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the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**

TORY LIES COST LIVES

Lie 1

PPE for all
frontline
staff



Lie 2

Ramping
up testing



Lie 3

Whatever it
takes for jobs
and wages



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 precision ventilators."

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DO YOU HAVE NEWS FOR US?

The Socialist is written, read, sold and bought by ordinary workers, trade unionists, young people and Socialist Party supporters. We want you to write for the Socialist.

Send us reports of your workplace and community campaigns, short letters on working-class issues, or ideas for other articles.

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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

Tory lies cost lives



Photo Usaf/CC

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 lay 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 corona 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 on it 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.

Here, there will be similar pressure from those who, in defence of their own economic interests, say 'the cure is worse than the disease'. And the government will try to blame a lengthy lockdown and rising death toll on individuals not respecting social distancing, to deflect from the real reason - its incompetence and failed profits-first strategy.

Workers in construction, Royal Mail and other industries have already challenged grasping bosses and management putting profits before health and safety. There must be no 'trade-off' between our health and their wealth. Any attempts to prematurely restart the economy, endangering health and lives, must be resisted - through strike action if necessary.

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**
- **Rent and mortgages written off for the duration of the crisis**
- **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**

(see back page for full Workers' Charter to fight coronavirus).

Nothing will ever be the same again 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.

This time the 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.

Donate to the Socialist Party

Coronavirus crisis finance appeal

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

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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.

May Day greetings: we need to fund independent workers' media now more than ever

Urgent: 16 April deadline nearly here

James Ivens
 The Socialist
 May Day greetings organiser

We need you to support the Socialist by sending May Day greetings. There is no other consistent, independent voice for workers and for socialism during the pandemic.

From day one, the Socialist warned that cuts and privatisation had left the NHS and public services unready. Our frontline reports from workers across sectors have given the hard truth behind the government's propaganda promises (see p4-5).

In the face of the capitalists' shortages and criminal missteps, we've proposed ways for the working class to fight to overcome them. In fact, nowhere has produced demands as clear and thorough as our workers' charter (see p16).

Meanwhile, some trade union leaders are trying to 'park' the defence of their members' interests or suspend operations just when they're most needed (see p11). And the right has recaptured the leadership of Labour (see p10).

But workers are still fighting, because they have to. The Socialist carries the latest on walkouts, workplace struggle, and the campaign for combative unions (see p6-7).

Even most 'left' media outlets

have fallen in line behind the bosses and Tories. The Socialist carries on the fight.

But to maintain that independent voice for the truth and working-class interests, we need finance. It goes without saying that the big advertisers won't touch us, and we wouldn't have it any other way. Our funding comes from the workers' movement. May Day greetings are a vital part of that.

Can your trade union branch, community campaign, workplace colleagues, trade union council or student society send us a donation and short message of solidarity? We publish these each year on International Workers' Day to help fund the socialist press.

Dozens of groups in the workers' movement have already pledged May Day money. Unite Community NW/11500 Lancashire branch has even donated £100 to the Socialist, on top of buying a quarter-page greeting for May Day.

Branch secretary and treasurer Jim Leigh said: "We hope this will go a little way in helping the Socialist newspaper navigate through this crisis." Could your union branch do the same?

Even just a one-off payment for a May Day greeting is valuable and wanted. We will accept any amount of money from any genuine group of workers.



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.

No matter how violent the winds that rise to batter the movement back, workers have no choice but to press on. The Socialist will too. We are your paper. Keep us going: send May Day greetings.

■ For prices, sizes and 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

The Socialist Party fights for socialism - a democratic society run for the needs of all and not 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'!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- 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 exemptions 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.

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- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
- A 35-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-fare, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

RIGHTS

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample 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!

Do you agree? Join the fightback! JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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Where is the lead from the unions?

The temptation to come home and cry at the end of every shift is sometimes overwhelming. As part of diagnostics, my department touches on most of the hospital.

Despite being designated a Covid-19 hospital, we still have cancer care, neurointensive care, paediatrics and heart surgery. Major trauma cases come on top of the stream of Covid-symptomatic patients coming through the doors.

Saturday mornings I spend imaging 'clean' patients - I wear a mask and apron and 'Actichlor' everything between patients, but could I have the virus and be passing it to those most vulnerable? None of my shift has been tested - only those they could get back to work from isolation are getting tested. And if that worries you, you can get chaplaincy services, but remotely of course!

Much of the rest of the shift is portable chest X-rays. For those on elderly care, and there are a lot of them, it's just mask and apron. In re-sus and intensive care it's the full kit - head to foot with elaborate decontamination afterwards.

I see people going home with chapped and bleeding hands from alcohol gel and cleaning fluids. It's easy to get dehydrated, sore and bruised wearing a mask all day. We try to make sure no one goes more than three hours without a break, but it's relentless.

We know resources are being diverted from non-Covid treatment - it's heart breaking, and people will die as a result. Staff aren't just exhausted, we are angry too.

No one trusts Boris and co, but where is the alternative? Where is the opposition condemning the failures of the system that we see every day? The need for answers and a bloody lead from the trade union tops, a workers' alternative, is way overdue.

An NHS health professional

Intensive care has run out of body bags

I'm working in a Covid-19 intensive care unit (ICU). On the afternoon of 3 April, we ran out of body bags.

The situation at the moment regarding personal protective equipment (PPE) is dire. I started working in the Covid ICU on 30 March and we had plenty of PPE. By that Thursday we were running low. On Friday, we were using secondary, cheap replacement gear, which none of us thought was up to the mark.

I'm going back to work concerned about the level of protection that we'll have in order to do our job. The ICU managers in my trust are doing a marvellous job with the pressure they must be under, but it's the supply chain that's the problem. The government keeps telling us that PPE is on order, but we simply don't have it in a frontline ICU.

None of us workers have been tested for Covid-19. I have a colleague who is from the north of England who has decided not to go home at weekends because he can't get tested and doesn't want to potentially infect his family. As a result of not getting tested, none of

Dispatches from the front: shortages of NHS staff, equipment - and union leadership



Socialist Party members and trade unionists demand PPE and tests, protest during national applause for the NHS, and find safe ways to distribute workers' charters photos London SP and Surrey Union



us working in the Covid unit know whether or not we are a potential infection risk to anybody else.

An NHS intensive care technician

Cleaners sent into Covid wards unprotected

A nurse told us that domestic workers are sent to clean wards filled with Covid-19 patients with just gloves and plastic aprons to protect themselves.

Unite union EM/NG32 Nottinghamshire NHS branch

Bosses' decisions prevent social distancing

Support workers (employed by outsourcer Serco) are particularly struggling with PPE availability. The national scarcity has even led to a

kind of 'every man and woman for themselves' situation. Serco workers are told to find their own equipment. They're having to pocket masks when they can.

