

Covid crisis

MAKE THE SUPER-RICH PAY, NOT THE POOREST

In the last week the real number of deaths from Covid has gone over 100,000, and the UK has recorded the highest per capita death toll in the world. Millions more have been thrust into poverty during the pandemic.

And what did the Tories do? Abstain in a vote that would have allowed the poorest to have just an extra £20 a week.

If you're an MP on a salary of more than £80,000 then £20 is just small change. But if

you've lost your job or on poverty pay and claiming Universal Credit (UC), £20 can mean you don't have to switch the heating off or go to the nearest food bank.

The Tories say £6 billion is too much to make the 'uplift' in UC permanent. That's after spending £280 billion so far on the pandemic. Just a two-point increase in corporation tax, already the lowest of the G20 major countries, would more than pay for the increase.

The Tories are divided down the middle over the issue and, if enough pressure was brought by the trade union movement, could be forced into yet another climb-down. But this time there is more at stake. It's about who in the long term is going to pay the cost of Covid - the working class or the millionaires.

We say:

- **100% pay for all workers furloughed, isolating, working from home, or having to stay at home because of workplace or school closures**
- **Make the £20-a-week increase in Universal Credit permanent and extend it to legacy benefits**
- **A minimum wage of at least £12 an hour as a step towards £15 - no exemptions**
- **Increase benefits in line with the minimum wage**
- **Make the bosses and the rich pay. Take the wealth off the 1%**
- **For a new mass party of workers and young people**
- **For a socialist planned economy not the chaos of the capitalist profit system**

Bosses profit out of 'starvation' food parcels

LINDSEY MORGAN
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Private companies were exposed earning £30 for 'starvation' food parcels - for families entitled to free school meals - that contained just north of a fiver's worth of ingredients. So the U-turn Tories have returned to using the voucher system, run by private company Edenred.

When I got the email from the school to let me know about the voucher, my first thought was: "At least it isn't the terrible food parcels".

But neither I, nor any other parent, should have to settle for the humiliation of vouchers, or not receiving support at all over February half-term.

Schools have been told not to provide vouchers for that week, and that parents should apply to councils for the Covid Winter Support Scheme. This is despite council after council saying they have no more of these funds left.

With every voucher I get an email reminding me to only spend the vouchers on food and groceries. Parents need this reminder, apparently, because of the swathes of drug dealers and pimps that accept Asda vouchers! The contempt that the Tories have for working-class families fills me with rage (see also page 14).

Can't claim

The threshold for not receiving free school meals is only £7,400. Thousands of low-paid parents, impoverished with crap wages due to the bosses' greed, are not entitled to claim.

Some low-paid parents are resentful that some get free school meals when they don't. All students should be entitled to free school meals, including if their parents are working.

I don't want to have to rely on vouchers. I don't want to struggle financially. But this has been forced on me by illness and benefits that are far too low.

Instead of giving us vouchers, put the cash in our child benefit. Let us use the money to be able to budget properly, and make value-for-money healthy meals for our children.

The working class needs to go on the offensive, and fight against job losses and for a £12-an-hour minimum wage.

The top 1% are £800 billion richer than we previously thought. They have the money, they have the profits. Increase our wages, and it should be work or 100% pay for everyone - including parents having to isolate or home-educate their children.

We're sick of waiting for the Tories to do the right thing. And we're sick of waiting for Keir Starmer's Labour to provide any opposition.

We need to fight for a new mass workers' party to fight against it all and for the socialist transformation of society.

the Socialist

formerly **Militant**

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

ALEX HUTCHINSON
HULL SOCIALIST PARTY

As the Covid-19 pandemic hits tragic, record-breaking numbers in the UK, the Tory narrative of blaming the public for the crisis is in full swing. Deflecting blame away from their disastrous decisions, policies and inaction, the government is desperate to put responsibility on anyone but itself.

But who is really to blame?
In this lockdown, unlike the first, more people are still going into work. Despite the school closures, the government has extended the definition of 'key workers' to more and more workplaces. More workers are being forced into work by their management.

The furlough scheme has been extended until April, but many are struggling to access the necessary financial support, or are being outright denied it, during the worst of the pandemic. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) revealed that 71% of working mothers who applied for furlough following the latest school closures, have had their request turned down.

In November, the *i* newspaper reported that many employers are rejecting furlough because "it will cost them too much in National Insurance and pension contributions", meaning that workers are either forced to work in unsafe conditions, or are simply made redundant.

Simply not enough
Even if people can access furlough, 80% of the salary simply is not enough to pay the bills and support millions of working-class families already struggling on minimum wage. This forces more and more people into work, and allows the virus to spread from workplaces into our communities.

But the problems go even deeper. Many of those who are ill from Covid simply cannot afford to self-isolate for two weeks on measly statutory sick pay of £95.85 a week, one of the lowest in Europe.

The one-off support payment of £500 for two weeks of isolation goes nowhere near enough to ensure the poorest people can safely stay at home without becoming destitute. But even this payment is a struggle to obtain.

In some coronavirus hotspots in England, more than half of people

The Tory blame game: scapegoating the working class - 100% pay for all now



USAF/JENNIFER ZIMA/CC

applying for financial support to self-isolate are being rejected. The Liverpool Echo states that 77% of applicants for the self-isolation payment in Liverpool have been rejected.

Councils say they are running out of cash, which demonstrates not only the lack of resources the government is willing to provide but also the damning effects of a decade of austerity and council cuts.

This lack of financial security means that millions are forced to continue going into work out of the risk of poverty and hardship. The inadequate support available during isolation pushes thousands of those suffering with Covid into returning to work too soon. They simply cannot afford not to work.

Coupled with decades of NHS privatisation, austerity, cuts to local authority budgets, and unsafe working

conditions, the reasons behind the crisis in the UK become perfectly clear. It is the Tory government, not the public, with blood on its hands.

The lack of opposition from Labour and the absence of many trade union leaders have left a clear political vacuum and allowed the Tories to start shifting the blame onto workers. The trade union movement must organise to resist this narrative and fight for 100% pay for all who need it.

Covid: Bosses chase profit and put workers in danger

Any lingering illusion that the government's strategy for handling the Covid pandemic was aimed at protecting the entire population, without fear or favour, has been well and truly shattered.

Workers are forced to attend unsafe workplaces, there's pitiful financial provision for those self-isolating, and a complete failure to bring to book employers flagrantly breaching the law. The government has been busy blaming ordinary people for spreading the virus to cover up its failure to take timely decisive action and its protection of employers.

A survey revealed that one in ten insecure workers had gone to work within ten days of a positive Covid test, compared to one in 25 for workers generally. This fact alone justifies banning gig economy practices. One in nine workers have been forced to go to their workplace when they could have worked from home.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) received 2,945 complaints of Covid-unsafe workplaces between 6 and 14 January, but has yet to issue a single enforcement notice during this lockdown. Of the 97,000 reports of workplace breaches of Covid precautions the HSE has dealt with, only 0.1% have resulted in any enforcement action.

Unsurprisingly, many low-income workers are avoiding the whole testing regime, because they can't afford to self-isolate, and may not be offered work in the future.

Frances O'Grady, general secretary of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) has rightly called for the law to be enforced against employers, but we need to go further. The Tories have proved that they have no intention of protecting workers or standing in the way of the bosses' profits.

We need a £12-an-hour minimum wage, and workers on furlough should get 100% of their pay. We need an end to the gig economy and its replacement by secure jobs with guaranteed hours.

The HSE has shown that it is in the pockets of the bosses and should be replaced by an enforcement body under the control of the trade union movement. That body could inspect the financial books of these companies. Any that can't afford these basic demands should be nationalised, under the democratic control of workers.

The Tories' policies - turning a blind eye to employers that place the lives of workers and their families in danger - will never properly cure this virus. The Tories have no right to rule and the labour movement should be campaigning for their resignation, and a new mass workers' party.

LIZZY HEDDERLY
COLLEGE STUDENT, GREENWICH, SOUTH LONDON

At the beginning of the first lockdown, in my house, we had one computer for three students and a parent working from home. Myself and my siblings receive pupil premium and free school meals.

I live in a single-parent household with a mum who is a student and completing voluntary work with the NHS for her psychotherapist diploma. Both of my younger brothers have special educational needs and have been attending school during this current lockdown.

When you have no money, the constant changing guidance and rules become more difficult to adjust to. If your family's income is not secure, the prospect of having everyone at home at all times has real implications.

How could they say it is as easy as just switching to online learning, when, as a young carer, I have to share the increased challenges in having my brothers at home?

A confused feeling of guilt is always around me and my mum - the feeling that you are always doing something wrong when you are being told you are never doing enough.

Food
There have been moments of relief. The scheme to provide laptops to those without meant we had another computer in the house, and I now no longer work from my phone like in the first lockdown.

The food vouchers we receive in replacement of our free school meals more than double our food budget, and are genuinely something we get excited about every two weeks.

I have strong feelings about the MPs who voted against the expansion of the scheme into school holidays. I waited for them to put forward a better, more effective short-term solution for the increase in food poverty, but of course that never came.

They ignore issues like wages and benefits being spread out across the month, as is the case with my family. It makes it impossible to save money through a large weekly or monthly shop.

Sometimes you can have what other people have. You can buy cost

Life in lockdown - being home from school when you're poor is hard



ineffective but healthy food like strawberries. The vouchers meant that we had a Christmas dinner that was more than the bare minimum.

But the threshold for access to these benefits is too low, and doesn't factor in increased costs like energy bills from everyone being at home.

Teachers: On the front line, in their own words

● Illness in pupil and teacher homes

I've been working from home this lockdown, looking after the virtual classrooms. Some of our pupils struggle to access the work from home, as their parents need to work too. And some have a lot of illness in their homes.

At school, we have a lot of children coming in - much more than the first lockdown. We had a serious and significant outbreak in the school before Christmas, and the school was on its knees.

Many school staff are still off work recovering, and some have lost multiple family members. Despite all

this, meaningful social distancing in the school is still not possible, and the staff are still not required to wear masks.

EAST LONDON PRIMARY TEACHER

● Academies still don't care about safety

Working through all of this is like trying to brush our teeth while eating a bag of Wotsits. The continued changes to guidance mean no-one knows which way they're going, particularly with regards to the online stuff that's completely new to us all. But Ofsted deem themselves to be expert enough to begin inspections in the area.

Personal experiences are the usual from previous lockdowns. The academy trust appears to be more concerned about seeing staff in the building to see where their money is being spent, rather than actual safety.

There's no consideration of mental health and wellbeing of staff, with a list of moderations and scrutinies planned. Bubbles are only 'important' on an 'as and when it suits' basis. Staff are spoken down to about social distancing, yet it's okay for a 'school improvements officer' to spread between two schools and then break the bubbles of an entire corridor.

