

# 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.

**Two kinds of logic, which  
cannot be reconciled:  
What we are told is  
possible, versus what  
the working class needs**

**No to "fire and rehire"!  
No cuts, whatever they  
are and wherever they  
come from!**

## EDITORIAL

Throughout the country, workers continue to fight back against full-frontal attacks on their pay and conditions and on their very jobs, including attempts at “fire and rehire”.

There have been successes, proving that taking determined action works; for example, at British Airways and SPS Technologies in Leicester. But there are more struggles elsewhere, even as Unite launches (26 April) its own campaign against “fire and rehire”.

Bus drivers are still on indefinite strike at Go North West in Manchester, and are still repeatedly voting to take strike action at the three RATP Dev subsidiaries in London (London United, Quality Line and London Sovereign). They have now been joined by around 4,000 drivers at Metroline in London, who have voted to strike against the company’s proposed “remote sign-on” policy.

Council workers in Thurrock (Essex), who have provided key services (refuse collection, highways maintenance and street cleaning) throughout the pandemic despite having no proper PPE until July 2020, started a three-week strike on 13 April in their fight against Thurrock Council’s plans to slash their pay and conditions by up to £3,500 per person.

Having taken strike action since January, just under 500 British Gas engineers (GMB members) have now been locked out for refusing to sign “fire and rehire” contracts.

Meanwhile, in its “Red Flag Alert” report for the first three months of 2021, corporate insolvency company Begbies Traynor points to the likely collapse of hundreds of thousands of UK businesses when the government’s financial support schemes end in the summer. According to its research, 723,000 businesses across 22 economic sectors across the country are now in “significant financial distress” and may well go under, potentially triggering mass unemployment counted in the millions.

The Starmer leadership’s policies are not guided by the workers’ resistance, and instead they are carrying on playing parliamentary games. Today, Starmer and his shadow ministers are shouting about “Tory sleaze” and calling for enquiries which they know will be ineffective, while for the previous twelve months they waved through every single government measure in the House of Commons and kept quiet about the government’s corruption and murderous failures.

*Labour Internationalist* supports every move to resist the policy of a government that has benefitted from the support of those who should be leading the fightback, but who instead are wrapping themselves in the flag and peddling a bogus “national interest” argument to those who are resisting – including in the face of police harassment and violence.

As part of this growing wave of resistance, the Greater Manchester Association of Trades Union Councils

(GMATUC) has informed us that it has adopted a resolution against all cuts in public services, whatever they are and wherever they come from (see page 6).

We unconditionally support the GMATUC resolution, and we call on everyone – whatever their political differences on other matters – to endorse it and adopt it as their own, and to reject the arguments of those people – whatever their political label – who would have us accept that the working class should pay the bill for the tens of billions that have been handed out to the Tories’ capitalist friends.

We are facing two kinds of logic, which cannot be reconciled.

On one side, there are those who in one way or another, sometimes hiding behind legal arguments, are telling the workers who are resisting – bus drivers, British Gas engineers, council workers, gig economy workers, health workers and many others – that what they are asking for is not possible.

On the other side, there are the tens of thousands of men and women who are fighting for their demands, organising and taking action for the simple reason that this is what they and their families need, what is needed by everyone – whether in work or not – who is affected by the government’s anti-working-class policies.

*Labour Internationalist* is on the side of those who are fighting for what the working class and the wider population need, and ultimately for a working-class government that will take back the billions gifted to the capitalists and, among other things, will:

- ban lay-offs and job-cuts, including “fire and rehire”;
- provide all necessary funding to municipal councils to support the full range of services needed by local communities;
- reverse the privatisation/marketisation of the NHS and education;
- revitalise all public services, beginning with renationalising the railways, gas, electricity and water;
- ensure a properly funded and functioning system to provide welfare support and housing to those who need it.

This is what *Labour Internationalist* is fighting for, and as we approach May Day, the international workers’ day, we invite you to join us. Tell us what is happening where you are, send us any information (e.g., strike news and views) which you think should be circulated in the labour movement.

Be part of organising the fightback against “fire and rehire”, be part of organising the fightback against cuts in local and public services, whatever they are and wherever they come from.

**28 April**

## SNAPSHOTS OF THE CRISIS

### **2 April: Government's report on racial disparities widely condemned and disowned**

Trade unions, MPs and hundreds of experts on race, education, health and economics all condemn the government's report on racial disparities for misrepresenting clear evidence of institutional racism. The report by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, which was published in full on 31 March, concluded that the *"claim the country is still institutionally racist is not borne out by the evidence"*. Academics who were listed as contributors disown the report, some pointing out they were not even contacted by the Commission for their views. Black and minority ethnic business leaders who took part in the working group on enterprise and employment widely condemned the report's findings, saying their 11 recommendations were ignored for containing *"inconvenient truths"*. *The Observer* reported (18 April) that 33 trade union General Secretaries representing more than 5 million workers had written to the Prime Minister, calling on him to reject the *"insulting"* report. In a statement (19 April), the UN's Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent said: *"In 2021, it is stunning to read a report on race and ethnicity that repackages racist tropes and stereotypes into fact, twisting data and misapplying statistics and studies into conclusory findings and ad hominem attacks on people of African descent."*

### **3 April: Starmer's purge continues**

More reports emerge of democratically selected Labour Party candidates for the local elections in Liverpool, Walsall, Haringey (London) and elsewhere being suspended and summarily deselected by the party's apparatus, only to be replaced centrally by candidates who had already been rejected by their local Labour Parties, or by sitting

councillors who had been deselected by their local party.

