

WORKERS' fight



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

THE NEED FOR A DETERMINED FIGHT BACK

Hours before their national strike was due to start, postal workers heard from the media that the leaders of their CWU union had called it off. But the only "concession" won by the union was to be allowed to sit down with managers in order to discuss how attacks on jobs and working conditions are to be implemented! A big fat "gain" that is, for workers who, after months of ineffective rolling strikes, are confronted with unachievable tasks imposed by arrogant managers!

This amounts to CWU leaders endorsing Mandelson's savaging of postal jobs, in the hope of resuming their cosy partnership with Royal Mail.

A pattern we cannot afford

Royal Mail is no exception. It has become a consistent pattern for union leaders to sign up to job and wage cuts, under the spurious pretext of helping out companies. These deals only resulted in lengthening the dole queues, while increasing the workload on remaining workers and, often, reducing their earnings.

It all started, months ago, when union leaders looked the other way as tens of thousands of casuals were sacked. They turned their backs on the "one out, all out" approach - as if this could "save" permanent jobs. This was a con, of course. Having successfully got rid of casuals, the bosses turned their axe on permanent workers.

But, once again, instead of mounting the determined fight back that was called for, union leaders started dithering and wavering, resorting to all sorts of legal gimmicks and half-hearted stoppages - anything but the kind of strike that was likely to stop the job slashers. All this, in the hope of "bringing the bosses to negotiate".

But what was there to "negotiate" in the first place? "Good" job cuts rather than "bad" ones, as if this could have made any sense? In fact, the only thing the bosses were prepared to "negotiate", in the absence of a direct



threat to their profits, was just cuts and more cuts. And the union leaders proved willing to oblige.

The struggle ahead

The CWU leaders' undignified climb down has left postal workers facing the diktats of cocky managers who think they can now rule the roost. But, instead of using their full strength to resist these diktats, postal workers will have to fight it out locally, in isolation.

Such tactics are disastrous. They only discredit working class organisations, while spreading confusion in workers' ranks. As if the working class could afford its collective interests to go down the drain and pay for the capitalists' crisis!

There is no shortage of anger against the bosses' attacks. This is shown by the high level of support for strike action in recent ballots - at Fujitsu, East London buses, the London Underground, local council refuse collection, etc.. The problem, however, is

to ensure that, instead of being used by union leaders to convince the bosses that they need the unions as "partners", these votes become the starting point for effective action.

And yes, the time is right for action. After all, hundreds of billions were splashed out on the financial system - and by the same token, at the big companies' shareholders. This is now feeding back in the form of another growing speculative wave on the stock market! So, let no-one dare tell us that the capitalist class is so hard up that it cannot afford to pay for every single worker to remain in a job with a decent wage!

For this to happen will take some real struggle, bringing large sections of the working class together, with a leadership determined to fight. This is the leadership that workers will have to find, from within their own ranks, if they want to stop the bosses' offensive. □

Their "recovery" - now you see it, now you don't

In the first three weeks of October, we heard a long string of economic experts and politicians hailing the end of the recession in Britain: the 3rd quarter GDP figure, due to be released on 23rd October, would show an increase for the first time in 18 months - or so they said. Alas, on that day, it turned out that GDP had shrunk, once again, by 0.4%.

Not that it took an economics degree to see that the recession

was still causing chaos, though. Workers, who were at the receiving end of on-going job and pay cuts, knew this all too well. So did the large number of working class families facing growing difficulties in paying their bills due to their reduced incomes and lack of access to credit.

But then, of course, the "economic affluence" supposedly linked to GDP growth, never had anything to do with the real situation of the working class - but

everything to do with the capitalists' well-being. The truth is that the "recovery" fortune tellers see only one thing in their crystal ball - the rise of company profits and share prices. Never mind if the majority of the population sees its conditions going down the drain at the same time! Isn't that typical of this profit system, which has long passed its shelf life? ☐

From the capitalist horse's mouth

Georges Soros is well-known as a multi-billionaire who built his wealth on financial speculation. He is also one of the few super-tycoons who can afford to be totally cynical about the profit system they thrive on, because they do not need to be in cahoots with politicians, nor worry about public opinion.

This explains why, after a number of US (and British) banks announced that they were making billions of profits again, Soros' response was: "Those earnings (...) are gifts, hidden gifts, from

the government, so I don't think these monies should be used to pay bonuses. There's a resentment which I think is justified."

Of course, coming from Soros, this is a bit rich (no pun!). Not only is the income of his enormous wealth worth far more than any of the bankers' bonuses, but his speculative activity benefits just as much from the flow of cash that the governments have been pouring into financial markets.

But this is precisely why, of all "experts", Soros should know! ☐

• **Recession over for shareholders - or so they think**

Good news for shareholders! A recent stock market study suggests that this year's cut-backs in dividends are only temporary and payouts will rise by an average of 8% next year. As far as the markets are concerned, share prices are on the rise - by over 50% in the past few months - and everything in the garden is rosy.

Companies' cuts in jobs and wages are cheering up the financial sharks and with the government splashing public cash so extravagantly in their direction, they think their chances of riding out the recession on our backs are looking good. But what if we decide to stop footing the bill? Maybe they should think again before cracking open the champagne.

• **Bankers' bonuses are safe**

With the bonus culture in the City in full swing again, thanks to Brown's bailout, Shadow chancellor, George

Osborne, decided to enter the fray. Describing these bonuses as "inexcusable", he demanded an immediate clamp down on them.

But what was behind this opportunistic bit of finger-wagging? It boiled down to making bankers take their obscene payouts mostly in shares, rather than cash - which is often the case already, anyway. Besides, Osborne would not apply this to all banks, just to the high street ones. Britain's large number of speculative funds, like hedge fund manager Man Group, which are among the biggest culprits, would not be touched.

