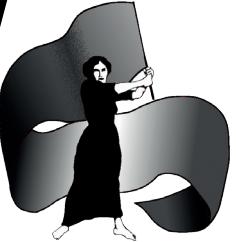


Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



INEQUALITY KILLS

- » Requisition industry to make tests and PPE
- » Full isolation pay for all

The care sector

Public ownership and public sector workers' conditions for the care sector

Page 8

Pause Brexit now!

The Tories' obsession with "getting Brexit done" regardless is costing us dear

Page 6

Safe and Equal campaign

Campaign for isolation pay for all, and PPE, grows

Page 2

Can we get R<1?

"Exit strategies"? How? We must fight for mass testing, PPE, isolation pay for all, and more

Pages 13-14

Getting safe and equal

By Michael Elms

The Safe and Equal campaign, safeandequal.org, is continuing to gather steam. A journalist from Left Foot Forward, briefed by our campaigners, confronted Business Minister Alok Sharma on the key issue of our campaign: the fact that many workers only have access to paltry Statutory Sick Pay when self-isolating, a fact which renders many workplaces, and especially NHS sites, unsafe.

Sharma responded by blustering about how much he respects carers, but refused to answer the question. As ever in this crisis, the Tories' Blitz-spirit waffle about their love for NHS staff can't mask their cold class contempt for workers.

The video clip of the exchange received tens of thousands of views when posted on [our Facebook page](#).

The online reach of our campaign, from a standing start, has grown nicely – and we are starting to make contact with individuals and groups of workers who want to take action over self-isolation pay and equality of conditions for agency and subcontracted staff. We have also received a series of requests for our workplace posters, and offers of assistance from leftwing MPs – on which we shall have more to report next week!

Our [home care workers' blog](#) has also been launched, along with plans for a sticker and poster campaign, aimed at finding new ways of getting into contact with care workers under conditions of lockdown and social distancing.

Tesco

The situation in Tesco has also increased in urgency. The chain has hired 50,000 new staff to replace workers who have left work due to the virus (because they are self-isolating, ill or for other reasons).

But we have heard reports of managers telling these new staff not to get comfortable; that they will be out the door again before too long. And the new hires are on worse terms and conditions than the workers they are replacing!

Although the leadership of USDAW, the main union in Tesco, has effectively shut down all real-world union ac-



Correction

The report in *Solidarity* 543 that workers at the NHS East London Foundation Trust have won big steps forward for isolation pay for agency workers was over-optimistic. A worker at ELFT says: "This is the bit we haven't won, and NHS England seem to have rowed back on it". □

tivity above workplace level, this is an urgent moment for a drive by supermarket workers to ensure safety at work – and the cornerstone of safety is equal and adequate workplace rights. □

MOMENTUM

What next for Momentum?

Socialists across the country are discussing candidates for the upcoming elections to the National Coordinating Group of Momentum.

The NCG was set up after an office "coup" abolished all previous democratic structures in Momentum. Left slates have run in previous elections, and won good numbers of votes, but generally office-supporting slates have won all or almost all the places, and the NCG has not been lively.

[Labour for a Socialist Europe](#) is discussing updates to a [platform](#) it adopted in January as a criterion for supporting candidates, and a number of activists have expressed interest on standing on that platform.

[Forward Momentum](#), a new grouping in Momentum led by organisers of The World Transformed (the festival run on the Labour Party conference fringe since 2016), has announced that it will "publish an updated set of proposals for the future of Momentum in a month's time".

It also says it will "stand candidates in the upcoming [Momentum] National Coordinating Group (NCG) elections", and promises "details" of an "open selection process" soon.

Its aim is to "refound Momentum so it is more democratic, member-led and capable of uniting the left".

Sadly, Forward Momentum, focusing on Momentum procedures, says little about the big "outside-world" issues – the pandemic, the Tory government. But supporters of the L4SE platform will of course seek to establish a cooperative working relation with Forward Momentum.

Momentum itself, a grouping which claims 40,000 members but didn't do much at the Labour Party's lively 2019 conference, is in flux.

It has produced a (not too bad, though bland) "statement" on the pandemic, bit.ly/mo-c-19, but has done nothing to campaign on it.

It promises NCG elections "soon" (they're now a year overdue), but has given no date. □

Inequality kills

“69 Editorial

This virus threatens the worse-off much more than the rich. Neither the scientists nor we know exactly how to combat the virus in general terms, but we do know what can and must be done to shield the worse-off.

In some countries, the first cases of Covid-19 were among better-off people who'd travelled as tourists to early-affected countries. But everywhere, as the pandemic proceeds, the worst-off are hit hardest.

The virus hits elderly people, or those with other health problems, much more than the young and otherwise healthy, and men somewhat more than women. But rich elderly men are doing ok. None of the deaths so far are of top capitalists.

Even if they're retired, they are well cared for, and they can shelter in big houses in uncrowded areas.

Those hit hardest are the elderly poor, often with other health problems, living in crowded care homes or in crowded housing, or living on their own with little help except from care workers on low wages and unprovided with PPE [Personal Protective Equipment].

African-Americans are dying disproportionately in the USA. Somalis are dying disproportionately in Sweden. Black and ethnic minority people, including black and ethnic minority health workers, are dying disproportionately in Britain.

Much about the different trajectories of the disease in different countries is unclear, and may come to look different over time.

Comparing countries

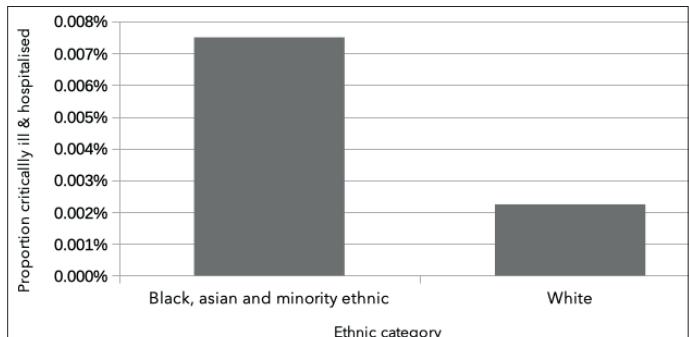
But the Gini coefficient is the most-used single-figure measure of a country's income inequality. And, so far at least, countries with lower Gini – Denmark, Finland, Germany, Sweden – are doing better than the countries with higher Gini – Italy, Spain, UK, USA. Italy is one of the countries hardest-hit by the virus: it also has the most crowded housing of all the big countries of Western Europe. Britain has the highest homeless-on-the-streets rate in Western Europe, and is doing badly in the pandemic.