### **8 April: Councils levying "care tax" on disabled and mentally ill adults**

Care charities highlight the fact that as a result of national underfunding of social care, councils in England are quietly increasing charges to people with learning disabilities and mental illness, in effect clawing back welfare payments and leaving some working-age adults with little more than £3 a day to spend. They describe the charges as a new *"care tax"*. The Health Foundation has estimated that at least an additional £6 billion a year is needed to meet growing demand, rising to £14 billion if the country wants to improve access to care and pay more to staff, many of whom earn minimum wage.

### **13 April: Lack of proper measures will "inevitably" result in more deaths**

Instead of making the useless £37-billion private-sector "track and trace" system fit for purpose and placing effective controls on the 8,000 or more people arriving in the UK daily by air, the government simply shrugs its shoulders as it lifts lockdown, with Johnson telling journalists: *"As we unlock, the result will inevitably be that we will see more infection, sadly we will see more hospitalisation and deaths, and people have just got to understand that."*

### **13 April: Ex-chief scientist accuses government of privatising the NHS by stealth**

Sir David King, a former UK government Chief Scientific Adviser and founder of the Independent Sage committee, accuses the government of corruption, privatising the NHS by stealth and mishandling the pandemic. He says: *"People say it's a crisis – I say the government is using a crisis to privatise sections of the healthcare system in a way that is completely wrong. A fraction of*

*this money going to public services would have been far better results."* He accuses the government of acting deliberately to carry out ideological aims of privatising the NHS: *"It is slipping this through in the name of a pandemic – effectively, to privatise the NHS by stealth. I'm quite sure this has not been an accident, I'm quite sure this has been the plan, there has been clarity in this process."*

### **14 April: British Gas workers lose their jobs in mass sacking**

Just under 500 engineers across the company who refused to submit to accept a 15 percent cut in pay rates and other imposed changes to their terms and conditions are sacked following 43 days of strike action. Some Labour MPs renew their call for the government to ban employers from using "fire and rehire" practices. On 15 September 2020, Starmer told the TUC Congress that "fire and rehire" tactics are *"against British values"* and called on the Tory government to act to end their use. On 25 January, the House of Commons passed an Opposition Day motion to outlaw "fire and rehire" that had been tabled by Labour. Opposition Day motions are not binding on the government. Responding to the sackings, GMB Regional Secretary Justin Bowden says: *"I have news for Mr O'Shea [CEO of Centrica, owner of British Gas]. This is not the end of the dispute. As well as being in dispute with his own staff he is now in dispute with the national union GMB. This is why this dispute will continue and become an official national lockout dispute. There will be more strikes and action short of strikes."* However, so far there is no sign of any campaign for the reinstatement of the 500 engineers.

### **14 April: Starmer and Evans sack more Labour Party staff**

Independent news website *The Skwawkbox* reports that 90 Labour Party staff have received letters

telling them they will be out of work from the end of May. On 2 September 2020, while the Starmer leadership was calling on the government to extend the “furlough” scheme, the LP apparatus informed its furloughed staff that they would be sacked when the scheme ended on 30 September – having already tried to sack them on 31 July on the grounds of “costs” and being forced into a temporary U-turn. In February, it laid off the party’s entire Community Organiser team, comprising 12 mainly BAME staff.

### **22 April: UK charity gives out a record 2.5 million food parcels in one year**

The Trussell Trust, the UK’s biggest food bank charity, says it gave out a record 2.5 million food parcels between April 2020 and March 2021, as low-income families experienced what it called “historic” levels of need. The charity says its outlets had experienced a 33 percent increase in the number of food parcels they distributed in that period (up almost 150 percent over five years), but this was a fraction of the total food aid handed out in the UK by thousands of other charities, schools and councils. Alongside the Trussell network, around 1,000 independent food banks were operating in the UK last year, while research by Kellogg’s estimated that one in five UK schools ran food banks. According to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society, new food banks opened in response to Covid-19 in nearly three-quarters of local authorities.

### **22 April: Warning of surge in bankruptcies and mass unemployment**

Corporate insolvency company Begbies Traynor issues a “Red Flag Alert” report for the first three months of 2021, in which it points to the likely collapse of hundreds of thousands of UK businesses when the government’s financial support schemes end in the summer, and government restrictions end on landlords demanding that businesses repay a year’s worth of rent. According to its research,

723,000 businesses across 22 economic sectors across the country are now in “significant financial distress” (almost 100,000 more in just the last three months, a 15 percent increase) and may well go under, potentially triggering mass unemployment of up to 10 million.

### **22 April: Another victory for gig economy workers**

Thousands of drivers for cab and courier company Addison Lee could be entitled to an average £10,000 each in compensation after the Court of Appeal found they were workers (not bogus “self-employed”) entitled to the national minimum wage and paid holiday. The Court dismissed Addison Lee’s appeal against a 2017 employment tribunal that found that three drivers for the company were entitled to the minimum wage from the time they logged on as ready to take passengers to the time they logged off. That decision was also upheld by an employment appeal tribunal in 2018.

