

# Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

# IT'S YOUR RIGHT TO REFUSE UNSAFE WORK

» Britain's daily Covid-19 cases  
still four times France or Italy

» Refusing unsafe work  
protects others

» Use "Section 44" to resist

## Undemocracy in Momentum

"Democratic reform" group  
deletes candidate from the  
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# Schools and the Tories' "1 June"

By an AWL school worker

On Sunday 10 May, in a pre-recorded message, Boris Johnson, stated the government's desire to open primary schools to all Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 pupils on 1 June. He also said he hoped that Year 10 and Year 12 would be able to get some face to face contact in the near future.

Further guidance from the government then added nursery age children in primary schools to that list.

The announcement was shocking and reckless, and sent a paroxysm of fear through school workers, particularly in primary schools. The science for the "re-opening" seemed very weak at best. Recognising (as primary school workers had been saying all along) that it would be impossible to socially distance primary-school-age children, the guidance just said it wasn't necessary!

Since 1 May the National Education Union (NEU) had set five tests which it said should be met before any return to schools is possible. These are that there are:

- A much lower number of cases, with a sustained downward trend, and testing and tracing in place
- A national plan for social distancing
- Comprehensive regular testing for children and staff
- Whole school strategies with protocols in place in the event of any case of Covid-19
- Protection for the vulnerable and those who live with the vulnerable, in particular continued shielding.

Other measures need to be added to the tests

- Continued support for self-isolation and Covid sickness, i.e. sick pay not counted against entitlements and absence not include in managing attendance procedures. A punitive approach to sickness and isolation will lead workers to come in when they shouldn't and put everyone at risk.

- Full sick pay and self-isolation pay for supply teachers, other agency workers and outsourced school workers. We are not safe if our supply or ancillary staff feel forced to come to work while ill or at risk to avoid loss of income.

- Full sick pay and self-isolation pay for all parents and carers.

- Any return must be phased and agreed with our unions

- The curriculum priority must be to welcome and re-integrate children and young people to the school community, to recognise and respond to the situation they have been through and to provide some enjoyment in learning

- The pause of non-essential processes must remain, e.g. performance management, support plans, capability, absence monitoring.

Schools are not closed. In the lockdown, they never have been. In fact, schools have been open over Easter and bank holidays and so for longer than in any other year.

They have remained open for a very limited number of pupils and for a specific purpose — to look after the

children of key workers and the vulnerable.

This typically has meant, on average, 2% of children in school in normal term time.

There has been a problem getting vulnerable children to attend schools in this period. All the available evidence is that the reluctance to send children to school is less to do with stigma and more to do with fear of the virus.

The definition of vulnerable used by the government was one where a social worker was involved supporting the family. It seems that many Local Authorities and schools have made their own wider definition of vulnerable. In the best cases teachers and school workers have been deciding which children from their cohort they feel would be safer in school.

At no point has the union opposed that. We have argued that workers know which children should be in. In many areas, schools, the Local Authority and the unions have been discussing ways of getting more vulnerable children in school.

Everyone involved in these discussions recognises that Government's proposed "reopening" of schools makes it harder to reach those vulnerable children.

There has been an increase in the numbers of vulnerable children returning to across the country in recent weeks, due to the effort of school workers and local authorities, alongside the perception that it is safer. The situation with vulnerable children and the situation concerning the distribution of free school meal vouchers and how they work has been raised by the NEU both with the Department for Education nationally and with many local authorities.

We are nowhere near a point where schools can safely be reopened to more pupils than those groups entitled to attend now. When we reach that point there will need to be a gradual and phased return, focusing on the students who most need to be in school. Those decisions should be taken by school workers.

The slogan "no return until it is safe" is a popular and useful way to sum up a pro-worker and pro-pupil position. Safety in this context is, however, unavoidably relative. The current arrangements aren't entirely safe. All the available evidence suggests that the threat posed by this virus will be with us for up to two years. It is not conceivable that schools will remain closed to the vast majority of pupils for that length of time, or that the school unions could impose that on government.

The left in the NEU have been agitating for a national ballot to strike against unsafe opening. This is correct and should be supported, but we should be under no illusion that this would sort the problem. Any ballot would not be able to deliver strike action until some considerable time after the 1 June "re-opening" date. In addition, there are many technical problems with ensuring a ballot such as this does not fall foul of the Tory anti-union laws. It will require a significant effort to win that ballot should it occur.

The leadership of the union has a policy of asking  
*continued bottom of page 3*

# Using the right to refuse unsafe work

## “” Editorial

As workers are encouraged to return to the workplace, as part of the government's botched and reckless easing of lockdown measures, an urgent discussion is taking place across workplaces and through unions about resisting a lurch back to work in unsafe conditions.

School workers' unions are organising to resist a planned reopening from 1 June of schools (beyond the vulnerable and key workers' children for whom they have remained open throughout — see p.2). Joe Anderson, the Labour mayor of Liverpool, and some other Labour councils have said they support the NEU's "five tests" which the union says must be met before schools reopen, and have indicated they will resist pressure to reopen schools under local authority control.

In public transport, the RMT union has issued clear advice to its members that they should refuse unsafe work, and given a commitment that it will support members who take this action. Guidance issued to its reps states: "RMT will not accept any plan that we believe increases the level of risk for our members and will take whatever steps are necessary to protect those members."

Passenger levels increased on the Tube on Wednesday 13 May, with widely-circulated photos and video footage showing packed buses and train cars, where passengers could clearly not maintain 2m distance from each other.

After weeks of refusing to issue masks, London Underground bosses are now distributing them to workers, but many have queried their effectiveness. A Tube worker told Solidarity: "They're not proper masks with a filter, they're just cloth face coverings. It's a token gesture from management because they realise distancing will be much harder as passenger levels increase."

Local managers are consulting with union safety reps to produce station-by-station distancing plans, but with some including plans for station workers to be positioned at the bottom of staircases or in passageways to direct passenger flows, making distancing impossible, some reps have denounced these as "business-as-usual with a face cloth." Tube cleaners have also been issued with face coverings,

*from page 2*

its members not to plan for the 1 June return. This is conceived of as a bargaining position to force the government's hand. It is reasonable as part of a strategy.

However, the key to stop the unsafe opening is likely to be school groups using risk assessment and health and safety law to stop the opening. Where schools open unsafely, we should be notifying members of their right not to work in unsafe conditions under Section 44 of the 1996 Employment Rights Act. It is crucial that the na-

but without adequate filters.

Thus far, London Underground bosses have said they will support workers who remove themselves from unsafe situations. An RMT rep said: "It's good they've taken that line; now we'll have to see if it holds up if refusals to work in unsafe situations start leading to disruptions."

On the mainline railway, an anticipated service increase on 17 May will see agreements for reduced working hours amended or abolished altogether. A mainline driver told us: "Early on in the pandemic, our company introduced reduced shifts and shorter working weeks. We won't be going back to our full rosters, but the service increase means our existing arrangement will end. With more passengers anticipated, that means increased risks.

"Some ideas workers have discussed include using tape or barriers to section off certain parts of the train or the platform, to regulate where passengers get on and off, to maximise distancing, both for passengers between each other, and between passengers and staff.

"There is some concern about how management might respond if workers refuse unsafe work, with some worrying that people will be sent home without pay. We need to be prepared to organise in defence of any worker who has that happen to them."

The "Rail Industry Coronavirus Forum", a committee involving both Train Operating Companies and rail unions, has issued comprehensive guidance, "Principle 1" of which is "maintain social distancing". Policing the implementation of that principle will rely on alert and assertive union organisation in individual workplaces, prepared to intervene and, if necessary, organise refusals to work if the principle is breached.

In the civil service, the PCS union continues to push for an agreement that any worker who can work from home is allowed to continue to do so, with any return to the physical workplace to be voluntary as far as possible, with numbers not exceeding levels at which it's possible to maintain safe distancing.

