

Labour Internationalist

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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.

**Sick and tired –
enough is enough!
NOW IS THE TIME
TO FIGHT BACK
for a ban on
lay-offs and job
cuts, for an
emergency
recovery plan in
the interests of the
working class**

EDITORIAL

"Go back to work or risk losing your job". That was the headline of an article (27 August) in *The Telegraph*, always the newspaper of the establishment and more recently a cheerleader for Boris Johnson's government. The article announced that Johnson was launching a major drive to get workers back to the workplace, while government ministers warned that continuing to work from home could make staff "vulnerable" to being sacked. According to *The Telegraph*, the government "have sent out the message that bosses at struggling firms will find it easier to hand out P45s" to those reluctant to return.

In her speech to the TUC Congress on 15 September, General Secretary Frances O'Grady said there was a threat of "a tsunami of job-losses".

In his speech to the Labour Party Conference, leader Keir Starmer pointed out that "this Government has let working people down. Britain shouldn't have one of the highest death rates in the world. And one of the deepest recessions. We shouldn't leave our workers without protective equipment. We shouldn't have failed the most vulnerable in our care homes. And people shouldn't have to traipse half-way round the country in search of a Covid test when they're sick." He also stressed the need to "protect millions of jobs".

Who at the TUC Congress and LP Conference could raise the slightest objection to defending jobs and the health of workers and their families?

What action did Frances O'Grady propose to reverse this situation? She referred once again to setting up a National Recovery Council, which in her own words would be "the way forward to save the country".

We know what a National Recovery Council means: a body in which the trade unions, the government and the bosses would be called on to work hand-in-hand. This proposal was put forward again in a statement she co-signed in late June (see <https://www.buildbackbetter.org.uk/index.html>) with some trade union leaders, as well as the Directors General of the CBI and the British Chambers of Commerce, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, various other religious leaders, and the heads of various charities and big NGOs.

Starmer called on the Tory government to "work with us. To create new, targeted support that can replace the Job Retention Scheme. To develop this through urgent talks with trade unions, businesses and the Labour Party." He condemned the "fire and re-hire" tactics being used by British Airways and British Gas. But he added: "I'm making an open offer to the Prime Minister: Work with us to keep millions of people in work, work with the trade unions and work with businesses, do everything possible to protect jobs and to deliver for working people."

This call on the government and the bosses was a key political axis of the LP Conference, where in practice Starmer advocated critical support for Johnson's

policies while only offering the next general election – four years away – as a perspective.

This did not go unnoticed by Chancellor Sunak, who in Parliament on 24 September told Labour's Shadow Chancellor Anneliese Dodds: "I do stand ready to work with the honourable member opposite, if she knew exactly what she wanted", adding in response to Frances O'Grady that "the government stands with the British people and British business with the CBI, with the British Chambers of Commerce with the Trades Union Congress in bringing much needed support to the economy."



TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady with Chancellor Sunak and the head of the CBI in Downing St on 24 September

Who can think for a second that putting a stop to "firing and re-hiring" and avoiding a tsunami of job losses can be achieved by working with representatives of a Tory government that is facilitating the destruction of millions of jobs, and with representatives of the bosses' organisation and the financial institutions?

There is nothing in common between a plan in defence of workers' rights and a plan for the needs of the capitalist class.

The trade unions and the Labour Party were both created precisely to defend the interests of working people and the oppressed, not the interests of the capitalist class.

There is an urgent need for a working-class emergency recovery plan, which can be imposed through the unity of all the forces of the working-class and its organisations. Now is the time to fight back!

We need a working-class emergency recovery plan that involves fighting toe-to-toe TODAY to put a stop to the lay-offs and job-cuts, and to successfully maintain the working class's rights and guarantees.

What kind of government will carry this out? Certainly not the Tory government, whether led by Johnson or anyone else.

An emergency recovery plan in the interests of the working-class would include first and foremost a ban on all lay-offs and job-cuts.

It would include the mass recruiting of teachers and school staff who are urgently needed to help children catch up and continue their education.

A working-class emergency recovery plan is needed to defend the health of the whole population, all the communities, to avoid more thousands of deaths, and this demands the immediate requisition of the financial means to set it up, without delay.

Avoiding more thousands of deaths requires opening up thousands more intensive care unit beds and the re-opening of hospital wards and beds that have been closed.

It requires taking social care back under public control, to ensure that the elderly are properly cared for with dignity and not be vulnerable to the vagaries of private care providers left to their own devices by a lying Tory government.

It requires the nationalisation of the production of tests and the whole chain comprised of carrying out tests, delivering the results and following up on possible infections.

The money that is needed for this is already available: the £350 billion allocated to the capitalists by the government under the plan that was approved in Parliament without any vote by all the parties.

Those billions are being used to lay off workers and to protect companies' balance-sheets, not jobs.

Those billions must be requisitioned and applied to the needs of the working class and the poor.

Only the organisations set up by the working class can achieve this task, provided they remain independent from the bosses and the government and remain true to their original objective.

Labour Internationalist will support any appeal and participate in any step to defend class independence.

This is why we are fighting to organise and regroup those in the labour movement who intend to carry out this struggle, which leads to the necessity of putting an end to the rule of those who own the main means of production.

24 September

Collaborate with the government and capitalists for jam tomorrow, or fight back today?

In late June, TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady co-signed a statement by the UK "Build Back Better" initiative (see <https://www.buildbackbetter.org.uk/index.html>) together with trade union leaders Len McCluskey (Unite), Dave Prentiss (UNISON), John Phillips (GMB), Dave Ward (CWU) and the Joint General Secretaries of the NEU, as well as the Directors General of the CBI and the British Chambers of Commerce, former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, the Bishops of Manchester, Dover and Reading, other religious leaders and the heads of various big charities and NGOs.

