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Issue 1086
14-20 May 2020



socialistparty.org.uk

the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**

**STAY ALERT
TO BOSSES PUTTING
PROFIT BEFORE SAFETY**

**STAY ALERT
TO TORY LIES ABOUT PPE,
TESTING AND DEATHS**

FIGHT BACK

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

On Sunday 10 May Boris Johnson tells construction, manufacturing, and other workers in England who can't work from home, to get on their bike and go to work. Two days later, we're told that working-class men in blue-collar jobs are twice as likely to die from Covid-19 than the population as a whole.

The Tories are sending workers to their deaths to safeguard the profits of their big business backers.

Over 100 health workers have died. Many of those could have lived if they had had adequate PPE. Over 30 bus drivers have been killed by the virus because the bus companies put profit before lives. In fact, during this pandemic it's even more dangerous to be a bus driver than it is to be a doctor!

If we go to the park we have to stay two metres apart, but social distancing can go out of the window on the factory floor, the building site, and the office, so that the capitalist economy can keep going and the profits rolling in.

It's OK for workers to be jammed together on the tube and public transport, putting their lives and those of transport workers at risk, because the wealth of a minority is more important than the health of the majority.

Who cares if nursery and primary school children become mass spreaders of coronavirus? The most important thing is getting them into the classroom so their parents can go back to work for the bosses.

Without social distancing, PPE, mass testing and tracing, and other safety measures in place, the Tories are giving a licence to kill.

Yes, we have to stay alert. Alert to how the Tories and the bosses will try to make us pay for this crisis with our lives and our livelihoods.

That means organising in the trade unions and in the workplaces to fight for the health and safety of all workers, and to defend our incomes and our jobs. And it means fighting for a socialist system where profit is not the driving motive, and the needs of society come first.

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

The Socialist goes to press on a Tuesday night. We publish online on Wednesday and in print on Thursday.

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The Socialist is the weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party, the England and Wales section of the Committee for a Workers' International

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ISSN 1366-9621

Registered as a newspaper
at the Post Office

Printed by Reach Printing Services
Published by Socialist Publications
PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

Militant issue 1: October 1964
The Socialist issue 1: 7 February 1997

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

Karl Marx

Tories put profit before lives

Unions must stand firm on workplace safety



WHAT WE THINK

“Meet the new messaging: same as the old messaging. Only even vaguer and more confusing. Not so much 15 minutes of TV fame as uncomfortable like watching someone have a breakdown in front of you. Rather than just stay at home, Boris's new maxim was to 'stay alert'. Less a slogan, more like a piece of advice to himself, given all the times he has taken his eye off the ball over the past few months.”

This was how the Guardian sketch writer John Crace described Johnson's Sunday night announcement ('Smart suit, brushed hair. It was just Boris Johnson's speech that was a mess')

Danger

Undoubtedly, the contradictions and caveats were surreal and almost comical, if you forget how catastrophically serious the situation is. How many workers will be put in danger by 'instructions' that could lead to crammed public transport and people going back to workplaces with no plan or system to make them safe?

Johnson's muddle represents the deep divisions in his Tory cabinet about how to proceed. Reflecting the needs of big business, all want to get the economy going, but some have more appreciation of the government's blunders, and the affects they have had.

The UK has the highest number of Covid-19 deaths in Europe, and pro-rata in the world. The real figure is at least 60,000 according to the Times. A second wave of deaths risks provoking a huge working-class backlash. As one senior official put it, the public will forgive us for mistakes going into lockdown but not coming out.

But despite the confusion, the material point from Johnson's



photo GoToVan/CC

statement is that the Tories are moving to lift the lockdown, even though people are still dying in their hundreds on a daily basis, the 100,000 per day tests are continually not being reached and the chaos over PPE provision continues.

Johnson's government is clearly putting bosses' profits before workers' safety. The continuing Covid pandemic is being used by the bosses and the Tories to put a gun to workers' heads - your job or your life.

Under rank and file members' pressure, the leaders of all of the major unions have belatedly been forced into opposition to a return to work at this stage, without the necessary health and safety measures in place. This even had some effect on Johnson's stance on schools reopening (see p4-5). Imagine what could be achieved if the whole weight of the trade union movement was employed in this crisis.

But that union pressure needs to be stepped up to prevent any backtracking. Frances O'Grady, general secretary of the Trade Union Congress, has already described the Tories' totally inadequate workplace safety guidelines as 'a step forward'.

The bosses, however, have been pressing for a return to work. Workers will now be asking what concretely the union leaders will do to protect their safety. It is not enough to make a statement and then leave individual workers alone to take decisions about whether to go back to work or whether a workplace is safe. There must be an immediate collective response from the unions in support of those who refuse to work.

On the eve of Johnson's announcement, transport union RMT publicly gave its backing to London Underground members who have a "legal right to use the refusal to work policy" should social distancing

prove impossible to maintain (see p6). Len McCluskey, general secretary of Unite union said: "Workers should be safe. If they don't feel safe, if their stewards and health and safety reps say it's not safe, they shouldn't go to work."

Our starting point is clear - unless the unions and their members say a workplace is safe, it isn't. That means no return to work until the necessary safety standards are met. And that should be on 100% pay. There must be no dilution of the two-metre social distancing, with clear floor markings and safe capacity in all factory floors, offices, buses and trains, etc.

It has been calculated that the London Underground can only be operated at 15% capacity to comply with social distancing. This must remain intact until the transport unions decide differently.

Sufficient PPE complying with NHS safety standards, regular

testing, ample hand sanitisers and washroom facilities - if these are not available, work should stop on full pay.

Workers should be advised to meet collectively (complying with social distancing). If they decide that their workplace is unsafe, they should decide together not to work, citing Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996.

Strikes

Even though official strike ballots would take weeks to organise and process, they can be useful in giving a lead and confidence to workers, and sending a message to the employers and the government. This should be combined with the demand that any victimisation of workers taking action over health and safety will be met with coordinated action across the union movement.

Workplace safety must be under the control of the workplace unions with democratic accountability to members. On a regional and national level there should be union committees, with access to medical and scientific advice, with oversight of any governmental decisions.

Economic predictions are painting an ever bleaker picture. Thousands of redundancies have already been announced, and tens of thousands more workers could face permanent job losses. If any company threatens redundancies, bankruptcy or closure, workers' committees should demand that that the books be open to union scrutiny. And, if necessary, the company should be taken into democratic public ownership to protect jobs and communities.

An emergency TUC General Council should be immediately called and turned into a council of war on workers' safety and jobs. If this isn't forthcoming, then the left unions should urgently meet to map a plan of action.

This should also include a discussion on how workers' independent political interests can best be represented. The consistent refusal of Keir Starmer and Labour front bench spokespeople to say they would back workers' refusing to work in unsafe conditions is yet more proof that this will not be through the post-Corbyn Labour Party. A new mass workers' party will be needed to fight for the working class against all of the attacks of the capitalist bosses and their political representatives.

SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party
May issue includes...

Covid chaos and the special crisis of British capitalism
Blairites NHS 'legacy'
Beeffing up state powers

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photo Judy Beishon

Furlough scheme extended Workers need 100% of wages

Rishi Sunak has announced the government's plans for the furlough scheme, which will be extended until October.

Almost a quarter of the entire British workforce have now been furloughed by their employers. As a result, the government is currently picking up 80% of the wage bill for 7.5 million workers, at a cost of £8 billion so far. This is expected to rise to £39 billion by the end of June, a sum equivalent to a year's spending on the NHS.

Unemployment

The government, with no plan for jobs or protecting workers living standards, is trapped. It is fearful of the growing costs of the scheme, but panicked by the rising predictions of unemployment. This is expected by some to rise from 4% to well over 10% - a level not seen since the 1970s - with all the subsequent problems that would bring.

Prior to the announcement on Tuesday 11 May, it seemed as if the government was about to relax the rules and allow workers to be able to return to work part time and claim part-time furlough money.

There were also proposals to reduce the amount of wages that could be claimed from 80% down to 60%, in order to both save money and force workers back to work, despite unsafe conditions.

If implemented, these proposals would have reduced government spending, and at the same time greatly increased poverty for workers already struggling with

loss of income, with many forming part of the extra 1.8 million benefit claimants.

In the end, fearing the economic and social consequences of these proposals, the government backed off and extended the scheme for four months. Even many of the so-called free marketeer bosses were demanding that the government maintain the scheme post-June.

Even before the extension, millions of low-paid workers were struggling to pay the bills and, in some cases, put food on the table, because of a 20% cut in wages. Many are already falling into debt. For these workers, four more months on poverty pay could be disastrous. Some could feel compelled to go back to work, even if their workplace is not safe.

Poverty or safety is no choice

It is vital that the trade unions take a stand and demand that the government pay 100% of wages as the only way of protecting all workers. No worker should be faced with a choice of poverty or return to a workplace that may threaten the lives of them and their families. No worker unable to return to work because of a government-imposed shutdown should be out of pocket.

And it's time we started demanding the opening of the books of the big corporations who are happy to hold their hands out for bailouts while trillions lie idle in their bank accounts - money which could more than provide the funds to protect the livelihoods of workers.



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.

- Scrap Universal Credit. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
- A 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

ENVIRONMENT

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

RIGHTS

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

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!

