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the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**

EXIT STRATEGY?



PPE and mass testing Workers' control of workplace safety



- End the profit system
- Socialist planning not capitalist chaos

The coronavirus pandemic in the UK has not yet passed its peak. Hundreds are still dying every day, and yet the pressure is mounting for the Tories to announce an 'exit strategy'.

But where is that pressure coming from? Not from ordinary people. Even though many are really struggling financially - three million are going hungry according to the Food Foundation.

Of course, most would like to be free to leave their homes and go back to their normal lives. But despite the frustration, they also understand the health reasons behind the order to 'stay at home'. We have to fight for working-class people to have the financial means to feed themselves adequately and pay the bills while they are doing so (see Workers' Charter p16).

There are genuine concerns among many people about the effects of a prolonged lockdown on jobs, mental health, education and domestic abuse. But here, as in other countries around the world, it is big business and their representatives in government who are buying the loudest for a way out of lockdown - and their main concern is not the health and welfare of working people but preserving their profits.

A credible exit strategy "would no doubt go a long way towards reassuring investors", said an editorial in the Times. The former head of the British Chamber of Commerce also wrote, "the cost both in human terms and to the economy mean that the cure is worse than the disease".

Unnecessary deaths

In Italy, the bosses' union Confindustria is complicit in causing unnecessary deaths because of its insistence on keeping non-essential industries going at the start of the lockdown there. Now its spokespeople in the four regions in the north hardest hit by the coronavirus crisis have banded together to once again pressure the government into prematurely lifting restrictions on business - effectively playing Russian roulette with more workers' lives.

In Spain, the government has accepted the demands of big business, and manufacturing and construction workers are being sent back to the factories and sites.

And the government has made it clear it expects workers to make up for lost hours with overtime and not taking paid holidays.

Here, construction, manufacturing and logistics industries have been sent new watered-down and dangerous guidance from the business secretary, Alok Sharma, saying that work could continue if done in line with social-distancing rules "wherever possible". And if it's not possible? They can get advice about how to still stay open!

It's clear from all the reports from workers that we have carried in the Socialist over the past few weeks that social-distancing rules are being constantly flouted by employers who prioritise profits over health.

We only have to look at Royal Mail, and the numerous local walkouts that have taken place there because of threats to workers' health and safety. Or workers in the Passport Office, callously told to go back to work by the Home Office because; "You are no more at risk at the workplace as you would be in your home or at the supermarket. It is about minimising it. We are working on the assessment that 80% of us, if we haven't already, will get the virus. We cannot hide away from it forever" (see also p6).

Although the lockdown is continuing for now, workers have to prepare to resist any future attempts to put lives at risk. Such as a possible "youth first" strategy, for example - one of the proposals being touted for a 'phased' exit - where 20 to 30 year-olds who don't live at home would be sent back to work like canaries down the mine.

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- Corona propaganda war, p10

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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



WHAT WE THINK

Continued from front page

There are enormous tensions within the government over the way forward. Rishi Sunak, backed by Boris Johnson, most clearly reflects the calls from big business for an early exit, while health minister Matt Hancock has been more cautious about the health implications of such a move.

But the Tories' strategy has been one of zig-zags and confusion from the very beginning of this crisis as it has tried to weave a path between profits and health.

This, and over a decade of austerity, have added to the number of both NHS staff and patients dying in hospitals, as well as the terrible tsunami of deaths in care homes, which do not even feature in the daily official statistics.

These divisions are likely to intensify as the crisis continues. The "jam tomorrow" testing policy, as it has been called by NHS chiefs, can only increase the difficulties of finding a way out. Epidemiologist Julian Peto has said that 10 million antibody tests a day would be needed for the lockdown to be lifted.

Everyone is agreed that the corona crisis will have a devastating effect on an economy run on capitalist lines - much worse than the Great Recession triggered by the 2007-08 financial crisis. But workers health and lives must not be sacrificed so that the big business profit system can remain intact. Capitalism is not the only way of organising an economy.

This crisis has shown that billions - trillions even - can be found if necessary. It's just a question of who controls the wealth in society and what they decide to spend it on.

In the Financial Times on 4 April,

EXIT STRATEGY?



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Philip Stephens wrote an article about 'paying for the pandemic' in which he summed up the dilemma the capitalist class is facing. "Low-paid workers in precarious employment took the hit after the 2008 crash", he wrote; "they will not be willing to do so again". "A return to austerity would be madness - an invitation to widespread social unrest, if not revolution".

And he added: "A little more welfare spending here, a touch of intervention here, and a dose of protectionism in strategic sectors are considered enough. They won't be". We would absolutely agree with that. But the answer is not, as he and other commentators have argued, a "new social contract" on the basis of a bankrupt capitalist system whose failings have been so clearly exposed in this crisis.

A genuine exit strategy - not just from the pandemic, but from the austerity, poverty and exploitation that the capitalist profit system generates - will only be possible in a fundamentally different kind of society.

This would be based on public ownership of industry, services and finance, in which the planning that governments have been randomly groping towards in this crisis - to build the hospitals, secure essential equipment such as ventilators and masks, distribute food, etc - could be extended to the whole of the economy.

Working-class people could then democratically decide and prioritise where the enormous wealth that already exists, and will be created in the future, should be spent.

The Socialist Party is fighting hard to defend workers' health, safety and livelihoods in the face of the coronavirus crisis.

We are helping to build trade unions and a working-class party - as defence organisations during the pandemic, but also as organisations that can proactively fight for the socialist society we need to combat disease, poverty, exploitation and environmental destruction.

MPs get £10k each for lockdown expenses - where's ours?

Lindsey Morgan
Leicester Socialist Party

MPs can claim up to £10,000 - on top of their salaries and other expenses - for remote working costs under lockdown. This is on top of the £26,000 a year MPs already get for office expenses!

The thing is, quite a few of us are having to deal with real extra costs right now. The difference is that we have no extra cash - in fact, a lot of us have had a 20% pay cut!

Apparently the idea that we're all in it together was missed by the 'Independent' Parliamentary Standards Authority (Ipsa) when it made the extra amount permissible last month. It's meant to cover expenses incurred by working more from

home, such as equipment and heating, for MPs and their staff.

This follows Ipsa approving another inflation-busting 3.1% pay rise for MPs. That's £6.5 million pounds extra, presumably found down the back of a sofa. Meanwhile, NHS staff and other key workers have suffered real-terms pay cuts for years, and are dying due to a lack of PPE. It's obscene.

With MPs working from home, they must be saving money on commuting too. So why do they need an extra ten grand in the budget?

Parents with their children home from school are having to pay out more for stationery, heating, broadband and so on, so children can learn from home. So where is our extra money?

The coronavirus crisis is high-

lighting the huge chasm between the many and the few in society. Money can always be found for war, MPs' expenses, or failed outsourced IT projects - but not to pay for the PPE, tests and pay rises that NHS workers and many others desperately need.

Makeshift PPE

Some nurses are forced to use bin bags for makeshift PPE. NHS trusts in London were expected to run out of gowns in early April. The budget set aside for MPs to claim £10,000 each could fund eleven million surgical gowns, reckons Nurses United UK.

The basic annual salary of an MP will be £81,932 from this month. The gap between this and the average worker's wage will continue

to widen. The Socialist Party demands that elected politicians receive an average worker's wage to help stem the disconnect between them and the people they claim to represent.

Expenses should only be allowable where clearly necessary to do the job, subject to the oversight of real representatives of working people in the trade unions. They should be published and accountable, particularly to the working people locally who have elected that representative.

And the government should guarantee all workers - key workers, other workers, self-employed, unemployed - 100% of their usual pay, plus whatever more is needed to cover lockdown costs and guarantee a real living income.

Final push for May Day greetings: fund independent workers' media for socialist corona response

Deadline extended to 23 April



James Ivens
The Socialist
May Day greetings organiser

We need you to support the Socialist by sending May Day greetings. You now have a full extra week to do it. There is no other consistent, independent voice for workers and for socialism during the pandemic.

The extended deadline for pledges is Thursday 23 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.

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' short-ages 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. The right has recaptured the leadership of Labour.

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).

The government is waging a propaganda war to deflect from its responsibility for the crisis (see p10). Even many 'left' media outlets fell in line behind the bosses and Tories on multiple issues. But the Socialist has carried on the fight.

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.

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*

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 attempting 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' (see p16) 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.



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.

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

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!

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Johnson's hospitalisation: a tale of two treatments

Tory prime minister Boris Johnson was discharged from hospital on 12 April following treatment for Covid-19. He had undergone testing at the first sign of trouble, while millions of workers with symptoms are told to simply stay home and see.

Johnson returns to a large, well-appointed, comfortable residence with a team of staff to look after him. His job and income are secure. He can work remotely at no extra risk to himself or others while in self-isolation.

A care worker had the coronavirus at the same time, and was treated with oxygen on a ward in the same hospital. Here we carry that patient's short tale of two treatments.

"Johnson was put in a private room at the top of St Thomas' Hospital. But then they realised he was too far from intensive care in an emergency. So they moved him into a room next to ICU with a whole team supporting him. Everyone else had one or two nurses to every four to six patients. Some staff seemed genuinely disturbed that he was in their hospital."

