



Covid-19: Put workers' lives before profit • Resist premature stampede back to money-making • Voices from the front line
• US capitalism fails test • North Sea Corona crisis **exclusive**
• see inside

£1 ★ issue 535 ★ April/May 2020
socialistvoice.scot

Scottish Socialist Voice

DEMAND A NEW NORMAL

Put people and planet first



Tough on the virus... tough on the causes of the virus:

- Health and care before profit
- Guarantee PPE for frontline staff
- No return to work until it's safe
- Create well paid skilled green jobs
- Increase minimum wage to £12/hour

Voice Extra

Look out for extra articles online at SocialistVoice.Scot

After Covid lockdown, we need a new normal

by Ken Ferguson

WITH EACH passing hour, the scope and scale of the Covid-19 (C-19) horror grows amidst sombre death tolls, hopeless personal protective equipment (PPE) shortages and an increasingly mix of back stabbing and muddle in the currently leaderless Johnson government.

Military chiefs have a maxim that no plan survives first contact with the enemy and this can seldom have been more graphically demonstrated than by the sea of confusion and crisis that characterises the response to C-19.

Of course the ability of individual ministers plays a part in this from Boris's casual relationship to the truth through a Tory front bench who, as they now sport NHS badges as they fail abysmally to source them PPE, were until a few months ago hardline austerity backers.

However, the multi-sided crisis laid bare by C-19 is far more fundamental than who "mis-spoke", had a bad press conference or forgot to order vital supplies.

Its many aspects include over reliance on "Just in Time" supply lines (originally pioneered by Toyota) a conscious policy of de-industrialisation to free capital for financial speculation, a decade plus of austerity and constructing an economy literally built of paper held by a so-called financial industry.

Tax dodgers

At the heart of this 40 year old structure—which was lauded by both major parties—is prioritising the needs of those who dodged tax and lived off moving money around the globe which is the sources of the growing crisis laid bare by and certain to grow as it unfolds. Elsewhere in this *Voice*, we flag up the urgent

Lockdown picks: Ken Ferguson

Film: *The Third Man*

Directed by Carol Reed, screenplay by Graham Green, starring Orson Welles.

Who can forget that theme on the Zither, the famous line about 500 years of Swiss peace producing the cuckoo clock?

Wonderful evocation of a post-war world not quite into the Cold War, yet entering the permafrost of the long struggle it produced. The final scene is a triumph and explains why the best pictures are in black and white.

Book: *Sunset Song*, Lewis Grassie Gibbon

Best Scots novel of the 20th century. Blends descriptions of rural life in the Meams with the lives, loves, hardship, beauty and cruelty centred on main character and farmer's daughter, Chris Guthrie.

The horrors of WWI brutalises Chris's husband, who subjects her to domestic violence and is shot for desertion in France. It would be a hard hearted person who reads this book without shedding a tear.

"‘GIVE US THE MONEY’ IS NOW THE CALL OF THE HOUR, WITH BILLIONAIRES LIKE RICHARD BRANSON ELBOWING THEIR WAY TO THE HEAD OF THE HAND-OUT QUEUE"

need for change if Pandemics such as C-19, which are not random events but caused by human activity, are to be controlled and also discuss the role of money in fashioning change.

Yet even with seemingly endless billions pledged to both combat the virus and supposedly return the economy to "normal", *Voice* readers will be under no illusion about the scope, scale and depth of what comes next.

The ruling class are certainly well aware of the forecasts of an extra two million unemployed, businesses which will never reopen and a future of economic and social misery stretching to the far horizon.

It is sure to be bad for business.

In the pages of their press from the *Spectator* to the *Financial Times*, remedies ranging from a Universal Basic Income to further "incentives" (hand outs) to business are under discussion.

Notably ignored are all those years when miners, steel workers, engineers and many others where thrown on the scrap heap because governments shouldn't interfere in business.

'Give us the money' is now the call of the hour with billionaires like Richard Branson elbowing their way to the head of the handout queue.

The immediate priority of course is to bring C-19 under control and to ensure that the resources such as PPE are made available as a key priority.

In this regard it is unforgivable that ministers are involved in wrangling about who said what to the EU about sourcing kit and pulling stunts such as sending the RAF for PPE in Turkey only to see the plane parked for days.

People not profit

The moment has surely now arrived to integrate our scattered largely privatised care system with the NHS and run the entire operation to meet human need rather than a source of profit ensuring fair pay and all necessary equipment for workers concerned.

However it would be a fatal error if we fall for the sub-Churchillian tale comparing today's crisis to the Battle of Britain or Dunkirk.

Indeed there is growing evidence that just such a mindset among the Johnson clique led to the mistaken idea that the British would deal with virus without much trouble.

This ended when the semi-eugenic 'Herd Immunity' strategy, which became a recipe for inaction was revealed as likely to kill up to

NHS: frontline staff are still not being provided with the kit they need to properly protect themselves and their patients



250,000 citizens. A panicking government has been running hard to get up to speed since and, as the PPE crisis shows, is running still.

What the crisis has laid bare is not just the incompetence of the Johnson government during it but in almost every aspect of policy, the fruits of 40 year neoliberal "rely on the market" lies in ruins.

Examples abound from the lack of capacity to make goggles, protective gowns and ventilators here in the UK to the nightmare of death dealing confusion in the care system built not on need but profit.

The eye watering sums of money being released has most surely killed stone dead any idea that the money isn't there to tackle problems. And of course it hangs the horrors of austerity around the necks of those politicians who enforced it.