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Fighting school reopening in highest mortality rate borough

Niall Mulholland
Vice chair, Newham Trade Union Council (personal capacity) and East London Socialist Party

With Newham in east London suffering the highest Covid-19 mortality rate in England and Wales, at 144.3 deaths per 100,000 people, there are widespread concerns among the borough's students, parents, teachers, and other school staff that schools and colleges will be prematurely reopened before they are safe.

In light of this, Louise Cuffaro, Newham's National Education Union (NEU) secretary, and a Socialist Party member, convened a Zoom meeting on 6 May to discuss the issue with local parents, councillors, the Labour MP for East Ham Stephen Timms, anti-academy campaigners, and Newham Trade Union Council members.

Louise outlined the 'five tests' that the NEU set for schools to reopen.



Socially distanced protest against coronavirus deaths in Newham
photo Dave Carr

Workers and parents should decide when it is safe to go back!

Ron Reader
Parent, North London Socialist Party

We are in the middle of a national crisis with Covid-19. We are parents of four and eight-year olds, and feel it is premature to consider reopening places of education.

Schools are busy and densely populated, and social distancing would undoubtedly be very difficult, if not problematic at best.

While schools would have policies in place to try and manage this, we believe it is unrealistic to expect social distancing to take place properly. How would mealtimes and going to the toilet be managed, for example?

Reopening schools early, before

The NEU states that the Covid-19 case count must be lower, and extensive arrangements must be ready for testing and contact tracing.

But are education workers in Newham confident this will be securely in place? The NEU says a national plan must be agreed for appropriate physical distancing and levels of social mixing. Will physical distancing be possible consistently in Newham's often overcrowded schools?

Hot spots

The NEU calls for comprehensive regular testing for children and staff to ensure schools and colleges do not become hot spots for Covid-19. So far, these tests and protocols have not been agreed to by the Tory government.

Louise pointed out that if teachers and staff are not assured, they can, under the Employment Rights Act 1996, refuse to return to work to a danger that they believe to be serious and imminent. The current coronavirus legislation states the virus poses just such a threat.

The meeting heard the shocking news that Newham council has not actually met since the coronavirus crisis, despite Newham being the epicentre of the pandemic.

Nevertheless, the councillors present agreed to take the NEU's five tests to the Newham mayor's office, and to seek to persuade the Labour-run council to agree to support the union's approach.

As chair of the Parliament's Work and Pensions Select Committee, Stephen Timms MP asked for workplace reports and proposals he can bring to its next meeting.

As well as Louise's comments, and others' suggestions, I outlined Covid-19 related concerns from workplaces that have been brought to Newham Trade Union Council, including from reps from the University and College Union, the higher education lecturers' union. We await with interest the response of the select committee.

we have reached a lower rate of infection, and have adequate PPE and testing and tracing - meeting the five National Education Union (NEU) tests - puts children, teachers and their colleagues at risk.

We worry that this increases the risk of a second spike, and will increase cases of infection and deaths of Covid-19.

Children, we have been led to believe by the mainstream media, are at low risk of being seriously ill from Covid-19. However, they may be carriers of the illness.

Many children, including ours, have not been able to see their grandparents for almost two months. We believe being at school and then seeing grandparents (once allowed to) will put them at risk. Remember, grandparents are in the

particularly vulnerable category.

We think we should decide when our children should go back to school.

We need a clearly defined outline of how schools will implement and manage social distancing, reassurances testing for teachers and children, how suspected cases will be managed, and then, after this, have the options of sending them in or not.

My wife and I would encourage parents to contact their school's union rep who will be able to offer support and guidance. Parents can offer help and support to the rep as well.

Workers and parents should decide how and when our children go back to school, under these unprecedented times, not the government.

Socialist Party members in National Education Union

Johnson's announcement that he intends primary schools in England to reopen to early years, reception, year one and year six from the beginning of June, was met with disbelief and anger by school staff and parents alike.

The full 'plan to rebuild' released on 11 May shows the plans are even worse. Yes, it says the return can be 'phased' at first - but not for long. Just a few weeks later, they are aiming for "all primary school children to return to school before the summer for a month". That would mean full classes and full primary schools before the end of June!

A plan to open even for year six alone was hard enough to accept when infection rates are still so high. Medical research is clear that reopening schools now will lead to a 'second wave' of infections and deaths in school communities. The reckless rush towards a full return of primary schools in a few weeks shows a callous disregard for health and safety.

It will be impossible to stop transmission of the virus among young children, particularly in settings where education is so dependent on play and sharing of toys and equipment. It will be impossible to maintain any social distancing in full primary schools.

Parents will be bringing their children to and from school, further accelerating the transmission of the virus from children to adults and from one family to another.

Having got primary staff back, the plan is also for secondary schools to start soon afterwards, starting with years ten and twelve. Policing distancing of teenagers will be equally difficult.

If Johnson was seriously concerned about safety and the danger of a second Covid-19 'spike', he wouldn't even be contemplating such dangerous proposals. In reality, he is simply responding to the wishes of big business to make sure childcare is in place so their workforce can be called upon to generate their profits again.

Union tests

If the Tories were serious about ending the lockdown safely, they would first make sure that the tests set by the National Education Union (NEU) and jointly by all the Trade Union Congress-affiliated school staff unions were met.

They set out what's needed to ensure safety in a school context - a low level of infections in the community, regular testing of staff, a "test, trace and isolate policy" fully up and running, clear protocols for isolation of adult and child contacts when positive tests are recorded, safeguards for vulnerable pupils and staff, PPE, cleaning, and all the other measures required to minimise the risk of transmission of the virus.

Safety reps should demand firm risk assessments drawn up on the basis of these key tests from any managers planning to implement Johnson's plan. Staff should refuse to go into school to work on any



such preparations.

You don't need a detailed assessment to know that Johnson's plan is unsafe. It's absolutely clear that those tests cannot be met in the next few weeks. It's equally clear, therefore, that schools will not be safe environments for staff, children or parents. That's why the message to Johnson must be clear, swift and overwhelming - we're not going back!

Unions need to respond quickly and firmly to make sure Johnson has to back away from his unsafe plans. It's now clear that ministers have only been pretending to listen to union concerns, while all the time weighing up their chances of enforcing a return, riding roughshod over union opposition. They must not be allowed to succeed.

Correctly, the NEU press release in response to Johnson's statement immediately threatened that "if schools are reopened to blatant breaches of health and safety, we will strongly support our members who take steps to protect their pupils, their colleagues and their

families".

But unions need to be clearer still - there is no 'if' here, Johnson's plan clearly represents such a blatant breach. All unions must fully back members who assert their rights under section 44 of the Employment Rights Act not to return to a dangerous workplace.

But time is short. Reps and officers must make sure urgent online meetings are organised with their members. They must explain the threat to their safety, their rights under the legislation, and discuss together how to jointly protect themselves.

At the same time, unions should be immediately asking reps to urgently check and update workplace membership records, in preparation for industrial action that may be needed at a later date to defend union members and staff health and safety collectively.

Unions must also oppose any ending of the furlough scheme, and organise support for agency workers and low-paid staff in hardship. No worker should be forced through

poverty back into an unsafe workplace.

Parents should also organise together to defend their community safety too. Head teachers and employers should also be making clear that they cannot assess the risks in Johnson's proposed return as acceptable, and will be refusing to implement Johnson's wishes.

If Johnson realises that he faces the prospect of a mass refusal to go along with his reckless plan, he can be forced to backdown.

Safety must come before 'child-minding' - which is all that Johnson is interested in. It is too early to start any phased return of schools. Instead, the necessary resources must first be found, both to put robust testing and tracing strategies and other safety requirements in place.

Until then, staff should continue to support children's education through rotas and distance learning, as schools have been doing from the start of the 'lockdown'.

The Socialist Party says:

- Reckless Johnson's proposals are unsafe for our staff, children and communities
- Trade union key tests can't possibly be met by 1 June
- Unions must fully back members' right to protect their own safety
- Let's all make clear, we're not going back to unsafe schools

I don't want to go back to school until its safe!

Bethany Morgan
School student

As a Year 9 school student I am, like most students and parents, scared. Questions and concerns are not being addressed by the government, and there is uncertainty about when parents are actually going to get free school meals.

I receive 'pupil premium' which means I should receive frequent money allocated for my meals, but this just isn't realistic. My mum has waited days at a time to receive vouchers from private company Edenred, which is being used by the Department for Education to deliver the scheme.

I never go hungry but there are families that do. Parents shouldn't have to sacrifice their meals so that their kids can eat. Edenred and the government have people's lives in their hands.

At school you get a large hot meal, pasta, sandwiches or wraps, and parents rely on this day-to-day. Many families on benefits already experience 'holiday hunger' during half terms and the summer. One of the ways to stop this is to nationalise the big companies like Edenred and run them under democratic control and workers' management so nobody goes hungry.



As a Year 9 school student I am scared. Questions and concerns are not being addressed by the government

When I go back to school I want to know am I safe, or am I going to get coronavirus and pass it onto those who are vulnerable? How can you socially distance in busy corridors or busy school buses for those who don't have cars? Are teachers going to get PPE? Are we going to wear PPE? How are we going to get food in a busy cafeteria? Are we going to still have assemblies? How are you supposed to sit in a classroom? Are breaks banned? How are you supposed to socially distance at lunch?

