



Workers of all lands, unite!

CP BRITAIN CP BRITAIN

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Communist Party of Britain international bulletin

May Day

THE FIRST OF MAY is a day of international solidarity for working people fighting against exploitation and oppression. On May Day 2020 Communists in Britain mark it by honouring all those across the world in the front line of resistance to Covid19 pandemic. Their dedication and commitment has demonstrated once again that it is on living human labour power – by hand and brain – that our survival depends. The impact of the virus itself, and of governmental responses to it, is exposing with startling clarity the weaknesses and contradictions of the global capitalist order and of particular countries within it. Correspondingly it has also highlighted the ability of countries not governed by the interest of private profit to combat the virus and to provide wider assistance.

Our survey is intended to bring together this information for the use of all those in Britain struggling for a better world free of capitalist exploitation and imperialist oppression.

Britain's record

Covid death rate 41 deaths per 100,000
Britain has one of the highest number of deaths by population in the world (26,000 people at the end of April). In terms of the preparedness of its health services Britain has one of the lowest number of hospital beds at 2.5 per thousand people in the developed world: China has 4.5, France 6.3, Germany 8.5 and Japan 13.0. In terms of the responsiveness Britain's government was one of the last to react: lockdown was on 24 March – eight weeks after the first article in the Lancet (from China) warning of need for emergency measures on 24 January, seven weeks after WHO declared a world medical emergency on 31 January (and the first UK cases were identified) and three weeks after cases had become widespread across England, Wales, Scotland and N Ireland. In terms of preparations for exit from lockdown Britain has repeatedly missed its targets for mass testing. It failed to reach its target of 10,000 a day at the beginning of April when Germany was testing 100,000 a day. At the end of April it had only reached 50,000.

International from Cuba

Covid death rate: 0.55 deaths per 100,000
Despite 60 years of blockade by the US, Cuba's socialist planning provides free health care for all its people with more than twice the number of hospital beds per head than Britain (5.2). Cuba's pharmaceutical industries are among the most developed in the world and by the beginning of April Cuba had tested twice as many people per head as Britain. It is now leading the way in developing an effective vaccine for Covid19. Its use of Interferon Alpha B treatment has reduced the death rate to just 0.55 per 100,000 (58 deaths in total). In March Cuba offered sanctuary to the Covid-smitten British cruise ship Braemar – refused landing rights elsewhere in the Americas – and provided medical treatment to its passengers. Since mid-March Cuba has supplied medical aid across the world. 1,450 Cuban medical personnel, equipped with medical supplies and equipment, are now working in the following countries: Italy, Andorra, Surinam, Jamaica, Dominica, Belize, St Vincent, St Lucia, St Kitts, St Thomas, Mexico, Antigua, Barbados, Haiti, Venezuela, Nicaragua, South Africa, Angola, Togo, Cape Verde, Qatar

China

Covid deaths 0.33 per 100,000
From Xinhua 4 April supplemented by CGTN for 10 April
Medical teams sent to Iran, Iraq, Italy, Serbia, Cambodia, Pakistan, Laos, Venezuela, Nigeria, Kazakhstan.
Free medical supplies (face masks, test kits, protective suits) sent to 130 countries as of mid April
Exports (commercial)
3.8 billion facemasks
37 million protective suits
2.4 million thermometers
16,000 ventilators
2.84 million test kits

Covid in Europe

European Union

International aid

The EU Commission placed a ban on the export from the EU of all Covid related items (PPE, ventilators and drugs) on 12 March. This was in response to the outcry over the unilateral ban on the export of such items to other EU members by Germany and France on 4 March. The ban on such exports is to be reviewed in May. Individual EU countries, such as the Czech Republic, have intercepted and seized convoys bringing aid from Russia and China to other countries in Europe.

EU Financial support for member states

EU institutions have failed to agree on any major financial packages to limit the economic impact of Covid on the weaker members states. On 14 March the Director of the European Central Bank declared that it was not the Bank's role to 'close the spread' between the borrowing rates imposed on different EU governments. After two months of argument the EU Council of Ministers announced on 23 April that a package of financial aid would be available. This would be composed of a package of individual grants equivalent to about 2 per cent of EU GDP – together with a commitment to use this to 'lever in' other monies equivalent to 2.5 per cent of EU GDP, possibly as loans. In March the German government had announced its own measures to provide financial assistance for German businesses equivalent to 30 per cent of German GDP (the US Congress and Federal Reserve announced measures also equivalent to 30 per cent US GDP). Italy, Spain and Portugal have expressed strong reservations about the EU measures and fears that most of the aid would be in terms of loans that have to be repaid on economically damaging terms (as in 2010).

Portugal

Covid deaths 22 per 100,000

Portugal has suffered fewer deaths per capita (2,236 per million inhabitants) than Spain (4,700), France (2,423) or Italy (3,142), and has seen new cases drop since roughly the start of April. The Portuguese Communist Party has argued that, although containment and public health measures were necessary, the declared state of emergency to enforce these measures – along with business-oriented economic support policies – are not in the public interest <http://www.pcp.pt/en/second-renewal-declaration-state-emergency>. The state of emergency means restrictions on worker organisation. The bleak economic situation is exacerbated by the years of austerity forced on Portugal by the Troika of European institutions, which are now (especially the Netherlands, Austria, Finland) refusing any material transnational economic redistribution: and the PCP renews calls for Portugal to free itself both from the European Union and from the Euro <http://www.pcp.pt/en/current-situation-benefits-risks-and-responses> (again the double bind of monetary and fiscal policy).

Hungary

Covid deaths 0.3 per 100,000

The right-wing government in Hungary has used the coronavirus situation to double down on its repression of progressive forces. The government abolished the right of unions to supervise safety and inspect workplaces. An emergency coronavirus law would suspend any elections during the emergency period and allow the government to rule without scrutiny from the Hungarian parliament. The law also criminalises the publishing of 'fake news', accompanied by veiled threats directed towards news outlets critical of the government.

Hungarian Workers Party has also demanded that the government send doctors to care

homes, where elderly people are most at risk of dying from the virus. It has also criticised the fact that state support for businesses has largely gone to supporting Swiss, Austrian, and German companies operating in Hungary.

Russia

Covid deaths 0.7 per 100,000

The level of infection in Russia has remained relatively low, although cases have been rising – with 1078 deaths by 29 April. Russia imposed travel restrictions with China in January 2020, and in early April most of the border crossings with China were closed, by joint agreement of both countries. Partly due to the low rates of infection, the response to the virus has been mixed and the country has imposed only partial lockdowns. The government made mistakes, such as organising a large parade in Moscow, which forced them to quarantine large numbers of soldiers. Some historically closed cities under the soviet period have once again been legally restricted to inhabitants and necessary personnel only.

The referendum on extending presidential term limits, originally set for the 22 April, has been delayed until it is safe to hold the vote. The Russian Communist Party (CPRF) supported the introduction of quarantine measures, it warned against oligarchs taking advantage of the situation, and it urged the government to learn from soviet experiences in combatting the epidemic.

France

Covid deaths 24 per 100,000

Confinement of the population was gradually introduced with increasingly severe curfews, up to the 23rd March when citizens were forbidden from going outside beyond 1km from their apartment. Passports and limited authorisations are issued for key workers and other exceptional circumstances.

The population generally accepts these measures. However unfortunately the confinement regime has led to many cases of police using the situation as an excuse for repression and arbitrary harassment, even in cases when citizens have the proper documentation on their person.

The effect of the virus has also been worse in socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods, such as the Paris suburbs. The government tried to avoid these areas getting overwhelmed by moving patients around the country to regions with spare hospital beds. The railway network was used to run special trains for this purpose. Overall the virus has exposed the inequalities in the French healthcare system

The French Communist Party (PCF) has put forward its proposals for dealing with the crisis, which include: the nationalisation of strategic industries, repurposing the armed forces for medical priorities, an immediate 20% salary increase for key workers, a stop to all economic redundancies, suppression of VAT on necessary goods, and the creation of a European fund for financing health services. They also call for strengthened parliamentary oversight of the confinement measures, so as to prevent potential abuses of power.

Poland

Covid deaths 0.8 per 100,000

Poland has experienced a more limited exposure to the Coronavirus than was anticipated. The latest figures at 29 April saw 12,640 confirmed cases and 624 deaths (38m pop) with 3,025 people in recovery.

Poland's right wing authoritarian government imposed lockdown measures in two stages in March including limiting family gatherings and religious assemblies to six.

Non essential travel was banned and the government responded to concerns expressed by medical professionals by attempting to muzzle them. This met with resistance from doctors and the Ombudsman gave constitutional protection to their rights to comment on grounds of freedom of speech and the right of the public to information.

Polish trade union have reacted strongly to attacks on trade union and workers rights under government proposal to meet the pandemic. The initial government "protective shield package" in early April greatly restricted workers' rights: companies were given the option of extending working hours to up to 60 hours a week and reducing minimum rest periods between shifts from eleven to nine hours.

The main union OPZZ and even Solidarnosc which usually is aligned with the government party opposed the measures and were successful in blunting their effect.

Attempts by the government – with threats of dismissal – to direct the labour of health workers led to collective action in which many refused to work without the appropriate protective equipment.

Initially the government proposed allowing dismissal by e-mail, freedom of dismissal for workers with a secondary source of income, forced holiday leave, suspension of job security rights and collective dismissals the suspension of collective bargaining.

OPZZ warned that the government was planning further changes. Tightened measures saw children and adolescents under the age of 18 only allowed to leave the house under the supervision of an adult. Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki wants the presidential election scheduled for May 10 to go ahead with a postal vote which would advantage the ruling party.

Opposition parties have called for a postponement of the vote.

