

NHS PAY: 15% FOR ALL NOW

BETH WEBSTER
NURSE, CARDIFF WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

NHs workers are infuriated that many of us are not receiving decent pay increases this year.

We remain in the middle of a gruelling battle against Covid-19, and are facing a second wave, yet still we have to struggle to afford the basics. We've had enough. A national day of action has been called with protests in over 30 towns and cities on 8 August.

The government's excuse for leaving nurses, porters, junior doctors, cleaners and other essential workers out of the pay deal is that we are already tied into a three-year deal. But that is a below-inflation 'rise' and many NHS workers have seen their wages cut by 20% in real terms since 2010.

With over 42,000 nursing vacancies in England and Wales, a recent Royal College of Nursing poll showed a third of nurses are considering quitting, and low wages are the main reason. Some nurses were using food banks even before the pandemic, and the Covid crisis has thrown up extra costs for health workers, such as childcare.

Some nurses I work with are facing £600 and more a month in childcare costs as their parents are shielding and unable to help. So we are not calling for a decent pay rise because we deserve it (although we do!) but because we need it.

Added to the financial strain has been the physical and psychological toll on health workers. Around 540 health workers have died during the pandemic - the highest number in Europe and third-highest in the world.

We experienced PPE and equipment shortages, were redeployed to unfamiliar and incredibly stressful areas, and separated from loved ones to protect them. We looked after other critically ill health workers in, at times, inadequate PPE, worried we'd be next to get ill.

Little seems to have changed to prevent these things happening again in a second wave. We remain under immense pressure as we restart services while keeping patients safe.

We urgently need to take action. The Thursday claps showed we have fantastic public support, but the actions of the government since prove that's not enough.

We need to get ourselves organised. The leaders of our unions have bitterly disappointed us, but some branches with combative members and reps have won safer conditions for members during the pandemic (see p5).

If we want to continue the fight beyond the protests, we must turn all union branches into fighting ones. The travesty of our union leaders backing a below-inflation deal can't happen again.

The grassroots NHS pay campaign calls for our unions to immediately reopen pay talks, for a fully funded 15% pay rise for all NHS workers, and for mass union meetings to engage members in the pay battle and prepare for industrial action.

▶▶▶ CONTINUED ON P13

Trade unions must fight

Hugo Pierre, Unison national executive committee (personal capacity) and Socialist Party member:

Full solidarity with the day of action! Seeing the government crow about its 'pay increase' for certain areas within the public sector will stick in ordinary working-class people's throats. Figures of 3.1% and 2.8% for teachers and doctors do little to meet the pay freezes the Tories have overseen over the last ten years.

To top it off, despite the fake support from Johnson and his Tory cronies for the NHS, hard-working nurses, carers, lab technicians, physiotherapists and other staff have been told they're not getting a pay rise.

Using the fake claim of a pay rise with regards to the previous three-year pay deal flies in the face of reality for NHS workers. The last ten years have seen a real-terms 20% pay cut with a frequent comment from staff being 'can I pay the bills with claps?'

I will be campaigning for the union to lead mass action and demand fully funded raises now. There should be an immediate 15% pay rise for all health and care staff, rewarding the key workers who've kept us going in the face of the Covid crisis.



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

Labour payouts: unions must discuss political representation



WHAT WE THINK

Unite union leader Len McCluskey rightly stated, in an interview with the Observer, that the Labour Party leadership has misused trade union members' money. He was referring to the Starmer leadership's decision to pay hundreds of thousands of pounds in settlements and apologise to eight people who had contributed to a scurrilous anti-Corbyn BBC Panorama documentary last year on antisemitism.

Jeremy Corbyn also criticised the settlements, calling them "a political decision, not a legal one". When he was Labour's leader, lawyers had advised him that the party had a strong case against the eight.

This latest episode in the long-running use of antisemitism allegations against Corbyn supporters adds to the list of rightward leaps spearheaded by Keir Starmer.

Rightward lurch

In the Observer, McCluskey warned Starmer not to go "too much to the right" and to stick to the ten pledges he made in his campaign to become leader. The pledges included the Corbyn policies of abolishing tuition fees and returning public ownership to rail, mail, energy and water.

However, after his victory, Starmer set about decisively shifting the party away from the Corbyn era. While only mildly criticising the Tories, he acted firmly to remove all remnants of Corbynism at the top of Labour, getting rid of Jennie Formby as general secretary and Rebecca Long-Bailey as shadow education minister, among numerous other changes.

'Blairism' has returned in more ways than as a political categorisation, as the new general secretary, David Evans, was once an assistant general secretary under Blair himself. Regarding keeping some of Corbyn's popular policies, Starmer knew they would help him to win the leadership, fully aware he could later drop them.

His pledges included that Labour should "work shoulder to shoulder with trade unions" and "maintain collective links" with them. But the influence of the unions on the Labour Party was drastically reduced during rightward steps between 1992 and 2015 to create the firmly pro-capitalist New Labour, and they have not been reversed.

Today the affiliated unions only have a third of the members of the party's National Executive Committee and less than a sixth of the



While only mildly criticising the Tories, Starmer acted firmly to remove all remnants of Corbynism at the top of Labour



The Socialist Party has called for discussion in the workers' movement on the need for a new mass workers' party.

National Policy Forum. Their affiliation fees provide the party with less than 15% of its income. So Unite, despite giving over £7 million to Labour since the start of 2019, is not able to prevent Labour's political misuse of that money on the settlements to the eight, even in alliance with the other affiliates.

Nor can it stop the many other misuses of its money in the course of the party being taken further and further away from representing working-class interests.

The explicit rightward path of the Starmer leadership makes it all the more urgent that trade union and anti-austerity activists, along with socialists inside and outside Labour, discuss how a vehicle for socialist, working-class political representation can be re-established.

Perpetrators into 'victims'

Seven of the eight people being given the financial settlements are former Labour staff members. They claimed to be defending their reputations after a representative of Corbyn's leadership called them "disaffected, politically hostile former employees" who gave "malicious, selective briefing" to the Panorama programme.

That they were politically hostile to Corbyn's leadership was never in doubt. Moreover, they were part of a Labour machine which in April 2020 he will stay in office until April 2022 - mentioned in the Observer a "major gathering" in the autumn. At this stage his position is: "It's not supposed to be an alternative. It's supposed to be a declaration that we are here. We are going nowhere. And we stand for those principles of radicalism and socialism that we've fought for all our lives."

John McDonnell subsequently commented: "The same procedures must apply to those implicated in this report as apply to other party members. If charges are serious, implicated members are suspended pending the outcome of investigation and discipline. Those found guilty of serious contraventions of our rules should be expelled."

Not surprisingly, no such action has been taken by the Starmer leadership. For them it's one rule for those on the right, while regular reports have continued of Corbyn supporters being suspended or expelled, in most cases on trumped-up charges.

Meanwhile, Labour's left figureheads have - both today and throughout Corbyn's leadership years - failed to go on the offensive against the politically motivated, false accusations of antisemitism, and to explain to a wide audience why antisemitism and socialist ideas have nothing in common.

Even Rebecca Long-Bailey, the politically closest leadership contender to Corbyn, argued for an apology and settlement to be given to the eight.

A fight against the right on that issue was just one of the many struggles needed to transform Labour away from a pro-capitalist agenda. Others should have included pushing for the reintroduction of mandatory reselection for parliamentary candidates; measures to transfer power from the party bureaucracy to the membership and affiliated unions; and demanding that Labour councillors must refuse to pass on Tory cuts.

Building an alternative

Len McCluskey - who has affirmed he will stay in office until April 2022 - mentioned in the Observer a "major gathering" in the autumn. At this stage his position is: "It's not supposed to be an alternative. It's supposed to be a declaration that we are here. We are going nowhere. And we stand for those principles of radicalism and socialism that we've fought for all our lives."

However, the scenario of prolonged capitalist crisis that has begun will be accompanied by battles between working-class and capitalist interests that will make that position untenable. The vast layer of workers and young people who face relentless attacks from the bosses on jobs, pay, terms and conditions precisely need the development of a clear and determined political alternative to Blairism.

Standing for 'principles of radicalism and socialism' will not be compatible with funding Labour MPs and councillors who implement austerity and other measures in capitalist interests.

This is why the Socialist Party has called for discussion in the workers' movement on the need for a new mass workers' party.

A 'major gathering' of trade unionists and socialists is definitely needed, in the form of a conference that can democratically discuss and debate how political representation for the working class can concretely be re-established in the situation created by Starmer's leadership.

Current support for Corbyn and his policies was shown in the response to a defence appeal for him, after he was personally threatened with legal action. In just over a week, £325,000 poured in from over 17,000 donors.

Some of the most rabid right-wingers in Labour are raring for more action against Corbyn than those legal threats.

Among them is former speech writer for Blair, Philip Collins, who used his column in the Times to hurl unpolitical insults at Corbyn and end with: "Kick Corbyn out. Take away the whip, expel him from the party" (24 July).

However, most Labour pro-capitalist strategists are highly wary of such moves, realising they could possibly drive Corbyn and his support base towards a new party.

Either way, with or without the involvement of any particular individual, the need for a mass workers' party that can discuss and adopt a socialist programme is inherent in today's situation.

The Socialist Party has already initiated a call for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) to once again stand anti-cuts candidates in the next local and mayoral elections, following TUSC's suspension of standing in the last local elections.

Presenting candidates who will fight for workers' interests can only aid the discussion on how a mass workers' party can be built, while in the meantime playing an important role in putting a socialist alternative on the ballot papers.



Len McCluskey urged Starmer not to ditch Corbyn's policies, but that has already started PHOTO PAUL MATTSSON



WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

Our demands include...

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

WORK AND INCOME

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

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

RIGHTS

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

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

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MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

Boris Johnson's easing of lockdown appears to have hit its limits. Where now? Back in March, when the spread of the coronavirus pandemic was accelerating globally, the Socialist explained that "a newly-spreading virus is a danger that can befall any society. The question facing the world today, however, is what kind of society can best meet such a challenge."

