

the socialist

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#BlackLivesMatter RACIST MURDER OF GEORGE FLOYD

THE WHOLE SYSTEM IS GUILTY

"You can't have capitalism, without racism" – **Malcolm X**

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by Lucy Marron

Covid-19 lays bare injustices of global capitalism

THE CORONAVIRUS crisis has highlighted class division worldwide, from heightened police repression, to attacks on public services. Here are some examples:

Lebanon: Uprising against austerity

Since October of last year, protests have gripped Lebanon, with a third of the country's population protesting against austerity. Resulting in the Prime Minister's resignation, protests demanding social security have been ongoing. Despite this, according to 2020 predictions, poverty in Lebanon was expected to increase to 50%. It's no surprise that a new wave of protests started in the wake of coronavirus lockdown, which has aggravated these conditions. Protests began in late April, one protester saying, "Our protest is not sectarian, it is a class struggle opposing the crushing of Lebanese people by the weight

of poverty, to the banking system which is responsible for the deterioration of the economic situation."

Chile: Movement against inequality

Last year, similar waves of protest exploded across Chile, resulting in a broad movement against neoliberalism. During lockdown, police and protestors have clashed in Santiago over food shortages. Santiago, despite being one of the most prosperous cities in Chile, has huge levels of inequality. Those protesting clashed with the police, the latter spraying tear gas and throwing water cannons to disperse the crowds. The inequality that grips Chile will likely cause a rise in protest when lockdown is eased.

Poland: Postal workers' action

Postal workers in Poland have been taking action. Despite the coronavirus

pandemic, the government was planning to go ahead with an election earlier this month. Despite mass opposition, they were planning to use the territorial army and postal workers to enforce postal voting. Postal workers reacted by setting up a strike committee, demanding not only the cancellation of the election, but a pay rise and the closure of post offices with full pay. The result: the government backed down and postponed the election to June.

India: Migrant workers forced out of cities

Over 120 million workers in India have lost their jobs during this pandemic. A huge number of these are made up of internal migrant workers from rural areas, working in the informal sector. With many migrant workers unable to pay rent as well as being unable to access or afford transport, millions began their journey home on foot, forced to walk hundreds of kilometres. Despite these workers being the backbone of India's economy, they've been left to fend for themselves. Dozens have already died of hunger and exhaustion on foot back home.

Rohingya refugees left to die

Hundreds of Rohingya refugees are stranded in trawlers in the Bay of Bengal in Bangladesh, without permission to enter the country. After the genocide of the Muslim Rohingya people in Myanmar, millions have fled to Bangladesh. Many aboard are experiencing starvation and disease. In late April, one boat was rescued, but reportedly hundreds had died



Belgian health workers turn their back on the Prime Minister in protest

before and were thrown overboard. Bangladesh is home to 5 billionaires and at least 25,000 millionaires. It's clear there is the wealth to provide food, shelter, and medicine to all Rohingya refugees.

Belgian health workers resist attacks

The Belgian government has used the coronavirus crisis to attack workers' conditions. The federal minority government attempted to give itself special powers, one decree aimed at requisitioning health care personnel, under

threat of fines and prison sentences, the second at delegating nursing to non-qualified workers. On 16 May, workers at one hospital held a protest during the Prime Minister's visit, turning their backs as she arrived to show their disgust. The decrees were suspended after clear opposition from health workers nationwide.



Protesters in Lebanon demanding sweeping systemic change

Debenhams: workers wage battle to stop asset robbery

By Ruth Coppinger

SINCE BEING laid off in April, Debenhams workers have waged a David & Goliath battle to save their jobs or win a redundancy package befitting their years of service.

Pitted against a big multinational chain, the Irish workers deserve massive credit for remaining a thorn in the side of this company, who coldly used a pandemic to dump up to 2,000 workers.

Asset stripping

In a ballot, a resounding 97% voted



in favour of industrial action to prevent valuable stock and assets being removed from stores by UK-based parent company, Debenhams Retail Limited (DRL). In a repeat of what happened at Clerys in 2015, when the owners of Clerys were able to shift everything profitable into a separate company, DRL claimed ownership of all assets — stock, leases and online trade — leaving the Irish subsidiary saddled with the debts. This is despite the fact that online profits previously accrued to the Irish business.

This is a feature of capitalism in recent years, taking more and more of what's called the social wage, undermining or blatantly raiding pension schemes and often consigning workers to poverty in old age. It ties in with the accumulation of wealth more and more to the top of society and less and less at the bottom.

The role of liquidators

In the Debenhams struggle, we are seeing laid bare that the laws and machinery of the state are set up in

the interests of big business, not workers. Everything from the liquidation hearing in the court where they had no voice, to the perfunctory way the liquidators ticked boxes and sanctioned the liquidation

And the 30 day 'consultation' period proved useless to the workers. Legitimate questions from their union Mandate weren't adequately answered. Myself, Mick Barry TD and a Debenhams worker held a meeting with the liquidator. The ownership of stock is still being contested, but the liquidation was still allowed to go ahead with no extension.

Another lesson has been how little interest there is on the part of authorities to ascertain the real financial situation of companies closing down. Workers' demand for the books to be opened up is never granted.

One Debenhams worker did huge research and continually mailed the liquidators, challenging figures put out by Debenhams. She was able to piece together her own accounts,

which, amongst other things, showed the situation wasn't as dire as depicted:

Open the books

Debenhams Ireland says business was not viable, but the annual turnover for the years 2016-2018 was actually higher than 2011-2015. There were 1,803 employees in 2010 and only 1373 in 2018, so pension contributions and payroll costs would have been considerably less.

The company's most recent audited accounts for the financial year ending 1/9/18 show a pre tax loss of €20.6 million — but this included exceptional items/costs of €18.8 million, which means the actual loss was €1.8 million.

Seventeen percent of sales were online in 2018, equating to €28.7 million. The High Court was told on two occasions that the online business was owned by the Irish company. Yet the online business has since been swiped by the UK parent company. The lucrative online business is worth even more now with no Debenhams stores in Ireland.

Jobs can be saved

The workers have battled to bring out these figures and to show that with rent reduction and other measures, debts could be overcome — but neither the liquidator or anyone in government has shown an interest.

The resilience of workers in the face of obstacles is really remarkable. In Cork, workers put on a flash picket when they discovered cash was being removed from the Patrick Street store. Since then, they and other stores, have had a workers' watch on loading bay areas. Any attempts to move stock in these stores will result in a picket.

In the view of the Socialist Party, the state should step in to take over Debenhams — and other sectors where jobs are threatened. Run under public, democratic control, with a business plan and with workers at the heart of running the company, stores could reopen and the fruits of online trade would also be used to invest. The state is currently propping up private industry massively. Why should a retail company not be publicly owned?

Tories' callous class interests shine through

By Ann Orr

IN MARCH 2020, the UK government announced a £123 billion package in response to the crisis sparked by Covid-19. Measures included a mortgage holiday and the state covering 80% of furloughed workers' wages. Announcing some of these measures, Chancellor Rishi Sunak claimed "this is no time for ideology". What he meant was that this is no time for the Tory and capitalist ideology which idealises the 'free market' and believes that, left to its own devices, it will find innovative and low-cost solutions to all problems. Nothing could be further from the truth, as Covid-19 has so glaringly exposed.

Death toll skyrockets

In the initial weeks of Covid-19 restrictions, many believed the government was doing all it could to deal with this crisis and that we were "all in this together". Both views defy reality. Johnson's government ignored warnings and delayed action, leading to massive PPE shortages. Recent figures suggest 200 health and social care workers have died after contracting Covid-19. The Tories and previous governments



The Tories and previous governments have overseen decades of underfunding of the NHS

have overseen decades of underfunding of the NHS and of care being privatised. At the time of writing, the UK has the highest official death rate in absolute terms across Europe. World-wide it is surpassed only by the USA, according to the Financial Times. Even the Tories cannot spin this as a success!

In recent weeks, the focus has shifted to the economic fallout. Different institutions have made vary-

ing predictions, ranging from expected contractions between 6.5% and 12.8%. The Bank of England has stated GDP could fall 14% in 2020. This would amount to the deepest annual drop since 1706. While we cannot say exactly how deep the unfolding recession will be, it is clear the last recession will appear mild in comparison. It is also clear that the Tories will expect ordinary people to pay the price for this. A two-year

public sector pay freeze is already being talked about, exposing the hollow nature of the Tories' support for health staff and other key workers.

