

SOCIALIST★APPEAL

NHS CATASTROPHE BLOOD ON TORY HANDS



Image: Steve Eason / flickr.com

SOCIALIST★APPEAL

WHO ARE WE? and WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING FOR?

Bold measures are required to deal with the coronavirus crisis. Only a clear socialist programme can offer a way forward.

We must have no faith in the Tories or their hangers on, whose worship of the market has brought the country to its knees.

- No trust or confidence in the Tories and their big business backers!
- Instead of attacking the left, Labour must provide genuine opposition to this shambolic Tory government. Support workers in the fight to put lives before profits!

The bosses and their craven political representatives have shown that they will always prioritise profits over lives. We demand socialist measures to protect workers, and put health before wealth.

- For a fully publicly-owned and free health service, under workers' control and management. Reverse all privatisation and outsourcing. All private health services must be nationalised without compensation, and integrated into the NHS.
- For a properly funded test and trace system, fully under public control. Boot out parasitic outsourcing companies like SERCO, and give power to healthcare workers, councils, and local communities in order to provide mass testing.
- Nationalise the pharmaceutical companies – without compensation – in order to ensure that vaccines are developed rapidly and made available to all for free.
- Reverse the austerity inflicted upon public services. Launch a fully-funded training programme for doctors, nurses, paramedics, medical staff, with decent pay and hours, to increase staffing levels across the board. New hospitals must be urgently built.
- Non-essential workplaces should be shut down until it is genuinely safe to reopen. The decision to

reopen should be in the hands of workplace committees and the trade unions. And it must be based on the implementation of health and safety measures and a safe working environment. The costs for this must be paid by the bosses.

- For safe work or full pay. Any lockdown or restrictions must be accompanied by measures to provide for workers affected by closures. This means 100% wage support for those furloughed, as well as full sick pay to those required to isolate.
- To fight job cuts and the threat of mass unemployment following the lockdown, work should be shared out without any loss of pay, in order to lower the hours of the working day.
- Scrap tuition fees and rents, and replace these with free education and full maintenance grants for all. Move university courses online. And put staff in control in schools and universities.
- Ban evictions and cancel housing debts. Give local authorities the power to cap rents at affordable levels. Requisition rooms at hotels and hostels for those sleeping on the streets. And bring empty properties and the assets of the big landlords and management companies under public control.
- Many small businesses are faced with bankruptcy, with banks resisting any extensions of credit. Many are squeezed not only by the banks, but by the big monopolies. By nationalising the banks we can supply these small businesses with the lifeline of guaranteed low-interest credit and loans.
- The financial resources required to fight the crisis must not come from increased taxes or more austerity, but through the nationalisation of the banks and finance houses. Rather than a 'wealth tax', we call for the expropriation of the monopolies.
- Instead of building up the national

debt through government borrowing, the money needed should be obtained entirely from expropriating the accumulated profits of big business.

- If the bosses say they can't afford to pay for workers' wages, we say: open up the books! Let the working class and the labour movement see the accounts! If firms plead bankruptcy, they should not be bailed out, but nationalised under workers' control.

- No to austerity! The working class must not pay for this crisis!

It is clear that the market has failed and capitalism is in a deep crisis. The anarchy of capitalism prevents the planning of society's resources, in Britain and internationally.

- We therefore stand for the nationalisation of the 100 biggest monopolies, banks, utilities, landlords and so on – under workers' control and management – and without compensation. On this basis, the economy can be democratically planned in the interests of the majority, and not for the super profits of a few.
- A Socialist Federation of Britain should be linked to a Socialist United States of Europe and a World Socialist Federation, in order to plan resources internationally for the benefit of all. This would put an end to barbarism of capitalism and allow humanity to begin solving the urgent issues of climate change, disease, and poverty that face society and our planet.

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SOCIALIST APPEAL
Left Publications LTD

newsdesk@socialist.net
Issue 340, January 2021

Editor: Rob Sewell
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Next issue date:
26th January 2021

Content/Layout:
Callum Douglas and Khaled Malachi

Queries:
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NHS CATASTROPHE: TORIES HAVE BLOOD ON THEIR HANDS

Dr Raj Mistry

The crisis in the NHS has become a catastrophe. Yet the scale of the on-going health crisis is difficult to grasp. According to a leaked NHS England briefing, London hospitals are predicted to be “overwhelmed” by 19 January, with a shortage of up to 5,500 beds. Across the country, hospitals are at breaking point.

So acute is the lack of beds and staff that even urgent cancer operations are being cancelled. A memo from managers at the Royal London hospital said, “we are now in disaster medicine mode”.

Underpaid, overworked staff and vulnerable patients are being made to take the brunt of the Tories’ incompetent and reckless response to the pandemic.

Tories to blame

It’s no secret that the NHS was not ready for this pandemic. Although the Tories are quick to blame the new, more infectious strain of the virus, the reality is that the NHS is now straining after decades of cuts, underfunding, and privatisation.

Over 75,000 hospital beds in UK hospitals have been cut since the year 2000 – a 30% reduction. Working conditions and pay have come under attack for years, resulting in a chronic shortage of staff. Thousands have left the health sector in recent years, with none being replaced. And the Tories have been preparing the NHS for privatisation and profiteering, not for fighting pandemics such as COVID.

With 1-in-10 nursing posts vacant, and a glaring shortage of skilled nurses, we lack the manpower to effectively fight the virus. The empty and idle Nightingale hospitals are proof of this.

We will never know the exact number of lives that could have been saved had the NHS been properly prepared. But what is certain is that the Tories have blood on their hands.

Breaking point

What about our patients? Many planned operations have been cancelled, leaving patients to suffer at home. If they are lucky



enough to be admitted, they’ll have to wait for hours in a busy A&E, while hospital wards desperately discharge patients to make beds available.

Once on a ward, their scans will take longer to be performed, and overworked nurses may struggle to give them their pain medication when they need it.

In the community, GP numbers have dropped dramatically. In some parts of the UK, only one in three GP spots are filled. This leaves those in work with longer patient lists, fewer community resources, and the difficult choice of whether or not to send a patient to the struggling local hospital.

Management’s response has been unsurprisingly feeble. We receive regular emails from our chief executive asking that we “give extra hours...work extra shifts”. Meanwhile, they sit on a comfortable six-figure salary – one which could pay the wages of six nurses!

Hands off our NHS

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed a truth that workers have known for years: the NHS is under attack. Decades of Tory (and ‘New’ Labour) rule have deprived the system of much needed resources. The result is harm to patients and excruciating inefficiency, whilst underpaid, overworked staff are made to pick up the pieces.

Meanwhile, the private health sector leeches off the NHS. Hospitals built under

Private Finance Initiatives (where private sector money was used to build new hospitals) struggle with increasing debts. And billions of pounds have been handed over to dubious, Tory-friendly ‘PPE providers’.

The NHS wasn’t gifted to us by the capitalist class; nor was it the result of so-called ‘national unity’ after the horrors of World War Two. It was fought for by the labour movement, against the bitter resistance of the ruling class.

Workers’ health can never truly be safe in the hands of the capitalist state, as revealed dramatically now with the COVID crisis.

With the nationalisation of the banks, finance houses, and top 100 monopolies, we could invest the necessary resources and more into the NHS. As healthcare workers, we demand:

- A mass vaccination effort, co-ordinated by trade unions, for ALL frontline staff.
- Full nationalisation of the private healthcare sector – including private hospitals, clinics, outsourced porters and cleaners, and the whole pharmaceutical sector – without compensation.
- Replace the bloated NHS bureaucracy and fat-cat management consultants with genuine workers’ control, through workers’ committees.
- A union-led mass recruitment drive of doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals, paid a fair wage, and guaranteed decent and safe working conditions.

Every day, my colleagues and patients are put at risk by a system not fit for purpose. To the Tories and private sector parasites, we say: Hands off our NHS! ■





UNISON ELECTION REVEALS POTENTIAL FOR A HISTORIC LEFT VICTORY

Rob Sewell

The results for the Unison general secretary election were announced on Monday 11 January. While Christina McAnea, the right-wing candidate, won the election to replace Dave Prentis, this election in reality shows enormous potential for the left.

Paul Holmes – 45,220 (33.76%)
Christina McAnea – 63,900 (47.7%)
Roger McKenzie – 14,450 (10.79%)
Hugo Pierre – 10,382 (7.75%)

The only reason why Paul Holmes, the left candidate, did not win a landslide victory – which was entirely possible – was because the left vote was split three ways. If there hadn't been three left campaigns fighting for votes for three different candidates, the result would have been entirely different.

The direction of travel was clear. Had Roger McKenzie and Hugo Pierre been prepared to stand aside in favour of the official left candidate and put their efforts behind Paul Holmes, he would have certainly scored a magnificent victory against all the odds. It would have changed the entire dynamic. Failure to do so criminally robbed the left of such an outcome.

While she won the election, McAnea has little to celebrate. This is the lowest percentage vote for any right-wing candidate in recent times, which has been falling steadily at each election. Dave Prentis got 77% of the vote in 2005; 67% in 2010; and 49.4% of the vote in 2015.

In this election, the combined votes for the left was over 70,000, compared to 63,900 votes for the right wing – a huge increase on previous elections.

This is an incredible vote given the circumstances. Once again, to underline the point, if the left had fought in a united

fashion, they would have trounced the right wing.

Divided left

As we explained throughout the campaign, Paul Holmes was the official left candidate, supported by Unison Action Broad Left.

Roger McKenzie also described himself as a 'left' candidate and was supported by Jeremy Corbyn, Diane Abbott, and other left MPs. But he had little active support on the ground. As an assistant general secretary under Prentis, he was part of the union machine.

When McKenzie announced he was standing, a layer on the left argued that "he had the best chance" of beating the right wing. This turned out to be false. In fact, Holmes won more than three times the number of votes received by McKenzie, a Unison assistant general secretary.

However, in the end, McKenzie's campaign was sufficient to take vital support away from Paul Holmes. It is clear that the left MPs should have listened to the left of the union and supported Paul.

Sectarianism

Added to the split in the left was the campaign by Hugo Pierre from the Socialist Party. Pierre was rejected as a candidate by the Unison broad left, but still decided to stand in any case.

Pierre and his campaign were repeatedly warned not to split the vote, and were asked to stand down in favour of the official left candidate. But he and the Socialist Party refused.

This meant that the 31 nominations that Hugo Pierre picked up – according to the rules – then blocked those bodies from supporting Paul throughout the campaign.

In other words, Pierre's vote was a wasted vote, which contributed to the success of the right-wing candidate.

The Socialist Party stood a candidate solely for prestige reasons, nothing more. In the past, they had played a certain role in the left of Unison. But those days have long gone.

How the balance of forces have changed since 2015! Here are the results from that election:

Roger Bannister, the Socialist Party candidate 16,853 (12.6%)
John Burgess, the official left candidate 15,573 (11.6%)
Dave Prentis, the right-wing candidate 66,155 (49.4%)
Heather Wakefield, the centrist candidate 35,433 (26.4%)

While the official grassroots left almost tripled its vote since then, the Socialist Party vote has fallen by one third, coming bottom of the poll. Significantly, Paul Holmes took 40% of the votes that went to Roger Bannister in the last election.

In effect, the Socialist Party's entry into this current election was a wrecking tactic. They hoped to beat Paul, and assume the mantle of the union left. With this aim, the SP scandalously spread unsubstantiated gossip about Paul, in an attempt to discredit him.

For the SP, it was clearly a game of putting the prestige and sectarian interests of their tiny group before the interests of the union membership and the broader working class. This is why, whatever the merits of individuals, they can never again be trusted. They have burned their bridges with the rest of the left.

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A left victory in this election would have been a political earthquake throughout Unison and the trade union movement. It would have decisively broken the grip of the right wing. The fact that this did not happen is the direct fruit of sectarianism, which always ends up playing a pernicious and reactionary role.

Knife edge

Nevertheless, the combined vote for the left indicates enormous potential for this year's elections to the Unison national executive committee. In these elections, the left is more likely to be unified. This is revealed by the experiences in the 2017 and 2019 NEC elections, where seats were either unopposed or were a straight fight between right and left.

In the past, the Unison broad left has never even put up a full slate for the NEC.

In effect, the right wing was given a free rein.

While the right wing have a majority on this body, it is very narrow. We should recall that when the NEC voted to endorse a general secretary candidate, the vote was originally tied between McAnea and Paul with 22 votes each. Then in the run off, the final outcome was 29 McAnea to 26 for Paul.

This was the first time, without any warning beforehand, that they had employed an exhaustive ballot, rather than using first past the post. This clinched the nomination for the right. But things are on a knife edge.

Turning the tide

The trade union bureaucracy represents an enormous brake on the movement, especially at this critical time.

Unison members face renewed attacks in local authorities, with increased privatisation and austerity; not to mention the safety of union members in hospitals,

care homes, and other workplaces.

The challenges are colossal and the right wing have no answers, except business as usual.

We must therefore up the ante. The left must build upon this impetus gained in the general secretary campaign to launch its biggest campaign ever to win a majority on the national executive. Nominations for this open on 1 February.

The left who stood behind Paul Holmes are determined to have a fighting left majority on that body. And *Socialist Appeal* supporters will proudly play our part in helping to change the union into an organisation worthy of its members.

As Paul Holmes explained in response to today's results: "The fight continues with renewed vigour!"

Without any doubt, this year the left is preparing a new chapter in the history of Unison – the biggest union in Britain, with 1.3 million members. In doing so, it will help turn the tide throughout the labour and trade union movement. ■



Paul Holmes

First of all, I would like to thank everybody who supported me in this general secretary election campaign. Without you none of this would have been possible.

Secondly, I would like to make a few basic points. We did extremely well. My percentage of the vote in this election (33%) was the highest ever obtained by someone who did not win. I managed to get three times the number of votes of the 3rd place candidate, and four times those of the 4th place candidate.