Five months on, just as we warned, the inability of global capitalism to respond to such a crisis has been sharply exposed. Its failure to protect both lives and living standards will have a lasting effect on workers' consciousness and influence the struggles that are to come.

According to official statistics, over 700,000 people have died worldwide as a result of Covid-19, although the real figure could be much higher. Workers' trust in the ability of their governments to even count death tolls accurately has been another casualty in the crisis.

Globally, the pandemic is still accelerating. It is now taking a heavy toll in the neocolonial world, where capitalism's ongoing failure to provide health facilities, housing, food and incomes now leaves millions highly vulnerable to the virus.

But capitalism's failures are also graphically exposed by the fact that the three countries with the highest official death totals at the end of July - the US, Brazil and the UK - should all have had the economic resources to deal with the crisis. Instead, many thousands have died needlessly thanks to the inept leadership provided by the right-wing Trump, Bolsonaro and Johnson.

Short-sighted

Instead of following the advice of medical experts to urgently introduce widespread testing and contact tracing alongside measures to prevent transmission, these representatives of the most short-sighted capitalists resisted taking steps that might threaten profit-making.

In doing so, they have ended up making matters worse even for their own wealthy backers. Their delay has only worsened the damage that has been done to the already-vulnerable global economy.

While countries like China that still retain elements of state ownership were better able to direct resources in a planned manner, a privatised economy like Britain's was unable to respond quickly enough.

It immediately became clear that there was a critical shortage of PPE for health and care workers. But Public Health England's solution to the problem was to fit its advice to the availability of equipment, revising its guidance downwards, advising that less-stringent protection was required.

Years of health cuts had left the NHS without the capacity to carry out mass testing. At first, the Tories ignored this vital need.

A catastrophic consequence was the discharge of thousands of elderly patients into care homes without any prior testing for Covid-19. Over 19,000 Covid-19 related deaths have since been registered for care home residents in England alone.

Ministers then decided to open their coffers - but not to fund NHS

FROM FIRST WAVE TO SECOND? CAPITALISM'S COVID FAILURES



Preventing a second wave requires effective testing and tracing - and this means public ownership and democratic planning

laboratories. No; instead contracts were awarded to private companies like AstraZeneca and GlaxoSmith-Kline, even though both had no proven track record in diagnostic testing.

Instead of a medical professional, the Tories decided to put one of their own - the Conservative peer and previous CEO of TalkTalk, Dido Harding - in charge of the test-and-trace programme. As a board member of the Jockey Club that had been so keen on the Cheltenham Festival going ahead at the end of March, she was clearly well-qualified in viral spread!

But under Harding's 'leadership', the promised NHS contact-tracing phone app has had to be scrapped. There is still no date for an alternative.

Now the Lancet Child and Adolescent Health has warned that the current NHS testing and tracing programme is too ineffective to prevent a second wave if schools reopen

Yet another Tory 'game changer'?

Once again, this incompetent government is blowing its trumpet over another 'game-changing' initiative as it 'ramps up' the fight against coronavirus. Its latest headline act is to deploy rapid (90 minute) test kits, sent out to hospitals and care homes.

In case anyone's forgotten, Boris Johnson pledged in June to turn around all Covid-19 tests within 24 hours. However, many parts of the country still have

to wait up to 34 hours to get test results. A 90-minute turnaround time sounds almost fantastic.

And, at the risk of sounding churlish, the Tory government abandoned a pledge to test regularly all people in care homes, starting on 6 July... until 7 September!

Moreover, on 16 July, Health Secretary Matt Hancock instructed care homes and the public to stop using Randox Covid-19 test kits after safety issues were raised.

That contract cost £133 million. Let's hope the latest 'game changer' isn't another costly failure.



PHOTO MARCO VERCH/CC

full-time in September. The study estimates that too few infectious individuals are being detected by testing and too few of their contacts are then being traced and isolated.

Moreover, the government had pledged to test all care home residents and staff by July - now that has been postponed to September. Yet another failure to deliver.

As well as the elderly and more clinically vulnerable, those working on throughout 'lockdown' without sufficient protection have been left at risk. Official figures for England and Wales listing the occupations where most deaths have occurred include not only nurses and care workers, but also security guards, factory and construction workers, taxi and bus drivers, chefs, and sales assistants.

Shielding is now ending - at the worst possible time. As a possible second wave gathers, there must be no compulsion to return to the workplace, or ending of support, for those most at risk.

The recent outbreaks - first in Leicester and Luton, then much of the north west of England - expose how the lack of a working test-and-trace system is costing further lives. In response, the British Medical Journal has demanded testing and tracing be integrated back into NHS and local authority control.

Private v planned

In short, privatisation is costing lives. Tackling the virus requires democratic control and planning - and hence public ownership.

If that's true on a local scale, it's even more the case on a global scale - particularly in the urgent work needed to try to develop vaccines against Covid-19. Under capitalism, the profit to be made from developing a viable vaccine before your competitors prevents the global sharing of research that would guarantee its quickest development.

In the absence of a vaccine, the pandemic remains an ongoing threat. But the likes of Johnson hoped they could get away with opening up the economy without a serious strategy to control the virus.

More serious establishment scientists, like those in 'Independent Sage' that split from the official government Sage group in May, warned that what they describe as a "fingers crossed through reopening" strategy was unlikely to be good enough.

The controversy over quarantining holidaymakers returning from Spain revealed the growing concern that, as lockdown measures ease, cases would again start to rise. That's certainly the case in countries like Israel, Japan and Australia. Now case numbers seem to be rising in Britain too.

Workers and their trade unions have to sound the alarm - and refuse to buckle under the pressure from big business to rush into an unsafe opening of workplaces, shops and schools. Instead of short-sighted capitalist profiteering, socialists demand a serious strategy to eliminate the virus. That needs to include:

- A fully resourced, community-based testing and tracing system - run through the public sector, not private profiteers
- Protection, support and full income for all those at greatest risk, needing to isolate, or hit by the economic crisis
- Democratic trade union and workers' control over workplace safety

Sick pay victory at Homerton hospital!

Workers and unions at Homerton hospital, east London are celebrating a major victory: winning NHS sick pay for all staff working for private contractor ISS.

More than half of cleaning, catering, portering and security staff have had to rely on statutory sick pay. That's just over £95 a week.

A long-running campaign has won several victories, including pay increases to the London Living Wage and above. But proper sick pay for all staff is the biggest yet.

Naomi Byron, co-secretary of the Homerton branch of public service union Unison, said: "This is a huge relief for staff to win occupational sick pay, and it's thanks to all the staff who stood together and fought so hard for our rights that we have won this major victory."

The campaign will continue for all staff employed by ISS to receive full NHS pay and conditions, and to be brought back in-house.

BRIAN DEBUS
HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

'First you clap us then you slap us': hundreds march for NHS pay rise



ISAI PRIYA
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

Hundreds of nurses and healthcare workers marched from St Thomas' Hospital in south London to 10 Downing Street on 29 July, demanding a pay rise that's long overdue.

Homemade placards condemning the hypocrisy of the Tories were seen throughout the demo.

Socialist Party members pointed out the irony that the Tories came out every Thursday to clap for healthcare workers. Nothing could be more fake.

"First you clap us, then you slap us" and "Boris, we don't want your clap - we want our money back" were the loudest chants, repeated again and again.

NHS healthcare workers have been battling on the front line during this pandemic, putting their lives at

risk, protecting the public and saving lives - 540 have died.

Many of these deaths could have been avoided if sufficient and adequate PPE had been available in good time. The Tory government's consistent failure to act during the pandemic is a well-known fact now.

These workers are not taking no for an answer and are determined to fight for their pay rise. The Socialist Party supports this fight, and says all key workers need a pay rise.

The Tories are bailing out multinational companies, banks and bosses to save the capitalist system. They are trying to make workers pay for the pandemic and economic crisis. We reject this.

To save our NHS, to fight for a pay increase, and to defend workers' rights and safety - the trade unions need to act now. We call for national union action for a 15% pay rise across the health service.

Capitalism's 'vaccine war' shows need for socialist cooperation

JON DALE
SECRETARY, UNITE UNION NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
HEALTH BRANCH

Covid-19 can travel round the world at jet speed. No one can feel secure without global action. Yet despite gushing words from government leaders about international cooperation on research and development, a 'vaccine war' is developing.

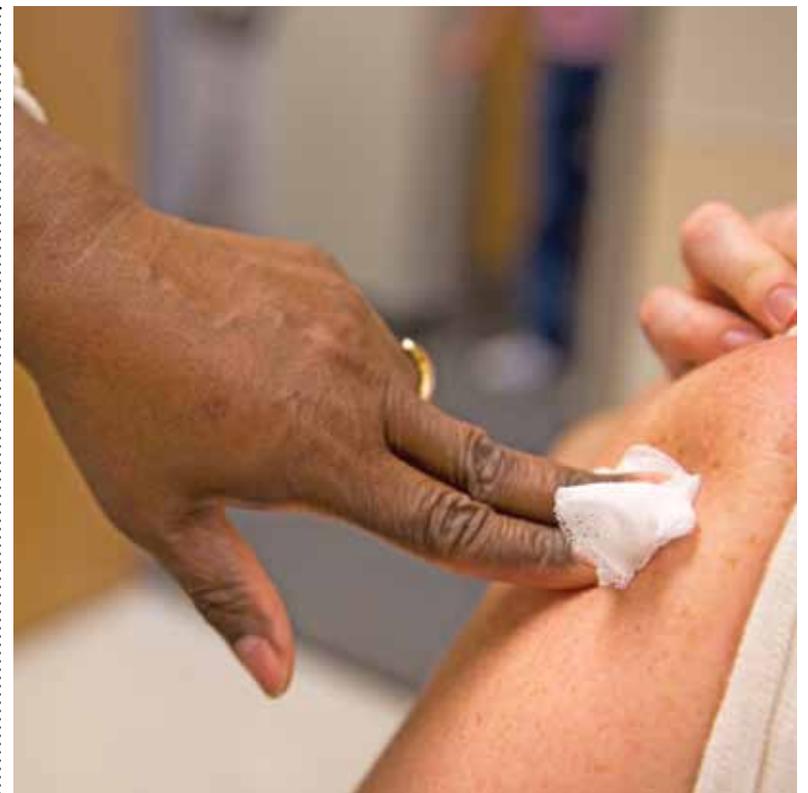
Rich capitalist countries are desperate to get their economies and profits flowing again. Governments are making 'public-private partnerships' with pharmaceutical corporations. Deals are being made to buy up vaccine stocks before they have even been developed, tested and manufactured.

