

# WORKERS' fight



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*"The emancipation of the working class will only be achieved by the working class itself" (Karl Marx)*

# THREATENING WORKERS' LIVES TO SAVE BOSSES' PROFITS!

Now that Johnson has opened up new ways for the coronavirus to transmit itself, we're meant to rely on "British common sense" to "save lives"! Yes, as opposed to any other kind of sense - and as opposed to most science, except the science which his government is "driven" by.

So no wonder Johnson has been so vague and has summoned up his stock of nationalist hot air. He needs to cover for the fact that this lockdown was started too late, applied too loosely and is now being ended too early. And the fact that the virus has caused more deaths here than anywhere else, except the US.

But he must also cover up the real reason for this relaxation - which is all about putting the bosses and their profits (the "economy"! ) ahead of the lives and health of the population. Governments have always done this. But this time, we're in the middle of an almost unprecedented pandemic. And that makes Johnson's irresponsible, air-headed approach nothing short of criminal.

## **A real recession**

The economy is now in recession. On 7 May, the Bank of England warned of the deepest downturn since 1706! But it also said that if the lockdown was ended by June, the economic damage could be limited to a 14% shrinkage. And this is why Johnson changed tack, finding data to show that the "British people" have brought down "R" (rate of transmission of C-19) - and so no longer have to "stay home"!

ONS figures show the economy already shrank by 5.8% in March, but that includes only one week of lockdown. Figures for April-July may show a shrinkage by 24-30%!

So it wasn't a surprise that Sunak



should extend the 4-month furlough to 8 months (maybe reducing its cover to 60% of wages), giving bosses more time to sort themselves out. But this isn't just a direct subsidy to them. It's a subsidy for redundancies!

Yes, as was seen with Rolls Royce and British Airways, who put thousands of their workers onto furlough and then announced that their jobs were cut!

5% of the workforce have already lost their jobs. There were 2.5m new Universal Credit claimants last month. Official unemployment may increase to "over 9%" we are told.

The bosses are desperate to get profits flowing in. So like magic, they're presenting workers with instant "Covid-secure", socially distanced workplaces. But workers know that they cannot trust the bosses on safety, not as far as they can throw them!

## **Afraid of the working class?**

There's another side to this, however. Newspapers have been making comparisons between the Covid crisis and the Black Death, which lasted from 1347 to 1351. It was the worst

pandemic in human history, killing up to 200 million. But the reason they raise this, is because it also sparked the first real fights against exploitation by peasant labourers against feudal landlords, causing wages to rise and working conditions to improve.

Maybe the bosses don't anticipate that so many workers will die that they'll have to pay over the odds to compete for their labour. But they'd be right to worry about the capacity of workers to come together collectively to oppose their attempt to force some back to work and others onto the dole.

What's more, there is every reason for workers to insist that essential work only, should be allowed to begin - and that this work should be shared out among all of the available workers in way that allows hours to be cut for everyone, while pay is maintained. Obviously, the priority has to be to keep exposure to Covid-19 to an absolute minimum. And the only way the working class can be sure that will happen, is if it takes charge itself. □

## Johnson's return

If Boris Johnson was changed by his close encounter with Covid-19, there's no sign of it. Quoting the Roman senator Cicero, just before his return to Downing street on 27 April he said that for him, "the health of the people should be the supreme law". And then promptly bowed to pressure from his masters' voices in the City and started to relax the lockdown, thus endangering the "health of the people"! But then again, he himself has recovered from the virus, so no problem!

### We won't forget what he did

Does he think everyone has forgotten that he and his government are to blame for the multiple-seeding of the coronavirus into the population? How, during the most critical first phase of the pandemic,

## How much more irresponsible can Johnson get?

he gave the go-ahead for 150,000 people to attend the Cheltenham horse races and thousands to go to a Liverpool football match on the weekend of 11-13 March? His delay in instituting a lockdown and its very loose implementation thereafter, means that Britain now has the highest Covid-19 death rate in Europe - likely to be 50,000 so far, if all available Office for National Statistics figures are used.

Of course, it was not only the refusal to follow the (real) science, already tested elsewhere, but his lame duck government's utter inability to organise anything properly, which made everything a hundred times worse. Whether it was procurement of PPE, getting the right kind of ventilator or virus tests. And now mass testing, tracing and isolating is relegated to the future!

Johnson actually said that the last

thing he wanted was to risk a 2nd peak of deaths by ending the lockdown too soon, but at the very same time, a second peak was developing among the elderly in social care.

