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the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**

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RICH GET HANDOUTS

WORKERS

GET PAY

CUTS

Make the rich pay for the Covid crisis

Steve Score
Leicester Socialist Party

Some of the richest people in the country are getting huge government handouts because of coronavirus. Meanwhile, millions are poorer as a result of the economic crisis triggered by the pandemic.

Certainly we aren't "all in together" when it comes to wealth. Top of the 2020 Sunday Times Rich List - the wealthiest 1,000 individuals or families in Britain - is James Dyson, who increased his personal stash by £3.6 billion last year to £16.2 billion.

At the same time, unemployment has rocketed. Official figures went up in the month of April by nearly 900,000 to 2.1 million. Millions more are 'furloughed' on 80% of their wages - while our bills don't go down!

Young people are hit hardest - one in three earning less than a few weeks ago. 35% are earning less than they did before the pandemic outbreak.

The Sunday Times says the combined wealth of the 1,000 richest people has fallen for the first time in a decade, by 3.7%. But it still leaves them about three-quarters of a trillion pounds to play with!

On the other hand, as the Rich List compiler points out: "Ever since the financial crisis of 2008-09, Britain's wealthiest people have become richer and richer." During which time working-class people have suffered drastic real-terms wage cuts and austerity.

The Tories, like governments around the world, have been forced to intervene massively into the economy in an attempt to prevent an unprecedented collapse. Driven by the fear of the reaction of working-class people, they have handed out huge loans to companies,

and introduced the furlough scheme to try to stop unemployment levels rising greater than the Great Depression of the 1930s.

But the Sunday Times shows that many Rich List billionaires are claiming government loans, demanding company bailouts, and taking taxpayers' money to furlough staff - while sitting on their personal fortunes, often refusing to top up workers' pay. These include the likes of Richard Branson, Mike Ashley, Wetherspoon's boss Tim Martin, and ex-BHS owner Sir Phillip Green. Five of the top ten richest are claiming furlough money to pay their workers.

And who will pay for the huge debt the government is racking up in this crisis? The super-rich certainly don't think they should!

If the Tories get their way it will be us - the very working-class people who have suffered years of austerity to pay for the last capitalist economic crisis in 2008-09.

A Treasury document leaked to the Telegraph details ways the government could start to claw back the cash. It suggests tax rises, reversing Tory election promises. It proposes another pay freeze for public sector workers - who have suffered years of it already - including health workers and others the government lauds as heroes! It also suggests cutting state pensions by £8 billion a year.

This isn't yet government policy - but they haven't denied it's possible either! However, they will have to tread carefully in squeezing the working class. There will be no mood to accept the punishing of 'key workers' after this pandemic. They may try to be sneaky in the way they steal it off us.

The only guarantee that the burden won't be loaded onto our backs yet again is building a mass movement, led by the trade unions, to defend living standards and jobs as well as the immediate issues of safety at work.

Moreover, we must permanently end the obscenity of wealth inequality by fighting for the socialist transformation of society, where big business is publicly owned and democratically planned for all.

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

CONFIDENCE PLUMMETS IN TORY STRATEGY FOR COVID-19



WHAT WE THINK

Boris Johnson's speech on 10 May was a watershed moment in the Covid-19 crisis. The moment when the already fraying 'national unity' was further exposed for the empty slogan it really is. Confidence in the government's handling of the crisis plummeted nine points in the week following the speech, and more people now oppose its strategy than approve of it.

The speech was met with incredulity by millions of people watching it on TV. How can it be OK to go back to work safely when hundreds are still dying every day? How can it be possible to safely open nurseries and primary schools when young children have no concept of social distancing and are potential spreaders of the virus?

Why do you have to socially distance when meeting members of your own family outside in the park, but not on the construction site or factory floor? How come nannies and cleaners can go into other people's homes to look after children and clean the house while family members or friends can't come to visit?

Those glaring contradictions, so jaw-droppingly obvious to everyone, are not just because Johnson is a bumbling idiot. They are the consequence of a catalogue of Tory policies and decisions, taken prior to and during the corona pandemic, based on what is most profitable for their big business bankrollers, not what is best for ordinary people.

This explains the desperate shortage of PPE, the poor quality of the PPE that has been made available, and the incompetence of its distribution. It is behind the fatal delay in locking down and implementing mass testing, leading to the highest death toll in Europe. Now the Tories find themselves in an impossible situation trying to square the circle.

Johnson's fiascos

Many people were prepared to give Johnson the benefit of the doubt when the pandemic first took hold. But trust and confidence in the government's handling of the crisis were already being eroded by the PPE and testing fiascos, and what effectively amounts to a massacre of elderly people in care homes. It is true that the NHS has not been overwhelmed, but care homes have been, and health and care workers have unnecessarily died.

The independent members of the alternative 'Sage' (the body which gives scientific advice to the government), have described the Tories' latest strategy as "dangerous" and said it will "inevitably" lead to local epidemics and further lockdowns. A second peak in infections and deaths could have a calamitous effect on both the NHS and the Tories' political support.

On the one hand the Tories want to satisfy the capitalist employers who they politically represent, and who are demanding the economy be reopened so they can resume profit making. But at the same time, Johnson and others in the cabinet are conscious of the enormous risk that a premature return to work - when the virus is not under control and mass testing is not in place - entails for the government and even their system.

Hence the tensions, contradictions, somersaults and contortions. They are in a bind of their own making and can find no clear way out on the basis of the capitalist profit system.

The Covid crisis has brought into stark relief the inequalities and inadequacies of that system. A democratic socialist planned economy would be able to match resources to need - producing and distributing quality and necessary PPE; integrating a fully-funded publicly owned system of health and social care; providing mass testing; coordinating and funding research on treatment and vaccines; guaranteeing a liveable income for those who are unable to work, and safeguarding the lives and wages of those who can.

Economic crisis

The historically unprecedented economic crisis that is now unfolding, triggered by the coronavirus pandemic but prepared by debt, low investment and the unresolved repercussions of the last recession, will expose the system's failings in a way that will be just as dramatic, if not more so.

A capitalist exit from the Covid measures will inevitably mean redundancies, closures and mass unemployment. We will not emerge into a period of sustained global economic growth as took place from 1950-1973, which allowed the debt accumulated during the Second World War to be gradually reduced. Although it may not happen immediately, for fear of the economic, social and political consequences, at a certain stage a Covid bill will be presented to the working class, whether through tax increases, attacks on wages or cuts in public spending.

A socialist government would write off the public debt and carry out policies in the interest of the

Workers must build workplace and political resistance



Protesting against Covid deaths and Labour council cuts in Newham photo Dave Carr



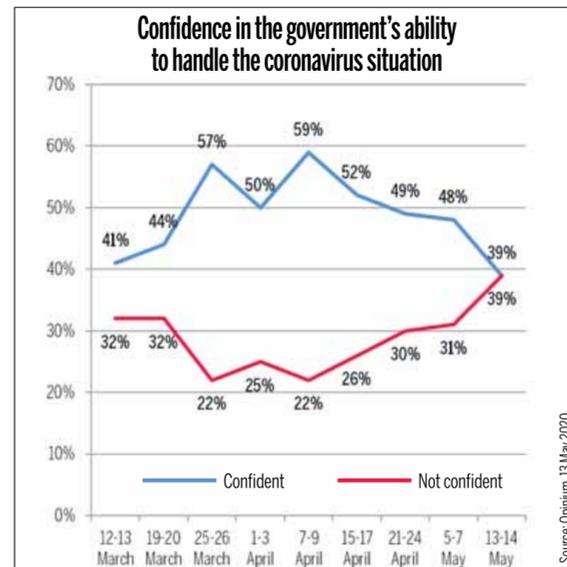
If those workers fighting today for health and safety in the workplaces were to discuss standing candidates in future elections, that would mark an important step towards building political resistance

working class. To prevent economic sabotage by the markets and the capitalists it would introduce capital controls and nationalise the banks and financial institutions.

Public ownership and democratic workers' control of the main companies in the manufacturing, building, transport, service and finance sectors, would enable the economy to be democratically planned. Jobs could be saved and new ones created where required. Resources could be allocated based on need not profit, while ensuring that the environment is protected. An appeal would be made to workers internationally to take similar measures.

The capitalists fear that this crisis could damage confidence in their system at a level much greater than after 2007-08 - pushing people, especially the youth, to embrace socialist ideas. This dread has been expressed in the pages of their own press. A Financial Times (FT) editorial, for example, wrote that, "mis-managed economies that leave many people behind give fuel to left-wing populists, who see state intervention as a replacement for capitalism, not just a corrective".

The FT, like many sections of the capitalist class, is in favour of a certain level of state intervention as a "corrective" - a necessary evil to be



appointed shadow ministers who are fulfilling their mission as a safe pair of hands for the capitalist class. So desperate are they to appeal to the establishment that they are not even prepared to say that workers should make use of their legal right to refuse to work in an unsafe working environment.

But the FT is right in one respect. The crisis is on such a scale that a combination of struggle and experience can push large sections of workers and young people to question the legitimacy of the capitalist system, and to explore the idea of a socialist alternative. This can be the case even in the absence of a mass working-class party.

But clearly, the building of such a party could rapidly speed up that process. Therefore, the necessity and means of doing so need to be discussed now in the trade unions, in community organisations and among young people and socialist activists.

Union power

The crisis has led to a heightened awareness of the potential strength of the trade unions. Even the Economist felt compelled to write about their "new relevance and influence" in an article entitled 'Trade unions are back'.

Understanding the need for collective support to safeguard health and safety in the face of the coronavirus, there has been an influx of tens of thousands of workers into the unions since the pandemic began. Nearly 10,000 joined the National Education Union just in the week following Johnson's announcement that school opening would be extended on 1 June. In some cases, new members are themselves immediately stepping forward to become union reps.

When the union leaders were going along with 'national unity' they were feted by Tory ministers as 'social partners'. Now that under pressure from their members they have been pushed into taking a stand on safety, especially in schools and on public transport in London (see p4-5, 8-9), they have been vilified by an unholy alliance of Tories, Blairite education ministers, and the right-wing capitalist press.

It is crucial that rank-and-file union members continue to organise to ensure that their leaders do not capitulate under the force of insults and criticism raining down on them from the establishment.

Those workers fighting today for health and safety in the workplaces could form the basis for transforming the trade unions into a militant force nationally - capable of resisting through coordinated national action the attacks which the bosses, and this and future capitalist governments, are likely to attempt to inflict on the working class. If those and other workers were to discuss standing candidates in future elections at a local and national level, that would mark an important step towards building political resistance and the mass workers' party that is needed.

