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& Workers' Liberty



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Easing the lockdowns

Demands for workers' control, requisitioning, fallback pay for all will become even more vital

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Safe and equal

By Michael Elms

Government and employers are hoping to avoid further concessions on workers' rights in the crisis: evidently their idea is that outpourings of patriotic rhetoric in the media and weekly clapping sessions will create a chorus of national unity that can drown out workers' demands for equality and safety.

The [Safe and Equal campaign](#) is trying to amplify those workers' demands, by reporting on, lobbying around, and drawing together the many issues and fights arising among front-line workers.

This week our supporters in the NHS have highlighted the duty of the Chief Nurse (and indeed all nursing staff) under the Nursing and Midwifery Council Code to escalate patient safety and public health concerns. We argue that as NHS England has now admitted, bad terms and conditions constitute a public health risk! If, as the GMB union has estimated, 400,000 care workers are without adequate self-isolation pay, that is a major public health

emergency.

This week we have run two new stories from supermarket workers: firstly, on new layouts in self-checkout areas - apparently in Tesco, USDAW union leaders signed off on new dividers in self-service areas without even looking at the gear! And secondly, on Tesco's 10% bonus on hours worked and the suspension of the chain's degrading attendance review routine - workers shouldn't accept a rolling-back on either of these things when we "return to normal". We should demand a "new normal" - where we all get decent pay and aren't treated with suspicion by managers, even when we're not under attack from a killer virus!

We have received contact details, requests for campaign materials, and messages of support from hundreds of workers, and we are running phone-banking sessions to process these new contacts, and promote workers organising and asserting ourselves politically as the solution to the public health crisis prepared by the bosses and their parliamentary servants. □

A platform for Momentum

By Michael Elms

As the Momentum National Coordinating Group [NCG] elections approach (we think: these elections have been postponed for well over a year, and it's possible that the office staff might decide to postpone them some more), debate is building on the left over the future direction for Momentum.

Supporters of the campaign group Labour for a Socialist Europe have put out a platform to set out an idea of how Momentum could change direction. They will be looking to stand and support candidates for the NCG who endorse all or most of this platform.

It is based around three themes of democracy, class struggle and internationalism, and its key planks are:

- a labour movement response to the Covid-19 crisis; not putting off our activism until things "return to normal", and advocating public ownership and workers' control as a response to the pandemic and financial crises
- democratising Labour, and also Momentum: going back to local groups electing delegates and a democratic annual conference, rather than easily-gerrymandered, whenever-the-staff-fancy-it online votes
- democratising the trade unions, rather than leaning on their existing bureaucracy
- an idea of socialism that's about workers' control, not "socialism is when the state does things"
- supporting strikes and the abolition of anti-strike laws
- calling on Labour councils to refuse to implement cuts
- opposing the idea that the answer to crime is "tough-

ness" and more cops

- defending and extending migrant rights and freedom of movement
- fighting Johnson's far-right Brexit programme every step of the way
- challenging, not triangulating to, British nationalism

One faction is in the process of making its case in this debate. Forward Momentum, led by people from Momentum's "World Transformed" events staff, has called for Momentum to democratise and accord a greater role to local groups. That effort is to be welcomed, and certainly Workers' Liberty endorses the broad thrust of that message.

But there are some big gaps in the Forward Momentum platform. Firstly, there are no specific political demands beyond the most general and impossible-to-disagree-with.

On democracy, where FM is clearer, there is (deliberately) no mention of Momentum having an annual sovereign conference, for example, but there are warm words about the present system of e-democracy. And while FM calls for local groups to be given a bigger role, their platform currently doesn't spell out what that role might be, beyond a general (and good) insistence that Momentum should junk its control-freak culture, welcome local initiative, and encourage pluralism and debate.

We hope that a spirit of openness and debate can lead to a more democratic Momentum, and sharper, clearer socialist policies winning out. □

Indict the Tories!

“” Editorial

The TUC has called for a public inquiry into PPE [Personal Protective Equipment] supplies, to start before the end of 2020.

The unions and the Labour Party must indict the Tories and demand different policies now, not just in 2021!

The Tory and Tory-led governments since 2010 have systematically pruned down NHS spending so that in 2018/19, overnight general and acute bed occupancy averaged 90.2 per cent, and [regularly exceeded 95 per cent in winter](#).

For years now, campaigners have warned that just an unusually harsh winter, would overwhelm NHS capacity.

Yet the Tories have continued to run the NHS on “market”, “just-in-time” criteria of efficiency.

After “Hong Kong flu” (1968-9), AIDS (from 1981), SARS (2002-4), swine flu (2009-10), MERS (2012), and the 2013-6 eruption of Ebola, it was only a matter of time until another pandemic. But pandemic risks generate no “market signals” in advance. And so they are systematically under-provided for by capitalist regimes, except those put under exceptional duress, like Taiwan and South Korea after SARS and MERS.

The New Labour governments did create an NHS emergency stockpile, and expanded it in 2008-11. But the whole NHS supply chain was [contracted out to DHL in 2006](#), and then re-contracted-out. The stockpile [was re-contracted-out](#) too, and run down from £831 million worth in 2011 to £506 million in March 2019, just £300-odd for each NHS worker.

The Health and Social Care Act 2012, extending market principles and privatisation in the NHS, hived off Public Health England from the NHS. Six years ago Martin McKee, from Britain’s leading school of epidemic-study, the LSHTM, [wrote](#): “The government’s NHS reforms have seriously weakened public health. They have led to an exodus of qualified staff and fragmentation of responsibility”.

Both Tory and New Labour governments have systematically privatised, fragmented, and pauperised the social-care sector.

When the Tories declared an emergency with the elderly most at risk, they still did nothing to provide PPE and PPE training, testing, and extra medical help in care homes, or isolation pay for care workers.

The centralised structure of the NHS gave Britain an advantage in dealing with the pandemic. By running the NHS via contracting-out and just-scraping-by “efficiency”, the Tories turned that into a disadvantage.

The government has consistently failed to meet its promises on tests and PPE. It has adapted policy to supply rather than raise supply to meet need. On testing

Britain is behind every other big European country other than France and Poland.

Even with this government, actual requisitioning – or approximations to it: commandeering the resources of private hospitals, and building new emergency hospitals – has worked. Intensive-care and ventilator capacities have been enough for the peak, of this wave anyway.

The standard capitalist method of getting a deal on the market has failed repeatedly. Much of the testing operation has been contracted out to Deloitte and G4S and the like. Contracting-out adds another layer of buck-passing and haggling and inertia and profiteering to the process.

The government has bluffed, stonewalled, blustered. It has blocked democratic supervision of the pandemic response except in workplaces where unions and workers have been strong enough to impose it locally.

