

Free Bulletin of the
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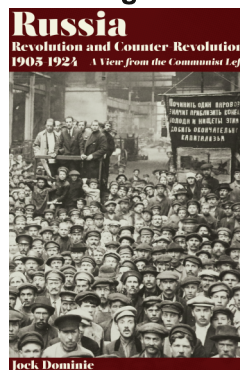
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End of Lockdown, No End to Workers Paying for it

Before the pandemic struck the global economy was on the brink of a fresh crisis. Massive speculation, debt and bankruptcies indicated what was coming. The Covid pandemic has provided a convenient scapegoat for the failings of capitalism itself. Everywhere states have injected trillions into their economies to prevent a complete economic collapse. In the year to April 21 the UK spent £355bn, or 17% of its GDP doing this. From March 2020, 11 million workers were on the furlough scheme where the state funds 80% of their wages. Despite its winding down, 2.4 million workers were still relying on it in July. When the scheme ends in September a large increase in unemployment will result. The furlough scheme and support for self-employed workers has cost the state £107bn. The cost of the pandemic to business itself has been £251bn. In simple language, capitalism is in a real mess. Who is going to pay for all this?

As usual the bosses are saying "not us" and are trying to get the working class to pay for lost profits. Wages, which have been steadily reduced over the last 4 decades, must now be reduced more. For public sector workers, apart from the NHS, there is a pay freeze for the year 21/22. For the private sector two strategies are being followed.

The first is the standard Keynesian, way of reducing wages by offering increases lower than the rate of inflation. The Bank of England expects inflation to be 3.7% later this year so anything less than this is a pay cut. A few examples of this are: Bexley Binmen who were offered 1.5% rise but went on strike after turning it down; British Sugar workers who were offered a 2% rise but voted it down; and, in the public sector, NHS workers, who were offered 1%. Despite this being, we were told, the absolute maximum the Treasury could afford, as the next wave of the pandemic threatened, this was miraculously increased to 3%. However, £500 million of this must be paid for by cuts to the NHS! For those who not so long ago were hailed and clapped as heroes this represents a pay cut and for the

NHS another kick in the teeth. The award, which does not even cover all NHS workers, would cost about £2bn. Meanwhile, our rulers are happy to shell out billions to their supporters in the capitalist class: £37bn for useless test and trace, £10bn on useless PPE etc.

The second is "fire and rehire". Where workers have a contract, the bosses simply tear it up, fire the workforce and offer a new contract with worse pay, longer hours and fewer benefits. Refusal to sign results in the sack. According to the TUC, 1 in 10 workers have been subject to "Fire and Rehire" since the first lockdown in March 2020. Unions are accepting it but many workers are not! For example Tower Hamlets council workers, engineers at Brush Electrical Machines, Ealing traffic wardens, workers at GKN Wheels and Auto Structures have all fought back. The problem is each struggle tends to be isolated instead of extending and combining with the many workers in the same boat. This weakness is only increased by unions sabotaging struggles. Two examples illustrate this.

At British Gas the bosses announced they were getting rid of 5,000 workers and told 21,000 workers that they had to accept new contracts or be fired. The new contracts included an extra three hours a week, no increases for working weekends and public holidays etc. These changes amount to a 15% cut in pay. The response was initially strong, with 7,000 workers taking 42 days of strike action but the 'defence' GMB union organised was nothing but a sell-out. As the April deadline for accepting the new contracts approached the GMB actually advised its members to accept the contract and sign! Even so 500 still refused. They were fired without redundancy pay.

Another example is that of Go North West bus drivers. Again the plan was to fire and rehire the entire workforce on worse conditions. The drivers struck but following 85 days of strike action, workers accepted a deal which meant they lost paid meal breaks and

got compulsory overtime as well as longer shifts while being paid the same. Unite negotiated this and hailed this as a victory because the bosses agreed not to use fire and rehire again!

Part of the way forward for workers today was shown by electricians at an Amazon warehouse being built in Gateshead. SSE Enterprise Contracting told untrained workers to carry out dangerous electrical works on-site. Not only did this go against health and safety, it also undermined the skilled trade of the electricians. The workers organised a successful wildcat strike. Fellow workers refused to cross the picket line. The main contractors gave in and hired electricians to do the work. However, another contractor, SIS Systems, then fired 35 electricians who had all been involved in the strike action. But the workers were resolute, and after three more days of wildcat strike action, all the electricians who had lost their jobs were reinstated.

