact that large numbers of pupils and teachers were indicating that they would, in effect, boycott schools anyway, so they could isolate in time for Christmas.

But primary schools remain officially open, until the government does another possible U-turn. The Welsh government should have

announced the closure of primary schools too.

Panic measures

It would have been much better if the Welsh government had heeded the warnings of trade unions and planned the closures. These panic measures make it very difficult for schools and families to plan online learning and childcare.

Council and education unions have been calling for a planned early closure for weeks. Socialist Party member Mark Evans - branch secretary of public sector union Unison

in Carmarthenshire - wrote to the leader of the council on behalf of the union, demanding he reverse his previous decision to keep schools open before "staff vote with their feet".

Mark also said: "Staff are exhausted and frightened." And that the union's warning that "schools would, in effect, be petri dishes for Covid-19" has "unfortunately and predictably proven correct".

- **Read Carmarthenshire Union's statement in full at socialistpartywales.org.uk**

Effective testing and properly funded safety plan needed in schools

Unions must act now



MITCH FUQUA/USAF/CC

MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES

NATIONAL EDUCATION UNION MEMBER

The contradictory chaos at the heart of the government's Covid policies has been brought into sharp focus by the sudden announcement that mass testing of secondary school students is going to be rushed out in parts of Essex, Kent and north east London.

There's no question that regular mass testing of school students and staff is needed. It's a demand that the National Education Union (NEU) raised as one of our 'five tests' for Covid-safety in schools back in May.

A few weeks ago, infection rates in the north of England were much higher than in the south. However, official statistics show that it's now London where rates are rising fastest, particularly among school-age children.

Like some Tory 'King Canute', health secretary Matt Hancock hopes rushing out mobile testing units can stop the rising tide washing over London and the south east. But, once again, instead of a properly resourced plan, he's resorting to half-baked measures.

The practicalities of making sure that schoolchildren in the targeted areas are all tested are far from straightforward. No doubt exhausted and overstretched school staff will again be expected to try and help bring some order to Tory chaos.

Testing this late in term also means that children testing positive will then have to self-isolate with their families over the Christmas period that the government has supposedly 'saved' from Covid restrictions.

Worse, government ministers still

can't bring themselves to admit to what is now surely blindingly obvious. If school-aged children are so widely infected, insisting that parents send them into classes of 30 - in badly ventilated classrooms - inevitably means that schools will be acting as a significant driver of wider community transmission.

Yet, while these mass tests are being announced, badly hit London boroughs are being ordered to withdraw their plans to manage the situation by finishing term with just remote learning (see below).

As parents and staff in the hard-hit north have understandably pointed out with anger, government failure to organise widespread mass testing in other regions has already left thousands of families vulnerable. Some of their children will have been returning home from school untested, probably without symptoms, but still infectious.

But government failure mustn't be allowed to stoke regional divisions. Regular effective mass testing of children should be happening in every area.

The risk of transmission should also be kept down through a properly resourced plan for safer reduced class sizes, with some children being supported to learn from home on a rota basis where necessary - certainly in those areas with the highest infection rates. Parents and carers, who are left without childcare, should be paid in full if they have to remain at home as a result.

Of course, these demands aren't new. Trade unions and parent campaigns have been calling for action to reduce infection risks in schools for months.

Instead of just pleading with

ministers who refuse to listen, what's needed is action to make sure they are forced to change policy. The NEU should follow the lead taken by the Scottish teaching union EIS in Glasgow, and prepare members for ballots for strike action where employers continue to refuse to act to protect health and safety.

Tories force Greenwich schools to close - but unions must stand firm

So the Tories have chosen to use the dictatorial powers enshrined in the Coronavirus Act to order Greenwich Council to keep schools open - presumably other London councils following similar routes will receive the same.

Greenwich Council has now backed down. But the council should have stuck to its guns. It was acting in the interests of public health - unlike the Tories.

Let's see the Tories justify in court why it's "necessary and proportionate" to force schools to stay open, just when London is going back into tier 3, and when Hancock has blamed the rising infection rate on school-age children!

The council hasn't stood firm, but the unions must. If there is a serious and imminent danger from rising infection rates, then the unions should advise staff of their rights under Section 44 to refuse to work in unsafe workplaces.

If the Tories up the ante, then they have to be faced down.



WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

Our demands include...

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

- 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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Met police investigate British mercenary war crimes against Tamils

● **We want a real, independent, public, workers-led inquiry**

PIRIYASHA

BIRMINGHAM SOUTH WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

The Metropolitan Police are investigating British mercenaries' hand in the massacre of over 100,000 civilians and the brutal defeat of the LTTE (Tamil Tigers), who fought an armed struggle for an independent Tamil Eelam nation.

Keenie Meenie Services (KMS), formed in 1975, were mercenaries that offered military aid to places in conflict, in support of British imperialism. In Sri Lanka, KMS trained the Special Tasks Force (STF) of the Sri Lankan Police, to battle the Tamil Tigers in the 1980s. The STF committed atrocious crimes against Tamil civilians, condoned by the British government.

Tamil civilians were detained, tortured, and killed by the STF as the Sri Lankan government tried to suppress the Tamil independence movement. One of the most dreadful recollections include the 1987 massacre of 85 Tamil civilians at a prawn farm in Kakkadicholai.

Classified documents came to fruition as a result of Freedom of Information requests by investigative journalist and author Phil Miller. They indicate that KMS were personally involved, providing air coverage for bombing and firing at civilians indiscriminately.

It was no surprise when the Tamil diaspora in Britain took to the streets to demonstrate during the end stages of the war in 2009. They called for

Gordon Brown's government to end the slaughter of thousands of Tamils in Mullivaikkal. But the right-wing Labour government did nothing.

In fact, the British government supplied weapons to the Sri Lankan state to aid the killing. Taxes paid by the working class, including Tamil workers in Britain, funded the murder of Tamils in Sri Lanka.

The Metropolitan Police launched the investigation into alleged war crimes and human rights abuses by KMS after immense public pressure. However, we can expect an investigation similar to the 'Spycops' inquiry, also conducted by Met police (see 'Spycops inquiry: why the capitalist state feared and continues to fear socialism' at socialistparty.org.uk). That inquiry did not allow the identities of police spies to be revealed, even their cover names.

We require an independent public inquiry to be undertaken against the British mercenaries that committed appalling war crimes, which is led by the trade unions and representatives of the working class, including the Tamil diaspora.

We also ask: Why does taxpayers' money fund imperialist wars, when we are told there is not sufficient money for decent jobs, homes and healthcare? If the working class collectively owned the wealth, and controlled it democratically, we could ensure that expenditure was directed towards society, and not to line the pockets of the capitalist class.

● See tamilsolidarity.org



London Black Lives Matter protest MARY FINCH

No to Tories' new anti-protest law

● **Current undemocratic laws already used against Bristol statue protesters**

TOM BALDWIN

BRISTOL SOCIALIST PARTY

Demonstrations of more than two people were banned for the first time last month. Unable to keep this draconian rule in place beyond the end of lockdown, the Tories are now looking at other ways to restrict the right to protest. Home Secretary Priti Patel has unveiled a raft of curbs on democratic rights expected to be put forward in a bill next year.