There's also a dire need for training. Cross-contamination is a risk if you reuse equipment, but because of shortages, untrained workers are hanging onto the same masks for three days. Serco has indicated it will catch up on this, but there's a whole bunch of confusion, anxiety and anger.

The porters' lodges are over-full. Social distancing is impossible inside. Management recently proposed withdrawing one of the lodges, which would make it worse! The union locally has intervened against that.

The NHS is now giving workers free food, but when that started it

obviously led to everyone descending on the canteen at once - again making social distancing impossible. All the furniture was removed as a result, but that means the porters end up sitting right next to each other in the lodge.

An NHS porter

Cuts and privatisation mean back-to-front ambulance response

Reports of ambulances waiting for over an hour to hand over patients at accident and emergency didn't start with Covid-19. Indeed, it was true for years when I worked for the service, and can be traced back to the marketisation of the NHS with a view to privatise.

When I joined the London Ambulance Service 30 years ago, it was

the norm to have two or three crews waiting on-station for the phone to ring. You could cover a call and then be back on-station for an hour, winding down and having a cup of tea.

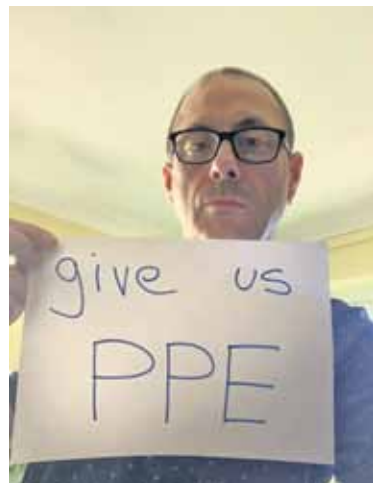
But as the neoliberal market mentality was applied to the NHS, this was not seen as cost-effective. In the warped minds of the Tory free-marketisers and their heirs in Tony Blair's New Labour, it made more economic sense to have the patient waiting for the ambulance to call, rather than the ambulance waiting for the patient to call.

So over time, as demand increased, the cover stayed the same. This has resulted in extreme physical and mental pressure on staff today.

It's time to properly fund the NHS, kick out the privateers, and bring back all staff - from cleaners to surgeons - onto NHS contracts, to meet



Scotland's SNP first minister Nicola Sturgeon has approved relabelling of out-of-date equipment for use - here, a use-by date of four years ago is concealed by a sticker photo by an NHS hospital cleaner



the needs of patients and workers alike. It's time to renationalise the NHS.

A retired NHS ambulance worker

Heavy-handed management compounding chaos

Three reception staff have walked out after managers refused to put up screens like they have at Tesco. Some routine appointments were only just cancelled in many of the region's hospitals, meaning last week members of the public were coming in for routine appointments.

The problem seems to be the managers being heavy-handed. All annual leave is cancelled, but it's a statutory right, and some staff wanted a break and to spend Easter with their kids. No discussion with unions, the bosses just did it.

Testing has only just started but already we've run out of swabs until next week. After being told by managers we can't wear a mask until a patient is suspected-Covid, union advice is risk assess every patient.

This means asking one simple question: can I do what I need to do with this patient without approaching within two metres? If the answer is 'no', then you need PPE.

An NHS imaging worker

First PPE shortages, now soap shortages - never again!

When we had our first cases of coronavirus, it quickly became apparent that the NHS was criminally unprepared. There was neither enough, nor indeed the right, protective equipment to deal with these patients.

Although the 'right' equipment

is now in place, or at least most of it is, there is now a shortage of basic items such as soap, paper towels and so on.

However, what has been inspiring is the way health workers have worked together, under extreme pressure, in order to care for these desperately ill patients. Many have been understandably apprehensive, but nevertheless have supported not just the patients, but each other. It should also be highlighted that staff such as domestics are in the front line, cleaning rooms occupied by Covid-19 patients, and getting paid just £9 an hour!

Some things are clear among health union members. There can be no return to the days of an underfunded, partially privatised NHS, built on cheap labour. We want a fully publicly owned NHS, with

good staff levels, and a significant increase in pay. We will settle for nothing less!

An NHS porter

Understaffed and frightened as body count rises

Staff with health conditions are left in uncertainty and fear. Everyone in an at-risk group is asked to report this, but weeks later, and two weeks into the lockdown, staff still haven't been given any info. It doesn't help that no one seems to have had their letter from the NHS for people in at-risk groups.

A lot of people are off sick. There are loads of new agency staff that are being brought in. But the staff say they are not getting proper training.

There is huge pressure on staff. The porters want more staff, especially at night when there are only four to cover the whole hospital. This is the same number as normal.

They are getting lots of complaints about delays, but every time they have to transport a body in the morgue of a patient who was Covid-19 positive, it takes them at least an hour because it takes so long to put on and take off the full protective gear they have to wear.

There are a lot more bodies than usual.

An NHS catering worker

Asked to return after years of retirement

The call went out for health professionals who had retired in the last three years to return to work. I retired over five years ago, but our regulator, the General Medical Council, is now giving temporary registration to those who retired within the last six years and asking them to consider returning.

The giant outsourcing company, Capita, is handling the process. NHS England entered into a £330 million seven-year contract with Capita in August 2015, with the intention of slashing 35% from the £90 million cost of running primary services.

After women were wrongly excluded from cervical screening, and 1,000 GPs, dentists and opticians prevented from working for up to six months, parliament's Public Accounts Committee described Capita as a "shambles" that put patients at serious risk of harm.

I feel the most useful contribution I could make now would be cups of tea for frontline staff, but I've sent my details back. I will wait to see what, if anything, I'm offered.

A retired NHS doctor

Sick ambulance staff not tested due to 'expense'

A worried ambulance driver in the GMB union, with a sore throat and no sense of taste or smell, says he was not referred for Covid-19 testing at Croydon NHS.

He reported the manager at his outsourced ambulance company said "tests are expensive" and "everyone is going to get it anyway." The worker expressed his concerns about spreading Covid-19 to patients but says he feels under pressure to remain at work.

GMB union

Capitalism causes crisis profiteering: fight for workers' oversight and public ownership

Iain Dalton
Yorkshire Socialist Party

The government's laissez-faire attitude towards supplies, in effect contracting out any control of this to the major retailers, means there have been opportunities abundant for speculators to rip people off.

Individual profiteers have been selling items at inflated prices via online marketplace platforms like eBay and Amazon. One user made £1,000 selling toilet roll for double the retail price, according to the Guardian. Another was selling a 72-pack of Andrex for £84.99, more than three times its normal price of £27, with another selling them for £99.90!

