

**& Workers' Liberty**

# **Solidarity**

**For social ownership of the banks and industry**

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# **COVID-19:**

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# Sanders' socialist plan for the pandemic



**Sanders campaign**

By Eric Lee

The mainstream media has already written off Bernie Sanders and crowned Joe Biden as the Democratic candidate to challenge Donald Trump (despite the primaries being far from over). But that hasn't silenced the Vermont senator.

Sanders has long seen himself as more than just a conventional politician and acts as the voice for a movement. This last week, he laid out a socialist programme for the pandemic.

Sanders began with a recognition of the severity of the crisis, saying that "the crisis we face from coronavirus is on the scale of a major war, and we must act accordingly. Nobody knows how many fatalities we may see, but they could equal or surpass the U.S. casualties we saw in World War II." American casualties in that war exceeded 400,000.

Unlike Trump, Sanders started with idea of community, of this being a shared problem. "Now is the time for solidarity," he says, using a word rarely uttered by American politicians but familiar to the labour movement. "We must fight with love and compassion for

those most vulnerable to the effects of this pandemic."

Sanders laid out what he means by the most vulnerable, the people for whom we must show compassion. These include, in his view, "those in nursing homes and rehabilitation facilities, those confined in immigration detention centres, those who are currently incarcerated, and all people regardless of immigration status."

These are fighting words in a country that criminalises immigration and that practices mass incarceration (with more people in jail than in China). Among Sanders' opponents on the right, there is little sympathy for immigrants or prisoners.

He was clear in his condemnation of the Trump administration. "Unfortunately, in this time of international crisis," he said, "the current administration is largely incompetent, and its incompetence and recklessness has threatened the lives of many people."

And then he laid out his programme, a socialist programme, for the coronavirus pandemic.

He demanded that a national state of emergency be declared and that a group of experts be convened to direct a response to the crisis that is "comprehensive, compassionate, and based first and foremost on science and fact."

Sanders was also demanding

that the government be completely transparent and called for "daily information — clear, science-based information — from credible scientific voices."

If it sounds like he's making a lot of use of the word "science", there's a reason for that. In the US, especially in the Republican party, there is considerable resistance to taking a scientific approach to anything.

Sanders has long fought for universal health care, but even now, before such a system can be set up, he demanded that the "government must be clear that in the midst of this emergency, that everyone in our country — regardless of income or where they live — must be able to get all of the health care they need without cost." In other words, the same core principles of Medicare for All could be applied right now, in the midst of the pandemic crisis.

He listed some very specific proposals, including a guarantee that a vaccine or treatment, when it becomes available, must be delivered free of charge to all. He called for emergency funding for paid family and medical leave. He demanded an expansion of community health centres across the country.

And in a country whose President is fond of boasting how it leads the world in everything, Sanders dared to speak the un-

varnished truth: "There are other countries around the world who are doing better than we are," he said. "We should be learning from them."

And when speaking about the pharmaceutical industry, Sanders said something no other politician in America dares to utter. Those companies, he said, "must be told in no uncertain terms that the medicines that they manufacture for this crisis will be sold at cost. This is not the time for profiteering or price gouging."

I could go on about his plan to address those suffering from the "global economic meltdown," as he calls it. But I think in looking at what Sanders says about the coronavirus pandemic, we are hearing the voice of an authentic democratic socialist, who draws not only upon the practical experience of other countries, but also from the moral foundations of the labour movement. It is a programme based on the ideals of solidarity, compassion and love — words which Sanders is not afraid to use.

In the age of pandemics, this is what socialism sounds like. □

• Eric Lee is the convenor of "London for Bernie", writing here in a personal capacity. For all Eric's columns and other Sanders coverage, see [bit.ly/el-bs](http://bit.ly/el-bs)



**Agenda**

This issue of *Solidarity* is produced and distributed in our usual way. At some point, maybe soon, with demonstrations and most meetings cancelled, and the streets and the campuses emptying, we'll have to adjust.

Then we'll go over to producing *Solidarity* as a printable pdf available online. We'll print a limited run centrally and mail some out; and the audio and e-reader versions will be available. To subscribe to the e-reader version, email [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org).

We'll continue face-to-face meetings and activities, with due precautions, as much as we can. (Getting iZettle card-readers, which enable people to pay for literature just by tapping a card, avoids the possible infection worry from cash-handling when selling literature.) The working class will still be at work — or at least many core sections, in essential services and industries — and the left has to be with the working class. Our activists will take due care of their health, but we wouldn't want to be just shut away, just looking after ourselves at home, even if we could be.

We'll also step up online discussion and activity. For information and details, check out our website, [www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org).

We've been running regular online political discussions for a while, using the Zoom platform, and will now increase them drastically, both locally and more widely. Check out [bit.ly/wl-online](http://bit.ly/wl-online), and email [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org) for log-in details for discussions you want to participate in.

We are producing for our activists a short guide about how to make quick and easy short videos, to expand drastically the range of political videos we already have at [workersliberty.org/video](http://workersliberty.org/video). It already includes a series of 19 short videos on the concepts in Marx's *Capital* volume 1, and six short videos on "In Defence of Bolshevism".

At our day school on class struggle environmentalism dayschool (Saturday 14 March) we set aside a session for discussion on how to win on sick pay, protecting cleaners, safeguarding zero hours workers.

We'd already made plans to safeguard (as far as possible) the workers in our office, to enable those who are self-isolating (as one already is) to work from home, and to keep the office staffed even if some are self-isolating.

And we're also taking some responsibility for seeing that our older comrades, and those in poor health, are looked after. □

## The feminist issues round "staying home"



**Women's Fightback**

By Katy Dollar

More and more of us will be advised or forced to stay home for whole periods, and to stay home longer each week even when we are going to work.

We must remember that for many women and children, staying home comes with additional dangers of its own.

In the 2015 Ebola outbreak when Sierra Leone shut schools, girls removed from school took on care work and were also at heightened risk of sexual abuse and teen pregnancy. Activist reports and police statistics both report a spike in domestic violence in Wuhan as a result of strict curfews.

The New York public school system has announced school closures but tried to delay as long as possible because of associated risks, as one New York City public

school student in every ten has experienced homelessness in the past year, and many of those children and others rely on their schools to provide meals.

We know "holiday hunger" is an issue with existing school holiday closures. Three million children in Britain face health and social issues in the holidays because of lack of access to free school meals.

Those children most at risk of hunger during the holidays may also suffer from social isolation, loneliness, and inactivity.

If schools are to close, or partially close, which may be necessary to stop the spread of infection, we must ensure that we do all we can to mitigate against the risks that brings to parents and their children. The government must fund local councils to provide food, social care, domestic violence and homelessness support.

It seems very likely that school closures will happen soon, as they have in other countries.

Already, according to govern-

ment figures, one grandparent in five, in the UK, spends at least ten hours a week looking after grandchildren. At the same time older people are being warned against sustained contact with children. This is because older people are more vulnerable to complications associated with Covid-19, and small children will often show relatively few symptoms and spend a lot of time touching and licking things and people.

Given the underlying sexist division of care and other domestic work, women are more likely to have to stay at home to care for children than their male partners. They are also far more likely to be single parents.

As women have entered the waged workforce en masse in the 20th and 21st centuries, we are still expected to do a disproportionate amount of care and domestic work.

Unpaid domestic work is supplemented by paid care work, paid for either by the state or families themselves. Schools, childmind-

ers, nurseries, care homes all take some of the burden of social reproduction.

The labour movement must insist on public resources being mobilised for socially-provided care, organised under the safest possible conditions, to avoid this epidemic bearing down with a double weight on women and children. □



Women's Fightback 24, March 2020. See [workersliberty.org](http://workersliberty.org)



# A year of climate strikes



## Climate

By Abel Harvie-Clark

It is nearly exactly a year since the first Global School Strike for Climate took place, and whilst the participation and coverage of the movement may appear to have peaked for now, the resolve and commitment of climate strikers across the globe remains strong.

Last year I was a climate striker during my last year of sixth form and I continue to be involved in the UKSCN branch in Newcastle, organising the climate strikes and trying to build links with the local labour movement.

While far from the strongest in terms of numbers, the UK strike movement particularly has taken on a strong political identity, at least at its core. Those involved in the early stages of UKSCN were proudly anti-capitalist, anti-racist, refused to work with the police, and saw workers' control as the key to combining climate and social justice.

The movement also included many oth-

ers: young Lib Dem members and even Tory sympathizers engaged in the need to "do something" about environmental issues, although often with a real lack of politics. Serious effort had to be put in by those most politically motivated to convince fellow school strikers that they should be calling for systemic, not individual, climate solutions.

We should recognise the perhaps overlooked achievement of UKSCN through hours upon hours of online organisation and education to create an ever more coherent movement that can call for system change and social justice, that takes a strong stance on against racism, sexism, and transphobia (including taking action within the organisation when issues arise), and opposes anti trade union legislation, as well as dedicating time and energy to ensure the organisation is transparent and democratic, limiting hierarchies amongst activists. This is important for the organisation, and sets a standard for other climate movements to rise to.

The understanding of the problems we face is, I think, pretty good. What is more difficult is forging a path forward. This is where the intersection of class struggle and environmentalism is key. Sure, overarching government legislation is seriously needed

and could make a serious difference, but it is through a conscious and radical organised labour movement that we will make genuine change.

### LIMITS

If we continue to rely on an inherently ecocidal capitalist state, do we not limit ourselves to a number of "green policies", essentially on the same spectrum as the "green sprinklings" on the recent Tory budget?

We have to think harder about this. That is not to say the answers do not exist. The 1970s saw green bans in Australia as well as the Lucas Plan, where organised workers posed serious industrial alternatives to environmental destruction and war. We should be inspired by these moments, whilst also recognise the new demands of the 21st century. Many young people undoubtedly oppose capitalism and its destruction of the environment, but are yet to be convinced of the need for working-class action to oppose it. By working in unorganised industries and developing new forms of democratic participation, we can work towards changing this.

The UK climate strike movement has so far failed to inspire a serious upturn in environ-

mental trade union action. But this crisis isn't going away, and the struggle is only becoming sharper.

Last month Drax in Selby announced several hundred job losses due to the phasing out of coal burning. The labour movement has a collective responsibility to organise for a zero carbon society, and also to protect itself from what is already becoming an extremely unjust transition.

The radicalism of the climate strikers should also inspire a rejuvenated movement, one that stands up to bureaucracy and authoritarianism, and opens more spaces which were once abandoned: for living and working together outside the capitalist model, for creating art and throwing parties.

It is impossible to ignore the fact that the climate strike movement is generating neither the excitement or attention that it was nearly a year ago. But that is certainly not a reason to give up on it. Whilst it may no longer be so trendy, there is a strong core of activists who are committed to carrying it on.

It is crucial that the importance of an organised labour movement is not lost on this group of activists; not only do they need each other, but together they will make a mighty force for change. □

## Class struggle environmentalism



## Climate

By Misha Zubrowski

"Class Struggle Environmentalism", a day of workshops, discussions, and debates hosted by Workers' Liberty on 14 March, drew around 50 people — socialists, environmentalists, trade unionists, more.

Of course the Covid-19 pandemic made the event smaller than it would have been otherwise. Nonetheless, we took serious health precautions at the event, and we had many fascinating and vital discussions.

The irony was not lost of a day to arm the movement with the

ideas and planning to halt climate change being so impacted by a pandemic which itself has been driven by the climate change we are seeking to stop.

We heard from socialist environmentalists active in many different workplaces and trade unions. We discussed how and why to organise environmentally at work, next steps for climate strikes, COP26, the fossil fuel industry,

The more theoretical end of the discussions ranged from the basics of Marxist ecology and socialist strategy to stop climate change to debating whether, how, and how much we need to reduce animal-product consumption and pursue afforestation.

As someone who has been immersed in these debates and dis-

cussions for a good while, I found it exciting. Many people there were much newer to class-struggle politics, to environmentalism, or to both. Those whom I talked to afterwards found it very positive, and took a lot away from it.

Articles in future issues of *Solidarity* will follow up on some of the discussions, as will our planning and campaigning. Audio from the workshop "Covid-19: Fight for Workers' Control" is already online, and most of the rest will be up by the time this paper goes to press. □

• Visit [workersliberty.org/audio](http://workersliberty.org/audio) to browse and subscribe to Workers' Liberty's audio. Audio from the event at [workersliberty.org/audio#forums](http://workersliberty.org/audio#forums)



## Ideas for Freedom 2020

Our Workers' Liberty summer school, Ideas for Freedom, has been scheduled for 20-21 June. Since the Covid-19 epidemic looks like being still in full swing at that date, we're now discussing whether and how we can reschedule it.

Speakers already signed up for 20-21 June include the list below. Of course, some may be unavailable at a rescheduled date, while others who were unavailable for 20-21 June may be brought in by the new date.

Earlybird tickets bought for the 20-21 June will be valid for any rescheduled date, and of course we'll refund if you're not able to come on the rescheduled date.

- Phillip Blond and Elaine Jones, to debate socialism vs Blond's "Red Toryism";
- Gregor Gall on anti-union laws
- Simon Pirani on climate change and fossil fuels
- Keith Kahn-Harris on antisemitism
- Brendan McGeever on antisemitism and the Russian Revolution
- Ruth Cashman on "why a revolutionary party?"
- Becky Crocker on rank-and-file organisation in the unions
- Cath Fletcher on the Renaissance
- Alison Brown and Stuart Jordan on socialists and mental health
- Pete Cashman on organising industrial action
- Liam McNulty on the strange history of Sinn Féin
- Josh Robinson on Theodor Adorno
- Patrick Murphy on "why the working class?"
- Edward Maltby on Michel Lequenne and what's happened with "Orthodox Trotskyism" since 1989-91
- Mark Osborn on Solidarnosc
- Sean Matgamna on the lessons of the revolutionary left in 1981-4
- Martin Thomas on automation and the working class

## Looking ahead to November: COP26



## Climate

By Cathy Nugent

Later in this year, assuming the UK has recovered enough from Covid-19, environmental activists will be active around 2020's UN climate change conference, COP26, in Glasgow (9-20 November).

