

WORKERS' fight

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

MAKE THE CAPITALIST SCROUNGERS PAY!

Having been forced to send their NHS bill back to the drawing board, the ConDems are grinding on ahead - aiming, this time, to turn their screw on the poorest and most vulnerable.

The Welfare Reform Bill, now under discussion, is nothing but a Scrooge law against the jobless and working class households on low-income. And, unlike the NHS bill, it won't generate opposition among layers of "professionals" that the government would rather keep on its side.

So, this time, the working class can rely only on its own resources to stop the attacks contained in this new bill.

Cheap demagogy

Of course, it may sound reasonable to consolidate into one "universal credit" the present bewildering array of benefits - which is so complex that it takes a degree in law and accounting to make sense of it. Except that the name of their game is to cut cost, so some will lose out - in particular, the poorest.

Hence the media's nasty campaign against housing benefit recipients - accused of "living in luxury on taxpayers' money". Never mind that their only "luxury" is to be caught in the claws of greedy landlords charging extortionate rents. But being among those on whose support the ConDems rely, these parasitic landlords won't be blamed for living off the state!

Hence, as well, the scandalous campaign against the disabled and long-term sick - branded as "scroungers" by the same media. Having already been forced to jump through humiliating hoops to retain their benefits - they now face even more humiliation to prove they can't work, when there are no jobs available, even for those who are fit!

Significantly, the only aspect of this bill which might be amended is the reform of child benefit - the only one not



specifically targeted at the poorest!

Ultimately, what this new bill is really about is blaming the poor for their poverty and treating them as petty criminals. Rather than modernising the welfare system, as Iain Duncan Smith would like us to believe, it is merely going back to Victorian times. Only the workhouses are missing - for the time being.

The real scroungers

Of course, there is cross-party agreement between politicians to avoid the real issues which underpin the very existence of the welfare system.


Why does the state have to provide an inadequate lifeline to millions in the first place? Why, if not because wealthy companies are free to cut jobs and pay inadequate wages, while lining shareholders' pockets?

Unemployment would not be what it is, if redundancies were made illegal and if the work available was shared out between existing workers, without loss of pay. This would dent

companies' profits? But since the capitalists caused the crisis, it's only right that they should pay for their mess.

As to the housing crisis, it wouldn't feed the landlords' greed if the state used its resources to build the houses that are so badly needed.

But instead of this, politicians of all stripe are encouraging the capitalists' parasitism on the state. As usual, the banks come first, with the £50bn of new money they just got from the Bank of England, together with the £27bn in bargain-basement loans they got from the European Central Bank. And guess what? They've just announced an increase in mortgage interest rates! Then, with Osborne's April budget, all British companies will get another cut in corporation tax in, which will just boost the already colossal unused cash pile on which they sit.

So, yes, the only scroungers in this society, are these parasitic capitalists who live on our labour and on the largesse of the state! 

A Scottish referendum for whose benefit?

After Cameron announced that a vote over Scotland's independence should take place within 18 months as a simple yes or no question, the political scene turned into a school playground. Cameron: "you said you wanted the referendum then you can have it now or never!". Salmond: "if you want me to have it now then I don't want it! I'll have it later!". Nick Clegg and Ed Milliband to Cameron: "why do you ask him

to have it now if he doesn't want to. We won't endorse that!", etc.

What turned them into quarrelling kids? Obviously not their concerns for working people, whose interests are the same, whichever side of the border they live on.

The Tories are caught between their support for the "union" and the tempting prospect of 41 Scottish Labour MP losing their jobs in Westminster, as opposed

to only one Tory. Labour and the Lib-Dems are also against independence, but would rather not spell it out for fear of losing votes to the SNP. As for the SNP leader, he wants the referendum postponed to 2014: for now, being a small Salmond in a big pond is preferable to being a big Salmond in a small pond, which may rapidly dry up! □

• That's very rich!

Next time you struggle to pay for your shopping, spare a thought for the super rich. Judging from US rich list magazine, Forbes, they actually struggle to spend enough! The magazine worked out the basket of "essentials" for the top 400 richest in America - whose combined worth is now £629 billion!

So what's in your goods basket when you're super rich? We know money's a headache, so for £204.39 a session, your shrink will help you shed some of your money troubles. Then go and relax in your own pool and sauna - a bargain at £800,100! To cheer yourself up a facelift is well worth it, at £11,630.95. To get around,

a Rolls Royce Phantom will set you back just £238,982. But why travel cheap, when you can get an airplane for just £9,306,240 to fly and dine at the famous Paris restaurant, "La Tour d'Argent, for a mere £295.58? All in a day's "work"!

And the worst about being super rich? Well, while we're all getting poorer, they're getting richer - the net worth of this small bunch of parasites just rose by 12%. Who says being rich doesn't pay?

