



For social ownership of the banks and industry

ISOLATION PAY FOR ALL!

- » **Protect your workmates**
- » **Public-health test-and-tracing**
- » **Work or full pay for everyone**

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The UK has the lowest sick pay of all rich countries

By Cathy Nugent

On average, across all the 34 OECD (richer) countries, workers receive about 70% of their last wage as statutory (or mandatory) sick pay (SSP). It is as high as 100% in a significant number of countries.

This sick pay has to be paid by employers for a period of time. In the UK it is up to 28 weeks. But the UK's £95.85 per week statutory level is now the lowest, as a percentage of earnings, of all OECD countries. In the UK as elsewhere some workers are covered by agreements with employers which provide much better sick pay, but the low level of statutory sick pay is a scandal.

Since the beginning of the pandemic most of the 34 countries in the OECD (a group of the richer countries) have expanded or initiated statutory paid sick leave and other forms of financial help. We need to make the arguments for most of these new arrangements to stay in place or be further improved. And we need to win the arguments over the general importance of paid sick leave in protecting health, jobs, and income.

The [OECD data](#) showed the governments that did most to support workers during the pandemic were (across a range of measures) Spain, Portugal, France, Finland, Australia and Canada. The least "popular" measures for governments were specific support for frontline workers and financial help for people with caring responsibilities.

An online report by the Centre for Economic Policy Research analysed the OECD data, highlighting the fact that 4 to 6% of all employed workers were on paid sick leave in the most critical period of the pandemic. That's a lot. The percentage would have been significantly higher had not so many workers been put onto job retention schemes.

But the levels of sick pay also count. Almost half of countries, especially Finland, France, Israel and New Zealand, increased the level of statutory sick pay for the duration of the pandemic. Not the UK. The government only abolished the first three "waiting days" for which, previously, you didn't even get SSP.

Everywhere the picture is not great for self-employed workers (depending on insurance rules), and is very bad for those working in casual and gig-economy employment.

Outside of pandemic conditions employers try to avoid paying sick pay by instituting maximum numbers of sick days and bullying workers back to work. That has been less possible to justify during a pandemic when openly bullying workers was undermining quarantine.

On the other hand, in most countries during the pandemic governments have allowed employers to reclaim statutory sick pay paid to people quarantining, so there was no real need for bosses to put the squeeze on workers over sickness days in their usual ways. It was the low level of sick pay, and the inability of workers to afford to

quarantine, which pushed many UK workers back to work.

Across the world, workers need to make the arguments to continue the concessions and improvements in sick pay, demanding action from both bosses and government:

- Paid sick leave remains important to protect us all from a second wave of Covid-19.
- Paid sick leave allows infected and potentially infected workers to quarantine quickly, without job loss and with limited income loss.
- Paid sick leave can protect us from infectious diseases at other times.
- Paid sick leave preserves the jobs of sick and quarantined workers. (According to other research, job losses and working hour reductions during the Covid-19 outbreak have been larger in US states without paid sick leave).

The OECD research, showing inconsistency in sick pay regimes, points to the need to level up and improve sick pay across the board and internationally. We need to argue for:

- Levels set at 100% of wages, over a long-term, for both sickness and quarantining and to enable caring responsibilities.
- Sick leave for all groups of workers and all types of disease and illness;
- Carers' leave with the same comprehensive conditions.
- A strong framework for returning to work, including flexible payments and hours.
- Stronger systems of help during epidemics. □

• Campaign for full pay for self-isolation for all, regardless of contract or status: [safeandequal.org](#)



New videos!

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

- [The US Civil War and the fight against slavery](#), with Mark Osborn and Sacha Ismail
- [The trade union bureaucracy](#), with Janine Booth and Becky Crocker
- [Make Labour fight for "grand schemes"](#). Solidarity editorial
- [The state and the current crisis](#), with Kate Harris, in "The state, crime, prisons, and police" series
- [Rhoda Dakar \(of The Bodysnatchers/The Special AKA\) on racism, class and culture](#) – interview with Janine Booth □

Please watch and subscribe; like, comment and share! All at: [youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK](#)

Isolation pay for all!

“” Editorial

In the Ministry of Justice, the United Voices of the World Union has won an [agreement](#) with the contractor OCS for full sick pay for workers covering time taken off since April, for a period of up to 14 days.

In care homes, after months of campaigning, some 40% now give isolation pay; the government has set up a fund explicitly designed to allow isolation pay for all workers; and a government report has recognised officially that absence of isolation pay increases the Covid-19 death toll.

In the USA, a [prospectus](#) for reopening schools in the autumn, written by the USA's former disease-control chief Tom Frieden, with two former Secretaries of Education, says: "Every person who works at a school, including staff members, contractors, and maintenance workers, must be given paid sick leave".

They add that people in crowded housing who need to self-isolate because they have Covid-19 symptoms, have tested positive, or are identified contacts of sufferers, should have the option of "alternative temporary housing so patients and contacts don't spread disease to others".

That's been done in South Korea and Taiwan, and is certainly possible in Britain, where a much smaller proportion of elderly people live in shared households with younger generations. (28% of over-65s living with 18-65 year-olds, and 1% with under-18s, [compared](#) to 55% and 15% in Korea).

The Australian unions have [announced](#) a new campaign for "paid pandemic leave" for all, "focused on casual workers who are not entitled to paid leave".

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

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

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

We want PPE supplies secured for the future with production, stockpiling, and logistics all as accountable public services, not opaque [webs of profiteering subcontractors](#).

We want private hospitals integrated into the NHS, expanding capacity as the NHS strives to make up a huge backlog. Not just given pay-outs to hold their facilities as temporary reserves.

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

All those moves will create better services and more security for all, as well as providing for the risks of this and future pandemics.

They will also create large numbers of socially-useful, well-trained, adequately-paid, secure new jobs.

Tory chancellor Rishi Sunak's 8 July jobs plan, boosted in Boris Johnson's bluster as a "new deal", offers only a few sops.

- Six-month minimum-wage "placements" for 16-24 year olds
- Bonuses to firms if they restart furloughed workers and keep them on the books to January 2021
- A temporary cut in VAT for restaurants, hotels, and cinemas until January 2021, and a government-subsidised discount on restaurant meals on Mondays to Wednesdays in August.

It is probably lucky that restaurants and pubs had only about 50% of pre-lockdown traffic when reopened from 4 July. With any but the lowest levels of virus circulation, crowded indoor places where people eat, drink, and chat face to face are more likely to spawn clusters of infection than most workplaces or shops.

And if "work from home" is going to continue on any scale at all, cafés and pubs relying on office-worker trade cannot but become less numerous.

Reorganise economic life to offer workers new and better jobs!

The big manufacturing and aviation firms declaring mass job cuts – like Airbus, Rolls Royce, BA, JLR, Easyjet – should be nationalised with minimal compensation and retooled (and their workers retrained) for the "green" projects which we need now to stop economic relapse to a fossil-fuel-based "line of least resistance".

New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern has [recommended](#) a standard four-day work week to rebuild after lockdown there, though saying that "ultimately that really sits between employers and employees". In France, a strong minority in government-sponsored citizens' commission on climate change has proposed a [28 hour](#) standard work week.

A standard four-day, or 32-hour, work week, with a corresponding increase in hourly pay rates to avoid loss of income, would reduce rush-hour crowding, push back overwork, and create millions of good new jobs.

We will push for our unions to develop plans for their sectors, coordinate, and remobilise to make Labour back those plans. □

Labour's NEC election: what does the left stand for?

