

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.

**A government
serving the
interests of the
vast majority
would ban
lay-offs
and job-cuts**

Unemployment continues to grow rapidly across the UK economy. Figures released on 16 July by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that the number of workers on UK company payrolls fell by 649,000 between March and June, and that the number of people claiming benefits last month is up to 2.6 million. This doesn't count around 500,000 employees who were not in work but received no pay in May.

Last week, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) laid out three scenarios. Under its "upside" scenario, unemployment will reach 10 percent, significantly higher than the 8.5 percent peak following the 2008 global financial crisis. Under the "central" scenario – which the OBR views as most likely – the jobless rate will rise to 12 percent, with around 3.5 million out of work, and the "downside" scenario will see unemployment hit 4 million. On 4 July, the OECD warned that unemployment could increase to almost 15 per cent of the working population (around 5 million workers) if the UK is hit by a second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In our March issue, *Labour Internationalist* first raised the question of banning job-cuts as an emergency measure in the current crisis. The following month, the trade unionist appeal which we endorsed and circulated made the explicit demand to requisition the £350 billion given to the banks and businesses and apply it to a list of emergency measures to directly protect the population, including a ban on "temporary" lay-offs and job-cuts.

It would be easy to dismiss the demand for a ban on job-cuts as impossible, "wishful thinking" and utopian.

But the whole history of the class struggle, both nationally and internationally, is full of examples of the exploited and the oppressed organising and winning gains through struggle which they were told beforehand were unobtainable, impossible, just wishful thinking. The 8-hour day wasn't a generous gift by the bosses, it was won through struggle. The same goes for health and safety legislation, the same goes for paid leave and pensions, and the list goes on.

The fact is that when the working class organised in their trade unions and fought back in the past, the capitalist class had no choice but to make concessions. So, why not today? The "failed old economics" of the capitalist system are still threatening people's livelihoods (even their actual lives) today, just as they did when Marx wrote *Capital* 150 years ago.

The urgent issue facing millions of workers today is to put a stop to lay-offs and job-cuts. But if – as some

would have us do – we count on the government to put a stop to them on its own initiative, then obviously it is a lost cause. What we need to count on is the capacity of the workers and their organisations to unite in order to impose a ban on lay-offs and job-cuts.

How practical a solution would this be? One answer to this question was given in 1938, in the founding programme of the Fourth International: "**The right to work is the only serious right the worker still has in a society that is based on exploitation. Meanwhile, this right is being confiscated from the worker at every step. Against unemployment – "structural" as well as "temporary" – it is time to put forward the slogan of a sliding scale of working hours, in parallel with the slogan of public works. Trade unions and other mass organisations should bind the workers and the unemployed together in the mutual responsibility of solidarity. Available work should be distributed among all available workers, and the working week determined in line with this. The average wage of every worker remains the same as it was under the old working week. Wages, with a strictly guaranteed minimum, follow the movement of prices. It is impossible to accept any other programme for the present catastrophic period.**" [original emphasis].

Everyone knows that the tens of billions of pounds needed to genuinely protect jobs and workers' living standards are already there and can be redirected by the government and big businesses – starting with requisitioning the hundreds of billions of pounds given to the bankers and the capitalists under the government's support schemes.



We do not ask everyone who wants to protect jobs to agree with the political programme which we stand for, as OCRFI supporters in the UK. But far from being "impossible" or unrealistic, the demands for a ban on lay-offs and job-cuts and the introduction of a sliding scale of working hours – therefore a relatively modest redistribution between profits and wages in order to protect everybody's job, share work out between everybody, and protect wages at the same time –

seems like common sense. Economically, there is nothing impossible about it. And this is just one possible solution.

Of course, this would put the power of the capitalist class – and ultimately its institutions and its whole system – into question.

In this situation, the leadership of the TUC with the support of Labour Party leaders have shamefully proposed a “National Recovery Council”, which would tie the trade unions to helping the government and bosses implement massive job-cuts in every sector.

For our part, we believe that society should be organised on a basis that starts from the social needs of the vast majority, not from the requirement for capitalist profit, and this poses the issue of breaking out of the framework of the capitalist system, which in turn poses the issue of socialising the means of production.