The Covid crisis is leaving no aspect of life unscathed. How we organise now can have a crucial effect on what comes after.



WHAT WE STAND FOR

The Socialist Party fights for socialism - a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also oppose every cut, fighting in our day-to-day campaigning for every possible improvement for working-class people. The organised working class has the potential power to stop the cuts and transform society.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) which organises across the world.

Our demands include...

PUBLIC SERVICES

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.
- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

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

WORK AND INCOME

- Trade union struggle for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £12 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage of at least £15. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings. Scrap zero-hour contracts.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

RIGHTS

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

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

Do you agree? Join the fightback!
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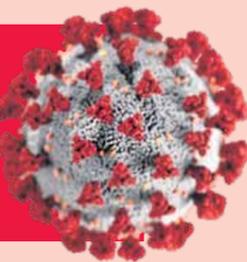


JOHNSON'S RECKLESS 'BACK TO SCHOOL' PLANS THREATEN EVERYONE'S SAFETY

Education staff and parents
organise the fightback

School staff are in the front line of the government's unsafe back-to-work strategy.

The following three-page feature shows how they are organising and fighting for safety together with parents and local communities.



Education unions must give a clear national lead

Martin Powell-Davies
Socialist Party national committee
and NEU member

The government is on course for a direct confrontation with school staff and their unions over its plans for a much wider opening of primary schools on 1 June. It's vital that unions now give a decisive lead to ensure that, rather than members feeling they have to accept putting themselves, their families and communities in danger, it is Johnson that has to step back.

On Monday 18 May, as many as 20,000 individual NEU members logged into a Zoom meeting to hear their joint general secretaries (JGS) explain how members can resist a reckless return to unsafe schools. As JGS Kevin Courtney explained, any agreement on safety would first depend on:

- The government publishing its modelling justifying that its plans won't be a risk to public health - and that the advice stands up to wider scientific interrogation
- Testing, tracing and isolation systems being properly in place
- Infection rates being at levels low enough to allow those systems to be able to operate successfully
- Local checklist compliance to confirm that social distancing, PPE, protection for vulnerable staff and their relatives, alongside other workplace requirements, were all satisfactorily risk-assessed.

There's absolutely no way that these conditions are going to be met by 1 June, or indeed any time soon.

It's clear that there's still hope amongst the union leaderships that the government will be persuaded by force of argument alone to rethink their proposals. But there's too much at stake for that. Force of numbers will prove the strongest argument - and the threat of a mass refusal to cooperate by staff and parents.

The members on the NEU call were



Force of numbers will prove the strongest argument - and the threat of a mass refusal to cooperate by staff and parents



correctly reassured that Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 and other legislation gave workers the right to refuse to work in an unsafe workplace. But the growing pressure on staff from some headteachers and employers means that there should be no further delay in writing to every union member to inform them of those rights so that members can discuss them, and act on them, together.

Workers' meetings

Union members must meet online together in workplace groups and across employers to confirm their legal rights. A simple message must now be made loud and clear - that schools can't possibly be safe to open further as yet, and that school staff right across England should, as one, refuse to put themselves in danger.

Clarity is urgently needed. NEU reps will have struggled to keep up with tactics that have changed from an initial position of general 'non-engagement' with negotiations, to one where reps are now being asked to go through a lengthy joint GMB/NEU/Unison/Unite union workplace safety checklist.

It's highly unlikely that many heads will be able to adjust group sizes and other arrangements to meet those checks in full, as is needed. However, there's a danger that some hard-nosed managers will try to split staff opposition by arguing that they have been largely met.

All reps need to understand that this local checklist is just one of the safety tests - and it's certainly not one that can be met by 1 June in any event. Even if acceptable local arrangements are eventually agreed, there can be no guarantee of staff and community safety without government action to meet the unions' national tests too.

With a clear national lead, and added confidence given to them by parental action too, school staff as a whole can assert their health and safety rights and force the Tories to think again.

Coventry: NEU members are looking for strong leadership

Nicky Downes
NEU Coventry joint district
and branch secretary,
and NEU national executive
committee (personal capacity)

Teachers and education staff all watched the announcement by Boris Johnson on Sunday 10 May in horror and disbelief. The National Education Union (NEU) and other education unions had no idea that he would announce that reception, Year 1 and Year 6 (and the day after, nursery!) would be expected to return to school by early June. It is a reckless and dangerous expectation.

Within seconds of the announcement, we had many messages such as: "Our school email has just gone crazy. We're all frightened for our students and ourselves. The head has just emailed and said she's reeling at the decision".

Within an hour, a national NEU survey had nearly 50,000 responses with 93% of those saying that they did not feel safe.

We were asked by the union nationally not to enter into any negotiations with heads or local authorities on a return, and to refuse further talks until the union's five tests are met. These include: testing for all not just those with symptoms, contact tracing, PPE, and a significant fall in cases.

By the first Coventry NEU members' meeting on Wednesday night, it was clear that concerns had grown, not subsided, as members in primary schools, in particular, grappled with an impossible task. How can you ensure any social distancing, especially with the youngest children? Educators in schools have found it almost impossible with just children of key workers and vulnerable children over the last two months.

We had 100 in the virtual meeting and over 90 left in the waiting room, unable to get in. This meant that we had to arrange a second meeting and urgently increase the capacity of our Zoom meetings. 125 members were at the second meeting. Across the country, huge numbers of union members attended meetings looking to the union for support, the biggest attendance of union meetings for decades!

It was clear from the outset that members were looking for strong leadership. However, they wanted to know how they could protect themselves if they were instructed to attend if their school was going ahead with the government's expectations. Lots of questions and issues were raised including supporting members and family members if they were in the 'vulnerable' category.

They wanted to know about practical issues like how they would set up classrooms, deal with break times, manage toileting arrangements, keep any form of social distancing. What if their own children were not returning to school? Could they be forced back if they did not feel safe? What rights do you have?

Local union leaders went through all the points and explained to members that contractually they have the



School staff flock to meetings and union in record numbers



right to refuse to work if they feel they are in imminent danger, and that they would be protected by Section 44 of the 1996 Employment Rights Act. Health and safety is taking centre stage in this crisis, and huge numbers of members have come forward to be health and safety reps.

There is a clear and imminent danger to our members, our members' families, students and their families, and the wider community. The fears of education staff have led to approximately 10,000 new members joining the NEU in a week. We need the leadership of the NEU to stand firm and only go back when the union's five steps are met. None of these have been achieved yet and our members in Coventry will not be forced to return until it is safe.

Hull: new members get active

Mike Whale
Joint secretary, Hull NEU

More than 70 new members have joined Hull NEU in the last few weeks, and 50 have joined since Johnson's announcement. A feature of those joining is that they quickly volunteer to be active as reps. We have held regular meetings of officers and reps to keep members in touch, and put out regular bulletins to all members. More than 60 members attended our all-members Zoom meeting.

At the same time, in the last few days a Hull parents' group has started to form expressly to campaign against the premature opening of schools. No one in Hull is falling for

the bare-faced hypocrisy of Education Secretary Gavin Williamson who claimed that the non-opening of schools would hurt the most vulnerable children. Where were you Gavin when your government chronically underfunded special education and slashed spending on children's services?

Worcester: schools' safety prep is window dressing

Sean McCauley
Worcester NEU state education
branch secretary (personal capacity)

154 NEU members participated in the virtual NEU Worcestershire members' meeting on Wednesday 13 May. It dwarfed even the excellent turnouts we achieved in June and November 2011, at the height of the public sector showdown with the ConDem government over its austerity plans.

The level of feeling is running high amongst members. We have nearly 20 new workplace or health and safety reps since schools closed on 19 March.

Education staff in the meeting reported they were desperate to see schools reopened. We know far better than most how the quality of a child's education suffers when we do not have them with us. We know what we do and how successful we are at doing it.

Most parents would readily acknowledge that while they have been doing wonderful things with home schooling, utilising all the tasks and

resources teachers have continued to provide throughout the lock down, the best place for learning is in school. And we weren't arguing with that viewpoint. But equally, parents agree that the provision at schools should not be expanded in exchange for increasing the risk to children, staff and communities to exposure to coronavirus. Schools should reopen. but only when it is safe to do so.

Headteachers in Worcestershire, like those in other areas, are under enormous pressure from the government to find ways to make the school environment safe for reopening. They have stripped out all soft furnishings and toys in nursery, reception and Year 1 classes; they have zoned off two metre areas around desks with yellow and black hazard tape. For three to six-year-olds returning it will be like more like a prison that a welcoming educational environment.

Yet all of this amounts to nothing if the risk that infection will find its way into a school is still too high. Rendering a school safer in this way is only so much window dressing.

Bradford: some schools and academies push to reopen

James Ellis
Bradford NEU

Teachers and education workers around the country have been turning to their unions for support after the government announced plans to reopen schools from 1 June. This

is especially true in Bradford where levels of Covid-19 remain high. Bradford has a high proportion of people from lower socio-economic and BAME backgrounds - both are groups that face a higher risk from the virus.

Bradford council, with the backing of over 80 headteachers and academy chains, sent a letter to the regional schools commissioner expressing grave concerns about the government's plan, and the potential safety risk it poses to the community. They confirmed that the vast majority of parents share these concerns, and that the government's announcement has caused significant anxiety amongst school staff.

75 members attended our online district meeting, which voted overwhelmingly in favour of the Socialist Party's motion calling for the union to seek a national agreement based on the NEU's five tests, and to support members in refusing to return to unsafe workplaces.

Despite this clear opposition, there are still schools and academy chains in Bradford pushing for a 1 June opening. It is essential that the NEU harnesses its members' renewed enthusiasm and stands firm against an unsafe return. The NEU must immediately inform all members that it will support a collective refusal to return to work, and empower local officers and reps to organise this.

Moreover, after this crisis the NEU must use its newly emboldened membership to fight for a fairer education system with higher pay, a reduced workload, and a focus on students' wellbeing and enrichment as opposed to exams and league tables.

Safety first: parents, carers, school staff and students together



The following is the text of an advice leaflet for parents produced by the Socialist Party.

Who does the government want back in school on 1 June?

Most schools have stayed open to safely care for small numbers of children. But now the government wants primary schools to open on 1 June for all nursery, reception, Year 1 and Year 6 children, as well as all existing priority children. That's over half the school back together.

But won't schools make sure they teach my child safely?

Schools simply can't open safely yet to more children. Young children sneeze and cough, they want to run and play together. It will be impossible to keep them safely apart. Shared surfaces and equipment will be infected. The virus will inevitably spread between children and staff.

Why are the government's plans so dangerous for all of us?

Infection levels in our communities are still too high. There is still no proper testing and tracing system in place. Nobody will know who is carrying the virus into school, especially as most children don't show symptoms.

