

PCS ★ MARXISTS

ISSUE NO. 1

WRITTEN BY SUPPORTERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARXIST TENDENCY IN PCS



PREPARING FOR THE BATTLES AHEAD

Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of the bulletin "PCS Marxists", produced by supporters of "Socialist Appeal" and the "Revolution" in Scotland.

As members of Left Unity we are keen to help strengthen the left within PCS, which is a bedrock for the union. Faced with a stormy period ahead industrially, the ideas of Marxism can provide an invaluable analysis in understanding the terrain and the tasks at hand.

Unprecedented crisis

Given the deepest crisis of capitalism in its history, Marxism has never been more relevant than it is today, especially for trade union activists. Our recent successful International Marxist University, in which 6,500 registered from 115 countries, shows the growing thirst for these ideas.

We are facing an unprecedented period in Britain and internationally. The Bank of England forecast that this will be the worst crisis for 300 years, as the world economy heads for a depression.

Workers are now facing a jobs "bloodbath", with unemployment predicted to rise to over 5 million, according to the manufacturing trade group, Make UK.

Tens of thousands have already lost their jobs just in the last few weeks. This will turn into a flood when the furlough scheme – covering the wages of more than nine million workers – comes to an end in October.

The Office for Budget Responsibility estimates that unemployment will reach at least 12% by the end of the year. It is clear that

millions will face the dole queue, especially young people.

On top of this, a recent analysis by the Resolution Foundation has found that UK households are seeing the largest fall in living standards since the 1970s. Despite the furlough programme propping up pay, real wages have fallen by 4.5% since the coronavirus began.

So much for the 'V-shaped' recovery that was being touted.

British capitalism is heading directly for the rocks. The world crisis – combined with the Brexit debacle due by the end of the year – will be a double whammy.

Second wave

Desperate to re-open the economy from the lockdown, the Tory government, these chancers, are prepared to risk everything. They are not interested in the danger to workers' lives. Despite, with transmission rates still stubbornly high, they want everyone back to work.

Britain is heading for a second wave, possibly in the winter months – the worst possible time. But Johnson hopes everything will be back to 'normal' by Christmas, and has downplayed the need for further measures.

The budget deficit is likely to rise to £350 billion, an eye-watering figure. With public finances collapsing, the ruling class will attempt to impose the burden onto the backs of the working class. They are preparing a massive offensive against the working class, with massive cuts, job losses and attacks on wages and conditions. This means all-out class war, posing a threat to all the gains of the past.

No opposition

However, the Labour Party frontbench under Starmer are afraid of their own shadow. The Labour leaders want to be a 'responsible' opposition. There is more life on a fishmonger's slab! Unfortunately, the left of the Labour Party failed to introduce mandatory reselection when they had the chance. Now we are paying the price for this.

There will now be a swing to the industrial front, where all hell is going to break loose as the crisis impacts on ordinary working people. Class struggle will be on the order of the day, as consciousness is transformed on the basis of these events.

This will demand decisive leadership. This cannot be "business as usual." The choice is clear: either we bow down before the attacks of capitalism; or we fight to get rid of it. There is no middle road.

What we have entered is a new world depression, worse than in the 1930s. This dog-eat-dog system of big business has reached its limits. A return to the 'good old days' is ruled out.

We say to hell with this system of capitalist ruin, which only offers permanent crises for working people. It is time the trade union leaders got off their knees and mobilised workers to put an end to this rotten system once and for all. That means the adoption of a bold socialist programme to take over the giant corporations and banks, under workers' control and management, and plan the economy in the interests of working people.

Marxism has a key role to play in this struggle. We appeal to you to help us build the forces of Marxism in PCS and the wider labour movement. ■

INTERVIEW WITH PCS PRESIDENT FRAN HEATHCOTE

“There can be no going back”



As the coronavirus pandemic continues to disrupt society as never before, considerable pressure has fallen on public sector workers. Many are having to operate under difficult conditions in order to ensure essential services continue to operate.

Fran Heathcote is the National President of the main civil service trade union, PCS. She was the DWP group president for seven years, and is the chair of the Northern Regional Committee. Fran spoke to us about the challenges facing the union at the present time.

The COVID-19 pandemic is the biggest issue facing workers at present, particularly key workers, how has PCS responded?

Well, like the rest of the world, we've had to adapt the way we do everything. Nothing has been 'business as usual'. The NEC is meeting fortnightly (now by Zoom) and we're in negotiations with the employer virtually daily.

The pressure on our members, often the 'unsung heroes', has been tremendous. Whole departments have been designated key workers, and the demands on our reps have been huge.

There's an unprecedented interest in everything PCS puts out right now so we are literally churning out information and guidance to deal with all of the issues.

Everyone has responded really well. We've set up a dedicated coronavirus response unit to support members. Like many others, we need to ensure that we keep our members safe, and that means keeping them at home wherever possible. But as socialists, we recognise the need to continue

One thing is certain, it must not be our members that pay the price, either through a loss of life or a return to harsh austerity. This crisis has shown who provides the really essential services in society.

to deliver services to the most vulnerable, and those who've lost their income.

One thing is for sure, when this is over, there can be no going back.

The Tories say now is not the time to raise issues like pay etc. What does PCS say?

We are already seeing signs of the government raising the spectre of the cost to business versus the loss of life. A hint here and there about who is going to pay for all of this.

One thing is certain, it must not be our members that pay the price, either through a loss of life or a return to harsh austerity. This crisis has shown who provides the really essential services in society, who the real key workers are, and we're hearing lots of warm words of praise.

I saw a message from the Cabinet Office Secretary to all civil servants praising them for their work in the lockdown. Whilst that is great, we cannot have people clapping for essential workers, whilst continuing to impose cuts and austerity on those same people as soon as the worst is over.

We placed a set of interim demands on the government, in terms of pay, pensions, redundancy, office closures and job cuts, to apply pressure on the government, prior to detailed negotiations taking place on our full demands. They didn't engage over those, beyond a minor concession in respect of the redundancy scheme, and we have since

launched our pay campaign, demanding 10%, whilst continuing to negotiate over pensions.

What key demands will PCS highlight in light of the experience of the pandemic for your civil service and outsourced members?

What has been shown throughout the pandemic is how much people need our services. Years of under-resourcing and under-staffing has left some of the biggest departments, like DWP, wholly unable to cope.

With the HMRC dealing with furloughed cases, and DWP picking up the huge number of new claims to Universal Credit, what has been abundantly clear is that the government's previous plans for office closures and job cuts are not sustainable.