Gatherings outside parliament and judicial hearings would be outlawed, as would those that block newspaper distribution. Demonstrations outside 'critical infrastructure' such as power plants would also be banned, possibly including picket lines by striking workers. It is not clear how 'critical' will be defined, potentially giving ministers and the courts even greater leeway to try and silence protesters.

In the worst economic crisis for 300 years, capitalist representatives are clearly not confident in the support for their system. Earlier this year, they announced schools would be banned from using anti-capitalist teaching materials. Now they're looking to strengthen the powers of

the state in order to protect the power and wealth of the bosses.

We are already subject to repressive laws that restrict the democratic rights of ordinary people. The area around parliament is currently a 'controlled area' where protests require permission now they could be banned altogether.

Four Black Lives Matter protesters are being charged with criminal damage after a statue of slave-trader Edward Colston was pulled down in Bristol in the summer (see 'Oppose racist symbols and the racist system' at socialistparty.org.uk). Five other people have already had conditional cautions relating to the incident.

Drop the charges

The charges against these protesters should be dropped. For decades councillors had dithered over what to do with the hated statue it was direct action which resolved the issue.

A series of anti-trade union laws already restrict workers' ability to organise and strike. Last year a 97% vote for strike action by Communication Workers Union (CWU) members in Royal Mail was overturned by an unelected High Court judge. Many

protesters around the country could share experiences of how the current laws are already used against them.

Priti Patel has hypocritically tried to justify the new laws on the grounds of protecting democracy. In reality this is about protecting property and profit.

Newspaper distribution is considered a vital 'democratic' function when it means spreading the ideas of billionaire press barons. Yet the privatisation of public spaces makes it ever harder to sell a workers' paper like the Socialist. We have many examples of successfully winning the right to sell the Socialist (see 'Waltham Forest: Campaigners score a victory' at socialistparty.org.uk).

These laws are an attack on democratic rights from a weak government sitting at the head of a weak capitalist system. This attack must be fought, and the workers' movement must be willing to break unjust laws to ensure the voice of the working class is heard.

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No surprise, poverty is rising

● **We want real benefits, living wage, rent control and socialism**

SAM MORDEN

SOUTH TYNE AND WEAR SOCIALIST PARTY

A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that 2.4 million, including half a million children, experienced "destitution" in 2019 - before coronavirus reached the UK. This is up 54% since 2017.

In a country where unemployment is on the rise because of the financial crisis, and more people are forced onto what little Universal Credit may give (draconian sanctions permitting), these numbers are set only to increase.

Of the destitute, a fifth are homeless or suffer from addiction. 54% have a chronic health problem or disability. 14% are in paid work. These are indictments of the capitalist system and its effect on our health.

Destitution has risen sharply in all regions. The worst affected are London, where wealth contrasts with grinding poverty, and the north of England.

A January 2020 report by the Child Poverty Action Group shows that my home constituency - Gateshead - has one of the highest rates of child

poverty in the north east (42%) - equal to Middlesbrough, and second only to Newcastle Central (48%).

The Foundation's report calls for the £20-a-week rise in Universal Credit to be extended, which the Socialist Party supports. But, in one of the richest countries in the world, it should be much more.

Benefits should be similar to a real living wage. Rents should be capped and council homes built. Only when the economy is taken into democratic public ownership will we see the wealth created used to end poverty for good.

Maternity unit deaths - democratic, public ownership needed to ensure an accountable NHS

JANE NELLIST

COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

The recently published Ockenden report into the deaths and serious injuries of mothers and babies at the maternity units in Shropshire and Telford Hospital NHS Trust exposes a very dark side of the lack of accountability in the NHS.

Credit must go to those parents who have fought tirelessly over many years to expose the hospital's failings at great cost to their own health and wellbeing, encouraging other families to speak out.

Although the report has only looked at 250 cases, the investigation has resulted in over 1,862 cases being exposed. An astonishing number of failures, have caused personal heart-break and a total lack of confidence in a service which serves half-a-million people in a mainly rural area. It begs the question, why has it taken over two decades to expose what was happening?

Bosses shift blame

The 48-page report, which has taken over two years to compile, is horrific in its findings. Women and families have been ignored, brutalised, killed, and even falsely accused of damaging their babies in an attempt to shift blame.



The very clear report outlines nearly 30 'local learning actions' that must be introduced now, as well as seven 'immediate and essential actions'. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the

Royal College of Midwives have both called for all the findings to be acted upon immediately, by all maternity services.

It should never be allowed to happen: NHS bosses seek a cover up, go

on to repeat mistakes over and over again, and ignore recommendations, causing more needless misery and heartache to many families over many years.

It is vital that there is a struggle to

Rich countries hoarding vaccine is danger to us all

NICK HART

BLACK COUNTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

The Covid-19 pandemic has been truly global in character, with every nation reporting cases. Why is it then, that as the first vaccine shipments leave the factories, your ability to access it will depend largely on what country you're living in?

Scientists have overcome the medical problems of creating usable Covid vaccines. But getting it administered to enough of the world's population to wipe out the virus will be an economic problem as much as a logistical one.

Vaccines from Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna had barely cleared trials before it emerged that wealthy nations had bought up 96% and 100% of their initial run respectively. Despite having a population of only 32 million, Canada now has enough doses on order to treat over 150 million people!

The ceiling on the number of doses that can be provided shows the limits of the pharmaceutical industry being organised on the basis of capitalist competition. Instead of the drug companies pooling their research, manufacturing capacity, and supply chains to get the maximum

amount of any effective vaccines produced as quickly as possible, they are left to negotiate individually with governments.

The result is that as many as 67 low-income countries are unlikely to get enough doses to inoculate more than 10% of their population in 2021. This is added to the relative lack of healthcare infrastructure in many neocolonial countries, resulting from decades of economic suppression by richer counterparts.

Vaccine nationalism

Public health advisers are now warning that the rise in 'vaccine nationalism' could leave Covid in circulation for much longer than necessary. As we saw at the start of the pandemic, the persistence of the virus in one corner of the globe could be the basis for it spreading to other countries once again.

The chaos of the free market is proving unable to efficiently stamp out Covid. To truly protect the working-class majority of the world's population from this and other diseases, we need the development and supply of medicine to be run on the basis of need, not profit, with democratic planning on an international scale. In other words, we need socialism.

Cancel exams for class of Covid



REECE MILLER

NOTTINGHAM SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Education secretary Gavin Williamson has refused to follow Scotland and Wales in cancelling exams, justifying his decision with: "Exams are the best form of assessment we have".

This suits the Tory minister perfectly, as there is a correlation between exams and a student's family income. Professor Ira Shor remarked that universities should simply enter students' family income instead of their grades.

Williamson has shown some leniency to students. Grading will be more generous. What does this mean?

Students will be told in January some of what is on the exam. Students will be given exam-aid worksheets, to reduce the amount of content that needs to be memorised.

And there will be back-up exams in July if students miss assessments. In other words, they are doing everything but cancel exams.

