

# thesocialist

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ACTION NEEDED TO PREVENT SECOND WAVE...

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# A tale of two pandemics

## Family fortunes of wealthy surge during pandemic

A new report by the Swiss bank UBS found that 77% of the richest families – who had average fortunes of \$1.6 billion – had seen their investment portfolios “perform in line with, or above, targets during one of the most volatile moments in the history of financial markets”.

Of the 121 family offices included in the survey, 93 had met or exceeded their financial targets in the year to May 2020. They achieved this despite most countries in the world suffering their worst economic contractions in decades. Some 24 of the family offices in the survey managed private fortunes of more than \$3 billion.



Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos now has a fortune of \$189 billion

## Globally 100 million face extreme poverty

The World Bank has warned that the pandemic could reverse years of progress for the poor in less-developed nations such as India and Nigeria, with as many as 100 million more people expected to fall into extreme poverty.

## \$75 billion this year: Bezos breaking obscene records

The world’s richest man, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, has made \$75 billion so far this year, to a record \$189 billion. No one has ever made so much money in such a short amount of time.

By comparison to the average Amazon employee, that’s 2.6 million times what they will earn this year. This is truly obscene.

## Children suffer from school closures

In 2018, 258 million children of primary and secondary school age were out of school. Now, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, 1.2 billion children find themselves out of school, at least physically.

And now, with the need to maintain physical distancing, schools are shut in 146 countries. This will also badly affect the 310 million children who rely on school meals.

Even before the pandemic 53% of children in low- and middle-

come countries couldn’t read and understand a basic text at age ten. The long term effect of such school closures could be hugely damaging.

## Threat of gender violence increases

Gender based violence is a global pandemic, which has exacerbated since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, the WHO Regional Office for Europe has reported a 60% increase in emergency phone calls and complaints related to intra-family violence, and foresees that up to 31 million more cases of gender violence will occur if lockdown measures stay in effect for six months more.

## The extreme case of the USA

In the US inequality is particularly bad, and the pandemic has exposed this further. The billionaires in the US have increased their wealth by a combined \$637 billion during the pandemic, while 30 million are unemployed and this is in a country where 40% of people said that they did not have \$400 to cope with a crisis.

## Major racial disparities...

Black people in the US have been dying from the coronavirus at nearly three times the rate of white people, while black people in the

Britain are four times more likely to die from COVID-19 than white people. In fact the first 10 doctors to die from the coronavirus in the UK were all from minority communities.

## ...reflect class disparities

The disparities in race clearly reflect the fact that ethnic minority communities are usually poorer, and poorer communities are always more at risk. In the North, a recent report has looked at the disparities in cases and drew the conclusion that: “The geographical distribution of Covid-19 deaths in Northern Ireland is further evidence that the burden of this infection is falling disproportionately on those most deprived.”



310 million children rely on school meals, which they cannot get due to the pandemic

# Joining the Socialist Party – making a difference

## “Why I joined”

ANN PEPPARD – Debenhams striker, Blanchardstown

The whole struggle has opened my eyes. I was previously an active in the water charges campaign but did not have strong party political views other than not trusting the government. That was until the situation at Debenhams came knocking at my door which set me off reading up on the views and ideas of various parties, the positions they took on legislation, how they dealt with the corporations as well as seeing who really represented working class people.

Going forward beyond this dispute I want to remain involved and joined the Socialist Party because of what they stand for but also because of how their members genuinely listened to the workers. Covid and how workers have been treated has opened people’s eyes up. I see a big shift and further change ahead and want to play my part in making the Socialist Party bigger so that its voice will be better heard”



## “Why I joined”

MEGAN STITH – Queen’s University student, Belfast

I am a (almost) 23-year-old Master’s student at QUB, and I recently joined the Socialist Party. Even as a young teenager, politics to me was much more than suits and rooms full of (middle-aged, white) men. Politics was about people, about connection and about human rights. I joined the Socialist Party because I came to confidence in my belief that power belongs to the people, and our government and economy should exist to protect us, bolster us, and provide a standard of living for every person.

Socialism is freedom to be alive and to be free as people, not as a commodity. I joined the party to take the next step towards taking action in all of its various forms, and, most importantly, to connect with other socialists who shared the same passion for justice and a revolution of thought and being.



# Education: No return until it's safe



A premature reopening of schools can put parents, pupils and staff at risk.

**T**HE RECENT announcement by Peter Weir, the NI Education Minister, that all pupils are set to return to school in September full-time will bring mixed feelings for parents and teachers alike, who no doubt will have serious concerns over safety. In order to facilitate this, Weir also announced that previously planned social distancing guidelines would be relaxed.

There is a serious danger that clusters of infection could emerge cen-

tered on large schools. The undermining of social distancing and the large concentrations of pupils could lead to a rapid spread of the virus. Professor Neil Ferguson has predicted up to a 50% increase in the rate of infection if secondary schools fully reopen this autumn.

In the South, more stringent measures are to be taken, including enforcing social distancing on school transport and reducing capacity. There is also a €75 million fund to allow schools to reconfigure their

classrooms and toilet facilities to allow for physical distancing of students.

This is positive but still woefully inadequate. An OECD report entitled Education at a Glance 2019 declared Irish education "overcrowded and underfunded". Much more will be needed to allow schools to fully reopen safely.

#### International experience points to rising cases

Recently, we have seen many US schools return to classes, effectively as normal, in states where infection

rates are soaring. Tragically, in Georgia, after the first day back in school, a second grader (age 6-7) tested positive for the virus, causing the whole class and related teaching staff to have to self-isolate. Likewise in France, 70 new cases were reported immediately after academic institutions opened their doors. We need proper safety measures to prevent the same occurring here.

The main education union in Britain, the NEU, has lobbied the government for clarity and demanded its "5 Tests" of safety requirements are met before a return to face-to-face schooling. These include important provisions around significant reduction in the "R" number, resources being provided for Covid-19 tests, and care for vulnerable students and staff.

#### No return until it's safe

The Westminster and Stormont governments have been woefully poor in providing a coherent plan to manage the easing of lockdown. A starting point should be consulting with parents, teachers and health experts in a genuine process, rather than dictating plans from above. Social distancing and hygiene must be rigorously maintained. This is the only safe way to function. Packed classrooms, hallways and school transport cannot be allowed. All funding necessary to expand facilities to meet need must be made available immediately and adequate time to prepare allowed.

## Oppose cuts to the pandemic unemployment payment

**IT APPEARS that the facade that the Irish government has been attempting to portray throughout the pandemic, as being the great protectors of workers in Ireland, is swiftly coming to an end. The true face of Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and the Green Party is once again being revealed as the champions of austerity and the enemies of ordinary working-class people.**

Already the government is beginning to implement cuts to the pandemic unemployment payment (PUP) which will undoubtedly have devastating effects on many people that are already struggling to make ends meet. The pretense put forward by the government for the cuts, is that those who were earning less than €350 per week when employed should not be entitled to the full PUP of €350, which in any case is also being cut to €300 per week.

#### Rising poverty

In many ways the government shot themselves in the foot by introducing the PUP for it was essentially an admission that the current social welfare rate of €203 per week is wholly inadequate to cover the huge costs of living in Ireland. €203 is not enough to even cover the rent for anything other than a bedroom and even still it barely covers that! The fact that so many workers were better off on the PUP is incredibly revealing about the abysmal state of the so called 'gig economy'.

Any attempt to cut the PUP rate will in reality only lead to more working-class people being hurled into penury, with already 760,000 people living in poverty in the South. It will also result in mass evictions as tens of thousands of workers will be unable to cover the extortionate rents. This is another cynical attempt to divide workers on the basis of who is 'deserving' and who is not. Nobody deserves to live in poverty.

#### Stirring division

This divide and rule tactic was further exemplified by the disgraceful comments of FF TD Marc Sharry, in attempting to divide public & private sectors workers by alleging that public sector workers were using the pandemic as an excuse "to do nothing" and "as cover to lie on the couch and watch box sets". The hypocrisy of these statements is galling especially considering how well paid Mac Sharry is as a TD, and a hapless backbench government TD at that.

We must not let ourselves be divided in the continued race to the bottom. We must challenge and oppose the real scroungers in society such as this government and its corporate allies like Apple who have scammed us all to the tune of €13 billion+. It's about time workers saw a bailout rather than shoveling even more fortunes into the coffers of the wealthy!