They have now identified that they need tens of thousands more staff to cope with the workload, and the continued economic downturn which will surely follow this crisis. Their previous decisions not to invest in adequate IT are really coming back to bite them now. DWP are now looking at reopening previously 'mothballed offices', as they recognise now that they need more estate not less.

So of course we will want to talk to them about our pay, and getting a proper pay rise that recognises the worth of our members, but there are those other key issues that

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need addressing now too.

In terms of our outsourced workers, whilst we have reached some good agreements for them throughout the crisis, we recently launched our 'No Going Back' campaign. This is to ensure that gains made – such as sick pay from day one and the civil service agreement to pay workers 100% pay whilst out of the workplace – must be retained after the COVID pandemic.

Ultimately, the best way of achieving this is to bring the work back in-house.

How has PCS developed its organising strategy in response to the pandemic?

With approximately 80% of the civil service not currently in the workplace, we have had to quickly adapt our strategy to embrace a lot of digital working.

We proactively contacted over 7,000 reps at the start of lockdown to check on them, make sure they were ok, that their details are up to date, and find out how they have been keeping in touch with their members.

That was incredibly well-received, and several hundred of them volunteered to work with PCS staff to ring up all members for whom we have a number; to find out what support they need from their union and how we can get them engaged.

We've seen a sharp increase in PCS membership throughout the pandemic. We have recruited hundreds of new PCS

Advocates who have come forward to say they want to be part of our campaigns so that will strengthen our organisation too.

So it's exciting at the moment, with lots of new stuff on the horizon. But I think we're all looking forward to a time when we can engage face-to-face again in a way that's safe for everyone.

PCS Left Unity is one of the most effective broad lefts in the movement, what role can it play to resist the Tories and how can it help build unity across the trade union left?

PCS Left Unity (LU) is one of the things I am most proud of within PCS. I have been the National Organiser since about 2004 now and it has been the organisation behind the PCS leadership throughout that period and before it.

Groupings within LU have come and gone throughout that time, but it has continued to be the socialist rank and file organisation within PCS, that defeated the right-wing moderates over 20 years ago, and has been the basis of developing a fighting, democratic union that is highly respected across the movement.

It's a fairly 'broad church', and obviously there has been some upheaval within PCS over the last couple of years, but Left Unity continues to flourish and grow despite all of that, which I think is really integral to our union's successes.

I think at the moment, following the

change in Labour leadership, many are looking for answers in terms of where we go next. One of the things the Left Unity led leadership of PCS were successful in doing before the general election was working with shadow ministers, through our PCS parliamentary group, and our campaign activity to help shape the manifesto.

We were lucky enough to have John McDonnell as our parliamentary group chair, followed by Chris Stephens of the SNP, so we built some strong relationships there.

Closer to home for me in the North East are MPs like Ian Lavery and someone now doing excellent work within the People's Assembly, Laura Pidcock. I think there is a lot of potential for building confidence across the left for the huge challenges that lie ahead.

Our ethos has always been 'Campaigning works, action gets results' and we have always pursued the strategy of linking up and building united campaign activity wherever possible.

As ever, we reach out to all of those who want to work together to build our campaigns and Left Unity has a key role to play in all of that. It's a platform we built on quite successfully, organising United Left meetings around the TUC, for example, or linking up across the public sector in the pensions campaign of 2011, where we got a real glimpse of what is possible when unions act together. ■

NEW IN DEFENCE OF MARXISM MAGAZINE

The new issue of *In Defence of Marxism* - our magazine of Marxist theory - is coming out at a critical time. As the editorial notes: "There are moments in history that can be considered decisive. We are now living through such a turning point."

This publication aims to provide a clear and in-depth analysis of struggles and debates - past and present - and show how the ideas and methods of Marxism can point the way forward.

Issue 30 contains articles that do just that. It should be read by all workers and youth seeking to not just understand society, but change it.

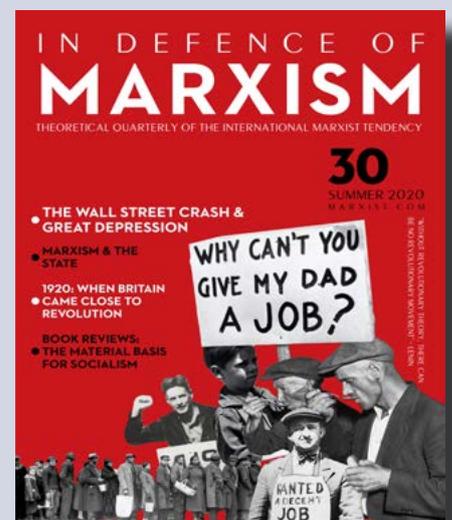
In this issue, James Kilby looks back at the 1929 Wall Street Crash and the Great Depression which followed it in the 1930s. He considers the real

causes of what happened, and outlines how this impacted on the class struggle.

Rob Sewell describes the mighty events of the year 1920 in Britain when workers struck in solidarity with the Russian Revolution, and the question of Bolshevism itself was being raised by active layers of the class.

Recent events have once again raised the key question of the state - what is it and who does it serve? Alan Woods, in the first of a two-part article, explains how Marxists approach this issue.

Finally, Adam Booth reviews three very different books on the material basis for socialism and what a socialist society might look like. What can we learn from these books and how can Marxism provide the clarity required to draw the correct conclusions?



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FIGHTING THE THREAT OF REDUNDANCIES AT HMRC

A HMRC PCS Workplace Rep

Politicians of every hue were quick to praise the vital and necessary work of PCS members, particularly those in HMRC who kept working and providing vital public services during the recent COVID-19 emergency. Amongst other things they helped to set up and operate the government furlough scheme in the space of weeks. This provided essential financial support to millions of people temporarily unable to work as a result of the crisis.

And what do we get in return for this great effort? We receive, no less, government threats to close offices and carry through redundancies!

This is nothing short of a kick in the teeth. But what should we expect from a government of the rich, for the rich, by the rich?

It is a disgrace and must be opposed all along the line by the union.

Getting away with murder

With the economy in freefall, it is estimated that the government's budget deficit will reach an eye watering £350bn, some say much higher.

However, it is the giant corporations and the rich -- the Tories' friends -- who do not pay their taxes and are getting away with murder. Let an enlarged HMRC tackle this public scandal. Give the HMRC the resources and powers to chase down this money from tax avoidance and evasion.

But the Tories, who represent the rich and powerful, are certainly not interested in this. They are behind this cover-up, with their off-shore accounts in the Cayman islands and elsewhere.

Workers in HMRC are also responsible for other things, such as enforcement of the National Minimum Wage, and other employment compliance matters.

