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# the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**

## BOSSES PUSH TO LIFT LOCKDOWN

# THEY ONLY CARE ABOUT PROFITS



- PPE and testing for all
- No return to work unless safety can be guaranteed
- Workers' and trade union control of workplace safety
- Socialist planning not capitalist market chaos

**This week will mark seven weeks since Britain entered lockdown. It appears that the death rate from Covid-19 is finally starting to fall. Nonetheless, the official number of deaths is now higher than every European country, including Italy.**

The low levels of testing, not least in care homes, means that the real death rate is certainly considerably higher. On 21 April, the Financial Times calculated a real toll of 41,000 deaths.

A comparison of official figures for the number of deaths above the average across 24 European countries shows that England had had the largest spike. Unsurprisingly, deaths

are highest in the poorest areas of Britain (see page 4).

Meanwhile there has been a 121% increase in families with children using food banks as poverty soars. Around two million people have had to apply for Universal Credit after losing work. Millions more have suffered pay cuts, often as part of being furloughed. Economic hardship and uncertainty are combined with the problems of isolation and being unable to visit loved ones.

For the whole of society, therefore, there is a tension between reasons to continue, and reasons to end, the lockdown. At this stage, however, opinion polls show that a big majority do not want to see the lockdown lifted. Just 17% are reported to think the conditions have been met to consider opening schools and only 9% pubs.

All reports, however, indicate that the government is now looking to put proposals to start lifting the lockdown. To prepare for this, the last of its five tests for doing so have been softened.

Previously, this was to "avoid risking a second peak of infection". Now it has been changed to avoiding a second peak that "overwhelms the NHS". This undoubtedly reflects the growing pressure from big sections of business to, as Johnson put it, "fire up the engines" of the economy.

A major obstacle to lifting the lockdown is the doubts the majority of the population have about it. At root, these reflect a completely justified lack of trust in Johnson and the Tories to take decisions based on the health and well-being of the working class.

### Splits

The uncertainty and divisions within the Tories on the way forward are real. However, they do not represent tensions between those who want to put the needs of big business first and those who want to prioritise the public health, but instead over how best to do the former.

The lockdown itself was never a means to prevent a certain level of Covid-19 deaths, but to try to stop the prospect of the worst predic-

tions of the death toll, and 'flatten the curve' in order to allow the NHS to cope. Those who want to extend the lockdown are concerned about the political and economic consequences of a second wave of the virus leading to a further lockdown.

The Tories' real approach to public health has been shown both by the relentless cuts to the NHS resulting in woefully inadequate resources to cope with a pandemic, and by their initial response to Covid-19.

Dominic Cummings summed it up in his reported comment, "herd immunity, protect the economy, and if that means some pensioners die, too bad." Only the fear of a mass movement booting them out of office forced them to retreat from their original position of total inaction.

Now, in moving to ease the lockdown, they are once again prioritising 'the economy' - the capitalists' profits - rather than public health. It is vital that the trade union movement launches a serious struggle to defend workers' rights in this latest stage of the corona crisis.

*continued page 2*

**Test and trace: Workers need a real plan**

special feature -  
see pages 8&9

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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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Friday before publication, or Monday morning for urgent news, unless otherwise agreed with the editors.

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

# They only care about profits



## WHAT WE THINK

### Continued from front

The government's briefings on the return to work are highly ambiguous. In all seven documents the section on PPE is blank - just saying "guidance to follow"! The lack of guidance undoubtedly reflects the lack of sufficient supplies of PPE.

On social distancing, the guidance says that: "It will not always be possible to keep a distance of two metres. In these circumstances both employers and employees must do everything they reasonably can to reduce risk".

### What suits bosses

The phrase "reasonably can" leaves enormous space for employers to do what suits their pockets rather than their workers' health. London Underground Limited, for example, has argued that social distancing must be reduced to half a metre.

This guidance is so clearly a charter for risking workers' health that



even the leadership of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) has had to say that while they "want to be able to recommend the government's approach to safe working", "as it stands" they "cannot".

Throughout this crisis the majority of the trade union leaders, along with Labour leader Keir Starmer, have fallen into the government's

'we're all in this together' trap, setting aside their criticisms of the Tories until after the Covid crisis. Even on 29 April, with anger at the Tories mounting, Starmer was still describing the government's handling of the corona crisis as "an amazing piece of work".

The Tories' plans for lifting lockdown, however, make it absolutely

clear, as the Socialist Party has consistently argued, that we are not 'all in this together'. The workers' movement needs to organise to defend the independent interests of the working class against the relentless attempts of the capitalist class, aided by the Tory government, to make us pay the price for this crisis.

Many bosses are cynically using

# Your donations can keep the Socialist going

## £24,047 raised - 96% of target

### Chris Newby

The Socialist sales organiser

Our special coronavirus appeal is still getting a fantastic response. Donations are pouring in across England and Wales to make sure that we have the resources to produce our socialist analysis and programme for the coronavirus crisis.

96-year-old Claude Mickleson from Gloucestershire branch has donated a marvellous £1,000.

It's clear that our readers really value the articles in the Socialist as the following quotes show:

Cath Byron from East London who has donated £50 writes on issue 1083 of the Socialist:

"I am deep in the Socialist and its brilliant articles re the Tories' disastrous response to the crises in the workforce, especially key workers beyond the NHS like bus drivers. It was so interesting to read Steve Nally's frontline report from his experience at St Thomas. The only account I have read of a patient from first symptoms to discharge, and afterwards back at home. And with such clear analysis, too."

Keith Morrell from Southampton who has donated £50 to our appeal writes:

"Excellent responses by Hannah Sell to civil service union PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka's complaints"

Mark Walker from south east London donating £30 writes:

"In response to the challenges that Covid is presenting us, the ideas must survive."

Karen Geraghty, who took part in the Socialist Party Wales public meeting last week, donated £100 following the financial appeal, and has now agreed to join the Socialist Party.

While the coronavirus special appeal is making up the largest part of our fighting fund, our members and supporters are looking at every opportunity to raise funds. Yorkshire members raised £130 from their online quiz night on May Day, Gareth Bromhall in Swansea raised £17 selling second-hand books, and Tessa Warrington in Leicester raised £25.40 selling clothes on eBay.

Our members and supporters are doing marvellous work in raising funds for the Socialist Party. But it's vital that we continue our efforts. Make sure that everyone you know is asked to donate to our special coronavirus appeal.

## Socialist Party Fighting Fund

	£ received	£ target	April to June 2020	Deadline: 30 June 2020
South West	3,992	1,800		222%
Northern	1,102	750		147%
Yorkshire	2,944	2,550		115%
Wales	2,611	2,300		114%
East Midlands	2,012	1,850		109%
West Midlands	2,571	2,600		99%
London	3,994	4,600		87%
Eastern	952	1,200		79%
Southern & SE	1,412	2,350	60%	
North West	415	1,150	36%	
Other	2,043	3,850	53%	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24,047</b>	<b>25,000</b>		<b>96%</b>

## Coronavirus crisis special appeal

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photo SK&N Photo Stream

the crisis as a cover to implement long-cherished plans to attack workers' rights. British Airways is threatening to sack the whole workforce and then invite them to reapply on worse terms and conditions (see page 7). Similarly, Royal Mail management has attempted to force through its restructuring plans under the cover of Covid-19, but has been forced to step back in the face of the Communication Workers Union response (see page 6).

### Workers shoulder burden

Yet Labour's Ed Miliband, now shadow business secretary, is still repeating the 'national unity' mantra, arguing that "together state, business and workers must share the risks and burdens we face." Left to the government and business, it will be workers who shoulder all the risks and burdens.

Not only regarding the health crisis, but also the unprecedented economic slowdown it is triggering. Capitalism is a crisis-ridden system, and after a decade of economic stagnation and austerity for the majority, a new phase of crisis was already heading down the tracks even before the pandemic.

But that has been enormously exacerbated by the Covid-19 shutdown of the economy - with the government's Office for Budget Responsibility predicting a giant 35% contraction in the second quarter of the year and a big spike in unemployment.

Panic-stricken about the scale of the economic crisis, and desperate to prop up the capitalist system, the government has ripped up the neoliberal rule book. It has intervened into the economy on a huge scale, pledging over £400 billion to prop up business during the lockdown.

In the aftermath of the immediate crisis, with dramatically increased public and company debts, the Tories will be looking for a way to make the working class pay the price.

However, given the likely scale of

the economic crisis they may have no choice but to continue to prop up capitalism with increased state intervention. In that sense, they will not necessarily be able to return in the short term to the savage cuts in public spending - summed up as 'austerity' - of the last decade. Nonetheless, Tory policy will not be for the good of society, but for the good of the capitalist elite. The result will be a different form of austerity for the working class.

During this crisis the railways have been effectively nationalised in order to prop up the rail companies that were shrieking that they faced collapse. Meanwhile, the pharmaceutical and private health industries, which are profitable, are left in private hands, rather than being nationalised to harness them for fighting the virus.

On the contrary, NHS privatisation is being extended under the cover of the crisis, with new services created to fight the virus - such as track-and-trace call centres - outsourced to private companies whose primary aim will be to make a profit.

The Covid-19 crisis is turning the world upside down, with profound political, social and economic consequences. The capitalist class will attempt to take advantage of the crisis in every way it can, above all by trying to restore its profits by attacking the wages and conditions of the working-class majority, not least by trying to force them to work in unsafe conditions.

Workers are looking to the trade union movement to defend them in this situation, hence the surge in union membership. A workers' movement 'council of war' is urgently needed to organise a struggle to fight back against the bosses' offensive. If the TUC refuses to act, the left trade union leaders should take the initiative.

Their demands have to include PPE and testing for all, no return to work unless safety measures can be

guaranteed with full pay for all, and workers' and trade union control of workplace safety. It should also call for nationalisation under workers' control and management, with no compensation to the fat cats, for all companies in the health and social care sector, and all those - like British Airways - using this crisis to kick their workers in the teeth.

Councils of war need to be organised at local and workplace level as well as nationally. Some trade unions have shut down democratic structures during the Covid-19 crisis.

Yet where local trade union bodies are meeting, they have been able to hold meetings, often virtually, with unprecedentedly large turn-outs. All democratic structures have to be immediately reinstated to allow workers to organise in defence of their interests.

At the same time, a discussion needs to urgently begin throughout the labour movement on how to make sure the working class has a political voice. As the Covid-19 crisis has shown, Johnson and the Tories defend the capitalist system, not the working-class majority.