# Tories put NHS up for sale



The Tories have publicly lied about their supposed commitment to protecting the NHS. In reality the Tories have cut, sold off and run down as much of the health service as they can.

By Chris Stewart

**I**N JULY, the Tories put the final version of their post-Brexit trade bill before Parliament. A proposed amendment that would ensure the NHS would be permanently off the table in any post-Brexit trade talks was voted down, signalling that the NHS is now unquestionably up for sale.

The reality is that the capitalist vultures of big pharma and private healthcare will be chomping at the bit to gain access to the UK's health market in order to ruthlessly milk as much profit from it as possible.

Certain medications could be out of reach for workers, only available to the rich. Some drugs that patients rely on may become unavailable on the NHS as US companies demand the utmost marketisation.

The Tories have publicly lied about their supposed commitment to protecting the NHS, fearing the massive support for the health service amongst working class people. In reality, for the last ten years, the Tories have engaged in rampant backdoor privatisation, driving the NHS into the ground through cuts, and selling it off piecemeal to capitalists.

The brutal reality of this has been

seen throughout this crisis. After decades of funding cuts, privatisations, loss of beds, and critical staffing shortages, the NHS was left unable to cope with the pandemic, to disastrous consequences for patients and workers.

In fact, the only thing that has held the NHS together is the enormous, sometimes ultimate, sacrifices of its workers. 500 health workers have died from Covid-19. NHS workers are underpaid and overworked. After a decade of pay cuts, many health workers are as much as 20% worse off in real terms.

When the Tories excluded many

health workers from a proposed public sector pay rise, these workers were rightly incensed. Health workers and their unions will be protesting this pay inequality and demanding a real pay rise.

This is a welcome movement which will have support from working-class people who recognise the sheer sacrifice of NHS workers. This, along with actions up to and including strike action, should be harnessed to put maximum pressure on the government, not only to give a real pay rise to workers, but for real investment and for a reversal of all cuts and privatisation of our NHS.

# Government's shambolic first month shows what we can expect to come

By Katia Hancke

**N**EW GOVERNMENTS often experience a “honeymoon period”: when they are given a chance to get their bearings and they are so new they can still blame the last administration for the problems in society. This government's honeymoon period lasted a few hours, which is probably because it's a government that nobody wanted, and because it looks so much like the last one – just less coherent, but still as right wing.

## Gaffs galore

We were told we needed “strong government”, national unity and the experienced hands of Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and the Greens to get us through the worldwide catastrophe that is Covid19. What we got was a circus of infighting, selfish careerism and staggering detachment from reality – in short, a vivid reminder that nothing has changed.

Not to be outdone by Fianna Fail, who had to sack a senior Minister within a week, Junior Ministers-with-more-titles-than-responsibilities showed how party divisions could be quickly overcome when it comes to fighting for a pay increase – their pay increase. Then there were the images of sleeping government representatives – and Eamon Ryan's dreams being interrupted by a vote to attack workers' rights.

## Anti-working class regime

But let us pick apart three episodes that give us a clear indication of what working class people can expect from



New government, same as the old government, gets off to a bad start

this government. The initial response by the then caretaker government to the Covid19 crisis showed they were aware of their own weakness (just weeks after a battering at the polls) and of the profound effects the shut down had on people's income.

The PUP was a basic response to both those facts. But a few months on Varadkar is all out of empathy – revealing once again his contempt for working-class people. Remember his infamous “welfare cheats” campaign a few years back? This time it started with a complaint that some people earned more on the PUP than they did when they worked full time. Obviously, this is scandalous – in Ireland, in 2020, low pay is so ubiquitous that workers in many sectors don't even take home enough to survive after a full week's work.

The obvious conclusion is that a raise of the minimum wage to the liv-

ing wage norm is absolutely necessary. Not for Leo. He concluded that paying people a PUP on which they could survive was the problem! And when he realised he couldn't get away with that line of argument (for now), he focused on his desire to police people on PUP taking a few days break in August.

The refusal to guarantee a ban on evictions leaves hundreds of thousands of renters vulnerable, mainly young people whose jobs are on the line, and shows they have learned nothing from the housing crisis the previous government left us with. And nearly all Green Party TDs had no problem supporting a bill that could see thousands evicted in the next period.

## Get organised

And then there is the (lack of) response to the Debenham workers. As

further job losses in construction, airlines, banking and retail are announced every week, the Debenham workers are showing us all the need to stand up and fight for a better deal. For the last five months these workers have called on the government to intervene. But it is clear this government is simply not willing to do so.

This is a government of opportunity. Fianna Fail and Fine Gael used a worldwide crisis to scuttle back into power despite their lack of popularity. The Green Party leadership picked up where they left off in 2011, throwing any green credentials out the window to join them. All of them have already shown that when it comes to a choice of defending the interests of big business versus ordinary people, we can't trust them. We will all need to follow the example of the Debenham workers, get organised to fight for our rights.

## “July Stimulus Package”: minimal & misdirected

By Oisín Kelly

**T**HE GOVERNMENT'S “July Jobs Stimulus” has budgeted an extra €7.4 billion to be injected into the economy. The stimulus is primarily for business interests and has all the hallmarks of a pro-big business (as opposed to small business or certainly workers) government. While it is the largest stimulus in the history of the Irish state, it is in line with the average in the EU and smaller than the comparative stimuli in US or Japan.

## Prioritising businesses, not workers

The pandemic unemployment payment (PUP) will be continued until April 2021, but will be reduced to the same levels as the dole, and will stop for new applicants in September. Much of the economic fallout from Covid-19 will continue into the Autumn, Winter and beyond, however. In fact the worst is likely to be yet to come. The closure of the scheme will bring hardship to workers, especially



Stimulus plan aimed at protecting big business, not workers

in hard hit sectors such as tourism and hospitality.

The extra grant aid to companies, however, comes with no conditions. Mick Barry TD outlined that grants to the small and medium companies should come with conditions such as guarantees for union rights, wages and working conditions.

Large companies, many who have made bumper profits during the pandemic, will benefit from mea-

sures such as the VAT reduction to 21%, rates freezes, wage subsidies and grant aid.

This includes companies such as Aer Lingus, Bank of Ireland and Ryanair, who are planning to lay off thousands of workers. This is unacceptable. Such companies should instead be brought into public ownership, with workers at the heart of management as part of a plan to maintain jobs and services.

## Radical, socialist policies

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Leo Varadkar, has always had an eye to those who are better off. This is seen in his tax credit scheme for those who avail of hospitality and tourism. Varadkar is unapologetic that those on the PUP, pensioners or others out of work will be unable to avail of the €125 tax cut. Similarly, in the area of housing there is a ‘help to buy’ scheme – but nothing for the control of house prices or rents, or the direct building of homes.

The Socialist Party demands a far more radical economic policy, made all the more necessary by the economic fallout from Covid-19. To ensure the health and livelihoods of workers and young people, we cannot rely of this right-wing government or the capitalist market system. We need socialist policies that use the wealth in society to ensure a guaranteed right to quality jobs, health, housing and education is provided for everyone.

## Dáil speaking time Government & Sinn Féin join forces to silence the Left

By Oisín Kelly

### THE GOVERNMENT and Sinn Féin have passed new Dáil speaking rules to reduce the impact of smaller left parties and groups.

In over 100 years of the Dáil all parties spoke once in the first round of speakers with the allocation in subsequent rounds making speaking time proportional. The government and Sinn Féin have come together to dispense with the established practice, aware that left and socialist voices are a major threat to them in the coming years. Instead of speaking 5th in debates, the Solidarity/PBP group will be pushed back to 12th place.

### Silencing the left

In the past weeks it has been Mick Barry TD and other left-wing TDs who have held the government to account on junior ministerial pay rises, the attempt to penalise those made unemployed by Covid-19, and the lack of support for the Debenham workers. Mick has also been to the fore in pressing for a solution for Leaving Cert students' exams.

Socialists are the most effective voice of opposition in the Dáil. This was seen when Joe Higgins held the capitalist establishment to account over banking practices and on workers' rights such as the GAMA workers. Ruth Coppinger brought the voice of young people and women into the chamber in demanding repeal of the 8th Amendment and an end to victim blaming in courts.