Of course, this initiative – which dubs itself "The UK Coronavirus Recovery Campaign" – does not have exclusive use of the name "Build Back Better": it was first used by the UN in relation to Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015; Democratic Party candidate Joe Biden is using it as his main economic slogan in the US presidential election campaign; the OECD used it to tag its June 2020 position paper on a post-Covid-19 economy; and in the UK, it is the phrase used by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's business-based proposal for a "circular economy" to reduce waste. These are just some examples, but the common thread of them all is making capitalism work better.

The June statement paints an attractive picture of ensuring that "*health, social care, housing and other vital public services are properly resourced and able to meet our future needs*", of mending "*the inequalities in our society so that everyone, no matter their background or race, can live a decent, fulfilling life*", of creating "*secure, well-paid and rewarding jobs for all who want them, particularly for young people*", among other things. The path for achieving this? "*Answering these questions, and more, is a challenge to us all; to governments, businesses, trade unions, civil society and citizens.*"

Unfortunately, we are used to seeing the TUC and Labour Party leaderships endorsing calls that sound progressive but always seem to be located on a far horizon. But this particular initiative involves working with the CBI and the Tory government, apparently towards the objective of radically transforming the economy and society for the good of the working class, the youth, the poor and disenfranchised. You cannot square the circle: the interests promoted by the CBI and the Tory government, based on maximising profit and cutting jobs, are antagonistic to the interests of the working class, the youth and the disenfranchised.

If the question is indeed how to radically transform the economy and society in order to improve the lives of the vast majority, i.e. those who earn a living by selling their labour, then a basic prerequisite for such a transformation is the socialisation of the means of production.

But the most urgent issue working people are facing today is protecting their jobs, their livelihoods. Put most simply: what the TUC and the trade unions should be doing is to defend the interests of their members – TODAY, not in a distant rosy future, and certainly not requiring the blessing of the capitalist class.

In today's situation, with spiralling unemployment and a wholesale attack on working terms and conditions, for the TUC, the big trade unions and the Labour Party to choose to make yet another appeal to the government's and the capitalists' "better nature" instead of organising the fightback is to turn their back on the workers' interests and to align themselves with the institutions of the capitalist system – in short, corporatism.

OPEN FORUM

Interview with Ian Hodson, President of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers' Union (BFAWU)

What has been the impact of the health crisis on your members, the impact on their jobs and working conditions?

Firstly, it is important to note that the majority of our members have continued to work throughout the crisis, doing essential work. The people who work in the food sector, in the various food industries, need to be paid properly, to have secure employment contracts, to have the right to decent contracts of employment instead of what has been happening in the industry, which is a constant undermining of the long-term security of employment.

What is the typical employment basis for your members?

There is a wide range, and recently there has been more and more insecure employment (minimum hours contracts, zero-hours contracts) that has been driven through the industry. Obviously, we the BFAWU have had strikes over these contracts. A high level of agency workers is pretty commonplace, and short-term hours contracts have been used quite significantly over the last two years. I think this use of agency workers and insecure employment is about driving down pay. If employers use agency workers and zero-hour contracts, then they don't have the pension liabilities and other employer's responsibilities. The crisis has highlighted the fact that they have relied heavily on the insecurity of employment.

What was the specific issue in the Greencore dispute?

At Greencore we represent part of the workforce, and we have had issues with the company from the very beginning of the Covid crisis. For example, we had to fight to get Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for the workers. In the beginning, they decided to issue face masks to those they deemed to be key workers – people in senior positions, such as supervisors and managers – and the people on the shopfloor were told that they were not classified as key workers, so they weren't provided with face masks. Management said they had carried out risk assessments, but their conclusions didn't make sense: deciding that the people working next to each other on the production line were not at risk, while managers who could work from home were at risk. We had to fight to get real risk assessments done. In the end, we made them recognise that people working next to each other on the line were key workers, just like the managers, and made them provide the risk assessment. Also, we had to put the company under pressure over its failure to provide people with proper payment. Northampton is not a cheap place to live, and unfortunately a lot of the Greencore workers have second and third jobs, because they are low-paid workers and many of them are on minimum-hours contracts. This means that some of them have caught the virus at Greencore and have been prevented from going

to their other jobs. They may get the £95 per week statutory sick pay, but their rent is probably £180 per week. The fact that the company agreed in August to bring forward and immediately pay the £400 annual attendance bonus to all weekly-paid employees, regardless of their attendance record and without any conditions attached, was a victory we fought for.

What is your view on the soaring unemployment rate and the fact that employers are using the crisis to drive down wages and worsen working terms and conditions?

I think that what this pandemic has demonstrated is that employers will make decisions in the interests of their business, regardless of the situation. The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the fact that so many people have not been able to accumulate savings that could get them through the crisis, and while the government can bail out these businesses to the tune of billions of taxpayers' money, they are not showing the same loyalty to their employees at all. We should not be afraid of taking industrial action, and I think this is a weapon we may have to use to force employers to negotiate proper pay, terms and conditions for our workers. (...)

While we have seen a boost to the hospitality sector in August [due to the government's meal subsidy scheme] and people have enjoyed eating out more cheaply, the fact is that this money has been going into the pockets of people like JD Weatherspoon owner Tim Martin and other entrepreneurs in the fast-food sector. (...) The Chancellor's measures have allowed the fast-food sector to keep some people in work, but the problem is that once these programmes have ended, we are going to see a massive rise in job-losses in many sectors.