It was the self-organisation of the workers which led to victory here. Moreover, unity across barriers is more important than ever as

large contracts today are broken up into many suppliers of labour. Yet another reason why we must take our own steps in organising across the bosses' divisions. Unions are primarily concerned with protecting their position within capitalism. They won't risk organising across different contractors or workplaces. By taking action themselves, Gateshead workers were in a much stronger position to actually win their struggle.

Yet capitalism's relentless drive to increase profits means that halting the bosses' attacks can only be temporary. Tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, a new onslaught will come. The only real gains can be in understanding ways to organise, and our awareness of the need for a higher form of society. The first means controlling our own struggles through general assemblies and strike committees and widening them to workers in other trades and areas. The second means understanding that we will always be on the back foot while capitalism exists and production is for profit. In short, we need to get political and work towards creating a new social set-up where production is for human needs.



"Let the Bodies Pile up in their Thousands"

Coronavirus stems from capitalism's destruction of the environment in its drive for profit. For our rulers, profits are more important than tens of thousands of deaths, as our prime minister has explained.

On "Freedom Day," 19th July, our rulers allowed the total opening of the country. All businesses back to pre-pandemic, no face masks, no social distancing etc. – back to work and full speed ahead with exploitation. In the face of rising cases and an insufficiently vaccinated population, this has been criticised as utterly reckless. In the first week of the opening it was reported that 1 in every 75 people now have the virus and the British Medical Association called for the opening to be reversed. A statement signed by over 1,000 researchers working in public health, responding to the health secretary's announcement that there will likely be 100,000 new cases a day, claims that "exponential growth will probably continue until millions more people are infected, leaving hundreds of thousands of people with long-term illness and disability". The three lockdowns imposed by the government were largely in response to a fear of hospitals becoming overrun but now that most vulnerable populations have been vaccinated, and the risk of bad press from patients being treated in hospital car parks is over, they are happy to condemn a generation of children to the poorly understood long-term

effects of covid in order to get the profit system working again.

From the start the government has put profits before deaths. In February 2020, Johnson explained this in a speech at the Old Naval College "When (...) Coronavirus will trigger a panic [...] that goes beyond what is medically rational to the point of doing real and unnecessary economic damage [...] humanity needs some government that is willing to make the case for freedom of exchange". A month later, Johnson appeared on "This Morning" to make the case for herd immunity, suggesting that "perhaps you could take it on the chin" and "allow the disease [...] to move through the population".

While he did eventually lockdown the country, it came entirely too late; and it is worth looking at which populations the disease was allowed to move through. Workers in care, health, retail and schools as well as in construction and manufacturing, which were kept open despite often being clearly non-essential, bore the brunt of the pandemic, with a much higher death rate than other occupations. These conditions have also been the principal cause of the virus spreading. Many of these "essential" workers, unable to work from home, had to choose between their income and their health. The UK has the lowest statutory sick pay in Europe at £94.25 a week, amounting to 20% of the average

wage, already an insufficient amount to live on for many. Given how widespread precarious employment is becoming, with more workers than ever working multiple jobs on zero-hours contracts, it should come as no surprise that many workers chose to ignore symptoms and refuse testing in order not to jeopardise their small income. Moreover, while there is already a higher mortality rate in general in more economically deprived areas, the rate of covid deaths there was disproportionately worse. The Northwest of England, which had seen record high rates of poverty leading up to the pandemic, saw a drop in life expectancy 25% worse than the rest of the nation.

Both here and abroad, the main vector through which the virus has spread, mutated and killed has been workplaces where the cold logic of capital has taken its toll on the health of the populace, forcing us to go without seeing our friends and loved ones for months to offset the outbreaks caused by employment. In schools too, the government outright admitted that they needed to be kept open so that parents would still be able to work.

The catastrophic handling of the virus in the UK, where as of July 2021 over 129,000 people have died unnecessarily, is an extension of the government's standard approach to healthcare. The NHS has been stretched to its limit each winter even under

ordinary circumstances, and reforms to the DWP have led to unprecedented rates of starvation and suicide among those the welfare state claims to be there to help. While ideology certainly accounts for some degree of the cruelty of our austerity regime, it is part of a wider trend since the 1970s, where, in the face of mass unemployment and dwindling profits, an assault on the living conditions of the global working class was required.

By branding care home staff and retail workers as "heroes" and celebrating their deaths for the sake of profit as "sacrifices", the reality of their existence has been hidden.

The entire Covid saga is an absolute condemnation of capitalism. First it spawns the virus by destruction of the environment, then refuses to protect us from it because this would reduce the profits it gets from exploiting us at work.

