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the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**

CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

 **Capitalist failings exposed**

 **Socialist planning vital to protect the public**

TESTS, FULL PAY AND FUNDING FOR ALL NOW

The lockdown measures introduced by Johnson have already been employed by governments internationally as a serious measure to combat coronavirus. But from day one this government has failed to act quickly enough to deal with the crisis.

As the editor-in-chief of the medical journal the Lancet said: "These dangers were clear from the very beginning. We have wasted seven weeks".

A government of big business, it has put profits before the health and welfare of working-class people. And with every measure announced there has been no detail on how it will be implemented.

Cuts and austerity have meant frontline health and social care workers risking their own health because of lack of masks and other personal protective equipment. A shortage of NHS test kits is putting lives in danger, while the rich can pay for testing (see p5).

44% of general and acute beds have been cut since 1987. With only 3,700 adult critical care beds and 8,000 ventilators in the NHS, medical staff could soon be faced with making terrible decisions about who should live or die, as is already happening in Italy.

Urgent action is needed. There must be an immediate massive injection of money and resources into the NHS and social care, to expand the supply of beds, equipment and staff. All private medical facilities must be seized and integrated into the NHS - and not a penny paid to the private profiteers.

Johnson and Sunak have eventually responded to growing public anger and agreed to pay 80% of wages (up to £2,500) for workers who are laid off because of the coronavirus. This will be welcomed by millions of workers who are desperately worried, not just about the virus, but how they are going to survive from day to day.

But this 'wartime' response by the government is far from the Blitz myth of 'we're all in it together'. On the contrary, it means workers taking a 20% hit on their wages while the bosses don't have to pay anything!

And once again, it's too little too late. Tens of thousands of mainly low-paid workers have already lost their jobs. They must all be reinstated immediately.

For workers already struggling to pay the bills, 80% of wages will not be enough to live on. Sunak has said there is "no limit" on what the government will spend. Then pay us 100% now!

And that money has to go to all workers. Millions of self-employed and workers in the gig economy will still only get statutory sick pay - a measly £94.25 a week, one of the lowest rates in Europe - or paltry state benefits.

We say full pay for all at work or not - with the money going directly to workers, not as a subsidy to the bosses.

> Continued on p3

 **CORONAVIRUS A WORKERS' CHARTER**

For all the Socialist Party's analysis, working-class demands and frontline reports, see socialistparty.org.uk

> See back page

 **A SOCIALIST RESPONSE TO A DEVELOPING CRISIS**

For all the Socialist Party's analysis, working-class demands and frontline reports, see socialistparty.org.uk

 **CORONAVIRUS PLUNGES CAPITALISM INTO GLOBAL TURMOIL**

New statement by the Committee for a Workers' International: socialistworld.net

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Italian unions threaten coronavirus general strike

Workers in Italy are striking over a government decree on essential workers. They are taking action because the list of key workers drawn up by the government is too broad and so is putting workers' health and safety at risk.

Even during the severest lockdown, most workers in manufacturing were expected to carry on working because bosses put profits before safety. With the new decree, metal workers, chemical workers and textile workers decided to walk out in Lombardy, the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak. Workers in aerospace have also downed tools.

The independent union USB called a 'general' strike for 25 March. Even the right-wing trade union federation Cisl has threatened to call a general strike because, under pressure from the bosses' organisation Confindustria, the government has not adhered to the original list drawn up in agreement with the unions.

The head of Confindustria once again accused unions of exploiting the situation, complaining that if 70% of production closes down, €100 billion a month would be lost.

These developments in Italy clearly underline the importance of unions being involved not only in deciding who is an essential worker, but also in enforcing any decisions - through strike action if necessary.

Oppose Facebook censorship of socialist response to Covid-19

The Socialist Party supports measures necessary to protect all people from the threat of coronavirus. But these measures must be carried out on a fully democratic basis, without any unnecessary infringement on civil and democratic liberties.

On 24 March, the Committee for a Workers' International (which the Socialist Party is affiliated to) attempted to put out a live broadcast on Facebook on the coronavirus crisis. Following this broadcast, the video was blocked on Facebook in an act of political censorship.

We demand that Facebook reverse this. The Socialist Party, trade unionists and all workers must act to defend all civil liberties, including freedom of expression during this crisis. We urge protests to be made to Facebook to reverse this. This can be done by contacting Facebook through its platform help centre directly.

NHS nurse: the tide is out before the tsunami

Working as a nurse in a small NHS community hospital the day after BJ's address to the nation on 23 March, it must be said things feel a little odd. Not a nice 'odd', but more like the eerie sense that the tide is out before the tsunami.

Covid-19 now means we're on lockdown and much of the world are bolting their doors. So far, no one from the ward has had to self-isolate, and long may this continue.

But we know the gigantic wave is about to descend on us. The mood is upbeat, if not a little nerve-wracking. The workers - domestics, healthcare assistants, therapist and nurses - are facing the idea of the coming onslaught with selfless courage. We are ready!

For years now, NHS staff have faced pay freezes, bullying, demoralising overwork, and feeling undervalued. Staff

have left in droves because of the above and it's amazing so many ex-staff are volunteering to return. However, starting from a 40,000-nurse vacancy rate, this is an extremely large hole to fill.

We have seen the effects of privatisation, 'PFI', ward closures and a social service system cut to the bone. We have been both patronised and called 'angels' when it's suited the ruling classes, and have felt the heat of demonisation from their press whenever we've dared to fight for our rights.

However, we know that the NHS belongs to all of us. That's why we continue to fight for it. We fight for it for our communities, not the corporate bully-boy top brass.

The Socialist Party calls for a fully publicly owned and funded NHS, run under democratic workers' control and management. There is very little faith in this capitalist system that hates the very idea of a health service free to all at the point of delivery.

Many of us on the ward have experienced much generosity and kindness from other workers in our community. A random member of the public paid for one of our nurses' items in the local chemist. Another had her boiler fixed and the plumber would accept no payment.

As usual, the public is on our side. This moment in history must never be forgotten.

An NHS nurse, Nottinghamshire

Hospital cleaners force hygienic practice

On 24 March, a supervisor told me to go to a ward to help clean the side rooms. Upon getting there the other domestic assistant informed me that she was cleaning the rooms of patients with suspected coronavirus symptoms, and was hesitant to do so because of the risk.

We both stopped work and went to the supervisor. We told her that under no circumstances is it possible to practice social distancing in a side room with three people, patient included.

We said if they didn't find me an alternative ward to work on until my training is complete, we would down tools and refuse to work under unsafe conditions.

Within five minutes I was moved to the neurosurgical ward instead. Only workers can stop the spread.

A newly hired hospital cleaner

Who are the real key workers?

Amid the chaos of coronavirus, it is interesting to note that on the Tory government's list of key workers not one billionaire boss is mentioned.

The 'benevolent' job creators, those with monthly bonuses that exceed the annual pay of some workers; the big landlords who do nothing but leech; the health profiteers so keen to buy our NHS - now seem to have gone silent.

When it's over, we should remember it was the nurses, carers, food and transport staff, and other workers - not the capitalist class in any shape or form - who got us through this. The official list is workers in health and social care, education and childcare, public services, food and basic goods, public safety, transport, utilities and communication.

Most of these workers are low-paid. Clearly we deserve much more. The Tories have let the cat out of the bag: the workers are necessary, the capitalists serve no purpose.

Max McGee Distribution centre worker

Transport union RMT demands action for coronavirus tube safety

RMT union members have shown a huge commitment to keep the tube running, in spite of the obvious risk to tube workers who are working.

We have made some progress. Cleaners working for contractor ABM are getting full sick pay if isolating or sick with coronavirus. But London Underground, the London mayor and government have failed to deal with the key issues confronting members at work.

London Underground must reduce usage now

It is ridiculous to have people being fined for congregating in groups of more than two while, at the same time, stuffing hundreds into a tube carriage where people struggle to maintain two inches of social distancing, let alone two metres.

The government must shut down construction sites and guarantee pay of all self-employed and gig economy workers

We know that crowding is mainly affecting services early in the morning from areas with high numbers of self-employed and gig economy workers.

Agreed enhanced-cleaning plans must be put into action now

Station staff must be told to work behind glass and only work in public areas when essential for safety reasons.

All non-essential maintenance must be cancelled

Transport for London must guarantee pay of all self-employed workers in its orbit.

RMT will tell London Underground that without these measures being agreed and implemented immediately we will be unable to advise our members that we consider it safe to come to work.

Extract from RMT union statement



Transport for London's reduction of tube services has obviously made the risk of contagion worse, not better photo Susanturner70/CC

Socialist Party member and tube station worker Jared Wood is the RMT union's executive committee member representing London transport. Jared has been central to putting forward demands to keep transport workers and passengers safe, and proposing action to achieve this.

Coronavirus and domestic violence: a double threat to women's lives

As we entered 2020 the number of women murdered every week by a partner or ex-partner in the UK rose to three. On top of this, three women a week kill themselves to escape abuse.