Care homes have paid suppliers for aprons at 166% of usual prices, reports the Times - and masks at a whopping 1,000%! One Dr Mark Ali made £1.7 million in just one week selling coronavirus tests through his company, 'Private Harley Street Clinic Ltd', based out of a north London flat.

These were then sent to Randox Laboratories in Northern Ireland. Ali charged £375 a test, while Randox provides them directly for an already-high £120.

Price controls

The capitalist system prioritises profit, not need, and continues to do so even in these crisis conditions. The government should implement price controls, under the democratic oversight of the trade unions, to prevent further abuses.

Big firms which bend the rules should be nationalised. Unions should also elect local committees of retail workers and consumers to control rationing policies where there are shortages, and form part of the oversight of price controls.

These are essential working-class counters to the profit system in this emergency. But the only way to prevent these problems outright is bringing all the major food and staple goods manufacturers, distributors and retailers into public ownership, as part of a democratic plan of production to meet people's needs. That would be a core part of a socialist programme.

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Where's the PPE Welsh Assembly?

Mark Evans
Branch Secretary,
Carmarthenshire County Unison

Our union branch raised with senior management of Carmarthenshire County Council that we did not accept the guidance of Public Health Wales (PHW) when it comes to the use of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE).

PHW advises that PPE should only be used where a patient is exhibiting Covid-19 symptoms, or has Covid-19.

We stated that we wanted all care workers who work in domiciliary care and in residential care to have full PPE - including a mask, eye protection, disposable gloves and aprons.

We said that the current guidance did not protect service users from contracting the virus from carers, and vice versa; if our members/staff continue visiting service users without adequate PPE, this will inevitably result in very serious consequences for service users and carers, and the service could be at risk of breakdown.

Senior management agreed that staff needed to be given full PPE for the above reasons, but that this was not a problem of their making. They said they were not getting sufficient PPE supplies from the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) despite pleading for them.

So, rather than admit that they do not have enough PPE, they issue guidance which effectively rations it. And where local authorities ask for more, they tell them to stop mis-using it!

The guidance of WAG through Public Health Wales is built around protecting WAG from criticism.

The situation is so bad that the directors of local government social



Carmarthenshire County Unison branch members on an anti-cuts lobby of the council photo SP Wales

care have jointly written a letter to the Welsh Local Government Association complaining about the lack of PPE. The letter states that the current guidance lacks logic, and that the guidance risks causing a failure in the service.

While it could not be predicted when a new virus would come on the scene, it was entirely predictable that one would rear its ugly head at

some stage. It seems apparent that the WAG and successive Tory governments did not plan sufficiently for this eventuality.

Not only that, the Labour WAG dutifully passed on devastating Tory cuts to local government in Wales, and underfunded our NHS by a billion pounds. These savage cuts were then administered by every council in Wales, leaving them in

a much weakened state to fight the impact of Covid-19.

Our members will strive might and main to keep critical services going. But they are not being given the tools (PPE) to do the job and stay safe. We are told we are all in this together, but it seems care workers are being expected to work in riskier situations than most.

The Labour WAG needs to come

clean about what PPE it has, and how it is going to get more. Care staff and NHS frontline workers need full PPE, and they need it now!

If necessary it should nationalise companies to ensure adequate supply. The WAG needs to be demanding the full funding of the NHS in Wales and that council funding by central government be returned to 2010 levels.

EE puts workers' health and safety at risk



Ross Saunders
Cardiff Socialist Party

EE is making it very clear why we can't leave it to the bosses to control our response to the coronavirus crisis.

Not content with dragging its call-centre workforce into work in the midst of the pandemic, including sales and debt collection, EE then demanded that many of its high street shop workers travel back to their workplaces.

The company told its confused and worried workforce that they will be answering customer queries online - a task that cannot possibly occupy all of the workers called in, and could have easily been performed from home.

Light dawned when management

told workers that anyone who didn't want to come in wouldn't have to... but they also wouldn't be paid! Bosses are demanding that workers use up their annual leave or take the time off unpaid.

Many will go into work, unless the company is forced to reconsider; few low-paid workers can afford to see their wages cut even further. No one should be forced to travel unnecessarily in the midst of the pandemic.

Doing so will expose EE workers to a greater risk of catching the virus, accelerate its spread, and increase the strain on the already hopelessly overburdened NHS.

No workers should have their income cut if they refuse unreasonable requests from management that put their safety at risk. There are reports of police forces taking action against individuals even for exercising

too much, but big companies are allowed to continue recklessly risking safety in order to maximise their profits.

Any union that takes action during this crisis should be supported; they're challenging the right of profiteering capitalists to run the response to the pandemic.

The CWU has won recognition in EE in its call centres, and Unite has members in some of the shops. Our trade union movement should provide leadership in the face of these threats. Big business can't be trusted not to risk our safety for the sake of increasing profits.

All workers, whether they're working at home, in isolation, are ill or in their customary place of work should get full pay. The TUC should organise a campaign to demand action against firms like EE which

are putting their workers and wider society at risk. Councils should be prepared to override companies' decisions on health and safety grounds.

If the work that companies like EE and BT are carrying out is so key, then it's too important to leave them in the hands of profiteers, and the whole telecoms industry should be nationalised to ensure access for everyone.

EE is exploiting the fact that it is carrying out 'key work' in the telecoms industry to try and cut its wage bill and boost its profits.

Workers' organisations like trade unions should negotiate what is genuine key work that needs to be performed, despite the pandemic, and what work should be suspended in order to limit the spread of the infection.

THINGS WILL NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN

Trade union organiser
Glynn Doherty reports from the public services frontline

"This certificate provides confirmation you are classified as a Sky key worker...Thank you for ...help[ing] keep Sky's critical services running for our customers."

The 'critical services' Jeremy Darroch, Sky's CEO in the UK, is referring to are television packages. To keep them running (or more accurately, the profits coming in), hundreds of workers are still crammed together in call centres on my patch, brazenly told to defy social distancing guidelines.

As few workers here are union members, my influence is mostly limited to reporting to the press such a flagrant breach of Covid-19 instructions. Most annoyingly, I do have to provide advice to thousands whose work really is essential, and I can do without having to also deal with stuff like this.

Sky and others get away with this

because government advice has been a masterclass in doublespeak. Claims that the advice is clear are laughable. Don't travel to work unless it's necessary - what does that mean?!

Only go to work if it's essential. Is my work essential? Ask your employer! Maintain two metres social distancing. What about the call centre? Or the cab of a refuse collection truck? Or the child with behavioural problems who needs, literally, hands-on support? Erm...ask your boss.