In a word: shambles. In a less polite word: clusterfuck
YORKSHIRE PRIMARY NEU REP



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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- or call **020 8988 8777**
- or text your name and postcode to **07761 818 206** to find out more today!

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Refund student rent and fees

Fight for free education and make the 1% pay

Socialist Students has launched a petition to build support for our demands on the way forward for the student movement and to solve the crisis in higher education. The petition demands:

- Rent refunds for students. For 100% rent refunds for any student unable to move into their halls for any reason, with the money for those refunds made up for by the government
- For the right of students in third-party accommodation or the private rented sector to be released from their contracts. Compensation to the landlords only on the basis of proven need
- For rent controls! Bring all third party halls into the ownership and control of the universities, as a step towards democratically set rents, decided on by elected committees including students
- Refund our tuition fees – this

year and every year! Fight for free education and make the 1% pay for it

- For a no-detriment policy to be introduced for assessments affected by the lockdown
- End all cuts! No attacks on jobs, wages, and conditions on campus to pay for refunds – make the government pay. For student and staff unity against all cuts on campus
- For democratic trade union and student oversight of all health and safety measures taken on campus to stop the spread of the virus – no trust in vice-chancellors, management or the Tories to handle this crisis in our interests
- Build a national student movement to fight for the funding our universities need. Scrap tuition fees, cancel student debt, and introduce genuine living grants for students. Fight for fully funded, high-quality and free education

Socialist students campaigning for free education in 2016 ISAN PRIYA



Plymouth rent strike continues despite police harassment

AVA KEELING
PLYMOUTH RENT STRIKE

We have now surpassed 400 signatures for our rent strike, with over £710,000 pledged to be withheld. For students there is no equivalent to the furlough scheme, and we're expected to hand over the majority of our maintenance loan to pay for accommodation that a lot of us aren't able to access.

As part of our campaigning, a banner drop planned for 13 January had to be scrapped after multiple phone calls from the police.

Five key organisers of the rent strike received phone calls threatening us with a £10,000 fine if we demonstrated or put banners up on public buildings. I received one of those phone calls, and I'm not even in the Plymouth area at the moment. I'm locked down at my family home, precisely one of the reasons I'm striking in the first place!

Having the police intervene in such a heavy-handed way prompted us to hold an emergency meeting to discuss our strategy. We agreed to stick rigidly within the law, and to go ahead with the banner drops from our own accommodation.

Come to Socialist Students online conference
Sunday 28 February



Despite this, another one of our organisers was again threatened with a £10,000 fine, all because of a since-forgotten-about Facebook event set up before lockdown. He was told, even after removing the event from Facebook, that if any group is caught protesting on campus, he will personally be charged with incitement to breach Covid legislation.

Subsequently, we had to issue another statement, reiterating that we do not plan to hold any demonstrations and will discourage students from doing so until it is deemed safe. The police even demanded we send them screenshots of our doing this!

We have remained within the bounds of the law, and to still be

harassed and intimidated has only succeeded in drawing more attention to the rent strike: it has really angered students. It raises huge concerns about the freedom to protest. We agreed that in our statement responding to the police phone calls, we would make it clear that as soon as it is safe to do so we will be organising a socially distanced demonstration on campus to give expression to the strength of feeling about our lack of support throughout lockdown.

Plymouth Rent Strike is linking up with student rent strikes across the country. Together we hope to draw up a list of demands, including an end to marketisation and a reduction in tuition fees.

Scrap fees, refund rents and pay a living grant

EVA PAPADOPOULOU
SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Right up until the last minute, the university seemed to be endlessly optimistic about how we could return this term for in-person teaching. On 31 December I received confirmation from the university that all teaching would be moving online. Many other students have been entirely online for the whole academic year.

We were lured to the university by the false promise that we would be able to attend things in person. People have been paying rent to sit in their rooms and do online lessons. This is something that they should be able to do from home, and for free.

When they let us know that teaching was to be entirely online, an obvious next step would have been to tell us what is happening with halls. A recurring theme throughout the whole situation has been that we have to fight for every little thing.

In Southampton, they took our rent on the very first day back giving us very little chance to build support among other students for a rent strike. A lot of people found that their rent had gone before they even realised.

Ironically, this didn't happen to me. My maintenance loan had come through, but because it wasn't enough to cover the rent, the payment bounced. I ended up being an accidental rent striker.

We have taken up the issue with the Students Union, people have been fighting to get rent refunds for January and February. The latest

communication from the university has said that "those eligible for a refund would be getting one", it said that more details would follow and that it would be for those unable to return to halls. We are still waiting for those further details!

The thing that makes me so angry, is that if we hadn't said or done anything, they would have just taken the rent for good, despite the fact that we are not able to be here. We have to argue and fight for everything.

We are making plans for next term, to organise a rent strike before they get a chance to take our payments, if the university doesn't issue refunds.

Lots of universities are giving different levels of refunds to students living in halls. But people are not just thinking about halls refunds, it's also about university cuts and redundancies. People are taking every victory and concession, but these leave a lot to be desired. What is the point of winning a refund just for this year, if next year I still can't afford my rent, even if there is no Covid?

Students should be able to live comfortably. We should get a higher maintenance payment, and rents should be capped at a percentage of this. There is the issue of tuition fees too. People are questioning why we are paying so much for what amounts to an online certificate. Tuition fees just make education less accessible.

Students are seen as consumers, they are not doing things in our interests, but to maximise the universities income. Schools and universities should not be run as if they were businesses, it's very simple

On the NHS front line

A new Covid-19 patient is arriving in hospital every 30 seconds and hospital admissions continue to rise. For people who fall ill and need to go to hospital, there is the terrifying prospect of arriving to find there is no space. And workers in the NHS know exactly who is to blame. It is successive Tory and Labour governments that have spent the last decades inflicting cuts and austerity, and the private corporations who continue to bleed the health service dry in their pursuit of profits. Socialist Party members who work in the NHS report from the front line.

Exhausted and traumatised staff face rising casualties

A HOSPITAL WORKER IN LONDON

It's so busy. There are so many patients. For weeks now there have been more Covid patients than there were in the first wave. Almost every ward has been given over to treating Covid now. Staff are being transferred from all kinds of jobs to the Covid wards.

The hospital is desperate for staff to do overtime. People are responding, but hospital workers were already exhausted and traumatised. They hadn't recovered from the first wave, now they have been flung into the second one.

Lots of people are dying. Despite everything learned about better treatments since the pandemic started, almost 1,000 people have died in London during the last week. Warnings from hospitals that they could run out of oxygen bring dread.

Some things bring little pieces of hope though. The supply of PPE is better than last time. We have still had to fight for appropriate PPE to be available to all staff, but we have got there faster.

The Covid vaccination programme has also started. There is a mood among many staff that the vaccine can start to make a real difference to the fight against Covid, particularly the death rate. There is real enthusiasm to get as many people vaccinated, as quickly as possible. There is debate about how effective the vaccine will be leaving a longer gap between doses, but the truth is: no-one knows.

At the moment, enthusiasm is dominating, but there is still a wide layer of people who are sceptical of the vaccine, or waiting to see how others react before they decide to take it. A lot will depend on how many of the people waiting to see can be persuaded to take it. Government stunts like changing the gap between the first and second dose don't help.

One of the staff working on the vaccination programme summed it up: "For months all we've been able to do is tell people: wash your hands, keep your distance, wear a mask. Now finally we can ask them to do something positive to help stop Covid: get vaccinated!"



The Socialist Party demands

- An emergency increase in funding for the NHS and social care
- Full PPE for all staff, for production and distribution to be taken into public ownership under democratic workers' control
- Unions must mobilise for a 15% pay rise for NHS staff
- For the scrapping of training fees and for free emergency training for staff to respond to the pandemic. Reintroduce training bursaries
- For the NHS to take over private healthcare facilities to be run in the interests of all
- Nationalise the big pharmaceutical companies, including the testing labs and vaccine production and distribution
- For a socialist plan of production and workers' control and management of the pandemic response



Unions must fight to ensure all staff are provided with full PPE DFID/CC

Workers left to work with inadequate PPE, again!

A HEALTH WORKER AT SOUTHAMPTON GENERAL

At the very beginning of the pandemic the advice to hospital workers was to use full PPE, head to foot! When it became clear we were going to have more than a few hundred cases the advice dramatically changed, and we were told this was only necessary when carrying out aerosol generated procedures like intubation.

Most of us felt the change of advice was more about supply than keeping us safe, but were glad we at least had enough surgical masks, aprons and gloves. Our hospital has kept staff well informed for the most part, but

there's definitely been a gap between what's promised and what really happens. We were told that staff providing personal care could wear PPE which included face coverings and long sleeves, but many wards didn't have the supply to keep this up, and staff were encouraged not to 'waste' PPE.

Recent news that Covid can stay in the air for long periods indoors, including in our closed wards, tells a very different story. Those of us working in emergency care are now supplied with FFP3 masks and hoods which are fit tested to each individual, but the situation on the wards and

elsewhere in the hospital is far from adequate.

The local BBC news visited the hospital this week to show the public how busy we are and to highlight the dedicated work of our porters, infection control and cleaning teams. But all the staff shown were only wearing surgical masks which often gape at the sides. And this week's figures for staff with Covid show it's the elderly care wards, which are always short of staff and have very poor ventilation, that are most effected - 25 on one ward alone!

We are constantly told we must support the NHS. Well, staff feel we've been sold short and we definitely don't feel supported by the politicians in Westminster. We need a massive increase in funding for the NHS, we need to sweep aside the leeching private sector, and we definitely need our union leaders to wake up and lead us into action for a 15% pay rise!

Staff shortages and lack of resources - a legacy of cuts and privatisation

MENTAL HEALTH WORKER IN THE SOUTH EAST

There were 100,000 vacancies in the NHS before the pandemic. Now there is even more demand on services. And currently 40,000 staff, including me, are off sick with Covid-19.

Staff have left the NHS because it is often not a pleasant place to work, patient care is viewed by management as a production line. People who enter their profession with hopes for the level of care they will be able to provide have those hopes destroyed.

High workload and low pay are big issues, and workers report widespread bullying and harassment from a hierarchical management. This is the consequence of austerity over many years from both Tory and Labour governments.

People are driven towards working in the private sector or to agency work where they are likely to find better pay and more flexibility and control over their working hours. These

are staff that will have previously been trained by the NHS.

