

## 'DAY OF RECKONING' COMING SAYS LILLIS - WE SAY ORGANISE TO DEFEND MEMBERS NOW!

### Editorial board statement

Many Usdaw members will welcome the recent comments of Paddy Lillis, Usdaw General Secretary, that a 'day of reckoning' is coming in supermarkets over pay. With retail sector wages barely keeping above the Tory's so-called living wage, this is desperately needed. But workers should not be lulled by the crumbs off the table the big supermarkets have offered us so far - improvements to sick pay and 10% hazard pay. As Tesco's dividend payout has showed, the big companies are confident about the huge profits we are making them. These crumbs have been given because we are all standing a head higher due to public recognition as 'key workers'. There are horror stories emerging across the retail sector of how profiteering managers are playing Russian Roulette with workers lives in order to boost the profits in their stores, as reports over the last few weeks in our 'Views from the Shopfloor column' have dem-

onstrated. With workers' memorial day coming up on April 28th, this can be used not just to remember the dead, but to fight for the living. The Sunday trading legislation is another area where companies are looking to increase their profits. Morrisons recently announced earlier openings to shop as usual, and rather than this being 'browsing time' we've had reports of tills opening before 10am, in breach of Sunday trading legislation. Paddy Lillis' comments on that issue at the beginning of April that 'we are not going to pursue this' had given employers the green light to go ahead. Some employers are clearly hoping to use the public goodwill towards NHS workers, with special opening times in supermarkets for them, to create facts on the grounds to establish longer opening times on Sunday's following the concerted campaigns across retailers over

the last few years to get rid of Sunday premiums.

With the now cancelled Usdaw Annual Delegate Meeting (ADM) due to have been taken place this week, it comes as a reminder that we must find ways

of being able to discuss the situation

facing retail and distribu-

tive workers in these

changed conditions. A

'day of reckoning' is urgently

needed now by shop workers. The Ex-

ecutive Council must discuss the demands Usdaw should be

putting forward in this changed situation - including updating the

now too low demand of a £10 an hour minimum wage. If branch

meetings or a physical ADM cannot be held, then we need to

hold one via digital technologies to discuss such demands and

how we build a campaign to win them in this new situation.

Sign the new Activist online petition - 'No extending Sunday trading in retail - retail workers deserve a break' search for the petition on [change.org](http://change.org)

### 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 other 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](http://usdaw.org.uk/join)**

## WMD - DEFEND WORKERS SAFETY

**Ryan Aldred, Plymouth & District Usdaw branch secretary (personal capacity)**

With International Workers Memorial Day (WMD) fast approaching on Tuesday 28th April, it is even more essential in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic that workers fight to protect their health and safety at

work. Every year there is an international day of mourning and memorial to remember those who have lost their lives due to dangerous working conditions. Workers should not tolerate unsafe conditions when it is their lives on the line.

Retail workers must resist bosses' attempts to prioritise sales over safety when workers and the wider

public will be the ones who will ultimately suffer by not implementing social distancing guidelines.

Despite growing pressure on supermarkets to limit panic buying only the bare minimum has been done. The only way to rely on effective measures to enable everybody fair access to groceries is by the unions

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## UNION DEMOCRACY - MORE VITAL THAN EVER TO FACE NEW SITUATION

On Sunday 26th of April, delegates and visitors would have been sitting down for the first of four days of discussion and debate about the issues facing workers in retail, distribution and allied sectors like manufacturing and others.

The spread of Covid-19 has meant lockdown measures that throw new challenges at all Usdaw members from safety issues for those working, to the worries of redundancy and an 80% cut in income under furlough schemes for those whose companies have shut.

Whilst it's clear ADM could not have gone ahead as usual, it is vital that union meetings do take place to discuss these new challenges and organise our membership to face them.

Whilst socially-distanced face-to-face meetings may be possible in distribution centres and factories, it's clear that the only way many branches will be able to meet will be through video-conferencing

technologies like Zoom and Skype. These should be organised as soon as possible to ensure reps can discuss the situations facing themselves in their particular workplaces.

But this also needs to be brought together nationally. That's why the Activist believes that the Executive Council should call a special delegate meeting to discuss the new situation under Rule 8, section 2, with the agenda limited to propositions dealing with urgent matters including those relating to the present situation. This should be in person if possible, but through video-conferencing if necessary. Although this year's ADM was a rule change year, because it hasn't taken place, then, s per the rulebook, branches will have the opportunity to do so next year. The EC, which would require a 3/4th majority to propose a rule change, should leave this until then to allow a full discussion.

