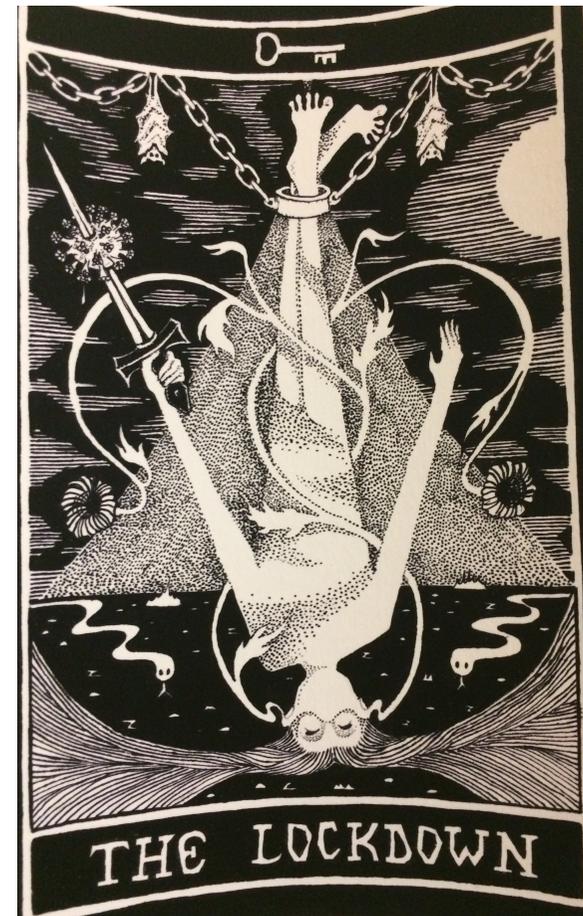


The lockdown interviews

Work and struggle during the pandemic



AngryWorkers, Winter 2020/21

angryworkers.org

Call-centre worker, Birmingham: *"In terms of corona, people are handling it in loads of different ways: paranoia, some don't care, there's no homogenous feelings. Even though the company are hiring new people, people are still scared of losing their jobs. As a workforce, we're doing okay I think but if management would start doing something like redundancies, now we're working from home, we'd be less strong to fight back. Saying that, there was a round of redundancies a few years ago and we couldn't do anything about that then either. The company acts within the law so can do what they want."*

The future is unwritten

While we write this, many workers are out on strike to defend their jobs, wages, and conditions - at Heathrow airport, British Gas, London buses, amongst many others. After having pulled society through the pandemic, we are now supposed to become victims of their profit crisis. The problem is that most of these disputes remain isolated within their workplaces and don't develop enough power against the bosses to really shut things down. Pickets are small and, often, trade unions are divided amongst themselves.

As the interviews have shown, we are all facing similar problems. We have to share our experiences of collective resistance - however small-scale these might be. Rather than just waving our flags and collecting solidarity messages we have to start talking openly about the strong - and the weak! - aspects of our struggles. This includes learning from the many struggles that take place in other countries.

As working class revolutionaries, we try to support the direct exchange between workers. Get in touch: angryworkersworld@gmail.com

That's another reason why we did more work. People say that the health visitors might have put themselves out of job by doing that."

Tube driver, London: "During the last week management have asked the drivers to do overtime. At the moment tube drivers can't do overtime. You need to have your two days off and you only work your 36 hours. That is an agreement that the union has in place. They suggested to us that drivers should do rest-day-working. Because many drivers are still off and the bail-out condition for London Underground was that they run a 100% service, they're desperately trying to run all trains. They're also trying to increase the number of trains on the line, supposedly to make social distancing easier. They also cancelled the night-tube and put these part-time workers full time on day shifts. The other part of the bailout is that they have to save money somehow. An obvious way to save money is to cut the night-tube."

