

# NEU★MARXISTS

Issue 1

Written by supporters of the International Marxist Tendency in NEU



## REOPENING OF SCHOOLS: TAKE FOUR

### Editorial

Education has bounced from crisis to crisis over the last year. Since schools reopened fully in September education workers have faced unsafe conditions in crowded buildings that make social distancing next to impossible. Knowing the value of pupils being in school, education workers have pushed on, as we do too often, carrying on as best we can in the circumstances we find ourselves in.

As a consequence, many teachers have contracted Covid – in fact the infection rate is 1.9 times higher in teachers than the general population - which has contributed to the wider spreading of the virus.

By the end of the winter term, workers were exhausted. During this time we've carried out additional duties, prepared both in-person and online lessons, and supported pupils with their mental health and the transition back into school. They've hardly been twiddling their thumbs as some papers have tried to argue.

Has this monumental push to keep schools open been done for the benefit of the pupils? Absolutely not. As proven by their policies on free school meals and in slashing school budgets in recent months, the government don't care about children's safety or education. What they do care about is having workers in work, not at home looking after children who could be in school.

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### The crisis of Capitalism

As with every decision taken by the government in response to the pandemic, the economy - or rather, the profit rate - comes first. GDP is forecast to fall by 11% or more and unemployment is set to rise to staggering levels. Some workers have been furloughed for almost a year now, but the government will not keep paying workers who are not working indefinitely.

Workers everywhere have been thrown back into work, facing Covid unnecessarily in order to prop up the failing capitalist economy. While doing this, employers across both the public and private sector have been using all kinds of dirty tactics, including the hated "fire-and-rehire" strategy, to attack pay and conditions.

What we are experiencing now is an attempt by the government to hold together the rotting seams of capitalism by maintaining as many people in work as possible, while hammering those they send back in order to squeeze more out of them. Looking at the situation in schools, it's no surprise that there was once again a rush to reopen schools over the past month - if their kids are back in school, these parents are freed up to reenter work, where they face the attacks mentioned above.

This is not just a consequence of the pandemic though. The pandemic was only the catalyst for a global crisis that has exposed the rottenness of the system. Parents have been skipping meals for days at a time whilst the capitalist class has enriched itself to the tune of over \$10 billion since the pandemic started, to give just one example.

However, as our physics lessons taught us, every action has its reaction. In response to these conditions, efforts to fight back amongst workers in every industry is emerging, and this is as true of the education sector as anywhere else.

### Fightback

NEU members have been at the forefront of a fight for workers' rights and safety. Citing section 44 in January, refusing to work in unsafe conditions and shutting hundreds of schools through our action, we've shown the potential strength we have when we're organised.

As a consequence, tens of thousands of teachers have joined the NEU, inspired by its members bravely taking matters into their own hands when the government would not act to stop the spread of a virus that has killed almost 100,000.

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It is not just teachers who are fighting for their safety and rights at work, however – in the past few months British gas workers have been on strike and BA luggage handlers have struck and won. In the coming months, every trade union will be under pressure, as workers realise that their backs are against the wall. We need to prepare for the battles that lie ahead.

As the economic fallout from Covid and the deep crisis of capitalism that we are entering into worsens, there will be more attempts by the government to roll back hard won reforms resulting in pay freezes, longer hours and worsening working conditions. We are confronted with the deepest crisis for 300 years. Mass unemployment and attacks on living standards are staring us in the face.

### The Labour Party

Where are the so-called political representatives of workers throughout this? Starmer and the leadership of the Labour Party have offered scant support to teachers during the pandemic.

Despite their push in recent weeks on free school meals and laptops for pupils, Starmer did not support our call to close schools in January until the day of Johnson's announcement.

Instead, his strategy seems to be to support the government until it becomes apparent that a U-turn is on the cards, at which point his position will also switch - the day before the Tories, so as to claim credit!

Indeed, he seems far more interested in attacking his own party's left wing than anything else. This is because Starmer, under orders from big business, is trying to push the Labour Party to the right. This means attacking the left in Labour, but it also means giving unions like the NEU the cold shoulder in order to look "business-friendly." That explains the move to kick out Corbyn, the ousting of NEU-supporting education secretary Rebecca Long-Bailey, and the war on the left in general.

If the Tories got into even more serious difficulties, he's indicated that he'd be quite willing to jump into a National Government of some kind - and we could expect nothing but the same attacks on teachers and education staff if he did. When he has opined on policy, it's been to oppose a corporate tax rise while shrugging off tax rises for workers and the poor!

