

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

LABOUR: DEMAND JOHNSON QUIT



» Contracting-out
messes up PPE and
trace-and-isolate

» A government of
bluff and bluster

» Rush for hard
Brexit

Momentum: a left voice in NCG poll?

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Beijing clamps down on HK

By Chen Ying

China's National People's Congress decided on 28 May to introduce a National Security Law in Hong Kong. It represents the most direct change of governance on Hong Kong, imposed by the People's Republic of China, without any discussion with Hong Kong's Legislative Council.

The passing of this law will allow mainland security agencies to operate in Hong Kong. The kidnap of five Causeway Bay booksellers in December 2015, for selling politically sensitive books banned in China was a chilling reminder of the global reach of Beijing's secret service. Soon they will operate officially in the city. Many fear that the thousands who have been arrested will be charged under new laws and even transferred to prisons in mainland China.

Why has China decided to do this, knowing full well that it would further inflame protests and provoke the USA and other western powers into retaliation? Wouldn't this move strengthen Taiwanese support for their pro-independence President, negating Beijing's strategic aim to "unify the country" and take over Taiwan?

The regime in Beijing is on the back foot, playing a move out of desperation, not from strength.

The unstable and volatile situation in Hong Kong continues to be a thorn in the side of a regime that habitually silences its critics, locks up dissidents, journalists and lawyers in the mainland. The prospects of losing many pro-Beijing seats in the forthcoming Legislative Council elections in September, after the whitewash in the recent district council elections, will further weaken the HKSAR Government's grip. It has to act to stem the tide of unrest in Hong Kong.

Calculated risk

It has few cards to play against an aggressive US regime determined to prevent China's geopolitical and technological ascendancy. It is on the defensive about its initial cover-up over Covid-19. For the first time in recent years, Premier Li Keqiang did not make a GDP growth prediction; economic growth had dropped from double digits a decade ago to 6%, even before the pandemic has created major damage to the economy. Over the years, the Chinese Communist Party has relied on economic development to shore up its legitimacy but the current economic dislocation and decoupling with the US economy will generate higher unemployment and social unrest, adversely impact on China's One Belt One Road foreign policy initiative as well as dent the Made in China 2025 strategic plan. In asserting its naked control over Hong Kong, it is taking a calculated risk that the sanctions won't be as sharp and severe as the international reaction over the Tiananmen massacre, when the PRC was diplomatically isolated for years.

The street protests so far have been sporadic and on a much smaller scale than before. On 24 May hundreds

of protestors were arrested. On 27 May, the day that secondary schools were due to re-open, a call for a city-wide strike to paralyse the transport system fell flat, and in the evening, the police arrested another few hundred street protestors. On the grounds of social distancing regulations, the police has refused to allow the annual 4 June Tiananmen commemoration event to go ahead in Victoria Park, forcing the organisers to organise small scale events in 50 different locations in the city as well as an online vigil.

So, Beijing wins the first round, catching its critics in Hong Kong off guard, demoralising protestors with hundreds of arrests, and looking to ride out the immediate US responses. For the first time in 30 years, there will not be a mass demonstration in Hong Kong to remind the regime of its brutality in Tiananmen. However, this setback will merely strengthen the resolve of Hong Kong people to fight on, maybe switching to longer-term tactics and strategies, with an initial focus on mobilising for the September elections.

It is also a time for sections of the protest movement to reflect on their previous reliance on and naïve belief that Western governments will send in the cavalry. Hong Kong will have to fight for its future on its own, unless its stance for freedom and democracy can inspire and mobilise working people in the rest of China to also turn against the Communist Party. □

- Abridged: full text at bit.ly/200601hk
- Sign the "Solidarity with Hong Kong freedom" statement, bit.ly/sol-hk. And join a Zoom solidarity meeting, 11:00, Saturday 6 June, bit.ly/200606hk

Upcoming meetings

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

From Tuesday 2 to Monday 15 June, excluding ongoing study courses:

Wednesdays 3 and 10 June 7-8.30pm: ABCs of Marxism – 3 June, [What will socialism look like?](#) 10 June, [What is the third camp?](#)

Thursdays, 6pm: [Covid-19:](#) informal discussion of politics and the pandemic. 4 June: the politics of test-trace-isolate.

Sunday 7 June, 6.30-8pm: [Minnie Lansbury](#) – A different sort of Labour councillor

Sunday 14 June, 6.30-8pm: [Solidarność: The workers' movement and the rebirth of Poland](#)

For full and updated details, zoom links, later meetings, ongoing study courses – newcomers welcome – and other resources, see workersliberty.org/c19-online □

Labour: demand Johnson quits!

“” Editorial

Enough of Boris Johnson! The way he has conscripted his Cabinet ministers to defend his wretched Rasputin, Dominic Cummings, is a symptom of much more.

A tinpot tyrant act. Trying to sideline scientific debate. Doing everything he does in the pandemic with a priority of paying profits to his mates, Serco or Deloitte or others, and evading responsibility.

On 20 May, Boris Johnson told Parliament: “we will have a test, track and trace operation that will be world-beating, and yes, it will be in place by 1 June”.

Leave aside the sickly talk of “world-beating”. Dido Harding, another posh Tory without relevant education or expertise (but she went to uni with David Cameron), has been brought in to run the “manual” track-and-trace. On 28 May, she admitted it would not be in full operation until the end of June.

Back on 20 March, the government said it was planning a smartphone virus-tracing app to be put in circulation when the lockdown was eased.

The contract for the app, with a US software company, has been managed by Matthew Gould, the boss of “NHSX”, the “digital policy” bit of the NHS. Gould has no education or expertise in medicine, public health, or information technology. But he did go to school with George Osborne and then to Cambridge.

In late April, the Tories promised the app for mid-May. We’re still waiting.

In other countries, track-and-trace has been run by local public-health employees, augmented by police, who, whatever else about them, are permanent public-sector employees with some relevant training and some slight level of accountability.

Under Johnson, the tracers are being recruited by Serco, an outsourcing company with no relevant expertise but with Rupert Soames as CEO (from an old Tory family, Eton, Oxford). Serco is hiring them for 12-week gigs, on minimum wage or a bit more, and giving scanty training.

Track-and-trace at best is only part of a policy against the virus. To work at all it needs smaller numbers of cases to be tracked than currently in Britain.

John Edmunds, a professor at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and a member of the government’s advisory committee, said on 29 May that he estimated 8000 new infections a day outside hospitals and care homes. The daily number of new confirmed (tested) cases in Britain is going down slowly, but is still four times the level in France and Italy. So is the daily number of deaths.

Back in January-March, when the government ran track-and-trace before dropping it in mid-March for lack of testing capacity, the average delay for getting test results and then reaching the close contacts of someone infected

was five days. As a [recent report](#) by scientists convened by the Royal Society comments, “by the time contacts were found, half of their onward transmissions [to infect yet others] had already occurred”.

To work better than it worked then, the operation needs quicker test results. Taiwan can provide them in four hours, Vietnam in five hours. Britain, with its big biotech industry, its big university biology departments, and its riches, but its Tory government – two days if you’re lucky.

The testing is organised by Deloitte, a firm of accountants, not people with medical knowledge. (Boss is David Sproul. A tax accountant. Paid himself £3.3 million last year, enough to endear him to Johnson).

Then if the contacts are traced, they need to be able to self-isolate. They need isolation pay. But not even all care-home workers have that yet.