Waitress, Manchester: "Work has opened back up but I haven't been called in yet. I'm not sure how they've worked out who to call back but those that have gone back are getting 40 hours a week but the rest of us are getting nothing. I think the manager wants to see how busy they are before asking too many people back. I've told her I will only go back if they can give me enough hours to make more than I'm making now on furlough. That means getting more than 25 hours a week. What they have said is that we've all got to sign a new contract. This will drop my guaranteed hours from 30 to 15 a week and they're saying if even one person in a department doesn't sign then we'll all lose our jobs and have to re-apply and then there's the possibility that some of us will lose our jobs. [...] The new contracts also extend our job roles so now as a waitress I can be asked to do other jobs like deep cleaning for a couple of hours but then I'd be losing my tips for those hours and I can't survive without tips."

Amazon worker, Glasgow: "The other problem is that they cancel shifts frequently. They hired too many people in October and November to be ready for the Christmas season, which meant that before December, lots of shifts were cancelled. On average one shift a week. Sometimes people are sent home at the door. Or they let you come in and say, "take a seat in the canteen and wait". Then they say "sorry, someone messed up, you have to go home". They offer to give you holiday for that day, if you had accrued enough holidays, or they take the piss and say, "I can give you a day off", unpaid of course! That's just a polite way to say, "fuck off". They have the power over you. There is an agreement that Amazon pays higher hourly rates than the other warehouses in the industrial estate, but then that doesn't mean much when they cancel your shifts. Apart from the shifts, getting your overtime pay on time is like constant guerrilla warfare with the company."

University lecturer: "Corona has been an opportunity for the university management to pursue a more blended learning model, which they've been wanting to do for a while now. I don't think they'd want a fully online learning model, because a major draw of the university is its location. At the moment, I think they'll carry on trying to push for more lectures being posted online, which is problematic because it makes them less reliant on staff but will probably become harder and harder to resist. I think the online meetings will continue, and that virtual one to one tutorials with students will become more normalised practice. There have been a lot of ongoing conversations about the handling of the pandemic and a lot of people I've spoken to at work are very angry. Management promising students stuff because they need to attract them in the marketed system is at odds with their needs as students and our needs as lecturers."

During 2020, we interviewed two dozen fellow workers about their experiences of work during the Covid-19 lockdown. We spoke to nurses, postal workers, tube drivers, call-centre workers, university lecturers, agricultural workers, school students and more. The purpose of these interviews was to figure out how the power relation between bosses and workers has changed during the pandemic. In many cases, it was workers who had to enforce health and safety measures at work. Many 'essential workers', whose work tends to be invisible and low-paid, entered the public spotlight. It became pertinent to ask how stuff ends up on the supermarket shelves. In many workplaces, the question of who controls our work and why, resurfaced. Is our work useful? Why is it organised the way it is? What is in the interests of management, and what is in ours? Would the fact that this essential had now become more obvious give these workers more confidence to fight for better conditions? Or is that confidence being undermined by the bosses, who want to turn the current crisis against us through things like 'fire and re-hire' strategies? Many of those we interviewed found themselves in the middle of this tension.

As working class revolutionaries, we want to support the discussion and independent coordination amongst workers beyond workplaces and sectors. We want to discuss how our day-to-day struggles relate to the fight for a different society, where we are in control of the means to create a better life. If you feel similarly, get in touch: angryworkersworld@gmail.com

In the beginning...

Royal Mail worker, London: *"Initially there was no supply of PPE and people were worried, they brought in their own masks. We got our first hand sanitisers two, three weeks after the official government lockdown. Workers complained to the union about this, but it also took the union in my office a week to get active. There were union endorsed wildcat actions at other offices due to lack of health and safety, but I am not to informed about the ins and outs of these actions – they tend to be localised. The wildcat strikes had a knock-on effect. In our office, management and union became pretty cautious about health and safety, but in a very contradictory manner."*

Tube driver, London: *"They can't run a timetable if so many people are off sick and the remaining workers don't want to risk their health. They had to more than half the number of trains during March and April. Initially they tried to stick to the timetable. But then it just descended into chaos if you have no drivers at the pick-up points. It creates a chain reaction, as someone then has to drive the train to the depot. There were four days of utter chaos."*

Primary school student, Bristol: *"Key worker school was boring at the beginning, none of my friends were there. But when some of them came it was much better than normal school. More relaxed, no uniform, only 15 people in the classroom, more interesting stuff to learn. The teachers were more relaxed and less strict during playtime, apart from the social distancing. Inside they managed the distancing, outside they didn't. They kept going on saying 'Be aware of the sleeping lion' or 'Keep on pushing your shopping trolley in front of you', to remind us to stay two metres apart. The playground is separated, so you can't play with year 6."*