London hospitals far worse than news portrays

The situation in London hospitals is dire, much worse than comes across in the news. At my hospital, for a few weeks already, every ward except one is a Covid-19 ward.

Our baseline situation is the intensive care unit full (despite doubling in size); no beds on wards; 40-plus patients on the wards on non-invasive ventilatory support (who, pre-Covid, would have been in ICU); every bed in A&E taken up with a Covid patient needing an in-patient bed (they're only admitted fully to the hospital if they require oxygen); alarm constantly going off, meaning low oxygen supply in the hospital.

We are on 'rolling divers' where we divert incoming patients for a few hours to let some spaces clear, then go off divert and they immediately fill, then go back on divert again.

At any one time we usually have around ten to 15 patients on the wards who need intubating, but no ventilators - and ten to 15 who are on maximum oxygen via a mask who need non-invasive respiratory support, but no machines.

Whenever a machine becomes available, we go down the list and decide who most urgently needs one, and who will probably hold out a few more hours until the next is available. This is just patients for full resuscitation. We are not using equipment on almost anyone over 70, or in their 50s and 60s with significant comorbidities, but who would have been treated for everything pre-Covid.

We have many patients die every day. It doesn't seem to be reflected in the national numbers.

An NHS junior doctor

Internal market scrapped as inefficient

It didn't take long for Hancock and the Tories to start blaming health workers for shortages of PPE. Not only that, but they imply that we are responsible for the virus spreading in hospitals!

We are beyond angry about this disrespect. Of course we are using our PPE correctly - we are the professionals! We support each other in this to keep the whole team safe. Would the Tories like us to reuse between patients, or just not have rest and meal breaks?

In my hospital they have abandoned Blairite New Labour's 'internal market' system and are storing PPE centrally. This is much more efficient as wards are not left stranded when their budgets run out.

We are - finally - well-stocked for masks and gloves. But with all frontline staff wearing them, how long will that last?

And stocks of gowns are another issue - these are packed sterile and must be changed after medical procedures, and we are running low. Nurses carry out personal care for Covid-positive patients wearing flimsy aprons and worry that their uniforms are not properly protected.

We are all stressed and fearful, but particularly staff with underlying health conditions - they should

Dispatches from the front: NHS staff say give us PPE, not medals!



NHS workers in England are receiving out-of-date masks relabelled with false expiry dates - and tested to an outdated standard that offers less protection photo by an NHS porter



We have many patients die every day. It doesn't seem to be reflected in the national numbers



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Our photo last issue exposing the same practice in Scotland photo by an NHS hospital cleaner

be working from home but most of us don't have that kind of job. I have staff redirected to work in 'cold' areas, but even there they can't socially distance, either from other staff or patients.

Raising this with management, we were told individuals could get their GPs to sign them off with stress! This is completely unacceptable. We don't want to be treated as heroes or given a medal - don't make excuses or half-baked apologies. We demand staff are protected now.

An NHS health professional

Workers given expired PPE under false pretences

Last issue, the Socialist reported that the Scottish SNP government was allowing out-of-date PPE to be relabelled for use (see 'Expired PPE relabelled for NHS use' at socialistparty.org.uk).

But it's happening in England too.

In the latest deception by the Tory government, healthcare workers in my hospital are discovering that expired PPE materials are having their expiry dates revised (pictured!)

Given that there are global shortages, we understand the strain on supplies. What we'll not forget or forgive, though, is being deceived and manipulated, on top of being endangered.

An NHS porter

Older masks offer less protection - and paramedics aren't fitted

We have found out that we are being given masks that went out of date six years ago too. We think nationally that this is what most departments are now using. Apparently, these older masks were also not tested to the same standards and offer less protection, even if not expired.

Paramedics taking suspected

Covid-19 patients to hospital are still not 'fit tested'. You need to have the right mask and it needs to fit. A trained nurse checks for 'spray'. It only takes about 15 minutes.

Morale is low, but staff don't know what else to do but carry on with crossed fingers as our colleagues seem to contract the virus one by one. Obviously not all will become seriously ill, but most of us know a colleague in intensive care, which is devastating.

An NHS imaging worker

Staff put on dangerous wards without PPE

So my hubbie goes to work only to find out two of his patients have tested positive for Covid-19. Patients he's been working with for weeks - and until a week ago, without PPE.

They wouldn't move him off the ward in case he infects other patients. Guess me and the lads don't matter. But to carry on, the staff worked the entire shift using the flimsy masks provided, the stupid aprons and short gloves. Bear in mind their uniforms are short-sleeved.

There are good masks with filters there - apparently for the doctors who don't do any personal care. This government has left frontline workers totally unprotected. And listening to the likes of Matt Hancock blaming NHS staff for wasting stuff makes me want to puke.

Him, that idiot Johnson, and the rest, need to be held to account for their total betrayal of those really keeping things running. Don't anyone ever ask me to clap for Boris or believe one word this pack of liars utters. I'm furious.

Wife of an NHS worker

NHS only coping by scrapping pro-market 'reforms'

The statement from Hancock is a miserable attempt to avoid responsibility for the PPE crisis. He contradicts himself by saying the government entered into this crisis with a stockpile designed to respond to a pandemic outbreak of influenza to accommodate 226 NHS trusts, but we are now providing supplies to 58,000 different providers!

As if Covid-19 has surprised everyone by not limiting itself to the nation's acute hospitals! Hancock and his government have left social care to rot for years. Fragmented into 58,000 providers, most motivated by profit, this crisis has exposed just how broken the system is - and the need for public ownership and planning.

Hancock also tries to avoid responsibility by saying we went into this crisis without a large-scale domestic PPE manufacturing industry. Of course this is correct, but that's a direct result of the transfer of Britain's manufacturing base overseas to low-wage economies, by successive governments including his.

The crisis we face would be even greater if Johnson and Hancock had got their way and further privatised the NHS - as they have both advocated in the not-too-distant past. As it is, the NHS has shown remarkable resilience in facing up to

the enormous challenges posed by the pandemic.

The fact that it has managed so far is only due to the 'reforms' of the last NHS reorganisation in 2012 being thrown out the door. Central planning and joint working between trusts have replaced internal competition. The purchaser/provider split no longer exists. The government has been forced to announce that trusts' debts have been cleared.

At a local level, our chief executive has sent an all-user email saying the PPE situation is getting perilous and urgent supplies are being sought. But where from?

The hospital's staff are bracing themselves for peak Covid-19 patients coming through the doors over the next week or so. It's an absolute scandal that these heroic efforts are being hampered by shortages of the tools needed to do what is already a dangerous and difficult job.

An NHS porter

Empty beds in some areas as other procedures cancelled

After decades of cuts, privatisation, and staff shortages, the NHS was in no position to deal with the coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, in order to cope, resources and staff were transferred within acute hospitals to deal with crises.

This has meant, however, that the overwhelming majority of operations have been cancelled, alongside almost all out-patient appointments. Other services have been curtailed, which has meant that local acute hospitals now have empty beds!

It's clear as this backlog builds up there will be serious health consequences for a lot of patients, for perhaps years to come.

There is also the wide-scale placing of patients who should be in hospital into nursing homes, where the level of care is considerably lower. As well as undermining patient care, this is putting nursing home staff at risk.

This also accounts for many of the empty beds in general hospitals. As we know, many patients are now dying without adequate palliative care in private nursing homes.

An NHS porter

Workers go home scared to hug their kids

Many staff are really scared. Covid-19 feels very close. There are so many patients being treated with Covid-19, or who have developed it. People are going home scared to hug their kids in case they give them the virus.

There isn't enough eye protection. People are trying to source it from anywhere they can because the government isn't providing it.

These people know PPE is life-saving equipment. They will not waste it. But it is health staff who are the most "precious resource" the NHS has. They are furious about this government lecturing NHS workers about PPE being a "precious resource" when they are asking health workers to risk their lives every day because of lack of it.

An NHS catering worker

NHS nurse: we're not wasting PPE - the Tories don't value us

An NHS nurse

Tory health secretary Matt Hancock is blundering from one calamity to the next. It's a disgrace that he accuses us of wasting personal protective equipment (PPE).

Myself and everyone working in the NHS have been overwhelmed by the incredible support from the public. The Thursday community clap for key workers brings tears to the eyes of overstretched staff.

In contrast, the Tories are skimping on vital equipment and showing what they value: money, not frontline staff and the general public.

"There's enough PPE to go round," says Hancock, "but only if it's used in line with our guidance. We need everyone to treat PPE like the precious resource that it is. That means only using it when there's a clinical need, and not using more than is needed." This has sparked outrage.

The guidelines are fraught with mixed messaging. The national message to NHS trusts about PPE seems to change daily. In my trust, we've gone from PPE to be worn only if the patient has confirmed Covid-19, to facemask and gown for any patients suspected of Covid-19, to wearing PPE at all times.

And we are still unhappy with the guidelines for looking after confirmed Covid-19 patients. It ought to be full covering from head to toe. Instead, we're told only to use eye, mouth and hand protection plus a gown. There's a genuine worry the virus will be on exposed parts.