Plus, Osborne sees this as a temporary "emergency measure", to be implemented now - that is, before he can become chancellor, so that he won't have to do anything himself to put his money where his mouth is. And once the "emergency" is over, no doubt it will be fine by him for City speculators to carry on merrily as before.

• **Pile 'em high and sell 'em cheap**

Brown announced that he would be putting £16bn of government assets up for sale. Not that this will make

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much of a dent in the huge financial hole left by the bank bailout, though. Among other things, the government plans to sell publicly-owned land, something they have already been doing for years.

Except that today, with land prices at a record low level, this seems like a ridiculous thing to do. Either Brown is using the crisis as an excuse to present land companies with a big bounty. Or else, this is just a desperate bit of PR, designed to try to convince us that the money it has poured - and is still pouring - into the financial system is not coming directly from our pockets.

Either way, who will be fooled by this attempt to pull the wool over our eyes?

Housing - behind the headlines

Newspaper headlines keep celebrating the rise of mortgage approvals. Yet another proof of "recovery", they say. In early October, they even claimed that house prices had "bounced back to last year's level".

However, this is a "slight" overstatement - only prices in done deals are back to that level. But housing experts say that there are so few houses on the market, that this is creating an artificial price boom.

In fact, the government's Land Registry, which is unlikely to try to undermine Darling's "recovery" claims, says that average house prices are still 9.4% lower than a year ago and 14% lower than in February 2008. So much for the "bounce back". In a way, this is fortunate, as otherwise it would mean that the past speculative



bubble is back.

However, the fact that new builds have collapsed could result in a new speculative wave. Which is why the hundreds of billions poured by Brown into

the bankers' coffers would be far better used in a large-scale public programme of really affordable, comfortable rented housing for working class people! ☐

Her royal Greediness!

The queen is currently arguing with the government over a pay rise. As if she did not get far too much already! She receives £7.9m annually from the tax payer to cover her daily expenses. When she first received it she was able to save so much of it that she built up a stockpile of £35m! Now she complains that the crisis has eroded her gilded mattress....

In addition she gets £15m

each year from us for the upkeep of her palaces. But that's without counting the income of her private fortune. The duchy of Lancaster (46,000 acres) brought in £12.6m last year. She also owns Ascot race course, commercial property, agricultural land and the seabed surrounding the British Isles! Apparently the growth of offshore wind turbines has been particularly lucrative. No

figures disclose exactly how much income she gets from all these little earners. But we do know that their value increased by 8%, to £6.5bn over the past 6 months, allowing her to maintain her position as one of the richest women in the world. Isn't it time the royals returned their wealth to the public and joined the dole queue? ☐

"God bless profiteering"

The speculative outfits known as hedge funds have a new defender - the Church of England, no less! The Church Commissioners along with 5 other charities complained to a House of Lords Committee that a draft EU directive on hedge funds would "significantly restrict our ability to generate funds and thus reduce our impact for public good."

These commissioners include Archbishops Rowan

Williams and John Sentamu. In September 2008, Williams supported the ban on "short selling", which contributed to the markets' fall. Sentamu went further, castigating the traders who made £190m out of short selling HBOS shares, as "bank robbers and asset strippers".

But when it comes to regulating hedge funds, the Church knows where its bread is buttered - on the side of profit. It is among the largest landowners

in Britain and 62% of its £4.4bn assets are in shares. It has invested £13 million in a hedge fund managed by Man Group and its pension board has invested in an Auriel Capital hedge fund whose activity includes the short selling of currencies. Presumably Williams and Sentamu will not be preaching about how Jesus threw the traders out of the Jerusalem temple any time soon. ☐

Obama's Nobel war prize

That Obama should be awarded the Nobel peace prize says something about about this prize. When nominations closed, in February, Obama had only been president for 2 weeks and his only record was his election campaign - which called for more troops in Afghanistan and the expansion of the war into Pakistan!

Since then, Obama has ordered an extra 17,000 troops into the country in April, soon be followed by another 15 to 44,000! Meanwhile,

under Obama's pressure, Pakistan's border region with Afghanistan has become a war zone. Can a policy be more blatantly aimed at promoting war? But is this surprising, when other Nobel prize-winners have had so much blood on their hands? Henry Kissinger was Nixon's security adviser during the Vietnam war which claimed 3.5m Vietnamese lives. Yitzhak Rabin, was a former commander in the Jewish anti-Arab militia. Menachem Begin was an Israeli

prime minister whose regime presided over the Sabrah and Shatila massacres. Not to mention FW De Klerk, the leader of the party which enforced apartheid in South Africa. The truth is that the Nobel peace prize has never rewarded peacemakers as such, but rather those who preserved the stability of the imperialist world order. Whether Obama will even be one of those remains to be seen, though. □

Blair back again?

So Blair is a wannabe "People's President"? It seems that this "has-been" is attempting a comeback on the stage as EU president, with only Italian right-wing president Berlusconi to back his bid! Make no mistake, though, because this is no "last stand" - he still has lots of nice little earners up his sleeve. Apparently, his outstanding "peacemaking" role in Iraq (1m Iraqis killed, 4.5m displaced) already qualified him to become the rich countries' "peace envoy" in the Middle East. And how convenient that was for his work as advisor to US bank JP Morgan, especially for its investment in the region! His own consultancy, Tony Blair Associates (TBA),

advising Emirs, Sheikhs and Princes, cashes in still further. Since 2007 he's earned over £15 million with his commercial ventures. But taxpayers fund his public "peace envoy" role, not to mention his projected £64-90,000 PM pension.