In the last fortnight I've had to challenge councils who insist grass cutting is essential or a dripping tap an emergency.

To make matters worse, the written government guidelines state you can travel to work if you can't work from home, contradicting messages about essential roles delivered verbally. I've now got councils saying members can't work from home so they're to continue coming to work as normal!

Anger as London local authorities bulldoze through powers to discipline workers

Unite the Union has expressed serious concerns over plans which will give local authority employers in London new powers to redeploy workers, under the threat of disciplinary action.

Rather than harnessing the growing spirit of volunteerism, local government employers in London

are attempting to bulldoze through excessive new measures during the current COVID 19 crisis.

Unite regional officer Onay Kasab said: "We understand that the capital faces a health crisis and local government workers are rising to the challenge, but this is the wrong approach.

"It's a poor way to treat public service workers who are providing vital services day in, day out.

"We have seen how people have come forward to volunteer all over the country - yet London councils seem to think that volunteering should be accompanied with threats. That is not volunteering, it's force. We have already had some



Care workers are desperately trying to get PPE photo Birmingham SP

The busiest part of my job is dealing with the many hundreds of members working for vast numbers of social care providers in the most appalling conditions. Every bit of news you've read about the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) is right... and more.

Growing anger

Workers on the minimum wage are caring for elderly, young and disadvantaged people who show Covid-19 symptoms, in care homes and in the community, not only without masks but also aprons and gloves.

I've lost count of the times members tell me they've bought

their own gloves locally; begging the question why their employer didn't!

The anger brewing in social care is palpable. My job as an organiser isn't just to represent trade unionists, but to empower them. I try and turn the feeling of helplessness when workers contact me to one that gives them the confidence to challenge their employer.

So, we're now getting workers on £9 an hour confronting chief executives openly. These are the first signs that things will never be the same again.

The world, in general and in the workplace, will not return to 'normal'.

Workers are awakening to their power. How it is their actions which are positively affecting the limits of the pandemic, while global capitalism can't cope.

My current task is to keep my members safe, but I'm looking forward to an era soon where workers put into practice what they've learnt during this crisis.

Where they challenge their employers and, indeed, trade union leaders who get in their way. Where they join the fight for a fairer society, which can only be a socialist society.

Oh...and my mole in Sky's call centre? She wants to become a trade union shop steward.

Victory for Medway bin workers

Unite the Union reps are pleased to announce that we have won in our dispute at Medway Norse and have ensured a safe environment for staff and the local community (see 'Refuse collection workers strike' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Thanks to the strength of workers who stood together and the support of people who signed our petition, Medway Norse have agreed to pay all staff for the walkout days regardless of whether they went to work or not. They have implemented social distancing measures, PPE (such as hand sanitiser, gloves, wipes and masks) has been made available, and all staff are guaranteed toilet access, even if they close the toilets to the public.

On behalf of Unite the Union, we would like to send a big thank you to everyone who signed and shared the petition and backed our members to get this victory.

Socialists in Unite meet via Zoom

Struggles continue in the workplaces

Unite union members in the Socialist Party, and our Scottish and Irish sister groups in the Committee for a Workers' International, held a Zoom meeting on 4 April.

They discussed developments in the union, and how to intervene in the workplaces during the coronavirus crisis.

Members gave examples from the NHS, passenger transport, local

government and other services of how workers have to fight for decent health and safety in this emergency, but also to break through the mood of 'national unity' that many trade union leaders, including on the left, are backing at the moment.

One member raised problems that have arisen on London Buses. Public transport is considered a key service. Yet, tragically, an increasing

number of bus workers have died after contracting Covid-19. Every safety measure had to be ground out of the management of bus companies. In addition, the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, was urging people not to travel but not putting pressure on the companies to protect their workers.

The meeting showed that workers' struggle continues in this crisis,

but is sometimes reflected through different channels. Members made financial pledges to help the Socialist Party through a period in which much public activity has been closed off to us. But the class battles continue inside the workplaces.

■ There will be reports on bus workers during the crisis in the next issue of the Socialist

Peter Taaffe
Socialist Party political secretary

“And to Mr Bezos [plutocratic billionaire owner of Amazon] my message is simple. I don’t give a damn about your power. You think you’re powerful? We’re the ones that have the power. Without us working, what are you going to do? You’ll have no money. We have the power. We make money for you. Never forget that... I am getting calls from Amazon workers across the country and they all want to stage walk-outs, too... We are starting a revolution and people around the country support us.”

These are the magnificent words of fighting militant worker Chris Smalls, who on Monday 30 March helped organise a walk-out over health and safety at an Amazon facility on Staten Island, New York. They are highly symptomatic of the gathering mood of opposition of workers in the US - and throughout the world - to the dictatorial boss class who, along with US president Donald Trump, wish to impose savage cuts on what they wrongly consider is a defenceless workforce in the teeth of mass layoffs.

The reaction of Chris Smalls and the workers in this warehouse indicates a wave of opposition - a colossal brewing revolt that is taking place, and will grow exponentially, in the next period.

Two similar reports dealing with this issue appeared in the British press: one in the ‘liberal’ Guardian from which the explosive comments of this worker on ‘revolution’ are featured; and another from the open organ of finance capital, the Financial Times, in which they are missing. This is not at all accidental. Even reports in the Financial Times can ultimately find their way to workers in Britain and elsewhere. They can inspire workers in Amazon in Britain and in other countries, and in a wider industrial context, to follow their example.

Change is coming

Indeed, the gripping account of how these Amazon workers rose up against the punitive measures of the bosses is a powerful expression of the molecular change which is taking place in the American workers’ movement. This in turn indicates a coming mass revolt - particularly under the whip of ailing American capitalism and its most repulsive national representative, Donald Trump.

Chris Smalls writes: “When I applied to work at Amazon, the job

description was simple. It said you need to have a high-school diploma or a GED (general educational development) and you have to be able to lift 50lbs. That’s it. Now, because of Covid-19, we’re being told that Amazon workers are ‘the new Red Cross’. But we don’t want to be heroes. We are regular people. I don’t have a medical degree. I wasn’t trained to be a first responder. We shouldn’t be asked to risk our lives to come into work. But we are.”

We agree. These words will find an echo among millions of workers throughout the world: postal workers, delivery drivers and many others faced with a similar scandalous situation.

Chris Smalls went on to say: “And someone has to be held accountable for that, and that person is you,” referring to Jeff Bezos. “I have worked at Amazon for five years,” he continued, “until I was fired last week from the Staten Island warehouse in New York City, I was a manager assistant who supervised a team of about 60-100 ‘pickers’, who pick items off the shelves and put them on conveyor belts to get sent out for shipment.”

