

PCS ★ MARXISTS

ISSUE NO. 2

WRITTEN BY SUPPORTERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARXIST TENDENCY IN PCS



WE NEED TO RISE TO THE CHALLENGE

Editorial

Greetings to the Left Unity conference, which is taking place at a critical time. Without doubt, there are colossal challenges facing left activists and the trade unions, as well as the working class generally.

We are confronted with the deepest crisis for 300 years. GDP is forecast to fall by 10% or more, the biggest fall on record. Mass unemployment and attacks on living standards are staring us in the face. Hundreds of thousands are losing their jobs as part of the ruling class preparing an offensive against the working class.

What we are facing in reality is a world capitalist crisis which has been exacerbated by the pandemic. It exposes the rottenness of the system, where profit is the prime motive, and risking the health of millions. Billions have been made by the pharmaceutical companies and their hangers-on. While millions face cuts in wages, the billionaire class has never been richer.

In Britain, the consequences of Brexit - whether there is a deal or not - will be to further undermine the position of British capitalism. As before, the working class will be asked to shoulder the cost. All this will serve to intensify the austerity coming down the line.

Every trade union will be under pressure as workers realise their backs are against the wall. They need to prepare for the battles that lie ahead. This, of course, includes our union. Given the seriousness of the situation, this certainly cannot be "business as usual".

The fact that these attacks will be across the board means we must seek to generalise the struggle and involve the other unions, beginning with those in the public sector. We must not allow

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one set of workers to be isolated and picked off. We must involve the left unions in a militant unified strategy as well as putting pressure on the TUC.

Increasingly, workers will look to the trade union front to solve their problems. Starmer, under orders from big business, is trying to push the Labour Party to the right. That explains the move to kick out Corbyn and purge the left. With the Tories in difficulties, he would be quite willing to jump into a National Government to serve the interests of capitalism.

In this civil war in the Labour Party we should give our support to the left. However, it also illustrates the need to build up the forces of Marxism, to act as a backbone. The left cannot afford to compromise. But this requires clear ideas and determination. The rightwing are the agents of capitalism. They should have been wiped out long ago by bringing in automatic reselection of MPs, but the left leaders failed to act. In fact, they blocked the move in favour of so-called "unity". Now we are paying the price for this prevarication.

The most important thing is not to lag behind events. The working class, and the labour movement, is going to be shaken from top to bottom.

Important trade elections are taking place, such as in the UNISON general secretary election, where the left can win. Unfortunately, the antics of the Socialist Party are placing this at risk by threatening to split the left vote. Their infatuation with prestige politics, as in PCS, means that they are destined to play a destructive role. That is their function.

Our task is to offer a Marxist 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 suffering terminal decline, there is no solution to the problems of working people.

Only by taking the economy out of the hands of the capitalists and bankers and putting it under the control of the working class can society be democratically planned in the interests of the majority. In other words, the fight is for the socialist transformation of society!

Marxism has a key role to play in this struggle. We appeal to you to help us build the forces of Marxism in PCS and the wider labour movement. ■

THE FUTURE OF OUR UNION

WE MUST PUT TRUST IN THE MEMBERSHIP

Julian Sharpe

The Covid-19 epidemic has had an enormous impact on the British working class, exacerbating an already developing recession, sharpening and accelerating many trends in society. For our members, the epidemic has changed their working lives significantly.

Our Culture Sector members are faced with massive job cuts and a worsening of their terms and conditions. Many have responded by taking strike action, winning significant if limited victories in doing so.

While many members continue to work from home, many of our members are working from their offices and the battle to ensure safe workplaces continues.

In every case, our members have been going the extra mile during this crisis to ensure the work of the Government continues and that the citizens of this country continue to receive the valuable services the Government provides through the work of civil servants.

What challenges are we facing?