By Sacha Ismail

The "Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance" of Labour left organisations, dominated by Momentum and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, has agreed a slate of six candidates for the nine CLP reps on Labour's National Executive Committee.

The CLGA slate is: Laura Pidcock, Mish Rahman, Ann Henderson, Yasmine Dar, Nadia Jama and Gemma Bolton. The CLGA is also supporting Lara McNeill, re-standing for Youth rep, and Ellen Morrison for Disabled rep.

Given the new NCG had only a few days after coming to office to get this sorted, the criticism that they did not hold a ballot on candidates is insubstantial at best.

The real issue is the lack of political discussion about what the left should stand for – and of basing discussion about who should represent it on that prior political discussion – and the culture of backroom deal-making that dominates the Labour left.

The one political issue that has come up is trans rights, on the basis that Ann Henderson and Laura Pidcock's positions are ambiguous. Momentum has said that it is fighting for the whole slate to issue a statement in support of trans rights, signed by all the candidates. It is unclear what will happen about this.

There has been little political debate here – just angry denunciations of Henderson and Pidcock (who in turn

seem to have said nothing to clarify their positions).

And what about free movement and migrants' rights? Laura Pidcock has taken a pro-Brexit position. What about broader internationalism? Yasmine Dar has repeatedly attended Islamist events celebrating the "Islamic revolution", i.e. the Islamist counter-revolution, in Iran.

Lara McNeill and Ellen Morrison are both linked to the Stalinist left in Young Labour and have been involved in witch-hunting the socialist left and shutting down democracy in sections of the party and left.

What positive politics does the slate stand for? What does it say about Labour and the labour movement's stance in the current and coming crises? □

• More: bit.ly/solnec2020. How the election will work: bit.ly/labourlistnec.

Momentum's social media output

By Mohan Sen

Last week we published an article about the first changes socialists should push for in Momentum bit.ly/momchange, following victory for a reform slate in the Labour left group's internal elections.

It's clearly early to judge the new regime. All we have to go on for now is Momentum's social media output – a very large part of what it does.

Since the new NCG came to office, the basic output has remained the same: generic anti-Toryism apparently calculated to maximise likes, shares, positive comments.

In a positive shift, the NCG voted to back the Tower Hamlets workers, just as their strikes began. But the Momentum Facebook has only put out one thing, sharing a post from Poplar and Limehouse MP Apsana Begum on 6 July, with nothing since.

On this and in general, Momentum's Twitter seems a little better. Momentum has retweeted several things about the strike and how to support it. But again, nothing since 6 July.

Let us say the Momentum office does not seem overly enthusiastic about supporting the strike.

Meanwhile it has added to its collection of politically bankrupt videos (police as "heroes", foreigners doing us down through rail privatisation, etc.) with a video of Community Integrated Care CEO Mark Adams describing him as a "care worker".

On the plus side, Momentum has retweeted an on-the-money statement from its new co-chair, FBU activist Andrew Scattergood, saying that while Angela Rayner's warm words about unions are welcome, "Labour must go further, including adopting the position of repealing ALL anti-trade union laws". This is the first time Momentum has ever publicly supported this position, despite the NCG agreeing it in 2017. □

Majority of women back trans rights

Some, on both right and left, frequently accuse trans rights advocates of ignoring "women's views", "women's concerns" and so on.

New [polling](#) by YouGov, commissioned by Pink News, undermines these arguments. Men in the UK agree that "a person should... be able to self-identify as a gender different to the one they were born in" 43% to 33%. The rest say they don't know. Women agree 57-21.

18-24 year olds support self-ID 64-14. Over-65s support it 35-34. Labour supporters support self-ID 70-13. Tory supporters oppose 35-42. Remainers support 62-19, while Leavers oppose 39-41.

Men agree that "schoolchildren should... be taught about gender identity in schools" 44-38. Women agree 52-28. Men agree that children should be taught about gay relationships 53-29, women 61-22. (Remainers, 65-20 on gender identity and 74-14 on gay relationships; Leavers 34-47 and 45-37).

These figures are relatively encouraging given recent attempts to generate a backlash against trans rights.

In the last year the proportion supporting self-identification has fallen from 56 to 50% and the number opposed risen from 23 to 27%. But that could be a margin-of-error issue. □

Protests mount in Israel

By Ira Berkovic

The Israeli government's plan to annex Palestinian territories remains stalled, with Israel coming under increasing pressure from other countries to change course. Egypt, France, Germany, and Jordan have all told Israel that pushing ahead with annexation would have "consequences" for diplomatic relations between the countries.

Opposition from within the far-right settler movement, parts of which feel the annexation plan doesn't go far enough, is also holding back government efforts.

Meanwhile, public opposition to the government's handling of the coronavirus crisis is mounting. Tens of thousands of people demonstrated in Tel Aviv, Israel, on Saturday 11 July, to protest over the issue, demanding increased social provision.

Payments from government compensation schemes, set up to support those who work has been affected by

the pandemic, have been slow to arrive, or have not arrived at all. Self-employed workers have been particularly badly hit, and unemployment has risen to 21%.

The demonstration blocked major roads in Tel Aviv, and 20 people were arrested.

Ayman Odeh, a left-wing member of the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, who heads the Joint List of leftist and Arab nationalist parties, tweeted a picture of the protest, saying: "there is nothing more political than bread prices. Welcome to the opposition."

Since Israel began lifting lockdown restrictions in May, infection rates have spiked. 1,500 new cases were recorded on Friday 10 July. Some restrictions are now being reimposed, meaning still more people will have their incomes or jobs impacted.

According to polling, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's approval rating has plummeted to 46%, from a high of 73% in mid-May. □

Cuba suppresses "Black Lives" protest

By Zack Muddle

A crackdown by the Cuban state on 30 June [prevented planned demonstrations](#) against the killing of an unarmed black man by Cuban police a week earlier.

Hansel Ernesto Hernández Galiano, a 27 year-old Afro-Caribbean man, was shot dead by police on the 24 June. On 25 June his aunt [denounced](#) the murder on social media, which was widely shared.

Following this criticism, the Cuban authorities acknowledged that he had been killed, and was not armed, although they attempted to partially justify it. They have not disclosed identities of the police responsible or whether any disciplinary action was taken.

State security agents staked out the homes of Cuban dissidents and journalists in advance of the 30 June planned protests, to prevent their attendance. At least 40 activists were detained by police, with some later released. The location of the main planned demonstration, in Havana, was swarming with police. No protest happened. Reportedly, the state telecoms monopoly cut off mobile internet service overnight.

The family stopped talking to media about the event after allegedly receiving threats from the state.

This was not an isolated incident in Cuba. Particular anger was however fuelled by the context of international anti-racist protests.

Yet many would-be left-wing people and organisations in the UK and internationally, hail Cuba as a "socialist" or "anti-imperialist" country.

The 1959 Cuban revolution led to the creation of a one-party police state modelled on and in close connection with the Stalinist USSR. Neither their self-description as

socialist, nor their – historically at least – comparatively good healthcare system and welfare state, nor even the long-term hostility of USA governments to the Cuban regime make it one to be supported. Let alone celebrated.

Racism in Cuba is dismissed as dismissed by the regime as a problem of individuals, as "remnants of the capitalist past". The one-party state did end racial segregation, but it also [shut down](#) a network of self-organised black social clubs which existed across the country. Black people are under-represented in leading positions and even the government's official figures for population – and over-represented in prison, as victims of police violence, and amongst the poorest.

