

WORKERS' fight

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*"The emancipation of the working class will only be achieved
by the working class itself" (Karl Marx)*

BROWN PLASTERS OVER THE CRACKS OF CAPITALISM, BUT WE NEED A PROFIT-FREE, CRISIS-FREE WORLD!

Since February's huge losses at RBS and Lloyds-HBOS, yet more mind-boggling amounts of public funds have been splashed out on the failed capitalist money machine.

This time, the two banking giants have been awarded a bounty of about £60bn. In addition, Brown will cover 85% of any loss on £600bn worth of loans by these banks - almost the equivalent of the government's entire annual budget! Finally, under the magical wand of "quantitative easing", Brown launched a money printing spree, which will put up to £150bn into the City's coffers.

The whole capitalist class is now on the make

The banks' bailouts were designed to rescue the system as a whole. But so far, outside the car industry's package, public funds were only handed out to the banks as an "encouragement" to resume lending.

But this did not happen: the banks hoarded the cash, when they did not use it in profitable speculation. Bowing to big business pressure, Brown is now throwing more funds at the system, but using wider-ranging measures.

His new guarantee concerns mainly loans to big companies. So that the biggest sharks will be able to renegotiate their loans and, possibly, get new, cheaper ones. And if, at some point, they want to shake off their debt, they will always be able to use the bankruptcy law and get taxpayers to foot the bill for them!

This is not just a subsidy to the banks, but to all big companies!

Contrary to Darling's claims, this will not relax lending to households nor to small businesses. Since, thanks to Labour, the state-controlled banks are "commercial" outfits, they will pick and choose those borrowers who can generate profits

despite the crisis - i.e. the richest!

As to "qualitative easing", this is just a mechanism to distribute new electronic money to existing owners of state bonds. Apart from boosting the market price of these bonds, thereby offering new profits to speculators, this will benefit big financial institutions far beyond the banking system, especially insurance companies. But for working people, this is just another huge figure which is being added to the bill that they will be expected to foot!

Stop the parasites, we need workers' control!

It takes mad doctors and mad medicines to try to preserve at all costs, a failed system. But this is exactly what the government is doing.

Flooding the City with hundreds of billions may help the profit sharks to cover their losses. But how can it benefit the overwhelming working class majority, which is at the receiving end of the crisis?

The talk about "helping" households faced with repossession was only hot air. And while tens of thousands of building jobs were cut, nothing was done to meet the need for affordable rented housing. Nor have Brown's bailouts reduced, let alone stopped, job cuts. Quite the opposite! How many companies, like the state-controlled banks, use public money to fund redundancies? Not to mention the government's own Royal Mail, for instance!

Out of respect for capital, Brown does not use his control over most of the country's big banks to contain their profiteering. Worse even, the new Banking Act gives the Bank of England (and, in fact, ministers) new powers to secretly inject public funds into private coffers. Commercial secrecy is now compounded by "official secrecy"!

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Yet, against the bankruptcy of the financial system caused by its own profiteering, the only effective response would be to merge the failed banks into one single state bank, used on a non-profit basis to allocate the funds necessary to cater for the needs of the majority, rather than the greed of the sharks who caused the crisis.

Of course, such a response would also require that all secrecy be lifted and that the working population takes upon itself the task to ensure that resources are allocated according to the collective interests of the majority.

A tall order? Maybe, but far less costly than the disaster that the capitalists and their politicians are cooking up for us! ☐

PFI on Skid Row?

The government has discovered that PFI also needs a bail-out, to the tune of £4bn in the next 18 months!

The private "partners" complain that they can no longer borrow funds from the banks. So Darling has stepped in with a £2bn loan for 110 projects, including schools, hospitals and the widening of the M25.

But wasn't the pretext for PFI precisely to get private companies to take on the "risk" attached to public investment? They borrowed the funding from the banks and, once the project was built, the government happily put the taxpayer in hock for 25 or 30 years to pay back the investment, with plenty of interest.

Of course the cost was a lot higher this way. But then, supposedly, the "risk" was on the PFI "partner". Except, of course, that there was no risk attached, making PFI such a profitable form of parasitism on public funds that it produced a whole new industry

which prospered on public-private "partnerships".

