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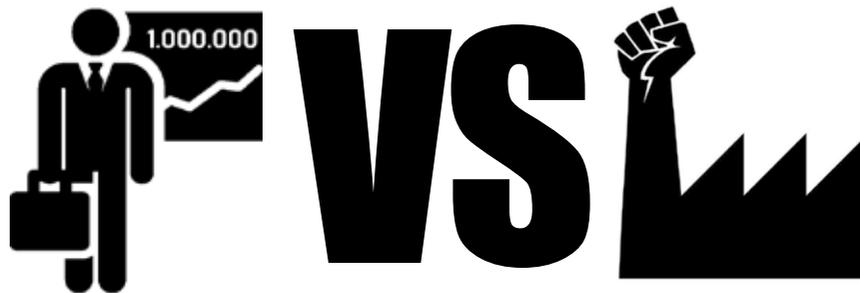
the Socialist

Issue 1109

12-18 November 2020

formerly **Militant**

CAPITALISTS



WORKING CLASS

NOT IN IT TOGETHER

“We are really not all in this together. It is far worse for some than for others.” It could be a quote from any of the millions of working-class people whose living standards have been hammered by Covid lockdowns and economic crisis. But actually it was from a Bank of England policymaker.

Predictions of another pre-Christmas slump in the economy after the newest lockdown restrictions, a “double dip recession”, will hit jobs and living standards further despite the Tories’ U-turn on extending the furlough (see page 4).

The huge economic rollercoaster over the course of a few months during this year is still expected by the Bank of England to leave the economy 11% below where it started.

While the world’s billionaires increased their wealth by 27% in the three months to July this year, it’s a different story for working-class people. A Save the Children survey found 60% of families on Working Tax Credit or Universal Credit had cut down on food and other basics during the pandemic. Tens of thousands of people in this country have

become homeless, despite a temporary ban on evictions.

Hundreds of thousands have already lost their jobs. Yet a new survey of companies shows 30% are planning further redundancies before the end of the year.

Economic crisis

Clearly, Covid sparked and exacerbated the economic crisis. But the fact that 22% of firms were planning job cuts even before the virus got to the UK indicates that recession was already on its way. Capitalism itself causes crises, and cannot guarantee the jobs and living standards or the health of the majority of society.

There are huge hopes in a potential new vaccine, which eventually could mean the lifting

of Covid restrictions. But, even if it proves to be effective and is rolled out quickly to all, it will not mean the crisis of living standards being solved.

A battle led by the trade unions, mobilising their nearly seven million members, must be launched to raise the minimum wage to £15 an hour, to nationalise firms threatening redundancies, and defend jobs and living standards.

The capitalist profit system is sick and needs to be replaced. A movement must be built to fight for socialism - a society where production is planned and existing wealth is used for the benefit of all. Join us in the Socialist Party in that fight!

STEVE SCORE
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

DONATE TO THE SOCIALISM 2020 APPEAL NOW!

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USA: AFTER THE POLARISED ELECTION - WHAT WAY FORWARD FOR THE WORKING CLASS?

▶▶ p2-3 AND 16



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The Socialist is written, read, sold and bought by ordinary workers, trade unionists, young people and Socialist Party members. We want you to write for the Socialist.

Send us reports of your workplace and community campaigns, short letters on working-class issues, or ideas for other articles.

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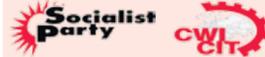
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

USA: After the polarised elections - what way forward for the working class?

ROBERT BECHERT

COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

In the US, and around the world, millions greeted Trump's defeat in the US elections. His probable removal from office, notwithstanding his legal claims, will be widely welcomed.

Clearly, there will be changes within the US and international repercussions - although many of the US foreign policy changes will be in trying to act more closely with traditional US allies than in fundamental policy shifts, for example in dealing with the Chinese regime.

While Trump's defeat was welcomed, the limits of Biden's victory were clear. Despite his huge vote there was no 'blue wave'. And it was not just Biden's but also Trump's vote that soared in the polarised election. The Republicans can, depending on January's special election in Georgia, hold the Senate and, in this election, made gains in the House of Representatives.

As the Independent Socialist Group in the US, co-thinkers of the Socialist Party, explained: "Biden mostly ran against Trump rather than for meaningful policies". A result was that in some areas there was less motivation to vote.

The New York Times reported that in key cities in 'swing states' like Detroit, Milwaukee and Philadelphia, the "dynamic" was that "Mr Biden won an overwhelming share of the city but did not improve much over Mrs Clinton [who contested the 2016 election]. And in wards of the city with majority black populations, fewer voters cast their votes for him than they did for her... Mr Biden also appeared to do worse against Mr Trump in city wards with a large number of Latino voters."

Undemocratic

Of course, the results were another demonstration of the undemocratic character of the US political system, beginning with the fact that in some states there are deliberate obstacles to even being allowed to cast a vote.

Biden's vote was mainly an anti-Trump one. Earlier this year, before Obama and others acted to save his nomination campaign, Biden was trailing in the primaries. He was rightly seen as a typical representative of pro-big business Democrats and a long-term 'Washington insider'. Indeed, in June 2019, Biden said at a New York fundraiser that he would not "demonise" the rich and promised that "no one's standard of living will change, nothing will fundamentally change".

Probably, Trump doesn't expect to win the legal cases he has launched to challenge the election result. While his legal action is at least partially motivated by personal pride, there is a more important political aspect - namely, keeping his voting base together for a comeback in 2024.



At this gathering, Biden went on to talk about his ability to work with segregationists like former Senators Eastland and Talmadge, showing that he could "bring people together"! Nevertheless, hopes have been raised by Biden's victory, but even bigger hopes were raised by Obama's 2008 victory when he succeeded George W Bush. However, Obama was followed by Trump, and a question now is, who will follow Biden? The fact is a Biden presidency could lead to such renewed disappointment that a right-wing populist can build upon Trump's 70-million-plus voters and win the next election in 2024.

Probably, Trump doesn't expect to win the legal cases he has launched to challenge the election result. While his legal action is at least partially motivated by personal pride, there is a more important political aspect - namely, keeping his voting base together for a comeback in 2024.

possibly by himself, or a member of his family, or another right populist when Biden disappoints. There are reports that Trump is about to launch a 'leadership political action committee', a legal body that individuals can donate up to \$5,000 a year to, as a vehicle for future campaigning.

Trump's populism

Certainly, Trump has the potential to organise his own personal base. Last month, a poll showed that 58% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents considered themselves supporters of Trump rather than the Republican Party.

Trump and Co's post-election populist rhetoric aims at keeping his base mobilised by saying that the election was by "big money, the elite, the tech companies... who think you are deplorable".

Of course, vote rigging has a long history in the US. For years, the

Republicans have been striving to enforce voter 'suppression', ie preventing people voting. But the same applies to the Democrats. The 19th century Democratic political machine in New York gave birth to the phrase 'Tammany Hall' - a byword for corruption and rigging, while in the southern states the Democratic leaders enforced racist 'Jim Crow' laws (which enforced segregation). And it's not just history. In 2016, the Democrats in New York City removed over 125,000 from the voting register so that they couldn't vote for Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primary, and this year, forced the Howie Hawkins/Angela Walker Green Party campaign off the ballot paper in some states.

The situation in the USA is complex, exhibiting progressive and reactionary features. Trump and Co campaigned against "socialism" both in reaction to the widespread interest in socialism among young people in

the US and, simultaneously, to exploit the hostility to the Cuban and Venezuelan regimes among some Latinos.

This latter campaign helped Trump increase his vote by over one million in Florida and get over 51% of the vote there. But this was not a mass vote for reaction. Simultaneously, 60.8% of people in Florida voted for a state-wide increase in the minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

Nationally, notwithstanding Trump and the Republicans hostile campaigning, a Fox News exit poll showed 72% of voters favour switching to a government-run healthcare plan, while 71% believed that the landmark Supreme Court 'Roe v Wade' ruling, which helped legalise abortion, should remain as it is.

Deep economic crisis

This shows how, in reaction to the deep economic and social crisis affecting the US, there is a widespread idea that things can't go on in the same direction. Years of stagnating or falling living standards for workers and sections of the middle class have produced disenchantment and, among some, a search for change.

This has been reflected in the massive increase in interest in socialism, including the support that left-leaning Sanders got in his 2016 and 2020 presidential election nomination campaigns.

Fearing that disappointment with Biden will strengthen the search for an alternative, sections of the Democratic Party leadership almost immediately began attacking the 'left' for the party's poor election showing, a blatant attempt to shift blame and also a pre-emptive strike to secure their position.

As President, Biden will be put to the test and found wanting - increasingly he will try to use the threat of Trump as a scarecrow. On this basis, Biden and the Democratic leadership will try to strike 'across the aisles' deals with at least some Republicans.

If the Republicans retain control of the Senate, Biden and Co will say there is no alternative if they want to get anything done. Even before election day, Biden was hinting that he was open to appointing Republicans to his cabinet, something Obama did four times during his presidency.

This is not accidental. The Democrats are a capitalist party, like the Republicans. Biden himself represents the so-called 'Washington consensus', the set of capitalist, often

neoliberal, policies that were enforced in many countries from the 1980s until the 2008-9 economic crisis.

Thomas Frank, a US commentator, wrote: "Biden personally played a leading role in many of the signature initiatives of the era: Nafta-style trade agreements, lucrative favours for banks, tough-on-crime measures, proposed cuts to social security..."

"Bill Clinton's welfare reform initiative was in fact a capitulation to racist tropes and brought about an explosion in extreme poverty. The great prison crackdown of 1994 was another step in cementing the New Jim Crow. And the biggest shortcoming of Obama's Affordable Care Act - leaving people's health insurance tied to their employer - has become painfully obvious in this era of mass unemployment and mass infection..."

