

Model motion for Branches/CLPs to consider

For a zero Covid strategy

To Keir Starmer and NEC

This Branch/CLP notes the worsening coronavirus crisis in Britain, as new cases of the infection and hospitalisations increase and a second wave of the pandemic advances - in a country already suffering one of the highest Covid-19 deaths per capita in the world.

We believe:

- the Tory government strategy is wrong and that it is reckless and dangerous to continue forcing people back to workplaces and easing the lockdown.
- reducing the virus to minimal levels is a precondition for economic recovery - the two are not in contradiction
- we cannot live safely with the virus and we should not attempt to
- Britain needs a zero Covid strategy - that would put the health of people first, as has been successfully implemented in countries, such as New Zealand, which have effectively eliminated the virus or reduced it to minimal levels
- a zero Covid strategy is possible here - in fact, the virus was declining rapidly until the Tories introduced easing measures

We note the calls for a zero Covid strategy from the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs and urge our party to support a zero Covid strategy and to campaign for the government to adopt this course.

Briefing Notes for zero Covid motion

Coronavirus cases are currently rising exponentially - according to Professor John Edmunds - a member of the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) on 7 September.

The R rate is back again above 1 - according to the UK government on 18 September it is in the range 1.1-1.4

Britain already has one of the highest mortality rates from Covid-19 in the world - even the Tory-supporting Daily Telegraph on 30 August reported that the 'response to the Covid pandemic has been woeful' and that 'the UK sits at or close to the top of the league tables for death whichever way you slice it'.

From 13 September the UK government has been reporting an average (7 days) of more than 3,000 new cases daily, in comparison with countries that have followed a strategy to eliminate the virus, so have reduced new cases to zero or minimal levels. These later countries include New Zealand, China, Iceland, Vietnam and Thailand - as referred to by Richard Burgon MP on Labour List.

By 18 September, following the re-opening of schools after the summer, there were already 1,230 UK Schools with confirmed Coronavirus infections among their school population. (source: @ToryFibs, which compiles a database from publicly available reports)

Despite clear warnings over many years there was a complete failure by the Tory government to plan for this pandemic, plus a decade of the Tories' austerity has undermined public services and the weakened the ability to tackle the pandemic. In addition, channelling large amounts of public funds to private sector companies which are incapable of responding adequately has added to the crisis.

The statement of Socialist Campaign Group of MPs 'For a zero Covid strategy', published on 9 September, is below.

FOR A ZERO COVID STRATEGY - STATEMENT BY SCG MPs

"Britain needs a zero Covid strategy which puts the health of the people first. And rising infection numbers mean that the need for such a strategy is urgent. We are seeing a renewed rise in Covid 19 cases, both globally and here in Britain. The number of cases in Britain is currently rising by 3000 a day. And this is before school and university students have returned to education.

This sharp increase in Covid 19 cases is because the government had the wrong strategy. It did not pursue a zero Covid strategy. Therefore, lockdown was started too late and lifted too early - before the level of infections had been reduced to minimal levels. So, we believe that it is reckless and dangerous to continue forcing people back to workplaces and easing lockdown even as cases rise. It is also impossible to force most people to resume their normal social lives while they are justifiably fearful of the pandemic. Reducing the virus to minimal levels is not in contradiction to economic recovery. It is the precondition for economic recovery.

A zero Covid strategy has been successfully implemented in other countries like New Zealand. They have effectively eliminated the virus or reduced it to minimal levels. It is possible here too. In fact, the virus was declining rapidly in this country until easing measures were introduced. We can eliminate the virus if effective lockdowns, and a proper tracing, tracking and isolation system is introduced.

The strategy should include:

- A target to reduce the number of new Covid cases week on week*
- Accelerating the development of a comprehensive locally led, but nationally supported, test, track and isolate programme in England*
- Screening at airports and other transport hubs such as train stations*
- Bringing back daily coronavirus briefings*

At the same time, we agree with employers' organisations and trade unions that the government must extend its support for businesses and workers. The furlough scheme must be extended, as has been done in France, Germany, the Netherlands and Ireland. Otherwise we will see spiralling unemployment.

We cannot live safely with the virus. And we should not attempt to. The government must adopt a policy of eliminating it. We need a zero Covid strategy."