Today, however, the "risk" is finally there, with the credit crunch. The logic of PFI would be for the "partners" to either deliver their part of the deal by footing the bill - i.e. the increased cost of borrowing - or else withdraw. But they won't and Brown won't compel them to do so, either.

The truth is that PFI is merely a way of financing the private sector with public money, not the reverse, as it has been claimed for so long. And since Brown's agenda is to feed the predatory fish, he will not let them go hungry.

Yet it would make sense for the state itself to build all these schools, hospitals etc., directly, without the exorbitant cost of feeding the PFI profiteers.

Yes, let us have "public works"! With all those construction (and other) workers out of work, there are plenty of hands waiting to do socially useful jobs! □

Freedom of information – but not about Iraq

After an information tribunal ruled that the government must release minutes of two cabinet meetings held just before the invasion of Iraq, Justice Secretary Jack Straw immediately announced that the government would use its veto to keep the information secret.

Straw said publishing the record of the cabinet discussions would risk "seriously damaging cabinet government", because these poor cabinet ministers might be afraid of having their discussions scrutinised in future - a ludicrous argument which the Tories immediately supported.

Not that the cabinet minutes would actually tell us much more

than we know already. Whether the then Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith, actually considered the war illegal or not, was never the real issue. With or without these minutes, we know that Blair's and Straw's war was based on lies about Iraq's non-existent weapons of mass destruction.

The US' and Britain's bloody occupation of Iraq aimed, and still aims, at securing the interests of imperialism in the region. For this, Bush and Blair sacrificed hundreds of thousands of lives. That is the real scandal, but no cabinet minutes are likely to expose it. □

Rendition: sharing in the dirty work

For a long time British ministers denied colluding in the US practice known as "extraordinary rendition" - taking prisoners for interrogation to countries outside the scrutiny of the US legal institutions, in order to be able to use torture without restriction. But this was yet another lie.

Eventually, Foreign Secretary Miliband admitted last year that two US military flights carrying victims of "extraordinary rendition" used the British air base of Diego Garcia for refuelling. Then, in February this year, Defence Secretary John Hutton revealed that two men from Pakistan, who had been captured by the SAS in 2004, were still being held by US forces in Afghanistan.

This did not stop ministers from trying to use the Official Secrets Act against a civil servant for having leaked information about their collusion with rendition. However the government's own lawyers decided that the civil servant's defence - that the information was in the public interest - had too good a chance of winning and the case collapsed. Nevertheless, the whistleblower remains sacked and has had to take the government to an Employment Tribunal.

Of course, none of this should come as a surprise. Exploiting the poor countries in the interests of the City, is a filthy business and those involved inevitably have blood on their hands. □

Child poverty: the poverty of Labour's policy

Back in 1999, when there were 3.4 million children living in poverty, Blair announced that his government was to reduce child poverty by 50% in 2010, before eradicating altogether by 2020. But a report on child poverty published last month by the Rowntree Foundation, estimates that 2.3 million children will still be living in poverty in 2010. Which is 30% more than the government's official target of "only" 1.7 million!

The report did highlight one change, however. Unlike 10 years ago, the majority of children living in poverty nowadays have at least one parent in work. So Labour's "welfare-to-work" policy, to get people into jobs, no matter how badly paid or insecure - has quite obviously failed to

"lift families out of poverty", despite what Brown's much-vaunted tax credits were supposed to achieve.

Of course nobody living in the real world would be surprised about this, given the pathetically low minimum wage, the casualisation of employment, the need to work several part-time jobs and still not have enough hours, and the difficulty in obtaining all-too-meagre welfare benefits when unemployed.

The recession can only be expected to make this situation even worse, as the report points out - all the more so, because this government has no plans to increase help for the poor. This is a privilege reserved for the "poor" bankers only! ☐

Teenage pregnancy: Britain's tin medal

The number of pregnancies in under 16s is up for the first time since 2002 - to 8,196 in 2007. Children's minister, Beverley Hughes is "disappointed". So she should be. In 1998, the government announced that by 2010, teenage pregnancies in England would be halved. With one year to go, they have fallen by only 12.6%.

Now Hughes says another £20m will be available for contraception/sex education schemes. Like on-site services at further education colleges (but not ALL schools!).