### Sinn Féin preparing for coalition

Sinn Féin are laying the ground for future coalition with Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. They supported the speaking time changes as they are aware that on issues such as water charges they were widely seen as conservative and out of touch in comparison to the Socialist Party's call for non-payment and building an active movement. On abortion rights Sinn Féin were not pro-choice and were far behind voices such as Ruth Coppinger. In the coming years as major issues and campaigns emerge, they wish to have left and socialist voices diminished.

Regardless of speaking time arrangements in the Dáil, the Socialist Party and our TD Mick Barry will continue to fight to build opposition to the government's right-wing policies inside and outside the Dáil chamber.

# NI Executive stumbles from crisis to crisis

By Kevin Henry

**I**N THE early stages of the Covid crisis, we were told the Stormont Executive would rise above politics and present a united front against the virus. This came after a period when cracks were already showing over what advice to follow in relation to closing schools and other measures needed to combat the virus.

However, the attendance of Michelle O'Neill and other prominent figures in Sinn Féin at the large funeral of Bobby Storey, an important republican figure, split this facade of unity asunder. The event was controversial as it breached Covid regulations and other families had been prevented from saying farewell to their loved ones in the usual way. All the main parties united to criticise Michelle O'Neill. Arlene Foster has since refused to attend public briefings with O'Neill. This also gave an impetus for a series of local marches and bonfires across the North around the 12th July, despite the fact it was discouraged by the DUP and Orange Order leadership.

In reality, there is hypocrisy all

round. We should remember that Black Lives Matter activists have been fined for engaging in socially distanced protests - something all the main parties, including Sinn Féin, are responsible for. While the other parties lambast leading figures in Sinn Féin for attending the funeral, all the main parties are united in reopening the economy without due regard for health and safety and have refused to take action in the face of clusters of cases, particularly in the meat industry.

Another indication of the tension is the fact that eleven DUP MLAs defied the party whip to abstain on the Executive Committee (Functions) Bill. This has been described as the largest rebellion in the party's history. As many commentators have pointed out, it is also an important warning for the leadership of Foster, who in many ways is a lame duck, damaged by the RHI scandal and only kept in place because removing her at the time would have been seen as a concession to Sinn Féin.

The bill itself is an attempt to square a circle. It essentially returns Ministerial power to the period before the 2006 Saint Andrew's Agreement, when the DUP and Sinn Féin



The tensions in the Executive can lead to more sectarian provocations

first agreed to share power. Unless a decision significantly impacts the functioning of other departments, the Minister essentially has free reign. The rationale for the bill is to give Ministers more power to drive through controversial decisions with less public accountability. In the context of an Executive based on a sectarian carve-up, it can be an instrument that creates more instability, rather

than overcoming it, if an individual Minister pushes through decisions which jar with their counterparts.

These tensions can lead to more sectarian provocations - such as Gregory Campbell repeating his old 'joke' relating to the Irish language. They also underline the reality that, in the context of the economic and social crisis related to the pandemic, there will be no return to the stability

which characterised the period following the Saint Andrew's agreement. These tensions can also find a reflection in broader society, posing dangers for ordinary people. The trade unions and other movements must offer an alternative to the pro-corporate policies and sectarian bickering of the main parties, uniting working-class people around our common interests.

## Stormont drives through health cuts under cover of pandemic



Last year nurses in the North took strike action demanding pay parity and safe staffing levels.

By Lucy Marron

**T**HE CORONAVIRUS pandemic has exposed the reality of years of chronic underfunding of the NHS. The reality of cutbacks has been evident in the scramble to obtain appropriate PPE, the lack of available ventilators, as well as staff shortages. The pandemic has led to a substantial increase in those on waiting lists, reflective of a longer-term crisis within the NHS. This raises the question of NHS management and illustrates the impact of privatisation.

The Health Minister Robin Swann has proposed a "restructuring of the NI health service" in response to the

crisis, where 1 in 7 are on a medical waiting list. In reality, these are plans which the Stormont politicians have been aiming to introduce for years. This has resulted in Down A&E being shut down "temporarily" under the cover of the pandemic. The likelihood is that this will be a permanent closure, given the experience of the Belfast City Hospital and elsewhere. Despite the apparent intention of the change being to alleviate the waiting time crisis, the centralisation of health services into urban areas creates a problem for rural access and doesn't work when put into practice. The measure realistically is a step to further undermine the NHS, with procedures being outsourced to the private sector.

Despite the issues exposed by the pandemic, the importance of the NHS has been illustrated, and it is clear that there is widespread consensus on this across Northern Ireland. To save our NHS, we need to fight for it. The health worker strikes in late 2019 for pay parity were a positive example of the power working-class people have when they stand together and demand change. There have been successful strikes and walkouts across the UK during the pandemic, fighting for better pay, appropriate PPE and safe working conditions. These fighting tactics work. If we want to save the NHS, a broader movement of health workers and working-class people will be pivotal.

## Shorts:

By Cerys Falvey

### BA throws workers on scrapheap

British Airways has once again made headlines in the poor treatment of its staff. In an all new attack, management have attempted to fire nearly all of its 42,000 staff members and rehire some with considerably less pay and poorer working conditions. Every hard won achievement fought for by staff and their unions is at risk under BA's new plans. The Tory government has come under considerable pressure to remove BA's airport landing slots in an attempt to make them back down. Unsurprisingly, no action has been taken. Workers and their new unions are organising protests to put pressure on shareholders and 'corporate partners' such as Marks & Spencer to call for BA to engage in meaningful negotiations.

### Defend free parking for NHS staff

Another recent scandal to hit the headlines is the reduction of free parking for NHS staff. At the best of times, it is ridiculous to think that some staff are paying up to £40 per day to park at work, but considering this in the context of a global pandemic in which health staff have been at the fore, putting their health and even lives at risk, it's downright insulting. In fact, some nurses said that they could earn



more in Lidl when they consider the cost of parking. Hospital car parks should be brought back into public ownership, with free parking for all staff, patients and visitors.

### Health, not profit - masks should be mandatory and free!

The Northern Ireland Executive was slow to make masks mandatory in shops, another example of their subservience to big business. Retail bosses lobbied against compulsory masks as they feared this would hit their profits. With the spread of the virus again rising, the Stormont politicians were finally forced to act. However, the cost of basic public health measures should not fall on the shoulders of ordinary people. Masks should be made freely available to all who need them, either by public bodies or retailers themselves.

**THE STORMONT** Department for the Economy is warning that the jobs market is “heading back to the 1980s”, with an estimation that unemployment in the months ahead could well exceed 100,000. A similar situation is reported in the South, with unemployment figures of 28% being recorded for April.

**THIS MIRRORS** what is happening throughout the world, as capitalism looks to defend its profits at the expense of workers' livelihoods. Employers across the board are looking to wage war on pay, jobs, terms and conditions.

**Capitalism never wastes a good crisis** There is no doubt that the pandemic and lockdown have affected industries across the board, but it is a myth to suggest that employers engaging in mass layoffs and redundancies do so because they have no other option.

British Airways (BA) is one example that illustrates this simple truth. They are threatening to terminate their entire workforce of over 42,000 employees. Under these proposals they will only allow workers to return only if they accept drastic cuts of up to 70% of their wages. BA was making massive profits prior to the crisis, with an operating profit of almost £2 billion in 2019 alone, with substantial reserves of £2.6 billion and shareholder equity £5.8 billion that would likely be sufficient to weather the storm until the end of 2021. BA has also accessed £300 million from the UK's Covid-19 finance facility, while owners IAG have accessed €1 billion from the

Spanish government. This money is being used to pad out the profits of the shareholders rather than protect jobs and livelihoods of working people.

Likewise, stationery chain Eason's plan to close their shops in the North and cut 144 jobs in the process, but shareholders are due to share a €20 million payout in the autumn among themselves, while their workers are left out to dry.

The truth is that these job cuts are not made by poverty stricken employers. In most of these instances, cuts are linked to maximising profitability at the expense of the workforce. We do not have to accept this.

#### It doesn't have to be like this

It is not a foregone conclusion that the attacks on workers' jobs must proceed unabated. Recently, we have seen important examples of workers utilising their collective strength to take on employers and secure victories.

Last year, workers at Harland & Wolff in Belfast secured the future of the iconic shipyard after a historic nine-week occupation. When the owners went into administration, they were told that the jobs must go - there's nothing that can be done, it's what the market dictates. Yet the jobs were saved. Had it not been for the

workers taking matters into their own hands and taking physical control of the yard after administrators were brought in, the firm would most likely simply have gone into liquidation and those jobs and skills would have been lost.

