



GRASSROOTS BLACK LEFT

Labour African, Caribbean and Asian Socialists

Black People Racism and the Covid-19 Pandemic (with a section on vaccines)

“ We are appalled at how many **Black people** are dying, including those doing their job **caring for the sick and elderly**, and will not keep quiet about it. Black **political unity** is essential to tackling the **crisis**.

Introduction

**We use the term political Black that embraces African, Caribbean and Asian people who share the common cause of combating racism from the perspective of lived experience.*

This Grassroots Black Left pamphlet sets out published facts about the coronavirus pandemic and how it has hit hardest the Black communities in Britain. It tackles head-on some of the controversies surrounding the issue and makes political demands about what should be done.

In view of recent developments, this pamphlet updates the original Grassroots Black Left (GBL) position paper with the same title, published in May 2020 which formed the basis of an article by Deborah Hobson, Co-Chair of GBL, published on 3 June that year in Tribune magazine.

Background

African Caribbeans in Britain have been dying from the coronavirus (Covid-19) at a rate that is four times more than white people. And Bangladeshis and Pakistanis are more than 50 per cent more likely to die from the virus as white people - with people of Indian and mixed heritage also more at risk. These shocking facts were revealed by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) in May 2020.

In consequence of these incontrovertible facts, the government directed Public Health England (PHE) to review the data into the disparities in risks and outcomes of Covid-19 infection. This report was published on 2 June 2020, confirming the ONS data, but disappointingly, without any recommendations. After mounting pressure, the second part of the PHE Review into the disparities of Covid-19 infection, which had been initially suppressed by the government, was finally released on 16 June 2020. The report admits that Covid-19 has just exposed long-standing, pre-existing inequalities. It states that "racial discrimination affects people's life chances and the stress associated with being discriminated against based on race/ethnicity affects mental and physical health" and calls for fast but sustainable, large-scale and transformative change at both structural and individual levels to reduce inequalities.

Of the 119 coronavirus deaths of NHS employees recorded up until 22 April 2020, an appalling sixty-three per cent were African, Caribbean and Asian, according to an exclusive report in the *Health Service Journal* and a staggering eighty-three per cent of these people were born outside the UK, including The Philippines, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and India, highlighting the UK's dependence on migrant healthcare workers.

The Black faces on front pages of newspapers at the beginning of the pandemic said it all, although the racial dimension was not referred to by the media and politicians at the time.

African, Caribbean and Asian NHS employees are concentrated in the lowest paid most precarious jobs and most likely to be subjected to disciplinary action by their white bosses.

ONS Head of Health Analysis Nick Stripe, told the BBC: "The risk [of getting Covid-19] is significantly higher for some of those ethnic groupings compared to the white ethnic grouping." (BBC Television, 7 May 2020.)

The ONS warned that Black people were also the hardest hit section of the population because of higher health risk factors like diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease in their communities. But the experts accept: "A remaining part of the difference has not yet been explained."

Putting the figures into more detail, the ONS stated: "When taking into account age in the analysis, Black males are 4.2 times more likely to die from a Covid-19 related death and Black females 4.3 times more likely than white ethnicity males and females."

The unofficial Independent SAGE (Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies), which has consistently held the official SAGE to account, published a review on 3 July 2020 of the evidence and recommendations relating to ethnic disparities in the impact of Covid-19. Independent SAGE listed a set of recommendations, both short and longer-term. These acknowledged the research evidence for the effect of structural racial discrimination on health outcomes. The short-term recommendations include increasing the social security safety net, and removing the *No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)* condition on migrants who have no leave to stay in Britain so they can have their basic needs met for food, water and shelter - all the better to reduce the risk to them and the wider population during the pandemic. Longer-term recommendations include increasing access to more social housing, to reduce overcrowding in housing and to tackle employment inequality, both of which are responsible for pre-existing health inequalities and the poorer outcomes of Covid-19 infection in Black communities.

Inequalities within Black communities have been well-documented, including in a report produced by the Runnymede Trust race thinktank in April 2020. Racist abuse has always been a feature in the NHS, with a report in October 2019 showing instances of it had almost tripled.

This coincided with the implementation of the government's racist "hostile environment" policy that interfered with the very foundations on which the NHS was built (through the introduction of the NHS migrant surcharge): healthcare for all, free at the point of delivery, based on clinical need and not on the ability to pay.

The public rightly applaud heroic NHS frontliners, but it is important to be reminded of the experiences of Black employees, who make up almost 40 per cent of the workforce – the majority in some hospitals – yet are around 15 percent of the population.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies outlines in a report published in May that: "In the short term, ethnic inequalities are likely to manifest from the Covid-19 crisis in two main ways":

- through exposure to infection and health risks, including mortality
- through exposure to loss of income

A further report on the findings of a survey by the Runnymede Trust entitled *Over-Exposed and Under-Protected* published on 5 August 2020 revealed that people from Black communities (especially Bangladeshi and Black African) "face greater barriers" when trying to protect themselves from exposure to Covid-19, including over-representation in key worker roles, reliance on public transport, overcrowded housing and not being given the correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) by employers.

No wonder former Labour equalities shadow cabinet member Dawn Butler MP said on Twitter, on 7 May 2020: "For those who think I'm fixated on race let me just say this. As an African Caribbean woman, I know the consequences of ignoring race issues and Covid-19 has highlighted to me that I must never be bullied into silence."