The election campaign was a great success – not just in terms of votes, but also the hundreds of new activists who joined our campaign and who want to get involved. Our job is to build upon this.

The process has now started for the 2021 Unison NEC elections, and many new candidates have come forward for those NEC elections.

In the current climate, particularly with COVID, public sector workers are frightened, tired, and over-stretched. Our union's members are facing redundancies, cuts to their terms and conditions, as well as fire-and-rehire tactics by employers – such as British Gas and Tower Hamlets council.

The NHS and the care sector are under great strain. There are 100,000 NHS vacancies; and 15% of NHS staff are off work with issues related to COVID. Local government workers face cuts to pensions and statutory redundancy payments, by an incompetent and vicious government looking to make workers pay for Tory

mistakes.

The Unison general secretary election result shows that our members will respond to calls for the union to really change. The Unison NEC elections will continue that process, with new layers of working-class Unison representatives coming forward to meet the challenge.

Workers understand that they need a Unison leadership who have led and won disputes, and who understand the nature of the fight to come. Our members' futures should be our union's main objective. We need to ensure that our branches have the resources, support, leadership and backing to successfully fight the battles that are inevitably ahead.

This general secretary election result has shown that this process has begun – and that there is a clear potential to win. ■

THE STRUGGLE FOR SAFE SCHOOLS

TEACHERS' BACKLASH FORCES ANOTHER TORY U-TURN

Sean Beazley

Croydon NEU

Health & Safety Rep

(personal capacity)

On Sunday 3 January, Boris Johnson insisted on multiple occasions that the majority of primary schools in England would fully open the following day. He repeatedly assured that they would be safe for students and staff.

These assertions from the Prime Minister came despite a planned week-long delay in exam-sitting pupils (those in Years 11 and 13) returning to secondary schools, along with a fortnight-long delayed return for non-exam-sitting pupils.

By the next evening, however, the same Boris Johnson was holding an emergency news conference to announce that all schools in England would be closed until mid-February at the earliest. Furthermore, this latest measure would be part of a full national lockdown, in which all but essential services and businesses would have to close.

Tory lies

Johnson stated that such a sharp U-turn was a consequence of dramatic changes in the objective situation – specifically, an alarming rise in the number of COVID cases, along with a new consensus amongst scientific experts.

Furthermore, the PM claimed that these changes were a consequence of a new strain of the virus emerging and spreading, which apparently could not be foreseen.

Like most of the words emanating from Johnson's mouth, however, this is all lies, fabrications, and distortions. Yes, the scientific evidence demanded a need for a strict lockdown. But such advice had come from SAGE [the government's own Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies] back on 22 December. So why the last minute change of heart on Boris' part?

Scientific evidence

In truth, the Tory government was forced to change course due to a backlash from the organised labour movement – a movement that, unlike Johnson and his ministers, has always been guided by scientific advice and the interests of workers, students, and the wider public.



On Saturday 2 January, the leadership of the National Education Union (NEU) took the decision to advise members who work in primary schools to issue a Section 44 notice to headteachers, and offer on-line teaching instead.

Section 44 is a notice that all workers have the legal right to issue to an employer, if they have evidence to suggest that their workplace is unsafe.

In this case, the necessary evidence was provided by SAGE and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. According to analysis presented by SAGE, the new strain of the virus was up to 70% more infectious; and schools are an important vector of transmission for this more contagious variant.

The scientific advisory group therefore recommended that schools should remain closed until mid-January at the earliest, so that the R-rate could drop below 1.0 – the level at which case numbers would start to fall.

A petition in support of this action was launched by the NEU and Unison that same evening – on 2 January. By the next morning, over 170,000 people had signed it; 24 hours later, 250,000 had.

Mass response

On Sunday 3 January – shortly after the Prime Minister had defended his position regarding the reopening of primary schools – a rally was held by the NEU leadership, in order to clarify the union's

stance and generate further support for this.

There was a limit of 40,000 places available in the online meeting – a limit that was quickly reached. In addition, many watched on other social media platforms.

Subsequently, figures show that 100,000 people listened to the entire meeting, with 400,000 attending in total. This event was therefore the largest on-line meeting in British history!

The NEU leaders presented their arguments clearly, supporting them with facts and figures from the scientific community. At the same time, the confused and contradictory arguments of the Tories were comprehensively demolished.

Those who attended evidently took these arguments back to their respective workplaces and colleagues. This was shown on the next day, when significant numbers of primary schools across the country were forced to remain closed due to Section 44 notices being issued. In Norfolk, East Sussex, and Durham – where the NEU is particularly strong – the vast majority of schools had to stay shut.

Furthermore, motions in support of teachers were moved by Labour activists in CLPs around the country. In Parliament, a significant number of MPs – primarily from the Labour Party – were also prepared to offer their support. Even some

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local councils, such as Brighton and Hove, came out and told primary school teachers and headteachers to defy the government.

The movement was clearly growing, going from strength to strength. All the indications were that the teachers were not going to be defeated. As a result, Johnson's latest U-turn came later that same day.

Profits vs lives

As we have argued before, schools should not have been fully open for some time. This is precisely *because* younger people are generally asymptomatic. Pupils therefore unknowingly spread the virus to their peers, teachers, and parents, and onwards to the wider community.

This has been the NEU's position. The union has argued for a blended curriculum of both on-site and online learning, on a rota basis. This would have reduced the number of pupils in schools at any one time, thus significantly reducing the transmission of the virus.

The Tory government, however, has refused to engage with the NEU. Instead, they have consistently pushed to keep schools fully open – even after evidence emerged that a new, highly-infectious strain of the virus was spreading, initially in the South East of England.

At root, the Tories' position on schools is a reflection of their priorities throughout this crisis: not for the health of the public, but for the health of big business and the bosses' profits.

The Tories and bosses want schools to stay fully open so that parents can continue to work. Some estimates suggest that around two million parents and carers are affected by school closures in terms of their ability to work. This means a lot of missed working-hours, and thus a lot of lost profits for the capitalists.

Ironically, we must add, the incompetence of Johnson and his chums has only exacerbated the public health crisis, leading to higher COVID levels and a subsequent need for longer, stricter lockdowns. In other words, by recklessly pursuing short-term profits, the Tories have actually increased the severity of the economic impact, deepening the crisis overall.

Put workers in control

These recent events directly pose the question: Who should run our schools? Should it be the Tory government, who are intent on sacrificing lives for the sake of the bosses' profits? Or should it be the teachers and workers who are on the



Had the government listened to teachers and the unions over the last year, working to make schools genuinely safe, then this unfortunate step of now having to close schools might not have been necessary.

frontline – those who know best about conditions in their workplaces and local communities?

In this battle, it is the workers who have come out on top, ensuring the safety of students, staff, and the general public. But unless action is taken to transform education, this same struggle is going to break out again and again.

To start, the labour movement needs to fight for the recommendations that the NEU have made to make schools safe. The current lockdown period must be used to carry through these changes, including:

- Keeping remote education in place until schools and universities are genuinely safe to reopen, as decided by teachers and their unions.
- Providing laptops and decent internet connections to ensure that all students have access to online education.
- Mass testing of students and staff.
- Requisitioning empty buildings in order to create extra space for reduced class sizes and proper social distancing.
- Providing emergency funds to hire more teachers and support staff.

Solidarity and support

Unfortunately, Keir Starmer and the Labour leadership have failed to back the teachers so far, refusing to support the closure of schools until after the fact. Similarly with the leaders of right-wing unions

such as GMB, who represent support staff in schools.

Instead of tail-ending the Tories, Labour should be giving their full support to teachers and teaching unions in their struggle against Boris Johnson and his rotten government.

Rank-and-file activists in the Labour Party and other unions should pressure their leaders to come out in defence of teachers, passing motions of solidarity – including calls for the above demands – in branches and CLPs across the country.

Struggle for safety

Had the government listened to teachers and the unions over the last year, working to make schools genuinely safe, then this unfortunate step of now having to close schools might not have been necessary.

Instead, the Tories have consistently demonstrated that they are willing to sacrifice the safety of teachers and students – and the health of wider society – on the altar of profits.

This recent win by the NEU is a significant victory for the entire labour movement, which shows the way forward for the working class as a whole – through mass struggle and militant action.

If workers are to successfully resist the attacks of the Tories and bosses in the period ahead, they should take a leaf out of the teachers' book. ■

FOOD POVERTY IN BRITAIN



UNICEF INTERVENTION REVEALS DEPTH OF CRISIS

Emma Stanhope

Norwich South CLP

The coronavirus pandemic has pushed poor families to breaking point, with poverty and food insecurity reaching new devastating heights. This was highlighted last December, with the announcement by Unicef that for the first time in its 74-year history, it would provide money to help to feed hungry children in Britain.

Unicef – the UN agency focussed on providing aid to children worldwide – announced that it has donated £25,000 to the organisation School Food Matters. This local community project is using the money to supply 18,000 breakfasts to 25 schools in the London borough of Southwark during school holidays.

Unicef's intervention is of course tiny compared to the scale of food poverty in the UK, but it highlights a much larger issue. Poverty in Britain is so extreme and so widespread that an organisation that focuses on helping out the most vulnerable children in the world has seen fit to step in.

Tight belts

Despite the UK being one of the richest countries in the world, the reality is that thousands of people go hungry every year. Freedom of Information requests have revealed that nearly 2,500 adults and children had been admitted to hospital due to malnutrition between January and July of 2020 – double the figures for the same period in 2019.

The Legatum Institute – a right-wing think tank – published a report last November that stated that the coronavirus crisis had pushed an additional 700,000 people into poverty, including 120,000 children. This takes the poverty figure in the UK to a horrifying 15.2 million people.

Lagatum's report found that, unsurprisingly, working-age adults who had lost their jobs due to the pandemic made up the bulk of this number. It also warned that, without further government intervention, millions more people could fall into poverty.

All of this demonstrates the inadequacy of the government's response to the pandemic, and their disregard for millions of workers, who were already struggling before the coronavirus pushed them to breaking point.

Contempt

In response to Unicef's announcement, deputy Labour leader, Angela Rayner, tweeted that Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Chancellor Rishi Sunak "should be ashamed".

However, not everyone seemed to agree. Tory MP and multi-millionaire Jacob Rees-Mogg came under fire for accusing Unicef's actions of being "a political stunt", a statement which received considerable backlash.

This highlights what we already know: that the Tories do not care about the lives of working class people and the most vulnerable in our society. They care only about lining their own – and their friends' – pockets.

We have seen this from the Tories countless times before, most recently with their shameful position on free school meals for poor children.

The Tories had previously refused to expand the free school meals scheme to help hungry children in the school holidays. One Tory MP even justified this on Twitter by arguing that food parcels would be sold or traded by some parents to buy drugs! They were only forced to back down after footballer Marcus Rashford led a successful campaign that finally pressured the government into giving way.

Poverty amidst plenty

Contrast the enormous levels of poverty with the equally enormous amount of wealth hoarded by the rich. Worldwide, the top 1% already owned nearly half the world's wealth at the start of 2020. Many have seen their profits increase dramatically during the pandemic. For instance, Amazon announced in July 2020 that it had doubled its quarterly profits to \$5.2 billion (compared with \$2.6 billion in the same period in 2019).

Ultimately, charities and organisations like Unicef, cannot solve society's problems, nor eradicate poverty. At best, they can alleviate some of the worst features of capitalism by helping some people in a particular situation at a particular time.

Only socialism can solve the issue of poverty, which exists as an inevitable feature of capitalism. The massive profits of those who own and control the productive forces of society, are based on the poverty wages of the overwhelming majority of the world's population – i.e. those who produce all the wealth. They are two sides of the same coin.

The wealth clearly exists in society to end world hunger several times over. However, that wealth is in the hands of a tiny group of capitalists that sit at the top. These ladies and gentlemen are content to let workers suffer, so long as they can hold onto their profits.

Therefore, we need to expropriate this obscene amount of wealth from the 1% and use it to provide for society's needs. Not only could we solve issues like world hunger but also homelessness, and the chronic underfunding of healthcare and education services. We need a society that works for people, not profit. Only a socialist revolution can bring about that society that we so desperately need. ■

CHARTIST REVOLUTION

By Rob Sewell

NEW FROM WELLRED: A MARXIST ANALYSIS OF BRITAIN ON THE BRINK OF REVOLUTION

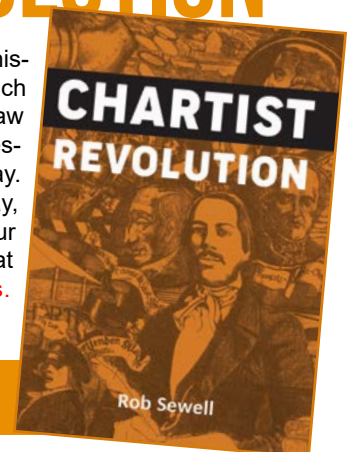
“Let there be no blinking the question. These are not the times to be nice about mere words: the fact is that there is but one mode of obtaining the Charter, and that is by insurrection.” George Julian Harney

Chartism was the first time ever that British workers fixed their eyes on the seizure of political power: in 1839, 1842 and again in 1848. In this struggle, they conducted a class war

that at different times involved general strikes, battles with the state, mass demonstrations and even armed insurrection. They forged weapons, illegally drilled their forces, and armed themselves in preparation for seizing the reins of government. Such were the early revolutionary traditions of the British working class, deliberately buried beneath a mountain of falsehoods and distortions.

