

WORKERS' fight



No 115 - Jul-Aug 2020

price 30p

<http://www.w-fight.org>
contact@w-fight.org

ISSN 2040-400X

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

CAPITALISM'S CRISIS CAN BE WORKERS' OPPORTUNITY

Things look bad for the bosses' economy. Experts agree this is the worst recession in 300 years.

The 1.8% rise in GDP last month failed to lift the capitalists' spirits, given the 20.3% plunge overall.

To quote the Office for Budget Responsibility, *"the coronavirus outbreak and the public health measures taken to contain it have delivered one of the largest ever shocks to the UK economy"*. It adds that it is *"difficult to predict what will happen from one month to the next"*.

Yes, their "uncertainty" has reached a whole new level. Of course nobody can know exactly when or how the pandemic will end. Will a second wave be worse than the first? Will an effective vaccine be found? So far, these questions have no answers.

However, there is another unanswered question - and that is what the added negative impact of Brexit, (and worse, a no-deal Brexit) will be, coming as it does, right on top of the Covid-crisis.

And this is a question which the government would rather avoid. Because, just like Johnson's criminal delay in implementing measures to mitigate the pandemic, this will be yet more "self-inflicted" damage.

"Pointing" workers out

The shape of things to come was clearly outlined by Priti Patel when she set out her points-based immigration system, due to come in on New Year's Day 2021. Freedom of movement into and out of the EU will end. All foreign workers will require a visa to enter.

The number of points required, poses a problem, however. Because most of the social care workers - the "heroes" of the Covid-19 pandemic, currently looking after the elderly, wouldn't qualify!

Patel has proposed a "fast track"



health and care visa, for workers who have a confirmed job offer in the NHS or care sector. But the job is meant to come with a £25,600 minimum salary, thus excluding today's frontline social care workers, most of whom come from overseas, and receive the minimum wage.

Brexit Patel boasts that her new policy will mean that *"Britain once more takes control of its borders"*. She says she will freely admit only those highly skilled researchers and scientists who meet the criteria of her "global talent scheme". But this begs another question: just who would want to join her "talent scheme" in the splendid isolation of a future barren and Brexited Britain?

What next for workers?

So where does this leave the working class? Unprecedented unemployment levels and a depression worse than the 1930s are predicted. That crisis gave rise to an explosion of ultra-nationalist fervour, fanned by big business and its politicians, which ended in the catastrophic

carnage of WW2.

Of course this is not the 1930s. Workers have the advantage of being able to learn from history. The working class can counter racism and nationalism, precisely because its ranks include workers from everywhere in the world. And collectively it can also ensure that everyone who wants to work, has work: that the jobs that are available are shared out among all the workers and that the capitalist class pays a living wage to everyone.

How? Well, that was proven possible by none other than Rishi Sunak! He found the means to bail out the capitalists, according to their needs, pay their wage bills, cancel their taxes and throw them credit lifelines...

So why should these same bosses and politicians not dig even deeper to meet the needs of the working class? All the more so, since without workers, there is no production, there are no profits, and there definitely is no "recovery". The working class can decide to let them all sink, or swim... ☐

Covid-19 crisis

By early July, local C-19 clusters across the country were emerging. An outbreak among 70 agricultural workers in Herefordshire, in food processing, in small plants and then seeding into communities in Rochdale, Bradford, Barnsley and of course Leicester.. But what some call a "2nd wave", is likely to be a continuation of the first, given that community testing stopped during May - only restarting on 1 June. This did not stop Boris Johnson from reducing 2-metre distancing to "1 metre plus" and easing the lockdown on 4 July, by proclaiming the opening of pubs, restaurants, hotels and many other "hospitality" businesses with tattoo parlours and beauticians to follow.

Having recognised that *"It might be a bit premature to make a speech about Britain after Covid-19 [...]"* (yes, it was!) Johnson went on to justify himself: *"...we cannot continue to be prisoners of this crisis"*.

Then, posing as the saviour of Britain's severely-slumped economy, he

• **Turning factories into C-19 incubators!**

Government policy, from the start, has been to "keep business running". Never mind that testing wasn't "up and running". For health care workers, it was only fully operational by the end of April, but for other "key workers", like in food production, testing only began in June - and only when it became clear that the low temperatures and lack of distancing in some of these factories were promoting viral transmission.

By 9 July, as many as 640 cases had been reported in the 2 Sisters meat factories in Anglesey, Wrexham and Merthyr, 165 cases in the Kobe-Asda meat factory in Kirklees, 10 cases in Tulip pork meat factory near Dudley and 14 in Princes Canning in Wisbech. In Leicester, there were outbreaks in Walkers Crisps, Pladis Biscuits, Bradgate Bakery and Sainsbury's.

As for "non-essential" sectors, small clusters have been reported at Dura Beds in Kirklees, Deep Sleep Beds near Wakefield, JD sports warehouse in Rochdale and BMW mini plant in Oxford - but this is likely to be the tip of the iceberg.

These workplaces have one thing in common: bosses turning the exploitation screw. Since the beginning of lockdown, the food industry has increased production by 50%: fast lines pushed workers to work "shoulder to shoulder". Meat factories introduced 24/7 working, with 4 rotating days of 12-hour shifts, increasing exhaustion and the number of hours exposed to the virus. Moreover, the lockdown was used as a pretext to introduce a "bank of reserve workers" on zero-hours contracts to cover any gaps. With no sick pay, they work even if ill.

The fool, a pint, and a second wave!



announced his Rooseveltian "new deal", aiming to reassure the public about the economic crisis and the pandemic on the one hand and to fill the pockets of the capitalists on the other - and "build, build, build". Of course, investing 0.4% of GDP compared to Roosevelt's 40% was hardly going to cut the mustard. Then he explained: what he really wanted to do was to *"build a platform for the private sector to invest and create jobs"*. In no way was he *"attacking*

Yes, thanks to the greed of these bosses reinforced by government policy, a second wave of infection has already begun within working class communities.

• **Leicester: exploiters and their C-19 hotbed!**

On 30 June the government imposed its first local lockdown - in the city of Leicester - where a spike in infections saw 994 cases identified in just 2 weeks - accounting for 10% of the national total.

In fact the cluster turned out to be concentrated around textile factories and in particular small sweatshops in the east of the city (there are around 1,000 of them!) which carried on working throughout the lockdown. They employ 50-100 workers, often in old Victorian workshops, supplying fashion giants like the profitable online fast-fashion retailer Boohoo. Many workers are from a south Asian background (as is half the Leicester population); and are among the most deprived, living hand-to-mouth in overcrowded, shared rooms. They earn between £3.50 and £4/hour (when the minimum wage is £8.71/hour) and of course there is no paid sick leave!

These crowded, unhygienic workplaces practising what amounts to "modern slavery" are an obvious hotbed for the virus. As to the precise number of workers infected, given their shadowy existence, it will probably never be known.