The case-numbers won’t be kept down long-term without PPE [Personal Protective Equipment] being available for workers across the board.

Even in the NHS, “securing sufficient levels of PPE” is still “a challenge”, according to the boss of NHS Providers, an umbrella body for NHS trusts, speaking on 25 May. The NHS doesn’t have “sustainable supply in place, and really effective testing of NHS staff and patients”. Dentists, due to reopen on 8 June, say they can’t get PPE.

A new report bit.ly/nhs-sup shows how the NHS supply chain has been divided into 11 contracted-out segments. Each contractor is a middle-man, which then does exclusive deals with suppliers. (That is why suppliers offering PPE could get no replies to emails when they offered extra supply in the earlier days of the pandemic). “Four layers of profit-taking”, and as many layers of buck-passing, intervene between the NHS paying the money to contractors, and the supplies coming.

The labour movement must demand requisitioning of industry for direct public provision of PPE and tests, workers’ control over reopenings, isolation pay for all, and work or full pay for the workers now facing job cuts.

We need to get rid of the Tory government and the whole nexus of privilege and profiteering which it serves. Getting rid of Johnson will be a start. It would be hard even for a Tory successor to get away with his tinpot-tyrant stuff, like his attempt to shut down Parliament last year and his rush for a hard Brexit formula before 30 June.

Make Labour speak out! □

House homeless, cancel rents

The government plans to cut off funding from the end of June for councils to get on-the-streets homeless people inside. More than 60 homelessness organisations have signed a protest letter: bit.ly/noone-out. The emergency ban on evicting tenants is also due to end on 25 June. The London Renters’ Union, Labour Tenants United, the New Economics Foundation and others are calling for outright cancellation of rents for at least three months: bit.ly/rent-s. □

Move against uni cuts

By Gerry Bates

Associate Lecturers (ALs) and Graduate Trainee Teachers (GTTs) at Goldsmiths University, London, plan to take action against the freezing of their short-term teaching contracts, against the withholding of payment for hours worked under lockdown (promised but not delivered), and against the decision by management not to use the government furlough scheme to help these precarious workers.

At the start of the year Goldsmiths management announced a programme of cuts ("Evolving Goldsmiths"). Then they withdrew under pressure from the unions. Financial uncertainty at the college has increased as a result of Covid-19. As elsewhere in higher education, the most precarious staff, ALs, GTTs and those on fixed-term contracts, will suffer the most. The hiring freeze means 472 posts are under threat.

ALs and GTTs, who are usually postgraduate students, receive just 7% of Goldsmiths' wage bill, but it has been calculated that they do about 40% of the teaching, one

of the highest percentages across UK higher-education institutions.

ALs and GTTs in many departments at Goldsmiths are currently refusing to return assessment grades until Goldsmiths changes course and negotiates with them. The UCU branch has passed a comprehensive motion, against the cuts and in support of these workers. The motion also highlights the implications of increased workload for other staff.

The new Warden at Goldsmiths, Frances Corner, wrote on her personal blog on 1 May: "1 May is International Workers Day... I'm thinking about the thousands of people across the country who are key workers."

Corner, who gets £238,000 a year, should also think about those workers closer to "home" and their so far unpaid labour helping students through the stresses of the last two months. □

• More: bit.ly/gucu-m; bit.ly/prec-gold.



Public ownership of finance

The Clarion held a Zoom meeting (29 May) on public ownership of high finance, and why this is essential for tackling the multiple crises we face. Speakers were:

- Ben Selby, Fire Brigades Union national executive council
- Ruth Cashman, Lambeth Unison secretary and Labour for a Socialist Europe convener
- Abel Harvie-Clark, climate striker and activist

They will publish the full video of the speeches soon. Meanwhile see a short collection of clips.

- Facebook: bit.ly/banks-video
- Twitter: bit.ly/twit-banks



Corrections

62% of England's care homes have had no Covid-19 cases yet; *Solidarity* 549 reported that mistakenly as *Britain's*. In Scotland only 38% of care homes have had no cases: bit.ly/scot-ch. □

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 – if you agree, join us! □

France's step beyond

By Rhodri Evans

Three of France's trade-union confederations – CGT, FSU, and Solidaires – have (26 May) got together with Greenpeace, ATTAC (the Tobin Tax campaign), and others to produce an "exit plan from the crisis":

bit.ly/cgt-gp.

It includes:

- "requisitioning of factories and businesses to produce masks and medical supplies"
- "re-establishing individual and collective liberties to move around, to meet, and to protest"
- restoration of trade-union rep access to workers, sometimes suspended on grounds of virus emergency
- "reducing drastically" the numbers in prison
- "a standard work week of 32 hours, without loss of pay"
- "a moratorium on rents"
- "for poorer countries... cancelling debt payments for the year 2020"
- restoration and strengthening of the wealth tax
- expansion of public services, public transport, and rail.

It doesn't propose public ownership beyond that, or workers' control, and it is vague about how to progress, but it's a step beyond official ideas so far in the British labour movement.

Left political life has begun to re-emerge in France, with a protest for the rights of "illegal" migrants ("sans-papiers") in Paris on 30 May estimated at 5,500 by the police, who used tear gas against it. □

A ragged 1 June, but schools union grows

By a Lewisham teacher

On 30 May, four scientists from the government's SAGE advisory group went public saying that the Tories' easing of the lockdown, including the wider opening of schools, is unwise at this time.

The number of cases and the infection rate are still high, and we don't know whether or how much children can spread the virus.

As I write on 1 June, the wider opening of schools planned by the Tories for today looks ragged. In Wales schools are not going back. The Assembly has set no date for a return. In Scotland schools will return from 11 August (the regular start to the school year there); Northern Ireland will have a phased return from mid-August.

Many councils across England have come out against a wider opening on 1 June. Some school leaderships won't open out even where the local council has not come out against 1 June; some will open out their schools in areas where the councils have come out against 1 June.

The government's plan was that primaries and nursery schools would open to nursery, reception, year 1, and year 6. Even where there is wider opening, it is often not to all those year groups, or all within those year groups.

The largest school workers' union, the National Education Union (NEU), has run a propaganda and lobbying campaign against wider opening on 1 June. It has been effective up to a point, though its selective use of statistics to back its case is not a model to be followed.

It has failed to develop an appropriate industrial strategy to embolden its members on the ground. It has developed a joint union checklist for reps and activists to use to ensure a safer opening when it is appropriate, or more likely where we can't stop it happening. It has discussed the use of Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, which gives workers a legal right to withdraw from work areas of "serious and imminent danger", but not loudly and not with much conviction.

What we demand in the crisis

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

- See full text at bit.ly/what-d
- Animated video of full demands: bit.ly/demand-video

There is now clear guidance on the union's website on how to escalate through to advising members of their rights under Section 44, should risk assessments not be appropriate and the checklist not be met, but it was posted only on 28 May.

The union wrote to all primary heads on 27 May arguing for a delay until the 15 June. They based that date on the suggestion in the Independent SAGE group's report that it might be safer.

There is little clarity on the Independent SAGE group's calculations about 15 June, and what the letter effectively did was undermine those fighting for schools not to open wider until later – start of the new school year, like Italy or Spain or Scotland – by setting a date that has now become the benchmark.

