

# thesocialist

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## COVID-19 SECOND WAVE SURGES

# DEFEND OUR HEALTH NOT THEIR PROFITS



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# Capitalism & the pandemic

By Manus Lenihan

## Food banks & billionaires

The People's Foodbank in Bluebell, Dublin was started up from the boot of a car at the outbreak of the pandemic. Now it serves 300 households weekly. In Northern Ireland, demand for food banks has soared. These examples of Covid-19 hardship are close to home, although obviously things are much more extreme in different parts of the world.

Amid all this suffering, a new report shows that the world's billionaires control a record \$10.2 trillion. UBS and PwC, the authors of the report, reassure us that these 2,000 billionaires will 'lead innovation', 'revolutionise the economy' and solve all the problems facing the

world. Who are they trying to fool? These billionaires are not the solution, they are the problem.

## Stock market bubbles

As the virus went global in February and March, the stock market crashed. But then governments poured trillions into bailouts, and the stock markets have spent most of the year surging to crazy highs even as the economy tanked. Tesla was worth €80 billion in January. It was worth €400 billion by August. All thanks to the biggest bailout in human history.

We should have bailed out the real economy instead, through investment in infrastructure, services, housing and green energy, and just let the so-called 'risk-takers' go bust.

## Profit vs Public Health

Fianna Fáil Senator Ollie Crowe called for the army to be sent in against students drinking outdoors in Galway. But amid the blame game directed at ordinary people, especially young people, everyone knows that blatant recklessness has been raging on, from the meat plants to 6,000 tourists arriving in the south of Ireland every day during 'lockdown'. All these inconsistencies, which stem from serving the interests of some businesses, make the public health rules seem arbitrary.

## ...but there's no pleasing some people

Michael O'Leary, Ryanair CEO, compares NPHER to North Korea because they won't let him make quite as much money as he's used to. O'Leary's bizarre rants over the years have ranged from union-bashing to climate change denial and now to Covid denial: this miserable chancer is enraged by any attempt to put the interests of humanity before his own profits. If we let people like him have their way, the death toll would be many times higher and the economic damage much greater.

## Capitalism – smothering innovation



India's Covid-19 case levels are rising exponentially

One source of hope is the potential for a vaccine. But over 150 vaccines are in development; instead of pooling their efforts, different enterprises are sealed off from each other. In the end, a possibly inferior vaccine will be the first across the finish line. And all the money, effort and expertise poured into the other vaccines? Wasted. Capitalism is smothering innovation, not driving it.

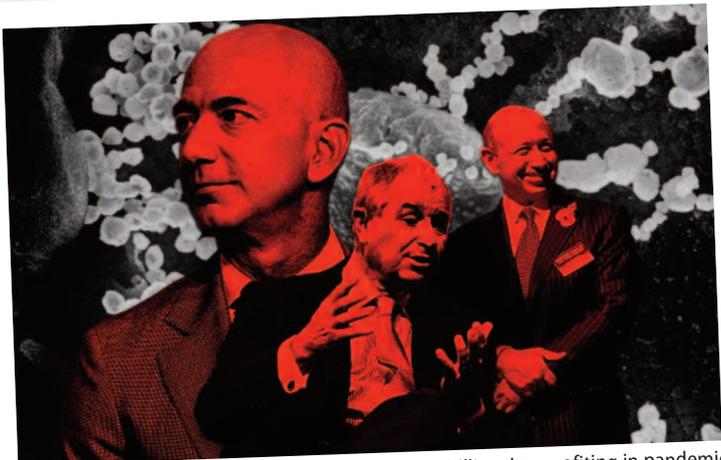
## Covid thrives on injustice

Wherever there is inequality and injustice, Covid thrives. Countries with private healthcare and poor labour laws, from India to the United States, are suffering far worse outbreaks than countries with universal healthcare and social protections (even

'poorer' countries).

But according to Oxfam, only 26 out of 158 countries spend 15% or more of their budgets on healthcare. Only one in five workers in the world have a social safety net. In the context of this capitalist dystopia, no wonder the virus is on a rampage.

But what if the wealth of society was directed toward human welfare instead of private profit? Toward healthcare, housing and workers' rights, instead of weapons, rents and algorithms to maximise clicks? It's hard to imagine, but one thing is certain: the worst damage has not been done by the virus itself, but by shoddy healthcare systems and the drive for profit, which, as we move toward a second lockdown north and south, now threaten to cancel out our sacrifices.



Jeff Bezos, Stephen Schwarzman &amp; Lloyd Blankfein: billionaires profiting in pandemic

# Government indifference in face of growing mental health crisis

By Mike Murphy

**From the outset of the pandemic, the focus has been on the spread of the virus, health system capacity, and development of vaccines and therapies. This is understandable and sensible. Measures such as social distancing and the restrictions on peoples' movements have been crucial to fighting the spread of the virus.**

However, it is important to note that there are consequences which result from the actions taken by states across the world, this is particularly when they've failed to utilise the space given by such measures to invest in proper testing and tracing as well as public health services generally. One casualty of the pandemic, and of governments' responses to it, is mental health.

## Lockdowns and social isolation

A feature of most governments' responses to the pandemic has been the introduction of social distancing and social restrictions, up to and including lockdown. The likely impact of such restrictions has been a source of concern since early in the pandemic. Research has shown that rates of depression and anxiety in Ireland and elsewhere were high

during the lockdown. Now we are again facing into a period of increased restrictions, with case numbers climbing north and south of the border.

## Government wastes opportunity

The fact is that governments, north and south, have displayed the same callous indifference to mental health that they did prior to the outbreak of this pandemic. They took no measures to give assistance to those suffering from the impact of this social crisis. They squandered the opportunity that resulted from the lockdown in the summer to put in place a proper system of testing and tracing and prematurely opened up the economy at the behest of businesses. Faced with a choice between our physical and mental well being on the one hand and the profiteering of the capitalist class on the other, the governments invariably plumped for the latter. Yet now we are faced with a potential new lockdown with all the impacts that will have, including to the economy.

An initiative to provide vulnerable older people with tablets, internet access, some training in the use of video-chat packages, could have been rolled out so as to allow continued social contact during a second wave. Fixed outdoor seating, at two

metre distance, with some shelter against rain and wind, could have been provided to facilitate younger people in congregating safely. Nothing of the sort was done.

Such measures could have been linked to major and necessary investment in the recruitment of counsellors to provide free 24-hour counselling services.

## Supports for workers taken away

Workplace closures also have an impact on financial security, and financial stress is a predictor of psychological distress.

People who are suffering financially as a result of the pandemic are seeing their governments reduce, rather than increase, the support they are given. We are peddled the myth that "we are all in this together", but the dishonesty of that claim is becoming clearer with every passing day. Workers are seeing their supports cut, while the enormous wealth of the capitalist elite is left untouched.

## Fears for a health systems

Those with pre-existing health conditions, both physical and mental, have been identified as being at greater risk of increased symptoms of depression. Mental health services are chronically under-resourced in



both the Republic of Ireland and the UK at the best of times – and these are far from the best of times. Any government that cared about the most vulnerable sections of its society would ensure mental health services were well resourced and adequately staffed. Under capitalism, vulnerable people are not the priority, as history and current experience amply demonstrate.

## Capitalism is bad for our health

We have learned a lot in this pandemic. We've learned about viruses. We've learned about vaccines. We've

learned about R numbers. And plenty more. But let's not fail to learn the social lesson. Capitalism doesn't care about us, except as contributors to the growth of wealth. Capitalist governments have consistently failed to provide adequate health services. Capitalist governments ignored years of expert warnings of impending pandemics, rather than spend in preparation. In the midst of a pandemic, capitalist governments cut payments to workers, while leaving the wealth of the ruling class untouched. Capitalism doesn't care about your mental health, as its actions prove.

# Government rush to reopen education leads to Covid surge

## Students, staff & parents can unite to win safe, free education

By Niall Dooris

**G**OVERNMENTS IN both Ireland and Britain rushed to open the schools, colleges and universities, without any certainty that it would be safe. This was aligned with their rushed opening of the economy after lockdown that has raised infection rates and put lives at risk.

Students and staff have been packed into classrooms and hallways with little measures in place to protect their health. Then students return to their homes and put further lives at risk. 300,000 children returned to school in Northern Ireland and by 8th September there were 88 cases in 64 schools. The NI Executive has now been forced to extend the half-term closure by at least a week because of the surge in infection.

Meanwhile, university students and lecturers were forced into unnecessary physical classes and



Students organising, north and south, have forced recent government u-turns

packed into cramped accommodation with thousands of others. This led to students being forcibly isolated in halls. In the first week, 30

students tested positive in Queen's University accommodation. While young people's lives were put at risk against their will, they were simulta-

neously scapegoated for the rise in infections.

### What we need

The victories of young people in forcing the cancellation of the Leaving Cert in the South and the scrapping of discriminatory algorithms for exam results in the North and Britain show that we can fight back. Now, school students in the South have walked out in protest against unsafe conditions. This gives a glimpse of how change can be won.