### **24 April: Protesting nurse fights £10,000 fine**

*The Guardian* reports that Karen Reissmann, a nurse with 39 years’ experience who has worked on the frontline throughout the pandemic, is fighting a £10,000 fine imposed by Greater Manchester police (GMP) in March for organising a protest over the government’s 1 percent pay-rise for NHS workers. GMP is refusing to back down, despite the fact that Reissmann had offered GMP a risk assessment of her protest and ensured it was Covid-safe, and despite a legal challenge to GMP’s interpretation of the government’s emergency laws. Reissmann believes that GMP’s desire to prosecute was meant to intimidate other nurses from organising protests: “It’s so punitive, clearly designed to stop others. I know people who stepped back from protesting because they were afraid of the £10,000 fine.” Her lawyer said: “Police forces have consistently relied on the Covid regulations as a pretext to ban protest.”

### **26 April: Johnson’s mask slips again**

Reports emerge that in late October 2020, Johnson said “No more fucking lockdowns – let the bodies pile high in their thousands”, after reluctantly approving a second England-wide lockdown for four weeks in November. Various ministers and Johnson himself publicly deny this, despite various media outlets (including even the BBC) saying that several sources had confirmed it – demonstrating once again that the Tories care more about business profit than working people’s lives. Meanwhile, the government continues to reject calls by bereaved families to initiate a public enquiry into its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **26 April: Unite launches national campaign against “fire and rehire”**

Unite launches a major national campaign to end “fire and rehire”, saying that “workers, trade unionists and supporters around the country will come out on strike, arrange solidarity actions and leaflet workplaces” against the tactic.



Unite Assistant General Secretary Howard Beckett, who is leading Unite’s campaign, says: “Bad employers are using the opportunity of crisis to fire and rehire workers on dramatically reduced terms and conditions. It can’t be allowed to happen. Workers cannot be made to pay for a crisis they have not caused. The government knows this is wrong and can end fire and rehire with one stroke of a legislative pen. But if the government won’t do the right thing, then Unite will. We have members in every sector and in every nation taking industrial action, we have a strike fund of over £40,000,000 and daily strike pay of £70. Fire and rehire will be stopped.”

# NEWS FROM THE PICKET LINE

## Strikes at Heathrow suspended after new offer

On 1 April, Unite announced that the series of 41 separate strikes in a 24-day period that were due to begin on 2 April were suspended after it had agreed a new offer on pay and future working conditions with Heathrow Airport Limited (HAL). Heathrow workers had taken strike action on nine separate days since December, following HAL's decision to "fire and rehire" its entire 4,000 workforce, slashing their pay and reducing their conditions. The scheduled strike action would have targeted engineering, airside operations, landside operations, fire service, campus security and central terminal operations, with each sector taking seven days of strike action.

The union's announcement said: *"The offer includes the potential for pay increases of five per cent over the next two years (depending on airport traffic and inflation), the insourcing of work which will increase earnings for some of the workforce by up to £3,000, and a commitment to review working hours of some sectors to improve work/life balance."* Unite's members will now be balloted on the new offer, with the union recommending acceptance, saying: *"If accepted, this offer will begin to restore the pay that members lost as a result of being forcibly fired and rehired."*

## Metroline bus drivers vote for strike action

Unite announced on 12 April that more than 4,000 bus drivers working for Metroline in the north and west of London had voted overwhelmingly (96-plus percent) for strike action over the company's plan to impose "remote sign-on". The new policy would mean that drivers would not report to a depot to start work (raising health and safety concerns), but would meet their bus at an alternative location such as a bus stop, thus reducing the company's costs and boosting its profits. On 23 April, Unite warned that Metroline has until 10 May to permanently drop its "remote sign-on" policy, or it will face a rolling programme of strikes in the summer.

## Strikes by London United drivers suspended

On Sunday, 25 April, Unite announced that strike action by around 2,400 bus drivers employed by London United (one of three subsidiaries operated in London by French company RATP) that was scheduled for 26 April was suspended, following an eleventh-hour "improved" pay offer which was yet to be finalised. The bus drivers will be balloted on the new offer at their seven depots in south and west London, having already voted to take further strike action on 7 and 8 May.

## Has the all-out strike against "fire and rehire" by Manchester bus drivers succeeded?

When the 400-plus bus drivers (Unite members) employed by Go North West (GNW) came out on all-out indefinite strike against "fire and rehire" on 28 February, they knew what they were fighting against: the loss of up to 50 jobs (a 10 percent cut), and new contracts that would result in longer hours for the same pay

(equivalent to a pay-cut of up to £2,500 per year) and greatly reduced sick pay.

GNW's first response was to mount a planned strike-breaking operation to keep its services on the road, paying around a dozen other bus and coach firms throughout Greater Manchester to run its services and lowering fares to a standard £1 for the duration of the strike. This went unanswered by Unite, which organises the majority of drivers in the other bus companies.

On 30 April, news emerged that GNW had withdrawn its "fire and rehire" plan and Unite would ballot its members on the new offer made by the company. The strike will continue until the vote takes place. At the time of writing, there are no details on the new offer, so it is not clear if the ballot will involve making concessions on jobs, pay, sick pay and rotas.

