

WORKERS' fight

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

KEEP THE SHARKS OUT OF THE NHS!

Twelve months on, the government's NHS "reform" bill is entering one of its last stages through Parliament. Nearly 2,000 amendments have been tabled, each of which will cause heated debates. Some commentators are even predicting that Cameron may have no choice but to drop it - although this remains to be seen.

The fact is, that so far, the bill has only succeeded in generating unanimous opposition from all quarters concerned - from health workers and professionals to patients. And rightly so, because, in addition to transforming the NHS into an even worse administrative nightmare than it already is, the "reform" is really designed to allow capitalists to parasitise the NHS budget on an unprecedented scale.

Profit sharks are queueing up

Not that private profiteers haven't been benefiting from the NHS for a long time - in fact ever since its inception. Among Britain's richest companies, the pharmaceutical giants, in particular, would never have been able to build up their business empires, nor to discover new medicines, without using the NHS, both as a gigantic captive customer and as a field for experimentation.

More recently, following on from its Tory predecessors, Labour introduced its backdoor privatisation. They created new ways for private sharks to line their pockets with NHS money - from the funding of infrastructure and services via Private Finance Initiatives, to the licensing of private clinics to carry out a range of clinical procedures.

The ConDems' "reform" builds on Labour's past measures, while paving the way for all-out privatisation.

So, existing NHS facilities would be run like commercial outfits. National Agreements would be ended, allowing hospitals to save on workers' wages. To raise additional income, they would,



The last thing the NHS needs is the profit plague

for instance, have to devote part of their NHS-funded resources to catering for fee-paying patients.

At the same time, the existing limits on the activities of private health facilities would be removed. Private health facilities would "compete" with cash-starved public hospitals for NHS funding, or would take over their management.

No wonder the private health giants are queueing up to lobby MPs, in the hope of getting a large chunk of the NHS budget through this "reform"!

A really public health service

Strangely enough, the government justifies the further opening up of the NHS budget to privateers by talking about *"the unprecedented challenges from our ageing population and new, more expensive treatments"*.

Of course, medical science allows people to live longer and offers better treatments. This is progress! But as a result, healthier people can use their skills more efficiently and for longer.

Effective medicine more than pays for itself - that is, from the point of view of society as a whole.

Then, of course, politicians are not concerned with society's needs, but the needs of capital. In the NHS, as in the rest of the public sector, they want to pour more public funds into the pockets of the profiteers.

We are told that given the cost of new treatments, "savings have to be made". How? By allowing private companies to pay dividends out of the NHS budget? But what about saving on the parasitism of the pharmaceutical giants which are charging astronomical prices to the NHS? Why not "save" by capping their profits or, if they resist, by nationalising the whole lot of them?

Health is too vital to be entrusted to capitalists whose eyes are rivetted on their profit figures. Not only should the ConDems' "reform" be stopped, but the NHS should be freed from private profiteering. Only then will a really public, socially affordable health service emerge, under the control of its workers and patients. □

Labour backs ConDems' cuts

Labour's only response to the ConDems' cuts has been to say that they "go too far, too fast". They never condemn them outright. And now shadow Chancellor, Ed Balls, has announced to anyone who would listen, that Labour can't promise to reverse a single one of these cuts in the future. He explicitly supported the pay freeze

imposed on public sector workers, proudly reminding everyone that it started under Labour!

According to him, Tory Chancellor George Osborne's pay restraint for the public sector – limiting pay rises to 1% for a further two years, on top of the pay freeze – is essential to tackle unemployment. How does he work

that one out, when Osborne announced at the same time that hundreds of thousands more public sector jobs were to be slashed? Anyway, how could unemployment be tackled, without curbing the bosses who are using the excuse of the recession to cut thousands of jobs in the private sector as well? ☐

• **New "New Labour"?**

Labour leader Ed Miliband backed Ed Balls' support for the ConDem's cuts – all in the name of making Labour more "credible" on the economy.

But "credible" to whom? Certainly not to the civil servants, council workers, nurses, education workers, health workers, firefighters, etc, who are facing a pay cut in real terms, year on year.