Probably very little radical or adequate policy will be decided at that conference, even though the world faces a pandemic and continuing climate crisis.

A lot of trade unions had been organising for a demonstration to put pressure on the conference. Work on that may now be suspended. Nearer the time we need to get it restarted, and get trade unions in Glasgow and Scotland are involved, including on the level of leafleting big workplaces in Glasgow and elsewhere to draw attention to the issues.

Socialists need to help the campaigning be bolder and more confrontational. We need to develop a class-struggle stream within the environmental movement. That means critiquing trade-union policies on such things as "just transi-

tion" and pushing for better ones.

What demands are important? Bring the energy companies into public ownership? End airport expansion? Abolish anti-union laws?

Most important will be to find ways to organise political discussion and education in the run up to and whilst the event is happening. That should be geared towards getting labour movement and climate activists to come together.

If you would like to help us with planning for our socialist interventions, get in touch. □



# Covid-19 and capitalism



By Angela Driver

Despite many predictions over the years by the World Health Organisation that a new pandemic was fairly certain, fairly soon, capitalist governments and businesses failed to do the research and development in advance that could have provided us with medical capacity to limit its effect, or environmental measures which might even have prevented the outbreak.

The Covid 19 pandemic has laid bare the lie that the welfare of the population can be “left to the market”. Only now, very late, have the ruling classes recognised that the destruction mandates coordinated, collective, market-flouting action, and this action is being taken by capitalist governments in their own capitalist way.

In China the initial response to the outbreak was to suppress information. For six weeks no meaningful action was taken to address or contain the emerging zoonotic infection. The state then flipped from punishing the whistleblowers to police-state measures to try to contain the outbreak.

To a large degree the police-state measures have succeeded in limiting the spread within China (56.2 cases per million as of 16 March, compared to Italy’s 409.3 cases per million according to worldometers.org). But we still can’t trust China’s figures, and the risk still remains of a second wave in China when the police-state clampdown is relaxed or frays.

In any case, the infection had already begun to spread to other countries. One by one, most of the worst-affected states have been imposing “lock downs” once the infection rates exceed certain levels. Iran has not imposed measures in the same way, and its figures do not appear to be accurate.

The US has not been able to obtain accurate figures due to multiple difficulties about its organisation of testing. There appears to be a strange lack of cases in Africa, not fully explained (Vaughan, New Scientist, 14.3.20). In many countries, we don’t know whether low counts reflect low impact of the virus, or low capacity to conduct tests and collect figures.

The UK government to date appears to be trying a different strategy, or at least differently-timed strategy, from the “sudden-lockdown” tactics of other states. This different strategy has been criticised both by right-wingers like Tory politician Jeremy Hunt, and by some on the left, for being not strict enough.

We should not trust the British government to act in our interests, but neither should we trust the model adopted by equally right-wing governments elsewhere like Austria’s. The UK’s stance seems to have been devised not so much by the Tory politicians, but by scientists, notably Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty, who as far as we can tell is well qualified to advise (for more see Neville, FT 14.3.20).

We on Solidarity feel well-qualified to raise issues about the need for full sick pay for all, about the need for government action to ride roughshod over profit considerations to requisition extra NHS and medical-production capacity, and so on, but not to second-guess the medical experts.

A fundamental idea for us, as Marxists,

is that socialist politics are different from crude “negativism”, from writing a minus wherever the bourgeoisie writes a plus, from going for whatever is most contrary to capitalist policy, and from crude “conspiracy” theories. We want the bourgeois effort to limit the virus’s impact to work. We oppose the bourgeoisie within that effort, as generally we oppose the bourgeoisie within capitalist development rather than opposing capitalist development outright.

As our lives depend on it, the population should have access to the underlying evidence. That has not been shared by the government so far.

And however well informed or astute the scientists are, there remain many things about this virus that are not yet known. Probably even the best-calculated expert response will turn out to include errors of some scale or another.

The much-needed funding for research into medical responses has now become available, and work has gone on to try to find a vaccine. This work has been an international collaboration partly funded by Cepi (the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, set up in 2016).

## RAPID DEVELOPMENT

Within just 42 days vaccines have emerged which are ready to be tested from several companies in different countries. At the same time previous knowledge has been put to use and tests are underway to explore whether other medications can help mitigate the effects of the virus for those who already have it, including treatments that have been developed for ebola HIV, flu and malaria (MacKenzie, NS, 14.3.20).

This rapid development demonstrates how much can be achieved in a short time when the funding is available. Faced with a threat which hits the whole of capitalist society, including the ruling class, capitalism is able to break down barriers to use technologies, allow international collaboration, and free up streams of funding almost instantly. Many things that we are often told are not possible become possible when the whole system, including its profits, is threatened.

There has been some level of international collaboration. But the competition between nation-states remains fierce and this has sometimes overridden wider capitalist interests. As usual the working class pay the price.

Some restrictions to movement are necessary to reduce the spread of the virus but Donald Trump’s abrupt announcement banning flights from Europe is of dubious value and has fanned the flames of xenophobia.

Italy has been the second worst affected country so far. Its health system is buckling under the strain. Yet when the Italian government asked for aid from EU neighbours, the response from European Central Bank president Christine Lagarde implied she wouldn’t act to keep Italy in the eurozone. That resulted in market crashes, and gave succour to the far right.

Rather than giving aid the German government banned the export of face masks so a German company supplying Italy could no longer do so. For its own reasons the Chinese government delivered 31 tonnes of equipment to Italy including ventilators (Hall et al, FT, 14.3.20).

In the UK it seems the government has calculated that concessions are wise to avoid civil unrest. The ruling class has thrown some crumbs down from their table, espe-



cially where trade unions have been proactive.

These include the moves to shore up the NHS and measures such as allowing the self-employed and those on zero-hours contract have the tiny sum of £95 per week statutory sick pay immediately rather than having to wait until the end of the first week of illness.

Yet the fate of some of the most vulnerable, including the homeless and those in prison, has largely not been discussed. The welfare of prisoners in Uyghur detention camps in China and in Iran’s jails is largely unknown. The conditions of refugees in Idlib, in Turkey, and in Greece meant that children were dying even before the outbreak. Measures to manage Covid 19 are likely to be near-non-existent.

Struggling businesses all over the world are swiftly minimising losses by sacking workers despite emergency measures by international banks. Without consumers it make no “business sense” to continue to employ people. The efforts of bosses to make workers pay, as far as possible, for the worsening and unfolding economic crisis, risk turning the crisis into a snowballing slump.

## SOCIALIST SOCIETY

If we lived in a socialist society, we might have been able to prevent this outbreak, or at least contain it quickly and have medication ready to mitigate the effects. Without the dominance of profit, research that began with SARS and MERS could have continued. Protecting our ecosystem and having a better understanding of zoonotic illnesses would reduce the risk of outbreaks.

If a widespread outbreak occurred in a socialist society there would still be the need for centralised and authoritative responses both at a regional and global level. But those at the centre would be accountable to the general population, and do their jobs without special privileges. The action would be more effective as they would be more likely to be trusted.

With background research, and an already functioning network of research centres and international comprehensive public health provision, cases would be more accurately tracked as they emerged, and this data used to inform the development of effective methods of managing the pandemic.

Without a system relying on market rules, production can be planned and altered according to need. The UK government is showing that a little of this is possible under

capitalism as they seek to repurpose hotels and car factories to produce the things that are necessary for health provision now.

In a socialist society there would be no need for negotiation and buyouts. The decision to adjust the focus of production would be a routine thing. There would not be the imminent threat of financial meltdown. Production could shift to increase provision of health-related products for the duration of the crisis, and change again or close unneeded units afterwards.

Without the limits we have on education and career opportunities in today’s society, probably more people would have knowledge and skills in multiple areas of interest including healthcare related sciences. Quite feasibly, many workers in other industries would have some basic knowledge of health care so that they could be deployed in a crisis.

Without worrying about rents and overheads places like theatres, pubs, cinemas, places where people gather, could temporarily shut without going bust. There is no reason why people should not live rationally and be able to do what is needed in society at a given point in time without being limited by the need to turn a profit.

The workers, the majority of the global population, do not yet rule ourselves. We have a small rich ruling class that makes much of the necessary organisation chaotic and is likely to result in huge numbers of unnecessary deaths soon. But the fact that we are the producers of all goods and profits, gives us power and we need to organise to use it.

The need for many people to self-isolate will result in multiple hardships and poverty for many. Having decent benefits and social provision to sustain the welfare of the most vulnerable in our society will save lives and improve conditions.

This is a global problem and must be tackled internationally. Huge aid programs are needed to build and sustain healthcare provision in every country in the world. This is needed to allow the global population to recover. More investment in research and protection of the environment to prevent and control future outbreaks is needed.

The agency to make these things happen is not the capitalist governments, who by their nature are driven by the demands of profit. Only the organised international working class can build a society in tune with the global needs of humanity. □



# Covid-19: override private profit! Fight for workers' control!

## 6699 Editorial

In this epidemic, Workers' Liberty fights for the labour movement to make itself an essential service.

The labour movement, as yet, lacks the capacity to take over society and reshape it so as better to minimise and control epidemics. Neither we as Workers' Liberty, nor the labour movement generally, has the depth of expertise to qualify us to second-guess the established bourgeois public health experts.

But the labour movement does have, and must develop more, expertise in pushing back and overriding the barriers to social well-being raised by the interests of private profit.

On 17 March the Tory government announced £330 billion in aid to business, to keep profits flowing. It's the job of the labour movement to keep wages and working-class incomes flowing.

The labour movement does have, and must develop more, expertise in speaking up for the most exploited, the most oppressed, and the least generally-listened-to.

It does have, and must develop more, expertise in working for the general change in society which will make human welfare and a sustainable balance with nature the guiding principles of development, rather than private profit.

The labour movement has essential jobs to do on all three fronts.

The British government is appealing to industries to convert to producing medical supplies like ventilators, and to hotels and similar to convert to housing extra NHS premises, offering them good money.

The labour movement must press for all those facilities, and the whole pharmaceutical and medical-supplies industry, to be requisitioned, as even bourgeois governments requisition facilities in time of war, overriding individual profit calculations.

To stop the economic blow from the epidemic (inevitable under any social system) snowballing into a typically capitalist economic crisis, we demand the requisitioning of high finance, under democratic control.

Bourgeois governments in war do their requisitioning bureaucratically, with tender care for profits and without democratic monitoring. The result, in Britain after World War One for example, was what even a Tory politician, Stanley Baldwin, called "a lot of hard-fell men who look as if they had done very well out of the war".

And the British government in 1918 (like other warring governments) suppressed information about the so-called "Spanish Flu" epidemic then (which killed more people than World War 1 itself) for fear of dampening war morale.

The labour movement needs to demand the setting up of emergency commissions, on which unions are represented and through which they are informed, with the right to speak out independently when they need to, at every level: globally, nationally, in every local authority, in every company and workplace. Fight for workers' control!

Several local Labour Parties have been



George Newman @gewman

active in setting up "mutual aid" groups to offer help to the elderly, the sick, the disabled, and the housebound in their areas. The Labour Party nationally should promote those groups, but also demand a huge allocation of funds from central government to local authorities so that they can provide for the homeless, those at threat from domestic violence, and others, plus representation of the mutual-aid groups in the working-out of local emergency plans.

The labour movement should demand the cancellation of rent bills and evictions during the epidemic.

In a number of workplaces, alert trade-union activity has won agreement that zero-hours and agency workers, as well as core employees, will get full sick pay and not have Covid-19 time off work counted against sickness absence entitlements. It has won better conditions, sick pay, and proper protective kit, for cleaners, whose work is now shown to be pivotal, and yet are often contracted-out and underpaid.

In many workplaces those things have not been won yet. Health and safety legislation which entitles workers to withdraw to a "place of safety" when they see "serious and imminent danger" — for example, from co-workers being forced to come to work even when infected, because of lack of sick pay — can be a lever here. Our centre pages this week explain how.

### WORKPLACE

In every workplace, even if no union is organised or recognised there, workers have the right to elect a health and safety rep and have management listen to that rep. Unions should support and provide training and information for the epidemic to new health and safety reps.

We do not consider ourselves qualified to second-guess the public health authorities on when to close schools. There are arguments even after a general closure for keeping schools partially open — at least for students dependent on free school meals, or from homeless households, or whose parents are essential-service workers.

We are qualified to say that this year's A-levels and GCSEs, and primary-school

high-stakes tests, and Ofsted inspections, and school league tables, should all be cancelled. And now. Don't leave it later and encourage schools which partially close down to send home younger students rather than older exam-class students better able to cope.

Even the bosses' federation, the CBI, has long argued that GCSEs do more harm than good, and should be abolished. There are plenty of workarounds to give students "CV" options for universities or jobs.

We are qualified, too, to argue that the "each country for itself" trend of policy in the epidemic is inhuman and short-sighted. Britain has problems with the NHS being unprepared. Imagine how much greater the problems are with the refugees in Syria, Turkey, and Greece, and the populations of many poorer countries, and how difficult it will be to delay and mitigate Covid-19 when it starts to sweep through those populations.

The labour movement must demand huge and rapid international aid, not the foot-dragging seen for so long with the AIDS epidemic in Africa.

We are critical of unions which have partially shut themselves down for the duration, suspending all meetings and pickets and even educational courses.

What can be done online, should be done online. Some workers have improved their positions enough to have the option of working from home, and to have good and hygienic homes to retreat to: good for them!

But large core sections of the working class will have to be at work throughout this epidemic, with only temporary and individual absences. The labour movement should be at their side, and not identify only with better-off workers who can retreat to safe homes and rely on other workers (water, electricity, food-supply, repairs, healthcare) to continue working to supply them.

There are reasonable arguments for saying that big, tight-packed gatherings are to be avoided in the epidemic. Smaller meetings, protests, and picket lines can however be organised with adequate precautions within them of social distancing and hygiene. The labour movement should remain "on duty", as an essential service.

