

Labour Internationalist

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

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Who we are, What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Now more than ever:
Let's organise
the fightback
to stop the
government's
reactionary offensive
For a workers'
government
based on the demands
and the needs of
the working class**

EDITORIAL

As part of the Spending Review he presented to Parliament on 25 November, Chancellor Sunak announced a pay freeze for firefighters, teachers, civil servants, council and government agency staff, police and members of the armed forces (nurses, doctors and other NHS workers have been exempted). His aim is to save around £2 billion in public spending, by reducing the income of more than 2 million public sector workers in real terms.

This projected saving represents a fraction of the £12.5 billion paid out to middle-men and speculators for PPE, all of it massively overpriced, some of it unusable and some of it not even manufactured yet. It represents an even smaller fraction of the £22 billion handed out to private companies for a useless national “test, track and trace” system.

Meanwhile, according to the Office for Budget Responsibility, if the lockdown measures are kept in place until spring next year and proven vaccines are rolled out in the second half of 2021, overall unemployment is forecast to reach 7.5 per cent, i.e. 2.6 million people will be officially registered as unemployed. There is no doubt that the real number of people who will lose their jobs will be much higher than that official figure. As poverty reaches unprecedented levels, thousands and thousands of people are still dying because of the epidemic and, in fact, because of the refusal by the government to take genuine measures to protect the health and lives of the people.

Is all this inevitable? Is there no possibility to fight back and block the brutal plans of the Johnson government?

The top leaderships of the TUC and of the Labour Party who have enthusiastically called for joint action with the government and the bosses seem rather disappointed. Responding to Sunak’s planned pay freeze, the national leaders of many trade unions, the TUC General Secretary and various Labour Party MPs put out statements that angrily condemned both the measure itself and the government’s “*divide and rule*” tactics. They used terms like “*shameful*”, “*a kick in the teeth*” and “*a deep sense of betrayal*”. UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis described the move as “*austerity, plain and simple*”.

Those words are accurate, but words are not enough: where are the proposals for concrete action? The wave of economic devastation and direct attacks on the working class and its rights is hitting the whole of Europe. During the OCRFI’s Third World Conference on 8-10 November (see pages 8 and 9), one of the delegates of the Italian section of the OCRFI reported on the class struggle in Italy, delivering the following facts:

Like in Britain, the leaderships of the Italian trade unions supported the government’s decisions in relation to the Covid-19 crisis. The General Secretary of the CGIL union confederation said at the beginning of the lockdown that there had to be “*general harmony*” between the unions, the government and the employers. All over Europe and around the world, workers were ready to fight back: they did not want to die for the sake of profit, they wanted to defend their jobs and their rights.

In Britain, despite the position taken by the top leaderships of the TUC and the Labour Party, dissatisfaction and the will to fight back have been clearly expressed by nurses and other NHS staff across the UK, the Sage Nursing Home care workers in North London, the Greencore food workers (BFAWU members) in Northampton, the Bexley waste collection workers, the Ilford School teaching staff in East London, the UCU branch at Northumbria University, the Unite members (including firefighters, engineers, security, baggage operations, operational and airside workers) at Heathrow Airport who have voted to strike in December against the “fire and re-hire” plan, and many workers in other sectors, especially workers on low-pay and those obliged to work in unsafe conditions. The youth across England are also resisting through student rent strikes, for example forcing Manchester University to cut student rents by 30 per cent.

In Italy, CGIL’s General Secretary signed a pact with the government and the employers’ organisation. The leaders of all the Italian trade unions followed him, but this could not stifle resistance from below. A strike movement emerged, starting in the metalworking factories of the northern Lombardy region against the widespread lack of safety at work.

The slogan of the strikers was “*We are not animals to be slaughtered*”.

The leaders of the metalworkers’ unions (FIOM, FIM and UILM) signed a first agreement, but it did not protect safety at work. There was then a second wave of strikes, despite the fact that the unions’ national leaderships did not call them. At that time, the regional leaderships of the unions came out in support of the strikes.

The strike movement spread and was joined by teachers and parents, forcing the national leaderships to support the mobilisation.

Faced with this situation, the Italian government then declared that it feared a social explosion, and it introduced a temporary ban on lay-offs and job-cuts.

Of course, the workers are still badly hit by the measures taken to protect profit: they do not receive 100 per cent of their wages. Initially, the ban was set until the end of June, then to the end of December, and now to the end of March 2021. There is one indisputable fact: the Italian government had to retreat.

The temporary ban was imposed by the working class against the will of the government and the bosses, and despite the willingness of the union leaderships to cooperate with government and the bosses.

This movement by the working class brought about new developments: 40,000 teachers and 10,000 ancillary school staff were hired to allow class sizes to be reduced as part of a schools catch-up programme and to combat absenteeism.

The proof is there to see: It is possible to fight back and to stop the reactionary offensive of the government in its tracks. This holds true in Britain as well as in Italy.

Of course, the Italian government will renew its attacks: it has to do so because of the needs of the ruling class,

but what has taken place is a first step to get rid of that government.

This will require new developments in the Italian labour movement. That is why the conclusions drawn by the OCRFI activists grouped around their paper *Tribuna Libera* is to increase its distribution, and to develop an organisation.

