

£1 / £2 solidarity price

socialistparty.org.uk



# the Socialist

Issue 1094

9-15 July 2020

formerly **Militant**

# FIGHT FOR EVERY JOB

## Fight for socialism

**NICK CHAFFEY**  
SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

**T**housands of jobs already destroyed. Thousands more announced almost every day. The 'job retention scheme' is turning into a jobs haemorrhage as the government starts to wind it down, with a view to scrapping it in October.

Now many profit-rich companies which took the furlough cash are preparing to dump thousands of workers on the dole. The scheme is being revealed as the bosses' bailout it always was.

As speaker after speaker at the National Shop Stewards Network conference on 4 July said, trade unions must fight every job cut and every pay cut. Workers must not pay for coronavirus (see p8-9).

The Tories have shown they are not acting in the 'national interest'. They represent the interests of big business looking to protect their profits and make workers pay the price for the new economic crisis - with cuts to jobs, pay, working conditions, benefits and pensions.

The Socialist Party calls for a mass fightback led by the trade unions to resist all job cuts. We have seen thousands join the unions in recent weeks to protect themselves at work.

With a bold lead this deeply unpopular government could be pushed back. That means fighting for clear socialist policies that can unite the working class and offer a way forward to build a socialist alternative to a new economic depression.

We call for the work to be shared out with no loss of pay to ensure full employment. Young people don't need a few weeks' 'retraining' on make-work schemes, but real apprenticeships on trade union rates of pay. The minimum wage should be immediately raised to £12 an hour - £15 in London.

We need free education and a mass programme of public works to build affordable council housing, schools, hospitals and transport infrastructure. A 'green new deal' could create socially useful jobs and protect the environment, but it has to be fully funded, not the paltry sum proposed by Rishi Sunak, and democratically controlled by the trade unions - a socialist green new deal.

The financial books of any company declaring job cuts and closures should be opened to trade union and workers' inspection, and major companies nationalised under democratic workers' control and management to defend workers' jobs.

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed the complete inability of big business and their political representatives to keep us safe and meet the needs of working-class people.

Now the economic crisis is further revealing that the system they represent cannot guarantee us jobs, pay, decent working conditions and public services.

The fight to defend every job must be linked to the fight for a socialist plan of production. This means taking the main industries and financial institutions out of the hands of those interested only in profit, enabling democratic working-class control and decision making over how the economy and society can best be organised to meet the needs of the majority.



PHOTOS: J.J. ELLISON/CC; PAUL MATTSSON; STEVE GERMAN

No going back: Nationalise social care >>> p11

National Shop Stewards Network conference: "Fight for our lives and livelihoods" >>> p8-9

End the scandal of sweatshop labour in lockdown Leicester >>> p5

the Socialist formerly Militant

Issue 1094 9-15 July 2020

DO YOU HAVE NEWS FOR US?

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.

CONTACT US

editors@socialistparty.org.uk 020 8988 8777 - ask for the editors

DEADLINES

Friday before publication, or Monday morning for urgent news, unless otherwise agreed with the editors.

The Socialist goes to press on a Tuesday night. We publish online on Wednesday and in print on Thursday.

SUBSCRIBE

to the Socialist for weekly working-class news, analysis and fighting strategy socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe

- Paper subscription £4.50 a month, or £6.50 including Socialism Today
• E-subscription £2.50 a month, or £4 including Socialism Today

SOCIALISM TODAY

our monthly Marxist magazine socialismtoday.org • Paper sub £3 a month, e-sub £2.50

SOCIALISM: THE PODCAST

weekly on all podcast platforms

FOLLOW US

facebook.com/CWISocialistParty Instagram @SocialistPartyCWI YouTube - Socialist Party Twitter @Socialist\_Party

SOCIALIST PARTY

The Socialist is the weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party, the England and Wales section of the Committee for a Workers' International socialistparty.org.uk socialworld.net



BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS

Socialist Books: our publishing house socialistbooks.co.uk Left Books: Marxist classics bookshop leftbooks.co.uk

OUR NEWSPAPER TEAM

Editor of the Socialist Sarah Sachs-Eldridge socialistparty.org.uk Editorial staff Dave Carr James Ivens Scott Jones Ian Pattison Circulation manager Judy Beishon Chris Newby

ISSN 1366-9621

Published by Socialist Publications, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office Printed by trade union labour at Reach Printing Services

Militant issue 1: October 1964 The Socialist issue 1: 7 February 1997

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

YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO FIGHT THE SYSTEM

HELEN PATTISON SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

The killing of George Floyd will be fixed into the minds of our generation as we move into a new period. For many, the recent anti-racist protests were a first taste of the strength of working-class people in struggle.

They might have been some people's first protests, but for many they won't be their last. The floodgates have been opened, and young people are beginning to conclude that this system does not work for the majority of them. With racism, division, oppression and poverty, it's a system that lets us down.

The initial protest movement is beginning to ebb in some cities. But none of the issues which brought people to the protests have been solved, neither police racism nor the conditions in which people live. Therefore, anger will inevitably bring people out to protest again in the future.

Before coronavirus, there was a growing crisis facing working-class and young people. We've seen the spread of the gig economy, leaving people in precarious conditions and on poverty pay. There has been a housing crisis, forcing young people to live at home or in overcrowded conditions.

These conditions have also helped the spread of coronavirus, and are partially responsible for the disproportionately high death rates of BAME people.

There have been attempts by the far right to capitalise on the deprivation in society and sow racist division; these have often been countered by local young people who refuse to allow racist protests though their areas.

Even before the recent anti-racist protests, there were international movements against sexism, and a huge outpouring of anger against environmental destruction during the school students' strikes.

Now young people face rising unemployment because of coronavirus and the economic crisis brought on by the pandemic. As well as this, there is a growing crisis in education, with rising tuition fees and a funding emergency in the universities.

So what will be our generation's response? From the huge solidarity, unity and anger shown on the anti-racism protests, clearly it will be one of action.

There can be a number of struggles which take up the multitude of issues facing young people. But the thread connecting these struggles will be the need to fight back against a system run in the interest of profit rather than meeting the needs of working-class and young people.

Austerity and cuts made by this and future governments to make us pay for the coronavirus pandemic have to be resisted.

In our workplaces we will have to



PHOTO JAMES IVENS

organise against poverty pay, casualisation, and layoffs. During coronavirus there has already been an influx of people into the trade unions, and new layers organising for safety at work because it was clear both the government and the bosses wanted to put profit before workers' health.

But we will need to build a bold and fighting trade union movement, fighting to defend every job, for every improvement in pay, terms and conditions, challenging all forms of racism and discrimination and bringing workers together in unity.

Young people are facing the scrap heap of unemployment in their millions. They face being forced to work for their dole, as we've seen in the past with 'workfare' schemes, with bogus apprenticeships and training schemes.

This is just one way the government will try and make working-class and young people pay for the crisis.

We will have to fight for the creation of socially useful jobs, on trade union rates of pay.

Austerity has also left young people without decent support networks or safe places to socialise outside of school. Cuts to leisure centres, libraries and youth clubs must be fought, and local councils should refuse to make cuts to services which the vulnerable, and young people, rely on.

We will have to fight for decently funded and free education. It will mean organising in our schools, colleges and universities, and for fighting students' unions that bring students together in struggle. It will also mean fighting for a say in what we learn, as well as a say in how our education system is run.

All of these struggles will expose the strength of working and young people to change society. After all, what has the coronavirus crisis exposed? That working people make

the wealth in society. When we can't turn up to work because of lockdown, the economy is in crisis. We have to use that strength to fight for a socialist society, democratically controlled by the working class, and run in our interests. Young people have no choice but to organise to fight for a decent future for all.

SOCIALISM the podcast

The weekly Marxist podcast from the Socialist Party Listen and subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, YouTube, and all major podcast platforms socialistparty.org.uk/podcast

£1,600 less benefits if your job goes - while super-rich splash cash

Households suffering unemployment during the pandemic will get £1,600 per year less in benefits than in 2011. Families with kids will have been robbed of £2,900 due to Tory benefit cuts, reports the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

And bosses could use Covid-19 to throw over a million more workers on the scrapheap, according to Bank of England projections. May estimates foresaw official unemployment doubling to 8% this summer, approaching the 2010 peak after the Great Recession.

Never mind paying down our debts, or even going on a modest

holiday. How are working-class people even to keep up with racketeering rent and utility costs, on top of a killer virus?

Meanwhile, the Telegraph reports that "a new item has been added to the wish list of ultra-wealthy homeowners: their own private hospital."

One super-rich house buyer specified on-site quarters for not one, but two full-time registered nurses (in case one gets sick). Buying agent Mark Lawson commented that "if you're spending £10 million or more, you'd expect it to come with large grounds and a few small cottages" to fit out and staff a personal clinic!

And there are no cancelled trips away for the super-rich! Shy Aviation, a private jet firm, reports a 300% rise in new client bookings compared to last year. Some are even "booking 13-seat aircrafts for

Testing: Tories' £5bn gift to private sector

Never mind expanding NHS labs or building new public science facilities. The Tories want their mates in big business to mop up on the social necessity of mass corona testing.

They're proposing a £5 billion handout to the private sector over two years. The government funding will go towards 'Lighthouse Laboratories' - another of the Tories' pandemic privatisation schemes (see 'Tories using pandemic to shift lab testing out of NHS' at socialistparty.org.uk).



Johnson blames care workers for deaths - real cause: cuts and privatisation

Boris Johnson has tried to shift the blame for the scandal of mass Covid-19 deaths in care homes. During a speech in Yorkshire, he said: "Too many care homes didn't really follow the procedures in the way that they could have." So that would make it care workers' fault.

Those would be the procedures which the government changed on an almost daily basis, would they? The procedures which diverted coronavirus-positive people into, and PPE away from, the care sector? The procedures which delayed or prevented essential measures like quarantine and testing?

Sunak's £3bn green pledge: not enough for climate or jobs

Chancellor Rishi Sunak has promised £3 billion of green investment. Goals include 'decarbonising' public buildings, insulating private homes, and creating work. That's all well and good - but, er, what about power plants, or transport?

By contrast, the French government has pledged £13.5 billion, and the German government £36 billion! Even those figures will not be enough to loosen the profit-polluters' grip on the world economy. But they might create a few more jobs than the Tories' miserly £3 billion.

Fundamentally what is needed is public ownership of energy and

transport - with full funding, not £3 billion sops. With big business profit out of the equation, production could be planned. Fossil fuels could be eradicated without loss of jobs, or extra costs for the working class.



Fund the fightback DONATE TODAY

Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join or call 020 8988 8777 or make cheques payable to Socialist Party, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD

one person, and they're running at £8,000 an hour." Private Islands Inc reports a 30% growth in enquiries about private islands.

Fight for a decent job, a living wage and living benefits for all. Take the wealth off the 1%. Nationalise the banks and big business - and turn them from cash siphons into planned providers for all.



Profiteering private care bosses put in place by Tory and Blairite privatisation may share some of the blame. But heroic, low-paid workers in the care sector deserve none.