Black lives matter everywhere, including in a self-proclaimed socialist state which is even *more* repressive than most avowedly capitalist states. The international left must offer solidarity with anti-racist and working-class dissidents in Cuba, some of whom are anti-capitalist, not their regime. □

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

The BLM protests after six weeks

By Maisie Sanders

In London, Black Lives Matter protests continue every weekend, six weeks after the protests sparked by George Floyd's killing on 25 May first spread to the UK. Although smaller than the first June protests, they are still getting from 500 to 2000 people. In Brighton on Saturday 11 July, 5000 joined the protest after a video circulated of a man shouting "I can't breathe" while being restrained by Sussex Police.

Initial demonstrations were very heavily young, Black, and working class, though with significant representation from all ethnic backgrounds. Now the protests have larger white contingents. They are still more lively and youthful than most demonstrations, but lack the urgency and palpable sense of anger of early June.

For thousands of young people, these demonstrations are their first ever. Workers' Liberty activists on these protests have found a greater interest in what socialists have to say, and propose in the way of ongoing activity, than on almost any other demonstrations.

The demonstrations have been promoted mainly through Instagram, and most do not have easily identifiable organisers or organisations behind them. The original group formed in 2016, Black Lives Matter UK, has promoted the demonstrations, but not organised them, because of concerns about covid-distancing.

Some have been organised by UK Black Pride, a non-political LGBT organisation that organises Pride celebrations; United.Ldn, an Instagram and Facebook page set up in June 2020, which may or may not be linked to a limited company registered in 2019; and All Black Lives UK, which describes itself as a "youth-led movement".

The youth-led All Black Lives UK now has a Bristol branch, protests in London every Sunday, and a set of demands, which include:

- Scrap stop and search and end the racialised war on gangs;
- Safeguard children against racial discrimination and bullying from teachers and students; decolonise the curriculum;
- Address racial health disparities such as the Black

maternal mortality rate and the disproportionate risk of mental health issues;

- Implement recommendations from the Windrush Lessons Learned review, the Lammy Review, Timpson Review, McGregor Smith Review and Angiolini Review.

The many detailed reforms these reviews recommend are not spelled out, or addressed in speeches. It is not clear whether the organisers want to form a political organisation, or an NGO, or a community group.

Sooner or later the activists will want to move on from repeating the same sort of street protest each weekend to longer-term activity. Labour, unions, and the left urgently need to join the Black Lives Matter movement, mobilise for demonstrations, debate clear demands to fight racism and police brutality, and offer clear and accessible paths for ongoing organisation and campaigning. □

Starmer: Campbell-Bannerman or Blair?

A Tory government, re-elected last time on a wave of nationalism, is ousted after many years in office. Under its new legal shackles were imposed on trade unions. A soft left government comes to power: what will it do about the right to strike?

That could be the situation in a few years' time. It was the situation in 1906, when a Liberal government led by Henry Campbell-Bannerman replaced the Tories in office. Trade unions and the new Labour Party demanded legislation to overturn the Taff Vale judgement, which made trade unions liable for costs incurred by employers during strikes. Liberal MPs and ministers resisted. Campbell-Bannerman, a "Radical" and a canny politician, was sensitive to the pressure from organised labour. He rebelled against his own cabinet and rallied MPs to support Labour's demands. The Trade Disputes Act was a huge victory; it "gave unions an astounding immunity", said George Dangerfield in *The Strange Death of Liberal England*.

At a recent AWL public meeting with Maria Exall and Sacha Ismail, we discussed the contrast between 1906 and Labour's coming to power in 1997.

In contrast to Campbell-Bannerman, Blair kept all the Tory anti-union laws (and boasted about it).

Even in 1997, many Labour MPs would surely have favoured a more radical policy. But the leadership dug in its heels – and unlike in 1906, the labour movement, or most of it, did not fight seriously to assert the right to strike.

Will Starmer be Campbell-Bannerman, restoring freedom to trade union action, or Blair, keeping the unions in chains? That will be decided by whether we can build a strong enough labour movement campaign to do what the unions and Labour did in 1906. □

- More: bit.ly/1906labstrike

(((•))) 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, organise watch parties on facebook! The videos (often subtitled) will "go live" at the times below on our [facebook](#), and (if not before) [instagram](#), [youtube](#), and generally [twitter](#). From Wednesday 15 to Tuesday 21 July:

Thursday 16 July, 1.30pm: "Isolation pay for all!" – *Solidarity* editorial with Stephen Wood (see page 3)

Monday 20 July, 1.30pm: "Towards a new revolutionary left?" – intro and closing speeches from a panel debate featuring Workers' Liberty, Mutiny, and Red Flag

Can public transport be safe?



Environment

By Zack Muddle

With lower levels of virus in circulation, can risk be reduced enough to make busier trains and busses workable? International evidence suggests yes.

South Korea has kept its daily confirmed Covid cases below 100 since the end of March, but in February had a higher rate of cases than the UK has now.

On public transport in its capital, Seoul, [safety precautions](#) include public guidelines, daily cleaning and disinfecting of the vehicles, hand sanitiser stations, and measuring temperatures of employees before and after shifts. (This is different from measuring temperature using infrared scanning, which is extremely unreliable.)

They have “staff evacuation plans” to isolate members of staff and their whole team if any member shows symptoms. There are dedicated transport services for passengers entering from abroad, who are required to self-isolate for a fortnight.

There has not been a “lockdown” as such within South Korea, and individuals have not faced travel restrictions as in the UK. The London Tube, by comparison, saw a 95% decrease in journeys due to lockdown.

Normally, public transport is responsible for around 65% of daily [traffic](#) for Seoul’s ten million people: 40% on metro, 25% by bus.

With work-from-home, Seoul’s car traffic decreased by

7.2% in March and public transport passengers by 34.5% compared to January, but not 95% or anything like that. Public transport usage has steadily increased since, and is [estimated](#) to have reached pre-Covid-19 levels.

More services have been added to limit congestion. Live updates are available for people planning journeys, and are communicated to passengers when congestion is above “130%”. Above “150%”, more active crowd control is enforced, and masks are mandatory.

The normal level of crowding in Seoul metro is lower than London Underground, but it is busy.

In France, across May, of 150 new confirmed covid-19 “clusters”, [zero](#) were from transport. In Japan, too, of all the infection clusters following their lifting of a state of emergency, none have been tracked to trains. Their commuter trains seems considerably *more* densely crowded, even during the pandemic, than the London Underground, in turn the most crowded transport in the UK.

One factor may be that people in Japan tend to travel in silence: speaking spreads droplets. Widespread masking, and limited exposure time given that people aren’t on buses or trains long, help; ventilation may do so too.

Passengers and transport workers will and should demand adequate safety precautions when travelling. This includes wider necessary changes as outlined in [Solidarity 555](#), which would reduce overall trips and increase cycling and walking, and specific workplace protections. Perhaps even stricter enforcement of face-mask wearing.

More research is needed, but such demands should not, I think, *necessarily* include a limit for example on London Underground passengers to 15% or even 25% of pre-Covid peak operating levels. □

“We’re showing we’re not weak”

After strikes on 3, 6 and 7 July, Tower Hamlets council workers will strike again 15-17 July to overturn the “Tower Rewards” scheme attacking their terms and conditions. TH Unison’s adult social care convener Amina Patel spoke to Sacha Ismail. Full interview at bit.ly/aminapinterview

This dispute has been on the cards for over a year, but with the pandemic we’ve all been occupied with other things, working from home, then the date was put back when the council postponed the changes. The strikes have really relaunched our momentum.