Blair would still like a higher profile in Europe, despite rejecting the euro and being against Britain's adoption of more favourable EU employment rights. He doesn't seem to stand a chance, but all is not lost for him. If the European spotlight is what he's after, there could still be a hot seat waiting for him in Europe - in The Hague actually, in the dock at the War Crimes Tribunal. □

• Brown to the cleaners? If only...

Apparently Brown is an extremely tidy man, judging from the £12,000 worth of cleaning bills he claimed on his MP expenses. Except that he had no right to be refunded. So, he will now have to repay the money. Brown always wanted to portray himself as the squeaky clean man, but by getting his bills paid by the taxpayer at a time when recession and unemployment is hitting working people hard, he certainly chose the wrong way to go about it. Cleaning up this act won't be enough to improve a very grubby image.

Cambridge College... or ticket tout?

What would Cambridge University's Trinity College, be doing buying the holding company, Meridian Delta Dome, which owns the O2 Arena's 999-year commercial lease? Isn't Trinity College that illustrious institution which educated Isaac Newton and 31 Nobel prize laureates to date? How come it has a spare £24m to splash out in this frivolous way, when students have to find £3,225 a year to pay for tuition fees?

Well, the truth of the matter is that Trinity, the wealthiest Oxbridge college, happens to be one of Britain's biggest and most established landowners - and speculators. It used to be said that you can walk from Cambridge to Oxford all the way on Trinity's land. In 2008, Trinity's estates income was £39.3m. It expects greatly increased revenue from a share in O2 ticket sales (coming soon are Eddie Izzard, WWE Raw



09, Beyoncé), which last year made £53m.

In fact Oxford and Cambridge universities have estimated assets of around £4bn each. But rather than use this wealth so that students can be educated for free, they want fees

to go up - which would mean even more high school graduates giving up any hope of gaining a degree. Yes, a top rate university education is, and will remain, the class privilege of the wealthy. And providing it will remain big, profitable, business. □

Credit cards - bounty for the bankers, burden for the poor

• Explosive plastic

The International Monetary Fund is not so sure that the credit crisis is over. Its latest estimate is that, on top of huge losses on housing still hidden away in the system, over £260 billion worth of consumer debt will have to be written off in the US and Europe. A sizeable part of this is expected to consist of Britain's credit card debt - amounting to £54 billion on its own.

Given the high interest rates attached to plastic cards, the better-offs usually pay off their balances every month. So, most of the outstanding credit card debt is owed by the worst off, who are made to pay the bulk of these exorbitant interest rates.

As these are the same working class families whose incomes are

hardest hit by the bosses' drive to make us pay for their crisis, they don't stand a chance of ever escaping from their spiralling indebtedness.

It is not as if the bankers were trying to defuse this mounting problem. Over the past 3 years, the average interest rate on credit cards increased from 15 to 18.2%. For cash withdrawals, this rate increased even more, from 21 to 30%. And this, at a time when bankers can raise cash at the lowest cost on record, thanks to the Bank of England's 0.5% base rate!

The credit card debt mountain is typical of how the profit system feeds its own crises. Its frantic speculation on housing resulted in millions being burdened with unsustainable mortgages,



thereby causing the credit crisis. By strangling the worst off with extortionate interest rates on their plastic cards, the bankers may well have created another time bomb.

• The cost of years of attacks on jobs and wages

Ironically, the one issue that none of the experts and politicians who claim to be concerned with personal indebtedness bothers to mention, is the root cause of the problem - low income.

For years, the bosses increased the level of casualisation with the help of governments which, at the same time, set the minimum wage at a derisory level. Hidden joblessness rose as a result, while real wages were driven down for a large section of workers. Small wonder that household poverty

has risen again since the turn of the century.

The increasing availability of credit helped to paper over workers' reduced purchasing power. Secured loans based on the speculative rise of house prices and credit cards helped to maintain consumption levels. But all this came at a heavy cost: chronic indebtedness for a growing number of low income households. The crisis has compounded this vicious circle. The bosses' all-out offensive against jobs and wages has reduced household

incomes even further, turning difficult situations into tragedies.

This is putting onto the agenda the urgent need for workers to impose a total halt to all job cuts, the sharing out of the available work between all workers and the cancellation of all debts for low-income families. After Brown's "bailout" of the wealthy, it is high time the working class "bailed" itself out by presenting the capitalists with the bill they should pay!

• A golden pond for the credit sharks

Officially, the government's plan to "moralise" credit card lending - due to be implemented next year - is supposed to aim at protecting consumers' interests. But does it?

True, this plan considers curbing some of the dirty tricks used by bankers to boost their profits. So, for instance, credit card companies could be banned from playing on the different interest rates attached to different kinds of card uses, by keeping the most expensive debt on card balances for as long as they can. But the main measure of this plan would be to increase the minimum monthly repayment from the present standard 2%, to 5% of the card's balance. Once again, this means that the poorest will be hardest hit.

By putting pressure on borrowers to increase their repayments, this

plan will certainly protect the bankers' interests by reducing some of the weight of credit card "bad debts" on their balance sheets. But, since the plan does not even hint at curbing the present extortionate interest rates, it will change nothing to the chronic indebtedness of low-income households. And the burden will remain entirely on them - "for their own good" as consumers, apparently. How hypocritical can these politicians get!

