As coronavirus deaths continue to mount at a terrifying rate - the government’s responsibility for worsening the crisis is becoming clearer every day.

We are reading heartbreaking stories of NHS staff dying in growing numbers because the personal protective equipment (PPE) promised by the government is not reaching them, or is not up to scratch.

In Southend University Hospital in Essex, a nurse was taken into intensive care just days after staff warned about the lack of PPE. Scandalously, medical staff in some hospitals have been threatened with losing their jobs if they speak out about PPE shortages on social media.

The testing chaos is far from being resolved. In March, Johnson told us that 10,000 people a day would be tested for coronavirus. Three weeks later only half that number was being reached. We were still being assured, however, that not only would 10,000 daily tests be carried out, but that the figure would be "ramped" up to 25,000 by mid-April.

Now, we’re expected to believe that health secretary Matt Hancock has finally ‘got it’, and that 100,000 people a day will be tested by the end of the month. Testing manufacturers say they were “blindsided” by his announcement, and that the target is unlikely to be met.

After weeks of lies and broken promises, putting lives seriously at risk, it’s no wonder that trust and confidence in the government is falling. 67% think the government has handled the crisis badly and only 26% think it is doing well, according to a recent YouGov survey.

Last week even the most pro-Tory papers were slamming the testing fiasco. “Questions without answers” was the headline in the Daily Telegraph, while the Daily Mail wrote about the “shocking testing scandal”.

Every day there has been a different excuse from the government - a shortage of swabs, a lack of chemical reagents, not enough processing labs, and so on. But one by one their excuses have been demolished by the facts.

Leading scientific institutions have spoken out about their offers of testing facilities being turned down or ignored. Oxford University Dunn School of Pathology, for example, offered 119 testing machines, but only one was accepted. Anthony Costello, former director of the World Health Organisation (WHO), has spoken about the 44 registered virology labs that could have been used for analysing tests, but were not.

The main reason for the lack of testing, and the criminal shortage of PPE, is successive Tory and New Labour governments prioritising profits over health. As far back as 2005, a WHO document advised countries to get ready for mass testing to cope with a future pandemic, but that advice was ignored.

Commenting on this, Professor Graham Medley, a senior government adviser said: “You can say it was a mistake or you can say the government didn’t want to invest millions of pounds into something that is about preparedness.” Exactly.

The Financial Times was just as hard hitting: “A decade of government-enforced austerity in the wake of the 2008 global financial crash had put the NHS under immense strain... By the standards of European counterparts the NHS is badly underfunded, with fewer doctors and nurses, fewer hospital beds, and fewer precious ventilators.”

Continued on page 2

- Organise to fight for health and safety
- Socialist planning not capitalist chaos
Tory lies cost lives

Continued from front

In early March some limited community testing was being carried out. But that was scrapped on 12 March when the government chose to go along with the strategy of ‘herd immunity’ - letting up to 60% of the population get coronavirus so that some immunity could be acquired, rather than trying to suppress it through a lockdown, as in Wuhan and Italy.

There’s no doubt that profit lies behind that decision and dictated which scientific advice the Tories accepted. They wanted to keep the economy going so that their friends in big business could keep their profits flowing. It was only four days later, when modelling from Imperial College London warned that this strategy could overwhelm the NHS, and lead to 250,000 deaths, that they abruptly changed course.

By then other countries like South Korea and Germany were testing thousands of people a day. Britain was ‘at the back of the queue’, scrambling around in a dog-eat-dog world market in competition for testing equipment, PPE and ventilators.

These international ‘mask wars’ with supplies for the German police, for example, being ‘hijacked’ by the US in mid-flight from China, glaringly expose the anarchy of a capitalist system based on profit and cut-throat competition. Nationally and internationally the coronavirus crisis is once again bringing to the fore the ideas of democratic socialist planning as an alternative to capitalist market chaos.

The testing scandal in Britain has not only exposed the deadly effects of austerity and an NHS ruled by cost-cutting. The delays in taking decisive action over testing equipment, and the chaotic response and failure to coordinate existing NHS facilities, have also revealed the inefficiency and incompetence of a bureaucratic, top-down health service, in which the rules of the private market increasingly dominate.

The need for democratic control and oversight of a fully funded public NHS by health workers, together with representatives of service users and the wider workers’ movement, which the Socialist Party has consistently campaigned for, has been made crystal clear from the coronavirus crisis.