Spain

Covid deaths 47 per 100,000

Spain has been hit particularly hard by the virus, with the largest death toll per capita of any large country (i.e. of over 1 million inhabitants: Luxembourg, Iceland, San Marino etc have a higher death rate). The PCE has called for a coordinated industrial policy of production of sanitary equipment (including PPE) [link], as well as greater international solidarity and cooperation with Cuba, China, Venezuela [link]. It has called for a pan-European plan for aid to poorer countries and sectors affected by the pandemic: but interestingly, supported the Portuguese premier's description of the current European reaction as "disgusting" [link].

Italy

Covid Deaths 31 per 100,000

In general, the pandemic situation in Italy is still grave, but steadily improving. Political and journalistic attention is focusing to the economic after effects of the pandemic, of pan-European "solidarity" (especially with regards to monetary and fiscal policy, through the ECB and European Commission/Council respectively). Before the complete lockdown of most "non-essential" economic activity, a series of strikes https://www.repubblica.it/economia/2020/03/23/news/coronavirus_sciopero_lombardia-252057177/ were taken out in the industrial areas most hit by the virus (Lombardy) with regards to workers safety, e.g. a strike of 700 workers at the Electrolux factory of Solaro in mid-March

https://www.ansa.it/lombardia/notizie/2020/03/13/coronavirus-fiom-scioperi-operai-non-sacrificabili_ac437f01-b260-418c-83d2-584587731e82.html. The Trade Unions, especially the prominent CGIL (historically CP-affiliated), were key players in achieving the lockdown early, and have been heavily involved in negotiating economic and social restrictions <http://www.cgil.it/coronavirus-landini-accordo-positivo-che-mantiene-salute-e-sicurezza-prima-condizione-per-ripresa-attivita-produttiva/>.

The political and social context for Europe's initially biggest outbreak

Italy provides the test case for the absolute necessity in timely preparations for outbreaks of coronavirus type pandemics. Among the comuni least affected by the COVID-19 virus is Prato which has a large number of people of Chinese extraction working in the textile business. Infection rates are low because the local population were more attuned to China's swift and effective response to the spread of the infection and began practicing social isolation

measures well before the Italian state and population in general were switched on to its necessity.

The latest figure 23 April 2020 for Italy is confirmed cases of infection 187,327 with 25,085 dead and 54,543 recovered. The highest incidences of cases occurred in the more northern regions. Lombardy, which includes Milan and the commune most especially affected Bergamo, Emilia Romagna, Piedmont and Veneto between them comprised the great majority of cases.

The response of the Italian state has been very rigorous with regional lockdowns enforced by the police and travel closely controlled by the carabinieri force directed by the Defence Ministry. There has been a strong movement of social solidarity and in places very great appreciation for aid deliveries from China and Cuba.

This is in contrast to what is politically the most profound movement in opinion which has been in relation to the EU.

Following the statement by Christine Lagarde, president of the ECB that "we are not here to close spreads" – which caused a sharp rise in Italian bond yields opinion polls show that 88 percent of Italians say that the EU failed to support Italy in the crisis, while just 4 percent believe that it is doing enough. Now 67 percent of Italians regard EU membership as a disadvantage, a rise from 47 percent in November 2018.

The response of political sectors of Italian life to the crisis has been instructive and closely parallels the differential response by political actors in other states. An interesting poll (<https://www.istitutoixe.it/2020/03/10/intenzi-oni-di-voto-10-marzo-2020/>) shows support Salvini's Lega is down 7.3% to 27% from its EU election total.

PD is steady at around 22.5% while Cinque Stelle has dropped from 17.1% to 15.6%.

In this fluid situation the loss of trust in both Lega and Cinque Stella may reflect their loss of prestige while in government and their vacillations over the EU which has seen both of them row back on their earlier critical rhetoric.

There has been some movement within the right to consolidate around the Fratelli di Italia semi fascist fringe and at the expense of Lega and especially Berlusconi's Forza Italia. Fratelli leader Giorgia Meloni is quite cleverly replicating the approach of an earlier leader of the far right Fini to appear as responsible and honest in comparison to their more sleazy rivals on the right.

Lega strongest areas were in the north where the they were blinded by their ideology and misunderstood the nature of the threat. Salvini's problem is that he bears regional responsibility in the areas most affected and despite a largely tokenistic bid to allow churches to open during easter has been largely mute.

His bid to crush his government partner/populist rival Cinque Stella failed and he is out of government while the new Conte government has been able to rally opinion in a national effort.

The Italian Communist Party points out that China has had to rush to the rescue of the most powerful capitalist state, supplying it with ventilators and other health protection tools.

"The confrontation of the capitalist West with the socialist states, starting precisely from China, is merciless: it is no coincidence that a society bound to the short-lived imperatives of the market and profit determines a distorting model of coexistence which is in fact not only unfair from the point of view of the production and the distribution of wealth, but also culpably fragile in terms of general social security.

"The common thought, which is less confused, that "nothing can be as before" has made its way into the common opinion. We Communists say that a profound transformation of the mode of production is needed, as well as ideas, aspirations and negative values inspired by the dominant liberal ideology.

"These considerations should ignite at least some doubts about the international relations maintained to date by the Italian governments of the center-right and center-left: relations characterized by loyalty to the Atlantic area and - whatever the cost - to the European Union."

The Italian communists say that the painful health situation has emphasized an internal crisis already underway in the European Union, posing a radical question for the very *raison d'etre* of the latter

REPORT FROM LEO IMPETT, PIERRE MARSHALL AND NICK WRIGHT (INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION EUROPE)

AMERICA

USA

Covid deaths 18.6 per 100,000

US imperial influence can be witnessed in almost every nation of the globe, however during this pandemic there is a clear distinct difference between the handling of domestic policy and foreign policy. Much like Britain, the US has eagerly tried to maintain the free market, which has left efforts uncoordinated, underfunded, and poorly handled. Due to the federal nature of the US, each state has some power in how to handle internal affairs, meaning the response has not been equal across the entire nation. Two notable extremes have been New York state staff resorting to the use of bin bags, instead of PPE. California, instead of addressing its extreme homelessness issue, has created 'social distancing homelessness' where spaces are marked for people to sleep on the ground 2 metres apart from each other.

As a result of the mishandling, there are extreme concerted efforts to shift the blame away from the GOP government. Many have encouraged anti-Asian racism suggesting ludicrous things like the pandemic was created by China in a lab. Others have suggested the panic is over the top, and we need to get back to work for the economy. This has led to a massive spike in anti-Asian racism and violent attacks. While also creating a situation where working class individuals are protesting the lockdown en masse. Many liberal/anti-Trump GOP elements have used this to highlight idiocy amongst this segment of the workers, almost as an attempt to legitimise why they should ignore their concerns.

The CPUSA have highlighted how, like most crises, this is used as an opportunity to attack the rights of workers. As of 29 April 61,000 have died as a result of Covid-19, the highest total globally, this has disproportionately affected working class and BAME Americans due to their population density within the frontline workforce. The American prison system, nursing home infrastructure, and 'immigrant detention centres' have also been hotbeds for the spread of the virus.

The biggest problem facing the American working class is the trade union movement and the labour movement simply do not have the strength or spread to influence enough states or the nation, meaning this crisis is being abandoned by Liberal elements as more predominantly white working class individuals will flock further to the right; bolstering Trump.

Internationally, the US is in a desperate grab to avoid losing too much global influence to China, while it tries to stabilise. This has seen the US increasing pressure on the Cuban blockade, remove funding from WHO, as well as trying other underhand tactics to destabilise Socialist nations like Venezuela or DPRK (the recent rumours of Kim Jong-Un's death are likely to be the result of the US trying to exert influence). The sheer extent of the impact on the US is still to be seen, however we would be foolish to think the US remains the largest global influence. We would also be dangerously naive to suppose the US will take this fall from grace lightly.

Brazil

Covid deaths 2.6 deaths per 100,000

The South American nation has had approximately 50,000 cases of Covid-19, with over 5,513 confirmed deaths. The right wing Bolsonaro has been following a similar trajectory to Trump with him personally joining protests to end the lockdown. Bolsonaro has also been desperate to re-open the borders, citing the need to keep the economy moving. Many left-wing leaders like Lula and Dilma Rouseff have been quick to condemn these anti-worker manoeuvres by Bolsonaro. Due to Brazil's economy being highly dependent on export of food the lockdown will be impacting the nation heavily. Unlike the US, many grassroots organisations are taking to basic campaigning i.e. providing food, sanitising streets of favelas, and other similar gestures.

With Bolsonaro's enthusiasm to maintain the economy, testing and other preventative measures have been lacklustre. The Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT) reported a recent study in Brazil showed the number of cases could be as much as thirteen times greater, due to the failing to do mass testing. The PT have also condemned the Health Ministers failures across the board. The PT are consistent and clear that the best way for Brazil to address

the pandemic and problems within society currently is to remove Bolsonaro and his party.

Bolsonaro has never been one to hide his political allegiances, however this pandemic has truly laid bare his alignment to the US over the Brazilian people. Like Trump, Bolsonaro is keen to make sure the economy keep moving regardless of the human cost.

Bolivia

Covid19 0.5 deaths per 100,000

Since the coup last year, Bolivia has witnessed a dangerous shift to the right. The rights of the working class and indigenous population have come under various attacks and political expression has been heavily repressed. Quickly after the coup's success, the Cuba doctors who had been stationed in rural regions were evicted from the nation; this coupled with a lack of investment to replace the loss of these doctors has meant distribution and support has been weak.

Bolivia has only 950 cases, placing it at 88th out of the 212 nations which have succumbed to the epidemic and 59 confirmed deaths. This statistic is more a reflection of the geography and population distribution of Bolivia over 'preparedness'. Bolivia's population is mostly rural, with few densely populated regions, making the spread of the virus slower - however this is coupled with a poor infrastructure to aid those infected, meaning once infection hits a region, it is hard to remove.