Likewise, the walkouts from meat processing plants that occurred at the start of lockdown in the North illustrate the power that workers have. Faced with callous employers and their disregard for health and safety, workers walked out, demanding adequate PPE, social distancing and other measures, winning important concessions. It has been workers and their trade unions who have taken the lead in standing up for health and safety.

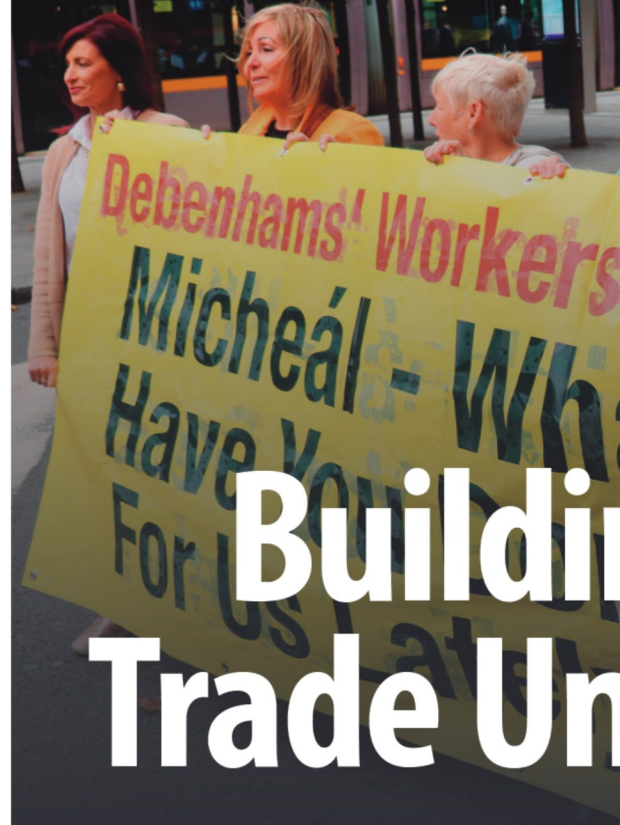
It is these tactics of occupation, walkouts and strikes that get results. What both the meat plant workers' struggle and the shipyard occupation show plainly is that, while it can seem that the employers hold all the power, in reality we do not have to accept their dictates nor those of the 'free market'. Working-class people can win when we stand together.

#### Leadership found lacking

Unfortunately, throughout the course of the pandemic, we have consistently found union leaders kowtowing to ideas of 'national unity' and partnership with the bosses. Frances O'Grady, of the British TUC, called for a "national council of reconstruction to rebuild the country". Unfortunately, this approach has led to inaction, inactivity and an unprepared response to the employers' onslaught.

We need to rebuild fighting trade unions, in which the members and their elected reps have control, not far-removed and unaccountable officials. Key union officials should be elected, subject to recall and paid a worker's wage, not a bloated salary which disconnects them from the lives of their members. To transform the unions along these lines will require a struggle. All workers should join and get active in a union, and link up with others to turn them into weapons fit for battling the bosses and the politicians who serve them.

# Workers must not pay



## Debenhams workers should

By Michael O'Brien

**FOUR MONTHS** into their fight for a decent settlement from their former employer the Debenhams strike will likely go down as the stand out workers struggle of 2020. The duration and the conditions in which the workers have had to pursue their fight for a decent settlement has won them widespread admiration and support among working class people.

Getting anything above the bare statutory redundancy after, in many cases, decades of service depends largely on the workers getting an advance commitment from the liquidator on the workers getting a proper share of the proceeds of the tens of millions of euro of stock to be sold off as part of the liquidation process.

#### Effective picketing

Without such a commitment from the liquidator the workers have been rightly blocking the removal of stock with pickets and night watches. So solid have these blockades been the workers correctly anticipated the possibility of injunctions being taken out against them by the liquidator but so far this has not happened with

the liquidator likely correctly calculating that such a move would be deeply unpopular and likely boost the active support for the workers.

There are at best hints from the government and MANDATE union officials of behind the scenes communications with the liquidator to secure a settlement but nothing concrete. That things have been even pushed this far is a testament to the determination of the workers. It must be said here that any negotiations that do take place must have the direct participation of Debenhams' shop stewards.

#### Laws for the rich

The laws as they stand give preferential treatment to the Revenue and business creditors ahead of the workers in liquidation situations. The authorities in this country also permit companies like Debenhams to play games such as bogusly claiming that the stock belongs to the UK parent company and that online sales in Ireland are likewise accrued to the UK parent and not the Irish subsidiary i.e. beyond the reach of the workers. The UK parent has also scandalously claimed that the Irish subsidiary is co-guarantor for an unpaid £200 million loan the UK parent company took out!



Workers in Harland & Wolff staged an occupation to save jobs in 2019

for Covid crisis...

# ng Fighting ionism Today

## ow the way

So what the Debenhams workers are fighting for is not just a fair settlement for themselves but for new rights to be won for all workers in this type of situation. We were promised after the Clerys' saga five years ago which shared many similar features to the Debenhams struggle that the laws would be changed. The new programme for government makes a vague promise on this as a result of pressure from the Debenhams workers' struggle.

However the best guarantee of achieving both a decent settlement for the Debenhams workers and lasting changes that would benefit thousands of other workers into the future is to support the struggle that is being waged by those workers now.

**Working-class solidarity**  
Solidarity TD and Socialist Party member Mick Barry, former TD Ruth Coppinger and party activists have actively supported the workers from the beginning both in the Dáil but most importantly assisting with protest actions to help sustain the struggle through the lockdown months.

We firmly believe that far more could have been done by the official trade union movement to champion the Debenhams struggle. The initia-



tive for today's protest has come from the workers and activists who support them but MANDATE should have officially backed it, circulating all their members and ICTU likewise circulate all their affiliates to turn out in force.

If the government were prepared to give in on wage subsidies, enhanced welfare payments, rent freezes etc as the lockdown begun a strong public call by the MANDATE leadership and the ICTU for a suspension of liquidations for the duration of the lockdown along with demands to save jobs in retail including by nationalising major jobs shed-

ding firms could have wrung concessions from the government on this score.

Employers in this country are not letting the Covid crisis go to waste and there is already an avalanche of closures and redundancies as well as attacks on pay and conditions on those remaining in work from aviation to construction. In retail alone 100,000 jobs are predicted to go and official estimates are that there will be 400,000 unemployed by the end of the year. The Debenhams workers have shown that these attacks from employers do not have to be meekly accepted.

## 80 years after his assassination: The life & ideas of Leon Trotsky

By Daniel Waldron

**THIS YEAR, 21st August marks the 80th anniversary of the death of Leon Trotsky in Mexico following an assault at the hands of a Stalinist agent. Alongside Lenin, Trotsky was the central Bolshevik leader of the October revolution in Russia which created the world's first workers' state. He would wage a lifelong struggle against both capitalism and Stalinist dictatorship.**

### The permanent revolution

In 1905, when the Russian workers first rose en masse against Tsarist autocracy, Trotsky was elected chairperson of the Petrograd soviet (workers' council) at the age of just 26. The revolution was ultimately defeated and Trotsky was forced into exile. However, it was an important learning experience for both the Russian workers and Trotsky himself.

He concluded that, unlike in the advanced countries, the capitalists in Russia and other underdeveloped countries were incapable of leading a movement to overthrow feudal absolutism. Instead, this task would fall to the working class who would then proceed to lay the basis for the socialist transformation of society. This became known as the theory of permanent revolution.

### Russian workers take power

In the February revolution of 1917, the Russian workers overthrew Tsar Nicholas II and demanded an end to the war, poverty and landlordism. However, state power was initially claimed by the unelected and pro-capitalist Provisional Government. Upon their return to Petrograd from exile, both Trotsky and Lenin – in opposition to the local Bolshevik leadership, including Stalin – argued that the Provisional Government would fail to deliver on the aims of the revolution and that the working class must prepare to take power through the soviets.

The October revolution bore out this perspective, with Trotsky heading the Military Revolutionary Committee. He would go on to lead the Red Army, which successfully defended the nascent workers' state against White counter-revolutionaries and twenty-one foreign armies who would attempt to crush the Soviet government in its infancy.

