



THE GREY PANTHER



Anarchist Communist Group

Pensioners Bulletin No 2

Freedom or Prisons?

The announcement that most restrictions, including compulsory face masks and social distancing, are to end on July 19th in England will lead to more hospitalisations and deaths amongst older people as well as the vulnerable. We know this from our experience so far of Covid 19.

Though older people are no more likely to catch the virus than younger age groups, they are more likely to need hospitalisation and are at more risk of death.

Statistics from the USA show that 50-64 year olds are 4 times more likely to be hospitalised than 18- 29 year olds and 35 times more likely to die. This increases to 6 times and 95 times for 65-74 year olds and 9 times and 230 times for the 74-84 age group. However, it is those over 85 who are particularly at risk- 15 times more likely to be hospitalised and 615 times more likely to die.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-age.html>

It is difficult to come by statistics for the UK as a whole because of the lack of data from England. After an intensive internet search it was only possible to find clear data from Scotland and Wales.

Scotland publishes detailed age breakdowns every week.

(<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/vital-events/general-publications/weekly-and-monthly-data-on-births-and-deaths/deaths-involving-coronavirus-covid-19-in-scotland>)

The summary from the beginning of the pandemic is:

40% of deaths over 85, 32%: 75-84, 17%: 65-74, 10% 45-64, 1%: 15-44.

A recent study by Imperial College found that age is also a factor in whether you

will get Long Covid, increasing by 3.5% with each decade of age.

<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/224853/over-million-adults-england-have-long/>

The old are expendable

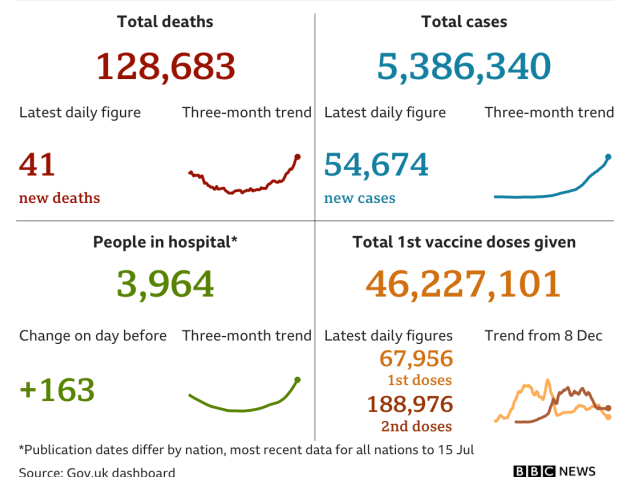
Given that the older you are the more at risk you are of death, hospitalisation and Long Covid, the fact that the government has not pursued a Covid repression strategy, like New Zealand and Australia and some of the East Asian countries, seems to suggest that the lives of older people are less valuable than younger ones. If it was younger people who were the main victims of the virus, we would likely see a very different approach. This is the only conclusion to be drawn from a policy of letting the virus “rip” through the population, with the aim of creating herd immunity and hoping that the incomplete vaccination programme will keep deaths and hospitalisations “under control”.

The government is going ahead with this knowing full well that people will die or suffer serious consequences and that these are likely to be over 60. As cases continue to soar, scientists have modelled what this could mean for hospitalisations and deaths. The government’s own advisory group predicts 1000 to 2000 admissions a day within weeks, with up to 200 deaths a day likely. Other studies predict 4000 hospital admissions a day by next month with another 46,000 deaths by the end of the year. Even the government has admitted that there will be an increase in deaths and hospitalisations- the strategy is not “risk-free”.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/coronavirus-sage-summer-wave-deaths-b1882726.html>

Myth of vaccine invincibility

Coronavirus in the UK



There is no doubt that the vaccine has greatly cut the chances of those with double jabs having severe symptoms and dying. However, protection is far from 100% with the Delta variant: 80% for the Pfizer vaccine and only 60% for the AstraZeneca. Also, the research is still unclear on how long protection from a vaccine lasts. In addition, a large portion of Black and other ethnic minority groups are vaccine hesitant for a variety of reasons. This means that they will be more at risk of catching Covid if other public health measures are scrapped. Therefore, scientists recommend people to continue to be cautious.

