

RESIST RELAXATION OF SUNDAY TRADING LAWS - RETAIL WORKERS NEED A BREAK TOO!



Amy Murphy

Sunday trading has and continues to be a contentious topic, with the Government's last attempt falling flat when David Cameron was forced to scrap a vote on plans to relax Sunday trading laws in 2015. In the run up to the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Sunday Trading Laws were suspended during July, August and September.

At the time the Government insisted this was a one off and not a prelude to a permanent change, really, I ask myself, then how come local council's are now using the current covid19 pandemic to temporarily relax the enforcement of Sunday Trading Laws once again! Supporting our key workers on the frontline during this pandemic is crucial, but let's not forget the other key workers in the mix, I am referring to shop workers of which I am one.

Everyday, shop workers put not only themselves at risk but also their families, to make sure the nation is fed, and although the

majority of customers are thankful, unfortunately, staff find themselves being shouted at, verbally abused and spat at on a daily basis, which is totally unnecessary and unacceptable.

Once again we are being told that the relaxation of Sunday Trading Laws by Council's is only 'temporary' just to support key workers until the pandemic is under control, with some suggestions saying that it could be six months or longer. Also it has been said that this relaxation will be really important for the recovery phase for retailers when they get up and running again, which poses the questions how long is a bit of string and when does temporary become the norm? We must be so careful that this does not happen and it is a big risk we are taking.

Let's not forget that shopworkers have families and the Sunday Trading Laws are very important in society as it allows families to spend quality time together and also rest time. Any relaxation will put more pressure on employees, all it does is favour big businesses and stop

employees spending time with their families. Consumers only have the same amount of money to spend, so although the Sunday spend may go up, it will just come from elsewhere in the week. There is also the added risk that customer demand will be displaced from small stores to large stores, as happened during the Olympics with convenience stores losing sales, which poses an even bigger threat to our already diminishing high streets.

Most of the big retailers have already put in measures to allow frontline key workers and those who are vulnerable to have extra access to do their shopping. Relaxing the Sunday Trading Laws is not the answer, the only beneficiaries would be big businesses, let's put our workers first and do the right thing by them, whilst supporting the frontline workers at the same time.

**Join the fightback
JOIN THE
SOCIALISTS**

Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join or call

020 8988 8777

or text your name and postcode to **07761 818 206**

to find out more about joining us today



Has your workplace implemented the following?

Social distancing within stores, warehouses and factories of 2m, scrap performance targets

Hand sanitiser and PPE available for all workers

Screens at checkouts, kiosk and customer service counters

Regular deep cleaning of stores, warehouses and factories

Regular health and safety meetings including elected reps from the workforce

If not, get together with others workers in your workplace and demand management acts!

Join the union and help us organise for

- Full pay for all workers self-isolating or laid off from day one - no to forcing staff to use holidays
- 35 hour working week with no loss of pay
- £15 an hour minimum wage and hazard pay
- Increase staffing levels in store to carry out any necessary cleaning & hygiene duties, bring back in house outsourced cleaners
- Scrap the 2 year qualifying period - Full employment rights from day one
- Full time contracts to all those who want them
- Time and a half for all overtime worked over contracted hours
- Reinstate lost paid breaks and premium payments, double pay on Sundays and time and a half on Saturdays. No extension of Sunday trading
- Trade union control over changing staff duties, hiring and firing, and opening time changes
- Open the books to trade union inspection if companies say they can't afford these measures
- Democratically elected committees of workers and consumers to control prices and rationing policies at all levels

Join Usdaw - usdaw.org.uk/join

STARMER WINS LABOUR LEAD- ERSHIP

The victory of Usdaw backed candidate, Keir Starmer, as new leader of the Labour Party is a major setback to the possibility of the transformation of the Labour Party into a mass party to defend the interests of working class people which was opened up by Corbyn's surprise victory in 2015. Under Corbyn's leadership, Labour adopted many policies passed by Usdaw ADM including a £10 an hour minimum wage, scrapping zero hour contracts, re-nationalising railways, rent controls and more. Usdaw members will be disappointed to see that given the evidence of Labour full-time officials deliberately undermining the 2017 election campaign under those policies. Starmer's response has been to protect those responsible! Likewise, he seems to be in even more of a rush than the government to get teachers back in schools, despite the lack of PPE and testing.

For more analysis of Starmer's victory - see recent issues of the Socialist newspaper

The view from the shopfloor

Connor O'Farrell, warehouse worker and Usdaw union member

In my workplace, the worry of deteriorating safety is becoming constant - and it is well-founded.