It’s a very important dispute because councils are facing further cuts after the pandemic. There are going to be a lot more restructures, and we have to start the resistance now.

John Biggs [mayor] and Will Tuckley [CEO] stood in Mile End Park and took the knee for Black Lives Matter; their hypocrisy is staggering, they are materially increasing racial inequality in the borough.

How would you respond to the objection that councils have no choice, when they’ve lost most of their funding?

We know their spending priorities are completely wrong. They are paying consultants millions of pounds a year. They are paying top managers huge salaries and expenses – Will Tuckley is on £237,000. Believe it or not, Tower Rewards actually boosts salaries at the top. If we’re going to make cuts, it should be to the white men in power, not the BME women at the bottom.

The wider thing is, where is the campaign to get more funding? They use this excuse but they are not fighting the government for more money.

They obviously feel that confronting the government is hard, but confronting the workers is easy, because we’re weak. We’re showing them we’re not weak. □

- For ways you can support the strike, including picket lines, donations and solidarity messages, see the Tower Hamlets Unison website bit.ly/thunison

A socialist epidemiolo

George Davey Smith, who is Professor of Clinical Epidemiology at Bristol University, talked with Martin Thomas from Solidarity about the pandemic.

“So far, and short of a vaccine, we seem to have only ancient measures to control the spread of the pandemic: physical distancing on different levels, and hygiene. Have we learned anything about variants of those measures which may be both effective and sustainable long-term?”

An important thing that's becoming clear is that this is very likely going to become the fifth endemic coronavirus. There are [four seasonal coronaviruses](#) (sCoVs) that cause symptoms of the common cold and occasionally more serious illness, and might even bring forward deaths among the elderly.

That the four previous coronaviruses are endemic doesn't mean that they are prevalent all the time. They tend to arrive seasonally. Levels of infection go up and down. There are levels of immunity and cross-immunity [immunity from one particular sCoV that provides some protection against another], so infection rates from any particular one can remain low for several years, until increasing again.

Any strategy for Covid has to start with the fact that this virus is likely to become endemic. One of the first scientific papers on this virus, coming out of China at the end of February, showed that 80% of infections were not being picked up as cases, being asymptomatic or being accompanied by mild common symptoms that would not reach medical attention. With that level of asymptomatic transmission it is extremely difficult to eliminate a virus.

Even when a vaccine arrives – if one arrives – over a quarter of people in the USA say they won't take it, with the equivalent figure in Britain being not far behind; and it is unlikely to be available widely enough in poorer countries. One of the more promising vaccine projects is for a vaccine which doesn't stop transmission, but makes you less ill if you're infected, which of course won't eliminate the virus; and viral characteristics are likely to change, as with flu, leading to constant vaccine modification.

The Independent SAGE proposal of a “zero Covid” aim is, in my view, unrealistic. On 14 July David King, the chair of Independent SAGE, said: “I don't believe schools should be reopened until we're reached zero Covid”. This completely fails to recognise the huge and lasting ad-

verse consequences of interrupted education, especially for the poorest in society.

The Independent SAGE model is New Zealand. But that's two remote islands where you could have literally no-one arriving on a plane for a while. And even there the long-term sustainability of “zero Covid” is not certain.

“There has been talk of ‘shielding’ old and frail people through the pandemic until they are protected by chains of infection in the wider population becoming short and rare. In fact many countries have failed drastically, and have had higher rates of infection in concentrations of old and frail people, in care homes for example, than in the general population. Can we change that for the future?”

One of the things we know about the virus is that it is extremely selective as regards the people who become sickest, with age being the strongest influence by far. The average age of deaths is over 80. In the early days in Britain there was extreme anxiety about personal risk across all age groups. In public communication, there was a failure to convey the very high degree of uncertainty in all the scientific estimates there is.

Figures were reported as if they were definite – such as the oft-repeated predication there would be 510,000 deaths from Covid – when there was (and remains) considerable uncertainty.

Seasonal influenzas have on occasion led to more deaths than Covid in younger age groups, and even with the four previous endemic coronaviruses there have been outbreaks associated with deaths in care homes. Boris Johnson and others have conveyed that this is the worst health crisis of anyone's lifetime; but the 1968 flu epidemic (let alone the 1951 or 1957 outbreaks) was more deadly if you make allowance for the fact that life expectancy has increased greatly since then and there are many more frail 90-year olds today.

The tragedy with the care homes in Britain was that by 23 March it was well known how age-selective the virus is. The shielding of institutions where a large proportion of people are susceptible should have been done properly. Indeed, the predictors of which care homes have done badly are the obvious ones: casualised staff, inadequate PPE, and so on.

Germany has done better, and one factor there is that care homes are better in Germany, and a higher proportion of people at any particular age are living in them. In the USA, one of the reasons why the Bronx has done terribly is that in the East Coast of the USA, if you want a cheap care home, the Bronx is the place to look.

Hospital-acquired infection has also been important. People have died who acquired their infection with the virus in hospital.

I think the lockdown-easing will continue for now with a decline in cases and deaths, but we may well see an increase again in October. Endemic coronaviruses are



Solidarność 1980-81

Sunday 19 July, 6.30-8pm: [Solidarnosc, the workers' movement, and the rebirth of Poland](#), with Mark Osborn

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, held via zoom videocalling. For more meetings and resources, see [workersliberty.org/c19-online](#) □

gist on the pandemic

generally seasonal. We won't know about this one until it has run through a whole year, but the decline in infections in Europe in April and after could reflect seasonality as well as lockdowns. Trump's asinine declaration that the sun was going to burn Covid away has understandably led to a reluctance to talk about seasonal influences.

It is obvious we should use the time for preparation. Denmark has a law to provide for safe accommodation for quarantining people who have been infected and are in crowded housing. China, Taiwan, and South Korea have done the same, moving people to hotels or to hospitals.

Testing, tracing, and isolation is very difficult to make complete when we have such a high level of asymptomatic infection. Masking can be useful, but I don't know if it's workable to make mask-wearing completely mandatory whenever you're out of doors.

The basic public health message has to be: to stop infection growing, you have to limit contacts which may bring transmission, even though you can't have 100% protection for every encounter.

"What about the work of Adam Kucharski and others suggesting that the infection spreads in a very uneven way, the bulk in 'clusters'?"

Everyone loves the language of "the superspreader", but heterogeneity of transmission probabilities can come from varying susceptibilities, perhaps due to pre-existing partial immunity, of people to a given dose of the virus. That may be behind Adam Kucharski's finding that 80% of transmission comes from just 10% of potentially-transmitting encounters.

"What about 'clustering' on a larger scale? Britain is unusual in a relatively even spread of infection across the country, while in the Netherlands, say, infection has been highly concentrated in North Brabant and relatively low in Rotterdam and Amsterdam?"

Yes, there is no Parliamentary constituency now which has had no deaths. The relatively even spread may be to do with patterns around the time of entry of the virus into Britain. We had lots of students moving around the country for the start of term then, and lots of people returning from holidays in Italy or France. Thus in Norway it's been suggested that one reason it has done well is that people go ski-ing within the country, rather than abroad.

Camilla Stoltenberg, the director of the National Public Health Institute in Norway, says that the decision to shut the schools there was [probably wrong](#). Studies have consistently shown that children, as well as being much less likely to suffer badly, appear not to transmit the virus as much as adults. Given all the bad consequences of a long period with schools closed, [I don't think](#) the schools should have been shut in Britain. But once they're shut you can't easily undo that.