The problem is they are all things that the Tories are not interested in. They stand for "light touch" regulation and the

Reduced capacity of HRMC caused by cuts to staff allows these scandals to flourish. Based on current activity rates, an employer is likely to be subjected to a HMRC minimum wage rate check once every 500 years... the lack of enforcement allows the most exploitative capitalists to flourish and push their more compliant competition out of the marketplace.

wonders of the "free market". Let us not forget, they opposed the introduction of the minimum wage.

They are certainly not interested in getting in the way of the bosses maximising their profits at the expense of the working class.

Leicester's 'dark factories'

Today, we have the scandal of garment workers in Leicester. Here, sweatshop labour and outrageous working conditions are still endemic in the rag trade, as was exposed in a report in the *Financial Times*: "Leicester's dark factories show up a Diseased System" (*FT*, 3.7.20). This outrage has continued largely without challenge, and has been going on for decades, where workers work in small units in the shells of old buildings. This has prompted a retired tax worker and former PCS activist to comment that:

"HMRC took responsibility for the rag trade, it set up a special unit in the 80s. It was always a problem area, but the unit kept them on their toes. The National Minimum Wage came in and after a battle, the council, my union, and hosiery unions persuaded HMRC to set up a policing body in Leicester. Hundreds of cases arose with workers getting thousands in back pay."

"Then five years ago HMRC dismantled the Rag Trade Unit, and four years ago moved the NMW section to Nottingham. With the shutting of the public counters,

leads dried up. The HSE was centralised in Nottingham some years ago. So all the methods of investigation have been slashed."

Resources were deliberately taken away from hunting down predatory businesses, including high-street brands like New Look and River Island, as well as Boohoo and Missguided. These capitalists have been making billions on the back of poor exploited workers, 99% of whom are paid less than the minimum wage.

"As ever with illegality, pinning down its scale is tough," explained the *Financial Times*. "It has got worse. Because nothing has happened, people have seen they can get away with breaking the law," explained Mick Cheema, general manager, Basic Premier.

Reduced capacity of HRMC caused by cuts to staff allows these scandals to flourish. Based on current activity rates, an employer is likely to be subjected to a HMRC minimum wage rate check once every 500 years. As we have seen in the Leicester rag trade, the lack of enforcement allows the most exploitative capitalists to flourish and push their more compliant competition out of the marketplace.

So whilst the government publicly praise HMRC workers, the Department responsible for this work have been ploughing ahead with the misnamed 'Building our

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Future' (BOF) project. This is designed to close hundreds of local tax offices, and centralise the work around big city centre hubs and increased online digital service provision.

Thousands of jobs lost

Scandalously, this has already resulted in thousands of jobs lost. These are mainly in small localities where there are limited redeployment options and where the impact locally is proportionately greater. Many of these areas continue to see their towns and localities massively impacted by the economic crisis.

The latest twist came on 25 June, when HMRC issued voluntary redundancy offers to around 2,000 HMRC staff, based in 26 sites which are due to close in 2020 through to March 2021.

The union has demanded that HMRC

pause its redundancy exercise, following months of protracted discussions with the union's HMRC Group representatives. Lord Agnew, the Cabinet Office and Treasury minister, told PCS that redundancies would not proceed unless they were "necessary and unavoidable".

Well, as far as the union is concerned, they are unnecessary and avoidable.

As Mark Sewotka explained:

"The chancellor acknowledged that people are anxious about losing their jobs. Unfortunately that applies to our members in HMRC, the very staff responsible for delivering the job retention scheme, who are now faced with the prospect of 2,000 redundancies. No worker who has played such a vital role in supporting people across our country, should be faced with the prospect of losing their job."

Recruitment is currently being planned in other departments, such as the Department for Work and Pensions. But without

a pause in the process, HMRC's timetable might mean that this recruitment comes too late for the redeployment of Revenue and Customs staff.

If the government rejects this "pause", then the union should consider balloting the members for strike action over these job losses.

These redundancies in HMRC are simply the thin end of the wedge. The capitalist crisis will mean more government attacks on public sector workers as they attempt to make the working class pay. Faced with this, a "united, coordinated campaign" will be essential, involving other public sector unions. The united trade union action over pensions in 2011 showed the potential. We must build on this to defend jobs across the board.

PCS should take the initiative to establish a Public Sector Alliance, starting with the left unions, as the cutting edge to a concerted fightback. ■

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Wellred Books is the publishing house and worldwide bookshop of the International Marxist Tendency, which is actively building revolutionary forces in over 30 countries around the world.

As Lenin famously decried, "Without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement."

A number of Marxist classics have been published by Wellred Books, including our well-known collection of The Classics of Marxism, which includes 'The Communist Manifesto' and Lenin's 'The State and Revolution'. We also publish some works which are not widely available in new print editions, such as Engels' Anti-Duhring. We are looking to publish many more classics as our resources continue to grow.

In addition to Marxist classics, Wellred Books publishes dozens of new Marxist titles, for sale almost exclusively on this site. The



most famous of these is Reason in Revolt by Alan Woods and Ted Grant, which was held in high esteem by Venezuela's revolutionary leader Hugo Chavez.

As well as books we publish ourselves, at Wellred Books we offer an array of left literature on all sorts of topics - from Marx's Capital to the speeches of Touissant L'Ouverture to a study of NHS privatisation - at very reasonable prices.

Events around the world are moving ever more quickly, as the greatest crisis in the history of capitalism becomes even deeper and prospects for world revolution continue to grow. In order for humanity to move forward, the need for an understanding of the global situation has never been greater, and we firmly believe that this understanding can be reached through the ideas of Marxism. Our aim is to help as many as possible to reach a clear understanding of revolutionary ideas by increasing our production of Marxist writings to keep pace with events

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WORKERS' FRUSTRATION SPREADS IN DVLA

WE NEED TO HOLD MANAGEMENT TO ACCOUNT!

A DVLA worker

The Covid-19 pandemic had shaken the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency from top to bottom. Constant delays and incompetence of management put lives at risk. Eventually, and only as a result of intense pressure from workers, the bosses at the DVLA and the Department for Transport (DfT) have closed most DVLA services. But with a looming mass return to work, there are outstanding issues and many workers are feeling angry.

There are around 6,000 workers currently employed in Swansea's DVLA offices. It is one of the UK's biggest service organisations, serving 45 million customers, processing hundreds of thousands of applications every week and bringing in £6 billion in revenue every year.

The offices, I am proud to say, are also home to one of the single largest trade union branches of PCS in the UK, with thousands of members. It is therefore a very important workplace. I will attempt to outline the current mood and situation in this key branch.

The pandemic effect

The management had been a farce from day one of the pandemic. They were completely careless, and put services and profits above our lives.

