



# WORKERS PARTY <sup>GB</sup>

## STATEMENT

### **LOCKDOWNS ARE NEITHER EFFECTIVE NOR FAIR, BUT A FURTHER PROOF OF GOVERNMENT FAILURE TO MANAGE THE HEALTH EMERGENCY EFFECTIVELY**

*The Workers Party of Britain condemns the new raft of lockdown restrictions brought into effect on Wednesday 14 October – initially targeting the north-west – as a stark admission of failure on the part of Boris Johnson's Conservative government to deal with Covid-19 on a national scale.*

As of Thursday 15 October, London, Elmbridge, Barrow-in-Furness, York, North East Derbyshire, Erewash and Chesterfield have joined much of the Midlands and northwest England, including Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester, in a higher state of lockdown (level two or three, of the new 'simplified' three-tier system), meaning that effectively half of England's 66 million people are now in 'local' states of lockdown. Meanwhile, the 'rule of six' is a blanket restriction that affects us all.

This policy is neither fish nor fowl; it is neither effective nor fair, and, by compounding increasing levels of hardship and poverty, it is taking a heavy toll on the British working class.

We have no confidence in the leadership of this government, and no confidence in the official Labour party opposition, to protect our interests and lead us through the crisis.

#### **Grand larceny and abuse of office**

Under cover of 'combatting the pandemic', billions of pounds of government money – taxpayers' money; our money – have been siphoned off by this kleptocratic administration, without scrutiny, under the auspices of the newly enacted Covid Act 2020.

#### **PPE**

In March, the debacle of personal protective equipment (PPE) provision was overseen by Deloitte, which was handsomely rewarded for doling out £5.5 billion for PPE to various subcontractors – many of which turned out to be fictitious 'shell' companies.

Yet Deloitte singularly failed to protect our public or key workers. We suffered almost 80,000 excess deaths during the period, and 350 healthcare workers paid for this corrupt ineptitude with their lives.

The Workers Party's call for widespread testing, tracing and social isolation and care of covid patients – the public health measures that proved successful in eradicating the virus in China and elsewhere – was ignored. Travellers from the most affected parts of the globe (principally Europe and the USA) continued to fly into British airports throughout the worst months of the crisis, despite the supposed 'lockdown'.

#### **Test, track and trace**

Yet as numbers receded following the raising of lockdown, the financial crisis and the summer holidays, Talk-Talk boss Dido Harding (a university friend of David Cameron, who made her a dame) was appointed to oversee testing and tracing for Covid on a national scale.

This Tory crony has overseen an incredible £12 billion spending

spree, allegedly for this purpose, to the likes of Deloitte, Serco, G4S, Lighthouse laboratories, etc, which between them have delivered a shambolic regime of patchy and inadequate testing, have failed to share information with local authorities and the NHS, and have scandalously failed to trace the contacts of those who test positive for the virus.

In early October, 15,000 positive test results were lost – because some employee in the chain didn't know how to use an Excel spreadsheet. Yet the great theft of public finances continues unabated, without any kind of sanction or accountability for those who have led us into the depths of this debacle.

The fact that our NHS is being hamstrung, privatised, sidelined and all-but-abolished by stealth has meant that in addition to failing to deal with covid, there are now over 10 million patients waiting for 'NHS appointments and procedures'.

This is taking a toll on the nation's health that will only increase as the lifeblood ebbs out of our economy and the failing capitalist parasites bleed the national treasury dry – aided and abetted by the government and wider parliament.

#### **'Eat out to help out'**

Just two weeks ago, we were being encouraged to 'eat out to help out' and to return to pubs. Students were encouraged to return to universities, where their extortionate fees have been eagerly collected. Predictable outbreaks on campuses have now led to lockdown in accommodation blocks, and teaching has anyway gone online.

Pupils have returned to schools and workers have returned to the office – all to keep the faltering economy from shuddering to a halt, but it has become increasingly clear that the 'lockdown' failed to deal with covid, as all informed observers predicted it would, so long as adequate public health provision was not provided, and while surging poverty left so many in our society unable to protect themselves.

#### **Economic crisis – furlough was another bail-out of the capitalists**

Lockdown hits the poorest in our society hardest, and 'tier two' lockdown puts no extra obligations on government to give financial support to its citizens.

We note that in March, when the first national lockdown was rolled out, some £350 billion in government aid was doled out, chiefly to businesses, with the largest and wealthiest businesses getting the lion's share of looted tax revenue and borrowed billions.

This was, in fact, a bail-out not of the population from the effects of covid, but of big business from the effects of an acute cyclical global capitalist economic crisis, for which the capitalist class bears responsibility. The economic crisis is a crisis, in fact, of world poverty, and Rishi Sunak's record government spending has, in reality, been a massive transfer of wealth from the poor to

the rich, just as we witnessed in the 2009 bank bail-outs.

Eighty percent of the wages of relatively well-paid workers were paid by the state. Many companies, like British Airways, and Virgin Atlantic, received huge handouts under the scheme, but nevertheless went on to make mass redundancies and pay cuts. The lowest-paid and long-term unemployed – those most in need – were least likely to receive relief under the furlough scheme.