When he was elected as Labour leader, Ed Miliband tried to distance himself from Blair's "New Labour". It's ironic that he's now using exactly the same reasoning as Blair did,

to justify Labour's servility to the bosses.

• **Mee me**

The government's Health and Social Care bill, if it passes, will open the door much wider to private health companies' profiteering out of NHS "business". Among those preparing to cash in, is a certain Cherie Blair, wife of the former Labour prime minister. She is one of the founders of a new company called Mee Healthcare, currently trying to raise £65 million to open a chain of private health clinics in shopping centres and supermarkets.

Of course, this is consistent with Labour's policies when in government. After all, it was under Blair that much of the backdoor, "privatisation by stealth" was implemented. The ConDems only aim to develop this further.

Cherie Blair's business venture could, however, embarrass the Labour shadow health secretary, who is touring the country to rally support and anti-privatisation votes among those opposed to the ConDem NHS reform. He would no doubt prefer his campaign to appear as "against" NHS commercialisation – even if he has no intention of reversing it.

• **Sex education is ok if it doesn't talk about sex**

Nadine Dorries, the MP who proposed legislation to curtail women's right to abortion a few months back,

is at it again. Now she thinks that sex education should be about teaching teenagers not to have sex. As if generations of parents haven't tried that one, and realised it doesn't work! Nevertheless, she thought her idea was so clever that she put it into a private member's bill.

Strangely enough, Dorries' bill wanted only the girls to be taught abstinence... As if she, herself, only got taught about the birds and not the bees at school, since she doesn't

seem to realise that you generally need both boy and girl, to achieve a pregnancy.

After some outcry and public protest, her bill has been shelved (for the present), although one wonders how it came to be read in the first place. Especially when such "chastity crusades" have already been shown to be so damaging in some parts of the US. Hopefully, it will end up in the dustbin of history, along with her reactionary ideas about women.

Class Struggle n°94

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• **21st century plumbing, 19th century system**

In the 1860s, when the London sewage system was completed, it was designed to prevent the sewers backing up and flooding streets, during heavy rain, by allowing foul waste to overflow into surface water pipes, which flowed into the Thames if it was needed.

However, what was considerable progress in 1870, is no longer acceptable today. Especially as discharges into the Thames occur, on average, once a week and after as little as 2mm of rain. This should have been fixed long ago. But vested interests

prevented that: from privatised Thames Water which delayed new investment, to the owners of some of the most expensive real estate who didn't fancy having major work done under their properties.

Eventually, under the pressure of EU regulation and the threat of a fine, Thames Water has had to change tack. Now a "super-sewer" is due to be developed. But never fear, Thames Water has already warned that it will pass on the cost to customers – about £50 each – rather than see profits drain away.

And they got it all wrong again!

Against Osborne's predictions, the economy shrunk by 0.2% in the last quarter of 2011. Construction was down by 0.5%, despite the drastic housing shortage! Manufacturing fell by almost 1% - meaning that the production of material goods went down by 4.5% over the year, and 13.3% since the beginning of the crisis!

So, once again, the Con-Dems got it wrong. They'd boasted that

there would be 2.5% "growth" in 2011, but the actual figure is now a dismal 0.9%. Meanwhile, despite their promise to bring inflation down to 2%, it is still hovering around 5%. And to top it all, their predicted figure for the public debt black hole in 2015 had to be increased by £30bn. Of course, they blame the eurozone crisis. Convenient!

But then, why would politicians who turned a blind eye when banks

were piling up astronomical speculative debt under their noses, be trustworthy when it comes to handling the economy? Not only are they concerned purely with boosting capitalist profits, but in a system which is based on the irrational, profit-seeking competition between private owners of capital, they are mere fortune-tellers looking blankly into their crystal balls! □

The public debt racket

On 24 January, newspapers reported that public debt had reached the £1 trillion mark. In and of itself this is a mind-boggling figure, equivalent to 65% of annual GDP. But what's behind it?

