

THE 152nd ANNUAL TRADES UNION CONGRESS

.....

Held virtually via Zoom

on:

**Monday 14th September 2020
and
Tuesday 15th September 2020**

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Congress President:

GED NICHOLS

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**PROCEEDINGS – DAY ONE
(Monday 14th September 2020)**

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FIRST DAY: MONDAY SEPTEMBER 14

(Congress assembled at 10.00 a.m.)

The President's Opening Remarks

The President (*Ged Nichols*): Hello. My name is Ged Nichols and I am the General Secretary of the finance union, Accord, and this year's TUC President. I have great pleasure in opening this the TUC's 152nd Congress. To keep us all safe this year's Congress is a little bit different. Usually we would have hundreds of delegates at our Congress representing working people in every conceivable industry and profession from every part of the UK. Instead, today we will be joined online by thousands of people watching us at home, or in their offices, or workplaces. Welcome to each and every one of you.

This is the first time in our 152-year history that we are holding Congress online. What could possibly go wrong! Over the next two days we will talk about the big issues that matter to working people, their families, and their communities. We will talk about the huge impact of Coronavirus on working lives, how we stop mass unemployment, and express our thanks to our key workers for their hard work and dedication.

We will hear from union leaders as well as frontline workers, people working in supermarkets, care homes, theatres, or the NHS, factories, or the people I represent in my day job, those in bank branches and contact centres. Today we will also hear from the TUC's General Secretary, Frances O'Grady, and tomorrow we will welcome Keir Starmer, the Leader of the Opposition.

Before I open our first debate on how we put safety first I would like to say a few words. It is a huge pleasure to be your President this year and to bring solidarity from my own union, Accord. Friends, this Congress is unlike any other. We meet in a mixed and economic slump and a public health emergency but trade unionism has never been more important than now and this is our opportunity to make our collective voice heard. That is why over the next two days we will be demanding jobs, security, and dignity for working people, for real change to come out of this crisis.

When I took over as President last year I could not have imagined a year like this. Within months we had the General Election and Labour's worst defeat since 1935, which was a body blow to our Movement. Tomorrow, we will be hearing from Keir Starmer about the road to recovery, about how we can work together to build an alternative future for our country, and that is doubly important because hot on the heels of the election, of course, we had Brexit and while the UK has now left the EU we are still in the transition period, and what happens in the next few weeks will be absolutely critical. The risk of a catastrophic no deal departure is alarmingly real and our Movement must fight tooth-and-nail because no deal would be a disaster for our jobs, our rights, and our services.

Friends, we may have left the EU on 31st January but the world as we know it changed just a few weeks later. Covid-19 has been the biggest challenge we faced in generations, the UK has suffered terribly from the global pandemic and more people have died here than anywhere else in Europe, among them workers just doing their jobs. Our economy has been the hardest hit in the OECD and the most disadvantaged people, notably our BME communities have borne the brunt. This is because the

pandemic has exposed the depth of inequalities in modern Britain, inequalities of race, class, gender, disability, and sexuality, and the urgent need to address them.

Amidst the despair of Covid there is hope too because it is not the great and the good that have kept the country going, not the hedge fund bosses and the captains of industry, but the labour of working people, people we are incredibly proud to represent in our NHS and public services, in transport, distribution, and energy, and in our High Streets workers in supermarkets and shops keeping people fed, and my own members in banks and call centres helping workers to manage their finances.

The crisis has shown that those doing the most important work are often those paid the least and later this morning we will be calling for key workers to get the pay rise that they deserve and, Congress, that should be just the start because when this is over there can be no going back to business as usual, low pay, stagnant living standards, austerity, these must be consigned to the economic history books. Brexit, automation, and climate change demand that we get our act together, invest for the future and build a new economy that meets the needs of working people, providing good jobs and wages, great public services, and world-class infrastructure, an economy with strong trade unions winning for workers, spreading prosperity to all classes, communities, and regions.

Friends, this is our 2020 vision and this is the moment to demand the change that workers need, to build on recent successes and really grow our Movement and to win a fairer, greener, more prosperous future not just for the few, not just for the many, but for all. Have a great Congress and solidarity to all of you.

Congress, I would now like to open up our first discussion with the General Council's Statement on Working People on the Front Line of Coronavirus. Beforehand I would like to remind everyone contributing to our discussions about the statement of conduct that was circulated to all speakers in advance. It goes without saying that we expect all attendees to behave in a courteous and respectful manner.

In a moment I will ask Liz Snape of Unison to introduce the statement on behalf of the General Council. After that I will take contributions from other colleagues. Everyone speaking after Liz will have up to three minutes to make their contribution. We will take a series of speakers in our discussions. All those who are speaking should have received a Zoom link in advance. If you are scheduled to speak and have not received this Zoom link or you are watching on the Congress live site, please contact Kevin Rowan in the GPC office as soon as possible and we will try to get you the correct link.

We will formally take the vote on this General Council Statement and all of the others at our meeting of the extended General Council this afternoon. If that is all clear, and I hope it is, I would like to start our first debate on Working People on the Frontline of Coronavirus.

General Council Statement 1: Safety First – Working People on the front line of Covid-19.

Video played to Congress.

The President: I would like to ask Liz Snape to move the first General Council Statement on Safety First.

Liz Snape (*Unison*): Good morning, Ged, and good morning, Congress. Congress, like never before the Coronavirus has brought into sharp focus the vital role our unions play in keeping workers safe and be in no doubt it is our trade union expertise and our trade union action that served to save lives, not just those of our members but of the wider public too. It has been unions leading the way on PPE, on testing, and on risk assessments, with the leadership of our Movement that has been sadly lacking by those in power. Far too often the Government have failed to take the action needed to keep the faith, with failed and hollow promises on PPE, it has failed to provide adequate funding for the HSE, it has failed to provide the adequate support to those who are sick or self-isolating, and it has failed to respond to the ongoing multiple crisis on testing and on track-and-trace.

The world pandemic has wreaked its havoc on our people and this litany of government failure, of neglect, of negligence, has exacerbated the crisis and it is a crisis that has so tragically taken the lives of so many of our members. It is a crisis, too, that exposed the inequalities that run deep in our society, black workers, migrant workers, disabled workers, women, have all borne the brunt of this crisis. But, as Ged said, more than anything it has exposed that deep division in our society, that class division with the lowest paid, the poor, and the most vulnerable paying the highest price as always.

That inequality runs deep with a miserly sum of statutory sick pay, many now left with the option of going to work sick, or going hungry, and those sectors that we

campaigned against for years, social care, food processing, the garment industry with appalling employment practices, all exposed, all hit hard, and all ravaged. It has been tough, Congress, but we have never shied away when things got tough. We have never been afraid of speaking truth to power, of making a stand or putting up a fight. That is why trade unions were created not for the good times but for times like this, crises like this, to defend our workers and to protect each other. We can do this because we are geared up and we are ready like always, and be proud of the work we do and we have done since March, with Kevin and Shelley at the TUC inspiring work over the past few months, our Health & Safety Officers in every one of our unions valued more than ever, but more than anything now rightly centre stage, our army of Health & Safety reps, visible and vital in all our workplaces across our four nations. We thank every one of you for the crucial roles you play more critical than ever and pivotal in moving forward.

Congress, our demands have never been clearer, they are set out clearly in our statement, and our role has never been more vital. Congress, this is our time to continue doing what is right, to continue doing what is needed, this TUC saving livelihoods, this TUC saving lives, and this TUC putting your safety first. Thank you.

The President: Thank you so much, Liz, for opening the discussion with that powerful speech and I would now like to ask Gail Cartmail from Unite to speak next.

Gail Cartmail (Unite): Thank you very much, President. Good morning, everybody. Without doubt it is our workplace reps who are the backbone of the frontline defence against Covid-19 and they have, as Liz said, worked tirelessly and proven yet again that a unionised workplace is a safer workplace. So, we demand the Government

respects and recognises the role of trade unions and that must start with a commitment to repeal the Trade Union Act and not least to lift restrictions faced by unions to gain recognition and elect reps. Unionised workplaces see incidents and accidents, and ill health, cut between 25 and 50%. Those facts speak for themselves and to fulfil their role our reps must have adequate paid time off. We need to buck the trend of cutting back facility time. Health & Safety cannot be left to grace and favour. Our reps should have the back-up of the Health & Safety Executive and public health officials so we call on the Government to fully restore funding to the Health & Safety Executive and to restore funding to local government.

Colleagues, why not a new right to access non-union workplaces where the involvement of our army of safety reps would guarantee better health and safety? Faced with the pandemic we have negotiated and we have been an integral part of carrying out risk assessments and we have worked with governments on guidance and called out shortcomings. We say all risk assessments should be published on an official government website and, as Liz pointed out, we know that disproportionate numbers of frontline workers who have lost their lives are black and of Asian heritage. We also know pregnant women and disabled workers are vulnerable to the pandemic and that is why Unite and our Movement have produced guidance on specific risk assessments that take these factors into account.

As we learn more about pandemic evidence of long Covid suggests that three-quarters of patients admitted to hospital suffer ongoing symptoms so employers must provide adequate sick pay provision to allow recovery, workers cannot survive on SSP, and it is essential that the Government immediately increases statutory sick pay to a real living wage level, which is also essential to support workers self-isolating.

As a Movement we salute our reps, our strength is our collective organisation, and representation is our strength. Let's step up to the challenge of growing our Movement, increasing our workplace strength, and of course together making work safer. Thank you.

The President: Thank you, Gail. Next I would like to ask James Anthony from Unison to make a contribution.

James Anthony (*Unison*): I am Vice President of Unison and a nurse working in the Health Service. Health & Safety in the workplace has always been one of the top issues for workers and for union reps but Covid-19 put it to the top of the media and political agenda as well. For nurses like me, along with other health and care workers, it has been a frightening time as colleagues fell ill around us and too many lost their life. The anger and frustration were palpable in the NHS with many staff working under the constant threat of running out of vital PPE but often partnership working at local and national level meant the issues were identified and dealt with.