The private facilities currently being paid for with public money should be immediately incorporated into the NHS with no compensation paid to the profiteers. Securing PPE, testing equipment, ventilators, treatments and a vaccine cannot be left to appeals to private business and the capitalist free market.

We know from the last world economic recession... the capitalists will be looking once again to make us foot the bill

The real cooperation and democratic planning needed to fight this and future crises will require the pharmaceutical companies, the big engineering and industrial companies, as well as the banks and financial institutions being taken into public ownership under the democratic control and management of working people.

The pursuit of profit also explains why even the government’s friends are turning it on over testing. With scientists saying that a Covid-19 vaccine is 12-18 months away, mass testing, tracing and isolating people who have the virus is the only ‘exit strategy’ from a general lockdown. Big business is terrified - not about the loss of life from coronavirus, but the loss of profits if lockdown goes on for months.

And they are clearly also worried about the unrest that could develop if the lockdown is prolonged. Not just ‘lockdown fatigue’, with people fed up of being stuck at home, often in cramped and overcrowded conditions, without an end in sight, but protests over food shortages and poverty, which are now beginning to take place in the south of Italy.

In Italy, big business initially resisted the closure of non-essential industry - endangering the health and safety of millions of workers. Strikes, walkouts and pressure from workers themselves forced the bosses and the government to back down. But now political representatives of the bosses are pushing again for industry to be reopened.

Nothing will ever be the same after this crisis. But we know from the 2008-09 world economic recession, the bank bailouts and the vicious austerity that followed, that the capitalists will be looking once again to make us foot the bill.

The union leaders have for the most part been invisible during this crisis (see p11). They should be going onto the offensive demanding everything necessary for workers to withstand a lockdown:

- 100% of normal wages paid directly to workers, not through the bosses
- No redundancies. Companies threatening closure to be taken into public ownership under democratic workers’ control and management
- An immediate increase in the minimum wage to at least £12 an hour (£15 in London) - low-paid key workers deserve a decent wage rise
- Benefits to be increased in line with the minimum wage - no delay in payments

Nothing will ever be the same after this crisis. But we know from the 2008-09 world economic recession, the bank bailouts and the vicious austerity that followed, that the capitalists will be looking once again to make us foot the bill.

The time this effects of the crisis will be even more severe. That’s why it’s so important that we organise now, in the workplaces, communities and virtual spaces to resist any current attacks on our health, safety and living standards - but also to prepare for the battles that will be necessary after coronavirus.

The Socialist Party offers a programme to fight back, a means of organising, and the prospect of a socialist alternative to the rotten capitalism system whose failings the coronavirus crisis has so clearly laid bare. Join us.
The coronavirus crisis has laid bare the class character of society in numerous ways. It is making clear to many that it is the working class that keeps society running, not the CEOs of major corporations. The results of austerity have been graphically demonstrated as public services strain to cope with the crisis. The government has now ripped up its ‘austerity’ mantra and turned to policies that not long ago were denounced as socialist. But after the corona crisis, it will try to make the working class pay for it, by trying to claw back what has been given. The Socialist Party’s material is more vital than ever, so we can continue to report from workers who are fighting for better health and safety measures, against layoffs, for adequate staffing levels, etc. Our ‘fighting coronavirus workers’ charter’, outlines a programme to combat the virus and protect workers’ living conditions.

When the health crisis subsides, we must be ready for the stormy events ahead and the need to arm workers’ movements with a socialist programme - one which puts the health and needs of humanity before the profits of a few. Inevitably, during the crisis we have not been able to sell the Socialist and raise funds in the ways we normally would. We therefore urgently appeal to all our viewers to donate to our special coronavirus appeal.

**Donate to the Socialist Party**

**Coronavirus crisis finance appeal**

The official deadline for pledges is Thursday 16 April - payment can come later. Please do your best to make a pledge by the deadline. However, if you need more time to agree a donation, please get in touch and we’ll discuss an exception.

The profits of a few. We also oppose every cut, fighting in our day-to-day campaigning for every possible improvement for working-class people. The organised working class has the potential power to stop the cuts and transform society. As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI) which organises across the world. Our demands include...  

**PUBLIC SERVICES**

No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.

No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.

Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.

Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and ‘free schools’!

Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

**WORK AND INCOME**

Trade union struggle for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £12 an hour without exempions as a step towards a real living wage of at least £15. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings. Scrap zero-hour contracts.

All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.

An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.