The National Education Union's model motion is brilliant, and I highly recommend my mum's article (see 'Private firm causes weeks of delay to free school meal vouchers: bring it back in-house!' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Let's say no to going back to school until it is completely safe and nobody is at risk or terrified to go into their workplace. No rushing back, and fight for socialism!

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Dispatches from the front: bosses prepare fresh attacks on NHS



photo Mary Finch

Will Tories use lower hospital attendance to close wards?

As an NHS nurse I was asked by the Socialist to provide a note from the 'front line'.

Well, in my own area, the district general hospital is running half-full and other in-bedded community hospitals have no patients whatsoever. This is in line with government guidelines to prepare for a rise in in-bedded requirements in response to Covid-19.

NHS wards have been 'temporarily' closed and staff told this is only during the current crisis.

Large numbers of staff are being redeployed to other areas while the current situation exists; often highly inappropriately, in that staff are expected to work in areas where they have little or no experience.

Community workers are facing additional pressures, as patients have been discharged from hospitals to home or to care homes. Of course, the scandal is the enormous death rates for residents of care homes, who originally were not counted in the government's Covid-19 mortality rate.

Most care homes are private and pay mostly minimum wage rates to poorly trained staff. Their lack of PPE provision has been widely reported.

So, the real front line lies at the feet of social care workers at this moment. Deaths of social care workers have risen exponentially, with roughly twice as many deaths from coronavirus than other workers.

The figures for the death rates of non-Covid-19 persons was widely reported in the press, and this has risen sharply as people are fearful of going to hospital even when they have life-threatening symptoms.

What worries me is that, as well as privatisation projects being rushed through, previously busy areas will

be closed going forward as it can be 'proved' there is 'no need for them'.

As the lockdown is lifted, and the population starts returning to hospitals, then all services will be put back under tremendous strain. It would stain the government and health officials' copy book if they then had to explain why they have closed wards. Therefore, it's much easier to have the staff on hand to restaff these closed wards if the demand is there.

In the meantime, staff are facing a very insecure work life on top of the fears that they have around their, and their families', safety.

The 'for profit' system in health and social care has proven entirely incapable of protecting patients and staff from this terrible virus, and government strategy has basically sacrificed our elderly population, and failed to protect our often lowest-paid workers.

We must question our whole way of looking after our elderly. We must demand that the private social sector should be nationalised, fully funded, and managed by workers.

An NHS nurse

Management still attacking workers' pay and conditions

The Covid-19 crisis has not stopped management from attacking the rights of health workers.

Those vulnerable workers who are shielding have been told that one of their 12 weeks must be taken as annual leave. Furthermore, because it's not termed 'sick leave', they would not receive their usual enhanced pay for working unsocial hours, which means significant pay cuts for many.

In the Unison union we are fighting this, but it's one indication of the bitter struggle that is likely to dominate the NHS in the near future.

An NHS porter

Public Zoom meeting on safety



Leicester care workers face pay cut and worse conditions

Heather Rawling
Unison union member
(personal capacity)

Care home workers in Leicestershire are to be rewarded for their courage and sacrifice during this crisis with a pay cut and worsening conditions of service. But that's alright. They will be applauded every Thursday night!

Under the cover of Covid-19, Leicestershire County Care Limited, which owns former council-run homes, has callously decided to cut the salaries of 97 employees. The worst-affected workers will see their salaries cut by nearly one third. Sick pay will also be reduced, to the legal minimum, two weeks will be taken off annual leave, and paternity, maternity and adoption leave reduced to the state minimum.

Effectively, this would abolish the conditions of employment fought for while the homes were run by the council. Privatisation threatens care standards and workers' pay and conditions.

Carer deaths

Care workers have been on the front line caring for residents in extremely difficult circumstances emotionally and physically. Proportionately, more care workers have died from Covid-19 than hospital staff. So to reward them with a pay cut is criminal.

They should be getting a pay rise for working in hazardous conditions and putting themselves and their families at risk. The average pay of a care worker in the UK is £8.21 an hour. Unison was informed of the changes before the announcement. The unions should be demanding no reduction in pay and conditions. No one should have to work for less than £12 an hour.

If the owners of the care homes say they can't afford it then they should be brought into public ownership



photo WorldSkills UK/CC



Under the cover of Covid-19, Leicestershire County Care Ltd has callously decided to cut the salaries of 97 employees

and democratically run by workers and the community. The government has shown there is money available when it has a mind to use it. We should be demanding that the government increases the funding to local authorities to pay for the care of the old, sick and vulnerable in our communities.

The whole trade union movement should move to defend the pay and conditions of any section of workers threatened with job losses and pay cuts by employers using the pandemic to attack workers.

Transport union RMT tells members: refuse to work in unsafe conditions

RMT union statement

The RMT has issued fresh advice to members not to work in unsafe Covid-19 conditions, warning that confused government messaging could have lethal consequences.

The fresh guidance to members across rail and tube is to refuse to work where safety is compromised. The union warning has come as it has become clear that the government is shifting away from the stay at home message, unleashing a surge in passengers on rail and tube, breaching social-distancing measures with potentially lethal consequences for both staff and the public.

In a circular to members issued on 10 May, the union says:

Your national executive committee has considered this matter and stated our total opposition to attempts by the rail industry and government to impose changes in working practices. We had only previously agreed to take part in a process to discuss such changes which had been intended to commence and be implemented from 18 May.



photo moonjazz/CC

RMT has no confidence in the government to manage the lockdown

Given the confusion and mixed messaging generated by the government in recent days, RMT has no confidence in the ability of the government to manage lockdown or its easing.

To be clear no agreement has been made to change any working practices or social distancing arrangements from 12 May.

Legal right

Therefore if two metre social distancing cannot be maintained we consider it to be unsafe and members have the legal right to use the 'worksafe' process. On London Underground they have the legal right to use the refusal to work policy. RMT will fully back any member who uses this process to ensure their safety.

RMT General Secretary Mick Cash said:

"This trade union will not sit back while confused and conflicting messaging from the government raises the prospect of a surge in passengers on our transport services, making a mockery of the social distancing rules with potentially lethal consequences.

"We are reissuing and reinforcing advice to our members not to work in conditions where their health and safety is clearly compromised. No employer should be sending their staff out to work in those kind of conditions and we are putting the industry on the clearest possible notice.

"We've seen the spin in advance of the prime minister's speech tonight. We are taking clear and decisive action now to protect our members."

West Midlands trade union activists discuss the battle for safety on the front line

West Midlands Socialist Party members

Socialist Party members in the West Midlands met online in a forum to talk through workplace situations during the coronavirus pandemic, and discuss strategy to defend workers' health against some truly despicable management practices from the private and public sectors.

The meeting included tax officers, teachers, union staff, probation officers, railway staff, shop and warehouse workers and more, as well as workers recently made unemployed.

We heard that some Ministry of Justice and HMRC office management have been flagrantly ignoring government advice on working from home. We heard that most supply teachers have been furloughed, but no money has been paid out from the furlough scheme yet.

And that rail staff have had to fight for weeks to get social distancing in work. Despite heaps of praise for shop workers by their employers, supermarket senior management



One non-unionised office forced the managers to adopt their rota model

have utterly failed in protecting their staff by denying them PPE and anything close to social distancing.

Success in health and safety has only been won by the organised determined action of workers. Vigilant campaigns have ensured adequate PPE, social distancing, remote working, and even furloughing at 100% pay.

Action success

In an incredible success of workers' action, one non-unionised office in the West Midlands organised its own rotas to ensure skeleton staff to keep the office functioning, keeping the majority of workers home and the rest safely distanced. Management there had insisted they would all need to be in the office, but the

workers forced the managers to adopt their rota model!

Many workers have successfully struggled to ensure their safety from coronavirus in the West Midlands and across the country, but too often this has been with the absence of trade union leaders.

The leaderships of some of the biggest unions in the UK, representing hundreds of thousands of workers, have failed to lead the fight to defend their members' safety. In this meeting Socialist Party members spoke out against union right wingers and careerists who have been far too concerned with bureaucracy and stalled negotiations with the government and employers, risking workers' safety week after week in a rapidly changing situation.

During and after the coronavirus crisis there will be massive attacks on workers as the capitalist class seek to recuperate their losses and minimise any increased consciousness among workers. Events so far have only been a small test in terms of what fighting leadership is needed from trade unions as the core organisations to defend the working class.



photo Surrey Union

Review: Pale Rider

THE SPANISH FLU OF 1918 AND HOW IT “FANNED THE FLAMES OF REVOLT”

Hannah Sell
Socialist Party general secretary

Laura Spinney’s book on the 1918 flu pandemic was first published in 2017. Now in the midst of a new global pandemic it is being widely read.

Spinney gives a global and vivid account of the huge effects of what was probably the biggest pandemic in history. Yet, as she explains, in popular history it is remembered mainly as an adjunct to the World War One.

It is estimated, however, that one-in-three people on the planet became ill and somewhere between 50 and 100 million people died, compared to 17 million who died in the carnage of World War One.

In Britain, the war was the bigger killer, but there was still a gigantic 224,000 who died from the flu, and between the two events almost a million lives were wiped out.

War and revolution

As Spinney makes clear, while the pandemic was a major event in world history in its own right, it cannot be separated from the war and revolution that surrounded it.