Morrisons supermarket worker, London: *"During the pandemic more people try to get jobs like these. There are actors working with us."*

McDonald's Worker, London: *"A lot of workers, some of them are university students, didn't come back after the end of the first lockdown. At the same time, you saw people who were full-time construction workers taking on roles here because their sites had been closed."*

Agricultural worker, Kent: *"As fruit pickers/agricultural labourers, we were definitely key workers, but in working on the farm I came to be aware of a kind of stratification of key workers in public conception, with doctors/nurses at the top and people doing our work much lower down. I guess doctors and nurses are clearly linked to fighting the virus in peoples' minds, but folks sweating away in an anonymous field deep in Kent less so. If anyone found a shop in Canterbury (the nearest large town), which offered discount for key workers, we'd all tell each other to be sure to take the most advantage of it as a kind of practical solidarity thing."*

NHS worker, Leeds: *"Managers are working from home also and find it hard to monitor everyone's activity and I and others tell colleagues who feel under pressure just do what you can in the hours you are paid for*

use IT to do their work have an MS teams account so we can easily look up other workers we wouldn't normally see during a day at work and message them. The Trust covers a massive area with hundreds of workplaces. We can easily arrange a union meeting for members in our own local team using Teams and we get a better attendance than before. Last week we had a meeting for UNISON and UNITE members across all the Primary Care Psychological Therapy Services in the Trust which would have been impossible to organise before because everyone is dispersed and would have to travel to a meeting and wouldn't be able to spare the time."

Wetherspoons worker, Bristol: *"There were a couple of instances where we actually took collective action. During the whole Eat Out to Help Out madness, we were working with a skeleton crew every night at a breakneck pace with the kitchen being absolutely overwhelmed. So the kitchen at one point told me that they just wanted to refuse any more orders. I went and had a quick chat with a couple of the workers who were in the union and we just turned off all the food on the till, so we essentially downed tools and forced the manager to not let anyone in and shut the pub for over an hour. The other occasion where we took collective action was when two workers in two consecutive days went home mid-shift displaying Covid symptoms. The manager basically decided that nobody else had to isolate and made up a definition of "close contact". We had a quick meeting and sent a pretty much co-authored message to the manager saying that we were pissed off and that we would be isolating and think thought that we should get paid for that isolation period. It ended up with the boss agreeing that we could isolate if we thought we should, and it turned out later that we had managed to convince him to skew it so we got full pay over those 14 days."*

Changes post-lockdown?

In many cases management introduced new working methods during the pandemic to compensate for the fact that a higher number of staff were off sick or that certain work could not be done. It is likely that they will try to keep some of these measures in place to get more work out of us. We have to remember that it was us who kept things going during the pandemic. We have to use this power to avoid being squeezed more.

Royal Mail worker, London: *"All this comes during a time when a lot of changes in Royal Mail were announced, in particular by the old boss Rico, who left during the pandemic. There were job cuts announced for central London, also by reducing delivery to a Monday to Friday schedule. Figures of 40,000 to 45,000 job cuts were circulating. With less workers needed to cover the rest days of other colleagues, people would have to move between offices. Management wanted to introduce more flexibility in this regard. There was an uproar when management announced this, and they retreated by saying that all this is voluntary for the moment."*

NHS Community Midwife, Bristol: *"The health visitors stopped working, they shut down their offices during lockdown. They only do phone calls, no visits at all. This has been a bit annoying because we have been doing them instead. We would normally refer some babies or women to health visitors, but there were none.*

are not willing to do much. I try to get them to join the union, but they say they can't afford £2 a month membership or say they don't want to get in trouble or say they're not stopping in the job for long."