• Loan sharks in respectable clothes

Monument, one of Britain's biggest "sub-prime" lenders, has closed down, asking its credit card holders to settle their balances. Monument was one of a number of companies, like Vanquis and Aqua, which provided loans to people with poor credit records, who could not get a credit card elsewhere. These companies used the precarious

situation of their customers to blackmail them into paying scandalous interest rates. Monument charged between 29.9% and 39.9%, but others charged up to 59.9% in some cases. To all intents and purposes, Monument was the classic example of a loan shark, except that it was a giant one - at its peak, it had over a million card holding customers.

It is worth noting, however, that between 2002 and 2007, Monument was part of Barclays' empire, until, following the first cracks in the US sub-prime market, the bank decided to get rid of its sub-prime arm. One can only wonder how many billions Barclays made out of charging £3 to £4 for every tenner borrowed by Monument's one million poor cardholders over all these years! Who said that wealth cannot grow out of poverty? For bankers, it does!

Labour's "fuel poverty" policy up in smoke

The number of households in "fuel poverty" – those spending more than 10% of their income on domestic fuel – is expected to rise to an estimated 4.6 million by the end of this year, up from 4m in 2007.

This sounds like a very optimistic under-estimate. The 2007 figure came out before last year's huge increases in the cost of gas and electricity. Wholesale energy prices have fallen again since, but suppliers have not reduced their domestic

consumer prices accordingly. Then there are the effects of the crisis on wages and unemployment. Citizen's Advice says the people who come to them because of problems with their fuel bills are mostly in work and their numbers have increased by almost 50% since April – though winter has not yet set in.

Even if it turns out that the government estimate was correct, 4.6m fuel-poor households is bad enough. It would mean that fuel poverty

has almost quadrupled since 2004. This makes a complete mockery of Labour's stated aim to eradicate fuel poverty in England by 2016 (and in Wales by 2018). Of course, to do that, they would have to crackdown on the profiteering of the energy companies – and that, despite all the hot air on protecting the "vulnerable", particularly pensioners, they have never been prepared to do. □

Boris Johnson, the mayor of London has just announced a steep rise in transport prices. Last year already, they were increased by 6%, well above inflation – an increase which was duly blamed on the previous mayor, Ken Livingstone. This year, despite the hardship caused by the crisis, Johnson has decided to increase tube fares by 3.9% and buses fares by a whopping 12.7% – never mind the fact that buses are used precisely by the majority of workers who cannot afford to take the tube! One of Johnson's excuses is that fewer people are using the tube. So, according to him the best way to "attract" them back is to price them off the buses, while making the tube even less affordable! One of these days, Johnson may well find that protesters are able to take to the streets, without having to use any public transport at all. □

London's transport racket



• BP and Shell: profits only cause loss

BP and Shell both reported drops in their profits – by 50% and 73% respectively – on last year's figures. Except that, last year, when the price of a barrel of oil hit a record high, at \$147/barrel in July, and petrol went up to almost 120p/l (diesel 134p/l), all oil companies made super-profits! And today, Shell's quarterly profit is still a hefty £1.83 billion, with BP's over £3 billion!

Yet nothing seems to prevent either of these vultures from cutting even more jobs – Shell intends to cut 5,000 more jobs this year – and BP, which cut 3,000 last year, will cut another 5,000 by the end of 2009. Oil companies are the top of the capitalist tree and what's more, are implicated in the wars which have

destroyed hundreds of thousands of lives over the past few years alone. Their billions should be taken to pay for this destruction, even if this still won't make up for the consequences of their greed – and the sooner the better.

• Vestas greenbucks windfall

The Danish company Vestas, the world's biggest wind turbine manufacturer, just announced 3rd quarter profits up 70% on last year at £149m, despite the credit crunch!

This is the same company that said it "had" to close its Isle of Wight factory this summer – making 600 workers redundant – due to poorer market conditions. Which wasn't the best timing for Brown, who'd just announced that "green" jobs were the jobs of the future! After a protest

occupation by 18 workers supported by environmentalists and activists (including the RMT's Bob Crow who offered to pay all legal fees) the plant closed on 12 August. Of course, the demand that environment minister, Milliband should nationalise the factory, fell on deaf ears. In the end 425 workers were sacked – with slightly higher redundancy payouts. Vestas will keep R&D and its UK office on the factory's site, with 40 additional jobs created there. All of this just goes to show that supposedly "green" companies are just as much into dirty profiteering as any other. As to the government, it would not dream of interfering in their "business plans", no matter how much hot wind it generates over "green" issues to try and gain votes.

Bin workers hold out against wage cuts

As we go to press, Leeds rubbish collectors have been on strike for 9 weeks, over threatened pay cuts of up to £4,500/yr. In mid-October, 92% of them rejected an "offer" to reduce the pay cuts to about £200, provided crews met productivity targets including emptying 220 bins per hour! In Brighton and Hove, where bin collectors face cuts of up to £8,000/yr, a work to rule began on 5 November, with a week-long strike due to start on the 9th.

These cuts are due to job re-evaluation under Labour's Equal Pay act - which was meant to end the discrimination against low-paid, mostly women workers such as school cooks, teaching and library assistants. But as the government did not back this up with the necessary funding, many councils have chosen to downgrade other workers' pay - especially those of bin collectors, where they have not been contracted out.



In Leeds, refuse collectors have been on strike for 2 months

Neither Brighton nor Leeds is Labour controlled, allowing union leaders there to blame Tories and Lib Dems. However, the pay issue affects all council workers. Instead of having to fight isolated local struggles, as unions

leaders want them to do, council workers would have a lot more muscle by joining ranks together, across the country, against the government's austerity policy - which is the root cause of the problem. □

BA ups the ante - and calls for trouble

Just as its cabin crew were to hold a strike ballot, British Airways upped the ante. Shedding crocodile tears over a £292m loss between January and June, BA now wants another 1,200 job cuts - bringing this year's total to 4,900, on top of last year's 2,500. Speculators were not fooled, though - BA shares went up 6% that very same day!