This book sees Chartism as an essential

part of our history from which we must draw the key lessons for today. Don't delay, order your copy now at wellredbooks.net

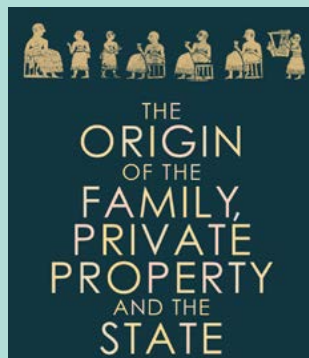


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First published in 1884, *The Origin of the Family* is one of the most important works of Marxist theory. Basing himself on the research of anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan, Friedrich Engels builds on his revolutionary discovery that the family structure has passed through multiple stages throughout history. He shows that, ultimately, the determining factor in these changes is the economic mode of production.



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Using the method of historical materialism, Engels also demonstrates that the oppression of women has not always existed, and is not the product of inherent traits. Rather, it emerged historically with the production of a surplus and the division of society into classes. He also shows that the state, far from being a neutral arbiter in society, arose with the emergence of class society. It is ultimately “armed bodies of men” in defence of the ruling class.

This new edition includes an introduction by Rob Sewell, placing the text in its historical context and defending the fundamental ideas and method of Marxism, which has stood the test of time. This book is a must-read for all socialists.



Marxist Voice

Culture war or class war?

25 days ago

News & Politics

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41:58

UNIVERSITIES BRACED FOR WAVE OF RENT STRIKES

Marxist Student Federation

Students at over 45 universities are set to undertake rent strikes this month. This is the biggest ever wave of student rent strikes to take place – a reflection of the profound crisis we are living through, and of the radical mood amongst young people.

As part of the latest national lockdown, students have been told to stay where they are, and to delay their return to university. This announcement has added fuel to the fire amongst students, who were already fuming from the chaotic COVID situation seen on campuses at the start of the academic year, when university management lulled students into unsafe accommodation.

Further rent strike campaigns were formed immediately in response to the new lockdown. These come on the back of successful action by Manchester students last November, who have won a 30% rent reduction for the first term, and a 10% reduction for the rest of the year.

Buoyed by this victory, students up and down the country are putting forward radical demands. In Brunel, campaigners

are demanding a full refund on rent and tuition fees.

If isolated, any rent strike is vulnerable to harsh clampdowns by management. Through collective and united action, however, students have the potential not to only win considerable reductions in rent, but also to revitalise the fight for free education.

Different national groups have formed to link these struggles. This demonstrates the potential that this strike wave has to create permanent structures through which students can fight for their own interest.

The current battle cannot be viewed as an isolated, one-off event. The crisis of capitalism is not going to end any time soon. Next year's students will therefore be facing even more insecurity than the current generation.

We should fight to fundamentally change the university system: to make education free and accessible for all – not just for ourselves this year, but for all students every year.

This strike wave is not an accidental occurrence, but is the result of years of cumulative attacks against higher

education.

Over the last two years, we have seen two national UCU strikes, supported by the majority of students. Students have joined picket lines to support academic staff, recognising that the fight for decent staff pay, pensions, and conditions is connected with the fight for free education, and the struggle against the marketisation of education.

The Marxist Student Federation is active in over a dozen local rent strikes. Marxist activists are calling for the formation of a structured, democratic national organisation to oversee this huge rent strike movement. Mass participation is the greatest strength that students have.

The Manchester victory shows the potential. Think how much more could be achieved if the vast majority of students were involved in this fight, locally and national.

We demand:

- Full refunds on rent and tuition fees!
- Universities to open their books – let us see where our money goes!
- Students and staff unite! Fight for democratic control of universities!



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WHAT WE SAY | NATIONAL LOCKDOWN 3.0

...new year, same rotten Tories!

Editorial

Many had hoped that the New Year would bring hope and comfort. But society has instead been thrown back to the darkest days of 2020. On Monday 4 January, with COVID cases soaring, Boris Johnson announced a third national lockdown, with restrictions similar to those brought in when the pandemic first hit Britain's shores almost nine months ago.

In reality, the situation is even worse now than then. The number of COVID-19 patients in English hospitals is significantly higher than that seen at the peak of the first wave, and the number is rapidly increasing. The death rate is also soon likely to exceed figures from last April. Even with the latest measures, epidemiologists are now predicting a total COVID death toll of over 100,000.

Johnson and his ministers have blamed a new, more contagious strain of the virus for the recent chaos. But the truth is that it is they – the Tories – who are to blame. It is this rotten government's recklessness, arrogance, and incompetence that has allowed the epidemic to repeatedly get out of control, with fatal effects.

The recent lockdown announcement, for example, followed a painfully familiar pattern. As with the introduction of the last

two national lockdowns, the Prime Minister has once again dragged his feet and ignored the advice of scientific experts, only to bow to the inevitable in the face of catastrophe.

This time round, for example, SAGE had stated back on 22 December that schools should remain closed following the winter holidays in order to slow down transmissions. But Johnson and his education secretary, Gavin Williamson, refused to listen.

Faced with a rebellion from teachers and parents, however, and with COVID levels spiralling out of control, the government was forced to U-turn in less than 24 hours, with remote education now planned to take place until at least the February half-term.

Lockdown in name only

Even before this latest episode, the Tory government was already behind the curve. From the outset, for example, scientists had questioned the Prime Minister's planned relaxation of restrictions over Christmas. In the end, Johnson abandoned the idea – but only late in the day, when families had already made plans, creating chaos across the country.

Coming out of the November lockdown, meanwhile, restrictions were clearly

over-relaxed for the benefit of big business. Under pressure from retail bosses, the government allowed shops to open 24-hours a day in the run-up to Christmas, in an effort to lure in punters and boost profits.

This resulted in a farcical situation where households (rightly) could not mix with friends and family in their homes, but could freely rub shoulders with hundreds of strangers in major department stores and high street shops.

Similarly, in this new lockdown, the bosses are again twisting the government's arm in order to dodge restrictions. For example, many businesses that were forced to shut in the first lockdown have managed to get themselves reclassified as 'essential' this time round. In other words, we are in lockdown in name only.

Of course, workers and councils have not been consulted about these decisions, which are instead being taken unilaterally by the bosses.

Breaking point

The emergence of a highly infectious mutation has certainly exacerbated the situation. Such accidents, however, reflect an underlying necessity.

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Mutations are an inevitable part of life. But the likelihood of a more dangerous strain developing is increased if the disease is more prevalent in the population. And the Tories have consistently enabled this by lifting restrictions prematurely, or by refusing to lockdown hard enough and fast enough.

In turn, by allowing cases to rise, the impact of the virus' exponential growth becomes ever more severe. Exponential growth from an initially low base could potentially be controlled and handled. Exponential growth from an already high level will quickly get out of control and overwhelm services – as is now the case.

The NHS is at breaking point. Hospitals have become war zones. And the situation is continuing to worsen by the day.

But the current crisis in the NHS was not created by coronavirus. Rather, the pandemic has exposed all the underlying and pre-existing weaknesses and cracks in the system: from chronic staff shortages, to the long-term decline in bed numbers.

No trust in Tories

Due to their litany of crimes and errors, public trust in the government has been severely undermined over the last nine months – particularly over its ability to carry out the mass vaccination programme that is needed to restore any sense of normality to people's lives.

From the Cummings affair early on, to endless contradictory messaging and screeching U-turns by Tory ministers: the overall impression is that the government has lost control of the situation (not that they ever had it).

Ultimately, these zig-zags reflect the contradictory pressures upon the government – between defending lives and defending profits. At every step, Johnson has prevaricated as a result of the demands of the bosses and the splits within his own party, which go all the way to top.

Now all the chickens are coming home to roost for the Tory leader. Public support for the Conservatives has slumped, with recent polls indicating that Johnson would lose his 80-seat majority if an election was held tomorrow. And even his own MPs are turning on him, with two exasperated

Conservative backbenchers submitting letters of no confidence in the PM yesterday.

Blood on their hands

Clearly a lockdown is not a permanent solution to combating coronavirus. Rather, it is a necessary temporary measure, required to limit infections and deaths. Importantly, a lockdown provides a breathing space – an opportunity to bring in the systems and structures needed to keep a lid on the virus until a vaccination programme can be fully rolled out.

The Tories have wasted such opportunities during the last two lockdowns. Instead of listening to the advice of scientific experts and the suggestions of those who know best – workers on the frontline – the government have pandered to the bosses and picked fights with the unions.

For all their attempts to shift the blame, it is clear that the Tories have blood on their hands. To combat COVID, we need bold socialist measures. This means bringing all essential services and infrastructure under public ownership; putting workers in control; and expropriating the wealth of the super-rich to pay for this crisis. ■

BORIS' BREXIT: PROMETHEUS UNBOUND OR DICKENSIAN GRUEL?

Editorial

Against a backdrop of COVID chaos and crisis, Boris Johnson proudly announced his Brexit deal to the nation before the New Year. Like an ostrich with its head buried in the sand, the Prime Minister boldly asserted that – with a deal now agreed – there is nothing to worry about.

"We have taken back control of our laws and our destiny," bellowed Johnson, sounding even more hollow than when he previously proclaimed to have an "oven-ready" deal.

In the dying days of 2020, the House of Commons signed off the Tory trade deal with the EU. The PM triumphantly proclaimed a golden future for "liberated" Britain.

In a spectacular own goal, for the first time in history, a political leader has heralded a trade agreement that will deliberately make their country poorer.

The reason why big business has generally opposed Brexit is that they stand to lose billions in profits. The trade agreement reached will increase British industry's costs, with new customs processes,

health checks, border procedures, and duplication of systems.

The Office for Budget Responsibility has predicted that even with a free trade agreement with the EU, Brexit will cost Britain 4% of GDP in the long run. Nevertheless, big business regards the deal as a mixed blessing, given the possibility of a no-deal calamity.

After bitter acrimony and fractious talks, Michael Gove hopes the UK and EU will develop a "special relationship". Johnson talked of a "happy and successful stable partnership". Clearly, hope springs eternal in the human breast.

Completely ignoring reality, Lord Frost, the UK's chief negotiator, believes that the Brexit deal represents a "moment of national renewal". Far from any "renewal", however, economic and social decline is set to accelerate, and the divisions in Britain will become even sharper.

Rather than a glorious "renaissance", Brexit will reveal all the weaknesses of British capitalism. The UK will be an ever smaller player on the world stage, crushed between the rival imperialist power blocs of the USA, China and the European Union.

The only way for UK businesses to compete will be to slash costs – particularly wages, which already lag behind rising living costs. Attempts to squeeze the working class will inevitably lead to bitter class conflict.

While European leaders have sighed in relief about the "end of Brexit", in truth the deal will mean years of troubled relations between Britain and the EU. For example, if UK manufacturers fail to comply with rules on origins of components, the EU has the right to impose tariffs – which it will.

On top of this, the Brexit deal will certainly add grist to the mill of Scottish independence. The impact and disruption of leaving the EU will further intensify the divide between Scotland and the English nationalist Tory government in Westminster.

As time goes by and the smoke clears, it will become obvious that this Brexit deal is simply the prelude to a new chaotic chapter in Britain. The world slump, the growing pandemic, and the Brexit disruption will be a series of hammer blows on society and consciousness, preparing the ground for revolutionary developments.



DEMAND AN IMMEDIATE LABOUR PARTY RECALL CONFERENCE!

Socialist Appeal

The Labour Party is being convulsed by a deep crisis. The right wing are engaged in a civil war against the left-wing membership, who were largely drawn into the party after the victory of Jeremy Corbyn as leader. Grassroots members gave wholehearted support to the introduction of left-wing policies, which were a decisive break from austerity and the years of New Labour.

The resignation of Jeremy Corbyn and the victory of Sir Keir Starmer as Labour leader represented a turning point. Since then, the Labour right wing have renewed their attempts to purge the party of what they see as 'Corbynism'.

In doing so, they have reverted to all kinds of subterfuge and bureaucratic manoeuvres to demoralise and drive out left-wing members.

Starmer's removal of left-wingers from his shadow cabinet and his tacit cooperation with the Tories, together with his failure to back the teaching unions in their fight for safe working conditions, have disgusted many. Tens of thousands of party members have resigned in protest.

Labour purge

Then came the suspension of Corbyn from membership, his readmittance, then his expulsion from the PLP. Many members were outraged by these undemocratic actions. A host of local Labour Parties

passed motions against these actions and in support of the former leader.

In doing so, members were told they could not discuss such matters. Those who defied these orders have faced disciplinary action, resulting in dozens of local party officers being suspended or put 'under investigation' for breaching these diktats.

In effect, Labour's general secretary, David Evans, has gagged the membership from expressing its views and denied members their basic democratic rights. This has caused shock and outrage.

The deputy leader, Angela Rayner, has outrageously threatened that thousands could be excluded from the party, and that she would be happy with such an outcome.

Sovereign body

This whole sordid affair, egged on by the mass media, has brought the Labour Party into disrepute.

Such a state of affairs cannot be resolved by the NEC, the PLP, the general secretary, or the Labour leader. All of these figures and bodies have, to one degree or another, been involved in this scandal.

There is only one democratic body which can deal with this acute crisis. And that body is the Labour Party conference.

The demand has been raised on the left for such a conference – a recall conference, made up of delegates elected at the previous conference in 2019. We 100% agree with this proposal.

A national conference of the Labour

Party should be convened immediately, with the express purpose of dealing with this crisis.

As Chapter 1 of the Labour Party rule book states, in Clause VI:1...

"The work of the Party shall be under the direction and control of Party conference, which shall itself be subject to the constitution and standing orders of the Party. Party conference shall meet regularly once in every year and also at such other times as it may be convened by the NEC." (Our emphasis)

Furthermore, as outlined in Chapter 3, Clause III:1:A-C...

