

Labour Internationalist

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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.

**We don't just need a
change of government:
we need real change
from top to bottom in
our society.**

**For a government
that will break with the
ruling class and defend
the workers' interests**

EDITORIAL

The end of the year is a good time to take stock and to reflect on what change is necessary.

What is the balance-sheet of 2020?

It is:

– a government totally unable to cope with a pandemic made uncontrollable by years of destruction of the NHS and other public services by the various governments – Labour and Tories – implementing the austerity imposed by the Maastricht criteria and the international financial institutions;

– a pandemic whose rapid spread was facilitated by those governments serving the capitalist system, through the prioritisation of pharmaceutical profits over basic research that could have provided insights into controlling the virus;

– a government which last March allocated tens of billions to the banks to bail out big businesses, while leaving millions of working people to cope with little or no support;

– a government which since then has handed billions to its friends and supporters in the private sector in the form of inflated supply and service contracts that were awarded without a tendering process and often failed to deliver to a proper standard.

– the top leadership of the Labour Party and the TUC that refused to listen to appeals from the working class and instead supported the government in the name of “national unity”, even going so far as to call for a national recovery taskforce made up of the government, the unions and the bosses;

– a government that reduced funding to local services and education while encouraging the bosses to use the bailout to hit the working class even harder and to lay people off and cut jobs on a massive scale.

This is the reality of what happened in 2020, a reality that has led a group of traditional Labour voters in a working-class suburb of one big city to write a leaflet addressed to the population, in which they say: *“It’s ordinary people who are really taking the hit in the Covid crisis. Things were hard enough before, but Covid is just making it making our situation even worse. Unemployment is rising fast and millions face an uncertain future. Real wages are being cut, forcing many families to choose between putting food on the table or paying the bills. The threat of eviction and repossession hangs over renters and mortgage-payers. The Covid crisis reveals the real divisions between the wealthy and the rest of us. (...) We’re not all in this together. (...) It’s the system they profit from that’s to blame. (...) They want us to pay for their crisis. We didn’t cause it, so why should we pay for it?”*

It’s not enough to simply criticise or complain. Nor is it good enough to be a toothless “constructive

opposition”, like Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer would have us believe.”

And they conclude:

“We need to campaign for proper healthcare to fight the pandemic.

We must fight to restore the local government funding for our city that the Tories have cut since 2010.

Working-class communities and trade unions must organise to fight evictions and repossessions. But we must do more than defend our community from attack.

We must have no more wars to make a killing for the rich.

We must put our efforts into saving our planet from climate catastrophe, which includes local and community projects with well-paid jobs.

We don’t just need a change of government: we need a real change from top to bottom in our society.

We need socialist politics that takes power away from the elite and puts real control in the hands of working-class people.”

The situation faced by this working-class community is not limited to their city – it is the situation faced by millions of working and unemployed people and youth up and down the country.

They are drawing the conclusion that this situation cannot be allowed to go on, that this capitalist system must disappear.

The programme they set out is that of a workers’ government, which alone can put an end to the current system:

– a government that breaks with the dictates of the capitalist system, a government that is motivated by the desire to protect working people and not the capitalist minority and its profits, a government that will find the resources wherever they are, and use them;

– a government that will take the emergency measures that will save working people, not the banks and big business;

– a government that will ban lay-offs and job-cuts;

– a government that will confiscate the billions given to the banks and business and will allocate it to the communities.

In a word, a government of the working-class organisations that will break with the ruling class, that will defend the workers’ interests and will turn its back on capitalist measures dressed up as “the national interest”.

This is the challenge facing the labour movement today. We will unconditionally support any step in this direction.

18 December

SNAPSHOTS OF THE CRISIS

1 December: Up to 12,000 jobs to be lost at Debenhams

After the failure to find a buyer, the Debenhams department store chain is to be wound down after Christmas, with the loss of up to 12,000 jobs and the closure of 124 stores.

1 December: Fat contracts for Tory mates

It emerges that a former pub landlord and neighbour of Health Minister Matt Hancock, who had no previous experience in medical supplies, was awarded a £30 million contract to make test tubes for Covid-19 test samples without CE certification. Meanwhile, at least one large UK-based manufacturer with the capacity, experience and certification for producing vials for tests was turned down for a government Covid-19 contract.

1 December: Government's mass rapid testing gives "false reassurance"

Government figures from the mass rapid testing programme in Liverpool reveal that the low-tech lateral flow tests identified just five out of 10 positive cases which had been detected by standard coronavirus tests, and seven out of 10 of those with high quantities of the virus. Public health expert Prof Allyson Pollock calls for an end to the use of rapid tests in universities and care homes, saying that they gave "false reassurance".

She says: "Mass testing should be stopped, and sensible advice about symptoms and contact tracing should be given to students. The lateral flow tests aren't designed to be used on healthy symptomless people in the community, it says this in the information sheets from the manufacturers." Pollock also criticises the government for "burying" the statistics in a wider document on community testing. The statistics are mentioned in just one sentence in the appendix of an 8,000-word government document on community testing.

6 December: UK students plan largest rent strike in 40 years

Student activists are preparing for the biggest wave of university rent strikes in 40 years, amid growing frustration at heavy-handed hall lockdowns, the prospect of paying for empty rooms and little face-to-face teaching when they eventually return in the new year. There are at least 20 rent strikes currently underway or being organised on campuses, with activists at both Oxford and Sussex universities this week signing up hundreds of students ahead of the new term. Other institutions also preparing action include Goldsmiths, University of London, and Edinburgh and Cambridge universities.

