

UK: Captain Sir Tom Moore's death used to boost politics of "national unity"

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Captain Sir Tom Moore, a World War II veteran who raised almost £33 million for National Health Service (NHS) charities, died in hospital on Tuesday at the age of 100. He had been suffering with pneumonia and had tested positive for COVID-19.

According to his relatives, Moore was unable to be vaccinated against the disease due to the medication he was taking for his pneumonia. He had been living at home with family until Sunday, when he was admitted to Bedford Hospital with breathing difficulties.

Moore's death has been met with genuine sympathy among millions of people. He rose to national prominence in April last year after pledging to walk 100 lengths of his garden—he was frail and needed a walking frame—before his 100th birthday to raise £1,000 for the NHS. The target was repeatedly exceeded within days, as over 1.3 million people donated, mostly in small contributions of around £20 each.

The event captured something of the overwhelming public support for NHS workers risking, and losing, their lives to combat the first devastating wave of the pandemic. Beyond that, workers identify the NHS as the most far-reaching and significant reform won by the working class in the post-war period.

All of which only underscores the filthy, cynical character of the outpouring of feigned grief from political figures and their efforts, supported by the media to use Moore's memory as a symbol for some non-existent "national unity".

The front pages of yesterday morning's papers were unanimous. The *Sun* referred to "Captain Marvel", the *Mirror* to the "Hero of our time", the *Daily Mail* to "the hero who walked into our hearts" and the *Telegraph* to "the very best of us". The *Metro* wrote, "We've lost a national treasure", the *Guardian* declared, "Where he walked the nation followed" and the *Daily Express*, "We never walked alone with you by our side". The *Times*

observed, "Queen leads tribute to a national inspiration". She knighted Moore last July.

Besides the queen, whose spokesperson credited "the inspiration he provided for the whole nation", Moore received tributes from the White House and NATO.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer tweeted, "This is incredibly sad news. Captain Tom Moore put others first at a time of national crisis and was a beacon of hope for millions. Britain has lost a hero."

The most revolting spectacle was presented by Boris Johnson. It took a strong stomach to watch Britain's Prime Murderer lead a revived "national clap" in Moore's honour yesterday evening without vomiting. In his statement in response to Moore's death, Johnson said, "In the dark days of the Second World War he fought for freedom and in the face of this country's deepest post-war crisis he united us all." The Union Flag at Downing Street was flown at half-mast.

It is a feature of a decaying social order that it turns the good and the sincere into the grotesque and sordid. Those supposedly honouring Moore's life are the same people who carried out and oversaw policies which have led to over 100,000 COVID-19 deaths in the last year—the majority of them elderly people.

Moore's charitable acts, and his death, are not a symbol of national unity but proof of the social chasm running across the UK between the ruling class—which has so thoroughly destroyed the NHS that a £33 million fundraiser to alleviate the hardship of nurses and doctors by Moore is necessary—and the working class which it has left to suffer and die.

Labour and Tory governments alike have carried out sweeping privatisations and cuts in the health service for decades. They allowed the NHS to run up staff vacancies in the tens of thousands and cut beds to one of the lowest per capita rates in Europe. Social care was abandoned to underpaid workers and profiteering private companies. A

study by the Institute for Public Policy identified 131,000 preventable deaths in the years 2012-2019 due to austerity cuts.

When the pandemic hit, the Tory government implemented a programme of herd immunity, reportedly summed up by perennially disgraced former adviser Dominic Cummings as, “if that means some pensioners die, too bad.” That policy has produced two devastating waves of death so far. Thousands of old people lost their lives in undefended care homes as the government kicked thousands of patients out of hospitals without COVID tests. Hundreds of NHS staff were killed after being provided with totally inadequate personal protective equipment.

Every rotten step taken by the government has been supported by Starmer, who, following his predecessor Jeremy Corbyn, has made a mantra of the “national interest” as a cover for political collusion in a monstrous crime.

The corporate media have obligingly cheered on every claimed turning of the corner and miraculous end to the pandemic, before castigating the public for each new round of infections and deaths.

This is not the story of national bonding, but of a vicious class war which the ruling class are seeking to hide behind the Union flag and glorifying the sticking plaster of workers’ charitable donations to conceal the decimation of public provision.

The government and its accomplices are seeking to drown the working class in appeals to the “milk of human kindness” while it carries out new and more terrible crimes. Their cynical outpouring over Moore comes days after the UK government and the devolved governments in Scotland and Wales announced plans to lift public health restrictions while the pandemic still rages.

Johnson announced last Wednesday that the UK would set out a roadmap for lifting restrictions on February 22 and would begin reopening schools on March 8. There are calls in the Conservative Party to speed up this agenda, after the Welsh and Scottish governments announced their intention beginning reopening schools from February 22.

These reopenings would take place with a far higher prevalence of the virus in the population than in September, when schools were last reopened, ahead of a massive surge of infections in which schools played a significant role. They are being carried out to prepare the way for a broader reopening of the economy in the interests of big business and British capitalism’s competitive advantage over other nations.

All of this is planned under conditions in which only a portion of the population have been vaccinated and new variants of the virus are being detected across the country which spread faster, are more deadly and reduce the effectiveness of inoculation. Cases of the South African variant have now been found in Britain, and the UK’s B117, or Kent variant is developing similar mutations.

Eight areas across Surrey, London, Kent, Hertfordshire, Southport and Walsall began receiving door-to-door testing earlier on Monday after 11 cases of the South African variant with no travel links were found in routine genetic screening of samples. On Tuesday, Health Secretary Matt Hancock announced another 11 “mutations of concern” had been found in Bristol and 32 in Liverpool.

Millions of people will view the ruling class’s transparent and mawkish embrace of Moore with contempt. The *World Socialist Web Site* noted last summer that the weekly Clap for Carers “came to an end after 10 weeks because workers could no longer stomach the sickening hypocrisy of participating government ministers. What began as a spontaneous act of popular solidarity has now been co-opted by the ruling class, turned into a vehicle for lecturing the workers on the importance of ‘national unity,’ spreading the lie that ‘we are all in it together,’ and providing a fig leaf to conceal the threatened collapse of the NHS.”

Before the pandemic, working people spent a decade of austerity being told that “we are all in this together” as wages fell or stagnated and profits and executive pay climbed to new heights.

These sharp lessons in the class divide across society have impacted on the political consciousness of millions of workers. They show that the real path to solidarity is one of ruthless struggle against the ruling class in the fight to unify workers as part of an international socialist movement.

The immediate task of that movement is to take the response to the pandemic out of the hands of capitalist governments, implement the necessary public health measures, and carry out a massive redistribution of the wealth hoarded by a tiny oligarchy to meet healthcare and all other social needs.



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