Nicaragua

Covid-19 deaths 0.06 per 100,000

Daniel Ortega's government has come under a lot of international scrutiny, especially from pro-NATO nations. The nation reported a remarkably low infection rate with only 14 confirmed cases and only 4 deaths. This incredible success has been used as an opportunity for right-wing opposition to try and undermine the Sandinista government. This has included stories of the government making no preventative measures, Daniel Ortega possibly being dead, or the government is hiding figures.

Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign highlighted how the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO) praised Ortega's government for its strong response to the pandemic. As early as March, Nicaragua had mobilised approximately 4,000 health professionals to test 70,000 citizens and provide the necessary care and education to help combat the pandemic.

Regardless of these facts, much like in Bolivia, Venezuela, or Cuba a moment of weakness has become a welcome opportunity for right wing and Pro-US elements to try and undermine the situation with the US imposing harsher sanctions on the nation. In 2021, the nation will be having an election, meaning this is a suitable opportunity for a coup in a similar manner to Bolivia. The disinformation and constant attacks from the right should be seen as a warning by all on the Left and emphasise the need to show solidarity.

Venezuela

Covid19 deaths 0.055 per 100,000 population

Venezuela has one of the lowest infection and death rates in the Americas. The government imposed a lockdown when the first cases were identified at the end of March and has developed a rigorous regime of testing to track and isolate sources of contagion (one million test kits have been supplied by China). This is despite the intensification of the US blockade which has blocked the commercial supply of medicines and all other commodities. At the end of April there were only 333 confirmed cases and 10 deaths.

Venezuela has a relatively high ratio of doctors (1.9 per thousand) and medical services have been reorganised over the past decade in liaison with Cuban medical practitioners. The Venezuelan national health services now focuses on the provision of free health care within poor communities on a micro-community basis. To combat the blockade on food supplies and to minimise internal transport, food production has been localised in rural areas and free food deliveries arranged for the poorest households. The government has imposed a suspension of rent and loan payments during the Covid emergency and banned utility providers from cutting supplies for non-payment.

REPORTS FROM STEVE JOHNSON, BEN LUNN AND ROBIN TALBOT (INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION AMERICAS)

MIDDLE EAST

Turkey

Covid19 35 per 100,000

Turkey has the world's fifth highest death rate. It has a population of 80 million. 3m are refugees.

Economy

Turkey is highly urbanised (74 per cent in towns) with a big industrial sector (27 per cent of labour force). It operates largely as a subcontract supply centre for European firms – particularly textiles and automobiles. It has a very high level of corporate debt to external banks, over a third of GDP, a majority owed by large infrastructure construction companies working on government projects and partly guaranteed by the government. In 2019 26 percent of total new investment came from banks and investment companies based in Britain, from Germany 10 percent, US 7 percent and Spain 4 percent (figures from Santander Bank)

Response of government

Erdogan's authoritarian AKP government has refused to impose a full lockdown and has kept open most of the sectors of the economy operating as cheap labour suppliers for European and US firms. A large proportion of the 28 million working population is in the 'informal sector'. Only 400k workers are covered by the currently operating salary support scheme. 300 arrests have been made of those, particularly in the health sector, protesting at the lack of anti-virus counter measures. The mayors of the three biggest cities, Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, all from non-AKP parties, have protested at the lack of a lockdown. Mass testing only started at the end of March – with 90 thousand tested out of 80 million by early April. On 20 April Erdogan announced a limited 4 day lockdown in 31 towns from 23 April preliminary to reopening the automotive sector in May.

Preparedness of health services

Turkey has one of the most developed health sectors in the Middle East – but its expansion over the past decade has been based entirely on the privatisation of health provision: private hospital beds up from 12 per cent in 2000 to over 40 per cent today. On 31 March two thirds of all intensive care beds were already occupied.

Assessment

Turkey's massive overhang of external corporate debt, partly guaranteed by the government, underlies the government's dangerous determination to refuse a full lockdown and to maintain production. Information from Turkish Communist Party TKP and <https://news.sol.org.tr/>

Saudi Arabia

Covid19 4 per 100,000

Deaths are concentrated among the country's migrant labour force. Migrant labour makes up 33 per cent of the 30 million population. 75 per cent of recorded cases are among migrants. All SA citizens are entitled to free health care. Migrants have no entitlement.

Response of government

The government initially halted travel to and from China. By late March travel to the holy cities had been halted and localised lockdowns imposed. Through April the government has been forcibly deporting migrant workers – although migrants provide three-quarters of all workers in the private sector and the great bulk of workers in construction.

The virus has demonstrated Saudi Arabia's dependence on migrant labour, the scale of their exploitation and lack of rights.

Qatar

Covid19 3.8 per 100,000 27 April

Deaths again concentrated among migrants. 2.3m of Qatar's 2.6m population are classed as migrants (1.2m are from India and Nepal). Only 0.3m are citizens. 92 per cent of the population live in Doha. Migrants live in overcrowded encampments with limited facilities on the outskirts.

Government response: a total lockdown has been imposed on migrants; limited measures of social distancing among citizens. On 14 April Amnesty International reported thousands of migrants being rounded up on the pretext of virus testing and instead imprisoned preliminary to deportation.

The virus has exposed a level of dependence on migrant labour even higher than SA – and no effective response to either the virus or to Qatar's complete dependence on migrant labour.

Lebanon

Covid19 4 deaths per 100,000

Lebanon has a population of 5.2 million of whom 1.5 million are refugees (initially from Palestine; more recently from Syria). It is highly urbanised. By the 1960s it had developed one of the most advanced social infrastructures in the Middle East. Lebanon then possessed a well organised working class movement and a strong Communist Party. Since then external interventions, US, NATO powers, Israel, Iran) have fractured Lebanon's democratic institutions and created competing sectarian power structures dominated the very wealthy. The political result of a much diminished labour movement is demonstrated by the collapse of public health care.

Decline of public health provision. The overall decline in the number of hospital beds per head of population between 1960 and 2009 was from 4.5 per thousand to 3.5 per thousand – but of these 85 per cent are now in the private sector. The proportion of public expenditure devoted to health declined from 3.8 per cent in 2000 to 1.8 per cent in 2012. Pre-virus, in autumn 2019, the World Bank predicted a rise in poverty from 30 to 50 per cent of the population.

Government response to the virus. The government used the crisis to close down the mass mobilisation by workers and students over the previous six months against the country's undemocratic, sectarian and big business dominated power structures. All education was closed from the beginning of March and all non-food shops from the second week in March. The Parliament was closed in the second week of March. In March the government defaulted on payments for government bonds and the currency lost half its value. This has inflated food prices and placed large numbers of students, now stranded overseas, in dire poverty. Assessment by Lebanese CP

Iran

Covid 19: deaths per 100,000 7.0

The Iranian people suffer under the COVID-19 pandemic, at the same time as brutal repression and US economic sanctions!

As of 26 April, according to the regime's official figures, there have been 90,481 cases of the coronavirus in Iran - resulting in 5,710 deaths - with more than 3,000 people requiring intensive care. More than 100 medical doctors and nurses have also paid with their lives in the course of their heroic fight to protect the nation from the virus. However, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has expressed its doubts over the official figures given the size of Iran's population and the significant delay before any real controls were introduced. There are reports that the figures have been underreported by 3.5-4 times in every category.

Iran has suffered the terrible consequences of the spread of COVID-19 due to the criminal neglect of the theocratic regime. As a result of the regime's gross irresponsibility and negligence in relation to public health and the pandemic, Iran has become one of the most severely impacted countries in the Middle East and West Asia region.

While there were widespread indications that the virus had reached Iran in January, the regime refused to acknowledge the danger or take any measures to prevent its spread. It is now a proven fact, acknowledged by ministers and informed officials, that the regime had instead prioritised mass participation in the celebrations marking the 41st anniversary of the 1979 Revolution on 11th February, as well as a high turnout in the parliamentary elections, that took place on the 21st February.

This regime policy was to prove costly. The presence of coronavirus in Iran and the first two deaths were only announced on the afternoon of polling day when the election was already well underway. By then the virus had in fact taken hold throughout the country. The country's Minister of Health has admitted that he raised the news of the infections at cabinet but was told by other ministers to keep quiet until after polling day.

The announcement by the regime two weeks ago that Iranians should return to work will only result in a more rapid spread of the virus and a further deterioration in the country - and there have been reports of a surge in casualties in a number of provinces across the country since then. In response to criticism of this policy, President Rouhani has indicated that he would rather see "2 million die than 30 million hungry protesting on the streets."

US sanctions

While the country's under-resourced and overstretched health sector struggles to deal with the pandemic, the US sanctions have not only stayed in place but have been expanded. The US refuses to spare the Iranian people from the disastrous impact of the sanctions, which affect the availability and provision of food and medicine while destroying the economic fabric of the country. The United Nations and leading European powers - including Britain, France and Germany - have officially called upon the US to remove the sanctions in order for a humanitarian relief effort to take place.

However, the US has blocked a \$5bn emergency loan to the IMF sought by Iran to help tackle the COVID-19 crisis. Iranian officials have told the IMF that in order to continue their countermeasures against the virus and to preventing a deepening of the crisis; they desperately need at least \$10bn.

Political prisoners

Against this backdrop, the fate of political prisoners is also cause for particular concern. Prisoners are kept in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions and are subject to routine mistreatment.

Just before the Iranian New Year, on 20th March, the regime begrudgingly assented to the release of thousands of prisoners. However, those political prisoners with a sentence of longer than 5 years were excluded from the release, including several of the country's most high-profile detainees.

An estimated 30,000 prisoners - out of 100,000 slated for possible release - were not set free. This number included a significant number of political prisoners. The decision to deny the release of these prisoners, despite the desperate situation vis à vis the virus inside the prison system and the widespread calls for mercy to be shown, led to serious revolts in several jails in late-March and early-April.