The key aspiration for all workers must be the maximum possible degree of workers' control, with risk assessments and decisions about return-to-work plans either directly drawn up by or overseen and scrutinised by workers themselves, via elected representatives. □

tional union makes it plain that if any member is docked pay or victimised for using this right, the union will organise strike action in their defence.

The NEU has grown massively in the Covid crisis. It recruited 10,000 members in the week after Johnson's announcement alone. The membership surge seems to have been roughly equally divided between teachers and support staff which has big implications for making the NEU the union for all school workers that Workers' Liberty has fought for. □

# Brazil in the pandemic

By Luiza Xavier

**B**razil is now one of the epicentres of the novel coronavirus pandemic. The number of confirmed cases is over 200,000, and deaths over 15,000, making it the fourth largest outbreak in the world.

The still almost-exponentially-increasing number of cases has, however, not been enough to convince Jair Bolsonaro to establish any sort of federal social distancing policy. The president was instead interviewed at a floating barbecue party (!) as the number of deaths reached 10,000.

Local governments have tried to institute their own policies, but lack of federal funding, extreme poverty and years of underfunding of the national health system have led to mass graves in the biggest cities, and some poorer states of the north of Brazil.

It was predictable that Bolsonaro would follow Trump and Johnson's initial response to Covid-19, encouraging only "horizontal" isolation where only high-risk or vulnerable people isolate. What is bizarre is his ongoing insistence on horizontal isolation, which has cost him two health ministers. Both sufficiently right-wing to have been appointed by the president in the first place, but have been fired for refusing to follow Bolsonaro's policy.

Bolsonaro has also recently lost his Justice Minister, and that-judge-that-sent-Lula-to-prison, Sergio Moro. Moro resigned over a request from the president to appoint the leader of the federal police in Rio, where Bolsonaro's son is being investigated for money laundering and funding of militias.

Bolsonaro's popularity has taken a hit since Moro's resignation, but small and enthusiastic demonstrations in his favour have continued. Bolsonaro has spoken at the demonstrations saying he will not allow for any more interventions against his rulings by the congress and senate, and that he "has the military on his side". The demonstrators demand a military intervention and protest "the fake virus".

Because of the federal nature of the country, state governors and mayors in Brazil have been able to organise isolation for certain regions. However, the majority of public money is controlled by the federal government, which

means full lockdown has been particularly difficult to introduce.

Amongst the worst affected states are Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (the first affected places, where the virus was introduced in high society gatherings, attended by rich people who had recently returned from Europe), and Ceará, Amazonas and Pernambuco, in the north and north-east of Brazil — poorer states where the health system collapsed much quicker and mass graves were dug to keep up with the mortality.

Extreme poverty and inequality are an obvious aggravating factor for the pandemic in Brazil. Social distancing is nearly impossible in favelas with incredibly overcrowded houses (often lacking plumbing) whose inhabitants are in precarious work they cannot leave. The monthly "help" given by the government is 600 reais per month (about 60% of the minimum salary). Some cities have reduced the amount of public transport to encourage people to stay at home, but without instituting a lockdown or offering security to workers, this policy has resulted only in buses being overloaded.

Following the collapse of the health system in Amazonas, in the last few weeks the northern states of Maranhão, Amapá and Pará have been the first to declare a lockdown, and other states such as São Paulo are considering it. Volunteer groups of scientists have come together to offer advice to local governments that are defying the resolutions of the federal government.

This might mean hope of more radical social distancing policies being instituted elsewhere in the country. □

## Upcoming meetings

**W**orkers' Liberty have a packed schedule of varied, important and exciting meetings coming up. They are open to all, held online via zoom videocalling.

From 18 May to Sunday 31 May, excluding ongoing study courses, we have:

**Monday 18 May, 7.30pm:** second of fortnightly series on [The state, crime, prisons, and the police](#)

**Tuesday 19 May, 7-9pm:** [Fake News!](#) Meeting organised by Lewisham and Sheffield AWL

**Thursday 21 (and 28) May, 6pm:** [Covid-19: Fighting for jobs as the economic crash unfolds](#). Informal discussion of politics and the pandemic, different focus weekly.

**Sunday 24 May, 7:30-9pm:** [Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution](#): forum with Brendan McGeever

**Wednesdays 27 May 7-8.30pm:** ABCs of Marxism (cancelled 21 May) — [The Transitional Programme](#)

**Sunday 31 May, 7:30-9pm:** [After Sanders, where now for the US left?](#) Workers' Liberty forum with Lois Weiner

For full and updated details, zoom links, later meetings, ongoing study courses — newcomers welcome — and other resources, see [workersliberty.org/c19-online](#) □

## New videos!

**W**atch Workers' Liberty's videos and playlists, and subscribe to [our youtube channel!](#) Many have subtitles, if desired. **New this week:**

- [Covid-19 crisis: what we demand](#). Animated doodles by Janine Booth explaining our demands.

- ["The politics of identity"](#), opening speech by Cathy Nugent, from "ABCs of Marxism" meetings series. □

Please watch and subscribe; like, comment and share! All at: [youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK](#)

# Fight the coming job cuts!

By Colin Foster

JCB, a big company making mechanical diggers, has sent out letters beginning the consultation legally required when declaring more than 100 redundancies.

The required 45 days consultation will end on 2 July, just after the end of the current phase of the “furlough” scheme under which the government covers 80% of the wages of workers sent home for the lockdown.

JCB plans to cut 950 from its permanent workforce, and 500 agency-worker jobs.

The *Daily Telegraph* has reported that Airbus plans to “finalise” plans to cut 10,000 jobs across Europe — from its 134,000 total workforce — in the next few days.

Rolls Royce has talked of cutting 8,000 jobs, and British Airways, 12,000.

These cuts will have knock-on effects in smaller firms which supply the giants. Special Metals Wiggin, in Hereford, said on 12 May that it plans to cut 150 jobs.

A flurry of job-cut announcements is likely now because of the 45-day span to the end of the current phase of the furlough scheme.

The government has said it will continue the scheme to the end of October, but, it says, “employers will need to share the burden of paying salaries with the government”.

Bosses want to put pressure on the government to maintain the full pay-out. In many sectors, like aviation, they also see their markets shrinking.

Other firms may shut down or scale down because their previous plans relied on expansion, and when creditors come after them as the lockdown eases they won't be able to pay their debts.

Ed Miliband, as Labour's shadow business minister in the new Starmer team, is floating proposals for a “green recovery plan” to be discussed with “businesses, workers, unions and others” and then put to the government.

Reconversion of industry from such sectors as aviation is

possible. But it requires public ownership of the large firms which are threatening redundancies.

And the labour movement must work out its own emergency plans, not rely on getting an agreement with business bosses.

Demands to expand public-sector employment, and to win a shorter working week with no loss of pay, will also be vital. □

## Right to protest

After a leaked Treasury paper suggested a two-year public sector pay freeze, a group of London nurses held a socially distanced protest outside Downing Street, wearing their PPE. This is one of a number of protests health workers have organised around the country.

In response NHS England and NHS managers in London have issued a statement saying workers should not join protests as it would “adversely affect public confidence”. It also suggested support for police repression of demonstrations! [bit.ly/nhsworkersprotests](https://bit.ly/nhsworkersprotests).

Over two hundred health workers have died from Covid-19 in eight weeks — more than the number of British soldiers who died during the Iraq war! Many of the workers' protests have been about lack of PPE.

A nurse who took part in the protest told *Solidarity*: “It's absolutely hypocritical of health bosses to tell healthworkers not to protest. Matt Hancock said we should be free to raise our concerns, and previous Conservative governments have passed ‘duty of candour’ laws to compel medical and nursing staff to admit errors.

