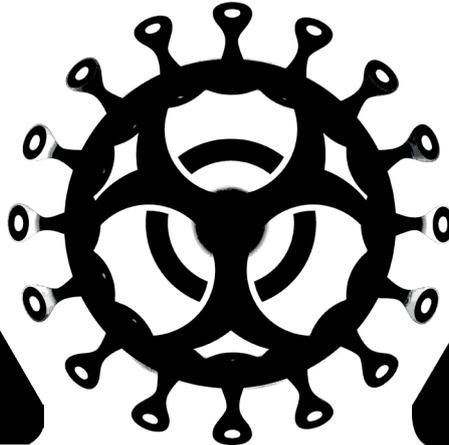


# Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



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



# STOP TORIES' BACK-TO-WORK LURCH!

- » Requisition industry for PPE
- » Workers' control of reopening
- » Full isolation pay for all

## Social care emergency

Win adequate PPE and public ownership!

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## Momentum Internationalists

A political alternative to the dominant direction in Momentum

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## Workers' struggle, or "alliance across business"

Becky Crocker answers Neal Lawson

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# Stop Tories' back-to-work lurch!

By Martin Thomas

On 10 May Boris Johnson called on construction and manufacturing bosses to force workers back into workplaces.

Without union agreements for safe working.

Without making PPE supplies adequate even for hospitals, GPs, and care homes, let alone for other workplaces.

Without full isolation pay rights for workers.

Without a track-and-trace policy for the virus even being sketched.

Without a sustained drop in infections.

Johnson dressed it up as "encouragement" to individuals to go into work. Furloughed workers in construction and manufacturing have not opted out individually. Their sites and workplaces have been shut, because of union pressure or because bosses thought it unworkable to continue.

The government wants to be able to cut furlough pay and avoid adding to the costly aid it's already granted to bosses. It wants to deflect the growing demand (from businesses as well as households) to cancel rent and utility bills during the emergency.

That is why it is pushing the bosses to reopen, as some construction contractors already have done.

This can be stopped. Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 entitles workers to walk out of any work area where there is a "serious and imminent" risk to safety. No workplace (except those with union agreements for safe working) is any safer now than it was on 23 March.

Section 44 has been used many times by workers in essential sectors since 23 March, and generally they've won improvements. We demand trade union leaders commit themselves to using it now, and to supporting strikes where necessary; and that the Labour leadership backs workers and unions on this.

We are not unconditional admirers of the Tory-designed "lockdown". At best it was only ever a measure to gain time for other policies. But no other policies against the virus are operating yet.

We do not idealise other governments. But other governments which have eased their lockdowns have announced specific measures – this or that activity to be restored – not issued blanket "push them back to work" appeals.

The Coronavirus Bill included many things we want rescinded – cancellations of rights for people in mental



distress, of bereaved people, of children with special needs, and of people with social care needs. We want the right to strike, picket and protest restored (with due care for social distancing). We are not against the measured "lockdown-easings" planned in Wales and Scotland.

But the Tories' new slogan "stay alert, control the virus" has no meaning other than to displace "stay at home".

Another measure of it was Johnson's claim to base himself on estimating R, the reproduction rate of the infection. R is a ratio of one number we can only guess (new infections) to another number we can only guess (existing infections).

Johnson said R is "between 0.5 and 0.9". Like saying your height is "between 5 feet and 9 feet"! Johnson was using pseudo-scientific jargon to blur what is not just a guess: that infections are declining only tentatively, and remain at least twice as high as in other countries which have "eased" lockdowns.

Stop the Tories' drive to force people back to work!

Demand requisitioning of industry to supply adequate PPE; workers' control of all reopenings; full isolation pay for all; cancellation of rent and utility bills in the emergency. □

- See also the video [No back-to-work drive!](#)

## More online

### Mauritius in the pandemic

Excerpt from a "pandemic blog", by Lindsey Collen of the Mauritius socialist group Lalit

[bit.ly/lalit-p](http://bit.ly/lalit-p)

### Camus' The Plague

John Cunningham takes another look at the 1947 novel

[bit.ly/camus-p](http://bit.ly/camus-p)

# Workers' control of reopening!

## 6699 Editorial

Workers in every industry and workplace must fight for the maximum degree of workers' control over the conditions under which any "return to work" takes place and under which services are resumed and increased.

While this will necessitate "working with" employers in the sense of meeting with them to present our demands, and scrutinise their proposals, the basic stance we must fight for our unions to take is one of militant distrust and hostility to our bosses.

On 5 May, the government shared guidance documents on conditions for returning to work with employers' organisations and unions. The TUC and Labour leader Keir Starmer criticised the documents for their "vagueness", highlighting the use of language such as "employers should consider" measures such as hand washing stations, suggesting such measures were simply optional nice-to-haves. TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady said, "we cannot support the government's back-to-work plans as they stand."

The TUC has called on the government to "agree plans with unions for safe operation of public transport", as well as calling for workplace-by-workplace risk assessments overseen by union safety reps. The TUC wants a "National Enforcement Forum" made up of "government, the Health and Safety Executive, local authorities, Public Health England, unions and business" – a version of workers' involvement in assessing safety that involves working in partnership with bosses and the state, rather than demanding control.

In a period of a historically low ebb of class struggle, the demand for workers' control can seem almost fantastical, but a crisis like this brings its logic into focus. It is not employers, who are often distant from the shop floor even in normal times, whose labour will deliver the "return to work" or any resumption of services, but rank-and-file workers. Why, then, shouldn't those workers control the basis on which that takes place?

At the workplace level, demanding that union reps sign off workplace risk assessments, which must be published and made available to all workers, detailing the safety measures which will be implemented in advance of any return or resumption, is a way of focusing the demand for workers' control.

Across the economy, many unions, with varying degrees of combativeness, are already tabling demands for measures that must be in place prior to any return to work. In the civil service, the PCS union is fighting for a commitment that anyone who can work from home is able to continue to do so, and only minimal levels of staff will be brought back into the workplace for essential work. The PCS calculates that 34% is the maximum pro-

portion of staff in a given workplace who can be present and still comply with distancing measures.

The union has also been pushing for a clear protocol for what will happen in situations where a case of Covid-19 is confirmed in a workplace, including the complete isolation of the workplace and the sending home of all workers on full pay. The PCS has issued advice reminding its members of their legal right to refuse unsafe work.

### Conditions for reopening

School workers' union NEU has issued a platform including five basic conditions for any reopening of schools: much lower numbers of Covid cases; a national plan for social distancing; comprehensive access to regular testing for children and staff; protocols to be put in place to test a whole school or college when a case occurs and for isolation to be strictly followed; protection for the vulnerable. It's right that unions pose these kind of broad, national and sectoral demands, and level them in national negotiations with employers. But unions must supplement that by equipping their local reps to fight for workers' control at workplace level to police and enforce any nationwide agreements that are secured.

Unite reps at an Aston Martin plant in Wales have announced that they have "worked closely" with the employer in drawing up a back-to-work plan, which includes mandatory wearing of masks and temperature checks on arrival. The statement, issued by the employer, states that their measures "exceed government advice."