They stand now in the dock of public opinion convicted of crimes such as the Bedroom Tax, the torture of Universal Credit, millions on poverty pay, thousands in housing misery, rampant insecure work and a relentless war on workers are their unions.

Build a new 'normal'

In 1945, after the 'blood, sweat and tears' of six years of total war, the people said 'enough' and set their hands and brains to fashioning something better including decent homes and the NHS.

With the breaking of the C-19 emergency herds of sacred cows governing how we live and

what is possible have been slaughtered and battle will now be joined in the debates about what we do next.

For the left and progressive movement the watchword must be surely no going back—build a new normal!

Policies founded on the test of meeting the needs people and planet need to be fought for. Old lefties used say that capitalist never waste a good crisis and neither should we.

A world to win

Billions handed to business should fund an extension of public ownership, of plans and skills to be put to work, not funding millions unemployed by the C-19 collapse but working for real change with people not profit at its heart.

Of course this will be bitterly resisted by the profiteers but that is a reason to fight back, not hold back.

It cannot be disputed that there is an ocean of tasks in front of us, re-skilling to produce goods and equipment to deal with the climate crisis, building thousands of rented homes, rebuilding our industrial capacity, jobs and communities, ending zero hours and poverty pay—the list goes on.

However, central to this essential task is winning the battle of ideas and breaking with the crazy profit system which trashes the planet and blights the lives of billions.

We have a world to win!

Lockdown picks: Bill Bonnar



Book: *Eleanor Marx: A Life* by Rachel Holmes

Eleanor was a key figure in the early socialist movement.

A trade union leader and founder and leader of both the Social Democratic Federation, Britain's first socialist party, and the women's suffrage movement. She had impeccable international credentials. She was Karl Marx's daughter too.

by Mike Downham

RECENTLY, I met two front-line doctors in Pakistan on a Zoom meeting. They described their work as a suicide mission. They have no PPE provided—they make what they can themselves. Health workers who protested were arrested and brutally treated.

They have three ventilators for the whole country (population 213 million), and no staff trained to use them. Anyone who gets coronavirus pneumonia dies. The government doesn't have a policy.

In India slumdwellers are being issued with hydroxychloroquine as an experiment—there's no evidence that it's effective. Getting food to these people—who, by the way, are human beings—is a bigger immediate problem than stopping infection. The government is panicking, already opening up the lockdown at a point when the epidemic is just taking off.

Yemen, after five years of civil war, has two million malnourished children. Malnutrition is notorious for reducing resistance to infections of all kinds. They don't know how much coronavirus they have in the country because they don't have tests.

As for Africa, a continent of poverty and underfunded health services, the predictions for numbers of deaths range from the terrible to the catastrophic—but how can you usefully describe the difference between hundreds of thousands of deaths and millions of deaths?

Meanwhile the Government of our rich, relatively small country, remains more concerned with covering its tracks than doing anything of significance. The Scottish Government didn't adopt a better policy than Westminster's at the point when they could have split, an act of subservience which the independence movement won't forget.

Saving lives must be our priority, and I'll come back to that.

Tackle root causes

But, first, this pandemic is a huge learning opportunity, and if we don't take action on the basis of what we learn, and begin to take action now, rather than wait until 'it's all over', there will be other pandemics of new viruses, waiting for their moment. We need to act now to tackle the root causes, not just the symptoms.

There is little doubt that this new coronavirus originated in primary forests, as did Ebola, Zika, Swine Fever, Sars and Mers. All these viruses are thought to have existed for centuries in primary forests, where they were contained by sustainable ecosystems.

The trouble started with deforestation to make way for agriculture—agriculture which

has become more and more industrialised, monocultural and as a result unsustainable.

There have been different intermediate hosts for each 'new' virus before it reached humans, and we don't yet know which hosts were involved for the Covid-19 virus.

Pigs are prime suspects, because pork has become a staple in China for the many who can now afford it. The Chinese eat an average of 39kg of pork in a year—even the Americans eat only 27kg.

This appetite for pork has fuelled a huge expansion of highly profitable production by big companies. The animals are raised in factory farms with the usual inhumane crowding and conditions. Last year 100 million pigs died in China with Swine Fever. These farms are mostly sited on newly bulldozed forest land.

The initial theory that the pandemic started in a wild animal market in Wuhan is no longer holding up, though it may have contributed.

Disrupting ecosystems

An additional factor may also have been that wild-animal foragers were forced to push deeper into forests to satisfy demand, another large and profitable food market for big business, disrupting sustainable ecosystems as they hunt.

The first thing we've learned, then, is that the profit motive on the part of big agricultural companies is the root cause of this pandemic. These companies, as we know, have expanded by grabbing forested land in poor countries—less expense, and easier to buy off protest.

The second thing we've learned is that governments, for the most part, have failed us in controlling this pandemic once it started.

The most despicable examples are the UK and USA Governments. For the UK Government to be prepared to sacrifice older people to save the shareholders is an abuse of human life which people will never forgive.

The third, and biggest thing we're learning is that we have the power to control this epidemic ourselves. London bus drivers, having failed to get adequate protection from the

Government, or from the Mayor of London, or from Transport for London, took things into their own hands.

They organised through a whatsapp group, sealed the front doors of their buses and waived fares. They were driven to this because they were dying—at the last count 30 TfL workers, bus drivers or Tube workers, have had their lives ended by corona virus infection.