■ *The NEC shall (whenver practicable) convene an annual session of Party conference during September / October in each year, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the constitution and these rules. It may also convene special sessions of Party conference when it deems necessary.* [Our emphasis]

■ *When a Party conference is called at short notice, the secretaries of affiliated organisations and CLPs shall, on receiving the summons, instantly take steps to secure representation of their organisation in accordance with the constitution and these rules.*

■ *Any session of Party conference summoned with less than ten days' notice shall confine its business strictly to*

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that relating to the emergency giving rise to the special session.

We thereby call upon the NEC to organise a recall national conference, as stated in the rule book.

If this is to be an online conference, then so be it. We cannot wait nine months for the next conference! Too much damage will be inflicted if we were forced to wait.

Far better to reconvene conference now, despite the adverse conditions. The NEU (National Education Union) successfully held an online event of some 400,000. This shows what is possible under these circumstances.

We must lift the ban on freedom of discussion. To do this, the NEC should immediately reconvene our party's national conference, with resolutions from CLPs and affiliated organisations on the agenda, in order to democratically decide on what steps are needed to resolve this damaging crisis, and to reestablish the party on a firm democratic and socialist basis. ■

RESOLUTION

We urge all our readers and supporters to urgently present the following model resolution to local Labour Party CLPs, branches, and affiliated trade unions and societies wherever possible and appropriate:

This meeting notes the escalating crisis within the Labour Party, which is threatening to spin out of control. It is clear that the general secretary is operating in a factional manner and by his actions is bringing the party into disrepute. Tens of thousands are leaving the party.

This meeting therefore believes that the party's crisis needs to be addressed urgently.

This meeting recognises that the highest body of the party is the national conference, composed of delegates from the CLPs, trade unions, and other affiliated organisations. We believe that this is the only body with the necessary authority to resolve this crisis.

We therefore demand that the NEC organises an immediate national recall conference of the Labour Party, under rule Clause VI:1, with the sole purpose of ending the impasse, restoring freedom of speech, and offering a real way forward.

GRASSROOTS VOICES FROM THE LABOUR PURGE



Socialist Appeal

Throughout the pandemic, the Tories have been allowed to get away with murder, thanks to the lack of a fighting opposition. Rather than going on the offensive against Boris Johnson and his reckless government, 'Sir' Keir Starmer has thrown his energy into attacking left-wingers inside his own party.

The release of the EHRC report into antisemitism opened up the floodgates for a vicious assault on the Labour left. Beginning with the suspension of Jeremy Corbyn, this attack soon widened out to include any rank-and-file member who offered support and solidarity to the former Labour leader.

Local parties have, in effect, been gagged by the right-wing leadership. General secretary David Evans has sent out a series of diktats banning democratic discussion and debate, in an attempt to silence grassroots members. And anyone found in breach of these decrees has been duly punished – suspended from the party just for voicing their opinion and utilising their most elementary democratic rights.

Shift to the right

This purge of left-wing members intensified in the run-up to the so-called 'festive' season. Leading left activists such as Alan Gibbons – the (former) secretary of Liverpool Walton CLP and a member of the Momentum NCG [National Coordinating Group] – are amongst those singled out by the party bureaucracy.

In a Kafkaesque twist, like many others, Alan was not even told of the reason for his suspension.

Despite this ambiguity, however, Alan was certain of the real reason behind the suspension of himself and other left-wingers. "You look at the figures across the party who have been suspended," Alan noted, speaking to us before the winter holidays, "and they are the most prominent activists on the Labour left."

"It's part of a strategy to shift the Labour Party to the right...an attempt to make it easier for the new leadership to shift the whole balance of the party...to make it much less radical; much less attached to its working class and socialist roots."

Witch-hunt

Elsewhere on Merseyside, Liverpool Riverside activist Audrey White has also been suspended as part of the witch-hunt against the left.

"I believe I have been targeted as one of the strongest voices on Merseyside," Audrey told us. "I was seen as the person who tried the hardest to get an MP in Riverside who represented the people there. My issue with Louise Ellman [the former Labour MP for Liverpool Riverside] was always about her politics, nothing else."

"We defeat this with strong and sustained solidarity for all those under attack," Audrey stated, talking about the battle ahead.

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"We mustn't be intimidated into accepting any injustice. Never have the attitude of 'choose your battles' and let injustice off. If you lose, you can always live with yourself afterwards. However, you might win important victories, as I did at Lady at Lord John. You have to fight wherever you stand."

Audrey's remarks refer to the battle she fought in 1983, when she was sacked for complaining about the sexual harassment of workers she managed. The subsequent dispute – which included a highly successful picket of the shop in question – led to Audrey's reinstatement, as well as a change in the law on sexual harassment.

This battle was celebrated by the TUC in 2017, as one of 150 stories over 150 years of labour movement history that helped build the trade unions.

Fight for party democracy

Alan was also upbeat about the prospect for fighting back against the right wing and their purge. Despite the suspensions and resignations, the balance of forces is clearly shifting in favour of the left.

As Alan highlighted: "That wave of solidarity that occurred in the CLPs – something like 25 percent of motions were in constituencies that had supported Keir Starmer [in the Labour leadership contest]."

Importantly, Alan emphasised, the fight against the witch-hunt must be linked to a wider struggle for party democracy, to put members in control.

"The next stage is looking for those things that will change the party," Alan stressed. "We've got to win [CLP] AGMs. We've got to get our members selected as delegates for conference. We've got to prioritise motions to democratise the party."

Alan correctly explained how the question of party democracy is not a secondary matter. The current attack by the right wing is precisely the consequence of the left leaders' failure to bring in sweeping democratic changes – such as open selection – during the Corbyn era.

"It wasn't rhetoric to say we need a member-led party," Alan asserted. "And we didn't do enough in the Corbyn years – nowhere near enough. It was a major setback."

"For example, we didn't get open selection through," Alan continued. "And we didn't fail to get it through because of an inbuilt majority. We failed to get it through because political concessions were made, which I don't believe should have been."



Save Our Socialists

One of the notable developments prompted by the right wing's attacks, however, is that grassroots activists have been forced to get organised. Across the country, left-wing CLP officers are beginning to link up and fight back.

As part of this, the 'Save Our Socialists' (SOS) campaign was launched back in December, in response to the wave of suspensions that saw Alan and other local leading lefts excluded from the party.

We caught up with one of the organisers of the SOS campaign, who asked to remain anonymous, out of fear of also being targeted by the party bureaucracy.

The SOS comrade was equally unequivocal about the political motivation behind the purge: "We believe that what is happening is a direct attack on socialism in the Labour Party."

"We don't think it matters who is behind the attack – it's a broad attack on the left. They [the right wing] want power and control, in order to move away from the grassroots member-led democracy. And we need to ensure that, where possible, that doesn't happen."

Like Alan and Audrey, the SOS comrades are also optimistic about the possibilities going forwards.

"Our immediate aims are to get suspended officers reinstated and the guidance from the general secretary withdrawn," the comrade from the SOS campaign continued. But these short-term goals, they explained, are only the beginning of the fight for a bigger transformation of the Labour Party into a genuine social movement.

"Going forward we want to do more

local organising, to build up power in our communities and embed the Labour Party in struggles for the things that matter – such as workers' rights, better living conditions, and peace and social justice: the things that should matter to every Labour Party member."

Recall conference

Alan Gibbons aptly summarised the mood amongst grassroots activists – a mood of determination, to take on Starmer and the right wing, and reclaim the Labour Party for its members, and for the wider working class.

"The comrades across the country are the absolute backbone of activism in the Labour Party," Alan stated. "And we're not going away. We're going to be back in the party in our numbers – and we're going to be organising."

It is clear, therefore, that the Labour civil war is not going to be dying down any time soon. The right wing are digging their heels in, and are set on expunging the left from the party, in order to make it a 'safe pair of hands' for big business. But on the other side, the left-wing mass membership is getting organised and fighting back.

The only way to resolve this deadlock is by putting power in the hands of ordinary members. This means campaigning for an immediate recall conference, where the rank and file can democratically remove the right wing and take back control of the party.

We call on all our readers and supporters to join us in this struggle. The right wing have thrown down the gauntlet. It is time for us to rise to the challenge. ■



Alan Woods, editor of marxist.com, looks at the tumultuous state of the world at the dawn of 2021. A full version of this article can be found [online here](#).

“**H**ope springs eternal in the human breast.” The celebrated words of the great 18th century English poet Alexander Pope contain a profound truth about the human psyche.

At the stroke of midnight, as 31 December turns into 1 January, it is customary to wish one's friends and family a happy new year. This year will have been no different. Old Pope was quite right.

So, just as usual, we raised our glasses and wished everybody a happy, healthy and prosperous year, in the hope that 2021 has to be better than 2020. After all, it could hardly be any worse!

And yet, and yet... in our heart of hearts, how many of us actually believed in this optimistic prediction? Truth to be told, there is very little empirical evidence to justify it.

The pandemic still rages out of control, subjecting millions of people to needless suffering and death. The total number of coronavirus cases on a world scale at the close of 2020 was 82,421,447. And the total number of deaths recorded was 1,799,076.

There is no doubt that these official figures understate the real situation by a considerable amount however. Who

in their right mind can believe the official statistics of people who have died of this dreadful disease in India?

It is sufficient to point to the blatant falsification of statistics to minimise the number of COVID-19 deaths in Britain and other so-called advanced countries to underline the point.

And since viruses show no respect for national frontiers, not even the richest states are spared. Some of the worst statistics of any country are to be found in the United States, where Florida is currently the epicentre of the epidemic.

A Los Angeles hospital was so overwhelmed with COVID-19 cases it's been forced to attend to victims of the disease in a gift shop. Such is the real state of affairs in the world's richest country.

A class question

Trotsky once said, noting the words of the great philosopher Spinoza, that our task is “neither to weep nor to laugh, but to understand”.

We are constantly being told that we must unite to face a common enemy – a pitiless, inexorable and invisible enemy called COVID-19. “We are all in this together” – that is the false and hypocritical slogan, by which the rich and powerful seek to divert our attention from the obvious fact that the present pandemic is also a class question.

It is simply not the case that “we are all in this together”. Quite the contrary, in fact. The pandemic has served to expose the deep divisions between rich and poor: the real fault line that divides society, into those who are doomed to get sick and die a horrible death, and those who are not.

And hard on the heels of the pandemic came the deepest economic slump in modern times. The world economic crisis has hit the USA hard. 40 million Americans filed for unemployment during the pandemic. As always, it is the poor who suffer most.

In 2019, the Fed reported that 4 in 10 Americans didn't have enough cash in their bank accounts to cover a \$400 unexpected expense. And in the first few months of 2020, the situation took a dramatic turn for the worse.

Alarmed at the danger posed by this situation, the ruling class was compelled to take emergency measures. The state – which according to free market theory should play little or no role in economic life – now became the only thing propping up the capitalist system.

In March, US lawmakers approved more than \$2.4tn (£1.7tn) in economic relief for businesses and households, in an attempt to blunt the economic distress suffered by millions of families. Actually, most of this money was spent on lavish

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handouts to the rich. But the money given to the unemployed undoubtedly served to ameliorate the effects of the crisis on the poorest and most vulnerable part of society.

But support has been dwindling since the summer and several key programmes – including benefits for jobless gig workers and people out of work for more than six months – were due to expire at the end of December. As the government has withdrawn support, a growing number of people are going without adequate food, or are falling behind on rent and other bills.

Hunger in the USA

Many people now find themselves in a desperate situation. Having suddenly lost their jobs, they are faced with losing their homes. They have no income, and not enough money to put food on the table. In the world's richest country, millions of families are going hungry.

Food insecurity has doubled since last year, reaching the highest level since 1998, when data about US household ability to get enough food was first collected. One in eight Americans reported they sometimes or often did not have enough food in November, according to a recent census survey.

The San Francisco-Marín Food Bank, which operates in some of the richest US counties – San Francisco and Marin – has been serving about 60,000 households, double its pre-Covid level.

"My pride has gone"

Take Omar Lightner, a 42-year-old truck driver in Florida. He lost his job in February because of the pandemic. Since then, he has been living off his savings in a motel in Jacksonville with his wife and children. Their money is quickly running out.

"My savings were \$22,000 (£16,200) when we went to the extended stay," Lightner said. "That ran us to about \$17,300. The rest went towards food stamps. That helped out a lot. But we've got two kids with severe autism; there's medicine and therapy to pay for."

As Lightner continues to look for work, his biggest and most immediate worry is how to secure a home for his family. They have fallen four weeks behind in rent and now face eviction.

As part of the motel's eviction policy, items deemed non-essential can be removed from their room. This week, it's been the TV, something the couple desperately need to calm Jamal, whose autism means he is unable to speak.

"We are a family of five, there are no shelters available to take us right now," Lightner said.



At a time when more than 40 million Americans were filing for unemployment, billionaires saw their wealth increase by more than half a trillion dollars.

"My pride has gone. We're pretty much homeless now. And I was a man who was always big on pride. I worked all my life. We always had a nice house and nice vehicles.

"I know how I grew up – I had to work to get that stuff. And it's been taken away through no fault of my own."

That is the real, brutal face of capitalism in the 21st century. There is no other. On the first of January 2021, for at least 12 million US citizens, the words Happy New Year had a bitter and hollow ring.

A happy new year for the rich

But hey! Let's not get too gloomy. Not all was bad news. In the midst of this endless sea of human misery, suffering, hunger and death, some people did very well indeed.

At a time when more than 40 million Americans were filing for unemployment, billionaires saw their wealth increase by more than half a trillion dollars. For such people, 2020 was a very happy year indeed. And there is absolutely no reason to doubt that 2021 will be happier still.

Just take the case of Amazon boss Jeff Bezos. He became the first person ever with a total declared wealth of over \$200 billion. Since the beginning of March, when the US saw its first coronavirus fatalities, Mr Bezos' wealth has

swelled by \$74 billion. So that is reason to cheer!