### Starmer backs government

Unfortunately, the same can also be said of Keir Starmer, the new Labour leader. His few criticisms of the government have mostly been welcomed by big business, as they have focussed on pushing the Tories to reopen the economy. Asked if he would support workers who refused to work when it was unsafe to do so, as they are legally entitled to, he refused to even say he would back them.

What is needed is a mass party that stands intransigently in defence of the working class, arguing for socialist policies rather than the Labour front bench's calls for unity between big business and workers. Achieving this will, in the view of the Socialist Party, require building a new mass party of the working class.



## 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.

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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.

- 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.

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

- For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

- 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!

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## DEATH RATE IS DOUBLE IN POOR AREAS: HOMES NEEDED TO END OVERCROWDING

Dave Carr  
East London Socialist Party

The revelation that people living in poorer areas of the country are twice as likely to die from Covid-19 as those in affluent areas, according to the Office for National Statistics, will not be a surprise to readers of this newspaper.

Just before the pandemic, the Socialist reported that the difference in life expectancy between rich and poor had got worse. News that the east London borough of Newham has the highest mortality rate for Covid-19 in Britain should also come as no surprise. After all, how can poor people living in overcrowded conditions socially distance?

East London, with its historically cheaper housing costs, has long been a destination for low-paid workers. Constructing large-scale council housing estates during the post-war period provided safe and secure accommodation, and also acted to keep rents low in the private sector.

However, Thatcher's 'right to buy' legislation in the 1980s, combined with the abandonment of building council housing by the right-wing Labour council, has left low-paid workers at the mercy of private landlords.

As rents have soared in the last decade, workers have increasingly been forced to share housing to split the bill, and housing occupancy has intensified.

In 2013, to much fanfare, the council instituted a register of private landlords.

It was supposed to weed out rogue landlords who cram tenants into often unhealthy conditions.

But while some of the more outrageous examples of exploitative landlords have been publicised, anecdotal evidence suggests serious overcrowding persists. Moreover, without social housing to turn to, where are tenants decanted from unsuitable accommodation meant to go?

Like many other London councils, Newham has paid private landlords in local authorities outside London to take homeless people off their hands. This means splitting up families, and breaking up residents' informal support networks.

To make matters worse, the 100% Labour council has rammed through hundreds of millions of pounds in Tory austerity cuts over the last decade.

The current administration is cutting a further £45 million - deemed "efficiencies" - from local services. It has also jacked up council tax bills, despite sitting on more than £1 billion in reserves.

Additionally, the coronavirus pandemic is placing more demands on overstretched local services without adequate additional funding by Johnson's government. This means communicable diseases, like coronavirus, have an undiminished reservoir of humans to infect.

Newham residents and workers deserve better. If the Labour councillors won't act, then they should stand aside and allow the people to elect socialist councillors who will implement a no-cuts budget and embrace renewed council housing.

## US: TRUMP'S PUBLIC HEALTH CUTS HAVE CONDEMNED THOUSANDS WORLDWIDE

Jon Dale

Secretary, Unite union Nottinghamshire NHS Branch (personal capacity)

More people in the US died from Covid-19 in three months than in nine years of the US armed forces' Vietnam War. The US private health-care system has been shockingly exposed.

So has the inequality divide condemning millions in the US to poverty and overcrowded housing, sometimes even without running water. Lack of sick pay forces workers to stay at work, even when ill.

Donald Trump is trying to turn attention from this complete system failure. He fosters conspiracy theories about what he calls "the Chinese virus." Normally so quick to boast, his tweets stay silent about his government's previous cuts to public health spending.

In November 2018, the American Journal of Public Health published a series of articles marking the centenary of the so-called 'Spanish' flu pandemic. Between 30 million and 100 million are estimated to have died - the equivalent of 120-400 million of today's global population.

The editors wrote: "We hope that stressing the lessons we have learned and those that we are still attempting to learn can help us avoid that cycle, so that the horrors of 1918 will never be repeated."

But "substantial public health funding cuts threaten pandemic readiness.

"Congress and the current administration have cut \$1.35 billion from the Prevention and Public Health Fund over the next ten years, including a 12% budget cut for the Centers for Disease Control, forcing the CDC to reduce its public health efforts in some of the world's hotspots for emerging infectious disease, including China, Pakistan, Haiti, Rwanda, and Congo.

"These cuts have prompted global health organisations to caution that 'critical momentum will be lost if epidemic prevention funding is reduced, leaving the world unprepared for the next outbreak.' Tom Frieden, former director of the CDC, warned that 'like terrorism,' epidemic disease cannot be fought 'just within our borders. You've got to fight epidemic diseases where they emerge.'

"He emphasised that these cuts mean [disease] surveillance systems will die, so we won't know if something happens. The lab networks won't be built, so if something happens, we won't know what it is. [The US] can't be safe if the world isn't safe."

In less than 18 months, these predictions have been borne out, at terrible cost to humanity across the world. Trump ignored these warnings, just as the Tories and New Labour before them downplayed the threat of pandemics, cutting back on essential preparation in favour of short-term profit-seeking.

## Bail out the real wealth creators, not the rich

Dave Reid  
Socialist Party Wales

Remember the bank bailout after the 2007-08 crisis? The banks went in hand to the taxpayer while their executives continued to receive multimillion-pound bonuses. The government took the banks' debts off their hands while leaving them the profits - and making the working class pay with austerity for over a decade.

Now, faced with an even deeper crisis, virtually the whole capitalist class wants to be bailed out. Never mind that many of them are sitting on huge cash reserves.

Even companies making inflated profits from the crisis, like Tesco, are being subsidised. Tesco has received £585 million in business rate relief while paying £900 million in dividend payments to its shareholders this year, after making profits of over £2 billion.

Payments to workers amount to a very small proportion of the overall government bailout. £330 billion, or 95% of the original £350 billion announced by Chancellor Rishi Sunak, was intended to shore up business.

The sheer shameless gall of the

billionaires makes you gasp. Richard Branson is sitting on Necker Island in the British Virgin Islands. This enables him to avoid paying any tax on the huge profits he has made while taking over £300 million in government subsidies for Virgin Trains, and over £2 billion in government contracts for Virgin Care.

He even sued the NHS when his company failed to win a contract from Surrey NHS clinical commissioning groups. But this has not prevented him demanding that the government stump up £500 million to stop his Virgin airline from crashing.

And while Branson's personal net worth is £4.5 billion, he is forcing the 8,500 staff of the airline to take eight weeks' unpaid leave, with deductions spread over six months. This saves him £34 million - less than 0.8% of his personal fortune.

This whole epoch in microcosm - workers tightening their belts, with many forced into severe personal hardship, to preserve the fortunes of the mega-rich. And the bosses are increasingly viewing the crisis as an opportunity to further attack workers' pay and conditions.

British Airways has announced the sacking of 12,000 workers, half its workforce, and demanded further cuts of the remaining workforce (see p6). Rolls-Royce

is threatening to cut up to 8,000 jobs (see p7) and P&O ferries has said that 4,000 jobs could go if the government doesn't cough up £150 million of public money.

Workers should have their jobs and income guaranteed, but the gold-plated parasites should not get a penny of a bailout paid for by the working class. All companies requesting funding should open their books so that we can see where their profits have gone - and how they have avoided taxes.

Any of the major corporations that are facing collapse or making workers redundant should be nationalised, with no compensation for the billionaire bosses, and run as public services under democratic workers' control.

After 2008 there was a public outcry at bankers' bonuses that even the Tory press was forced to echo to a certain extent.

But once the furore had died down, there was a concerted propaganda campaign to shift the burden onto the working class, especially through cuts to public services, and to justify an enormous austerity programme.

This time, working people will not lightly accept further attacks while the rich laugh all the way to the bank.



### Tories don't give a damn about non-Covid patients

I've spent most of this week in the 'cold' emergency department, still wearing mask and apron, X-raying patients with broken bones, serious gastric issues, cancer and so on. We've been able to split our A&E department into 'hot' and 'cold' areas to try to reduce the spread of coronavirus.

Triaging during the separation of patients is by no means an exact process, and patients can be moved from cold to hot after further examination. Work is often very different between the two, with hot 'resus' needing donning and doffing of full PPE and detailed cleaning.

We are increasingly concerned for the needs of our patients who don't have Covid-19, even if the government isn't. Many of our poorly elderly were farmed out to local care homes to allow the hospital to prepare for the expected surge at the beginning of the outbreak. This has proved to be a disaster given the huge number of deaths in care homes.

Cancer patients are having their treatment delayed and are fearful of coming into hospital. We still have elderly falls patients coming in who often face even longer delays on trolleys before finding a bed and surgery, as resources are concentrated on the Covid effort. And distressingly, we've seen a considerable increase in suicide attempts and patients with mental health crises.

It's pretty clear the Tories don't give a damn about our other patients, and the dilemma hospitals have over restarting urgent 'elective' work for those who are

## Dispatches from the front: don't put us through another peak

suffering in pain and misery at home with many debilitating conditions. But do we have enough PPE to restart this work for those on increasing waiting lists?

My colleagues can see the hypocrisy of the money thrown at this crisis, which is not for us but for the Tories and their system to save face. When we look to rebuild after the crisis is over, many more will be demanding a fully funded, comprehensive health service, that provides care when it's needed. An NHS for the 99%, not for the greedy profiteers.

**An NHS health professional**

### We may be past the peak - but we don't want Covid wards full again

It's two to three weeks since the peak in this hospital. Almost every ward was full of Covid patients. Now there are quite a few wards with some spare beds, and new Covid patients coming in. Less patients dying too.

Some staff are still exhausted, but some others are hoping we are now past the peak and are getting impatient for the lockdown to be relaxed. But many rightly fear this.

Without the testing and contact tracing that some countries have used to get the pandemic under control, we risk going back to another huge increase in

infections. No one who has worked on a Covid ward wants to see them full again.

**An NHS admin worker**

### All NHS staff are essential workers - and deserve to be treated like it

Why are they calling them 'offers to NHS staff'? You need an NHS email to get most of them. They don't give out email addresses to us. The hospitals would be shut down if we didn't do our job. We get told we are essential NHS workers, and we are, but we aren't treated like it.

**An NHS domestic**

### Staff risk becoming super-spreaders while government offers platitudes

A recent 'sweep' test, something which ought to be customary by now but which remains extraordinary, was undertaken at my NHS trust. 400 frontline staff were tested. Of them, 21 were confirmed Covid-19 positive.

Forget for a moment the disruption this meant for service provision. Consider instead that asymptomatic clinical staff served as potential super-spreaders while the government offered us platitudes and hollow gestures.