9 December: Johnson and Starmer reassure the capitalists

In the House of Commons, Johnson promises that capital will benefit from a no-deal Brexit: "*whatever happens from 1 January, (...) we will be able to get on with instituting low-tax free ports*". Keir Starmer says: "*The Prime Minister asked me how I will vote on a [Brexit] deal that he has not even secured. (...) I can say this: if there is a deal – and I hope there is a deal – my party will vote in the national interest, not on party political lines, as he is doing.*"

11 December: "Test and trace" treated like a sales campaign

A damning report by the National Audit Office (NAO) finds that the government's centralised £22 billion "test and trace" programme is contacting just two out of every three people who have been close to someone who has tested positive, with only around 40 per cent of test results delivered within 24 hours, well below the government's targets. The report says that a target to provide results within 24 hours of in-person testing deteriorated to a low of 14 per cent in mid-October before rising to 38 per cent in early November.

Three days later, *The Guardian* reports that England's "test and

trace" service is being subcontracted to dozens of private companies employing inexperienced and untrained contact tracers under pressure to meet targets. The private company Serco, which is being paid up to £400 million for its work on "test and trace", has subcontracted the bulk of contact tracing to 21 other companies. Contact tracers working for these companies had received little training, with one saying they were doing sensitive work while sitting beside colleagues making sales calls for gambling websites. One contact-tracer, earning £8.72 an hour, said he was having to interview extremely vulnerable people in a "target-driven" office that encouraged staff to make 20 calls a day, despite NHS guidance saying each call should take 45 to 60 minutes. Until October, this complex work had been handled only by NHS clinicians, known as Tier 2 Clinical Contact Caseworkers. NHS job adverts for this role list a health or science degree and previous experience in the NHS or social care as essential requirements.

Gabriel Scally, a visiting professor of public health at the University of Bristol and a member of Independent Sage, said it was a "complete and utter disgrace" that inadequately trained staff were handling such sensitive calls. "*The government has turned to these commercial organisations that are totally unsuited, inexperienced and unfit to do this really specialised contact tracing work. They are the modern equivalent of low-skilled sweatshops.*"

15 December: New record increase in redundancies

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) says redundancies rose to 370,000 in the three months to October, fuelled by job losses in retail and hospitality. The 217,000 three-month increase in redundancies was a record and pushed up the headline UK unemployment rate to 4.9 per cent.

The latest figures from HMRC show there were 820,000 fewer employees recorded on company payrolls in November than in February before the pandemic struck, with more than one-third of the reduction coming from the hospitality sector.

16 December: UNICEF to feed hungry children in the UK

The UN humanitarian aid agency UNICEF pledges a grant of £25,000 to the community project School Food Matters, which will use the money to supply emergency food packages to vulnerable children and families in Southwark (South London) over the two-week Christmas holidays and February half-term school holiday. Labour MP Richard Burgon tweeted: *“Britain is one of the world’s richest nations. UNICEF, for the first time ever, is now delivering emergency*

food to children here. Poverty is a political choice. The Gov’t could end UK child poverty by making the super-rich pay fair taxes. It refuses to.”

18 December: More evidence of Tory snouts in the trough

A *Guardian* and ITV News analysis identifies logistics company Uniserve as the company that has received the highest total value of government Covid-19 contracts without an open tender. The company, which last reported annual sales of £243 million, says it will make tens of millions of pounds profit from £779 million of contracts to supply PPE and logistics services. Uniserve’s owner is listed as a speaker for the influential pro-Brexit lobby group Prosperity UK, which is linked to a number of Tory MPs.

Meanwhile, the *New York Times* publishes an analysis of the roughly 1,200 central government contracts that have been made public, together worth more than £16 billion. Of this total, around £9 billion went to companies either run by friends and associates of politicians in the Tory Party (including Uniserve, Randox Laboratories and Deloitte), or with no prior experience (including fashion designers, pest controllers and jewellers) or a history of controversy (including Serco, found to have defrauded the government; KPMG, sued for negligence; and Honeywell, investigated for global bribery). Meanwhile, smaller firms without political clout got nowhere.

OPEN FORUM

Stefan Cholewka’s notes of the month

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Trades Council: Anti-austerity strategy

The government’s austerity cuts are widely seen as a political choice and not an economic necessity. Therefore, it is critically important in the run up to the local government elections in May 2021 that we pin the blame for the cuts in local government services squarely on the government, which is causing them.

That is why we need urgently to build a national campaign and to work alongside Labour councils to mobilise local campaigns to demonstrate the devastating impact of this government’s cuts to local council spending.

We wish to work with Rochdale Labour Council in forging strong alliances with local community campaigners, council staff that are under stress as a result of Tory spending cuts, local citizens and others, in order to defend local services. (...)