Only a Labour Party that has waged a successful fight against its right-wing elements, including by introducing open selection of MPs, and which stood unapologetically on a bold socialist programme could be counted on to aid workers and their unions in our time of need.

### Our Task

The task of NEU Marxists is to offer a proper analysis of events, as well as a clear strategy and tactics that can take the movement forward. We will fight for every reform or gain for the working class. But we also link up these struggles with the need to change society. On the basis of capitalism, which is in terminal decline, there is no solution to the problems of working people.

The fight for the NEU's recovery plan for education and the 10 point plan for reopening goes hand in hand with the fight for socialism. The battle for fair assessment and fair pay for education staff are inseparable from this too.

By taking the stand we did, the education workers organised with the NEU showed that we are the only ones who can be trusted to put our interests first, and not the bosses, bankers and their representatives in the government. Similarly, workers across a wide range of industries are now showing what power they have when they stand together to take action.

It's that power which can not only safeguard education for future generations of our children, but create a socialist society in which they can reach their fullest potential in every way possible. ■



## DON'T TRUST BOSSES WITH OUR SCHOOLS

# NEU MUST LEAD THE STRUGGLE!

Thomas Soud

Data from the World Bank has revealed that 53% of children are in learning poverty, defined as being unable to read a short paragraph by the age of 10. The UN aimed to eliminate learning poverty by 2030. Instead, however, the pandemic will see the total numbers rise by 72 million. The reluctance of governments across the world to implement high quality, covid secure teaching, means the UN's target is disappearing over the horizon.

Teaching staff across the world have taken on the monumental effort of attempting to mitigate the educational effects of the pandemic. In the advanced capitalist countries logging into Zoom has replaced the dash for the school gates. Where broadband and data cannot reach, national TV and radio try to plug the gaps, but for the poorest children the gaps have become gaping abysses.

In Chile, the poorest fifth of children lost 88% of their learning across the year.

Forty-five percent of children in sub-Saharan Africa have lacked remote learning entirely. Even the major western nations are not immune. Dutch school students (where data is available) have lost the equivalent of 36 school days of learning.

The world bank estimates this will amount to an average of \$16,000 lost in lifetime earnings for every child currently in school across the planet, totting up to a \$10 trillion bill for an entire generation. Philistines will place this at the feet of teachers who have fought for school closures during the pandemic.

Yet, we were forced to fight for this only when the government refused to make schools covid secure. In Britain, the government failed to implement the 10-point plan set out by the NEU and has dashed into a hasty reopening.

Even when it came to the relatively simple task of ensuring all children had internet access, they failed. In Britain over 1 million children lack decent internet access one year into the pandemic, in the US it is 14% of all children. When the bosses'

representatives are custodians of education this is the inevitable result.

Repairing the damage capitalist mismanagement has inflicted on education globally will take years. Major investment is required until the end of the decade. Highly trained and well looked after teachers are going to be required in abundance. Smaller class sizes and well-funded schools are a must.

The capitalists have completely different priorities, however. They are preparing for rampant austerity to ensure that workers, young workers in particular, will pay for the crisis. This has already been implicitly announced in Sunak's recent budget.

We cannot let them get away with this. The NEU must deepen the good work it has already done and stand at the forefront in the fight for decent high-quality education. We can have no faith in the Tories and the boss's system they represent to defend education - only we, the workers who keep this sector running, can do that. ■

# TORIES PRIORITISE PROFITS OVER SAFETY

**Aaron O' Connor**

The inability for the capitalist system to prioritise lives over profits finds one of its most acute expressions in our schools. An analysis of The Department for Education's data by the NEU in January found that Covid infection rates were 1.9 times higher in teachers than the general population.

Meanwhile the Tory government has repeatedly stated that there is no evidence to suggest that teachers are at greater risk than any other profession.

The DfE have refused to publish the total number of teacher absences, illnesses and deaths, claiming that it is "not in the public interest" to share it at this time. At other occasions, they have stated that they simply do not have the data. The limited data that is available does show at least 65 deaths in the education sector between 9 March and 20 April 2020, 26 of which were teaching staff.

On the morning of the lockdown announcement in January, Williamson willingly sent 3 million children into schools. Parents, families, communities and staff were put at risk despite overwhelming data and the presence of the new strain of the virus. The government's decision did not stem from heartlessness but rather from the economic system they represent which can not afford parents to be out of work due to childcare.

Estimates published just before the full national lockdown highlighted as many



as 2 million workers unable to work due to childcare commitments, costing £1.75bn over the initial two-week closure. Under a national lockdown, these figures will have been far higher.