In fact, the estimation of this figure involves a sleight of hand. Firstly, it does not factor in the cost of the banking bailout (a mere £1.3 trillion!). And secondly, it includes sums

which it shouldn't. For instance, the £275bn of government debt held by the Bank of England as a result of its "quantitative easing programme", despite the fact that buying back this debt with newly-printed money amounted to repaying it early!

There's nothing innocent in the way public debt figures are worked out and reported. It's all about justifying the ConDems' turn of the screw

against the working class. But, at the same time, it's also about throwing up a smokescreen to hide the real beneficiaries of the public debt racket. It's no coincidence if the politicians who keep shedding tears over the £140m in interest paid daily by the government on its debt, never mention that most of that cash goes directly towards boosting the banks' profits!

• "Responsible capitalism"? Yes, for today's chaos!

When RBS boss, Stephen Hester, announced he would not take his £963,000 bonus, the sighs of relief in Westminster might have blown down buildings. Miliband and Cameron had accused each other of hypocrisy - with Miliband accusing Cameron of weakness towards the boss of a government-controlled bank and Cameron claiming that his hands were "tied" by the status granted to RBS by the previous Labour government, after it took it over, and the terms and conditions it had offered to Hester.

In the course of their polemics in the media, both leaders posed as champions of what they called "responsible capitalism". Of course, neither of them really bothered to explain what they exactly meant by

this. Nor did they say how a system based on the mad rivalries between individual capital owners fighting for the highest pickings, could possibly be "responsible" towards society as a whole. In fact, in view of the social hardship which has already been caused by the capitalists and their crisis over the past few years, there's only way to see it: if capitalism is "responsible", it is primarily for generating the poverty which is rising today!

• Behind the charade of Hester's bonus

RBS boss Stephen Hester finally forfeited his bonus, but that's a tree which hides a forest: this government-controlled(!) bank paid its top 323 earners a total of £350m in 2010!

And what about the other banks? They may not be state-controlled,

but would they still be in business, if it were not for the state buying their "toxic" loans and giving them £275bn in cash as part of its "quantitative easing"? Yet, as new European rules about disclosure have revealed, eight of these "embattled" banks paid 1,265 senior staff an average £1.8m each in 2010, with Goldman Sachs topping the roll, with an average £4m! Thanks to past and present governments, bankers are making a fortune out of the crisis. But this is also true of all big companies, thanks to the tax breaks and subsidies they were awarded: the CEOs of the FTSE100 companies awarded themselves a 40% pay increase over the last year!

In short, the storm in the politicians' teacups caused by Hester's bonus has conveniently concealed big business' parasitism on public funds, and on society as a whole.

• Not the Apple of their i

With a market value of £263bn, Apple has now overtaken ExxonMobil as the world's most valuable company. And Facebook, which has just been floated, is already valued at £63bn. Not such companies produce anything really vital for society. The only reason for their high valuation is the size of the dividends that shareholders hope they will

generate.

Apple's superprofits - £8.3bn in the last quarter of 2011, with a profit margin of over 30% - are the result of contracting out its production to the Taiwanese company Foxconn, which super-exploits hundreds of thousands of Chinese workers. This allows Apple to pay Foxconn £110 for each iPhone4, which are sold for over £350.

Even the business weekly "The

Economist" admitted that "at Foxconn, iPhones and iPads are assembled largely by hand, with assembly lines of thousands or tens of thousands of workers giving themselves crazy repetitive motion stress disorders". The factories are vast, over-lit halls where workers put in huge overtime to earn wages of around £40 per week! Let us hope that their growing resistance to such exploitation will bite Apple where it hurts.

Finally shutting the pension door...

Shell - the last of the FTSE100 still allowing workers into a final salary pension scheme - is now scrapping it for new hires from 2013. Never mind its record £12bn profits. Ford is doing the same - if the workers don't prevent it (a strike vote is underway). GE announced its scheme's closure to new entrants last year, but now its Aviation section is balloting for strike. Unilever, closed off its scheme in 2008 but wants to downgrade it to a "career average" based pension of 20-40% less (depending on whether you're a worker or a boss!). Workers are currently fighting this move. Seemingly bucking the bosses' trend, BMW in Oxford just

backed down from closing its scheme after "talks" with the union.