Again, countries where workers have better sick-pay conditions, and so take time off work more often when they're sick (like Germany: average 18.3 sick days per worker per year) are doing better than Britain (4.4: the lowest in Europe after Ukraine, Malta, and Switzerland).

The labour movement can make a difference.

We can fight for – and have won, in a number of places – full isolation pay for all, including agency and zero-hours workers.

We can fight for – and have won here and there – workers' control over safe working conditions and PPE where



Critically ill or hospitalised, in UK, as a proportion of ethnic group. Using data from ICNARC, 4 April 2020, and national census data.

needed in all essential industries and services.

We can organise pressure on the government to requisition industry to produce PPE, tests, and ventilators, rather than haggling with private firms doubtful whether it'll prove profitable to convert their production lines.

And to requisition (rather than ineptly to negotiate for) hotels and similar accommodation as safe housing for the homeless and for domestic violence victims. □

More nationalism shoved down our throats

The Tories have moved the May Day 2020 bank holiday to 8 May, to commemorate "Victory in Europe" in the Second World War.

The plan was for nationalistic "commemorations" across the country. Though the pandemic will tone it down, you can be sure the nationalist jubilee will be marked. We should display banners on the day with messages like "Workers of the world unite" and "Solidarity against the pandemic".

1 May has been International Workers' Day since 1904. In 1978 the Labour government made the first Monday in May a bank holiday. In 1993 and again in 2011 the Tories have talked of replacing it by a nationalistic "Trafalgar Day" holiday in October. □

Howie Hawkins

After the withdrawal of Bernie Sanders, Solidarity is supporting the US presidential campaign of Howie Hawkins.

Hawkins, a long-time socialist and associated with the socialist group Solidarity (USA), is running for the Green Party nomination, due to be decided in July 2020. For Hawkins' campaign, see <https://howiehawkins.us/>. For our interview with Howie Hawkins, see <bit.ly/howie-h> □

Singapore in the pandemic

By Sara Lee

Of the 728 new COVID-19 cases reported in Singapore on 16 April, 654 were linked to migrant worker dormitories.

In a statement that best captures the racism against foreign workers in Singapore, Cabinet Minister Lawrence Wong said "we are already having to deal with a foreign worker dormitory cluster.

"Let's not have more clusters emerge outside of that in our own community as well."

An estimated 62,500 migrant workers have been quarantined in just eight foreign worker dormitories. Workers have reported that they are subject to cramped and unhygienic living conditions and have been served inadequate or spoiled food.

The poor food and the sheer congestion have always been a feature of these dormitories, but with police now enforcing a quarantine, migrant workers are sitting ducks for coronavirus.

Migrant and undocumented workers in Singapore have long been subject to dangerous and precarious working conditions. In 1997, a construction worker from Bangladesh, having been paralysed in a lift accident, was driven to a remote part of Singapore and left in a drain to die.

The outbreak of Covid-19 has thrown a spotlight on the conditions under which migrant workers live, and local activists are calling on the government to recognize the freedom of migrant workers to speak out and have a voice in policy-making. But the precariousness of migrant labour, the hazardous conditions under which they work, and their racialised stigma, should not be seen as unique to Singapore or to its political situation. They are natural features of capitalism.

Almost three-quarters of Singapore's construction industry is migrant workers. With migrant labour, capitalist production and reproduction of labour power are in geographically different places, and since the costs of life are often lower at the site of social reproduction, capitalists pay little more than just the day-to-day cost of sustaining and regenerating labour-power at the site of capitalist production.

Capitalists in labour-intensive sectors like construction draw on migrant labour in order to slash costs and maximise profit. They cram 12 to 20 workers into a room, and provide little in the way of food or healthcare.

Governments do not spend very much on migrant labour-power either. Not even a purported welfare state like Singapore, which gave 600 SGD (about \$420) to each of its citizens as a "solidarity payment" for the pan-

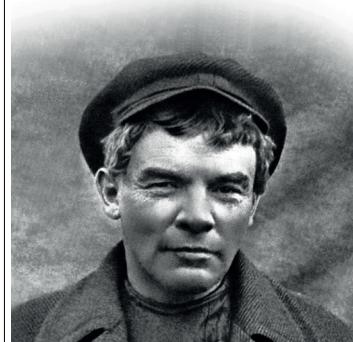
demic. States benefit from the labour of migrant workers, but treat them as second-class citizens.

Surgical and cloth masks were distributed to every household in Singapore, but not to migrant workers. Singaporeans returning from abroad were quarantined in luxury hotels, but migrant workers were left to languish in overcrowded rooms with bunk beds.

The government is being lobbied to improve the situation of the migrant workers, and the capitalists too must be held responsible for migrant workers' inhumane living conditions and for the spread of Covid-19. □

In Defence of Bolshevism

Max Shachtman



Featured book

Max Shachtman's *Under the Banner of Marxism*, the bulk of this book, should be considered one of the classic Marxist polemics. It defends the Bolsheviks, their revolution, their work to build a revolutionary socialist movement, and the continued relevance of their approach. 311 pages, £12.

workersliberty.org/books

When workers have refused to work on safety grounds

More details at bit.ly/h-s-44

UK transport workers

[BA cabin crew, Covid-19, 2020](#)

[Crossrail, 2019](#)

[Tube train safety checks, 2015](#)

[Tube drivers, 2011](#)

[Gavia Thameslink, 2016](#)

[Tube drivers, Northern line brakes, 2005](#)

[Various examples, 2007](#)

International

[USA, Covid-19](#)

[France, Covid-19](#)

[Canada, Covid-19](#)

[Australia, unsafe trains](#)

See also <https://section44.co.uk/> □

Sweden in the pandemic

By a reader in Sweden

Swedish policy in the pandemic has been an outlier in two ways. Alone in Europe, it has not had a lockdown, only social distancing guidelines. And the policy has been explicitly set by the public health scientists.

The outcome is unclear: Sweden's cases and deaths show the same sort of graphs as other countries, worse than some, not as bad as others, and with similar doubts about the accuracy of the figures. Some scientists in Sweden are calling for policies there more like the UK's.

The Left Party is calling for "compensation to people in risk groups who cannot work from home", "increased support for homeless", stopping evictions and a state rental guarantee fund, etc., but not for a lockdown.

The science of it seems to depend on the idea that asymptomatic people have a much lower risk of spreading disease. I have a suspicion that the decision wasn't entirely from a scientific perspective.

The Swedish approach has been more orthodoxy centrist-neoliberal in the sense of putting the longer-term interests of capitalism first and not being overly authoritarian. It looks to me as if the lockdown approach has been a more populistic knee-jerk reaction by governments who felt they had shown "strong leadership".

Scientifically, we still don't know. But the experience in Sweden will at the very least be useful for other countries, when they consider easing off lockdowns, to see what eased-off policies might work.

