

Labour Internationalist

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

Issue No.11, October 2020

Price: £1

Who we are, What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

Often, this also means opposing those in the labour movement who ignore the mandate of their membership and co-operate with capitalism's plans, at the workplace, institutional or State level.

Labour Internationalist aims to be part of the fight against that process of integrating the working-class organisations into capitalism's plans.

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

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

**Defend working-class
interests!**

**NO TO ANY FORM OF
"NATIONAL UNITY"
COLLABORATION!**

**The urgent need is to
put an end to this
government and this
system, which are
leading to barbarism**

Last April, during the first spike of the pandemic, tens of thousands of lay-offs and job cuts were already being planned by those same companies that were receiving massive public financial support following the government's quick decision – with the support of those who are supposed to represent the working class, i.e. the leaderships of the Labour Party and of the TUC – to give £350 billion to the banks and businesses while leaving millions of working people wondering how they would survive.

At the time, trade unionists and labour activists from various backgrounds in the labour movement co-signed an appeal that began: *“A single necessity should guide all measures put forward in the current crisis: the need to directly guarantee the health and general well-being of working people, their families and the wider population.”*

This appeal demanded immediate measures aimed at protecting working people, not the banks and big business, as well as an immediate ban on lay-offs and job cuts as the only means to prevent the impending disaster.

That was six months ago. What is the situation now?

Big high-street chain stores like Marks & Spencer, Debenhams, Boots and John Lewis have either shed jobs, closed some stores, or both, while others like Oasis and Warehouse have disappeared altogether. In the first week of October, Sky News reported 34,304 job losses in aviation, 33,304 in retail, 30,421 in hospitality, 24,461 in the wider economy, 9,600 in the energy sector and 8,968 in manufacturing, including the auto industry. When the furlough scheme ends on 31 October, unemployment is forecast to rise rapidly by between 1.8 million and 6 million, as employers permanently lay off previously-furloughed workers. UK Hospitality chief executive Kate Nicholls told the House of Commons Treasury Committee (6 October) that 500,000 redundancies were anticipated in the hospitality industry.

At the NHS Providers Annual Conference, Health Secretary Matt Hancock said that the UK faces a *“perilous moment”* in the fight against Covid-19. Nothing is being done to avert the impending disaster. The number of people who tested positive has tripled in the space of a fortnight. Junior health minister Nadine Dorries has admitted that hospitals would reach a *“critical”* point very soon.

How did we get here?

One of the main features of what happened in the last six months is that the leaderships of the TUC and of the Labour Party – the only forces whose action could prevent disaster – have pursued the same policy of support: full support for some measures, critical support for other measures, but support in any case for the government in the name of *“the national interest”* – but in fact in defence of the interests of the

capitalists and their profits, which the Tories and their friends in the CBI represent.

In late June, TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady co-signed a statement by the UK *“Build Back Better”* initiative on the line of *“we are all in it together”*, along with trade union leaders 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.

At this year's TUC Congress, Frances O'Grady 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. At the time, Keir Starmer seconded her invitation to the government to *“work with us”*.

This kind of *“national unity”* in defence of the interests of capitalist profit goes against the very reasons why the working class began building their own class organisations two centuries ago: the trade unions and a political party. In the House of Commons on 24 September, Rishi Sunak presented the Government's so-called *“Job Support Scheme”*. In her reply, Labour's Shadow Chancellor Anneliese Dodds said: *“There is much in the statement that we do support – as I just said, we have repeatedly called for a system of targeted wage support, (...) – but we must ensure that these measures are as effective as possible at (...) **keeping viable businesses in operation**”* (our emphasis). The response by Chancellor Sunak was: *“the Government stand with the British people and British business, with the CBI, the British Chambers of Commerce and the Trades Union Congress, in bringing much-needed support to the economy.”*

Anyone conscious of the fact that the interests promoted by the Tory government, based on maximising profit and cutting jobs, are antagonistic to the interests of the working class, the youth and the disenfranchised would have expected a denial by the TUC.

But two hours later, Frances O'Grady appeared in a photo-call in front of 11 Downing St with the head of the CBI and Chancellor Sunak after he had presented the Government's plan proposing wage cuts, a three-day week and the decision to defend only so-called *“viable”* jobs; in other words, to help cut millions more jobs.

All this is causing outrage in the ranks of the labour movement. Neither Frances O'Grady nor the TUC General Council have given any explanation as to why Frances O'Grady stood alongside the CBI Director-General and Chancellor Sunak.

Reporting on the recent decision by Unite's executive to cut its affiliation funding to the Labour Party, the *Mirror* quoted a Unite source as saying that it was "a signal to Keir [Starmmer] that our people are fed up".



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

The whole issue focuses on two words: "viable" jobs. What is a viable job? Who decides which job is viable and which is not, and for whom?