What's more, my trust is yet to face the spike of positive cases other areas have had - but PPE here is already sparse.

Trust the workers

It's positive that the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) has issued its own PPE guidelines. Other unions should also issue guidelines. The question we have to ask is: who should we trust on PPE?

The Tories in Westminster who have attacked the NHS for a decade or more? Or the workers on the frontline doing the job itself? A central demand for trade unionists should be independent workers' control of PPE guidelines, and oversight of PPE production and distribution.

The heart-breaking death toll of NHS staff and other key workers rises almost daily. We get reports from across the NHS of workers putting themselves at risk, wearing home-made or substandard PPE, as they care for critically ill patients. It's a national scandal.

NHS workers' caring and self-sacrificing nature is being exploited by the capitalists and their politicians. We routinely refuse breaks and work unpaid overtime to meet the huge pressures their cuts and privatisation have put on the health service.



photo by Ascalon Studios/CC

Now we're pressured into working despite unsafe PPE levels. Workers' lives are on the line! Even the traditionally conservative RCN has instructed members that they should refuse to work if the correct PPE continues to be unavailable.

It's NHS staff who are the most precious of all our resources. Every single worker should be entitled to every ounce of the very best PPE.

The current crisis highlights the importance of the NHS. It's clear the Tories and big business cannot be left in charge of it. We need a mass campaign led by the trade unions and NHS workers, drawing in the wider community.

We must demand the reversal of all cuts and renationalisation of every privatised service in the health system. Nationalise the big pharmaceuticals and medical suppliers too,

to end their parasitic leeching off the NHS.

Give all NHS workers the living pay rise we deserve. Scrap student debt, and implement free training with living grants for all.

And fight for democratic workers' control and management of the health service. NHS workers and service users should make the decisions in the NHS.

The bosses and their politicians see good health as a privilege, not a right. Ever since its inception, the capitalists have attacked the NHS as a luxury capitalism can't afford.

The only way to guarantee a fully resourced NHS for the future is to take the capitalists out of power for good. A democratically planned socialist economy would organise resources for the needs of society, not the profits of the bosses.

Passport workers forced back to offices as Home Office shirks its duty of care



photo Neil Turner/CC

PCS shop steward

I work for the civil service and am a member and rep of the PCS trade union. Like many of my colleagues, I was shocked and appalled at the Home Office's decision to call workers at passport offices back into the workplace after a three week hiatus due to concerns over Covid-19.

This move is contradictory to official government guidance which advises people to stay at home and avoid all non-essential travel, and it will understandably worry and anger many Passport Office workers.

It is completely contradictory to the department's duty of care to its workers. It also contradicts the department's earlier approach. This was to close all offices for three weeks, after the government, already dragging its heels, announced stricter conditions for tackling the spread of the virus on 23 March.

What has changed since then? The amount of Covid-19 cases reported in the UK has increased on a daily basis and, tragically, so has the number of people who have died. In fact, the government and health professionals still can't say when the peak of the outbreak will arrive! So what is the justification for forcing workers back to offices now?

Shockingly, the Home Office has reportedly tried to justify this move

by stating that 80% of the population will contract Covid-19 anyway, and that "we cannot hide away from it forever". They also claimed: "You are no more at risk at the workplace as you would be at home or at the supermarket."

It is true that passports cannot be issued from home due to staff not being issued with laptops and other equipment, as has been the case in other government departments, and because the software required it cannot be put onto personal devices at present.

But why should workers pay for this? Many of them are on or just above minimum wage and are being told to risk their lives and the lives of loved ones they live with.

It is also hardly essential work, with people currently unable to go on holiday or business trips abroad due to the crisis. The only alleged essential work involved would be the issuing of passports to people who need them for purposes such as claiming benefits.

But according to PCS members in the Department for Work and Pensions, it isn't true that passports are required for this. If it were the case, then the department should put in place very limited cover, only asking workers who aren't vulnerable, don't live with anyone who is vulnerable, and are showing no symptoms, to come into the

office.

Even under these circumstances, other health issues should be taken into consideration, such as mental health, and nobody should be forced to return to work or face disciplinary action.

Moreover, why can't the department pay to have laptops with the required software on them sent to workers' homes and avoid anybody having to risk going into the office?

Equally worrying has been general secretary of the PCS Mark Serwotka's approach to the Covid-19 crisis. While Serwotka has correctly described the Home Office approach as "cavalier" and condemned the move, he has done so in words only, asking that offices are closed during the crisis.

His approach has been to let the bosses off the hook, effectively suspending negotiations over pay, office closures and other issues. As well as standing up for members' health and safety, and for a maximum number of workers to be able to work from home, Serwotka should not falter but push for all PCS policies!

For full resourcing of departments, the stopping of permanent office closures and a 10% pay rise for all. It is the underfunding of public services that has exacerbated the problems in tackling the coronavirus crisis.

Collectively demanding safe warehouse working conditions

Connor O'Farrell
Warehouse worker and Usdaw union member

In my workplace, the worry of deteriorating safety is becoming constant - and it is well-founded.

First, a long-standing worker was confirmed with Covid-19, and then a trainer who had close up contact with many workers during a recruitment drive by the employer. But with rotas of seven days in a row at least once a month, and the majority of union reps self-isolating, worrying is not enough.

In order to cut across the artificial divide of old vs new, and contracted workers vs agency, we are trying to co-ordinate a potentially depot-wide grievance campaign to include demands such as the sterilisation of all equipment, the opening up of all unused conference rooms to shop

floor workers on breaks to aid social distancing, and for emergency pay to be maintained due to the vital nature of this line of work.

Individual grievances will be treated as just that by management. So, through the use of a mailing list, a programme, patience, and the understanding that we are the union, answerable only to the workers, we can raise their sights to fight back collectively.

So far, two workers have joined the Socialist Party, with more regularly reading the Socialist.

Working-class lives are being sent over the top for profit and this cannot continue. The vaccine for capitalism is socialism.



Ushaw shop workers' union activists meet via Zoom

Iain Dalton
Socialist Party Ushaw caucus convenor

Following weekly virtual meetings of Socialist Party members in Ushaw the shop workers' union to discuss the rapidly changing situation in retail, and producing several special issues of our bulletin, the Activist, we decided to hold a virtual public meeting on 11 April to take these discussions to a wider audience.

Ryan Aldred, Plymouth and District Ushaw branch secretary, introduced the meeting, highlighting some of the key issues from the retail workers' charter drawn up and published in the Activist.

Ryan commented that many workers in 'non-essential' retail will be worried about how long their companies can survive, with Debenhams being one of the big names going into administration. He highlighted how Ushaw should be championing the demand it adopted after the collapse of BHS, that such companies should be brought into public ownership to save jobs.

Ushaw President, Amy Murphy spoke about the varying levels to which local supermarket management have implemented social distancing policy. While some stores are adhering to all measures, and letting only a limited number of people into the store, Amy reported being contacted earlier that day by Tesco workers in a store where the manager had decided to let into the

store as many people as possible to boost his sales over Easter.

Amy also reported that Tesco management has tried to bring in screens between checkouts to enable stores to bring all checkouts online, rather than just every other checkout. In her store, agreements have been made jointly with management to stick to just opening every other checkout, due to workers feeling that if screens were installed they would be less than two metres away from each other.

It will be important for Ushaw members and reps to be vigilant that safety measures aren't loosened prematurely.

No going back

The meeting was attended by workers from Tesco, Sainsbury, Morrisons, Co-op and B&M Bargains among others. Several people commented on the improved sick pay and hazard pay that companies had been forced to concede, but also stressed the need to ensure we don't go back to the way it was once this emergency is over.

In concluding, Ryan stressed the need to reach out to workers and draw them into the union and help them organise.

His branch will be holding an on-line meeting in the next few weeks to do this, and he urged attendees to encourage their branches to do the same, so we can discuss the new issues facing retail workers in this crisis.

Unite the Union opposes all cuts to domestic violence services

Jon Dale
Secretary, Unite union EM/NG32 Nottinghamshire Health branch (personal capacity)

Tension is growing in many locked-down homes. It's no surprise domestic violence is increasing too. Calls to Refuge's helpline, the domestic abuse charity, are up 120% since the lockdown began.

The Respect helpline website, which gives confidential advice to perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse, saw a 125% increase in the week beginning 30 March.

Services for women and children fleeing domestic violence have been slashed. Since 2010 almost a quarter of the funding for council services have been cut - almost half in some areas.

Over a six-month period in 2018 1,000 women and children were turned away from refuges due to lack of funding.

Domestic violence is also a workplace issue. Victims may have anxiety, affecting their performance at work, higher sickness absence and experience stalking. Employers need

policies to support workers - not push them through standard capability or sickness absence procedures.

Women's Lives Matter was set up in 2018 by campaigners from women's refuges fighting cuts by local councils and other activists, including Socialist Party members. It produced a model motion for trade unions. This calls for union campaigns to oppose all cuts to domestic violence services, linked to the fight for decent jobs and pay, council homes and public services for all.

The motion also calls on unions to work with campaigners and supportive local councillors to hold people's budget meetings to produce a no-cuts budget which is necessary to prevent the destruction of domestic violence services and the lives they protect.