In Britain, we are facing the same issues. *Labour Internationalist* intends to help all initiatives and moves towards mobilising the working class against the plans

and measures of the Johnson government. Within this framework, *Labour Internationalist* aims towards regrouping all those who share the conviction that such a struggle opens up the perspective of a workers' government, a government formed by representatives of the workers' organisations and committed to a platform based on the demands and the needs of the working class.

28 November

SNAPSHOTS OF THE CRISIS

3 November: The Tories carry on looking after their own

The government awards a new £347 million Covid-19 testing contract to Randox, a Tory-linked private healthcare company whose testing kits had to be recalled over the summer because of concerns about contamination. The deal is a 6-month extension of an existing contract and was agreed without other companies being invited to bid. It means that Health Secretary Matt Hancock has now approved transfers of nearly £500 million in taxpayer funds to the company since the pandemic began.

3 November: Health crisis regs used to stifle protests

The government publishes new lockdown regulations that remove the exemption which provided for political protest. Declaring such protests illegal is now at the discretion of UK police forces.

4 November: Lloyds cuts more jobs despite massive profits

Lloyds Banking Group announces that it plans to cut a further 1,070 jobs, in addition to the 865 job-cuts it announced in September and the 780 jobs it cut in February, despite posting third-quarter profits of more than £1 billion. In October, the bank announced it wants to cut 9,000 jobs that are "no longer needed" due to technological advances.

5 November: Sunak bins his new scheme, the BoE prints more money to bail out big business

Sunak announces that his new "Job Security Scheme" (JSS) has been binned before it even starts, opting instead to extend the existing JRS "furlough" scheme through to the

end of March 2021. Meanwhile, the Bank of England announces it is printing another £150 billion to bail out big business with low-cost funding through its "quantitative easing" bond-buying scheme.

6 November: Government's mass testing trial in Liverpool criticised by health experts

As six new testing centres open their doors in Liverpool in a trial for the government's "Operation Moonshot" mass testing project, five public health experts raise significant doubts about the trial in a letter to Liverpool MPs. They say the plans to test asymptomatic people was against advice from the government's scientific advisory committee (Sage) to prioritise the testing of people displaying symptoms.

The experts warn that there is no evidence the plan will offer any benefit, the effectiveness of the tests it uses is weak, and the programme itself has been structured without input from the body responsible for advising ministers on screening strategy.

Angela Raffle, a public health consultant in Bristol, said she had looked carefully at the Liverpool proposals and concluded they were not fit for purpose: "*Experience with screening tells us that if you embark on a screening programme without having carefully evaluated it first, without a proper quality-assured pathway, without certainty of test performance in field settings, without full information for participants, and without the means to ensure that the intervention needed for those with positive results does indeed take place, the result is an expensive mess that does more harm than good.*"

One week later, Sir Muir Grey, a screening expert and founder of the National Screening Committee (NSC) in 1996, confirms in an interview that the NSC would have taken "a week or so" to scrutinise the proposed programme and set the right objectives.

Meanwhile, *The Guardian* reports that the 20-minute "Operation Moonshot" test, on which the government has spent £323 million for use with hospital and care home staff with no symptoms, identified only 46.7 per cent of infections during a crucial pilot trial in Manchester and Salford in October.

6 November: National "test and trace" system still failing

Figures published by the Department of Health and Social Care show that in the week ending 28 October, only 59.9 per cent of close contacts of people who tested positive for Covid-19 were reached by the national "test and trace" system and asked to self-isolate. Just four of the data processing bodies in "NHS Test and Trace" are public sector, 22 are private companies.

Local health protection teams (HPTs) have been proving highly effective in tracing close contacts of infected people, with 97.9 per cent being reached and asked to self-isolate in the week to 28 October. By contrast, only 58.5 per cent of close contacts not managed by local HPTs were reached. Experts have said at least 80 per cent of close contacts have to be reached in order for "test and trace" to be effective. Overall, 33 per cent of close contacts have not been reached since the national system began operating in May.

10 November: Unemployment climbs with record job-cuts in three months

Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures show that the UK unemployment rate has jumped to 4.8 per cent in the three months to September (0.9 per cent higher than a year ago), with an estimated 1.62 million people now out of work. The ONS says: “*Redundancies increased in July to September 2020 by 195,000 on the year, and a record 181,000 on the quarter, to a record high of 314,000. The annual increase was the largest since February to April 2009.*” There were 782,000 fewer employees paid on payroll in October 2020 compared to March, when the Covid-19 lockdown began across the UK.

10 November: Head of national “test and trace” system not sure what bears do in the woods

Appearing at a joint meeting of the House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee and the Science and Technology Committee, “test and trace” head Dido Harding says that the demand for testing in September, as schools and universities started the new academic year, took the programme by surprise...

12 November: Food-bank head condemns need for charity in the world’s fifth richest country

Food-bank charity the Trussell Trust reports a 47 per cent rise in food parcels given out by its volunteers between April and September, reflecting an explosion in demand for food aid, including from “newly hungry” families who had fallen into hardship. Trussell Trust Chief Executive Emma Revie says: “*We have to find better ways of supporting one another as a society than leaving people to rely on food charity. It’s not just about ending food banks; it’s about finding an alternative to the need for mass distribution of charity food in the fifth wealthiest country in the world.*”

12 November: Personal debt crisis looms

Debt charity Stepchange publishes research showing that household borrowing by low- and middle-income households and arrears linked to the Covid-19 pandemic have soared 66 per cent since May, to £10.3 billion. The number of people

who are in severe debt has risen to 1.2 million – nearly doubling since March – with a further 3 million people at risk of falling into arrears after taking on extra short-term loans. A report in October by a parliamentary committee laid part of the blame on the Universal Credit (UC) system, which it said pushed many families into the arms of payday lenders because initial payments take five weeks to arrive.