What kind of government will carry this out? One whose perspectives and policies will be dictated by the vast majority, by the working class, by the workers and their organisations, and not by the interests of a small minority, the capitalists. In other words, a workers’ government.

But we do not make agreeing with all of our political positions into a precondition for fighting for a ban on lay-offs and job-cuts. We fully support the position taken by the Greater Manchester Association of TUCs and Birmingham Trades Council against the National Recovery Council and in favour of a ban on lay-offs and job-cuts. We will support and join any further steps – however limited – in that direction, whether by individuals or organisations.

27 July

Where is the call to resist, to fight back? Who will lead?

In his *Guardian* article (28 May) entitled “Protecting and creating jobs must be a priority in any coronavirus recovery”, Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey stated that the government’s job retention scheme (JRS) “*was a major victory for trade unions*”, and then argued: “*Support for our proposal for a national council for recovery, which has so far fallen on deaf ears in No 10, is growing among the business community. Many understand the need for the country to come together at this time of national emergency. The ideologues opposing it must stand aside, acknowledging there is no quick fix to this crisis and that the failed old economics (...) have no place in these vastly changed days*”.

McCluskey ended his article by appealing to Chancellor Sunak: “*Talk with those in business and the workplaces, the experts in defending and creating jobs, and you will find the right path for the people and the country.*” Meanwhile, in June the GMB called on the government to maintain its interventionist approach “*to drive the UK economy forward*”.

Sunak gave his reply in his Summer Statement on 5 July, when he announced that the JRS will start to be wound down in August and will end on 31 October, justifying this with the government’s new mantra: “*We can’t protect every job*”. The other measures announced by Sunak as part of his so-called “Plan for Jobs” are relatively superficial, offering employers a few perks – including guaranteed cheap labour under his “Kickstart Scheme” – while doing nothing to prevent job-cuts.

So, Unite members, GMB members and other trade unionists at British Airways, British Gas and in every sector of the economy might well ask: Is that it? We politely ask the government and management to kindly reconsider cutting jobs, and hope for the best? Where is the call to resist, to fight back? Who will lead?

Can the union leaders just shrug their shoulders and talk about “these vastly changed days”?

Supermarket giant Tesco plc is the latest example of the capitalist system in action. From 24 August, Tesco is getting rid of contract cleaners in 1,920 Metro and Express supermarkets, and staff working there will have to take on extra tasks like cleaning floors, windows, shelves and fridges, as well as cleaning their own break rooms and toilets, without any extra pay.

The company has referred to extra UK running costs of between £650 million and £925 million due to the safety measures needed to protect staff and customers during the health crisis. But that is only part of the equation. In June, Tesco announced that UK store sales were up 8.7 per cent in the three months to 30 May, as more people prepared their own food under lockdown. While making much bigger profits, Tesco decided in April to pay a £635 million dividend to shareholders while accepting a business rates holiday worth £585 million from the government’s emergency Covid-19 support package.

The proof is there: Tesco could find the cash to pay contract cleaners to clean its stores, but it is choosing not to. What should the response of leaderships of the workers’ organisations be? Just shrug their shoulders and talk about “these vastly changed days”?

SNAPSHOTS OF THE CRISIS

30 June: Airbus announces 1,700 job-cuts in the UK

Airbus announces 1,700 job-cuts in the UK (out of 15,000 job-cuts globally, almost 15 per cent of its 135,000 global workforce). Most of the cuts in the 14,000 UK workforce will be in the Broughton factory in north Wales, currently employing around 6,000 people.

1 July: Airlines push ahead with job-cuts after receiving government bailouts

After EasyJet announces that it plans to cut up to 727 pilot jobs (one in three) and up to 1,200 cabin crew jobs across the UK, and to close its bases at Stansted, Southend and Newcastle airports, pilots' union BALPA agrees to accept a 20 per cent pay cut for Ryanair pilots in order to save 260 jobs. Ryanair's chief executive responds by telling all staff that the airline can avoid many of its planned 3,500 job losses if they agree to pay cuts of up to 20 per cent. In May, Ryanair benefited from a £600 million Bank of England loan under the government's Covid Corporate Financing Facility (CCFF), after sacking 110 Stansted ground services staff in March rather than furlough them. EasyJet was also granted a £600 million CCFF loan, in April.

