

Labour Internationalist

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

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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.

**It is only
by breaking
with the
interests of the
banks and big
business that
the impending
disaster can be
avoided**

On 20 May, TUC General secretary Frances O'Grady chaired a Zoom event with the participation of Labour Shadow Cabinet member Anneliese Dodds in which the TUC – with the backing of the Labour Party leadership – launched its report entitled “A Better Recovery – Learning the lessons of the corona crisis to create a stronger, fairer economy”. The report says (p.45): “*The TUC is calling for a National Recovery Council, replicated at sectoral and regional level so that unions and employers can work together with government to approach strategically and handle collectively the coming challenges.*”

This statement had been announced on 19 May by *The Guardian* under the headline “TUC boss calls for new council to build fairer economy after Covid-19”. Since then, there has been no publicity around the statement – as if the TUC leader and the Labour Party were keen to act as secretly as possible. That is understandable. To form a joint “council” bringing together the state, the employers and the representatives of the trade unions to run the economy is in blatant contradiction with the very reasons why the workers built their trade unions and decided to give them a political expression, so as to defend their own interests against the employers and the governments which support capitalist exploitation.

This constitutes a coup against the will of the working class to defend its rights and its lives in a period when they are being directly threatened for the sake of capitalist profit.

It constitutes a coup against workers’ democracy, on which the labour movement rests as a whole.

It is an essential part of the struggle against the murderous plans of the exploiters and the Johnson government that the voice of the labour movement be heard – at all levels of the labour movement, in the trade unions and in the Labour Party – to say: NO to any attempt to institutionalise subordination of the labour movement to the government.

The call for a National Recovery Council has been made at a time when massive lay-offs have been signalled in press reports. Rolls Royce, a company that has received public money to furlough thousands of workers in application of the Tory plan supported by the Labour Party leadership, is to cut 9,000 jobs globally, 3,375 of them in Derby alone. British Airways is set to cut 12,000 jobs, Virgin Atlantic plans to axe more than 3,000, and Ryanair to slash up to 3,000.

These announcements came after it emerged (in a leaked document published recently by *The Telegraph*) that the Treasury intends to make ordinary people pay for the economic crisis: an increase in income tax; a possible NHS/social care

surcharge; the end of the triple-lock on state pension increases; a two-year public sector pay-freeze; cuts across the board in public services; and further reductions in local government funding, which in practice could mean as much as 20 percent cuts in local services and social care in order to set a “legal” balanced budget. James Jamieson, chair of the Local Government Association (LGA) has estimated that councils will face costs of nearly £13 billion to tackle the crisis this year.

So, a “*National Recovery Council, replicated at sectoral and regional level where unions and employers will work together with government*” is being presented as a response to this unprecedented offensive against the working class.

But the response should be a united struggle by all of the component parts of the labour movement to impose a ban on lay-offs and job-cuts.

The position of *Labour Internationalist* – published by the British supporters of the OCRFI on the basis of the Fourth International in continuation of Leon Trotsky’s struggle – is clear and unambiguous: it is not by teaming up with the Tories in a “national unity” body together with representatives of the banks and big business that those claiming to represent the working class can avoid the impending disaster. We totally reject this corporatist committee, and call on all trade unionists to oppose it.

Everyone agrees that the country is facing a national disaster. At the time of writing, tens of thousands of families have been hit by the mounting Covid-19 death-toll, and – despite the government’s increasingly transparent lies and misinformation – people are still dying for lack of PPE and timely and effective testing.

Beyond the key workers who have kept the public services, utilities and food supplies going throughout the health crisis, working people in general are now facing increasing pressure to return to work in order to “reopen” the capitalist economy, ignoring the continuing risks to health – for instance, by cramming into public transport.

Workers are turning to those representing them in the communities and in the workplace to organise the resistance. With the backing of parents, the teaching unions are refusing to reopen primary schools on 1 June without guarantees for the health and safety. In the Wirral, more than 3,000 people joined an online rally hosted by the NEU, NASWUT and UNISON against the Tory plan.

At least 22 councils around England (including Liverpool, Hartlepool, Birmingham, Leeds, Slough, Wirral, Brighton and Hove and Bristol, plus Staffordshire and Kent county councils), most of them Labour-led, have now said they also reject the Tory plan to get schools reopened in order to push

more people back to work regardless of safety conditions – to “save the economy”, as the government puts it.

Now, the health crisis is combining with the economic crisis born from the bankruptcy of the capitalist system, resulting in the current situation. This combined crisis poses a fundamental threat to the lives of working people, and a basic challenge to the labour movement as a tool for defending the workers’ interests against the demands of this failed capitalist system.

Today’s situation marks the start of a new wave of attacks on workers’ living standards and rights: more job-cuts, continuing downward pressure on wages, increasing flexibility and insecure working, extension of unpaid overtime. Meanwhile, poorer citizens will find their housing and their basic ability to feed themselves and their families at even greater risk.

The country is heading towards a major disaster. Immediate emergency measures are needed. This is why more than 75 Trade unionists and activists from all political tendencies of the labour movement have signed an appeal, launched in early April and endorsed by *Labour Internationalist* (1) that declares: “Protect working people, not the banks and big business! Let’s come together to push for the basic emergency measures that democracy requires.” These are:

- Free distribution of masks to the whole population;
- Ban “temporary” lay-offs and job-cuts;
- Ban bogus self-employment;
- Full pay immediately, not in May or June, for all self-isolated workers, whatever their work status;
- Paid time off to care for children when there is no other option available;
- All employers without exception to be legally bound by the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, and the Employment Rights Act 1996, which together give employees the right to leave their place of work if they feel they are in “serious and imminent” danger;

- Financial security for all: scrap Universal Credit;
- Moratorium on all debt and the payment of rent and rental charges (utilities, etc.);
- All social benefits and support allowances to be paid immediately, not in May or June;
- Staple foods and basic goods to be distributed for free to people in difficulty;
- Requisition vacant/available premises to provide accommodation to the homeless and poorly-housed;
- Scrap all Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts, which have been a tool for commercialising education and privatising the NHS;
- Repeal the Coronavirus Act 2020, replace it with properly scrutinised measures that do not restrict civil liberties.