Indeed, facilities are not available locally, the sparse sex education comes too late and services are inaccessible. The likes of that 13-year old boy who made tabloid headlines after his 15-year-old "girlfriend" became pregnant, would certainly have fallen through the net.

The government has cut NHS contraception clinics (it always expected charities to fill the gap of

its inadequacy) while transferring the responsibility to GPs - even if this is hardly appropriate for the young and the very young seeking help and advice! It has bowed to reactionary lobbies against sex education in schools. Tory Alan Duncan's comment is typical: teenagers get pregnant because they are not "taught about right and wrong"!

Britain has the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Europe - 4%. In the Netherlands it is just 0.7% (1.5% in France). Why is this?

Obviously, the incidence of teenage pregnancy is linked to poverty and social deprivation. Economic decline started here long before it hit the rest of Europe.

But in addition, backward social attitudes have been promoted, thanks to the concessions made by Labour to religious reaction over the past years. And this includes a refusal to accept the natural sexuality of teenagers, which just exacerbates the deficiency of provision for their needs. ☐

DIY dentistry increases as NHS dentistry recedes

A recent survey found that 8% of those questioned had tried DIY dentistry: 26% had pulled a tooth using pliers, 30% had tried whitening teeth with bleach, and 11% had stuck broken crowns with glue.

This was reported in much of the press as evidence of people's ignorance. When in fact it exposes the real shortage of reputable dentists still operating under the NHS and the level of dental charges, often unaffordable for patients.

Dentistry was never fully integrated into the NHS. From 1948 to 2006, dentists were paid for each item of treatment and the patient paid a percentage of that amount, up to a fixed ceiling. In the 1990s, government attempts to curb rising costs led to friction with dentists - who began to leave the NHS. Finding an NHS dentist became increasingly difficult.

Then in April 2006, an oversimplified new scheme was introduced by the government, which removed payment by item and replaced it with three broad price bands which include all treatments. It also scrapped the responsibility for dentists to leave a patient "dentally fit" and broke the link between time taken and materials used.

Many dentists now refuse to carry out more expensive treatment on the NHS at all, or they split the treatment into separate "courses" and charge the patient all over again, each time. And yet more dentists have left the NHS.

Judging from the result, one can only wonder whether the government's aim was not precisely to push as much dental treatment as possible into the private sector, where profiteering now abounds at the expense of the population's dental health. ☐

Jaguar-Land Rover: "extraordinary measures"

As the Geneva Motor Show exhibits a £1m Aston Martin and all the car companies are boasting of their super luxury models, the workers in Jaguar-Land Rover (JLR) who make some of these very expensive cars have just been blackmailed into voting for a pay cut - on the advice of union officials.

How did this happen? In February the workforce was told that they faced compulsory redundancies - after 450 jobs had already been cut in December. But apparently the bosses were open to "negotiation", because the union officials from Unite then organised a ballot which placed two options in front of the workforce: either accept compulsory redundancies, or prevent them ... by taking a pay freeze until 2010 - and by going onto a 4-day week (meaning taking a pay cut in addition).

Yet JLR could well have found the money to pay the whole,

uncut, workforce in full, had it been told to go jump by the workers. After all, it is owned by the huge Indian-based multinational conglomerate, Tata Industries, which has multiple credit lines and very large assets. Not that this has stopped Tata from joining the other car makers to ask the government for a bailout in January, however!

Unite's official negotiator, in congratulating himself for "saving jobs" at JLR, said "*we all recognise that extraordinary times require extraordinary measures*"!

Unfortunately, however, it is no longer extraordinary for union leaders to negotiate pay cuts, as workers at companies like JCB and Toyota have found out.

However, the one "extraordinary measure" which we do need - but which the union officials never mention - is a general fight back against job, wage and pension cuts! □

RMT ballots: if only this meant a concerted fight back across the railways!

The RMT has called a strike ballot of all its members in 3 train companies, First Capital Connect, South West Trains and National Express East Anglia, as well as the London Overground. For the first time in a long time, these ballots co-incide - with the implied threat that all these workers could strike together.