1 July: More hospitality sector jobs are cut

SSP Group, the owner/operator of extensive food and drink brands and outlets – including Upper Crust and Caffè Ritazza, and hundreds of Starbucks, Burger King and Jamie Oliver sites at airports and railway stations around the world – announces it will cut 5,000 jobs in the UK, more than half of its 9,000 workforce. SSP, which had put a number of workers on furlough, cites a slower than expected bounce-back from the pandemic by the economy and the travel industry.

1 July: BAME households twice as likely to live in poverty

The latest annual report by the Social Metrics Commission (SMC) finds that Black and minority ethnic (BAME) households in the UK are more than

twice as likely to live in poverty as their white counterparts, leaving them disproportionately exposed to job losses and pay cuts caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The SMC report says that all people in poverty had been far more likely to suffer reduced incomes since lockdown, increasing the risk that the pandemic would drive a "significant" increase in the incidence and severity of poverty. Overall, 14.4 million people in the UK were living in poverty in 2018-19, up by 100,000 on the previous year, of which 4.5 million were children.

2 July: Government set to award Covid-19 testing contracts worth £5 billion to private bidders

The government issues a public notice outlining a plan to award Covid-19 testing contracts worth an estimated £5 billion to commercial bidders. The vast new budget, which works out at £2.5 billion per year and will be managed by Public Health England (PHE), is equal to the entire annual spend on English NHS laboratories. Professor Allyson Pollock, a public health specialist at Newcastle University, said the money should be used to build up publicly-owned laboratories run by the NHS or PHE. Instead, she said, *"this looks like a big subsidy for industry through the back door to support the government's policy of building a British diagnostics industry."*

9 July: Sunak's Summer Statement will not stop rise in unemployment

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), Britain's leading tax and spending thinktank criticises the flagship policies in Sunak's £30 billion Summer Statement as badly timed, poorly targeted and likely to do little to stop unemployment from rising. The IFS said most of the £9.4 billion allocated for the government's £1,000 job retention bonus scheme – to incentivise employers to take back furloughed staff when the scheme ends on 31 October – would be spent on jobs that were already safe.

16 July: Thousands of businesses plan to cut jobs as furlough scheme ends

British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) says 29 per cent of businesses in a survey of 7,400 firms planned to cut the size of their workforce in the next three months as the government prepares to wind down its furlough scheme. The BCC says that this was the highest percentage of companies planning to make redundancies since it began tracking employment intentions in 1989, and that big companies with more than 250 staff were more likely to be planning job cuts than smaller firms.

16 July: British Gas workers given ultimatum: job-cuts or new contracts with worse conditions

British Gas's parent company Centrica tells its 20,000 UK employees that they must accept new contracts with worse terms and conditions (including unpaid overtime) or lose their jobs. New Centrica Chris O'Shea says that the plan is to *"modernise and simplify the way we do business"*. Centrica hasn't yet started the "fire and rehire" process by sending out a Section 188 notice, and says it will only do so *"as a last resort"* if negotiations with unions fail. But a formal advance warning of mass redundancies has been made.

Unite Regional Officer Mark Pettifer said that Centrica is *"using Covid-19 as a smokescreen to cut jobs"*, but appealed to the management's better nature: *"Unite urges the Centrica management to have an urgent rethink and engage constructively with the trade unions to tackle the specific issues facing Centrica and, more generally, the UK energy sector post-Covid-19."*

15 July: British Airways starts to fire and rehire

British Airways (BA) starts carrying out its threat to fire and rehire thousands of workers – days after unions joined talks with a plan to save jobs. Long-serving cabin crew are served notice in a letter dated 15 July to either accept an enhanced redundancy package within three

weeks, or risk losing it by reapplying for a similar job at much lower pay. BA had told its senior crew that, if rehired, their pay would be only 80 per cent of current basic in a new single fleet. The airline currently operates with two “fleets” of crew – longstanding staff and a lower-paid “mixed fleet”, which critics accuse BA of setting up to undercut pay and conditions during the strikes of 2010-11. BA now wants to merge the two into a single lower-cost fleet.