But then at the beginning of March, before the first confirmed case of coronavirus at the facility people were getting sick: fatigue, light-headedness, vomiting. He therefore told human resources:

“Hey, something’s wrong here. We need to quarantine the building.” “I wanted us to be proactive not reactive” he said. “Management disagreed and assured me they were ‘following CDC [Center for Disease Control and Prevention] guidelines”

How similar this is to countless workplaces in Britain, including even in hospitals, in which a callous and insensitive management tries to use the same kind of methods, and is met with resistance from some unions - but not all - and from workers.

So is the description of the conditions that existed: “The lack of protections worried me. Inside the warehouse, there are gloves, but they are not the right kind. They are rubber instead of latex. There are also no masks. Hand sanitizer is scarce. There are limited cleaning supplies. People are walking around with their own personal hand sanitizer, but good luck finding one in a local grocery store. Because of those conditions, I didn’t feel safe, so I took paid time off to stay home and avoid getting sick. Eventually, though, I ran out of paid time off and I had to go back to work. Other colleagues don’t have that option. Many of my co-workers and friends at the Amazon facility have underlying health conditions. Some have asthma or lupus or diabetes. Others are

older people, or pregnant. They haven’t gone to work in a month, so they haven’t been paid. They’re only doing that to save their lives: if they get the virus they could be dead. One of my friends, who has lupus, is living with his relatives so he doesn’t have to pay rent. Can you imagine if he couldn’t do that? He’d probably be homeless.”

Chris is only echoing here what millions of workers throughout the US and the world have experienced, and still are today, including in Britain. Moreover, his reference to the “homeless” - the likely fate of many American workers expelled from the factories - is a chilling reminder of what the working class suffered in the 1930s ‘Great Depression’, which could be the fate of the American working class today if they do not fight in their millions.

Homeless

What this courageous worker shows is the likely outcome of the attacks of the greedy American capitalists and their narcissistic president, Trump, one of the most vicious anti-union presidents in US history. This was clearly illustrated in the searing ITV programme on Thursday 2 April: ‘Trump and the virus’. It outlined the horrific future for the growing army of the hungry homeless sleeping under bridges in New York and other cities of the US, as well as all the other indignities that flow from the spectacular decline of US capitalism.

“Another problem”, explained Chris “is that Amazon has imposed mandatory overtime to keep up with the demand of everyone ordering online. The result is that Amazon employees are going to work sick as dogs just so they can earn \$2 per hour on top of their



Coronavirus: Amazon workers threaten revolution!

regular pay. Do you know what I call that? Blood money. Workers who want to make extra money are doing up to 60 hours of work a week and risking their lives. Some are working even if they are sick. When people are coughing and sneezing they say, oh, it’s just allergies. It’s a scary time to be in the warehouse right now.”

He concludes: “When I went back to work last Tuesday morning, I spoke to a team member who looked really ill. She told me she feared she had corona and had tried to get tested. I told her to go home and get some rest. Then, two hours later, we had a managers’ meeting. That’s when we were told we had a first confirmed sick employee. The crazy thing was, management told us not to tell the associates. They were being very secretive about it. I thought the secrecy was wrong, so as soon as I left the meeting I told as many people as I could about the situation. Shortly after that, I started emailing the New York state health department, the governor, the CDC...”

“I did everything I could to close that warehouse down so that it could be properly sanitized but the government is too overwhelmed to act right now. That’s when I realized I would have to do something myself... I decided to start spreading awareness among the workers in the building. I had meetings in the common areas and dozens of workers joined us to talk about their concerns. People were afraid. We went to the general manager’s office to demand that the building be closed down so it could be sanitized. We also said we wanted to be paid during the duration of that time.

Another demand of ours was

that people who can’t go to work because of underlying health conditions be paid. Why do they have to risk catching the virus to put food on the table? This company makes trillions of dollars. Still, our demands and concerns are falling on deaf ears. It’s crazy. They don’t care if we fall sick. Amazon thinks we are expendable.”

Quarantine

Then 50 to 60 workers decided to walk out and a number of them spoke to the press. Chris continued: “It was beautiful, but unfortunately I believe it cost me my job. On Saturday, a few days before the walkout, Amazon told me they wanted to put me on ‘medical quarantine’ because I had interacted with someone who was sick. It made no sense because they weren’t putting other people on quarantine. I believe they targeted me because the spotlight is on me. The thing is, it won’t work. I am getting calls from Amazon workers across the country and they all want to stage walk-outs, too. We are starting a revolution and people around the country support us.”

But Amazon got more opposition than they bargained for: the New York attorney general called for an investigation over the “disgraceful firing of Chris Smalls”.

This mega monopoly that needs about 270,000 workers to turn up each day to keep its US operation running smoothly faces a huge revolt. Globally the company’s entire workforce totals 800,000. It cannot be excluded that massive national strikes of Amazon workers take place, as well as international link-ups, amongst this potentially powerful force.

Above all, this indicates the

growing revolt of the American working class, which can have a decisive effect on events in the US in the next period. This has been accelerated through Trump’s period in office. And yet, scandalously, it is not even excluded that he can creep back to power in November’s presidential election, so lamentable is the capitalist Democratic Party with the opposition provided by the former vice-president Joe Biden

On the other hand, some Democrats, in desperation, are beginning to canvass for New York state governor Andrew Cuomo to at least be on the ticket.

New workers’ party

The whole situation in the US, however, is crying out for a mass workers’ party to be created, independent from the Democrats, creating a force that can politically harness the class anger of those workers like Chris Small and millions of others who are instinctively, through their own experience, implacably opposed to American capitalism and Trump, in the factories and workplaces, but also in the political sphere.

The US working class could still be the anvil upon which the fate not just of the US but of the world can be hammered out. It has immense potential power, but it has to be freed politically and organisationally from the conservative restraints of misnamed ‘friends of labour’. It is the millions like this Amazon worker, fighting for powerful independent unions, linked to the idea of a socialist, democratic mass working-class party, that can take power and refashion America and the world.

End of the Corbyn era

Organise to fight for socialist policies



WHAT WE THINK

Keir Starmer, as was widely predicted, has been elected leader of the Labour Party. He won on the first round with 56.2% of the vote.

Almost half a million people voted in the election, and Starmer won a majority in all three categories: members, affiliated supporters (mostly members of affiliated trade unions), and registered supporters.

Starmer's victory represents a qualitative step in the capitalist class's campaign to make the Labour Party once again, as it was under Blair, a reliable vehicle for their interests. They were terrified by the 2017 election result, where Corbyn came close to being elected.