Workers at risk

Furthermore, the regime is refusing to support the call for the provision of a safe environment for emergency work to be carried out and is not providing guarantees for workplaces that decide to stop production owing to the pandemic. This means that workers are coerced into going to their workplaces despite the dangers, rather than being left jobless, destitute and hungry.

The combination of the theocratic regime's sheer ineptitude and brutal disregard with the vengeful actions of the US, in intensifying sanctions, is putting the lives of many ordinary Iranians at risk. Both must be opposed; both must be stopped.

Iraq

Covid19 deaths: 0.2 per 100,000

Plight of the Poor Aggravated by Coronavirus Pandemic and Government Failure

The Coronavirus pandemic in Iraq has seriously impacted the people, especially the poor. According to the latest official figures, on 23 April 2020, the total number of confirmed cases was 1677, with 83 deaths and 1171 recovered.

The government initially issued health advice and warnings to the public. However, when the Coronavirus was declared a global health emergency by the WHO, and neighbouring Iran became one of the major hotspots of the pandemic, strict measures were imposed, culminating in a curfew. It was partially lifted on 20 April 2020 in preparation for Ramadan, despite a warning from the WHO that the epidemic has not yet reached its peak.

There is deep concern that the official figures do not reflect the gravity of the situation. They are based on a very small number of tests, totalling no more than 64882 (as of 23 April) out of a population of 40 million.

The pandemic has exposed the dilapidated state of the health sector and highlighted the catastrophic consequences of poor funding and attempts of privatization. There has been a lack of essential protective personal equipment (PPEs), ventilators and test kits. On the other hand, Iraqis are full of praise for the valiant efforts of the medical and nursing cadres and health workers.

The pandemic has compounded the hardship suffered by the poor in Iraq, numbering more than 10 million in a population of 40 million, according to official figures. As a result of the curfew imposed by the government on 17 March 2020, the poor and low-income strata were deprived of their meagre daily earnings. The government's efforts to alleviate their

suffering have been pathetic.

The pandemic has, however, instigated an unprecedented societal response and a spirit of communal solidarity. Mass campaigns were launched to provide food parcels to poor families. These are coupled with efforts to raise public health awareness. Young men and women, many of whom were involved in the popular protests since 1 October 2019, have been at the forefront of these efforts.

Women's organisations have also condemned the rise of violence against women since the curfew was imposed. They have called for speeding up the enactment of a law deterring domestic violence and protecting women.

Afghanistan

Covid19: 0.12 deaths per 100,000

The chaos of poverty, corrupt governance, war and occupation multiply the impact of COVID-19!

Afghanistan is going through especially difficult times with serious crises on a number of fronts before the coronavirus pandemic is even factored into the equation. Of course, severely underdeveloped countries like Afghanistan are particularly vulnerable during such a global phenomenon. Afghanistan is also largely dependent on the economic assistance of the occupying powers, especially the US. Unfortunately, added to this is the damaging role of backward religious leaders in Afghanistan who mislead people about the pandemic, the threat it poses and how to tackle it.

Against this backdrop, the official figures relating to coronavirus and its spread in Afghanistan are dubious to state the least. Owing to the chaotic situation that reigns throughout the country, properly verifiable data is difficult to come by even where the official willpower exists. Thus, as of 26 April 2020, there have been 1,499 confirmed cases of the virus, with 206 having recovered and 47 deaths in Afghanistan - with the highest figures being recorded in Kabul, Herat and Qandahar before the numbers significantly trail off elsewhere.

One of the main issues affecting Afghan people is economic hardship, with 60% of the population living below the poverty line... A problem which manifests itself in extremely low wages paid to workers engaged on a temporary, often daily, basis; unemployment in the millions; similarly high rates of drug addiction; and woefully inadequate levels of government aid. The aid provided by those powers occupying Afghanistan fails to alleviate the suffering of the people or reach those most in need due to the endemic corruption in the country's officialdom.

This situation is compounded by the great misfortune of the Afghan people in that all of the relative economic infrastructure (such as silos) and social structures (cooperatives and trade unions) that could have been utilised to help the people out of these crises, have been destroyed as a result of the reactionary social policies of the ruling forces over the last almost thirty years, as well as an uninterrupted state of war and instability since the late 1970s.

Israel

Covid19 deaths 0.2 per 100,000.

14,885 cases reported as of 24th April with 193 deaths and 5,334 recovered with 240,303 tests

Since 12 April the wearing of face masks outdoors and social distancing made compulsory and fines imposed for any breach of regulations. Surveillance increased on movement of citizens using sophisticated technology perfected in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza. Whole neighbourhoods locked down wherever 'hotspots' occur, most of which are in overcrowded ultra-Orthodox communities.

The Emergency Regulations have been used in an attempt to stifle protests. Demonstrations by Israeli peace groups against the occupation and ethnic cleansing of East Jerusalem were met with heavy fines of 35,000 shekels (\$10,000) which the protestors vowed not to pay. A Right-wing 'Emergency National Unity Government' has been established supposedly to deal with the pandemic, the effect of which will be the annexation of the illegal Jewish settlements on the West Bank and the Jordan valley in an enlarged State of Israel as well as the continuation of neoliberal economic policies.



The Communist Party of Israel condemned the coalition agreement saying 'there is absolutely nothing about the deep social, economic and health crisis spawned by the Covid-19 pandemic'. It reported drastic shortages in laboratory materials for testing for Covid-19 and a dramatic increase in prices being taken for face masks due to speculation and profiteering.

On 17th April The Times of Israel reported that 3 million surgical face masks had arrived in Israel purchased from China by the Russian oligarch Yuri Milner. Earlier in the month the Ministry of Defense said it had brought in 11 aircraft from China containing millions of medical equipment including ventilators, face masks and protective suits.

There were reports of discrimination against the Arab minority in Israel as testing has been significantly lower than among the Jewish population. The proportion of Arab doctors in Israel is in line with the overall population (20%) but one quarters of nurses are Arab and half of pharmacists together with a significant percentage of ancillary staff in Israeli hospitals. HK member Youssef Jabareen of the Joint List said 'Our greatest fear is that they are on the front line every day, and then they come home, where they can transmit the virus.'

The CPI went on to report that over 50% of the 35,000 asylum seekers had 'lost their jobs because of the pandemic, given that many of them work in the restaurants and hotels, construction and cleaning. But unlike Israeli citizens and permanent residents, they have no unemployment benefits, social security or a communal support system to rely on.....They have almost no financial safety net for purchasing food and paying rent'. In addition almost a million Israeli citizens have registered for unemployment benefit, the vast majority of them after having been placed on unpaid leave due to the coronavirus crisis.

Hadash MK (Member of the Knesset) Ofer Cassif of the Leftist Joint List coalition called for the resignation of the long serving Minister of Health, Yaacov Litzman, leader of the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism Party, for delaying the implementation of regulations that might otherwise have come into effect early in March and 'blatantly violating his own coronavirus guidelines'. He said that the Ministry had long been neglected because of Netanyahu's neo-liberal policies.

Chairman of the Joint List coalition MK Ayman Odeh from Hadash spoke at the rally in Tel Aviv opposing the new far-right government on 19 April saying 'Given our shared fate, we are fighting the cruel coronavirus epidemic – Arab and Jewish doctors, caretakers and pharmacists.....only through a joint Jewish-Arab struggle can we succeed. This crisis present a huge opportunity for a wide Jewish-Arab front for peace and democracy'.

AFRICA

The COVID-19 pandemic is being exacerbated by the deep-rooted poverty, underdevelopment, and instability which affect the 55 countries and 1.3 billion people of the African continent – a legacy of colonial domination, post-colonial exploitation of people and resources and imperialist economic, political and military interventions today.

The relentless quest to secure, control of Africa's gems, minerals and oil has over decades fuelled western support for dictatorships and right-wing regimes with no interest in building provision for the health and wellbeing of the masses of people. Together with ethnic tensions resulting from post-colonial settlements, this drive continues to produce devastating conflicts across the continent – in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, Mali, Sudan's Darfur region, Somalia, South Sudan and Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara. These war zones are even less able to withstand the impact of the pandemic, as ongoing military operations and devastated infrastructures significantly hamper or prevent medical and aid workers accessing those affected by COVID-19.

These conflicts and crippling poverty also produce millions of refugees - 18 million in Sub-Saharan Africa alone, 26% of the world's refugee population. Crowded into camps without basic amenities or moving north towards Europe, these people have virtually no protection in the face of a generalised COVID-

Palestine

Covid19 deaths 0.08 per 100,000 of the population

480 cases reported with 4 deaths and 92 recovered with over 27,000 tested

Several international, Israeli and Palestinian aid and human rights organisations released a joint statement emphasising Israel's legal and moral obligations to 'take measures to save lives, permitting the entry of medical equipment and supplies to meet patients' needs'. They pointed out that 'Article 56 of the Fourth Geneva Convention specifically provides that an occupier has the duty of ensuring and maintaining the adoption and application of the prophylactic and preventative measures necessary to combat the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics'.

The Israeli navy has maintained its enforcement of the 3 nautical mile limit for fishing boats from Gaza resulting in the wounding of some of those on board by rubber-coated metal bullets and the seizure of boats that are only returned after lengthy delays and often in poor condition. Materials to repair and maintain the boats are difficult to obtain as a consequence of the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip. With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, lifting restrictions on the fishing vessels has become even more crucial for the food security of the general population.

A Palestinian government spokesman said that the majority of new infections were recorded among workers returning from Israel. Many, especially in construction, had been laid off as a result of the Israeli lockdown.