• "Art" of speculation

The art market is booming while everything else is in a slump. As the head of a specialist art insurer, Hiscox, points out *there is a lot of cash around at the*

moment and many places to put it... But for the wealthy, it doesn't mean investing in useful production, to create jobs, for instance. No, this is just not an option they're interested in. So art seems to them a good place to hide (in their language: invest) their dosh.

So no wonder a Francis Bacon painting at Christie's art auction reached £80.5million - their 2nd highest earnings for a contemporary sale since they began business in 1977! And these artworks aren't being sold to collectors but to fund managers. Yes, those same big players, who helped accelerate the crisis because of the astronomical size of their gambles. For them, "playing" the crisis is an art to enjoy and get fatter on, at everyone else's expense.

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• Not in IDS' backyard

Three NHS hospital trusts have been given the go-ahead to merge in April. Barts and the London, Newham University and Whipps Cross will form a single trust, promising to reduce "back office duplication" and reinvest the savings in patient care. Some of the savings will no doubt go towards bailing out the Whipps Cross trust in Leytonstone, which last autumn revealed it was £4.5m in deficit and where management had asked workers to 'voluntarily' relinquish their holidays or do unpaid work to save money.

• Petroplus and Carlyle's long financial arm

Coryton refinery in Essex is threatened with closure by the end of April, after its owner, Petroplus, went into administration. Since 1993, this Swiss company had been buying ageing refineries from the oil majors, becoming Europe's largest refinery group. It made huge profits by running them with minimum maintenance and investment - so much so, that it attracted the interest of Carlyle, a secretive, giant, US investment fund, which now owns 57% of the group.

With the crisis, profit margins may be squeezed, making it hard for

Whipps Cross' future has been in question for some years, and now minister, Iain Duncan Smith joined campaigners to save it, as the local MP. He publicly signed petitions outside 10 Downing Street against neighbouring maternity and A&E closures at King George's Hospital in Ilford, warning: "This closure will seriously damage local health services, placing enormous pressure on other hospitals". Does that mean that IDS the MP does not realise the consequences of what IDS the cabinet minister is up to? A serious case of schizophrenia maybe?

Petroplus to compete with more modern rivals. But why should the workforce of Petroplus' refineries - whether at Coryton, or at its other 4 remaining refineries in Europe - pay for the company's recklessness? Its main shareholder, Carlyle, with its huge assets estimated at £60bn, could be made to keep the refineries running, or in any case pay the wages of their workers, until they find alternative employment or retire. After so many years of fat profits earned from Petroplus, this is the very least that Carlyle should do!

There's piles of cash out there!

Politicians justify cuts by claiming that social expenditure has become "unaffordable" because of rising life expectancy, expensive medical treatments, etc., and that, due to scarcity of funds, state public services can no longer be taken for granted.

Yet it was a huge surplus of funds which caused the crisis - a flood of loose cash, roaming the planet in search of a quick buck, feeding frantic speculation and the build-up of

the debt mountain which collapsed in 2007.

Has all this wealth melted away? No, in fact. It is estimated that companies operating in Britain own a cash pile worth 8.3% of GDP, or over £115bn - comparable to the government's official current deficit. And in this respect, Britain is top of the pops - with the highest corporate surplus among the richest G20 countries and the lowest level of corporate investment!

So let no-one dare to tell us again that "there is no money". What's missing some kind of effective control by workers over the way big business uses its cash. Only by imposing such control over the capitalists, could the working class ensure that all available funds are invested in socially useful, job-creating production, and thus start reversing the situation caused by the crisis. □

• Amec - parasites in action

If anyone wonders what rich companies do with their spare cash, the engineering and industrial services giant Amec provides a typical example.

This is a company which started to grow after Blair came into office, by milking public funds through public-private contracts. It went on to expand in the US, while providing services to western companies in Iraq, after US and British troops had finished their dirty work. But it really blossomed after the beginning of the crisis, by swallowing smaller rivals.

In February, Amec announced profits up 12% to £299m. And what does it intend to do with this cash? Invest in new jobs and production? Increase wages? Not at all - in addition to lining shareholders' pockets with higher dividends (+15%) it plans to buy back £400m worth of its shares in order to boost their market price. That's all it can think of doing with the wealth produced by its 25,000 employees! If that's not parasitism, what is?

• Barclay's stinking profits

Despite an unbelievable £5.9bn profit, Barclays moans that it's 3% down on 2010 (can you spare a dime?) although its shareholders won't "suffer", since dividends will go up by 9%. But how did it make such a profit?

First, by milking public funds. Not only has Barclays been tapping the Bank of England's "Liquidity Scheme"

which helps banks to offload their worthless assets, but it has taken opportunity of the cheap loans offered by the Eurozone's central bank!

Second, by defrauding public funds. The Inland Revenue just closed down two of Barclays' £500m tax-evasion schemes. But by going through the bank's accounts, one can find a strange "hole": while it claiming "to have paid total tax globally of £6.4bn, including £2.9bn in the UK", its accounts only showed a total £1.9bn tax payment. So where's the difference?