The Government is seeking to make the working class pay for the additional money that the Government was forced to spend due to the epidemic. Much of this money found its way to private contractors, many of them friends of Ministers, and some money has simply been wasted through this. We know that the country is more than wealthy enough to pay for this – but the logic of capitalism dictates that the working class will pay.

Hence the Government will try to ensure that the sector of workers they have most control over, civil servants, members of PCS, will pay their share.

So we will see, as has already been floated in the media at the time of writing, that the Government will seek to impose a pay freeze on civil servants for three years which will follow over a decade of below inflation pay increases. And we know that the Government is now preparing further attacks on our terms and conditions.

What do we have to do?

The first duty of any Marxist trade union rep is to tell members the truth. We have to tell members exactly what's going on with the situation we all face and what we can do about it.



We have to prepare for the battles ahead. We should ensure that the union is as strong as it can be to prepare for a struggle with the employer. We need to ensure that resources are targeted at recruiting members and strengthening the local organisation of branches – this means that our organising strategy must have the resources it needs.

We will have to seek allies in the public sector unions and work towards public sector-wide industrial action to oppose the imposition of yet more austerity, and of course we will have to build for another ballot on pay and prepare members to take industrial action.

Above all Left Unity has to appreciate the political situation we are in.

NEC Proposals

In this situation, the NEC is looking at how the union is organised. Although the Union's membership has increased this year to around 180,000, proportionally the Union is spending more each year on internal structures and admin costs.

The NEC are looking at two main options: restructuring the Union in order to give more resources to organising and campaigning, and merger with another union. It is possible that they will even look at a combination of both options.

We believe the NEC are right to look at these options. Action needs to be taken. There is no emergency and so the union has some time to decide. Any decision made has to be transparent and democratic and preserve the gains that have been made in making PCS a

member-centred union. There should be no surprises for activists in this process and everything should be talked through before decisions are made.

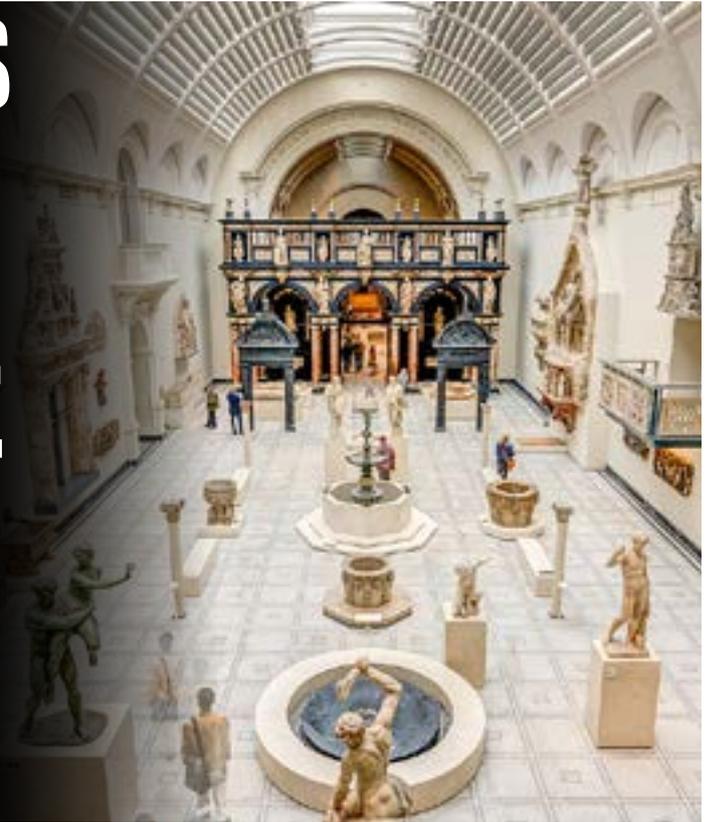
On a possible merger, this is not a principled matter for Marxists. We would always support the maxim, "one industry one union," and therefore a merger with another civil service union would make industrial sense. But merger with any of these unions would be problematic and would be unlikely to preserve the hard-won democratic rights of members in PCS. Therefore any merger would likely be with a union whose members are predominantly from outside the civil service.