Where safety measures have been drawn up and implemented in workplace, unions must not only trumpet how "closely" they have worked with the employer, but ensure continual scrutiny and policing of the ongoing implementation of those measures by reps. Aston Martin's statement also says that its workers "have been engaged in a number of activities designed to help in the fight against Covid-19, from the manufacture of various items of PPE to the offer of free emergency repairs to NHS workers' cars." While Aston Martin poses these as gestures of goodwill, workers must fight to expand such schemes.

If measures can be implemented to give reasonable assurances for resuming production, we must fight for that production to be geared towards social need rather than profit. Part of the labour movement's return-to-work policy should be that the manufacturing capacity of private industry is socialised and repurposed to produce PPE, ventilators, and other necessary medical equipment – inarguably far more socially necessary, and less ecologically destructive, than Aston Martin cars.

While the demand for workers' control of return-to-work plans, rather than a blanket position of "extend the lockdown indefinitely!", must be central, the current evidence suggests that Britain is not ready for a rapid or substantial easing of lockdown measures. This means that, in many sectors, the necessary response to bosses'

*continues page 4*

# Workers' control of reopening!

from page 3

return-to-work plans may be, for now, to simply oppose and resist them. In the construction sector, which the government has highlighted for a rapid resumption of work, rank-and-file workers have been running a "Shut the Sites" campaign for several weeks, arguing that safe distancing is impossible.

Meanwhile, rail unions RMT, TSSA, and Aslef have written to the governments of the UK, Scotland, and Wales to oppose any increase in rail services at the present time. The letter says: "We are not convinced that there is any basis at this time for a safe escalation of services." It argues for an "industry-wide agreement with the unions that any increase in services does not increase danger and risk of virus transmission for our members, passengers or our communities." Like PCS, RMT has also issued material reminding members' of legal rights around refusals to work.

As *Solidarity* went to press, bosses on London Underground were in discussions with unions about a possible ramping up of the service. Passenger levels are currently down 95%, but are expected to rise as the lockdown eases.

As on the mainline railway, unions have argued against any immediate ramping up, and demanded network-wide agreements and safety measures be implemented prior to any resumption. Union pressure has already secured the implementation of a number of safety measures, including reduced shift patterns on stations to eliminate non-essential work. On some train stock, where the driver has to enter and exit their cab via the passenger car, screens have been installed to close off the first car, ensuring drivers can distance safely.

## Additional measures

Safety reps are now advancing demands for additional measures, including the installation of hand washing points outside stations, with compulsory hand washing on entry; compulsory mask wearing; queuing and one-way systems to regulate passenger flow into stations; and the switching off of all touchscreen ticket machines, with entry via Oyster or contactless card only, with some gates left open.

Many other metro systems internationally, such as the Seoul metro and the Bay Area Rapid Transit System in California, have implemented measures of this type, as well as additional checks including temperature screening.

Unions are also demanding that 2m distancing measures, including physical barriers and station staff working from control rooms or behind glass wherever possible, be maintained and increased. This will be a key fight, as TfL and other transport providers have been pressing for distancing guidance to be reduced in order to facilitate an increased service. TfL calculates that it can only carry 15% of its usual capacity if the 2m guidance is maintained.

Unions must resist arbitrary reductions in distancing guidance. Any difficulties this poses for TfL's revenue should be addressed via government subsidy.

While London Underground has stepped up its antiviral cleaning regime, it was late to do so, and its frequency still lags behind other metros internationally. Meanwhile, it has denied staff travel passes to outsourced cleaners, and refused to top up the 20% differential for cleaners who are furloughed. This creates a clear additional public health risk, as cleaners who are unwell may now return to work, or work through their symptoms, to avoid being furloughed.

RMT is rightly taking up this demand, and securing it must be key to any safe resumption of the service. While other metros have issued masks to all frontline workers, LU has only just begun to issue some masks to some workers, after initially refusing to do so and claiming they were unnecessary.

On London's bus network, where more than 20 drivers have died of the virus, bosses were slow to implement the simple measure of having passengers enter via the middle door only. Prior to implementation, one bus company went as far as threatening to discipline any driver who acted directly to implement this measure themselves.

Without additional safety measures such as adequate PPE for all drivers, and access to regular temperature screening and testing, drivers face greatly increased risk if passenger levels rise as the lockdown eases.

The details of sectoral and workplace-by-workplace demands for safety measures that must be in place before workers deem it safe to return to work or ramp up services must be worked out collectively, from the shop floor up, ideally via unions' democratic structures. Underpinning all of those discussions must be a collective effort to empower and galvanise each other to take direct action to implement those measures ourselves where our bosses won't – or, where that's not possible, to withdraw our labour and refuse to work in unsafe conditions.

Workers must remember that it is our labour that makes workplaces function and produces goods and services. In Eugene V. Debs's phrase, "we can run the mills without them, but they can't run them without us." □

## What we demand in the crisis

1. Requisitioning (emergency public ownership) of key sectors
  2. Workers' control
  3. Make the labour movement an essential service, to exert workers' control
  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)

# Demand councils follow Salford

By Mohan Sen

Salford City Unison has won what looks like strong policy for the right of all care workers in their borough to self-isolate on full pay.

The policy agreed between the union and the council says:

"All providers will be expected to ensure staff who are absent as a result of Government guidance will be paid full pay for the first 14 days, and then at 80% for a maximum total of 12 weeks period of absence. Providers are able to claim back the difference between what they would normally pay and what they are required to pay, from the NHS.

"Payments should be made on the basis of typical hours worked, rather than basic contractual hours – as the pro-

vision is to cover commissioned work in its totality."

The union says it has checked "rigorously" it is being implemented. For the full policy, which is very detailed, see [bit.ly/salfordannouncement](https://bit.ly/salfordannouncement)

The "Care Workers vs Covid-19" campaign run by the North West region of Unison reports other breakthroughs on these issues across the North West: [bit.ly/nwvictories](https://bit.ly/nwvictories).

From what we understand, however, these agreements have not yet been pinned down, advertised and implemented in the same way as in Salford.

The same sort of problem seems to exist in other local authorities. And then there are Labour councils which are not insisting on isolation pay for care workers even on paper.

We should try to spread the example of Salford as widely as possible. □

## Jeff Bezos, superspreader

Amazon have done well out of the pandemic. Very well. Over the last few weeks Amazon's share price has risen by 50%; the personal wealth of its CEO Jeff Bezos (richest man in the world) has risen by \$41 billion to \$146 billion.

Anti-corporate greed blog [sumofus.org](https://sumofus.org) have calculated that just 1% of Bezos' fortune would cover two weeks' sick pay for Amazon's global workforce of over 798,000. A US Amazon employee earns on average \$16.26 per hour.

Not only do Amazon not provide sick pay, on 1 May Amazon ended a policy allowing unlimited unpaid time off. According to the *Guardian* (7 May), in California, at least four warehouses have recorded cases of Covid-19.

SumofUs have installed a giant billboard outside Bezos' Washington DC mansion accusing him of being a super spreader.

SumofUs are right. All bosses who refuse to pay full sick and isolation pay are contributing to the spread of the virus.

