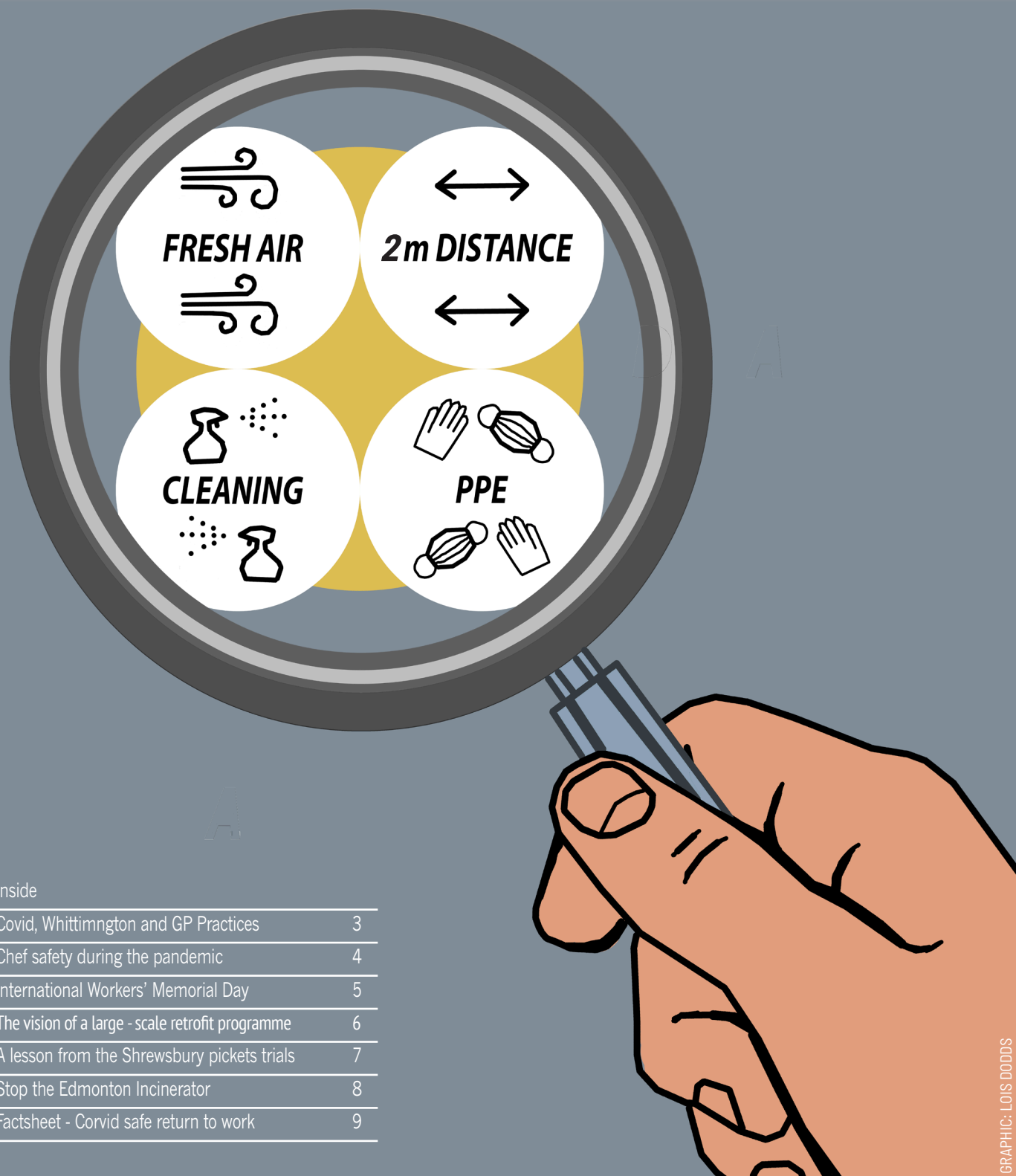


WE WANT A SAFE WORKPLACE



Inside

Covid, Whittimngton and GP Practices	3
Chef safety during the pandemic	4
International Workers' Memorial Day	5
The vision of a large - scale retrofit programme	6
A lesson from the Shrewsbury pickets trials	7
Stop the Edmonton Incinerator	8
Factsheet - Corvid safe return to work	9

AFFILIATE AND HELP KEEP US GOING

We are asking you to affiliate to the London Hazards Centre so that we can continue the work we were set up to do in 1985 – provide advice, information and training to make London a safer place in which to live and work.

Arguably the work of the London Hazards Centre is more important than ever as a result of cuts to the HSE budget and scrapping of key pieces of health and safety legislation.

The London Hazards Centre is also a campaigning organisation that takes a lead on issues like safety reps rights, as well as working closely with trade unions and other organisations, for example, to fight against blacklisting.