Understaffing is a big issue in the area of the South East that I work. Recruitment is hampered by potential staff being lured to work in or closer to London where they can receive a higher London-weighted pay. Meanwhile, the cost of living remains unaffordable for low-paid health workers in places like Surrey, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire.

We need to fight for a pay rise for all NHS staff of 15%. The union leadership should be campaigning on this now and calling a consultative ballot.

We have seen a failure of the NHS unions' leadership to challenge the NHS management and government over many years from both Tory and Labour governments. We have fought to ensure that all agency staff employed in our trust get full pay when off sick or are forced to isolate. We need a fighting union leadership nationally to assist in fighting for better safety, pay, terms and conditions for all NHS workers, as well as demanding a fully funded, publicly owned NHS.

A day in the life of an agency worker

We need real work, with real contracts, and trade union representation



AN AGENCY WORKER

Following a six-month period on furlough, I took voluntary redundancy from the factory I'd worked at since leaving school. At 61, I felt I'd like to try something different, and the work in the factory was getting heavier and the twelve-hour night shifts harder.

My job search demonstrated immediately that 'unskilled' workers are victims of parasitic agencies that work for employers. Work can almost only be found online. You may see an ad reading 'Royal Mail jobs'. But by clicking on the link you go directly to an agency. A dozen jobs may be on view, almost all minimum wage and none of them with Royal Mail.

I use Royal Mail as an example, but the ad could be for Tesco or Sainsbury's, or indeed any major employer. But on further investigation none of those companies are hiring. Just minimum wage, factory, warehouse work, and the like.

I eventually took one such job for a major British company, obviously working for an agency and on minimum wage. When I arrived, there were about 15 new workers, five for each of the three different shifts. All of the other workers were young people (under 30). All seemed intelligent and keen to work hard. The first thing we did was split into three groups.

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One of the lads I spoke to had been working for Amazon, but had left because all the previous week he had received a phone call at 6pm telling him not to go to work the next day. One lad had been an engineer in the army, but found this was the only type of work he could get, although he did say he hoped to go back in the army.

These workers are in temporary, unstable work, with little hope of full-time work in the future.

We must fight to make these practices illegal. We need real work, with real contracts, and trade union representation. Dignity at work should be a right not a privilege. If capitalism can't provide that then we must fight for a society that can - socialism.

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British Gas engineers in the GMB union have announced seven new strike dates, for 24 hours each day, on 20, 22, 25, 29, 30, 31 January and 1 February. The workers have been out on strike for five days so far against massive attacks on their pay and terms and conditions.

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PCS Broad Left Network conference: "A BLN-led union will fight and win for members"

KATRINE WILLIAMS

PCS BROAD LEFT NETWORK (BLN) JOINT EQUALITY OFFICER AND PCS NEC CANDIDATE

The PCS Broad Left Network conference met on 16 January. It discussed the key questions facing PCS union members, and launched its 2021 national election campaign.

The Broad Left Network is a PCS, socialist, rank-and-file group in which Socialist Party members are active.

The conference agreed a fighting, democratic programme covering the issues of concern to PCS members - from taking on the Tory pay freeze to Covid-19 safe-working arrangements.

A new constitution agreed by the conference makes clear that the BLN is open to all PCS members who want to fight for socialist ideas, a democratic union and a leadership which will meet the challenges its members face.

The election candidates agreed by the conference include a number of Socialist Party members, including Marion Lloyd for president and Dave Semple for vice-president. The full election slate can be found at pcsbln.wordpress.com

Steve Hedley, RMT senior assistant general secretary spoke of how rail bosses were exploiting the Covid-19

crisis by attacking his members' conditions. Steve warned that attacks on the working class as a whole will increase with attempts by the Tories to pass the cost of the pandemic on to workers. It will be necessary, he said, to build alliances across the movement to resist these attacks.

Lois Austin, from Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance (COPS), gave a vivid and moving account of how spy-cops, orchestrated by MI5, had infiltrated the labour movement. She called for conference support for the demands the campaign is putting to a hearing on 26 January, for live streaming of the inquiry, and the right to cross-examine witnesses. All labour movement groups and organisations should apply for core participant status, she said.

A campaigning agenda was adopted by the conference, including how we should build the campaign to fight the pay freeze, the attacks on our pensions, and the issue that is at the forefront of every members' mind at the moment - ensuring we are kept safe during the pandemic. An emergency motion opposing the PCS leadership's attempt to hijack the 2021 PCS conference by telling branches what can be discussed, and by placing a limit on branch motions, was also carried unanimously.

Over £1,000 was raised in response

to a financial appeal made by current national executive committee member and BLN communications officer, Fiona Brittle.

Marion Lloyd, as BLN chair, highlighted the work of PCS reps in keeping members safe. She said: "Members' understandable preoccupation and concern over the coronavirus will give way to anger at the way they have been treated by this reactionary Tory government. We deserve better. A BLN-led union will fight and win for members."

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A day in the life of an agency worker We need real work, with real contracts, and trade union representation



AN AGENCY WORKER

Following a six-month period on furlough, I took voluntary redundancy from the factory I'd worked at since leaving school. At 61, I felt I'd like to try something different, and the work in the factory was getting heavier and the twelve-hour night shifts harder.

My job search demonstrated immediately that 'unskilled' workers are victims of parasitic agencies that work for employers. Work can almost only be found online. You may see an ad reading 'Royal Mail jobs'. But by clicking on the link you go directly to an agency. A dozen jobs may be on view, almost all minimum wage and none of them with Royal Mail. I use Royal Mail as an example, but the ad could be for Tesco or Sainsbury's, or indeed any major employer. But on further investigation none of those companies are hiring. Just minimum wage, factory, warehouse work, and the like.

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PAUL MATSSON

Morrisons pay offer - £10 an hour headline hides divisive pay offer

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN USDAW

Almost five years since the £10 an hour minimum wage demand was adopted by Usdaw, Morrisons has become the first major company in which Usdaw represents workers, to accept the demand.

Undoubtedly, shop floor workers in Morrisons on the basic rate, which is currently £9.20 an hour, will welcome an 80p an hour pay rise.

However, there are caveats to the deal, which mean that many Morrisons workers will not benefit as much - or even at all. The deal is partially self-funded through the abolition of the annual bonus. On its own, the consolidation of a bonus into hourly pay can be a positive development.

However, many of Morrisons' skilled workers, and those with more responsibilities who were already near or over £10 an hour, will not gain nearly as much from the deal. Many of these are not getting any real pay rise, but only the consolidation of the bonus so, in real terms, workers may only see as little as 1p an hour more - in effect a far-below-inflation pay rise.

A worker in a Morrisons manufacturing plant told us: "My own view is that it's better to have money in your wage packet instead of the way of a bonus, because they are not obliged to pay the bonus, and it can be taken away at any time. But those who are being given a role of responsibility are being screwed over and I think there will be some who will be reconsidering their positions."

And a Morrisons home delivery

worker told us: "While this is a really good pay rise for your average colleague, it's an insult to any skilled worker who was already over the threshold of £10 an hour. While delivery drivers have had a 20p rise, with them losing their entire bonus they could actually be on between £100 and a £1,000 a year less."

A majority of Usdaw members will probably vote for this deal. Undoubtedly, the anger demonstrated in the initial rejection of the 2019 pay offer has increased pressure to come up with something better this time around. But the squandering of the potential to organise a serious campaign has allowed for the offer this time to still be less than what was possible.

As we argued at the time, Usdaw needed a strategy to build a campaign among the membership to win more from management - including a meeting of lay reps to discuss a strategy and a national lobby of Morrisons headquartars.

If this had taken place, more could have been won. Like other big retailers, Morrisons has done well from the pandemic.

In the third quarter, including Christmas (excluding fuel), there was 9.3% growth in sales. The company is due to pay out a special dividend of 4p per share on 25 January, as well as being able to pay back £230 million in business rates relief.

Usdaw should raise its minimum wage demand to £12 an hour, reflecting the enhanced position of retail workers who are now seen as key workers, and following the increased profits of the supermarkets.



PHILAFRENZY/CC

Deal secures Rolls-Royce Barnoldswick factory future following strike action



SOCIALIST PARTY REPORTERS

The future of the Rolls-Royce factory in Barnoldswick, Lancashire, and its 350 jobs has been secured after a deal was agreed between the workers' union Unite and the company. It was supported overwhelmingly by the workers and follows nine weeks of determined strike action.

The future of the factory was thrown into doubt last summer, after pushing for wages that better reflect the status of Morrisons workers as key workers, ahead of future pay negotiations to win more for our hard-working members."

The strikes, which received widespread solidarity from the community and trade union movement, began on 6 November 2020 and ran until Christmas Eve. Workers then returned to the picket lines at the start of 2021.

The deal struck by Unite includes:

- A ten-year manufacturing guarantee for the site
- A guaranteed minimum headcount of 350 workers
- The creation of a 'centre of

excellence' training school supporting the development and manufacture of zero-carbon technologies and advanced manufacturing excellence

- A guarantee of a two-year no-compulsory redundancy agreement to facilitate discussions on a plan to develop advanced manufacturing work, supporting carbon-free energy generation, along with synthetic fuels and green technologies

Ross Quinn, the Unite regional officer with responsibility for Barnoldswick, says: "When many could be forgiven for thinking there was nothing that could be done, our Unite reps led these workers and the town of Barnoldswick and collectively they stood as one to say 'no way'."

"They united, taking to the picket line in all weathers, to fight back against closure, and won. Today's news is their victory and it is 100% deserved."

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Jeff Edwards 7 July 1948 - 3 January 2021

Jeff Edwards sadly passed away at Whipps Cross hospital on 3 January, having contracted Covid-19.

Jeff had worked as a porter at Whipps Cross hospital for more than 30 years. He was a supporter of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and a Socialist Party member.

Although Jeff never held a union position formally (apart from auditor) he played a role in the fight to help build union organisation at the hospital in the years following the trust's privatisation of ancillary services in 1997.

A hugely popular figure, Jeff had the ear of the young porters whom he helped gain an understanding of their industrial strength, and what could be won through collective trade union action. He helped make

the union's case to longer-serving porters to take what was successful strike action, alongside their newer counterparts leading to the raising of pay, terms and conditions to that of their longer established colleagues.

Having retired only two years ago, Jeff will be forever remembered by our Unite union branch for his unswerving commitment to the union. He was a stalwart on our picket lines through successive strikes by the hospitals ancillary workers against the effects of privatisation over the past twenty four years.

A lover of life, of people and a few beers, Jeff was in every sense a real East End cockney legend and will be missed by many.

LEN HOCKEY
WHIPPS CROSS HOSPITAL SHOP STEWARD

British Gas strike continues

British Gas engineers in the GMB union have announced seven new strike dates, for 24 hours each day, on 20, 22, 25, 29, 30, 31 January and 1 February. The workers have been out on strike for five days so far against massive attacks on their pay and terms and conditions.