Unite, like many other unions, had a policy on domestic violence which contains many good points. However, it was written ten years ago and did not reflect a decade of massive cuts from government, passed on by local councils.

In March last year, Unite Nottinghamshire Health Service branch discussed the Women's Lives Matters motion. The branch added an

amendment that men can also be victims of domestic abuse, and need to be able to access appropriate services.

The motion was sent to the East Midlands regional committee which passed it to Unite's executive council. They referred it back to the regional committee saying it should also include the need for appropriate agreements to be negotiated in the workplace.

After the motion was sent back to the branch we amended it and sent it back to the regional committee, which then passed it back to the executive council. Twelve months after the first discussion at Nottinghamshire Health Branch this is now Unite's national policy!

Where domestic abuse services are being cut by councils, campaigners should approach Unite for support. Local councillors should refuse to implement any further cuts and demand the money needed for these vital services from the government, as part of a campaign to protect all public services.

As the Covid-19 crisis is showing, years of cuts have left services unable to cope with our needs.
■ See also page 11



Postal workers walk out

Postal workers in Didcot walked out on 8 April after their depot was not cleaned when a member of staff contracted Covid-19.

The Royal Mail workers followed guidance by their union the CWU after only the workers' delivery van was cleaned and not the whole building. The workers returned to work two days later after the company was forced to clean the building.

CWU rep at the depot, Steve Gill, said: "The van he used needed cleaning which was done by a cleaning company. But our building was only originally cleaned by a man with a rag and a spray bottle."

Over the last two weeks, staff at eight Royal Mail sites have walked out over safety concerns.

photo JamesZ_Flickr/CC



photo Jaggerty/CC



Holland and Barrett workers' petition

High street chain Holland and Barrett has kept its shops open during the coronavirus crisis, but workers are campaigning for them to shut, arguing their health is at risk.

The 'alternative health' shop has 750 UK stores and claims to be an essential retailer because its products cater for people with special dietary needs. But staff have set up a petition, demanding management close stores over safety concerns. They argue that what the chain sells is not essential, unlike supermarkets or pharmacies. But they also warn that most stores are too small to be safe, with no room for social-distancing.

■ Sign the petition at change.org search 'Close Holland and Barrett Stores'



photo Donald Trung/CC

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LONDON TRANSPORT WORKERS FIGHTING PRIVATE COMPANIES AND TFL TO SECURE HEALTH AND SAFETY

A life and death battle on the buses

At the time of writing, 21 transport workers in London have died from coronavirus, 15 of them bus drivers. London bus driver and Socialist Party member **Moe** describes how he and his fellow drivers have battled with the private bus companies and Transport for London to secure proper protection.

Transport for London (TfL - an arm of the Greater London Authority under the jurisdiction of London Labour Mayor, Sadiq Khan) and some bus operators met at the start of the crisis. Only a few agreed to pay drivers company sick pay from day one. Other operators agreed only Statutory Sick Pay. Khan told the press there was "no risk" of catching coronavirus on the tube.

When Boris announced the belated lockdown bus drivers realised that the threat was real. Locally at depots, drivers stopped hand-shaking, but there were no hand sanitisers. Bus depots ordered sanitisers and soap, but kept running out.

Services were put onto weekend services on weekdays; this meant longer hours and shorter breaks. Bus drivers are unable to find somewhere to eat, often starving for 12 hours. We return home to a family frightened of the disease.

The interests of the bus drivers were not a priority, companies were more concerned about long-term financial loss. Health and safety reps were not released to allow inspections, auditing and reporting; instead the companies forced them to drive a bus. Through our campaigning, this demand has now been won.

Some bus drivers were abroad when the lockdown came into effect. These drivers are stranded without pay. None of the companies have made any effort to ensure their wages and jobs are protected; instead, they have forced annual holidays and unpaid leave on them.

Drivers who already have medical conditions and fall under the category of 'high risk' are being forced to return to work. They are meant to take 12 weeks off shielding, but bus companies have refused to pay company sick pay.

The Mirror exposed that one driver,



“ Drivers who already have medical conditions and fall under the category of 'high risk' and 'vulnerable' are being forced to return to work

who subsequently died, was told by his company he would lose pay if he didn't work. We have now finally won company sick pay from day one.

After two weeks, we started to hear about the rising number of deaths of drivers around London. One death was too many, and drivers started to complain to management and their union leaders, and demand protection.

More drivers joined the 'Bus Drivers in London' Facebook group of Unite union activists. We are now close to 4,000 members, that's nearly 20% of drivers in London.

Drivers demanded deep cleaning of the cabs. We were worried about the speaker holes in the assault screen, and took our own measures, starting to Clingfilm over the holes to prevent the virus coming through.

As a result of drivers posting this on social media, it came to public attention and exposed the companies' failure to act promptly. Unite demanded Perspex film be fitted, and this happened.

Drivers were worried about passengers sitting close to or standing adjacent to the driver. They started to tape off the front area.

However, in one company management continued their bullying and

put a notice out threatening disciplinary action. But this didn't work because of pressure from workers and the notice was taken down. TfL then supported the union members' demands to cordon off the seats near to the driver.

When the number of driver deaths from Covid-19 reached five, Unite leaders came under pressure to report them. Sadiq Khan had to answer to the public.

Many drivers and bereaved family members appeared on the news. NHS workers gave messages and videos of mutual support and solidarity. Three weeks after the lockdown, hand sanitiser was deployed.

Safety screens

The mayor said that an enhanced cleaning regime and Perspex film were in place, but the drivers didn't trust management or Khan because the bus cabs were still dirty. Drivers were cleaning them themselves, and some were sealing the front door. Courageous acts were shared on social media among drivers - now it was nine drivers who had passed away.

Companies with the most vulnerable and high-risk drivers. In other companies, drivers are saying: "Do

our colleagues have to die before furloughing agreements are signed off?"

Some drivers are saying that because of the poor working conditions the number of drivers that fall into the 'increased risk' category is high, and bus companies do not wish this fact to be exposed.

As a result of our campaigning, one depot is trialling sealing off the front doors. But drivers across London were outraged that it was only one, and continue to demand that front doors be sealed off. Some drivers have taken matters into their own hands to protect themselves.

In the depot, management aren't adhering to social distancing; markings are still not being drawn despite drivers complaining of this.

Drivers still have not been provided with masks, and Sadiq Khan is defending WHO and PHE guidance that there is 'no evidence' of the need for protection. But a driver at the wheel, when they sneeze, won't be able to stop droplets going everywhere because he must remain in control of the bus.

Many drivers are now demanding buses are taken off the roads until it is safe. They don't trust their employers and Khan to protect them. Some drivers are already refusing to attend

work on the grounds of safety.

The Socialist Party has always argued that buses be publicly owned with workers' democratic control. This pandemic has exposed how the capitalist system exploits bus workers, including cleaners, engineers and local supervisors.

There is rage and anger among bus workers, and Unite should lead the way and fight for its members for safety now, and to bring buses back into public ownership.

We also need to remove outsourced cleaning contractors and bring the workers back in-house in a publicly owned industry with workers democratic control and management.

We demand:

- Deep cleaning
- PPE
- Seal the front doors
- Full pay

If these measures are not put in place, then drivers will conclude they have no choice but to declare it is unsafe to take the buses out.

An urgent review must be conducted, involving trade unions and drivers, to establish the level of service necessary and safer alternatives to transport NHS and other essential workers.

The fight for a safe underground service

Jared Wood
RMT national executive committee (personal capacity)

Most RMT (Rail, Maritime and Transport union) members on London Underground want to keep an emergency service running for essential workers. The vast majority of tube workers remain at work.

The RMT told London Underground and London Mayor Sadiq Khan, that to be able to achieve a reliable emergency service our members must be able to maintain social distancing, and work in such ways that minimise the risk of infection.

At a senior level, many assurances have been given, and the service level has been massively reduced to allow for fewer staff in work at any given location.

But problems persist, caused by a failure of senior management to take all necessary action, and by a layer of middle managers who cannot understand that now is not the time to pursue petty battles and bully staff.

Of all these issues, the refusal of London Underground (LUL) to provide masks is likely to become an issue that could seriously impact on running the tube.

Like their TfL masters, the Underground's managers insist that Public Health England (PHE) does not recommend using masks. But the PHE advice is based on an assumption of social distancing.

RMT members on the tube have to perform roles where this is just not possible. Members working at (still) busy stations cannot always maintain two-metre distance from the public,

nor can train drivers dealing with an incident on a train.

Maintenance staff need to carry out two-person lifts and share some equipment. Incredibly, some managers still instruct our members to leave control rooms and stand out in the public areas for the sheer hell of it. Management just do not engage with unions around this issue, preferring to repeat PHE advice to people who are able to maintain distancing at all times.

The biggest problems occur during the new, earlier, rush hour. The morning peak has moved forwards to about 6.30 to 7.30am, and RMT members report that the bulk of it is comprised of construction workers.

Non-essential work

No blame should be attached to these workers, who will not be paid if they don't go to work. Instead, the government must take responsibility for this.

All non-essential construction must be stopped, and the wages of all construction workers, including the self-employed, must be guaranteed by the government.