The first round of job cuts announced in the summer, included 1,700 cabin crew and 1,250 check-in staff. New working conditions

were to be imposed on the remaining cabin crew from mid-November - increased workload, reduced allowances, a 2-year wage freeze and a lower pay scale for new recruits. Meanwhile, many cabin crew were blackmailed into going part-time. BA's attack on cabin crew contracts prompted Unite leaders to "act" - by seeking an injunction from the High Court. Of course, had it been BA seeking an injunction against a strike, the judges would have obliged straight away. But, in

this case, they set a hearing for... next February, long after the new contract comes into force! Only then did the Unite leaders organise a belated strike ballot.

But now that BA is upping the stakes, wouldn't the workers' safest bet be for cabin crew, check-in staff, luggage-handlers, etc., to join ranks together in order to meet BA's provocation with the all-out strike it deserves? This may not be on the Unite leaders' agenda, but who says workers can't have their say? □

Whether Magna or GM, their axe must be stopped

General Motors has finally pulled the plug on its sale of Opel (and therefore Vauxhall) to Canadian firm Magna. Having emerged from US bankruptcy protection after cutting tens of thousands of jobs there, and with a big handout from Obama, GM is making no mystery of its plans to cut 20% of Opel's 50,000 European jobs - just like Magna planned, in fact.

In Germany, where Magna had

pledged not to close any plant, the announcement prompted Opel workers to down tools and stage street protests. But, in Britain, Unite's general secretary Tony Woodley, described this as a "fantastic decision", adding that it was "inevitable" there would be some job losses at Vauxhall.

It should be recalled that the same Woodley had previously signed up to a deal with Magna, endorsing 600 job cuts, a 2-year

pay deal and a cut in pensions. This is to say that Vauxhall workers cannot expect anything from more horse-trading, this time between Woodley and GM. Their best bet is more likely to be to co-ordinate directly with other Opel workers, in Germany and in the rest of Europe, to stop GM's axe - before union leaders allow it to fall. □

Postal strike: THE CWU LEADERS' COP OUT

CWU postal leader, Dave Ward, called off the 24-hour all-out strikes scheduled for Friday the 6th and Monday the 9th of November, at 6.30pm on the evening of the 5th - just hours before the first strike was due to take place. Coming after months of partial rolling strikes involving at least 18 separate days lost in pay without any apparent result, these all-out national strikes seemed to be a sign that at last, the union leadership was willing to escalate the action so that the government and Royal Mail bosses would feel the real strength of 120,000 militant workers on strike! Even more so, as demonstrations had been arranged for the Friday morning in several of the biggest cities and towns, so that for once, postal workers would have been visible on the streets, fighting for their jobs!

Rotten deal

This makes the CWU's climbdown even more confusing for many workers who feel they have been shafted, yet again, just like in the 2007 strike. What's more, the CWU leaders have got very little to show for this decision. The "interim" deal which they finally released to the membership 12 hours after the first strike was due to take place, includes no commitment whatsoever on Royal Mail's part, concerning any of the most important issues: i.e. job cuts, pensions and the overloading of postal workers with unfeasible tasks.

Talks are supposed to carry on between Royal Mail and the CWU, involving an ACAS arbitrator. But so what? How is that going to force Royal Mail into reversing its vicious attacks of the past months? Since the CWU has effectively agreed



On the picket line at Mount Pleasant mail centre, on 22nd October - a delegation from the RMT is visiting

to a no-strike deal until Xmas, RM has nothing to fear and certainly no more reason to concede ground than during the past months of "rolling" one-day sectional strikes.

The agreement says: "In offices where change has been implemented without agreement the local parties will engage in genuine negotiations to reach local agreement. In reviewing the current position the mutual objective will be to identify improvements in line with the full range of principles of the Pay and Modernisation Agreement 2007." But in Mount Pleasant's EC deliveries, for instance, where change was steam-rolled through, managers claimed all the while that this was exactly what had been agreed "by your union" in 2007! This latest agreement now leaves units to fight their own battles "locally" when it was precisely such isolation that landed them in the current mess in the first place!

As in 2007, but all together

There is no other way to describe the behaviour of the CWU leaders than as an outright betrayal of the membership's interests. It is an echo of the bitter experience of 2007, when workers were forced to resort to unofficial action in order to try to by-pass the reluctance of the union leadership to stand up to Royal Mail. This time round the choice is clear. If postal workers don't want to find themselves isolated, each in their own offices or depots, fighting local bosses who have been reinforced by the climbdown of the union leaders, then they will have to recall how they organised the wildcats in 2007. But this time, since the union leadership has decided to torpedo the national strike before it really even got started, it will be up to postal workers themselves to bring it back into existence. □

• Can anyone out-Tory Mandelson?

Politicians from all sides had a go at striking postal workers - making it all too obvious how they're really all on the same side! But since the Tories want to please their electorate, their hot air has to be a little hotter - so they spelt out what would be in store for strikers and for postal services. The Guardian claims that they plan to make strikes illegal unless a majority of the total workforce

eligible to vote, actually votes to strike - i.e., they'll set a minimum turnout level, rather than allow a simple majority to decide - as is the case now.

As to the future of the postal service, shadow business secretary, Ken Clarke, claims that Royal Mail's privatisation is long overdue - but in fact, all he promises is no less, nor more, than Mandelson already proposed, before he postponed the deal for lack of bidders: that is, part-privatise RM, cut the public

service aspect of RM to the bare minimum and along with it, even more jobs - to allow private business to squeeze a profit out of it. The only difference being that Labour is implementing these attacks, whereas the Tories are just talking about them.