The Tories have said that Britain has difficulty with tests and PPE because it lacks the industrial base for them. But Britain has the biggest biotech industry in Europe, and relatively large pharmaceutical and chemical industries. Compared to most countries, it has large capacity which could be requisitioned to produce tests and PPE not just for Britain but also for countries with smaller industrial bases.

The Tories, and New Labour before them, have helped British bosses impose a lower rate of taking sick days here than in almost any other country in Western Europe. They have helped bosses put [a million workers on zero-hours contracts](#), six times as many as in 2010.

And so exceptionally many workers are under extreme economic pressure to continue to work even when virus-infected.

The Tories have enforced punitive “No Recourse to Public Funds” policy against migrants, introduced by New Labour in 1999, with [only patchy easings](#) for the pandemic.

Tory and New Labour policies have brought heavy overcrowding in London especially, and in rental housing especially. As of 2018-9, more than 283,000 households who rented privately were living in overcrowded conditions. The rate had [doubled since 2008-9](#). Almost certainly overcrowding greatly increases transmission of the virus.

Tory and New Labour policies have given the UK the most crowded prisons in Western Europe, with [over twice the imprisonment rate](#) of the Netherlands and Scandinavia. But as of 14 April only 18 people had been released under the two schemes announced by the government in response to the pandemic, and now releases are stalled. [Infection rates are rising fast](#) in jails. Only about 350 of over a thousand people held in immigrant detention centres have been released.

Labour and the unions must indict the Tories and demand positive alternatives. Requisitioning. Workers’ control. Isolation pay for all. □

Against Israel's new coalition

Maisam Jaljuli and Asaf Yakir are activists in Omdim B'Yachad (Standing Together), a left-wing Arab-Jewish social movement in Israel.

They spoke to Daniel Randall from *Solidarity* about the new coalition government in Israel, which has promised quick moves formally to annex a large part of the West Bank to Israel, and about their activity. Excerpts here: full interview at bit.ly/mj-ay

DR: What's your assessment of the newly-formed coalition government, and how can the threat of annexation be resisted?

AY: The main political parties in Israel don't have significantly differing policies, so it's not surprising they've formed a coalition. In some ways it clarifies things, as it makes clear where people stand and who the real opposition is. We need to organise in the streets against the government, and use whatever power we have to push back.

MJ: Annexation was a threat whatever the outcome of the election. Gantz declared his support for it during the election, and thanked Trump for the so-called "deal of the century". So we knew it was coming. Now it'll be a reality in a year, maybe six months, unless we can stop it. Netanyahu needs annexation to placate his base.

The occupation of Palestinian territories and the economic situation inside Israel are connected, and we need to help people to see that.

There are many voices, across the political spectrum, which say the two-states solution is dead. There are many in my community, the Palestinian community, who hold this view. But I still believe in it. The immediate alternative to a two-state solution is not one democratic state, but Netanyahu's one-state solution, ruled over by a dictator, with the Palestinians living under an apartheid system. This is his vision, for a Greater Israel "from the river to the sea".

We need to convince Jewish citizens, including Zionists, that the only way to change the regime in Israel - to change the government, to change society - is as part of a class-based alliance with not only Arabs, but also Ethiopian communities, poor Jews from the former Soviet states, and other marginalised groups. That's the basis for building a new left.

AY: Prior to the election, we organised a large protest in Tel Aviv against annexation, and were involved in some smaller protests in areas under threat of annexation. Currently we're organising campaigns that focus on the coronavirus crisis.

The government's response to the pandemic has been very bad. Only 5% of GDP has been spent on aid and relief, even less of which has actually found its way into people's pockets. We're running two main campaigns,

one demanding 100% financial relief for workers, including self-employed workers, which would involve wage subsidies as well as other forms of relief. The other campaign, mainly led by students, demands rent freezes and rent relief.

Even during the lockdown, we've been doing some stickering and flyering around supermarkets, taking up the question of food prices, using slogans like "we can't pay 100% of the price if we don't have 100% of our wage."

MJ: There are visible differences in terms of the effects on the virus depending on people's socio-economic status and background. For example, extensive testing in the Arab areas of Israel started two and a half weeks after it began in Jewish areas. This is also part of our struggle. Almost a third of health workers in Israel are from Arab backgrounds, so the Arab citizens who are on the frontline of helping us confront the virus are then going back to their communities and not being able to access testing.

DR: How has the pandemic affected life in the Occupied Territories?

MJ: The Palestinian Authority understood that they simply did not have the healthcare infrastructure to cope with a severe spread of the virus, so they implemented very comprehensive lockdown measures very early on. It's a joke amongst Palestinians in the Occupied Territories that, since they're used to the occupation, lockdown conditions are easy for them to deal with.

Palestinian workers who travel into Israel to work, for example in the construction industry, have been very badly mistreated. When the lockdown was imposed in Israel, they were made to stay in very poor conditions, in temporary dormitories in and around construction sites. They weren't given access to testing, and anyone suspected of having the virus was simply sent back to the Occupied Territories.

DR: And in Gaza?

YA: It's more difficult to know, as there are far fewer opportunities to meet people from Gaza.

DR: What can socialists internationally do to support your activities?

MJ: It's so important for the international left to simply be aware of our existence and our activities. We're affected by BDS movements which tell people it's wrong to make direct links with anyone in Israel - which, as a Palestinian citizen of Israel, really makes me sad. We're the people on the ground who are fighting the right wing in Israel, who are opposing the occupation. It's a shame when people refuse to acknowledge us and stand in solidarity with our struggles. □

The labour movement and lockdown-easing

By Martin Thomas

Starting with Austria reopening small shops on 14 April, almost all European countries have now begun easing their pandemic lockdowns, or announced plans to do so (Italy from 4 May, France from 11 May).

Iran has reopened the bazaar in Tehran. Schools have restarted in Beijing and Shanghai.

The World Health Organisation, however, has declared that “the worst is yet to come”. Its worry is not so much about a second wave in Europe, as first waves elsewhere.

Africa so far shows 1,428 deaths, far fewer than Europe or the USA, and concentrated in Algeria and Egypt (over half that total between them). South America shows 6,321, concentrated in Brazil (two-thirds of that total).

But Brazil and Egypt (and Mexico and India, too, though not Algeria) show increasing daily counts of deaths, not levelled-off or decreasing counts as in Europe or even the USA.

Even in Europe, the official death counts are unreliable. And in Jakarta, Indonesia, for example, in the same period of March-April when there were officially 90 Covid-19 deaths, the “excess deaths” calculated from burials ran at 1,400.