For women who need to self-isolate and are experiencing domestic violence the situation is particularly dangerous. In China in February domestic violence cases reported to the police tripled. In the US the domestic violence national hotline has seen a huge increase in calls.

As Covid-19 forces us indoors in the UK, women and all victims of domestic violence are at risk.

There have been vicious cuts to domestic violence services and refuges,

and replacing the refuge places that have been cut under austerity.

In reality, these are basic demands that women fleeing violence should already have access to.

For women and children fleeing violence there's been nothing but cut after cut. But the pockets run deep when it comes to helping the rich keep their profits. The government has shown with its measures to protect business that there is the money there to fully fund refuges.

But they won't act without a fight. Amy Cousens Sign and share the Women's Lives Matter petition at change.org/Covid-19-DomesticViolenceCrisis

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Chris Thomas

You cannot fight a fire blindfolded... test, test, test." The advice of the director-general of the World Health Organisation for combatting coronavirus could not be clearer.

It's a total scandal, therefore, that the government has basically ignored it, potentially putting thousands of lives at risk. Last week an average of just 3,746 patients a day were tested, almost all patients who were already in hospital. That compares with around 15,000 a day in South Korea, with results available within hours via text. Germany is carrying out 160,000 a week.

Here, desperately needed frontline health and care workers are self-isolating for days - possibly needlessly - because they can't get access to a test to find out whether they have coronavirus, or just a cold or normal flu. Some are not even ill, but have household members who are, and can't get a test.

Consultant cardiologist Mark Gallagher, stuck at home with a temperature of 38°C, called this a "policy of surrender". "They are abandoning the basic principles for dealing with an epidemic... test whenever possible, trace contacts and contain."



All private healthcare resources should be immediately requisitioned and incorporated into the NHS

It doesn't take a genius to work out why this is happening. It has nothing to do with medical advice or strategy for fighting the virus. Medical staff have confirmed that cuts, privatisation and total lack of preparation have led to a shortage of testing kits and lab capacity in the NHS.

Not a problem if you have the money to pay for a private test, though. We're hearing all the time about politicians, and the rich and famous, who have tested positive, while the nurse working in intensive care has no idea if they have Covid-19 or not.

The private Harley Street Clinic is selling home testing kits for £375 a shot - much in demand, the clinic says, by "lords, ladies and knights." £2.5 million raked in - in just one week.

Boris Johnson says the government is "ramping up" testing to 25,000 a day. But it could take four weeks to reach this level. That's far too late! The supply of tests must be massively expanded now to guarantee a mass testing and tracing policy to save lives.

All private testing and processing facilities, as well as all other private healthcare resources, should also be immediately requisitioned and incorporated into the NHS. We need a fully publicly funded, integrated and democratically run health service that puts the health and needs of the many before the profits of a few.

We need tests for all now! Nationalise production and research



Underfunded NHS: Hospital monitoring equipment held together by sticking plasters in London photo Steve Nally



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 > The new economic crisis: not a repeat of 2007-08
 > How the far right can also gain
 > Lessons from the revolt in Chile for a new era of struggle

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Jon Dale

Secretary, Unite union Nottinghamshire NHS branch (personal capacity)



Large companies making diagnostic tests don't invest in tests that may never be needed

Testing large numbers is critical to bringing outbreaks under control. All patients' contacts, and health and care workers, need to know they have not become infected themselves and are passing the virus on.

A new virus - like Sars-CoV-2, the coronavirus which causes the disease Covid-19 - needs new tests. They can't be taken off the shelf.

Small biotech companies employing 20-30 scientists are rapidly developing faster, more accurate tests. One now takes just 30 minutes and does not need large lab equipment, compared to two hours for existing tests.

But by the time these new tests have been trialled to ensure they work, it may be too late for this pandemic. Private investment in these biotech companies between 2015 and 2019 was six times less than in companies researching treatments, where higher profits are hoped for.

Tara O'Toole, executive vice-president of the CIA's non-profit venture

capital firm In-Q-Tel, said it was a "market failure" that diagnostics were less valued than treatments. "We're in a diagnostic renaissance from a technological point of view, and yet we find ourselves without adequate diagnostics yet again in a big outbreak."

Large companies making diagnostic tests - like Thermo Fisher, worth about \$110 billion - don't invest in tests that may never be needed. They want guaranteed sales.

A socialist plan of production would combine laboratory research with modern purpose-built factories, prepared for new infectious disease outbreaks whenever they arose. Public ownership and investment, not short-term profit-hunting, would save many lives.

Covid-19 hospital worker: when will they test staff?

An NHS health professional



Yes, we have personal protective equipment, but it's being rationed

When are they going to test frontline staff? This has been the question across the hospital all weekend - and is it any wonder? We feel we are being put in danger. Yes, we have personal protective equipment (PPE), but it's being rationed.

In A&E, 'query Covid-19' patients walk down to X-ray wearing a thin surgical mask. A member of staff performs a chest X-ray with a yellow apron, mask and gloves.

When staff go up to the intensive care unit with the confirmed cases, we get the full gear - full sleeves, proper masks, hat and visor - with separate entrances in and out to decontaminate.

Colleagues from elsewhere in Europe say back home, PPE is worn with every patient, as the virus is in the community - but not here!

We are currently emptying out patients to the local Spire private hospital, and wards now stand empty ready for the influx - but

do we have the staff to look after them? All departments have a number of staff having to self-isolate at home.

Many are cancelling annual leave to fill uncovered shifts. But staff who have underlying conditions are still expected to come to work, with ineffective arrangements, just not to work on the 'front line'. And the recently retired make contact, afraid they will be forced to return despite age and underlying conditions.

We must oppose the Tories introducing draconian policing methods for hospital staff and other workers. And we demand again - when will they test staff?

Going viral



Socialist letters and comments on the coronavirus crisis

The Covid-19 pandemic is a world social crisis which touches every aspect of life. The iniquities and failings of the capitalist system are being exposed, and workers and communities are organising in response. Send us your comments, reports, anecdotes and thoughts, in not more than 200 words, to editors@socialistparty.org.uk

■ Boris doesn't speak for us

When Boris makes his announcements, who has he spoken to apart from Dominic Cummings?

He announced food hampers for 1.5 million who have to stay at home for 12 weeks. Did he speak to local councils to see if they could prepare, produce and deliver them or was it Harrods?

He said schools had to stay open for children of 'critical workers', but lost the list for a couple of days! Did he speak to anyone who ran a school or just to his old head at Eton?

He announced we all have to stay inside - fair enough. But did he let the people delivering services to 'critical workers' know in advance he wasn't talking about them?!

He can't get testing kits ready, he can't get PPE to health staff or critical workers, he can't get ventilators to hospitals that need them for critically ill patients.

This bumbling champion of the 'private sector' now has to rely on a tattered state to battle this epidemic. He's paying out billions to shore up private-sector provision - private hospitals, private rail companies, etc, and now he wants emergency powers.

The biggest emergency is to get rid of him and these parasites now! I'm sure there are hundreds of thousands of factory workers that would turn their production capacity over to producing PPE, ventilators, testing equipment and food if they ran it.

I bet there are hundreds of thousands of delivery drivers, including those in the gig economy, who know how to get those products to where they are needed.

There's no planning, no coordination and no understanding of how to get things done. I don't want to keep politics out of this. This crisis has exposed why these capitalist politicians chose to save their own profits at the expense of our lives.

Workers, let's take back control! That's what socialism is about.

Hugo Pierre
Tower Hamlets

■ Hospital - an inside view

Being in hospital is not much fun at the best of times but there is palpable fear at the moment across the board: staff, patients and visitors. And the coronavirus surge is yet to come. The health service has been starved of funding for the last 12 years. Quick fixes now are not going to solve the problem.

For example, if intensive care wards generally are like Homerton Hospital, east London, then they rely heavily on agency nurses. Good as they are (and they are good), the nature of agency work

pressures them to continue working.

At the moment they are stretched to the limit. Before the Corona outbreak changed the situation, it appeared that certain people who already leech off the NHS were looking at the agency use as a prelude to further privatisation.

This virus has dealt these ideas a blow. Alongside this, the government's new policies on immigration post-Brexit are going to mean a drying-up of the trained nurses they were sucking in from other countries. This will leave a gaping hole. There is a big lack and time lag of UK-trained nurses.

This is not a good situation when dealing with a virus like this. We need to demand an end to privatisation, nationalisation of the pharmaceutical industry, and a health service free at the point of use for everyone.

The covers of capitalism have been thrown back by the coronavirus, giving people a glimpse of the idea that the current system can't deliver. Only a mass workers' party with system change at its core can satisfy those needs. Time for such a party to come forward to end this current madness.

Mick Cotter
Hackney

■ We won't pay for this crisis

Whether you are under house arrest, self-isolating or just working from home, C-virus has a lot to answer for.