Well that's clear, so postal workers can concentrate on extending their fight, now and into the future, in their own interests, regardless of who is in office. It's by no means over yet.

Royal Mail managers deliver mayhem everywhere...

• from Chelmsford...

In delivery offices all around the country, RM managers have been imposing cuts in the workforce, and then making the remaining posties' walks longer by adding extra addresses and streets, which renders the job totally impossible to do in the given time.

In Chelmsford, for eg., the number of delivery points for an individual postie has been increased from 400 to 500. When anyone complained they were told they could "leave the job".

In future, they'll be expected to have a driving licence and share vans in order to be able to squeeze in all these extra deliveries. Previously in many areas, workers used their own cars, at their own expense and risk, just to get the job done in normal hours. They have to be young and fit! Older workers just can't manage anymore and in DOs everywhere, years of service (as "seniority") have been derecognised.

• ...to the home counties and London City...

In one of the home counties, delivery points have been increased to as much as 700 per postman. This means a huge amount more mail to sort into an individual walk before even leaving the office. Everywhere, posties have less time to deliver, in fact, because workers who used to sort the mail into walks the night before, have been radically cut or abolished altogether, even though the machinery meant to replace them isn't in place yet and/or doesn't operate properly! As is the case in Mount Pleasant's "EC" postcode office - for London City - where only a dozen night sorters are now left. Drivers are also expected to sort mail, before they go out on their business rounds. As a result, they can't finish inside normal hours!

• ...to NW...and all...

In a north-west London office, because of the backlog (due to all kinds of factors, not necessarily a

strike!), sorting was taking so long in some cases, that an hour or less of the working day might be left to deliver 3½ hours-worth of mail, before the cut-off. (RM has cut all overtime.) But postmen were told they had to take out ALL of the mail - just so that the manager could mark the walk as "cleared" - despite having no hope of delivering more than a part of it. The rest had to be brought back to the office, to be given to part-time casuals to take out. These casuals are either hired through agencies on the minimum wage, or called up from the "Xmas casual" list by phone, on a day-to-day basis. If permanent posties are asked to do the extra hours on overtime, they may get "time off in lieu" instead of overtime pay. Now into the Xmas season, the 3 ½ hour maximum time limit for a walk, is already stretched to 4 or 5 hours, or even more. It all boils down to wanting to casualise the workforce - which would indeed make RM "cheaper" to run and even easier to cut further. And that cannot be in anybody's interests!

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

• A tactic for today, strike or not

Why are we still sorting SW's (and SE1s) DO mail?? Did all their night jobs get cut? Maybe they're sorting our mail? We could arrange a march from office to office, to see what's going on, asking workmates to join us on our way! And it'd be a lot healthier than having managers' hot breath on our necks. [RM Mount Pleasant Workers' Fight bulletin 19/10/09]

• Big irony, don't they know

The day before Mandelson/RM announced that 30,000 temps will be taken on by RM, (against laws not to engage workers to replace strikers!), "Peter", as Billy calls him, announced that equal rights for agency temps would be delayed till 2011! [RM Mount Pleasant Workers' Fight bulletin 19/10/09]

• This super-exploitation never stopped

30,000 temps? But hang on, what "news" is this? Thousands of temps already cover deliveries in many DOs (tho' not here in EC). Some never left, since last Xmas! Others are "on call" - and have no cut-off, so could be out there looking for letterboxes till midnight! Since they're also used on strike

days - that's definitely illegal... And what about the ones already sorting the backlog in secret warehouses? [RM Mount Pleasant Workers' Fight bulletin 19/10/09]

• We never agreed a thing

On EC, if we finish late we should get the time back or we should be paid for it. But the DOMs are saying the 2007 flex agreement says we have to do the extra time - free! Honestly! What chancers they are. Seems that "agreement" is still being written and rewritten. We recognise not one single dot or comma of it. [RM Mount Pleasant Workers' Fight bulletin 19/10/09]

• What about a showdown?

Cleaners were expecting a bonus last Friday based on "performance". This kind of bonus is just a nonsense, of course. Since they cut our numbers, we've never been able to "perform" properly. We do need more money - but integrated into our basic wage. As to "performance", one thing we can maybe do is make a real song and dance over the latest attempt to step up our work! [RM Mount Pleasant bulletin 3/11/09]

• Working our hours will stop the mail

Lately, when managers do actually want us to work overtime, or, if they give us additional tasks which take us into that grey



area of "flexible hours", and we refuse to cooperate, these mis-managers have had the cheek to take us off pay! At Rathbone Place (among others), there've been lightning strikes against this - and it works! RM wants us to "work our hours"? We will - and not a millisecond more! [RM Mount Pleasant bulletin 3/11/09]

• "I'm off to Dartford on a yorkie..."

Are we being asked to undermine our own strike? On the 2pm-5pm shift we were told to bag up mail for 500 yorkies a day to go to Dartford! We may find it hard to tell managers to "go hop it" (on the other hand, some of us find it hard to say anything else to them), but what we could do, is go WITH the yorkies to Dartford - one way or another, to let the mates there know what the score is. And then get them to join us in the fight for a future public service with decent permanent jobs for all... [RM Mount Pleasant bulletin 3/11/09]

King's Cross railway station (London)

Network Rail's bad track record

Network Rail (the rail infrastructure company) already announced several months ago that it was planning to cut 1 maintenance job in 5. As if this was not bad enough, it now wants to sack the entire maintenance workforce of 13,000 workers and then re-hire far fewer of them on different terms and conditions. West Coast Mainline would be hardest hit. Yes, the same line that saw the Grayrigg derailment, which was blamed, precisely, on a maintenance problem!