But it is going to be very difficult to be cautious when cases are skyrocketing and basic safety measures are not in place. When cases levels are low, the chances of coming into contact with an infected person are very small. And, if masks are worn indoors and social distancing is observed, then everyone can feel confident about getting out and about and meeting up with people.

However, if the amount of cases are high, the situation is very different. As the government has poured £37 billion into an ineffective track and trace system and

with many people asymptomatic, there is no way we can actually know who around us has Covid and who does not. In the report of July 9th

(<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/coronaviruscovid19infectionsurveyspilot/9july2021>), the Office of National Statistics estimates that 1 in 160 people had Covid in England and 1 in 100 people in Scotland in the previous week. This is an average so in some places the figures will be more like 1 in 50.

Limited options for older people and the vulnerable

If people are at risk and understandably don't want to get Covid, then what can they do? The only choice is to go back into isolation, suffering all the mental anguish in order to stay physically well. (For info on the elderly and mental illness:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-021-84127-7>).

If mask wearing is no longer compulsory, then people cannot be confident that everyone will choose to do the right thing. Going into shops and cafes, and travelling on public transport will become risky activities. The person wearing the mask is not completely protected unless that have a more expensive variety which many will not be able to afford. The system works when everyone is wearing masks. Meeting up with others will also carry risks as family and friends could easily be carriers and not know it.

Bring back mutual aid and solidarity

We always knew that we cannot rely on the government or the bosses to keep us safe. Their main aim has always been to ensure that capitalism continues to

function, making profits for a few. They are desperate to get things "back to normal"- people going into to work and then spending their money in the shops, in the clubs, pubs and restaurants, and by going on holiday. If a few old people die, then that is an acceptable price to pay. After all, they are not productive members of society and only a burden on hard working families- so make no contribution to profits!

We cannot accept this and the working class itself must self-organise to keep everyone safe. No level of Covid deaths is acceptable and every life matters. We don't need laws to tell us what is best practice- people can continue to wear masks and keep social distancing. Workers can insist on enforcing safety measures on public transport, in shops, and in educational settings. Mutual aid groups may be needed again to support older and vulnerable people in a community who no longer feel confident about going out.



Already London Transport has stated that they will continue to insist on mask wearing. This was a demand from the unions. (See: <https://www.rmt.org.uk/news/rmt-warns-of-fatal-folly-of-removing-transport-covid/>).

However, this puts a great burden on workers to enforce something that will be unpopular with some. This means that the public must be prepared to support transport workers and also demand more staff to support the health and safety measures.

Older workers will also be worried about going back to work- partly because of unsafe transport but also because workplaces will not be safe. This could lead to older workers being forced into early retirement.

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/latest-news/2021/may/new-figures-show-older-workers-deeply-impacted-by-covid-19/>

Not just the old and vulnerable



We must also keep in mind, that it is actually about keeping everyone safe. It does matter if **anyone** gets Covid. Firstly, Long Covid can have devastating consequences for people of all ages and it is impossible to know who will suffer from it. See:

<https://mylongcovididiaries.medium.com/the-hidden-voices-of-long-covid-5109fed0d79b>

Also, if you do get it and luckily don't have any lasting symptoms, then you can still pass it on to someone who may end up with Long Covid or even dying. This is what we mean by solidarity, making sure

that you support and stand by those who are in need, regardless of what the government says.

Anyone can contract
#CORONAVIRUS
regardless of race, gender, age
or other personal qualities.

#SolidarityNotStigma fights
the spread of **#COVID19**.



 World Health
Organization
Western Pacific Region

Resources

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/age-and-covid-19>

Pensioners Attacked on All Fronts

Over 2.1 million pensioners in the UK are below the poverty line after payment of rent, an increase rise of 200,000 on the previous year, and the highest for 15 years. This government has already taken away free TV licenses for those over 75, and now threatens the triple lock pension. The Labour Party has already hinted that it will support the taking away of the triple lock. Added to this is the threat to free prescriptions for those between 60-66. How soon before the free travel pass and the winter fuel allowance are threatened? Time to fight back!