Research in the summer by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Save the Children found that nearly two-thirds of families on UC borrowed money to stay afloat. It found that 70 per cent of families had cut back on food and other essentials, while half had fallen behind on rent or other household bills.

13 November: More than 600,000 care workers earn less than the “real” living wage

Figures published by the Living Wage Foundation show that almost three-quarters of around 832,000 frontline care workers in England are earning less than the “real” living wage. The proportion is even higher in northern areas, where care homes have been hit hardest by Covid-19. In the north-east, 82 per cent of care staff earned less than the England-wide real living wage of £9.50 per hour, while the proportion was 78 per cent in the north-west. One care worker in Lancashire earning £8.72 per hour who recently had her pay cut told *The Guardian* that some of her colleagues have been using food banks.

16 November: Government set to plunge 700,000 more people into poverty next spring

Research by the Resolution Foundation shows that the government’s planned withdrawal on 31 March 2021 of £20 from weekly Universal Credit payments will automatically bring 700,000 more into poverty, 300,000 of them children. 500,000 of the already poor will be plunged into even deeper poverty as they lose out on £1,000 a year. This is in addition to the impact of rising unemployment, rising food prices and the continuing impact of the two-child limit and the cap on benefits and other social security cuts now in force.

18 November: NAO report reveals extent of Tory graft

A report by the National Audit Office (NAO) reveals that the government awarded £18 billion of Covid-related PPE contracts to 493 suppliers with political connections during the first six months of the pandemic. Favoured suppliers were directed to a “high-priority” channel for UK government contracts where bids were 10 times more likely to be successful, as their pitches for contracts were automatically treated as credible by government officials charged with procuring PPE, in some cases despite the fact that bidders lacked any relevant track record.

Meanwhile, the *Liverpool Echo* reports that Merseyside company Florence Roby has had to lay off a fifth of its workers after its offer to supply PPE to the government was ignored and then refused.

23 November: Speculators punish lack of profit from people’s health

The share price of AstraZeneca drops 3.8 per cent – roughly £4 billion in the company’s value – after announcing promising data for its “vaccine for the world”, developed in partnership with Oxford University. The company has pledged to distribute the vaccine at cost during the course of pandemic, and has also been clear that it won’t make profits from the initial orders that have been received from governments and international bodies. In contrast, Pfizer’s share price surged 4 per cent when it announced its vaccine trial data, based on projected sales: one analyst estimated that a Covid vaccine would add US\$1.7 billion to Pfizer’s pre-tax profit in 2022.

25 November: Sunak announces pay-freeze for more than 2 million public sector workers

While handing out tens of millions of taxpayers’ money to “entrepreneurs” who brokered purchases of PPE at extortionately inflated prices, while billions more are earmarked for private companies as part of the government’s “moonshot” plan for mass testing, and while £16.5 billion is allocated for defence spending, Chancellor Sunak announces the latest government measure designed to make working people pay the cost of its crisis.

OPEN FORUM

Stefan Cholewka's notes of the month

Respect, dignity and equality at the Sage Nursing Home

A resolution by Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Trades Council

Rochdale MBTC:

1. Notes with admiration that domestic and care workers at Sage Nursing Home in Barnet (North London) have heroically continued to care for the elderly in our community over the pandemic period, despite challenges, including a lack of PPE;

2. Is appalled to learn that the domestic staff and care assistants at Sage – who are recognised by the government as “key workers” and provide essential services – receive poverty pay rates ranging between £8.72 and £9.60 per hour. In the case of the lower rate, that stands at nearly 20 per cent below the London Living Wage, and more than 40 per cent below the UK’s average wage of £15 per hour;

3. Further notes that these workers only receive statutory sick pay, and that unsociable hours payments for working weekends and nights were removed in Spring 2019;

4. Welcomes the rapid unionisation of these workers, the majority of whom identify as women;

5. Supports the workers’ call for a voice at work, noting that since 20 July 2020 the union of their choice, United Voices of the World, which is a grassroots and militant union for precarious and migrant workers, has reached out to Sage management to recognise the union on a number of occasions. Despite this, UVW has yet to see a

willingness from Sage to reach an agreement on recognition;

6. Stands with the Sage workers and backs their call to be treated with respect, to be given pay rates and other terms and conditions that reflect that respect, and to ensure therefore that they can live a dignified life in London; and

7. Resolves to actively participate in the campaign for dignity, respect and equality at Sage Nursing home, by:

- sending a message of protest to the co-chairs of the board, Adrian Jacobs (adrian@adrianjacobs.co.uk) and Stephen Goldberg (stephen@nmholdings.co.uk);
- helping to spread the word to women’s groups, health campaigners, union members, local parliamentarians, councillors, community groups and carer workers at a local level and national level;
- being ready to support with picketing, leafleting, and more by joining the UVW “Quality Care Deserves Quality Pay” action group/solidarity network/campaign group by emailing: sagenursinghome@uvwunion.org.uk; and
- sending this motion to affiliated Trades Councils and CLPs, raising the profile of the dispute and encouraging donations to the strike fund.