Within the Labour Party, the bombshell leaked report about its handling of antisemitism complaints confirms what many Black members have known for a long time about the institutional racism and hostility to them they have historically faced in the party, of which Africans, Caribbeans and Asians are its most loyal voters. Grassroots Black Left (GBL) has dealt with the issue separately by submitting a report, with the help of expert legal advice, to Labour's independent inquiry, led by Michael Forde QC. We look forward to his findings due out later this year.

Racism in the Labour Party

On its past record, we cannot trust the Labour Party bureaucracy to champion Black issues. It is therefore our responsibility.

We are still awaiting a statement from the Labour leadership decrying the abhorrent racism against Black party members, including MPs Diane Abbott, Dawn Butler and Clive Lewis, revealed by the leaked report about the handling of antisemitism complaints. The *Guardian* reported on 13 August 2020 that Black Labour members now perceive a "hierarchy of racism" within the party and as a consequence, Black voters are beginning to stop voting Labour.

Hate crime

Black people facing inequalities are much more likely to be affected by Covid-19, as has been reported. A disturbing under-reported aspect of the pandemic is that it has led to an increase in hate crimes against Asian, particularly Chinese people. They are facing the brunt of Covid-19-linked race hate crimes, as highlighted in an interview in April 2020 by the Institute for Race Relations with Monitoring Group director Suresh Grover, a veteran anti-racist campaigner. The *Guardian* reported on 13 May 2020 that Police coding figures on crime reporting systems identified a 21% increase in hate crimes against South and East Asian people in the first three months of 2020 compared with the same period the year before.

Chinese people have been scapegoated and targeted for vicious attacks by racist thugs who ignorantly claim they are responsible for the pandemic. Irresponsible politicians and some media outlets have fanned the flames of this xenophobic China-blaming, which has its contemporary roots in US President Donald Trump seeking to maintain America's position as the only superpower.

Public inquiry

There were calls for urgent government action, as reported in the Guardian on 16 April 2020, not least because Black people account for 35 per cent of all Covid-19 patients in intensive care. The staggering racial inequality statistics in regard to the killer virus led to the government launching an official inquiry to explain the reasons and come up with answers.

GBL agrees an expert probe is clearly needed. But we question the credibility of the "independent" government inquiry into the disproportionate effect of Covid-19 on Black communities. We note there has been widespread concern raised about the role of the former chair of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, Trevor Phillips, and his private consultancy company, which has been given a contract as part of the government inquiry. In past controversial media interventions, Phillips has made divisive comments about Muslims, for which he has been suspended as a member of the Labour Party, and he has under-played the effects racism has had on Black people in Britain.

GBL thinks Trevor Phillips is unfit to be a part of any inquiry to do with race, especially the one being set up by the government.

GBL proposes a truly independent inquiry by experts drawn from the Black communities. We have set up a Health Workers Group with Black doctors and other people on it, demonstrating the sort of expertise available in the African Caribbean and Asian communities.

That Phillips is involved in the government's inquiry gives many people in the Black communities, including GBL, the impression it will be a whitewash.

For this reason, we believe it is a waste of public money with a predetermined outcome, absolving the government of any blame and therefore equally, the need for it to invest in urgently needed solutions.

GBL welcomed Labour's announcement that it was launching its own independent inquiry, led by Baroness Doreen Lawrence, provided that conditions set out in the original GBL position paper were met in order for the Black communities to have confidence in the inquiry. The original GBL position paper had been submitted to Labour's inquiry as part of the consultation process. The Lawrence Review has since been published at the end of October 2020 with

recommendations that GBL endorses. GBL's pamphlet *Supporting Black Health and Social Care Workers: A Blueprint for Action* refers to this in more detail.

GBL welcomes the TUC announcement in September they have set up a new antiracism taskforce chaired by the Black General Secretary of the NASUWT teachers' Union Dr Patrick Roach, who said it will deal with racial discrimination and fairness at work.

Migrants

On an important question, there has been alarm that the Conservative government's discredited anti-migrant, anti-refugees and anti-asylum seekers "hostile environment" policy will lead these vulnerable groups of people to be "too scared to seek medical help because they live in a country where hostility courses through the veins of our basic services", as academic and author Maya Goodfellow wrote in a *Guardian* article on 30 March 2020.

After the sustained efforts of campaigners against the migrant surcharge, introduced in 2015 as part of the hostile environment policy, and in light of the public outpouring of gratitude to NHS and care staff risking their lives during the coronavirus pandemic, Prime Minister Boris Johnson capitulated to pressure on 21 May 2020, promising that this surcharge would be refunded to all health and social care workers on migrant work visas. However, many care workers are still awaiting this refund. A letter from Dame Donna Kinneer, chief executive of the Royal College of Nursing, dated 9 June 2020, co-signed by Unison, the BMA and the Royal College of Physicians, asked the government to confirm that NHS and social care staff and their families are to be made permanently exempt from the surcharge and that this will be refunded to all those who have already paid it. We note the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Faculty of Public Health, as well as the Royal College of Nursing have all called for the hostile environment policy of the migrant surcharge to be scrapped (not just for NHS and care staff) because they say it "threatens to weaken the bonds of trust between doctors and patients".