The losers in this vaccine auction will be working-class and poor people in poorer countries.

Four different types of vaccine are being researched in many centres around the world. Any of these - alone or in combination - may turn out to be successful. Billions of dollars, euros, yen and pounds of public money are being invested.

Welcoming this, the chief executive of Gavi, the public-private alliance to distribute vaccines in poor nations, had to admit: "But... you end up with unnecessary competition, shortages of supplies and a failure to optimise a pipeline that should make the best vaccines available at scale as quickly as possible."

Some corporations, like US company Johnson and Johnson, say they will sell the Covid-19 vaccine without profit. It can certainly afford to! Its 2019 sales were \$82 billion. It spent \$11 billion on research and development, paid \$2 billion tax and made over \$15 billion profit.



As well as a Covid-19 vaccine, Johnson and Johnson's cancer treatments, medical devices and all other essential products should be sold without profit! But this requires public ownership and democratic workers' control.

Meanwhile, Pfizer and BioNTech will sell their Covid-19 vaccine to the US government at an estimated \$19.50 per dose, leaving the companies with a "decent margin" of 60% to 80% profit, according to one US banking analyst.

"I think at the end of the day, what we'll see is everybody is going to

recoup their costs and make some profit," said a former associate commissioner of the US Food and Drug Administration. "I suspect they are all saying different things that mean the same thing."

Even if sold to less-developed countries at \$10 a dose, mass vaccination would be unaffordable to many. Bangladesh spent \$94 per person on health care in 2017. Only the wealthy few could be sure of vaccination. Countries also need good public health systems with health workers, logistics and transport to get vaccines where they are needed.

Bayer's chief executive in 2013, Marijn Dekkers, cynically let the cat out of the bag. Referring to its cancer treatment Nexamar costing \$65,000 a year, he said: "We did not develop this medicine for Indians. We developed it for Western patients who can afford it."

A YouGov opinion poll showed 96% of people in the UK want national governments to work together, ensuring treatments and vaccines can be manufactured in as many countries as possible and distributed globally to everyone who needs them.

A vaccine manufacturer's official told the Financial Times: "In the future, we need a better system." It's needed now! A socialist system of public ownership, democratic planning and international cooperation would meet everyone's needs.



Poorer nations in Africa and Asia will face a struggle to obtain vaccines

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Reinstate FCC activist Tony Smith



Trade unionists will be outraged at the dismissal of Tony Smith by an FCC waste disposal company disciplinary hearing. Tony, a Unison union activist, has been sacked for 'gross misconduct'. But in reality he has been victimised for trade union activities.

All of Tony's fellow drivers at the FCC plant at Wilmington agreed that Tony made a correct health and safety call, and view this decision as a blatant stitch up by management.

Tony led the successful strike two years ago which won sick pay rights

for 2,500 FCC workers up and down the country.

40 attended a protest (above) organised by Hull Trade Union Council on 4 August. There will be a bigger protest in Hull on the day of Tony's appeal, and at other FCC sites around the country.

Please send messages of support to Tony Smith c/o Hull City Unison, Town Hall Chambers, 39, Alfred Gelder Street, Hull HU1 2AG or to info@unisonhull.org.uk.

MIKE WHALE
CHAIR, HULL TRADE UNION COUNCIL

Wales: GE Aviation workers march to save jobs

DAVE REID
SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

Over 400 GE Aircraft Engine Services workers and supporters marched through Caerphilly, south Wales in a socially distanced but lively demonstration on 1 August to save jobs at the Nantgarw plant.

GE has announced the loss of 369 jobs out of a workforce of 1,350 which threatens the long-term future of the aircraft engine plant. Jobs at GE are hi-tech, highly skilled and well-paid industrial jobs. For generations the plant has taken on dozens of apprentices, male and female, to be trained for well-paid jobs. The knock-on effect of lay-offs and job losses at the plant will be devastating on communities in Caerphilly and Rhondda Cynon Taff.

Nearly 4,000 job losses have been announced at plants in the Welsh aviation industry since the Covid pandemic began, and this threatens the loss of thousands more jobs in the supply industries. The temporary collapse in the aviation industry is allowing employers to restructure to the detriment of workers.

Every loss of jobs at GE threatens the viability of the plant and means it might lose important projects, bringing the future of the whole plant into question. 2,500 jobs were lost after the slowdown in aviation following 9/11 in 2001.

Once lost, the jobs are gone forever: rather than reskilling for other jobs, the already skilled workers mainly migrated to where the work was across the world. So the loss of 369 jobs would be a permanent blow, and there have been rumours that another couple of hundred jobs could go.

GE workers are demanding that the UK government steps in to safeguard the plant and the jobs. At the rally, Kerry Owens, Unite union deputy convenor, showed the determination of workers to save all the jobs. A total of 1,350 work at the plant, and all but 300 are on furlough.

He demanded that all the



PHOTOS SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

furloughed workers - including those whose jobs are threatened - be brought back into work for training and upskilling on the new low-fuel GE9X engine. Three days a week, he proposed, could be paid by the company and two days mainly by Westminster and the Welsh Government - with a contribution by local government.

None of the GE workers in Italy, Germany and France, Kerry told the crowd, are losing their jobs, because governments there have bowed to workers' pressure and moved to implement similar schemes. He

pledged the full support of GE workers to British Airways workers fighting job losses and attacks on wages and conditions.

Speaking on behalf of the National Shop Stewards Network and the Socialist Party, Alec Thraves pointed out that there should be no bail-out for the bosses as there was with the banks. GE made \$1 billion profit at the beginning of the year. If it says it cannot afford to keep all jobs at the plant, then the company should open the books to show where those profits went and, if necessary, the plant should be nationalised.

Aviation engines have been maintained at Nantgarw for 80 years, originally as part of British Airways, before being taken over by GE in 1991. If GE begins to run the plant down, then the government must step back in to save this important facility.

The plant should be brought back into public ownership along with BA (which is threatening 42,000 jobs), and the aviation industry should be democratically planned, with workers' control and management.

In 1971, Rolls-Royce aircraft production was nationalised by the Tory government when the company was in trouble. Most of the industry has been nationalised at one time or another because of its strategic importance. With thousands of aviation jobs once again under threat, there must be a mass campaign by aviation unions to force the government to step in and renationalise the industry.

South west trade unionists meet

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) held a successful meeting on 25 July to develop its work in the south west of England. Over 42 people joined in the Zoom meeting, brought together by a desire to help build the rank and file of the trade union movement.

Trade union militancy will be a vital means of the working class defending itself from the tsunami of attacks on jobs resulting from the

capitalist Covid crisis. The meeting covered key aspects of the struggles we face including defending jobs, developing trades councils, recruiting young and unorganised workers, and defending health and safety, especially in schools. Volunteers came forward for a coordinating group to set up a regional conference in the new year to further strengthen the NSSN in the south west.

TOM BALDWIN

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PCS union: Reject longer DWP opening hours



KATRINE WILLIAMS
VICE-PRESIDENT PCS DWP GROUP
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The government's headlong rush to pretend things are getting back to normal is impacting on PCS members working in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The PCS union represents workers doing all sorts of jobs for the government.

All through the lockdown, PCS members have been focusing on the main tasks of paying benefits and supporting the public. This has been done remotely in the main, to help keep both DWP workers and the public safe.

Despite pronouncements that our safety is paramount, the haste in reopening the job centre doors is putting our members at risk. This will be further exacerbated by the government's drive to return to 'conditionality' rules. We are clear that during a recession everything should be done to support the public. We reject the government's harsh welfare regime which is even more inappropriate in the current climate.

The pressure on members will be further increased by government plans to staff offices until 8pm - stretching already stressed workers more thinly to cover longer hours. Management plans to have members working in Universal Credit service centres and larger job centres until 8pm, and on Saturdays.

This is on top of the rejected pay offer of 2.5% being imposed by management that does nothing to address the pay issues in the DWP. And it is poor recompense for working flat out to deal with the huge increase in benefit claims that our members have processed and ensured that the public got paid over the past four months.

The PCS Broad Left Network is a socialist organisation within PCS, in which Socialist Party members participate. PCS Broad Left Network members on the DWP group executive committee have been arguing consistently through the pandemic that branches should be given a lead and supported to mobilise our members.

This is needed to tackle the issues facing our members, but also to demonstrate and bring our collective strength clearly to bear on management at a local level, and increase the pressure in talks at national level so that we can win for our members.

We have been encouraging branches to organise members' meetings in a safe way, to make progress on our demands on the many issues facing our members. And to ensure our workplaces are safe, deal with workload pressures, show anger over pay, and oppose the unsafe reopening of jobcentres.

Failure by the group executive to mobilise our collective strength during the period of the pandemic has

undoubtedly emboldened management. This has led to decisions to impose this year's derisory pay increase, press ahead with opening up local offices, and now extending hours.

The group executive committee has now agreed to run a consultative ballot to oppose the extension of operating hours in Universal Credit and Jobcentres. It is vital that we get the highest possible Yes vote in this ballot which begins on 17 August.

A massive Yes vote will send a warning to management, and form the basis of a statutory strike ballot if management refuses to listen to our concerns.

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Papa John's workers' pay protest



PHOTO SHEFFIELD NEEDS A PAY RISE

Campaign group 'Sheffield needs a pay rise' and the fast food workers' union BFAWU organised a protest against wage theft at Papa John's pizza chain on 25 July.

Workers were demanding wages owed to them for work completed before the franchise was transferred from the previous owner in June. Some claim their wages for this period amounted to less than the legal minimum wage.

Workers faced unsanitary conditions including no access to private toilets, and no breaks during long

shifts while the store remained open throughout the lockdown. But on 27 June they arrived to find their store was closed.