Behind this epidemic stand two great fac-

tors, determined by the warping of society through private profit.

Ecological disruption from climate change has increased the risk of new viruses crossing species barriers (which often means viruses which have minor or no effects in one species become killers when they cross to another).

Development of vaccines and treatments from viruses, promoted in spurts at the height of previous crises (AIDS, SARS, and so on), has been allowed to languish for lack of funds when the crisis passes and research no longer promises short-term profits.

The NHS and other health services have been cut back to minimise the tax burden on the well-off, so that they normally and usually, outside of crises, run at nearly full stretch. They haven't been planned to run with ample spare capacity and reserves in normal times, so that they can adapt quickly in crises. For years it's been known that even an unusually severe normal seasonal flu bout would overstretch the NHS, and yet governments have continued to starve it of funds.

Now Covid-19 tests and protective equipment are in short supply, and the NHS is short of facilities to remedy the shortage quickly enough.

At the time of the 1891-2 famine and cholera epidemic in Russia (the cholera killed nearly 270,000 in the Tsarist Empire), the Russian socialist movement was still an affair of small groups.

Many socialists simply threw themselves into what the relief efforts there were, mainly organised by local authorities led by the liberal elements of the nobility. Others argued socialists must also make the arguments to prepare the people after the epidemic to win a democratic society.

And in fact it was in the years immediately after the famine that the Russian Marxist movement first became a mass force.

### SPANISH

It was after another great pandemic, the so-called "Spanish flu" of 1918, that the world's first-ever NHS was developed — by our comrades, the Bolsheviks, in Russia, as they began to win the civil war there against counter-revolutionary armies backed by Britain and other powers.

The socialists could do and say little about the "Spanish flu" at the time. Even the best-qualified medical experts knew little, and the facts of the flu were blurred by a welter of other epidemics (cholera, typhus).

The "November revolution" of 1918 in Germany happened at the height of the death toll from the "Spanish flu" there, yet the political histories of the time say little about it.

But in India, it seems fairly sure, mass anger against the British colonial administration's inhuman indifference to the "Spanish flu" — which killed 18 million there, more than anywhere else — triggered the mass eruption of the movement which would eventually win Indian independence in 1947.

Indian independence was won under bourgeois nationalist leadership, and left the mass of the people still exploited. The Bolsheviks were eventually defeated by the internal counter-revolution led by Stalin.

This time we must win for good. The political battle starts now, in the midst of the pandemic. □



# Don't let Tories push through anti-migrant law

By Ben Towse

The Conservative government's new Immigration Bill would grant sweeping "Henry VIII" powers to the Home Secretary to make up immigration rules with limited oversight or accountability to Parliament.

The Johnson government's new post-Brexit border policy ends free movement with the EU. It extends to EU migrants the brutal anti-migrant regime that is already imposed on non-EU migrants, while also changing that regime in new ways.

It classes migrants earning less than a certain salary threshold as "unskilled" and offers no general route for them to enter the country. They will be allowed in only as family dependents of "skilled" migrants; or on precarious, hyper-exploitative, short-term industry-specific "guest worker" schemes. Otherwise they will be shut out entirely, pushing more people towards dangerous routes, putting them at the mercy of unscrupulous bosses and smugglers.

EU migrants already in the UK are eligible to apply for Settled Status. Those successful will avoid being subject to this regime. But a

litany of exceptions and problems with the system means that many are at risk of falling through the cracks. And if they don't secure Settled Status in time, people who may have lived in the UK for years or decades will become "illegal" overnight.

Since that report, the new Bill to implement the government's policy has now had its first reading in Parliament. On top of everything we already knew about the Conservatives' xenophobic, anti-worker plans, the Bill's publication reveals an added danger.

Rather than setting out these proposed immigration rules in detail, it delegates sweeping powers to the Home Secretary who will be able to make up immigration rules as she sees fit, through "secondary legislation".

Secondary legislation is subject to much less scrutiny by Parliament than is required to pass primary legislation, including less debate and no opportunity to amend. By reducing parliamentary scrutiny over immigration rules, such "Henry VIII" provisions also effectively reduce the window in which outside pressure from campaigners, protesters, strikers etc could hope to influence decision-makers.

**Protecting migrants protects everyone.**

**We demand:**

- Free detainees now
- Halt NHS charging & data sharing with the Home Office
- Visa extensions
- Protect asylum seekers in shared accommodation
- Suspend 'no recourse to public funds'
- No penalties for staying at home

**Labour Campaign For Free Movement**

We don't yet know when the second reading – the first opportunity for MPs to debate the Bill – will come. The Tories have a large majority, so it will be difficult to stop them signing this blank cheque to themselves. And the Covid-19 crisis makes it harder to organise protests and other public actions that might force MPs' hands: the Labour Campaign for Free Movement has already had to postpone indefinitely the planned 25 April day of protest against the Bill.

Nevertheless, it's vital that we make as much of a stand as we can now. Labour, the unions and our movement need to voice our unequivocal opposition to the Bill and the Tories' policy, and positively argue for the alternative overwhelmingly backed by Labour conference last year: to defend and extend free movement and migrants' rights. Even if the Bill passes now, putting down a marker now will help us build a movement to reverse it later.

So at 12 noon on Saturday 21 March (the time of the national anti-racism demonstration that was cancelled due to Covid-19), LCFM is organising an online group call with MP Nadia Whittome. This will be an opportunity for supporters to get a briefing on the Bill and discuss ideas for the campaign against it.

See [labourfreemovement.org](http://labourfreemovement.org) and social media for details to join the call, and please get involved. □

# Covid-19 only strengthens the case to welcome refugees

By Mohan Sen

Right-wing governments and movements are using the C-19 crisis to demand refugees from the Middle East and elsewhere are kept or driven out of Europe.

In fact the crisis only strengthens to the case they must be let in, welcomed and integrated.

The Syrian government says the country has no confirmed C-19 cases, but the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports outbreaks in several provinces. It says the regime has issued a gag order to stop medical personnel discussing the issue.

Meanwhile Syria is one of very few countries in the region not to have stopped air travel with Iran

— the regional epicentre of the outbreak, at 14,000 confirmed cases and 700 deaths. The World Health Organisation assesses Syria's risk as "very high".

Syria's healthcare system has been devastated by years of civil war. But it is the refugee camps on Syria's borders that face the gravest danger.

There are as yet no reports of cases in the camps. If – when – the virus does reach there, it will most likely spread like wildfire, in conditions that could almost have been designed for rapid spread.

If C-19 cannot be contained in rich countries with relatively solid healthcare and public services, imagine what is likely in the camps. Just since December, the Syrian-Russian war drive has

displaced a million new people in north-west Syria, with about half the population now in camps. The surge of new arrivals means it is now common for multiple families to share tents.

In addition to other problems and shortages, in some camps there is literally no running water.

There are likely to be many more Syrian refugees soon. In refugee camps in Europe, for instance on the Greek island of Lesbos — "home" to 20,000 Syrians — the situation is better but still dire, and highly conducive to the mass spread of the virus.

On Lesbos, last week, far-right activists from across Europe joined their Greek comrades to carry out attacks on aid workers and burn down a migrant shelter.

The Turkish government is pushing Syrian refugees towards and into Greece in an attempt to extract financial concessions from the EU. While justly denouncing the Greek government for its treatment of migrants, it too is treating the Syrians appallingly — including, almost unbelievably, denying them access to healthcare.

Europe is the world epicentre of C-19, not the Middle East. In any case, the infection of desperate, densely-packed refugee camps will increase the chance of a more rapid spread of the disease in the surrounding countries, and further. Demonstrating again the absurdity of nationalism, the virus does not respect borders and fences.

The safest course of action for everyone is for the camps to be

dispersed by the refugees being let into the country of their choice, welcomed into the networks of society, and given full, equal access to healthcare and services.

Equally importantly, this is the only course of action that can avoid or minimise incredible suffering among people who have already suffered horrendously. A Syrian life is not worth less than a British or Greek or German life.

So socialists and labour movement activists must use this crisis to argue to open Europe's borders and welcome migrants.

We must argue for urgent, huge aid from the governments of rich countries to poorer countries to enable them to rapidly build up their healthcare capacity and public services. □



# Winning safer workplaces

By Gerry Bates

Early on in the Covid-19 crisis, the public service union Unison in Lambeth Council won assurances that anyone working on its premises, including outsourced workers and contractors, would be given full paid leave so that they could comply with the public health advice.

Workers' absences on Covid-19 related leave would not count against sickness monitoring policies, and the union won the right to a break every hour for handwashing for all frontline staff.

If these guarantees can be won from Lambeth council, a right-wing Labour council strapped for cash after ten years of central government cuts, then they can be won from other employers.

The major outstanding issue in Lambeth is paid leave for workers who may have to stay home to look after children if the schools are closed.

Transport for London has agreed that workers for its cleaning contractor will get full sick pay for Covid-19 absences, and similar concessions have been won by contracted-out staff at the government department BEIS and workers for the big cleaning contractor ISS.

A worker in an NHS mental health trust tells us that after some days of agitation in his workplace about sick pay for "bank" (casual) and subcontracted staff, he found a policy agreed in November 2019 which says that all "bank" staff with shifts booked in advance and anyone working for a subcontractor gets two weeks leave on full pay.

"The effort to get this information involved talking to about 100 workers across the Trust and allowed some useful conversations about trade unionism, workers rights, including our rights to walk off the job, and socialism.

"I have collated a list of further demands from these conversations, including asking the trust to negotiate free parking for all staff

as a way of increasing social distancing and reducing risk of infection.

"Nobody knew that this policy existed—neither senior managers nor workers — and the next step is to insist that the Trust advertises it widely as a basic infection control measure. They sent out an email today but most of the workers affected are not on email.

"I will also propose we ask the Trust to ensure that organisations that we share premises with have similar policies in place.

"In my break I spoke to workers in the local Sainsburys. Got a very good response. Gave them the Workers' Liberty Covid-19 web address..."

Workers in schools have generally not supported the call by some left-wingers for an early and complete shutdown of schools (though they recognise that closures will come soon). Instead they have focused on sick pay and absence policies as in other workplaces.

Additional demands have included calls

to be fully consulted about management plans, including plans for deep-cleaning of "hot-desking" areas. (Unison in some councils has proposed a straightforward end to "hot-desking" during the epidemic).

Science teachers have raised the need for good science education about viruses, infections, and their risks. Schools could be a channel to counteract the flood of conspiracy theories and quack remedies on social media.

Islington branch of the National Education Union says: "We suggest than members discuss with their Headteacher how during a period of school closure staff could work for a limited opening to ensure that we can look after the children of... NHS staff, food and distribution workers, police, prison and fire brigade staff and those who are working to produce medical equipment, including hopefully industries being re purposed to produce ventilators... [and] ensure that children on free school meals or otherwise in food poverty can eat nutritious meals... [and] support other children in need". □



## Make the Labour Party speak out!

By Rhodri Evans

On 17 March, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn presented a list of demands to the Government:

- extend sick pay to all workers;
- increase sick pay;
- introduce rent and mortgage payment deferment options;
- ban coronavirus evictions;
- remove the requirement to present for Universal Credit and reduce the waiting time;
- support councils working with food banks.

Those leave a lot unsaid, though, and the Labour leadership has made no effort to publicise the demands. A short video put out on social media by the Labour Party on the same day, 17 March, did no more than explain that the epidemic makes the case for "collective public action".

All the Labour leader candidates have been fairly quiet, too, though Rebecca Long Bailey has been a bit more vocal, and Richard Burgon has called for "taskforces, involving trade unions, to reorientate non-essential industries into producing medical equipment where possible".

Coventry South Labour MP Zarah Sultana (pictured above) has pointed out:

"In last 24 hours:

"Denmark: Protects wages and prevents layoffs with a trade union and employer deal.

"Spain: Nationalises private hospitals.

"France: Suspends rent, gas, electricity and water bills".

France's suspension of bills is, however, only for businesses, not for households. Labour should simply be demanding that rent, mortgage, and utilities payments are cancelled for the duration of the epidemic.

Ireland has introduced a £182-per-week (£203) fallback payment, easily and quickly claimed, for all workers and self-employed people losing income and not covered by sick pay.

Sweden has guaranteed laid-off workers 90% of their income. New Zealand has introduced a fallback payment of £284 per week (\$585), though channelled not directly to workers but via employers who can show a 30%-plus decline in income.

As well as demanding full sick pay for all (including agency and zero-hours workers), Labour should be demanding a much bigger and quicker-delivered fallback payment than Statutory Sick Pay (£94.25 a week) or Universal Credit (five weeks' delay) for workers who will fall through the net (self-employed, or workers whose bosses go bust).

Labour has shut down all meetings, instead of replacing them by smaller meetings in which social distancing can be respected, and online meetings. Many local Labour Parties have initiated local "mutual aid" groups, but the Labour leadership is doing nothing to promote them.

The labour movement needs to act as an "essential service" in this crisis, fighting to break through the barriers to effective action made by the rules of private profit, fighting for workers' control, fighting for the worst-off. □



## Workers' plan for the Tube

By a London Underground worker

Tube union RMT has made the demands below to London Underground.

The *Tubeworker* bulletin supported by Workers' Liberty is demanding, in addition, "a monitoring committee, including representatives of passenger groups and trade unions, to sit in permanent session during this crisis to scrutinise information and recommend necessary actions".

*Tubeworker* argues that this "is particularly important, as it allows us to keep up with a rapidly-changing situation and to assert the right of working people — workers and passengers — to scrutinise and drive the policies that directly affect us".

On 17 March Transport for London committed to paying full pay for any Tube cleaner who self-isolates, rather than just Statutory Sick Pay. Union pressure was the major factor in securing this concession. The full list of RMT demands is:

1. Immediately ensure that all staff in all LUL [London Underground Limited] workplaces have ready access to hand sanitiser, gloves and liquid soap. This must be available to LUL staff and all contracted staff. Hand sanitiser must also be made as widely available as possible to passengers.