Students in worse conditions get worse grades. These conditions have

strengthen the trade unions in the health service, so that workers are in a position to be able to whistle-blow and suggest changes, without fear of victimisation or losing their jobs.

Accountability

There is no accountability of NHS services to the local community, except for a few Patient Participation Groups. The Socialist Party demands democratic accountability across the whole of the NHS. This means being accountable to service users, NHS workers through the health service trade unions, and the working class as a whole.

With the prospect of even more cuts, privatisation and rationalising services in the NHS, the issue of accountability is vital. Privatising health services makes them less accountable, and the drive for profit makes services less safe.

That's why the Socialist Party argues for the renationalisation of the whole of the NHS under democratic working-class control and management.

If the Ockenden Report highlights one thing, it's that these tragic events should have been exposed and acted upon a long time ago. Democratic, public ownership is the only way to make sure that the NHS stays true to its original intentions.

only been compounded by the coronavirus crisis, which has laid bare the inequalities of capitalism.

Comparing the 2020-2021 budget to 2017-2018, the increases in per-pupil funding for children on free school meals was only two-thirds the rate of other students.

More funding means students get more support in school. More family income means students are more likely to access help out of school - help from university-educated parents, access to individual laptops, or even personal tutors.

Poorer students are disadvantaged, both in and out of school. This is especially pertinent when we have been through a period of schooling at home. Exams would be an extra burden on both students and teachers, who have had more than enough stress this year.

The National Education Union (NEU) already calls for an end to "the over-reliance on exams", and instead proposes school-assessed grades based on teacher assessment.

This system provides a fairer and just as accurate - if not more accurate - measurement of knowledge and abilities compared to exams.

This government has already U-turned on the disastrous exam algorithm. With coordinated action, they can be forced to cancel exams this year.



Tamil Solidarity Campaign in 2017 MARY FINCH

Openreach and EE: Massive vote for action in consultative ballot

CWU MEMBERS IN BT

Openreach and EE (now owned by BT) CWU members have retuned a massive 97.9% 'yes' vote on a 74% turnout in a consultative ballot on whether they wish to take industrial action against compulsory redundancies, site closures, reduction of terms and conditions, and a race to the bottom.

For decades the no compulsory redundancy agreement has been the jewel in the crown of the BT unions' achievements, but the realities of crisis-ridden capitalism, weak union leadership, and the never-ending greed of the bosses, mean that these are luxuries they can dispense with.

If the bosses get their own way, the consequences for workers could be severe. Not only will some people lose their jobs, site closures will result in many engineers who need lighter indoor duties having no other job to go to and being made redundant.

The employers' proposals are not

driven by operational needs but by the greed of the bosses. BT and Openreach have been giving work which should be done in-house to contractors, and are busy recruiting new staff on inferior terms and conditions. Since the time that BT bought EE, it has been attempting to level down pay and conditions to the inferior EE ones.

This is part of a planned attack on pay, jobs, and terms and conditions, and must be resisted. The CWU wants to use this ballot result to persuade the company that its proposals are so unpopular that they will be scrapped.

The bosses may think that the union leadership is sufficiently weak to cave in. Socialist Party members believe that the time spent on this consultative ballot would have been better spent mobilising for an industrial action ballot.

But if the employer does not back down by the beginning of 2021, the CWU should build on this magnificent vote and organise a legal

industrial action ballot to halt these attacks on telecom workers.

As long as telecoms companies are privately owned and run for profit, there will be attempts to attack workers. The only way to remove this threat and stop the continuous race to the bottom is to nationalise the entire industry under democratic workers' control and management. The union should raise this policy amongst the membership.

The plan to reduce office-based sites from 300 to 30 is a massive issue and will have devastating effects on workers' lives, adding up to two to three hours to a working day with travel time.

CWU members have made it clear in an amazing ballot result - at a time when face-to-face branch meetings could not take place - that they will not accept the current management attacks on their jobs and terms and conditions of service.

BT needs to back off or deal with the consequences.



JOHNNIE PAKINGTON/CC

Christmas redundancy shock at L&Q housing association



PAUL MATTSSON/CC

Workers at highly profitable housing association L&Q were shocked to be told of major restructuring and the threat of large-scale redundancies.

In recent months, they have been congratulated for their efforts to keep the organisation going through the pandemic, but now they will face restructuring and the threat of job losses.

The rumour among workers is that 20% cuts are in the pipeline. If this is untrue, Unite the union is calling on management to level with staff and spell out the real position immediately.

While the chief executive makes his Christmas plans knowing that his £344,097 a-year pay is secure, his workforce faces an anxious festive

season, and the potential of a disastrous new year.

The organisation declared an annual surplus of £414 million in its last published accounts. It benefits from low interest rates, and only in October boasted of its most successful bond issue ever.

Despite this, staff were told that the rushed 'consultation' will proceed through the Christmas period so that redundancies can be completed by the end of the financial year.

There is no justification for ramming these changes through and no rationale for redundancies. Unite believes that L&Q bosses should fully consult both staff and residents, and stands ready to support workers in any action they wish to take.

Unite launch ballot over sacked London bus rep Judith Katera

Unite the union is running a consultative ballot on 16-17 December to launch the campaign to get Judith Katera reinstated. Judith, a long-standing union rep and activist in Battersea garage in South London, has been dismissed by Abellio. She feels that both herself and Moe Muhsin Manir, the rep at Walworth garage in the same company, are being targeted by the company because of their union activities.

It is vital that there be the biggest 'yes' vote possible, to send the message to Abellio that bus drivers in Battersea will fight for Judith's job and stop attacks on the union. We hope that such a vote will force management to reinstate Judith. But if they still refuse, the union would then be able to launch a full industrial action ballot.

NATIONAL SHOP STEWARDS NETWORK



Stop 'fire and rehire' at British Gas

As a loyal employee of over 20 years I am disgusted with the way senior management at British Gas are treating their staff.

The threat of the S188 'fire and rehire' is bad enough, but now the company is trying to break the collective bargaining of two unions, singling out the 'no' voters in order to pressure workers into signing up for greatly reduced terms, conditions and pay.

Years of extremely poor

management and horrendously bad financial decisions have led to customer losses. They use the energy pay cap and the Covid crisis as cover for their own failures.

The new chief executive officer Chris O'Shea is not willing to learn from his predecessors' mistakes and is now making a whole new set of poor decisions, hurting the brand and trust of both customers and workforce alike.

How he sleeps at night is beyond

me, but I'm sure his bank balance and possible shareholder rewards are the motivation. Sad times, and if this is allowed to continue, watch this space, as large companies follow suit. This is disaster capitalism at its worst.

BRITISH GAS ENGINEER

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JAMES IVENS

EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Two strikes in Newham, east London have the future of publicly owned and run education at their heart. What's more, the mini-strikewave which has followed them in surrounding boroughs shows the potential for wider action.

The action against forced expansion of Little Ilford School rages on. Its seventh and eighth strike days on 8-9 December again counted dozens of pickets. This is despite multiple year groups and staff members isolating due to rampant Covid cases.

The strikers' mood is dogged and participation remains firm. In fact, the school's National Education Union (NEU) group has grown from 60 to 75.