India and the countries of Africa and South America have fewer hospitals, fewer health workers, and scantier medical supplies than even the worst-provided European countries.

Some of them have sparser populations, but some denser (India, 420/km², ahead of the Netherlands at 412/km²); and most have a lot of their populations in large and very crowded cities.

Their populations are younger (median age in Nigeria, for example, is 18, while in Japan and Germany it's 47). But many of them also have more people in long-term ill-health (Sudan, Pakistan, and Egypt have among the highest rates in the world for diabetes, for example).

The labour movement should demand that the government requisition industry, not just to meet Britain's demand for PPE, tests, ventilators, etc., but to help provision for countries with smaller industrial bases.

Most of the countries of Europe look to have passed their peak rate of Covid-19 deaths, for this wave anyway, around or before mid-April.

But many still show a high number of cases, and quite high daily numbers of deaths.

No-one knows which easings will keep the disease still fading, and which won't. Some countries are starting with a staged reopening of schools, some with a staged reopening of smaller shops.

Neil Ferguson, a scientist at Imperial College who worked on the 16 March report which spurred the British government into lockdown, has promised to publish within a few days a new report “modelling” scenarios for easing. Interviewed online, he said his best guess is that Britain should try to follow the model of South Korea.

South Korea's peak number of identified active cases of Covid-19 was 7,362, in a population not much smaller than Britain, and the current number here is 131,764. At the least, scaling up the South Korean operation by a factor of 15 or 20 will not be easy.

Scientists still do not know, even approximately, many of the basic facts about this virus. More testing will give us better guesses, but only better guesses.

The labour movement should campaign for more testing and tracing, and for workers' and trade-union supervision, assisted by experts, of the conditions for all reopenings after the lockdown.

In Britain, a survey done by academics (on 9-11 April) has found an 87% to 7% majority for continuing the lockdown for another three weeks (from the date of the survey: bit.ly/ld87-7).

So, despite some right-wing outriders, the government looks unlikely to move fast. It has suggested that it may increase restrictions in one way, by imposing a 14-day quarantine on everyone who enters the country.

Some building sites and hardware shops are reopening. The general secretary of a head teachers' union, ASCL, has talked of schools reopening in early June (for the second half of the summer term).

The social and even health costs of long school closures are sizeable.

Yet testing, contact-tracing, provision of PPE, and guarantees of isolation pay, are still inadequate and will be still important, maybe more important, in an eased lockdown. The labour movement should insist on adequate provision as a precondition.

More testing of health workers, care workers, etc., and more “experimental” testing to gauge infection rates in different areas, is required. Some scientists have suggested that weekly testing of the whole population be tried out at least in one city; but to extend that approach generally would require a testing rate over a hundred times bigger than any big country has managed, and probably wouldn't work well.

Before roll-out of phone-based contact-tracing apps, the labour movement should insist on guarantees about control of the data, and about the workability.

The Net-a-Porter luxury-goods mail-order firm shut down under pressure from the GMB union, and is now doing a deal with the GMB to reopen with safety provisions agreed with the union (smaller numbers on site at any time, one way in another way out, stopping the searches previously done on workers at the end of each shift...)

In workplaces remaining open during the lockdown – mail offices, refuse collection operations, the Tube – workers, sometimes using “Section 44” walkouts, have won agreements to improve social distancing and other protections.

The labour movement should take that approach as a model, in schools and elsewhere. □

Ease lockdown on Labour debate!

By Mohan Sen

Labour Party general secretary Jennie Formby has sent around a letter instructing local Labour Parties that any online meetings they hold cannot take votes and decisions. But many activists report meetings starting up again, particularly branch meetings.

We have reports of CLPs or branches holding meetings across the country - in Newark, Mid-Worcestershire, Sheffield Central, Islington North, Islington South, Croydon Central, Edinburgh Southern, Newcastle East...

Others report that their CLP [Constituency Labour Party] is not meeting or active at all. Regional officials generally say that informal meetings with political discussion and so on are allowed, but not formal decision-making meetings, except EC [Executive Committee] meetings to deal with "organisationally critical decisions" including CLP accounts.

In general left-led CLPs and wards seem to be meeting more than right-led ones, but many left-led ones are not meeting.

In some areas where Labour Parties aren't yet meeting, local left caucuses are - for instance in Darlington and Stevenage. (Stevenage CLP itself is, reportedly, planning to meet, but hasn't yet.)

Everyone should push for speaker meetings, discussions, socials and whatever they can get in their ward and their CLP, bringing people back together and introducing as much political discussion as possible. The more meet-

ings that happen, the better for the movement, and the better to put pressure on councillors and the parliamentary Labour leadership to act on the pandemic.

We also need to raise the question of formal decision-making. Labour Parties need to be able to discuss and take positions on responses to the pandemic, the crisis in social care and many other issues. Unions are taking decisions. Labour can too.

It is now only two months to the 30 June deadline which the Tories wrote into law and agreed with the EU as the date by which any extension to the Brexit "transition period" must be sorted out.

More and more EU and capitalist figures are pointing out the obvious: that it will be impossible to negotiate even a halfway-workable Brexit deal by 30 June, because the negotiators are not even able to meet, decision-makers are distracted, and all discussions now have to be on the basis of economic conditions which are in drastic and unpredictable flux. It's like learning how to ride a bike in the middle of an earthquake.

From the point of view of the labour movement, the essential thing is that any deal (or no-deal formula) rammed through before 30 June will necessarily be done without even a minimum of democratic scrutiny. The labour movement should demand that Brexit procedures are paused until they can be discussed properly!

Many Labour activists, even ones who were pro-Remain, are reluctant to discuss this. Oddly, the idea seems to be that we shouldn't raise the demand... because we might well win! The Tories, when it comes to it, will have to recognise the need for postponement. So, cunningly, we should let them take the "blame" for postponement, rather than being seen to demand it.

But our first job is to tell the truth. And the truth is that a Brexit decided by 30 June makes no sense even if you are in principle for Brexit.

Labour Parties need to discuss that. And campaigning, too: to support mutual aid groups, trade unions, councils demanding funds from the government...

Many people on right and left seem to think campaigning is something we can start again when things return to normal. But all those issues are urgent. □

Immigration Bill shelved. Now bin it!

The Tories have pulled their Immigration Bill from the House of Commons order paper, ahead of its second reading.

Unfortunately the Liberal Democrats have been clearer and more vocal on opposing the Bill's core thrust of ending EU-UK freedom of movement than the Labour leadership.