But the small print now shows that in a new single fleet the basic pay of the longstanding crew would be frozen permanently and eroded by inflation. They may also be rehired at a lower rank, losing a further 10 per cent. Flight pay and allowances, which make up a substantial part of crew earnings, would also be slashed. Another effective 8 per cent pay cut will be enforced by a mandatory month of unpaid leave.

21 July: Government expands slum housing by sidestepping planning permission

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick tables new laws to extend permitted development rights (PDR), allowing a range of building types to be converted into housing without planning permission. The new rules, which will come into effect by September, will mean that full planning applications will not be required to demolish and rebuild unused buildings as homes, and former offices, shops and warehouses can be quickly repurposed.

The same day, Jenrick’s own ministry publishes a report condemning PDR for leading to “worse quality” homes. Academic researchers found that the PDR planning loophole had unleashed a new breed of tiny, dingy apartments, many barely fit for human habitation. The research found that only 22 per cent of dwellings created through PDR met the nationally described space standards, compared with 73 per cent of units created with full

planning permission. They frequently came across studio apartments of as little as 16 square metres, less than half the size of the national standard of 37 square metres. The homes were also eight times more likely to be located in the middle of a business park or industrial estate, while only 3.5 per cent had access to outdoor space.

22 July: Failing “test and trace” system opens door to second wave

The government’s flagship “test and trace” system is failing to contact thousands of people in areas with the highest infection rates in England. Data obtained by *The Guardian* show that in areas with the highest infection rates in England, the proportion of close contacts of infected people being reached is far below 80 per cent, the level the government’s scientific advisers say is required for “test and trace” to be effective. In Luton, which has the sixth highest infection rate in England, only 47 per cent of at-risk people were contacted by test and trace. In Leicester, which remains under a partial lockdown, the rate was 65 per cent, meaning more than 3,300 people were not reached by the programme.

24 July: Lack of childcare played a role in almost half of female lay-offs

A survey of almost 20,000 working women in 48 hours by the campaign group Pregnant Then Screwed (PTS) reveals that a lack of childcare played a role in almost half of female lay-offs. PTS founder Joeli Brearley said: *“The needs of working mothers have been completely ignored during this pandemic and (...) we are now seeing that they are the first to go when jobs are cut – mothers are the sacrificial lambs for the economy contracting. The crisis in the childcare sector has been growing for years, but now it is at breaking point – and without this vital social infrastructure in place, we will revert back to the 1950s very, very quickly.”*

According to the PTS survey of almost 20,000 working women:

- 72 per cent worked fewer hours due to lack of childcare;
- 15 per cent had been made redundant or were facing redundancy, with 46 per cent of those citing a lack of childcare as the reason;
- 81 per cent needed childcare to be able to do their paid work, but only 49 per cent had the childcare they required;
- 11 per cent of pregnant women were made redundant or expected to be. Of these, 57 per cent were pregnant black women;
- 74 per cent of self-employed women had their earning potential reduced because of a lack of access to childcare.

26 July: PCS doesn’t rule out strike action by civil servants

The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) reacts furiously after being told at a private meeting in Downing Street that the government is pushing civil servants across the country to return to their offices from 1 August, basically ignoring the current health guidelines.

In a letter to the Cabinet Office after the meeting, PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka says: *“This unnecessary and hasty push for an upscaling at workplaces has the potential to create serious industrial unrest. (...) It is clear that this is a political decision to use public sector workers to prop up and maintain an already decaying economic model, regardless of the risks to their safety.”*

A union source said that balloting members on strike action was not being planned, but neither was it being ruled out. *“There are no immediate plans for a ballot, but nothing is off the table.”*

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The Tories will always protect big business and the rich

By John Sweeney

Ultra-capitalists always have a low opinion of state intervention, but on occasions like the current crisis, they will be happy for socialist policies to put big business back on its feet before they unleash another blizzard of capitalism on the post-pandemic world. Rishi Sunak admits that much of his spending will be “dead weight” and – if not managed correctly – could lead to a “moral hazard”, hard-right code for the undeserving poor.

Never mind about job losses, Sunak is ready to ride to the rescue with his jobs scheme, which sounds like another plan in the good old Workfare tradition of Iain Duncan Smith. Slim down the dole queues and manipulate the unemployment figures with “guaranteed jobs” that aren't jobs at all, just “work for your benefits” and provide free labour for parasite companies.