## Deliveroo riders strike over pay and conditions

On 7 April, around 400 delivery riders working for Deliveroo and organised by the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain (IWGB) went on strike over pay and conditions and held socially-distanced protests in the streets of central London, York, Reading, Sheffield and Wolverhampton. Greg Howard, a Deliveroo rider and the Chair of the IWGB's Couriers and Logistics Branch, said: *"I'm going on strike for my basic rights and those of all the other riders struggling to get by and support families on Deliveroo poverty pay."*

## Lewisham hospital cleaners take action again

On 12 April, cleaning staff (GMB members) held a socially-distanced protest outside Lewisham Hospital (south-east London) against plans by private contractor ISS to cut 495 hours from its cleaning contract with Lewisham & Greenwich NHS Trust, which would also involve job-cuts. Cleaners at the hospital are already struggling with *"impossible workloads"*, and ISS are apparently advising "spot cleaning" rather than thorough cleaning in some areas of the hospital.

GMB regional organiser Helen O'Connor said: *"GMB members are angry because ISS are constantly making detrimental changes that are cutting the quality of hospital services."*

*Many of our members have been seriously unwell with coronavirus themselves and they are very concerned that cuts to cleaning during a pandemic will kill hospital patients who are already unwell and very vulnerable. [Our] members will not stand by and allow a private company raking in huge profits to put patients at risk and [we] are asking the local community to stand with them and fight to protect services."*

This is the cleaners' second dispute with ISS in little over a year. They had downed tools and walked off the job in February 2020 after ISS botched their wages – meaning they went underpaid for several weeks. That action resulted in a significant victory, with ISS paying wages in full with backpay, at the increased hourly rate of £10.55 per hour.

## OPEN FORUM

### **GMATUC and Rochdale TUC say: No cuts, whatever they are and wherever they come from**

*The Greater Manchester Association of Trades Union Councils (GMATUC) and Rochdale Metropolitan Borough TUC (RMBTC) have adopted a resolution against cuts to local services and wider public services. We reproduce the resolution below, together with the cover letter sent to 135 Trades Councils and some 20 County Associations of Trades Councils.*

**D**ear Brothers and Sisters,  
I am writing to you to inform you of a resolution against local government cuts adopted earlier this month by Rochdale Metropolitan Borough TUC (RMBTC) and the Greater Manchester Association of Trades Union Councils (GMATUC).

As well as imposing a 6 percent cut (£9 billion) on NHS England's budget for 2021-22 – a period when the NHS will need to deal with a big backlog of surgery and other treatments, and increased mental illness – and ignoring the social care system, the government's latest budget puts a further squeeze on local council funding to the point of forcing cuts.

Despite some emergency Covid-related funding from central government, councils are facing huge financial gaps caused by massive drops in income (especially business rates) accompanied by big Covid-related expenditure. Manchester city council is facing cuts in the next financial year of £41 million; in Bolton, the figure is £35 million, and in Rochdale £34 million. The London borough of Newham is set to implement "cuts and savings" of £43 million by April 2023, £30 million of it this year. Leeds council is facing cuts of £87 million, the single biggest amount to be taken out of its spending since the start of the Tories' austerity policy.

As councils try to balance their books, millions of council tax payers in hundreds of council areas are now facing increases of up to 5 percent in their annual bills from April, with those on low and middle incomes hit hardest by a sixth year of increases in England above the rate of inflation.

The unions that represent municipal council workers have won individual local battles in the recent period, but in the coming months they will face massive cuts due to be made across the board by hundreds of councils throughout the country, all of them the result of the government's funding decisions, and all of them hitting the local communities in the same way.

**GMATUC and RMBTC have both resolved that these cuts are unjustified on both social and economic grounds, and that what is needed is action on a united and co-ordinated basis to oppose all cuts to public services, whatever they are and wherever they come from.**

We urge you to adopt the same resolution, and would ask you to let us and your local press know if you do so.

Fraternally,  
Stefan Cholewka  
Secretary, GMATUC & RMBTC

### **No cuts, whatever they are and wherever they come from**

GMATUC/RMBTC notes that:

1. Central government grants to local government were cut by 38 per cent in real terms between 2009-10 and 2018-19, even as demand for key services increased;
2. As a result, local public services have been cut and private-sector providers have been called in to plug gaps in housing, social care, transport, planning, and cultural and leisure services;
3. Cuts to funding from central government have led to a 17 per cent reduction in council spending on local public services since 2009-10;
4. The COVID-19 crisis is having immediate effects on councils' budgets as a result of increases in spending on local services and reductions in revenue. Based on councils' forecasts of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on their non-tax income and spending in 2020-21, there is an estimated £2 billion gap between the funding provided by central government and the spending pressures anticipated by councils, and this gap is very likely to widen;
5. At the same time, the Government has been quick to channel tens of billions of pounds to private sector companies 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;

(cont.)

GMATUC/RMBTC therefore resolves:

6. That working people and local communities should not and will not be made to pay for the health and economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather than allocating tens of billions of pounds in public funds to private sector companies, the Government must allocate the funding required by local councils to provide the full range of local services needed by working people and local communities;
7. To oppose all local government cuts, whatever they are and wherever they come from;
8. To link up with other trade unions, organisations, associations and campaigns, at both the local and regional levels, in a united campaign to oppose all cuts to all public services.

