

MEGAPHONE

THE MAGAZINE OF SOCIALIST STUDENTS 2020

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Class of Covid vs government of U-turns



INSIDE:

Where next for the Black Lives Matter movement?

After Starmer's victory: will the Labour Party fight for students?

80 years since the murder of Leon Trotsky: Stalin's most dangerous enemy



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WHERE NEXT FOR THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT?



Deji Olay
Socialist and Black Lives Matter activist

This summer the Black Lives Matter movement reignited, following the police murder of George Floyd. Millions of people in the US, UK and across the world took to the streets to fight against racism and police violence.

The protests over the last several months have drawn attention to racism but, if we want change, the movement has to go beyond raising awareness. The question that needs to be asked now is - how can we turn this energy for change into effective action?

Seeing the popular support for the movement, corporate PR departments raced to tell the world that they also believed 'Black Lives Matter'. However, these empty gestures often backfired when employees described their own experiences of racism at these companies. Never mind that these companies continued to profit from the capitalist exploitation of working class and poor black people across the globe.

The Tory government has attempted to quell the protests by launching another inquiry into racial inequality, with this one being set up by someone who doesn't believe in institutional racism. They have also deliberately attempted to divert attention away from the real issue of police brutality and racism by stoking fears about helpless refugees. The BBC and capitalist media have supported this and created hysteria around 'cancel culture' - but not a single protestor or organisation called for BBC Proms to stop the singalongs of Rule Britannia!

Rather than promote the aims of the movement, as the leader of the Labour Party, Keir Starmer called some of demands "nonsense", a statement Nigel Farage "heartily agrees" with. Months after

leaks revealed racism from some Labour Party officials towards Diane Abbott, the party has still done nothing. This is all well in line with Starmer's aims to reverse the changes made under Jeremy Corbyn and move the party back to the right.

It's clear that corporations - and the politicians they own - are not going to fight against racism as long as they can profit from division and imperialism. All they can offer are empty gestures. To get the changes we demand, the Black Lives Matter movement must move beyond raising just awareness and demonstrations.

Following the shooting of Jacob Blake, sports athletes and teams organised wildcat strikes in the US. This is a huge step up in the movement and a significant opportunity for the Black Lives Matter movement to increase its strength. While protests and boycotts can be ignored, the economic impact of a strike forces the ruling class to make concessions. Disappointingly, the initial strikes ended early in the NBA due to harmful advice from former President Barack Obama, but a day of action still had the billionaire owners scrambling to the negotiating table. Imagine what could be achieved if workers took strike action?

The battle needs to be continued by students and young workers organising where they are strongest.

Socialist Students demands protection for workers from racism in the workplace; however, if we want an effective way to fight racism we must be better organised at work. Trade unions are still powerful organisations. Black people and young people can no longer afford to be underrepresented in the unions, especially in this economic climate, considering that the 2010 recession resulted in half of young black men in the UK facing unemployment. We say all workers into the unions, all unions into the struggle!

The GCSE and A-level algorithm has

shown that the government still wants to maintain racial and class inequality. When I speak to teachers in the education unions about the effects of racism in education, they support change. Teachers and communities need to be empowered to make changes. Socialist Students calls for democratic control by workers, unions and the community of education.

The spontaneous Black Lives Matter protests this summer were a sign of the energy and potential of the Black Lives Matter movement in the fight against racism and police brutality. However, to get substantive change students and young workers must organise at work, schools and universities.

We fight to:

- End discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice. For the building of a mass movement which unites all young and working-class people around a socialist programme to end oppression and austerity.
- End police harassment. For the democratic accountability of the police overseen by local committees, made up of democratically elected representatives of trade unionists, local community organisations, young people and local authorities.
- A democratic socialist plan of production and distribution to meet the needs of the overwhelming majority in society and to provide a future for young workers. Nationalise the top 125 monopolies, banks and finance houses in Britain under democratic workers' control and management so we can make the decisions about what is needed. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.

A STUDENT NURSE SPEAKS

Charlie Kennedy Student children's nurse

Nursing has always been a career of hard work and compassion, where you dedicate your life to the service of others. It has always been about fulfilling the NHS values of care for all, no matter your background, race, religion, class; but despite this it has been undercut by decades of vicious Tory and right-wing Labour cuts and privatisation, looking to make a quick profit off the back of the working class.

I have been a student children's nurse since 2019 and I have seen first-hand how the Conservatives are determined to undermine nurses and other healthcare professionals within the NHS, and social services.

Upon starting my nursing journey, I was greeted with the introduction of my first year's student loan of roughly £19,250 (£9,250 for the course and a £10,000 maintenance loan). I was hit by the realisation that I would be paying off this debt for the rest of my life and for a career where I would be earning very little, all whilst giving back to the community.

Whilst it is true that the Conservatives have introduced a new £5000-a-year bursary, this is nothing compared to the original nursing bursary, which paid for your entire course. In fact, the new funding is only a scratch on the surface for nursing students in supporting their study. Before 2017, nursing students received a nursing bursary worth up to £16,454 but now the maximum amount that a current nursing student can claim is only £8,000, just under half of the previous amount.

Nursing is not the only profession hit by the scandal. Want to be a physiotherapist, radiographer, midwife, or just about any other healthcare professional? You will also be faced by this enormous debt, weighing you down until old age. Student midwives, for example, leave their healthcare education with an average debt of £41,000.

In my first year, I worked as a healthcare assistant in a London hospital during the COVID-19 crisis, supporting the staff in the intensive care unit. There, I saw first-hand how the NHS had been stripped to the bone and both nurses and nursing students were being hit by an underfunded and under-resourced NHS, impacting on their wellbeing, as well as decreasing the quality of care given to patients. The COVID crisis has really exposed the fragility of our NHS and its current peril.

This undermining of NHS staff continues after qualification, where nurses are paid a salary that has been cut in real terms by 7.4% since 2010.

It's no wonder then that according to a recent UNISON / Savanta ComRes poll, 69% of the public think that all NHS workers should get an early pay rise before the end of the year. Despite this, the government's war on nurses and NHS workers continues.