Students, staff and parents should unite to demand all measures necessary to ensure education is safe - whether reducing class sizes, moving to online teaching, demanding new equipment, and so on. Linking these demands to a demand for free, high quality and fully public education for all, including in higher education, could be the basis to build a movement to reshape our education system in the interests of staff and students.

## Greece: Students occupy hundreds of schools to protest Covid measures

By Haritha Olaganathan

**HUNDREDS OF** Greek schools have been occupied by students protesting the Ministry of Education's refusal to take measures against Covid-19 seriously in their reopening. The lives and health of 620,000 second-level students and teachers clearly wasn't a concern for the Greek government when students were ushered back into classrooms on 14 September. The result has been a surge in Covid cases, unsurprising with maximum class sizes of 27 pupils for the majority of secondary school students.

### Young people take action

Lyceums (secondary schools) in the cities of Karditsa and Agrinio led the wave of occupations, with thousands of students across the country joining protests until 700 schools were occupied by the end of September. The strikers' main demand is supported by teachers' unions: reduce class sizes to 15 students. Many schools still remain occupied despite huge pressures, demonstrating the militancy of young people to fight against a system that refuses to provide even the most minimal concessions to its youth.

Alongside the occupations, rallies, marches, and protests against the "public health time-bombs" have taken place in focal cities and towns. Here, students have drawn comparisons between the billions being thrown towards the military and the inability to adequately fund education during the pandemic. There has not been a sufficient recruitment drive of teachers to safely carry out lessons, and there is a serious lack of cleaning staff in schools. This is representative of a system that will always skimp on essential services to hoard profits for the super rich.

### State's brutal response

The state's reaction to the brave actions of the protesters epitomises this. Rather than listening to the lived reality of staff and students and adequately funding the education system, students have been met with brutality and villainisation. Police forces have tear gassed school students in Athens, whilst government officials continually deny that overcrowding is an issue in Greek schools.

This hypocrisy of the ruling class has pushed Greek students to strike for their education, but their exposure of the rigged nature of capitalism has led layers of students to extend their struggle to other issues stemming from the system. Young people in Volos are leading the fight for a clean environment, organising against a climate crisis perpetuated by a for-profit system.

We stand in solidarity with the school student protesters in Greece, but we also see a similar picture in Ireland today.

## University managements put "profit over people's lives" – a lecturer speaks out

**WITH INFECTIONS rising on university campuses, *The Socialist* spoke to a lecturer and University & College Union (UCU) activist in Belfast about the situation. Since this interview, the NI Executive was forced to recommend that all but essential in-person classes are suspended.**

### What were the reasons behind the push to reopen university campuses?

Quite simply, it is the prioritisation of profit over people's lives. Clearly, this Conservative government would like to see the further marketisation of UK higher education and, as such, upholds a model that considers income generation above all else.

### What is your impression of the safety measures taken by universities and how does this impact on staff?

It cannot be denied that much effort went into preparing classrooms, reducing room capacities and considering cleaning regimes. However, it has become clear that the virus can remain airborne for periods of time and that aerosol is also a key factor in transmission. Classrooms are usually badly ventilated spaces and teaching inherently involves speaking at a raised volume. The impact on staff is that they have been told to work in an unsafe environment.

**In recent days, Covid infections have increased massively in Northern Ireland. There have been attempts to blame students for this -**



### what is your view on this?

Students were asked to come to campus, to move into halls or private rentals, by universities. Students then, in many cases, became trapped in their high-density living conditions when the inevitable happened and students tested positive for Covid. Senior managers did this for reasons of maximising fee and accommodation income and directly against the advice - as we find out - of the SAGE advisory body. Focusing attention on illegal parties in the Holylands area is a naked attempt to dodge the responsibility the institution clearly holds for the exceptionally high rates of infection we now have.

### What was achieved by UCU's strike action in 2019 and what are the

### pandemic's impact on the disputed issues such as workload?

Many would answer that the strike action achieved nothing. I wouldn't say that, because it helped to consolidate a feeling among staff that the marketised university is the enemy of decent teaching and research and that all of our grievances cannot be meaningfully tackled without significant institutional reform. Industrial action taken by strong trade unions with large memberships is the only way to redress the balance of power and make those changes within our institutions. The pandemic has been absolutely ruinous to workloads but the hit is not experienced evenly. Those with caring responsibilities (primarily women) took an incredible hit over the summer - both in terms of their own

### health but also in terms of career development.

### What action do you think staff and unions need to take in the coming weeks and months?

Management have fuelled a pandemic instead of exercising the much-vaunted 'leadership' that we pay their inflated wages for. They have failed to make the decisions necessary to save lives, treat students and staff with dignity and address the genuine needs of teaching and research in the context of this crisis. Students and staff need to work together in solidarity, join a union and take on the responsibility that management has shamefully avoided - the responsibility to make our campuses safe places to learn and share ideas that can build a better future.

# Government & bosses to blame for Covid surge

By Conor Payne

**WITH RATES of infection rising across the country, we now face a public health emergency. Thursday Oct 15 saw the biggest daily number of cases to date, 1,205. Already, the health service is starting to feel the strain. Cork University Hospital is “congested” due to the effects of the virus.**

This means that there is now a need for further urgent action to combat the spread of the virus – instead the government have decided to ban home visits, which will be completely inadequate while the majority of workers are travelling into work and retail remains fully open.

## Opportunity squandered

While attempts are being made to blame ordinary people for the surge, the truth is that infections did fall sharply after the first shutdown, but the government and Ireland’s capitalist establishment criminally squandered the opportunity afforded by this to build a real capacity to deal with the virus.

They haven’t created the capacity in the health service to deal with a rise in infections – in fact there is less ICU capacity than in April. Ireland’s ICU capacity is one of the lowest in Europe.

They didn’t create a system of testing and tracing that matched up to what was needed. Contact tracing is done from just eight centres across the country, with staff including vol-

unteers, and unable to cope with the rising levels.

They conceded to business demands to reopen sections of the economy prematurely and turned a blind eye to the complete neglect of health and safety in the meat factories.

The approach to reopening of schools is also an important factor. Reopening schools could have been done in a safe manner, but plans to enable social distancing in school such as a ‘half in / half out system’, where only half of students are in school at any one time, which were considered at the outset of the crisis were ultimately cast aside.

## Putting business interests first

At every stage, they have attempted to return to capitalist “business as usual” – that is to put profit over people’s lives and health.

Leo Varadkar’s attack on NPHE was a cynical attempt to pit “the economy” against public health. Bigger sections of the establishment are now embracing this approach despite the huge danger posed by the rates of Covid infection. They say this is about maintaining people’s jobs, incomes and mental health – these crises are undoubtedly real, but we shouldn’t buy this rhetoric from a political establishment which has cut the Pandemic Unemployment Payment and reversed the ban on evictions. It’s really about avoiding any interruption of the flow of profits to big business.

Socialists reject the false choice



Government wasted the progress made after the first lockdown by not investing the necessary infrastructure

between living standards and public health. The truth is that there is more than enough wealth in Irish society to maintain living standards even while taking the necessary measures to fight the virus. A report conducted by Oxfam in January of this year found that Ireland’s 17 billionaires had a staggering combined wealth of €40 billion.

Any new shutdown measures will only work if part of an integrated plan to deal with the virus and defend the jobs and incomes of working people. This means investing in public health service capacity and an extensive programme of testing and

tracing. It means a fight to demand the right of all workers to a healthy and safe workplace. It also means the seizing of the massive wealth in Irish society and using it to guarantee workers are not made to pay the price of any economic shutdown.

## Radical socialist measures

The voice of working-class people must be heard in this crisis. The trade union movement should now fight to organise all unorganised workers, and put the demand that workers should have democratic control over health and safety in all workplaces. Where the union leaders

are failing, the striking Debenhams workers have shown it is possible to wage a serious fight against the bosses. All jobs should be defended, and workers should resist and strike to maintain employment. Job shedding companies should be brought into public ownership to save jobs.

To meet the needs of the situation we need socialist policies and an end to the rule of the profiteers. This means bringing the wealth and resources of the capitalist class into public ownership and planning the economy to ensure investment in healthcare, housing and our other needs.

## Government’s Climate Action Bill – a greenwashed sell-out

By Sam Belton

**THE GOVERNMENT finally published its much-anticipated Climate Action Bill. Although there were slight improvements on the version delivered by Fine Gael’s Richard Bruton in 2019, such as a legally binding commitment to carbon neutrality, the bill predictably falls short of anything that could be described as being even remotely radical.**

For instance, the target year for achieving carbon neutrality is a distant 2050, a target which governments will only be legally bound to “pursue” rather than “achieve”. Additionally, the bill contains zero references to a ‘just transition’, even though it was taken to be a mainstay in the Green Party’s programme for government. This will hardly place Ireland “at the vanguard of EU efforts” to create a greener society, as asserted recently by Green Party leader, Eamon Ryan.

Carbon budgets, of which three will be introduced, lasting five years each, are to be produced by the new Climate Action Council. However, the likelihood



New climate bill is utterly inadequate, and an indictment of the Green Party

that these won’t disproportionately burden poor and working-class people is low given that the Green Party are

still in favour of regressive water charges, carbon taxes and are even flirting with ideas such as imposing

minimum pricing on cheap clothing and a ban on 2-for-1 food deals.