We call upon the local Labour Group of councillors to respond positively by:

1. Confirming that the government’s austerity cuts are a political choice and not an economic necessity, and therefore it is the government that is to blame for the cuts in local authority services;

2. Exposing publicly how the cuts in government funding for this local authority have impacted and will impact services and the quality of life for local citizens;

3. Working with the local TUC and CLPs to call all Labour Party members in this local authority area to a meeting or meetings to discuss action to mobilise support for a local *Needs Plan and Budget Campaign* to win more government funds for our local authority;

4. Calling a conference of representatives of all local community and campaigning groups, together with the trade unions representing the workers that deliver council services, and local TUC and trade union branches that represent organised employees working in the area, to seek agreement and action in support of the demand for more financial resources from central government;

5. To link up with all the other campaigns against government cuts in health, education, social care and housing, including Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) and the Pensioners Action Group;

6. Holding public meetings in every local authority ward, with platforms of councillors, trade unionists

and community organisation spokespeople to mobilise public support for the campaign against the government's cuts;

7. Opening up all council policy areas and committees to representation from community groups and activists, to discuss with councillors the options available to meet the needs of our citizens; and

8. To seek co-ordination with other Labour councillors' groups in the campaign for more financial resources.

By such actions, the local TUC, Labour councillors and Constituency Labour Parties will mobilise local citizens to oppose the Tory government and prepare the way for Labour success in the elections ahead.

"No cuts, whatever they are and wherever they come from" Unity against local budget cuts

By Mike Calvert, Deputy Branch Secretary, Islington UNISON (London)

On 10 December, members of Islington trades unions (UNISON, NEU and Unite) as well as Islington Trades Union Council protested outside the main Islington Council offices at 222 Upper Street.

This campaign – initiated from the membership of the three major unions – will fight on a platform of "no cuts, whatever they are and wherever they come from".

It is a united-front campaign to stop all cuts and welcomes all, from ordinary members on the ground to the top levels of the unions and councillors.

Speakers at the open forum rally included UNISON NEC member Jane Doolan, Tony Buttifint from the NEU, and Mick Gilgunn of Unite and Chair of Islington TUC.



Photo by Mike Calvert

"People have been weaponizing accusations of anti-Semitism for political ends"

The following article is based on views expressed to us and in the public domain, in response to the suspension of Jeremy Corbyn from the Labour Party and the later withdrawal of the Labour whip after his suspension was ended. This was done under a false implied accusation of "anti-Semitism" – in fact, condemning Corbyn for having supported the Palestinian people!

Corbyn's political fall is very much of his own making. In the name of "Labour Party unity", he refused to take the lead in the struggle to carry out the mandate given by the Brexit referendum, and has since accepted all the conditions imposed by the right-wing leadership.

But this does not prevent all those who defend freedom of political expression in the labour movement from fighting against this denial of democracy. It reinforces the need for an independent class policy in defence of the interests of the working class. If there is one lesson to draw from Corbyn's experience, it is that the ruling class and its agents will show no gratitude to those who seek an accommodation with its needs.

Of course, this goes beyond Corbyn himself and even the problems of the Labour Party and its leadership. The issue is what forms the key focus of the OCRFI Manifesto: the struggle for even the most limited demands by working people can be fulfilled only by starting from a clear break with the ruling class, its governments and its reactionary institutions.

The Labour Internationalist editorial team

We would like to share some facts and thoughts about the withdrawal of the Labour Party (LP) whip from Jeremy Corbyn and the whole "Labour is anti-Semitic" row, and what this all means in a wider context.

When one speaks of anti-Semitism today, it evokes the genocide of the Jewish people in Europe and the Nazis. To attempt to malign Jeremy Corbyn by calling him an

anti-Semite – whatever the political differences one may have with him – is at the same time intolerable and ridiculous.

We think that, in fact, the current situation has very little to do with the genuine struggle against anti-Semitism and everything to do with two separate projects which are running in parallel and sometimes overlap through both indirect and direct co-ordination.

Firstly, the real issue is not the struggle against supposed anti-Semitic trends inside the Labour Party, but the push by the Starmer leadership to silence, suspend or simply expel anyone who might oppose its collaboration with the capitalists and its Tory government in the so-called “national interest”, including the 300,000 people who joined the LP after 2015 in the hope of a new left-wing revival of the party around Jeremy Corbyn.

Secondly, this campaign is also part of a wider international campaign aimed at banning from the labour movement any expression of solidarity with the struggle of the Palestinian people for their national rights, by equating that struggle with anti-Semitism. This is often referred to as the “new anti-Semitism” project in academic circles. It should be noted that many people of Jewish origin as well as entire sections of the Israeli left are also fighting in support of the rights of the Palestinians, despite ongoing attempts to write the Palestinian people out of history.

The “new anti-Semitism” project is closely linked to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism. It is an inherently political project – some would argue that as the creation of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton with others, the IHRA was a vehicle for their international agendas regarding close links with the State of Israel, which necessarily spilled over into their domestic political agendas, since their imperialist perspective on Israel needed to predominate over the perspective of the anti-colonial and anti-racist left.

Today, the whole point of the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism is to try to redefine anti-Semitism in order to argue explicitly: “in the old days, anti-Semitism was targeted at Jewish people as Jews, but nowadays anti-Semitism is targeted at the Jewish nation, embodied in the State of Israel”. So, the IHRA definition is a clear attempt to restructure the whole debate on Israel-Palestine.

But it does not do so directly through the definition itself, but through the examples given by the IHRA which “may serve as illustrations”, and in particular: “Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour.” Applying this logic, you can say that the State of Israel is racist now, in its current laws (e.g. the Jewish Nation-State Law passed in July 2018), but you cannot say that the State of Israel itself is a racist endeavour.

At a stroke, this argument tries to erase from any discussion the basic historic fact that the State of Israel was created in 1948 as an ethnostate based on the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people. It aims to shift the debate away from 1948 to 1967 onwards, limiting it to the question of the Occupied Territories – in effect, saying that racism only started in 1967. And this being the case, the Palestinian people’s Right of Return is automatically excluded, just as Israel has consistently fought to exclude it from the so-called “peace process”.