2. An immediate function by function review of arrangements for cleaning and responding to trains/workplaces where someone has been symptomatic. This must include immediate isolation of that workplace with all staff removed to a safe place.

3. Immediate risk assessment of all staff by line management in conjunction with Tier 1

health and safety reps.

a. Allow vulnerable staff to stay away from the workplace without loss of pay.

b. Allow those living with/caring for vulnerable people to stay away from the workplace without loss of pay.

4. Immediate action needed on cleaning

a. TFL must immediately guarantee full pay to all cleaners who have to take sick leave or self-isolate.

b. Increase the number of cleaners available.

c. Provide all cleaners with appropriate PPE and equipment.

d. Give immediate training to all cleaners in how to make work areas exposed to Covid 19 safe while protecting their own health and safety.

e. Bring cleaners in-house now

5. Urgently discuss with the trade unions how to implement a managed emergency service that can be maintained while projected isolations and sickness absence continues.

a. Suspend Night Tube

b. Only require members to run a service to meet the greatly reduced needs of essential users.

6. Reduce risk at stations

a. Review all congestion plans to prevent the build-up of crowds in enclosed passages

b. Turn off multi-user touch screen devices and leave WAGs [Wide Aisle Gates] open.

c. Suspend SATS [station staff on platforms announcing and helping to despatch trains]

d. Allow staff to work behind glass as far as possible. □



# Covid-19: take action t



## COVID-19

- Full pay for all workers from day one of absence
- No disciplinary action for following NHS advice in staying away from work
- Abolish zero-hour contracts and outsourcing
- All necessary measures to protect workers' safety

Has your boss:

- guaranteed full pay (not Statutory Sick Pay, SSP) and no disciplinary action for all workers from day one of any absence, including asymptomatic self-isolation?
- taken necessary precautions to minimise the risk of exposure?

If not, there are actions that you and your workmates can take.

- Contact your trade union. If you are not in a union, join one and form a workplace union group.
- Elect a health and safety representative. You have the right to do this even if there is not a recognised trade union in your workplace.
- Draw up a list of demands and table them to your boss.
- Where you believe that you are in serious and imminent danger, refuse to work. You have the legal right to do all these things.

### YOUR DEMANDS

We suggest that these include:

- full sick pay (or paid special leave) from day one for all workers in the workplace (including agency and contract workers) who are following government advice in staying away from work

- no disciplinary action for following government advice in staying away from work
- adequate hygiene provision, including access to frequent hand-washing
- social distancing at work, including withdrawal of duties that involve close contact, and home working where practical
- the establishment of a monitoring committee including elected workers' representatives to scrutinise all information and advice and recommend further actions.

### REFUSING TO WORK ON SAFETY GROUNDS

Under Regulation 8 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999), and Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act (1996), all workers have a right to refuse work on health and safety grounds, without victimisation or loss of pay, if they perceive there is a "serious and imminent risk".

We believe that there are good grounds to perceive serious and imminent risk if, for example:

- there are insufficient hygiene facilities in your workplace e.g. lack of access to soap and water; inadequate alternative provision for mobile workers
- your work involves close contact with other people
- you are working alongside people who may be infected but have come to work because they would lose vital income or face disciplinary action if they did not

### WITHOUT FULL SICK PAY, WE ARE NOT SAFE

Official government advice from Thursday 12 March is to self-isolate for seven days if you have a new persistent cough or a fever. Many workers — especially workers in unionised workplaces — are entitled to full sick pay and/or other leave arrangements that mean they can self-isolate without worrying about the financial impact.

# What the law says

The relevant sections of legislation are pasted below. The law gives us the right to take "appropriate steps" to avoid "serious and imminent danger", and to be protected from suffering any detriment, including loss of pay, for doing so. Clearly, an employer inclined to argue the toss could contend that their refusal to guarantee full pay to anyone self-isolating does not represent a "serious and imminent danger", or that refusing to work until they do is not an "appropriate step".

But the stronger your action, and the more workers involved in it, the flimsier their ability to make that argument will be. Given everything we know about the highly contagious nature of this virus, there is a clear case for arguing that forcing potential carriers to come to work, in direct defiance of public health advice, because they can't afford to do otherwise is a "serious and imminent danger".

For more info on the law and how it works, we recommend this briefing, from the RMT union: [rmt.org.uk/news/publications/serious-and-imminent-danger-booklet/serious-and-imminent-danger.pdf](http://rmt.org.uk/news/publications/serious-and-imminent-danger-booklet/serious-and-imminent-danger.pdf)

And this website: [section44.co.uk/](http://section44.co.uk/)

### The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (the Management Regs), Reg 8:

[legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1999/3242/regulation/8/made](http://legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1999/3242/regulation/8/made)

Procedures for serious and imminent danger and for danger areas 8

(1) Every employer shall— (a) establish and where necessary give effect to appropriate procedures to be followed in the event of serious and imminent danger to persons at

work in his undertaking;

(b) nominate a sufficient number of competent persons to implement those procedures in so far as they relate to the evacuation from premises of persons at work in his undertaking; and

(c) ensure that none of his employees has access to any area occupied by him to which it is necessary to restrict access on grounds of health and safety unless the employee concerned has received adequate health and safety instruction.

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1)

(a), the procedures referred to in that sub-paragraph shall— (a) so far as is practicable, require any persons at work who are exposed to serious and imminent danger to be informed of the nature of the hazard and of the steps taken or to be taken to protect them from it;

(b) enable the persons concerned (if necessary by taking appropriate steps in the absence of guidance or instruction and in the light of their knowledge and the technical means at their disposal) to stop work and immediately proceed to a place of safety in the event of their being exposed to serious, imminent and unavoidable danger; and

(c) save in exceptional cases for reasons duly substantiated (which cases and reasons shall be specified in those procedures), require the persons concerned to be prevented from resuming work in any situation where there is still a serious and imminent danger.

(3) A person shall be regarded as competent for the purposes of paragraph (1)

(b) where he has sufficient training and 5

experience or knowledge and other qualities to enable him properly to implement the evacuation procedures referred to in that sub-paragraph.

### Employment Right Act 1996, Section 44 (Health and Safety Cases)

[legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/18/section/44](http://legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/18/section/44)

(1) An employee has the right not to be subjected to any detriment by any act, or any deliberate failure to act, by his employer done on the ground that —

(a) having been designated by the employer to carry out activities in connection with preventing or reducing risks to health and safety at work, the employee carried out (or proposed to carry out) any such activities,

(b) being a representative of workers on matters of health and safety at work or member of a safety committee —

(i) in accordance with arrangements established under or by virtue of any enactment, or

(ii) by reason of being acknowledged as such by the employer, the employee performed (or proposed to perform) any functions as such a representative or a member of such a committee,

(c) being an employee at a place where —

i) there was no such representative or safety committee, or

ii) there was such a representative or safety committee but it was not reasonably practicable for the employee to raise the matter by those means, he brought to his

employer's attention, by reasonable means, circumstances connected with his work which he reasonably believed were harmful or potentially harmful to health or safety,

(d) in circumstances of danger which the employee reasonably believed to be serious and imminent and which he could not reasonably have been expected to avert, he left (or proposed to leave) or (while the danger persisted) refused to return to his place of work or any dangerous part of his place of work, or

(e) in circumstances of danger which the employee reasonably believed to be serious and imminent, he took (or proposed to take) appropriate steps to protect himself or other persons from the danger.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1)(e) whether steps which an employee took (or proposed to take) were appropriate is to be judged by reference to all the circumstances including, in particular, his knowledge and the facilities and advice available to him at the time.

(3) An employee is not to be regarded as having been subjected to any detriment on the ground specified in subsection (1)(e) if the employer shows that it was (or would have been) so negligent for the employee to take the steps which he took (or proposed to take) that a reasonable employer might have treated him as the employer did.

(4) Except where an employee is dismissed in circumstances in which, by virtue of section 197, Part X does not apply to the dismissal, this section does not apply where the detriment in question amounts to dismissal (within the meaning of that Part). □



# o win safe workplaces

But others do not have this right. If these workers take time off, they may only get SSP, £94.25 per week. This less than a third of the net pay of a worker on the minimum wage, significantly less than the dole, and less than half an average weekly rent in London.

Even if you have sick pay rights yourself, you may well work alongside people who do not – especially if you work in large public service industries such as hospitals, schools and transport.

Workers on zero-hours or outsourced contracts usually have the lowest pay and worst conditions in our workplaces: they are the cleaners, caterers, security staff, etc. If these workers get a cough or a fever, they are put in an impossible situation — either follow government advice and face impoverishment, or struggle through work and potentially infect colleagues and the public with a deadly virus.

These harsh employment practises are obstructing the self-isolation strategy, which the government assures us will delay the spread of the virus.

All workers, directly-employed and outsourced, permanent and zero hours, must stand together to demand real action, and equal treatment, from our employers.

## WHAT TO DO

**1. Speak with your workmates.** Talk to them about their legal rights and discuss the issues. If you are in a unionised workplace, and can pursue this activity through the structures of a recognised union and collective bargaining machinery, great. But we need to act more quickly than many formal structures allow.

**2. If you are not part of a trade union, join one.** Any long-term effort to win more rights and power in your workplace requires permanent organisation. Information on joining a union is here: [tuc.org.uk/join-union](http://tuc.org.uk/join-union)

**3. Draw up a list of demands.** Use the list above and add things that are relevant to where you work. Involve all your workmates in doing this.

**4. Elect a health and safety representative.** Information on the role and rights of staff health and safety reps here: [hse.gov.uk/involvement/hsrepresentatives.htm](http://hse.gov.uk/involvement/hsrepresentatives.htm)

**5. Write to management.** This could take the form of a letter or a petition. We've provided a sample template; adapt it based on your specific workplace circumstances. Make sure you give your employer a deadline by which to implement your demands.

**6. If you face serious and imminent danger, stop work.** Do not wait for management to consider the situation – they can do this when you stop work, and will be more likely to do so! The law gives you the right to refuse to work on the basis of a serious and imminent risk.

Exactly what form such refusals and stop-pages take might vary from workplace to workplace, but it could involve a straightforward refusal to work at all until management

meet demands to minimise risk. In this case, explain your action to other workmates and encourage them to join you.

## IT CAN WORK

In early March, following pressure from the local branch of the public service union Unison, Lambeth Council agreed to ensure full pay for zero hour contract workers who self-isolate or take sick leave. If Lambeth Council can do it, after a decade of austerity, why can't every employer?

## SPREAD THE WORD

If you take this action, let other people, especially other workers in your industry, know you're doing it, and especially if you get results.

## WHAT NEXT?

If your management continues to refuse to budge, speak to your union about formalising your action into a dispute. Spreading the word about your action and encouraging social media pressure on your employer can also add to the impact of what you're doing.

In the longer term, continue to press demands for equal treatment and conditions. This crisis clearly highlights the exploitative and unjust nature of zero-hours contracts, outsourcing, and other employment practises that divide workers. All workers should be directly employed, with access to the same benefits and conditions.

- See all of this online and in pdf format at [workersliberty.org/covid-action](http://workersliberty.org/covid-action)
- See [workersliberty.org/covid-19](http://workersliberty.org/covid-19) for more articles on Covid-19.

## WHAT IS WORKERS' LIBERTY?

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty (AWL) is a revolutionary socialist organisation active in the working-class movement in Britain, including trade unions and the Labour Party. We fight for a revolutionary alternative to capitalism and Stalinism, based on common ownership and workers' rule.

Our members and supporters work in a variety of industries and are active in a range of unions, with decades of experience of involvement in workplace and community struggle. We have a press, including workplace bulletins and a weekly newspaper, *Solidarity*, and can use our experience and networks to help amplify, spread, and support your action. □

- [www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org)
- [fb.com/workersliberty](https://fb.com/workersliberty)
- [@workersliberty](https://twitter.com/workersliberty)



## TEMPLATE LETTER TO YOUR MANAGEMENT: YOUR DEMANDS

To [THE BOSS]

As workers in [WORKPLACE] who are members of [TRADE UNION], we are writing to demand that you, our employer, take all necessary precautions to minimise risk during the Covid-19 pandemic. Immediately we are concerned that some workmates, such as those on zero-hour and outsourced contracts, cannot afford to self-isolate, as they may only receive Statutory Sick Pay (SSP), if that. This means that these workers are economically prevented from carrying out public health instructions and could therefore put themselves and others at greater risk.

We therefore demand that all workers in [WORKPLACE], whether directly-employed or outsourced and regardless of contractual status, are guaranteed full pay from day one of any self-isolation or sickness absence. This may involve you as an employer instructing the holders of any outsourced contract to pay full pay to their employees, or underwriting such payments yourself.

Further, we demand the following measures to minimise risk:

[add demands specific to your workplace, which may include:]

- more frequent breaks for hand-washing
- adequate supplies of soap, water, etc
- appropriate hand-cleaning materials for mobile workers
- suspension of work tasks involving contact e.g. cash payments

To ensure that the workplace continues to take up-to-date appropriate act, we ask you to establish a monitoring committee including trade union representatives, which will have access to all data, information and advice, and which can recommend action.

We demand that you take these measures is taken as soon as possible, and within no more than five days.

Should we come to believe that we are in serious and imminent danger, we will exercise our legal right to withdraw from work.

Yours,

[COLLECT SIGNATURES ON THE LETTER] □



## TEMPLATE LETTER TO YOUR MANAGEMENT: REFUSAL TO WORK ON THE GROUNDS OF HEALTH AND SAFETY CONCERNS

To [THE BOSS]

I am concerned for the safety of myself and others, as I believe that I am in serious and imminent danger of coronavirus infection due to the lack of adequate safety measures in my workplace. Specifically, I face serious and imminent danger from:

- contact with workers attending work while ill or infectious because they are not receiving full sick pay or paid special leave and can not afford to stay off work
- contact with workers attending work while ill or infectious because they face disciplinary action if they follow government advice and stay off work
- lack of adequate access to hand-cleaning facilities
- work duties involving close contact with persons who may be infectious e.g. taking cash payments

[make these specific to your working conditions]

You have a duty to provide me with a safe workplace and I ask that you assure me that the arrangements you have in place adequately protect my safety and the safety of others for whom I am responsible.

