



## Brexit or not:

# Workers Have Their Own Battles to Fight

The Brexit pantomime threatens to fracture the traditional political set-up of the British ruling class. Yet the whole issue just diverts attention from the dire situation experienced by the working class. Theresa May has announced that austerity is over but the massive spending cuts that have been implemented in recent years are not going to be reversed.

### It's a Bosses' Crisis but Workers Suffer

Working class people have seen reduced in-work benefits, cuts to unemployment and disability allowances, abolition or paring down of a whole range of local government services and amenities, including the cancellation of school and house building programmes. Inadequate funding has pushed areas of public health and education to the brink of collapse. Whether it's called universal credit or job seekers' allowance, people without paid work have to find a way through a demeaning maze of bureaucratic hoops to get the measly 'benefit' they are entitled to. The massive rise in the use of food banks is set to increase, the shortage of "affordable housing" will remain and reports of hidden and not-so-hidden homelessness will continue.

On the jobs front, where the official statistics show that more people than ever are "in work", far from a contented, prosperous working class looking forward to a bright future for themselves and their kids, we have a world of increasingly precarious, low-paid work; where the prospect of a decent pension is diminishing by the day; where nominal wages have barely reached the level they were a decade ago

(though inflation has not gone away); where life without resorting to the credit card and/or loan sharks is unthinkable for many. If you want a reliable statistic, check out the United Nations facts and figures. According to the UN, 60% of people "in poverty" in Britain are from working families, including 2.8 million in a family with a full-time worker.

Everyone knows that the gap between the rich and everybody else is now a chasm. However the ONS (Office for National Statistics) added insult to injury when it announced in March that it has been miscalculating "the very highest incomes in the country". In fact "top earners' incomes are twice as high" as previously portrayed and, what do you know, "This means income inequality is higher than thought". In fact, the ONS admits, "even using the current method, top incomes grew sharply in 2018 while incomes for the poorest fifth fell". (Info from the *Financial Times*, 4.3.19)

### Hardship is Worldwide Class Resistance Must Be Global

Of course this is not just the condition of the working class in the UK. Throughout the whole of the so-called advanced states, the situation is essentially the same. In the not-so-advanced states, it's even worse. China is now the world's second "superpower". There, 30 million or so people have to live on less than 90 U.S. cents per day. And for the hundreds of millions who live in the world's least advanced countries, they invariably live in "extreme poverty". Everyday life is a constant struggle to stay clothed, housed and fed. The local states prop up the capitalist system that generates

this living hell. Many of our class sisters and brothers are forced to flee as refugees, risking their lives to seek any sort of hope.

The point is that this picture is not changing for the better. We are not living in the post-war boom period of the 1950s and 60s. For decades now global capitalism has been grappling with its inevitable crisis of falling profit rates in the 'real economy' and turning more and more to financial speculation. The 2007-8 banking crash was the inevitable consequence. But the 'solution' to the crash — dole out billions of pretend-dollars, pounds and euros to the banks — has only postponed the next crash and made the capitalist debt mountain even higher. It's estimated that the total debt is about 12-14 times the total value of everything that is produced worldwide in a year.

Put simply, capitalism has no future to offer the working class anywhere.

Across the globe there are growing signs that workers are overcoming fear and learning how to fight back on their own account. From the brave struggle of workers in Iran to the determined resistance of workers in the *maquiladoras* on the Mexico/US border, the working class is beginning to recognise the power it potentially possesses: the power to overthrow this system based on profits for a tiny few stolen from the unpaid labour of the working class. Sure, the anger that is welling up does not always point to a clear way forward: the *gilets jaunes* is a cross-class protest movement with multiple agendas; as yet the street protests in Algeria have no other agenda than get rid of the decrepit Bouteflika; and it

would be naïve to pretend that all grassroots protest movements are good.

The bottom line is that unless and until the internationalist communists are well enough organised and strong enough to influence the political direction of what's going on, the anger of the working class will be dissipated piece by piece. In the same vein, unless and until substantially more workers realise that they must organise and fight for themselves, then the message of the internationalists will remain a cry in the wilderness.

But there is no other road. Anyone who sees this bigger picture should not be taken in by the politics of the likes of Corbyn, McDonnell and their admirers. The left Labour agenda, as always, is a fictional national solution using the capitalist state and pretending there is a parliamentary road to 'socialism'.

If our alternative makes sense to you, get in touch with the CWO and help us argue for a revolutionary perspective inside the rest of the working class.

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## No War But The Class War!

Internationalist communists oppose every war that the capitalist class and their governments create to defend their own interests. This position is nothing new but is the legacy from previous generations who saw that "War or Revolution" is a choice that has to be made clearly and consistently.