**An NHS porter**

## Tories using pandemic to shift lab testing out of NHS

An NHS laboratory worker

The Tories have set up a parallel structure to the existing NHS laboratories network, involving big private companies, and a mixture of unidentified and unqualified staff. Meanwhile, NHS labs have not even been running at full capacity.

Why? It is clear the Tories are exploiting the crisis to establish private-sector medical testing networks - as a precursor to winding down NHS laboratories in the future.

The Tories have spent weeks trying to avoid making testing a central aspect of their coronavirus strategy, to the extent that the UK was criticised by the World Health Organisation. But NHS laboratories were more than ready to take on the extra work.

In many cases, workloads in the laboratories were significantly reduced. Fewer people are attending GPs' surgeries and specialist clinics, so the number of other tests requested fell. In addition, a policy of prioritising the most urgent cases prevailed in the laboratories in anticipation of a large increase of coronavirus tests.

The NHS laboratory that I work in has spare capacity and a willing



workforce, but even after a month nothing has come of it, despite a new 'assay' (test) being validated. Daily testing capacity, however, has reached 73,400, so there is plenty of capacity within the NHS generally to take on the work.

### 'Super-labs'

The Tories are clearly looking outside the NHS to have the tests done. They are setting up 50 new regional testing centres, and three new 'super-labs'. This is instead of fully using the existing NHS laboratories - 44 of which are underused, according to a

former director of the World Health Organisation.

The super-labs decision was taken behind closed doors, with no consultation with the trade unions involved. They are reportedly to be run by "highly qualified staff and volunteers," leaving existing NHS staff and our unions wondering where these other "highly qualified staff" will come from, and what exactly the role of "volunteers" would be.

Health journalist John Lister reports that new 'lighthouse labs' are being set up through a partnership. It includes the government's

Department of Health and Social Care, the science business networking organisation Medicines Discovery Catapult, not-for-profit processing facility UK Biocentre, and the University of Glasgow.

In Cheshire, the project is reported to be 'working closely' with pharmaceutical multinational AstraZeneca. In Glasgow, it is linked with drug research firm BioAscent Discovery Ltd, and big pharma giant GlaxoSmithKline is also involved.

Equipment for these laboratories has been borrowed from universities and other organisations across the UK. In addition, AstraZeneca and GlaxoSmithKline are setting up an entirely private-sector super-lab in Cambridge.

So much for the praises heaped daily on the NHS by the Tories at the moment. It's nothing more than a PR exercise while they pursue their aim of destroying the NHS.

NHS workers in NHS facilities should do this vital work, adequately funded, on trade union conditions, working in conjunction with universities where appropriate. Private companies should have resources requisitioned, not be put in control!

The coronavirus response must be about saving lives and preventing suffering - not about undermining the NHS in order to make profits for big business.

■ *Test and trace: workers need a real plan - see p8-9*

## HOMELESS LEFT ON STREETS DURING PANDEMIC - HOMES FOR ALL, REVERSE THE CUTS!

Andrea Gilbert

Homelessness worker

On 29 March, the government told local councils and outreach teams to bring all rough sleepers into accommodation. But even according to the government, just 90% of rough sleepers have now been taken off the streets - leaving 10% still on the streets with no support.

The government announced £3.2 million to help with this, and London's mayor provided ten hotels. But it's not enough.

After this pandemic is over, the government and councils cannot let things go back to how they were before. They need to start mass building of council homes to support society's most vulnerable with somewhere to live.

This will help ensure they can connect with local services to get the support and guidance they need to live a fulfilling life. Councils have a further part to play by ensuring services are available and staff have up-to-date training to support these people.

A former soldier, Mike, 85, is currently rough sleeping with up to 30 others at Heathrow Airport Terminal 5 during the lockdown, according to the Daily Mail.

Mike, who served in the Canadian armed forces, was in the process of applying for British citizenship before the pandemic started. He said his immigration status "is a bit complicated. I don't

want to tell you too much because I could get into trouble and I have enough problems already.

"There were a lot more homeless people sleeping at the airport a few weeks ago but most of them were found accommodation. But I think because I'm not British and because of my age, nobody is helping me."

Mike is in the at-risk group for the coronavirus, and should be self-isolating for 12 weeks due to his age. It is shocking that a pensioner is being left on the streets with no recourse to public funding. This policy needs to go as it is leaving people on the street longer and not supporting the most vulnerable.

We need requisitioning of property unused by the super-rich as they're taking homes from people who need them. And we desperately need to expand welfare and social services so they can provide.

Only socialist policies can reverse all the cuts and support us moving on from this crisis. Capitalism will not do this, which is why we need to fight for rough sleepers alongside fighting to change society for the better. We need socialism now and for the future so we can all thrive.

A petition to support rough sleepers during and after the pandemic has over 4,000 signatures. Please sign and share widely.

■ *Search for "The government stated every rough sleeper off the street but this hasn't happened" on Change.org*

Jack Jeffery

North London Socialist Party

Working in homelessness, I was happy to hear the government announce the creation of a taskforce on to end homelessness on 2 May.

This followed guidance from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on 26 March that during the pandemic, local authorities had a duty to house all homeless people, regardless of their circumstances.

However, as time passes - similar to PPE, testing and care homes - government propaganda is increasingly out of line with reality. Although the Tories claim that 90% of rough sleepers known to local authorities have had an accommodation offer, I have heard many reports of rough sleepers still struggling to find shelter.

One of my clients with limited phone access has been on Tottenham Court Road for over a month. Despite outreach having multiple contacts with him, he is still waiting for an accommodation offer.

Their failure to fight against years of austerity means local authorities have lost roughly 49% of their income since 2010. This leaves scant resources to deal with the wave of homelessness austerity helped create.

Although the government has announced some funds to support councils, this is nowhere near the £9 billion estimated shortfall due to coronavirus.

As the lockdown stretches on, this is increasingly impacting those who work in insecure, low-paid industries such as hospitality. Many of these workers were on zero-hour contracts, employed by agencies who have no interest in furloughing staff, or have been thrust into unemployment when businesses close.

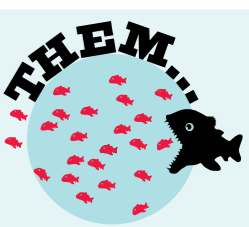
Not earning enough to have formal rental agreements, many combined sofa-surfing with short stays in London's many youth hostels. With these shut, funds running out, and travel restricted, they are increasingly thrown onto the street.

Once there, they find council offices shut, day centres closed, housing options and outreach services overwhelmed, and emergency accommodation full. This needlessly places not only their own, but also others' health, at risk.

Only through placing people in accommodation where they have the ability to self-isolate can we reduce their own risk of infection and the possibility of transmission to others.

Councils must demand full funding now, to guarantee same-day accommodation offers for all rough sleepers. To emerge from this pandemic as a healthy, resilient society, shelter must become a right, not a privilege.

Like, comment, share  
facebook.com/CWISocialistParty



### Amazon exec resigns over worker persecution!

The vice-president of Amazon has resigned over the sacking of workers who had organised against the company's unsafe working conditions during the coronavirus pandemic. Tim Bray called the firings "chickenshit" and "designed to create a climate of fear."

"At the end of the day," Bray said, "the big problem isn't the specifics of Covid-19 response. It's that Amazon treats the humans in the warehouses as fungible units of pick-and-pack potential. Only that's not just Amazon, it's how 21st-century capitalism is done."

Amazon made more than \$33 million an hour in the first three months of this year. Chief executive Jeff Bezos, the richest man in the world, has seen his personal fortune grow to \$145 billion.

On May Day, Amazon workers across the US took part in a "sick-out" to protest against lack of PPE, safety measures and sick pay.

See also 'Coronavirus: Amazon workers threaten revolution' at socialistparty.org.uk.

### US airlines spent 96% of cash on share buybacks

The top airlines in the US - now begging for bailouts to prevent bankruptcy - spent an average of 95.8% of their free cashflow in the last decade on share buybacks, calculates Bloomberg.

When firms buy their shares back, they are handing money to those (former) shareholders. But this also increases the wealth of remaining shareholders, who therefore own a bigger proportion of the company. All the bosses win!

Airlines are among the worst, but firms across the 'S&P 500' top US companies spent an average of 53% of free cashflow on share buybacks in the last ten years. That's billions upon billions of money the bosses could have invested in new production, reserves against calamities like this, or wages for workers.

### Half of all world's workers face imminent destitution

The 1.6 billion workers in the informal economy - casual workers, who make up half the global workforce - are in immediate danger losing their livelihoods, warns the UN's International Labour Organization. Worldwide, this section of workers lost 60% of its income in the first month of the pandemic alone.



# Postal workers force Royal Mail back



photo Paul Mattsson

**Gary Clark**  
Secretary Scotland No 2 branch  
Communications Workers Union  
(CWU)

CWU members have forced Royal Mail to retreat over its attempts to push through unilateral changes to the 'universal service obligation' which ensures six days a week delivery.

Even prior to the pandemic there was a major industrial clash about to take place between the CWU and Royal Mail, with two massive Yes votes in favour of industrial action. In the first 97% were in favour and in the second 94.5%.

After the first vote management ran to the capitalist courts, forcing the CWU to reballoon its membership yet again, producing our third Yes vote in two years for industrial action.

Soon after the latest ballot result the CWU announced that it would not take industrial action during the period of the pandemic, and called for a period of peace during a national emergency. An offer was made by the union that the Royal Mail service should be a 'fourth emergency service', which was never seriously taken on by either the government or Royal Mail.

During this time, after a series of meetings between Royal Mail and the CWU, Royal Mail CEO Rico Back announced he would not meet the CWU again during this period. By doing so he drew the battle lines, clearly showing that the CWU tactic of seeking a period of peace had only given the go-ahead for an offensive by management.

On 28 April, Royal Mail announced in the media that it was

suspending the universal service obligation. This was done without any consultation or negotiation with the CWU at any level. This provoked a massive reaction, and succeeded in creating a tinder-box situation in the workplace.

On 29 April, the CWU announced that it would advise the membership to ignore the management's instruction. Workers were advised to remain on their current duty pattern.

It became clear that the regulator Ofcom had agreed the changes, as had the government. If these changes had gone unchallenged and became permanent, they could have led to 20,000 job losses. It was also a clear attempt to derecognise the CWU, in all but name. The union advised all local reps not to cooperate and to put in disagreements on the issues.

This led to the possibility of the CWU enacting the industrial action ballot, and of unofficial action which could have quickly spread.

## Agreement

On May Day it became clear that Royal Mail was not so confident. It had been taken back by the mood in the workplace. A CWU postal executive committee meeting took place later that day.

This was followed by an announcement that a form of words had been agreed between the CWU and Royal Mail, in which the suspension of the universal services obligation for a minimum of three months was now only for six weeks.