**Sources:**

Point 1: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/local-government-funding-england>

Point 3: Tom Harris, Louis Hodge and David Phillips, "English local government funding: trends and challenges in 2019 and beyond", Institute for Fiscal Studies (November 2019), available at <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14563>

Point 4: Kate Ogden, David Phillips and Jean-Christophe Spiliotis, "COVID-19 and English council funding: what is the medium-term outlook?", Institute for Fiscal Studies (September 2020), available at <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/15041>

## **Local elections: "Government, workers and businesses acting in unison" is NOT a core Labour value!**

**By Stefan Cholewka, GMATUC Secretary (personal capacity)**

**T**he local elections on 6 May will be a key test for Starmer's Labour leadership. Yet sources within Labour have already begun briefing the media that they expect a disappointing result. Starmer himself recently referred to the upcoming local election as "tough". One shadow cabinet member was even more explicit to the *Financial Times*: "Our expectations are that we're going to really struggle." This view is borne out by several polls of voting intentions.



*Thurrock refuse workers starting their 3-week strike on 13 April*

LP NEC Member Luke Akehurst sums up the Starmer pro-business argument when he eulogises in an article on *LabourList* that Labour needs to "seize this chance to define what being 'the party of business' means" in order to win the May 2021 elections:

*"It starts with the council and mayoral elections on May 6th, where many Labour candidates understand precisely the needs of businesses and workers. Steve Rotherham and Andy Burnham have signalled with their employment charters just how Labour, and businesses themselves, want to support employers that invest in and reward their workforce. Sadiq Khan's*

*record level of support as a pro-business mayor who can balance the interests of retail, tourism, hospitality and financial services while promoting the London living wage shows just how businesses and workers are not as diametrically opposed as the Tories want to suggest.*

*These elections are essential to hammering home this message, and winning in May is key to our ambitions as a pro-business and pro-worker party".*

*Government, workers and businesses acting in unison is a core Labour value that wins the hearts and minds of voters across the country. Policies such as the plan to extend start-up loans to back the next generation of entrepreneurs signals that Labour means business. As a member of the Labour business executive, I know that Labour only wins when business is with us. Labour has the opportunity to seize this, and give a new definition to what it means to be 'the party of business'".*

Opposition parties historically perform well in local elections. However, Labour has not won more than 80 seats in a local election since 2014. Meanwhile, the government is riding high, with Boris Johnson's approval rating at its highest since last May. Not only that, but the areas up for election were last contested before Britain left the EU, many before Britain even voted to leave.

Keir Starmer was elected as Labour leader specifically because he was seen as the most electable candidate. Yet it seems inevitable – even to Starmer himself – that his first election as leader will result in a humiliating defeat; because emphasising "new leadership" while positioning Labour as a pro-business party can only have one disastrous outcome for the Labour Party and the working class.

# I agree with Keir (Hardie)

By John Caseman, Unite and Labour Party member

**T**he death on 9 April of Prince Philip (official titles: Duke of Edinburgh, Earl of Merioneth, Baron Greenwich, Royal Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, Extra Knight of the Most Ancient and Most Noble Order of the Thistle, etc., etc.) triggered an orgy of institutional forelock-tugging.

The BBC cleared its TV and radio schedules and instead put out programmes mainly comprised of live and pre-recorded tributes, resulting in a genuine bit of news: the BBC received a record 110,000 complaints over its coverage, with its website unable to deal with the high volume at one point.

Parliament's response was no better, with the Tories clearing the House of Commons schedule of all other business to allow 7.5 hours of obsequious tributes instead of addressing vital matters. As the independent news website *The Skwawkbox* put it: *"After all, there's nothing much else going on, apart from riots in Northern Ireland, vaccine-resistant coronavirus strains, 150,000 and more needlessly dead and an economy still reeling from Tory mishandling of the pandemic, burgeoning racism (and Establishment denial thereof), etc., etc."*

Prime Minister Johnson led the grovelling, saying that Prince Philip *"helped to steer the royal family and the monarchy so that it remains an institution indisputably vital to the balance and happiness of our national life."* Having cancelled all campaigning in the local elections because of the royal death, Sir Keir Starmer (official title: Leader of Her Majesty's Most Loyal Opposition), chimed in: *"The United Kingdom has lost an extraordinary public servant in Prince Philip."*

I am not sure that the families of the dedicated frontline workers who died from Covid-19 for lack of proper PPE (including 850 healthcare workers between March and December 2020, according to the *BMJ*) will endorse that statement about a 99-year-old who died peacefully in one of his many beds after a privileged and very comfortable life.

Let's remember that far from being a tourist attraction that is "good for the country", the British monarchy is first and foremost a drain on public finances that channels a chunk of its vast wealth (estimated at roughly £66 billion by business consultancy Brand Finance in November 2017) into offshore accounts to avoid the modest taxes levied on it. That estimated wealth ranges from the Crown's concrete assets (including Buckingham Palace, the Royal Collection of art, the Crown Jewels and the Duchies of Lancaster and Cornwall), via the lands and holdings comprising the Crown Estate (a trust which technically is the property neither of the British government nor the royal family), to the "value impact" of its brand.

Then, the monarchy as an institution has important powers: among other things, the armed forces swear allegiance to the monarch, who orders their

deployment; the Prime Minister is appointed by the monarch; and the monarch has the power to remove a democratically-elected government by royal prerogative, as happened in 1975 when Prime Minister Gough Whitlam of Australia was "dismissed" by Governor-General Sir John Kerr, the Queen's representative.

So the performances by various public figures on 9 April had a very specific political content: the "Queen and Country" tub-thumping served to reinforce the "national unity" myth being peddled by the Labour Party leadership in order to excuse the institutional failures and betrayals of working-class interests during the year-old health and economic crisis. To take just one example: thousands of temporary census workers in England and Wales – many earning just over £10 an hour – were forced to take unpaid time off when Prince Philip died, after being told without any notice via email by the Office for National Statistics that they should stop work immediately and go home, but they would have to "make up their hours" later.

