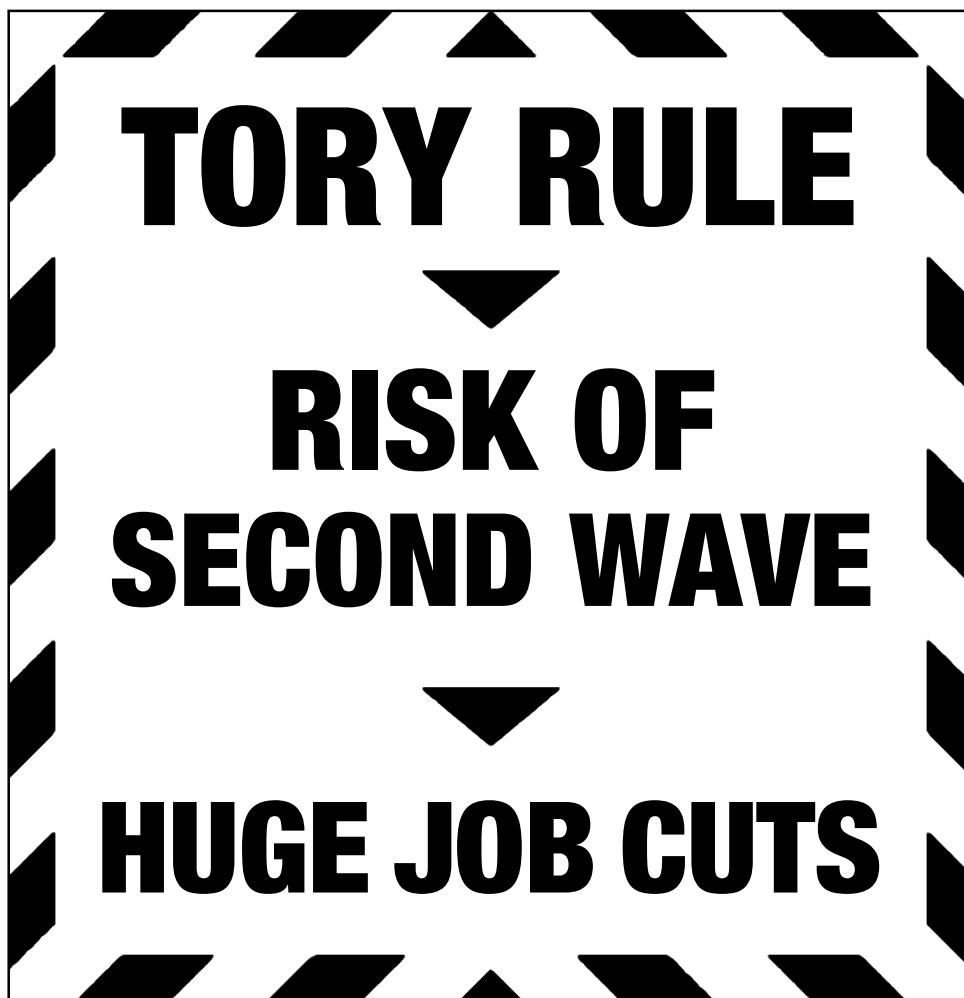


Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



MAKE LABOUR FIGHT!

- »» **For workers' control over reopening**
- »» **For full isolation pay for all**
- »» **For shorter work week and more public jobs**

Rhoda Dakar interviewed

The singer and "all-round troublemaker" talks about the fight against racism.

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Tower Hamlets strike

Workers resist imposition of new contract by right-wing Labour council.

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Big win for Forward Momentum in the NCG election.

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New Zealand in the pandemic

A success story, but "not all rosy".

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Hong Kong under the gun

By Chen Ying

The new National Security Law imposed by Beijing on Hong Kong on 30 June has created four new offences – secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign forces to endanger national security.

Secession is defined as “to participate, plan or implement... acts of secession... whether or not force or the threat of force is used.” The law will prohibit the advocacy of independence or self-determination for Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang or any part of China.

Likewise, subversion would include attacking or damaging government venues, facilities and emblems. Terrorism would include interference or damage to societal infrastructure – utilities, public transport and health systems.

Collusion with foreign forces includes “to request foreign institutions, organisations or agents to implement, conspire or support war, sanctions, blockades, enacting laws and policies against China”, and “to cause hatred among Hongkongers towards the Hong Kong or Chinese government.”

Draconian sentences include 10 years minimum up to life imprisonment. Not only is the HK police given widespread powers to search, freeze assets and detain suspects, with the re-establishment of what is effectively a Special Branch disbanded after 1997, but the new law establishes a National Security Office directly controlled by Beijing that overrides Hong Kong’s legal system, including right to silence, granting of bail, open trial by jury, appeals, judicial reviews and other safeguards. The

police no longer need to apply to a court for a warrant to demand that software providers of Gmail, Whatsapp, Facebook and Telegram divulge user data.

Schools are now required to provide national security education, to remove books that may be deemed to be illegal from libraries and to train all students to sing the national anthem. Further control of the curriculum is widely expected to follow. The Government has been quick off the mark, seeking to interpret the new law, implying that the slogan “Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution Now” as well as the song “Glory to Hong Kong” are now illegal.

Beijing has factored in the adverse reaction from Western governments in taking this decision, a defensive measure to protect its geopolitical interests. Hong Kong continues to be a key part of the chessboard in Beijing’s combative game with the US and its allies, with a lot of financial considerations at stake on both sides.

Anti-government election candidates for the forthcoming Legislative Council elections in September now expect to be disqualified from standing if they declare their opposition to the new National Security law. What had promised to be another landslide electoral defeat for the pro-Government political parties now looks like the complete opposite.

Whilst some prominent pro-independence figures have chosen to leave, to Taiwan or the West, others have chosen to stay for the fight, knowing that the stakes are higher than just what will happen to the city. □

• Abridged. More at bit.ly/hk-gun

Annexation: use the delay!

By Ira Berkovic

The 1 July date set by Israel’s hard-right government to launch its annexation of occupied Palestinian territories passed with what Palestinian journalist Amjad Iraqi, writing in +972 Mag., called “very little fanfare.”

Iraqi wrote: “Disputes and unpreparedness within the Israeli government and the settler movement, along with growing international criticism in recent weeks, appear to have stalled the annexation process.”

Speaking in a webinar, Iraqi added that debates within the government may also have contributed to limiting the Israeli state’s ability to act. “There are disputes between Netanyahu and Benny Gantz, the Alternate Prime Minister, as well as between other members of their parties. These are not so much about whether annexation should take place, but how to go forward with it, how it should be implemented, how far does it go.”

Discord from the settler movement may also have been a factor, with some settler leaders insisting Netanyahu’s annexation plans did not go far enough, and that even the pseudo-sovereignty granted to the Palestinians under

the Trump administration’s so-called “Deal of the Century” moved too far towards Palestinian statehood.

Demonstrations have continued across Israel, with the left-wing Arab-Jewish social movement Standing Together prominent in organising and mobilising for several. Within Palestinian politics, the secular-nationalist Fatah and the Islamist Hamas, Palestine’s two main parties and historic rivals who have often engaged in armed conflict against each other, held a joint news conference on 2 July, committing to working together to oppose annexation. Addressing the conference, Fatah official Jibril Rajud reaffirmed the Palestine Liberation Organisation position of fighting for an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In advance of 1 July, the Palestinian leadership had threatened to downgrade its security cooperation with Israel, a promise which Amjad Iraqi says “it seems to have fulfilled.”

The delay to Netanyahu’s plans must be seized by anti-occupation campaigners in Palestine, Israel, and internationally, to continue building domestic and international pressure on the Israeli state to abandon its policy. More, see: 972mag.com/annexation-israel-webinar. □

Make Labour fight for “grand schemes”!