Mr Bezos now makes more money per second than the typical US worker makes in a week. The average American man with a bachelor's degree will earn about \$2.2 million in his lifetime; Bezos makes about \$2.2 million in 15 minutes.

With his wealth, he is so rich that an average American spending \$1 is comparable to the Amazon CEO spending \$2 million. His fortune is more than twice that of the entire British monarchy, and is as big as the GDP of entire countries.

Nor was he alone in his good fortune. Casino magnate Sheldon Adelson saw his wealth increase by \$5 billion, while Elon Musk saw an increase of \$17.2 billion. When you add up the numbers, billionaires in the United States have increased their total net worth by \$637 billion during the COVID-19 pandemic so far.

As we have pointed out, a large part of their new wealth came straight out of the generous handouts of the public purse. Of the huge amount of money handed out by the government to counteract the crisis, the lion's share went straight into the pockets of the wealthiest one percent.

Wealth-friendly tax laws and loopholes then keep those billionaires at the top.

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And those are just the legal avenues that the wealthy take to avoid paying taxes. In 2017, researchers estimated that about 10 percent of the world's GDP was stashed in offshore tax havens. A study in 2012 found that as much as \$32 trillion was being held offshore by the world's wealthiest people.

The gulf separating the haves from the have-nots has widened into an unbridgeable abyss, deepening the social and political polarisation and creating an explosive mood in society.

Capitalist conclusions

On 29 December, the *Financial Times* published an article with the title: "A better form of capitalism is possible." It was signed by the editorial board, and therefore carries the stamp of editorial approval of one of the most authoritative journals of the bourgeoisie. For that reason, it is worth quoting the article at length.

In it we read the following:

"The quiet of the Christmas holiday period is a moment to remember how the Nativity story describes the family of Jesus: sent on the road by absurd administrative rules, left without accommodation, and going into labour in undignified conditions.

"We might note how well their precariousness could also describe an underclass in the wealthiest societies humanity has ever known. The pandemic has shone a harsh light on the vulnerable parts of rich countries' labour markets.

"Most of us depend — at times literally for our lives — on people stocking shelves, delivering food, cleaning hospitals, caring for the old and infirm. Yet many of these unsung heroes are underpaid, overworked, and suffer unpredictable work opportunities and insecurity while on the job.

"A neologism coined to describe them — the 'precariat' — is apt. Over the past four decades, work has failed to secure stable and adequate incomes for growing numbers of people. This shows up in stagnant wages, erratic incomes, non-existent financial buffers for emergencies, low job security and brutalised working conditions — to the point of such grotesque episodes as the woman giving birth in a toilet cubicle for fear of missing a shift.

"Many suffer a rising risk of homelessness and epidemics of drug and alcohol-related diseases. Benefit systems can help — but can also trap already vulnerable people in labyrinthine administrative Catch-22s.

"This is a problem of long standing, but it intensified sharply in 2020. Most jobs in the precariat require physical presence for manual service work, leaving workers more exposed both to coronavirus contagion and to income loss from lockdowns."

The central problem is stated here with admirable clarity. But what is the solution? The author informs us that: "It is a moral imperative to help the neediest. But lifting people out of economic precariousness is also greatly in the self-interest of the better off."

Praiseworthy sentiments indeed! These lines call to mind Charles Dickens famous story *A Christmas Carol*. In Dickens' story, the misanthropic, money grabbing capitalist Scrooge is gradually convinced to mend his ways, share some of his wealth with the poor and vulnerable, and become in general a thoroughly agreeable and kind old gentleman.



In Scrooge we have the authentic voice of capitalism: the cold, calculating voice of market economics; of a reactionary Malthus; the real mean-spirited, grasping, selfish and cruel voice of the men and women of money.

This sentimental ending is undoubtedly the weakest part of the story, and conveys only the pious wishes and daydreams of the author. The really valuable part is its commencement, which accurately describes the real morality of capitalism.

The authors of the *FT* article seem to be uncomfortably aware of the futility of any attempt to appeal to the better nature of the obscenely rich minority that dominates society on the grounds of a supposed "moral imperative to help the neediest".

This was already evident to Charles Dickens, who describes the vain attempts of well-meaning people to obtain a donation from Scrooge for a Christmas charity:

"Are there no prisons?" said Scrooge. "Are there no workhouses?"

"They are. Still," returned the gentleman, "I wish I could say they were not."

"Many can't go there; and many would rather die."

"If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population."

Here we have the authentic voice of capitalism: the cold, calculating voice of market economics; of the reactionary Malthus; the real mean-spirited, grasping, selfish and cruel voice of the men and women of money — which has remained unaltered from Dickens' day down to present times. Realising the futility of appealing to the capitalists' nobler instincts, he

appeals to their self-interests (their greed and selfishness). Here we are on firmer ground altogether!

"It is not just that the better off have the most to lose if continued economic polarisation leads to a rejection of capitalism. They also have much to gain from addressing it."

But no amount of moral preaching will

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have any effect on these creatures, just as it had no effect on Scrooge. What made him change his mind was not moral imperatives, but fear – the fear and anxiety produced by the ghosts that Dickens sent to haunt him.

Therefore, the author of the FT article makes the wise decision to frighten the bourgeoisie by confronting them with the inevitable consequences of the present situation. It is a far more frightening prospect than the Spirit of Christmas yet to come:

"Groups left behind by economic change are increasingly concluding that those in charge do not care about their predicament — or worse, have rigged the economy for their own benefit against those on the margins."

"Slowly but surely, that is putting capitalism and democracy in tension with one another. Since the global financial crisis, this sense of betrayal has fuelled a political backlash against globalisation and the institutions of liberal democracy."

"Right-wing populism may thrive on this backlash while leaving capitalist markets in place. But as it cannot deliver on its promises to the economically frustrated, it is just a matter of time before the pitchforks come out for capitalism itself, and for the wealth of those who benefit from it." (My emphasis, AW)

Oh yes, the serious bourgeois strategists understand the revolutionary implications far better than the myopic reformists. They can see that the violent swings of public opinion to the right can very easily be the preparation of even more violent swings to the left, that the discontented masses can turn in an anti-capitalist direction.

The author cannot see anything beyond the existing capitalist system, and therefore dreams of reforming it into something better. But capitalism cannot be reformed, as the stupid reformists imagine. They consider themselves realists. In reality, they are the worst kind of utopians.

In order to save capitalism, he says, its adherents must "polish off its rougher edges".

"The winds are changing," the article's writer announces triumphantly. "Politicians from Joe Biden to Boris Johnson have mandates to 'build back better'; the guardians of economic orthodoxy have jettisoned the view that inequality is the price of growth. Capitalism can be made to secure dignity to all."

What a beautiful picture!

Everything is therefore reduced to dreaming of a different kind of capitalism



We remain stubbornly and defiantly optimistic in the future - not the future of the capitalist system, but the future of the revolutionary class struggle...

– a nicer, kinder, more humane capitalism, just as Dickens dreamed of a nicer, kinder, more humane Scrooge. Needless to say, the one dream is just as futile and utopian as the other.

Why we are optimists

"Taken all in all, the crisis has been burrowing away like the good old mole it is." (Marx to Engels, 22 February 1858)

The capitalist system is sick, sick unto death. The symptoms of this are very clear. Beneath the surface, everywhere there is a seething anger, rage, bitterness and hatred towards the existing system, and its hypocritical morality, injustice, intolerable inequality, and indifference to human suffering.

The old institutions, which were once regarded with respect, are now looked upon with utter contempt by the masses, who feel betrayed and neglected. Politicians, judges, police, the media, the churches – all are regarded as alien and corrupt.

The institutions of formal bourgeois democracy were based on the assumption that the gulf between rich and poor could be contained within manageable limits. But the continued growth of class inequality has created a level of social polarisation not seen for decades.

It is testing the traditional mechanisms of bourgeois democracy to its very limits, and beyond those limits. This was seen very clearly in the events in the USA over the last year.

The spontaneous uprisings that swept the country following the murder

of George Floyd, and the subsequent unprecedented events that preceded and followed the presidential elections marked a turning point in the entire situation. Here, in embryo, we have the outline of revolutionary developments in the future.

The year 2021 will be a year like no other. Will it be a happy new year, as the optimists predict? It will, of course, be a happy new year for this tiny minority who have reason to be happy – the less than 1 percent of the population that enjoys unlimited control over the wealth produced by the great majority.

But for that majority there can be no question of a happy new year. For them, the future under capitalism can only be a bleak one.

Nevertheless, we remain stubbornly and defiantly optimistic in the future – not the future of the capitalist system, but the future of the revolutionary class struggle that is destined to overthrow the system once and for all.

The road to a happy future depends upon a fundamental break with the past. The road that lies before us will be a hard one. The working class will enter a very harsh school. But from that school it will draw the necessary lessons.

After a long period of relative inactivity, the working class is stretching its limbs, like an athlete who is preparing to enter into a decisive contest. That, and that alone, gives us hope and optimism in the future of humanity.

Alan Woods

London



USA: TRUMP'S 'INSURRECTION' AND THE CHAOS OF US BOURGEOIS DEMOCRACY

Socialist Revolution

Editorial Board (USA)

If anyone had any remaining doubts, the events of 6 January exposed the depth of the crisis of US capitalism. Even in the turbulent years before and after the US Civil War, we have never seen the US Capitol building breached by protesters—and encouraged by the sitting president!

As former president GW Bush put it, these are the scenes one would expect in a “banana republic” – i.e. in a country ravaged by US imperialist intervention, not in the belly of the beast itself.

For decades, the US was the most steady and stable of the major capitalist countries. Now, the whole world watches as right-wing protesters run riot in one of the three most important federal government buildings. The ‘almighty’ institutions of the American government have been exposed as much weaker and feeble than they appear.

The fundamental crisis of the capitalist mode of production has led to tremendous social instability and decline in the ‘citadel’ of world imperialism. This is reflected in a sharp polarisation, combined with massive political confusion.

We would have to go back to the Antebellum (pre-Civil War) years to find a time when the ruling class and its politicians were as bitterly divided as they are today.

We have seen that when the ruling class is paralysed and at odds, the masses sense an opportunity and storm into the breach in an attempt to bring about a fundamental change.

However, what we saw at the Capitol building was not the working masses rising up to seize their destinies to change society. This was a counter-revolutionary mob that sensed an opportunity to upset the apple cart.

Chaos on Capitol Hill

6 January – the day Congress was scheduled to certify the Electoral College vote in a joint session – was bound to be a tense day in Washington. This was the culmination of Trump's attempt to frame the election as fraudulent, and the President had organised a ‘Save America March’ to coincide with the Electoral College vote.

The rally brought out several thousand of his most fervent supporters. Many of these traveled from rural counties across the country, including hundreds of armed militiamen, Proud Boys, and other reactionary elements of the extreme right.

The same Trump who so vehemently opposed the Black Lives Matter movement called on his supporters to march on Pennsylvania Avenue and show their anger at the US Congress.

Instead of the militarised scenes of riot police and National Guard troops patrolling every building and street corner

in Washington, as seen during the Black Lives Matter protests, the police presence ranged from totally unprepared to openly sympathetic.

Shortly before 2pm, just as pro-Trump members of Congress were objecting to the Arizona electoral vote certification, the crowd outside the Capitol building swept past the paltry police barricades and swarmed the government building, scaling walls and shattering windows.

The protesters poured into the building, bringing the Congressional session to a halt. They proceeded to occupy and ransack legislators' offices. Tear gas was used, and the FBI and other armed agents were called in to retake the building.

Trump and his diehard supporters in Congress almost certainly did not plan for the crowd to invade the Capitol – but they were playing with fire. In the presidential debate in the autumn, he infamously told the Proud Boys to “stand back and stand by”. Tired of standing by, Trump's attack dogs broke free of their leashes and ran snapping and snarling to smite their master's enemies.

An attempted coup?

To be sure, these are dramatic events. But we must maintain a sense of proportion. This was not an organised insurrectionary coup on the verge of overthrowing the

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US government and imposing a fascist regime to crush the workers and the left. Far from it.

To launch a successful coup, a would-be Bonapartist leader must have the support of significant sections of the military. Trump does not have this. Just three days earlier, all ten living former Defense Secretaries published a joint statement in the *Washington Post* defending the election results and warning that military involvement in the election would “would take us into dangerous, unlawful and unconstitutional territory”.

The Proud Boys, “Q-Anon” conspiracy theorists, and the rest of the far right are not enough to establish a dictatorship. Even without organisation and leadership, these numerically insignificant and poorly organised social forces could be smothered quickly through mass working-class action.

Nevertheless, there is no question they can pose a real threat on an individual scale. Even a little cancer can metastasise into something far deadlier, if not treated early on.

However, this threat is only a realistic perspective if the working class fails to take power over the next decade or two; and only after a series of serious defeats. A move in this direction at this stage would create even more instability and would awaken the working class.

The majority of millions who participated directly in the George Floyd movement, or supported its demands and actions from home, are the real revolutionary future for this country. It is only a matter of time before the movement goes back on the offensive on an even higher level.

Trump and the Republican Party

The education system, bourgeois politicians, mainstream media, Church, and other institutions of capitalist rule barrage us with the mantra that America is the most democratic country that exists or has ever existed. Marxists do not accept these banalities.

Trump has inadvertently helped to expose the truth. Leaving aside the billions in corporate campaign donations and armies of well-heeled lobbyists, American ‘democracy’ is not based on the concept of ‘one person, one vote’. Decisions made by all three government branches are ultimately taken in defense of, and within the confines of, the capitalist system.

The capitalist class is concerned, above all, with the interests of the system as a whole. But Trump cares only about his immediate self-interest. His egomaniacal behavior is tearing down the ‘democratic’ curtain that has long hidden a dictatorship



of the billionaire class. This is the root of the ongoing conflict between Trump and the majority of the ruling class.