Yet it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good. Budgens supermarket has attracted media attention by hiking the price of a toilet roll by 60%. All the supermarkets are expanding their workforce in the hope of making a killing (no pun intended). Will their underpaid employees benefit from the largesse of the millionaires who own the supermarkets? This is not likely.

The government's response to the C-virus has been to hand out money to the rich with the promise that some of it will trickle down to the working class. In the past, such schemes have always seen the money remain attached to the sticky fingers of the millionaires. They didn't get where they are today by being generous to their employees.

McDonalds, before they were forced to close, was trying to get its employees to work without basic protection like hand sanitiser. You can bet the bosses were well protected from the virus.

As reported in the Socialist, Richard Branson has demanded billions from the taxpayer while insisting the people who make his money for him can manage without any for eight weeks.

And if the working classes start getting uppity because they are not being paid? Boris Badenough has 20,000 troops on standby, just in case.

The Trade Union Congress (TUC) has been cooperating with the government. It is time for the union leaders to take the government warmly by the throat and insist that the working class should not pay the price for this crisis.

The Socialist Party's 'Workers' Charter' (see back page) to fight the C-virus is a good example of the kind of demands the TUC should be making.

If the TUC were to get off its knees it would find there is a lot of support in the country. Listen to what people are saying in the supermarket queues. There is a lot of anger which needs to be channelled by the Labour movement.

Derek McMillan
self-isolated in Worthing

■ Essential - not low-skilled

"Funny how all of these 'low-skilled' jobs (cleaners, delivery drivers, retail assistants) that so many look down upon are now on the frontline holding society together while we work from home.

Those jobs aren't low-skilled, they're essential and they should be paid as such."

Seen on a London bus drivers' WhatsApp group

■ Shafted by the suits

There are over 4.7 million good people like me. Zero-hours, locum, agency, gig economy workers. People, who care, clean and provide valued services.

People who from necessity genuinely plan for most eventualities, but could never plan for a pandemic. That's for governments, the big people. Sadly, the rancid suits that now run the UK aren't fit to walk dogs. They don't care about the low-paid, the vulnerable, the poor. Or me.

Coronavirus now means I'm not working and have to self-isolate. It was an instant decision based on a duty of care to me. I've been around the houses but it was a shock. I almost threw up, not with fear, but by the powerlessness of it all. And the sadness, because I work with vulnerable people and really like my job.

No work for me means having to claim benefits. The last few days has involved numerous calls and hours on the phone, to hopefully receive a pittance. And to build up more debt because the Tories are not going to bail me out, and the millions like me, as they did the bankers.

Benefit claiming is like a complex maze. I really feel so sorry for the vulnerable and those whose main language is not English. It must be hell.

And then I hear about that human vomitorium - aka Iain Duncan Smith - who says that Universal Credit payments should now be speeded up after he brutally slowed them down. They say you couldn't write it.

This madness need not be. I don't blame the virus, I blame all those politicians and so-called labour movement 'leaders' who for the past 40 years implemented cuts or refused to fight them. Capitalists and cowards united as one. They will be to blame for all the needless carnage we will face.

I have a friend in hospital recovering from an operation. Her post-operation monitors are held together by sticking plasters. That says it all.

Steve Nally
Lambeth, south London

■ Overcrowded buses

Weekday buses in Leeds have moved to a Saturday service. Prior to the pandemic, Leeds buses were already at capacity and had issues with overcrowding.

I live on a route that's heavily used by NHS workers (running past two hospitals) and several large supermarkets. As expected, there was a lot of overcrowding with the new bus timetable making 'social distancing' impossible.

Many key workers will instead have to rely on walking, cycling or taxis as a safer alternative. Many of these workers will already be working extra hours in this crisis.

We need a planned transport industry that keeps these crucial bus routes running, even if it is not profitable to do so. The private companies will not agree to this, so we should nationalise them and run them for the public interest not private profit.

Tanis Belsham-Wray
Leeds

■ Socialism for the rich

A number of people are commenting that the coronavirus crisis is forcing Johnson into taking 'socialist measures'. While this reaction is understandable, it is not correct.

The crisis is forcing Johnson to abandon elements of neoliberal capitalism, in favour of state intervention in the capitalist economy to overcome the problem that free market forces alone are wholly inadequate for solving the problems created by the crisis.

Johnson is still appealing for private industry to make ventilators; he initially called for pubs and restaurants to close, rather than enforcing such measures by law, in order to protect the insurance companies from the claims that would result from compulsory measures.

The funding made available today for wages to pay laid-off or self-isolating workers, while welcome, is none the less a taxpayers' subsidy to the insurance companies.

Socialism would requisition private hospital beds, and bring the private

hospitals into the NHS, not pay £300 per night per bed. Socialism would nationalise the banks, insurance companies and major industries, abolish the profit motive, and plan production to meet human need, not private profit.

Socialism would not leave democracy at the factory gate/office door, or limit it to a five-yearly ballot, but extend to all areas of society, allowing ordinary people to use their talents, training, education and experience to control the politicians, the economy, industry and public administration for the general good.

The current crisis won't be resolved by Johnson's Tories. It will be resolved by ordinary working people, from all walks of working life, getting together and doing the right things.

Roger Bannister
Liverpool

■ Laid-off in ten seconds

I've been temporarily laid-off until the virus is over. I was working as a sales assistant in a retail opticians. But no financial compensation for the hours I won't be working.

I received a ten-second phone call informing me of this - that was it. I don't know when I will be back in work or anything. I know there might be a 'lock-down' anyway, but I really don't know what's happened to my job.

When I was working, most of my colleagues were stressed out because of the uncertainty, and the lack of response from the government and from the directors here. Some of them didn't want to call in sick as they didn't get paid and they couldn't afford to lose money.

One colleague was confused as to why we were still being asked to work. Personally, it was frustrating to go to work. I expected the store to close temporarily, but I didn't expect to be cut off, over the phone. There are no measures here to protect workers in this business.

Socialist Students member

■ Social-distancing - who's to blame

The media tried to demonise ordinary people going out on a sunny day. These 'selfish' people are supposedly to blame for the coronavirus crisis. The Tory NHS cuts, the shambolic lack of testing, the dysfunctional market are all let off the hook.

The media is silent about the greed of the PFI firms, the private medical firms, the profiteers and the Richard Bransons. The aim of Johnson's campaign is to absolve the government of austerity and the capitalist system of mass carnage, and instead put the blame on ordinary people.

Amnon Baron-Cohen

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?
editors@socialistparty.org.uk



Retail and the coronavirus outbreak - organise to defend workers interests



View from the shopfloor

A Sainsbury's rep told us that: "You don't see empty shelves like this, even at Christmas". Sainsbury's has given workers seven days fully-paid leave for self-isolating but "given the government now says 14 days isolation that should be extended immediately". "We had a shipment of hand sanitiser, and it was good that Sainsbury's has been putting some of this aside for staff, ensuring that all checkout operators and the kiosk have access to it. However, there are no procedures in place for wiping down door and trolley handles."

"The store has a sign-up sheet for people willing to do shopping for others who have to isolate - obviously that's a help to those people, but I can't help feeling that Sainsbury's are doing it to protect their profits by making sure people shop here."

A Morrisons café worker told us about the turmoil in their store:

"We only started displaying coronavirus guidelines in the café about social distancing, which no one pays attention to. The soap in the café that staff use is making my skin crack from washing and I have no idea if it even kills coronavirus. We haven't been supplied any hand sanitiser because customers get priority, and the moment it's put out it's gone."

"We've had basically no staff in. I've had to shut down the café with only two people, one of whom had only worked three shifts prior. I've had no one to cover my breaks because no one else can take over the till."

"And, get this, Morrison's has graciously set up a trolley for people to purchase and donate items to people in the hospital next door instead of just donating the stock for free!"

A food factory worker and Usdaw member says:

"There have been changes in procedure - with staggered breaks, fewer tables in the canteen and further apart; tables sanitised after every use, extra hygiene with staff spraying everything all day, extra sanitiser on entering the building and by the clocking in machine."

"Some lines have been delisted, concentrating on products that are, or can be, frozen. People currently undergoing cancer treatment or with underlying conditions have been told to self-isolate. We seem to be taking more precautions for the staff than any of the stores."

Iain Dalton and Ryan Aldred
Socialist Party members in
Udaw shop workers' union

Coronavirus is sending tremors through capitalist society. Many workers who have been enduring increasing casualised working conditions, such as zero or short-hour contracts, have had further cuts to sick pay and other contractual changes.

But workers in the food manufacturing, distribution and retail sectors, which Usdaw organises, are now like an 'emergency service'.

Given the bulk of Usdaw's membership is concentrated in four large supermarket chains (Tesco, Sainsbury's, Morrisons and Co-op) then this throws up huge questions for members and reps to deal with in ensuring our members health and safety while providing these vital services.