Furthermore, the statement said no decision had been made regarding the company's long-term view and there will be no job losses or imposed duty changes. Any

changes would be voluntary and had to be agreed locally with the CWU. No withdrawal of current schedule agreements was also agreed. Meetings between the union and Royal Mail would also take place to agree the basis to reopen talks around the national dispute.

Clearly, the CWU has forced a significant climb down by Royal Mail, which had hoped it could use the pandemic to break the CWU and our members. That has clearly failed, massively. But pressure must be kept on management, and we should remain vigilant as they can't be trusted.

We can't allow talks to drag on. The mandate for the rerun ballot expires in mid-September. Regular updates must be given to the reps and members as to how these talks are progressing, via national online meetings if need be. If the view is they are not progressing at a pace, then invoking industrial action must be considered.

This horrific pandemic, which has seen postal workers die, has shown once and for all that the private sector is incapable of running vital public services. And the workload since the lockdown has reached unprecedented levels. Members up and down the country have declared they have never seen this amount of parcels in 20 years of service.

Despite this we are having to carry on delivering door-to-door advertising, which not only increases the load but also multiplies the potential risk to the people we deliver to.

The postal service is an essential service and must be brought back into public ownership. But this time under democratic workers' control as part of a socialist economy and plan of production.

# Nationalise British Airways to stop 12,000 redundancies

**British Airways worker**

British Airways' announcement of 12,000 redundancies represents an opportunistic attack on its workforce. The British Airways/International Airline Group board are firm believers in the neoliberal view of never allowing a crisis to be wasted.

In addition to the redundancies, the airline is threatening to dismiss the whole workforce and 'invite' up to 75% of its employees to reapply, accepting new contracts which have worse pay and poorer terms and conditions.

To be clear, this is not a move from the company driven by economic necessity - International Airline Group is sitting on a cash pile and credit lines to the tune of £10 billion plus. Those cash reserves could easily see the company through to 2022.

International Airline Group has accepted a government bailout in Spain, but campaigns for no industry help in the UK. The company clearly hopes its competitors will go to the wall and it will emerge from this crisis with a lower cost base, ensuring monopolistic profits for its shareholders.

The airline has shown no empathy for its workforce in a time of pandemic. It insisted its frontline employees continued to work without PPE, resulting in the tragic death of flying crew and ground staff.

It equally shows no feeling for the present situation, where every family is struggling with anxiety and loss due to the pandemic. Although this looks like a devastating announcement, and individual workers sitting at home furloughed, and isolated are unable to feel their collective strength, resistance to all these proposals is possible.

This would be the first time in the airline's history that the management attempted to take on the whole workforce. As long as we act collectively and negotiate at a national level the workforce will see off this challenge. It is not a simple

matter to dismiss everybody and reconstitute a new airline without the cooperation of the workforce.

Given that half the workforce is furloughed, it shows how many sections are still required to operate in order to maintain the grounded fleet. Customer relations are still dealing with millions of customer requests for refunds or rebookings; and engineering is still 'mothballing' the planes which have to be regularly checked in order to keep their airworthiness.

Although British Airways' operation has been consolidated into Heathrow Terminal 5, we are still flying 20 to 30 flights a day which require all the operational functions. In addition, there are unprecedented levels of cargo it is trying to get onto a limited schedule. Postal bags, for instance, have been going into overhead lockers. There is considerable IT infrastructure that needs to be supported while we are flying at least one aircraft.

Unite and the GMB unions are launching a legal challenge. British Airways is taking part in the job retention scheme, known as furloughing, while it announces, with considerable brass neck its intention to implement redundancies. Part of the furloughing arrangement is that workers are not contacted by their employer. This means it would be impossible to have meaningful consultation, which breaks the law.

British Airways would like the different sections of its workforce - cabin crew, pilots, ground services, engineering and head office - to negotiate separately on the company's proposals. This must not happen. We need to engage collectively at a national level, not allowing any section to be picked off, and demand that all UK operations are nationalised to save jobs.

The anger of the workforce must now be channelled into a determination to resist this brutal smash and grab on employees pay, and terms and conditions. Together we can resist and win.



photo BriYYZ/CC

# Further protests in Ireland against Debenhams closures - UK fightback needed

Among the slew of retail companies entering administration, Debenhams has the highest profile, not least for only recently coming out of administration after closures. A wave of warehouse and shop closures went through in 2017. A further three UK stores closed in December 2019, and then 19 more in January 2020.

This time the administration has been ended by its lenders buying out the company, including Bank of Ireland and Barclays who benefited from government support after the 2007-08 economic crisis, and engaging in attacks on workers.

These include the closures of all the company's stores in Ireland, sparking protests outside stores, which the police dispersed despite social distancing (see 'Irish police use Covid-19 emergency powers to disperse Dublin shop workers' protest' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)). This was met by further workers' protests on 29 April at stores across the country.

While in receipt of government



Protesters in Ireland outside Debenhams 30 April photo Stand With Debenhams Workers

funds for furloughing staff, Debenhams is closing at least 11 UK stores. It is telling workers in those stores that they will need to claim redundancy from the government. In Wales, where the Welsh government isn't extending business rates relief to larger stores with rates above £500,000, the company has threatened to close its five largest Welsh stores.

We welcome the two rounds of protests by Debenhams workers in Ireland, and the support given to workers by the 450 plus-strong

# Rolls Royce threatens 8,000 job losses

**Ian Hunter**  
Derby Socialist Party

Rolls Royce has announced a possible and imminent 8,000 redundancies. This was explained as 'necessary' because of huge cuts in production by aircraft manufacturers such as Airbus during the current Covid-19 pandemic. Airbus has cut production by one third and furloughed 3,200 staff.

Details of the redundancies are expected by the end of May. The Financial Times recently stated that the company's restructuring plan could shrink the workforce by 15%.

In early April, the workers' union Unite agreed a deal with Rolls Royce to 'financially protect' the company's 20,000 UK workforce during the coronavirus pandemic. The package included a 10% pay 'delay' from April. Unite has now told Rolls Royce to "step back" from making redundancies.

The latest round of redundancies will have a devastating impact on

the workers' families and the local economy. Action will be difficult at the present time. A mass community march and demonstration, like the 10,000-strong protest in 2010 when Derby-based train-maker Bombardier was under threat, is not possible under current lockdown restrictions.

However, Unite should call for the nationalisation of Rolls Royce as happened in 1971 - under a Tory government! This should be under democratic workers' control, with no enforced job losses, and the development of a future alternative plan of production.

Get all the latest union news...  
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with the NSSN bulletin  
[shopstewards.net](http://shopstewards.net)

# TEST AND TRACE: WORKERS NEED A REAL PLAN

## Only a national plan and workers' control can guarantee a safe exit from lockdown

Martin Powell-Davies  
Socialist Party national committee

There is a growing scientific consensus that successful management of the coronavirus crisis requires a comprehensive plan - combining mass testing, contact tracing and supported isolation of potentially infected individuals. But a managed plan of action is precisely what chaotic capitalism is struggling to achieve.

Medical science was already well aware that contact tracing has to be a key part of any strategy to tackle a viral epidemic, particularly where no vaccine is yet available. It is a technique already proven to work when tackling Ebola, Sars and Mers, for example.

The strategy is simple enough to understand. If you can quickly identify the close contacts of someone who is found to be infected, and then make sure that all these individuals are safely isolated, onward transmission of the virus is hopefully prevented. If this is done consistently, most new cases can be identified, isolated, and the outbreak eventually brought under control, avoiding further peaks of new infections.

Of course, what works medically has a social and economic cost too. Who pays to look after the income and welfare of the isolated individuals and their dependants for what, in the case of Covid-19, might need to be at least 14 days in isolation?

Their jobs and income must be guaranteed, or the strategy will fail to operate successfully. Similarly, resources have to be in place for food deliveries and other practical support to those who need it in order to remain isolated.

### Contact tracing

How is contact tracing itself going to be carried out? Commentators place hopes in the development of tracing apps that could use smartphones to alert people that they have potentially been infected by someone who has been close to them.

But, even if they prove reliable, many, particularly the oldest and worst-off, may not own the kind of phones needed. Fears about privacy will also need to be addressed for take-up to be sufficiently high - perhaps requiring 60% of the population and 80% of smartphone owners - for such a system to work.

So, in addition to tracing apps, mass recruitment of contact tracers is



photo by CDC Global

going to be needed. Some of the work can be done remotely though phone interviews, some may require direct visits with adequate PPE.

A group of retired doctors and public health experts in Sheffield has set up a community contact tracing team. They train volunteers who identify contacts and then make daily phone calls to monitor symptoms, guard against mental health problems developing through isolation, and organise practical support like food delivery.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock has announced the recruitment of 18,000 tracers. But, yet again, it's without the necessary urgency, clarity and infrastructure. All will need to be properly trained and paid for this important role. Meanwhile, 5,000 local authority environmental health officers, who



**Bluntly, unless workplace safety is put ahead of short-term profits, the outbreak cannot be properly managed. If the employers won't guarantee it, trade unions must assert control with elected workplace health and safety committees**

already have the necessary skills and experience, have not been mobilised for this task.

The government is even proposing that 15,000 contact-tracing call centre staff will be hired through notorious outsourcingers Serco and G4S, responsible for a litany of corner-cutting and incompetence in the public sector. Once more, the inability of the Tories and capitalism to apply a clear strategy is being exposed.

For a disease like Covid-19, where some proportion of infections seem to be passed on from people without obvious symptoms, mass testing is also vital.

It's not good enough to set up random access to headline-grabbing testing centres that take hours to get to, with the risk that some carriers may spread the virus as they travel

there. We need testing properly integrated into an overall strategy, firstly to identify individuals who have the virus, and then to test their traced close contacts.

If this could be done in sufficient numbers, and with sufficiently reliable tests, this could alleviate some of the isolation requirements. It might also identify more of the individuals who actually need hospitalisation rather than just isolation.

Given the nature of the virus and uncertainty over immunity, testing will need to be regularly repeated, not just a one-off. It also requires much faster results - turnaround times can reportedly be as fast as six hours; backlogs mean processing times of several days. All of this demands an increase in capacity, certainly far greater than the 100,000 tests a day claimed by Hancock.

Having moved the goalposts multiple times, he finally announced the 100,000 target had been beaten on 1 May. The day before, there were apparently 122,347 tests. However, this only represented 73,000 new people tested, the rest being retests. And fully 39,000 of the total were counted before they had even been carried out!