These employers will not think twice: they will make a substantial amount of money from the taxpayer during this period, but they will have no loyalty to their employees. Those workers in those industries will be thrown on the scrap-heap regardless of the amount of money that has been thrown at these businesses.

The resolution on the economy passed at the TUC Congress calls for a National Recovery Council (NRC). This refers to a proposal that was already made, for a body where the trade unions would sit down with the government and employers to plan together what would happen next on jobs, etc. What is your view on such an NRC? Don't you think that class independence is crucial for trade unions in all

circumstances, that labour must always remain independent from capital?

We do have to be independent. In any case, the idea that the government would include us is unlikely, so maintaining our independence from a political environment that doesn't want to recognise the people who we represent is important. Obviously, we need to take whatever actions are necessary to ensure that we do hold them to account and protect employment in this country.

What do you think of the politics of the situation, the government's record and the opposition?

Politics is so poor at the moment. I am not inspired by the political debate; you have people waiting for one political party to collapse because they are doing nothing in government, and you have the other political party just standing in the wings and saying "we're not in government, they are". Opposing what the government has been doing is the right thing to do – this government has killed a lot of people who died before their time, because of a lack of support and measures put in place early enough to protect people. This is the result of a poorly-performing uncaring government, and the failure of the Labour Party to hold it to account has been terrible.

We heard Keir Starmer, during his keynote speech to the Labour Party's virtual Conference, basically argue that we have to wait four years for the next Labour government before anything can change. Don't we need to fight back now?

The problem is that he has reneged on a lot of the promises he made during his campaign in the 2019 Labour Party leadership election, so I don't place a lot of faith in any idea that Keir Starmer has got the interests

of working people at heart. We saw him sit on his hands last night [Editor: *On 23 September, Labour officially abstained in the vote on the government's Overseas Operations Bill, which aims to introduce a presumption against prosecution for British soldiers serving abroad, including offences such as war crimes and torture. The Bill also imposes new time limits on veterans bringing personal injury claims against the Ministry of Defence.*]. He campaigned on the idea that we would uphold international law and protect human rights, but sat on his hands last night and punished those [Labour MPs] who voted with their conscience to oppose the exportation of torture, on a Bill that stops veterans from making legal claims against the State. If you sit on the fence, you get splinters in your backside. I am starting to lack confidence that Labour's interests and our interests are aligned. In my opinion, Starmer will have to convince working people that he will uphold the deal offered to us in 2017 and 2019. I am not seeing that in his actions.

For months now, Labour Internationalist has been arguing for an emergency plan based on the interests of the vast majority, including a ban on lay-offs and job-cuts, which goes against a lot of what this government has been doing, supposedly in the name of helping the country get through the Covid crisis. Clearly, the money is available to make sure that nobody needs to lose their job because of the Covid crisis. What is your view on this?

We need to do everything we can to protect employment. (...) If it really wanted to, the government has the opportunity to reinvest in the economy and change our reliance on the service sector. (...) We need to see a better investment in people's future. And if they want to talk about trust, they need to be honest and look at what our priorities should be.

Stefan Cholewka's notes of the month

#BuildBackBetter: The UK Coronavirus Recovery Plan OR an emergency recovery plan for the working-class?

By Stefan Cholewka, GMATUC Secretary (personal capacity)

The opening lines of #BuildBackBetter's homepage (www.buildbackbetteruk.org) state the following: *"It's time for a new deal that protects public services, tackles inequality in our communities, provides secure well-paid jobs and creates a shockproof economy which can fight the climate crisis."* Their About Us page states: *"As a campaign we are run by a steering group. The campaign was initiated, and is currently co-ordinated, by Green New Deal UK, working with a growing range of groups and organisations. The campaign is drawing on existing funding from the European Climate Foundation and Oak Foundation."*

The TUC has signed up to the #BuildBackBetter: The UK Coronavirus Recovery Plan statement alongside all the environmental NGOs and think-tanks as well as the Confederation of British Industry and the main religious organisations.

The same applies for the Liverpool City Region Economic Recovery Plan, which was signed off by Steve Rotherham, the directly-elected Labour mayor of Liverpool City Region, and all the major stakeholders in the City Region. #BuildBackBetter was originally a United Nations campaign for economic recovery plans in developing countries, and was subsequently taken up by the OECD.

#BuildBackBetter folds neatly into and complements the TUC and Labour Party leaders' position, shamefully proposing a "National Recovery Council" that would tie the trade unions to helping the Tory government and bosses implement massive job-cuts in every sector.

Today, the Tory government is re-opening schools and universities with the support of the TUC and the Labour Party leaderships, under the notion that we cannot abandon the Covid-19 generation of students. But why

should the need to re-open the schools and universities be counterposed to protecting health?

A government that is concerned with both of these imperatives would facilitate the recruitment of teachers and university lecturers in order to double staff numbers and allow the recommended physical distancing to be maintained, thus reducing the risk of transmission. It could also roll out Covid-19 testing kits widely, establishing a nationalised industry to produce testing kits and a network of national laboratories for processing within required timeframes after systematically testing children, teachers, lecturers and all those who are at risk of developing the disease.

The Johnson government is doing the opposite. It is not allowing schools and universities to recruit teachers and academics. Currently, 9.1 million workers (more than a quarter of the workforce) have been furloughed, and the

“Job Retention Scheme” is winding down in September and ending completely at the end of October, thereby threatening the jobs of millions of workers.

The Johnson government continues to ignore the reality of the situation, which is known to all. There is an urgent need to massively increase the production of testing kits, re-open the tens of thousands of hospital beds and services that have been shut down in recent years, hire on a massive scale and doing so with wage-levels and working conditions that will allow the necessary healthcare staff to be hired. The government rejects all that.