Some intensive care NHS workers have decided, hospital by hospital, to refuse to work if they don't have adequate protection. NO KIT, NO CARE.

They feel they have a responsibility to make that painful decision, not only for their own survival as vitally essential workers, but also because they know that if they become infected they will pass on the virus to large numbers of both patients and other workers. They will not be complicit with intensive care units becoming coronavirus reservoirs.

Construction workers are forcing closure of non-essential sites—luxury flats and hotels for example—if they do not have adequate protection, either by persuading management to shut down, or by walking out. NO KIT, NO WORK. People not at work are setting up highly effective mutual support networks in their communities.

That's a lot to have learned in a few weeks, but it's not all.

Learning through lockdown

We're learning, through lockdown, ways of daily living that had been taken away from us—people are realising they've been working too hard, delegating too much of the care and education of their kids, delegating too much of the care of their older people, and relying too heavily on long and vulnerable supply chains for their necessities, especially food. They've learned above all that they like to have opportunities to be kind.

This pandemic isn't the biggest crisis we face. Far bigger is the crisis of global warming. Yet there are similarities between these crises.

Both are killing large numbers of people. Both are global. And the only solution is

This will happen again unless we stop it now



radical change of the economic system, mediated through participative and decentralised democracy.

Some of the things we've learned from this epidemic are directly transferable to the fight against global warming. Bulldozing primary forest is as lethal through its huge impact on global warming, as it is through the setting free of new viruses.

Capitalist scam

As we come to understand more intimately the unsustainability of monoculture of pigs we'll be able to more confidently reject the crazy proposal, supported by the Scottish Government, to replace Scotland's old forests with monoculture quick-growing trees to capture carbon, harvesting these trees frequently to burn them in power stations—'Bio Energy and Carbon Capture and Storage' or BECCS, which is nothing more than a capitalist scam.

One of the construction sites which was shut down last week on the insistence of workers was the building of a new gas power station at Keadby, near Scunthorpe. The workers saw this as work which was only essential to the company (SSE, headquarters at Perth), not to them or to the rest of us.

It's a short step from here to seeing the nonsense of building a new fossil fuel power station at the very point when we should be arguing, right now, for a Just Transition away from North Sea oil and gas. The construction workers will have jobs which are truly essential to all of us, and which will put their essential skills to better use. And we will be able to meet our carbon targets without resorting to carbon capture.

The action by London bus drivers to provide free bus travel puts us into a strong position to argue right now for publicly owned, democratically controlled, decarbonised and free public transport across the board. What's more, people are already talking about how good it is to have less traffic on the roads. They know their health is benefiting from reduced air pollution.

I'll finish by coming back to the immediate priority of saving lives. There are three things we can all do to save lives, on top of social distancing.

We can encourage people in our communities and networks, particularly older people, who develop symptoms they think may be due to coronavirus, and become breathless, to phone for an ambulance if they can't

get through to NHS 111 or their GP. It's become clear that many people are uncertain how ill they should be before calling for help, yet we've also learned that breathing difficulty can get worse rapidly, and that getting to hospital quickly gives people a better chance of being treated successfully.

This decision isn't easy to make, especially if you live on your own, or even for the people living with you. It can help to give your phone number to any older people you know so that they can at least speak with someone if they can't get NHS advice when they need it.

Hospital hesitation

Secondly, it's also become clear that some people who suddenly become ill in other ways—they think they may be having a heart attack, or a stroke, or they have breathing difficulty because of COPD or asthma which has got worse—are hesitating about going to hospital at all.

They may be frightened of catching the virus, or of putting further strain on the hospital and the ambulance service—or both. They may delay phoning, or even not phone at all.

They can be supported to understand that although there is a risk of catching the virus if they go into hospital, the risk of not going into hospital is more certain.

Paramedics are reporting that people are dying at home with these common non-Covid emergencies—or getting to hospital too late to be treated successfully.

For more detail on the last two points, go to actionagainstausterityblog.wordpress.com

Thirdly, we can join the swelling chorus of people demanding better PPE and testing in care-homes—for the sake of both residents and workers.

Care home deaths

It's an on-going scandal that the Government continues to be slow to respond to the needs of care homes, and to be less than open about the numbers of deaths of people in care homes caused by this virus.

In France, where care-home deaths have been added to hospital deaths in daily reports since early in their epidemic, around 50 per cent of all Covid deaths have been in care homes. The lack of respect shown by the UK Government for people dying in care homes by not even counting them is despicable.

This pandemic is frightening—people are dying around us in appalling numbers, and our governments have failed us.

But the virus has brought with it a determination among people everywhere to change the way our world works. Nothing could be worse than a return to 'normality'.

by Richie Venton,
SSP national workplace organiser

NOBODY WANTS the so-called lockdown to continue indefinitely. But for the preservation of human life, it's absolutely essential. All the evidence shows it's helping to suppress the spread of this deadly killer.

The same week the UK and Scottish governments announced continuation of the lockdown until at least 7 May, there's a growing danger of premature removal of restrictions, motivated by big business profits, at terrible risk to human life.

As we warned in the previous issue of the Voice, sections of employers, the Tory party, and indeed right wing Labour figures such as Sir Keir Starmer and Tony Blair, are ramping up demands to 'reopen the economy'.