**100 years ago** communists met to found the Communist International. [See <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2019-02-28/founding-of-the-comintern-then-and-now>]. The Congress drew together those who supported the working class revolutionary wave which had ended the First World War. We echo the words of Boris Reinstein, of the U.S. Socialist Labor Party;

*"... in our century there can be no wars that are not rooted in capitalist competition ... the proletariat not only does not have the duty, it does not even have the right to support its government, even in so-called defensive wars. There is only one war that the proletariat is duty-bound to*

*support, and that is social war, the social revolution."*

The statement here has been drafted by the CWO in response to a request from a "No War but the Class War" meeting in January that was organised by the CWO and the Anarchist Communist Group (ACG). After discussion of the situation and how to chart a practical way forward, the meeting agreed to draft a statement which the attending organisations could support and publish in their press. The CWO was delegated to produce the first draft which we present here. It is self explanatory, applying the same approach as revolutionaries adopted a century ago.

### No War But the Class War (NWBCW)

Worldwide capitalism is in a long term and deepening crisis which is taking us down the road to generalised war. There are more than 60 local wars going on today. Every one of those destroys the lives of our working class sisters and brothers while different

gangs of bosses struggle for control. Most of these wars are between the clients of the key imperialist powers. They are proxy imperialist wars which, together with open trade wars, are harbingers of a wider global conflict. The drive to war is an outcome of the operation of the capitalist system itself. It is not the result of a few mad or bad capitalist leaders and only the overthrow of the capitalist system can prevent war. The real alternative we face is war or revolution.

Supporters of No War But the Class War (NWBCW) are aiming for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism by the working class and the creation of a new global system of production. We are for a system based on common ownership to directly satisfy everyone's needs. This will be controlled democratically by the working class via a global system of workers councils. Production for profit and the system of nation states and borders will be eliminated. In the process capitalism's degradation of the planet will be reversed and humanity will be able to plan for sustainable development.

To achieve this we need to organise ourselves on a global scale and spread the understanding of both the need to create a new society and consciousness of how to achieve it. The working class itself needs to create an international political organisation of revolutionaries for this task.

The necessary starting point is to step up the defence of our own interests and reject ruling class agendas, including the wars they ask us to support. All these wars are imperialist wars in the interests of sections of capital. NWBCW exists to oppose war on the basis of class, not just against one section of the ruling class, but against the whole rotten system which offers the world's workers death, destruction and misery whether slowly by poverty, disease and disaster or at the faster tempo of war.

Workers have no country! So-called "national liberation" or "anti-imperialist" wars are simply imperialist wars in disguise! We make no common front with any of

the bosses' puppets on the capitalist Left, like the parliamentary parties and trade unions and their hangers on in the pseudo-revolutionary swamp. They are all embedded in the bosses' system and support it in peace and in war.

No War but Class War! Let us step up and generalise class struggle as our response to bourgeois war mongering and austerity!

NWBCW is an organisation of groups and individuals who support the political positions above. We invite others who support these positions to join NWBCW to help us produce and distribute propaganda and carry out interventions in the class struggle for "No War But the Class War".

**To join the organisation, discuss further, get on the mailing list or get more information about how to form a NWBCW group, contact:**

**Communist Workers Organisation,** email: [uk@leftcom.org](mailto:uk@leftcom.org), Website: <http://www.leftcom.org/en>

Or **Anarchist Communist Group:** [www.anarchistcommunism.org](http://www.anarchistcommunism.org)





# The Crisis in Care For the Elderly

**"Elderly care is the fulfilment of the special needs and requirements that are unique to senior citizens." (Wikipedia)**

Attitudes towards old people reveal a lot about a society. The UK is one of the richest countries in the world. But it is a world which is only managing to stave off economic collapse by piling up debt and turning just about every aspect of life into a commodity nexus for financial speculation. Of course capitalist commercialism which typically glorifies youth and plays on sex appeal to sell commodities predates the current crisis. By the swinging Sixties the post-war world was more and more in denial about the fact of ageing, never mind the process of death and dying. This cultural frame can help explain how nurses in a hospital ward for ‘the elderly’ can respond to someone in their death throes simply by putting up the bed rails and leaving him for the other patients (or should we say ‘bedblockers’?) to contemplate. Treating the last stages of life as an illness from which the patient ought to recover is part of a wider mindset that puts every infirmity of old age into the same bracket as a youngster with a broken limb: with a bit of time and some physiotherapy then the patient can get back to ‘independent living’.