The National Association of Pension Funds says only 19% of final salary pension funds remain open to "new hires". Of the 20m workers with any kind of occupational scheme, just 2m have final salary benefits intact. This means a maximum of 2/3 of final earnings, while a stock-market based (defined contribution) pension will pay 1/5th at most. And what of the 10m without any occupational scheme at all? Given the poor basic state pension (at most £102/w with full NI contributions) pensioner poverty, already at 2m, will be rising exponentially.

... and burning what's left

Pensions Minister, Steve Webb wants to burn pensions' regulations to help bosses cut their costs. Of course they just hate paying into workers' pensions, full stop! After last year's encouragement to the private sector to follow its lead, by indexing pension increases to the CPI instead of RPI, the government wants to go further. Yes, it

wants to scrap any obligation for bosses to protect pensions against inflation! This could cut an estimated £7bn off the value of workers' pensions!

Webb asserts this would help keep bosses from terminating schemes. But he also claims that *"every piece of regulation will go unless we can justify its existence"* - with the emphasis on



"we"! Including a new EU law meant to ensure the solvency of pension funds. In the meantime, he's delayed the start of the government's auto-enrolment scheme for workplace pensions (stock-market based!) until May 2015. This is what the government calls *"re-invigorating workplace pensions"*! Do they have the same dictionary as the rest of us? ☐

• Welfare cap: how to create more poor

On 2 February, MPs voted for a £26,000 cap on the total benefits paid to families with children. According to ministers, this will affect 310,000 individuals, adults and children. Households will lose an average of £83 a week, with over 11,000 losing more than £150 a week. A family with 4 children with a rent of £400 a week, could lose £14,000 a year.

Never mind that the highest benefits are paid to households which face extortionate private sector rents due to the shortage of social housing. Although a large part of that money goes straight into the pockets of greedy landlords, there is no question of capping private sector rents! The last thing the ConDems want to do is to dent landlords' profits.

In 2010, the government's own departments considered that £26,500 was the poverty line for a family with 4 children. By imposing their welfare cap, the ConDems are therefore quite consciously pushing more thousands of families into poverty. Blaming the poor for being poor, and forcing them into even worse poverty, is a very old weapon used by the wealthy to reinforce their parasitism on society. But it is an attack on all workers.

• Defeated in the Lords - for all of a week!

The ConDems' legislation to cap the welfare benefits paid to any single household at £26,000 a year, was only briefly derailed by a "rebellion" - of lords and bishops. This was big news, partly because bishops do not normally defy the government, and partly because the "rebel" lords included Paddy Ashdown, ex-leader of the Lib Dems. They backed an amendment, which won a narrow majority in the Lords, exempting child benefit from the cap.

The week after all this well-reported politicking, the government activated an old procedure that allows it to override the Lords where a bill has "large financial implications". No big surprise there: the House of Lords has never been anything more than an expensive relic of an outdated aristocratic past.

However, a government spokesman found it necessary to explain that exempting child benefit from the cap would undermine "fairness", since it might mean some people were better off not working. If so, rather than the benefits system, isn't it the inadequate level of wages which is the real problem?

Letter from Sussex

Once in the leafy west of Eastbourne, there was a prep school, one of whose pupils was Eric Blair. His family was not particularly wealthy, but he managed to get a scholarship to Eton. Instead of going on to Oxbridge, he joined the Indian Imperial Police and came back an anti-imperialist. He lived for a while with vagrants in Paris and London, developed socialist convictions, and started writing under the pseudonym, George Orwell.

When Orwell penned his anti-Stalinist satire, *Animal Farm*, he based it in Willingdon, on the northern edge of Eastbourne. The farm and the pub frequented by the drunken Mr Jones were real places. The farm is now a hotel and the pub is still there. When the Attlee government set up the NHS, Orwell's old school became the Dental Estimates Board, which administered all NHS dental treatment. New buildings were added and it became the biggest employer in Eastbourne.

Alas, there is no happy ending. Rather, things have gone almost full-circle. In 2006, another Labour government, led by another Blair, abolished the Dental Board and today, there is an application to turn the original building into one of the "free schools" introduced by the present "Old Etonian"-led government...