Our members in social care and nursing homes fared far worse, too often an afterthought for policymakers, and with a fragmented and privatised system broken long before Covid-19. For Unison these members are a priority and together we have achieved improvements in PPE guidelines to reflect what our members on the ground needed based on their experience. We achieved funding to pay social care staff who need to self-isolate but are still having to fight across a number of employers to make sure this happens. It is vital for care staff, too often on or even below the minimum wage, to be able to afford to isolate to protect the service users. I worked as a care assistant and I can tell you this is highly skilled work, not low skilled like this

Government call it, but it must be clear for all to see now that we need a national care service with national standards, including improved pay and conditions for staff.

It was Unison and other unions that spoke up for our black members as it became clear that they were being disproportionately affected and union reps locally who were ensuring appropriate risk assessments are carried out and action is taken to protect black staff.

Unions organising does not only help protect our members it helps protect our service users too. Research just published shows a 30% reduction in mortality in unionised nursing homes. Think about that, in that study deaths went down by a third when staff working in the home were unionised, trade unions literally saving lives. You would not think so given the way the Westminster government take unions in education as being the enemy that somehow seems to hate children. If anything, it is the confusion and ineptitude of Johnson's government that led to students and parents being understandably worried. It is unions and our members in schools, colleges, and universities, working to ensure the safe return but only when it is safe to do so.

In tough times many workers turn to unions. Members have been joining us in droves but we have been working to ensure they stay with us and get active within the union, and this has meant boosting the number of vital Health & Safety reps to help us deal with the pandemic and beyond.

Today, we are launching our *No Going Back to Normal* campaign because you clapped us and we thank you, it was a real boost for us in those dark times but now help us make sure we do not go back to the undervalued public service workers in

unsafe workplaces in an unsafe society. Our support and solidarity for each other is the only thing that will get us through this pandemic, let's build a new society based on those values, no going back to normal. Thank you.

The President: Thanks very much, James. I would now like to ask Mary Bousted, from the National Education Union, to speak.

Mary Bousted (*National Education Union*): Thank you, President. When people fear for their health and safety they look around and see who can offer some protection and for the NEU, in the Covid crisis, members and new members have turned to their union. Our *Only When It's Safe* campaign to open schools and colleges safely generated a petition of 500,000 signatures. We trended on Twitter. NEU members wrote 70,000 letters to their MPs. In June, the NEU, with Unison, the GMB, and Unite, created a digital Health & Safety checklist up and we asked our members who are not reps to become checklist monitors and hundreds did so, and are now reps all but in name.

Working with the other unions we created a new checklist for this September's schools and college openings. We rang all our reps in the week before schools and colleges started to make sure they had filled in the checklist. The data we had from these calls and the digital app means that we are creating real time information about the Covid readiness, or unreadiness, of our members' workplaces. We are using this information to put pressure on the Government to keep our members safe.

The NEU website has had 9.7 million views, the most viewed being the NEU advice on Health & Safety. The NEU has not let Covid stop our communications with

members: 100,000 members have joined our Zoom calls. On 18th May, we held a Zoom call with 20,000 members on it, which is a world record. We made all our calls accessible by investing in advance subtitles and BSL interpreters. We have hosted regular Zoom calls with officers and reps explaining to them what they should be doing at each stage of the pandemic and pointing them to any NEU guidance and resources.

The NEU rep density has increased by 12%, 72% of the new reps are women, and we have doubled our percentage of black and LGBT+ reps. 700 reps attended our new online Health & Safety course. 1,000 new reps attended our virtual 90-minute new reps briefing which was focused on setting up JNCs, holding virtual meetings with members, and communicating with them. 2,000 reps have attended our regional online training, and our trained reps have acted decisively, 71% of them have held formal meetings with school and college management, 85% have set up virtual communication platforms such as WhatsApp to speak to their members during the pandemic, and as potential members having seen the power of the union and the power of the NEU they have joined us, and we have recruited over 50,000 new members. Over 7,000 members have attended union training and the most popular course is supporting children during the pandemic, which shows where our members' hearts and professional integrity lie.

We stepped up. We have not let a terrible crisis to go to waste. We have used it to show our members, and potential members, the power of the union and we will continue to develop and trial new ways to engage our members, they deserve no less. Through them we will build the strength of the union and keep our members safe at work.

The President: Thanks, Mary, for the perspective from the education sector. I would now like to ask Dave McCrossen, from the shop workers' union USDAW, to join the discussion. Dave.

Dave McCrossen (USDAW): Thank you, President. I am the Deputy General Secretary of USDAW. Congress, safe working conditions have always been a fundamentally important issue for the Trade Union Movement and if we did not know it already the Coronavirus has clearly shown why this has been such a key issue for us in workplaces over many years. Many USDAW members working in supermarkets and shops, and making deliveries to people's homes, driving lorries, and working in food production, are key workers and have worked throughout this crisis. Workers in retail faced unprecedented levels of risk as they went about their job to ensure that food was available and that the shelves in our stores did not go empty.

Across all sectors trade unions worked long and hard negotiating with employers to minimise risks and make workplaces as safe as they possibly could. The Trade Union Movement has been tested to the absolute limit by this virus and, indeed, by this sham of a government. We all stepped up and we all met that challenge. The Trade Union Movement has every reason to be proud of what we have achieved during this crisis, risk assessments, social distancing, protective screens, face coverings, hand sanitizers, limiting numbers in store, full pay for those who could not work, and bonuses for those who were at the front line. These are just some of the measures that we fought for and won in our supermarkets, in our shops, and in distribution centres.

Sadly, we have been shocked to see that Covid-safe measures which were designed to protect staff and shoppers have led to flashpoints which have led to abuse from some customers. The vast majority of customers recognised and fully supported the efforts being made by staff in stores. But even at the height of this pandemic a significant minority of customers were abusing and threatening shop workers. Usdaw's research has shown that thousands of retail workers faced abuse and of even greater concern we found that verbal abuse of shop workers more than doubled during the crisis. Of those 5,000 retail workers who were surveyed over 200 shockingly were actual victims of physical assault. Key workers on the front line encouraging people to follow basic safety measures deserve better and that is why USDAW has launched a petition calling on the Government to make it a specific offence to abuse, threaten, or assault a shop worker. So far over 60,000 people have signed that online petition. At 100,000 signatures the Government have to formally consider it for a debate in parliament. I urge everybody today to sign that petition, ask your family to do the same, ask your work colleagues and your friends. During this crisis shop workers were finally recognised as key workers, something that we knew all along. Now the time has come for all of our key workers to get the protections that they deserve. Please add your name to the online petition today. The link can be found on the USDAW website. Thank you and enjoy the rest of Congress.

The President: Thanks, Dave, for that contribution. I would now like to ask Mike Clancy from Prospect to make his contribution. Mike.

Mike Clancy (*Prospect*): Good morning, President, colleagues across the Trade Union Movement. Prospect represents members across the public and private sector and we are privileged to represent a lot of people who are safety experts, none more

so than our membership in the HSE who have been key to so much of our work in the last few months.

What I want to focus upon is how attitudes from the past can frame the problems of the present. In 2012, David Cameron in a New Year message told us how he was going to kill the monster of Health & Safety culture, how he was going to banish a lot of this pointless time-wasting from the economy and British life once and for all.

The last six months have allowed us to see the consequences of that perspective and it reached an interesting point when a fellow traveller at the dispatch box, the Prime Minister, told us how there was going to be spot checks and inspections by the HSE as a confidence-building measure in the midst of the crisis. It would be good if we had an HSE that the Prime Minister thought we had but what we really have is the consequence of the Cameron perspective playing out not only in relation to Health & Safety but across our public services. What we have also seen is how that monster of Health & Safety has now become essential to how we live our lives, how businesses operate, how it is essential to commerce. What we need to do is banish the thought for good that Health & Safety, good regulation, agile regulation, is anything other than the way we have to live our lives.

What is also important for us to recognise as trade unions is that in the early part of this period of the pandemic we were very much seen as part of the solution. We brought ideas to government, they reached for us, and trade unions were there filling the headlines full of positive messages as our members went about dealing with this crisis. The same applies to Health & Safety, it is not about know, it is about how, how safely and how we enable good public services and good businesses.

We can see the consequences for the HSE in the attitude of previous governments over the last decade. The HSE funding has been cut by 50%. Prosecutions successfully pursued are down by about 48%. The spot inspections, the nature of pro-activity that the Prime Minister thought existed is a figment of imagination that is uninformed by fact. The HSE, its management, our members, have performed regulatory gymnastics just to have reach, despite all of these cuts.

It is really important to reflect there are more MPs than there are frontline inspectors. HSE, like many public servants, have suffered from the cuts in relation to pay. Just recently the £14m that the Government announced, which is a one-off contribution to the HSE, was being used to fund in a way to fill gaps that have been arising for some time and bringing back inspectors who previously had retired. That is just one example of how the HSE has had to cope with what has been pressed upon it.

The public is on our side. Our polling tells us that 67% of people expect and want physical inspections of the workplace. 52% of people were telling us in our polling that a phone inspection would not breed the confidence in them to return to their workplace, to continue to work in their workplace successfully and safely. Around a third of people, and this is probably most concerning, did not believe that their concerns, if they identified them, would be properly inspected, properly reported upon by their employer, and brought to resolution.

We should not kid ourselves, we do not have the environment in which safety is being delivered at the level that is needed to enable successful commerce and our civic life to continue whilst we continue to adjust to the virus. So like other trade unionists we

echo the importance of consulting with trade unions, working with our safety representatives, and reminding people that unionised workplaces are the safest of workplaces. We want a properly funded HSE, self-evidently that has to be built upon a track-and-trace system that works, not just in someone's imagination but in the practical experience of citizens of this country. We want a clear, coherent, public information campaign that carries us over the next six months in a way that we can breed confidence in what we have to do to live lives, to work and protect each other. We want to be part of the solution, for employers to work collaboratively with us and ensure that the sentiments of this statement are delivered as we go through this next period. Congress, thank you.