### We know not to trust him

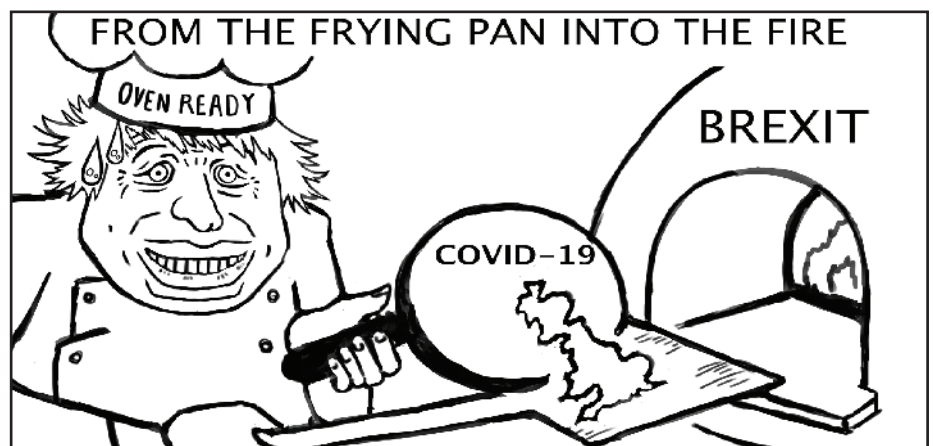
We now know that ending the lockdown, under instruction from the bosses, was exactly what Johnson had in store. And that he was just distancing himself in advance from the consequences. In fact he can now blame the public for not "staying alert" enough to "control the virus" and "save lives" - as the new slogan goes.

However the given the (internationalist!) common sense of "the people", as opposed to his "British" Brexiteer nonsense, we know who really is to blame. □

## • Still digging the Brexit ditch

Even in the middle of a the worst pandemic in history, the government is still posturing over Johnson's "oven-ready Brexit" and asserting its determination to leave the EU. So on 7 May, when the SNP's Ian Blackford asked once more for a 2-year extension to the transition period, fearing a "no-deal" Brexit because of the Covid-crisis, Michael Gove quickly jumped in to say that the government "did not want the UK to continue with its European Union-lite membership beyond December" as a way to "save taxpayers' money"..! Of course what Gove "wants" will not necessarily be what he gets. Brexit is not likely to be immune from the coronavirus!

Indeed, only one round of "leave" negotiations has taken place so far because two sessions were cancelled when both Michel Barnier, the EU negotiator, and David Frost, the British envoy, tested positive for Covid-19! The next scheduled meeting in



June is meant to be about fishing rights, i.e., a chance for more posturing about "taking back control of Britain's waters". Never mind that the fishermen have had

to be bailed out by the government with a £10m "lifeline" because their export market collapsed as a result of the Covid-crisis. Yes, 80% of their catch is sold... in the EU.

## • Nasty Brexit legacy

Johnson singled out the nurses from New Zealand and Portugal who'd watched over him while he was in intensive care, for special thanks. Yet his government's policy is to treat such workers as a burden on the same NHS which they serve. Since 2015, all workers from outside the EU, Switzerland, Norway or Iceland, on visas for longer than 6 months, have paid an up front surcharge for the right to use NHS services, as part of the visa fee - even those working for the NHS! The ConDems set it at £200 per year, May's government doubled it to £400 and in March Sunak raised it to £624, with a charge of £470 per child! Moreover, all EU workers will now also be surcharged from the end of the December due to Brexit!

By implementing this surcharge and implying that overseas migrants were "spongers", Cameron hoped to muzzle his own bigoted backbenchers, stopping the haemorrhage of votes to UKIP and swinging votes

behind "Remain" in the 2016 referendum. But this just legitimised the demands of the far right - and one of the results was Brexit. So, after his sentimental guff about the NHS being "powered by love", will Johnson's Home Office now retain this anti-immigrant NHS levy? Or drop it?

### • PPE: lying about why we don't have it

The fact that the government hasn't procured enough Personal Protective Equipment is an ongoing scandal. As we know now, ministers had the chance to participate in a joint PPE procurement effort, launched in late January by the EU pandemic response group. But after attending initial meetings, Brexit-minded ministers made a conscious decision to "go it alone", thus putting their political bigotry before the lives of the British population. And then proceeded to lie about this, not once, but over and over, desperate to avoid blame,

as front-line NHS and care workers started dying from Covid-19 due to lack of effective protection.

Ministers first said they'd missed a deadline for placing their order, due to a "miscommunication", implying it was the EU's fault. Then a top civil servant admitted to a Commons select committee that Britain's non-participation was a political decision. But he was forced to withdraw this statement after Health Secretary Hancock explained at a press conference that Britain was still part of the EU scheme! However, said Hancock, this scheme hadn't delivered anything, implying yet again, that the EU was the problem. Another lie. As the EU procurement group immediately confirmed, Britain had opted out of the scheme and was welcome to opt back in if it wished, since it was still in the EU until December 2020. But ministers are sticking to their go-it-alone stance, while the PPE shortage continues to kill.

## Covid's British "success" story

How has Britain ended up with such a high death rate? There are the obvious reasons, of course, starting with Boris Johnson's denial that it was a problem - and his famous hand-shaking with Covid patients, just 2 days before the first death from the virus in Britain. Or his dropping of quarantine arrangements for those arriving from affected countries, just when they were really needed - apparently because "Sir" Patrick Vallance, chief scientific advisor, had the idea that the virus should be allowed to rip through the population and induce "herd immunity" in those who survived. A peculiar kind of

science, given that at the time the immune response to the Covid-19 virus was little understood - and still isn't... But of course the biggest immediate factor in the spread of Covid was the late institution of the lock-down - and what may keep the rate of infection up, is its early lifting.