The "Safe and Equal" campaign [safeandequal.org](https://safeandequal.org) is agitating for full isolation and PPE where needed for all workers. This week it is also promoting a statement supporting Nadia Whittome MP's stand on PPE in social care and demanding public ownership and public-sector conditions in [social care](https://socialcare.org). □

## Ready to rally

Some of our supporters have already been in contact, fortunate still to be receiving full pay and donating the money they have saved not going out or cannot use from cancelled holidays towards our hardship fund (see below) and our other activities. This week, thanks go to Chris in Leicester, who donated £600 to us.

Other comrades have increased their regular standing orders.

We'd urge everyone reading this to do the same. Covid-19 lays bare the failures of capitalism. A system that is unable to provide the PPE and supplies needed for workers and the most vulnerable.

In Workers' Liberty we are arguing for and promoting an alternative vision of society, increasing exposure for our ideas and winning new people to our cause. But we can't indict the Tories without more resources and an increase in our funds.

The whole industrial estate where we have our office has been temporarily shut, so for our paper production and distribution we're having to do the best we can with working-from-home, pdfs and limited print runs, and supplementing with video and audio content on the website. We have also set up a hardship fund for our comrades who have lost work or large amounts of income.

We need to be ready, once the emergency eases, to rally and pick up some of the work we have had to suspend. Our summer school, Ideas for Freedom, is now postponed to November, but we need to start fundraising now. □

Make a contribution at [workersliberty.org/donate](https://workersliberty.org/donate)

# Nationalism and the labour movement

*Fire Brigades Union activist and National Officer Riccardo la Torre spoke to Sacha Ismail the day after "Victory in Europe Day".*

I'm angry that workers are dying because they're at work and aren't given proper protection, and yet the same "leaders" responsible want us waving Union Jacks.

Of course, that strand of patriotism always exists. I never cease to be baffled by the amount of reasonable-minded people who love the Queen. They may be struggling to feed their family, working on the minimum wage, but they love the Queen. This feeds off and exacerbates that.

The government has been successful from the start of this crisis in harnessing the language of war-time, constantly comparing this to World War 2 and the Blitz.

It may not work out that way later in the "war", of course. It's important to remember that for large numbers of people, their thoughts are more complicated. They don't necessarily see it as the flag of the ruling class, but the flag of their neighbour, their family, the people they go to work with. There are plenty of people who rally to the flag but hate the Tories and what they're doing. There is hope in that, but these distinctions have to be drawn out through debate and argument.

## **How do you assess the labour movement's response?**

I think we've lacked the courage to pick it apart. I can see why, there is a fear of what union members and Labour voters think, let alone the wider working class. It becomes easier to concentrate on strands which have some legitimacy – the defeat of fascism, the sacrifice of working-class people to make that happen – but in practice that means merging into the dominant message.

The Labour leadership exemplifies this. You can see the road they're going down on nationalism but also I'd guess immigration. This just reinforces the idea these ideas can't be challenged, and they become stronger. It makes it more difficult for all of us.

I think some union leaderships turn to nationalism because it's an easier alternative to fighting in very difficult circumstances. You get talk about competition, about supply and demand for labour, about workers coming into the country because of our failure in not repealing the anti-union laws, in not having the fights over pay, collective bargaining and workers' rights. Let alone anything bigger. It means we don't have to get to grips with what we've lost and the size of the task in fighting back.

The left has to confront the arguments, including in Labour. It's encouraging to see socialists are putting forward arguments and proposals around migrants' rights, international solidarity and class struggle within the party and Momentum. □

• For the full interview, in which Riccardo discusses the *Morning Star*, FBU migrants' solidarity including trips to Calais, and why we need to halt Brexit, see the AWL website [bit.ly/riccardolt](https://bit.ly/riccardolt)

## **"You can't have socialism in one country"**

*Julie Ward, former Labour MEP for the North West, spoke to Sacha Ismail.*

### **Why did Starmer win, in your view?**

I think Keir has a certain bland gravitas combined with a forensic quality that many craved after years of confusion, high drama and exhausting infighting. We need to hold him to his word. There should be no backsliding on key issues, particularly left-wing economic policies.

I also think you're asking the wrong question. Why did Rebecca Long-Bailey lose? Sadly she could not shake free of the influence of the team who surrounded Jeremy, eventually suffocating him. At times she seemed more Blue Labour than Lisa Nandy and she couldn't lay claim to the Green New Deal because everyone in the party owns it. From my view she also failed the feminist test with her worrisome views on late-term abortions.

### **You've backed the Forward Momentum and Momentum Internationalists initiatives. Explain why?**

I've found initiatives such as The World Transformed exciting. That's what politics had been missing – participation, creativity, education, inclusion, empowerment, fun. Forward Momentum recognises Momentum is stuck in an outdated groove and needs a proverbial kick up the backside, especially with regards to democracy.

Momentum Internationalists mirrors my belief that you can't have socialism in one country and that solidarity with all workers around the world must be our number one priority.

### **You've also championed the demand to delay Brexit [see [bit.ly/labourexend](https://bit.ly/labourexend)]. Why?**

Even some notable Brexiteers acknowledge that an extension to the transition period is required. The original timetable was gung-ho and over-ambitious, and the crisis that now engulfs us means there is little public appetite for unnecessary distractions away from the life and death issues. Plus there's also the possibility that we can find a way back. □

• Full interview, in which Julie discusses Labour's response to Covid-19, and the wider issue of Brexit, on *The Clarion* [bit.ly/juliewinterview2](https://bit.ly/juliewinterview2)

# An open letter to Keir Starmer

**K**eir! – In a round of media interviews on 5 May, you were asked about the government’s plans for easing the lockdown and bringing workers back to work. While you mentioned that trade unions (“and businesses”, you were sure to add) have concerns about workplace safety, and pressed for the government to be “less vague”, you declined to take a firm stand in favour of workers’ rights.

Specifically, in this case, you declined to uphold the right not to have to work in unsafe conditions, even though that is actually a right in existing law (“Section 44”), and has been used in this emergency many times, and successfully, by workers.

You declined to support the consensus now developing across the labour movement for opposing any returns to work or increase in services in conditions in which workers’ representatives have not had oversight over the implementation of adequate safety measures in the workplace. Asked if you would support workers who refused to work on the grounds of safety, you declined.

We do want the government to be clearer, and we do want national standards and agreements imposed, legally binding on all workplaces, around safety measures that must be in place in order to facilitate phased returns of workers into the workplace, or stepping up of services. But rather than simply suggesting that the government be “less vague”, you and the Labour Party must be articulating independent demands and policies, and fighting for them. Basic standards could include:

- Distancing measures in every workplace, including rotating shift patterns and reduced working weeks, with no loss of pay, to ensure numbers in the workplace don’t exceed levels at which it’s possible to distance safely
- Handwashing stations throughout the workplace
- Adequate provision of PPE, including masks, wherever necessary

The core principle the labour movement, including the Labour Party, must advance is workers’ control: the maximum degree of direct oversight over and sign-off of workplace safety measures by elected union representatives and committees.

For the most part, our bosses could continue to work from home indefinitely with little to no impact on the functioning of our workplaces. It is us, frontline workers, whose labour will power any resumption. We should decide when and how it’s safe to go back to work.