The government's current policy means that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers will continue to be disproportionately at risk of catching Covid-19, within and across communities, while also having the least healthcare and employment protection. This is a huge injustice. Government detention centres holding migrants - hotbeds for the spreading of Covid-19 among an extremely vulnerable section of the population - should be immediately shut down.

Of course, the bigger picture is that health service charging has been introduced for migrants, the most marginalised group in society, which plays on the xenophobic and racist narratives given oxygen by the toxic Brexit debate, as just the start of the incremental process of introducing charging for the wider population over time. Scapegoating achieves the objective of allowing some people to enjoy a sense of superiority over others while being themselves duped into supporting policies that act against their own self-interest. Hence this tactic of "divide and rule" is used constantly by politicians and their friends in the media to secure the interests of the elites and is "the oldest trick in the book".

GBL believes that there should be no barrier to migrant and undocumented people being able to get free healthcare in the UK and work in the NHS. It should be acknowledged, many of them have vital skills that should be used within the stretched-to-breaking-point health and social care sectors.

The Coronavirus Act 2020 was rushed through parliament by the government on 25 March and has raised serious concerns about people's rights and freedoms. Any human rights clamp-downs are likely to impact disproportionately on Black people.

GBL will closely monitor the situation and work in solidarity with rights organisations and be a part of any fight-back.

Vaccine

GBL recognises the urgent need for a vaccine to defeat Covid-19. But we are shocked by the appalling statement by Dr Jean-Paul Mira, head of the Intensive Care Unit at the Cochin Hospital in Paris, France, calling for the testing of potential vaccines in Africa. He said, "a little bit like it's been done for certain AIDS studies, where among prostitutes, we try things, because we know they are highly exposed and do not protect themselves?", as reported by *Al Jazeera* on 4 April 2020.

Due to a public outcry sparked by the overt racism underpinning his statement, Dr Mira was forced to apologise.

GBL opposes any such studies being done in Africa or anywhere else where the safety of human beings cannot be guaranteed through the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE), adequate public health measures and intensive care facilities.

Western governments, including the UK, are stockpiling vaccines through pre-ordering, even before efficacy and safety trials are completed, jeopardising fair global access as reported in the *Telegraph* on 3 August 2020. Ultimately, this could backfire as the virus cannot be contained within national borders as has clearly been demonstrated thus far with this truly global pandemic. Nations need to work together to find a global solution. The *Telegraph* reports that the World Health Organization and global partners have set up the ACT (Access to Covid-19 Tools)-Accelerator, the only truly global initiative working to find, manufacture and deliver a vaccine and treatments such as dexamethasone on the scale the world needs, sharing the costs. The UK and other wealthy nations need to be part of this instead of following short-term policies.

It should be kept in mind, Covid-19 is a global pandemic and not confined to a single country, so the battle to defeat it must be international.

January 2021 vaccines update

Since the publication of this paper on the GBL website in November 2020, the Pfizer BioNTech, Oxford AstraZeneca and Moderna vaccines have emerged. The process of rolling out the vaccination programme across the UK has begun. However, with regards to the vaccine itself, now that it is here, it is welcome news as a scientific breakthrough. The fact the husband and wife team behind the first vaccine to be approved by the UK's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) are Turkish, migrants to Germany, husband and wife Uğur Şahin and Özlem Türeci, exemplifies the huge contributions of migrants, sometimes on a global scale, as in this case. This vaccine has been tested on volunteers from the United States, Brazil, South Africa, Germany and Argentina, across age, gender and ethnicity demographics.

Of course, there is no drug or vaccine that can be guaranteed to have zero adverse effects in an individual, even those that have been extensively trialled, hence no one should feel coerced into having the vaccine. The principle of informed consent should be adhered to, with the individual's ability to weigh up risks and benefits respected. However, enough people need to take the vaccine to reduce community transmission, and it may yet save many lives, including those from Black communities who continue to suffer disproportionately from Covid-19 infection during the UK's second wave.

There is a mistrust among Black communities when it comes to their treatment by the medical profession. Hence the understandable reluctance among some Black people to have the vaccine. This mistrust has historical roots in the pseudoscience of eugenics which was adopted enthusiastically throughout the western world during the first half of the 20th century, which gave false validity to the notion of there being superior and inferior races. This is predicated on the notion that people of a darker complexion are genetically inferior, based on a racist worldview, rather than science. It helped to justify imperialism and racist government policies at home and abroad.

Modern genetics, of course, shows that skin colour is inherited independently and is not linked with the propensity for diseases such as diabetes or hypertension, mental illness, personality or intelligence; so has served to debunk this false science. Even so, the legacy of eugenicist thinking keeps rearing its head, with some scientists searching for a link between skin complexion and infection with Covid-19 in order to explain the disproportionate number of deaths in "BAME" people in the early days of the pandemic, rather than focus on the obvious – that "BAME" people were over-exposed in the first place due to structural racism and social inequalities. Thankfully, respected experts such as biochemist Dr Winston Morgan, from the University of East London, have scientifically deconstructed this narrative of genetic susceptibility and shown it to be false.

Schools

On the question of the lockdown and schools, the government's announcement that GCSEs and A-Levels were to be replaced by teacher assessments understandably rang alarm bells, because studies show that Black Caribbean,

Pakistani and Bangladeshi boys face systematic under-marking by teachers in the UK.