Behind Johnson's irresponsible ineptitude, however, the "success" of this virus is undoubtedly due to the lack of adequate means to deal with it. Everything had been run down, whether government stockpiles for dealing with pandemics, or the public sector infrastructure which should have been able to coordinate a

## Covid-19 crisis

response - beginning with the NHS. Of course, from the 1980s onwards all public institutions were subjected to the profit motive via a brutal programme of cuts and outsourcing. Care homes are now almost entirely in the private "for profit" sector. As for the NHS, it was finally dismantled as a "national" body by the Conservative-LibDem coalition's 2010/11 Health and Social Care Act. This also abolished health authorities which had previously administered public health locally and were thus crucial in disease control. Today we're paying the price for these policies, counted in corpses. □

### • **Fraudulent statistics to cover up deaths**

The government's "scientific" advisors have presented graphs and statistics every day, to "explain" the progress of the Covid-19 outbreak. But their methods have little to do with science. Good statistics need good quality data. But their data was lacking right from the start. So their statistics and their graphs couldn't - and still cannot - represent the real situation. But of course that's not the aim. The aim is to provide a cover for the government's inadequacy.

Take their "new cases per day". To confirm cases, enough accurate tests need to be done. Yet even with the ramping up of tests to 100,000 per day (by 13 May 2,094,209 in total), they don't get close to number of tests needed in order to monitor the progress of the disease. So the "new cases" statistic ends up reflecting the too-low testing capacity - and little else. And up to now most of the tests were targeted only at those with symptoms.

As for "daily deaths", it was only 7 weeks into the lockdown that care home and community deaths were included in the total. But death notifications are notoriously delayed, so the count given for "the day" actually represents deaths from previous



days or even weeks before. So how can they pretend they know for sure whether there is a real trend - up, flat, or down?

Then we come to the famous "R-zero". "If we all #StayAlert and follow the rules, we can control the virus by keeping the rate of infection (R) and the number of new cases down" tweeted Johnson on 11 May. But again, there's a problem. To have a really accurate measure of "R" we need a much better idea of the number of infected people, ideally through mass-testing, which

we don't get. So the "R" value, said to be below 1, is really a guess... And to keep it down, yes, mass testing, tracking and contact tracing followed by isolation of those infected, would be mandatory. But the government is nowhere near being able to do this.

All of this said, the fact is, that using inaccurate data and skewing it to your own ends is a political choice. The problem for the government is that it's been found out: fortunately, the "science" it claims to follow is not the only science out there!

### • **Masks and gowns needed, not claps nor crocodile tears!**

Public Health England's guidelines were clear: full-length gowns, FFP3 face masks, visors or goggles, 2 pairs of gloves are mandatory when treating Covid-19 patients.

Yet the supply of this PPE has fallen short, time and again. Health Secretary Hancock's promise of 55,000 gowns on April 17 covered only 8 hours of supply: at that point, the NHS was using 150,000 gowns/day! As for the 400,000 gowns ordered from Turkey, only 67,000 had arrived by early May and only 4,500 passed quality tests. With supplies running low, Public Health England revised its guidelines, advising that front-line workers could wear plastic aprons instead of gowns!

As a result, hospitals have been forced to find their own PPE. But now the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has banned them from doing so. It claims that "NHS organisations compete with each other for the

same supplies"! Never mind that in reality, hospital trusts share their stocks! Anyway, which PPE is the DHSC talking about? The PPE stuck in transit in Turkey, or the PPE which subcontractors like G4S, Serco, Mitie, Boots are meant to find, under the "central" command of Deloitte - to whom the government has now outsourced procurement? It even outsourced the "app" for monitoring supply and demand! Yes, nothing like aiding and abetting their friends' profiteering out of a crisis!

### • **Care homes or death homes?**

To date (12 May) there've been 9,700 Covid-19 positive deaths in care homes. And far more adding those not tested. By now the elderly in care comprise 40% of total Covid deaths.

This is the result of deliberate neglect aggravated by an acute shortage of PPE. Even when care homes were included in the government's distribution scheme, they only received a day's supply of basic items! Masks had to be rationed to 1/day, plastic aprons

rather than proper gowns had to be worn - and no visors were provided.

Little wonder that up to 20 April, 131 social care workers had also died of the virus - the highest toll among key workers. Many are agency staff paid a pittance and sent from home to home with no protection against catching or spreading the virus. It's scandalous: the government knew full well that the elderly in care were more likely to die of this virus. Yet no special protective measures were put in place. Quite the opposite. The very old were asked to sign "do not resuscitate" orders and were denied critical care hospital beds if they got ill, while Covid positive patients were discharged from hospitals into care homes. Testing of residents was limited. Only now are staff being screened, but it's late in the day.

It's insulting that a £500 "gift" for Welsh care workers should be thought of as a reward. or that "clapping for carers" is meant to make them feel better. Nothing can compensate for the fact that care workers and the elderly have been thrown to the wolves by this government.