Stormont serves big business

Stormont politicians, although not following the Tories directly, are also clearly pushing for a return to economic activity in the name of profit, despite the risk to public health which could lead to a second wave of

infection. Throughout this crisis, they have not ensured companies protect their staff. In Northern Ireland, there has also been talk of increasing local council tax rates by up to 30%.

Scandal sums up Tory hypocrisy

Any remaining belief that "we are all in this together" evaporated with the Dominic Cummings scandal. While countless people made huge personal sacrifices, did not see dying relatives or accompany their children to hospital treatments, Cummings broke the rules he himself helped shape. For many, this was the final straw and Johnson's approval ratings have plummeted since. The Tory party representing the interest of the elite and doing so with such arrogance and sense of entitlement is nothing new. With Starmer now the leader of the Labour Party, there is no clear alternative being given. Workers and young people must find other ways of organising to resist attempts to make us pay for this crisis. Organising in workplaces is vital to this, as is building socialist forces to strengthen the struggle, not only against the Tories, but also to fight for a future in which we can democratically control society's resources in order to plan for human needs, not the profits of the super-rich.

Criminal indifference to the elderly COVID-19 & care homes

By Cerys Falvey

THE DEVASTATION caused by Covid-19 has been felt across communities and the care sector, but perhaps nowhere quite so deeply as in care homes for the elderly. Recent data collated in five different European countries suggests that the mortality rate of those infected in care homes is as high as 42-57%. The effects of underfunding and privatisation are being laid bare.

In Belgium, 90% of care homes have confirmed positive cases and 42% of Covid-related deaths in the country have been in care homes. In France, it's 45%; 53% in Italy; 54% in Ireland and, in Spain, it's 57%. These numbers are truly terrifying for anyone living in, or with loved ones living in care homes and brings social care back into the spotlight.

Worst death toll in Europe

In Britain, the Conservatives tried to cover this up and initially didn't in-

clude deaths in care homes as part of their official data. Once they were forced to, it was revealed that Britain had the worst death toll in Europe, and the second highest in the world. Statistics from Northern Ireland show a 45% death rate of those infected in care homes. Almost half of the Covid-linked deaths recorded by the statistics agency, NISRA, occurred in care homes.

One of the main factors threatening the lives of care home residents is the serious struggle to access PPE and to keep staffing levels safe. The care sector was left with next to no advice or support and had to rely heavily on donations from others, including staff, to obtain enough face masks and PPE. Clearly, universal testing of all care home residents and workers should have been carried out on account of the high death rate amongst the elderly and vulnerable, which would have helped massively in being able to isolate cases and protect other residents and the staff caring for them.

These deaths were avoidable and could have been prevented with adequate testing and PPE.

Another major issue threatening care homes' ability to cope with the virus is the ten years of cuts to our social services. The Department of Health has pledged £6.5 million to assist the care sector, but according to one care worker speaking to the BBC, it is just a "drop in the ocean" in terms of what is actually necessary to secure the safe continuing of care in the community.

Run for profit

The vast majority of care homes in Northern Ireland are run privately and inevitably place profit over residents' needs, which has led to a number of crises in recent years. Clifton Nursing Home in north Belfast was threatened with closure because it handled a Covid-19 outbreak so badly. But now it looks likely to be taken over by another private company!

This pandemic has laid bare the cri-



Almost half of Covid-linked deaths recorded by NISRA, occurred in care homes

sis of capitalism and has raised many important questions, one of the most important being how we will organise social care once this pandemic is over. Firstly, all private care homes should be immediately brought into public ownership, with workers paid a living wage, all cuts reversed and extra fund-

ing provided to bring care homes back up to decent standards. We need mass testing for Covid-19, including all care home residents and staff. But we also need to build a society where the care sector is not an afterthought but an indicator of how successful our society is.

South:

Green Party: Once again lured by trappings of power

By Colm McCarthy

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST Greta Thunberg said recently that: "There is a lot of talk about returning to 'normal' after the COVID-19 outbreak. But normal was a crisis." Taking little heed of this important warning, the Green Party went into negotiations with Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael and at the time of writing are on the verge of a deal to form a government for the next five years.

The welcome and significant increase in awareness of the seriousness of the climate crisis has seen an increase in people looking to the Green Party, a force that had been seriously damaged from its period in the 2007-11 government, but recovered in elections over the last year. The question now is are the Greens doomed to squander that recovery by repeating past mistakes?

A pro-capitalist party

That the Greens intended to take this approach had been well signaled in advance. At last year's Green Party conference, arguing against a motion that would have ruled out coalition with Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael,



After 2008 the Green Party served as a rubber stamp for the bailout of bondholders and the banking system and every austerity measure

Eamon Ryan spoke of the need for "inclusive politics." By this he meant politics that aligns and coddles the powerful and the capitalist class and its representatives, in the hope of garnering concessions, rather than ending their rule. It is consistent with the party's long held self-description "as neither left nor right".

Substantial divisions have opened up within the party on the issue over whether-or-not to go into coalition with Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

Faced with an election result that saw the traditional two largest parties reduced to their lowest ever levels of combined support and for the first time ever a minority in the Dail,

the idea of putting not only one, but both parties back in jarred with the message of the election.

The Greens' record in office

When the Greens went into coalition with Fianna Fáil in 2007, TD, now MEP, Ciaran Cuffe described this arrangement as a deal with the devil. It worked out about as well as most fables based around undertakings with demons. With the Great Recession of 2008 and its aftermath, the Green Party served as a rubber stamp for the bailout of bondholders and the banking system and every austerity measure, from cutting the blind pension to the removal of cervical cancer screening for young girls. They failed to gain any substantial environmental measures.

They betrayed the community led protests in Rosspoint, Co. Mayo against Shell's Corrib gas pipeline that they had supported in opposition. Farcically, Eamon Ryan, as minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources undertook a scheme that incentivised the purchase of Diesel engine cars, a major climate and public health risk after taking the Volkswagen Deiselgate figures at face value.

As a result, the Green Party lost all six of its seats in the 2011 general

election and were forced into political wilderness.

Will Greens deliver?

The collapse in economic activity recently due to Covid-19 means that a greater drop in emissions are likely to occur this year than otherwise would. Any ignoring of it in the coming years will come as a government is embedded. The party can come under considerable pressure from the capitalist establishment to stay in government. There is every chance that if the Greens have at that stage lost support, feel trapped in a prison of their own making, they will hang on for any morsel that may fall from the table to justify avoiding the wrath of the public.

Whatever the Green Party ultimately does, there will be a need to build a working-class movement to defend our planet and to resist the attacks on living standards that are coming down the road. Such a movement must aim to break with capitalism, a system that incentivises the rapacious drive for profits over the long-term survival of the planet. It must unite workers and young people in a struggle for a democratic socialist society that fights for society's wealth to be publicly owned and democratically controlled by the majority.

North: Working class solidarity in a time of crisis

By Kevin Henry

"THESE ARE the times that try men's souls. You will no doubt hear a great number of stories respecting the situation of this country. Its present unfortunate state is entirely owing to treachery; the rich always betray the poor."

These were the words of Henry Joy McCracken, leader of the United Irishmen, after the failed rebellion which sought to unite "Protestant, Catholic and dissenter." Today, we again live in trying times which demonstrate that "the rich always betray the poor."

Profit comes first

That is seen in countless ways, from the lack of PPE at work to the drive to end the lockdown, putting profits ahead of workers' health. The lockdown has also shone a light on the real power that working-class people have, from the walkouts at food processing factories to the essential role played by many workers in our society who, only months ago, were dubbed 'unskilled'.

The crisis has also revealed the role of the main parties at Stormont, who are happy to do nothing in the face of flagrant health and safety violations, or to allow children and parents to

face the pressure of 'transfer tests' - archaic exams which discriminate against those from working-class background - in the autumn despite the crisis. While they have claimed to 'rise above politics', the sectarian fault lines between the main parties have been exposed at times, with their instincts to follow the lead of either the capitalist establishment in London or Dublin.

However, the crisis has also demonstrated the willingness of ordinary people to step forward and offer solidarity. We see that in countless ways. In every working-class community, people en masse are standing out to clap in solidarity with frontline workers who are Protestant, Catholic and neither. Importantly, workers have also stood united together in the workplace against their bosses.