The appeal rightly said: These are immediate measures that are needed to avoid medical and economic carnage. Requisition all the resources needed to protect the population!

Who can take these measures? The government was quick to give £350 billion to the banks and businesses, but has left millions of working people wondering how they will survive. Who will confiscate the £350 billion given to the banks and businesses and allocate them to preventing disaster? Only a government carrying out the emergency measures that will save people and not the banks and big business can prevent the impending disaster of a combined health and economic crisis.

The road to a government of the working-class organisations that will break with the ruling class and its plans begins with defending the workers’ interests and refusing to collaborate with carrying out capitalist measures dressed up as “the national interest”. This is the challenge facing the labour movement today. We will unconditionally support any step in that direction.

20 May 2020

(1) For a copy of the appeal, which was reproduced in Issue No.6 (April 2020) of *Labour Internationalist*, contact emergency.action@aol.com.



SNAPSHOTS OF THE CRISIS

1 May: Government fiddles the figures again for appearances' sake as the death-toll grows

Hancock announces that the government has reached its much-touted target of 100,000 tests per day, calling it “a national achievement”. It later emerges that a third (around 39,000) of the 122,347 tests included in the final 24-hour period before the deadline were counted before they had been carried out. The total number of tests carried out, including repeat tests on the same people, falls well short of 100,000 on each of the next seven days. On 3 May, it emerges that just 7% (2,300) of the 31,000 tests delivered to care homes to test all residents and staff had been carried out so far, largely due to a lack of clarity about who could administer them.

1 May: The virus is killing more poor people than rich people

Figures published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that the most deprived areas of England and Wales have 55.1 deaths per 100,000 people, compared with 25.3 in affluent areas. The mortality rate in the east London borough of Newham – 144.3 deaths per 100,000 people – is closely followed by Brent in north London (141.5), and Newham’s neighbour Hackney (127.4). The data confirms what has been suspected all along: people living in the poorest parts of the country are dying from Covid-19 at a much higher rate than those in the richest.

3 May: Millions of people, including children, are going hungry

New data from the Food Foundation show that the number of households with children going hungry has doubled since lockdown began, as millions of people struggle to afford food. Almost a fifth of households with children have been unable to access enough food in the past five weeks, with meals being skipped and children not getting enough to eat as already vulnerable families battle isolation and a loss of income. With schools no longer providing a reprieve for children reliant on free

breakfast clubs and school lunches, poorer families are at crisis point.

4 May: As the government prepares to push people back to work, the TUC and Labour Party express concern

The government gives the trade unions just 12 hours to respond before finalising its draft guidelines for getting employees back to work during the Covid-19 crisis. Among other things, the guidelines leave safety measures at the discretion of employers, ignoring employers’ binding obligations under existing health and safety legislation; they don’t specify what PPE should be provided, thereby preventing any meaningful measure of the steps taken; and they don’t specify any penalty if employers don’t comply with the proposals. Labour’s Shadow Employment Rights Minister Andy McDonald says: “*The entire country wants the government to succeed, but this is not how to build confidence or trust.*” In a letter to the government, TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady says: “*Working people need to see that the government is genuinely committed to protecting their health and safety.*”

5 May: Government continues to feed contracts to private companies

Local government officials express serious concerns that the government’s preference for outsourcing its tracing plans to private companies such as Serco via a centralised, national contact centre “*would be a disaster*”, ignoring local knowledge, existing tracking and tracing systems already in place and experienced public health and environmental health teams.

8 May: Government uses Covid-19 crisis as an excuse to erode child protection

It emerges that during April, the government removed or diluted more than 60 legal protections for children in care without any public consultation or parliamentary debate. They include social worker visits, six-monthly reviews, independent scrutiny of fostering and adoption, the skills and

experiences of children’s home staff, placements of children many miles from home, the notification of criminal convictions, and more. A single statutory instrument was used to make around 100 amendments to 10 separate sets of regulations, using the Covid-19 crisis as an excuse.

9 May: UK care homes scramble to buy their own PPE as government’s delivery scheme fails

Care home providers say that only a small fraction of the PPE needed is being supplied under the government’s delivery pilot scheme, contracted to private company Clipper Logistics at the end of March, with the national rollout for the system still weeks away.

9 May: Big unions write an open letter to the government in the spirit of “national co-operation”

The leaders of Unison, Unite, the GMB and Usdaw join the TUC in warning Johnson that they will not recommend a return to work for their 3 million members until the government and employers agree to firmer health and safety measures. In a letter to *The Observer*, they say: “*The trade union movement wants to be able to recommend the government’s back-to-work plans. But for us to do that we need to ensure that ministers have listened and that we stay safe and save lives at work too.*”

11 May: Low-paid and manual workers more likely to die from Covid-19 than professionals

The ONS publishes figures up to 20 April which confirm that people in low-paid, manual jobs face a much greater risk of dying from Covid-19 compared to higher-paid professional, white-collar workers. Men (security guards, care workers, construction workers, plant operatives, cleaners, taxi drivers, bus drivers, chefs and retail workers) are four times more likely to die from the virus, while women working as carers are twice as likely to die compared to those in professional and technical roles.

12 May: Education unions and local councils resist reopening of primary schools

The National Education Union (NEU) and UNISON tell members not to “engage with” government planning for reopening on 1 June. Nine unions representing hundreds of thousands of teachers, school leaders and support staff issue a joint statement accusing the government of a “lack of understanding” about the health dangers, and call on ministers to step back from plans for a phased reopening schools in England beginning on 1 June.

