

Scottish National Party spearheads UK-wide return to work campaign

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Scottish National Party (SNP) First Minister Nicola Sturgeon's mapping out of a Scottish exit from the lockdown and return to work has been embraced by Britain's ruling elite and its media.

Boris Johnson's Conservative government has been fatally compromised by the horrific consequences of its de facto herd immunity policy and failure to protect the working population—that has officially led to almost 20,000 deaths and far more in reality.

Under these conditions, Sturgeon's supposed "progressive" credentials, backed in Scotland, England and Wales by the Labour Party and the trade unions, offer an avenue for big business and banks to engineer a political shift towards a return to work.

This takes place under conditions in which people are dying daily in the hundreds and in which no systematic COVID-19 testing of the population has been carried out. Yesterday, a further 768 were reported dead, with Britain set to pass the grim milestone of 20,000 deaths today. The newly opened website for key workers showing symptoms of COVID-19 crashed due to unmet demand after 16,000 people secured either a test at a drive-in centre or a home test kit.

Sturgeon insisted, "What we will be seeking to do is find a new normal—a way of living alongside this virus."

She declared, "It may be that certain businesses in certain sectors can reopen" with "employees and customers two metres distant from each other." The Scottish population had to prepare for multiple lockdowns, "with little notice" because the "horrendous reality" was that everyone must get ready for repeated cycles of infection.

Sturgeon's speech accompanied the release of a 26-page document by the Scottish government, "COVID-19—A Framework for Decision Making." It

states in more explicit terms than Sturgeon did publicly that the lockdown had to end in order to "do everything possible to avoid permanent, structural damage to our economy."

The foreword states, "It is clear that we cannot immediately return to how things were just over 100 days ago. But it is equally clear we cannot stay in complete lockdown indefinitely, because we know that this brings damaging consequences of its own. So we must adapt to a new reality."

The report details how "Our plans to respond and recover must take account of the possibility of a cycle of lifting and re-imposing restrictions. The steps we take to rebuild our economy or restore some degree of normality in society must recognise the possibility of restrictions being re-imposed quickly. That will require fundamental change to how all sectors of society organise themselves."

The SNP government does not try to pretend that any of this is based on a scientific approach. Instead, it glorifies a reckless suck-it-and-see policy that will see many die. It states: "If, after easing any restrictions, the evidence tells us we are unable to contain the transmission of the virus, then we will have to reimpose them, possibly returning to lockdown with little notice. While we will do our best to avoid this, it is possible that such a cycle may happen more than once until we reach a point when we have in place an effective vaccine."

The trade unions are intimately involved in enforcing a return to work. The document states, "We have already begun the conversation on how to respond, reset, restart and recover with our business community and our trade unions."

Without explaining how reopening the economy will facilitate a declared aim of "Stopping a resurgence of

the pandemic,” the report states this “will allow us to work with our partners in business, trade unions, local government, the voluntary sector and in broader society to redesign workplaces, education settings and other premises so they are places where spread is minimised—allowing people to get back to work, children to return to school, and our young people to continue their education through our colleges or universities ...”

The SNP’s initiative was welcomed by leading forces in the Tory government demanding a return to work—including former conservative leader Ian Duncan Smith and David Davis. Duncan Smith has said getting schools to reopen, in particular primary schools, is “key to unlocking labour.”

These layers are already in an alliance with newly elected Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer and powerful sections of business in championing a “back-to-work” strategy.

A right-wing media campaign is underway in the push for a return to work. The *Daily Mail* published a piece Thursday including photos of people queuing outside newly opened stores of DIY chain B&Q and a Five Guys burger chain outlet in Edinburgh, headlined, “Britain votes with its feet.”

On Friday, Rupert Murdoch’s the *Sun* editorialised, “We must end lockdown as soon as it’s safely possible before our economy is completely destroyed,” while Murdoch’s *Times* ran an editorial headlined, “Back to Work.”

Jaguar Land Rover will resume production gradually at its Solihull plant and at its engine manufacturing operation in Wolverhampton from May 18. Aston Martin Lagonda will reopen its new plant in South Wales even earlier, on May 5. Construction conglomerate Taylor Wimpey resume work on some sites on May 4. The Vistry Group—formerly Bovis Homes—will recommence operations at 90 percent of partnership sites and a significant number of its housing sites from next Monday.

A timetable is being laid down, with the weekend to be used by the ruling elite to mount a propaganda campaign for a return to work. BBC Political Editor Laura Kuenssberg, who has intimate connections to the Tories, said Friday, “One interesting thing I think we might see more of before we actually get a big announcement [regarding dates for a mass lockdown

exit] from the Westminster Government is more of what has been described to me as ‘prodding.’”

The *Daily Telegraph*, under a front-page emblazoned with “Johnson back at the controls Monday,” declared that the prime minister, who nearly died of COVID-19 and required seven days of treatment in hospital, “is planning to return to No 10 as early as Monday to take back control of the coronavirus crisis amid Cabinet concerns the lockdown has gone too far.”

Johnson is held up as the man who can seize the rudder of state and end the “prevarication” of those ministers who have been deputised in his absence.

The ruling class is set on a head-on confrontation with the working class. The constant references in daily Downing Street briefings to “flattening the curve” confirm that the government continues to pursue its herd immunity strategy. With an enforced return to work, this will open the way to another wave of the pandemic, likely worse than the first.

Many workers will have no jobs to go back to and those who remain in a job will confront demands for wage cuts and speedups in workplaces with little or nothing in the way of safety measures. Such are the explosive consequences that the *Times* felt it necessary to caution, “Protections should be put in place for employees who believe they are being pressurised to return to work in unsafe conditions ... it is hard to see how they could reopen otherwise, since if staff didn’t feel safe many would refuse to turn up for work.”



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