The answer is in the question. Under the current system, the only criterion is profitability, not whether people can live on two-thirds of the minimum wage while having to jump through hoops to access inadequate Universal Credit payments.

Just one example: How many thousands of jobs will be deemed "unviable" in Liverpool and Manchester when the recently-implemented curfew will force the closure of hundreds of pubs and restaurants?

The duty of the leaderships of the TUC and of the Labour Party is precisely to organise the defence of every single job, and this can be done only by imposing a ban on lay-offs and job cuts.

We repeat the question:

By what mandate did Frances O'Grady join the head of the CBI and Chancellor Sunak in front of 11 Downing Street after he presented the government's plan to cut wages, impose a three-day week and only support so-called "viable"

jobs; in other words, to help cut millions more jobs deemed "unviable" by the financial institutions?

A TUC Congress motion? We have not seen anything of the kind.

A decision of the TUC General Council? We have not been informed of anything of the kind.

As far as we are concerned, like the vast majority of trade unionists, Labour Party members, Labour voters and community members involved in the struggle against lay-offs and job-cuts, we remain faithful to the fundamental mandate of every trade union, the demand being expressed by working people today, that ALL jobs should be defended.

It is completely normal for the Tory government and the CBI to only concerned about "viable" – i.e. profitable – jobs. But the support given by members of the TUC and Labour Party leaderships, a demonstration of "national unity" not seen since the Second World War, is contradictory to the nature of those organisations and threatens their very existence.

More than ever, we remain convinced that the only solution to avoid the impending job carnage is a strict ban on lay-offs and job cuts, and that such a policy can only be achieved in full independence from the Tories and from capital which they serve.

It can be achieved only by rejecting the existing order.

Unity of working people and their organisations can and must be achieved on banning lay-offs and job-cuts, as the starting-point for any policy that breaks with the capitalists' interests and meets the needs of the vast majority.

In our trade union branches, in our LP party wards and constituencies, we must organise to achieve the conditions for such a fightback.

27 October

This chaotic sham of a democracy is adding to the crisis, not solving it

The government is failing to give even the appearance of consultation and meaningful communication, regularly announcing unscrutinised decisions after supposedly "consulting" regional and local government officials and MPs by inviting them to uninformative non-meetings just minutes before the announcements, or simply not bothering to "consult" at all. It is able to do so because of the powers it has under the Coronavirus Act 2020, which grants ministers the power to impose ministerial regulations in place of proposals that would normally be scrutinised and voted on by the House of Commons.

This chaotic sham of democracy includes the awarding of hundreds of millions of pounds' worth of government contracts to private companies without any tendering process or scrutiny, and often despite hard evidence of a previous failure to deliver.

The current system means that the Covid-19 crisis has led to political crisis inside both the Tory party and the Labour Party. Tory MPs are making it increasingly and publicly clear that they are not prepared to simply go along with whatever Johnson and his clique come up with next, particularly as the Covid-19 crisis starts to overlap more directly with the prospect of a no-deal Brexit. There are signs that the Tories may soon decide to ditch Johnson. Meanwhile, Labour MPs and trade union leaders are starting to go public with their concerns that the Starmer leadership has limited itself to offering verbal criticism while endorsing every one of Johnson's measures and abstaining on Commons votes – basically, giving Johnson a blank cheque. The more recent "combativity" displayed by Shadow Cabinet members is a direct result of this internal pressure within the LP.

The only real answer is to put an end to this government and this whole system, replacing it with a working-class government that will serve the interests of the vast majority, i.e. those who can only make a living by selling their labour.

SNAPSHOTS OF THE CRISIS

1 October: Always a profit to be made from suffering...

While the national “test and trace” system run by private companies Serco, Sitel, Deloitte and others continues to fail in its basic tasks, it emerges that consultancy giant Deloitte is involved in selling separate contact-tracing services directly to local public health officials in the UK. One director of public health who received an email pitch from Salesforce, a US software company with which Deloitte has a business partnership, said: *“The ongoing failure of NHS test and trace is being turned into an opportunity for one of the companies engaged in it to profit. This is not a coherent world-beating system. It is a worsening fiasco. While NHS Test and Trace talk about working in partnership with us and fail to deliver, one of the providers of testing comes round the back door to profit from councils trying to pick up the pieces.”*

2 October: Councils given five minutes' notice of local lockdown confirmation

Hartlepool and Middlesbrough councils were only informed of the confirmed detail of the proposed lockdown restrictions when they received a draft press release from the Department of Health and Social Care five minutes before the measures were announced by Matt Hancock on 1 October. In Merseyside, where new rules were also announced on 1 October, council officials were briefed on the measures 30 minutes before Hancock's statement. One senior source said they were surprised and concerned that the rules had been “watered down” from what had been discussed with a minister only 12 hours earlier. Middlesbrough Mayor Andy Preston said there had been a *“monstrous and frightening lack of communication”* from the government, which had shown *“disregard for local expertise, local knowledge and local need.”* Earlier the same week, Newcastle City Council leader Nick Forbes accused ministers of creating *“chaos and confusion”* by making significant announcements affecting millions of

people without properly consulting local leaders.