Trade unionists demand a government U-turn on Covid, cuts and the public sector pay-freeze

By Stephen Hall, President, Greater Manchester Association of Trades Union Councils (GMATUC)

(Excerpts from a press statement by the GMATUC, 23 November 2020)

The government’s lockdown measures, its plan to cut funding for Greater Manchester for 2021-22, and the pay freeze for public sector workers will result in a much higher death-toll from Covid-19 than might occur otherwise, and will lead to increased mental stress and anguish as a result of needless additional job-losses and much reduced incomes for most people. Not to mention the potential financial ruin, homelessness and countless other social problems which will cost us all considerably more in the long run than the supposed financial savings from the Government’s currently proposed course of action and staggering costs already borne by the public purse.

The safety of the people is always the first consideration of any government, so the economic cost of that principle should always be a secondary issue, no matter how much it might amount to financially. However, had the government been prepared and acted more decisively at the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak, then much of the huge cost so far of the measures implemented by the government would not have been incurred, and we would not now be discussing the additional costs still to be borne by the government as a result of a clearly failing “on-off-on” national lockdown with various tiers of restrictions in between, and a “leaves-a-lot-to-be-desired” national test, track and trace system, all of which could still go on for many more months, despite the advent of a vaccine. No, instead, what we would have

more likely been talking about is Christmas and New Year celebrations without restrictions and all of us being financially better off than we currently are.

We believe the government should abandon its present course, which will only prolong the Covid-19 crisis, and instead immediately adopt a zero-Covid strategy as done by such countries as Taiwan, Singapore, New Zealand, Australia, South Korea and China. Their success speaks for itself. A key element of it has been the protection of the livelihoods of EVERYONE adversely affected by lockdown. As a result, the overall economic impact of Covid-19 in those countries has been considerably less than in Britain. Their governments have also spent substantially less than the British Government has spent – and still has to spend – as a result of not acting decisively earlier and not looking after everyone financially throughout, and by not bringing the virus under control as has been done in those countries. Further, in this country, however generous it has been claimed that the government's package of financial support has been, we have seen many thousands of jobs lost, many thousands of household incomes slashed by 20 per cent or more, many thousands of families now in huge rent arrears and facing potential eviction, and almost 4 million people provided with little or no support at all. This latter national figure equates to around 200,000 people in the Greater Manchester region.



Regarding the government's proposed cuts to the Greater Manchester authority's coffers of around £500 million for 2021-22, our Metro Mayor and council leaders should make it clear to the government that any proposed cuts at this time are simply unacceptable, and will only pour more misery into Greater Manchester households at a time when we should be investing in long-term projects which will more than pay for themselves. These could include building thousands of new hi-spec zero-carbon council houses and other social housing, insulating people's homes, and expanding local renewable energy generation, all of which will help to create thousands of new jobs as others are being lost due

to Covid-19, and which additionally will allow us to intensify our fight against the even bigger threat to us all than Covid-19, which is the threat of irreversible catastrophic climate change. This additional spending would not be wasteful expenditure burdening future generations, but on the contrary – by helping to tackle the huge housing shortage, climate change and alleviating the current widespread financial pressures on millions of households nationally caused by the Covid-19 pandemic – would possibly represent the best investment we could make presently in the interests of our children and future generations. We could also re-train people to equip them to do the increasing number of new jobs that need to be created, in addition to training and employing more social care workers, mental health professionals, teachers, nurses, etc., in order to better look after everyone's social, health and mental wellbeing.

What the government is proposing won't help us to achieve anything positive at all, and will ultimately just suck money and spending power out of the Greater Manchester economy at the same time as impoverishing many thousands of households. What it is proposing is also a completely false "saving", which will lead to greater financial and social costs be borne by the public purse at a later date. Local Trades Union Councils across the city region stand ready to fight alongside residents, workers, and service users, to oppose any such cuts in Greater Manchester and to work with all those who support the fight for a turnaround in Government policy.

In relation to the pay-freeze for public sector workers other than NHS staff, who may get a paltry pay-rise to help them pay to park at work, as a reward for their efforts over the last nine months, it is simply outrageous to suggest that many key workers such as care home staff, teachers, refuse collection workers and school cleaners – many of whom receive in-work social benefits because they are so poorly paid – should see their pay frozen at any time, let alone in the current circumstances. If anything, we should be rewarding them all with a hefty pay-rise. What the government needs to remember, and private businesses and self-employed people also need to bear in mind, is that if ordinary people don't have money to spend, they can't afford to buy the products and services for sale; and the more disposable income workers have, the more money they can spend in the local economy, all of which has a local economic "multiplier" effect. Also opposing pay-rises for public sector workers does not help to achieve anything for private sector workers, who, if they think they are currently hard done by, should join a union and fight to improve their own situation. Across Greater Manchester, the Trades Union Council movement stands ready to support them.

Stephen Hall informed *Labour Internationalist* that on 26 November, Bolton West CLP adopted a resolution opposing the Greater Manchester cuts, and will be writing to Mayor Andy Burnham about linking up with other bodies in the labour movement in order to fight back. GMATUC has offered to work with Bolton West CLP to roll this initiative out in the Greater Manchester region.

Who will implement a four-day week with no loss of pay?