Already, employers, including transport providers, are lobbying for distancing guidance to be revised to ease restrictions on their ability to generate profit. Will you take a clear stand against this? Will you support us and our unions’ demands to put health before wealth? Workers

## Wake up Labour!

A 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 at: [bit.ly/w-u-l](https://bit.ly/w-u-l)

in numerous industries and sectors have already taken action – all of it “unofficial” because of Britain’s restrictive anti-union laws – to defend and extend workplace safety. Do you support that action? Will you support us when we act again?

You were elected leader of the Labour Party, on a landslide, on a platform of pledges promising “economic justice” and “strengthening workers’ and trade union rights.” Where are those pledges now? Why have you settled, almost immediately, into a stance of “constructive engagement” with this hard-right Tory government? “Scrutiny” is not enough: we need opposition.

This is not a plea for “help”. Ultimately it is our own organisation and direct action in our workplaces that will be decisive. It is a demand that you support us. You are the leader of the Labour Party, the party founded to speak up in official politics for the independent interests of the organised working class.

If the party under your leadership is to fulfil that role, even in the most limited sense, you must speak up for workers’ rights, including our right to take action to win safer workplaces.

*Ruth Cashman,  
Lambeth Unison activist and Secretary*

## More on The Clarion

- Forward Momentum: radical reformers or new establishment? [bit.ly/fm-rr-ne](https://bit.ly/fm-rr-ne)
- John McDonnell on nationalising the banks: what he said in 2008, and it’s still valid now [bit.ly/mcd-bk](https://bit.ly/mcd-bk)
- Tell Labour to call for cancelling rents! Sign the statement [bit.ly/rent-x](https://bit.ly/rent-x)

# Workers' struggle, or "alliances across business"?

By Becky Crocker

Where now for the Labour Party? Following election defeats and facing environmental and economic crises, many articles are asking what direction Labour should take under its new leader.

On the eve of the leadership result, Neal Lawson, director of the Compass lobby group, wrote an [article on Open Democracy](#) in which he argued for what he called a new approach.

He starts with an appraisal of the current situation.

"Labour's new leader will operate in the context of unfolding and manifest crises. The pandemic now, but a financial and economic crisis that will follow, the crisis of inequality after that, and then of housing, care and climate, before a new pandemic hits".

I would say that this is a fairly accurate estimation of the challenges ahead. I'd only add that these current crises compound the effects of 30-plus years of neoliberalism and 10-plus years of post 2008 austerity.

But Lawson's appraisal of the political forces available to challenge this situation is based on assumptions I do not share. He says the left is fundamentally weak and left lacks, "a coherent agent of change (the working class)".

This inaccurate statement almost implies, without evidence or argument, that the working class has no role in politics. The working class has not gone away; as long as we exist we will be an agent of struggle and change. We might lack political coherence. But Lawson makes no recommendations for sharpening the working class as a political force. Much easier to write us off, in a tone that almost cheers on our demise.

He suggests that working-class based parties are a thing of the past: "globalisation, financialisation and individualisation have left parties of labour weak everywhere". This one-sided account does not take account of how the workers' movement internationally has responded to globalisation; how recent workers' organising, in China for example, indicates that the cause of labour is still the hope of the world. His statement carries finality; his perspective is that what is weak now will be weak for all time.

With such sweeping and unsubstantiated statements, it seems simple for Lawson to dismiss working class potential. He takes the last 30 years of defeat, a low-ebb in the

class struggle, as an irreversible fact. But class struggle cannot be stamped out of a society built on exploitation. Even in the midst of defeat, there are always pockets of struggle. We have seen unofficial walkouts for safety in the during the Covid-19 crisis. Struggles will become more and more necessary when recession begins to bite.

Labour's "new approach", says Lawson, must not "triangulate" between Corbynism and Blairism, "between two old and tired poles". He groups Corbynism and Labour's orientation to the working class together in almost the same breath. By implication, the working class, like Corbynism and Blairism, is one of the "old and tired poles" that Labour must now turn away from.

## "New approach"

His vision for the "new approach" is as follows:

"The core of a new approach is contained in one word – capacity. Can Labour's new leader see him or herself as the capacity builder of the countervailing forces to really transform our country as it comes out of the corona-crisis?"

"These forces are: vision, policy, narratives and alliances across politics, business and civil society."

Firstly, this is vacuous nonsense. What does it even mean? "Vision", "policy" and "narratives" are not forces. They are just buzzwords borrowed directly from Blairism. Secondly, "alliances across politics". Does this mean that the left should ally with the right and neuter itself? Again, this is not a "force", just a prescription for ineffectiveness.

Thirdly, "alliances across....business". His starting assumption that class struggle is dead leads him to argue that Labour will be best served by allying with employers and business – the very forces of oppression and exploitation. He invokes the concept of "civil society" as though he is describing a classless entity, where bosses and workers can live in harmony.

In reality, this alliance would squeeze the working class out of organised politics. From everything Lawson has said about the fate of parties of labour, he would probably say that's no bad thing.

The absence of class struggle from his vision means that his proposals are largely irrelevant for the struggles of the coming period. The perspective underpinning this article is that Labour has the luxury of leaving behind its traditional working class base, looking elsewhere for a potential saviour.

Old and tired some of us may be, defeated and disorganised our whole class may be – but not irrelevant. In fact, to nurture every germ of working-class struggle will be Labour's best hope if it means to challenge the right effectively in the "turbulent times" ahead. □

• Abridged. Full text: [bit.ly/nl-bc](http://bit.ly/nl-bc)

## “” 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! □



## 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 13, 20 May 7-8.30pm:** ABCs of Marxism – **13 May:** [The state](#). **20 May:** [Why the working class?](#)

**Thursday 14 May, 6pm:** [Covid-19: Stop Johnson's "back to work" turn!](#) A weekly informal discussion on different topics about the politics of the crisis.

**Saturday 16 May, 2-4pm:** [For one school workers union! Learning from industrial unionism.](#)

**Sunday 17 May, 6.30-8pm:** Sunday "political hangout": [Who was James Connolly?](#)

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

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

**Sunday 31 May, 7:30-9pm:** [After Sanders, where now](#)

[for the US left?](#) Workers' Liberty forum with Lois Weiner

### Zoom videocall study courses

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

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• **Friday 29 May, 7-9pm:** The Clarion mag. – [Escaping the crisis:](#) why we need public ownership of finance

• [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.

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• [Online Workers' Liberty – facebook page](#)



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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](#).

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• [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...

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• [Who was Lenin?](#) An intro by Becky Crocker

• [A short photo-intro to Lalit, Mauritius](#) Labour Day 2020 Solidarity message

• [Rise of the far right in Europe: How to fight it](#) intro by Tom Harris

• [The Communist Manifesto: an introduction](#) by Daniel Rawnsley

• [Fifty years of women's liberation](#) – opening speech by Kelly Rogers

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# Justice for Ahmaud Arbery

By Carrie Evans

On 23 February 2020, a young black man named Ahmaud Arbery was chased and gunned down whilst jogging in Brunswick, Georgia, USA. The two assailants were retired police officer Gregory McMichael and his son Travis.