Amazon worker, Glasgow: "There is not much collective resistance. There were two incidents where people said, "we should start a group", when they had their shifts cancelled. People suggested a petition, but that would mean handing over names of people who might then get even less shifts. Once when I was stopped at the door, four, five of us waited and told the manager that he should sort out a job for us. There was a bit of militancy, but basically with the aim to get some work. There was a refusal though to just go home. People are not aware of the other Amazon struggles that are going on internationally. Many people who started recently also don't know that Amazon paid a bonus during the first lockdown period. Amazon have told us all we are working an extra two hours every day to cope with increased orders (with no prior notice, of course). Lots of us have refused, simply told them we can't do it, and leave when we are scheduled to leave. There is certainly an increasing sense of disdain towards Adecco and Amazon."

Housing officer, Manchester: "I'm not aware of the union doing anything about these deteriorating conditions. We're all in the union but you only ever see it when someone wants to get elected or if you're on a disciplinary and you can take the union rep in. I say to all the others the reason the management get away with it is because we don't do anything collectively, there's no solidarity. People only care when they themselves are in the shit. So, the managers are able to deal with everyone through individual conversations, persuading people that they should just carry on working. That's the environment we're working in nowadays. People only deal with it by going and getting another job or getting their doctor to sign them off with stress. I keep saying to people we've all got the same problem, what have you got to lose by speaking up, but people just aren't interested."

Morrisons supermarket worker, London: "The main grievances are around sick pay or rather the lack of sick pay. People tell you not to lift things in a certain way, because if you hurt your back the company won't pay you. People also complain about the unsafe environment, like, there are too many people in the break room at the same time. They also give you your shift rota too late, like a day before, which is hard if you work night shift. One co-worker suggested to write a collective letter, but that never happened. People are angry, but also knackered, they don't want an extra argument. The union is not present on the shop-floor."

McDonald's worker, London: "During lockdown, our campaign was impacted severely. We only had Zoom meetings. We couldn't visit other McDonald's stores. Although the union campaign has existed for a few years now, it still relies on paid union organisers. It would be better to have teams of workers who visit other workers in their area. Workers organise the Zoom meetings, but not the real-life campaign yet. Organisers organised a protest once in front of my store, but that was six months before I started working there. People who were organising in the store at the time are now gone. That's the painful part."

NHS worker, Leeds: "I work for the NHS, a Primary Care Psychological Therapy Service. Nearly all of us have been working from home doing telephone or video therapy using MS Teams. Working from home is a double-edged sword. Yes, we feel isolated at times, but we can also easily call each other up. All staff who

and ignore the targets. Most staff in our service are now doing this, which is self-activity of a sort. The other thing people are learning is that we don't really need managers, the service runs quite well with the therapists managing their own caseloads and the admin staff booking patients in and sending out letters etc."

The quotes above show that the pandemic and the lockdown shook up our daily lives. There are of course negative aspects here, people felt scared and alone. But there are also opportunities as the daily grind is interrupted and some people had more time on their hands. Many fellow workers experienced an initial period of chaos, where the bosses didn't know what to do and where there was more space to make decisions on the shop-floor, rather than the boardroom. Even more than in normal times it depends on our ability to improvise to keep work running. In many cases though, this causes extra stress. The question is, how we can use the need to improvise to improve our conditions collectively?

What changed under lockdown?

Work life became harder in some instances as management quickly made decisions about new working arrangements that workers had no say in or did not respond to the new pressures workers were under. On the other hand, some peoples work became easier as footfall dropped and there was less to do. Juggling childcare though was a common problem throughout. Here are some examples of how the daily routine changed.

Royal Mail worker, London: "Normally the postmen and women go out with the van drivers once they've finished sorting the mail. We tend to have to wait for the van drivers. Now management say that we cannot go in a van together. They told us that we have to either walk to our patch – which in my case can be an extra 45 minutes each way – or take public transport. Public transport became very crowded as time went on, which puts you in an absurd situation. But management insists on continuing the measure, probably also because work can be done quicker! Instead of having to wait for the van drivers we start our round earlier and only few of the postmen wait till the final sorting work is done. The union also defends this measure, saying that it would save jobs! Management threatened anyone sharing vans with immediate dismissal."