Literally as we go to press, the Scottish government has published a paper on future criteria for easing the lockdown. However well-intentioned as "the start of a conversation that treats the public like adults", the danger is it could be turned into background music for a growing chorus of demands by profit-itchy businesses to 'get back to normal'.

A dangerous stampede towards a premature exit strategy, motivated by their desire to make money, whatever the human risk.

Trump leads reckless stampede

The most glaring, grotesque display of this trend is to be found in the USA. Back on 24 March, a group of powerful billionaires (personal fortunes ranging from \$17.1billion to \$2.8billion) met Donald Trump, bombarding him to set an early date for lifting health restrictions, to reassure the money markets.

Within hours, Trump appeared on *Fox News*, declaring he would like to see the economy opened up and "just raring to go by Easter," 12 April. He gushed that it would be "a beautiful timeline because Easter is such a beautiful day."

Just days later, Trump handed over \$500billion in a bailout of big business. Not content with being subsidised to the hilt, many business moguls persisted with their demands to reopen production.

For example, Dick Kovacevich of Wells Fargo demanded that people aged under 55 should return to work by late April, stating, "Some of them will get sick, some may even die, I don't know. Do you want to take an economic risk or a health risk? You get to choose."

Later, as the global death toll crossed the grisly landmark figure of 100,000, refrigerated lorries stacked high with human corpses stood outside hospitals in the USA, and people were buried in unmarked mass graves in a field in the Bronx.

But that same week the media emphasis switched from grim warnings of the mounting death

Resist premature stampede back to money-making

for PPE, mass testing and workers' control over health and safety

toll to talk of 'light at the end of the tunnel', with Trump advocating the US "open with a big bang."

Now Trump is actively encouraging right-wing demonstrations to 'lift the lockdown'.

British bosses put profit first

This mounting pressure to put what they call 'the economy' before public health is not restricted to the USA.

We've seen an intensification of aggressive national capitalist rivalries, in the face of a global pandemic that knows no borders. They not only grab hold of safety equipment intended for other countries, but also ignore scientific warnings in a race to reopen production in the interests of the separate national ruling capitalist classes.

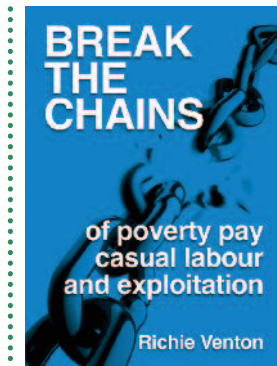
Across Europe, governments are being pressurised by the big profiteers to reopen 'business as usual', nowhere more so than in Britain. With customary brutality, the *Economist* magazine has written:

"Covid-19 (C-19) presents stark choices between life, death and the economy. It sounds hardhearted but a dollar figure on life... is precisely what leaders will need if they are to see their way through the harrowing months to come. Eventually even if many people are dying, the cost of distancing could outweigh the benefits."

What the Tories really mean

We suffer the grotesque spectacle of Tory Scottish Secretary of State, Alistair Jack, declaring: "I would hate it if we come out the other side and the poverty that came from a broken economy killed more people than C-19. We know from previous analysis of recessions and depressions that poverty kills."

Lockdown picks:
Andy Brown



Book: **Break the Chains** by **Richie Venton** **BUY NOW!**
Clear, simple and readable critique of the inherent conflict and contradictions within the capitalist system. Provides transitional demands to point the way forward and end exploitation. Indispensable.

There should be no doubting what these voices of big business really mean, behind their honeyed words of 'concern'.

When they speak of 'the economy' they actually mean the profits of a tiny clique who own the bulk of the economy.

When they express concern about people's mental health being damaged through social isolation, these are the very same class of business owners who have generated an epidemic of mental illness before C-19 ever appeared.

They've caused record levels of mental illness through insecure jobs; alienation at work from total lack of control by workers, even over their working hours; poverty pay; and horrendous physical and mental pressure by them overworking a shrinking workforce in pursuit of maximum profit.

The same Tories, like Alistair Jack, who belatedly stumble on the truth that poverty kills, preside over a system built to consciously create poverty for millions to provide the wealth of a few millionaires—in the full knowledge that poverty kills.

They have systematically dismantled wages, benefits, sick pay, and the health service in a fashion that's caused countless avoidable deaths.

The same Tories listened to and echoed the same big business voices by not calling a halt to non-essential production in good time, and thereby caused thousands of unnecessary infections and deaths in February-March, as they let C-19 rip through the population, with their ruthless theory of 'herd immunity', until they eventually conceded a partial lockdown on 24 March.

They couldn't give a damn about workers' health. Their one concern is owners' wealth. They are quite prepared to sacrifice human life on the altar of their great god—profit.

The Tories are just as liable to prematurely end these precautionary measures as they were reluctant to introduce them, for the same reasons: not wanting to undermine private profiteering, putting what they misleadingly call 'the economy' before public health, profit before people, regardless of how many are slaughtered in the hunt for renewed production and sales.