GBL supports the joint union statement sent to education secretary Gavin Williamson on 8 May 2020 by trade unions, including the National Association of Head Teachers and the National Education Union, GMB, Unison and Unite.

They said their more than three million members would not return to work until ministers can guarantee that adequate safety policies are in place. These include requiring employers to assess the risks and come up with measures to deal with them, as reported in the *Guardian* on 10 May 2020.

Despite these concerns and the concerns of former government adviser Professor Neil Ferguson, the government pressed ahead with opening schools in September 2020. In a *Guardian* article published in August 2020, a source from Public Health England acknowledged that the re-opening of schools posed a risk but this had to be balanced by the possibly greater harms of children not going back to school at a population level.

That is why the government has been hailing the test and trace system as its “robust” solution to mitigating this risk, even though Serco, one of the companies awarded the lucrative contract for test and trace, has a track record for failure in the services it has provided. Serco, whose chief executive is Rupert Soames, grandson of Winston Churchill, was fined £19m for a previous government contract which it settled with the Serious Fraud Office and has already had to apologise for breaching data protection rules for its test and trace contract, as reported in the *Guardian* on 6 June 2020. This is part of the government’s ideological privatisation drive which often results in contracts being awarded to its friends, despite their repeated failures. Altogether a scandalous £10bn has been spent on test and trace contracts as reported in July 2020 in the *British Medical Journal*.

African, Caribbean and Asian parents and school governors should be vigilant and oversee real-time monitoring of the situation in relation to school safety.

The government has overseen the fiasco of an A level grading system, based on a flawed computer algorithm, that led to pupils from socioeconomically deprived communities in the state sector, having their teacher-assessed examination results being down-graded. These adjusted grades, released on 13 August 2020 have jeopardised the future educational and career prospects of young people, particularly those from Black communities as reported by ROTA (Race on the Agenda). In contrast, pupils attending private schools have disproportionately benefited from this rogue algorithm.

Mental Health

The mental health impact of the Covid-19 has been highlighted by many experts, including the World Health Organisation (WHO).

On its website, WHO state: “In public mental health terms, the main psychological impact to date is elevated rates of stress or anxiety. But as new measures and impacts are introduced – especially quarantine and its effects on many people’s usual activities, routines or livelihoods – levels of loneliness,

depression, harmful alcohol and drug use, and self-harm or suicidal behaviour are also expected to rise.”

Mental health issues topped a survey of 22,000 workplace activists by the UK and Ireland’s largest union, Unite, whose results were released on 11 May 2020.

It showed that members’ concerns about their state of mind have increased dramatically by almost two thirds since the lockdown began. The union calls on employers to take a proactive approach to dealing with employees’ mental health challenges immediately as employees return to work and begin to adjust to revised working conditions. It is no surprise that Black people are again likely to be disproportionately affected by the under-reported mental health aspect of the current crisis.

Disability Rights

In June 2020, the Office for National Statistics revealed the shocking figure that almost 60% of the Covid-19 deaths in the UK have been people with disabilities. Disabled women are 2.4 times more likely to die from Covid-19 and disabled men 1.9 times more likely to die, with the risks rising significantly in the under sixty-fives to 11.3 for disabled women and 6.5 for men.

A report by Inclusion London on 24 June 2020 detailed the evidence for disabled people being “abandoned, forgotten and ignored” due to blanket policies and resource rationing.

A policy report by the Oxford University Disability Law & Policy Project published in July 2020 came up with 22 recommendations, after finding that the government had failed to implement its legal duties with respect to the rights of people with disabilities. GBL demands the implementation of these recommendations, which include an independent inquiry into the disproportionate effect of Covid-19 on disabled people and ensuring access to healthcare services throughout the pandemic.

GBL fully supports disabled people in their too often forgotten fight for justice.

Domestic abuse

Another area of considerable concern in Black communities, like other communities under pressure from the economic impact of the crisis, is the disturbing rise in domestic abuse. This has been going on behind closed doors since the pandemic began, as reported by the Metropolitan Police in London, Britain’s Covid-19 epicentre. Every effort must be made by the authorities and community members to help people subjected to such abuse so they are not forced to suffer in silence.

Concerns have been raised that women who do not speak English have been turned away from refuges, even when there are available places, as reported in the *Guardian* on 9 August 2020. Karma Nirvana, a charity that supports women who are victims of forced marriage and honour-based violence, has revealed that this problem has been exacerbated during lockdown, citing the cases of five

women who were turned away from refuges because of a language barrier. This should absolutely not be a barrier to safety from domestic abuse.

Grieving

Also troubling are the huge changes to grieving, death and bereavement rituals, particularly funerals, that have been brought in by the government as a result of the pandemic.

GBL recognise these restrictions are an issue for all faith communities but raise our voices in support of people from the Muslim community, who have had to adapt Islamic burial rites to the new safety regulations. We believe additional support should be given to people who bear the burden of supporting their faith communities through this difficult time.

Labour leadership

The newly-elected Labour leadership can have a big say in influencing the national Covid-19 debate and should therefore not shy away from going on the political offensive on behalf of the public to whom the government have consistently lied. Keir Starmer has an open goal as a result of Boris Johnson's slow response, which has caused thousands of unnecessary deaths. Every day the government should be attacked for its shocking failures resulting in Britain having the highest numbers of deaths from the disease in Europe and one of the highest in the world.