While Johnson now has a substantial parliamentary majority, the Tory Party remains a deeply divided party with a shallow social base which - faced with major events - could prove incapable of holding onto power. The coronavirus crisis, and the deep recession developing, could prove to be those major events. So ensuring Labour is a safe second team remains urgent for the capitalist class.

They have no prospect of political stability, however. On the contrary, in the face of the corona crisis they have had no choice but to support, in a desperate attempt to prop up their system, state intervention that - in some senses at least - goes further than Corbyn's programme. This is one indication of the potential to win mass support for socialist ideas in the coming period.

Campaign

Starmer did not openly campaign as a candidate of the pro-capitalist Blairite wing of the party, instead posing as a 'unity' candidate.

He also stood on a programme that included a number of demands from Corbyn's 2019 manifesto, including supporting 'common ownership of rail, mail, energy and water; end outsourcing in our NHS, local government and the justice system.' Had he not taken this approach he could not have won the election.

However, 'by your friends shall you be known', and his supporters revealed the reality. He was backed by Progress and Labour First, organisers of the pro-capitalist forces within the Labour Party. He also received widespread backing from the capitalist press, including from the editor of the Evening Standard, ex-Tory Chancellor George Osborne!

Given the scale of his victory, Starmer can now begin to reveal his real agenda more clearly. This is demonstrated in his shadow cabinet. Not only are Corbyn and McDonnell gone, so are their most consistent supporters - Ian Lavery, Barry Gardiner and Jon Trickett.

At the same time, the unabashed Blairite Rachel Reeves, who as shadow work and pensions minister promised to be 'tougher' on benefit claimants than the Tories, is back in the shadow cabinet, as is Lisa Nandy, the leadership candidate who was more openly right-wing than Starmer.

'Covid coalition'

Starmer has refused to rule out joining a 'Covid coalition' government, a form of national government with the Tories. This is probably not posed immediately, but is nonetheless an indication of Starmer's approach.

There is not one single 'national' interest but different class interests. The working class needs a party that will fight for its independent interests, not collude with the Tories in acting for the capitalist elite.

Starmer's first post-victory article was written for the Murdoch-owned Sunday Times. In it he pointed to the need for the party to change in order to "become a credible government-in-waiting". He added that "that starts by saying sorry to the Jewish community".

Starmer's piece was accompanied by an article by the Deputy Editor of the Sunday Times, Sarah Baxter, which called on him to "send packing the Marxists, the ultra-leftists and the anti-semites who flocked to Corbyn's banner".

This shows the strategy of the capitalist class, with Starmer as their representative, to use false allegations of anti-Semitism to drive the left out of any positions of influence they continue to hold in the party - and where possible out of the party itself.

Starmer's victory was made possible because of the failure of Corbynism to transform Labour. The structures of the party remain largely the same as they were in the undemocratic Blairite years. The majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party and councillors are still on the right. Blair's pro-capitalist version of 'Clause IV' remains.

The National Executive Committee (NEC) was one key party body which did, at least to some extent, shift left. But Starmer is also aided by the fact that all three NEC by-elections declared on the same day as his election were won by Progress/Labour First candidates, two of them replacing Corbynites.

The vote in the by-elections demonstrates the ebbing away of the Corbyn wave. Progress/Labour First candidate Johanna Baxter, for

example, was elected with 57,181 votes, less than the 60,366 she lost with in 2016.

Those who were enthused by Corbyn were never organised into a mass movement to transform the Labour Party into a mass party of the working class armed with socialist policies.

To have achieved this would have required a tenacious battle to take the party - at every level - out of the hands of the pro-capitalist wing. Instead, endless compromises were made with the right of the party in the name of unity.

They never achieved unity because the pro-capitalist wing would only have been satisfied with the annihilation of Corbynism, as they will now prove.

They did, however, succeed in muddying Corbyn's message, not least on Brexit - leading to his defeat in the 2019 general election - and demobilising and demoralising many who had joined the Labour Party to fight for anti-austerity policies.



Starmer's victory was made possible because of the failure of Corbynism to transform Labour

As a result, many of the most combative and working-class Corbyn supporters have long since lapsed into inactivity in the Labour Party. Others - at the top - are developing their careers via incorporation into the pro-capitalist wing of Labour.

No doubt the voting figures include some right wingers who joined the party just to vote for Starmer. This is certainly true of the 'registered supporters' category.

Back in 2015, it was the registered supporters - then able to vote in the leadership election for just £3 - who set Corbyn's campaign alight.

In 2016 too, as the campaign to defeat the 'chicken coup' against Corbyn raged, registered supporters again played an important role. 180,000 paid £25 over two days to sign up, overwhelmingly to vote for Corbyn.

This time was a very different story. Only 13,626 paid £25 to vote, and the big majority - 10,228 - did so in order to back Keir Starmer. Just 650 of them voted for Rebecca Long-Bailey.

However, the figures also indicate that many Labour Party members, including some of those who joined under Corbyn, voted for Starmer in the hope that a candidate that was

more acceptable to the capitalist class - in reality more right-wing - would stand a better chance of winning a general election.

This can be no surprise. Given no lead, and demoralised by the 2019 defeat, they were only offered Rebecca Long-Bailey's woeful campaign. The 29% of Labour Party members who voted for her did so, in the main, in order to try and stop Starmer, rather than out of enthusiasm for her.

She was dubbed the 'Corbyn continuity candidate'. At no stage, however, did she challenge the relentless right-wing narrative that the general election result was the worst since 1935, despite Labour's vote being higher in percentage terms than in 2010 or 2015.

She did not put forward the urgent need for Labour councils to stop implementing cuts, which was a major factor in workers' distrust of Corbyn.

In addition, she accepted the witch-hunting charter of the Jewish Board of Deputies, setting the scene for further moves against the left in the aftermath of the leadership election. As a result she only received a total of 135,218 votes.

Watershed

This marks a definitive end of the Corbyn era. The burning need for the working class to have its own political voice has not lessened, however, but increased. An urgent discussion needs to take place in the workers' movement on how to bring a mass party of the working class into being.

In the five years after his leadership victory, the Socialist Party recognised that organising the forces that had crystallised around Jeremy Corbyn appeared the most viable route to achieving that.

We put forward a programme for transforming Labour into a mass socialist workers' party, and argued that we should be allowed to affiliate to aid that fight.

Momentum and others did not adopt the fighting approach we proposed, resulting in that opportunity going down to defeat. Therefore, another route now needs to be found.

Those that remain in the Labour Party have to draw a line in the sand, and fight tenaciously for socialist policies against the ascendant capitalist wing of the party.

