

# Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



**For social ownership of the banks and industry**

# In the pandemic the labour movement must fight to make us all

# SAFE AND EQUAL



## **Labour under Starmer**

Matt Wrack and others interviewed; the 860-page report; Forward Momentum

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Germany: not as good as some suggest, but not made incompetent by Thatcherism

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# Why Sanders lost



## Sanders' Campaign

By Eric Lee

Why did Bernie Sanders fail to win the Democratic nomination in 2020? Let's start with three explanations that don't work.

1. The Democratic party establishment conspired to stop him. That was only partly true in 2016 - and not true at all in 2020. One of the things Sanders did after 2016 was force the Democratic Party to reform, ensuring (among other things) that so-called "super delegates" would have much less influence than before. In 2016 there was a lot of evidence of the party machine working behind the scenes to elect Clinton, using devious methods. That doesn't seem to be the case today.

2. He was too left wing. This is a mainstream media favourite. Yes, Sanders called for a "political revolution" when he really meant social democratic reforms, looking more towards Denmark than Bolshevik Russia as his model. And yes, he got caught up in a pointless argument about Castro's Cuba (when he actually said nothing different from Obama). It turns out that his main ideas - medicare for all, free tuition in public universities, etc. - are still very popular.

3. He wasn't left-wing enough. This is the default answer given by the far Left following an electoral defeat. But it makes no sense in a country like the US where Sanders was the most radical candidate for the presidency ever, in any major party. Can anyone seriously believe that had he argued for, say, nationalisation of industry that he'd have won the South Carolina primary?

So why did he lose?

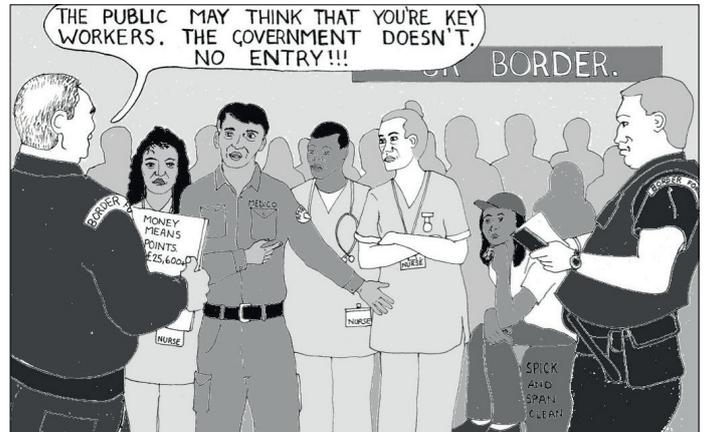
His campaign made plenty of mistakes (as they did in 2016). Sanders should have done much better with

### "Class power on Zero Hours"

The Angry Workers of the World (AWW) is involved in workplace organising, primarily in food manufacturing and logistics. Their recently published book "[Class Power on Zero Hours](#)" discusses their experiences, and aims to grapple with "what next for working class politics and revolutionary strategy?" They produce a number of factory bulletins and a newspaper.

Although organised to encourage debate as well as learning from each others' experiences, this [Workers' Liberty-hosted forum](#) is not a "head-to-head", but a presentation from AWW comrades, then time for questions, comments, and discussion. □

• Sat, April 18, 3-5pm, online: [bit.ly/cp-zh](https://bit.ly/cp-zh)



African American voters and pensioners. But one problem with looking over the mistakes he and his campaign made is this: did Biden not make mistakes?

### Socialist movement

Biden ran one of the worst campaigns ever, and in some states he won, he had no campaign at all. You cannot explain Sanders' defeat based solely on the many anecdotes about this or that mistaken decision.

I think socialists have to be honest about why Bernie lost. And part of that reason is that he was a socialist politician in a country with no socialist movement.

The largest socialist group in the US has around 50,000 members, which is a drop in the bucket in a country of nearly 330 million people. Only a couple of leading American politicians, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez among them, have self-identified as socialists.

Clement Attlee could not have become prime minister of the UK in 1945 without a strong Labour Party. None of Sanders' favoured Scandinavian welfare states became that way without social democratic parties.

Having a socialist movement doesn't necessarily mean an independent political party. It is entirely possible to imagine a powerful socialist faction inside the Democratic party. But that too does not exist - yet - in the US.

With Sanders out of the race, the question is whether his slogan "Not me - us" now becomes real, and whether a movement is born. □

• Eric Lee is the convenor of "London for Bernie", writing here in a personal capacity. For all Eric's columns on the Sanders campaign - of which this is the last - and other coverage on Sanders, see [bit.ly/el-bs](https://bit.ly/el-bs)

### Another socialist for US president

Howie Hawkins, a socialist, is leading in the contest for the Green Party nomination for US president.

• [bit.ly/howie-h](https://bit.ly/howie-h) □

# Safe and Equal!

## “” Editorial

The “Safe and Equal” campaign, publicly launched on 13 April ([safeandequal.org](http://safeandequal.org)) is for equal rights to full self-isolation pay for all workers regardless of their employment status.

In too many workplaces, agency staff are getting short shrift and being obliged to choose between going down to £94/week statutory sick pay, or coming into work sick or potentially contagious.

Safe and Equal grew out of the work of activists at the East London Foundation Trust (ELFT) hospital, where a campaign of posters and letter-writing has already won big steps forward for self-isolation pay for agency and “bank” workers. The ELFT staff who ran that campaign have reached out to trade unionists and socialists in other industries to launch a broader campaign on the same issue: levelling up the rights of workers who face the harshest exploitation.

NHS England, after years of union pressure, in the grip of the Covid-19 crisis has admitted that workers’ rights are vital to infection control. That is very significant. But now workers have to take that admission and make it real - in every workplace, in every industry that is still open, we have to press the point: no-one is safe until everyone is safe.

### Advice, ideas, news, campaign

Safe and Equal will collect and distribute advice, ideas and news by and for workers who want to fight for their rights to workplace safety. The campaign will tell people’s stories, rally support for disputes, and push MPs to act.

A special dedicated [blog by and for care workers](#) will seek to link up carers and push a common set of demands across the whole industry.

The campaign will also push for adequate PPE everywhere it’s needed, collect “PPE horror stories”, and make the point that workers need to be trained in appropriate use of PPE - not just given this or that bit of kit to shut us up!

### This is the campaign’s [founding statement](#):

While management have retreated to the safety of their private homes, many of us are still at work, putting our lives and the lives of our loved ones at risk to provide essential services to our communities. Hundreds of thousands of us, including in the NHS, are precariously employed with no ordinary rights to paid leave.