Johnson has tried to backtrack on his statement due to the backlash. What care workers and service users need on top of PPE and testing is a living wage and more staff. The Socialist Party fights for trade union action to win this, with full funding, public ownership and democratic control. (See p11)



Poverty rises again - especially for BAME workers

100,000 more people fell into poverty in 2018-19, reports the Social Metrics Commission. Black, Asian and minority ethnic households were more than twice as likely to have been pushed below the breadline.

65% of adults in 'deep poverty' - over 50% beneath the poverty line - had lost more income during the lockdown. This compares to 35% of those over 20% above the poverty line. BAME households are around 2.5 times as likely to be in deep poverty.

An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.



Socialist Party

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.

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!

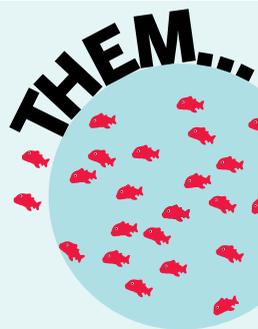
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

- 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!

Help fund the fightback!

DONATE TODAY socialistparty.org.uk/donate





● England's privatised water firms have paid out **£57 billion** in dividends since 1991,

says Greenwich University analysis for the Guardian. They have accrued £48 billion in debt in

that time - meaning borrowing has funded payouts rather than investment in leaky infrastructure.

● **The world capitalist economy will shrink by \$12 trillion due to the pandemic**, reckons the IMF. The 4.9% global contraction compares to 0.1% in 2009 during the Great Recession.

● **But central banks have bought over \$6 trillion of financial assets to boost big business** this year. The immediate result? A (precarious) stock market bonanza. Bosses scramble for golden tickets while the workers who made their wealth lose pay and jobs.

● **The lockdown led to a surge in illegal killings of rare birds of prey**, reports the RSPB. The reason? The rich retreated to their country piles - and birds of prey disrupt their game shoots.

● **Retailers paid just 14% of their quarterly rent bills last month**. Taking offices and industrial premises into account, 18.2% of commercial rent was paid, reports Re-Leased - compared to 25.3% in March. Can workers stop paying rent if we can't afford it too?

● **US billionaire wealth exploded by 20%** between 18 March and 17 June, report the Institute for Policy Studies and Americans for Tax Fairness. That's an additional \$584 billion and 29 new billionaires. Jeff Bezos's personal fortune grew by \$43.7 billion - or the GDP of Paraguay.

● **While the net worth of US billionaires soared to \$3.5 trillion, US households lost \$6.5 trillion**, and 45.5 million filed for unemployment, reports Forbes. And the US employment-to-population ratio fell to 52.8% in May, says the Bureau of Labor Statistics. To return to its 64.7% peak in 2000 would mean creating 30 million jobs, says the chief economist at Deutsche Bank.

● **Women workers in Britain have been hit particularly hard by the corona crisis**. The number of part-time vacancies fell 69.4% from February to May, finds Adzuna.co.uk. 73% of part-timers are women, says the Women's Budget Group. Mothers are 47% more likely to have lost their jobs than fathers, and 14% more likely to have been furloughed, says the IFS.

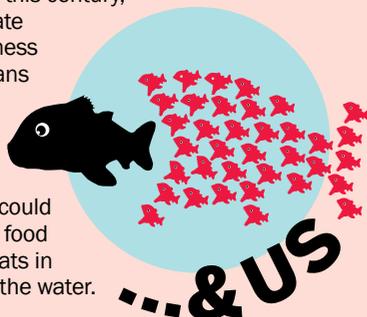
● **And it's not just at work. 70% of mothers report carrying the main burden of home schooling**, and 67% the main burden of general parenting, says University of Sussex research. 57% told Pregnant Then Screwed that pandemic childcare has damaged their career prospects. Website visits to domestic violence charity Refuge surged 950% under lockdown, the charity reports.

● **Boris Johnson has promised £1.57 billion to rescue Britain's collapsing culture sector**. But a quarter of that is in loans, and the rest is a one-off payment. Make it all a grant, and make it permanent - fund access to culture for all workers!

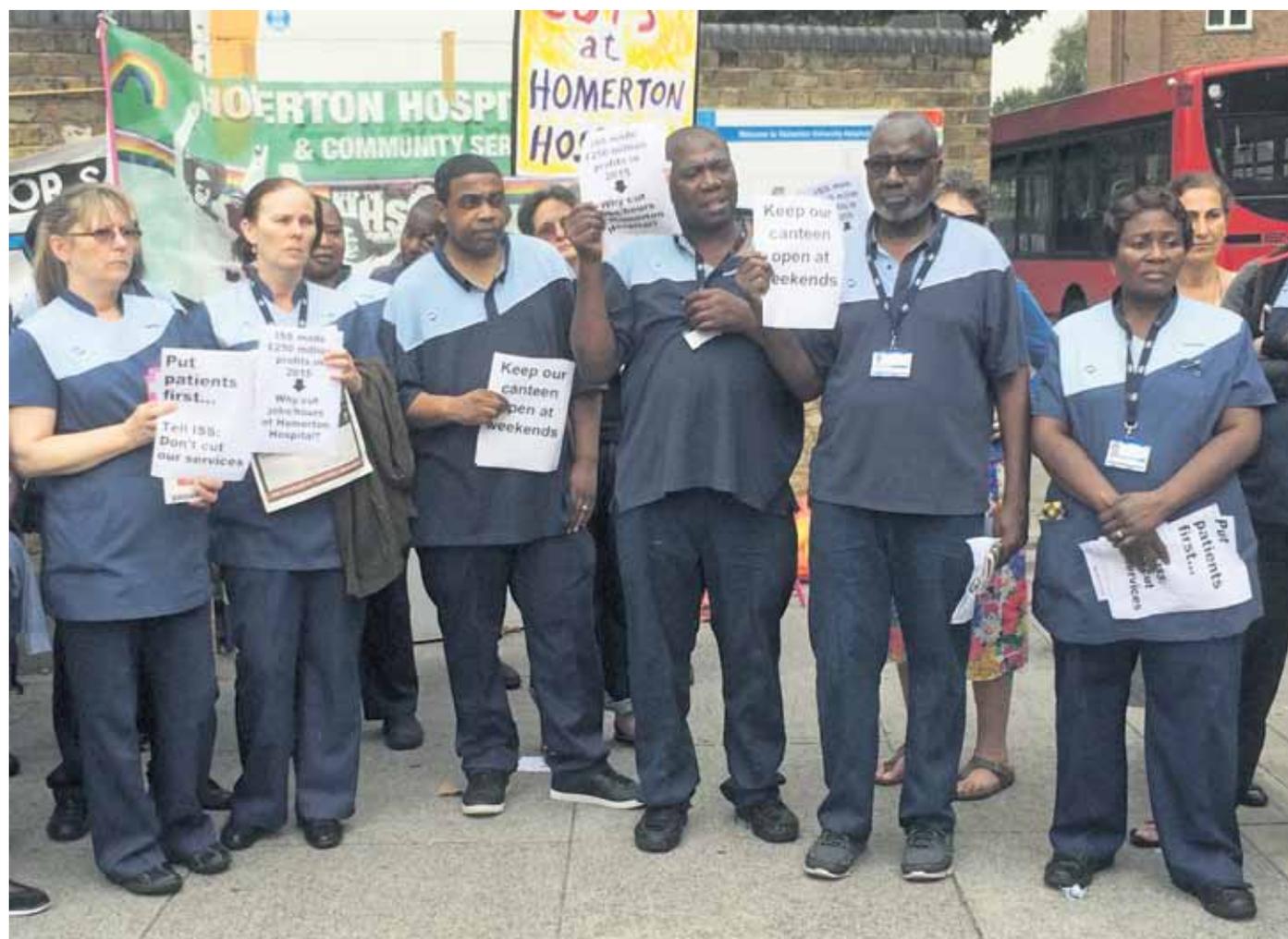
● **Pandemic economic paralysis caused a 17% fall in year-on-year global CO2 emissions** in early April, reports Nature Climate Change. This rose to an average of 26% in the countries with strictest lockdowns. To make this permanent, the answer is public ownership and socialist planning to replace fossil fuels. Only this can both improve living standards and deal with the remaining 83%.

● **Even if emissions plummet, climate change in the deep oceans could accelerate by a factor of seven** in the second half of this century,

finds Nature Climate Change. The vastness of the oceans means heat stored now could continue permeating down for years to come. Marine life could be displaced from food sources and habitats in different layers of the water.



# Homerton hospital workers deserve equal pay and conditions



Homerton Hospital workers during an earlier dispute in 2016 // PHOTO SOCIALIST PARTY

**BRIAN DEBUS**  
HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

Management at Homerton Hospital in Hackney, east London, has outraged staff by insisting that outsourcing and inferior pay and conditions for ancillary workers will go on. The trust has decided to sign a new five-year contract with multinational privateer ISS.

This is despite a big campaign by staff and unions to bring these 300 workers back in-house. Since then, 170 doctors at Homerton have written an open letter to the trust. They call on trust bosses to rethink, and put ISS staff on the same terms and conditions as NHS staff.

The trust says the best it can offer ISS staff is a contract that guarantees the London Living Wage throughout. This is nearly £1,500 less per year than staff would earn on the lowest NHS pay band. And that's before you take into account enhanced rates, for night and weekend working, and so on.

Staff unions are sceptical about even this pledge. When the current five-year contract came in, ISS assured workers that pay would be at least the London Living Wage throughout. But many staff haven't received this rate for nearly half the contract! So how can members trust ISS?

Many workers are still owed £1,100 to £2,100 back pay, depending on

their contract. What has happened to that money?

Another scandal: around half of ISS staff receive no occupational sick pay. This leaves them scraping around to survive on statutory sick pay. Statutory sick pay isn't even payable for the first three days off work. After that, workers get a maximum of £95.85 a week - equivalent to wages of just £2.56 an hour!

The idea of forcing workers to choose between coming to work sick, or not being able to pay their rent and bills, is brutal. So is the financial disaster faced by anyone who has a serious illness and needs more than a few days off.

But in a hospital, this is also a public health hazard. How can you control infection when your staff cannot afford to go off sick?

The trust is apparently considering adding proper sick pay to the contract. But why is this the limit of bosses' ambition? ISS staff at Homerton deserve equal pay and conditions with their NHS-employed colleagues.

Meanwhile, Covid-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement have

shone a light on capitalism's institutional racism. The NHS has pledged many times to tackle this. The ISS workforce is nearly 80% black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME).

The trust could use the opportunity of the contract ending to begin addressing these very real inequalities. Instead, bosses are choosing to ride roughshod over the rights of staff, and enshrine economic inequality for a largely BAME section of the workforce for a further five years.

The reason? To save money. Instead, we say workers should be guaranteed decent and equal pay and conditions, and a campaign initiated for additional resources as needed.