## What could be done differently?

Mass public investment in energy-efficient housing; free public transport and major expansion of public transport capacity; significant increases in state forestry hectareage; subsidies and retraining programmes to help livestock farmers transition into becoming green sector workers; actions such as these would be far more effective in reaching carbon neutrality sooner and in a way that not only doesn’t penalise working-class people, but provides quality new green sector jobs.

These could be paid for using the enormous wealth that exists in Irish society. For example, Ireland has the fifth highest number of ultra-wealthy individuals in the world, and an inhumane corporation tax regime which results in some of the world’s wealthiest companies paying tax at rates ranging from 12.4% to 0%.

Rather than utilise even a portion of this wealth – wealth which is ultimately produced by workers and not CEOs –

Fine Gael, Fianna Fail and the Green Party instead fight to keep it in the grubby hands of a capitalist elite.

## Radical action against capitalism

Recently, David Attenborough, in an interview for a ten-part BBC podcast series on climate change, stated that climate change can only be halted by curbing “the excesses the capitalist system has brought us”. This speaks to a growing understanding among broad layers of people that meaningful climate action will not be possible unless the economic system which is driving it is challenged.

As far back as 1867, it was explained by Karl Marx that capitalism tends to destroy its two sources of wealth: nature and human beings. Since then, endless scientific investigations have piled a mountain of hard empirical evidence supporting this observation.

Hope lies with the exploited majority of working class people who, once organised, have the power to end this outdated and barbaric system and replace it with a socialist planned economy that places the needs of people and the planet before profit and greed.

# Covid resurgence: Stormont has failed

## Organise to defend public health, jobs, pay & services!

By Daniel Waldron

**F**ollowing a dramatic surge in Covid infections and hospitalisations, the Northern Ireland Executive has introduced a raft of new restrictions. The most significant of these are the extension of the half-term break in schools to two weeks and the closure of cafes, bars and restaurants - except for takeaway and delivery - for a month. This raises the threat of further large-scale redundancies in the sector, unless there is an immediate emergency intervention.

Socialists support all necessary measures to stem the spread of the virus and protect the capacity of our health service. However, these must be consistent with the science and driven by the interests of public health and the wellbeing of the population, not shaped by the interests of big business, as has been the case under the Northern Ireland Executive. The economic and social cost of this crisis should fall on the shoulders of the bosses and billionaires who have made a killing by profiteering off it, not on the shoulders of the working class.

Restrictions on people's ability to meet with their friends and family are being maintained and tightened. Yet, many will still be compelled to work in close contact with others in non-essential sectors, including non-essential retail, which is to remain open and poses a particular risk. People are being told to work from home where possible, although there



The Stormont parties preside over a Covid-19 disaster

is no clarity as to how employers will be compelled to comply.

Arlene Foster and the Executive have stepped up their rhetoric about 'personal responsibility', trying to shift blame for the resurgence of the virus onto us - particularly young people - and away from their own failings. Overwhelmingly, ordinary people are acting responsibly. Following the Tories, the Executive rushed to re-open schools and the economy without adequate safeguards in place, and has failed to adequately expand staffing and capacity in our health service, or to roll out mass testing and a robust track-and-trace system.

As socialists have argued from the outset of this crisis, we cannot rely on the pro-capitalist politicians in Stormont or Westminster to act in

our interests. Instead, workers and young people need to get organised through the trade unions, student bodies and in our communities to

defend public health, as well as jobs, pay and public services. The measures which we should demand include:

- **An immediate moratorium on redundancies and sackings for all but gross misconduct**
- **Furlough payments to be topped up to 100% of wages by employers, or by the state where that is demonstrably unaffordable**
- **Guaranteed right to work from home or to shield where necessary without penalisation**
- **Democratic control of health and safety in workplaces, schools and colleges**
- **Temporary closure of non-essential retail, with re-opening of sectors only when workers and unions agree it can be done safely**
- **Repeal anti-union laws to allow workers to stand up for their rights**
- **Emergency investment in NHS capacity, including mental health services**
- **Mass testing to get ahead of the spread of the virus, and the strengthening of track-and-trace measures**

## Young people stand up to bigotry and oppression

By Ciara Rainey

**I**N RECENT years, huge strides have been made in both LGBTQ+ and women's rights here. It was only the beginning of this year when we saw same-sex marriage introduced, and later abortion decriminalised up to twelve weeks. Most would think we are moving into a more progressive world, while others are still ready to fight against it.

However, we still cannot deny that as a culture we have lengths to go. Traditionally feminine work is still undervalued, more evident than ever in the critical underpaying of nurses and other care roles. Meanwhile, being kicked out due to their sexuality is a leading cause of youth homelessness, and LGBTQ+ people are both more likely to suffer from a hate crime and develop serious mental health issues.

Many of Northern Ireland's young people have once again recognised



these issues before our political leaders, and some have decided something needs to be done. Over the past 3 to 4 weeks, Belfast students have been organising rallies in the city centre via Instagram, to show solidarity and support for the marginalised

LGBTQ+ in response to the comments of homophobic and transphobic preachers.

These students show disenchantment and anger at the current system which upholds the idea that the very existence of gay, lesbian, bisex-

ual, trans, and gender non-conforming individuals is up for debate. They're sick of a system which allows hateful religious attitudes to infiltrate education so heavily, that LGBTQ+ children must sit through classes where the topic is whether or not they deserve rights. Women, in a similar way, must sit through lessons to teach them that their body is not theirs, and that their choices are not theirs to make, in order to push anti-choice rhetoric.

We cannot continue to allow these groups to live in fear and under this oppressive system. We must meet this issue head on. The only way to do this, therefore, is to establish a youth and working-class coalition movement to fight against oppression and hatred of any people, in any form. We must recognise that these divisions and hatred serve no one but the capitalist ruling class, and therefore can only be fully removed through systematic and cultural changes only possible under socialism.

## Spy Cops Bill: an attack on democratic rights

### Keir Starmer's Labour lets it pass

By Conor Morgan

**THE COVERT Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Bill, more commonly known as the "Spy Cops" Bill, was passed in the House of Commons with support from the Conservative Party and the DUP, effectively condoning crimes by undercover intelligence officers and assets by granting legal immunity from prosecution, even for assault or murder. The Labour Party, hopelessly eager to become trusted as a party of "law and order", instructed their MPs not to vote on the bill, though 20 of them (all members of the Socialist Campaign Group) rebelled to vote against it.**

While the Tories try to belittle fears that intelligence officers will break the law, past precedent tells a very different story. The shadow of state collusion hangs over many deaths here in Northern Ireland, including that of Pat Finucane. Victims campaigners will take no comfort in the Tories' empty promises. There is also a clear precedent for intelligence officers committing sexual assault, as in the case of undercover officers Mark Kennedy and Bob Lambert. Both men formed abusive and manipulative romantic relationships with left-wing environmental activists under false identities in the full knowledge of their commanding officers, with Lambert even fathering a child whom he abandoned after 2 years. The Metropolitan Police recently agreed to pay compensation to Lambert's child.

Of the thousands of groups infiltrated by police and intelligence services over the years, the vast majority were left-wing. Officer Peter Francis was placed undercover in five trade unions over the course of his career, and believes that evidence he collected was used to "blacklist" trade unionists from future employment. One has to wonder if this was on the minds of the Unite Executive when they chose to cut 10% of their donations to Labour following the party's abstention on this bill, as they had previously called for "no stone to be left unturned" in the cases of these "spy cops". Following Labour's previous abstentions on the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill and on continuing the ban on COVID-19 Evictions, the question remains: How much does Keir Starmer really care about your human rights?

**There's no doubt that the recent wave of Black Lives Matter mass protests shook the ruling class, writes James McCabe. While elements of the establishment have welcomed greater representation of people of colour, they also fear organised movements that threaten social stability in any way.**

**MALCOLM X argued that "you can't have capitalism without racism", and the capitalist class in recent months particularly feared the multiracial, anti-racist character of the BLM movement as it threatens the institutional racism and division that serves their interests.**

#### Absurdities of "race"

While it's indisputable that racial oppression serves the interests of the ruling class, it was instituted in various ways in different societies. When the Spanish State ruled Cuba in 1907, the census of that year classified people from a Chinese or Indigenous Mexican background as "white", whereas under US occupation in the same year, the US census classified these two groups as "coloured". While racial categorisation is absurd and ambiguous, racial oppression is destructive for the majority of working people and rather than being a part of human nature as some believe, it is socially constructed to serve definite ends.

#### Did racism always exist?

The development of anti-Black racism is completely connected to the brutal slave trade in the early stages of capitalism. The question is; was the Atlantic Slave Trade "legitimised" on the basis of an already existing anti-Black racism prevalent in places like England? To give one example, the Black

protagonist in Shakespeare's 1604 play Othello was a multi-dimensional, if very flawed character. Two hundred years later in the southern states of the US, the very same play was banned because the idea of a black lead character was unacceptable to the white-supremacist norms of that society.