Such bullying tactics are nothing

new. At the end of last year, all platform staff were "restructured" according to new so-called "voluntary" contracts. These included the possibility of working up to 20% extra hours for free depending on business requirements! In fact, this "possibility" applies to any time in the week. In King's Cross, for instance, all those who started after privatisation are rostered to work on Sundays for no extra payment - although Sundays are not part of the normal working week! It was no doubt thanks to this turn of the screw that Network



Rail, although supposedly "not-for-profits", announced pre-tax profits of £1.5bn, while boasting about a 4% efficiency increase.

It is pretty clear that NR is now trying to blackmail maintenance workers into submission. However, these workers also have a track record - of industrial action. Network Rail may find that, this time, they are trying to bite off more than they can chew. ☐

First - nought on offer

First Group is using the recession as an excuse for a pay freeze. After 7 months of pay talks, they told workers in their First Capital Connect and First Great Western train franchises that they will get no pay rise this year. In fact a 0.5% rise above inflation pledged for next year would be a pay cut, if inflation turns to deflation. But even if it doesn't, a rise of just above the official rate is likely to be a cut in

real terms anyway.

Yet First actually increased revenue on its First Capital Connect franchise this year - meaning that if passenger numbers fell, it must have been fleecing them more than ever. Besides, it is receiving the maximum "revenue support" from the government, to cushion the effects of the recession - an extra subsidy worth £75m for the first 6 months of this year alone. No wonder they

made an operating profit of £166.5m for this period. First's chief executive puts this down to the fact that they are on track to exceed their cost-cutting target and boasts that they've cut 4,000 jobs instead of the 3,500 planned. And they want workers to believe that the cupboard is bare - so they can dish out more to their shareholders? ☐

• The only language they understand

Network Rail gave the contract for agency security guards to Legion Group a few months ago. They made a great start by under-paying all of us. So we sat in the messroom and refused to budge - and that made them sort it out double-quick! But they're still messing with our pay - just one by one, instead of all together. That doesn't mean we can't react all together, though - since we know it works! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 20/10/09]

• Slippy season

FCC's leaf-fall timetable (with earlier start times, to allow for slower journeys) began on the 12th. But the leaves didn't consult it and started coming down well before... [Workers' Platform King's Cross 20/10/09]

• We shouldn't lose out

In NX's FAQ on the transfer to the state-owned East Coast Company one question is conspicuously avoided, that is what happens to our free travel on NXEA and C2C (and their reciprocal concessions on the East Coast). Well, they can play musical chairs if they like, but

we shouldn't lose money as a result. As we're being nationalised, we should have free national rail travel - as should everyone! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 3/11/09]

• A small tick for a toc

NX East Coast had the biggest performance improvement of all the Train Operating Companies last year. Well, they started so far down, there was only one way to go! They also had a drop in complaints - probably because passengers know they're on their way out. Why bother, eh? [Workers' Platform King's Cross 3/11/09]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• Need to make our views clear?**

Agreed reluctantly and only until December, this shift system we're working is unacceptable on health grounds. Management seem to be dragging their feet about discussing and voting on replacements - although, as we need a month's notice of any change, they've only got till the end of the month to come up with a new proposal. [BMW Workers Fight 20/10/09]

• Involuntary back-to-track

Apparently BMW dislikes the union-backed alternative of more, but shorter shifts, because it would mean taking on more people to build in cover. That's a reason for us to support it! In fact the

current system isn't working for them. For instance PAM 8 in Assembly on B shift was 10 workers short on days on Monday. So we were treated to the sight of managers actually working for a change! [BMW Workers Fight 20/10/09]

• Mandelson shows his colours

Peter Mandelson had the cheek to use his visit here last week to have a pop at the postal workers. He claimed it would be "suicide" for them to strike. Actually, if the posties are in favour of striking right now, it's because they don't want their jobs to kill them! And nor do we! [BMW Workers Fight 20/10/09]

• Less haste, less damage

With damage to cars up, PAMs have been



round on a drive to check whether we are using protection devices. But if we are not using them, it's no wonder. With BMW cranking up the linespeed to get out 55 cars an hour, averaged across a whole shift in some cases, we're being pulled down the lines as it is. So if they want less damage the message is clear - slow down! [BMW Workers Fight 3/11/09]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• The whole operation is unsafe!**

The cut in the workforce in the S&TO scrap operation from 19 to 9 is directly responsible for the accidents we have been having - with 3 injuries in the last 2 weeks alone. One mate broke his ribs, one fell off the crane steps and was badly bruised and one hurt his arm in the baler. EMR had to bring in an extra worker (on less money!) from another workplace to fill in! This is the real price of outsourcing! And why should we pay it? [Workers' Fight bulletin 27/10/09]

• All out until it's given the all-clear!

A fire inspection in the Press shop and basement last week revealed missing fire exit signs, faulty sprinklers and faulty emergency lighting. Is that why there's all this painting going on? Or is it because another Ford big knob is coming round for a visit? This place is a disgrace! [Workers' Fight bulletin 27/10/09]

• One Ford screw

Southampton's Transit workforce has, of course, gone down from 1,150 to 542 on 1 shift. Ford calls it the "One Southampton" scheme. More like "Half Southampton"! But even Ford Inhuman Resources admits it's screwed people. Otherwise it wouldn't have to try to boost morale with the pretence of a "One Ford" happy family. Our brothers and sisters down there have our sympathy for having to put up with all this b-s. [Workers' Fight bulletin 27/10/09]

• Decent pay, not overtime!