Health and safety

It is clear many retail workers will have to remain at work through this crisis to help ensure supplies of food, but this raises crucial issues of health and safety. Many workers experience of cleaning schedules in normal times is that there often isn't enough time to complete cleaning rotas. Reports indicate that new cleaning regimes installed by companies to attempt to protect workers from coronavirus are simply not carried through.

To ensure any procedures are fully implemented, and additional ones brought in where workers demand them, members of retail unions need to come together in stores and establish local health and safety

committees. Reps should take the initiative to try and establish them. This can raise issues with management for action - while also being prepared to use provisions under health and safety legislation to refuse to work in unsafe environments. This also applies to protection from abuse and assault.

Given government advice for workers and their immediate household is to self-isolate if they have symptoms of coronavirus, and the closures of schools due to the outbreak, then we have to demand that any worker who can't work is not financially worse off.

We welcome that Usdaw's call for food supply chain, pharmacy and funeral workers to be classed as 'key workers' has been recognised, with schools helping to provide childcare for those workers. And we support the demands that National Education Union members are putting forward to ensure this is done as safely as possible.

The government should immediately introduce price controls on staple goods and supplies as well as rationing of items to ensure fair distribution. These measures, in addition to changes to opening hours to facilitate restocking, should be agreed in discussion with union representatives. Any proposals to move staff from their regular duties and shifts should be done under the control of the union to ensure those workers are capable of carrying out those new duties.

There are widespread reports of recruitment drives by retail companies, particularly to assist with expanding online deliveries. Retail union reps should have the opportunity to attend induction meetings and bring these workers into the

union. We believe those jobs should be full-time ones, unless workers choose to work part-time.

The government has talked about wanting to work with trade unions to tackle this crisis. If the government is serious about this then it should bring in immediate measures such as compulsory collective bargaining throughout the retail sector to ensure full measures to protect workers and their interests. Usdaw should call on the government to increase the minimum wage immediately to at least the £10 an hour it currently demands, although it should be aiming higher.

Profits

Despite the talk of 'working together' in the joint statement by the major supermarket chains, for their managements its profits that ultimately come first.

Rather than simply going along with company directives, retail unions should be putting demands forward in workplaces where they have a presence. Where companies are claiming to struggle, unions should demand that they open their books to trade union scrutiny to ensure that they are not simply guarding profits.

Supermarket share prices are rising compared to most other retail companies who are struggling due to store closures and reduced custom. This indicates that the markets think they're making a killing.

On 17 March, for example, shares in Sainsbury's were up by 6.6%, Morrisons was up by 5% and Tesco was up by 1%.

The chaos and competition of the market has also been exposed, and competition laws have had to be relaxed to ensure companies can

share supply chains and delivery vans. This shows the vital need for coordination and socialist planning of our food supply chain, rather than the chaos that the capitalist 'free market' has created.

Ultimately the only way to guarantee that companies are run on the basis of social need rather than private profit is by bringing them into public ownership under democratic workers' control and management.

Retail and distribution workers have a fundamental role in securing the safety and sustenance of the wider population. Usdaw must step up if it is to earn the authority among workers to call itself the campaigning union and other retail union's must follow suit.

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Social care: "Not good enough by miles"

Boris Johnson has said that non-urgent operations will be cancelled, and people already in hospital sent home, to free up 30,000 general and acute beds in the NHS to accommodate coronavirus patients. According to Johnson, they will be released into the care of "community health providers". Many of these people will be elderly with

important social needs. But how will the social care sector cope with the coronavirus crisis after years of privatisation and Tory government imposed austerity implemented by local Labour councils?

Glynn Doherty, a trade union organiser, looks at the state of social care, and what demands the labour movement should be fighting for.



Birmingham homecarers won their 2018-2019 strike against pay cuts and other attacks by the council

£8 billion needed - not gonna happen without a fight

Announcing an extra £5bn for the NHS in the budget, chancellor Rishi Sunak added an afterthought - the money was for "social care too", unintentionally emphasising the poorer-cousin status of the social care sector.

But failures in social care seriously hamper NHS services. Between the 2017 and 2019 general elections, lack of social care led to 2.5 lost million bed days in the NHS, costing £587 million or £27,000 every hour.

The one constant for each austerity and 'post-austerity' government is universal disapproval of their handling of social care. From care providers to service users, condemnation is continual and rightly so!

The Tories gave just one page of their 2019 election manifesto to social care. Simon Bottery, social care lead at the King's Fund think tank tweeted: "This conservative manifesto 'three-point plan' for #socialcare isn't a plan and arguably doesn't even have three points. It involves: 1. A small amount of cash, 2. An offer of cross party talks with a 'red line' on their goals. Not good enough by miles."

Even Boris Johnson said "I accept the full plan needs to be developed!"

But it has not been developed since.

Health and social care secretary Matt Hancock has written to MPs seeking a "cross-party consensus" on reforming funding, which critics translate as 'We've not got a plan, have you? It can't include extra money BTW'.

Almost 850,000 people were receiving long-term care in England in 2018, and an ageing population will increase demand. (Just under half of current social care expenditure is on working-age adults).

Lack of funding

The lack of funding is acute. The Local Government Association says adult social care services will face a funding gap of nearly £4 billion by 2025, just to cover basic inflationary and demographic pressures.

The government claims councils have an extra £1.5 billion for social care this year but a third of that is only available if they increase council tax by 2%. A further £220 million is already 'spent' to pay for April's minimum wage rise.

Austerity has hit social care harder than most sectors. Spending on adult care by local authorities in 2018/19 was £22.2 billion, £300 million below the level it was in 2010/11.

One in eight care homes has closed in the past decade, and this figure continues to rise. Over 1,600 no longer exist.

Of those that remain, far too many are in the private sector where the accumulation of profit, not the provision of care, is primary.

The Centre for Health and Public Interest published research last year estimating 10% of income for private residential care homes suspiciously "leaked out" each year.

Across the 26 largest care home providers in the UK, £261 million of the money they receive to provide care goes towards repaying debt; £117 million in payments to related companies - a known way of dodging tax and hiding profits.

Public sector union Unison quotes a figure of £8 billion that experts say is needed immediately to restore acceptable standards and access to care.

That sort of figure is not going to be invested unless there is a battle for it; a fight that must include trade unions, campaigning organisations, service users and providers and Labour councils, who must stop making cuts and use their reserves and borrowing powers to set needs budgets.

Underpaid. Overstretched. Leaving.

1.5 million people work in adult social care in England, in 1.1 million full-time equivalent jobs. Most of them are employed by one of the 18,500 small and medium-sized private providers. There are also almost 150,000 jobs where carers are directly employed by service users. However, virtually a third of care workers leave the social care profession each year. There are currently 120,000 vacancies!

Why? The median hourly pay of care workers is around £8.00 an hour, and the average wage in the sector is below that of shopworkers and cleaners. That's why!

Trade union density is low in social care, particularly outside of local authorities. Even where Unison,

Unite or GMB unions have members, these are often in too small numbers to threaten employers with a united workforce. The unions are not really organising in private social care, merely providing an individual representation service.

Unions need to rethink how they can organise care workers. They need to show they're serious in winning higher pay and better working conditions. Legal victories over travelling time (which two-thirds of care workers don't receive) and sleep-in payments have been overturned or rendered toothless. These two issues are crucial in recruitment campaigns - but only by unions promising to fight for workers, not just relying on the courts.



photo Hackney Socialist Party

Coronavirus - a social care workers' charter

All the disparity between council and non-council care workers is being highlighted rapidly by the coronavirus pandemic. In the organised sector, full pay has been protected where workers are forced to self-isolate. In non-organised businesses, owners seek to protect profits by making workers pay for the crisis.

But the major effect on social care workers is obvious. The people they look after are the most vulnerable and, therefore, they are put at the highest risk just for doing their job. This needs special consideration and extra demands:

■ Any care worker who is pregnant, suffers from a chronic organ disease or neurological condition like MS, or

has diabetes or is severely asthmatic, should be allowed to self-isolate on full pay immediately

■ Employers must provide full personal protective equipment (PPE) for all workers at all times. Any worker not provided with adequate PPE to remove themselves from working in potentially dangerous situations on full pay and without disciplinary sanction

■ Staff who have to miss work through childcare issues during the schools shutdown should not be forced to take leave or resign their post. All care employers to be flexible on shift patterns and workers must not be penalised for actually controlling the spread of the virus

■ Councils to ensure private providers of social care are granting the same protection measures for staff as local authority care workers. Those failing to do so will lose the contract, with the services - and staff - brought under immediate council control

■ Councils to refuse to implement cuts, use their reserves and borrowing powers, and organise a campaign to demand that the government finds the money necessary to fund social care and other vital services



Good, committed and talented staff burn out fastest and move on to better paid pastures - like their local supermarket.

There is no additional incentive for staff at this time - it's a case of work until you can't. Some are already self-isolating under Johnson's instructions.