## Crisis watch

So far, 7.5m workers (almost a quarter of the workforce) have been furloughed on to Chancellor Sunak's Coronavirus Job Retention scheme (CJRS), getting at east 80% of their wage. This number will almost certainly rise, with even more companies expected to furlough workers over the next months, given the scheme has now been extended to October.

Of course if you are low-paid, you can't live on 80% of very little, and the CJRS offers nothing to workers who were sacked. So much for job retention! Two 2 million (likely to rise to 3.5m) of these workers have already become new Universal Credit claimants, on unemployment benefit.

On the other hand, company bosses and shareholders haven't had to fork out a penny of their own money as a result of this crisis. Their costs have been cut, business rates frozen, tax returns postponed and free loans and cash injections offered! What's

## A £42bn subsidy for how many job cuts?



**Rolls Royce factory in Derby - 8,000 jobs at risk**

more, their wage bill is being paid for them: the £42bn estimated cost of CJRS up to June, is literally a subsidy of public money to the capitalist class.

But of course the intention of the CJRS was only to allow companies to keep workers "on hold" for the moment, while bosses work out their next steps. There's no obligation whatsoever for companies to retain

jobs, despite the name of the scheme - as has already been seen with Rolls Royce and British Airways, among others. Once production restarts, they'll judge the demand and then try to cut/casualise as many jobs as possible, taking opportunity of this pandemic crisis to increase the level of exploitation. The workforce doesn't have to stand for it, though! □

### • Car bosses "gearing up" to cut jobs

Car companies had been making plans to deal with falling demand at least a year before the Covid-crisis hit. Many, like JLR and PSA had already announced "cost saving plans". In March last year BMW announced a plan to save €12bn - and this month they said they were "extending" it.

But now all of sudden, the fall in demand has arrived, big time. New car sales fell 97% in April, the lowest level since 1946! No one knows when, how fast, or even if, that demand will recover.

But the car companies will make sure they are ready to begin selling again as soon as it does.

So production has already begun gearing up right across the industry. Since demand is still unknown, most factories will start slowly, with fewer workers. BMW's mini plant at Cowley, for example, is not currently scheduled to return to full 3-shift production until early June.

While car bosses might justify this slow return to work by the government's

"social distancing" rules, it's really about testing how many workers they will need for production. If they decide they have a "surplus", they'll try to cut jobs and further casualise those who remain.

So the workers will have to decide what they do about it: when and how they stop the bosses from riding roughshod over jobs, employment status and conditions - and hopefully sooner rather than later.

### • Airline industry: destination profits

The airline industry is obviously badly affected by this crisis. British Airways (BA) furloughed more than half its 45,000 workforce from early April - thus keeping them on the payroll via the government's "job retention scheme". But on the 28 April it nevertheless announced that 12,000 workers would be made redundant! So much for retaining jobs! And now it wants remaining staff to sign a zero-hours-type contract!

Yet BA's parent (AIG), International

Airlines Group, which also owns Iberia, Vueling and Air Lingus, last year announced operating profits of £2.6bn. It could easily keep all its workers on its payroll without cutting conditions. What's more, just days after BA's cuts were announced, IAG secured a total of £1.3bn in loans from the Spanish and British governments.

Another job-cutting company, connected to the airline industry, is Rolls-Royce, which builds aircraft engines. It

announced 8,000 lay-offs and threatened 16,000 more, with the aim of saving itself £750m. But after cancelling shareholders' final dividend and obtaining credit of £1.5bn, its "liquidity" rose to £1.9bn! Yet it's made no mention of cancelling the job cuts!

Yes, this is how companies - even among the worst-hit by the Covid-crisis - are nevertheless capitalising on it - by slashing jobs and filling their pockets with government aid.

### **The sick system needs overturning**

The Food Foundation reported that an estimated 1.5m people went without food for at least a day during the first 3 weeks of the coronavirus lock-down. The Trussell Trust issued 50,000 food parcels in the space of a week, almost double its usual volume. The Independent Food Aid Network (Ifan), said its food banks

experienced a 59% increase in demand for emergency support - 17 times higher than the same period a year ago. In fact 5 Trussell Trust Foodbanks ran out of food.

None of this is any surprise, given that an additional 20% of the workforce has been rendered jobless. By now 2.5 million have applied for universal credit (UC), needing food charity to tide them over while awaiting payment.

But already before this crisis,

foodbanks were experiencing a 23% increase in demand compared to 2018; 14m adults, 4m children and 2m pensioners (20% of the population) were living in poverty - and out of these, 5 million were chronically food-poor, in this, the 5th richest country in the world. How many the coronavirus crisis will add to this, we do not yet know. But that anyone should go hungry at all, is an indictment of an incurably sick social system.

## What next?

Economic commentators warn that there will be no going back to "normal" after the "Covid-19 emergency" is over. And they are likely to be right.

Of course, no-one can actually say how we will get out of this emergency. Will the virus eventually just disappear? Will it be contained, somehow, by an effective vaccine or treatment (or by a combination of both)? At this point, medical science still cannot answer these questions.