#### Multiracial struggle; a threat to the status quo

Attempts by the English ruling class in the 1540s to enslave the working people there failed due to organised resistance, resulting in a law called the Statute of Artificers that banned slavery, and ruled that workers should be paid wages. These rights were reversed in the English Colony of Virginia in the early 1600s due to the needs of the dominant tobacco plantation owners for an increased rate of exploitation. Racial hereditary slavery did not exist in the Colony of Virginia for most of the 17th century. In fact, three-fourths of the limited-term bonded labourers before the late 1600s were of a European background. The European bonded labourers were not indentured servants as they did not sign contracts and they could be bought and sold. Most were prisoners or homeless children, and in the early 1600s most died within their first year of service.

There are many documented incidents in the legal records of the Colony of Virginia of successful or

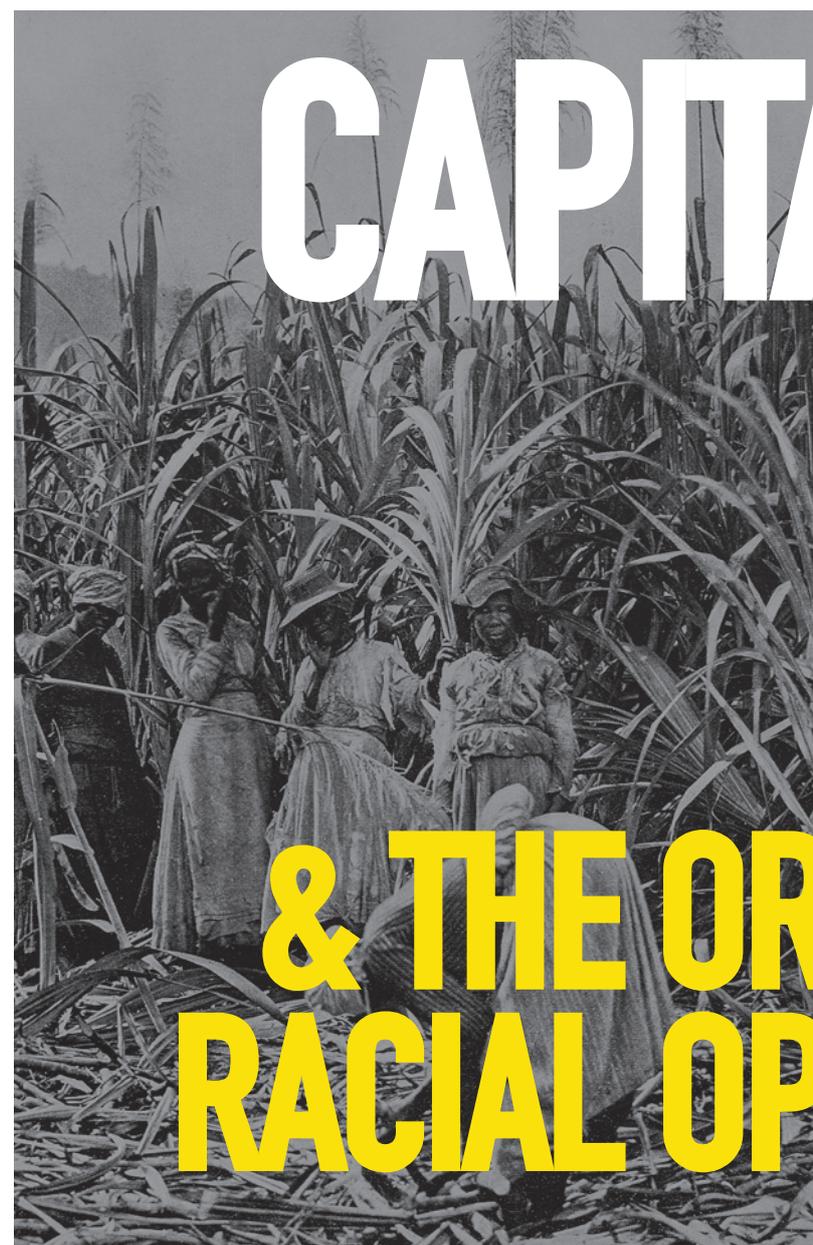
failed collective escape attempts by labourers of African and European descent. There were also ten multiracial rebellions from below in the colony between 1660 and 1676, the most well known being Bacon's Rebellion, which rocked the tobacco plantation elite to their very core. They responded with institutionalised segregation along racial lines.

#### Hereditary racial slavery; a response to struggles from below

For decades in the 1600s, free African Americans had the right to vote, the right to own guns, the right to marry, the right to read and write. Many owned land and some were owners of European bonded labourers. The tobacco planters and their political representatives in the pattern-setting Colony of Virginia conducted a very conscious campaign to strip these rights from all people of African descent there, in order that rights that were the norm for all men in England became advantages for all men of European descent in Virginia. Even the racial category of "white" does not appear in any of the records of Virginia until the year 1691.

Before then people from a European background were referred to as "English" or "Dutch", etc. Racial oppression can best be understood as a system under which the most degraded member of the oppressor group, is exalted over any member of the oppressed group, however educated or wealthy they may be. The "white" race was invented by the ruling class to get labouring European Americans to dissociate themselves from Black people, in part due to access to birth rights and advantages that were cut off to Black people.

**"Where there is oppression, there will be resistance" – Assata Shakur**



## From Haitian Revolution to Black Lives Matter The history of struggles for Black

By Peter McGregor

**BLACK HISTORY Month within schools and in the media is almost completely tokenistic and doesn't really delve into black history or the many struggles against slavery and oppression of black people. Yet, for those serious about defeating racism today, it is incredibly important to look back at some trailblazing struggles led by people of colour.**

#### Black Lives Matter

One historic struggle is happening right now – the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. BLM began in 2014 after the racist police murder of black teenager Michael Brown Jr in Ferguson, Missouri. His murder sparked a wave of protests in Ferguson, but also all across the US and internationally. The current wave of BLM protests erupted after the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, which ignited an international mood against systemic racism. Since then, protests have continued in a way which we haven't seen before, with waves of protests appearing after almost every

police murder of a person of colour.

Those opposed to this uprising try to put a wall between it and the earlier civil rights struggles. In reality, it is a continuation of those struggles which - by mobilising black workers and poor alongside other workers, and particularly young people - were able to strike blows against racist discrimination in the US. Many of the leaders of that movement - including Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, who was assassinated while giving his support to striking sanitation workers - began to draw the connection between racism and the capitalist system itself.

#### Haitian Revolution

The revolution in Haiti (previously San Domingo) is another example of an inspirational struggle of black people that is rarely discussed in schools and so on. In 1790, the 'Mulattoes' – children of slaves who had been raped by their 'owners', who themselves owned property and slaves – revolted against the French colonialists, which was followed by a revolt of the slaves themselves in 1791. In 1792, the French ruling class

agreed to grant more rights to the Mulattoes, but as black Marxist thinker CLR James wrote, "All these slave owners, French nobility and French bourgeoisie, colonial aristocrats and Mulattoes, were agreed that the slave revolt should be suppressed and the slaves remain in their slavery." However, the slaves did not give in and fought against the French ruling class and the Mulattoes for their own rights.

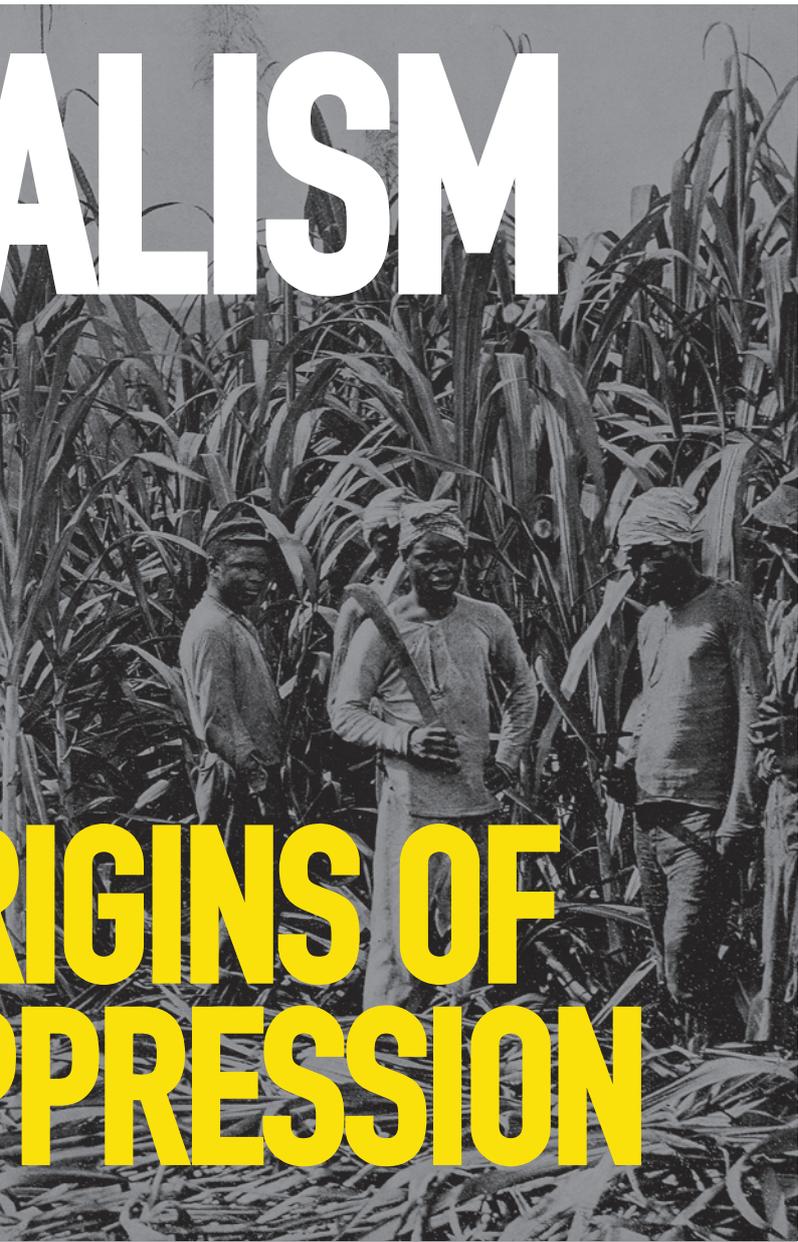
In 1793, the British invaded Haiti and, along with the Spanish, started claiming the island as their own, eventually carving it up between them. However, in 1794 during the French revolution, it was announced by those fighting against the aristocracy that the enslavement of black people would be abolished. This news filtered through to San Domingo and other French West Indies islands. Inspired by this news and led by Toussaint Louverture, a former slave, the black population delivered a striking defeat to the imperialist powers and continually pushed back Britain's attempts to invade. In 1804, Haiti was declared the world's first independent, black republic.