Scrap Universal Credit. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.

**DONATE**

socialistparty.org.uk/donate to help fund the fightback  

**SUBSCRIBE**

socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe to book your greeting, visit socialistparty.org.uk/mayday  

**For help or resources including sign-up sheets and model motions, email jamesivens@socialistparty.org.uk**

**WHAT WE STAND FOR**

- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unionites, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time unionists should be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker’s wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
- A 24-hour week with no loss of pay.
- **ENVIRONMENT**

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and un-recycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low-care, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

**RIGHTS**

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trammp over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman’s right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.
- For the right to vote at 16.

**MASS WORKERS’ PARTY**

- For a mass workers’ party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Fight for Labour to be transformed into such a party: deselect the Blairites.

**SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM**

- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses’ neoliberal European Union and single market.
- For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!
Intensive care has run out of can't get tested and doesn't want to go home at weekends because he league who is from the north of supply chain that's the problem. The marvellous job with the pressures of the system that we see every exhausted, we are angry too. try to make sure no one goes more than a cup of tea. The need for answers and a worries you, you can get chaplaincy kit - head to foot with elaborate de- Covid-symptomatic patients coming- ing 'clean' patients - I wear a mask but without equipment, but because of shortages, unsuitable workers are being called into an emergency. But the only way to control rationing policies where we have some opportunities abundant for aprons at 166% of usual prices, and so on. The government's laissez-faire at- mindset to deal with these patients. The manager recently given- the mask on his face. This is the same number as normal. The government's laissez-faire at- the oversight of price controls.unchannelled, partially prioritised? NHS has made £1.7 million in just one week for aprons at 166% of usual prices, and so on. The government's laissez-faire at- the oversight of price controls. That would be a core part of a social-ship, as part of a democratic plan of profit, not need, and continues to profiteering: fight for workers’ oversight and public ownership. The government’s laissez-faire at- the major retail chain, means that many workers who work for private speculators to rip people off. bosses have paid suppliers for 10% of usual groceries, plus VAT – 2% of your food bill. The problem seems to be the marketisation of the NHS with a national scarcity has even led to different employers. Although the ‘right’ equipment Carrington, staff were not referred for Covid-19 testing due to ‘expense’.

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struggling with PPE availability. The

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Unite the Union has expressed serious concerns over plans which will cause workers to be made redundant in London new powers to redeploy staff. This move is intended to mirror decisions made at the same time across the country. The worst part of this is that people who are essential workers are being made redundant simply to save money.

The world, in general and in the workplace, will not return to ‘normal’. Workers are awakening to their power. Here it is clear that the greed of capitalism is being effectively challenged. As others point out, they do not have enough PPE; they issue appeals to provide do not have enough PPE, they issue appeals to provide staff for more, they tell them to stop misusing PPE, masks but also aprons and gloves. The least easy of the three materials are masks. Our members tell us they’re for their good health: begging don’t work (speaking in personal capacity) for details - Usdaw president

The busiest part of my job is doing things with the many hundreds of members working on various roles across local social care providers in the current affecting situations. Every bit of work you’ve done could earn you the share to an era soon where workers assert their power. How it is their actions which positively affecting the limits of power. How it is their actions which

Anger as London local authorities build power to powers to discipline workers

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The reaction of Chris Smalls and the workers in that warehouse to the hypocrisy of the bosses is that taking place in the American workers’ movement. This is a new source of strength, the outburst of the molecular change which is taking place among the American workers’ movement. This in turn indicates a growing mass revolt, particularly under the whip of selling American capitalism and its policies.

Change is coming

Indeed, the gripping account of how these Amazon workers are rising up against the punitive measures of the bosses is a powerful example of a vanguard movement.

Chris Smalls went on to say that there had been no hard words, no threats of any sort

Certainly, all want to stage walk-outs, too…

These are the magnificent features of the rising movement led by Chris Smalls, who on 30 March helped organise a walk-out that was supervised a team of about 60-100 Pickers who pick boxes off the shelves and push them on conveyors, both to get out of work and to get out of Amazon.

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Coronavirus: Amazon workers threaten revolution!

Quarantine

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On the other hand, some Democrats, in desperation, are beginning to campaign for New York governor Andrew Cuomo before the next poll on the ticket.

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Keir Starmer’s (left) labour leadership victory, cheered on by the capitalist class. 

Workers take action while union leaders call truce with government and bosses.