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USA IN CRISIS - THE NEED FOR A SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

The period running up to Joe Biden's inauguration as president of the US on 20 January was marked by unparalleled turmoil and crisis. **Tony Saunois**, secretary of the Committee for a Workers' International, analyses the significance of those events and how they affect the prospects for a Biden presidency.

Amid unprecedented events, thousands of supporters of Donald Trump rallied in Washington on 6 January. Hundreds, some armed, then stormed the congress buildings on Capitol Hill in Washington DC. Donald Trump, promising a "wild" protest, had summoned his supporters to come together. Far-right militias like the 'Proud Boys' and the far right conspiracy group QAnon, and others, converged on Washington as Congress debated the usually formal procedure of certifying the election results.

Like everything else in this polarised drama, the battle is still being played out, and will continue to do so even after Joe Biden is sworn in.

Regimes such as those of Xi Jinping in China and Putin in Russia have looked on with glee at the turmoil unfolding in the US. They have used it as a propaganda weapon against both US imperialism and the idea of 'democracy'. The turmoil which has engulfed the US will threaten to further undermine the standing and credibility of US imperialism with regards intervening internationally, especially in the neocolonial world.

Inauguration

The inauguration day is posed at the time of writing to be like no other. Further attacks by armed right-wing militias are possible throughout the country, if not in Washington itself, which is in a 'ring of steel' with thousands of national guardsmen deployed as the city goes into lockdown. Trump has declared that he will not attend Biden's inauguration - the first time in 152 years that an outgoing president refused to attend.

Many of the features of war also apply to revolution. Yet they also apply to counter-revolution as well. On 6 January, events unfolded at a dizzying speed and have continued since. Splits, divisions and political summersaults have taken place within the Republican Party and among Trump supporters.

The vast majority of the US ruling class, already wanting Biden to replace him, have been terrified by the events which have unfolded and are intent on punishing Trump. Banning him from Twitter and other social media platforms, they are attempting to impeach him and prevent him from standing for election in the future.

Imprisonment for financial irregularities is not excluded. They have brutally moved against this out-of-control egomaniac. This is an indication of how they would also react to a serious challenge from the socialist left.

At the top, many of Trump's erstwhile defenders have peeled away and abandoned him, including Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, and House representative Liz Cheney, who are now backing Democrat proposals for his impeachment.

What the events on 6 January represent has provoked discussion on the left. Some have simply dismissed Trump protesters as a rabble and a mob - including the majority of the capitalist politicians. Others have wrongly denounced Trump and all his supporters as 'fascists' and 'racists'.

For socialists, this requires greater analysis in order to have an accurate assessment of the forces involved in order to combat them. Fascism, for Marxists, is a special form of reaction, which acquires a mass social base with the objective of destroying and atomising the working class and its organisations.

This is not what is represented among the mass of Trump voters and supporters. Within the movement around him there are racists and some fascist elements, especially in some of the militias. However, the majority of his voters have been drawn behind the right-wing populist rhetoric denouncing the Washington elite, 'big tech', and the rich, due to the lack of a serious socialist alternative existing.

Now they believe the election was rigged, partly because Trump has repeatedly claimed it was, and because the US has a long history of vote rigging. This, and other movements of this character, pose a serious threat and challenge, and need to be fought against. However, they are not the same as the mass fascist movements which developed in the 1920s and 1930s in Europe.

The events on 6 January need to be placed in context. They follow attempts by Trump, once he lost the election, to circumvent the result. It had the features of an attempted coup, if not military, then parliamentary and judicial, backed up by an attempt to mobilise right-wing forces on the streets.

The Black Lives Matter movement was denounced as violent

'antifa', 'anarchists' 'socialist' and 'communist'. In the election campaign, Trump denounced Biden and Harris as 'socialist'.

This political preparation was then followed by attempts to manipulate the postal service to minimise the importance of postal ballots. After the vote, Trump launched 62 court cases, including one to the Supreme Court. State legislatures were appealed to, to keep Trump in power and declare the election a 'fraud'.

At the same time, street protests, including those by the far right Proud Boys and others, took place around the country. A parallel attempt to control the executive was put in place, with the firing of the Secretary of Defence, the cyber security chief, and homeland security directors. The court case pursued by Texas won the backing of 127 members of Congress. The question of declaring martial law was discussed in Trump's inner circle.

The declaration on 18 December by the Army Secretary and Chief of Staff that the military had no role in determining the outcome of the election, was followed on 3 January by a similar declaration by all ten living former defence secretaries. This indicated what was being discussed behind the scenes in Trump's inner circle.

Unprecedented

Amid signs that some serving police and military personnel, as well as reservists, supported attempts to block Biden becoming president, the very tops of the US military issued on 12 January an unprecedented statement saying: "President-elect Biden will be inaugurated and become our 46th Commander in Chief".

It is unclear if any clear co-ordinated plan existed for 6 January - however, some of the right-wing groups, in carrying handcuffs and some weapons, may have had the intention of kidnapping members of Congress.

The decisive majority of the capitalist class in the US and the tops of the state machine clearly opposed these developments by the out-of-control Trump administration. Sections of the Republican leadership like vice-president Mike Pence peeled away, undoubtedly under ferocious pressure from the capitalist class, while McConnell, having used Trump to consolidate the Supreme Court's conservative majority, moved to try to break Trump's grip on the Republican Party.

Trump and the far right clearly did not have the forces to carry off their attempt to overturn the election results, which would have produced a social explosion.

The fact that the attempts to



enact a 'coup' did not have the forces for it to succeed, does not mean that it was not attempted. In 1981 in Spain, Antonio Tejero led 200 Civil Guards into parliament to prevent it electing the government. Ministers and parliamentarians were held hostage for 18 hours. Yet the ruling class opposed this adventure and it collapsed.

In Venezuela in 2020, operation Gideon, aimed at overthrowing Maduro's government with the support of the Venezuelan opposition, collapsed into a farce.

The developments in the US illustrate the polarisation which exists in US society. This will evaporate under Biden. Although not mass organisations, it is clear that some of the far-right organisations in the US view the events of 6 January as the first encounter for a new civil war in the US. Some are even posing the question that the 'two Americas cannot live together and they must live apart and separate'. For some, behind this is the idea of greater powers and autonomy to the states, and a partial fragmentation of the US.

An element of this has always existed in the US, but it is not excluded that this could develop further as the crisis and polarisation deepen in the coming period.

Covid-19

The devastating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the economic and social crises facing US capitalism, will not be fundamentally resolved under a Biden presidency. The disappointment with the Obama era, the social crisis, the lack of a powerful socialist working-class alternative to the Republicans and Democrats, and the social conditions which exist, have created a vacuum in which Trump and the right-wing populist forces around him have won a basis of support.

Some sections of those who have rallied behind Trump could have been won to supporting a serious socialist alternative. The cynical switch of Trump to describing the protesters, firstly as "heroes", then as a "mob", may cost him support among those who had previously backed him. One of the tasks of an independent party of the US working class would be to appeal to Trump's base, with a view to splitting it and winning its support for a genuine working-class alternative.

In the light of the events which have unfolded, a big majority of the US ruling class and the Democrats, together with international capitalist politicians, have launched an onslaught against Trump. Only a few weeks ago, these same international representatives of capital were extremely timid in their attacks on the Trump regime. US capitalism is terrified that the Trump disaster could be repeated.

Biden now speaks of the need for a domestic anti-terrorism act. Yet workers' and socialists cannot rely of these measures by the capitalists to defeat Trump. These same methods will be deployed against socialists and the working class. In Seattle, the Democrats are attempting to remove the socialist councillor Kshama Sawant, illustrating the real character of these 'Democrats'. This is opposed by the Committee for a Workers' International and all socialists.

The way to defeat Trump is by building a political alternative which challenges capitalism - the system which allowed him and his reactionary forces to flourish.

The crisis has opened big divisions in the Republican Party as a backlash to the events which have taken place. The die-hard Republicans who backed Trump in the House of Representatives and Senate in opposing the certification of the election results have been at logger heads with big business groups, many of which are already withdrawing funding from them.

It is possible that a split, or even a series of splits, could take place. The future of the party as it is currently constituted is an open question. If the 'traditional' Republicans were to gain the upper hand, a split to form a Trump-based party - with or without Trump - is inherent in the situation. This prospect is one measure of the crisis confronting the US ruling class.

The devastating economic and social situation facing US capitalism means that the Biden administration will be compelled to introduce a big stimulus package. Already he has announced a \$1.9 trillion stimulus package to tackle the pandemic crisis. The health crisis, the millions who are unemployed, the 30 million facing the prospect of eviction, together with the likelihood of further racist attacks by sections of the police, means that Biden will come to power facing an explosive situation.

The Democrats, representing corporate capitalism, are coming to power under entirely different objective conditions to those faced by Barack Obama and Bill Clinton. Defending the interests of capitalism will compel him to attempt to adopt certain measures in an effort to avert even greater social upheavals. The Financial Times is urging Biden to be more like Franklin Roosevelt than previous Obama administrations and "go all out for structural change".

However, such measures will have limits, and will not be able to resolve the underlying crisis which exists. It is the worst crisis facing US imperialism since the 1930s. The massive investment in infrastructure in the New Deal introduced

by Roosevelt in 1933-36 had a significant impact. However, alone it was not sufficient to overcome the crisis. With a renewed crisis in 1937, it was mainly rearmament as the onset of the world war loomed which began a rebooting of US capitalism, opening the prospect for an unprecedented upturn in the world economy after World War Two. US imperialism was also in an assertive position as the dominant imperialist power. The situation in the Covid-19 era of capitalism is entirely different.

Any concessions or reforms introduced by the Biden administration could have a conjunctural effect, but they will not resolve the underlying devastating crisis.

The decline of US imperialism is also in marked contrast to its global dominance following the end of World War Two. The selection of Boston mayor, Marty Walsh, a former building workers' union leader, as Labor Secretary, illustrates how Biden will attempt to lean on the trade union leadership and the AFL/CIO trade union federation.

The dire economic situation facing the US working class will provoke big struggles from the working class, and the need to transform the trade unions into fighting combative organisations of the working class. The building of opposition groups in the unions to fight for their democratisation, and organisations to defend the working class and break from the Democrats, is a crucial question for the working class in the US.

Limitations

The limitation of Biden's programme is reflected in his opposition to a universal health system, free at the point of use. The timidity of the 'left' Democrats like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was reflected in her refusal to force a vote on the 'Medicare for all' system because it was "too divisive".