Even its name, ‘Spanish flu’, came about not as a result of its origin - which was certainly not Spain - but the fact that Spain’s neutrality meant that the pandemic was reported in the press there, unlike in the censored warring countries.

There is no certainty where the particularly lethal H1N1 strain of flu did

originate from. Spinney identifies an army base camp in Kansas - a jump-off point for soldiers being sent to the front in Europe - as the most likely origin.

She also reports on the work of scientists who have successfully recreated the H1N1 virus and studied it, finding significant differences between the first wave of the virus and the second.

The second - and by far the most deadly - wave is known to have started on the Western Front, and viruses are thought to mutate more rapidly when inhabiting malnourished bodies. This, combined with the use of poison gas - some of which encourage mutation - were, Spinney surmises, likely causes of the lethal properties of the pandemic’s second wave.

And, of course, the global troop movements resulting from the war were the main transmission belt for the pandemic. In other words, while the existence of viruses might be natural, the development of the 1918 pandemic, like today’s, was driven by a capitalist system in crisis.

Viruses also lay bare the inequality created by the capitalist system, and its inability to care for the health and well-being of the population. Medicine was obviously far less advanced in 1918 than today. Scientists had not yet realised that the flu was a virus, never mind developed a vaccine. Nonetheless, it was understood that the flu was highly contagious and was spread via human proximity.

Like with Covid-19 today, it was understood that handwashing and social distancing were vital to stopping



In Britain in 1918, despite a propaganda campaign telling people to avoid crowds, no concrete measures were taken to shut workplaces or prevent overcrowding on public transport



the spread of the disease. Social isolation to stop the spread of disease had already been well established over centuries. Nonetheless, in many countries, including Britain, no serious measures were taken.

In Britain, despite a propaganda campaign telling people to avoid crowds, no concrete measures were taken to shut workplaces or prevent overcrowding on public transport. 250,000 people died, but the cabinet never discussed the pandemic, and it was only discussed in parliament at the end of October 1918, weeks after the second - and most deadly - wave of the virus had hit the country.

This approach remains the default for British capitalism today, and was the Tories’ initial plan for dealing with Covid-19, relying on the development of ‘herd immunity’. As 1918 shows, that potentially meant accepting hundreds of thousands of deaths.

‘Asian flu’

The same approach was taken by the Macmillan Tory government in 1957, with the arrival of ‘Asian flu’. Tory Health Minister John Vaughan-Morgan predicted that 20% of the population would catch it, but also described it as no more than “a heav-

en-sent topic for the press during the ‘silly season.’

Public events went ahead as normal, including the Tory party conference, at which Macmillan didn’t even mention the flu in his speech! That flu pandemic is estimated to have infected nine million Britons and killed 30,000.

This time, the strategy of waiting for herd immunity was looking like it might kill numbers closer to 1918 than 1957. Belatedly, it became clear to the Johnson government that its strategy of inaction would threaten a serious public revolt as the number of deaths spiralled. It therefore beat a hasty retreat to lockdown.

Now, however, the Tory cabinet is trying to lift it without having implemented the necessary testing and tracing, nor having secured other robust health and safety measures.

The effects of the 1918 pandemic were not just the immediate loss of life. Babies born in 1919 were an average of 1.3 millimetres shorter than those born in the surrounding years as a result of so many having been exposed to the virus in womb.

Spinney argues that Spanish flu “fanned the flames that had been smouldering since before the Russian

revolutions of 1917” by “highlighting inequality” and “illuminating the injustice of colonialism and sometimes of capitalism too”.

She points, for example, to the horrific 18 million people who are estimated to have died in India from the flu, combined with the effects of a drought. Despite mass starvation, British imperialism did not halt the export of wheat until the crisis had already been at its peak for weeks.

She describes how “rivers became clogged with corpses because there wasn’t enough wood to cremate them”.

The relief effort was mainly led by organisations linked to the Indian independence movement, and Spinney argues, played an important role in fuelling that movement.

This is one of countless examples of the callous cruelty of British imperialism. Another was the malaria epidemic in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) in 1935.

The report to the Royal Medical Society by the British officer responsible for dealing with the epidemic simply dismisses the measures which would have been necessary to destroy the mosquitos’ breeding grounds as “quite out of proportion to the ben-

efit expected,” ie stopping around a quarter of the total population suffering from malaria, with around 50,000 dying!

The anger created by imperialism’s disregard for human life, combined with the role of socialist activists organising to fight the epidemic, were key to the founding of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party at the end of 1935, which became a mass Trotskyist party.

Revolutionary wave

In 1918, the direct effects of the pandemic can’t be separated from the revolutionary wave that swept large parts of the world in the wake of World War One and the Russian revolution.

Spinney argues that the flu was central to the 1918 general strike which engulfed “well-ordered” Switzerland, for example. No doubt it was one factor, but so were the fall in wages by a quarter and the revolution developing in neighbouring Germany.

Spinney also points to the role of the flu pandemic in convincing capitalism “that it was no longer reasonable to blame an individual for catching an infectious disease”. She argues this led to “many governments



Belatedly it became clear to the Johnson government that its strategy of inaction would threaten a serious public revolt as the number of deaths spiralled

embracing the concepts of socialised medicine - healthcare for all, free at the point of delivery.”

There is no doubt it strengthened the fight to demand free healthcare by the workers’ movement in many countries. However, as she also explains, it was Russia in 1920 that “was the first to implement a centralised fully public healthcare system”.

Spinney adds that it wasn’t universal because it didn’t cover rural populations, “but it was a huge achievement nevertheless, and the driving force behind it was Vladimir Lenin”.

She points out that doctors feared persecution after the revolution but “Lenin surprised them by soliciting their involvement at every level of the new health administration, and in the early days, this placed particular emphasis on the prevention of epidemics and famine.”

In 1924, the Soviet government called for medical schools to produce doctors who had “the ability to study the occupational and social conditions which give rise to illness and not only to cure the illness but to suggest ways to prevent it.”

In Russia, in 1917, the working class succeeded in overthrowing capitalism and beginning to build a new society for the first time in history. Economically ruined and politically isolated after defeating imperialist wars of intervention, and after the defeat and failure of revolutions elsewhere, in particular in Germany in 1923, the revolution later degenerated under an emerging caste of state and party officials headed by Stalin. But what Spinney is describing is the

attempt to create a democratic workers’ state, based on a planned economy, and the huge steps forward that led to for healthcare.

In passing, she also refers to the Soviet Union developing a flu vaccine before any other country on earth, and giving it free to all factory workers. In reality, it was the existence of the Soviet Union, and the fear of the capitalist classes of the world that workers in their own countries might follow Russia’s lead, that had the biggest effect in driving forward the development of public healthcare in other countries.

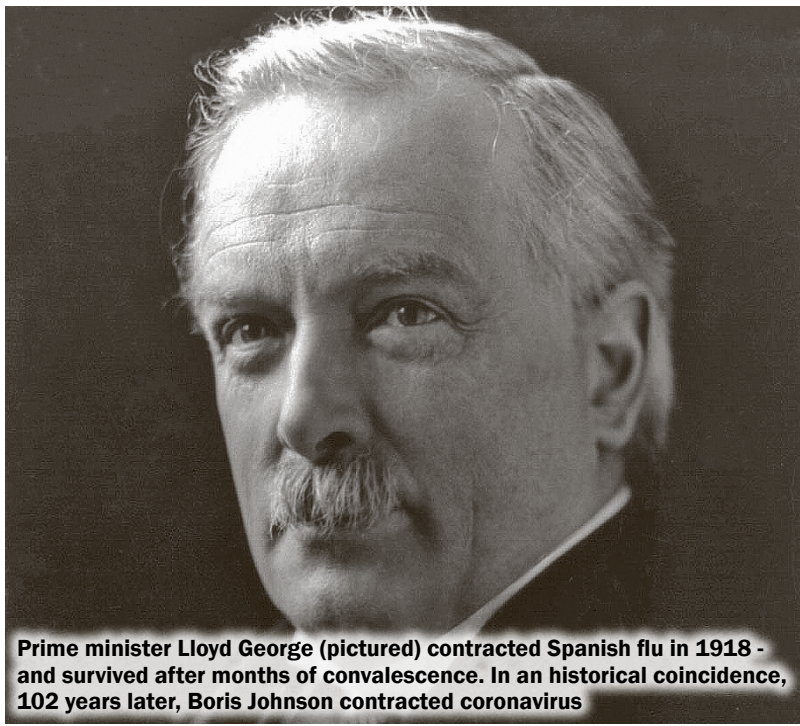
Prospects

In Britain, it took until 1948 for the National Health Service (NHS) to be established. Successive pro-capitalist governments - Tory but also New Labour - have privatised and cut huge swathes from it.

The current pandemic has forcefully driven home why we have to fight for the rebuilding of the NHS, dramatic pay increases for its workforce, and the throwing out of the privateers who are making fat profits from it.

Movements in defence of the NHS will be an important feature of the coming months and years. So too will movements against the gross inequality created by capitalism which - just as in 1918 - is being laid bare by the pandemic and will, as Spinney puts it about the events of a century ago, “fan the flames of revolt.”