First, a long-standing worker was confirmed with Covid-19, and then a trainer who had close up contact with many workers during a recruitment drive by the employer. But with rotas of seven days in a row at least once a month, and the majority of union reps self-isolating, worrying is not enough.

In order to cut across the artificial divide of old vs new, and contracted workers vs agency, we are trying to co-ordinate a potentially depot-wide grievance campaign to include demands such as the sterilisation of all equipment, the opening up of all unused conference rooms to shop floor workers on breaks to aid social distancing, and for emergency pay to be maintained due to the vital nature of this line of work.

Individual grievances will be treated as just that by management. So, through the use of a mailing list, a programme, patience, and the understanding that we are the union, answerable only to the workers, we can raise their sights to fight back collectively.

So far, two workers have joined the So-



cialist Party, with more regularly reading the Socialist.

Working-class lives are being sent over the top for profit and this cannot continue. The vaccine for capitalism is socialism.

A JD Sports worker

JD Sports Workers have been organising to demand the company close their warehouse and pay all shop floor and warehouse workers full pay for the duration of this crisis. To understand why we took this decision rather than accepting our furlough pay, we need to go back to May 2019.

A report from The Guardian suggests that JD's CEO 'earned' a £6m bonus (over 2 years) on top of his handsome £2.5m basic salary - a salary 146 times that of the shop floor workers. Meeting unspecified performance targets could make him the highest paid CEO in Britain, earning more than the CEO of Tesco, despite them making five times the amount JD make.

At the beginning of 2020, a report in the Financial Times reported that JD were set to make over £425m - a new record for the company, beating the previous record set in the previous year - with the final figure to be announced on 15 April.

Since then, JD were forced to close their stores and chose to furlough shop floor workers at the tax payers' expense, despite their record profits. The way furlough pay is calculated means that my colleagues now face losses of up to £100 per week, causing unimaginable and unnecessary anxiety and financial hardship.

They also decided to put profit before people and continued to operate online and keep their warehouse open. It's been well documented that the conditions in the warehouse is potentially lethal: inadequate PPE, inadequate hand washing facilities and cramped work stations that make it impossible to follow social distancing guidelines.

15 April came and went without the publishing of the accounts, with JD claiming it would be "inappropriate" to publish them. Of course, they are correct. It would be incredibly inappropriate to announce over £425m profits just two weeks after going cap-in-hand to the treasury, begging them to take on 80% of workers' poverty pay packets. Especially since a news article this week featured a company spokesperson boasting of the "more than adequate" cash reserves they have to survive the crisis.

Our message to JD is clear: close your warehouse and guarantee us all full pay for the duration of this crisis.

Sign their online petition - search for 'Close The Warehouse And Pay Staff In Full' on charge.org

Usdaw activists meet via Zoom

Following weekly virtual meetings of Socialist Party members in Usdaw the shop workers' union to discuss the rapidly changing situation in retail, and producing several special issues of our bulletin, the Activist, we decided to hold a virtual public meeting on 11 April to take these discussions to a wider audience.

Ryan Aldred, Plymouth and District Usdaw branch secretary, introduced the meeting, highlighting some of the key issues from the retail workers' charter drawn up and published in the Activist.

Ryan commented that many workers in 'non-essential' retail will be

worried about how long their companies can survive, with

Debenhams being one of the big names going into administration. He highlighted how Usdaw should be championing the demand it adopted after the collapse of BHS, that such companies should be brought into public ownership to save jobs.

Usdaw President, Amy Murphy spoke about the varying levels to which local supermarket management have implemented social distancing policy. While some stores are adhering to all measures, and letting only a limited number of people into the store, Amy reported being contacted earlier that day by Tesco workers in a store where the manager had de-

ecided to let into the store as many people as possible to boost his sales over Easter.

Amy also reported that Tesco management has tried to bring in screens between checkouts to enable stores to bring all checkouts online, rather than just every other checkout. In her store, agreements have been made jointly with management to stick to just opening every other checkout, due to workers feeling that if screens were installed they would be unsafe because workers would be less than two metres away from each other.

It will be important for Usdaw members and reps to be vigilant that safety measures aren't loosened prematurely.

The meeting was attended by workers from Tesco, Sainsbury, Morrisons, Co-op and B&M Bargains among others. Comments were made on the improved sick pay and hazard pay that companies had been forced to concede, but also stressed the need to ensure we don't go back to the way it was once this emergency is over.

In concluding, Ryan stressed the need to reach out to workers and draw them into the union and help them organise. His branch will be holding an online meeting in the next few weeks to do this, and he urged attendees to encourage their branches to do the same, so we can discuss the new issues facing us.