“Yet when we voice concerns about our poor working conditions or the government's handling of the crisis we are told to shut up, and our democratic rights are threatened.” □

## Tories' anti-migrant rush

The Tories are trying to rush through their new Immigration Bill under the cover of the pandemic.

The “second reading” in Parliament was announced at a few days' notice as Monday 18 May. The [Labour Campaign for Free Movement](#) is calling on the Labour leadership and MPs to oppose the Tories' xenophobia by standing up for the alternative: solidarity, equality and free movement for all.

It asks supporters to:

- sign a statement [bit.ly/sign-vs](https://bit.ly/sign-vs) calling on Labour to oppose the Bill

- tweet a quick (less than 2 minutes) video of yourself talking about why you oppose the Immigration Bill, with the hashtag #KillTheImmigrationBill

- and spread the word!

The Bill aims to end free movement with the EU by ex-

tending to EU migrants the brutal anti-migrant regime that is already imposed on non-EU migrants, while also changing that regime in new ways.

It classes migrants earning less than a certain salary threshold as “unskilled” and offers no general route for them to enter the country. They will be allowed in only as family dependents of “skilled” migrants; or on precarious, hyper-exploitative, short-term, industry-specific “guest worker” schemes.

Otherwise they will be shut out entirely, pushing more people towards dangerous routes, putting them at the mercy of unscrupulous bosses and smugglers.

The Bill spells out little detail, and instead would grant sweeping “Henry VIII” powers to the Home Secretary to make up immigration rules with limited oversight or accountability to Parliament. □

# Quarantine, not border-closure

By Andi Brookes

It's Friday 13 March 2020. The UK has 789 confirmed cases of Covid-19. It is still 10 days away from a national lockdown that will stay in place for seven weeks, effectively shuttering large swathes of society.

And the government has just removed the Foreign Office advice that travellers from Wuhan, Northern Italy, and other "hotspots" for Covid-19 should self-isolate for 14 days on arrival in the UK. The country now has no advice or restrictions on international arrivals to contain the pandemic.

However, on 11 May, the UK government reversed its position, releasing guidance announcing that "as soon as possible" nearly all international travellers would be asked to self-isolate for 14 days after entry into the UK. Arrivals will need to provide contact information and voluntarily download the government's contact tracing app.

It might seem counterintuitive that the UK's borders remain open, despite the global pandemic, but experts largely agree that closing borders does far more harm than good from a public health, humanitarian, and economic perspective.

As anyone who has played the mobile game "Plague Inc." will also tell you, by the time most countries close their borders, it's too late. If you already have sustained community transmission, it's better to focus on reducing the rate of infections in your country, rather than preventing imported cases by shutting borders.

Also, closing borders shuts off safe migration routes for people fleeing from war and persecution or seeking to reunite with their families. Morally, all of these are "essential travel".

Quarantining of new arrivals however, should form part of a comprehensive public health response, and allows those who need to move to do so.

Given all this, the government's move to quarantine arrivals to the UK, rather than using this crisis as an opportunity to impose stricter border controls, should be welcomed. However, abandoning people after asking them to self-isolate for 14 days is insufficient.

We need to be arguing for regular testing, financial support during self-isolation, and protection from dismissal for those dependent on work visas, at a minimum, to ensure people aren't disadvantaged by the new requirements. The guidance on how the scheme will work hasn't yet been released, so now is the time to lobby the government to include these pillars into its plan.

Regular testing could minimise the length of quarantine, particularly important for marginalised and vulnerable people reliant on the state for housing during this time. The UK government has a long history of abusing detention mechanisms and turning short stays into indefinite detention. We need to be vigilant against mission-creep from the Home Office turning quarantine into yet another extension of the hostile environment.

Regular testing through the 14 day period will not only help catch infections rapidly but could also support early release of people who have two negative tests, for example.

Both those self-isolating and those in state quarantine need financial support and protection from dismissal, if the scheme is to be successful. As with workers already living in the UK, those arriving need to know they will still be able to eat and pay rent if they comply with self-isolation. People should receive full pay while they're quarantined, regardless of where they're from and how long they have been working in the UK.

This is not just the morally right thing to do, it is also a central feature for compliance with the scheme. We have already seen the devastating effects on the number of infections and deaths of frontline workers from forcing people to continue working because they can't afford to pay their rent and bills on statutory sick pay — there are moral and pragmatic arguments for workers' protections during a pandemic.

We should also be pushing for specific protections for workers arriving on visas tied to jobs. No one should be facing the choice between job loss and complying with quarantine.

The quarantine period requirement should be made clear during the visa process and employers need to face significant and real penalties for encouraging people to start work before the 14 days are up or firing them. While visas shouldn't be tied to individual roles in the first place, we still need to fight for these protections for workers in the short term.

As socialists we should be pushing for support systems for workers, so we can all follow public health advice and self isolate, without bosses coercing us back to work, or losing our jobs. Quarantining new arrivals is just one part of a comprehensive public health response which also has a handle on local transmission of the disease via a "test, trace, isolate" strategy. There is no point in quarantining people for two weeks to make sure they don't have the virus if you are subsequently going to send them into a community where transmission is widespread.

It's therefore up to activists and workers to keep pushing for a properly coordinated response that leaves no one behind to prevent further catastrophe from occurring as the pandemic continues. □

• Abridged from the [Labour Campaign for Free Movement](#)

## What we demand in the crisis

1. Requisition key sectors
2. Fight for workers' control
3. Make the labour movement an essential service, fighting on the issues listed here
4. Defend workers' rights. Work or full pay! Cancel rent, mortgage, and utility payments.
5. Take care of the worst-off
6. Defend civil liberties
7. International solidarity □

• See full text at [bit.ly/what-d](https://bit.ly/what-d)

• Animated video of full demands: [bit.ly/demand-video](https://bit.ly/demand-video)

# Brexit deadline in six weeks

By Sacha Ismail

It is now just six weeks until the deadline for the UK to request an extension to the Brexit transition period (30 June), and the Tory leadership is digging in. Their spokesperson said:

“We will not ask to extend the transition period, and if the EU asks we will say no.” According to the *Sunday Times* (17 May), civil servants previously working on pandemic control have been shifted to work on no-deal Brexit preparations.

Even if the UK and EU agree a trade deal, it will represent a very hard, damaging form of Brexit. But as we go to press negotiations have once again stalled. A No Deal Brexit, smack in the middle of the economic and social fallout from Covid-19, looks highly possible.

The UK’s chief negotiator, David Frost, has complained about the EU’s “ideological” approach. What he means is indicated by the reports this week that one UK demand is the watering down of environmental protections.

UK polls show that two thirds want an extension, including clear majorities in every age group, region and social grade. They suggest that in the last month support has grown most in the categories least enthusiastic about extending — over-65s, for instance, and people in Yorkshire and the North East. Most strikingly, support from those who voted Brexit Party in the election has more than doubled, to 45%!

The Scottish and Welsh governments, the SNP, the Lib Dems and the Green Party have all called for extension. Labour and the unions have not.

Well over 80% of Labour voters favour extension. It is the working class and the poor who will suffer worst in the destruction when Covid is multiplied by Brexit, and from the turbo-austerity, worker-attacking, migrant-bashing agenda the Tory right will use the chaos to push. Yet Labour’s voice has been determined by Keir Starmer and his lieutenants telling the press they are “not calling for an extension”. Instead they urge the government to work hard and get a deal done!

Those with insight into the backroom discussions say that Starmer and co. favour extension, but don’t want to raise it for fear of right-wing attack. They hope the Tories will get into an even deeper mess and be forced to call for an extension at some point anyway.