Matt Hancock, may have said on 5 July that he is *"very worried about the employment practices in some factories"*, but not a single mobile testing unit was sent to these workplaces! Meanwhile, residents of Leicester describe the second lockdown as "invisible", since people are still allowed to meet in groups of up to 6, distancing is

our great companies" nor was it a *"raid on the wealth creators"* - as if anyone could have been mistaken about that! Going a lot further than necessary, he confessed that: *"My friends, I am not a communist"*!

And so Johnson blusters on, caught between his political ego, his need to be re-elected and the reality of the ongoing crisis and the crisis to come. Whether he'll be able to dig himself out of his latest ditch, remains to be seen. □

down to 1 metre "plus", and going to work is still considered as essential travel!

• **Unsafe data from unsafe politicians**

A rise in Covid-19 cases in Leicester had been noticed already 3 weeks before the lockdown was imposed: on 8 June a school was closed due to an outbreak. And though data was being collected by government agencies, this wasn't shared with local health officials until it was too late to prevent the spike. Anyway, the quality of much of the data was poor. But never mind, on 5 July, Health Secretary Hancock happily claimed that local councils had *"all the Covid-19 data they needed"*! Those on the ground know this isn't true. The Mayors of Leicester, Salford and Manchester have written to Hancock, accusing him of "lying".

As Leicester's mayor revealed, postcode information of cases would have been vital in order to locate infection clusters. They didn't get it. He pointed out too, that data on occupation and place of work of those who take a C-19 test is not routinely collected! Neither does data include ethnicity. This, when Public Health England's own BAME report showed that black and Asian men and women had 3-4X higher mortality from Covid and recommended detailed "risk assessments" for front line workers - impossible, given the current available data!

Of course, the government doesn't ask its statisticians to produce this kind of detail for a very "good" reason: as it keeps telling us, it balances the risk to health (i.e., dying), against the risk to "the economy". Lockdown restrictions haven't been lifted because it is now "safe". And reliable data would reveal just how *unsafe* it is.

Johnson's testing mess

By now it's accepted fact that Johnson's "world-beating" test-and-trace system is a complete mess. It won't be fully operational until September.

Of course when the pandemic hit, Britain's pathology labs, part-privatised and underfunded, weren't up to the job of providing the needed tests. But the government then decided to bring in private (for profit!) management consultants like Deloitte, and companies like Serco, Sitel and Amazon - as well as the military - and never mind the lack of any relevant expertise.

From the start, testing figures just covered up government failure. Besides over-counting the number of tests done by at least 20,000 tests a day, to prove it would meet its own overblown target of 100,000 tests/day by the end of April, public health officials were told to "hand-crank" the numbers, and "buff" the system.

And the situation hasn't improved.

• The app: designed, piloted, ditched

The NHSX contact-tracing app for android phones, which was designed by US company, VMware, and on which the NHS had already spent £12m, was finally scrapped on the 18th of June.

All along, Health Secretary, Matt Hancock, had insisted it would work, despite advice to the contrary. But the pilot on the Isle of Wight proved him wrong: it didn't work on iPhones and there were concerns about data security. An alternative system based on Google and Apple platforms, is still being looked at, but whether a new version will be adopted at this stage, is anybody's guess. Johnson responded to criticism over his app-fiasco, by saying that "no country in the world has a working contact-tracing app". So Germany and Gibraltar, which recently launched apps, and South Korea, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Australia and Vietnam, which have had



While 4m home test kits have been sent out since late April, as many as 2.6m are still unaccounted for. With multiple agencies, labs and "pillars" to testing, there's no consistency in the system, so much of the data ends up being meaningless. As for the contact tracing system, run by Sitel and Serco, despite employing 27,000 tracers, it's traced 8 times

fewer contacts than local authority health teams whose workers number a few hundred in all.

fewer contacts than local authority health teams whose workers number a few hundred in all.

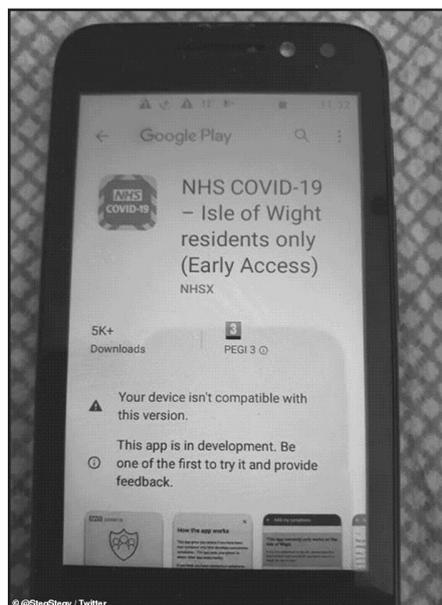
This does not augur well for any future spike of infection. Accurate mass testing is vital to monitor the prevalence of the virus and prevent its spread: but there's no guarantee we will have it. □

• Super-spreading Saturday

Why was it "essential" to open the pubs on 4 July? To prove that a government that can't organise an effective response to Covid-19, can at least organise a "piss-up"? Pub landlords were asked to take down everyone's name and phone number (many Mickey Mouses...) as a precautionary measure... but only one name per group.

Of course, it was predictable that physical distancing would break down, the more people drank. By the 8 July, 3 pubs and a restaurant had to close after staff and customers tested positive... How could it be otherwise? These pubs did their own contact tracing, phoning customers, even though this "duty" was not in government guidelines. But they couldn't possibly have contacted everyone.

Given all that, and the packed streets of Soho and other city centres, a new Covid spike won't be any surprise. One has to wonder which "behavioural scientist" advised Johnson & Co on this one? Was it Nigel Farage?



Do we need their "education"?

Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, finally abandoned his plan to get all children back to school before summer. Most schools are so tight on space that it would be impossible for them to accommodate pupils while maintaining social distancing.

Some children have undoubtedly had a hard time during this pandemic, all the more so, if they were cooped up

indoors most of the time. But in that sense, it's not much different to being at school, except they've been without their friends. In "normal times", secondary pupils are lucky if they get 2 hours of PE a week! In some schools, time to run around outside at lunch break can be as short as 30 minutes - and then only if the school has enough space outside. Many schools sold off their playgrounds to raise funds.

Teachers and politicians alike have

made a big deal over the "education" that pupils have supposedly missed out on. They might even extend the school year next summer, to make up for missed teaching. But what they really mean by "education" is simply teaching children to pass exams. Which isn't the same thing. In fact it is quite possible that many children really did learn new things - outside of the narrow school curriculum - thanks, precisely, to the lockdown!

NHS

Nightingale hospitals: 7 big, white elephants

The 7 Nightingale hospitals which were opened in England from the beginning of April cost £346m. Yet only two, in London and Manchester, received any patients at all. The east London Excel Nightingale, with capacity for 4,000 treated just 54.

NHS CEO, Simon Stevens claims this as a "success" for the NHS: evidence that it coped so well that these giant hospitals weren't needed. But doesn't the waste of hundreds of millions of pounds, show that the government, its advisors and top NHS officials made gross errors of judgement?