The Tories boast about their Nightingale hospitals and are able to support paying millions out in contracts to private companies for faulty NHS equipment and a test and trace app that has yet to be released, yet they cannot pay our frontline workers more.

The only way to end the destruction of our NHS is for nurses, students and NHS workers to get organised and fight back against the Tories. In 2016, junior doctors across the country took strike action against Tory attacks on their pay and conditions, demonstrating that not just nurses are up for a fight against Tory attacks to the NHS.

This year nurses across the country have been organising protests demanding a 15% pay rise. Socialist Students calls for a 15% pay increase for all healthcare workers, including those employed in the private sector, as well as an increase in the minimum wage to £12 an hour - £15 in London - to support those at the bottom of income chain, who need it the most. Health worker trade unions – such as UNISON and the RCN – could play a decisive role in the fight for 15% by starting a campaign now within their trade unions for strike action.

But the fight for our NHS isn't just a fight for pay. The NHS must be completely nationalised, with a complete scrapping of Tory and Blairite privatisation to ensure that care is delivered for people and not profit. The nursing student bursary must be completely returned to its original state to support those who are training to join our great workforce, and lastly NHS funding should be increased to meet its needs so that it does not struggle on its knees.

Capitalism however is a system in crisis. Only by fighting for a socialist transformation in society – starting with taking the biggest banks and businesses into democratic public ownership – can the future of the NHS be guaranteed. Together workers and students can achieve this possibility. We must unite and fight.

THE BATTLE TO KICK OUT TRUMP

Oisín Mulholland
Swansea Socialist Students

The US presidential elections loom large this autumn. Donald Trump's term has been a disaster for working-class people. Inequality in the US is at the highest level since the federal government started tracking it 50 years ago. The richest 1% of Americans now account for one-third of the country's net worth, while the bottom half of the population scrapes by with only 1.2%!

The world situation is dominated by the ferocious struggle unfolding between a declining US imperialism and China, which also has negative implications for working-class living standards inside and outside the US.

Trump's brutal approach to Covid is nothing new. Like the virus, his policies attack those already made vulnerable by capitalism – with attacks on migrant children, women, Black people, trans people, etc. Under his leadership the



US has managed to be one of the worst nations at handling the corona-crisis, a difficult feat when considering how badly the Tories or far-right Bolsonaro in Brazil have tackled the pandemic. Unemployment is at over 8% at the time of writing with evictions and food-bank queues on the rise. This is despite the biggest bailout in US history – with big business the main beneficiaries.

The experience of Covid and Black Lives Matter has added to the mood to get Trump out at the election. But Joe Biden, the Democratic Party candidate, offers no alternative for working-class and young people. He is not running against the pro-capitalist anti-working class policies that have delivered this situation under decades of neoliberal Republican and Democratic administrations but only against Trump - and not much else. He is not promising to fight for crucial improvements in living standards like free healthcare, free education and a \$15/hour minimum wage for all.

These demands were part of the programme of Bernie Sanders which enthused and mobilised important layers of the working class, and above all young people who have grown up in the age of austerity. But Sanders allowed his message to be muffled and eventually silenced by the Democratic leadership. His refusal to break from the Democrats and form a new party is shown starkly to be a criminal lost opportunity.

The Democrats, like Trump, defend the capitalist system. Throughout the decades when the Democrats have governed, attacks on the working class, cuts to public services and the advancement of the interests of Wall Street have all continued and been encouraged. Biden himself was Vice-President in the Obama

Democratic Party administration between 2008 and 2016, which saw more bombs dropped on the Middle East than under George Bush, or any other president. The Obama-Biden administration also deported more migrants than any other, continued the usage of ICE facilities, and ramped up utilisation of Guantanamo Bay.

Given Hillary Clinton's anti-working class record, Trump was able to tap into an anti-establishment vote in the 2016 election but the façade is now beginning to slip. His inauguration in January 2017 was met by the women's marches, then the biggest protests in US history. Racist police murders have continued under Trump and the demonstrations against him that have come out of the Black Lives Matter movement have been even bigger and are of enormous importance.

The initial huge Black Lives Matter uprisings took place under the Obama-Biden administration. It is encouraging to see the BLM protests turn into 250,000-strong anti-Trump protests in the US – but they need a new mass political voice that defends the interests of working-class and young people, and fights for a socialist alternative to capitalism and the racism that is inherent to it.

Trump has lent on and encouraged far-right groups. The need then, for a new mass workers' party, is even more potent. The US working class desperately needs a party that represents its interests, a socialist party. Though Biden is polling higher, a Trump re-election is a serious possibility, as is a close result and a chaotic situation. The US working class needs mass organisation, trade union and youth movements with a socialist programme to oppose the brutal capitalist attacks that are to come in the next period.

EDITORIAL: THE CAMPUSES, COVID AND CAPITALIST CRISIS

The victory of A-Level and GCSE students over the downgrading of overwhelmingly working-class students' grades, as well as the massive explosion of anger around the Black Lives Matter movement, are fresh in the minds of thousands of students. The burning question this term is how we can continue to organise a mass movement and fight for our futures.

The outbreak of the coronavirus has brought with it a new period of economic, social and political turmoil in Britain and internationally. The economy has tanked - hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost while thousands more are threatened. The university campuses themselves have not escaped the crisis.

The coronavirus pandemic has starkly revealed the class divisions which exist within capitalist society. While millions have lost their jobs and income, 45 billionaires in Britain have seen their wealth soar by £25 billion during the lockdown period.

The coronavirus also exposed the nature of education within capitalist society with the A-Level and GCSE results fiasco. The now infamous 'algorithm' demonstrated that exam results were as much based on your class background as they were on the hard work of individual students.

Young people have demonstrated in action their immense anger at the system. The Black Lives Matter movement saw hundreds of thousands of young, overwhelmingly working-class youth mobilise in the streets, demanding not only a future free from institutional and police racism, but a future free from low pay, unemployment, slum housing and austerity in general. Nurses have organised protests across the country demanding an immediate 15% pay rise. And A-Level and GCSE students got organised and forced the Tories into a double U-turn, forcing them to scrap the exams algorithm.