"It is no coincidence that, as Democrats pursued their professional-class 'third way', Republicans became ever bolder in their preposterous claim to be a 'workers' party' representing the aspirations of ordinary people."

Working-class force

Experience shows that the 'lesser evil' argument (ie better Biden than Trump) is, at best, short-termist and, more importantly, obscures the question of starting the work now to win support for an independent, working-class based force that can defend living standards and pose the urgent necessity for a socialist alternative.

Even more than ever, there is the need for such a party that can pose an alternative, oppose all forms of oppression, and build a united struggle.

This is linked to the question of how to oppose and weaken the threat of right populism. Attempts need to be made to try to make inroads into those workers who voted for Trump, some of who had voted for Obama in 2008.

It means especially looking towards those who supported Trump because he appeared to be outside the ruling elite, without making any concessions to those racists who supported him.

In his nomination campaign, Sanders partially raised this, but then threw it away when he capitulated to the Democratic leadership in both 2016 and this year.



Sanders himself has a big responsibility for what has happened. It is now decades since he moved away from supporting the idea of forming a Labor party in the US. In doing so, he blocked opportunities to start to seriously build one.

Sanders has twice gathered mass support in the last five years, and yet at both times turned his supporters towards supporting the Democrats, a party which offers no alternative to capitalism.

A new force is above all necessary. Alongside clarity that the Democratic Party offers no way forward for working people or socialists, it needs to have a clear programme, with democratic and socialist demands.

Such a programme would be an alternative, not only to capitalism, but also to the individualist solutions proposed by both the supporters of 'identity politics' and the demagoguery of the right-populists. Even Trump's vote is unstable; those who see that he is not an 'outsider' to capitalism could be won to socialist ideas.

The creation of such a movement is already being prepared in the experiences of the struggles and protests that have rocked the US recently. The Black Lives Matter protests, the recent wave of workers' strikes, the women's demonstrations, the different protests against Trump and his policies, and the increased election turnout, all show the potential.

New struggles will drive events. The challenge facing socialists is to build the forces that can help lay the basis for a movement that will transform society, both in the US and, given the US's international position, worldwide.



WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

WORK AND INCOME

- Trade union struggle for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £12 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage of at least £15. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings. Scrap zero-hour contracts.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.

- Scrap Universal Credit. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
- A 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

ENVIRONMENT

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and un-recycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low-fare, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

RIGHTS

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.
- For the right to vote at 16.

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

- For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join
- or call 020 8988 8777
- or text your name and postcode to 07761 818 206 to find out more today!

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KIRILL VENEDIKTOV/CC

NICK CHAFFEY
SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Boris Johnson's recent U-turn, to extend furlough, will give a glimmer of hope to some workers, but will come too late for many already dumped by their employers.

Since March, 782,000 fewer people have a job. The majority are young workers aged 16 to 24.

Poverty levels have rocketed for those left in work on 80% wages - reflected in soaring demands on food banks, home evictions and calls for free school meals to be extended. Three million people slip through the government's inadequate support.

The idea of a new national lockdown with workers receiving even less - just 67% of wages and employers forced to contribute more - was untenable. Why? Because the furlough and support measures of the first lockdown were far from the "everything necessary" Johnson boasted. As a result his initial popularity had plummeted. 53 Tory MPs voting against or abstaining on a second national lockdown show the discontent Johnson faces in his own ranks.

Far from exploiting government

The Socialist Party calls for:

- Full pay for workers who are furloughed or asked to self-isolate
- All jobs must be protected - the trade unions must demand nationalisation of companies carrying out redundancies
- The financial books of big business must be open to scrutiny by the workers, to see where profits have gone
- Full employment and an end to poverty
- A programme of public works

to build affordable council housing for all

- Apprenticeship schemes at trade union rates of pay
- A 35-hour week, with no loss of pay
- A minimum wage of £15 an hour
- This should be financed by an immediate 50% wealth tax on the 1% and the £650 billion cash pile lying idle in the bank vaults of big business
- Nationalise the banks and the biggest 150 companies that dominate the economy

91,000 workers joined trade unions under the impact of Covid. The potential exists to gain much more for workers, if a serious fight is mobilised.

Work or 100% pay. That fightback would see many more thousands joining the unions, especially the youth.

It is vital to fight for socialist policies in the interests of the working class in the trade unions, and prepare to stand anti-cuts candidates in the May 2021 elections - the Tories first test at the ballot box since Covid. Only socialist measures can both address health needs, and maintain jobs, pay and economic development.

Jobs crisis: the fight for work or 100% pay - one of the sessions at socialism2020.net Online forum 20-23 November

Take this motion to your union meeting Labour movement conference to defend Corbyn and discuss new party

- This union branch condemns the suspension of Jeremy Corbyn by the Labour Party and the removal of his parliamentary whip. Jeremy has broken no rule and has always opposed antisemitism.
- This branch believes that the decision of Blairite Labour general secretary David Evans to suspend Jeremy for stating antisemitism within Labour has been "dramatically overstated for political reasons" is an incredible attack on the right of Labour Party members to express their views. This includes Constituency Labour Parties being banned from passing motions that criticise the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) report or Corbyn's suspension.
- This branch believes that this

represents a political attack on the pro-worker policies expressed in the Labour 2017 and 2019 general election manifestos under Jeremy's leadership.

Keir Starmer is intent on moving Labour in the direction of big business interests, shown by his secretary David Evans to suspend Boris Johnson keeping schools and colleges open during the new lockdown.

This union branch calls on the union executive/national committee to:

- In affiliated unions, instruct our representatives on Labour's national executive committee to demand that all disciplinary action against Jeremy Corbyn be rescinded
- Approach other unions, both inside and outside of Labour, to convene a labour movement conference to fight this attack, and discuss how to ensure workers have a vehicle that does fight for their interests

How can a mass workers' voice be built - one of the sessions at socialism2020.net Online forum 20-23 November

Tory U-turn: Free school meals Less starvation for us, more humiliation for the government

LINDSEY MORGAN
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

In its latest U-turn, the government finally agreed a £170 million package to support children - children largely made vulnerable as a result of the Tories' capitalist system.

Free school meals will be provided for those currently entitled to them - over Christmas, Easter and summer holidays - until the end of 2021. This is a huge sigh of relief for many families, like mine, who will no longer have to starve some days so their children can eat.

Footballer Marcus Rashford lived in poverty as a child. His campaigning has shown up the inhumanity of the Tories and provided much more 'opposition' than Keir Starmer's Labour.

The money - while massively welcome - isn't being given back to us because the Tories have developed a conscience. It is to stymie potential civil unrest.

One of Rashford's demands was for free school meals to be extended to all families in receipt of Universal Credit. Many low-paid workers are not entitled to free school meals,

despite being in need, because they earn slightly over the threshold. They missed out when free school meals were extended to holidays in the first lockdown.

Rashford has not merely accepted the deal. He has promised to keep campaigning.

Rashford said: "There is still so much more to do. And my immediate concern is the approximately 1.7 million children who miss out on free school meals, holiday provision, and Healthy Start vouchers, because their family income isn't quite low enough." As families are dragged down, there will be more demand on the scheme and many more families in need.

There must be an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £12 an hour, as a step towards £15, and benefits on the level of a living wage-work or 100% pay. It is a disgrace and a modern tragedy that, in the sixth richest country in the world, people need to campaign for children not to go hungry.

This U-turn is a victory, but we deserve so much more. If we can't 'afford' to feed our children under capitalism, we can't afford capitalism.

Tory U-turn: Furlough extended Not enough to save jobs

division to fight in the interests of the working class, Labour leader Keir Starmer has maintained general support for Johnson's measures. And Trade Union Congress (TUC) leader Frances O'Grady shamefully stood alongside Chancellor Rishi Sunak as he announced savage wage cuts.

Donate to the Socialism 2020 appeal now!

CHRIS NEWBY
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

With only days to go before the main political event of the year, it is vital that you get your pledges in now for the Socialism 2020 Fighting Fund Appeal.

If you want to donate, please visit: www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate and mark your donation for Socialism 2020 in the comment box.

If you would like to make an IOU please email finance@socialistparty.org.uk with how much you would like to donate.

With both donations and IOUs please send a photo of local campaigning in your area.

Hundreds of socialists, trade unionists, students, young workers and anti-cuts fighters will be coming together from 20 to 23 November to discuss all the complex questions that confront us in the fight for our lives and our livelihoods. Covid means it will be an online event. Socialism will be a place where everyone can participate in discussion on ideas to change the world.

We have made a good start to the appeal - but we need to ask everyone to donate, all members, supporters,

friends and family, to make sure we achieve the best possible amount. We need to explain that every penny is needed.

Normally we would be sat together, a thousand of us, listening to the rally speakers explain how capitalism causes misery across the world and how we can fight back against it. This year's speakers will put forward a Marxist analysis and programme vital to building an effective working class fightback: Hannah Sell, Socialist Party general secretary; Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party political secretary; Howie Hawkins, Green US presidential candidate; Bea Gardner,

Student activist; Hugo Pierre, Union NEC (personal capacity); Isai Priya, Socialist Party Black & Asian members coordinator. This year we can't get together physically for the rally on Saturday 21 November - but we still need to raise the money collectively. That's why we're asking for donations and pledges to be sent in now.

The pages of the Socialist are full of reports of the struggles involving trade unionists, students and community campaigners. Socialist Party members play an important part in these campaigns and, in some cases, lead them. It is vital that the Socialist

Party has the finances to be able to pay for leaflets, papers, posters and placards to get our socialist message to as wide an audience as possible. Every donation we receive for the Socialism 2020 appeal will help us put socialist ideas forward in a world where they are more needed than ever.

- For info about Socialism, the agenda, or to buy tickets: www.socialism2020.net or phone 020 8988 8777
- Details of how to watch the Socialism rally will be in the next issue of the Socialist



JOE FATHALLAH
CARDIFF EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

Wales emerged from a two-week lockdown on 9 November. There is little evidence that the 'firebreak' introduced by the Welsh government had much impact on the spread of the virus.