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themselves setting and implementing limits.

Supermarkets made £10.8 billion in the month of March alone with many reporting better than Christmas sales as they profiteer from panic buying whilst also benefitting from business rates relief. With all this extra revenue coming in there is no excuse for bosses not to employ extra staff to implement rigorous deep cleaning regimens to keep staff and the public safe. Likewise, with workers assuming the extra risk of working throughout this pandemic they should be demanding wages that reflect their status as key workers.

As one Tesco worker put it "we're key workers, we should be on double what we're on now" which is why the Activist members in Usdaw are calling for £15 minimum wage as well as a hazard bonus throughout the pandemic. Where bosses refuse to take World Health Organisation guidelines seriously workers should

form health and safety committees to enforce the correct measures.

It is vital that unions organise to limit the risk of infection to both staff and customers. If bosses continue to ignore workers' demands for safe workplaces workers should be prepared to coordinate walkouts using Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 and refuse to work in dangerous conditions. Workers must not allow themselves to be put unnecessarily at risk when bosses are only concerned about keeping the money coming in.

It has been tragically reported that there have already been deaths of Usdaw members due to Covid-19, but also that bosses have asked it to be kept quiet in case it puts off potential shoppers. If this is the lack of concern bosses have for their staff and the wider public workers should have no doubts that it is in their interest to organise to keep themselves, their colleagues and their customers safe.

## The view from the shopfloor



### A B&M Bargains worker

In B&M Bargains management's attitude has been 'business as usual'. There are some staff furloughed, often in stores in shopping centres which have closed anyway, and some admin staff. But most staff are still working, with the companies attitude being that we can pick up sales from competitors whilst they are closed.

B&M management are using the argument that we are key workers because we sell some food, but it's a minority of what we usually sell, and in my store we're selling even less than usual at the moment. Instead most of the people coming in are in the garden, DIY and paint aisles.

In their rush to sell as much as possible health and safety is going out the window, we've had cages blocking fire exits so people can restock quicker. The cleaner in store had to self-isolate, yet for days no-one replaced her. Our till screens are next to useless. They are free standing but they keep falling and hitting the cashiers on the head. It's been reported to management but nothing is being done.

The company are only paying SSP, and when someone posted the policy notifying this on Twitter, the company's response wasn't to improve this, but to stop posting policy changes up - instead we have to be told only verbally - so we've no idea how much we're being told correctly or not!

Easter weekend was the worst period. We had a policy of only allowing 20 people in the store at a time, then it went up to 30, 35, 40 and then 120 at a time! Management told us they were letting in "only how many we feel safe" - I think they really wanted to make as much money as possible over Easter. To cap it all we had a regional manager in on Good Friday - was he concerned about our safety? No, he was more bothered about clip strips on the paint aisle!

It's only through the union that we've managed to win 10% hazard pay for those still working, but only from

March 29th on old wage rates. We also managed to get the company to agree to furlough staff with letters telling them to 'shield' from the NHS rather than just get SSP. With a low union density at the moment and just nine reps across the country, we need more B&M Bargains workers to join Usdaw and get organised.

### A Sainsbury's worker

It has taken only a few weeks but, Covid-19 has made all of us re-evaluate what is essential and what is important. Workers on the frontline, those who are supplying the products and providing the services we all need, are now starting to realise how critical their role is and how undervalued they have been in the past.

Also, after a series of ambiguous statements by government, the general public have identified that frontline workers, including shopworkers, are, without doubt, the "key workers" within any business or service sector.

It is with this newly found consciousness that we must act and demand that our rightful status is not only recognised, but reflected in our contracts, terms and conditions, our living wage and trade union and workers' rights.

We need action now! Do not let Covid-19 be an obstacle to workers' progress, let it be the springboard for action. We insist our Trade Union leaders listen to its members, in order to understand the feeling on the ground then, with the backing of its "key workers", open negotiations with the employers.

We need all retail trade unions to show solidarity with this proposal, as joint action could be critical. The "Big Four" retailers do not only follow government anti-trade union laws and each other, closely; but they set the standard for the retail sector. We need to organise and unify the distributive, shop and allied workers throughout the UK and ensure that our message of solidarity is heard by all employers.