Only by recognising our place in the world as workers, subordinate to the wage relation, can we find a way out of the continued mass death and degeneration of our quality of life being inflicted on us. By uniting together as a class, across workplaces, industries and national borders, we can destroy this decaying society and build a new one, in which production is determined by human need rather than a parasitic class happy to see us die if it preserves their accumulation of wealth.

Police Powers Bill – Preparing for Class War

The Police, Crime Sentencing and Courts Bill has given rise to a wave of 'Kill the Bill' protests and demonstrations across the country, and has been criticised for the wider powers it gives to the state in general and more specifically to the police.

The bill extends existing police powers to curb demonstrations including static assemblies. The police will be able to impose conditions on a procession if they believe that the noise produced may 'result in serious disruption to the activities of an organisation which are carried out in the vicinity of the procession' or could have 'a significant and relevant impact on persons in the vicinity' which could include 'serious unease, alarm or distress'. In these circumstances the police can impose any conditions necessary to prevent it. The criteria are vague, and the Home Secretary will have discretion to define these terms. Furthermore the bill extends existing powers to prosecute individuals for breaching those conditions. Currently it is only an offence if it can be proved that the individual intentionally broke the conditions, but under the terms of the bill the prosecution will only need to show that the individual 'knew or ought to have known' about the condition. This effectively makes it a strict liability offence which puts anyone at a demonstration at risk of prosecution, and to cap it all the maximum prison term will increase from 3

months to 51 weeks. Other measures include a new public nuisance offence which will include 'obstructing' the public in the exercise or enjoyment of a right' and will carry a maximum sentence of 10 years. There will also be powers to curtail single person protests deemed to be too noisy. In short, the bill will make it much easier for the police to clamp down on any demonstration they or their political masters want to prevent or disrupt.

The bill is not limited to measures to curb public protests. It will be an offence to reside or intend to reside on land without the owner's consent where this is likely to cause 'significant disruption, damage or distress'. Penalties include fines up to £2,500 or 3 months in prison as well as seizures of vehicles including cars and caravans. This is clearly aimed at Gypsies and Travellers and threatens those who are forced into using private land due to the limited availability of authorised sites in the UK. It has been criticised as a breach of recognised Traveller rights under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). It also threatens the increasing number of homeless people who have no option but to sleep in cars; the power to seize their vehicles is particularly draconian and robs them of the only accommodation they have. This is a measure that effectively criminalises people for the heinous offence of being poor.

No suite of modern repressive laws is complete without the assistance of big data. Under the guise of preventing and reducing serious violence there will be a new statutory duty for specified authorities such as health care providers, youth services and educational bodies to disclose information when requested by the police. This will override any professional duties of confidentiality and existing data protection rights. To complement this there will also be an expansion of stop and search powers with the introduction of Serious Violence Reduction Orders. This will enable the police to stop and search an individual on the basis of their profile but without the need for any suspicion of a specific offence being intended or committed..

The Police Bill comes at the same time as the Borders and Immigration Bill which will effectively criminalise asylum seekers who enter the UK illegally (which is most of them as there are few legal routes) and is widely seen as being incompatible with the Refugee Convention. There is also proposed legislation to limit judicial review, the ability of judges to hold decisions by the State and its bodies as unlawful, such as Johnson's proroguing of parliament. Not only are existing conventions such as those on refugees and human rights violated, the proposed legislation will also undermine the cherished bourgeois doctrine of separation of powers!

The Police, Crime Sentencing and Courts Bill and the other legislation in progress represent a significant increase in the repressive powers the state is giving itself. Although today's targets appear to be Extinction Rebellion, travellers and refugees, ultimately these measures are aimed at the working class. They are an attempt to forestall any fight back as the screws of wage freezes and wage cuts via measures like "fire and rehire" are tightened. The fact that the laws can be amended in this way shows that any so-called rights we are supposed to have can be removed as soon as they appear to threaten the system. Our so-called rights only exist so long as they are not a threat to the capitalist exploitation of the working class and capitalist property.

The fact that our rulers think it is necessary to remove these so-called rights now is an indication of the crisis the entire capitalist system is in, but also of the nervousness of our rulers; a nervousness resulting from their inability to find a way out of the crisis. Instead they chose to outlaw protest against the injustices which the system spawns. This is just another indication that the system which demands continual profit and continual growth needs to be overthrown worldwide and replaced by a system of cooperative production for human need.

Save the Planet – Destroy Capitalism!

In July hundreds of lives were lost in heat domes over western Canada and the US, and floods in Germany and China. Wildfires raged out of control from California to Greece, Turkey and Siberia. These disasters are clearly the result of global warming disrupting weather patterns. If emissions of greenhouse gases continue on the present path, these events will seem like a vicar's tea party in comparison to what is to come. Millions upon millions will die.

