

Labour Internationalist

Monthly publication of the British supporters of the Organising Committee
for the Reconstitution of the Fourth International (OCRFI)

Issue No.5, March 2020

Price: £1

Who we are, What we stand for

We believe that the working class needs to rely on its own efforts, both at home and around the world, to defend its interests against a capitalist system that is determined to extract maximum profit regardless of the human and environmental cost.

We believe that the capitalist system, based on private ownership of the means of production, cannot be reformed and has to be abolished by means of a proletarian revolution that will introduce socialism.

We stand on the founding programme of the Fourth International, the *Transitional Programme*, which says in particular: "It is necessary to help the masses, in the process of their daily struggles, to find the bridge between their current demands and the programme of the socialist revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands which stem from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class, and invariably lead to the same conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat."

The working class's struggle against the capitalist system – on its own account as well as on behalf of all of the oppressed – needs to be united and based on class independence from capital and its national and international institutions.

This means defending the organisations which the workers have built, and helping the workers themselves to build new forms of organisation to carry out their struggle in ways which they decide on freely and which they control.

Often, this also means opposing those in the labour movement who ignore the mandate of their membership and co-operate with capitalism's plans, at the workplace, institutional or State level. *Labour Internationalist* aims to be part of the fight against that process of integrating the working-class organisations into capitalism's plans.

Labour Internationalist therefore focuses on helping to advance the struggle by the working class in its own interests – locally, nationally and internationally.

Consistent with this view, *Labour Internationalist* defines itself as a forum of class struggle that is open to all individuals, groups and currents in the labour movement that are committed to political independence of the working class and to internationalism.

**The government
is protecting
businesses
and benefiting
the insurers
and bankers.
The
working class
must take
its defence into
its own hands!**

EDITORIAL

“Thinning out the herd”: austerity kills

As the Covid-19 virus gets a grip on the UK and countries around the world, and its economic and political ramifications evolve from one day to the next, it is clear that we are facing a global disaster that will result in deaths counted in the tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, or even millions.

But, as a question mark is raised over the future of humankind, we have the right to ask: who is responsible for its rapid spread around the world?

For us, the answer is simple: capitalism. The bankruptcy of the capitalist system based on private ownership of the means of production is expressed strikingly in the prioritisation of pharmaceutical profits over basic research that could have provided insights into the spread of Covid-19.

It is expressed in the commodification of people's health and the prioritisation of building healthcare markets over ensuring that timely and effective healthcare can be accessed by all as a basic right. It is expressed in the deliberate underfunding of public healthcare systems and forced privatisation of services that has resulted in underequipped and overstretched hospitals that can barely meet demand in normal times, never mind in a major health crisis. It is expressed in the permanent attack on social care, with local councils being pushed by government to rely on private care service providers. And especially today, it is expressed in the refusal to make the necessary timely choices on the production and distribution of basic material and equipment for protecting the population.

The systemic failure of healthcare provision is the responsibility of governments of every political stripe – both Tory and Labour – which, especially since the Blair government, have followed the orders of the IMF, the World Bank, the European Central Bank and the European Commission, by enforcing the rules of the “market economy”.

In the UK, recently published data prove that the social impact of 10 years of budget restrictions, slashed public services and austerity driven by the European Union includes a lower life expectancy for poorer people around the country. Chancellor Rishi Sunak's “Coronavirus Budget” allocated just £5 billion in emergency funding to the NHS, but the NHS was deprived of an estimated £125 billion in underfunding in the previous 10 years. And now, with the Covid-19 crisis, the gaps and shortfalls in the NHS caused by austerity are being exposed even more sharply, and are becoming even more brutal. Today, we do not have enough testing kits or people to do the tests, we have practically no spare ICU capacity in terms of beds, equipment or trained staff, and not even enough masks, sanitisers and other protective equipment for our frontline NHS and social care staff.

And if the virus's evolution in the UK echoes what is already happening in Italy, within a few weeks doctors in an overwhelmed NHS will have to decide which patients will receive treatment and which will be left to die.

The Johnson government's initial response to the crisis (for at least one month) was to ignore the views of epidemiologists and immunologists around the world who were calling for urgent practical measures to limit and confront Covid-19. Instead, it chose a strategy based on the theory of “herd immunity”, which means survival of the fittest: let the virus work its way through the population, who will gradually build up immunity, and if hundreds of thousands of older and weaker citizens die, well tough luck.

In other words, a theory which is reminiscent of a eugenics approach, which harks back to a dark period in world history.

A briefing document by the government agency Public Health England, which was kept secret by the government but then leaked last week, says that: “As many as 80% of the population are expected to be infected with Covid-19 in the next 12 months, and up to 15% (7.9 million people) may require hospitalisation.” The document projects a death-toll as high as 531,100.

This attitude of “let it thin out the herd” is the ultimate expression of the bankruptcy of the capitalist system: let the older and weaker citizens die, which ultimately will lighten the burden on the NHS and the pensions system.

The emergency financial measures being announced by the government exclude the poorer members of society – especially workers in various forms of insecure work – at a time when the capitalist class is already using the crisis to cut jobs and shift its impact onto the workers' backs. For example, Vauxhall's UK factories in Ellesmere Port and in Luton are to close until 27 March as part of a Europe-wide shutdown by owner PSA Group due to Covid-19, and Nissan has suspended production at its Sunderland plant.

The government and the bosses will use the pandemic to hit the working class even harder. And to do so they will resort to the “national unity” argument. The fight to save lives is of course a priority. But this is why the labour movement must fight for the solutions it needs, even if these are antagonistic to the needs of capital.

Those at the top leadership of the labour movement who a few months ago opposed the will of the majority of the working class and sided with the Remainers will now support calls for national unity, refusing to break with the capitalists and their government that bears responsibility for the current situation.

This is the meaning of the TUC leadership's call for an emergency Covid-19 taskforce with unions and business, as well as the statement by UNISON's General Secretary that “Government, businesses and unions all need to work together to get the country through the next few difficult weeks and months.” Although the working class is being hit hard, it is still fighting back.