Case numbers are still rising. Seven local areas have a positive result in at least 20% of tests, and nearly a third in Merthyr Tydfil. The World Health Organisation (WHO) says restrictions should be maintained until the figure is less than 5%.

Over 1,300 people in Welsh hospitals have the virus. NHS workers report intense pressure on their ability to treat patients.

First Minister Mark Drakeford was pressured to introduce restrictions in the hope that they will be enough to allow a normal Christmas in Wales. But once again the Welsh government has opted for half measures which won't contain the spread.

Maximum profits

Drakeford focuses on limiting personal freedoms while leaving maximum freedom to make profits. The firebreak was not used to accelerate the development of mass testing. A properly functioning publicly funded 'test and trace' system would probably have meant the second lockdown wouldn't have been needed. The Welsh government should have broken with the Tories' nepotism on this.

Once half term was over, schools were open to all but the oldest children. These measures are to make sure parents of young children are kept working, but do significant damage in containing the virus.

On the other hand, far-lower-risk environments, like small shops, have been forced to close. The restrictions were imposed in crude top-down fashion.

In an attempt to pacify small business owners - forced to shut their shops and on the verge of bankruptcy - Drakeford announced supermarkets would only be allowed to sell 'essential items', so they didn't cut across sales from local shops.

This led to a significant backlash. People pointed out that a can of beans isn't much use without a tin opener.

If small businesses genuinely need assistance to survive the restrictions, then this should be provided directly from the Welsh government.

Socialist Party Wales demands:

- A massive Welsh government investment in test and trace
- Publicly owned and accountable test centres and labs to replace the failed Lighthouse Lab scheme
- Re-open public labs closed by cuts
- 24-hour test results for all who need them
- Full pay for all forced to self-isolate or furloughed
- In schools...
 - Weekly onsite testing of staff
 - Return to blended learning
 - No classes larger than 15
 - Government resources to help home learning
 - In universities...
 - Refund student fees
 - Cancel hall rents
 - Provide resources to allow students to return home safely if they wish
 - Free education
 - Workers' control of workplace safety
 - Stop privatisation of NHS and public services, under cover of Covid
 - Nationalise firms threatening redundancies

Covid law used against striking workers For workers' control of safety measures

IAIN DALTON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

On the very first day of the new national lockdown, police issued dispersal orders to a picket line of striking workers, on the grounds of breaching the new rules.

Unite members at Optare in Sherburn-in-Elmet have been social distancing and wearing masks, in contrast to contractors the company employs, who have been travelling into work in cars together without masks. Management has been harassing strikers and attempting to 'catch them out', despite strikers reporting numerous lapses around Covid measures by management.

Home Secretary Priti Patel's deliberate decision to end the exemption from Covid rules for protests is an aid to the bosses in attacking their workers.

How much additional risk is there

standing together on a picket line from workers who would be working together indoors? Optare workers are striking two days a week and working the other three.

The Tories' measures to tackle Covid are not politically neutral. They have acted in the interests of their class, the capitalists, to hand out lucrative contracts for PPE, testing, and 'track and trace' to Serco, G4S and others.

Ordinary working-class people's lives will be put first if measures to tackle the virus are taken out of the hands of big business and their political representatives, and put into the hands of democratically elected and accountable representatives of workers and their organisations - as the Socialist Party has advocated throughout.

The Labour Party under Starmer showed again how reliable a prop it aims to be for the capitalist class

by voting with the government on this. Workers need a party that will fight to put their needs first - not the profiteers - including defending their democratic rights to strike, picket and protest.

The Socialist Party condemns the use of the police and Covid regulations against the Optare strikers. We continue to encourage trade unionists and union branches to send messages of support to davidbrain99@icloud.com and donate to the strike fund via bank transfer:

• Bank: Unity trust bank. Account name: NE/200/1 Optare Branch. Account number: 20327132. Sort code: 60-83-01

What now for the fight against austerity? - one of the sessions at socialism2020.net Online forum 20-23 November

SOCIALISM TODAY



Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

November issue includes 'The battle for Unite'

In July-August issue, every page is on 'Lessons of the Corbyn experience' socialismtoday.org/subscribe 020 8988 8777

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• Go to tusc.org.uk for breaking news from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC)

RMT union AGM votes to defend union democracy - now for a fighting general secretary

TED WOOLLEY
RMT AGM DELEGATE (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

This year's RMT transport union's annual general meeting (AGM) was like no other I have ever attended.

Delegates were relieved that the conference took place at all. Due to Covid, it was organised as an online event, and at the last minute, the national executive committee decided to curtail it from five days to only two, to be concluded early next year.

As a result, the agenda was reduced substantially, with only the items which could not be dealt with later included.

However, the item by which this AGM will be remembered was an appeal against the national executive committee's decision in April, to suspend and discipline senior assistant general secretary Steve Hedley for comments he had made on Facebook back in March.

Steve has held a position of opposing the 'national unity' arguments of so many others in the trade union movement since the Covid crisis began, and has argued against the leadership calling off strikes.

Steve put forward a forceful defence, and delegate after delegate spoke in his support.

However, when general secretary Mick Cash rose to speak against the appeal, he demanded delegates vote it down, otherwise he would stand down from his position. The delegates responded to this ultimatum by supporting the appeal 44 for, with 23 against.

Minutes after the AGM had concluded, an online report announcing the general secretary's retirement was retweeted by RMT head office,

which disappointingly included attacks on the rank-and-file leadership of the union, and blamed bullying and factionalism for the reasons behind his decision.

These disgraceful comments, after a highly democratic decision, follow a controversial series of letters from the general secretary to the membership attacking our national executive committee over the summer. It is clear that Mick felt that the national executive committee, and now even the AGM, the parliament of the union, has no right to disagree with or challenge him. He was wrong.

The AGM passed judgement on this unacceptable position, and the process to elect a new general secretary now begins.

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

- Defending the union's policy on redundancies and attacks on pay and pensions. Bring the whole public transport network into public ownership

- No Transport for London cuts. Organise joint industrial action. Call on Mayor Khan to refuse to pass on Tory budget cuts

- Defend lay member democracy. For the general secretary to be accountable to national executive committee

- Approach other unions inside and outside Labour to resist Keir Starmer by calling a conference to discuss building a political vehicle for workers

- Maintain involvement with the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) to ensure a political challenge in next year's elections

Sainsbury's and Argos: Closures, cuts and soaring sales



SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN USDAW

The news of over 3,000 job cuts, with closures of Sainsbury's meat, fish and deli counters, will have been a bombshell to many Sainsbury's and Argos workers. As would the closure of 420 standalone Argos stores, alongside posting a £137 million loss for the half year to the end of September.

Like all the major supermarkets, Sainsbury's had seen surges in sales under lockdown, from the initial 'panic-buying' surge through to competitors in non-food sales being closed. Like-for-like retail sales are up by 6.9% as a result. Despite lockdown, sales in Argos (whose standalone stores had to shut as non-essential) have risen by 11%.

Many of the supermarkets have talked about additional spending due to the pandemic. In Sainsbury's case this is around £290 million, yet this additional spending was largely offset by business rates relief of £230 million.

Increased profit

When the figures are examined further, then even with a loss of £55 million from its banking business, Sainsbury's group underlying profit has actually increased by 26% up to £301 million for the half-year. It's the statutory profit - the underlying profit adjusted by one-off costs in which a loss has been registered for the year.

Yet over that same half-year,

Sainsbury's have reduced net debt by £610 million. Moreover, they're paying out both a special dividend for the delayed 2019-20 financial year, plus a dividend for the current half-year period as well!

So if all of this can be afforded from this half-year's income, why then make these cutbacks? It's simply that having lived without keeping these counters and stores open for part or all of the last six months, Sainsbury's bosses have decided they don't need these and the workers who staff them to keep piling on the profits.

Undoubtedly, this has been reinforced by 90% of Argos sales now being received digitally (although this includes collecting in store), up from 61% a year ago.

Unfortunately, both of the unions recognised in Sainsbury's, Usdaw and Unite, have released statements which seem to accept the closures of counters as largely inevitable, reconciling themselves that many workers could be redeployed into the expanding home delivery services and infrastructure. But why accept such closures as inevitable?

It's true that in recent years, faced with the growth of discounters Lidl and Aldi, many of the big supermarkets have attempted to copy parts of their model, which includes cutting costs wherever possible, including not having staffed counters. Whilst retaining meat and fish counters, Tesco have already used this crisis to shut their deli counters.

Yet counters offer a far more precise portion size than pre-packed products ever can, as well as advice for shoppers and the opportunity to speak to someone face-to-face, which for some, especially elderly shoppers, is welcome.

Why couldn't the retail unions link up with customers in their local communities to build a campaign to save counter services? With redundancy notices not coming into effect until March next year, there is time to build such a campaign.

Strategy

Likewise, in their retail industrial strategy, Usdaw championed a 'bricks and clicks' approach to expanding online retail, which would see physical stores maintained as an important part of infrastructure for returns etc. But this will not happen by wishful thinking or asking retail bosses nicely, if such a strategy is to be pursued then the union must organise a fight for this in the here and now.

More than ever, a co-ordinated approach is needed from Usdaw and Unite. Currently, neither has full collective bargaining rights within the company, and the Sainsbury's bosses play each union off against the other - this has to end.

There should be joint meetings called of Sainsbury's and Argos workers in both unions to discuss the situation urgently and develop a strategy to fight to defend these jobs.

Rolls-Royce: Lancashire workers' strike shows the way to fight aerospace cuts and job losses

Barnoldswick

DAVE BEALE
CHAIR, UNITE LANCS COMMUNITY BRANCH
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Rolls-Royce workers in Barnoldswick, Lancashire, launched strike action on 6 November to save jobs and stop their factory's closure. The workers' union Unite secured a sensational ballot result of 94% for industrial action and has rock-solid local community support.