We need your support. We are asking individuals, trade union branches and regions, along with community organisations – to affiliate to us. The annual affiliation fees set out below remain the lifeblood of the London Hazards Centre.

Affiliation rates	
Community groups, tenants and residents associations	£20
Trades Councils, law centres and advice/resource centres,	£30
Tenants federations	
Trade union branches (up to 300 members)	£40
Trade union branches (more than 300 members)	£75
Regional trade union or voluntary organisations	£120
National trade union or voluntary organisations	£240
Subscription rates	
Unwaged individuals	£10
Employed individuals	£20
Commercial organisations	£300
Address to affiliate: London Hazards Centre, 225 - 229 Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park, London, N4 2DA. Telephone: 0207 527 5107. Website: www.lhc.org.uk	
Registered Charity No: 293677 Registered Company No: 01981088	

Why not volunteer?

The London Hazards Centre, is looking for volunteers to help run and organise some of our activities. Perhaps you have skills and knowledge that could help organise events, produce promotional material, train others or assist in our campaigning work?

If you are interested in volunteering at the London Hazards Centre why not call 0207 527 5107 or email mail@lhc.org.uk

We'd like to hear from you.





Covid, Whittington, and GP Practices

Boris Johnson recently quipped that the success of the vaccination programme, the only successful part of the Government's Covid strategy, has been down to "greed and capitalism". He was so wrong

The vaccine rollout was carried out through and by NHS workers, working under principles of Public Health. Astra Zenica is selling at cost price. Volunteers have also had a major role in the distribution of the jabs. The rest of the Government's shamolic Covid and NHS strategy was driven by profit.

It was "greed and capitalism" that led to Britain currently having one of the highest death rates in the world (only beaten by the Czech Republic, Belgium, Hungary, and Slovenia). In addition to the "Eat Out to Help Covid" campaign, The Department of Health and Social Care broke with the usual commissioning arrangements for NHS contracts and made massive procurements for two of the most vital elements for controlling the nasty impact of Covid - personal protection equipment (PPE) for front-line workers and a test-trace-and-isolate system for identifying and stopping the spread of new cases.

Many of the Government's private Covid contracts went to friends of ministers and Tory

donors. The spend on private Covid contracts in February 2021 totalled £24.4 billion. This included £10.18 billion for test and trace and £9.58 billion for PPE paid by the DHSC to Dido Harding, the Tory peer, and married to a Tory MP, who is in charge of the Test and Trace system. It is misleadingly named the NHS test and trace system but in fact the DHSC have subcontracted the running of the whole programme to private 48 private organisations, the main one being Serco.

Test and trace plays a vital role in reducing the Covid pandemic. But the privatised system set-up by people with no experience of public health has been a disaster. It failed to record large numbers of Covid cases, failed to reach people who has tested positive to find and failed to advise their contacts. Most health academics suggest this should have been run by local community health centres where records are kept of all patients, patients and medical histories are known, and they are more accessible. Additionally, £145m was paid to Deloitte, for consultancy support for expanding Covid testing.

Our local hospital, the Whittington, has gained a well-earned reputation for its Covid care, largely through the coverage of its life-saving treatment of author and poet, Michael Rosen. It is a relatively small hospital, so at one stage the large number of Covid patients took up 73% of general and ambulatory care beds.

Along with the other hospitals in the area, they had adapted their intake for Covid, allocating the beds normally used for elective and day surgery to Covid care, creating more Intensive Care beds. In addition, The Whittington provided all the children's accident and emergency care normally provided by the Royal Free and University College Hospitals.

While there was some local panic that it ranked as one of the hospitals with a high proportion of its beds allocated to Covid patients, this was no surprise

because the total number of beds there is comparatively low. They also had troughs of no Covid patients.

On March 19th this year, there were 4 patients in the hospital who had tested positive for Covid, but the ICU still had many patients requiring long terms care.

The cancellation of elective treatments, apart from paediatrics, maternity and some cancer care, has led to a huge backlog. At the end of February 2021, there were 1,213 patients who had waited more than 52 weeks for treatment. All patients currently waiting over 52 weeks are considered to be of clinical lower priority. An action plan has been set up to manage this backlog, which also involves paying for beds in non-NHS hospitals.

Being an integrated care provider, the Whittington was involved in the vaccine rollout for its staff and the wider community. All care home and housebound residents had been offered a vaccine by 14th February.

The stress on hospital staff during the third Covid wave was more intense than in the first wave. Family illness was more frequent as was family bereavement. Despite being keyworkers, some the staff's children were sent home from school to isolate. 163 staff tested positive and then did not work on wards to prevent exposing patients and colleagues to infection, but causing more pressures on remaining staff. And on top of all this was the mental distress caused by witnessing so much illness and death.