GBL joins health workers, social care workers, carers and campaigners in demanding adequate personal protection equipment and medical resources for health workers for them, including in much-neglected care homes, where many Black people work.

Lockdown lifting

The Labour leadership has disappointingly focused on pressing the government to publish plans for *lifting the lockdown* and when the easing of restrictions from 4 July 2020 was announced, rather than hold the government to account, has been largely supportive of the government's confused messaging on how to stay safe. This has resulted in local outbreaks and sudden local lockdowns for cities such as Birmingham, Bolton, Leicester, Liverpool and Manchester. Polls have shown most members of the public were heavily in favour of the lockdowns and have complied with them. The Labour leadership should have demanded that lockdowns be maintained until all new Covid-19 cases everywhere are reduced to the very low numbers that allow for thorough testing, tracking and tracing to succeed.

There has been some concern about the initial delay in communication of the data collected from the outsourced Pillar 2 tests to local Directors of Public Health, which would have allowed better and earlier understanding of the local measures required to contain the spread of Covid-19 such as in Leicester. The

British Medical Journal reported on 4 August 2020 that the local authority in Leicester had only been receiving Pillar 1 data of positive tests in health and social care settings (for those with a health need and those doing key worker roles) which numbers were going down as in the rest of the UK, and were only given the postcode data of positive results from the outsourced Pillar 2 tests (for members of the wider public) on 25 June 2020 after signing a data security agreement, 10 days after the initial alert regarding rising positive cases. So, the announcement of a government-imposed local lockdown on 29 June 2020, by Matt Hancock in the government daily briefing came as a surprise to local officials.

Dr Kamlesh Khunti, Professor of primary care at Leicester Medical School and a member of Independent Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) told the *British Medical Journal*, "We could have stopped lockdown happening if we had got the data 10 days earlier, if we had the data coming in real-time". Professor Khunti explained that the numbers of hospital admissions with Covid-19 had remained stably low, having peaked in early to mid-April and that 70% of those testing positive were either children or young people of working age who were likely to have either been asymptomatic or have mild disease. In addition, the government's much vaunted test and trace system had only managed to contact 65% of close contacts of positive cases so the city council had to set up its own test and trace system to contact those people whom the centralised system had failed to reach. Leicester's Mayor Peter Soulsby was quoted as finding the poor communication of data extremely frustrating and felt that the government's handling of the situation was a deliberate political ploy in order to make an example of Leicester as a preliminary to further lockdowns in other areas.

As lockdown is eased, employers must ensure that safety measures are implemented for their workers, based on independent risk assessments or risk assessments carried out by employees themselves (if they have that capacity), including union health and safety officers. This should be enforced by the government and workers should have recourse to appeal the conditions their employers set if there are safety concerns.

Trade unions should play a key role in this regard and we are pleased to see the TUC has set out some really useful proposals on ensuring a safe return to work, available on its website.

A disturbing narrative has emerged as a result of easing lockdown – that of blaming Black communities for these outbreaks when they are often the ones putting their lives at risk to support the smooth functioning of society, through essential key worker jobs, for example, in food production, and satisfying consumer demands like in the making of cheap clothing. This view is not just peddled by anonymous Twitter and social media users. Tory MP Craig Whittaker was widely condemned for stoking racial hatred by blaming "BAME" and Muslim people for "not taking this [the pandemic] seriously enough", during an interview on LBC on 31 July 2020. Outrage towards day-trippers, not observing social distancing when visiting Britain's beaches, is notably framed in non-racial terms due to the demographic group consisting of mostly "white" people – it seems, ethnicity only matters to media outlets and racist social media users when Black people can be blamed.

Surely, the priority should be to save the lives of members of the public and not the railroading through parliament of a reckless policy of prematurely reopening businesses in order to put private profit before people.

Voluntary sector

Black communities have been forced to rely on themselves and their highly-developed voluntary sector of African, Caribbean and Asian-led organisations. However, this is seriously at risk.

Black organisations have cried out to say how worried they are feeling about the state of their voluntary sector services when the lockdown eventually ends.

Workplace safety and discrimination

We demand that the Labour Party and trade unions champion the cases of any NHS worker or carer within our communities victimised by management for refusing to work without adequate PPE. GBL stands in solidarity with such workers and will defend them by any means necessary.

This applies to transport workers, including cleaners, as well. GBL notes that at least 37 of them have died in London as a result of Covid-19, including 28 bus drivers, according to a report in the *New York Times* of 2 May 2020.

GBL welcomes NHS management issuing guidance, reported in the *Nursing Times* of 29 April 2020, that: "BAME personnel be "risk-assessed" and reassigned to duties that leave them at lesser risk of contracting coronavirus." However, implementation of this has been inconsistent, with some NHS Trusts slower to respond than others as highlighted in the 10 July 2020 online issue of the *British Medical Journal*.

On 26 June 2020, Sky News reported that NHS England issued an apology after an investigation found that only 23% of health trusts had risk assessed BAME staff. It also reported that 75% of all healthcare workers who have succumbed to coronavirus were from a BAME background. In the segment, a senior consultant in the NHS, who wanted to remain anonymous said he still hadn't been risk assessed despite many attempts to push managers, and feels it is down to long standing racism issues within the NHS.