So any possible merger would have to be judged on its merits. And the NEC have correctly set out some principles upon which the merits of any merger would be judged, including whether there would be an increase in industrial strength and bargaining power, and whether member-led democracy would be maintained or enhanced.

The attitude of the NEC gives the lie to the claims of some sectarians that are in the Union, but are otherwise on the fringes of the Labour movement, who accuse the Left Unity members of the NEC of adopting a "rushed approach" and seeking to bounce members into massive changes. This is simply not true.

The next few years will be challenging for the Union and we will have to adapt. But if we put our trust in our members and offer them a fighting leadership we will succeed. ■

REDUNDANCIES AT THE V & A: FIGHT TO RENATIONALISE THE MUSEUMS



Kit MacDougall

During the midst of a global pandemic that has already severely impacted the mental health and wellbeing of workers in all sectors, the V&A museum has sought to follow the Tate, Royal Academy and Southbank Centre by becoming the latest arts institution to announce major redundancies.

The 103 proposed redundancies are to effect the 'front of house' staff exclusively. This level of the workforce represents by far the least well-paid and most diverse layer of the museum's total staff. An announcement of the 'restructuring' process was made by Deputy Director Tim Reeve over Microsoft Teams on Tuesday 29th of September. It came as a bit of a shock, as staff had previously been personally assured by Reeve that the museum was in a secure financial position following the government's £1.57 bailout - as well as the millions of pounds procured during the blockbuster Dior exhibition that the museum had held the previous year.

'Cruel irony'

Reeve labelled the decision a 'cruel irony', as he acknowledged that it was those workers who had directly brought in the visitors (and thus the money) who would nevertheless have to bear the brunt of the situation. When asked if he

would himself, or any other executive level staff would take a pay-cut, Reeve dismissed the idea - despite having no decent counter-argument except that it was not a 'viable' solution to the problem created by coronavirus. Director Tristram Hunt made a brief appearance during the announcement, but has since made himself scarce, avoiding questions as much as possible. It must be noted that Reeve is estimated to earn between £165 - 170k a year, while Hunt earns around £205 - 210k.

This aggressive strategy from the management has meant that the V&A PCS branch has had to mobilise quickly. Numerous discussions are already taking place in order to outline the strategy of the union. A ballot has been circulated asking whether members would be happy to move forward with industrial action, with the result being largely in favour. The exact demands of the union have not been fully stated as of writing, but clearly we will oppose all proposed redundancies across the museum.

At the moment, the PCS branch leaders are working to achieve full representation for all workers in the museum, as technically the union only formally represents workers on the older civil service contracts, and not those who have joined the museum after 2016 - who are on the much more precarious 'V&A Enterprise' contracts (even though

most are still fully-fledged members of PCS.)

Workers control

In light of Rishi Sunak's recent comments about the need for artists and culture sector workers to 'adapt' to different (and supposedly more useful) jobs, it is important that we fight against the Tory government's attack on the creative industries as a whole. During the national lockdown, art, music, film and TV became the most important elements of life for many people, and the situation would have been frankly unbearable without the consolation offered through these mediums.

Previous to the new lockdown, museums and galleries have understandably been amongst the most popular places to visit. We therefore need to make it clear that places such as these rely on a highly knowledgeable workforce to remain open, and that a threat to this workforce means a threat to the enjoyment of art by the public. The current situation for the V&A is a direct result of Tory cuts to museums, and the increased corporatisation of various national institutions over the last decade or so. We should highlight this, and argue for both the re-nationalisation of museums and the establishment of workers control over the industry. ■