As most workplaces began practising 'working from home', concerns grew around what would happen with the DVLA. It was clear that a lot of our services could be modified. For example, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA), a sister organisation, extended its MOT deadlines by six months. Equivalent action could have easily been taken in all DVLA departments. But weeks went on and nothing happened.

Eventually, a big chunk of the workforce was sent home for a 14-day period of self-isolation in March. But a large number of workers were still in work. Many hundreds of workers continued to work in close proximity, with hand sanitiser regularly lacking. All this, while the number of cases and deaths in the UK, including in Wales, began to grow dramatically.

As the DVSA was allowed to close its premises due to the virus, the question was simple: Why couldn't we do the same?

The mood of anxiety was growing by the day. One worker told *Wales Online*:



The DVLA bosses do not care about their staff, the union is not taking action... how many people have to die for you to do a complete lock down or let people with vulnerable families isolate long term?

"People who suffer with mental health problems have to go in, I found a colleague crying on the floor having an anxiety attack today after she was offered unpaid leave if she wants to go home".

There were workers who have vulnerable families, a partner with an autoimmune disease, or an elderly parent. You name it, hundreds of lives were being put at real risk every day. One case could spread here like wildfire.

Workers were very conscious that lives were being placed in danger. And this anxiety was showing on the shop floor. Under pressure, managers sent hundreds of workers home, starting with those who live with people in vulnerable groups. "It is too risky for you to come in," workers were told. But only hours later, all these workers were called back in. Despite the initial warnings, the HR department decided on a U-turn and brought all these people back to work.

One worker aptly described the mood on Twitter: "The DVLA bosses do not care about their staff, the union is not taking action... Let me ask you this, how many people have to die for you to do a complete lock down or let people with vulnerable

families isolate long term?...Your staff are scared for their lives."

You could see this on people's faces. And who could blame them? One worker's partner spoke to *Wales Online*, saying that: "My partner has been told that she should return to DVLA to work or take unpaid leave, even though she has three members of her household in the vulnerable group. The office cleanliness is below par, and the toilets are unclean. Hand sanitiser dispensers are fitted, however, no fluids."

Threat of a walkout

Days passed, and pressure grew to unimaginable levels. There was open talk of strike action. If things had continued like this, then a walkout would have been on the cards, as has been seen in other workplaces. The bosses in HR and at the DfT felt the heat. And in the end, they closed down most of the DVLA services. Only a bare minimum amount of staff remained on site.

It took the pressure from below and the real threat of a walkout to bring the management to their senses. It was not

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done willingly. It is clear that we aren't "all in this together".

It reveals that the bosses are completely incapable of thinking about the real interests of their workers. It is therefore essential that we do not let our guard down.

If this is how they treated us during a deadly pandemic, you can be sure they will do the same with the incoming onslaught of cuts and austerity. And indeed, the recent Tory pay freeze announcement sets the tone for the kind of future they're preparing for us.

The fallout of Coronavirus

Under lockdown, there was a significantly reduced amount of staff on site. Unnecessary delays were created. This was not helped by resources wasted on the continued sale of private number plates or enforcement cases. Despite impressive hard work, an enormous backlog developed dating back to March in some cases. There was no plan for dealing with this.

This means an enormous strain, not just on those workers who process the applications, but also on the completely overstretched Contact Centre, where DVLA staff take constant calls and face an increasing torrent of abuse from customers.

With a "swift" response only five

months after the start of the pandemic, the management have come up with a plan. They are extending working hours and introducing Saturday and Sunday shifts on a voluntary basis. Workers in danger groups will be brought back in and cramped into the offices.

DVLA workers are facing workloads on an unseen scale. But Tory Chancellor Rishi Sunak had recently announced a "pay rise" for public sector workers. So what does it mean for us?

Hundreds of frontline DVLA workers risked their lives and continued to work in the offices throughout the pandemic. Thousands will be working overtime to clear up this mess created by HR mismanagement. But it's not us that will be getting even a penny increase.

It is the higher managers who worked from home the minute everything began to kick off - it is they who will be getting pay rises. This is a slap in the face. When I mentioned this to my colleagues they couldn't believe it. Now is the time for PCS to go on the offensive. The petition for a pay increase will find mass support in DVLA, if a fighting campaign is conducted.

Just like the DVSA extended its MOTs, we can put similar emergency measures in place to protect both DVLA customers and staff who are made to work on these unnecessary cases. The mass return to work, including those who live with people in danger groups is

premature and will put lives at risk.

There is plenty of anger around. The DVLA PCS branch had blocked members from commenting or posting on its Facebook group, saying that their grievances can make them a target to hostile managers and disciplinary measures. This is understandable. But this anger cannot be swept under the carpet. We must seize the moment. We need a means for members to communicate with each other and organise a fight back. The pay petition must be the beginning of a mass campaign, in which the DVLA workers will play a key role.

More importantly, we urge all members to get active in the union. This crisis has brought home to many just how important the union is. Nobody else is going to protect us except ourselves organised through our union. To maximise involvement, we should organise online meetings for PCS members to discuss the situation, get information, and see what steps to take. The pay campaign is a fantastic opportunity to facilitate this.

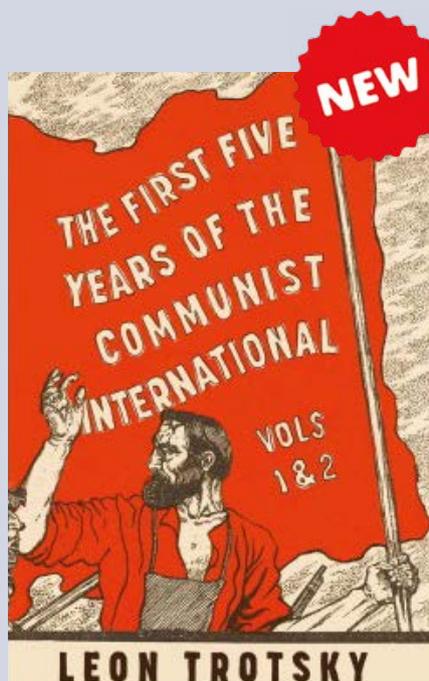
There will be further struggles confronting us very soon. Our wages, pensions and working conditions will be under attack. We need to involve and organise as many workers as possible to defend our pay and conditions. Make the bosses pay for the coronavirus crisis, not our members! ■

LEON TROTSKY'S "THE FIRST FIVE YEARS OF THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL"

In its early years, the Communist International was the general staff of the world revolution. Its congresses represent the highest peak achieved to date by the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat. Here was a mass international organisation of the working class, led by the leaders of the first successful proletarian revolution, that truly threatened the future of capitalism itself.