Until I receive such assurance, and in line with my legal right under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, I am refusing to carry out my work [or specified parts of my work] and/or I am withdrawing from the workplace which I believe to be unsafe.

Please initiate the company's procedures for protection against serious and imminent danger and addressing my concerns.

Yours

[YOUR NAME] □



# “Lib-Lab” is a way backwards, not forwards

By Sacha Ismail

Some, even on Labour’s left, advocate Selectoral alliances or coalitions between Labour and non-labour movement “progressive” parties — mostly, in practical terms, meaning the SNP and the Lib Dems.

From a class-struggle, socialist point of view, there are many arguments to be made against such “progressive alliances”. Here I try to draw some lessons from Labour’s history, focusing on alliances with the Liberals.

Debating “progressive alliances” with Janine Booth from Workers’ Liberty at the 2019 Labour conference fringe event *The World Transformed*, left Labour MP Clive Lewis cited the 1906 Lib-Lab electoral pact as a positive step forward. (For the other side, see Janine Booth at [bit.ly/wcpols](http://bit.ly/wcpols)). Lewis argued that without this pact the Labour Party would never have got off the ground.

That is wrong. I’ll look at the experience of 1906 as well as the Liberal-supported Labour governments of the 1920s and 1970s, and the war-time coalitions Labour took part in; and try to draw some conclusions for today.

## HOW LABOUR BEGAN

The Labour Party arose not through clever electoral manoeuvres, but a growth of working-class consciousness, organisation and political self-expression which broke through the Liberal-oriented politics and alliances of the labour movement’s leaders.

It took a long time. In the 1840s, Britain had the first independent working-class party in the world — Chartism, organised around the demand for universal suffrage (usually “universal” male, but some Chartists demanded votes for women too).

For decades after Chartism’s disappearance in the 1850s, there was only a small trade union movement, mostly “craft” unions of better-off “skilled” workers. Political trade unionists generally supported the Liberals, the party representing pro-free trade industrialists and big capitalist landowners. (In some parts of the country where the major employers were Liberals, trade unionists responded by supporting the Tories.)

Until the 1867 Reform Act, pretty much no workers could vote. The 1867 Act enfranchised over a million workers, perhaps a majority of the (adult, male) urban working class. It was the product in part of a militant labour movement campaign, led by trade unionists who a few years earlier had demonstrated energy and internationalism in the fight to prevent British intervention in support of the slave-owners in the US civil war.

It did relatively little immediately to challenge the working class’ political subordination. To Marx’s disgust the bulk of the trade unionists, with whom he had worked closely, backed the Liberals, some attempting to become Liberal candidates.

In 1874, Friedrich Engels wrote that “no separate political working-class party has existed in Britain since the downfall of the Chartist party”, identifying one reason as concessions made to some workers on the

THE LABOUR PIONEER. JANUARY, 1906.

GENERAL ELECTION, 1906.

Central Labour Representation Committee Manifesto.

To the ELECTORS of MERTHYR.

This Election is to decide whether or not Labour is to be fairly represented in Parliament.

The House of Commons is supposed to be the People's House, and yet the People are not there.

Landlords, employers, lawyers, brewers, and financiers are there in force. Why not Labour?

IS THERE NO NEED?

The Trade Unions ask the same liberty that capital enjoys. They are refused.

The Aged Poor are neglected.

The slums remain; overcrowding continues, whilst the land goes to waste.

Shopkeepers and Traders are overburdened with rates and taxation, whilst the increasing land values, which should relieve the ratepayers, go to people who have not earned them.

Wars are fought to make the rich richer, but the underfed school children of the poor are still neglected.

Chinese Labour is defended because it enriches the mineowners.

The unemployed ask for work; the Government gave them a worthless Act, and now, when you are beginning to understand the cause of your poverty, the red herring of Protection is drawn across your path.

Protection, as experience shows, is no remedy for poverty and unemployment. It serves to withdraw your attention from the land, housing, old age, and other social problems.

LABOUR ELECTORS.

You have it in your power to see that Parliament carries out your wishes.

The Labour Representation Executive appeals to you to forget all the political differences which have kept you apart in the past, and

VOTE SOLIDLY FOR

**HARDIE**

SIGNED ON BEHALF OF ONE MILLION WORKMEN—

A. HENDERSON, M.P. (Ironfounders), Chairman.	W. HYDSON (Railway Servants).
J. R. CLYNES, Vice-Chairman.	BEN TURNER (Weavers).
J. J. STEPHENSON (Engineers), Treasurer.	W. H. WILSON (Textile Trades).
J. N. BELL (N.A.U. of Labour).	J. KEIR HARDIE, M.P. (Independent Labour Party).
JAMES CONLEY, J.P. (Bollermakers).	JAMES PARKER (Independent Labour Party).
PETE CURRAN (Gasworkers).	EDWARD R. PEASE (Fabian Society).
J. HODGE (Steel Smelters).	J. RAMSAY MACDONALD, Secretary.

LRC manifesto for the 1906 general election. Note the very clear class-based message, but the lack of socialist politics, and the chauvinist appeal against Chinese workers (in South Africa!)

basis of Britain’s domination of the world market. He noted that the British ruling class had gradually conceded important elements of the Chartists’ demands as safeguards were put in place. They also conceded greater freedom and legal space for trade unions, and began to cultivate some union leaders.

One of the most important safeguards for the ruling class was the weakness of independent working-class politics. In the 1874 election, the first trade unionists were elected to Parliament — two of them, as Liberals. Ten trade union candidates standing against both major parties were defeated.

The thoroughly capitalist Liberal Party was extremely resistant to accepting any

more trade unionists as candidates — a factor in pushing many union leaders towards independent politics, eventually.

As Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald later wrote: “We didn’t leave the Liberals. They kicked us out and slammed the door in our faces.”

Engels pointed out the increasing absurdity of failing to stand independent candidates now that a large and growing number of workers were enfranchised. Many labour movement activists also noted, and took inspiration from, the presence (after 1874) of Irish nationalist parties in the House of Commons, holding a large block of seats independently of the two British capitalist

parties and dragging concessions from them.

The 1880s saw the enfranchisement of a majority of male workers and then the rise of strikes and mass trade unionism (“New Unionism”) among “unskilled” workers. The new unions were less tied to the old Liberal-only strategy and more open to the idea of labour representation. The socialist movement also revived, a bit earlier in the 1880s: its activists played key roles in New Unionism.

It took many years of agitation by the socialists for things to reach a tipping point. A counter-attack by the ruling class, Liberal as well as Tory, against the new unions and the working class in the 1890s also played a role.

Future Labour leader Keir Hardie first proposed an independent labour party at the 1887 TUC Congress. Hardie was elected as an Independent Labour MP in 1892; and he was central to the (broadly socialist, but woolly) Independent Labour Party founded in 1893. Not until 1899 did TUC Congress pass a resolution, originating with rail trade unionists, leading to the founding of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900.

Socialist groups of various sorts were the pioneers, pulling along the unions (and at first only a minority of them) with them.

At the second LRC conference in 1901, the Marxist Social Democratic Federation moved a motion committing the organisation to the class struggle. When it was defeated they walked out. The “walkout” was in fact only from the SDF’s national affiliation to the LRC. SDF members remained active and often central in local Trades Councils (which were generally the local LRC organisations: the LRC and then the Labour Party had no individual membership until 1918). They were active in LRC and Labour conferences as delegates from Trades Councils. SDF members sometimes stood as Labour candidates.

But the “national” walkout must have helped to reinforce the controlling influence of Liberal-minded union officials, the fuzzy socialists of the ILP and the middle-class elitist Fabians in this new political movement of the organised working class.

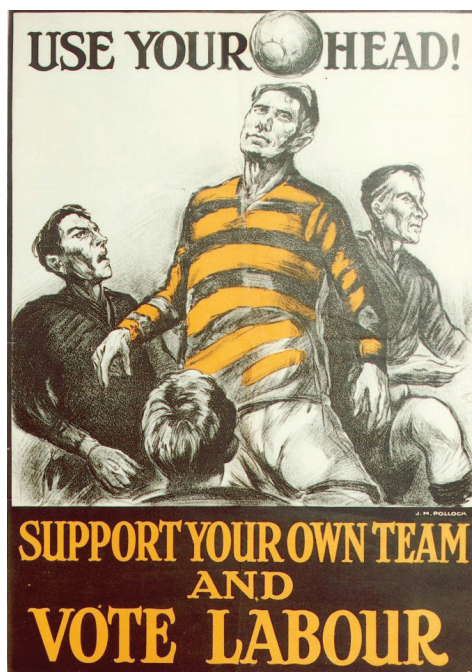
The organisation’s first year saw only a small proportion of unions affiliate — representing about 350,000 out of two million members, many fewer than had been formally represented at its founding conference.

Very important unions remained hostile and committed to Liberalism — in particular the miners’ unions with their four hundred thousand-odd members (ironically: the Liberals were very much the mine-owners’ party). Not until 1908 did the unified Miners’ Federation of Great Britain back Labour.

## 1906 AND ALL THAT

The vote for independent Labour candidates drifted up during the 1890s, but in 1900 the LRC and other independent labour candidates won less than 50,000 votes and only two MPs. In 1906, with the non-aggression pact with the Liberals in certain constituencies, the LRC won over 250,000 votes and 29 seats (immediately after the election it renamed itself the Labour Party).





1923 election poster

But to think that advance proves Clive Lewis' point is to miss the powerful movement for independent working-class representation that had been built over decades. The 1900 election took place too soon for the LRC to campaign properly; it was not a proper test of the social movement which was already well off the ground.

The LRC gained major accessions of strength soon after 1900 but well before 1906. Again, the actions of the capitalists provided important push. In 1901, the House of Lords confirmed a legal ruling against the main rail union that trade unions were liable for costs incurred by employers during strikes. (The verdict was in favour of the Taff Vale Railway Company in South Wales; hence the Taff Vale judgement.) Obviously this was a disaster for organised labour, threatening to abolish the de facto right to strike that workers had won over decades.

There was outrage across the labour movement. In 1902 LRC affiliations increased from 350,000 to 450,000, in 1903 to 850,000. In terms of institutional support and grassroots popularity, the campaign for labour representation became a mass movement.

For what this meant electorally, consider some by-election results. In the 1895 and 1900 general elections, the Lancashire seat of Clitheroe was taken by the Liberals *unopposed*. In a 1902 by-election, the Liberals wanted the LRC to stand aside; but organised local cotton workers insisted on standing one of theirs, David Shackleton, and the Liberals who lost their nerve and stood down. (Shackleton was elected unopposed. In 1906 he would defeat an independent conservative with 76% of the vote.) The textile workers' union joined the LRC soon after.

In a 1903 by-election, future Labour leader Arthur Henderson narrowly defeated the Tories and the Liberals in the previous Liberal safe seat of Barnard Castle (county Durham). In the 1907 by-election for Colne Valley in West Yorkshire, socialist Victor Grayson narrowly defeated both major parties as an Independent Labour candidate, supported by local Labour activists *despite the fact that the national party refused to support him*.

It seems clear that the Labour Party emerged out of a major social-political thrust towards independent working-class politics, rooted in long-term changes in British society and the rise of the labour movement, developing slowly at first but in flood by 1906. International factors were also in play: labour and socialist movements were rising across Europe and in the US, and the world had just been shaken by the 1905 Russian revolution.

Without the 1906 Lib-Lab pact, the course taken would of course have been different. But the pact was not Labour's ladder to

heights it would not have reached otherwise.

It actually ran counter to the more independent, class-based (though far from fully socialist) approach into which the labour movement was rapidly shifting. Those responsible for it knew that: which is why it was largely kept a secret at the time! Far from being a consensual or popular strategy, it was not something even the mostly Liberal-inclined Labour leaders were particularly comfortable advocating or defending.

These leaders did not want to replace the Liberals, as they soon would; they did not dream at first of Labour becoming the government. They only wanted to exert pressure. (The second LRC MP elected alongside Keir Hardie in 1900, Richard Bell of Derby, soon defected "back" to the Liberals.) However, they were leading a movement with its own logic and drive, one they could not fully halt or control even while they sat astride it.

We can't know how many MPs Labour would have won in 1906 without the pact (though, in addition to the by-election record, five of 29 were elected in seats with a Liberal candidate). That was the crucial question for the right-wing Labour leaders, but not fundamental for working-class politics.

Under great pressure, the Liberal government legislated to overturn the Taff Vale judgement, introducing unparalleled legal freedoms for trade unions — the freedoms the Tories would attempt to curtail in 1927, 1972 and, successfully, after 1980. They also introduced the first, extremely limited elements of a welfare state.

To go from a mistaken reading of these years, when Labour was just emerging but already had potential to supplant the Liberals, to advocating today's Labour Party gives the fairly marginal Liberal Democrats a hand up by standing aside for them in multiple seats is to redouble the mistake. Central to both mistakes is a failure to adequately grasp the idea that, now as then, workers need our own independent political voice.

## THE 20S: LIBERAL-SUPPORTED LABOUR GOVERNMENTS

Labour's big leap came in the 1918 election, held on the threshold of a post-war radicalisation, and with all men and many women able to vote for the first time, and when it broke the pact with the Liberals. Although it gained only 17 more seats, its vote more than tripled to 20.8%. The Liberals split over continuing the wartime coalition with the Tories, with "Lloyd George" and "Asquith" Liberals winning 13% each. The Tories went down 8% to 38%, but won a clear majority.

The growth of the unions, a strengthening of working-class consciousness, waves of mass workers' struggles in Britain and revolutions in Europe, all played through in Labour's continued rise. In 1922, Labour won 29.7% and almost tripled its parliamentary group to 142. In 1923 it won 30.7% and 191 seats, and together with the Liberals denied the Tories their majority.

This was an unprecedented political situation for Britain. A working class-based political party now became the government for the first time. But as socialist historian Brian Pearce put it, this first Labour government "marked a new phase both in the advance of the working-class movement and in the degeneration of its leadership".