Different types of murals

Symbolically, we have seen NHS and banners appear in both Protestant and Catholic communities, sometimes in place of paramilitary murals that have historically been used to mark territory. In Portadown, wood gathered for the annual Twelfth bonfire has been turned into a two-storey tribute to the NHS. For years, the state has sought in

a clumsy manner to replace some of the most blatantly sectarian murals, with hardly any lasting success. Here, we have a development organically linked to working-class communities that gives a glimpse of what is possible, and shows that it is common struggle which can break down sectarianism.

Sectarianism won't be challenged by abstract calls for unity. The common misery faced by working-class people will produce the basis for common struggle of workers, which ultimately can break down division. Nationalist and Unionist parties who base themselves on sectarian division cannot and will not overcome it. Neither will parties like Alliance, who say they are non-sectarian but support right-wing, pro-capitalist policies which create the social conditions in which sectarianism breeds.

New working class party

This crisis has demonstrated the potential for working-class people to come together around our common interests, as has happened many times in the past. But we also need to build a mass, anti-sectarian political force rooted in the organic unity of the working class, in workplaces and in struggle.



Murals supporting the NHS in both Catholic and Protestant areas have sprung up in place of some paramilitary murals

Such a force cannot ignore or wish away the issues which divide our communities, but can demonstrate how genuine solutions can only be found when workers come together in a

spirit of solidarity and mutual respect. Crucially, the means fighting for a socialist future, free from poverty, oppression and coercion.

South: Meat industry

Criminal neglect of workers' health & safety

By Mick Barry TD

COVID-19 ripped through meat plants on the island of Ireland in the month of May. By the middle of May, 860 meat workers had tested positive for the virus in the Republic of Ireland alone. Meat factories have proved to be hotspots for the virus across the world but the situation here has been particularly acute.

The rate of infection per meat plant is eight times higher than in the USA, which has come in for international criticism on the issue. In Northern Ireland, 58-year-old East Timorese meat worker Luciana Viviana da Silva died from Covid-19 on 3 May. The meat industry workforce is low-paid and overwhelmingly comprised of immigrants. The factories tend to be run like dictatorships and the workers are treated appallingly.

Disgraceful treatment of workers

This was brought home in a couple of riveting interviews on RTÉ Radio One's Today show on 15 May, where immigrant meat factory workers told of workmates being sent home with temperatures but instructed to report back to work the following day. The workers said that PPE had only been distributed in their workplaces very recently. Workers spoke with voiceovers for fear of losing jobs and accommodation. Reporter Brian O'Connell told of workers "standing



The rate of infection per meat plant in Ireland is eight times higher than in the USA

shoulder to shoulder, on top of each other."

Workers have also been put at risk by their low pay (often barely above minimum wage) and by high rents. These have combined to force many workers to share accommodation in overcrowded conditions which has exacerbated the spread of the virus.

Workers in Northern Ireland have pushed back against these conditions in dramatic fashion. In Linden Foods, Moy Park, ABP and the Foyle Food Group, workers have walked

off the job to successfully demand improved health and safety measures.

Shocking inaction

Workers' action contrasts sharply with the shocking inaction of the state on these issues. In the Republic, not a single Health & Safety Authority inspector had set foot in a meat plant until such time as the virus had run amok in the industry for the best part of a month. Taoiseach Leo Varadkar told me in

the Dáil that this had nothing to do with Fine Gael's fear of treading on the toes of the meat bosses — but failed to give any alternative explanation for the complete lack of action.

To properly guarantee workers' health, safety and lives, workers need to be in charge of health and safety in these workplaces. Workers need to organise — and receive backing from trade unions — to win workers' control over these issues. Workers and the unions must insist

that meat factories with Covid-19 clusters be closed down until such time as workers and their families are tested. Workers must receive full pay if and when plants are temporarily shut.

Ending the rule of profit

Nationalisation of the meat factories would take ownership of the industry out of the hands of the profiteers who have exploited workers so ruthlessly and compromised the health of tens of thousands. Workers' control in such a scenario would switch from being a constant day-to-day battle with the meat bosses to a relaxed and rational way of running a public enterprise.

Nationalisation would also allow for a move away from intense meat production on a just and phased basis, which would mean defending the jobs of those workers working in this industry. A move away from meat production is necessary from the point of view of reducing carbon emissions and protecting the climate. There needs to be an end to the cruelty faced by animals in this industry. A phased transition could allow for profits to be used to provide alternative training and jobs.

Production for social need (socialism) rather than production for private profit (capitalism) is more than just a nice idea — it is an urgent necessity. If you want proof of that you will find few better examples than what has happened in this industry during the Covid-19 crisis.

North: Meat workers take action to defend public health

By Daniel Waldron

"IF THE disease was in the animals, they'd have closed the place. But for workers, the factories can do what they want." — Worker in an Irish meat factory, speaking to *The Guardian*

Even at the best of times, working in meat processing can be tough. It is physically demanding, repetitive and, for many, unpleasant by nature. It is also an industry where low pay is the norm, with migrant workers making up much of the workforce. However, meat workers are now facing a new and serious threat in the form of Covid-19.

Temperature testing has been implemented widely across the sector in Ireland. However, given that many people carrying the virus are asymptomatic, this is ineffective unless coupled with other measures. Workers in many factories report that, at least initially, PPE and distancing measures were inadequate at best.

Walkouts

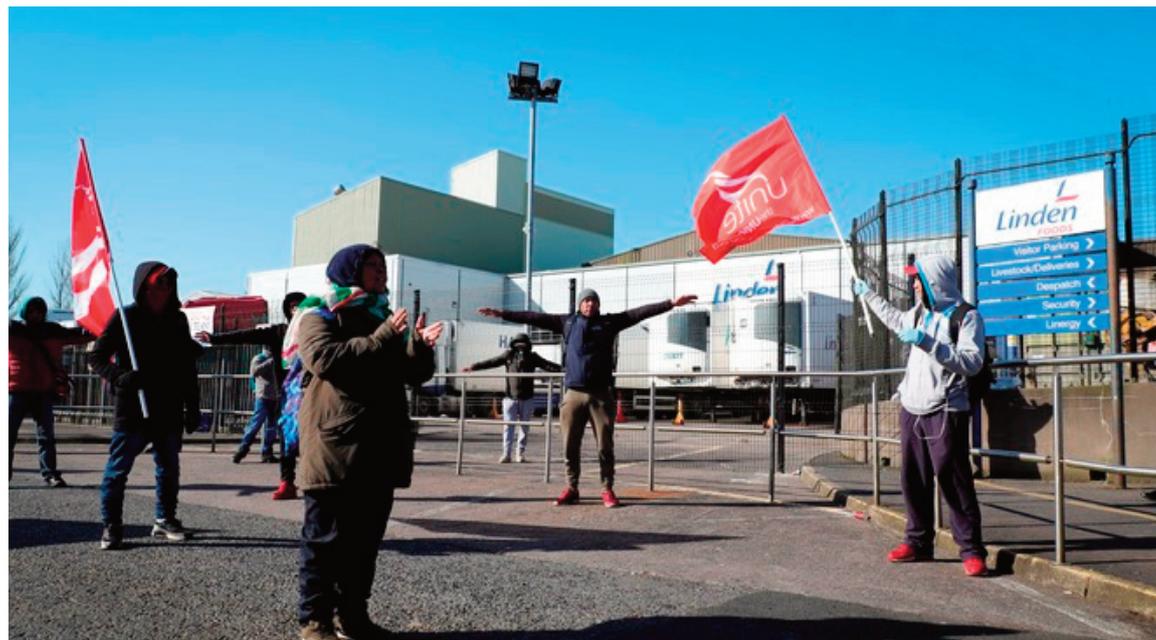
In late March, around 100 workers at Moy Park — the largest private sector employer in the North, which made pre-tax profits of £64.5 million

last year — in Portadown staged a walkout over lack of enforcement of safety measures. Similar protests by workers took place at ABP Meats in Lurgan and Linden Foods in Dunganon. These actions did win some improvements in conditions.

The latest walkout took place on Monday 11th May at the Foyle meat factory in Omagh, where a major cluster of infection had emerged, with around 40 staff affected. The company has since boasted of implementing a '100% testing policy' of its staff. However, workers with access to a vehicle are being asked to make a two-hour round trip to get tested. More importantly, production has continued uninterrupted, with reports of workers being pulled from the lines when their tests come back positive.