By John Caseman, trade unionist, Bristol

It was widely reported in mid-November that a group of politicians and union officials “on the left” from across Europe had written to Boris Johnson, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and other leaders, arguing that the UK, Germany, Spain and other countries should adopt a four-day week to help their economies recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The group, which included former Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell MP, CWU General Secretary Dave Ward and Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey, wrote: *“Throughout history, shorter working hours have been used during times of crisis and economic recession as a way of sharing work more equally across the economy between the unemployed and the over-employed. For the advancement of civilisation and the good society, now is the moment to seize the opportunity and move towards shorter working hours with no loss of pay.”*

Let’s have a closer look at this proposal.

In the current situation, a four-day week for employees would be divisive between those currently in jobs and those without jobs, for one simple reason: who is going to hire new staff, for the foreseeable future? This proposal is a diversion from the single most pressing demand right now: a ban on lay-offs and job-cuts.

And then: no loss of pay. Really? As bosses up and down the country think up new ways to drive down wages and cut jobs on a daily basis, who is going to offer a shorter week with no loss of pay?

Finally: writing to a Tory Prime Minister is obviously a waste of paper and effort. We know that the money is already available for implementing a whole raft of measures to genuinely protect the health and incomes of millions of people. But only a working-class government based on meeting the needs of the working class would implement them.

Until we own the means of production, we will always be subject to the scams and brutality of capitalism

From our Liverpool Correspondent

The Tories and ruling classes across Europe are using the Covid virus as an opportunity to make further gains at the expense of working people.

Economists warn that shrinking the economy by imposing cuts to our wages and conditions will only deepen “the crisis”.

“Crisis, what crisis?” It’s an old phrase, but very appropriate for today. The Tories have found the magic money tree that they claimed didn’t exist. They’re being very generous. Contracts worth millions have been handed out to their friends. Two billion for Richard Branson would imply that they have indeed found a money tree. Except, of course, there is none for the people who provide all the necessary services that keep society running.

We’re told that “we” owe trillions. I expect many people would ask who “we” owe the money to. Considering these vast sums are just invented at the push of a button, then it’s arguable that we don’t owe it to anyone. And, of course, the other question: If there is no money, then where has it all gone? There is around £26 trillion in offshore accounts. I used to think a billion was a lot of money!

Of course, this also begs the question why we have austerity, or poverty, as we’re always being told that there is not enough money to go round. But there is plenty for the millionaires, it seems, just at the push of a button: Kerching! “It’s in your account now, Sir”. Instead

of giving Branson £2 billion, the government could have bought his airline and made it work for everyone’s benefit.

The scam of capitalism is there for all to see. Yet strangely, nobody in the mainstream seems willing to ask the pertinent questions about how it works, and who capitalism works for. As workers across the world see their living standards tumble to levels their grandparents fought against, then those obvious questions are now being asked by many.

Capitalism is now at a stage where it cannot even afford democracy. The concept and expectancy of a fair society is a threat to their determination to suck the life out of the planet, human beings included. It is good that the younger generation, at least, see the monsters for what they are. They are few and we are many.

The argument that capitalism puts forward in its defence is easily beaten. We need a leadership that fights for us; instead, we mostly have “snouts in the trough” who pay lip-service to the ideals of democracy and accountability.

The answer is socialism: public ownership of the utilities, transport, education and health, for a start. Until we own the means of production, we will always be subject to the scams and brutality of capitalism. If we don’t own the economy, then how can we run it? Instead of huge pay-packets and dividends for shareholders, we would have excellent services.

INTERNATIONAL

OCRFI World Conference adopts Alarm Manifesto, charts road ahead

On 8-10 November, the Third World Conference of the Organising Committee for the Reconstitution of the Fourth International (OCRFI) was held. Given the conditions imposed on workers by governments around the world in the name of the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, this “Alarm Conference”, as it was named, had to be held by video-conference. More than 100 activists and guests from 35 countries took part (1). The delegate from Turkey was hospitalised, and therefore was unable to attend.

However, these difficult technical conditions did not prevent the participating activists from discussing and making decisions during three separate five-hour plenary sessions. The discussions focused on the struggle for the reconstitution of the Fourth International at a time when globally there is, on the one hand, a brutal offensive against the working class and oppressed peoples, and on the other hand, working class mobilisations and revolutionary explosions on every continent.

The delegates took a firm stance against any and all forms of “social pact” with the bosses and the governments serving their interests – in other words, against all forms of “partnership” that subordinates the workers’ interests in the name of “unity” with the bosses and their client governments (2). Delegates called on the trade unions and working-class organisations to break with the capitalists and their governments. Delegates also put forward the perspective of workers’ governments and the fight for socialism.

An Alarm Manifesto was discussed widely, amended and then adopted by the Conference. The Alarm Manifesto is addressed to “workers, youth, worker activists and all those who want to put an end to capitalist exploitation”. It can be obtained in multiple languages from all the organisations linked to the OCRFI.

The Conference also discussed ways to make the OCRFI a true centre for helping to build revolutionary organisations around the world and to improve the publication of its six-language theoretical magazine, *The Internationale*. The Conference also voted to give its full support to the preparation of the World Conference Against War and Exploitation, For a Workers’ International, to be held in 2021.

(1) Afghanistan, Algeria, Azania/South Africa, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Burundi, Canada, China, France, Germany, Greece, Haiti, Hungary, India, Ivory Coast, Italy, Mexico, Morocco, Korea, Pakistan, Palestine, Peru, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Senegal, Serbia, South Africa, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, Zimbabwe.