### Bureaucratic degeneration

Lenin and Trotsky always said that a healthy workers' government could only survive in Russia if the revolution spread to the more developed economies of Europe. In the wake of the October revolution, there were revolutionary upheavals across the

continent, but they were betrayed by the pro-capitalist leaderships of the workers' parties. Isolated in the conditions of backward and war-torn Russia, a parasitic bureaucracy began to develop around Stalin.

In 1922, Lenin and Trotsky formed a bloc against the rising bureaucracy, calling for the strengthening of democratic control, the elimination of privileges and other measures. Trotsky continued this fight after Lenin's death, forming the Left Opposition. However, given the continued isolation of the revolution – due in part to the policies of the Stalin clique – the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union deepened and Trotsky was ultimately forced into exile in 1928 on trumped up charges. Stalin would have preferred to have Trotsky executed, but feared reprisals.

### Trotsky's fight continues in exile

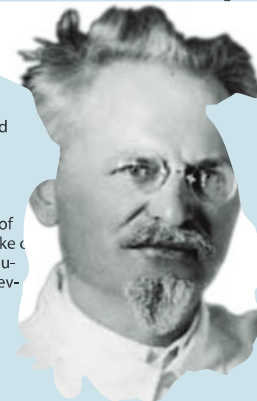
Trotsky would continue to rigorously defend the gains of the October revolution – chiefly the abolition of capitalism and the creation of a planned economy – while building support for a political revolution to overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy and reinstitute workers' democracy. He founded the International Left Opposition and later the Fourth International to defend the ideas of genuine Marxism and to give them an organisational form.

The Stalinists carried out ruthless purges in the Soviet Union to consolidate their power, leading to possibly over a million deaths. In the show trials, Trotsky was always the key defendant in absentia, subjected to preposterous slander. Even in exile, Stalin saw Trotsky and his ideas as the prime threat to his power. Many of Trotsky's family were murdered by the Stalinists, before he was finally assassinated in 1940.

### "Life is beautiful"

Despite this persecution and suffering, Trotsky was unwavering in his ideas and his hope for the future. Six months before his death, he wrote, "My faith in the communist future of mankind is not less ardent; indeed it is firmer today than it was in my youth... Life is beautiful. Let the future generations cleanse it of all evil, oppression and violence, and enjoy it to the full!"

A new generation internationally is looking towards socialism as an al-



...can  
...ation from  
...y's life but, most  
importantly, his ideas  
offer a vital and practical  
guide for the struggle  
for a socialist future  
worthy of the name.

# Portland protests push back Trump's feds

By Peter McGregor

**SINCE THE murder of George Floyd at the hands of the police, the USA and countries all around the world have seen Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests. In Portland, Oregon, the BLM protests have been continuing nightly since the murder, mainly focused at the Lownsdale Square Park, a plaza flanked by courthouses.**

**Trump uses police brutality in power move**

On 4 July weekend, Trump sent in federal troops (feds) to attack and arrest peaceful protestors. Trump justified this as defending federal property. In reality, it was a move to

appear more in control in the midst of an economic crisis and falling support ahead of the election. For months now, state police have been hounding the protestors, but the brutality of the feds and arresting of protestors for no apparent reason - all while not wearing uniform or ID badges - was a heightened attack on the protests and the community.

The response was an intensification of the nightly protests. More and more working-class people came out to defend their community from police repression. The newly invigorated protests saw a 'wall of moms' at the front, and 'dads' using leaf blowers to disperse tear gas. Workers are banding together and standing alongside others in their industry. The re-

sponse from protestors in Portland has now resulted in the feds pulling back. This has shown that when working-class people band together, they can win.

**"You can't have capitalism without racism" - Malcolm X's words hold true today**

In order to win meaningful change, to challenge police brutality and inequality, the US labour movement as a whole needs to get outside with the BLM protests. With 14 million workers unionised, and a huge potential to build further, the ability of workers to shut down industries and hit the profits of the capitalist establishment is a crucial potential weapon in the struggle.



Portland protesters came out to defend their communities from police brutality

## China: oppose brutal repression of Uighurs

By Robert Cosgrave

**OVER RECENT years, the Chinese state has intensified its repression of the Uighur community - a majority Muslim, Turkic speaking ethnic group who make up the majority of the province of Xinjiang in the far north-west of the country.**

Under the guise of fighting 'terrorism' and 'national separatism', up to a million Uighurs are interned in 're-education camps'. These camps have proven to be an extremely profitable source of free labour, both for Chinese capitalism, and for the multinational companies - particularly in the clothing industry - such as Adidas, H&M, and Calvin Klein.

**CCP maintaining control**

The province of Xinjiang is extremely important to the Chinese economy, a quarter of all hydrocarbons, nearly two fifths of all coal, and 84% of all cotton in China comes from the region. The logic of the CCP's repressive measures is rooted in the need to exert maximum control over the province, its resources, and its population.

The ruling élite of the CCP is com-

elled to whip up the most backwards sentiments in Chinese society: Han chauvinism; Confucianism; Islamophobia; Chinese nationalism; etc., to maintain its rule - which has become increasingly unstable with the slowdown of economic growth.

**Imperialist hypocrisy**

At the same time however, the other capitalist powers who criticise the Chinese state for the repression against the Uighur community are not doing so out of the good of their hearts, and their cynical hypocrisy should be criticised. President Trump attacks China, but the record of the "land of the free" on democratic rights is hardly better, with its treatment of ethnic minorities, its repressive state apparatus, and vicious imperial adventures.

**Solidarity**

The only real ally of the Uighurs is the working-class, the majority in China, and internationally, with the power to resist all forms of state repression. Socialists fully support the democratic rights of national and ethnic groups, and stand in full solidarity with the struggle of the Uighurs.

## ISA holds Virtual Marxist University

By Amy Ferguson

**FROM 18-25 JULY, socialists from 37 countries attended the largest ever gathering of International Socialist Alternative, to which the Socialist Party is affiliated. Every year, the ISA hosts a physical international school but, due to Covid-19, it had to be held online this year. We refused to let Covid cut across our political activity and refused to let it cut across our opportunity for sharing political lessons and experiences, evidenced by over 1,500 ISA members taking part over the course of the week, with 12 different languages being spoken.**

Each day represented a different theme of discussion and participants could choose from a variety of different sessions to attend. We had days devoted to developing our understanding of economics and the current capitalist crisis, to considering how we could fight against various forms of oppression today, to reading groups on key Marxist texts, to sharing our experiences and tips for organising our workplaces. Key sessions included discussions on the events