Sweden has the legislation in place to deal with people being off sick. You get 80% of usual pay. That's not union agreements with individual employers: it's a national policy. It used to be that you didn't get pay for the first day off, but the government has removed that restriction.

And there is an unemployment insurance scheme run by the unions and regulated by the government, under which you can claim around 80% of your wages for a year if you lose your job. It's been made easier to qualify for these payments, and the minimum and maximum amounts that can be claimed have been raised.

A social factor in Sweden which may make a difference to pandemic policies is a lot of one-person households – I think the highest proportion in the world – and comparatively few older people living in big households. Few young people live with their parents beyond 20 or 21, while in Italy the average age for leaving your parents' home is over 30. It's much easier to get decent rented accommodation than it is in the UK.

Then, generally, people don't go out as much as in other countries. People are more likely to socialise from home. People don't kiss and hug each other as much as

they do in other countries.

The norms as regards taking time off sick are different. In Sweden, if you have even a sniffle, you're expected to stay at home. Whereas I remember when I worked for Royal Mail in Britain, the sickness policy was extremely punitive.

How significant those factors are, I don't know.

In the Swedish model, businesses pay a lot of tax compared to most EU countries, and it's used to fund sick pay and parental leave. There is a consensus, shared by the unions and the majority of the population, that in times of crisis you pull together, and people have to take responsibility.

The Left Party isn't stepping outside the general idea that it's in everyone's interest to keep the economy working. So there's a widespread view that if the public health authorities tell us that this is the advice, then we should cooperate.

Boris Johnson and Trump have not had a consistent policy. In Sweden, the line is: this is what our scientists are saying, and we can increase the level of shutdown if we need to.

There has been a growth in trade-union membership in Sweden in the pandemic. Unions are demanding protective equipment for care workers, and virus contraction at work to be treated as a work-related injury (so entitling workers to claim lost income while off sick and compensation to families in the event of death).

It's not business as usual. More people are working from home, people go out less, unemployment is rising. Among people generally, there's some concern that Sweden is an outlier, but I think the general instinct is to follow the advice of the scientists.

Distance learning was introduced at an early stage in universities and the upper secondary schools. Most schools have stayed open, but are required to be ready to shift to distance learning fast. The teachers' union has had concerns about the demands placed for distance-teaching.

On the other hand, all the national tests have been cancelled, and that's a huge stress factor removed for both teachers and students. □

Reminiscences of Ted Knight, 1933-2020

Supplement to *Solidarity* 543. Available online and as printable pdf at bit.ly/tk33-20 □

Brexit is putting lives at risk

By Jim Denham

As hapless Health Secretary Matt Hancock blames first NHS medics and then clinicians for the desperate shortage of PPE and NHS bosses ask doctors and nurses to work without full-length gowns or re-use single-use PPE, the *Guardian* has revealed that:

"Britain missed three opportunities [on 28 February, 17 March and 25 March] to be part of an EU scheme to bulk-buy masks, gowns and gloves and has been absent from key talks about future purchases..."

"European doctors and nurses are preparing to receive the first of €1.5bn (£1.3bn) worth of personal protective equipment (PPE) within days or a maximum of two weeks through a joint procurement scheme involving 25 countries and eight companies, according to internal EU documents.

"The EU's swift work has led to offers of medical equipment, including masks, overalls and goggles, in excess of the number requested, a spokesman for the European commission said. The EU is separately establishing stock-piles within member states, with the first being set up in Romania". (*Guardian*, 14 April)

This scandalous act of anti-EU dogmatism (and/or sheer incompetence) is already costing lives and follows on from the revelation that the government missed out on EU mass procurement of ventilators (despite still being eligible to participate), and instead called on UK manufacturers like their pro-Brexit friend Dyson to design and build machines from scratch - with miserable results.

Downing Street at first said the UK would not be joining the ventilator scheme because "we are no longer members of the EU". They later changed their story, claiming that they'd missed the deadline because there an email had gone missing (!) This pathetic excuse is either an admission of total incompetence or of putting Brexit before breathing. Either way, it's a disgrace.

Meanwhile the Tories pig-headedly insist that the December deadline for the end of the transition period will not be extended.

Even the pro-Brexit *Sunday Times* has noted (18 April) "the impression that this is a government that puts Brexit above everything else ... It fits with a narrative of a government so obsessed with Brexit that it was slow to respond to the coronavirus danger in January and February."

But it's not just a question of an "impression" or a "narrative": these latest revelations prove Brexit triumphalism and anti-EU dogma has cost lives and continues to put

lives at risk due too the UK's desperate lack of PPE and ventilators.

At a time when international co-operation is more essential than ever before Brexit has been shown to be deadly. It must be stopped: Starmer take note! □

- Sign the call on Starmer and Rayner for Labour to demand the government pauses Brexit during the pandemic and before its 30 June deadline: bit.ly/labextend

Better independent

Solidarity has argued for left-wing Labour MPs to remain on Parliament's backbenches rather than take positions in Keir Starmer's ministerial team, so they can better help organise the grassroots activist left and take clear political stands free from the leadership's restrictions.

We were disappointed to learn that two MPs we have great respect for, Lloyd Russell-Moyle and Nadia Whittome, have taken junior positions - Lloyd as Shadow Minister for Natural Environment and Air Quality and Nadia as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Shadow Health Secretary Jon Ashworth.

Nadia, in particular, stands out as a class-struggle socialist actively involved in grassroots campaigns, a track record she has continued since her election in December.

Those junior positions oblige the MPs holding them to support their senior shadow minister, and to toe the leadership line or lose their jobs. Sometimes in the past shadow ministers have been able to keep a left-wing profile by nods and gestures and choosing to stress the more left-wing aspects of front-bench policy, but MPs really effective in boosting the grass-roots left have always been back-benchers, from Aneurin Bevan in 1940-5 and 1951-5 and Tony Benn after May 1979, through to today.

We want to see Nadia, Lloyd and others return to the backbenches. We urge them to continue to take stands for what they believe in, and to strengthen their relationship with struggles, grassroots organising and the internationalist left, even if that causes difficulty in their new positions, as it will. □

The left must rebuild

By Maria Exall

Maria Exall, an activist in the Communication Workers' Union's Greater London Combined telecoms branch and Vice-Chair of Labour Unions (the Labour Party-union link organisation), talked with Sacha Ismail.

How should the labour movement be responding to the Covid-19 crisis?

The immediate issues for the labour movement are the same as those for the wider working class - the lack of PPE, problems with safety at work and elsewhere, the threat to the NHS, and so on. The wider question is how the economy will look as we emerge from the crisis. There's going to be the threat of mass unemployment, with the collapse of whole sectors.