## Wake up Labour!

Call for the Labour Party to restart decision-making meetings, to function as a campaigning force in the pandemic, and to get accountability for councillors and the parliamentary leadership! Sign here: [bit.ly/w-u-l](https://bit.ly/w-u-l)

### Allow online Labour meetings

Another petition demands that the next NEC meeting gives permission for formal business to be conducted by Labour Party units online: sign at [bit.ly/allow-meet](https://bit.ly/allow-meet) □

This ignores the glaring fact of the 30 June deadline — and that getting an extension will be significantly harder after it. In any case, this is politically bankrupt. The labour movement should be using this issue to indict the Tories, charging them with putting their nationalist ideology above saving livelihoods and lives in this crisis. It should do that regardless of its wider divisions on Brexit itself.

The labour movement’s stance should not be decided by the narrow circle around Starmer. We should demand our movement’s democratic structures discuss it. Labour’s National Executive (NEC) should debate and come to a decision. Meanwhile, local Labour Parties, union branches and union executives should start meeting online and take a stand on this.

Labour for a Socialist Europe has taken the lead in demanding that Labour and the unions speak up. L4SE’s statement has now been signed by five hundred party and union activists, including six of the UK’s ten former Labour MPs. L4SE and Another Europe is Possible have organised public meetings to discuss the issue, with more coming up. L4SE is planning more activity, including an initiative among health workers.

Given the extremity of the situation, and that much of the ruling class is not happy, all this could still blow up in the next six weeks. Labour speaking out could be crucial. In any case, we need to get keep pushing — to tell people the truth, prepare them, and maximise the chance of reopening this if 30 June comes and goes. □

- Sign the L4SE statement calling for Labour to speak out [bit.ly/labourexend](https://bit.ly/labourexend)
- AEIP Zoom meeting on the issue: 1pm, Saturday 23 May. Details at [anotherurope.org](https://anotherurope.org)
- Help the campaign. More: [labourforasocialisteurope.org](https://labourforasocialisteurope.org) or [info@labourforasocialisteurope.org](mailto:info@labourforasocialisteurope.org)



## New audio!

Listen, download or subscribe to [Workers’ Liberty audio](https://workersliberty.org/audio) recordings of our paper, other publications, and many meetings. **New this last fortnight:**

- *Solidarity* 547 [part 1](#) and [part 2](#) plus 546 [part 1](#) and [2](#)
- [Fighting for trans rights in today’s labour movement](#)
- [Marxist ABCs — Who was Lenin?](#) an intro
- [Marxist ABCs — The Communist Manifesto:](#) an intro
- [Rise of the Far Right In Europe: How to Fight It](#) speech
- [Solidarność: The workers’ movement and the rebirth of Poland in 1980-81](#) — a playlist of the book
- [France 1968: When Ten Million Workers Took Capitalism By The Throat](#) — article

Links to the audio version are at [workersliberty.org/audio](https://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](#). □

# To stall the new slump:

The 2019 TUC Congress passed a proposal from the Fire Brigades Union for “public ownership of the big banks, which could play a central role in building a sustainable economy, investing in a publicly owned energy sector and creating decent, unionised jobs in the interests of working people”.

As we face an implosion of credit and a snowballing slump, the demand is more important than ever, both to protect ourselves immediately and for any serious move towards socialism.

**John McDonnell MP (2008, during the Labour government's bank bail out)**

We [the government] are putting up £50bn of tax payers' money. We're getting preference shares with no votes so no controlling interest. We can't even put people on their boards. The shares will be bought in those banks that really need it, and they're the ones with the dodgiest debts...

We should have been more forthright. We should have nationalised to stabilise and then allow us to reform the banking system. We shouldn't be nationalising with compensation. What we're doing now may stabilise it, but it means we've got no controls over it again, and in two years they'll be back into binge investments and bonuses and massive executive pay, because the conditions we're attaching today are virtually unenforceable, because we have no controlling interests in these companies...

This is like your next door neighbour having a binge party, buying a new car, going on holiday and then sending you the bill and expecting you to pick up the tab. That's what the government is expecting the tax-payer to do, without any control over what will happen in the future. □

• Full interview at [bit.ly/mcddbanks](http://bit.ly/mcddbanks)

**Matt Wrack, Fire Brigades Union General Secretary (2012)**

The Con-Dem coalition argues that further privatisation and deregulation is the route out of recession but it was the deregulated private finance sector that sparked the crisis. The government's arguments need to be challenged. The banks cannot be allowed to carry on the way they've done before. We need a sharp break with the practices of the past.

## The Clarion public Zoom meeting

[Escaping the crisis — why we need public ownership of finance](#). 7pm, Friday 29 May (on Zoom). Speakers:

- Ben Selby, FBU executive council member who moved the policy at TUC 2019
- Ruth Cashman, Labour for a Socialist Europe secretary
- Abel Harve-Clark, climate striker and activist

More at [bit.ly/banksmeeting](http://bit.ly/banksmeeting) □

The labour movement should place on the agenda the call for a publicly owned finance industry which would provide a public service to industry and working people.

Taking over the banks will enable the state to plan investment. Instead of investment bankers gambling with money in financial markets, funds could be switched to creating millions of sustainable jobs and investing in the housing, public services and infrastructure we need. The privately owned banking system created a huge credit bubble that burst and triggered the biggest economic slump in Britain for generations.

Regulation failed to stop banks collapsing and bringing down the economy. More regulation won't work now. It's expensive, bureaucratic and ineffective.

Some argue that the banks should be broken into smaller units so that competition can flourish and the monopoly of the big five can be broken. But the banks are too interconnected — if one goes down, they can all go down like a row of dominos.

In any case, the crisis did not start with the big banks. In Britain, it started with the smaller lenders like Northern Rock. More regulation or a break-up of the banks will not make them operate in the interests of the wider economy... Only public ownership of the major banks with a new democratic structure of control can turn banking into a public service. A publicly owned banking system could finance a mass programme of useful public works, to create jobs and modernise infrastructure.

The resources are there. But they are in the hands of the billionaires, not in our hands.

We need to ask ourselves what sort of society we want — one where spivs and gamblers decide what happens or where the majority decides? □

• Full article [bit.ly/wrackbanks](http://bit.ly/wrackbanks)

**Charlotte Austin, Labour National Policy Forum member (2017)**

In the aftermath of the 2007 banking crisis, the Labour government carried out a nationalisation that cost in the area of a trillion pounds and yet failed to tackle the corruption and inequality that led to the crash.

Labour missed the opportunity of a generation — and we are still paying dearly.

The way in which the major banks were part-nationalised represents a very bad deal for everyone but the bank bosses. By insuring banks against their “toxic assets”, the Government took responsibility for the banks' liabilities while leaving their profits untouched, sanctioning the reckless activity that almost brought the entire system to collapse...

Nationalising the banks under democratic control is the right course of action to avoid future crises.

A public, democratically run banking sector would be able to act in the public interest in order to direct credit where the economy needs it most. It would be able to put jobs,



# take over the banks!

business and services ahead of creating a casino economy. Nationalising the banking sector would give an enormous boost to Labour's ability to develop an economy run in the interests of the many. □

• Full article at [bit.ly/austinbanks](http://bit.ly/austinbanks)

## Nadia Whittome MP (2019)

We have a decade to radically restructure the international economy. It's not enough to tweak around the edges or to limit ourselves to one country.

We need to take banking and energy industries into public ownership, and build a decarbonised economy that creates secure, well-paid, unionised jobs in green industries and serves people not profit.

We need a radical Labour government: a government that taxes the rich to fund public services, expands common ownership, and abolishes all anti-union laws so workers are free to stand up for ourselves. □

• Full speech at [bit.ly/whittomebanks](http://bit.ly/whittomebanks)

## Ben Selby, FBU National Executive member (2020)

When we had the financial crisis in 2007-8 and we saw the likes of Northern Rock crash, the people impacted were the workers. Then workers got hit a second time with the austerity that paid for the bank bailout. How do we avoid workers being made to pay for this crisis and future ones? The question of the banks and who owns and controls them is still key.