US imperialism hopes that a Biden administration will enable it to reassert itself internationally. While Biden will undoubtedly have a different approach to Trump, attempting to have a 'diplomatic offensive' and reach out to the US's allies, it will not be in a position to revert to its unipolar dominant position.

The decline of US imperialism and strengthened position of China has changed world relations. The blow struck against the US by the recent trade agreement between the European Union and China illustrates the changed world situation.

The crucial task facing workers and socialists in the US now is how to begin to take the necessary steps towards

building a new independent party of the working class. It is clear that the only perspective advocated by Bernie Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez and others, is to remain within the Democratic Party and apply pressure on the Biden administration. For their services in supporting Biden, and refusing to break from the Democrats, they have been rewarded with nothing!

The Democrats do not want the masses mobilised or on the streets. Where protests arise they strive to channel them into the safe avenues of the Democrat machine. Confronted with the mobilisation called by Trump, the Democrats and its 'left' wing, as the Committee for a Workers' International supporters in the US have explained, consciously sought to oppose and block any attempt at counter protests.

The struggle against Trump needs to be linked with the idea of building a political alternative of the working class to Trumpism and the corporate Democrats, at city and state level. Initiatives need to be taken of those who are prepared to begin to build a movement to fight Trumpism, and oppose the corporate Democrats. Assemblies and meetings of socialists, Greens who supported the Howie Hawkins presidential campaign, rank-and-file trade unionists, youth, and others, need to be organised to discuss the way forward and prepare for the struggles that are looming ahead. These initial meetings could take the steps to form coordinating committees to link up on a state and eventually a national level.

Such initiatives could be the important first step towards building an independent party of the working class with a socialist programme. This is now more urgent than ever in the US.



Peace and Justice Project - no way forward for socialism

HANNAH SELL
SOCIALIST PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY

Around 10,000 people attended the online launch of Jeremy Corbyn's Peace and Justice Project (PJP). Speakers - in addition to Jeremy Corbyn - included Len McCluskey, left general secretary of Unite, and Labour peer Christine Blower. While the rally was billed as a global event its participants were mainly from Britain.

There are many reasons to attend a left rally right now. The death rate from Covid is the highest in the world and 6.2 million people have to rely on Universal Credit to survive.

At the same time, Starmer's New Labour leadership is determined to show the capitalist elite they can be relied on to defend its interests. Corbyn is currently fighting for his right to be reinstated as a member of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

There is clearly an urgent, burning need for the Labour and trade union left to come together and discuss out a strategy for how to fight back and to organise effectively in the interests of the working class. Unfortunately, the launch of the PJP was not the kind of event that is needed.

The only speaker based in Britain to make any reference to the 'elephant in the room' - Corbyn's suspension from the Labour Party - was Len McCluskey, who has supported Corbyn throughout his leadership.

But while Len McCluskey correctly called for Corbyn's reinstatement, he went on to give an inaccurately positive impression of the current balance forces in the Labour Party. He stated that Jeremy had "changed the Labour Party forever" and that in the Labour leadership contest, all "three candidates ran on socialist platforms, although we have to keep reminding Keir".

This is when one of the candidates - Lisa Nandy - was part of the 2016 attempted coup against Corbyn. The victor, Starmer, has spent his time as leader systematically breaking from Corbyn's policies.

Shift to right

From largely backing the government's approach on Covid, to whipping Labour MPs not to vote against the Spycops bill, to failing to sign a letter to stop a Windrush deportation flight, Starmer's every action, from the smallest to the largest, is designed to show that he does not have a socialist programme.

No amount of 'reminders' will change Starmer's direction. It was clear from the live feed of written comments that many participants fully understood this and had come to the launch hoping it would offer them a way forward, including the establishment of a new mass workers' party.

Instead, they heard general comments supporting 'peace', 'justice',



Corbyn remains suspended from the Parliamentary Labour Party after Starmer's edict PHOTO JEREMY CORBYN/CC

'hope' and, as Corbyn put it "a more decent and just economy". What these words actually meant, and how they were to be achieved, was unfortunately absent. A project of that kind is, in reality, a diversion from the urgent issues facing the workers' movement.

Corbyn raised that he wanted to

defend and build on ideas in Labour's 2019 manifesto. Doing so requires openly mobilising to combat Starmer's return to pro-capitalist New Labourism, and to do that effectively the struggle cannot be confined within the Labour Party.

As the Socialist has raised previously, a far more effective 'project' to

take this battle forward would be for Jeremy Corbyn to stand on a socialist programme in the London Mayoral contest due to take place in May of this year (see page 11).

• **For a fuller analysis of the Peace and Justice Project see the forthcoming edition of Socialist Today**

SOCIALISM TODAY

Magazine of the Socialist Party

December/January issue includes...

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 - Police spies - inquiry or cover-up
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Millionaire tendency regains control of Scottish Labour

Build a new mass workers' party

PHILIP STOTT
SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND

The resignation of the nominally left Scottish Labour leader Richard Leonard will, in all likelihood, result in the Blairites winning back the leadership of the party in Scotland.

Anas Sarwar, the right-wing MSP (Member of the Scottish Parliament) and millionaire, who Leonard defeated in 2017, is likely to announce he is to stand.

Sarwar transferred his £4.8 million stake in the family cash and carry business to his children during the 2017 leadership contest. The Sarwar family firm did not pay the living wage or recognise trade unions. He also supported the coup in 2016 against Jeremy Corbyn by Owen Smith.

The announcement of Leonard's resignation came the day after a meeting between multi-millionaire

businessman and former Labour donor Lord Haughey, as well as Robert Latham, the lawyer who gave £100,000 to Keir Starmer's leadership campaign. Haughey, it was reported, had demanded Leonard be removed before he would donate to Labour again.

Significantly, at that meeting leading Scottish Blairites Jackie Baillie MSP and Ian Murray MP were also present. Starmer was told about the meeting and then asked Leonard to stand down.

Richard Leonard claimed he had been considering resigning over the Christmas anyway, which is probably the case.

Either way, these events underline, yet again, alongside the defeat of Corbynism in the UK Labour Party, that the pro-capitalist wing of Labour is now in the ascendancy.

The opportunity to create a genuine anti-austerity workers' party was



Ex-Scottish Labour leader Richard Leonard PHOTO PARLIAMENTS.CO.UK/CC

squandered by the leadership of the Corbyn movement, who sought compromise with the Blairites at every turn.

Instead, as Socialist Party Scotland and the Socialist Party called for, the right wing should have been driven out of the Labour Party by allowing the right of Labour members to democratically deselect Blairite MPs, MSPs and councillors.

Under Leonard's leadership, Labour councils still carried out cuts. The policy of opposing the right to a second referendum on Scottish independence was maintained, further undermining Labour's already dwindling support in Scotland among the working class. At the December 2019 general election, Labour in Scotland was yet again reduced to a single MP.

As we warned in November 2017 after Leonard's victory: "The right wingers in the Labour Party are ruthless. They will do everything in their power to defeat the left and remove Corbyn and, for that matter, Leonard over time. In this they

have the full backing of the capitalist establishment."

With the millionaire tendency back in the driving seat of Scottish Labour, the trade union movement, with more than 500,000 members in Scotland, should call a conference to discuss building real working-class political representation through a new workers' party.

As a step toward this, the Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is standing candidates in the May Scottish parliamentary elections. Our candidates will be standing on a fighting socialist manifesto committed to public ownership, trade union rights, an emergency programme for job creation, a mass campaign for 'indyref2' and a new party for the working class in Scotland.

• **Article in full can be read on socialistpartyscotland.org.uk**

LONDON'S MAY ELECTIONS: TORIES AND LABOUR'S KHAN BOTH VYING TO SLASH PUBLIC SERVICES

Working class need an anti-austerity alternative



The overcrowded (pre-Covid) Transport for London-run Underground is facing huge cuts under mayor Sadiq Khan PHOTO D CARR

HELEN PATTISON
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY SECRETARY

London's population is heading for nine million and, partly because of its size, it is the most polluted city in the UK. An affordable, accessible, and green transport system is, therefore, a necessity for its inhabitants.

Since 2018, Transport for London (TfL) has mainly been funded through fares, and its entire government subsidy has been removed. Despite the recent eight-year period, when fares rose faster than wages, after Covid hit and people stayed home, TfL's income plummeted, sparking a financial crisis.

Reducing gate-line workers and leaving stations and platforms unstaffed, will make the transport system less accessible and more dangerous to passengers. The review even highlights how it will be older people, disabled people, mothers, pregnant and BAME people, who will be hit hardest by removing services. They are also proposing axing up to 150 bus routes in outer London, where some of London's poorest communities live.

Even Khan's review is compelled to admit that these cuts will force up to 250 million journeys off public transport and into private cars. And this is just the beginning. It also floats the idea of a 25% increase on journeys into the central Zone 1, and removing the cycle hire scheme, as well as river services.

Investment has been on the basis of vanity projects and expensive outsourcing. Neither the current right-wing Labour-run Greater London Authority (GLA) nor the Tories offer the kind of integrated system that is needed to ensure a safe and green transport system.

Khan's recently commissioned Independent Review looks towards

"three groups to provide additional funding: residents, consumers, and drivers." In short, they expect working-class Londoners and transport workers to pay for the financial crisis facing TfL. This must be rejected.

The review openly refuses to make big business pay - either through an employment levy or business rates increase - as it would be too big a burden on business.

Yet a huge council tax hike, new charges to drive into the greater London area, and a full-frontal attack on the pay and pensions of transport workers, including huge redundancies, and removing more of the already shrunken workforce from the network, is on the cards.

That's why we need a genuine anti-austerity political alternative to Khan. In 2016, the Socialist Party understood the huge desperation of Londoners to get rid of the Tories from the GLA. But we also warned that Khan was no 'Corbynista'. Instead, he would use his position to attack Corbyn and fail to stand up to the Tories to protect the living standards of working-class Londoners.

just before Boris Johnson left the office of mayor in 2016. But the lack of a real anti-austerity alternative from Khan will leave space for even the likes of Shaun Bailey, the Tory candidate for mayor, to pose as pro-working class by opposing extra tax hikes.

Bailey has already shown how out of touch he is with ordinary people in London, by suggesting that homeless people could save £5,000 for a deposit on a house!

That's why we need a genuine anti-austerity political alternative to Khan. In 2016, the Socialist Party understood the huge desperation of Londoners to get rid of the Tories from the GLA. But we also warned that Khan was no 'Corbynista'. Instead, he would use his position to attack Corbyn and fail to stand up to the Tories to protect the living standards of working-class Londoners.