Fight for workers' control of health and safety

As across the economy, it is only action by workers which can ensure that public health is put before profit. Workers' ability to disrupt production — and therefore profit — through strikes and other forms of industrial action provides the most effective way of winning improvements in health and safety, as well as pay and other conditions. The small



Workers at Moy Park, Linden Foods & APB Meats have staged walkouts demanding appropriate health & safety measure at work

but important walkouts which have taken place so far are testament to this. Workers can use this power to win control over management of health and safety.

A weakness in the meat processing sector, like in many others, is the relatively low level of union mem-

bership and organisation. The Socialist Party encourages all workers to join a trade union to safeguard their rights at work, but also to become an activist in their workplace where possible. However, there is a responsibility on the trade union movement to make a particular ef-

fort to recruit and organise in the midst of this crisis. That requires demonstrating a fighting approach which can win victories, but also overcoming language difficulties and any other barriers to reaching immigrant workers, who are often among the most exploited.

The scale and rapidity of job losses across the private and semi state sector arising from the necessary restrictions on commercial activity is without precedent, writes Michael O'Brien.

EVEN COMPARED to the Great Recession of a decade ago what took several years to unfold in terms of a steep climb in unemployment levels has been surpassed in a few weeks in the case of Covid-19.

The mood music of governments both sides of the border is one of not going down the austerity road. Such alterations in language should not be mistaken for either a sign of fundamental strength in the Irish and global economies being in evidence before Covid-19 restrictions. Nor should it be taken as a sign of any kind of genuine reappraisal of the austerity approach on the part of the main capitalist parties in Ireland, North and South, and internationally.

Governments respond to crisis

Rather it is a reflection both of the depth of the crisis forcing governments and the state to employ and contemplate measures to save capitalism that in "normal" times would be seen to be at odds with neo-liberal doctrines. Furthermore there is a political calculation being made by governments the world over, and Ireland included, that the working class globally will simply not acquiesce to another round of full frontal austerity hence the emphasis on government borrowing over further cuts in living standards to pay for the crisis.

This is not to say that they won't ultimately go down the austerity route but they will do so with trepidation. 2019 was marked by protest movements all over the world fuelled by dissatisfaction with living standards and basic democratic rights. While such movements have receded in the midst of the pandemic the factors that drove people onto the streets have not dissipated and if anything have deepened.

Capitalism as an economic system characterised by private ownership of the economy, wage labour exploitation, production for profit and an absence of democratic and rational economic planning constantly relies on the state to promote and protect its interests while maintaining a fiction that the free market system is in essence independent of the state.

The repressive apparatus of the state, the education system, taxation policy, infrastructure and a host of other supports are primarily geared towards assisting profit maximisation.

The return of Keynesianism

However the economic shut down forced upon us by the coronavirus has doubly shattered the illusion that the

free market system can operate independently of the state. To avert a total collapse laissez faire norms must be set aside, and replaced with overt state intervention in the forms seen in Ireland and elsewhere including income supports for private sector workers, tax and rates deferrals, control of private hospital usage and a package of €6.5 billion in soft loan facilities for businesses in the South, and similar measures in the North underwritten by the Westminster government.

This suite of interventions and supports, mirrored to one degree or another in other countries and the promised direction of governments in the months and years ahead amounts to a revival of a form of Keynesian economic policy; that is, an effort to prop up capitalism through the crisis in a manner that leaves the relations of production i.e. private ownership, intact post Covid-19.

Leo Varadkar in the Dáil recently said he was not hung up on whether Aer Lingus, where job and pay cuts are being sought, was publicly or privately owned. That's a lie. There is an aversion on the part of capitalist governments to measures such as nationalisation of enterprises and sectors of the economy formerly in private hands. This is not just evidenced by the arrangement entered into with the private hospitals but also in the total

failure to come up with a workable childcare solution for frontline essential workers; where instead weeks were wasted with inducements to private providers who in the end, for insurance reasons, could not buy in.

Most of all in our elder care the outgoing Fine Gael government alongside Fianna Fáil, who were responsible for it being privatised in the first place, do not want to face up to the catastrophic failures of those services being run on a for profit basis.

Public ownership

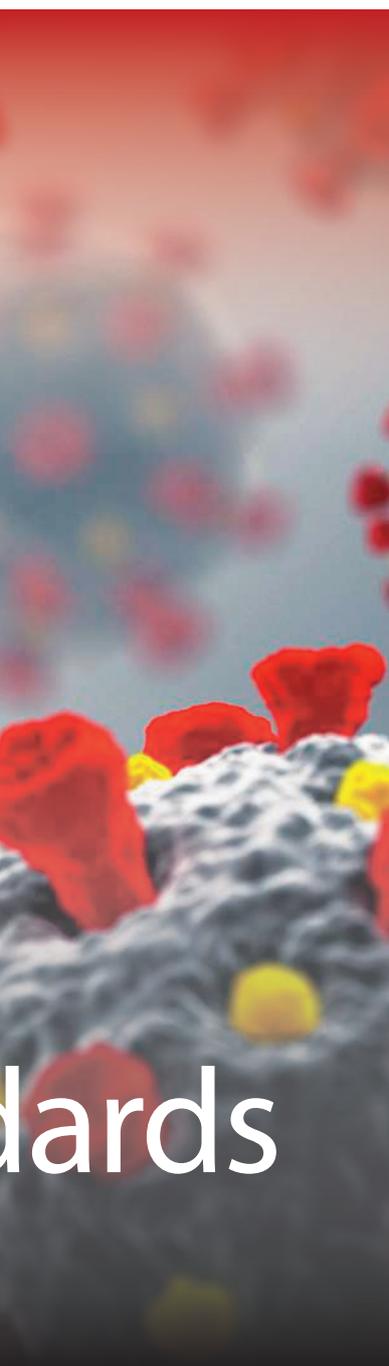
It is one thing to provide income support, tax deferrals and soft grants and loans to private businesses willing to accept them to keep themselves afloat through the crisis. But Debenhams, Ryanair, Aer Lingus and many other companies show that these measures are no guarantee against liquidations and significant downsizings which can only be avoided on the basis of public ownership.

Former Socialist Party and Solidarity TD Ruth Coppinger was ridiculed, by some, when a decade ago she correctly made the call for Dell's operation in Limerick to be nationalised to save thousands of jobs. Those doing the ridiculing were resting on the assumption that such a demand would appear outlandish to the average person. Whatever about people's recep-

Covid-19 crisis

Defend jobs, living standards & public health





workers in sectors such as healthcare, public transport, food retail, refuse collection, among others, who have had to keep working through the crisis putting their health and lives on the line.

Here and elsewhere, for example in construction, postal delivery, manufacturing and hospitality, workers have often had to take the initiative themselves to agitate for PPE, safe systems of work and closures of non-essential enterprises where bosses were primarily concerned about the bottom line.

Workers must decide

From a health and safety aspect alone workers, via workplace trade union structures, need to be empowered in all workplaces to determine when to return to work and how the work be organised to eliminate the risk of the virus spreading. This is all the more important now as billionaires are loudly calling for a rapid unwinding of restrictions in the interests of their profit making.

The overarching demand for workers in the course of the unwinding of the Covid-19 restrictions is that there should be no going back until workers feel that it is safe to do so. The virus is a threat to human biology, but capitalism itself has further exposed itself to be a sick system that does not deserve the type of “life support” that governments want to give it – it has to go.

Standards

We demand:

- **State investment for the creation of thousands of jobs including public works; social infrastructure like public childcare and eldercare; public home building; and retrofitting and renewable energy.**

- **For the trade union movement to organise the unemployed in the fight for a public jobs programme and fight for mandatory trade union recognition and the scrapping of anti-trade union laws.**

- **Take job shedding companies into public ownership, with compensation only on the basis of proven need, under democratic workers' control and management.**

- **For trade union and workplace committees to determine how a return to work is organised including testing for all workers before they return.**

- **Maintain the ban on evictions, for real rent controls in the South.**

- **For one tier public health care system that is free at the point of use funded by taxing the wealth of the super-rich and big business.**

- **Capitalism must go! Take the key sectors of the economy into democratic public ownership, democratically plan the economy to meet the needs of the majority not the profits of the billionaires and big business.**

We're not all in this together

Class inequality & Covid-19



The Covid-19 pandemic disproportionately affects working-class people and those from ethnic minority backgrounds

By Dean O'Donnell

WHILE RESPONSES to the COVID-19 pandemic have varied from country to country, one common thread to all is the near uniform refrain from governments, the mainstream media and the super-rich: 'we are all in this together'.