The BLM protests in 2020 represent the biggest protest movement in US history

# ALISM

# ORIGINS OF OPPRESSION



The barbaric system of racial hereditary slavery could not be instituted or maintained by the wealthy elite whose interests it served without facing serious struggles of resistance and therefore needed a layer of the population who could act as an intermediate social control stratum. There were too few people of European descent in the Anglo-Caribbean colonies of Jamaica, Barbados and St Croix to institute a white supremacist system along the lines of Virginia. In those islands, a middle-class layer of traders and professionals was made up of free Black and mixed-race people. By 1830, 23% of slave owners in Jamaica were Black.

The ruling class deliberately encouraged participation by free people of African descent in the slave patrol militias there, in contrast to the US where the slave patrol militias were white-only, and serving in the slave patrol militias became mandatory in Virginia for all white men. In contrast to the Anglo-Caribbean, where there were too few Europeans to make up the middle class, in the US there were too many to be promoted to the middle class, and so labouring Europeans were brought into the all-class “white” race identity.

### The fight against racial oppression is crucial for all working people

In the southern states of the US where racial oppression has been deepest and most institutionalised, the living standards of all working people have tended to be lower than other parts of that same country. The US is also unique in the advanced capitalist world, as having never had a mass party of the working class. Racial oppression has played a major role in this. It's absolutely clear that fighting racism is a central plank in the battle for socialist change.

## Black Liberation

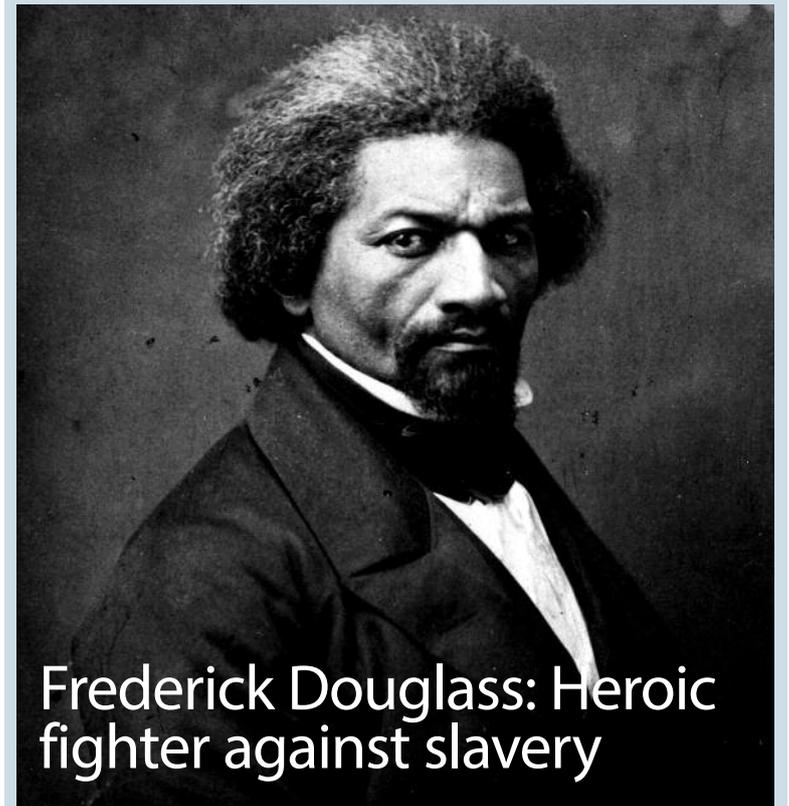


Mural of black history in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

**History of struggle rich in lessons**  
The capitalist class will never fully invest into Black History Month and will by no means allow an end to oppres-

sion and inequality. Learning about the history of black struggle – past and present – is crucial for socialists. From the fight against slavery and the opposition to segregation, to the current

BLM movement – these struggles can provide many lessons to assist in the fight against racism today and the capitalist system in which it is rooted.



## Frederick Douglass: Heroic fighter against slavery

By Leah Whelan

### “If there is no struggle, there is no progress” – Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass was born in Maryland into slavery in 1818 and escaped to the north of the US in 1838 where he began his anti-slavery lectures, which included discussions on the oppression of women and racial oppression. Douglass was still owned by a slave-owner and escaped his captivity through an organised, underground network. The fear of recapture forced him to exile in Ireland and England between 1845-1847 – where he gave lectures on slavery and the abolitionist movement.

On board the Cambria in 1845, heading to Ireland and England, an incident occurred which foreshadowed the success of his Irish antislavery tour; Douglass was supported by an Irishman against the threats and harassment from southern, pro-slavery passengers. The Limerick Reporter recounted the incident saying that when someone threatened to throw him overboard, the harasser was told by the Irishman that ‘two might play at that game’. In a letter back home, Douglass stated that “I can truly say, I have spent some of the happiest moments of my life since landing in this country. I seem to have undergone a transformation. I live a new life”.

### Happy days in Cork

Douglass spent a month in Cork, a place that benefitted hugely from the slave trade at its ports. However, his arrival in Cork was met with support and he was successful in organising in anti-slavery societies. His connection with Daniel O’Connell assisted in his positive reception when he arrived in Ireland. A conscious internationalist, he argued that the cause of the slave was the cause of the oppressed everywhere.

His audiences in Cork included mostly working-class people, especially women. Many of the attendees would have been illiterate, but felt strongly about the importance of fighting colonial and racial oppression. The support from poor and working-class people in

Ireland was so strong that they donated money to help Douglass buy his freedom. When describing Ireland in his letters home he said, “eleven days and a half gone, and I have crossed three thousand miles of the perilous deep ocean...instead of the bright blue sky of America, I am covered with the soft grey fog of the Emerald Isle. I breathe, and lo! the chattel becomes a man”. On his tour of Ireland, he also noted that “No one... seemed to be shocked or disturbed at my dark presence”.

### Capitalism and Racial Oppression

On the nature of US capitalism, Douglass noted “there is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than of the people of the United States at this very hour”. Slavery in the US depended on the abuse and unpaid labour of Black people which generated huge profits for plantation owners.

Of course many Irish emigrants were impacted by the white supremacist nature of US society. They were entitled to certain rights and advantages denied to African Americans the minute they got off the boat. The Catholic Church and pro-slavery Democratic Party waged a vicious, unrelenting and unfortunately successful campaign to turn the bulk of the Irish American community in the northern cities against abolitionism and recruit them to the idea of being members of the “white” race and against multiracial solidarity.

### Legacy lives on

The impact of slavery is still evident today in the systemic racism that’s manifested in racist police murders, racial wealth gaps and the prison industrial complex – all of which is driven by the generational dehumanisation and stereotyping of Black people. However, the recent international Black Lives Matter (BLM) movements highlight that a large proportion of young people today from all backgrounds are willing to fight to end racial oppression.

The example and legacy of Frederick Douglass should be a source of inspiration to all anti-racist and socialist activists today who continue his struggle.

## US presidential election: Trump, Biden offer no solutions to historic social, economic & health crises

By Ollie Bell

**WITH THE 2020 presidential election drawing closer and Covid-19 showing no signs of stopping any time soon, all eyes on the US on who will become the next president. Covid-19 has shown us the cracks within the capitalist system. Workers that were once considered unskilled and low paid are now being told they are essential workers.**

### Backdrop of election

Profit is being put before people's lives as many countries rush to open back up in order to save the economy. Just look at the US to see how a for profit healthcare system and Trump's refusal to take the crisis seriously can worsen a pandemic. The presidential elections are also happening against the backdrop of the explosion of the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer and calls to defund the police. With the Democratic Party offering no real alternative to Trump, it is clear that only a mass movement of working class people, that breaks with the capitalist system and its ruthless profiteering, can solve these inequalities.