The first lockdown shattered an already fragile economy leading to a contraction of 3-6% GDP, amounting to approximately £5bn per week. Rishi Sunak was forced to admit we are facing the worst recession in 300 years. These are not conditions under which the government can afford to keep schools closed and they have rushed into a big bang reopening ignoring the advice of 9 Education unions. Only the organised education workers alongside the NEU were able to force the government to U-turn.

Schools are reopening not because they are safe, not because they are no longer

vectors of transmission but instead to prop up the profits of big business. The government has already admitted the reopening of schools will lead to 30,000 more deaths. Social distancing in overcrowded and poorly ventilated classrooms is a cruel joke which working people will be forced to pay with their lives.

We have shown strength in numbers up and down the country and need to act again to ensure the safety of our staff, children and communities. We cannot rely on a government which has proved itself unable to prioritise lives over profit. We know the needs of their schools and should be the ones to decide what measures will secure the safe return of their staff, children and communities and be provided with the appropriate funds to do so. ■

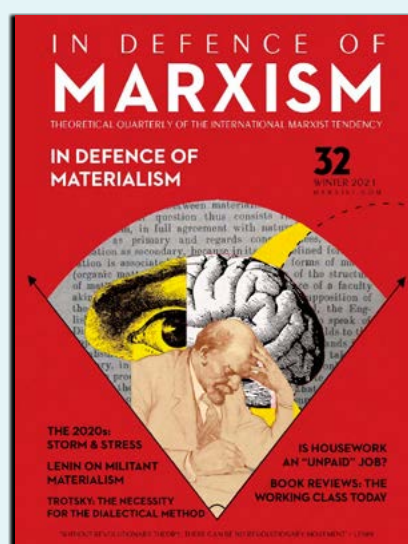
## NEW IN DEFENCE OF MARXISM MAGAZINE

The new edition of In Defence Of Marxism is packed with material which every reader of Socialist Appeal will find of great value.

The centrepiece article is an introduction by Alan Woods to a new edition of Lenin's 1909 book 'Materialism and Empirio-Criticism.'

In this article Alan explains how Lenin's defence of the materialism method has become even more relevant today, in an age where reactionary ideas once again dominate philosophy.

Also included are articles from the archives by Lenin and Trotsky on the importance of dialectical materialism and the need to fight against idealism and religion.



This issue also has articles taking up the debate over whether housework can be considered an "unpaid job", and whether we should therefore take up the slogan of "wages for housework" as some have advocated.

This issue also includes reviews of a number of books which have come out recently examining the question of class, and what it means to be "working class".

With an editorial looking at the issues facing us in 2021, there is plenty to get your teeth into. Order your copy now!

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# ONE TEACHER'S EXPERIENCE...

**Clara McGill**

Since August 2020 teachers across the UK have been forced to work in unsafe conditions. Students and teachers have been exposed to literally hundreds of different households each day with very few safety precautions in place. Even under the last lockdown, figures have shown that over 50% of students were still attending school in many areas.

Throughout the year many teachers have come forward to share their experience of the blatant disregard for safety in school. I would like to share my experience as a primary teacher in Glasgow. In October there was an outbreak of Covid-19 among our cleaning and dinner staff. We were not informed of the outbreak until lunchtime the following day, when it dawned on us that the infectious cleaners had been in our classrooms the night before with no cleaning since then.

The rest of the week we had no replacement cleaning staff and were told to "spray down the tables ourselves if we want", in the

middle of a global pandemic. The other staff and I were shocked when 3 days after the outbreak most of the cleaning and dinner staff were made to return to work, without having been tested.

They had apparently been deemed "not close contacts" with those who had the virus despite all working in the same kitchen every day. One staff member who was forced to return to work started to show symptoms the following week and later tested positive for Covid-19.

This is just one experience, of which I am sure there are thousands more. It is clear that proper safety precautions have not been implemented in schools, leaving staff and students at severe risk. A sage report in November stated that:

"While cases have increased rapidly in the general population, this has been particularly acute among school-aged children and young people. There has been a 50-fold increase since the start of September for 11-16 year olds, and infections are now higher for this age group than any other. Infections for primary school children continue to rise. Misleading information has been given on

health risks to teachers. Action is urgently needed, to make schools safe for staff and students and to reduce infections in the community."

We now know that the decision to close schools was taken far too late. The Tories want to keep the schools open at all costs, in order to keep parents at work to try and prop up the failing economy, while implementing little if any safety measures.