Trump has actively undermined the legitimacy of the US electoral system since he first announced his presidential candidacy. Although he won the Electoral College vote and the presidency in 2016, he lost the popular vote by three million. Still, he insisted there was massive voter fraud and claimed that he had won the popular vote as well.

In the run-up to the 2020 election, he asserted that the only way he could lose was through massive fraud, and he refused to promise he would facilitate a peaceful transfer of power.

Trump’s ‘respect’ for the voters’ will was evident in his recent phone call to Georgia’s right-wing Secretary of State, Brad Raffensperger demanding he “re-calculate” and “find” the 11,780 votes he needed to tip the balance.

Trump’s determination to fight and stay in the White House has served to exacerbate the deep divisions in the Republican Party.

As for the bosses, who generally never saw Trump as a reliable representative of their class interests, they are now voicing their disapproval of the president more forcefully than ever. This includes the US Chamber of Commerce, historically the voice of big business. Even the *New York Post*—a mouthpiece of Rupert Murdoch—which supported Trump through thick and thin, eventually called on him to accept the election results.

The way forward

In the midst of a pandemic and economic slump, we cannot lose sight of labour’s immense potential power. The working class is the overwhelming majority of the country, and without it, nothing is produced or transported.

Not only is the working class capable of bringing the capitalist economy to a halt, but it is also the only social force that can defeat Trumpism and fundamentally transform society.

The labour movement should be

mobilised to fight for a programme of bold social demands, including a guaranteed \$1,000-per-week minimum wage, an end to evictions, and a cap on rent of no more than 10% of income. Given the depth of the crisis, these demands would electrify millions. This would also undermine Trump’s cynical efforts to pose as a ‘friend of the working class’.

A mass movement fighting for these demands would cut across the reactionary partisan polarisation and unite workers on a class basis. This cannot happen without leadership. The current union leaders put forward no such perspective, despite the mood of discontent and growing class-consciousness among the young generation of workers.

Although only a few days remain in Trump’s tenure, there is widespread talk of impeachment or of invoking the 25th Amendment, which provides for the removal of a president unable to “discharge the powers” of the office.

After their late victory in Georgia, the Democrats now control both houses of Congress and the presidency. With an economic depression looming, they will be put to the test now that there are no serious excuses for not passing measures that achieve more than just palliative relief for millions of struggling workers.

The weakness of the American left is directly connected to the fact that most of it tries to accommodate and collaborate with the Democrats. This is the approach that has led to the present disaster. It’s not too late to change course!

We are witnessing the protracted death agony of American capitalist ‘democracy’, and world capitalism as a whole. The Marxists’ historic task is to build the subjective factor that can catalyse the working class in its mission to overthrow capitalism.

Armed with a revolutionary perspective and class-independent programme and organisation, the working class can put an end to the present and future horrors of US capitalism. Fight for a workers’ government! Only revolutionary socialism beats Trumpism! ■

PAKISTAN: AMAR FAYAZ RELEASED

Socialist Appeal are greatly relieved and enthused to hear that comrade Amar Fayaz – who was abducted by the Pakistani state on 8 November 2020 – has finally been released, thanks to a tremendous international solidarity campaign.

Pakistan Trade Union

Solidarity Campaign

On 3 January we received the amazing news that comrade Amar Fayaz has been released, with security agencies dropping him at his village.

Amar's release was made possible through the immense and successful international campaign organised by students, youth, and workers from all around the world. We will update our supporters as we get more details on Amar's release.

We thank all our supporters for their immense efforts. These include campaigning, signing and sharing our petition, and performing various solidarity actions for the release of Amar Fayaz.

Amar Fayaz was abducted by the state security agencies on 8 November 2020 at around 1:30am. Men in two security services vehicles, along with three police cars, abducted Amar in the city of Jamshoro in the Sindh Province of Pakistan.

Until his release, his whereabouts were not known by his friends and family, including his wife and daughter.

International campaign

Immediately, the Pakistan Trade Union Solidarity Campaign initiated an international solidarity campaign called **#ReleaseAmarFayaz**.

We launched an online petition, for which we managed to get over 12,200 signatures from 50 countries. Supporters also organised protests in front of Pakistani high commissions, embassies and consulates in various countries, where COVID-19 restrictions did not prevent safe gatherings.

For example, a day of action was organised in Canada, where supporters initiated a massive campaign of protests in front of Pakistan missions in Canada in Toronto, Vancouver, Ontario and Montreal, alongside sending letters and emails to Pakistani officials and getting representation in the mainstream media.

Our supporters also gathered the support of their local members of parliament and trade union leaders for Amar Fayaz's release.



A message from Amar Fayaz



Support from MPs

In Canada, a process was triggered to present a motion in the Canadian Parliament, sponsored by Niki Ashton MP.

In Sweden, an independent Socialist MP, Amineh Kakabaveh, signed a protest letter to the Pakistan Embassy.

In Germany, we gained the support of Tobias Pflüger, a Die Linke MP of the Bundestag, who wrote to the Pakistani embassy in Berlin in his capacity as Chairman of the German-South Asia Parliamentary Friendship Group. Leading trade union figures sent letters of support

and demanded Amar's release in various countries, from Canada to Chile and Argentina, to Italy and Belgium.

Solidarity efforts in Britain

In the UK, the campaign gained support from several MPs, including left Labour MP Apsana Begum, who wrote to the Pakistani High Commissioner in London. In addition, an Early Day Motion was presented in Parliament, sponsored by several MPs, including Apsana Begum, John McDonnell, Ian Lavery, Ian Byrne, Dan Carden, Zahra Sultana, and Jeremy Corbyn.

On 3 December, Socialist Appeal supporters and students from the Marxist Student Federation demonstrated outside the Pakistan High Commission in London. Comrades made speeches highlighting the brutal oppression of Marxists in Pakistan who dare challenge the corruption of the capitalist class.

A petition of over 4,000 signatures and a letter demanding Fayaz's release and information of his whereabouts was handed to the High Commission.

A victory for international solidarity!

This is just a short report of the international solidarity campaign for Amar Fayaz's release. Thousands of our supporters and comrades showed their immense support through signing the petition; regularly posting pictures and appeals on social media channels, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok; writing to Pakistani authorities, and making appearances in the media.

Amar Fayaz's release is a great victory for our campaign, which shows that – when it comes to oppressing students and workers – an injury to one is an injury to all. Only through a united and joint international struggle are we able to successfully resist all attacks on youth and workers by the forces of oppression.

The Pakistan Trade Union Solidarity Campaign will continue to raise its voice against all brutalities against students and workers in Pakistan and around the world. We will continue to work with our network of supporters and comrades in our campaigns towards this goal. ■

**CLICK HERE TO DONATE TO
THE PAKISTAN TRADE UNION
SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN**

COVID-19 VACCINATION CAMPAIGNS HAMPERED BY CAPITALIST CHAOS

Joe Attard

With the Oxford/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine recently approved for use in the UK; and products by Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna and others already being administered around the world, one would think we are approaching the end of this pandemic. However, pharmaceutical profiteers and political representatives of the ruling class are bungling the rollout in some of the worst-affected countries. In their haste to return to 'normal' and get the economy moving again, they are ignoring the science, cutting corners and putting lives at risk.

Despite ordering enough doses to vaccinate their populations several times over, governments in Europe, the US and the UK have already fallen well behind their vaccination targets. In Britain, where a new, highly virulent strain of the coronavirus is running riot, experts estimate that two million jabs a week are needed to start to bring the situation under control. Currently, about 250,000 jabs are being administered weekly.

This is partly due to the irrationality of capitalist production, which has created gaps in the supply chain. Companies like Pfizer and Moderna have sold far more doses than they can currently supply, guaranteeing huge profits upfront. In order to meet their commitments, they have to strike deals with other companies for items ranging from DNA molecules to lipid nanoparticles.

All of these commodities are owned by the private sector, which expects to be reimbursed. In short, private interests and a lack of central coordination are holding things up. Under socialism, all the necessary materials could be sourced and distributed immediately, without having to worry about businesses' bottom lines.

But despite the protestations of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson that the sluggish rollout is all down to a shortage of supply, there are problems with distribution as well. Officially, there will be 530,000 doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine ready for use in Britain from 11 January, along with an additional 450,000 in the subsequent 24 hours. A further 18 million are in various states of preparation and approval. On top of that, it is estimated



that about 5m doses of the Pfizer vaccine are ready for use.

There is, however, a shortage of medicals to administer them. The NHS is barely coping with the latest wave of infections. This disaster has resulted directly from the Tories' hapless handling of the pandemic.

This puts huge strain on the health service, which already put out a call for trained volunteers to deal with the influx of patients around Christmas.

Then there is the issue of the special, ultra-cold fridges needed for the Pfizer and Moderna product, of which the British government has not sourced nearly enough. There is even a shortage of normal fridge space available for the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. Or rather, there is plenty of fridge capacity: but it is in private hands (private hospitals, supermarkets, restaurants etc.), meaning the public purse will need to cover the costs.

Under a planned economy, all essential resources and manpower could have been requisitioned and marshalled, and as many inoculation centres as necessary established across the country, to administer the vaccine.

Off to a bad start

In Europe, a painfully slow rollout has seen all semblance of 'unity' against the common viral threat break down into bickering and recriminations. An agreement (spearheaded by Germany) saw

responsibility for securing vaccine doses delegated to the European Commission. In practice, bureaucratic obstacles and incompetence in Brussels, combined with local variations in rollout speed, have resulted in a terribly inefficient and patchy inoculation campaign as each ruling class seeks to look out for its own interests first.

The EU has signed six vaccine contracts but so far only the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine has been approved for use. The attempt at 'diversification' has meant the Commission paid for a lot of vaccines it can't yet use, and doesn't have enough of the one it has actually approved to meet demand. This, combined with the fact that richer EU countries have been able to secure additional doses outside of the joint purchasing agreement, is causing huge frustration across the bloc.

The situation is particularly acute in France, where the right-wing Macron government planned to vaccinate 20 million people in the first half of 2021. It has so far inoculated just 350 people, despite receiving 500,000 doses of the BioNTech vaccine.

Vaccine wariness is higher in France than anywhere else in Europe, mostly due to a deep and profound distrust in the establishment and all its works following years of austerity, betrayals and repression.

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Finally, in India – the country with the second-highest death and infection rate after the USA – a locally developed coronavirus vaccine (Covaxin) was approved for use despite Bharat Biotech not revealing its testing data. Malini Aisola, co-convenor of a health watchdog based in New Delhi, stated that she is “extremely alarmed and shocked because this is really signifying the grant of regulatory approval without efficacy data... The government has taken this accelerated process too far.”

Between the lasting economic impact of the draconian lockdown in March, a rising peasants revolt, and skyrocketing COVID-19 casualties, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is clearly desperate to rush out a vaccine – even before it is confirmed to be safe – to maintain his authority and get business up and running.

Ignoring the science

All over the world, political representatives of the ruling class are locked in a deadly race with a virus they have utterly failed to manage or contain. Faced with overrun hospitals and spiralling infection rates, and determined to get the economy going again at any cost, many of them are turning to cutting corners.

In Britain, the government is hoping to stretch its available vaccine supply by lengthening the recommended intervals between the two necessary doses from around three weeks to three months. It is also suggesting a ‘mix-and-match’ approach in emergencies: for example, where a second dose of the Pfizer vaccine is not available, administering a patient the Oxford/AstraZeneca product.

With the former, the rationale is that a lower-but-broader level of immunity might be preferable in the short term, and full immunity can still be achieved at a later date. But it is still not clear how long immunity is retained, especially after just one dose. The idea was justified by Britain’s chief medical officers, who pointed out that participants in Oxford’s UK study sometimes got their second dose between four and 12 weeks after the first.

However, a 21-day interval remains the recommended advice from Pfizer/BioNTech, and obviously it is not in their financial interests for these major products to fail.

Meanwhile, there is zero data behind Britain’s proposal to mix vaccines. The Pfizer and Oxford/AstraZeneca products are based on totally different technologies. CDC states categorically the coronavirus vaccines are not interchangeable. “None of this is being data-driven right now,” echoed Dr. Phyllis Tien, infectious disease physician at the University of California, “we’re kind of in this Wild West.”



In their haste to restore economic normality, capitalist politicians are taking big risks that will hamper vaccination efforts.

A socialist society would simply expropriate the pharmaceutical pirates under workers’ control, and put their knowledge and technique in the service of humanity.

And Britain is leading the rest of the world across this new frontier, with the US considering extending the period between doses, and Germany and Denmark ready to follow suit. In their desperation to get profits flowing again as quickly as possible, the political representatives of the ruling class are jeopardising their vaccination efforts, with billions of workers, poor and youth set to suffer the consequences if these drugs don’t have the expected effect. Given that public confidence in these vaccines is already low, it is incredibly irresponsible for governments to take risky shortcuts on a whim.

Vaccine Apartheid

As we have written before, hoarding by the richest western countries is putting any vaccine out of reach for billions.

Vaccine nationalism always favours countries that can afford to pay the Big Pharma profiteers. The WHO’s COVAX programme, which calls on international cooperation to bring vaccines to the poor world, faces “a very high risk of failure” due to underfunding and a lack of participation from the US and China.

Meanwhile, the World Bank is providing aid for the delivery of vaccines in the form of loans, thus deepening Third World debt. “We’re facing a global vaccine apartheid,” said Zain Rizvi, law and policy researcher at Public Citizen.

In Israel, this term is especially apt. Despite inoculating a tenth of its population already (the highest proportion anywhere)

and shipping out vaccines to settlers in the occupied territories, Palestinians living there might be waiting months for COVAX to provide them with vaccines.