The labour movement should fight for the Bill to be not just suspended but completely withdrawn. It should campaign for the Labour Campaign for Free Movement policy passed at Labour conference last year (bit.ly/lcfmpolicy), to extend free movement and migrants' rights not curtail them. □

Gap virtual protest: end forced Uyghur labour

Tuesday 5 May, 2pm join a [virtual protest, jamming Gap's comms](#) against their ties with forced Uyghur labour. Organised by [Uyghur Solidarity Campaign](#)

The inequalities are glaring

By **Katrina Faccenda**

Katrina Faccenda is a Labour Party activist in Edinburgh and Labour candidate for the Scottish parliamentary seat of Edinburgh Northern and Leith. She talked with Sacha Ismail from Solidarity.

This crisis has starkly highlighted all sorts of inequalities and made them glaring. Vulnerable people are now much more vulnerable - people in poverty, women, BAME communities. It's an indicator not so much of how awful the pandemic is, as how dysfunctional our society was even before.

At the same time, we've seen the power trade unions can have when they actually put their mind to it, winning victories and concessions, including through direct action which simply ignores the law.

From an international perspective, all this has exposed the absurdity of migration controls. Britain's a country with people from all over the world working here, and they have the right to. Anyone talking about managed migration is coming from a very weak argument, particularly if they're part of the labour movement.

We also use this moment to engage people with what's

happening in other countries. The virus is international and the solutions must be international. When we get a vaccine, it has to be fairly shared around the world, because that's right and because otherwise none of us will be safe.

So there's space to make and win socialist arguments. The danger is that nationalists are pushing in a different direction - right-wing nationalists, obviously, but the SNP have also flirted with using the crisis for anti-English agitation. They tried to claim PPE had been diverted to England, which was proved to be untrue, but it fitted the logic of their approach.

Here in Edinburgh we've had attacks on the Chinese community. Meanwhile family back in Italy have talked about the anti-EU feeling growing there because people feel abandoned.

I've spent most of my life working in Europe, I've got family in Europe, my partner's a European migrant. Freedom of movement is very personal for me, and in any case, I'm an internationalist. The Tories' Brexit project is completely counterposed to that and we need to find ways to continue to oppose it. □

• More bit.ly/katrinafinterview

Time to be combative

A left member of the PCS civil service union's national executive talked with Sacha Ismail.

There's going to be a vast amount of social turmoil created by this. The economic and social fallout is going to be enormous. The benefits system needs thoroughly transforming so it actually supports people.

In the short term that might involve some form of a Basic Income to get money to people fast, but there are much wider issues of how the system works and treats people.

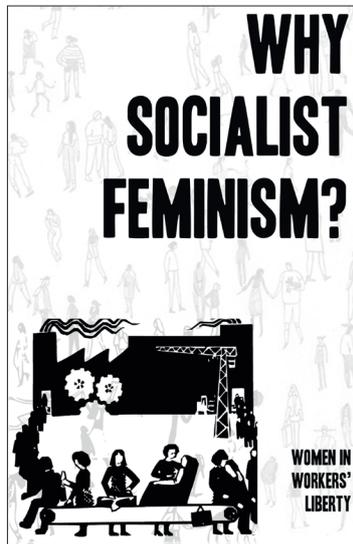
Under a bit of pressure but fundamentally because they were worried about their system collapsing, the government has resorted to a kind of crude economic planning, backed up by massive public spending. That begs the question of public ownership. We should demand public jobs, public provision, public ownership are majorly expanded.

We also have to raise the question about how public organisations are run, whether it's a centralised state thing or whether as I would advocate an important element of power and control lies with workers in these institutions and those they are serving.

Both on workplace issues and the wider demands, now is the time for unions and the labour movement to be combative as we have leverage we may not have later

on. To some extent that leverage is being used but a lot of it is being squandered by unions pursuing policies of class collaboration. If we don't push hard the employers will start to push us back and then after all this we'll be coming under attack in a very bad situation, opening the way to horrendous austerity. □

• More bit.ly/combativenow



WHY SOCIALIST FEMINISM?

Featured book

As revolutionary socialists fighting for a society based on human need not profit, Workers' Liberty makes class struggle and radical social change central to our feminism. We are socialist feminists. This pamphlet explores what "socialist feminism" might mean today. 102 pages, £5.

workersliberty.org/books

The USA in the pandemic

By Traven Leysnon

As the US currently leads the world with nearly one million cases, the death rate is particularly high in New York and New Jersey, and cities like Seattle, where the population is more concentrated and the culture is more cosmopolitan.

The virus has come to rural states, like mine in Vermont, later. The majority of deaths in Vermont have come in nursing homes. The staff in those homes, in this state anyway, are entirely non-union and very low-paid.

There are also a lot of deaths in the prisons, and in the meatpacking plants, where the workers are primarily low-income and undocumented.

26 million have applied for unemployment benefits in the last five weeks. The federal government has made a \$1200 payout to everyone – well, everyone except undocumented people, and that's many millions. In Vermont, for example, most of the agricultural workers. They're not in a position to self-isolate, and they won't go to the health-care clinics for fear of being deported.

The virus is spreading, to the southern states and particularly to the states which have not taken isolation measures, or taken them only briefly and are swept up in the right-wing movement to open up industry again. Those are also areas which are typically poor. The poor, black, and Latino are disproportionately becoming infected.

The Trump administration has been clear that our postal service, for example, which they would like to privatise, is not going to receive any help. It's due to go bankrupt in June or July, but it's needed now more than ever.

The resources of the federal government are going overwhelmingly to business, and mostly to big business. The big banks are making huge fees from disbursing the funds.

Some money is going to hospitals, and a little money is going to the states for testing, but states and municipalities have tremendous revenue losses from the lockdown, and austerity is going to come on a huge level. Unlike the federal government, states (except Vermont) are required by statute or by their constitutions to balance their budgets.

In Vermont we've already had proposals to shut down three of the public higher education campuses, in the poorest areas of the state. That's elicited a big response and car protests in the state capital. Those have got the closures postponed, but then the state may go for cutting

K-12 [kindergarten and school education], which is highly unionised.

That sort of activity is supported by unions, but not organised by them. There have been a lot of wildcat strikes in grocery stores and auto factories and meatpacking plants. There's a mini strike wave.

Protection

Theoretically there is some protection against unsafe working in some industries. But take the example of United Parcel Service [UPS], a major logistics company which is incredibly busy now. They've been pushing their workers, and not supplying safety equipment. Whistleblowers going to OSHA [the Occupational Safety and Health Administration] have been fired.

Workers are winning some protections, at places like Whole Foods or Amazon. Detroit bus workers, through their union, won free fares on the bus service as a way to protect their drivers.

General Electric workers who are being laid off, through their union CWA, have been demanding the repurposing of jet engine factories to make ventilators.

But I don't as yet see the unions gaining members here as they have in Britain. The unions are losing financial capacity as their members are laid off.