End of the Corbyn era
Organise to fight for socialist policies

Given the scope of his victory, Starmer can now be seen in need of real agenda more sharply.

McDonald goes, so are their most prominent opponents: John McDonnell, Barry Gardiner and Jon Trickett. The next, the shadowed Blanche Rachel Reeves, as shadow work and pensions minister promised to be ‘vague’ on Trump, but in the main, is still in the shadow cabinet, in Lisa Nandy, the leadership candidate who is offering a pro-capitalist class from right to Starmer.

The motion of Crossland, the pro-capitalist wing of the party, the by-election, was won by Pro-Corbyn, who was more openly right-wing than Starmer.

The vote in the by-elections demonstrated the extent to which the capitalist class no longer believes in the socialist option. The result was a clear indication of the potential to significantly broaden the trade-union base in the coming period.

Campaign

The Labour Party’s new leadership under Keir Starmer remains a pro-capitalist party. The Starmer era, like the Corbyn era before it, has no prospect of political change. The Labour Party is now the instrument of the capitalist class, with Starmer as their representative, to use false allegations against Corbyn’s 2019 manifesto, in some senses at least, goes further.

Almost half a million people within the Labour Party. He also received the support of the pro-capitalist class from right to Starmer. The motion of Crossland, the pro-capitalist wing of the party, the by-election, was won by Pro-Corbyn, who was more openly right-wing than Starmer.

They have no prospect of political change. The Labour Party is now the instrument of the capitalist class, with Starmer as their representative, to use false allegations against Corbyn’s 2019 manifesto, in some senses at least, goes further.

More than one million Union Credit applications, which would have tipped the scales in Starmer’s favour, were found to be invalid.

The unions need to fight for more, for all paid employees, including self-employed, workers.

This is because the current period is defined by a series of developments that have made union leaders so complacent.

Misses, on the one hand, the New Local Stop Strikers Network (NSSN) or the nationalisation of those sections of the economy that are essential for the functioning of society, as well as the undemocratic ballot thresholds brought in by Cameron in 2014. This approach can disarm workers and free employers and bosses.

The TUC is happy to tweet about the new pay deals being negotiated in the public sector. The unions need to fight for more, for all paid employees, including self-employed, workers.

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Under the microscope: Pandemic news in brief

Oxygen crisis
The hospital oxygen supply in Hertfordshire came within inches of failing due to an increase in demand. Overburdened systems required engineers to attend, some patients were sent away, and management alerted the military. Medics were forced to prepare to ration oxygen, in the knowledge that this would lead to avoidable deaths. Luckily they didn’t have to - this time. Hospital planners predicted a critical incident was coming the week before, says the Guardian - but the government had not responded to appeals for aid.

NHS super-spreaders?
Nurses are forced to hold their breath when seeing patients due to lack of PPE, reports Dr Rinesh Parmar of the Doctors’ Association. 43% of doctors surveyed have no eye protection and 20% don’t have it for the highest-risk procedures. The children’s hospital at Great Ormond Street had eight patients with Covid-19 at the start of April. But fully 73 staff had tested positive, and another 318 were in self-isolation. PPE now!

Dividends discontinued?
Spare a thought for the financiers. Reductions in income mean many firms have cut or suspended share-holder dividend payments. 39% of European and North American businesses tracked by SquareWell Partners have done so. Hedge funds are down - Invesco High Dividend is 43% down; and the colossal Aberdeen Income is down by 27.5%.

Ventilator diplomacy
What a heart-warming story. Trump and Putin have a friendly chat and, hey presto, 400 ventilators arrive at JFK airport, in coronavirus hotspot New York, from Russia.

Bosss’ bonuses
Anxious investors and capitalist politicians are asking execs cutting workers’ pay during the crisis to hand over their bonuses. Anxious investors and capitalist politicians are asking execs cutting workers’ pay during the crisis to hand over their bonuses.

Plane stupid
Australian airline Qantas has suspended a union and safety rep following concerns about the rollout of PPE. Take 400, enough, the 62 Barcelona baggage handlers went on to test positive, meaning 100 more airport workers will now be isolated and their flights cancelled or turned back.

Workers washed out
550,000 people applied for Universal Credit in the last two weeks of March. Millions of self-employed and unemployed workers will not benefit; governments promises to support workers, according to studies by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Resolution Foundation.