Yes, an emergency plan is indispensable, but not just any old plan: a working-class plan. There can be no confusion between planning the defence of workers’ rights and planning for the needs of the capitalist class.

Remain is still fighting the same battle it embarked on in 2016

By John Sweeney

The various political and legal manoeuvres, for example to prevent the proroguing of Parliament or to force defeats on the government, “worked” but were also disastrous strategically. So much of the Leave campaign was based on the concept of sovereignty, so it was easy to portray those government defeats as diminishing the sovereignty of Parliament, as well as being attempts to thwart Brexit.

The same is true of the latest shenanigans regarding the supposed illegality of the Internal Market Bill. Any arguments based on the fact that the Bill (or rather, the use of powers contained in the Bill) breaches international law are doomed to failure electorally, even though they may work in the short term to block the Bill or prevent the relevant clauses being enacted.

Labour has tried pursuing narrow tactical victories like forcing a meaningful vote, preventing the proroguing of Parliament, etc., and lost the war. Some keep quoting a “soft Brexit”, but what is that? The problem is that the European Union was never going to offer such a thing, because it was too dangerous for it. For the UK to have some sort of “associate membership” – a.k.a. “soft Brexit” – would lead to other countries taking the same route, and for all intents and purposes would spell the end of the EU.

Labour’s big chance for power was in 2016, when it had the chance to defeat the Tories in their own Remain-supporting referendum. If Labour had opposed the Tories and supported Leave, Leave would have won by an even larger percentage and Labour would be the sole party with a legitimate mandate to deliver that vote. Everything since then has been a question of damage control.

And on that question, Labour completely failed in no

small part because of Starmer’s time as the Shadow Brexit Secretary and his role in pushing for a second referendum. It became less a case of Labour doing damage control and more a case of Labour doing everything it could possibly do wrong on Brexit.

The problem has always been that Brexit was naturally a Labour policy; there isn’t anything even vaguely good about the EU, at least from a left-wing, humanistic perspective, and the fact Labour has been caught out bizarrely supporting what is fundamentally a capitalist club has been a disaster.

Labour as a party had every reason to champion Brexit from an ideological perspective: the EU’s treatment of refugees, and in particular the brutal way it polices its borders; its massive focus on right-wing economics of unchecked free trade (within the largest free trade area in the world) that has complete freedom of capital, goods and services within it; the push for austerity to maintain these economic features when they fail.

These economic policies come together to seriously undermine workers’ rights and trade union movements by making everything a matter of competition. Not to mention the active role of the European Court of Justice in suppressing union action (see the Laval and Viking cases for examples of this).

Is Starmer doing better than before, by ignoring the issue rather than purposefully sabotaging the party? Absolutely, but he doesn’t get any medals for that, considering he delivered the Tories an 80-seat majority. Corbyn’s attempts to sidestep Brexit for the sake of so-called party unity were met with dismay by those who voted to leave the EU. It allowed Brexit to dominate all other issues during the 2019 election and was a very predictable political suicide.

The art of distraction

By Charles Charalambous

When it set up its “test and trace” system, the government chose to cut out local councils in favour of private-sector contractors, so they sidelined public health and GP services when they handed responsibility for community testing to the management consultancy firm Deloitte and others, without a clear plan for how this centralised privately-run operation should link up with the public sector.

The overall failure of the “test and trace” system has been painfully clear for months. Time and again, it has lagged behind demand at crucial points and has consistently failed in its basic mission to identify and trace potentially infected people on a scale and within a timeframe necessary to combat the epidemic effectively.

On 10 September, Hancock announced the government’s “moonshot”: supposedly a £100 billion project, based on technology that doesn’t yet exist, to provide 10 million tests daily to the UK population. This, after the government repeatedly missed a series of testing targets over several months and struggled to reach more than 200,000 tests per day in September, resulting in a situation where local and regional lockdowns are inevitable, and even a new national lockdown cannot be ruled out.

What the various media outlets and commentators ignored when reporting this ridiculous announcement is the hard fact that the government has already allocated £500 million of the total proposed budget to its private-sector friends such as Deloitte, G4S, Sodexo and Serco.

Professional conjurers and stage magicians who currently can only reminisce about playing in front of audiences will have recognised a basic trick of their trade: distract the audience with talk of tens of billions while slipping another £500 million into their friends’ concealed grasp.

This government is more concerned with regularly refilling the trough for the private sector rather than doing everything possible to combat Covid-19 and protect jobs.

A working-class emergency plan would include the nationalisation of the production of tests and the whole “test and trace” chain, mobilising all NHS and research labs, requisitioning private labs as necessary, and ensuring that timely test results are followed up in the quickest and most effective way, centred on the existing local government networks and resources and hiring as many new people as necessary.

SNAPSHOTS OF THE CRISIS

3 August: Train companies reclassified as public companies

Based on the Government’s assumption of the financial risk for the train operating companies, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reclassifies them as public non-financial corporations, backdated to 1 April. The Rail Delivery Group, which represents train operators, insists that the reclassification should only be seen as cosmetic, “a temporary accounting change”. TSSA General Secretary Manuel Cortes says: *“the transport secretary, Grant Shapps, must come clean and acknowledge that our railways are now in public ownership and take direct control of running them rather than continue to line the pockets of fleeing privateers with taxpayers’ money.”*

3-6 August: Government starts to wind down JRS as more job-cuts are announced

As the government starts to wind down its so-called “Job Retention Scheme” on 1 August, employers are

asked to cover National Insurance and pension contributions for furloughed workers. On 3 August, fitness and gymwear firm DW Sports collapsed into administration, putting 1,700 jobs at risk, and tour operator Hays Travel announced 878 job-cuts. On 4 August, Pizza Express announced that it would close up to 70 (15 per cent) of its UK restaurants, costing as many as 1,100 jobs, and Dixon Carphone (which owns Currys PC World) announced it will cut 800 store management jobs. On 5 August, WH Smith announced it will cut 1,500 jobs, while fashion retailer M&Co announced it will close 47 of its shops (18 per cent), with just under 400 jobs cut out of a total workforce of around 2,600. On 6 August, foreign exchange firm Travelex collapsed into administration, with the immediate loss of 1,309 jobs.