Meanwhile, Liverpool becomes the first local authority to rule out reopening its schools until at least 15 June. The same day, Hartlepool council announces that schools would not reopen on 1 June. Other councils indicate that they would only reopen schools on 1 June if they were confident that it was safe to do so.

13 May: For the first time during the Covid-19 crisis, collective strike action is threatened

As the lockdown begins to be relaxed in London and people cram onto public transport amid continuing fear of health risks, RMT General Secretary Mick Cash says that strike action could be necessary to “protect workers and passengers”, adding that staff would be entitled to refuse to work if they did not feel safe. “If that’s what needs to be to keep people safe, then we will stop trains.”

15 May: Government pushes ahead to “re-open the economy”

without the means to prevent a second wave

Three weeks after Hancock announced that the government was “ramping up” its supposed “test, track and trace” strategy by “hiring an initial 18,000 people, including over 3,000 clinicians, including public health specialists”, adding “we’ll be training up the massed ranks of our contact tracers over the coming weeks and roll out the service”, the government admits that just 1,500 people (out of 15,000 applicants) had been hired by 11 May.

With inadequate safety measures at work, insufficient testing, and no “track and trace” system in place, a second wave becomes more likely.

19 May: Official unemployment figure reaches highest level since 1996

The ONS says that some 856,500 people signed up for universal credit and jobseeker’s allowance benefits in April, driving up the number of people claiming unemployment benefits to almost 2.1 million.

Economists say the dramatic increase in unemployment would have been much higher without the government’s emergency wage subsidy scheme.

The ONS does not count “furloughed” workers as unemployed.

20 May: TUC and LP propose “National Recovery Council”

TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady launches The TUC report entitled “A Better Recovery – Learning the lessons of the corona crisis to create a stronger, fairer

economy”, with the support of the Labour Party.

The report says (p.45): “The TUC is calling for a National Recovery Council, replicated at sectoral and regional level so that unions and employers can work together with government to approach strategically and handle collectively the coming challenges.”

20 May: The real Covid-19 death-toll nears the total number of civilian deaths in World War Two

According to the ONS, the total UK death-toll involving Covid-19 stands at more than 44,500, but this does not include the people who have died from heart disease, cancer, strokes and other illnesses that would have been treated if there wasn’t an epidemic.

The wider ONS data show that the total UK number of excess deaths (the number above what might be expected at this time of year, judged by a five-year average) was just under 55,000 up to 8 May. *Financial Times* economics editor Chris Giles notes that “a cautious estimate” of excess deaths linked to Covid-19 up to 18 May is 62,100, while a former ONS official estimates excess deaths to be 62,900 up to 17 May.

The official civilian UK death-toll for the whole of World War Two was 70,000.



NEWS FROM THE PICKET LINE

RMT to members: Unsafe? Don't work!

The RMT has issued fresh advice to members not to work in unsafe Covid-19 conditions, warning that confused government messaging could have lethal consequences. RMT General Secretary Mick Cash said: *"We are reissuing and reinforcing advice to our members not to work in conditions where their health and safety is clearly compromised. No employer should be sending their staff out to work in those kinds of conditions and we are putting the industry on the clearest possible notice."*

The government must bring P&O Ferries under public control!

P&O Ferries has announced job-cuts on key Channel and North Sea routes. The company has taken taxpayer support at the same time as paying large dividends to its foreign owners. The RMT is calling for the government to take control of the company and condemned as *"an appalling betrayal"* the announcement of more than 1,000 job losses on routes from Dover and Hull. It has accused the company of planning to dump British seafarers and replace them with cheaper staff from overseas.

The British taxpayer is already paying out millions through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to meet 80 per cent of the wages of 1,400 key workers – seafarers, dockers and other staff – at P&O Ferries. More public funds are to be released shortly to support operators of major ferry routes from Britain to the Continent during the pandemic. P&O Ferries is expected to bid for these too. *"The UK government needs to take public control of this vital service or at the very least take a significant public stake"*, said the RMT.



Government forced to back-track on its policy on the immigration status of NHS workers

The Home Office is now extending the offer of indefinite leave to remain, free of charge, to the families and dependants of NHS support staff and social care workers who die as result of contracting coronavirus. One GMB organiser said: *"It's great that the GMB has forced the Home Office to backtrack on this. But as with everything, the devil is in the detail, and we urge the Home Secretary to mirror the free auto-extension of work visa scheme as well as the free*

indefinite leave to remain for grieving families to all those staff eligible for Matt Hancock's Life Assurance payments; that is – all key workers who are in front-line healthcare roles. Not only is it the right thing to do, it's also an acceptance that regardless who you work for, where you were born or how much you're paid – if you have fought front-line during this pandemic – you and your family will be supported and treated the same."

Equal rights for all – BMA: Scrap the immigration health surcharge!

Under government plans, NHS workers from overseas were facing the prospect having to pay £625 from October (up from £400) for themselves and £625 for every member of their family to use the NHS – the very institution they work for.

BMA Council Chair Dr Chaand Nagpaul said on 20 May. *"The immigration health surcharge is unfair, illogical and penalises hardworking international staff for dedicating their lives to NHS patients. (...) At a time when skilled international doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers are risking their lives in the fight against Covid-19 – and most tragically, in some cases dying on the frontline – it beggars belief that they are still being charged to use the very service they are working for. These staff are also already paying tax and national insurance like everybody else – meaning they are being charged twice for NHS treatment."*

On 21 May, Johnson was forced to make an embarrassing U-turn. He *"asked the Home Office and the Department for Social Care to remove NHS and care workers from the surcharge as soon as possible."*

Dyson employees force management to retreat

Engineering firm Dyson told staff who were able to work from home to return to the office in rotating shift patterns from 18 May, in contravention of government advice. The proposals prompted anger among employees, and the company reversed its decision the following day.



ISSUES OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Cuts are cuts, whatever form they take and whoever makes them

By Mike Calvert, UNISON and Labour Party member, Islington (London) (personal capacity)

The Government has now begun to ease the lockdown in an attempt to save decrepit British capitalism.