Leon Trotsky, along with Lenin, was pivotal in setting up the Communist International and that is reflected in this new edition of *The First Five Years Of The Communist International*, first published in Moscow in 1924.

This book contains all of the key speeches, reports and articles that Trotsky wrote for the International at this time. It is a treasure trove of Marxist strategy and tactics, and the method of analysing the class struggle through its various stages.



The 2 volumes of this work are now republished by Wellred Books together as a single book with a new introduction by Fred Weston, editor of Marxist.com, where he outlines some of the key debates and decisions as well as a summary of the development of the International during this critical period.

Today, we are faced with the same problem Trotsky outlined in 1924: there is no mass international organisation of the working class with a clear understanding of the task at hand. Therefore this new book is not just of historical interest but should be read as a guide to action for all seeking a revolutionary way forward.

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Image: Steve Eason/flickr.com

CULTURE WORKERS ORGANISE AGAINST CUTS

Joe Russell, London

The Southbank Centre in London, Europe's largest centre for the arts, has announced that it will not be reopening until April 2021. As a result, management will be making 356 redundancies out of a total of 577 staff members. This is over 50% of Southbank workers, including almost the entirety of the front of house staff.

Those keeping their jobs are those on the highest pay in positions of management. This shows clearly what the priorities are for those at the top.

The full extent of the capitalist crisis is yet to be felt. Due to months of lockdown and billions in state spending, the economy has so far largely been on pause, suspended in mid-air. Now that businesses are beginning to trade again, however, their financial life-support is being withdrawn – and they are looking down into an abyss.

As we have reported previously, the arts and culture sector is being hit particularly hard by the pandemic. The government has provided some emergency funding for the arts, but nowhere near enough. The amounts pledged – around £1.6 billion spread across the entire industry – are peanuts compared to the scale of the problem; or relative to the lavish sums used to bail out big business.

Militancy

The National Theatre, next door to the Southbank Centre, has also announced 400 redundancies to staff on casual contracts.

Workers from both institutions held a joint demonstration against the redundancies on Saturday 1st August on the Southbank, organised by the PCS union.

200 workers at the Southbank Centre are unionised with PCS, along with another 200 in Unite. Members from both unions are working together on the campaign.

Around 200 workers were present at the demonstration. There were several speakers addressing the crowd. The mood of the speeches was one of anger and militancy. But none of the workers present seemed remotely surprised by their mistreatment. Years of casualised contracts, poor working conditions, and bad management have hardened the mood and attitude amongst workers.

One speaker used his time on the megaphone very well to raise important class questions with the crowd. He referred to the working class and our need for unity. "By working class," he stated, "I don't mean the stereotypes we are given by the media, but those of us who sell our labour."

Unity

Socialist Appeal supporters approached this speaker for an interview. The comrade explained that the situation being faced by the workers at the Southbank Centre and the National Theatre is not unique.

The activist also told us that workplace reps from different unions and different cultural institutions have been building a network across London. The aim is for workers to utilise their full strength across the sector, instead of holding isolated strikes and demonstrations.

"We thought instead of founding another union, i.e. the culture workers' union, the thing to do was to hear that militancy where it was happening. And we started... we contacted the rep we knew on Twitter, and said do you want to hang out for a bit? And we built like that over time and we built through educational events... And then COVID hit us..."

"As a group, we were about two things, really. One was to support each other's protests and strikes. And the second was the face-to-face education stuff, which obviously fell off. We had a bit of a hiatus, honestly. But yeah, now we're back. Although it's just the shop stewards at the moment."

Organisation

The next major development is that workers at the Tate art galleries will be balloting for strike action. As our interviewee informed us:

"Tate have got their ballot coming back on Monday, and are quite optimistic about it. Hoping for a strike, a good strike in the second half of the month..."

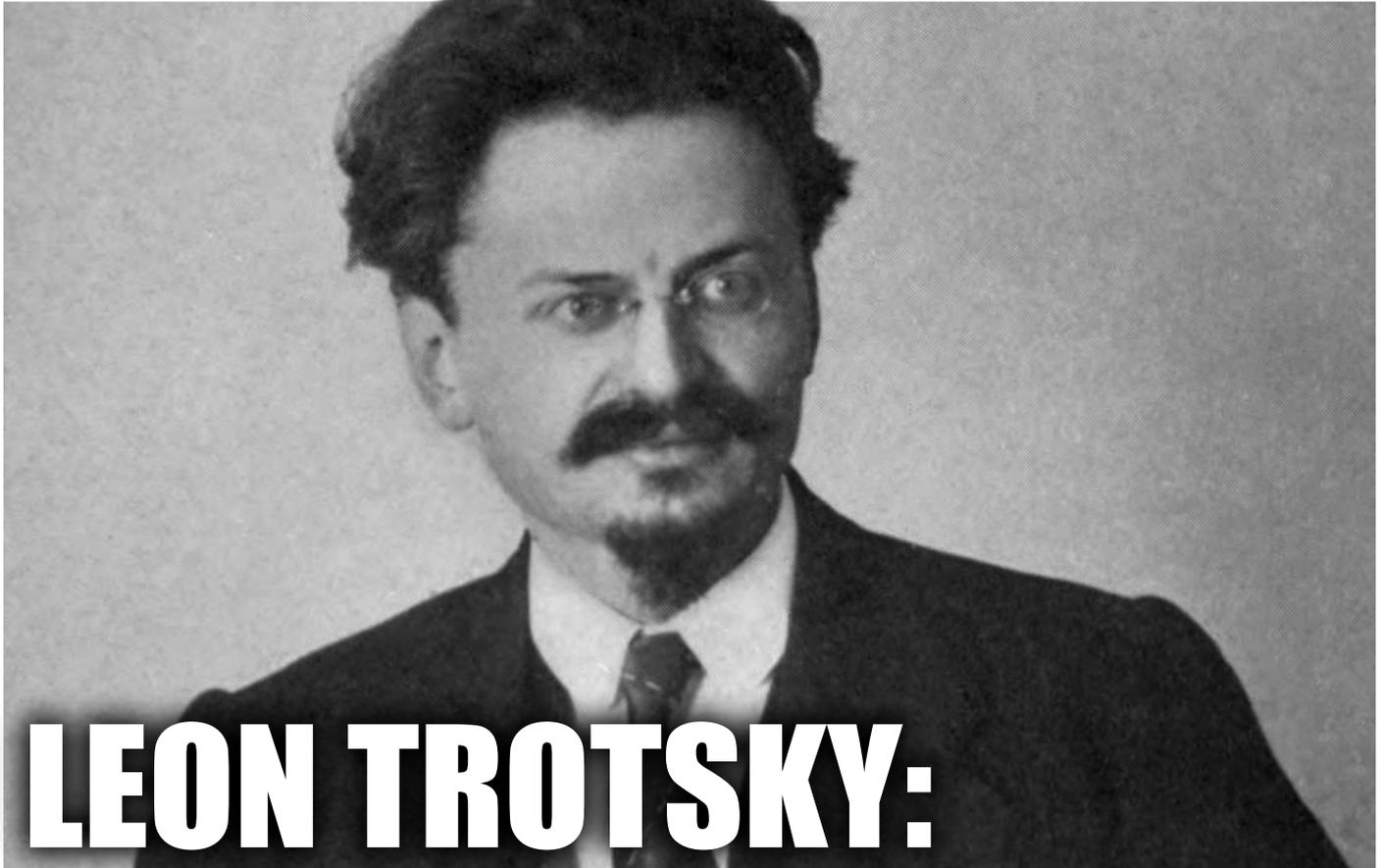
"And then, when it comes to workers, they're organised. They are actually mounting a campaign against the job losses. They haven't got long – I think it's about a month in the case of the Tate – before people start losing their jobs."