12 August: Food bank use surges during crisis

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) says that the Covid-19 crisis has had

a catastrophic effect on the nutritional health of the UK’s poorest citizens, with as many as one in 10 forced to use food banks, and vast numbers skipping meals and going hungry as food prices increase. In its survey, 23 per cent of people aged 16 to 24 said they had accessed food through a charity or food bank. On 14 September, the Trussell Trust (the UK’s largest food bank network) says that ending the “furlough” scheme in October would trigger a rise in food bank use of at least 61 per cent, and predicts that at least 670,000 extra people (double the current number) will become destitute in the last three months of the year if the government withdraws Covid support for low-income households.

12 August: Government fiddles the figures to cut death toll

Public Health England changes its definition of Covid-19 deaths, cutting the official death toll by 5,000. The new definition sets a cut-off limit of 28 days for deaths following a lab-confirmed positive Covid-19 test,

rather than counting deaths related to Covid-19 without a cut-off limit. *The Financial Times* calculates the number of UK excess deaths (more than the five-year average for the same period) to be 65,700.

17 August: More proof that Covid-19 kills more poor people

The Brent Poverty Commission, which had been running for two months before the start of the Covid-19 crisis, says that appalling housing conditions, chronic overcrowding, crippling rents and widespread poverty in the north-west London borough (also one of the UK's poorest boroughs) created ideal conditions for Covid-19 to thrive and helped turn it into a hotspot of virus deaths. On 5 September, a highly confidential analysis by Public Health England is leaked; it says that Covid-19 could now be endemic in some parts of the country that combine severe deprivation, poor housing and large BAME communities.

18 -27 August: More job cuts

Marks & Spencer announces a further 7,000 job-cuts over the next three months, out of a total workforce of 78,000. On 26 August, Gatwick airport announces it plans to cut 600 jobs, around a quarter of its workforce. On 27 August, Pret a Manger announces it will cut nearly 2,900 jobs and close 30 branches.

27 August: Data on Covid care home deaths kept secret to protect commercial interests

Covid-19 death tolls at individual care homes are being kept secret by England's regulator Care Quality Commission (CQC) and the Care Inspectorate in Scotland to protect providers' commercial interests. The regulators are refusing to make public which homes or providers recorded the most fatalities, amid fears it could undermine the UK's care system – which relies on private operators – before a possible second surge of the virus.

27 August: Capitalists put more pressure on jobs and pay

Tory mouthpiece *The Telegraph* reports on government warnings that people risk the sack if they continue to work from home. Meanwhile, Heathrow airport tells

its 4,700 frontline staff they must take a pay cut of 15-20 per cent or face job losses. On 2 September, the airport issues formal section 188 notices, allowing it to potentially fire and rehire employees. The Unite union says it is “*deeply concerned*” and urges the airport to continue talks. On 5 September, the PCS says it will consider strike action over government plans for the vast majority of civil servants to return to the office by the end of the month.

7 September: BoE says mass unemployment is a “necessary process of adjustment”

Speaking on the City AM podcast, Bank of England Chief Economist Andy Haldane warns the government against extending the furlough scheme, arguing it will delay an “*inevitable*” shake-out of businesses hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. He says a “*necessary process of adjustment*” was underway, and an extension of the JRS beyond the 31 October deadline would only delay this process taking place. Rejecting concerns of soaring unemployment without the subsidy remaining in place, Haldane said it was the central bank and government's job to support the transition to new ways of working.

8 September: ONS update confirms fiddling of death stats

The latest ONS figures show that 57,417 deaths have been registered in the UK where Covid-19 was mentioned on the death certificate, including suspected cases. This contradicts the government's headline UK Covid-19 death figure of 41,554, which only covers people who died within 28 days of testing positive for the virus.

15 September: Homecare workers win £10,000 each in back-pay

A group of homecare workers are awarded an average of £10,000 each in back-pay after a tribunal ruled that they had been unlawfully paid less than half the minimum wage (£7.20 per hour at the time the case was brought by UNISON in 2016) for looking after elderly and disabled people in their own homes. The group – the majority of whom were BAME women and on zero-hours contracts – were not paid for the time

they spent travelling between multiple clients' homes in north London, despite working for up to 14 hours a day. The judgment in this case is not binding on other tribunal cases, but it could change the interpretation of the law.

18 September: Failure of “test and trace” system confirmed

Appearing before Parliament's Science and Technology Committee, “test and trace” programme head Dido Harding admits that demand is up to four times capacity, while 90 per cent of tests are failing to hit the 24-hour turnaround target, with huge time-lags in identifying possible contact infections. It then emerges that the government is drafting in hundreds of staff from private consulting firms like KPMG and EY to work on “back office” parts of the system “on a short-term basis” over the next six months.