Model motion for Branches/CLPs to consider

Extend the furlough scheme to save jobs and protect the economy

To Keir Starmer and NEC

This Branch/CLP notes:

- the Tory government's furlough ('Coronavirus Job Retention') scheme is due to end on 31 October.
- but the Coronavirus pandemic is intensifying and will not end on 31 October
- as a result of ending the furlough scheme, the current sharp rise in redundancies is expected to accelerate - increasing unemployment and harming the prospects of a future economic recovery
- the government's own Office for Budget Responsibility has predicted that unemployment will climb to 12%
- some European countries have already decided to extend their furlough schemes into next year, to protect their economies and jobs - including Germany, France and Ireland
- some employers are taking advantage of rising unemployment to fire and then rehire their workforce on much worse pay and conditions

This Branch/CLP calls for the national Labour Party to demand the government:

- extends the furlough scheme into next year, to protect the economy and jobs
- outlaw employers, both in the private and public sector, from firing and rehiring employees

Briefing Notes on extending the furlough motion

In September 2020 the Office for National Statistics reported that unemployment by July had already risen to 4.1% and that the number of employees on companies' payrolls in August was around 695,000 lower than March 2020.

This bad situation is expected to dramatically worsen if the government continues with its current policies. There will be mass unemployment. Economic forecasters are predicting far higher job losses than after the 2008 financial crash. For example, the Office for Budget Responsibility has predicted unemployment will climb to 12% and the Institute for Employment Studies is predicting that around half a million jobs will likely be lost just during this autumn.

Rising unemployment is already being used to push down wages, so as to increase profits - this explains why Tories want to end the furlough scheme. Government finances are able to support the scheme continuing.

Countries that have already decided to extend their furlough schemes include Germany - which has extended its furlough scheme to end of 2021; Ireland to 31 March 2021; and France till the summer of 2021.

The TUC is calling for the extension of the furlough scheme and Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey has asked for a meeting with the Prime Minister to make the case.

Firing and then rehiring a workforce on much worse pay and conditions is legal in Britain - but not in other countries including Spain and Ireland. Employers that are already firing and rehiring in Britain, or plan to, include British Airways, Centrica (which owns British Gas) and Tower Hamlets Council.

Model motion for Branches/CLPs to consider

Oppose a damaging Tory US trade deal

To Keir Starmer and NEC

This Branch/CLP is concerned that the current trade deal that the British government is negotiating with the US has the potential to:

- undermine food standards
- lead to further privatisation of public services, including the NHS
- give US corporations special legal powers to challenge the policies of our national and devolved governments, by introducing investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) or 'corporate courts' which allows foreign investors to sue governments in secret arbitration panels for 'unfair treatment'
- give big tech corporations more powers to abuse our data.
- threaten workers' rights
- undermine our ability to reduce carbon emissions and meet our climate change targets.

We are further concerned that the deal is being negotiated in secret, away from the scrutiny of elected MPs.

We welcome the fact that the Labour leadership has taken a position against any deal which includes ISDS.

We call on the Labour leadership and NEC to stand by the 2019 general election manifesto policy commitments:

- that all UK trade agreements must be consistent with international humanitarian law,
- that parliamentary scrutiny is necessary for all trade and investment agreements
- rejecting any trade agreements that undermine labour standards or environmental protections

Briefing Notes on US trade deal

To get a full understanding of this issue, you should read *Trade Secrets: The truth about the US trade deal and how we can stop it*, by Nick Dearden, published by Global Justice Now. If you don't have time, here are a summary of its arguments.

When Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn held up pages and pages of blacked out trade documents during last November's general election debate, it became clear why the government wanted to keep them secret. They confirmed widespread fears about its willingness to capitulate to the US corporate lobby.

Now even the Daily Mail is expressing concern about the threat to UK food standards from a US trade deal, as British farmers mobilise to protect their livelihoods. Whatever views people may have had on Brexit in 2016, a clear-cut majority of the public is opposed to most of Trump's top priorities for a trade deal.

The US trade deal is not really about importing more American products. It's about importing the American economic and regulatory model.

On food standards, the US has made it crystal clear that it is not going to compromise. "We either have fair access for agriculture or we won't have a deal," said US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer. The problem is that US food standards are a lot lower than the UK's. US agriculture is dominated by largescale agricultural corporations, which push the intensive use of antibiotics, hormones and steroids to promote the rapid growth of animals, leading to quicker profits.

Genetically modified crops, chlorinated chicken and vegetables containing much higher levels of pesticides would all find their way onto our supermarket shelves. A recent report shows that American apples are allowed to contain 400 times the amount the UK allows of some insecticides linked to serious health conditions, and grapes 1,000 times the amount. In a recent test, 95% of US baby foods contained toxic metals.