Socialist Party members in Hackney stand in solidarity with all workers at Homerton Hospital. We are fighting for:

- All staff and services to be brought back in-house - end all outsourcing and privatisation
- Pay rises and NHS pay and conditions for all workers in the health service
- Reverse the cuts - for full funding of our NHS and all public services



**Around half of ISS staff receive no occupational sick pay... workers get a maximum of £95.85 a week - equivalent to wages of just £2.56 an hour!**

**Join the fightback**

**JOIN THE SOCIALISTS**

- Visit [socialistparty.org.uk/join](https://socialistparty.org.uk/join) or call **020 8988 8777**
- or text your name and postcode to **07761 818 206**

to find out more about joining us today!



HEATHER RAWLING  
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

**W**hy has there been a spike in people testing positive for Covid-19 in Leicester? It is most prevalent in areas that have a thriving underworld of sweatshops.

Investigations have highlighted what many knew already: that Leicester's garment industry is a murky place. Many factories employ workers on slave wages of around £4 to £4.50 an hour. £5 an hour is considered a good wage.

Many of these workers live in extremely overcrowded conditions. Parts of Leicester are among the most overcrowded in the UK outside of London, according to the 2011 census. Up to 20 factory workers can share a small terrace house.

Some homes are owned by the employers, giving bosses power over nearly all aspects of their lives. Most employees are black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME), including Eastern European. A number do not have documented resident status.

Much of this underbelly of the Leicester economy continued operating during the lockdown at 100% capacity. The factories were fulfilling orders. The government knew about this, and informed Leicester's Labour mayor. Neither did anything.

Boohoo Group Ltd is a fashion company which reportedly relies on East Midlands sweatshops. Boohoo accounts for 75-80% of garment production in Leicester, and sources 60-70% of its products from Leicester, according to campaign group Labour Behind the Label. This apparently increased in recent weeks, to around 80%, as Boohoo quickly adapted to changing requirements during lockdown.

Labour Behind the Label has reported that workers who tested positive for Covid-19 were required to work throughout their sickness in order to fulfil orders. Some work in more than one factory.

Recent revelations of its sweatshops have caused some problems for Boohoo. On 6 July the company's shares fell by 23%.

### Health and safety

Garment manufacturing is a major industry in Leicester, with over 1,000 known sites, excluding homeworking. Health and safety is rarely on the employers' agenda. Social distancing? Forget it.

The dilapidated Imperial Typewriters building, where a famous strike took place in the 1970s against blatant racist practices, now houses a few of these sweatshops. The Corah site, a major garment manufacturer that used to supply companies like M&S, has now been broken up into many smaller factory units.

In fact, most sites are small workshops, often housed in old, previously disused factory buildings - a legacy of the decline of the hosiery and manufacturing industries in the 1970s and 1980s. The unions in Leicester failed to mount an effective campaign against closures at that time.

The National Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers (now a part of Community, which mainly organises steel workers) relied on a campaign against import controls. Cheaper goods were being imported from countries like India and Bangladesh, where sweatshop wages were paid.

# END THE SCANDAL OF SWEATSHOP LABOUR IN LOCKDOWN LEICESTER



An international campaign to raise the wages of all workers, and occupations to protect jobs and facilities, could have been more successful.

Some hosiery machinery was shipped abroad, but some workers used their redundancy money to buy machines and set up on their own. Most were squeezed by multinationals demanding cheaper clothes.

Today, slave labour conditions

thrive in Leicester. It is truly a 'race to the bottom' as sweatshop employers compete to worsen pay, terms and conditions for workers. Manufacturers investing in machinery, and paying the minimum wage and above, cannot compete. Why invest in new machinery when human labour is so cheap, even if it is illegal?

It is a microcosm of capitalism in decline. As Marx proclaimed, capital came into being "dripping from head

to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt." He was talking primarily about slavery. But capitalism still drips with blood and dirt.

Although the Covid-19 spike in Leicester has brought this shady world to wider attention, it has been known about for a long time. The line taken by government, local and national, has been to do nothing in case it causes mass unemployment.

Poverty breeds coronavirus. 41% of Leicester's children officially live in poverty. In 2014, the Office for National Statistics said Leicester had the lowest disposable income in the country - £5,000 a year less than the national average. No wonder people are forced to go to work in unsafe conditions.

Is this all that capitalism has to offer? Doing nothing means that people have got ill, some will die, schools have had to close, and the local economy has been shut down before it even got to reopen.

What is happening in Leicester will happen elsewhere. It's the direct result of successive governments cutting back health and safety inspections, failing to enforce the minimum wage, and otherwise worsening the living and working conditions of the working class.

Labour-controlled Leicester City Council is also culpable for ignoring what has been going on. It has failed to defend workers' rights.

Larger food manufacturers have had outbreaks too: Walkers Crisps, the Pladis Biscuit factory that makes McVitie's biscuits, and Samworth Brothers - a union-busting firm. All mainly employ migrant and BAME workers who are more vulnerable.

There are many dangers. The racist right will blame the increases in Covid-19 on BAME and migrant workers themselves. But they are the victims of a system of extreme exploitation, where there has been little choice but to work in unsafe conditions.

Work or don't feed your family. Work or become homeless. The same employers and capitalist politicians responsible for ripping off workers in textile sweatshops have been ripping off the rest of the working class too.

### The Socialist Party calls for:

- A massive trade union recruitment campaign to unionise these workers on reduced membership rates. Leafleting homes in the affected areas could be a start. Publicise the conditions and organise campaigns among members where appropriate. Call for solidarity action from unionised workforces, like transport and postal workers
- An amnesty for all migrant workers from deportation and other punitive measures so they are not afraid to report abuses
- Close down the sweatshops and create new, safe, publicly owned workplaces. Job guarantees for all workers. If needed, share out the work with no loss of pay. For democratic workers' control and management of publicly owned industry
- Pay a living wage! No one should earn less than £12 an hour, or £15 in London, as steps towards a real living wage
- The big retailers who buy and sell these garments knew about this extreme exploitation. Nationalise the garment industry under democratic workers' control and management to prevent future abuses

## SUBSCRIBE TO THE SOCIALIST

Visit [socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe](https://socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe) or call 020 8988 877

- E-subscription £2.50 a month, or £4 including Socialism Today
- Paper sub £4.50 a month, or £6.50 including Socialism Today

Subscribe by direct debit and choose from a range of free books!



# Jobcentre reopening: only union struggle will put safety first

A JOBCENTRE WORKER

Jobcentres have become the latest battleground between workers' desire to work in safety and employers' desire to reopen services, ready or not.

At the end of June, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) announced it would be increasing the number of benefit claimants required to physically attend Jobcentres in England. At the time of writing, Wales and Scotland Jobcentres will not be affected, but plans are being put in place for the same approach.

When lockdown first began, Jobcentres were closed, except for appointments with those claimants who would otherwise not have been able to receive benefits. Most contact with claimants has been by telephone or online.

## "Conditionality"

Increasing attendance comes hard on the heels of the announcement that "conditionality" - proving job searching - will be returning to job-seeker's allowance and Universal Credit claims. (See 'Benefits system being used to force return to unsafe workplaces' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk).) The political decision to extend Jobcentre opening is an attempt by the government to indicate it is back to 'business as usual'.

Across DWP, screens are being fixed to desks to provide the illusion of protection. Management makes assurances that seeing claimants will ultimately be voluntary; that there will be regular cleaning of desks

between appointments; that there will be increased security. But all of this is designed to mask the reality that there is no pressing need to extend opening.

Members of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union, which represents staff in Jobcentres, have been holding meetings to discuss this. The reaction to the increased risks for staff and claimants has been anger. Where socialists, in their capacity as union reps, have provided a strong lead, the opposition has been unanimous.

For well-organised areas, this is likely to lead to the employer backing off. Much of the detail of the proposals has not been dictated at national level, but left for local managers to sort out through risk assessments alongside local union reps.

Where union members are given a lead to stand up for their rights, managers can opt for the maximum protections and minimum attendance. This could help protect both staff and claimants.

PCS has served DWP with a union inspection notice covering all offices. DWP has been unable to provide sufficient assurances about health and safety to allow the union to sign off a national risk assessment.

This is a necessary step in preparing the ground for members to exercise their rights under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996. This lets workers remove themselves to a place of safety if they feel they are in imminent danger.

Reps from the Broad Left Network - a socialist organisation within PCS, in which Socialist Party members

participate - have called for safely organised workplace meetings in DWP to prepare members for this. For months this has been opposed by 'Left Unity', the faction which controls the union's DWP group leadership, and the PCS national executive committee.

## Leadership

Instead, union leaders in DWP have emphasised that the decision to walk out is for staff individually, and that collective opposition is not possible. In so doing, the union leadership is failing in its role in organising workers.

Under current group president Martin Cavanagh, the union leadership in DWP has even opposed letting PCS health and safety reps travel to workplaces which do not have one to ensure social distancing is in place.

This blind trust in management, and unwillingness to put the health and safety of members first, is exactly what has encouraged DWP to press ahead with extending Jobcentre opening.

From the tentative nature of the DWP's attempts to get more claimants into the Jobcentres, it is clear the employer expected opposition. Many reps across DWP, rejecting the reluctance of the Left Unity leadership, have called meetings in the West Midlands, Yorkshire, the North West of England and other areas.

These have signalled steadfast opposition. This opposition can be built upon. A refusal to do so by the union's executive committees will be taken as a signal for DWP to push further towards business as usual.



# Southampton UCU: election victory for combative rank and file

BEA GARDNER

SOUTHAMPTON UCU (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

An overwhelming victory for rank-and-file activists is the result of the first contested branch elections in years for Southampton University and College Union (UCU).

The new rank and file convincingly won the majority of positions, including president, vice-president, health and safety officer, anti-casualisation officer, and communications officer. The victory cements a process of transformation underway since the 2018 pensions strike that is being replicated in many branches.

In 2018, thousands joined the union. Branch democracy was revitalised, with many stepping into activity for the first time.

The new activist layer was fed up with business-as-usual politics. They wanted the union fighting for members who have had their pay and conditions eroded by a decade of market-driven policies.

Over the last year, this fresh layer has developed confidence and experience. It led the 'Four Fights' dispute in many branches, in which members took up to 22 days of strike action last academic year.

However, while introducing a new layer to workers' struggle, experience



UCU members took 22 days of strike action in the 'Four Fights' dispute last year photo Ian Pattison

has also exposed them to the barriers posed by trade union bureaucracy. The so-called 'old guard' has been resistant to change.

Unable to see the shifting ground

beneath their feet, they have written off new activists for being too militant, and appealed to a 'moderate majority' which no longer exists. In such circumstances, elections are

essential to move past the factional stalemate.

Some go to great lengths to avoid elections, thinking it divisive for the branch. But without them, the



**They wanted the union fighting for members who have had their pay and conditions eroded by a decade of market-driven policies**

majority of the membership is left with no choice over who represents them. Elections provide an opportunity for debate about the best direction for the union, and the sort of leadership members want.

The Southampton UCU victory is therefore a decisive step for the development of the branch. However, it is just the start. The new leadership will be tested by the enormity of events in the next few months, including the financial crisis in higher education.