20 September: Tories unleash a tsunami of evictions

The Tories lift the ban on eviction, which had been suspended due to the Covid-19 crisis. The suspension meant that courts did not hold eviction hearings, but on 21 September the courts can restart the process for progressing eviction notices. Generation Rent estimates that 55,000 private renters have already been handed notice since March.

22 September: More job cuts, with young workers hit harder

Whitbread (which owns Beefeater, Brewers Fayre and hotel chain Premier Inn) says it plans to cut up to 6,000 jobs, one in five of its staff. JD Wetherspoon announces plans for a further 450 job cuts at its six airport pubs. On 7 September, Pizza Express had confirmed it is to close 73 restaurants, putting 1,100 jobs at risk, after a restructuring plan was approved by creditors. On 14 September, London City airport started consulting over 239 job losses, more than one-third of its staff. On 15 September, ONS figures showed that 695,000 workers had dropped from company payrolls since March when the pandemic struck, with younger workers bearing the brunt.

Regarding recent events in Lebanon and Palestine

By Salah Salah, Palestinian refugee and long-time activist living in Lebanon, a member of the Palestinian National Council since 1970 and a member of the Standing Committee on Refugees since 1989

Published in Issue no.255 (9 September 2020) of *La Tribune des Travailleurs* [Workers' Tribune], the weekly newspaper of the French POID

In Lebanon

What was at the centre of political discussions in Lebanon before the explosion in the port of Beirut was the serious economic crisis that the country is suffering from and its repercussions on the unemployment rate; the rise in prices; the fall in the value of the Lebanese lira against the dollar; and the inability of the State to control the Bank of Lebanon, whose general manager is protected by foreign forces more powerful than the Lebanese State.

A huge popular movement has risen up in all parts of Lebanon. The youth have been courageously at the forefront, though traditional political forces, both in power and in opposition, have managed to contain and put an end to it.



Salah Salah

Three external factors contributed to the defeat of this popular movement. The first is the Covid-19 epidemic and the restrictive measures that prevent rallies. The second is the participation in the movement of certain groups known to be linked to the US Embassy, which prompted many activists to withdraw from the movement. The third is the huge explosion – the largest in Lebanon's history – that occurred on 4 August in the port of Beirut, causing considerable material losses. It is considered to be the third largest explosion in the world since the Second World War. Its shockwave reached Cyprus, Greece, Syria, and Jordan. It caused some 205 deaths, 50 missing, 6,000 injured, and damage to 50,000 homes. Some 300,000 people were displaced, and material losses were estimated at US\$15 billion.

The explosion has raised many questions

The experts point out that two factors came into play to prevent the damage from devastating the whole of Beirut. Firstly: only 60 tons exploded, because the rest of the explosives had been stolen, without specifying by whom (corruption). Secondly: 20 per cent of the

shockwave hit Beirut, while most of it was absorbed by the sea and, to a lesser extent, by the grain silos.

The explosion raised many questions. Why did a ship carrying 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate, which was on its way from Georgia to Mozambique, stop in the port of Beirut?

Why did this ship stay there for so long (seven years), getting bogged down in silt, without its owners bothering to take it back? Why didn't the ship's owners try to retrieve it?

More important: the Lebanese authorities were all aware of the presence of the vessel at Pier 12, so why did no-one in charge take the necessary measures to avoid the risks involved in storing this material?

Who is responsible for the explosion? Was it due to negligence? Was it premeditated? All these questions have not been answered clearly, and nothing has filtered through the investigations. It is more than likely that the explosion was a premeditated act. Then, who was the perpetrator?

This is the most important question!

Accusations have been levelled against Hezbollah by those who claim that Hezbollah has arms depots close to Pier 12, and that this proximity caused the explosion. Hezbollah Secretary General Sayed Hassan Nasrallah denied this accusation, calling on the judiciary to conduct its investigation, while warning against the risk of interference from US and French investigators, as was the case, he recalled, with the International Commission of Inquiry into the assassination of Rafik Hariri [*Former Lebanese Prime Minister, killed in an attack in 2005 – Editor*]. After 15 years of investigation, which cost nearly US\$800 million, the Commission finally decreed that the culprit was an isolated person with no connection to anyone.

New foreign interference

Some accuse the State of Israel – encouraged and perhaps even supported by the United States – of being behind this explosion, since it is the biggest beneficiary. This is in order to put pressure on Lebanon to accept the demarcation of its land and sea borders with Israel, to remove Hezbollah from power in order to prevent any rapprochement between Lebanon and Iran, and to weaken Hezbollah's role in the resistance and the constant threat that it poses to Israel, particularly in the north on the Lebanese borders.

However, the target was easy to hit, as was the possibility of concealing this crime. Both Trump and Netanyahu face serious internal difficulties, and Trump needs success to win the elections, just as Netanyahu needs to consolidate his position in power.

In addition to the economic crisis, the explosion has had consequences on the Lebanese government: Prime Minister Hassan Diab has been forced to resign. From my point of view, this once again puts political life in a deadlock: who will form the alternative government? This will pave the way for new foreign interference – especially US, French, and Saudi interference. The visit by French President Macron and his Foreign Minister indicates that France is in charge of managing the situation in Lebanon under the following conditions: speeding up the formation of a “government of national unity” and carrying out reforms of the Lebanese system.

In Palestine

The Israelis no longer care about anything – neither the Oslo Accords nor the decisions of the “international community”. The Palestinian Authority in the West Bank is, in fact, deprived of any authority, as its President, Mahmoud Abbas, has acknowledged. It is completely under Israeli control from both the security and economic points of view.

The authorities in the Gaza Strip are under siege and its inhabitants live in a large prison, the keys to which are in the hands of Israel on the one hand and Egypt on the other. And neither of them uses its key without the consent of the other.

