

UK Conservative Party conference: Letting the virus rip and waging class war

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Addressing the Conservative Party conference, Prime Minister Boris Johnson delivered a Thatcherite screed to an audience made up of fellow political criminals.

Last year's enforced pose of concern over the pandemic gave way to naked triumphalism, proclaiming that COVID-19 had been all but defeated thanks to the essential work of entrepreneurs, bankers, and the mighty power of capital.

It was now time to focus on building on the success of "one of the most open economies and societies" in the world, with "the fastest growth in the G7"—based on a shared understanding that the government will let the virus rip through the population while waging social war on the working class.

Johnson told those gathered in Manchester that they could meet to celebrate "cheek by jowl" because "on July 19 we decided to open every single theatre and every concert hall and night club in England." A reference to the disease having "sadly not gone away" prefaced a sickening appeal for delegates to "thank each other, go on—try a cautious fist bump, because it's ok now."

As for the "plan" going forward, it is to do nothing that would impinge of the bottom line of the major corporations. Johnson invoked the memory of Margaret Thatcher, who "would not have ignored this meteorite that has just crashed through the public finances. She would have wagged her finger and said more borrowing now is just higher interest rates and even higher taxes later."

He had the gall to attribute the crisis facing the National Health Service to beds being occupied by 30,000 people "who could have been cared for elsewhere, whether at home or in residential care."

He dismissed the fuel and goods distribution crisis as "the present stresses and strains which are mainly a function of growth and economic revival," promising the assembled xenophobes that he would not "reach for that same old lever of uncontrolled immigration" in response.

This led into an unguarded admission of his own political pedigree when he cited "the economic theory behind levelling up," the government's nod to popular anger at worsening social hardship for millions. Reassuring his audience that "levelling up" will not involve any measures of wealth redistribution, which Johnson derided as cutting the heads off

the "tall poppies", he said its philosophy "is contained in the insight of Vilfredo Pareto, a 19th century Italian figure who floated from the cobwebbed attic of my memories, that there are all kinds of improvements you can make to people's lives, he said, without diminishing anyone else."

Pareto is stuck in the cobwebbed attic of Johnson's psyche because of his place in the cannon of anti-socialist thinkers—whose theory of natural "elites", contempt for all measures of social reform, and insistence that nothing must interfere with the proper allocation of wealth and power by the market, provided inspiration to Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini, whose rule Pareto celebrated at the end of his life.

A friendly critic writes of Pareto, "His admiration is all for the Machiavellis, the Bismarcks, the 'strong men' unencumbered with scruples or tender sentiments; his scorn is all for the idealists who preach the gospel of liberty, democracy, solidarity, progress." Nevertheless, "Pareto is in the first place an excellent corrective for the excesses of the Marxist doctrinaires: their artificial division of society into 'bourgeois' and 'proletarian'; their naive erection of 'capitalism' into the universal scapegoat..." [Herbert J. Muller, "Pareto, Right and Wrong", *Virginia Quarterly Review*]

In Johnson's diatribe, "levelling up means fighting crime, putting more police out on the beat as we are and toughening sentences." It means Home Secretary Priti Patel responding to environmental protestors by "taking new powers to insulate them snugly in prison where they belong."

Above all it means hailing the private sector for supposedly making the Oxford University-developed and 97 percent publicly funded Astra-Zeneca vaccine "possible": "Behind those vaccines are companies and shareholders and, yes, bankers."

"It was capitalism that ensured that we had a vaccine in less than a year and the answer therefore is not to attack the wealth creators, it is to encourage them," he added, before making his most sickening declaration, "And we need the spirit of the NHS nurses and the entrepreneurs because each enables the other."

Johnson also made clear that his post-Brexit dream of a "global Britain in action, of something daring and brilliant that would simply not have happened if we had remained in the EU" was epitomised by the AUKUS military alliance with the

US and Australia, and sending “the amazing carrier strike group to the far east” led by “HMS Queen Elizabeth, as long as the entire palace of Westminster, and rather more compelling as an argument than many speeches made in the House of Commons”.