Having spent most of March ignoring what was happening in Italy (let alone Wuhan), downplaying the virus and delaying lockdown, the government suddenly made its panicked U-turn on the 23rd. NHS officials proceeded to clear hospital beds of tens of thousands of patients, discharging them into care homes (untested!) or sending

• Endless queues

The huge backlog of treatment/investigations as a result of the "pause" during the pandemic, means that there are currently 4.2m patients on waiting lists. And this number might soar to 10m by December. At the end of March, there were already 220% more deaths related to dementia/Alzheimer's disease and 75% more cancer deaths than normal. In April alone, cancer assessments were down by 60% and the number of patients starting



them home prematurely. The NHS was turned into a Covid-only Health Service.

But in the end it wasn't capacity of the hospitals which was the problem, but the capacity of the over-stretched staff, who were pushed to breaking point despite the 18,000 doctors and nurses invited back from retirement to help out. Some had to "isolate" away from their families, staying in hotels for months. A lack of PPE (incredibly,

wearing masks was only made mandatory in hospitals on 15 June!) has contributed to the death from Covid-19 of more than 300 health workers. And they are still at the sharp end. On 3 July, Hillingdon Hospital had to shut its doors and isolate, after 70 staff in A&E tested positive for the virus. The Nightingale Hospitals, however, remain empty. □

cancer treatment dropped by 20%!

The government has said it wants the NHS to resume "urgent services", before the backlog caused by the pandemic collides with the annual winter flu outbreak. But there are still 2,000 Covid-19 patients in hospitals. Healthcare services are still operating at only 60% capacity, and haven't begun "normal" work. And would "normal" even be possible, given the 90,000 NHS staff vacancies dating from before the

pandemic? Not to mention the under-capacity that the NHS has been plagued with, since the cuts and privatisations began and the fact that many Trusts are in serious financial trouble!

At the mercy of incompetent government and gross under-resourcing, even if a large second spike in C-19 infections is averted, the NHS is in serious trouble. Fake plaudits from ministers and "rainbow" posters cannot disguise this reality.

• Terror attacks? Yes, against mental health services!

Two knife attacks, in Reading and Glasgow in the space of a week, were first reported as terrorism. But it soon became clear that the two young male suspects were hardly typical "terrorists". The 25-year-old Libyan charged with killing three men in Reading, was well-known to mental health services there and was released from a mental health unit just three days beforehand. Friends of the asylum seeker from Sudan, shot dead after six people were stabbed in a Glasgow hotel, said he'd become paranoid, threatening staff and tenants with

violence after being rehoused during the pandemic.

In truth, the real problem here is the "terror" attacks by successive governments against mental health services. Most cuts were in hospitals. Community mental health services, meant to support patients after long-term mental hospitals were closed, were never enough to meet the sharply rising need. Between 2010 and 2015, there were annual cuts of nearly £600m to mental health trust budgets! By 2016, 6,600 fewer mental health nurses were working in NHS

England, a decline of 15% from 2010. In 2014, a promise of "equal priority for mental and physical health services by 2020" was made. Yet in 2018, analysis of funding commitments until 2023-24, found that only 4 in 10 of those needing mental health support would get it.

Scarcely a week goes by without some member of the government coming out with sanctimonious platitudes over "mental health" and the effects of the pandemic. But on whose hands is the blood of all of these latest victims?

Housing crisis**Councils give... and take back**

At the beginning of lockdown, the homeless were urgently rehoused by councils as a preventive measure. The government gave them a total of £3.2m additional funding for this. But in fact it was totally inadequate: since 2010, local homelessness services have been cut by £1bn/year - and 9,000 beds have been lost!

Despite this, however, almost 15,000 rough sleepers were temporarily housed

nationwide. The government claimed that this represented 90% of the homeless population - a figure contested by councils, who estimated that there were at least 28,000.

Of course, rough sleepers need permanent housing and other social help in order to rebuild their lives: 53% of the homeless have mental health issues. But many homeless do not qualify for rehousing, or only qualify for temporary accommodation, since they don't meet the 5 necessary criteria: being "legally

homeless"; meeting immigration conditions; being in "priority need" (which doesn't include sleeping on the street!); being homeless through "no fault of their own"; and having a "local connection" to the area.

The temporary rehousing scheme is due to stop at the end of July. Yes, just when some of the homeless have started to organise their lives again, the rug is being pulled from under their feet and they are being thrown back onto the street.

Social care thrown to the wolves

The pandemic has exposed the extent of collapse of the 20,000 residential and 19,000 non-residential adult care establishments in Britain. But the 18,500 mostly private organisations that own these establishments have made a financial killing out of this sector, thanks to government policy over the past 30+ years: from Thatcher's split of social care from the NHS, to the 2012 Health and Social Care Act which further opened the sector to private companies.

Indeed, in the 1980s, 64% of residential and 95% of non-residential care was still provided by local authorities or the NHS. Thirty years later, by 2012, this was down to 6 and 11%, respectively. Needless to

• The government's deadly virus

In order to "protect the NHS", the government decided to free 30,000 beds occupied by what they cynically call "bed blockers", i.e. elderly patients. Never mind that many were in hospital in the first place because social care is in such a poor state! To ensure that the elderly sent to care homes weren't carrying the virus, the government promised that they would be tested for Covid-19. But they weren't!

That wasn't the only promise broken by

• The failure of their "science"

The blatant incompetence of the government in controlling the pandemic and the devastating 20,000 death toll in care homes led Johnson to shift the blame onto care homes themselves. On 6 July he stated that "too many care homes didn't really follow the procedures in the way that they could have". Unsurprisingly, that caused a furore, so Hancock "corrected" this, explaining: "nobody knew the correct procedures at the time because the extent of asymptomatic transmission was not known".

Really? Scientific publications first suggested the possibility of asymptomatic transmission as early as December 2019 and by February this was confirmed. What's more, the "extent" of asymptomatic transmission would have been known, if testing had been "up and running" - but it still isn't. The government has thus ignored



say, today, almost the entire social care sector is now in the hands of the private "for profit" sector. And every year, an estimated £1.5bn in excess profits goes directly into the pockets of

the government in this regard. On 2 April, Personal Protective Equipment was supposed to reach care homes, but it didn't. And 3 weeks after health secretary Hancock had promised Covid-19 tests for care workers, only 1 out of 5 had managed to get one!

In fact, the government consciously downplayed the risks of the pandemic in care homes. Its advice, in place until 30 March, stated that it was "very unlikely that anyone receiving care in a care home or the

silent spread of Covid-19, also holding out against making the wearing of face masks mandatory in all settings - claiming there was a lack of "scientific evidence" that they offered protection. As always, though, it depends which "science" you choose to follow. Johnson's and Hancock's choices have set the scene for Covid's second wave.