The challenge is not to go for the lowest common denominator but be far more ambitious - on creating socially useful jobs, including green jobs, with strong workers' rights; on tackling inequality; on having a welfare system that is genuinely supportive not punitive; on rebuilding public services in a comprehensive and democratic form. It's obvious to many what the problems are, but the question is can the labour movement take the initiative with radical solutions?

The care sector highlights the issues we face, unable to deliver decent standards for the people it looks after or the workers it employs. If we don't campaign for public ownership and strict standards across the sector then we are simply not rising to the challenge.

The government had no choice but to support workers' incomes to some degree or the economy would have collapsed immediately, like bailing out the banks in 2008. The issue is we should be putting conditions, including in terms of taking public ownership or public stakes, and looking at that on a sectoral basis and not just individual companies.

In my industry, telecoms, the absurdity of private ownership is shown by the fact that the regulator expects all the firms to compete, but now in this crisis they have suspended that and are trying to work together cooperatively to desperately provide the service people need.

Jailed trade-unionists in Iran

Iran's official figures show new Covid-19 cases peaking there about 30 March and deaths peaking about 4 April, and 5,118 deaths so far. An Iranian activist told *Solidarity*: "The official figures are rubbish! What the true number is nobody can tell. Some people are saying there is going to be a second wave. Lots of workers have died".

Mohammad-Hossein Sepehri, a teacher jailed in Mashhad's Vakilabad prison, has contracted coronavirus. He has been denied medical care.

There are many teachers and hundreds of other labour and social rights activists languishing in the Iranian regime's prisons and now exposed to a high risk of contracting Covid-19. □

That's true in many sectors. Integrated and democratic public ownership is the logical conclusion.

TUC Congress passed policy for public ownership of the banks, but the unions are not campaigning on it. Now is the time. We should totally reject the idea that banking and finance are somehow unnecessary - we can see that now with the problems about restarting the economy, about loans to small businesses and many other issues. The problem is they are run according to neo-liberal principles, with zero public accountability.

We need to take the widespread feelings floating around about cooperation and solidarity, and infuse that with labour movement and socialist values; and bring in concrete proposals about reshaping society.

What's your assessment of the Labour leadership outcome and developments since? What should the left be organising around now?

Keir Starmer has got a mandate for essentially soft left politics, which I think is reflected in the new shadow cabinet. He and Angela Rayner are saying to the unions they want to continue with Corbyn's policies. But we do need to assess honestly not just the new leadership but the missed opportunities of the last five years.

I'd raise two key things for the left to rebuild itself.

The first is democracy. The left's attitude to party democracy has been very mixed; it has never pushed for it consistently. There's been a lot of left-populist rallying to the leader, rather than the idea of a democratic labour movement. The idea of "digital democracy", meaning plebiscitary ballots, has gained ground and that is dangerous. We need to reassert ideas of accountability and bottom up control. That includes a sovereign conference, but there's not just one fix, one structure that needs changing. It's about many structures but also the wider political culture.

An essential aspect of all this is strengthening and enhancing the link with the affiliated unions. Much more can be done locally in particular to develop an empowered union base for the party, rooted in workplaces.

Secondly, the left also needs to be much more consistent on equalities issues: antisemitism is glaring, but more widely issues of racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia. On the left's watch these issues have actually gone backwards in many cases. Transphobia has been a serious problem: it reminds me of homophobia in the 1980s.

But in the 80s the progressive left ran with these issues whereas now on the left you can't make that assumption, on various questions.

We have a lot to do show the left is serious, and in the first instance to be serious. We need to repair a damaged reputation but also learn real lessons. □

- For a longer version in which Maria talks about workplace organising, the right to strike, fighting for left policies in Labour, Momentum, the call for a national unity government and Brexit see *The Clarion* bit.ly/mariaexall, and bit.ly/2-rebuild

Social care: full public ownership!

By Sacha Ismail

Care England estimates that 7,500 care home residents may have died as result of Covid-19 - five times the 1,400 estimated by the government.

The background is the radical fragmentation and privatisation of the care system - both care homes and home care provision - over forty years, and the conditions most care workers now work in. (The following figures come from a variety of sources; obviously some of them are approximate, but they give an overall picture.)

The answer is a comprehensive state takeover of and large-scale public investment in the sector, with majorly improved care standards for service-users and terms and conditions for workers.

Care is a vast sector, employing substantially over a million workers, and providing for many millions of people.

Care workers suffer from low pay, casualisation and weak rights. Between 40 and 60% do not get the "real living wage" of £10.75ph in London and £9.30 outside.

38% are not paid for travel time at all, a major issue when huge numbers of workers have to travel between multiple homes. Many more will not receive full pay for travel. 33.7% of care workers and 56% of home care workers are on zero hours contracts.

Private sector

In the private sector, which accounts for a clear majority of care jobs - 795,000 workers versus e.g. only 33,600 employed by local authorities - things are substantially worse. 38.5% are on zero hours contracts, versus only 10.1% of those employed by councils; average annual pay is £15,700, versus £18,900; 51.5% have no relevant qualification, versus 19.3%; 36.1% have been employed in the sector less than two years, versus 12.9%. Pay is even lower: in local authorities the average is £9.80ph.

In the early 1990s a majority of care homes were still owned by councils; now 3% of care home beds are provided by councils and 85% by private providers. There are 18,500 organisations involved in providing social care, with 9,000 home care agencies!

Union membership is relatively low, with only 19.8% of care workers a member of a union or staff association - as against 82.6% of nurses.

69 What we stand for

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty fights for socialist revolution, and for the labour movement to militantly assert working-class interests.

See workersliberty.org/about – if you agree, join us! □

The thorough privatisation and extreme fragmentation of the sector - along with £8bn of cuts in public funding since 2010 - makes enforcing high standards on anything very difficult, let alone a desperate attempt to deal with a devastating emergency like the pandemic.

Consider that 27% of home care workers report carrying out visits as short as 15 minutes, and just over two-thirds of councils commission 15 minute visits. Many more visits will be not much longer than that.

Brexit is a major and very immediate issue. Leaving the EU will probably result in 120,000 fewer care workers, in the context of estimates that 600,000 more will be needed by 2035 to cope with a rapidly growing older population. There are already over 120,000 vacancies in the sector.

Issues around PPE and testing are well known and widely reported.

Sick pay

Crucially, even if all care workers had the right to self-isolate on full pay, their pay and conditions would make it difficult for many to take that decision. In fact something like half a million workers get only Statutory Sick Pay (£95.85 a week). At the daily C-19 briefing on 16 April, Business Secretary Alok Sharma twice refused to answer a question about this, fobbing it off by repeating the word "Heroes" over and over.