Workers claimed they were not told that the store would be closed temporarily, and that the franchise, which covers all Sheffield Papa John's stores, had been transferred to a new franchisee.

In the month since, the previous owner has not paid workers the full pay they are owed, including all hourly wages at the legal minimum wage, and delivery allowances.

Bexley bin workers win better pay

Strike action by Bexley refuse workers in south London was called off after a revised pay deal was accepted. 150 workers were set to strike for five days but voted to accept a revised pay deal from outsourcing company Serco.

The deal includes a new £10.25-an-hour minimum rate, backdated to 1 April this year, and a 2.75% pay rise for everyone already above the minimum rate, pending the outcome of national negotiations.

Unite union regional officer Ruth

Hydon said: "We have made significant progress on the pay issue and other matters, such as health and safety improvements."

"But the campaign is not over as Bexley council is currently considering whether to award the contract to Serco for a further five years up to 2025.

"We believe that the contract should come back in-house and Unite will be campaigning to that end as councillors gear up to make that decision this autumn."



SOCIALISM TODAY
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- Black Lives Matter: A movement for system change
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In the fourth of our 'No going back' series, Socialist Party and University and College Union member (personal capacity) **Bea Gardner** explains how socialist policies could save the university sector wrecked by cuts, privatisation and the pursuit of profit under capitalism. See socialistparty.org.uk for the whole series.



WHAT WOULD SOCIALIST UNIVERSITIES LOOK LIKE?

Record student numbers will find education cut

Record numbers of 18-year-olds in the UK have applied to go to university this September. Applications are up 1.6% for UK students and 10% for international students.

Despite record numbers, university bosses are making massive cuts to spending, including staff redundancies. They are terrified that the continued uncertainty around coronavirus will mean many students defer their place, leaving them financially ruined.

Research for the University and College Union (UCU) estimates there could be a £2.6 billion funding shortage next academic year, due to the potential drop in tuition fee income. In the current system, this could mean as many as 30,000 jobs in the sector are cut, with even more in the supply chain.

Both Boris Johnson and university bosses are pushing for a rushed return to campus learning, with the hope this secures tuition fee income from students, particularly overseas students who pay substantially higher fees.

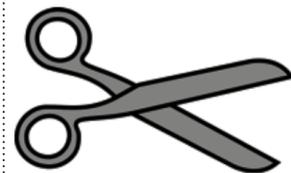
But there is no doubt; a forced reopening will exacerbate the spread of coronavirus. In Leicester, the highest incidents in the current outbreak were of under 19-year-olds, disproving the idea that young people are safe. This short-termism could also see home students charged £9,250 for rip-off online-only courses, designed in mere weeks, if campuses cannot fully reopen.

These attempts to make staff and students pay for the coronavirus funding crisis has the potential to see student fightback and workers' action reemerge.

Scrap fees, save jobs

The coronavirus crisis has exposed universities over-reliance on tuition fee income, based on short-term balancing of books. The system doesn't work in times of uncertainty, like now, when student numbers may temporarily fall, particularly high-fee paying international and postgraduate students.

University bosses' solution is to implement widescale job cuts, increasing workload for already overworked staff, and further eroding student learning conditions. Meanwhile, the government has ignored appeals by both university bosses and unions to bail out the universities, only implementing some minor measures to help cash flow by releasing tuition fee payments early.



The university trade unions must organise to defend members' jobs in the face of such attacks. Campus trade unions should make the demand for 'opening up of the books', to inspection by workers and their unions, making university bosses justify the financial situation and prove the need for cuts.

In 2018, universities sat on combined reserves of over £44 billion. The average vice-chancellor pay is now £350,000 a year.

Campus unions should take a no-cuts stance, arguing for the use of reserves and borrowing. If cuts are necessary to balance the books, they should come from the top, through reductions in senior management pay and bonuses.



CARTOON GEORGE COGHILL/CC

A decade of marketisation misery

The current attacks come on top of more than a decade of austerity, underfunding and increased privatisation, which have seen education across the board suffer. School academy trust bosses, college chief execs and university vice-chancellor pay packets have soared. In contrast, the majority of education staff have seen their working conditions driven down.

Since 2010, universities have seen year-on-year income increases, but expenditure on staff pay fell by 3.35%. At the same time, capital expenditure - spending on buildings, land and equipment - shot up 35%.

This spending is aimed at maximising profits by attracting the highest number of students possible. But the quality of education students receive when they arrive has been decimated. Lecture theatres are overflowing on oversubscribed courses. There are few, if any, additional staff employed to manage increased student numbers, meaning reduced contact time with academic staff. Books, computers, printers and library desks are difficult to access because of over-demand.

Under the free-market system, research is driven by the needs of business and not the needs of society. Research is often funded by big companies who then try and sell their findings back to us for profit.

If there isn't profit to be made, they abandon the projects. Following the Sars outbreak in the early 2000s, a new

vaccine, which could have helped prepare us for this current crisis, was dropped due to lack of profitability.

Government and charity funding is only awarded through short or fixed-term grants, distributed via competitive bidding processes that favour cheap, short-term projects and quick results. An estimated £1 billion worth of researchers' time is spent on failed bids each year in Europe, time which should be solving the problems we face in society.

The instability of the current research and teaching funding system also means the proliferation of fixed-term and casual work, which creates a highly competitive research and teaching landscape.

Famous physicist Peter Higgs said that he would not get a job now, as he would not be considered productive enough for current research standards, where researchers are expected to "keep churning out papers". The pursuit of profit is holding back the development of society.

Tuition fees have been one of the main drivers behind this marketisation of education. The Tories continue with this policy, even though the student loan system is now more expensive for the UK government than before tuition fees were introduced.

With only 30% of students able to repay their loans in full, the debt pile is growing with added interest. Total student debt is currently £121 billion and expected to hit £450 billion by 2050.

Nationalisation is only way out

As well as fighting to save jobs, we must campaign for the renationalisation of universities, running them as a public service and not a business. The government has shown that the money is there, paying the wages of nine million furloughed workers. The Bank of England has pumped more than £700 billion into the economy since the start of the pandemic.

The renationalisation of universities as a public service would not only avert the funding crisis, but also allow universities to play a vital role in Covid recovery. It would secure jobs and offer hope to thousands of young people and workers facing the misery of unemployment.

Even pro-capitalist spokespeople say massive reforms of the sector are necessary, given the astronomical amounts of debt building up through unpaid student loans. But any market

solution will be temporary at best, and will not solve the issues of bad learning and working conditions.

For that, there needs to be a fundamental shift in how universities are organised. Instead, universities should be democratically run in the interests of everyone.

The Socialist Party fights for the scrapping of tuition fees, with all education costs publicly funded in full with living grants for all students. Existing student debt should also be written off, sparing thousands of young people from the burden of debt.

The fee system is the leading cause of the current crisis. Any measure other than scrapping fees will be a short-term solution, fundamental problems will remain.

We also fight for long-term, public investment in research. This would

allow universities to be a valuable resource in the fight against climate change, helping drive more sustainable means of production, developing sustainable technology and retraining the workforce to use it.

University renationalisation has many more benefits. Students are charged extortionate rates for university halls, some built more than 50 years ago, which generate further income for universities.

If profit was removed, and universities publicly funded, rooms could be charged at much lower rates, giving more disposable income to students. Students could focus on their studies rather than working several jobs to pay rent.

Similarly, as publicly funded services, everyone in the community could benefit from university facilities, such as sport and leisure services, library resources and meeting rooms. Life-long learning could be advanced, with a variety of evening classes freely accessible to workers in the community.

Give workers, students and community democratic control

For the true benefits of renationalisation to be felt, decision making would need to be in the hands of university workers, students and local communities. We campaign for elected committees of staff and students, in conjunction with campus unions, to democratically decide how to run universities. This would ensure resources are spent where they are needed most, including guaranteeing the health and safety of all.

Increased democracy would also mean fair salary distribution, giving a significant pay rise to the workers that have seen their pay eroded by 20% in real terms since 2010. The current exam system could be overhauled, not only at university level but also

making the application process fair, transparent and democratic.

A variety of courses could be introduced, with different types of qualifications based on community needs, not so-called 'cash cow' courses, which make the most money. Democratic worker and student control could overhaul the syllabus, including 'decolonising' the curriculum, a key demand of the Black Lives Matter movement.

The current crisis reveals the fundamental limitations of the capitalist system and its ability to provide for the majority in society. University workers, students and the wider workers movement cannot go back to the misery of 'business as usual' of marketisation misery.

Uni workers reject bosses' lousy offer



PHOTO ELAINE BRUNSKILL

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN UCU

Members of the University and College Union (UCU) have rejected the employers' latest offer in the 'Four Fights' dispute on pay, workload, equality and casualisation. 61.2% voted to reject the offer on a 30% turnout, paving the way for further industrial action in the new academic year.

The vote signals the continued determination of university workers to fight, on a national scale, against the erosion of pay and conditions in the sector. It sends a strong message to the employers - university workers will continue the fight against the effects of marketisation. Despite management's attempt to use the pandemic as an excuse for further attacks, we will not be co-opted into accepting worse conditions.

22 days of strike action by 72 branches, between November 2019 and March 2020, forced the employers to the negotiating table. For the first time the bosses discussed non-pay aspects of our dispute, having previously claimed they had no mandate on issues such as workload.

Leverage lost

However, the dispute was set back when our ballot expired in April. With the strike mandate expired for most branches, limiting leverage, the employers put forward a lousy offer, woefully short of any meaningful improvements.

The proposal made no binding obligations and did not budge on pay at all (see 'Reject the university employers' offer' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Shamefully, the UCU leadership initially recommended accepting the offer and imposed an undemocratic time frame for consultation. Fortunately, branches saw through attempts to bury the dispute, voting

at a branch delegate meeting for the leadership to recommend rejecting the offer when a ballot was put to members.

The rejection of the offer keeps the Four Fights dispute alive, but is only the first step. More members need to be won to a fighting position to successfully beat the Tories' 50% turnout rule in a strike ballot.

A critical higher education sector conference in September will determine the next steps. It is vital that a clear strategy for future action is democratically decided at the conference, which learns lessons from the dispute so far.