62% of firms in the UK have no more than three months’ cash, according to a small British Chambers of Commerce survey. 18% of small and medium-sized UK businesses are likely to collapse within a month due to inability to access the government’s promised support, says the Corporate Finance Network. Fashion and homeware retailer Debenhams is going into administration, after having to close its 152 stores. Bosses say they intend to resume trading after the pandemic, but 22,000 jobs are in question.

A staggering 6.65 million workers filed for unemployment in the US in the fourth week of March. This followed the record-breaking 3.3 million the previous week. That’s 10 million US workers on the scrapheap in a fortnight.

Pandemic news in brief

Socialist letters and comments on the coronavirus crisis

The Covid-19 pandemic is a world social crisis which touches every aspect of life. The injustices and failings of the capitalist system are being exposed, and workers and communities are organising in response.

Send us your comments, reports, anecdotes and thoughts, in not more than 200 words (we reserve the right to shorten letters), to editors@socialistparty.org.uk

Open spaces and mental wellbeing
Bradgate Park in Leicestershire - which is a huge open space and much easier to socially distance in compared to the local supermarket - has been closed. It’s really affecting our health not to be able to get into large open spaces. How I miss my daughter supposed to be able to get out for long walks and help manage her anxiety if they are closed?

All the parks should be opened. It’s horrible being cooped up.

Lindsey Morgan
Leicester

Social apartheid
If the authorities stop people exercising outdoors what are people in crowded citi-

ies like London going to do when it’s really hot? People who live in flats won’t be able to get out.

It’s ‘social apartheid’. People who have gardens will be able to get out and those without won’t be able to.

Nancy Taaffe
Walthamstow

VIPs living in glass houses
After the SNP joined the Tories’ “stay at home” moral crusade in the last few weeks it seems people can’t decide which of their luxurious homes they should stay in!

Matt Dobson
Glasgow

PPE - now!
A friend I spoke to the other night told me her doctor daughter-in-law has no PPE. Her health-care assistant daughter-in-law has no PPE, and her paramedic granddaughter has no PPE!

This is another government failure. Major firms linked to production and distribution of PPE, tests and ventilators should be nationalised under democratised control and parcel of Toby Young’s thinking. It is more important than ever that those with life-limiting illness should opt for DNR.

One patient told Sky News: ‘It made me feel worthless. I’ve lived with cancer for eight years and I want to live another couple of years. I’m not digging my grave yet.’

The advice is that PPE should have ‘discussions’ with elderly patients. That is different from bullying them to sign a DNR form. That is different from making people feel worthless.

The government’s pathetic failure to ‘ramp up’ testing for the virus is part of a plan and parcel of Toby Young’s thinking. It is much cheaper not to test and if old people die as a result that’s all to the good in his mind and philosophy.

When all this is over it is the Tory government which will need resuscitating and the public might consider DNR in that case.

Derek McMillan
Worthing

Health and safety
My housing association sent out a gas engineer for my annual gas safety check - not due till August. I cancelled the last visit but I was told it was compulsory, so I rebooked.

An engineer arrived wearing uniform and gloves but no mask. When I asked why no mask he said: ‘Well, it would be one per job and there wouldn’t be enough’.

It’s a cost overtime to nurses and residents. I’ve lived with cancer for eight years and I want to live another couple of years. I’m not digging my grave yet.”

Simon Carter
East London

Mission: Impossible
While I totally agree with the social distancing campaign, it’s utterly untenable to expect people to literally stay indoors all the time.

People need fresh air, exercise and something else to see other than their four walls, for our own sanity.

I went for a run for an hour this morning and kept at least five metres away from others. And I counted 25 other runners.

Domenico Hill
Bristol

Tory party - Do not resuscitate!
Toby Young - described by the Daily Re-

cord as a “pound shop Peter Hitchens” - has laid bare the thinking of the Con-
tervatives. He knows the view that it is a waste of money to keep old people alive. Of course, Toby Young is rapidly becom-
ing old himself.

Thanks to Tory cuts, the NHS is unable to cope with the ‘normal’ needs of the population and they are already talking about ‘tough decisions’ which will have to be taken.

Toby Hart
Chesterfield

Benefit delays
With regard to coronavirus and the new cohort of benefit claimants, these people are experiencing the same rubbish service that claimants have had for decades.

My only hope is that the roll-out of Uni-

cersal Credit for ESA claimants will be further delayed.

Helen Parkinson
Birmingham

Don’t blame us
Did anyone see the pictures of people in parks? All respecting the two-metre distance and wearing masks, they are being labelled as ‘criminals’.