Of especial concern was the situation of the thousands of Palestinians incarcerated in Israeli prisons including hundreds of children without any regard for the circumstances of the corona epidemic. Mohammed Baraka said that 'these days, in the light of the Corona pandemic, the demand for the release of prisoners is even more urgent, especially in the light of the conditions of the occupation prisons, in terms of health overcrowding, and harsh living conditions, all of which make us more worried and demanding their release, because it is enough for one prisoner to be injured, or infected with this virus, to turn into a massacre'.

The Communist Party of Israel reported that 'Attacks by Jewish settlers on Palestinian farmers and their property, including the cutting down of olive trees and the diversion of raw sewage onto fields, have been on the rise during the current state of emergency in the West Bank due to the coronavirus pandemic. Over the years the Israeli occupation authorities have fostered a culture of impunity for Jewish settlers committing acts of vandalism and physical attacks on Palestinians in the occupied West Bank'.

It was also reported that Israeli police had raided a coronavirus testing clinic in occupied East Jerusalem and arrested its organisers, because the clinic was being run in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority (PA). The Government

19 outbreak.

The pandemic, which took hold in Africa several weeks later than Europe, is now having a major impact. By 28 April, 33,273 cases of COVID-19 had been reported (up by almost 10,000 from the previous week), with 1,467 dead and 10,091 patients recovered after the infection, according to the Centre for Disease Control (CDC), an agency of the African Union. The CDC notes that there is sometimes a time-lag between tests being carried out and reports submitted. It goes without saying that many cases go unreported and unrecorded.

Morocco, Egypt and South Africa are worst affected so far, with in excess of 4,000 cases each. Algeria is a close fourth. The highest recorded death tolls are in Algeria and Egypt. However, when population figures are factored in, Djibouti, Mauritius, Seychelles, Tunisia and Morocco head the list of cases per 100,000 people. At the time of writing, only Lesotho and Comoros had yet to report instances of the disease.

The World Health Organisation fears the virus will spread rapidly. The UN Economics Commission for Africa has asserted that without intervention more than a billion people could catch the virus, with a death toll above three million and that even with measures in place to contain the virus, over 120 million could be infected.

Poverty and years of underinvestment in public health will be major factors in this. Seventy per cent of the world's most destitute live in Africa, their plight contrasting sharply with the life of rich and corrupt elites who hold

regards East Jerusalem as being part of Israel and refuses to accept the PA having any jurisdiction or right to operate in the city. The quarantine is invariably impacting the economic situation of all East Jerusalem residents, but especially those who now no longer benefitting from UNRWA services due to the annexation measures.

Palestinian Prime Minister Dr Mohammed Shtayyeh at a press conference in the Council of Ministers in Ramallah, said that 'Humanity will triumph over this epidemic, but like all wars there are victims and in crises the worst of humanity emerges but shows the best of them, and our people showed their best of high national spirit and solidarity'. He reported that medical assistance was being received from China and Chinese businessmen.

The Political Bureau of the Palestinian People's Party stressed that 'the response to the Covid 19 pandemic comes against the backdrop of continued aggression of the occupation and its practices in ethnic cleansing in Jerusalem, the expansion of settlements and the continued efforts to implement (Trump's) 'deal of the century' plot and the siege of the Gaza Strip'.

Syria

Covid Deaths 0.02 per 100,000 of population

Prensa Latina 29 April: Syria has reported zero new Covid-19 cases with 43 patients so far, 21 of whom have recovered from the disease and three died, while authorities have taken measures to prevent the spreading of the new coronavirus. At the end of April the daily reopening of businesses and industrial facilities was authorized, as long as they comply with the measures to prevent crowds, and interprovincial travels will be authorized on April 30 and May 1 only. Likewise, the daily curfew between 19:30 to 6:00 hours on the next day is still in force, as well as the activation of 38 facilities for quarantine and primary care of infection cases. The Ministry of Education instructed to apply tests in the 9th and 12th grades next month, on the basis of the classes taught until March 24, where the emergency was decreed. Meanwhile, the industrial sector has increased production of articles for sterilization and disinfection, in addition to mobile equipment to clean streets and buildings, and devices to detect new Covid-19 cases.

Throughout Syria efforts are being stepped up by the government to prepare laboratories and isolation wards and raise public awareness of prevention measures. Health facilities and intensive care units were being prepared and communities most at risk identified. Yet 9 years of war have affected hospitals and left them ill-equipped to deal with the outbreak. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reported that less than two-thirds of hospitals were operating at the end of 2019 and 70% of healthcare workers had

the reins of power in many countries. In Swaziland, "Mswati (the king), true to his policy of enriching and protecting the royal elite and the rest of the Swazi ruling class, has responded to the Covid-19 pandemic as if the majority of our people do not exist" says a spokesperson for the country's communist party.

The economy of the Africa was facing a major recession about to impact on millions of the most vulnerable before the advent of the virus. This will be compounded with the consequences of the pandemic and measures taken to slow its progress, with businesses failing, unemployment soaring and millions more thrown into poverty. As the prime minister of Ethiopia warned in late March, African economies are fragile at the best of times but now they are "staring at an abyss."

The health systems of the majority of African countries are fragile and dangerously under-equipped, without having to grapple with a global pandemic. Some teeter on the edge of collapse as a result of years of chronic underinvestment. The density of doctors and health workers is in many cases extremely low. Many hospitals lack even basic resources. At the time coronavirus hit, there were said to be only three ventilators in the whole of Mali!

Many workers and their families are in poor health as a result of poverty and undernourishment, more prone to falling victim to the virus and less able to recover from it. According to the UN, of all continents, Africa has the highest prevalence of certain underlying conditions like tuberculosis and HIV/Aids and diseases such as malaria.

fled since the war began in 2011.

The Senior Humanitarian Advisor to the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria reported that 'donor countries – including those which have imposed sanctions - must ensure that exemptions for medical care be fully and immediately utilised and all obstacles put aside as the crisis unfolds'. The UN Special Envoy 'saluted front-line humanitarian workers and doctors and nurses across Syria who are responding to Covid-19 at great risk to their own lives'.

The Government have adopted a series of measures to stem the spread of the virus, closing shops and restaurants as well as imposing a strict curfew and movement restrictions. It announced that all Primary and Secondary school students will not resume classes this academic year but will all advance to the next grade, whilst the number of examination centres would be increased for final year students in order to ensure adequate distance between them. Universities will remain closed at least until the end of Ramadan in late May.

While the government has regained control of most of the country after almost a decade of war, some areas were still held by pro-Ankara rebels. Although a ceasefire negotiated at the beginning of March between Turkey and Russia had so far held, a lack of food, clean water and exposure to cold weather had already left hundreds of thousands of displaced people in poor health, making them even more vulnerable. The International Committee of the Red Cross warned that physical distancing is impossible in the camps in Idlib, the last rebel-held province.

The International Rescue Committee, whose President is David Miliband, warned that 'the security and political vacuum that the pandemic will create is likely to be exploited by actors in the Syrian conflict – including ISIS extremists – to serve their interests'. However Professor Balanche of the University of Lyon said that 'this epidemic is a way for Damascus to show that the Syrian state is efficient, and all territories should be returned under its governance'.

In a statement issued on 15th April, the Communist Party of Spain 'condemns attempts to impose new sanctions against Syria and calls again for the end of the economic blockade against the country. Since 2011, the Syrian people have been subjected to an unjust and illegal economic blockade, with humanitarian consequences that are especially evident these days. To avoid the collapse of a public healthcare system already punished by sanctions and terrorist attacks, Syria has become the country with the toughest restrictions in the world to avoid the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has meant an almost total halt in its economy at a critical moment for the reconstruction of the country and the return of displaced people'.

Reports from Navid Shomali, Robert Wilkinson and John Foster (International Commission: Middle East)

The virus and lockdown cause disruption for almost everyone. But for poor families, the shutdown is often a matter of life and death. The president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, articulated the dilemma clearly when he said that measures to slow down the spread of the pandemic were essential, but that people also had to eat and earn a living. The South Africa Alliance has raised major concerns that under lockdown, domestic violence will soar and many will have difficulties accessing basic food and clean water. Problems are also being stored for the future. Rain-dependent agriculture is tied to weather cycles and any disruption to planting and harvesting may undermine supply and the future food security of millions.

Lack of access to clean water and basic sanitation in many parts of the continent and overcrowding in the sprawling shantytowns of cities such as Cairo (20.4 million), Kinshasa (13.3 million) and Lagos (21 million), make it impossible for many to observe minimal hygiene or exercise physical distancing.

Many now ask why the level of preparedness was so low. The 2014-15 Ebola epidemic raised the alarm. It demonstrated the devastating effects of an "invisible killer." In the aftermath, everyone knew it was not a question of if this would happen again but when. Why therefore so little investment in health and other public services? Why was there so little planning for future similar events?

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We need look no further than the relationship between the interests of imperialist powers and the local corrupt elites who serve their interests. Writing in 2016, War on Want director, John Hilary, exposed Britain’s part in the continuing “plunder” of Africa’s gold, platinum, diamonds, copper, oil, gas and coal, its “scramble for Africa.” Over a hundred companies listed on the London Stock Exchange, operate in 37 countries of sub-Saharan Africa, “actively aided and abetted by the UK government.” Collectively they control some \$1.5 trillion of resources and over 370,000 square kilometres of land. The revenue of Glencore alone is ten times greater than the GDP of Zambia!

Little wealth remains on the African continent to benefit the masses. Instead it fills the coffers of multinational corporations and lines the pockets of the corrupt big bourgeoisie in every state. The fate of millions is of no concern if it gets between the bosses and their banks. The syphoning of wealth has led to a spiral of underdevelopment, underpinned by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). IMF loans are conditional on implementing “structural adjustment programmes.” These force countries to lower living standards for their own people; cut wages, social spending, public healthcare and education; and open their fledgling economies to predatory transnational corporations, all to expedite the repayment of toxic debt.

