

# UNISON Retired Members Forum

## Newsletter Special

Hi Folks.

Hi everyone. I hope you are all ok and looking after yourselves in what can only be described as unprecedented times in which we live in. There is only one story out there which is completely dominating world news and that is the Corona Virus (Covid19) outbreak which has now become a pandemic. The public are on high alert and are being asked to stay at home and do not travel outside your home unless it is to do shopping. Concern, panic and fear is on everyone's minds as there seems to be no end in sight. Measures are being put in place to stop the spread with our schools closing and places of entertainment

including restaurant's and businesses shutting down with workers losing their jobs and facing uncertainty across the whole of the UK. Indeed we thought we would be looking at such stories as the RHI Report which came out on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> March and reporting back on the various conferences and meetings but with the ever developing concern over the Corona Virus our Newsletter is dominated by this story. For years to come this story will be on the minds of many and how it affected the whole of the world at such a fast pace. The virus has especially taken its toll on the elderly, the vulnerable and those with underlying illnesses

and health problems. As you read on you will hear of the community spirit that is taking place and the excellent work being done by our healthcare workers in our hospitals from portering & domestic staff who keep the hospitals clean, to the cooks who provide the meals and the nurses and doctors who are all on the front line caring for the sick and vulnerable in society. We all have our part to play in looking after one another and caring as citizens for those who cannot do shopping because they have to self-isolate and are locked in their homes for up to 14 days. We will also look at government response so far.

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### *Inside this issue:*

- Hi Folks.....1.
- Corona Virus Covid19.....1.
- NHS Staff-we support you in this crisis.....2.
- Gov Have Big Questions to Answer over Mishandling of Covid-19 Crisis.2.
- Message from the Chair & Vice-Chair with photos.....3.
- Workers Memorial Day with photos.4.

## Corona Virus (Covid19)

On December 31, 2019, the World Health Organisation's (WHO) China office heard the first reports of a previously-unknown virus behind a number of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, a city in Eastern China with a population of over 11 million. What started as an epidemic mainly limited to China has now become a truly

global pandemic. Covid19 as it is known across the world has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and is not finished by a long shot. Across the world the virus has taken its toll on the elderly and those with underlying health problems. Many countries like China, Italy, Spain and the Republic of Ireland

have gone into lock down to help prevent the wide spread of the virus. Stringent measures have been taken by governments to ensure that large gatherings become a thing of the past and that shoppers are being asked to stay at least 2 meters apart in supermarkets and stores. It is serious times we live in.

## NHS Staff – we support you in this crisis.

NHS Staff are at the frontline right now fighting one of the most serious worldwide pandemics that has caused death and infection to tens of thousands of people across the world. Sadly among the dead are doctors and nurses who put their lives on the line to save others. Care home staff is also facing the crisis as are our staff in the community. Many staff on the frontline is afraid of what the future holds for them as they battle with an invisible enemy and at the same time are concerned for their own health and wellbeing and those whom they are caring for as well. As each day passes our doctors and nurses are caring for the sick

and dying like never before seen as they pay a special part in acting as relatives on behalf others. They are to be commended for the hard work and the task that lies ahead for them and there are many calls for the NHS workers from all sectors to be given a proper recognised pay rise at the end of all this. But it's not just our doctors and nurses who are at the front line as domestic staff, porters, ambulance personnel, paramedics, admin staff, laundry workers, catering staff and maintenance staff is all playing their part to help in the fight against this hidden virus. Laboratory staff in our hospitals and testing centres

across the whole of the UK and the world are working hard testing people for the virus and putting their time into producing a vaccine that will not only slow the virus down but give protection to everyone who needs it. The entire union of Unison is fully 100% behind all the members and everyone in the NHS who is putting their lives at risk to save the lives of others as this crisis deepens. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Retired Members Forum here in Northern Ireland are furious that the UK Tory Government have let our NHS staff down badly through cuts and austerity down over the years and will ask questions in the future.

