



## Coronavirus, our NHS and capitalism

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Political education leaflet by Workers Party of Britain

**What is it?** A virus is an infective agent that hijacks the metabolism of the host cell to produce symptoms. Coughs, colds and the common flu are all air-borne viruses.

The corona virus affects the lungs, producing fever, cough, aching joints and headache. For young and fit people, it may cause no symptoms whatsoever.

It is more dangerous than the flu, but its effects vary. The elderly, especially over-80s are most severely affected. Those with other illnesses (diabetes, heart and lung problems, immune problems and chronic medical conditions) are most affected. Around 5% of the infected population seem to develop a severe viral pneumonia, requiring oxygen and a proportion of these will need ventilation in hospital to survive.

The virus seems to have originated in Wuhan, China. The Chinese people and government have done an amazing job of combating the infection. They recognised the new virus, decoded its genetic structure and shared it with the world and developed anti-viral medical treatment that is effective. They threw up hospitals for those requiring oxygen therapy and for those requiring ventilation. Extraordinary public health measures were taken to contain the

virus, including testing 1.6 million a week, rigorous contact tracing and isolation of infected and potentially infected citizens, providing sufficient ventilatory support and intensive care beds, and closing down inter-state transport and social functions.

Western media has been filled with torrid anti-Chinese propaganda relating to the outbreak and no credit has been given to the incredible feats which have limited the spread to just 0.005% of China's 1.4 billion population.

In China the mortality rate fell from 3.4% to 0.7% due to these heroic efforts.

But lessons have not been learned in the west, where free-market fundamentalism, the profit motive and a contempt for the working class pervade our ruling business and political circles.

In Italy, where the infection has rapidly spread, hospitals are overwhelmed and the mortality rate exceeds 5% as the elderly are triaged to be less likely to survive and not receiving limited ventilator support.

In Britain there is 80-95% occupancy of ITU capacity. Just 2,000 people can be tested for corona virus a day. Contact tracing has been lax. All social functions have continued. While the numbers reported

are currently low, health secretary Matt Hancock, has predicted 80% of Britons will be infected, while Boris informed us on Good Morning Britain that discussions in cabinet and Cobra explored the possibility of **"letting the virus spread through the population and taking it on the chin"**! This is likely to mean in excess of a million deaths.

The cynical view of the capitalist class is that this will "cull the surplus population, the economically inactive, the old, the chronically unwell." That would mean savings, for example, in health and pension budgets. This is the reasoning of those who see workers only as a resource to be farmed for profit, and cannot recognise – as China has done – that the purpose of human wealth is to serve society, to improve the lives of the people.

That appears to be why few if any steps have been taken to increase our efforts to limit the virus, which would have economic costs. What's more 40 years of progressive **privatisation** has left all NHS trusts and hospitals at financial and organisational

breaking point, with no ability to rapidly expand the levels of care.

The chancellor's budget, "raining cash" on the NHS, to quote the BBC will prove to be too little too late.

**Our best advice** is to: self-isolate if infected, or suspected. Take vitamin D and vitamin C and eat plenty of fruit and veg. Stay hydrated and get enough rest. Avoid unnecessary travel. Demand an increase of intensive care capacity *now* and be relentless in pointing out that these measures, if not enacted now, will make our government directly responsible for the outcome.

We note that the pharmaceutical giants are rushing to the gold mine of a vaccine. Billions will be made for the first to develop one. Meanwhile China has shown the way: that a system that puts its people first can eradicate the virus *before* it becomes a pandemic.

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