This kind of competition would immediately lead to farmers here pressurising the government to lower UK standards. There would be a race to the bottom in levels of protection. Yet in a recent survey, only 8% of the public think the UK should lower food safety standards.

Cosmetics are another major health concern, with the US regulatory law in this area not updated since 1938. Over 1,300 toxic ingredients have been banned from use in cosmetics here, but only 11 in the US. Even asbestos has been found in small amounts in makeup marketed to children.

Modern trade deals tilt the balance of power firmly to the side of big business. They often give corporate lobbyists guaranteed access to decision-makers and the ability to object to proposed regulations, even before elected representatives have seen the proposals. Concretely, there is a US offensive to get rid of "unjustified" warning labels on products, for example those indicating high sugar content.

Trade in services accounts for \$5.8 trillion a year, or one quarter of all global trade. This includes what we would see as public services – like healthcare – and trade rules do not exempt them. They

promote irreversible privatisation. Additionally, medicines are typically four times more expensive in the US than here. Despite government assurances that higher medicine prices won't be part of a US trade deal, it is already being discussed. Returning other services, such as rail and energy, to the public sector would also be made significantly harder under any trade deal, despite the popularity of these policies.

Another likely part of the deal is the introduction of secret corporate courts, allowing companies to claim compensation if the government takes restrictive action to protect consumers. Argentina was sued in such courts for \$80 billion after its government froze water and energy prices in the public interest. But these courts don't consider the public interest, only investor rights – real cases include companies suing governments that pass laws requiring cigarettes to be sold in plain packaging. Governments have no right to appeal in these courts, nor can they claim their legal costs – usually millions of dollars. They can only lose, or lose worse.

A digital trade chapter in a US trade deal could severely constrain the ability of future governments to make the big tech giants like Amazon and Facebook operate in the public interest. The UK idea of a 'digital services tax' to ensure these corporations pay their taxes would be out the window and online privacy would be compromised. A particular concern is whether UK negotiators even understand the issues at stake.

A US trade deal would have a negative impact on the climate emergency, just as the now-shelved TTIP threatened to lead to an additional 11 million metric tons per year of CO₂. Labour's shadow foreign secretary Lisa Nandy MP has said Britain should not sign a trade deal with any country that refuses to abide by the climate change obligations in the UN Paris Agreement. The US is intending to leave the agreement this year. Here too corporate courts would have a role. Canada, for example, was challenged by a mining company under the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) for trying to take dangerous chemicals out of petrol and placing a moratorium on fracking. The company was awarded \$300m.

Socialists should be particularly concerned about the effect of any deal on UK labour standards. Many of the hard-won protections for British workers simply do not operate in the US, where workers labour on average an extra 250 hours a year. Again, using NAFTA as a model, it's estimated that 1.3 million jobs were lost in Mexico after it was signed.

The whole deal is being negotiated with no oversight by Parliament. When Britain was a member of the European Union, elected MEPs exercised some control over the negotiations. No such power resides in the UK Parliament, which is not even guaranteed a debate or vote once the deal is completed. In the words of one former trade official, Britain is "at the far end of the secrecy" spectrum.

So how can the deal be stopped? Public pressure inflicted defeat on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) – 250,000 people took to the streets in Germany alone – and eventually the deal was shelved. On the US deal, a wide coalition is already in formation – farmers, NHS campaigners, unions, anti-poverty and environmental campaigners – which promises to reach beyond the Brexit divide. But we also have to articulate a new positive vision of what equitable trading relations would look like, regulating trade and investment flows to ensure a fairer and more sustainable international economy that works for people and planet. This could involve coordinating taxation and controlling speculative financial flows, as well as finding ways to prevent

the undercutting of government regulation between countries, which leads to a race to the bottom in standards. International rules also need to help poorer countries to diversify their economies. This includes a greater allowance for technology transfer, a preference for regional over global trading and agreements which improve commodity pricing.

For those hoping that President Trump's defeat in November's presidential election will remove this threat: don't forget it was President Obama four years ago who pushed TTIP. Whoever is president of the US, the terms the US would be pushing would be similar.

There were some very positive ideas setting out a new direction in Labour's 2019 general election manifesto. "Labour believes human rights should drive our trade policy," it said. It promised to require all UK trade agreements to be consistent with international humanitarian law, to introduce legislation to ensure parliamentary scrutiny of trade and investment agreements and to reject any trade agreements that undermine labour standards or environmental protections.

Labour now needs to step up the fight against the US trade deal.