Moreover, despite toothless regulations to prevent private interests dictating access to medicine in poor countries, Big Pharma is jealously protective of its intellectual property to avoid the production of cheaper derivatives. These fatcats shouldn’t be allowed to get away with this, but you can’t control what you don’t own. A socialist society would simply expropriate the pharmaceutical pirates under workers’ control, and put their knowledge and technique in the service of humanity.

When will it end?

As the pandemic grinds on, the fight for socialism is ever-more urgent. The longer the virus runs amok, the greater risk of it mutating into a strain the existing vaccines can’t cope with. Already, Sir John Bell, regius professor of Medicine at the University of Oxford, has already raised a “big question mark” over a mutant strain in South Africa.

It is a tragedy that the essential task of manufacturing and distributing this vaccine has been left to a system wracked by crisis and decay. Under a globally planned socialist economy, so many of these pitfalls could have been avoided. It is the duty of the working class and youth worldwide to put an end to capitalism, rescue science from the straightjacket of the market, and chart a healthy, prosperous future for humanity. ■

NEW IN DEFENCE OF MARXISM MAGAZINE

The new edition of In Defence Of Marxism is packed with material which every reader of Socialist Appeal will find of great value.

The centrepiece article is an introduction by Alan Woods to a new edition of Lenin's 1909 book 'Materialism and Empirio-Criticism.'

In this article Alan explains how Lenin's defence of the materialism method has become even more relevant today, in an age where reactionary ideas once again dominate philosophy.

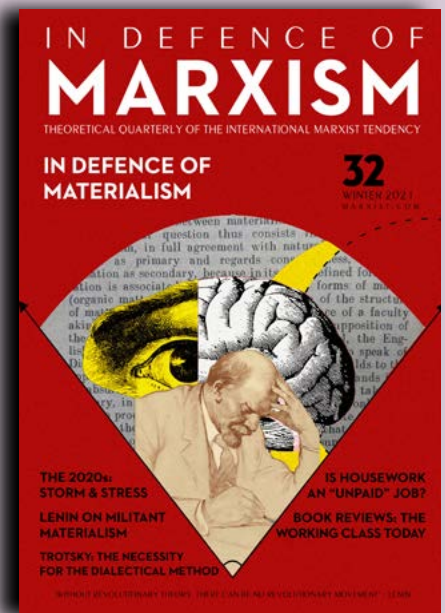
Also included are articles from the archives by Lenin and Trotsky on the importance of dialectical materialism and the need to fight against idealism and religion.

This issue also has articles taking up the debate over whether housework can be considered an "unpaid job", and whether we should therefore take up the slogan of "wages for housework" as some have advocated.

This issue also includes reviews of a number of books which have come out recently examining the question of class, and what it means to be "working class".

With an editorial looking at the issues facing us in 2021, there is plenty to get your teeth into. Order your copy now!

**Subscribe today
from £8 per year**



Help us raise £27,000 by the end of March!

We would like to begin our first Fighting Fund column of 2021 by wishing all our readers a Happy New Year, although we appreciate that there is little to celebrate about the barbaric situation faced by the workers of the world.

Here in Britain the rampant Covid pandemic is pushing the NHS to the point of collapse - an entirely avoidable catastrophe that has been prepared for by years of austerity and corruption. But even those workers who have not yet been struck by the virus are facing unemployment, poverty and even hunger.

Lenin once remarked that capitalism was "horror without end", but amidst all this horror, we remain the most determined optimists, not because we believe that the capitalist class or its corrupt representatives are capable of alleviating this crisis - far from it - but because in the titanic struggles that are emerging we see the unstoppable power of the working class to transform society.

The remarkable growth of *Socialist Appeal* over the last year demonstrates the enormous appetite of workers and youth for the revolutionary ideas of Marxism. And thanks to the contributions of our supporters, old and new, we have taken great strides forward, hosting our biggest ever public event

in October and almost doubling the full-time staff. But we must see this as just the beginning of our struggle to build a fighting Marxist leadership for the British working class, which has never been so urgently needed.

If we are to continue our impressive growth we must expand our office space. Already our office is too small and we will need even more space in the next couple of years. This will require considerable funds to pay the extra rent. We must also raise as much money as possible to support the vital work of our comrades abroad, in the

USA, Latin America, India and many other places around the world.

To this end we have set ourselves the target of raising £60,000 by our annual conference in the Spring. So far, with your help we have raised just over £33,000. We would therefore like to make this appeal direct to you, our readers: Please help us raise the £27,000 we need to push forward and continue to build the forces of Marxism in Britain!

Any donation of any size will be gratefully received. If you can help us, then please donate today!

North East	£810.71	£2,500.00
Yorkshire	£4,293.65	£7,000.00
North West	£1,059.60	£2,500.00
Midlands	£2,386.92	£3,500.00
East Anglia	£2,420.68	£4,800.00
West England	£2,241.70	£3,500.00
Wales	£1,111.40	£2,000.00
South Coast	£923.82	£2,200.00
London	£7,684.95	£18,000.00
South East	£406.65	£1,000.00

LETTERS

NEWSDESK@SOCIALIST.NET

HOW ESSENTIAL?

Dear Editor,

Lots more businesses and shops are open now than was the case during the national lockdown in early summer. That's because they all managed to get recategorised as "essential"... generally on pretty tenuous grounds I must say. Clearly this new lockdown will just be a version of the pre-Xmas tier 4 - extended to everywhere - which as far as I can see is pointless if huge swathes of the workforce are still at work.

Right now most blue collar workers have to go to work, whilst most white collar workers work from home. So people are being tricked by the Tory press into blaming blue collar workers for not observing lockdown during their free time.

Evidently house parties of 20 in Thurrock is what's letting the side down and not you know... millions of people working and shopping! The fact that infection and deaths rates are surpassing the high watermark of April last year suggests a more obvious reason than just slackness on the part of some people. But the Tories don't want to take the blame for a crisis they have exacerbated with their blunders and greed.

Despite the growing infection rates, everything is still pretty much normal as far as I can see in our town centre. It's a bit harder for everyone to get a cup of coffee, and the bouncy castles are closed... pending their application for being deemed essential no doubt. Otherwise the shops are open despite the risk to staff and customers. Yet again it is profits before people.

A shop worker

MICK BROOKS (1948-2021): A DEDICATED LIFE-LONG SOCIALIST

Dear Comrades,

We are very sorry to hear about the sudden death a few days ago of Mick Brooks from the COVID-19 virus.

Mick's involvement in the revolutionary movement goes back a long time. He

joined the Militant in the late 1960s. He became a full-time worker for Militant and ran the bookshop for many years.

He wrote regularly for the paper and was a popular speaker at many meetings and schools, one who had his own individual style, laced with analogies and dry humour. He spoke especially on history and Marxist economics, in which he specialised and in many ways popularised.

He left Militant shortly before its great split in 1992. He then worked for a period as a librarian. Some years later he joined the Socialist Appeal and eventually went full-time. For a period he took over as editor of the newspaper.

He developed political differences and left the organisation, later becoming the political secretary of the Labour Representation Committee, as well as writing regularly for the Labour left magazine Labour Briefing. In 2012 he published a book, "Capitalist Crisis - Theory and Practice". As always he remained an active member of his local Labour and trade union movement.

Despite our later differences, Mick was dedicated to the cause of socialism right up to the day of his death.

We send our condolences to his partner and comrade for many years, Barbara Humphries.

Rob Sewell

on behalf of the Editorial Board

A LETTER FROM THE FRONT LINE

Dear Editor,

I am a junior doctor working in a hospital badly affected by COVID. Last week, I heard the news that nurses' annual leave may be cancelled in preparation for rising cases. While the nursing staff have been stoic and happy to sacrifice for the greater good, I can't help but wonder whether we would have needed these sacrifices if we had adequate nursing levels.

As one senior nurse commented, "scrapping annual leave means more tired and sick nurses, which means fewer nurses on the wards and more stress". Nurses' mental and physical health is at risk.

I work in one of the best health systems

in the world, where for decades patients' health has been protected from the profit motive. My colleagues, be they nurses, healthcare assistants, porters, cleaners, are overworked and criminally underpaid for their sacrifices during the pandemic and beforehand.

Management fails again and again to reassure and protect these workers. We need a fully nationalised NHS under workers' control, not a bloated bureaucracy.

*Solidarity from the frontline,
A junior doctor*



At Socialist Appeal we are looking for a political cartoonist. As such, we are pleased to announce a competition to kick off the year: We appeal to our readership to consider submitting their own cartoons under the theme, 'New Year, Same Rotten System'. Cartoons will be judged by the editorial board and the winner featured in a future issue.



*If interested, please send submissions into
newsdesk@socialist.net
by the end of January.*

TELL THE TRUTH



THE REAL WINSTON CHURCHILL

This year we are launching a new column, titled Tell The Truth. Each issue, we will bring to our readers' attention one little-known episode or myth in the blood-soaked history of British imperialism. We begin the series by examining the life of British imperialism's favourite son: Winston Churchill.

Winston Churchill is venerated by liberals and conservatives alike as a national hero. He is revered as a defender of democracy and as the man who single handedly beat Hitler. Such is the mythology surrounding him that in 2002 he was voted 'The Greatest Briton of all Time'. But who was the real Winston Churchill, and what did he stand for?

Churchill was the son of Lord Randolph Churchill and a wealthy American heiress, Jennie Jerome. Churchill was conscious that he was part of a ruling class. He felt he was personally born to rule and was a man of extraordinary ambition. He dreamed from a young age of being a great journalist or war leader. His school performance, however, was mediocre and only on the third attempt did he make it into Sandhurst. His journalistic career meanwhile owed everything to his wealthy mother's connections and little to talent.

Churchill had contempt for the working class and despised socialism, famously declaring, *"Socialism is the philosophy of failure, the creed of ignorance, and the gospel of envy."* When a strike broke out in Tonypandy in Wales, as Home Secretary, Churchill sent troops into the Welsh valleys to violently suppress the movement. *"If the Welsh are striking over hunger, we must fill their bellies with lead,"* he said.

In the 1926 general strike, Churchill would place what journalistic ability he

had at the disposal of the government's machinery of lies and slanders. As editor of the official government organ, the Daily Gazette, Churchill was the voice of the scabbing operation.

Churchill's contempt for the working class has been covered up by historians. But so too has his ineptitude as a military tactician. In 1909-1910, whilst most military leaders were raising the possibility of a threat from Germany, Churchill was shortsightedly arguing for cuts in military spending.

In World War One, Churchill played a blundering role as First Lord of the Admiralty. With a complete disregard for human life, and consumed by personal vanity and the hope of becoming a 'war hero,' Churchill launched a catastrophic naval adventure at Gallipoli.

In 1920, Churchill was given the role of Minister for War. When he complained that there was no war, Bonar Law shot back at him, *"If we thought there was going to be a war you wouldn't have got the job"*.

We are, nevertheless, taught that Churchill took a brave stand against fascism in Europe. However, the whole course of World War Two has been rewritten by revisionist, 'patriotic' historians who have vastly exaggerated Britain's role as a whole. It was the Soviet Union, rather than Britain, that tore the guts out of Hitler's army. 80% of the Wehrmacht's forces were thrown into action on the Eastern Front.

Ideologically, Churchill, Mussolini and Hitler were not so far removed. Churchill shared many of Hitler's views on race and a similar burning hatred of Bolshevism.

Before the outbreak of World War Two, Churchill was generous in his praise for both Hitler and Mussolini. In a visit in 1927, Churchill said of his Italian

counterpart: *"If I had been an Italian, I am sure I should have been whole-heartedly with you from the start to finish in your triumphant struggle against the bestial appetites and passions of Leninism."*

Ignored by historians of today is the fact that Churchill was himself an antisemite. He penned a notorious antisemitic article entitled 'Zionism versus Bolshevism', in which he divides Jews into 'good', patriotic Jews and 'bad', internationalist, Bolshevik Jews. In the war of intervention against Soviet Russia, Churchill was at the forefront in rendering eager assistance to the pogromist armies of General Denikin. And when the opportunity presented itself to bomb the Auschwitz extermination camp, Churchill refused to give it the go ahead.

His views were streaked with racial bigotry that saw British imperialism as the natural master of the peoples of the world. When discussing the plight of Afghans and Kurds, the great humanitarian leader was quoted as saying, *"I cannot understand this squeamishness about the use of gas"*.

Of the Indian people Churchill remarked, *"I hate Indians. They are a beastly people with a beastly religion."* Indeed the great war leader thought little of allowing millions to starve in West Bengal in 1943 as a direct result of his government's policies.

The real reason that Churchill and the British ruling class went to war against German fascism was to stop the threat that the German rival posed to British imperialism and the huge profits. Those profits were distilled from the misery, toil and hunger of Welsh miners and Bangali peasants alike. Winston Churchill was a lifelong imperialist, a defender of the worst atrocities of capitalism, and it is as such that he should be remembered.

2021: A YEAR OF EXPLOSIVE STRUGGLE AHEAD

Sean Hodges

Unite the Union

London & Eastern Region

(personal capacity)

The year 2020 was an extremely challenging year for the working class. But 2021 is likely to see even sharper struggles.

Everywhere, the story is the same. While the biggest monopolies have scooped up even more wealth than before, workers have been forced to shoulder the cost. And with Tory Chancellor Rishi Sunak pledging to “balance the books”, it is clear that a new wave of austerity and attacks is on the cards.

Public sector workers will see their pay frozen. The dire financial situation in local government will put the jobs of thousands of council workers under threat. And no doubt the bosses will go on the offensive in the private sector, in an attempt to make workers pick up the bill for the coronavirus crisis.

Workers therefore face an assault on all fronts: on jobs; on wages; on conditions; and on public services. Many have already been made redundant. Millions more will likely join them in the dole queue when the government’s furlough scheme is eventually wound up.