Our role in Defend the Whittington Hospital Coalition is supportive to our hospital at this time of crisis. Additionally, we are now involved in the campaign in the primary care sector where greed and capitalism has led to the privatisation of over 70 GP surgeries across the country, affecting over 500,000 patients. Operose, the UK subsidiary of Centene, an American health company, has managed the

takeover of 49 GP practices in 19 London boroughs. Unsurprisingly, Centene puts profit before health and so has a record of poor health care for patients with massive cutbacks in their privatised surgeries.

As soon as this takeover was discovered people mobilised. In London, campaign groups led by GPs, local Keep our NHS Public groups, campaigns like Defend Whittington Hospital Coalition and the national We Own It Campaign. People have been holding large Zoom meetings to inform each other, holding socially-distanced masked protests outside Operose-run surgeries and are planning protests outside the Operose headquarters in London.

While it is true that GPs never fully signed up to the NHS when it was established in 1948 and are actually privately-owned practices, they have always been offered nationally agreed contracts to work for the NHS, in terms of salaries and pensions, vocational training and running costs. But in 2004 the Government created new GP contracts to allow for the private takeover of GP practices by private companies. These Alternative Providers of Medical Services (APMS) contracts did not include nationally agreed salaries and pensions for staff. These contracts allow for the likes of Centene to exploit the NHS and health needs of patients in the search for profits. They also provide a foot in the door for large corporations for when the Government offers more lucrative parts of the NHS for sale.

This Government's focus on capitalism and greed places our NHS at risk of being taken over by large profit-oriented health companies. We need to fight back together on the streets and in our unions for an NHS that meets our physical and mental health needs, publicly run, publicly owned, and free at the point of delivery.

Shirley Franklin
Chair Defend the Whittington Hospital Coalition



CHEF SAFETY DURING THE PANDEMIC

Peter (not his real name) has been toiling away in one of London's increasing number of 'dark' kitchens over the last few months. These largely unseen kitchens have been operating flat out during the pandemic to satisfy the needs of a burgeoning take away food market.

While hospitality businesses that have been able to flex into the takeaway sector have fared significantly better, the workers who have been supplying the food have been overlooked.

Peter has been working in a kitchen where social distancing seems to be ignored. Face

masks are used intermittently and he has never seen a Covid risk assessment (despite asking on several occasions). He has occasionally been working nights, without any fire training or lone working policy. He has raised Covid safety concerns anonymously with the local authority, but no one has responded.

Set this against the backdrop of recent ONS (Office for National statistics, 25/01/21) figures which cite chefs as being amongst the highest risk category of dying from Covid 19 and you have a recipe for a massive safety problem.

Covid transmissions in the hospitality sector were pegged at 5.18% on average for the period July-September 2020

(Public Health England Sept 2020). Having said this, it is widely thought that the government's 'Eat out to help out' scheme was a contributing factor to the spike in Covid rates last Summer (up by 8-17% according to a University of Warwick report Oct 2020).

Unite the union recently surveyed over a thousand of our chef members from across the U.K. who raised a number of concerns in their workplace.

- 22% of chefs felt their employer had not taken Covid seriously.
- felt they were not consulted or issued Covid safety guidelines.
- felt social distancing was a challenge.

When you couple this with inadequate ventilation or extraction systems, the risk of contracting Covid is significantly increased. 29% of our chefs also cited that a lack of decent company sick pay meant workers are usually reliant on Statutory Sick Pay. At £96.35 a week, even the Health Minister is starting to admit that this is proving problematic when we are trying to encourage people to self-isolate in the public interest.

Many chefs also stated that they suffered from weakened immune systems brought about by years of excessive hours and stress at work. Of those who now say they intended to leave the industry; 50% stated excessive hours being the reason, while 73% stated stress at work.

40% also stated that their employer had taken advantage of the pandemic situation by reducing pay or cutting contracts. Many are fearful when they return to work that not only are they facing

reduced pay (65% of chefs who indicated they were leaving the trade cited pay reasons), but increased workloads and stress.

Even well-intentioned hospitality operations that set out good Covid practices on paper, realise when it comes to feeding the guests and maximising the profits safety comes second best. One chef who we spoke to who works for a national chain of hotels said 'We have got good practices on paper but when it comes to a busy service it all goes out of the window.... when we reopen bookings will be huge, which means more staff & more congestion.'

Another chef (Jules) who works in gastro-pubs said 'I recently had a trial at a busy deli restaurant where there were no face masks being worn and no social distancing. There were loads of people working in close proximity. When I asked if this was ok, I was fobbed off'.

This is why Unite has been campaigning hard for the introduction of 'roving' health and safety reps to be given legally mandated access to workplaces. Unite has an army of health and safety representatives that could be deployed to visit hospitality workplaces across the U.K. By robust reporting we could raise safety standards in hospitality and help protect public health. In Scotland, this has already been accepted as a way forward.