Capitalism still isn't working

Last month's official figures showed a further rise in unemployment to 2.685 million, with 118,000 more people out of work over the 3 months to November. 52,000 more young people were unemployed, compared to August-October. Other published figures showed that private companies created just 5,000 new jobs from July to September - while the

public sector cut 67,000.

Whilst the number of full-time jobs fell by 140,000 for the quarter, there were 31,000 more part-time jobs. And according to the Office for National Statistics, 1.3 million people are now working part-time, because they cannot get full-time work - a record number since the ONS started measuring this 20 years ago.

Cameron told the Commons he took "full responsibility". Not "blame", of course! And responsibility for what, anyway? Not for creating the new jobs really needed to repair his "broken" society, of course, but for harassing more claimants off benefits into any poorly paid jobs, or unpaid "work experience". Which keeps them off the official counts!

Self-(un)employment

A report published in January showed that the number of "self-employed" had reached a record 4.4m - a 300,000 rise since the beginning of the crisis. But as the report itself admits, *"it's far from clear that the recent rise in self-employment marks a resurgence in British enterprise culture, with many of those taking the self-employed route back to work looking more like an army of part-time 'odd jobbers' desperate to avoid unemployment"*.

Yes, indeed. And the Guardian exposed what a con self-employment can be, by quoting from a job advert: *"make £275 or more per trip as a Courier Driver, delivering same-day documents and parcels across the UK ... Please note this is not a job, this is a self-employed business opportunity"*!

For a long time, especially in construction, bosses have used "self-employment" as a way of avoiding National Insurance, holiday pay, sick pay and employment regulations. But



In construction, self-employment has long been a form of casualisation

now, this has spread to all sectors as a way for the bosses to cut jobs and the government to conceal under-employment. 90% of the newly self-

employed are part-time, many are low waged and the jobs required are unskilled. This is just a way of enforcing DIY exploitation!

• No work without a decent wage!

A 22-year old jobless student who was ordered to work full-time without pay at Poundland, under threat of losing her benefits, has taken the government to court for using her as forced labour.

Forcing the jobless to "work for their benefits" is part of several ConDem "work experience" programmes. Although what sort of "experience" can be got by stacking shelves at Poundland for free is anyone's guess - except that of lining the bosses' pockets! The government may well deny that this can be equated to forced labour, but one wonders what else it can be called!

With such a pool of free labour on offer, the bosses are queuing up to get their share. The Guardian revealed that some of the richest companies, were up to their necks in this swindle - including Tesco, Sainsbury, Argos, Asda, McDonald's and Burger King.

The government plans to subject 250,000 jobless to such a treatment over three years. Not only is this an

unacceptable attack against the already very limited protection of the minimum wage, but it is a means for the bosses to avoid creating real jobs. And this is why it can't be tolerated, anytime, anywhere!

• Stop the bosses' free lunch!

Over 5 million workers in Britain regularly do unpaid overtime by working through lunch hour, staying late, coming early to work, etc. How many jobs could be created with all that overtime? The TUC estimates that last year alone, these workers were working one extra day a week for free - equivalent to 1 million extra jobs altogether.

But what if one takes into account all the extra hours paid as "legitimate" overtime? As workers try to make ends meet on low wages, every type of overtime has become rampant in Britain. And while some are killing themselves at work, others can't find a job. How many more jobs would be created if bosses were forced to recognise the 8-hour day, pay decent wages and share the work around?

• Jobless unwelcome

Large chunks of the BBC are being relocated to Salford, a borough of Greater Manchester, which is going to become "Media City UK" - a sort of reduced, British version, of Silicon Valley for the media industry.

However, the local jobless are not likely to benefit. There were 23,000 applications for the 680 jobs created so far. Only 26 of the newly-recruited workers come from Salford itself - a city with 229,000 inhabitants and 9.7% unemployed. Under half the recruits come from the Greater Manchester area (population 6.2m) - just 246, including a number of 16-19 year-olds, on the minimum wage, whose so-called "ambassador" jobs will be solely to greet visitors.