Elsewhere, Johnson urged people to “get back to work in the normal way... Otherwise you are going to be gossiped about and you are going to lose out.” Asked by ITV News about staffing shortages, rising inflation and interest rates post Brexit, he cited Thatcher again: “In a famous phrase, there is no alternative. There is no alternative.”

Health Secretary Sajid Javid, when asked his opinion of warnings of a winter spike in the pandemic by the government’s Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) replied, “They’re entitled to come to their own decisions. And I’m entitled not to listen to them.”

Patel told conference she would give “no apology for securing our borders... Control. That is not unreasonable.”

Secretary of State for Justice Dominic Raab pledged to restore “common sense” by rewriting the Human Rights Act enshrining the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic law.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak told conference he knows that unfunded pledges, soaring debt and reckless borrowing are “un-Conservative” and that he is keen to start cutting taxes as soon as possible. Admitting “people will lose their jobs” with the end of the furlough scheme, his response was a meagre £500 million support package to supposedly help people back into work. It is a measure of the character of the Tory Party and the grotesque social order it defends that the multi-millionaire Sunak and his billionaire’s daughter wife could fund this package out of their own personal fortune.

The *Guardian* was filled with articles expressing bewilderment at the Tories’ ability to rule unchallenged, with an editorial noting their “defying gravity” and describing Johnson as “a master of political escapology”.

Numerous articles commented on the scandal of the party’s funding by prominent figures cited in the Pandora Papers and London’s leading role in the offshore economy, such that one Conservative MP described it as the “money laundering capital of the world”. The links included businessman Mohamed Amersi, who bankrolled Johnson’s campaign to become prime minister.

But Johnson simply told reporters, “All these donations are vetted in the normal way in accordance with rules that were set up under a Labour government,” while Sunak told BBC Radio 4’s *Today* programme that the City of London’s role in tax avoidance was not “a source of shame because actually our track record on this is very strong.”

A handful of Labourites made their predictable complaints. People’s Assembly national secretary Laura Pidcock tweeted, “There are multiple crises facing working-class people. They are cutting over £1,000 a year from the poorest. Children will

go hungry”. Labour MP Jon Trickett tweeted a list of “A thousand fewer Sure Starts, 125 fewer A&Es, 600 police stations cut, 773 libraries cut, 763 youth centres cut, 471 schools cut, 10,000 firefighters cut, 350 HMRC offices cut, 100 job centres, 300 courts cut, 22,000 NHS beds cut.”

The conclusion to be drawn, according to the *Guardian*’s Andy Beckett, was that even “A winter of discontent is unlikely to dissolve the Tories’ support.” The government has “too much power”, and whereas, “Power corrupts... it also reassures.”

The real conclusion is that Johnson et al can get away with mass murder only because they are shielded from mounting public anger by a Labour Party and trade unions that serve the interests of the major corporations and the super-rich no less faithfully than the Tories.

This central lesson is becoming clear to millions thanks to the terrible experiences of the pandemic, in which the misnamed “labour movement” has conspired to suppress all opposition to the Tories’ reopening of workplaces and schools and betrayed every single strike against speed ups and wage cuts.

The Socialist Equality Party offers a genuine answer to the crowing of Johnson and the Tories that will wipe the smug expressions off their faces.

On Sunday October 24, an international webinar has been organised by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

“How to end the pandemic: The case for eradication” will bring together scientists and public health professionals with representatives of rank-and-file committees in the forefront of an emerging international rebellion against the pro-capitalist and bureaucratic parties and trade unions. Its aim is to “provide the public with the critical knowledge necessary to develop a broad-based and international movement to end the pandemic and reclaim the future.” Those workers seeking to mount such a counter-offensive should make plans to attend.



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