Nobody will know which children and adults are then taking the virus back to their families and their vulnerable relatives. A 'second wave' of the virus will spread - that means more danger and more deaths.

Will this make my child unwell?

The government is trying to trick parents into thinking this can all be done safely. It can't. They say most children can't get seriously unwell with Covid-19. That's true - but some can. For example, while rare, there's a growing concern about an inflammatory syndrome in children linked to the virus.

But children also won't be happy. They will be told to keep apart from friends and teachers. Schools will be strange and confusing places. Emotional and wellbeing support also needs to be securely in place before schools open safely.

Why does the government want schools to open when it's not safe?

Their plans are not based on safety. If they were, you wouldn't start with the youngest kids who will find it hardest to keep apart. For them, it's all about childminding - so employers can tell us we should all be back in our workplaces, whether we think it's safe or not.

Of course, parents need pay and help with childcare. But safety comes first, not employers' profit margins.

When will it be safe for schools to open?

We can't trust ministers to know what's safe for our children. It's their failure to get infection rates down, and to make sure testing and tracing systems are in place, that are to blame for schools not yet being safe to open further.

Doctors understand health, not politi-

cians. Their professional association, the BMA, says "until we have got case numbers much lower, we should not consider reopening schools" and that government plans are "too fast, too confusing and too risky".

They agree with staff trade unions that schools must have testing and isolation protocols securely in place first so that any outbreak can be controlled.

Parents and unions should make the decision together about what's safe for children and staff, not the politicians who have failed us.

It's hard for me to look after my child at home. What can I do?

It's been hard to have children off school for this long. But schools are doing what they can to support families with online learning and teaching small numbers of children in school itself. Contact your school if you need more help or if your child is struggling with work they have set. But, again, it's the government that needs to act.

They haven't delivered on their promise to provide laptops and broadband to families who can't afford them. They should be making sure every parent who has to look after children is fully supported financially, and telling employers that they can't force parents back to work before schools can reopen safely.

I agree it's unsafe. What do I do now to make sure we all refuse?

- Tell everyone you know - our children must not go back until schools are safe
- Contact other parents at your school and get organised together. Reassure them that the government has confirmed there will be NO fines if you keep children off school
- Join a trade union and get support if your employer is putting you under unfair pressure to return to work
- Write to your school and tell them parents think it's unsafe to open up on 1 June.
- Most headteachers have exactly the same concerns as parents. Your support can help them stand firm against reopening. But some will be under pressure to open anyway
- Where academy trusts, local councils or individual schools are planning to open as the government wants, parents should organise a mass refusal to send their children in
- Call a public 'online' meeting to explain and organise your action. Write to the press. Write to local councillors and MPs and demand they stop schools opening unsafely
- School staff unions are also organising to refuse to work in unsafe schools - contact your staff - or their local unions - and give them confidence that they have your support

But children also won't be happy. They will be told to keep apart from friends and teachers. Schools will be strange and confusing places. Emotional and wellbeing support also needs to be securely in place before schools open safely.

Of course, parents need pay and help with childcare. But safety comes first, not employers' profit margins.

Let's all refuse to send our children back until we agree it's safe

- Get organised with other parents - and with staff trade unions too
- Leaflets can be ordered from campaigns@socialistparty.org.uk



photo vperemen.com



The Leicestershire campaign group is mainly made up of working-class parents who want to fight

Lindsey Morgan
Leicester Socialist Party

Solidarity is as important as ever in the wake of the latest attacks on teachers by the capitalist press. After demanding that students return to school when it is safe to do so they have been accused of being lazy, hysterical, and worse.

This is despite teachers already working to teach keyworker children and provide online resources, marking, and teaching for the majority of their students.

This is as well as ensuring that at-risk children are supported with resources, and encouraged to attend school. In a particularly obscene use of emotional manipulation the government has stated that teachers are making at-risk children suffer, pointing to those in violent households in particular.

These are the same Tories that have overseen the turning away of two out of every three women

who attempt to flee to a refuge, the decimation of youth services, a crisis in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (with a frequent two year waiting list), and the infliction of a decade of austerity on these self-same families. How dare they?

If they cared so much about vulnerable families, why were they so slow to act when it came to free school meal vouchers? The rush to open schools is because getting parents back to work to earn profits is a higher priority than the safety of our communities. Thousands of teaching staff have joined the NEU in the fight for their lives and safety for all.

Parent group

After reading material that I had written in the Socialist on free school meals, a number of parent friends reached out to me about it, and I suggested setting up a parent group. Quite quickly after came the announcements that children will be asked to return on the 1 June. So we created a group called 'Safety

First: Parents, Carers, School Staff and Students Together'.

The Leicestershire campaign group is mainly made up of working-class parents who want to fight. We have forged stronger links locally with the NEU, which has been possible due to the work of Socialist Party members within the union. The aim of our campaign is to provide solidarity and support for all engaged in struggle for safety at school, and to boost the confidence of education workers in struggle.

We will be contacting schools, local authorities, MPs and multi-academy trusts to say that our children will not return until the NEU's five tests are passed. We are sensitive to the fact that parents are worried about losing their jobs if they don't send their children to school.

The government must make assurances that the choice for parents to send their children back is a real choice by providing them with the financial support they need.

Contract tracer speaks out: Tories' plan is outsourced chaos

An NHS contact tracer

The government's new contact tracing scheme is outsourced to Serco - which subcontracted recruitment to Capita. Both big companies have banked huge sums of public money for years, running public services for profit.

In 2012, Serco was found to have falsified records 252 times at the Cornwall out-of-hours GP service it ran. Capita archived 148,000 patients' medical records instead of sending them to GP practices in 2015. Despite their record of corner-cutting, bungling and profiteering, the Tories are rewarding them with even more contracts during this crisis.

Testing large numbers of people is the vital first step if Covid-19 is to be controlled without mass vaccination. Medical and practical support is needed for those testing positive.

Contact tracing is then essential, to test people who may be infected but don't yet know it. If a contact tests positive they can isolate instead of spreading the virus.

An effective contact tracing scheme needs local knowledge and

local services. Years of austerity cuts have stripped these bare.

Nevertheless, there are still council environmental health and trading standards officers, public health specialists, school nurses, sexual health nurses and health visitors doing similar work. They have valuable experience and know their local areas. Recently retired community nurses and GPs, and locum GPs, could also be very helpful. A group in Sheffield has successfully shown this.

Disastrous decision

One of many disastrous government decisions was stopping contact tracing - on 12 March. Unchecked, virus spread accelerated.

Now the Tories are desperately trying to run to catch up. But their legs are tied to their capitalist roots, so they have awarded the contract for a new centralised contact tracing scheme to Serco, rather than properly fund existing local public services.

18,000 contact tracers are being recruited - 15,000 as call handlers, most without clinical experience, on zero-hour contracts, paid just £9.42 an hour, and with one day's training.

Without detailed local knowledge, their task will be more difficult. The intensity of the outbreak varies from place to place, even within the same city.

GPs fear these contact tracing results won't be passed to them as the new service is outside the NHS structure. Results from the Deloitte-run drive-in testing centres and 'Lighthouse Laboratories,' separate from NHS laboratories, have also not been shared with local authority public health departments or GPs. This leaves them in the dark instead of coordinating the response in their area.

This scheme follows a pattern - the government announces large sums of money to fight the virus, most of which is then funnelled to big business. As well as Serco, Capita and Deloitte, G4S has had contracts at Nightingale hospitals built by Interserve, and pharmaceutical, biotech and medical supplies companies have all had big payments from public funds.

All these big corporations should be nationalised and integrated into a democratically run, well-funded NHS, meeting every local community's needs.

Crisis in council services: Labour must fight or stand aside

Josh Asker

Southampton Socialist Party

A £10 billion financial black hole faces councils, according to a Labour Party report. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a big rise in the demands on social care - for which local authorities are responsible. This, a decade of unchallenged austerity, and a big drop in revenue have created a perfect storm.

To avoid whole swathes of councils going effectively bankrupt, the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, has promised £3.2 billion in coronavirus assistance. This is not enough. Even the skeleton services which local authorities currently provide entail spending of around £100 billion a year!

Ten years of austerity

Ten years of austerity - dictated by national government but dutifully carried out locally - have left services decimated. Having not fought the enormous cuts to the central grant, councils are increasingly reliant on raising their own income.

But lockdown has caused big reductions in councils' revenues. They have been unable to generate income from parking, leisure centres and so on.

And councils face even bigger problems longer term. The recession will reduce their income from business rates, and rising unemployment will reduce their income from council tax. The risky investments some local authorities have made in commercial property are likely to lose value too.

So far, council leaders have responded by saying they will be forced to stop all services but social care. That means the wholesale closure of libraries, leisure centres, community centres, Sure

Start centres and more. There has been an avalanche of stories in the local press as authorities detail the depths of their deficits.

We say to Labour councils: you have to fight!

Most councils have hundreds of millions of pounds in reserves, and they all have the power to borrow huge amounts on top. All of these resources should be used to save jobs and services - but not as a mere accounting measure. This spending should be used to mobilise a campaign to win funding from government and to fully fund local services.

Faced with a proposed pay freeze for public sector workers, and potentially thousands of job losses, council workers' trade unions - Unison, Unite, GMB, NEU and others - have a huge role to play. A campaign in the workplace, with support from local communities, is the way the government can be forced to pay up.

Campaign

Such a campaign can stop councils going bust and save our jobs and services. It should be linked to socialist policies to take social care and all outsourced services back in-house under democratic local authority control, and to fight to reverse all the cuts of the last ten years.

Labour councils should be leading this fight. But Keir Starmer's feeble opposition to Johnson shows this campaign needs to be built from below by working-class fighters in local communities and unions.

We say union and community activists should prepare to stand candidates in next May's elections against any councillors of any party refusing to carry out the necessary struggle, to offer an alternative to the failed policies of the Tories and right-wing Labour. The Socialist Party will be at the forefront of that fight.

More car cavalcades have taken place to protest against Tory mis-handling of the Covid-19 crisis and cuts, with the latest in Southwark and Newham (pictured). The Socialist Party first participated in socially distanced protests on 7 May (see 'Safe social-distancing car-cavalcade protests' at socialistparty.org.uk) followed by more the following week, including in Sheffield and Haringey.



Safe protests against Tory corona chaos continue

Furlough cut-off could force millions back to unsafe workplaces

■ 100% furlough for all until workers say it's safe ■ Full protection for vulnerable people

James Ivens

Will my boss starve me back to work this summer? It's a question that might start keeping 7.5 million furloughed workers up at night under the terms of Chancellor Rishi Sunak's extension. Even those workers most vulnerable to Covid-19 will be pushed to return, Sunak has confirmed.

