

Financial oligarchy turns UK into a killing field

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The following speech was delivered by Socialist Equality Party (Britain) national secretary Chris Marsden to the 2020 International May Day Online Rally held by the World Socialist Web Site and the International Committee of the Fourth International on May 2.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's name will be forever associated with the murderous policy of "herd immunity".

It has cost the lives of tens of thousands—with the UK about to overtake Italy to become the centre of the Coronavirus pandemic in Europe and, worldwide, second only to the United States.

The full extent of official criminality is still hidden because the government is lying about the real death rate. It was only this week that thousands of deaths in care homes were recognised, but only those that tested positive when such tests were mostly unavailable.

Estimates put the overall death toll at twice the official figure, well over 50,000.

The government in fact anticipated between half and three quarters of a million deaths from a pandemic. Yet it did nothing to prepare. Nothing to stockpile protective equipment or prevent the spread of infection. It slashed NHS spending, and, when caught out, tried to hide its crimes.

The Tories said they wanted to "complete the Thatcher revolution." Now we know what this means!

The UK has been transformed into a killing field by a sustained and brutal offensive against the working class on behalf of the financial oligarchy. This finds grotesque expression in a Covid-19 death rate twice as high in deprived areas as in affluent areas.

All the accumulated ideological filth from those decades—from Thatcher's proclamation that "There is no such thing as society" to the declaration of Tony

Blair's New Labour that it was "intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich"—finds expression in Johnson's response to the pandemic.

What is the government's real agenda?

Cull the old and infirm!

Hand over billions to the corporations!

Get people back to work and making profit!

Get them used to the ever-present threat of painful illness and early death!

How did we get here? Mention Blair and you give a name to the transformation of Labour into an open party of war and social reaction, and of the trade unions into an arm of management and an industrial police force for the government.

For the past five years, workers and young people were told that this could be reversed and Labour reborn as a party for them, thanks to the election of Jeremy Corbyn.

How does this fantasy look today?

Five years of Corbyn's leadership was an exercise in politically demobilising the working class. Amid a raging government crisis over Brexit, Captain Corbyn sat at the helm opposing any strike or political mobilisation against Tory cuts, warmongering against Syria, Russia and China, and any move to kick out the Blairites.

Now we have Boris Johnson in Number 10 and Sir Keir Starmer as leader of the Labour Party.

Corbyn's last act in parliament was to declare that he did not wish to be "relentlessly negative" about the government's coronavirus record—not even mentioning the "herd immunity" policy or the £350 billion corporate bailout. Instead he sermonised about the need to "recognise the value of each other and the strength of a society that cares for each other and cares for all."

This last refusal to fight, together with Corbyn's

pledge of loyal support to Starmer, has set the stage for the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress to take their place in a de-facto government of national unity.

The express aim of the TUC is, and I quote, to “manage the mass return to work at the end or easing of lockdown.”

Its policy document declares: “The TUC does not take a position on the science of how to manage a pandemic, or the speed or nature of any return to work. It is invidious to argue about the relative priority of public health or economic growth: both are important to the wellbeing of working people.”

Union bureaucrats, whose sole concern is for the profit margins of their paymasters, are sitting down with Tory ministers formulating plans that will cost thousands more lives in an inevitable second wave of the pandemic.

Meanwhile Starmer fawns on the Tories like a latter-day Uriah Heep, praising its “work on social distancing and critical care capacity” as “amazing.”

“I said I wouldn’t ask for the impossible and I won’t,” he told parliament. He was as good as his word.

The old parties that once held the allegiance of millions are rotting on their feet. The working class in Britain, like its brothers and sisters all over the world, must now build the leadership necessary to wage an irreconcilable struggle against the capitalist class.

For four decades workers and young people have been subjected to an endless and increasingly hollow paean to the wonders of the market and the supposed failure of socialism. Corbyn tapped into an initial popular rejection of this lie, amid ever worsening social inequality and the systematic impoverishment of millions.

Britain had been transformed into a playground for the rich and a social wasteland for millions of working people before the coronavirus struck. Now we are all told to accept the “new normal”—of mass unemployment, wage cuts, speed-ups and the decimation of remaining social protections—so that the super-rich can continue to live like lords amid generalised squalor and suffering.

The Socialist Equality Party is preparing now for the inevitable eruption of mass opposition this will provoke—in the UK and throughout the globe. We will

give this movement the socialist and internationalist programme and leadership necessary for victory, in a unified struggle with our co-thinkers and comrades in the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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