■ **Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World is published by Cape.**



Prime minister Lloyd George (pictured) contracted Spanish flu in 1918 - and survived after months of convalescence. In an historical coincidence, 102 years later, Boris Johnson contracted coronavirus



An English middle-class family poses for the camera during the 1918 pandemic

Cuts and lockdown damage mental health services

The lockdown could worsen people's mental health. Various capitalist commentators have periodically expressed this, but usually cynically to argue for an end to the lockdown.

People are told that GPs and talking therapies are still available online and by phone. This ignores the mental health crisis, completely inadequate funding, and lack of availability before coronavirus.

Therapies are 'still available' on the basis that they were available before. There has been no extra money for NHS mental health services.

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (Nice) guidelines say that you get the cheapest therapy first, anti-depressants, and only something else if that proves not to work.

Nice says that counselling is 'not proven to be effective'. You have to fight to get talking therapies, when the last thing you are able to do is fight. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) can be offered, but only for seven weeks.

The last time I had CBT, it was going quite well until the 6th week. My counsellor asked why my weekly

questionnaire scores weren't improving if the sessions were helping.

I realised that the next week was the 7th week and they wanted me off the books. I did get nine sessions in the end. I was lucky.

I referred myself and had to fill in a long questionnaire, and then have a two-hour telephone assessment. I was told I could have face-to-face CBT, but I would have to wait 14 weeks.

In the end I waited eight. But in other areas, it's up to a year.

When lockdown came, my long-established coping mechanisms for mental health issues were no longer possible. Even if I thought talking therapy would help, if I applied now it would be months before I got it. With no additional resources and increased demand, waiting times would be even longer.

The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the poor state of mental health services after years of austerity and cuts. Full funding of the NHS must include proper funding of mental health services.

Clare Wilkins
Nottingham Socialist Party

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.

■ Social care: Even Tories swayed by nationalisation

As has been reported in the Socialist (see 'Care homes coronavirus scandal: blood on their hands' at socialist-party.org.uk), the anarchic nature of England's social care set-up - around 18,500 separate providers - has been brutally exposed during this crisis. Profits are creamed off by private providers, who pay lip service to the health and welfare of residents and staff. While charitable organisations in the sector are run on shoestring budgets, which mean PPE and decent wages are in very short supply. But crises make strange bedfellows. Tory peer Baroness Altmann has called life in the sector "a game of financial pass the parcel, where hedge fund

companies cash in on company debts" - capitalism, for short. She added: "With Covid-19, the sector has come crashing down because it's not integrated into the health service... it's possible we may need to nationalise the sector." If only the public sector trade union leaders would come out with such demands.

Glynn Doherty

■ My bus company: Profit before safety

My local bus company, Keighley Bus Company (KBC), has broken every regulation under social distancing. KBC knows full well it is breaking social-distancing rules, but will not run more buses, because it will cost it money. Many local people use the buses - a majority are over 60 years of age. They

have no choice but to use packed, overcrowded buses. KBC will not issue full PPE to its bus drivers. Over half have no protection, shield or masks.

Not only are they putting their lives at risk driving long hours, but also their passengers and the general public. KBC don't give a damn if people in Keighley catch Covid-19. As long as they make a financial profit out of the lockdown, they couldn't care less.

It's about time public transport was put into public ownership and the likes of KBC were named and shamed. The negligence to their customers will cost someone's life.

Mark Sayers
Keighley, West Yorkshire

■ Privatisation kills

Newsnight reports that so many care home staff work for agencies and don't get sick pay. This is a factor in the excessive death rates in care homes. Privatisation and the driving down of labour costs have killed thousands of elderly people before their time. There's one word for this: Murder.

Nancy Taaffe
Waltham Forest, London

■ Neil Ferguson

Government scientist Neil Ferguson resigned after breaking lockdown rules. The question is, why did the Telegraph stake out the home of the country's leading epidemiologist - the main proponent of the lockdown? Ferguson's resignation makes it much easier to lift the lockdown, and start profits flowing again for the bosses.

Dave Reid
Cardiff

Oh by the other delegates there.

The bosses can rest a little easier now that Mrs Oh is no longer with us. You will be missed Sandra but your legacy will go on.

Paul Coughman
Surrey County Union (in a very personal capacity) and Socialist Party

pleased to say all charges were dropped, the case dismissed, and the managers removed. She would have been a key line of defence for all care workers during this crisis, if she was still working.

She was part of Surrey County Union's delegation to conference twice. She was called to

speak once. 100 yards from the rostrum, she virtually ran all the way there - she had difficulty walking, let alone running, due to her asthma. When she got to the mic, she let out a long sigh, the subtitles on the big screens just said 'oooooooooooooooooooooh'. From that day on, she was known as Mrs



Newham photo Niall Mulholland



Haringey photo David Kaplan



Newham photo Dave Carr



Sheffield photo Alistair Tice

Safe social-distancing car-cavalcade protests

■ Newham Lives Matter

Newham trade union council organised a car cavalcade through Newham, east London on 7 May to combine with the Thursday 8pm clap for key workers.

Newham has the highest death rate in England and Wales during the pandemic. This is no accident.

A borough ravaged by austerity and cuts, 43% of children in Newham grow up in poverty, 19% live in fuel poverty.

27% of homes do not reach the 'decent homes' standard, and Newham has the highest rate of overcrowding - 35%.

Many immigrants in the borough do not have access to public services, NHS or benefits. These shocking statistics explain why the death rate is so high.

Despite this, Newham Labour council voted through another pro-cuts, pro-austerity budget in February - another £45 million from local services.

Our borough can't take anymore. We will not stay silent while members of our community become seriously ill or lose their lives to coronavirus.

We took to our cars, and some were on their bikes, to thank key workers. But we went further. We demanded PPE for all who need it, and an end to poverty and cuts.

East London Socialist Party joined the demonstration demanding the £45 million planned cuts are scrapped. Instead, the council must use some of its £1 billion in reserves to invest in the borough - join with the community and trade

unions to fight for more money for Newham to reverse the devastating impact of years of austerity.

The primary responsibility for the crisis in Newham is with the Westminster government, but it doesn't help when Newham council carry through cuts.

We didn't replace one pro-cuts council, led by Blairite Robin Wales, just for another lot to come in and carry on in the same way. On Thursday 14 May we will be out again with another safe social-distancing protest - join us by car or bike if you can.

Lois Austin
East London Socialist Party

■ Sheffield: Test, trace, PPE

With the city's roads and footpaths still relatively quiet, Sheffield Trade Union Council's (TUC) eight-car cavalcade certainly got noticed by those people that were out. Plastered with window posters, a megaphone shouting out and horns blaring, the TUC's CV19 Council of Action got its message out: "Testing, tracing, PPE; Keep workers virus free".

On 7 May, we drove slowly from the city centre through Burngreave, with a large black and Asian population, to Northern General Hospital. We stopped there for a half-hour socially distanced protest outside the main entrance - with placards and leaflets for staff and passers-by.

Had a "get to work", and a couple of "go home", but mostly thumbs up and cars and buses honking in support of 'no return to work until it's

safe' and that safety should be decided by the trade unions and workforce. All of us thought it was well worthwhile, and we will be repeating every Thursday, especially after Johnson's car-crash statement.

Alistair Tice
Sheffield Socialist Party

■ Haringey: Families waved and workers clapped

A car cavalcade, organised by Haringey Coronavirus Action Network, got a great response Thursday 7 May in north London. Eight cars gathered in the unused car park at Tottenham Green Leisure Centre.

The police were quite suspicious, but having assured them that we would be social distancing - and campaigning for PPE on their behalf - we moved off at 7pm.

We wound our way slowly through the streets of Haringey, west to Turnpike Lane and then east to White Hart Lane, horns and megaphones blaring: "Test, test, test; PPE; keep key workers virus free."

Families waved to us from the road sides and homes. We finished at the North Middlesex University Hospital, just before 8pm.

We were met by NHS staff, applauding our arrival. We circuted the car park, eventually leaving our cars to join them from a safe distance.

David Kaplan
North London Socialist Party

Johnson's plan terrifies me

Readers react to lifting lockdown

Vague - Muddled - Impossible

Boris Johnson has filled me with dread.

Construction workers are being thrown to the wolves. It's going to be impossible to socially distance on building sites.

A muddled, vague plan, but with higher fines for those who don't get it right.

And the schools! Have I got it right? Reception, year one, and year six to go back first. How the hell does he expect five and six year olds to socially distance?

Johnson's plan genuinely terrifies me. I don't trust this Tory government, and I definitely don't trust Boris Johnson.

Boris oversees a system, capitalism, that puts its profits before our safety. We need to fight to keep each other safe.

Elaine Brunskill
Gateshead

NHS overwhelmed by cuts

So category 5 is 'material risk of overwhelming the NHS'? We're at 5 now, and we have been for years.

One in nine nursing positions are unfilled. We keep getting corridor queues, thousands of avoidable deaths routinely, and historic firsts of junior doctors and nurses striking.

Just a couple of winters ago we had the Red Cross coming into hospitals to help us. To even get to '4' we need the NHS to be fully staffed,

debt written off and all facilities back under public ownership.

Adam Harsmworth
Coventry

Government does not care

Make no mistake. If we genuinely lived under a government that prioritised the physical and financial health of the nation, they would not even be thinking about schools going back in June. But no school means fewer workers at work, which means a slowed economy, which means less profit.