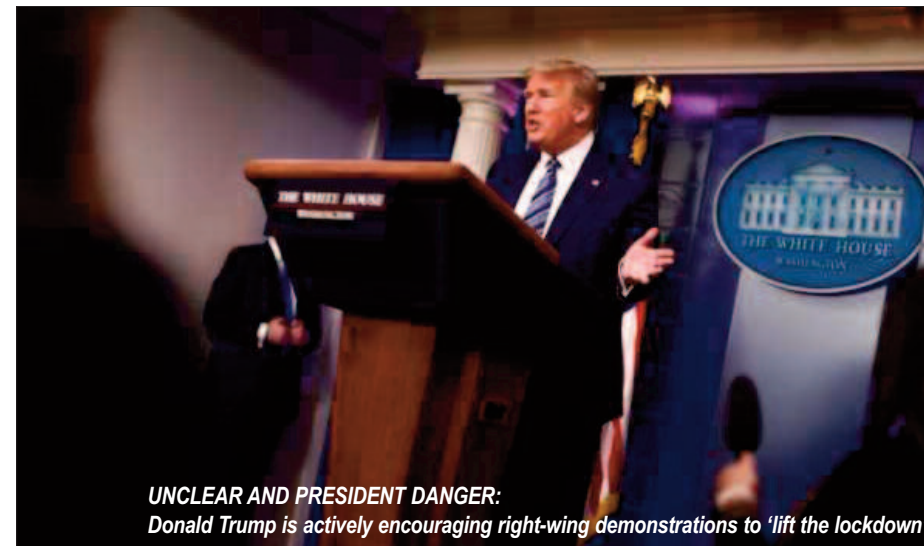
Scientists warn of catastrophe

An array of eminent scientists, nationally and internationally, are warning against premature removal of lockdown restrictions.

The World Health Organisation has warned it could lead to a deadly resurgence of the disease, which in turn could force governments to reinstate even more severe lockdowns.

They warn that there is no conclusive evidence that people who have contracted C-19 then become immune to it.

Reports from South Korea and China indicate people who had recovered from it have caught it a second time, which further punctures the callous nonsense of relying on 'herd immunity'.



Voices from the front line

Professor Helen Ward,
Department of Infectious
Disease Epidemiology,
Imperial College London

IT'S VERY sad that so many people have died and so many more are desperately ill because politicians refused to listen to advice.

We said lockdown earlier, we said test, trace, isolate. But they decided they knew better.

There will be a reckoning and it will not be forgiving.



Professor Helen Ward

Professor of Virology at the University of Surrey, Nicholas Locker, recently stated “You can’t lift the lockdown as long as you’re not testing massively. As long as the government is not testing in the community we’re going to be on lockdown.”

Editor of *The Lancet* magazine, Richard Horton, says: “It’s wrong to say we don’t have an exit strategy. We do. What is missing are the plans for its implementation. Surveillance, early detection, isolation, contact tracing, monitoring, real time estimates for the speed of spread of the virus.”

Mass testing, tracing, isolation

Emphasising that much more needs to be done than the current partial lockdown, the Institute for Global Health at University College London has a different plan they calculate will avert 353,000 UK deaths.

It includes mass testing of everyone; contact tracing for those testing positive; care and thorough isolation; proper provision of PPE for workers in essential services, such as the NHS, care workers and those in food supplies.

They advocate weekly testing for everyone, which would require 10 million a day, something they estimate is possible to virtually reach by August. The same experts estimate this would require 70,000 public health workers (about 6-7,000 in Scotland).

But there is no evidence the government has such plans. They have failed to provide PPE of the quantity or quality required to frontline staff putting their own lives on the line to care for others.

The alleged ‘Health’ Secretary Hancock recently advised hospital staff to wash and re-use contaminated gowns, and blamed the scarcity of PPE not on supplies organised by his government, but on how much NHS staff use it! Nurses have died of C-19 after complaining of lack of proper protection.

The Tories’ promises of 100,000 tests a day at the end of April sound increasingly hollow and insulting as they only just reach the figure of 18-20,000 daily. Every day, the 5pm UK government briefing claims progress on testing and PPE, followed an hour later by TV news horror stories of hospital staff and care workers left unprotected and untested, with increased numbers pronounced dead as a result.

Concrete safety measures

Rather than allow workers become victims of a premature stampede back to ‘business as usual’, the unions have a particular duty to demand a concrete plan of safety measures before non-essential businesses reopen.

Not just empty promises of such measures from a government shown to have lied and prevaricated throughout, but actual concrete supplies and measures already in place.



NO, MINISTER!
Health Secretary Matt Hancock recently advised hospital staff to wash and re-use contaminated gowns, and blamed the scarcity of PPE not on supplies organised by his government, but on how much NHS staff use it

Those would need to include recruitment of a vast army to conduct mass testing of the population without stripping frontline workers from other lifeline services.

‘Test, trace and isolate’ needs to be transformed from a mantra to a material reality before it’s safe to consider reopening non-essential businesses. Isolation for those who test positive should include safe, caring health facilities, not just being stuck at home with others in the family, when the evidence from China suggests most transmission occurs within families or households.

Seize production to match needs

It should include demands for the government to take over appropriate production units for the emergency, sustained supply of quality PPE for

Lockdown picks: Jim McVicar

Film: *Zulu Dawn* directed by Douglas Hickox, score by Elmer Bernstein
An excellent film which highlights the arrogance of British imperialism during their colonisation of Africa.

Ten Days That Shook the World
by John Reed

The book is an excellent eyewitness account of the Russian Revolution and the events of 1917 that took the Bolsheviks to power.



Voices from the front line

Nan, a care-home worker

WE HAVE about 120 staff in two buildings in the care home. One of the buildings claims to have no Covid-19 cases, although we don’t know for certain because there are no tests done. The other building has five people tested positive and two other residents have already died.

We’re being shunted around from one building to the other all the time, because there’s not enough staff.

The only protective equipment we’ve got are gloves and plastic aprons. And even they are being rationed with the manager handing them out two or three times a day.