Yet as the figures for infections and deaths continue to climb, the evidence mounts as to the disproportionate and devastating impact the virus is having on those that were already suffering the worst effects of a deeply unequal and racist system.

An indiscriminate pandemic?

While the virus can infect anyone, how it spreads is far from indiscriminate. Recent figures published by the UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS) showed that people in the poorest parts of England and Wales were dying at over double the rate of those in the wealthiest. The ONS statistics also pointed to a higher mortality rate amongst people of colour.

In the US the trend is very much the same: 33% of those hospitalised with the virus are African American, despite amounting to only 13% of the population. In Chicago, black people make-up 29% of the city's inhabitants, but shockingly account for 70% of the city's COVID-19 deaths.

Conditions of the working class

How can we explain such stark disparities? For one, the dire housing crisis that has been a feature of many cities over the last number of years has seen overcrowding become the norm in many working-class communities.

Another massive factor is working conditions. While many have shifted to working at home, these are ultimately a minority and tend to be higher earners, particularly those in sectors like finance and insurance. In contrast those lower-paid workers who have not lost their jobs are more likely to be public facing or work in confined conditions.

Yet for many, even those considered at-risk, there is an economic compulsion to remain in jobs that pose a direct risk to their health. The incurred loss of income through giving up work coupled with lack of adequate social services would push many people and their families, already struggling, into an outright crisis.

"Shocking and inhuman"

To fully grasp the higher death rates we need to examine capitalism's grim health inequalities. Even in supposed 'normal' times impoverished and deprived communities experience a greater and wider degree of health issues and have a higher mortality rate than average.

The common underlying conditions that make COVID-19

more severe – diabetes, asthma, cardio-vascular disease, high blood pressure – are inordinately higher amongst poorer sections of society. Research in the US found that people with lower incomes tend to develop chronic illnesses between five and 15 years earlier in life. In the South, one report in 2014 found that the death rate from chronic disease had “a clear social class gradient, with the rate in the lowest occupational class demonstrated to be 100–200% higher than in the highest occupational class.”

The roots of health inequality

We should firmly reject the condescending and moralistic narrative that puts bad health down simply to poor individual choices around diet and exercise. These issues have more systemic roots. Decades of neoliberal privatisation of healthcare has had a grievous impact on the lives and well-being of working-class people.

In communities where decent education and employment are systematically closed off to its residents, alcohol and substance abuse are never far from sight – a form of self-medication for the anxiety and depression that comes with social marginalisation. Many such deprived areas are lacking in sport and leisure facilities and community programmes that promote social and physical well-being.

Finally, the type of work one does also has a profound impact on one's health. Studies have found higher mortality rates amongst “semi-skilled” and “unskilled” workers. Physically exhausting labour, unsafe conditions, long and irregular shifts that limit one's ability to prepare healthy food and plan exercise, as well as the stress and anxiety that comes with precarious and badly-paid employment have an array of negative effects on one's health.

Working-class struggle

The list could go on as to the number of ways the system makes us sicker. Not only are the poorer sections of society more likely to contract the virus, but the underlying health inequalities that capitalism has fostered over the last number of decades means they also face the biggest complications and risk of death.

Nevertheless, these bitter and tragic experiences will leave an indelible imprint on the consciousness of working people and the oppressed. The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated the horrendous inequalities woven into the fabric of capitalism.

The words of James Connolly, uttered over 100 years ago, that “the day has passed for the patching up of the capitalist system is passed; it must go” is taking on a renewed relevance for a while generation and poses directly the need to build a united movement of the working class capable of breaking with a system that so clearly places profit over human lives.

George Floyd killing was racist state murder

By Harper Cleves

ON MONDAY, the 25 May, George Floyd was tragically murdered by a Minneapolis policeman. Police arrived in response to a call from a shopkeeper about someone attempting to use a counterfeit bill and arrested Floyd. Security cameras demonstrate that Floyd willingly went with the officers, despite claims of violent resistance. Witnesses recording the incident later show an officer kneeling on Floyd's neck for seven full minutes, despite on-lookers calling for him to stop and Floyd loudly proclaiming 'I can't breathe,' and 'I'm about to die.'

Many have made the connection with the 2014 death of Eric Garner, who similarly proclaimed 'I can't breathe' while being asphyxiated by an officer in the New York Police Department. When Floyd became unresponsive, the ambulance was called and he was pronounced dead at the hospital.

Solidarity protests

George Floyd's death sparked an immediate series of protests that began in the city of Minneapolis and spread across the country including Los Angeles, Louisville, Columbus, New York City, Memphis, Denver and



Protesters across the world have demanded an end to the systemic racism inherent to US Capitalism

Oakland. In New York City, over 70 protesters were arrested. In Louisville, Kentucky seven civilians have been shot in protests that addressed not only the murder of George Floyd but also Breonna Taylor; a 26 year old health care worker who was shot in her home by police in March.

These protests, which are now being characterised as 'riots' in order to discredit those working class people involved, are an expression of anger amongst black and working

class communities that has been building for years. In cities like Denver and Los Angeles protesters of all races formed human chains to block highways and streets. In Minneapolis, public transit has shut down as bus drivers refuse to assist police. Bus driver Adam Burch stated 'I refuse to transport my class and radical youth [for the police]' and that 'an injury of one is an injury to all.'

Systemic racism

The murder of George Floyd is just

one more string of high profile cases in which police officers have killed unarmed black people. Black people are three times more likely to be killed by a police officer than white people, despite the fact that they are 1.3 times more likely to be unarmed.

This inequality is also represented in the sorts of jobs that people of colour have in the United States. Black and Latinx people make up 32% of the general population in the United States, but account for 36% of the essential workforce with particu-

lar concentration in food and agriculture, transportation and delivery services, and industrial/residential services. This, combined with historical issues of housing segregation and the fact that the median income of white households is 13 times higher than that of the median income of black households.

Black people in the United States are 2.4 times as likely to die from Covid-19 than White people. Capitalism in the United States was founded on the economic and social system of slavery, where the most oppressed of society - the black enslaved as well as other wage workers - were able to be arbitrarily divided on the issue of race, thus stunting their ability to unite against their common oppressors.

System built on racist oppression

Malcolm X said you cannot have capitalism without racism. By the same logic, you cannot solve racism under capitalism. In order to tackle racist state violence, you must address the poverty conditions the majority of black people in the United States live under. In order to address the poverty conditions, you need to address a system that profits off of the unpaid labour of workers. These protests demonstrate the potential for solidarity amongst the working class and fighting back against a system that exploits us all.

How Big Pharma blocks our healthcare

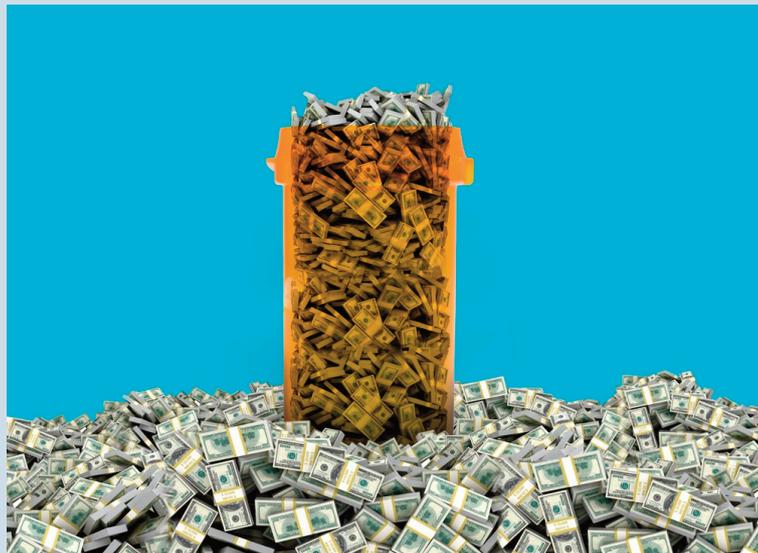
By Summer Conneely

WITHIN THE current Covid-19 crisis, there are important negotiations occurring among the world's leaders on how to develop and distribute any potential drugs or vaccines, with Donald Trump adopting an "America first" approach, and the EU largely supporting a voluntary patent pool.