Of course this is perfectly possible for some. Not every oldster is on their last legs. But when a local authority complains that the home care workers they employ to ‘speed up recovery’ and get people back on their feet within 6 weeks are not meeting their ‘targets’ we begin to smell a capitalist rat. Last July Birmingham council announced that ‘only 20 per cent of clients are independent after receiving the service’. So they set a new target of 80 per cent at the same time as proposing a ‘more flexible’ shift-system for the care workers that puts an end to full-time jobs! OK. Now it’s clear. We’re in the capitalist land of ‘targets’ and cost-cutting: As well as freeing up valuable and costly hospital beds Council bosses claim the changes will make the service more productive and save £2 million a year. [Birmingham Live website] And since the main cost to the Council is the care workers’ wages then, logically, they have to be cut! No wonder there have been over 46 walkouts by care workers in Birmingham over the past year.

But this is not just a Birmingham scandal. All over the country job’s-worth administrators in cash-strapped local authorities are trying to pretend that cutting care workers’ pay and making them work nigh on impossible hours will produce a ‘better service’ for a growing number of elderly citizens.

**"... it has been observed globally, older people consume the most health expenditures out of any age group." (Wikipedia)**

The first argument trotted out to ‘explain’ the

dire state of care for the elderly is that there are simply too many old people. Last year the Local Government Association published a typical warning about the population over 85 growing three times faster than the rest of the adult population “and the number of older people needing publicly funded social care is forecast to increase by nearly 70% by 2035”. But these kind of projections are not new. Way back in the late 1950s and Sixties statisticians were predicting such an increase and the NHS began to plan for more Care Homes and long-term provision for the elderly. When the first state spending cuts kicked in, way back at the end of the post-war boom, funding for elderly care was one of the first sectors to be slashed. And so it has continued. In the 1980s much of what was now termed the ‘care industry’ was taken out of direct management by the NHS (i.e. the state) and handed over to private firms, most of them private equity companies. Now, since the financial crash over a decade ago and subsequent cuts in state spending (austerity) fewer than one in ten elderly people in long-term care are in local authority or NHS institutions. This has not changed the impact of central government cuts on local authority budgets, Despite all the off-loading, a recent report points out that 31 of 62 cities now spend the majority of their budget on ‘social care’ (not only elderly care) compared to 4 cities a decade ago.

Still, this is not the problem of the companies who have stepped in to see the elderly are well cared for — well, OK, with the aim of making quick financial gain. (We would say ‘profit’ but many of them are are up to their ears in debt and on the brink of bankruptcy.)

**"Increasingly, in modern societies care is now being provided by state or charitable institutions." (Wikipedia)**

Far from being charitable bodies, most care homes are in the hands of a complex web of finance capital, mainly private equity companies which “traditionally offer high returns” (*Financial Times*) for investors. According to the British Private Equity and Venture Capital Association the typical “private equity manager will work alongside the company management team to enhance the value in the business. ... from the top-line growth, efficiency savings, cash generation and procurement, to supply-chains, marketing and sales, improving reporting and human resources.” Then, after “a fixed life-span”, normally of 4-10 years, “they will have had to return the investors’ original money, plus any additional returns made”. In other words these are financial sharks out to make a quick kill.

As well as the fees that more and more families have to pay as the old NHS dictum of ‘free at the point of use’ dissolves into thin air, the ‘stakeholders’ are grabbing the revenue from local authorities (about 60% of care homes residents still get some funding from LAs).

Naturally they are not too happy when this income stream is reduced. It makes it even more tricky to “increase returns” for investors. Apart from borrowing against the estimated market value of the ‘business’ the main way these sharks look to ‘increase their returns’ is by cutting the running costs of the homes. And, of course, the biggest ‘expense’ for them is the wage bill. For some the combined disasters of reduced income from the state, an increase in the minimum wage for care workers and a reduced supply of cheap wage doctors and nurses due to tighter immigration rules have all been too much. Care ‘businesses’ are going bust all the time. In November the *Financial Times* recorded:

*The FTSE 250 listed outsourcer Mitie sold its domiciliary care business for £2 last year after racking up large losses, while Mears, ... said last year that it was losing £3m a year on its home care business, and was handing back unprofitable local authority contracts.*

These are the small fry. In 2011 the bankruptcy of Southern Cross, so far the biggest care home business to go bust, created a scandal and human disaster for many old people who found themselves being wrenched from familiar surroundings and friends and farmed out to other homes like a bunch of animals. There is danger of something like this happening again.

Last October the Care Quality Commission told local authorities to make contingency plans for the collapse of one of the biggest ‘home care’ providers, *Allied Healthcare* [owned by a German private equity firm *Aurelius*, after being bought up from *Saga* for £18m in 2015], which lacked “the ongoing funding or new investment necessary to ensure the business can operate beyond November 30, 2018”. In the event the company was sold on to another dodgy financial group for “an undisclosed amount” which promised to guarantee no disruption to people’s care. Well, that’s a relief. But the writing is on the wall, at some point another major ‘care provider’ collapse and a media outcry is in the offing.