However, Rolls-Royce is a hard-nosed employer. It plans 350 compulsory redundancies at the plant, and the transfer of Trent jet engine blade production to Singapore, while simultaneously seeking £1 billion of Tory government support. This is part of a bigger Rolls-Royce plan for UK and global job losses, with half of its workforce being in the civil aviation sector.

Unite has demanded Rolls-Royce cancel its plans to move production offshore, or introduce similar work on comparable employment levels. The union thinks failure to do so will make the plant unviable and lead to full closure. The factory dominates the small town and implementation of Rolls-Royce's plans would be a disaster for the local community and this region of Lancashire. Thousands of jobs are also believed to be at threat in the factory's supply chain.

Unite regional officer, Ross Quinn, said: "Unite has given Rolls-Royce every opportunity to change its plans, confirm there will be no more compulsory redundancies and guarantee the long-term future of Barnoldswick, but it has refused to do so. To offshore work and destroy the viability of this historic factory would be nothing short of industrial vandalism." The Barnoldswick plant is the birthplace of jet engine production and has a highly skilled workforce which is very proud of its history.

A victory for the union here would be a major boost for other workers fighting job losses especially with the vast economic crisis we now face. Almost certainly, other employers will be watching this dispute closely too, aware of the wider implications for the tough battles ahead.

It could be a protracted dispute but the union has the potential to win. The mood, money and solidarity are there for escalation of the action and imposing a defeat on the employer. Even a factory occupation is possible.

At the same time, the global economic crisis in civil aviation is not going to go away. Ultimately, nationalisation of Rolls-Royce is the only real path to provide full job protection and an alternative plan of production, if necessary, using the high level of skills of the Barnoldswick workforce.

• Please send messages of support to: Ross.Quinn@uniteunion.org



PHOTO MARK KOBAYASHI-HILLARY/CC

Derby

IAN HUNTER
DERBY SOCIALIST PARTY

As the BBC headline on 5 November stated, the "cull continues" at Rolls-Royce. The company has announced its intention to create a further 1,400 redundancies in its civil aerospace division which makes and maintains aero engines. Of this 1,400, 950 will be in the UK, and is part of the continuing programme to cut 9,000 jobs from Rolls-Royce's 52,000 global workforce.

Derby is Rolls-Royce's main aerospace plant and will again bear the brunt of the redundancies. This will mean that Derby's aerospace workforce has been halved over the last three years. 2018 saw 3,000 job losses, May 2020 1,500 redundancies, and now (November) the bulk of the proposed 950 job cuts. This is a further shattering blow to the local economy and to the futures of many younger workers.

In May of this year Rolls-Royce said it would take action to "increase our liquidity, dramatically reduce our spending in 2020", and that "we will need to take further action."

Rolls-Royce's aerospace division

is financially in dire straits, and currently shoring up its finances through bond sales, share issues, and capital loans. The company is appealing to the government for financial support but currently appears to be more interested in 'financial engineering' than production engineering, in their desire to prop up and support share value, dividend returns, and executive pay and bonuses.

Despite declaring earlier in the year to 'fight for every job', Unite locally has repeatedly failed to take a fighting stance, preferring instead to attempt to continue talks and press for government aid.

Meanwhile, Rolls-Royce has continued to steamroller through their resizing of the workforce and axing jobs. A notable fighting exception recently is the strike action by the workers at the Barnoldswick plant in Lancashire.

Socialist Party members will continue to campaign for no job cuts, nationalisation of the aerospace, division with democratic workers' control, and the development of an alternative production plan for sustainable employment engaged in the production of socially and environmentally useful products and services, utilising the skills and experience of the workforce.

Unite has been reported that Roger McKenzie, assistant general secretary of Unison and another candidate in the general secretary election, has been referred to the Labour Party for alleged antisemitism.

Hugo Pierre says: "I completely oppose any attempt to witch-hunt Corbyn-supporters in the Labour Party. I also strongly oppose any moves inside Unison to block members' right to debate Corbyn's suspension and deny the right of the Labour Link, the committee of Unison members who pay into the affiliated political fund, to even discuss a motion of support for him.

Hugo Pierre for Unison general secretary Fight the witch-hunt of Corbyn and his supporters

Socialist candidate in Unison's general secretary election, Hugo Pierre, has condemned the witch-hunt against Jeremy Corbyn and those who support him in the Labour Party, and the attempts in the union to squash debate on the issue.

Hugo is calling for a conference of the trade union and workers' movement inside and outside the Labour Party to fight these attacks and discuss how to achieve genuine independent political representation.

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"This hostile environment within the Labour Party is further evidence that the right wing backing Starmer are determined to make a full break with Corbyn's political programme and are intolerant of any socialist ideas. It makes clear any attempt to unite left and right is false.

"This confirms the position I have argued for in this general secretary election, that Unison needs an independent fighting political voice. "I am the only candidate in the election to have said we should only use our members' money to politically back those who back us and the policies we stand for.

"Antisemitism must be taken seriously and combated, as must all other forms of racism. This, however, is a cynical attempt to use false accusations of misuse the serious issue of antisemitism to attack the left.

"Keir Starmer has laid down a clear challenge to the trade union movement. The choice is clear - accept having no party that represents the interests of the working-class majority, or stand up and fight!

"If I was general secretary of Unison, I would immediately contact Unite and other trade unions to call a conference of the workers' movement inside and outside of the Labour Party, to fight this attack and to discuss how to ensure workers have a political vehicle that does fight for their interests.

"In the midst of the worst economic crisis since the 1930s - with unemployment spiralling and children going hungry - a mass socialist vote, including at the ballot box, is desperately needed.

"If this step is not taken from the top, there will be many workers and young people who will be prepared to do so anyway.

"Unison branches should be allowed to support them. Not a penny more to cutters and privatisers."

- For more information on Hugo's campaign and his full programme for a fighting, democratic Unison general secretary on a worker's wage, see 'Hugo Pierre 4 Unison General Secretary' on Facebook.

- Rules introduced by Unison to clamp down on democratic debate in the union mean that candidates for union elections cannot 'invite or accept' support 'in money or kind' from any entity which 'is not provided for in Unison rules'. These articles are produced without the authorisation of Hugo Pierre, in order to comply with these requirements.



HUGO PIERRE

SPYCOPS INQUIRY: WHY THE CAPITALIST STATE FEARED AND CONTINUES TO FEAR SOCIALISM

HANNAH SELL

SOCIALIST PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY AND
SPYCOPS INQUIRY PARTICIPANT

Almost six years after its establishment, the public inquiry into undercover policing has finally begun. It was set up by Theresa May, then home secretary, to head off growing pressure following a series of revelations about 'spycops'.

Environmentalists exposed an undercover police spy - Mark Kennedy - in their ranks. He and others were revealed to have had relationships with women activists while under cover, even having children in some cases. These abusive and deceitful relationships caused great harm to the women affected.

Another spycop, Peter Francis, who infiltrated Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE) and the organisation which led it, Militant Labour - now the Socialist Party - revealed what he had done and demanded a public inquiry. As his barrister put it in his opening statement to the inquiry, Francis became a whistle-blower because "the public have a right to know what is done in their name and paid for by their taxes".

The inquiry is not, however, shaping up to meet Francis's desire to let the public know what happened. It has not released the names of the big majority of the organisations spied on.



The foundation of the SDS is uniformly justified by fear of the revolutionary events taking place in France in 1968 spreading to Britain

Nor has it given us the real or even the cover names of the majority of spies. The 'non-state core participants' - those who were spied on - have, in almost all cases, still not received any of the police files relevant to them.

The inquiry reports that it has received over one million pages of documents, but less than 6,000 have been released to the core participants.

The Queen's Counsel (QCs senior barristers) for both the inquiry and for the majority of spycops, point out that the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS) - the Metropolitan Police's spycops organisation from 1968 to 2008 - was funded by the Home Office and reported to M15 (domestic spy agency), which benefited "greatly from the intelligence product" it secured.

Yet, many key documents on the links between the three bodies - for example from a 2014 report on the Home Office's funding of SDS - are absent, presumably shredded.

Window on the state

Even so, for anyone wanting to get a glimpse of the racism and sexism that was rife, and also to understand the role of the police and other state agencies, now and in the past, the Inquiry has already provided valuable material

Oliver Sanders QC, representing 117 spycops, defended undercover policing as nothing new, and "its lawfulness was confirmed" as far back as 1833 by a parliamentary select committee. He did not add that the committee was responding to complaints about the early Metropolitan Police's routine use of police spies and excessive force when dealing with 'unlawful political assembly'.

The Met's defence at that time was that they had employed the least intrusive and coercive methods necessary for the proper enforcement of laws and the maintenance of the public peace. Identical to Sanders' defence 190 years later!

Back in 1833, the inquiry exonerated the Met of the charges. One of the first tasks undertaken by the newly legal police spies was infiltrating and reporting on a major strike by London tailors in 1834.

It is significant that in 1833, the role of police spies was openly discussed at a parliamentary select committee. At that stage only one in seven adult men - and, of course, no women - had the right to vote. The franchise was limited to property owners who, via 'watch committees', went on to have considerable rights to demand the police acted in their interests.

When the working class won the vote, however, they did not win democratic control of the police or other

state agencies. On the contrary, as the inquiry has already illustrated, the forces of the state continued to act, ultimately, in the defence of the capitalist elite. Many aspects of their work were, and are, shrouded in secrecy.

At today's inquiry, the solicitor advocate for the Met explained the SDS had two central roles: "gathering intelligence for the purposes of preventing public disorder", and "to assist the security service in its task of defending the UK from attempts at espionage and sabotage and from actions of persons judged to be subversive of the security of the state."