It also torpedoed resistance to wider opening in secondaries. The government wants secondaries to start face to face meetings with Year 10 and 12 pupils from 15 June. By accepting primaries could go back by the 15th, the union has tacitly accepted the government's programme for secondary reopening.

Despite the significant problems in the NEU's national approach, it is at least visible, clear and attempting to address the real concerns that school workers are facing. This has led to growth.

Since the crisis has begun the union has recruited 2,000 new reps and 20,000 new members, 9,000 of whom are support staff members. This takes the support staff membership up to 38,000, comparable to Unite's membership in schools. That should end the TUC agreement for the NEU not to have negotiating rights for or actively recruit support staff members. The industrial logic of one school workers' union is unfolding before our eyes.

£10,000 by 22 Nov

We have reached the £3,000 mark in our appeal for £10,000 by 22 November, as donations from Stuart, Chris, John and Bryan take us to £3,125.

Since 30 May we have seen the first large protests since the Covid-19 emergency hit. We still don't have the "ecology" of meetings, demonstrations, and street and door-to-door activity to sustain our usual tabloid publication, but we will be out there in the actions across the country in solidarity with the protests in the US and against racism and police brutality across the world.

Our online output continues to increase. New videos include our now weekly editorial video and, this week, two supporters in Lewisham speaking about the climate crisis and the socialist answer to it. Keep watching and reading our content, join us on the streets, and continue to donate: workersliberty.org/donate

Forward Momentum bins democratically-agreed left policies

By a Forward Momentum policy committee delegate

On 2 June Forward Momentum published its “plan to take Momentum Forward” (fwdmomentum.org/plan). This was put together following two gatherings of delegates elected in local and other (e.g. BME) meetings of FM supporters. In that sense, the process was reasonably open. There were, however, serious problems both with the process and the political positions the majority used it to take.

First of all, the delegate meetings included unelected “founding members”, who nonetheless got a vote. And then a number of important policies adopted by the delegate meetings have simply been dropped from the final document. Almost a third of delegates at the second meeting voted against campaigning for “free movement and migrants’ rights”. That’s bad enough. But it was passed 38-16-2. Then free movement was left out of the published statement (screenshot [here](#)) – until a Momentum Internationalists supporter contacted the FM organisers, made a fuss and got it added back in!

As we go to press, on a quick check other demands not added back, i.e. binned, include:

- “Campaign to make the Labour Party conference sovereign with a final say on manifesto policies”
- “Campaign for democratic ownership of energy and finance”
- Reference to pushing for councillors to “fight cuts” and holding them “to account over... opposition to austerity”.

Particularly given the dropping of the high profile and controversial issue of free movement, it seems implausible these were oversights. In any case, it is extremely bad.

In addition, delegates voted to reject a number of important and even essential demands including:

- “Hold an annual Momentum sovereign conference to decide policy and strategy”
- “Reinvigorating regional networks with annual regional all-member conferences to build networks and to coordinate on campaigns and on the Refounding Momentum process”

- “Regional conferences to elect some representation to the NCG”

- “Give members the data and resources to organise autonomous Momentum networks in trade unions to push for democracy and radical action in unions”

- “Campaign to extend the Brexit transition period”

They also rejected the call to “campaign for UBI” (Universal Basic Income). There is a strong socialist case against UBI, but an emergency UBI is surely a valid and useful demand in the current circumstances

(For what was voted up and down, with voting figures, [see here](#).)

The whole process and the way it was used looked like trying to avoid anything too radical or concrete.

Given what was rejected and even more so given what was adopted but then dropped, we should have no faith in Forward Momentum to stand up and fight for radical policies that it has included.

An FM victory over Momentum Renewal in the Momentum NCG election is preferable, but the most important thing is the election of more radical candidates who will argue clearly for socialist politics, bring pressure to bear, and help organise struggles.

For quite a while there was ambiguity about whether Forward Momentum would adopt a wider political program at all. Whether it would seemed to change depending on what was most convenient for a particular argument or controversy. What has happened now suggests that FM has not broken from the basic approach of the existing Momentum leadership, which long argued against members democratically discussing and adopting policies to fight for in the Labour Party and then suddenly announced policies from the top down.

Is this how FM will continue to run Momentum if it wins?

The “plan” and what has been dropped from it raise concerns about Forward Momentum’s commitment to democracy and to socialist politics. □

- Sign petition call on Labour to back pausing Brexit: bit.ly/labouextend

Nominations open for the Momentum NCG

By Mohan Sen

Both the main groupings standing candidates for Momentum’s national coordinating group (NCG), Forward Momentum and Momentum Renewal, have now announced their full, 24-strong slates of candidates. Nominations, and sign-ups for Momentum membership to vote in the election, close on 11 June, and voting is 16-30 June.

The Momentum Renewal (momentumrenewal.co.uk) slate is far more “celebrity” heavy than the Forward Momentum one, with Labour conference arrangements

committee member and London party vice-chair Seema Chandwani; Scottish deputy leadership candidate Matt Kerr; NEC member Huda Elmi; Jon Trickett MP; London assembly member Murad Qureshi; and Preston council leader Matthew Brown. It includes at least four who are already NCG members (a quarter of the elected part of the existing NCG), plus one former NCG member, two ex-Momentum office staff, twelve politicians of various sorts, and two MPs’ staffers.

There are a couple of politically surprising people on the MR slate, and the very worst Stalinists, witch-hunt-

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Why I'm standing for the Momentum NCG

By Ruth Cashman

I'm standing for the Momentum National Coordinating Group as a trade union activist with a wide range of experience in a union branch and local left that have organised numerous struggles, in workplaces and the wider community, around a range of issues - from cuts to management racism to the right to strike. I'm standing to say Momentum needs to become an organising centre for labour movement activists - instead of seeing the trade unions as a support group you relate to through their general secretaries.

More broadly, as a socialist who wants to develop socialist ideas and working-class consciousness and struggles.

Our central message should be making the rich pay and taking control of their wealth to reorganise society. Aggressively campaigning for public ownership, including of the banks and finance, is crucial.

The Labour left has been incredibly hesitant even about demands that would have been bog-standard before Corbyn - the most glaring example being repeal of the anti-union laws, which is even more essential in the situation we're in.

To take an even more immediate example, it's right to express solidarity with protesters in the US, but what do we advocate to challenge the police and the prison system here? Corbyn's Labour advocated more police - Momentum supported this, and much of the left remained silent. We really need to get to grips with that problem.

Similarly in terms of internationalism, there is a minority

of the Labour left that has adopted flatly nationalist positions, but a much wider layer that talks about internationalism but in practice tails the nationalists. A majority of the Labour membership has internationalist sympathies, for instance on Brexit and free movement, but the internationalist left has been too weak to develop that into a force. We need to regroup.

Neither Momentum Renewal or those who run Forward Momentum have really got to grips with these political problems. Nor with the need for a genuinely bottom up, lively, grassroots movement, like we had to some extent in the early days of Momentum, but which is something which many even in Forward Momentum are quite scared of.

That fear of genuine, uncontrolled democracy also explains why I was banned from the Forward Momentum primaries. Very people on the left set out wanting to suppress democracy. They set out with good intentions but start to worry about things getting out of hand, about people making what they regard as the wrong decision. It was the same with Jon Lansman in Momentum. People come under pressure, external or in their heads, to start to cut the corners of democracy. That's also why you get people who know red-baiting and witch-hunting from the Labour right and the Stalinists is wrong, but don't want to face it down and inevitably start reproducing it themselves.