What this wider project depends on is the legitimacy of those who claim to speak on behalf of “the Jewish community”, as if a person’s religion overrules any other consideration, such as social class, financial status, political beliefs, specific affiliations, etc. The fact is that just in the UK, there are dozens of Jewish organisations covering a wide political spectrum (including explicitly political organisations such as Jewish Labour Movement,

Jewish Voice for Labour, Yachad, Jewdas, etc.), with all this implies regarding views on Zionism and the repression of the Palestinians by the State of Israel. But that multiplicity of views is ignored when a pro-Israel and/or anti-left project is underway.

Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi, co-founder of Jewish Voice for Labour and the recently-suspended Vice-Chair of Chingford and Woodford Green CLP (more on this later), has highlighted (for example, in her clip dated 25 November 2020 for Double Down News on YouTube) the problem that the Jewish community tends to be treated as one monolithic bloc (“a typical trope of all forms of racism”), and the fact that if you criticise the State of Israel’s actions towards the Palestinians, you are branded “a self-hating Jew” or “the wrong kind of Jew”, and no-platformed and ignored by the media. She said: “The media have totally sidelined and ignored left-wing Jews. Not only left-wing Jews, but eminent Jewish scholars who have written extensively on the subject of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party, and demonstrated that the [IHRA] definition that is being pushed to define what is anti-Semitic is untrustworthy, faulty and actually dangerous, because it conflates being Jewish with being a supporter of Israel, being Jewish with being a Zionist.”

This is where the two projects referred to above overlap, with a detrimental effect on the real struggle against anti-Semitism. In Wimborne-Idrissi’s opinion, “people have been weaponizing accusations of anti-Semitism for political ends. The fact that this is going on seriously undermines and endangers our chances of dealing with genuine anti-Semitism.”

Moshe Machover – a respected mathematician and philosopher, also a socialist activist noted for his writings against Zionism – was suspended from the Labour Party on 30 November. The LP is now investigating whether his online and offline conduct represents “conduct which in the opinion of the NEC is prejudicial, or in any act which in the opinion of the NEC is grossly detrimental to the Party”. In his public response to his suspension (see <https://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/article/moshe-machover-suspended-again-he-has-issued-a-public-response/>), Machover said: “I joined the Labour Party in 2016, when it opened its doors to socialists – who are, by definition, anti-imperialists. I regret I am now among the numerous victims of a purge driven by right-wing heresy hunters, bureaucratic enemies of free speech. But at least I can use this occasion to promote the views I have been advocating for many years; in particular, socialist opposition to the Zionist project of colonisation and the Jewish-supremacist regime of the Israeli settler state.”

Accusations of anti-Semitism were being used as a weapon before Kier Starmer assumed the leadership of the LP, as just another way of attacking political opponents. But what is new under Starmer is that he and his clique are using accusations of anti-Semitism and other things in a conscious offensive against anyone – including Rebecca Long-Bailey, Jeremy Corbyn and others – whom they consider to be an obstacle to their policy, which at this point is focused on their willingness to support the Tory government in the so-called “national interest”.

The result is that, beyond the specific LP members who are being targeted and victimised, the party itself is being

ripped apart (50,000 members have resigned under Starmer's leadership) as a party of the British working class. If this offensive is successful, and therefore gives the Starmer leadership a free hand to pursue its policy of collaborating with the Tories, it will ensure that the working people whom the party claims to represent will suffer the direct consequences of that policy. Every month, thousands of people are dying from Covid-19 for lack of sufficient testing resources and tens of thousands of people are losing their jobs and incomes, and meanwhile the clique that is leading the Labour Party is focused on suspending party members and launching disciplinary proceedings.

For example, in July the pro-Starmer right succeeded in removing Labour control of Brighton and Hove City Council and handing it to the Greens after losing three councillors in an "anti-Semitism" witch-hunt. As a result, the Labour-led campaign to prevent a local primary school being designated an academy is now in question, as well as the funding priorities for local services.

Following an internal delegate meeting of Chingford and Woodford Green CLP, held via Zoom on 30 November, the speeches by CLP Chair Gary Lefley and Vice-Chair Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi were leaked to the *Jewish Chronicle*. The newspaper published an inaccurate report on 1 December, and both officers were suspended shortly afterwards.

Gary Lefley said in his speech (which was transcribed and posted on the Jewish Voice for Labour website): *"The government's mismanagement of the virus has been catastrophic from day one (...). Add to this the serial corruption at the heart of government, with inflated contracts being awarded to friends, family and corporate class associates. Share values going through the roof while workers are furloughed, and while unemployment rockets and public workers' wages are frozen. The overall picture is that of the most incompetent, unashamedly class-driven and corrupt UK government of my lifetime. (...) So why, after eight months of unrelenting government health-care ineptitude, of gross economic mismanagement and corruption, with, I repeat, the worst death toll of the 51 states of Europe, why did this catalogue of catastrophe not merit censure from the Labour Leadership? (...) Why was Keir Starmer still colluding with the government? If you think the word "collusion" is a touch strong, here are Sir Keir's own words, spoken in interview with Andrew Marr as late as 20 September. Starmer said: (...) "I've reiterated the government message because I think that is the right thing to do in the national interest." But whose 'national' interest? That of Rees-Mogg and his corporate buddies – or the rest of us? (...)*

With the health service, the economy and millions of working people on their knees, Keir Starmer decided this was the moment to suspend the former leader of the Party, and expel him from the Parliamentary Labour Party. (...) And it is Starmer, not Corbyn, who has plunged the party into internecine warfare, when we should be exposing and combatting this vile class-driven, corrupt government, something we should have been doing for 11 months. (...)