A resolution in favour of a voluntary patent pool is expected to pass at an annual meeting of the World Health Assembly. This resolution, while seeming like a positive step, is simply a weak compromise which lays bare the fact that the strive for profit is at odds with the health and needs of the public.

What is a voluntary patent?

A voluntary patent pool allows companies, or any patent holder, to voluntarily license their patents to a pool, which is then made available to third parties, who pay royalties to the original holder. However, the exact nature of the proposed patent pool may vary. This is not the same as an open license, which essentially allows third parties to freely recreate the original work or product. The concept of an open li-



When publicly owned and operated by the workers, primacy would be given to human need not profit

cence for patents for drugs and vaccines in the context of Covid-19 has been opposed by countries with large pharmaceutical companies, such as the US and the UK, who insist on the need for higher prices of drugs in certain countries in order to offset the price of production.

This opposition is echoed by the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA), who claim "We have never needed innovation so much as now and this is probably the worst possible time to weaken intellectual property". While this may seem a particularly self-

ish and heartless statement, this is a fundamental view of capitalism. At the heart of the arguments in favour of capitalism is the idea that free market competition drives innovation in an efficient manner.

Total failure of private healthcare

This view, however, falls apart under the weight of scrutiny, with the United States' largely privatised healthcare system having, among many issues, the worst access to care among the world's wealthiest nations. It also falls apart under the weight of international crisis, with healthcare experts highlighting the need for a unified response to Covid-19, and the easing of patent laws for wider availability of drugs and vaccines.

We may, rightly, feel disgusted at these pharmaceutical companies, who are concerned with patent rights and profit in the midst of an international pandemic. However, we must recognise that this is simply a product of the system we live under. Capitalism is an unstable system and, as the Covid-19 crisis has shown, even many large companies are no more than a few weeks away from their end [6].

This instability leads companies to adopt the most predatory, greedy tactics to stay afloat, which always intensifies the suffering of working-class and poor people.

Human wellbeing, not profit

The development and operation of capitalism is simply in direct opposition to our wellbeing. This only leaves one resolution; the nationalisation of this industry, with its workforce at the heart of management. To take it out of the hands of the profiteers. When publicly owned and operated by the workers, primacy would be given to human need, and pharmaceutical companies will never have the need, pressure, or opportunity to operate in a manner which is opposed to the wellbeing of the masses.

This would mean pooling the resources of these companies, their research and development and the skills and capabilities of their workforces. If we wish for the most efficient, humanitarian way to discover and distribute a drug or vaccine for Covid-19, it is through a system which completely removes profit as a motive for the pharmaceutical industry.

Mental health: We can't tolerate the intolerable

by Eóin Dawson

OVER THE course of the pandemic, there has been speculation about what impact the lockdown and other measures have had on people's mental health. While some services have seen a reduction in referrals, with life's ordinary pressures eased for some, certain groups have been left vulnerable by the lockdown.

Emergency services in crisis

Phone counselling service Childline reports that it delivered 43% of last year's total counselling sessions in the first seven weeks of lockdown. Many of those who rely on face-to-face counselling to maintain their mental health have found that phone counselling just isn't the same and have presented to emergency services in crisis. There has also been a spike in eating disorder referrals.

The pandemic has exposed many things, including the eating patterns of many young people, particularly young women, striving towards unattainable beauty standards and seeking to internalise a sense of control over one aspect of their lives at least. Young people also find themselves cut off from key support in the form of friends.

Reduction in services

There has also been an increase in reports of primary-school-age children and their parents struggling to cope.

Children as young as four have presented to crisis mental health services with concerns that they are a significant risk to themselves or others. This is reflective of the needs of young children to have an enriched, engaging and social environment. It also demonstrates the impact that a reduction in mental service availability is having on families.

However, it's important to recognise that, pandemic or not, the state of people's mental health is often in large part a reflection of their material conditions. Working-class people are most vulnerable to these effects. Those with little or no outdoor space, limited access to transport to outdoor spaces, and limited income to struggling to cope with lockdown, mental ill health is too often a normal reaction to abnormal circumstances. Mental health practitioners are acutely aware of this and avoid invalidating people by trying to teach them to tolerate the intolerable. The reality is that to attempt to do so would in itself be harmful.

Massive investment needed

In addition to the economic debt, there will be a huge mental health debt from this crisis. The looming mental health crisis will inevitably be compounded by the unfolding economic crisis. The pandemic cannot be used as an excuse to withhold mental health services or deny access to living conditions that make many such services redundant. Mass investment must be made in mental health ser-



Protesters at Stormont demanding more investment into mental health services, the need for investment has never been more urgent. Important a role as they have to play, the limitations of mental health services must also be acknowledged. No amount of counselling or mindfulness will successfully train people to tolerate the intolerable. The most effective way to improve people's men-

tal health is to liberate them from poverty, hardship, oppression and marginalisation. This means liberation from the intolerable conditions which capitalism as a system requires, and replace it with a socialist system that enriches ordinary people's material and social environment.

Billionaires profit from a pandemic!



In America alone billionaires added \$282 billion to their combined net worth between March 18 and April 10

By Haritha Olaganathan

US billionaires saw their collective wealth increase by \$282 billion in the first twenty-three days of lockdown.

Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg is the biggest financial reaper, as shares in the social media company have surged by almost 60% over the past two months. Another profiteer includes CEO of Amazon Jeff Bezos, whose wealth has increased by \$25 billion since April 15th 2020. Bezos,

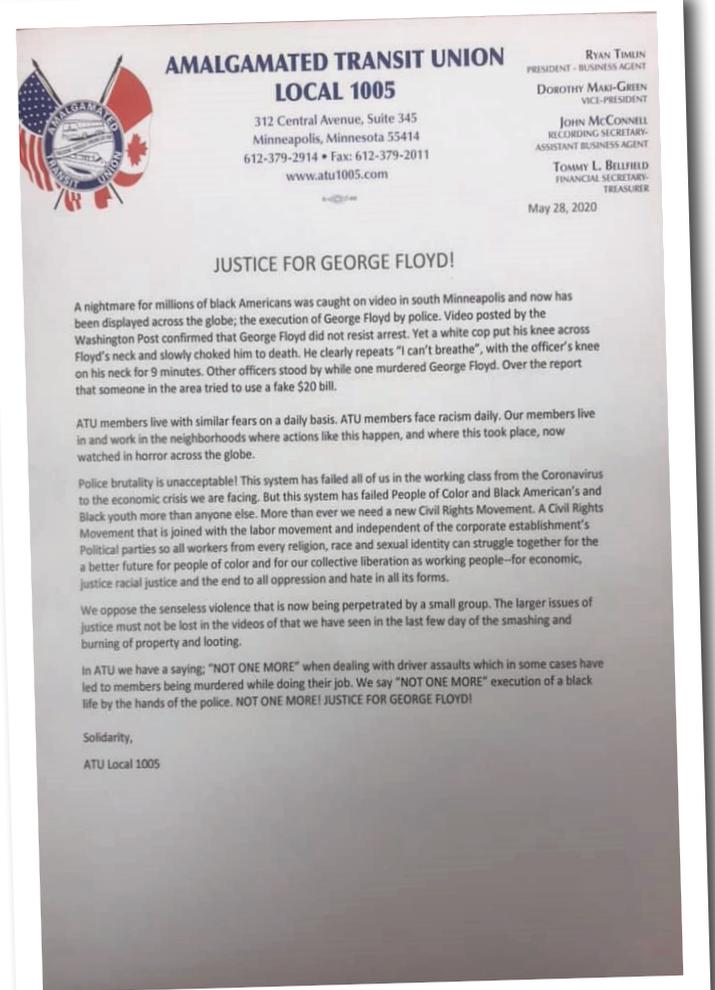
the richest man in the world, currently boasts a net worth of \$146.9 billion, and is expected to become the world's first trillionaire by 2026.

Whilst the super-rich manipulate this pandemic to churn out maximum profits, billions of workers are subject to inhuman levels of pay and gruelling working conditions. Covid-19 has provoked workers at Amazon to organise against their sickening treatment, notably walking out of warehouses to demand proper PPE and hazard pay as part of May Day protests.