Small wonder then that little was done since Ebola. The governments of many countries had neither the inclination nor, in some cases, the option to invest in meeting people’s needs when only the interest of foreign capital held sway. Even where there was a will to improve, the cost and scale of what was needed was too great. The prime minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed put it starkly: “Nothing has prepared us for the threats of COVID-19.”

Going forward, the international movement has a duty support the working class and people of Africa and their organisations in building the post-COVID continent in their interests not those of the multinationals. We must stand in solidarity with peoples and movements in Africa working to free themselves from occupation, as in Western Sahara; from the stranglehold of dictatorships, as in Swaziland; from the machinations of reactionary forces that attempt to thwart all progress, as in Sudan; and from all those who would undermine the sovereignty of states, such as South Africa whose people bravely stood against apartheid.

In Britain, we must campaign vigorously against the aggressive and exploitative foreign policy of our government and its allies. African leaders are calling for a moratorium on debt repayments. We must support them. Sources of support based on true internationalism, such as from Cuba, whose doctors have worked in Africa since 1963 and whose medical teams are now at the forefront of the fight against the COVID-19, must not be barred. Britain’s arms trade with Africa and all British military interventions, overt or covert, must cease. But above all, we should demand an end to the plundering and despoiling of Africa. Our solidarity will thus help the people of Africa build a peaceful, safe and healthy future.

REPORT FROM JOHNNIE HUNTER AND LIZ PAYNE
(INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION AFRICA)

ASIA PACIFIC

India

Covid19 deaths 0.07 per 100,000 population

Government response

The first cases were reported at the beginning of March. The prime minister announced a lockdown from 24 March to 3 May. India’s millions of migrant workers were required to return from cities to their home communities (often hundreds of miles away). No transport was provided. A \$2b package was made available to improve health care preparedness and \$22b in economic subsidies (in total 0.2 per cent of India’s GDP). For the great majority of India’s workers in the informal sector no provision is available despite the loss of employment. On 21 April the main Indian Trade Union Centre CITU organised mass protests about the lack of financial support for laid off workers and lack of PPE for many front-line workers. There were on 29 April 33,000 cases and 5,079 deaths

Hospital provision

India has one of the lowest ratio of hospital beds in the world: 0.23 per 1000 as against 2.5 in Britain, 4.3 in China and 13.0 in Japan. State expenditure on health is 1.1 per cent of GDP and 69 per cent of all health care is paid for by patients.

Reasons for the relatively low death rate

Three main reasons have been put forward: India’s very young population age; under-reporting of deaths (80 per cent of all deaths in India not in hospitals); limited diagnosis.

Kerala – a Left governed State 0.01 deaths per 100,000

At the beginning of March Kerala had three of India’s six active cases (students returned from Hubei in China). Today it has the lowest incidence of all Indian states – with just 4 deaths in total. The CPIM-led government ordered a lock down ten days before Modi, provided continuing food to all school children, provided economic assistance for all workers, developed mass testing and was able to rely on a comprehensive and largely free health service. The state government has now permitted a limited resumption of work.

China

Covid deaths 0.33 per 100,000

Origin and response
Wuhan Municipal Health Council announced a cluster of pneumonia-like illnesses on 31 December – the WTO issued first warning on the identification of a new virus on 5 January and issued technical guidance on 10 January. A lockdown was imposed across Hubei province on 21 January and then extended across all provinces over the following two weeks. The first test kit, based on sequencing the virus genome, was produced in China on 13 January and mass produced over the following week– with adequate supplies by 27 January. The construction of two new 1,000 bed hospitals in Hubei began on 23 January and was completed by 31 January. In the course of February 42,000 medical staff were concentrated in Hubei province and central government took control of food supplies to ensure adequate distribution during the lockdown. Advance information tracking and repeated mass testing was used to identify and isolate cases outside Hubei province and permitted a sequenced lifting of the lockdown in the course of March. On 14 February the London Financial Times reported that scientists at the Seattle Cancer Research Centre had run genetic tests on the virus which established its ‘wild animal’ origin and refuted US government claims that it was ‘Laboratory developed’.

Hong Kong

Covid deaths 0.05 per 100,000

Population 7.5 million Covid cases -1038. Deaths – 4.

OVERVIEW

Hong Kong has been a Special Administrative Region of People’s China since 1997 and has its own autonomous SAR government controlling immigration, customs, healthcare, currency, legal system and policing. Hong Kong shares a land border with Guangdong Province, is linked by regular ferry services to several mainland cities

and Macau. There is a single international airport, which is a major international transport hub. Around 60 million people visit or transit Hong Kong each year about 80% from Mainland China

COVID RESPONSE

The scientific magazine *Nature* has reported that: “Hong Kong seems to have given the world a lesson in how to effectively curb COVID-19. With a population of 7.5 million, it has reported just 4 deaths. Researchers studying Hong Kong’s approach have already found that swift surveillance, quarantine and social-distancing measures, such as the use of face masks and school closures, helped to cut coronavirus transmission — measured by the average number of people each infected person infects, or R — to close to the critical level of 1 by early February.”

One negative factor has been the politicisation of issues such as cross-border restrictions and also the designation of quarantine centres. Extremist groups even firebombed buildings that were in consideration for quarantine use despite the fact that those quarantined would overwhelmingly be HK citizens. There was an attempt by radical anti-China healthworkers to generate a strike to force a border shutdown but this movement quickly fizzled out.

Summary

Hong Kong’s response has been complicated by the long-running political crisis in the city. Nevertheless Hong Kong’s highly efficient immigration and world-class healthcare systems have combined to avoid a major outbreak. Hong Kong’s experience of handling the SARS outbreak in 2003 (774 deaths) appears also to have ensured that anti-epidemic procedures and preparedness were of a very high level.

Macau

Covid19 deaths per 100,000 none

Population 670,000 Covid cases 45.

OVERVIEW

Macau has been a Special Administrative Region of People’s China since 1999 and like Hong Kong has its own autonomous SAR government controlling immigration, customs, currency, legal system and policing. The territory was formerly a Portuguese colony. Its economy is almost entirely based on tourism from Mainland China and Hong Kong as it is the only Chinese territory to permit gambling, generating 80% of tax revenue. Macau is among the top three economies in the world according to per capita GDP (US\$82,000) and is one of the most densely populated territories in the world. Macau shares land borders with Guangdong Province, is linked by regular ferry services to several mainland cities and Hong Kong. There is a single international airport.

COVID RESPONSE

Macau received nearly 40 million tourists in 2019, 70% from Mainland China, making it particularly vulnerable to infections from Hubei province. The first recorded Covid case was on 22 January but only 9 other confirmed cases were identified, most involved Wuhan connections. From 15 March until 8 April, 35 other “imported” cases were confirmed mostly from Europe (including the UK). Today Macau has had no new cases for 21 consecutive days.

The Macau government acted decisively in January to implement health checks on arrivals from Wuhan and extended that to other visitors over the coming weeks. On 4 February all casinos were told to close for 15 days.

Entrance to casinos and public buildings requires a temperature check. Visits to the Post Office, for example, require customers to register their personal details on a government app, for contact tracing.

On 20 February the government tightened visitation restrictions from all parts of the mainland. All foreign transit flights stopped in March. Ferry services and the road bridge linking Macau with Hong Kong were suspended.

Public information in the form of posters, TV, radio and online ads, has been intensive. In addition, government and police vehicles patrol major residential areas and public places blasting out health messages in Cantonese, Putonghua, Portuguese and English.

The government commandeered empty hotels (some 5-star) to use as quarantine centres for those subject to compulsory 14-day quarantine orders.

Face masks are worn by 99% of the population. To prevent shortages and

profiteering, the government instituted a mask distribution system through pharmacies and clinics. Non-essential government workers were told to work from home. Mass testing of bus drivers and public transport workers was carried out.

The government also announced that each Macau citizen would receive a cash-card with a value of around £300 for use in local shops for food and other basic necessities. Water and electricity bills have been cancelled for 3 months.

Summary

Despite Macao’s high population density, direct land links to China and huge visitation from mainland China, the territory has succeeded so far in restricting the spread of the virus and ensuring no fatalities. Early government action, travel restrictions and mandatory quarantines, which put the population’s health ahead of economic interests (Q1), has been the key. Macao has also upgraded its emergency response expertise after several disastrous typhoon strikes several years ago.

Taiwan, province of China

Covid19 deaths 0.025 per 100,000

Population 24 million

Covid cases -429.

Deaths – 6.

OVERVIEW

Taiwan (which also uses the name Republic of China internationally) is a province of China but outside the jurisdiction of the Chinese central government in Beijing. The current government of Taiwan is pro-separatist and rejects reunification with the PRC. Taiwan is a developed capitalist economy but increasingly in recent years it has become more dependent on cross-straits trade. Taiwan also includes several smaller island groups as well as the main island.

COVID RESPONSE

The Taiwanese government integrated data from its island-wide healthcare system, immigration, and customs authorities to identify and response to the virus. Government efforts are coordinated through a "National" Health Command Center, established to aid in disaster management for epidemics following the 2004 SARS outbreak.

Taiwan began early screening of flights from Mainland China and used apps and police checks to track individual cases.

Taiwan’s handling of the outbreak has received international praise for its effectiveness in quarantining people and by using the "electronic fence" to slow down the virus. Taiwan is significant politically because of the attempt to contrast its "democratic openness" with that of authoritarian China. In fact, the closest mainland province of Fujian (population 38 million) has had only 1 death.

From 19 March foreigners were barred from entering Taiwan, with some exceptions.

Summary

Taiwan’s impressive performance, is attributable to a number of factors. First it is a hi-tech society, it has first-class health system, it learnt lessons from the previous SARS outbreak and its geographical advantage as an island with no land borders. Government action was swift well planned and implemented.

Vietnam

Covid 19. No deaths

Population: 96 million Covid cases 270. Deaths 0.