The new Labour prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald, had opposed World War 1 on a pacifist basis, and came from the "soft left" of the Labour Party, then represented by the ILP (which was, literally, a "party within a party"). His government carried out some pro-working class reforms, notably the Wheatley Housing Act of 1924.

But the Labour leaders had tamed the radicalism widespread after the war. Far from being socialist, the Labour government did not even begin to approach the more radical

reformism of 1945. It carried out no nationalisations; it maintained and administered the British empire with essentially no changes; it did not disband the strike-breaking organisations soon put into operation by the Tories in the 1926 General Strike.

MacDonald included Liberals in his cabinet, in addition to the ex-Liberal minister Viscount Haldane, symbolising a string of Liberal politicians' migration to Labour.

This government was not very different from the Liberal one of 1906; it demonstrated the strict limits of Labour's *political* break from Liberalism even after it had displaced the Liberals as the UK's second party *and* formally come out for socialism (in Clause 4 of the party rulebook, adopted in 1918).

Labour depended on the Liberals for its majority, but the Labour leaders' left-Liberal politics were almost certainly more decisive for determining what they did and did not do. They showed no real sign of wanting to escape the political limits they faced.

The second MacDonald government (1929-31) was also dependent on Liberal support, and again committed to essentially Liberal politics. Its response to the economic crisis after 1929 was essentially an orthodox free-trader one, and more conservative in fact than the Liberals, who became the first big party to back "Keynesian" public spending.

Rejecting proposals for state intervention and provision to deal with burgeoning unemployment, the Labour government instead cut unemployment benefit, putting it to the right of some prominent Liberals. The cuts program eventually led to a split in the party, with MacDonald and his allies defecting to lead a Tory-dominated national government, but even on the eve of the split a majority of cabinet members supported further cuts in the dole (11-9).

## THE WARTIME COALITION

In the First World War, Labour had entered the Liberal-led coalition along with the Tories, but it was fairly marginal to it. There was only Labour cabinet member, and great swathes of the Labour Party and labour movement regarded the coalition as wrong and illegitimate.

In the Second World War, Labour was the major coalition partner with Winston Churchill's Tories, holding five cabinet posts alongside eight Tories and three others. Labour leader Clement Attlee was deputy prime minister.

Today it is often argued that participation in coalition with the Tories was a necessary prelude to Labour's election victory and the reforming government from 1945. But in fact that victory was based on widespread working-class hostility to the Tories, on a wave of left-reformist political radicalisation, and on a prompt withdrawal from the coalition (in May 1945, before the war ended).

## THE 70S: "THE BANKS CAN NOW SLEEP SAFELY"

After the war, the Liberals declined dramatically, winning only 2.5% in the 1951 general election. Between the 1970 and February 1974 elections, the Liberal vote recovered from 7.5 to 19.3%, as a section of voters looked for "middle ground" in the hot class struggles of those years. In the October 1974 election, they maintained 18.3%; Labour, which since February had led a minority government, now gained a majority of three.

Alongside the rise of working-class struggles, the old working-class politics was in crisis. It would either be reconstituted on a more radical basis, as socialists fought for in the '70s and early '80s, or decline severely, as eventually happened after many defeats for the labour movement and left. Increased support for Liberals was a symptom of this.

In 1977 Labour lost its small majority through by-election defeats. Prime Minister James Callaghan made a deal with the Lib-

erals to remain in office. To win Liberal support, the government promised to step away from the relatively radical policies it had included in its 1974 manifesto — and some of which it had implemented in 1974, despite being a minority administration, because the Tories and Liberals were convinced blocking these measures would discredit them.

In fact Callaghan and co. had already shifted further to the right when they made a deal to secure an IMF bail-out in 1976.

The terms of the Lib-Lab pact included direct elections to the European Parliament (which many on the left, motivated by nationalism, opposed) and progress on establishing devolution in Scotland and Wales.

But Labour also committed to abandon proposals to expand local authority-run "direct works" projects. There was also strong implied commitment as to what Labour would not do. "The banks", declared Liberal leader David Steel, "can now sleep safely". In addition to his broader meaning, he boasted specifically that thanks to the Liberals' nationalisation of the banks and insurance companies was now off the agenda.

As *Workers' Action* commented at the time: "Labour's pact with the Liberals is a pact of betrayal. Not because of its [specific] terms, but because this pact draws the Government even further away from any accountability to the organised working class..."

"In reality there has been nothing socialist in the government's policy even without the Liberals... What makes the Labour Party a working-class party is its connection with the organised working class. And what makes the pact with the Liberals criminal is that Callaghan says to the working class: I will consult the junior Tories before I consult any decisions of the working-class movement..."

"The terms of the pact don't give the Liberals much. There wasn't much left to give. Socialism as a guiding principle or goal has been surrendered not by this government but by the leaders of the Labour Party from its inception 71 years ago..."

"But the temporary informal coalition is an open rebuke to the Labour left, a clear victory for the coalitionist forces [represented by various Labour] Libs in Labs clothing."

*Workers' Action* called for an organised campaign in the Labour Party and the unions to oppose and overthrow the pact. In fact the pact fizzled out in 1978, leaving Labour once again a minority government — but one still committed to pro-capitalist, essentially Liberal policies. Thus the great workers' struggles of the '70s ended with Labour paving the way for Thatcher's first victory in 1979.

## FOR CLASS POLITICS

The "Corbyn surge" beginning in 2015 opened possibilities to renew and rebuild the labour movement and working-class politics, many of which had been lost — at least temporarily — by the time Jeremy Corbyn departed as Labour leader in 2020.

The basic problem is that, even with a greatly expanded Labour membership, the labour movement's base in workplaces and working-class communities has continued to stagnate and decay. In many respects "Corbynism" did not even try to rebuild it.

Labour post-2015 was not "too much" a working-class party, but "not enough" one (the phrase is from *Tribune* magazine, though *Tribune* was expressing wrong, pro-Brexit conclusions).

The defeats we have suffered are not a result of failure to make deals with non-labour movement-based, pro-capitalist parties like the Lib Dems, but a failure to build up working-class consciousness and organisation, as ends in themselves and as a more solid platform for Labour and socialist advance.

"Progressive alliance" deals and politics cut against this urgent necessary work. □



# The anatomy of Labour's "youthquake"

By Matt Cooper

In the 2017 British general election, Labour succeeded in closing a 20% deficit in the course of the campaign. Labour ended up with only 2% less than the Conservatives, and denied them a majority.

There were many reasons for that turnaround. One was a "youthquake" — an increase in turnout among younger voters who overwhelmingly voted Labour. The effect was so notable that the Oxford English Dictionary made "youthquake" their neologism of the year.

In the 2017 election around 62% of 18-24 year olds voted Labour. Only 27% voted Conservative. (Unless otherwise stated, data on age and voting is taken from Ipsos

The age gradients for general elections since October 1974 are: 1992 — 3.5 / 1997 — 3.4 / 2001 — 3.0 / 2005 — 3.2 / 2010 — 2.7 / 2015 — 7.8 / 2017 — 13.8 / 2019 — 17.5

From 1974 to 2010 there was an average age gradient of +3. There was, on average, 15 points more support for Labour over the Conservatives among 18-24 year-old voters than among over 65s. Between 1974 and 2010 young people voted on average 39% Labour and 32% Conservative; older people voted 43% Tory, 35% Labour.

2015 saw a departure from this general pattern. The change went much further in 2017 and 2019.

There was a large increase in young people voting Labour in 2017, and even more so in 2019, but also increases in Conservative

the emergence of current trends.

There are two short books on the issue. Keir Milburn's *Left Generation* (2019) contains no meaningful empirical data on young people and their motivations. Milburn dumps truck loads of questionable theory onto the subject until the reality is no longer visible.

His conclusions are plausible enough, suggesting the 2008 financial crisis and ensuing austerity have led young people to reject the pre-crisis dominance of neo-liberalism and that activism around Occupy and similar movements has rippled out into more general political culture among young people. He offers no evidence that what is plausible is also true.

A more useful and empirical analysis can be found in James Sloam and Matt Henn's *Youthquake 2017: The Rise of Young Cosmopolitans in Britain* (2019). It suggests the development of a culture of "left-cosmopolitanism" among younger Britons, a somewhat vaguely defined set of attitudes including both economically left-wing views (greater state spending on health, homelessness and wealth redistribution) and an anti-nationalist cosmopolitan outlook (pro-EU, accepting of immigration, welcoming of cultural diversity).

## COSMOPOLITAN

Poll data from both 2017 and 2019 tends to confirm this view that younger voters are distinguished by a culture of cosmopolitanism against older voters' socially conservative nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiment. A similar, although weaker, trend can be seen in older voters who appear to be becoming more economically right-wing. With straightforward links between economic position and voting becoming weaker, it appears that the cultural differences of cosmopolitanism against nationalism are more important.

The poll data on the issues that voters feel are important is patchy, but some policy issues stand out as having strong age-related levels of support. The age gradients here are not strictly comparable with those for voting above, and will necessarily appear less strong.

In the 2019 election the strongest differentiators in two polls (by Lord Ashcroft and YouGov) were:

For young voters:

- Climate change (+5.10 YouGov, +3.8 Ashcroft)
- Cost of living (+3.4 Ashcroft)
- Inequality/homelessness (+2.2 Ashcroft)

For older voters:

- "Getting Brexit done" (-6.4 Ashcroft, -4.08 YouGov)
- Immigration/asylum/ travellers (-4.29 YouGov, -2.8 Ashcroft)
- Strong leadership (-2.6 Ashcroft)
- Law and order (-2.85 YouGov, -2.4 Ashcroft)
- Defence and security (-2.04 YouGov)

support from older voters.

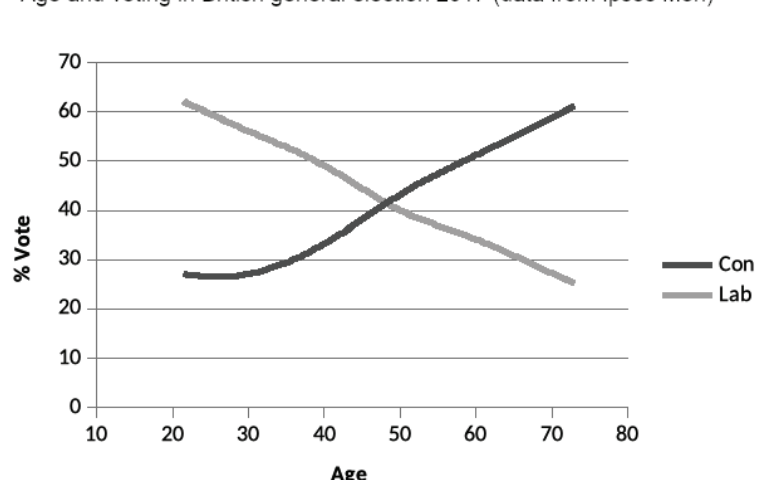
This appears not to be just the reflection of some other demographic trait. For example, young people are more educated than older people, but young people's voting in 2017 and 2019 was not simply the product of young students and graduates voting Labour. Among young people, those of all educational backgrounds tended to vote Labour (although the least educated young men far less so).

Nor was it just a matter of younger people being worse-off and more concentrated in "worse" jobs. The pollsters all use the rather blunt tool of the ABC1/C2DE classification. But that crude measure shows young people from manual occupational backgrounds D and E only slightly more likely to vote Labour than those from professional backgrounds (and some polls show no differences at all).

Although the more educated, women and those from a BAME background were most likely to vote Labour, Labour voting was generally high among all young people, with the partial exception of young men with no or few educational qualifications.

There is a lack of hard evidence on why. As far as I am aware there have been no large scale studies of the political views of young people in the UK since studies around the 2001 and 2010 elections, well before

Age and voting in British general election 2017 (data from Ipsos Mori)



Another way of looking at this comes from ideas recently developed by John Curtice and Ian Simpson in *British Social Attitudes*.

Their analysis of the 2017 election in BSA 35 (2018) suggests that the surge in young people voting Labour was associated with a move of 2016 Remain voters to Labour. Prior to 2015 whether someone was socially liberal or socially conservative had some impact on their voting, but that impact has become much more marked since the Brexit referendum and Labour's shift left (and the Conservatives' shift to a more right-populist position).

This has led to a move of socially liberal voters away from the Tories and many younger first-time voters (who are strongly social liberal) to Labour. While left-right patterns still underpin voting for Labour and the Tories, the move of all types of social liberals towards Labour has increased its youth vote. A lack of clear data means that we do not know if some young socially liberal youth who are also "right-wing" in the sense of anti-egalitarian have been drawn to Labour.

## LUMPING

It is probably wrong for Sloam and Henn to call these voters "left-cosmopolitans", and a close reading of their analysis suggests that they are lumping all cosmopolitans together, whether they are left-wing or not. It also suggests that Milburn's view that a large part of this young cohort constitutes a unitary age-class is wrong. As this cohort

ages and economic issues assert themselves, it is likely to split along class lines.

But currently, it appears that the surge in the Labour vote was strongly influenced by the increasing cultural cleavage in British society fuelled by Brexit.

There is a lack of evidence to show that young people were attracted towards Labour's left-wing programme, though, equally, no evidence that they were not.

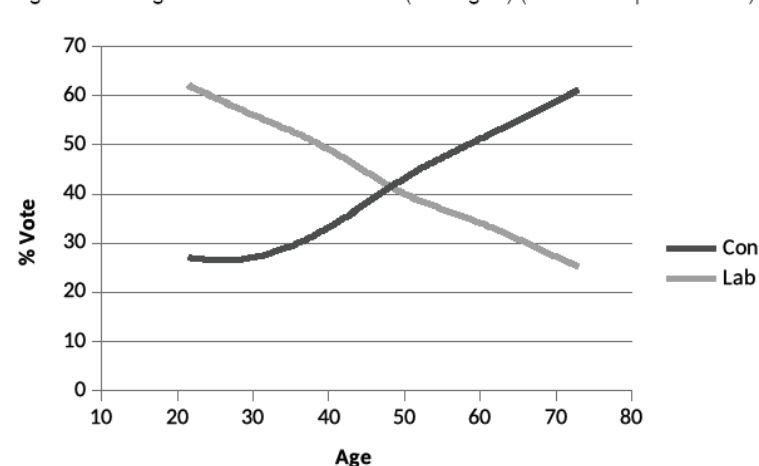
It is clear that some young people were enthusiasts for Corbyn's Labour, it is unclear the extent to which this was the case in younger voters as a whole. The most important issue (by some distance) to young voters was climate change. More traditional left-right issues featured less prominently.