They are trying to blame us for the crisis but it is the government and rich and powerful that should be called into account. People are scared of this virus, but if but when. Yet instead of planning for one, they have cut back on health pro-

vision, councils have cut services and private companies are incapable of cohe-
sion planning.

Heather Rawling
Leicester

Hancock - keep your distance
To listen to Tory health minister Matt Hancock you would think everyone who took to exercising in public open spaces last weekend engaged in a rugby scrum! Perhaps the Covid-19 recovered min-

ister can explain how he contracted the virus - not enough social distancing?

While he’s pondering that, he should also reflect upon the government’s own emergency coronavirus legislation, which explicitly allows people to exercise outside once a day or take the pet for a walk with members of their household.

Simon Carter
East London

PPE - now!
A friend I spoke to the other night told me her doctor daughter-in-law has no PPE. Her health-care assistant daughter-in-law has no PPE, and her paramedic granddaughter has no PPE!

This is another government failure. Major firms linked to production and distribution of PPE, tests and ventilators should be nationalised under democratised workers’ control and management - as part of a overall plan of production to secure proper supplies and distribution of such vital equipment.

People are dying and in danger because of system failure, not simply coro-

navirus per se.

Nick Chaffey
Southampton

COVID-19the

Socialist

9-15 April 2020

12

Readers’ opinion/News

Going viral
Thank you for having me. Having left the Labour Party today after five years I’m thrilled to be a part of the Socialist Party.

I wish to join a true socialist party. Labour with Starmer is, I feel, going to become centrist and renounce socialist values.

While Jeremy Corbyn’s time as Labour leader is heartbreakingly that all his hard work is going to be undone. Socialism is the only way to end the evil austerity programme introduced by the Tories.

As a trade union rep I’ve seen how austerity has affected our members and don’t trust a Blairite in Keir Starmer. We need to keep the positive message socialism can deliver to help millions of people living in poverty.

After today’s election result. I feel I can no longer pay into what has been basically a centrist party.

I have been a socialist all my life and want to be involved in politics within a party that shares my views. I sincerely hope this will be it.

I have heard of you, but would like more info. I am a socialist, I am scared of how the Labour Party is going. We need to get rid of the Tories from power, I have seen too much poverty.

I was suspended from the Labour Party for five years during Jeremy Corbyn’s second leadership campaign. My vote didn’t count. When Keir Starmer became Labour leader I decided to stop appealing my suspension and leave.

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Lessons from history
CLASS COLLABORATION AND WORKER MILITANCY IN WORLD WAR TWO BRITAIN

In the second of a series of articles on ‘war, global crises and working class struggle’, Alec Thaves - Socialist Party national committee - explains how workers’ militancy broke the shackles of the World War Two coalition government in Britain.

The horrific coronavirus crisis has seen international capitalist leaders, like US president Donald Trump and Prime Minister Boris Johnson, compare this unprecedented modern-day disaster to wartime conditions - which therefore require exceptional emergency measures and enormous personal sacrifices, especially from the working class!

But as in past wartime conditions, the primary role of these political bag carriers of big business is to protect and preserve their capitalist system, by any means necessary, so that when conditions return to some kind of normality their grotesque profits can continue to roll in.

The experience of World War Two exemplifies the methods and measures capitalism adopts during serious crises.

Typically, the full resources of the capitalist state to control society are utilised. These include integrating and cooperating with traditional political adversaries in the leadership of the labour and trade union movement, and crucially, concealment of the Labour Party’s collaboration with the Tories that lasted five long years.

Ernest Bevin, right-wing, anti-communist general secretary of the powerful Transport and General Workers’ Union (T&GWU), again fitted the role perfectly, and he was given the job as Minister of Labour and National Service (1940-45).

With Bevin on board the coalition pushed through the ‘Emergency Powers Act and Defence Regulations’ (the Act was finally repealed in 1959!) giving it the right to direct and control all labour. This was followed by ‘Essential Work’ legislation in 1941 allowing the ‘dilution’ of labour (ie using unskilled or semi-skilled workers in traditionally skilled occupations), and the direction of skilled workers to wherever they were most needed. Strikes and lockouts were also banned.

However, Churchill’s political coup of bringing Bevin into government didn’t prevent industrial action from taking place.

In 1941, there were numerous disputes and strikes in defence of wages, conditions, health and safety, and opposition to unscrupulous employers who were taking advantage of government legislation to further boost their profits.