• Care workers at the receiving end

The pandemic has also highlighted the working conditions of social care workers. More than half of the workforce is not even paid a living wage. And around 335,000, that is 25% of the entire workforce, are on 0-hours contracts or, which is almost the same, work through an employment agency and have bogus self-employment status. And since these workers don't have sick pay, many have no other choice but to work

Social care

their shareholders, private landlords, and to directors' fees, etc., which could be used for front line care of the elderly. That says it all about the kind of society we live in! ☐

community would become infected". Three months later, as many as 20,000 care home residents had died of Covid-19.

But only 1 out of 5 elderly died of Covid-19 in a hospital. The rest were just left to lose their breath and die without any active intervention. And now the government boasts that the number of infections and deaths is going down in care homes - when this is simply due to the fact that so many of the vulnerable have already died.

when ill, or starve!

Moreover, many social care workers on precarious contracts don't necessarily have a fixed workplace - they have to move from the community or domiciliary care, to care homes day to day. According to the NHS chief executive, Simon Stevens, this is yet another reason why there was such a high rate of infections in care homes. Indeed, care homes with permanent staff had a lower rate of infections compared to those employing workers on agency contracts. As a result, not only did many care home residents die, but care workers themselves were more than twice as likely to die from Covid-19!

So now what? Will care home staff be employed by the state on decent terms and conditions? Will the government take social care back under the NHS? Most unlikely - even if it this is precisely what needs to happen!

Councils on the brink

Local councils were told to provide additional services such as extra adult social care, shelter to homeless and food to the most vulnerable during lockdown. They were also asked to suspend parking fees, which on its own cost councils in England £885m in lost revenue. Councils, which were already on the brink of bankruptcy after 60% of government funding was cut in the past decade, are now left with an estimated

£6.9bn financial black hole.

But Local Government secretary Jenrick pledged a mere £4.3bn extra-funding - of which £600m goes directly into the pockets of private social care providers and £500m is to cover for unpaid council tax. So only £3.2bn is, in reality, "new" funding - i.e., not even half of what would be needed to fill the previous funding gap, let alone compensate for the cost of all the extra measures implemented as a result of the pandemic. Eighty percent of councils in

England are virtually bankrupt..

So they are making yet more cuts. Leeds, for instance, has frozen vacancies. Tower Hamlets in London decided to sack 4,000 workers and rehire them on worse conditions. This attack was met with a 3-day strike, which started on 3 July. The council still managed to impose the new contracts, cynically called a "Reward Scheme", on 6 July. But Tower Hamlets' workers aren't ready to give up. Indeed, why should council workers pay the Covid-19 cost?

Their Covid economy Sunak's "jobs plan": another free gift to the bosses

As part of his "summer budget update", chancellor Rishi Sunak has announced a "plan for jobs". He needs one. As he himself explained: since March, the economy has shrunk by 25%. The IMF predicts the deepest recession since records began. The British economy was already in trouble before Covid-19 and now also faces an inevitable Brexit hit on top.

Of course, the government is worried about the coming "scourge" of unemployment. On top of the 11m currently furloughed workers, there are already 4m unemployed. Up to 700,000 school-leavers will soon join them. The Covid-crisis has given many companies a pretext to restructure and cut costs, above all, by cutting jobs.

And presiding over this situation is a government which has proved its incompetence by its criminal mishandling of the Covid-19 pandemic. These are ingredients for a social explosion. And that is a very frightening prospect for Johnson, Sunak & Co., and the capitalist class they represent.

So Sunak now pretends to address "workers' worries" with his "job creation plan". But just like his furlough scheme, it is a handout, not

• **Not so hospitable to workers**

Sunak's so-called "Job Retention Scheme" ends in October. So is his new "plan for jobs" at least an admission that this scheme failed in its purpose?!

In fact in the hospitality sector, among those hardest hit by the lockdown, sales are down by 56% compared with last year. Thousands of jobs have already been lost

• **From furlough to the sack**

The coronavirus furlough scheme is to continue as a "flexible" furlough until October, tapering the employers' subsidy available, so that they should (at least, in theory!) contribute 10%, and then 20%, to make up 80% of workers' wages. But they can bring back workers in rotation and part-time - and re-furlough them - and still claim wage refunds for the difference between any hours workers work and their normal hours.

And of course, Sunak is not threatening to reclaim payments from companies who sack workers during or after furlough. Although HMRC might "ask questions", if it looks as though the company intended to sack the workers all along. That is unlikely to prevent companies like John Lewis or Boots, which furloughed thousands of their workers, from going



Sunak with business leaders

to workers, but to the bosses. His "kick-starters" scheme doesn't "create" even one job! It offers bosses who will pay a minimum of £520/month and who provide 25 hours minimum work a week to 16-24 year-olds, a "bonus" of £1,000 per worker.

In other words, it's a reward to bosses for offering part-time work at a starvation wage - because the minimum wage is a starvation wage: apprentices get £4.15/hr, and then the level varies from just £4.55/hr to £8.20/hr according to age!

And yet the "scourge" for the working class - is not just the

and more cuts are threatened. While hospitality employs 10% of the country's total workforce, it accounts for almost a quarter of all zero-hour contracts - simple to hire and fire! So much for Sunak's pledge to ensure that bosses provide "good and secure" work! There is no question of him impinging on these bosses' "rights" and banning their

ahead with the job cuts just announced of 1,300 and 4,000 jobs respectively. And any boss with half a brain probably knows how to cook the books and bury the damning evidence!

• **Jobcentres back, sanctions too**

To cope with the largest ever increase in claims for unemployment benefits, the DWP took on 2,000 extra call centre workers. But outrageously, it made sure that the new recruits would themselves rejoin the army of unemployed as soon as they're no longer wanted, by hiring them on temporary agency contracts!

In fact Jobcentres re-opened in early July, for urgent rather than routine face-to-face appointments and the draconian sanctions regime, which had been temporarily suspended during the height of the first wave, has been reinstated. In other words claimants are going to be

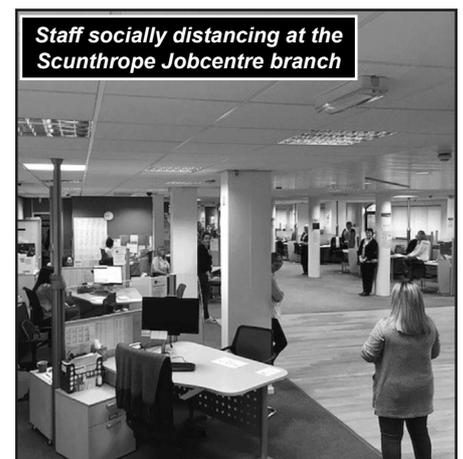
absence of jobs, but the nature of these jobs - low paid, part-time, precarious! Did Sunak say one word about banning zero-hours contracts, or making it mandatory to offer permanent jobs? No. He has given the bosses an incentive - a nice little bonus - to employ, under the pretext of "training", cheap, part-time youth for 6 months only.

The working class has seen such "smoke and mirror" tricks before. And it surely knows by now that the social change which is needed - and which becomes more urgent by the day - will have to be "kick-started" by workers themselves. □

use and abuse of these contracts.