There is no reason why the rest of the UK cannot adopt this practice.

The public would have confidence that the 'dark' kitchens were operating safely and Peter wouldn't have to go to work petrified of getting Covid.

Kevin Reynolds,
Unite Chefs Combine.

INTERNATIONAL WORKERS MEMORIAL DAY

'Remember the dead and fight for the living' is the watchword of the trade union movement on International Workers Memorial Day. April 28th is the day when workers and their trade unions unite in solidarity to remember those who have been killed or injured at work. This year perhaps more than any time in living memory, these words have a special poignancy after so many frontline workers lost their lives during the Coronavirus pandemic. It's vital that we learn from the pandemic.

Learning from the pandemic

The last 12 months has been nothing short of tumultuous, workplace health concerns have never been higher in the national consciousness.

The key for trade unionists for this year's International Workers' Memorial Day is to look forward and ensure we have learned the lessons of the pandemic. Crucially we must commit to redoubling our efforts on workplace safety and campaign so that mistakes are never repeated.

What we have to shout from the rooftops - and it can't be repeated too often - is recognised workplaces with safety reps fully engaged in developing safe working procedures, are far superior in protecting workers from exposure to Covid-19.

With workplaces increasingly being seen as the major place where transmissions are occurring, and with no sense of hyperbole, we can say with confidence that the dedication of safety reps in every sector has literally saved thousands of lives.

This is why it is essential that all unions prioritise the training and recruitment of safety reps, the

workforce's first line of defence for all future health and safety challenges.

Meanwhile, it is absolutely imperative that the pressure to force the government to hold a judge led public inquiry, into all aspects of the pandemic, must be increased.

Over 125,000 people have died in the UK, we must be told why they died, whether deaths were preventable and could the UK government have acted sooner. The government must not be allowed to hide awkward truths.

In the early months of the pandemic, PPE went from an acronym used by safety specialists, into front page news. It is an undeniable fact there was simply not enough PPE available, there wasn't enough for the general public, there wasn't even enough for key workers, and criminally there wasn't enough for NHS and social care staff, treating Covid patients. Shockingly, over a year later there are still shortages of certain types of PPE for all clinical workers. Such shortages must never be allowed to re-occur and our emergency planning must dramatically improve.

Another key area is protecting

the vulnerable. It is beyond a doubt that the BAEM community, were much more at risk of being severely affected by Covid and succumbing to the disease. This was grimly demonstrated among Unite's members employed in a variety of key worker roles. When did the government know that people of BAEM origin were at greater risk, and why was more not done to protect them? Questions that demand answers.

Another area where it is essential we must force change is in sick pay. Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) is worth a pitiful £96 a week. Research has continuously found workers admitting that they haven't self-isolated when they had symptoms, as they simply couldn't afford to. This has dramatically increased the spread of the disease, made lockdowns longer and increased the death toll.

The fundamental principle of when you are sick you shouldn't be in work needs to be re-established. Not only should the level of SSP be increased but companies need to be compelled to offer additional sick pay, so workers can rest and recover when they are ill.

One organisation that singularly failed to cover itself in glory during the pandemic is the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Not a single workplace has been closed by the HSE due to the failure to adhere to Covid regulations, even though many workplaces have experienced major outbreaks. MPs criticised the HSE as "toothless" for not carrying out a visit to a factory where three workers died from coronavirus early last summer.

Covid was not even one of the HSE's key priorities. Workers, especially those in unorganised workplaces rely on the HSE. The HSE must be given the

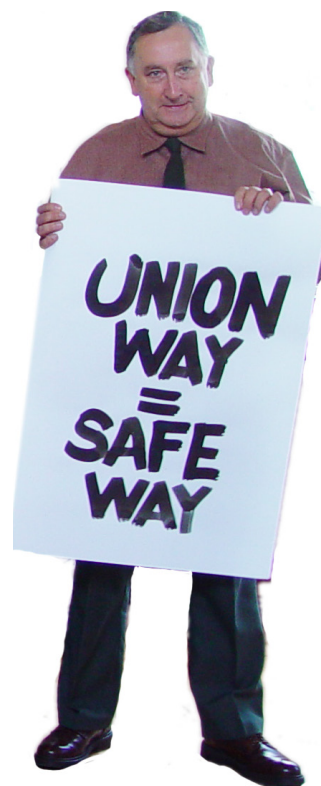
power, resources, and authority to do better.

The pandemic has made society, on every level from class, race and income more unequal. The poorest and most vulnerable are at greatest risk of dying of Covid, we are certainly not all in this together.

On this year's International Workers Memorial Day, we need to ensure that we commit ourselves to the challenge of building a better, fairer, more equal, and safer society.

We all owe a huge debt to the health and safety reps whose tenacity, skills and dedication was on offer to be deployed across non-unionised workplaces. An offer ignored, and I for one want a judge to ask government, why?