Too many students, too few staff, and yet more disruptive building plans are the reasons for this dispute. But its political crux is privatisation.

With expeditious strikes in 2018-19, Newham NEU defeated most attempts to turn more local state schools into state-funded, privately run 'academies'. Under huge pressure, the local Labour council even reluctantly agreed it would formally oppose academisation.

Newham needs new schools

Meanwhile, Labour's own gentrification policies in London had funnelled working-class families into localities with insufficient school places. What Newham needs is new schools to take the pressure off.

However, the Tory-Liberal central government's Education Act 2011 introduced 'academy/free school presumption'. This meant local government could only build new 'community schools' - owned and run by the council - if they received no viable pitch for a privately run school.

The final arbiter? The (Tory) education secretary.

In 2015, the Tories updated the 'presumption clause' to 'free schools' only. Free schools are simply new academies which anyone can set up. Like all academies, they are 'free' from national union agreements on pay and conditions, the national curriculum, and even the need for qualified teachers.

In the meantime, the dangers of free schools are underlined by the

East London shows the way: strikes are how to fight for state education

JAMES IVENS



So now Newham is saying the only solution to the problem it has created is an under-resourced school expansion - or a free school.

In fact, it could fully resource staffing and student places by using its vast reserves and borrowing powers, and demanding the money back from the U-turn Tories. With some creativity, and backing for the NEU's campaign, it might even find a way round free school presumption.

The vicious school management sacked NEU rep Sharon Morgan - for the crime of asking questions about Covid safety. A judge even decided in her favour, but such rulings are not binding.

Staff and students work in cramped facilities. Like in all schools, workload

is increasing while staff numbers fall. One striker told us the time between bells to change classrooms has been cut completely - periods end and begin simultaneously! Are teachers expected to teleport?

Turnover is high. Conditions are unbearable. This is sweated education, and it's the future the Tories want for school workers and working-class students.

Nonetheless, the brave core of strikers have rattled bosses, stood at the windswept Docks gate on six

days this year. Management attempts to intimidate pickets and keep students away show this.

Both these local strikes are fighting aspects of a national problem: free school presumption. They are also angry and worried about coronavirus safety, falling pay and rising workloads - national problems too.

Next-door Tower Hamlets NEU called a strike of SEND educators on 9 December. The Labour council is proposing redundancies in the 'Support for Learning Service'.

Having Sixth Form College struck on 10 December for safer Covid measures. All the students are in every day! Outside London, Kingsway Primary in Wirral, Merseyside struck for Covid safety the same day. With or without a national lead, schools have no way forward but to fight. They must not be left to fight alone. The national leadership of the NEU needs to learn from East London and have the confidence to build ballots on industrial action nationally.

Determined strikers at Leaways school



CHRIS NEWBY

HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

NEU members at Leaways school in Clapton, East London, are taking part in a six-day strike spread over three weeks. The school is run by private company Kedleston Group, and teaches children from across London with autism and social emotional and mental health difficulties.

Teachers and support staff are angry that the school is not providing the conditions to enable them to give students the best possible education. They are demanding that the school gives them parity with the 2.75% pay award that teachers in state schools have received, instead of the 1% the school has offered them, and an increase in the number of days sick pay, which currently stands at seven days a year. They are

also demanding an increase in the number of staff as classes are currently understaffed.

NEU members on the picket line explained the terrible conditions that they and the students work in. This is a four-storey building where the heating doesn't work above the ground floor. This, coupled with the fact that windows have to be left open because of Covid, means that teachers, education assistants and students have to keep their coats on the whole day because it is so cold. Also, there are not enough computers to

go around for the students. There are also no outdoor play areas for the students.

The striking NEU members are very determined to win their demands. There have been about 30 to 40 on the picket line, with lots of homemade placards. It is clear that there is a lot of local support, with many passing motorists tooting their horns. The strikers were very pleased to see Socialist Party members visiting the picket line to offer their support. The next three days of strikes run from 15-17 December.

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CAN GREEN TECHNOLOGY AND AI SAVE CAPITALISM?

The following article is an edited transcript of the speech by **Mark Best** in a workshop at the Socialism 2020 event organised online by the Socialist Party from 20-23 November (see 'Socialism 2020: Growing search for ideas to change the world' at socialistparty.org.uk). We would encourage everyone who spoke in the excellent discussion at the workshop to write up their contributions as future articles for the Socialist - editors@socialistparty.org.uk. We also welcome other contributions to the debate.

When Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were writing in the 19th century, the capitalist system, despite the poverty and inequality associated with the exploitation and oppression of workers nationally and around the globe, and the economic booms and slumps which are rooted in the profit system itself, was nonetheless able to develop and harness science and technology, and produce goods and services which could take society as a whole forward.

But capitalism today is very different. It is decaying. It is crisis-ridden, and is no longer able to make full use of the scientific and technological gains which are still being made today. To make use of those advances, to invest with confidence, the capitalists would need stable expanding markets in which to sell their goods and services at a profit on a long-term scale which, because of the contradictions inherent in a system based on profit rather than need, is no longer the case.

The Covid pandemic has highlighted the scientific and technological gains that can be made. Some of the vaccines which have been announced use something called messenger RNA, which is a breakthrough in vaccine technology. But that has been made possible on the basis of governments across the world pouring public money into research. After the SARS epidemic, the pharmaceutical companies had ditched their research into a coronavirus vaccine because it was not deemed profitable to continue with it at that time.

One of the fields which makes clear the crises and chaos of capitalism is green technology. The idea that the capitalist class will be able to funnel investment into wind, solar and tidal energy, to be able to produce cheap energy, in the future on the scale necessary in order to grow after this crisis, is clearly unlikely. Capitalism has the contradiction of being a global system, but at the same time based on nation states. This means that you can't have a directed plan of production to solve the many problems facing society today. The actions of just

one capitalist class are not enough to solve global warming, the plastics crisis, biodiversity crisis, etc.

That doesn't mean, however, that, under the pressure of workers and young people across the world, some limited actions won't be taken to attempt to solve the environmental crisis. In the short term, potentially some smaller countries could try to seize an opportunity to corner what they potentially think will be an expanding market. But even if one capitalist country decided to ban the burning of fossil fuels and plant thousands and thousands of trees every day, the government next door might say, right, we want as many polluting industries as possible. The question of climate change and environmental destruction is a global one.

In order to solve these problems, what we actually need is global planning, something which is impossible on the basis of capitalist competition, and only possible on the basis of socialism.

Limits of capitalism

There are many examples of how new technologies come up against the limits of the capitalist system itself. The rise of the gig economy over the last ten years has led the Economist magazine to imagine a future in which you won't have a job, you will just have skills and sell yourself, and by being so flexible you'll be able to live a life of luxury.

But the reality of what the gig economy actually means hit home years ago. It's obvious that these apps are being used to drive down working conditions and pay. And resistance to that exploitation has been a feature of workers' struggle across the world.

Under socialism, however, the technological discoveries, which have led to the use of smartphones and the ride-sharing apps and algorithms which match a person to a job, would have massive potential. You can imagine a system in which those of us who like to go cycling, for example, could do that but at the same time help those who can't get out of the house to obtain food.

