



# On Guard

onguard.bulletin@gmail.com

no. 22 March 2020

## Coronavirus Pandemic Special

### Fight for full pay when off work! Fight for safe workplaces!

COVID-19 has put capitalism as a method of running society under the spotlight, and is proving it to be inadequate to the task.

Only last month the government (for the purposes of deciding who are essential workers to be allowed in to the country) defined cleaners, care workers and delivery workers as unskilled. Now, Coronavirus has proved that society cannot run without any of these people. Cleaning has become the number one job. People in care homes, or requiring care in their own home, are reliant entirely on the skill of the careworker. Everyone in isolation, which is increasingly becoming the majority of the population, are utterly dependent upon delivery workers to keep them supplied with the essentials of life.

All of a sudden the government want us all to 'pull together' and look after each other. This flies in the face of the ruling class's way of being, particularly since Thatcher, who declared that there is no such thing as society. Trade unionists and socialists, however, have fought for solidarity amongst the ranks of the working class ever since capitalism began.

Two years ago Junior Doctors had to take unprecedented strike action against government attacks on their working conditions and on the NHS. Now the NHS is at the front line of protecting us from the Coronavirus. Now the government is asking industry to change production to medical essentials such as ventilators. Human need before profit! This is socialism in action but they don't know it.

Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, has announced an unprecedented amount of cash to keep things moving during this pandemic. The magic money tree, dismissed out of hand by Theresa May, is suddenly available. But do not be fooled. Sunak's guarantee of £330bn is for businesses to decide how to use. It is not laid out by the government that they use this money to pay staff their full salary whilst off sick with the virus.

The government's main concern is to protect the economy. Our main concern must be to protect workers rights and to protect life. That is what solidarity really means. The labour movement is our essential service.

#### Has your boss:

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

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

- Contact the union. If you are not in a union, join one now. For Rail Gourmet, cleaners and SSP staff, this will be the RMT.
- Elect a health and safety representative if you do not already have one.
- Draw up a list of demands and table them to your boss.
- Where you believe that you are in serious and imminent danger, refuse to work. You have the legal right to do all these things.

#### The Demands

- Full pay for all workers from day one of absence
- No disciplinary action for following NHS and government advice in staying away from work
- Adequate hygiene provision including access to frequent hand-washing facilities
- Withdrawal of close contact duties eg collection of revenue on trains.
- Provision of face masks for all staff and alcohol-based sanitisers in all work positions.

#### Refusing to work on safety grounds

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

On Guard believes there are good grounds to perceive serious and imminent risk if the above provisions are not met

**On Guard** is a rank and file socialist bulletin by and for workers of all grades and companies at Sheffield rail. It is published by socialist group Workers' Liberty .  
**Contact us:**  
 onguard.bulletin@gmail.com

Protect yourselves, your workmates, your families and the public.  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home)



### Rat Watch

Richard Branson; love him; founder of the Virgin Group, with a net worth of £4bn; owner of a Caribbean Island; suer of the National Health Service for an undisclosed amount, but to the tune of billions; awarded over £2bn worth of NHS contracts over recent years; and claimer that 'money isn't everything' and 'stuff doesn't bring you happiness'.....  
.....has decided to lay his airline staff off for eight weeks with no pay. It would cost £4.2m to pay all of these employees £500 a week, a cost of £34m for 8 weeks, a tiny fraction of his own personal wealth. On Guard is not sure who to give the Award of the Rat to though since Unite the union have agreed to his unpaid lay offs! For a better union response, take a look at the article below.

### RMT wins full sick pay for cleaners on the London Underground.

The RMT have been fighting for contracted sick pay for the cleaning staff on London Underground since the private company ABM took it over. The cleaners, like ours at Sheffield only get Statutory Sick Pay which is £94 a week but not for the first 3 three days. This week on the back of the coronavirus pandemic, the RMT won. Transport for London issued the statement:

*"Recognising the frontline, critical role our ABM colleagues play in keeping our TfL network clean and safe for both our teams and our customers, TfL has agreed with ABM that going forward, all ABM staff at TfL who need to self-isolate, based on Public Health England advice, will recieve full shift rate of pay for the duration of their isolation period".*

Cleaners on our station, please take note! This is a winnable demand. Forecourt staff are also essential. Demand the same of SSP.

### S(tand up for full) S(ick) P(ay)

SSP management last month changed the contracts of their staff on the forecourt at a day's notice, cutting their hours. If you rely on your wages to pay a mortgage or the rent, how are you supposed to organise your finances at a day's notice? The reason given was that the closure of Thomas Cook last September has had the knock on effect of fewer passengers passing through airports and stations. There are even fewer now! Forecourt staff were told that there is nothing they can do about it because a clause in their contracts allows for short notice changes. What does this mean for the onset of an international pandemic, causing staff to go home at short notice?

SSP staff, please join your union and demand full pay from day one of sick leave! London Underground RMT show what can be acheived.

### Northern in Hot Water?

Skeleton services should not mean full mess rooms!

We have enough problems with the Northern messroom already - hot water supply has been off and now back on but unreliable, bits falling off left right and centre. The facility, good though it now is, needs more work before it can handle heavier use, and we're just heading into a period of reduced service.

Aside from all that, we are working through a pandemic. Gatherings of people are being discouraged - that means if we have no work to carry out, we should not be expected to spend hours in messrooms. Staff not rostered any booked work should be allowed to stay at home, and messroom time should be confined to breaks. If jobs are cancelled then the crew should be allowed to leave work. As far as possible we should not be at the depot at all if we do not have trains to work.

### Covid on the Northern

Staff falling into "High Risk" groups have been stood off with full pay. On-board revenue collections cease from 19th March (better late than never). Sick Pay arrangements have been temporarily amended to ensure more cover for new starters and full pay from day one for all staff

- . -

However, Nothing of substance appears to be being done about cab sanitation. Telling us to wash our hands is right but any infection is going to be all over cab equipment, we need to be able to quickly disinfect when we enter a cab!

- . -

The latest brief has gone quiet about Special Leave for those self-isolating, which was what the brief issued on 13th of March said would be done with staff members well enough to work but forced to self-isolate. The brief from ASLEF has said that this remains the policy, the company are probably being cagey about it because they think we're all queuing up to take the mick. The MFA policy, if triggered, will still be applied unless a staff member can provide medical evidence of COVID-19 infection - a ridiculous requirement when most people who have the virus will not get the opportunity to be tested!

- . -

The unions should insist that all instances of respiratory illness during the period of the pandemic be discounted from MFA.

All staff should also be issued with advice on cab sanitation and appropriate equipment to carry this out.

Special Leave should continue to be used for those self-isolating but otherwise fit for work. These people do not require Sick Leave and should not be expected to self-cert, as they would not qualify for or be able to get a doctor's note.

Full pay from day one for those too sick to work, Special Leave for everyone else who can't work due to self-isolation!