Democracy is about bringing people closer to power, but what happened in 2008 and since shows that power is a million miles from workers. If we're going to achieve socialism and real democracy, which are essential to one another, that has to include democratic control over this key section of the economy and therefore public ownership...

The other aspect is about climate change, and this is a point that applies internationally as well. Our response to the climate crisis would be much stronger if we had the power to make decisions about investing in the right things, in renewable energy and green jobs and infrastructure rather than fossil fuels and extreme energy. □

• Full interview at [bit.ly/selbybanks](http://bit.ly/selbybanks)

## Maria Exall, Communication Workers' Union and Labour Unions Vice-Chair (2020)

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 and policies, with zero public accountability. If we can integrate this

case into a wider argument about reformulating the kind of economy we have, it can win support. But to win the argument the labour movement needs to make it. □

• Full interview at [bit.ly/exallbanks](http://bit.ly/exallbanks)

## Owen Jones (2017)

According to a recent poll, half the electorate support nationalising the banks, despite almost no one arguing for such a policy in public life.

Sure, the rip-off inefficiency of rail privatisation, or the failure of the great energy sell-off, or the indefensible debacle of privately run water — all are testament to the intellectual poverty of the “private good, public bad” argument. None quite compete, however, with the matter of the banks leaving the entire western world consumed with the gravest series of crises since the second world war.

The principal architect of Labour's recent manifesto, Andrew Fisher, called for the nationalisation of Britain's banking sector in his 2014 book *The Failed Experiment: And How to Build an Economy That Works*. He was surely right then and he is right now. Labour is right to call for a German-style public investment bank, backed up by similar publicly run local banks.

But such proposals are not in themselves sufficient. Britain's privately run banks have proved a disaster for everyone except their shareholders. The only good alternative is public stakeholder banks, run by workers, consumers and local authorities, with an obligation to defend the best interests of our communities. Privately owned banks have proved a catastrophic failure — for our economy, our social cohesion and our politics. There is surely no alternative to public ownership. □

• Full article at [bit.ly/jonesbanks](http://bit.ly/jonesbanks)

### TUC Congress policy

2019: [bit.ly/tucbanks](http://bit.ly/tucbanks)

2012: [bit.ly/tucbanks2012](http://bit.ly/tucbanks2012)

### Young Labour conference policy (2017)

[bit.ly/ylbanks](http://bit.ly/ylbanks)

### Policy submitted to Labour conference (2019) by the FBU and by CLPs

[bit.ly/lpconfbanks](http://bit.ly/lpconfbanks)

### Fire Brigades Union pamphlet (2012)

[bit.ly/fbubanks](http://bit.ly/fbubanks)

For a section on how this connects to climate struggle see [bit.ly/fbuclimate](http://bit.ly/fbuclimate)

### Labour for a Socialist Europe policy (2019)

[bit.ly/l4sebanks](http://bit.ly/l4sebanks)

### Debate at The World Transformed (2018)

As reported by economist Michael Roberts

[bit.ly/twtbanks](http://bit.ly/twtbanks) □

# Undemocratic back-room politics

By Sacha Ismail

There is a fight about the future of Labour left organisation Momentum.

A new grouping, “Forward Momentum”, is in conflict with those who run the Momentum office (which means, in Momentum as currently constituted, run the organisation). The office people seem to be supporting a counter-initiative, “Momentum Renewal”. Both will run candidates in the imminent National Coordinating Group elections.

Neither grouping presents a clear, concrete, politically adequate or honest line about how Momentum should function, what it should argue for and what it should do. Workers’ Liberty and other class-struggle, internationalist socialists have organised Momentum Internationalists to put forward clear socialist ideas and proposals to enable the left to orient adequately in the current crises; and with the even more basic aim of repoliticising the debate.

Forward Momentum held “primaries” on 12-16 May to select candidates for the NCG.

It said the left “is stronger when we’re inclusive and democratic; when everyone’s voice is heard”. It said it wants a “truly member-led Momentum”, with an end to “the assumption that only a handful of people in senior positions... can be trusted to lead”. And “an end to stitch-ups or slates decided behind closed doors”.

But in some ways those who run Forward Momentum have been less democratic and inclusive than the current Momentum regime. They banned Momentum Internationalists candidate Ruth Cashman from the primaries on a ludicrous and cynical pretext. Meanwhile some have participated in a campaign of slander against her, Momentum Internationalists and Workers’ Liberty.

## The campaign

Immediately before the ballot opened Ruth was informed by the FM “elections panel” they would not allow her to stand. They cited a 2015 article from the Weekly Worker ([bit.ly/wwwarticle](http://bit.ly/wwwarticle)) scandalising about her refusal to condemn a 2006 article on right-wing politicised religion — Christian, Islamic and other — by Sean Matgamna (see [bit.ly/2013-row](http://bit.ly/2013-row) for the article and the 2013 arguments about it).

Ruth was charged: “We expect prospective candidates to be committed to opposing racism... defending a racist article is not compatible with the values of this campaign.”

Panel member Charlie McNamara told Ruth she had been denied the chance to make a submission in response because she hadn’t answered the phone quickly enough — though she had told them she is a key worker and was not available until the evening. As it happens, most of the election panel’s members are full-time unelected union officials (including one in Ruth’s union, Unison).

The charge is nonsense politically. Neither Sean, nor his argument in the 2006 article, nor Ruth is Islamophobic or racist. The actual issues are the failure of much of the left to seriously get to grips with the threat posed by right-wing political-religious movements; and more broadly a “political” culture which substitutes whispering campaigns and ritual

denunciations on social media for meaningful discussion and argument with political opponents.

The elections panel has made no public criticism of Ruth’s record on racism and sought no debate. In fact Forward Momentum have not even told their supporters about the decision to bar Ruth — presumably in order to avoid having to explain themselves properly.

Some in Forward Momentum have also started to agitate around a sexual assault allegation by one then AWL member against another referring to 2005. They falsely claimed our organisation orchestrated a cover-up. For extensive documentation on this, including the investigation we launched once our committees heard the charge (in 2018) and the measures we took, see [bit.ly/responsestatement](http://bit.ly/responsestatement).

Some have claimed the AWL is top-down, secretive and

## What the left candidates said

At the 14 May Forward Momentum hustings for Momentum NCG candidates, Councillor Josh Lovell said: “In 2017, after the regional structures and national committees were abolished from above, Momentum changed for the worse. E-democracy failed, membership numbers have fallen over time, groups have become inactive.

“The organisation needs radically rebuilding — on democratic grounds, but also on the lines of class struggle and internationalism. We need radical socialists leading Momentum. Momentum needs annual elections. It needs rank-and-file networks to build class struggle.

“We’ve got an insurgent far right; a Tory Immigration Bill which is about to ravage communities; and a global crash looming following the fall-out from Covid-19. In this pandemic, we need to demand every worker has the right to self-isolate on full pay. We need to immediately release all immigration detainees. We need to urgently recruit people into the unions and abolish the anti-union laws”.

Nadia Whittome MP said:

“I don’t think MPs should have reserved places on the NCG, but while we do I am putting myself forward. Momentum was vitally important not just in building a Labour left, but in building outside too. That hasn’t gone far enough, and a lot of that is down to the fact Momentum isn’t democratic. The number one thing has to be democratising Momentum: rebuilding local groups, ensuring the leadership is accountable, which can be done through having a sovereign conference. We need a pluralist left and Labour Party.

I want to provide a bridge between what’s happening outside Parliament and what’s happening inside.

“In terms of holding representatives accountable, I’ve submitted myself to open selections in my CLP. I’ve stood as a workers’ representatives on a worker’s wage.