Rather than accept pro-capitalist Labour politicians representing it, however, the labour and trade union movement, and socialist activists, must start a discussion now on the need for a new mass workers' party with a socialist programme, and how it can be built.

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

editors@socialistparty.org.uk



Keir Starmer's (left) labour leadership victory, cheered on by the capitalist class, marks a complete break with the left-wing Corbyn era photo Jeremy Corbyn photostream/CC

WORKERS TAKE ACTION WHILE UNION LEADERS CALL TRUCE WITH GOVERNMENT AND BOSSES



Union leaders must prepare members to fight any offensive by the bosses to make workers pay for this crisis photo Paul Mattsson

"And I want to thank them (key workers) and also the leaders of the trade unions who represent them..."

These were the words of Michael Gove at the Tory government's daily briefing on 31 March. This from the ex-education minister, in office at the height of the cuts offensive between 2010-14. Such was the hatred towards him that the teaching unions all passed votes of no confidence in him. Yet now he is a firm fan of the union leaders!

This comes on the back of the uncritical response of some union leaders to the government's measures over coronavirus. With this undeclared 'truce' the union leaders are effectively giving in to the capitalist establishment's pressure for national unity, trying to suspend the class struggle. This should act as a warning to union members and reps who have to keep their union leaders under pressure to resist.

After the recent National Executive Committee of the PCS union, the union's general secretary Mark Serwotka reported in a video message on discussions with the government. He said that normally at this time, PCS would present its full pay claim. But due to the crisis, PCS had voluntarily "parked" this, and instead put forward a watered down "interim" submission.

This can create the illusion that the same Tory government which has hammered civil servants over the last decade - particularly targeting PCS by trying to financially bankrupt the union by stopping the deduction of union dues from salaries ('check-off') - will look fondly at the union once the crisis abates.

However, this is not the experience of those PCS members on the frontline, forced to come to work in offices and call centres, often short of safe working procedures and hand sanitisers.

This is especially so in departments such as DWP, where workers are struggling to cope with the one million Universal Credit applications, or HMRC which has to administer the thrown together 80% compensation scheme for waged, and now self-employed, workers.

There have also been joint communications from rail and transport unions with the Department of Transport. Yet this is the same Tory government that still has plans for vicious anti-union laws on the table, directed precisely at these unions.

Where is the public call for Johnson to drop this threatened legislation, as well as the undemocratic ballot thresholds brought in by Cameron in the Trade Union Act in 2016?

This approach can disarm workers. While many workers will welcome the government concessions that have been made, they are not enough.

Up the ante

The unions need to fight for more, as well as preparing members for when the government and bosses go on the offensive later. They have to warn these employers that any attempt to take anything back will be met with fierce resistance from unions and their members.

Key and emergency workers have enormous power right now. Surrey FBU and its firefighting members have waged a tenacious struggle against the brutal Tory Surrey county council. Their members walked out last week over safety in one of the fire stations.

The union has suspended an overtime ban during the current crisis, and the council has delayed the second phase of its fire service cuts. But the first part, cutting four fire engines, went ahead on 1 April. The real danger is that the council will come back later, when the crisis eases, and the leverage of the union

and its members is lowered.

Similarly, despite winning a strike vote by 96% on a 80% turnout, Unite has suspended action on pay by its refuse members against privateer Biffa at Labour Wirral Council. Yet just as we go to print, they have walked out over safety fears.

Like many others, these two groups of workers are showing that they are prepared to take action to defend their safety. Short, sharp, wildcat action in Royal Mail, construction and other sectors has often resulted in victory.

The firefighters in Surrey and binworkers in Wirral can gain confidence from their unofficial action during the pandemic to carry over into their official disputes against cuts and pay respectively

It is revealing that the unions nationally are reluctant to publicise these. And just as we go to print, they have also walked out over safety fears.

The TUC is happy to tweet about action taken by workers in the USA but not posties in Scotland!

Where these actions are published, as in the Socialist and in the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) Forum, they can give confidence to others that it is possible to fight now.

That's why rank-and-file networks such as the NSSN are so important in the current period, to help organise the rising tide of struggle today and tomorrow.



Going viral



Socialist letters and comments on the coronavirus crisis

The Covid-19 pandemic is a world social crisis which touches every aspect of life. The iniquities 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 my health not to be able to get into large open spaces. How is 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 cities 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 some 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 healthcare 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 democratic workers' control and management - as part of an 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 coronavirus per se.

Nick Chaffey
Southampton

■ Don't blame us

Did anyone see the pictures of people in parks? All respecting the two-metre rule. No need for the hysterical media response.

They are trying to blame us for the

crisis but it is the government and rich and powerful that should be called into account.

There seems to be a siege mentality here. People are scared of this virus, but we mustn't turn against each other. We must look to the reasons why this crisis is much worse than it should have been.

Governments have known for over a decade that a pandemic was likely. Not if but when. Yet instead of planning for one, they have cut back on health provision, councils have cut services and private companies are incapable of coherent 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 minister 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 dog for a walk with members of their household.

Simon Carter
East London

■ Mission: Impossible

While I totally agree with the social distancing measures, 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 Record as a "pound shop Peter Hitchens" - has laid bare the thinking of the Conservatives. He takes the view that it is a waste of money to keep old people alive. Of course, Toby Young is rapidly becoming 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 the "tough decisions" which will have to be taken.

GPs have been advised to consider 'Do not resuscitate' discussions with elderly patients. One practice - Llynfi Surgery in Maesteg, South Wales - jumped the gun by sending out a note to patients saying 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 GPs 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 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 twisted 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." Obviously cost overrides employees' and tenants' safety.

He said currently there are just the engineers working and even if you cancel due to self-isolation, someone else will call within days. He also said that many of his workmates had signed the Change.org petition - Gas Safe Register.

Apparently I was within my rights to refuse entry and I gave him some copies of the Socialist Party's 'Workers Charter' and asked if he would pass them around.

Cait Mallon
Stoke

■ 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 Universal Credit for ESA claimants will be further delayed.

Adrian B Rimington
Chesterfield

Under the microscope: Pandemic news in brief

Oxygen crisis

The hospital oxygen supply in Hertfordshire came within inches of failing due to a huge 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 shareholder dividend payments. 39% of European and North American businesses tracked by SquareWell Partners have done so. Hedge funds are down - Invesco High Income by 36%, and the colossal Artemis Income by 27.5%.

However, some firms are maintaining payouts, but cutting investment in new jobs and production - already at historic lows. Insurance giant Legal & General is paying a full £750 million dividend, despite shares tumbling 10%.

And Tory caricature Jacob Rees-Mogg could make a killing. His Somerset Capital Management says: "Market dislocations of this magnitude happen rarely, perhaps once or twice in a generation... History has shown us that super-normal returns can be made during this type of environment."