Just like the Hillary Clinton campaign in 2016, Biden is leading a campaign based on complacency. Instead of knocking on doors, ringing potential voters or registering young people to vote, it is relying on people's deep hatred of Trump to get people to vote for him. Biden's cam-



Polls show neither of the two main candidates inspire confidence in most voters

campaign is failing to put out a programme that inspires young and working-class people to go and vote. This can be seen with Biden's refusal to defund the police and Kamala Harris' reassurance during the Vice Presidential debate that Biden would not ban fracking. Ultimately, this flows from the fact that the Democrats are a party that represents the interests of Wall Street and big business in the US.

### "Law and order" card

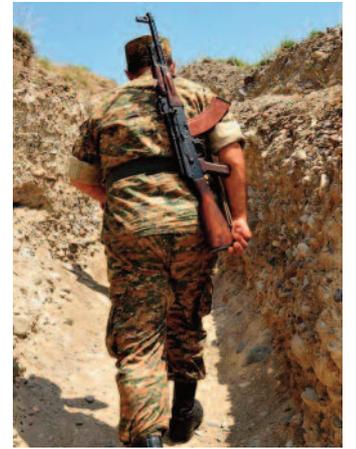
Compare this to Trump's campaign which is drumming up "law and order" sentiment and calling the Democratic establishment the "radical left" in order to play into certain people's fears. Trump has encouraged far-right violence with his refusal to condemn white supremacy and even telling far-right group the Proud Boys to "stand back and

stand by". Even though the Biden campaign withdrew negative ads targeting Trump because of his Covid-19 diagnosis, the Trump campaign has refused to do the same.

The Presidential elections are also happening in the aftermath of the death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg (RBG). With Amy Coney Barrett as Trump's nominee, this could mean a massive threat to LGBTQ+ rights, abortion rights, immigrant rights and union rights. Many victories have been attributed to the Supreme Court such as *Roe v. Wade* and *Brown v. Board*, but these advances were only won because of the mass movements out on the streets. But under capitalism, rights can be easily taken away. This has been the case with abortion rights for a number of years now. The fact that the death of RBG poses such a threat to the rights of the majority of American people shows how undemocratic the Supreme Court and the whole political system is.

No matter who the next president is, the inequalities inherent in capitalism will still exist. A Biden victory will not bring about any real change, as he doesn't support even the bare minimum such as a Green New Deal or Medicare for All. Mass movements are the only way to safeguard the rights of working class and oppressed people. The "lesser of two evils" must be rejected and a movement led by workers and young people for a socialist alternative to this rotten system must be built.

## Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict: workers & youth can stop the war



By Seán Burns

**TENSIONS BETWEEN Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh region have broken out into open conflict. The Caucasian region is a jigsaw of nationalities and religions. It has been the scene of many conflicts, including two horrific Chechen wars, civil war in Georgia, and the Russo-Georgian war of 2008. The current conflict finds itself played out in the context of an immense economic crisis, inter-imperialist rivalries and the Covid pandemic.**

The Russian regime has long treated the region as its back yard. It has tried to balance between the ruling elites of the two countries and has been selling weapons to both sides. It has proposed mediating peace talks, but both sides have rejected this proposal. Russia's motivation is not benign humanitarian opposition but its own strategic interests. An escalating conflict in the region would bring further instability and economic damage.

The US and EU also have major interests in the region. Most Azerbaijani oil and gas is produced by the US/UK owned BP, while the US supports the development of the South Caucasian pipeline. They will no doubt look to intervene in some way into the region to protect their assets.

The war has to be stopped. The intervention of imperialist powers, in whatever form, will not prevent it but add further fuel to the fire. The root causes of the conflict must be resolved. The local ruling elites and foreign powers that look to rob wealth and natural resources from the region offer no solution. The active mobilisation of working people and youth in both countries in a powerful anti-war movement – with demonstrations, strikes and the active solidarity of similar movements in Russia, Turkey and elsewhere – can defeat the drift towards war.

## Voter suppression in "the land of the free"

By Ty Nolan

**FOR DECADES, voter turnout in US presidential elections has hovered just over 50%. Turnout for midterm elections is closer to 40%, meanwhile, local elections are closer to 25%. It is necessary to then ask why are so many Americans declining to cast a vote in election after election?**

Those in the US looking to cast a vote in an election face serious barriers. There is the issue as to whether your vote counts at all. Gerrymandering, a system by which political parties redraw districts for their own benefit, is widely used to target African-American voters to minimise the impacts of their votes.

### Anti-democratic laws

The working class also has its votes suppressed through voter ID laws, disenfranchisement of ex-felons, and closing polling stations just to name a few. These laws are pushed through under the guise that immigrants are committing voter fraud. Right-wing politicians benefit from

any resulting racial divisions the anti-immigrant messaging sews in the working class. They also benefit by disenfranchising working-class Americans who oppose austerity and other right-wing policies.

While Republicans are particularly known for using gerrymandering and disenfranchisement efforts to their benefit, Democrats are also guilty. Both the 2016 and 2020 presidential primaries saw Bernie Sanders pose a legitimate threat to the Democratic Party. When the establishment was faced with a leftward threat, they responded by ensuring long lines to vote and substandard election equipment to prevent working-class people from voting for Bernie.

All of these forms of voter suppression are part of the reason why so many Americans never vote. Voters rightfully see that neither party offers solutions for the main issues affecting working-class Americans today. What cannot be ignored is that there is a need for a mass workers party organised on socialist principles to inspire working-class people currently alienated from elections.



The political system in the US is designed to disenfranchise workers and poor people

## #StrikingIsNotACrime

# Court repression of Debenhams' strikers is met with defiant response

By Councillor Kieran Mahon

**T**HE MOVE by KPMG to seek a High Court injunction against ex-Debenhams' workers pushes the 6-month dispute into a new potentially decisive phase. The injunction, granted by Justice Leonie Reynolds, means those who defend the picket line from strike-breakers can be summonsed in front of the courts and asked to give an undertaking not to engage in effective picketing. Workers, and supporters who do not give that undertaking can be jailed by the courts until they do so, or for a fixed term. Fianna Fáil and the Greens are now presiding over this very serious escalation.

KPMG's application named three workers who have played important roles on pickets and in workplace occupations at Mahon Point, Cork and in Waterford. In court, Cork worker Carol Anne Bridgeman defended the collective actions of workers and again reiterated the workers' calls for government intervention and further talks between KPMG, Mandate and shop stewards to achieve the workers' demands of two weeks statutory and the agreed additional two weeks from company assets.

### State backs bosses over workers

The escalation by the state, on the side of bosses, has had a hugely politicising effect. In preparation for Tuesday's hearing workers organised a Facebook meeting, now viewed almost 9,000 times, and launched



Pickets are being maintained on an almost 24-7 basis at many stores

#StrikingIsNotACrime, which immediately trended on Twitter. Workers also pulled in broader political support from opposition parties. Picket line meetings have demonstrated serious resolve to defend the stock, fight any threatened jailing and face down KPMG, the courts and government.

The coming days will see attempts to enforce the injunction and break pickets. Representations by KPMG to Mandate offering two hours' notice before attempts to remove stock are designed to try and soften pickets but in any event was not honoured early the following morning in Henry Street when a van arrived to deliver packaging. Mandate and ICTU should fully resist this, stand with members and tackle head on the bla-

tant denial of workers' rights this dispute is exposing.

These attacks can be defeated on picket lines which have already stood firm in the face of huge adversity. Workers must also politicise any attacks by Gardaí and the courts by piling pressure on Taoiseach Micheal Martin and Fianna Fáil. Rank and file union and community support must be mobilised to stand with workers, defy injunctions and test the threats of jail. Despite the challenges of Covid-19, the safely organised defence of any worker threatened with prison must be organised.

Should Fianna Fáil and The Greens allow any jailings it will burn deeply into working-class consciousness and they risk a huge backlash.

### An unjust system

That Debenhams workers would face jail for organising in their own economic interest in the same week that the budget again copper fastened Ireland's tax haven policies for multinational companies speaks volumes about Irish capitalism. The use of state machinery against Debenhams workers actually shows how effective, grass roots trade unionism has to this point stopped the theft of any further wealth created by these workers. Capitalism is a system based on the exploitation of workers for profit. All workers must follow the example of Debenhams and organise, fight and lay bare the rottenness of the system if gains are to be won.

## Driving instructors fight for health, safety & dignity

The Socialist spoke with Laura Broxon, a driving instructor & Unite member who's part of an ongoing dispute with the RSA about health and safety.



