

Retired UK welfare advice worker Terry Craven: “If they are going to build a herd immunity, they already know it’s going to kill thousands of people”

Our reporters
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Retired welfare advice worker Terry Craven contacted the WSWs to express his concerns about the lack of provision for people in the UK on social security benefits showing symptoms of Covid-19.

Craven now deals with cases on behalf of a Liverpool-based organisation, the Community Advice Service Association (CASA), where he advises people on benefit claims and their rights.

Craven supported benefit claimant Stephen Smith from Liverpool when he was turned down for Employment Support Allowance (ESA). Stephen was declared fit for work despite having multiple, serious health problems and subsequently died last April.

“[UK Prime Minister] Boris Johnson said the most vulnerable in society were going to get all the help they need,” explained Craven.

“There are no special provisions being made for claimants who are sick and self-isolating who cannot attend a medical assessment if they are claiming personal independence payments (PIP). If you say I can’t make the assessment, your benefit could stop.

“For people on Employment Support Allowance (ESA), if they can’t attend an assessment, they need to go to a doctor for a sick note saying they can’t attend. Boris Johnson says he doesn’t want too much pressure on the National Health Service, but his own department are telling people to get sick notes.

“When people on ESA and PIP get an appointment for an assessment, they find that stressful, they want to get it out of the way. So, we have people with the full-blown virus who could turn up for an assessment.

“The majority of people who I support are in very

vulnerable groups [susceptible to falling seriously ill if they develop Covid-19]. A lot have got COPD [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease], a lot have got cancer. One of my clients is expected to attend a tribunal coming up, which puts him in an environment where he’s coming into contact with other people who may have the disease.

“China stemmed the epidemic. Why aren’t we doing that?” Asked what he thought about the Johnson government’s previously declared policy of creating a “herd immunity” by allowing the infection of up to 60 percent of the UK population with the virus, Craven said, “If they are going to build a herd immunity, they already know it’s going to kill thousands of people. I don’t think we’re being told [by the government] the half of it. People like benefits claimants are expendable.”

Craven deals with many claimants who require food parcel donations from food banks. He said, “There are going to be food shortages. God help the people who rely on food banks.”



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