As support workers we understand that it is our duty to continue supporting our clients the best we can. And it will be our chance to show Boris and his ilk just how 'low-skilled' we are!

Working in the care sector is incredibly stressful and requires multiple skills. Daily we provide personal care, cook meals, clean, take phone calls, arrange appointments and meetings, test fire alarms and equipment, take extensive notes, fill out forms, track, monitor and, of course, deal with challenging behaviour. Challenging behaviour can be shouting and

Karen Smith

I work in a home with vulnerable adults, many of whom fall into the category of being at a high risk of coronavirus.

The company has instructed us to only allow service users out to any kind of gatherings for essential purposes. This is already proving very difficult, with some on the autistic spectrum not being able to understand why their routine has changed.

Staff are under a lot of pressure, not only to constantly clean but to keep service users distracted all day, every day, for an indeterminate length of time. Most of the staff team make pennies above the minimum wage, many have school-age children, and some are in the high-risk category themselves.

screaming, inappropriate touching or physical assault.

Some of my shifts are 14 hours and rarely will I get a 10-minute break away from service users. However bad working conditions are, unionisation is a struggle.

It is unsurprising every place I have worked since 2012 has had a high staff turnover. Good, committed and talented staff burn out fastest and move on to better-paid pastures - like their local supermarket.

But the coronavirus crisis could lead to a growing number of support workers standing shoulder to shoulder, unionising to demand better pay, better conditions, and more respect for what is one of the most unappreciated roles in society.

The problem is clear - local authorities are paying huge care packages to private companies to meet the growing needs of the country. These companies are profiting directly from privatisation at the expense of care staff and vulnerable adults.

Risk

Many companies will take on very difficult clients because of the higher income, irrespective of the suitability of the placement, and without increasing staffing levels. This not only puts staff at increased risk of injury, but also other service users who are in care primarily to be kept safe!

I worked in a home where the one male service user assaulted three of the women in the home. It was not until the third woman was hospitalised that he was moved.

In my area some of these companies have failed to meet the needs of the people in their care. Olympus Care Services was recently taken back into public ownership for this reason.

Adult social care is a need that impacts most people in their lifetime. Capitalism is woefully inadequate for dealing with the demands of the sector. Only a democratically owned and run public health and social care sector can provide for our communities.

With full funding, better training and staff paid at decent living wages, social care can be transformed. Not just for the betterment of the staff and service users, but society as a whole.

University workers win full pay for casual staff



UCU members picket line as part of recent national strike action

Bea Gardner
Southampton University and College Union (personal capacity)

Like many workplaces, university bosses have come under fire for their slow and inadequate response to the coronavirus crisis. In Southampton, all three campus trade unions wrote to the vice-chancellor outlining our concerns about insufficient information and advice, including on home working and pay for casual staff.

We pushed for an urgent meeting, but initially, they did not respond to our requests. Our union branch unanimously passed a motion, taking a position that there should be no financial disadvantage to any employee, regardless of contract type, as a result of the virus.

The University and College Union (UCU) has recently taken 14 days of strike action. Part of the 'four fights' dispute is over excessive workloads and the use of exploitative, casualised, hourly paid contracts. Both issues have the potential to be exacerbated by this crisis, with cancelled teaching and classes moved online.

As a postgraduate research student, all the work I do teaching undergraduate seminars is hourly paid. I have no guaranteed hours or access to sick pay.

University central communications announced on 13 March that the Easter term would be brought forward by a week, with all scheduled teaching the following week cancelled. We received no confir-

mation on where that would leave precariously employed staff like me.

The following Monday, I received an email from my hiring manager stating we would not be paid for cancelled teaching. In addition, students received an email stating all assessments would be conducted remotely, before the staff had been told or asked if this was possible!

As a result of the trade union and student union working together to put pressure on university management, the university has now confirmed that casual workers will be paid in full for any scheduled teaching cancelled anytime up until 19 April.

However, it should not have been so hard. I see trade unionists up and down the country putting forward ideas for continuing to operate in a way that is fair and safe for all. But at the same time, I see incompetent management giving outdated advice which puts people at risk, as well as policies entirely unworkable on the ground.

The battle continues within the higher education sector for the proper equipment to work from home, appropriate processes for those with caring responsibilities and other issues.

We also face widespread cuts and redundancies if overseas student numbers fall. But while we have much bigger battles ahead, our union has shown this week that if you fight you can win. Collectively we can push back against any attacks to working people as a result of this crisis!

Paul Couchman
Surrey Unison local government branch secretary (personal capacity)

Our Unison union branch committee has been working remotely since 16 March. We are communicating and making decisions via WhatsApp. Our workplace reps are also linked up in their relevant WhatsApp groups, and are supporting each other during the crisis.

We have passed an emergency motion, pledging to provide support and advice on Covid-19 issues to all members (including those who join now), pledging also to provide emergency financial support via Unison's welfare charity, and putting aside an initial £50,000 for that reason.

Workplace issues so far have been mainly related to if members should go into work or not, and when and how. Our branch covers members in over 400 schools, and there is understandable confusion as to who is expected to go into school and how this is all going to work.

Our school reps are stepping up to the mark, working with their schools to ensure all staff are treated fairly and kept as safe as possible if they are at work - and ensuring they do not lose any pay if they have to stay away.

We had an issue with dozens of our members in libraries demanding that the libraries close.

We were in urgent negotiations with the council (all virtual of course) and we were advising members of their rights under the Employment Rights Act S.44, not to place themselves at risk at work. The council closed the libraries on 20 March.

We are daily providing telephone and email advice to members through our network of branch officers, reps and branch-employed staff, and we intend to hold virtual video meetings as regularly as possible via Skype or Zoom, while being in constant contact via WhatsApp.

Organising in the workplace in the time of coronavirus



Bosses not workers should pay for JCB shutdown

A JCB worker

This year is the 75th anniversary of the founding of JCB. The year started with statements that the order books were the fullest for certain JCB products since their inception. Record numbers of agency workers were being recruited to cope with the increasing demand. There were plans to have big celebrations and even talk of a £750 bonus to boot.

On the 18 March all JCB UK plants shut down production. I was at home on my day off so was informed by email. Graeme Macdonald, CEO

not had any further information regarding the future. JCB employs thousands of workers in the UK and abroad, and our future remains uncertain like millions of others.

We are being paid up until the 30 March, but beyond that we are still uncertain if we will continue to be paid, or if we fall into the category announced by the government.

The unions need to demand that any company planning redundancies should open up the books to the workforce and trade union inspection. Let's see where all the money has gone.

Anthony Bamford who owns JCB is one of the richest people in the Midlands and is a Tory Lord. Over the years he has given millions of pounds to the Tory party. Make them pay and not us.



of JCB said: "This rapidly evolving situation means that demand from our customers is worsening by the hour. We fully expect further order cancellations and deferred deliveries in the coming days as customers continue to lose business confidence in this increasingly volatile environment." He went on to say: "As a team, we all need to face up to the fact that some unprecedented action will be required to maintain business continuity."

This statement was made before the government announced it would cover the wages of workers retained by companies. The statement showed what JCB were considering - to me unprecedented action reads as massive job losses.

Since this statement we have

not had any further information regarding the future. JCB employs thousands of workers in the UK and abroad, and our future remains uncertain like millions of others.

We are being paid up until the 30 March, but beyond that we are still uncertain if we will continue to be paid, or if we fall into the category announced by the government.

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Nick Auvache

Despite organisational difficulties, trade unions can, and should, continue to function during the course of the corona outbreak. I work for Unite housing workers' trade union branch.

As well as responding to members' fears and inquiries, we are having to encourage and develop new ways of organising, ensuring that workers can communicate and act collectively to exert pressure on employers to keep workers safe.

Many housing workers are being told to work from home. This raises certain problems. Many families and young people sharing cramped accommodation will find it very difficult to work in their homes, especially if they are having to look after children at the same time.

However, other workers such as repair workers, night workers and some support workers are still having face-to-face meetings with tenants and clients. These workers are more susceptible to the spread of the virus because of their jobs, but there are many stories of employers not providing the correct protective clothing or putting proper safety procedures in place.

This has caused a spike in contacts from members seeking advice and wanting to know if they are obliged to carry out these tasks. On the one hand, the government is telling them to socially distance themselves.

Yet the working conditions of many of these workers often make this impossible. Workers are concerned about their health. But they are also concerned about their jobs and their wages, and so feel compelled to take risks.

Some workers, however, are very angry, and are even refusing to work if they have concerns about safety. This is a very positive step. But our advice is, as far as possible, to ensure that workers take action collectively.

They should discuss the risks in their teams and local areas, formu-

late demands, and refuse to undertake any of these risks until the employer has agreed to their demands. In many cases, this will not only be protective clothing, but also provision for washing and disposing of their clothing afterwards.

We are advising workers to ensure that all risk assessments are amended regularly, in line with health and safety legislation. Where there are new or heightened risks, the employer is obliged to take this step. However, despite the existence of limited regulations, we know that employers routinely ignore these unless there is a trade union present to enforce them.