Historically the human species has survived in a narrow range of mean average temperatures (MAT), the so-called climate niche. This range is approximately 11°C to 15°C and it also is the range for successful cultivation of crops and livestock. The average pre-industrial temperature was about 13.75°C and so far MATs have risen 1.1°C above pre-industrial temperatures so we are already at the limit of optimum temperatures for human survival. Since 2010 there has been an increase of 0.4°C in MAT which means we will reach the famous 1.5°C agreed at the Paris Climate Conference in the next 5 to 10 years, not by the end of this century. A rise of 2°C, possibly by 2040, will put a third of the human population outside the climate niche. Even at 1.5°C there will be a large reduction in food produced, and at 2°C yields are estimated to halve in areas like the US Midwest and India. Millions, possibly billions, of people will be forced to migrate as the climate niche moves to higher latitudes. This will lead to social breakdown and wars.

A number of warming processes are already beyond the tipping points, the points where human action cannot reverse them. Three important tipping points now appear to have been crossed; the melting of the Arctic ice, the melting of the west Antarctic ice sheet and the bleaching of the coral reefs. A further three processes appear to be close to tipping points; the melting of the Greenland ice sheet, the melting of the East Antarctic ice sheet and disruption of the Gulf Stream. While we produce more greenhouse gases we are also destroying nature's ability to absorb them. The Amazon basin, for example, has changed from a net absorber of carbon dioxide to a net emitter because of fires and forest clearance.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) in its report for achieving net zero emissions by 2050, the Paris conference goal, concludes this can only be achieved if there are

"No new oil and gas fields approved for development [and] no new coal mines."

Of course our rulers have not taken the



slightest notice of this. The bulk of new energy investments is going into fossil fuels. The G7 as a whole spent \$189bn to support oil, gas and coal in the year 2020 - 2021, 29% more than they spent on renewables, and in the 6 years since the Paris Conference the G20 have subsidised fossil fuels to the tune of \$3.3tn! The IEA reports that just 2% of the \$16tn allocated for the pandemic recovery is going to clean energy and notes that CO2 emissions are likely to surge to a new peak by 2023.

Why are our rulers doing the exact opposite of what their scientists tell them? The reason is they do what capitalism demands. Firstly the capitalist system only produces for profit, and fossil fuels are still very profitable, and secondly the system requires continual accumulation of capital, which means continual growth, which translates into energy growth. While the capitalist system dominates the world the need for profits and growth will determine what our rulers do even if this is leading to future extinction of Homo sapiens.

Intimately connected with the production of greenhouse gases is the pillage of the planet. Capitalism's use of the renewable resources of nature is now annually 1.6 times what nature can replace. This is simply not sustainable. What can be done? Today we are presented with two alternatives; global conferences of the leaders of world capitalism agreeing to decarbonise, or direct action to disrupt the system forcing governments to decarbonise. Neither of these will work.

The first relies on the leaders of global capitalism agreeing to halt the way capitalism works. The COP conferences are supposedly a forum for this and the latest, COP 26, is due in Glasgow in November. The COP conferences

have met annually since 1995, yet all previous COP conferences have achieved nothing whatsoever. Global warming has steadily increased. The Paris conference was supposed to produce legally binding commitments, however, such commitments are unenforceable! Apparently 100 poor nations will come to the Glasgow meeting demanding money from the rich nations to fulfil the Paris COP 21 pledges which they haven't met! Another fudge will be the outcome and the participants will, as usual, pat themselves on

the back for making promises they have neither intention nor ability to fulfil.

The second alternative imagines global capitalism can be forced to decarbonise the economy by disruption and mass disobedience. This is the strategy espoused by Extinction Rebellion (XR) and its offshoot Burning Pink. They propose a "peaceful" revolution via members elected to parliament and citizens' assemblies controlling decarbonisation. Decarbonisation costs are to be paid for by confiscation of 90% of the assets of the richest 10% of the population. The real criticism of all this fantasy is that the capitalist system with its continual demand for profit and growth is, according to XR, to remain in place. In other words all the forces which are leading us to catastrophe remain intact.

The simple truth is that there can be no solution to the environmental crisis while capitalism remains the global system of production. The ending of wage labour and production for profit is absolutely necessary before the terrible damage capitalism has inflicted on the planet can be rolled back. A global system based on cooperative production for human need must be constructed before we can strike at the root of the environmental problem.

What We Stand For

Aurora is published by the Communist Workers' Organisation (CWO).

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 working class 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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