In order to keep staff and students safe the NEU 10-point safety plan needs to be implemented immediately. Empty buildings need to be requisitioned and used as nightingale schools to allow for smaller class sizes and social distancing. We need a massive investment to train new staff and bring ex-teachers back into the profession.

Most importantly it should be the teachers themselves, through their unions and in consultation with SAGE, who decide when it is safe for schools to re-open for all. This is the only way that we can ensure that staff and students are safe in schools and prevent the callous loss of life which will occur otherwise. ■

## NEW FROM WELLRED:

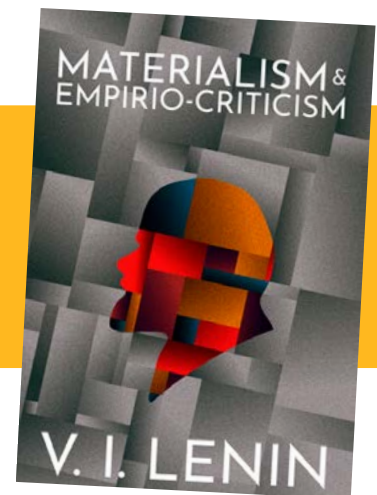
### LENIN'S 'MATERIALISM AND EMPIRIO-CRITICISM'

In this classic text, Lenin brilliantly explains the fundamental principles of the materialist philosophy of Marxism. He defends them against idealist attacks from the subjective idealism of Machism, a philosophical trend, which at Lenin's time was becoming very fashionable, even within the workers movement.

Step by step, layer by layer, quoting at length from the many trendy philosophical and scientific publications of the day, the book exposes idealism in all its guises. The aim was very simple: to bring out in the open the real difference between Marxist dialectical materialism and subjective idealism, which in the last instance always leads to some form

of religious world outlook.

Analysing the different shades and expressions of Machism internationally, Lenin stressed that "in every philosophical question raised by the new physics, we [trace] the struggle between materialism and idealism." And he showed that: "Behind the mass of new terminological devices, behind the litter of erudite scholasticism, we invariably discerned two principal alignments, two fundamental trends in the solution of philosophical problems. Whether nature, matter, the physical, the external world should be taken as primary, and consciousness, mind, sensation (experience - as the widespread terminology of our time has it), the psychical, etc.,



should be regarded as secondary - that is the root question which in fact continues to divide the philosophers into two great camps."

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# IMPACT OF COVID ON TRAINEE TEACHERS

Juvan Gowreeswaran

Being considered both essential workers and students, the Coronavirus pandemic has had a significantly negative impact on the experience of trainee teachers over the last two academic years. Trainee teachers have dealt with challenging circumstances and uncertainty. This has created stress and taken a toll on the mental health of trainees, in addition to a lack of vital classroom experience.

Trainee teachers have repeatedly been left in limbo due to a lack of clarity from the Department of Education and the slowness with which the government has taken decisions concerning students and schools. When the 'student travel window' was announced in November, trainee teachers were left wondering whether this included them and whether they would be able to finish the term early to isolate in order to return to their families for the Christmas period.

University management was slow in announcing this: some Universities did not let students know till the week before the intended travel dates, with some students reporting that their universities let them know that they would be finishing

early before informing them a few days later that they were expected to stay till the end of the school term on the 18th December.

The continued failure of the Department of Education to announce their decision left some trainee teachers unable to return home for Christmas due to not having enough time to isolate. We saw a repeat of this at the start of the Spring term as the Tory government displayed a lack of concern for teachers and pupils opening schools for a day before closing them as "vectors of transmission" after maintaining that schools were the safest place for school aged children to be during the Christmas break.

Ignoring the advice of their own scientific advisors, the Tories put profits before the life of school staff and pupils, as well as the families and communities that these children went back into. The uncertainty over the opening of schools has left schools and universities unable to effectively plan the placement of trainees, with trainees not finding out their new placements until the last minute. The continued mismanagement and poor government response have left future teachers in a continued position of uncertainty creating unnecessary stress that could have been avoided with rational planning.

The financial impact of the coronavirus pandemic can be seen with the continued cuts to the training bursary. Trainees starting in the 2020-21 academic year received less in their bursary compared to the previous cohort as trainee teachers were early victims of the cuts to deal with the government's poor management of the crisis. Student training to teach Geography, Design and Technology, English, Art and Design, Business Studies, History, Music, Religious Education and Primary Maths received bursaries between £6000 to £15000. For the 2021-22 academic year, it has been announced that none of these subjects will receive a bursary. Due to the woeful mismanagement by the Conservative government, trainee teachers will have to struggle financially during their PGCE years.