If they cared about poverty they'd levy a 50% tax on the wealthiest in the UK - combined wealth of £700 billion - and introduce a basic income so people could both remain safe and be financially secure.

Boris Johnson is not a changed man looking to keep us all safe. He's a wealthy man, with wealthy friends, who haven't lost a wink's sleep over poverty deaths in ten years. They won't be crying over working-class cannon fodder anytime soon.

Amy Cousins
Bradford

SNP and Tories: hand in hand

SNP now trying to socially distance themselves from the Tories, but they have been in lockstep. They went along with abandoning testing and contact tracing on 12 March, letting the virus rip through Scotland. And they do not have the capacity and resources, because of implementing cuts, to start again now.

Matt Dobson
Glasgow



photo Ted Sullivan/CC



photo Kuhlmann/MSC/CC

Obituary: Sandra Ayliffe A care worker never afraid to stand up

Our friend and comrade, Sandra Ayliffe, has died from coronavirus.

Sandra was a shop steward for public sector union Unison in a Surrey care home, until her retirement ten years ago. She was a militant trade unionist and a proud member of the Socialist Party, even though she was unable to be active

due to poor health in the last few years.

Sandra fought many battles on behalf of her members and was never afraid to challenge management. She was once suspended for speaking up against bullying managers.

I was proud to represent her and

£26,846 raised, 107% of target - but we need more to keep going

Congratulations to all our members and supporters who have helped us break through this quarter's target. This is a particularly good achievement in difficult circumstances.

However, it is vital that we keep the money coming in, so that we can maintain our vital party publications in this ongoing crisis. We need to reach out to as many people

as possible, and ask them to donate to the coronavirus special appeal.

We value every single donation, no matter what the amount. This week, we've had £25 from a

pensioner, Benny Felstead in north London, and £300 from Maddy Steeds in Manchester.

Here are some of the quotes we've had from people donating to the appeal.

Rebecca Fryer, who has donated £20, writes: "In solidarity to my socialist friends who I'm grateful for my political awakening." Donating £100, John Handforth says: "Keep defending workers' rights during this awful crisis."

"The Socialist Party and the Socialist are now needed more than ever to help workers steer their way through the Covid crisis and provide the ideas for the new society that humanity and the planet needs", writes Terry Warby, donating £100.

We've also had excellent pledges at our online meetings, £1,700 raised

at the South West regional meeting and £2,000 in the North West.

As well as all the donations to our coronavirus special appeal, Socialist Party members and supporters are still looking at other ways to raise fighting fund. Members in south

east Wales raised at least £60 from Barty's lockdown quiz, and Joe Fathallah raised £100 with a Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) chess championship.

Socialist Party members and supporters are doing excellent work in raising the necessary finances to make sure we continue to get our socialist message across. But we need to keep up this good work. Who do you know that can make a donation to our special appeal?

Chris Newby
The Socialist sales organiser

🍷 Socialist Party Fighting Fund

	£ received	£ target	April to June 2020				Deadline: 30 June 2020
South West	4,102	1,800					228%
Northern	1,152	750					154%
Wales	3,252	2,300					141%
East Midlands	2,275	1,850					123%
Yorkshire	3,089	2,550					121%
West Midlands	2,690	2,600					103%
London	4,758	4,600					103%
North West	1,055	1,150					92%
Eastern	962	1,200					
Southern & SE	1,520	2,350				65%	
Other	1,993	3,850				52%	
TOTAL	26,846	25,000					107%

Coronavirus crisis special appeal

DONATE TODAY

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



PANDEMIC SHORTAGES CAUSED BY CAPITALIST MARKET - SOCIALIST PLANNING IS THE ALTERNATIVE

Iain Dalton
Socialist Party national committee

With planning, personal protective equipment (PPE), ventilators and other key products should have been easy to provide. Yet as each day goes by, the scale of the government's unpreparedness for the Covid-19 crisis becomes more and more apparent.

As reported in the Socialist, and now featured even by the BBC in a Panorama documentary, UK stocks of medical supplies were far from adequate due to long-term run-downs under austerity. And the government's unwillingness to intervene in production meant even more delays.

Three nurses photographed wearing bin bags due to lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) all later ended up diagnosed with the coronavirus. Over 100 NHS workers have died from Covid-19 so far.

So how can the shortages be tackled? One of the problems in Britain, and indeed many richer western countries, is that much of the PPE isn't produced here. Instead it's imported from around the world, including China.

To provide for everyone, global production of PPE needs to increase by 40%, according to March estimates by the UN's World Health Organisation. In the meantime, only the highest bidder will receive enough. Demand for some PPE is at 20 times the normal level, said the Economist on 19 April.

That has meant a scramble for supplies. Many countries barred exports of pandemic goods to other countries.

Some European Union member states stopped selling to others even within the bloc - a practice the free-market EU was meant to overcome. And additional barriers will have a devastating impact on poorer, neocolonial countries in particular, which have already suffered at the hands of more powerful trading blocs like the EU.

It's especially bad for those which have limited manufacturing themselves. The Economist reported some examples: "93% of Jamaica's imports of air-purifying respirators come from America; 90% of Cape Verde's face shields, protective spectacles and gloves come from the EU." This also includes Britain.

The disjointed nature of the government's efforts is due to its reliance on capitalism: on the market, which is anarchic rather than consciously planned. It is not designed to meet the needs of ordinary people, but to make profits for big business.

Market anarchy

If there is demand for a product or service, the profit motive is meant to attract investors to fund making it. However, different capitalists then compete to make the most money out of producing and selling it.

This leads to duplication, corner-cutting, waste, secrecy, and many other problems. It also means that if no immediate profit seems forthcoming, production is unlikely to happen, making proper planning impossible.

But the lockdown has closed many normal avenues for profit. So a number of private manufacturers have indeed retooled to produce different goods, sometimes in just a few days - albeit belatedly in most cases.

Very early on, distilleries started making hand sanitiser in large quantities. Many clothing companies have started manufacturing gowns, masks and other PPE garments.

British arms multinational BAE Systems states that "employees in our air sector, who normally produce parts for combat aircraft including Eurofighter Typhoon, and our submarines business, are 3D-printing parts for newly designed face shields."

Not all bosses have decided this is worth their while, however. Different individual corporate interests clash with the need for a coordinated plan of production and distribution of key supplies. This has even

led some workers to walk out or protest. Those at the General Electric aviation plant in Lynn, Massachusetts, for example, demanding their factories be converted to produce goods like ventilators.

After all, the president of Canada's Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association told the Economist that "whether you're making a plastic part that goes into a ventilator or a plastic part that goes into a Jaguar, it's the same process."

This shows that society already has the productive power to solve our immediate pandemic needs, it's just a question of how industry is organised - and who controls it. But it also shows how conversion from wasteful or harmful production to socially useful production could be achieved.

In 1976, bosses at the struggling British weapons manufacturer Lucas Aerospace threatened their workforce with redundancy. So the workers came up with an alternative. The 'Lucas Plan' would have retained all the workers' knowledge, skills and experience by retooling the plant to make over 150 socially useful products instead.

The plan was not adopted by the bosses. And today, there have been lots of reports of companies and entrepreneurs offering to provide supplies - but these aren't always the supplies we actually need.

Ventilators

Elon Musk made high-profile statements about supplying hospitals with ventilators in New York and California. However, the vast majority turned out not to be the 'invasive' ventilators for severe cases which are in particularly short supply. Instead, they were the non-invasive 'BiPap' and 'CPap' machines - which, in the latter case, have even been linked to spreading the coronavirus.

The Tory government's 'Ventilator Challenge' to industry apparently resulted in a number of products that clinical experts say are simply unusable. And the RAF's much-publicised PPE airlift from Turkey turned out to include 400,000 gowns



Socialist planning is necessary to overcome the chaos of the capitalist market

which are unsuitable for use.

The Lucas workers knew what was needed in 1976. NHS and other frontline workers know what is needed today. It's the bosses who are preventing it from happening.

To guarantee the supplies we need, workers on the front line and in manufacturing need democratic control over what is being produced and in what quantities. Rather than unelected profiteers blindly competing, workers could then produce a democratic plan for production.

Legal obstacles

Another key obstacle is the patent system. Private companies jealously guard profitable designs.

In Italy, a start-up which was 3D-printing back-engineered ventilator valves reportedly faced legal threats from the ventilator's manufacturer. Legal threats have also been issued between companies over patent infringements around tests. In some cases, firms have had to turn to 'clean sheet' designs that need to go through extensive testing instead.

Patents and trade secrets prevent the sort of collaboration that can lead to quick research breakthroughs even in normal times. They should be abolished and all the information made public, starting with life-saving technologies. The emergency has already forced a limited degree of this from academic journals.

The high-profile VentilatorChallengeUK Consortium was lauded for getting a new respirator through regulatory tests by mid-April. But this design was a reimplementa-

tion of a previously existing invasive ventilator, just using parts more easily sourced in the UK. It was also subsidised by a £100 million grant from the government.

But why should major, profitable companies be getting substantial public subsidies for their profits while millions of workers are struggling? Take big businesses into public ownership instead!

This would remove the legal and competitive barriers to collaborating on producing needed supplies. And the full benefit could go to society rather than shareholders' profits.