I'm standing to contribute to radically changing this culture. □

• Abridged. Full text at bit.ly/ruthcncg

from page 6

ers and bullies have been left off. Nonetheless, this is clearly very much a species of "continuity Momentum", and moreover represents the worst wing of the Momentum office faction (see bit.ly/mrarticle1). The Forward Momentum slate is more of a mixed bag politically (fwd-momentum.org/ncg). It includes three candidates who backed the Momentum Internationalists program in the FM primaries (Abbie Clark, Nadia Whittome, Ana Oppenheim). One, Abbie Clark, has been central to MI. MI will challenge other candidates to back that platform, and other candidates who back it will also be standing.

In the Midlands region, where Forward Momentum is standing Andrew Scattergood, a left-wing Fire Brigades Union activist, Momentum Renewal are also standing an FBU activist - Andrew Fox-Hewitt, a prominent supporter of nationalist demagogue Paul Embery. Many of the FM candidates are unknown to us. There are two who made witch-hunting the AWL one of their central primary planks (Sonali Bhattacharyya and Mick Moore); and one (Liz Smith) who has argued vocally and organised actively around the idea that Momentum's problem was too

much criticism and pressure on Corbyn.

Activists in and linked to the Red Flag group are standing three candidates under the banner "[Anticapitalist Platform](#)".

The Momentum website displays candidates as they nominate (bit.ly/candidatesmom). All nominated by 2 June were outside the main slates. The wing of the left that is hostile to outgoing Momentum chair Jon Lansman not because of his suppression of Momentum democracy but because he has correctly identified antisemitism on the left as a real problem seems to be backing East London Labour activist Syed Siddiqi, who stood in the FM primary but is now standing independently. That wing includes Lansman's disgruntled former lieutenant Christine Shawcroft, but also some other surprisingly prominent London Labour figures.

When MR launched we described it as "Morning Star Momentum". In fact the Morning Star has not backed MR.

The Skwawkbox blog has denounced MR as a careerist-dominated "Lansman front". Skwawkbox was not bothered about the destruction of Momentum democracy but dislikes Lansman for speaking out about antisemitism. □

Safe and Equal: three fronts

By Michael Elms

The Safe and Equal campaign safeandequal.org is pressing on three fronts.

Firstly: we want to popularise the idea, adopted as Labour Party policy in conference 2019, and recently re-raised by Nadia Whittome MP, that the care sector must be re-organised as a well-funded public service, rather than as the patchwork of small privately-run companies that currently makes it up.

Instead of a jigsaw puzzle of frequently inefficient, abusive and despotic private fiefdoms, we want instead to see a democratically-run service offering the same high standards of care and workers' rights to all users and staff. We are beginning this work by circulating a campaign statement which has drawn the signatures of over a hundred trade union activists, Constituency Labour Party secretaries, and elected officials.

We plan to launch it more widely in the week beginning 1 June.

Secondly: the campaign is trying to make a noise about the farce and waste of the Tories' [£600 million "infection control fund"](#), announced on 18 May. This fund, provided by central government to local authorities, was advertised (quietly) as a means of funding infection control measures in social care. And yet we are still hearing reports across the board from care workers of inadequate access to PPE and great difficulty in getting more than Statutory Sick Pay if you need to self-isolate.

We suspect that the great majority of the "infection control fund" is stuck in the pipeline or has maybe been

poured into the pockets of care companies without reaching workers. We are systematically making Freedom of Information requests to get the truth about this.

We are also organising a letter, signed by Labour MPs, which calls for the government to do more to ensure that this money is actually used for infection control and points out that really controlling the virus requires all workers, not just care workers, to be able to afford to isolate when necessary.

Finally, we are working to link up those groups of workers who are asserting their rights to safety. In various workplaces around the UK in many different industries, workers have collectively asserted their right to refuse work on health and safety grounds (some invoking the famous "Section 44" of the 1996 Employment Rights Act).

We are talking to these groups of workers wherever we can, to share information and best practice, and make it widely known what the best way is to defend your safety at work. □



Wake up Labour!

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

Allow online Labour meetings

Another petition demands that the NEC meeting allow formal business to be conducted by Labour Party units online: sign at bit.ly/allow-meet □

((•)) Upcoming livestreams

Workers' Liberty have a schedule of videos going "live". Please tune in to watch, take part in the conversation as they are streaming, invite others, even organise watch parties on facebook! The videos (often subtitled) will "go live" simultaneously on our [twitter](#), [facebook](#), [instagram](#), and (if not before) [youtube](#). Visit the sites at the times below!

From Tuesday 2 to Monday 15 June:

Thursday 4 June, 1.30pm: "Labour: demand Johnson quits!" *Solidarity's* editorial with Stephen Wood

Monday 8 June, 1.30pm: Where now for the US left? with Lois Weiner (New Politics)

Thursday 11 June 1.30pm: Stephen Wood's video of *Solidarity's* editorial next week

Monday 15 June, 1.30pm: For one school workers' union! Learning from industrial unionism.

Spread social care call

One hundred and fifty union and Labour activists have signed the statement for public ownership and provision of social care initiated by the Safe and Equal campaign. That includes a wide range of union officers and activists from care, health and local government, and many dozens of Labour Party activists including ten CLP Secretaries. There is wide and growing support in the labour movement and beyond for public ownership of care, but it will not happen without a serious campaign. We need to think how such a campaign can happen. Getting a lot more support and publicity for this statement is a good start. Please help by signing, sharing and sending on. □

• bit.ly/socialcarestatement. For more information and to get involved email Ed Whitby edunison@gmail.com

More jobs, less work



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Economic research at the University of Essex has warned of job losses of around the 6.5 million mark as a result of Covid-19.

That would equate to about a quarter of the UK's total jobs, with more than half of the positions in certain sectors being lost. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) found that the virus lockdown has so far hit younger workers the hardest. They are nearly two-and-a-half times more likely to work in a shutdown area.

The IFS also found that the virus was likely to have a bigger effect on women's earnings because of a disproportionate amount of women working in retail and hospitality. 17% of female employees work in shutdown sectors, and 13% of men.

Similar effects have been seen in the US, where women make up a smaller percentage of the working population, but a majority of the people who were laid off.

Rising unemployment should reignite the call for a

shorter working week without loss of pay. Calls for the four day week often focus on increasing productivity, but we should concentrate on far more important benefits.

By sharing out work, by creating more jobs on fewer hours, we can help those in work with long hours and struggling with work-life balance, and also create jobs for those without work. For those working part-time who wished to work the same hours, the change would mean a pro-rata pay increase.

It is harder to find well-paid permanent part-time work. Shortening of the standard working week should be used to level up conditions between full and part time workers.

A standard working week that is shorter would make it easier for women and men to more equally share unpaid caring work. At the moment the financial incentive is to have one parent concentrating on career development and working long hours in a better paid role, with another working shorter hours in a worse-paid supplementary role in order to care for children.

That isn't the only reason women do more unpaid labour at home. We also need a cultural shift toward sharing out of social reproduction.