Why does the NJNC insist that Ford honours a 3 year deal when in fact it was a lousy 3-year deal? And when being able to fight for better pay, as often as possible, is what we need right now! Do they think it makes them sound militant? We hear 2% will be paid to us on 24/11, but inflation-linked deals at this level are ridiculous. Official inflation for September is 1.1% (CPI) or 1.3% (RPI). A 2% rise will go unnoticed. Guess we shouldn't even bother to ask about 30 years and out on full pension? [Workers' Fight bulletin 13/10/09]

**• Covering up shortages of all sorts**

So in the meantime what about the shortage of hands in South Estate, on Puma, on Tiger, on the 1.8? It's common knowledge this is an on-going problem. Yet we have a management that organises down days AND overtime in the same plant in the same week! How does that add up? Of course HARMONISATION of our shifts, grades, and pay would at least iron out the differences between us all - and we guess that's precisely why Ford wouldn't dream of it. [Workers' Fight bulletin 13/10/09]

Ford workers in the USA fight back!

Just before Ford posted its "unexpected" 3rd quarter profits of \$1bn, it had gone back to the Ford US workforce and asked for yet more concessions from them!

Just this April Ford already bulldozed through a new contract which froze wages, added new conditions for health care insurance, forced transfers to other plants and cancelled thousands of dollars in bonuses. But now

Ford bosses wanted more, and with the help of the leaders of the United Auto Workers' Union, which had gone behind workers' backs, they tried to con workers into voting for it.

But this time workers were ready and led by the example of the Dearborn truck plant in Detroit, an overwhelming majority - 70% in production and 75% in skilled trades - voted to reject the agreement! This is the first time

in 27 years that a national UAW auto contract was voted down! Workers in Detroit said that for too long they heard the complaint that "no-one will do anything". Now Ford workers have done something. Does it mean the tide is turning? That would be up to all workers - wherever we happen to be - because the bosses try to make us all pay for the crisis, from the USA to Asia and all the countries in Europe! ☐

Afghanistan

• **Western-funded corruption**

The presidential election ended as it had started - as a farce. After one million votes attributed to president Hamid Karzai were declared void, a new election was due to take place. But on the eve of the ballot, Karzai's only contender withdrew, arguing that the vote would not be any fairer. So, after over 2 months of this "democratic" charade, Karzai is back in office, together with the corrupt regime which has survived under Western protection for over 8 years.

• **Support Joe Glenton!**

Next January, lance-corporal Joe Glenton is due to face a court martial - and a possible prison sentence - following his refusal to take a second tour of duty in Afghanistan, back in 2006. Instead he went AWOL and spent time abroad, before returning to Britain to defend his case.

This prospect did not prevent Glenton from defying orders on 24 October, to speak at the anti-war march organised on that day in London. Glenton explained that he and his comrades "were told quite specifically the different reasons we were there: to provide security, reconstruction, rebuilding infrastructure. But over the course of my tour it became

Another joke was Obama's subsequent sanctimonious demand that Karzai should clean up his act and get rid of corruption. Just as the White House's official statement was being released, the New York Times revealed that Karzai's own brother, Wali, who organised the ballot rigging in Kandahar and whose name has been repeatedly linked to drug trafficking, had actually been on the CIA's pay-roll for years.

In many parts of the world, corruption is a by-product of poverty.

straightforward combat." As a result, he added, "a lot of guys around me didn't know why we were there. (..) It is distressing to disobey orders, but when Britain follows America in continuing to wage war against one of the world's poorest countries, I feel I have no choice." And Glenton concluded by calling for the immediate withdrawal of all western troops from Afghanistan.

For a soldier to stand up on his own against the whole military machinery takes some courage. And Joe Glenton deserves the respect of the working class movement, if only for that reason. But he also deserves all the support of our movement, because it is in the interests of the working class of this country to oppose the bloody

But in Afghanistan, it is, above all a product of the billions thrown into the occupation by the rich countries. Faced with a hostile population, the western powers can only secure a semblance of "security" in parts of the country and prop up a pliable puppet regime in Kabul, by bribing local warlords and strong men to do their dirty work. Karzai is just the visible part of the mountain of corruption generated by the western occupation. □



wars waged against the population of Afghanistan by British capital and to demand: "Troops out, now!" □

Pakistan

The ever-expanding quagmire

A string of lethal bomb attacks rocked major Pakistani cities in October, causing hundreds of deaths and injuries. These terrorist attacks carried out by Islamic fundamentalist groups are supposed to be in retaliation against the latest offensive staged by the Pakistani army against these groups' strongholds in the North Western Border Province, alongside the Afghan border.

So, today the Pakistani population is made to pay twice over for the army's

offensive. On the one hand, hundreds of thousands of refugees are forced to flee from the war zones in order to avoid the threat of bombs and the risk of being caught in the cross fire between the two sides. On the other hand, civilians across Pakistan are now faced with the threat of bloody terrorist attacks in markets and other public places, by terrorist thugs who have as little regard for the interests of the population as the army generals they claim to be fighting.

Ultimately, however, what is being staged in Pakistan is the expansion of the Afghan war advocated by Obama in his presidential campaign. Right from the day when Afghanistan was invaded, there was always a risk that it might destabilise the whole region. Today, this destabilisation is becoming a reality. After the 25 million Afghans, it is now the turn of the 180 million Pakistanis to be pulled into this western-made war. □

In addition to this monthly paper, we publish fortnightly bulletins in several large workplaces in the South East, a quarterly journal, "Class Struggle" and the "Internationalist Communist Forums" - a series of pamphlets on topical issues.

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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