“” Editorial

Shadow Chancellor Anneliese Dodds told the Marr Show on Sunday 5 June: “I’m not going to say to you that Labour is going to be advocating some massive grand scheme right at this moment when social care is in crisis”.

But we need grand schemes exactly at this time of crisis! The Tories’ floundering has imposed a *massive grand* Covid-19 death toll, threatens a *massive grand* risk of a whole new second wave of the virus, and is generating *massive grand* job cuts.

As the Safe and Equal campaign has revealed, bit.ly/pay-sick, an official survey has confirmed that lack of isolation pay and insecure work have increased the risk of care home residents getting the virus.

The Vivaldi study surveyed 9,081 elderly care homes. It found the risk of infection was reduced by between 7 and 18% when staff had sick pay, and almost halved when care homes had regular and permanent staff rather than using bank and agency workers on zero hours contracts.

Isolation pay

The 7 to 18% figure must be an underestimate, because 93% of care home managers reported they did give sick pay, and government figures say only 40% do. (Maybe the managers thought the meagre Statutory Sick Pay scheme, which is a binding legal minimum, counts as “giving sick pay”).

Both the government and the scientists who criticise it say that finding people with Covid-19 symptoms, testing to confirm, tracing their close contacts, and getting sufferers and contacts to self-isolate, is central to controlling the virus.

That can’t be done unless sufferers and contacts (who will probably have no symptoms) do self-isolate. They must have isolation pay, to make it *economically* possible; and, if they live in crowded housing, special accommodation to make it *physically* possible.

We need a “grand scheme” to ensure that provision for all workers and all industries. And a “grand scheme” of bringing all care homes into the public sector, with workers on permanent public-sector contracts, pay, and conditions. Now!

We need a public-health test-and-trace operation, run by properly-funded local authority public health departments, not the Tory botch under which half the testing is contracted out through Deloitte (and local public-health authorities don’t even get the results until too late) and half the tracing is contracted out through Serco.

We need private hospitals to be requisitioned – taken into emergency public ownership – to enable the NHS to catch up on all the treatment delayed at the height of the pandemic, and to secure capacity for a second wave of the virus.

We need workers’ control over safe reopening of workplaces, to avoid workplace infection-clusters such as have been central to the outbreak in Leicester.

On jobs, Boris Johnson says he has a “grand scheme” (a “new deal”), but it’s largely bluster. The labour movement should have a real grand scheme:

- Nationalisation of the big firms declaring job cuts, like BA, Airbus, Easyjet, Rolls Royce, etc., and retraining and retooling to redirect the workforces to green and socially useful production.
- A big expansion of public-sector jobs, in care, in the health service, and in local services, to give good alternatives to workers losing jobs in cafés, pubs, shops, etc.
- A shorter work week across the board – a new standard of 32 hours or four days full time – with no loss of pay, to share out the hours and push back overwork.

The Tories are forcing the pace with reopening because they want to stop paying out furlough money. Thus their risky opening of pubs on 4 July, and simultaneous reduction of the two metre rule to one metre.

If Britain were able to continue the improving trend of May and June, then it would be possible by late July to get confirmed infections down, not as far as remote islands like New Zealand or Iceland, but to the 2 or 3 per million of Denmark, Norway, or Finland.

From that level, experience suggests it’s *medically* possible to control the virus in a sustainable long-term way, maybe with localised outbreaks and quarantines but no worse, by means of careful contact-tracing, work-from-home, quarantining cross-border travellers, masks, moderate covid-distancing, screens, hand-washing, etc.

To make it *socially* possible to do that, and to avoid escalating mass unemployment? Make Labour fight for “massive grand schemes”! □

The New Deal

The New Deal in the USA in the 1930s, which Johnson invokes, was a bigger thing than anything he promises. But Marxists explained at the time that it was limited to attempting to salvage capitalism in a deep crisis, and much of its limited positive effect on jobs was down to war preparations. See online “Five Years of the New Deal” bit.ly/nd-1938 and “FDR and the Industrial Mobilisation Plan” bit.ly/nd-1939. □

Momentum: what needs to change?

By Mohan Sen

With a clear Forward Momentum majority on the National Coordinating Group of the big Labour left organisation Momentum, there is the possibility of significant changes for the better in the organisation.

There is so much that needs changing in Momentum that it's almost hard to know where to begin. Here are some ideas for priorities in the next month or two. Much bigger changes are needed in the longer term.

Small bits and pieces around certain disputes it may have seen as "trendy" (e.g. the McDonald's strikes) aside, Momentum has done essentially nothing to support workers' struggles.

An immediate test: thousands of council workers in Tower Hamlets have struck for 3, 6 and 7 July to stop the imposition of worse terms and conditions. Tower Hamlets Momentum has been active in support of the strike, but until now not the wider organisation.

The 4 July NCG passed a motion in support of the strikers; new Momentum co-chairs Gaya Sriskanthan and Andrew Scattergood's first email out mentioned this as evidence Momentum is changing. But so far nothing about what people can do and so far nothing on Momentum's extensive social media.

There are numerous things Momentum can do to actively support workers, and working-class communities, in struggle. There should be people on the NCG responsible for driving this work. As a start activists should pressure the NCG to insist that the organisation starts using its social media, email lists and so on to advertise actions, promote statements and solidarity, collect money and above all raise consciousness – starting with Tower Hamlets.

And there will be many other struggles. Such battles raise two additional issues. Momentum should campaign for repeal of the anti-trade union laws. The NCG agreed this in 2017, but it was never carried out. With a number of Free Our Unions supporters now on the NCG (including new co-chair Andrew Scattergood), we can hopefully make progress on this fast.

Left-wing campaigns

There is also the issue of what the organisation says about councils cuts and how to fight them and reverse them. A serious discussion about that is needed.

More broadly, Momentum needs to establish links with and mobilise support for a range of left-wing campaigns. Most urgent is the campaign against the Tories' Immigration Bill, which has gone to the House of Lords and will return to the Commons soon.

Many of the new NCG members signed the Labour Campaign for Free Movement's pledge. Starting to establish campaigning links with LCFM (to oppose the Immigration Bill and more broadly fight for migrants' rights and free movement) is crucial, both in terms of shifting to a campaign culture and in terms of shifting from Momentum's previously weak stance on migrants' rights.

There are many important left-wing campaigns, par-

ticularly Labour-focused ones, that Momentum should link up with and support. But that implies a change in its political approach on many issues. Supporting the Black Lives Matter protests, for instance, is hollow without abandoning the pro-police line Momentum has pursued and developing demands to at least rein in the police.

Momentum should start to argue and campaign for left-wing policies agreed by Labour conference to be carried out, as an essential part of democratising the party (along with democratic reforms such as open selections) and getting it campaigning.

Momentum should campaign for Labour Parties to be able to hold decision-making meetings again and the scheduling of a real-world, decision-making national conference in the first half of next year.

There is a lot that can be done here but again promoting this message, as well as specific campaigns and struggles, on social media and email would be a start.

The first step is to get the National Coordinating Group functioning as the organisation's actual week-to-week governing body, with real control over the office – which has emphatically not been the case previously.

Member-led process

A genuinely member-led process to discuss changing Momentum's constitution needs to be put in place as soon as possible. That should involve a properly democratic convention, representing local groups and affiliates, where different proposals can be seriously debated. The Forward Momentum "Plan" promises some sort of re-founding convention by May 2021. That is a long way off.

It needs to be made clear to the NCG members chosen by Labour Party office holders and by non-trade union "affiliates" (many of them paper organisations) that they cannot stand in the way of democratic reform. There also needs to be a clear consensus developed about abolishing these types of positions.

More generally activists and officers need to develop and campaign for a clear program of democratisation to feed into the process (see e.g. bit.ly/momdemocracy on the Momentum Internationalists site).

There also needs to be action to get Momentum's complaints system working properly, or indeed working at all. There are numerous complaints about in some cases serious bad behaviour and even bullying and harassment by supporters of the old regime which have never had a response, let alone been dealt with seriously.

