

Ealing Trades Council Newsletter (March 2020)

Greetings Sisters and Brothers,

Obviously, we won't be holding Trades Council meetings for a while (Coronavirus alert), however, we will find ways of promoting working class solidarity online and in workplaces.

Ealing Trades Council will send out updates and your thoughts, reports and stories will be welcome. Please also check out the [Ealing Trades Council Facebook Page](#).

It's a very surreal time, not just because of the threat of infection. The Government has finally noticed that big Magic Money Tree growing in the yard and they've flipped economic policy over from austerity to desperate spending and borrowing, including paying wages of inactive workers. This wasn't just made possible by the Virus, it's also because the trade unions and the radical leadership of the Labour Party helped to undermine the failing right-wing orthodoxy of neoliberalism.

Self-interest and the free market are no longer championed as the solution. Overnight, exploited delivery workers are recognised as key workers and previously ignored NHS staff are being extolled (though no pay rise, something we should also demand). There are, of course, many more vital workers who should be valued and paid more, including cleaners, carers, refuse collectors, food workers. Perhaps they could swap places and salaries with the City 'trader' parasites.

- **New Ways of Organising**

We are all coming to terms with how we can organise with less meetings. Hopefully as this crisis unfolds solidarity and group support will win over hearts and minds. Community support groups are already springing up to support the vulnerable across communities. Many unions are also organising practical support for members in different ways. There are so many issues. Shop workers and others in constant contact with the public are at risk. Vulnerable zero hours workers are facing poverty, little or no sick pay, limited rights at work.

Talks with employers are under way everywhere: schools are closed, privatised cleaners on the Underground are to get full sick pay, if they have to self-isolate, PCS has requested a moratorium on tax office closures, talks have agreed reduced services on rail with safety provisions. Some employers have been good, others need to be named and shamed.

Meanwhile many union branches are starting to organise online with activists being asked to sign up to WhatsApp and especially to [Zoom](#), a free app that enables video conferencing.

- **NHS Solidarity**

Our local hospitals have been under huge pressure (how much worse if the *'Shaping a Healthier Future'* closure plans had gone through!) NHS staff at Ealing and elsewhere have been bravely working long hours. The main local hospital dealing with the virus, Northwick Park, became overloaded at one point even though we're still in the early stages. The lack of protective clothing led to some nurses clothing themselves with bin bags.

Solidarity and support for NHS Staff has to be stepped up, **especially the demand for all NHS staff to be tested**. Please support the *Keep Our NHS Public* petition online – or see Ealing Save Our NHS – [6 Demands from NHS staff to help us tackle Coronavirus](#)

There is no doubt that the weak response in the UK is heavily down to the huge under-funding of our NHS over the last decade. Meanwhile, Boris Johnson, like all weak bosses in a crisis, is trying to give himself draconian powers. From a quick reading, this includes powers to lock up people for reasons of quarantine or mental health, remove the obligation of local authorities to provide care, close ports or airports and shut down gatherings. These arbitrary powers are to last for two years without renewal – even longer than the anti-terrorism or wartime powers.

There is some guidance from the [TUC](#) and [Unite](#) and I think that both they and individual unions will increasingly provide more focused advice.

Comradely,

Oliver New, Secretary, Ealing Trades Council

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