In fact his only "bright" idea to help restaurants in this sector, besides a (temporary!) cut in VAT to 5%, is for the Treasury to pick up 50% of the tab when punters go out to eat... but only Monday to Wednesday, only through August and only up to £10 per meal!

penalised for not meeting application targets for work, when every low-paid, long-hours vacancy is going to have hundreds or thousands of applicants!



Staff socially distancing at the Scunthorpe Jobcentre branch

Ongoing unemployment tsunami

New figures published on 16 June by the Centre for Retail Research predict 235,704 retail job cuts, with 20,622 stores closing down in 2020. Boots is closing around 48 of its stores. John Lewis is planning to close 8 stores. Same goes for fast food chain Burger King, which plans to close one in ten branches, with the loss of 1,600 jobs. Airlines are "restructuring". EasyJet will sack 4,500 workers and close hubs at Stansted, Southend and Newcastle airports. Rolls Royce has made 3,000 workers redundant and DHL has laid off 2,200 logistics workers on its JLR contract.

Yet before the pandemic, Boots was making above £1bn/year and John Lewis made well above £220m/year over the 6 past years! As for Burger King, it made £257m in



profits last year, and since 2013, has always made above £120m/year. EasyJet has had profits above £400m over the last 7 years. Rolls Royce has huge assets over £30bn - and expects to squeeze £1.3bn out

Their Covid economy



the current sackings! DHL increased by +30% their profits in 2019 to £4.1bn! Yes, these "past" profits are more than enough to weather the Covid-storm - without cutting one job! ☐

• Covid-19 profiteers

Covid-19 may have cost thousands of workers their jobs, but some companies have "never had it so good". The obvious candidates are pharmaceuticals, PPE makers, online supermarkets, online gaming, and companies like Netflix and

Zoom, the provider of virtual meeting rooms!

Of course the biggest winners are pharmaceutical companies: for instance, Regeneron's shares are up by 37% and Novavax, a company developing a

Covid-19 vaccine, has seen an incredible 1,900% rise in value. Clorox, producer of disinfectant wipes and PPE in the US, has made a fortune as prices of essentials like masks keep going up and up. And while Amazon workers were forced to strike over their working conditions and lack of PPE - all around the world, in fact - Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, already the world's richest man, managed to increase his personal fortune by (a record!) £19bn since Covid-19, bringing it to £109bn!

Others in the new "top 100 companies" are Ocado, the British online supermarket which has reinvented itself as a global tech supplier to other grocers, and Peloton, whose exercise bikes equipped with video screens became popular as gyms closed.

Of course, this is how capitalism works, while some collapse during a crisis, others profit from it.



• The City: more hits to come

Since no extension to the Brexit transition period was agreed, negotiators failed to meet a June 30 deadline for completing their assessments of each other's regulatory regimes for financial services. It means that City of London "asset managers" could potentially lose their "passporting rights" to sell funds seamlessly across the EU. As much as £9 trillion may stand idle as a result! Such a scenario is not one which City bosses want to face, especially following the disruption to their dealings caused by Covid-19.

The economy was already in recession before Covid-19 and plummeted even further after the worldwide lockdowns. Figures published by Link Group in *Dividend Monitor* estimate that dividends might fall as much as 51% in 2020. So far, 45% of British companies have

scrapped payouts, while pre-tax profits dropped by 29.8% in comparison to the same time last year. According to Link's *Profit Monitor*, Covid-19 is expected to impact business profits by £170bn over 2020 and 2021.

A second hit by a "no-deal" Brexit will strike Britain's already weak economy hard! That is why the government is now negotiating to keep as many single market benefits as it can - preferably Brexit in name only - even while it advocates "freedom" from the EU!

• Tory scandal, like old times

Last November, housing and local government secretary Robert Jenrick overruled a refusal of planning permission for a 1,500-apartment housing development on the old Westferry print works site on the Isle of

Dogs. The site's owner, who had lobbied Jenrick personally at a Tory fundraising dinner, was billionaire speculator Richard Desmond. Desmond made a fortune in pornography before buying the Daily Express, Daily Star and Channel 5, but has sold them since, to concentrate on property. Jenrick admits watching a promotional video - apparently for the development - on Desmond's phone.!

In addition, Jenrick "managed" to make this decision just before new rules on developers' contributions to council services kicked in, potentially saving Desmond £40m! Desmond, (who once gave UKIP over £1m), apparently gave an admittedly paltry £12,000 donation to say thanks. When all of this came to light, Jenrick quickly reversed his decision, rather than defend it in court, saving his own bacon, for now.

Brexit watch

Johnson just can't help himself from making false and grandiose claims. He says that no country in the world has done more to support its workforce during the pandemic than Britain has. Does he imagine nobody ever fact-checks? Sunak's furloughing, business loans and tax holidays are just a "copy and paste" of measures taken by most OECD countries, only in some respects, less generous! That said, no worker - not in any country - has fared well during this Covid-crisis: the "luckiest" have been temporarily laid off and paid part of their wages; others were sacked.

Germany adapted its already existing "Kurzarbeit" scheme in order to

The EU's C-19 furloughs: Britain isn't best

furlough workers and has extended this to 21 months (cf Sunak's 7-month cover). This is a state-administered short-time work allowance, paying up to £6,000 a month to workers with children, and in the context of Covid, covering 10m laid-off workers. It pays for any hours not worked at 60% for the first 3 months, 70% during the 4th to 6th months, and 80% from the 7th month. So, if hours are reduced by 30%, the loss in pay is 10%.

So what about France? Its furlough is also paid directly to workers out of an existing state scheme. It covers 13m workers and pays 85% of net salary, up to £6,000 a month. Minimum wage

workers get 100%. It also allows workers to work part-time, without complicated calculations and has now been extended to 2 years. Even Ireland has been paying workers laid off due to C-19 up to 85% of their wages since 4 May.

As for the size of the support packages, the total in "real money" which Sunak has made available since the start of the pandemic is £190bn. The latest German package is £116bn - but like all EU states it has access to the EU's emergency loan fund of £675bn... Britain, of course, has to find its own source of credit - already in short supply, in more ways than one. □

• OneWeb: wrong satellites?

The British government, together with Brexit-supporting Anil Mittal's Bharti Enterprises has "won" a £1 billion bid to buy bankrupt communications company OneWeb. The deal was pushed by Dominic Cummings and strong lobbying from Airbus, which had already sunk money into OneWeb.

Before going into administration, OneWeb was building a global internet



broadband service (in competition with Elon Musk's Starlink!) by using small satellites that orbit very close to Earth (750 miles), but it only launched 74 out of the 650 it needed before going belly-up. Bharti was already one of the largest investors in OneWeb, so it is in effect saving its own investment - and getting help from British tax money to do so!