The headlines focused on the Tory Treasury chief prolonging the

subsidy to October - a relief to many. Ominously, however, he also said bosses would have to "share with the government the cost of paying salaries" from August.

Bosses are already meant to be 'sharing the cost'. The subsidy only covers 80% of your wages. But in many cases, the cost of the missing 20% has been 'shared' onto workers, not paid out of bosses' profits! Who can afford a 20% pay cut?

On top of this, Sunak signals the subsidy could fall even lower come

late summer. But there's no safe exit strategy in place for the lockdown! Workers could face a choice between a further pay cut, unemployment, or risking your life to patch up the billionaires' profit machine.

And then, responding to questions from third sector employers, the government says that in effect vulnerable and disabled workers will be bullied back in at the same time! In fact, the government's 'shielding' category is inadequate as it is. The truth is that many workers who are

older, have underlying conditions, or family members who are shielding, already have little option but to work.

It's not acceptable. We demand 100% furlough wages for all, paid directly to workers rather than subsidising bosses. And we demand a guarantee from the government that this will persist as long as workers feel they can't work safely.

And what about the thousands of workers who recently started jobs? Sunak says they can whistle for it.

HM Revenue and Customs needs

the info on employees' first payslips to calculate Job Retention Scheme support. So workers who hadn't received one before the 19 March cut-off can't get the furlough subsidy. It's left - you guessed it - to the charity of your boss.

Of course, as an employee, you can't claim unemployment support unless you're made redundant. And the chickenfeed available on Universal Credit - if you're even eligible - can take weeks. Open the furlough scheme to new starters!

Johnson claims workplaces safe but HSE cancels inspections

You can't believe a word that Johnson says is true. In his drive to end lockdown, the prime minister has reassuringly told anxious workers that construction sites, manufacturing

workplaces and food outlets will all be "Covid-compliant."

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) will be enforcing that, and we will have spot inspections to make

sure that businesses are keeping their employees safe."

However, according to the HSE, it has "paused all proactive inspections at this time to reduce any

risk posed to our own staff and the public."

So there you have it! Companies will not be checked, but instead will 'self-police.'

“Transport unions must work together to organise a campaign and coordinate action”

Moe
London bus driver

Transport for London’s (TfL) financial settlement with the government is an attack on workers and could lead to further privatisation, risking jobs, safety, pay, terms and conditions.

In 2015, George Osborne, then Tory chancellor, announced £600 million annual cuts to TfL and nil funding from 2020. The Socialist Party at the time knew that this would mean further cuts. TfL implemented cuts to bus routes affecting vulnerable members of the public, workers were working longer hours and jobs were cut.

Had a campaign to fight the cuts been organised at that time, London bus workers would have been in a stronger position to fight the cuts during this pandemic.

But it is not too late. Transport

unions must work together to organise a campaign and coordinate action. We need to fight for a publicly owned, fully integrated transport system, with democratic workers’ control and management.

Action organised by tube and bus workers at the moment over safety can also support those workers and passengers who are being bullied to return to work. Buses and tubes are packed and anyone under the age of 18 is now being asked to pay.

Over 60s are being asked not to travel, and disabled people may be restricted to travelling only at off-peak times. Johnson says people should drive to work instead of using public transport but the congestion charge is being raised from £11.50 to £15 and extended to 10pm during the week and to weekends.

Prior to the pandemic, Unite was prepared to fight against fatigue, when workers overwhelmingly supported strike action across London, but the pandemic postponed it. Workers must not now be forced to work longer hours. There should be more buses and more bus workers.

Bus capacity should be reduced by an agreed amount, the front doors must not be opened.

After many bus drivers were killed by Covid-19, we managed to force TfL to seal the cabs of the majority of the front door operating only buses. That needs to extend to all buses in London to stop the virus coming through if the buses get packed. Unite have advised correctly that any driver in a position that is no longer safe should use Section 44 of the 1996 Employment Rights Act.

workers, in particular construction workers.

Of course, these workers, many registered self-employed, have no alternative but to continue working on central London sites, even though these include non-essential luxury housing developments, etc.

Nonetheless, I, like many other passengers, understand that close contact with people for 15 mins (less than the average tube journey) is ample time to contract Covid-19. And that wearing a face covering is no guarantee of preventing the virus’s transmission.

In effect, we are being corralled by the government’s ‘profit before safety’ strategy to play Russian roulette with our health. That’s why workers must collectively organise to resist this premature easing of the lockdown.

Lack of funding and safety TRANSPORT WORKERS AND PASSENGERS MUST NOT PAY THE PRICE

To please their big business backers the Tories are trying to force workers back to work, regardless of whether it is safe or not to do so. As well as extending the opening of schools (see p4-5), increasing the capacity of the transport system, especially in London, is seen as a key plank of its ‘back to work’ strategy. This threatens the safety of both transport workers - over 30 of whom have already

died of Covid-19, a higher rate than among doctors - and passengers.

This dangerous situation has been exacerbated by London Mayor Sadiq Khan’s passive acceptance of a totally inadequate funding package from the government for Transport for London. This comes with strings attached that will compromise safety and jobs, and increase fares for passengers and commuters.

Jared Wood
RMT union executive committee member (personal capacity)

The London mayor Sadiq Khan and Transport for London (TfL) have accepted a financial settlement that effectively gives control of the tube to the government. Having helped the Tory government to remove the subsidy for public transport in London, the mayor is now finding out that he is as expendable as transport workers themselves, once the Tories decide he is of no use to them anymore.

Tube management and the mayor know they cannot maintain social distancing and run a full service, yet they have agreed to run a 100% service in return for this rotten settlement.

Health and safety reps have been speaking with the company, to try and establish what plan there is for intensifying services and attempts to carry more people. What is absolutely clear is that there is no plan. It’s completely chaotic.

There have not been risk assessments in many key areas. The company doesn’t know, even now, how many trains they are going to try and run. You’d think that you would try and run a railway according to a planned timetable!

London Underground has said themselves that 13% of their capacity is the most they can possibly run while maintaining social distancing. And yet they’ve got no real plans in place for how they are going to control that, and prevent more people than that from coming onto the system. Their plan for maintaining two-metre social distancing is to simply go with the government’s rewording and recategorise social distancing as two metres ‘where possible’.

With the government and employers desperate to get the economy going again, now should have been the

ideal opportunity to push for full-funding - with no strings attached. But according to the mayor’s own public statement on funding, the government only made one offer and refused to improve on it. TfL needed £1.9 billion to run services up to the end of September, but was only offered £1.1 billion, with an additional £500 million loan to be repaid. In addition to committing to run a 100% service, TfL has also accepted a review of spending, daily reporting of absence to civil servants, and above-inflation fare increases.

The government and officials of the Department for Transport have

found negotiating with the London mayor to be pretty straightforward. Sadiq Khan’s whole tenure has been characterised by accepting whatever the government demands. Faced with this crisis, he had no other approach in his armoury.

But as this battle over funding moves from the corporate boardroom to the imposition of cuts, the government will face the organised workforce of TfL and London Underground. This will present them with a resistance that the mayor was never going to provide.

Having kept the tube running through this crisis, the RMT transport

union will not be prepared give up anything. We will seek to work with the other unions recognised in TfL to defend members as we always do. We must defend all current jobs, terms and conditions for staff, but also link up with passenger groups to oppose fare increases and preserve travel concessions for freedom pass holders and under-18s.

On safety we’ve been told we can’t have masks that actually protect people from infection, and we’re being morally blackmailed - if we were to have N95 face masks that would take them away from the health service. Our attitude to that is, this is the fifth biggest economy in the world, why can’t we produce enough £3.99 masks - which before this crisis you could buy in many shops? If you can’t provide that then unfortunately you can’t have your railway service.

We’ve given advice to members that wherever two metres can’t be maintained they should refuse to do work, and withdraw themselves to a place of safety. And if that means leaving the workplace, then so be it. And the RMT has said if that means stopping trains from running, then so be it.

The coronavirus crisis has highlighted what we have always told government and the mayor. You cannot run a transport network like that controlled by TfL without government support. London is the only city of comparable size that has tried to do this. We must now fight for a publicly funded transport system. Massive savings can be found immediately by ending outsourcing and bringing core activities like cleaning and routine engineering in-house.

It must not be passengers, who already pay some of the highest fares in the world, or TfL workers, who have delivered massive productivity increases in recent years, who are made to pay the price for the collapse of the Tories’ funding model.

“Feelings are very stressed at the moment and drivers are worried”

Sheffield bus driver

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, bus driving has become a very hazardous profession with, at the last count, 33 London drivers having lost their lives. In South Yorkshire there have been, to my knowledge, two deaths and a number of drivers testing positive.

Most drivers are somewhat resigned to our key-worker status - taking health workers to and from the hospitals, and providing a service for people doing their daily essentials.

There are a range of concerns for drivers, including cash handling (which is a direct source of infection for both driver and passengers receiving change), and only having perspex assault screens to mask us, which are ineffective for stopping a virus.

Unlike London buses, ours are front loaders only, which means

passengers are within the two metre social distancing area. The managers have provided gloves and hand sanitiser, but no masks, which drivers bring themselves.

Another issue is duty allocation mid-crisis. There are many shift patterns from part-days to standard shifts, with a wide variety of start, finish, and break allocation. In order to fill contracted hours for drivers, we are being assigned an ad-hoc mixed bag of daily duties. This often means mixing morning starts with late starts in a single week’s work, and it’s leaving drivers stressed and tired with broken sleeping and eating patterns. Not great if your job is to carry passengers safely.

So feelings are very stressed at the moment and drivers are equally worried that these mixed-bag duties may indeed remain, even after the crisis as it suits the management to have us on a piece of elastic to twang back to work whenever demand peaks.

“We say that to maintain social distancing then 10% should be the number of passengers at any one time - the company’s position is 50%”

Southampton bus driver

We don’t have the option of front door closure like in London as our buses only have one door. Our employer has said that services are being ramped up from 18 May and a lot of our drivers have been contacted. It’s not a full back-to-work situation, it’s going to be up to 26% from the current 10%. A lot of workers are starting to go back.

Our trade union’s position is to use to Section 44 of the 1996 Health and Safety Act if necessary. We’re giving our drivers that information. If they

find themselves in an unsafe environment then they should follow that and pull over.

We’ve made the calculation that to maintain social distancing on the buses then 10% should be the maximum number of passengers at any one time. The company’s position is 50%. There’s no chance of social distancing at that number. Their instruction to drivers is that if you reach 50% then you are to pull over, call control, and seek guidance. Our position is that it should get nowhere near 50% and we’re encouraging our drivers to pull over a lot sooner.