There should be a push begun through as many channels as possible to encourage the reconstitution of well-functioning and democratic local groups.

The NCG should encourage local groups to hold meetings to discuss the next steps, and convene regional all members' meetings to widen the discussion, exchange information and start to rebuild regional links.

Momentum's public message is, generally speaking, lowest common denominator anti-Toryism and soft social democracy, with bits of Stalinism and extreme statism

continued page 5

Forward Momentum sweeps election

By Mohan Sen

Reform group Forward Momentum has swept the board in the elections for Momentum's National Coordinating Group, winning all 20 seats elected by members. Full results at bit.ly/momresults.

Momentum Renewal won the four seats reserved for and chosen by Public Office Holders (councillors and MPs). Since then four people broadly on the Momentum Renewal side have been selected for the seats reserved for non-union "affiliates" – many of them not representing much.

Even with that manoeuvring, Forward Momentum has a clear majority. But that majority is not united by a clear political perspective. Serious debate of the kind that did not really get off the ground during the elections is necessary.

The defeat of the demagogic, lying and witch-hunting campaign run by Momentum Renewal (e.g. see bit.ly/mrislamophobia) is positive. But the politics MR represented are far from defeated. A fight is needed to draw out the political lessons as well as positive ideas and proposals for reorienting Momentum. □

A new iMac

Thanks to Daniel, Stuart, Andrew, Colin, Stephen, John and folkandroots for an additional £1,421 this week. A contribution from a pay rise, responses to an appeal to help us buy a refurbished iMac for our office, and other donations have brought us to £5,237, halfway to our target of £10,000 by 22 November. With the extra iMac, we will be able to produce the paper with a combination of some staff in our office and others working from home. Some of our branches are now back doing street stalls, with attention to covid-distancing and hygiene, on top of our sales at Black Lives Matter and other demonstrations. Help us by sending in your cheques, increasing your standing orders, or making one-off bank transfers or PayPal donations: www.workersliberty.org/donate. □

from page 4

(e.g. presenting the police as "heroes" and any activity the existing state as socialist). It will take a while to seriously sort that out, through serious political argument. Pushing for Momentum to seriously promote working-class and liberation struggles and socialist policies and demands (like taking over the banks as part of transforming the economy in a "Socialist Green New Deal") will help. In any case, recognition that the political message is inadequate and needs shifting is necessary. □

- Forward Momentum's "Plan To Take Momentum Forward": bit.ly/fwdmomentumplan
- Ideas agreed by the FM Policy Committee but not included in the plan: bit.ly/fmplanleftout
- Momentum Internationalists' demands: bit.ly/midemands

- "We need democracy to push the party and the leadership": an interview with new Momentum National Coordinating Group member Abbie Clark done during the campaign, discussing Momentum, Forward Momentum, what the left should fight for, Labour's response to Covid-19, Brexit, the left and Starmer, and other issues.

bit.ly/abbieinterview.

STV for NEC

By Keith Road

The elections for the Constituency Labour Party (CLP) seats on Labour's National Executive (NEC) will this year be conducted by Single Transferable Vote (STV).

Long campaigned for by Open Labour, the move has been voted through by the NEC on 30 June for a process starting 10 July. As noted by Jon Lansman in an NEC report-back for Momentum, many of those who voted for this also voted against the use of STV or AV in other sections. While pleading they want democracy, they also continued the lockdown bar on CLPs making political decisions, with the exception only of NEC nominations and candidate selections.

Solidarity is in favour of STV or similar being used to conduct elections for all sections of the NEC and for most committees in the labour movement. But an existing committee deciding unilaterally on a change in how it is elected, rather than having a rule change at conference, is bad practice.

So some protest is justified. But STV is how the election will be conducted. The legal challenge to it (with support from Unite the Union) looks like a dead end.

This makes the push for a single unified left slate for the CLP section more difficult and less imperative. □



Correction

"[Recovery: green or fossil fuel?](#)", *Solidarity* 553, should have read "Recovery from the 2008-9 economic crises saw the world's largest ever *increase* in emissions: 1.7 Gt CO₂ in 2010 (rebounding after a *decrease* of 0.4 Gt CO₂ in 2009)." □



Wake up Labour!

The 30 June meeting of Labour's NEC voted to license local Labour Parties to have "virtual meetings" and decide NEC nominations, candidate selections, etc., but (by one vote) rejected allowing ordinary political decision-making. Sign here to demand that democracy and accountability be restored: bit.ly/w-u-l □

Travel after lockdown



Environment

By Zack Muddle

In the lockdown, cycling and walking have increased, but public transport traffic has fallen more than car traffic.

Socialists [have long advocated](#) the expansion of public transport, and partly to reduce car use. But at present car traffic is recovering towards pre-lockdown levels much faster than public transport, and that looks likely to continue. That pattern could continue for some time. People don't want to use public transport because it brings a greater risk of infection than travelling alone in a car.

Permanent working-from-home cannot be the answer, even where. Apart from anything else, permanent working-from-home atomise workforces, making union organisation and even ordinary day-to-day solidarity between workers more difficult. Ensuring a good temperature etc. in a large office is also much more energy efficient than many individuals in houses.

Four-day standard working weeks could cut 20% off commuter traffic, and would bring many other benefits. More flexitime would flatten traffic peaks. Options of partial working-from-home (two days in, two days out?) would reduce travel without atomising workforces.

More people have cycled and walked in the lockdown (though mainly not to work), and better "active transport" policies could build on that. 35% of commutes in Copenhagen are by bike. [In the Netherlands](#), 23% of trips made by people over 65 are on a bike, 40% of trips by people under 17 – age is not a barrier.

[In Britain, in 2015](#), commutes by bus averaged 5.3 miles, and by car 10 miles, so similar figures are possible here. An average cyclist could travel 10 miles in under an hour. In urban contexts, traffic systems and lights slow down cars and busses where off-road shortcuts give bikes an advantage. For many journeys, bikes are the fastest mode of transport.

We can get towards that by:

- Configuring streets and cycle routes to be more attractive and pleasant
- Better places for bike storage, showers or changing rooms at work
- Schemes for people to get cheap or free bikes, including e-bikes, and bike maintenance
- Make more streets car-free, and reduce speed limits on others, and stricter rules about overtaking and giving right-of-way to pedestrians and cyclists
- Better bike storage on trains
- Public campaigns to encourage

cycling and walking

What about public transport? The evidence from the Seoul Metro or the Berlin U-Bahn is that even quite busy public transport is not a big virus transmission site, at least if infection levels are low and Covid-19 sufferers and identified contacts are supported to self-isolate rigorously. But it is hard to imagine risk being low if people were packed in as densely as they were in pre-lockdown rush-hour, on, say, the London Tube.

The more workers are guaranteed full self-isolation pay, the less feel economically compelled to travel with – or at risk from – potential Covid-19. Lower net infections, likewise, make public transport safer. Wider PPE provision, more regular cleaning, wider provision of hand-washing and sterilising facilities, and the opening of all ticket barriers, are invaluable.

These changes, alone, would however not be enough to avoid an increase in private car use.

Changes to public transport could allow higher numbers of people to safely travel. Where possible, trains, buses, metros, and the Tube should run more frequently than pre-Covid, and with more carriages.