The Campuses

Before the coronavirus pandemic, universities faced a growing crisis around overcrowding as vice-chancellors and management chased funding by cramming more and more students into campuses without a corresponding increase in funding for learning resources, such as more teaching staff, support services for students, study and communal spaces, and so on. Students starting or returning to university this year amidst the pandemic are going to find the same crowded and unsafe learning and living conditions.

But this crisis facing students and staff this year did not just fall from the sky. Implementing the necessary measures

to keep students and staff safe – such as social distancing measures – will be impossible after universities have been forced to sustain years of cuts, marketisation and outsourcing. Socialist Students demands investment in our campuses for more spaces for students to study, live and socialise safely, and for an end to and a reversal of all cuts to jobs and wages of staff on campus. All privatised and outsourced cleaning services should be brought back in-house to ensure decent pay and conditions for staff on campuses, as well as ensuring the health and safety of staff and students.

Unaccountable vice-chancellors and management have proven that they cannot be trusted to prioritise the needs and wellbeing of students and staff on campuses. That's why we say that the only way to guarantee an education system which meets our needs and can ensure our safety is to fight for the democratic control and oversight of the universities, including by campus staff, trade unions, and students ourselves. We call for the setting up of all-union health and safety committees on every campus, with democratic representation of staff and students.

But the source of the crisis that grips the universities currently does not begin and end on the campuses themselves.

The marketisation of universities by both Blairite Labour and Tory governments, including the trebling of tuition fees by the ConDem coalition in 2010, is what laid the basis for the almighty funding crisis which has now hit the Higher Education sector. Instead of being publicly funded and free, the introduction and raising of tuition fees accompanied deep cuts to government funding of Higher Education, forcing universities to become extremely reliant on tuition fees for income.

Despite the fact more British students are now attending university than previously predicted when the pandemic first began, universities are expecting a much higher drop-out rate of students this year. As a result, cuts to jobs and courses are posed on campuses.

These cuts are threatened at a time when we need more resources and staff on the campuses to tackle the increased workload which has come with the coronavirus. Some university managements have told students that there will be maximum seminar sizes of five students for some courses. Without an increase in the number of available teachers, and therefore the number of seminars themselves, this will potentially mean a cut in contact time for students, an increase in workload for remaining teaching staff, or even a combination of both. Imposing cuts on the campuses is especially reckless when universities could be playing a leading role in the research and development of a covid vaccine.

Socialist Students opposes all cuts and privatisation. We demand that no more such cuts are carried through on campuses to jobs, services, or courses. Management should open the books to democratic inspection by campus unions and to elected committees of students. If we find there is a shortfall, then students and staff should get organised together to fight the Tories for the funding that our universities need.

Tories offer no answers

The Tory government, as on many other key issues, is split on the matter of what to do about the crisis in Higher Education. While some Tory ministers have publicly advocated letting universities facing bankruptcy fail, others have argued for limited government bailouts for universities facing bankruptcy, on the condition that those

universities implement further market reforms, ie cuts, on the campuses.

Whichever approach they choose, none of the options being discussed by the Tories offer a solution for students or workers on campus. The Tories represent the capitalist class, a system which puts the creation of profit ahead of the wants and needs of the majority in society. While young people struggle for a decent, quality education system that is capable of providing us with a genuine development of our knowledge, education and skills for our futures, capitalism always pushes in the opposite direction, trying to mould an education system that serves its own narrow interests.

Split Tories, crisis of youth leadership

The Tories' inability to make a decision over what to do about the universities represents deeper fissures in their party over what direction to take weakened, crisis-ridden British capitalism. The bitter divisions which caused the public unravelling of the Tory Party prior to the last general election have not disappeared, and will only deepen as the crisis of capitalism develops.

These divisions represent a huge opportunity for the student movement. That is why it is so crucial for students to get organised, starting by getting organised on the campuses themselves, to democratically discuss out a fighting programme to fight for our education and futures, and to build a mass movement to take on the Tories.

Despite the enormous attacks the Tories have in store for students, where has the supposed leadership of the student movement been? The NUS, which enjoys the affiliated membership of over 600

students' unions, has been silent. Locally on the campuses students' unions themselves have been silent for years as well.

And Sir Keir Starmer, leader of the Labour Party, has demonstrated time and time again that he's more interested in smashing the remnants of the left in the Labour Party than he is in fighting against Tory attacks on our education and our futures.

Join Socialist Students

Despite all of this, it is vital that students get organised to fight against the attacks that the Tories have in store. Socialist Students is a national organisation which wants to organise any and all students who want to fight for free, quality education, for affordable student housing, for an end to cuts on campuses and other issues. We fight for free education – for the scrapping of tuition fees, for student living grants, and for the cancellation of all outstanding student debt. The policies of marketisation have led to the monumental crisis which is consuming the campuses this year – only by fighting for a complete scrapping and reversal of these policies can we win a decent and free education for all.