Vietnam is a developing nation with a population of around 96 million and a GDP per capita of US\$2,740 (IMF). The ruling Communist Party of Vietnam describes its economy as a socialist-oriented market economy. Key strategic sectors of the economy are in state hands but there is widespread use of markets and encouragement of foreign direct investment. The country shares land borders with China, Lao PDR and Cambodia. The country has become a major tourist destination and received 18 million international visitors in 2019 (32% from China).

COVID RESPONSE

During the SARS crisis of 2003, Vietnam was one of the first territories to declare itself clear of the virus. In response to Covid, the Vietnamese applied similar strategies but this time with greater access to technology and a stronger economic base.

The Vietnamese government first tightened airport and border controls on 11 January and cancelled all international flights on 31 March. It also pursued a similar phased escalation of other anti-Covid measures, such as quarantining international arrivals and inter-provincial travellers, as well as tracing all those linked to known clusters.

The CPV mobilised its grassroots membership and those of its allied organisations Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, Vietnam Women's organisation, and trade unions. The country's military, police and security forces have all been deployed

Vietnam's achievements are all the more remarkable that the crisis hit during Tet, the Lunar New Year festival (late January) traditionally a holiday marked by large family gatherings and travel. Vietnam described the mobilisation as "Spring General Offensive of 2020", a deliberate reference to the 1968 "Tet Offensive".

Testing (around 200k tests so far) has focused on known clusters – villages, hospitals etc, and is followed by strict contact tracing (including secondary contacts) for anyone known to be infected, then immediate isolation followed by quarantining. There are mobile phone apps for people to record their health status and symptoms. This has been by an "energetic and creative public education campaign that included TV cartoons, social media, and posters that draw on the traditional iconography of official propaganda but replaced heroic workers and peasants with heroic doctors in face masks", according to one recent US report.

Vietnam's extensive textile and light industry sectors have been quickly adapted to manufacture PPE. Vietnam therefore had enough capacity to meet domestic PPE needs as well as sending 1.25 million masks overseas, mostly to its neighbours Cambodia and Laos, but also

Europe and the USA.

Industry observers estimate that Vietnam now has the capacity to produce 7 million new fabric masks and 5.72 million surgical masks a day. State and private sector car and mobile phone factories have been encouraged to retool, aiming instead to produce 55,000 ventilators a month.

SUMMARY

Socialist Vietnam's capacity for mass mobilisation, public education and the previous lessons learned from the SARS outbreak are major positive factors. In addition, the economic development of Vietnam's textile and light engineering sectors have allowed the country to produce more than sufficient PPE.

Japan

Covid Deaths 0.29 per 100,000 population

Similar to other nations in East Asia, Japan has a very low Covid-19 death rate of 0.29 per 100 000. At 27 April, only 372 lives had been lost in a population of 126.5 million (30% aged over 60).

The pandemic had a drastic and early impact on Japan's economy. By February just-in-time supply chains of parts and raw materials from China were paralysed. Domestic consumption, car and technological exports have slumped. The government has launched a \$990 billion stimulus and compensation package (equivalent to 20% of GDP). A 7 April limited lockdown of only 7 prefectures including capital Tokyo was extended to all 47 prefectures one week later. A state of emergency is in place until 5 May.

The Japan Communist Party (JCP) is calling for the 100 000 yen Covid-19 relief payment to be paid to all residents of Japan rather than to the more narrowly defined 'citizens' as proposed by the ruling nationalist Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

Japan's nursing and elderly care services have come under severe strain and face severe labour shortages. 210 000 private hotel rooms have been requisitioned to back up public funded hospitals. The militant public services union Jichoren is calling on the Welfare and Labor Ministry to increase budgets to support front line health care services including recruitment of more workers.

The large US military occupying force in Japan is a cause of constant mass opposition and the pandemic has proven no exception with the US authorities refusing to disclose the extent of Covid-19 infections in its 57 000 military personnel on the Japanese archipelago. The controversial issue has been raised in the House of Representatives by JCP deputy Akamine Seiken.

A move by Japan's ruling class to add 'emergency powers' to the post war Japanese constitution is meeting stiff resistance from the left. The 16 April editorial of Akahata, the communist daily, warned 'it is totally unacceptable for the LDP and PM Abe to go forward with their constitutional revision attempt while the ongoing corona crisis is threatening people's lives and livelihoods'.

Australia

Covid death rate 0.33 per 100,000

The Covid-19 death rate in Australia is 0.33 per 100 000. In a population of 25.8 million there had been 83 deaths by 27 April.

The death rate is low but the lockdown to prevent the spread of the virus has had a severe impact on a capitalist economy dominated by financial services and vast mining industries. The right wing Liberal/National coalition government has committed \$320 billion to an economic stimulus and safety-net measures. As many as 28% of Australians are out of work with a wage

replacement scheme hastily provided by the state. A 16.4% drop in economic output has led business lobby groups to apply intense pressure for relaxation of lockdown restrictions, in particular for the re-opening of internal state borders. Bloomberg has reported that Australia is facing its most severe economic crisis in 100 years.

In recent decades Australia has seen creeping privatisation of public hospitals and defunding of Medicare resulting in an under resourced public health care system lacking in essential PPE. Dr Don Costa writing last week in The Guardian, a communist weekly newspaper, said that 'Covid-19 has been a perfect storm for a government whose sole purpose has been to redirect monies into the private sector and maximise private profits over the needs of the people'.

Australia is at the forefront of US inspired global anti China campaign. Trump sycophant Prime Minister Scott Morrison is leading calls (pitifully supported by the Labor opposition) for a so called independent international inquiry into the Covid-19 outbreak in China. The Australian media and intelligence services have conducted a long running disinformation campaign against China leading former Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating to complain about anti-China hysteria 'which fails to grasp the magnitude of shifting power in the Asia Pacific. The whispered word communism of old has now been replaced by the word China'.

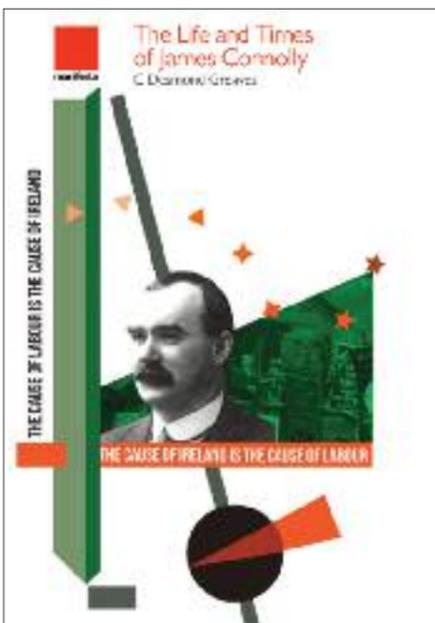
The Communist Party of Australia has condemned the government's response to the crisis, its failure to protect frontline health workers and is demanding an end to all private profiteering from the people's suffering during the emergency.

REPORT FROM KENNY COYLE, KEVAN NELSON, BEN CHACKO (INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION: ASIA PACIFIC)