The “Jewish State Law” passed by the Knesset (Parliament) in 2018 now governs Israel’s behaviour. This law affirms that all the territories of the Palestine Mandate [*i.e. historic Palestine, formerly under British control – Editor*] constitute the borders of the State of Israel and that only Jews have the right to self-determination in this country.

That is why they have declared Jerusalem the sole capital of the State of Israel and consider the construction of settlements as their legitimate right to a land that they are taking back from the Palestinians, which they claim the Palestinians stole thousands of years ago. In the same context, Netanyahu claims that he will annex the Jordan Valley (where settlements have been built since 1995) as well as “Area C” of the Oslo Accords (1993), *i.e.* 60 per cent of the West Bank. All this means that the Israelis no longer pay any attention to the Palestinians. It doesn’t matter to them whether they are angry or satisfied, it is no longer their problem to negotiate with them about anything; they have taken everything they needed.

The “normalisation” of relations between the Arab regimes and Israel

Israeli interests now require them to turn to the Arab regimes to normalise their relations with as many of them as possible. These relations are not new, they have existed for a long time, but they must now be

formalised. Hence the importance of the US plan dubbed the “Deal of the Century”.

In my opinion, behind all this, the United States is seeking to strengthen Israel’s role in the region, in order to continue and reinforce US domination in the Arab region, by creating an alliance – public or secret – around Israel to confront Iran and enable Israel to obtain a share of the wealth of the oil-producing countries.



Palestinians protest against the Bahrain-UAE-Israel agreement

But history has shown that not everything that the colonial powers and their reactionary allies want is always achieved. Revolutions in the Arab region have confirmed this, from Algeria to Yemen, to Egypt, from Libya to Palestine.

Israeli policy feeds the path of resistance

The situation in the Arab region shows that the US invasion of Iraq has destroyed and dismantled the country. Trump admits, however, that it was a big mistake by the United States, because by getting rid of Saddam Hussein they replaced him with Iran. The same thing happened in Syria: by trying to control it and failing, they strengthened the role of Russia and Iran, their worst enemies.

In my opinion, Israel’s growing involvement in the Arab region will only increase hostility toward it among the people. The calls to fight back against Israel and the “normalisation” of relations with Arab regimes will grow louder. The Zionist project and its intentions for expansion are worrying Arab intellectuals. They fear seeing the realisation of the project of a Greater Israel “from the Euphrates to the Nile”.

Concern is growing among young people, who have seen from their own experience that Israel does not want a peaceful and just solution that would allow the Palestinians to constitute their own independent and sovereign state, and it refuses to implement international resolutions allowing the refugees to return to the towns and villages and to recover the property they were forced to leave in 1948.

Israeli policy, supported by the United States and Europe, is fuelling the path of resistance.

Beirut

31 August 2020

FRANCE

LIAISON COMMITTEE FOR UNITY ON BANNING LAY-OFFS AND JOB-CUTS

We reprint below a translation of the appeal launched on 19 September in France, at the end of a national delegates conference involving 69 delegates of all political tendencies from 31 enterprises. The conference took place following a proposal in mid-July by workers at international airport operator Groupe ADP (formerly Aéroports de Paris, or ADP), who had formed a “Unity Committee for banning lay-offs and job-cuts and Air Transport Officer posts at Roissy and Orly airports”.

The conference opened with a proposal that was approved by all of the participants: to send a complete report of the discussions and decisions to those press agencies, media outlets and publications that uphold the defence of social gains and democracy.

La Tribune des Travailleurs [Workers’ Tribune], the weekly newspaper of the Democratic Independent Workers Party (POID) in France received the report and published its own presentation of the conference in Issue No.257 (23 September).

Labour Internationalist in turn is pleased to bring to its readers’ attention an initiative that relates closely to the situation facing workers in the UK today.

Promote the demand everywhere in every form BAN LAY-OFFS AND JOB-CUTS

The first conference of the Unity Committees for Banning Lay-offs and Job-cuts brought together delegations from 31 enterprises (1) on 19 September. We hereby launch an appeal to all workers in this country.

As workers of various shades of opinion, unionised and non-unionised, we can sometimes have different points of view on this or that issue, but one obvious fact unites us:

There is nothing more urgent than banning lay-offs and job-cuts!

- Plans for laying people off and cutting jobs are happening everywhere. Tens of thousands of us have already lost our jobs. One million job losses are being forecast for the coming months (2). The working class is in danger!

- The bosses are ramping up their attacks on all collective rights. The government has given the keys to the country to the banks and the bosses. On 19 March, the unanimous vote in the National Assembly established a mechanism that enables the bosses to receive billions of euros and impose lay-offs and job-cuts. This amounts to 560 billion! Thanks to Macron’s executive order on 20 May, the bosses can even – as in the case of Alinea – wind up their own company, lay people off and then buy back the company themselves.

- The workers and their families want to live. They are fighting for this. Every time rallies have been held together with the trade union organisations to oppose the shutting down of factories, thousands upon thousands of workers have demonstrated together

with the wider population (Nokia in Lannion, Renault in Maubeuge, Airbus in Toulouse, Aéroports de Paris at Roissy and Orly, etc.).

- Nobody wants division and fragmented actions. One single thing is important – unity built on the only demand worth making: “Ban lay-offs and job-cuts!”

20,465 workers have already signed an appeal for this purpose. We hereby commit to promote this demand in every form and in all circumstances.

Together, everywhere, let us build up this slogan, let it become the rallying cry for all, the rallying cry that will enable the united mobilisation by millions of workers together with their organisations.