Even in Bevin’s own T&GWU backyards, and to a greater extent in the state-owned shipbuilding industry, the T&GWU not only continued to organise work stoppages and strikes, but encouraged the workers to use all means of resistance to defend their rights.

Despite the legal ban on strikes, Bevin’s renowned conciliatory approach, there were over 900 illegal strikes in the first few months of the war, and the number of strikes increased each year until 1944.

The Minister of Labour introduced conscription for the mines to help increase coal production, and 48,000 ‘Bevin Boys’ (young workers drawn from other industries), as they became known, joined the half a million miners who, despite their crucial role, were seeing their wages falling behind other workers during the war.

Not only were miners prepared to strike for better pay, against the wishes of their Miners’ Federation leaders, but they were also demanding nationalisation of the pits and no return of the coal owners after the war!

It took unofficial, illegal strike action to win their wage demands.

120,000 miners on strike in Yorkshire, 100,000 in Wales, several thousand across Lancashire, Staffordshire, Durham and Scotland, achieved in militant action what their ‘leaders’ failed to achieve through negotiations.

Trade union membership increased by three million during the war to around seven and a half million by 1946, alongside a big growth in the number of shop stewards, committees established to fight local battles, and to counteract the weight of the full-time trade union officialdom.

State exposed

The role of the capitalist state in using emergency legislation to attack democratic rights and curb trade union action was even more exposed in 1944.

At the peak of wartime strike action, legislation was introduced, supported by the Trade Union Congress (the umbrella organisation of the trade unions), that made ‘incitement’ to strike unlawful. But in that year there were over 2,000 stoppages and the loss of nearly 4 million days of production.

The attempt to stop ‘outside agitation’ inciting workers to strike was allegedly aimed at Communists, and particularly Trotskyists, but was treated with the contempt it deserved. This was especially the case among industrial militants in the essential services of coal mining, docks and wartime manufacturing who had more than enough of their own agitators!

Those commentators who applauded Labour’s class collaboration with the Tories, and particularly Bevin’s role as a minister, ignore the vital importance of the trade unions being independent and separate from the state.

Any concessions made by Churchill during Bevin’s ministerial portfolio weren’t due to Bevin’s belligerent character or his trade union negotiating skills. They were because of the fear of the ruling class that rank-and-file trade unionists, and the working class generally, would start to recognise the real reasons for the war, and start searching for an alternative - ultimately a socialist alternative.

Yes, the roots of the first majority Labour government 1945-1951 were to be found during World War Two and the foundations of the welfare state stemmed from that period. But it was the desire of the returning troops and their families at home for a better life, a true ‘land fit for heroes’, and the potential for revolutionary struggle to achieve those aims, that dragged those reforms out of the ruling class.

The superiority of centralised planning of the economy and services instead of the chaos of the neoliberal market; public ownership and nationalisation instead of private ownership and greed; democratic rights and equality instead of draconian laws and oppression; that was the real fear of the ruling classes.

But those alternatives are only possible in the long term if the means of production and distribution are owned and controlled democratically by the working class.

If not, then temporary gains, such as those that were made after World War Two will, as we have witnessed, be privatised on the altar of privilege and profit yet again.

Nye Bevan, the left-wing Labour MP - a thorn in the side of Ernest Bevin - challenged the minister towards the end of the war to explain how his public commitment to full employment could be solved without the ‘transfer of economic power’. Bevan received no reply from Churchill’s minister!

There was no ‘going back to normal’ for the working class after World War Two. And with the collaboration of the Labour and trade union leaders, economic concessions from the ruling class and the absence of genuine, mass revolutionary parties internationally, then imperialism and Stalinism derailed a potentially historic movement.

For a new generation of socialists many lessons will be learnt from this period so that mistakes are not repeated and socialism becomes the future to end all wars and capitalist crisis!

*It was more dangerous working in the coal mines than being in the armed forces. One-third of Bevin Boys were either maimed or killed during the first year!