2 October: The government funds asset-strippers while withdrawing financial support for workers

It emerges that UK companies owned by private equity firms will be able to access emergency state-backed loan schemes. Private equity specialises in borrowing huge sums to buy firms after they have been refused loans by the banks. Once in charge, the investors can increase “profitability” by sacking staff and selling off the company's assets. Guildhawk, a leading software translations company, warned the government back in March that *“vulture funds”* will use the crisis to *“acquire, asset-strip and neutralise good companies”*.

2 October: Government ignores science to shore up private testing system

The government quietly changes its guidance on the number of days (from 5 to 8) within which people with Covid-19 symptoms should get tested, increasing the risk that the virus could spread more quickly. Covid-19 helpline team leaders have suggested that tests do not provide an accurate result more than five days after first having symptoms. Staff reacted with surprise to the change, which was made without announcement or explanation. Independent Sage committee member Prof Allyson Pollock said: *“The problem is the government has carved testing out of health services and general practice and public health, and created a centralised, ineffective, privatised testing and contact-tracing system instead of rebuilding public health and primary care and NHS lab capacity locally.”*

4 October: Cineworld leaves most of its staff out in the cold

Cineworld informs staff that it is “temporarily” closing down all of its cinemas in the UK from 8 October. Some 5,500 staff at its 127 Cineworld and Picturehouse UK cinemas will be out of work, plus contractors such as cleaners and security workers. Cineworld's cinemas are generally

run by a small team of salaried managers and a larger group of workers on zero-hour contracts. Employers must give employees with less than two years' service at least one week of notice, but they don't have to give those on zero-hour contracts any hours during the notice period. This means that workers with less than two years' service – including many of the students and young people who make up much of the Cineworld workforce – may not be entitled to redundancy pay.

7 October: More job-cuts

Manchester Airports Group (MAG) begins discussions with trade unions over its plan to cut up to 900 jobs (465 at Manchester airport, 376 at London Stansted and 51 at East Midlands airport) at the end of the government's “furlough” scheme. MAG also wants to change job descriptions and staff roster patterns for those workers who keep their job. Meanwhile, brewery and pub operator Greene King says it is cutting up to 800 jobs and closing 79 pubs and restaurants, with around one-third closing permanently and the rest “mothballed” until they can reopen. Its brewing/pub competitor Marston will follow suit on 15 October, announcing it will cut 2,150 jobs.

9 October: Sunak unveils his new scheme for “viable” jobs

Ahead of the government's announcement on 12 October of its new “three-tier” local lockdown plan, Chancellor Sunak announces his “Job Support Scheme” (JSS), due to replace the “Job Retention Scheme” (JRS) from 1 November.

JRS: Ends 31 October; nationwide scheme; covered 80% of all employee wages (including non-discretionary overtime) up to £2,500 max; tapered wages and overtime (i.e., as the scheme tapered down from 1 August, employers were required to contribute to the costs of national insurance and pension contributions of furloughed workers, and from 1 September they were also required to contribute increasingly each month to furloughed workers'

wages, including non-discretionary overtime).

JSS: Begins on 1 November; applies only to companies “forced to close” by local or national government restrictions; covers 67% of employee salaries up to £2.100 max, no tapering announced. Companies will still need to pay national insurance and pension contributions. The JSS will be available for six months, with a review in January.

For someone in the hospitality sector on the minimum wage, this means:

	Aged 18-20	Aged 25+
Min. wage per hour	£6.45	£8.72
JRS	£5.16	£6.97
JSS	£4.23	£5.77

For those workers covered by the JSS, rents and household bills won't be reduced by a third, food costs won't be reduced by a third, transport costs won't be reduced by a third. And without customers, hospitality workers can't earn tips to supplement their meagre wage. For the 700,000 freelancers in the hospitality industry, there is nothing: no work, no furlough, no financial support.

13 October: UK redundancies rise at record rate

The Office for National Statistics says that the number of people being made redundant in the UK almost doubled in the three months to August (increasing by 114,000 to reach 227,000), rising at the fastest rate since records began. The unemployment rate rose by more than expected to 4.5%, up from 4.1% in July.

14 October: Government pays consultants up to £6,250 a day

Sky News reveals that the government is paying Boston Consulting Group (BCG) £10 million for 40 consultants to work for four months to improve its failed “test and trace” programme. Under the original terms, individual consultants from BCG could earn £2,400 per day and the most senior consultants up to £7,360 per day; BCG then offered discounts of 10-15 per cent on different parts of the project.

The next day, the chair of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee says she is shocked at the fact that the bill for private consultants hired by the government to help combat the pandemic has

soared to £175 million, adding that her committee had launched an inquiry into the government's use of consultants.