Much emphasis was given on how spycops infiltration of protest groups resulted in demonstrations and protests being more peaceful. No evidence was given for this, however. On the contrary, the potential for violence on demonstrations was illustrated by pointing to two people killed on them in the 1970s - Blair Peach and Kevin Gately - without pointing out that both demonstrators were killed by the police!

In one of countless examples, Peter Francis described how in 1993 he spied on YRE's mass demonstration against the far-right British National Party. Far from leading to peaceful policing, that demonstration was savagely attacked by the Met.

In addition, the National Union of Mineworkers' barrister gave evidence as to how state infiltration was just one aspect of the sustained onslaught that striking miners faced from the police and other state agencies during their year-long strike (1984-85): "11,313 miners were arrested... 7,000 injured, 5,653 put on trial, 960 dismissed from their employment and 200 imprisoned."

The second role of the SDS, however, even more starkly reveals in whose interests they acted. It was founded in 1968, following an anti-Vietnam war demonstration outside the US embassy in Grosvenor Square, London, where 250 protesters were arrested.

Labour's James Callaghan was Home Secretary at the time, and is reported to have been "very concerned about the October [anti-Vietnam war] demonstration".

The QC for the inquiry summed up the reasons for SDS's establishment as follows: "Our government was concerned about communism, particularly but, importantly for our purposes, not limited to, the Soviet version. The United States was deeply involved in an increasingly unpopular war in Vietnam," and "that conflict was the subject of the mass demonstrations and public disorder on the streets of London which led to the formation of the SDS."



The more overt police 'intelligence gathering' operation usually seen on labour movement protests PHOTO PAUL MATTSOON

"Public disorder and discontent amongst students was widespread in Europe, notably in Paris. There were fears, in official circles, that the same was occurring in London and could grow out of hand. In far-left circles, some at least, were hoping that it would do so. The Communist Party of Great Britain was not an instigator of mass protest. It was advancing its aims through a different strategy. We shall hear evidence that Maoist and Trotskyist groups were organising with determination, as were other groups, at a time of heightened political consciousness."

Other barristers for the state also gave considerable emphasis to events

taking place in France. The barrister for the Met, for example, stated: "In France, there was widespread civil unrest, with mass protests, general and wildcat strikes, industrial action, rioting and the occupation of universities and factories"

The spycops barrister added: "1968 was marked by an upsurge in unrest and disorder: the Prague Spring and the subsequent Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia; near-revolution in France; student protests across Europe"

The foundation of the SDS is uniformly justified by fear of the revolutionary events taking place in France - where ten million workers occupied



Domestic spying agency M15 supplied employers organisations with details of union 'troublemakers' PHOTO PAUL MATTSOON

the factories - and elsewhere, spreading to Britain. From the outset, its focus was overwhelmingly on infiltrating the left.

All of the eleven MPs known to have been spied on, for example, were in Labour and generally on the left. They included Dave Nellist, Socialist Party member and Coventry South East Labour MP (1983-92).

Also infiltrated were black justice and family campaigns, some of them grieving the death of a family member at the hands of the police or racist gangs.

Of the 1,000 organisations it is known to have infiltrated, only three are thought to be right wing.

To try and justify this to the inquiry, state barristers have so far used a mixture of diversionary hyperbolic lies and internally contradictory arguments. On the one hand, they argue spying is necessary in order to uncover serious crimes like sex trafficking, drug dealing and so on.

This is a complete diversion. Even they do not attempt to accuse the organisations the SDS infiltrated of being involved in such crimes, and undercover officers tasked with uncovering serious crime are part of another department not dealt with by the inquiry.

Then they argue that they were worried about a foreign power - the Soviet Union. Yet they are forced to recognise that the Soviet-backed Communist Party of Great Britain was not "an instigator of mass protest".

Trotskyists targeted

Most of the groups they spied on were opposed to the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union, and many were supporters of Leon Trotsky - who had been murdered on Stalin's orders as a result of his intransigent opposition to Stalinism and his fight for workers' democracy in the Soviet Union.

Finally, they fall back on arguing that those they spied on were in favour of some form of "totalitarian" alternative to "parliamentary democracy".

This is a complete lie. For example, Militant, now the Socialist Party, which the inquiry barrister admits was spied on by M15 as well as the SDS, then and now, argues for an enormous extension of democracy; calling, for example, for the abolition of the undemocratic House of Lords, for MPs to be elected for a maximum of two years and subject to recall by their constituents, and to receive a maximum salary commensurate to a skilled worker's wage.

Their final straw man is that the past is another country, and what was done then is not relevant today, because "following the end of the Cold

War" the "far left became of less interest to M15 and the SDS".

Yet this too is contradicted by their defence of a continued 'right to spy', including the Met's barrister pointing to the 'Spycops' Bill currently passing through parliament, which would authorise state agencies "to participate in criminal conduct where the conduct is necessary and proportionate", and pointing to "necessity for these purposes", including defending "the economic wellbeing of the United Kingdom."

What does this mean other than the 'economic wellbeing' of employers facing their workforce going on strike or, more broadly, growing support for socialist ideas that threaten the 'economic wellbeing' of Britain's capitalist elite?

Despite the lack of information and the state barristers' desperate attempts to disguise it, the reality that the SDS existed to defend the existing order - an order where a tiny minority own and control the main industrial and financial levers of society - came through loud and clear in the first week of the inquiry.

Those that were spied on were considered a potential threat to that order. Militant stood for, as does the Socialist Party today, the nationalisation - under democratic workers' control and management - of the major corporations and banks that dominate the economy.

Militant was able to lead effective mass struggles that took on and defeated Thatcher's government - including in the leadership of Liverpool City Council, and then spearheading the 18 million-strong poll tax non-payment campaign. This is what made us a target for the state.

Today, in a world where Britain's billionaires' wealth has increased by more than a third in the last year - while unemployment soars, and where there is growing discontent with the existing order - it is laughable to suggest that "political policing" against the left has ceased.

For five years, until the start of this year, one of the left MPs that the SDS spied on was leader of the Labour Party - Jeremy Corbyn.

When he was first elected, Britain's most senior general expressed his "worry" that Corbyn's programme might ever be "translated into power". And there can be no doubt that while the head or the army 'worried', other state agencies were spying.

In 2017, Corbyn's radical programme led to the biggest increase in votes for any party in one general election since 1945.

Britain's capitalist class was clearly terrified - not so much of Corbyn



Militant was able to lead effective mass struggles that took on and defeated Thatcher's government ... this is what made us a target for the state

himself - but that if he won a general election, mass popular pressure could push his government into taking far-reaching socialist measures.

Corbyn has now been defeated, but new possibilities to build mass support for socialist ideas will again develop. Given the pro-capitalist right's increasing stranglehold on the Labour Party, the development of a new, mass party with a socialist programme will be posed sooner rather than later.

Just as in the past, no amount of political policing will be able to prevent this. Famously, prior to World War One, two of the six Russian Bolshevik deputies (members of the Duma parliament) were among numerous police spies that had infiltrated the party.

But this did not prevent the Bolshevik party leading the October 1917 Russian revolution, in which the working class was able to take power for the first time.

Nonetheless, the workers' movement needs to fight for an end to all political policing, and for a police force that is genuinely democratically-controlled and accountable.

Despite its limitations, the spycops inquiry gives an opportunity to publicise the repressive role of state agencies during the last 50 years in acting to defend the existing capitalist order, and the measures they were prepared to take in order to do so.



The influential, Militant-initiated anti-racist organisation YRE was targeted by the state PHOTO RICHARD NEWTON



Socialist organisations and movements have long been targets for undercover police agents PHOTO PAUL MATTSOON

Socialist Students statement Solidarity with Manchester students – Fight for democratic control of campus safety



CARDIFF SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Socialist Students sends solidarity to students at the University of Manchester (UoM), who through their protests, have ensured the removal of two-metre high security fences designed to pen them in. University management took the outrageous decision to set up fences around the Fallowfields student accommodation, with the only available exit for students guarded by security.

After the protests, UoM Vice Chancellor Nancy Rothwell apologised and announced the fences would be removed first thing the following morning, begging the question why they were ever set up in the first place? This incident highlights the crucial need to take decision-making about how to curb the spread of the virus on campus out of the hands of university vice-chancellors and management, and put it in under the democratic control and oversight of staff and students ourselves.

Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, Socialist Students has been calling for the establishment of democratically elected health and safety committees on the campuses, made up of campus trade unions, staff and students. For years, management on campuses have been

happy to implement vicious cuts to jobs, courses, and student support services, as well as privatisation and outsourcing - attacking both our education and staff. Why should we trust them to run the campuses in our interests in this time of crisis?

Cuts on campuses

It's been these cuts - cheered on by the Tories and right-wing Labour MPs in Westminster - which have left our campuses completely vulnerable to the spread of the virus. And these cuts are the result of the tuition fee funding system, which means our universities go underfunded while university bosses compete among each other to attract as many students to 'their' universities as possible.

They have gone so far this year as lying to students about face-to-face teaching and the existence of 'real-life' freshers' and other social events. We demand a full refund of the fees paid this year, and public funding of free education.

Socialist Students condemns this outrageous incident on the Manchester University campus. But attacks like this are happening on students all across the country, as the government and university management try

and pin the blame for the spread of the virus on students.

We call for the establishment of staff and student health and safety committees on the campuses, as a step towards a democratic discussion about how to start running the universities in our interests. We fight to reverse all of the funding cuts to our campuses in the last decade, and to end all outsourcing on campus. We demand an end to rip-off landlords preying on students for profit, and fight for students to be able to democratically set rents in all student halls.

To win all of that means building a national student movement, armed with a programme to kick private profit out of higher education. It means fighting for the scrapping of tuition fees, and for government funding for our universities, to guarantee a high quality, safe and free education for all students.

Socialist Students recently held a rally bringing together over 80 student campaigners and young workers from across the country. We discussed building the national campaign for free education, for decent well paid jobs for all, and for a future for young people. Get in touch with Socialist Students to join us on your local campus.