In 1944, with the assistance of Trotskyists (forerunners of the Socialist Party and rank-and-file Communists), (Communist Party leaders were collaborating with the government), apprentices organised and took successful strike action, especially in the North West, North East, and Yorkshire, against conscription into the mines.
CORONAVIRUS
A WORKERS’ CHARTER

Pay and benefits
- Full pay for all workers. Workers, especially those on low pay, can’t afford to lose 20% of their income.
- Any worker who has to self-isolate or cannot go to work should receive full pay from day one and not be forced to take annual leave. Pay should be paid directly to the worker not via the employer.
- Increase benefits to the level of the national minimum wage. No delay in the payment of benefits.
- Increase the minimum wage immediately to at least £12 an hour, £15 in London.
- Workers who follow health advice to be absent from work to avoid potential spread should be excluded from any attendance-management procedures.
- Open the books of any company threatening redundancies or closure to the inspection by the workforce and trade unions.
- To defend workers’ jobs and incomes, industries should be nationalised under democratic workers’ control and management, with compensation only on the basis of proven need.

National Health Service
- Emergency increase in funding for the NHS and social care.
- Adequate protection for all frontline workers.
- NHS to take over private healthcare facilities and staff, and any other private facilities necessary for care, quarantine, and supplies. No compensation to the private fat cats.
- Emergency training of NHS staff to deal with the coronavirus crisis.
- Resources to be mobilised from government and big-business sources so that anyone with flu or cold-like symptoms has the right to a free coronavirus test with results available within hours, as has been the case in S.Korea and some other countries. Requisition private testing and analyses facilities to increase production to meet the urgent need of more protective and medical equipment, including ventilators and virus testing.
- Take over industries and converting production where necessary, under democratic workers’ control of those industries and the wider workforce.
- Reverse privatisation in the NHS, remove the privatisers and cancel all the estimated £50 billion annual PFI payments.
- Nationalise the big pharmaceutical companies to guarantee research, production, and supply of medicines, vaccines and treatments.
- Suspend fees for overseas NHS patients - treat all patients for free without the need to register to control the spread. Scrap prescription charges.

Public services and housing
- Emergency funding to take on more workers in essential services. Resources to protect workers, patients, and service users.
- Councils to coordinate a local response. Scrap existing cuts and budgets. Councils to use reserves and borrowing powers to fund necessary jobs and services.
- 24 hour, adequately staffed, local authority helplines for vulnerable and elderly people forced to self-isolate.
- Community and trade union control over local distribution of food, medicines and other supplies.
- Workload demands must be reduced and time made available to prioritise protecting the health, safety and welfare of staff and service users. Workers asked to work from home must be supplied with adequate equipment, and performance monitoring should be scrapped.
- Quality childcare for vulnerable families and children of essential workers must be organised under the democratic control of education and care workers, with adequate protection for all. Emergency local authority provision of meals to children normally in receipt of free school meals under community and trade union control.
- Nobody should lose their home because of coronavirus. Mortgage and rental payments should be suspended. Government funds to exist to guarantee and local authority hardship funds for landlords in genuine need.
- Councils to take over empty homes to house the homeless and those in inadequate housing. Hotels to be used to provide emergency accommodation.
- Funding for 24 hour helplines and emergency accommodation for victims of domestic violence.
- No action to be taken for non-payment of utilities. Free broadband for all.

Trade union and workers’ action
- Trade unions to establish an all-union health and safety committee in every workplace to agree joint actions required to guarantee safety.
- For the Trade Union Congress and the unions, the biggest voluntary national organisation with over six million members across the country, to prepare to lead national coordinated strike action to protect people should necessary health and safety measures not be taken.
- Democratic trade union oversight over any government or private sector emergency measures taken to contain the virus, such as restrictions on public assemblies or strikes and supermarket supply rationing.
- No profiteering. Prices to be controlled by democratically elected committees of workers and consumers.
- No erosion of workers’ rights to organise, including the democratic functioning of trade unions and parties.
- No trust in the Tories and other pro-capitalist politicians who are responsible for the crisis in the NHS and other public services to deal with the coronavirus crisis. For a mass workers’ party, drawing together workers, young people, socialists and activists from workplaces and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- The resources are there to deal with the crisis. Introduce an immediate 50% levy on the hoarded £750 billion lying idle in the bank accounts of big business.
- The capitalist market system that prioritises profit and is based on competition cannot keep society safe. We need a democratic socialist plan of production and distribution to meet the needs of the majority in society. Take into public ownership the banks, financial institutions and the top 150 companies that dominate the British economy and run them under the democratic control and management of working-class people so that we can make the decisions about what is needed. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- For international socialist cooperation.

This charter is for discussion and debate in workplaces and communities so that we can organise to defend our health, safety and rights during the crisis. Get in touch if you would like to join a Socialist Party online meeting.