The major forthcoming battle facing the working class and its organisations will be against the employers as they plan to square the budget circle.

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), 1.6 billion workers have lost or are at risk of losing their livelihoods due to the Covid-19 crisis. This is 24 times the entire population of Britain. It is also over half of the world's workforce of 3.3 billion.

The Bank of England has forecast that the British economy will experience its deepest recession in 300 years – in fact, since the “Great Frost” of 1709 – with output set to plunge almost 30 per cent in the first half of this year alone. This makes 1929 and the Great Depression look like a tea party by comparison.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Sunak said on 19 May that the UK faces a deep recession.

The government's much awaited “easing” of the lockdown has ended up in a welter of confusion. In a pre-recorded speech on 17 May, Boris Johnson left the entire country none the wiser about what comes next.

When Boris's bluster and spin is cast aside, what is left? A green light for big business to call their workers back to work so that their profits can begin flowing again. Workers are being thrown into the meat grinder in the interests of the bosses' profits.

Construction and manufacturing are to start up as soon as possible. The message to these workers was: work from home “if you can”. No doubt, managers everywhere breathed a sigh of relief. Builders, labourers and factory operatives await recall back to work.

Meanwhile, workers were told to use their car, cycle or walk, and to avoid public transport “where possible”. Where that is not possible, again for the poorest workers, they will just have to take their lives into their own hands on their daily commute.

These issues are being debated in the labour movement, with a recent article in the *Morning Star* arguing that “*We are reaching a crisis point in the management of the coronavirus pandemic that sharply reveals the inadequacies of government and the personal shortcomings of the premier. The facts create a compelling picture of incompetence*”.

Many factors account for the current situation, but the debate is not over the government's competence. When it comes to saving the capitalist economy, this government shows they are very competent. They were quick to give £350 billion to the banks and businesses, but left millions of working people wondering how they would survive. Their competence in bailing out the banks and big businesses was acknowledged by the City – the financial institution giving the orders.

The situation we are facing now is not the result of incompetence, but of the policies of successive governments – of both the right and left – which for decades destroyed the NHS and all public services and cut local budgets on the pretext of reducing public spending, in application of the dictates of the IMF and the EU.

It is the people that must be saved and protected, not the banks and businesses.

Now, the government is preparing a wave of austerity to make working people pay for the bailout of the banks and businesses. They are planning a wave of local cuts.

Islington Council's Chief Executive told the trade unions a week ago that then the Council was “*upwards of £62 million in deficit and losing up to £1 million a day*”.

James Jamieson, chair of the Local Government Association (LGA) and Conservative leader of Central Bedfordshire Council, has estimated that councils will face costs of nearly £13 billion to tackle the crisis this year.

Labour Party leader Starmer is calling for a national consensus, working hand-in-hand to make local communities pay while banks and businesses are being bailed out with taxpayers' money.

So, where does that leave the working class and trade unions and their organisations today?

The unions must forge an independent path, distinct and opposed to the national consensus advocated with the bosses and the Tories and being pushed by Starmer. The TUC must call on the unions to fight.

It is absolutely clear that we need to defend the working class – our members – and the only way to do this is to reject any kind of “national unity” initiative.

We need to pressure the union leaders to fight the forced march back to work – beginning with rejecting the reopening of schools, which can only lead to another spike in the virus and yet more infection and deaths.

We need to seriously begin to address the need to fight these cuts – whatever form they take and whoever makes them.

To do that, we need to regroup and come together, have a discussion and then face up squarely with a united response in the Labour Party and the trade unions.

That response needs to be across London and nationwide.

OPEN FORUM

Classism

By John Sweeney

Johnson knows that realistically, it is too early to lift the lock-down: the numbers just aren't there, new cases and deaths (while declining) are still too high, and the government is weeks away from having any sort of half decent strategy in place.

There is plenty of money – limitless amounts – when it comes to bailing out banks, paying for vanity projects, and allowing the super-wealthy to evade taxation. Enough to get over the worst of this pandemic before sending mainly low-paid manual workers back to work in dangerous circumstances.

It makes no logical sense to ban larger gatherings outside for leisure purposes, but compel people to return to work indoors in close proximity in far greater numbers. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that the health, and even lives, of working-class people are judged to be expendable for a greater cause: profit margins and shareholder returns. What we have here is an unvarnished attempt to start the engines of industry. The unions are appalled. Companies aren't prepared for "social distancing", let alone workplace distancing.

Kier Starmer indicated he agrees with the actions of the Conservatives – his only disagreement is how the message was presented.

A Starmer government would be almost indistinguishable from this Tory government. Because by turning Labour into a Blairite tribute act,

the right-wing Parliamentary Labour Party bear some responsibility for this government being in power.

We have crass leaders, supported by a crass media. If you're not rich, you're worthless in their eyes. How else do you explain the higher burden of deaths on the working class? Inequality kills as surely this pandemic, and THAT is the underlying reason for this utterly shocking massacre of the poor. It certainly looks like those who have taken the hardest hit are about to be thrown to the wolves.

If there is one thing Covid-19 has shown us, it is that the class system is not a natural phenomenon, it is a capitalist construct and in its purest form it can be broken down as follows:

"I'm upper class, I'm staying in my second home and going out to play golf later."

"I'm middle class, I'm working from home and going out to play tennis with my wife this evening."

"I'm working class, I'm going to die."

Classism is alive and well, and actually one of the most toxic forces in the country. Which is why we must fight for a bold internationalist and genuine socialist alternative. We must be courageous and ensure mass movements are developed across the world.

We must seize the moment and unleash the potential force of the working class, youth and poor to end the chaos of capitalism.

Stefan Cholewka's notes of the month

The UK economy is crashing!

Who will save capitalism: the TUC & the Labour Party!