In reality, many of the applications of this technology aren't actually profitable at the current time.

They exist on the basis of massive investment from hedge funds, particularly in Silicon Valley, on the expectation of future profits. And they are being used to try to atomise workers and break the power of the organised working class.

It is also interesting that some of the main investors in the technology for self-driving cars have been Uber, Amazon and Google. Self-driving cars used in a socialist planned economy would be a marvellous way of reducing the amount of cars and pollution within our cities as part of an expanded public transport system. You could have a fleet of cars which carry six or seven people and then automatically work out where the car needs to drive to efficiently deliver people to where they need to go.

Jobs like bus and taxi drivers would no longer be necessary, but with a socialist planned economy their skills could be redeployed, rather than being thrown onto the scrapheap as happens under capitalism.

Another issue is that many of the self-driving car companies are putting money into creating very detailed maps of the roads across the world. But there are multiple companies doing this, and it's creating vast amounts of data, which then needs to be stored on servers which use massive amounts of energy. And all of these companies, because of competition under capitalism, are keeping their work under lock and key.

Whichever one works best will be kept. But the others will probably just be thrown in the bin, along with all the data collected because, with an absence of co-operation, each system is incompatible with each other. This massive amount of wastage is inherent within the capitalist system.

'Internet of things'

One of the trends at the moment which really sums up the nature of technology under capitalism is that of a computer connected to the internet being placed on as many devices as possible - the so-called 'internet of things'. One example is fridges connected to the internet, making it possible for companies to collect and sell data on how much is being consumed, how often you shop, what you're buying, and so on.

Companies use this to advertise and sell more goods. But it's not creating new productive wealth. It's just allowing companies to sell their goods better and get one over on their competitors. But under a socialist system, that kind of data would be invaluable for drawing up a democratic plan of production nationally and internationally.

Technology is also changing the workplace. Artificial intelligence

and machine learning are being used even more, and the pandemic has sped this up. Jobs in sectors like law, journalism, architecture, aspects of medicine, and so on, are being replaced by algorithms. A deskilling of these previously relatively well-paid jobs has pushed law clerks, local journalists and others towards the working class and its methods of struggle, through unions and strike action.

This is particularly true in fields like journalism. Recently, the Guardian even published an essay which it claims was written by an algorithm. But what they actually did was tell the machine to write six essays and then picked the best paragraphs from each one to make a coherent argument. So, despite claims that artificial intelligence has developed so far that you no longer need human input, that's not the case.

Often the things that get advertised on Facebook, like spam and clickbait articles, are written by a computer. You can tell because they're so repetitive and aren't adding anything of note, regurgitating other articles or press releases. So computers can do those tasks, which are relatively simple. But it's impossible to produce creative ones in this way.

Manufacturing

Automation in manufacturing and in some service sectors threatens to throw many workers onto the scrapheap. There are already some factories in which goods go in one end and finished items come out the other using only automation. But these are extremely limited, and mainly run in-between workers' shifts. And even then, you still need workers to maintain the machines and the infrastructure network necessary to run those factories - the internet, the power lines and that sort of thing.

Automation in that way hasn't abolished the need for workers who are connected to the productive forces, and has placed in the hands of relatively few workers the production of masses of goods.

But there's also the fact that capitalism is a blind system. The companies don't set out and say, 'I want to create the most automated factory that I can.' They just want to make the most profit possible. And if this means paying workers the minimum wage or less, then this is what they will do. For example, workers are paid pitiful wages to wash cars, when automated car washes have existed for decades.

So while there is one trend within capitalism towards automation, capitalism cannot take any trend to its full conclusion. But under a socialist system, in which we can plan and make full use of those technologies to automate

everything possible, it would be possible to free ourselves up from drudgery.

Even under capitalism there is potential to use new technology for our benefit. Smartphones are used by companies to divide and try to atomise the working class. But in the massive factories in the neo-colonial world which produce these, they are helping to draw together and create potentially powerful working classes.

There are some on the 'left', like Paul Mason and Aaron Bastani, who look at these advances in technology in isolation. They don't look at how they relate to the rest of the world, and particularly how they relate to the class struggle.

No ruling class has ever left the stage of history without a fight, and there's no way that the capitalist class would create the technologies, and utilise them to the full and create socialism by accident or through the backdoor!

Socialism

The technology and the productive capacity is there for socialism already, but the levers of political and economic power lie in the wrong hands. There are many ways in which the technology we have now could save us work and free our lives from drudgery. We could run society based on what is good for the majority of people, as opposed to what makes a profit for a few of those at the top.

The key question for us is - how do we get to that society? And that is a question of the working class taking control of the factories, the wealth and knowledge which is locked up in the vaults of various companies, and using it to democratically run society in the interests of the majority.

That won't happen without getting organised now, and it won't happen without a programme to appeal to the mass of workers so that we can fight to end capitalism, and build socialism in Britain and across the world.

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Book launch: The national question – a Marxist approach

OISIN DUNCAN
SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND

90 socialists from Scotland, Wales, England and Ireland, and even from as far afield as the US, attended an online book launch public meeting organised by Socialist Party Scotland on 10 December.

The new book, ‘Scotland and the national question - a Marxist approach’, is a 150-page contribution to a vital debate that is taking place in Scotland: how, and using what methods, can an independent socialist Scotland be achieved?

Philip Stott, national secretary of Socialist Party Scotland, pointed out that there were two main reasons for producing the book now. Firstly, to look at how our programme on the national question has evolved over the decades. Unlike the vast majority of forces on the left in Scotland, Militant and Socialist Party Scotland can reproduce our material on this issue and stand by it. We have always taken a very sensitive approach to the right of the Scottish people to self-determination.

Philip pointed out that another key reason for producing the book now was the major confrontation that was looming between a Tory government at Westminster, who will at all costs refuse a second independence referendum, and the majority of the working class in Scotland who now



support independence. The Scottish elections in May 2021 will very likely see a pro-independence majority government at Holyrood.

Trade unions must take lead

The scene is therefore set for a massive collision on the issue. Even now, 79% of 16-24 year-olds support independence for Scotland. A key task of this book, Philip argued, is to make the case for a mass working-class-led movement for IndyRef2, with the trade unions taking a decisive lead.

The workers’ movement and socialists must fight for the leadership of the movement for self-determination and link this to the struggle for an independent socialist Scotland.

Peter Taaffe, political secretary of the Socialist Party England and Wales, explained that the national question is in many cases one of the unresolved tasks of capitalism. Even at the height of its powers, capitalism failed in a number of bourgeois national revolutions to complete the task of creating settled nation states.

As a result, in this period of capitalist crisis, the national question has remerged with a vengeance in many countries. It is the task of socialists to be powerful advocates for democratic rights, linked to the struggle for socialism and the creation of a voluntary socialist federation of states.

Dave Reid from Wales explained that the movement for Scottish independence is having a big effect in Wales. Support for independence is increasing - as high as 25% in some polls this year. 40% of young people

support independence. Socialist Party Wales calls for a parliament in Wales with a socialist majority and full economic and tax-raising powers.