So far 9.2 million have lost their employer-provided health insurance. So the question of "Medicare for All" is huge. Even before the coronacrisis some 35% of US citizens have no or inadequate health coverage.

Our state AFL-CIO and my Labor Council are unusual in that they're primarily led by DSA members and other socialists.

Our Labor Council has called for requisitioning of PPE [Personal Protective Equipment] – of stocks held in private operations, and of production facilities to produce more. But that's not a widely-taken-up demand. And private companies are reluctant to switch production to something where they're not sure how long there's going to be a market for it, and they don't know what restrictions may be put on their profits.

The end-the-lockdown demonstrations often have a contingent which is paramilitary. On 22 April, for example, there was a small demonstration at the Vermont State House which included literature being distributed by the Patriot Front, which is a fascist organisation.

That whole thing is very much tied up with "gun rights", attacks on the right to abortion, attacks on immigrants, demands that Fauci [the federal administration's leading medical expert on the pandemic] be fired.

It appeals to the economic desperation that many self-employed and small business people feel. It has the potential to grow, and it is extremely well-financed by networks like the Koch brothers and the De Vos family.

It's small in Vermont, but it's not small in some of the southern states, and it hasn't been small in Michigan. And it's being amplified by the President. □

“What we stand for

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

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



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.

Wednesdays 29 April, 6 and 13 May 7-8.30pm: ABCs of Marxism – **29 April:** [The Communist Manifesto](#). **6 May:** [politics of identity](#). **13 May:** [The state](#)

Thursday 16 April, 6pm: [Covid-19: testing, tracing, and “exit strategies”](#). A weekly hour-long informal discussion about organising in and around the crisis.

Sunday 3, 10 May, 6.30-8pm: Sunday “political hangout” – **3 May:** [What can we learn from past pandemics?](#) **10 May:** [Marxists on the US civil war and the fight against slavery](#).

Sunday 3 May, 2-4pm: Socialist feminist reading group – [The Anti-Social Family](#)

Monday 4 May, 7.30pm: first of fortnightly series on [The state, crime, prisons, and the police](#).

Saturday 16 May, 2-4pm: [Education workers and the Covid-19 crisis](#).

Saturday 24 May, 7:30-9pm: [Antisemitism and the](#)

[Russian Revolution](#): forum with Brendan McGeever

Zoom videocall study courses

Wednesdays 4-5pm, until 24 June: [Online study course on Marx’s Capital](#), volume 1.

Thursdays 8pm: [Trotsky’s History of the Russian Revolution](#) A 13-week online study course.

Sundays until 10 May: [Marxism and trade unions](#). Registration closed.

Resources and campaigns

- [May day Free our unions action](#) for rights and safety
- **Friday 1 May:** LabourStart “[virtual May day](#)”
- **Tuesday 5 May, 2pm:** [virtual protest, jamming Gap’s comms](#) against their ties with forced Uyghur labour
- [Safe and Equal](#). Campaign for full pay for self-isolation for all, regardless of contract or status: with sub-campaigns for NHS workers and care workers.
- [Pause Brexit](#). Campaigning for the Brexit transition period to be extended beyond 31 December.
- [Take action to win safe workplaces](#). A briefing for workers and union branches.
- [Disabled Workers and the Covid-19 Crisis](#). Briefing.
- [London Renters Union campaign](#) for rent holidays.
- [Online Workers’ Liberty – facebook page](#)
- Local mutual aid [group listings](#)



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...

For studying in reading groups, in pairs, or alone. If you’d like to work through one, but might like to discuss it with someone [contact us](#) and we may be able to buddy you up! ☐

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Workers’ Liberty videos

Explore Workers’ Liberty’s videos and playlists, subscribe to youtube channel: bit.ly/wlvideos

New this week:

- [Fighting for trans rights in today’s labour movement](#), the last in a series of meetings on trans rights

Featuring:

- Several videos giving [socialist commentary on the Covid-19 crisis](#) – a playlist
- [Ed’s Corona Diaries](#) – a playlist
- [In Defence of Bolshevism](#): series by Martin Thomas accompanying the book, its namesake
- [A debate on Marxist perspectives on Irish history](#): Rayner Lysaght and Sean Matgamna
- [Two nations, Two states 101](#) – Camila Bassi explains our perspectives on Israel/Palestine

Plus many more debates, introductions, comment pieces, and coverage. ☐

Buy our pamphlets from workersliberty.org/pamphlets — The German Revolution; For workers’ climate action; Two nations, two states; more!

Facemasks a factor?

By Zack Muddle

Martin Thomas's article "[Can we get R<1?](#)" was useful and insightful (*Solidarity* 544, 21 April 2020,). However, he is too quick at one point to evaluate and attribute causality in successful strategies for limiting the spread of SARS-CoV-2 (the coronavirus which causes Covid-19):

"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, 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."

Our ability to compare how different countries are faring in tackling Covid-19, at the current time, given current data, is seriously limited. Often [questionable metrics](#) are used. Even more difficult is to attribute what factors *cause*

these differences, and the *relative importance* of these factors.

It is necessary that attempts at such comparisons are made, so that different methods can be evaluated and implemented, improved, or discarded as relevant. The data and research should be open so that governments, companies, can be held to account by a more informed labour movement. But our conclusions must be cautious in proportion to the weight of our evidence.

Lockdown, quarantines, testing, and tracing, are not the only relevant differences when comparing South Korea to, for example, most European countries and the UK.

South Korea has promoted, successfully, much more facemask wearing by members of the public. While evidence suggests that many facemasks offer little protection to the wearer, maybe also *may reduce the transmission* from the wearer. Opinion is [divided](#) about what we should draw from this. But when attributing outcomes of particular public health policies to particular components, attempted "universal mask wearing" must be taken into account.

"Social distancing" and "lockdowns" aim to reduce R through minimising general social contact; testing, and even more so "contact tracing", aim to reduce social contact but in a more targeted, fine toothed way; facemasks, hygiene and PPE aim to reduce R in cases where social contact (perhaps mediated by surfaces) does happen. □

Slump after the slump?

By Colin Foster

57% of US university chiefs say they will be cutting jobs in the coming months. Many US universities are expected to shut down altogether.

In Britain, councils say they will face an unpayable £5 billion debt as they move out of the lockdown. Some are already planning cuts, and some are threatening to declare themselves bankrupt.

Workers in some elderly-care homes have been told that their jobs may disappear as the lockdown eases, since the homes will have fewer old people to look after.

In Britain already, one and a half million people have claimed Universal Credit. Those who have lost jobs, or a lot of their pay, are disproportionately young and worse-off. 80% of the workers facing lay-offs or sizeable pay cuts are estimated to be without university degrees, although about 43% of the population aged 21 to 64 have degrees.