This is morally repulsive and a major threat to the health of massive numbers of workers, service-users and the wider public.

For years, Labour talked about a "national care service", but vaguely. Activists linked to Keep Our NHS public have launched a Reclaim Social Care initiative for free fully-public provision: see its demands at reclaimsocial-care.co.uk.

Labour Party conference 2019 passed left-wing motions attempting to commit the party to a similar stance: see bit.ly/confsocialcare (p.19-20). As with other issues, the challenge is to get that policy acknowledged and campaigned for.

Socialists should work to bring together social care and NHS campaigners, Labour activists, health and care trade unionists and workers' campaigns into a force to win comprehensive public ownership of the sector, fully funded and free, with dramatically improved, strictly enforced and uniform standards, conditions, pay and workers' rights.

This is not a small policy. As with the NHS in the 1940s, the labour movement should be ambitious. □

- Longer version at bit.ly/soc-care



Covid-19 crisis: online resources & meetings

workersliberty.org/c19-online brings together articles, online meetings and resources to help us through the crisis. All articles on Covid-19: workersliberty.org/covid-19.

Online meetings

All meetings are open access and use Zoom videocalls.

20 April, 7.30-9pm: [The fight for trans rights, past, present and future.](#)

Wednesdays 22, 29 April, 7-8.30pm: ABCs of Marxism – **22 April:** [Who was Lenin?](#) **29 April:** [The Communist Manifesto](#)

Thursday 23 April, 6pm: [Covid-19, capitalism and socialism](#). A weekly hour-long informal discussion about organising in and around the crisis.

Friday 24 April: [Fifty years of women's liberation, forum](#)

Sundays 26 April, 3 May, 10 May 6.30-8pm: Sunday "political hangout" – **26 April:** [Marxism and Religion](#). **3 May:** [What can we learn from past pandemics?](#) **10 May:** [Marxists on the US Civil War and the fight against slavery](#)

Monday 4 May, and fortnightly: [The state, crime, prisons and the police](#)



Audio recordings of publications and meetings

We have been recording an audio version of our paper, *Solidarity*, for some time. We have recordings from various other publications and meetings!

Links to the audio version are at workersliberty.org/audio, and can be found through many podcast providers: search "Workers' Liberty" or "Solidarity & More". More information on subscribing and using podcasts at [the URL above](#).

E-reader version

Email awl@workersliberty.org for e-reader version of *Solidarity*.

Study guides

Many educational resources, lots of them tried, tested, and revised over years or decades, can be found at workersliberty.org/study. Includes:

- Marx's Capital. A study guide; link to *Capital* in audio format; 19 short videos; extensive background notes.
- 13-session "[Introduction to Workers' Liberty](#)"
- Russian Revolution: 13-session study guide to Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution; The Fate of the Russian Revolution vol. 1; vol. 2; more...
- The revolutionary party and the working class: Pierre Broué's *The German Revolution 1917-1923*; Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?*; Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*; more...
- And much, much more...

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850-page report shows two scandals

By Dale Street

Until spring 2018 the Labour Party systematically failed to deal properly with complaints of antisemitic conduct by Party members. In many cases it failed to deal with such complaints at all.

That is the core finding of the recently leaked 850-page report "The work of the Labour Party's Governance and Legal Unit in relation to antisemitism, 2014-2019".

At the moment the status of the report's findings is only that of allegations. But, if true, they certainly paint a grim picture.

According to the report, in the period 2015/16 the Governance and Legal Unit (GLU) was characterised by:

"An almost complete lack of systems, processes, guidance and training for staff members. There was no system for logging all complaints, and the GLU did not apply the Macpherson principles of recording all complaints of racism as racism."

Personal ties and political affiliations allegedly influenced how disciplinary proceedings were dealt with: The GLU targeted left-wingers but covered up for right-wingers accused of more serious misdemeanours.

In the same period the report alleges that the GLU's failings were compounded by an ongoing lack of guidance on how to deal with complaints of antisemitism. This, says the report, "resulted in a number of individuals being 'let off' who should not have been."

Continued failing

In the period late 2016 to early 2018, according to the report's allegations, the GLU continued to demonstrate the same or similar failings - and even worse ones:

"[The GLU] did not develop or maintain any functioning system for consistently or comprehensively logging, acting on or monitoring the progress of complaints. Complaints were frequently lost, including cases involving extreme levels of antisemitism such as Holocaust denial. The vast majority of complaints of all categories simply were not acted on."

Even more seriously, the report claims that the GLU not only failed to investigate most complaints lodged by "Labour Against Anti-Semitism" but also provided LOTO (Leader of the Opposition's Office) with misleading information, claiming that the complaints had been actioned.

Much of the report's coverage of this period provides copious examples of grossly antisemitic posts on social media by Party members which, it claims, resulted in no more than an investigation, if even that, by the GLU.

The report rejects claims that LOTO intervened to prevent action being taken in response to complaints of antisemitism. According to the report, the GLU proactively sought the views of LOTO about a number of cases and

welcomed its input.

The closing section of the report deals with the changes made in dealing with complaints of antisemitism following the appointment of Jennie Formby as the Party's General Secretary. It concludes:

"Particularly from spring 2018 onwards, the Party has introduced appropriate processes, systems, training, education and effective line management to ensure antisemitism complaints are dealt with swiftly and robustly. These safeguards ensure that the past mistakes in the handling of antisemitism complaints cannot be repeated now."

The report alleges that the Party's failings to deal properly with complaints of antisemitism flowed out of a factional hostility towards the new Corbyn leadership.

Vile conduct

The report's opening sections, which have received the bulk of the publicity generated by the report, contain copious allegations (backed up by *prima facie* evidence) of truly vile conduct by certain Labour employees:

- They intervened in internal CLP affairs, showed no interest in Labour winning the 2017 general election, wanted Labour's opponents to win in by-elections, and manipulated election rules in Labour Students to preserve right-wing control.

- They conducted widescale purges on spurious grounds to exclude Corbyn supporters from voting in leadership contests, planned another leadership coup in 2017, and looked forward to unions disaffiliating from the Party.

- They routinely: used derogatory mental health terms to abuse Party members, voters and employees; criticised women Party employees on the basis of their physical appearance and dress and used misogynistic terms of abuse; and employed violent language in criticising Corbyn and his supporters.

If such allegations are true, the right wing must be called to account for its scandalous conduct. Yet not at the expense of ignoring, downplaying or misrepresenting the report's findings on the Party's failure to process and act on complaints of antisemitism. □

- Longer version: bit.ly/850-p

More online

Another take on the 850-page report

- bit.ly/edd-m

London Underground Fleet and Engineering workers in the pandemic

- bit.ly/fle-eng

Councils and the pandemic

By a Lambeth council worker

In Lambeth, our union, Unison, has been able to press the council on its response to the pandemic, and with results.