The new book on the national question can play a key role in arming workers and young people with the programme and methods needed to win the struggle for national self-determination and socialism.

Scotland and the national question - a Marxist approach

- Order your book today from Socialist Party Scotland. Go to socialistparty.scotland.org.uk and click the Donate button. Cost: £8 including postage(£10 solidarity price). Email info@socialistparty.scotland.org.uk with your postal address



TUSC relaunch in the north west

ROGER BANNISTER
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

Socialists, community activists and trade unionists were all represented at an online meeting held on 12 December to relaunch the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in north west England. The main speaker was Chris Williamson, former Labour Party MP and now a member of the TUSC national steering committee, whose contribution was well received by the audience.

The meeting had an open discussion, during which the depth of experience of those attending was revealed. The discussion included a councillor from Copeland in West Cumbria who has been thrown out of the Labour Party, former Labour Party activists from South Cumbria,

and two members of the Liverpool 47 councillors, who led the heroic struggle against Thatcher’s Tory government in the 1980s.

It was made clear that Starmer’s leadership of the Labour Party, and its sharp turn to the right, is alienating many Labour members who are now looking for a proper, socialist electoral alternative. After a full discussion, there was a general acceptance that the next step would be for local TUSC groups to be set up in the new year, to start to plan and organise for the local elections in May.

Voting Labour in May would be voting for a continuation, rather than an end, to austerity. It is crucial that as many workers and young people as possible have the opportunity to vote against cuts in these elections.



TUSC campaigning in 2015 MERSEYSIDE TUSC

Tremendous fighting fund reflects political confidence



Socialist Party members and supporters have done brilliant work over the whole of 2020 in making sure we smashed through our fighting fund target for the year. In the current campaign we have already raised more than 200% of the target. This has mainly been achieved by the tremendous financial appeal we had at Socialism 2020 (See ‘Socialism 2020: Growing search for ideas to change the world’ at socialistparty.org.uk).

We appreciate the sacrifice of all those members and supporters who have contributed as well as the efforts of the Socialist Party branches in making sure that this was one of the most successful fighting fund appeals we have ever had.

This tremendous appeal reflects the political confidence of Socialist Party members and supporters in our programme and key tasks, particularly on the issue of working-class political representation. This quote

from Peggy Wang in Cambridgeshire who donated £40 to the Socialism appeal reflects this support: “Thank you for a wonderful conference. It was so informative and inspiring, and I am grateful to be part of an organisation dedicated to the betterment of working people. It has given me much hope and meaning in my life.”

SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND									
AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q3-4: OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2020					DEADLINE: 31 DECEMBER 2020	
Eastern	4,458	1,200							372%
East Midlands	6,421	1,850							347%
South West	5,712	1,800							317%
Southern & SE	5,693	2,350							242%
London	10,804	4,600							235%
North West	2,387	1,150							208%
West Midlands	5,045	2,600							194%
Northern	1,344	750							179%
Wales	4,100	2,300							178%
Yorkshire	4,110	2,550							161%
Other	2,961	3,850					77%		
TOTAL	53,035	25,000							212%



School boy assaulted by police in Tottenham - end racist policing

HELEN PATTINSON
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

People woke up to a horrific video on Friday 11 December. It was of a 16 year old black boy in his school uniform, being assaulted by a police officer in Tottenham, north London. A protest was quickly called and grew to around 80 people.

The incident took place outside Park View school as students were gathering to pick up their exam certificates.

The demo marched to Tottenham police station, which has been the

focus point of anti-racist protests over decades. There have been a number of racist deaths of black men and women in custody. Protesters asked why local Labour MP David Lammy was not attending.

The Socialist Party supported the protest with posters against racist policing. Our material called for democratic working-class control of policing, so that trade unions, young people and working-class communities have the ability to challenge racist policing, including the ability to appoint and dismiss chief constables and senior officers.

Protest against immigration enforcement centre in Newham

ROB QUIRK
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The Tory government is trying to build an ‘immigration enforcement centre’ in Docklands, east London. A demo on the evening of Friday 4 December protested against Home Office plans to construct the centre in Newham.

The Tory Windrush scandal recently hit workers from the Caribbean who had lived and worked in Britain since the 50s and 60s. Many had their citizenship revoked, were denied services such as NHS treatment, and faced deportation - to countries they had, in some cases, not seen since they were a child.

Last year, the Home Office submitted plans to Newham’s Labour council to relocate an immigration reporting centre from Becket House in central London to Warehouse K at the Royal Victoria Docks. However, the government did not mention the plan to construct 35 holding cells for migrants.

This was no mistake from the Home Office. To relocate just minutes from London City Airport, increases the likelihood of Warehouse K being used for deportation. This could potentially create hostilities in a working-class multicultural borough like

Newham. The Tories try to whip up division to distract from their attacks on all working-class people. We need to fight for jobs, homes and services for all.

The council rightly rejected the application - and this must continue. The demonstration outside Warehouse K was attended by around 40 people, including the Socialist Party.

Despite the message being clear that Warehouse K should not be used as an enforcement centre, the only speaker to criticise Labour was Steve Hedley from the RMT (transport workers) union. He rightly said Labour has not done enough to fight racism and attacks on workers, including allowing the recent ‘Spycops’ bill to pass (See ‘Spycops inquiry finally opens’ at socialistparty.org.uk).

Newham Labour council is currently trying to force 300 more working-class students, mostly Asian, into the already overcrowded ‘Little Ilford’ school. Unfortunately, the approach of ‘Stand Up to Racism’, which called the protest, is not to criticise the Labour politicians responsible for these attacks.

The campaign must seek the consultation and support of workers in the existing Home Office facility, organised in the PCS union.

Protests in solidarity with Indian farmers For a united struggle against the Modi regime

● Cardiff

Around 300 people from the city’s Indian Sikh community turned out in Cardiff Bay on Saturday 12 December to protest in solidarity with farmers in Punjab, India, taking action against the brutal right-wing regime.

Modi, the Indian prime minister, is pushing the Farmers’ Act through parliament in an extremely undemocratic manner. These new laws will remove the minimum price that small farmers must currently be paid for their produce.

One speaker at the rally pointed out that this is akin to the UK government abolishing the minimum wage. It will drive farmers and their families into grinding poverty. Big agribusiness, in cahoots with the

government, will be aiming to drive out the independent farmers, and monopolise control of the land to increase their profit margins. Farmers protesting for their livelihoods have faced brutal repression at the hands of the state.

Last month, India saw a general strike involving at least 250 million people, against austerity and privatisation carried out by the Modi government. Modi, a deeply sectarian Hindu nationalist, aims to sow divisions between India’s various ethnic and religious groups, to prevent united struggle against his brutal capitalist policies.

Socialist Party members supported the protest, and our leaflets, with a statement from New Socialist Alternative, our sister party in India, were very well received. Socialist Party

member Mariam Kamish spoke at the rally representing Caerphilly Trades Council, and received the loudest cheers of the day when she raised the need for cross-community, cross-ethnic struggles of the working class and poor to defeat the rule of Modi and the super-rich oligarchs.