New steps

New and imaginative steps are being taken by many workers in terms of communicating and formulating demands.

There are a number of WhatsApp groups now existing in workplaces that our branch covers, including in St Mungo's, where workers have recently been on strike (see 'Determined St Mungo's homelessness workers strike for three days' at socialistparty.org.uk). Workers have not waited for a lead from union officials. They have now organised among themselves, and formulated a set of minimum demands such as hand sanitisers to be installed in foyers.

These forms of organisation will become increasingly necessary to ensure that workers are not isolated. And while it is a positive step that workers are not waiting for a lead from union officials, or in some cases workplace reps, it is important that trade unions seize this opportunity to encourage and support these steps.

Unite housing workers' branch has been contacting reps and activists in an attempt to join up these groups and raised the possibility of an online conference to share experiences and draw up a set of sector-wide demands. This could see the emergence of a new layer of predominantly younger union activists.

Union independence must be maintained - a reply to the Trade Union Congress



photo Michael D Mathews/CC

Rob Williams
Socialist Party industrial organiser

In its statement: 'Coronavirus help: what workers need now' the TUC sets out its main demands on the government in the current crisis.

It contains useful information for union members and reps. Some of its demands would amount to a big step forward, although we would go much further. But the last point that calls on the government to 'bring together a taskforce of unions and employers to help coordinate the national effort' is very worrying.

Labour and trade union leaders from the right and, unfortunately, the left, including John McDonnell and TUC deputy general secretary Paul Nowak, have made similar comments about this being a period where we must all work in the national interest instead of 'political point scoring'.

In reality, this is capitulating to the pressure of the capitalist media and politicians. Whether we are in so-called 'normal' times or wars and emergencies, there is no single 'national interest' but different class interests. Ultimately, Tory PM Boris Johnson and his cabinet act in the interests of the capitalist class and will continue to do so.

Even the measures which on the surface appear to protect workers, are really concerned with boosting

the economy, shoring up present and future profits of big business, and seeking to avoid an economic collapse that would threaten their capitalist profit system.

Any approach by the unions that blurs class lines can disarm workers when the Tories and the bosses move in a more openly aggressive manner against them. Already, unions are issuing joint statements with government departments.

Just hours after the rail and transport unions issued such a call, bus drivers in the south of England were being told that they were going to be laid off without pay. However, through the pressure of the drivers and their union, the RMT, it appears that the company has backed off. The unions cannot afford to give up their independence in this period.

Johnson is putting forward a bill that will give him emergency powers for two years. This is the same Boris Johnson who included in his December Queen's Speech yet more anti-union legislation, targeted specifically at the rail and transport unions. Labour amendments will seek to include a mandatory review after six months.

But why are Labour and the unions not also demanding that new anti-union laws be ruled out, and that all others be repealed, including the Trade Union Act and its undemocratic strike ballot thresholds

brought in by Cameron in 2016?

There can be no trust in this anti-worker government, in 'normal' or exceptional times. The TUC's position would amount to an unofficial 'national unity' government, propped by the Labour and trade union leaders. This wouldn't be too far from the war-time national government that included Labour leaders in Churchill's cabinet, along with TGWU leader Ernest Bevin. He became minister of labour and, in effect, policed the government's restrictions on strikes.

Unions have to ensure that independent activity continues, up to and including taking industrial action where necessary to enforce health and safety in the workplaces and stop the attacks of the bosses. Many of the employers will try and avoid measures to protect workers.

In any case, millions of workers have few rights in so-called normal times - in precarious employment and on zero-hour contracts. The unions must seize the opportunity to become a champion for these workers, many of who haven't heard of the trade unions.

But the best way to ensure that these measures are actually implemented and maintained is for the unions to act as a strong independent force. And in this way they will be better prepared for the mighty class battles that will inevitably break out soon.

Vote for Mick Joyce in Unite elections



photo Elaine Brunskill

Socialist Party member Mick Joyce (above in high-vis jacket) is standing for the executive committee of Unite the Union in the elections which begin on 30 March. Mick is a senior shop steward at Kone Lifts in the north east and played a leading role in the successful strike there in 2015. At last year's Trade Union

Congress, he called for the steel industry to be nationalised to save jobs and communities.

He is standing on the United Left slate in the engineering, manufacturing and steel sector, along with Anthony Pearson.

Read Mick's interview at socialistparty.org.uk

Royal Mail dispute latest

Communication Workers Union members have been pushing Royal Mail for a national agreement to resolve the 'four pillars' dispute over pay, pensions, workplace bullying and a shorter working week.

There were a number of unofficial stoppages on 24 March in an effort to get the dispute agreed locally.

CWU members recently beat the anti-union laws for the third time, delivering a massive 94.5% yes vote for strike action.

Read more at socialistparty.org.uk



photo Steve Score

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■ Moorfoot, Sheffield Council offices, 7:30am, Friday morning

"It's like the Mary Celeste in here" says first worker going in. But I still sell five copies of the Socialist. Less than usual, but not bad considering more than half the staff are now working from home.

I get some feedback on the front page headlines: 'Coronavirus - System in Crisis'. "That's an understatement" says one, "I think this virus will turn more people into socialists" says another.

I sell the Socialist here every week. I hear the F-word a lot. "Must be Friday". Still hear the F-word if I sell on another morning. "It's not Friday, is it?"

Shows the importance of being consistent to build up sales. Be friendly, be enthusiastic, not too much though at 7:30 am. "Morning", "hiya", boldly show the front page, offer everyone a copy. Only one or two never acknowledge me, so I call them out with my most enthusiastic "morning" call.

It means you get to know people. You end up exchanging pleasantries about holidays, grandkids and the weather. "Bet it's cold for you today?", like you hadn't noticed, stood there freezing. Football banter with the Blades fans, and the one Wednesday supporter. Call out the Tories, "morning comrade!" Talk to the ex-miner, the 'lefty' manager, the Guardian reader, the guy that holidays in Chernobyl. I kid you not - tell me it's now the safest place not to get coronavirus.

But we also talk about council cuts, the homeless sleeping rough by the

office doorways, Brexit, Corbyn, the general election and now the Big C. You find out the union members, the Labour Party supporters, the young Corbynistas.

You build up regular readers, occasional sales and first-time buyers. "I've not got any cash on me", "take one, read it, if it's worth it, pay me next week", they always do. Or use a card-reader.

On average I sell 7-8 each issue, with a few for £2 solidarity price. I sold 14 when I shamelessly promoted my front page article on the NHS.

I got a May Day greeting from readers last year. Over the years here, I have met three council workers who bought the Socialist and have gone on to join the Socialist Party.

Alistair Tice

■ Reading: "Capitalism won't survive"

One young mum said: "Things are so difficult and have been for a long time, this crisis just makes life impossible. I can't see capitalism surviving this."

Patients and health workers at Royal Berkshire hospital stopped to take our leaflets, sign our petition and discuss the impact of the Covid-19 crisis.

It was quieter than normal, but those that stopped thanked us for our campaign work and agreed with our central demands:

1. NHS funding to test and treat
2. Full pay for all workers

This crisis comes on top of the decade of austerity and reveals the impact of cuts, especially to the NHS - people are angry about that.



Selling the Socialist
Just some of the events where the Socialist newspaper was sold in the past week...

■ Carlisle: We won't make rent

The mood on the streets has changed, the fear is now palpable. This is what people are telling us:

One of the medical staff at Cumberland Infirmary told us she'd been working with a cough for weeks, yet there are no tests even for hospital staff. Another confirmed the panicky promises of more equipment were "too little, too late."

Their colleague added: "we've been

understaffed and under-equipped for years, but the government has ignored all our warnings - now we're struggling under the effects of all the cuts".

Workers on their dinner break desperately told us they would carry on working, even if they caught the virus, because they couldn't get by on just £94.25-a-week sick pay: "That won't even pay my rent".

One of the five million workers in the gig economy said: "my boss has just told me the government is going to give him £25,000. That's what I get in two years,

but I won't see any of that. He said I should sign on, but how can I live for five weeks with no money?"

Brent Kennedy

■ Southampton: Workers' sacked

Our campaign stall was still busy, even though it was very quiet in town. The picture is clear. Many workers are being laid off unpaid. How many? It must be tens of thousands across the country.

'Meeting' to discuss socialist ideas - more vital than ever during the crisis



During the corona crisis the Socialist Party is still meeting. Many branches are utilising online resources. Go to socialistparty.org.uk/whatson to join in your area.

■ East London

We had 15 people at the East London Socialist Party branch meeting - biggest of the year so far. We were online via Zoom!

James Ivens spoke on coronavirus. Hopefully we'll have some kind of physical meeting (keeping a safe social distance) soon, so we can distribute material like the

Socialist Party's Worker's Charter to fight Covid-19 (see back page).