As the Socialist commented last issue, one respected epidemiologist estimates the UK has capacity for ten million tests a day. It is only the Tories' lack of a national plan to requisition and direct the resources, preferring to leave as much as possible to the private sector and the market, which holds this back.

A socialist government would have been in a far stronger position to manage this. Nationalisation of the healthcare and medical supply sectors, as well as big business generally, under the democratic control and management of workers, would allow a rapid and thorough democratic plan of emergency production and distribution.

Of course, identifying carriers and contacts quickly is one thing. Ensuring they then isolate themselves is another.

### No 'quick fix'

Contact tracing is not the 'quick fix' that some sections of big business seem to think it is. For it to work, employers need to understand that some of their workforce may well receive a message to say they need to quickly isolate themselves. Workers need to be assured they can do so without loss of income.

If, as in the case of schools, health, transport, construction, and so many other sectors, work is being carried out without adequate social distancing and PPE, the risk of being a close contact of an infected person increases significantly.

Where possible, workplaces must close to allow for deep cleans after confirmed cases. Where, as in schools, consistent physical distancing is hard to guarantee, closing

altogether may even be necessary. In workplaces where this cannot happen, like transport hubs, PPE, staggered usage, hygiene provisions and other protocols are doubly important.

The National Education Union has rightly set the following condition for schools to fully open: "Protocols to be put in place to test a whole school or college when a case occurs and for isolation to be strictly followed."

Another problem is that it is unclear exactly how accurate these tests are, because this is a new disease. Early research in China - unconfirmed as yet - suggests the most common test could give false negatives up to 30% of the time. So workers must have a negative test and be symptom-free before returning to work.

On top of this, the government states that if you live with someone experiencing symptoms, you should self-isolate for 14 days. This rule does not extend to working with someone experiencing symptoms - but we say it must.

Workers with underlying conditions should also continue to be 'shielded' at home, and given full pay. And the government guidance on at-risk age groups begins at 70 - but the stats indicate it should begin at 60.

### Safety v profits

Bluntly, unless workplace safety is put ahead of short-term profits, the outbreak cannot be properly managed. If the employers won't guarantee it - and experience shows they will not - trade unions must assert control over safety with elected workplace health and safety committees.

Of course, if these necessary measures had been carried out earlier, then it wouldn't now be so difficult to repair the damage. But on 12 March, the government stopped contact tracing.

The Cheltenham Festival went ahead that same week, and pubs and schools stayed open, all while Johnson claimed the 'science' didn't prove further steps were needed. After a decade of austerity, including £500 million 'efficiency savings' to Public Health England, it only had 290 contact tracers in its team at that time.

In reality, the evidence from China and other countries that had already been battling the infection already showed what was needed. There, early application of contact tracing and testing was used to isolate the outbreak to more manageable hotspots. Here, Tory delay means it will take a lot longer for a similar strategy to work. However, it is the only realistic approach to ending the lockdown safely.

## Contact tracing apps: big data, big potential - and dangers

Joe Fathallah  
Software developer,  
Cardiff East Socialist Party

Contact tracing is not a new idea. For example, it has been used for decades by sexual health clinics to try to identify and inform anyone who may have had sexual contact with a patient diagnosed with an STI. It's a lot harder, however, to keep track of everyone you've been within a two-metre radius of.

Community-based contact-tracing teams would provide the necessary local knowledge, accountability and flexibility that a purely central scheme lacks. But if contact-tracing staff re operating alongside new technology, in particular smartphones and big data, it could help maximise that system's power.

Not all phones have the technology required to operate an app-based system, however. Indeed, some of those most at risk, including the elderly, are the most likely groups to have older or basic mobile phones, or even not have them at all. This necessitates the use of manual-only tracing for these at-risk demographics.

The government has announced recruitment of 18,000 tracers working with councils and the NHS, asking people who they've been in contact with. This is a start, although probably much more will be needed, along with proper resources rather than just headline-grabbing announcements.

And there are also political complications that come with new technology. On 29 April, 177 cybersecurity experts wrote to the government. They said "it is vital that, when we come out of the current crisis, we have not created a tool that enables data collection on the population, or on targeted sections of society, for surveillance."

### Location tracking

One approach is a smartphone app which monitors the phone's location. If the phone's user is later diagnosed with coronavirus, it then automatically informs other phones which had come within two metres by text message.

This would involve sharing an uninterrupted stream of location data with either the state or a private company. We've already seen how tech companies collect highly



personal data and sell it for a profit. As they say in Silicon Valley, if you're not paying for it, then you're the product being sold.

In the internet age, companies like Google and Facebook can know us better than we know ourselves. They use that data in an unaccountable manner for profit interests. Effectively, almost every app we use is a kind of legal spyware.

This design might also run into technical problems with multi-storey buildings. If you're living in a block of flats, the satellites tracking your location may struggle to tell which floor you're on, and could think you've been in close contact with those living above or below you. This issue would, of course, disproportionately affect working-class people living on estates and in tower blocks.

Nonetheless, in South Korea this kind of approach has been successful. On 30 April, it became the first country to have suffered over 10,000 cases that was able to report a day with no new cases.

However, it came with draconian restrictions on personal freedoms, such as credit card transaction monitoring, tracking wristbands for those breaking quarantine laws, and making

Gove has hinted, it involves early lifting of lockdown measures, then residents will effectively be guinea pigs.

We say any testing of the app must not entail reduction of other safety measures. Workers and residents should decide democratically when and how it is safe to begin lifting restrictions.

A Bluetooth token system could be preferable from a privacy point of view as it can operate without a central database. But the government's app seems to be a kind of hybrid, using both Bluetooth technology and a central database.

Central databases do have important legitimate functions, such as data analysis by medical and public health professionals to find hotspots. However, in the context of mass working-class anger even before the pandemic, and likely social upheavals after it, a precedent for this kind of detailed mass electronic surveillance is troubling.

### Data democracy

Britain's capitalist state already has a record of secretly infiltrating democratic workers' movement organisations, including trade unions and the Socialist Party. The Chinese state and other regimes have shown how surveillance can be used to repress workers and youth organising to fight for workers' and democratic rights.

It's vitally important that any database or central processing system be publicly owned, limited, and subject to transparent and democratic control.

At the very least, we demand oversight committees comprising elected representatives from the workforce and the wider trade union movement. These committees could have remote access to the database at a 'metadata' level - without being able to see personal details - to keep track of whose data is being stored, how long it has been held for, and who else has had access to it.

Medical data can have exemptions from data protection laws, for legitimate reasons. But we say democratic rights within contact tracing must include free and immediate access for any individual to all data stored about them, as well as an agreed expiry date on records, and even the right to delete personal data in certain circumstances.

Ultimately, only by removing the profit motive will it be possible for big databases to exist without threatening personal privacy and democratic rights. Public ownership of the banks and big business would eliminate the imperatives to sell advertising data, or to undermine movements which threaten private profit.

This would also enable democratic, socialist planning of the economy. In this context, big data would not only be safer, but more thorough. It could finally be exploited to its full potential, to benefit the health system and all humanity, not to enrich tech billionaires and facilitate state snooping.

The Tories have proposed the Isle of Wight as the test zone, because it is isolated and so easier to control. But if, as senior cabinet minister Michael

# No increase in transport capacity without adequate safety precautions for workers and passengers

## RMT members in London

There are reports the government is considering abandoning advice to maintain two metres social distancing.

This comes as no surprise to the RMT. We had seen a presentation by London Underground to the International Union of Public Transport in which it argued that social distancing must be reduced to 0.5 metres in order to meet the expected demands for capacity under a “soft lockdown”.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the so-called science can be changed according to whatever the government wants to do at any given time.

For all the fancy talk about working in the national interest, and cooperation between industry and unions, we are seeing the same old disregard for workers as the bosses try to get the economy moving again.

Let's be clear. We all understand the need to be able to produce the stuff we need. Our public services and day-to-day needs cannot be met if the whole economy is shut



down. But getting it moving cannot be left in the hands of the same government and bosses that have made such a mess of the crisis so far.

The fact that the UK did not have, and cannot manufacture, sufficient PPE or tests is not an unavoidable consequence of the emergence of coronavirus. The government modelled a pandemic just like this back in 2016. It concluded that the NHS would not have enough critical care beds or ventilators. It did nothing.

Workers on the tube and across public transport services must be able to maintain two metres social distancing unless, and until, it is clearly safe to move away from this. The only mitigation for working without social distancing is PPE, and that doesn't mean wrapping a scarf around your face. With proper PPE unavailable we have no mitigations in place on London Underground.

There are 20,000 London bus drivers, and there are at least 22 known

coronavirus deaths among them. That's a rate of more than one per 1,000. Far higher than the rate for NHS staff. Many bus drivers believe this tragedy was avoidable, and was made worse than it could have been by the refusal of Transport for London and the bus companies to seal the front doors and limit boarding to the middle doors. Eventually this has been done, but too late for many.

Tube workers want to provide an essential service, but not with a reckless disregard for our safety.

We have not looked to shut down the tube in this crisis. RMT members have demonstrated a commitment to provide a service to those who really need to travel around London. We will also get that service back up to a more intensive service when we can do so safely and without gambling with our lives. We will not have a near full service imposed on us by politicians and bosses who only care about themselves.

## SOCIALISM: THE PODCAST

The weekly Marxist analysis podcast from the Socialist Party

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## Unsafe Workplace? “It's up to you” PCS tells reps and members

### Socialist Party members in PCS and Broad Left Network

PCS union reps and members at Paisley Jobcentre walked out on 24 April. Following an outbreak of Covid-19 in their office, they reached an agreement allowing staff to go home with the office closed for 72 hours. (See 'Civil servants in Paisley protest after Covid outbreak' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk))

Union reps at Paisley acted decisively to protect themselves and their members. They correctly determined that the health and safety of members was paramount, and collectively refused to work in a workplace they deemed unsafe.

But had they relied on advice and a lead from the union nationally, they would have been disappointed and still waiting.

APCS Briefing, “Coronavirus - can employees refuse to attend the workplace”, has been recently issued. At the end of a lengthy cataloguing of bits of legislation on health and safety, the briefing concludes with a statement bereft of guidance and leadership: “This briefing provides general information about statutory rights which are available to all em-

ployees in the UK. We are not advising you to do, or refrain from doing, anything.” In other words, sort it out yourself - leaving members and activists to their fate.

The incident at Paisley highlighted the need to secure arrangements which give better protection to members.

Other areas have successfully achieved this. For example a ‘serious incident protocol’ has been negotiated in HMRC. It has forced the closure of several HMRC buildings for periods of up to a week. The DWP PCS executive committee should negotiate a similar or better agreement for our members, and the national executive committee should try to get a similar or improved agreement to cover all our workplaces.