Arbery, a former football player and keen athlete, was out jogging in Satilla Shores, a predominantly white Brunswick neighbourhood, on the morning he was shot. Just that was enough to arouse suspicion and spur a number of 911 calls from residents.

Despite the fact Arbery was unarmed and innocent of any crime, the McMichaels claim Arbery was responsible for a string of unreported burglaries in the area. According to them, the local police department, and the former lead prosecutor on the case, the McMichaels were merely attempting to make a citizen's arrest and that led to them shooting Arbery in self-defence.

Arrests were not made until 8 May, and then only because a leaked video of the incident sparked international outcry. The video also led to the popular online campaign #IrunwithMaud which has seen people all over the world (but especially in the US) dedicate their lockdown runs to Ahmaud Arbery.

How in 2020 can two white men publicly lynch a black man and face no repercussions? Part of the answer lies with Gregory McMichael's connection to the local police department in Brunswick.

Since the investigation opened two separate prosecutors have had to recuse themselves from the case over possible conflicts of interest because McMichael previously worked as an adviser to the District Attorney's office. The initial investigation was conducted by a police department that McMichael formerly worked for. Both

the initial police investigation and prosecutor's report have been widely condemned as fatally mismanaged, biased and flawed at best or a cover up at worst.

It would be disingenuous to try and draw a like for like comparison between the situation in the US and the UK. But in the UK there has never been a successful manslaughter prosecution brought against a law enforcement officer following a death in police custody, although there have been 1500 such deaths since 1990.

Between 1998 and 2009 only one police officer and one staff member were found guilty of any offence related to a death in police custody. Both were convicted of misconduct in a public office.

Here in the UK, too, black and minority-ethnic people are most at risk of dying at the hands of the police. According to a report by the charity Inquest, BAME people are twice as likely to die in custody from force or restraint-related injuries as their white counterparts.

The Labour party must stop playing into the right-wing narrative of "law and order" and instead stand with victims of police violence and vulnerable communities across the UK and beyond. □

Caroline Jeffries adds: Some activists in the UK joined the weekend of action on 10 May by cycling to the US Embassy in London to stage a socially distanced action.

There were two armed guards outside the embassy. They saw the group of us standing there, at this point without any banners, and only asked us not to sit on the embassy wall. We complied.

However, the second we pulled out our banners, the police became aggressive with us, demanding to see IDs and know protesters' names. The incident was small, but showed a double standard in how social distancing rules are being enforced. □

## Support Momentum Internationalists!

By Lewis Joyes

Forward Momentum – the organisation set up recently to democratise Momentum – will run its "primaries" between 12 and 16 May: a selection contest for the [Forward Momentum](#) slate for the elections to the National Coordinating Group of the big Labour left network Momentum.

The Momentum election will have nominations open between 28 May and 11 June, and voting 16 to 30 June. It is a whole year overdue.

The Forward Momentum primaries are being held in all five Momentum "regions" and the Labour Public Office Holders category. There will be a hustings via Zoom on Thursday 14 May between 6pm and 9pm (after those signed up to Forward Momentum have received their ballot).

Although the broad aim to democratise Momentum should be supported, Forward Momentum have been less clear about what this means, what structures they think a reformed Momentum should adopt, and how they expect to achieve all of this.

Their platform does not commit to an annual confer-

ence, the broader politics (beyond democratic demands on Momentum) of those involved are not stated, and they have only set up Forward Momentum as a short-term temporary campaign.

The "Momentum Internationalists" group has committed to campaign within Forward Momentum on a programmatic basis to win places on the Forward Momentum slate. It includes people with a sustained and serious commitment to fighting for socialist ideas in Momentum and our movement, such as those involved in Labour for a Socialist Europe, the Labour Campaign for Free Movement, and Free our Unions.

Our aim is to re-found Momentum as a democratic, internationalist class struggle organisation, and have candidates that are pledged to fight for an annual Momentum conference, to gear momentum to build and bolster strike action, and develop stronger international links within the Labour movement.

Momentum Internationalists are standing candidates in all of the Forward Momentum selection categories, and *Solidarity* urges all our readers to support them. □

• More: [momentuminternationalists.org](https://momentuminternationalists.org)

# The Morning Star and “patriotism”

By Phil Grimm

On 7 May the *Morning Star* carried an article last week with the snazzy headline “Patriotism is good for you.” A better headline would have been “Stalinism turns you into a useless nationalist who can’t pick the right side in an industrial dispute”.

Before examining what this Comrade Blimp has to say about the fusion of nationalism and socialism, it’s worth saying something about the piece’s author.

Doug Nicholls is chair of the board of Ruskin College. Last year college management victimised workplace activists in the UCU. Nicholls refused to back the workers, and then invited the college principal to speak at a meeting at TUC congress. It’s worth bearing in mind this class-struggle record when wading through his article.

In keeping with the nationalist politics of the *Morning Star*, Nicholls describes the right-wing attacks on the working-class and democracy of the last few decades, and then blames them on foreign powers. The EU is to blame for neoliberalism and the USA controls “our” foreign policy. “Our political economy” became subject to “foreign control”, he says, and we lost our “sovereign parliament”.

You would think, to read Nicholls, that Thatcherism had been imposed from abroad by an alien force, or that prior to the Reagan years the Foreign Office had been pursuing some kind of ethical outreach programme.

In fact, the attacks on the working-class in the UK and all the peeling back of post-war social democracy were orchestrated by our “own” bourgeoisie, via the Tories and New Labour. The reason Parliament privatised industry and battered the unions was because it was dominated by capitalist politicians, not because its “sovereignty” had been usurped by foreigners.

Nicholls says the left needs to develop a sense of patriotism. We need to worry less about “individual rights” (an instruction I might find less alarming if it wasn’t published in a newspaper that supports regimes like North Korea) and instead focus on a sense of nationhood. Whereas some Labour Party “patriots” try to make a distinction between patriotism and nationalism, Nicholls is less concerned with such niceties.

“To say nationalism has no place in the new world order,” he warns “is to say workers do not have a place”.

Brexit, according to Nicholls, was a national revolt against “humiliation on the world stage” and “servitude” to the EU. He has nothing to say about the widespread and obvious hostility to immigrants that motivated Brexit. Nor is he eager to explain why the Leave voters he thinks are so wonderful and righteous were martialled so enthusiastically into voting Tory.

Capitalism is an international system. To defeat it, we need to unite with workers around the world. Marx famously said the workers have no fatherland, calling for workers of all lands to unite. That remains an infinitely better path for victory than the flag-waving invocations of

national pride and “sovereignty” offered by bureaucrats like Nicholls. □

Labour for a Socialist Europe has signatures now flooding in on its declaration calling for Keir Starmer and Angela Rayner to demand that the Tories pause Brexit. The Tories have set themselves a 30 June deadline for an outline Brexit deal, but no deal will be possible by then unless it is a very minimal one – a very “hard” Brexit – and done (in the midst of the pandemic) with hardly any democratic scrutiny.