Early on, we won full isolation pay for all workers in the council, including agency workers and zero-hours workers.

The council has moved on other issues. Councils are demanding a "cast-iron public commitment that [the government] will provide additional funding to fully meet extra costs to councils and compensate for lost income" in the pandemic. Immediately, the government has paid out £1.6 billion to councils, allowed councils to postpone business rates payments to central government, and moved to pay care grants up front, so the councils' worry is more about a financial squeeze down the track than immediate cash-flow.

Shortages of qualified workers in some areas, thanks to cuts over many years, are not so easily fixed.

The government called on councils to "make sure that... people who are sleeping rough, and those who are in accommodation where it is difficult to self-isolate, such as shelters" have somewhere they can self-isolate, "ideally single room facilities". The government said that councils should "utilise alternative powers and funding to assist those with no recourse to public funds" (a restriction put on some migrants).

Lambeth council has told us that it's been housing all the homeless in hotels and similar. Migrant rights groups have said that "many destitute migrants continue to sleep on the streets either because councils have turned them away when they try to access emergency support or because, in the absence of clear government guidance, they do not know how to go about getting this support": bit.ly/mi-ho

Full isolation pay

We're demanding that the council does what Salford council, for example, has done, and instruct all those employing care workers on council contracts that they must give full isolation pay. To follow up, the union is doing a survey of care workers on isolation pay and PPE [Personal Protective Equipment].

The council now says that it will supply PPE free if contractors do not provide it, but that's only since the council itself received PPE, in the last week.



The council has restricted care visits, replacing as many as it can with phone calls. That is explained as reducing virus risk to care workers and those they might visit, but has clear downsides. We want to see more testing and more PPE so that more visits are done.

The council has set up a food hub in our leisure centre to provide food for the vulnerable people who are strictly self-isolating. The food is packed by volunteers, including council workers whose usual workplaces are shut, and delivered by redeployed council workers. The council has a list from the NHS of people sent letters classifying them as specially vulnerable, and individuals and mutual aid groups can add names to the list.

The council is stepping up provision for domestic violence victims. But access to domestic violence services is often through places which are now shut like schools, children's centres, libraries. I think the council should advertise helplines in supermarkets, too.

We've asked the council about provision for end-of-life care. There have been, and there will be, more people dying at home outside the scope of the NHS. The council's end-of-life provision will be stretched.

An underlying problem in this as many areas is not so much shortage of cash, at this point, as shortage of staff. Because the local government workforce has been cut back over many years, it is now an older and so not especially healthy workforce.

We'll be asking for training and support for new staff, and more testing and more PPE so that services can be extended. □

What we demand

1. Requisition (in other words, take into emergency public ownership)

- private hospitals
- the care sector
- the pharmaceutical and medical-supplies industries, so that production can be ramped up in a coordinated way of tests, PPE, ventilators, etc.
- high finance, so that the epidemic is not compounded by a snowballing economic slump resulting from an implosion of credit
- and other sectors where coordinated mobilisation is necessary.

2. Fight for workers' control

The workers ourselves, taking expert advice, should have a decisive voice in identifying and running what is essential, and how to work as safely and effectively as possible in the emergency.

3. Make the labour movement operate as an essential service!

It is the duty of the labour movement to make itself an essential service in the emergency:

- to impose workers' control on the emergency response, to stop it being impeded by bureaucratic inertia and profit priorities
- to defend workers' rights – all workers, including those still at work in essential services, those who have to self-isolate on public health advice or stay at home to look after children, and those already laid off
- to stand up for the worst-off, who generally suffer the worst in epidemics: low-paid and insecure workers, the homeless, migrants, those in jail, the disabled.

4. Defend workers' rights

All workers outside essential services should be at home, working from home if possible, on leave otherwise, on full pay.

In all essential services, unions must insist on full pay for every worker (including zero hours, agency, and subcontractor staff) who takes time off to follow public health advice or because they have to care for children whose schools or nurseries are closed.

Work or full pay! We demand immediately accessible fallback pay for all. The government has promised to ban evictions during the emergency. We demand cancellation of all rent, mortgage, and utility payments during the emergency.

5. Take care of the worst-off

People held in detention centres should be released and offered accommodation if needed. The same for those in jail, excluding only those whose record indicates a threat to human life and safety if they are released.

"No Recourse to Public Funds" and other rules and charges restricting public services for migrants should be abolished. Suspend all enforcement of restrictions on migrants, and enable "illegal" migrants to get help, and defend their rights, without risk of deportation.

House the homeless. Hotels and similar accommodation should also be made available to domestic violence victims.

6. Defend civil liberties

There is a public-health case for restricting movement and assemblies. But the emergency powers law pushed through by the government goes beyond that in a number of ways.

7. Think internationally

The labour movement has a duty to think internationally, and to demand the resettlement in decent conditions of those held in refugee camps across the world, and massive aid to poorer countries. □

When "efficiency" kills

Slow and clumsy responses to the pandemic are down to "pursuit of maximum efficiency – just-in-time manufacturing, supply chains, and deployment of personnel [becoming] the norm across the private and increasingly the public sector".

That's not a socialist comment, but a columnist in the *Financial Times*. "Efficiency" is measured in capitalist terms of visible "market signals", and so inescapably fails to provide against unknown risks.

The FT says: "The over-efficient management of the NHS means that for just-in-case scenarios, we were in deep trouble. There was no margin for error". □

Migrant workers

In Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain, even official figures say that nearly all Covid-19 cases have been among migrant workers, many of whom live in crowded and squalid labour camps.

Some labour camps have been locked down, as in Singapore. And Covid-19 has also been used as an excuse to deport migrant workers.

According to Amnesty International, "Qatari authorities rounded up and expelled dozens of migrant workers after telling them they were being taken to be tested for Covid-19... They were taken to detention centres and held in appalling conditions for several days, before being sent to Nepal..."

- More: bit.ly/c-19-mi

Can we get R<1?

By Martin Thomas

Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Norway, Italy, Spain, and France have all announced measures to ease their pandemic lockdowns.

Several other countries in Europe look as if they are at or past a pandemic peak. The UK may be around a peak.

As of yet, no-one – not the scientists, not the governments, and not us either – has even a halfway clear picture of how these easings (over-hopefully called “exit strategies”) can avoid new peaks. Only slow, piecemeal, feeling-our-way approaches are possible. The UK looks not yet ready even for that. The wild “exit now” talk of Bolsonaro in Brazil and Trump in the USA, fortunately resisted by state governors, makes no sense.