Market competition for private profit has also caused rampant profiteering and speculation. One NHS trust chief interviewed by ITV News reported 'FFP3' masks at ten times the usual price, and coveralls at £16.50 - over eight times their usual £2! The Guardian has even revealed one NHS official set up a company, Sure Stock Ltd, to trade PPE in bulk on the side.

Price controls on essential products and basic goods could stop this. And public ownership could allow essential products to be sold at cost - or even at a loss, with the difference made up elsewhere.

Early on in the crisis there were also huge pressures on the supplies of food and other household goods. Some foodstuffs are still limited today in the supermarkets.

The government has even had to suspend some of the competition laws during the crisis. This allows supermarket chains, for example, to collaborate more with each other, to share logistics and ensure food supply. Why not go all the way and nationalise them?

Instead, they still maintain their own operations, their own policies, and compete with each other to boost their own profits. Hence bosses' various relaxations of social distancing in stores.

The latest example was at a Home Bargains store in South Shields, Tyneside. This led to a walkout, forcing management to restore social distancing - and claim they'd never relaxed it in the first place!

We say workplaces should be run based on the safety of workers and the public. Instead of owner-appointed managers seeking to bring in the highest revenues, elected committees of workers and consumers could make decisions to guarantee safety and fair provision



Capitalism's pursuit of profit and beggar-thy-neighbour logic has given us a world of poverty, climate change, pandemic and economic crisis

in rationing policies and price controls.

These elected bodies could then be democratically linked - not just one workplace to another, but on a geographic and sectoral basis as well. This regional and industry-wide coordination could give direct input on what is needed in each community and workplace.

It could give a clear idea of what is being produced, by who, and in what quantities. This is the vital starting point for planning to match supply to need, and working out where shortfalls lie in advance. On that basis, these elected committees could allocate resources to expand production as necessary.

Nationalisation

Nationalisation of big business would facilitate this. And nationalisation of the banks is essential too. The banks can be responsible for deciding which industries and firms grow or collapse, particularly in crises, due to their control of credit.

Capitalist governments try to leave these decisions as much as possible to the capitalists themselves. But in this unprecedented crisis, even the US Federal Reserve has had to guarantee loans to businesses rather than letting the banks decide whether to risk lending their money.

Both the private banks and the financial institutions of the capital-

ist state are unaccountable to workers. They are making decisions to prop up the profit system. The vast majority of the Federal Reserve's money has gone to big business, for example.

Public ownership, combined with democratic workers' control of safety and production, and democratic workers' management of economic planning, would enable their huge resources to be channelled democratically. Workers and public health, not profits, would come first.

This must also be linked to anticipating future needs. For example, planning to produce a successfully tested vaccine in sufficient quantities for its rapid and widespread distribution.

In this crisis, capitalist nation-states have turned inwards. Governments and businesses seek to look after their own interests to the exclusion of others. Donald Trump even reportedly offered \$1 billion dollars to a German biotech company, CureVac, for exclusive rights to a Covid-19 vaccine it was seeking to develop.

But rather than efforts by isolated companies, or even national efforts across companies, the fastest route to a vaccine is international collaboration. All research teams must be able to share all their data, and learn from all each other's setbacks and steps forward.

National and international coordination is vitally necessary in food, PPE, medicine - in fact in all production and all supply chains, particularly where goods can only be produced in specific locations.

Capitalism's pursuit of profit and beggar-thy-neighbour logic has given us a world of poverty, climate change, pandemic and economic crisis. These are issues that can be solved with the resources and capability already available in the world. But they can only be solved on the basis of putting the needs of ordinary people first - through a socialist plan of production.

Starmer in full retreat over C-19 rents crisis

Paul Kershaw
Chair, Unite housing workers branch

The economic hardship from the coronavirus crisis is biting; millions must choose between paying the rent and eating. Tenant organisations are calling for rent to be cancelled during the crisis, and this was backed by Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader. But under 'responsible' Keir Starmer, the policy has been changed to a call for an *extension* of the temporary ban on evictions.

Low-income tenants who lose their jobs will, in many cases, see their income fall in half, even after their Universal Credit payments come through. Research in April showed that residential tenants were already paying less than half what they owe in rent. Whether payment is due in June, as the government scheme requires, or later, as Labour now proposes, the accumulated Coronavirus arrears will be simply unaffordable for many.

Research carried out in April by Opinium, found six in ten renters said they had already suffered financially as a result of the UK-wide shutdown. Of those, one in five had been forced to choose between food and bills or paying rent, and one in four said they had already had to voluntarily leave their home, move

in with friends or parents, or request an earlier end to their tenancy because of the crisis.

Labour now suggests a scheme in which arrears would have to be paid back over a two-year period. That amounts to a 12% rent increase on top of other rent increases, and consumer debt was rising even before the crisis. 35% of private renters live in poverty before any of this. In the context of a capitalist recession, this will be the last straw that leads to homelessness for many.

Workers who are furloughed will typically face a cut of 16% in their income after tax, according to the New Economics Foundation, which supports rent cancellation. On average, renters pay a third of their income on rent. Many workers in this relatively favourable position will also find that their rent becomes unaffordable.

Within days of Starmer's retreat, thousands of Labour Party members had signed a protest letter. Trade union leaders should add their voice and the unions should campaign to cancel the rent even if Starmer refuses to change tack on this.

Socialists should fight for a blanket suspension of rent payments and a freeze of residential mortgages. No workers should lose their homes as a result of this crisis.

Coronavirus, capitalism and worldwide socialism Committee for a Workers' International reports

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) - the socialist international organisation the Socialist Party is part of is posting regular updates from our sections around the world.

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

In particular, there is a statement of the newly launched platform of CWI-Turkey (IEK Türkiye - Devrimci Sosyalist Sol) - 'Turkey: Erdogan's rule, capitalist crisis and working-class political representation'.

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During the Covid-19 crisis, many commentators have talked about a ‘new Bretton Woods’ and the need for post-crisis international capitalist cooperation and reconstruction. In the fifth in our series on ‘war, global crises and working-class struggle’, **Robin Clapp** looks at reconstruction and global relations after the Second World War and the lessons for today.

The United States emerged from the carnage of World War One immeasurably strengthened, both economically and militarily. The socialist revolutionary Leon Trotsky, in a speech analysing inter-imperialist and global relations in July 1924, observed: “For the master of the capitalist world - and let us firmly understand this! - is New York, with Washington as its state department,” adding that despite “draping itself in the toga of pacifism, American capitalism is seeking the position of world domination; it wants to establish an American imperialist autocracy over our planet. That is what it wants.”

20 years on, Trotsky’s prophetic words were further borne out by the decision of American imperialism to take the controlling role in reshaping the world economy and geopolitical affairs in the form of the installation of the Bretton Woods financial agreement in 1944, the Marshall Aid Plan four years later, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) in 1949.

America’s ruling class chose an isolationist path after 1918, largely cutting itself off from any involvement in assisting war-torn Britain and France, both struggling with unpayable war debts that dragged their economies into deep and persistent recessions.

Defeated Germany was punished with punitive war reparations that further devastated its economy and political stability. US indifference to promoting international economic recovery was to become a contributory factor towards both the Great Depression in 1931 and the rise of fascism in Germany.

Bretton Woods

As the world’s undisputed economic colossus after 1945, the US now realised that it must move quickly to stabilise Europe and Asia. The first step was taken even before the end of the war, in July 1944, with the ratification of the Bretton Woods agreement.

Under this treaty, the mighty US dollar was to become the financial ambassador for dominant US imperialism. A new financial order was established that henceforth would govern monetary relations among signatory states.

The dollar became the world’s new reserve currency with a fixed relationship to gold at an exchange rate of \$35 to an ounce. Massively benefiting US imperialism, the dollar was now “as good as gold”, and had additional qualities in that it could earn interest and was more

Lessons from history

A new world order - global reconstruction after World War Two



Russian leader Joseph Stalin, US president Harry Truman and British prime minister Winston Churchill in 1945 on the eve of the new ‘Cold War’ which rapidly emerged between US imperialism and the Soviet Union



The Marshall Aid programme provided US assistance to war-torn Europe. It was seen as vital too that West Germany be rescued in order to restore stability photo Carl Weinrother/CC

flexible than the precious metal.

Other capitalist countries were powerless to stop the imposition of the dollar’s new status. Members of the Bank of England smarted at the indignity of seeing sterling lose its former preeminence as the world’s ‘most trusted currency’ with one claiming that Bretton Woods represented “the greatest blow to Britain next to the war.”

Bretton Woods paved the way for the setting up of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, institutions still functioning today. Despite the eventual break-up of the Bretton Woods monetary system in 1971, as the post-war boom was stuttering to a halt, these still act largely under the guidance and interests of American imperialism as financial instruments dictating capitalism’s agenda on its 189 participants.

Revolutionary movements

The election in 1945 of a Labour government committed to the implementation of a new welfare state in the UK, was one sign that across the entire European continent millions were determined to avoid a return to the inter-war era of depression and hunger, with many sympathetic to socialist and communist ideas.

Post-war revolutionary movements took place in countries such as Italy and France, but were derailed by the communist and social-democratic parties entering into government with capitalist parties.