For example, postal workers in several depots in London have taken strike action over inadequate protection against Covid-19, while CWU members have voted 94.5 percent in favour of all-out strike action against the Royal Mail's changes to working practices.

The GMB has rightly demanded that the government uses emergency powers to requisition private health services, rather than – for example – paying companies like Virgin Care £2.4 million per day for the use of private hospital beds.

The British Airline Pilots Association (BALPA) is saying the government must act immediately to support the UK airline industry, which is feeling the pressure of the impact of Covid-19. Unite Assistant General Secretary Diana Holland said (15 March): “The aviation industry employs hundreds of thousands of workers and they are all looking at the government for immediate help, to ensure they will still have jobs in the future. Ministers must not, however, write a blank cheque for irresponsible magnates to line their pockets or squirrel away offshore.”

As long as the capitalist system survives, the working class will always have to fight to defend its rights and particular interests as a class. And to do so, its organisations must reject all attempts to co-opt it into “national unity” initiatives.

Emergency measures are needed: a ban on all job-cuts; maintaining wage levels; full coverage for all sick leave and enforced absence from work; allocation of all necessary funding for the NHS; requisition of private health facilities and services. Also, a return to a fully public NHS, and nationalisation of British Airways. But this will not come out of the blue, it will not be achieved through an “agreement” with the Tory government and the capitalists!

It can only result from the struggle of the workers and their trade unions to impose these measures.

The money is there. What we need is a government that releases these funds and allocates them to the vast majority of the population and not to big business. Now is not the time to pause in raising our demands, in the name of “national unity” around the government. Now is the time for the workers to step up the struggle for their demands. More than ever, the answer lies in the total independence of the workers’ organisations.

What kind of government will implement the measures needed by the working class? Only a government that breaks with the diktats of the capitalist system. The current situation in the NHS is the result of many years of restrictions on public spending imposed by the EU and applied by governments carrying out its orders. The Johnson government is continuing to apply the EU’s policies outside of the EU.

What we need is a government that is motivated by a desire to protect working people and not the capitalist minority and its profits, a government that will find the means wherever they are, and use them.

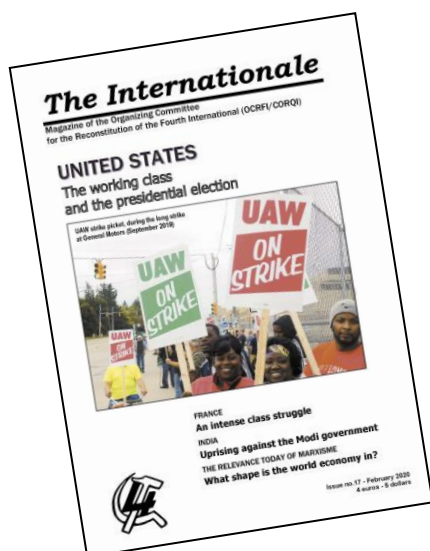
Only such a government will be able to do all this, because it will have the support of the majority of the population: those who can only live by selling their labour.

17 March 2020

The Internationale

is published in Arabic, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish

In issue No.17 - February 2020



EDITORIAL NOTES

ANALYSIS

France: An intense class struggle

India: The scope and impact of the huge movement that is rejecting Modi and his policies

United States: The US working class and the November 2020 presidential election

West Africa: The class struggle and inter-imperialist contradictions

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Snapshots of the crisis

Our readers will not be surprised to learn that the editorial in this issue of *Labour Internationalist* was revised several times – sometimes in a single day – before we “put it to bed”, as the situation evolved and the government announced yet more revisions of its strategy and new measures. We therefore publish below various elements which were not included in the final version.

13 March: Johnson hangs the hospitality sector out to dry

Then there is the catastrophic blow to the hospitality sector in the form of the government’s “advice” that people should avoid pubs, clubs and the like. Britain’s hospitality industry contributes more than £120 billion a year to the economy and is worth more than the automotive, pharmaceuticals and aeronautics industries combined. More than 3.2 million people work in pubs, restaurants and other outlets (the third-largest employment sector in the country), and a further 2.8 million work in the wider supply chain.

The government has offered general assurances that sick pay will be made available to full-time employees who are forced to stay at home, but has carefully avoided giving detailed commitments or acknowledging the reality of zero-hours contracts and part-time and insecure work for hospitality sector workers. Mass job-cuts are now likely. Employers’ organisations in the hospitality sector are already asking why the government is not providing immediate financial support. Meanwhile, the government’s refusal to order a shutdown, instead just “advising” customers to stay away, benefits the big insurance companies, since owners of small- and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) are unable to claim on their insurance.

17 March: The insurance companies protect their own interests

The Guardian: “Most British companies that suffer a loss of sales or shut down due to the Covid-19 pandemic are not protected by their insurance policies, the Association of British Insurers has told MPs, leaving firms exposed to bankruptcy even when the government orders them to close.”

17 March: No to “national unity” initiatives! Independence in defending working-class interests!

Keir Starmer, writing in *The Guardian*: “*The scale of this crisis we face means things cannot simply be left to Whitehall. The government should convene an economic taskforce involving councils and devolved nations, representatives of key sectors of the economy, businesses (large and small), trade unions and economists to thrash out the economic*

implications of the crisis and the stimulus required to maintain investment and jobs for the future.”

17 and 18 March: Employers like Amazon and Waterstones put profits ahead of workers’ health

Workers at more than four of Amazon’s 17 UK warehouses are being forced to work compulsory overtime despite government calls to restrict social contact, with the company putting profits above safety. But Amazon workers are fighting back internationally (see “A Letter From Germany” in this issue).

Meanwhile, book retailer Waterstone, with 280 branches in the UK, has obliged sales staff to carry on working without adequate health protection. One shop-floor worker who is paid the minimum wage said: “*We have zero protective measures. We have a small bottle of sanitiser for five people... In a bookshop the average customer touches how many books? Ten? Twenty? People browse, flick through, sit down for a read. Come right up to us to ask for recommendations. What about the horrendous finger-licking turning of the page?*”. After negative reports in the national press, the company announced on 22 March that it would close its branches temporarily on the basis of the government’s announcement of financial support to employees.