Staff and students must unite for safety

SALLY GRIFFITHS
SALFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

Students reacted immediately to the fences being erected, holding outdoor meetings and rallies to communicate with each other and to let the university know they were having none of it. After a night of protest, the university "recognised" their mistake of not advising the students that they "were taking measures to improve their safety" and promised to remove the barriers. The students had already removed many of the seven-foot barriers.

At the protests, home-made banners including "HMP Fallowfield - £9K to enter" were abundant. Students spoke of how they had been tricked into returning by being assured their universities were safe. One student said: "We were promised a safe campus. Thousands of students live in unsafe halls and then we are being told this is our fault. This is not our fault." Another said they were being "treated like animals."

The students are being treated like cash-cows during their study. Dragged back to university campuses and paying £9,000 per annum for perhaps one socially distanced lecture a week, paying hefty fees for accommodation that isn't fit for self-isolation - the



NICK CHAFFEY

students are rightly angry. Students' unions should organise, mobilise and demand fees and accommodation refunds. Fees should be cancelled and students should have oversight of all measures proposed to stop the spread of Covid. Safe campuses are essential for students and staff alike. The campus trade unions should link up with students' unions and Socialist Students to challenge university management and make the universities a decent and safe place to work and study.

Southampton trade unionists demand: "We won't pay for Covid"

SUE ATKINS
SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Southampton Trades Council held a protest rally on Saturday 7 November, which in the circumstances of lockdown was small, but with a bold, positive spirit.

We had done a risk assessment, maintained social distancing, and wore face coverings to be as safe as possible, while maintaining our right to protest.

As local trade unionists, we believe it is important not to lower our banner at this time, no matter what some of our trade union leaders might think. We are not 'all in it together' while kids are going hungry, students are in prison-like conditions at

university, thousands are losing their jobs every week, and illegal evictions are taking place making thousands homeless. We raised the demands for "work or full pay", "defend jobs and services", "feed the kids" and "we won't pay for Covid".

Our protest attracted the attention of two police officers who personally were not opposed to our rally, and indeed explained that protesting is our human right. They told us about cuts to their own service which has meant all the preventative work they valued has gone out of the window. So it would seem that opposition to endless austerity is reaching deep into society. That is why it is vital that we continue to be out on the streets, to articulate an alternative.



NICK CHAFFEY

Determined to struggle for a new mass workers' party

● Cardiff

Socialist Party Wales moved quickly to respond to news of Corbyn's suspension, with all branches calling meetings to discuss what the working class must do next, now that it's clear that the road to transforming Labour is blocked.

Cardiff West branch managed to more than triple its usual weekly attendance at a meeting addressed by the Socialist Party's general secretary, Hannah Sell. 35 people attended, including 13 people with whom we'd had no previous contact. The branch had put up posters near supermarkets and sent everyone who liked our social media posts short, friendly messages inviting them to attend.

There was intense emotion in the meeting - some in despair, but mainly angry at the sabotage of the right wing while Corbyn was leader, and their ruthless witch-hunt once they gained the leadership. There was determination to find a way to get socialist ideas to the mass of ordinary people, and an understanding that this means standing independently of Starmer's Labour.

Several people that attended are interested in having discussions about joining the Socialist Party with, at the time of writing, one person having agreed to join already, and an inactive member restarting their membership subs. There was enthusiasm for standing Socialist candidates as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in the Welsh parliamentary elections next year.

ROSS SAUNDERS
CARDIFF SOCIALIST PARTY

● North London

37 people came to the North London Socialist Party meeting on 4 November, together with Hackney branch. Ten of the attendees weren't members of the Socialist Party... yet.

Six days before our regular weekly meeting, Jeremy Corbyn was suspended from the Labour Party. We quickly changed our meeting topic to discuss it.

Throughout the week, we were constantly talking on WhatsApp about who else we could invite to our discussion. Dave Nellist, Socialist Party member from Coventry, introduced the discussion on how we can fight for a new mass workers' party. When Dave was a Coventry MP, he was expelled from Labour for refusing to pay his Poll Tax.

Our meetings are on Zoom. And although better than not meeting at all, it isn't as good as face-to-face discussion. We set up another WhatsApp group for a small team of Socialist Party recruiters. We messaged new people during the meeting to see if they liked what they heard, and if they would like to join the Socialist Party to help fight for it? Three days after our meeting, three new people have joined our growing Socialist Party branch.

IAN PATTISON
NORTH LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

After Corbyn: How can a mass working class political voice be built?
socialism2020.net
Online forum 20-23 November



Leicester Socialist Party members campaigning at the start of the second lockdown LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND					
AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q3-4: OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2020		DEADLINE: 31 DECEMBER 2020
East Midlands	883	1,850			48%
Northern	288	750			38%
North West	382	1,150			33%
London	1,321	4,600			29%
West Midlands	704	2,600			27%
South West	396	1,800			22%
Southern & SE	394	2,350			17%
Yorkshire	384	2,550			15%
Wales	283	2,300			12%
Eastern	100	1,200			8%
Other	415	3,850			11%
TOTAL	5,500	25,000			22%

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socialist students
Visit socialiststudents.org.uk/join
or call 020 8988 8761
or text your name and school, college or uni to 07749 379 010

Selling the Socialist
Just some of the events where the Socialist newspaper was sold in the past week...

After some discussion, we decided to do a normal campaign stall at our usual time, despite lockdown and uncertainty of how police, and

more importantly the public would react. We decided to go to our usual spot in the main shopping area of Brighton. It was definitely a lot quieter with all shops around us shut, but people were out and about. There was no hostility to us being out campaigning from anyone, and no approach to us by police. We had four members out, including our new recruit this week who

sold his first paper. In the end we sold eleven papers, including making our first sale on the contactless card machine. We got a good response to our slogan: "Trump's gone - now let's get rid of Boris!"
GLENN KELLY
BRIGHTON SOCIALIST PARTY
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MORRISON BRETT/CC

Trump is out – Our readers react

I teach US History for GCSE. I spent a chunk of the lesson yesterday trying to explain why the federal constitution uses an electoral college and not a popular vote to choose a president (because the founding fathers wanted to secure slavery). And why the voting regulations vary so much across the nation (a legacy from reconstruction and the Jim Crow era). Intelligent 15-year-olds can understand it for what it is - a reminder that racism is embedded in the fabric of US society.

CHRIS HOLMES

As good as it is to see the end of Trump's maniacal time as president, don't forget Biden and Harris are still representatives of the ruling class and ultimately act in their interests.

Trump became president for a reason, and that's because people are pissed off with their living and work conditions, and thought Trump might be different to the usual establishment politicians.

The conditions that led to Trump will remain under the Biden presidency, with the Democrats trying to manage crisis-ridden capitalism. The US needs a mass workers' party with a proper socialist programme giving a voice and lead for working-class people.

MICHAEL HIRST

Up until news broadcaster CNN declared Biden as President-elect, it was fairly easy listening. At times they were witty in their condemnation of Trump. I laughed at Trump being called an "obese turtle on

its back flailing in the hot sun", then seeing the crowds pouring onto the streets. Particularly the young people, black and white, it reminded me of when Mubarak was ousted in Egypt. These young people were celebrating seeing the back of a racist, misogynistic president.

All of this has been riveting to watch. But now CNN, part of the capitalist establishment, are going out of their way to pretend that 'all voices must be heard' - except those who agree with Sanders or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. From CNN's point of view, any idea of socialism or defunding the police cannot be tolerated. In reality CNN, and the establishment it represents, want these young people to celebrate today, then to go home and leave politics in the hands of the establishment's representative - Joe Biden. If these young people want a decent future they're going to have to fight.

ELAINE BRUNSKILL

"We've dumped Trump." He's thrown all of his toys out of the pram, so "take him away." Trouble is, he's not going far. He'll hang around like the ghouls stoking up trouble. Then in four years he will try and come back unless he croaks.

The Democrats will be damn-all use, tied as they are to the rotting corpse of

capitalism. They will not succeed in dragging US workers out of the very deep world recession. Then we'll see the return of Trumpism with a vengeance if he can bamboozle or demoralise enough people.

Is this as good as it gets? Working people and youth desperately need real democratic socialist parties that can thrash out a way forward, here and in America, by fighting to change the system forever. Join the Socialist Party today and get in that fight!

CHRIS PARRY

While the majority of Americans, and indeed a majority around the world, are breathing a sigh of relief at seeing the back of Donald Trump, they should reflect on why the billionaire bigot got to the White House in the first place. The answer is because of the anti-working class policies pursued by the capitalist leadership of the Democrats, including the likes of Biden, over the last three or four decades.

Just like Tony Blair's 'Third Way' capitalism in the UK represented a seamless transition from 'Thatcherism', the same process occurred with Clinton, Biden et al continuing 'Reaganism' in the US. That meant policies such as massive tax breaks for corporations and the super-rich, increasing wealth and health

inequality, dismantling social security, pursuing anti-union policies, demonising and incarcerating young black men, and negotiating free trade deals accelerating deindustrialisation.

Little wonder then that in the 2016 presidential election, many working people were indifferent or even hostile to the establishment Democrat candidate Hillary Clinton, while Republican Trump, with his pseudo pro-worker rhetoric, was able to flip previously Democrat-supporting states.

Biden, in defeating left-leaning Bernie Sanders in the primaries, made it crystal clear that he represented 'business as usual' capitalist politics. This was ignored in voters' desperation to oust Trump, but unless the labour movement takes steps to break from the Democrats and construct a new, mass working-class party, based on socialist policies, then Trumpism can return.

SIMON CARTER

US after the elections with Howie Hawkins, Green Party presidential candidate - one of the sessions at socialism2020.net Online forum 20-23 November

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

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

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

THE SOCIALIST INBOX

● Killed by the system

Philippa Day died having overdosed - A letter from the DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) was found next to

her rejecting her request for a benefits assessment to be carried out at her home - a decision the family believes triggered the overdose.