The large-scale rallying of young people to a Labour Party which they must have seen as left-wing (even if many, perhaps, do not consider themselves all that left-wing) is something to build on. The lack even of a serious attempt to build a real Labour youth movement has to be counted as one of the main failures of the Corbyn years.

But the evidence suggests this is not a generation of oven-ready socialists. Notably, trade union density among employed 16-24 year olds is below 5%, while it is above 35% for workers over the age of 35.

The future of these cohorts of younger voters remains to be determined by the way that the left and labour movement relate to them. □

Age and voting in elections 1987-2010 (averaged) (data from Ipsos MORI)



MORI polling data).

Meanwhile, only 25% of over-65s voted Labour, while 61% voted Conservative. Among the youngest age group Labour had a lead of 35 percentage points, among the oldest the Conservatives had a lead of 36 points. In the 2019 election this difference was even greater, with a Labour lead of 43 points among the youngest voters, and a 47 point Tory lead among the over-65s.

This split is not business as usual. Young people have always been more likely to vote Labour than older people in British general elections (this pattern goes back to at least 1974, probably further). In Conservative landslides more young people voted Tory than Labour but by a smaller margin than older voters. To see the pattern of this I have condensed voting figures by age into a single measure, the "age gradient".

The higher this figure, the greater the tendency for young people to vote Labour and older people to vote Conservative in that election. The figure is the increase in the percentage Labour/decrease in the Conservative vote for each ten years change in a voters' age, with a positive figure showing more young people voting Labour. This is a fairly rough and ready metric designed to easily see how voting patterns have changed over time.



# In praise of Mega2

By Paul Hampton

The Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (Mega) is a project to publish a complete critical edition of the publications, manuscripts and correspondence of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The project is still incomplete after almost a century. However as more materials are published, we get a far deeper understanding of the origins and development of Marxism. For anyone interested in working class self-emancipation, the Mega should be an irreplaceable referent.

The Mega was conceived after the Russian revolution. The Bolsheviks wanted to make the theoretical legacy of Marx and Engels available to the revolutionary working-class movement. In 1921 David Rjazanov was appointed director of the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow. He prepared the first editions of the Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (known as Mega1). In 1927 the first of a planned 42 volumes appeared. Twelve volumes came out over the next six years.

In 1931, Rjazanov was arrested and Mega1 effectively terminated by Stalinism. The Stalinist states brought out editions of Marx and Engels' writings in Russian, German and English editions. From the 1950s the East German state produced the Marx-Engels-Werke (MEW), while from 1975 the 50 volume English Marx-Engels Collected Works (MECW) was produced. These disseminated a huge quantity of Marx and Engels' materials, but the scholarly apparatus was often marred by the dogmas of Stalinism.

## MEGA2

The second Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (Mega2) was also conceived in East Germany during the late 1960s. The first volume appeared in 1975, with a further 39 volumes appearing before the collapse of the USSR and Eastern European Stalinism.

A new era began in 1990 when the Internationale Marx-Engels Stiftung (IMES) was established in Amsterdam. This network brought together the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (BBAW), the International Institute of Social History (IISG, Amsterdam), the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI, Moscow) and other bodies to coordinate the further production of volumes.

In 1998 the first 'new' volume was published. In total, 69 volumes have now come out and once completed, the collection will



Jenny Marx, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, as portrayed in the film "The Young Marx"

entail 114 volumes. Each has an elaborate apparatus and contextual annotation (in German). In 2008 Mega2 started its digital project along with researchers from Tohoku University in Japan.

Mega2 consists of four sections, with volumes published and total planned:

- Part I: Works, articles, drafts — 23/32
- Part II: Capital and the preliminary studies — 15/15
- Part III: Correspondence — 14/35
- Part IV: Excerpts, notes, marginalia — 15/32

## I: WORKS, ARTICLES, DRAFTS

The largest number of volumes so far cover Marx and Engels' published works, articles and drafts. This includes much of their journalism throughout the 1850s. Marx and Engels contributed articles to 120 newspapers in total — most were originally published anonymously. A comprehensive survey of their journalism for the Mega2 has found a further 200 articles newly ascribed to them, to add to the materials already known.

There is some controversy about some of the volumes in this section. The so-called 1844 *Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts* are published as if they were an independent work. They were brought out separately from the excerpts (in Part IV), making it harder to understand the development of Marx's thinking during this time. Similarly, *The German Ideology*, published in Mega2 in 2017, still collates the fragmentary manu-

scripts as if they were a finished 'work'.

There is now an English translation of the original Feuerbach manuscript, produced by Terrell Carver and Daniel Blank, along with a separate commentary, which explains how the *German Ideology* book myth was created. Far from elaborating a philosophy of historical materialism, Marx and Engels were mostly settling accounts with some of their previously close contemporaries.

## II: CAPITAL

Part II of Mega2 (*Capital* and the related studies) was finally completed in 2013. Eight of the texts contain manuscripts published for the first time. Some sections of the Mega2 *Capital* are also accessible on Megadigital. They allow us to reconfigure our understanding of Marx's primary work.

First, they show there is no definitive edition of *Capital* volume 1. Marx published three German editions in 1867, 1872 and in 1883. However he also produced a revised French edition in 1872-75. The first English edition (1887) was prepared by Engels. He also produced a fourth German edition.

Marx did not finish *Capital* volumes 2 and 3. Both were published by Engels. A comparison with Marx's original drafts shows some small but significant changes. The manuscript used for *Capital* III has now been translated into English by Ben Fowkes (introduced by Fred Moseley), shedding more light on many debates. For example it is clear that the "tendency for the rate of profit to fall" is not the last word (or even the main aspect) of Marx's incomplete crisis theory.

There is no volume 4 of *Capital* — or what has been known as *Theories of Surplus Value*. These were in fact part of the 1861-63 manuscripts, literature reviews interspersed with early drafts of his own thinking. These have previously been translated into English in MECW. Some of the drafts became part of *Capital*, others were discarded. Marx's political economy remained unfinished and underdeveloped, far more 'open' than previously presented.

## III: CORRESPONDENCE

Marx and Engels exchanged letters with over 2,000 correspondents from all over Europe and the United States. They included other socialists and family members, publishers and friends, authorities and adversaries. Previous editions published and translated the letters of Marx and Engels themselves.

However Mega2 makes accessible (often for the first time) the letters that were written to Marx and Engels. This is a far better way to understand how they developed their thinking through interaction with others, rather than in splendid isolation. Such correspondence brings out a more rounded sense of Marx and Engels as individuals, as well as contextualising their politics in the time they lived.

## IV: EXCERPTS, NOTES, MARGINALIA

Probably the most exciting aspect of the Mega2 concerns the publication of Marx and Engels' notebooks of excerpts. These demonstrate the range of philosophers, economists, activists and other thinkers that they learned from. The notebooks, with passages copied verbatim or summarised from the works of others (some long forgotten), spread across multiple languages and sometimes annotated with their own observations, shed new light on how Marxism developed.

Many of Marx's early notebooks, made in Kreuznach (1843), Paris (1844) and Manchester (1845) are now available. They demonstrate the origins of his political economy in reading some of the classics of bourgeois thought, including Adam Smith and David Ricardo. This was synthesised with the work of contemporary revolutionary activists.

For example many will have heard Marx's famous dictum in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) that "workers have no country". Less known is the quote Marx recorded in his notebooks (Mega2 IV/3: 427). Brissot de Warville, a French revolutionary and slavery abolitionist had written decades before that "there can be no virtue since three-quarters of the people have no property; for without property the people have no country".

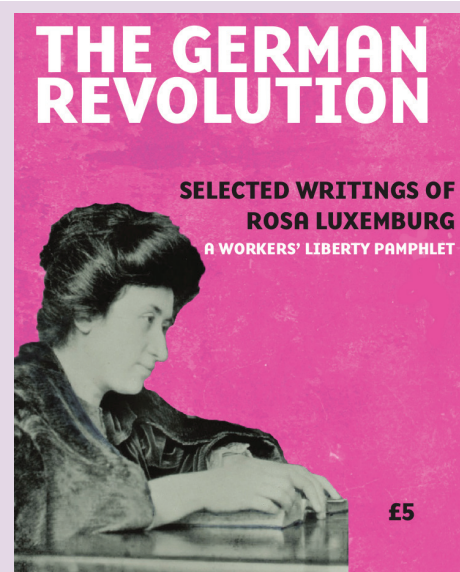
After his exile to London in 1849, Marx went to the British Museum and filled 24 notebooks, now known as the *London Notebooks*. These contain a substantial number of excerpts on agricultural chemistry, including Marx's first usage of the concept of metabolism. This has inspired an ecological reading of Marx, vital for today's climate activists.

Marx's notebooks, known as *Books of Crisis*, show Marx grappling with the 1857 crisis as it unfolded, one of the first global economic crises in history. After 1868, Marx continued to study natural sciences seriously, intensively researching agrosience and even modifying his judgement about scientists such as Justus von Liebig and Carl Nikolaus Fraas. This is a fertile starting point for ecological Marxism.

During the last fifteen years of his life Marx produced one-third of his notebooks. Half of these deal with natural sciences. Others tackle anthropology and non-capitalist societies across the globe. All illustrate the inquisitive, expansive research Marx and Engels continued to explore until their deaths.

The continued publication of Mega2 volumes will shed new light on Marxism. Old questions and controversies can be revisited. New approaches and different vistas open up. Marxists seek to understand reality in order to change it. Understanding how Marx and Engels went about their work provides a method we can develop in today's conditions. □

- The Mega2 project is very well explained in Gerald Hubmann and Marcel van der Linden, *Marx's Capital: An Unfinishable Project?* (2019)



This pamphlet from Workers' Liberty, "The German Revolution: Selected Writings of Rosa Luxemburg", contains Rosa Luxemburg's major articles from 1918-9.

They span the time from when the German revolution of 1918-9 broke out, and she was released from jail on 8 November 1918, through to her murder on 15 January 1919 by a right-wing militia operating under the protection of the Social Democratic government.

An introduction is provided by Paul Vernadsky, author of the Workers' Liberty book "The Russian Revolution: When Workers Took Power". It tells the story of the German revolution and discusses the findings of recent scholarship on the events.

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## Where we stand

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. The capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class must unite to struggle against capitalist power in the workplace and in wider society.

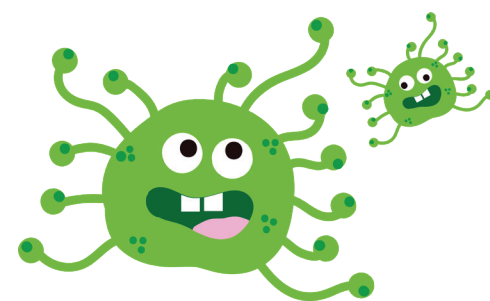
The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

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- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us! □

# The virus



## Diary

By Emma Rickman

"You know that Corona sales have plummeted? They've lost millions."

"What?"

"Yeah you can get a crate on special offer in Morrisons — we should throw a barbecue."

"Fucking...what...?"

"The beer! You plant-pot..."

For the last few weeks the conversations at work have been about trivialising:

"It's only old people and sick people who're at risk; and they die of the flu every year anyway but no-one cares — everyone here will be fine"

("Except you D, you're basically at death's door.")

Making fun:

"Me and the missus were at the check-outs and saw these two women with a trolley-load of loo-rol. We're all staring at them and thinking the same thing, so I said to my missus quite loudly 'Is one of the symptoms of this virus diarrhoea?!'"

Scaremongering:

"J can you stop sending me videos of dead bodies and bags of blood from Iran...?"

And when the company calls a meeting about it, ridiculing:

"So we're having a meeting to discuss why we should stay away from each other?! What the hell are they so worried about?!"

The meeting is lead by the current plant manager, who reads out a corporate circular I've already seen. Veolia is continuing

operations as normal, but has contingency plans in place for staff shortages; as with the government statements, all details of these plans "will become available as and when they're needed" as "the situation continues to develop".

## COVID-19

Covid-19 waste at the time of the meeting was categorised as "Type B" clinical waste and therefore must be incinerated above the operating temperatures of the ERF (1500 Celsius). Since the meeting I've learned that this waste is now classified as a separate, highly hazardous category, and is being dealt with by specialist teams — plant workers at the ERF [Energy Recovery Facility] don't know the details of its collection and disposal.

If a person is self-isolating, they are instructed to double-bag all bin waste and await test results. If they test positive, a specialist clinical waste team will collect the bags. If they test negative, the bags are collected by Veolia as normal.

A discussion around PPE and disinfection follows. D would like clarification on wearing full-breathing apparatus and hosing the crane-grabs; his manager says that none of the existing procedures have changed, that D can wear full-mask if he feels uncomfortable, but that the risks of contamination from bin waste are the same as they've always been. M requests sanitiser at the reception and weighbridge; G confirms that's already under way.

Sickness absence procedures and policy will remain the same for the virus as with any other illness. This procedure is not outlined in the meeting, but it's an unpopular policy that led to an industrial dispute

last year.

In the control room, J explains that the "Bradford Factor" Veolia's HR department uses is a way of keeping the number of worker sickness absences below a certain threshold; workers are arbitrarily disciplined if they phone in sick more than three times during a financial year.

Phoning in sick for several short periods marks you down for disciplining earlier than taking one long period of absence. However, absences of longer than 10 days require doctor's notes and HR proceedings either way.