We now have face goggles but only if we are dealing with somebody who already definitely has the virus, after being tested. And there are only two of these face shields for the whole workforce, even though 25 or so are in the infected unit at any time. We’re told to wash them after use and re-use them.

The cleaning situation is a nightmare. A lot of the housekeepers (cleaners) are off sick, with very few in. Those who are at work are quite rightly refusing to do overtime because they are only offered £2-an-hour extra, whereas the rest of us get time-and-a-half if it’s overtime with a week’s notice, or double time for a last minute shift.

One of the housekeepers has been told they would be disciplined if they didn’t go into the infected unit.

There is no testing of staff at all. We have about 40 off with symptoms, or at least they think they might have, but have not been tested. That adds to the pressure of staffing levels and adds to the dangers, by us swapping buildings all the time.

all workers in the firing line. It’s brilliant and life-affirming to see networks of people sewing scrubs for NHS staff in their homes, but the scale of mass production required can only be organised by the state.

Which raises the need for the government to take over major companies to coordinate armies of workers producing—in safe conditions—all the safety equipment for NHS, care, food retail, and other essential services staff.

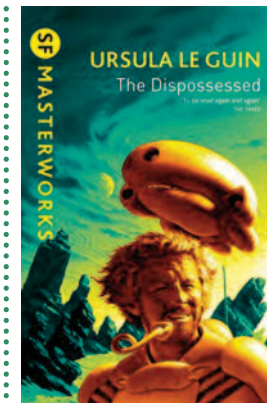
Likewise, rather than the unseemly squabble between different nations for supplies of masks, scrubs, ventilators and Intensive Care Units, the government should commandeer factories to produce all that is needed, in the same fashion industries were taken over by governments for war production during World War Two.

We cannot rely on the whims of the capitalist market to meet the life and death needs of workers and their families.

This whole crisis has heavily emphasised the critical importance of organised trade unions and collective action. It took intense lobbying by union reps, and mass walkouts by workers in many cases, to gradually force employers to introduce basic safety standards, or to shut down non-essential workplaces, with the demand for 100% average pay.

The RCN and Royal College of Anaesthetists are both rightly advising members to reluctantly refuse to work without adequate PPE, after the

Lockdown picks: Sandra Webster



Book: *The Dispossessed* by Ursula Le Guin
Protagonist Shevek, a physicist from the moon Urras, travels to Annarres, a planet that sent anarchist revolutionaries to the barren moon of Urras. The revolution was led by a woman, Odo.

latter’s survey found one in every five lacks proper PPE, and one in four feels pressurised to fit ventilators on C-19 patients, unprotected.

For workers’ control of health

At workplace level, this whole experience underlines the importance of workers’ control of health and safety, through elected shop stewards and Health & Safety reps.

Such bodies need to be revived or established in every workplace, applying concrete demands for safer working conditions where they are already at work, or before non-essential production or sales resume.

These to include reorganisation of workplaces to guarantee safe social distancing; deep cleans and intensified daily cleaning routines; screens, masks, surgical wipes and increased washing facilities; full average pay for vulnerable workers to self-isolate, or to shield vulnerable family members; and the right to refuse work when feeling endangered, as already exists as a right on paper, under Health & Safety legislation.

Mass, weekly, professional testing at workplace level, as well as in the community, would be a major strand to any serious plan towards reviving production, sales and public transport.

Through this whole process it’s right there needs to be a plan on when and how to ease lockdown. But workers’ union representatives, alongside scientists, need to be fully involved in decision-making, not just told what senior management have already decided in their absence.

Workers’ voices must be heard

It’s welcome that Nicola Sturgeon has established a panel to look at this scenario, but very unwelcome that the unions are not represented on it, certainly not so far.

The initial members of the SNP government’s Advisory Group on Economic Recovery gives us a warning glimpse of the ‘business as usual’ outlook of that government. It’s to be led by Benny Higgins, former Chief Executive of Tesco Bank for ten years, after stints as a top boss in RBS and HBOS.

His first comrade-in-arms is Sir Anton Muscatelli, overpaid Principal of the University of Glasgow, not best known for his support for striking staff or protesting students!

Both at national level and in each workplace the expertise and knowledge of workers themselves needs to be harnessed to ensure the safest possible working arrangements regardless of the impact on short-term profits.

We need to organise resistance to any premature return to capitalist ‘business as usual’.

Workers’ lives must come before the profits of the parasitic plunderers.

by Colin Fox, SSP national co-spokesperson

JEREMY CORBYN was the most Left-wing leader Labour ever had. Bernie Sanders was the most Left-Wing presidential nominee the Democrats ever had.

Both have gone, replaced by Right-wingers, without securing a single advance for working people. Their followers, like *The Guardian* columnist Owen Jones believe they 'radically altered our politics' and 'unquestionably repositioned' both parties to the Left. An objective analysis must surely be more honest and critical.

The shelves of countless university libraries will soon be full of expensive academic tomes explaining how Corbyn led Labour to its worst General Election defeat since 1935.

His inept campaign saw the Tories stroll to an 80 seat majority in 'The Brexit election' Corbyn welcomed. This was a man who opposed Britain's membership of the EU for 40 years, then called for a Remain vote (because he had just become leader) before 'fudging' the most important political conflict in 80 years.