But the easing of the lockdown could bring more job cuts than the lockdown itself.

Small businesses will often be surviving despite lost income because they're not paying their rent and bills, and in full lockdown those payments are not chased hard. As the lockdown eases, their creditors will come after them.

Burger King has said publicly that it is paying no rent on any of its shops, and many smaller operations must be

doing the same. Burger King can do a deal with its landlords as the lockdown eases. Smaller operations, maybe not.

Even big businesses will be in trouble, despite the government's lavish promises of credit for them. The worldwide total of corporate bonds (a sort of IOU) in 2019 was \$13.5 trillion, twice the level of 2008. A much slighter tightening of credit than in 2008 will topple many firms who have built their plans on a spiral of debt.

Governments, too, will have built up huge debts. Governments and big businesses will try to restore their position at the expense of the working class.

Universal Basic Income has drawbacks as an all-purpose formula for a social "safety net". But right now, in this particular emergency, an emergency Universal Basic Income, paid to everyone without application procedures or delays, of the type of the \$2,000 per month for everyone demanded in the USA by Bernie Sanders, is the only formula foolproof and speedy enough to meet the case.

Coupled with a cancellation of rent, mortgage, and utility bills during the emergency, it could save millions from pauperisation and economic life from an implosion.

Together with that, the labour movement should demand the emergency public ownership, under democratic control, of high finance, to protect our lives against the danger of an implosion of credit and a snowballing slump even as the pandemic eases. □

Anti-trans feminists blinkered on Tories



Women's Fightback

By Natalia Cassidy

On 22 April, Minister for Women and Equalities Liz Truss addressed Parliament's Women and Equalities Select Committee, laying out her priorities. The Tory minister's comments and plans were met with much support from many from socialist feminist backgrounds on the basis that she thought single-sex spaces should be protected (a shorthand to communicate to the relevant audience that trans women will be excluded from accessing services and particular areas of public life).

The feminists in question – who subscribe to a very different kind of feminism from ours – have spent the last few years agitating against any reform to the Gender Recognition Act. Hence their acclaim for Truss' call for "checks and balances" on the ability of trans adults to live their lives as they wish without fear of persecution.

So busy lauding the Tories for their efforts in taking up the mantle of eroding the rights of trans people, these feminists failed to take any kind of critical view on the final point of priority laid out by the minister: that "under 18s are protected from decisions they could make, that are irreversible in the future [...] it's very important that while people are still developing their decision-making capabilities that we protect them from making those irreversible decisions".

Given Truss' previous stated priorities, one might understand why many have reacted as if the only application of this is the seeking of trans healthcare by teenagers. It is important to be clear in this matter, it is often construed that these treatments are surgical when in fact most treatment for trans adolescents amounts to hormone blocking treatment in order to delay the effects of puberty. This course of treatment is not nearly as irreversible as surgical intervention that we are led to believe is being performed en masse.

There are, however, far wider ramifications to what Truss is saying here. This is effectively an opposition to Gillick competence: the ability for children under 16 to consent to their own medical treatment. This means that teenagers will often be unable to access contraceptive medication (for whatever reason) and that pregnant teenage girls could be forced to carry children to term by way of a parental veto. These represent a huge step backwards for the bodily autonomy of girls, the way for which was paved by cries to "protect women and girls".

This is the logical end-point of the anti-trans feminism that has dominated the bourgeois press, is a major force in the hierarchies of many unions (much less so among their activists) and much of the left influenced by the *Morning Star*.

For some even on the left, the desire to push back against the rights of trans people is so strong that it scarcely matters what other rights must be pushed back at the same time. The calls for vigilantism against trans

women in women's toilets led to widespread harassment of butch and otherwise gender non-conforming women. This was a price worth paying for these feminists. When the calls to protect children by preventing all treatment to trans adolescents inevitably mean that teenage girls will be unable to access medication they need or be forced to carry their pregnancy to term by their parents, that too will be a price worth paying.

Of course this will more broadly aid the conservative and radical right, who actively want to drive down the rights of all oppressed groups.

We need to assert rational, inclusive socialist feminism and mobilise the labour movement, including obviously the Labour Party, for trans rights, women's rights and the rights of all the oppressed. □

• New video online: [Fighting for trans rights in today's labour movement](#)

Memories of Tony Reay

By a Lewisham AWL member

Tony Reay, who died on 23 April, was a campaigner, trade unionist and socialist. For most of his adult life he worked closely with Workers' Liberty comrades in the civil service trade unions, first the CPSA and then the PCS. He was based in Lewisham for the past 30 years and was hugely respected in the Lewisham labour movement.

Over years of working on the Trades Council together and in various campaigns, we became good friends.

Tony was acerbic, but he would work with anyone to achieve his aims and was willing to change his opinion in the light of the facts. He was also averse to mindless factionalism. This aversion to factionalism was particularly valuable recently as the Lewisham left became a factional bearpit. Tony demanded honest discussion and democracy, and refused to allow Workers' Liberty comrades to be sidelined by our enemies.

He was a mainstay of Lewisham Trades Council, always keen to promote workers' struggle, on every picket line. and always centred on the needs of our class.

He returned to the Labour Party when Corbyn was elected leader. He navigated the vicious split on the left by demanding we all focus on the tasks of getting a Labour government and ensuring rights for zero-hours and agency workers as well as other working-class demands.

He felt the discussions about antisemitism in the party or even about Brexit were diversions which risked squandering the opportunity of getting a Labour Government. We disagreed with him about that. But his focus, drive and determination to win for our class was never in doubt.

There are already plans in Lewisham to commemorate Tony's life and struggles. We can best serve his legacy by building a movement focussed on working-class struggle and untainted by puerile factionalism. □

• Abridged here: full text at bit.ly/t-reay

Reply to 66 Old New Leftists who urge support for Biden

By Paul Le Blanc

A large group of people who had been prominent in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) [in the 1960s have] written an open letter about the importance of supporting Joe Biden [for US president]... They tell us "this is an all hands on deck moment," and that supporting Joe Biden in order to defeat Donald Trump "is our high moral and political responsibility."

The letter of the sixty-six appeals to the lessons of history, which I think is always a good idea. What they do with history, however, strikes me as selective and superficial.

When I saw the letter mentioning the stormy year of 1919, I thought there would surely be reference to the great socialist Rosa Luxemburg. But no, she never comes up. Instead there is reference to the presumed wisdom of an anti-socialist, the liberal academic Max Weber, who warned left-wing students that "the best politics should be painfully aware of the consequences of action, not just intentions."