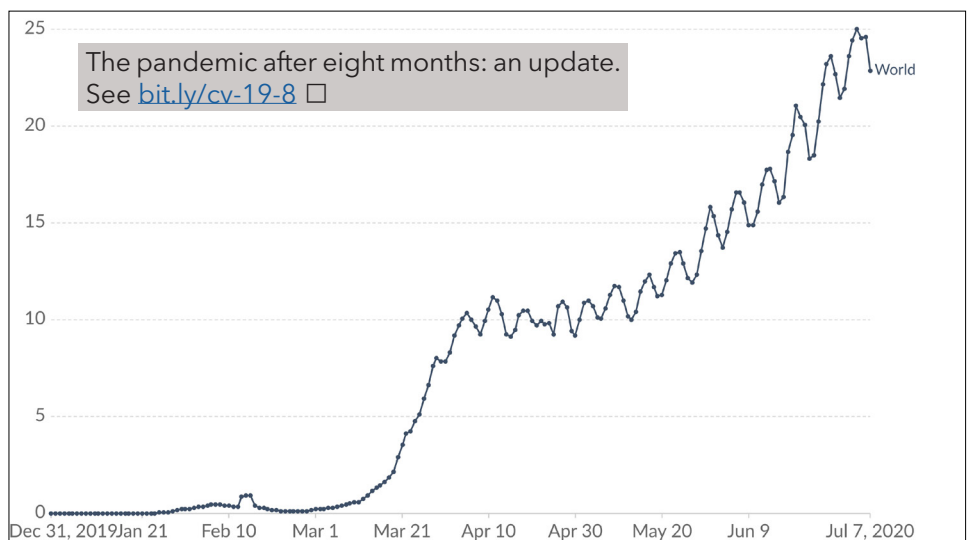
This would all also help longer-term shifts away from cars and airplanes, but requires significant investment, and [upgrading of technologies](#).

While oil prices have now dropped to an historical low, creating a stronger incentive to drive and fly, greener public transport must be much cheaper or free. Much space currently used for car-parking should be repurposed.

The necessary transport routes should not be taken as a given, around which transport must fit.

The configurations of cities grow intertwined with dominant transport methods, but also with the whims of the market.

Denser living is more efficient. More democratically – and rationally – planned distributions within cities of shops and services, homes and parks, workplaces and social spaces will reduce the annoyances and environmental impacts of unnecessarily long journeys. □



£10,000 for maternity care



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Maternity Action has lost its legal challenge to the scheme of charging destitute migrant women for NHS maternity care. Following an oral hearing on 1 July, the High Court denied the charity permission to proceed with a judicial review.

It is considering whether to appeal. The case was brought by Maternity Action on behalf of a woman who was charged more than £10,000 for vital maternity care.

Charging migrants for maternity care deters, delays, or denies access to healthcare for pregnant migrants, those giving birth, or those who need postnatal treatment. This is particularly dangerous as many migrants are more likely to be poor, isolated or marginalised and are already at greater risk of poor maternal health outcomes, including death, and premature birth.

Ros Bragg, Director of Maternity Action, has said:

"For more than ten years, we have been asking the Government to stop putting the health of destitute pregnant women at risk by charging them for essential NHS care, and we will not stop campaigning on this. We know from our research that charging deters vulnerable women from attending for maternity care, putting the lives of women and their babies at risk. These are women who struggle to afford food and shelter. They are in no position to pay for healthcare.

"The pandemic creates new dangers for pregnant women, and particularly for BAME women who are at greater risk of hospitalisation and death. It is of enormous concern to us that the Government is still resisting our calls for suspension of maternity charging.

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 □

• Robert Cuffy, a well-known revolutionary socialist in New York City, and also a founder of the Socialist Workers' Alliance of Guyana, was attacked by an unidentified man on a recent march in New York. Activists are calling for the New York Police Department to fire the officers who ignored this attack and aided the attacker. bit.ly/rcuffy.

• After protests, the sentences of flogging and jail handed down against 41 (apparently: not 42) workers at AzarAb Industries in Arak, Iran, have been annulled. bit.ly/azarab □

"The confidential inquiry into maternal deaths, released last year, found that three women who died were affected by NHS charging. We know from our advice service that there are women with high risk pregnancies who are avoiding maternity care out of fear of incurring a debt they cannot pay.

"The Government claims that it is conducting an internal review of the impact of charging on pregnant women, however this only came to light in the week before the court hearing. Whether the Government is genuinely committed to explore this question remains to be seen."

"The Royal College of Midwives reports the NHS charging regulations are also having a profoundly negative impact on midwives, who report that charging has hindered their ability to form good relationships with vulnerable women.

"Midwives and other health care workers also report feeling stressed and anxious when having to apply the regulations which are complex and often misapplied". □

Fabrication not antisemitic?

By Martin Thomas

No-one, I think, now denies that the story of Minneapolis cops learning neck-kneeling from Israel was a fabrication. But, in the wake of Rebecca Long Bailey's sacking from the Shadow Cabinet, some still suggest – for example, in Momentum's 1 July Zoom report-back from Labour's National Executive – that it wasn't antisemitic.

Denunciations of Israel (so the argument goes) can't be antisemitic, because only antisemites can identify Jews with Israel and consider a denunciation of the Israeli state as an attack on Jewish people.

But here we have a very special sort of denunciation. That it's untrue is the least of it. It attributes to Israel and its international connections a great and malign global power which only supernatural forces could gain for a tiny state with a small diaspora.

Even if the mechanism of that global power is named as "the Israeli lobby" or "Zionism", rather than "the world Jewish conspiracy", it's the same idea.

Jews outside Israel may well dislike the Israeli ruling class. Almost all, however, will have some identification with Israel, at least to the extent of not wanting to see it overrun and its population subjugated or dispersed. They have family or friends there, and they know it has been the "liferaft state" for survivors of the Holocaust and refugees from other antisemitic persecution.

Inescapably they're targeted by stories which tell us that Israel and its international connections are the hub of evil in the world. □

An all-round troublemaker

Rhoda Dakar is "an all-round troublemaker and a musician." She was in all-female Two-Tone band The Bodysnatchers in the 1980s, then in The Special AKA, who recorded Free Nelson Mandela. Her new single with Dub Pistols is Stand Together, "about how we were taking two steps back in the fight against racism and we've got to stand together to move forward again." She talked with Janine Booth about racism and recent events.

On recent events in the USA: It's wrong, but it's not the first time and it won't be the last. As Will Smith said, racism hasn't got worse, it's just got filmed.

It feels like a tipping point. We're all angry, we've been sat at home for weeks. George Floyd was the straw that broke the camel's back.

People in Brussels draped the statue of Leopold II in DRC flags because his reign in the Congo was so brutal. The news person said they were calling him a murderer, when actually they were calling for reparations.

It's just five years ago that the British government finally paid off the reparations to the slave owners for giving up their slaves.

On the difference between policing of BAME communities in the UK and USA:

[UK] police don't routinely carry guns, that's the difference.

My son is 23. He may not have got to that age in the US. He has been handcuffed for cycling on the pavement, and the white woman who walked past, who knew him, did nothing.

I write letters of complaint and get apologies, but the damage is done. Not everybody can write those letters, not everybody's in that position.

On "abolish the police" and "defund the police":

We require a police force, and when there is a problem I will go to the police.

There's no point in defunding. People might need racial awareness training, but you have to deal with the people you have in the police. What we do is hold them to account more.

On the difference between today and the 1980s:

It's very much about black boys and black men. My situation is pretty much the same as then. I didn't get any aggravation going down the street.

On activism:

Everybody should be active as much as they can. But not everybody has time and often the people with the time aren't the people who need the most activism around their situation.

Young people know how to move forward. That's why it is mostly young people on the demos. My children went: I didn't have to tell them to, they knew it was their right, and good on them.

On racism and class:

In this country our biggest problem is class. Class keeps faces like mine out of top universities and top schools.



The disparity between the top 10% and the bottom 10% is getting wider, and there are very few faces of colour in the top 10%.

My white granny used to say that we never needed slaves in this country because we had the working class.

On the left and the labour movement:

In Red Wedge in the eighties, we used to refer to unions and the upper echelons of the party as "the fat men in red ties". They weren't interested in us, in women, in black people. I'm sure it has changed, I'm not sure how much.

How many female Prime Ministers have we had? Two. From what party? The Tory party! And why are there so many black people in the Tories?!