"What about the risk of students taking infection from school into households with elderly or frail people?"

One of the key issues in preparing for September and October is to try to get a coherent shielding strategy, with good [assessments of risks](#) for individuals and what can be done about them. It can't just be self-assessment, because over 50% of people who have died from Covid-19 in care homes already had dementia; but of course for institutions like care homes, the whole institution needs shielding.

Several universities are planning to have PCR testing in place for returning students and all new arrivals. Obviously that testing will only give a snapshot, but it could help with efforts to reduce the number of infections. Institutions may also develop their own phone apps to detect possibly infectious contacts. To work well, the operation has to be locally based.

"Current estimates are that rates of having been infected are still low, even in the countries hardest-hit by the virus, so the chances of a contribution to infection control from even moderately widespread immunities in the general population, gained from having gone through infection rather than from a vaccine, are small. What do you think?"

We don't know, but the general consensus is that in Britain, for example, the proportion who have responded to an infection is likely to be higher than the 5% estimated from antibody tests. Other aspects of immunity – known as cell-mediated immunity – can provide some protection in the absence of detectable antibodies. In the largest

continued page 11



New audio!

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- [Marxists on the US Civil War and the fight against slavery](#) – with Mark Osborn and Sacha Ismail
- Marxist ABCs: [The politics of identity](#), introduction with Cathy Nugent
- [Rhoda Dakar](#) (of The Bodysnatchers/The Special AKA) on racism, class and culture
- [The state and the current crisis](#), with Kate in "The state, crime, prisons and the police" series
- [Do we need prisons?](#) with Anita Downs, same series
- [Left unity: is Momentum fit for purpose?](#), with Ruth Cashman
- [Solidarity 555 part 1](#) and [part 2](#); [554 part 1](#), [part 2](#)

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Brazil in the pandemic

By Luiza Xavier

Brazil is one of the epicentres of the pandemic, surpassing 1.4 million cases and 60 thousand deaths. The pandemic has not plateaued in Brazil, yet the worst affected areas, in terms of numbers of cases, Rio and São Paulo, have started reopening commerce, bars and restaurants.

The Brazilian president, Jair Bolsonaro, maintains his position against social distancing measures (which are left to be done by local governments on a much smaller budget), and has recently vetoed policy passed in congress making the use of face-coverings compulsory in shops, schools and churches.

Bolsonaro has also recently announced he's tested positive for Covid-19. Since, he's opportunistically made public appearances to say he is being treated hydroxy-chloroquine, a medication for which tests show a lack of scientific evidence of effectiveness against SARS-CoV-2, but praised by Trump and subsequently Bolsonaro as a "wonder drug", and included in the Brazilian Ministry of Health protocol of treatment of Covid-19.

The environment

"We should take advantage of the media attention on the pandemic to let the cattle go past" – said Bolsonaro's environment minister in a leaked statement referring to the illegal deforestation of the Amazon for farming. Indeed, the deforested area of the Amazon in April 2020 was 170% than the same period last year. Not coincidentally, a project of law for the privatisation of water supplies in Brazil has gone to discussion in the Senate. This was perhaps the most unpopular part of Guedes's economic plan, which included the privatisation of dozens of state-owned companies.

Covid-19 and indigenous communities

Indigenous peoples are especially sensitive to respiratory infections (which are their number one cause of death), and practices such as sharing food bowls and utensils and living in close quarters accentuate transmission. Specialists state that the pandemic has the potential to wipe out Brazilian indigenous communities.

Given the lack of government measures such as food deliveries, indigenous people still need to make regular visits to towns or cities for supplies, where they might catch and carry the virus back to their communities. Un-

surprisingly, Bolsonaro has also recently vetoed a law allocating resources such as drinking water, PPE and respirators to indigenous communities.

Corruption

Fabricio Queiroz, ex-chief of staff of Flavio Bolsonaro (Jair's son), has been arrested for corruption after being found in a farm belonging to the family's lawyer.

This is the latest development on the corruption case against Flavio Bolsonaro, and a major contributing factor to Bolsonaro's recent loss of popularity. It is worth remembering that ex-minister of justice, Sergio Mouro, resigned over Bolsonaro's attempts to control the appointment of the chief of police in Rio, who would be in charge of his son's investigation.

Black lives matter

Following the demonstrations in the US, Brazil also saw a rise in activity of the black movement in the past few weeks – especially in Rio and São Paulo, big population centres where police violence is particularly rampant. Demonstrations have been smaller than usual due to the pandemic, yet hundreds of protesters on the streets call, amongst other things, for the "demilitarisation" of the Brazilian police, and for justice for Miguel Otávio and João Pedro.

Miguel Otávio, an 8 year old boy, son of a domestic worker, died after falling off a building due to gross negligence of his mother's boss. And João Pedro, a 14 year old, was brutally killed by the police, with more than 70 shots in his own home.

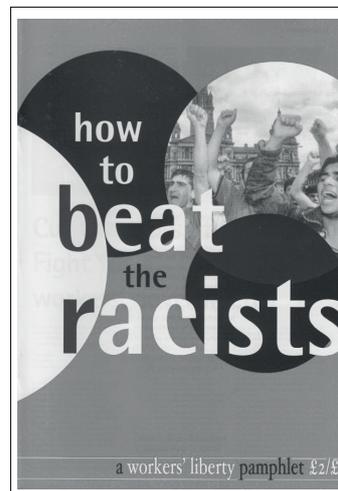
Partly due to pressure from the streets, the Brazilian supreme court resolved to stop all police operations in favelas during the pandemic. But even after the resolution, there were reports of many shots fired by the police in the Rio favela Complexo do Alemão.

An average of three people a day die at the hands of the police in Rio, most in big, almost military, operations of the "war on drugs" in favelas. □

6699 Anti-racist resources

We have compiled various anti-racist resources to learn about anti-racist movements, and arm yourself with ideas to beat back racism: readings and pamphlets, video and audio.

See workersliberty.org/anti-racist-resources □



The 2001 edition of this pamphlet, published after the far-right BNP more than tripled its votes in the election that year, aims to convince labour movement activists of the importance of fighting racism, anti-racists of the importance of the labour movement – and fighting to transform it. workersliberty.org/pamphlets

Melbourne back to lockdown

By Riki Lane

The largest-yet [surge](#) of Covid cases in Australia hit the state of Victoria in early July.

Unlike in March, when infections came from overseas, these are almost entirely community infections. There are now over 100 outbreaks, including in hospitals and aged-care centres.

Two key sources of infection have been:

- The staff of quarantine hotels, where returning citizens are kept for 14 days on re-entering Australia. They are poorly paid and trained private security sub-contractors rather than regularly-employed public sector workers.

- An abattoir with poor working conditions and inadequate monitoring

Infections then spread rapidly from these sources through family celebrations that liberally interpreted eased restrictions.

The government responded with a return to lockdown, stricter than before, including:

- heavy restrictions on travel interstate and from Melbourne to regional areas;

- tighter limits on social visits

- five days of complete isolation in their flats for 3000 residents of public housing towers, with no notice, and enforced by heavy police presence.

After extensive testing, one tower with 55 positive cases remains in isolation for a further 9 days. Despite their crowded conditions, infected residents have not been offered alternative quarantine accommodation

Tabloid from 15 September

Our provisional plan is for *Solidarity* to return to its usual 16-page tabloid format from the issue dated 15 September.

