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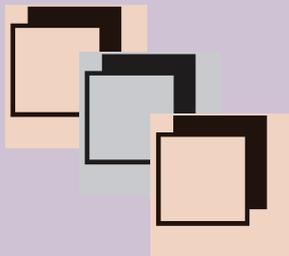
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Comment

It is tempting to say that the Covid crisis is ending, not with a bang but a whimper – but that would be to suppose that it is ending at all. The problem is that it feels like things are back to normal with pubs and restaurants open, subject to social distancing, but that often seems to be a discipline followed more in the breach than the observance.

I reckon there is a big economic problem brewing. Many firms are continuing to allow staff to work from home; a number have declared this as a policy, never intending to re-open expensive offices. I suspect that this may not work long term for manufacturing businesses. Internal service staff, who act as a conduit to customers, often need instant contact with production departments to answer queries efficiently. External sales staff may be different, though even here reps exchanging ideas will help solve problems with clients.

Businesses based solely on service are another matter and here the problem is twofold. How long will it be before managers decide that it would be cheaper to outsource the jobs? I have no doubt that there will be agencies trying to persuade them that this is the case. The result will be more redundancies and reduced income for the workers involved as many are forced to join the very call centres that pinched their jobs in the first place. The bigger problem, and one of which the government seems only too well aware, is the hit that caterers will take when workers are no longer out at lunchtime buying sandwiches or meeting for coffee.

Some of which may seem remote from windows but the economy is a complicated money-go-round. If people have less surplus income the new windows or door are likely not to be priorities. Reduced income for the window company means making that saw centre last another year not to mention the reps' cars and even the boss's BMW. Especially if no one is, any longer, putting in the miles because they can do many of their meetings on Zoom.

And what about the poor landlords? A class for which there is little sympathy, I know. But with no income from all those empty offices even the Bentley dealers might be feeling the pinch. In fact the only detractor I have heard on the subject of working from home was a spokesman from an association which represents landlords. He claimed they had research showing that home workers were less productive than those in offices. Anecdotal at least we all know that isn't true (see Comment The Fabricator July for the real picture).

But again, with no income, the landlords will not be refurbishing their buildings which means another hit for construction in general and windows and doors in particular.

On the other hand the industry is being its usual optimistic self as far as recovery is concerned. The latest from the aluminium sector (the CAB column page 14) reports results from its latest quarterly survey which shows that the sector suffered less than the wider construction industry and expects a rapid bounce back to previous levels.

But it still isn't over by a long way. The cheery chaps at the World Health Organisation recently reckoned the pandemic will be over in two years' time. So don't wait for the fat lady to sing just yet. In any case Boris has told her to lose weight. Let's hope she doesn't lose her voice as well.

John Roper
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