At our meeting we had people - in self-isolation/with childcare/still at work - who couldn't normally attend otherwise.

Next week we're discussing the poll tax - when working-class communities got organised and beat the Tories - with one of the leaders of the campaign (see pages 14-15).

Ian Pattison

■ Southampton

We managed a combined real and virtual branch meeting, with 14 of us. We had a report back from the Socialist Party Congress, and

a discussion on what's happening in Britain, around the world, and Covid-19.

There were reports of workers' struggle - and victories - from Socialist Party members working on buses and in universities. Our branch meeting agreed to write to the leader of the Labour council, outlining what we see as key tasks that need to be urgently addressed.

■ Reading

We put our Socialist Party branch meeting live online. 17 of us discussed what is happening and many others were able to view our message.

Coronavirus: What role could community support groups play?

James Ivens
Socialist Party national committee

Many neighbourhoods across Britain are throwing up local solidarity networks to support each other during the pandemic. 'Mutual aid' groups are trying to make sure the elderly and vulnerable still receive supplies, sharing advice and information, and coordinating local efforts.

This instinctive action gives the lie to the capitalist idea that all humanity is made up of isolated individuals with competing interests. And as well as providing support, these groups could help working-class communities organise collective defence against shortcomings from the government, big business and local councils.

Many councils are now appealing for volunteers too, exposing the deficiencies in provision by local authorities. In fact, the government has said it expects councils to rely on neighbourhood volunteers and charities to fill the yawning gaps in provision during lockdown.

Cuts and privatisation in social care (see p8-9) have left many older and more vulnerable people without an effective support network, for example, while the housing crisis could increase contagion.

In fact, for a decade, councils - including Labour councils - have simply followed Tory instructions. They have destroyed jobs, homes and services in every area.

Meanwhile, with a handful of honourable exceptions, councillors



Local groups could oppose evictions during the crisis, and demand councils and the government step in to help people photo Socialist Party

have refused to propose the alternative. That would mean spending reserves and using borrowing powers to stop the cuts, while building a campaign alongside trade unions and communities to win the funding from Westminster.

Councils still have the power to change course - and this emergency demands it. The Tories have turned on the taps - ask for full funding

now! Labour leaders must instruct councils to do so.

Of course, as the official seats of local democracy, it makes sense for councils to use their platform to coordinate a response. But why is this response reliant on local charities and the unpaid goodwill of people who may be losing income already?

Councils must launch an emergency hiring drive across the board, with particular emphasis on expanding services most needed under coronavirus - and bill the government. Neighbourhood networks could have an important role to play in campaigning for this, flagging up where help is needed, and holding councils to account if they don't provide.

More than this, councils should forgive council tax and other charges for those affected by lost income. Landlords can apply for delays to mortgage payments - so those losing pay should get rent written off. Local groups can demand all this as well, and organise action to achieve it if necessary.

This is the lesson of the campaign against the so-called 'poll tax', a hated flat-rate charge introduced by Margaret Thatcher. Militant, forerunner of the Socialist Party, led the organising of 18 million non-payers from the bottom up. This defeated the poll tax and forced Thatcher out of office (see p14-15).

And it's particularly important that residents' groups coordinate with organised workers. Staff in supermarkets, warehouses, local authorities and healthcare are facing serious struggles. Industrial action has already proven necessary to ensure safe working and proper income in some jobs.

Trade union councils, bringing together all the unions in a local area, should offer to help facilitate this liaising. They should also extend their resources and expertise to help solidarity networks organise. The unions nationally should support this process, and help workers and residents build an independent voice to fight for our interests during coronavirus.

Workers help each other, and organise society better than the bosses

In my terraced working-class street in south Bristol, 85 houses, a vibrant Facebook group has been established with over 45 participants - following a note delivered to every door by one resident.

Food swaps are taking place between neighbours, offers are being made to walk elderly persons' dogs and shopping is being collected for older people by those who can.

People are collectively organising, talking to each other, finding out how their skills might be utilised and interacting in a way that rarely occurs, even though it's forced to happen mainly online at this time.

This example, no doubt being repeated in many other communities, is inspiring and shows several things. In general, if they have time - albeit enforced for many at the moment - workers will look out for each other. Those who sneer that ordinary people could not organise society better than the bosses are wrong.

Without exaggerating this development, there is the same seed germinating here that in the past drew workers to the conclusion that they needed to organise collectively and build trade unions.

In a socialist, workers' state this seed would flower extensively and demonstrate how our class can quickly utilise existing and future technologies, and learn to manage and administer tasks in a way far superior to the anarchy of the capitalist unplanned market.

Robin Clapp
Bristol Socialist Party

Working class looking after their neighbours

I joined the local Shepton Mallet coronavirus volunteer group to help those self-isolating around me. It did not take long to realise that it was being run by a very small number of middle-class locals.

I posted a request for help because I could not get any bread or milk for my partner, son and 90-year-old aunt - who all are self-isolating.

I was then just given a list of local, expensive, and exclusive businesses. I pointed out that these were not open at times I could access them. Then asked if anyone knew of a supermarket or corner shop that might be open.

I received a mass of responses about how I should not use supermarkets and instead support local businesses. I can see their point under normal circumstances, but this is not.

The posts kept ping-pong - telling me how good the food was from here, there and everywhere - but no actual practical help.

A young Tesco worker messaged me privately. She would put the items I needed together to collect. She did not have to do this, but felt enraged by the response of the people running the group.

Dave Moody
Bristol South Socialist Party

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The coronavirus is triggering a serious capitalist crisis. Millions of people are worrying about the prospects for their health, jobs and security.

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In our pages you can read about workers fighting back, including - in Britain and internationally - those taking strike action to demand

proper health and safety measures to combat the virus.

Our workers' charter for the coronavirus outlines a fighting programme for the current situation (see back page).

However, the developing crisis also affects the production of the Socialist and other Socialist Party literature.

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South West	3,245	1,800		180%
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North West	1,557	1,150		135%
Northern	985	750		131%
Wales	2,923	2,300		127%
London	5,742	4,600		125%
Yorkshire	2,572	2,550		99%
West Midlands	2,321	2,600		89%
Eastern	914	1,200		76%
Other	5,769	3,850		150%
TOTAL	33,685	25,000		135%

30 years since the huge anti-poll tax demo...

AND HOW MASS NON-PAYMENT OF THE TAX WAS BUILT IN WORKING-CLASS COMMUNITIES

On 31 March 1990, a massive demonstration surged into central London. It was the culmination of months of organisation and defiance of the Tory government's hated poll tax by millions of overwhelmingly working-class people.

The peaceful start to the march became a 'riot' in Trafalgar Square and the surrounding streets when baton-wielding riot police tried to forcibly break up the rally. Images and film footage of protesters being beaten, but also of protesters fighting back, were beamed around the globe.

Many capitalist media commentators in retrospect said the demo itself led to the Tory Thatcher government abandoning the poll tax. This is echoed by some on the left. However, while the demo undoubtedly shook the government, months of mass non-payment involving millions of people had effectively killed off the tax. This is borne out in the memoirs of Tory ministers at the time.

The fine detail of how anti-poll tax unions were built on working-class estates in virtually every city, town and even in villages, is the real story of how the tax was defeated.

This critical tactic of mass non-payment was the key demand that Militant, the forerunner of the Socialist Party, campaigned for in the months preceding the demo.

The following article by **Elaine Brunskill** beautifully captures the mood and exhausting legwork of how mass non-payment was built in working-class communities. In a companion piece, **Steve Nally** - who was secretary of the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation - relates what happened on that fateful day, 31 March 1990.



Elaine (second left) with fellow campaigners on one of the many anti-poll tax demos that year

Working-class warriors who took on Thatcher's hated poll tax - and won!

Four of us sat around a table in our local pub. This was the first time in my life I'd been involved in any campaign. We were young, working class and angry at Thatcher's proposal for a poll tax. This was an arrogant Tory prime minister attempting to push us further into poverty.

I was a mam with two young children, and about to become one of an army of millions who would fight this rotten tax - and we would win! But sitting in the pub that night, with a Militant member in our midst telling us our task was to build a mass campaign of non-payment, I liked his enthusiasm, strongly felt something had to be done, but wasn't immediately convinced it was possible. However, nobody else was showing a lead, so I made the decision to get stuck in.

Everything began to snowball quickly. We booked a hall in our local school, printed off thousands of leaflets, talked to our families, friends and neighbours.

Everyone agreed something had to be done. All the while the Militant members were stepping up to the challenge - I was watching them, and was impressed.

Our first public meeting was phenomenal. I was in the audience, and it was standing-room only. One of the local councillors spoke. He was politely received when he talked about the pernicious role of Thatcher.

Mass non-payment However, the most applause came for Militant's stance of mass non-payment.

The councillor retorted that we'd be sent to jail. Then the call went out - who was prepared to go to jail? Everyone, including me, put their hand up. That night our local Anti-Poll Tax Union (APTU) was forged. We all signed up.

