

# Lithuanian Social Democratic Party

**Dear friends, dear comrades,**

Lithuania, as well as the rest of the world, has suffered from COVID-19. As of 6<sup>th</sup> of May there have been confirmed 1428 cases of the novel coronavirus, 718 people have recovered and, sadly, 48 have died.

Strict measures have helped to prevent the spread of the virus – nationwide quarantine has been in place since 16<sup>th</sup> of March and currently is scheduled to end on 11<sup>th</sup> of May but most likely will be extended beyond that date. Currently we are seeing some restrictions being lifted – small businesses, such as bars, cafes, hairdressers etc., are starting to reopen as well as public places – but physical distancing is here to stay.

Quarantine measures have impacted our physical and mental wellbeing – unemployment has gone up to 11.3%, some started working part-time and thousands more are in downtime which has considerably lowered levels of their income. Simultaneously people feel uncertainty, face doubts about their future and other mental problems.

However, declaring quarantine was the ‘easy’ part. By easy I mean easy politically – everyone understood the need to lockdown the country, limit the spread of the virus and there was not a big debate on this. But now, when restrictions are being gradually lifted, we have to face the economic and social problems, and this will be much harder.

Government of Lithuania has declared its intention to borrow 5 billion Euros to fight the consequences of Covid-19, but the distribution of money has been lagging – money began to reach people only a few weeks ago. Furthermore, the amount distributed is not sufficient. For example, freelancers get only 257 euros a month. We are calling for this sum to be doubled.

But there also were attempts to diminish workers’ rights – center-right groups in the Parliament proposed amendments that could see work day being extended up to 12 hours, easing the restrictions on firing employees or not paying them for the overtime. This did not pass in the parliament, but we are sure that there will be more attempts to scale back the rights of workers in the future.

What considers us - we are proposing several things:

1. The state should begin working on big infrastructure projects (highways, a deep-water harbour which is important for pollution reasons as well). This would safeguard jobs, people’s earnings and even create more jobs. The state is capable of doing so and that is what we need right now.

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2. We are again calling for a 4-day workweek for social workers and/or nurses. People working in these fields face enormous pressure and day-to-day tension but their wages is nowhere near sufficient.
3. For small and medium businesses we are proposing:
  - a. A nonreturnable payment of 10% from annual turnover up to 45 thousand Euros (payment – up to 4500 Euros).
  - b. A state loan with zero interest rate of 10% from annual turnover up to 300 thousand Euros for two years (up to 30 thousand Euros).
  - c. A state loan with zero interest rate of 6% from annual turnover from 300 thousand Euros up to 1 million Euros for two years (up to 60 thousand Euros).

At the start of the quarantine we launched Mutual Assistance Center where people can either ask for help (paying the bills, shopping, taking care of their pets etc.) or volunteer to help others. When the pandemic started acquiring face masks was a huge challenge and we are proud to have helped people to get not only face masks but other protective equipment, such as gloves and disinfectant liquid.

Simultaneously we cannot ignore the risk of a second wave in autumn and the preparations must start now. Since the virus does not acknowledge borders a great amount of international solidarity and cooperation is required to overcome this challenge, create a vaccine, and solve the underlying problems Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated – income inequality, access to quality healthcare services and a need for an economically strong and capable state.

In today so needed solidarity,

Gintautas Paluckas,

Chairman of Lithuanian Social Democratic Party