In 2008, the UK bailed out some major banks by taking multi-billion-pound stakes in them. But without access to state support, many companies folded. Now that the state is giving its full support to the bankrupt bosses, the likelihood is that the state itself will be bankrupted.

The fear that mass unemployment on a scale not seen before will lead to revolution, has led to the Tories spending billions to keep businesses going, while at the same time facing the prospect that if the vast debt is not repaid out of the superexploitation of the working class, then Britain faces the same future as Weimar Germany, with its gigantic inflation and the middle classes begging in the streets.

Trade unions are warning the government that it is treading on the thinnest of thin ice and that the working class will rise up and overthrow it if it attempts to impose super-austerity. PM Johnson's drive to return workers to work, despite the coronavirus epidemic, announced in Parliament on 18 May, has met with a split response in the trade union movement.

The RMT's General Secretary Mick Cash warned: *"The government's 'return to work' policy from Wednesday morning risks unleashing total chaos on a transport network which has not been told to prepare for a rise in numbers until next Monday. This is a ridiculous and dangerous way to treat both staff and passengers alike, and will have potentially lethal consequences. (...). RMT*

has made it clear that our members have a right to refuse to work in unsafe conditions and the union will be closely monitoring the situation Wednesday morning. We will have no hesitation in protecting our members' health, safety and livelihoods by whatever means required. The government will be held to account for their actions."

The GMB said: *"Ministers must pause any return to work until proper guidelines, advice and enforcement are in place to keep people safe."*

However, TUC leader Frances O'Grady called the Johnson plan *"a step in the right direction"*! O'Grady and the majority of the TUC leadership are corporatists. They long to work alongside the Johnson government as its special advisers, and constantly stress how useful their experience in dealing with workers would be.

Johnson, following Trump, is desperate to get the working class back to work so that they can be super-exploited to pay off the vast debts of Britain's bosses and bankers.

On 12 May, the CITY UK group said that British capitalism is sitting on a £105 billion debt time bomb. The ratings agency Fitch forecast that the big five banks face credit losses of £25 billion for 2020. Superexploiting the working class to cover the debt is what Johnson's "return to work" is all about.

On 11 May, Starmer said in a national broadcast, *"Whether we voted for this government or not, at this moment of national crisis, we all rely on the government to get this right. That's why we've called for a national consensus."* The Labour Party, he continued, *"remains committed to working constructively with the government in the national interest."*

From our Correspondent in Liverpool

I believe this is the lull before the storm. The stock markets have been falling since November, and despite the stimulus, look set to fall further. The UK is now officially in recession and the forecast is for 8 percent negative growth for the coming year. The crash of 1929 started in 1928.

Capitalism, as we know, has seemingly hit an impasse. The US can't service the debt and inject more cash into the economy, which is the only way to climb from recession.

I believe they will have to make a choice. They can attempt to crush us, removing democracy in the process, but knowing at the same time that this measure would strengthen opposition. Or, they can bend the rules of capitalism to get themselves out of the shit.

I would imagine then that many more people will realise that there is no requirement for austerity and hardship, and the rules aren't worth a carrot except to maintain privilege for the few. If the government can bend the rules for the banks, then they can do it for us – or better still, let's have some new rules.

I think it is a golden opportunity to prove why we have capitalism: it only works for the rich and is only going to get worse.

The conclusion of the May Day rally organised by the IWC is absolutely correct in my view. As I said, I think the worse is yet to come, and feel that consciousness should be raised, using simple facts and figures, to demonstrate how the economics of capitalism function.



INTERNATIONAL



More than 13,000 people take part in the May Day online international rally, organised on the initiative of the IWC: "*Three hours for the Workers' International*"

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This May Day meeting is unique", stated Nambiath Vasudevan, joint co-ordinator of the International Workers Committee Against War and Exploitation, for the Workers International (IWC) along with Daniel Gluckstein, in introducing the rally. He added: "*Despite enormous obstacles, workers and activists from 45 countries have decided to come together in this online rally in the true tradition of international working-class solidarity to raise their voices and speak out against the continued abandonment of the working classes, who are denied the most basic care.*" Indeed, due to the pandemic and the widespread lockdown measures around the world, the international rally convened by the IWC had to be held online.

Over the course of three hours, 48 activists from 45 countries (see the list below) spoke. Beyond their origins and their diverse political and trade union affiliations, they all placed themselves in the common framework of this rally: "*Three hours for the Workers' International. It is the workers, youth and humanity that must be saved, not the banks and capitalists!*" Clicks on the IWC website show that more than 13,000 workers and young people from dozens of countries on all five continents followed this May Day rally, which was broadcast live and then replayed (and still available for viewing).

The rally constitutes a point of support for the preparation of the next World Conference Against War and Exploitation, for a Workers' International, convened in Paris next November.

Given the circumstances, as Daniel Gluckstein indicated in his conclusion, the next World Conference will take place, "*if not in November, then in December, and if not in December, then in 2021*", because "*the time has come to move forward with the Workers' International in order to fight for the reorganisation of the whole of society and of the economy, to provide solutions to the demands of the majority of the people.*"

The day after the meeting, new endorsements in support of the World Conference reached the IWC, further expanding the preparations for the World Conference for the Workers International. The meeting is still available for viewing in English, French, Spanish and Turkish.