He said: "This is an institutionally and structurally racist organisation and certain groups of people are not prioritised and not treated the same. I think if you flipped it over and if this was an illness that affected preferentially caucasians it would be a very different story." He has had to bury some of his colleagues and treat other BAME staff who hadn't been risk assessed.

Those working in social care (largely employed by private agencies) have been even less likely to have had proper risk assessments and PPE compared with the NHS.

In fact, the government's attempt at the acquisition of adequate supplies of PPE has been shambolic. This included a £252m contract being awarded to Ayanda Capital, which supplied 50 million unusable masks because of failure to meet the required safety standard, as highlighted by Craig Murray, the former British Ambassador to Uzbekistan, whistleblower and human rights activist, on his blog on 8 July 2020. Craig Murray called his piece "Banana Republic Corruption" decrying the utter lack of a public tendering process and Ayanda Capital's obvious complete lack of prior expertise in PPE manufacture, as a private wealth management firm, ultimately owned through an offshore holding firm based in the tax haven of Mauritius. He says the "Ayanda Capital PPE deal represents all that is wrong with UK capitalism" and that it "has not caused anything like the stir it should, because UK citizens appear to have come to accept that we live in a country with a Banana Republic system of capitalism".

GBL demands:

- A high-level of PPE for all workers but a recognition of the greater risk that workers from Black communities are taking in continuing to work for their country. Employers must do risk assessments to protect the health and lives of their employees. These risk assessments must take into account the increased risk of more severe infection and death for Black workers from Covid-19.
- That employers implement extra safety precautions for all African, Caribbean and Asian women throughout their pregnancies, and re-deploy them to non-people-facing roles. The All Wales Covid-19 Workforce Risk Assessment is a very user-friendly document for health and social care workers which makes this clear and GBL recommends it. The Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecologists has issued guidance for pregnant "BAME" women who have been found to be at increased risk of more severe infection from Covid-19 based on a study of 427 women, particularly in the third trimester of pregnancy, in those over 35 years of age and with co-existing illnesses, for example hypertension.
- That cash-strapped and marginalised Black voluntary sector organisations are prioritised for access to the promised £750m the chancellor has earmarked for the third sector.
- An immediate end to the government's "hostile environment" policy, with urgent processing of refunds of the NHS surcharge, as promised on 21 May 2020, for migrant health and social care workers, without whom the NHS and social care system would collapse.
- That Black workers' rights need to be more actively and robustly protected. There is evidence that some unscrupulous NHS employers have deliberately put Black workers at risk during the Covid-19 pandemic as reported in the *Nursing Times* in April. A report in the *Nursing Standard* on 19 May 2020 quoted a Filipino nurse who had witnessed both Filipino and Indian migrant nurses being put on extra shifts on Covid wards without adequate training, over and above white colleagues. A survey conducted by ITV of more than 2000 Black NHS workers showed that the commonest reason they felt there was a higher proportion of Covid-related deaths among Black staff is the deployment of Black doctors and

nurses in frontline roles where there was a greater risk of exposure. These employers need to be named and shamed.

- The number of inspectors and funding for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) must be boosted so that the safety of workplaces can be properly and robustly scrutinised, with powers to shut down businesses and workplaces not deemed Covid-safe. The HSE has been run down by austerity cuts. According to figures compiled by the House of Commons Library in April 2020, HSE's funding was progressively cut from over 10 years £239m in 2009/10 by 43% to £136m, as reported in the *Mirror* on 20 April 2020. This has resulted in drastic staffing cuts which has led to significantly reduced capacity to carry out inspections. Unsafe workplaces, including factories supplying food and clothing have been the centre of outbreaks worldwide as well as in the U.K. as reported in the *British Medical Journal* on 9 July 2020. This is due to employers failing in their duty of care towards employees.
- Unions should support workers who feel unsafe in their work environments, due to inadequate risk assessments and safety measures instituted by employers, to be empowered to remove themselves from the workplace without repercussions, until appropriate measures are implemented. Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 gives employees the legal right to remove themselves from the workplace if they feel their health and safety is at risk. This has been successfully argued by Unison in Lambeth where the local council had initially kept libraries open but were forced to shut them with workers on full pay, after workers staged a walkout as reported on *Reel/News* on 4 November 2020. Workers should be given full sick-pay if they need to self-isolate. GBL endorses the Covid-19 Workplace Safety Charter published by Independent SAGE on 27 August 2020 which can be a useful document to persuade employers and central government to take workers' safety seriously.
- Institutional racism must be rooted out in all councils across the country. Unions and workers can lead the way, by being at the forefront of the fight against institutional racism.

GBL is appalled at how many Black people are dying, including those doing their job caring for the sick and elderly in Britain and will not keep quiet about it.

We believe Black political unity is essential to support how African, Caribbean and Asian people work together across the UK, with statutory, non-statutory, voluntary organisations, charities and grassroots activists to ensure their voices are no longer ignored.

NHS Privatisation

This inevitably costs the tax-payer much more than a fully publicly-funded NHS as shockingly revealed in NHS campaigner Dr Bob Gill's documentary film, *The Great NHS Heist*. The sell-off has become even more blatant amid the chaos of the coronavirus pandemic as evidenced by the multi-million pound contracts the

government has given to companies, such as Deloitte, G4S and Serco, to run the Pillar 2 testing for Covid-19 in the so-called "Lighthouse Laboratories". This was instead of keeping these tests within the public sector by expanding capacity.