NHS community midwife, Bristol: "For me the main issue around PPE was time, the time it takes to change and clean. You have 20 minutes to see each woman in normal life, and that is still the case. But in these 20 minutes you now also have to walk down two flights of stairs, change your PPE, wipe all surfaces and so on and then go back and let the next woman in. Everything takes literally twice as long. They should have given us more time for that, they should have changed to 30-minute appointments. I kept bringing that up, but then created my own solutions. We had more work, for example because of the cleaning. Then there were less workers. I normally finish at 4pm or 4:30pm. Now I would stay till 6pm to get the work done. Weekends we normally finish at about 2pm, I would finish at 4 or 5pm. If a colleague's partner would have symptoms, she would have to isolate herself for two weeks, also because there was no testing or track and trace. Loads more work because of people shielding or isolating. During the peak of the lockdown I worked about a quarter again, unpaid."

Heathrow maintenance worker: "At the beginning, they also cut most peoples' hours – again, with no loss of pay. They realised that we couldn't all be at work at the same time. All the management and tech staff were working from home before the lockdown was imposed, which is another reason why they sent vulnerable workers home as well – it wouldn't have looked good otherwise. Management hasn't been hassling us either about work that isn't completed. We haven't taken on any new tasks either. We're only doing 'emergency cover' so British Airways knows not to expect the same level of service from us. We have less work to do overall as less things are being used but been as we have half the staff, the workload individually is very similar."

Housing officer, Manchester: "Most of our work is face to face interactions so after the lock down we had to find ways of doing things without this. This made everything twice as hard. Often you needed tenants to sign things and this couldn't happen. We had to find ways round this, either by doing things online or over the phone. Mostly these new ways were just worked out by people themselves. When management did tell us to do things it was usually after we had already worked that out. My job is so varied that they couldn't work out rules to cover everything. Not only has my workload increased a lot but working from home was very bad. My work normally is very stressful and I now realise how having a work environment defused that a bit but working from home is awful. At first, they had me working on a little tablet and working for seven hours a day on a little screen, which I had to do for months, was very difficult. On top of all this stress you've got managers also at home with nothing to do but monitor us more than usual and it's so hard to motivate yourself to do eight hours work stuck at home all day."

Elderly care volunteer, London: "In our charity we organise social meetings, games, health talks, arts and crafts for elderly people in our area, who are mainly from a working class and migrant background. We use public spaces like libraries and community centres to do that – in this regard we depend on the (Labour) council to provide us with these spaces. With the Covid lockdown these spaces were closed, only our office space remained open. Many of the elderly people are without family, or their families live further away, so we started phoning them regularly. We started going shopping for them or getting their medication. Their mental health was affected by being isolated. The council had sent most of its workforce to work at home, so there were not many official council workers on the ground. What the council did do was transfer people to us who needed support, as most other local charities, for example mental health charities, were also closed."

University lecturer: "The workload has gone up for sure. We had to reconfigure all our lessons to be taught online. All students had a blanket 'mitigating circumstances' which meant that they could all resubmit work if they wanted, which meant extra marking for us. This went right on into the summer, meaning we had less time to prepare for the next academic year. Now the new term has started, I'm working around 10 extra hours a week than my usual 37.5 hours. The union did manage to negotiate some extra hours for teaching in our 'Workload Model', which assigns a time to each task – but it still doesn't really reflect how long it takes, which means we end up working more hours than we are paid for."

Morrisons supermarket worker: "Since the pandemic started, they open the store earlier, on some days for vulnerable customers to come in, on some days just to extend opening times. That means you have an hour less to do the actual job before customers are on the floor. Especially when a delivery comes in late it

appointments by telephone." Or something like that. They played into the whole NHS heroes bullshit too much."

Tube driver, London: "We were in the middle of our pay ballot, which we just cancelled. We were going to strike over pay. But the company said if you don't accept the pay offer now, we will withdraw it and the next offer will be less due to the money we will lose because of the corona virus. The decision to cancel the ballot and to accept the offer was top-down. There was no involvement from the rank-and-file. The NEC made the decision, which is supposed to be the democratic body of the union, but it's only twelve people, and only one of them works on London Underground. (...) "We came up with a charter of a dozen health and safety and other Covid-related demands. We told management that if they don't meet these demands there will be a ballot. The demands came up through branch meetings. The branch meetings took place on Zoom. We have a weekly train-grade Zoom meeting, these used to be monthly meetings. Normally hardly anyone attends these meetings, somewhere in a basement in Kings Cross. Recently attendance grew from 6 people to 70 or 80 people. There was so much engagement that they started having it weekly. Some people who never turned up before started joining on Zoom. That became very useful to share information across the network."