Speakers (in order of appearance):

Introduction by

Nambiath Vasudevan – India
(IWC Joint Co-ordinator)

Chris Silvera – United States
Ricardo Sonny Martinez – Argentina
Jung Sikhwa – Republic of Korea
Camille Sellier – Belgium
Eleni Pieropolou – Greece
Gladys Lyra – Mexico
Rubina Jamil – Pakistan
Jules Souleymane Diallo – Senegal
Mario Tome – Portugal
Yuri Glushakov – Belarus
Ross Ashley – Canada
Marat Santos Huaman – Peru
Workers Tribune – Morocco
Andreas Gangl – Germany
Cemal Bilgin – Turkey
José Limaico Vela – Ecuador

Naji Al-Khatib – Palestine
Mafa Kwanisai Mafa – Zimbabwe
Messan Lawson – Togo
Christel Keiser – France
Prof. Boanerges Zulmires Elias Neto – Brazil
Milind Ranade – India
Paul Nkunzimana – Burundi
Lorenzo Varaldo – Italy
Marc Simete – Switzerland
Monica Aguilera – Australia
Maritzas Bastias – Chile
Lee Cheuk-yan – China
Soulé Salako – Benin
Ciaran Campbell – Ireland
Andrei Kalinkin – Russia

MESSAGES:

The Organising Committee of Internationalist Socialists (COSI) — Algeria; **Constantin Cretan** – Romania (mineworker trade unionist, political prisoner for many years due to his trade

union activity); **LALIT political party** – Mauritius; **Worker militants** – Côte D'Ivoire

Berthony Dupont – Haiti
Left Radical of Afghanistan, Kabul – Afghanistan
Lubone Mbozomani – Azania/South Africa
Lotfi – Tunisia
Angela Mateu – Spanish State
Yuk Yuk Choi – China
Randy Miranda – Philippines
Zongo Sibri Ablasse – Burkina Faso
John Sweeney – United Kingdom
Judit Somi – Hungary
Democratic Workers Party – Bangladesh

Closing speech by

Daniel Gluckstein – France
(IWC Joint Co-ordinator)

To endorse the appeal for the World Conference, go to the IWC website: <https://coi-iwc.org/>

To support the IWC's international activities, please send your financial contribution to:

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Closing speech to the IWC's May Day International Rally by Daniel Gluckstein, IWC Joint Co-ordinator

Brothers and Sisters, Friends and Comrades,

My name is Daniel Gluckstein. I am one of the two co-ordinators, along with Comrade Nambiath Vasudevan, of the International Workers Committee Against War and Exploitation, Against Precarious Work and for the Workers International.

It is a fact that the crisis facing humankind today is the worst crisis in many decades. As far as we know, the Covid-19 virus is the result of a process of nature, but the tremendous expansion of this virus the world over, the hundreds of thousands of deaths already announced officially, they are not the result of a process of nature; they are the result of a lack of research on this kind of coronavirus over the past 20 years. They are the result of hospital closures, and the lack of medical services and doctors the world over. They are the result of the greed for profit.

Many speakers before me have highlighted the fact that the bosses and governments are seizing the opportunity of this coronavirus to launch a new wave of attacks against the working class and democratic rights. Since the beginning of this pandemic, millions of workers have been laid off. Hunger is spreading throughout the world. Millions of people are dying of starvation.

Different speakers before me raised the accusation – and they are right – that all these phenomena do not derive from the laws of nature. They derive from the destructive policies implemented the world over by all the governments serving the interests of this capitalist system – a system that is based on private ownership of the means of production.

Why are we gathered today, on 1 May 2020? We are here because we cannot accept the idea that this pandemic simply was our fate. We cannot accept the false idea according to which everybody is on the same level facing the pandemic – the idea that workers and bosses, rich and poor, are on the same level facing the pandemic. This is not true.

On the contrary. Everything that is happening today in every country shows that through this pandemic, the struggle between the working class and the capitalist class is becoming sharper every day.

My comrade Christel, who spoke before me, explained what is going on in my own country. Can you imagine that in France, which is one of the richest countries of the world, the pandemic started more than two months ago, and until this day, the 1st of May, there are not enough masks, not enough protection equipment for the population. The French government, which is lying, has had to recognise that even within three or four weeks, everything that is needed will still not be available.

The first decision that the French government took after the beginning of the pandemic was to ask Parliament to pass a bill that gives 343 billion euros to the banking system in order to help the capitalists – 343 billion

euros! This huge amount of money is almost the equivalent of France's annual budget.

And this bill was passed on 19 March by every single member of the National Assembly – from the far right to the far left. One condition that the capitalists had to fulfil to receive these funds was that they must prove their willingness to downsize their plants and lay off their workers.

Meanwhile, the government gave 5 euros to each person requesting food assistance. Today, there are between 8 million and 10 million people in France requesting food assistance. At the same time, the fund for the banks and the capitalists has gone up to 400 billion euros.

This is not specific to France. This is a situation that is well known by workers the world over, where all the governments during the past 30 to 40 years have bowed to the diktats of the IMF and the European Union. They have bowed down and agreed to shut down hospitals and attack the Social Security and healthcare systems. They agreed to cut public budgets and public services in order to help the bosses make more profits.

Over the past 40 years, in France those policies against the working class, against public services, have been implemented both by so-called right-wing governments and by so-called left-wing governments.

And today in Parliament, all of the National Assembly members claiming to be representatives of the working class – or at least, the parliamentary members of the so-called “left” political parties – agreed to give 343 billion euros to the bosses and the banks.

And this raises another serious issue.

Many people in my country – and I understand this is true in other countries – are now calling for a kind of “national unity” and even for a “national unity government” to deal with the pandemic. We know the story. When the bosses talk about “national unity”, workers should check their pockets to see if their money has been stolen! When the bosses talk about “national unity”, you can be sure that what they mean is that everybody should rally round to defend the bosses' interests and their profits.

That is why our political party in France, the Democratic Independent Workers Party, is arguing for the need to prepare the way for a working-class unity government – as opposed to a so-called “national unity government”. Our party has stated publicly that a working-class unity government is needed to carry out the emergency measures which the situation calls for.

This means banning lay-offs. It means maintaining all the workers' wages and salaries.

It means requisitioning the 343 billion euros given to the banks and the capitalists – and applying this huge amount of money to carrying out the emergency measures regarding jobs, healthcare, education and public services.

It means nationalising without any compensation the banks and all businesses capable of mass-producing face masks, testing kits, and all other means of personal protection.