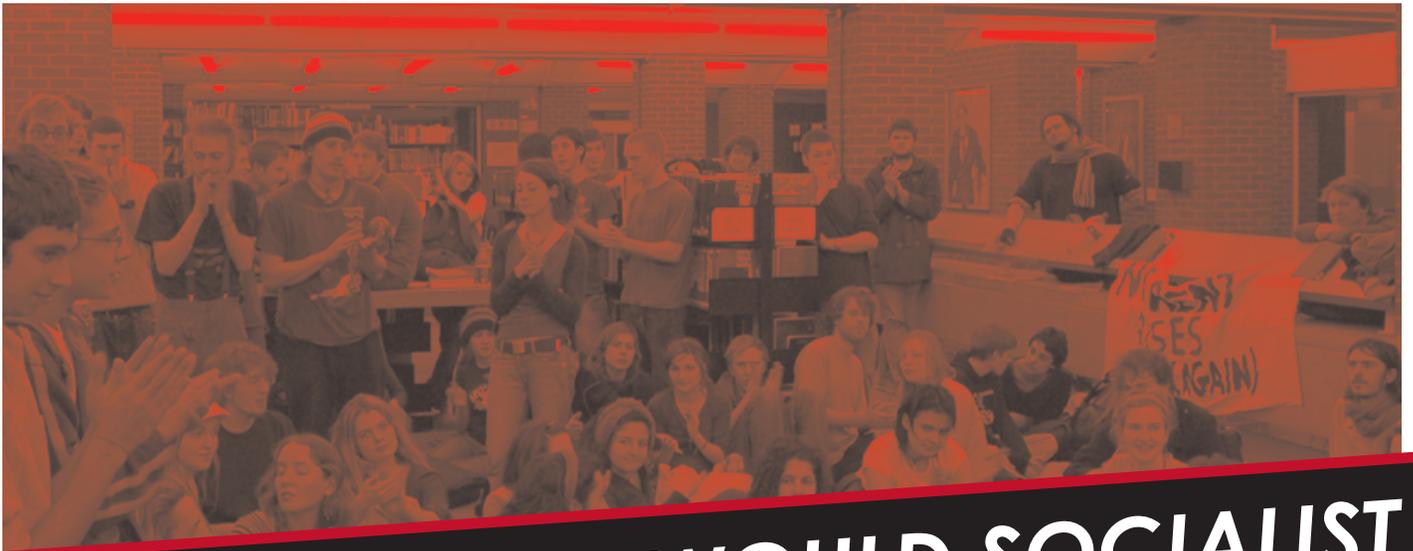
But capitalism – a system in crisis – is unable to guarantee a free and quality education for all. That's why Socialist Students also fights for socialism – to take the banks and the biggest businesses into democratic public ownership, to lay the basis of a democratic plan of societies' resources to provide all young people with access to a free education, a decent job, somewhere to live and a decent future. Join Socialist Students if you want to get organised on your campus or college to fight for our futures.

**COME TO THE SOCIALIST STUDENT /
YOUNG SOCIALIST NATIONAL ZOOM RALLY**

**SUNDAY 25 OCTOBER
STARTING AT 1PM**

**SCAN QR CODE TO REGISTER
TO RECEIVE ZOOM DETAILS**





WHAT WOULD SOCIALIST UNIVERSITIES LOOK LIKE?

Bea Gardner
Southampton Socialist
Students

Despite record numbers of students applying to universities this summer, university bosses are making massive cuts to spending, including staff redundancies. There are still a number of uncertainties on campus regarding student numbers. While some universities have seen increases in attendance so far this year, other universities lower down the league tables have seen no increase. Drop-out numbers due to the coronavirus are expected to be higher throughout this year. And it isn't until students have arrived on campus that numbers can be guaranteed.

In the current system, reduced student numbers mean reduced university income. University bosses are making spending cuts despite more resources being needed to deliver safe teaching and campus access.

Both Boris Johnson and university bosses have been pushing for a rushed return to campus learning, with the hope this secures tuition fee income from students, particularly overseas students who pay substantially higher fees.

But there is no doubt that a forced reopening without necessary staff and student action to ensure safety on campus will exacerbate the spread of coronavirus. This short-termism could see courses rushed back online before the end of term if further outbreaks develop, as has

happened in the United States.

These attempts to make staff and students pay for the coronavirus funding crisis has the potential to see student fightback and workers' action re-emerge.

Scrap fees, save jobs

The coronavirus crisis has exacerbated the already existing funding crisis in universities. The tuition fee-based funding model has never delivered for students and staff, and cannot be repaired or reformed in our interests. But it especially doesn't work in times of uncertainty, like now, when student numbers may temporarily fall, particularly high-fee paying international and postgraduate students.

University bosses' solution is to implement wide-scale job cuts, increasing workload for already overworked staff, and further eroding student learning conditions. Meanwhile, the government has ignored appeals by both university bosses and unions to bail out the universities, only implementing some minor measures to help cash flow by releasing tuition fee payments early.

The university trade unions and students must organise to defend jobs in the face of such attacks. Campus trade unions and students should make the demand for 'opening up of the books' to inspection by workers and their unions.

In 2018, universities sat on combined reserves of over £44 billion. The average vice-chancellor's pay is now £350,000 a year.

Campus unions should take a no-cuts stance, arguing for the use of reserves and borrowing.

A decade of marketisation misery

The current attacks come on top of more than a decade of austerity, underfunding and increased privatisation, which have seen education across the board suffer. School academy trust bosses, college chief execs and university vice-chancellor pay packets have soared. In contrast, the majority of education staff have seen their working conditions driven down.

Since 2010, universities have seen year-on-year income increases, but expenditure on staff pay fell by 3.35%. At the same time, capital expenditure - spending on buildings, land and equipment - shot up 35%.

This spending is aimed at maximising profits by attracting the highest number of students possible. But the quality of education students receive when they arrive has been decimated.

Before COVID, lecture theatres were overflowing on oversubscribed courses. There are few, if any, additional staff employed to manage increased student numbers, meaning reduced contact time with academic staff. Books, computers, printers and library desks are difficult to access because of over-demand. Social distancing will reduce access to these resources further still.

Under the free-market system, research is driven by the needs of business and not the needs of society. Research is often funded by big companies who then try

and sell their findings back to us for profit.

If there isn't profit to be made, they abandon the projects. Following the Sars outbreak in the early 2000s, a new vaccine, which could have helped prepare us for this current crisis, was dropped due to lack of profitability.

Government and charity funding is only awarded through short or fixed-term grants, distributed via competitive bidding processes that favour cheap, short-term projects and quick results. An estimated £1 billion worth of researchers' time is spent on failed bids each year in Europe, time which should be solving the problems we face in society.

The instability of the current research and teaching funding system also means the proliferation of fixed-term and casual work, which creates a highly competitive research and teaching landscape.

Famous physicist Peter Higgs said that he would not get a job now, as he would not be considered productive enough for current research standards, where researchers are expected to "keep churning out papers". The pursuit of profit is holding back the development of society.

Tuition fees have been one of the main drivers behind this marketisation of education. The Tories continue with this policy, even though the student loan system is now more expensive for the UK government than before tuition fees were introduced. With only 30% of students able to repay their loans in full, the debt pile is growing with added interest. Total student debt is currently £121 billion and expected to hit £450 billion by 2050.

The fee system is the leading cause of the current crisis. Any measure other than scrapping fees will be a short-term solution, and fundamental problems will remain.