In all these companies, there are job cuts as well as cuts in one or other aspect of the service, (for instance ticket office closures) while fares have been increased. But that goes for all of the train companies, not just these 4! So, while this co-ordinated strike ballot might seem to be a positive development, it has excluded whole sections of workers on the railways and London Underground, who are just as affected by the cuts. This is the case for workers in National Express East Coast,

for instance, where cuts have been across the whole line up to Scotland, with changes affecting ticket staff, catering and guards. On the other hand, retail workers in C2C, another NE company, were called out on 24-hour strike, all on their own, on 2 March!

Of course it is not just co-ordination of ballots which is an issue when it comes to the RMT leadership's response to attacks against the workers it represents. These leaders have also got themselves a reputation of calling strikes and then backing out of them at the last minute. Yet a truly concerted and co-ordinated strike across the transport network could not fail to have a huge impact and allow workers to feel their very real strength for once. But if we want such a strike to take place, we will have to rely upon ourselves alone! □

For one profit-shark in the nick, how many get away with murder?

Not many bosses have ever been sent to jail for endangering their workers' lives. And with the current cuts on Health and Safety inspections this is unlikely to improve.

Nevertheless, some bosses do get caught, as was shown by the recent case of a Sussex roofing contractor. This company was found guilty of corporate manslaughter, after an employee fell to his death through a roof on an industrial estate.

The degree of negligence was so blatant that even a justice system known for its indulgence towards employers, could not ignore it.

The company had supplied its workers with only two crawling boards, on which to walk across the roof, while a rival firm, bidding for the job had recommended twelve! The victim had no safety harness or safety net. As to the "risk assessment" carried out by the company's director to cover his back, it claimed that the roof was metal, when in fact it was made from asbestos.

In the end, the company was ordered to pay £30,000 and its director was jailed for a year - not much, considering that a worker was killed by the criminal profiteering of this company.

But then, in this capitalist society, profits can justify more or less anything, from manslaughter to outright war! □



Railway workers working for dozens of companies are faced with the same attacks on jobs and conditions.

Royal Mail privatisation - or pension plunder?

Business secretary Peter Mandelson is now using the (estimated, but who knows?) £5.9bn deficit in the Royal Mail pension fund as a justification for selling off 30% of Royal Mail to a private bidder. Pension fund trustees back him up by claiming that if this does not happen, Royal Mail will not be able to plug the hole and pension benefits may be halved.

On this basis, Mandelson's blackmail is simple: if a private partner is found to help fund Royal Mail's "modernisation", the government will take responsibility for the pension fund. If not, the pension scheme is doomed because the government will not lift a finger to fund it.

In other words, this crude push to part-privatise Royal Mail has, in fact, two objectives:

One objective is very likely to be the pension fund itself - not the deficit - but its estimated £22bn assets. Taking "responsibility" for it could very well mean that Mandelson plans to take the whole lot and fund pensions out of the government's budget in the meantime

- in which case, the "deficit" would vanish in the short term, but the postal workers' contributions would as well. This would be a very convenient way to plug some of the astronomical deficit that the government is building up as a result of the bank bailouts!

The other objective, "modernisation", is well-known to postal workers. They have been in the process of being "modernised" for years - meaning not investment, but massive job cuts.

Presumably Brown is not too keen to take the blame for yet more huge job cuts (and service cuts) at a time when unemployment is rising so fast. He would rather be able to blame future cuts on the requirements of a private partner!

In any case, this attempt to pull the wool over everyone's eyes only makes Mandelson's plan even more outrageous and means that it must be opposed with all the effective means available - i.e., collective mobilisation on the ground. □



Tens of thousands of jobs have already been "modernised" - i.e. dumped - over the past years. Mandelson wants more to go.

No bail-out for RBS workers



RBS' bosses could not have been more truthful!

The government already has a majority stake in the failed bank, RBS, and will end up owning 90% of it after its latest bailout. So presumably Darling was fully aware of the announcement by the new RBS boss of another round of job cuts among RBS staff, which is said to threaten up to 20,000 workers. Yet, the only issue which seems to be bothering Brown and his ministers is ex-RBS boss Fred Goodwin's pension pot. That tens of thousands of workers stand to lose their wages is obviously perfectly acceptable for this government. After all, isn't RBS supposed to carry on being run "commercially" - i.e. on the backs of working people?