19 October: TUC protests at lack of reward for its “national unity”

The TUC teams up with employers to urge the government to reverse its decision to axe the £12 million Union Learning Fund (ULF) at the end of March 2021. This decision means that while big corporations carry on receiving massive state aid, the cash that currently supports workplace learning will be lost, affecting more than 200,000 workers who get access to learning activities via the TUC's UnionLearn, by agreement with the Department for Education. The workers who gain their first ever qualification, get help to read, write or learn digital skills – these are the real victims of this Tory cut.

22 October: Government carries out a massive U-turn over JSS

After widespread criticism of the government's new JSS announced in September, Sunak meets representatives of the TUC, business groups and the hospitality industry in a pizza restaurant in London, in an attempt to patch up relations ahead of announcing major changes to the JSS before it even comes into effect on 1 November. The new scheme, primarily aimed at the hard-hit hospitality, accommodation and leisure sectors, has been completely rewritten. Instead of employers being invited to pay 55 per cent of the wages of someone working 33 per cent of normal hours, an employee now needs to only work 20 per cent of their usual hours to benefit from the JSS, and the level of employer contribution has been cut to 5 per cent. This means the government will pay 62 per cent of a worker's wages for the time they are away from their job.

23 October: Government mistargets funds for self-employed

In a report (“Jobs, jobs, jobs”) to be published on 27 October, the Resolution Foundation think-tank highlights the fact that the government's £12.7 billion flagship scheme to help the self-employed through the pandemic (the Self-employment Income Support Scheme, or SEISS) has handed £1.3

billion to more than 400,000 workers who were able to claim support despite losing no income in the crisis – and at the same time, giving nothing to 500,000 people left without work.

23 October: Laptop allocation for England's schools slashed by 80 per cent

Headteachers across England receive emails from the Department for Education on the eve of half-term informing them that their allocations of laptops for disadvantaged pupils had been slashed by around 80 per cent. The blow comes just two days after the government used its Covid-19 emergency powers to impose a new legal duty on schools to provide remote education to any pupil unable to attend lessons because of the pandemic. One head teacher said: “We are now in a position where we have to offer remote learning within 24 hours of young people being sent home. We are actually breaking the law if we don't.” Another said: “Like many schools, we've all been planning, we've had a legal requirement put on us since Thursday to plan for remote learning. The day after all those plans had to be finalised then we get told the number of laptops we were expecting has been reduced massively.” Shadow Schools Minister Wes Streeting said: “Only this incompetent government could introduce a legal duty on schools to provide online learning for pupils isolating at home and then cut their allocation of laptops the very next day. We know that many families do not have the laptops or unlimited broadband they need for their children to be able to access lessons and resources from home.”

27 October: Covid-19 death toll passes 60,000 mark

Although the government's official death-toll is 45,365, the actual number of people killed by Covid-19 in the UK rises to 61,469. Of this total, 59,927 deaths were recorded across the UK's statistical agencies and includes all deaths where Covid-19 was recorded on the death certificate. The rest are deaths which occurred subsequently according to the government's data dashboard, including deaths which occurred within 28 days of a positive Covid test (the government's preferred measure).

Stefan Cholewka's notes of the month

GMATUC and Rochdale TUC appeal to the Trades Council movement and trade union branches (excerpts)

By Stefan Cholewka, GMATUC Secretary (personal capacity)

The North West TUC and TUC Congress House have refused a TUC Development Grant for GMATUC, Bolton TUC and Rochdale TUC community campaigns against evictions of people who have fallen into arrears due to the Covid-19 crisis.

Many of the campaign issues have already been included in the Trades Councils Programme of Work 2020-21 and signed off by the JCC: "New Deal for Workers"; "Precarious Work – a role for Trades Union Councils"; organising young workers in precarious employment and the gig economy; "A Housing Programme for all Tenures"; "Fighting for Jobs and Skills, Post-Pandemic".

It seems that the TUC is not willing to give grants to allow GMATUC, Bolton and Rochdale Against COVID Evictions (RACE) to organise specific community-based campaigns in the face of a global pandemic and following a national lockdown, and when local lockdowns are being superseded by the introduction of a three-tiered system of local COVID alert levels in England. One of the worst effected regions, of course, being the north west of England, including the whole of Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region. (...)

Today the Tory parliamentary party is split from top to bottom on the Government's Covid-19 strategy, following the abject failure to come to grips with the pandemic the first time around; and now clearly failing in the face of a second Covid-19 wave, with Boris Johnson's premiership hanging in the balance. (...)

The TUC has given its full support to Chancellor Sunak to impose wage cuts and a three-day week. In an extraordinary photo opportunity in Downing Street, the Tory Chancellor was pictured with both the leader of the TUC and the leader of the boss's organisation, the CBI. He was flanked by TUC leader Frances O'Grady and CBI leader Carolyn Fairbairn. (...)