CHARTIST REVOLUTION

By Rob Sewell

NEW FROM WELLRED: A MARXIST ANALYSIS OF BRITAIN ON THE BRINK OF REVOLUTION

The new book from Rob Sewell on the history of the Chartist movement in 19th Century Britain is starting to attract considerable interest and praise from trade union and labour activists. Chartist Revolution (Wellred) has already gained some key endorsements. For example:

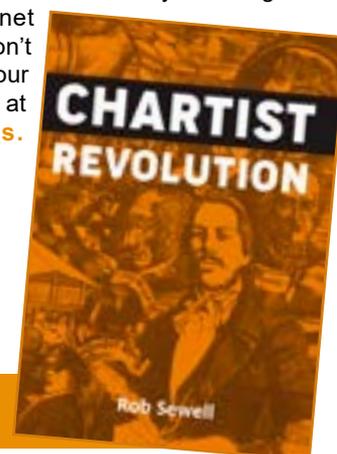
"This is an excellent account of Chartism and the pivotal it played in the long-standing struggle by the working class for equality and justice. The origin of the movement can be traced to an area of South Wales I call home and this movement and those that followed have had an enduring impact on my politics. At a time of great uncertainty for workers, this book is a timely reminder for everyone of the importance of working class solidarity."

Mark Serwotka, general secretary, PCS union.

"It is essential we learn about our history - the history of the working class - which has been completely distorted and buried. Rob Sewell has done a grand job in bringing to life this remarkable history of Chartism as well as drawing important lessons from those turbulent times. They resonate with us today. This book is a must read for every labour and trade union activist who wants to understand our heritage."

Ian Hodson, National President, Bakers', Food & Allied Workers Union

With another lockdown underway, now would be a good time for readers to order their copy. Incidentally, bookshops, trade union and Labour party branches, etc. can order bulk stocks at a trade discount by emailing Laurie@socialist.net for details. Don't delay, order your copy now at wellredbooks.net



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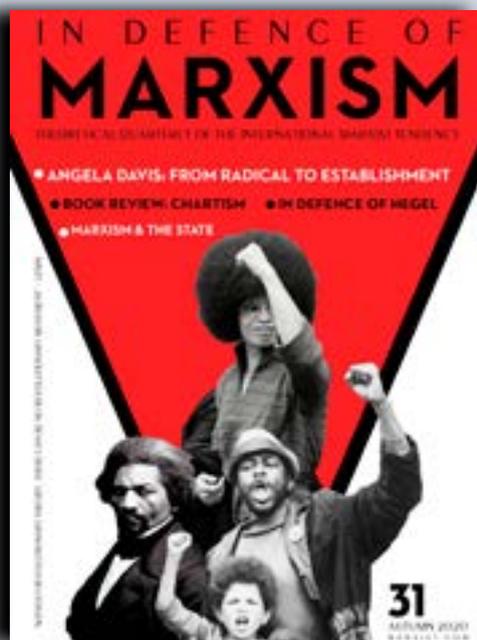
NEW IN DEFENCE OF MARXISM MAGAZINE

With the explosive events now unfolding around the world - including, as we go to (digital) press, in the USA - there has never been a better time to explore and study Marxist ideas and theory.

The latest edition of our magazine of Marxist analysis - In Defence of Marxism - will provide plenty of food for thought - and action - for workers and youth looking for an alternative to capitalism.

The first main article in issue 31 looks back at the political trajectory taken by '60s radical icon Angela Davis - from radical revolutionary, to mainstream commentator. It outlines her heroic role during the struggle for civil rights in the 1960s and 1970s but also shows how confused she became when that struggle started to ebb.

With the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and the growing divisions within US society, many of the issues raised by Davis during her radical period have come to the fore again. A new generation has come onto the scene - what can they learn from the past and where do



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they need to take the struggle? In looking at Angela Davis and her writings, Fiona Lalli draws important conclusions for today's youth.

The publication by WellRed of a new book on Chartism is the subject of a major review by Josh Holroyd which shows how the struggle of the Chartists in 19th Century Britain has major implications for workers today. We are all part of that revolutionary thread which should inspire all of us to complete what they started.