Gail Cartmail,
Assistant General Secretary,
Unite.



The vision of a high quality large-scale retrofit programme

The built environment contributes around 40% of the UK's total carbon footprint, almost half from energy used in buildings and infrastructure.

Newly constructed buildings are more energy saving, except that many are constructed with carbon-intensive concrete, but 80% of buildings in 2050 have already been built, so a major priority is decarbonising the existing stock. Indeed, Britain has one of the highest proportions of buildings in Europe built before 1945 and generally 'hard to heat', resulting in many estates suffering fuel poverty. In small recognition of the possibilities this situation presents in addressing climate change and creating new employment opportunities, the government recently offered a Green New Deal package of £3bn, of which £2bn is envisaged for Green Homes, £1bn for energy efficiency and £50m for social housing upgrade. This compares with £12bn in France and £36bn in Germany, which has a far lower proportion of 'hard to heat' building stock.

Both Camden and Islington have declared a climate emergency and laid out plans to address this. Islington launched its Vision 2030 for net zero carbon in June 2019, and organised its first Tackling the Environment and Climate Emergency meeting, intended pre-Covid to be annual, in which officers, councillors, unions, local environmental groups, tenant associations and experts actively participated. In June 2020, Camden presented its 5-year Climate Action Plan,



Carlton Chapel House in Kentish Town retrofit scheme

having held a Citizen's Assembly in 2019, envisaging all major developments to be zero carbon and reliant on 100% renewable energy. Both boroughs also boast exemplary retrofit schemes: in Camden, the Passivhaus retrofits in Agar Grove and at Carlton Chapel House in Kentish Town; and in Islington the Mildmay Community Centre Passivhaus retrofit, and the use of heat pumps in Boleyn Road. But such projects are like a drop in the ocean, considering that Camden owns 30,000 homes and Islington has 25,000 properties. Plans on a much greater scale are needed.

Already across the country retrofit campaigns are being initiated, including in Leeds by Leeds Trade Union Council (TUC) and in Battersea and Wandsworth TUC, together with the Greener Jobs Alliance, representing a partnership between unions and campaigning groups.

Leeds TUC campaigns for a large scale and deep retrofitting programme to high insulation standards and for the use of renewables, including heat pumps. This programme should be coordinated by the council in partnership with unions, practitioners, community groups and Further Education Colleges and address above all poor housing conditions, high energy costs, fuel poverty and consequent health problems.

The danger is that, without

confronting the problems involved, any Green New Deal initiative could end up as a repeat of the 2013 Green Deal, which included the certification of workers installing energy saving interventions and was premised on the 'Golden Rule' that the costs involved would be offset by the energy savings. This was launched with a £200 million budget, with Ministers projecting 250,000 possible jobs and claiming that 14 million homes would be made more energy efficient by 2020. In July 2015, with just 10,000 households benefitting, the government stopped funding. This earlier 'Green Deal' exposed the difficulties entailed in retrofitting on an individual basis and seeking to embed low energy construction by certificating and training particular skills on a one off basis without a comprehensive rethink of the entire vocational education and training (VET) system for construction and the organisation of the construction process.

Extensive studies across Europe have highlighted the need to upgrade construction VET systems to achieve energy literacy and overcome the performance gap in, for instance heat pump installation, between the energy efficiency envisaged in the design and the actual building performance on site. Zero energy construction requires a high standard of knowledge and know-how,

including physics and how to achieve air tightness, as well as integrated teamworking to bridge occupational and professional interfaces. Yet the number of construction trainees, including apprentices, have declined dramatically over many decades and the industry faces a major skills shortage crisis, not helped by Brexit. With half of the construction workforce 'self-employed' and a reliance on micro firms and subcontracting, there hardly exists an infrastructure for work-based training and colleges themselves have been starved of funds and facilities.

The alternative is for the councils to rely more on their own resources and to work with the colleges, the unions and local organisations to achieve the energy literate skilled construction workforce required for large-scale retrofitting of council property. Glasgow City Council has shown the way, with 2,200 construction workers directly employed in its City Building workforce, innovative low energy new build housing and retrofit schemes, and a comprehensive 4-year training programme for 250 trainees carried out in its training centre and local colleges. Islington Council is also half-way there, having now in-sourced the repair and maintenance of its properties. Just as local authorities have addressed the housing crisis in the past with their new build council housing schemes, so they can today in partnership address the climate emergency and play a central role in planning and carrying out the retrofitting of their properties with their own well-trained workforces, employed under good conditions. This then is the vision for an accountable, large-scale, and high quality retrofit programme focussed on energy saving rather than accommodating to energy demand.