Nationalisation is only way out

As well as fighting to save jobs, we must campaign for the renationalisation of universities, running them as a public service and not a business. The government has shown that the money is there, paying the wages of nine million furloughed workers. The National Audit Office has itemised more than 190 state measures introduced up to the first week of August, at an estimated cost of £210 billion.

The renationalisation of universities as a public service would not only avert the funding crisis, but also allow universities to play a vital role in Covid recovery. It would secure jobs and offer hope to thousands of young people and workers facing the misery of unemployment.

Even pro-capitalist spokespeople say massive reforms of the sector are necessary, given the astronomical amounts of debt building up through unpaid student loans. But any market solution will be temporary at best, and will not solve the issues of bad learning and working conditions.

For that, there needs to be a fundamental shift in how universities are organised. Universities should be democratically run in the interests of everyone.

Socialist Students fights for the scrapping of tuition fees, with all education costs publicly funded in full with living grants for all students. Existing student debt should also be written off, sparing thousands of young people from the burden of debt.

The fee system is the leading cause of the current crisis. Any measure other than scrapping fees will be a short-term solution, and fundamental problems will remain. It's estimated that removing university tuition fees and restoring grants would cost £11.2 billion. The furlough scheme cost more than that for just one month.

We also fight for long-term, public investment in research. This would allow universities to be a valuable resource in the fight against climate change, helping drive more sustainable means of production, developing sustainable technology and retraining the workforce to use it.

University renationalisation has many more benefits. Students are charged extortionate rates for university halls, some built more than 50 years ago, which generate further income for universities.

If profit was removed, and universities publicly funded, rooms could be charged at much lower rates, giving more

disposable income to students. Students could focus on their studies rather than working several jobs to pay rent.

Similarly, as publicly funded services, everyone in the community could benefit from university facilities, such as sport and leisure services, library resources and meeting rooms. Lifelong learning could be advanced, with a variety of evening classes freely accessible to workers in the community.

Give workers, students and community democratic control

For the true benefits of renationalisation to be felt, decision-making would need to be in the hands of university workers, students and local communities. We campaign for elected committees of staff and students, in conjunction with campus unions, to democratically decide how to run universities. This would ensure resources are spent where they are needed most, including guaranteeing the health and safety of all.

Increased democracy would also mean fair salary distribution, giving a significant pay rise to the workers that have seen their pay eroded by 20% in real terms since 2010. The current exam system could be overhauled, not only at university level but also entry exams, putting an end to inequality and class bias in the application process by making it fair, transparent and democratic.

A variety of courses could be introduced, with different types of qualifications based on community needs, not so-called 'cash cow' courses, which make the most money. Democratic worker and student control could overhaul the syllabus, including 'decolonising' the curriculum, a key demand of the Black Lives Matter movement.

The current crisis reveals the fundamental limitations of the capitalist system and its inability to provide for the majority in society. University workers, students and the wider workers' movement cannot go back to the misery of 'business as usual' marketisation misery.

We must fight for a completely different vision for higher education - one where research and learning can indeed be of benefit to everyone and not just a means to line the pockets of the bosses.

The alternative vision is more than achievable in a socialist society, where the distribution of resources can be democratically determined by all, for all. This is the vision that campus unions and the student movement must fight for as part of the immediate task of defending against job losses.

SOCIALISM QUESTION AND ANSWER

Interview with Lluís Bertolin Birmingham Socialist Students

What is the state of capitalism in Britain in 2020?

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed the contradictions of capitalism worldwide. On the one hand we've seen the closure of workplaces and the furloughing of millions of workers, while on the other the stock markets have boomed with the gap between the rich and the rest of society only growing.

All the efforts of Boris Johnson's government have been geared towards getting the bosses' profits flowing again through the increase of consumption, even at the potential cost of lives. And yet the Tories offer no measures to improve the lives of working-class people. They accuse young people of spreading the virus while they promote "eating out to help out". Who is it, we must ask, that they really want to help out?

Those young people who remember the 2008 economic crisis and more than 10 years of austerity already know that the so called 'recovery' of the economy will only be based on further cuts and austerity against us. The future of capitalism is in question and in a critical state, unable to provide solutions to the current situation, but ready to become more vicious than ever on the backs of ordinary people.

What do we mean by 'socialism'? And what solutions would a socialist society hold for the key problems facing young people and society today?

Socialism is the idea that it is the workers who should own and control the means of production instead of the capitalist class. In short, socialism seeks a world and society that is democratically managed and planned in the interests of ordinary people - the very people who create the wealth in society and keep it running!

Once the private interests of the capitalists have been done away with, and production is run to satisfy the needs of the whole of humanity, instead of enriching a tiny privileged section of it, many of the inherent problems that

capitalism generates would be solvable. Without speculation, affordable housing for everyone could be guaranteed. Without the private interests of healthcare companies, the NHS would flourish. Without bosses pushing for tax cuts and always attacking working conditions, no job would be precarious or undignified. Society could then be based on the social needs and wants of the majority, not profit, and guarantee a decent life for everyone and the freedom to enjoy it, instead of worrying if there will be a next pay cheque.

Capitalism, whether we like it or not, exists everywhere across the planet and seems unchangeable. How can students and young people who want to fight for an alternative kind of society fight for socialism?

Just as capitalism thrives only by expanding itself around the world, widening its access to resources and markets, so socialism needs to be an international struggle. The 1917 October Russian Revolution, the only successful socialist revolution, began the process of fundamentally changing society. But from its very beginning its leaders - Lenin and Trotsky - warned that the socialist society that the Russian working class was building could not be built in isolation within Russia itself. For its survival it had to be the spark of further revolutions across the world.

The isolation by the failure of the revolutions in Germany, Hungary and elsewhere, combined with years of imperialist invasion - 21 capitalist armies invaded Russia following the revolution - to crush the revolution, had taken the lives of millions and caused severe privations.

In this crushing context of setback and isolation, the crystallisation of a bureaucratic caste became possible, led by Stalin. This bureaucratic caste put its own comforts and privileges before the interests of the international revolution. Over many years it slowly removed and destroyed many of the remnants of the 1917 revolution. Those who struggled to defend workers' democracy and internationalism led by Leon Trotsky were slowly removed imprisoned and killed, including Trotsky himself.