Electoral oblivion

In his desperation to ignore 'Brexit' he misplayed the 'radical' parts of his programme (on massive public spending increases, public ownership and justice for the WASPI women). But in the process he threw totemic Left-wing policies onto the flames of electoral oblivion.

The antipathy towards Corbyn was already clear across large parts of working class Britain. Few, not least in Scotland, believed he had the leadership skills needed to deliver 'radical' change and the election campaign rather confirmed it.

His successor Sir Keir Starmer, Labour's first Knight of the Realm leader, will milk Corbyn's demise to insist 'Left-Wing ideas are unpopular and

Corbyn, Sanders posed no 'serious disturbance to the vested interests'



AND IT'S GOODNIGHT FROM THEM: Corbyn and Sanders talked the talk behind the banners of non-socialist parties

lose elections'. The fact is the Corbynmania witnessed in some quarters after 2015 was a pitiful delusion, the apparent belief that Labour provided a route to socialism in Britain, one moreover that did not apparently involve rank and file resistance of any kind.

'Wait for Labour—Leave it to Jeremy' was the variation on an old message, 'working class people don't need to do anything'.

Antonio Gramsci warned about the foolishness of such a 'messiah complex' a century ago. For Gramsci it did not reveal a high level of consciousness rather a low one based on working class passivity.

The record of previous Labour governments—slashing the benefits of single parents, privatising public services, launching illegal wars, introducing tuition fees—were all erased from memory.

The leopard had apparently changed its spots because Corbyn had become leader.

The Sandernistas were just as culpable in attempting to defy the laws of political science and history.

There are reasons why Bernie Sanders never joined

the Democratic Party. No self-respecting socialist in the USA ever would. And yet he sought their nomination, twice!

This is the party of Hilary Clinton—whom Sanders endorsed in 2016 much to the chagrin of his supporters and to the great discredit of every 'socialist' word he ever uttered! This is the party of Bill Clinton, JFK, LBJ and numerous other capitalist warmongers.

'What then did these two movements leave behind for future generations of socialists to build upon?' That is surely the fundamental question their supporters must address. And the answer is very little.

They bequeathed no socialist organisation stronger than the one they inherited. Rather, they fostered dangerous illusions in two capitalist parties.

Neither Labour nor the Democrats have ever sought to emancipate working class people. Both are part of the political establishment, neoliberal, more pro-capitalist now than ever and more imperialist too.

What challenges face socialists today then in the wake of Corbyn and Sanders' defeats and a world reshaped by the Covid-19 pandemic?

There is widespread speculation about the impact the C-19 pandemic will have on the economy and class relations when it finally fades out.

Writing in the *Sunday Times*, one influential business commentator Irwin Stelzer suggests it could be profound. Globalisation's central philosophy, he concludes, has been undermined by this pandemic.

Governments will now insist on playing a much larger part in the economy and 'managed trade' will dominate 'as the age of globalisation comes to an end'. And capitalism will face much more stringent regulation of its operations.

Stelzer reminds us of the view John Maynard Keynes, the famous academic, economist and philosopher took after that other acute crisis, the 1930s depression, which he said represented 'a serious disturbance to the vested interests'.

Militant commitment

The 'social democracy' that forced capitalism to concede the welfare state, public housing provision, public ownership and higher living standards did so through the mass mobilisation of working class people into strong trade unions and Left-wing parties.

Those movements were successful because they posed a threat to capitalism itself and relied upon high levels of class consciousness and a militant commitment to socialist ideas.

These phenomena are unfortunately in short supply today and yet without such parties, like the Scottish Socialist Party, the changes so urgently required in our post-pandemic age will not be forthcoming.

Covid-19 'a failure of US capitalism at every level'

by Bill Bonnar

PICTURE THE scene. A large piece of derelict waste ground. Tractors are digging up the earth to create a mass grave. A little way off are rows of cheap cardboard coffins filled with dead bodies ready to be loaded into the mass grave.

One would think it was a scene from a so-called third world country which has recently undergone some kind of cataclysmic event. In fact, welcome to the Bronx in New York.

Those being buried have families too poor to afford the cost of a funeral; and are being provided with paupers graves by the local authorities. Only those being buried now number in the hundreds.

Nothing better illustrates the impact of coronavirus on the greatest city in the richest and most powerful country in the world.

Nothing better illustrates the impact on a society in which millions of people live in poverty with little or no health care or social security provision.

America's response to the crisis represents a failure of government. It also represents a failure of capitalism.

This was highlighted most effectively by Bernie Sanders who showed that the main thrust of the US governments response was to protect American capitalism, in particular big business, protect the interests of the private health care system and to blame everyone else for the crisis.

Trump, rabbit, headlights

In descending order this crisis has been caused by the Chinese Government, the World Health Organisation, the Democrat controlled Congress, Democrat controlled states and cities and sections of the media. No doubt illegal immigrants are to follow.

With a Presidential election due in November the Trump administration knows there will be a backlash when the full extent of the crisis and the failure of government becomes clear to the American people. The president's initial response was that of a rabbit caught in headlights.

He first denied there was a problem accusing others of scare mongering; he then said the problem was being exaggerated



MASS GRAVES IN NEW YORK: America's response to the C-19 crisis represents a failure of government. It also represents a failure of capitalism

and it was only when a state of emergency was declared in New York that he was forced to act.

That action consisted of two things; a fiscal package aimed at protecting big business from the economic impact of the crisis and the most minimal lock down measures imaginable.