Maximum impact

Key will be maximising the impact of any action. Appealing to fellow campus trade unions Unite and Unison - whose members are also affected by these issues - to join in the rebalot and coordinate action is essential.

Timing a rebalot to strategically coincide with periods in the academic year that offer potential to cause the most disruption is also important. So too is action that enables as many types of members to participate as possible.

More branches need to be out. A key decision will be whether to ballot all institutions involved as a whole or run the ballot university by university. Either way, a 'get the vote out' campaign which links the immediate issues of job losses and cuts to the Four Fights dispute is needed.

Rejecting the offer further indicates that the autumn term is set to be significant. Recent attacks and threats by university managements have only highlighted the need to fight the Four Fights. The dispute can play a key role in linking the struggle against job losses and cuts with the end of marketisation.





**CWI
CIT** Committee for a Workers' International rally

80 years since the murder of Leon Trotsky Can they kill his ideas?

The global economic crisis and the pandemic is causing mass misery for millions around the world not seen since the 1930s.

The mass movement which has erupted around the Black Lives Matter movement and other protests and strikes show the bitter anger which exists and demand for an alternative to capitalism and racism.

Hear what the Committee for a Workers' International and

Trotskyism has to say about the Black Lives Matter movement, the need to build combative fighting trade unions and a mass socialist alternative.

Join us and rally on Sunday 23 August 2pm BST. Register for information to attend on socialistworld.net.

The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), international socialists organised across the planet.

Socialist Party black and Asian members' meeting Fighting to end racism and capitalism

ISAI PRIYA
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

A very well-attended Socialist Party black and Asian members' meeting on 25 July was an opportunity to discuss the Covid crisis, the Black Lives Matter demos, and how we can build a mass working-class movement to smash racism.

Hugo Pierre, one of the elected black members' reps on the national executive of public sector union Unison, speaking in a personal capacity, introduced the first discussion. Covid-19 has exposed the inequality and exploitation that exists within capitalism.

It is not a surprise that black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people are most affected by the pandemic. One third of black and Asian workers in London are key workers and have been working on the frontline during the pandemic. The vast majority



of BAME people live in overcrowded housing, work long hours in low-paid jobs, and live in poverty.

Hugo also outlined the root cause of racism - class inequality under capitalism - and how it's used as a tool by the capitalists to divide the working class on racial lines, or to blame black and Asian people for the

ongoing shortage of services. Racism is inherent in capitalism. To get rid of racism we need to end the capitalist system and fight for socialism.

We discussed institutionalised racism in workplaces. A Socialist Party member and social care worker explained the racial discrimination she faces daily and how in-work racism can be fought.

The Socialist Party has been organising discussions on the role of the working class in fighting racism, the lessons of the Black Panthers, the ending of the slave trade, and more. The meeting agreed to add to the material we have, and produce a new pamphlet on the socialist ideas needed to arm the anti-racist movement.

It is these socialist ideas, the understanding of the root cause of racism and the strength of the mass working-class movement that have the power to challenge capitalism and all the exploitation and oppression it represents.

Doncaster: Vigil for murdered women

Women and men attended a vigil in Doncaster on 22 July organised by the Women's Lives Matter campaign, after the alleged murder of five women from the town in the last two months. Eight have died across South Yorkshire.

Domestic violence and abuse has got even worse during lockdown.

Women's Lives Matter has been contacted by a lot of press - asking

why Doncaster? Why have there been so many murders of women in Doncaster?

To us it's fairly simple. It's what happens when you have a community ravaged by cuts.

Doncaster doesn't have a Citizens Advice Bureau. The Women's Aid got cut. The only solicitor that offered 'first 30 minutes free' consultations stopped.

Women going through the family court with a perpetrator have to travel to Sheffield, because Doncaster family court was closed. It's a forgotten-about northern town wracked with poverty and with little services.

Poverty equals women being trapped in abuse.

AMY COUSENS
WOMEN'S LIVES MATTER

Young Socialist day of action - We won't mortgage our future

The Tories want to make young people pay for the capitalist crisis. Young Socialists in London, however, made it clear that we are prepared to fight for our future.

In July, Young Socialists organised mega campaign stalls in Finsbury Park, in north London, and Peckham and Vauxhall, in south London, to build a campaign around the youth charter produced by young members of the Socialist Party (see socialistparty.org.uk).

Speaking on the megaphone, we said that we won't mortgage our future for the capitalist crisis. We stressed the importance of young people getting organised and joining and becoming active in a trade union.

We raised our demands - £15-an-hour minimum wage with no exemptions, a mass programme of council house building and real investment in creating socially useful jobs.

These stalls were organised by

new, young members of the Socialist Party. Groups of young people enthusiastically signed up to get involved.

Young Socialists is a fighting organisation aiming to bring together young workers and students. We will hold a day of action on A-level results day, 13 August, plus more events in London on 22 August (see back page).

BEKKA KARTAV
SOUTH WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Get the Socialist over the summer

The Socialist is now in our summer schedule. This gives our editors a chance to take a well-deserved summer break.

The next issue of the Socialist will arrive with you on 20 August. Our normal weekly schedule will resume on 3 September.

Don't worry, you won't miss out over the summer. You can still read socialist news, campaigns and analysis at socialistparty.org.uk and socialistworld.net.

● **Subscribe to the Socialist at socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe**



Socialist Party campaign stalls on jobs, pay, NHS and racism

All over workers are angry

● Waltham Forest, London

Anger is deepening in London about the way workers have suffered disproportionately. We told people we will be challenging in the elections next year.

We met one bloke who said he worked in emergency housing and yet still can't get a home, even though he doubles up as a bouncer in a club. There is some reckoning coming.

NANCY TAAFFE

● Mansfield

It's quite difficult for people to see us smiling under our masks, it looks like we're staring them out, but we had a captive audience queuing to get into McDonald's.

● Newcastle

After almost four months it was good to get back on the streets on 25 July.

One woman told us the company she works for was always telling employees that they were part of the company's family. But that has now gone out of the window. Their boss sacked them via email.

On 1 August we went out onto Northumberland Street to stand for decent pay and jobs, as well as demanding that the price for coronavirus doesn't fall on workers' backs. We heard from workers that were in fear of losing the precarious work they had, plus those that had already been made redundant.

Young workers, in particular, were furious about unpaid internships, insecure work, and lack of prospects. One mentioned that a part-time role he was looking at had 700 applicants.

They all agreed that the fact they were nervous about not having an income, while the profits of their bosses rose, showed a real problem in the system. As the crisis deepens we'll continue to push for a socialist transformation of society, to stop the greed of the bosses and bring power back to the working class.

DAN GILMORE

● Sheffield

It's great to be back on the streets of Sheffield, campaigning for the NHS, jobs and homes, against racism, and to get the Tories out. An ex-Labour member and a 15-year-old school student signed up for invites to our next meeting.

● Swansea

We had three Socialist Party campaign stalls, for the first time since lockdown. In Swansea campaigning against the jobs massacre and attacks to the NHS; a Young Socialist stall against youth unemployment and racism; and in Port Talbot calling for the nationalisation of Tata Steel and the protection of those skilled jobs.

● York

Still buzzing after our best response on a stall since lockdown began. It was great to be joined by a new member and a non-member who joined the Socialist Party straight after the stall.

IAIN DALTON

● Birmingham

We're inspired by everyone that comes up to support us. Lots of

support from working-class people from all over in the city centre and in Acocks Green, south Birmingham, for our campaigns on affordable housing, living-wage jobs, fully funded public services, and to demand workers don't pay the price for Covid.

● Worksop

The first Socialist Party stall organised by new young members in Worksop, north Nottinghamshire took place.

● Leeds

On our first Socialist Party campaign stall in the city centre since lockdown, we campaigned for a pay rise for NHS workers, a properly fund NHS and against privatisation.

● Too many places to mention

Between 25 July and 1 August, Socialist Party members were also out campaigning in Tooting against the jobs massacre, in Worcester for workers' rights, and in Cardiff in support of 250 Wales Millennium Centre workers fighting to save their jobs.

In Bradford we were agitating against NHS cuts and privatisation, demanding a pay rise for staff. In Nottingham we called for jobs and homes for all to oppose the far right planning to come to the city on 22 August.

Bumper Southampton Socialist Party stalls called for a massive increase in the minimum wage and NHS workers' pay, the renationalisation of the service - kick out the privateers.

Why I joined the Socialist Party - Covid changed my outlook

GEORGE HOLMAN
SOUTH TYNE AND WEAR SOCIALIST PARTY

I joined the Socialist Party a month into the lockdown. Previously, I had always avoided politics and tried to remain neutral. Covid made me change my entire outlook.

I work as a recruitment consultant. The business I work for has a typical cut-throat approach.

In my role, I have seen staff, temporary and permanent, abused and exploited by bosses. Everything we did was purely in the interest of profit and in utter disregard of the health and wellbeing of workers and their families.

I even saw a cleaner sacked because they were so hungry they ate out of a bin. All because they didn't have the money to feed their family and themselves.

To me it's clear as day that this is the result of capitalism.

Money means power and in today's society the rich have proven they don't deserve power. How can they when a handful of billionaires own most of the wealth, but millions live in poverty?

Seeing all this, and feeling like I couldn't help, had me awake till 3am during lockdown. That was when I found the Socialist Party website - socialistparty.org.uk.

Since joining I have really felt welcomed and learnt a lot. It has provided a support network and allowed me to feel like I am really helping to support others.

I would urge anyone to attend a meeting and see what it is like. There is no hierarchy, no judgement and everyone gets their say. Something hard to find these days.



West London PHOTO HELEN PATTISON

Socialist Party meetings: Online and in-person

● Southampton

Southampton Socialist Party was live, in two gardens and on Zoom from many homes on 30 July. We discussed the revolutionary struggle in South America and the relevance of Leon Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution.

We also heard reports from this week's campaign stalls. The struggle continues.

● West London

In west London we hosted a hybrid meeting. Socialist Party members joined via Zoom and six of us met socially distancing in a park, logging in on a laptop.