## US: Tax Amazon victory



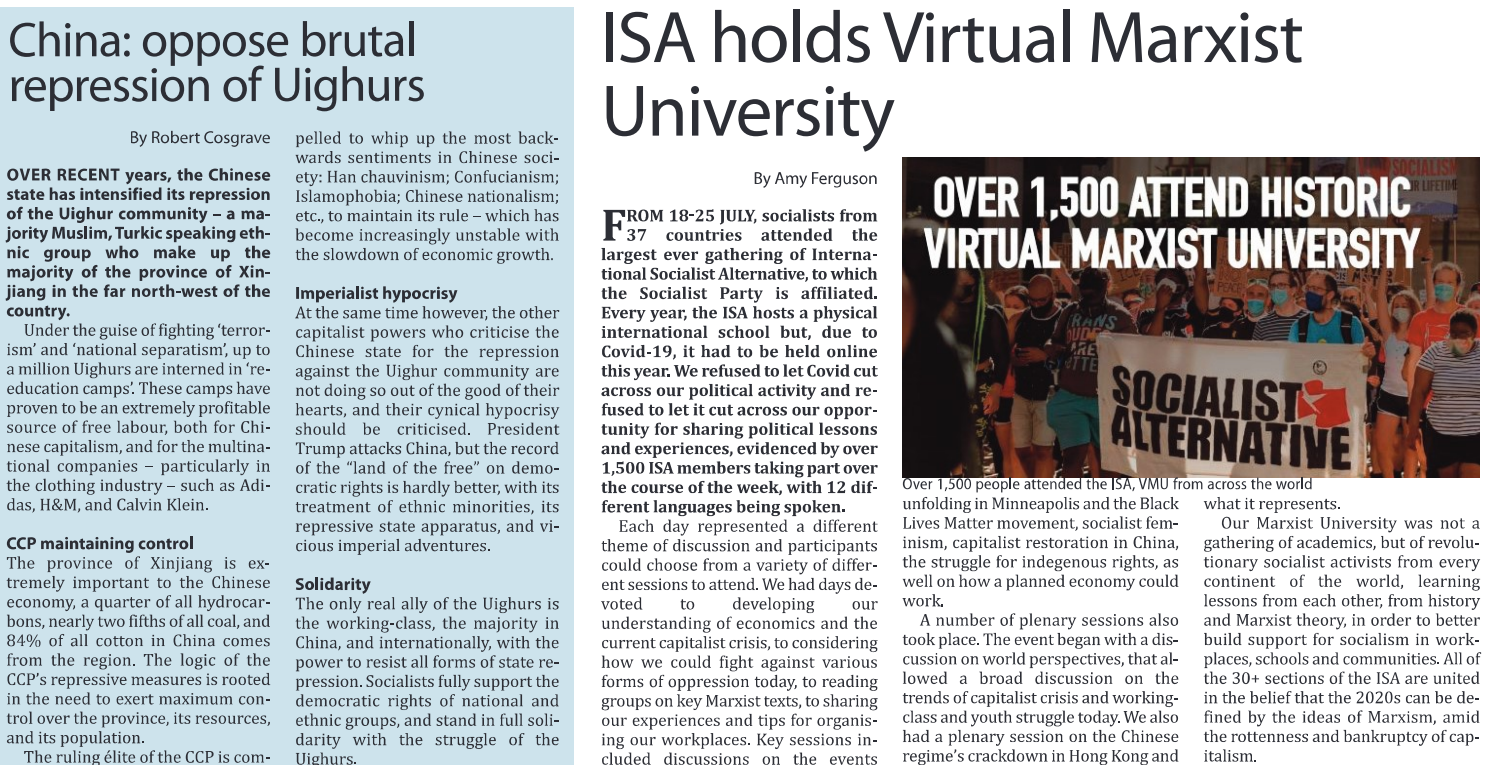
The tax amazon campaign won a historic victory against Jeff Bezos.

By Conor Morgan

**population of around 12,500.**

**FOLLOWING A three year struggle, the Tax Amazon Movement has won a historic victory in Seattle, spearheaded by City Councilmember Kshama Sawant of Socialist Alternative. The JumpStart Tax Bill was passed by a 7-2 vote early last month, and is set to raise \$210-240 million per year, which will be invested in the building of permanently affordable social housing. This is a massively important cause in Seattle, as the city currently has a homeless**

This construction will also create tens of thousands of eco-friendly union jobs in the city. The passing of this bill is a massive blow to Seattle-based Amazon, which had previously fought off proposals for a far less aggressive 'head tax' in 2018, leading to Councilmember Sawant's revival of discussions around a big-business tax. This bill, alongside Councilmember Sawant's upcoming proposal for a 50% defunding of the Seattle Police Department, truly shows the effect socialist politics can have on a local level.



Over 1,500 people attended the ISA, VMU from across the world unfolding in Minneapolis and the Black Lives Matter movement, socialist feminism, capitalist restoration in China, the struggle for indigenous rights, as well on how a planned economy could work.

A number of plenary sessions also took place. The event began with a discussion on world perspectives, that allowed a broad discussion on the trends of capitalist crisis and working-class and youth struggle today. We also had a plenary session on the Chinese regime's crackdown in Hong Kong and

what it represents.

Our Marxist University was not a gathering of academics, but of revolutionary socialist activists from every continent of the world, learning lessons from each other, from history and Marxist theory, in order to better build support for socialism in workplaces, schools and communities. All of the 30+ sections of the ISA are united in the belief that the 2020s can be defined by the ideas of Marxism, amid the rotteness and bankruptcy of capitalism.



# Pandemic update: Workers must decide how & when economy reopens

Niamh Ní Bhrangaile

**AS OF 5 August 2020, there have been 18.4 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 696,147 deaths, reported to World Health Organisation (WHO). Globally, case numbers are still climbing due to the further spread of COVID-19 to more regions and its reappearance in others.**

The graph below provides a visual of the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the outbreak in China, December 2019, the epicentre of the virus moved to Europe and Eastern Mediterranean in March 2020 and then onto the US. Cases in these regions reduced and stabilised.

However, as of June 2020 the number of cases in these regions has resurged. This together with the spread of the virus to more regions, this means there are now more cases globally than ever. Currently, the Coronavirus is affecting 213 countries and territories around the world and two international conveyances.

## Viral Resurgence

Resurgence is not a phenomenon individual to the Coronavirus. Resurges or further waves have been seen during other pandemics such as The Black Death, The Bubonic Plague and The Spanish Flu. A resurgence is avoidable if public safety is put before the need for economic growth in the interests of profit. However, most politicians and governments are resolute in their protection of the capitalist economy,

which they insist cannot endure more disruption caused by the pandemic. Instead, they consciously cast aside the suffering of the working class and have lured them into a phased return of “normality” in order to recover the economy.

Until a vaccine is available, public safety must be a priority over the economy. The lies about insufficient money to provide public care and support needs to stop. There is money available and the fact that politicians and public servants gave themselves a collective pay rise of €264 million a year proves that.

## Vaccine Developments

Globally, there are more than 160 coronavirus vaccines in development. Approximately 140 of these are at the preclinical stage and another 25 are being tested in humans. As the race for a vaccine continues, the WHO needs to stand firm in the face of commercial profiteering and make the vaccine freely available to the public.

The safest way to deal with a pandemic in the absence of a vaccine is to lockdown where necessary and restrict movement in order to suppress viral spreading. Anything below this is disregard for public safety. The all too widespread notion that people who have recovered from COVID-19 and have built up antibodies against Coronavirus are immune from a second infection is scientifically unfounded. In addition, the Coronavirus could mutate which would render previous infections and consequent immunity insignificant.



## Ease of Lockdown in Ireland

With the risk of a resurgence looming and despite scientific warnings, governments across Europe are sacrificing public health in a bid to resuscitate their economies by implementing localised lockdowns.

Many workers have been forced back to work. Best efforts to socially distance and take precautions to limit the spread of the virus have been ineffective. In Ireland, a large number of workplace outbreaks have occurred in construction sites, fast food outlets, supermarkets and food processing plants. Even more worrying is the increasing number of cases among vulnerable groups such as the Traveller community and those in Direct Provision. There is evidence to suggest that re-opening of schools

is likely to cause outbreaks too.

As the working class are sacrificed and the most vulnerable left exposed, still almost 6,000 tourists arrive into Ireland each day by air, often from places with much higher infection rates. This compulsion for profit is criminal.

## Social Differentiation

There is a biological differentiation associated with COVID-19. The highest number of deaths are in 75+ years age group, with 61.8% of those being male and that pre-existing illnesses puts patients at higher risk.

However, COVID-19 has spread too on a logic of social differentiation. A study by the Office for National Statistics, UK found that there was a higher death rate among those

identifying as from another religion. A similar trend was seen in Paris, France, with higher mortality in large working-class areas of immigrant origin. The elevated risk of certain religious groups as in the case of the UK is explained by geographical, socio-economic and demographic factors and increased risks associated with ethnicity. These groups often are low paid workers that live in overcrowded housing and poor access to quality healthcare.

The truth of how capitalist society works only for the rich, and the value of the working class has become evident during this pandemic. Workers are essential to overcoming the pandemic and it is workers who should make the key decisions about how we how and when the economy reopens.

# Only socialism can stave off catastrophic climate change

By Sam Belton

**THE CURRENT period is being defined by an ever-growing series of crises, all of which are interlinked and ultimately stem from the mayhem of the global capitalist system. Of these crises, climate change is by far and away the gravest due to the near-immediate threat it poses to large swathes of the human population.**

2020 was born in the backdrop of the apocalyptic Australian bushfires and was met soon after with the outbreak of the current Covid-19 pandemic, both of which are the result of climate change. For example, the evolution of SARS-CoV-2 (the coronavirus) was turbo-charged by a combination of intensive regimes of capitalist agriculture and the global breakdown of finely-tuned ecosystems.

## A bleak climate perspective

Worryingly, last year alone, extreme weather events displaced some 24 million people. If current trends continue, by 2070 the number of climate



Colossal bushfires in Australia: just one of many climate related disasters

refugees is set to rise into the billions, as one third of the human population will be living in regions which will be too warm to support organised human life. In addition, recent projections of global coastal flooding revealed that 52% of us will be at risk of

flooding by the year 2100, a risk which will be especially severe in north western Europe and Asia.