Branch leaders will also face enormous pressure to drop their most combative demands. To counter this, they will need to continue to engage and mobilise members in a movement from below, while quickly learning lessons from previous victories (and defeats) of the workers' movement.

# Tower Hamlets council workers strike against wholesale attack on terms and conditions

Council workers across all services in Tower Hamlets, east London, have been on strike against attacks on their terms and conditions.

The long-running dispute, known as 'Tower Rewards', came to a head with members of public service union Unison downing tools on Friday 3, Monday 6 and Tuesday 7 July. Unison has announced further strikes from Tuesday 14 to Thursday 16 July.

Unison hoped to avoid industrial action by involving the conciliation service Acas. But all hope was dashed when council bosses announced they were determined to sack 4,000 staff on 6 July, and reengage them on the controversial new contract, no matter what.

It is an outrage that a Labour council is using the worst methods of private sector bosses to impose

detrimental changes. One picket told the Socialist: "For the last few months, the council have been calling us 'key workers' and 'heroes'. But now we're being sacked and reemployed on worse pay and conditions - and being told we're letting down the community by going on strike."

The council has been unwilling to defer the change to allow further talks to take place, and more distance to be put between the peak of the pandemic and any potential confrontation. This left staff with no choice but to strike.

Bin workers, mainly in general union Unite, refused to cross picket lines in solidarity. They have recently been on strike themselves against their former employer, Veolia, before being brought back in-house.

EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY



Tower Hamlets Labour council is using the worst methods of private sector bosses to impose detrimental changes photo Hugo Pierre

# Nottingham unions fight council job cuts

JEAN THORPE

CHAIR, NOTTINGHAM CITY UNISON (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Local councils are facing huge financial crises due to Covid-19, on top of government funding cuts since 2010.

Nottingham City Council's main grant has been cut from £127m in 2013 to £25m for the last financial year. In February, it was reported that since 2011 Nottingham has lost £529 spending power per household.

Increased spending during Covid-19, including areas of social care and housing homeless people, together with revenue losses from income such as car parking and use of leisure facilities, has created a perfect storm for council finances.

As a substitute to fighting for proper funding, Nottingham City Council embarked on a commercialisation strategy. It bought properties, such as in Newcastle, and it's not sure whether or not rental

income losses from properties during Covid-19 have been included in its huge Covid-19 funding gap of £65 million.

Nottingham City Council faces other financial problems. It created a not-for-profit energy company, Robin Hood Energy (RHE), in 2015. Designed to try to reduce fuel poverty in Nottingham, the company has ultimately not been able to compete against the big six energy companies. The city council has loaned money to RHE on commercial terms. From April 2018 to March 2019, the company lost £23.1 million.

The council has also put at least £17 million into the redevelopment of the Intu Broadmarsh Centre. Intu has now gone into administration part-way through, and the council, which owns the freehold, has been handed back control of the site.

As has always been the case, the city council has chosen to pass some of the burden onto its workforce. It has just sent out letters to employees (apart from a number of exempted areas that are seen as critical council functions), inviting them to apply for voluntary redundancy.

Sweetened with an enhanced redundancy package (redundancy payments had previously been hacked back to the statutory minimum and over 1,000 jobs shed), the council is planning to cut 500 jobs.

Threats of further job cuts are likely, but the council admits that even these measures may not prevent it issuing a Section 144 notice, meaning that all but absolutely critical spending would not be allowed.

The political make-up of the council is overwhelmingly Labour with 50 of the 55 councillors. Of these 50, around 17 identify as being on the 'left'. However, scarcely any of the councillors have come out against either previous cuts/savings of £271.4 million from 2010/11 to 2019/20, nor against the budget in March 2020 that included cuts of £15.623 million, or, as yet, the proposed 500 job losses.

The main council unions are campaigning against these job losses. They are calling on the city council not to make cuts, using all available legal means, to campaign for a legal needs budget, to demand that central government fully funds Covid-19 expenditure, and that the government grant is raised to pre-2010 levels.



PHOTO PAUL MATTHEWSON

# SOCIALISM

A SOCIALIST FORUM OF DISCUSSION AND DEBATE OVER FOUR DAYS

20-23 November 2020

Sign up now!

This will be an online event - but if the opportunity to have in-person meetings arises you will be able to upgrade your ticket or keep a virtual pass

Course themes to include:

- Smash racism
- World in crisis
- After Corbyn
- Trotskyism
- End oppression
- Marxism Today
- Covid lessons

Hosted by



[socialism2020.net](http://socialism2020.net)

KRISTIAN O'SULLIVAN  
BIRMINGHAM NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

A fantastic virtual meeting of up to 300 trade union reps, workers, campaigners, socialists and international visitors took place on the 4 July as the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) held its 2020 summer conference.

The NSSN conference is the biggest annual event that brings together fighting rank-and-file union members with campaigners, this year including the parents who have organised with education workers against the Tories' reckless reopening of schools, and the anti-racist protesters who have exploded into action after the killing of George Floyd in the USA.

Rob Williams, national chair of the NSSN, appropriately summarised the current struggles as "a fight for our lives and livelihoods". If you want these words backed up with examples, look no further than how the biggest Covid-19 spikes are in factories not parliament. A localised lockdown has been introduced in Leicester, fuelled by the Tories mad rush to reopen schools in an attempt to kick-start the economy. This is despite mass opposition from teachers and parents due to fears about their community's safety.

However, it was made very clear at the conference that it's not just verbal opposition but an organised fightback that workers are prepared for. Rob said: "Whether physically or virtually, the NSSN will remain the hot breath on the backs of the necks of the trade union leaders at this time, saying what needs to be said, and doing what needs to be done."

Speakers listed both the industrial actions and social movements unfolding across the country, which the NSSN has given solidarity to: PCS members in the nation's Jobcentres, Communication Workers' Union (CWU) members in our mail depots, Unison members on the front lines of our healthcare services, RMT members in our transport systems, Unite members in the aviation sector, and much more.

**Fightbacks**

Industrial fightbacks are taking place at the same time as the amazing social fightbacks in the Black Lives Matter protests - protests fighting for racial justice, especially against systemic racism, but also linked to systemic injustices such as unaffordable and overcrowded housing, gentrification, Grenfell, low-paid work, PPE shortages, and how Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities are four times more likely to die from Covid-19 due to all these reasons.

Linda Taaffe, national secretary of NSSN, made the important and relevant point of how it wasn't until 2015 that the British state had paid off reparations to slave owners! But in this lunacy, she points out, why not use the same tactic of borrowing money and spread the debt over 200 years?

But instead of putting the money into the back pockets of big business, put it into the back pockets of ordinary working-class people and their families! Making sure workers don't pay a single penny for a crisis they didn't cause. We all know how fast the Tories found the 'magic money tree' when their system was put at risk.

Howard Beckett, assistant general secretary of general union Unite, stated categorically how this Tory

government was not just slow in its initial response to Covid-19 but "basically asleep at the wheel! It has failed in its duty to protect ordinary workers as it puts the profits of big business as its first priority." Howard also shone a light on the failure of the Labour Party and its response, now under the Blairite leadership of Keir Starmer.

The same Keir 'invisible man' Starmer, who instead of being the voice of millions of working-class people angry and prepared to fight the government, has been completely absent. Coming out with pitifully inadequate statements such as how he won't be "opposition for opposition sake", and how Labour must work with the Tories for 'national unity'.

As Rob pointed out, "does Starmer not realise the Tories only have national unity with their own class?" The man, who CWU member Clive Walder pointed out, was less brave than 67 Tory MPs who called for Dominic Cummings to be sacked, while his silence was deafening.

The government has been all too happy to throw the rest of us under the bus, or more grimly to let bus drivers die in droves due to lack of health and safety protection. Unite bus safety rep Moe, and Unison national executive committee member Hugo Pierre, (in a personal capacity) spoke about the situation in London.

It was Moe and his fellow workers who took their own initiative to seal up the cabs and close the front doors of buses, to protect bus workers' safety, before Transport for London was forced to make it mandatory policy (Labour mayor Sadiq Khan being also absent in support).

**Strike**

The first post-lockdown strike to take place has been in Tower Hamlets, east London, with a Labour council trying to sack over 4,000 workers and renege them on worse terms. The conference sent a message of solidarity to the strikers, and it was reported that bin workers, members of Unite, had refused to cross the picket line in solidarity.

Suzanne Muna, Unite housing workers' branch in London said: "In our branch there is a new level of confidence and energy. We've recruited an enormous number of new trade union reps over issues of health and safety. One of our new reps has led a successful campaign to win better toilet facilities."

And Onay Kasab, a Unite officer in local government in London, speaking in a personal capacity, said: "Boris Johnson has said there will no return to austerity. But tell that to local government workers. We will fight the cuts that are coming."

The way forward for that fight was detailed by Hugo Pierre: "The blueprint of how to fight that struggle is the Liverpool council in the 1980s." The 1983-87 socialist-led Labour council won back tens of millions of pounds for the city by building a fighting working-class movement in the city and setting a no-cuts budget. The millions were invested into building the new council housing, parks, nurseries, and to create jobs.

Jared Wood, Socialist Party member and RMT national executive committee spoke in a personal capacity about the battles to defend workers terms and conditions, and safety, on London Underground, and across the transport sector. He said: "There should be no trade-off between workplace safety and opening

# National Shop Stewards Network conference 2020

## "FIGHT FOR OUR LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS" SAYS FANTASTIC VIRTUAL MEETING



Below, some of the hundreds who attended the conference which sent solidarity to Tower Hamlets council workers on strike (above). The conference also discussed the situation in retail and fighting racism // PHOTOS ISAI PRIYA, PAUL MATTHEW, NSSN



**Industrial fightbacks are taking place at the same time as the amazing social fightbacks in the Black Lives Matter protests**

up the economy - a big issue for our workforce on tubes and tube stations. Instead of providing PPE, we're told 'just get on with it' - the same mentality that led to this crisis in the first place."

He also voiced anger at the profiteers WabTec for cutting jobs in Heathrow Express, and the 'vulture' consultants KPMG, proposing more austerity cuts for Transport for London.

Jared's solution was quite clear, and backed up by CWU member Steve Wootton, whose union is facing similar issues of privatisation in Royal Mail and telecommunication. Open up the books! Let workers follow the money and decide for themselves where resources should go, and fight to renationalise these vital services!

Other companies threatening thousands of job losses, particularly in the airline industry, should also be nationalised to save jobs. Sharon Graham, Unite executive officer, said about proposed job losses at British Airways (BA): "BA thought on the 15 June that they could sack 42,000

workers and reemploy 30,000 on crap terms and conditions because they thought they could get away with it.

"They thought we couldn't take industrial action because people were in lockdown, and they thought they would do it under the cover of Covid-19. Other companies are looking at BA to see what happens. We are in a huge moment for the movement. We have to start putting stakes in the ground to say you are not getting away with this."