18 March: The devil is in the details...

On 17 March, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced £330 billion in aid to businesses. However, on 18 March, he confirmed to the House of Commons Finance Committee that this will take the form of a government guarantee of loans to be made to SMEs by the commercial banks, with a 6-month interest honeymoon.

In practice, this obliges SMEs to take on extra commercial debt based on an assumption of deferred business income in addition to normal income, while the reality they are dealing with today is irretrievably lost normal income, with no guarantee of things “getting back to normal” in six months’ time. This measure will most definitely benefit the banks, and will not prevent SMEs from going bust.

18 March: Tenants left at the mercy of landlords

Under the government's measure to "protect renters and landlords", emergency legislation will be introduced to suspend new evictions during the crisis, while landlords (including buy-to-let landlords) will benefit from a three-month mortgage holiday. But what happens when time is up, at which point many tenants will be in a terrible financial situation? The government says "*landlords and tenants will be expected to work together to establish an affordable repayment plan, taking into account tenants' individual circumstances*" and it promises to "*issue guidance which asks landlords to show compassion*". In other words, tenants will be left at the complete mercy of landlords.

19 March: Once again - Independence in defending working-class interests!

While 94.5 percent of members of the postal workers union voted for strike action against the Royal Mail's changes to working practices, the CWU leadership is setting aside the strike vote and is offering to draft its members into "an additional emergency service" during the COVID-19 pandemic. After acknowledging the "*huge mandate*" given for strike action, the CWU's press release declares this to be irrelevant in light of the "*changing (...) priorities for our members and the country.*" and proposes to put "*the interests of the nation first*" by having Royal Mail workers not only stay on the job but assume the role of "*an additional emergency service.*"

19 March: For self-employed and insecure workers excluded by the government's financial aid, the choice is: work or starve

A survey carried out on 18 and 19 March by Populus for the Royal Society of Arts showed that of the 5 million people who are self-employed or in a form of insecure work, 47 per cent of self-employed, 51 per cent of those in insecure work, 55 per cent of those on zero-hour contracts and 46 per cent on temporary contracts would feel obliged to work even if they had Covid-19.

19 March: Government uses Covid-19 crisis to attack democratic rights with emergency powers bill

The government's 329-page Coronavirus Bill is set to be rushed through Parliament without any scrutiny, or even a vote by MPs. The new law, which restricts civil liberties in a number of aspects,

would be on the statute book for two years, with ministers having the power to either shorten or lengthen that timetable by six months.

The Bill gives powers to the police (in Schedule 20) to detain anyone they think "*is potentially infectious*", and makes refusal to comply into a criminal offence.

It also gives the Secretary of State (in Schedule 21) the power to restrict or prohibit events and gatherings during the pandemic in any place – therefore including strike pickets and protest rallies – and makes refusal to comply into a criminal offence.

20 and 21 March: Big retailers and other businesses lay off workers to protect profits

Big retailers Marks & Spencer, Primark, Debenhams and the Arcadia group (which owns Topshop, Dorothy Perkins and Miss Selfridge) announced shop closures and suspended supply orders in order to protect their profits. Meanwhile, sales staff at a South London branch of Haart estate agents were given two minutes' notice for a conference call in which they were told their contracts were to be cancelled immediately, and Cineworld in Liverpool laid off more than 50 staff who were eligible for sick pay.

22 March: NHS staff "feel like cannon-fodder"

Frontline NHS staff are not getting the protective equipment they need to treat Covid-19 patients, and are having to substitute the correct gear with items that are less effective – or even improvise with non-medical materials.

Dr Rinesh Parmar, chair of the Doctors' Association, told BBC1's The Andrew Marr Show: "We have had doctors tell us they feel like lambs to the slaughter, that they feel like cannon fodder. GPs tell us that they feel absolutely abandoned. (...) What our doctors are telling us is that although some equipment is arriving, some of it is inadequate, some of it doesn't meet the World Health Organization guidance."

23 March: The government expands its emergency powers to ban public protests

In his national TV address, the Prime Minister added the detail that under the government's emergency powers as set out in the Coronavirus Bill 2020, "*we will stop all gatherings of more than two people in public – excluding people you live with.*"

WORKPLACE NEWS

Capitalists are using the epidemic to strike even harder

Gig workers

There are more than 1 million gig workers in Britain who typically have no rights to SSP and are only paid per job because they are treated as self-employed contractors.

DPD, whose 5,000 couriers deliver parcels for brands including Marks & Spencer and John Lewis, is offering self-employed couriers who need to self-isolate the equivalent of statutory sick pay (£94.25 a week). It is well short of the approximately £550 its drivers with worker status are supposed to earn weekly. DPD has also said costs of renting equipment and vans will not be waived but deferred.

Hermes, which has around 15,000 self-employed parcel couriers, will only pay £20 a day to drivers if they need to self-isolate and only if they typically earn less than £90 a day. This means that almost half its workers will receive nothing and those who do will see payments capped at £280, because they are effectively limited to 14 days.

Deliveroo, the takeaway delivery firm, says it will offer its 35,000 riders in excess of statutory sick pay (SSP), for up to two weeks of self-isolation if they have certifiably contracted the virus, been placed in quarantine by a medical authority or chosen to self-isolate following medical advice. But it did not specify how much higher the payments would be.

The GMB trade union said it was irresponsible that companies which use the gig economy model “*put courier safety and public health at risk by creating disincentives to self-isolation*”.

Council workers

Labour-run Tower Hamlets council in east London wants to sack workers and re-engage them on worse contracts. Unison, GMB, NEU and Unite are battling against the council Bosses who want to slash severance pay, reduce flexitime, attack special leave entitlement, cut travel allowances and shorten paid night work hours. The council is threatening workers with legal action using the Tory anti-union laws.