### Do you want to give a brief overview for how the dispute kicked-off?

Definitely. When the government announced that the RSA driving tests could resume and driving-schools were reopened, we were getting back to work to find out that we were locked out of the RSA test centres. Normally the test centres would have a public waiting room, a bathroom facility, somewhere to stand in out of the rain etc. A lot of driving instructors would be self-employed and wouldn't have their own offices or buildings so we wouldn't have anywhere else to wash our hands or use the bathroom... The RSA have said that they are locking us out for their health and safety protocols... but the areas that we would normally be in to wait in are areas that the RSA staff would not be in anyway.

### What kind of actions have you done so far?

Dublin we have a protest at the Finglas test centre every Friday from 10-11am. There's been other protests going on throughout the country at the Sligo test centre, Waterford test centre and Cavan test centre. At the moment we are considering whether to take on full strike action. In the meantime we are continuing on with our weekly protests. We are also trying to engage with Ministers, TDs, trying to get the RSA union FÓRSA to engage with our union (Unite).

### As well as safety, do you also think there's a question of dignity attached to this dispute?

I definitely think that in general the RSA doesn't have a lot of respect for driving instructors... It's very inhumane to treat anyone like this... It is a matter of both health and safety & respect and dignity.

### Anything else you'd like to add?

One other issue we have with the RSA at the moment is the fact that they are still scheduling their exams -- requiring driving instructors to do their check tests, which is a practical exam we must do in a car with an examiner every two years in order to keep our teaching license and our job. During covid-19, it makes no sense to be putting us in contact with people unnecessarily... Apart from that, we would just love if FÓRSA would engage properly with UNITE so we can negotiate to make a compromise for both sides because we are in this together, and in Covid-19 we have to be in this together.

## No cuts to bus services!

## Fight for free, fully funded & accessible public transport!

By Mike McCourt

**I**N RECENT weeks, Bus Éireann and Translink have announced route cuts and redundancies respectively, hitting major blows to the working class on both sides of the border.

In September, Bus Éireann announced cuts linking Cork, Galway, Limerick and Belfast with Dublin. This makes travelling to Dublin extremely difficult, particularly for people from rural areas.

### No Covid cuts

Two weeks earlier, Translink announced its first mandatory redundancies in decades, with up to 100 jobs at risk. Unite the Union representative Davy Thompson commented on how the cuts reflected "...the particular challenges posed by the COVID pandemic against the backdrop of the long-term under-

funding of public transport".

Bus Éireann has claimed the cuts are to help prevent Covid-19 spread. However, what is needed is investment in the necessary health and safety protocols, including additional fleet to prevent overcrowding. A recent report showed 90% of the Bus Éireann fleet have not met protocol standards, putting workers and passengers at risk.

### Public transport essential

While the two services are partially controlled by their respective states, they both have private elements. This deliberate undermining of the public transport system after continuous underfunding is undoubtedly an attempt by both capitalist governments to move further towards privatisation.

In the shadow of a looming climate catastrophe and the current economic crisis, public transport should not be cut, but expanded and



We need investment not cuts to public transport

made free to aid workers economically and reduce carbon emissions. Furthermore, the Socialist Party calls for complete nationalisation and democratic control of public transport to guarantee services, jobs and

to ensure an efficient service, accessible to all. This would be easily achieved by taking wealth from the billionaires who have amassed even greater fortunes over the course of the crisis, as well as major polluters.

# Brexit saga continues:

## Workers' movement must take independent action

By Kevin Henry

**BREXIT HAS** once again emerged as a looming crisis. Pressure is on for a trade deal between the UK and European Union. If no deal is reached and there is no agreement to extend the transition period, then a 'no deal' Brexit would be the consequence.

The situation has been further complicated by the Johnson government bringing forward their Internal Market Bill. This overrides parts of the Withdrawal Agreement negotiated between the Westminster government and the EU last year, by giving ministers the power to unilaterally make regulations relating to customs procedures for trade between Northern Ireland and Britain, as well as on state aid.

### The border

Johnson wants the freedom to use state aid in order to give British companies support not possible under EU rules, which will still apply to Britain under the current arrangements if it affects the "integrity of the EU market", including, for example, if the British government wished to provide state aid to a company which also had operations in Northern Ireland. This form of state aid will not be used to save jobs or public services, but instead as a way of subsidising big business, such as tech companies, which Johnson hopes will allow Britain to compete with the US and China.



Any Brexit deal done by Boris Johnson will be fundamentally anti-working class

The Internal Market Bill raises the possibility of the British government refusing to impose checks between Britain and Northern Ireland, which – if it was deemed to undermine the integrity of the EU single market – would lead to pressure from the EU to force the Irish state to impose checks on its side of the border. The prospect of such a hardened border would not be tolerated, particularly by the Catholic population in the North and border communities. It would lead to significant economic damage, evoke memories of the Troubles and be seen as the copper fastening of partition on the island of Ireland.

### A socialist approach

The starting point for socialists is what is in the interests of working-class people. As well as opposing the Tory government, we also oppose the EU which, despite presenting a 'progressive' facade, is an undemocratic capitalist institution with a long record of imposing anti-working class measures, while pursuing militarisation and a racist immigration policy which has led to thousands of deaths in the Mediterranean.

Representatives of pro-capitalist parties – whether 'leave' or 'remain' supporters – cannot be trusted on democratic or workers' rights. An il-

lustration of this is the fact that pro-remain MLAs voted at Stormont to implement the Tories' immigration bill, which attacks migrants' rights.

A 'no-deal' Brexit and the turmoil it would cause would not be in the interests of working-class people. However, neither will any trade agreement between the Tories and the EU – which would be a deal between two capitalist blocs.

The new Labour leadership has abdicated any responsibility for providing a real opposition. 'Starmerism' is being defined as patriotic and being a responsible opposition – in other words: the same policies as the Tory Party but car-

ried out in a more organised way. As socialists have consistently argued throughout the Brexit negotiations, the trade union movement – which unites 6 million workers in Britain and 800,000 in Ireland, including almost 250,000 from across the sectarian divide in the North – must act independently to defend the interests of all workers on these islands.

### Working-class unity

A starting point would be to organise emergency conferences of trade union activists to discuss how we can fight back, including preparing for bosses to use a 'no-deal' Brexit as an excuse to attack jobs and conditions. As well as organising against any attack on workers' rights, socialists have a responsibility to oppose the 'hostile environment' against immigrants and refugees currently whipped up by the Tories. Likewise, socialists oppose any measure which would heighten sectarianism in Northern Ireland – that includes any hardening of borders, either east-west or north-south.

We need to build solidarity between workers in struggle across the continent and fight for a different kind of Europe: a socialist Europe, run in the interest of the millions, not the billionaires, in which the democratic rights of all are protected.

An abridged version of a statement available at: [socialistparty.org](http://socialistparty.org)

## Golden Dawn trials: Historic victory for Greek anti-fascist movement

By Eleni Vetsika

**OCTOBER 7th 2020 will go down in the history of the antifascist movement in Greece and Europe as a whole as an important victory. The Greek courts declared Golden Dawn (GD) a criminal organisation, seven of its leading members (most of whom are former members of the Greek or EU parliaments) guilty for setting up and directing a criminal organisation, and 68 GD members in total were found guilty.**

As we go to print it has been announced that 57 out of the 68 will face prison sentences as high as 13 years. However, 7 October will also be the day that tens of thousands of antifascist protesters took to the streets, vibrant and determined to show that the movement is there united against fascists despite the tear gases and heavy-handed police presence.

### Who are Golden Dawn?

But let us look at who GD was. It is a fascist, neo-Nazi organisation that was founded in 1980 and since then have engaged not only in fascist rhetoric, but a plethora of attacks – some fatal – against migrant workers, LGBTQ+ peo-

ple and left-wing activists. They remained in the margins of political life till the early 1990s when they got some public attention during the Imia conflict between Turkey and Greece.

In the early 2000 their headquarters were shut following relentless pressure from antifascists, however they remained active and managed to exploit the recent deep recession and hardship and managed to build their support which was reflected in gaining representation in the national and EU parliaments.

### Murder of Pavlos Fyssas

In September 2013, Pavlos Fyssas – a left-wing activist and rap singer – was stabbed to death by GD members, the prominence of this attack and the resulting pressure from the movement ensured that its members finally had to stand trial. The GD trials began in April 2015, after hundreds of witness testimonies, and numerous video and photographic evidence they were completed in September 2020 and did not only deal with murder of Fyssas but other crimes as well.

The court verdict of 7 October is a clear victory of the tireless and militant stance and pressure of the antifascist

movement, the friends and family of Fyssas, the eyewitnesses – who didn't give up despite the threats – and the prosecution solicitors. More importantly, the antifascist movement now cannot rest on its laurels, there are important tasks ahead and more importantly there can be no trust in the establishment parties and the police to rid Greek society of fascism.

### What next?

Politicians from the capitalist establishment who now condemn GD had no problem, sharing platforms, shaking hands and taking photos with them. Furthermore, it has been proven that GD have significant support among the police force who not only turned the blind eye to their criminal activities but have cooperated with them attacking left wing protesters. The fight against fascism has not ended, and it will be a big mistake to assume that the 500,000 people who voted for them will not seek other forms of ultra-right political expression especially as the financial and political crises will only deepen.