University lecturer: "Not being in the same physical space as my co-workers changes things. There are obviously less general collegial interactions. But on the flip side, there have been more opportunities for people to participate because all our discussions now happen online. Attendance of the union branch meetings has increased. And we've been discussing how to support each other – with the extra work and our mental health, which has been really good. The relationship with management has become even more distrustful after the strike and with their stance in relation to corona. They refused to renew loads of fractional/hourly paid contracts because of the university's more precarious financial situation. This has increased the workload even further onto the permanent staff. (...) While the union agreed that it was still too dangerous to simply resume face to face teaching, management didn't seem to be budging. In our department though, we decided to take our own course of action: staff teaching on face to face modules wrote a joint letter setting out the reasons why we didn't think it was a good idea – the usual stuff like H&S and risk assessments, but also pedagogical reasons. Management ended up agreeing to our demand that all teaching in our department continues online, which was great! I'm not sure if the union knows we managed to do this though, at least, they haven't contacted us about it..."

Courier worker, Denmark: "Covid made it harder to organise because you couldn't meet in person which is a big deal for precarious workers. You don't have a physical workplace and you don't know the people you are working with so face to face meetings are so important and now we couldn't have them. Also, we were just having pay negotiations with the company and were supposed to have a meeting with them just after the Covid hit so those meetings were postponed for about 5 months. So organising fell to just a small group and wider meetings became impossible while all the time the company was pushing this 'you're heroes, we're all a team' mentality."

Waitress, Manchester: "I think some stores would go on strike if things get worse. Where I work only about 10% of people are in the union and it's a bit of a water cooler mentality, i.e. people will talk and complain but

staff and volunteers of the organisation grew closer during the crisis. We had to figure most of the things out ourselves, as there was no official protocol. This is not surprising, as the government itself didn't really know what it was doing."

McDonalds worker, London: "When the first lockdown started, people were no longer allowed to sit inside to eat in. Some new rules were introduced, like wiping counters more regularly, wearing masks in-store and glass shields between different parts of the kitchen. But the managers themselves were running back-and-forth between different sections and there was a shortage of masks at first. Even now, managers do not really care about safety. A manager told me that if I am too worried, I should stay home. There was no real collective resistance about all this. The financial situation of my family is pretty bad, so I couldn't afford to stay home. At the same time, I didn't want to go to work, as my parents are vulnerable. So, I initially took holiday days because we didn't have much information about whether we would get paid at all after McDonald's closed. So now I don't have any holidays left."

Agricultural worker, Kent: "Between workers coming and going, there was no cleaning of the caravans. This was left up to the workers. Because it was the lockdown period, people left often as work reopened, e.g. the local McDonald's. When a new person came, the site manager would knock on your door and then it was up to you to introduce them to the caravan site and show them around. The new worker's bed could still have the old worker's stuff on it. So no, not much cleaning. To begin with, pretenses were made at keeping us in 'bubbles' and staying two metres apart, but this quickly dropped and everyone (our farm- roughly 100/150 people) more or less interacted as normal, before the pandemic. Our temperatures were taken once a week to check for fever, but really that was all."

What kind of disputes emerged? And what was the role of the union?

The question is how we can respond to such situations collectively? In some workplaces there are trade unions, but they don't necessarily do what workers want on the shop-floor. We have to build our own groups and structures in order to put pressure on management.

Royal Mail worker, London: "During the beginning of the lockdown, the CWU leadership called off industrial action against the management's restructuring plans, saying that we are needed during these times of national emergency. At least temporarily this might have worked out for them. Management is now cautious to attack workers, who have just been declared heroes. We have to see how this turns out in the long run. The CWU is pretty top-down, the decision to call off action was not discussed. Our reps only inform us rarely of what is happening."