Job losses

UK airline Flybe has collapsed with the loss of 2,000 jobs. The GMB has warned of the “domino” effect,



revealing that a further 1,400 jobs in the supply chain are threatened.

Already, thousands of UK steel workers and a large number of auto workers have lost their jobs. Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) is to shut its Halewood plant in Merseyside, which employs just under 4,000 people, for nine days from 19 March. In January, JLR, which is owned by India’s Tata Motors, announced the end of the night shift in Halewood, putting 500 jobs at risk. Halewood and Solihull will also close for a week at Easter and a week at the end of May for Whitsun, in regular holidays that were scheduled in November.

JLR is also “adjusting the production schedule at its Castle Bromwich and Solihull plants”.

Barclays bank is closing a major processing centre in Leeds, with nearly 800 jobs lost. Barclays also announced a further 345 staff cut across the country, including 157 jobs cut in Coventry.

News from the picket line

Bin collections in some areas of Glasgow were suspended last week, after refuse workers staged a sit-in because they had no access to hand sanitiser or hot water at their depot. Workers at the Polmadie depot refused to work on Thursday of last week, leaving parts of the south east of the city without collections.

Workers at SOAS, University of London, won key demands after they threatened to walk out unless bosses agreed to close the site. It follows a student being diagnosed with Covid-19.

Cleaning, portering and catering workers at Lewisham Hospital in southeast London, where some Covid-19 cases have been treated, walked off the job on 12 March in fury at unpaid wages. Around 30 workers struck unofficially after finding out that private subcontractor ISS had failed to pay the wages of the hospital workers.

GMB, the union for NHS staff, has secured another big win for workers after private outsourcing company Medirest promised full pay for all health workers self-isolating due to Covid-19. The private company joins other NHS outsourcers ISS, Sodexo, Interserve and Mitie in guaranteeing full pay following GMB pressure.

OPEN FORUM OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE

Correspondence received

Stefan Cholewka's Notes of the Month

The Tories are preparing to unleash a further debt storm by printing money to keep a collapsing UK economy going. The government will do anything and everything possible to try and save capitalism, while telling workers that deaths in their families are inevitable and will just have to be endured. It is tax cuts for all types of businesses. This budget offers nothing except more austerity for the working class who face full-scale closure of factories and plants. It offers nothing to those forced to stay at home except the promise of a measly £94.25 a week in statutory sick pay – and even this will be unavailable to gig workers or the self-employed while the wealthy and businesses are given tax cuts. The truth is that capitalism exists purely for profit at all costs while human life is not even a secondary consideration.

The capitalist system has no weapons in its armoury to stave off recession and collapse, except to carry on printing worthless paper money at a time when the stock markets are crashing and industry is closing down. The Italian medical society for critical care has said that “*very scarce resources*” will have to be restricted to patients with “*a higher chance of survival and more years of life to come.*” This is also the future for workers in Britain under a capitalist system which for decades has systematically cut health budgets under austerity in order to bail out the bosses and bankers from the banking crash in 2008.

Trade unions and business are being called on to come together to rescue British capitalism. Chancellor Rishi Sunak opened his Budget speech with an appeal to “*put aside party politics, and act in the national interest*” in

order to confront the economic and social crisis that is overwhelming British capitalism. TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady was quick to respond to this call. In her statement on the Budget, O’Grady pledged the support of the TUC and its willingness to collaborate with the Tories in rescuing British capitalism at the expense of the working class. She welcomed the Budget and called for an emergency taskforce with unions and business. This enthusiasm for the Tory Budget was taken up by UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis. Prentis said: “*This was a budget to calm the nation and showed the government’s been listening – to a point.*” Prentis went on to endorse the collaborationist position saying: “*Government, businesses and unions all need to work together to get the country through the next few difficult weeks and months.*” For his part, Unite Assistant General Secretary Steve Turner said: “*The Chancellor has ripped through the magic money forest to try to inject some life back into the ailing UK economy. The question is, will it be enough to repair the vandalism of ten years of deliberate austerity and lowering of living standards and cope with the economic crisis that could accompany the spread of the coronavirus? The answer to that is a resounding No.*”

What is clear is that there can be no “national interest”, only class interest. The trade unions must demand that workers will not lose a penny in pay. If that means shutting down industry and production for two weeks to defeat the virus, then every single worker must receive full pay.

“We’re better off without them”

By John Sweeney

Four hundred years ago, when the Great Plague descended on London, everyone who had money fled, including Charles the Second and his court. The poor were forced to stay behind in the London slums, where they perished.

Things haven’t changed much. Those with money are stockpiling goods, while those on benefits have to wait a fortnight for their money, only to find that by the time it is paid, the shelves are empty. Also note how the middle classes have stockpiled important items such as hand sanitiser, toilet paper and cleaning wipes. Poorer and more vulnerable people usually cannot do this.

Maybe, just maybe, one of these people will have the fleeting thought before the light of existence is extinguished from their eyes forever that buying a myriad of toilet rolls in the middle of a pandemic was not their greatest contribution to human society. All that

thought will be lost though, as, unable to speak, they become the equal of all life that has gone before them. In the equality of the grave.

When the inequality embedded in our society delivers a feckless spawn of privilege like Boris Johnson as Prime Minister, it surely puts many livelihoods and lives in mortal danger even when all attendant circumstances are benign, but especially so when competent leadership is needed to steer us safely through the perils of what might prove to be a deadly pandemic.

The UK government is deliberately taking an enormous gamble with the lives of its subjects (there are no citizens in the UK), in the hope that by encouraging the spread of the virus, “herd immunity” will develop before too many people die. Everywhere else in the world, scientists are saying that we simply do not know enough about the virus, and rather than risk people’s lives, the best

approach is to continue to track and contain the virus.

People need to wake up; Covid-19 is now a tool for the government to carry out social engineering. You don't think so? Let's look at the approach of the UK government (compared with the rest of Europe) to tackling the virus. Who is most at risk? Older people, poor people, people with underlying health problems and no access to health services. The Tory government has thrown the proletariat under the Covid-19 bus!