GMATUC and Rochdale TUC are calling on the government to do more for those who will be threatened with eviction, and calling on Rochdale Council to prepare for additional renters seeking emergency housing assistance from them.

In a very short time, we have seen our support grow amongst trade union, community and faith groups across Greater Manchester and Rochdale who share our concerns and are proud to work alongside Greater Manchester Law Centre and Greater Manchester Tenants Union.

Homelessness often has lifelong consequences for people. The social and financial costs of homelessness and resettlement as a result of evictions are huge and will fall to our already over-stretched council.

Precarious employment, zero-hour contracts, a shrinking jobs market and the worst sick pay in Europe all contribute to the increasing vulnerability of renters, with many people struggling with in-work poverty and being just one pay-packet away from destitution. Giving people longer to pay only delays the inevitable: you can't pay 24 months' rent with only 22 months' pay. (...)

Doctors think NHS won't cope with demand this winter

More than 6,500 doctors in England have told a BMA survey they have little or no confidence in the NHS being able to cope this winter.

More than 70 per cent of staff are either not at all or not very confident about the abilities of services in community settings to cope, and 65 per cent not confident about their own local healthcare service's ability to cope.

Doctors also say they are very sceptical about the effectiveness of the government's restrictions. Just under 6 per cent say the measures will have any significant impact on containing the spread of the virus, but 37 per cent say they will have no impact or be ineffective.

BMA council chair Dr Chaand Nagpaul said: "Doctors know that this winter is likely to be one of the most difficult times of their careers. They are extremely worried about

the ability of the NHS to cope and their ability to care for the needs of their patients. These survey findings show the enormous scale of the challenges for the NHS in the coming months – and they reinforce the BMA's call for a national and strategic approach to getting this virus under control."

Around one in five doctors say they are seeing more Covid-19 patients than they did at the same point during the first wave, and 28 per cent have found non-Covid demand higher than before the pandemic.

The survey also reveals that there is still a backlog of millions of patients who did not receive treatment during the first wave, with only around one-quarter of doctors reporting that they have started to tackle the backlog.

INTERNATIONAL



To all the correspondents of the International Workers Committee Against War and Exploitation, For a Workers' International (IWC), To labour activists of all political backgrounds throughout the world

Published in *IWC Newsletter* No.164 (9 October 2020)

Dear Comrades,

The IWC, which was formed at the end of the International Conference Against War, Exploitation and Precarious Labour held in Mumbai in November 2016, met on 2 October 2020.

As you know, we had launched an appeal for a new International Conference against War and Exploitation, For a Workers' International to be held in Paris on 5 and 6 November 2020.

When we launched that appeal, we stated that, "the class struggle remains the motor force of history. We affirm that the progress of human civilisation, of peace and democracy, depends first and foremost on the ability of the exploited and the oppressed throughout the world to preserve the independence of their organisations."

Since that appeal was launched, more than 300 trade union members and working-class activists from the five continents have endorsed it. Today, the need for such a conference is stronger than ever.

The impotence of all the capitalist governments confronted with the Covid-19 pandemic has clearly exposed the incapacity of the capitalist system worldwide and in every country to preserve the most elementary requirements of civilisation. The way the pandemic has spread all over the world, causing hundreds of thousands of deaths, hitting the working-class majority of humankind fiercely – especially its most vulnerable sections – is a terrible indictment of that system.

Everywhere, instead of using the technical capacities available to fight the pandemic, the exploiting classes have on the contrary used them to intensify their attacks against the standards of living of the majority of the population, have increased unemployment on an unprecedented scale, and are fiercely attempting to destroy all the working-class gains, their organisations

and their rights. At the same time, the threat of generalised war is higher than it was at the time we launched our appeal. But precisely, because of the needs of the capitalist system, the consequences of the pandemic have created a situation where each continent – and to a large extent each country – is isolated, and where the relations between working people are in fact locked down. These conditions make it impossible to hold a genuine open World Conference against War and Exploitation, For a Workers International at the date which was at first set.

Such a conference is too important to take the risk of having it become a rump conference, in which those who could attend would in practice be selected by decisions of the various governments.

Therefore, we have no choice but to postpone this conference to a date to be set later, sometime in 2021.

We propose – even if it is impossible now to set a precise new date for the international conference – that the preparation of the conference enters immediately into a more active phase.

We propose to organise a large-scale fact-finding survey at the international level (see below). It will enable us to collect the facts that show the responsibility of the failing capitalist regime, and it will be a call to fight for the independence of the labour movement and to do away with the society of exploitation.

Comradely,

Follow-up committee of the International Workers Committee Against War and Exploitation, For a Workers' International, set up at the Mumbai Conference (November 2016).