If these workers, who are often the lowest paid, get Coronavirus symptoms – or a member of their family

gets Coronavirus symptoms – then many will not be able to afford to follow public health advice to self-isolate. This is a problem not just for these workers but for the entire workforce and the people we serve. To slow the spread of Covid-19 all essential workers need the right to follow public health advice without suffering financial hardship.

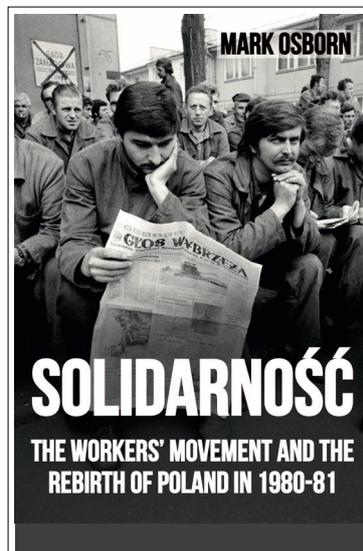
NHS Employers have recognised that workers’ rights to full paid leave to follow public health advice are “essential” for “infection control purposes”. If it is essential in the NHS then it is essential for all of us going about our duties at this time: food production and distribution, transport, logistics, delivery, social care, utilities, manufacturing and the large numbers of security and cleaning staff who work alongside us in all sectors.

The degrading of workers’ rights over many decades has allowed capitalists to maximise profits at our expense. Privatisation and outsourcing have not only turned public services into opportunities for private profiteering, but also have fractured and broken trade union organisation, atomising workers and making it more difficult to fight back.

We have lived through a long period of gradual defeats for our class, and it has left us ill-prepared to deal with this crisis.

But in the last few weeks, through workers’ solidarity and collective action, many workers have won full sick and self isolation pay for all. In the NHS, London Underground and elsewhere, we are winning safer workplaces and improved workers’ rights for all. We are campaigning to build on these successes and ensure that when this pandemic is over, we retain the rights we have won and have stronger trade union organisation to win further gains for all.

Join a union. Fight the bosses. Stay safe and look after one another. No going back. ☐



### Featured book

New book for the fortieth anniversary of the explosive birth of the Polish independent workers’ movement, Solidarność. This book explains why the movement emerged when, where and how it did; and was eventually crushed by the anti-working-class Polish state. 116 pages, £5.

[workersliberty.org/books](http://workersliberty.org/books)

# No question of “national unity” government!

**Fire Brigades Union general secretary Matt Wrack talked with Sacha Ismail from Solidarity**

In terms of trade union structures, there are real challenges in re-establishing basic functioning in this situation. We've had to play catch up to re-establish core functioning and communication under the lockdown. Certainly in the FBU it's taken us a couple of weeks to get on top of the basics, even things like how do you take a vote properly in an online meeting.

Nevertheless, unions need to have the political will to step up. The FBU has been very clear that our organisation - not just our head office but our officers and reps out in the country - needs to carry on working. We're facing big industrial challenges, primarily around health and safety but also terms and conditions of service. We're working to ensure our officials at the local level continue to engage with employers - we have no intention of just allowing them to impose conditions on us.

I welcome our members getting involved in mutual aid groups and community support work alongside other trade unionists, Labour members and others.

The labour movement needs to maintain its political independence from the government. There's clearly a need for a massive collective effort to deal with the virus, and that is of course people's focus, but right from the start we've insisted that the government's response needs criticising.

In the first place it's a dramatic failure of emergency planning. The possibility of a pandemic has been there on the National Risk Register for years, and yet they were totally unprepared. It's not just a technical failure. There's been a lot of talk about “resilience”, but the resilience of our public services and support systems has been severely undermined by hundreds of thousands of job cuts, by funding cuts, by privatisation.

## Different interests

Labour's response to the crisis has not been adequate. There could have been greater dialogue with the public sector and emergency service unions. But the key thing is Labour should be clear that the majority of society has very different interests from those the Tory government represents.

There should be absolutely no question of a national unity government. We can cooperate against the pandemic, but we can't have “unity” with the people who've slashed jobs, suppressed wages, stolen our pensions and undermined the essential workers who are risking so much to tackle this crisis.

All this raises very fundamental questions about society

- exemplified by the fact that the workers who are getting us through this have had warm words but in reality contempt from the government. Public-sector workers who are regularly accused of being privileged, of being bloated, of having gold-plated pensions, but also hard-pressed, low-paid workers in the private sector, in retail, distribution and so on.

On issues like PPE, job security and protection of wages, union organisation is key to winning what workers need, but we are facing a government that is utterly hostile to unions and has worked consistently and aggressively to undermine them.

Right now not everyone will want to hear these criticisms, but more people will come to understand their importance.

The organisation the FBU uses for our balloting is in the same situation as other authorised balloting organisations, which is that it judges it can't operate under the lockdown. So does that mean workers no longer have the right to take industrial action? We must have that right. The anti-union laws insist on postal ballots. The labour movement should be arguing this situation highlights how that is nonsense, and demanding it is changed.

In fact even if we could have functioning ballots, the issues workers are facing now, like PPE and safe working practices, are so urgent that a lengthy process of having to give notice to the employer, conduct the ballot, then give notice of strike action would be absurd. You're talking weeks and months. If workers need to simply walk out to ensure their safety and their rights that should be completely lawful. In any case, those taking such action should be supported.

We need to demand the Labour Party backs workers who are taking action, and that it campaigns to repeal the anti-union laws. □

• Interview abridged. In full: [bit.ly/mw-543](https://bit.ly/mw-543)

## More online

Stuart Jordan on the pandemic, wars, and socialism

• [bit.ly/sj-war](https://bit.ly/sj-war)

Tower Hamlets council on brink of mass sackings

• [bit.ly/th-brink](https://bit.ly/th-brink)

Schools and the pandemic: update

• [bit.ly/sch-update](https://bit.ly/sch-update)

Italy: the bankruptcy of the rulers

• [bit.ly/he-ital](https://bit.ly/he-ital)

The Sixties Left in the USA

• [bit.ly/60s-usa](https://bit.ly/60s-usa)

# We need a bigger and different public sector

Tom Zagoria spoke to Sacha Ismail

One background to the crisis is a decimation of the positive aspects of the state's capacity. There has been criticism of decisions about the lockdown and so on, and I'm sure there are lots of weaknesses there that reflect pressure from employers - but there is a wider and longer-term problem.

We've had more than a decade of big cuts in local government and other services. There are more and more hoops people have to jump through to access services, and a great distrust between people experiencing homelessness and local authorities, which is still a barrier to people getting help even when they are terrified and want to get off the streets. Outsourcing to the voluntary sector is another factor.