(2) In France, this “social pact” is known as the Sacred Union between the workers, the capitalists and the politicians in the capitalists’ pay. “Sacred Union” harks back to outset of World War I, when the working-class parties and unions initially opposed giving support to the war efforts and credits, but were co-opted by the powers-that-be into supporting the war in the name of “national unity” to defeat the Germans.

Look out for the December Special Issue of *Labour Internationalist*

containing the full text of the Alarm Manifesto,
with an introduction

Nine months of the pandemic ravaging the UK and the world: the OCRFI’s response

According to the UK government’s own statistics, the Covid-19 death-toll stood at 57,551 as of 27 November. This official figure only counts deaths within 28 days of a positive test for the virus, so the total of around 1.59 million recorded cases has resulted in a much higher real death toll. According to the Continuous Mortality Investigation (CMI), there were around 64,900 more UK deaths between the start of the pandemic and 13

November than there were during the same period last year.

The tens of thousands of unnecessary deaths are down to the government’s ideologically-driven mismanagement of the crisis, typified by empty promises and outright lies. Just one example: 383,521 daily tests – including repeat tests on the same person –

were carried out as of 27 November, compared to the supposedly “guaranteed” target of 500,000 daily tests by the end of October.

Meanwhile, the Tory government has handed out £22 billion to private companies to set up and run a national “test and trace” system which continues to fail miserably in its basic tasks. *The Guardian* (26 November) reported that just 56 per cent of infected people get tested and receive a positive result, and only 23 per cent of infected people provide contacts who are reached. The available statistics show that just 11 per cent of people who are traced by the government’s app actually quarantine themselves. Probably the biggest reason is that they simply cannot afford **not** to continue working, because of the insufficient levels and gaps in financial support for people who need to self-isolate.

The economic crisis triggered by the health crisis means that the UK economy is forecast to contract by 11.3 per cent this year, and the pandemic will leave the economy 3 per cent smaller in the long run, piling on the financial misery for millions of working people as more jobs are cut and wages are driven down. The 2.6 million people who are forecast to be unemployed by the middle of next year will find themselves on unemployment benefits that are at their lowest real levels since 1990, and a growing number of families will find themselves homeless as a result of the government’s decision to freeze the level of support they can get with their housing costs.

“What measures appropriate to the situation [Covid-19 pandemic] would a workers’ government take to protect the health of the vast majority?” was the question posed by the OCRFI on 24 March, as capitalist governments around the world poured billions upon billions into bailing out the private sector. Below is the response, reprinted from the Alarm Manifesto adopted by the OCRFI’s Third World Conference on 10 November: a workers’ government based on the demands and the needs of the working class.

“Such a government would place the entire production apparatus under State control and immediately direct it towards producing goods that are indispensable for stamping out the epidemic: masks, testing kits, disinfectant products, medicines, etc. It would organise the systematic testing of the whole population. To do so, it would not hesitate to requisition the big enterprises (starting with the pharmaceutical corporations) and the banks’ assets. Such a government would immediately reopen all hospital facilities that have been closed down, it would requisition all available premises needed to house as soon as possible the hospital facilities and life-support units that are indispensable for meeting current and future needs. Such a government would take the billions from where they are today, in order to ensure that medical care is free to all, and that the funding is there for all the medical staff and equipment that are needed to run hospitals properly.

Such a government would organise the containment of the whole population, in particular by obliging businesses to guarantee the payment of wages to all employees who are isolating themselves at home. And in the dominated countries, where the vast majority of the workforce is in the “informal sector”, without regular wages or guarantees, such a government would guarantee to each

worker an income to live on satisfactorily during the lockdown period. It would organise the distribution of the foodstuffs and basic subsistence products needed by the population.



August 2020: Nurses across the UK demand a pay-rise

Such a government would nationalise or renationalise basic research, and would allocate to scientific teams the funds needed for research into emerging viruses and other diseases. Such a government would proceed immediately with the requisition of residential buildings and would house all homeless and badly housed people, for whom the “containment” measures that have been announced are meaningless as long as they do not have a home.

Such a government would decree an immediate halt to evictions, it would declare a moratorium on the payment of rent and rental charges, it would decide to immediately ban layoffs and job cuts. Such a government would order price controls on basic necessities and medicines, in view of the fact that the major retail chains and pharmacy chains are pushing up prices everywhere on the pretext of the pandemic and the economic crisis. In order to do this, such a government would requisition the big powers’ military budgets, which today continue to fund imperialism’s military interventions against the peoples. More generally and irrespective of the country, such a government would redirect credits allocated to the military towards the needs of the hospitals.

Such a government would immediately stop servicing both the domestic and external debt. It would confiscate the billions tied up in speculation (especially the speculation currently being carried out by the big corporations in relation to the fall in the value of their own shares!) and apply them to servicing the healthcare needs of the vast majority. A government that would take measures that are needed for the survival of working people, measures that are contradictory to the demands of the capitalist class, would not hesitate to break with that class.

For our part, organised in the OCRFI and fighting for the reconstitution of the Fourth International, in each of our countries we declare ourselves in favour of forming such governments that will exclusively serve the interests of the vast majority, and we will support any step by the working-class organisations in this direction. We are in favour of governments that will not hesitate to requisition the pharmaceutical corporations, large companies and the enormous assets of the banks in order to fund measures for protecting the urban workers, rural workers and the youth.”