Linda Clarke

Centre for the Study of the Production of the Built Environment (ProBE) University of Westminster, December 2020

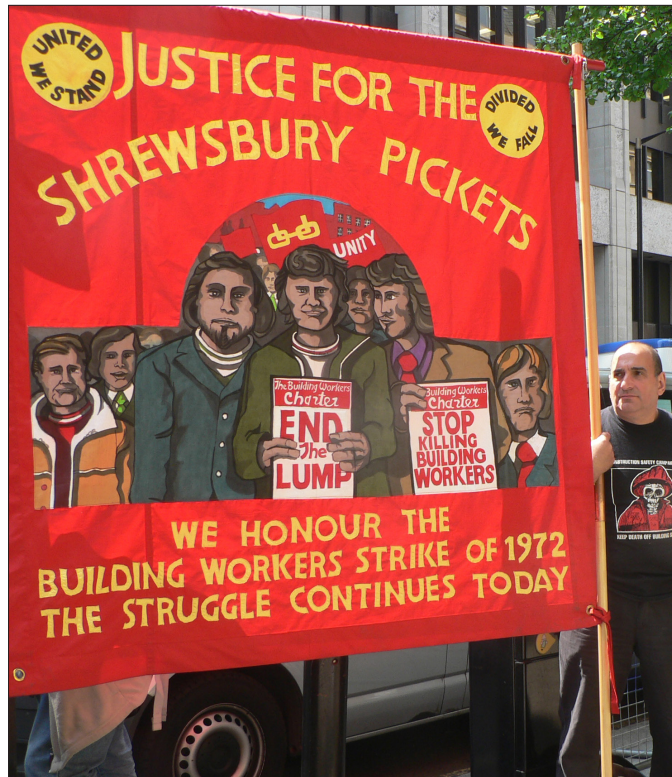
A LESSON FROM THE SHREWSBURY PICKETS' TRIALS

All trade unionists should celebrate the Court of Appeal decision on the 23 March 2021 to overturn the convictions of 14 Shrewsbury pickets for their part in the national building workers strike of 1972.

The verdicts were quashed because the state had evidence of a breach of Police procedures that made the verdicts in all previous trials unsafe. The Police deliberately destroyed original witness statements.

In the 1970s, building workers' wages were low and their working conditions were harsh and hazardous. 190 workers were killed on construction sites in 1972 and a further 231 killed in 1973. Increasingly, workers were employed as 'lump labour' (714 tax-exempt) and falsely classed as self-employed. This creeping casualisation of the industry sought to undermine trade union organisation and erode collectivism. Attempts by workers to win improvements were blocked by profiteering employers with activists being victimised and blacklisted. In the summer of 1972, the national building workers' strike won significant improvements in wages and conditions, but today they are under attack again.

In response to the spontaneous general strike following the jailing of the Pentonville 5, the Tories instigated a media and police witch-hunt culminating in the jailing of 6 pickets by Shrewsbury Crown Court in December 1973. The Tories' plan was to use the witch-hunt to create the political climate they needed to pass legislation to outlaw effective collective workers' solidarity action. They used same strategy to create a political climate that was hostile to Jeremy Corbyn. Both



witch-hunts were coordinated by professional pundits paid by media channels owned by Tories or their profiteering backers.

The defence team for jailed pickets Ricky Tomlinson and Arthur Murray argued that the broadcasting of the witch-hunting 'Red Under the Bed' documentary during the Shrewsbury trial by the commercial TV channel covering the Shrewsbury area - and nowhere else in the UK - was planned to influence the jury. The Royal Court justices specifically dismissed this argument. According to their judgement, "Given the political climate of the early 1970s and the clear issues in the case, we are confident that any juror who saw this programme would not have been prejudiced against the appellants as a consequence." In other words, "because of the political climate"

at the time, any right-minded person like the Royal Court justices would have formed the same judgement as them, and would have found the pickets guilty regardless of any police evidence.

The political purpose of the Justice for the Shrewsbury Pickets national campaign, started by Mick Abbot in 2006, was the election of Labour government that would challenge the Shrewsbury verdicts and revoke the anti-trade union laws because, as jailed picket Des Warren made clear in his speech from the dock on December 18th 1973, "The working-class movement cannot allow this verdict to go unchallenged. It is yet one more step along the road to fascism - and I would remind you that the greatest heroes in Nazi Germany were those who challenged the law when it was used as a political weapon by

government acting for a minority of greedy, evil men."

Any home secretary with any egalitarian principles could have easily found the "unsafe" evidence and had the pickets' convictions quashed years ago. Shamefully, almost the entire time Des Warren spent in Jail was under a Labour government, with Home Secretary Roy Jenkins turning down requests for his release

Twenty years later, 'New Labour' wanna-be oligarchs colluded in making the political climate more hostile in refusing to repeal Tory anti-union laws and pursued a slavishly pro-business agenda. Zero-hours contracts, fire-and-rehire on worse wages and conditions, and victimisation of trade union H&S reps who challenge unsafe procedures are escalating on a scale without UK precedence. The Tory government is able to commit the 'social murder' of British people with impunity because Labour and trade union leaders since 1973 have collectively ignored Des Warren's ominous warning.