Each stage of the struggle threw up challenges, but we faced up to them. One of our first hurdles was to ensure the courts were tied up dealing with non-payers. However, instead of the usual town centre court being used, non-payers were summonsed to another, which was far harder to get to.

“By the time the bailiffs turned up there was around 20 of us waiting for them. This emboldened the woman. She answered the door holding a baseball bat, with all of us standing by her side. The bailiffs looked petrified!”

Friends (a lay person giving support in the court). At one stage we were told the next person up as a McKenzie's Friend would be arrested on the spot (the courts were acting illegally doing this). I was the next one up.

As the police moved forward to arrest me I was surrounded by others from our local APTU. They threatened to arrest us all, but didn't have enough cells! We were fearless!

Then the jailings began. Disgracefully the first person in England to be jailed was a pensioner from South Tyneside. We were shocked that a Labour-controlled council was leading the attack against us. What could we do?

Military operation

Again it was Militant members who came up with a strategy. To raise awareness we would occupy the South Tyneside Labour leader's office. A couple of Militant members, alongside a group of women from South Tyneside APTU, were joined by us women from Gateshead APTU. This was a military operation.

We stormed into the leader's office, slammed the door shut, and then barricaded ourselves in.

We'd already tipped off the local media something was happening. They were contacted from a local phone box - no mobile phones then! This stunt gave us loads of publicity - we were turning the screws on the Labour council, and they were squirming.

The same council also jailed a

Militant supporter for non-payment. We retaliated by asking everyone we knew to phone every South Tyneside councillor - at 6am in the morning! We told them the poll tax prisoner would be getting his wake-up call, so we thought they should have one too! We demanded they stop the jailings.

Another threat, which many feared more than being jailed, was the bailiffs - who, if they gained entry to a property, could seize and sell off a person's possessions, usually at a fraction of their value, to pay the poll tax and court fines. The women from Gateshead APTU became 'Bailiff Busters'. We were scary!

Telephone trees

This entailed real attention to detail. I was one of the women at the top of a 'telephone tree'. If anyone was threatened with the bailiffs they could ring one of us, we would then call a few more, who would ring a few more (much easier now with social media).

Then we had to let people know about our telephone tree. We knocked on doors, had stalls and street meetings. We gave advice on what to do if the bailiffs came (including never let them in your house).

It didn't take long for our first call to come through. The bailiffs were going to a woman's house - could we help? By the time the bailiffs turned up there was around 20 of us waiting for them. This emboldened the woman. She answered the door holding a baseball bat, with all of us standing by her side.

The bailiffs looked petrified! This wasn't the reception they were expecting, she was supposed to be frightened of them! Word quickly got around that the bailiffs could be fought.

As support grew for the campaign it became increasingly difficult for the authorities to act against us. Some of the activists from our local APTU were caught flyposting by the police. It was at a bus stop, but the police backed down from doing anything because everyone in the queue supported the posters being put up.

Maggie! Out! Out! Out!

When Thatcher opened a new building at Newcastle College two of us managed to convince the police we were her biggest fans. We were paraded up to shake her hand, but shook our fists and shouted: "Maggie! Maggie! Maggie! Out! Out! Out!" To our surprise we weren't arrested. They probably decided it would just give us more publicity.

There's many valuable lessons to be learnt from the anti-poll tax struggle. Just like Thatcher, Boris Johnson thinks he is invincible. We have to be ready to reach a new generation of working-class fighters who will undoubtedly move into action on a whole host of social, economic and political issues.

All these years later, myself, and others involved at the time, are immensely proud of the militant stance we collectively took. We were working-class people who became anti-poll tax warriors. Our motto - "Better to break the law than break the poor" - still resonates today.

An historic demo of the mass non-payment anti-poll tax movement



The monster-size demo assembles in Kennington Park

The All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation (APTF) demo against the poll tax on 31 March 1990 in London (a separate demo was held in Glasgow) was an important part in building a mass non-payment campaign. A campaign that eventually embraced 18 million non-payers, and broke the 'Iron Lady' prime minister Margaret Thatcher and her hated tax.

The Militant-led APTF and local anti-poll tax unions had played the key role in organising it by distributing over 1 million leaflets and posters as well as filling 1,000 coaches and a few trains.

Alongside clogging up the courts, busting the bailiffs and defending those facing jail (see main article) the central London demo was the culmination of months of huge lobbies of councils across England and Wales that involved tens of thousands of people - building on the success of the big anti-poll tax movement that had already existed in Scotland (the Tory government had introduced the tax a year earlier as a 'test run').

On a sunny spring day the demo marched from Kennington Park in Southwark to Trafalgar Square, with well over 300,000 protesters flooding the streets of central London. Tens of thousands had travelled hundreds of miles to join what was a carnival of working-class protest adorned with homemade banners, along with thousands of APTF and Militant placards.

Trade unionists marched beside pensioners who marched beside families with children. Londoners typically walked miles to get there because the buses were full. Attendances at London football games that day were down as many fans joined the demo. There was even a 'Bikers Against The Poll Tax' contingent!

The demo poured into Trafalgar Square to welcome speeches by left Labour MP Tony Benn, Dave Nellist (then a Militant-supporting MP) and others. The Square echoed to the chants of "No Poll Tax! No Poll Tax!" It was a festival atmosphere that reflected the growing confidence of the campaign and the feeling that on

this front the Tories had finally bitten off more than they could chew.

The demo was 'people power' on a grand scale, something which the Tory government and Metropolitan Police could not tolerate. So yet again the police saw fit to brutally attack a mass, peaceful, working-class demonstration.

This was a regular feature of life under Thatcher. Miners, printers, travellers and students had all faced similar treatment during the 1980s. However, the weight of numbers on the demo meant that the usual lies about 'violent protesters' fell flat.

Too many people had been there and could report back that it had been peaceful until the police were unleashed. Many returned home later that night unaware that the demo had been attacked as they had left early to catch coaches.

Battleground

There are many versions as to how the events in Trafalgar Square started but just one unalterable fact; the police on horses, and riot police wielding batons, viciously attacked the 80,000 present in the square. Defenceless protesters were battered and one woman was trampled over by one of the many police horse charges that took place. They even drove vehicles into the crowd.

No wonder demonstrators fought back to defend themselves and others. Even to this day the images of police attacking peaceful protesters on a sunny day in London are truly shocking.

These police actions continued for many hours across the West End, and in particular against the vast number of youth who had been forced to live on the streets of London due to Tory cuts to youth benefits.

It is viewed by many as the one event that beat the poll tax, when in reality it was one of a series of many acts that played their part as the battle unfolded. But critically, the demo had made its point.

Mass non-payment was being built, millions would refuse to pay and the events of that day showed the strength of the growing movement, its true roots and its exuberance.

Couldn't Pay, Wouldn't Pay, Didn't Pay
 compiled by Eric Segal

Dave Nellist - Socialist Party member and former Labour MP - says: "While a definitive history of the great battle against the Poll Tax is yet to be written, the invaluable importance of **Couldn't Pay, Wouldn't Pay, Didn't Pay** lies in the oral history of personal reminiscences and the contemporaneous minutes of those in the front line of the struggle and the lessons it contains for battles yet to come"

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- Emergency increase in funding for the NHS and social care
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- Emergency training of NHS staff to deal with the coronavirus crisis
- Resources to be mobilised from government and big business sources so that anyone with flu or cold-like symptoms has the right to a free coronavirus test with results available within hours, as has been the case in South Korea and some other countries. Requisition private testing and analysis facilities
- Increase production to meet the urgent need for more protective and medical equipment, including ventilators and virus testing. Convert production where necessary, under the democratic control of workers in those industries and in the wider workforce
- Reverse privatisation in the NHS, remove the privateers and cancel the estimated £50 billion annual PFI payments
- Nationalise the big pharmaceutical companies to guarantee research, production and supply of medicines, vaccines and treatments
- Suspend fees for overseas NHS patients - treat all patients for need to register to control the spread. ■ Scrap prescription

Public services and housing

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



Pay and benefits

- Work or full pay. 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
- Self-employed, agency, zero-hour-contract and gig economy workers to be granted emergency benefits, at full pay, for the equivalent of at least a full working week of 37.5 hours, or more if they usually work longer
- Workers in receipt of in-work benefits such as Universal Credit, should be paid their full benefits and receive no sanction
- Increase benefits to the level of the national minimum wage. No delay in the payment of benefits
- Increase the minimum wage immediately to at least £12 an hour, £15 in London
- Workers who follow health advice to be absent from work to avoid potential spread should be excluded from any attendance-management procedures
- Open the books of any company threatening redundancies or closure to the inspection by the workforce and trade unions
- To defend workers' jobs and incomes, industries should be nationalised under democratic workers' control and management with compensation only on the basis of proven need
- Government funding for local authorities to help small businesses - hardship funds to be democratically controlled by a committee involving workers and community groups

Trade union and workers' action

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