The left doesn't want to be bothered with the likes of me: I'm just trouble. I remember Labour Party Black Sections lecturing Red Wedge about how things should be done. The left does its best but there's a lot of hand-wringing.

On trade unions and universities:

A lot of change has been brought about by two groups. One was unions, but unions don't have the power base that they used to, so the union movement doesn't encompass people in the same way. If you go to meetings you learn, you might read a bit, and if you don't have that conduit into the labour movement then how are people going to get into it?

The other way is being politicised at university. So many people go to uni now, but that's people who already have a bit more privilege. Until the bottom 10% can work reasonable hours, they do not have the time to take part.

So I come back to the fact that the biggest struggle is a class struggle. □

• Abridged. Full interview at bit.ly/rhoda-d

The New Jim Crow

Review by Martin Thomas

Police violence in the USA is only a shore of a whole continent of racial oppression and marginalisation, so Michelle Alexander argues in her 2010 book, now a “classic”, *The New Jim Crow*.

Alexander is a civil rights lawyer by trade. Chunks of the book are lawyerly, dissecting a string of Supreme Court rulings. She says herself that she wouldn’t have got to a “fancy law school” without affirmative action rules.

Her punchline, though, is that racial oppression is knitted into a larger system of social inequality, and measures which create a bigger black middle class aren’t enough. “Piecemeal, top-down policy reform on criminal justice issues... will not get us out of our nation’s racial quagmire...”

“We must join hands with people of all colours who are not content to wait for change to trickle down, and say to those who would stand in our way: Accept all of us or none”. She calls for an “expansive vision [that] could open the door to meaningful alliances between poor and working-class people of all colours [to achieve] a society in which human beings of all races are treated with dignity, and have the right to food, shelter, health care, education, and security”. The left in the 1970s got rolled over in the Reagan-and-after backlash for lack of “finding a way to create a durable, interracial, bottom-up coalition”.

The Jim Crow system of segregation and subordination which dominated the Southern states of the USA from the 1880s-90s to 1965 represented, argues Alexander, a re-configuration and adaptation of racial oppression after the abolition of slavery (in 1865). The mass criminalisation of young African-American men geared round the “War on Drugs” over the last 40 or 50 years represents a new adaptation after the civil rights victories of the 1960s.

Since the 1970s there has been a huge increase in the US prison population, previously stable and proportionately no bigger than other countries’. It has been driven mainly by increased sentences and more police operations which go out to find people to arrest, even though violent and property crimes have been decreasing since the 1980s. The increase in prisoners, in turn, is only, so to speak, the coastal strip of the “New Jim Crow” continent. People classified as “felons”, even if put on probation rather than jailed, are drawn into a vortex of social disadvantage.

- Jobs and welfare. As international capitalist competition sharpened from the late 1960s, US industry restructured dramatically. The gap between better-off and more secure workers, and the low-paid and insecure, grew. Many of the big-city manufacturing jobs which African-Americans had gained over previous decades moved away. Even in 2010, after general unemployment had fallen sharply, one young African-American man in three was unemployed.

Lack of jobs and increasing lack of welfare provision drives people towards crime. And criminalisation drives people to unemployment. Forever after once being found

guilty of (or, most probably, having plea-bargained for) a “felony”, even if it’s only possession of a little marijuana, and even if not jailed, people have to state that record on job application forms. Mostly, they don’t get the jobs. And they’re excluded from what welfare there is.

- Housing and homelessness. US cities are de facto segregated. African-American areas have underfunded schools, “more like prisons”. Cops trawl for drug arrests mostly in minority districts, and get their lucrative higher arrest figures there, although drug use is as high or higher among white Americans.

Ex-prisoners are mostly destitute on release. “Felons” and even their associates are barred from publicly-funded housing. They may have their driver’s licence suspended (for a petty drug offence) so be unable to commute to jobs. Many become homeless. And then the police are after them again.

- Mental health is heavily dealt with as a police problem. Many mentally unwell people end up in prison. And then prison makes them more unwell.

- Politics and law: in the USA, “felons” generally lose the right to vote and to serve on juries, and in sufficient numbers to substantially skew outcomes.

Poverty and economic insecurity generate crime. And, in the USA to an exceptional degree, criminalisation generates poverty.

This system is racist although “colourblind”. And even decriminalisation of drugs won’t be enough to break the malign feedbacks.

Established politicians, Clinton maybe even more than the Republican presidents, have constructed their story about building a secure society for the majority, in a hypercapitalist world of huge insecurity, around the repression of criminals. The story has been “colourblind” but racist “objectively”, as well as allowing maximum effect to the substantial remnants of explicit or implicit racism in individuals.

On the level of individual reactions racism has been beaten back a long way in the USA. That is vital background for building a new movement.

It won’t be easy. Alexander records that Joe Biden has been “one of the Senate’s most strident drug warriors”.

Yet [Alexander wrote](#) that in the protests after the killing of George Floyd, “I’ve glimpsed... a beautiful, courageous nation struggling to be born...”, and the potential to “move beyond civil rights to human rights and democratic socialism”. □

“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! □

The pandemic in New Zealand

By a New Zealand resident

There has been no community transmission of Covid-19 here in New Zealand since early April. The only cases currently being identified are New Zealanders returning from overseas, who are being detected in border quarantine facilities. Life is essentially back to normal. Workplaces, shops, pubs, sports, etc. have all been back to business as usual for about a month. We can travel freely around the country.

The government imposed a highly restrictive lockdown on 25-26 March which lasted for 5-6 weeks, followed by a graduated relaxation of the restrictions. We are currently at the lowest alert level, where the only restrictions we have are around the border remaining more or less closed.

The government has implemented a large financial package to lessen the effects of the lockdown. There have been unrestricted wage subsidies – paid either to employers, or directly to individual contractors, who comprise a large amount of NZ's deregulated workforce. There has even been a financial allowance for artists. Beneficiaries have received a (small) increase, and there was a doubling of the winter fuel subsidy to pensioners and beneficiaries. A 12 week prohibition on landlords terminating tenancies was put in place.

My perspective, from inside health, was that the government had no choice but to lockdown once they saw the projected rates of hospitalisation and critical illness. NZ has the lowest per-capita number of ICU [Intensive Care Unit] beds of the developed world. The Public Health sector was decimated during the National Party years, and was in no way able to rise to the pandemic challenge.

Ardern has framed the responsibilities of physical distancing as "Act like you have Covid" and you're trying not to spread it, rather than the version based around "protect yourself from others". There was a high level of compliance with lockdown.

The emphasis was on health outcomes from the suppression/mitigation strategy initially, but it became apparent that elimination was possible, so the emphasis became on the economic benefits of maintaining elimination. Re-opening the economy with business as usual became a goal, to mitigate the predicted recession.

So much of the NZ economy relies on tourism, however, and this part of the economy has pretty much gone for good. Some high-value economic activity, like the film industry, looks set to blossom given the situation over-

seas. The government had a budget which prioritised a number of infrastructure projects. The wage subsidy will end soon, and I think a number of people will become officially unemployed then, so we don't yet know the true unemployment rate.

It is not all rosy. Lots of people on temporary work visas have lost jobs in the service and tourism sector, and are ineligible for benefits, requiring civil emergency NGOs to provide support. Long term NZ workers who don't have citizenship or residency have been caught on the wrong side of the border and unable to return, with many families separated. Immigration application processing has ground to a halt, both for those already in NZ and those applying to enter.

A two tier benefit system has emerged with those requiring a job seekers benefit because of Covid related factors being eligible for almost double the payments of long-term beneficiaries. There has been a nasty racist dog whistle coming from the Tory National party about the number of Covid cases being diagnosed in the border quarantine facilities and their country of origin.

We cannot really travel, and hardly any non-New-Zealanders can enter, and this may be the situation for a long time. There was talk of a travel bubble with Australia, but the new wave of infections in Melbourne currently has squashed that hope. At best we may be able to travel to the Pacific Islands, but there is great concern for the impact of Covid entering these vulnerable countries. It is only last year that a measles outbreak that originated in NZ led to the deaths of almost 100 Samoan children.