The measures of social equality and care for the worst-off which we’ve been campaigning for through the pandemic will still be vital, or even more vital, to make easing work.

Richard Horton, editor of *The Lancet* and the most strident medical critic of British government policy, has said “to exit lockdown, we need to maximise economic productivity under an R<1 constraint”.

R, R₀, herd immunity

What does that mean? And is it possible?

R is the reproduction number of an epidemic: the average number of new infections each sufferer generates. R₀ is the “basic” R, in a population with no immunity. If R<1, the disease dies out. If R>1, the disease grows, but more people become immune from having had the disease. As the proportion without immunity decreases towards 1/R₀, R decreases towards 1. Eventually the average sufferer comes to generate less than one new infection because so many of the people they meet are immune.

Without intervention, the epidemic grows until 1-1/R₀ of the population - half if R₀=2, two-thirds if R₀=3, etc. - have gone through the disease. Covid-19, sadly, seems to have a fairly high R₀ in ordinary conditions.

At 1-1/R₀ we have what’s called “herd immunity”. Not everyone is immune, but enough are immune that the population as a whole resists growth of the disease.

Sometimes “herd immunity” is referred to as a bad strategy to which there are alternatives. Short of a treatment where everyone can be cured just by taking a pill – and no-one predicts that – every strategy has to be a “herd immunity” strategy.

A vaccine allows a much lower threshhold for “herd immunity”. A 90% effective vaccine, taken by 90% of the population, would get there with just 10% having immunity from previous infection as long as R₀<5.8. (No vaccine is 100%. The MMR vaccine, a very good one, is 97% effective against measles and 88% against mumps. No

vaccination program is 100%. Double-dose MMR is running at about 86% in Britain).

We may not have a good vaccine for a long time yet. What then?

Then we have to find ways to push down R₀ (and hence both R over time, and the “herd immunity” threshhold at which R≤1).

That is the aim of the lockdowns and social distancing. The MRC Centre at Imperial College does daily-updated estimates of R for European countries. Their best guess is that the lockdown in the UK has reduced R from between 3 and 4 to about 0.7.

With R at 0.7 for the time being, any population has “herd immunity” for the time being, and new infections will decline whatever the proportion who have already gone through the disease. Until the lockdown eases.

Uncertainty

There is much uncertainty about the calculation. The MRC team have estimates for different R₀ for different European countries (depending on levels of crowding and so on), which vary between 2.8 for Sweden and 7 for Belgium, but only estimates.

To continue without schools, travel, social gatherings, etc. for some months may be good, but hardly for years. The issue will become one of finding a policy which allows social and economic life while keeping R below or close to 1, either by having a large enough immune population, or by adjusting social life to push down R₀.

It won’t be easy. Sweden’s non-lockdown “social distancing” policy, in favourable social conditions, is estimated by the MRC team to have reduced R only to 1.8.

A lot more people have had the disease than the 0.16% certified cases in the UK or in Germany. Test figures do not tell us how many more, because even in Germany (the highest-testing large country) only 2% of the population have been tested, plus, no-one knows how many of that 2% who tested negative a while back have got the disease since.

The MRC team estimates 11% have had it in Sweden, 4% in the UK, but as few as 0.5% in Norway.

Even the Swedish 11% requires social measures producing R<1.12 to get “herd immunity”.

China seems to have exited lockdown, and South Korea to have avoided it. That is hopeful. But that has been done by measures of state control and surveillance which European states could not equal. Even France, which many more police per head of population than the UK, and has imposed 100 times more fines for breaches of lockdown, couldn’t come near it.

South Korea managed to “contain” an outbreak originating from a religious gathering. It did a lot of tests,

continued page 13

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but not nearly as many as Germany, and charging people \$150 for them. The difference is that the government tracked everyone's movements through their mobile phones, credit-card use, and CCTV, and then notified all the contacts of people who'd tested positive. The population was already epidemic-conscious because of SARS and MERS, and complied.

Taiwan, New Zealand, and South Korea, with heavily-policed borders, may be able to "contain" the virus in the medium-term.

In Europe [it is more difficult](#), but voluntary tracking-and-tracing programs *may* have enough take-up to work, even after the virus has spread widely. On the calculations of [their advocates](#), those will require testing on a scale over a hundred times bigger even than that of the highest-testing big country at present, Germany, or several hundred times the UK's current rate.

None of the statistics is solid. We do know, fairly certainly, that measures of social equality will minimise the risk in the "easings-off", as in the lockdown.

PPE, and PPE training, for all, especially including care

workers who currently lack it. "Requisition" the care sector and integrate it into the NHS, under NHS workers' conditions. Full isolation pay for all. Vastly increased testing. Good housing for all, especially the currently-over-crowded. Close the detention centres. Empty the jails of all prisoners other than those who indicate a real risk to life and safety. □

• Longer version: bit.ly/r-less-1

Uncounted deaths

Ecuador's official figures show 474 Covid-19 deaths. But overall death figures there show an excess of 5,700 deaths over usual rates in the first two weeks of April for Guayas province alone, the area round Guayaquil.

Even in New York City, where healthcare provision is much ampler, Mark Levine, chair of the NYC health committee, has said (5 April): "Normally in NYC 20-25 people die at home each day. We are now at 200-215. Every day". But most don't get tested for Covid-19. □

"Absolutely essential"?



Diary of a tubeworker

By Jay Dawkey

While I waited for my train into work I heard three separate automated announcements.

One from a member of staff, one from an NHS paramedic and one from the child of an NHS worker. They had one message in common "Do not travel unless you are a critical worker making an absolutely essential journey".

That first part is right, but that second part? Well, why are TfL playing me a message about not travelling unless absolutely essential when they want me to come in right now at 23:00 on a Friday? This week I was unlucky. I didn't get my act together, emails went unanswered and my phone calls didn't get me anywhere, so I'm back on a night shift, for Night Tube, which is... closed.

Maybe I can just go home and cite that message? Something tells me that won't work. I think at least I will get plenty of my book read. Since I was put back on the stations from my cancelled training as a Tube driver, I have finished five books. I can at least look to that as a positive.

When I get to work, I am greeted by the now familiar "What are you doing back?...Oh yeah, training cancelled... sorry man".

I can hear the same video I have heard played dozens of times now from N's phone. "All these dead birds, around Kent on the M25, and why?...5G". Given cinemas

are closed, this video must have had more views than any of the films that were released in March. I ask N if he has watched to the end. "Yeah, I mean, maybe it's crap but you don't know, lots of things the government haven't told us". "So you get to the bit where he lists all the other things that aren't true like 9/11?" "Yeah, look, the guy is probably crazy, but maybe he has a point about this".