For all those losing or about to lose their incomes, and for the overworked struggling to balance leisure, paid and unpaid work, we need to cut the working week. □

Aviation: a third option



Environment

By Zack Muddle

At the end of April, British Airways announced intentions to lay off 12,000 people, up to 30% of its workforce. Heathrow's Chief Executive has warned that they may decide to follow suit, while on 20 May Rolls Royce – which constructs, among other things, airplane components – announced plans to make redundant 9,000, or 17%, of their global workforce.

Airbus is planning redundancies. Easyjet, a UK-based company, plans 4,500 redundancies, 30% of their workforce.

In 2018 it was estimated that the UK aviation sector directly employs [341,000 people](#). Bailouts to the tune of tens of billions have already been agreed across [Europe](#) and [the USA](#).

Carbon emissions from aviation are high and have been growing. And affordable, low-emissions flights are not available, or likely soon.

Some environmentalists, such as [Extinction Rebellion](#) or [George Monbiot](#) say simply that aviation companies should not be "rescued". [Greenpeace](#), [Labour](#), and [Unite](#) have lobbied for bailouts to have arms-length green strings attached.

There is a third alternative.

Environmentalists must neither abandon huge swathes of workers in the fight against climate change, nor rely on nudging the "free market" to make the needed transitions.

In the coming months and years, we can expect some demand for flights to grow, haltingly at first, and then to soar; and market forces to make the industry still lucrative for bosses.

To seriously rise to the challenges faced by climate change and an economic crisis, the labour movement must organise to demand aviation be taken into public ownership and under democratic control.

Workers in the industry should be guaranteed retraining and jobs in publicly owned green industries, as part of a "green recovery" to the current crisis. This must include an expansion and improvement of affordable, quality, and high-speed public transport to undercut flying.

A "green recovery" of some form even has [significant support from many bourgeois economists](#), as better for the immediate interests of the economy – as they see them – as well as the environment.

The short-term re-opening, and medium-term radical shrinking, of the aviation industry should be done in a managed way. Older, less efficient crafts should be scrapped immediately. Flights which do operate must be done on the basis of need and use, not the business plans of the bosses of for-profit destructive industries.

Research and development arms should be kept open, but geared towards environmental sustainability. □

The politics and limits of tracing

By Martin Thomas

The government, and many of its critics too, cite “test-trace-isolate” as almost a cure-all to control the virus while still easing the lockdown.

The labour movement cannot claim expertise on the details. But we must demand that the operation be accompanied by full isolation pay for all, and run as a public-service operation, by public-sector workers on good public-sector terms, not contracted-out.

The idea is people with symptoms like Covid-19 are promptly tested. If they test positive, then they’re asked to list all the people outside their household with whom they’ve been in less-than-two-metres contact for 15 minutes or more over the previous days. The first person, their household, and those other contacts are asked to self-isolate for up to 14 days, so they don’t infect others.

A [report \(27 May\)](#) from a team of scientists with the Royal Society (who support a tracing effort) is useful.

In mid-May, they reckon, there were about 10 cases of Covid-19-like symptoms (cough, fever, etc.) for every one Covid-19 infection. It will be more than 10 in winter. So: test the first person before you start contact-tracing, or otherwise the tracing system will be swamped.

The contacts, in turn, can be tested. But the value of that is limited, because the tests do not detect the virus in the first few days.

The authors reckon that if done well (quick test results, all contacts traced within three days of the symptom report, 80% compliance with self-isolation), tracing will reduce the reproduction rate of infection by between 5 and 15%. Useful but limited. That’s “if done well”, but the Tories plan it as a cheapskate contracted-out casual-labour operation, without solid provision for isolation pay.

Another study (29 May), by Neil Ferguson and others, shows that South Korea’s tracing was deployed efficiently against the virus outbreak in the Shincheonji religious group (which was 48% of all cases up to 11 May). Overall, though, “it is unclear how much the ‘test, trace, isolate’ strategy on its own” helped check transmission “relative to other measures such as social distancing [there was no lockdown in Korea] and regional quarantine”.

South Korea has government surveillance over everyone’s smartphone and payment cards which, together with CCTV, enables the government to trace any infected person’s recent movements within ten minutes of a test result and send out notification texts.

Such surveillance is not available to the British government and would have many downsides.

The Royal Society report praises tracing in Germany, but uses only outdated British press coverage. A more recent, and German, report (14 May) found: “Only 24 percent of [local authorities] meet the [tracing] requirements agreed upon by the federal and state governments... 67 percent do not have enough employees...” [bit.ly/200514t-s](#). Germany has a low case fatality rate for Covid-19, but probably not from good tracing.

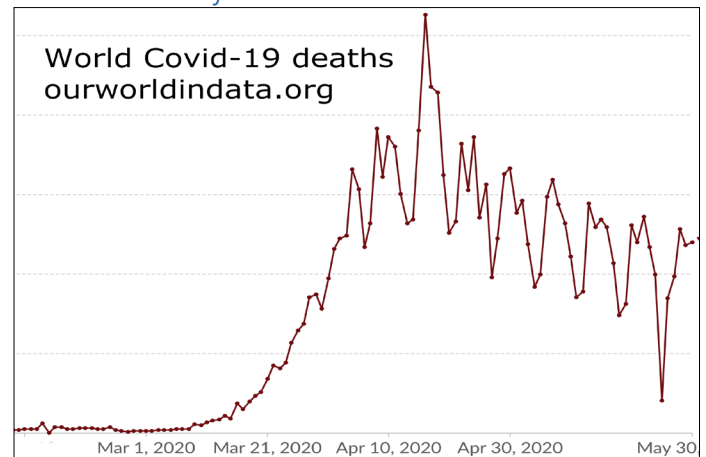
Cause for hope is a trickle of research indicating that

transmission of the virus is concentrated in “clusters” (as in Korea, or as in the Netherlands, where the big cities, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, have Covid-19 hospitalisation rates only one-sixth those in the North Brabant province, bordering Belgium).

One study, by Adam Kucharski and others, estimates that 80% of transmission is generated by 10% of sufferers. Other studies indicate that transmission has been concentrated in hospitals, care homes, some other workplaces notably in the meat industry, and churches.

If that’s right, and if those “clusters” can be tracked and controlled, then tracing may work better.

For now, though, Britain ranks bottom but two in Oxford University researchers’ world index of countries’ readiness for lockdown-rollback, and would be below even Iran and Nicaragua were it not that it scores high for “community awareness”: [bit.ly/roll-back](#). □



Six months on

We’re now six months on from when Covid-19 emerged in Wuhan, China.

Eleven weeks from the start of deaths rising exponentially in Europe, then the USA, and lockdowns spreading.

About eleven weeks, also, from when the first lockdown-easing started, in China; about 8 weeks from the start of lockdown-easing in Europe.

Six weeks from the death peaks worldwide and in the USA, maybe eight from the peak in Europe.

Death rates have continued to fall in countries easing lockdowns, with occasional and local blips. We don’t know why, or whether it will last, but that’s been true in the USA and (at least until an uptick in the last three days) Iran as well as where the lockdowns have been eased with care and caution. Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Peru, Russia, India are now the main countries with death curves rising (more linearly than exponentially, as in Europe in late March). We don’t know whether a “second wave” will come later in the year.

Requisitioning of industry to produce PPE and other medical supplies, workers’ control, work or full pay, re-conversion plans, and shorter work weeks without loss of pay, remain critical demands. □

USA: the partisan pandemic

By **Barrie Hardy**

The Covid-19 death toll across the USA is now into six figures. Major cities are in flames in protest against the casual killing of black men by police officers and white racist vigilantes.