Bosses' bonuses

Anxious investors and capitalist politicians are asking execs cutting workers' pay during the crisis to reduce their own incomes. A few dozen firms have cut directors' compensation by around 20%, says the FT, to mirror the amount stolen from furloughed staff.

But most are doing nothing of the sort. And anyway, 20% for a worker on the breadline is a catastrophe - but 20% for a multimillionaire exec

is meaningless! We say: 100% pay for the workers. Take 100% of the profits if that's what's needed to cover it!

The Bank of England, however, has stopped private banks from paying £8 billion in dividends to owners - and banned bonus payments to bank bosses. Of course, the decree comes after the bulk of hundreds of millions in bonuses has already been paid.

Workers washed out

950,000 people applied for Universal Credit in the last two weeks of March. Millions of self-employed and unemployed workers will not benefit from government promises to support workers, according to studies by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Resolution Foundation.

And 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 3.28 million the previous week. That's 10 million US workers on the scrapheap in a fortnight.

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 hot-spot New York, from Russia.

However, the sheen appears to have quickly worn off this modern-day détente after it was revealed that said ventilators are manufactured by a Russian manufacturer subject to US trade sanctions. But hey, it's a humanitarian crisis!

However, Russian opponents of Putin bitterly complained that doctors in Russia are having to sew their own masks, raise donations for PPE - and lack functioning ventilators in their own hospitals.

Plane stupid

Australian airline Qantas has suspended a union health and safety rep for raising concerns about lack of PPE. Sure enough, eleven Adelaide baggage handlers went on to test positive, meaning 100 staff in self-isolation and flights cancelled or turned back.

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.



After the great work done by Jeremy Corbyn in putting socialism at the front of Labour's policy it's heartbreaking 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 become basically a centrist party.



I've just left the Labour Party as they no longer represent my views. The Socialist Party does.



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.

Since Keir Starmer was elected leader of the Labour Party, the Socialist Party has been inundated with applications to join. Here are just a few of the comments we have received.

Labour leadership election
STARMER WINS
BUT THE FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM GOES ON
Join the Socialist Party
www.socialistparty.org.uk

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.



Keir Starmer's leadership today leaves me politically homeless. I support Jeremy Corbyn but know he will stay in Labour. I do not want to support Labour.



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.



Due to a lurch to the right within the Labour Party, I'm looking for fellow socialists to help lift my disillusionment



Labour is no longer fit for purpose. I've waited since Michael Foot. They will never let a socialist be leader. Full of Blairites. I need a left party.



Have put off joining for a long time but it seems more urgent than ever at the moment. Looking forward to supporting the movement.



Join the fightback
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join or call **020 8988 8777** or text your name and postcode to **07761 818 206** to find out more about joining us today



I'm disappointed (although not surprised) at the result of the Labour leadership contest and therefore feel politically homeless. I stopped my membership of the Labour Party having been disappointed at RLB's backing of the Board of Deputies' ten pledges as it was her I intended to use my vote for.

Coronavirus, capitalism and fighting for socialism worldwide

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI - the socialist international organisation the Socialist Party is part of) is posting regular updates from our sections around the world - including Algeria, Sri Lanka, Denmark, Finland, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, South Africa, USA, France, Japan, Nigeria, India and more.

These articles analyse the failings of capitalism, exposed by the coronavirus pandemic; report on working-class struggles to secure safe working conditions, health coverage and food security; and how CWI sections are advancing socialist programmes to deal with this immediate crisis and a post-coronavirus world.



See socialistworld.net

Getting the Socialist out safely under lockdown

Hull: picking up the Socialist at a safe distance

I'm trying this (picture right) to distribute the Socialist, which relies on people's honesty. I had a couple of thumbs up and eight papers have been taken. I have faith in people.

Of course you don't all have to come round ours to pick up the Socialist. To subscribe, visit socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe
Phil Culshaw

Leeds: readers impressed with Socialist coverage

I posted a copy of the Socialist to someone who normally buys it off me once a month. He was so impressed with our coverage on Covid-19 and its effect on the trade union movement he texted me and asked to be sent a copy of the Socialist



every week for the next two months.

At our Unite Community meeting - held online over Zoom - one of our members reported an alternative 'Thursday night clap for NHS'. Add an additional chant: "Test, test, test... PPE... keep key workers virus free!"
Kevin Pattison

East London: virtual race turns into real fighting fund

East London Socialist Party organised a 'virtual Grand National' horse racing sweepstake for the party's fighting fund on 4 April - to mitigate the negative effects of the coronavirus lockdown on our public fundraising activities.

People paid online and the sweepstake raised £65 for the fighting fund along with a £15 prize - and no horses were injured!

Simon Carter

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 Thraves** - 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, comparing 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, concealing from the working class the responsibility of their system for such devastation.

The capitalist class successfully portrayed World War Two as a 'peoples war' against fascism, concealing the underlying imperialist struggle for world market domination.

In 1940, when Tory Prime Minister Winston Churchill invited Labour to participate as a full partner in his wartime coalition government, it represented the start of a period of class collaboration with the Tories that lasted five long years.

Churchill recognised that in order to dampen any opposition and

retain working-class support for the draconian measures necessary to pursue the 'war effort', he needed to attract the endorsement of the trade union movement from the very outset.

Ernest Bevin, right-wing, anti-communist general secretary of the powerful Transport and General Workers Union (T&G, now Unite) 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 fact, 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&G backyard, and much to his embarrassment, two major disputes erupted in 1943. One involved 12,000 bus workers, and the other was on the Liverpool Docks.

Despite the legal ban on strikes, and 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 ac-



Workers defied the strike ban during WW2 including dockers in Liverpool

tion 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 dead 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 agitators' 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 ap-

plauded 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.



Right-wing Labour MP Ernest Bevin

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 for social care
- Adequate protection for all front-line 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

- PPE for all NHS and frontline staff
- Tests and full pay for all
- Take over private health and other necessary facilities. Not a penny to the profiteers
- Socialist planning not capitalist chaos

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.

available within hours, as has been the case in S.Korea and some other countries. Requisition private testing and analysis facilities

- Increase production to meet the urgent need of more protective and medical equipment, including ventilators and virus testing. Take over industries and convert production where necessary, under democratic workers' control of those industries and in the wider workforce.

- Reverse privatisation in the NHS, remove the privateers 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 budgets. Councils to use reserves and borrowing powers to fund necessary jobs and services

- 24 hour, adequately staffed, local authority helpline 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 rent payments should be suspended. Government funds for democratically controlled 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' right 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