Some councils have suspended rules that limit access to services - "no recourse to public funds" for migrants, and requirements about having a "local connection" - but this is patchy. The Mayor of London's office has said that in London-wide shelters - essentially big hotels - NRPF rules are suspended, but the access point is local councils, many of which are still operating the rule.

It's not just a matter of lack of joined-up thinking, or even a bad approach by council leaderships and officers, but the whole way the public sector has come to function.

The Labour Party is not making these arguments. It's not pushing to consistently suspend NRPF, let alone making the political case it should be abolished.

Part of the point is that the limited concessions that have been made - new forms of income support, housing rough sleepers, some relaxation of various rules - will be taken away again when this crisis ends. If the message is that the government is doing a good job in a tough situation, and we're all on the same side, it doesn't put us in a strong position to fight when things are rolled back.

Joining a national unity government would be a very bad mistake. It might allow the left to regroup against Starmer, but the wider point is that the labour movements need to be an independent voice.

## Never again

The political mood is complicated, but I do think there is a "Never again" feeling about the NHS and other issues. If the Tories want austerity 2.0 after this crisis I think it will be harder than last time.

During the election, canvassing in areas like Derbyshire and South Yorkshire, areas we lost, there was nonetheless a strong hostility to austerity, although unfortunately a lot of people believed Brexit was the answer. So we could see opposition grow. Labour should be raising clear demands for that opposition.

Labour should demand immediate requisitioning of empty buildings to provide enough housing that everyone has somewhere decent to live. Not on the basis of private-provision and profit - putting people in hotels and giving money to the big hotel chains. In the NHS, we need a much stronger stand against privatisation, bringing services back in house, as well as better funding. We need an integrated public sector in which private companies are not taking profits from our services.

What we're experiencing now is not just a result of cuts but the earlier progress of neoliberalism, for instance privatisation under New Labour, when services were improved on the basis of injecting private money and private control. We need arguments about democratic control and workers' control of public services instead. Obviously we want more spending, but we need to get beyond the idea that more public spending is in itself a left-wing policy. We need state spending and state provision organised in a way that can benefit people above capital.

I think the insecurity people are feeling is only going to get worse with more natural disasters, including pandemics. The left needs to say we can't rely on the market, that we need collective and democratic solutions and ultimately a very different economic model. Obviously it will require a lot more class struggle to achieve that, but we can start making the arguments.

## What's your assessment of where things are at in Labour after the leadership election?

I voted for Long-Bailey. We don't have time to lick our wounds but we do need to consider and discuss. We should try to recreate the more open and pluralist and lively left that organised behind Corbyn in 2015. There are various initiatives appearing, for instance Labour Transformed and Forward Momentum.

I think a technocratic approach is where the left has gone wrong. In 2017 there was an excitement around the kind of left populism Labour represented, despite the lack of a strong workers' movement base, but then instead of trying to develop that base the line was, right, we're the government in waiting, let's get suited up and go for meetings with the City of London. Even in 2019 when we had a more radical manifesto the policies were introduced at the last minute and in a way it felt less radical than 2017.

That carried over into the leadership election in that RLB seemed to represent the more technocratic side of Corbynism: left policies put forward from above by a lawyer who would perform well in the media. We weren't able to convince the membership that we had a useful

*Continued overleaf*

# We need a bigger and different public sector

From page 5

alternative vision to Starmer, so his pitch about electability worked.

If we'd had more of a base in unions and social movements and if we'd developed radical policies and arguments further back, it might have been different. In the end, it was all pretty tame.

## So what now?

Focusing on party policy and campaigning makes sense. Lots of members were convinced by Starmer, or alienated by aspects of the left, but still want left-wing policies. As do lots of people beyond the membership. The more the left is serious about developing policies and pushing for them to be taken up the more it can reassert itself. We need to do the kind of work we did at Labour conference last year, but it needs to be sustained and developed between conferences and linked to pushing for democracy in the party.

The Tories seem determined to push through a hard Brexit at the end of the year, despite the pandemic.

In terms of the immediate argument about extending the transition period, yes, this is a common sense demand and it's urgent that the Tories are pushed back – particularly for the sake of those migrants who are seeing their window to apply for settled status disappearing during the pandemic. The labour movement should stop trying to ignore the issue and start pushing.

However, I think the argument needs to be not about remaining in the EU but about the impact the Tories' plans will have on vulnerable people as well as the wider working class. I've come around to the view that we can't viably oppose leaving the EU. Tying our internationalism to EU membership and structures is a mistake, because the EU is representative of a real issue about lack of democracy and control. I'm not trying to claim that the drive for Brexit, or the sentiment backing it, was left-wing, but I do think the issue about democracy is real. If we counterpose ourselves to that, rather than accepting Brexit will happen while arguing for international class solidarity, it will be self-defeating.

I know superficially similar arguments are made by Stalinists whose "internationalism" amounts to support for authoritarian regimes in other parts of the world. We should distinguish ourselves not by trying to stop Brexit but by reasserting socialist arguments and fighting hard on issues like free movement. Even in terms of the immediate question of extension we need to emphasise that what concerns us is the impact on the working class, not "the economy" in some abstract classless sense.

If we slip into support for the EU, rather than internationalism as such, it's another manifestation of the technocratic approach I criticised before. □

• Tom Zagoria is a London-based activist in the Labour Homelessness Campaign; he works in homeless provision

# Taking the lid off

By Patrick Murphy

At least three things seem clear from the recently leaked Labour Party report on its "governance and legal" issues.

First, the remnants of New Labour hated any attempt, however modest, to move the party back to the left. They were opposed to Ed Miliband and Andy Burnham as well as Corbyn.

Secondly, as was clear from their actions, they preferred a Tory government (even under Johnson and his hard Brexiteers) to a Labour victory under Corbyn. In a kind of "Third Period Blairism", this was a case of "after Boris our turn".

Thirdly and maybe most shocking, they put factional opposition to Corbyn ahead of dealing with incidents of antisemitism effectively. No matter of principle, even the one they claimed to champion most, was immune from their poisonous anti-socialism.

These people are amongst the most contemptible anywhere in politics, in any of the main parties. They believe in no principle higher than their own importance and wisdom. They dream of no goal more significant than their own careers. It is not a matter of factionalism to call them out. It's a matter of simply observing their actions and drawing the only possible conclusions.

On the other hand I have seen people attempt to use the report to justify the claim that antisemitism was never a problem and was just made up by these malevolent forces. Anyone trying to do that simply hasn't read the report.

The executive summary says this: "This report thoroughly disproves any suggestion that antisemitism is not a problem in the Party, or that it is all a 'smear' or a 'witch-hunt'.