This political mentor of the letter-writers had enthusiastically supported the German war effort during World War 1, which he saw as necessary if Germany was to function as a leading world power. He had denounced revolutionary socialists as engaged in "dirt, muck, dung, and horse-play—nothing else."

He singled out Rosa Luxemburg as someone who should be confined to a zoo. Soon after, it is true, he expressed regret when she was brutally murdered in early 1919 by right-wing death squads, but he also suggested she had brought this on herself.

The open letter correctly notes that the moderate Social Democrats and the militant Communists might have prevented [Hitler's rise to power in 1933] had they joined together in a united front against Hitler.

Instead they denounced each other, with the Communists engaging in ultra-left street fighting and the Social Democrats supporting the "lesser evil" in the elections of 1932 by helping to re-elect the old conservative nationalist Paul von Hindenberg as the most practical way to block Hitler.

Of course, Hindenberg and those conservatives around him decided it would be most practical for them to adapt to the Nazis, and they brought Hitler into their government in 1933, after which he transformed it into his government. This important information, too, is missing from the open letter.

One historical lesson: neither ultra-left street fighting nor settling for a "lesser evil" in the electoral arena will necessarily bring about the results we intend. Instead, it makes sense to build a united front of revolutionary socialists, moderate socialists, and others to fight against lesser and greater evils - in our communities, in our work-

places, in the streets.

[And] it makes sense to grasp the difference between humanist liberals (potentially allies of socialists) and corporate liberals (without a doubt, opponents of socialists and humanist liberals).

Joe Biden's entire political history is that of a corporate liberal. One could argue that Donald Trump is no better, and that in fact he is much worse. I think that is true. It doesn't take away the fact that Joe Biden is a corporate liberal.

"Bernie or Bust"

DSA [Democratic Socialists of America] took a position early on that it would endorse Sanders as a socialist candidate running on the Democratic Party ballot-line, but it would not endorse any other Presidential candidate. There is a logic to this, given the nature of DSA as an explicitly socialist organisation.

As a corporate liberal, Biden is an anti-socialist, pro-capitalist, pro-billionaire enemy of what Sanders and his supporters were fighting for.

Biden offers a return to "the good old days" of corporate capitalist America, before Donald Trump assumed the Presidency. Of course, those good old days were not so good, generating the growing discontent that discredited "mainstream" politicians like Biden and paved the way for Donald Trump. A good dose of what Biden and those around him have to offer, should he win the Presidency, will set us up for the "solutions" offered by forces more disciplined and sinister than what Trump represents.

I have decided to support eco-socialist Howie Hawkins, Green Party candidate, so that I will be able to campaign for something I believe in during the upcoming electoral season.

The crises of capitalism are deepening in our country, and an increasingly desperate population is polarising.

Coming out of the shadows are elements prepared to defend old racist monuments of the Confederacy, shoot down young black men wearing hoodies, enter synagogues to slaughter Jews, and rally to state capitals, guns in hand, to push for an end to coronavirus restrictions - in order to "get the economy going again," so that Big Business can retrieve its profits, even if significant numbers of "lesser people" have to die.

On the other side of the spectrum, there are statistics that offer hope. Those in the United States today inclined to identify positively with the notion of socialism include 43 percent of all US citizens, 51 percent of young people (ages 18-29), and 57 percent of Democrats. □

• Abridged with thanks from the *New Politics* blog: bit.ly/plb-bi

What we demand

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

- private hospitals, as Ireland and Spain have done
- 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 themselves, 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. □

Child care cut

At the same time that schools are generally closed, and few of the children registered as “vulnerable” are turning up to the limited school provision which continues, the government has (on 23 April) published a decree suspending many of the social-care obligations of local councils.

For example, the duty to arrange social worker visits to children in care at least every six weeks has been removed. The requirement for six-monthly independent reviews of a child's care has been removed. And much more: bit.ly/care-ch □

Hong Kong arrests

On 18 April, Hong Kong police arrested 15 pro-democracy figures on suspicion of organising and participating in unauthorised marches on 18 August 18, 1 October, or 20 October. Police have said the 15 are due to appear before magistrates on 18 May. □

Book review: Searching for socialism

Will Sefton reviews the new book by Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *Searching for Socialism: The Project of the Labour New Left from Benn to Corbyn*. □

- See bit.ly/pan-leys

Unanswered questions



Diary of a tubeworker

By Jay Dawkey

On Wednesday [22nd] after London mayor Sadiq Khan is quoted saying that TfL [Transport for London] has run out of money and then we are notified that TfL will start furloughing some staff, people have unanswered questions.

"We are getting our pay rise now and that won't help".

"The pay rise is factored in, they've known about it since the deal was agreed. He [Khan] is saying this to put pressure on government for more money"

"He should have been asking for this money a long time ago", I say.

"He allowed the government to cut the grant, put up no fight. It's ironic he's found his voice now."

"What about if some of us get furloughed? Will we come back here? I don't want to be moved to somewhere miles away". Later on we get confirmation that people will be protected for their full pay, and no one will be moved. The conversation moves on to the beggars and rough sleepers on the network.

"It takes skills to finesse people, he's more than just a thief (one of the regular beggars at the station). He knows what he is doing, picks his targets and then he confuses them and is off with the money."

"They aren't happy though, corona and no oyster deposit refund anymore, no one is using cash."

"I just don't like it when people lie to them. Bruv, you are collecting your change from the machine now, don't tell man you've got no change. Just tell him to do one".

"The nittys are struggling now y'know. I hear some have been refused places to stay".

"A lot of the places are overcrowded and why would you want to be locked up with a load of other people like that? They are safer on the streets. I don't blame them".

The radio goes off, "Tango five four, can you come to the control room, please?" I hope it's time to go. "Yeah, tbh I didn't realise you were here, you could have gone 30 minutes ago. Sorry about that".

I'll be home for dinner tonight at least.

Another day had started badly. "Why have you come in now?"

"It's my book-on time".

"If I'd known, you could have come about 1900, if you are the late turn".

"What do you mean if you knew? You do know. It is on a piece of paper in front of you. So you could have told me."

"Well, I couldn't have rung you. I don't have your number."

"Why didn't something get sent out on email asking us to ring two hours before a shift to check?"

"Yeah, well, just call me tomorrow. Now you know."

First shift of the week has got off to a frustrating start. I am two hours earlier than needed. I go up to the depot mess room and read. No point going back home, and it's not like I can go anywhere else...

I don't speak to a single customer for the whole week. I won't have given anyone wrong directions this week. □

- "Jay Dawkey" is a Tube worker.