Howard Beckett, echoed by other speakers, went on to say if the Tories want to use false World War Two themes and myths to act as cover for their failures, then let's use real facts from World War Two. Despite being a war-ravaged country, with tanking GDP, Britain, through collective action and sacrifice by workers was able to build homes, the welfare state, the NHS, and much more.

We need to once again say - we are not going back. This pandemic is a war, a war between ordinary workers saving the nation and bosses who are benefiting from it. More workers have

died from Covid-19 than during the Blitz.

A poignant example of this was illustrated by Beckett when he told the story of a Unite retail member working in Sainsbury's, who was told by management that she is "feeding the nation" - she responded by asking for a pay rise so she can feed her family.

Amy Murphy, Socialist Party member and president of the retail workers' union Usdaw, spoke in a personal capacity fresh from her shift in Tesco. She reiterated the need for shop workers to receive a pay rise, spoke about their fight for safety, and how supermarket workers are prepared to fight against any attempt by the government to try to rejig Sunday trading laws.

She said: "Throughout the pandemic shop workers have been hailed by Boris and the government as heroes, keeping the nation fed, and now this is a real slap in the face to our members that we're being treated like this."

Shop worker and Usdaw rep Ryan Aldred pointed out: "The retail sector has seen both sides of the extreme - on the one hand we have seen

retailers go out of business, and on the other hands the huge profits of the supermarkets which reported an extra £2 billion in profits and sales in March alone. We have a huge job to fight to save jobs that are being lost left, right and centre, and likewise a huge fight to win better pay and terms and conditions. We need to take those fights to the bosses."

Education workers and campaigners from Leicester told the conference about the campaign to defend safety in communities and schools - and the links between school opening, sweatshop operation, and Covid-19 outbreaks. Leicester National Education Union is organising to build a joint union and community campaign across the city.

The main session at the conference was followed by workshops on BAME workers, young workers, the NHS, unionising social care, education, workplace safety, housing, and fighting the cuts.

It has only been possible to lightly skim the surface of the fantastic contributions and energy that was

present at the NSSN conference, but the same themes were interwoven in all of them: if you want a safe workplace and community join a union! Organise in your union to drive the labour movement forward for an organised fightback of industrial action, political strikes, and a clear anti-austerity programme to defend the working class against Covid-19 and the Tories; to fight for nationalisation under democratic workers' control; for full PPE; full pay rises; reversing of all austerity cuts, for teachers and parents to decide when it is safe for schools to reopen.

Claps don't feed nurses and workers were always 'key' before and after Covid-19.

Get all the latest union news  
nationalshop stewardsnetwork  
with the NSSN bulletin  
shopstewards.net



**The NSSN can play a role in linking up rank-and-file trade unionists, to unite struggles and win better pay and conditions**

## BAME workshop: Union fightback needed to defeat racism

ISAI PRIYA

A well-attended workshop of the NSSN conference on the discriminating conditions of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) workers discussed how the NSSN can put pressure on the trade union leaders to build a movement to fight against racism and racial inequality in communities and workplaces.

The session was chaired by Lawanya Ramajeyam, NSSN steering committee and Tamil Solidarity member. She introduced the session by saying: "One of the key reasons why BAME workers are disproportionately affected by the pandemic is the inherent inequality that exists within this exploitative system."

"Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority workers have been on the front line, as key workers without sufficient PPE, and faced the brutality of this system - of poverty, low pay, long hours and living in overcrowded accommodation."

The main speakers were Hugo Pierre, Unison national executive committee member, speaking in a personal capacity, Moe, bus driver and Unite activist, and TU Senan, a member of the Socialist Party and Tamil Solidarity international coordinator.

Hugo mentioned the institutionalised racism in workplaces, where BAME workers are paid less on average and are less likely to be given promotions. He also referred to the Trade Union Congress resolution passed at its 2018 conference - and the need to implement it.

Moe gave a personal example of how workers got organised to protect their health and safety. He said: "We are the workers, we provide the services and we should make the decisions."

Senan explained why the Black Lives Matter movement was taking place now. The young people have seen the rotten nature of capitalism exposed by the pandemic and they are not going to put up with it. He also raised the need for workers' political representation in parliament to fight against austerity, racism and class inequality.

There was then a lively discussion, with passionate personal contributions and proposed actions. It was the beginning of the discussion on the set of demands that need to be raised at this period, in this crisis - to win back our rights. The NSSN can play a role in linking up rank-and-file trade unionists, to unite struggles and win better pay and conditions - this was brought to the fore.

The session agreed that the urgent task ahead is for all workers to join a trade union and to get actively involved. And for the workers in trade unions, to get organised - to put pressure of their leadership to fight for a £12-an-hour minimum wage (£15 in London), for jobs, homes and services for all.

## WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?



• [editors@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:editors@socialistparty.org.uk)

or, if you're not online, write to the Socialist Inbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD

### ● Worse than useless

Anneliese Dodds, Labour's shadow chancellor, was asked on the Andrew Marr show, does Labour support all the care workers in this country coming back under government control, to nationalise them?

Do you think they should all work for one regulated employer, i.e. the government? She didn't agree.

Marr said Labour (Jeremy Corbyn) once supported a nationalised care sector. She still wouldn't agree.

Privatised care workers, due to not receiving sick pay, actually carried the virus into care homes.

There's no point in Keir Starmer's Labour Party if, after a national scandal, it can't simply call for the nationalisation of care. She's useless.

**NANCY TAAFFE**  
WALTHAM FOREST, LONDON

• See 'No going back: Nationalise social care' on opposite page.

### ● Jobs and council homes not gentrification

Southampton one-bedroom flat £195,000. Who can afford that? Very few.

Nuffield Southampton Theatres to close with loss of 86 jobs.

Why isn't the council stepping in with its £200 million property fund? Can't we show this useless Tory government there is an alternative to an economic recession?

Southampton council should get shovel-ready with a programme to defend jobs and services, restoring the £140 million government funding stolen from the council by the Tories since 2010, and build affordable council housing for all.

The council could show it had a different vision to Tory inequality.

**NICK CHAFFEY**  
SOUTHAMPTON

### ● NHS 72nd anniversary

The NHS is 72. The hospital my mum works at delivered the first NHS baby.

Millions since have benefited from healthcare provided for need and not on ability to pay. The NHS was founded not as a charity or a business, but as a publicly owned service paid for by everyone, for everyone.

During the coronavirus pandemic, NHS workers have played an absolutely vital role in less than ideal conditions. Hundreds have died from the virus.

They were betrayed by lack of PPE and testing. The NHS went into the pandemic understaffed from a decade of cuts

that has eroded the number of hospital beds.

We must campaign for a 10% pay rise for all NHS workers, the reintroduction of NHS student bursaries and kicking out profiteers from the health service. We cannot go back to how it was before.

**BEA GARDNER**  
SOUTHAMPTON

Breathtaking hypocrisy - Boris Johnson joins the national clap for the NHS.

Healthcare workers need a decent pay rise; an investment in extra staff to ease their workload; a properly funded, publicly-run health service free of profiteers; a nationalised pharmaceutical industry that takes research and development seriously; investment in our social care system to make it fit for purpose for our loved ones.

That's how we thank our NHS.

**KAREN SEYMOUR**  
MANSFIELD

Leeds NHS protests were not just another clap that Boris Johnson could join in on, but put forward demands about decent pay, kicking private companies out and having a properly funded NHS.

**TANIS BELSHAM-WRAY**  
LEEDS

### ● Tories talk through Telegraph

Why are government ministers making announcements about lockdown changes through the Telegraph?

At the beginning of the pandemic they got called out because some of the articles were even behind a paywall. How can all people protect their health and follow the rules if you have to pay to know what they are?

The Telegraph got a backlash so made some, not all, of the articles free. Elected government ministers think it's OK to make government announcements through a right-wing, big business paper rather than through the whole press. Even the BBC radio host was annoyed about it.

**HELEN PATTISON**  
ACTON, LONDON

### ● Utilities sold off

All the utilities sold off by the Tories have put billions into the grubby hands of their profiteer friends. This money, now in the bank accounts of the super-rich, dwarfs the piddling amount being promised by BoJo (see 'Boris' new big deal' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)).

We need to fight for the renationalisation of all our utilities, under democratic workers' control, with compensation only given on proven need.

**ELAINE BRUNSKILL**  
GATESHEAD

### ● Covid and PPE are big business

Business has declined no opportunity to flourish, capitalising on human misery, throughout the Covid-19 crisis and the scramble for PPE. Some firms have sourced substandard and flimsy masks in a rush to profit from people's natural desire to protect themselves.

National retailers have been exposed for charging as much as £1 for very basic and single-use masks, which fail to



Photo Leeds Socialist Party

conform to clinical standards. The result has been already-devastated household budgets strained further, mountains of waste littering streets, and a collective false sense of security.

The latest culprit is Tyne and Wear Metro rail, allowing its preferred vending partner Selecta to charge punters £3.70 for a pack of three masks which offer limited protection at best. Accompanied with a £5.30 day ticket, a whopping £9 for essential workers, commuting to increasingly scarce and dangerous employment.

**WILLIAM JARRETT**  
NHS WORKER

### ● Queen sacks government

The Australian high court has allowed the release of the Queen's secret correspondence before the dismissal of the

Whitlam government in 1975 (see 'When the Queen's representative sacked a government' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)). Shows the role of the monarchy, when the chips are down, they will be used against us.

**ALEX GOUNELAS**  
HACKNEY, LONDON

### ● When I worked in a library

All the damage done by the Tories was predicated on the Blair years, virtually all of it. The Blair 'reforms' privatised and smashed up the safety net; the consequences were to be felt by future generations.

When I worked for the library service, we used to have a room out the back that stocked all the books which were the basis of the housebound service.

It had books for the blind, the disabled

and the elderly. We supplemented it with books from the whole service.

We all had our regulars. We sent notes to them and they sent notes to us about what books they liked or didn't.

I remember one Christmas, one woman had missed the doorbell and missed her 48(!) books over Christmas.

She was crying down the phone as she needed her books like others need medicine. She was on her own and never had a tele.

When I was sorting books out the back, I used to get visited by a middle-aged woman - a trade unionist for the home-care workers. She too loved her job and felt important in her work.

She administered day care for people in their own homes who came out of hospital. We were both trade union organisers, fighting to defend the most delicate of services under the then Blair government.

Time for a new workers' party.  
**A LIBRARY WORKER WHOSE JOB WAS CUT BY A LABOUR COUNCIL**

## SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

July-August issue includes...

- #BLM rising - a movement for system change
- The origins of racism
- A new era begins

[socialismtoday.org/subscribe](http://socialismtoday.org/subscribe) // 020 8988 8777

- Paper subscription £3 a month, e-subscription £2.50



# NO GOING BACK

# NATIONALISE SOCIAL CARE!

In the second of our 'No going back' series, trade union organiser **Glynn Doherty** looks at the pandemic scandal which has devastated care homes, who's to blame, and, what needs to change.