While the global lockdown implemented to curtail the spread of Covid-19 is thought to have put a temporary brake on climate trajectory,

atmospheric CO2 levels for 2020 are still forecast to increase by 2.48 parts per million, only 0.32 ppm less than if there was no pandemic. Grimly, the unprecedented spending by governments to tackle Covid-19 means that the badly needed,

widescale investment in green infrastructure is even less likely to materialise.

## Who's to blame & what's needed?

In June of this year, the results of a study published in the prestigious scientific journal Nature Communications demonstrated that affluence, which is an inherent by-product of capitalism, is the main driver of climate change, with the lifestyles of the super-rich being far more damaging compared to those of working-class people. The authors made clear that unless the capitalist economic system is fundamentally replaced with a socialist one, then attempts to address climate change will be nothing short of futile.

As Marxists, we agree that capitalism is the root cause of climate breakdown. If the dystopian climate scenarios are to be averted, free market anarchy urgently needs to be replaced with a planned economy which is democratically run by, and in the interests of, working class people (i.e., 99%). Nothing less will do.

# Solidarity with Direct Provision protest in Cahersiveen

By Colm McCarthy

**A CAMPAIGN by Direct Provision (DP) residents of the Skellig Star Hotel in Cahersiveen County Kerry, which culminated in the hunger strike by the 32 adult residents, has forced the government to promise to move all residents out of the centre.**

## Intolerable conditions

In March, Asylum seekers from four separate DP centres in Dublin were moved into the Cahersiveen at a day's notice, in a number of cases leaving behind jobs. While this was justified publicly as being done to combat Covid-19, it made no sense. A "boutique" hotel, the Skellig Star's rooms are tiny, leaving little chance for the over 100 people originally moved there to self-isolate. It later emerged that one of the hotels that people were transferred from had already suffered an outbreak of Covid-19, which the HSE had knowledge of. In the next six weeks there were two dozen positive tests among residents.

Lack of a functioning boiler meant that for the first two months of the residents' stay, there was no central heating. The reduction of the water

supply to an insufficient level following a boil water notice in the town was the final straw for residents, before beginning their hunger strike on the 28 of July.

## Local solidarity

Property prices and the rewards available in urban Ireland for hotels and landlords in short term letting have meant that the Department of Justice have increasingly sought locations in more remote areas for DP centres. These areas often suffer from insufficient infrastructure. Cahersiveen, with a lack of employment and adequate public transport, has seen a steady decline in its population in recent decades.

Unlike in some other areas faced with DP centre controversies, the far-right were unable to gain traction in this instance. Locals in Cahersiveen and residents of the Skellig Star built connections and campaigned alongside each other for a resolution. The campaign has led to a significant victory over the government in attaining a promise to move residents out of the Skellig Star. However, under questioning from Mick Barry TD, Justice Minister Helen McEntee only committed to getting all residents out of the centre by end of the year, showing the need



Locals joined with residents to protest against the scandalous conditions in the DP centre

for campaigners to remain vigilant.

## Abolish Direct Provision

That the DP system is cruel is its entire point. It is used as a stick by the "pull factor" obsessed powers that be. An unwillingness by the Department of Justice for any chink in the armor of the DP model contributed significantly to the spread of Covid-19 in Ireland. In the last week, four

centres in have seen clusters develop.

Who the system does work for, though, is rent seeking capitalists. From 2000-2017 over 1.1 billion euros was paid out to companies running DP centres. These are often well connected to those awarding the contracts, which come with little in the line of overheads or risks, or much in terms of regulation.

The DP system is utterly inhumane and needs to be abolished. The barriers placed in front of asylum seekers' right to work needs to be scrapped. Solidarity and support to those in the DP system is crucial and should come from the working-class, especially the trade unions, which has the power to force change on this issue and cut across the politics of divide and rule.

# Homelessness: Another deadly epidemic

By Conor Burke

**THE RECENT spate of homeless deaths has once again highlighted the plight faced by so many people who find themselves without a home in the South. A total of 11 people living in emergency accommodation or sleeping rough on the streets died in the month of July, this bring the total number of homeless deaths to approximately 250 in the Dublin area alone over the past 5 years.**

Government ministers and even many mainstream journalists like to compare figures to International standards in what can only be seen as an attempt to normalize this situation, but the reality is that there is nothing normal or natural about this.

## Profiteering leads to homelessness

Increases in homelessness are directly linked to increases in rents, property prices and private for profit housing development, which in turn is directly linked to government housing policy or lack thereof. The inherent weakness of Irish capitalism means that there is an over reliance on speculative industries such as property, which is geared towards profit maximization instead of meeting the needs of people. This is combined with the neoliberal ideology of the mainstream parties, which insists that the private sector must dominate the economy including housing.



11 homeless people died in month of July in South

Hence, despite the fact that the rent freeze and eviction ban introduced as part of the Covid-19 emergency legislation were working to reduce the numbers of people in emergency accommodation, it is seen as too much of a barrier to capitalist and landlord profits.

## Homes for all

At its worst the housing crisis had reached 10,514 (officially) living in emergency accommodation, and while these numbers have declined in recent months due to the rent freeze and eviction ban, the Government have just voted to lift these measures on everyone except those who can

prove that they are impacted economically by the Covid crisis. This will inevitably lead to a rise in homeless figures once again as landlords seek to increase rents and evict tenants.

The Socialist Party have long campaigned for not only a rent freeze but rent reductions and controls, as well as a ban on evictions and the key demand of state intervention to build public and affordable housing, which will cut across the private property developers and bring rents and property prices back to affordable levels. These kinds of policies would ensure that everyone who needs a home gets one.

## Save our Sperrins! Stop gold mining!



By Mike McCourt

**SINCE 2010, Canadian firm Dalradian has been attempting to set up a gold mining project in Greencastle, County Tyrone, threatening to pollute large areas of the Sperrins, spoiling the natural beauty and threatening the local wildlife. Fortunately, the enterprise has already met with strong community resistance. Protests, coupled with 37,000 letters of objection, have forced the company to forgo the use of cyanide. However, the project is still officially to go ahead pending a public enquiry.**

This, of course, all occurs in the context of an ever accelerating climate crisis, with just 10 years to take the necessary action if catastrophic and irreversible destruction is to be avoided. However, Edwin Poots, the Northern Minister for the Environment, has rejected calls for an ur-

gent timetable for action to tackle climate change, denying there is a crisis. This continues the Executive's lame attitude towards climate action, which has been reflected in its cosy relationship with international mining and fossil fuel companies.

To preserve our local environment and to aid the international fight against climate change, we must reject plans of capitalist mining companies who wish to play 'dine and dash' with our natural resources and landscape. Instead, we need to demand a socialist Green New Deal and a just transition away from fossil fuels, with public investment in renewable energy, sustainable industry and public transport to create decent jobs and tackle climate change. The trade union movement - representing almost 250,000 workers in Northern Ireland - should put itself as the front of this struggle and the fight against environmentally destructive industries.

# 75 years on “No More Hiroshimas”

By James Clement

**ON 6 August 1945** the world first witnessed the horrific power of the atomic bomb. The bombings of Hiroshima, and Nagasaki only days later, are today still the only examples of nuclear weapons having been deployed against a population.

The death toll immediately after the blast in Hiroshima was 75,000 people; yet by December this number had risen to around 140,000. After the Nagasaki bombing, the total death toll was well over 200,000. And for many more years to come, those not killed immediately would continue to suffer the awful effects of radiation poisoning, whether they were the Hibakusha (atomic bomb survivors) or the children of people there.

## Immense death and destruction

The word ‘Hiroshima’ today still conjures up powerful images of the mushroom cloud, or the scale of the devastation. The ruined shell of the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall, now known as the ‘A-Bomb Dome’, is a stark visual example of what happened 75 years ago.

There are plenty of accounts from survivors and witnesses of the horrors of the bomb, describing the carnage from the impact of the blast, the



Nagasaki. Of the 245,000 people in the city, about 100,000 died that day, over 100,000 subsequently

way people’s eyes and skin melted and burned, and the way that objects disintegrated in the intense heat left a ‘shadow’ burnt into the ground where it was.