The first government to ban strikes

By Mohan Sen

Portugal's social democratic government has for years been cited as a model, particularly among leftist anti-Brexit campaigners. It has done better than other European governments, reversing many austerity measures and expanding elements of social provision, but within a neo-liberal framework.

In the pandemic, Portugal has had a lighter toll than elsewhere (928 deaths so far; the virus arrived later, reaching 10 deaths on 21 March, by which time neighbouring Spain had already had 1381; a lockdown from 23 March "flattened" the curve from early April, even if it has not yet pushed it down much). But this "left" government has become the first in Europe to ban strikes in economic sectors designated essential.

And it is not hypothetical: in March the government used its powers to force striking dockers in the port of Lisbon back to work.

The British government has not bothered to ban strikes. So onerous and restrictive are the procedures required for industrial action to be legal here even in usual times that in the lockdown they have simply ceased to function, bringing us much closer to all strikes being illegal. But many "Section 44" walkouts have won gains.

In Portugal as in Britain, workers have continued to struggle and take action in defiance of dictats. More of that is needed, under a capitalist "left" government as much as under the Tories. □

- Labour for a Socialist Europe will be publishing a "Europe in Revolt" briefing on Portugal's response to the emergency soon: labourforasocialisteurope.org

Make workplaces safe first!



John Moloney

We're still waiting for a response from the civil service to our proposals for what employers should do in cases of some who might be effected by the virus.

We made various demands about the isolation and closure of workspaces; we were promised a response this week, but that's now been delayed.

For the past fortnight we've been holding off bosses' plans to increase staffing levels in the workplace itself in the Passport Office. There's currently a 17.5% staffing level in the workplace, and bosses want to ramp that up to 25%.

They want to clear a backlog of applications, but on the whole that's clearly non-essential work. We've managed to hold them off until now, but they are now insisting that workers return to the workplace. The union has issued advice to all members who've been instructed to return around their legal rights to refuse to work in unsafe conditions, and making clear we'll support them if they do that.

This is part of wider plans, we fear, throughout the civil service to bring more workers back to work. There'll be an emergency session of our National Executive Committee this week to discuss that.

Our current stance is that no-one should be in the workplace if they can work from home, and that work must be brought to the worker at home rather than the worker goes to the work place.

In some departments, there is growing pressure from managers on people who are isolating or distancing at home, for example due to having underlying conditions, to return to work. Overall it's clear that civil service bosses are planning for a substantial return to the workplace. Indeed they are planning to be ready for this from 11 May.

We are clear that there can be no mass return to the workplace until it is safe. □

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

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

Solidarity production team: Cathy Nugent, Martin Thomas (editor), Misha Zubrowski, Sacha Ismail, and Simon Nelson.

Resist transport cuts!

From Tubeworker

London's mayor Sadiq Khan has taken to BBC Radio London to announce that TfL [Transport for London] may run out of money to pay staff by the end of April, and may need to cut services unless the government steps in.

It's right that Khan should appeal to the government for funding; this is something he should've been doing loudly and vocally for years, pre-pandemic, joining unions in an active campaign of protest at the abolition of the government subsidy to TfL.

But he also has a responsibility to reassure and protect the workers who keep TfL running, many of whom are now concerned for their future. We should demand open books and full scrutiny of TfL's and London Underground's finances so workers, through our collective organisations (unions), can make our own assessment about how money is being spent. Highly-paid directors should have their salaries cut, and expensive and unnecessary managerial positions should be deleted, before any frontline worker loses out.

LU has assured unions that any worker who is furloughed will have their salary, pension, and job protected. But TfL's initial announcement on furlough said that anyone on a non-permanent (i.e., fixed term) contract would be having their contract "reviewed".

Mayor Khan and TfL/LU bosses need to give all workers – permanent and fixed term, directly employed and outsourced – assurances that their pay, conditions, and jobs will be protected.

Khan should add his voice to our demands for a properly funded transport system in London; better late than never! □

May Day: support workers' action for rights and safety

On International Workers' Day, [Free Our Unions is calling on activists](#) to support workers taking action in the crisis to stand up for their rights, safety, and to abolish the anti-union laws which constrain such action. □

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Solidarity



For a workers' government

SOCIAL CARE: RISE TO THE CHALLENGE!

By Sacha Ismail

The mainstream media has extensively covered the raging crisis in social care – unsurprisingly, with thousands of care home residents dead as a result of Covid-19. It has barely touched on how devastation of the sector and its workforce by capitalism has facilitated the spread of the virus. The socialist left must push this reality to the centre of the discussion, and offer clear, radical solutions.

Before the crisis, the labour movement inattention to the chronic problems and important struggles in social care – and we include ourselves in that – was a serious failing. Now, in the pandemic, it should be abundantly clear that this sector is at the cutting edge of the class struggle, both in terms of workers' rights and standing up for the vulnerable. We must step up.

What you can do:

- Educate yourself. Read our briefing on the issues in social care and why we must fight for workers' rights and comprehensive public ownership: bit.ly/social-carearticle. See also articles and resources on [The Clarion website](https://www.clarionmag.org/).

- Educate others. Integrate arguments about the centrality of workers' rights and the need for public ownership into your day-to-day discussions and organising. Organise an online discussion.

- Build links with care workers and service-users. There are care workers' and service-users' organisations linked in the briefing you or your union branch, Labour Party or activist group can contact. Contact your local Unison, GMB and Unite branches and see if they organise care workers. Support care workers' and service-us-

ers' struggles; learn from them; find ways to raise their issues in the labour movement and the community.

- Raise clear demands in the labour movement. For a model motion demanding workers' rights and public ownership, see *The Clarion*: [theclarionmag.org/motions](https://www.clarionmag.org/motions). Get your union branch or Labour Party to host a discussion. Our briefing links to a range of campaigns and initiatives who supply speakers.

- Raise the issues with your council. Demand it does what Salford has done and ensures all care workers in its area can self-isolate on full pay (bit.ly/salfordannouncement); and that it takes action to ensure adequate PPE and testing. Get your Labour Party or union branch to take this up. □

For help with any of this, or if you'd like to help us campaign, get in touch: awl@workersliberty.org

//Me and my colleagues in care work are risking our lives for just over £8 an hour... Whether it's PPE shortages, faulty tests, or low sick pay, key workers are treated like collateral"
- Nadia Whittome MP

//The big challenge is not to go for the lowest common denominator but be far more ambitious ... It's obvious what the problems are, but the question is can the labour movement take the initiative with radical solutions? ... The care sector highlights the problems we face, unable to deliver decent standards for the people it looks after or for the huge number of workers it employs. If we don't campaign for public ownership and strict standards across the sector we are simply not rising to the challenge"
- Maria Exall, Labour Unions Vice-Chair □