This year marks the 250 anniversary of Hegel's birth. What legacy has Hegel left us? Hamid Alizadeh looks over the contribution made by Hegel and calls for a re-evaluation.

The final article in this issue is the second part of Alan Woods' piece on Marxism and the state. Are Marxists in favour of violent revolution? Is a peaceful revolution even possible? This article looks at how Lenin and Trotsky considered these questions.

With a major editorial covering the current world crisis, there is much to read and study in the new issue of IDOM.

STRIKES AT THE TATE GALLERIES: THE POWER OF WORKER SOLIDARITY

PCS Marxists spoke with one of the workers involved in this summer's strike action at the Tate Galleries, she explains in her own words what lessons she has learned.

Victoria Karlsson

After returning from the first lockdown in August 2020, PCS members working at Tate Enterprises – the commercial arm of Tate Galleries, mainly comprised of retail and catering workers – were told the company planned to make over 300 people redundant (almost 50% of the total workforce), in the middle of pandemic and during what might well be the worst economic crisis in decades. The people affected by the redundancies at Tate Enterprises, which operates as a separate company, but are 100% owned by the Tate Galleries, are among the lowest paid and most diverse across the galleries. In response, the members of PCS at Tate Enterprises decided to take strike action to defend jobs and reverse the redundancies. The strike lasted for 42 days.

Building Solidarity

PCS has always had a strong presence at Tate Commerce (the retail arm of Tate Enterprises), with three experienced union reps. The PCS reps kept working during the lockdown, meeting regularly with the gallery about re-opening and health and safety. They would feed back to us what was going on at work, what we could expect about the re-opening, including the plans the gallery had for a timeline for the re-opening. For most of us – union members and otherwise – the PCS reps became our only source of information. This really built the trust in the union and the union reps, who, for most people, seemed to be the only ones who cared about us, kept us informed and fought for our safe return to work.

The Strike

After several meetings between the gallery, the PCS reps, and our PCS officer, it was clear their positions would not shift, and that redundancies would go ahead. We balloted for strike, and voted in favour, with a turnout of around 80%, with over 90% voting for strike action.



Unsurprisingly, the management tried to undermine the strike action in any way they could – including asking Tate Eats staff, who normally work in cafés and restaurants, to cover the retail shifts. One of the more important moments of the dispute was when, about halfway through the strike, people were told if they had been made redundant or had kept their jobs. We felt Tate management believed this would weaken the resolve, and that many people who had found out they had kept their jobs would come back to work. They could not have been more wrong – we had been determined to fight for everyone's jobs from the start and having frank discussions about this scenario before it happened meant we were even more determined to keep going.

Outcome

Negotiations mediated by ACAS were taking place from a couple of weeks into the strike. Around 5 weeks into the strike, our PCS officer told us that Tate management had agreed to a lump sum, which he felt would allow anyone made redundant to receive an enhanced redundancy payment. We and our reps asked that we get more details, and also made it known that any decision to accept or reject the terms, and end the

strike, would have to be voted on by all the members.

When we received further clarification around the terms and the finances of the offer, it became clear that any of the more long serving members of the union would not be covered by any enhanced redundancy payments. We were determined that this should not happen – 'no one gets left behind' was something often repeated in our meetings.

We asked the PCS officer to go back to Tate management, convey our disappointment with the fact that some members would be left out, and make it clear that if this was voted on now, we would reject the terms. Tate management immediately came back with an enhanced offer covering all staff who had been made redundant.

Even though the strike action did not, in the end, achieve its goal of saving jobs, I think the majority of the members who took part in it felt proud of the way we stood our ground until the end. The fact of that last action – when we refused to back down from our demands or lose our sense of solidarity – shows how much power workers standing together and supporting each other have. The challenge now is to maintain this for the future. ■

“PCS members and other workers can fight back and can win”

...An interview with Paul Williams

With the lockdown now over, DVLA staff are being ordered back to work - with terrible consequences. PCS Marxists recently spoke to Paul Williams (PCS Department for Transport Group President) about the situation developing within this field, what tactics the union is using to combat this situation and what will happen next.