She was a single mum, with a history of domestic abuse, and had been thrust into a cycle of debt after her benefits were reduced.

Cutting benefits is state violence. Let's ensure the DWP knows that people are watching this inquest. We know there is blood on the government's hands.

AMY COUSENS

● Priced out of safety

Tory scum strike again. Around 300,000 people are living in tinder boxes clad in Grenfell-style cladding, like my mother's flat. Residents have now been made liable by this Tory government to pay for the cladding's removal. My mother and thousands of others cannot afford the astronomical cost.

The Tories are endangering hundreds of thousands of people in these buildings just so their billionaire landlord mates don't have to spend a penny. Tories not only want to starve children, they also don't care if you die in a fire because

you didn't have the money to replace the dangerous cladding. The Tories, with their right-wing ideology, are a danger to everyday people's lives.

MARK TROTTER

● Socialist internationalism to oppose militarism

Those who survived the Great War greeted 11 November as the end of the insanity, and the beginning of peace. They would have been mystified to see generals and royals using it as an opportunity to celebrate war over a hundred years later.

Since the end of the Second World War, there has not been a single day of peace. In my lifetime there has been one imperial war of conquest after another.

The red poppy is an ambiguous symbol. On the one hand it represents remembering those who fell in war, and the money raised is used to support those soldiers who suffered as a result of war.

On the other hand it is used by generals and the royal family to glorify war. If anyone dares to criticise this disgusting militarism, they are immediately accused of disrespecting the fallen and being too mean to help the military victims of warfare.

The people of Iraq, Syria or Afghanistan are some of the poorest people in the world. What with the ruthless bombing campaigns of American imperialism and the disgusting brutality of the Taliban and ISIL, their sufferings have been made worse.

Socialist internationalism is the only basis on which militarism can be opposed.

DEREK MCMILLAN

Book Review: A revolutionary whose ideas couldn't be killed

TROTSKY'S IDEAS LIVE ON IN THE CWI

MARK BEST

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

Eighty years after his assassination, the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) has published a collection of ten essays on the life and ideas of Leon Trotsky. It's a portrait of a lifelong revolutionary, one of the leaders of the Russian Revolution alongside Lenin, who was persecuted, exiled and murdered at the say-so of Stalin. Trotsky was killed because of his struggle for the genuine ideas of Marxism, against the distortions of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Peter Taaffe, describing the Transitional Programme, writes: "Here unfolds before us in all its richness the application of the method of Marxism to the historical tasks of the workers' movement". These essays are in the same vein. Trotsky engaged with debates and revolutionary struggles, and leaves a wealth of material to be studied and used in the fight for socialism today.

"We cannot select the arena and the conditions for our activity to suit our own likes and dislikes", Trotsky wrote, regarding the trade unions in Britain. This book provides clarity to many contradictory and complex conditions we face today and combines the lessons of Trotsky's works with an analysis of the present time.

Political programme

What programme is necessary to bridge the gulf between the necessity of the socialist transformation of society and the confidence of the working class to lead that transformation? What lessons can be learnt from the fight against German fascism? How should socialists work in trade unions whose leaders will line up with the bosses rather than struggle for socialism? How do socialists relate to movements for national independence?

These questions can only be answered by an analysis of the concrete situation - the mood and movements of class forces, tactical flexibility, and an unwavering confidence in the ability of the working class to run society for itself.

Trotsky in the 1920s and 30s was writing at a time of capitalist crisis and decay. His writings deal with the tempo of events, of revolutions and counter-revolutions, of mass movements, war, and missed opportunities for socialist change.

His analysis of the Soviet Union was that it degenerated into a bloody mockery of socialism, but which still gave a glimpse of something different to capitalism. Without understanding the class nature of the Soviet regime, it would have been impossible to understand the effects that capitalist triumphalism had on mass consciousness after its collapse, or to build support for socialism in Russia and Eastern Europe today.

It was experience of the class struggle, and through debates and discussions in the workers' movement, that



Here unfolds before us in all its richness the application of the method of Marxism to the historical tasks of the workers' movement



It was experience of the class struggle, and through debates and discussions in the workers' movement, that Trotsky, Lenin and others developed their ideas



Trotsky, Lenin and others developed their ideas and understanding of the importance of the need for a party to fight for these ideas.

Trotsky spent the last years of his life building a new socialist international organisation - the Fourth International from supporters of the International Left Opposition in the Communist International, and workers moving into struggle. This was after reaching the conclusion that a new organisation was needed after the transformation of the Third International into the "border guard" of the Stalinist Soviet Union. He wrote in 1935 that this was "the most important work of my life" - fighting to maintain the thread of the ideas and methods of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

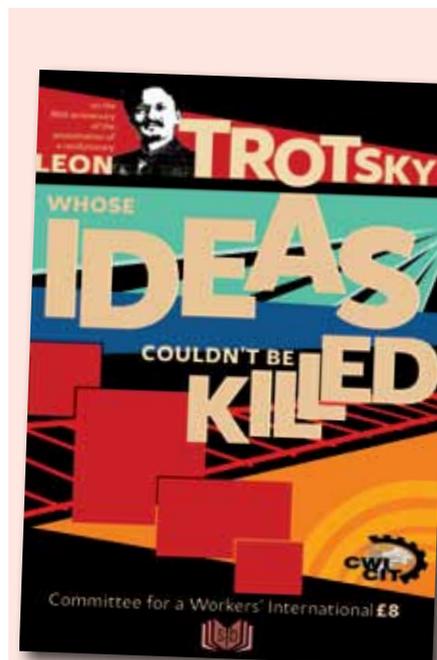
"Political leadership in the crucial moments of historical terms can become just as decisive a factor as is the role of the chief command during the critical moments of war. History is not an automatic process." Trotsky fought for a revolutionary party, armed with a programme to unite the working class in common struggle against the capitalist system.

The CWI stands in this tradition of genuine Marxism against the attempts

to bury it by Stalinism, groups that reduce it to a dry dogma with one-sided phrases without grasping the method, and those that abandon a systematic orientation to the working class;

impatiently looking for other forces capable of transforming society.

A must read book - Trotsky a revolutionary whose ideas couldn't be killed, because they live on in the CWI.



• This is a must read book for workers and youth who want to find out about Trotskyism, and the relevance of Marxist ideas today - revolutionary ideas that are invaluable in the struggle to build the socialist forces necessary to end the misery and chaos of capitalism. Don't delay - order your copy today.

- The discount price of £6 is extended until 22 November.
- Order now at leftbooks.co.uk

READERS OF THE SOCIALIST REACT TO EFFECTS OF LOCKDOWN



JUDY BEISHON

“My hopes of secure employment killed”

RICHARD SHATTOCK
WATFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

I was left stunned, shocked and bewildered when, on 9 October, Cineworld temporarily closed all 127 of its sites across the UK, putting 5,500 jobs at risk. Especially since they hadn't even informed us of plans to close cinemas beforehand. I only learned about it through a leak to the press!

This has put my job at the cinema in jeopardy, and I was even told by my own manager to start looking for work elsewhere in the meantime.

The mothballing of the cinema chain comes after James Bond's latest instalment No Time to Die was pushed back to April from this November, ironically killing my hopes of secure employment for the foreseeable future.

Being employed on a zero-hour contract, I don't always get the hours I need. And now to be told that I won't be getting any hours at all, for potentially many months, shows a complete disregard for the workforce, many of whom are barely living above the breadline. I still have to live at home with my parents because of the lack of pay and hours. Now any hopes of me leaving home have been put on the backburner.

What is also insulting is that I have been effectively kept on the company's books, but without shifts or even pay to compensate. The CEO Mooky Greidinger emailed us to say that our last pay day would be on 30 October, which meant we were only paid for shifts and time on furlough up to the 15 October, and now furlough has been extended, not a lot of help for us.

The fact that furlough isn't enough

to live on anyway for most people, including myself, being under 100% of pay, means that this cut off is particularly cruel, with Christmas just around the corner. I'm sure Mooky however isn't worrying about where his income is coming from in the run up to Christmas.

This is why I am in the Socialist Party. We demand full pay, for as long as is necessary to protect jobs and livelihoods during the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. This would stave off job losses, and give reassurance to myself and the thousands of other workers employed at Cineworld and elsewhere.

Jobs crisis: the fight for work or 100% pay - one of the sessions at socialism2020.net Online forum 20-23 November

A publican speaks: Tories only back big business

PAUL SMITH
PUBLICAN OF THE SCHOONER AND THE THREE TUNS, GATESHEAD

As a small business owner, some of the spiteful conditions attached to the latest lockdown will make it difficult for some, if not most small businesses to survive. No business rates based handouts this time, just a set of rules that seem to be specifically designed to drive the small players out of the market.

My grandmother used to say to me when I was a little boy, “never trust the Tories, they are brought up to make sure the rich get richer and the poor get poorer”. It made sense as a young boy and I'd often debate with the posh kids at my school and get heated about the lack of fairness.

As I got older, I began to think some of this rhetoric was just a misplaced loyalty to a bygone age, and people closest to me will remember before the last election I was often heard to say things like: “Boris isn't so bad” or “I just don't trust Jeremy Corbyn”. I didn't vote in the end. Honestly, I thought Boris might make a reasonable fist of it despite Brexit.

How horribly, horribly wrong I was. I've watched this unfold, often opening my big mouth at the wrong times, saying things in hindsight I probably shouldn't have said. But



THOMAS CIZAUSKAS/CC

I'm convinced about one thing - this government are mismanaging the pandemic in a disastrous fashion and no matter what happens from here, I'll be convinced that their decision making is based on the fact that Tories want the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer.