Covid impact

During the pandemic, the limits of Khan in relation to protecting transport workers' health and safety, has been clear. Despite a high Covid death toll among transport workers - 42 bus workers have died of the virus - he sided with bus companies for weeks instead of listening to the safety concerns of bus drivers and their trade unions. The companies wanted to carry on collecting fares and refused to close the front doors of the buses, which would have helped protect drivers' health.

Now, Khan has failed to stand up to the Tories on TfL funding, meaning transport workers will face more attacks.

In addition to the vital issue of funding the transport system are questions on housing shortages and costs, and widespread low pay. Just before the pandemic started it was



London mayor Sadiq Khan on the election trail PHOTO PAUL MATTISON

reported that overcrowding was at a 40-year high: this social problem has helped spread Covid in the city.

One-in-five Londoners earn less than the London living wage of £10.85 an hour, and many are on zero-hour or similar exploitative work contracts. This has also meant that many workers during the pandemic have been unable to properly isolate and protect their and their fellow workers health, or have been forced to work in dangerous environments.

Khan's approach to the TfL funding crisis shows he will again fail to challenge the Tories on these other important issues, and it is working-class Londoners who will pay the price.

Currently, the approval ratings of Khan and the Tories have maintained

a consistent gap, with Khan on a 20+ percentage point lead. But that can change if he continues to put forward that the working class must pay for the crisis.

Because the mayoral election in London are on the basis of a 'supplementary' voting system (ie candidates are ranked in preference), an anti-austerity candidate can send a message to Khan about the anger at his austerity policies while also being able to keep the Tories out.

• **An online meeting of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) will be taking place on 20 January to discuss possibilities of a working class stand against Khan and the Tories.**

• **For further information about TUSC go to tusc.org.uk**

VACCINE CONFIDENCE - A WORKER'S RESPONSE

JOSH ASKER
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

A successful vaccination programme, if effectively delivered, gives millions of people hope of an easing of Covid-19 restrictions over the course of 2021.

It is in the interests of everyone, especially those with health vulnerabilities, for the vast majority of the population to be vaccinated.

But with trust in politicians, the media and all elements of the capitalist establishment at an all-time low, there is hesitancy among some layers of the population to take the vaccine. There's also suspicion that big pharmaceutical corporations are exploiting the pandemic for profit.

'Pimlico Plumbers' boss Charlie Mullins has announced plans to introduce a 'No jab, no job' policy on his workforce. He plans to potentially rewrite employment contracts to stipulate vaccination as a requirement for employment. The man, who three years ago lost a Supreme Court battle over denying a worker sick pay, claims that that he is acting out of concern for his employees' health.

The way to give people confidence in the safety of the vaccine is not by threatening them with their jobs, or using other repressive measures. Different nations approving different vaccines at different times, as well as the delay of the second vaccine doses, contrary to the method used in trials, have the potential to knock people's confidence in the vaccine.

Decades of austerity and privatisation in the NHS have increased workloads; so much so that many GPs have retired or left the profession

early. Many people do not even know who their doctor is, let alone have developed a relationship in which advice and guidance can easily be sought.

Throughout the pandemic, NHS Covid-19 related advice is largely only available online or through automated phone systems. A fully funded NHS would give people reassurance that unlikely complications or long-term effects of Covid-19 infection or treatments would be seen quickly and dealt with effectively. Benefits equivalent to a real living wage are also essential, instead of the miserly Statutory Sick Pay or Employment Support Allowance.



The way to give people confidence in the safety of the vaccine is not by threatening them with their jobs

The Socialist Party has demanded from the beginning that vaccine trial designs and results should be open to public scrutiny. Vaccines and other medicines, and the way in which they are delivered, must be subject to the independent evaluation of the workers' movement.

The experience and expertise of trade unionists in unions such as the UCU, Prospect, Unite and the BMA could be used to reassure people of



PHOTO US SECRETARY OF DEFENSE/CC

The government's shambolic handling of the Covid pandemic hardly inspires confidence in the vaccination roll-out

safety. If this were done, delaying the second dose might be accepted as the most practical way to quickly reduce the number of seriously ill people - not just seen as the government lurching from one panic measure to another.

The shambolic government handling of the Covid-19 crisis, and the profiteering of pharmaceuticals and other health companies, means that increasing layers of the population

are drawing the correct conclusion that capitalism cannot look after our health.

Oversight

Trade unions must oppose any repressive compulsion of workers to get vaccinated, but must also fight for democratic oversight of the whole pandemic response, to give confidence to workers that decisions are being made in the interests of workers'

safety and not bosses' profits.

Also the pharmaceutical companies benefited from enormous state funding of their research into coronavirus vaccines. Their nationalisation and incorporation into health services under democratic workers' control is also necessary to ensure that future research and treatments are developed in the interests of the health of the majority and not the profits of their shareholders.

Trump Twitter ban: only independent workers' voice can defeat right

JAMES IVENS
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

First the election, now his Twitter account - it's bad news all round for bigot-in-chief Donald Trump. But the ousted US president's eviction from social media is also a warning to workers and young people in struggle.

His ban followed the notorious events at the Capitol building on 6 January (see pages 8-9). As with any political action in the internet age, social media was a key tool of Trump and his supporters.

Two days later, Twitter announced his permanent suspension. Facebook, YouTube and others followed suit. Right-wing social media platform Parler has also been 'deplatformed'.

Twitter cited the "horrific events" at Capitol Hill and Trump's "glorification of violence". But Trump has based his whole presidency on whipping up division, bigotry and violence from day one, and not just on social media.

Some suggest the courts or legislature should regulate online speech. Others that the tech bosses themselves should take action, as



PHOTO GAGE SKIDMORE/CC

Big tech can also find a pretext to remove socialist organisations from social media

happened in this case. Some even suggest using anti-monopoly law to break up platforms into less influential competitors.

Socialists oppose Trump's reactionary rhetoric and policies. But we do not support his banning from social media. The tech bosses took action this time under pressure

from the capitalist establishment for whom Trump had clearly gone too far, assaulting the authority of the state itself and damaging its ability to effectively defend the capitalist system.

But with the capitalists in control there is one free speech for them and another for us. Republican and

Democrats alike can glorify far more 'horrific events': murderous policing, military adventure, profit-driven pandemic negligence, without any action being taken against them.

Big tech is already known for arbitrary suspension of anti-capitalist accounts. On the same day Twitter banned Trump, for example, it temporarily suspended the account of the Committee for a Workers' International, the world socialist organisation the Socialist Party is affiliated to.

False credentials

Meanwhile, Trump's social media ban does not strip him of his billions or remove him from more traditional media channels. It can even burnish his false credentials as an opponent of the establishment.

Most importantly, it does nothing about the worsening social conditions and lack of a working-class political voice which allowed him to build support.

The desire to defeat Trump's anti-working-class propaganda is right. But inviting the bosses or their state to suppress it risks making things harder for the workers' movement. Whatever the legal rules are, the

capitalist state and its mouthpieces will always apply them to divide workers and suppress the left.

It's not a question of regulating the economic and ideological monopoly of social media but taking it out of the hands of the billionaires who control it, through nationalisation under democratic workers' control and management.

And to challenge the lies of the right, the working class needs its own, independent voice.

The growth of the 'alt-right' is not some automatic consequence of racist YouTubers. In a world of capitalist chaos, people are desperate for alternatives.

Despite commentators' anxieties about 'filter bubbles', people exist in the real world where the biggest impact on public ideas comes from.

The answer to social media charlatans and Trumpism is pulling together a mass workers' party which can show millions that class struggle is not just another idea on the internet.



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Socialist Party national women's meeting

Working-class fighters discuss a socialist programme for women

HEATHER RAWLING
EAST MIDLANDS SOCIALIST PARTY REGIONAL COMMITTEE

Youthful enthusiasm, experience and ideas were in abundance at the Socialist Party national women's meeting on 17 January. Over 100 women gave up their Sunday afternoon to discuss the economic, political and social impact of the pandemic. Chris Thomas gave an excellent introduction which laid the basis for a varied, inspiring and uplifting discussion, even in these difficult times.

U-turn

Women have been at the forefront of struggles in the NHS, Tower Hamlets council, schools, and parent organisations. The National Education Union (NEU), with a majority of women members, has forced one of the biggest U-turns from this government. It showed that where a lead is given, members will take up the struggle. 21,000 joined the NEU last year. 17,000 in the first week of this year have become activists fighting for workplace safety. 400,000 people attended a Zoom meeting to organise for action on school safety.

The increase in trade union membership over the last year is majority female. It's not surprising, since threatened job losses and worsening pay and conditions have mainly hit the sectors where women predominate: retail, leisure and hospitality.

We heard, from direct experience, about the problems facing

working-class women: NHS workers, school workers, civil servants, carers. The double oppression of working-class women described vividly.

It falls mainly on the shoulders of women to home school their children, and many are expected to continue working from home. 70% of women who applied for furlough because of schools closing were refused and forced into taking unpaid or annual leave. They fear that there will be no job for them to go back to.

Speakers mentioned the impact on mental health. 90% of working mothers say their stress levels have gone up during the pandemic, and young women are three times more likely to be depressed than young men. Others spoke of the contemptuous way the government has handled the need for free school meals, resulting in some families going hungry.

Violence

A student spoke about the problems of sexual abuse on campus. Domestic violence has also increased dramatically in society. In the last lockdown, 16 women were killed by their partners. After a decade of austerity, councils will be cutting even more services, affecting women as workers and service users.

It's clear that social issues could become a lightning rod for all the other issues that are stoking anger in the working class. Class battles can erupt in the workplace and in communities, and we need to be prepared to intervene when they do.

The meeting agreed to update our programme of demands for women

in 2021 and the ongoing pandemic. It should be an important part of the coming local election campaigns, where the Socialist Party will be standing anti-cuts candidates as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

We also want to take our programme on women into the trade unions. Socialist Party member Hugo Pierre, who stood as a candidate in the Unison general secretary elections, campaigned on our programme for women. We will also fight for our programme on university campuses.

This was a meeting that laid out clearly the perspectives for the coming year, and the problems we are facing, but also had the determination to fight any attacks on the working class with a socialist programme.

Book: It doesn't have to be like this:



Women and the Struggle for Socialism
by Chris Thomas

- Visit leftbooks.co.uk
- or call **020 8988 8777**
- PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

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Why I joined the Socialist Party: Looking at history has shown me that everything is possible!

JEN BOTTOM
READING SOCIALIST PARTY

Before I started educating myself, I'm sorry to say that, in part, I fell for the media coverage of 'scrounging benefit cheats'. Documentary footage of someone saying they couldn't afford to buy food, before showing their large expensive-looking TV and other gadgets, did wind me up, as someone who has a disability and has had to rely on charity to fill in the gaps in state provision.