Paul Williams

PCS Department for Transport Group President

(personal capacity)

Hello comrade, it's a pleasure to speak to you. Could you briefly introduce yourself, and what your role in the PCS is?

I am the PCS Department for Transport Group President and I am currently a member of the PCS National Executive Committee.

Covid-19 has brought forward various issues to workers in different departments. What have been the issues workers had to face in DVSA?

There have been many, but the biggest issues has been the forced return to the workplace for staff who are clinically vulnerable and those who when working in their day jobs have had no social distancing i.e. Driving Examiners conducting car tests. There has also been the fact that members in DVLA have been herded back to work, causing Covid outbreaks amongst staff.

The fact is that in many cases management is only paying lip service to these outbreaks, ignoring both health and safety risk assessments and any protocols for dealing with outbreak situations. All of this has caused huge stress and anxiety to members who are being forced to go into workplaces.

How has the PCS responded to these issues so far?

We have engaged with management in all areas of the Department and have agreed risk assessments, we have carried out Health and safety inspections, and have agreed protocols on how Covid outbreaks would be dealt with. We also have kept our members informed of their rights, in particular their right to remove themselves from imminent danger using Section 44 of the Health and Safety Act which allows an individual to remove themselves from a workplace if they believe they are imminent danger.

What is the latest news regarding this strike ballot?

As a result of us advising members to use Section 44 the Cabinet Office and Government Ministers knew that it was legally acceptable to do this. They reacted by telling any staff that if they used Section 44 they could take their own annual leave or have unpaid special leave. Clearly that is a detriment for many members and not surprisingly very few were prepared to take that option.

Therefore we have taken a decision to ballot members in 10 test centres at the present time based upon Section 44. These test centres are primarily in Tier 3 areas in the North West and the North and have had high rates of Covid infections in their areas. Many have suffered many months of high infection rates. It is only when national lockdown restrictions were imposed that driving tests have been stopped.

Now that the national lockdown has ended, driving tests are carrying on in all tiers at present. Not only will our members be protected if their ballot is successful, but it will also allow the PCS to take employment tribunal cases to recover their loss of earnings. The ballot notification has been given and ballot papers will arrive with members on the 4 December, The ballot ends on the 11th December.

Could the upcoming fight back in DVSA be replicated across the Department for Transport and other groups?

We believe this ballot and tactic is ground-breaking and is a new way of looking at things. It is primarily using health and safety issues with industrial action, given that the employer is seeking to provide detriment to our members. We hope that this can be used in other areas to strengthen our members rights under health and safety. Most importantly we hope that this will lead to agreements at the places where tests are reduced or stopped, causing them to align to the Government tier restrictions as they are not doing that at present, and that Covid testing of staff and candidates becomes compulsory.

We think it can inspire confidence in other members to take this action and puts pressure on the Devolved Governments in Wales and Scotland to take note. They must also be reducing and stopping driving tests and aligning that to their tiered restrictions as well, particularly where no social distancing can happen in your job, and where PPE is not adequate to protect staff.

What do we need to do as members of Left Unity to build on this?

Firstly, we need to advertise that this ballot is taking place and why, and additionally that this can be used elsewhere. Secondly, we need to gain support for the members if they take strike action. They will be on strike pay but will need more funding as well. The more we can raise in donations the longer they can stay out.

Lastly, and most importantly, we need to build confidence amongst our membership by showing that, even in the most horrendous of situations, PCS members and other workers can fight back and can win. If we are to take on this Government over the big issues of pay and jobs, then it will be the smaller victories that builds that momentum and Left Unity members have a vital role to play in that. ■

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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