### **Government Have Big Questions to Answer over Mishandling of Covid-19 Crisis**

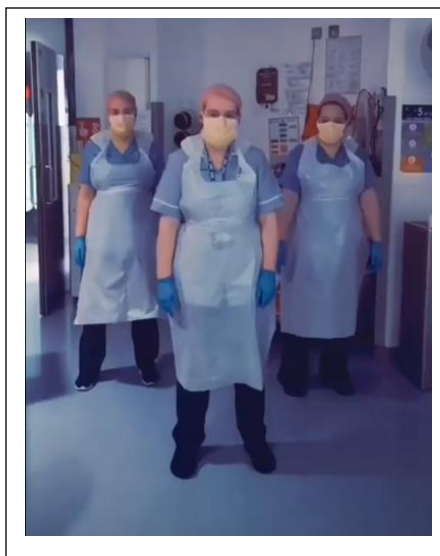
All of us by now are zoomed in on the enormous amount of media attention been given to the current crisis sweeping the entire world as the Corona Virus-(Covid-19) continues to threaten livelihood and the economy. Day by day we learn of the enormity of how our frontline staff on the NHS and across the healthcare sector are struggling to find the necessary PPE Equipment needed to be able to get on with caring for the sick and dying who have been stricken with the virus. Many staff right now on the frontline faces the risk of becoming a victim of the virus due to the lack of proper equipment to do the job. Indeed our own union, Unison fought long and hard against the enormous amount of cut backs and austerity caused by the current Tory Government. This is the answer to those cutbacks and austerity 'the NHS struggling to deliver excellent care with the proper equipment in place'. Many of our frontline workers in the NHS have sadly fallen and became victim to this deadly virus and have died. This should not be happening to any frontline worker outing their lives before others to

help those in need. We see a daily update on the BBC of just where we are at with the current crisis and we see the Health Minister Matt Hancock and others talk about the amount of PPE that is going to be distributed out to our care staff on the frontline. But it is still sitting in warehouses waiting for the red tape to be signed off.

Government have known from the start of January this year about the pandemic that was about to take over the whole world and yet they sat back and did very little to prepare for what was to come down the line. Indeed it was reported by the 'Sunday Times' recently that the Prime Minister Boris Johnson had missed out on up to five Cobra meetings between January and March when this virus was beginning to raise its ugly head elsewhere in the world. Government however are denying that this ever happened but the

media are usually on the ball when it comes to a story. They are 'like a dog with a bone' they hold on to it and never let go. After this crisis is all over and hopefully we all come out the other side the Tory Government will have serious questions to answer over the neglect and mishandling of the Covid-19 crisis especially when they were made aware since January this year that the pandemic was getting out of hand and spreading across the world. Indeed if anything a full public enquiry should be held into why the Government mishandled, neglected and misled the frontline workers into believing that PPE was on its way, tests were been done when in fact they were not due to lack of chemicals and materials. Meanwhile our frontline workers are continuing to put their lives at risk to save others without the proper PPE in place. Many of our NHS staff on the frontline has lost their lives in the line of duty and this should not be happening especially in times when the Health, Safety & Welfare of all staff should be a priority at this very difficult time for everyone.

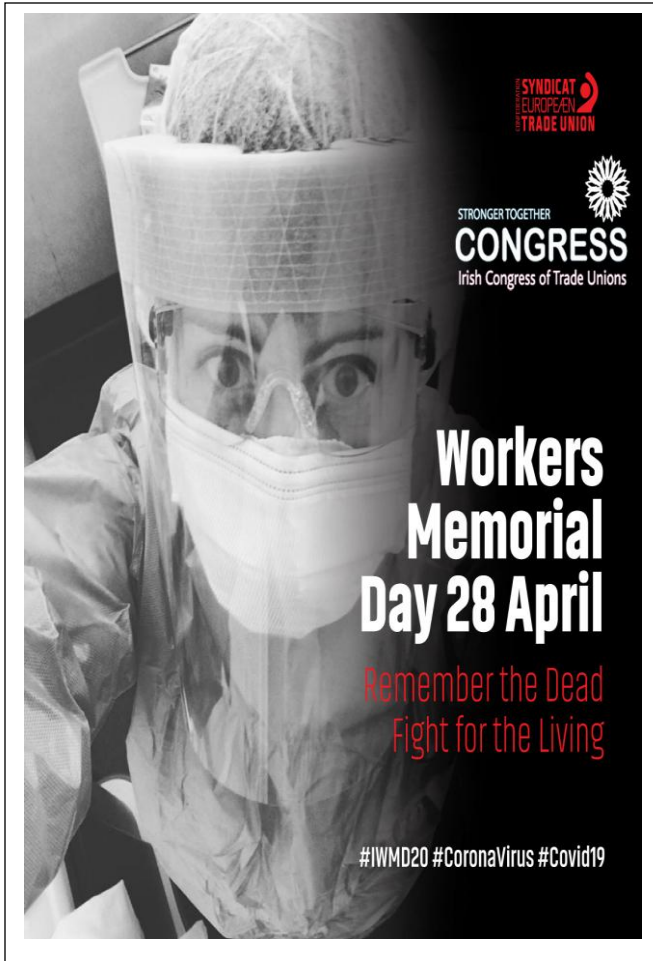
**'Meanwhile our frontline workers are continuing to put their lives at risk to save others without the proper PPE in place'.**