Broad Left Network members were active in the Paisley Jobcentre demand for a safe workplace, and in the action supporting this demand. We have no hesitation in recommending reps follow their example.

PCS should demand of management that they make all the workplace adjustments needed to ensure workers safety. These include:

- Everyone should work from home unless their work is both

critical and can't be done at home

- All staff with underlying health conditions, who live with someone with underlying health conditions or have caring responsibilities must work from home or be placed on paid special leave

- Where office attendance is necessary, agreed social distancing of at least two metres in all areas of the office - no compromise on capacity

- Thoroughly cleaned premises and equipment

- Hand sanitisers available at every point where they are needed

Where demands are not met to the satisfaction of reps and members, a car park meeting should be held (with proper social distancing arrangements in place), to agree collectively how to respond. Stick together until a solution is agreed and accepted by members. Yes, unity is our strength in these difficult times. A lesson it seems the national leadership of the union has yet to learn. Our members' safety is not for sale.

Join the fightback  
**JOIN THE SOCIALISTS**

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



## EDF Energy workers furloughed on 100% pay

Unite has successfully negotiated that nearly 500 EDF Energy workers will be furloughed on 100% pay during the coronavirus pandemic.

The agreement covers meter installers, meter fixers and revenue collection workers in London, the south east and south west regions.

Unite regional officer Onay Kasab said: “The agreement reached with EDF Energy will protect the pay and jobs of our members during the current coronavirus crisis.

“What we have achieved is the fundamental and central role of a trade union - defending workers' interests in the workplace, through thick and thin, and especially so when times are particularly hard.

“This is the time when a union's values, strength and resilience are truly tested and our reps at EDF have met that challenge 100%.

“This agreement was hammered out because this is a Unite organised work force. Nothing is ever guaranteed - but what this does show, yet again, is that you stand a fighting chance if you are a member of a trade union.”

The rest of the non-furloughed staff remains on full pay, and will be either voluntary emergency staff, who are on call, or employees who have volunteered to take part in community schemes - for example, delivering prescriptions and medication to the sick and elderly.



## Readers' opinion

# Is facemask advice based on science or shortages?

**Gareth Bromhall**  
Swansea and West Wales  
Socialist Party

There has been a lot said about facemasks. I help run a Covid-19 support group in Swansea and one of the most contentious subjects has been face coverings for the public.

Some countries have attempted to stop the contagion by suggesting or mandating the use of masks. On 28 April, Scottish first minister Nicola Sturgeon suggested people wear them in shops and on public transport.

There has been a lot of confusion, conflicting advice and misinformation.

It would appear from scientific advice that there is some benefit from masks - especially those with medical grade filters and single use in stopping viral particles - and just restricting access to the mouth and nose could also be of benefit.

Why is it then that the govern-

ment has not suggested masks, and seem to be keen to push dodgy science about their use?

Given that the main demand from frontline workers is 'PPE now', could it be that the government, knowing that it has a huge crisis of access to PPE, aren't encouraging the public to use masks in case it depletes already limited supply - to the detriment of our health? I don't think this can be discounted.

This crisis of supply of PPE could easily be solved. Textile companies have offered to make masks and gowns, engineering firms have offered to make ventilators, and thousands of DIY-makers in their homes have been 3D printing shields, sewing masks and even scrubs.

The workforce and infrastructure exist. What's missing is a socialist economy that can use the best scientific advice and democratic planning to ensure that PPE and other supplies needed to combat this pandemic, and others in the future, are produced and distributed in the interests of the majority.



photo USAF/Brooke Moeder/CC

# 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](mailto:editors@socialistparty.org.uk).

### ■ Another care home scandal

People in my village have heard cries for help coming from the nursing and care home. It transpires that one of the residents was confined to her room after she tested positive for Covid-19.

When villagers enquired further, we found out that she didn't even have a TV in her room. Managers stated that it was up to relatives to provide one.

This woman is now allowed out of her room, but she has been so traumatised that she is reluctant to leave it.

All residents should have TVs in their rooms if they want one. Care homes should be owned and run by the councils.

A care worker at the home told me that five residents tested positive for Covid-19 and they stopped testing after five. Staff have flimsy aprons. A doctor

showed her how droplets containing the virus could penetrate her face mask.

We demand full PPE and regular testing of staff and residents.

**Heather Rawling**  
**Leicester**

### ■ VE Day

The British ruling class, the Tories and Labour leader Keir Starmer, are going to try and utilise Victory in Europe Day (VE Day, 8 May).

It should be marked. Every time you have a discussion about what happened with the generation who lived through that war, you learn something.

But now what is happening to many of these heroes who defeated fascism? Left unprotected to die in care homes.

What is the real story of what happened in 1945? When Winston Churchill addressed the crowds in London he

claimed "this is a victory for no party or class, but a victory for all". But working-class people's conclusions were different.

At the end of the war in Britain, 500,000 were homeless and four million homes were bomb damaged. The wartime coalition had faced a militant strike wave in key war industries (see 'Class collaboration and worker militancy in World War Two Britain' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)), and a mood of organisation from the officer corps and rank-and-file soldiers.

In mainland Europe, the human suffering was unimaginably worse, and a revolutionary wave was seen. In Britain, Churchill is presented as a 'hero' today, but was thrown out and a Labour government voted in that was forced to nationalise 20% of the economy, set up the NHS and build council housing.

Then as now, there can be no going back.

**Matt Dobson**  
**Glasgow**

### ■ Lockdown

Contrary to the propaganda about how restless we are to go back into potentially life-threatening situations, an Observer poll suggests we could put up with lockdown a lot longer, if it meant we could save lives. Around 60% put health first and think the government should err on the side of caution.

I've never heard so many Tories going on about hungry children and domestic abuse victims. As if they give a flying frig about starving children or vulnerable women and children.

They haven't given a toss about the victims of neoliberalism these last 40 years. The last ten years of austerity read like they had it in for these

vulnerable groups.

The Socialist Party fights child hunger and violence against women every day, the Tories compound and create the problems.

**Nancy Taaffe**  
**Waltham Forest,**  
**London**

### ■ Football

South East London Socialist Party had an amazing meeting on 'football in a time of crisis'.

A number of clubs furloughed low-paid staff despite making huge profits and paying players big wages. Of course, footballers paying their taxes isn't enough to solve the huge health and economic crisis caused by coronavirus; we need socialist policies.

It was an opportunity to discuss what sports might look like after lockdown. We discussed a socialist approach to football and sports - kick profit out of the game, safe stadiums, democratically run clubs, decent facilities and funding for all, including women's teams, against racism, and much more.

**Helen Pattison**  
**London**

### ■ Lords

An example of how 'we are all in this together'. The House of Lords was due to have a virtual meeting.

But Lords can only claim their expenses, £323 a day, if they turn up at the building. So of course, some Lords said they would not do the virtual meeting, unless they got their money - which is tax free and can be claimed 150 times a year.

**Pete McNally**  
**Worcester**



### Celebrating May Day

Socialist Party members wore red to celebrate International Workers' Day...



... and across the world in the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

Austria



Belfast



Dublin



France



Germany



Nigeria

# Universities £2.5 billion funding 'black hole' Pay full fees for virtual courses? - No way!

Bea Gardner  
Southampton University and College Union (personal capacity)

The higher education sector faces a massive £2.5 billion funding 'black hole' which could see thousands of job losses if the government does not step in.

A recent report by London Economics, for the University and College Union (UCU), warned that 111,000 fewer UK and 121,000 fewer international first-year students will attend courses in September, resulting in billions of lost tuition fees income.

The report estimates 30,000 university jobs at risk, with a further 32,000 jobs under threat throughout the supply chain.

Not included in the report was the current losses for the sector from activities like summer conferences and accommodation. The Office for Budget Responsibility has predicted a 90% reduction in education output this quarter alone; a greater loss than any other sector.

Yet, despite mounting pressure to provide financial help, the treasury has this week confirmed it will not give any new money to the sector. Instead, the government has announced it will allow universities to continue to charge full tuition fees, even if the campuses remain closed and teaching is delivered online.

In reality, this means passing the cost of the crisis on to students who already pay extortionate fees which saddle them with a lifetime of debt.

The announcement means students starting in September could be paying £9,250 a year for remote courses, thrown together in a matter of weeks, without the physical resources like library books.

The quality of education has already been eroded by more than a decade of marketisation, slashing quality and workers' conditions, to increase profits. Now, students are



Universities could be charging £9,250 in fees for 'virtual' courses photo Mary Finch

expected to continue to pay outrageous fees for even further reduced quality of education.

In comparison, the Open University, which delivers all its degree courses online, recently announced it spent two years developing a new online course.

The likelihood is this announcement will push more students to defer their place until it is safe for them to physically attend, causing an even greater financial impact for universities.

The universities are playing a leading role in Covid-19 research. If universities were nationalised and run as a public service, not a business, then a fluctuation in student numbers would not be an issue.

If democratically run by staff and students, universities could focus on excellent research, teaching and collaboration rather than competition and vanity projects.

But even if the government continues to refuse financial help, the universities have reserves and other assets they could use. Some universities have announced they will

continue with expensive new buildings while slashing staff numbers.

The UCU must now mount a determined and co-ordinated campaign, including strike action if necessary, to protect jobs.

Meanwhile, students should not pay the cost of the higher education crisis. They should join with UCU activists and Socialist Students to campaign for universities to be run democratically by staff and students under public ownership.

Socialist Students demands that students and staff are not made to pay for this crisis. Students need organisations of their own which fight for the immediate scrapping of tuition fees, the cancellation of student debt, and to end the capitalist driven marketisation of higher education which has led universities to the brink of collapse. If you're a student, join Socialist Students today.



## TV - BBC Panorama PPE shortage - how many lives will be lost?

Barbara Clare  
Stevenage Socialist Party

I was astounded as to the extent of the government's PPE failures and how NHS staff are being put at risk. The daily items of 'PPE' reported by Downing Street include detergent, paper towels, clinical waste bags, cleaning equipment, each individual glove (not pairs) and plastic aprons that provide limited protection.

Some hospitals reported only receiving ten gowns a day from government deliveries, leaving them to buy extras themselves. Libby, a union rep, displayed items donated by the public - aprons, bin bags, homemade items and swimming goggles. One employee showed a white use-by-date sticker stuck over an original yellow one on the box of a recent delivery - both were out of date.

The Panorama programme explained that for almost a decade a pandemic has been designated the greatest threat to Britain. However the government didn't stockpile any gowns, even though at the end of 2019 advisers said they were needed.