"The report's findings prove the scale of the problem, and could help end the denialism amongst parts of the Party membership which has further hurt Jewish members and the Jewish community". □

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To subscribe with a standing order: £5 a month, or pay us more to support our work. Forms online, as above. □

# A lack of opposition

Rachael Baylis talked with Sacha Ismail

Keir Starmer is doing even worse than I thought he would. He isn't oppositional, let alone socialist. "I'm sure the government is doing everything it can" - when we know this is nonsense. He seems quite relaxed about a very alarming situation.

Politically, there seems to be a large element of returning to Milibandism, accepting the dominant political narrative but with left tweaks. It seems like the progress made under Corbyn is being reversed.

We're not even in a national unity government and there is such a lack of opposition. Joining a coalition would surely worsen the disengagement we saw in the last general election. We shouldn't assume we can't lose the younger voters and BME voters, for instance, who have been enthused by a left-wing Labour Party. There is still a lot of anti-Tory feeling out there but Labour is not representing it.

As a young person I feel the next decade of my life is going to be shaped by how society comes out of Covid-19. There are so many issues where we need a radical Labour Party to serve our interests - housing, for instance, and free education and even the demand for free broadband.

The broadband demand is very relevant in this crisis, when people are stuck at home and have to work or just need reliable internet access to stop themselves going crazy. Yet Starmer won't argue for this. Other countries have suspended rent payments - why aren't we advocating that? We need clear demands that benefit the working class, but I haven't heard the leadership saying anything concrete.

## Reshaping society

We're in a situation which is terrible, but it's also a chance to reshape society. What we face is unprecedented - now is the time to be throwing out ideas and say things don't have to be the way they are.

During the leadership election all the candidates talked about left-wing policies, but now those arguments aren't being taken seriously. I am quite disillusioned with Labour. We need to develop working-class struggles to push politics in the right direction.

At the moment, even in the labour movement, I think there is reticence about militancy. There is a reluctance to challenge how unions operate, and to challenge the anti-union laws that reify that conservative way of thinking. That may be why newer, smaller unions are coming through and organising new groups of workers.

You could see this reflected in Corbynism, with hesitancy on the anti-union laws but also a lack of emphasis on control by communities and workers. We can advocate nationalisation, but how will those industries be run,



The [Labour Campaign for Free Movement](#) is asking everyone, at the Thursday 8pm "clap for carers", to remember that many of them are migrants who face NHS charges and have no access to social security.

Put up a banner in your window and join us demanding universal healthcare for all and an end to "no recourse to public funds"! □

## Where we stand

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

See [workersliberty.org/about](#) - if you agree, join us! □

from the top down like before?

A month ago many of the workers who are keeping us alive were the ones deemed "unskilled" and Priti Patel wanted to exclude them if they're not British. Whatever the rhetoric, they are continuing with that policy. We need to make strong arguments about what their Brexit plan will mean for workers and particularly for migrants.

It may be opinion will shift, so there could be a case for a second referendum. But in 2019 we didn't win the argument and many people felt we weren't listening to them, so we need to consider our approach.

However, we should definitely say delay. We should be very concerned about a "shock doctrine" scenario - that the Tory right will use a hard Brexit next year to push through radical neoliberal policies, more attacks on migrants and more attacks on democratic rights. □

• Rachael Baylis is a student activist involved in worker solidarity at Brighton University and in Worcestershire Young Labour.

# The stats of Covid-19

By Martin Thomas

African-Americans are being hit harder by Covid-19 than others in the USA.

In Chicago, African-Americans are half the Covid-19 cases and more than 70% of deaths, yet only 30% of the city.

In Milwaukee, they are 81% of Covid-19 cases and 26% of the population. In Louisiana, 70% of deaths and 33% of the population.

Almost always in epidemics, the worst-off suffer worse. They are likely to be in poorer health already; to live in more crowded housing; to have to continue to work in sometimes crowded workplaces, rather than working from home or taking time off.

In Britain, home care workers – usually un-unionised and with almost no workplace organisation – are still out and about with no PPE (Personal Protective Equipment).

We campaign for equal rights for all to PPE, for closing down inessential workplaces in the shutdown, and for rent cancellations, fallback pay, etc. for all, so no-one is under economic pressure to behave unsafely.

## Undocumented impacts

In the Spanish Flu pandemic, the Chinese in San Francisco seemed on paper to get off lightly. Almost certainly they got little medical help and their flu deaths were not counted as such.

Something like that is happening on a global scale today. On the official figures, Covid-19 deaths in Ecuador are running at about 10% of long-term average deaths per day. In Britain now, around 50%.

But journalists report desperate households in Guayaquil, Ecuador's biggest city, dumping corpses in the street because they can get no help. No-one counts accurately.

The statistics of this epidemic are difficult to pin down even with good and well-resourced effort.

## Duration

On 6 April scientists in the Netherlands concluded that the country will need two years of gradually-eased lockdown to tame the virus ([bit.ly/NL-2y](https://bit.ly/NL-2y)). On 24 March scientists at Stanford University in the USA modelled different lockdown and easing schedules: all of them project some on-off lockdown well into 2021 ([bit.ly/stf-m](https://bit.ly/stf-m)).

But we don't know some of the basic numbers here.

What proportion of Covid-19 cases have gone uncounted with no or tiny symptoms? Estimates range from 5% to 80%: [bit.ly/cv-asymp](https://bit.ly/cv-asymp). We don't know how many uncounted infections have happened with symptoms which might be Covid-19 or might be another virus: [bit.ly/cv-86](https://bit.ly/cv-86).

What is  $R_0$ , the number of people a sufferer will infect in a population where no-one has immunity? The study by British scientist Neil Ferguson which pushed the British government into lockdown measures by predicting

high deaths cited best estimates between 2.2 and 2.6: [bit.ly/nf-16m](https://bit.ly/nf-16m). Now a study from the US Center for Disease Control estimates 5.7 (they're fairly sure it's between 3.8 and 8.9): [bit.ly/cdc-57](https://bit.ly/cdc-57).

With  $R_0=2.2$ , 54% of the population will eventually get the virus, unless a vaccine comes; with  $R_0=5.7$ , 82%. (So far, *counted* Covid-19 cases number just over 0.1% of the UK population).

The purpose of the lockdowns is to push down  $R_0$ , delay the spread, and help the hospitals cope. But full lockdowns cannot continue forever, and (except in a small country which can police its borders rigidly) they can't wipe out the virus. Without a vaccine, they will be followed by a bigger  $R_0$  and some new spread of the virus.

We're fairly sure that Covid-19 is spread via person-to-person contact, by droplets carrying the virus. Some say that most of the spread has come from household contact and gatherings where people kissed, hugged, held hands, etc.