This is the 17th “pandemic issue”, produced as black-and-white A4 so that readers can easily print off copies from the web, and so that we can economically manage a shorter print run. (Stapled formats are generally much more expensive than folded-only tabloid). To return to the tabloid, we need the “ecology” of meetings, demonstrations, street stalls, etc., and of comrades gathering face-to-face and driving or cycling round to deliver papers locally, that sustains the tabloid’s bigger minimum print run. That has started to re-emerge, especially with the BLM protests, but only started. 15 September is our best guess for when it may be sufficiently restored. Provisional, of course: we can’t tell whether or when there may be a virus “second wave”, or at what scale. The industrial estate where we have our office shut in mid-March, so we had to do all our “office” functions from our people’s homes. (But we did them). The office has been open again since 18 May. The paper production is done by one staff member in the office and others working from home. □

Schools are going back to remote learning for most students, except those in the last two years of secondary school. The government’s logic is that they want to help those students enter university or the workforce in the next two years, and that older students are more capable of covid-distancing. Many teachers are concerned about the risk, but the relevant union has not opposed the move.

After Australia’s initial impressive government-led suppression and near-eradication of the virus in Australia, this recent surge highlights the failures of capitalist structures, in particular the role of precarious employment. □

Socialist epidemiologist

from page 9

serology study in the world, in Spain, individuals who had clearly been infected did not have detectable antibodies at a later date. The crucial question is the extent to which there may be varying levels of susceptibility due to pre-existing sCoVs and prior SARS-CoV-2 exposure.

I doubt that there is a single explanation of the different outcomes so far in different countries. A big part may have been played by chance events in different countries at the early stage. People debated a lot about why Edinburgh did much worse than Glasgow with HIV, but it now looks like it was mainly a matter of early arrivals of cases before it was clear what was happening and interventions were in place.

In the short term, it is unlikely that lockdowns have had no effect. Some countries have done very well so far with no or very limited school closures, for example, but probably how lockdowns have been implemented will have influenced both the on-target (Covid-ameliorating) and off-target (adverse effects on people’s lives) outcomes.

A very large percentage of deaths in Britain has been in care homes, and a lot must be put down to the mess-ups by the government and how care homes and hospitals have been inadequately protected and managed. But, for example, a contribution to why Britain has done so badly (though by no means the full explanation) may be that Britain has had very mild flu seasons for the last two years.

If you compare across Europe, one predictor of Covid-19 deaths is [low flu deaths](#) in the last two years. It may be that high flu deaths in recent years leave you with a smaller surviving frail elderly population vulnerable to Covid-19. It’s unclear what the final conclusion will be about this, but indicates the complexity of research in this area.

Overall, it is still too soon to start doing fine-scale league tables of which countries have done worse and which better. We haven’t had a complete cycle of the virus yet, and we haven’t even started to observe the long-term consequences of both viral infection or the social responses to it. □

20% think virus is a hoax

By Elizabeth Butterworth

An Oxford University [study](#) conducted in May found that around 20% of adults in England may believe in conspiracy theories about the coronavirus pandemic. In a study of 2500 adults – weighted by income, region, age and gender – people were asked about the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements about coronavirus.

Alarmingly, 60% of respondents said they believed the government was misleading the public about the cause of the virus and 40% believe that there is an attempt to use the virus to control the population.

The most agreed-with statement was that “coronavirus is a bioweapon developed by China to destroy the West”, with only 54.6% of people saying “do not agree”.

Just under 20% of respondents agreed with statements blaming Jews or Muslims for the spread of the virus. Just over 20% of respondents agreed to varying extents that “Bill Gates has created the virus in order to reduce the world population.” More than 25% agreed to an extent that “celebrities are being paid to say they have coronavirus.” 21% agreed to an extent that 5G was causing coronavirus.

As the academics leading the study point out, the significant minority who do not accept official explanations or guidance on Covid-19 could have an impact on public health and how we manage this pandemic. Follow up questions showed that the same people were less likely to follow government advice. In the future, they may also be resistant to vaccination.

Conspiracy thinking also leads to more immediately dangerous behaviour, such as the attacks we have seen on telecommunication towers, endangering the lives of workers in that industry.

Moreover it shows the deep rot of racism in society and how this can be re-ignited or given new life, especially in times of crisis.

Conspiracy thinking tends to be based on old ideas – most clearly demonstrated here by antisemitism. But it is fuelled by recent technologies and the fact that social media has, for many people, become the chief way they find out about current affairs or read about politics.

As Luxemburg said, “The most revolutionary thing one can do is always to proclaim loudly what is happening”,

and as Lenin said, “Our strength lies in stating the truth!”

Socialists must be truth-tellers in our workplaces and communities. It’s up to us to both criticise our government’s handling of the crisis at the same time as defending scientific truth and reality.

Although greater levels of education do help, anti-scientific conspiracy thinking is not confined to the uneducated – as can be seen in the number of middle class people who are against vaccinations, or indeed in Prince Charles’s promotion of pseudoscience such as homeopathy. People of all classes, including our own, may well believe complete bunkum on certain issues, even if they are sensible on others. We have to address this clearly and robustly with the aim of convincing them.

Finally, we have to hold those in power accountable for erasing public trust in institutions through repeatedly lying and covering up the truth. We are now (at least in part) reaping the fruit that they have sown. □

Learn from Bosnia

July 11 1995 was the beginning of the Srebrenica massacre, the worst atrocity committed by Serb nationalists during their wars to dominate the other peoples of former Yugoslavia. In a few days over 8,000 Bosnian Muslims men and boys were murdered. It was by far the largest mass killing in Europe since the 1940s.

There were crimes committed on all sides during the wars in former Yugoslavia, but it was nowhere near symmetrical. Serbia, in control of the bulk of Yugoslavia’s military machine, and Serb nationalist militias attempted to deny the other nations of the former federation self-determination. The Bosnian Muslims were faced with being crushed and dispersed. The Serb authorities actively organised slaughter of civilians, ethnic cleansing, rape and destruction of mosques.

Under the banner of “peace” and opposing Western intervention, the Stalinist-influenced Labour left sided with the Serb nationalists, allying with elements of the Tory right to do so. The SWP declared its opposition to all nationalisms – as if that resolved the issues – and emphasised opposition to intervention. By the time of Serbian offensive against Kosova, in 1999, it had shifted to an effectively pro-Serbian position.

Failure to support the mainly-Muslim Bosnians and Kosovans against the virulently Islamophobic Serb nationalists shines a remarkable light on the pro-Islamist politics of much of the left after 2001. So does failure to support the Uyghur people against China’s oppression today. □

- The left and Bosnia (1995) bit.ly/leftandbosnia
- Open letter to Tony Benn: the main enemy is Serb imperialism! (1995) bit.ly/lettertobenn
- Ratko Mladic, Srebrenica, and lessons for the left (2011) bit.ly/s-2011

Herman Benson (1915-2020)

Herman Benson, who died in New York on 2 July, was the last survivor, at least to our knowledge, of the “first generation” of “third camp” Trotskyists from the late 1930s who built the Workers Party and the Independent Socialist League. bit.ly/hb-ob □

Woke vs liberal?

By Mohan Sen

A letter to US literary and political magazine *Harper's* signed by 150 writers and academics, Noam Chomsky, Margaret Atwood, Salman Rushdie, and others, argues there is an increasingly intolerant and intellectually constrictive culture on the left (bit.ly/harpersletter)

It has sparked fierce debate, including a counter-letter (bit.ly/harpersreply) signed by a similar number of (less prominent) writers and academics.

