

BOSSES REAP PROFITS WHILST WE STRUGGLE

**Connor O'Farrell, Tesco
warehouse worker**

Tesco's CEO has been handed a £6.42m pay package, the biggest annual haul for an executive at the supermarket since the departure of Sir Terry Leahy nearly a decade ago. He will also be entitled to a proportion of share bonuses, partly dependent on performance of the company, over the next few years.

However, back in the real working world and the the chaos of coronavirus, whilst retail and distribution workers make the Tory's key workers list, CEO's didn't.

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

This worry has realised itself now on multiple occasions, first a long-standing worker was confirmed with COVID-19, then last week a trainer, who had close up contact with many workers due to the high recruitment drive by the employer.

Now an agency worker has died of COVID-19 with family setting up a gofundme to have his body sent home for cremation. The most common incubation period of this virus is 5 days, an average work week, but with rotas of 7 days in a row at least once a month, and the majority of union reps self isolating, worrying is not enough.

Messages are regularly sent out to staff via tannoy and wrist

trackers to thank them for their hard work during this period, but after the recent clap for carers in the depot and nationally, it begs the question, how the essential sectors are being treated during this time, and how what that treatment could retreat to once "normal" is restored?

It was the normal we had before that has exacerbated these conditions. A 10% pay rise has been offered to the workers and although this should be bitten into with lockjaw, it helps to remember a couple months before this period, after 1.8% pay rise was initially offered as part of wage negotiations. This was promptly rejected by over 90% of the balloted workers. This insult was in stark contrast to the bonuses received by management.

An intake of hundreds of new starters over last few weeks, with agency workers trained in clusters of 10, social distancing not enforced during this training period and bike sheds not allowed to be used for smoking to adhere to this policy.

A collective worry is that asymptomatic carriers will pass on the virus without realising due to the late and inadequate health and safety provisions being made, and once a co-worker is infected, symptomatic carriers will pass on the virus due to no temperature reading being taken at the turnstile.

Although performance targets have been quietly suspended

for contract workers, the agency workers are not told this. While having liquidated certain lines for obvious reasons, in order to make up shortfall of profits they are dragging their heels with health and safety but sprinting towards recruitment drives.

Even after the death of an agency worker, their agency continue to undermine performance suspension and therefore a vital layer of social distancing gained by Usdaw for contracted staff.

Once fully won these measures should be translated to all workers, for emergency pay to be maintained due to vitality of this line of work, positive rota changes to be kept for those that want them, especially single parent workers who have been kept from seeing their children for months with no end in sight, due to shift pattern and lockdown measures, for trainee clusters to be spread out in accordance with guidelines, especially given the recent cases on the shopfloor.

If all measures are not rushed and minimal, why are management separating themselves from the rank and file? As clear as the glass plates dividing us, are the class tensions rising, something all trade unionists in this period can see. This cannot continue, working class lives being sent over the top for profit, the vaccine for capitalism is socialism.

**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. Full time contracts to all those who want them
- Scrap the 2 year qualifying period - Full employment rights from day one
- Scrap performance targets
- 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
- No lifting of any social distancing measures without agreement from elected local health and safety committees/ reps
- 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

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The view from the shopfloor



A convenience store worker

The shop I work in is constantly busy at the moment, from being in a situation pre-Covid-19 where like other companies we were talking about store closures over the course of this year and the next. Before this we had cut-backs on staffing levels in stores and at a couple of points of the day were working only with one member of staff in store.

Now our takings per week have almost doubled. Whilst we still have some availability issues, the company are trying to move more back to normal, so we're now selling things like scratch-cards that we'd stopped selling as they weren't essential.

How are the company rewarding us for all the extra work? We've had messages telling us how 'proud' of us they are. Many supermarket chains have given their staff hazard bonuses – but we haven't been given that, instead our manager was told to give us some snacks from the shopfloor to thank us! It's difficult for us to actually enforce the socially distancing measures in the store – we have just 4 people in at any time, and only two of us most of the time to police it. Fortunately the customers are good at sticking to it, with many poking their hands through the door and asking if its okay to come in before they do.

Everyone has access to visors or gloves if they choose to use them, and we have a one-way system through the store. One really positive change is that now the shop closes when we work deliveries, rather than trying to do that along with everything else before – we need to try to ensure that carries on whenever we go back to a new normal.