The government has been emboldened to keep the NHS on the table for the planned post-Brexit trade deal with the US, despite earlier denials, which will accelerate the realisation of a US-style insurance-based health system that will leave millions of people without adequate universal healthcare, free at the point of delivery, based on need, betraying the principles upon which the NHS was founded. Inevitably, this will affect the worst the most disadvantaged communities, including Black people. The NHS logo will only be a badge of a bygone era. We cannot let this happen right under our noses, otherwise the public put their own future healthcare in jeopardy and the future generations will never forgive us for allowing this daylight robbery of the NHS to take place.

Unity

Black people united can:

- Rally the intellectual, academic and community-based expertise in our communities to tackle the wider institutional and structural racism in all aspects of society, for example in education, housing, employment, health, including mental health, Tory government- imposed austerity that has impacted disproportionately on our communities, resulting in well-documented poor health outcomes.
- Organise a Black-led independent inquiry, whose terms of reference should include how the racism of the government's hostile environment, and its impact on our communities, should be dealt with.
- Join forces and express solidarity with our allies campaigning for disability rights, refugee rights, workers rights, racial equality and our international allies advocating for oppressed groups.
- Educate and signpost our peers and allies to alternative media and educational resources, links to some of which can be found on GBL's social media platforms.
- Add our voices to the campaign to stop and to reverse the privatisation of the NHS, which has already been happening by stealth with the sell-off and outsourcing of services to private companies whose main motive is profit.

Conclusion

The thrust of this paper is articulated well by Black commentator Nels Abbey, a former *Voice* newspaper columnist, who said in the *Independent* on 7 May 2020:

“The shameful Black death rate disparity shows that post Covid, we have to get serious about equality, justice and diversity at all levels of British society.”

He added, powerfully: **“Never again must any British ethnic group be left vulnerable. And never again should any group be dismissed for speaking up.”**

About GBL

Grassroots Black Left is the natural successor to the Labour Party Black Sections. It is unique in having African Caribbean and Asian socialist activists working together throughout Britain, some of whom are councillors and party officers. GBL had its parliamentary launch at the House of Commons in 2018 attended by MPs, including Clive Lewis, who was a Labour frontbencher at the time. In May 2020, Claudia Webbe MP used the position paper on which this pamphlet is based to question prime minister Boris Johnson. She subsequently took part in a GBL zoom meeting on the subject.

SOME USEFUL LINKS:

Tribune <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2020/06/why-black-people-are-bearing-the-cost-of-covid-19>

ONS

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronavirusrelateddeathsbyethnicgroupenglandandwales/2march2020to10april2020>

PHE

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/Government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/892085/disparities_review.pdf

PHE

[6/COVID stakeholder engagement synthesis beyond the data.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/Government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/89237/6/COVID_stakeholder_engagement_synthesis_beyond_the_data.pdf)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/Government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/89237

HSJ <https://www.hsj.co.uk/exclusive-deaths-of-nhs-staff-from-covid-19-analysed/7027471.article>

Independent SAGE <https://www.independentsage.org/category/reports-on-bme-populations-and-covid-19/>

Runnymede Trust <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/projects-and-publications/employment-3/the-colour-of-money>

ITV <https://www.itv.com/news/2019-10-31/can-i-have-a-white-doctor-for-the-operation-racist-abuse-against-nhs-staff-almost-triples-itv-news-finds/>

Institute of Fiscal Studies <https://www.ifs.org.uk/inequality/chapter/are-some-ethnic-groups-more-vulnerable-to-covid-19-than-others/>

Runnymede Trust

<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Runnymede%20Covid19%20Survey%20report%20v2.pdf>

BBC <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-53651954>

Institute of Race Relations <http://www.irr.org.uk/news/race-hate-crimes-collateral-damage-of-covid-19/>

The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/13/anti-asian-hate-crimes-up-21-in-uk-during-coronavirus-crisis>

The Guardian https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/05/nhs-heroes-and-targets-of-racists?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

TUC <https://www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/coronavirus-why-structural-racism-putting-bme-lives-risk>

The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/16/inquiry-disproportionate-impact-coronavirus-bame>

The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/25/leading-muslims-hit-out-at-trevor-phillips-role-in-covid-19-bame-deaths-inquiry>

The Voice <https://www.voice-online.co.uk/news/coronavirus/2020/04/26/labour-announces-review-of-bame-covid-19-deaths/>

The Morning Star <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/b/socialist-labour-mps-call-Government-safeguard-migrants-through-pandemic>

The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/30/hostile-environment-covonavirus-crisis-britain-migrants>

The Independent <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/boris-johnson-nhs-surcharge-keir-starmer-pmq-s-health-care-workers-foreign-a9570541.html>

British Medical Association <https://www.bma.org.uk/media/2582/rcn-bma-rcp-and-unison-letter-to-prime-minister-09062020-final-docx.pdf>

The Guardian [theguardian.com/politics/2018/dec/20/medical-colleges-criticise-charging-migrants-for-nhs-care](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/dec/20/medical-colleges-criticise-charging-migrants-for-nhs-care)

British Medical Journal <https://www.bmj.com/content/368/bmj.m1320>

Al Jazeera <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/racism-row-french-doctors-suggest-virus-vaccine-test-africa-200404054304466.html>