A million miles away from Keir Starmer's forelock-tugging, let us recall the stand taken in Parliament in 1894 by Keir Hardie, the Scottish trade unionist who helped found the Scottish Labour Party (1888), the Independent Labour Party (1893), and then the Labour Representation Committee (1900, which formally changed its name to "Labour Party" in 1906). After an explosion on 23 June 1894 at the Albion Colliery in Cilfynydd near Pontypridd (South Wales) killed 290 men and boys, Keir Hardie (who himself had started work as a coal miner at the age of 10) asked that a message of condolence to the relatives of the victims be added to an address of congratulations being sent by Parliament to the Crown on the birth of a royal heir (the future Edward VIII). The request was refused, prompting Hardie to make a highly controversial speech attacking the monarchy.

Hardie followed this up with an editorial article (entitled "Snobbery") in a special edition of his own newspaper *Labour Leader* (30 June 1894), in which he said: *"For the lick-spittles of the press who have no ears for the cry of the poor widow and orphan, and who attempt to see in the birth of a child to the Duke and Duchess of York, an event of Divine significance to the nation, there can be nothing but contempt. The life of one Welsh miner is of greater commercial and moral value to the British nation than the whole royal crowd put together, from the royal Great Grand-mama down to this puling royal Great Grand-child."*

I couldn't agree more. If only we had the original Keir leading the Labour Party today, fighting for a government that will genuinely represent working-class interests, for demands that are incompatible with the monarchy, for a workers' republic that will dismantle all the bourgeois institutions.



# INTERNATIONAL



## INDIA

### A human tragedy is taking place in India

Published in *IWC Newsletter No.185, 4 May 2021*

We endorse this appeal by the International Workers Committee Against War and Exploitation (IWC), and invite our readers to add their signature (contact details below) and circulate it as widely as possible for further endorsement.

*Labour Internationalist*

Presently, India is facing a second wave of Covid-19. The images coming out of India are scary.

IWC correspondents in have India informed us: *“The number of people infected with Covid-19 is rising every day. Those who can get a hospital bed are considered lucky. Deaths are mounting owing to the lack of hospital beds, medicines, oxygen – the healthcare system has collapsed, there are no doctors and paramedical staff to cope with the mounting cases.*

*In this scenario, elections to five states took place in April. The Prime Minister himself addressed mammoth crowds without masks and physical distancing. Worse still, the government allowed 27 million Hindus to take a holy dip in a river, in the name of Kumbh Mela, when the new Covid-19 surge was on.”*

The responsibility of the ultra-reactionary Modi government is indisputably engaged. But so is the responsibility of imperialism’s global domination, its willingness to sacrifice everything to the maintaining of profits.

The Indian government boasts of producing not one, but two vaccines. But the daily reality for millions of Indians is that when several hundred or even several thousand people turn up at the vaccination centres, only the first 50-60 are served due to a shortage of vaccines throughout the country.

India is considered to be the “pharmacy of the world”, and a large proportion of the generic drugs used worldwide are produced in India. But today, the Indian population has no access to vaccines, to the most essential medicines, or even to oxygen.

It is a fact that the governments of the great imperialist powers – the United States, Great Britain and the main governments of the European Union (France, Germany, etc.) – have for more than six months banned India from mass-producing vaccines, within the framework of the World Trade Organisation.

This tragedy comes after the “first wave” in 2020. A year ago, after the Modi government declared a strict lockdown, giving only four hours’ notice to get prepared for it, the tragedy of millions of migrant workers – without protection or care, forced to flee the cities on pain of starvation and to begin a long march back to their villages – began.

The human toll was high and millions of jobs were lost. The Modi government claimed to have defeated the epidemic, but above all, it did not take any measures to strengthen the health services.

Moreover, taking Covid-19 crisis as an opportunity, the BJP government led by Narendra Modi enacted anti-citizenship, anti-farmer and anti-worker legislation. Since November last year, the farmers of India have been occupying streets leading into Delhi and protesting against the laws in favour of corporations, and workers are opposing the mass privatisation of public sector enterprises on the one hand and the naked attack on labour rights on the other. As per the orders of the capitalists, four new labour codes have been imposed on the workers.

Indian states are under lockdown again, to varying degrees. Once again, workers are without work and wages, and migrants are again on the move. Even according to official estimates, 800 million people would need food support. Several millions are without jobs and incomes in the cities and rural India. But a handful of corporations that are beneficiaries of the BJP’s policies are propping up the government and an artificial stock exchange boom.

Instead of concentrating all possible means on the fight against the epidemic, the Modi government is stepping up its military presence against China, as requested by the Biden administration.

But the anger that is growing among all sections of the population is not separate from the struggles waged by urban workers, peasants and the youth.

The International Workers' Committee Against War and Exploitation, For a Workers' International, which was formed in Mumbai in November 2016 at an international conference with delegates from 40 countries and hundreds of labour activists from India, has declared: "*The tragedy that India is experiencing today is a terrible illustration of the fate that the capitalist system holds in store for the workers and peoples of the world!*"

The IWC calls on the workers of the world to stand with the workers, peasants and people of India.