It seems that New-New Labour will be supporting this slave labour; perhaps Starmer is under the strange impression that this scheme will actually promote real jobs.

The Labour Party needs to stop imagining that some magic man alone will save them, and acknowledge that the problem is far more to do with the wider culture in the party and the fact the majority of its MPs

are hostile to ever putting forward a programme of socialist policies.

The Tory government has so far delivered nothing but failures and caused misery to millions of the population. Sunak's summer budget won't change that; their level of competence can only be assessed in relation to their purpose. I find it difficult to accept the incompetence narrative. It's too easy an escape route for those whose competence may serve a hidden agenda.

Throw in jingoism, predominately right-wing media propaganda, the typical “divide and conquer” stance of Tory politics, and it becomes crystal-clear what that agenda is. The fact that many workers will descend into even deeper levels of poverty won't dissuade the Tories from protecting multinational companies and the rich. Precious little of this stimulus package will end up benefiting working-class families.

But there is light at the end of the tunnel: the capitalist state is gathering together all of its forces for a last-ditch defence of private property, of corporate capitalism and the super-rich, before it collapses in on itself or falls to the socialist revolution.

The final battle is fast approaching, and together we can forge a new beginning.

Stefan Cholewka's notes of the month

The war on the youth and the brutal impact of the Covid-19 crisis on cancer patients

The government has declared a war on the youth, with Chancellor Sunak's new £2 billion so-called “Kickstart Scheme” designed to convert unemployed people aged between 16 and 24 into cheap disposable labour for the bosses. Under the scheme, the government will subsidise six-month work placements for youth on Universal Credit, with no prospects of a real job.

For each “Kickstarter” placement, the government will cover the cost of 25 hours' work a week at the National Minimum Wage: £4.55 per hour for under-18s, £6.45 per hour for 18- to 20-year-olds, and £8.20 per hour for 21- to 24-year-olds.

The scheme will enable the bosses to sack current employees in January, and then bring in different groups of “Kickstarters” as cheap labour, to be replaced every six months by a new batch.

Meanwhile, the British Medical Association (BMA) has said that thousands of cancer patients have not

received the care they need, and their conditions have worsened owing to the focus on Covid-19. Performance figures published by the NHS on 11 June revealed that the number of cancer patients being seen for urgent check-up after GP referral fell to 79,500 in April – a drop of 60 per cent from the previous year. Patients starting treatment for cancer in April fell by 20 per cent from the previous year to 10,800.

BMA Council Chair Chaand Nagpaul said the statistics lay bare the “brutal impact” which Covid-19 has had on healthcare services and patient care. He added: “*It is vital that services resume as soon as possible and that the government provides the NHS with the support, resources and capacity for this to happen safely whilst the pandemic continues. (...) This will require transparency around capacity and the workforce crisis, and the need to invest in infrastructure that can meet the healthcare needs of patients.*”

NEWS FROM THE PICKET LINE

"Not only are they not taking the necessary measures, they are using the pandemic and the crisis to reinforce all existing anti-working-class and anti-democratic measures."

OCRFI statement, 24 March 2020

Bexley Council refuse workers on strike for a living wage

More than 150 refuse workers in Bexley (Kent) are taking five days of strike action in July and August over the continual refusal by outsourcing giant Serco to pay a "living" wage. The five days of strike action are set for 30, 31 July and 3, 4 and 6 August, to run from 05.00 – 09.00 each day.

The dispute, which predates the March lockdown, has ignited again over the refusal of Serco bosses to pay the workers a minimum of £13 an hour, similar to their counterparts in Greenwich. The workers are also angry over a bullying culture.

Nissan workers in Sunderland march against changes to pension scheme

Hundreds of workers at Nissan's Sunderland plant marched and rallied on 11 July with their Unite reps against plans to close their final pension scheme and to replace it with an inferior defined contributions scheme, which would affect around 1,500 of the total 6,000 workforce.

Tower Hamlets Council trying to impose worse contracts

On 6 July, the Labour council in Tower Hamlets (London) sacked 2,700 staff (two-thirds of the workforce) who refused to sign new contracts and then re-employed them on inferior contracts, imposing worse pay and conditions. The new conditions will make it easier to sack people in the future.