The Telegraph <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/thought-days-panic-buying-now-different-kind-stockpiling-emerging/>

The Telegraph <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/unless-every-country-has-access-covid-19-treatments-whole-world/>

The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/04/genetics-bame-people-die-coronavirus-structural-racism>

The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/may/10/recipe-for-chaos-trade-union-leaders-warn-against-return-to-work-lockdown-coronavirus>

The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/05/schools-reopening-in-england-risks-sharp-rise-in-covid-cases-says-expert>

The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/06/serco-wins-covid-19-test-and-trace-contract-despite-1m-fine>

British Medical Journal <https://www.bmj.com/content/bmj/370/bmj.m2805.full.pdf>

The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/aug/14/gavin-williamson-under-pressure-to-resign-over-a-level-results-fiasco>

ROTA <https://www.rota.org.uk/content/rota%E2%80%99s-statement-2020-level-results>

World Health Organisation <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-technical-guidance/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-outbreak-technical-guidance-europe/mental-health-and-covid-19>

Unite the Union <https://unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2020/may/mental-health-issues-top-of-workers-lockdown-concerns/>

ONS <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronaviruscovid19relateddeathsbydisabilitystatusenglandandwales/2marchto15may2020>

Inclusion London <https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/disability-in-london/coronavirus-updates-and-information/campaigns-news-during-coronavirus-crisis/abandoned-forgotten-and-ignored-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-disabled-people/>

University of Oxford Faculty of Law <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/news/2020-07-02-affront-dignity-inclusion-and-equality-coronavirus-and-impact-law-policy-practice>

Oxford University Disability Law and Policy Project https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxlaw/summary_recommendations.pdf

Metropolitan Police <https://www.met.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/daa/domestic-abuse/>

The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/aug/09/uks-womens-refuges-turn-away-victims-who-speak-no-english>

GM Journal <https://www.gmjournals.co.uk/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-islamic-burial-rites>

Socialist Health Association

<https://www.sochealth.co.uk/2020/05/04/sha-covid-19-blog-8/>
British Medical Journal
<https://www.bmj.com/content/bmj/370/bmj.m3028.full.pdf>
Sky News <https://news.sky.com/story/tory-mp-condemned-for-blaming-bame-and-muslim-people-for-rise-in-coronavirus-cases-12039949>
The Isle of Thanet News
<https://theisleofthanetnews.com/2020/05/22/plea-to-reopen-minnis-bay-toilets-after-beach-visitors-leave-behind-piles-of-human-waste-and-urine/>
Rye and Battle Observer
<https://www.ryeandbattleobserver.co.uk/news/transport/new-plan-tackle-camber-sands-gridlock-problems-2897826>
Huffington Post https://m.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/bame-community-groups-coronavirus_uk_5ea044c7c5b6b2e5b83b0261
Civil Society Futures <https://civilsocietyfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2018/12/Civil-Society-Futures-Lets-talk-about-race-031218.pdf>
Change.Org https://www.change.org/p/prime-minister-boris-johnson-and-an-taoiseach-leo-varadkar-access-to-healthcare-housing-and-food-for-all?utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=custom_url&recruited_by_id=7795ce50-71e4-11ea-8057-f5648c0d1ec1
The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/aug/13/hierarchy-of-racism-fears-threaten-starmers-hopes-of-labour-unity>
The New York Times
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/02/world/europe/coronavirus-london-buses.html>
Nursing Times <https://www.nursingtimes.net/news/workforce/letter-from-nhs-leaders-sets-out-new-measures-to-protect-bme-staff-in-pandemic-29-04-2020/>
British Medical Journal
<https://www.bmj.com/content/bmj/370/bmj.m2792.full.pdf>
Sky News <https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-nhs-england-apologises-after-investigation-finds-only-23-of-health-trusts-have-risk-assessed-bame-staff-12015363>
Craig Murray <https://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2020/07/banana-republic-corruption/>
The Independent <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/coronavirus-face-mask-ppe-nhs-ear-matt-hancock-a9657631.html>
YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxTtlvHLYxo&t=1s>
Welsh Government
<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-08/covid-19-health-workforce-risk-assessment-tool-2020-08-12.pdf>
Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology
<https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/covid-19-virus-infection-and-pregnancy/>
Nursing Times <https://www.nursingtimes.net/news/coronavirus/exclusive-bme-nurses-feel-targeted-to-work-on-covid-19-wards-17-04-2020/>
Nursing Standard <https://rcni.com/nursing-standard/newsroom/analysis/covid-19-how-can-we-protect-bame-nurses-during-crisis-160956>
ITV News <https://www.itv.com/news/2020-05-13/discrimination-frontline-coronavirus-covid19-black-minority-ethnic-bame-deaths-nhs-racism>
Mirror <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/number-health-safety-inspectors-drops-21941003>

British Medical Journal <https://www.bmj.com/content/370/bmj.m2716>
ReelNews
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfqQNdb-xAc&feature=youtu.be>
Independent SAGE <https://www.independentsage.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Work-COVID-Safe-document-agreed.pdf>
The Great NHS Heist <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwlvLe-X27o>
British Medical Journal
<https://www.bmj.com/content/bmj/369/bmj.m2484.full.pdf>
The Independent <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/coronavirus-deaths-black-ons-trevor-phillips-a9504181.html>

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