Still, everyone you talk to says "we are so lucky", "we are so lucky to be here", "thanks goodness we have Jacinda" (even the dyed in the wool Tories). It will change as unemployment increases and the wage subsidy ends, but for now we are feeling relieved and fortunate. □

• Abridged. More at bit.ly/c19-nz.



New audio!

Listen, download or subscribe to [Workers' Liberty Audio](#) recordings of our paper, other publications, and many meetings. **New this last fortnight:**

- [Rhoda Dakar](#) (of The Bodysnatchers/The Special AKA) on racism, class and culture
- [The state and the current crisis](#) – with Kate, part of a series on the state, crime, prisons, and the police
- [Starmer and the Labour Left](#) – intro, by Duncan
- [Solidarity 554 part 1](#) and [part 2](#); [553 part 1](#) and [part 2](#)
- Josh Lovell: [Covid-19 and Fighting Council Cuts](#). Josh is a Labour councillor

See workersliberty.org/audio for links to the audio version. All recent episodes can be found through most podcast providers: search "Workers' Liberty" or "Solidarity & More". More information on subscribing and using podcasts at [the URL above](#). □

Vietnam, despite a common border with China and limited economic resources, has had only 369 identified cases of Covid-19 and zero deaths. The government quickly identified cases and contacts, imposed local lockdowns and quarantines, and restricted entry to the country to Vietnamese citizens, who had to serve 14 days quarantine. The website *Equal Times* carries an [article by Joe Buckley](#) highlighting also the role of wildcat workers' action in winning PPE, workplace precautions, and isolation pay. □

Support Tower Hamlets workers!

By Steve Allen

Thousands of council workers in Tower Hamlets struck on 3-6-7 July against mass sackings and the imposition of new, significantly worse terms and conditions under the "Tower Rewards" scheme. As we go to press Tower Hamlets Unison reps have been meeting to discuss their next steps. There may be more strikes in the week starting 13 July.

Picket organisers reported a strong strike turnout and good numbers at socially distanced pickets across the borough, plus many more members "striking from home". Refuse workers organised by Unite and GMB supported the action, and some refused to cross picket lines.

Management attempted to deter pickets by calling police, leading to two supporters being arrested on 6 July. This is the latest shameful tactic employed by a Labour council against its workforce.

Online rallies were held on 3 and 6 July, with about 400 at both. 12 Labour councillors have now spoken out

against the attack. 1,300 Labour members and trade unionists have signed an open letter supporting the workers and calling on the council to withdraw the scheme.

Although the Momentum machine has still put out almost nothing about the strike, the decision of the Momentum NCG to back the workers has sparked incipient controversy about the role of Labour councils, with Labour right-wingers taking to social media and the LabourList site to denounce any criticism.

We should use this dispute to push the other way, to get serious debate about what Labour councils should be doing to stand with rather than attacking their workforces and communities. □

- Sign the open letter in support of the workers: bit.ly/thstatement
- Sign the Free Our Unions statement protesting against the council's striking-breaking and use of Tory anti-union laws: bit.ly/THstrikebreaking
- More on the [Tower Hamlets Unison site](https://bit.ly/towerhamletsunison)

Nationalise social care!

By Rohan Fernando

Simon Stevens, Chief Executive of NHS England, has called for politicians to "decisively answer" how social care can be reorganised to deal with the problems exposed by the Covid-19 crisis.

Stevens is no left-winger. He spent the best part of a decade as Chief Executive of US private healthcare corporation United Health. He has defended and promoted privatisation in the NHS. But so glaring is the problem of a radically fractured and privatised social care system that in his interview with the BBC he hinted at some kind of public ownership:

"If you take back the history coming out of the Second World War, the country at that point was on austerity. We had rationing for bread and potatoes. The founders of the NHS did not use that as a moment to hesitate, they said, 'Let one of the legacies of the war be the creation of the NHS'. That's the same legacy we need for long-term care support in social care coming out of coronavirus."

The government has responded with waffle that makes clear it intends very little to change: "there are complex questions to address... We will bring forward a plan that puts social care on a sustainable footing".

A big problem for challenging this is Labour. Far from responding with a ringing call for public ownership and provision of care, Keir Starmer and Shadow Chancellor Anneliese Dodds replied to Stevens with their own waffle. Starmer: "The system needs a huge amount of work – it has been broken for a long time. I think it has been fractured, it's been underfunded, I think staff have been undervalued and underpaid, and the prime minister needs to take responsibility."

Asked explicitly whether she'd support public ownership, Dodds refused to say.

This is despite the fact that Labour conference voted unanimously for a publicly-owned care system last year.

We need a fight in the Labour Party and labour movement to build a real campaign for public ownership. That is the only serious answer to the question Simon Stevens has posed. □

- 76% want the NHS reinstated as a fully public service, 15% want continued private involvement. 78% want the NHS to receive more public funding to deliver services, 11% want more money for private providers – Survation poll for We Own It campaign, July 2020
- Sign the [Safe and Equal](https://bit.ly/safeandequal) statement for public ownership and a labour movement campaign to win it: bit.ly/socialcarestatement
- More on social care: bit.ly/socialarticle

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

Uni staff rally against cuts

By Cath Fletcher

On 25 June over 500 people attended an online rally jointly organised by branches of the University and College Union (UCU) at Imperial College, SOAS, Roehampton and Liverpool Universities in parallel with socially-distanced protests in Liverpool and London.

Those institutions are facing some of the harshest cuts in the university sector. Management at Reading have threatened to sack the entire workforce and rehire only those prepared to accept inferior terms and conditions. Roehampton staff have been asked to take a voluntary pay cut, and a redundancy scheme is up and running. Their branch has passed a motion to initiate a formal local dispute.

Across the sector non-renewal of fixed-term contracts and withdrawal of hourly-paid work for Graduate Teaching Assistants is the norm, leaving permanent staff faced with an enormous rise in workload – especially as most courses will have to be delivered in both online and face-to-face forms next year to allow for self-isolating and clinically vulnerable students. Multiple institutions have suspended research leave.

The rally heard calls for the national leadership to step up. UCU held a national rally with over 2,000 people in attendance to launch its “Fund the Future” campaign in mid-June. This is primarily a political lobbying campaign aimed at winning government financial support for both Further and Higher Education.

That’s a good first step but it feels a long way from the immediate dire impact of the cuts on many workers’ lives. Already prior to Covid-19 some institutions had been through multiple rounds of redundancies. Marketisation was leading to course closures – for example at Sunderland and Portsmouth – even before the pandemic hit.

The branches involved in the rally – the second of two grass-roots protests – are on Twitter as UCU Solidarity Movement @ucu_solidarity. There is potential for this initiative to develop into the rank-and-file organisation UCU needs to unite branches in struggle.

UCU branches and activists will also need to build links and campaigns with the other unions on campuses, notably Unison and Unite. These represent admin, technical and manual workers who are also going to be hit by any cuts. This will not be easy or obvious, as these unions are generally less well-organised than UCU, but unity across job families could be crucial to building a campaign that can win.

Recent controversy over plans to impose a flat-rate levy to cover strike pay for the 2019/20 HE dispute has shown there’s still a long way to go to build a serious industrial strategy in UCU. Members were informed by email that an additional £15 would be deducted via direct debits alongside this summer’s subs. At a time of job cuts this was remarkably insensitive, and it has rightly been withdrawn in favour of a push to fundraise and a levy as yet unspecified but likely to be targeted at higher subs bands.

The specific proposal (backed by the Independent Broad Left and General Secretary) was rushed through at an NEC back in February, at which members were told progressive contributions weren’t an option – a position that’s now changed. But the hole in the strike fund is partly a product of a UCU Left proposal to offer more generous strike pay without being sure that could be met by fundraising.