The President: Thank you, Mike. I would now like to ask Jane Loftus from the Communication Workers Union to make a contribution.

Jane Loftus (*Communication Workers Union*): Good morning, Ged, and good morning, Congress. I am the Vice President of the CWU, a union that covers postal, telecom, and financial service workers. First of all, I would like to pay tribute to all those people who lost their lives at the early part of the pandemic and to the families and friends of those people who are still recovering. The postal workers did take a hit during that time. We were all announced as key workers but, unfortunately, like so many other unions and society as a whole, when we paid tribute to the people who had lost their lives in our industries you could clearly see that the BAME membership was affected disproportionately and we need to make sure that they are safe in any up and coming lockdowns and that we do address the issues that the *Black Lives Matter* movement is raising.

All workers deserve Covid-safe workplaces whether you are in a union or not. All people in society expect the places that we go to do our shopping, or go to work, should all be safe. Unfortunately, Covid-safe workplaces cost money and that is what we have seen within Royal Mail and other organisations. Employers do not want to pay this extra money and then will do anything they can to cut back or tell you it is safe and abuse people's vulnerability during this extremely dangerous time of the pandemic.

When we went into lockdown the CWU and the postal sector had just delivered a massive Yes vote. It is a very bitter dispute and therefore we did not go into lockdown in the best frame of mind. That has continued at the beginning of lockdown with daily battles in the workplaces that our local reps and our Health & Safety reps have had to deal with on a daily basis about safe ways of working, what correct PPE people should have, and the social distancing within workplaces.

During this point the Royal Mail decided that they wanted to change everyone's duties and the time that they would go to work. This affected about 80,000 workers. You all know your postal workers, they have been out on our streets delivering throughout and they have become again a valued member of society, but they wanted to change all these duties. Our members stood together, we could see no sense, it was not the right thing to do during lockdown, and as a consequence people refused to change. People said No. Rico Back, a union-busting CEO brought in to break the CWU, resigned, a marvellous victory during the lockdown and the pandemic, but it still continues today. We still have to fight for our safe workplaces. Things have got slightly better but we all know if an employer can get any more money out of you, or can do it cheaper they will do and that is why we are seeing mass redundancies now

where we know if the economy comes back those people would still be employed and then they start recruiting on lesser terms and conditions.

What I have seen throughout the pandemic is the solidarity that people have shown to each other, the support the workers have given to each other. When we had the clapping you saw convoys of postal workers going to the hospitals to show support and solidarity. We know we have to fight and we know we have to be united and fight for what we want, we have to fight for safe workplaces, and we also have to fight against the attack on our terms and conditions.

By standing together showing solidarity, by supporting each other, we can deliver a better workplace, a better society, one where no one is left behind, and one where all workers are valued. The lesson of the pandemic is if you stand together we can deliver change and change for the better, and we need to do this going forward because one victory for one sector of the workplace i.e. I would say if the National Health workers were given a decent pay rise, is a victory for all of us. We show what real trade unionism is and that is ensuring not only a worker's safety but that we are fighting for better working conditions and a fairer share in society.

Join a union if you are not in a union. If you are in a union encourage your family, friends, and people that you are in contact with to join a union. It is now time that we stand together to ensure this Government does not inflict any more pain on ordinary workers and stand united as the Trade Union Congress to ensure all workers benefit from safe workplaces. Thank you very much.

The President: Thanks very much, Jane. I know that those contributing from home do not have the traffic light systems in front of them, I still do, and I have been quite generous with the past couple of speakers who have gone over the allocated three minutes. Can I just ask for cooperation from other speakers, please, to keep your contributions to time, if you possibly can. Next up we have Harley Vardakis from Nautilus International. Harley, I invite you to make your contribution.

Harley Vardakis (*Nautilus International*): Hello, and thank you, Ged, and Congress, for having me here today. I am a current member of Nautilus International. It is my first addressing Congress today and I am very pleased to be here. During the Coronavirus pandemic many people went into lockdown, their homes also became their workplace and they were unable to see family and friends for many months. Welcome to the life of a seafarer. We work away from our family and friends for anything from three to six months plus at a time, working every day and often with very little connectivity on board meaning we cannot keep in regular contact with our loved ones back home.

UK Seafarers were designated key workers during the pandemic due to our responsibility in providing 95% of everything to the UK. However, in the most part, we continued to operate out of sight and out of mind. In many other countries as the situation developed and became even more worse, they closed their borders to us meaning we have been unable to return home at the end of our contracts and others were stuck at home unable to relieve us.

My three-month contract turned into a five-month contract on board, while both my parents were stuck at home with the virus, which makes staying on board that much

harder. Seafarers work every day for up to 12 hours per day and as much as we love our jobs it can be extremely difficult when you believe you are going home to be told you are now no longer. This situation continues today. While many of us are trying to get back to normal after the Covid lockdown around 300,000 seafarers worldwide are still unable to return home to their families, some having been working for more than 365 days straight. The risk to safe working and mental health as a result of this I hope is obvious to all. Many of my colleagues in the industry who are unable to join their ships were unable to access any sort of governmental support because our employers can register our employment in tax havens and not pay employer National Insurance contributions. Seafarers also receive tax rebates due to being out of the country for more than 183 days a year. Those seafarers who cannot now get to work will be unable to access this rebate. Despite the Government waiving the rules for wealthy non-dom equivalents, these key workers and their families now face a massive triple whammy of no work, no financial support, and a massive unbudgeted tax bill.

I call on Congress to think back to their time in lockdown and spare a thought for our seafarers where this is our every day and I ask for your unwavering support for those working to get us back home to our families. Thank you.

The President: Thank you, Harley, for that really interesting contribution and well done on your first contribution to a Trade Union Congress. I hope that you get the opportunity to make many more. I would now like to ask Mark Serwotka from PCS to speak. Mark.

Mark Serwotka (*Public and Commercial Services Union*): Morning, Ged. Good morning, Congress. I wanted to start by paying tribute to the thousands of PCS members who have done a magnificent job during the pandemic, our members in the DWP dealing with 2.6 million claims to Universal Credit, our members in HMRC who have delivered the Government's furlough scheme, our members across prisons and the justice system, working in transport, in devolved government, all of those have helped, as have our members in the ports and the borders. They have shown what this country needs, dedication to deliver a frontline public service and because they are in a union, like many we have heard from today, there is a strong union that has thousands of workplace activists who I also want to pay tribute to. We have been successful for the pandemic in trying to keep the overwhelming bulk of our members safe. For those who have to be in work we have tried to keep those workplaces safe but for the majority we have successfully got them working from home where they have been able to deliver frontline services.

What a contrast that approach is to this chaotic Government. As this resolution sets out I have no doubt in saying the actions of this Government have contributed to thousands of deaths that could have been avoided, to hundreds and thousands of frontline public sector workers being put at risk because of the irresponsibility of the Government, and they must be held to account, there must be a public inquiry, and we should never forget what the Government have done in this pandemic. They are about now to make that worse.

In the civil service the people we represent are being subjected to the most awful political decisions. The Government to cover up the fact that it is ending the furlough scheme is now pretending to care for the economy and it is trying to use its own low

paid workers as an example by forcing them back into the workplace. 80% of all civil servants are expected now to report to a workplace by the end of September. That is irresponsible and at a time when the R rate is rising, when local lockdowns are having to be put in force it is the actions of a disgraceful government. Contrast that to the Scottish government, that today has notified all Scottish civil servants that they will continue to work from home until 2021.

Our union and our members are not prepared to stand for that. We will stand against anyone being forced back into a workplace where it is not safe to do so. This week we will start talking to our thousands of reps who are serving our members and we are prepared to take action if that is what is needed to keep them safe. My appeal to this Movement is simply this: if we work together we can keep people safe and we can hold this Government to account. If we work together there are, for example, six different campaigns run by unions around the appalling level of statutory sick pay, it would be more effective if we have a single joint campaign. Nobody should be forced back to work when they are ill because they cannot afford to live on the appalling levels of statutory sick pay.

Our message is this: we thank all key workers and we thank all trade unionists who have performed magnificently during this crisis. We will hold this Government to account but in the here and now we will work with others to keep every trade unionist safe to ensure nobody's health and safety is put at risk by the actions of this disgraceful Government. Thanks very much, Ged.

The President: Thank you, Mark. I would like to ask Jill Taylor from the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists to speak next.

Jill Taylor (*Chartered Society of Physiotherapists*): President, Congress, speaking in support of the General Council Statement. As a frontline worker within the NHS I have had firsthand experience of working throughout the pandemic. Myself and my team specialise in burns and hand trauma, a service which remained essential and pressurised during the effects of lockdown, dealing with industrial injuries and accidents at home and on our wards. My colleagues and I have all worked above and beyond our roles making sacrifices, including isolating ourselves from close family members to keep them safe.

As a local CSP union rep I am proud of what I and fellow reps have done to protect members at work. I am proud of what my union, other health unions, and the wider union Movement has achieved in the most trying circumstances to stand up for the health and safety, and jobs, of millions of working families.

Over the past few months society has been badly battered and bruised and many lives have been lost. We all know somebody who has been hurt or suffered in some way and, sadly, we cannot say the worst is over, far from it. With the numbers of cases going up Covid-19 remains a real danger, the economy is already on its knees, and we are facing the end of furlough and possible further Brexit-related difficulties.

Over the coming months public services will inevitably be stretched to breaking point as we take the strain of a society where millions may be out of jobs. Millions of children and young people are at risk of becoming a lost generation where many have suffered rising scandalous levels of domestic violence and mental illness, which is fast becoming a second pandemic the Royal College of Physicians has warned us.

Our NHS is short of tens of thousands of staff and patients are facing rising waiting times. Huge demands will be placed on the service as suspended services are restored to meet the long-term rehab needs of Covid survivors. We must retain current staff and attract new staff, and fair and decent pay is central to this. That is why the CSP is calling on the TUC to join health unions in calling for a meaningful and immediate pay rise for NHS staff. More broadly, the pandemic has shown us how there must be no returning to the way things were before. The TUC has been long calling for a new deal for workers and their families. This is now needed urgently with quality employment, quality public services, and health, safety, and wellbeing, at the heart of it. Thank you.