**T**he anarchy of free-market capitalism has been brutally exposed to millions through its inability to combat the Covid-19 pandemic in the richest countries on the planet.

This is highlighted clearly - and tragically - in the social care sector in England and Wales. The lives of thousands of the most disadvantaged in society have been sacrificed in the pursuit of maintaining private profits. Always the poor relation to the NHS, this has been devastatingly confirmed by events.

While health settings received a third of the number of eye protectors from central government, care homes received 5%; hospitals received three-quarters of gloves required from central stocks, care homes received 8%; and care homes received no gowns from central stocks.

By May, central government's online PPE system was catering for about 1,400 providers. There are over 50,000 primary, social care and community care providers across Britain!

The shortage of PPE meant some care homes were paying more than £1,000 a day for masks! Others - without such resources - just forced staff to continue unprotected. One care home I came across set its own 'rules' so staff were only provided with PPE if residents displayed two separate Covid-19 symptoms - one symptom was insufficient!

Testing, which should have been mandatory for all care staff from day one of the pandemic, was virtually non-existent. It may never be known how many people have died - and continue to die - through this failure of the Tory government.

## Public funds

The lack of planning in social care is its stand-out characteristic. In 1979 two-thirds of care was NHS or council-run, but now 84% is for-profit.

No one seeking to run a comprehensive, joined-up service would start from suggesting there be tens of thousands of different employers! In 2018 there were around 18,500 organisations across 39,000 care-providing locations in England alone. And yet, big business with all its money-grabbing has a firm foothold.

HC-One, catering for 17,000 residents, has 62 companies, including 19 registered offshore, with the



The trade unions need now to take stock of their failures over decades to significantly organise social care workers PHOTO PAUL MATTHEWSON

parent company based in the Cayman Islands. It paid a £6 million dividend to shareholders in the year to September 2019 - down from a total of £48.5 million in 2017 and 2018 - though only some accounts are publicly visible, making it impossible to tell whether more money is flowing out of the company.

Four Seasons Health Care, the second-largest provider, has already been taken over by US hedge fund H/2 Capital Partners. This is not care provision; it is syphoning public funds from overstretched local government budgets into the coffers of the already rich.

To highlight the pickings that can be accumulated, recently agencies have raised the price of staff to as high as £90 an hour, per person, while, of course, the carers themselves receive the minimum wage.

The calls for change are many and varied. The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services has called for the sector to be "reformed" and "reset" and demands "sort out social care once and for all".

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy chief executive Rob Whiteman said: "It's time for the government to stop treating social care like the poor relation and provide this critical sector, which cares for the most

vulnerable people in society, with the resources and long-overdue reform it requires".

While the Chief Executive at the Health Foundation, Dr Jennifer Dixon, called on the government "to ensure that those who already face most disadvantage do not continue paying the highest price [by seizing] this moment to implement a national health inequalities strategy."

Not all are as demanding. A Guardian editorial on the government edict to move patients from hospitals to care homes without the necessary safeguards, which caused a great number of the 20,000 more deaths than would normally have been expected in care homes, simply said: "Boris Johnson needs to say sorry for this deadly failure to protect the elderly". Millions will say he needs to resign not just apologise!

## Integrated health and care

But none of these demands will tackle the root of the problem. While social care, and health services in general, are run for profit, most of the failings exposed during this pandemic will recur.

Journalist Polly Toynbee, hardly a left winger, recently concurred: "After this, care needs to be renationalised, locally run with a single seamless NHS/care profession... the service

needs to be free for rich and poor alike by the time they use it... There is no better time for brave reform, with care newly valued by all who have stood and clapped."

The Socialist Party agrees and embraces the demands of a publicly run, fully integrated health and care service, where resources, expertise and experience can be shared to the benefit of all, rather than the privileged few.

It must be funded to the level where it can be run as a professional service, with staff health, safety and wellbeing properly protected through full training, with a career structure that would encourage staff to specialise and, of course, where decent living wages would be paid.

Charles Tallack, an assistant director at the Health Foundation, has said "Social care professionals are clearly undervalued and underpaid". He correctly predicts this "might create pressure to professionalise and improve pay and conditions."

It's often said care workers can take home more pay with a sideways career move into supermarket shelf-stacking. It is not intended as a put-down of shop workers, but to publicise the appalling pay levels social care work attracts. It highlights what capitalist society will get away with if workers' organisations allow it.

The unions - Unison, Unite and

the GMB - need now to take stock of their failures over decades to significantly organise social care workers, specifically those working for private employers or in the voluntary sector.

## Political change

Yes, they need to launch campaigns for more pay, for better conditions, for shorter hours. But they also need to mobilise social care workers into a much larger campaign for political change - for nationalisation, an integrated health and care service, and an end to big business and hedge fund profiteering on the backs of deteriorating health and ageing.

When the neoliberal think tank, the Adam Smith Institute, feels the need to comment in a recent report that "making social care free to everyone as part of the NHS is a non-starter and would be the largest nationalisation ever", you know its time has come!

Millions are learning through bitter experience that capitalism can't protect them. They need socialism. Social care workers will be a key force in transforming society.

If union and Labour Party leaders don't listen, those workers will strive to transform the unions and build a new party of the working class, as a step towards ridding us of capitalism and building a socialist future.

## Books that inspired me: The Fire Next Time

MARK PICKERSGILL  
STEVENAGE SOCIALIST PARTY

James Baldwin's 'The fire next time' is a series of short essays describing the author's experiences of being black in America in the 1950s and 60s. The essays were published in 1963, 100 years after the emancipation of slavery act. Baldwin remarks that every black American bears a name that originally belonged to the white man whose chattel he was.

He writes about his personal journey as an African-American, encountering segregation in what he calls the richest country in the world.

Baldwin faced the familiar police prejudice and victimisation even as a 13-year-old boy in New York. "Why don't you N\*\*\*\*\* stay uptown where you belong?", he was told by a policeman. Just one example of the police racism that he remembered. He developed a strong sense of injustice and rage.

### Rage

Baldwin was able to articulate this rage in many of his writings. He also exposes the hypocrisy of Christianity, and how it was used in order to justify the enslavement and colonisation of the African continent.

He highlights his own conflicting experiences of attending church and teaching at Sunday school, as he tried to come to terms with his own consciousness. Reluctantly teaching the word of God, rather than telling his congregation to throw away their bibles, get off their knees, and organise a rent strike.

Turning his back on religion, he recognised the effects the liberation struggles in Africa had on the struggles of black people in the USA. At the same time, he raises the fact that western imperialism had to constantly look over its shoulder towards the Soviet Union - granting independence, but trying to hold on to its influences in the post-colonial world.

Baldwin describes the constant struggle for equality in US society in the years just before the emergence of the black civil rights movement, and the anti-Vietnam protests of the late 1960s.

He comes to the conclusion "that there would be no possibility of a real change" for black people in America without the most radical and far-reaching changes in the American political and social structure."

James Baldwin's skill was his unique ability to question the ideology that sustains American imperialism. His conclusions and observations address the same issues that confront the recent Black Lives Matter protests that we have recently witnessed in present-day US society.



The school that tried to end racism // Photo Channel 4

CHRIS HOLMES  
NORTH LONDON TEACHER

It has become a truism that racism is not inherent but learnt. So, when the Channel 4 series 'The school that tried to end racism' showed an experiment with a group of Year 7 students in a South London school to explore how racism was learnt, it was always going to be a powerful piece of television. Unfortunately, it promised much more than it delivered.

At the start of a three-week programme, the students were given a benchmark test developed by Harvard University to detect unconscious racial bias. Students were timed in their positive or negative responses to different images of race. Shockingly, the same twelve year-olds who had said that they don't see colour and had expressed anti-racist ideas, showed an overwhelming pro-white bias.

### Hollow

Shocked that their previously expressed views of equality and tolerance has been exposed as hollow, the students were then divided into 'affinity' groups; of white, and BAME students, to discuss the issues behind this.

While the white students' group had little to offer, other than repeating abstract statements about equality, the young BAME students shared shocking evidence of their own personal experiences of racism in the form of profiling in shops and being stopped and searched on the street by the police.

Initially unsure about being separated from their friends of other races, the BAME students were clearly more comfortable with the affinity group than the white students. They said that it was the first time that they had the chance to openly share their experiences with people who understood.

For the white students, the

# TV: The school that tried to end racism

## Good intentions are not enough

introduction of the idea of certain advantages was not such a comfortable experience. The use of the 'handicap race' - an exercise that has gone viral on social media - where participants in a race are given different starting points dependent on their life experiences of racial discrimination, gave a powerful practical demonstration of advantages and disadvantages that the white students had previously been unaware of.

So far so good. However, having established that simply ignoring colour would not end racism, it was in the second episode that the limits of the essentially individualistic focus of the unconscious bias model was exposed. Students were taken to the National Portrait Gallery and shown the striking absence of black history or black role models exhibited there in the national story. There was a cursory discussion of the slave trade, and students were shocked to hear about the compensation of slave owners after abolition, but there was no attempt to examine their own school curriculum.

There was frequent use of the terms 'institutional racism' and 'systemic discrimination', but in fact

this was restricted to a discussion of negative stereotypes perpetuated by the media and other institutions that produce a cycle of discrimination. The discussion ignored the main argument of theories of institutional discrimination, that unequal outcomes are not necessarily the result of intent or the actions of individuals, but of in-built inequalities in policies and process.

### Uncomfortable viewing

This is not a theoretical issue - the students were not asked to share their experiences of life at school, for example, in terms of how they experienced behaviour policies or curriculum options, which might have made for uncomfortable viewing by school leaders.

Similarly, the students took part in a debate about whether Britain was a racist country. But this still did not really address issues of racism in wider society. Most significantly, no reference was ever made to the central role of class in creating inequality and disadvantage, and how that intersects with race.

Perhaps the choice of school for the experiment had some significance in

this. Glenthorne High School is an outstanding academy with a significantly lower proportion of students on free school meals than the national average and based in the suburban London borough of Sutton. A very different picture would probably have come from an inner-city school that reflected experiences of poverty, housing, unemployment and crime, all of which cannot be separated from racial inequalities.

The series ended on a feel-good moment when the students retook the test of unconscious bias. Predictably, the results showed that the students had lost their previous bias and were now more genuinely race 'neutral'. Undoubtedly, some of them had been on an important personal journey through the three weeks and, as with any school-based television, this had thrown up moments that were genuinely both funny and moving. However, the programme also showed the limits of an individualistic approach to anti-racism. Whatever its good intentions no school can 'end racism' - it is fundamentally a systemic problem, rooted in capitalist society, requiring fundamental system change.

# The best place to start - join the Socialist Party



Lincolnshire Socialist Party

JACOB CORR  
A MEMBER OF THE NEWLY RELAUNCHED  
LINCOLNSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY BRANCH

I joined the Labour Party, like many people, in the surge of support that grew around Jeremy Corbyn. Finally! Someone who is saying what we all can see.