This is what politicians enthusiastically hail as a way of "regenerating" deprived areas like Salford, which have been ravaged by decades of reckless profiteering! They are incapable of providing the one thing that's missing: socially useful jobs, on decent wages, for all those who need them!

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Rewarded for fatal failures**

It seems nobody in a highly-paid job is prepared to "scrape by" on just their basic salary. Network Rail chief executive, Sir David Higgins, is in line for a bonus of £336,000 on top of his £560,000 salary. Five other Network Rail directors also stand to get bonuses worth 60% of their six-figure salaries.

This bonus scheme, which could be worth £20m to these six bosses over the next three years, is supposedly an "incentive" to improve

performance. Then what are they being rewarded for, in a year when Network Rail performed so badly that it faces being fined by the Office for Rail Regulation?

On top of that, Network Rail is going to be prosecuted for the failures of maintenance which caused the fatal crash at Grayrigg, and has just admitted responsibility for the death of two teenagers at a foot crossing, six years ago. In the latter case, it failed to act on its own



recommendation that the gate should be fitted with an automatic locking mechanism.

Not only should Network Rail's directors' bonuses be docked; they should be put in the dock, charged and jailed!

• Thin end of the wedge?

First Capital Connect has written to some of us saying we'll have to increase our pension contributions. OK, it may be by only 0.14%, but every penny counts. And why should we be paying a single penny more, when the pension fund built up in British Rail days was depleted by companies taking a contribution "holiday" after privatisation? [King's X Workers' Platform - 24/01/12]

• Dim idea

East Coast has found a way of cutting their electricity bills on trains and giving themselves good marks. They replaced light bulbs in the toilets and some in kitchen corridors with energy efficient ones. The toilets are now so dark that we're struggling to find the toilet bowls and wash basins. Energy efficient or not, it's certainly not hygiene efficient. Might as well take them out altogether - it would make little

difference and save even more money! [King's X Workers' Platform - 10/01/12]

• Reality TV?

To improve our mood (not), East Coast has decided to do some filming round the station, so we keep getting cameras shoved in our faces. They're going to get some nice shots of scowls, from both us and the passengers. [King's X Workers' Platform - 10/01/12]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• On guard against Angard**

The saga of Royal Mail's wrongdoing against its 2011 Xmas casualties is ongoing. The cowboy agency, Angard, which Royal Mail set up itself and then got Reed Employment to manage, promised that workers would be paid by 11 January. Most were not.

However, those who shouted loudest are receiving some payment. Some of that shouting was done

through an online and press campaign; thousands of employment tribunal applications and complaints to MPs and even the postal affairs minister felt obliged to make an apology for Royal Mail's outrageous and contemptuous incompetence towards these many workers. He said that a Royal Mail review would ensure that "there is no repeat in future" of "the



issues that arose this Christmas". Sure! What postal workers know all too well is that this kind of cock-up is a hall-mark of "Royal Fail"!

• Permanent jobs on equal pay!

We hear that Angard is, and has been, "supplying" temps to fill the many gaps in deliveries resulting from "Revisions". So union policy (yes, there used to be one!) which refused to allow RM to use temps outside of Xmas is officially shelved? When did they ask us? Surely if temps appear in any delivery office we shouldn't go out until the boss writes out a permanent contract and gives it to them, there and then! [Workers' fight Mount Pleasant 24/1/12]

• This world ain't "normal"

As to "Revisions", it was very interesting to hear that the union executive up

at HQ now thinks there are no more issues which need clearing up in Deliveries and they can sign up to everything in our names. Haven't they heard of absorption? Or Door to dustbin? But of course they have! They agreed to sell the lie to us, that we had to do the junk mail to "save jobs" and accept job cuts to ... "save jobs". In a normal world, that would be considered certifiably insane. [Workers' fight Mount Pleasant 24/1/12]

• Mail traffic control

These big flat screen TVs are apparently not for watching football, but to show the time before a despatch, with blue, yellow and red colour coding. Just like a rocket launch countdown! Only it was a bit

of an anti-climax last Wednesday when the system crash-landed... [Workers' fight Mount Pleasant 10/1/12]