“In the pandemic: firstly, repeal all anti-union laws. Indefinite leave to remain for key workers. There are strong arguments for a universal basic income. Increase statutory sick pay so it’s high enough for everyone to live on. A very big one is scrapping rents, so debts are not just deferred”. □

# in Momentum

undemocratic. Falsely, and ironically when you contrast our democratic constitution and practices to the practices we are discussing here.

There has been stream of vicious and dishonest denunciation on social media, and it seems behind the scenes.

The official FM twitter account made the false claim, previously not made by anyone, that multiple candidates had been included on the Momentum Internationalists candidates list without their permission. This was duly repeated around social media.

A group of prominent primary candidates in London, apparently linked to the Socialist Action group, put out publicity making hostility to the AWL a key campaign plank!

Would a Momentum run in this way be any better than the current one?

## The labour movement

Forward Momentum is not rich in labour movement activists. Leading Fire Brigades Union people are involved — comrades we have worked with closely on issues including the anti-union laws, the Green New Deal and migrants' rights. They have protested against Ruth's exclusion and the "fake news" attacks on us.

Ruth is co-secretary of a large and pretty militant union branch, and a rank-and-file workplace organiser with a strong record of organising workers' struggles. That includes lots of anti-racist campaigning, as part of a branch with a majority black membership and on her own account.

None of that exempts her from normal political criticism. But the attitude of those leading the attack seems to be that they are only interested in labour movement activists as window-dressing for their projects. We suspect Ruth's record as a working-class militant is of little interest to them.

## Forward Momentum and the old regime

Some of those leading the attack on Momentum Internationalists and the AWL were recently connected to the dominant faction in Momentum.

This includes Socialist Action, who have members on the current NCG. They have been supporters of the old Momentum regime, diverging from it mainly to the right (for instance, they opposed the mild Labour for a Green New Deal motion to Labour conference last year as "ultra-left"). It includes people instrumental in the office's hostile takeover of the Labour Against Racism and Fascism campaign (see [bit.ly/larafreport](http://bit.ly/larafreport)). It includes Christine Shawcroft, one of Jon Lansman's key lieutenants in the "coup" which abol-

## Morning Star Momentum?

The new "Momentum Renewal" faction, supported by many prominent figures and eleven MPs, bills itself as wanting "bottom up" reform of Momentum but looks more like a "continuity Momentum" campaign. To be more precise, it represents the wing of the old Momentum most influenced by *Morning Star* politics. More next week.

• [momentumrenewal.co.uk](http://momentumrenewal.co.uk) □

ished Momentum democracy overnight in early 2017, who says she has not changed her mind about that!

Lansman is stepping down from the NCG and the Momentum leadership. The recently-proclaimed "Momentum Renewal" looks like the "continuity slate". But it also seems that, as the old "office faction" has lost confidence and broken up, some from the old regime have joined FM instead.

This is a consequence of Forward Momentum's lack of clear politics on anything, including Momentum democracy.

## What should the left fight for?

In these primaries, Momentum Internationalists has been far and away the main force advocating clear, substantial politics and policies. It has published extensively on what the left and labour movement should fight for in this crisis — see the statements and blog on its site (below). Its candidates have stood out for advocating clear, concrete democratic, internationalist and socialist ideas — for the pandemic, working-class struggles, the climate emergency and migrants' rights.

This includes an orientation to grassroots workplace and working-class struggle, and to reorienting Momentum and Labour in that direction.

It includes proposals for genuinely democratising Momentum — establishing real membership-control, with a sovereign decision-making conference, not just more consultation (see [bit.ly/mmdemocracy](http://bit.ly/mmdemocracy)). And a program for democratising the Labour Party ([bit.ly/lpdemocracy](http://bit.ly/lpdemocracy)).

These are the kind of ideas and struggles we need to take forward in Forward Momentum and Momentum, in the party, the unions and more widely. □

- [momentuminternationalists.org](http://momentuminternationalists.org)
- [fwdmomentum.org](http://fwdmomentum.org)
- [momentumrenewal.co.uk](http://momentumrenewal.co.uk)

## Forward Momentum results

The 24-strong Forward Momentum slate for Momentum's National Coordinating Group (see [bit.ly/fmslate](http://bit.ly/fmslate)) looks like a very mixed bag politically.

Three candidates who signed up to the democratic and socialist program put forward by Momentum Internationalists were elected: Abbie Clark (Midlands and Eastern region), Nadia Whittome MP (elected officials section) and Ana Oppenheim (London region). So was Andrew Scatergood (Midlands and Eastern), who we have worked with closely in Free Our Unions and on other issues.

The slate includes two people, Sonali Bhattacharyya and Mick Moore (both London), who made witch-hunting Workers' Liberty one of their central campaign planks. And one, Liz Smith (Northern, Scotland, etc), who has argued vocally that Momentum was not *insufficiently* but *too* critical and pushy towards Corbyn and his leadership.

Some of the others we don't know. We also don't know yet what political program and policies FM will adopt to campaign on. Its policy committee meets on 20 May. A fair number of MI supporters have been elected to the committee from local meetings. □

# The long battle on

By Pete Radcliff

When I worked long ago in a notoriously unhealthy and dangerous steel works, Stanton near Nottingham, we often had disputes about safety.

When I first worked there the plant had the worst industrial accident record in the East Midlands region. Worse than any colliery. Deaths, limbs lost, massive burns, and cancers and lung disease as a result of fume inhalation.

Noise levels were rarely less than 100 decibels. In some areas over 125dB. When the company was eventually required to give hearing tests, one third of the workers were found to be suffering from hearing loss, including myself, though I religiously wore ear protection.

Perhaps there were a couple of shifts or parts of shifts when, like many of my work mates, I didn't stuff cotton wool in my ears — the only protection available in the first years. I have suffered the consequences with tinnitus ever since.

In almost every dangerous industry in those days, a macho and cavalier attitude had been cultivated among the workforce by managers. I started working there at about the time the first Health and Safety Act, 1974, came into force. It took years after that before the unions, particularly mine, the GMBATU as it was then, got their act into gear.

Before and after the Act, disputes had often flared up over safety in my works.

Those disputes across industry were probably the cause of a Bill similar to the eventual Act being steered through Parliament by Barbara Castle for Labour prior to 1970. When the Tories were ousted in 1974, Labour completed the amended Act. Legislation was necessary because, particularly in more weakly organised areas, the unions knew that they could not protect workers from the levels of risk.

But at Stanton, as in many workplaces, some union stewards bargained money for risks.

I can remember when, after my interview, I was first walked round the plant where I was to work for 15 years. I asked about workers I saw barely visible through a cloud of fumes. They were working on the dipping tank — a heavily manual process where iron pipes were dipped in a hot tank of bitumen.

The bitumen fumes contained xylene and other carcinogenic compounds. The extraction fan above the tank had broken. It often did, apparently. The workers were intermittently coughing.

I was told it was ok. The union had bargained and the workers had been granted a "fume bonus", 50p per shift!

## Stop forced Uyghur labour

2pm 19 May: [Uyghur Solidarity Campaign](#) is organising a [virtual protest](#) targeting Muji: end conscription of Uyghur forced labour for big business by the Chinese state.

Before I finished work there 15 years later, a number of those workers had died of cancer.

Demanding action on dust extraction, PPE, ear defenders was probably my major activity as a young militant.

It took many years to get the union to take the matters seriously.

They were ok on immediate risks to health. But action for protection from long-term damage to hearing or to lungs was more difficult to get.

Limited protective equipment — goggles, safety specs, visors, leather gloves etc. — was provided. Many workers didn't use the equipment apart from the basics of leather gloves and steel toe-capped boots, without which it would be simply impossible to work.

Eye injuries were common. I had to be taken to hospital to have iron particles removed from my eye on four or five occasions in about two years whilst working as a grinder or fletcher, finishing off the spigot and socket end of iron pipes which needed to be joined up airtight for pipelines of water, gas and oil.