London Underground also has to do more to protect people who are vulnerable and at increased risk of serious illness, should they be infected with coronavirus. It is common for private sector employers who are furloughing part of their workforces to prioritise furloughing vulnerable workers.

Yet London Underground persists in pressuring some vulnerable staff to keep working in high-risk environments.

A major concern of many members

is the threat of taking the virus home. London Underground's solution to this is to offer five days special leave. What use is that?

RMT advice to members is clear. If asked to do something unsafe or work in an environment where they cannot maintain social distancing as recommended by PHE, members must exercise their right, under law, to be removed from danger.

Where members have done this, management response has usually been to address the concerns. Of course, we shouldn't have to force the issue to get basic PHE advice adhered to by employers.

Refusals to work could increase rapidly if LUL does not do more to avoid unnecessary exposure of our members to risk.

Members are rightly proud of the service they continue to provide. They want to be able to transport NHS staff, care workers, other transport workers and all genuinely key workers, as safely as possible.

But they don't want to keep the construction industry going to protect the profits of multinational developers and their City backers. The least they expect, and should expect, is for their bosses to do everything possible to minimise risk.

- Provide PPE now
- Close down all non-essential construction sites
- Effective measures to protect all vulnerable staff or those who live with vulnerable people
- Take action against managers who refuse to implement social distancing
- For a coordinated trade union oversight of safety on TfL services



We need socialists in City Hall



London Mayor Sadiq Khan has shown himself to be a loyal servant of big business interests photo Paul Mattsson

Nancy Taaffe
Waltham Forest Socialist Party

London is the epicentre of the UK coronavirus crisis. It's a label none of us want. The city has become a scary and dangerous place, especially if you're one of the 'key workers' - who yesterday weren't worthy of a pay rise or job security, but are now pushed onto the frontline without adequate protection but told they're 'heroes'.

One nurse summed it up: "Please don't call me a hero, I'm being martyred against my will."

This statement accurately reflects the growing lack of faith in establishment leaders who have acted too late and put the interests of business and the City of London finance hub before the interests of the working class. Labour London Mayor Sadiq Khan is included in this.

The mayor's office should have started a programme to confront the virus after Christmas. A socialist mayor would have advocated this. We could have had the public information campaign straight out of the traps.

A socialist plan for London would have sourced PPE in a coordinated way with the rest of the country.

We could have switched the light industrial units that surround outer London to making PPE and other socially useful products. This would have absorbed those without work.

A socialist plan would have made the ventilators, fired up a testing programme and had the city on a war-footing to fight the first battle against the virus. The whole country needed it not to spread out from

London. We needed a decisive, confidence-inspiring, planned approach - a socialist approach.

Instead, the word 'chaotic' doesn't even come close to describing what's happened. We were told to 'use the tubes but watch where you put your hands'.

When the lockdown began, workers had to keep working in the construction industry because companies wanted to keep making profits. The transport network was reduced to a limited service, so workers are travelling in even more cramped conditions.

Sadiq Khan, the London mayor, has been about as useful as a Tory prime minister. He has been invited to Cobra meetings. But Khan has never confronted the passivity of the government.

In the face of impending economic catastrophe he says: "Cities around the world need to pull together". By this he means pulling together with his big business counterparts, not mobilising an almighty fight to ensure the working class does not pay further for the crisis.

Khan is a Blairite defender of free-market economics, who previously stated he wanted more billionaires in London, along with opposing a Tory tax on the likes of Amazon and Google - such a tax could have bought us mountains of PPE.

We will not forgive, and we will not forget the unnecessary loss of life. We will fight all we can against the attempts to make workers' pay for the economic crisis.

That should include a political challenge in the postponed London Assembly and mayoral elections next year. Let's fight to get socialists into City Hall.

Fight back against the corona propaganda war

James Ivens

The BBC must be for the government," said its founder Lord Reith during the 1926 general strike. That has certainly been the case during the coronavirus pandemic.

In fact, the BBC might as well have rebranded itself the 'Boris Broadcasting Corporation'. For the most part, it has simply amplified the ever-receding Tory guarantees on tests, ventilators, income and so on, without question.

Propaganda - in the sense of distorting public information to defend power - is not just about blunt lies or diversions. In a propaganda war, as in a real war, sometimes it is necessary to make a tactical retreat. So propaganda can also be about delaying the spread of an inevitable truth, to attempt to release it in a safer way for the ruling class - 'flattening the curve' of public anger.

Information is sometimes omitted outright. More often it's late, or structured to minimise the most damaging news, 'burying the lead'. And the BBC's trademark sobriety of tone masks the dishonesty of its arguments.

Of course, there hasn't been a total suppression of the facts. That would risk undermining the BBC's authority with mass audiences. Newsnight, for example, has excoriated ministers at times during the crisis over problems like lack of PPE

and testing.

However, Newsnight caters to a small core of political viewers. Axed rival Victoria Derbyshire gave figures of 297,000 for an episode of Newsnight before the crisis. BBC News at Six was pulling in around 15 times that, to say nothing of the website and social media.

For mass consumption, however, we have little criticism of the government, medical staff reduced to tears on the news, and bed-ridden patients gasping for breath - all saying: stay at home.

Individual responsibility

The Socialist Party supports social distancing and other measures to control the outbreak, although the government's own planning requires over five million workers to continue going to their physical workplaces. But the capitalist media emphasis attempts to shift all responsibility onto the individual - as a deflection from the bigger issues.

It is lack of PPE, mass testing, full-income support, unprofitable preparation, and decisive early action that is leading to unnecessary deaths of patients and frontline workers. It is the consequence of a government and a system that put profit above health.

Naturally, anxiety for information during an emergency plus forced time at home is swelling media consumption. There's now more peak-hours viewing than there was over Christmas, according to the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board.

News is the main beneficiary. In the third week of March, BBC1's News at Six pulled in 7.8 million viewers, a 74% increase on 2019.

For now, the growing distrust of the media under crisis-ridden capitalism seems to have gone into temporary reverse. Furloughed workers are isolated from collective discussion in their workplace, subjected to individual bombardment by the mass media.

It is completely wrong, therefore, that some trade unions have suspended meetings or declared 'partnership' with the employers and the state. Workplace organising and electronic union meetings must go ahead to cut across the government propaganda, and to organise against the attacks on workers' health, safety and income.

The Socialist has continued production to counter the lack of information and misinformation. We have explained from day one that cuts and privatisation had left Britain unprepared, and the Tories' emergency measures are caught between defending public health or private profit. We give the other side - the truth of what's happening on the ground, and socialist proposals to resolve it.

Only democratic working-class control of the state and the mass media could create the conditions for a genuine exchange of information and ideas. To build towards that, the workers' movement must maintain and extend its own independent organisations and media.



Fake news 'fact-checking' exposed

The government has announced a crackdown on fake news. Damaging misinformation should be challenged. But who decides what's fake? The Tory party? Big business? Their unelected friends at the top of state institutions?

Facebook censored a broadcast by the Committee for a Workers' International, the world socialist organisation which includes the Socialist Party, which criticised capitalism's response to the pandemic. But the 'neutral' BBC can peddle government fabrications to millions without hindrance.

Let's take an example. The BBC's authoritative-sounding 'Reality Check' web article on coronavirus testing is silently rewritten as the situation develops, rather than producing a new article for the record each time. 'Reality' is malleable, it would seem.

On 19 March, hollow government promises about testing were the lead. Under them were red-herring pronouncements about finite resources and prioritisation, meant to neutralise expert comments (included for 'balance') warning that more testing was necessary.

Then, buried right at the end, the fact that South Korea was testing more than twice as many by the time it had the same number of confirmed cases. But "it is very hard to know how much of that is a genuinely larger outbreak, and how much is down to more cases

being picked up through testing." Clearly, more testing would have found more infections! The UK response was therefore substantially behind the curve. This implicit condemnation was present in the 'Reality Check' article during the early hours of 19 March. By 2.11pm the same day, it had been edited out.

On 30 March, questionable pledges to ramp up testing were still the lead. But the article finally had to acknowledge that "the UK is lagging behind comparable countries like Italy, Germany and South Korea." This was days after growing sections of the private capitalist press had begun criticising the government.

Coincidentally, these very mild BBC criticisms appeared the day before senior minister Michael Gove admitted that testing was insufficient. The BBC also belatedly whispered some criticisms of the Tories' atrocious treatment of the self-employed just before the official position changed.

This is a case study, but the approach is general. Even after the government acknowledges a blunder, the BBC still takes some days to present the full force of criticisms which have existed for days or weeks.

Indeed, the whole notion of supposedly 'neutral' fact-checking is being exposed as nonsense. All media has to make value judgements of one sort or another, and does so according to definite interests.

Self-declared arbiters, more often than not, are just concealed defenders of the capitalist establishment. Support the open defenders of the working class: subscribe to the Socialist!

Plymouth students discuss rent strike

Sami Vickery
Plymouth College of Art student and Old Dairy tenant

The Old Dairy is private rented accommodation provided by Host to students in the University of Plymouth and Plymouth College of Art.

It is one of the few Plymouth student-let buildings that has yet to put into place measures to assist students during these special circumstances, such as rent discounts or early cancellation of our tenancy agreements.