The national committee Mick Abbott founded still exists. The main lesson we have learned is that the only way to stop governments "acting for a minority of greedy, evil men" from continuing to commit social murder with impunity is by planned collaborative solidarity action by progressive movements and alliances on a scale not matched in the UK since the general strike that followed the jailing of the Pentonville 5.

The labour movement now needs to step-up the demand for a full public inquiry into events at Shrewsbury and the part played by the state's security services in securing the convictions.

Steve Ballard,
London Hazards Centre

LONDON IS HURTLING TOWARDS AN AVOIDABLE MISTAKE:

STOP

THE EDMONTON INCINERATOR

Impervious to climate, circular economy, public health, and social justice imperatives, the seven councils that comprise the North London Waste Authority (NLWA) remain committed to building an unnecessary 700,000-tonne incinerator that would become a stranded asset well before the end of its operational life. What are campaigners doing to stop them?

As decarbonisation targets grab headlines and the government vows to propel the country towards greater circularity, the current Edmonton incinerator is—perhaps quite fittingly—coming to the end of its life. Indeed, the NLWA is preparing to decommission this quintessential symbol of the linear economy by 2027. This step could signify the end of an era, particularly if it impels north London's seven councils to usher in a net-zero waste strategy, buttressed by robust new measures to boost green job creation, reduce waste, and increase reuse, repair, and recycling.

Unfortunately, the very opposite is under way. The councils are planning to replace the old incinerator with a new, much larger one. They have not wavered in their determination although north London is generating far less waste than

the NLWA predicted. Nor have they reconsidered their decision in view of the mayor's forecast that London would have enough incineration capacity even without the Edmonton plant, so long as recycling targets were met. Disappointingly, the mayor has remained silent on the issue, citing limits on his powers.

The most persistent opposition to the project has come from the Stop the Edmonton Incinerator Now campaign, a coalition of local anti-incineration groups, including Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion (XR). The campaigners are calling for a pause and review, and leafletting to raise awareness of the multiple social, environmental, and financial harms associated with the councils' plans. They are well aware that the window of opportunity is closing fast, as the NLWA is due to award a construction contract to the winning bidder in mid-2022. A contractual cancellation fee would make it far more difficult and costly to identify a viable alternative.

The councillors who have shown some willingness to consider a pause and review tend to ask the same two questions: what's the alternative and what will it cost? Complicating matters, the NLWA has failed to carry out ongoing need assessments,

relying instead on faulty plans it drew up in 2015, when it requested government permission to build the new incinerator. It should go without saying that ongoing assessments of waste trends and alternative technologies are de rigueur for any waste incinerator project, especially given the sea change experienced since 2015.

In the absence of evidence-based re-evaluations and with the window of opportunity narrowing, the onus has fallen on the campaigners to propose a more sustainable alternative and estimate its cost to the taxpayer. Consequently, in March 2021, XR Zero Waste launched a series of waste management briefs tailored to individual councils' unique circumstances and requirements. The first brief lays out and costs a ten-point action plan to help Camden Council cut residual waste by 65% and achieve 70% recycling by 2030. The idea is to demonstrate that all seven councils can achieve similar goals without building a new incinerator.

Meanwhile, XR Zero Waste made the case against the Edmonton incinerator to Camden Council's scrutiny committee, which led to two encouraging outcomes. First, the committee chair announced that he would establish a dedicated subcom-

mittee to scrutinise the incinerator plans and to 'look at alternatives and the best way forward'. Second, in response to XR Zero Waste's proposal, the managing director of the NLWA agreed to assess the potential role of a new mixed-waste material recovery facility, which would reduce the amount of waste sent for incineration by at least 40%.

XR Zero Waste now urges all seven councils to establish scrutiny subcommittees on the Edmonton incinerator, to ensure that the NLWA follows through on its promise to evaluate the potential integration of a material recovery facility, and to work jointly on a net-zero waste strategy for north London (one that requires the removal of plastics from incineration streams by 2025).

Residents can help by writing to their councillors, their MPs, and the mayor to raise concerns about the Edmonton incinerator plans and to call for a more sustainable alternative. The Stop the Edmonton Incinerator Now website is a great resource for anyone who would like more details, including on how to get involved (stop-edmonton-incinerator.org).

Tania Inowlocki and Dr Rembrandt Koppelaar.
XR Zero Waste (www.xrzerowaste.uk)

Covid-safe return to work

The government's lack of preparedness to quickly introduce control measures to stop the spread of Coronavirus in early 2020 is a scandal.