Add your signature here: [bit.ly/labourexend](https://bit.ly/labourexend). Starmer said on the radio on 11 May that he would not call for an extension of the 30 June deadline (his calculation seems to be that this is “clever”, because the Tories will eventually realise that they have to ask the EU for an extension, and he wants the Tories to “take the blame” for it). However, in a poll of Labour Party people on the LabourList website, 76% were for an extension. □

## Not the kitchen, but a teaspoon?

Labour right-winger Bridget Phillipson, installed by Keir Starmer as Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, denounced the 2017 Labour manifesto as “all must have prizes” and “vote Labour and get not the microwave, but the whole kitchen”. Not the 2019 manifesto, even, but the 2017 one.

In a leaked letter to her front-bench colleagues, Phillipson has now argued that there is a problem about “policy costings” not looking credible to the public and in the media. She calls for an “achievable road map” – suggesting the policies in Labour’s last manifesto (let alone the more radical policies demanded by Labour conference) are not achievable.

Meanwhile Starmer has given an interview to the *Financial Times* in which he describes the 2019 manifesto as “overloaded”.

Phillipson says that policy ideas requiring spending or tax rises must be agreed with the Shadow Treasury team and the Leader’s Office. On one level, that seems reasonable. But any idea that members should decide party policy, already tenuous, is rapidly disappearing from sight.

We must fight back, to insist that party conference is sovereign and that the (generally left-wing) policies it agrees should be carried out. Starmer should be reminded of the commitment to left policies he made in the leadership campaign and called to account. □

- Labour members need democracy to hold Starmer to left policies: on *The Clarion* at [bit.ly/holdstarmer](https://bit.ly/holdstarmer)
- More on the BBC website: [bit.ly/bphletter](https://bit.ly/bphletter)

# The rollbacks so far

By Martin Thomas

A provisional “lockdown rollback” checklist compiled by researchers at Oxford University [bit.ly/ready-rb](https://bit.ly/ready-rb) puts the UK fourth from bottom among all the world’s countries for readiness to roll back lockdown measures.

The detail of the list is unreliable, but daily deaths have gone down less than in other European countries which are “rolling back”. Daily new confirmed cases aren’t really going down.

Supplies of PPE are still inadequate in the NHS and care homes, let alone in other places. Isolation pay rights are patchy. Tracking-and-tracing plans are vague. Few workplace-reopening plans have been checked by unions.

All that is good reason for delay, for example of school reopening until September, and new stress on our demands for requisitioning for PPE supplies and for isolation pay for all.

But the lockdowns have been at best only a way to buy time. They don’t cure anyone. They have social and health costs. Those costs weigh heaviest on the worse-off. The inescapable facts are that there are no proper scientific studies (vs more or less informed guesses) of what “works” or doesn’t to slow infection, and that for many years to come (even with a vaccine, which won’t be 100%) we will be balancing unknown risks.

Good news: pretty much all the variety of partial lockdown-rollbacks have “worked” *so far*. Emphasis: *so far*. We still don’t know if trends will turn worse after a few weeks, or whether big second and third “waves” will come. Britain being late gives us a chance to learn by observing experience.

China has been rolling back since 11 March; the Czech Republic since 7 April; Austria, South Korea, and others since mid April. Almost all European countries have started rollbacks now. There have been “blips”. The state-by-state rollbacks in the USA look risky. The detail varies widely from country to country. *Very few* countries have solid tracking-and-tracing operations (not Germany, for example). But generally, and *so far*, trends of declining infections and deaths have continued after the rollbacks.

In France, the main teachers’ union organisation, the FSU, supports advice from government’s own scientific advisory committee to remit school reopening to September rather the government’s schedule of 11 May. It highlights the difficulties of combining distance-teaching with in-school teaching.

The FSU and other union organisations (CGT, Solidaires) have also launched a petition about “the day after”: [bit.ly/d-after](https://bit.ly/d-after). It calls for requisitioning of industry for medical supplies, a ban on dividend and bonus payouts, taxing the rich, and expansion of public services.

Some countries have started reopening with shops, others with schools. Often parents are told not to enter the schools because of infection risk to school workers.

There’s usually increased cleaning and handwashing, plus social distancing for school workers; in China and Taiwan, daily temperature-testing.

China and Germany have put exam work for older students first; Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands, the youngest primary students first. Sweden has cancelled exams while keeping schools open throughout.

Western Australia and South Australia called all year levels back to school from 29 April, and about 70% are back. In Queensland, schools were closed on 30 March after the teachers’ union threatened an (illegal) strike; they reopen on 11 May with the youngest (kindie-prep-1) and oldest students. New South Wales is bringing back all year levels, but one day a week each. Victoria has set no date.

The New South Wales Teachers’ Federation is agitating for a reopening more like Queensland’s. The unions have won on issues like guarantees for supply and contract teachers.

The Australian public health authorities set no rules for social distancing for students. (That’s based on the balance of evidence that children rarely suffer severely from the virus, and *seem to be* much less infectious to others, plus the view that it won’t work anyway).

In Israel, the big issue for the teachers’ union is provision for medically high-risk teachers. Danish schools are working on two-metre social-distancing for students; China, on one-metre. The Netherlands has plastic shields round students’ desks, but the desks themselves not separated. Norway says primary students must play in groups no bigger than five.

Generally new rules for increased cleaning and PPE and social distancing for workers have been won or granted in public transport.

Beyond that it varies. In Paris, the métro is due to start running 75% of services from 11 May, with (it plans) 15% of usual passenger numbers. All passengers must wear a mask (the unions are demanding they be distributed free) and travelling at rush hour will be illegal without a letter from your employer.

In China, the Wuhan metro has reopened with elaborate provision to limit passenger numbers. The Shanghai metro is busy. The Seoul metro, in South Korea, the Hong Kong MTR, and the Berlin U-Bahn, have remained fairly busy throughout, though less crowded than usual.

Britain has been almost the only country in the world not to have something like 14 days’ quarantine for all entrants. (Quarantine, rather than testing entrants, because the tests will not detect infections from the last few days, e.g. from the journey).

We call for quarantine accommodation for those who need it, and warn against further restriction (e.g. restricting entry to returning citizens only, as in Australia and New Zealand) or attempts to build further migration barriers from the emergency measures. □

# The jobs battles to come

By Colin Foster

Government figures say 27% of workers went on the official furlough scheme in late March and early April.

The government is to cover 80% of their wages, and employer may or may not make up the other 20%.

The scheme is due to end on 30 June. The government says it will be “tapered off”, not ended suddenly.

The chief driver of Boris Johnson’s “back to work tomorrow” announcement on 10 May looks to have been the government’s wish to reduce its furlough bills, and avoid further bills for its (lavish) aid to big business and (now increased) aid to small business.

The government also wants to deflect calls to cancel rent, mortgage, and utility bills during the emergency, made not only by households but also by businesses, including big businesses.

Many big businesses, like Burger King and Superdrug, are publicly refusing to pay rent. Their proposal, in fact, is not the three months’ rent-cancellation most currently demanded for households, but nine months’ cancellation. According to the *Financial Times* on 9 April, in the previous fortnight shops had paid 41% of their rents due, and residential tenants 44%.

Having landlords go bust would be no damage to general economic life, since the land and buildings would be intact. Nationalise the land! But the Tories, being Tories, think any “rent holidays” would have to go together with compensation to landlords.