Then there was the radioactive ‘black rain’ which fell across the area, leaving victims with extremely severe radiation sickness. Hair would fall out, people would become feverish, and if they did not die quickly, would develop cancer or leukaemia. After

the bombing, it was said nothing would ever grow again in the area.

## Unjustifiable

The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we are often told, brought an end to the war and spared the Allied forces the need to launch an invasion of the Japanese islands. Yet even high-ranking American military officers denied using the bomb was necessary. For example, Fleet Admiral

Chester Nimitz, Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet, stated only two months after the bombing of Hiroshima that “the atomic bomb played no decisive part, from a purely military standpoint, in the defeat of Japan...”

The tensions with the Soviet Union that would lead to the Cold War, had already begun; dropping the atomic bombs on Japan was not a military tactic, but a political one.

President Truman needed to show Stalin that the US military had already successfully developed an atomic bomb, to limit Soviet expansion into Asia.

## Ban all nuclear weapons

The question of nuclear power – whether for military or peaceful use – is above all a question of who controls the technology, and to what end. Socialists fight for a world without imperialist wars over resources, carrying the ever-present threat of nuclear weapons being used which are far greater than the ones used 75 years ago.

Members of the capitalist class and the ruling elites will pay lip service to the idea of a ‘nuke-free world’. But this is rank hypocrisy, as the USA, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Israel, North Korea and the UK are among those nations who hold their share of the world’s 13,400 nuclear warheads.

The massive funding into military nuclear power must stop, with the money instead used to fund and massively improve vital services and research for health and sustainable, renewable energy sources.

But we shouldn’t stop there. We fight for a socialist society, one in which all industry and the entire economy is placed under the democratic control and management of working-class people.

## 2020 awakens a generation to injustice Young people organising for system change

By Haritha Olaganathan

**CONTRARY TO the period of stillness and silent obedience the establishment would have desired quarantine to be, the last few months have seen explosions of struggle, demonstrating the deep-seated and determined will of working-class people to see change in society. From the burgeoning Black Lives Matter movement in the US and internationally, to the Debenhams strikes in Ireland, the pandemic has exposed a system built off of inequality and injustice.**

This inequality is encapsulated by the fact that US billionaires have seen their wealth surge by \$637 billion since the beginning of the pandemic, whilst over 40 million Americans have filed for unemployment in this time. Capitalism invariably allows the super-rich to profit off of a pandemic that is robbing working-class and poor communities of their livelihoods.

### Extreme inequality

This wealth disparity is not isolated to the US; capitalism scourges the working-class globally without prejudice. In Ireland, Covid-19 has seen thou-

sands of layoffs in the meat industry alone at the hands of billionaires like Larry Goodman. Instead of properly nationalising essential industries and providing adequate PPE for its workers, the Irish government would rather obsequiously hand over €13 billion to Apple and give their junior ministers a hefty pay rise. All whilst lauding frontline workers for their daily sacrifice.

Exposed to these inequalities on the daily, millions have taken to the streets in contempt of a system that will always have the odds stacked against them. Rallied awake by the brutal state murder of George Floyd, young and working-class people around the globe have taken a stand against the racism that stems from the heart of capitalism. This time with a sharper understanding of the need to fight against a system that thrives off of the division of the working-class, a generation of young people have begun to pose a real threat to the racist establishment.

### Radicalised by crisis & struggle

Their cries are not ones of compromise, calling for the barest, most minimal concessions, but demands for real



change. They envision a society that doesn’t subject anyone to oppression or discrimination, a society that is only possible through socialist politics and a system that prioritises its people over its profits.

When organised, we have witnessed the power of protest and strike. The victories of Marriage Equality and Repeal in the South were only won because of the insurmountable threat an organised force of largely young and

working-class women and LGBTQ+ people posed to a barbaric establishment. Similarly, the angered refusal of parents, teachers and students to sit a life-altering and incredibly stressful terminal exam in the middle of a global pandemic is what forced the cancellation of the Leaving Certificate earlier this year.

### Taking on capitalism

Reflecting on these gains, a clear les-

son we can draw from Covid-19 is the urgent need to get organised. We cannot end oppression in any of its forms without attacking the system that perpetrates it – capitalism. Young and working-class people must organise around socialist politics in order to effectively fight racism and the housing crisis, fully nationalise our health system with a demand of full provisions for its trans patients, and end the climate crisis.

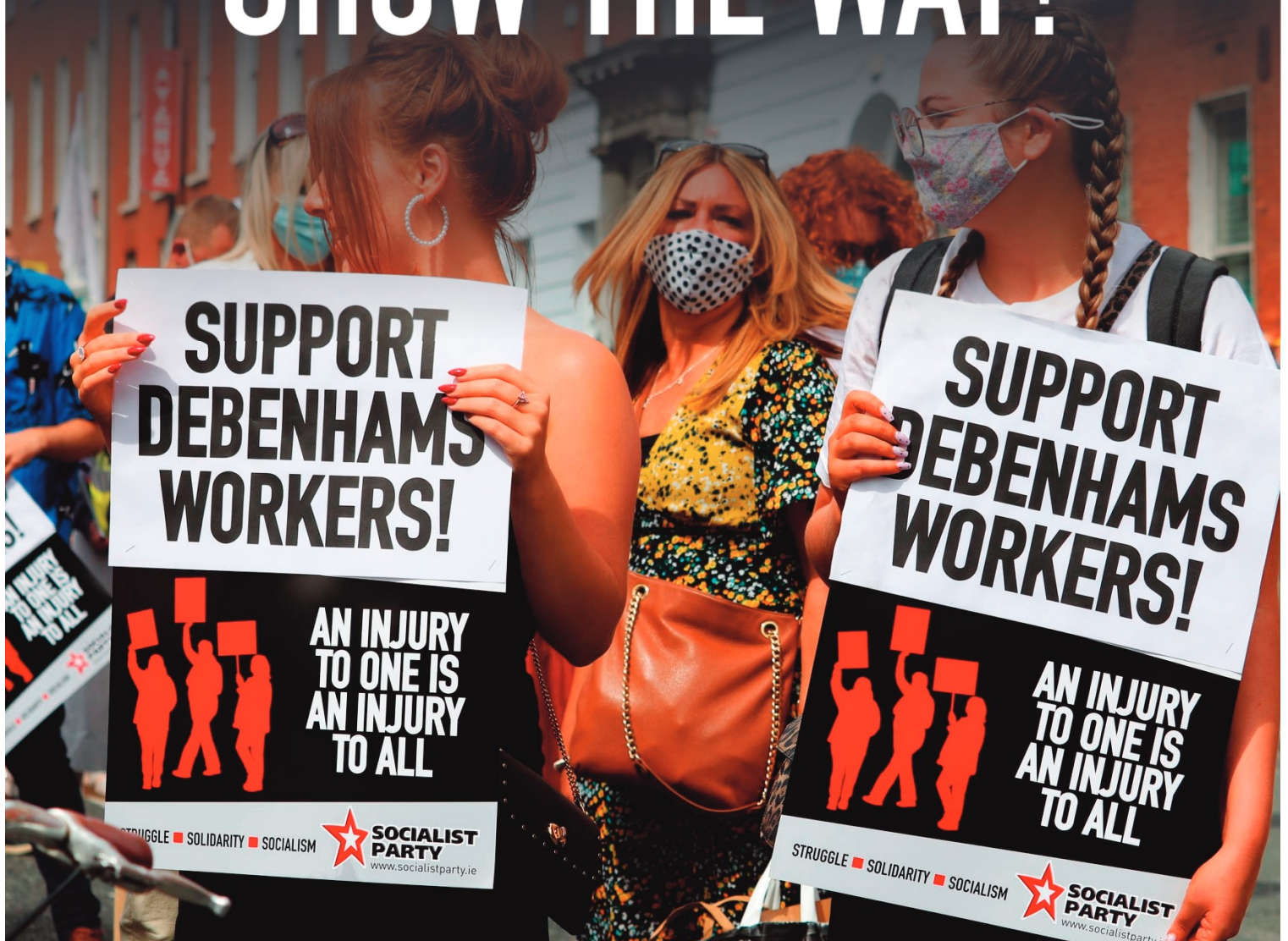
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PAPER OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY

ISSUE 132

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## Bosses use the crisis to try to shaft staff, but **DEBENHAMS WORKERS SHOW THE WAY!**



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