The so called 'socialist' countries created in Eastern Europe following the Second World War were all formed under the auspices and direction of Stalinist USSR, in its image and thus these emerging regimes had the same bureaucratic flaws that afflicted the Soviet Union.

However, the material gains of the 1917 revolution, and the nationalised planned economy that the bureaucracy rested on, still remained. In fact, they would allow the Soviet Union to continue to make some progress, compared to the chaos of capitalism.

Trotsky warned that without democracy, the Soviet state would suffocate and continue its slow degeneration until it collapsed. This prognosis proved true, decades later, when Stalinism fell in Russia and Eastern Europe, and ruinous gangster capitalism took its place.

What do we mean by 'socialism'? And what solutions would a socialist society hold for the key problems facing young people and society today?

The ruling class will never give up their wealth and privileges without a fight, so it falls to the working class to get rid of capitalism. And for the workers to dissolve it they need to organise. The key to effective organising is building bridges between workers of all backgrounds and situations, and actively intervening in disputes, strikes and social struggles. This can often be a difficult and time-consuming task, but necessary to build the united working class force that is needed to fight to end capitalism.

Students and young people can potentially play a key part in this process. We too are promised only a bleak future under capitalism. Any young worker or student who wants to contribute to carve out a better future for themselves and their peers can get their feet wet in the struggle by not only learning new radical concepts from books, journals and debates, but also by supporting and participating in the many struggles that workers will face in the near future.

AFTER CORONAVIRUS: IS A GREEN NEW DEAL POSSIBLE?

Evan Vaughan
Swansea Socialist Students

The promise of a new future through investing in 'green' energy, industry and jobs has been a discussion gaining traction, particularly since the rise of Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders.

The idea is to boost sustainable economic growth by pouring resources into the green energy sector. The reference to US President Franklin Roosevelt's 1930s New Deal public infrastructure projects is no coincidence.

The Covid crisis has breathed new life into the discussion of a Green New Deal as the catastrophic drop in GDP (total output) in capitalist countries has forced capitalist governments to implement radical interventionist policies – motivated by the threat to their system.

In Britain, Tory Chancellor Rishi Sunak's recent hint of raising corporation tax from 19% to 24%, would be only 2% less than Corbyn's proposed plans in the 2019 Labour manifesto. The Tories' effective nationalisation of rail, despite their ideological opposition to public ownership, reflects government fears that the capitalist economy is in grave danger.

Covid has ripped open the wounds inflicted after decades of neoliberal economic policies. The fact that many workers live precariously from paycheck to paycheck means that without furlough schemes or similar, many countries would already have reached unemployment levels not seen since

Left up to the market, the future is bleak. With socialist planning a Green New Deal could lead to a new age of sustainability and rising living standards.

the Great Depression. But such short-term bailout measures cannot rescue ailing British capitalism in the long run.

The likes of Elon Musk are hailed as the champions of capital who will usher in green capitalism, but a few CEOs taking credit for their engineers' hard work is not good enough. The rate at which we are switching from gas-guzzling cars to electric powered ones for example is at a snail's pace. Current projections from the Global Electric Vehicle Outlook 2019 place an estimated 30% of vehicle market share in the hands of electric vehicles by 2030. That's far too slow for a transition to a carbon-neutral economy. Even if we did continue at the projected pace of vehicle electrification, the current economic downturn will stall consumers from making big switches as incomes fall.

Left up to the market, the future is bleak. With socialist planning, a Green New Deal could lead to a new age of sustainability and rising living standards. Not the 'growth' which workers have experienced for years, where real wages have stagnated and house prices increased, while the big business class add to their hoard of stolen wealth. Green industry,

through democratic public ownership, can be built from the ground up with democratic control and management by the working class.

Projects such as a mass building of net-zero carbon emissions council housing, will combat both the housing crisis facing young and working-class people, and create thousands of new jobs, as well as teaching new skills focused on green energy.

On a local level a socialist Green New Deal could be used to make a carbon-neutral, nationalised transport network. Bus services that have been cut, leaving smaller communities stranded from the cities, can be given new life with proper transport links. This will create jobs and also end the isolation of more remote communities.

The leaderships of the trade union movement – which embraces over six million workers – must play a leading role in the fight for a workers' Green New Deal. This would mean fighting for a bold programme to guarantee replacement jobs and protect pay of those workers in polluting industries, offering reskilling and redeployment. And fighting for socially useful jobs in the face of the avalanche of job losses the bosses are implementing as their system enters a crisis.

Workers' action to secure green jobs and a green economy has to be linked to mass action of workers and young people to end the capitalist system, which is destroying the planet we live on. Only through socialist planning can we have a hope to build a new future for our generation.

AFTER STARMER'S VICTORY: WILL THE LABOUR PARTY FIGHT FOR STUDENTS?

Michael Morgan Warwick Socialist Students

In 2015 I went to a Jeremy Corbyn rally in Coventry as part of his initial leadership bid; I was 15 at the time and pundits were still painting the chance of a Corbyn victory (and a victory for left-wing ideas in the Labour party) as extremely slim. But I felt inspired and joined the Labour Party, I felt sure that his ideas were right and was so happy when he won. When he won again in 2016 I was ecstatic, surely with the support of the majority of the party's half a million members (as it was at the time) the party would support his programme and vision in all aspects.

It was with immense disappointment over the last few years that, despite Corbyn's policies on free education, the NHS and privatisation - as well as improving the lives of young people through access to mental health and youth services - I have realised that the Labour Party is perhaps no longer a vehicle

for socialist change in this country that it could potentially have been. Here, the election of Sir Keir Starmer presents a critical blow. While during his election, he occasionally paid lip service to free education for students, his weakness on the recent A-level U-turn, and his lack of solidarity and support for the Black Lives Matter movement are just some indications of his shifting the Labour Party to the right. This has left many young Labour members in a similar situation to me - leaving the party.

Starmer was elected earlier this year, during the pandemic, on the vague positions of uniting the party and to 'restore trust in Labour'. While claiming to stand on the programme of the 2019 manifesto, he was largely quiet on the issue of free education, anti-austerity and workers' rights. He defeated the Momentum and Corbyn-backed candidate, Rebecca Long-Bailey.