This is all the more of a disgrace as these latest job cuts come on top of 13,000 jobs which RBS has already cut worldwide, plus 2,300 in Britain. RBS employees are not the only target, either. Compass, which runs the catering at RBS headquarters, has just told half its 200 workers that their jobs are under threat.

So the tens of billions of taxpayers' money which are being pumped into the bank are, in fact subsidising some 35,000 job cuts (so far)! For Brown and Darling, it is much easier to endorse RBS throwing workers on the dole than to tell Fred the Shred that he should make do on an average pension and give up his golden handshake. □

BMW (Cowley) - Sacked on the spot, at 5.30am!

At 5.30am on February 16, BMW summoned all weekend night shift agency workers to a meeting. An agency manager then read out a letter that sacked the 350 workers on the spot, with a further 500 to go after the next week's shut-down. Uproar ensued, as union officials tried to justify their silence stretching back weeks.

There was all the more reason for the sacked workers to be angry as, in addition to the brutality of the announcement, most of them had been waiting for a promised permanent job for years.

BMW did not even have the decency to wait before offering weekend overtime. But when managers did that at the end of the first week back, because 850 cars needed reworking, many turned the offer down. Work the first weekend after BMW had dumped the weekend shift? BMW could sort out its own mess!

Of course all of this could have been pre-empted if, instead of going along with the company's secrecy games, union officials who knew about

BMW's plans since January at least, had exposed them straight away and proposed a course of action to stop the company's plans.

Now, BMW bosses probably expect to get away with screwing even more work out of the remaining workforce. But this may well prove more difficult than they think. After all, they still need Minis to be produced. And since they think they can sack workers on the spot like this, nothing should prevent us from walking out, on the spot whenever circumstances require. □

**Mount Pleasant mail center (London)****• Fighting for our jobs**

The open-air meetings outside the Phoenix Centre, organised for EC [delivery office] this Thurs (5:30am and 9:30pm) are aimed at getting us to reject the revisions, until there is a "national agreement that protects the people who stay, as well as those who wish to take Voluntary Redundancy".

But past national agreements were made outside of our control and assumed that we'd sell our jobs and our kids' jobs for enough of a cash bribe! Indeed, whether it's a "permanent benefit" from savings, or a one-off bonus from savings, it's still the case that savings=job cuts.

Why should we ask to get a part of this money, which Royal Mail makes at our expense, by cutting yet more jobs (60 more here in EC)? [Mount Pleasant - Workers' Fight, 24/02/09]

• Our demands first!

This is especially outrageous at a time like this! No, we should be demanding that the government pays as much as it takes to keep us all on a decent full-time wage. And anyone leaving on EVR/VR should be replaced.

That should be the only "national" demand we put forward! [Mount Pleasant - Workers' Fight, 24/02/09]

• Relying on ourselves

Proof that we need to take resistance to RM and the government's plans into our own hands, if we needed it: Billy Hayes told the Times "Obviously, there has got to be a reduction in the major sorting centres. You'll never find a bit of paper that says we don't recognise that there are going to be job losses."

Yes, Mr Hayes, that's the problem with the union leadership, in a nutshell. [Mount Pleasant - Workers' Fight, 24/02/09]

• Hardly a candid camera

Did you know that the CCTV isn't there to spy on us, but on the managers? Yes, in Work Time Sleeping we were told yet again not to push 2 or more Yorks at once - but this time they added that any manager seen on CCTV to ignore this going on, will be in trouble! Sure. As if managers would be punished when they rush us and harass us to the point of ruin. [Mount Pleasant - Workers' Fight, 24/02/09]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• BMW can't be trusted**

At a meeting this Monday, agency workers were told that up to 150 of their jobs were safe. For the rest of us, who were to be sacked on Thursday, that announcement was meant to be our notice! If that doesn't show total contempt for us... And why would we trust them anyway? [BMW Cowley - Workers' Fight, 24/02/09]

• The carrot that was a mirage

BMW claimed to the media that it is being "straight" and "fair" about "releasing" agency workers. We know the truth: BMW has cynically abused agency workers for years, with the dangled carrot of a BMW contract but with no intention of honouring its promise. Not until late this Monday on Radio Oxford, was smoothie BMW spokesman Biggs questioned about the length of service of sacked workers and asked "when does a 'temp' become more than a 'temp'?" He had no answer. [BMW Cowley - Workers' Fight, 24/02/09]