But even then, I was questioning the system, though I had not yet formulated my thoughts enough.

Looking at a few individual people is not the issue. We need to ask: why do we have a system that does not address the causes and only treats the symptoms?

Perhaps there will always be a few people who are able to play a system to get a bit of a leg up, but that's nothing compared to what the entire system of capitalism is doing!

When I started realising this I first joined the Green Party. But I recently concluded their policies didn't seem to go far enough.

Initially, I was scared to look at a more left-wing party because of the one-sided media coverage, and my capitalist education. But once I was

brave enough to do some reading and investigating, I found the Socialist Party.

The Socialist Party's non-sectarian approach and policies certainly seem like the best way forward to me. I decided to join, and since then I've done so much more than just pay my subs and read generic emails.

I've been encouraged to ask questions and talk about anything I'm uncomfortable with, which has helped me get a different perspective on many of the common reasons people give for being against socialism.

I have evaluated the arguments from both camps and found those of the capitalists wanting.

I'm also playing an active role within my local branch, and even felt confident enough to speak at some of the Socialism2020 discussions.

Looking at history has shown me that nothing is set in stone and everything is possible. I therefore encourage anyone interested in a fairer and more equal society to join the Socialist Party and start pushing for the change we want to see.

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

TUSC 2021 local elections conference

Fighting back against Starmer's new New Labour - including at the ballot box! - Sunday 7 February



It will start at 11am and conclude by 1:30pm. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) includes transport workers' union RMT, the Socialist Party and others. Go to tusc.org.uk for details.

SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND						
AREA	& RECEIVED	& TARGET	Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2021			DEADLINE: 31 MARCH 2021
South West	1,265	1,800				70%
Southern & SE	1,028	2,350				44%
North West	360	1,150				31%
Northern	218	750				29%
Wales	482	2,300				21%
West Midlands	392	2,600				15%
London	587	4,600				13%
Yorkshire	323	2,550				13%
East Midlands	67	1,850				4%
Eastern	5	1,200				0%
Other	5,050	3,850				131%
TOTAL	9,777	25,000				39%

Books that inspired me: The Road to Wigan Pier

DOMENICO HILL
BRISTOL SOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

In early 1936, a then unknown George Orwell was commissioned by the publisher Victor Gollancz to travel to the north of England to research 'the conditions of the working class'. 'The Road to Wigan Pier' was published in 1937, after Orwell had travelled to Spain in December 1936 to fight fascism, as part of the Poem (Workers' Party of Marxist Unity).

The book is not only a great insight into the actual conditions workers faced during the depression of the 1930s, but also sheds light on the political journey of Orwell himself. He progresses from lower-middle-class Eton boy and colonial police officer, through unstable employment and poverty, towards growing socialist convictions.

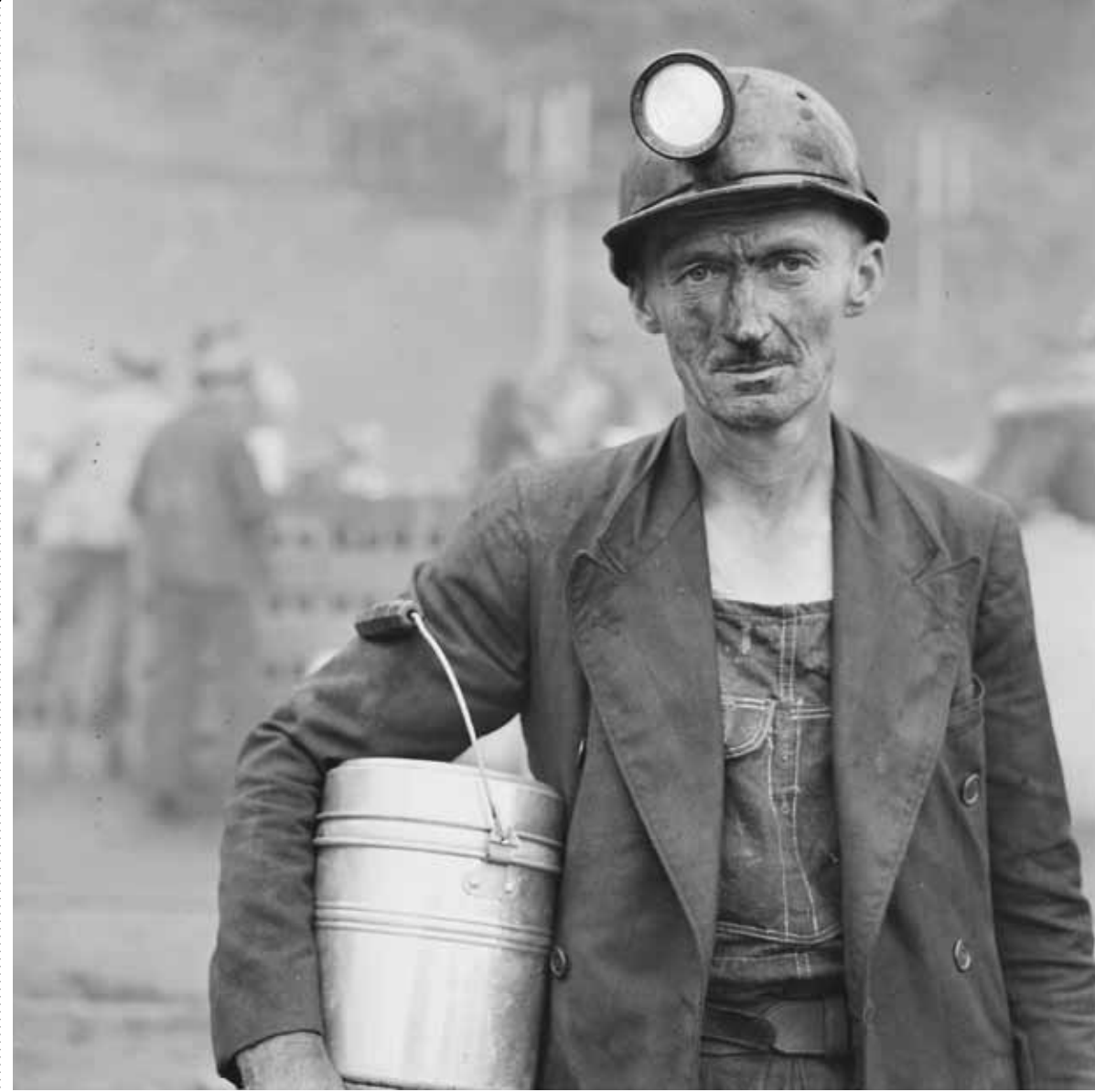
Orwell stayed at a boarding house in Wigan and noted that, far from being wealthy and detached, many landlords barely made a living, sharing the rationed portions given to their lodgers, desperate to get the income provided from travelling salesmen, while bitterly resenting their lodgers.

Coalmining

He managed to join a shift at a local coal mine and was exhausted within minutes just getting to the coalface, which not infrequently was over a mile on foot from the main shaft. Orwell, a tall man, describes an agonising walk through a low tunnel, constantly doubled over and crawling on his hands and knees. On arriving at the coalface, the miners had to lie or kneel down and hack away at the coal with their pickaxes.

For anyone who has read Zola's novel 'Germinal' about French miners in the 1860s (see 'Books that inspired me: Germinal' at socialistparty.org.uk), it's glaring that conditions had changed very little, except that now there was a mechanised conveyor belt which took away the coal rather than ponies.

Orwell writes about the housing conditions and income of mining families, particularly of unemployed miners. Unemployment benefits, 'the dole', had been introduced in



Orwell joined a shift at a coal mine and wrote about the terrible working conditions of miners and their lives above the pit. RUSSELL MARTIN/CC

1920. A debate raged in the press about whether the amount of dole was too little or too much, 'encouraging idleness'.

Orwell lists a weekly budget for an unemployed miner, his wife, and two small children, based on a means-tested dole of 32 shillings a week - an amount of money barely able to cover a semi-starvation food diet, fuel and rent. The main items are potatoes, flour, meat, coal, sugar and tea. Only a small percentage of

expenditure goes on vegetables. Milk for the infant is donated by a charity. Rent makes up 9 shillings.

An outraged citizen wrote to the News of the World and the New Statesman claiming it was perfectly possible to eat healthily for a week with 3 shillings and 11 pence. Among the food items listed by this gentleman are: three wholemeal loaves, 1lb carrots, 2lb dates, 1lb onions, 1/2 lb margarine and ten oranges. The list excludes rent, fuel, clothing, repairs,

travel, and the budget is for just one person.

At that time, many middle-class people raged against workers who 'didn't eat properly and couldn't cook'. A particular source of ire was the perceived indulgence of workers for massive amounts of tea, sugar and cigarettes. In the case of the unemployed miner, tea and sugar cost 2 shillings and 9 pence a week, out of 32 shillings. If only the workers would get educated and eat more oranges!

Now in the 21st century, unemployment benefits continue to mean semi-starvation for thousands. While, parliament debates clawing back £20 a week from Universal Credit, food has to be distributed by ever-expanding foodbanks (see front page). The capitalist press continues to push lies about workers spending food vouchers on cigarettes and alcohol, leading to their replacement with meagre food parcels for school children who qualify for free school meals.

Housing

In the 1930s many workers lived in houses which were subsiding and damp, with walls bulging out and frequently blocking doors and windows. The design of many of the terraces was such that not only did people have to go outside to go to the toilet, but they had to go out the front door and walk down the end of the street to join a queue at the back.

Orwell mentions the new 'corporation' (council) estates being built then, which survive in suburbs to this day. No doubt these represented a massive improvement in conditions, with baths, running hot water, and gardens.

But Orwell states how many workers felt resentful and alienated by having to move there, and some preferred to stay in the slums because it's more homely. Orwell found that the rents for council houses were usually far higher, workers were moved much further away from their places of work, and complained that the estates were 'soulless' and 'prison-like'.

The Road to Wigan Pier dwells a lot on the attitudes between classes, particularly the dislike and even physical revulsion many middle-class people felt for the working class, disguised by a studious courtesy. The more middle-class people slid into poverty in the 1930s the more tenaciously they held on to their perceived privileges of being 'gentlemen'.

Much of what Orwell writes about social attitudes and divisions, fostered by the capitalist class, echoes painfully in the current day. This book is a must read to remind us of what we have won, what is being taken away, and how to win a better society in future.