Personally, I have no confidence in Keir Starmer to unite this Party – his leadership election pledge – in fact, he is

ripping it to pieces. I do not have confidence in him to expose and defeat the Tories."

In her speech, Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi referred to the current wave of suspensions from LP membership simply for debating motions on Corbyn, after LP General Secretary David Evans had instructed members and MPs that they are banned from discussing Corbyn's suspension from the party: *"I'm absolutely horrified that one of the people suspended recently is chair of a CLP in Nottingham, Louise Regan, who is a former President of the National Union of Teachers [section of the NEU], a very well-known and respected trade union leader, still active in the union (...) of which I'm a member and several others of us are members. (...)*

We've got a General Secretary who is making up the rules as he goes along (...). If there are people in this room who want the 300,000 people who joined because of hope delivered by Jeremy Corbyn and the movement around him, if you want all those people to leave, carry on as you are doing. If you actually believe what Keir said about being the man to unite the party, and the man who was going to stick to 10 pledges based on the previous leadership's manifesto, then, you know, let's hold him to that, shall we? There are motions of no confidence going in around the country to our leadership, and there is good reason for that."

The gagging edict issued by David Evans has caused an outcry across the LP. In the last two weeks, CLP Chairs and Secretaries from around the country have signed an open letter addressed to Evans, protesting at the ban on discussion of topics such as the withdrawal of the whip from Jeremy Corbyn. As of 14 December, the letter had been signed by 272 CLP Chairs and Secretaries from 187 CLPs (roughly one-third of the UK total). In the open letter, the LP officers said that David Evans's "restrictions on items of party business that can be discussed in meetings, accompanied by threats and suspensions," go against the fundamental human right to freedom of expression "that was long fought for and has been traditionally upheld by the Labour Party, including in our party meetings. The right to freedom of expression is not only about the right to speak but it is also about the right to listen to others and for different views to be heard. Party members should have the right to express their views, including on whether the whip should or should not be restored to Jeremy Corbyn."

So, in conclusion, let us repeat what should now be clear to everyone who has read up to this point: the experiences of LP members like Moshe Machover, Gary Lefley and Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi stand as proof that the whole "Labour is anti-Semitic" row has very little to do with the genuine struggle against anti-Semitism. At the international level, it expresses the Starmer leadership's complete alignment with the policy of imperialism, and at the national level it is an expression of the leadership's "national unity" approach which implies the destruction of the Labour Party as a party of the working class.

Labour Party members and the working class as a whole deserve better.

**CC, for Labour Internationalist
16 December 2020**



HONG-KONG

Appeal by the Cathay Pacific Airways Flight Attendants Union (November 2020)

Published in *IWC Newsletter No.171, 4 December 2020*

On 21 October, Cathay Pacific Airways announced its intention to make around 6,000 people redundant and introduce a new Condition of Service (CoS20) for all remaining cabin crew. The new contract includes a permanent pay-cut of up to 36 per cent plus a cut in various benefits. A new “Trade Union Agreement” clause has been added in the contract, making any agreement reached in the future no longer binding on all cabin crew. It is obvious that the new CoS20 is not just aimed at reducing operational costs, but also to demean the status of the Cathay Pacific Airways Flight Attendants Union (FAU).

The FAU represents more than 75 per cent of Hong Kong-based cabin crew. For the past 10 years, we have maintained an open dialogue with management and used the opportunity of the annual Year-End Negotiation (YEN) to review wages, benefits and other topics that concern the crew community the most. Each year, after a genuine exchange of ideas and thoughts, both management and union would come to an agreement on areas that would help improve the working condition of cabin crew. Local businesses would also pay attention to our YEN, as they would follow the results, including wage increment levels. Undoubtedly, the YEN is significant both internally and externally.

However, the company announced the cancellation of the YEN and showed reluctance to sign a collective agreement with the union, as they believe that these traditions may hinder the company moving forward. We are disappointed that the company has decided to abandon this tradition and deprive us of the right to negotiate with the company on behalf of the majority of cabin crew. It is obvious that Cathay Pacific Airways is trying its best to demean the status of the FAU and weaken our collective bargaining power.

This is certainly another example of Cathay Pacific exploiting labour’s rights by suppressing the union after the redundancies and the introduction of the unfair CoS20. We are concerned that these changes will further suppress the right to collective bargaining and worsen employment inequality in Hong Kong.

We demand that Cathay Pacific Airways engages with us in 2020 and promises to carry on this tradition in the coming years to protect our labour rights.

We would like to have your support in this fight. Please help us by signing this online petition as our first step. No man is an island. We must unite to strengthen trade union and employment rights.



Cathay Pacific cabin crew strike over pay in August 2020

- Sign and share this petition with others: <https://forms.gle/LgAPvsD7iNkjZ1m6A>
- Invite your Cathay Pacific Cabin Crew friends to join the FAU membership, and please join your union in your work field to increase the workers’ bargaining power
- Subscribe and share FAU’s latest movement (<http://www.facebook.com/faucpa>) and participate in our campaign
- Last and most important: fight against injustice by actively participating in the union’s affair, and don’t forget Hong Kong.

We are all in this together.

If it has to be a permanent change, it will become OUR permanent fight.

UNITED STATES

Mumia Abu-Jamal in great danger again!

