

Families paint defiant Covid-19 memorial wall opposite UK Parliament

Paul Mitchell
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Families of those who have died as a result of Covid-19 in Britain have painted a defiant and moving 500-metre-long wall of 150,000 hearts opposite the Houses of Parliament in London. The names of their loved ones are gradually being added to the hearts.

The National Covid Memorial Wall was started by Covid-19 Bereaved Families For Justice UK Movement—a group of family members who have “come together to seek justice in the names of our loved ones gone too soon from Covid-19.”

The group says, “We firmly believe that had the government approached the pandemic differently, truly ‘followed the science’ and ‘taken the right actions at the right times’ that many of our loved ones would still be here today.

“As time goes on, more evidence emerges about government failings in relation to the timing of lockdown, provision of PPE and testing in health and care settings, isolation of cases within care homes and hospitals and much more.

“Despite this and the fact that the UK has one of the highest death tolls in the world, the government continues to speak of its ‘apparent success’. For the hundreds and thousands of people in mourning in the country, this is a failure to recognise the facts and an insult to the memory of our loved ones.”

Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson has refused to meet with the Covid-19 Bereaved Families campaign. He visited the wall with his security officers late in the evening, under cover of darkness on April 27, in a cynical damage limitation exercise, amid allegations, leaked as part of an ongoing factional war in the Tory party, that he had demanded last October “no more f***ing lockdowns, let the bodies pile high in their thousands!”

After Italy and Brazil, Britain has the third highest

death toll globally per million population—among countries with a population above 12 million—even based on the government’s own underestimated death toll figure of 127,570.

The outburst exemplified the “herd immunity” discussions being held behind closed doors, with it reported that Johnson also said around the same time of the virus that he would rather “let it rip” through the population than implement another lockdown.

Covid-19 Bereaved Families co-founder Matt Fowler told reporters that Johnson would not meet them or discuss their calls for a statutory public inquiry. “For weeks we’ve asked him to come to the wall and meet bereaved families. He’s refused to even acknowledge our request... Then, the day after it’s [alleged] he said he’d let ‘bodies pile high’ he makes a late evening visit under cover of darkness.

“It constantly feels like the prime minister views us as nothing more than an annoyance, an inconvenience on his doorstep. It hurts that he won’t even offer us the respect of engaging with us to learn the lessons from our lost loved ones.”

Earlier in the day, Jackie, visiting the memorial wall with husband Dave to write the name of her brother Bernard in one of the hearts told the WSWs, “I have come here because I hate Boris Johnson and the Tories for what they did to my Bernard.” Recalling the BMJ (formerly, British Medical Journal) editorial in February that accused the world’s governments of “social murder” in their collective response to the pandemic, Jackie labelled Johnson a “mass murderer”.

“Not only did I lose Bernard well before his time, but it has been impossible to find out the circumstances of his death. There has been a cover-up that’s impossible to penetrate. The authorities are trying to prevent any legal action and Johnson and his ministers will get

away with it. [Labour Party leader Sir Keir] Starmer has been useless.”

Sita had come to record the name of her sister Raksha, who had visited her doctor’s surgery early in the pandemic and contracted Covid-19 from another patient. “She rapidly became ill and died a horrible death.”

“I blame Boris Johnson for what happened. He treated the whole thing as a joke at first before reluctantly ordering a lockdown. Then when the second wave hit, he is even supposed to have said ‘let the bodies pile up high’. I think that has always been their attitude. Now Johnson talks about a third wave being inevitable.

“The government has also given huge amounts of money to their cronies. I still can’t believe something like £35 billion has been spent on the Test and Trace system, which has been a fiasco. When my sister got ill, I was phoned up several times and asked the same questions by people who didn’t know any more than the simple script they had been told to read out.

“At the same time, the government only gave the doctors and nurses a one percent pay rise this year. I can’t bear to watch the politicians and TV talk about our ‘National Health Service heroes’ and how ‘we are all in this together’”.

Sita said that she has family members in India. “As you can imagine they are really scared. It’s a catastrophe there. All the Conservative government here has done is offer a few hundred bits of medical equipment, probably a lorry load. Johnson is refusing to send vaccines. All the talk about how every country would co-operate to stop the pandemic when it first started has vanished into thin air. It is a dog-eat-dog situation which can only lead to more new variants of the virus appearing. There must be a way of running the world in a more just and co-operative way.”

Flora, a trainee social worker, explained how there was now a lot of pressure to stop home working and get everyone back into the office. “Up to now about 90 percent of the time we have been able to do our work remotely. Occasionally, there was no option but to go out to help people thrown into vulnerable situations. We were always very careful with PPE [personal protective equipment] and social distancing. We were given vaccines although that was only recently. We were praised for all our efforts.

“Now all that is changing. The safety attitude is disappearing. People don’t wear masks, don’t keep their distance. No one’s being tested. Managers are saying we have to be in the office five days a week, that we’re under-performing and they are going to carry out a re-organisation. That’s the thanks we get.

“I agree with what you said about the trade unions and the Labour Party and how they have co-operated with the government to get everyone back to work as soon as possible and stop us rebelling against all those rich bastards who seemed to have continued making a lot of money whilst we have got nothing.

“The unions are nowhere to be seen at my workplace. That’s probably not the way to say it. They are probably in an office somewhere conniving with management.

“I also agree with your May Day meeting and the idea of having committees of workers set up around the world to do things for ourselves. The pandemic has shown that you can’t sort it out with each country doing its own thing. I guess that goes for most of the world’s problems.”



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