Many branches, meanwhile, have taken up calls raised by the Black Lives Matters campaign. Four years after Oriel College first promised to remove its notorious Rhodes statue – only then to u-turn when donors objected – the college says it will be taken down.

Under public pressure after outrageous racist comments, David Starkey has resigned from Fitzwilliam College Cambridge. It’s nine years on from his similarly racist observations on the London riots, but better late than never.

Broader calls to “decolonise the curriculum” need to be properly resourced. Asking already overstretched staff to train to teach new topics without the necessary preparation time is unacceptable. Many of the best-prepared staff for this work are among the most junior and most precariously employed.

At Goldsmiths College the wildcat marking boycott has now largely ended, with a formal motion from the union branch to move into dispute if management don’t present Equalities Impact Assessments of their job cuts, which strikers say disproportionately affect Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff. □



New videos!

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

- [The state and the current crisis](#) in “The state, crime, prisons, and police” series
- [Rhoda Dakar \(of The Bodysnatchers/The Special AKA\) on racism, class and culture](#) – interview with Janine
- [The Anti-Social Family part 1/2](#), intro speeches from the Socialist feminist reading group
- [Organise to make the future!](#) Solidarity editorial
- [What is the police? Where did it come from?](#) A two-minute doodle intro □

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

“” 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 □

BA threatens “fire and re-hire”

By Mark Simon

British Airways has seized on the pandemic crisis to attack the terms and conditions of its entire workforce. Using the claim that they need to impose redundancies, they are attempting to fire and re-hire every BA worker.

Only weeks into the furlough scheme, with the state picking up almost the whole wage bill for BA staff, the company issued redundancy notices to 42,000 staff, with a deadline of 14 June to accept a wholesale change to their contracts and pay.

BA was one of the first companies to argue that the lockdown left them no choice but to cut jobs and wages. Unite, the main union in BA, has exposed this lie, pointing out the plan by International Airlines Group (BA's holding company) to spend a billion on buying a Spanish airline, IAG's £2.6 billion plus profit in 2019, and the average £446 million per year paid out in dividends.

In the good times money flows into profit and dividends but when things get tough it's the workers who bear the cost. This sad truth is now being played out across the world economy.

Planned attack

BA has been planning this attack for over a decade. Willie Walsh (previously chief exec of BA and now chief exec of IAG) saw the pandemic as a golden opportunity to finish the attack he launched on BA workers in 2009. Since a dispute in 2010, BA management has been building a two tier workforce by only taking on new staff on worse terms and conditions than pre-2010 staff. This led to a long strike by those on the worse cabin crew contract in 2017.

As lockdown started, Walsh leaped into action, grabbing money from the Government to furlough the vast majority of staff with one hand, while issuing 42,000 redundancy notices with the other. The largest union, Unite, reacted by challenging the legality of redundancy consultation of staff who were furloughed, and there was a hiatus of several weeks.

It was a very difficult situation for workers. The vast majority were not at work. With a looming deadline of 14 June, the long-windedness of the legal process for an industrial action ballot made going for a legal strike inadequate; but with so few at work, even an unofficial walk out was impractical.

Unite launched a crisis “leverage campaign”, BABetrayal.com, in early May targeting corporate clients, partners and financiers of IAG. Small, targeted protests across the UK, Spain and even in New York, promoted by a social media campaign telling the truth about IAG's wealth, have pushed MPs – even leading Tory MPs – to go on record against the actions of BA. The Tory-led Transport Select Committee that questioned Walsh called BA's treatment of its workers a “national disgrace”.

The reaction amongst the public, in the press and in parliament has clearly worried a BA management looking for big bailouts. Willie Walsh scrapped the 14 June deadline in a radio interview.

Still, talks with the unions have not yet started, and the threat of “fire and rehire” on top of 12,000 redundancies remains. The BABetrayal.com leverage campaign has shown that despite the current very difficult circumstances, a fightback by the unions is possible.

That start needs to be built on, and the follow-up should include clear demands for social ownership of industries that insist on putting profits first even in a pandemic. □

((•)) 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](https://www.facebook.com/workersliberty), and (if not before) [instagram](https://www.instagram.com/workersliberty), [youtube](https://www.youtube.com/workersliberty), and generally [twitter](https://twitter.com/workersliberty). From Wednesday 1 to Tuesday 7 July:

Thursday 9 July, 1.30pm: “Make Labour fight for “grand schemes”! *Solidarity* editorial (see page 3)

Monday 13 July, 1.30pm: Marxists on the US Civil War and the fight against slavery



Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings open to all, held via zoom videocalling. From Wednesday 8 to Sunday 26 July, excluding ongoing study courses:

Sunday 12 July, 11am-12.30pm: [Winning in schools for all workers](#), with AWL school workers

Sunday 12 July, 6.30-8pm: [Towards a new revolutionary left?](#) A panel debate with speakers from Workers' Liberty, Mutiny, and Red Flag

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

Sunday 26 July, 6:30-8pm: [The Black Jacobins and the Haitian revolution](#).

For more, see workersliberty.org/c19-online □

Working-class politics and anarchism

A Workers' Liberty pamphlet



Featured book

How do the revolutionary anticapitalist traditions of Marxism and of anarchism differ, and how do they overlap? Articles, debates, and other exchanges between members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and writers and activists from different strands of anarchism. 140 pages, £5

workersliberty.org/books

Halting the job cuts express

From the **Off the Rails railworkers' blog**

We know that job cuts are coming, thundering down the track towards us like a runaway freight train, loaded with attacks on our pay, conditions and pensions as well.

Wabtec has already announced job cuts at its Doncaster rail equipment refurbishment site, Heathrow Express is threatening to cut over a hundred posts, and we can be sure that more will follow. The best way to stem the flow is to fight effectively from the outset.

But how? Most importantly, we need to decide to fight the attacks on our jobs and conditions! In a traumatised world with a damaged economy, it can be difficult to feel confident and belligerent about defending ourselves, but defend ourselves we must.

And we need to fight to win, not just to limit the damage. If our unions respond to redundancies by arguing about the terms, then we have already lost. Instead, let's unite the whole workforce against any cuts in jobs: those whose jobs are under threat, and also those who stand to keep their job but with greater workload and worse conditions because their workmates have been sacked.

We need imaginative and militant industrial action – occupations, strikes, "action short of strikes" – in a coherent

strategy drawn up by rank-and-file workers through democratic discussions in the unions.

Our resistance will be more effective if we put forward an alternative. The law allows unions to formally propose alternatives to redundancies. If our unions do this – proposing to save jobs and instead cut bosses' pay, end outsourcing, and demand government funding – we can win support from the wider labour movement and community by publicising our positive vision for transport services.

For example, if post-Covid austerity leads to accessibility improvement projects being scrapped, then disabled people's organisations will support our fight against this, defend our jobs as well as their access rights.

All the localised and company-specific fights will be stronger if we fight them as part of a national campaign. Such a campaign can make the political case against job cuts.

We can make the case for public transport. It is not a service just to passengers, but also to employers. We take their workers to work and their customers to their outlets every day. We literally help deliver their profits – it is only right that those profits be taxed to fund public transport, which in turn must be publicly-owned. In France, employers pay a "payroll tax" towards public transport provision. Why not here?

Whenever there is a crisis, there is a struggle between the capitalist class and the working class as to which will pay for it. We don't need to start a class war, as it is already brewing and will soon start to boil: we need to fight our side of it. The cost of coronavirus needs to be borne by the broadest shoulders. The rich and big business can pay.

If the Tories and employers get their way, rail and transport workers, who they lauded as key workers and heroes at the peak of the pandemic, will be discarded as collateral damage afterwards. And while it is unusual for us to express any sympathy with the rail companies, there is a bitter irony in transport providers now being penalised for doing the right thing and telling people not to travel.