The President: Thank you, Jill. Next we have Matt Wrack from the Firefighters Union. Matt, I invite you to speak.

Matt Wrack (*Fire Brigades Union*): President, Congress, I want to add the thanks of the Fire Brigade Union to the millions of workers who have worked through the months of lockdown earlier this year and have continued to work through this crisis. It has been workers who have borne the brunt of the worst aspects of the pandemic and it has been workers who have got us through those terrible months. We need to remember it was workers in both the public and private sectors so we reject any attempts now to play divide and rule between us. We stood together to save lives and we stand together in defence of our rights.

Our members, firefighters, and emergency control staff, along with the huge range of workers represented at this Congress, went above and beyond to do their duty to our

communities. Millions of those workers are members of our trade unions. I have said this before, when politicians and the media start attacking us point them to those key workers and tell the politicians that is what trade unionists look like.

In the Fire & Rescue Service the FBU was able to use our UK-wide collective bargaining arrangements to improve safety during the pandemic. We negotiated a collective agreement for additional work that firefighters could do to protect our communities and to assist NHS and social care staff in tackling the virus. This agreement protected terms and conditions, protected contractual rights, and it built in safety and risk assessment from the start. It enabled us to expand to 14 additional tasks that our members engaged in. This involved everything from delivering essential packages, driving ambulances, delivering and fitting PPE, moving the deceased, as well as working in Nightingale hospitals and care homes. Of the Fire & Rescue Service three-quarters provided personnel for ambulance driving, more than 70% were involved in delivering PPE mostly for the NHS and ambulance services, and almost two-thirds had assisted with the movements of dead people to mortuaries. Almost half assisted with the face-fitting of PPE masks.

Thousands of firefighters were proud to volunteer to do that work. We are immensely proud to support our members to ensure risk assessments were carried out and the right prevention and control measures were put in place. We have extended that collective agreement because of the risks of a second wave and while the Westminster government has failed miserably workers in our unions have shown our worth during the pandemic. It will be up to us in coming months to step up once more to defend our members and to protect our communities once again. Thank you, Congress.

The President: Thank you, Matt. I would now like to ask Ann Deane from the GMB to make her contribution.

Ann Deane (GMB): Thank you, President. Congress, I am speaking for GMB in support of the Statement. This pandemic has cruelly exposed which workers are exploited to keep this country running. It has cruelly exposed which lives are deemed to be of more worth than others. The Statement explains the direct link between poor employment standards and adequate terms and conditions, and the risk of exposure. As the Statement sets out huge Covid spikes have occurred in textile factories and meat processing plants, reminding us all that packed and unsafe factories are still part of our economy. These workers and their poor working conditions might not have become part of the national concern if not for the pandemic.

GMB also welcomes the inclusion of the issue deriding the disproportionate effect Covid-19 has had on BAME workers. They say that the virus does not discriminate but it is clear that our society does.

In supporting the Statement we must highlight the issues that health and social care workers have faced throughout this pandemic with inadequate pay and with only statutory sick pay provisions care workers have been going to work putting themselves at risk and those they care for. For too long workers and service users have both been afforded the bare minimum by care providers and the state, and in GMB's most recent survey of the care workforce 81% have responded and said they would be forced into work if they became ill on statutory sick pay. By relying on statutory sick pay alone in its current form most care workers lose £250 a week, on average. A further 80% of respondents say they would have to consider borrowing

money from friends or family, or even going into debt in order to make ends meet and in a pandemic what about the responsibility they have to those who they care for and for their own families. What a terrible choice to have to make to be penalised by statutory sick pay or do the right thing and take sick leave.

This is why GMB is campaigning for full pay for care workers from year six. All of us here today will have clapped for our nurses, doctors, and care workers, in the first few months of the most severe lockdown restrictions. We know the worth of these care workers and many members of the public do too. The General Council Statement calls on the Government to recognise the worth of all workers and to make their workplaces safe. We have a great responsibility as trade unionists to fight for these workers and for their rights as a robust union representation can keep these workers safe and this deadly virus out of our workplaces. Please support the Statement. Thank you.

The President: Thank you so much, Ann. I would now like to ask Jo Grady from the University and College Union to speak. Jo.

Jo Grady (*University and College Union*): Hi, Ged. Before I start I just wanted to pay tribute to the thousands of UCU members and hundreds of UCU staff who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic. Education never stopped even if politicians keep referring to universities, colleges, and schools, as having been closed. UCU members have taught students throughout. They have serviced online resources. They have continued all of the administrative functions that we need to carry on in our institutions and they have worked hard to protect each other. At the beginning of lockdown this meant demanding health and safety for prison educators

alongside protecting jobs for the precariously employed by getting the furlough scheme extended to them and pushing employers to top up any lost income.

This month, however, we face another challenge as millions of students and hundreds of thousands of staff in adult further and higher education have been pushed to return to in-person study and work on campuses across the UK and yet the Government's own scientific advisory group on emergencies is telling us to get ready for outbreaks in our institutions. It is warning that the return to in-person working could cause a second wave at the very worst time of the year, but this wave is preventable.

We do not have to live out the awful future that we can see ahead of us. UCU has called for as much work to be done as possible remotely. This will make our workplaces as safe as possible for anyone who does have to be there and avoid more chaos for learners when things inevitably are forced to move online again. We are the ones calling for caution and planning. The Government and sector leaders are ploughing ahead because they have constructed a marketplace for education that needed ultimate consumers, our students, to pay fees and rent. Unions are the only organisations with the power to keep workplaces and the wider population safe in situations like these but we need to be clear and realistic about where that power comes from.

The TUC statement for Congress on safe working practices sets out measures which outline how workers should be kept safe if, and it is a big if, the Government and employers follow them. There is a deeper lesson we need to take from the past few months. The real power of our Movement lies in the mass participation by workers who take the initiative to speak out and act decisively when they know they are right.

When UCU members stood by their students last month over the exams fiasco we demonstrated what can happen when you campaign unapologetically about injustice. We supported the NUS in their clear, coherent, and assertive set of demands, the Government saw this and it forced a U-turn.

The whole approach of this Government to its disciplines has been to ignore disaster that is on the horizon. They have no answers that do not rely on rebooting the economy by asking us to pay with our health. They point fingers at minority groups when the consequences of their instructions manifest themselves and people get sick, their sole intention is to get the economy going again but the economy is broken and it does not serve us. They may not have the answers but we do: we have them on climate change, we have them on economic justice, on anti-racism, on every other challenge we face, and now is the time to talk to everybody you know to organise with them to join together because it is the only way working people have ever defended themselves, protected their communities, or advanced their collective interests.

Now, unions are the vehicle for this and it is very important that everybody joins one but ultimately workers make unions, people who show up and say, “Enough”, and UCU members are doing this now all over the UK. They are doing it to protect themselves, their students, and the sector that they love. So, to everybody watching this, please support your local college, your university, and we are also going to need you later this year to help us support prison workers in education. We need everyone to pull together to keep the whole of the UK safe. Where the Government will not act people and their trade unions must. Thank you.

The President: Thanks, Jo. Finally in this section I am going to ask Sarah Woolley from the Bakers Union to speak. Welcome, Sarah.

Sarah Woolley (*Bakers, Food & Allied Workers Union*): Thanks, Ged. I am General Secretary of the Bakers, Food, and Allied Workers Union, representing thousands of workers in the food industry that have kept our nation fed through this pandemic. Congress, statutory sick pay is a very real issue for our members in the food industry and has been for a long time, especially for those in unrecognised workplaces, part-time workers on low contracted hours, and for those on zero-hours contracts.

Through the pandemic even though our members have been classed as key workers they often have not been treated as such. We have seen examples of members working at Greencore being forced to isolate due to breakouts of positive Covid cases in their workplaces yet expected to survive on statutory sick pay at £95.85 a week, which barely covers their rent never mind anything else. We have seen four households that had to have their wages slashed as each of them has had to isolate due to being in contact with a positive case after one of them displayed symptoms, and by doing the right thing by staying at home they have been penalised for doing so financially.

For many of our members their wages are the only income they have. We have many migrant workers who do not have access to the full range of benefits British nationals have, for example, the changes to housing benefits stops them from being able to claim it, despite the myths and lies suggesting otherwise. Also, the flaws in the Universal Credit system means that even those who can claim it for support receive it far too late to make a difference leaving many relying on £95.85 a week, or even

nothing if they do not meet the earnings threshold, which affects over two million workers in the UK.

The BFAWU agree with the TUC's position on removing the earnings threshold for statutory sick pay making it payable from day one as a right and increasing the level to the rate of a real living wage. We do not believe it goes far enough and as it stands it is too easy for a Tory government and their supporters to ask where the money is going to come from. Along with other unions and organisations the Bakers have launched a new campaign around statutory sick pay. We are calling for the Government to legislate for full rights to at least six weeks of contractual sick pay for all workers from day one at 100% of wages. The scheme will be funded by those employers not committing paying company sick pay for the first six weeks so there is no extra burden on the taxpayer there. After six weeks statutory sick pay would kick in for 28 weeks at an increased rate and would cover all workers. Those on zero-hours contracts or short contracted hours would receive pay based on an average of the last 12 weeks.

As a union we strive to improve the lives of people working in our industry where pay is often low and hours precarious and this campaign is designed to do just that. When people are ill with Covid, or any illness, the last thing they need on top of that is the stress and worry about how they are going to eat, pay the bills, support their children, or simply just survive. This campaign provides the necessary changes to statutory sick pay that means people will not be plunged into poverty or be penalised financially just for being ill. Thank you.