The critics argue that the *Harper's* signatories create a problem where none exists, or dramatically exaggerate it; and in fact they are defending the powerful and privileged against militant criticism.

A lot of the signatories are old white men, they say. Much has been made of J K Rowling's signature, because of her transphobic views. Though most of the signatories are left-ish, some are right-wing. But there are many BME signatories and the organiser of the letter, journalist Thomas Chatterton Williams, is black.

Brigid Delaney in the *Guardian* bit.ly/guardianharpers sees the backlash approvingly as a more radical and collectivist left politics challenging an individualistic and privileged liberalism: "The shift is from 'me' to 'we'... the collective position of the woke".

But to constitute a genuinely collective political or social force requires a radically democratic culture, of which individual freedom of speech and debate are an essential part, if only a part.

When self-appointed representatives of the "woke" (a collective which has no democratic structure) seek out unvirtuous language or phrases, and use outrage on social media to anathematise and stigmatise those declared unvirtuous, that is not a new and better form of democracy, but corrosive of debate and inquiry. It suppresses "the one who thinks differently" in favour of "we"-thought.

The letter welcomes the "powerful protests for racial and social justice are leading to overdue demands for police reform, along with wider calls for greater equality and inclusion across our society, not least in higher education, journalism, philanthropy, and the arts". It argues that "this needed reckoning has also intensified a new set of moral attitudes and political commitments that tend to weaken our norms of open debate and toleration of differences in favour of ideological conformity. As we applaud the first development, we also raise our voices against the second."

It is hard to judge the "intensification" claim specifically, because the letter can validly be criticised for vagueness, and because I lack knowledge of the issues in the US.

To respond, as left-wing Congresswoman Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez has, by pointing out that left-wing activists routinely have their free speech and right to organise suppressed by conservative forces and institutions, is to miss the point. That is certainly the case. The issue is whether the left responds with its own attempts to limit speech, debate and organising, and how we deal with *disagreements and arguments between left-wingers* and

what kind of culture should regulate them.

The *Harper's* letter is right to "refuse any false choice between justice and freedom, which cannot exist without each other."

Some of the debates in the US, for instance around "cancel culture", are hard to judge and follow from outside. But in the UK, there surely is an attempt to "cancel" uncomfortable debate and criticism in many places on the left – most notably in some student organisations and in the Labour Party. We've seen that in the recent Momentum NCG elections and in Young Labour, for example.

The victims of this culture within the British left are typically (broadly speaking) left-wing organisations and individuals. We do not find it used, for example, against activity by the Catholic Church on left-wing university campuses. We do not find its advocates speaking against the frequent banning by university administrations, these days, of stalls, literature sales, and posters on campus.

The working class and labour movement need democracy and free debate more than anyone else does.

As Fire Brigades Union General Secretary put it in the FBU's book for its 2018 centenary, the labour movement needs "a spirit of openness and pluralism", with "different voices and opinions... heard", even when that "may make uncomfortable reading and might provoke sharp debate".

Too often instead we have "a high handed and dismissive approach to debate" instead of the "culture of debate and democracy which accepts that there will be different views and sometimes sharp differences of opinion... central, and essential, to building any movement to challenge those in power". □

Debate with Mutiny and Red Flag

70 people attended the Zoom meeting on the way forward for the revolutionary left we held jointly with two other socialist groups, Red Flag and Mutiny, on 12 July. It was an interesting and useful, though very preliminary, discussion. We hope there will be more.

Ruth Cashman for Workers' Liberty, Neil Faulkner for Mutiny and Kady Tait for Red Flag led a discussion on issues including what unites and what divides different revolutionary socialists, and what greater common activity is possible and desirable in the context of the dramatic crisis that is looming.

Ruth and other AWL comrades argued for more joint activity in existing campaigns and struggles, to boost those struggles and create better spaces and platforms for discussing new initiatives.

We made the case for further discussions, both about class-struggle activity and wider political ideas and program. However much unity one judges is currently possible, such discussion can still help take the left forward.

On Monday 20 July at 1.30pm we will release on Soundcloud, YouTube, and other platforms: "Towards a new revolutionary left?", the intros and concluding speeches from the debate. More: bit.ly/revleftdebate □

Valves and schematics



Diary of an engineer

By Emma Rickman

Brace yourself for a pretty technical and nerdy diary entry. One of my tasks this week has been to identify the valves on the plant that will need isolating during the Outage.

Each valve controls the flow of water or steam for a significant process on the plant, and all are operated remotely from the Control Room. I look up “the addresses” for all the valves, then I go in search of the cabinets on the plant itself.

I have to find the actual physical position of each valve, and as I’m doing so pieces of information I’ve picked up slowly during my training start to click into place. Most of the significant valves control the flow of steam in the turbine hall; these are huge red things controlling steam hurtling through pipes as wide as a kitchen table.

On Level 9 I find some valves tucked behind the long horizontal cylinder that is the boiler itself. It’s very hot at this level and I struggle trying to confirm the valve tag-numbers on cables covered in grime. These valves control the flow of steam and feed-water to the boiler and, confusingly, the flow of water to “de-superheat” the steam once it has been through the boiler so that some of it can be condensed and re-heated in the furnace.

The I/O cabinets can be found on different floors of the plant, not necessarily near the valves themselves. Each cabinet has a row of PLC (Portable Logic Control) modules – small blue boxes with lots of holes in them – that transfer instructions to or from the computer to individual signal wires. These signal wires connect to terminal rails, which link to the wires going to the valves or instruments – these are the “field wires”, because they connect devices “out in the field”.

Within the cabinets are dusty folders of schematics which I thumb through by torch light – I find the drawing given by the address in the I/O folder, confirm that the instrument exists in the drawing, and find the terminal where its field wire is located. The schematic drawing shows me the instrument (by tag number) and a line branching off it to connect with a long horizontal line

marked “Earth” – this branching line is numbered “3” and the “earth” line is marked “X25”, so to isolate the valve I must disconnect the cables at terminal 3, X25.

I search for some terminals within the cabinet and find them easily. Others, I search several times and don’t trust my senses until I find another bank of terminals hiding behind the cabinet. One of the cabinets is kept underneath the feed-hopper where the waste is dropped into the furnace, and the crashing of waste onto the metal roof above me is deafening.

In other news, we now have a functioning fly-zapping machine in our mess-room (The Insectocutor) but there are still many flies that aren’t buying it. □

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

Threats to rail jobs

Extracts from *Tubeworker* and *Off The Rails*

On London Underground [LU], we hear a manager in Stations Structural Maintenance has been appointed to conduct a “headcount review” of the entire department.

Tory-appointed auditors KPMG may be recommending similar reviews elsewhere.

The unions need to prepare to fight job cuts wherever they’re proposed.

Boris Johnson has suggested in an interview that one condition of ongoing government funding for Transport for London and LU should be a move towards driverless trains. “Let’s not be prisoners of the unions.”

Although the real technical barriers to implementing driverless trains are much higher than most of its advocates care to admit, or perhaps are even aware of, we can’t afford to be complacent. The government is deeply committed to attacking unions, and is still planning to bring forward new legislation specifically to restrict railworkers’ right to strike.

The RMT union has produced a useful “Covid-19 Charter”, collating the main demands for additional safety measures and policies the union has been pressing for across LU throughout the pandemic.