Oddly, bosses’ organisations, the CBI, Institute of Directors, and London Chambers of Commerce, reacted to Johnson’s “back to work” speech with calls for delay. Some are keen to restart fast. Many would prefer a longer spell on government rations to a risky reopening which might leave them with their full usual running costs but little sales income.

As we go to press on 11 May, the prospect seems more of a grinding, bit-by-bit drive to reopen, over weeks, than Johnson’s “start back tomorrow” line. Rail and London Underground bosses, for example, were already working towards increased services from 18 May before Johnson’s 10 May speech. It’s a prospect of hundreds and thousands of workers’ and union battles over safety at work; and it will be life and death to win them.

They can be won. Many groups of workers who have been in their workplaces throughout have won improvements by using “Section 44”, which entitles them to walk out of any work area where they see “serious and imminent” risk. With the exception of the RMT rail union, union leaders are hesitating about backing workers who use that legal right, or, worse, telling workers that they can’t use it because its use would be “unlawful industrial action”. It wouldn’t. Using the right is not, in terms of the law, “industrial action” at all.

The biggest school union, the NEU, has opposed reopening schools on 1 June, and advised members not to cooperate with plans for reopening then, but failed to say that it will support members using “Section 44”.

The union leaders must be turned round, and the La-

bour Party should back workers insisting on safety.

About a quarter of workers are on furlough now.

Travel to work has dropped 65%, so probably about a third of workers have been going in to work throughout the lockdown, in health and social care, cleaning, food supply, logistics, transport, utilities, etc.

Maybe 40% have been working from home. The figures don’t tally neatly. Some workers have worked from home most of the time but occasionally gone in, some have two jobs in which their statuses are different, some have been working but fewer hours, and so on.

As far as can be seen, full-on unemployment is still much lower in the UK than the USA’s 14.7%. New claims for Universal Credit total 1.8 million, but many of those are people in work (only less work). There are 250,000 new claims for Jobseeker’s Allowance so far.

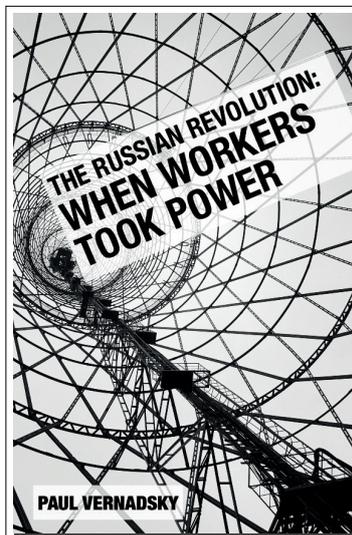
Manufacturing and construction faced no legal ban to continuing in the lockdown (other than for non-essential construction in Scotland), but many sites shut either through union pressure or because bosses thought it unworkable to continue.

Manufacturing ran at 58% capacity in the lockdown, so probably something like half of manufacturing workers have been in. Only 35% of construction sites stayed working through the lockdown. More have been reopening bit by bit. According to *Construction News*, 63% were open in the week ending 8 May.

We don’t know how many reopened sites had adequate union agreements for safety, and how many didn’t. Bosses will seek to hurry workers back on other sites without adequate agreements.

Mass unemployment also looms as a threat. Creditors will start pressing. Small businesses, and some big ones, which hunkered down for “wait and see” in April, will close down. Businesses which had expanded fast by taking on huge debts will go under.

The strategic demands for the labour movement will be work or full pay; large-scale creation of good new jobs by expanding public services and a socialist Green New Deal; and public ownership and democratic control of high finance. □



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# “You saw the email about supplies”



## Diary of a tubeworker

By Jay Dawkey

The streets are fairly clear at 0410 when I leave the house. I don't meet anyone else until I get on my first of two night buses. I could get the staff taxis. They've changed it to only take one passenger at a time now. But I would be walking in the rain for 15 minutes to pick it up.

The bus is not busy, but it's hard to socially distance as another set of orange overalls or Royal Mail hi-vis jackets climbs up the stairs. I exchange a solemn nod with the other tube worker on here as I get off. No one is in the mood for talking. Everyone looks tired and ready for the bed they've only just left.

The gates open up at 0516. A couple of people trickle

in. I go back to the mess-room. Do I have a coffee or do I go to sleep? Perhaps I can do both. Get the coffee, fall asleep before it works and wake up feeling refreshed? We turn the light off and close our eyes.

The part-timers trickle in after 0700. Looks like too many of us are in for this to be sensible. And several of the part-timers don't hold the same licence as me.

Bollocks, I think. Means I won't be getting out of here early. Of course everyone in can do the jobs that my licence allows, but the company want to save money, and it can pay these people six grand less because they haven't been given an extra week's worth of training.

D comes to the door. "Can you go down to Platform 5? I think there is a black rucksack on a bench. No one is with it".

"I'll get some gloves"

"Can you just take one?"

"How can I look inside it once I have checked it, if I only have one glove"

"Yeah I know, but you saw the email about supplies".

"If that wasn't a joke, then this surely is. I am getting a pair of gloves".

As I go down, I realise I haven't been onto the platforms in work time since the crisis started. Platform is empty, as is the bag. I go back inside.

"Base to all radios, good morning, good morning. Can we have someone in the GLAP (glass box by the barriers) on rotation from 0800. Customers starting to come through".

M answers. I hadn't seen him, he must be in the other mess room. "Kilo 32 to base. If customers are making essential journeys only then they'll know where they are going".

Throughout the week certain managers try to encourage people to go out. Some do, but only to sit, looking down and keeping the door closed.

"Why do managers want to just exercise this power, sitting in their offices and asking us to risk ourselves?"

"How will they do it when there is meant to be more people travelling? There will be queues worse than the shops. We can't manage that. It's scary."

"We are going to find out in two weeks. And it won't be good, I know that much." N says as he leaves. □

• "Jay Dawkey" is a Tube worker.

## Pandemic used to scrap worker rights

By Mohan Sen

Three Indian states with a combined population of over 300 million have used the Covid-19 crisis to radically weaken workers' rights.

Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have all legislated to allow a major lengthening of shifts with no increase in pay. Madhya Pradesh is allowing employers to hire and fire at will, has removed the need for contractors to have a licence to employ up to 49 people, changed factory licence renewals from annual to every ten years, and given employers the right to bar workplace inspections.

Uttar Pradesh, whose chief minister is a radical fundamentalist Hindu monk, has exempted all employers from almost all previous labour laws for 1,000 days. Only a few laws, including those banning outright slavery and insisting on payment of wages, will remain functional.

These changes – which the national government of Narendra Modi now has to approve – are being justified on the basis of creating jobs for workers returning to their home states as a result of the pandemic. Their advocates are also demagogically pointing out that a large majority of workers work informally and so are not effectively covered by legal rights.

Even the "union" linked to the Hindu fundamentalist BJP and fascistic RSS militia has denounced the changes.

The BJP regime has consistently attacked and undermined workers' rights and India's labour movement. Indian workers are on the back foot, but at the start of the year many tens and probably hundreds of millions joined a mass strike against the government. □

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## John Moloney

The union has commenced discussions with the Cabinet Office on a return-to-work protocol for the entire civil service, but we're having to fight the managements of individual departments who want to pre-empt that by unilaterally bringing in their own return-to-work plans, prior to a national agreement being in place, or simply pressuring people back to work.