"But my thinking is that if enough pressure can be put on the board through events like this, through the media, etc., the management board will either fund the money from their own budget, or get more from the state."

What is clear from the developing situation is that workers are getting organised. The arts sector is beginning to demonstrate to workers the depth of the economic crisis and the ruthlessness of the bosses.

As workers, we can only rely on ourselves. And our only defence is our organisation and our unity, which is why being a trade union member is so important.

The task ahead is to go from defensive strikes and demonstrations onto an offensive against the bosses – and to link these struggles into a fight for socialist policies that will make the capitalists, not workers, pay for this crisis. ■



LEON TROTSKY:

DISCUSSION WITH A CIO TRADE UNION OFFICIAL

We republish here an extremely interesting discussion between Leon Trotsky and Abraham Plotkin, Midwest representative of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), held at Trotsky's home in Mexico in 1938.

Trotsky's insights on the nature of the trade unions are strikingly relevant, as relevant today as they were in the stormy years before World War II, as we enter into a new world crisis.

CIO Official: Our union's policies are aimed at preventing complete unemployment. We've got the work spread out among all the members of the union with no reduction in the hourly rate of pay.

Trotsky: And what percentage of their former total wages do your workers now get?

CIO Official: About 40 percent.

Trotsky: Why that's monstrous! You've won a sliding scale of working hours with no change in the hourly rate of pay? But that only means that the full burden of unemployment falls with all its weight on the workers themselves. You free the bourgeoisie from the need of spending its resources on the unemployed by having each worker's sacrifice three-fifths of his total wages.

CIO Official: There's a grain of truth in that. But what can be done?

Trotsky: Not a grain, but the whole truth! American capitalism is sick with a chronic and incurable disease. Can you console your workers with the hope that the present crisis will have a transitory character and that a new era of prosperity will open in the near future?

CIO Official: Personally, I don't allow myself such illusions. Many in our circles understand that capitalism has entered an era of decline.

Trotsky: But of course this means that tomorrow your workers will get 30 percent of their former wages; the day after, 25 percent; and so forth. Episodic improvements, it is true, are possible, even inevitable; but the overall curve is toward decline, degradation, impoverishment. Marx and Engels predicted this even in the Communist Manifesto. What is the program of your union and the CIO as a whole?

CIO Official: Unfortunately, you don't know the psychology of the American workers. They are not used to thinking about the future. They are interested in only one thing: what can be done now, immediately. Among the leaders of the trade union movement there are, of course, those who clearly take

into account the dangers that threaten. But they can't change the psychology of the masses all at once. The habits, traditions, and views of the American workers tie them down and limit what they can do. All this can't be changed in a day.

Trotsky: Are you sure that history will provide you with the years enough in which to prepare? The crisis of American capitalism has "American" tempos and proportions. A sturdy organism that has not known sickness before begins to deteriorate very rapidly at a certain point. The disintegration of capitalism means, at the same time, a direct and immediate threat to democracy, without which the trade unions cannot exist. Do you think, for example, that Mayor Hague is just an accident?

CIO Official: Oh no, I don't think so at all. I have had quite a few meetings in the recent period with trade union official on this subject. My opinion is that in every state we already have—under one banner or another—a ready-made reactionary organization that can become a support for fascism on the national level. We don't have to wait fifteen or twenty years. Fascism can conquer among us in three or four.

Trotsky: In that case what is—?

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CIO Official: Our programme? I understand your question. It is a difficult situation; some major steps are necessary. But I don't see the necessary forces or necessary leaders for this.

Trotsky: Then does that mean capitulation without a fight?

CIO Official: It's a difficult situation. I have to admit that the majority of union activists don't see, or don't want to see, the danger. Our unions, as you know, have had an extraordinary growth in a short time. It's natural for the CIO chiefs to have a honeymoon psychology. They are inclined to view difficulties lightly. The government not only has them figured out, but even plays with them. They are not used to this from past experience. It's natural that their heads spin a little. This pleasant dizziness is not conducive to critical thinking. They are tasting the joys of today without worrying about tomorrow.

Trotsky: Well said! On this I agree with you completely. But the success of the CIO is temporary. It is merely a symptom of the fact that the working class of the United States has begun to move, has broken out of its routine, is hunting for new ways to save itself from the threatening abyss. If your unions do not find new ways, they will be ground to dust. Hague is already stronger than Lewis; because Hague, despite his limited situation, knows exactly what he wants, while Lewis doesn't. Things may end up with your chiefs waking from their "pleasant dizziness" to find themselves—in concentration camps.

CIO Official: Unfortunately, the past history of the United States with its unlimited opportunities, its individualism, has not taught our workers to think socially. It's enough to tell you that at best 15 percent of the organized workers come to union meetings. That's something to think about.

Trotsky: But perhaps the reason for the absenteeism of 85 percent is that the speakers have nothing to say to the ranks?

CIO Official: Hmm. That's true to a certain extent. The economic situation is such that we are forced to hold back the workers, to put brakes on the movement, to retreat. This is not to the workers' liking, of course.

Trotsky: Here we have the heart of the matter. It is not the ranks who are to blame but the leaders. In the classical epoch of capitalism the trade unions also got into difficult situations during crises and were forced to retreat, lost part of their membership, spent their reserve funds. But then there was at least the assurance that the next upturn would allow the losses to be made up, and more besides. Today there

isn't the slightest hope for such a thing. The unions will go down step by step. Your organization, the CIO, may collapse as quickly as it arose.