2 October 2020

IWC SURVEY

Throughout the world – though under different forms – the workers and their organisations are faced with questions regarding the pandemic, its consequences, the governments' policies and the stance taken by the labour movement.

We do not hide the fact that we intend, starting from facts, to back up what we have kept saying in every IWC document: the capitalist regime – based on private ownership of the means of production – is leading the whole of society into an abyss. The positive solution to the unprecedented crisis humankind is going through is in the hands of the working class.

This highlights the question of the independence of the labour movement in relation to the capitalist class and the governments that serve their interests.

The results of this survey will provide material to prepare the Second International Conference against War and Exploitation, For a Workers' International (which we will hold in line with our commitment, when the conditions for travelling and meeting are back to normal).

In order to facilitate the circulation of these documents (in English, French and Spanish) among the organisations, groups and activists from 53 countries and all backgrounds who have issued a call for the Conference, please limit your contributions to between 10,000 and 20,000 characters (2,000 to 4,000 words).

1. What have the consequences of the health crisis for the population been – especially for the working class? What has the COVID impact been on employment, how many jobs have been lost?
2. Are there any figures available concerning the lives lost of workers in general and particularly front-line workers, including doctors and other hospital staff?
3. What measures were taken or not taken by the government to cope with the pandemic? Were any wage deductions imposed by the bosses and governments?
4. What new attacks against workers' rights and democracy were launched by the bosses and governments during this year, as they took advantage of the pandemic?
5. For years, the number of workers in the informal sector has continued to increase. The fight against precarious labour must lead the labour movement to think about organizing these workers. The workers in the informal sector have paid a heavy price in the healthcare crisis. What has their situation been since March 2020? What reactions has this triggered?
6. Women workers have also been particularly hit. They are the first to lose their jobs, the last to be taken back at their work places when they reopen. They have to take in charge their children deprived of schooling. Domestic violence has increased with the lockdown. What form has it taken? What mobilisations have taken place to defend the rights of working women?
7. With the new technologies, the capitalists dismantle labour relations, restructure companies and destroy jobs. What are the consequences and what are the threats to labour relations in the coming period?
8. What were the positions of workers' organisations and their leaderships during that period? What were the demands? What was their attitude towards the plans designed by the bosses and the governments?



French workers protest the closure of a Renault auto plant during the Covid-19 crisis

UNITED STATES

Binational Conference Against NAFTA 2.0, the Wall of Shame and the Migration Pact, 10 October

The Binational Conference Against NAFTA 2.0, the Wall of Shame and the Migration Pact was held on 10 October. The conference was slated to be held in the border city of Tecate, Baja California, but due to the Covid-19 measures restricting mobility, the meeting was held in a hybrid format, with a majority of participants linked through video conferencing and with union hubs in six cities in Mexico, including Tecate. 132 people from 43 organisations in Mexico, the United States, Canada, and Argentina participated in the conference.

Greetings were sent by Nambiath Vasudevan and Daniel Gluckstein, the Co-ordinators of the International Workers Committee Against War and Exploitation, For a Workers' International (IWC), and by Paul Nkunzimana, an IWC activist in Canada. These were read out at the beginning of the conference.

Participants from Mexico included leaders and/or rank-and-file members from the Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME), the New Workers Central (NCT), teachers from the CNTE, agricultural workers from SINDJA, oil workers, autoworkers from Generando Movimiento at GM, and maquiladora workers. Members of the Organisation of Workers and People (OPT) and of movements in defence of natural resources and migrant workers also participated.

From the United States, participants included leaders and/or grassroots activists from the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA, AFL-CIO) in Sacramento and San Diego, the California Teachers Association (CFA), the San Francisco Labor Council, the Teamsters union in Ohio, the United Educators of San Francisco (UESF), Rideshare Drivers United (RDU) in San Diego, as well as committees in defence of migrants, and Socialist Organizer, among others.

Conference participants focused on the devastating effects of “free trade” agreements on workers’ rights on both sides of the border, and on how these treaties – particularly the new USMCA, more aptly called NAFTA 2.0 – undermine the sovereignty of oppressed peoples and nations by allowing US imperialism to plunder their resources and superexploit their labour forces.

Two simultaneous conference breakout sessions were held, one devoted to “national sovereignty, migration and defence of resources” and the other to the “defence of labour rights”.

In the first breakout session, participants slammed the Migration Pact between the US and Mexican governments and the construction of the Wall of Shame on the border. Immigrant rights activists lashed out against the migrant detention centres in the United States, which have become death-camps in this period of pandemic.

The looting by large transnational corporations, which have taken over Mexico’s natural resources such as water, was highlighted. Special attention was paid to the theft of vital water resources by Constellation Brands

(Corona beer) in the greater Mexicali (Baja California) region, and Coca Cola in Chiapas.