Professor John Ashton said it's "breathhtaking". No visors or swabs were stockpiled either, and not a single body bag. When Covid-19 started, we still had time to stockpile. At the start of the pandemic

the government had 33 million respirator masks, but only 12 million have been handed out! The government has refused to say where the rest have gone.

The TV programme anonymously quotes from two heads of procurement at NHS Trusts.

One said: "We've been told not to talk about shortages outside of meetings and calls. They don't want people to know how bad it is." The other said: "The supply chain is erratic, unpredictable and incompetent."

Covid-19 was originally classed as a High Consequence Infectious Disease (HCID). HCID guidelines state that all staff should wear a respirator mask, full face visor and a gown, and that the government has a legal obligation to make sure NHS staff have this kit.

Government PPE guidance has changed because of shortages. On 19 March, the government downgraded Covid-19. Now, recommended PPE is an apron, gloves and a flimsy surgical mask.

Why on earth shouldn't coronavirus be in the most serious category of classification? Some members of the committee responsible told the BBC it had to be a 'pragmatic' decision based on availability of PPE.

One quote from an NHS worker stood out: "Calling us heroes just makes it okay when we die." How many lives will be lost because of the scandalous shortage of PPE?

## Lessons from history

# THE TYNESIDE APPRENTICES' STRIKE DURING WW2

Heather Rawling  
Leicester Socialist Party

I have been enjoying reading the articles on World War Two. There are many lessons to be learnt for today for our class and the youth.

The article 'Class collaboration and worker militancy in World War Two Britain' (see socialistparty.org.uk) by Alec Thraves, mentioned the apprentices' strikes of 1944. These took place in the North East, North West and Yorkshire.

I have a particular interest in this dispute, as not only am I from Tyneside, but my uncle Roy was involved with the Tyneside apprentices strike, and went to prison for his actions. I can remember my mam and dad discussing it when I was a young girl, as they too had played a role in the strike.

The class struggle during the war reached a peak in 1944. The official number of strikes was 2,194 in that year, with more than 3,700,000 working days lost.

Coal was the major fuel for industry and shipping in those days, and so essential for the war economy. Extra demands were made of the miners to produce more coal. As the article mentioned, the miners went on strike for more pay and demanded nationalisation.

In January 1944, at a time when the government needed coal the most, it had provoked the biggest single miners' strike since the 1926 General Strike. This was despite massive profits being made by the coal owners.

Today, the Tory government has totally mismanaged the war against coronavirus, and will pay the price when workers' anger translates into industrial action and protest.

In 1944, the government blamed the miners' strike on a 'Trotskyist conspiracy'. Ernest Bevin, right-wing Labour MP and Minister for Labour, claimed that the miners' strike "was worse than if Hitler had bombed Sheffield and cut our communications."



Right-wing Labour MP Ernest Bevin, wartime Minister for Labour

Bevin received the full support of the Trade Union Congress leaders (TUC - the umbrella organisation of trade unions) who attacked the miners, saying they had "struck a blow in the back of their comrades fighting in the armed forces". The TUC was representing the so-called national interest against the interest of workers.

The pro-Stalin Communist Party newspaper the Daily Worker (forerunner of the Morning Star), also urged the striking miners to go back to work.

Workers today are fighting for better health and safety provision to fight this deadly coronavirus, and we are in danger of being conscripted back to work for the benefit of big business, hungry for profits. Business leaders have floated the idea of the young returning to work first. Again, sacrificing the young in their pursuit of profit.

The Bevan Ballot scheme was one of the most unpopular measures of the war. It met with fierce opposition, particularly on Tyneside. Many of the apprentices, 'Bevin Boys', conscripted to the mines in 1944, had been on very low pay for three or four years.

They at least hoped that they would complete their apprenticeships as skilled workers, but the Bevan Ballot took that away. They were given no guarantees that they could take up their chosen trade when the war ended.

Their militancy is hugely significant as this group of workers were bound by contract to their employers. They were not allowed to go on strike, and some were not even allowed to join a trade union.

Given the opposition of the TUC, the apprentices set up the Tyne Apprentices Guild and approached the Revolutionary Communist Party, (RCP - forerunner of the Socialist Party) for support. With the help of the RCP they linked up with apprentices on Clydeside and elsewhere, and recruited the support of family members and other workers. They helped the apprentices produce leaflets to distribute.

By the end of March 1944, 26,000 apprentices on the Tyne, Glasgow, and other industrial areas were on strike against the Bevin Ballot scheme, and in support of the call for the nationalisation of the mines.

The activities of the RCP had not gone unnoticed and, despite being a relatively small organisation, had been discussed at Cabinet level. M15 (the domestic secret service) had a file on them.



Bevin Boys undergoing training with pit props

The apprentices' strike lasted two weeks, and straight after their return to work the police raided the headquarters of the RCP. Homes of party members were also raided.

My uncle, Roy Tearse, industrial organiser of the RCP, was one of those arrested on Tyneside, along with Ann Keen and Heaton Lee. Another RCP leader, Jock Haston, was later arrested in Edinburgh. The press was vicious in condemning them. Headlines labelled Roy Tearse the "evil cripple" as he had been disabled from childhood poli.

### Socialism on trial

Roy and his fellow comrades were tried under the hated Trade Disputes Act which declared that: "No person shall declare, instigate or incite any other person to take part in, or shall otherwise act in furtherance of any strike among persons engaged in the performance of essential services or any lock-out of persons so engaged". They were also charged with conspiracy.

Socialist Appeal, newspaper of the RCP, launched a Defence Committee. Left-wing Labour MP Aneurin Bevan spoke in parliament in their defence.

Sympathetic soldiers petitioned the home secretary. In their letter they wrote: "Tearse and his comrades are accused of fomenting the strike amongst the apprentices and the coal miners. We do not believe

that that is true. That they gave guidance and advice to the miners and apprentices is to their credit, for that is the job of all faithful workers' leaders."

They went on to say: "We soldiers are also workers. We do not want to come back to a life where living conditions have been driven down to intolerable levels. We consider the miners' fight as a struggle to maintain these rights". Soldiers in the Eighth Army (drawn from across the Commonwealth) declared that the "right to strike is part of the freedom we fight for".

These words must have struck terror in those at the heart of government and representing the interests of big business. When soldiers begin to understand their common interest with workers and identify as workers, then the very existence of capitalism is in jeopardy.

The defence campaign also won the support of trade union branches around the country. The four were still convicted though. Roy Tears and Heaton Lee were given 12-month jail terms, Jock Haston six months, and Ann Keen 13 days. But in September 1944, the convictions were quashed.

The prosecution of these Trotskyists was the most significant anti-worker militant criminal prosecution undertaken by the ruling class for many years.

The RCP militants had been up against the might of the state

during a world war. But they had successfully appealed to their class and won support, along with some Labour MPs like Jimmy Maxton and Ernest Silverman.



**We soldiers are also workers. We do not want to come back to a life where living conditions have been driven down to intolerable levels**

The overturning of the conviction was a victory, not just for the RCP but for workers everywhere. The organised working class had gained one of the most important legal victories in the struggle against anti-union legislation. The defence had upheld the right to strike.

Already, in the struggle by workers to win safe working conditions during the coronavirus crisis, unofficial, and therefore illegal, strikes under the current law have taken place. These victories will not be lost on workers, and can be the spearhead of a future campaign to overturn the Tories anti-union legislation.



## Peter Hadden remembered

Many Socialist Party members will remember Peter Hadden, who died ten years ago, on 5 May 2010 (Obituary: Peter Hadden - an inspiring life for socialism' - socialistparty.org.uk).

Peter was a leading member of the Irish section of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), to which the Socialist Party in England and Wales is also affiliated. Along with his CWI comrades, in the North and South of Ireland, Peter spent decades fighting for workers' unity and socialism. He wrote extensively on Marxism and the national question (marxists.org/history).

Peter's polemical pamphlet, 'The Struggle for Socialism Today' (marxists.org/history) is particularly relevant in today's world of crisis-ridden capitalism, and with the challenges facing the left.

Peter argues, in common with the CWI, that to achieve full, lasting liberation of all the exploited and oppressed, requires building powerful working-class parties, united on a bold socialist programme, while avoiding the pitfalls of political opportunism and ultra-leftism.



# INDIA: FIGHTING THE CURSE OF CAPITALISM AND CORONAVIRUS

Jagadish G Chandra  
New Socialist Alternative  
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The coronavirus crisis has exposed all the inadequacies, incapacities, and insoluble contradictions of India's capitalist state.

The 21-day lockdown (now extended until 3 May) was announced in a shoddy and authoritarian way by the right-wing, Hindu-nationalist Prime Minister, Narendra Modi.

On 24 March, just four hours' notice was given of the complete lockdown to be complied with by the mammoth population of 1.34 billion. It shows the inept nature of these capitalist representatives, especially in neo-colonial countries like India.

Within minutes of Modi declaring the lockdown, the privileged upper-middle class, with hefty salaries, thronged shopping malls and marts to grab everything, especially food items. It was unbelievable coming across empty shops.

The middle class and the rich, who are the mainstay of support for the right-wing Modi, are full of praise for the prime minister's 'visionary' actions.

The lockdown comes at a time when the state's weakened public distribution system (PDS) has been systematically destroyed by decades of neoliberalism. Consequently, food distribution was thrown into utter chaos owing to widespread supply shortages.

Even before Covid-19, India accounted for a quarter of the world's child deaths. This is because the market maximises the production of what is profitable, not what is socially necessary - luxury condominiums, not public hospitals.

Regions across the country face acute shortages of doctors and nurses, as well as basics like test kits, hospital beds, ventilators, masks and gloves, sanitary supplies, cleaning products, transportation, and almost every other element of the goods and services necessary to get out of this crisis.

This current system of society, based on a rapacious capitalist class working to safeguard only its own interests, cannot and will not save India from the coronavirus.

## Migrant workers

The country is said to have 14 to 16 million migrant workers (from within the country), but unofficial estimates place the number way above the official count. The migrant workers engaged in construction, road building, ancillary industries, and

various other hazardous jobs - who make a significant contribution to the economy - have been left abandoned during this crisis. Now they are subjected to harassment by the local mafia, usurers, landlords, and loan sharks.

## Death warrant

The abrupt country-wide lockdown has been a death warrant for many migrant families living in the shanty towns of large metropolises and other towns. Most of them do not enjoy social security benefits or tickets to other welfare.

With the lockdown extended to 40 days and no additional relief measures announced, migrant workers' distress will only increase.

Signs of their burning discontent came to the fore recently in Surat and Mumbai, as thousands gathered on the streets. All they wanted was to be extricated from the continued trauma imposed by the brutal lockdown and be able to go home.

