

## **People's Assembly Scotland Statement on the current crisis**

The failings of the Tory government and the blind tacit following of their strategy by the Scottish Government has all contributed to the current disastrous situation we now face in all our front-line services, resulting in the unnecessary deaths of many workers and the general population at large. This added to the number of deaths in the community caused in part by the Scottish government's unpreparedness is a national scandal.

The Tories initially pronounced a policy of herd immunity, where acceptable losses should and would be accepted, because those losses would be in the lower classes. Where the protection of corporations and the financial system was their paramount priority.

The Tories and the Scottish Government are still failing to adhere to the World Health Organization's guidelines of, test, trace contacts and isolate those individuals.

They suppressed the conclusions of a cross government pandemic drill codenamed Exercise Cygnus that took place in 2016, which accurately predicted that the NHS would be plunged into crisis by an infectious and deadly disease.

This crisis in the NHS and Social Care is the direct result of cuts to all public services by first, the Tory Lib Dem coalition and then subsequent Tory Governments. New Labour have a case to answer here as well with privatisation in the NHS and the cuts to public services they implemented when in power.

A total lack of preparation has resulted in the ongoing fiasco around ventilators and PPE. We were told not to worry, there is plenty of PPE, yet a RAF flight to Turkey brought at current usage only two days' worth of supplies. But it matters not as private corporations like Burberry and Dyson are now reaping rewards.

On testing and tracking the list of failings and broken promises grows daily with targets continually being missed, a tactic the Scottish Government are also failing on as they have blindly followed Westminster policies from day one. SNP Govt has not used existing devolved powers to better protect us.

Other countries who handled this crisis far better, such as Denmark, New Zealand and Taiwan. All acted early on and have reduced the death rate. Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany, told her country to “take it seriously” and she did. Testing began right from the get-go. Germany jumped right over the phases of denial, as seen below. Germany’s numbers are far below its European neighbours.

COUNTRY	LEADER	No. of Deaths*
Denmark	Mette Frederiksen	260
Iceland	<u>Katrín Jakobsdóttir</u>	8
Finland	<u>Sanna Marin</u>	49
Germany	Angela Merkel	2,673
New Zealand	Jacinda Ardern	4
Norway	Erna Solberg	98
Taiwan	Tsai Ing-wen	6

Data from the European Centre for Disease Control as of April 12, 2020

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/avivahwittenbergcox/2020/04/13/what-do-countries-with-the-best-coronavirus-reponses-have-in-common-women-leaders/#486668633dec>

While other countries heeded WHO advice and acted appropriately, our governments all but gave up contact tracing and did nothing. Mass gatherings, concerts, racing and Champions League football all continued unchanged and schools and pubs remained open.

Currently across the country front line workers are putting their lives on the line.

Who are these key workers that we all rely on to survive this crisis?

NHS, Porters, Security, Admin, Cleaners, Nurses and Doctors

Social Care workers both public and private

Transport and shipping workers

Local Government workers across all sectors

Maintenance and construction workers

Retail and warehouse workers

Postal and delivery workers

Manufacturing workers

Few of these essential workers would be allowed entry to our countries due to proposed restrictive immigration laws by the current government.

It will soon be International Workers Memorial Day and the mantra of “Remember the dead but fight for the living” will have an even greater resonance this year. Workers are not being adequately protected, resulting in the deaths of frontline workers across all sectors.

The TUC has requested a national one minute silence on 28 April to commemorate/honour workers, doctors, nurses, care workers, bus drivers etc who have caught and died from virus at work. Our STUC should also adopt this simple measure as a show of solidarity.

Action is required now by all three Governments across Britain.

Manufacturing companies across all sectors that can be diversified should be ordered to switch production to PPE, respirators and all the other necessary equipment required by all our frontline services.

We need to follow Test, Test, Test, trace and track, not just in the NHS but wider

Public transport is now seen as a front-line necessity, it should be nationalised.

Social Care is in the direct firing line with the lack of PPE putting all workers in danger. All Social Care should be brought into the public domain.

We need a nationalised pharmaceutical company.

Once this crisis has passed, we will be faced with a situation much worse than the financial crash of 2008. The COVID-19 pandemic should not be blamed for, yet another severe cyclical crisis of the capitalist system caused by corporate ownership of the economy and the anarchy of market forces.

This crisis only underlines the inability of capitalism, especially our privatised, free-market neoliberal model, to meet public health and environmental emergencies.

According to official UK estimates and the latest analysis from the UN Council on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), bailing out private enterprise in Britain will cost at least £350bn over the coming period.

We must prepare a mass campaign uniting People's Assembly groups alongside the STUC, Trade Unions, Trade Union Councils and all other community campaigning organisations against the onslaught we will be faced with.

We cannot go back to business as usual, where the cost of this crisis will fall yet again on the poorest. Where all frontline services which we all rely on, will once again face further cuts to balance the government's books. Ensuring the protection of the financial industry and the continuing dominance of corporate power will be the foundation of all that they propose.

The People's Assembly Scotland last year re-launched its own vision of what can replace austerity. A vision of investment where we build and protect our services. Our booklet "In place of austerity – A Programme for the People" gives a base and starting point for the discussions and organisation we need to be having now.

Both “In Place of Austerity” and the joint People's Assembly and Unite Community Universal Credit guide can be found on the People’s Assembly Scotland Facebook group at:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/752289384786607/files/>

We support the call from the TUC for a public inquiry looking into the “grotesque” failure to provide frontline workers with adequate personal protective equipment.

We hope that the STUC will echo this and call for a similar enquiry here in Scotland.

When this crisis has passed there should be no return to “normal”. We need to salute those we have lost and those key workers who have served our people well despite being undervalued by those in power. This should be with both national and local demonstrations and rallies under the banner of thanks but no return to the old “normal”.

No return to the “normal” of low paid precarious work and bogus self-employment but for recognition with a rise in pay backdated to long before the start of the crisis, the provision of any PPE required for dangerous tasks and government.

Anything less would be an insult to the memory of all who have died whether in their workplace or as a result of governments inaction and unpreparedness.