Contact: unite.interdiction.licenciements@gmail.com

(1) TUI France; City of Paris cleaning workers; Professeurs de la Ville de Paris (PVP) (organises the 765 teachers of the city’s 340 public elementary schools); BPCE (banking group); CH Sud 77 (teaching hospital); CH Sud 77 EHPAD (public retirement home); Alinéa (chain of furniture and home décor stores); Renault Flins; Randstad Intérim (temp agency workers); Air France; CLL; ADP Roissy; ADP Orly; Calberson (distribution); URSSAF (national body for collecting employee and employer social security contributions); Éducation nationale (Education Ministry workers); Lido de Paris (cabaret); CNFPT (National Centre for Regional Public Services); University of Burgundy; La Poste; Laboratoires Sophartex Eure-et-Loir; Arras Committee for Banning Lay-offs and Job-cuts; Alstom Saint-Ouen; Alstom Villeurbanne; EDF; PSA; CBS Bagage; Aéroportiste (transportation and logistics); BPI Paris; Territoriaux (regional public servants) Seine-Saint-Denis; Groupe 3S (airport services).

(2) According to the Bank of France.

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UNITED STATES

“Break the Grip of the Two-Party System” National Conference, 19-20 September

On 19 and 20 September, 198 activists met in an online national conference on the slogan “Break the Grip of the Two-Party System”, co-sponsored by Labor Fightback Network (LFN), Ujima People’s Progress Party (UPP), and Labor & Community for an Independent Party (LCIP).

The participants included trade union activists (some holding senior positions), activists from several Black and Latino working-class organisations, other political and community activists of various political tendencies (including militant activists of Socialist Organizer, US section of the Organising Committee for the Reconstitution of the Fourth International, or OCRFI) as well as invitees from Mexico and Canada.

The theme of the conference – how to break the grip of the two dominant capitalist parties, the Republicans and Democrats, on the political process in order to create a mass working-class party – was explored in six break-out groups addressing specific aspects, as well as in two plenary sessions.

As Alan Benjamin, Editorial Board member of *The Organizer* newspaper and delegate to the San Francisco Labor Council, explained in his closing presentation: *“We discussed difficult and challenging issues, often with great enthusiasm and passion. (...) The struggle to build and sustain a mass-based independent working-class party in this country has taken place over the past 150 years, without success. The task ahead, therefore, is onerous. But we showed that it is possible to engage in serious political discussion about the need for independent working-class politics, with lessons drawn from past defeats, with a wealth of experience among us, and with proposals on how to move forward.”*

The proposals up for discussion were framed by the Conference Call to implement the two prongs of the LCIP’s Statement of Purpose: firstly, forming independent labour-community coalitions to run independent labour-community candidates at a local level, thereby laying the foundation of an independent working-class party rooted in the unions and oppressed communities; and secondly, building Labor Party committees in the trade unions to promote the two resolutions adopted by the national convention of the AFL-CIO in October 2017 that call for an end to labour’s support for “lesser-evil” politics [*which regularly leads to the trade union movement subordinating itself to the Democratic Party – Editor*]. As one speaker put it, *“a Labor Party based on the unions, not a vague People’s Party bringing together vague “middle classes”, as we sometimes hear.”*

The conference did not take place in just any situation. Several participants referred to the fact that *“twenty million people were in the streets, despite the pandemic, to protest the police murder of George Floyd and countless other Black and Brown people.”* Others referred to the *“upsurge in the labour movement – from the educators’ strikes in the Red States – then in Los Angeles, Oakland and Chicago. There has been a reactivation of union organising drives and strikes by meatpackers, UPS drivers, janitors, and other sectors of the workforce.”*

Another of the conferences objectives was to link the perspective for a Labor Party to *“support for the right to self-determination and self-organisation of Blacks and other oppressed people as a condition for principled unity in building such a Labor-based party.”* Nnamdi Lumumba, co-convenor of the Ujima People’s Progress Party in Baltimore, formulated this link in the following terms: *“While we support a national Labor Party that recognises both the shared and independent struggles of oppressed and exploited workers on the job and in their communities, we affirm that nationally oppressed people have to centre the discussion and self-organisation around their own specific oppression. (...) Having said that, we need to create a mass-based working-class party that says capitalism does not serve you, imperialism does not serve you, and racism does not serve you.”*

In his closing presentation, Alan Benjamin addressed one of the difficult questions that had come up: *“Is support for a Black-worker-led political party “divisive”, as a few people asserted in this discussion? Is support for the right of Black people to self-determination “divisive”? Our answer is an unequivocal NO; it is NOT divisive. Support for the right to self-determination, including the fight to build Black working-class parties, is, in fact, a precondition for building principled working-class unity. We must understand that the wealth of this nation was built upon the genocide of the indigenous peoples and the blood and sweat of the millions of Black slaves brought to these shores from Africa as chattel. We must understand that white supremacy, in its more overt or covert forms, is a scourge that continues to plague our country and our labour movement.”*

He also referred to the fact that *“some people criticised us for convening this conference before the elections, calling our effort a “distraction.” Our gathering has proven them wrong. (...) Others have criticised us for going ahead and re-launching the fight for a Labor Party (...). It’s not yet time, our detractors say. To this we have answered: Yes, it is time; in fact, the fight for a Labor Party is long overdue. The two AFL-CIO resolutions on independent politics must not remain paper resolutions. We need to bore into the labour movement with this effort (...), and build organised support for these AFL-CIO resolutions in our unions. We must understand that a major obstacle facing the working class today is the subordination of the trade unions, the only class-based organisations of the working class, to the Democratic Party. We have to help remove this obstacle today – not tomorrow.”*