A recent Chinese study reckons the risk from casual contact, on public transport for example, is only 1% of that from household contact: [bit.ly/gzh-1](https://bit.ly/gzh-1). But we don't know. We don't know how your outcome if infected depends on the "viral load", the *quantity* of the virus you first receive.

We want more testing. But Germany, with the highest testing rate of all the big countries, has done only 1.5 tests per 100 population. And we are not sure how accurate the tests are: [bit.ly/test-acc](https://bit.ly/test-acc).

None of this tells us to despair. A vaccine may be developed. A treatment may be developed. The virus may mutate benignly. We may find social-distancing policies more sustainable long-term than full lockdown which can reduce  $R_0$  a lot. The higher estimates of uncounted cases and the lower ones of initial  $R_0$  may prove right. The current easings of lockdowns by China, Austria, Denmark, and Norway may go well.

## Conclusions

But five conclusions follow.

- We're in for a long haul.
- We are ignorant. We should insist on open scientific debate and scrutiny, and warn against quack "instant" answers. More information from more testing will help.
- Vaccine research is vital. That the Wellcome Trust has to appeal to donors for \$8 billion to fund that research is a scandal.
- Pharmaceuticals and other industries should be requisitioned and put under public control and workers' scrutiny to get the best mobilisation both for basic health supplies (like PPE) and for future vaccines or treatments.
- Whatever the medical parameters turn out to be, a fight for social equality will reduce the extra blow against the worst-off. □



## Covid-19 crisis: online resources & meetings

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

### Online meetings

- All meetings are open access and use Zoom videocalls.
- Wednesdays 15, 22, 29 April, 7-8.30pm:** ABCs of Marxism – **15 April:** [Nationalism and the national question](#). **22 April:** [Who was Lenin?](#) **29 April:** [The Communist Manifesto](#)
- Thursday 16 April, 6pm:** [Covid-19, capitalism and socialism](#). A weekly hour-long informal discussion about organising in and around the crisis.
- Saturday 18 April:** [Class Power on Zero Hours](#), with the Angry Workers' of the World
- Sunday 19, 26 April, 6.30-8pm:** Sunday "political hangout" – **19 April:** [Abolition of the Monarchy](#). **26 April:** [Marxism and Religion](#).
- 20 April, 7.30-9pm:** [The fight for trans rights](#), past, present and future.
- Friday 24 April:** [Fifty years of women's liberation, forum](#)

### Zoom videocall study courses

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

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

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

### Resources and campaigns

- [Safe and Equal](#). Campaign for full pay for self-isolation for all, regardless of contract or status: with sub-campaigns for NHS workers and care workers.
- [Pause Brexit](#). Campaigning for the Brexit transition period to be extended beyond 31 December.
- [Take action to win safe workplaces](#). A briefing for workers and union branches.
- [Disabled Workers and the Covid-19 Crisis](#). Briefing.
- [London Renters Union campaign](#) for mortgage and rent holidays.
- [Online Workers' Liberty – facebook page](#)
- Local mutual aid [group listings](#)



## Audio recordings of publications and meetings

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

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

### E-reader version

Email [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org) for e-reader version of *Solidarity*.

## Study guides

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

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

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

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## Workers' Liberty videos

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### New this week:

- [We're not "all in it together"](#): Ed's Corona diary #3
- [Covid-19: the threat to disabled people](#) by Jantine Booth

### Featuring:

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

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

Buy our pamphlets from [workersliberty.org/pamphlets](http://workersliberty.org/pamphlets) — The German Revolution; For workers' climate action; Two nations, two states; more!

# Lenin on war economy and socialism

By Martin Thomas

World War One, like the Covid-19 pandemic, pushed capitalist governments into “socialistic” measures of public control of economic life.

World War Two would do so even more. And by then governments in Britain and the USA, having to deal with stronger labour movements and sorely remembering the revolutionary tumults at the end of and after World War One, conceded a stronger “social” element and more liberties in their state control of economic life.

Writing in October 1917, Lenin presented his working-class socialist programme as a “revolutionary-democratic” going-forward from wartime state capitalism.

His approach can help guide us in our demands for when the pandemic subsides.

## This is how he put it:

*What the German [pro-war social democrats who still made an effort to present themselves as Marxists] call “war-time socialism” is in fact war-time state-monopoly capitalism, or, to put it more simply and clearly, war-time penal servitude for the workers and war-time protection for capitalist profits.*

*Now try to substitute for the... landowner-capitalist state, a revolutionary-democratic state, i.e., a state which in a revolutionary way abolishes all privileges and does not fear to introduce the fullest democracy in a revolutionary way.*

*You will find that, given a really revolutionary-democratic state, state-monopoly capitalism inevitably and unavoidably implies a step, and more than one step, towards socialism!*

*For if a huge capitalist undertaking becomes a monopoly, it means that it serves the whole nation. If it has become a state monopoly, it means that the state (i.e., the armed organisation of the population, the workers and peasants above all, provided there is revolutionary democracy) directs the whole undertaking. In whose interest?*

*Either in the interest of the landowners and capitalists, in which case we have not a revolutionary-democratic, but a reactionary-bureaucratic state, an imperialist republic.*

*Or in the interest of revolutionary democracy – and then it is a step towards socialism.*

*For socialism is merely the next step forward from state-capitalist monopoly. Or, in other words, socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people and has to that extent ceased to be capitalist monopoly.*

*There is no middle course here. The objective process of*

*development is such that it is impossible to advance from monopolies (and the war has magnified their number, role and importance tenfold) without advancing towards socialism. □*

## The snowball of debt

By Colin Foster

Trade unionists and other have called for the government to write off all households’ council-tax and benefit-overpayment debt, and to freeze rent, utility, council tax, and loan-repayment loans during the pandemic.

They also call for the suspension of all debt-collection activity. They estimate the plan would cost the government about \$10 billion: [bit.ly/frz-debt](https://bit.ly/frz-debt).

Another group, 200 NGOs and similar, have called for the cancellation of all external debt payments to be made by poorer countries in 2020, and emergency finance to help them through: [bit.ly/db-jub](https://bit.ly/db-jub).

Even the Institute of International Finance, a grouping of over 450 banks, hedge funds and other global financial firms, has called for a suspension of debt payments by the poorest countries to private creditors “for six months or to the end of 2020”: [bit.ly/iif-db](https://bit.ly/iif-db). And Tidjane Thiam, former boss of the Swiss bank Credit Suisse, and other plutocrats, have called for a two-year moratorium on the \$115 billion debt of African countries.

The pandemic has already pushed the British government to wipe out £13.4 billion debt owed by NHS hospitals, and the official Financial Conduct Authority has said that credit cards should not be cancelled during the pandemic.