Playing Russian roulette on the Tube

Simon Carter
East London Socialist Party

In the first week after Johnson’s ‘get back to work’ speech, passenger numbers on the London Underground increased by a reported 10%. Matt Hancock, and other ministers, say “don’t use it” - as if that’s a realistic option for hundreds of thousands of workers.

I can personally vouch for this surge and how this is compromising social distancing. Entering a District Line tube train at West Ham station during peak evening travel is a nerve racking experience, packed as the carriages are by large numbers of



Trade unionists organise to fight for workplace safety in big NSSN meeting

Isai Priya
Waltham Forest Socialist Party

Trade unionists called for workers' safety to be put before bosses' profit, and for trade union and workers' control over workplace safety, in a valuable and inspiring National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) meeting on 16 May.

The public Zoom call took place at a time when the Tories are spearheading plans to lift the lockdown - when the safety of workers is not guaranteed.

More than 200 took part - an even bigger participation than the excellent NSSN meeting organised three weeks before. There were some new activists and trade unionists, as well as local shop stewards and reps, and trade union officials.

Rob Williams, NSSN national chair, introduced the session, saying: "To belong to a union, to be organised, to act collectively, is the key to the particular times that we are living in - when workers are facing a life-and-death situation." Speakers expressed the concerns of workers, and explained how they have organised successfully on health and safety.

The unsafe reopening of schools was prominent in the discussion. Teacher Martin Powell-Davies and parent Lindsey Morgan are both involved in organising boycotts of 1 June school reopenings. They spoke about this completely unsafe move by the government, and the need to put children's and teachers' safety first (see p4-6).

Transport workers are also in the

firing line right now. We heard from Jared Wood, the London Transport member of transport union RMT's executive committee, in a personal capacity. Moe, a bus driver, also spoke. They outlined the volatile situation on London's transport. There has been an increase in commuters, but with no proper risk assessment, and still no sufficient PPE for workers (see p8-9).

General union Unite's assistant general secretary Howard Beckett gave his solidarity and support to the NSSN, Royal Mail workers' union CWU, and teachers' union NEU. He outlined Unite's position that workers come first, and workers are entitled to leave if their workplace is not safe.

Many more workers and union activists spoke - including a new care home worker; Iain Dalton, chair of retail union Usdaw's Broad Left; Kathy Smith, chair of Bromley Unite; and Suzanne Muna from the Unite housing workers' branch.

Rob Williams concluded by saying this government has failed to protect key workers. Over 100 healthcare workers and over 30 transport workers have sadly lost their lives.

We cannot trust the Tories with our health or safety. Workers should only return to work when the trade unions and workers themselves decide it is safe to do so. It is workers' control that will put safety before bosses' profit.

Contact the NSSN if you want more info on how to organise in your workplace, and to build coordinated, collective workers' action - visit shopstewards.net.

Postal workers action results in double victory for union

Gary Clark, secretary of Scotland No 2 branch of the Communications Workers Union (CWU), addressed, via Zoom, hundreds of National Shop Steward Network trade union activists on 16 May. Gary declared a victory for the union following the departure of Royal Mail's notorious anti-union boss, Rico Back. His exit comes quickly after management's climbdown over its suspension of the 'universal service obligation' (USO), which stopped Saturday postal deliveries.



photo Paul Mattsson

Postal workers are celebrating seeing the back of Rico Back, capping what has been an amazing few weeks at Royal Mail. And let me make it clear, he was sacked.

Back took over Royal Mail two years ago - drawing £10 million pounds in salary, pension and so on. His brief on joining was to take on and smash the CWU, to facilitate greater returns for the big shareholders who now own the company.

I'll put this development into context. At the end of last year, the CWU balloted (97% majority to strike) after Royal Mail reneged on a national deal over jobs and conditions. After a politicised court injunction dismissing this ballot, we won a strike rebalot in the New Year by a massive 94.5% vote.

Mistakenly, the union leadership called off the strike because of the coronavirus pandemic. This gave Royal Mail bosses the confidence to go on an offensive against the union.

Incidentally, 13 postal workers have died from Covid-19 during this pandemic. During the first week of the lockdown we, along with other CWU branches, had members

refuse to work in order to secure safe working conditions.

On International Workers' Memorial Day (28 April), Royal Mail announced without negotiation - and undoubtedly with government approval - that it was going to 'suspend' the USO. This was against the backdrop of Rico Back saying he would no longer speak to the CWU during the pandemic.

This executive action, in suspending USO, was designed to ridicule postal workers, and was a clear statement this was going to be a fight to the finish with the CWU.

Between this announcement and 1 May we launched a consultation campaign. We also asked all our union reps not to enter in talks with local management over USO, and to adhere to the existing duty structures. What we anticipated was unofficial walkouts of up to 90,000 postal workers on May Day, in advance of Royal Mail implementing its plan.

Facing this workers' uprising, Royal Mail crumbled, and announced on 1 May the ditching of its plan. We believe that the government, fearing a national postal

strike just as Johnson was about to announce a partial return to work, pressured Royal Mail to abandon its plan.

Clearly, Back had completely misjudged the mood among postal workers, and he had no alternative but to go - albeit with a huge severance package.

We have also secured a Covid payment worth £200 for full-time postal workers and pro rata for part-timers. I believe this should have been paid fully to all members and not pro rata on this occasion.

But let's be clear, our original dispute, after Royal Mail reneged on our national deal over jobs, pay and working conditions, is not over. We have forced the employer back to the negotiating table, and we intend to press home our advantage to ensure a just settlement.

Workers and the public have experienced a deterioration of the postal service under privatisation. The wider trade union movement, representing millions of workers and their families, must actively come behind our demand for the renationalisation of Royal Mail, and booting out profiteers like Back.

Posties walk out in Peterborough after manager tests positive

Carl Harper
Peterborough Socialist Party

Royal Mail workers at Peterborough Delivery Office left work on the morning of 16 May after learning a line manager had tested positive for Covid-19.

The members of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) were unhappy that the manager had been 'operating' around the workplace and failing to adhere to social distancing prior to the result. Management had not even informed the

union the test was taking place.

We understand that 95% of the office walked out. Many went home rather than return to an unsafe workplace. Royal Mail bosses say a "deep clean" has taken place.

Many members have requested they be tested too. One worker reports at least three more staff have tested positive, and delivery workers exposed to the manager in question have been tested.

The Socialist Party supports any collective action that workers at Royal Mail and elsewhere take in defence of their members against

unsafe conditions.

Postal workers have already died as a result of this horrific coronavirus pandemic. It shows how the private sector is incapable of running vital public services such as Royal Mail. We stand for bringing those services back into public ownership.

But to finally solve all the problems, they should be run under democratic workers' control and management, and as part of a planned, socialist economy. Then the safety and needs of workers and wider society can replace the search for big business profits at our expense.



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Universal Basic Income

NOT A SOLUTION TO INSECURITY AND POVERTY UNDER CAPITALISM

Tessa Warrington
Leicester Socialist Party

Few could have imagined when the Tories won the 2019 general election that five months later they would be carrying through measures of state intervention beyond the scale even of Jeremy Corbyn's Labour manifesto.

With tens of millions now pushed into insecurity overnight by the Covid-19 lockdown, Chancellor Rishi Sunak's furlough scheme has effectively already seen the government take the step of temporarily 'nationalising' 7.5 million wages.

Following on from this, the spectre of a wave of deep, protracted global economic recession coming hot on the heels of lockdown has led to some discussion in the mainstream media on the possible value of a Universal Basic Income (UBI). Even the Pope in his Easter address suggested that "this may be the time to consider a universal basic wage".

UBI is the idea of an unconditional, tax-free, regular payment, regardless of work status or home situation, which would replace the benefits system.

Public opinion

An 'Eupinions' survey showed 71% of EU and UK citizens in favour of introducing UBI, and over 100 MPs and peers across seven parties (none of them Tories) signed a letter in April by the think-tank Compass calling for a "recovery basic income" that would be "sufficient to provide economic security". A parliamentary Early Day Motion discussing the issue also gained support from almost 100 MPs.

Many people have already fallen through the cracks of the government's present schemes and are unable to get financial help. Beyond that, receiving 80% of a wage is simply insufficient, especially for the low paid.

While opinion polls currently show high approval ratings for the government's actions, largely due to the furlough payments, the scheme is under the control of employers, not workers, and big business is desperate to restart the economy.

UBI importantly raises the idea of a fundamental right of everyone to have an income that meets their basic needs. But would it do this?

The millions claiming Universal Credit and the soaring demand on food banks are just two indicators of



Proposals eventually offered up by capitalist governments reflect attempts to be as 'revenue neutral' as possible, ie to avoid significantly hitting the wealth of the 1%

the mounting social crisis and anger it is creating.

Socialists would support any improvements in living standards for the poorest in society - and for the overwhelming majority. But internationally, none of the schemes with elements of UBI provide a decent level of income for the recipients.

Neither are many of them 'universal'; for instance, a scheme being planned in Spain wouldn't even apply to every household that is in poverty.

A genuine UBI of a decent level isn't on the agenda of any of the mainstream pro-capitalist parties because it would cost a

great deal more than a targeted benefits system. So most capitalist representatives oppose the idea, including Sunak.

Blairite Labour and Tory governments have over the years moved in the opposite direction, reducing the level of present benefits.

Child benefit - previously a fixed standard payment for parents - became means-tested, with its value falling in real terms. People were squeezed off their benefits by arbitrary changes to Work Capability Assessments.

Some UBI advocates argue that a form of UBI would be more effective than the complex system of schemes devised by Sunak.

However, the huge drop in pay swallowed by many workers under lockdown conditions, and the drops that are still to come through businesses closing or downsizing, would not be compensated for by a UBI.

Rather, we must demand that there are no job losses, the available work is shared between workers, and all workers stay on 100% of their previous pay. Along with those measures, benefits should be increased to the level of the national minimum wage, and there should be no delay in paying them.

Proposals for variants of UBI can be found among supporters of right-wing ideology, as well as from some on the left.

A UBI test study under a right-wing coalition government in Finland, led one of the study's researchers to say: "Some found the guaranteed income increased the possibility for them to do things like providing informal care for their family or their neighbours".

Clearly, the bosses could see UBI as a means to push the burden of domestic labour even more onto working-class people.

Among other dangers is that UBI could really be welfare for capitalists rather than workers. In free-market capitalism employers would have less incentive to pay their workers a wage they could live on if they knew those workers were being paid a UBI.