The quality of PPE was often poor, but unions usually didn't get into arguments about that.

### REFUSAL

Personally, I regularly stopped the job — refusing to work grinding pipes because the extraction equipment wasn't working and I would be otherwise working in a cloud of silicon and iron dust. The usual problem was that the power of the motor of the extraction equipment was too weak. Iron and silicon dust was too heavy to be pulled down the extraction pipe.

Quite often I would spend 20-30 minutes taking the 5 metre long extraction pipe to pieces and clearing it of accumulated iron dust before working. A major production line, normally pushing through 80 pipes per hour each weighing 200 kg, would be frozen.

You can imagine the arguments with the foremen and, yes, a small number of workers worried about pretty feeble productivity bonuses.

Other workers would do the same as me, but we were probably a small minority.

For safety representatives or shop stewards, to get an



## More articles online

### Going on the offensive

Luke Hardy argues that unions are growing, and unionised workers are seeing their power

[bit.ly/go-off](http://bit.ly/go-off)

## 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](http://workersliberty.org/about) — if you agree, join us! □

# work safety

individual to say “no, I’m not fucking doing it” was a cause for celebration. There was a genuinely strong feeling of solidarity against the gaffers.

If they threatened disciplinary action, as they did against me and others, we hoped others would stand by us, and they generally did.

As knowledge about the protection of the Health and Safety Act came in, it helped. For quite a period, neither managers or workers knew where we were.

I used to carry round a little booklet. I’m not sure now whether it was the regulations or guidelines. A small brown booklet, from which I quoted extracts to workers and bosses alike.

It gave confidence to workers. It worried managers.

On not one occasion did the regional Health and Safety Executive get involved. They were mostly sympathetic to the union case, but ridiculously overworked. They also saw their job as influencing managers rather than fighting them, as we had to. The only time we had any liaison with them was when we had a fatal accident.

What are the lessons of that experience long ago for now?

Firstly, the Health and Safety Executive are simply not up to task of enforcing whatever good legislation there is. They were not up to it the 1970s, when much of the legislation came in.

## Extend self-employed support too!

Under pressure from extreme circumstances, and from the labour movement, the Tories have backed away from their talk of ending the “Coronavirus job retention” furlough scheme for employed workers or reducing it from 80% of wages. They have extended the scheme till October.

There is ambiguity about the meaning of Rishi Sunak’s request for employers to “contribute” to the cost and, in any case, the scheme as it exists is not nearly good enough. But the extension is a partial victory.

What about the parallel scheme for self-employed people, which expires in June? (It is only just starting to make payments for March-June now.) The government has said nothing about this and, for some reason, there is little fuss so far. That is in stark contrast to the blow-up through which the self-employment support scheme was originally added to the furlough scheme.

If the self-employed scheme ends in June, millions of working people — including very large numbers who are in reality precarious wage-workers — will be thrown into dire poverty, under even greater pressure to work unsafely.

The unions and Labour must loudly demand and actively fight for it to be extended too. □

Their powers are weak. The legislation is always couched in terms of what is “reasonably practicable”. At the end of the day, the interpretation of that phrase is down to the courts. The courts aren’t under our control and will more likely be sympathetic to the bosses rather than to workers.

Enforcing good health and safety standards needs active union organisation. But there is uneven consciousness amongst workers. Some live in denial of the injustices they suffer. Some are afraid to confront their bosses. They can hide that fear by believing that they somehow can survive in spite of the statistics on accidents, injuries, infirmities and death.

Culturally, our movement has made fantastic strides in the last 45 years in making workers aware that what is important is not only their pay — including the 50p fume bonuses — but their health and their lives.

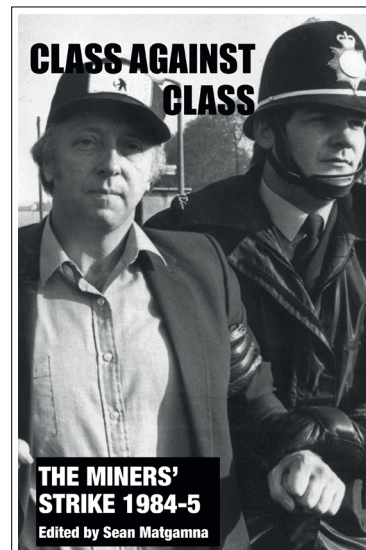
## STAND UP

However we still need to encourage individuals to stand up on issues. The Health and Safety legislation has little power, particularly in the context of an immediate dispute. It can, however, give an individual worker the confidence to stand their ground — knowing that even capitalism’s rules nominally acknowledge that they have rights not to put their lives at risk.

Today, as workers by their tens of thousands are being herded into workplaces, with risks of contracting coronavirus and passing it on to their families, among them will be people prepared to demand safety compliance, valid risk assessments of Covid-19 threats, effective protection. They will face bullying managers, people wanting to offer them the modern equivalent of the 50p fume bonuses, people questioning their motivations.

However, in our communities there have never been more workers aware of the need for solidarity to stop this disease spreading. People will stand up.

It is up to the labour and union movement to make victories out of their moral stands. □



## Featured book

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# Sitting in the glass box



## Diary of a Tube worker

By Jay Dawkey

“With the right PPE it may be possible to reduce social distancing and that would be the way services could return to something more like normal”.

Everyone seems pretty sceptical about this. Would everyone, passengers and staff, need to have this PPE? What makes a difference? It's 24 hours after the government announcement to “stay alert” and everyone expects more people to start travelling. And that means we will be asked to be “visible” and to assist more.

Already people are complaining about being made to sit in the GLAP (glass box by the barriers). “Who is cleaning it?” I ask. “You can clean it yourself if you like”, I am told by F, a supervisor who clearly hasn't got time for anyone being “awkward”. I don't go out there, and no one asks me

## Breakthrough on isolation pay?

By Todd Hamer

On Friday 16 May, in response to the growing death rate in care homes, Boris Johnson announced a £600 million “infection control fund” for care homes.

Buried in the small print of the guidance, the Department of Health and Social Care state: “The infection control fund is intended to help providers pay for additional staff and /or maintain the normal wages of staff who, in order to reduce the spread of infection need to reduce the number of establishments in which they work, reduce the number of hours they work, or self-isolate.”

To date there has been no press coverage of this new provision, and the government is keeping quiet about it.

Presumably they don't want workers in other sectors demanding the same rights, or the awkward question: how many lives might have been saved if careworkers were granted full sick/isolation pay from the start of the pandemic?

Safe and Equal will do all we can to broadcast this new provision and encourage careworkers to join unions and fight for their rights.

As more careworkers become aware of this new right, our carehomes will become safer. We hope it will also give confidence to workers in other sectors to raise their own demand for full sick pay and isolation pay. □

- [safeandequal.org](http://safeandequal.org)
- [facebook.com/safeandequal](https://facebook.com/safeandequal)

to again.

Throughout the week people are sitting in it, with barriers marking out two metres so people can stand back from it. We are told you can just direct people to go and ask at the control room.

But even with pointing, two people trying to talk to each other through a glass box, both wearing masks, two metres apart, isn't easy.

“I got told I could keep the door closed, but then they can't hear you so you open it, then they come close to you”. K, shakes his head and goes back inside.

We won't have the same cover soon either. They plan to reopen 37 stations. That means fewer spare staff, busier stations. We'll be back to our usual shifts in no time.

The WhatsApp pings as we get told a manager is asking people to sit in the GLAP at another station, someone has refused, he's writing a memo.

“Stations are going to shut, when we can't get in on busy buses. Unless they are going to put taxis on for all of us, then I'm gonna end up getting here late if I am avoiding people”.