Our sister party in Greece, Xekinima has played a central and outstanding role in setting up and running the



The verdict represented some justice for the murdered rapper Pavlos Fyssas

'They aren't innocent- Jail the Nazis', a campaign that managed to secure international support and bring the movement together against not only GD but a system that fosters fascists. And while this is a massive blow

against the far-right, the left now needs to work towards a genuine left socialist government able to address economic and social crisis that faces the Greek working class by breaking with this capitalist system.

# Reclaiming the 'season of the witch'

By Aislinn O'Keeffe

**Halloween is the time of witches and ghouls. The time, according to the original pagan beliefs that signalled when the veil between our world and the Otherworld was at its thinnest. At this time, you might encounter the spirits of your ancestors, or demons or devils. In order to protect yourself from these unwanted visits, it was best to wear a mask or disguise in order to fool them. This part of the ancient tradition has conveniently survived today and the business of wearing Halloween costumes is a multi-billion-euro industry worldwide, with Americans spending approximately \$3.2 billion on costumes alone in 2019.**

One of the most enduring Halloween costumes is that of the figure of the witch. Dispensing with all mysticism reveals the most truly chilling aspect of the witch however, namely the reality of the 40-60,000 individuals who were executed throughout Europe and the colonised Americas in the early modern period (15th to 17th centuries) with approximately 100,000 accused and tortured.

## Persecution of women

There is a common misconception that witch hunting was a product of the backwards Middle Ages. However, the first organised witch hunts occurred during the Renaissance. As Michelangelo was painting the ceil-

ing of the Sistine Chapel (1508-1512), elsewhere in Italy and Europe innocent people were burned alive in village and town squares accused of witchcraft. It is estimated that between 75-85% of the victims were women, the vast majority of victims being members of the lower classes.

Historical and popular accounts of these hunts often portray these events as a case of mob mentality and superstition gone wild, with the blame for these atrocities typically falling at the feet of the 'uneducated' lower classes. This definition of a witch hunt has largely survived into the present time. This narrative fails to take into account the centuries of Church and state propaganda, along with contemporary propaganda such as the *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer of Witches) published in 1486.

Unfortunately, for the victims of these crimes, the development of witchcraft ideology coincided with the invention of the printing press in Europe. This saw the profitable proliferation and distribution of pamphlets, books, art, and reports of trials and accusations throughout Europe. In addition, religious and secular authorities worked hand in hand in seeking out supposed witches, and the arrest, imprisonment, torture, and public execution of the accused.

The demonisation of women through witch ideology bred a deep distrust of women which served to keep them out of public life and sentenced to a life of domesticity. Some of the main concerns of witch hunting included providing the ideology used to curb the use of contraception, the procuring of abortions and control



Many young women activists have used the symbol of the witch to as a sign of resistance

over women's sexuality. Oppression of women has been a feature of all class divided societies, and continues to be essential to the functioning of the capitalist system today. A 2018 Oxfam report, estimated that women's unpaid domestic and care

work saves the global economy US\$10 trillion a year, for example.

## Liberating the commercialised witch

While there is a general acknowledgement that these witch hunts occurred, their history has never fully been rec-

onciled meaning that the figure of the witch is still played for laughs and scares. Even more perversely, the witch continues to be a source of profit in the form of costumes, figurines, movies, and books. Increasingly, however, many feminist and socialist feminist historians, activists and artists are reclaiming the witch as a symbol of women's oppression and as a figure of rebellion against the oppressive and patriarchal capitalist system. This includes a resurgence in witch activism, with self-proclaimed witches placing hexes on public figures such as Donald Trump, some of whom are now taking credit for his recent Covid-19 diagnosis!

"We are the descendents of the witches you could not burn" has been a common placard in the global feminist movement of recent years, including repeal demos in Ireland. This interest in a feminist and left analysis of history reflects the radicalisation and politicisation taking place today globally amongst a new generation of the working class, whereby young women are at the forefront again and again. Historically, a mystical or superstitious narrative surrounding witches has helped to obscure the very real persecution of predominantly women during witch hunts. Today, the power of working class and socialist feminist struggle requires a laser-focus grounded in an analysis of material conditions with a very concrete goal – namely organising the great majority, all the exploited and oppressed – to overthrow capitalism which continues to perpetuate oppression and injustice.

'Tis the season of the witch.

## Review: *The Social Dilemma* directed by Jeff Orlowski

By Brandon Byrne

**THE SOCIAL DILEMMA provides an insightful new look at the impact major social media platforms have had on society and how by design they foster addiction.**

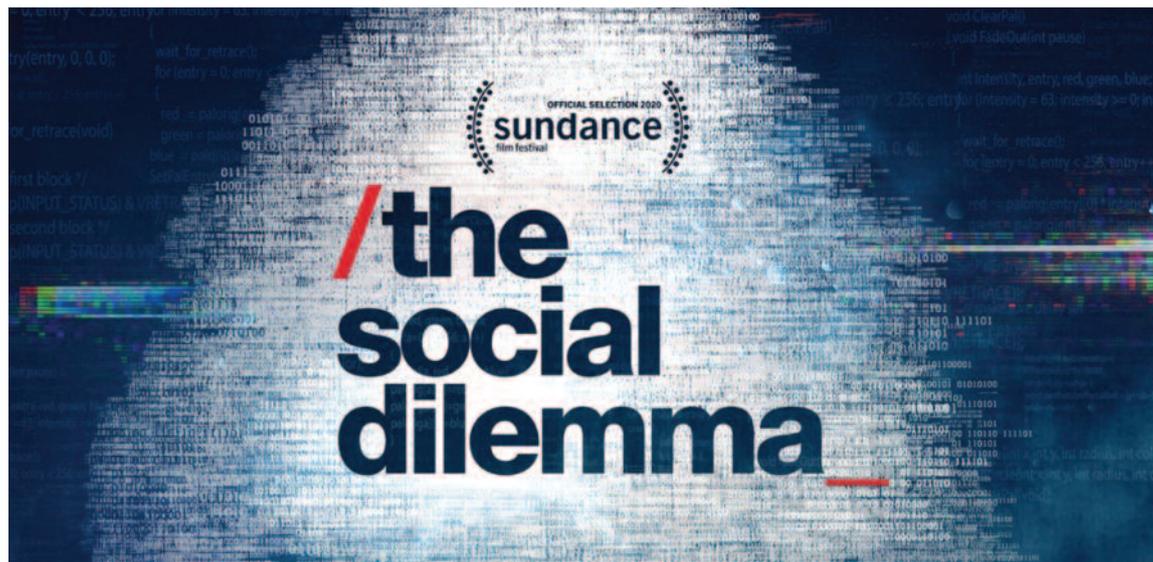
Director Jeff Orlowski presents these insights through a series of talking head interviews with tech industry insiders whose work has brought them close enough to see the critically flawed design at the heart of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Reddit and others. This is intercut with a dramatised narrative about a family experiencing the negative impacts of social media through their almost constant interaction with it.

## Fake news

The film opens with a telling sequence of those being interviewed struggling to answer the question; "What is the problem [with social media]". Like the interviewees, the film itself explores many answers, but also fails to give a fulsome answer to the root cause of the ills social media has caused society. Many of the problems discussed in the film are sadly not new revelations – social media addiction has been a topic of discussion for years. Along with

this is its negative effect on mental health, correlating to rising suicide and self harm rates, particularly among teens and pre-teens which has been a known scourge for some time. What the film does mark as a newer and less explored topic is social media's role in the rise of conspiracy theory groups and political polarisation, as well as its use as a tool and vector to spread fake news.

Those interviewed stress that these problems are unintended consequences of the engines that drive the growth of major social media platforms. For example, Guillaume Chaslot, a former engineer at YouTube, explains how the recommendation system he helped create had a hand in the rise of flat earth conspiracy groups. The system by design targets people with videos that catch their attention and hold it for as long as possible to drive up engagement so more money can be made from advertisers. However there is no consideration given to the content that is recommended, merely algorithms using vast amounts of data collected from your usage to present you with any content it deems you will be susceptible to. This led to millions of recommendations of flat earth conspiracy videos to people whose data told the engine they would engage with it.



## Surveillance capitalism

The use of massive amounts of people's personal data to drive systems that increase growth and profit is called "surveillance capitalism" in the film, and the common belief among all those interviewed is that it is harmful to people and society. However this is where the documentary and those involved falter. While all the enlightened tech gurus and reformed executives lament the situation and call vaguely for reform, none

of them have any concrete ideas about what the core problem that needs to be solved is.

At one point, Asana co-founder and co-inventor of the Facebook 'like' button, Justin Rosenstein, comes within a hair's breadth of naming the issue as he describes how the economy is set up in a way that promotes the destruction of the environment and the extinction of species for short term profit despite the devastation it causes, but he fails to blame the system the economy is based on for this.

The motive for relentlessly pursuing profit at all costs is core to capitalism. While tech companies exist in a capitalist society there is no reason for them to reform their practices while they are profitable.

*The Social Dilemma* presents a moral and ethical argument for seismic change to the tech industry, but that argument is meaningless to the capitalists in charge. For true change to take place the capitalist system on which they are built must be defeated.

# thesocialist

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