Conference participants also exposed the role of Mexico’s billionaires, who are buying up lands that have belonged for centuries to indigenous communities for private, for-profit mega-projects, such as the TrenMaya (Maya fast train) and the “economic development” transoceanic corridor in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

Speakers also reported that the new NAFTA 2.0 treaty retains the original NAFTA Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) clause that explicitly prevents the Mexican government from halting or reversing the privatisation drive of Mexico’s oil and energy industries by foreign multinational corporations. If the Mexican government were to undertake such measures, Mexico under NAFTA 2.0 would be subject to heavy sanctions and tariffs on its exports – a modern-day form of extortion!



It should be recalled that one of the election pledges of Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) was to repeal the privatising “Energy Reform” enacted in 2014 by then-president Peña Nieto. However, AMLO turned his back on this pledge when he supported the new NAFTA 2.0 treaty – which bans him from taking any action against the destructive Peña Nieto reform. A central pillar of Mexico’s economy and sovereignty has been its oil and energy industries.

The second breakout session was devoted to the defence of labour rights on both sides of the border. Participants examined the Labor Chapter (number 23) in the new treaty. It was noted that this Chapter was included under pressure from the Democratic Party in the United States and the leadership of the AFL CIO union federation, as a means of getting wider approval for this fundamentally anti-worker treaty. In fact, the Labor Chapter is nothing more than sugar-coating on the poison pill that workers are meant to swallow; it lacks the enforcement mechanisms necessary to protect labour rights.

The horrific effects of the Covid 19 pandemic on the working class were also discussed: thousands of lay-offs,

forced work under the risk of infection and death, new forms of labour exploitation such as teleworking, which increases the workday, makes labour relations more precarious, and generates double and triple exploitation, especially of women.

Participants also exposed and denounced the new “business schemes” that reject classifying workers as members of a collective entity with labour and other rights, transforming them instead into individual contractors, atomised and without minimum wages or pensions. Proposition 22, on the ballot in California, was taken to task for its offensive against the entire working class, not just against Uber or Lyft drivers.

After hearing the reports from the breakout groups, participants in the plenary session agreed to issue a final statement, to be distributed to the labour movements in Mexico and the United States, and also to the press and to authorities in both countries.

The statement will register our unswerving opposition to NAFTA 2.0 and will insist that all the demands brought forward during the course of the Binational Conference

must be met. To that end, it was agreed to promote broad-based labour solidarity campaigns with all the unions and popular organisations in struggle – with special attention placed on the campaign to defend the Mexican Electrical Workers Union from the intervention into its internal affairs and the violation of its union autonomy by the Mexican government.

In order to promote these campaigns, it was decided to provide a framework for ongoing discussion, exchange and action by establishing a Binational Conference Continuations Committee, one of whose tasks will include reaching out to Canadian workers and unions, so that the next conference against NAFTA 2.0 can be a Trinational Conference.

It also was agreed to participate in the International Workers Conference Against War and Exploitation, For a Workers’ International, organised by the IWC in 2021.

**Report submitted by Alan Benjamin (United States)
and Juan Carlos Vargas Reyes (Mexico)**

OUR POLITICAL HERITAGE

The *Communist Manifesto* is more relevant than ever!

By Daniel Gluckstein

What many financial analysts and media pundits call “globalisation” does not represent a new stage in the development of the capitalist system. On the contrary, it corresponds to its phase of extreme decay. The question at hand is about the regime based on the private ownership of the means of production, and – more specifically – the fact that such a regime has survived more than a century beyond the epoch where it was capable of being a factor in social, human, and economic progress. This survival has fuelled all the phenomena of decay and destruction that we see today.

The recent breakdowns of the world economy momentarily destabilised the theoreticians of all stripes who had, over many years, painted glossy pictures hailing this new globalisation. But the crisis has not caused them to abandon their basic script.

What is involved here is not a theoretical question, but a social question. Those who have tied their fate to the preservation of the system based on the private ownership of the means of production cannot look at this reality and give a sincere description. To do so would be to undermine their own parasitic roles in the system.

To be sure, one can hear many pundits ask how the excesses of globalisation can best be moderated, or how small touches of regulation can best be introduced into the process of world deregulation. It is now a matter of curbing the excesses of a misnamed “neoliberalism”. But such questioning has been purely for show.

This applies to all those who – from their seats in government – have devoted their energies to dismantling existing regulations over the past 40-plus years. It applies to all those in the financial, fiscal, and

banking domains who have dismantled all the existing regulations in order to open the doors even further to speculative activity, derivatives and short-term markets, which have literally absorbed major sectors of the world economy.

It applies to all those who, in their own countries, are organising social deregulation, dismantling labour codes and collective bargaining agreements, public service statutes, systems of social protection, and public education systems. It applies to all those who, at the political level, have deregulated the institutions that constitute the nation in such a way that they have delivered their people to the diktats of the supranational institutions. It applies to all those who have gone forward with an unbending policy of deregulation, and who continue today to expand privatisations and counter-reforms. None of them have the will, the intention, nor the means to introduce even a “teaspoonful” of regulation into the mad dash toward global deregulation.