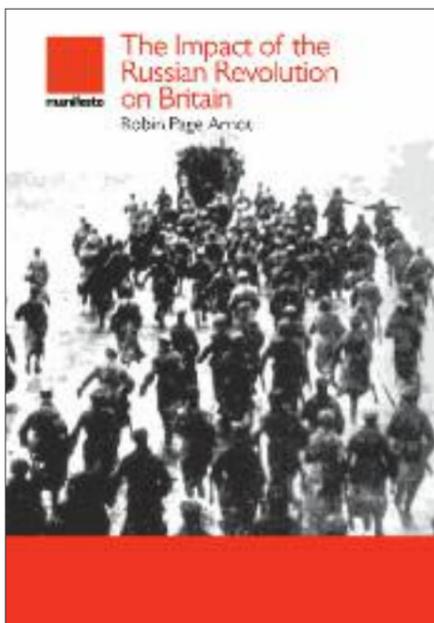
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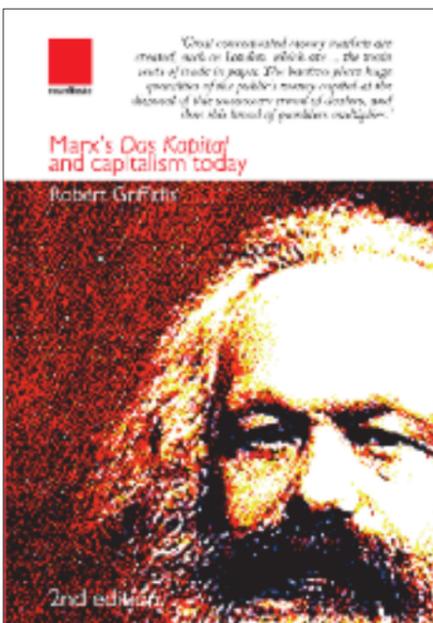
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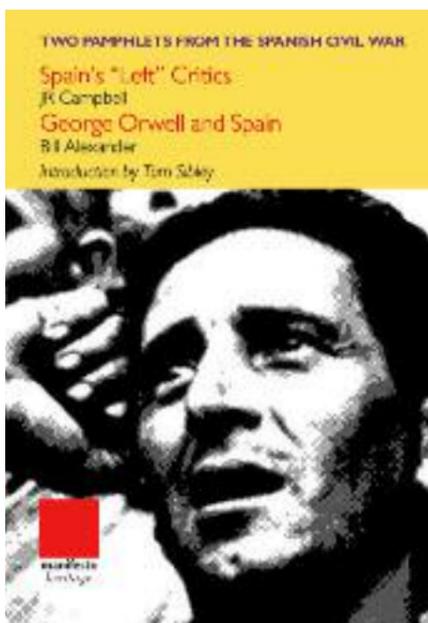
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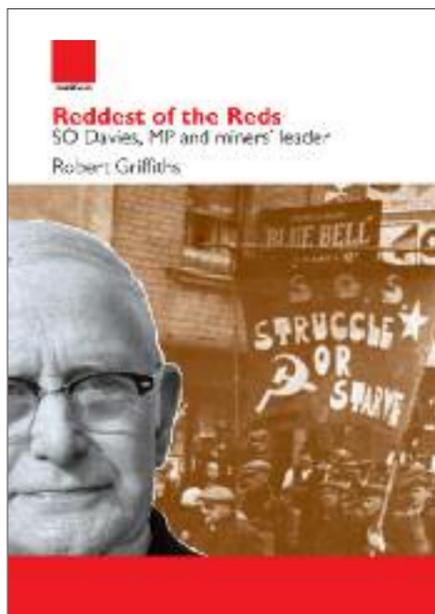
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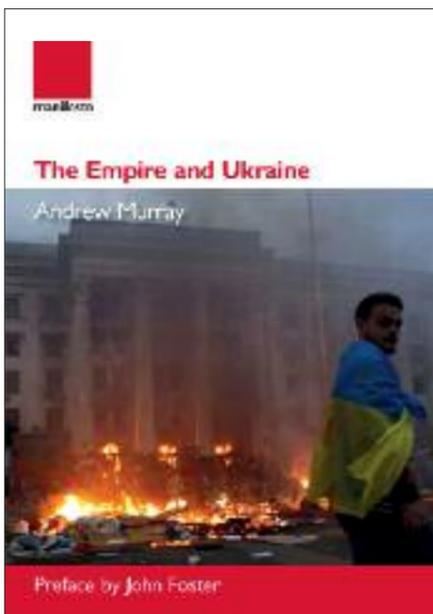
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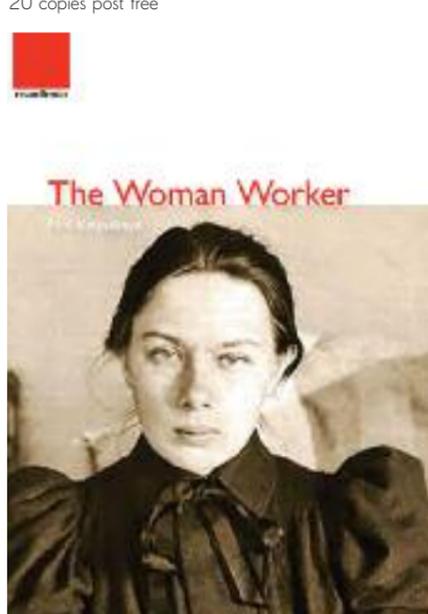
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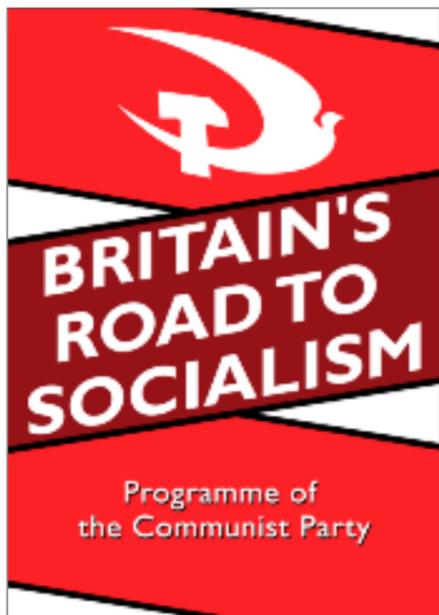
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THE CASE for socialism is needed now more than ever and so the Communist Party has launched a new up-to-the-minute revised edition of its programme, *Britain's Road to Socialism*. Updated to take account of new developments in British and global capitalism, its arguments against capitalist ownership are compelling and its case for socialism has never in Britain been put with greater force or conviction.

Britain's Road to Socialism is not a dry compendium of slogans but a constantly evolving programme for the revolutionary transformation of Britain and a celebration of the human forces for change in the working class movement.

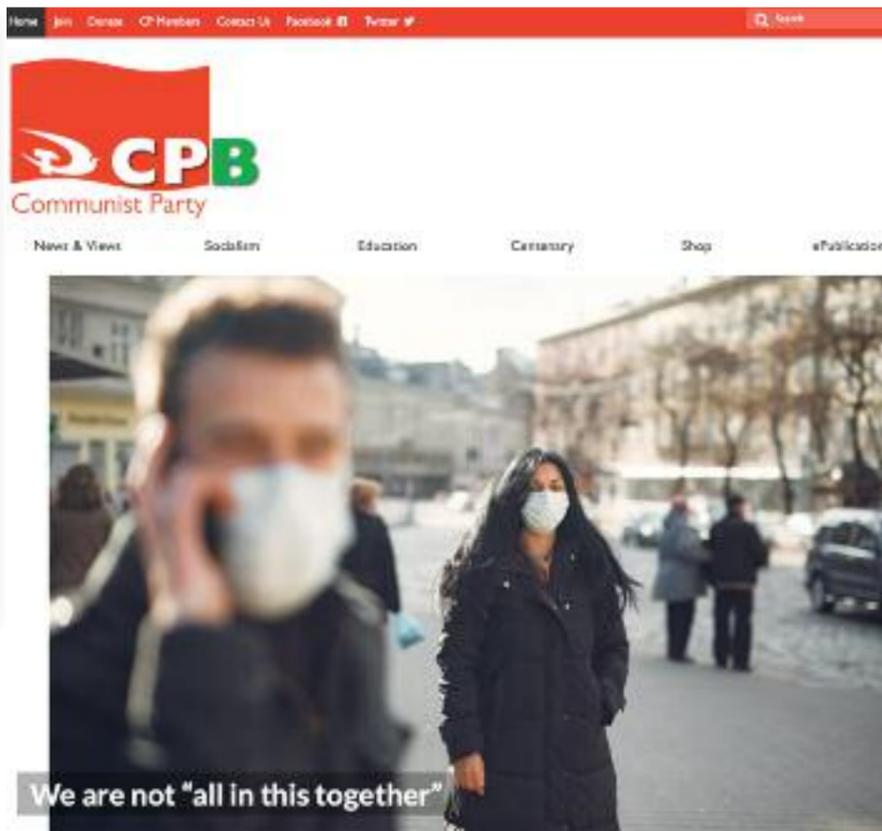
Read it and pass its message round, hold online meetings and education classes. The package costs just £3 and is available on order from Shop.comunistparty.org.uk. Multiple copies can be bought and if you agree with the revolutionary case for socialism, you can apply to join Britain's communists.

"We have literally been swamped with orders for the print and PDF version of the Communist Party programme *Britain's Road to Socialism*" says the launch project leader Phil Katz.

"In fact we ran out of the first print consignment, selling 250 copies in the first 48 hours. It is now back on the press. Keep ordering, keep promoting, now is the time to put the boldest case for socialism out to working people and the whole labour movement".



Challenge, the magazine of the Young Communist League has been redesigned and launches its new website on 30 April. www.facebook.com/challengeycl



COMMUNIST PARTY WEBSITE

The Communist Party's website has been built anew to meet heightened demands placed upon it firstly by the fast-changing political situation and a big increase in applications to join the party and secondly, from people keen to know more about its policies, activities and programme. The launch is set for Friday 1 May. As well as outward-facing features including

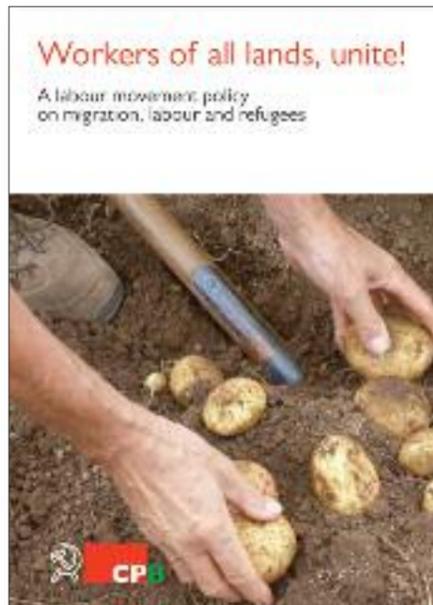
political education tools and agitational materials an expanded shop features centenary merchandise, publications including *International Bulletins* and dozens of publications to buy and download. It hosts a secure back operation that allows party members and party organisations to communicate directly with the party centre, hold open and closed meetings, online education and handle organisational tasks.



No racist immigration laws
A ground-breaking pamphlet by the late Vishnu Sharma, published 1979, has been reissued with an introduction by Tony Conway convenor of the Communist Party's Anti-racist, Anti-fascist Commission.

The pamphlet, by the leading Indian communist in Britain, who resigned from the Commission for Racial Equality in protest is a scorching condemnation of the racist immigration and nationality policies of the Tory and Labour governments of the period.

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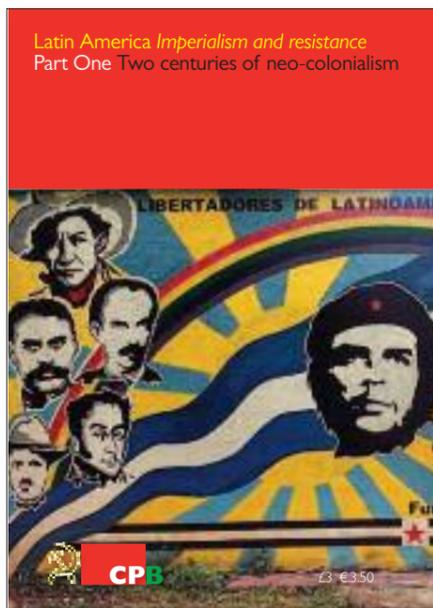
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