### Nanoviruses not megabucks

Had there been no "Covid-19 emergency", however, we would now be deep into a major financial crisis, anyway. Indeed, by the end of 2019, every economic expert worth his salt was warning against levels of indebtedness which were way above their pre-crash peak - up by +288% for government debt and by +243% for corporate debt. Rather than funding an investment spree, this massive indebtedness had been filling the coffers of big business, while feeding a speculation fever which could only lead to another financial crisis. In fact, exactly a year before the "Covid-19 emergency" broke out, the USA's largest bank, JP Morgan, had already announced to its customers that the next

financial crisis would take place in 2020!

So, by the end of 2019, it wasn't a question of whether a financial crisis would break out, but how soon this would happen, what would trigger it and how it would affect the rest of the economy. What's more, Britain was very likely to be affected much more than other countries: Johnson's Brexit madness was bound to increase considerably, the impact of the world crisis over here.

However, as it happened, the economy hasn't gone down the road of financial crisis, at least not yet. Instead of the current crisis being caused by the speculative frenzy of trillions of pounds roaming the planet in search of a quick buck, as in 2008, it has been triggered by a minute virus, so small that you'd have to put over 125 million in a row to make up a single inch!

### The crisis double whammy

So, this time, unlike in 2008, capitalism went on ticking as if it was business as usual. Well, almost. Because very early on, even before the first hint of a pandemic emerged, it became obvious that a stock market crash was on the cards and that, simultaneously, a drastic reduction in

## Crisis watch

demand was already threatening some of the most indebted industries - like oil, aircraft manufacturing and airlines. Behind the coronavirus, the spectre of the major financial crisis which had been predicted for over a decade was suddenly re-emerging.

Then, while the Covid-19 pandemic was spreading across the world, governments quickly came up with policies aimed at protecting the profits of their respective big companies - while closing down much of their countries' economies and mortgaging their public finances for years to come.

So much so, that by now, many of the most prestigious financial experts argue that the economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis will be even more drastic than that of the 1929 Stock market crash. If the 1929 crash triggered the "Great Depression" of the 1930s, the economic impact of this pandemic will trigger an even "Greater Depression" in the 2020s.

The capitalist classes know all too well what they are facing. They are already anticipating the shrinkage of their markets and are trying to protect their profits, by slashing jobs and conditions so that fewer workers will produce more value. This is what the working class needs to start organising against, as soon as possible! □

## • Their "ending of lock-down" lies

The government's lock-down measures are being relaxed. But allowing business to start "returning to normal" has been the government's objective ever since it belatedly - and reluctantly - announced its lock-down on 24th March. Just 3 weeks afterwards, it set out "5 tests" to be met for the lifting of restrictions: the NHS must be able to provide sufficient critical care; deaths should be falling "consistently and in a sustained" way; "reliable data"

(!) should show the infection rate down "to manageable levels"; testing and PPE supplies should be "in hand", and a second peak must be avoided.

Can these criteria be met in the absence of effective mass testing, tracing, treatment, and effective vaccines? Of course not! But restrictions are being lifted anyway, since the government's patently unreliable data is said to show a "consistent" fall in the death rate! Never mind that workers are

already collateral damage of this pandemic. Not just in NHS/social care, but in transport - 34 in London - plus an unknown number in retail, postal and delivery services. Now that factories/construction (which were never "instructed" to shut down in the first place!) are restarting fully, the only way workers can ensure that they and their contacts aren't exposed to Covid-19, is to collectively refuse to work. They don't have to allow this.

## • Our history: The 1929 Great Depression and our times

On the 24 October 1929, New York's Wall Street stock market crashed, triggering the deepest and longest economic crisis that the capitalist system had produced so far. Yet just a month before the crash, bankers and industrialists had been declaring that the high tide of prosperity which they were enjoying would never end. Of course, there had been a post-war depression in 1920-21. But soon afterwards, the economy had started to grow rapidly again, producing the so-called "roaring 20s", thanks to the huge expansion of credit and new technological innovation.

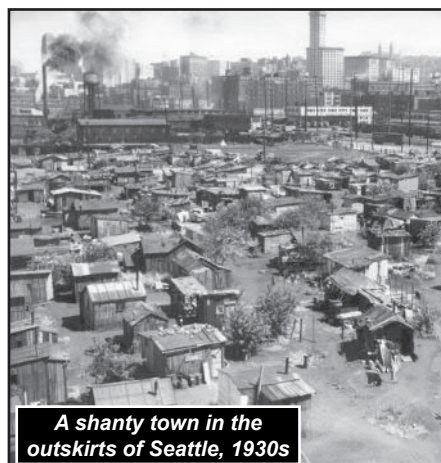
Indeed, new industries like those mass-producing radios and motor cars, attracted growing amounts of speculative investment. However, financial speculation was a self-feeding mechanism: the anticipation of rising profits in a company resulted in the rise of its share prices, which, in turn, attracted more speculative investment and, therefore, more profits. Real estate - and "unreal" estate, sold by fraudsters - became another target for speculation, fuelled by a spiral of credit and debt. This paved the way for the development of a phenomenal stock market speculative

bubble, more and more removed from the real economy. And then the bubble suddenly burst, triggering a drastic fall in Wall Street's stocks and shares, which reverberated right around the world.