Big business and the mega-rich are destroying our NHS, eroding our public services and stripping our economy to line their own pockets. Somebody who will stand up for what the working class has been begging for since the Blair years. Someone with principles and a proven

record of sticking to it when push comes to shove. Someone who will stand up for me.

As the years progressed, it became apparent the Corbyn movement was dying. The pro-Corbyn campaign, Momentum, failed to get itself off the internet and onto the streets.

I was looking for a positive, proactive alternative. That's when I turned to the Socialist Party. I am extremely proud to be the branch secretary for the newly relaunched Lincolnshire branch.

In my short time in the party, I have already found Socialist Party members participating in local campaigns, holding regular street stalls

and making our faces shown at local protests. Socialist Party members are active in the labour movement, from the trade unions to the campaign to save the A&E in Grantham.

Our members are passionate. They put their blood, sweat and tears into organising to fight for the real revolutionary change that we so desperately need.

We have a long road ahead of us to our goal, a socialist world run for the millions not the millionaires. But I know in my heart that it begins where we are - on the streets with ordinary people grouping together to fight for each other. For a system that works for everyone.

## Bangladesh: Stop closure and privatisation of Jute Mills - Sign the solidarity statement

This statement has been initiated by East London Socialist Party members. We encourage trade unionists to add your name in support - please email [petemason@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:petemason@socialistparty.org.uk). Read the full thing at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk).

We give full support to the workers in Bangladesh fighting to stop the closure, and subsequent privatisation, of state-owned Jute Mills. And

condemn the arrest of Jute Mills trade union leaders, Nurul Islam and Waliar Rahman.

Chronic underinvestment, winding down production, and corruption have been used by the government to 'prove' the mills are no longer efficient. Vulture privatisation will aim to strip the factories, and drive down jobs, wages and conditions in the name of profit.

The government are bowing to the demands of world capitalism,

especially the World Bank, who want an end to all state-owned enterprises in Bangladesh.

Rather than neoliberalism, we pose the full modernisation of the plants, the retention of the entire workforce, the dismissal of all corrupt officials, and workers' control and management to plan the production of the industry.

We fight neoliberal exploitation with defence of workers' interests and socialism.



London // Photo Greg Randall

## Trans rights protests oppose Tory backsliding

### London

Well over a thousand overwhelmingly young trans and non-binary people and supporters protested in Parliament Square on 4 July against the Tories backsliding on trans rights.

The chant of "Black Lives Matter - Trans Lives Matter" was to the fore, expressing solidarity, and showing how, when one oppressed group in society moves into action, radicalisation spreads.

Theresa May's government consulted on reforming the Gender Recognition Act, so that trans people could register their legal identity in the appropriate gender without a lengthy medical process.

The Johnson regime looks likely to ditch this idea after a transphobic campaign by the right-wing press, shamefully given encouragement by some who claim to be on the left. The Tories may even introduce

a 'bathroom bill', following far-right Republicans in the US, putting trans people's safety at risk by barring them from public toilets and other facilities.

Protesters were angry and determined, with speakers addressing the difficulty of life for trans and non-binary people in a society that discriminates and denies their existence.

The Socialist Party leaflet (see 'Yes to self-identity: Fight for trans rights' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)) linked trans' struggles to the need to defend jobs and services, building a democratically organised mass movement against oppression, and changing society so that legal rights can be

guaranteed. This was so well received that we ran out of the 500 leaflets we brought.

Many thanked us for being there and raising socialist ideas. This included putting our position to a very few who objected to socialist ideas being raised and accused us of trying to co-opt the movement.

We replied that we want it the other way around. We put our socialist ideas forward so that those ideas can be co-opted by the movement.

One person said they wouldn't take a Pride flag on a Black Lives Matter protest as "that would be against intersectionality", but had no answer when we said that is exactly the kind of link-up needed. This was a very small minority, with vastly more agreeing when we said that a fight for liberation requires a fight against capitalism.

One thing is sure, if the Tories go through with attacks there will be a big and radicalised movement in response.

The trade unions must take this up, defending trans rights and joining the fight for self-identification, both by defending trans workers in the workplace, and also politically.

GREG RANDALL

### Newcastle

100 protested for Black Lives Matter and trans rights in Newcastle on 4 July. A Socialist Party member earned applause and cheers on the open mic when they raised the need for mass working-class action to achieve rights for all.

SAM MORDEN

## Black Lives Matter - the fight is not over

### London

Hundreds gathered for a Black Lives Matter protest on 5 July. Given it was the anniversary of the opening of the NHS, the protest started with a round of applause for the NHS, and all the healthcare workers on the front line of Covid.

Speeches focused on the need to have a decent healthcare system, the high number of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people who work on poverty pay in healthcare, and the disproportionately high mortality rates of black women, particularly maternity deaths.

Another speaker urged people to join a trade union to fight racism in the workplace. Socialist Party members discussed with people about the need to build a

mass united movement against racism, oppression and capitalism.

HELEN PATTISON

### Bradford

The upsurge in coronavirus in Bradford meant the protest on 4 July in Centenary Square was smaller compared to those that came before.

The protest was still home to a diverse impassioned crowd, showing the fight is far from over - a movement not a moment.

Almost all of those attending got a copy of our leaflet, and many took the Socialist Party's popular Malcolm X placards to hold.

TOM GIBSON

# Covid pandemic and Northern Ireland

# WORKERS MUST RESIST THE BOSSES' OFFENSIVE



**DONAL O'COFAIGH**

CCLA COUNCILLOR AND MILITANT LEFT MEMBER  
(CWI IRELAND)

**T**he coronavirus pandemic hit Northern Ireland at the very same time as the political parties in the Assembly (Stormont) were re-establishing a power-sharing Executive for the first time in over three months.

A major contributory factor to that political development was the victory of the Conservative party in the general election, which settled the status of the Brexit deal - a major cause of division between the parties.

But another factor was the huge growing public revulsion at political parties on either side of the historical nationalist/unionist community divide, which are responsible for an extended political stalemate at a time of mounting economic and social challenges.

A new crisis at Stormont has broken out following the attendance of Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill at the funeral of a well-known Republican, Bobby Storey.

First Minister and DUP leader, Arlene Foster, called for O'Neill to stand down while an investigation is made into whether she and other Sinn Féin leaders broke coronavirus social distancing guidelines during the funeral.

O'Neill is adamant she stuck to the rules. While the Stormont Executive is unlikely to fall over this latest clash, it goes to show how shaky it remains.

The strike of tens of thousands of public sector workers in the health and civil service over low pay and staff shortages was decisive in forcing the hand of the politicians.

The hope of the parties for an extended 'honeymoon' after concluding a power-sharing deal was dashed as the divisions between the parties reopened over issues as varied as whether to follow the lead of Dublin or London in the lockdown, the deployment of the British army in distributing PPE, and conflicting attempts to source PPE by procurement in conjunction with Dublin or London.

## Momentum

While the politicians flailed around in the face of the crisis - the forward momentum of the trade unions continued, especially during the initial stage of lockdown.

Workers organised to force shutdowns and furlough agreements, unofficial walkouts forced meatpacking companies to provide basic infection controls, and in the public sector, legal action was threatened to ensure

the provision of PPE in health and social care settings.

However, as the weeks wore on, a demobilisation of the working class increasingly took its toll. Many workers were absent from workplaces and dependent on employer-sanctioned furlough arrangements which only provided 80% of their wage.

Trade union democracy was put on ice by officials from above as a means to affect a class truce between workers and bosses (see box). At the same time, companies increasingly sought to use the pandemic as an excuse to bring forward redundancies and attacks on wages and terms and conditions of employment.

Even the more proactive and ostensibly 'left' trade union leaderships sought to reduce workers' struggle through securing concessions on infection controls and state bailouts for private businesses via partnership-type arrangements with the Stormont government.

As the Tory government in London and the caretaker government in Dublin both rapidly executed their 'reemergence', pressure grew on the laggard Assembly Executive for similar moves.

The pressure was foremost exhibited through threats and actual job losses - in aviation, aerospace, retail and hospitality in particular.

## Young people

The militancy which formed around the Black Lives Matter movement was driven by young people - many of who were forced out of jobs in the first weeks of the pandemic shutdown.

Tens of thousands of young workers on zero-hour contracts suddenly had no hours and no comeback with their bosses. Agency workers were no longer required. Temporary and permanent workers with less than a year's service were seen as fair game as they had no redundancy rights either.

Many students lost part-time jobs but retained responsibility to pay enormous rents to student slum landlords.

When the mobilisation of Black Lives Matter arrived a new generation fed up of racism, and also sectarianism, came out onto the streets, and showed their opposition. But in the hours before major mobilisations in Belfast and Derry, the Stormont Executive passed legislation giving police powers to impose fines on those attending protests of over six.

All shades of the political establishment were a party to this move - which effectively limited the right to free assembly. At the same time, the Executive's Health Department announced plans to give itself special



Growing numbers of workers are turning to the trade unions to fight for decent workplace conditions photo Donal O'Cofoigh

Covid powers to close health and social care services without any formal consultation.

This can only be interpreted as a power grab to better deliver a programme of closures and privatisation, which has been delayed as a result of grassroots and trade union campaigns for over a decade.

The threats posed to Northern Ireland's economy are stark. The aviation sector is under huge pressure. Flybe, the mainstay of Belfast City Airport, collapsed - casting a shadow over that airport's future. Hundreds of jobs have been lost in the other major airport, Belfast International, with cutbacks by Easyjet and Jet2.

The hugely significant aerospace and defence industry has already suffered major layoffs and remains under huge threat as the sector faced a potentially permanent global contraction.

The other two pillars of the economy, agriculture/food and pharmaceuticals, are hugely exposed to any adverse headwinds from Brexit. Should a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic reemerge in the context of a breakdown in trade negotiations between London and Brussels - an increasingly likely prospect - they too will face tremendous pressures.

## Economic outlook

Northern Ireland's economy faces a period of grave instability. Like everywhere else in this global downturn, there is an ever-growing 'reserve army of labour'. The likelihood is, if

the trade union movement does not take the lead in a fightback over jobs and living standards, then workers will struggle to avoid a sharp downturn in conditions.

Covid will be used by employers to further depress workers' conditions and the neoliberal establishment will push forward with attempts to cut back on the vestigial public services.

Running contrary to that is the growing numbers of workers turning to the trade unions - in part a new generation but also new sectors of the workforce. It seems likely that this will result in widening and

deepening struggle in trade unions between militant workers and a conservative officialdom.

What seems even more likely, is that demands for nationalisation of industries will reinvigorate the demand for socialist politics which transcends the divisions which have marked previous politics.

While it represents a colossal challenge, Covid has accelerated underlying trends in society, opening open the door to working-class politics which can prepare the way to build a mass party of workers with a socialist programme to challenge capitalism.

## Nipsa - fight the 'coup', yes to union democracy

The Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (Nipsa) the largest trade union in the north of Ireland, had a strong reputation as a democratic union. But the recent actions of its ruling body, the General Council (GC), has deeply damaged that reputation.

Nipsa postponed its 2020 Annual Delegate Conference following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the absence of a conference, the union began a direct ballot of its 160-plus branches who elect the union officers - President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and various committees.