In this political context the US ruling class moved to use its economic and military power to restore war-shattered economies in Europe, and in so doing avert the growing and very real threat of Soviet subversion, and even outright social revolution. In undertaking this task, America would benefit from expanding markets for its rapidly developing exports.

‘Europe must be made stable’, was the cry echoing from the White House to the Pentagon. They were fearful of the emergence of a strengthened Stalinist Soviet Union, a temporary wartime ally after 1941, but beginning to be perceived again as a dangerous geopolitical adversary. It had begun to massively develop its influence in eastern Europe and would, over the next few years, draw into its sphere Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and, most decisively, the eastern part of dismembered Germany.

The new ‘Cold War’ rapidly emerging between US imperialism and the Soviet Union, the former based on capitalism, the latter on a bureaucratic planned economy, was a crucial impetus to the unveiling in 1948 of the European Recovery Programme, popularly known as the Marshall Aid Plan, and a year later the formation of Nato.

These momentous steps shored up the consolidation of western Europe, laying the basis for what was to become the development of a golden period for world capitalism, often referred to as the post-war boom, which was to last for a generation.

Between 1947 and 1951 the Marshall Aid Plan saw the US pump \$13 billion (equivalent to

\$800 billion today) in foreign aid to European countries. The non-repayable aid benefited America hugely, as European nations were directed to buy US manufactured goods and raw materials, which were then contracted for shipment on American merchant vessels.

The war had flattened European economies, with railways, roads, bridges and ports destroyed. Agricultural production was in tatters, and some countries stood on the brink of widespread famine.

Marshall Aid provided US assistance to 16 countries, with Britain receiving around 25% and France a further 18%. It was seen as vital too that West Germany be rescued in order to restore stability - unlike in 1918 when the German republic, still engulfed in the flames of social revolution, was deemed responsible for the war, and made to pay crippling reparations enshrined in the 1919 Treaty of Versailles.

Simultaneously, the US provided military assistance to Greece and Turkey in order to assist those regimes in defeating left-wing insurgents and becoming part of the newly-crystallising Soviet bloc.

Marshall Aid

The Marshall Aid programme helped to stimulate demand, and by 1952 European industrial output had grown by 35%. A little acknowledged fact is that the CIA (US spy agency) received 5% of the total funds allocated through this policy, using the money to establish ‘front’ businesses in several European countries in order to further assist in neutralising the Soviet threat, creating pliable trade unions, and blacklisting suspected ‘communist agitators’.

Thus was laid the basis for the long economic recovery with the US at the steering wheel. New technologies, unable to be brought into production in the 1930s now began to flourish.

Keynesian infrastructural investments, including a huge surge in housing and construction, all stimulated demand, expanding markets and creating rapid increases in productivity, along with full employment levels and rising wages.

The threat from Stalinist Russia, which in 1949 had created a rival economic bloc around COMECON, ensured that the US was compelled to continue its largesse, including to Japan which was put under an American umbrella, protected economically and militarily as a vital counterweight to Soviet and later Chinese Stalinist influence in East Asia.

Today’s landscape is very different. US capitalism, already weakened by the 2007-2009 crisis, is unable to play the same dominant economic and geopolitical role as in the post-war period. And the ideas of neoliberalism, which have dominated economic thinking over the last 30 years, now lie in tatters as Covid-19 threatens to plunge the world economy into the deepest crisis since the 1930s.

A repeat of the post-1945 boom is ruled out in these crisis conditions for capitalism. But if you listen carefully, you can hear the impending march of the approaching socialist revolution.

‘Victory in Europe’ - 75th anniversary

A RESURGENT WORKERS’ MOVEMENT AND THE FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM

Dave Carr

Victory in Europe had come at an enormous cost. 40 million soldiers and civilians had been killed, 27.5 million in the Soviet Union alone. The German ruling class’s gamble with fascism had resulted in much of eastern Europe coming under the influence of the USSR, with capitalism and landlordism being swept away there.

In the West, capitalist industry was on its knees - crippled by the burden and destruction of the war. Throughout Europe, mass migrations of demobbed soldiers, workers and refugees were creating political instability. Everywhere there were food shortages, unemployment, homelessness and poverty.

But as the Allies advanced into Germany they frequently found factories and mines taken over by committees of workers who had driven out SS saboteurs. The first act of the Allies was to ban these anti-fascist organisations!

Nonetheless, the power of the workers’ committees meant that the demand for nationalisation of the mines and other war industries became widespread. For example, in 1946 in Hesse, Western Germany, 72% approved of the socialisation of industry in a referendum. A shocked US commander Clay vetoed it!

However, the resurrected German communists (KPD) and social-democratic parties lagged behind workers’ demands by only calling for partial nationalisation of industries, while both called for a renewal of capitalism.

In 1947 a strike wave took place in the industrialised Ruhr area of Germany which included demands for nationalisation of industry. At its height, 350,000 workers were on strike. The US occupiers, in response, threatened to cut food rations and to impose martial law.

The Allies’ situation was saved by the trade union leaders and KPD leaders who restrained the workers from taking action. Improved food supplies, an end to the dismantling of industry, and the establishment by the occupying authorities of ‘works councils’ to address workers’ wages and conditions, gradually eased the conflict.

Workers’ resistance

In France and Italy, the dying days of the war witnessed massive strike waves by a working class growing in confidence of its power. This was to be a major problem for the Allied occupation.

In late 1943, after Mussolini’s removal, the Italian workers in the industrialised north, still under the control of the German army, organised strikes and a 15,000-strong armed resistance movement.

In March 1944, one million workers struck in the occupied north. In



Striking workers clash with mounted cops outside an electrical factory in Philadelphia in 1946

Milan, the bosses were forced to pay the workers for the days on strike!

Liberation in 1945 left communist and socialist workers dictating to the capitalists the terms and conditions of employment. Perhaps as many as two million workers joined the Communist Party.

Likewise in France, 50,000 Parisians - arms in hands - drove out the German occupiers forcing the Allies to rush General Charles de Gaulle into the liberated city to head off a new Paris commune (the 1871 workers’ uprising).

The Resistance movement published a charter demanding nationalisation of the capitalist monopolies. In many regions, this demand was implemented with many companies being run by workers’ committees.

In the first elections in France in October 1945, the Communists won 26.1% of the vote and the socialists 23.8% - a near majority. Moreover, for the first time, a majority of workers were organised in trade unions.

The capitalists’ fears, following the collapse of the Nazi regimes, were summed up by the Economist magazine (1 December 1945):

“The collapse of that New Order imparted a great revolutionary momentum to Europe. It stimulated all the vague and confused but nevertheless radical and socialist impulses of the masses. Significantly every programme with which the various Resistance groups throughout Europe emerged from the underground contained demands for nationalisation of the banks and large-scale industries; and these programmes bore the signatures of Christian Democrats as well as of socialists and communists” (*Quoted in Capitalism since World War II by Andrew Glyn et al.*)

In the victorious countries of Britain and the USA, the working class demanded its reward for defeating fascism. Above all, there was a widespread mood that there should be no return to the poverty and unemployment that characterised capitalism between the two wars.

In the US the trade unions embarked on a massive strike wave for better wages and conditions in 1946.

In Britain, the Attlee Labour government was swept into office and established a welfare state and carried through the nationalisation of basic industries. But, generally, it was only the investment-starved, near-bankrupt companies that were taken over.

The weakened capitalist class would not have been able to seriously resist widespread public ownership measures but the Labour and trade union leaders had no intention of challenging capitalism.

In 1946 in Hesse, Western Germany, 72% approved of the socialisation of industry in a referendum

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Stalinism

Stalin, who controlled the communist movement, had agreed during 1944-45 with Churchill and Roosevelt to co-exist with imperialism and to divide conquered Europe into Western and Soviet ‘spheres of influence.’

This counter-revolutionary arrangement was to last until the fall of Stalinism in the USSR and eastern Europe between 1989-91.

In France, despite the weakness of the capitalist class and the enormous strength of the Communist Party (PCF), no revolution took place. Instead, the PCF participated in a ‘government of national unity’ which ruthlessly pursued an imperialist policy in Indo-China (Vietnam), Algeria, Madagascar and elsewhere.

In 1947, US imperialism, now a superpower, (British imperialism was bankrupt and faced colonial

revolutions in its decaying empire) sought to undermine revolution in Western Europe by imposing stability through the Marshall Aid recovery programme (see opposite page).

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In 1946 in Hesse, Western Germany, 72% approved of the socialisation of industry in a referendum

The right-wing leaders of the British and US labour movement were also mobilised in defence of capitalism in Europe. The British TUC, for example, persuaded the German trade union leaders to take measures to prevent communist influence.

Eventually, the revolutionary wave in Europe exhausted itself, blocked by the political leadership of the workers’ organisations who acted as transmission belts for the policies of either imperialism or Stalinism.

In Western Europe, the ruling classes could not, following the collapse of the Nazi and fascist regimes, use widespread repression against the working classes to ensure the continuation of capitalism.

Instead, they relied upon the pro-capitalist leaders of the workers’ movement, who argued that socialism should be “postponed”, to resist the popular demands for socialism and gradually stabilise the capitalist system.

First published in the Socialist in 2005

CORONAVIRUS A WORKERS' CHARTER



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
- No return to work unless adequate safety measures are agreed with trade unions and the workforce
- 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
- 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
- No return to work unless safety can be guaranteed
- 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