Corbyn and his supporters should have fought to transform the Labour Party starting with a bold campaign

to kick out the Blairites and refound the Labour Party as a democratic anti-austerity party. They could have rallied the support of the thousands of new members to clear out the Blairites instead of compromises and deals with the pro-austerity Labour right.

Whilst the sabotage Labour MPs wreaked on the Corbyn project since his election has been abhorrent, it was not surprising. The Blairite MPs were opposed to Corbyn's programme because they represented alien class interests to the workers and young people who were inspired by it. They represent the bosses who saw in Corbyn's programme, partial as it was, a threat to their profits and a potential threat to their system. These Blairite MPs worked tirelessly to undermine and sabotage Corbyn. Just look at self-styled everywoman Jess Phillips, who told Owen Jones she would stab Corbyn in the front. This was only the most open expression of many Labour MPs' sentiments.

Starmer's actions since being

Corbyn and his supporters should have fought to transform the Labour Party starting with a bold campaign to kick out the Blairites and refound the Labour Party as a democratic anti-austerity party.

elected during the pandemic have shown his true colours. He curried the favour of Nigel Farage in his response to the grassroots BLM movement, dismissing it as a 'moment' when he denounced the taking down of former slave trader Edward Colston's statue in Bristol. And

instead of putting forward what was necessary to deal with racist policing, he praised police in saying that as "director of public prosecutions for five years, [he's] worked with police forces across England and Wales bringing thousands of people to court, so my support for the police is very strong".

We should not forget his former role as head of the crown prosecution service, and how institutional racism plagues the justice system on which he built his career and name.

One might then say: okay so he's not perfect on the Black Lives Matter movement, but surely as students we can get behind his policy of abolishing tuition fees? While Starmer claimed to support the abolition of fees during the leadership contest, he has since appointed Claire Ainsley as his policy chief, and she has argued that the 'vast majority of the public support some kind of fees'. As well as this, his deputy leader, Angela Rayner, has privately argued not to abolish fees according to

the Independent. The sacking of Rebecca Long-Bailey further indicates how free education is perhaps not Starmer's priority, as he has now kicked out the only Corbynite that was in his cabinet. There is no one in shadow cabinet meetings to fight for the inspiring programme that so many young people joined the party for, and it is no wonder many of them are now leaving.

What has happened to policies of taking water, energy and rail into public ownership, which would massively benefit the lives and incomes of students? What will happen to Corbyn's fight for a real living wage for all workers regardless of age? Corbyn's Labour included the demand for free broadband for every household, which while bold at the time, has proved to be an absolutely crucial issue to young people after months of working or studying from home in crowded study spaces, with poor Wi-Fi connections.

The issue of housing is also key to students. In many cases we have paid rents for properties we did not occupy in the past months, and we've been at home with families in crowded homes which affect our mental health. Starmer cannot understand that only an inspiring programme of investment in infrastructure, jobs, skills and services can win students' support.

As well as this, it has been reported that Starmer may drop Labour's 2030 net zero climate target. If we want our futures to be prosperous, and if we want a safe planet for those futures, young people cannot rely on Starmer. The climate emergency and capitalist crisis that causes it cannot be tackled lightly or by degrees. We must challenge it head on with bold socialist policies. [see page 11]

If Labour under Starmer isn't the way forward for young people we need to find a new way. Socialist Students fights for young people's futures, and if you want to fight for a socialist future, you should join. But we still need a political voice as part of the fight for our futures. We need a mass party ready to fight for students, for our education, our livelihoods and our planet. If Labour won't fight for students, we must fight for ourselves.

80 years since the murder of Leon Trotsky: Stalin's most dangerous enemy

Oisín Duncan
Glasgow Socialist Students

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the assassination of the co-leader of the October 1917 revolution in Russia, Leon Trotsky. Murdered on the 21st August 1940 by an agent of Stalin's regime in the USSR, Trotsky's ideas still provide an indispensable set of tools for anybody wanting to struggle for the socialist transformation of society.

The October revolution marked the first time in history that the working class took power and began to organise society's resources on a democratic basis. It's no wonder then that today the representatives of the system of capitalism - a system based on the exploitation of the majority by a handful of the super-rich - seek to denigrate and bury the lessons of that revolution and Trotsky's ideas.

Like all of the great Marxist leaders - Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and fellow Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin - Trotsky was not an abstract theoretician. He was also an inspirational fighter and activist in the revolutionary movement who tested out his ideas and programme in the fires of revolution and counter-revolution.

With oversimplification, the political struggle between Leon Trotsky and Josef Stalin in the aftermath of Lenin's death is presented as little more than a personal power struggle between two 'heirs to the throne'.

This is a profoundly dishonest presentation of the foremost political opponent and committed fighter against the vicious Stalinist bureaucracy. Often in official capitalist history (especially the kind in secondary school textbooks), the degeneration of the Russian Revolution into the bureaucratic tyranny of Stalinism is presented as an inevitability. To answer this, Trotsky published 'Revolution Betrayed' in 1937, which analysed for the first time the phenomenon of the Stalinist bureaucratic regime in the Soviet Union.

Trotsky's role in the events of the Russian Revolution was immense. He was elected chairman of the Petrograd Soviet (council of workers and soldiers) following the 1905 revolution, and then went on to reprise that role in 1917 after a long period of exile and imprisonment. Soviets, democratic organisations of the working class, became the decisive organs of struggle and the basis for the new workers' state, which was formed after the revolution in October 1917. Petrograd, being the largest industrialised city in Russia with a large working class, played a key role in the events of 1917.

Based, in part, on the experience of the 1905 revolution, Trotsky developed the theory of 'The Permanent Revolution'. Trotsky argued that the capitalist class, entwined with the feudal landlords and their system, was too weak to carry through the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution - the development of industry, solving the land question, unification of the nation, and establishment of a bourgeois

parliamentary system - and was too terrified of the working class to allow it to do so.