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Donald Trump has scheduled executions of death-row inmates in federal prisons until the very last moments of his tenure, including the use of firing squads and the electric chair. Although he can no longer be executed directly, Mumia Abu-Jamal (1), the “voice of the voiceless,” is also in great danger. Mumia and his supporters have issued a warning about a serious outbreak of Covid-19 at the Mahanoy Correctional Facility in the state of Pennsylvania, where Mumia and 2,400 inmates are being held. Twenty prison guards have tested positive. Inmates are kept in lockdown in their cells, except for showers and emergencies.

Mumia is 66 years old and has suffered years of liver damage, making him extremely vulnerable to the pandemic. Prison personnel are the ones bringing in the virus.

The coalitions in the United States fighting for the release of Mumia Abu-Jamal are calling on organisations and activists the world over to urge Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf to release Mumia and other elderly and sick prisoners on humanitarian grounds. Wolf has the power to grant “compassionate release.”

The International Workers Committee Against War and Exploitation, For a Workers’ International calls for this campaign to be relayed as widely as possible on an international level. The IWC calls on trade union, political, and democratic rights organisations around the world to demand that Pennsylvania Governor invoke

“compassionate release” for Mumia and all aging elderly inmates. Your letters and statements should be sent post-haste to the Pennsylvania governor at the following addresses:

Governor Tom Wolf
Office of the Governor
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120
United States

Or by email to brunelle.michael@gmail.com.

Please send copies of your statements to:
Mobilization4Mumia@gmail.com and
owcmumbai2016@gmail.com

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Exploitation, For a Workers’ International

(1) Mumia Abu-Jamal, a Black activist, member of the Black Panther Party at the age of 14, then a freelance journalist in Philadelphia, PA, was sentenced to death in July 1982 for the murder of a white police officer in a rigged trial. He spent 29 years on “death row.” In 2011 the U.S. Supreme Court commuted his sentence to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.

INDIA

250 million workers answer call for one-day general strike, farmers rise up against the Modi government

Based on material provided by Nambiath Vasudevan, Joint Co-ordinator of the International Workers Committee Against War and Exploitation, For a Workers’ International

Four words summarise the situation in India on 26 and 27 November: “*Bharat Bandh*” (general strike) and “*Delhi Chalo*” (Go to Delhi!). On 26 November, no fewer than 250 million workers (one-fifth of the whole country’s population) came out on strike in response to the call by the 10 main trade union confederations (with the exception of the one linked to the far-right RSS party, which supports Narendra Modi’s ultra-reactionary government), on a platform of emergency measures to safeguard working people and rejection of the discriminatory laws and division between Hindus and Muslims. The general strike linked up with the “Go to Delhi” march by a united front of farmer organisations and rural workers for the repeal of anti-farmer legislation, organised at the local, regional and national levels and using a historic slogan with huge resonance in

India’s anti-colonial struggle for independence, which reached Delhi on 27 November.

The date for the general strike – Constitution Day – was not a random choice. Rejecting the division between Hindus and Muslims that was formalised with the bloody Partition of India in 1947, the trade union organisations included in their platform the demand for the repeal of the discriminatory laws passed in 2019 that target Muslims, going against the principle of a secular state enshrined in the Constitution.

Platform of emergency measures

Other strike demands, put forward as a platform of emergency measures, included: the withdrawal of all anti-farmer laws and anti-worker labour codes; the cancellation of small farmers’ debts; a monthly cash

payment of 7,500 rupees for all families not paying income tax; a free food ration of 10 kg per month per person in need; an immediate stop to privatisation of the public sector (railways, Bharat Petroleum, ports, coal mines, defence industries, airports, publicly-owned banks and insurance companies); permanent contracts for workers on insecure contracts; equal pay for equal work; withdrawal of the pensions reform forcing government employees into early retirement, and payment of a minimum pension of 10,000 rupees to all; expansion of the MGNREGA (rural employment guarantee scheme) to provide 200 days' work per year in rural areas at enhanced wages of 600 rupees per day; the building of a high-quality hospital in each district; legalisation of all categories of worker in the "informal sector", with health insurance and a minimum pension of 3,000 rupees; and cancellation of the new education policy. This platform outlined what should be the first emergency measures by a government serving the workers' interests.

The Free Press Journal reported (26 November) that the strikers and protestors were expressing widespread anger, saying that "the central government has taken undue advantage of the health emergency crisis created by Covid-19 and the pandemic and neglected the implementation of the existing labour laws. They say that without bothering to have some consultation with trade unions, political parties and without even discussing in Parliament, the central government brazenly passed four new anti-labour codes. (...)

During the unplanned and unprecedented lockdown, thousands of workers and small businesses were rendered jobless and without income, which in the context of India also means without a roof over their head and almost complete starvation. (...) Indians also witnessed crores [tens of millions] of working people starving, when they were trudging hundreds of miles without food or water [Migrant workers were obliged to return home for lockdown – Editor]. And, during the same time, there were also reports of Mukesh Ambani's assets [the biggest fortune in India] increasing from Rs 4.8 lakh crore [trillion] to Rs 6.5 lakh crore [trillion]."

Shutdown

A joint statement issued on 26 November by the trade union confederations confirmed widespread support for the strike: "Kerala, Puducherry, Odisha, Assam and Telangana have reported complete shutdown. Tamil Nadu reported complete shutdown in 13 districts, while the industrial strike continues in the rest of the districts, Punjab and Haryana have reported that the State road transport buses have not left their depots in the morning." The statement said that there was a partial strike in the coal, defence, telecom and banking sectors. It concluded: "This situation has arisen because the incumbent BJP government is following in the footsteps of the Britishers, using unconstitutional means to sacrifice the interests of the workers and farmers in favour of the corporates."