It is best used like a checklist, ticking off the measures that have been won in your workplace, and seeing which ones we need more pressure on. If there are more crosses than ticks, then a refusal of unsafe work needs to be organised collectively, rather than just on an individual basis. □

• Fighting job cuts: Zoom meeting, jointly hosted by *Tubeworker* and *Off the Rails*. Thursday 16 July, 16:00-18:00. [Zoomlink](#). Speakers: Janine Booth, London Underground worker and chair of the RMT Disabled Members Advisory Committee; John Pencott, Network Rail worker, RMT lay tutor.

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Victory on sick pay



John Moloney

Outsourced workers at the Ministry of Justice, organised by the United Voices of the World (UVW) union and the PCS, have won a significant concession from OCS, the outsourced contractor.

After a substantial campaign, spurred on by the tragic death of UVW member Emanuel Gomes, who died after working through his symptoms due to being refused full sick pay, OCS has agreed to retrospectively pay full sick pay for workers who've taken time off since April, for a period of up to 14 days.

There's still more to fight for, as OCS is still refusing to make an open-ended commitment to pay full sickness and isolation pay in all circumstances going forward, but it is a major victory and a testament to the good work UVW have done in the workplace. We're meeting with UVW next week, and plan ongoing joint working in Ministry of Justice. We want to organise so that if either union goes into dispute, the other union will join them.

In the Department for Work and Pensions, many job centres did not reopen more widely to the public, despite the government's push for this. Union reps are challenging management risk assessments at workplace level, often issuing "Union Improvement Notices", which are demands for additional safety measures. In some places, where mitigating safety measures, such as perspex screens, were not able to be installed in time, those job centres did not reopen. The union has rejected the overall departmental risk assessment, which we believe may even be unlawful. Our position remains that reopening is not safe, and we're continuing to support members in resisting.

The reintroduction of conditionality and sanctioning of claimants, which PCS opposes, has been pushed back to 16 July. Given the massive spike in unemployment, insisting new UC claims take place in person could lead to a stronger "back-to-work" push, which we'll need to organise to resist.

PCS reps in other sectors have been doing excellent work; the union's Culture Group, which organises in museums, galleries, arts centres, and heritage sites, have won significant concessions on things like furlough arrangements. There is a significant threat posed, however, by the uncertain funding situation for this sector, which employers could use to attempt to cut jobs and attacks terms and conditions. Workers at Hampton Court are already facing wage cuts.

We'll also be redoubling our campaigning for the in-housing of work like cleaning, catering, and security. Direct employment ensures greater transparency, and forces the central employer to take responsibility for the conditions of everyone who makes the job run. □

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

Jobcentres reopen

By Paul McStay

Jobcentres have re-opened to the public. Management have stated to the civil servants' union PCS that just over half of Jobcentres in London and Essex are open, although footfall remains extremely low.

PCS provided members with advice on their legal right to withdraw themselves from serious and imminent danger. As the national risk assessment, and therefore the risk assessment for each office, had not been signed off, PCS stated, " (we are) not satisfied that the risk assessment is safe. PCS do not believe that all necessary safety arrangements are in place and the level of risk remains unacceptable."

This was going to be a structure test for the union. Unfortunately it failed to deliver. On Monday evening 6 July a further all-DWP [Department of Work and Pensions] reps Zoom call was set up. When questioned, the Group President said that we are not aware of any member or group of members withdrawing themselves from the workplace.

There was criticism from the Greater Manchester branch that the union's DWP Group Executive had not done enough to co-ordinate action centrally. To some degree that is correct, but it doesn't tell the whole story. Branches and members were provided with the information they needed to walk off the job, but that didn't happen anywhere.

The advice now appears to have shifted to "Don't volunteer". But if management don't get enough volunteers there is a danger they could start press ganging members. An e-mail has been sent to all staff in Peckham Jobcentre telling them just that.

There needs to be a serious conversation in PCS about what we need to do to rebuild our structures, our activist base and our density. Simply blaming those in leadership avoids that conversation. □

£5,301 towards £10,000

Less to report this week. An additional £43, including an order for one of our Workers' Liberty t-shirts, which are still available. That brings our total up to £5,301. Our fund-appeal target is £10,000 by 22 November. Keep contributing! workersliberty.org/donate □

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Solidarity



For a workers' government

HONG KONG: POWER FOR DEMOCRACY

By Pete Radcliff

On 11-12 July, over 600,000 people in Hong Kong took part in the election primaries of Power for Democracy, the election umbrella for the pro-democracy, anti-CCP forces.

The primaries were to select candidates for the elections in September to the ruling Legislative Council (LegCo) of Hong Kong. The turnout was a morale boost after the National Security Law (NSL) was imposed on 30 June.

There have always been tensions within the democracy movement between the "traditional" democrats and the movement that grew after 2014.

The new movement, loosely referred to as "localist", was overwhelmingly young and based on street agitation. It grew out of frustrations with the gradualist approach of the existing pro-democracy parties, which appeared locked in a fruitless effort to extract concessions from a Hong Kong government moving in the opposite direction under pressure of Xi Jinping's desire to absorb Hong Kong into mainland China's system long before the 2047 deadline for an end to the "One Country, Two Systems" agreement of 1997.

The political differences in Power for Democracy were evident in the primaries. As Lester Shum, former student leader at the China University of Hong Kong and successful candidate in the primaries, put it: "The primary is a battle of different approaches. It is a question of whether we should still allow moderate and appeasing traditional pan-democrats to make up the majority in the legislature... My answer is a resounding 'no'."

Amongst electors there is a growing awareness that "One Country, Two Systems" is a damaging illusion and there is a need for genuine autonomy. It is muted because of the new NSL, under which any open call for independence of Hong Kong could lead to a life sentence in prison.

The results, according to one early analysis shared on Hong Kong social media, showed a significant increase in support for the "localists" up from 14% in last November's local elections to 30% now.

The same analysis claims that support for the "traditional" democrats (Democratic Party, Civic Party, Labour

Party, and ADPL) has fallen from 62% to 28%.

The HK Labour Party, closely linked with the pro-democracy HKCTU union confederation, and still seen as tied to the moderate democrats, did not do well in the primaries. Carol Ng, chair of the HKCTU, failed to get selected. That might lead, for the first time in many years, to no representation from any explicit Hong Kong workers' movement in the LegCo elections.

The courageous leader of the HKCTU, Lee Cheuk Yan, was a central organiser of the most successful street protests of the last year. Unions around the HKCTU also attempted to organise a general strike against the NSL in late June, although they called it off as they felt they had insufficient support.

Despite a considerable growth in unionisation over the last six months, the unions have not been able to demonstrate a working-class power that might complement the direct action of the street movement and inspire those wanting urgent action against growing Chinese repression.

Chief Executive Carrie Lam has warned that the pro-dem primaries may violate the NSL: "I am not saying that they have breached the law but I have to put forward a warning". Many of the candidates may be banned from standing, some even arrested and imprisoned. Lee Cheuk Yan is threatened with jail.

If the candidates aren't barred and the September elections go ahead, there will be a need for an election campaign that dispenses with illusions in slow reform via the gerrymandered LegCo, where half of the delegates are not elected by universal suffrage.

And whether an election campaign is allowed or not, the Hong Kong democracy movement needs to win over economically worse-off people currently supporting pro-CCP parties.

It will need to advocate policies that combat the huge inequalities in wealth, provide answers to the housing crisis, and support oppressed migrants and minorities.

Rather than go for isolationism, or look to US or UK banks and corporations to counterbalance Chinese ones, a democratic Hong Kong has to base itself on international working class solidarity, in particular with Chinese workers and their struggle for democratic revolution in China. □