Many of those attending the protest, and especially the young organisers, were extremely open to the ideas of socialism, and keen to discuss socialist solutions to the huge poverty and inequality in India. Several copies of the Socialist were sold, and we agreed to discuss future solidarity actions that we can take to support the struggles of Indian farmers and workers. (See more, visit socialistworld.net)

JOE FATHALLAH
CARDIFF SOCIALIST PARTY

● Birmingham

Birmingham Socialist party extended solidarity on behalf of New Socialist Alternative, our sister party in India, to a protest in support of Indian farmers on 12 December.

The Kisaan Rally was in response to the new laws passed in the Indian parliament in June which will significantly affect the farmers. The new law creates imbalance in the food market by removing subsidies and price controls, without which prices can rapidly fluctuate depending on what the corporations decide.

This leaves the farmers without a safety net and basic rate of pay for their products. The new laws are anti-worker, pushed forward by the conservative Modi government.

The farmers have been protesting for a while with initial protest carried out in India. They have now spread internationally and taken place in the USA, Canada, Australia and the UK.

The protest had an amazing atmosphere. Many of the Gurdwaras (Sikh temples) across Birmingham came together and organised the protest. The streets surrounding the Indian Consulate in the Jewellery Quarter were full of protesters and cars.

We gave out leaflets to protesters and we were given food and drinks in return. The socialist material and our program were well received. We also had good dialogue with people about pushing the struggle further and extending the protests internationally.

ABDUL
BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY



Supporting the protests in Birmingham BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

‘SOCIALISM - UTOPIAN AND SCIENTIFIC’ BY FRIEDRICH ENGELS

Clear explanation of what socialism is and why it’s necessary

In the fourth article in our series marking the 200th anniversary of the birth of Friedrich Engels, **Ross Saunders** looks at one of Engels’ best known work.

Engels was very proud of his book ‘Socialism: Utopian and Scientific’. He declared that it had outsold even the Communist Manifesto when it was published in 1880. Despite the dated language, it is still one of the greatest and clearest explanations of what socialism is and why it is necessary.

Like the Manifesto, it was written as part of a living struggle of ideas. The book developed out of a battle for the soul of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), then a new party growing rapidly in the 1870s and 1880s.

The SPD was being brutally repressed by the German state, which had been forced by severe economic depression and a tumultuous mass movement to intervene in the economy to a degree. This was unprecedented.

Capitalist control

Some made the mistake of thinking that capitalism might gradually and naturally slide towards socialism because of this intervention. Eugen Dühring, a prominent academic, challenged the revolutionary socialist ideas of Marxism that dominated the SPD at that time. Dühring supported intervention in the economy from the capitalist state, but argued that ultimately the interests of workers and bosses would be aligned.

In ‘Socialism: Utopian and Scientific’, Engels explained, with Marxist clarity, that capitalists might temporarily allow parts of the economy to be run by the state. But they would fight to the death to ensure that the majority of the economy would be in private hands, so that they could continue to extract profit.

There would be no ‘painless’ slide into socialism. Workers would have to organise to take power from the capitalists.

The Socialist Party is in full agreement with this. We say that the grip of big business on our economy must be broken by nationalising the biggest 125 companies, in this country, under the control and management of workers. This would create the basis for a plan of production, drawn up democratically by workers here, and in international collaboration with workers in other countries.

‘Socialism: Utopian and Scientific’ explained that, far from being new, the unrealistic, utopian ideas of Dühring repeated the mistakes of the early pioneers of the socialist

movement. Before the development of the big factories of industrial capitalism, they couldn’t understand the potential role the working class could play in running society and the economy.

It was understandable, said Engels, for Henri de Saint-Simon, writing just after the great French revolution of 1789, to believe that the most oppressed layers couldn’t run society alone. But to repeat this mistake, after the explosive development of the numbers and breadth of struggles of the working class - especially the Paris Commune of 1871 - was inexcusable.

Early French socialist Charles Fourier brilliantly exposed the hypocrisy of capitalists who fought the old ruling class during the French revolution for control of society. They demanded ‘freedom, solidarity and equality’, only to deny all these things to the poor masses who had backed them, once the feudal aristocrats were out of the way.

But the mistake of utopian socialists like Fourier was to think that it was enough to expose the “irrationality” of those running society, in order for them to be replaced. Marxists know that no ruling class gives up power without a struggle.

Robert Owen

Welsh entrepreneur Robert Owen tested utopian ideas to destruction. He set up ‘model communities’ based around factories in Scotland and later in the USA. Workers lived in better conditions with early-years education, healthcare, shorter working hours and so on.

Owen hoped that the example of these communities would spread, but instead they collapsed, taking his fortune with them. Karl Marx explained that this was inevitable, because employers who drive their workers’ conditions down gain a short-term advantage over their rivals in the market. ‘Kind’ capitalists are weeded out by the essential workings of capitalism.

The failure of his experiments led Owen in a more radical direction, towards class struggle. He chaired the first national trade union meeting in Britain in 1834, and experimented with communist ideas.

But although Owen himself saw the weaknesses of his early ideas, that has not stopped mistaken ideas being repeated many times over. Often this is from people who have a genuine desire to change society for the better, but cannot face up in full to the realities of the capitalist system they confront.

This is one reason why Engels’ book is still worth reading today. We



Many of the utopian socialists were inspired by the French Revolution

encounter these old mistakes in new forms all the time, especially now when socialist consciousness is beginning to develop, but has not yet fully matured.

There are many examples. Hope that ‘fairtrade’ products could end the exploitation of workers was killed by the sale of fairtrade label Green & Black to multinational corporations.

The idea that green charities could end the damage being done to the environment by convincing big profit-making corporations of the moral arguments of behaving more responsibly: 50 years of experience shows the futility of this strategy.

Or the idea that socialism could defeat capitalism by setting up more and more workers’ cooperatives, which gradually take over the economy, without confronting the capitalists’ control of the state. This was disproved by the sale of the Co-operative Bank to predatory hedge funds.

In a new introduction to the book, Tony Sanuois (secretary of the Committee for a Workers’ International - CWI - the international organisation of the Socialist Party is part of) analyses the ideas of some modern-day

utopians, including political commentator Paul Mason who advocates “parallel currencies, time banks, co-operatives and self-managed spaces” which, he says “offer an escape route - but only if these micro-level projects are nurtured, promoted and protected.” The CWI explains that these experiments were given flesh by South American regimes like that of Hugo Chávez, but failed to fundamentally transform the situation.

In contrast to these false hopes, Marxists explain that the major problems which confront society can only be solved if the working class takes over running society from the capitalist class. Workers must be prepared to struggle to achieve this aim, and build organisations, especially a revolutionary party, in order to succeed.

This idea, Engels explained, isn’t one that’s been invented by any individual. In contrast to the utopian schemes of early socialists and their modern-day (often unconscious) imitators, it is demanded by the real material development of society. Every struggle of the workers, every strike which challenges the authority

of the bosses to run things, is groping in this direction.

Engels explained that before capitalism developed widely, in the medieval period, products were the private property of the individuals who largely made them on their own. But as capitalism developed, it ‘socialised’ production.