UNITED STATES

A massive repudiation of Trump, which makes independent workers' politics more necessary than ever

Published in *IWC Newsletter No.168*, 13 November 2020

The Democratic Independent Workers Party (POID) in France had intended to organise a mass rally on 7 November. The rally was not authorised by the authorities. The POID then said they wished to demonstrate. The demonstration was banned. A video rally was organised with the participation of thousands of workers. Comrade Alan Benjamin, editor of Socialist Organizer (United States) spoke at the rally. This is his speech.

As I speak to you today, Joe Biden has not yet been declared the winner in the presidential election, though his victory is all but assured. He is just hours away from being declared the new president of the United States.

Biden's victory – with roughly 75 million votes – represents a massive repudiation of Trump and his policies.

This vote against Trump was the expression in the electoral arena of the massive strikes of teachers, often illegal, against Trump's drive to destroy public education.

It was an expression of the 24 million people who took to the streets earlier this year to protest the police killing of George Floyd.

It was an expression of the anger over the deaths of 240,000 people in the United States from Covid-19.

It was an expression of the millions opposed to the caging of immigrant children and the separation of their parents, of the massive destruction of the environment – and so much more.

Biden's main campaign message was that he's a "unifier." He is someone who can bring Democrats and Republicans together again. He is someone who can bring workers and bosses together to "*rebuild the economy in the interests of all Americans.*" He is someone who can restore the United States' "prestige" worldwide.

Many analysts point to the fact that the Black vote for Biden was double the number obtained by Hillary Clinton in 2016. This is true. But in no sector of the Black working class was there any enthusiasm for Biden, who is viewed widely as the architect of policies that criminalise Black people. "*Biden is no friend of Black people*", stated an elderly woman in Maryland interviewed on PBS who had never voted in an election. "*But this time around I had to vote for Biden; it was a question of survival for me and my family.*"

Socialist Organizer did not call for a vote for Biden or for Trump

Having said this, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the Democrats were hoping for a landslide victory against Trump – and that landslide never materialised. The Democrats failed to take back the Senate or increase their majority in the House of Representatives, as they had predicted. This stunned the Democrats. It is producing a major crisis inside the Democratic Party, with the "moderate" wing blaming the "progressive" wing for being too "socialist," and with the

"progressives" blaming the moderates for failing to articulate a coherent programme.

Neither wing of the Democratic Party, of course, is capable of drawing the only conclusion to be drawn: You cannot defeat the Republicans with Democratic candidates and policies that do not differ fundamentally from those of the Republicans. And the reason these policies do not differ – and cannot differ – is because both parties are funded and controlled by the same financial and corporate interests.

That is why it's essential for working people to break with these two parties of capitalism.

That is why Socialist Organizer, the organisation on whose leadership body I serve, did not call for a vote for Biden or for Trump – both candidates of the capitalist class. We raised the need for a Labor Party and for a Black Workers Party linked to the struggle for a Labor Party. In September, we organised a labour and community conference with over 200 unionists and community activists in attendance from across the country to chart the way forward by running independent labour candidates at a local level.



We called for the labour movement to heed and implement the 2017 resolutions adopted by the AFL-CIO that raise the need to break with "lesser-evil" politics.

We have also put forward a fighting platform that calls for:

- Single-payer healthcare;

- No cuts in social services; no layoffs or concessions to pay back the capitalist debt. Bail Out Main Street, Not Wall Street!
- Massive public-works funding to put the 30 million jobless back to work at union pay scale;
- Massive funding for hospitals, proper protective equipment, and research to address the scourge of Covid-19, which has taken four times the number of lives of US soldiers who died in Vietnam;
- Defund the police and redirect the funding to vitally needed social programmes;
- Stop the deportations of undocumented immigrants, shut down the detention centres and repeal the NAFTA 2.0 "free trade" agreement!
- End the US wars and interventions the world over; slash the war budget and redirect the funds for jobs and social services.

These are policies that neither of the twin parties of the bosses is able or willing to embrace and act upon.

Wall Street needs to restore stability of the institutions in crisis

While Biden is certain to be declared the winner sometime today, this does not mean that the issue of the transfer of powers has been settled. Far from it.

Donald Trump issued a very ominous declaration the day after the 3 November election – a declaration he has reiterated repeatedly: "*If you count the legal votes, I easily win the election! If you count the illegal and late votes, they can steal the election from us.*" He insisted that he would not stand by and let this happen.

Donald Trump Jr. took it a step further, proclaiming that, "*We must fight to the death*" and "*This is total war.*"

We cannot underestimate the seriousness of these threats, however frivolous the allegations of "illegal votes" may be. Trump has vowed not to concede the election; he is filing hundreds of lawsuits and hoping that the Supreme Court will save him.



It is far from clear that Trump will get anywhere with these allegations of "illegal votes". The consensus among the political establishment is that Trump does not have a legal leg to stand on. Leading Republican figures, including past Republican presidential candidates, are peeling off from Trump. Some are offering to meet with Biden to propose cabinet members, including the Secretary of State, who could be supported by both Democrats and Republicans.

The dominant wing of the capitalist class – including the Army and national security apparatus – has sent clear signals that it would prefer to see Trump pack his bags and exit the scene peacefully. The stability of the political institutions of capitalism – which Trump is disrupting – is at stake.