Should a vaccine be developed, it will almost certainly be in limited supply to start with. I wonder which sections of society will get priority? No doubt the rich will get vaccinated in private health clinics, but they will be the exception. While all the rest of will wait our turn.

And the sickening thing is that the architects of the inequality would not be in power without the recurrent support of their victims. It is "battered spouse syndrome" on a national scale.

With the Tories, wealth and privilege run alongside an unshakeable conviction, affirmed through many centuries of aristocratic convention, that their lives are more important than those of the poor.

This is further endorsed by comments such as "they deserve it" and "they're lazy", promoted so regularly through their tabloids, but there is a yet more disturbing comment which will be whispered in the dark recesses and corridors of fiefdom: "We're better off without them".



INTERNATIONAL

European Workers' and Youth Meeting in defence of pension systems, jobs and public services

A letter from Germany

From Andreas Gangl, Ver.di trade union delegate, member of the Bad Hersfeld Amazon Strike Committee to his British brothers and sisters

International class struggle in times of coronavirus

The current period is revealing the difficulties faced by the workers in an internationally operating company like Amazon, which has digitised and standardised all of its processes globally. It is trying to maintain "production" at all costs. The company is not listening to any of the demands from its employees aimed at protecting their health. On the contrary, it is encouraging people to take risks by offering an attendance bonus of up to 2 euros per hour. For many people, this bonus represents a significant pay increase, which is leading them to come into work despite being contaminated.

In mid-March, just as the pandemic was escalating massively, Amazon workers from the United States, Poland, Germany and Spain held a conference in Madrid. One of main decisions taken was to demand the closure of Amazon warehouses throughout the world, since they do not carry out work of primary necessity. But Amazon has completely ignored this perspective, deeming profit to be more important than protecting its employees. Strike action has now begun in Italy, Spain and France. But there is no joint international action, because each country – and the respective trade union – is acting within its own borders. In Germany, the trade union is limiting its action to a written protest. What about Britain? Up to now, there has been no contact with Amazon employees in Britain except with some UniGlobal union members, but what can this result in?

International class struggle can only be waged by organising Amazon employees at the world level, and by globally planning action to be taken in each country. We must deprive Amazon of the opportunity to make its



employees in different countries compete against each other by shifting production at a moment's notice to places where there is no social movement.

This is why it is important to develop organisation at the international level, with the help of the relevant trade unions or without them. In the United States, a huge regroupment is currently taking place outside of the trade unions.

This is why I am calling on our friends in Britain: let us meet, let us exchange information and views, let us set up a network, let us organise collectively. I know from experience that your problems are the same as ours.

Contributions to the act of indictment of privatisation and the destruction of public services, the NHS and pensions

***"I ask you to invite as many people as possible
to support and contribute to the Liege initiative"***

By John Sweeney Labour Party member, leave activist, London

International cooperation is the core of international solidarity. Owing to the magnitude of global and local challenges, the alarming increase of natural and man-made disasters and the continuing rises in poverty and inequality, as well as the adverse social and economic

effects of globalisation including the impact on labour, we must come together and actively oppose capitalism.

These grim realities reinforce the argument for international solidarity and for judiciously moving

forward without further delay. The importance of the meeting in Liege on 2 May has a bridge-building function across all divides and distinctions. It encompasses the values of social justice and equity, goodwill among peoples and nations and the integrity of the international class struggle.

The situation calls for international solidarity. Workers around the world face the same conditions: bosses who maximise their profit by moving their investments without regard to their impacts on communities or the environment. We must work collaboratively across

borders in order to effectively fight back against the multinational corporations that dominate our economies.

By remaining unwavering in our commitment to international solidarity in the coming period, we advance our interests in promoting revolutionary rank-and-file workers' control at home and abroad.

Comrades, I ask you to invite as many people as possible to support and contribute to the Liege initiative on 2 May. The current European and world situation calls for international solidarity action and attention.

Once again, the most vulnerable will pay the price

by Doreen McNally retired nurse, Liverpool Unite the union

We have a huge shortage of beds in the NHS, and only have 4,000 intensive care beds. We have a shortage of ventilators, and the government has asked for a national effort by engineering companies to make as many as possible and they will buy them. The problem with that is we have no-one to operate them, as there is a shortage of independent treatment centre (ITC) nurses, as well as all other medical staff, due of course to years of underfunding by the Conservative government. GMB General Secretary Tim Roache and Labour have said that there are about 8,000 private beds in 570-plus hospitals lying empty while people are left dying for want of a bed.

Roache said that the NHS should be able to utilise them. Boris Johnson has "done a deal" with private hospitals, which will cost the NHS £2.4 million a day. There is a multi-BILLION bailout for businesses ravaged by Covid-19, which will be updated tomorrow. People have been told not to go to pubs, theatres, etc., but bars have not been told to close, so they cannot claim on their insurance. So insurance companies are protected. Nothing for zero-hour contract workers and the self-employed – people will have no money for food, the mortgage or rent, bills. Once again, the most vulnerable will pay the price.

Eye of the Storm – Genocidal Capitalism

By our correspondent in Liverpool

The situation in the UK regarding the virus is probably worse than much of Europe, and the world. China, despite a slow start in reaction to the virus, then acted quickly, isolating and containing people thought to be affected.

Many other countries took swift action to protect their populations, ensuring that all reasonable measures were employed to help prevent the risk of spreading the virus.

Our Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, announced that the UK government intend to let "herd immunity" be applied. This means that the Tories are content to allow an estimated half a million people die. Many older people and those with low immune systems are especially at risk.

Our NHS has already been run into the ground, with low staff morale, and the few spare beds available are expected to be filled quickly. Many hospital staff are also

going to be directly affected by the virus. This means that many, especially older people, will be left to die at home.

It is becoming a common view that the Tories will be counting how much money they will save on pensions, as the number of bodies pile up. Many people already know how callous our current government is; I suspect many more are going to have their eyes opened soon.