Rather than staying in large blocks of shared flats, a lot of students have opted to return to our families, to ensure we're adhering to social-distancing recommendations. We are unhappy that we are still required to pay in full for accommodation when our college has shut.

We're even expected to pay utilities as part of our rent, utilities that simply aren't being used since many of us are not present in our flats. Host has told us that no action will be taken and no changes will be made to tenant contracts.

Students have collected over 400 signatories in less than a week, to allow students to exit their contracts early. Host has repeatedly rejected any requests for early terminations.

It will only do so if you receive a letter from your GP to exempt you from the tenancy agreement. This further highlights how poorly this is being handled.

Host opts to take away precious time from doctors, to settle petty disputes. This proves it has chosen money over morals.

Old Dairy students are discussing the possibility of a rent strike.

Colleges and universities have shut. Does the government seriously expect students to pay for our rent in full, when many of us have lost jobs or are on reduced pay?

Surely it's reasonable to not pay for accommodation we're not using?

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photo Senior Airman Rusty Frank/CC

Lockdown increases domestic violence calls Tory money a drop in the ocean

Amy Cousens
Women's Lives Matter

Home secretary Priti Patel, has announced a 'you are not alone' campaign to support domestic violence victims who are more at risk than ever under lockdown. The primary goal, she said, is to 'get perpetrators out' of family homes.

The government is looking into providing alternative accommodation. But what accommodation is she thinking of? The Conservatives have cut refuges to the bone in the last ten years.

The UK has around 4,000 refuge beds. Last year there were 19,000 referrals and a rejection rate of around 60%. Patel has announced a £2 million boost to services to help to deal with the increase in referrals under lockdown, but this will be going toward helplines and online support.

This is after the government stopped funding the national Women's Aid Helpline and gave the contract to the charity Refuge,

presumably as they were the lower bidding contract, although that is still unclear.

Let us say for argument's sake the 'extra' funds will be going toward accommodation. A small to medium refuge housing around 10-12 women and their kids would need approximately £200,000 a year to run - to support women financially, physically, and emotionally.

So £2 million would provide around 100-120 more beds nationally, or 200-240 if over a six-month period. Say a refuge is cutting it fine and only needs £50,000 to open up ten more beds over a six-month temporary period - the figure would rise to 400-480 more bed spaces.

We are still not getting anywhere close to the predicted 15,000 bed shortfall - a shortfall that does not take into account the huge increase in victims needing to flee under lockdown (see p 7).

It does beg the question, what planet is Patel living on? This money is given in the same breath as tax breaks are being handed to individ-

ual big businesses alone. Tesco, a big business swamped in cash, dealt out £900 million to its shareholders in the midst of the lockdown because 'it didn't need the surplus cash.' This was days after being handed £585 million in a tax break. It is clear that the planet Patel is living on is one in which the rich are handed a blank cheque and ordinary people are left with the crumbs.

There's no doubt that the government has decided to act, even on this minute level, due to campaigns like Women's Lives Matter putting the pressure on them to do so. But we need much more. As an emergency measure, local councils should use their powers to take over empty properties to house women fleeing domestic violence, and demand extra resources from national government.

Women's Lives Matter Campaign, along with the Socialist Party, will be fighting for that as well as continuing to campaign even harder for the funds that are necessary long term to keep women safe.



Just part of the Socialist Party northern region meeting



West London Socialist Party's money jar

Join an online Socialist Party meeting during lockdown

> Find a meeting near you socialistparty.org.uk/whatson.

■ South East London: Working-class fighters striding forward

I attended a fantastic meeting of South East London Socialist Party on 8 April - 18 attended, maybe more, can't always tell on iPad.

But much more importantly, it was full of working-class fighters - underground, buses, education, housing, and more, plus trade union organisers, experienced socialists, and a number of new people.

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

■ West London: Instead of rooms, we are paying for Zooms

We are meeting virtually, but still have costs. Instead of paying for rooms we are paying for Zooms!

We are producing the Socialist Party Workers' Charter and the Socialist newspaper - these say what we need to fight for and how workers can get organised.

So I've started a room money jar to pay into (see above). If you have read our newspaper or our website and want to help us keep doing going during the coronavirus crisis, visit socialistparty.org.uk/donate.

Mark Best

■ Swansea: Valuable donations to keep Socialist Party going and our message heard

25 members at the Socialist Party branch meeting on 9 April - an interesting discussion on the global economic situation. We had an update on the trade union response to the virus, and reports of workers taking action.

The financial appeal garnered £820. And the people there raised their membership subs by £77, which will be valuable

to keep our party going and our messages being heard.

A new member joined the weekend before, and more want to do the same in this difficult period.

Gareth Bromhall

■ North East: We are the working class

The Socialist Party virtual meeting on 9 April was phenomenal. Our meeting underlined how the Socialist Party is rooted in the working class.

Thirty attended, including NHS workers, carers, retail, construction, and IT. A number are shop stewards in their workplaces.

Five people have just joined the Socialist Party. Our Socialist Party members are leading struggles now on health and safety issues in the workplaces and preparing for future battles.

Elaine Brunskill

■ Northampton: Using technology to keep going

I came away from my Socialist Party branch feeling infinitely more positive and inspired by everyone in attendance. I'm so glad we have the technology to be able to continue meeting and building throughout this crisis. Forward to socialism!

Jac

■ Nottingham: 'Packed!'

Nottingham Socialist Party had 51 at our Zoom public meeting on 6 April.

Clare Wilkins

■ Leicester: Workplace issues

We had a very good Socialist Party meeting - some really helpful discussion on workplace issues in these crazy coronavirus times.

Heather Rawling



Keir Starmer, Labour's new right-wing leader, has backed up the government and patronised overworked and underpaid NHS staff, saying they should be 'rewarded' with medals



photo DFID/CC



We need PPE and tests not medals and lies

I honestly can't believe this. Health professionals are dying because there's no testing and a lack of PPE, and Keir Starmer wants to give out medals! Give me strength!

I also hate it when politicians roll their sleeves up like they're doing work - he's just visiting a hospital not volunteering.

Why hasn't he demanded the government use their emergency powers to take over textile and

clothing companies to speed up the manufacture of gowns, masks and other protective clothing?

Why hasn't he demanded the government use its emergency powers to take over all the labs and research facilities, private or otherwise to ramp up the number of tests that can be carried out?

Why hasn't he demanded the government use its emergency powers to requisition manufacturers

to produce ventilators instead of watch them mess about to see what percentage of the cartel they will get?

He's not a Labour leader, he's posturing. The worst thing you can do in a crisis where over 10,000 people have lost their lives.

We need the trade unions to demand the above from a government that comes on telly every day at 5pm to lie about how good they are! If the union leaders don't there are plenty of socialists out there willing to do just that!

Hugo Pierre
Unison national executive committee (personal capacity)

Coronavirus crisis special appeal

DONATE TODAY

visit socialistparty.org.uk/donate or call 020 8988 8777 or make cheques payable to Socialist Party, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD. And indicate its for the special appeal



The Socialist Party and socialist ideas are growing

■ Stoke: Labour's no longer for me

I've been reading comments on political sites and been unsure if I should stay in Labour.

Thinking it's not for me now, but then get swayed into thinking will it be better than the Tories and we

need to stick together.

However, that live talk - 'the case for socialist planning' with Socialist Party general secretary Hannah Sell - determined that my gut was right and I've joined the Socialist Party.

A new Socialist Party member in Stoke

■ Search 'Socialist Party' on Facebook to watch our talks during the lockdown



■ Nottingham: Workers' bulletin

A worker in my local Co-op is putting the Activist bulletin (see left) - written by Socialist Party members in shop workers' union members in shop workers' union Usdaw - in their staff room. Email usdawactivist@gmail.com for copies.
Clare Wilkins

Going viral

Socialist comments and letters on the corona 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.

■ PPE: No more diversions

Every time Matt Hancock is asked about PPE, or the lack of it, or healthcare workers deaths, he always brings it back to staying in.

The lack of PPE is killing people now, not youths sitting in the park. It's a really crude diversionary tactic.

They had four years to prepare. They were told four years ago to stockpile PPE. They never.

They could have initiated a slow lockdown from January. They never.

It is not people going out now that has made this crisis so tragic, it's what was done before. And they don't want us to think about that.

Nancy Taaffe
Waltham Forest, London

■ PPE: Collective action needed

The Royal College of Nurses (RCN) says nurses should refuse to treat coronavirus patients, "as a last resort", if they don't have PPE.

This is just not good enough - leaving every nurse and NHS worker to individually refuse to work without proper safety.

The RCN and Unison should be organising action collectively until every NHS worker has the equipment they need to keep themselves and us safe.

Ross Saunders
Cardiff

■ Bristol councillors give themselves pay rise for sacking workers

Bristol councillors voted unanimously on 17 March to accept an independent remuneration panel's recommendation and award themselves, and the Labour Bristol mayor, eye-watering increases in expenses and pay.

This was just days before many workers learned that they would be made redundant, furloughed, or have their wages slashed for the duration of the Covid-19 emergency.