In fact OneWeb's purchase was first promoted as an alternative to the EU's Galileo GPS system, which Britain no longer has access to after Brexit, thanks to the government's decision not to negotiate the new agreements required. What's more, an alternative GPS satellite navigation project was shelved 2 months ago because of its £5bn cost. According to Dr Bleddyn Bowen, space policy expert at Leicester University "What's happened is that the very talented lobbyists at OneWeb have convinced the government that we can completely redesign some of the satellites to piggyback a navigation payload on it. It's bolting an unproven technology on to a mega-constellation that's designed to do something else. It's a tech and business gamble."

Whether this "gamble" will pay off, remains to be seen. But space research analysts are sceptical, saying that it looks as if "nationalism is trumping solid

industrial policy". Yes, and that would certainly be par for this government's course!

• Vaccines: Britain to go it alone, again

Business secretary, Alok Sharma, has decided to opt Britain out of the £2.1bn EU scheme to secure coronavirus vaccines. This plan provides advance funding to ensure that new vaccines, once found to be effective, can be produced in the required quantities for mass immunisation.

Sharma claims that there is no guarantee that Britain would get the number of vaccines it needs "on time". But this is unlikely to be the real reason. In fact the government has already jumped at least one queue, in order to be first to get the AstraZeneca/Oxford partnership vaccine, which is meant to be rolled out in October. However, there are as many as 200 vaccines under development - and who knows which ones will work?

The pharmaceutical industry is not known for its ethics. Behind the scenes there are huge financial interests which dictate government decisions, whether or not in the interests of finding effective treatments or vaccines - not to mention the hyped up Brexit nationalism of government ministers.

Racism**• Systemic and systematic!**

Over the past weeks alone, there have been a string of incidents where the police stopped, searched and arrested young black men, while they were going about their normal lives. Ryan Colaço was on his way back home from a TV interview on institutional racism in his car when he was stopped by police who smashed his car window and then held him in prison for 12 hours, citing suspicion that he had drugs on him. A similar suspicion apparently caused cops to haul a black woman with a baby out of a car with her partner and even arrest a black child on a bicycle.

When Met Police Commissioner Cressida

Dick was asked about police racism she said: "I don't think it is a massive systemic problem, I don't think it's institutionalised, and more to the point I think we have come such a very, very, very long way": British police are "different" from the US cops who killed George Floyd. If British cops stop and search (and often "rough" up) black men 10 times more often than whites, we're to believe this is nothing to do with racism. Really?

• Ever-hostile environment

It's not just the cops. Priti Patel's Home Office continues its "hostile environment policy" - yes, the same one which led to the 2018 Windrush scandal, which the government was forced to admit was a travesty. Those declared "illegal immigrants" - jailed

or sent to the Caribbean - have still not been compensated. Five have died in the meantime - after slaving away in public service, including in the NHS!

Patel's deportations of black offenders - to their supposed "home countries" - also carries on behind the scenes. British-born twins Darren and Darrell Roberts face deportation to two different Caribbean islands (which they've never been to!), after serving full sentences for offences committed when they were minors. Social services failed to sort out their naturalisation when they were in foster care. As their sister says, "Darrell and Darren's plight highlights the systemic racism built into our institutions in Britain". Yes, and this racism will only be eradicated when the system itself is eradicated.

Playing security politics with Huawei

In an escalation of the US-China trade war, Trump has imposed export controls aimed at limiting Huawei's access to semiconductor technology produced in the US. Of course, the aim is to undermine Huawei's lead in providing and selling its 5G technology - including to Britain, to clear the field for US companies.

Right from the start, when the British government first chose Huawei to help build part of the infrastructure required for 5G, a section of Tory ministers and backbench MPs began a war of words against China, accusing the Chinese state of planning to use Huawei's technology to spy on Britain, even if there were no grounds for this whatsoever. However now that Trump has ramped up his anti-China rhetoric, the British bandwagon has been refuelled: former chief of MI6 Sawyers said: "UK intelligence services can.. no longer provide the needed assurances that Chinese-made equipment is still safe to use in



the UK's telecoms network".

Of course, choosing Huawei above the US tech giants, or Nokia and Eriksson, was controversial. MPs on both sides of the House disapproved, even though Huawei was ahead of the game, cheaper, and has been providing its tech to Britain for over 20 years. But now the government is about to reverse the decision it made just 6 months ago - and ban Huawei entirely from British telecommunications networks. Even

though this means ordering network operators to remove and replace all the Huawei equipment which is already installed. And that could take... until 2030! BT and Vodafone have been clear that such a step would lead to major communication disruptions and cost billions of pounds. But never mind. Better to follow Trump, join the trade war against China and forget "common sense". No matter the price. ☐

• Hong Kong: Johnson plays saviour ... by whitewashing Britain's imperialist past

Johnson's attempt to play saviour to the Hong Kongese is a sickening joke! He wrote in The Times (June 3) that "Hong Kong succeeds because its people are free ..." - a blessing handed down ... by the British empire! If China passes a national security law, "Britain would have no choice but to uphold our profound ties of history and friendship (!) with the people of Hong Kong" by giving Hong Kongese British National Overseas passport-holders the right to work in Britain, thus putting them on a

path to British citizenship - if they can get a work visa allowing them to stay in the UK beyond a year and if they can find and keep a job in the midst of the current economic crisis, for five years!

By Britain's ties of "history" and "friendship", Johnson meant Britain's imperialist rule of Hong Kong for 156 years, after capturing it from China during the mercenary opium wars of the 19th century and after which it was used as an entry point for the imperialist powers to exploit the Chinese mainland!

And "democratic" British Hong Kong more closely resembled a dictatorship. It was ruled by an all-powerful governor appointed by London, assisted by a mostly consultative legislative council in which only 1/3rd of the seats were directly elected and for which only 1/3rd of the population could vote! No, Johnson's posturing is just a bargaining chip in his negotiations with China - and a gesture to Trump's anti-Chinese chauvinism.

Poverty

• Unprecedented poverty

A study into poverty before the coronavirus outbreak, found that as many as 14.4 million people were living in poverty in Britain. This included a third of all the country's children - 4.2m. It also pointed out that black and Asian households were more than twice as likely to be in poverty than white families. And that a record high of 60% of people in poverty are in work, as wages had shrunk and part-time, casualised work had increased. Average household debt was 31% higher than during the financial crisis in 2008.

So the situation was already dire, before Covid struck. Since then, a further 11% of "working poor" have lost their jobs. It is estimated that 4 million more households have borrowed money or gone into debt. With unemployment estimated to reach an official figure of

15%, levels of poverty are likely to rise to levels not seen since the 1930s.

The Institute for Public Policy Research's estimate is that 1 million more people will be pushed into poverty due to coronavirus. And yet the only measure taken so far by a government (which has been so quick to bail out businesses!), is to increase the level of Universal Credit payments by £20/week for one year. Which would help, minimally, but only if all those eligible actually received what they were entitled to... And of course the wait for the first payment is still 5 weeks, so claimants have to resort to charity, or starve.