Rishi Sunak's Plans for Triple Lock Pensions: Bad news for both old and young

"The triple lock is government policy but I recognise people's concerns about what that might mean, given some of the numbers that are being put around. We will approach these decisions with fairness in mind - fairness for both pensioners but also for taxpayers." Rishi Sunak



The Chancellor Rishi Sunak has strongly hinted that the Johnson government will “temporarily” break the pension triple lock this year so that it is not liable to a bill of £3 billion extra to update pensions.

The triple lock is linked to earnings growth and the cost of living. As earnings have gone up by 8% then there is meant to be a translation of that to pensions in April 2022. At the 2019 election the Tories pledged to remain with the policy of raising the state pension in line with average earnings until at least 2024.

Sunak and his cronies in the Johnson regime is worried that the rise in pay after lockdown will result in an increase in the state pension by 8%. They are determined to make the mass of the working class pay for the costs incurred

to the government by the pandemic. They were alerted to the probable 8% rise by the Office for Budget Responsibility.

Sunak indicated the government line of thinking in a series of interviews on radio and TV. He is backed up by various think tanks. For example, Lord David Willetts, president of the Resolution Foundation, said "The Covid crisis has laid bare the design faults of the triple lock, with a severe jobs crisis last year inadvertently contributing to an unnecessary and unjustified 8% rise in the state pension next year. The chancellor should take the opportunity this autumn to replace the triple lock with a smoothed earnings link. This would mean the state pension would rise in line with the living standards of working age people - a change that would be fair to all generations."

Britain has one of the lowest pension rates in the developed world and poverty among pensioners has been increasing in the last few years. This is expressed too in the increase in pensioner deaths in winter. For many, the state pension was the only income after retirement.

This government is looking to using this time of crisis to make permanent changes to the pensions system. This will not just affect the old, as the young will face not just job insecurity in the present, but pension insecurity in their later years. This is an attack that effects all of the working class. Pensioners need to seek links with both employed workers and with youth to mobilise against this attack.

And They're After Our Free Prescriptions Too!

The Johnson regime is considering scrapping free prescriptions for people between the ages of 60 and 66 years old and is launching a consultation that will last eight weeks.



Those below that age currently pay 35 pence per prescription item and those with a regular prescription can buy a prepaid certificate for £108.10 for 12 months. The move to scrap prescriptions for those between 60-66 would mean that this age group would end up spending an extra £46.75 on average per year for those without continual need of medicines. This would increase to an additional £130.90 for those who need more than 12 prescriptions per year.

Leading this onslaught is Health Minister James Bethell. This the creature who opposes wage increases for nurses and blames the poor for contracting COVID, see www.anarchistcommunism.org/2021/03/10/baron-bethell-the-beast-from-hell/ for that and his dodgy goings-on as Minister

for Test and Trace.

We warned that the Johnson regime would start to try and claw back money as a result of the costs incurred by the pandemic and this is proving to be true.

Bethell said “The upper age exemption for free prescriptions used to align with the state pension age, but that link has been lost over the years. Prescription charges are an important source of income for the NHS, and the costs of providing free prescriptions continues to increase with our ageing population. I encourage anyone with views on our proposals to share them through the consultation response form, available online on gov.uk.”

Tell Bethell what you think of his plans!

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/aligning-the-upper-age-for-nhs-prescription-charge-exemptions-with-the-state-pension-age>

We have to mobilise to defend the triple lock, free bus passes and winter fuel allowance. Whether pensioners or the young, we need to unite to defend these, and to fight not just for the preservation of triple lock but for pensions that correspond to a living wage. Ultimately we will need to go beyond this, to the creation of a free and equal society where older people are looked after and respected.

<https://www.anarchistcommunism.org/>

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