Self-employed musicians, taxi drivers, delivery people, hospitality workers, kids on free school meals, hairdressers, small business owners and their employees - all suffering. Whereas those that already have plenty are rescued, bailed out, provided with ludicrously generous subsidies, and soothed with promises of a level of support post-Covid, that makes the investment in small businesses and even the furlough scheme seem like peanuts.

Remember the billionaires bailed out to the tune of £700 billion just a few years ago, despite the fact they caused the crisis with their greed and exploitation of the working class? Think about that figure. 0.001% of that would have paid to feed every child on free school meals in holidays. 2% would have paid every small business owner, every self-employed musician, taxi driver and other workers affected by this crisis, £1000 a month for a year, protecting the jobs, wellbeing, mental health and social welfare of millions of people.

● Cuts to children's care when it's needed most

A recent Ofsted report describes a 20% increase in the numbers of babies killed or seriously harmed by their carers during the first lockdown, compared to the same period last year. 64 babies suffered deliberate harm. Eight tragically died.

Ofsted highlighted isolation, poverty, and poor mental health as contributing to this increase. The ability of social workers and health staff to support families face to face

has been severely limited due to lockdown. The lockdown in March came on the back of ten years of cuts to council services, and many of these cuts have fallen on children's services, in particular Early Help services.

These services can be crucial in supporting families at an early stage, often preventing more serious difficulties occurring later on. In the first lockdown, schools did remain open for children who were known to be vulnerable. Understandably, many of these families were fearful of sending their children to school for health reasons.

During the first lockdown, visits by social workers to children at risk were restricted due to Covid risks. Many

visits were undertaken remotely as opposed to face to face. Visits to children who were seen as being at the greatest risk did continue, but were often conducted on doorsteps or in gardens.

This has minimised Covid transmission risks, but weighing up how to keep children safe has been very stressful for staff. The capacity of the workforce has also been reduced as some staff have been ill or self-isolating. In the midst of all this, it is really shocking that many councils are continuing to cut staff in children's services. These cuts reduce the safety nets available to protect babies and older children who are at risk of harm.

A CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORKER

● Sunak's message to the bosses

Sunak's announcement that the furlough scheme is extended until March is not because he is sympathetic to the plight of full-time workers facing redundancy during lockdown.

It's more to do with telling the bosses that they don't have to announce mass redundancies as yet (businesses need to give legal notice of 30 days), because the furlough scheme was originally only up until the beginning of December.

BILL MULLINS
SOUTH EAST LONDON

● What future?

I'm sure I'm not the only person who's been advised against going to university, because of how completely and utterly useless a degree would be. There's truth in that too. People with masters degrees have been having to find minimum wage jobs because there just aren't any good ones left.

So what does that mean for me? I'm 16, I'll be out of university in another six years. Then what? I doubt there will be any specialist jobs left by then, let alone for anyone younger than me.

CHARLIE PANDIT
SOUTH EAST LONDON

● “Apart from open windows and markings on the floor, it’s business as usual”

MIDLANDS TEACHER AND NEU OFFICER

While we welcome the NEU taking the stance that schools and colleges should be part of the lockdown, what’s become clear to members is that it lacked teeth. Our education staff are still working in schools with an increasing number of infections.

There needs to be a clear strategy of what we can do now to protect all of the school community - staff, students and their families. This cannot just be rotas for secondary schools. In primary and special education, the infection rate is rising and bubbles are regularly bursting. Primary and special education reps are unhappy that they are being ignored.

The escalation strategy of the union relies mainly on schools with reps, but even in an active district like mine, we have many schools that don’t have reps. Our reps are finding it difficult to argue for escalation to individual school ballots as staff don’t want to go it alone. It’s not just Covid that’s the issue. Workload is increasing, with extra work being provided for isolating students, and staff are exhausted. Management pressure is also increasing, with ‘learning walks’ and observations being prioritised above safety of staff.

Apart from the windows being open and directional markings on the floor, it’s business as usual. The photographs in the newspapers of classrooms with tables far apart and education workers socially distanced are a farce. Children are crammed in with tables facing the front and there’s no distancing in primary schools, just a fragile bubble.

Classrooms are cold with the windows open all the time and some schools are providing extra clothing for families so their children can layer up. All this is unsustainable. We need to be ready to take union-wide action. We need to look to the bus drivers and French teachers, and fight for schools to be included in lockdown. We need to protect our staff, students and community.

Schools need union action for safety

Socialist Party members in schools speak out



● Schools are failing to keep children safe

A BRISTOL TEACHER

Dark humour and stress are all that’s keeping schools open. Jokes about the superhero power of school gates that prevent Covid-19 from entering, are the only parts of light relief. Staff are juggling educating those in the classroom and those isolating. At the same time as constantly battling schools trying to cut safety measures, which are hitting schools’ dwindling budgets.

Classrooms are fuller than ever with bubbles, that were already too large, growing with staff absence. Colleagues are working across year groups with 30 to 150 children a day, as ‘catch-up’ is prioritised over safety.

Staff are frazzled as they try to balance students’ learning and fears, with ridiculous pressures, such as those from Ofsted last week - apparently schools are sending students home too readily! Schools are doing their best to follow ever-changing government guidance, which currently says if you have been in direct contact with someone positive you must self-isolate. As those children and young people who are sent home don’t have to be tested, it leaves staff and students in school terrified that they may also have contracted it, putting their own and families’ lives at risk.

And all through this we’re working in rooms with no heating and wide-open windows. Children are already wearing jumpers and coats and we’re yet to hit winter temperatures. It’s my job to keep them safe in school, yet there’s nothing I can do about the shivering but hand out coats and request again that the heating’s put on.

Schools are failing to provide children with the basic needs to be kept warm and to be kept safe. That’s why members of the Socialist Party in Education, and others we work with, are putting pressure on the National Education Union to take decisive action including balloting members to strike.

Schools have now created robust programmes to support learning at home, with on-line and paper-based resources that were not ready in March. Learning could easily continue at home. Following a complete lockdown, rotas on part-time school-based learning could keep bubbles smaller and minimise risks faced by staff and students on a daily basis.

For this lockdown to be effective, it needs to include schools. Would you eat Wotsits while cleaning your teeth? Allowing thousands of students and staff mixing in every town and city in the country will not bring the death rate down. This is not the education we need! We demand unions force the government to put the safety of our young people, education staff and communities first, and close all schools with immediate effect.

● Full return to school meant social distancing became impossible

A SERIOUSLY CONCERNED LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANT

I work as a Learning Support Assistant in an SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) school for learners aged 11-21, many of whom are extremely vulnerable and have underlying health conditions. After the first lockdown, I was impressed by the way the school handled the safe return and reintegration of students to the school. Temperatures were taken at the front entrance, students with symptoms were sent home, and a rota separating staff and students into small bubbles ensured that cases could easily be isolated.

Having vulnerable family members, I was anxious that the measures put in place in the summer term would continue to be maintained in

September, however they were not. On returning we were told by the headteacher that the school had a woefully inadequate supply of PPE. The list was given as follows: ten testing kits, 50 masks, one box of disposable aprons, and one bottle of disinfectant spray.

Moreover, we were told that, counter to the extra funding promised for dealing with the crisis, the school had had the same amount deducted from their budget, in effect gaining nothing. It was clear that, despite government promises, the allocation of PPE and emergency funding to the school was a ‘tick-box’ exercise at best, and at worst, an outright lie.

A full return to school meant that social distancing became impossible to maintain given the sheer numbers staff and students. The school had

pretty much returned to how it was before the March lockdown. Temperatures were not being taken, students with symptoms were not sent home, and hygiene standards became lax.

The nature of students with learning disabilities is that many of them cannot comprehend, and struggle to maintain, social distancing and basic hygiene rules. Since September, I have been in contact with students who do not cover their hands when sneezing, smear mucus and other bodily fluids on staff, frequently hug staff, and neither recognise black and yellow tape as a warning nor an obstacle to accessing play equipment and objects forbidden from use. The net result of all this is that our school was forced to close its doors nearly a week before the half-term break due to the numbers of Covid cases.



WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?



● editors@socialistparty.org.uk

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the Socialist

Issue 1109

12-18 November 2020

formerly **Militant**

USA: TRUMP OUT! BUT MASS WORKERS' STRUGGLE NEEDED DISCUSS AT SOCIALISM 2020

ONLINE FORUM 20-23 November. Debate ideas to change the world

Hosted by



■ **USA: After the polarised elections - what way forward for the working class?** See pages 2-3

The nightmare of Trump's presidency and the chaos of the US presidential election represent, at root, the crisis of US capitalism – which is in decline as a world superpower – and of the capitalist system itself which cannot escape its crisis since the 2007-8 crash.

The chaos also reveals starkly that a 'lesser evilism' approach offers nothing but a dead end to the working class and young people fighting for their lives and livelihoods amid the misery of covid and capitalist crises.

What is the prospect now for building a working class political voice and fightback?

Socialism 2020 is a forum of political discussion and debate open to all looking for ideas to change the world.

Socialism 2020 includes 38 workshops including one led by socialists from the US, and workshops on the theme of 'after Corbyn'.

The US presidential candidate for the Green Party, Howie Hawkins, used his campaign to raise the need to build a mass working-class political voice there.

Howie will speak at the main rally of Socialism 2020, 6-8pm, Saturday 21 November

Workshops include:

- **NEW WORLD ORDER: CHINA AND THE US**
Saturday 21 November 2-4pm
- **THE US AFTER THE ELECTION**
Monday 23 Nov 11am - 1pm
- **HOW CAN A MASS WORKING-CLASS POLITICAL VOICE BE BUILT?**
Saturday 21 Nov 11am - 1pm
- **LESSONS OF TODAY'S NEW LEFT FORMATIONS**
Sunday 24 Nov 2-4pm



For agenda, tickets, info: socialism2020.net or 020 8988 8777

A SOCIALIST RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CRISIS
▶▶ socialistparty.org.uk/coronavirus

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS
▶▶ see column on p3