Unemployment has topped 12 percent and is rising. One third of British children are hungry, yet it is left to the conscience of footballers like Marcus Rashford, rather than to Conservative ministers or the Labour opposition, to demand the most basic relief – that our children should be fed!

The Workers Party believes that ALL school meals (breakfast and lunch) should be free for all students.

The furlough scheme is now being withdrawn, even as the rates of covid infection increase and the unemployment rate are skyrocketing. Today, in the sixth-richest country on earth, an incredible 5 million British workers face destitution, while 300,000 families are threatened with imminent eviction – unopposed by Labour.

## Failure was not inevitable

Nations with centralised systems, strong enough to respond to the epidemic by mobilising national resources for the benefit of their people with speed and efficiency – notably China, for example – have emerged from the original wave of the pandemic to some sense of normality.

Their practice was formed of several key yet simple elements: quick detection; strict travel limitations; effective mass testing; a national track-and-trace system that worked; newly-built isolation hospitals that were put to proper use; full support for all those in quarantine.

It is no coincidence that a nation like Britain – where the NHS has been consistently chipped away at, undermined, marketised, and underfunded – has found it impossible to make a similar response. And this despite knowing as early as 2016, when Operation Cygnus was overseen by Jeremy Hunt, that a pandemic would cause an immediate shortage of capacity – of staff, beds, PPE and ventilators – and our health system to ‘fall over’.

Rather than change course, our free-market fundamentalist government decided to double down and leverage the crisis to accelerate the robbery of Britain’s most prized communal property.

## Herd immunity – the real policy

All of this underlines the truth of the words blurted out by Boris Johnson’s most trusted advisor, Dominic Cummings, when he intimated to a powerful inner circle of mandarins that the policy of the government was “Herd immunity, protect the economy, and if a few pensioners die – so be it!”

It was the scale of the deaths unfolding in front of the government’s eyes that caused ministers to blink – and belatedly introduce a lockdown. That lockdown was already an admission of failure to test, track and isolate – and thereby to protect British workers in the first instance.

The policy of herd immunity was then immediately resumed, however, and ramped up by degree – which has led us right back to square one. We are now seeing 20,000 infections a day; 700 hospital admissions per day; 5,000 covid patients and approaching 1,000 mechanically-ventilated patients with Covid-19 in our hospitals.

The spectre of rising covid deaths is once again haunting our nation.

## Punctuated herd immunity

In the face of a second failure to control the spread of infection and protect the British public, the government is again resorting to repressive lockdown measures – but after the experience of its first abject failure, the government has lost the confidence of a large section of British workers, who are tired of the fruitless hardships they have endured.

It is increasingly clear that these lockdown measures simply represent a kind of ‘punctuated’ herd immunity, and that the government has no intention of taking the measures necessary really to safeguard the wellbeing of those unemployed, elderly or impoverished workers from whom it makes little money, and therefore sees only as a burden.

For effective protective measures – including the reversal of NHS privatisation, investment in public services, the creation of decent jobs and livelihoods for working people – undermine the very essence of the government’s goal, which is to safeguard the interest of the billionaire class at all costs, and at workers’ expense.

## NHS privatisation

This new raft of lockdown restrictions is therefore a damning indictment of the free-market fundamentalist management of our public health system, which has been hollowed out for too long.

Over the decades we have seen the introduction of an internal market to the health service; the establishment of a revolving door between big business and health management; the isolation of the clinical expertise of the NHS workforce from management decisions, and in particular its consultant doctors and nursing staff; the PFI debt trap and the creeping (now galloping) privatisation of services; the downgrading of the NHS’s capacity to drive private demand; the Health and Social Care Act 2012; the five-year forward view; structural transformation plans; clinical commissioning groups and the creeping takeover of NHS services by the health insurance and private health sector (under the tender ‘leadership’ of Sir Simon Stevens, little-known chief executive of NHS England, the body that now runs the NHS, who is a servant of US health insurance giant United Health).

All this has created a system that has proven unable to cope in the face of a national health emergency – and of course it is the working class who bear the brunt of its failure. So, instead of a fair, efficient, effective national strategy, making full use of a strong and well-funded national health service, what have we got?

Punitive, politicised measures, disproportionately impacting the poorest section of the working people, from a governing party hellbent on preserving and increasing the wealth of the billionaire parasite capitalist class.

And all the while, the ultra-rich will remain at loose, free to roam or to jet off abroad, comfortable enough for their wallets to take a hit without fear of eviction or hunger. Their class war continues.

## Take action!

We recognise the growing levels of mistrust and resentment, not just on Merseyside but amongst workers across the country.

This is why we in the Workers Party of Britain demand a free and comprehensive healthcare system. We want the NHS to be able to do what is expected of it, and for it not to be attacked at every opportunity by hostile governments.

This is also why we are calling for a corona wealth tax – a 5% one-off tax on fortunes exceeding £10 million. Because the pandemic is just the tip of the inequality iceberg – for far too long now our nation’s problems have been socialised and the profits privatised.

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