To stand by the Indian workers and their organisations, who demand that all pharmaceutical industries be forced to produce in order to meet the needs of the people, not for export profits.

To stand by the workers, peasants and their organisations fighting for the withdrawal of all anti-democratic, anti-working class and anti-peasant laws put forward by the Modi government.

The IWC calls on workers and working-class organisations to condemn the governments of the imperialist countries which, in accordance with the WTO, are not allowing India to freely produce the hundreds of millions of vaccines needed.

Let us demand that these governments lift the ban on making the patents for producing vaccines public so that India, which has the technical capacity, can produce the hundreds of millions of vaccines needed to deal with the tragedy. It is urgent!

**Daniel Gluckstein and Nambiath Vasudevan**  
IWC Co-coordinators

To endorse this appeal, expressing your solidarity with the Indian workers, peasants and youth, and joining in the demand to lift the ban on putting patents for the production of vaccines in the public domain: Please email [owcmumbai2016@gmail.com](mailto:owcmumbai2016@gmail.com) (CC [labour.internationalist2019@gmail.com](mailto:labour.internationalist2019@gmail.com)), stating your name and organisation in the form they should appear publicly, and indicating whether you are signing in a personal capacity or on behalf of your organisation

## PALESTINE

### ***"I write to remember the brutality of Jewish violence I saw in Jerusalem"***

**By Orly Noy, political activist, editor and translator**

**Published in news and opinion webzine +972 Magazine on 24 April. A version of this article was first published in Hebrew on Hebrew-language news site *Sikha Mekomit* [Local Call]**

Early January saw an increase in the number of forced evictions of Palestinians from their homes in Jerusalem, especially in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. Jewish and Arab activists held protests against these evictions. Then, Palestinians were banned from gathering in the evenings during the month of Ramadan, which intensified the protests by Palestinian youth, described by one activist as a "mini-Intifada".

This was the context on 22 April, when hundreds of members of the far-right Zionist organisation Lehava organised an attempted anti-Palestinian pogrom with the slogan: "*Death to Arabs!*" Lehava is headed by Bentzi Gopstein, a former member of Kach, the movement created by Meir Kahane, a US-born rabbi who promoted the forced expulsion of most Palestinians and Arab Israelis from Israel and the Palestinian territories. The US State Department identified Kach as a terrorist organisation in 1994.

However, its political heir, the Religious Zionist Party, has just entered the Knesset (Parliament) with six seats, and Netanyahu has been courting them in the hope of forming a coalition government.

Young Palestinians were joined by Jewish activists in resisting the racist thugs on 22 April, but their action was brutally put down by the Israeli police. The apartheid policy of the Israeli leaders, supported previously by Trump and today by Biden, leads to this.

***Labour Internationalist***

Since the beginning of Ramadan this month, Jerusalem Police have banned Palestinians from sitting on the wide steps at the entrance to Damascus Gate, the main plaza in the Old City, and holding evening gatherings in honour of the holy month. This arbitrary decision,

for which no plausible explanation was given, has ignited widespread Palestinian protest. The police, as if just waiting for the perfect opportunity, have turned the place into a nightly battlefield.

Against the backdrop of this violence, activists from Jewish supremacist group Lehava called on their supporters to arrive in droves on Thursday “to restore Jewish dignity”, after several TikTok videos surfaced showing Palestinians harassing ultra-Orthodox Jews in the city. Backed by their representatives now sitting in the Knesset, hundreds of supporters of the Kahanist organisation responded to the call, arriving in the area with the stated goal of attacking Arabs (or, alternatively, leftists).

They marched toward the Damascus Gate while chanting “Death to Arabs”, turning Thursday into the most violent night Jerusalem has known in years. We, the left-wing activists of Jerusalem, also showed up to try and counter-balance the fascists as they marched through the city streets.

I am writing now not because I have any faith that describing the war-zone I witnessed on the streets of Jerusalem this week, or going into detail about the Jewish youth who chanted “Death to Arabs” in the heart of the city, will change anything. I know it will not.

I write because of the need to break down this madness into its most basic elements – so that perhaps I can understand it better. I write to give my testimony, because there is nothing else I can do. I write to remember.

To remember that among the clouds of tear gas and the deafening sound of stun grenades shot at Palestinians, I saw a father holding the hand of his daughter, trying to flee together.

To remember the terrified eyes of the teenager who was dragged by police officers after they charged into a group of young Palestinians.

To remember the empty steps across from Damascus Gate, from which Palestinians have been banned since the beginning of Ramadan.

To remember that when the stench of the “Skunk” – a vehicle that shoots foul-smelling liquid at high speeds during Palestinian protests – nearly caused me to vomit and the faeces of the police horses was left on the ground, I wondered whether the municipality would clean up the filth the following day, and how unbearable it must be to break the fast on Ramadan nights after being soaked by the Skunk’s putrid sewage. These are supposed to be the most festive nights of the year.

To remember the sound of the grenades reverberating long after I had left the area.

To remember how I was not afraid when I saw a bloodthirsty pack of Kahanists approaching. Instead, I was shocked by how many and how young they all were.

To remember how I was afraid later that night when a few young Jewish boys asked us: “Are you leftists?”

To remember the ultra-Orthodox Jews who stood on the other side of the Jerusalem Light Rail, near the Jewish side of the Musrara neighbourhood, and looked at the explosions from the stun grenades being fired in Damascus Gate with excitement in their eyes.