The real economy collapsed. Between 1929 and 1932, industrial production in the

US fell by 46%. Over 100,000 companies had gone bankrupt, while the rest responded to the shrinking market by cutting jobs. By 1932, 24% of the active population was jobless. Shanty towns sprang up at the edge of every major city and 2m workers and poor farmers became homeless. Eventually the government had to step in, with, among other interventions, the so-called "New Deal", creating jobs around huge state infrastructure projects, promoting a recovery.

If there is a parallel with today's Covid-crisis, it is in the sudden, unprecedented rise in unemployment. In the US, 33m workers registered as unemployed in only 7 weeks - bringing the rate of unemployment to 21% of the active population! In Britain, 7.5m workers have been laid off work and are surviving on the government's furlough scheme, facing an uncertain future and a further 2m have already lost their jobs - altogether, 30% of the workforce! However there is a positive side to all of this. Society has woken up to the fundamental importance of the working class. It's up to the working class to ensure that once the pandemic is over, nobody forgets it. □



A shanty town in the outskirts of Seattle, 1930s

**King's Cross railway station (London)****Lock down the trains now!**

All along - despite the so-called "stay-at-home" lockdown, around 60% of LNER's trains have been running from King's Cross, either to the main stations along the line or all the way to Edinburgh and back, acting as potential virus-spreaders across county - and country - lines.

The justification for not shutting down the railway was that key workers had to get to work. But key workers don't travel from Edinburgh to London, nor vice versa - and if they use these trains between

more local stations over shorter distances, then safe alternative transport could easily be arranged for them.

However, as a result of this irresponsible policy - and now the proposal to ramp up the service from 11 May - we're meant to come to work, with all the risks involved and without even basic protection like masks. As for social distancing, it's impossible on-board. How can a guard walk along a 9-car Azuma (to count the passengers), and still keep



2m from everyone? The answer is they can't. In fact LNER should not have run trains after the 24 March. The right thing to do to "save lives" is to stop the service now. Better late than never. ☐

- **Sending c-19 from Kx to Waverley & back**

While we're wondering why trains in and out of KX have been allowed to run at all since this Covid crisis started, we see the unions have now got together to insist that there's a "safe resumption" of rail services. As if trains (but especially the tube!) hadn't been running unsafely all along! Or is the current 2/3 "reduced LNER service" both "safe" - and justified - in their view? [Workers' Platform King's Cross 06/05/20]

- **All for masks, masks for all**

Believe it or not, we saw LNER brought in some masks for distribution here at KX. So we were thinking, hey, maybe the 10,000 masks rumour was true! What we didn't expect was that the masks were for the yankees - and no-one else! Okay, we get that they're in close contact with passengers and obviously need them. But if the virus is in the air, in aerosols and droplets, then we all need to wear masks - and so do all passengers - and all of the time we're in public spaces. [Workers' Platform King's Cross 06/05/20]

- **Can't go, won't go!**

It looks like Atalian manager-upstarts don't get the meaning of "essential travel"! Since there are fewer trains to clean, they keep trying to send us somewhere else. Now they're fixated on "Peterborough"... (there are doctors for that...). This involves a 45-min journey on the train, to clean walls, a bridge, you name it. They can't even make sure we all have masks for it! And what happened to the promised visors?! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 06/05/20]

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)****Saturday delivery fiasco**

Royal Mail announced on the 28th of April that it was temporarily suspending Saturday letter deliveries. Unfortunately as it turned out, this wasn't in order to "ease the additional burden" on us caused by the Covid-19 crisis. They just wanted us to process and deliver parcels instead, since they've been piling up due to a surge in online orders during the lock down!

But in the meantime the union leaders saw a chance to push themselves forward and maybe get their feet back under RM's table,

having been left out since the new CEO arrived. So they raised the red herring of a covert threat to jobs and the Universal Service Obligation and even threatened to ballot for industrial action if Saturday deliveries were halted! Never mind that delivery workers are overworked, fed up, lack PPE and would prefer the day off!

However, after an exchange of polite letters with RM's CEO Rico Back, who explained that the USO wasn't under threat and that the union officials were welcome to sit down at



the negotiating table again, they got off their high horse. But now, instead of getting to rest, we're back risking our lives, 6-days a week, exposing ourselves to the virus at work and in public transport. In fact it's over these issues that we should be organising a strike. ☐

- **We don't need their advice**

How's it possible that some managers still don't think that wearing masks is vital? We know some of them like to repeat the nonsense peddled by the government, that there's no proof that masks stop the virus from spreading... But it's obvious that they do! (And there IS evidence out there!).