Modi announced on 29 April that students and migrant workers can go home, but the government will not run special trains. Going by bus means that some journeys could take two or three days!

India's societal curse - the caste system - has a built-in structural apathy and animosity towards the labouring classes. The privileged sections of society - particularly those with comfortable incomes and owning and controlling resources,

like land, access to drinking water, factories, houses - show complete disdain towards the real wealth creators in society - the mass of blue and black-collar (illegal) workers.

The regime of the Modi government is avowedly anti-poor. Unlike the Congress Party governments before, its social base is not the poorer sections of the population. It is a party fundamentally of traders and the 'successful' middle classes. It unabashedly represents the Indian elite's disdain for the labouring poor, which is so deep-seated that it makes it impossible to admit that the poor might even be essential people.

The opinion-makers - the '1%' along with the 2% or 3% of the upper-middle classes and privileged castes - have not only hogged all the resources historically but have seen to it that government policies (be it BJP or Congress) predominantly cater to their greed and not the dire needs of the majority.

## Haves and have-nots

This grotesque reality has been starkly exposed during this coronavirus crisis. Democracy in India is a privilege that the minority of 'haves' enjoy by riding high on the bent backs and starved stomachs of the majority of 'have-nots'.

51% of India's rural population is landless. For farmworkers across many states, work has come to a standstill in the fields. While the

government announced an economic package in March, this relief has only focused on the landed farmers. For the landless labourers, there has been no income over the last weeks, forcing them to adopt drastic measures like reducing their own food intake.

When the lockdown began, hundreds of thousands of young workers decided to head back home. Because of the ham-fisted way in which the logistics of the lockdown were handled, all rail and road transport was brought to a grinding halt.

Many tens of thousands started walking from various cities of India, not only to join their families but also to be available for the seasonal work of harvesting.

Many covered the unimaginable distances of hundreds of kilometres on foot, and others managed to hitch rides on trucks.

By the time they completed their horrendous journeys to their native places, the bleeding blisters on their feet left a trail along the dusty roads of rural India. Some, especially the older people and the women, sometimes failed to complete their journeys.

Large farmers in many villages, particularly in the north of India, decided to use harvester machines because hiring labour during the lockdown was more difficult. As a result, the farm workers have been left with absolutely no income whatsoever.

The 'omnipotent' prime minister has been tall on promises. Given the rate at which he has verbally promised a raft of 'goodies' in his six years of rule, by this time, his favourite phrase of "achche din" ("the good days") should have become a reality.

Now, his recent television broadcast is full of white lies. As well as many high-sounding schemes, the



Modi's inept and brutal lockdown has devastatingly impacted on India's multi-millioned poor photo kremlin.ru/CC

# Trump puts profit before safety (again)



Meat processing factories have become coronavirus hotspots in the US photo NorthAmericanMeatInstitute/CC

US president Donald Trump has invoked a 1950s Korean War-era piece of legislation to re-open meat processing plants, closed because of high rates of coronavirus infections among their workforces.

Many employees being forced back to work are low-paid, migrant workers on precarious contracts. It's widely reported that strict social-distancing protocols - which aren't mandatory - have not been adhered to.

About 50 workers from the Perdue Perry Cook poultry plant in Kathleen, Georgia, walked out on 23 March in protest at the unsanitary conditions inside the plant and demanding the factory was sanitised.

Police arrived in unmarked SUVs, surrounded the workers demonstration, and broke up the protest.

The average salary for a general labourer at Perdue foods is reportedly \$12.66 an hour. In 2015 the Perdue family was worth an estimated \$3.2 billion.

## Blaming workers

One of the country's biggest pork processing factories, Smithfield Foods in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, temporarily closed after more than 700 of its 3,700 workforce became infected with Covid-19.

It reportedly took Smithfield 18 days after the first case of Covid-19 among its workers to pause operations for 48 hours over Easter to 'deep-clean' the plant. But, the BBC reports that workers continued to operate shifts during this period.

Outrageously, the company suggested that the plant became a hotspot for the virus, not because of the

lack of PPE and social distancing, but because of migrant workers' "living circumstances".

A Smithfield spokesperson reportedly said it is hard to know "what could have been done differently" given the plant's "large immigration population."

However, the AFL-CIO union federation in Sioux Falls says its officials approached Smithfield management back in March, before any employee at the plant tested positive, to demand PPE - gloves, masks, aprons, etc. Instead, it's reported that the company provided beard nets, which do not stop airborne particles.

## Legal cover

The biggest union in the meatpacking industry, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW), has reported 72 deaths and 5,322 workers directly impacted by the coronavirus throughout its total membership of 1.3 million.

The UFCW is demanding PPE, social distancing and so forth, to protect workers at the reopened plants. But the union also reports that Trump's administration is providing legal protection to companies whose employees subsequently contract the virus at work.

Last year the federal government allowed pork processing companies to speed up production lines, thereby increasing the risk of injury to workers.

Yet another example of Trump's deregulation of industry, designed to boost corporate profits at workers' expense.



**The Jungle.** Upton Sinclair's classic socialist novel, exposing the horrendous working conditions and adulteration of food in Chicago's meat-packing industry at the beginning of the 20th Century.

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**“”**  
The regime of the Modi government is avowedly anti-poor... It unabashedly represents the Indian elite's disdain for the labouring poor



A newspaper vendor under lockdown photo Vaikunda Raja/CC

The recent Delhi riots (predominantly anti-Muslim) gave them the necessary alibi to build a scare campaign among ordinary Hindus. While every religious grouping was flouting lockdown norms, Muslim congregations were targeted and rumours of a 'Corona Jihad' were spread to polarise public opinion against Muslims.

The police in various states are using the curfew norms to launch a reign of terror against the people, all while the virus spreads unchecked amid society's most vulnerable.

## Profit motive

Instead of a total lockdown, the government could have announced a halt to all gatherings and non-essential businesses while absorbing all relevant enterprises and essential workers, equipped with PPE, receiving hazard pay and benefits, into a nationwide public health and disaster mitigation effort.

Garment manufacturers should be requisitioned to supervise the production of masks and gloves. Empty buildings and construction sites should be taken over to build hospital wards. Factories should be designated to make ventilators and oxygen tanks, and delivery and taxi companies directed to transport essential supplies.

Marxists and socialists will fight for all reforms that can at least mitigate the crisis situation, at the same time explaining and warning of the utterly temporary nature of such reforms, reluctantly granted by the bourgeois who will do anything and everything to defend the profits that keep their system going.



The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the world socialist organisation which the Socialist Party is affiliated to. The CWI is organised in many countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against capitalism and to fight for a socialist world. socialistworld.net

announcement of 2,000 Rupees (\$26) direct bank transfers to peasants under the PM-Kisan (farmers) scheme is hogwash.

Farmers are anyway entitled to 6,000 Rupees (\$78) annually. This is usually paid in three instalments. The government has merely advanced the payment of one instalment. And even this poverty assurance has not been extended to landless labourers or the small tenant farmers.

While the Modi government has announced free rice to be available through the public distribution system, there are umpteen complaints from across all the states that the promised rice is getting siphoned off due to corruption.

Those with small children are affected in a very bad way. They are even struggling to feed them. New mothers in rural areas are already starving and not able even to suckle their babies.

On the one hand, millions of tons of food grain are rotting away in the storehouses of the government, but children are being abandoned by parents who cannot feed them.

## State apparatus

Coronavirus landed in India when the country was raging with protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which discriminates against Muslims and criminalises their very existence in the country.

As far as Modi and co are concerned, Covid-19 was a god-sent tool to control the vast population by instilling fear of imminent death. They used the Covid-19 threat to further criminalise the religious and national minorities, particularly Muslims.

Internet thugs on the payroll of the BJP unleashed a rumour war to foist Islamophobia upon the people.

# CORONAVIRUS

# A WORKERS' CHARTER



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## Income, jobs and workplace safety

- 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 asked to work from home must be supplied with adequate equipment, and performance monitoring should be scrapped
- Workers who follow health advice to be absent from work to avoid potential spread should be excluded from any attendance-management procedures
- Trade unions to establish an all-union health and safety committee in every workplace to agree joint actions required to guarantee safety
- No return to work unless adequate safety measures are agreed with trade unions and the workforce
- 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

## NHS and social care

- Emergency increase in funding for the NHS and for social care
- Adequate personal protection for all frontline workers
- NHS to take over all private healthcare facilities and staff.

- PPE for all NHS and frontline staff
- Tests and full pay for all
- Take over private health and other necessary facilities and industries. 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.**

Government should take over other industries and convert production where necessary, under the democratic control of workers in those industries and in the wider workforce, to guarantee the supply of PPE, medical equipment and testing. Not a penny to the profiteers

- Emergency training of NHS staff to deal with the coronavirus crisis
- Reintroduce full student nurse bursaries, and waive their student debt immediately
- Immediate 10% wage rise for all NHS staff and social care workers
- Resources to be mobilised from government and big-business sources so that free, accessible testing with rapid results is available for all frontline staff, workers interacting with the public, patients transferred into social care and anyone with flu or cold-like symptoms. Requisition all private testing and analysis facilities. Massively increase the number of contact tracers
- Reverse privatisation in the NHS, remove the privateers and cancel all the billions of pounds in annual PFI payments. End profit in social care and bring it into the public sector under democratic working-class oversight
- 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 local distribution of food, medicines and other supplies to the needy and vulnerable with the democratic oversight of trade union and community organisations. Scrap existing cuts budgets. Demand that the government nationally finance all additional spending necessary to deal with the coronavirus crisis, as well as releasing the resources to reverse a decade of austerity
- 24-hour, adequately staffed, local authority helplines for vulnerable and elderly people forced to self-isolate
- Workload demands must be reduced and time made available to prioritise protecting the health, safety and welfare of staff and service users
- Quality childcare for vulnerable families and children of essential workers, under the democratic

control of education and care workers, with adequate protection for all. No delay in food vouchers for children normally in receipt of free school meals. Vouchers must reflect the real costs of providing a nutritious daily meal

- Nobody should lose their home because of coronavirus. Mortgage, rent and council tax payments should be waived for the duration of the crisis and arrears written off. Democratically controlled local authority hardship funds for landlords in genuine need
- Councils to use their powers to take over empty homes to house the homeless, those in inadequate housing and those fleeing domestic violence. Hotels to be used to provide emergency accommodation
- Funding for 24 hour helplines and increased spending on refuges and safe 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

- 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
- No erosion of workers' right to organise, including the democratic functioning of trade unions and parties
- No profiteering. Prices to be controlled by democratically elected committees of workers and consumers
- 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