To remember the young man with the yarmulke arguing with a Palestinian on the other side of a police barricade before telling him: “We will slaughter you all, you know we will kill you one by one.”

To remember the fireworks that lit up the sky as the Kahanists sang “Do not fear, Israel, do not fear.”

To remember the left-wing activists who walked around in very small groups, sometimes in pairs.

To remember that as I left home, my daughter asked me, “If you see them hitting someone, what will you be able to do?” and I had no idea how to respond.

## FRANCE

### May Day Manifesto

#### of the Democratic Independent Workers Party (POID)

Published in Issue no.287 (28 April 2021) of *La Tribune des Travailleurs* [Workers’ Tribune], the weekly newspaper of the French POID

Comrades,

On May Day 2021, we salute the comrades around the world who are commemorating the sacrifice of the workers in Haymarket Square, Chicago on 1 May 1886.

We salute you, comrades from India and South Africa, from Brazil and Germany, from Turkey, Algeria, China and all over the world.

We salute you, our brothers and sisters who for the last 15 months have been hit not only by the Covid-19 virus but also (and above all) by governments whose

profit-driven policies are turning the health crisis into devastation that is sacrificing millions of lives.

We salute you, our comrades, who in recent months, in the face of the pandemic and in spite of it, have taken to the streets in your millions, from Bombay to Algiers and from Beirut to Minneapolis.

We salute you who have been fighting tirelessly for social justice.

On May Day, the international day of working-class struggle, we strongly affirm that workers all over the world form one single class, women and men,

whatever their nationality, skin colour, culture or religious belief, all of them hit by a ruthless capitalist regime, but all of them united in a class-against-class struggle for democracy and rights, for majority rule.

France is currently experiencing a wave of strikes affecting hundreds of companies.

One of these is SAM in Viviez (Aveyron *département*), whose workers blockaded the factory last week to oppose the dismantling imposed by the company it works for: Renault. On a placard held up on the picket line, the words: "*The State, Renault's puppet*". This is a reality that concerns the entire working population: since Renault was privatised, the shareholders have been dictating their demands to the State. In the last few months, Renault has received 5 billion euros of public money, supposedly in the name of recovery. And Renault is using those billions to lay off thousands of workers, and even tens of thousands if you count subcontractor companies.

Yes, the state is Renault's puppet. The State is the puppet of all the multinationals to which it offers enormous sums of money to allow them to freely deregulate, fire workers and slash wages.

On 19 March 2020, Macron had the National Assembly unanimously endorse the 343-billion-euro vote for the bosses (which has since become 560 billion euros). The result? Fourteen months later, France (like everywhere else in the world) lacks the millions of vaccine doses needed to protect the population; and the thousands of intensive care beds to provide treatment; and the resources to enable schools to continue to teach in safe conditions; and teachers and carers; and public services... Meanwhile, hundreds of billions go to the bosses!

France lacks millions of jobs, lacks a law banning lay-offs and job-cuts...and yet hundreds of billions go to the bosses.

So yes: under the Fifth Republic, the State is a puppet of the hedge funds and multinationals...

At the highest level of the State, the President of the Republic is also a puppet of the multinationals. And what about the ministers who carry out his orders? And what about Parliament, reduced to the role of rubber-stamping?

In France, as in the rest of the world, the workers want democracy and justice.

The wave of strikes that is sweeping the country – for wages and jobs, against job insecurity and the undermining of working conditions – is the bearer of these demands.

Democracy means majority rule. But on the contrary, this so-called Republic – the fifth to bear the name – imposes rule by the minority of profiteers, exploiters and speculators.

This is true no matter who the President is. The workers have learned this through experience, since for more than 60 years, Presidents of both the right and the "left" have succeeded one another as the head of the Fifth Republic, and all of whom – whatever their political label – have acted as the capitalists' puppets. If democracy means majority rule, then democracy demands breaking with this system.

Democracy demands the abolition of the office of the President of the Republic, a king without a crown. It demands the dismantling of the institutions of the Fifth Republic and breaking out of the straitjacket of the European Union. Democracy demands a sovereign Constituent Assembly, an assembly elected by proportional representation, comprising delegates of the people who are mandated, overseen and subject to recall by the people, and who are not paid more than a skilled worker.

Let us counter the capitalist Republic – a monarchy without a crown in the hands of the banks and a puppet of the multinationals – with the Republic of the majority.

A supporter of socialism, the POID fights for the workers' republic, which will not hesitate to:

- Establish a nationalised pharmaceutical industry for the production of vaccines in quantities that will allow the vaccination of all those who wish to be vaccinated;
- Re-establish the monopolies of the renationalised public services;
- Ban lay-offs and job-cuts;
- Re-establish the right to organise and to demonstrate;
- Guarantee to all young people the real right to study, on equal terms, and access to a real qualification, a real job, a real wage;
- Repeal the counter-reforms of the unemployment insurance system and public pension schemes;
- Confiscate and requisition the 560 billion euros shamelessly handed out to the capitalists, and allocate them to education, healthcare and public services.

This is the programme that the Democratic Independent Workers' Party (POID) is advocating on May Day 2021. This is the content it gives to the campaign undertaken together with workers and activists of all political tendencies to say "*Out with Macron and his policies, the sooner the better!*". These are the slogans on which the POID invites workers, activists and young people to gather on 5 June in Paris. This is the struggle for which the POID calls on you to join its ranks!

**POID National Bureau**

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