NHS community midwife, Bristol: "The Royal College of Midwives are half a union, half a professional association. They didn't do anything. Nothing that I can remember anyway. They put out bulletins, but nothing that I could wave in front of management's face and say: "Here you see, we can do 16-weeks

becomes a bit of a nightmare. Having to wear a mask all the time when you are lifting 25kg boxes is also tough. A lot of people have dropped out and left the job. Management doesn't really want to talk to you, they hardly ever come out on the shop-floor. There is no guidance, you learn by doing things wrong and then someone correcting you."

NHS worker, Leeds: "At first early on it was pretty much the same, and then as the pandemic got more widespread our normal acute medical workload actually dropped right down as people were avoiding coming to hospital as they were scared. As that happened our department ended up a bit over staffed and quieter than normal. When that happened, they started talking about redeploying some on us to different departments. This happened after a few more weeks, and some of us ended up doing the jobs of junior doctors in acute medical wards as plenty of them were off sick at various points. We also ended up rotating through wards that had Covid patients on, although not the sickest. That was stressful and something people weren't happy with at all at first, especially as it didn't seem to be done in a fair way (sometimes managers would just send someone seemingly randomly from the shift) but it did settle down."

University lecturer: "What's been better and worse during corona? Ive' spent more time with my child, and less time commuting. But the increased stress and uncertainty during this time has definitely affected my mental health. My kid is only in nursery part-time because it's too expensive for full-time care. Me and my partner, who is also working from home have had to devise a schedule where we take it in turns. Before we did that, it was chaotic and unworkable."

NHS worker, Bristol: "The main thing was childcare, and the fact that all that is based on kids going to school. That was difficult for people. There is key workers' school, but midwifery doesn't go from 9 to 5. Key workers school increases the health risk to your family. So what do you do? Some people picked up lots more overtime, bank work at the weekends. But childcare was the main issue. People left older kids at home, but then felt guilty about it and worried. My two flatmates lost their jobs in hospitality and found themselves without income overnight. I relied on them to do childcare. Other co-workers had their older children coming back from university and could rely on them. People had different strategies. But another reason why many of us stayed till six was because many of us were bloody bored by our children and partners at home. Home life became a topic of conversation. People were supposed to work from home with their kids around and realised that that is damned difficult, if not impossible. Childcare is work. It revealed the role of the grandparents, and all the neighbourhood structures and stuff women have put in place, like play dates. All this is vital to go to work. This is normally invisible, the whole fucking house of cards is built on these informal relationships and if you take them away... everybody suddenly saw the unpaid work, because it was not done. It takes a village to raise a child, but the village was shut. You can't put your kids in front of the telly for eight hours."

Who imposed health and safety?

Given the late response by the government and the prevalence of disorientation and unwillingness amongst management, workers often had to enforce health and safety from below. Here we can also see how workers are in different positions to enforce this. In some sectors, where workers have more power, it is easier than in others. Overall, there is a close relationship between workers' general confidence to question unsafe conditions and the general rate of infections.

Royal Mail worker, London: *"Due to the lack of reaction from above, many people voted with their feet, sick-rates went up to 15 to 20% during the period of the lockdown. This meant that many walks could not be done, and work was piling up. There was a lack of drivers. Management offered overtime, but not many workers took it up. Most people just wanted to get their job done and go home – and due to the lack of traffic people managed to finish quick. This aggravates a general problem: some workers come in early and don't take their breaks in order to finish early. Many workers have second jobs in the afternoon."*

NHS community midwife, Bristol: *"I think the public locked down before the government did. And our health Trust didn't do anything before the government did. There was still a time lag even then. By the time the Trust management did anything we had already been quite nervous for two, three weeks. There was no management advice before lockdown, no changes. I myself changed my work routine at the risk of getting in trouble. I am on various midwife Facebook groups and I knew that a lot of Trusts were doing more than we were. And even our team was not doing as much about health and safety as other teams within our Trust. The RCOG (Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists), who are the uber-advisors, suggested ways to safely see women less. They put a Covid strategy on their website, like, there were certain appointments you could do over the telephone, there were certain blood tests that you could combine. A reduced schedule that wouldn't compromise women's health too much. And our Trust wasn't doing that and neither was my team leader – but I was to a certain extent. The measures taken varied extremely between Trusts. I have colleagues in Hackney, in Cambridge and so on, and on the Facebook groups people were asking each other what each Trust was doing, for example, are you doing telephone booking or 16-weeks phone appointments? The differences were stark, in particular compared to my team."*