Only the working class was able to carry through a 'democratic revolution', but having taken power would immediately be in conflict with the capitalists and landlords, and the revolutionary process, to succeed, would have to pass on to the socialist revolution, thereby ending capitalism and feudalism.

Moreover, for the socialist revolution to survive, the workers' state in Russia would need to rapidly link up with the working class in the more industrialised capitalist countries carrying out socialist revolutions.

Trotsky provided Marxist analysis of events and bold opposition to the First World War. Only a tiny minority of revolutionary Marxists resisted pressures to back the 'war effort' and maintained a principled working-class internationalist stance, including Lenin and Trotsky. This stance was expressed in Lenin's April Thesis which set out the need for the working class to take power, giving no trust to the capitalist provisional government which had been established following the revolution of February 1917. This approach was critical in the revolution's success in October.

World capitalism, following the taking of power by the working class in the October revolution, was panicked. Capitalist governments around the globe set out to drown the revolution in blood.

Trotsky played a crucial role in politically and militarily leading the struggle against the White armies of reaction and their 21 imperialist backers.

At the time Stalin's role was not obvious and he became the general secretary of the by then Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Despite Lenin's final wishes, as expressed in his Last Testament, Stalin remained in this post, allowing him to use his position to isolate the genuinely Marxist elements within the party.

Stalin's consolidation of power within the Communist Party was only possible after the exhaustion of the Russian working class following the Civil War, as well as the isolation of the Russian revolution owing to the failures of revolutions in the industrialised West such as Germany.

These historical objective factors contributed to the increased role of administrative bureaucrats within the planned economy, and the consolidation of that control via anti-democratic methods. It was this social and economic phenomenon, and not any personal rivalry in a succession struggle after Lenin's death, which motivated Trotsky's next period of political activity: fighting for workers' democracy in the USSR and for international socialism.

Trotsky and the Left Opposition

Trotsky was for a period tolerated by the growing clique based around Stalin. However, his increasingly vocal criticism of the bureaucratic regime heightened tensions within the Russian party and the Communist International (Comintern).

Eventually, Trotsky's faction, representing thousands of workers and experienced Bolshevik cadre, organised itself formally as the Left Opposition. While there were other groupings within the party opposing Stalin and his collaborators, the Left Opposition was the only group with a programme for

defending and extending the original gains of the October revolution, including the establishment of workers' democracy.

Written in 1923, the Platform of the Left Opposition set out a campaign in defence of revolutionary workers' democracy - against bureaucratisation, for open elections to all party positions, and for proven working-class elements to take the leading positions in the party. The Opposition also objected to the heavy tax burden placed on the poorer peasantry, criticising figures like Bukharin and Stalin for encouraging the formation of the 'kulak' layer, essentially an early farmer-capitalist class.

This very clearly shows how the tendency represented by the Left Opposition was working for a deepening of the gains of the October Revolution, while the ruling bureaucracy was only looking to shore up its privileged position above society.

The battle over the Communist International

The same approach of the bureaucracy - putting their personal privileges ahead of the interests of international socialist change - influenced the foreign policy of the Soviet Union and impacted the work of the Comintern. Bureaucratic advice to Communist parties in Britain, Germany and China led to the defeat of revolution and massacres of militant workers, while further isolating the USSR itself.

Trotsky criticised fiercely the scuppering of the Chinese Revolution of 1925-27, based on Stalin's false policy. Stalin and bureaucratic 'advisers' to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clung to the policy of a 'bloc of four classes'; essentially they claimed that the pressures of imperialism bound together the aspirations of all Chinese society into the pro-capitalist party, the Kuomintang (KMT). Allegedly this was the sole political vehicle that could deliver independence for China, and at a later stage, socialism.

Trotsky's position at the time was for the CCP to maintain political independence of the KMT, and for it to publish its own newspapers proposing an honest Marxist analysis of the ongoing struggle, and in particular, the best path to liberation for the peasants and

workers.

Stalin's mistaken line led to brutal massacres of class-conscious and Communist workers in Hankow, Shanghai and elsewhere by the nationalist militias. Chiang Kai-shek, bourgeois leader of the KMT, had always intended to attack the Communists whenever he saw the opportunity.

To maintain an official policy, and protect their own position, the bureaucratic caste ruling the Soviet Union had to theorise both an explanation for the failure of revolutions in other countries, and the perspectives for continuing to build socialism at home. These two requirements were fulfilled by Stalin's theory of 'Socialism in One Country' - completely alien to the Bolshevik policy of the struggle for international revolution and working-class solidarity.

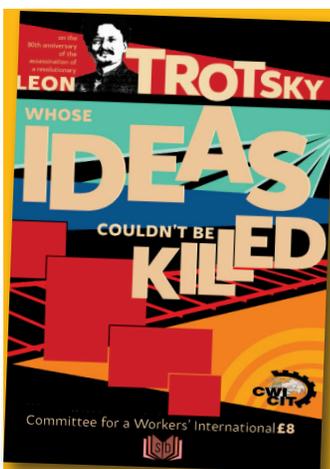
The violent methods of Stalinism

But the Stalinist bureaucracy did not seek to secure its position with an open and democratic exchange of views. As Trotsky later explained, "He (Stalin) seeks to strike not at the ideas of his opponent, but at his skull."

The Stalinists began a barbaric campaign of intimidation, expulsions and outright murder to push out the Left Opposition and protect their privilege above the Russian and international working class. Left Oppositionists were sent to the gulags in their thousands, while Trotsky himself was exiled from the Soviet Union and expelled from the CP, leading him to found the International Left Opposition in an attempt to oppose Stalinism in the Comintern.

When this also became untenable, Trotsky was involved in the formation of a new international, the Fourth International. He continued to write on the failures of the Stalinist bureaucracy, but always defended the conquests of 1917. In exile in 1930 he wrote the History of the Russian Revolution to ensure future generations could benefit from these lessons.

Even with Trotsky in exile in Mexico, and his family scattered across the globe or murdered, the Stalinists could not tolerate his power to undermine their influence over the international working class. Despite his murder 80 years ago, Trotsky's contributions to Marxism on revolution, working-class organisation, internationalism, and the heroic role he played in struggle still provide invaluable lessons for anybody looking to fight for a socialist future.



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