There are stores refusing entry to customers not wearing face masks and stores where they'll only let you in if you aren't wearing one. There are states where strict lockdown rules have been in force for many weeks and others like Georgia where lockdown has hardly been enforced before the State Governor declared most businesses could open.

According to a recent survey, if a vaccine against coronavirus were successfully developed, 50% of the American public would willingly take it, whilst a similar number wouldn't.

The "Culture War" has turned this serious public health crisis into a partisan political battleground – a partisan pandemic. A battle in the ongoing war to keep the Republican Party – representing the most rapacious wing of the American capitalist class – in power in the face of demographic change.

The demographic clock ticks away until the non-Hispanic white population in the USA is a minority.

That moment is twenty years off, but the voting implications are here and now. Republicans are invariably the losers when it comes to the popular vote, even if they emerge as winners owing the institutions such as the Electoral College – put in the country's constitution to placate the slaveowners.

Trump's problems

Now the unpreparedness and incompetence of the White House in dealing with the emergency, and bizarre pronouncements recommending injecting disinfectant and light rays as a cure for the virus, compound Trump's problems.

A shift has taken place among the elderly population who may have voted Trump last time. Seniors are one of the many demographics where Biden now enjoys a substantial lead. The only demographic Trump is now ahead in is among whites.

Despite all the propaganda about the USA being a beacon of democracy, many states actually go out of their way to make it difficult for their citizens to vote. If voting were easier, then, as Trump recently said, "you'd never have a Republican elected in this country again". In recent years there's been a veritable orgy of voter suppression as Republicans seek to maintain their grip on power. Don't register people. Have few polling stations so people get put off queuing and won't bother. Put polling stations miles away from where people live. Purge electors from the rolls without them knowing it. Demand ID.

Electoral districts are blatantly gerrymandered to the invariable advantage of Republicans. Wisconsin is a stand-out case of this. In 2018 Republicans got 45% of the vote and 63 seats in the state assembly, and the Democrats on

55% only got 36 seats. Trying to overturn gerrymandering and voter suppression through the courts is problematic if the judiciary is stacked with Republican appointees.

In Wisconsin again, last April, with the pandemic raging, voters were forced to queue to elect a member of the State's Supreme Court. The expectation was that low voter turnout would secure a conservative victory. Voters braved risks to their health and prevented that.

Trump's packing of the US court system with "conservative" judges has been his most important service to Republican rule. Future challenges to voter suppression will be met with staunch rearguard action in the courts.

One way of making voting easier is to encourage voting by mail, which brings Trump to the point of apoplexy. In his opposition to voting by mail, Trump is setting up the narrative for denying his impending electoral defeat. The claim, based naturally on no evidence whatsoever, is that postal voting is open to massive electoral fraud.

That was going to be the explanation for Trump losing the 2016 election, except that he didn't. A narrow defeat this year will see fraud claims ramped up even further and is bound to lead to some degree of violence on the part of his supporters.

Trump doesn't want to exchange the White House for a prison. A whole range of court cases have stacked up against him. Four more years' immunity from prosecution whilst in office will see the statute of limitations run out on a lot of them.

The election period also allows for the advancing of socialist ideas and policies which have become popular in recent years.

Particular emphasis can be laid on the need for a socialised medical system, now more urgent than ever, when Trump wants to strip millions more Americans of medical cover.

No illusions must be entertained with respect to the Democrat Party leadership. They represent different corporate capitalist interests and are in no sense a party of the working class or the labour movement. □

• Abridged: full text at bit.ly/usa-pand

New videos!

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

- [Climate change and coronavirus](#): opening speeches by two socialist environmentalist activists
- [Make the schools safe!](#) and [It's your right to refuse unsafe work!](#) *Solidarity* editorials, with Stephen Wood
- [Crime and policing](#) – intro to the second of a series of meetings "The state, crime, prisons and the police"
- [What is the state?](#) – intro to the first of the series □

Please watch and subscribe; like, comment and share! All at: youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK

Scrap NRPF! For good!

By Ben Tausz

On 27 May Boris Johnson revealed he was unaware of the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) policy that denies social security to migrants and their children.

At a committee hearing, Labour MP Stephen Timms raised the plight of a family in his constituency left destitute and without support during the coronavirus crisis, due to NRPF. Johnson appeared surprised that they could not claim Universal Credit, stated that those “who live and work here should have support of one kind or another”, and promised to review the situation.

NRPF is a condition applied to most migrants’ visas and Leave To Remain permissions. It means they cannot access most benefits, tax credits, or social housing. It throws workers and their families into destitution and desperation. Its racist cruelty even extends to denying means-tested free school meals to their children.

The policy also undermines workers collectively – British citizens and migrants alike. When one group of workers know they will have no support if they lose their jobs, they are more vulnerable to heightened exploitation and

mistreatment by employers. With the threat of poverty, hunger and homelessness hanging over them, they may feel less able to stand up to their bosses, or to quit and look for other work. In turn, this undermines pay and conditions in that workplace and across the labour market.

For socialists, it is important to oppose these holes in the social safety net for two reasons. We demand humane support for all those in need, and we also recognise that universal and generous social security strengthens the collective hand of the working class vs our employers.

The only credible socialist and anti-racist response is therefore to demand an end to NRPF, and the extension of social security to all documented and undocumented migrants. Johnson’s slip provides an opening to advance that demand: we must grasp it firmly.

The Labour Campaign for Free Movement (LCFM), and other migrants’ rights organisations, are raising the call. But, despite the 2019 Labour Party conference’s overwhelming vote to support scrapping NRPF (as part of the migrants’ rights policy we proposed), the Labour leadership has not gone beyond asking the government to temporarily waive NRPF during the pandemic. That would bring welcome relief, but clearly does not go far enough.

Stارmer’s is not the first Labour leadership to cop out over NRPF. The 2017 manifesto under Corbyn endorsed NRPF. Even after Labour conference voted to support ending it, the 2019 manifesto was silent on the matter. In fact, it was New Labour which introduced the policy in its modern form in 1999. Only some individual MPs, including Kate Osamor and Nadia Whittome, demand the party’s democratic policy: a permanent end to NRPF.

Even more need, therefore, for campaigning pressure from below – on both the Labour leadership and the government – despite the constraints of lockdown. □

- LCFM has called a [#scrapNRPF](#) selfie campaign on Twitter: bit.ly/s-nrpf.
- See labourfreemovement.org for more
- Scrap the health surcharge for everyone: bit.ly/scrap-sur

Starmer woos the banks

Keir Starmer has pushed successfully for Blair-era Labour Party bureaucrat David Evans to be appointed as Labour’s new General Secretary. In his previous party roles Evans waged war against the left, the unions and party democracy.

Less widely noticed has been Starmer’s campaign to woo the magnates of banking and high finance.

The *Financial Times* reports that the party has “embarked on a charm offensive with banks and fund managers”, “drawing a veil over its previously fraught relationship with banks and fund managers under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn”. This is being led by the Shadow City Minister, Labour right-winger Pat McFadden. Shadow Chancellor Anneliese Dodds is also playing a central role.

The FT quotes senior financial figures lauding a “sea change” and a “completely different approach” from Labour under Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell.