A Sainsbury's rep

I had a meeting with my manager before leaving work today and he used the acronym BAU and explained that this is now the focus at managers meetings within Sainsbury's. Essen-

tially, what it means is that, despite social distancing measures still being in place in all stores, managers are meeting to discuss how they can get back to "Business As Usual". That tells you how the retail sector will put profit before people.

An Usdaw member

Health, transport, communications, energy - all these are seen as essentials in life - all of which have been described as key workers, much of the workforce in those sectors are still workers. And all of these are either currently publicly owned or there have been big campaigns in recent years to bring these into public ownership, recognising their 'key' status in society.

But doesn't the same apply to the supply of food and household essentials? So why hasn't there been similar campaigns for big supermarket chains to be brought into public ownership - with Tesco, Sainsburys', Morrisons, and Asda controlling over 80%+ of the UK groceries market.

Of course, these haven't been publicly owned previously unlike the other sectors - but until the post-war boom then supermarkets didn't really exist.

Like in other sectors, there's a tendency to concentration, with a few, largely indistinguishable companies fighting over market share.

But doesn't the fact that some competition laws in retail were suspended in this crisis demonstrate that the free market isn't the best way to run things? Capitalist competition means duplication and waste - let's end our food supply system been run for profit, and run it to meet the needs of people instead.



RETAIL WORKERS FIGHT BACK AROUND THE WORLD

The Covid-19 crisis has shown up just how exploitative some of the retail bosses have been - with companies like Tesco giving shareholders hundreds of millions of pounds in payouts and Amazon boss Jeff Bezos set to become the world's first trillionaire. Meanwhile retail workers remain some of the lowest paid and most casualised sectors of the economy.

But around the world workers have fought back during this crisis - there have been strikes by Amazon workers in the US, Italy and France over safety, sick outs across US retail giant like Walmart and Target on May 1st over lack of social distancing and PPE, strikes over lack of soap and paid sick leave by some US McDonald's workers, Barnes and Noble workers in Australia struck after a worker tested positive for Covid-19, and we've previously reported on the socially-distanced protests by Debenhams workers in Ireland, to name just a few of the struggles around the world.

Below we print an extract about strikes in Amazon & Whole Foods in the US from a longer article by Sam Skinner from the Independent Socialist Group (full article at <https://independentsocialistgroup.org/2020/05/09/coronavirus-strikes-so-do-we/>)

Amazon & Whole Foods

Amazon and Whole Foods – both owned by billionaire Jeff Bezos – employ hundreds of thousands of employees between them. Since being founded in 1994, Amazon has vigorously resisted attempts for its workers to unionize. Whole Foods under Bezos has pursued the same anti-union action, including deploying tracking technology on employees to gauge “unionization risk” at all Whole Foods locations. The pandemic has revealed how essential these workers are

and, coupled with the company's simultaneous total disregard for their well-being and record profits, has pushed workers who have been trying to organize for years into action.

At Amazon's Staten Island warehouse, workers walked off the job on March 30th, after being told to continue working despite a co-worker having tested positive for COVID-19. Around 200 workers walked out, demanding that their workplace be thoroughly cleaned, in addition to demands for hazard pay and retroactive hazard pay. One of the organizers of the walkout, Chris Smalls, reported that workers were made responsible for cleaning their workspaces themselves, and in the event of displaying symptoms of COVID-19 have been forced to self-quarantine without pay. Amazon responded by firing Smalls and attacking the whistleblowers and strikers, rather than resolving the dangerous conditions and policies of their warehouses. Amazon has since been forced to rehire Smalls, proving that we can organize to defend our jobs.

The day after the Staten Island Amazon strike, workers at Whole Foods across the country took similar action. Organized by the group, Whole Worker, the “sick out” demanded increased hazard pay, and guaranteed paid sick leave for all employees. Whole Foods' then sick leave policy only granted leave to the fortunate few employees who could procure a positive COVID-19 test, something which is still not widely available in the United States. Policies like this, and loopholes in the federal Family and Medical Leave policy, force workers to risk staying at home and missing out on essential income, or coming into work and putting their fellow employees and customers at risk.