Furious council workers launched rounds of strike action over the following weeks.

UNISON says that the new contracts have been imposed under duress, and since the strikers have not signed, they are in dispute with the new contracts and the council.

UNISON Assistant Branch Secretary Kerrie Anne said: *"As soon as everyone was sacked, we were immediately re-employed on the inferior contracts. This is obviously a legal tool which you expect to see*

being used in unscrupulous companies, not a Labour council."

The fight to preserve jobs at British Airways has begun

British Airways (BA) has begun its "fire and rehire" programme of sacking all its 42,000 employees and re-hiring 30,000 of them on vastly inferior terms and conditions. The employees received a letter dated 15 July from Director of Heathrow Mel Birch giving them a deadline of early August to agree to massive cuts in pay and conditions if they want to be considered for holding on to their jobs. Otherwise, they face the sack by 31 August.



In 2010, the Unite leadership agreed a two-tier payment system leading to the creation of a Mixed Fleet Cabin Crew section at BA on vastly inferior pay and conditions. On the basis of this agreement, BA now wants all cabin crew on Mixed Fleet rates or worse in the future, and senior cabin crew have been informed that if rehired, this will be on 20 per cent less pay and worse conditions.

The same levels of pay cuts will apply to drivers, baggage handlers, loaders and other ground staff, with employees also being required to accept an annual mandatory month of unpaid leave, amounting to a further 8 per cent pay cut.

On 3 July, a protest in Brighton was attended by staff from cabin crew to engineers. The struggle to preserve jobs has begun.



Second International Conference Against War and Exploitation, For a Workers' International (Paris, November 5-6, 2020)

• The crisis facing humankind is the worst crisis for many decades. The greedy pursuit of profit on the basis of the functioning of the capitalist system has created a global situation where the Covid-19 pandemic is still raging out of control, six months after it emerged. Millions of infections and deaths: this is the price being paid by the peoples. Hunger is spreading throughout the world.

Making use of this tragedy, bosses and governments are launching a new wave of attacks on the working class. Millions of workers have been laid off since the start of the pandemic. The struggle between the working class and the capitalist class is becoming more intense from day to day. The survival of humankind is at stake.

• Following on from the First World conference held in Mumbai in 2016, 408 activists from 52 countries launched an appeal in December 2019 for a Second World Conference. The appeal said:

“Every day that goes by, humankind is being dragged further towards barbarism. This has become clear to workers and activists all around the world. (...)”

However, there is nothing inevitable about barbarism prevailing: the resources for achieving a positive outcome for humankind exist on the side of the labour movement. (...)

It falls to the labour movement to open up a perspective for peace, progress and a future. (...)

– By taking action against war, so that workers are in the factory and not involved in murderous conflicts, the labour movement is a factor of peace.

– By fighting for its right to exist, to ensure that the workers can freely organise in trade unions and political parties, and can set up the fighting bodies that are needed for a united and effective struggle in forms which they themselves will choose, the labour movement is defending democracy;

– By fighting against the grip of the multinationals and against the external debt that is strangling the peoples, the labour movement is taking the lead in the struggle for the right to national sovereignty;

– By fighting in defence of the working class’s collective rights and in defence of the social welfare systems, the labour movement is defending the right to work, which produces all wealth;

– By fighting to put an end to the capitalist system and for socialism, the labour movement gives hope and a future to humankind.



There is no shortage of struggles around the world...

Of course, the workers are well aware of the difficulties they are facing.

Governments around the world – whether of the right or the left – are attacking the trade union organisations by either repressing them or by trying to co-opt them. They are putting into question the right to strike and the right to demonstrate.

The difficulties facing the labour movement are also due to the fact that instead of carrying out their mandate in a united struggle against the capitalists, officials of the labour organisations are embracing the process of integration into the State, and also due to the fact that some of those officials consider the market economy to be an “unsurpassable horizon”.

More recently, some currents have even been calling for the abandoning of all forms of organising the working class (trade unions and political parties) and to dissolve those forms into informal movements.