## Message from the Chair & Vice-Chair

### ***To all Delegates of the Retired Members Forum NI:***

Hello everyone and we hope you are all keeping very well at this very difficult time in our lives. Over the years since the formation of what was first a committee and now a forum a lot of great work has been done by everyone involved. We hope and pray each day as it comes that we will all meet at the other end of this very long dark tunnel and be able to continue with the great work as before. On behalf of the forum we would like to extend our continuous support for the frontline workers in our NHS, Care Homes and beyond as they continue the battle to save lives and it is important to show this every Thursday at 8pm. We must not forget however the frontline workers in the NHS, Care Homes and beyond who have become deceased and fallen victim to the Corona Virus and not least the patients who they have cared for who have passed away from this horrible disease. We believe that the lives of everyone on the frontline and beyond do an excellent job by putting their lives at serious risk to save others but the issue of PPE is so serious and complicated that Health & Safety is always an issue. The Corona Virus has also claimed the lives of many of our elderly in Care Homes across the UK and carers there have seen no PPE or very little in comparison to the hospitals. We are calling on the government to address this very serious issue of testing and PPE as our frontline workers working in our hospitals and care homes should not be subjected risk against their Health & Safety while at work. There are many questions to be answered by the Tory Government right now but now is not the time to do so but rather when we reach the other side of this pandemic. Finally we extend our sympathy to every relative who have suffered the loss of a loved one during this crisis and thank the frontline workers who stood in on behalf of relatives and went beyond the call of duty. This will be our last newsletter as all conferences and meetings have been cancelled until further notice. We look forward to meeting up once again. Keep safe.



## Workers Memorial Day

Workers Memorial Day which falls on the 28<sup>th</sup> April is a very sad time for many colleagues across the public and private sector as they remember their colleagues who have lost their lives in the line of duty. This year however is a very poignant and very sad time for everyone in what can only be described as the worst time in everyone's life as the Corona Virus (Covid-19) pandemic has completely taken over the whole world killing hundreds of thousands of people in its path with no end in sight. Many of the people who have passed away are members of the public who have at some stage worked or were working during the onset of the virus. Across the world the Corona Virus has taken its toll on our health care workers in care homes and in hospitals which has been devastating for

their families who never got to say goodbye. At the time this was been edited up to 130+ NHS workers in the UK had passed away since the onset of the pandemic. It has come to light that the most serious issues out there was the severe lack of PPE, the severe lack of ventilators and the severe lack of testing kits and the chemicals and materials that go to making them up. The government did not move quickly enough when it was first highlighted that the virus was spreading at a rapid pace across the world. The government misled the workers on the frontline into believing that there was tons of PPE on its way to the hospitals when in fact it was been shipped out to other countries. It also immerged that the government was counting a single latex glove as one piece of equipment and not a pair of gloves

like it should have been. NHS Managers at the top were making threats against staff who decided to speak out for what was rightfully a basic need for PPE so that they could do their job to the full and not be worrying about the severe risk they faced on a daily bases. It was also highlighted on Panorama on BBC1 that the severity of the virus was downgraded from a 2 to a 3 by the UK government and this in turn meant that government could issue the lower grade of PPE to staff on the frontline. Everyone downed tools at their workplace and held a one minute silence across the whole of the UK at 11am for our Health Care workers and those working in the care homes and hospitals who died on the frontline delivering the ultimate care.