If they had refused to do so, they would have drawn more revenue and suffered less financially – but thousands more people would be dead. □

More online

McDonnell and Osamor back the Uyghurs

Labour MPs John McDonnell and Kate Osamor spoke at a Uyghur Solidarity Campaign meeting on 5 July

bit.ly/mcd-o-uyg

Prospects in Australia

On top of a new local flare-up of the virus in early July, Australia faces big social issues after lockdown. Janet Burstall surveys the prospects for struggle.

bit.ly/aus-cv

Two new translations from Trotsky on antisemitism and reactions to it

Stan Crooke has translated Trotsky's articles on the 1911-13 Beilis frame-up and on the attempted assassination (by another Zionist) of Zionist leader Max Nordau in 1904

bit.ly/ldt-beylis and bit.ly/ldt-nordau

Media and prejudice in the 60s and 70s

Tilly Bean looks back at the days of The Black and White Minstrel Show

bit.ly/tilly-b

Left voices in Singapore's election

The ruling party is sure of a big majority. But, Sara Lee reports, there are more left voices this time.

bit.ly/poll-sg

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The right to refuse



John Moloney

The government is pressing ahead with its plan to re-open job centres and driving instruction centres to the public from 6 July. We've given advice to our members in those sectors that we thinking this return to public-facing work is unsafe, and have reminded them of their rights to refuse unsafe work. We'll back up groups of members who take that action.

We don't know exactly how things will play out. 60% of staff in the Department for Work and Pensions are already working from the physical workplace, rather than from home. DWP workers have continued to see particularly vulnerable claimants physically, but the vast bulk of work has been over the phone. The government's plan is about opening the doors of job centres to the public, at a time when unemployment is soaring and there'll be millions of new claimants. Safety measures like perspex screens have been installed, but we have little confidence in these; some have shattered on installation.

We know there's deep unease amongst middle management in DWP about the reopening, a wholly political act undertaken to promote the government's narrative that the economy is opening back up and we're getting back to normal. The reinstatement of sanctions, which will take place next month, is also an act of spectacular cruelty in current circumstances.

We held a national DWP reps' meeting online last week to discuss plans, and our reps will meet again. This will be an ongoing organising issue, with reps making dynamic assessments of the safety situation in the workplace and having to respond. There is some culture in DWP of job centre workers walking out in response to workmates being attacked or injured, so if we see an incident like that, we could see action in response.

We also expect the chancellor to announce a significant staffing increase in the DWP, in the tens of thousands. The department has already taken on additional agency and casual staff; the union will be fighting for these jobs to be made permanent. □

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

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 **Online meetings & resources: workersliberty.org/c19-online**

More efficient = less profit



Diary of an engineer

By Emma Rickman

The new plant manager, who began work in February, has resigned after four months. His resignation email praises the professionalism and warm welcome from all staff, and offers no explanation for his leaving or details of his next job.

His message is also surprisingly poorly worded, with many spelling mistakes. I speculate that he's unused to writing his own correspondence, and the "warm welcome" is meant sarcastically.

The control room gossip has always been "he won't last long". Being sandwiched between the Sheffield City director and the gang of plant Operators must have left him with very little power. When the plant tripped on an electrical fault last month, neither Northern Powergrid nor Veolia were able to resolve responsibility or cause – or at least neither would admit it to the maintenance team.

The ex-plant manager once proposed to the Operators that improving boiler efficiency should be pursued, so that the plant could extract more energy from the waste burned. The operators explained to him that the opposite was desirable – Veolia do not make money selling power and heat, they make it from the disposal of waste. Each kilo tipped on the site is paid for by the government, commercial or private customers. A private customer, such as the owner of a private GP surgery, will pay £300 per kilo to have sensitive medical records incinerated.

If the boiler were to made more efficient, each kilo of waste would transfer more of its heat into the feed water, generating more steam, driving the turbine faster for longer, and generating more power. The turbine and the generator are already kept running continuously at full capacity; with improvements to the boiler they could be kept at full capacity with less waste burnt. But Veolia want to burn as much waste as possible, filling and emptying the tipping hall quickly to make space for more waste and more customers. Waste is not a fuel to be saved, it's a commodity on a fast-moving "low-carbon" production line; it would be more profitable to make the boiler less efficient.

My colleagues wonder if it was this absurdity which tipped our new manager over the edge. From working in steel and nuclear power where small efficiencies to huge processes save millions, he moved to a small scale bin-burner managed by petulant accountants. I didn't like him, but sometimes I sympathise. □

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

Solidarity



For a workers' government

UNION TELLS WORKERS: YOU HAVE RIGHT TO REFUSE UNSAFE WORK

By Paul McStay

On 29 June the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) announced that it was re-introducing benefit conditionality, or sanctions, from 1 July. Conditionality was suspended at the start of lockdown for all claimants as it wasn't practical to look for work. This also meant that staff could be redeployed on processing the millions of new Universal Credit claims.

Secretary of State (and arch right-winger) Theresa Coffey announced her intention that 14 Jobcentres would open on 2 July. As it happens only one opened, Marylebone. That was going to open come what may so Coffey could get her photo op and the DWP could produce a sinister propaganda video.

The health and safety officer of the DWP London region PCS [civil service workers' union] attended the Marylebone site risk assessment the day before, along with the PCS branch secretary. Both have extensive health and safety experience.

They both said they could not sign off the risk assessment because of inadequate control measures, mostly around cleaning of devices used by members of the public, PPE, and control measures for BAME staff.

Like many corporate organisations, DWP have attempted to appropriate the Black Lives Matter campaign. They tell us they are in listening mode when they could say that BAME staff can shield, just like they do with staff that have health issues that make them extremely vulnerable.

Nationally PCS has been unable to sign off the national risk assessment due to its inadequacies and the undue haste of the consultation process, which could be measured in hours rather than days. A Zoom call was held for all DWP reps, and 225 joined.

National lay negotiators and the Full Time Officer who is head of bargaining explained that the Union will back any member, or groups of members, who wish to withdraw themselves from serious and imminent danger. They did not go as far as to encourage action.

As we go to press we do not yet know how many members will withdraw themselves from the workplace. This is a structure test for the union.

Like the rest of the movement, our structures are not in the best of shape at the moment. We can have all the legal rights in the world but they are no good if we can't enforce those rights through collective action.

As for sanctions, a DWP select committee report published in November 2018 described them as "at worst counter-productive". Sanctions increase the hostility between the individual and the DWP. There is very little evidence that sanctions make individuals more likely to get a job, or move closer to the labour market to use the Government's parlance. They should be abandoned.

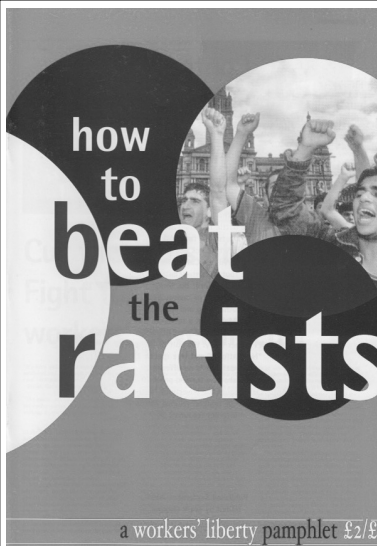
Leaving aside moral arguments, they should be dropped on the basis of efficacy. That is unlikely to happen because they are there for ideological reasons. It's your fault you haven't got a job!

The question then posed is how do we get rid of them. Some have argued that PCS should have a policy to encourage members not to implement them. That would probably constitute industrial action and require a ballot.

PCS has recently had three national ballots, two of them statutory, on the issue of pay. We have been unable to get over the 50% threshold. That was not because we have had national leaders or a bureaucracy trying to stop a strike. The National Executive and HQ officers wanted strikes to happen.

As I've said above, the PCS structures are in a dire position at the moment. They need re-building. Some of us have been arguing for years that many in the leadership in denial about where we are organisationally as a union. □

• See also John Moloney's column, page 15



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