All this is only reducing a snowball of debt which will roll down on life as and when the lockdowns ease – household debt, government debt, company debt. Governments across the world borrowed \$2.1 trillion in March, the highest monthly figure ever.

Germany’s post-1945 economic recovery started in June 1948 with the effective abolition of all debts (and most savings). Economic life was put on “restart” with firms and individuals allocated a more-or-less flat-rate quantity of the new currency (60 DM per individual or employee).

We need to start thinking about something comparably radical. □

# Germany: less “Thatcherism”, fewer deaths

By a reader in Germany

Despite many years of public service cuts, privatisation (including of hospitals), outsourcing, cuts to social security, and so on, Germany still hasn't really had full-on Thatcherism.

Remnants of the “German model” of so-called “social partnership” still exist. The number of hospital beds is much higher than in Britain, partly for that reason, and partly for another.

The private concerns, in some cases multinational, or church organisations, that have taken over many clinics across the country are a strong lobby, and they earn well from patients and their health insurance schemes (and even more out of private patients).

The German model of “social insurance” as opposed to a welfare state is based on government subsidies for your treatment by profit-oriented businesses. When the hospital is paid per day, it makes sense for the owners to keep people in as long as possible. And so more beds.

In a crisis like this, it is good that these beds exist, though Berlin is getting its own “Nightingale Hospital” in the city's exhibition centre and mothballed hospital buildings are being rapidly refitted.

Housing here is generally of a much higher quality than in Britain. Damp is rare. People don't die of the cold because they cannot afford to heat their flats adequately. Homelessness does exist, but homeless families do get housed, and not in squalid “hostels”. Pneumonia and transmission of the virus because of housing-related poverty must be fairly low.

## Fake self-employment

Germany also does not have mass fake self-employment like in Britain (meaning fewer people are working when they should be at home). Cross-EU coordination may have helped.

Figures now suggest around 60,000 tests per day. At the start of the crisis it was difficult for patients with symptoms to get tested. Now the testing machines are gradually wearing out and getting test results often takes many days.

The relatively large amount of testing is possible not because of any technological developments from giant firms like Bosch and Roche, but because of 170 mostly private laboratories of various sizes across the country which can test for Covid-19.

There are however no national statistics, not even for the exact numbers of people tested or numbers of tests carried out. Some reports suggest the numbers of confirmed infections and deaths may not include people who are tested at GPs or cases from care homes, i.e. many elderly cases.

The federal and state governments - which do not do

daily press conferences: those are left to the scientists - are keen to remind people that medically we are still in “the calm before the storm”.

A lot of the problems in Britain exist here, though quite possibly at a less serious level (and have improved over the last weeks). There is a severe lack of PPE, virus-killing disinfectant, and swabs. There have been incidents of elderly-care homes and indeed hospitals where a mass breakout has affected residents and patients as far as death.

There are other problems special to Germany: the lockdown decrees vary considerably across the country, and public health authorities in poorer areas are underfunded and lack vital staff.

## Social peace

For the time being, the federal government seems to be sparing no expense to keep social peace. Six weeks' sick pay at 100% is normal, longer illnesses mean around two-thirds of previous earnings for 72 further weeks. In the crisis, the rules on Kurzarbeitergeld have been relaxed.

Kurzarbeitergeld is essentially a present to businesses, as it means workers can be (effectively) laid off on about two-thirds of their previous wage, paid for from the unemployment benefit system, without the workers becoming officially unemployed.

Kurzarbeitergeld for public service workers has now been raised to 90%, and the government is calling for pay increases for shop workers, health service workers, and careworkers. Most careworkers are not covered by union agreements because of their very low union density.

Schemes have been created to quickly aid small businesses, with fairly unbureaucratic and almost-immediate interest-free loans which will also be written off in the future if they cannot be paid back. Others who are not part of the usual benefits system have had schemes quickly developed for them. It is being discussed whether students who have lost their jobs will be able to claim unemployment benefit or get interest-free emergency loans, and those students who get grants or loans are now able to earn more (in “system-relevant sectors”) without deductions.

People can put off paying the rent or utility bills if they cannot afford to pay, which will be a reality for many on Kurzarbeit. Applications for certain benefits often to take a very long time. At the same time some health and safety and working-time rules have been “relaxed” to the detriment of working people.

The lesson for Britain: underfunded public services, along with benefit cuts and abolition of “red tape”, mean people - generally the poorest and the most vulnerable - unnecessarily die. □

# Supermarket workers organise

By Charlie George

Tesco's response to the pandemic has been unusually clear, and provides a firm starting point for those of us wanting to ensure greater protections on the shop floor now and better pay and conditions when this crisis starts to subside.

We've been given paid leave to self-isolate up to 14 days, and our vulnerable colleagues (everyone who needs a flu jab, or is pregnant, or over 65) have been given 12 weeks' paid leave to make sure they stay safe.

Gloves, masks, and hand gel should be available to anyone who feels like they need them, and there's a one-way one-in-one-out system in operation across all stores, and barriers are being put up around the tills.

This all sounds pretty good. But here's the catch:

The paid leave is based on core hours and isn't available to the 45,000 new starters! In order to protect our staff and our customers, it should surely be the case that everyone we work with should be able to isolate themselves without worrying about paying for food or rent. We demand full paid leave, based on average hours worked, for all staff working in Tesco.

Despite the clarity of the policy, however, some line managers or even store managers think they know better! I've heard reports of managers refusing people 12 weeks' paid leave without the letter from the NHS declaring them "extremely vulnerable", despite this leave being available to all vulnerable colleagues; line managers have been encouraging staff to come to work despite the fact they should be self-isolating; store managers have been ignoring the social distancing policies and bragging about how much money they're making. □

Local group chats and Facebook groups for union reps in the shopworkers' union USDAW are more active than ever.

But the union nationally has closed down its democratic structures, cancelled all its conferences, meetings and schools, and sent everyone on release back to work.

While it may be a good idea to postpone our larger conferences, there is no reason at all why our branch meetings and educational discussions couldn't happen online, and why, with appropriate PPE, reps on stand down couldn't continue to provide support in their area.

USDAW must rapidly find a way to reopen its branches and divisions for democratic discussion. □

After fury from Waitrose staff, the store has backed down after insisting that its workers would have to make up any time they take to self-isolate and up to two weeks of the time their vulnerable employees take to shield themselves.

Their scheme would have forced people to work well above their usual hours or else come to work whilst sick, endangering the lives of their colleagues and customers.