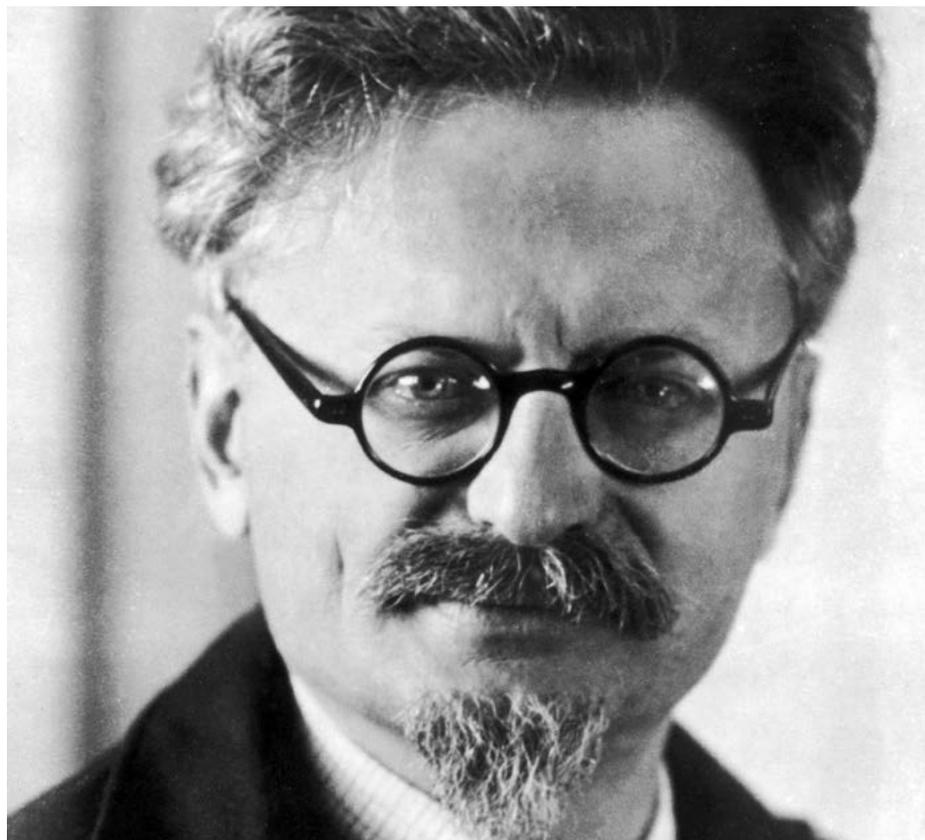
CIO Official: What can be done?

Trotsky: Above all, one must tell the masses what's what. It's inadmissible to play hide-and-seek. You, of course, know the American workers better than I. Nevertheless, let me assure you that you are looking at them through old eyeglasses.

The masses are immeasurably better, more daring and resolute than the leaders. The very fact of the rapid rise of the

immeasurably more firmly, consistently, daringly, than do the leaders of the proletariat—these skeptics, routinists, bureaucrats, who are smothering the fighting spirit of the masses. It is from this that the danger grows of a victory for fascism, even in a very short time.

The workers don't come to your meetings because they instinctively feel the insufficiency, the lack of substance, the lifelessness, the outright falsity of your programme. The trade union leaders give out platitudes at the very moment when every worker senses catastrophe overhead. One must find the language that corresponds to



CIO shows that the American worker has changed radically under the impact of the terrible economic jolts of the postwar period, especially of the past decade. When you showed a little initiative in building more combative unions, the workers immediately responded and gave you extraordinary, unprecedented support. You have no right to complain about the masses.

And what about the so-called sit-down strikes? It wasn't the leaders who thought them up, but the workers themselves. Isn't this an unmistakable sign that the American workers are ready to go over to more decisive methods of combat? Mayor Hague is a direct product of sit-down strikes.

Unfortunately, no one in the top layer of the trade unions has yet dared to deduce from the sharpening of the social struggle such daring conclusions as capitalist reaction has. This is the key to the situation.

The leaders of capital think and act

the real conditions of decaying capitalism and not to bureaucratic illusions.

CIO Official: I have already said that I see no leaders. There are separate groups, sects, but I see no one who could unite the worker masses, even if I agree with you that the masses are ready for struggle.

Trotsky: The problem is not leaders, but programme. The correct program not only arouses and consolidates the masses, but also trains the leaders.

CIO Official: What do you consider a correct programme?

Trotsky: You know that I am a Marxist; more precisely, a Bolshevik.

My program has a very short and simple name: socialist revolution. But I don't ask that the leaders of the union movement

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immediately adopt the program of the Fourth International. What I do ask is that they draw conclusions from their work, from their own situation; that for themselves and for the masses they answer just these two questions: 1) How to save the CIO from bankruptcy and destruction? 2) How to save the United States from fascism?

CIO Official: What would you yourself do in the United States today if you were a trade union organizer?

Trotsky: First of all, the trade unions should stand the question of unemployment and wages on its head. The sliding scale of hours, such as you have, is correct: everyone should have work. But the sliding scale of hours should be supplemented by a sliding scale of wages. The working class cannot permit a continuous lowering of its living standards, for this would be equivalent to the destruction of human culture. The highest weekly pay rates on the eve of the 1929 crisis must be taken as a point of departure. The mighty productive forces created by the workers have not disappeared nor been destroyed; they are at hand. Those who own and control these productive forces are responsible for unemployment. The workers know how to work and want to work. The work should be divided up among all the workers. The weekly pay for each worker should be no less than the maximum attained in the past. Such is the natural, the necessary, the unpostponable demand of the trade unions. Otherwise they will be swept away like trash by historical developments.

CIO Official: Is this programme realizable? It means the certain ruin of the capitalists. This very program might hasten the growth of fascism.

Trotsky: Of course this programme means struggle and not prostration. The trade unions have two possibilities: either to maneuver, tack back and forth, retreat, close their eyes, and capitulate bit by bit in order not to “anger” the owners and “provoke” reaction. It was by this road that the German and Austrian Social Democrats and trade union officials tried to save themselves from fascism. The result is known to you: they cut their own throats. The other road is to understand the inexorable character of the present social crisis and to lead the masses to the offensive....

CIO Official: But what is the further perspective? Where will such methods of struggle get the trade unions in the final analysis?

Trotsky: It is obvious that the sliding scale and workers' self-defense are not sufficient. These are just the first steps, necessary in

order to protect the workers from death by starvation or the fascists' knives. These are urgent and necessary means of self-defense. But by themselves they will not resolve the problem. The basic task consists in laying the foundation for a better economic system, for a more just, rational, and decent utilization of the productive forces in the interests of all the people.