The election process was due to close on 10 June. But before the election could run its course, 14 members of the so-called Independent Group on the 25-member GC used their majority to cancel the election and appoint their own people as top officers.

They used the spurious excuse that this was necessary because Nipsa branches have stopped functioning due to Covid-19, and members could not be consulted.

However, this manoeuvre was exposed when two-and-a-half hours after a circular was issued cancelling the elections, a new circular was issued instructing all Nipsa Northern Ireland Civil Service branches to consult members on pay.

This blatant gerrymandering of the elections is a direct challenge to the union's 44,000 membership. Already branches are in an uproar. Every branch of the union should be calling upon the GC majority to respect democratic rights and hold real elections.

# Hong Kong: Beijing steps up repressive measures

## How can workers and young people fight for democratic rights?

CLARE DOYLE

COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

**T**housands of protesters took to the streets of Hong Kong on 1 July on the 23rd anniversary of the settlement between London and Beijing, which marked the end of more than 150 years of British rule of the colony. Under the 1997 treaty, there was to be a 50-year period of compromise with the Chinese 'communist' government, labelled "one country two systems".

The demonstrators were expressing their anger at Beijing's recent move to impose direct rule in Hong Kong - ending its limited autonomy.

In May, the National People's Congress of China approved a proposal for the Beijing government to use its own forces to impose 'order' on Hong Kong. It came into effect on 30 June, and will stop, prevent and punish acts of "secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces [which] endanger national security".

Trials could possibly be held in mainland courts, and sentences could range from fines and restraints on activities to detention for life in the notorious camps or prisons on the mainland of China, and even the possibility of execution in extreme cases.

### Street protests

The scenes on 1 July of demonstrators facing tear gas, water cannon, pepper spray and rubber bullets from police differed little from those seen for months last year over a proposed extradition law (which was dropped) and in pursuit of five basic democratic demands.

Well over two million of Hong Kong's seven-and-a-half million population - predominantly youth - are estimated to have been involved in street demonstrations last year, and tens of thousands of them arrested. Some are still held in detention.

Their determination was exemplified by the youth who went into each battle with written wills in their pockets - prepared literally to die for their cause.

The coronavirus outbreak brought those mass protests to a halt. But the easing of the lockdown saw brave and determined demonstrators back on the streets.

On 1 July, riot police arrested more than 370 demonstrators, including Hong Kong parliamentarian Ray Chan. Just ten were charged under the new security law and quite rapidly released. However, books and literature that Beijing deems a threat have now been removed from libraries.

Chinese state forces are already based in Hong Kong, but can now be supplemented by additional forces from the mainland. Beijing has appointed Luo Huining as an 'adviser' to Carrie Lam - head of Hong Kong's legislature and already a puppet of Beijing. Lam told opponents "not



The Chinese regime's new security law effectively bans democratic rights protests in Hong Kong

to challenge the law or the consequences would be serious".

Huining's task is to oversee the implementation of the new security law, backed up by a new security agency headed by Guangdong official Zheng Yanxiong. Zheng is notorious for his central role in the vicious crushing of mass protest in Wukan, China, in 2011, and elsewhere.

### Western governments

The heads of European governments have voiced objections, but not too strongly. The European Union managed a five-sentence declaration promising to "raise the issue in our continuing dialogue with China".

On the other hand, Boris Johnson in Britain, whose popularity is flagging, has been quick to condemn Beijing's move, and offer 'unconditional citizenship' to all three million Hong Kong residents eligible for British National Overseas (BNO) passports.

However, Tory foreign secretary, Dominic Raab actually admitted that the government would not be able to "coercively force" China to allow BNO citizens to travel.

Many will anyway not want to leave Asia. Britain has sizeable interests in banks and businesses in Hong Kong established over a century and a half as the colonial power.

Today's Tory government sheds crocodile tears over the lack of democratic rights in the territory, and poses as the friend of the harassed citizens of Hong Kong. But British governments have long tolerated the repression of genuine democratic rights in Hong Kong, along with those in China, in the interests of trade, investment and banking that have made big profits for British enterprises.

One of the problems of the British government taking a hard line over the security law is indicated by the early declaration of the sizable London-based bank HSBC that it will abide by the new security law.

Hong Kong's stock market actually rose in the week after the law was passed, indicating renewed confidence among investors, and funds poured in from Beijing.

Calling on Britain's partners in the 'Five Eyes' intelligence alliance - Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US - to act decisively against China, and promising to pull out of deals with giant Chinese firms like Huawei 'for security reasons', the British government is falling in with the approach taken by Donald Trump.



**Brave fighters persecuted by the Hong Kong and Chinese authorities have shown enormous resilience and tenacity in refusing to accept dictatorship**

Not long ago, Trump was calling Xi Jinping the "greatest leader in Chinese history"! According to his former security adviser, John Bolton, Trump considered that the herding of a million Uighurs into Chinese prison camps was "exactly the right thing to do"! That was when Trump was seeking a truce in the trade war between the world's two major powers, so that China would buy more US products.

Now, in his battle for the White House, Trump portrays Xi as 'the greatest enemy of the US'. Under US pressure, WhatsApp, Facebook and Telegram are 'pausing' cooperation with data requests from Hong Kong authorities.

China's president Xi Jinping is not immune from criticism at home. The economy is experiencing its slowest growth for three decades, and a big rise in unemployment. Discontent is accumulating over both the state's handling of the pandemic and the failure to eliminate mass poverty.

An aggressive policy over Hong Kong can be an attempt to galvanise support at home, as are China's naval exercises in waters around Vietnam, the Philippines, and the Paracel islands in the South China Sea.

China's move to clamp down on Hong Kong may not go to the lengths of a full-scale military clampdown or 'Tiananmen solution'. If Beijing's move to threaten maximum use of force succeeds in eliminating opposition on the streets of Hong Kong, and paralyses the struggle for even minimum basic democratic rights, the Chinese regime may not need to implement all the clauses of the new security law.

Just the very real threat has seen a number of leaders of the democracy movement emigrate. However, setting up a 'parliament in exile' will not solve the day-to-day problems of working people in Hong Kong. Appealing to the reactionary US or British 'democratic' governments will not take the movement forward.

Brave fighters persecuted by the Hong Kong and Chinese authorities have shown enormous resilience and tenacity in refusing to accept dictatorship in any form. There are young people who are absolutely

determined to stay in Hong Kong and carry on the fight.

Of course, there are times in history when the leadership of forces persecuted by the state have to seek refuge abroad, to live to fight another day. But the flight of the leaders of the pro-democracy movement indicates a lack of determination to conduct a fight to the finish.

### Struggle

There have truly been elements of a revolutionary situation in Hong Kong in the past year. A few short strikes have taken place in the course of the battle for democracy among workers, including in the Health Service, on the docks and the transport network. But the independent unions have failed to make a clear call for general strike action.

The brave fighters on the streets have fought relentlessly in pursuit of democracy. How much more worthwhile if their bravery and preparedness to fight to the end was channelled by a workers' party into a challenge against capitalism in Hong Kong, across the vast country of China and beyond.

The situation is crying out for a party wedded to the idea of state ownership of the 'commanding heights' of the economy, with truly democratic workers' control and management of enterprises, the economy and of society as a whole, through democratically elected and controlled committees, and for genuine workers' democracy.

Unless such a struggle is engaged, the Chinese dictatorship and US imperialism will continue to fight out their disagreements to the detriment of the wellbeing of all working-class and poor people.

● This article can be read in full on [socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)

£1/£2 solidarity price

socialistparty.org.uk



# the Socialist

Issue 1094

9-15 July 2020

formerly **Militant**

# TORY NHS BETRAYAL

## Trade union action can force full funding

**T**ory chancellor Rishi Sunak promised us all that the government would give the NHS "whatever it needs." Now he's refusing to stump up the cash.

NHS England has reportedly requested £10 billion to stay afloat during the next wave of Covid-19 and the hard winter months. Really, this should be a minimum, given the years of austerity and privatisation that emaciated the service before coronavirus. Sunak says no.

And what about frontline workers themselves? Health Secretary Matt Hancock has promised a "reward" for NHS staff. But he refuses to commit to the reward they most need and deserve - a decent pay rise and more staff. Meanwhile, Boris Johnson ineptly tried to blame mass deaths in care homes on care workers! (see p3)

NHS workers spoke to the Socialist about the Tories' treachery. "Yet another betrayal from this government of liars," said one ancillary worker. "They will hand over billions to their mates in private companies like Serco - who fail again and again. But when they are asked for money for the NHS, suddenly the coffers are bare."

"The only thing the Tories can be trusted to do is to attack both the pay and conditions of health

workers, and the NHS itself," said health worker Roger Davey. "To secure a decent wage increase, and a fully funded, publicly owned NHS, we will need to fight for it - which will have to include industrial action."

"Typical hypocrisy from the Tories," said Matt, a nurse. "They stand and clap for PR reasons while continuing to attack, privatise and destroy our NHS. Staff are called heroes, yet forced to turn to use food banks due to poverty wages. After the 72nd anniversary of the NHS, never forget the Tories fought the creation of the NHS, have tried to get rid of the NHS ever since, and are doing everything they can to sell it off today."

"The promised additional hiring was conducted through the back door, on a casual basis. We haven't gained the



PHOTO PAUL MATTSSON

reinforcements we need," said porter William Jarrett.

"Temporary contracts have lapsed. Workers who sacrificed their safety and fought valiantly alongside permanent staff have been sent home for good. Student nurses who cared for patients have been dismissed as worth a fraction of the value of their colleagues. Workers are burned out and exhausted, and totally demoralised by the prospect of an imminent second wave."

"We are tired but we are also angry. We've stood together as workers to fight this pandemic, despite the idiot behaviour of our government," said radiographer Maggie Fricker.

"It's made us aware of our strength, and we won't be taken for granted. They think they can brush aside what we've been through and offer us nothing. They need to think again."

"Shame on this Tory government - now trying to blame its shameful response to Covid-19 on care workers," said nurse Tom Hunt.

"How low can the Tories get, promising funding then trying to wriggle out of it with their smoke-and-mirror tactics? All care homes should be publicly owned, fully funded, democratically controlled, with decent pay and conditions for all workers."

"Health workers had the NHS winter crisis - trying to treat patients with dignity, but without enough staff, beds or resources. Then Covid-19 hit like a bombshell, causing upheaval, anxiety, many to become ill and 300 to die," said Jon Dale, secretary of the Unite union Nottinghamshire NHS workers' branch.

"After all that, this year's pay rise for an experienced 'Band 5' nurse is £42 a month - after a £400-a-month real-terms pay cut since 2010. Meanwhile, MPs have given themselves (yet another) £200-a-month pay rise."

"Health workers haven't gone through what we have to be treated like this," said porter Len Hockey. "We are angry at being put at risk and patronised. We are part of the six-million-strong trade union movement."

"This now needs to be met with preparation and organisation by our union leaders for national industrial action."