Waitrose backing down is a display of what can be achieved when workers make a fuss. Staff at Waitrose should carry on pushing for full provision of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) and full isolation pay for all staff working across the John Lewis Partnership. □

• Charlie George is an USDAW Rep in a large format Tesco store in London

## First aid for the spirit



### Book review

By Dan Rawnsley

*CoronaVerses: poems from the pandemic* ([bit.ly/cv-p](https://bit.ly/cv-p)) is a rapidly pulled together collection in a rapidly changing world. Collected over the course of a week after Janine Booth set up a CoronaVerses Facebook group, it was collated and released in just over a fortnight.

In a socially-distanced world this act of creating space for the looser, deeper observation poetry and other creative arts can make to our understanding of our present situation is important. If, like me, your eyes have been glued to the news, this book is a good opportunity to step back and think in a different way.

The collection touches on the shifting emotions many will be feeling, alternating from anger to a sense of endless torpor, to humour and sorrow as one poem flows into another. Poems like "Siena" and "Human Touch" have a sense of being without ending and capture the listless feeling after life has shifted into the weird and frightening. "Hungry" relates the anxiety of trying to protect and provide for your children. "Viral Haiku" and "Tragedy: a haiku series" are vicious, witty and angry and "The List" carries anger over into laughter and mockery of the class enemy.

There is too much to go into great depth, but the breadth of the collection is an astounding feat, especially given the two-week time scale it was created in. Right now, in the rapid flow of feelings brought on by crisis and social distancing, poetry like this can be a first aid kit to the spirit. □

# What we demand

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

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

## 2. Fight for workers' control

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

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

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

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

## 4. Defend workers' rights

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

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

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

## 5. Take care of the worst-off

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

"No Recourse to Public Funds" and other rules and

charges restricting public services for migrants should be abolished. Suspend all enforcement of restrictions on migrants, and enable "illegal" migrants to get help, and defend their rights, without risk of deportation.

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

## 6. Defend civil liberties

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

## 7. Think internationally

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

## Tories ran down NHS stocks

The Department of Health's emergency stockpile was run down from £831 million worth in 2011 to £506 million in March 2019, reports the *Guardian* (13 April 2020).

So that's why the NHS is so short of PPE [Personal Protective Equipment]. £506 million sounds a lot, but is only about £8 for each potential patient, and £300-odd for each NHS worker.

The NHS stockpile had been expanded in 2008-11, under New Labour and after the 2002-4 SARS and 2009 swine flu epidemics.

Despite MERS in 2012 and Ebola in 2013-6, with the Tories cuts have come first.

Running the NHS on the basis of having just enough capacity to meet demand is certain to downgrade provision for risks which generate no current "market signals".

The "internal market" must discourage NHS Trusts from making such "uneconomic" provision. And it looks as if Tory cuts geared the NHS procurement and distribution system to economically fitting routine demand and made it ill-adapted to large emergencies.

They couldn't have stockpiled tests for Covid-19, but they could have set up in advance systems to enable emergency efforts to move fast.

Requisition industry and facilities now to meet the shortfalls! □

# “Doing my head in”



## Diary of a tube worker

By Jay Dawkey

“You can sit in the mess room, but only two of you. There is the locker room and then the ticket office.

“The GLAP (the glass box by the barriers) is your choice if you want to go in there.” The supervisors are doing their shift change. M asks if there is anything she should know from D.

“I can’t tell you anything, we don’t have the sheets, so not sure who is coming in. But you’ve got T, Jay and S. It’s pretty dead anyway”.

A customer comes to the window to ask how to get to Old Street. M asks us “Would essential workers really not know where they are going?” The tedium of working means many of us have become amateur detectives. Why is that person travelling? What do those shoes mean? If you need to work, you’ll be going into work, I suggest. Very few people are going to go out of their way to make them, their friends or family ill.

I remind people that one of the cleaners last week was upset when he was told to stay home because his flatmate was symptomatic. People are worried and no amount of reassurance about sickness policies or pay not being suspended is going to make people think that all our bosses will act fairly.

It’s 0645 and, having woken up at 0530 to get in to do nothing, I can’t say I am in the best mood, but then would I be if I’d been told there was loads to do? Perhaps it’s coming in to work full stop that is the problem...

I choose the locker room. I go and dump my stuff. T and S are in the mess room. That is the two it can take, so I leave the discussion on the merits of Bad Boys 3 and choose the locker room.

E, on her way to another station, comes in to change her shoes. We haven’t seen each other for a week. She has been self isolating: she lives with three other people who all became symptomatic one after another. “I stayed off for 14 days, but is it 14 days from the last person or first person? I’m not doing it any more whatever it is, and I didn’t get it. But I should have been on leave for one of these weeks. This is doing my head in to be honest, I don’t know what we are meant to be doing. Can I get that leave back?”

Just before 1430, I see if I can get out. I’ve finished my book and sitting in the airless cell of the locker room is leaving me restless. I think I’ll try and get in somewhere else for the next shift.

M lets me know we both agree the situation is “madness”. “When we were working on nights together, if I had said that in 2020, the guy who presented the Apprentice

was US president, that Australia would have been burning, and that we’d be in lockdown, you would have told me to stop with the horoscopes.”

I laugh, “Yeah, you’ve got a point, but I’m not letting up on horoscopes being bullshit just yet”. □

• “Jay Dawkey” is a Tube worker.

## Regaining Momentum?

In his final message as Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn called on Labour Party members to support Momentum.

But Momentum, a Labour left network launched in late 2015 as a continuation of the grass-roots organising for Corbyn’s leadership campaign, is in flux.

On 7-8 April, almost simultaneously, the Momentum NCG officers made a statement saying Momentum “cannot continue as it has been” and (vaguely) promising more democracy in Momentum; and other Momentum people launched “Forward Momentum” to “refund” and “democratise” Momentum.

The driving force in “Forward Momentum” seems to be people in the backrooms of The World Transformed, the festival run on the Labour Party conference “fringe” since 2016, which was launched by Momentum but has since acquired some autonomy and helped run local “Transformed” events.

The wish to democratise Momentum is welcome. Momentum had some democratic life in 2016, but that was shut down by an office “coup” in early 2017. Since then Momentum has operated essentially as a top-down electronic-mailing service to mobilise Labour members for internal elections and for the 2017 and 2019 general elections.

However, neither the Momentum NCG officers’ statement, nor “Forward Momentum”, says anything about the battles against the pandemic or against the Tory government.

To regroup and reassemble, the left has to be active and vocal in those battles.

Labour for a Socialist Europe (L4SE) adopted a statement in January in view of the Momentum National Coordinating Group elections (much-postponed, but now rumoured for May), and is due to discuss updating for the pandemic. A number of activists are planning to stand on that sort of platform for the NCG contest, and are likely to want to discuss cooperation with Forward Momentum. □

• L4SE text [bit.ly/l4se-m](https://bit.ly/l4se-m)

• Ten demands for Momentum, from *The Clarion* [bit.ly/10d-m](https://bit.ly/10d-m)

# Workers hit by café and pub shutdown



## Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Young workers and women are likely to be the hardest hit by the coronavirus shutdown of businesses such as restaurants, hotels, pubs and retailers.