Ultimately, if welfare remains in the dominion of the capitalist state then it will continue to be used to service the interests of the capitalist classes and their governments, ie the transfer of wealth from the poorest to the richest in society.

Programme

A socialist programme, on the other hand, calls for every person's needs to be met through taking the major industries and services into public ownership under democratic workers' control and management.

This would allow for the collective planning of the economy and use of the vast wealth currently hoarded in private hands, to meet the needs of all.

Automation could be used to reduce working hours without loss of pay.

Necessary work could be shared out among everyone who is able to do it, and the wealth created could then be used to provide a good standard of living for all - including those unable to work, studying or retired.

The coronavirus crisis may have exploded the level of insecurity in our society, but the underlying conditions flow from capitalism itself. Without building a working-class movement to break with this system of profit, inequality and oppression, then it will not be possible to solve the problems faced by the millions struggling against poverty and destitution.

**WHAT'S
YOUR
VIEW?**



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Eric Segal
Kent Socialist Party

Book: The Jungle by Upton Sinclair

Capitalism's remorseless attack on workers' safety and conditions

Upton Sinclair, in his book *The Jungle*, described the meat packaging factories in Chicago in 1906 in the following way: "It was the incarnation of blind and insensate Greed. It was a monster devouring with a thousand mouths, trampling with a thousand hoofs; it was the Great Butcher - it was the spirit of Capitalism made Flesh."

The free market of America in the late 1800s and early 1900s wasn't free. It was controlled by a handful of corporations which conspired together to set prices and wages, and smash the rising labour movement - under the comforting name of the 'Trusts'.

There was the Railway Trust, the Beef Trust, the Steel Trust, the Sugar Trust, the Coal Trust, and so on.

The so-called free market meant that the Trusts were free to employ children in factories; free to make people work 60 or 70 hours a week; free to pollute rivers and streams; to hire private armies and to bribe; free to sell what they wanted at whatever price they liked.

The exploitation of the working classes grew - creating a dramatic increase in the gap between rich and poor.

Workers not meat

Upton was not primarily drawn to write *The Jungle* out of concern for the horrible contamination and corruption of meat that workers consumed and fed to their children. His main concern was the horrific condition of meatpacker workers following the failed strike of 1904, when 18,000 union members in Chicago walked off the job to win higher wages.

Upton met, and was inspired by, socialists to become an activist in the rising socialist movement. He joined the newly formed Workers' Party at the age of 26, and sold the rights to a book on the conditions of workers in the meatpacking industry to the editor of *Appeal to Reason*, a socialist weekly newspaper.

He travelled to Chicago to do research for the book, and lived among the meatpacking workers. There he met Adolph Smith, a founder of the Social Democratic Federation in England, who influenced Upton's socialist conclusion to *The Jungle*.

For seven weeks he eats with the meat packers, breathes the same air, and lives with them in squalor - all in preparation for his book, which follows the Lithuanian immigrant Jurgis and his family who come to America yearning for a better life.

The book was first published in instalments in *Appeal to Reason*, boosting the papers circulation to 175,000. But the book was rejected by five publishers who were fearful of its powerful socialist message.

However, with the backing of activists in the socialist movement, including the famous author Jack London, he raised \$4,000 in advance sales, and as a result the book was finally published.

Upton's descriptions in the book



Meatpacking then and now
photo Jorge Royan/CC

of rampant disease, absence of health and safety protection, violence, prostitution, alcoholism, drug addiction and the desperation of children driven to work in all weathers under poisonous conditions to help their parents cover the costs of shelter, warmth, clothing and food, are incomparable.

The Jungle was an immediate success, allegedly causing President Theodore Roosevelt to choke on his breakfast and turn vegetarian after reading an advance copy. The *Jungle's* graphic account of the presence of chemicals, diseased meat and rodent excrement in sausages incensed the president who decided to call for an investigation into the

meatpacking industry.

This resulted in two important pieces of legislation: the Pure Food and Drugs Act and the Meat Inspection Act which, were passed in Congress.

However, Upton was disappointed by the impact of *The Jungle* which had been written to help meatpacking workers rather than improve the quality of meat. Upton later wrote: "I aimed for the public's heart, and by accident hit it in the stomach".

Mass queues for work, strikes and scab labour all figure in this book. But the remorseless demands of capitalism are the same across the world.

Ben Tillet, the dockers' leader

in England, described the 'call-on' of workers desperate for work in the docks in the late 1800s: "We are driven into a shed, iron-barred from end to end, outside of which a foreman or contractor walks up and down with the air of a dealer in a cattle market, picking and choosing from a crowd of men who, in their eagerness to obtain employment, trample each other under foot, and where like beasts they fight for the chance of a day's work".

This is similar to the sight that confronted Jurgis when he started work at the meatpacking plant in Chicago.

The conditions in slaughterhouses gradually improved for

meatpacking workers in the years following *The Jungle*, because workers organised in unions and fought to improve their lives. By the late 1930s, most of the industry was unionised. And by the mid-1950s, meatpacking workers had one of the highest-paid manufacturing jobs in the United States.

However, once again under the dark cloud of Covid-19, low-paid migrant workers are being forced back to work in the meat processing plants where high rates of infections are reported. The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW) reckons that 72 workers have died and 5,322 are directly affected by Covid-19.

The result is that workers are afraid to return to work, with reports that some plants have slowed production or closed because of worker 'absenteeism' amid legitimate fears of infection.

Among the closures is the Smithfield Foods pork plant in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Some 853 of its 3,700 employees were infected with the coronavirus, resulting in indefinite closure at the request of state and local officials.

But a leap of imagination is not necessary to see the similarity of the hand of capitalism in the vast business empires of the couldn't 'care' less homes like HC-One. With 300 UK care homes, only one in six of its staff were tested for Covid-19, and one in three of its residents

According to the Health Foundation: "In the week ending 1 May 2020, there were 2,423 COVID-19 related deaths recorded in care homes, 3,214 recorded in hospitals and 254 recorded in private homes."

Where are the books?

Where are the books written about this army of care workers, many from immigrant families, desperate to pay rent, feed their families and find transport costs to and from work? The workers who are heroically looking after our parents and grandparents in their old age, many of whom are infirm and now sick with Covid-19?

Sinclair's harrowing descriptions of the degrading, filthy, dangerous, exploitative and near slave working conditions in the meatpacking factories in the early 1900s - conditions that are being replicated in workers lives today - will drive you to fight for workers' rights and socialist change.

I challenge you to read Upton Sinclair's masterpiece and walk away untouched by the mental pictures he weaves. But beware, this is no book for the weak of heart, it will burn in your memory till your memory is no more.



The Jungle, £6.50 including postage. Available from leftbooks.co.uk, 020 8988 8789 or Left Books, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT.

Going viral

Socialist comments and letters on the corona crisis

The Covid-19 pandemic is a world social crisis which touches every aspect of life. The iniquities and failings of the capitalist system are being exposed, and workers and communities are organising in response.

Send us your comments, reports, anecdotes and thoughts, in not more than 200 words (we reserve the right to shorten letters), to editors@socialistparty.org.uk.



Newham protest for PPE and an end to cuts
photo Pete Mason

■ NHS already overwhelmed

What counts as "not overwhelmed"? Hospitals are still cancelling procedures that are not Covid-related, no doubt causing huge distress and potential dangers to health.

And now it seems it's going even further than that. We received two cancellation letters for my partner - one cancelling a CT scan of his chest and one cancelling an appointment with the haematology clinic.

He has been suffering from pneumonia and blood clots as a result of Covid and these appointments were both follow-ups because of Covid! I'm not sure what callous ivory-towered Tory toffs count as overwhelmed, but I'd say this comes pretty close.

Anonymous
London

■ Tories clap now, cut later

So the key workers they've been clapping for - while simultaneously not providing them with adequate PPE - will be made to pay for the financial crisis that will follow coronavirus. You can bet they won't be taxing Branson, Ashleigh et al. Because that would also affect the bunch of posh boys in government.

Frannie Lianne
Cardiff

Clap for heroes dying on the frontline during the crisis - post-crisis wage freezes and tax increases. The Tories couldn't give a shit about nurse, teachers, council workers, cleaners - I could go on and on.

Matt Whale
Nurse, Hull

■ School student protest

All 600 sixth formers in my daughter's school refused to go into the assembly hall. This was mid-March, one parent had tested positive with Covid-19, just one week before the lockdown.

They were told that they were being insubordinate and were breaking school rules. They were threatened with detentions and other sanctions, but they held their ground. Eventually school relented and the assembly was cancelled.

If this is what 600 students did on their own, imagine what the labour movement, with six million trade unionists could have done. Strike action could have shut down schools, public transport, airports and other unionised work-places.

The labour movement could have imposed a shutdown in early March, a few weeks before the government finally moved, and in this way saved tens of thousands of lives. This would have taken preparedness to break the Tory anti-strike laws.

Amnon Cohen
Haringey, London

■ Anti-lockdown protest

I gave into curiosity and watched some footage of the very small anti-lockdown protest in London on 16 May. I have absolutely no political agreement with Piers Corbyn and co - the pandemic is real, 5G is not the real virus, climate change is real, and a vaccine would be a positive thing. Clearly far-right elements were present on the protest.

Marx does explain that under capitalism, society is "run behind the backs of the producers". There have been very real lies and conspiracies about the virus, testing, public sector resources,

profiteering and many other things in this crisis.

One of the main things I am struggling with in this pandemic is the increased powers the authorities have. The behaviour of the police does serve as a serious warning to socialists and trade unionists about 'the new normal'.

Protestors were grabbed for standing around with their signs, which contravenes "health protection", and arrested under the powers of new coronavirus legislation. You can easily imagine the same tactics being used to deal with workers picketing or occupying.

Matt Dobson
Glasgow

■ Free technology from profit

When I was in the hospital, the young doctor told me that the CT scan can detect Covid in the lungs. Imagine what we could do with that technology, and how much more advanced it would be if it was free from the fetter of capitalist profiteering!

Mobile scanners could check workers' health for free. Many, many times working-class people can't get the scans they desperately need due to cost. You could find cancers before they became malignant and untreatable.

Although I didn't present with Covid symptoms, I was seen in the 'red zone', but still wasn't tested because they only test if you are admitted.

I think people are praising Nicola Sturgeon because in comparison to Boris, anyone would look competent. Even my wee dog could run things better than him.

Lynda McEwan
West Dunbartonshire

■ Tories don't give a damn about poor kids

Former Tory MP Amber Rudd is foaming at the mouth to release the lockdown - banging on about poor kids suffering. She presided over massive cuts to both schools and social services when she was in government.