But we all know that in order to participate in the struggles in our countries, the workers and activists are taking action in the very course of their class struggle to defend the organisations which they have built and to build new ones, in order to be able to organise themselves in forms which they decide upon freely.”

• The crisis has more than confirmed all this. In many countries, Covid-19 has exposed the pathetically inadequate public healthcare system, and the fact that

mandatory physical distancing is impossible for the masses for want of proper housing.

The governments would like to impose a Sacred Union (1) between the rightist parties and those presenting themselves as parties “of the left”. The workers reject this. They are fighting back for their rights, against exploitation and against racism in all its manifestations. The growing list of labour mobilisations is long. They are even happening at the heart of US imperialism.



For millions of workers, it is clear that it is the capitalist system – private ownership of the means of production – that is responsible for the current situation.

There is no doubt that the working class and the oppressed peoples are going through difficult times around the world, and that things might get worse in the coming months. the capitalist class will do

everything it can to make the workers pay for the crisis.

But the capitalist system is doomed. Its survival threatens the whole of humankind.

the working class must rally together all of its forces. more than ever, there can be no question of confining ourselves within national situations. The time has come for a Workers' International.

In line with our December 2019 appeal and commitment made during the international rally on May Day 2020 held at the initiative of the IWC, we hereby **formally announce that the Second International Conference Against War and Exploitation, For a Workers' International, will be held on 5-6 November 2020 in Paris (France).**

**Daniel Gluckstein
Nambiath Vasudevan**

For all correspondence, contact the International Workers Committee Against War and Exploitation, For a Workers' International at owcmumbai2016@gmail.com

(1) The *union sacrée* or Sacred Union was a political truce in France during the First World War, in which a significant part of the socialist movement agreed not to oppose the government or call any strike, in the name of patriotism.

HONG KONG/CHINA

A damaging blow against working people throughout China

Published in Issue no.248 (15 July 2020) of *La Tribune des Travailleurs* [Workers' Tribune], the weekly newspaper of the French POID

The Beijing government has just enacted a “Law on Safeguarding National Security” that applies to the territory of Hong Kong. The law targets the crimes of “*secession, subversion, organisation and perpetration of terrorist activities, and collusion with a foreign country or with external elements*”. These crimes can be punished with prison sentences of up to life imprisonment. None of the offences are clearly defined. To put it plainly, any expression of opposition to the current government can be classified under one of these headings.

Despite the Covid-19 epidemic and a ban on protests, as soon as the new law came into force on 1 July, Hong Kong witnessed powerful demonstrations and protests. They resulted in 370 arrests: hundreds of people were detained under the new law for carrying placards.

Through its population and its history, Hong Kong is indisputably Chinese territory. Although this territory with some 7.5 million inhabitants is a Special Administrative Region under the current Constitution of the People's Republic of China, the fact is that Hong Kong was snatched from China by British imperialism during the Opium Wars and remained a British colony from 1842 to 1997. The struggle against British rule in Hong Kong was very much as part of the struggle of the whole Chinese people, as demonstrated by the 1925 general strike. The “handing back” of Hong Kong to China in 1997 was done on the basis of an agreement between the British government and the Chinese bureaucracy that completely preserved the capitalist system in Hong Kong. This is referred to as the status of “one country, two systems”, which has made Hong Kong the world's third biggest financial centre and the main hub for relations between imperialism and China's governing bureaucracy. In

this context, the workers fighting against capitalist exploitation have used the limited political rights granted to Hong Kong to their advantage, forming their own independent organisations, their trade unions and their union confederation. Over the last year, the labour movement has played a crucial role within the movement against the extradition bill. It is significant that 91 new trade unions have been set up during this period, very often in the middle of strike action. It is the working class first and foremost that today is the target of the attacks launched under the new law. The existence of independent trade union organisations in Hong Kong is a leverage point for the workers of the whole of China as they take action to assert their right to organise, to strike and to protest.

Several commentators are assuring us that the Chinese government has just delivered a fatal blow to the status of “one country, two systems”. Nothing of the sort: the Chinese authorities have reaffirmed their commitment to the free movement of capital in Hong Kong and their respect for private ownership. Big capitalist institutions like HSBC Bank and the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce have publicly supported the new National Security Law, seeing it as a source of stability.