In fact when individual states, after listening to expert advice; imposed their own more draconian measures he denounced them and urged people in those states to defy the lock down, rise up in 'defence of freedom and liberty' and not to listen the scientists.

After all these were the same people peddling all that nonsense about climate change. Already thousands of Americans have died while the economy has shrunk to a level not seen since the Great Depression. Millions are out of work while many sectors of the economy may never recover.

It represents a colossal failure of the kind of free market, neo-liberal system so recently promoted both sides of the Atlantic. The United States has a highly developed capitalist system yet one which leaves tens of millions of its citizens floundering in poverty and economic insecurity with no social security or health protection.

It is that section of the population which has been left brutally exposed by coronavirus. The contrast with other major capitalist countries is now self-evident.

Almost without exception these countries have large state institutions, well developed national health services and extensive social welfare provision. In other words when in times of crisis the state comes to the rescue.

In America, the political backlash is already looking increasingly disturbing. While many have warmed to the message articulated by Bernie Sanders and others there has also been a disturbing rise in racism and xenophobia.

Coming to America

A narrative has been developing which blames immigrants and ethnic minorities for spreading the virus; a virus coming to America from an enemy power. It is a narrative fuelled by many of the statements from Trump and his entourage.

The message from socialists in America, and there are many, is clear. Do not blame immigrants or minorities, foreign governments, and international institutions.

This is a failure of American capitalism at every level. The scenes in the Bronx in New York resembled that of an underdeveloped country in the middle of a crisis. That is because for millions of Americans they do live in an underdeveloped country.

Many will now look abroad, compare the responses in other countries and hopefully draw the correct conclusions.

North Sea workers and the virus

Voice Exclusive

by Jake Molloy, RMT Regional Organiser

THE RMT has demanded government intervention to save lives, jobs and energy resources in the North Sea. We continue to battle the virus itself and employers who are attacking jobs rather than engage to protect the future. Furlough protections have been secured for RMT and sister Union members covered by offshore catering and contractor agreements, but these protections need to be extended immediately to all offshore workers, whether they are on a day rate, temporary or full time contract.

We have achieved the establishment of 'Corona Copters' demanded by workers for evacuation of Covid-19 (C-19) sufferers, but the reception facilities on installations and on land for many offshore workers advised to self-isolate are often woeful and are causing further spread of the infection in some cases.

The employers' body, OGUK, has claimed that a standardised approach promoting best practice cannot be achieved. We and our sister unions disagree. This unwillingness to adopt a standardised approach is made all the worse as some workers now face disciplinary action for alleged breaches of some patently inadequate individual company C-19 procedures.

Testing programme

Oil & Gas UK have now invited the combined offshore trade unions (Offshore Coordinating Group) to sit on their "Pandemic Steering Group", which is dealing with issues arising from the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. We have submitted proposals we want to see adopted by the industry, as they reflect what our members are telling us.

We want a system whereby all workers are tested prior to mobilisation to any offshore installation. We feel this is reasonably practicable and should be established at the earliest opportunity.

Additionally, as and when workers are removed from an installation with suspected symptoms, and prior to a decision being taken on their travel home, we want a testing programme introduced.

This could be done in a clinical setting, by using an airport hotel as a pre-mobilisation/demobilisation point, which would also allow



CORONA COPTERS:
the RMT has achieved the establishment of 'Corona Copters' demanded by workers for evacuation of Covid-19 sufferers

workers to be isolated if necessary. We want a comprehensive travel plan developed that covers workers getting safely from their home to offshore and back home.

This would cover travel to/from mobilisation points and compliance with social distancing guidelines, helicopter travel and recommended maximum passengers numbers for aircraft type.

We have asked that the industry works with key partners in airports and air traffic facilities to put in place a schedule which allows social distancing within air traffic and airport facilities, while maintaining operational cover. Without these workers the industry cannot continue to operate in a safe manner.

We have called for all non-essential work to stop now and that workers are stood down at home and placed into the government's furloughed worker scheme.

We think that 'non-essential' work would mean all work outwith the scope of those services which are critical to maintaining safe production operations and life support/welfare services. This should in many cases also allow single occupancy of cabins, and reduce the risk of contracting C-19, something which hasn't been achieved on a number of installations.

As this crisis has developed we have encountered several examples of what we would consider to be 'good practice'.

We have asked OGUK to post details on their website of those actions which we consider to be 'best practice', sharing information which might alert others to adopt a similar approach.

We are requesting that ALL workers being stood down, or those at risk of being laid off, are placed into the government-funded furloughed worker scheme.

We want this done irrespective of whether it is anticipated that work will be available at the end of the crisis or not.

We ask this is done to ensure we have the resilience to get through this crisis as analysts are predicting that upwards of 40 per cent of employees could at any time be off sick, and we do not believe we have as yet reached the peak of this crisis.

Critical pool of labour

We also believe that if all non-essential work is postponed for the period, along with shutdown works and others, there will be a high demand on labour.

Maintaining a substantial pool of labour may be critical if we are to meet the labour demands during and after the crisis period.

Our final proposal was that all non-UK domiciled workers are placed in the furlough scheme. We believe the risks associated with workers travelling to and from countries outwith the UK gives rise to unnecessary risks to them, their families, the wider public and the offshore workforce. We want them considered as 'shielding' workers.

RMT members have helped deliver government revenues of £52.765billion and an average return of 13 per cent on oil and gas investment since 2008. The industry must not be allowed to discard these workers and their families at this time of crisis.