It means nationalising in order to plan food production and ensure its free distribution. And so on. We know that such emergency measures should be on the agenda in every country.

But this means that the working class's fightback must seek to impose this kind of emergency measures – NOT the kind of measures that are currently being implemented with the sole aim of protecting the interests of the bosses and the banks.

We understand that for comrades from poor countries, it is hard to believe that even in the richest countries the most elementary means to defend the working class are lacking. This is one expression of the unity of the class struggle the world over. In poor countries, in rich countries, in imperialist countries and in oppressed nations – we are all suffering the consequences of the deep crisis of this capitalist system.

Is it possible to find a solution that meets the vital needs of the working class? Yes, it is possible. But such a solution must be independent of the bosses and the bourgeoisie. Such a solution also has a precondition: protecting the independence of the working class and its organisations.

The priority should be to do everything possible to save humankind. The means exist, the wealth exists, the resources exist to provide for the 8 billion people living on this planet, so that they have the possibility to escape from starvation, the possibility to access the healthcare they need, the possibility to provide schooling for all the children.

We know that those resources exist; but we also know that they've been confiscated by a tiny minority of exploiters and speculators. Gathered here today, we know that what we have in common is more than we could possibly have in common with the capitalists and the governments in each country.

The history of the working-class movement is that of real attempts to come together and build together. We must remember the fact that a little over a century and a half ago, the First International – the International Workingmen's Association – was founded in London (Britain), bringing together most of the existing currents and tendencies of the working-class movement.

The names of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are well known the world over; but in the framework of this First International, a lot of people did not share the views of



many others; for example, about what was meant by socialism or working-class emancipation. Many of them were trade unionists, some of them were members of various socialist groups, others were more or less close to the anarchists. But all of them shared the following point of view: these different currents, these different tendencies, whatever their disagreements, were members of the same International Association because they understood that the interests of the working class and the interests of the capitalist class were diametrically opposed.

Therefore, all of them shared the view that the working-class organisations must defend and preserve their independence. They also shared the view that if the working class is to defend itself, it must champion the struggle for every particular demand, however limited this may be. They understood that the working class must embrace the demands of all the oppressed sectors facing national oppression, facing racist oppression, facing the specific oppression of women and gender oppression, and facing all forms of oppression and discrimination.

People belonging to the International Workingmen's Association over a century and a half ago shared another point of view – and that is, that the working class not only had a duty to fight for economic demands, but that the workers had to fight back to free themselves from the capitalist system. They understood that the most important demand was that the workers should seize power in order to reorganise the whole of society and the whole economy on a new basis. They understood that the socialisation of the means of production would make it possible for the wealth to belong to those who produce the wealth – meaning the class of the producers, the working class.

Of course, this was one century and a half ago, but we feel that today, opening the way for building a Workers International is more relevant than ever. We know that the labour movement, the movement of the working class, has a long history, that it has gone through a lot of struggles, sometimes ending in victory, and sometimes ending in defeat.

We know that the working-class movement has gone through a lot of crises, and has met with a lot of disillusionment. But we feel that we have no choice but to follow this course: the future of humankind depends on the ability of the working class to protect itself from the barbarism of a capitalist system that is leading it to destruction, in the name of the era of “globalisation”.

But what does “globalisation” mean in the mouths of the capitalists? It means their right to plunder and to dismember, it means their right to drive millions from their homes, to force them onto the road to exile, only for them to end up in jails, or in camps, or to drown in the seas and oceans.

The working class must rally together all of its forces. The time has come to move forward for a Workers' International. Whatever the differences among us, we understand that we have a common destiny. We understand that we are fighting against the same enemy, against those governments and those bosses who are only out to increase their profits, to develop the arms economy, by producing more and more weapons, by

provoking more and more wars against the peoples, and by building more and more walls to divide them.

But we must understand, as the comrade from the Philippines said before me, that the present crisis gives an opportunity to open up a path for millions and millions of people. But let's be clear about the purpose of the struggle.

The purpose of the struggle cannot be to imagine a new kind of capitalism, a "gentler" and "more humane" one. The purpose cannot be to wage the struggle against so-called "neoliberalism".

We must say clearly that those responsible for the current crisis are not people who have mismanaged the capitalist system. The capitalist system itself is to blame; private ownership of the means of production is to blame. We know that the working class and oppressed peoples throughout the world are facing hard times, and we know that we will face harder times in the next period. We understand that this huge crisis means a massive destruction of productive forces, and first of all, the mass destruction of the main productive force: the labour-power of the exploited worker. The capitalist class will do everything in its power to make the workers pay for the crisis. They already have started making speeches to say that the situation is feeding a global debt that is growing bigger and bigger by the day.

They are explaining that it will be necessary to service and repay this debt, that the people, the workers, will have to shoulder the repayment of the debt.

We understand that this capitalist system is condemned; the present crisis is a demonstration that there is no way for this system to save humankind. But above all, we understand that whatever differences may exist between us; whatever the colour of our skin; whatever the differences of language; whatever the differences of beliefs, whatever our political, social, religious or national traditions – all of us, men and women, young and old, we are all part, the world over, of a single working class. That is why – still respecting the differences between us – we have the responsibility to take a step forward on the road of a new Workers International.

Comrade Nambiath Vasudevan reminded us that we met in Mumbai, India, in a very successful conference in late 2016. Many working-class activists took part in that conference, many of whom were involved in the trade union movement in their countries. Other delegates were more involved in a political activity. Many participants in that conference did not claim to belong to any specific political current. Others didn't hide their political origins. Some of them were linked to the socialist tradition, others to the communist one, while others were members of the Trotskyist current – which is my case – or of other currents of the workers' movement in general.

But all of us together, we decided together to launch this new framework, respecting the diversity of this

gathering, on the common foundation of the fight for working class independence and for the Workers' International.

Comrade Vasudevan also reminded us of the decision that we took some months ago, to convene a new World Conference Against War and Exploitation and for a Workers' International.