Tube driver, London: *"We had a driver at the beginning of March whose husband tested positive for the virus. We asked management what they are going to do about it, but they said: "Unless she tests positive we won't do anything". There was conflict with management about this. We were fighting them from January for PPE or some sort of health and safety plan. All the reps started emailing them when the pandemic started in January in China. It basically took management till the middle of May to get a regular supply of masks and hand sanitiser and stuff. Around 25 to 30 % of staff went off sick with symptoms. Passenger numbers went down by 95%, so straight away workers thought: "What's the point? The more time I spend at work, the more dangerous it is for me". Workers were only working four to five hour shifts and then went home. Drivers came to work, drive for three and a half hours and go home again. They had no breaks; they didn't interact with many other staff. On a full-time schedule you have four meal breaks in different locations, you meet loads of people. None of that was going on. People felt safer because of that. The five hours shifts later on got*

formalised across the entire network. (...) So they could not run the usual timetable. They started an emergency timetable and then a 'Covid 19' timetable. They wanted to have trains running every 4 minutes. That would have meant longer hours and more mingling for workers at work. Drivers and reps rejected this timetable. Management then came to the union and said: "You reps can redesign this timetable a little bit and try and make it work. The industrial reps were released for a week. So yes, management relied on the union in that regard. The problem was that management rejected every proposal made by the reps. They tried to enforce their timetable, we rejected that. We threatened them with a ballot over it, that went to ACAS. Things dragged on. In the end, the 5-hour day continued for two months."

Heathrow maintenance worker: *"Before government guidance was issued about corona and the lockdown, our management had pre-empted the way things were going to go. So two weeks before the lockdown, they sent those older workers with pre-existing health conditions home on full pay. The union didn't want to ask for this, fearing that if it came from them, the management would try to get out of paying those workers in full. The thinking was that if the company led on these policies, the onus would be on them to give fully paid time off. They sent around 20 people (out of 130) home."*

Waitress, Manchester: *"I went back to work saying, 'we've got to sanitise all the touch points' but no-one else was taking it seriously. I was going around with sanitiser everywhere and the others were saying 'you're taking it too far'. Actually, the manager was trying to keep everyone informed of what was going on but people still didn't really take things seriously. We changed our practice a little bit but no-one was wearing PPE or anything. I started wearing gloves but my teammates were telling me to take them off."*

Amazon worker, Glasgow: *"Inside the warehouse they have a strict two-metre social distancing policy. They hand out red cards and threaten you with the sack if you don't comply. But it's impossible to stick to it. The work you are doing there necessitates that you are in close proximity to others. If the rule was actually applied, Amazon would not fulfil half their orders. People are rushed, people throw parcels at each other, managers rush them to hurry up. Initially, they told you no one has to lift more than 15kg, but now everyone lifts heavier items alone. Some have complained about this. (...) That's the most frustrating thing at the moment; they're weaponising health and safety against you. It feels like an important tool in their hand to discriminate against people in the warehouse. There are people whose job it is to walk around with a big stick saying '2 metres distancing' and to shout at you, we call them the "2 metre Nazis". At the same time, you have grid controllers who send you to work in overcrowded aisles. They pressure you, they say "I'm sorry, but you have to do it". We had a meeting with a big site manager last week, normally we hardly see him. He said that he was appalled at the chaos and lack of social distancing in the warehouse. He told us that on his first day back from holiday he sacked 50 drivers because they weren't abiding to the distancing rules. He was bullshitting, he didn't sack 50 drivers, but he wanted to scare us."*

Elderly care volunteer, London: *"The relationship with the council was pretty much a one-way street, as they would ask us to take on cases, but when we asked for PPE they never responded. It's hard to get any material support from them. They did set up a website where people could volunteer work or donations. I personally worked longer hours at the charity during lockdown, from 11am to 4pm from Monday to Friday, as a volunteer. It was good to see that people really appreciated our work and that the relationships between*