The President: Thanks, Sarah, and thanks to all of the speakers in that really important debate. As I said earlier, we will take a formal vote on the Statement at the General Council Meeting later today. Colleagues, I would now like to ask the TUC's General Secretary, Frances O'Grady, to make her contribution to Congress. Over the last six months Frances has been at the forefront of the TUC's efforts to secure the health, lives, and livelihoods, of working people in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. Normally, at this stage of our Congress Frances would be addressing a packed hall in a Conference Centre and it is a bit of a change from the usual arrangements today. Frances, I am sure everybody watching at home or at work will still be looking forward to what you have to say, so over to you.

Address by the General Secretary of the TUC, Frances O'Grady.

The General Secretary: Thanks to our President for his kindness, humour, and patience, especially when he has to remind us yet again that we are on mute! Thanks to the General Council for their wisdom and camaraderie and thanks to all our brilliant workplace reps and organisers. Trade union membership grew again this year, that is three years in a row, more women and men standing together for a fair deal for working people.

Sometimes this Movement falls short of its ideals. There are battles that I thought my generation had won and would not have to keep on fighting, including on sexual harassment, but let there be no doubt this is a "me too" moment for our unions, women demand dignity and justice and our Movement must pass the test. True trade unionism is about common purpose between all working people here in Britain and around the world, treating each other with respect, looking after each other, winning

better working lives, and if there is one lesson that we have learned from this terrible pandemic it is that there is such a thing as society. We have shopped for our neighbours, kept each other safe, saved jobs and livelihoods.

It takes a whole community to beat a pandemic. It cannot just be done from Westminster corridors or company board rooms, we all have to play our part, yet some in the establishment behave as if there is one rule for them and another for everybody else. Too often ministers struggle to imagine lives that are unlike their own, like when the Prime Minister ordered a return to work without a proper plan for public transport, and precious little thought about working mums and dads, and childcare; instead, a useless app, a mutant algorithm, and a half-baked test-and-trace system, less moon shot, more a case of moonshine.

This crisis could not make it plainer how much we need diversity in decision-making, practical life experience, competence, challenge, and that is why I argued for trade unions to have a seat at the table. Unions have always stepped up in national emergencies and we always will. We first called for a national recovery council in March to plan for the good green jobs we need, with unions and business on equal terms. Maybe if Government had listened then we would be in a better place now. It is no coincidence that the scheme that paid the wages of over nine million workers was the one that unions had pushed for, the job retention scheme, not perfect but millions of livelihoods were saved, employees and the self-employed.

From Thursday this week it will be just 45 days before the job retention scheme is due to end. That is the 45-day notice period that companies have to give if they intend to make mass redundancies, and if Government does not act we face a tsunami of job

losses. This is not about obsolete jobs or zombie firms, these jobs are on the line for one reason only, the global pandemic, and they do have a future. Once this pandemic is under control people will still want to fly on holiday and go to gigs, and shows, and if we are to earn our way in the world Britain will still need steel and manufacturing.

The pandemic is not scheduled to end in October so neither should state support for jobs. It is so much better to keep people working, paying their taxes, spending their wages, helping to rebuild the economy. Perhaps this Government needs reminding about what mass unemployment does to a country: the despair of a young generation's dreams crushed, or joining the dole queue in your 50s afraid that you will never work again, and what happens to local pride in identity when overnight a town's biggest employer goes bust.

Now, I lived through mass unemployment in the 80s, in fact I was a fan of the Coventry band, The Specials, so, yes, let's talk about ghost towns and let me tell you flexible working will not destroy our town centres but you can bet your life that widespread poverty will. Some say the numbers out of work could rise to 2.5, 3, or even 4 million. The price of unemployment is always too high and it is always paid by ordinary working families. That is why this Movement will always stand for the right of everyone to a decent job, full employment, the chance to work and to get on in life for everyone.

Here is what the TUC proposes: in return for state support firms must come up with credible plans to rebuild hours and productivity, a new job protection and skills deal, a three-way bargain, the employer brings people back at least on short hours, during downtime workers retrain and upskill, and the state subsidises wages on condition that

employers pay at least 80% of the normal rate. Let me be clear, there should be no blank cheque for business, no handouts for board room bonanzas, shareholders must tighten their belts, and to qualify every company must pay their fair share of taxes here in the UK.

When the crisis began the Chancellor said he would do whatever it takes. He must keep that promise. Some will ask, can the country afford to do it? The answer is we cannot afford not to. The Chancellor must learn the lessons of the job retention scheme and keep on supporting jobs.

My message to the Chancellor is this: we worked together once before, we are ready to work with you again if you are serious about stopping the catastrophe of mass unemployment. Rishi Sunak, stand by working families. Don't walk away. Whatever happens we will not give up. Unions will fight for every job, even more so with the clock ticking down on Brexit. The Government must stop the bluster, buckle down, we need a good deal. Putting more jobs at risk as unemployment rises is plain irresponsible. We know who gets targeted first for layoffs, young people on insecure contracts, disabled people and those shielding, pregnant workers, and black workers, much more likely to be at risk in the pandemic working on the front line but too often when it came to proper PPE stuck at the back of the queue.

This summer has seen a reckoning long overdue for the injustice that black people face in the UK as in the US and around the world. Trade unions must play our part with open minds and open hearts. This Movement is drawn from the society we live in. Our history like this country is scarred with racism, it is right to acknowledge it,

but we also have a proud history of fighting racism and we know that when black workers rise we all rise.

We do not need another review to know what needs to change, the Government must act now. They could start by making employers publish their race pay gaps and then fix them, and ban zero-hours contracts that keep too many black workers poor. Coronavirus is no leveller, on the contrary it has exposed huge inequality in modern Britain. The new working class, heading out to hard work for low wages, if you get ill statutory sick pay just £96 a week. Matt Hancock even admitted he could not live on that so how can he expect workers to stay home and self-isolate if it means they cannot afford to feed their families.

Too many workplaces still are not safe. When we asked low paid workers what the boss had done to reduce risk, one in four said “Nothing”, zero. That tells us a lot about the pursuit of profit over safety. Thank you, Prime Minister, but we do not need another pep talk about returning to work. From the start, whether on the shop floor or from the kitchen table, millions have worked hard through this crisis. Instead, we need this Government to get tough on workplace safety and deliver decent sick pay, hard work should pay for everyone, no matter who you are or what kind of job you do, yet too many of those who kept this country going through the crisis do not get the respect they deserve. They do valuable work, skilled work, but they are short-changed.

So, I have a message for this Government and the Red Wall Tories about the minimum wage, that is the wage of 2 million key workers, it must rise as planned. Don't punch down on the working poor. Key workers have shown courage,

dedication, that is real civic duty. Now it is time for Government and employers to repay that debt, fix their contracts, raise their pay, give people dignity at work.

Congress, I will end with this, on behalf of our Trade Union Movement I say to all key workers, staff in shops, energy, utilities, firefighters, and prison staff, bus drivers and railway workers, delivery drivers and posties, refuse collectors and civil servants, teachers, and support staff, our wonderful members in the NHS and social care, thank you for your sacrifice and for your service. This country must make a promise to you and to all working people, there must be no return to business as usual. We demand a new deal for working people and we will not rest until we win. Thank you, Congress.

The President: Thank you very much, Frances. It is strange not to hear the hall echoing with applause at the end of one of your speeches. Thank you for your leadership as well during this incredibly challenging period.

Special Feature: Key Workers

THE PRESIDENT: Colleagues, I would now like to move to a special feature and it is all about key workers, postal workers, teachers and support staff, and all of the others that Frances just mentioned, the nurses, police, and justice workers, civil servants, for all our social care workers, NHS staff, and my own members in the finance sector, and thousands of others. It was their hard work and dedication that got us through the crisis. Colleagues, I am sure you will agree that it is time for the key workers to get the decent pay that they have earned. It is time to raise the minimum wage and to ban zero-hours contracts that leave carers, shop workers, and delivery drivers struggling.

Today, we are launching the TUC's campaign for decent pay for key workers and a new deal for working people.

Video shown to Congress.

The President: I would now like to invite some of our key workers to share their stories. Could I ask Sandra Persaud from the National Education Union to talk about her experiences. Sandra.

Sandra Persaud (*National Education Union*): Thank you. Good morning. My name is Sandra and I have been a primary school teacher for over 20 years. This is my first time speaking at Congress.

My learning curve during the pandemic was steep to ensure that all children had access to home learning. I learnt how to use online platforms and made videos, I adapted lesson plans so that parents knew how to teach them, and I made regular calls home which were sometimes upsetting. I often worked until the early hours just so that I could teach my own grandchildren during the day and as a union rep I had many phone calls and discussions, and meetings, with concerned staff. As we went back to the classrooms we were told we did not need PPE as schools are apparently safe with social distancing, which is practically impossible with younger children. Regular hand-washing eats into our teaching time, social distancing makes it difficult to teach children in small groups as we have to teach all subjects as usual plus extra catch-up sessions in literacy and maths. We also have to be ready to teach online as soon as

our bubbles have to isolate so how on earth do we ensure that all children catch up under these circumstances.

Teachers have always worked under pressure. We have always gone above and beyond to do the best for our pupils. We have a huge workload and yet as this pandemic has shown we will adapt readily for any new situation quickly. Parents appreciate us more than ever before and they have a new found respect for the work that we do. A pay rise is not only deserved it would be a great motivator to continue our good work. It would also show respect for all that we do even at great risk to our own health because we genuinely do care. Thank you for listening.

The President: Thank you, Sandra, and well done on your first contribution to Congress. We will now hear from Taj Salam from Unite.

Taj Salam (Unite): Good morning, Chair, Congress. I am a bus worker and a trade union lay official at local level for Unite the Union. During the Covid crisis PPE was slow to arrive and the cleaning regime was not great but trade union intervention helped to speed things up. Current issues are around money handling, face-covering, and social distancing. Our collective bargaining agreements have been suspended so some of us are at work around 15 hours a day, which will impact on our health too. We are afraid that this situation could go on for months to come. We have been classified as key workers, along with many others, and we have shown commitment to keep the towns and cities moving. We have carried on turning up for work while we have been worried about our own and our family's health and safety. We do want to see a decent pay rise and good working conditions, which will give us assurances

that we are being appreciated in action rather than just in words. Thank you, President.