Alliance of workers and farmers

The joint statement also pointed out that the All-India Kisan Sangharsh Co-ordination Committee, an apex organisation of farmers' groups, had come out in support of the workers' demands. A major concern of the farmers

is that the three laws passed by the government in September 2020, which will dismantle the minimum support price (MSP) system for agricultural produce, would push small farmers into the hands of big corporates and legalise the black market in food grains, as well as cause poverty and threaten food security.

This linking up between the working class and the farmers' organisations is a major problem for the government, which expressed its fear of the explosive nature of the situation by surrounding Delhi with roadblocks and barricades by police, who used tear-gas, baton-charges and water cannon against the "Delhi Chalo" marchers. One of the protesting farmers said: "We will not go back till our demands are met. We will stage a peaceful protest now at the designated place. We had to cross several barricades to reach the place but we are ready to face anything." (*The Hindu*, 27 November)

Speaking to the ANI press agency (27 November), Amandeep, a farmer, said: "The main demand is that they should listen to us. They have brought in farm laws and still, they are not hearing us. If the MSP and Arhtiyas (middlemen or service providers) system are removed, then what will the farmers do? We have brought enough rations to sustain us for five to six months in Delhi. We are conducting peaceful agitation. (...) The farmers will break the barricades. We know how to satisfy the hunger of people so we can overcome any obstacle to meet our demands."

National farmers' strike

The government's next response was to try to negotiate with the farmers' representatives while keeping the anti-farmer legislation in place. The farmers' organisations rejected this, demanding that Parliament be convened to repeal the legislation, and calling a further day of strike action on 8 December, which was supported by the union confederations that called the general strike on 26 November.

On 8 December, after thousands of farmers had camped out for more than a week around Delhi, sitting along police barricades on the three main roads going into the capital, over 450 farmer's unions and organisations supported the nationwide strike and shut down large sectors of the country's transport, shops and markets. Hundreds of thousands of farmers blocked all roads into Delhi for most of the day, and across the country demonstrated on railway lines and highways and called for a shutdown of shops, in support of their demand to repeal the three anti-farmer laws.

Kuldip Malana, a farmer from Bant district in Haryana, said (*The Guardian*, 8 December): "Over the last 25 years, farmers have suffered and the government has not bothered about us, even when so many are committing suicide. (...) They have not thought about us for years, and suddenly they come up with reforms that have nothing to do with helping the farmers and only benefit the big corporations. These laws are suicide for us all."

This combined struggle by the workers and farmers has already created additional political pressure at both the state and national federal level, and will continue to do so as it expresses the need for a government that will serve the interests of the working population.

UNITED STATES

Labor & Community for an Independent Party (LCIP) Statement on the US Elections 2020 (10 December 2020)

As we approach the end of 2020, it is clear that Joe Biden defeated Donald Trump for the US presidency, having won both the popular vote and the Electoral College by significant majorities. Nonetheless, Trump still has not conceded, despite losing numerous vote recounts and more than 50 lawsuits claiming fraud, as well as failing to persuade Republican lawmakers and election officials to overturn the results.

At this point, it would be very difficult for Trump to win a second term through any legal method. That does not preclude illegal methods. Additionally, it is doubtful that attempts to overthrow the US government by direct violence would succeed without support from the military – and that military support does not appear to be forthcoming at this time.

Before and immediately after the election, Donald Trump's threats to organise a coup inspired great concern. Now that the election is over and Joe Biden is the apparent President-elect, fear of a Trump coup is declining. However, the possibility remains that Trump could instigate a new emergency and, with the consent of recent appointees to Homeland Security and a conservative majority in the Supreme Court, could declare martial law, mobilise his armed supporters, and convince others to postpone Biden's transition to the White House.

Meanwhile, Trump is using his remaining days as President to continue undermining government agencies that provide social services and environmental protections. In addition, Trump is doing what he can to ensure that neither of the contested senatorial seats in Georgia will go to the Democrats in the upcoming run-off election, which – if the Democratic candidates win the run-off elections in January 2021 – would place the Democratic Party in control of both houses of Congress.

Labor & Community for an Independent Party (LCIP) supports and applauds efforts to protect the recent US election results. We condemn Donald Trump's failure to take necessary action to mitigate the Covid-19 pandemic. We condemn his overt racism, misogyny, and xenophobia, his denial of the threats related to climate change, his blatant corruption, appeals to violence, and his efforts to prevent government agencies from carrying out their mission in ways that could potentially benefit the US working class. In particular, we applaud and defend those forces – especially in the labour movement – that have called for mass actions, strikes and general strikes in the face of a potential coup. Indeed, supporters of LCIP helped to lead several of these initiatives.

However, LCIP's support of protecting the recent US election results is not support for the incoming Biden-Harris administration; we have no confidence whatsoever that the Biden-Harris administration will advocate for or benefit the US working class majority. If the Democrats fail to win the two Georgia Senate seats

necessary to have a majority in both houses of Congress, Biden will have the perfect excuse to not raise bold, needed policies and to claim that Republicans will only block them.

But even if the Democrats win both Senate seats in the Georgia runoff elections, expect to hear pleas for activists to back off from demanding the progressive agenda supported by the majority of voters, an agenda not in the interests of capital but in the interest of working people and those living in poverty in the US.