US: Workers solidarity against racist state murders

Members of Socialist Alternative and organisers with the Amalgamated Transport Union in Minneapolis, organised to stop arrested protesters being put on buses in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd by a police officer.

See a letter of solidarity written by the union. (Pictured Right)



Members of Socialist Alternative and organisers with the Amalgamated Transport Union in Minneapolis, organised to stop protesters arrested being put on buses in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd by a police officer.

Students won #CancelTheLeavingCert!

By Myriam Poizat

OFFICIAL RECORDS will show that the cancellation of the 2020 Leaving Cert exams was only due to logistical problems related to organising state exams in a pandemic. Yet, another significant factor in this decision was the pressure that students in the main, but also parents and teachers behind them, put on the government — raising their voices about both the loss of school time and the inhumane decision of proceeding with state exams in a pandemic with heavy strains on the mental health of young people.

The student opposition, which was going to grow more, clearly made the government fearful of what the coming weeks might have brought. Not only did the Leaving class of 2020 speak out online and organise a poll of nearly 25,000 students which showed 79% of students in favour of the cancellation of the exams, but they also started organising actively — with 2,500 attending an online protest rally organised by Mick Barry TD, Socialist Students and

the Socialist Party, and 1,500 signing up to join a campaign initiated at the rally to increase mass pressure on the government. The next day, the Leaving Cert exams were cancelled, showing that when we fight and organise, we can win.

Say no to discrimination & unnecessary pressure on students!

Now, a “Plan B” or ‘calculated grading system’ (very close to the one put in place in the UK under the Tory government) has been put in place. This system, which will hugely discriminate against students from working-class communities and schools, has to be opposed. In a pandemic more than ever, students deserve a break and no unnecessary pressure should be put on them. That means no one should be issued with a fail this year, and a certificate to enter third level, apprenticeship or work should be handed to all!

We can organise and win an alternative to the Leaving Cert!

The pandemic has played a part in exacerbating inequalities embedded in the Leaving Cert system. Instead of

being asked to develop intelligence and skills that would be useful for entering active life, students are required to regurgitate a full 18 months’ curriculum in a series of memory tests, a system favouring a very small amount of students who, amongst many things, have quiet study spaces or can afford private education such as grinds. Not only does everyone not enter the exams on an equal foot, but a 2019 survey conducted by Studyclix reported that 75% of Leaving Cert students experienced “extreme stress” as a direct result of the exams.

The points system only exists because of a lack of investment in education, forcing students to enter a rat race for limited places in third level. Instead of refusing to accept the €15-plus billion Apple tax, the government should use it now and come up with a plan of emergency taxation on big corporations to massively invest in third level education and ensure this year’s fifth and sixth year students don’t have to be pitted against one another in the middle of a pandemic. Such an alternative could also point a way forward to how third



Solidarity TD and Socialist Party member Mick Barry gave this anger a clear expression in the Dáil (Southern Parliament), adding to the mounting pressure to cancel the exams.

level should operate from now on; with the abolition of the stressful and outdated Leaving Cert system once and for all.

The recent victories around the water charges, Repeal and the Leaving Cert show that, if organised behind clear demands, young people — with parents and teachers behind them — have the power to put pressure on the government and achieve real change for their own education.

The fight for the abolition of the Leaving Cert exams should be linked with the fights to end of all forms of inequalities and oppression, to separate Church and state; for real, democratic management of schools by teachers, parents and students; and for a socialist alternative — which would be a system for each according to their abilities, valuing curiosity and skills, not competition and productivity.

Defending workers' health and safety - Interview with Unite organiser Tom Fitzgerald

AS CONSTRUCTION workers start going back to work, once again the issue of health and safety at work takes centre stage. *The Socialist* spoke to Tom Fitzgerald, Regional Officer for Unite, about the issues workers encounter and how the trade union movement can fight for workers' rights.

How do you see health and safety being safeguarded in the sector? Considering how weak the policing of the HSA was before Covid-19, is that a task that can be left to the state?

“There are only 67 inspectors for the whole of the Irish economy, and 11 of these are assigned to the construction sector. Clearly, that is utterly inadequate. The government now say they are in talks to bring that number up to 120, but clearly that will still be far from enough. So, a first thing we are campaigning for is an immediate and significant increase in inspectors. But linked with that, there is an issue that inspectors currently have very limited powers.”

“At present, it is customary for HAS inspectors to notify construction companies in advance of an inspection



Unions can't be beholden to employers and effectively represent workers — it comes down to a simple question: ‘Which side are you on?’

— and for those inspections to be very superficial. And while they, in theory, have the power to close unsafe sites or parts of sites, they can only do so by going to the High Court, which is a long and drawn out process. Covid-19 more

than ever demands swift action. We are looking for sites to function safely. For that to happen, we need inspectors with the power to have on-the-spot inspections and to issue fines there and then. Only inspections with real powers

will help create a culture of compliance.”

“But in addition to that, there needs to be serious engagement between unions and employers in the sector to make sure there are elected workers’ representatives in each workplace who can represent workers’ concerns.”

What is the role of trade unions in fighting for this?

“Unfortunately, for the moment there is only lip service being paid to the concept of workers’ representatives, with the employer insisting that this is an appointed position, as opposed to a position elected by workers. This means workers have no real representation in ensuring their own health and safety. All unions in the sector should demand mandatory election of workers’ representatives on sites.”

“We are also fighting for a right to extended lay-off period for workers who need to be facilitated to protect the health of their family and/or themselves. For instance, this week we were contacted by a worker whose child has cystic fibrosis but who was forced back to work by his employer under threat of losing his job. The state has to intervene here, sit down with unions and employ-

ers to facilitate workers in this situation.”

“It is disappointing that the agreement trade unions nationally signed up to recently does not include any of the above demands.”

It seems that more battles are to come in the construction sector in the next period, as the impact of Covid-19 continues. How are the unions in the sector preparing for that?

“It certainly looks like we are heading into a period in which employers will look for pay cuts and cutbacks. Under the current agreement, a pay increase is due in September/October but it is possible that employers will now challenge that. The impact of Covid-19 will be felt throughout the sector — from hotel, to commercial/office, to house building. To fight for workers’ interests, we need unions that are independent from the employers — in how they recruit members and how they represent them. There are deep concerns that, at present in the construction sector, that is not always the case. Unions can’t be beholden to employers and effectively represent workers — it comes down to a simple question: ‘Which side are you on?’”

North: NHS workers save lives despite capitalist mismanagement

By Pat Lawlor

ACROSS BRITAIN and Northern Ireland to date, over 200 health workers' lives have been lost to Covid-19. However, Westminster and the Stormont Executive have manipulated the figures, so this will be grossly under-estimated. Grottesquely, the overwhelming majority of these deaths were preventable.

The Assembly followed the Tory plan, prioritising profit before people to protect the interests of big business and capitalism. Sinn Féin and the DUP disgracefully used the pandemic as an opportunity to pursue their own sectarian agendas, throwing the Executive into paralysis. This can only be described as criminally negligent in the extreme.

Incoherent response

The incoherent Assembly response was evident from the beginning, throwing health workers into a life and death pandemic without preparation and essential resources. The level of preparation needed to be extensive, as our health service was already on the verge of collapse after a decade of Assembly austerity. Ten years of missed targets in emergency, cancer and cardiac services, with astronomical waiting lists increasing annually. A chronic staffing crisis due to savage pay cuts and services slashed saw thousands of health workers take industrial action late last year.

As the pandemic took hold and

our hospitals began to fill up with Covid positive patients, our health and social care service would have disintegrated. Effectively, all services except emergency and urgent cases and services dedicated to Covid-19 were stood down. All health workers were declared essential, irrespective of employment, age and health status; this was partially reversed for vulnerable staff who refused to comply, supported by their union branches.

While services were restructured, management communication was incoherent or non-existent.

No proper protections

Mass redeployment of staff occurred without training, with workers simply expected to manage. Ever-changing national guidelines were loosely interpreted, putting staff in harm's way, as the Assembly failed to supply enough personal protective equipment (PPE) or implement systematic mass testing. Instead of acting in the interests of public health and taking non-essential companies into public ownership to produce much-needed equipment, the Assembly Executive - like the Tories - pandered to private sector parasites such as Randox Medical and Deloitte, who have profited handsomely.