It was great to take part in the meeting as a group. We had a few hitches along the way. But we got there. Definitely worth repeating.

HELEN PATTISON

● Find a meeting near you or join us online - socialistparty.org.uk/whatson

Kent County Council spending 'consultation'

Unite union branch pledges to support socialist candidates who oppose cuts

ERIC SEGAL

CHAIR, UNITE UNION SE/6305 SERVICES BRANCH

The response by Tory Kent County Council to Covid-19 is to launch a public consultation entitled: "Have your say on Kent County Council's spending priorities and approach following the Covid-19 pandemic". The consultation closes on 9 August. Kent council said: "This means we now need to relook at our budget and make some changes."

This consultation document formed the background to a Unite union SE/6305 Services branch meeting, held recently on Zoom. The reality of this 'consultation' is that the council wants to get rid of services that our members and working-class families depend upon at the moment, and are most desperately needed.

The branch discussed how we can fight the proposed cuts to services, looking at the various options. This included the position of the Labour Party, because we are aware that

elections will be held in 2021. The branch is concerned that if Labour is not prepared to fight all cuts, then members' hard-earned union subscriptions will go to fund Labour candidates who support cuts to services.

Significantly, the branch agreed to circulate a proposition to all members across Kent which states: "SE/3605 Services branch calls on Unite the Union to fight all austerity cuts. We do not believe that merely putting the blame of mismanagement over the Covid-19 pandemic on the government as the cause of cuts in local services is the way forward.

"We therefore call on Unite the Union to build a campaign of opposition to all cuts in local services in Kent. This branch states that as

a part of this campaign, candidates supported by this branch must be prepared to defend our local services from all cuts. This union branch will therefore support socialist candidates standing in opposition to Labour candidates who will not oppose all cuts."



Oppose BT site closures - national strike ballot needed



CWU MEMBER

The site closure programme currently being planned by British Telecom (BT) will have devastating effects on workers in those areas.

BT announced that it would close most of its current 300 sites, leaving many office-based staff in a precarious position. Towns and cities losing the jobs will suffer if BT is able to get away with this plan.

Engineers who become unable to work in their current roles due to disabilities are moved to office work. In many areas this will not be an option

if the closures take place, so it will affect all BT workers.

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) has a no compulsory redundancy agreement with BT. But there is no way that some workers will not be forced into accepting redundancy if they are expected to travel long distances to new workplaces - increasing their working day, and at a huge cost.

The plans need to be opposed and workers prepared for action if BT doesn't back off. The CWU needs to expose this plan to the media both nationally and in local areas, to start campaigns to end the plans.

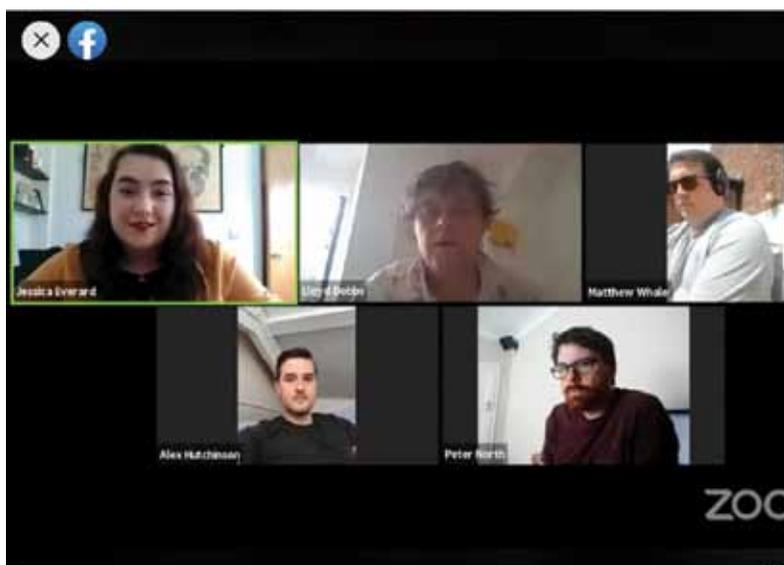
Home working has also been dismissed as an option, despite BT using it during the Covid pandemic. The fight needs to start now!

BT has used many actions to divide workers, including home parking for engineers and selling off sections of the business to contractors.

We need to unite the workers for a victory, and get public ownership of the telecoms industry. Get the fight on the road. No to site closures. We need to build a campaign for a national strike ballot and vote Yes in a ballot for action.

Engage for Change Hull

Trade union youth festival goes online



'Engage for Change' held an online, virtual festival on 25 July. Engage for Change aims to educate young working-class people on the role of trade unions through music and the arts. It's an initiative of Hull and District Trades Union Council, the body that brings together the trade unions in the city.

This year's physical festival, as with most other major events, was cancelled due to Covid-19. We felt it was important to put on a virtual festival.

The virtual festival had bands, solo

artists, and poets plus discussions on Black Lives Matter and the impact of Covid on the music industry. We heard about strikes and workers' disputes on NHS pay, Tower Hamlets council contracts and British Airways jobs.

The event videos had over 16,000 views live and since, a tremendous success. It gives Engage for Change a really strong basis for more events and festivals.

MATT WHALE

HULL SOCIALIST PARTY

North London: Socialist Party speaks at Black Lives Matter protest

MIRA GLAVARDANOV

NORTH LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

A lively Black Lives Matter protest in Edmonton, north London, on 25 July didn't shy away from politics. The event organiser said the whole lives of black people have been political for centuries.

Local examples of police brutality were raised, including the rise in stop and search. A man was tasered in his own home by police in Tottenham.

Speakers pointed to the complicity of London mayor Sadiq Khan, who has responsibility for the police. They put out a warning - black people, mostly Labour voters in London, might not support Khan in the next mayoral elections if he continues to turn a blind eye to the despicable treatment black people receive from the London police.

Edmonton has never had an Afro-Caribbean community centre and a petition went round to demand that Enfield Council provides one. The campaign warned local businesses that they could face boycotts, following the refusal of some local shops to display Black Lives Matter leaflets.

North London Socialist Party attended the protest and we were invited to speak. We pointed out that working-class people have to rely on our own strength.

We pledged our solidarity, saying that capitalism benefits by dividing



Mira speaking at the protest PHOTO NORTH LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

the working class on race. Only if we come together can we fight capitalism and inequality.

We still live in the same capitalist system responsible for slavery, and the ruling class that got rich from it continues to keep black people oppressed, while stirring up racism.

Socialist Party members said that the Black Lives Matter movement has frightened the ruling class - and they need to be frightened.

The organiser finished by saying black people couldn't do this on their own, and called for more solidarity in the future.



PHOTO MARY FINCH

NHS pay crisis underlines a broken health care system in need of socialist repair

►► CONTINUED FROM P1

There are concerns among NHS workers that we can't ask for pay rises while others are facing wage cuts and redundancies.

But we shouldn't have to choose between decent wages for us or jobs for others. The money is there to fund our pay rise.

For example, the Welsh government gave nursing agencies £69 million last year. Nurses often work agency shifts on top of their full-time NHS hours to top up their wages, or because they need flexible hours for their families.

But NHS 'bank' work doesn't pay enough. Why not use that money to raise NHS nurses' wages and ensure flexible working is available within the NHS?

It's not money that's lacking, it's political will. We should link up with other workers and fight all wage cuts and redundancies in both the public and private sector.

There are also concerns that if we need to take industrial action, it will negatively impact patient care, but look how it's being impacted now when we don't take action!

Fightbacks

Nurses struck in Ireland last year for better wages. Home carers in Birmingham and Glasgow have won strikes in recent years for fair wages. Lewisham hospital workers successfully struck at the beginning of the pandemic in a wage dispute with an outsourcing firm. All these enjoyed huge public support.

The pandemic and the fight for fair pay have raised other vital issues. The care sector crisis shows a nationalised care service is long overdue. It has highlighted the dangers of privatisation, with private firms refusing to provide PPE for their workers.

It has also highlighted huge inequalities such as racism within the NHS and wider society: around 60% of health workers who died were black, Asian and minority ethnic.

This battle is about more than pay.

Our experiences in the pandemic show that we cannot leave the NHS and social care sector in this government's hands.

But we cannot leave the pay battle in our current union leaders' hands. Look at the courage lay members have shown during the pandemic: these are the people we need at the head of our unions and our NHS.

We need public ownership, and democratic control by health workers and communities, of health and social care. These protests are only the beginning.

A socialist programme for the NHS should include:

- An immediate 15% pay rise for all health and care staff including those in privatised sectors
- Minimum wage of £12 an hour - £15 in London. Scrap zero-hours contracts immediately
- Reverse all privatisations. Scrap the 'Private Finance Initiative' and cancel all PFI debts
- Bring all outsourced workers and services in-house on a permanent contract
- A fully publicly funded NHS and care system, free at the point of use. Scrap prescription charges in England, dental charges and all health charges
- Nationalise the private healthcare sector, care homes, the medical supply industry and the pharmaceutical companies - integrate them into the NHS
- Reinststate student bursaries and scrap tuition fees in England
- We can't trust pro-privatisation, pro-austerity, anti-working-class politicians
- Fight for the building of a new mass workers' party
- Unite and fight the institutionalised racism of the bosses. Black Lives Matter!
- A socialist NHS - democratically run by elected and accountable committees, including service workers and users
- A socialist planned economy to end oppression, poverty and inequality

Tories' obesity plans - blaming individuals not the profit system

HEATHER RAWLING
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

First, the elderly were told to shield from Covid-19. Then, statistics revealed a disproportionate number of people from ethnic minorities were dying from the virus. Now, obesity is being linked to a serious risk of fatality from the virus.

The common factor, however, is poverty. And poverty is written into the DNA of capitalism.

According to the Nuffield Trust, there is a strong association between deprivation and obesity in children. In 2018-19, the prevalence of obesity in those aged 10-11 was 27% in the most-deprived areas and 13% in the least-deprived areas. Almost two-thirds of adults in England are overweight.

Poorer people suffer from a lack of decent housing, the gig economy and zero-hour contracts, low wages, Universal Credit and poor diets.