This conference was supposed to take place in Paris in November 2020. At this point, nobody can say if we will be able to organise this World Conference at its scheduled time because nobody knows what the situation will be in the coming months. Nobody knows if it will be possible for comrades throughout the world to travel and to meet together.

But we hereby make this solemn pledge at this public rally on May Day 2020 that if it is not in November it will be in December, and if it is not in December it will be in 2021. Whatever the date, the World Conference Against War and Exploitation will take place; it is on the agenda.



The time has come for the workers to fight back together, shoulder-to-shoulder, in each and every country. The time has come to move forward on the path for the Workers' International in order to fight for the reorganisation of the whole of society and the whole economy in order to meet the demands of the majority of the people.

Before concluding this rally, I want to thank all the speakers from the different countries and continents. I also want to address a special thanks to the dozens and dozens of comrades who helped organise this effort, the comrades who helped us to overcome the lockdown, where everybody is supposed to be isolated in their own homes. I want to thank the dozens and dozens of comrades, the technical staff, the translators – to all of them who did this as a service to the working class, to all of them, let us say a huge thank you.

Comrades and friends, brothers and sisters, let us rally together and support the call for a world conference. All of you attending this rally are invited to join us. Be part of the process, sign the appeal for the world conference.

Long live May Day!

Long live the working class!

Long live the Workers International!

Workers of the world, unite!

CHINA / HONG KONG



**Lee Cheuk-Yan,
Chinese trade union leader,
summoned to court!**
**Declaration of the China Inquiry
Commission**



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In this month of May 2020, when the general lockdown has made the celebration of May Day virtually impossible, the government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, a region of the People's Republic of China, has summoned Lee Cheuk-Yan, General Secretary of the HKCTU trade union federation, to court on a charge of "participating in a public demonstration on 31 August 2019, which violated the Decree on public order of Hong Kong".

The decree that the Carrie Lam government is using is the result of the emergency rules which the British colonial government had issued against the seamen's strikes back in 1922 and the 1967 workers' strikes. It is in the name of this public order that more than 7,000 demonstrators have been arrested since June 2019 and 1,000 have already been sentenced!

Lee Cheuk-Yan appeared in court on 5 May and is summoned again to appear on 18 May. When tens of thousands of workers have been laid off or are out of work in Hong Kong, and millions are unemployed on the mainland, the right to defend one's interests is a vital need for workers. And it is not by chance that dozens of unions, independent from the ruling powers, have been formed in Hong Kong during the actions over the past few months, demanding the withdrawal of a bill that threatens democratic rights.

At all times, in every country, workers have fought and are fighting to secure the right to make demands, demonstrate, strike, build their own organisations independently from the powers-that-be, from the bosses or the leaderships.

Back in June 1925, it was the Chinese workers of Hong Kong and Canton who, through a massive strike, demanded freedom of speech, freedom of association and freedom to demonstrate, and thus gave full significance to the creation of the ACFTU, which had just held its founding conference on 1 May. How could the working-class movement accept that, almost a century later, the very same rights should still be so undermined?

The China Inquiry Commission, which for almost 30 years has fought for the right of Chinese workers to organise as they wish and had Lee Cheuk-Yan as guest of honour at its recent banquet in Paris in October 2019, asserts firmly:

No sentence must be passed on trade union activist Lee Cheuk-Yan!

The China Inquiry Commission calls on the international working-class movement to say loud and clear that any sentence against him must be ruled out, and it places this demand on the Hong Kong authorities.

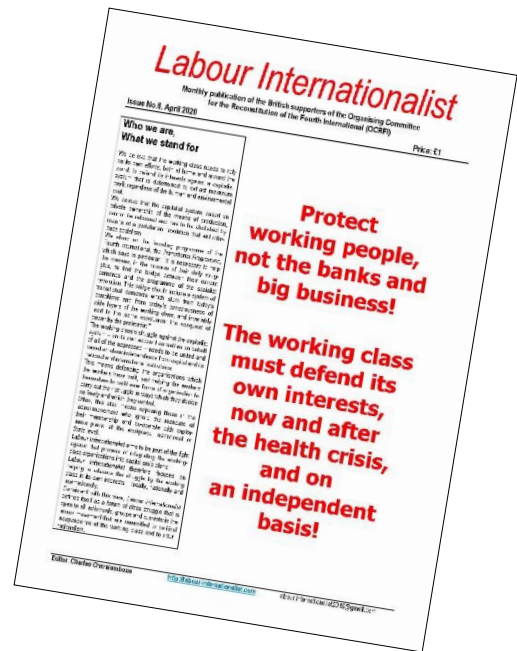
We, the undersigned, demand that all the charges against trade union activist Lee Cheuk-Yan be dropped.

Down with the criminalisation of trade union action!

Please email your message to the Hong Kong government at ceo@ceo.gov.hk. Please CC the HKCTU at hkctu@hkctu.org.hk and the China Inquiry Commission at comenchine@wanadoo.fr

Name

Email

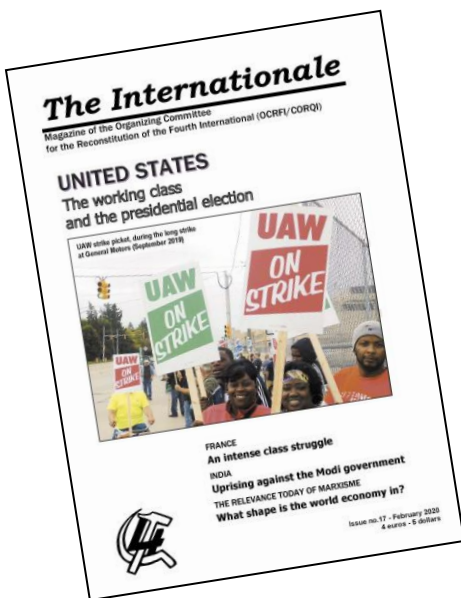


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