The full effects of Tory ideology are being unleashed on the population, alongside their plans to privatise the economy on behalf of their wealthy friends. Many will be cursing those in the Labour Party who worked incessantly to ensure that a Jeremy Corbyn-led socialist Labour government never happened.

The treachery of the individuals and groups of the liberal "kinder, gentler" politics agenda, differing little from Tory ideology, ignored the millions of working people desperate plight, and democratic wishes. With friends like these, we don't need enemies.

Trade unions, government and businesses do not share the same interests

By Mike Calvert, Islington Unison member (person capacity)

This is an explanation of the situation we are faced with in Islington, North London. My branch represents nearly

2,000 members in local government spread across all services, but especially schools, care homes and day

centres. Our members visit vulnerable people in their homes and so will come into contact with the virus. Already, our members are “dropping like flies” as the virus spreads rapidly.

At this moment, it is clear that it is the responsibility of the trade unions to put our own demands – the workers’ demands – to the local bosses to try and make them act faster in an evolving situation. Especially in the current situation, which is evolving every day; for instance, if the local employer does not provide the necessary protection (e.g. sanitiser gel), or refuses to abide by the health and safety regulations, or if our members have any problems due to the new situation. In such a situation, it is the right solution for a trade union absolutely not to give up its independence and to work hand-in-hand with the government and the bosses. We have absolutely taken this approach at our AGM.

This is why we have written an open letter to all councillors, managers and staff, stating what our members demands are – and, while it is vital to work with the employer where we can, it is clear that we are placing our own demands first and foremost. I said “work with the employer”, which does not mean **collaborate**. We are not on the same side of the fence. Our membership has no confidence in the Council/employers, and this is demonstrated on a daily basis in the enquiries and comments we are receiving from our members.

We also organise workers in the health and social care sector. The budget will allocate £5 billion to the health

sector. This is a drop in the ocean compared to what was stolen from the workers over the years since the 2008 crash.

We fundamentally disagree with Dave Prentis that “*This was a budget to calm the nation and showed the government’s been listening – to a point.*” No! These fiscal measures would not have been necessary were it not for what Jeremy Corbyn told our AGM on Thursday: “*The budget is the direct consequence of 10 years of austerity.*”

It is my personal view that the crisis in public health funding is a direct result of the rules and policies inflicted by the international financial institutions, including 40 years of EU membership that were enforced by every government over the last 50 years, Tory as well as Labour.

The opening of the NHS to private care provision is a direct consequence of these policies. It was possible for Blair and Brown to bail out the big banks to the tune of trillions of pounds in 2008. Austerity was also a result of the global crash of 2008. They made people pay for the bailout of the banks to the detriment of public services. Trillions of pounds were utilised by the Brown-Darling administration to bail out these parasitic leeches!

Our AGM gave us a clear mandate on how to proceed on the Covid-19 virus. We have adopted a series of demands in the open letter which, while imperfect, point a clear independent path forward.



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WHY *LABOUR INTERNATIONALIST* ENDORSES THE JOINT STATEMENT ON REFUGEES



We fully support the joint statement issued by the editorial teams of labour publications in five European countries (see below). The UK government is blaming migrants for the collapse of essential social services, which in fact have been gutted by years of anti-working-class measures implemented by successive Labour and Conservative governments under the auspices of the EU. This is not what we voted for when we rejected the EU and its policies in June 2016. If you are rich enough, you have no problem. The 2008 “golden visa” scheme still allows the super-rich, gangsters and the like to buy their way into the UK. It is an entirely different story for refugees fleeing wars and repression, as well as for workers from European countries and around the world who want to settle in the UK.

Joint statement by the editorial teams of *Ergatika Nea* (Greece), *Tribuna Libera* (Italy), *Freie Plattform für Arbeiterpolitik* (Germany), *La Tribune des Travailleurs* (France), *Bulletin Unité-Eenheids* (Belgium)

THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES ARE FACING DEATH: OPEN THE BORDERS THROUGHOUT EUROPE FOR THE VICTIMS OF IMPERIALIST WARS!

The news and images coming from the Greek-Turkish border and the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea are making millions of workers in Europe and around the world indignant. The European Union and all of Europe’s governments are applauding the Greek government which, helped by the EU’s FRONTEX border guards, are allowing the Greek police to open fire on refugees with live ammunition. Fascists and border guards are acting with impunity as they push the refugees’ makeshift boats back towards Turkish waters and prevent them from landing on the islands. Publicly and in front of the media’s cameras, they are deliberately putting human lives in danger. Once again, the Mediterranean risks becoming a vast graveyard. Tens of thousands of refugees are fleeing from the wars and military interventions in which the European governments, notably those of our countries, are participating or are giving their support, in the Middle East, in Afghanistan, in Syria, Libya, Iraq and various parts of Africa. Others are fleeing the poverty created by imperialism’s pillaging of their countries’ wealth.

The EU, cheered on by all the governments, negotiated a deal with Erdogan in 2016 under which he would cram the refugees into camps in appalling conditions and keep them in Turkey. Today, Erdogan is driving thousands of refugees – some of whom had lived in Istanbul for years – towards Europe’s closed borders, and he has just ordered (7 March) a ban on refugees departing in boats. He wants to renegotiate with the EU the price for holding the refugees hostage in Turkey. In this way, the EU is collaborating with Erdogan in delivering thousands of families into repression, the cold, hunger and insecurity, and is exposing them to the risk of death.

This is the true barbaric face of an EU that is touted as a zone of peace and democracy!

The thousands of Greek workers who demonstrated in Athens on 5 March were completely right to shout

“Open the borders throughout Europe!” and “No to Fortress Europe!” “Peace to the Peoples, War on the fascists!”