Government data revealed that during the first months of lockdown 3.7 million were forced to use food banks. You take what is offered, whether it is healthy or not.

Pre-pandemic council cuts have closed swimming pools and sold off playing fields and other sports facilities. Private gyms are too expensive if you're on a low wage or benefits even if you could afford the kit.

This pandemic has exposed inequalities in a most cruel way. Poverty, obesity and its related diseases make some people old or dead before their time. But don't worry, Boris Johnson

has announced government plans to tackle obesity, possibly because of his own Covid brush with death.

The proposals include:

- A ban on TV and online adverts for food high in fat, sugar and salt before 9pm.
- End of deals like 'buy one, get one free' on unhealthy food high in salt, sugar and fat.
- Calories to be displayed on menus to help people make healthier choices when eating out - while alcoholic drinks could soon have to list hidden 'liquid calories.'
- A new campaign to help people lose weight, get active and eat better after the Covid-19 'wake-up call'.

In other words, it's the individual's responsibility. "If we all do our bit," says Boris, living on a different planet to the rest of us, "we can reduce our health risks and protect ourselves against coronavirus".

What choice?

How much choice do we really have in the food we buy and eat? Working parents arrive home shattered and have little time or energy to prepare a home-cooked dinner.

Families living on housing estates are often miles from shops selling fresh food as local shops cannot compete with the superstores.

Public transport has been drastically cut back and most people on benefits don't have cars. Chances are, though, there will be fast food outlets offering trans-fats, high-sugar, and high-salt cheap meals, made with inferior ingredients, nearby.

Obesity is not an 'individual's problem'. The food industry is responsible for driving down food standards and aggressively marketing unhealthy foods.

You can bet that even now, the food manufacturers are lobbying the government to water down its inadequate proposals.

ITV and Channel 4 have warned the government that the media sector will lose £200 million in advertising revenue from these proposals.

We can't even trust the research. The British Nutrition Foundation was funded by the sugar industry, with a vested interest in keeping our sugar consumption high. Instead, the emphasis on obesity is a lack of exercise or unbalanced diets, not junk food.

The Socialist Party demands:

- The major food producers and distributors should be nationalised and democratically run as part of an overall plan of production to enable people to eat healthily at affordable prices
- A minimum wage of £12 an hour - £15 in London
- Increase benefits to the level of the minimum wage
- No more cuts! Organise a mass campaign to demand the government fully fund council budgets. Councils should provide easily accessible sports and leisure facilities
- A fully funded, national public transport system
- Make the roads safer for cyclists and walkers



Capitalist industry has a vested interest in keeping sugar consumption high, despite the adverse effects on public health

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CUBA: COVID-19 AND THE 60-YEAR-OLD EMBARGO

Defend the revolution's gains, fight for workers' democracy

SCOTT JONES
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Cuba has one of the lowest Covid-19 death rates in the world - 0.8 per 100,000, compared to 67 in the UK and 44.1 in the US. As well as this, Cuba has sent doctors, nurses and other health workers to 26 other countries during the pandemic.

It also gave sanctuary to the MS Braemar, a cruise ship carrying 682 mainly British tourists, which had cases of coronavirus on board. It had earlier been denied entry by several Caribbean countries. According to sources in the British government, the United States administration had refused to help.

Cuba has done this in the face of a six-decade, brutal trade embargo by the US - the reality of which has been shown again during the pandemic. A shipment of 100,000 facemasks, diagnostic kits and ventilators from China was blocked en route to Cuba because the cargo carrier's owner is a US-based company subject to the embargo.

Nationalisation

The embargo was put in place in 1960, in response to Cuba's revolutionary government nationalising American-owned companies, without compensation, that year. The nationalisations followed the revolution that overthrew US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista and the super-rich, casino owners, gangsters and bosses who had dominated and exploited Cuba. (See 'Cuban revolution at 60: defend the gains and fight for workers' democracy' at socialistparty.org.uk)

Although the Cuban revolution was not based on the working class, and the regime the revolution ushered in has been bureaucratically run from above without the workers' democracy which genuine socialism has to have, it is one of the great, historic hammer blows to capitalism.

A combination of the pressure of the Cuban masses and hostility from US imperialism led to the new Cuban government nationalising most of the economy. This included all the major industries, land and much of the private property owned by US capitalists and, in some cases, organised crime. The hostility went as far as supporting armed intervention in 1961, in the infamous Bay of Pigs invasion, as well as subsequent terrorist attacks carried out by the CIA and right-wing Cuban exiles.

It ushered in huge advances in the day-to-day lives of the Cuban

people - gains which, as its management of the pandemic shows, largely last to this day. The social gains include free healthcare and education. Life expectancy is now almost two decades longer than in 1959 and infant mortality is lower than the United States.

There are now 15 times more doctors since the revolution, with the best doctor-to-patient ratio in the world. And the medical internationalism it's shown during the pandemic is nothing new - since the 1960s 400,000 medical professionals have provided healthcare in 164 countries. Cuba even had brigades ready to help in the US during the Hurricane Katrina disaster in New Orleans in 2005, but the US government rejected this help.

Due to the country's completely nationalised medical system, and also difficulties obtaining certain drugs due to the embargo, Cuba has also made impressive biotech innovations. A Cuban anti-viral drug Interferon Alfa-2B that has been used since the 1980s to help patients fight viruses, is now helping patients recover from different stages of Covid-19. Cuba says that globally, there have been more than 70 requests for pharmaceuticals it has developed.



The need to oppose and build an alternative to the increasing threat of capitalist restoration, and to fight for genuine workers' democracy and a socialist planned economy is more urgent than ever

The trade embargo is called 'el bloqueo' in Cuba, referring to the early years when it was enforced by a US naval blockade. It's estimated to have cost Cuba \$1 trillion.

Since 1992, the United Nations general assembly has passed a resolution every year condemning the embargo and declaring it in violation of international law, with the United States and a handful of its allies voting against each year.

There was a very limited thaw in Cuban-US relations under the presidency of Barack Obama, but Donald Trump has rolled these back and even strengthened the embargo, implementing 90 economic measures against Cuba between January 2019 and March 2020 alone. He has tried to pressure other governments to reject Cuba's help during the pandemic.

The embargo bit even harder in the 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Union. It forced Cuba into what became known as the 'special period', which in reality meant austerity measures, as the vast resources and funds channelled to Cuba from Moscow dried up.

It is testament to the support for Cuba's revolutionary gains, and the determination to keep them, that Cuba's planned economy survived this period.

But the Soviet Union's influence, combined with the absence of genuine workers' democracy from the start, meant Cuba's planned economy developed into a top-down bureaucratic model, similar to the 'deformed workers' states' in eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union itself.

The programme of the Socialist Party and the Committee for a Workers' International is for a 'political revolution' to overthrow

the Cuban bureaucracy, and the implementation of workers' democracy, with elected representatives - nationally, regionally and locally - being accountable and subject to instant recall. We call for these elected representatives to receive only the average wage of the workers.

The revolution in 1959 had total support from the workers and poor masses of Cuba, and many of the revolutionaries, led by the example of Che Guevara, were incredibly self-sacrificing. Most officials took average wages and refused any perks. Cuba hasn't ever taken on the same horrific character of Stalin's Russia.

But because the revolution was achieved through guerrilla war and there was no revolutionary party like the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917, there has not been the key workplace and political democracy mentioned earlier. Particularly since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, this has left it open to attack and exploitation again.

The planned economy and socialist gains of the revolution have shown again during Covid-19 what can be achieved by breaking from capitalism and giving a glimpse of what could be achieved under genuine socialism.

Crossroads

Cuba rightly has the support and sympathy of workers and young people around the world. But today Cuba is a country at a crossroads. Both the pride in its remarkable revolutionary past, and the problems and threats of the present, can be seen when visiting the country.

Cuba has suffered the hammer blows of the 2008 world recession, and the drying up of cheap oil from chaos-ridden Venezuela which helped to sustain Cuba through its links with former Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez and his left populist government. Now Covid-19 is compounding the economic problems by hitting tourism in particular which, since the 1990s, Cuba has come to rely on more and more. The pandemic has hit the state, which controls much of the tourism industry, and the many workers who are employed in the sector.

The need to oppose and build an alternative to the increasing threat of capitalist restoration, and to fight for genuine workers' democracy and a socialist planned economy in Cuba in these tumultuous times, is more urgent than ever.

This movement, defending the gains and winning new ones, fighting alongside the working class and youth who are increasingly moving into action all over the world, could build a real socialist alternative to capitalism. And this movement, taking inspiration from the Cuban revolution, while learning its lessons, can win.



Cuba: Socialism & Democracy by Peter Taaffe, £8 and
Che Guevara - Symbol of Struggle by Tony Saunois, £4
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Anniversary of nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

CAN THE SLIDE TOWARD A NEW ARMS RACE BE HALTED?

BERKAY KARTAV
SOUTH WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

75 years ago, as World War Two was drawing to a close, United States forces dropped two atomic bombs above the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This is still one of the most deadly and vicious military attacks in human history.

The first atomic bomb on 6 August immediately killed more than 100,000 people in Hiroshima; the second bombing on Nagasaki on 9 August killed a further 70,000 people, and wounded as many, or even more. Both cities were instantaneously destroyed. It demonstrated the immense destructive capabilities of US capitalism at the time.

Although conventional bombs in a single attack had also killed tens of thousands of civilians - in Dresden and Tokyo for example - the use of the atomic bomb was far more destructive and deadly than any other weapon used in the war. It ushered in the era of nuclear proliferation.

At the time, when the atomic bomb was dropped over Japan, Nazi Germany had already been defeated. Stalin's Soviet Union - at enormous cost to its oppressed population, and despite the treacherous mistakes of its bureaucratic leadership - had played a crucial role in the defeat of Hitler's regime. The Soviet Union had recently declared war on Japan and invaded its northern islands.

That the Soviet Union was expanding beyond its agreed 'spheres of influence' worried the capitalist regimes in the West.