Low earners are seven times as likely as high earners to work in a business sector that has shut down, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Their analysis found a third of the bottom 10% of earners worked in the worst-hit sectors, against one in 20 (5%) of those in the top 10%.

Women are about one-third more likely than men to work in a sector that has been shut down, as they make up the bulk of retail and hospitality workers. One in six female employees worked for businesses hit by the lockdown, compared with one in seven of male counterparts.

Xiaowei Xu, an author of the briefing note, said: "There is a remarkable concentration of younger and lower-paid workers in the sectors most affected by the current lockdown. Women are also more likely to be affected than men. The problem is compounded by the number of jobs in these industries being zero hours contracts or guaranteed hour contracts which guarantee far few hours that the workers normally work".

Immediately the labour movement must demand these workers are paid at the normal rates whilst their workplaces are shut. We must demand decent contracts and better pay across retail, tourism and hospitality.

The Covid-19 crisis has made very visible the importance of labour, both in essential services and in sectors heading for collapse because workplaces cannot open. It has also highlighted inequality within the working class, with far worse terms and conditions in areas of low union density and more young, women and migrant workers.

The labour movement must fight to level-up contracts.

The shrinking of public sector, and in particular local government, has chucked many women out of relatively secure unionised work on better terms into unemployment or precarious industries. Local government funding should be increased to at least 2010 levels and privatised services should be brought back in house.

A rationally planned economy would take vulnerable workers out of essential food distribution on full pay and redeploy workers from other sectors into expanded supermarket and food delivery provision. It would offer up space and buildings from hospitality and tourism to enable more space for exercise and reduce overcrowded or unsafe housing.

It is possible even a right-wing Tory government will bring in some of these measures: they are being compelled to enact some degree of public planning against the logic of the market to deal with the crisis.

The labour movement must push for the greatest possible increase in working-class conditions, and protect them when the government aims to return to "normal". □



## John Moloney

At Trinity House, an HMRC workplace in the north west, a worker was diagnosed with Covid-19. The bosses only moved people from their immediate team.

The local union demanded that the building be shut entirely and deep cleaned. Management initially refused, so the union issued an ultimatum, and management agreed to shut the building.

We now have an issue with the Passport Office, where the employer wants to bring large numbers of workers back into the office to do routine work, despite the fact that very little international travel is taking place now.

Obviously we have huge concerns about this. Union pressure has succeeded in budging management from their initial position, which was that the workers must report to their workplace on Tuesday 14 April, to an agreement that they will consult fully with the union before anyone is brought back to work.

We are issuing guidance to all our reps, branches, and workplace groups around the use of union-issued "improvement notices", which are a means by which reps, particularly safety reps, can identify issues in the workplace which need addressing. If management fail to take action to address them, then workers have the right under law to remove themselves from an unsafe situation or location and refuse to work.

We want to spread that message through the entire civil service and ensure our members are empowered to take those steps where necessary, and have the knowledge and confidence to do so.

That's especially important now as we may be approaching the peak of the virus, and because some departments, like the DWP, are now recruiting temporary staff. With the addition of workers who've been self-isolating or off sick now returning, higher numbers means it may be harder to safely distance in the workplace. If workers cannot maintain safe distancing at work, they shouldn't be in the workplace.

The Welsh government has passed legislation stating that the two-metre distancing rule must be maintained at work, so a key part of the role for workplace organisation is to police that, and ensure that bosses are complying with it and not cutting corners. □

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

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# Solidarity



For a workers' government

## RAAB: EVEN WORSE THAN JOHNSON

By Mohan Sen

**B**oris Johnson's stand-in Dominic Raab is even more right-wing and nationalist, and more ideologically committed than the opportunist Johnson.

In last year's Conservative leadership election, Raab was, before he was eliminated, the right-wing opposition to Johnson, waving the banner of a No Deal Brexit to Tory members. He advocated linking a No Deal Brexit to a large cut in corporation tax!

He has a long history as a right-wing ideologue. In 2011, Raab co-authored a pamphlet, *After the Coalition*, with four other Tory MPs from the "Free Enterprise Group" - all now central to Johnson's government - advocating extensive privatisation of the NHS.

"Hospitals should be given their independence, extending the Foundation Hospital model - initially controversial but now almost universally accepted.

"New non-profit and private operators should be allowed into the service, and, indeed should compete on price."

They advocated even harsher attacks on benefits and the right to strike than the Tories would actually implement in the next decade. They wanted to exempt small firms from paying under-21s any minimum wage, expand free schools and allow them to make money, and contract out more prisons to the private sector.

### Priorities

They saw reducing corporation tax and income tax for the high-paid as "a priority".

They admitted that in passing that immigration does not affect wages, but nonetheless advocated new restrictions on migrants.

Raab would develop many of these views further over the next years, for instance advocating privately-run and profit-making state schools.

In 2012, the same group of Tory MPs wrote a book called *Britannia Unchained*, which claimed that "Too

many people in Britain, we argue, prefer a lie-in to hard work... We must stop bailing out the reckless, avoiding all risk, and rewarding laziness... Once they enter the workplace, the British are among the worst idlers in the world. We work among the lowest hours, we retire early and our productivity is poor."

To remedy this problem, the book advocated a series of attacks on workers' rights. Attacking workers' rights is a favourite theme of Raab's going back years, one which he has consistently tied to a desire to escape EU standards and regulations.

In 2017 he sparked outrage by saying that most food bank users are not "languishing in poverty".

Not neglecting the right-wing culture war while he is busy promoting extreme neo-liberalism, Raab has described feminists as "obnoxious bigots" and claimed that the "most flagrant discrimination [is] against men". He has proposed abolishing the Government Equalities Officer and the Department of International Development.

In 2018 he claimed that immigration was responsible for soaring house prices.

During his time as a junior minister in the Ministry of Justice, Raab waged war on the rights of prisoners, leading opposition to a European Court of Justice decision giving at least some prisoners the right to vote and attempting to get foreigners sentence to longer than a year deported.

Raab is even more likely than Johnson to exploit the Covid-19 crisis to promote extreme right-wing policies and to push for a disastrous hard Brexit at the end of the year, with no delay. □

### Ideas for Freedom 2020

Our summer school, Ideas for Freedom, has been provisionally rescheduled from 20-21 June to 21-22 November. Details at [workersliberty.org/ideas](http://workersliberty.org/ideas)