• They know why we're angry

The final insult, of course, was being told to return uniforms and ID cards or be docked £35 - on top of any hours "owed back" up to 33! Do they fear we'll slip back into the plant at a later date? [BMW Cowley - Workers' Fight, 24/02/09]

Con trickery at Ford

After Ford told the British-wide union negotiating body that it was cutting 850 jobs and intended to "review" the pay offer of 5.25% (due last November as part of a 3-year deal), union officials threatened strike action. They pretended to be furious that Ford had reneged on a pay deal which part of the workforce had already voted for.

Unite's official wrote to Ford's boss, complaining that the "normal business relationship we have enjoyed in the past, regrettably, may never be restored". He reminded him that "it was the trade unions that proposed an agreement of 3 years duration. [...] to give the company the stability it craves during such an unprecedented period". He concluded by accusing Ford of "no longer playing the part of a genuine partner", asking that Ford honour the pay rise and that there would be "no compulsory redundancies".

This provided Ford's boss with all the pretexts he needed - so as to appear to be giving something, while taking away more! He said he would reinstate the pay rise, but just for 2009. But the job cuts would go ahead. And he said "other actions" would be needed "to assist our financial position" - i.e. other cuts.

The threatened strike ballot is now forgotten, regardless of the announced job cuts. 500 "voluntary" redundancies are to be implemented at Southampton's Transit plant by 1 May and 350 salaried staff jobs are to go. Whether Ford ever really intended to "renege" on the pay deal is questionable. After all, don't the bosses resort to playing smoke and mirrors often enough, to get what they want?

That said, ballot or not, job cuts, present of future, can be opposed and fought. ☐

King's Cross railway station (London)

• Doesn't add up

National Express has invited station staff to apply for voluntary redundancy. But since we're not disgraced bankers with multi-million pound pension funds, a few thousand quid isn't likely to persuade us to volunteer for the growing dole queues!

And why is NX even talking about job cuts when there are too few of us as it is? They should be giving all our agency workmates permanent contracts - and then looking for some more permanent workers to join us.

[King's Cross - Workers' Platform, 24/02/09]

• Snow joke!

The rail companies are stubbornly sticking to the lie that it was somehow our fault if we couldn't get to work on "White Monday".

Rail Gourmet even tried to sign away our right to be paid for the day. NX tried to pretend they'd managed to run normal services, though anyone who tried to struggle in on NX East Anglia routes knows better. Besides, schools were closed, so even if we could get in, what were we supposed to do with our kids? Bring them along to lend a hand?

[King's Cross - Workers' Platform, 24/02/09]

• Messages from the other side

During the "Arctic" weather, drivers on the Great Northern side got plenty of text "alerts" about problems with the Thameslink service. But First Capital Connect only managed to text us about the wires being down at Hitchin 2 days after it happened!

[King's Cross - Workers' Platform, 24/02/09]

• An example to follow

On a very busy NX afternoon train, we were trying to provide a catering service with the new reduced staffing levels. A manager happened to be travelling and was quickly roped in to help wash dishes. The poor thing must have had the shock of his life. In no time, he was on the phone to King's X management to ask for more staff on that rain.

Nice to see one of them tasting their own medicine for once... [King's Cross - Workers' Platform, 09/02/09]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

• Hats off to Dagenham Press Shop!

Despite the serious outstanding questions on the pay deal, the 850 job cuts and the further austerity measures that Ford wants out of us, the reinstatement of the 5.25% pay rise from Nov 2008 to Nov 2009, is indeed a climb-down by Fleming. He was probably afraid to unleash industrial action against his proposed pay freeze AND against job cuts, which could have been contagious! What certainly helped put the frighteners on him was the immediate stoppage by the hourly-paid in Dagenham Press shop/Subassembly on the 4th Feb! So it's hats off to us! Let's have more of the same! [Ford Dagenham - Workers' Fight, 25/02/09]

• Illiterates!!