So yes, we need to wear our masks (and gloves) everywhere and at all times at work and outside - it's our health and our workmates' health that's on the line! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 06/05/20]

- **Clueless**

Would you believe that managers still don't seem to know what should and shouldn't be prioritised? This last Monday on Lates, packet processing was mad - but we ended up processing useless stuff, while essential packets are left behind! What can we say... Royal Mayhem at its very best. [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 06/05/20]

- **Going at our own pace**

So we've absolutely no chance of processing all the packets: those left over can just be brought back when we're done (or, even better, not even brought out in the first place). Managers can try pressurising us

to go faster if it makes them feel better, but there is no way we're going to rush to clear every day - it's simply not possible. [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 06/05/20]

- **Emergency service?**

We can't believe RM is still expecting us to prep and deliver Door-2-Dustbin. Yes, we see in that joint RM/CWU letter that those of us who won't be doing Saturday deliveries will still have plenty of work... including "preparation of D2D items for the following Monday". We thought we'd been clear: we don't want to see D2D anywhere near our work, period. [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 06/05/20]

**BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**

**Suspect tactics**

**B**MW has now told us we are to have a "phased return" to work starting 18 May. So for the first 2 weeks only 1 shift would come in and the following week there would be 2 shifts. By the end of the 3rd week, i.e., the 8th June, BMW would like normal production to resume.

We also hear that because of the long shutdown due to Covid-19, that the summer "holiday", which was supposed to last 5 weeks, will be shortened to 3 weeks. Xmas shutdown

will, however, be extended, and would start early, on 7 December. Not to compensate us for stealing our holiday, but because they want to set up new facilities, whatever that means.

This all sounds very dodgy. The coronavirus pandemic is far from being over. And anyway their precious market is unlikely to recover any time soon. How can we forget what BMW did last December, when it tried to cut a whole shift, using the excuse of the economic



crisis? And we also remember the cuts in shifts which followed the crisis in 2008. So one thing we know for sure, is that we can't trust this company as far as we can throw it... ☐

**• Our health comes first**

BMW's "safety measures" don't fill us with confidence any more than the government's. So, since they're calling us back to work on 18 May, during this deadly pandemic and without any breakthroughs in treatment having happened, they should test everyone before we come to work. That's the only way we can be sure we're safe. And to keep us virus-free, if anyone needs (socially-distanced) transport to the plant, that should be provided too. If we think we aren't safe, we don't

work. Full stop. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini 14/05/20]

**• Enter only with spacesuit!**

The full spacesuit (gas mask, gloves, hooded suit) which BMW showed in one of the pictures that were passed around, must be for all of us. Whether permanent, agency, contractors, ALL. Fobbing us off with just a hi-vis, or docking wages to pay for PPE, won't be acceptable. Full protective gear must be provided free, for all, whatever it costs! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini 14/05/20]

**• New conditions must mean more breaks!**

That said, working for 7.5 hours shifts in the full spacesuit is going to make us too hot. Masks and gloves get wet and ineffective; breathing becomes tiring within a couple of hours; work becomes even more exhausting than "normal". So, we'll need breaks as often as needed to rest and put on clean gear. With Boris Johnson's Covid-spreading carelessness all round us, this is our "common sense". [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini 14/05/20]

**Ford Dagenham Engine Plant**

**Ford's ventilators: good publicity for all!**

**T**he government's appeal for ventilators on 14 March, was a panic call to manufacturers to ramp up production in order to increase the number of ventilators in intensive care units. And Ford saw it as an ideal opportunity to raise its profile. So it enthusiastically jumped onto the bandwagon, as part of a so-called "Ventilator Challenge UK Consortium" and set up a ventilator production line in a disused building here at Dagenham.

However, 3 weeks into this

production, it's clear that the government has made another of its serial cock-ups and the NHS doesn't need so many ventilators after all. Nevertheless production continues for the time being, on a small scale, which allowed Labour MP John Cruddas to get some publicity by visiting the plant. He later tweeted: "Great to be welcomed to @forduk#Dagenham by convenor Terry Warden & union reps for a tour of the new ventilator plant. I want to put on



record my appreciation for all the workers volunteering to build 400 new ventilators a day - your selfless act will save many lives." Does he really think that the mainly agency temp workers on minimum pay can be described as "volunteers"? They don't think so! ☐

**• We don't trust Ford**

So Covid-19 is not under control yet but Ford managers want us back on 18 May... and on full-shifts! This isn't a "staggered start", but is throwing us all together, in one go, risking our health, and for what? Producing "essential" diesel engines? When what we need at the moment is to be away from work (and public transport) as much as possible?! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 14/05/20]

us back at work, if and when we think it's safe, they can give us regular virus antigen and antibody tests. Otherwise how can we be reasonably sure that this killer-bug isn't going to spread among us? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 29/04/20]

manager- and boss-free plant? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 14/05/20]

**• Testing must be done**

Has management conveniently forgotten that some people carrying the virus are asymptomatic? So what good does temperature-taking do? When Ford wants

**• We have an idea or two**

For once, we agreed with Ford Britain chairman Graham Hoare, who said in that Sunday Times interview that the ventilator production line here at Dagenham shows we can shift production to anything useful. Yes, he's even quoted saying that "when the engine plant reopens fully in summer, Dagenham will reinvent itself". And sure, we've many ideas for reinventing Dagenham... Like a