The masks we have been provided — flimsy, surgical face coverings — are optional. I just wear mine to and from work, as the advice suggests. Maybe 25% of customers at most are wearing “face coverings”. It's on posters now and in announcements, no one really thinks it will do much.

“How many have we got, where do we keep them, can you wash them?” We get told supplies are fine, but it's the same people who only wanted us to use one glove when doing a security check.

On Thursday I help close up the station. Some maintenance contractors come in just as we close up, “Are you the governor tonight?” one asks. “No, what do you reckon? He's in his office, us out here are the ones working”.

“Ain't that right”, the other one who looks like he has a full gas mask on says. “Take it easy anyway, boys. At least it's not raining”. □

• “Jay Dawkey” is a London Underground worker and RMT union activist

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# “Section 44” in the civil service

The National Executive Committee (NEC) of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) met on 13 May to discuss the union’s position on a potential back-to-work drive. This is an abridged and slightly edited version of a report published by an NEC member and supporter of the Independent Left network. The full version will be published on the [Independent Left website](#).

Our Independent Left proposals, built around how to respond in the worst-case scenario of a mass return to work, were as follows. It was broadly agreed that 1, 2, 4 and 5 were covered by the union’s actions and/or overtaken by events. 3, about using legal rights to refuse unsafe working, was lost, with the Left Unity majority voting against whilst their former comrades who split to form the Broad Left Network voted with us.

1. That the NEC reaffirms the union’s position that no member currently away from the workplace (working at home or otherwise absent) should be asked to return.

2. That the NEC reinforces that message via various communication channels.

3. In the event that the Cabinet Office — or any other employer — refuses PCS’s position and attempts to enforce a mass return to work, the union takes the following actions:

a. A template letter is drafted for members to send if they are told to report to the workplace, citing their rights under section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 — and the law or policy position of the devolved nation where a member lives and/or working in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

b. Groups and national branches are asked to coordinate inspections across their areas to identify the risks ... in order to issue Union Inspection Notices (UINs) in response to members being forced to return to work.

c. Members are provided with the UINs, advice on their legal rights, and the template letters with instructions based upon the union’s assessment of the risks in attending their workplace.

d. Work with local safety reps and organisers to ensure that any refusal to attend work is done on a collective basis...

4. That the NEC highlights the disproportionate risk and impact upon BAME members of any reduction in lock-down measures and incorporates this into our political and campaigning activity.

5. That we ensure that facilities management workers are taken into account in PCS negotiations and actions at all levels.

There was some debate around the use of Section 44 as a basis for refusals to work. The rights under Section 44 should be seen... as a tool we can use as part of our collective union activity.

This should, of course, go hand in hand with wider organisational and campaigning activity to bring pressure to bear on the employer. □

# Threat of London Transport cuts

London Mayor Sadiq Khan needs to brush up on his negotiation skills. Mere hours after he announced Transport for London was on the verge of running out of money, and services may stop running if additional funding wasn’t forthcoming, he managed to secure... a package of less money than is needed, with more strings attached than a marionette.

In exchange for the £1.6 billion package, Khan has agreed to return the Tube to 100% service levels “as soon as possible”, and to a long-term review of TfL’s finances — which the Tory government will no doubt use to demand cuts. Khan also agreed that information on staff absences will be sent directly to the government — which can’t mean anything good for us as staff. He has offered to increase fares by 1% above inflation, breaking an election pledge. And government officials will now sit on the TfL board.

We might query what there is left to cut, after a decade that has seen one cuts programme follow another (OSP... Fit for the Future... Transformation...), it is likely the Tories will be looking around for stuff to slash or sell off in order to claw back some over their grudgingly-given dosh.

We shouldn’t let the inevitable arguments about the difficult circumstances and the need to tighten our belts dissuade us from fighting that for all we’re worth. Workers and passengers should not pay for the crisis. □

## Fund appeal

The industrial estate where we have our office has reopened from 18 May, so our office is open again. But on a limited basis. We do not yet know what additional expenses we will incur as we adjust to the “new normal”.

Since we started our new fund appeal last week we’ve had an additional £120 towards the fundraising target. Thanks to Harold and Linda and to Tim for their contributions.

Several supporters have also agreed to raise their standing orders, so by the beginning of June we should see an increase in our regular income. Please consider doing the same: [www.workersliberty.org/donate](http://www.workersliberty.org/donate) □

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# Solidarity



**For a workers' government**

## ISOLATION PAY FOR ALL!

By Todd Hamer

Just days after the government announced the planned easing of lockdown, over 180 people attended the Safe and Equal campaign's first public Zoom meeting on 12 May. The meeting brought together workers from health, social care, local government, the civil service, supermarkets and retail, construction, power and education sectors, including many outsourced workers.

The meeting heard from Ruth Cashman, library worker and Lambeth Unison joint branch secretary, Tracey McGuire, teaching assistant and NEU [National Education Union] Executive member, Kas Witana, NHS worker, and MPs John McDonnell and Nadia Whittome.

John McDonnell MP spoke about the impact of austerity on our care sector and on the government's ability to respond to the pandemic: "there were over 100,000 vacancies in social care before the pandemic hit us, and you had over a million people not receiving the care that they should have received. Social care... before the pandemic... was based on low-paid, very exploited workers, in extremely insecure employment."

"We now have more than a million on zero-hour contracts, which makes them extremely vulnerable to exploitation. We've still got the overhang of anti-trade union legislation, undermining the ability of trade unions to represent people effectively."

Nadia Whittome MP was recently laid off from her job in a care home after speaking out about the lack of PPE and sick pay rights for care workers. She spoke about the culture of bullying and silence in care homes, with workers being threatened with dismissal if they whistleblow.

The second half of the meeting was given over to workplace organising. Workers met with others in their industrial sector to discuss how to advance the struggle for full isolation pay in their workplace.

Many workers attending the meeting are currently on the "vulnerable" list and have been shielding at home. With the drive back to work, there is a danger that these workers may be forced back into workplaces that pose very serious risks to their lives. Safe and Equal has campaigned for isolation pay for potentially infectious workers. Equally significant is protecting the health and lives of our workmates with underlying health problems.

Education workers discussed the proposed reopening

of schools. There are pockets of schoolworkers, such as outsourced cleaning and catering staff, who lack ordinary rights to occupational sick pay. And another problem for stopping the spread of the virus within schools is the rights of parents and caregivers to paid time off.

In normal times, parents and caregivers often rely on grandparents or other members of the extended family to care for children when they are sick. However, this is not an option during the pandemic. If any member of the household gets symptoms, then adults will have to stay off work for 14 days to care for children.

If those adults do not have full isolation pay then they may continue to work when they should be self-isolating, and children will continue to attend school. The virus may spread quickly throughout the school community, especially as infected children often experience mild symptoms or are asymptomatic.

The only way to meaningfully reduce this risk is give all workers the freedom to follow public health advice without suffering financial hardship. Schoolworkers can insist on this right for parents and caregivers as a necessary school safety measure. If education workers took up this demand, then it could have a powerful impact on the lives of many low-paid workers.

It is worth noting full isolation pay has been introduced, in a limited and partial way, by emergency legislation... in the USA. At the beginning of April, Trump rushed through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act which granted all employees in medium-sized businesses the right to isolate on full pay for two weeks. Overnight between 22 and 65 million workers were granted the right to two weeks' full isolation pay.

Even hyper-exploitative firms like Walmart and McDonalds followed suit, and many more laws have been passed at a local and state level to extend this provision. Trump's administration was forced to recognise the public health implications of poor workers rights during the pandemic.

Safe and Equal will continue to organise action at workplace level, share some expertise and resources on the right to refuse work on health and safety grounds, and lobby MPs to demand sick pay for all. □

• [safeandequal.org](https://safeandequal.org)

• [facebook.com/safeandequal](https://facebook.com/safeandequal)