In the end, all of this is caused by the priorities of the government - the priority of keeping the profit system going. You can either have an education system truly fit for purpose, or you can have one that doesn't impact heavily on the state budget (and therefore the gains of the capitalists), but you can't have both. Trainee teachers must be organised to fight for their rights and for socialism. ■



Marxist Voice

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40:19



# WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING FOR?

**We are faced with the worst capitalist crisis in 300 years. Only a clear socialist programme can offer a way forward.**

**We have no faith in this rotten Tory government or their hangers on. It was their precious “market economy” that has brought the country to its knees.**

**The bosses and their craven political representatives have shown that they will always prioritise profits over lives.**

**We demand measures to protect workers, and put health before wealth. The demand that workers return to work should be answered with the demand for workers’ control of all workplaces:**

- All non-essential workplaces should remain shut until it is genuinely safe to reopen. All workplaces to establish workplace committees, along with the trade unions, to decide on such matters. This must be based on the implementation of health and safety measures and a safe working environment, with social distancing in place and the necessary PPE guaranteed for all. The costs for this must be paid by the bosses. This is essential given the threat of a second wave of the virus.
- Workers sent home should be on full pay for as long as necessary. Those out of work, including the self-employed, should be fully paid by the state.
- Faced with the growing threat of mass redundancies, the trade unions must fight to defend every job. No job losses! Share out the work with no loss of pay in order to lower the hours of the working day, provide jobs for all, and share out the benefits of automation and productivity gains.
- Those companies threatening redundancies must be forced to open their books to workers’ inspection, to reveal what has happened and how they have squandered their profits. If firms plead bankruptcy, they should not be bailed out, but nationalised under workers’ control.
- Those workplaces threatened with closure must be occupied and the demand must be raised for them to be nationalised under workers’ control. The struggle of occupied factories

should be linked in a common fight.

- We demand the launch of a fully-funded national programme of public workers to build the homes, schools, hospitals, community centres, and the things needed by our communities.
- The massive increase in government spending, to save the system, must not come from increased taxes or more austerity. This is a capitalist crisis, not caused by the working class. If someone is going to pay, then it should be big business. Big business are sitting on combined cash reserves of over £700 billion – accumulated profits made from the exploitation of the working class. These assets should be expropriated for the public good, not used for private gain.
- Rather than a ‘wealth tax’, we call for the expropriation of the monopolies, the banks and finance houses. All deposits will be secure and guaranteed by the nationalised banks.
- No to austerity! The working class must not pay for this crisis!
- Many small businesses are faced with bankruptcy, with banks resisting any extensions of credit. Many are squeezed not only by the banks, but by the big monopolies. By nationalising the banks we can supply these small businesses with the lifeline of guaranteed low-interest credit and loans.
- We are utterly opposed to all discrimination and oppression on the basis of the colour of our skin, religion, sexual orientation, or nationality. We demand that the organisations of the working class help to organise the fight against racism and oppression of all kinds. Capitalism is responsible for oppression and we stand for the unity of workers of all backgrounds in the struggle against this system.
- It is clear that the market has failed and capitalism is in a deep crisis. Capitalism has become a massive barrier to the development of society. It is an anachronism. The anarchy of capitalism prevents the planning of society’s resources for the benefit of all, in Britain and elsewhere.
- We stand for the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of

a rational society, based on the principle from those according to their ability to those according to their need. This can be done by the nationalisation of the 100 biggest monopolies, banks, utilities, land and natural resources under workers’ control and management – and without compensation to the fat cats. On this basis, the economy can be democratically planned in the interests of the majority, and not for the super profits of a few.

**In this period, the organisations of the working class will be put to the test. We must fight for militant trade unions, where leaders are regularly elected, and live on the average wage of a skilled worker.**

**While fighting for day-to-day questions, the trade unions must also put themselves in the vanguard of the fight to abolish capitalism, the only solution to the problems faced by our class:**

- We stand for the right of national ‘self-determination, up to and including separation. We stand for a new independence referendum in Scotland.
- We stand for an independent Socialist Scotland in a voluntary socialist federation with their brothers and sisters in England and Wales. We are in favour of a socialist United Ireland, which, if they so wish, could join a socialist federation with the other nationalities of these islands. This is purely a voluntary question.
- We also stand for a Socialist United States of Europe as a step towards a World Socialist Federation, in order to plan the resources internationally for the benefit of all. This would put an end to barbarism of capitalism and allow humanity to begin solving the urgent issues of climate change, disease, and poverty that face society and our planet.

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