The President: Thank you, Taj. I would now like to ask Sian Stockham from Unison to share her story.

Sian Stockham (*Unison*): Thank you, President, Congress. I am a frontline carer who has two part-time posts, one on a rehabilitation and rehab unit, and the other supporting adults with learning disabilities. Due to the pandemic I have only worked on the rehab unit and across the care sector things have become very intense. Due to staff shielding staff were asked to cancel leave and we worked extra hours. Staff across the care sector have had concerns about the lack of the correct PPE and at the beginning the constant changing of the guidelines on how to use it and when to use it. There have been issues with masks that cause a rash on the skin, hand-wash that was too strong and caused cracks in the skin. The different guidelines between the four nations have also confused people and caused anger and confusion.

I love the job I do. It has never been so hard or important. We are looking after people because of the lockdown and because they are unable to see their families and in some cases with gentle words and kindness ease their passing. All carers deserve more than a clap. We deserve to be fairly paid.

The President: Thank you, Sian. Up next I would like to introduce Stefan Campbell, from Usdaw. Stefan.

Stefan Campbell (*Usdaw*): Hi there. I am a team leader for Co-Op Food. My job role entails running a large grocery store ensuring everything from ordering stocks and supplies to filling shelves, to the point of purchase, is carried out in the most efficient way possible. My experience during the pandemic so far has been one that has pushed me to work 60-plus hour weeks and 17-hour days due to nearly 40% of my team having to self-isolate at some point. On top of this I have had to shop for the elderly and vulnerable family and friends to ensure they have everything they need to self-isolate safely as the Government failed to provide this essential service.

One further addition to my job because of the pandemic was restricting sales of products that there was a national shortage of, such as hand-sanitizer and cleaning chemicals. This was in an effort not to let a person's wealth being a deciding factor in their access to these essential goods. This was not government policy, instead it was a moral decision to put people before profits. The side effect of this was me suffering verbal abuse, being spat at, physically assaulted, from enforcing a policy that benefited everyone.

A meaningful pay rise to key workers would be a step towards a fairer society and the recognition that no one profession is more important than a key worker and as such why key workers need an equitable pay rise as they are the backbone of any society. Thank you.

The President: Thank you very much, Stefan. I would now like to ask Erin Whealan from GMB to share her story.

Erin Whealan (*GMB*): Thank you, President. I work as an EMT for Yorkshire Ambulance Service. How to capture the role that I have played throughout Covid-19 and its monetary value is impossible but I will try. The things that I have seen and experienced have been physically and emotionally exhausting. Throughout Covid-19 I did my job above and beyond and I asked those that I love to wait and trust that it was the right thing for me to do, especially at the beginning when Covid and its effects were so unknown. I asked my family to be patient, hold on, come second, and show kindness. I asked my daughter to cope alone at a time when as a 2020 school leaver her world had come crashing down, and I asked my husband to forgive my absence and I left him to worry alone, and I did it without a second thought, but it came at a cost.

We have lost more than we have gained and we lost time and moments with our families and children. We lost colleagues and fellow clinicians all over the country. It came at a huge cost. All work has its worth and all workers need to know and feel their value. The fact that we go above and beyond should be reflected in our pay, the fact we give more than is expected should be reflected in our pay, and the fact that we place ourselves and our families secondary to our jobs should be reflected in our pay. I am asking the Government to recognise the sacrifice that was made and pay the worker their worth so that when it is time to recover ourselves it is without financial strain. Thank you.

The President: Thank you, Erin. Finally in this section I will ask Anis Boukhalfa from RMT to speak. Over to you, Anis. Do we have Anis?

Anis Boukhalfa (*National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers*): Thanks, President. Thanks, Congress. I am happy and proud to be part of 2020 Congress. I work on London Underground as an SPC cleaner along with over 2,000 others. Like the majority of my colleagues I am a migrant worker. A cleaner on London Underground is outsourced. We are employed by an American multinational firm, ABM FED. Also we are paid the London living wage. ABM does not pay us company sick pay meaning if we are off work sick we only receive the statutory sick pay. This means most cleaners literally cannot afford to be ill. Because we are outsourced we also do not receive the staff covered buses that directly operate. Our labour is to ensure station, train, and depot, are safely cleaned but London Underground charge us travel on the system we help run. We are just as much part of the permanent London Underground workforce as the station itself, the drivers, engineers, and others, but we are treated like second-class citizens. We also have no access to TfL pension scheme. All key workers like us deserve a secure contract, fair treatment, and decent pay. Thank you.

The General Secretary: Thank you so much, Anis, and thank you to everybody for all your stories and thank you for your hard work and dedication. I reckon if this hall was full we would all be up on our feet now applauding our brilliant key workers. The truth is when so many lockdown at home the UK's key workers carried on working making sure that this country kept going, looking after our older people and those who are unwell, making sure that the lights stayed on, we had food to eat, and that our public transport system was clean, and so much more. We owe them a real debt of gratitude and, as you have heard, that gratitude must be paid for in a decent pay rise and an end to unfair contracts. That is the campaign that we are launching today.

Everyone watching around the country I am asking you, please, to go on to the TUC website and to tell your MPs this, we will not stand for a freeze in the national minimum wage, we want a decent pay rise for all of the fantastic workers who got us through this pandemic, or are getting us through, and it is time right now to ban those zero-hours contracts that allow no dignity and no control. This autumn the Government are supposed to decide on next year's minimum wage, they are also supposed to introduce an employment bill, and supposed to have a budget. These are all chances for the Government to do the right thing by key workers. After all, it is nothing less than key workers deserve for their bravery and dedication, for doing their job to the best of their ability in the hardest of times. So, the time for applause is past. Tell your MP we want a pay rise for key workers and we want it now. Thank you, Congress.

The President: Thank you, Frances, and thank you to everybody who spoke in that session. We are incredibly grateful for the work that you have done.

The President: Colleagues we now move to our second debate, the unequal impact of Coronavirus and we will start this session with a short film.

General Council Statement 2: The Unequal Impact of Coronavirus

Video shown to Congress.

The President: I would now like to ask Philipa Harvey from the National Education Union to move the General Council Statement on the Unequal Impact of Coronavirus on behalf of the General Council. Philipa.

Philipa Harvey (*National Education Union*): Thank you, President. Covid-19 has had an unequal impact across our society and we as a Movement must adjust this with urgency to ensure that we do not go backwards and move what we have gained to our trade unionism of the past. We should be proud of the brilliant work trade unions have done during the crisis to defend all our members because we recognise that our strength comes from the fact that we are a diverse working class movement built on shared values of fairness, solidarity, and equality. But there is no doubt that this pandemic has exposed and amplified deep structural inequalities at the heart of our society. We have all witnessed the fact that it is the working class women, black workers, disabled, and LGBT+ workers that have been hit hardest by Covid-19. Low paid work people are more likely to have been required or needed to go to work, more likely to have been furloughed, and less likely to have received a good level of sick pay. That has not only put them at higher risk of contracting the virus but also increased their chances of falling into debt and poverty even if they do not get ill.

This crisis has exposed and exacerbated glaring inequalities in the UK labour market. Black workers have seen some of the UK's highest Coronavirus death rates. Black workers are literally dying on the job. Systemic inequalities mean black workers are over-represented in lower paid insecure jobs with the risk of contracting Coronavirus far higher. Black agency workers and those without permanent contracts, many of whom are migrant workers and black women, have been exploited through threats to

cancel work, or reduce hours, both to silence them or to force them to work in higher risk situations.

The Government's Coronavirus response has not only failed to adequately address these structural inequalities, in fact this systemic racism in many case has made them worse. The impact of Covid-19 on women has been deep and devastating. Women have faced disproportionate responsibility of unpaid care during the crisis, looking after children and elderly parents or relatives. When measures were taken to contain the spread of the virus, such as the necessary closure of schools and nursery settings and of social care services, it was women who were left to fill the unpaid care gap. A survey by the campaign group, *Pregnant then Screwed*, revealed that within four months 67% of key workers were forced to reduce their hours because of a lack of access to childcare; 45% did not have the childcare they needed in place for the summer and over 30% of those surveyed, pregnant workers surveyed, had been suspended on incorrect terms such as being told to take sick leave or to start their maternity leave early. A survey done by the TUC revealed how working mothers had been stretched to their limits working early in the morning and late into the evening to balance their work and childcare.

The Government's furlough scheme, which was widened to allow companies to furlough workers for childcare reasons, will end in October and so we have yet to see the full impact of this crisis, a crisis that is set to reverse the decades of progress in women's equality in the workplace with a widening of the gender pay and pensions gap.

We were all pressed to stay at home. Some women have faced a terrifying increased risk in the home itself. We have seen an alarming rise in domestic abuse, a 150% increase in visits to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline, and at least 16 women have been tragically killed, murdered, in domestic abuse related incidents since lockdown began.

Trade unions have provided vital support to members experiencing abuse but it is time employers stepped up and met their duties towards supporting workers experiencing this abuse. We have seen unions step up to support the women's sector and this support for safe places for women must continue. We need day one rights to paid leave for survivors of domestic abuse and to flexible work, as well as robust policies and training in all workplaces to help prevent and tackle this sexual and domestic abuse. We will hold all employers to account. We will hold this Government to account. Promoting equality must be at the core of this Government's recovery strategy.

Covid-19 is far from the great leveller the Tories would have us believe. The virus does not discriminate but this Government's response to it certainly has. We will not allow our agenda to be derailed or deprioritised. We will not allow our hard won rights to be rolled back. We must organise and demand that they deliver prosperity, dignity, and security to every class, community, and cohort. President, I am glad to move this motion on behalf of the General Council. Thank you.

The President: Thank you very much, Philipa. I would now like to ask Maria Exall from the Communication Workers Union to make a contribution. Maria.