Pure bloody-mindedness or what? While it's now single shift production on the Lynx engine line, bosses insist we still work nights, so that we ___earn___ our shift protected money, even tho' we'd be healthier and happier on permanent days. Obviously these miserly idiots never read any research about what goes down (everything!!) as a result of night working! [Ford Dagenham - Workers' Fight, 25/02/09]

• This is a disgrace but we have a suggestion...

Using the excuse of the credit crunch, Ford isn't giving long serving (30 years!) mates the usual slap-up dinner and presentation in Brighton - instead it's handing them a £100 voucher... for designated places like Pizza Hut! After 30 years, shouldn't these mates get a brand new car of their choice, at very least? Speaking of which, if Ford needs a quick cash injection, why doesn't it sell all its unsold cars crammed in by the Jetty for half price? Or less? [Ford Dagenham - Workers' Fight, 25/02/09]

A working class victory in the Carribean

The working class of Guadeloupe, a French colony in the Carribean, has broken the bosses' offensive. On March 5th, the island's workers went back to work after a 44-day general strike, having won most of their main demands.

The strike was called on January 20th by "Lyianaj kont pwofitasyon" ("Alliance against excessive exploitation"), which includes 49 organisations - from the union confederations and left-wing parties to many local groups. It was the workers' response to the poverty caused among the half-a-million population by low wages, job cuts and rising prices.

The strike closed down most sizeable workplaces, while the strikers took control of energy and goods supplies, but also of the island's main roads, by setting up road blocks and holding daily rallies and marches in the main centres.

The bosses tried to play for time while Paris sent more police, hoping to break the strike. But it remained solid.

In the end, the bosses and the French right-wing government had no option but to grant the £180 monthly increase on all low wages demanded by the strikers, together with cash bonuses for the poorest 80,000 households. The strikers also won cuts in local taxes, transport fares and in the price of petrol and many staple goods, together with a social housing rent freeze.

Beyond their anger against the profiteering of the capitalists, what welded the strikers together was the democratic operation of their struggle, in which decisions were taken in daily mass meetings, under the control of the strikers themselves. In the words of a strike activist interviewed by a French radio, "a collective consciousness has emerged, things will never be

the same in Guadeloupe".

Meanwhile, a general strike launched on February 5th in the neighbouring French colony of Martinique remains solid, while another is starting thousands of miles away, on Reunion island, another French colony located in the Indian Ocean. □

REBELLE!

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TOUT, TOUT
DE SUITE
By any means
necessary

"Everything, immediately", says the headline of this paper published by radicalised youth during the general strike in Guadeloupe.

Ireland: workers refuse to pay for the bosses' crisis

On 21 February, in Dublin, 120,000 marched against a plan to make public sector workers pay up to an extra 10% towards their pensions. With protesters carrying placards demanding "Charge the fat cats" and "Stop fleecing working families" the demonstration surrounded the Irish parliament and closed down the capital for an entire day. Only 5 days later, 13,000 civil servants followed with a one-day national strike. Currently 4,000 council and hospital workers are balloting for industrial action over the same issue.

For almost two decades Ireland's "Celtic Tiger" model was used as an

example of "partnership" between the unions, state and employers. Annual national agreements helped to keep wages low, while union leaders contained social unrest. This was supposed to lure foreign investment and bring prosperity.

However, while this prosperity never materialised, the flow of speculative and financial "investment" fed a massive housing bubble, even more inflated than in Britain. With economic cracks appearing, investors fled, the housing bubble burst, the construction industry collapsed and unemployment soared, rising by 70% over the past year.

But if the Dublin government ever thought that it would get away with making workers foot the bill of the "Celtic tiger" failure, it has miscalculated.

Its attacks are backfiring. In addition to public workers' protests, sections of workers in the private sector are putting up a fierce resistance, as at the Waterford Crystal factory, which has been occupied by workers since the end of January, to stop 480 job cuts. And they are right - this is the only language the capitalist class understands! □

In addition to this monthly paper, we publish a quarterly journal, "Class Struggle", the "internationalist communist forums", a series of pamphlets as well as fortnightly bulletins based on several large workplaces in the South East.

If you wish to find out more about our ideas, activities and publications, contact the Workers' Fight activist who sold you this issue of our paper, or write to us either by e-mail, at contact@w-fight.org, or by postal mail at:

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