Ironically, it’s not as different as that. In 2018-19, McDonnell embarked on his own attempted charm offensive, even telling bankers that a Labour victory “would bring them into government”. McDonnell’s previous support, up to 2015, for public ownership of the banks and high finance was dropped completely.

Clearly this was not good enough for the bankers, who were upset by moderate statements from the former Shadow Chancellor about salaries and bonuses and about the banks’ role in the 2007-8 economic crisis – to say nothing of the Corbyn leadership’s left-wing past and sympathies, and other left Labour policies... □

- Full article on The Clarion site at bit.ly/starmerbanks.

More online

“We need much more organised pressure on Starmer”

Health worker activist Mark Boothroyd interviewed about the pandemic, protests, Starmer, Brexit, and more
bit.ly/markbinterview

Migrant labour, racism and class struggle in Singapore

Sara Lee on how the pandemic has hit migrant workers in Singapore
bit.ly/sing-p

The end of the first American republic?

Charlie George floats ideas on political prospects in the USA
bit.ly/USA-republic

Unions in the pandemic

By Ollie Moore

Workers' Liberty members active in workplaces met via Zoom on Saturday 30 May, for a joint meeting of Workers' Liberty's industrial "fractions", groups of members in particular industries and sectors.

Workers' Liberty currently has four industrial fractions – school workers; civil servants; higher education workers; and rail workers – and two cross-industrial union fractions – Unison, covering local government and health; and Unite, covering a range of industries and sectors.

On the Tories' push for school reopening; one member of the school workers' fraction described how they'd set up a union-run safety committee in their school, to scrutinise management's proposals, make its own demands for additional safety measures, and empower workers to refuse unsafe work if reopening is forced through. As the comrade put it: "The aim is for the maximum degree of workers' control."

Union membership has risen in some areas. The number of school support staff joining the NEU (9,000 out of 20,000 new members since the beginning of the emergency, taking the NEU's support staff membership to 38,000) strengthens the logic of industrial unionism in education. It makes the NEU leadership's policy of not actively organising support staff, for fear of antagonising other unions which currently organise them, increasingly unviable.

Union functioning

Comrades in the RMT rail union reported that, after a rocky start, union functioning had now improved, thanks in part to rank-and-file pressure which Workers' Liberty comrades helped organise. That varies across unions. In Unison, for example, some branches have continued to meet, but some regional officials have insisted online branch meetings are against union rules.

In higher education, Workers' Liberty members are arguing against acceptance of employers' latest offer to settle the "Four Fights" dispute on pay, workload, casualisation, and equality, and for a strategy of re-energising the dispute, including (difficult though this may be) building towards a new ballot. The importance of an industrial unionist perspective for the fight against HE job cuts was also emphasised; the Workers' Liberty higher education workers fraction includes both academic workers in the University and College Union (UCU), and non-academic campus workers in Unison.

A government bailout of Transport for London (TfL) has numerous strings attached, including a full audit of TfL finances conducted by the government itself. Rail worker comrades also described ongoing efforts to ensure safety measures are in place prior to any significant increase in passenger levels, and the potential use of refusals-to-work if maintaining distancing becomes impossible.

In manufacturing, the demands for a reduced working week with no loss of pay for full-time workers, and a pro rata pay increase for part-time workers whose hours

would not be reduced, and for transitions to socially useful production, are needed against the coming job cuts. So far Unite does not even go as far as opposing all job cuts, instead advocating redundancies of no more than 10% in return for bailouts.

In the civil service, outsourced workers' employers have frequently flouted protocols agreed between the Cabinet Office and the civil service unions and intended to cover all workers, such as the right to full pay for sickness and self-isolation. Emanuel Gomes, a outsourced cleaner at the Ministry of Justice, died of the virus after working through his symptoms because he was denied isolation pay.

The PCS civil service union now has a charter of five "tests" for return to workplaces, but the majority of the PCS leadership is reluctant to promote the idea of refusals to work under health and safety legislation. As one comrade put it, "if more-or-less immediate action is required, and we accept that a formal dispute and ballot will take too long, but we're ruling out promoting 'refusals-to-work' as a possible strategy, what weapons do we actually have left? Our 'five tests' don't mean much if we're not prepared to organise action if they're not met."

Regional bureaucrats in Unison have taken a similarly conservative attitude, forcing branches that had issued material promoting Section 44 rights to withdraw it. A renewed fight over local government pay is also needed.

The fight for workers' rights – including full sickness and self-isolation pay and adequate PPE – in the health and care sectors was discussed via a report on the Safe and Equal campaign, in which Workers' Liberty members across a variety of industrial sectors have been central.

We also talked about the Free Our Unions campaign for the abolition of anti-union legislation. And plans to rerun from mid-late June our online political education course in "Marxism and Trade Unionism", now approaching the last session of its first run. □

• Abridged. Full text at bit.ly/union-p

New audio!

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- [Climate change and Covid-19](#) – opening speeches
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Falling over and getting up



Diary of an engineer

By Emma Rickman

Normally the morning shift change is quiet, but Saturday morning is different – everyone is angry and anxious to get out the door. V, the team leader, is nearly bellowing the night's events at the operator taking over from him;

"It was midnight, and then everything just went pitch black. We sat there staring at each other for nine seconds – then the screens blinked back on and everything was red..."

J explains "The plant tripped last night. Electrical fault – apparently they've called in all the 'tricians."

When I describe "trip" to my partner, they laugh and say "It's like the plant's fallen over!" In fact when a machine fails many technicians call it "falling over", which implies a temporary failure (as opposed to "fucked" which is total breakdown.)

The night shift have done an amazing job; the plant is still burning waste and producing steam, but the turbine, generator and transformer are down, so all the steam is being released out the roof.

Our generator is connected to our transformer, which converts the 11,000 volts generated into 33,000 volts for the Northern Powergrid (Yorkshire's version of the National Grid, a semi-privatised company). What has tripped the plant is the opening of a circuit breaker between the generator and the transformer, which has caused Northern Powergrid to open their circuit breaker on the other side of the transformer to protect their equipment. These two breakers are dependent on each other, which means Powergrid must close their breaker before we can close ours and generate power.

Important people begin ringing each other; sensory inspections are performed on the transformer and the switch gear, but no-one on site is qualified to properly test them. Finally, Powergrid send their engineer to look at the equipment. The young man from the grid is half the age and size of the operators, but he's fast, friendly, and very sharp.

He opens a dusty room he's never seen before and

quickly makes sense of the old drawings and switch-gear. He discusses the possibilities with the shift leader and manager, weighing up the risks of damage to the transformer and the generator. After phone calls to very high-up managers, they decide on the order to close the switches.

Because of the high voltages involved, closing an HV switch can lead to electrical arcing and immediate death. Making a mistake can destroy millions of pounds worth of equipment. The operators close the switches remotely from a panel well outside the switch room itself. The Powergrid engineer doesn't touch a button; he instructs his colleagues to close the breaker remotely.

After a second we hear the transformer come back on-line, and confirm that nothing is damaged or faulting. The maintenance electricians then head to the switch room and watch the turbine start up. Once it reaches a certain speed, the generator kicks in, which synchronises its frequency with the national grid – 50Hz – and suddenly, we're back in business. □

• Emma Rickman is an engineering apprentice at a Combined Heat and Power plant in Sheffield.