The thousands of workers and youth who demonstrated across Germany for the opening of the borders are completely right. The editorial teams of our publications declare:

- THE REFUGEES ARE OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS! INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY OF THE WORKERS OF EUROPE!
- THE PEOPLES OF EUROPE ARE THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF THE PEOPLES OF THE MIDDLE EAST!
- THE BORDERS MUST BE OPENED IMMEDIATELY, FREE THE REFUGEES HELD IN THE TURKISH CAMPS AND GRANT A DIGNIFIED ASYLUM TO THE FAMILIES OF REFUGEES WHO ARE VICTIMS OF IMPERIALISM’S ACTS OF VIOLENCE!
- WE MUST FIGHT BACK AGAINST IMPERIALISM’S ACTS OF PILLAGE AROUND THE WORLD, WHICH ARE SOWING POVERTY, DEATH AND EXODUS!
- WITHDRAW ALL THE TROOPS OF EU STATES THAT ARE INTERVENING ALONGSIDE U.S. IMPERIALISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND ACROSS AFRICA!

This issue will be at the focus of the European workers’ meeting in Liege (Belgium) on 2 May 2020, initiated by Belgian workers, against war, exploitation and insecurity: Do not let them divide us, the workers of Europe are working-class brothers and sisters, our only enemy is imperialism.

We support the Liege meeting and call on the workers of all countries to send their delegations.

8 March 2020

Reflections on Trump's "Deal" against the Palestinian People

Excerpted from a statement published in *OCRFI Newsletter No.11* (1 February 2020)
by the Organising Committee for the Reconstitution of the Fourth International

The "Deal of the Century", unveiled by Donald Trump on Tuesday, 28 January, in Washington in the presence of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, needs to be characterised as what it really is: a plan for the total expulsion of the Palestinian people from their land.

That is the meaning of the authorisation that has been given by Washington to the Zionist State to annex the Jordan Valley and all the land of the Israeli settlements which, for years now, have been chipping away continuously at the "Palestinian Autonomous Territories" (West Bank and Gaza Strip) established by the 1993 Oslo Accords. All aspects of this plan have one guiding orientation: the Palestinian people must disappear. From this point of view, US imperialism – for its own reasons – is authorising Zionism to carry its colonising expulsion project of the Palestinians through to the end.



This "Deal" is being promoted by a significant sector of the U.S. bourgeoisie around Trump. It has, of course, been cheered in Israel, both by Netanyahu and by his main rival in the March 2 elections, Benny Gantz. But the plan could not have seen the light of day without the support of the reactionary Arab regimes in the region, particularly Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies, which have promised US\$50 billion of so-called "investments" in the plan under the heading of its "economic plan".

It is, however, necessary to respond to one question: Is this plan the "negation of the two-State solution", as many are claiming? Or is it, rather, the culmination of the policy of the partitioning of Palestine that began with the United Nations resolution of 29 November 1947, promoted by US imperialism, with the support of the Stalinist bureaucracy of the Soviet Union?

In the United States, a fraction of the ruling class has expressed publicly its reservations concerning the plan, notably through Democratic Party leaders. Democratic Party Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi indicated that Trump's proposal "raises many questions, specifically regarding unilateral annexation, settlement freezes and lack of negotiations with the Palestinians." Joe Biden, a Democratic Party candidate for president, noted, "I've spent a lifetime working to advance the security and survival of a Jewish and democratic Israel. This is not the

way" because "a peace plan requires two sides to come together."

Elizabeth Warren, another Democratic Party presidential candidate, stated that "releasing a plan without negotiating with Palestinians isn't diplomacy, it's a sham. I will oppose unilateral annexation in any form." For well-known billionaire Mike Bloomberg, who is also in the Democratic primary race, "Every peace plan deserves a chance, but any viable plan requires buy-in from both sides."

For his part, Bernie Sanders, the candidate of the "left wing" of the Democratic Party, said, "Any acceptable peace deal must be consistent with international law and multiple UN Security Council resolutions. It must end the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and enable Palestinian self-determination in an independent, democratic, economically viable state of their own alongside a secure and democratic state of Israel."

Furthermore, 12 Democratic senators, including Bernie Sanders, sent an open letter to Trump expressing their "profound concern" which concluded as follows: "Unilateral implementation of this one-sided proposal will risk eliminating any remaining prospects for achievement of a peaceful and viable two-State solution."

Let us ask a first question: Is the Trump plan a break with the "two-state" policy and therefore a break with the Oslo Accords that established the Palestinian Authority in 1993?

The French daily newspaper *Le Monde*, a supporter of the so-called "two-state solution", asserted that "the Trump plan sketches the far-off perspective of a Palestinian rump State" on a few scraps of territory. On the condition – Trump adds – that the Palestinian leadership recognises the State of Israel and that it "rejects terrorism in any form" (i.e. that it renounces any and all fight for the liberation of Palestine).

The Trump plan says that this "Ersatz State" will be "demilitarized": the Zionist State will be responsible for the security and control of its air space and "borders", "Without control of its borders and its lines of communication, the State that is being promised [to the Palestinians] will be a State in name only," concluded *Le Monde* indignantly. As for the right to return of the Palestinian refugees driven from their land in 1948 – an elementary democratic demand – it is purely and simply denied: "Palestinian refugees will be given a choice to live within the future State of Palestine, integrate into the countries where they currently live, or resettle in a third country", states the White House.

The truth compels us to point out that all the characteristics of the "Trump State" contained in the Trump plan were already included in the 1993 Oslo Accords.

In 1993, the Fourth International – reproclaimed that same year – was the only political current to warn against the Accords signed in Washington under Bill Clinton, in a statement published in September 1993. This statement recalled that in 1988, the Palestinian leadership had renounced the Palestine National Charter, which Yasser Arafat declared “obsolete”, thereby abandoning the perspective of a democratic and secular Palestine on all its historic territory, and de facto recognising the State of Israel.



The declaration cited the preamble to the Oslo Accords: “The two-state solution, Israeli and Palestinian, living side by side, is possible on the condition that violence and terrorism cease.”

The Fourth International declaration also cited Annex 2 of the Oslo Accords, which specifies that in the “Palestinian Autonomous Territories”, the following functions will not be the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority: “external security, settlements, Israelis, and foreign relations.”