Maria Exall (*Communication Workers Union*): Thank you, Ged. To defend all of our members' jobs and livelihoods we must stand together and show solidarity. This Tory government won power by dividing and ruling. They used the politics of resentment and grievance and bulldozed their way into office and they are careless of the consequences of their actions. They are promoting culture wars, trying to turn one group of working class people against another. This is a useful distraction from their multiple and miserable failures to keep us safe. It is a deliberate distraction from their accelerated programme of outsourcing and privatisation which gives more profits to their cronies and donors. Congress, let's not fall for it. We need to stand together and fight this threat. We have heard from Philpa about the effect of Covid on women and the real danger to women's equality.

I am a proud feminist and a proud trans ally. I say let's stick together, let's not fall for the divisiveness of the ruling class and their friends. Sexism and other prejudices in our society are being made worse by the Covid-19 crisis. The intersection between persistent racism and class has been highlighted by the crucial and important *Black Lives Matter* movement, and we have seen how ingrained our society's casual disregard for disabled workers lives is. Where is the proper sick pay, where is the support for those shielding to say I am particularly vulnerable.

Congress, I want to talk a bit about the situation for LGBT + workers. At the time of lockdown many LGBT+ working people have found themselves isolated from their support network with grave effect on their mental health. These networks are vital, especially for many young LGBT+ people because often home and neighbourhoods are not safe places for us. LGBT+ key workers providing essential services are facing increasing levels of homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic hostility. At the time of

redundancies there are more LGBT+ workers losing their jobs, which is why we need statutory rights for union equality reps. Many LGBT+ workers have deliberately chosen to work in sectors where it is easier to be out and respected yet many of these sectors are the very ones which are disappearing, such as arts and culture, travel and tourism but also in specific areas within aviation and hospitality.

We need to target the essentials of the furlough scheme. As sponsors have said, we are facing a tsunami of unemployment and the whole self-destruction of our social fabric. It is time to act now for LGBT+ workers, for our rights, and for working class unity to win the battle ahead. Let's build our Movement's strength on the real diversity of our membership. Please support the GC Statement. Thank you.

The President: Thank you, Maria. I would now like to ask Patrick Roach from the NAS/UWT to join the discussion. Patrick.

Patrick Roach (*NAS/UWT, The Teachers' Union*): Thank you, President, Congress. I am speaking in support of the General Council Statement on the Unequal Impact of Coronavirus. The NAS/UWT welcomes the General Council's Statement highlighting the failure of the Government's response to tackling existing structural inequalities, including deregulation and casualisation, as well as cuts to support families, and underinvestment in our schools, all of which are exacerbating the negative impact of the coronavirus crisis on black workers, women, disabled people, and LGBT+ communities.

In May the Prime Minister gave assurances to the British people that the Government was going to insist that businesses across the country look after their workers and are

Covid secure and Covid compliant yet we know that black workers are still three to four times more likely to be impacted by the Coronavirus. In June, the Prime Minister said in a statement to parliament that primary and secondary education will recommence in September, with full attendance, because, “it is safe”. As we see daily outbreaks in schools we still see a government recklessly insisting that schools open with no social distancing in classrooms, no national provision for PPE in schools, no safeguards for vulnerable staff and no additional funding to ensure that classrooms and schools can be kept clean and safe.

Now, this Conservative Government has claimed to be the party of law and order so, Congress, we should call them out if they are in breach of their legal obligations under the Equality Act, obligations which require the Government to take action to eliminate discrimination and to advance equality for women, black, disabled, LGBT+, and other workers with protected characteristics. So far the Government have refused to publish the equality impact assessments underpinning their decisions in relation to schools, arguing outrageously that it is not in the public interest to do so.

NAS/UWT members and our representatives are doing whatever it takes to keep children in education and to keep them safe. The NAS/UWT will do whatever it takes to keep our members safe. We must continue to hold the Government to account, it must be a priority for our Movement to campaign and lobby for a national coronavirus recovery plan that protects all workers and that tackles the causes of labour market inequality and injustice. It must also be our priority to campaign for action right here, right now, starting with positive action by the Government to keep all workers safe, the immediate publication of equality impact assessment across the board, including on school opening, urgent commitment to further protection for all workers whose

jobs and incomes are at risk with the ending of the job retention scheme and commitment to increase investment, not cuts, now and at the next spending review to protect our vital public services and all those who deliver them. Please support this statement. Thank you.

The President: Thank you very much, Patrick. I would now like to ask Diana Holland from Unite to speak.

Diana Holland (Unite): Thank you, Ged. President, Congress, I am speaking strongly in support of the statement on the Unequal Impact of Coronavirus. These are difficult, demanding, even devastating times, times of great sadness, fear, passion, and anger, and as our General Secretary, Frances, so powerfully said earlier, Covid-19 has exposed the terrible reality of deep underlying systemic inequalities and discrimination.

As Unite's Assistant General Secretary for Equalities and for the Transport and Food sectors I know the time for measuring and reports is long gone. We have done that. What we need now is action, action for equality on safety, pay, and jobs, dignity and security, to ensure everyone is protected, no one left out and no one left behind, action for equality, a risk assessment and an equality impact assessment in every workplace and on all policies made public, to stop the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on black and Asian people's lives, to ensure women have safe personal protective equipment that fits and protects them, that disabled workers and pregnant workers are not targeted for redundancy, that LGBT+ workers are not being subjected to bullying and harassment, or isolated from support, action for equality, new rights, not just to measure the pay gap for women, black and Asian ethnic minorities and

disabled workers, but a mandatory requirement to take action on the underlying reasons for the pay gaps, tough on the pay gap, tough on the causes of the pay gap, and ending once and for all the second class status of union equality reps, they need statutory rights now.

Finally, enacting part one of the Equality Act, action on socioeconomic inequalities, in other words, class. No worker should be faced with the impossible choice between caring for their family and keeping their job, or between safety and having enough to live on. Anyone facing domestic violence or abuse or mental health pressures must have somewhere to turn. The hostile environment for migrant workers must end and the migrant domestic worker visa be restored. These changes are not just long overdue. Without them the underlying inequalities exposed so starkly by Covid-19 will continue and deepen. We cannot let this happen. 2020, now it's time for equality. Thank you.

The President: Thank you very much, Diana, for that contribution. I would now like to ask Graeme Ellis from Unison to make his contribution. Graeme.

Graeme Ellis (*Unison*): Congress, President, we all saw the mess this Government has made over exam results in the summer but let's be honest it was not the algorithms fault. Every year working class kids' life chances are reduced because of the school they go to, and Coronavirus has just made that more obvious for the first time. Because inequality and unfairness is hardwired into our education system Coronavirus also showed that it is hardwired into working life too. Black workers and disabled workers are twice as likely to die of Coronavirus. That is not an accident at birth, it is because we are more likely to be in lower paid frontline jobs and that is

because of discrimination. Black workers are routinely rejected for better paid jobs and the only explanation for that is racism. Disabled workers are refused reasonable adjustments that go to help us do our job better. We get stuck on the lowest pay grades as a result. Women cannot move on in their career because the part-time jobs they need to fit around caring responsibilities are mainly low paid.

I am lucky I work for a benefits charity as an adviser. My employers supported me to work from home since the start of the pandemic. I got extra help from Access to Work who supplied me with specialist equipment, such as a plasma screen, and specialist software so I can work from home and deal with my clients and do benefit appeals virtually. But many disabled workers were forced to continue to go into the workplace, even though they could have done their jobs from home, putting them at greater risk. Home working must be a reasonable adjustment for disabled people who want it and that must carry on into the future. Unison's survey of 5,000 disabled workers in June found that 73% of them were productive or more productive working at home. We were delighted when the Treasury heeded Unison's call for extra funding for Access to Work and extending it to cover home working, but we now need Government to take that extra step and give disabled people a new right to work from home if they want to.

Coronavirus has brought us to a crossroads. We let an unfair algorithm continue to force us onto the bottom rung in the workplace. Government needs to grab this chance to radically rewrite the algorithm and put equality for black, disabled, LGBT+, and women workers at the heart of the new normal. Thank you.

The President: Thank you, Graeme. David Hope from GMB, you are up next. Hello, David.

David Hope (GMB): President, Congress, I am speaking in support of the Statement. They say that Covid does not discriminate but it is clear that society does. The outbreak devastating impact on minority communities is a badge of shame for our nation. Just look at the figures, black men are more than three times likely to die from Covid than white men. Black women are more than twice as likely to die and men are more at risk of death. Three-quarters of workers most exposed to the virus are women. This includes in social care where zero-hour contracts, poverty sick pay, and the minimum wage, has become the norm. Disabled workers and people with long-term health conditions are also at higher risk.

Congress, Stonewall and the TUC have warned over the months of lockdown that increasing hostility for some members of the public and the lack of access to health services has had a negative impact on LGBT+ people. As the return to work gathers pace we know that the minority communities are at greater risk of redundancies. Behind each of these statistics are our members, the key workers, the people on the front line and the working class in all its diversity. They are the people that hold our country together. Congress, Coronavirus has torn through the inequalities of our society like wildfire. Where there is prejudice, discrimination, and poverty, the virus has left a trail of broken lives in its wake. We cannot change the past but we can fight for a better future. Our response to this crisis must reflect on the best of our Movement and, Congress, in a modern trade union movement diversity is a strength too.

The General Council's Statement shows the inequalities in our society and sets out a serious plan for reform, from strengthening the equality audit to raising sick pay and equality pay audits. These are policies that a Labour government should demand for the united voice. Congress, our country is at a crossroads. The Conservative Government wants us to return to the status quo. We are clear we cannot go back to the way things were on behalf of the GMB I am proud to support this motion and as Will Thorne, the founder of our great union, once said, "Inequality is not invincible. Whilst there is breath and life in me I shall continue to fight. There's a world of freedom, beauty, and equality, to gain." Let's all be true to our principles as we rebuild our society. Congress, please support this statement. Thank you.

The President: Thank you, David. I would now like to ask Martin Cavanagh from PCS to make his contribution. Martin.