• Child malnutrition doubles

The 22 year old footballer Marcus Rashford made headlines this June, because he forced the government to make a U-turn and agree to provide free meals to school children during the summer holidays. He pointed out

that as many as 200,000 children had missed meals during lock down and that the voucher scheme which the government had decided to discontinue should be reinstated.

In fact according to figures obtained under Freedom of Information requests by Lib Dem MP Layla Moran, in the first 6 months of 2020, 2,483 children in England alone were admitted to hospital with malnutrition. This is twice as many as last year. However, these figures are from fewer than two-thirds of hospitals, meaning the real number must be much higher.

Foodbank charity Trussell Trust said it handed out 89% more food parcels in April compared to the same month last year. Another foodbank saw a 175% increase in requests. Hunger has surged, with 7.7 million adults having missed meals and cut down on portions during the lockdown. Yes, in the 4th richest country in the world...

King's Cross railway station (London)**What next for GN?**

A letter has been sent to GN workers to tell us that the plan for TfL to take over Great Northern's Moorgate to Stevenage line (but only up to Letchworth Garden City) might finally go ahead. But only after GTR's franchise ends in 2021. Any changeover is likely to be delayed until September 2022.

In fact there are no details as to how this is going to work, nor whether TfL might outsource the running

of the service, as it has done with its other Overground takeovers. Or even if it might include it as part of the Northern Line - as the Moorgate to Finsbury Park line used to be before WW2! There's a suggestion too, that the connection to King's Cross could be scrapped.

If this means a refurbishment of the track, tunnels and stations, which have been left to fall into disrepair for so long, fine. But when



the GTR boss says in his letter that our jobs won't be impacted "immediately" we know very well what's in store, for "later". Forewarned is forearmed. ☐

• Put the mask on

We don't understand why face coverings (or better, proper masks?) weren't made compulsory on public transport 3 months ago? Public transport has been a major hub of infection all this time - and still is!

And of course, that means face coverings are also needed while passengers are waiting on the platforms or in the station... not only on the trains! Or does the DfT think that this virus is not infectious outside the trains...? These "exceptions" are getting ridiculous. [Workers' Platform King's X, 17/6/20]

• It "should" mean "must"!

How many times do we need to ask passengers to step back at the LNER gates, especially when they're not wearing masks?! The problem is that even as the station is getting busier, face masks - tho' made available to passengers - still haven't been made compulsory. In fact, only (the few) BTP officers can enforce wearing them - and only on trains, not on the platform, nor the rest of the station! But face coverings only work if everyone wears them - everywhere! [Workers' Platform King's X, 2/7/20]

• Against cuts and on-board cleaning

When work is actually increasing with more trains running, why would Atalian want to cut an entire night shift, as it now proposes? Rumour has it that LNER wants more on-board cleaning. And from Atalian's perspective, we know that on-board means less waiting time between trains, equals more work done by fewer of us. That's why. And that's also why we'll oppose it. [Workers' Platform King's X 2/7/20]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**BMW milks the crisis**

BMW has been complaining of an uncertain future for many months now and threatening job cuts in its English factories. Before coronavirus, of course, most of this uncertainty was about the effect of Brexit on exports of their Minis. But in the first quarter of 2020, as Covid-19 spread around the world, the BMW Group's car sales were 20.6% down on the same quarter last year. Despite this, however, BMW reported a profit before interest and taxes of £1.26bn, an increase of 137% on last year's £531m! The bosses boast in their financial

statements that BMW continues to enjoy a great credit rating and to claim the second best cash liquidity of any company in the world!

So they hardly needed to rush the workforce back into Cowley last month, while infection rates in the community were still high. Anyway, BMW was only adding 10% of our wages to the government's 80% while we were furloughed: the other 10% is to be paid by us, in "banked" hours which we will work when needed. Since the restart, there has been overcrowding on some jobs and high line speeds have sent



physical distancing out of the window. This has inevitably led to a cluster of cases of Covid-19 in two production areas - with at least 12 workers contracting Covid-19 - so far. But has BMW decided to re-furlough us? Not on your Nelly! ☐

• Slow the spread, slow production!

BMW risks our health, and then blames us when the virus breaks out again - but we're having none of it! We noticed weeks ago that hand sanitiser was running out and not being replaced. When we pointed this out to managers, they told us to go and wash our hands in the toilets (not at all "COVID-secure" places themselves)! Workstations are not being cleaned as a matter of course in between shifts. Their production will have to be lower and slower,

so that there's more time for cleaning, and washing our hands. And if they won't slow it down, we will! [Workers' Fight Bulletin, BMW Mini Oxford 2/7/20]

• Covid-insecure

So no, we weren't surprised that 9 more workers tested positive for Covid-19. But we hear it could be at least 15... and how many of us have been exposed, and are now shedding the virus, even though we don't have symptoms? So why weren't all workers in the area immediately sent home (on full pay of course!) until tested? Instead of

being told to keep quiet and keep working! [Workers' Fight Bulletin, BMW Mini Oxford 2/7/20]

• Not worth the wait

Why did BMW cancel two mass briefings in the last two weeks? Were they afraid to tell us something? It's no secret that they want to cut jobs in 2020. And they've already started offering early retirement packages. But we've got things we need to discuss now, so we need our own mass meeting(s) asap! [Workers' Fight Bulletin, BMW Mini Oxford 2/7/20]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

Royal Mail's Covid-Insecurity

On 3 July, Royal Mail confirmed that 7 postal workers working in Chester Delivery Office tested positive for Covid-19. Responding to this, managers had only the usual platitudes to offer, like, "RM takes the health and safety of its colleagues, its customers and the local communities in which we operate very seriously"! Never mind that the Chester outbreak is not an isolated case! On 24 June, for instance, 6 cases were recorded in Barnsley DO. But it took RM 2 days to finally decide to close the office and pay for a deep-clean!

In fact, these outbreaks are

hardly surprising. Even here at the Mount, managers have not been prepared to make radical changes on the shopfloor to allow safe distancing everywhere. As for mask-wearing, which might "mitigate" having to work more closely together, this is still not compulsory, despite all the evidence that masks decisively reduce the risk of infection.

In fact the Office of National Statistics has provided an incomplete, but damning picture of the impact that Covid-19 has had on our ranks. Between the 9 March and 25 May, 91 "postal workers, sorters, messengers and couriers" died from



Covid-19. And how many more have died in the 6 weeks since then?