Elections scheduled for May have been postponed until 2021. Several of these greedy councillors might not be re-elected or decide to stand again.

Rather than displaying the merest shred of understanding, they decided not to postpone their increases until then, but to stuff their bank accounts now.

According to local press, the 'debate' took all of 37 seconds. Not one voice piped up to at least question the insensitivity of the timing.

This outrageous action will not be forgotten by Bristolians. The Socialist Party will publicise it widely and stand for election across the city next year, including going head to head against incumbent mayor, Marvin Rees.

To add salt to the wound, the council continues to demand that everyone pay their council tax, even though for people who pay through their local post office, this option is no longer possible.

Robin Clapp
Bristol

■ Refused Universal Credit from my hospital bed

After being furloughed, I was advised to claim Universal Credit (UC) by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which I did. I informed DWP that I was in hospital with Covid-19.

They then sent a note requesting half a ton of info, which was obviously at home. I gave them a piece of my mind, but their lack of humanity is literally breathtaking.

This awful approach must be made public. The PCS union needs to know what is happening.

This is a scandal, and must be happening to others.

Steve Nally
Lambeth, London

■ Capitalism has failed, never again

This pandemic has shown that we should never trust the market to take control of our lives.

The rundown and privatisation of the NHS, even without this virus, put lives at risk. Years of austerity left the country ill-prepared.

The rich still fly private planes and demand money from the state to save them, as they sunbathe in their Carib-



photo USAF/CC

bean tax havens.

Just as workers after World War Two said 'no return to the thirties', socialists today say 'no return to austerity', because the capitalists want workers to pay for the rich's mistakes.

Some say 'wait before you criticise'. But if you don't criticise now, you are taking the side of the rich and powerful.

Sean Brogan
Devon

■ Contact tracing app? Another Tory smokescreen

The Tories are proposing a contact tracing app to battle coronavirus. This has only been effective in countries that get test results back within a couple of hours.

This is another smokescreen by the Tories - so it looks like they are doing something - instead of sorting PPE, testing and ventilators for the NHS.

Dave Moody
Bristol

■ Boris Johnson's hero

Boris Johnson is a fan of Winston Churchill. If Churchill had his way there would be no NHS.

Churchill's Tories voted against the formation of the NHS 21 times before the act was passed. Churchill believed that the NHS was a "first step to turn Britain into a National Socialist economy".

Derek McMillan
Worthing

■ Poor people

New York governor Andrew Cuomo has expressed concern that the majority of deaths from Covid-19 in the USA are poor people. "We've got to learn the lessons why" he opined.

It seems the governor isn't a keen history student. If he was, he would have known that during the devastating 1918 influenza pandemic, those living in poor neighbourhoods were much more likely to die from the virus than the wealthy.

Perhaps the lesson is: 'end poverty'?
A rocket scientist

■ Tragic NHS worker death

On 18 March Dr Abdul Mabud Chowdhury wrote to Boris Johnson. He asked him to "urgently ensure PPE for each and every NHS worker in the UK."

Three weeks later, Dr Chowdhury, aged 53, died after 15 days in hospital with Covid-19. He had told the prime minister that healthcare workers "have a human right like others to live in this world disease-free with our families and children."

Dr Chowdhury was a locum urologist at my local hospital, Homerton Hospital, in Hackney, east London. It's our only major hospital following the closure of several in the surrounding area.

The same week that Dr Chowdhury's death hit the news, my neighbourhood WhatsApp group shared an appeal from Homerton Hospital. In desperation for PPE, the hospital was asking for donations of swimming goggles, visors and

other equipment like baby monitors.

Within 24 hours local residents donated an estimated 400 items. An amazing achievement.

But how long will they last in this major hospital? And how effective will these second-hand items be compared to purpose-made PPE?

I suspect there are similar stories across Britain and the world. What an indictment this is of the failures of the rotten capitalist system and the politicians who ignored all the warnings.

Our neighbourhood WhatsApp group was started as an aid and support group, but the fear and goodwill are turning to anger. A few of us have shared articles and reports, including the amazing work by Moe, a Socialist Party member and union rep in Unite, who is forcing the issue of protection for bus drivers and cleaners (see page 8-9).

This is a political issue, not an unfortunate act of nature. We have turned the passive hand-clapping Thursday into a shout out, with slogans like "test, test, test! PPE! Keep all workers virus-free!"

People are angry and getting angrier, and we must not allow the Tories and their media to use their distraction tactics of blaming us for government failures. They never take responsibility for the failures of their rotten system.

Hillsborough - blame the fans. Grenfell - blame the tenants and the firefighters. If we are unemployed, sick, homeless - it's our fault.

Well, it's not! It's the fault and failure of a corrupt system, capitalism, that cannot provide for and protect us.

Alexis Edwards
Hackney

Sabotage – the inner workings of Labour’s political machine exposed



Unsurprisingly, as the leaked report confirms, Watson’s supporters in Labour’s bureaucracy actively conspired to remove Corbyn as leader photo Rwendland

Dave Nellist
Coventry Socialist Party and former Labour MP

A leaked internal Labour report, a mammoth 851 pages in length, has detailed internal sabotage by senior party officials of Jeremy Corbyn’s attempts to radicalise Labour policies.

The report – ‘The work of the Labour Party’s Governance and Legal Unit in relation to antisemitism, 2014–2019’ – quotes from transcripts of thousands of emails and WhatsApp discussions between Labour’s senior officials, particularly in the 2015–2018 era before the current general secretary, Jennie Formby.

The official report was drawn up, so its authors say, to provide context to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) investigation into the party’s handling of complaints of antisemitism.

It found no evidence that complaints of antisemitism were treated any differently to any other complaints, but that other work was prioritised for factional gains, such as the purge of Labour members prior to the 2015 and 2016 leadership elections.

It claims senior officers, at Labour’s head office, deliberately worked against the party’s attempts to win the 2017 general election, in

the expectation that defeat would lead to a third leadership contest and that Jeremy Corbyn could be initially replaced by Tom Watson, then deputy leader.

In particular, the report claims party finances were routed to right-wing, anti-Corbyn MPs and parliamentary candidates; with some funds being controlled through a separate office, in ‘a parallel general election campaign’ to hide their destination from Corbyn and his staff.

When the result of the 2017 election was the Tory government’s loss of majority, one senior official is quoted as saying Labour’s better than expected outcome (which would mean Corbyn was unlikely to resign) was the ‘opposite to what I had been working towards for the last couple of years’.

There are numerous communications detailed in the report between senior right-wing officers describing activists in abusive terms – for example hoping that one ‘dies in a fire’, to which another official replies ‘wish there was a petrol can emoji’.

Senior staff working directly for Jeremy Corbyn are described in pejorative and misogynistic terms. Jeremy Corbyn himself is described in June 2017 by Labour’s then head of political strategy as ‘a lying little toe rag’.

Two of the frequently quoted officials, both then at director level, now work at senior levels in Unison; one was suggested, in several media stories in February, to be a possible candidate under Sir Keir Starmer for Labour’s next general secretary!

The Socialist Party argued right from Jeremy Corbyn’s first victory as Labour leader in September 2015 that attempts to transform Labour’s previous Blairite trajectory would fail unless the composition of the Parliamentary Labour Party, and of Labour’s own internal machine, were also transformed.

Not restoring mandatory reselection for MPs left most right-wingers in place. And, as this report indicates, not acting decisively against the right-wing machine at the top of Labour’s structures meant that the Corbyn project was doomed to failure.

Keir Starmer’s election as Labour leader, together with the restoration of right wingers to leading positions, has pleased those capitalists who viewed the Corbyn era with fear, and now relish Labour being transformed back into a safe ‘second eleven’.

Labour, union, and socialist activists, must now start a discussion on the need for a new mass workers’ party with a socialist programme, and how that can be built.



Don’t blame me for coronavirus! photo Valerius Tygart

Rapacious capitalism and the spread of coronavirus

Simon Carter

Donald Trump continually refers to the coronavirus pandemic as the ‘Chinese virus’. He believes this demonisation of China plays to the isolationist, racist and xenophobic sections of his domestic support – a crucial audience as the bigoted president seeks a second term in office.

This weaponisation of the pandemic also serves his geopolitical interests as he pursues his trade war with China.

Of course, none of this racist rhetoric is preventing mainly poor Americans succumb to this deadly virus. Nor will Trump’s gamble of blaming outsiders for the coronavirus crisis in the US necessarily succeed in preventing a working-class backlash, at some stage, against his administration’s inept response – which is centred on ensuring the continuation of capitalist profit.

But Trump isn’t alone in blaming China, and Chinese practices, for the global pandemic. True, the Chinese state bureaucracy – a military police dictatorship – crucially delayed for several weeks notification of the new virus, and silenced whistleblowers in its healthcare system.

But the same charge of delaying a response can be levelled at most Western capitalist democracies – including the UK, where Johnson’s Tory government delayed testing to identify those infected and who thus could be isolated. And, as is widely reported, even now the scope of testing even healthworkers and carers remains ludicrously low.

Instead, lest we forget, Johnson and his sidekick advisor Dominic Cummings initially pursued a criminal ‘herd immunity’ strategy, which meant that by the time the lockdown and testing was belatedly introduced, the virus had firmly established itself in the population.