There are two sides to this story, however. The capitalists will certainly go on the attack. But workers can only be put under so much pressure before their resentment and anger boils over. And we are beginning to see this boiling point being reached in many workplaces and industries across Britain.

Showdown

In construction, many workers have been forced to work throughout the pandemic on sites that are breeding grounds for infection.

Unite the Union is the biggest organiser in the construction industry, and its members in this sector have a proud history of militant action. They showed they were prepared to fight when the Joint Industry Board tried to impose pay cuts of 35% back in 2012-2013 – and history could well be about to repeat itself.

Construction bosses have demanded a pay freeze. But this has been decisively rejected by union members. The stage is therefore set for a bitter showdown.

Public sector

In education, a mass campaign by the NEU – including walkouts by teachers – forced



Virtually every section of the working class is being targeted by the bosses and the Tories. But workers are reaching the end of their tether, and are beginning to mobilise in response.

the Tories into yet another screeching U-turn, with remote learning now in place until at least the mid-February half-term.

But unless this time is used to actually make schools safe for reopening, then nothing will fundamentally have been solved. Instead of listening to the suggestions of the teaching unions, the Tories are looking to pick a fight with them. This is an extremely combustible cocktail, which is ready to explode.

In the public sector, Unison represents over a million workers across the NHS and local government. Already, members in higher education are mobilising against an insulting 0% pay offer.

The next round of cuts, meanwhile, will push council workers into defending themselves. This has already been the case in Tower Hamlets, where the council has used fire-and-rehire tactics to hack apart terms and conditions for the staff. Similarly, Croydon Council now looks to emulate this strategy, following a declaration of bankruptcy.

Industrial battles

In what remains of Britain’s industries, the battle has already begun. For example, workers at the Barnoldswick Rolls Royce factory have undertaken strike action in order to defend themselves against the

threat of mass redundancies.

A week-long strike quickly spiralled into a much larger struggle, as the bosses responded with a lockout. But this has only fuelled the workers’ determination to fight.

The transport and logistics sector has also seen escalating action, with DHL workers taking strike action, only for management to bring in the police in an attempt to remove pickets blocking depots.

Elsewhere, Cargo workers are facing down British Airways at Heathrow airport to defend pay and conditions. And British Gas engineers have walked out in response to fire-and-rehire threats from the bosses.

Fires of struggle

These cases are just the tip of the iceberg. The examples could go on and on. Virtually every section of the working class is being targeted by the bosses and the Tories. But workers are reaching the end of their tether, and are beginning to mobilise in response.

The best defence is a bold offence. The specifics of the situation may vary between industries, but the general

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picture – of attacks on jobs, wages, and conditions – is the same for workers everywhere.

This calls for these struggles to be joined-up, with coordinated action between unions. The TUC was formed precisely for this purpose – to provide strength through unity. Now is the time for them to do exactly that.

Coordinated action

Firstly, this means organising solidarity for any workers moving into action. Secondly, it means coordinating strike action – in particular, a one-day public sector strike against the pay freeze being implemented by the Tories in their latest austerity package.

Such a move would help to galvanise workers, showing the potential power of the labour movement, and giving workers confidence to take further action against the Tories and the bosses.

This, in turn, must be followed up with a mass drive to recruit and organise workers into the unions – particularly those in the most precarious sectors and workplaces, who often face the most exploitative conditions and the lowest pay.

Socialist fightback

Finally, the leaders of the trade union movement should be generalising these economic demands and industrial struggles into a bold socialist political programme.

Rather than cosying up to Rishi Sunak and the CBI (the bosses' union), the TUC should be organising a mass campaign in defence of jobs. Instead of class collaboration in the 'national interest', we need militant action, linked to demands for a socialist alternative.

The means fighting for the nationalisation of the major monopolies, under workers' control, so that production can be democratically and rationally planned in the interests of society, along socialist lines.

This is what the union leaders should be calling for in order to ensure that workers are not made to pay for this crisis of capitalism. Enough is enough. We need a militant fightback. ■

CONSTRUCTION PAY FREEZE SPARKS MILITANCY

Unite electrical worker &
union construction sector
committee member

It may come as a shock to those who quite keenly follow industrial relations in Britain that, despite all the attacks on collective bargaining over the decades, there are still a number of construction union/employer National Agreements running in Britain today.

Unite the Union, due to mergers, has inherited nearly all of these construction Mechanical & Electrical (M&E) National Agreements, which stretch across every imaginable job role in the construction sector.

From electricians and pipefitters to scaffold erectors, virtually every type of work on the sites is grouped into a National Agreement of some kind.

All of these National Agreements now have one thing in common – in the latest round of negotiations, the bosses have offered these workers a big fat 0% pay increase. In real terms, this is obviously a pay cut due to inflation.

Organise

The bosses are playing with fire, however. A substantial number of Unite M&E workers are getting active in militant rank-and-file committees across Britain.

They are serious about fighting back – not just over the wage freeze, but also about reinvigorating the M&E National Agreements.

It isn't just a demand for wages that moves these workers, but also a demand to have control over their working lives - not only with the bosses, but also within their union.

Ultimately they want an organised union workforce on construction sites across Britain, meaning a democratic workers' organisation that can wrestle control from the bosses.

It's a lot to fight for, but why shouldn't they? We have had enough of blacklisting, casual work, bogus self-employment, deaths and injuries.

The magnificent rank-and-file movements in 2012 showed what is possible now. Beating back the attempts of Balfour Beatty to tear up terms and conditions, the rank-and-file committees showed their strength as fighting organisations. The lessons of this struggle have been well learned.

As well as rejecting the pay freeze, these committees are now also demanding of Unite the Union that M&E has their own sector within the union's structures.

This is as the current Unite construction sector doesn't properly represent a good chunk of the members organised under its banner.

The demand is for an Electrical Mechanical Engineering

Construction (EMEC) sector to fight against the problems specific to their industries, alongside those fights involving all construction workers. Some of the most well respected militants in the union, including Tony Seaman and Frank Morris, are leading the charge for this new sector to be formed.

Control

It isn't just a demand for wages that moves these workers, but also a demand to have control over their working lives – not only with the bosses, but also within their union.

Like a pile of gunpowder, this simmering discontent is about to be sparked off by the offered pay freeze. These workers have fought against the brutal exploitation in their industries before, and they will do so again.

Ultimately the only way to defend our livelihoods is to get rid of the capitalist system that constantly attacks workers like us and replace it with a socialist planned economy, under the democratic control of our own class.



BT WORKERS CALL FOR MASS ACTION AGAINST MANAGEMENT ATTACKS

Steve Jones

British Telecom workers are set to take strike action later this year after a union consultative ballot last month returned a massive 97.9% vote for action. The December ballot result must be seen as a clear mandate to push forward and put the union on what has been called a war footing. The bosses have been warned.

With 74% of members voting it is clear that should the CWU now call an official strike ballot then any resulting action will be both solid and be able to jump over any hurdles placed in its way by the Tory anti-union laws. This could be the biggest mobilisation of BT workers since the strike of 1987.

Why are BT workers so angry? For years now, a gung-ho management, obsessed with cutting costs and boosting profits for money-grabbing shareholders, has been trying to trim down the company and squeeze evermore out of its workers.

One BT engineer told us that even during his short time with the company - which was one of the first state utilities to be privatised under Thatcher back in the 1980s - he had seen a huge increase in the workload combined with real and actual cuts in basic pay. The pressure had become unbearable and for what?

The consultative ballot was sparked by an announcement that offices were to be closed, compulsory redundancies implemented, terms and conditions of work revised (i.e. made worse) and, for good measure, the 2018 Pensions Agreement revoked.

Although management have said that this only affects certain sections, the warning for all BT workers is clear. BT together with its auxiliaries - Openreach and EE - have now been told to expect an official industrial action ballot to be called.

As the union HQ explained when the ballot

result was announced: "For a long time BT Group has been claiming that our union does not speak for the employees and that people are happy with the direction of the company. This result shows how laughable those claims are and have always been... Our members - many of them key workers - have made it crystal clear today that they will not support an agenda of compulsory redundancies, site closures and a 'race to the bottom' on terms and conditions. BT Group ignores that message at its peril..."

Rising pressure

The huge pressure being felt by BT workers is only being added to by the pandemic. There has been a huge increase in demand for telephone and, especially, internet services and upgrades. This requires many BT workers to be visiting and working in offices and peoples homes, with all the risks that currently involves.

The pandemic has also exposed the lack of investment on the part of BT. Many parts of the country are struggling to maintain and improve internet services, given the decrepit nature of the infrastructure.

Although there are several internet providers in Britain, all (excluding cable suppliers) are dependent on BT engineers, BT landlines and junction boxes to provide a connection. Service provider staff have to liaise with and use BT workers to complete installations.

As such, engineers have been at the frontline of a torrent of complaints over massive delays in upgrading or even getting an internet service when it is most desperately needed.

Considering the essential role that the internet is having to play at present - with schooling going online and many if not most people now completely reliant on internet links to stay connected and continue to function - the question must be asked as to why Britain is in such a sorry state.

When the telephone system (and therefore now the internet system) was privatised, we were told it would make the setup more efficient and dynamic. Yet now we are behind many other countries. The same story can be repeated for the UK phone network. The only thing the BT management has made more efficient is profiteering.

Fightback

BT workers have had enough and are ready to fight. In addition, Repayment Project Engineers (RPE) at Openreach have already had a strike ballot and voted nine-to-one to take action, with February as the likely date.

At the last election the call was made by Labour for internet services to be free. This was attacked by the establishment at the time but is now starting to look like a very popular demand indeed.

BT and the internet companies should be nationalised and put under workers control. By doing so, a proper online services plan can be implemented, with fully developed infrastructure put in place that anticipates future requirements for all - not future profits for the rich.

The struggle of BT workers for a better deal and an end to management attacks must be seen as part of the bigger fight to get rid of the dead hand of capitalism. ■



SUPPORT STRIKING BRITISH GAS WORKERS! FIGHT FOR NATIONALISATION!



Pat MacDonald

Eltham CLP

Workers at British Gas have recently undertaken strike action, from 7-11 January. The five-day strike – organised by the GMB union – had a landslide 89% ‘Yes’ vote in the ballot, with a 59% turnout amongst 9,000 members nationally.

This is a resounding call for action, showing the determined mood amongst the workers, and giving the union a great chance of victory going forwards.

Nevertheless, despite this strong strike, the bosses are digging their heels in. The stage is set for a further showdown. Further action will therefore be needed to force management into a retreat.

Bullying tactics

The recent British Gas strike involved around 4,500 service and repair gas engineers, 600 central heating installers, 540 electrical engineers, 170 specialist gas engineers, and 1,700 smart-metering engineers.

These workers have endured a bullying set of negotiations with British Gas CEO Chris O’Shea, who has tried to intimidate them with ‘fire and rehire’ threats.

Workers originally faced a 20% cut to their pay and conditions. This is despite reported operating profits of £901 million by British Gas parent company, Centrica.

Following a battle with GMB negotiators, this was reduced to a 10% pay cut.

At this point the tone of negotiations changed, with management adopting a ‘take it or face the sack’ position. A deadline of 23 December was presented to the union, with officials expected to force a miserable deal upon members.

“His idea of compromise – to reduce a 20% cut in pay down to 10%, and then lambast and attack the shop stewards for not selling his proposals,” stated GMB national secretary Justin Bowden, “has been overwhelmingly rejected by the gas, electrical and smart-meter engineers”.

For fighting leadership

Ruthless bosses have therefore provoked a strike in the coldest part of the year – amidst a pandemic and a national lockdown! The responsibility for the stoppage lies entirely with them.

Why should British Gas workers accept a penny less from their pay, while the bosses and shareholders see huge profits?

Last month, British Gas narrowly avoided strike action by 7,000 frontline office workers. In the end, these workers – represented by Unison – accepted the management’s offer.

But rather than providing evidence that this is a ‘fair deal’, as the bosses will claim, the acceptance of this deal actually points to the pressure that ordinary workers are under to hold onto their jobs at any cost.

Against a backdrop of economic crisis and mass redundancies, bad deals can get forced through. This is especially the case in the absence of fighting leadership in the unions. Only organisation and militant action can guarantee workers a decent future.

The GMB’s decision to limit picketing due to the coronavirus is a regrettable but correct one. But new conditions call for new solutions.

Striking workers will therefore have to find new means to win solidarity and to demonstrate their strength – for example, taking a leaf out of the teachers’ book, where the NEU have organised mass online rallies and petitions to win support for their struggle against the Tories.

Nationalise the Big Six

Ultimately, this situation is yet another clear sign that the market is failing in the energy industry, and across the whole economy. This is the case both for workers and customers.

3,000 people die every year as a direct result of fuel poverty. And this was the case even before the pandemic reared its head, forcing people into hibernation in shoddy, poorly-insulated accommodation.

“Workers have been laid off, furloughed, or are working from home, increasing domestic energy use,” acknowledged Ofgem, the government’s energy watchdog, earlier this winter. “Some customers are struggling to pay their bills. These impacts could increase over winter, as consumers use more energy.”

That some customers are ‘struggling to pay’ is an understatement!

Ofgem has predicted that energy companies will try and claw back lost profits by hiking up prices for millions of people.

This begs the question: If companies like British Gas – the UK’s biggest provider – can neither pay their workers a decent wage, nor provide affordable energy, then what are they good for?

These energy monopolies should be nationalised immediately – under workers’ control, and without compensation.

We say:

- No to pay cuts for British Gas workers! Open up the books for British Gas and Centrica!
- Forward to a rolling strike to make the bosses back down! For solidarity across the labour movement, in support of striking workers!
- Nationalise British Gas under workers’ control! Nationalise the Big Six energy companies as part of a socialist planned economy!

SOCIALISTAPPEAL★

**THE MARXIST VOICE
OF LABOUR AND YOUTH**

JOIN US!