**• Spaced out... of here!**

We heard Ford invented wrist-bands which buzz if you come within 2 metres of each another. For sure they won't be given to us - the buzzing in the plant wouldn't ever stop! No way can assembly be done at a 2m "social distance", even by trying to space us out. And talking of short space, we'd need PPE-space suits, the same kind so desperately needed in NHS/ICU. So no, best we just stay home - and if Ford needs convincing, a socially-distanced picket line is in order. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 29/04/20]

## Letter from India

While PM Modi's coronavirus policies continue to cause enormous social chaos, he nevertheless told a recent meeting of chief ministers of various states: "we can turn this crisis into a big opportunity". His government has been busy eliminating labour protection laws to squeeze out as much profit as possible for the capitalists. Five states: Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Punjab, have extended working hours from 8 to 12 hours, as they reopen their economies. The Gujarat Chamber of Commerce has demanded the prohibition of the right to form labour unions. The Uttar Pradesh government has already suspended 35 out of 38 labour laws for three years.

As for the over 100m migrant workers who were stranded by the lockdown, hundreds of miles away from their villages, most have not been paid wages for last the 2-3 months. Many have attempted to get home by any means, including walking for hundreds of miles. Some walk on railway lines to avoid police harassment on the highways. In the last week, 16 were killed by a goods train while they were resting on the tracks. And then there are 1.4m who have been forced into temporary "relief camps".

In the last month, protests have erupted despite the lockdown, notably in Surat and Mumbai. Attempting to

## USA

*This was the editorial of the 10 May workplace bulletin of "Spark", a Trotskyist organisation in the USA, where 33m workers are now without a job, many ineligible for even basic welfare.*

Trump has called on workers to be "warriors" for the economy. Yes, risk going back to work, as 2,000 people continue to die every day from the virus. Well, if Trump wants to risk dying, let him. Let him give up being tested every day, as he is now, to protect his health. But don't let him dare call on us to go into work under conditions that guarantee more infections, and a steadily growing death toll.

We are in this mess because no public agency prepared for a new epidemic. No public agency put enough money into research so there would already be a vaccine against the corona family of viruses. No county or state set aside funds so public health departments could test and trace whenever a new disease appeared. Counties

## Coronacrisis: provoking workers' anger



Workers in Surat, Gujarat

let out some steam, Modi announced that he would allow workers to go home - and as the lockdown relaxed on 3 May, lay on "workers' trains". But of course, the trains are too few: the capitalist class is worried there will be a labour shortages. The Confederation of Indian Industry has even demanded that workers be ordered back to work by law!

Workers' anger against these policies broke out on the streets in many industrial districts across the country between 2-4 May. The most combative were in Modi's Gujarat. In Surat, thousands of workers gathered to demand that they be sent back home and that they should not be forced to start work. They resorted to breaking

windows and overturning cars parked at the under-construction new diamond exchange. A number of smaller protests took place across Chennai on 2 May, with construction workers demanding state arrangements for their return. In Rajasthan, 2,500 workers from a cement factory with the same demands, stone-pelted the police and destroyed factory property. Protests also took place in Bangalore, Hyderabad, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi-NCR, and Jammu.

The capitalist class has been ruthless in its attacks. But workers have confronted them on the streets and in large numbers. If they had any illusions in Modi's government left, they are rapidly losing them. □

## facing the virus, the bosses... and Trump

and states had other priorities - handing out money to corporations and other capitalists, propping up their profits.

As for the federal government, and its Federal Emergency Management Agency - even its name is a joke. Forget about stocking basic protective equipment. FEMA didn't do it. Even hospitals forgot about it. And no medical insurance company even thought about it; their aim was simply to make profit from the population's ills.

Today, the governors are beginning to open up the states, letting companies send us back to work despite the death rate. Many of us are called back to join those who never stopped working under unsafe conditions. But they show what will happen to the rest of us.

Meat-packing, for example, worked all through the shutdowns. People work on lines, with too few bathroom facilities, with limited space in break areas. Like in many other factories, the whole set-up crowds

workers on top of each other. Hundreds of these workers have died: but also their families, their neighbours, as well as people in the shops and cafes in the little towns where the plants are located.

Grocery stores also worked all through the shutdowns. Walmart had to close some of its stores, when they became centres of an outbreak, with hundreds infected, including people who shopped there. How is Walmart different from the other retail stores and public venues that governors now talk about opening?

Caterpillar has a small factory in Illinois that never stopped working. Several workers died, more contracted the disease. Was it worth it? Caterpillar and its stockholders probably think so. Because on April 8, the company paid out 500 million dollars in dividends to its stockholders. This is what it means for us to be "warriors" for Trump's economy: to die by the thousands so the capitalist class can make millions. □

In addition to this paper, we publish bulletins in several large workplaces in the South East, a journal, "Class Struggle" and a series of pamphlets on topical issues. If you wish to know more, contact Workers' Fight by e-mail, at [contact@w-fight.org](mailto:contact@w-fight.org), or by postal mail at:

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