TDL votes for strikes

By Zack Muddle, Bristol Couriers' Network – IWGB

Medical couriers transporting Covid-19 samples on behalf of NHS pathology contractor The Doctors Laboratory (TDL) have voted overwhelmingly for 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, on behalf of eight of its members who are being targeted for redundancy, has also filed a trade union victimisation and whistleblower victimisation claim. Almost all of the ten targeted workers had been demanding better and safer working conditions.

One of them, Alex Marshall, is a key organiser who blew the whistle on the company's unsafe practices.

TDL, a subsidiary of Australian multinational Sonic Healthcare, is using the cover of the pandemic for this victimisation. TDL couriers have for the last two months 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 not:

- Given full self-isolation pay to at-risk workers
- Regularly tested medical couriers for Covid-19
- Reinstated an unfairly dismissed courier with serious medical conditions

- Provided proper PPE to medical couriers
- Implemented social distancing where possible

TDL has more than enough money to do so.

The majority of the 152 TDL medical couriers in London and the South East are IWGB members. □

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Five tests



John Moloney

The union has communicated our “Five Tests” to the Civil Service. These are: No wider return until communities are safe; workplaces must only be for essential work; workplaces must be safe places; staff must be individually assessed; and outbreaks must be controlled.

We need to make these demands, and the details beneath the headlines, known and understood amongst the membership – and, crucially, discuss throughout the union how we respond if the employer fails to meet these tests. A national ballot for industrial action is not a practical proposition in the here and now; it would simply take too long to allow for action to be organised to the necessary timescale. Workers can and should use Section 44 of the 1996 Employment Rights Act, and other health and safety legislation, if they are pressured to work in an unsafe way.

Currently, there is no push from the civil service centrally to bring people back to offices. The employer is happy to maintain homeworking, something that our members overwhelmingly support.

Challenges

This does present some challenges, however. As homeworking continues, the employer may use that to widen and accelerate their programme of office closures. If buildings are sold off, and work is concentrated into large centres, that could be an increased infection control risk in any future outbreak if and when workers do return to offices. So that’s an additional argument for opposing office closures.

There are some exceptions to the current position of favouring the continuation of homeworking, such as the Ministry of Justice, which wants to bring more workers back to the workplace. Most departments, though are proceeding cautiously and there is no “back-to-work” lurch as yet.

The union will launch a “Dying to Work” campaign on 15 June, focused on outsourced workers. One of the key demands of that campaign will be for a permanent agreement for full sick pay from day one for all outsourced workers, which has also been taken up elsewhere by other unions and campaigns, including the Safe and Equal campaign. We have reached out to the TUC on this as well, because this needs to be a campaign across the whole labour movement. □

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

Protect Night Tube workers’ jobs!

From the Tubeworker blog

London Underground has told a meeting of the Trains Functional Council, the negotiating body for drivers, comprised of senior bosses plus reps from the Aslef and RMT unions, that it plans to mothball Night Tube, the 24-hour services which run on certain Tube lines on Fridays and Saturdays, and which have been suspended for months, until March 2021.

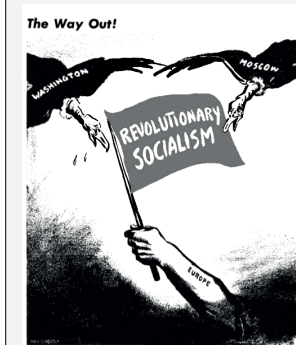
There’s every reason to continue the suspension. The late-night economy that Night Tube principally serves will not be restarting any time soon, and forcing Night Tube workers to run a service would certainly not be in the spirit of eliminating non-essential work, something the unions rightly continue to demand from LU.

But we need guaranteed protections for Night Tube workers. LU says it “has no plans” to permanently cut Night Tube services, but their plans could change. Any Night Tube worker who wants to change their hours to work during the day must be given the opportunity to do that, and those who wish to retain Night Tube hours need to have their jobs protected, possibly with an extended use of furloughing.

Night Tube workers must remember that, while they can be asked to *voluntarily* work outside of their contracted hours, they cannot be *compelled* to do so. □

In an era of wars and revolutions

American socialist cartoons of the mid-twentieth century



Cartoons by Carlo and others
Edited by Sean Malgama

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Solidarity



For a workers' government

George Floyd: we need a new movement

By Jane Edwards

"Police brutality is unacceptable! This system has failed all of us in the working class, from the Coronavirus to the economic crisis we are facing. But this system has failed People of Colour and Black Americans and Black youth more than anyone else. More than ever we need a new Civil Rights Movement. A Civil Rights Movement that is joined with the labour movement and independent of the corporate establishment's political parties..."

That was the statement the Minneapolis Amalgamated Transit Union made after Minneapolis bus drivers refused to help police cart off arrested demonstrators. New York bus drivers have done similar.

On 25 May, an African-American man George Floyd, 46, died after a white police officer, Derek Chauvin, knelt on Floyd's neck while he was pinned to the ground. "I can't breathe", Floyd said repeatedly, and Chauvin continued for eight minutes and 46 seconds.

Chauvin has been charged with murder. As of 2 June a wave of protests in US cities is still rising, and gaining solidarity from protests around the world.

Comparing the protests with riots after the police beating of Rodney King in 1992, African-American academic Jody David Armour says: "The protests and marches today you see are multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, even multi-generational. And the allyship is something that is more pronounced now than it perhaps once was".

The response from the police to even the most peaceful of the protests has been rubber bullets, tear gas, mass arrests, and violence. And Trump threatens outright war on the streets – tweeting "when the looting starts, the shooting starts", calling for mobilisation of the National Guard, and threatening to put the US military on the streets and designate an anti-fascist group as a terrorist organisation. Left-wing Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez adds: "If you're calling for an end to unrest, but not calling out police brutality, not calling for health care as a human right, not calling for an end to housing discrimination, all you're asking for is the continuation of quiet oppression".

The protests have become a general backlash against the politics represented by Donald Trump. Another African-American academic, Henry Louis Gates, says: "As a

country, we've been here before, first following the collapse of Reconstruction and the rise of Jim Crow, and then again in a less well-known series of events that unfolded in 1919. Following the

influenza epidemic of 1918, and the return of black soldiers from World War I, and at the apex of the legitimisation of Jim Crow, white vigilantes engaged in an appalling series of lynchings of innocent black victims, so brutal that it was soon dubbed 'the red summer' of 1919." Floyd's death is in a long line of police killings of black people in the USA. African Americans have suffered 30 police shootings per million since the start of 2015, compared to 22 per million for Hispanics and 12 per million for whites. African-Americans have also died disproportionately from the virus, and suffered disproportionately from 40 million workers being thrown out of jobs in the USA's lockdown, with scanty social provision and no equivalent of European furlough schemes.

In Britain, too, we should raise demands for an end to police repression, an end to the raiding of people's homes, for curbing police powers including stop and search, for the police to be disarmed, for democratic accountability and scrutiny of the police. (In the USA, Citizen Review Boards are being demanded).

Meanwhile, we have a Tory Government which will be using the Brexit process for further attacks on freedom of movement and the rights of migrant workers. That will fuel an increase in racist attacks.

Alongside building solidarity, let's start to seriously discuss lessons for our struggle. □

• See also "America explodes", bit.ly/usa-ex



Belly Mujinga

The TSSA transport union is supporting a petition calling for justice for Belly Mujinga, the transport worker who died of coronavirus after being spat at on the concourse of Victoria Station: bit.ly/belly-p. □