After all, Barack Obama enjoyed a Democratic congressional majority in Congress his first two years as President, and the US working class did not achieve its goals then, even those he directly promised – such as passing the Employee Free Choice Act, a law that would have made it far easier to organise unions. Obama demobilised his base, and then served eight years with policies no different from those of a moderate Republican, which he claimed publicly.

Given Biden's record and his choices thus far for his cabinet and transition team, we can expect a return to multilateral imperialism backed by wars, "free trade" agreements, tech industry dominance, few or no healthcare reforms, labour sell-outs, increased surveillance of US citizens, and only token support for environmentalism. At this time, the Biden-Harris team promises to prioritize Covid-19, economic recovery, racial equity, and climate change; however, once they take office, we can expect a lot of back-tracking on campaign promises, with the possible exception of taking stronger measures to end the pandemic.

We are already hearing the compliant mainstream media and Democratic Party mouthpieces attempt to rein in expectations as they advocate the need for austerity, and wax ecstatic over Biden's diverse cabinet with personal stories that ignore Biden's cabinet members' shady ties to big tech, finance, and the war industry.

Liberals dutifully applaud the diversity of Joe Biden's transition team – 40 per cent are people of colour and over half are women. Though such increased representation is generally desirable, we cannot ignore that the individuals selected have been chosen for their loyalty to the corporate "neoliberal" agenda and their concerted effort to attack the left wing of the Democratic Party. A pro-corporate, anti-working-class agenda is not better because its promoters better represent the diversity of the US population.

LCIP's purpose is to build a movement to create our own party, grounded in and committed to the struggles of labour and oppressed communities. The Democratic Party claims the support of organised labour and communities of colour, but it has never delivered the goods to merit that support, as it is beholden to its corporate masters.

During a devastating pandemic such as we have experienced in 2020, a pro-labour, anti-racist party

would fight to protect the working-class majority. Below are just a few of the policies that LCIP believes such a party should advocate for in the US:

- Redirect the \$740 billion Pentagon budget to fund hospitals and to do the necessary work required to vaccinate everyone against COVID-19, as well as to meet other social needs, along with enacting the Defense Production Act to produce masks, personal protective equipment (PPE), testing kits, and vaccines.
- Enact a single-payer, improved Medicare for All programme to ensure that no one goes without health care due to lack of money.
- Provide housing for all who need it, no evictions and a moratorium on all rental charges.
- Create a massive jobs programme, end lay-offs and job cuts, continue unemployment insurance providing a living wage for all unemployed workers, including independent contractors, and full wages for all workers isolated at home.
- Repeal all anti-union laws.
- Tax the rich and end all loopholes that allow the wealthy to avoid taxes.
- The list above includes the immediate demands that LCIP would advocate for so that the US working class could survive the pandemic. Such a party would also demand, among many other things:
- Community control of police and the transfer of funds budgeted for police into social services.
- End mass incarceration, and amnesty and release of all political prisoners, especially those of the various Black, Brown, Indigenous, environmental justice and anti-war movements. Many of these political prisoners, such as Mumia Abu-Jamal and Leonard Peltier, have been in prison for over 40 years.
- Full rights for immigrants and refugees, an end to ICE and release all immigrants in ICE detention centres, as well as reconnect all families torn apart by ICE detentions.
- Fully fund the public education system from preschool to college.
- Equal pay for equal work.
- Defend reproductive rights, stop forced sterilization, provide economic support to parents, and repeal state anti-abortion laws.
- End all discrimination against the LGBTQ community.
- Take climate change seriously, do what is necessary to achieve and enforce the elimination of fossil fuels, end environmental racism, and create jobs

dedicated to protecting the environment and mitigating the harm caused by climate disasters.

- Rescind the Citizens United decision that allows unlimited corporate funding for candidates, restore the vote to those who have had it taken away, and ensure that all voters have safe, easy access to voting, both by mail and in person.
- Expand mass transit and rebuild our crumbling infrastructure.
- Bring all US troops home now.

What we know for sure is that the Democratic Party has no intention of carrying out any of these demands, even if it does gain control of both houses of Congress. The Democratic Party is a corporate party filled with those who offer tepid, if any, policies to meet the needs of the US working-class and oppressed communities. It offers empty rhetoric to appease the masses while working to ensure that the lives of the ruling class continue without adversity. This is why workers and all of the oppressed need to create our own party.

For that to happen, unions and organisations based in oppressed communities must stop supporting either the Democratic or the Republican parties. This will require internal education and caucus building within US labour unions and in our organisations to promote political independence, and a fight against the complicity of co-opted or corrupt leaderships.

For example, when many union locals, labour councils, and even a state federation called for a general strike to resist Trump's plans for a coup, the AFL-CIO leadership should have praised, supported, and promoted this resistance. Instead, when the Vermont Federation of Labor passed such a resolution, AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka sent a letter threatening to put it into receivership and deny funding. Why? Trumka and other misleaders don't want to disrupt their cosy relationships with Democratic Party politicians, no matter how little these politicians might do to advance a pro-working-class agenda.

If you agree with this statement:

- Please endorse LCIP. Go to: <https://lqipcampaign.org/>
- Help build local labour-community coalitions to lay the groundwork for a new party.
- Organise within your union or community organization to win support for an independent party.
- Continue militant resistance actions demanding positive change from the new administration.

No "honeymoon" for Biden and Harris!

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