“Re-regulation” and “renationalisation” of previously privatised public enterprises and public services – what the Mexican workers are demanding when they cry out “Our nation must be defended; Pemex is not for sale!” – can be imposed only as a result of the class struggle, that is, through the independent action of millions of workers and their organisations, who are resisting the policies of deregulation and destruction imposed on a world scale. This class struggle can be independent only to the extent that is not subordinated to the policies of globalisation that are dictated by world imperialism and its institutions.

One can see that the survival of the regime of private ownership of the means of production is leading the vast majority of the people of this planet toward a hopeless degradation. This is a fact which even institutions that do not share our conclusions are compelled to recognise.

The Manifesto of the Communist Party is more relevant than ever. Several elements speak particularly to this relevance.

– Class antagonisms have never been as sharp as they are today. Never before has the gap been so large between the rich, who grow wealthier and wealthier, and the immense army of increasingly impoverished masses. Never before has the chasm between antagonistic interests been so deep. On one side stands the capitalist class, which – in order to preserve its profits (based on the extortion of surplus value produced through the process of capitalist exploitation) – is dashing headlong into an offensive to destroy the productive forces, combined with spiralling speculation, and bringing with it waves of restructurings and the destruction of companies and jobs. On the other side stand the workers, the vast majority, who seek to preserve their right to a job and a living wage so that they can maintain their capacity to live under decent conditions.

– This moment of “globalisation” which we are living through is not some new era in the history of humanity. It is just another link in the long chain of human history, which is the history of class struggle.

– In 1938, at the founding of the Fourth International, one of the first lines of its programme was the recognition that “*the economic prerequisite for the proletarian revolution has long since achieved the highest point that can be reached under capitalism.*” From this recognition, the *Transitional Programme* draws the conclusion that “*the historical crisis of humankind comes down to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.*”

– Decades after these lines were written, the “*crisis of the proletarian leadership*” has yet to be resolved. The processes of the class struggle on an international scale have deepened.

On the one hand, the apparatuses that have emerged from the decomposition of the organisations historically constituted by the working class – those of the Second International as well as the ex-apparatus of disintegrated Stalinism – are playing their role more and more completely. This means they take a direct part in the implementation of the policy of plunder and disintegration required by imperialism. This political factor plays an increasingly essential role in the survival of the rotting system based on the private ownership of the means of production.

On the other hand, there are the same processes of working-class resistance to capitalism that have marked the recent period. Today, the offensive to destroy all the social conquests and progressive reforms wrested in earlier stages of the class struggle nourishes the

resistance of the workers and the oppressed masses on every continent and in every country. There is direct resistance to capitalist exploitation. And there is resistance that takes the particular form of the will to defend the independence of working-class organisations, and hence of the democracy upon which they depend. Thus far, capitalism has not managed to break this resistance within the “traditional” framework. And because it finds itself seized by the throat by the crisis of decay of its very system of production, the capitalist class has brought out the weapon of globalisation – with which to impose its destructive plans, no matter what the cost.

– It is on this terrain of working-class resistance on an international scale that – with all the difficulties confronting the workers and the peoples – — we find the elements for a regroupment, a reorganisation, and a reorientation of the workers’ movement on a worldwide scale (to which, more often than not, the apparatuses are opposed). It is in the service of this recomposition of the workers’ movement on an international scale that it is necessary to establish clearly the analysis of what moment this situation puts us in. Humanity will be able to find a way out only with an agenda that includes taking the means of production into the hands of the producers themselves. Only that will make it possible to reorganise the entire economy and society on a global scale with the objective of making the satisfaction of social needs the starting point and goal of all human activity – not the over-gratified appetites of a handful of speculators, bankers, and capitalists.

What was written 150 years ago in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* is absolutely relevant today: the workers of the entire world “*cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation.*” At the same time, the assertion is made that the working class constitutes a movement “*of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.*”

Marx and Engels explain that “*the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property* [i.e. private ownership of the means of production].” This cannot be dissociated from the organisation of the working class as a class, and hence from the independence of its organisations.

We do not ask anyone to endorse this point of view as some sort of revealed truth, or even worse, as some sort of imposed truism. For our part, we simply draw the conclusion – based on facts and facts alone – that the stage capitalism has reached today puts on the agenda, as an absolute necessity for humanity, the struggle for the proletarian revolution.

Excerpted and adapted from Chapter 1 of *Class Struggle and Globalisation* by Daniel Gluckstein (San Francisco: APIO Publishing, 2000), originally published in French as *Lutte des classes et mondialisation* (Paris: Selio, 1999)

Subscribe to *Labour Internationalist*: £10 for 1 year (12 issues)

Email labour.internationalist2019@gmail.com for details