The “demilitarized” Palestinian Authority established by Oslo had neither an army, nor border control, nor air space, nor control of its own territory anywhere that was occupied by Israeli settlers. Let us further note that the Oslo Accords were supplemented by an interim agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip (called Oslo II or the “Taba Accord”, September 1995), dividing the West Bank into three zones: Zone A (18% of the territory), entirely under Palestinian control; Zone B, under “mixed” control; and Zone C, entirely under Israeli control.

The September 1993 declaration of the Fourth International raised the question: “Is this a first step toward a Palestinian State? In what way is the Self-Government Authority [which then became the Palestinian Authority – Editor] a first step, when the enclaves of Gaza and Jericho remain under the control of the Israeli army, which will be charged with applying the decisions of US imperialism, and when water, electricity, defence, land and the economy are under foreign control?”

It is a fact that the Trump plan does indeed go further than what was imposed in 1993. But in what way is what

Trump is proposing today *qualitatively* different? Also, when the representatives of the Palestinian Authority today protest against Trump’s plan – like Saeb Erakat, one of the major Palestinian negotiators, has done – and when they threaten to “quit the Oslo Accords”, it will be hard for them to get the Palestinian people to forget that in 1993 they accepted the very same reasoning which, today, US imperialism and its Zionist lackey are simply pushing through to the very end.

As we wrote in August 2017, in the OCRFI’s theoretical review, *The Internationale*, (issue No.7): “As for the Palestinian leadership, all of its various fractions ultimately – first in 1988 and finally with the Oslo Accords in 1993 – renounced the Palestinian National Charter, which set the target of liberating the whole of Palestine and establishing one State whose citizens would all have equal rights, whatever their religion. Every one of the fractions of the Palestinian leadership – not just the PLO – shared in renouncing the Palestinian National Charter, including Hamas which, on 1 May 2017, officially declared itself ‘ready to support the (Palestinian) state on 1967 borders’ (in other words, the West Bank and Gaza Strip). There is no possible ‘third way’ between a democratic State and a war of extermination. The only alternative to a two-State solution is one single secular and democratic State, with equal rights for everyone – Christians, Muslims and Jews – on all of historic Palestine, declared Saeb Erakat, chief negotiator on behalf of the Palestinian leadership, in February 2017...only to immediately rule out this ‘only alternative’, which would require breaking with imperialism, which the Palestinian leadership is not willing to do.”



It is clear that all those who today hold up the UN resolutions (beginning with the resolution of November 1947) or call for “respect for the Oslo Accords” to counter Trump’s

plan, share – whether they like it or not – a major point of agreement with Trump – namely, that it is not up to the Palestinian people to freely decide their own destiny.

All the “solutions” to the Palestinian question since 1947 have been based on the notion that people other than the Palestinians should be the ones to decide, thus denying the Palestinian people’s democratic right to self-determination. The organisations of the Organising Committee for the Reconstitution of the Fourth International, while calling for the broadest unity of the democratic and labour movement to reject Trump’s “Deal,” cannot fail to repeat that it is up to the Palestinian people, and only the Palestinian people, to decide their own destiny.

India: Nambiath Vasudevan calls for the “mobilisation of the labour movement” in order to impose a “fair enquiry that will reveal the truth”

Originally published in *IWC Newsletter No.154* (13 March 2020)
by the International Workers Committee Against War and Exploitation, For a Workers International

The disturbing tragedy which unfolded in India's capital city, New Delhi, during 24-26 February, and took more than 42 lives, both Muslims and Hindus, injured 200 men, women and children, is a matter of serious concern. **This tragedy took place after months of mass protests by the Indian people against the attempt to divide them and discriminate on the basis of religious beliefs. It also took place after Modi's party, the BJP, suffered a heavy electoral defeat in Delhi.**

The tragedy took place in working-class areas. Houses and shops were burnt down. Hundreds of people are without shelter and food. Hindus and Muslims in the local area have shown tremendous empathy with each other. The communal flame was incited by ruling BJP leaders, who vowed to retaliate against those opposing the new Citizenship Amendment Act in India, particularly targeting women who have held a sit-in in Delhi's Shaheen Bagh district over 70 days. Despite the US President being in Delhi on 24 February, the government did not deploy police or army to save the lives and property of the common people. Those who indulged in



violence, killings, looting were outsiders and were given a free hand to cause mayhem, as happened in Gujarat during 2002, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the Chief State Minister there. The Delhi communal killings are a blot on democracy and secularism. Only an impartial enquiry would bring out the true facts about the perpetrators of this heinous crime. **To impose this, a strong and united mobilisation of all those who have shown their will to defend democracy and secularism, and especially a show of strength on the part of the labour movement, of the trade unions, is necessary.**

Nambiath Vasudevan

This struggle concerns the workers and peoples of the whole world

The massive protests against the discriminatory laws enacted by the Modi government have changed the political landscape of India since December 2019. This wave of protests started mainly among the youth and students. On 8 January 2020, the main trade union centres as well as independent trade union organisations called for a 24-hour general strike against the anti-working-class policies of the Modi government.

The action on 8 January gave an opportunity to unite the struggle against the anti-working-class platform of the government and the struggle against its anti-democratic plans expressed in the discriminatory measures which target the Muslim citizens of India. In strike action and in the streets, unity was achieved between those different aspects of the same struggle.

More than any other section, the working class need democracy, unity and secularism to make its

demands prevail. The labour movement, its trade unions, should naturally be at the forefront of such a struggle.

This struggle concerns workers and people the world over. That is why the IWC regards as its duty to widely circulate all information about this struggle and to express its strong solidarity with those engaged in the struggle.

We are convinced that the struggle of the Indian workers and people, in the spirit of the Mumbai International Conference held in December 2016, will be central in the International Conference Against War and Exploitation, For a Workers' International, to be held in Europe in November 2020.

Daniel Gluckstein, Nambiath Vasudevan
OWC Co-ordinators