

ECONOMIC (IN)JUSTICE

FACTSHEET - STORY

Name	Lola McEvoy
Details, area of experience	Works for the GMB union as an organiser, one of the biggest trade unions in the country. [Previously Senior Campaigns Manager at the Living Wage Foundation.]
Interview date	December 2020
Issues addressed	Pay, health and safety, working conditions for lower paid key and casual workers, public perception of lower paid workers. "We want to see fundamental change in how people value the work of our carers."
Injustice category (linked to economic injustice)	ability <input type="checkbox"/> age <input type="checkbox"/> class <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> faith <input type="checkbox"/> gender <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> neuro-diversity <input type="checkbox"/> race <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sexuality <input type="checkbox"/>
Dates mentioned	2020 pandemic
Locations referenced	All over the UK
Campaigns, movements, protests	Successful action during the pandemic to change national policy on financial support, including sick pay for low paid key workers.
Historical context	2020
Tactics	Collective identification of change needed; clear demands ; workplace organising and network of reps reporting issues; lobbying and letter writing ; use of the media : anonymised media interviews; data and statistics backed up by personal stories ; industrial action .

Key words	Trade unions Key worker Casual work Gig economy Media Pandemic Sick pay Industrial action
Key points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Historic undervaluing of lower paid, casual and ‘gig economy’ workers ● how the pandemic has enabled a new appreciation of their value of and our dependence on them ● “the common thread of humanity” - winning over the wider public with human stories people connect to ● clear identification of the change needed, e.g. sick pay for all NHS workers ● the importance of collective organisation and of people being agents in their own change ● the power of first-hand testimony to affect change ● action by organised low pay workers achieved major significant change affecting people all over the country ● successful action builds confidence in people to get involved

Story summary	<p>Lola McEvoy tells the story of contacting national press to expose the PPE crisis in care homes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her action led to a government investigation in order to ensure adequate PPE and full sick pay for everyone working in NHS hospitals not paid directly by the NHS.</p> <hr/> <p>The GMB exists to protect its predominantly female members in many industries all over the UK. Members get together on issue of concern, e.g. pay, unfair management, safety at work. 2020 has been especially hard for key workers on the front line. The pandemic has left people unprepared and unprotected at their workplaces. Members in health and social care have been brave but had to fight for their protection. The gig economy, casual work, make it difficult for workers such as social care workers, supermarket stackers and delivery people. Historically, society has dismissed those occupations. People’s actual lives have been at risk during the pandemic.</p> <p>As an organiser, Lola talks to members and sees what they want to change. Giving people confidence to take action and raise the</p>
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	<p>alarm about PPE in care homes. One care worker on minimum wage in East London, looking after vulnerable elderly, called to say they were using binbags because there were no aprons and had not got the protective equipment they needed. They had been told not to use face masks in case they ran out unless there were confirmed cases of Covid-19. Lola passed the story to the national press and used sickness statistics and data backed by stories from people’s human situation to let people know what was happening. By using anonymised media interviews of real people but without their names or personal details, she was able to expose what is going on.</p> <p>The government had to investigate and ensure PPE was getting to the right places. The result of the campaign was that they won full sick pay for everyone in the country working in NHS hospitals but who were not paid directly by the NHS. They got statutory sick pay brought forward from the third day to the first day of sickness, for everyone in the country. Other wins included support for members and their families who caught Covid and died, and for lower paid key workers who were not being supported as much as the higher paid.</p> <p>Lola’s task is to consider what tools they have that can change the power dynamic and how to bring people with them. It is all about the members and how they benefit for themselves and take an active role in winning from the ground up. Industrial action is the strongest and sharpest tool, but the union tries to avoid it because it is unpopular, difficult to do (including financially) and can leave members facing stigmas and work victimisation. Sometimes getting people together with energy, being creative and articulating what your demands are works better instead. There have been big shifts around respect for the work done by members and this narrative shift leads to more wanting to be union reps. Action can be contagious – people gain confidence and want to do more.</p>
Stand-out quotations	<p>“The axis of value that we put upon workers has shifted fundamentally.”</p> <p>“The pandemic has been a tipping point to show that we need those workers and they have protected us ... making sure we get what we need as a society and as individuals.”</p> <p>“An organiser’s job is to cause trouble ... to encourage people to fight for what they want to win.”</p> <p>“When you bring a group of people together, everybody’s got something they want to change.”</p> <p>“In the words of one of our reps, ‘we’re dropping like flies.’”</p>

	<p>“Important to get our members, our ordinary people doing those jobs, front and centre.”</p> <p>“If you get the right narrator to tell the story, and you put it in the lived experience of a lot of other people, you find the common thread of humanity and people will agree with you.”</p> <p>“Start from a space of shared common experience.”</p> <p>“Covid doesn’t discriminate based on salary and neither should we.”</p> <p>“It’s not right that the people looking after our elderly ... are not given a decent wage and are struggling at the very bottom, asking for crumbs from the table.”</p>
Main themes for learners	<p>What should guide how we value the work people do and how should that be reflected in pay and conditions?</p> <p>Why have key workers been so undervalued?</p> <p>What is the ‘gig economy’?</p> <p>The role of trade unions</p> <p>The power of human stories to win support</p> <p>The power of human stories to galvanise people to feel confident in taking action</p> <p>Why it is important to work together</p>

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