Adrian O'Malley
Unison Mid Yorkshire Health branch secretary (personal capacity) and Socialist Party

Wakefield Socialist Party members are saddened to hear of the untimely death of our longstanding comrade Rob Crabb at the age of 60 on 30 March. Rob joined our party in the 1990s after becoming a shop steward in the Unison union branch

She doesn't give a damn about working-class kids. It's all about childcare, so the workers can be lashed back to work. She doesn't care about how many of us die as long as her mates make money.

Nancy Taaffe
Waltham Forest, London

■ Labour fails renters

Despite the threat of mass evictions, Labour's shadow housing secretary has said it would be "un-Labour" to suspend rents.

Bailing out banks at eye-watering cost is realistic politics. Supporting renters threatened with poverty and eviction isn't. Got that?

Thangam Debbonaire's reasons tell a story - some people would get their rent suspended who weren't going to be evicted. Are universal benefits 'un-Labour'?

She says if landlords go bust people would be made homeless. No reason to allow that, she doesn't deal with the linked proposal for mortgages payments to be suspended.

Why not take over homes from landlords that can't cope?

Paul Kershaw
Enfield, London

■ Unskilled?

They voted against pay rises for nurses. But there they are, standing outside their mansions clapping their hypocritical, blood-soaked hands for NHS staff, carers and other key workers.

The Tories have failed these workers completely. They failed to control the virus, they failed to provide adequate protection, and many have paid with their lives.

The majority of frontline workers are low paid and undervalued. Without them society would fall apart.

And now the Tories rushed immigration legislation is slamming the door shut on 'low-skilled' immigration and will exclude 180,000 EU nationals in the NHS and care sector alone. I can't imagine what impact that will have.

While the Tories stand there pretending to be friends of frontline workers, they have been scheming to exclude

in Wakefield hospitals.

He was a coronary care unit nurse at Pinderfields Hospital for many years, before he was forced to take ill-health retirement when he was diagnosed with cancer. Rob fought his terrible disease for over a decade with great strength and dignity.

Prior to his illness Rob stood as a Socialist Party candidate in the 2004 local elections, and was a regular attendee at Socialist Party campaign stalls and events. In the latter years,

many of them in the interests of an elusive "foundation for a high-wage, high-skill, high-productivity economy." For the sake of our health and safety, this hypocritical Tory government has got to go.

Heather Rawling
Leicester

■ Care homes: Tests and pay

Care workers fear being tested in case they have the virus and go from £400 to £94 a week sick pay. It's a disgrace. Privatised care homes are at the epicentre of infections and Covid-19 deaths. All workers must be entitled to full pay if off sick for any reason.

Care homes and the Scottish and UK governments must ensure all staff are financially protected, with no loss of earnings. These homes must be brought under public ownership with all workers paid a living wage under local authority terms and conditions

Philip Stott
Glasgow

■ Tory Flu

Having just read Hannah Sell's review of Pale Rider (see 'The Spanish Flu of 1918 and how it fanned the flames of revolt' at socialistparty.org.uk), I was reminded that the powers that be always give nicknames to these pandemics - Spanish Flu, Asian Flu in 1957.

It struck me that apart from that oaf Trump trying to dub the current virus the 'Chinese Flu', we don't really have a common name for Covid-19. I think this is a bit remiss and we're missing a chance here.

Perhaps we could call it Hancock's Flu or Johnson's Flu. Wouldn't it be great if we could get one of these names to stick for posterity?

Perhaps the Socialist could run a competition for a favoured name? £20 book token prize for the winner! Yes alright I'll pay for it.

Personally I'll stick with the Tory Flu. Stay Safe.

Kevin Wilson
Leeds

Rob Crabb obituary A nurse who fought with strength and dignity

TRUMP, CORONAVIRUS, CAPITALISM, AND THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE

Claire Bayler,
Independent Socialist Group,
Executive Committee and
Nicholas Wurst
EC and TCU/IAM Local 1089
(personal capacity)

Five months after Covid-19 reached the United States, the Trump administration and US capitalism have still failed to mobilise an effective response to the pandemic. Parts of the country began reopening for business on 1 May despite a national lack of mass testing and an insufficient drop in hospitalisation and infection rates. The rich are desperate for workers to return to work. Without our labour and our purchasing power, there are no profits. Emergency unemployment benefits administered through the CARES Act run out on 31 July, unless extended in a new stimulus package. One way out from under these costly emergency measures is for

the government to declare the economy open. For example, Ohio state, in an attempt to accelerate the return to work, encouraged reopened businesses to report workers who elected not to return to work. Workers who are too scared to return to work can then be denied unemployment benefits for “voluntary joblessness”!

This push to reopen clearly places profits above lives, as 1.45 million Americans are confirmed infected as of writing, with over 86,000 deaths reported. The continued lack of mass testing hides the real rate and spread of the infection. With most workplaces still lacking proper protective equipment, sanitation, and social distancing practices, workers may not survive returning to work.

Economic crisis

The American economy staggers forward like someone who has been dealt a fatal blow but not yet fallen. The real jobless rate has reached 23% and is expected to increase further,

including losses in traditionally ‘recession-proof’ industries like healthcare. Workers who lose jobs also lose any employer-sponsored healthcare. Already an estimated 27 million additional Americans are newly uninsured.

Thanks to the billions of stimulus funds pumped into major corporations, the stock market is showing a rebound, directly contradicted by the real economic conditions. Amazon’s Jeff Bezos saw his wealth jump by \$24 billion. But this level of profiteering is not an indication that the capitalist economy is healthy. Rather, it reveals a gap in the pandemic-constrained market that Amazon will likely monopolise in the aftermath.

The billions in stimulus funds are saving so-called ‘zombie corporations’ that took out enormous loans while credit was cheap only to spend it on stock buybacks.

While this creates profit for stakeholders in the short term, it has no bearing on real productivity. Stimulus funds and tax cuts to the rich are used to speculate in the market or squirrelled away in offshore accounts, unlike stimulus support to workers which is injected directly into the economy through purchases and payments.

Polarisation

High-profile confrontations between lockdown protesters and essential worker counter-protesters have filled the headlines.

While some may be protesting because they see a return to work as the only way to regain some semblance of economic security, the organisations that initiated the protests have been linked to powerful right-wing forces including “some of the same people and money that built the Tea Party” (New York Times).

Following the widely reported racial targeting and killing of black jogger Ahmaud Arbery - by a white father and son in the predominantly white and conservative neighbourhood, of Satilla Shores, Georgia - legally armed black citizens came out to protest in the neighbourhood.

As the Committee for a Workers’ International has mentioned



Trump is gambling that a second wave of the pandemic won't hit the US before the November presidential election

previously, there are elements of a civil war developing in the United States. The situation will polarise further when the inevitable second wave of the virus, spread through contact after reopening, hits during the phase-out of expanded welfare benefits, eviction moratoriums, and other emergency economic measures.

Trump's response

Leading experts, scientists, and policymakers are either stumbling over each other to appear the most loyal to Trump and his decisions, or are fired for defending a scientifically informed pandemic response. But the greatest weakness of Trump's response to the pandemic comes not from his personality, but his role as a representative of capitalism's interests.

Despite being briefed on the risks of Covid-19 before it even reached the US, Trump denied the initial spread of the infection. This was an attempt to maintain market confidence and Trump's poll numbers, since the US economy was looking strong on paper.

Undoubtedly, the initial response to the pandemic by the Trump administration caused tens of thousands of preventable deaths, and his ongoing response will be responsible for tens of thousands more. After finally declaring the state of emergency, his administration and many allied state governments began manoeuvring to reopen as soon as possible.

The burden of preventing infection has been forced onto individual workers, rather than coordinated at a national and international level.

The Trump administration is encouraging competition, not co-operation, between states but also between nations. The lack of a centralised response is exacerbating existing inequalities and snarling supply chains.

The pandemic response is handled largely on a state-by-state basis, from policy decisions to supply provisioning. States have been caught in the middle of national bidding wars for much-needed supplies. Unlike the federal

government, states do not have the authority to run a budget deficit to fund response programmes.

The US has been accused of blocking or diverting supply orders of other countries. Tensions are arising among traditional ‘allies’ over the ‘America First’ attitude of the Trump administration.

Imperialist tensions are also on the rise as Trump and US capitalists continue to clash with China over trade matters, exacerbated by economic meltdown. The Financial Times has described the vaccine race between the US and China as a “new cold war”.

These failures are not specifically a failure of Trump or his administration - many capitalist countries wasted precious early response time. Barack Obama was responsible for scrapping a White House pandemic unit during his presidency as well as bailing out the big banks and auto manufacturers at the expense of workers. The history of pandemics in the modern era is a history of capitalist mismanagement and inability to plan for the long term, putting profits over preparedness.

The Democrats

In the aftermath of the 2016 election, the Democrats attempted to brand themselves as the “resistance” against Trump in hopes of capitalising on the upsurge of anger and disillusionment. Yet politicians and government officials of both parties are using the pandemic as an excuse to push through a host of anti-worker measures.

The Environmental Protection Agency has rolled back key climate policies. The Department of Justice is quietly seeking the right to indefinitely detain people without trial during emergencies. The decision to ban abortions in Texas during the pandemic as a “non-essential medical procedure” was upheld in appeals court.

New York Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo continued to push cuts to Medicaid - even if it means risking billions in relief funds. Thousands of essential city workers in Philadelphia had their time-and-

a-half coronavirus pay revoked.

Joe Biden, Democratic presidential nominee-apparent, continues to oppose free universal healthcare, along with his party.

Only now, in the second month of the crisis, is the Democratic Party seriously proposing a major stimulus package that would be more far reaching than the previous Republican-initiated packages.

A real opposition party would be mobilising its supporters to win far-reaching change. There have been no protests organised by the Democratic Party, despite multiple demonstrations of safe protest methods over the past weeks.

Trump is clearly relying on a re-surgent economy to anchor his campaign, but the Democrats are not interested in using their ties to US labour to organise job actions to win real gains.

The Democrats have not put forward anything resembling a comprehensive programme or plan to deal with the crisis.

Such a plan would provide wage guarantees for those who have lost jobs or are otherwise unable to work, hazard pay for those still working, intervention into the food

market to keep supply up without ruining farmers; importing tests and implementing on-demand testing; opposing any unsafe reopening; nationalising hospital companies to increase capacity; nationalising pharmaceutical and biotech companies, and centralising research for a vaccine.

Presidential race

The capitalists have worried since the beginning of Trump's administration that his erratic behaviour may damage the government's credibility and US capitalism's interests more than the precedent set by impeaching him.

The Republicans have now united behind him. Initially campaigning on job growth and a healthy stock market, since the outbreak, Trump has attempted to minimise the economic damage.