The Assembly's failure to protect workers from physical risks was compounded by little support for increasing mental health problems due to stress. Workers feared catching and bringing the virus home to their families, while those working in ICU and Covid centres, working 12-hour shifts



Due to lack of funding, planning and preparation by the local Assembly and the UK Government, health workers were thrown into a life and death pandemic without preparation and essential resources

for months in the most hostile of environments, faced infection on a daily basis. These staff are highly trained and experienced, but no amount of training can prepare you for this level of trauma and heartbreak.

Workers must not pay

Now we face the prospect of a second wave due to the irresponsible drive by the Assembly to open up the economy to safeguard big business. The weeks of support for 'NHS heroes' by

politicians only appears crass and cynical to health workers now. Assembly cuts to unsocial hours payments for working 12-hour shifts, night duty and weekends, and a further threat of a two-year pay freeze and pension cuts, shows health workers that nothing has changed. As in the financial crisis of 2008, the Assembly Executive will expect workers to take the hit, while the rich are to be protected. However, this pandemic shows us everything has

changed; workers can resist paying the price this time.

There is overwhelming support for our NHS and growing confidence amongst health workers to rebuild a fightback through our unions for a real pay-rise, safe staffing and better services. We must ensure our union movement acts decisively now and in the wake of this crisis, including through determined and coordinated industrial action if necessary. This way, we can win for all.

South: No attacks on Panemic Unemployment Payments

By Shane Finnan

LAST MONTH, Leo Varadkar described the emergency Covid-19 payment of €350 as "unsustainable" and "unfair". It didn't take long for the 'we're all in it together' mask to slip! The government, under pressure from the bosses, wants to phase out this payment as quickly as possible.

Varadkar's idea of "unfairness" stems from the fact that nearly 40% of people, or 200,000 workers, on the Covid-19 payment are better off in receipt of the payment than they were when they were working. The Taoiseach riled up anger by saying that if people refuse to return to work at their employer's request in the future, they will get the Covid-19 payment revoked.

Let's be clear, the majority of workers who are currently unemployed are in that position because of the pandemic. The idea of a significant cohort of Irish society refusing to go back to work is an argument concocted by the government, IBEC and the media to pave the way for the eventual removal of the Covid-19 payment. The "enforcement" Varadkar spoke of last week is forcing



The "enforcement" Varadkar spoke of last week is forcing many workers back into low-paid, precarious and possibly unsafe working conditions.

many workers back into low-paid, precarious and possibly unsafe working conditions.

"Winning the lotto"?

Supermac's executive, Pat McDonagh, described the Covid-19 payment

as "winning the lotto" for some part-time employees. This is nonsense. What Pat McDonagh is trying to do here is pressure the government to remove the payment for a section of workers. Why? For Pat McDonagh's profiteering interests, of course!

Pat McDonagh wants to force workers to return to precarious working-conditions where they are low-paid so he and his fellow corporate executives can exploit their workforce and resume their profiteering pursuits. All the while, there are serious questions about the safety of these workplaces in the context of the pandemic, which Pat McDonagh has little to no consideration for.

Also, Pat McDonagh's "winning the lotto" comments are doubly ludicrous, insofar as many part-time workers also receive social welfare payments and wouldn't be getting as much as what they usually receive with the Covid-19 payment.

The rigged economy

Workers on the minimum wage could work 35 hours a week and by the end of it not even come out with €350. This amount per week also translates into €8.75 per hour for a forty-hour week. The South is a disgracefully low-paid economy, with precarious work in retail and hospitality the norm for many young people.

Forty percent of those on the Covid-19 payment earn €300 or less per week. This should be the real scandal; how much hospitality and

retail sectors thrive on minimum wage and part-time work exploitation! Those rates are what is unsustainable, not the Covid-19 payment. To return to this status quo is not 'sustainable' for working-people, particularly as this will likely coincide with the lifting of the rent freezes, with rents already at disgracefully exorbitant levels.

Workers need a living wage

The 2019 Living Wage rate was €12.30 per hour. This is the average gross salary a single adult (without dependents) working full-time would need to receive to meet all their essential needs. Yet low-paid workers deserve more than this, we need a €15 minimum wage now with no exemptions. The resources exist to pay for this.

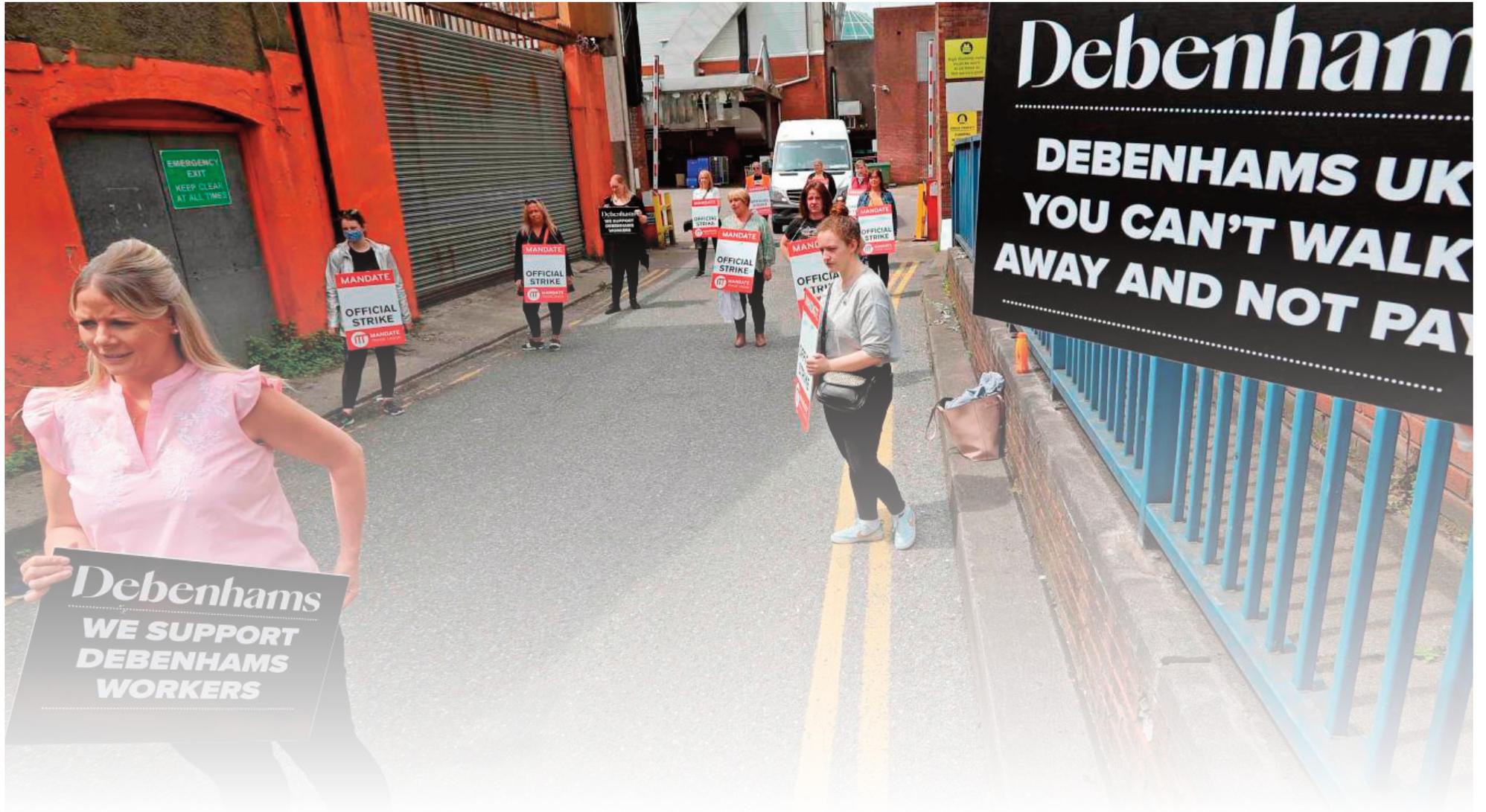
The top ten wealthiest people in the country have more money than all 300 of Ireland's richest a decade ago. The 17 billionaires in Ireland have over €40 billion between them. There is a superabundance of wealth in Ireland but it is hoarded and controlled by a small, super-wealthy elite. Workers should not be expected to work in poverty conditions, while this capitalist elite parasitically enriches itself.

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