Veolia's policy initially forced line managers to initiate this procedure, regardless of their opinion of the worker, and this was what triggered union action last year. I found this out the hard way during my first winter at the plant with a string of bad colds — instead of gritting my teeth and going back to work mid-week, I should have just taken the week off.

## DISCIPLINARY

My manager was considerate and very reluctant, but he warned me that if I called in sick during the next six months I'd begin a disciplinary procedure. The number of complaints from workers at all levels caused Veolia to revise this instruction, and line-managers can now choose not to discipline for sickness unless they want to. My line manager does seem like a decent person in this regard, and I can understand why workers trust him, but this is no solution — he'll be retiring soon.

During the discussion about Veolia's inadequate policy, I ask my mentor what I should do if my partner needs to self-isolate. He's

sarcastic and tells me: isolate yourself, obviously, but you'll be disciplined. P asks about self-diagnosis while GP surgeries are closed.

"If we have symptoms, and self-isolate for seven days, but then test negative — will we be disciplined? And if we then get better, go back to work, and get symptoms again — will we be expected to stay in? How can we prove our symptoms without sick notes? Does Veolia want us to come into work if we've got symptoms, just in case we haven't got it?"

At least we have sick pay, a steady income and secure jobs. The plant can and does operate, on nights, with four operators. There are plenty of operators who would provide emergency cover if offered overtime.

However, the plant will shut down without waste deliveries, and not collecting domestic waste would be a disaster for the city and a breach of contract with the city council. I suspect it will be delivery drivers who will cause the most disruption when they start contracting the virus.

I suspect that a manager, somewhere, has a contingency plan for this such as hiring contractors from outside the city... or maybe they don't.

Our college course has been cancelled and all teaching will take place online for the foreseeable. At first my college friends think they can have the day off (or in the pub) but then realise their managers have all been sent the same email: "Damn, looks like we're gonna work." □

• Emma Rickman is an engineering apprentice at a Combined Heat and Power plant in Sheffield.

# Students: after the strike, into the shutdown

By Maisie Sanders

The fourth week of the strikes by the UCU university staff union (9 to 13 March) saw twelve student occupations: UCL, University of the Arts London, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Liverpool, Imperial, Manchester, Exeter, Brighton, Glasgow, Nottingham and the Royal College of Art.

Sussex students blockaded multiple university car parks, Exeter students disrupted an open day, and Leeds students held a sit-in during a University Senate meeting, forcing it to be adjourned to a non-strike day. The Cambridge occupation expanded to take three floors of the Old Schools building, including the office of Chief Investment Officer and USS negotiator Anthony Odgers.

Staff and students at Kent stormed their Senate meeting to protest upcoming huge cuts, including 500 compulsory redundancies.

Now many universities have started to shut down and go online because of the Covid-19

pandemic. Only Edinburgh is still in occupation. The UCU has decided to suspend the rebalots necessary for further escalation of its dispute. On Friday 13 March many pickets were cancelled and teach-outs were moved "online" due to fears of infection.

## SUSPENSION

The temporary suspension could mean a very damaging loss of momentum for the dispute. But the issues aren't going away.

Student Strike Solidarity is continuing to hold regular online meetings to discuss plans for campaigning, particularly around Covid-19. Staff on short-term contracts have no guarantee that they will still have their jobs once the crisis eases, and zero-hours and outsourced staff still do not know if they will be entitled to sick pay.

Many students who work will struggle to cope if they self-isolate, lose their jobs or have hours cut. It is unclear what will happen to exams and coursework, when students will not have access to library resources and many will be ill.

Students in halls need assurances that they will not be charged rent if they leave university accommodation to return home. Normally, students can only exit the contract early if they find another to take over their room.

At SOAS (the School of Oriental and African Studies, in London), a student strike is planned after a cleaner was asked to clean a room contaminated with Covid-19 without personal protective equipment, and without being informed of the risk. Potential rent strikes are also being discussed by students living in halls, demanding they be allowed to leave their contracts early to avoid paying rent for accommodation they are not living in.

Staff and students should agree shared demands on management, including things like full sick pay, suspension of rent in halls, no attendance monitoring for online lectures, an end to outsourcing and zero-hours contracts, adequate hygiene provision, and representation for staff unions on committees set up to manage the crisis. □



## Tube drivers vote for strikes



By Ollie Moore

London Underground drivers in the Aslef union have voted by a 95.2% majority for strikes to win an improved settlement on pay and conditions, on a 74.5% turnout.

Although Aslef is a minority union on the Tube overall, it represents a slight majority of drivers. The result is significant, and smashes the arbitrary thresholds of the Tories' anti-union laws.

Aslef's pay claim overlaps substantially with other unions' claims, including in its demand for a 32-hour, four-day week. It also includes a sectional claim for a driver-specific salary increase to bring Tube drivers' pay more in line with that of drivers on mainline train companies.

The RMT, which is the majority union on the Tube, and which organises across all grades and departments, is currently balloting its members over pay and conditions, in a ballot running until 31 March.

Many Tube workers' immediate focus has now been claimed by the Covid-19 crisis, but demands for improved pay and work/life balance remain pressing. RMT has levelled a number of demands on London Underground over Covid-19. □

• See page 7

# Postal workers vote for strikes, but union holds back

By Ollie Moore

Postal workers in the Communication Workers Union (CWU) have voted by 94.5%, on a 63.4% turnout, for industrial action in their dispute with Royal Mail over working conditions and job security.

The CWU was forced to hold a new ballot after a previous vote, which returned a 97% majority on a 76% turnout, was injunctioned by the High Court, after Royal Mail bosses claimed it breached anti-union legislation.

However, the CWU's leadership has declared it will not be calling strikes, and has instead demanded that the post is designated as an additional emergency service during the Covid-19 crisis. In an article in the *Mirror*, CWU general secretary Dave Ward said the union will be "writing to the Prime Minister to gain the government's support for

this approach."

It is not clear what additional remit or duties "emergency service" designation would involve for postal workers, or what additional powers it might give to Royal Mail as an employer.

Ward writes: "We have called for Royal Mail Group to step back from their attacks in the workplace, imposing un-agreed change and destroying the very morale and vocational sense of purpose the nation now needs and work with the union to enact our proposal.

"If we can agree the introduction of the very best health and safety provisions and equipment that can guarantee our members safety, they will become an additional emergency service."

It is unclear how the union intends to respond if Royal Mail refuse to "step back from their attacks", or what its next steps might be now that it has ruled out calling

a strike.

The decision to take this approach seems to have been decided entirely by the CWU leadership, with no prior discussion amongst members.

A North London postal worker told *Solidarity*: "As a rank-and-file postal worker and union member, I'm well aware of how important we are during this crisis. However, with no commitment so far from the company or the state to protect our jobs and conditions, it seems bizarre to commit to not striking, apparently unconditionally.

"Royal Mail have top form when it comes to going back on agreements — look at how they reneged on the 'Four Pillars' agreement, one of the catalysts for the current dispute. It seems pathetic to try to endear yourself to the current far-right government. Union leaders can't keep making these decisions without consulting us." □

## Full pay at BEIS



John Moloney

We met the Cabinet Office last week, and have two more meetings scheduled this week. We're pressing a number of key demands, including the right for any worker with an underlying condition to stay at home, on full pay, regardless of whether they have symptoms.

We want the employer to ensure the latest government advice is actually adhered to regarding our members, and they won't suffer any detriment for sticking to those policies — which is ironic, considering that the main employer is the government itself.

We're also taking up outsourced workers' issues very strongly. We're demanding full pay for all outsourced workers who have to self-isolate. In some areas, we've already won this — for example at BEIS London.

That's a department where our outsourced worker members are well organised and recently won victories after sustained strikes. That shows that where organisation is stronger, you can make gains. We want to organise more outsourced workers into the union to push these demands across the civil service.

Museums and galleries are likely to close in the coming weeks, and we're fighting for our members there who are on zero hour contracts to be guaranteed full pay, based on an average of what they work, if so. We're also preparing for the possibility that employers will attempt to make temporary lay offs. □

• John Moloney is assistant general secretary of PCS, writing here in a personal capacity.

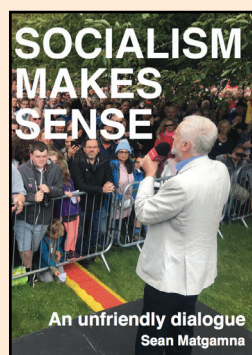
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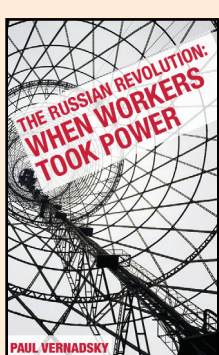
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**Daniel Randall on Sanders, Biden, and the movement**

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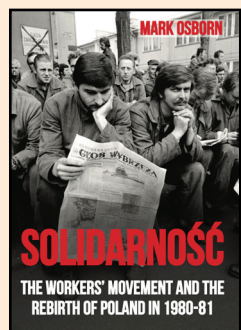
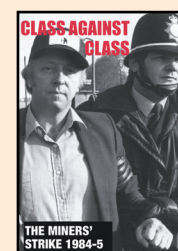
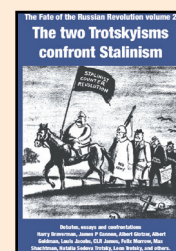
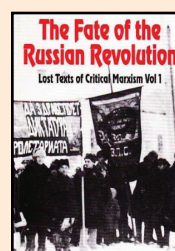
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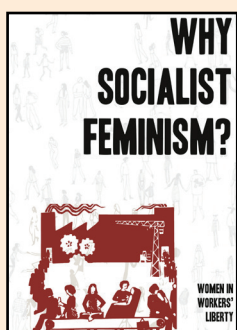
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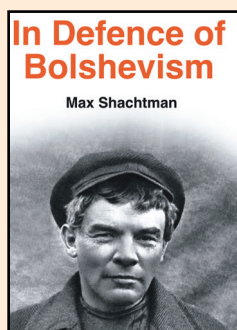
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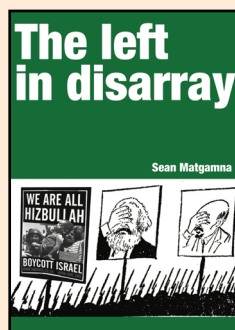
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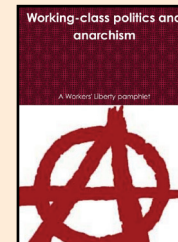
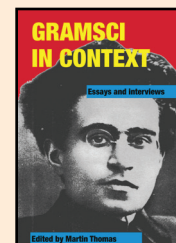
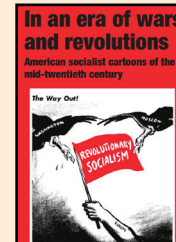
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# Solidarity

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## Anti-migrant policies worsen Covid-19 dangers

By Ben Towse

The harsh regime of hostile policies imposed on both documented and undocumented migrants living in this country is already a racist scandal.

Now, with the spread of Covid-19, these policies put migrants at increased risk and could exacerbate the public health crisis. Labour, our unions and our movement must demand immediate action to protect migrants.

1500 to 2000 people are imprisoned in the UK's immigration detention centres. Close-quarters incarceration and the frequent moving of detainees between centres mean that Covid-19 could spread rapidly and put both detainees and staff working in the detention system at heightened risk.

Migrants' rights groups have already issued a call to free all immigration detainees. The government must let them leave immediately, while ensuring they are supported with decent healthcare as needed,

and decent housing and financial support so that those who need to self-isolate can do so. Any workers sent home as a result must be kept on full pay.

Similarly, asylum seekers sheltered in temporary accommodation need urgent support and protection. This temporary accommodation has been contracted out by the government to private businesses, and it is often overcrowded.

We need independent health inspections of asylum accommodation; relocation of particularly vulnerable people and anyone in accommodation found to be below standards; and specific healthcare provision.

For both asylum seekers needing relocation, and any released detainees who don't have decent housing to which they can return – as well as all homeless people, whether UK citizens or immigrants – the government must be prepared to requisition housing if necessary.

This might mean homes left empty by landlords and property

speculators, or hotel rooms and the like. Decent-quality, warm, non-overcrowded housing is a human right at any time, and even more so in a public health crisis.

We know from extensive evidence that NHS charging and the threat of information being shared with the Home Office deters migrants from accessing healthcare. Even where specific diseases are exempt, as Covid-19 is, there are still charges for any other conditions they might have at the same time, plus the threat of being targeted by immigration enforcement.

### NHS

All NHS charging must be halted immediately, a firewall must be established to prevent any data-sharing with immigration authorities, and the government must mount a publicity campaign to let everyone know they can access the NHS without fear.

As increasing numbers of workers are asked to self-isolate, there has been widespread discussion

of the need for full financial support. We can't obey medical advice if staying home means not having enough money to feed ourselves or keep the heating on. That includes everyone. So the pernicious "no recourse to public funds" conditions that deny the majority of migrants access to social security must be suspended right now.

Similarly, the Home Office needs to suspend the conditions that force many visa-holders to report in regularly, and must issue reassurances that anyone forced to miss appointments or deadlines will face no penalty.

The government has already introduced some limited visa extensions for Chinese nationals. This isn't enough. Anyone needing to self-isolate, or anyone facing a requirement to return to any high-risk region around the world, must be granted an automatic and unconditional extension. The Home Office must issue physical documents confirming this to everyone affected.

Given that individuals' circumstances can be complex, and the situation is changing rapidly, it would be safest and simplest for the government just to extend all visas and suspend all immigration enforcement.

The demands raised here are temporary measures to face the crisis. But most of them would ideally be permanent.

Public health crises force us to remember that our individual well-being is connected to that of others around us. As long as any of us are subject to repression and precarity, none of us can truly be free and secure. When the crisis subsides, let's not forget it.

Instead let's fight for a permanent end to the violent injustices of detention and deportation and for an NHS and social security system that are truly universal. □

• Reproduced with thanks from the Labour Campaign for Free Movement [labourfreemovement.org](http://labourfreemovement.org)

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