Police use Covid-19 laws to intimidate Black Lives Matter protesters

BERKAY KARTAV
SOUTH WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

On Saturday 16 January, around 15 Black Lives Matter activists gathered by Parliament Square, in London, to protest the tragic death of Mohamud Mohammed Hassan after being released from police custody in Cardiff. Socialist Party members were also present at the protest, wearing masks and social distancing, to demand an end to racist policing and for democratic working-class control of the police.

Soon after the protest had started, an army of police officers stormed towards the crowd to tell protestors

to leave immediately. Without giving the protesters any chance to discuss and decide what to do, the police threatened to make arrests.

Police used Covid-19 regulations as an excuse for intimidation. But the truth is that anti-racists protesting in the open air are far less likely to spread the virus than a bunch of police officers stuck in police vans.

Police want to use force and intimidation to put young people off protesting again in the future. It also forms part of an ongoing attempt by the government to blame young people for the spread of the virus.

The police were more careful, however, when NHS workers organised a

protest outside Downing Street just two days before. Public opinion in support of NHS workers means that police could face a backlash if they chose to use Covid-19 regulations against frontline workers fighting for safety.

If the Black Lives Matter protest had been more widely publicised, it is possible that many more working-class youth would have attended. This would have made it more difficult for the police to disperse the crowd so easily.

Moreover, the heavy-handed response of the police shows the importance of democratically controlled stewarding by trade unions;

to ensure all protests are properly organised, and to keep everyone safe.

Many people are understandably worried about catching Covid-19, and this is one of the reasons this protest was smaller compared to other Black Lives Matter protests.

Despite the issues around how the protests could have been organised, the police were heavy handed in protecting their fellow police officers involved in the murder of Mohamud.

We need police to be democratically accountable to the trade unions, youth and communities. This includes being able to determine policing policies and priorities, access to scrutinise bodycam footage and other data, and the ability to appoint and dismiss chief or senior constables.

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

New Cross Gate fire 40 years ago

Forty years ago, on 18 January, a fire started deliberately by suspected racists swept through a house where a 16th birthday party was being celebrated by young black people in New Cross Gate, south east London. 13 died and many were injured. But instead of pursuing the assailants, the police and establishment media blamed the fire on some teenagers attending the party. This was despite a series of earlier racist petrol bomb attacks in the area.

The outrage among the black community led to a large weekday protest demonstration on 2 March 1981 from New Cross to central London in which Militant (forerunner of the Socialist) supporters participated, and which shook the Thatcher Tory government.

● An article on this historic march will appear in a future issue of the Socialist.

Justice for Mohamud Hassan!

- Black lives matter
- End police brutality
- Democratic working-class control of the police



►► CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE

The Socialist Party also brought support to the protest from the trade unions in Cardiff and reminded the protest of the role that the police had played spying on anti-racist campaigns and on striking workers. The police are not neutral, but defend the rich and powerful.

The Socialist Party is calling for a movement to be established to campaign for justice for Mohamud, and for all the other miscarriages of justice carried out by Welsh police forces: the racist investigation that led to Dyfed Powys police imprisoning Siyanda Mngaza for defending herself, and the inadequate investigation into the death of Christopher Kapessa by the South Wales police.

Their campaigns must not be allowed to fade from public view with time.

As soon as word got out, the angry demonstrations showed great determination to keep fighting for justice. That determination should be gathered into an organised campaign. Some heroic individuals have come

forward to call Black Lives Matter protests.

Organising regular open meetings, where activists could get involved and discuss what to do next with the campaign, would give the movement a powerful new injection of life. Calls are already being made for renewed protests if it becomes clear that the IOPC is attempting a cover up.

That's why Malcolm X said: "You can't have capitalism without racism" and why the Black Panther Party committed itself to fighting for socialism.

We call for:

- The immediate suspension of the police officers involved in Mohamud's arrest
- All bodycam and CCTV footage

to be released and made available to Mohamud's family and lawyers

● An inquiry launched into Mohamud's murder - not an internal police inquiry headed by the IOPC or by establishment figures with a vested interest in a coverup, but a workers' enquiry headed by a committee that includes representatives of Mohamud's local community and trade unionists whose only interest is in getting justice for Mohamud's family and all ordinary people

● Committees should be formed from working-class communities and organisations to monitor arrests, conduct, and policy

● For police operations to be accountable to the communities they serve, through the establishment of democratically elected local policing committees

Idle rich

At the same time as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published its 2020 report showing that Britain's poor got poorer due to furloughing and job losses, etc, while the rich prospered - Boris Johnson reshuffled his government and appointed Kwasi Kwarteng as the new business secretary.

Kwarteng is notorious for co-authoring a 2012 pamphlet - 'Britain Unchained' - along with Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, Home Secretary Priti Patel and International Trade Secretary Liz Truss, which accused British workers of being "among the worst idlers in the world" and said that "too many people in Britain prefer a lie-in to hard work".

In 2013 he argued for lowering the minimum wage in some areas and for regional public sector pay because they were 'crowding out' private employers.

Kwarteng has tried to allay workers' fears by saying he'll protect workers' rights post-Brexit. But already its reported that the government is looking to end the weak 48-hour maximum working week law. All part of its 'Singapore on Thames' cheap labour vision for the country.

Brexit Broadcasting Corporation

It's a case of Lucifer replacing Satan. The previously flagged-up front-runner to become BBC Chairman - ex-editor of the Daily 'Torygraph' Charles Moore - is standing aside for 'family reasons' and instead, Boris Johnson has appointed former Goldman Sachs banker and Tory donor Richard Sharp to oversee the Beeb's output.

Appointing Sharp - a right-wing Brexiteer who was chums with current Chancellor Rishi Sunak at Goldman Sachs - will undoubtedly cheer members of the reactionary European Research Group of Tory MPs. Already, he has referred to the apparent 'Remainer bias' of panellists of the BBC's Question Time during the 2016 EU Referendum campaign. This is an odd example to illustrate the liberal-lefty BBC,

as leading xenophobe Nigel Farage seemed to have a permanent seat on the programme!

Profitable flight path

The US Department of Justice (DoJ) has fined giant US aircraft manufacturer Boeing \$2.5 billion for "fraudulent and deceptive conduct" ie lying and covering-up, to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the US air safety regulator. This follows two fatal crashes of Boeing's 737 Max 8 plane, the first in October 2018 and the second five months later, killing 346 passengers and crew.

Crash investigations revealed that central to these disasters was the 737 Max's flawed anti-stall software device that the flight crew were unaware of, and which pitched the aircraft into fatal nosedives.

Boeing blamed two former employees for deceiving the FAA over the safety of its anti-stall software. However, the DoJ found Boeing had chosen "the path of profit over candour by concealing material information."

Lawyers representing victims families of the Ethiopian Airlines crash expressed anger that "a corporation pays billions of dollars to avoid liability while stonewalling and fighting the families in court."

But why isn't the FAA in the dock too? Its decade-long policy allowed Boeing and other airline manufacturers to self-certify compliance with safety regulations. Astonishingly, the FAA's 53-page report that formed the basis of the 737 Max training guidelines for pilots noted "no specific flight characteristics", despite the plane's novel anti-stall software. It illustrates the cosy relationship between government and corporate capitalism.



Christmas Crossword Competition

Thank you to everyone who entered the Socialist's Christmas Crossword Competition in issue 1114. We are pleased to announce the answers and the winners, and what they have won.

Cryptic crossword prize winners:
1st prize: Jane Ward - £30 worth of books from Left Books
Runners-up: Sue Barnes and Derek McMillan - £10 worth of books each

Quick crossword prize winners:
1st prize: Michael Barnes - £30 worth of books
Runner-up: Ian Hunter - £10 worth of books

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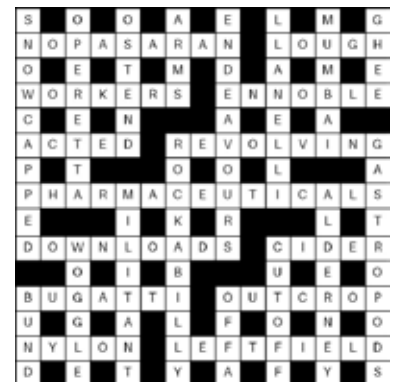
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Cryptic crossword



Quick crossword



JUSTICE FOR MOHAMUD HASSAN!

- **Black lives matter**
- **End police brutality**
- **Democratic working-class control of the police**

ROSS SAUNDERS
SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

Hundreds of people have marched and rallied at Cardiff Bay police station to protest the death of Mohamud Mohammed Hassan shortly after being released from custody at the police station. Despite Covid restrictions inevitably inhibiting the turnouts, hundreds of working people from all over Cardiff demonstrated for hours for four days, as carefully as possible, at the police station, outraged at police brutality that likely led to his death.

Mohamud, a Somali-Welsh 24-year-old, was arrested on 8 January at his flat in Cardiff on suspicion of a breach of the peace. He was held at Cardiff Bay police station and, after his release without charge, returned home on the next morning with injuries. He was found dead later that day.

His aunt, Zainab Hassan, said she saw him an hour after his release: "He was released on Saturday morning with lots of wounds on his body and lots of bruises. He didn't have these wounds when he was arrested, but when he came out of Cardiff Bay police station, he had them. Nothing we do is going to bring him back, but we will not rest for a second until we have justice."

The police claim that there was no evidence of excessive force used against Mohamud that could have caused his death. The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) police 'watchdog' said: "Preliminary indications are that there is no physical trauma injury to explain a cause of death, and toxicology tests are required."

Alun Michael, the Blairite Labour Police and Crime Commissioner, has appealed for calm and to await the outcome of the IOPC investigation. But the interim post-mortem has already found that Mohamud died with wounds and bruising on his face and arms, and injuries consistent with "impact against hard surfaces".

People will not be calm or wait. The South Wales police force is notorious for miscarriages of justice and of racially prejudiced assaults. The IOPC has no credibility within the ethnic minority communities in Cardiff, and far from being a 'watchdog,' is regarded as more of a guard dog for the police. Clearly the authorities are hoping that protests subside and Covid-19 restrictions will prevent a movement developing to demand justice for Mohamud.

Five hundred people gathered at a few hours' notice in the city centre on 12 January and marched to a protest at Cardiff Bay police station. The following day, 200 people gathered again to rally there. The mood of the protesters from all ethnic backgrounds has been angry and determined, blocking the road. "Say his name - Mohamud Mohammed Hassan," "No justice, no peace!" and "F*** the South Wales police!" have been roared at the police station.

Socialist Party members have played a prominent role, speaking at the protests. We called for the police to be held to account, and for the abolition of the toothless IOPC: "South Wales Police must be made to answer for the death of Mohamud Mohammed Hassan. We want true democratic accountability - where the police are held to account by the communities they are meant to serve."

▶▶ CONTINUED ON P15

