



On Guard

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Full isolation pay for all!

Fight redundancies! Defend Jobs! No cuts!

We are in a pandemic lull now, in Britain, except where spikes occur. New Covid-19 cases are probably lower now than at any time since the start of March. There may well be a "second wave" of the virus in autumn. Worldwide it has been spreading fast again since about mid-May, and the rate of spread is accelerating. It's not going away.

Mobilise

The labour movement should use the lull to regroup, remobilise, and push for the social measures needed for pandemic response. All those measures will also make a better society even if the "second wave" is small or delayed.

No private testing

As well as isolation pay, we need a public-health test-and-trace operation, run through boosted local-authority public-health departments, not one half-outsourced to Serco, Deloitte, and other private contractors, with poor coordination and communication of information.

No private PPE

Recently the government had to stop the use of 50m facemasks in the NHS, made by private company Ayanda Capital, for which the government had paid £150m. This and other fiascos, will be paid for, if the government get their way, by cutting jobs and services. We want PPE supplies secured for the future with production, stockpiling, and logistics all as accountable public services.

NHS

We want private hospitals integrated into the NHS, expanding capacity as the NHS strives to make up a huge backlog. Not just given pay-outs to hold their facilities as temporary reserves. We want an expansion of public sector jobs including in the NHS, which has 100,000 vacancies, and a boost of workers' pay. If the pandemic has taught us anything at all, it is that public services, which repeated governments have tried to destroy since Margaret Thatcher's Tory government in the 1980's, are essential to the smooth running of society at any time, but especially during a global crisis.

Public sector care homes

We want care homes, and home-carer work, taken into the public sector, as public services done by permanent workers on public-sector pay and conditions, not casualised, temporary and cheap labour.

Full isolation pay far all

The government claim to want to stop the risk to lives from Covid but still force workers who cannot afford to take time off to go into work. The demands of the Safe and Equal Campaign (see list on back page) include that all workers should be able to self isolate and shield vulnerable family members without fear, regardless of the contract or terms under which they work, including zero hour contract staff. Without full sick pay we are not safe.

Jobs

In the coming months millions of furloughed workers are in danger of losing their jobs. Government estimates that unemployment could reach 2.5m.

The figure could be much higher than that; for instance, if pubs and cafes have to shut down again. Over half a million young people leaving schools and university are going to be looking for jobs which aren't there. The future potential of a whole generation wasted.

The labour movement

For all of these things to happen, we need a fighting, militant labour movement which can prevent the onslaught on our working conditions and wellbeing. Workers need to join their unions in their thousands and demand a fightback. Unionised workers can change what happens in their workplaces and in their communities.

The demands

- Extend the furlough and self employed support schemes.
- Drop the reintroduction of 'conditionality' on Universal Credit.
- Shorten the working week with no loss of pay to create more jobs.
- Expand directly employed public sector jobs in health, social care and other public services.
- Expand council house building.
- Take manufacturing and aviation giants declaring job cuts into public ownership, and reorganise their equipment and workforce skills towards green and socially useful production.
- Take the banking and financial sector into public ownership and democratic control to restart investment.

An all workers' station Whatsapp group will be set up shortly. Look out for notices!



Rat Watch

Rail Gourmet and its parent company SSP have revealed plans to make huge numbers of catering contract staff redundant. This is despite making huge profits in the two years before the Covid pandemic followed by extensive use of furlough money during lockdown.

RMT research shows that in 2018 & 2019, SSP Group made a total profit of £416m, profit from UK operations was £191m, and it paid out a total of £346m in dividends to shareholders.

Now the company threaten to throw their workers under a bus so they can continue to pay their shareholders' dividends. No doubt the plan will be to replace them with zero hour flexible contracts as business begins to pick up again.

The rats in big business and in the government want to ensure that workers pay for the crisis caused by the pandemic while they keep their profits and their dividends.

Fight the redundancies! End zero hour contracts!

Hasty and unsafe return

How many local lockdown areas does Northern serve (and in the process link up and help spread the virus)? And yet we're seeing more and more passengers using services as Boris Johnson's hasty return to business progresses. We might be coping for the most part but what happens as rush hour and weekend evening services get busier still? There appears to be no plan whatsoever for managing over-full trains. We're already seeing instances where commuter services or trains carrying weekend revellers are getting too full for passengers to socially distance. The normal recourse for train crew to refuse unsafe work is harder to justify in this instance, as if a service ends up being cancelled then the passengers will just cause even worse overcrowding on another service. So what do we do? We need our unions to protect us from the dangers presented by the rush to return to a near-normal level of service.

Speaking of which.....

The pandemic and lockdown have brought the scourge of zero hours contracts into sharp focus for On Guard and our readers. With most of the shops and catering outlets on the station still closed, there are many familiar faces we are yet to see return. As we understand it, SSP just got rid of these people rather than furloughing them - something a zero hours contract allows them to do easily. They don't have to sack you, they just don't give you any hours. Never before has it been so obvious that we need everyone working in the industry in a union and in proper secure jobs.

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Renationalise

What will the long term impact of the pandemic be on our industry? Although we are seeing passenger numbers rise again and this is presenting dangers at times, we are still not seeing anything like the peak time footfall, and revenue has fallen off a cliff. The government has been propping up the TOCs since the start of the lockdown but public money should not be compensating fat cat shareholders for "lost profits". The railway has effectively been - temporarily- nationalised. Time to make that permanent and cut the parasites out of the equation for good. We can work towards that by pressuring our unions to fight hard against any threats of redundancies or "efficiency savings" demanded by the government in return for the bailouts. We must let the employers know we won't roll over just to maintain profitability - the sooner they give up trying to cling to their long-since failed dream of a privatised railway, the sooner we can get on with running a safe publicly owned railway fit for the future, with quality secure jobs for all rail workers.

Contracts for gnomes!

Some eagle-eyed train crew will have noticed the small army of garden gnomes that has been congregating near S150 (the signal protecting the north end of Sheffield station) for some time now. Word of their appearance has reached *On Guard* and we're wondering whether they have been taken on under one of Network Rail's bogus self-employment sub-contracts after a fall-off in garden work during the lockdown. We're hoping RMT gets them in the union and on permanent contracts soon. In the meantime, send us your gnome updates!



- Full sick pay (or paid leave from day one for all workers who are following government advice by staying home).
- No disciplinary action for following government advice and staying home.
- Adequate hygiene provision, including PPE and access to frequent handwashing.
- Social distancing at work, including withdrawal of duties that involve close contact, and home working where practial.
- The establishment of a monitoring committee including elected workers' representatives to scrutinise all information and advice and recommend further actions.