Reopening the economy without mass testing, proper sanitation, and appropriate hospital capacity will undoubtedly cause a devastating second wave, but Trump sees it as his only option.

A new spike in deaths would be catastrophic for his campaign, but the expected deep recession caused

by continued shutdowns would be an equal threat. Trump's campaign will gamble on the timing of the second wave, and hope that the economy is back to some semblance of its pre-crisis self by November.

In case he can't revive the economy, Trump is attempting to paint the virus as a foreign plot to boost his reelection. From stoking racist violence by calling Covid-19 the “Chinese Virus”, and demanding reparations from China for damages, to passing an immigration ban in the guise of “preventing contagion”, the Trump administration is using racist rhetoric to appeal to the most xenophobic elements of his base.

The Democrats

Despite a strong start, the Sanders campaign has already conceded the race and supported Biden, who has pushed for anti-union, racist, and sexist policies over his long career in Congress.

The two millionaire presidential candidates and their parties agree on the vast majority of policies, most of which Sanders supporters oppose. Nonetheless, the Sanders campaign is exerting serious pressure on the forces it mobilised to now support Biden, including a party unity campaign, and high-profile Sanders allies accepting nominations to various positions proposed by Biden.

Biden's campaign has failed to counterbalance Trump's poor pandemic response.

Despite Trump's abject failure to handle the deep crisis, the Biden campaign may still find a way to lose the election.

The left

Sanders supporters are only now beginning to grapple with the way forward in the vacuum of left leadership. Democratic Socialists of America (a left-leaning faction linked to the Democratic Party) has, for now, voted against supporting Biden, though it may reverse its position or condemn with faint praise any of the independent left campaigns.

The Los Angeles chapter of Our Revolution, an organisation founded by Sanders after his 2016 run, has now broken with the national organisation and allied itself with



We won't get universal free healthcare, guaranteed income, rent and mortgage forgiveness, or job security from the Democrats or the Republicans

the Movement for a People's Party in calling for the formation of a left party to challenge the Democrats and Republicans.

This call has been the centrepiece of Howie Hawkins' campaign for the Green Party presidential nomination.

It remains to be seen whether any of the independent left campaigns can be used to successfully harness the anger of Sanders supporters and mobilise the alienated working class in enough numbers to lay the foundations of a serious challenge to the capitalist two-party system.

A workers' party

We won't get universal free healthcare, guaranteed income, rent and mortgage forgiveness, or job security from the Democrats or the Republicans. The heavy cost of the 2008 Great Recession was paid by working people in the following decade while the capitalists made unprecedented amounts of profit.

Workers, especially people of colour, permanently lost generations' worth of wealth through home foreclosures and bankruptcies.

The high-paying jobs with benefits lost during the recession were replaced with precarious, low-paid, and ‘gig’ alternatives. We only have to look at the bailouts of the big banks, airlines, and auto manufacturers to know how the capitalists intend to make workers pay for this crisis again.

But we don't have to resign ourselves to further suffering. We can defend our jobs, pay, benefits, and

workplace safety by organising among our co-workers, especially in union workplaces. We can push for a union leadership to take up a fighting defence of our rights and wellbeing instead of rolling over and conceding to the cuts.

If the current union leadership won't fight to defend us, we can elect one that will defend and extend our rights.

To resolve this pandemic we need an organisation that draws together the working class, our organisations, and our movements into a coherent force that can fight to win. We need to organise to promote our political interests, from universal free healthcare to full funding of social programmes.

Building a left workers' party in the US would be an enormous step in the right direction. The vast majority of Americans don't support either the corporate Democrats or Republicans - they simply don't vote!

Some have been deliberately disenfranchised, others see no point in voting. Some voters hold their noses and vote for the ‘business-as-usual’ Democratic Party candidate, while others vote for figures like Trump in protest!

Through a workers' party we can unite workers, youth, oppressed communities, unions, progressive organisations, and social movements to build campaigns to win the policies we need now, without having to wait for election year.

We can, and must, also run workers' representatives on a workers' platform and show what it means to have an administration and society that puts people before profit.

Fundamental change, however, would require breaking with the capitalist system and bringing the 500 major corporations that dominate the US economy into democratic public ownership. This would then enable society's enormous accumulated resources to be harnessed to begin to build a democratic socialist society that could meet the needs of all.

■ See also ‘Coronavirus Strikes: So Do We!’ by Sam Skinner, Independent Socialist Group, on independentsocialistgroup.org



A “Liberate Minnesota” protest. One of many anti-lockdown, anti-Democratic Party protests which right-wing pro-Trump ‘Tea Party’ Republicans have organised photo Lorie Shaul/CC

Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

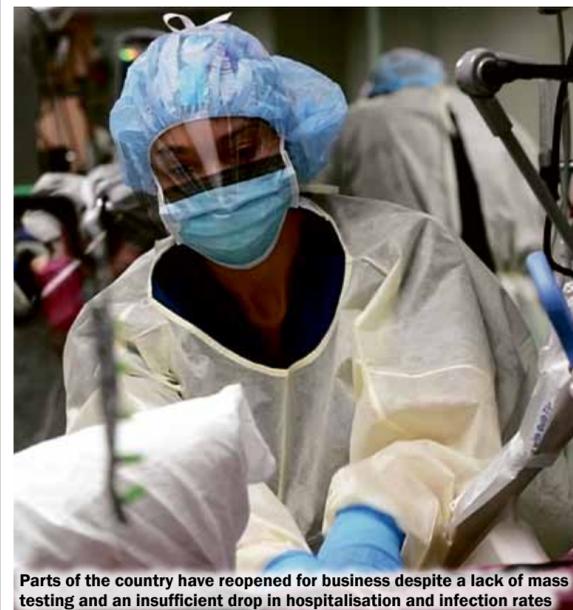
The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) - the socialist international organisation the Socialist Party is part of) is posting regular updates from our sections around the world.

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

In particular, there is a new statement on coronavirus and capitalism titled: ‘New era of capitalist turmoil and social upheaval opens – only a socialist alternative offers a way forward’. See socialistworld.net



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



Parts of the country have reopened for business despite a lack of mass testing and an insufficient drop in hospitalisation and infection rates

CORONAVIRUS

A WORKERS' CHARTER



ISSN 1366-9621



Income, jobs and workplace safety

- Full pay for all workers. Workers, especially those on low pay, can't afford to lose 20% of their income. Any worker who has to self-isolate or cannot go to work should receive full pay from day one and not be forced to take annual leave. Pay should be paid directly to the worker not via the employer
- No return to work unless adequate safety measures are agreed with trade unions and the workforce
- Increase benefits to the level of the national minimum wage. No delay in the payment of benefits
- Increase the minimum wage immediately to at least £12 an hour, £15 in London
- Workers asked to work from home must be supplied with adequate equipment, and performance monitoring should be scrapped
- Workers who follow health advice to be absent from work to avoid potential spread should be excluded from any attendance-management procedures
- Trade unions to establish an all-union health and safety committee in every workplace to agree joint actions required to guarantee safety
- Open the books of any company threatening redundancies or closure to the inspection by the workforce and trade unions
- To defend workers' jobs and incomes, industries should be nationalised under democratic workers' control and management with compensation only on the basis of proven need

NHS and social care

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

- PPE for all NHS and frontline staff
- Tests and full pay for all
- No return to work unless safety can be guaranteed
- Socialist planning not capitalist chaos

This charter is for discussion and debate in workplaces and communities so that we can organise to defend our health, safety and rights during the crisis. Get in touch if you would like to join a Socialist Party online meeting.

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

- Emergency training of NHS staff to deal with the coronavirus crisis
- Reintroduce full student nurse bursaries, and waive their student debt immediately
- Immediate 10% wage rise for all NHS staff and social care workers
- Resources to be mobilised from government and big-business sources so that free, accessible testing with rapid results is available for all frontline staff, workers interacting with the public, patients transferred into social care and anyone with flu or cold-like symptoms. Requisition all private testing and analysis facilities. Massively increase the number of contact tracers
- Reverse privatisation in the NHS, remove the privateers and cancel all the billions of pounds in annual PFI payments. End profit in social care and bring it into the public sector under democratic working-class oversight
- Nationalise the big pharmaceutical companies to guarantee research, production and supply of

medicines, vaccines and treatments

- Suspend fees for overseas NHS patients - treat all patients for free without the need to register to control the spread. Scrap prescription charges

Public services and housing

- Emergency funding to take on more workers in essential services. Resources to protect workers, patients, and service users
- Councils to coordinate local distribution of food, medicines and other supplies to the needy and vulnerable with the democratic oversight of trade union and community organisations. Scrap existing cuts budgets. Demand that the government nationally finance all additional spending necessary to deal with the coronavirus crisis, as well as releasing the resources to reverse a decade of austerity
- 24-hour, adequately staffed, local authority helplines for vulnerable and elderly people forced to self-isolate
- Workload demands must be reduced and time made available to prioritise protecting the health, safety and welfare of staff and service users
- Quality childcare for vulnerable families and children of essential workers, under the democratic

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

- Nobody should lose their home because of coronavirus. Mortgage, rent and council tax payments should be waived for the duration of the crisis and arrears written off. Democratically controlled local authority hardship funds for landlords in genuine need
- Councils to use their powers to take over empty homes to house the homeless, those in inadequate housing and those fleeing domestic violence. Hotels to be used to provide emergency accommodation
- Funding for 24-hour helplines and increased spending on refuges and safe emergency accommodation for victims of domestic violence
- No action to be taken for non-payment of utilities. Free broadband for all

Trade union and workers' action

- For the Trade Union Congress and the unions, the biggest voluntary national organisation with over six million members across the

country, to prepare to lead national coordinated strike action to protect people should necessary health and safety measures not be taken

- Democratic trade union oversight over any government or private sector emergency measures taken to contain the virus
- No erosion of workers' right to organise, including the democratic functioning of trade unions and parties
- No profiteering. Prices to be controlled by democratically elected committees of workers and consumers
- No trust in the Tories and other pro-capitalist politicians who are responsible for the crisis in the NHS and other public services to deal with the coronavirus crisis. For a mass workers' party, drawing together workers, young people, socialists and activists from workplaces and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting political alternative to the pro-big business parties
- The resources are there to deal with the crisis. Introduce an immediate 50% levy on the hoarded £750 billion lying idle in the bank accounts of big business
- The capitalist market system that prioritises profit and is based on competition cannot keep society safe. We need a democratic socialist plan of production and distribution to meet the needs of the majority in society. Take into public ownership the banks, financial institutions and the top 150 companies that dominate the British economy and run them under the democratic control and management of working-class people so that we can make the decisions about what is needed. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- For international socialist cooperation