All this translates into increasing misery in the real world. On the one hand ‘senior citizens’ are not being looked after as they should and could be, whether at home or in residential care. At home, people with terminal illnesses can be left to a night of agony because a carer is not qualified to administer pain relievers. Fifteen minutes, or half an hour for someone—often a stranger—to provide ‘personal’ or ‘household’ care (depending on job description) is a joke and can leave the ‘client’ simply wishing to be left alone. Negative reports are increasing, including complaints of disturbing experiences in residential care ranging from neglect to callous treatment and sometimes outright cruelty. (Indirectly acknowledged by notices in some homes about how to file an official complaint against ‘bullying’.) Anxious relatives are resorting to trying to monitor what’s going

on by installing their own video cameras.

**"The majority of care givers are women." (Wikipedia)**

On the other hand the people employed to administer ‘care’ are charged with doing the impossible on the lowest pay an employer can get away with. As one ex-care home worker explains, “[in the] advertising you will see images of carers sitting with residents, reminiscing and having fun, [but] there just wasn’t the time,” ... “Most days we were short-staffed; that’s four people for 50 [residents]. My time would be spent making sure people were dry and fed and hydrated, and that was it.”

Many find themselves going well beyond the bounds of duty, out of simple concern for other human beings. Home carers who have to supply their own car, visit up to 6 ‘clients’ in one hour and possibly fill in a worksheet for each visit are in an equally nonsensical position. And the situation is getting worse. More and more care workers are on zero hour, agency work which they dare not refuse. (Last year one of Britain’s care agencies, Newcross Health Care Solutions made the headlines for docking pay and fining workers who called in sick £50!) Many are getting stressed out and burnt out.

Some are seeing the need to resist. Unison has been having a field day enrolling new members from amongst care workers. And the more angry they are, the more the union has been pushed into staging some sort of action, as in Birmingham. But the unions are part of the problem, not the solution. It is obvious that a single group of service workers needs the active support of as many other workers as possible. It is equally obvious that ‘actions’ limited to one local authority or city are easy to contain and pick off one by one. Of course, this is not just a care workers or service sector dilemma.

The most pressing problem is that there really are no solutions within crisis-ridden, class-divided capitalism where a tiny minority at the top are getting richer as the living standards of everyone else are being ground down. The answer is not futile calls to ‘defend the NHS’. As we said, the NHS mess is as a result of the deeper capitalist crisis within which there is no progressive solution.

This dire situation really does pose the question of what sort of society we should and could be living in in the 21st century. The material and human means exist for a completely different kind of world. A higher form of human community. A community where everyone’s needs are met directly without some set of moneybags making a profit whilst the people who do the work have to exist on a paltry wage; where those who care for others do so out of choice, and where all of us have a direct say in what is produced, built and decided for the future. The old world is crumbling. But a new world is possible. It’s up to those who can see this to organise, articulate and communicate the political way forward as we stick with our class in the troubles ahead.

**Towards the Future International**

**Communist Workers’ Organisation // leftcom.org**

Some years ago we wrote: *The revolutionary programme serves no purpose at all if it exists only in the minds of a limited number of "thinkers" who are deluded into assuming their ideas are being transmitted "to the class" when they appear in a journal of equally restricted readership, or on the html files of some site on the Internet.*

More recently we have written: *Our earnest hope is to engage with those new forces which do come to a consciousness of the need to overthrow the system, to give them a political compass, something to rally around, whilst at the same time, we seek dialogue with those forces which already exist to actively cooperate where possible, agree to disagree where necessary, and ultimately to unite as history inexorably moves on and a real class movement develops.*

We welcome anyone interested in this vital task to come and discuss with us.

**What We Stand For**

The CWO stands for a global society where production is for need and not profit (and is therefore sustainable), where the state, national frontiers and money have been abolished, where collective power is exercised through class-wide organisations like workers councils. This has to mean the active, daily participation of the majority aiming for the interests of all. Only then can the world be rid of the capitalist offspring of poverty, hunger, oppression and war: We call it communism but this vision has nothing in common with Stalinist state capitalism and the old USSR.

In order to get there we are working to create a world proletarian political organisation: a ‘party’ for want of a better word: Not a government in waiting but a guide in the struggle for a new world. We by no means claim to be that party but we do aim to be one of the elements which will need to come together in its formation. As the working class is more and more faced with the consequences of a crumbling capitalist system it will have to unite and confront capitalist power.

We are not in competition with other organisations but seek to unite on a clearly agreed political programme to prepare the way for the majority of the world’s population, the exploited of the earth, to overthrow the capitalist system and its bloody imperialist appetites.

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