It isn't the first conversation I have had about 5G. People I work with circulated a petition on WhatsApp calling for a halt to the roll-out. Political awakening from YouTube is definitely people's first choice. Last week someone was watching David Icke on an Ipad on their way into work.

More people have started bringing in books to read, though. From before, people always knew I read, always asked what I was reading at any one time. Like me, most people aren't reading much fiction, but the books they are into are all get-rich-quick type "self-help books". I wonder how there can be so many different versions of the same arguments, and how much people believe they can just follow these gurus and get out ahead of everyone else.

When I next need to move, I can go home. I'm travelling a different route now. I get halfway and then have to wait 10 minutes for a train. On the Underground, outside of night tube, that wait is basically unheard of. It is stressful, but you can't quite place why. At least I will get back before it rains, my phone tells me.

Oh and I'm not connected to the internet? I realise there is a trial of 4G on sections of the Jubilee line. Well, at least no birds will fall out of the sky. □

• "Jay Dawkey" is a Tube worker.

After Trinity House



John Moloney

We're in negotiations with the civil service to secure a national agreement on what should happen if there's a confirmed case of Covid-19 in a workplace.

Obviously that individual worker needs to immediately go home, with full pay, and our demand is that their immediate team is also sent home on full pay. We're further demanding that their immediate work space, if it can be isolated, be shut down and deep cleaned, and if it can't, that the entire building be closed.

The national negotiations were impelled by struggles our members faced at workplace level, for example at Trinity House, an HMRC workplace in Liverpool mentioned in previous columns. After a case of the virus was confirmed there, significant union pressure was required before management agreed to close the building.

We hope that securing a national agreement will put a clear protocol in place for bosses to follow, but it will still require policing by union organisation in the workplace. We're clear that, if we can't reach an agreement on this issue, we will be in dispute.

We are also determined that any agreements we reach cover outsourced and agency workers as well as permanent, directly-employed staff.

PCS will not allow outsourced workers, who often do some of the most difficult and arduous jobs putting them on the frontline of confronting the virus, such as cleaning, to be treated as second class citizens. □

Mitie steals cleaners' wages

From **Off the Rails**

Notoriously exploitative outsourcing contractor Mitie has robbed cleaners on Merseyrail of wages.

Bosses have announced they're withdrawing from a recent agreement, due to be backdated to July 2019, to increase wages to £9/hour. This will leave cleaners £500 out of pocket and around £1,000 worse off per year than they should be.

As they are across the transport industry, cleaners on Merseyrail are absolutely on the front line of efforts to confront coronavirus. Mitie's actions would be scandalous in "ordinary" times. In the midst of a pandemic, they are utterly obscene. □

Furlough can you go?

From **Tubeworker**

TfL [Transport for London] and LU [London Underground] bosses have announced, via a bulletin from TfL Commissioner Mike Brown, that they intend to explore the use of the government's "Job Retention Scheme" to place some workers on "furlough", essentially a paid leave of absence.

The government scheme subsidises 80% of employees' wages, with bosses having the option to top up the remaining 20%. TfL/LU have committed to paying any permanently-contracted employees who are furloughed in full, and committed that pension arrangements won't be affected. Brown's bulletin says the initial furlough period will be for three weeks, with a possible extension beyond that.

On the face of it, this shouldn't necessarily be cause for concern for permanently-employed staff.

However, unions must press for clarity about how workers will be identified for furlough and how the decision will be made. This process must be fair and transparent.

Of more concern is Brown's statement that TfL will be "reviewing contracts for all non-permanent employees." We cannot allow workers on fixed-term contracts to be treated as disposable commodities for our bosses to do away with when they need to save money. Their jobs must be protected, and any furlough scheme extended to them if necessary.

Finally, TfL and LU must also take direct responsibility for self-employed and outsourced workers under their umbrella. If major contractors like ABM begin furloughing cleaners, LU must top up their wages if necessary.

Any worker who is furloughed must be guaranteed that they'll have a job, and protected terms and conditions, to go back to once the pandemic ends. □

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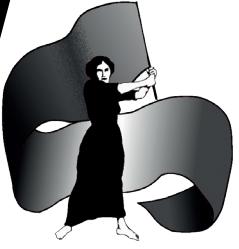
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The industrial estate in which our office is located is currently closed for the pandemic, so please contact us by email or phone.

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For a workers' government

WAKE UP LABOUR

By Mohan Sen

Parliament is set to reopen virtually on 21 April, as Labour leader Keir Starmer among others has demanded.

That's a good: it will subject the Tories to more, badly needed, scrutiny. But if Parliament can meet, why can't the Labour Party start having meetings again too?

In general Labour's response to the crisis has been to shut down as a party, including by stopping pretty much all meetings and activity. Beyond some muted encouragement for local mutual aid groups at the start, the Labour Party as such - as opposed to many Labour activists - has played little role in struggles during the pandemic. There is a similar problem in many, though not all, trade unions.

We should try to change this. Whatever the physical difficulties, now more than ever we need political structures to keep people connected, facilitate discussion and debate, and express demands to deal with the crisis. Nor are the difficulties actually that great: Labour Party meetings can easily be held by Zoom or similar, and in fact many are being held, informally.

We should push for Labour to allow and indeed encourage CLPs and branches to restart formal, decision-making meetings. Labour's National Executive should meet by Zoom and report its deliberations. Meanwhile local parties (and union branches) should organise get-togethers of various sorts, including political discussions, speakers and online social events.

The aim should be to raise members' spirits, encourage political discussion and education, pull as many as

possible back into collective organisation, and re-enable democratic control over what the Labour Party says and does.

At least some Labour Parties are doing this already, or starting to. On 21 April, the day Parliament reopens, Ouseburn branch in Newcastle is holding a widely-advertised Zoom meeting about the Covid-19 crisis, with a member involved in organising a local mutual aid group speaking.

Ouseburn chair Ed Whitby explained: "We wanted to bring members together to discuss the issues and get the branch going again. It has had a great response and I'm really looking forward to seeing my Labour comrades at the meeting. This is definitely something other Labour Parties and union branches should try."

We'll report other examples over the coming weeks. Let us know about your meetings and events. Raise the idea in your local party if you haven't already.

We should also discuss possibilities for campaigning. All kinds of campaign groups and networks have organised campaigning activity during the lockdown, some of it quite effective. Stalls and large, clustered demonstrations aren't possible at the moment, but many other forms of activity are.

Waking up the Labour Party and labour movement is necessary to bring greater pressure to bear on the government and inform and shape public opinion as the disastrous nature of its Covid-19 policy (all its policies, in fact) becomes more glaring.

As part of that, it is also necessary for pushing the Labour leadership out of its bland quarter-support for the government and onto the path of struggle. □