The first formal meeting with Cabinet Office will take place this week. Our National Executive Committee will meet to review our position; currently our policy is that home working should continue for all workers who can work from home, with any return to the workplace to be voluntary and conditional on risk assessments, overseen by union reps, which include risks assessing workers' journeys to and from work.

We're also demanding PPE for specific work tasks if that's necessary and appropriate. Any protocol must apply equally to directly-employed and outsourced workers.

In situations where we feel members are being pressured back to work in conditions in which it's unsafe, we're encouraging members to organise collectively and refuse to work in those unsafe conditions. Where we're not able to build up confidence for a collective refusal, we issue advice to all members about the rights to refuse as individuals. □

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

## Rail union says: if it's unsafe, then refuse

In the week ending 9 May, railway industry bosses signalled intentions to go for a unilateral ramping up of services from 11 May, despite no national agreement with the unions being in place to facilitate that.

Unions had been negotiating towards an agreement, with a projected date of 18 May in mind for a possible increase in services. Bringing that forward a week could mean many of the safety measures implemented during the pandemic, such as temporary rosters to eliminate non-essential work, could end without new arrangements being put in their place.

On the Tube, bosses had insisted there would be no ramp up on 11 May, and there was none, though traffic has increased a bit at least in some areas over the last couple of weeks.

Tube bosses say they are still working towards 18 May.

Rail union RMT has rightly issued advice to all its members reminding them of their legal rights to refuse to work in unsafe conditions.

If bosses impose a ramp-ups without putting additional safety measures in place, and it becomes impossible to maintain safe distancing in the workplace (either between us and our workmates, or between us and passengers), workers have to refuse to work. It's that simple. □

[workersliberty.org/audio](https://workersliberty.org/audio)

Online meetings & resources: [workersliberty.org/c19-online](https://workersliberty.org/c19-online)

# Covid-19 sample couriers vote on strike

By Zack Muddle, treasurer of Bristol Couriers' Network — IWGB

Medical couriers transporting Covid-19 samples on behalf of NHS pathology contractor The Doctors Laboratory (TDL) will vote on strike action, in response to the company's decision to make redundancies during the pandemic, and its failure to address health and safety concerns.

The IWGB union – who represent a majority of the 140 medical couriers – issued a notice of strike ballot on 6 May, following TDL's 1 May announcement of a 30-day consultation aiming to make ten couriers redundant. The strike ballot will run from 13 to 27 May.

One courier threatened with redundancy is the Chair of the Couriers and Logistics Branch of the union, who has been extremely high profile in leading the battle against TDL. He has fought hard for improvements since 2016, lifting dozens of TDL couriers out of poverty. Recently he has been raising multiple health and safety issues with TDL, especially in regard of the company's lack of PPE.

These redundancies are a thinly veiled assault on trade unionists using cover of the pandemic.

The strike is also over the company's failure to address a number of demands the workers have made to ensure their health and safety.

For the last two months, the couriers have been going into hospitals with a high concentration of Covid-19 patients to pick up Covid-19 samples and deliver them safely to pathology labs.

Despite repeated demands the company has failed to: give full self-isolation pay to those at high-risk; regularly test couriers; provide adequate PPE; implement social distancing where possible; reinstate an unfairly dismissed courier with a series medical conditions.

TDL turns over large profits and could afford such measures if desired.

After a letter-writing campaign over the threatened redundancies, TDL have threatened to sue IWGB. IWGB have now initiated a second letter-writing campaign.

Participate at [bit.ly/tdl-10](https://bit.ly/tdl-10). □

## Contact us

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

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# Solidarity



For a workers' government

## The social care emergency

By Sacha Ismail

On 6 May Nottingham East MP Nadia Whittome, who returned to her old care job after the Covid-19 crisis hit, was sacked for speaking publicly about PPE shortages in the industry.

She used the burst of publicity to argue not only for workers' rights and unionisation, but also for "democratic public ownership" of care. Labour movement activists should take up that call.

Nadia wrote in the Guardian ([bit.ly/nadiawarticle](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/06/nadia-whittome-ppe-shortages)):

"As an MP, I am financially secure and can afford to speak out over a lack of PPE and testing, and risk getting sacked. Across the country, there is a policy of gagging and enforced silence... the insinuation is often that demanding basic rights and pay for yourself means that you do not care about the people you look after..."

"The 'keep your head down and keep your mouth shut' attitude of the sector is not only unethical, it is also dangerous in the context of a deadly virus where speaking out about poor practice has the potential to save lives..."

"If you are on a zero-hours contract, many employment rights and due process simply do not apply to you. If this is how I'm treated, imagine how companies treat other workers who do not have a platform, many of whom are not members of a trade union..."

The article concluded:

"On the ground, I hope that this crisis has given care workers the confidence and pride to join a union and demand better..."

It clearly identified the root problem in who owns and control care provision:

"I am also angrier than ever... about the privatisation of social care that has left the sector fragmented and mismanaged, with the government for its years of cuts and failures on PPE and testing, and with the attitude of private companies, which run care homes, have towards their staff."

"The coronavirus pandemic has shone a light on the fact that the whole social care system is chronically, tragically, not fit for purpose. Many care workers could have told you this already. Due to decades of privatisation and underfunding, the system is a jigsaw puzzle of different private providers who cannot string a strat-

egy together between them and often compete for the same contracts.

"Read the website of any of the big care companies and you could be forgiven for thinking that their mission was one of pure altruism. In fact, they are bringing in profits on the back of their undervalued workforce and government subsidies. Many do not recognise trade unions. The entire sector is carried by its overwhelmingly underpaid, hyper-exploited and exhausted workforce. These workers are overwhelmingly women and many are migrants, who spend their leisure time being told they are a burden on public services..."

Many Labour MPs would leave it there, but Nadia advocated a clear solution for the labour movement to fight for. The deep crises in social care, she argued:

"...require a reckoning with decades of underfunding, fragmentation and privatisation, and deep change in how our health and social care systems are run."

"We need a new deal for social care, a huge injection of public money, and a model based on democratic public ownership, so that local people, workers and service users can have a say in how it is run. Workers in care homes should be paid properly and have strong rights, and managements should be accountable to local people and their elected representatives..."

This matches the policy passed at last year's Labour Party conference (see [bit.ly/socialcarearticle](https://www.labour.gov.uk/2019/11/socialcare)). Yet as far as we know Nadia Whittome is the only Labour politician to have publicly argued for it.

Trade union and Labour activists should take up the call for public ownership of care provision and make it a campaigning banner.

The demand for public ownership should be linked to campaigns to drive up care workers' pay and conditions. We must raise two urgent demands to at least mitigate the chaos, damage and virus spread:

1. Emergency measures to ensure adequate PPE for all working in or attending care homes and home care, organised accountably from the public sector;
2. The right of all workers to self-isolate on full pay.

Anything less fails in our duty to the millions of people who in one way or another rely on the care system. □

• Nadia Whittome has called for any care workers facing pressure, threats or discipline for raising issues about PPE to contact her office: see video [bit.ly/nadiacall](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)