Meanwhile, the various imperialisms – especially US imperialism – fully intend to seize the opportunity to further increase their political, economic and military pressure on China. We know that it is always with grand statements about democracy that US leaders launch their wars and interventions against sovereign nations.

Contrary to its proclamations, the bureaucracy’s government has just delivered a blow against the unity of China, against the unity of the Chinese people and workers. Just before enacting the National

Security Law, the government banned – for the first time in decades – demonstrations in Hong Kong to commemorate the Tiananmen Square Massacre in June 1989, when the bureaucracy’s government bloodily repressed the huge popular movement that had risen up “for democracy, for freedoms” against it and the social consequences of the policy of opening China up to the multinationals that had been initiated in 1978.

In 1989, the working class stood up against the corrupt bureaucrats. Autonomous working-class organisations were born throughout China, including Hong Kong (which was still a British colony). What marked those demonstrations was the unity of Hong Kong’s workers with the workers of the whole of China. This is also what the new repressive law has sought to prevent.

An official in charge of security in Hong Kong has been appointed as part of implementing the new law. He is Zheng Yanxiong, who rose up through the Chinese Communist Party hierarchy after putting down the revolt by the inhabitants of the village of Wukan in 2011. They had risen up against the plundering of their lands and the local officials’ corruption, and had successfully held elections to choose their own municipal council.

This example is a good illustration of the fact that above all it is fear of seeing working people make use of democratic means that explains the violence of the measures taken by the governing bureaucracy. These measures are a blow against the whole of China’s working population, they are a blow against the unity of the Chinese people, and they can only serve the needs of imperialism.

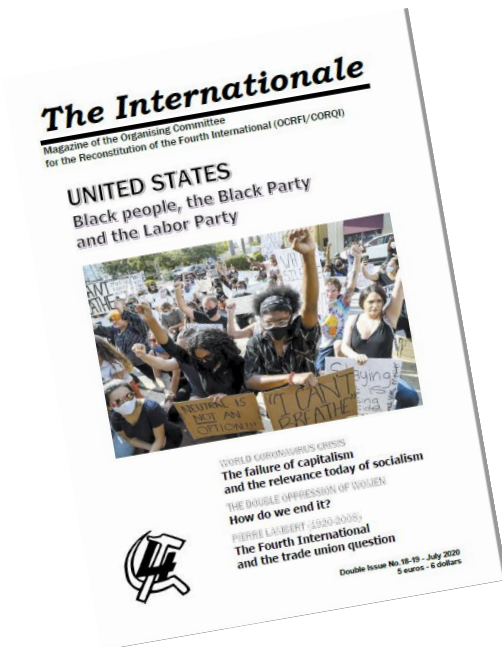
A. Frandor



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THE RELEVANCE TODAY OF MARXISM

Pierre Lambert (1920-2008) – The Fourth International and the trade union question

An excerpt from the conference report “World coronavirus crisis: The failure of capitalism and the relevance today of socialism”

First of all, what is Marxism? Marxism is the unity of theory and practice in organising. Marxism constantly starts from theoretical questions to reach their practical consequences, and at the same time examines the concrete situation to achieve a generalisation of the principles that flow from it. And to do so, Marxism starts with the facts, and only the facts. We are in the habit of saying that if the facts were to invalidate the Marxist viewpoint, then we would have to reconsider Marxism itself.

Among the questions posed in the lead-up to this conference, some comrades have asked about “fake news”. The principle of Marxism is to rely solely on verified facts which any worker and any activist can observe for themselves and check on their reality, and not to be afraid of saying that we don’t know what we don’t know. (...)

Can one avoid bailing out the banks in order for them to bail out businesses? If one did that, wouldn’t it create more problems for employment? Before answering this question, let’s point out that Marxists are not surprised by the crisis that is developing. The economic and social crisis, which risks becoming bigger than anything seen for three-quarters of a century, is not the result of the epidemic. Logic would dictate that the epidemic would have given way to a rapid expansion of economic activity. The reasons for the crisis go much further back. They had matured even before the crisis of 2008. They are inherent to capitalism. The eruption of the epidemic was only a triggering event. If it wasn’t the epidemic, other factors would have intervened. (...)

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