Front-line workers in their thousands either had no PPE or PPE that was not up to the job. The shocking news that the HSE has failed to shut down a single workplace since the start of the pandemic confounded workplace reps and health and safety campaigners. Now, as more and more people return to their workplace, what measures should they expect to be in place to protect them. What needs to be done to make workplaces Covid-safe?

Stopping the spread of the virus

In May 2020 Independent Sage¹ published recommendations to the government to suppress the spread of the virus as a number one priority. It was recommended that employers should clearly understand their responsibilities to make workplaces safe for returning workers and for health and safety legislation to protect workers reporting violations. The main way coronavirus spreads is when someone who has coronavirus breathes, speaks, coughs or sneezes and another person breathes it in. The virus can be spread by someone touching something that a person who has coronavirus has touched, breathed, coughed or sneezed on.

Employers responsible for making workplaces safe

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSWA), is the primary piece of legislation covering occupational health and safety in the UK. Under the HSWA, employers have a duty to provide a safe place of work and protect the health and safety of their employees and others that may be affected by their work activities. It is the employer's responsibility to ensure the organisation has the necessary management framework to protect the health

and safety of staff and to provide a safe working environment. The 'Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999' sets out the requirements for employers to assess hazards and risks and make effective arrangements for preventative and protective measures.

Risk assessments key to making workplaces safe

A risk assessment is part of the risk management process that is the responsibility of employers. It involves identifying hazards in the workplace that may cause harm to employees and visitors. It is the legal responsibility of every employer to carry out risk assessments on the work of their employees. Employers should implement the following 5-step plan to produce risk assessment for the work of all their employees; Who might be harmed and how, what is already being done to control the risks, what further action needs to be taken to control the risks, who needs to carry out the action and when the action is needed by.

The union approach to keeping workers safe as the UK Government eases restrictions following lockdown (A safe return to the workplace, TUC²)

In April 2021 the TUC published its view on managing the return to work at the end or easing of lockdown in a way that supports worker safety and worker livelihoods.

Make workplaces Covid-secure: All employers must update their risk assessments to take account of what we now know about the importance of ventilation. As the UK unlocked in summer 2020, more emphasis was placed on surface disinfection – but the guidance has since changed to make effective ventilation the priority. Any activity which can be conducted outside should be, and employers should invest in

ventilation systems, as well as continuing to enforce social distancing and the wearing of face coverings. Everyone who can work from home should continue to do so until at least 21 June.

Decent sick pay for all:

The TUC says decent sick pay remains critical to ensuring a safe return to work. A year into the crisis ministers still haven't fixed the problem of workers not being able to afford to self-isolate – despite repeated warnings from the TUC and the government's own head of Test and Trace Dido Harding. The TUC says ministers should increase Statutory Sick Pay to at least the rate of the real Living Wage, and extend eligibility to the two million low-paid workers who currently don't qualify for it.

Supporting workers to get vaccinated:

The TUC says employers must step up and help the national health effort by giving their staff paid time off to get vaccinated. Companies should seek to persuade staff to get the vaccine, but not make it a condition of employment – making vaccinations compulsory will damage employer-staff relations and could result in legal cases on the grounds of discrimination. The TUC believes any Covid status passport scheme must require employers to consult with recognised unions at sectoral and workplace level, and will only work where employers provide decent sick pay.

Cracking down on bosses who risk workers' safety:

As England reopens, the TUC says that the government must start cracking down on employers who break the rules on workplace safety. Despite thousands of workplace outbreaks, not a single employer has been fined and prosecuted for putting their staff in danger. And the TUC notes that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has still not amended its much-criticised designation of

coronavirus as a "significant" rather than a "serious" workplace risk, which limits the enforcement options open to inspectors. The TUC says the government must take a much harder stance with companies who flout health and safety rules, and provide the HSE with a long-term funding boost.

Refusing to work when it is not safe:

Employees have the right to withdraw from and to refuse to return to an unsafe workplace. They also have legal protection from dismissal, disciplinary or any other detriment for raising a health and safety issue. The Government must remind employers of employees' legal protections when dealing with what they reasonably believe to be a serious or imminent danger in the workplace. Unions will back up our members, refusing to work when it is not safe.

Enforcement: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) must act quickly to apply sanctions to employers that do not risk assess for Covid-19 or fail to provide safe working arrangements. These are legal duties, and failing to meet them amounts to criminal breach, not just technical failings. We know Covid-19 is spread by people displaying no symptoms. The HSE needs to take action – including prosecutions – against employers who do not take safety seriously.

¹ Independent SAGE is a group of scientists who are working together to provide independent scientific advice to the UK government and public on how to minimise deaths and support Britain's recovery from the COVID-19 crisis'. <https://www.independentsage.org/independent-sage/>

² TUC, April 2021. Return to work April 2021.pdf (tuc.org.uk)