• They treat us as if we're dumb

The Romec company magazine "Impressions" is really comical. You have to wonder who comes up with the ideas and who then writes them down! They tell us they gave a "secret award" to a cleaner at Stornoway DO (not a secret anymore, then?) who "lives and breathes the values". Another from Croydon DO is described as a "World Class Mail Environmental Pillar". They must be choking. We are, just reading about it! [Workers' fight Mount Pleasant 10/1/12]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• The ballot can't be the final word**

The national strike ballot at Ford is underway. The final results should be due mid-to late February. A "yes" for strike means the majority rejecting what seems like a relatively "good" offer of 6% on wages for 2012, above inflation in 2013 and retirement lump sum hiked by 20% - which deliberately conceals an attack on pensions (closure to new starts from 2013) - and a 20% cut in wages for all new recruits from 1 April. Yes, Ford wants workers'

further exploitation to keep feeding record profits - £12.9bn for 2011 - while it whines about the European "slump"!

Ford and the union officials who recommended the deal were already caught short when 2 out of 3 workers at Dagenham rejected the offer in a consultative ballot held last November. British workers know about the 50% wage cuts for new starts and huge pension/healthcare cuts Ford enacted in the USA. The



latest British contract also hints at increased flexibility, which was a feature of the 2011 US contract. If there is a strike vote, the next task will be to ensure that decisions on conducting the fight against Ford are taken by the whole workforce and not just a few union officials!

• The "other" Ford??

Whatever happened to "One Ford"? If you happened to glance at the "Ford letter" given out with a 2nd copy of the offer, we're told how hard-up Ford of Europe is.

Is this a different company then, from the Ford that's clocked up £8.6 billion in profits just in the last 3 months, has "turned the corner" ahead of the competition and will start paying dividends for the first time in 5 years at the annual cost of £520 million?!!!! [Workers' Fight - Ford Dagenham 31/1/12]

• The timing was right!

The only union letter against Ford's offer was sent to members of the Unite

1107 branch last week!

It may have been wrong about the ballot paper having an option to vote for "action short of strike" and wrong to suggest we support that(!) but at least it underlined how new starts taken on with a lower rate for the job would create a 3rd tier if you count the subcontracted workers already on lower rates as 2nd tier! And it said the pensions sell-out is unacceptable, full stop!! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 31/1/12]

• Who's representing whom?

A well-respected Lion mate who tried to pass some of the 1107 union letters round during Friday tea break, was called to the manager's office! We're told that it may have been the Chief

Womble himself who "arranged" this censorship!!

Then, to crown it all, union stewards came along with the company's propaganda - Ford's offer with the plant bosses' letter inside, pleading with us to accept! What a tragic farce! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 31/1/12]

• We want rpi restored!

Jaguar Land Rover has decided to restore the RPI on pensions for former Ford workers at Halewood after "conversations" with Unite. Obviously Unite didn't have such "conversations" with Ford, when they stitched us into CPI! But if JLR can cave in on this, so can Ford! Forget those bribes! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 31/1/12]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• Not over by a long chalk**

So BMW has withdrawn its plans to close the pension fund and employ new agency workers on lower wages. But for how long? Apparently BMW does not want any bad publicity before the Olympics and clearly a refusal to work Saturdays at Cowley would lose a whole shift's production.

But if the forthcoming talks are to be "meaningful", we'll want guarantees that both proposals are "dead". [BMW Mini Oxford 24/01/12]

• They didn't fancy it!

What BMW's step back does show us is that if the workforces from Cowley, Swindon, Hams Hall and Rolls-Royce all stand together, we can be a force to be reckoned with.

BMW saw this prospect and backed off. And if we want to make progress on the pension fund, agency workers' conditions, not to mention excessive shift lengths and WTA, that's the way to do it! [BMW Mini Oxford 24/01/12]

• Pensions: first things first

So far BMW has threatened to close the pension scheme to new starters. And isn't the problem precisely the lack of new starters? For years BMW dribbled new contracts instead of guaranteeing them after a fixed period - and then virtually froze all BMW contracts after autumn 2008. So that must be sorted - starting with contracts for everyone here already. Then we'll see how the pension fund looks! [BMW Mini Oxford 24/01/12]

• Rock v hard place? We abstain!