Besides, a Biden administration, hemmed in by a Republican Senate and framed by Biden's announced quest to "heal the divide" with the Republicans, may just be what Wall Street needs to ensure passage of the draconian budget cuts necessary to pay back the mounting debt and open the way to yet another "jobless recovery" that lines the pockets of Big Business and the bankers.

But Trump and his minions, emboldened by the roughly 71 million votes received in this election, appear to have other ideas – and we cannot exclude a very chaotic next couple of weeks, even months.

It is up to the American labour movement to defend democratic gains

A significant wing of the US labour movement, together with labour's allies in the Black and Latinx movements, have come forward to fight any attempt by Trump to steal the election.

Hundreds of labour resolutions and statements have been adopted to stop a planned coup, many calling for rolling strikes and even a nationwide general strike.

Later today, rallies and marches led by the labour movement and its community allies will be held nationwide to defend the democratic right to vote – to insist that counting every vote is not "promoting a coup," as Trump has declared; quite the opposite.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, a rally and march will be held in downtown San Francisco as all five Bay Area Labor Councils come together to defend the democratic right to vote against the Trump coup-plotters.

We will keep you informed of our ongoing activities.

**7.00am, 7 November
San Francisco**

Biden, the economy and the drive to "co-opt" the labour movement

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On 16 November, Joe Biden and Kamala Harris held a press conference in Wilmington (Delaware), in which they outlined their plan to "restore the economy". They had just met via Zoom with business and labour officials. *The New York Times* (17 November) reported on this press conference as follows:

"The president-elect described his conversation [with business and union leaders] as 'very encouraging', painting it as an example of his campaign message – national unity – in action. He said that both the CEOs and the union bosses had agreed that the government must act boldly to bring the economy back up to speed. 'I wish you

could've heard – corporate leaders and labour leaders singing the same hymn here,' Biden said.”

The corporate CEOs have every reason to be content with the outcome of the elections on 3 November. The French financial daily newspaper *Les Echos* (28 October) reported that “*Wall Street gave four times more money to Biden than to Trump.*”

The New York Times (10 November) summarised Wall Street’s reaction concisely: “*The prospect of a divided government – should Republicans retain control of the Senate – appeals to businesses for a variety of reasons. Wall Street has warmed to the idea, believing that such a situation would restore credibility to the White House but prevent progressive policies that target businesses from being enacted.*”

“Slowing Global Economy”

In recent weeks, Wall Street analysts have warned of a “*slowing global economy from which the United States cannot escape*” and a “*widening recession*”. They have called on the incoming administration to enact the “*harsh*” austerity measures needed to “*get the economy back on track.*” (PBS Nightly Business Report, 16 November)

The trillions of dollars of “stimulus package” debt, the overwhelming majority of which went to line the pockets of the Wall Street speculators, must be repaid, the spokespersons of Corporate America insist – and it’s the workers who must shoulder the burden of the austerity measures (budget cuts, massive concessions, corporate restructuring and lay-offs, etc.) that inevitably come with debt repayment.

“National unity”

If the unions are to be compelled to swallow the poison pill of austerity, “national unity” between the workers and the bosses becomes not only necessary, but essential.

This is not only an “American” phenomenon. The drive to co-opt the unions into accepting and implementing the bosses’ anti-worker agenda is taking place the world over, often with different names: “Social Pacts”, “Labour-Management Partnership Agreements”, “Sacred Union”, among others. Everywhere the labour movement is being summoned to sing from the same – corporatist – hymnal.

That is the reason why Biden has included 27 labour officials, many of them top AFL-CIO officials, in his transition team. The presence of United Farm Workers (UFW) President Teresa Romero on the Transition Advisory Board, which oversees the work of the entire transition team, is most revealing.

The EFI “model”

For many years, the UFW has prioritised its “partnership” agreement with the corporate growers

through its participation in the Equitable Food Initiative. According to its own website, “*the UFW helped found EFI in 2008 to improve farm worker lives in greater numbers than can be achieved through unionization.*”

Instead of fighting for enforceable labour laws with strict implementation procedures, instead of organising workers and negotiating strong contracts, the UFW has promoted what is called “social labelling” – meaning “*a certification system through which farms found to comply with EFI standards are licensed to apply its ‘Responsibly Grown. Farmworker Assured.’™ label to their products.*”

Social labelling has been implemented in countries around the world, where it is used as a means to squash union organising drives and impose lower wages and standards.

Worker resistance is growing

Growing sectors of the US labour movement, just like their European and Asian counterparts, are refusing to subordinate the interests of their members and working-class communities in the name of “national unity” schemes. The bosses’ offensive against the working class has intensified, but so, too, has the workers’ resistance to the growing attacks.



This fighting spirit of the labour movement was captured in the Open Letter sent at the end of October to the presidents of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA) by the presidents of seven educators’ unions in California. The Open Letter states, in part:

*“As an alliance of education unions in some of the largest cities in California, we call on our national unions – the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers – to commit to immediately mobilise millions of union members, community allies and others into mass protests at the first indications of an attempt [by Trump] to steal the election. **Specifically, we must be prepared to act independently of the Democratic Party to defend the future for working people through collective action.**”* (our emphasis)

Acting independently of the Democratic Party will be needed – in the workplace and in the political arena – if the working-class majority is to survive the barbarism of a capitalist system in its death-agony.

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