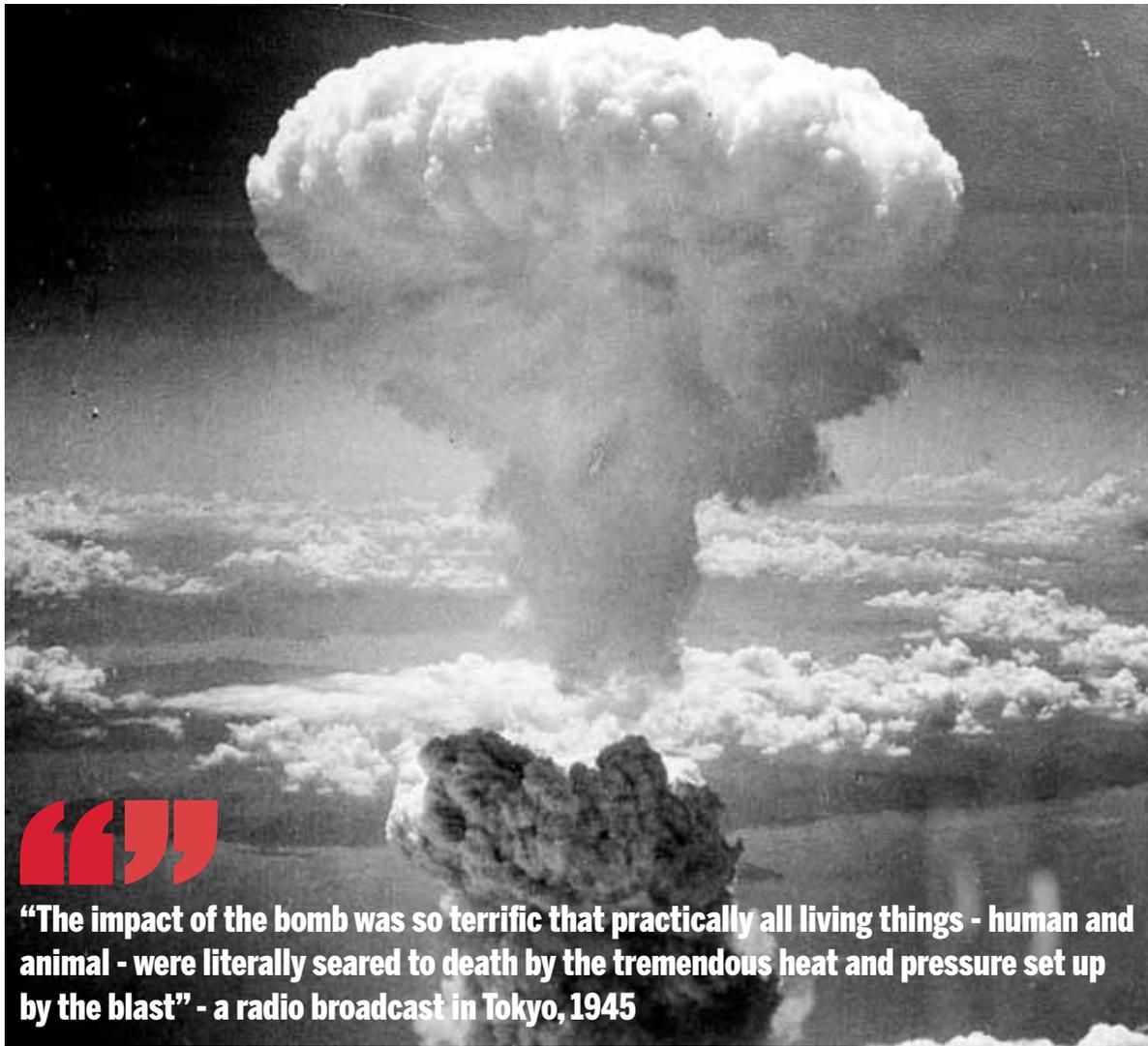
An important reason why the political representatives of the US ruling class were so keen to use the atomic bomb was that they wanted to show their military and technological superiority to the Soviet Union.

A protracted war in the Pacific region, which had already killed many US soldiers and became materially costly for the US, was also cited as one of the factors behind the decision to drop the atomic bomb. But a report produced by the US Strategic Bombing Survey suggested that Japan was already suing for peace.

To develop the nuclear bomb, massive funds had been secretly invested by the US government in the Manhattan Project, which included scientists such as Robert Oppenheimer and Enrico Fermi.

Even though the overwhelming majority of the scientists who worked on the Manhattan Project were against the use of the atomic bomb against Japan, the decision to use a destructive weapon lay in the hands of a tiny minority of society.

In the aftermath of World War Two, with the escalation of the conflict between the capitalist regimes on the one hand, and the Stalinist regimes, based on a bureaucratically planned, nationalised economy on the other, the number of nuclear warheads stockpiled massively increased. Given the destructiveness of these



“The impact of the bomb was so terrific that practically all living things - human and animal - were literally seared to death by the tremendous heat and pressure set up by the blast” - a radio broadcast in Tokyo, 1945

weapons, however, both the Western powers and the Soviet Union wanted to avoid a nuclear war and their 'mutually assured destruction' (MAD).

Nuclear arms today

It has been 75 years since the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the US remains the only country to have ever used the atomic bomb. Today, not only has technology developed to an unimaginable scale compared to 1945, but eight more countries are in possession of

nuclear weapons - including China, Israel, France, India, Pakistan, North Korea and the UK, while Iran has resumed its attempt to build a weapon. Currently, Russia and the US possess over 90% of the world's total nuclear warheads.

Several treaties have been signed in the past to limit the number and the range of these nuclear weapons. But US president Donald Trump withdrew from both the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) last year - which he accused

Russia of reneging on - and also the Obama-era nuclear weapons deal with Iran.

The Trump administration views the 'Russian bear's' invasion and annexation of parts of Ukraine as a threat, notwithstanding the expansion of the US-dominated western military alliance of Nato into eastern Europe since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The US also wants to build up its military forces against China, which didn't sign the INF. This treaty



Trade and diplomatic hostilities are rising between US president Donald Trump and Chinese premier Xi Jinping THE WHITEHOUSE/CC

withdrawal, therefore, is a reflection of the growing competition between major capitalist powers as the global economic crisis intensifies.

Capitalist competition is leading to increased international tensions between states. The US drone attack which assassinated Iran's top general, Qassem Suleimani, earlier this year, has underlined the volatile and dangerous situation which exists in the Middle East. Iran retaliated to the assassination by carrying out a ballistic missile attack on US bases in Iraq.

It is possible that future military skirmishes could escalate and threaten regional wars between states with nuclear arsenals, for example between India and Pakistan. The US or Israel could also pre-emptively attack Iran if the latter comes near to achieving nuclear weapons capability.

Meanwhile, Stalinist North Korea remains wedded to its nuclear arms testing programme. The ratcheting-up of tensions between the US administration and North Korean regime - which reached its highest point in 2018 when the latter tested a nuclear bomb - once again underlined the fact that none of the attempts to demilitarise the Korean peninsula since the 1950-53 war have worked.

The US maintains its massive military presence in South Korea. But the Korean working class also has a proud record of struggle against militarisation.

Capitalist rivalry or socialism?

The intensifying competition between China and the US in world markets, and these super-powers' attempts to further their geopolitical aims, have already led to a trade war and an expanding militarisation of the Pacific Rim region. On top of that, the present world economic crisis has triggered a new wave of international tensions.

The current situation poses the question of whether there will be a military conflict between these two powers.

Although the 'MAD' consequence means that their use of nuclear weapons can be ruled out, the territorial disputes in the South China Sea are an indication that conflicts over strategic trade routes can lead to some sort of military clash.

As long as the capitalist system remains, geopolitical rivalry and capitalist competition to enhance profit means that the threat of conventional wars, and even a regional nuclear exchange, remains a real possibility, albeit not in the short term.

The working class is the only force in society that can overthrow this war-inducing, rotten system of capitalism and replace it with a socialist society.

Introducing a socialist plan of production, on a world scale, will lay the basis for international cooperation to bring an end to the horrors of nuclear and conventional wars and secure a permanent peace.

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the Socialist

Issue 1097

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formerly **Militant**

A-level results day 2020

FIGHT FOR OUR FUTURE!

Free education, real jobs and training for school leavers

KRIS O'SULLIVAN
BIRMINGHAM NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Picking up your A-level results is always a nerve-racking day. But 13 August is especially so, as it won't be 'business as usual' for young people afterward, despite what the Tories are saying.

For young people, it's not just a matter of waiting to see what results you've got. It's also having to weigh up all the real-life effects of an ongoing global pandemic, years of austerity and privatisation, universities going through a funding crisis, and more.

With all this looming, young people see a grim future for their opportunities in education, jobs and housing.

The UK is the fifth-richest country in the world. But the capitalist system is crisis-riddled, and there has been a complete mishandling of lockdown by this government of big business.

That means the threat of mass unemployment

and poverty for young people, for years to come, in a scarred economy. Look already at how workers in hospitality, retail, the gig economy and self-employment, have been abandoned and left out to dry.

Enough is enough!

Young people are sick and tired of going through the old joke of being told 'if you get the grades this will mean jobs and homes to move out to'.

In reality, the current education system is young people being pushed through exam-factory schools and debt-machine universities. It means a lifetime of debt and no guarantee of a job at the end of the road!

This is if you can even get to university in the first place. Many student hopefuls are now told they might have to accept just their predicted grades for A-levels as colleges and sixth forms are stretched to the limits. This overwhelmingly jeopardises the futures of young people from working-class backgrounds.

If capitalism can't provide us with full employment and living-wage jobs, affordable, high-quality housing, and free education for all - then we can't afford capitalism.

So join Young Socialists and Socialist Students as we turn 13 August into a day of action, organising the fightback on the streets.

Against bogus apprenticeship schemes, and for guaranteed jobs at the end of all training. Against poverty pay and zero-hour contracts, and for living-wage jobs for all. Against tuition fees, for free education, scrapping the debts, and living grants, not loans. Against overpriced student halls and private landlord exploitation, and for rent caps and high-quality housing for all.

We say young workers and students must not pay a single penny for a crisis we didn't cause.

The socialist fightback begins today!



PHOTO: MARY FINCH

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

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

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