Whistleblowers in the NHS have also been threatened with the sack if they complain about the lack of PPE and testing on social media.

What really lies behind the relentless jibes and attacks of Western capitalist leaders and political commentators on China’s ‘lack of transparency’, is that president Xi

Jinping’s regime is now kick-starting its economy while the British, US and EU countries remain mired in lockdown. And that the Chinese political bureaucracy could emerge from the crisis far better positioned to expand its share of global markets and enhance its status.

Charge of backwardness

The other charge against China is that coronavirus started in its unhygienic food markets trading in dead and live wild animals (‘wet markets’), such as endangered Pangolins, bats, and so forth. This charge is a similar one to the emergence of Ebola virus in west Africa. That is, poor and uneducated people trading bushmeat or deriving traditional medicines from wild animals became exposed to new viruses.

The reality is more complicated. As the academic Andrew Liu recently wrote: ‘Statistics suggest the real key variable are the effects of globalisation, which have enriched the country’s (China’s) business classes. Prices for the animal (Pangolins) have climbed from \$14 a kilo in 1994 to more than \$600 today... Customers ordering wildlife often do so in order to flaunt their wealth or to celebrate a good day on the stock market, although they remain a minority: most Chinese citizens support strict limits, if not a ban, on wildlife consumption. Resurgent Pangolin consumption is thus a result of economic liberalisation in China – which the US championed – not simply of traditional culture.’

In late February, the Chinese authorities finally outlawed the sale of wild animals in food markets. Capitalism in its drive for profit ruthlessly exploits nature and the environment. Land clearances for logging and agribusiness, and by poor people driven by poverty, brings humans into contact with animals carrying reservoirs of new viruses. Global trade then ensures these diseases are swiftly circulated round the world.

In that sense, coronavirus is not ‘natural’ or the result of traditional or backward practices, but the result of rapacious capitalism; and the victims are human populations and the environment we depend on.

Lessons from history

HOW THE CATASTROPHE OF WW1 SPARKED REVOLUTION

In the third of a series of articles on ‘war, global crises and working class struggle’, **Philip Stott** – secretary, Socialist Party Scotland – describes how the horrors and privations of WW1 provoked revolutionary working class uprisings

“Nous sommes en guerre” – we are at war. Those were the words used by French president Macron recently to describe the coronavirus pandemic. Macron and the ruling elite he represents are not just referring to the current health emergency, but also the systemic threat it poses to the profit system of capitalism.

Covid-19 has many of the multiple features of a global war: tens of thousands have died, millions are, in reality, infected. Resource-starved healthcare systems are collapsing under the pressures of emergency hospitalisations. At least one-third of the world’s population is in lockdown. The global economy has fallen off a cliff.

In the US, those applying for unemployment benefits is expected to reach 20 million soon – on a par with the 1930s Great Depression.

As the American economist Nouriel Roubini recently pointed out: ‘Not even during the Great Depression and the World War Two did the bulk of economic activity literally shut down, as it has in China, the US and Europe today.’

Wartime comparisons

Many capitalist commentators are also using wartime comparisons, warning of what could happen after the war is over.

‘There will be no recovery. There will be social unrest. There will be violence. There will be socio-economic consequences: dramatic unemployment.’

These words from Swedish industrialist Jacob Wallenberg reflect the fears of the capitalist class that their system and rule is threatened, not so much by Covid-19 itself, but what it is revealing about the capitalist system and its inability to provide for the working-class majority.

The colossal fiscal, monetary and state interventions by central banks and governments are almost unprecedented. Yet they are unlikely to prevent a huge radicalisation and shift to the left, including towards class struggle and socialist ideas, in the aftermath of the crisis.

This is a key reason why a raft of emergency repressive legislation banning gatherings, demonstrations and potentially strikes has been enacted, which is due to last for up to two years.

War has long been described by



Wars and societal catastrophes are often the harbingers of revolutionary change photo Paul Mattsson

Marxists and also accepted by the capitalists as the midwife of revolution. And for good reason. The 1905 Russian revolution erupted in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese military conflict.

The February 1917 Russian revolution and then the Bolshevik-led October revolution, that created the world’s first workers’ state, grew out of the bloody carnage of the World War One. These events also sparked a revolutionary conflagration throughout Europe.

Red Clydeside, the period covering 1914–1919, was an heroic chapter written by the Scottish working class both during and after the world war.

While the current lockdown in Britain and across large parts of Europe makes it difficult to carry out widespread socialist activity just now, we can take inspiration from how Marxists and socialists did so at the start of the war in 1914.

Sometimes socialists need to swim against the stream, even if it seems like a tsunami. The Scottish Marxist John Maclean rapidly emerged as a leader of the anti-war struggle (in WW1), and as an implacable fighter against capitalism and in defence of the rights of the working class. In this he stood alongside Lenin and Trotsky in Russia, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in Germany, and James Connolly in Ireland.

Maclean and the Glasgow branch of the British Socialist Party organised regular street meetings and sent speakers to the engineering

and munitions workplaces, not an easy task given the jingoism that existed at the start of the war.

The famous weekly Sunday night anti-war public meetings in Bath Street also began. First of all a few hundred attended but as the anti-war mood deepened it grew to thousands to hear Maclean and others speak.

By February 1915, rumblings of discontent had broken out on Clydeside. A labour shortage gave the workers confidence that they should act, and strike action began.

Workers’ action

Much like today, as workers take part in walkouts to demand bosses and employers accept social distancing policies and provide protective equipment, this was unofficial action organised by the shop stewards of what became the Clyde Workers Committee.

In contrast, the then Trade Union Congress (TUC) had agreed a policy of ‘industrial peace’ for the war effort. Moreover, strikes were illegal under the Defence of the Realm Act – a faint echo of today’s current emergency legislation.

During the war, pressure on housing was immense. The landlords and their factors (landlords’ agents) saw an opportunity to squeeze more money from tenants and started to raise rents in 1915.

Most immediately impacted were working-class women. Mass anger ignited into a campaign of non-payment of the rent increases, with women

playing the leading role. Attempted evictions by sheriff officers (bailiffs) were stopped by mass mobilisations of the local community. This is something that can be taken up today if landlords threaten evictions for non-payment of rent.

In October 1915, 25,000 marched in Glasgow against the rent rises. The involvement of Maclean and other BSP members meant that the campaign was taken into the shipyards and engineering factories.

Faced with being unable to either collect the rents or evict tenants, the government and factors went for wage deductions instead. 18 shipyard workers were summoned to the court on 18 November 1915 to have their wages arrested for non-payment of rent.

Later that day, the Battle of George Square erupted as police were sent in to attack the workers.

The then secretary of state for Scotland, Robert Munro, said: ‘It is a misnomer to call the situation in Glasgow a strike – this is a Bolshevik uprising.’

Lessons
Today world capitalism, already in a weakened state following the decade long post-2008 depression, is set to lose even further legitimacy in the eyes of millions.

Support for mass working-class struggle and socialist planning in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic will become increasingly seen as viable and attractive.

It is that perspective that the Socialist Party and the Committee for a Workers’ International will fight to make a reality.



While the current lockdown in Britain and across large parts of Europe makes it difficult to carry out widespread socialist activity, we can take inspiration from how Marxists and socialists did so at the start WW1.

A general strike had been called for across Clydeside on 22 November unless the government agreed to a rent restriction act for the duration of the war. A rent restriction act was introduced immediately!

John Maclean was imprisoned a number of times for his anti-war activities. His famous speech from the dock in 1918 rings true today: ‘I am not here, then, as the accused; I am here as the accuser of capitalism dripping with blood from head to foot’.

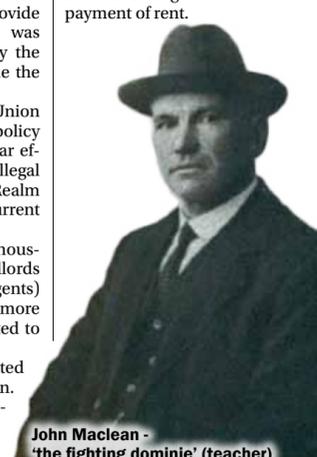
The 1917 May Day demonstration in Glasgow saw 80,000 marching in solidarity with the Russian workers who had recently carried out the February revolution, against war, and demanding the freedom of John Maclean.

Demands for real improvements after the war, the impact of the Russian revolution, and rising industrial unrest, combined to pose a real threat to British capitalism. The demands for a shorter working week resulted in a mass strike wave.

A general strike was also called for 24 January 1919. On that day, tens of thousands of workers from all the main yards and engineering shops in Glasgow came out on strike.

Later that day, the Battle of George Square erupted as police were sent in to attack the workers.

The then secretary of state for Scotland, Robert Munro, said: ‘It is a misnomer to call the situation in Glasgow a strike – this is a Bolshevik uprising.’



John Maclean – ‘the fighting dominie’ (teacher)

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.

Recent articles on socialistworld.net include: **Algeria, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, South Africa, USA, France, Japan, Nigeria, India, Chile, Ecuador**, 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



CORONAVIRUS

A WORKERS' CHARTER



ISSN 1366-9621



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