In order to keep their profits flowing, RM volunteered us as "key workers" without the least thought for our safety. Bosses had to be pressurised into taking the most rudimentary precautions, including by walk-outs and threats of strike action. The lesson being, that a safe workplace is only possible when we take things in our own hands! □

• Always asking for more

RM bosses are telling us they're in a pickle... And what sort of pickle is that, excuse us? In their annual financial results, they've just announced they made profits of £180m before tax! So what's all this talk about "losing" £1m per day?! With packets enough for 3 Xmases piling up on the shop floor, it certainly doesn't look like that!! But even if profits were down the drain, that doesn't change the fact that our rent, food, transport, etc., have gone through the roof! So we don't want to hear any excuses when it comes to our

jobs and pay! [Workers' Fight Bulletin, Mount Pleasant 2/7/20]

• We need our plan

Yes, because the "Three-step" plan announced by "interim" CEO Keith Williams gives a preview of their "attack" strategy. Step 1 is "proposing management restructure impacting around 2,000 roles" - in other words, cut the heads of 2,000 managers (but who else will be included in this?). And we're told that no such thing is planned for the rest of us? Except that steps 2 & 3 are to press ahead with "operational change" and "underpin the USO" to ensure the business is

"sustainable in the long term". We know what all this means. We better have our "One-step" plan ready: fight back against every cut! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 2/7/20]

• When managers fly!

We'll be happy to show managers the way out, if they vote for a strike (who knows their CMA-Unite union might ballot?)... And in fact it's the only way they might be able to get back in!

PS: We can even offer to help them with some placard ideas for the picket line: like "down with the bosses"? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 2/7/20]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

• Flexible furlough: more money for Ford

This is a bit crazy: after having had just a few weeks back at work, Lion assembly mates, some of phase 2 Panther machining, Lion machining and some Linside Logistics mates are all re-furloughed - till 17 August!

Ok, so it's good to have another break and get out of a potentially risky workplace environment, given the latest outbreaks of Covid have been in factories... But of course Ford now gets its wage-bill re-subsidised! And it does make us wonder what's in store... [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 8/7/20]

• Check your payslip!

Those of us who've been re-furloughed had better watch out! The government's so-called "flexible furlough" requires ridiculously complex calculations - meaning plenty of scope to pay us short. Like the bit comparing our baseline number of "usual hours" with the number of actual hours worked... We can already predict the pounds and

pennies which will be missing, unless we "stay alert"... [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 8/7/20]

• Real challenge

We'd like to know where all the surplus ventilators produced here will go? The countries that need them at the moment are poor countries and can't afford to pay for them. So Ford and the other companies who boasted of their "selfless" Ventilator Challenge effort, have another chance to prove themselves... Give them away for free. [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 8/7/20]

• Not heroes after all?

And what happened to the Randstad agency staff who helped to build these ventilators? They've been gotten rid of, like "thanks, now piss off!?" Well, we didn't expect much more from Ford. [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 8/7/20]

• Strength in numbers!

When us Linside Logistics workers were working in the baking hot heat of DEP 2 weeks ago we were told we were not



allowed to wear shorts! Bosses said it was against health and safety regulations. Really? So how come Ford workmates in the same conditions, can wear them? Well, next heatwave, what if we all come to work in shorts? They can't send us all home..! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 8/7/20]

• Wear a dress!

Better still, maybe we should come to work in dresses? Definitely a lot cooler! Only we'd better be careful nobody makes a video.... Yes, we heard that 2 mates in J building ventilator production became instant You Tube stars for dressing in a dress - and that instead of taking it for the joke it was, some tight-assed higher-up took disciplinary action against them! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 8/7/20]

India

Indian workers are faced with the twin attacks of the Covid-19 virus and the capitalist virus. The bosses' mad dash to restart their factories, speed up production and increase their market share, has played a large part in spreading the virus to 265,000 people (by 9 July).

By late June, there were already 140 Covid positive cases in the 8,000-strong Bajaj motorcycle factory in the western state of Maharashtra - and 2 workers had died. Instead of halting production to control the spread of the virus, the company sent a letter threatening those workers who started staying away from work to protect themselves, that their pay would be stopped! Predictably, within ten days, the number of cases had risen to more than 250, with 5 dead!

The bosses' scramble to restart production without proper safety checks has also led to more than 30 fatal industrial accidents, killing 75,

USA

Trump is fanning racism in a desperate attempt to maintain his voter base in the run-up to the 3 November election. In his Independence Day speech held at Mount Rushmore, he tried to whip up anger against the recent anti-racist protests that spread across the country after the murder of George Floyd. He said: 'Our nation is witnessing a merciless campaign to wipe out our history, defame our heroes, erase our values, and indoctrinate our children'. He has promised harsh penalties for those who vandalise statues of slave-owners and anti-abolitionists, and criticised the National Association for

Latin America

Latin America is home to 8% of the global population, but nearly half of recent Covid-19 deaths: more than 120,000 of the world's 524,000 coronavirus fatalities. In its most populous country, Brazil, the death toll has risen to more than 73,000 - the second highest in the world after the United States - with some commentators now predicting it could overtake the US. Mexico, where 30,000 have died, has overtaken Spain as the country with the world's sixth highest death toll.

The situation is nowhere as devastating as in Brazil, owing to the policies of President Bolsonaro, who

The bosses' murderous race for profits



injuring more than 100 and displacing more than 10,000 people since the lifting of the lockdown!

But some workers are making a stand. From 2-4 July, despite the deployment of paramilitary troops to intimidate them and protect strike breakers, no less than 550,000

miners and transport workers across nine regions went on strike, demanding a wage rise and protesting against the privatisation of India's coal industry. If Modi & Co thought they could get away with their attacks on the working class without a response, they were wrong! □

US election: Trump's racist card

Stock Car Racing (NASCAR) for banning the Confederate flag at its races.

But then, what else can he campaign on? "Victory" over the virus? Hardly, as infections are peaking in areas that never had them. In fact Trump is the original "Covid-19 Denier". Thanks partly to his policies, the world's richest country has reported the largest number of pandemic deaths in the world. What about the economy? With some 40 million people still out of work, there is little more to say.

So, Trump reverts to fuelling racism, attacking the people who demonstrate

against outrages like the death of George Floyd, and hopes to divert attention from the disasters of his making. For Trump, anything is justified if it assures him victory. In all this, the Democratic Party candidate Joe Biden may well benefit, as people may vote to simply get rid of a racist demagogue. But racism itself cannot be "voted out", as some of the placards at the protests have suggested. It has to be organised against and fought, as part of the fight to get rid of the system which spawned it. □

In the eye of the Covid storm

continues to downplay the impact of the virus as "a little flu" and has been attending anti-lockdown demonstrations! Even after testing positive for Covid-19, he continues to make dubious statements like his "lungs are clean". Just as the country crossed 1.6 million-mark for infections, large cities like Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo were opened up, with Bolsonaro encouraging people to get back to work. Millions in the favelas and poor-neighbourhoods have been left to fend for themselves. The president has recently vetoed a law that would help guarantee drinking water, disinfectants and hospital beds to the country's

indigenous population.

In fact the pandemic threatens to spiral the whole continent into crisis. Venezuela is already beset with the highest poverty rates in the region due in part to hyper-inflation. Peru and Ecuador saw their health systems collapsing, with cadavers lining the streets in Ecuador. Every country's economy is poised to suffer a severe slump, with activity declining by 9%, pushing an estimated 52 million more in poverty. The virus has exposed a system which can only bring new disasters for the poor billions of this world. □

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, or by postal mail at:

BM Workers' Fight - LONDON WC1N 3XX.