This can't be attained by the ordinary, “normal,” routine methods of the trade unions. You cannot disagree with this,

labour party will have to be postponed another four year.

Trotsky: There precisely is the tragedy resulting from the fact that Messrs. Leaders look to those above them instead of those below. The coming war, the decay of American capitalism, the growth of unemployment and poverty, all these basic processes, which directly determine the fate of dozens and hundreds of millions of people, do not depend on the

This means organising the entire national economy according to a single national plan whose aim is not the profit of a small bunch of exploiters but the material and spiritual interests of a population of 130 million.

for in the conditions of capitalist decline isolated unions turn out to be incapable of halting even the further deterioration of the workers' conditions. More decisive and deep-going methods are necessary. The bourgeoisie, who hold sway over the means of production and who have state power, have brought the economy to a state of total and hopeless disarray. It is necessary to declare the bourgeoisie incompetent and to transfer the economy into fresh and honest hands, that is, into the hands of the workers themselves.

How to do this? The first step is clear: all the trade unions should unite and form their own labor party. Not the party of Roosevelt or La Guardia, not a “labour” party in name only, but a truly independent political organization of the working class. Only such a party is capable of gathering around itself the ruined farmers, the small artisans, the shopkeepers. But for this it would have to wage an uncompromising struggle against the banks, trusts, monopolies, and their political agents, that is, the Republican and Democratic parties. The task of the labour party should consist in taking power into its own hands, all the power, and then putting the economy in order. This means organizing the entire national economy according to a single national plan whose aim is not the profit of a small bunch of exploiters but the material and spiritual interests of a population of 130 million.

CIO Official: Many of our activists are beginning to understand that the course of political development is moving toward a labour party. But Roosevelt's popularity is still too great. If he agrees to run for president a third time, the question of a

candidacy or “popularity” of Roosevelt. I assure you that he is far more popular among the well-paid CIO officials than among the unemployed. Incidentally, the trade unions exist for the workers, not the officials.

The idea of the CIO inspired millions of workers for a certain period, the idea of an independent, militant labor party that aims to put an end to economic anarchy, unemployment, and misery, to save the people and its culture, the idea of such a party is capable of inspiring tens of millions. Of course the agitators of the labor party would immediately have to show the masses, by word and deed, that they are not electoral agents of Roosevelt, La Guardia, and company, but true fighters for the interests of the exploited masses.

When the speakers talk in the language of workers' leaders and not of White House agents, then 85 percent of the members will come to meetings, while the 15 percent of conservative oldsters, worker-aristocrats, and careerists will stay away. The masses are better, more daring, more resolute than the leaders. The masses wish to struggle. Putting the brakes on the struggle are the leaders, who have lagged behind the masses. Their own indecisiveness, their own conservatism, their own bourgeois prejudices are disguised by the leaders with allusions to the backwardness of the masses. Such is the true state of affairs at present.

CIO Official: Now, what you say has a lot of truth in it. But—well—we'll talk about that next time. ■

WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING FOR?

We are faced with the worst capitalist crisis in 300 years. Only a clear socialist programme can offer a way forward.

We have no faith in this rotten Tory government or their hangers on. It was their precious “market economy” that has brought the country to its knees.

The bosses and their craven political representatives have shown that they will always prioritise profits over lives.

We demand measures to protect workers, and put health before wealth. The demand that workers return to work should be answered with the demand for workers’ control of all workplaces:

- All non-essential workplaces should remain shut until it is genuinely safe to reopen. All workplaces to establish workplace committees, along with the trade unions, to decide on such matters. This must be based on the implementation of health and safety measures and a safe working environment, with social distancing in place and the necessary PPE guaranteed for all. The costs for this must be paid by the bosses. This is essential given the threat of a second wave of the virus.
- Workers sent home should be on full pay for as long as necessary. Those out of work, including the self-employed, should be fully paid by the state.
- Faced with the growing threat of mass redundancies, the trade unions must fight to defend every job. No job losses! Share out the work with no loss of pay in order to lower the hours of the working day, provide jobs for all, and share out the benefits of automation and productivity gains.
- Those companies threatening redundancies must be forced to open their books to workers’ inspection, to reveal what has happened and how they have squandered their profits. If firms plead bankruptcy, they should not be bailed out, but nationalised under workers’ control.
- Those workplaces threatened with closure must be occupied and the demand must be raised for them to be nationalised under workers’ control. The struggle of occupied factories

should be linked in a common fight.

- We demand the launch of a fully-funded national programme of public workers to build the homes, schools, hospitals, community centres, and the things needed by our communities.
- The massive increase in government spending, to save the system, must not come from increased taxes or more austerity. This is a capitalist crisis, not caused by the working class. If someone is going to pay, then it should be big business. Big business are sitting on combined cash reserves of over £700 billion – accumulated profits made from the exploitation of the working class. These assets should be expropriated for the public good, not used for private gain.
- Rather than a ‘wealth tax’, we call for the expropriation of the monopolies, the banks and finance houses. All deposits will be secure and guaranteed by the nationalised banks.
- No to austerity! The working class must not pay for this crisis!
- 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.
- We are utterly opposed to all discrimination and oppression on the basis of the colour of our skin, religion, sexual orientation, or nationality. We demand that the organisations of the working class help to organise the fight against racism and oppression of all kinds. Capitalism is responsible for oppression and we stand for the unity of workers of all backgrounds in the struggle against this system.
- It is clear that the market has failed and capitalism is in a deep crisis. Capitalism has become a massive barrier to the development of society. It is an anachronism. The anarchy of capitalism prevents the planning of society’s resources for the benefit of all, in Britain and elsewhere.
- We stand for the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of

a rational society, based on the principle from those according to their ability to those according to their need. This can be done by the nationalisation of the 100 biggest monopolies, banks, utilities, land and natural resources under workers’ control and management – and without compensation to the fat cats. On this basis, the economy can be democratically planned in the interests of the majority, and not for the super profits of a few.

In this period, the organisations of the working class will be put to the test. We must fight for militant trade unions, where leaders are regularly elected, and live on the average wage of a skilled worker.

While fighting for day-to-day questions, the trade unions must also put themselves in the vanguard of the fight to abolish capitalism, the only solution to the problems faced by our class:

- We stand for the right of national ‘self-determination, up to and including separation. We stand for a new independence referendum in Scotland.
- We stand for an independent Socialist Scotland in a voluntary socialist federation with their brothers and sisters in England and Wales. We are in favour of a socialist United Ireland, which, if they so wish, could join a socialist federation with the other nationalities of these islands. This is purely a voluntary question.
- We also stand for a Socialist United States of Europe as a step towards a World Socialist Federation, in order to plan the 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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