

Multi-millionaire Charlie Mullins brands UK workers “lazy” and “selfish”

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Charlie Mullins, founder and chairman of the UK’s largest plumbing firm, Pimlico Plumbers, has been given an open door to the media in recent weeks to voice the ruling elite’s contempt for the working class.

Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson and other senior politicians have made transparent efforts to project a “caring persona” during the pandemic, concealing their class prejudices to avoid a social explosion. Mullins says what they all really think. He has become the go-to-guy for the right-wing media, a rent-a-gob, who declares that workers are “lazy”, “selfish” “scroungers” who should get back to work.

As COVID-19 cases continue to surge, the government’s back-to-work-at-any-cost campaign requires the ending of the jobs furlough scheme and all measures protecting workers’ livelihoods. Mullins, “plumber to the stars”, with a personal fortune of £70 million, has demanded the ending of furlough payments, insisting that “time’s up” and that workers have been “taking advantage”, “sponging off the government”, and that anything hindering “getting the economy going” i.e., profits for the likes of Mullins, should be scrapped.

The 67-year-old’s anger is heightened by the fact that plumbing is one of the few sectors to have experienced a spike in business during the COVID-19 crisis. In the first half of July, Pimlico Plumbers saw an increase of more than 10 percent on the same period last year. In one week in July, it booked in more jobs than any other week in the company’s 40-year history.

For Mullins, the sun is shining, and he needs workers to make his hay. But with some workers continuing to stay at home, including those with co-morbidities who face a heightened risk from the virus, he complains, “You’ve got less people in your company that can create revenue for you.”

For his openly right-wing views and crass style of expressing them, and for his ability to play the “self-made man” who knows about “hard graft”, Mullins has been afforded banner headlines, live interviews and even the opportunity to pen his own articles. He has made multiple appearances on Sky News, Channel 4 News, BBC Radio 4’s Today Programme, BBC 5 Live, TalkRADIO, BBC Sunday Morning, ITV’s This Morning, Good Morning Britain, and several BBC regional news stations. He has written personally in the Daily Mail and the i newspaper.

Of the furlough scheme he says, “We need to ... stop this stupid culture of people thinking that they can sit at home and just be paid for it.” Those hesitant to go back to work while the pandemic still rages are “milking the system”. “The problem is,” he sneers, “most people’s workplace is too far from the beach for them.”

For Mullins, the fear of catching or passing on a virus that has taken more than 46,000 lives in the UK and almost three-quarters of a million lives worldwide, causing as yet unknown long-term damage to 20 million more, is a sackable offence. In the Daily Mail, he wrote, “I’ve heard all the excuses—people are worried about catching Covid-19, or they’re afraid of infecting a vulnerable relative who is self-isolating. But to any employee who tells me that they don’t want to come back, who wants to string out the furlough... I’ve got one thing to say: we don’t want you back. So far I’ve already told 30 former staff: ‘Don’t bother coming in, ever.’”

Even those working from home don’t escape Mullin’s wrath. He says, “I don’t think they’re going to be motivated enough to say that they’re doing a proper day’s work.” They are “very selfish”, “sitting about in their pyjamas” and “couldn’t care less about nobody else or the economy.”

“You’re gonna create a culture,” he says. “It’s like the people on benefits. They’re never gonna wanna come off it.”

Mullins’ most recent on-air outing was to slam the proposal to give sick pay to workers forced to quarantine when returning from holiday (returning from destinations the UK government had claimed were safe). “No way. They’re not sick,” says Mullins. “If we start paying people £100 a week to sit at home and do nothing we’re back to square one. The economy can’t afford it.”

This is a man who spends £300,000 on holidays every year. For most people, losing two weeks’ pay during quarantine has serious financial implications.

Not one of the media outlets has compared the meagre weekly statutory sick pay of £95.85, or even the £34 billion cost of the furlough scheme which has preserved almost 10 million jobs, to the astronomical £350 billion handed over to UK corporations in March. The funnelling of this unprecedented sum of public money straight into the pockets of the corporate elite was conducted without a parliamentary vote and has barely been mentioned since.

Mullins did not help his case by conducting his media interviews from one of his several million-euro villas in the Spanish resort of Marbella, filmed against sun-drenched backdrops of swaying palm trees and his swimming pool.

Workers suffering the worst global health crisis in a century, and facing economic devastation under a system incapable of prioritising lives over profits, hit back on social media, “How come Charlie Mullins gets so much airtime?”, “Why is Charlie Mullins on BBC news several times in a week?” and “It’s a Mullins monologue.”

Many pointed to the unbridgeable class divide. One worker tweeted, “An alarm bell is ringing out loud and clear: One rule for us; another rule for everyone else.” Another wrote that Mullins is, “the worst type of capitalist, slagging off his employees, whilst he sits on his pile in Marbella. He’d run workhouses if allowed.”

Others wrote of the desperation the coronavirus crisis has brought into their own lives, “Charlie Mullins is really getting my back up. My company has reopened and I’ve not been brought back when I want to. Furlough/lockdown has ruined everything for me. My mental health has suffered and my marriage has fallen

apart and I’m still out of work.”

There are those who question how Mullins can be an authority on employment issues at all, given his seven-year legal battle, eventually lost in 2018, over the classification of his engineers as “self-employed”—an attempt to reduce costs and remove workers’ basic employment rights. “Not sure I can agree with tax dodging Charlie Mullins who fought tooth and nail to avoid having to financially treat his employees as employees despite in every other way treating them as employees,” tweeted one.

Losing the high-profile case has not changed his business model and all Pimlico Plumbers engineers continue to be “self-employed.”

Mullins cites Margaret Thatcher as his business inspiration and forced his entire staff (the “self-employed” included) to wear black armbands when she died. He has donated tens of thousands of pounds to the Tories and was particularly close to his admirers, former Prime Minister David Cameron, and former Chancellor George Osborne, who had him in “every four or five months.” In return for his generous donations to the Tory Party—and of course for his “services to the plumbing industry”—Mullins was awarded an Order of the British Empire in 2014. He intends to campaign to become Mayor of London in 2021.



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