Capitalism’s role

Capitalism gathered more and more workers together in the same workplace, divided up the tasks involved in production, and finally brought in machines - made by yet more workers - to improve the efficiency of production. In this time period, capitalism was playing a progressive role.

Today, the more complicated products we use have been worked on by thousands of workers, in supply chains that cross many borders - from the extraction and working up of raw materials, to the manufacture of components, to the assembly of finished articles.

Yet despite the collaborative character of our production today, the products made by that method are still the private property of an



Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels MANFRED BRÜCKELS/CC

individual owner - a person or corporation - not the collective property of workers. The productive forces have outgrown the old outmoded property relations which still contain them.

This is not only the source of the gross inequality we find in society, but it is also the reason why capitalism is regularly wracked by destructive economic crisis. Workers are paid too little to buy back the products which their labour has produced, and the blind nature of a market made up of privately owned organisations makes it impossible to balance the economy correctly.

The market is unable to find profitable outlets for the huge sums in private hands. Therefore, investments - which could vastly improve the standard of living, oversee a rapid transition to renewable energy and solve the other problems - are not made (see ‘Can green technology and AI save capitalism?’ on pages 8-9).

Engels explained the solution “can only consist in the practical recognition of the social nature of the modern forces of production, and therefore in harmonising the modes

of production, appropriation, and exchange with the socialised character of the means of production. And this can only come about by society openly and directly taking possession of the productive forces, which have outgrown all control except that of society as a whole.”

It is as true today as it was in 1880 that there will be no solution to economic crisis, war and environmental destruction without transforming society along socialist lines. Only then can we harness the full productive potential of humanity.

- Our other articles on Engels are available at socialistparty.org.uk
- A revolutionary who played a pivotal role in the development of socialism
- Condition of the working class in England
- Engels and the answer to the housing question

Get your copy of **Socialism: Utopian and Scientific** by Friedrich Engels at socialistbooks.co.uk



PCS union conference stripped of powers by NEC



DAVE SEMPLE
PCS NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

At a scheduled meeting on 10 December, the national executive committee (NEC) of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union, which covers civil servants and those on private sector government contracts, decided to remove key powers from the union’s Annual Delegate Conference for 2021. Strenuous objections from Socialist Party and Broad Left Network (BLN) supporters on the NEC were ignored.

Where is member control?

General Secretary Mark Serwotka and the ‘Left Unity’ majority on the NEC proposed that branches lose the ability to decide the subjects and running order of the conference. This will pass control of the conference to the NEC and the National Standing Orders Committee (NSOC). Branches will also be restricted in terms of the motions they put forward. Each branch will be allowed four motions; three will have to be on subjects predetermined by the NEC and the fourth can be on anything - but making it on to the agenda will now be down to NSOC.

Previously, all decisions by the NSOC had to be ratified by conference itself, and branches had the right to dispute with the NSOC. This is now gone, opening the door for a stage-managed conference led by Left Unity majorities on the NEC and NSOC.

Key issues face the union, including on the unfolding Tory Brexit disaster and the union’s attitude to

the Labour Party. On both of these questions, the NEC flatly broke conference policy, backing a second European Union referendum at the TUC in 2019, and indiscriminately backing Labour MPs at the general election in 2019, including those leading the charge against policies we support.

The result has been the total wreckage of the union’s political strategy. In ordinary times, conference might very well wish to correct and criticise the NEC for disregarding conference policy.

Mark Serwotka, who likes to pose as a champion of equality, was left scrabbling to reassure NEC members who asked why equality issues weren’t listed as part of the three key issues he suggested for the NEC-determined sessions. Serwotka wanted these sessions to be on pay, Covid-19, and his strategy for the future of the union.

A recent finance paper to the NEC has shown that, with a modest increase in the recruitment of members - in a civil service that has grown by tens of thousands of new jobs, not an insurmountable task, if the union is doing the basics - the future of the union would be secured. This can only add to the feeling amongst reps that, at a time when PCS is trying to build a national campaign on pay and to defend members’ health and safety at work, Serwotka’s threat of voluntary redundancies for PCS staff, and huge structural changes for the union’s branches and groups, is just bizarre.

Significant union resources have been dedicated to producing reams of documents ‘proving’ the need

for changes in the union (they do no such thing) and addressing consultation meetings across the union about the two alternatives Serwotka is trying to foist on reps - merger or restructuring - at a time when Chancellor Rishi Sunak has announced a pay freeze for 2021.

Meanwhile, the union’s national pay campaign for the last six months has been a petition on Parliament’s website, to try and trigger a debate in the House of Commons. When confronted at the NEC with the reality that a petition on its own was going to do absolutely nothing, the Left Unity majority responded in outraged tones that building for the petition would help union organising.

Reality

The reality? Of 104,000 signatures at the time of writing, the union knows that 20% of these were union members and has no idea about the other 80%. This means there’s little usable data to tell us where the union’s organisation is weak, even from such a task as getting a petition signed.

Socialist Party members on the NEC have from the beginning pushed for a robust strategy on pay, for a serious response to Covid-19 that mobilised the weight of those members still stuck in offices, and have flatly opposed inroads into the democracy of the Annual Delegate Conference. Inside the PCS, we participate in the Broad Left Network with activists and reps who seek to build a fighting, democratic union, and we call on all those with similar aims to attend the BLN conference on 16 January, on Zoom.

FIGHT FOR NHS PAY AND FUNDING

On 2 March 2020, as coronavirus cases rose to four in a day, Boris Johnson told us that Britain was “well-prepared with a fantastic NHS”. Nine months later, no one doubts that Johnson has lied from the start. Not only was the NHS criminally unprepared by the decades of funding cuts and privatisation, Johnson himself was part of the Tory austerity governments responsible for that.

A new report highlights how austerity - a wealth transfusion from the working class to the bosses via cuts, privatisation and low pay - is a major factor in Britain's Covid performance being one of the worst in the world.

The report correctly points out some of the austerity by which our NHS was so badly undermined: “The budget for Public Health England was cut after its foundation in 2012 by 40%... Spending on public health in local government was cut by about £800 million.”

Years of cuts

Tory and Blairite cuts and privatisation laid the basis for today's ambulance queues outside hospitals, staff shortages, and funding shortfalls that now mean millions are denied the health and care service they need. It is the defenders of capitalism who caused this crisis.

These factors alone are enough for a volcano of anger. But there is more - the cronyism, of mates of ministers getting fat contracts in the health service, confirm the impression that ours is increasingly a health service run for profit.

A fightback is necessary to turn our anger into effective change.

The health and care workers fighting for a 15% pay rise show the way. Collective workplace and trade union action has the potential to win. As long as the decisions of the Tories and the fat cats they represent go unchallenged, our NHS will continue to unwind.

It was the intervention by working-class people, through mass struggle and building their own political voice, that delivered the NHS in the first place. Today, the lessons of that period have never been more needed.

- **For a fully funded nationalised NHS and social care sector**
- **Scrap all private contracts. End private profiteering in the NHS**
- **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**
- **A socialist NHS - democratically run by elected and accountable committees, including service workers and users**