Martin Cavanagh (*Public and Commercial Services Union*): President, Congress, supporting the General Council Statement. The Covid pandemic has had a profound and long-lasting impact on how we all live and work. No one needs to tell either us or our members the extent this pandemic has had massively different responses in terms of the views that are reflected by this population. The impact has varied immensely. What it has shown is that inequalities have been deep-rooted across society, pre pandemic, and rather than the Government and society working to eradicate those inequalities we have seen those inequalities intensify and grow as the virus has taken hold and, Congress, we have to be realistic and say that unless we are at the forefront of addressing those inequalities we have a real job on our hands to make sure that the recovery is not put back as a result.

That is why, Congress, it is absolutely critical that the trade union and labour Movement be at the forefront of taking bold and radical action. We have seen and we have already heard on the video, and other contributions, that the poorest in society have been hardest hit throughout this pandemic. Research has shown that income has a massive impact when it comes to the impact of Covid-19. People who live in the most deprived areas of the country are four times more likely to test positive than those living in affluent areas. We have seen in the same study by the University of Oxford that black people are four times more likely to test positive with Covid-19 than white people, and we have seen various studies that have shown black people are more likely to die once contracting Covid-19.

Millions have been thrown out of work as a result of Covid-19 and it has shown a real scandal of modern day housing with more and more people now facing eviction as a result of what we are facing throughout the pandemic. PCS have long campaigned for a better and more improved social security system and, comrades, I just want to take a few minutes to highlight what our members in the PCS have been facing throughout this year.

Members who continued in many cases to come into work and put themselves and their families at risk, making sure that the benefit system kept on top of a massive increase in claims for Universal Credit, and other benefits. Our members have administered the job retention scheme and we have kept airports and ports Covid-secure throughout this pandemic. But, comrades, at a time when we expected the Government to respond and to put in place practices and measures that were more than just warm words and praise that they have been putting on our members they have failed miserably. They salute us at the despatch box one minute but then they

insult us with derisory low pay and demand us to get back to unsafe workplaces the next.

If this Government genuinely wanted to show appreciation of the hard work and sacrifice that our members have been putting in during this pandemic, they would be giving us inflation-busting pay rises and reversing damaging job losses and office closures over the past two decades.

The President: Could I ask you wind up, Martin?

Martin Cavanagh (*Public and Commercial Services Union*): Yes, no problem. Thank you. Congress, we need to have a very clear response to this crisis. We need to ensure that we recalibrate the economy, that we do not just return back to the economy that existed pre-Covid, and that we put equality, fairness, and humanity and dignity at the heart of everything we do. Please support the statement.

The President: Thank you, Martin. Well done. Next can I ask Zita Holborn from the Artists Union England to make a contribution. Zita.

Zita Holborn (*Artists Union England*): The Coronavirus has impacted disproportionately on those who already face discrimination and barriers at work and in wider society, with specific adverse impact on women, black, disabled, and LGBT+ people. Black people and some disabled people, and women, are in the high risk group and with black people contracting and dying disproportionately. There has been a failure to protect the most vulnerable at work and provide PPE, or home working, with black and migrant workers facing devastating impact, people like Belly

Mujinga who worked at Victoria Station and who died of Covid-19 in April this year, and who had been forced to go to workplaces physically to keep essential services running, and many of whom like Belly are black women and migrants. Caring responsibilities already fell disproportionately to women and this has intensified during the pandemic, with childcare, home schooling, and care of high-risk and vulnerable families and communities. There has also been an increase in domestic violence with those at risk even more isolated in lockdown with violent partners and confined in spaces for long periods.

The majority of AUE members are women and our members are also often socially engaged artists working in communities with vulnerable people and those who face discrimination and barriers. Our members have seen all their work cancelled for the foreseeable future. Most of our members have fallen between the gaps when it has come to government measures during the pandemic leaving them and their families destitute and struggling to survive, forced to live off savings if they have any, worrying about the future. Because our members receive such a low income in the arts, most have to work part-time doing other jobs and these jobs, like their work in the arts, are low paid, precarious, and temporary, also hit by the pandemic. On top of this they have not been able to access their studios to produce art during lockdown yet at the same time they are forced to pay unaffordably high rents.

We have campaigned throughout the pandemic on these issues and raised them repeatedly with the Government with zero response. These impacts in the arts and culture sector have hit black women and disabled artists the hardest when they already face discrimination and barriers in the sector, and are now amplified by the economic impacts going forward meaning that young people have no opportunity to get a step

on the ladder. We need action to support and protect existing workers disproportionately impacted to provide opportunities for future generations for the disabled arts and culture sector and ensure it is inclusive, equal, and accessible to all. Equality must be at the heart of the response to the Coronavirus crisis with equal access to employment, protection for workers and communities most at risk, and full involvement of our entire Trade Union Movement, which is at the forefront of responding to the crisis. Thank you.

The President: Thank you, Zita. Just so that everybody is aware, I have two more speakers and we are running over time somewhat but I want to give the two people who have been nominated the opportunity to speak. Next we have Steve McGurk from Community. Steve.

Steve McGurk (*Community*): Thank you, Ged. President, Congress, I am the Community NEC rep for disabled members speaking on the unequal impact of Coronavirus. Covid-19 does not affect all population groups equally. Disabled people have been particularly affected. More than 22,000 disabled people died from Coronavirus in the past three months of this pandemic. Because of the greater risk from Covid-19 many disabled people were asked to shield, not to leave their homes at any time for any reason; even now when these restrictions have eased many disabled people feel unsafe and have not been able to return to the workplace, hospitality centres, or shops.

At the peak of the outbreak disabled people were three times more likely than non-disabled people to say they felt very unsafe when outside their home. Furthermore, many disabled people have missed out on official medical treatment because of this

pandemic. In July a quarter of disabled people were not receiving medical treatment for one or more of their conditions. This is frightening. Whilst at home disabled people are particularly vulnerable to domestic violence, victims of abuse will be spending extended periods of time with an abuser, and disabled people are twice as likely to experience direct domestic abuse than non-disabled people.

The effects of social isolation have been particularly devastating to disabled people in terms of loneliness, isolation, fear and anxiety, and have been just too much for some to take with so many feeling the only way out was to take their own life. Disability is just one of the many things dividing us into the haves and have nots, but now is the time for change. As a trade union movement we must stand together to promote equality and our plans for recovery and act now to tackle structural inequalities. We must demand this from Government. The status quo is just not good enough. This means building inclusive institutions that are powerfully inclusive, a zero tolerance attitude to discrimination and taking action to protect victims of domestic violence, it means a decent wage and decent work for everyone and opening access to all kinds of work to everyone. Just as the pandemic exacerbated and brought our inequalities to the fore, brave policy making can create the change that fundamentally shapes our economy and our society making it fairer, kinder, and stronger. Thank you, Congress.

The President: Thank you, Steve, for that excellent contribution. Last but by no means least we have Martin Furlong from the College of Podiatry. Martin, over to you.

Martin Furlong (*College of Podiatry*): Thank you, Chair. President, Congress, speaking on the General Council Statement on the Unequal Impact of the

Coronavirus. We have already heard from Philipa and others how Coronavirus has highlighted the deep inequalities in our society. The College represents members who work both in the NHS and in the private sector and we have been contacted by many BAME members worried about the risks they may be at working as a healthcare professional. Women workers struggling to juggle childcare responsibilities, self-employed private practice members not being able to have quick access to financial support if indeed they are even eligible for it, and many more.

None of this is new, of course, to our members in the healthcare and across all areas of industry who have had these problems for years, but as we have been hearing Covid-19 has starkly highlighted these problems even more. One of the most prominent issues that the College has been approached about is ill-fitting PPE and the TUC and other affiliated unions have raised many times over the years many issues with PPE and issues with poor fit. As we know this has a disproportionate impact on female members due to most PPE not being made to fit their body shape or size. We have been contacted by many members having difficulties getting properly fitted PPE, especially face masks due to the masks being too big for their faces and not being able to pass fit tests. There is also a shocking lack of attention in design of PPE to those who, for example, have facial hair due to either their religious beliefs or like me just have a beard, and we have had examples of managers asking staff to shave to make PPE fit. I certainly would not be happy being asked to get rid of my beard but just imagine how that would feel if you were asked to do it because of your religious beliefs.

Legally PPE is supposed to be suitable for the individual and women should not be treated any less favourably than men. Employers have been allowed to get away with

providing one size PPE from footwear to face masks for too long. This is putting workers' health and lives at risk and was even more highlighted by the pandemic. It was disappointing to hear Liz Truss, Women and Equalities Minister, tell the women equalities parliamentary committee that despite 75% of the NHS being women they were not at risk as PPE is made for everyone. This just goes to show how little this Government understands the issues on the front line. Furthermore, the Health Foundation has said people facing the greatest deprivation are experiencing a higher risk of exposure to Covid-19 and existing poor health puts them at risk of more severe outcomes if they contract the virus.

This exposure to structural disadvantage and discrimination are faced by those who are black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities. The Government and wider society needs to control this to save lives now, where the virus is exacting a heavier social and economic price on those already experiencing inequality. The inherent inequality has to be addressed. For far too long the Government have relied on saying, "Well, there is the Equality Act to deal with these issues," while we are actively trying to tackle the issues with ministers being outdated and unknowledgeable. Now is the time for the Government to act with the TUC to incorporate proper equality guidance, legislation, and legislation in their recovery plans via a national cross-departmental health equalities strand issue. We therefore call on everybody to support the General Council Statement. Thank you.

The President: Thank you, Martin, and thanks to all of the speakers in that debate. As I mentioned earlier, we will take a formal vote on the Statement at the General Council later this afternoon. Thank you.

Congress, that completes our business for this morning but there is still lots of ways you can get involved in the Congress. There is a variety of fringe events taking place this afternoon from 2 p.m. and you can get details on the TUC website. A record of all decisions taken during this year's Congress will also be available on the website. Congress is now adjourned. Take care, everybody, and please join us tomorrow when we will hear from Keir Starmer, the Leader of the Opposition, as well as having debates and discussion around how we rebuild the UK economy, how we fight racism, and how we build international solidarity in the post Covid-19 world. Thank you everybody for tuning in today.

Congress adjourned.