Currently BMW are looking at alternative shifts and we will no doubt be asked to vote on which conditions of servitude we prefer. Sign away our Saturdays or work excessively long shifts that will injure our health! Why should we vote for either of these? BMW want us to build 12 months worth of cars in 10 months and pay with WTA for their two months of planned shut downs.... [BMW Mini Oxford 24/01/12]

**• A matter of urgency**

BMW's little bombshells were probably meant to distract from pay talks. But bills still keep coming in and we need a rise to cope with all the increases. By some accounts BMW withdrew from talks as soon as they saw the claim. Since BMW shelved its attack on pensions, we've heard nothing - yet the increase is nearly a month overdue.

Imagine their reaction if their precious production schedule was delayed like that! There's a thought. [BMW Mini Oxford 24/01/12]

Spain

Unemployment in Spain just hit 5.5m (22.8%) - and that's official unemployment, probably a gross under-estimate. Spain already had Europe's worst unemployment rate (in Greece it is 18.2%), but now 1.5m households have no wage earner and almost half 16-24 year-olds (48.6%) are jobless! It is even worse than that, since so many have several part-time jobs on rock bottom wages. As many as a third of the population in hard-hit Andalucia, has no job.

The new right-wing Popular Party government under Mariano Rajoy expects the regions to make harsh cuts in services - which means healthcare, education and social support disappearing just when the poor need them most. It now plans labour reforms - making it easier for bosses to hire and fire - as if it isn't

Joblessness skyrockets



Trade-union rally in Madrid last December

already! It is certain that the Spanish working class will not take any of this lying down. Last year millions of "Indignados" took to the streets over austerity measures. Over the past

week public sector workers - including the cops - have demonstrated in all the main centres. If such protests escalate, Rajoy's government will have to think again. □

Costa-Concordia

The capsizing of the Costa-Concordia, off Italy's coast, on 13 January, left 29 dead or missing. But it also lifted the veil on the multi-billion "dream cruise" business.

Some in the media were quick to blame the crew's "incompetence". Except that on this giant floating leisure mall carrying 3,200 passengers and 1,000 crew, there were fewer than 100 sailors. And because it's so much cheaper to hire them on short-term contracts from the Third World,

their familiarity with the ship's emergency procedures and knowledge of all the passengers' languages was limited.

The ship's owner ship, a subsidiary of Miami-based cruise giant, Carnival, hypocritically blamed the captain for having steered the ship too close to the coast. Except that Carnival itself encourages such practices, known in the trade as "thrill diversions", in order to "enhance passengers' experience". This, despite

the fact that, as the size of these ships increases, in order to host always more passengers and more night-clubs, swimming pools, casinos, etc.. (the Costa-Concordia was 952ft long), they also become more difficult to manoeuvre, especially in shallow coastal waters, and more unstable.

Ultimately, it's all about size and greed. The larger the ship, the more profitable it is. Never mind safety!

They would rather lock them up!

Britain's prison population has been hovering around a record 87,700 for months - ever since the courts started dishing out draconian sentences following last summer's riots. With 151 persons imprisoned for every 100,000 of population, Britain has the highest incarceration rate in Western Europe. By comparison, Germany, with 95 per 100,000 and France with just 85/100,000, have static or even

falling prison populations.

Yet it's not as if Britain's justice system had a better record than the rest of Western Europe - rather the opposite. But under pressure from politicians who play on reactionary prejudices, the courts choose to lock up defendants for the pettiest of crimes: more than half of all sentences are for less than 6 months.

So never mind the fact that prisons

are well-known for turning petty offenders into entrenched criminals.

Never mind either, that petty crimes have generally much more to do with social problems and deprivation, mental disorders, or addictions, which could and should be dealt with using structures designed to provide help rather than coercion.

It's so much easier to pander to the "hang 'em, flog 'em" brigade than to address the faults of this social system!

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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