That governments can't be trusted to stop tax evasion is stating the obvious. But ending banking secrecy and entrusting the control of banks' finances to their mostly low-paid employees, definitely would.

• New money for old banks

In February, the Bank of England held a third round of "quantitative easing", worth £50bn. In other words, to date, the BoE has printed £325 billion worth of new money to buy back government bonds from the banks - supposedly to provide a "boost to the economy".

Quantitative easing does provide a boost to banks' profits, if only by offering them fresh cash to speculate with. For the real economy, however, it's another matter. While BoE governor, Mervyn King and Osborne repeat that it "works", the facts tell differently: the economy shrank by 0.2% in the last quarter of 2011 and industrial

output by 1.4% over the year.

But then how could it be otherwise, since the purchasing power of the working class is squeezed, both by unemployment and by inflation - which, itself, results from quantitative easing in the first place? So rather than solving the problem, they are just hiding it, if not making it worse.

• Classless "taxpayers"

Following more losses at government-controlled RBS and Lloyds (£5.4bn in total), the media are shedding tears over the resulting "losses" for a classless entity called the "taxpayer".

But isn't this a convenient way of sweeping far bigger scandals under the carpet? For instance, the fact that, the two "state-controlled" banks used a scam to defraud vulnerable customers - Payment Protection Insurance schemes. Or the fact that under the watch of both Labour and ConDem, they cut 80,000 jobs. And isn't the biggest scandal of all the fact that these banks' shareholders were bailed out, in 2008 - which wasted £66bn of public funds, created a public finance black hole and is used to justify today's social expenditure cuts?

The victims of these much bigger "losses" are not, as we keep hearing, classless "taxpayers" - especially not the richest who know how to keep their cash in safe places. Society as a whole suffers, but it is the working class which really pays the price.

• AAA as in austerity

This February, the American credit rating agency, Moody's, warned that Britain may lose its top-notch (the so-called "AAA") credit rating. So far that hasn't happened. But at the time, some politicians went ballistic against Moody's "attack" on the ConDems' austerity policies.

Credit rating agencies like Moody's act much like tipsters at Aintree.

Except that rather than advising punters on how to bet on horses, they advise speculators on how to bet on government debt bonds. And like tipsters, they can't predict the future. Their advice is based on the rumour mill among speculators. It's not for nothing that they did not warn against the property bubble, in 2007! However, unlike punters betting on horses, the speculators who listen to the credit

agencies have the power to play with tens of billions at the click of a mouse - and at the cost of pushing whole countries to the wall and their populations into destitution.

But there was no such criticism of the credit agencies and speculators' power from the politicians who took exception to Moody's warning. That would have put into question the very profit system they defend!

Welfare reform

The Welfare Reform Bill has been winding its way through parliament since last February. Aiming to knock £18bn off benefits and tax credits this year and next, it is designed ultimately to "save" much more when a "universal credit" is introduced, replacing many elements of the benefit system. This threatens to devastate the lives of millions of pensioners, the disabled, low-waged, and the unemployed. Here are some examples of its likely consequences.

• *Evict parasitic landlords!*

The government's £340 a week cap on housing benefit is already unleashing a wave of homelessness on low-paid working families in central London. The problem is, of course, the astronomical level of rents. Since Thatcher abolished the Fair Rent Act in 1988, taxpayers' money spent on housing benefits has rocketed from £5bn to £20bn and most has gone straight into the pockets of private

Declaring war on the poor

landlords charging a fortune for sub-standard flats, especially in London.

Measures to peg rents would not go down well with Cameron's friends. It's far easier to cap benefits and blame recipients for "living off the state" than to admit that it's the wealthy who parasitise the welfare state with their extortionate rents!

• *Brick up your spare bedroom!*

Typical of the government's petty-mindedness is the "spare bedroom" tax. Currently those on housing benefit can have one spare bedroom before benefit is affected. Soon it will be docked by 14% for an extra bedroom and by 25% for two or more. But, of course, that won't take a penny off the rent for tenants.

The government claims that it will save between £100m and £500m (it doesn't have a clue!) and reckons to have the public support of tabloid readers, thanks to the "war on scroungers" which is being ratcheted up. In fact the consequences for

people who generally have no-where else to go are blindingly obvious. The most vulnerable could end up on the street. Not that many ConDem politicians will lose sleep over it.

• *A home at last.... in jail!*

Squatting by the homeless is already a civil offence and you can be convicted for damaging a squat or not paying for electricity used. But with a chronic shortage of housing and nearly 1m empty homes, squatting is a desperate measure sometimes used by the homeless to get a temporary roof over their heads. Yet Cameron has chosen to include in his Welfare bill a "Clause 130", making squatting punishable by £5,000 fine or one year in prison.

This is one of the ConDems' little nasties that could backfire, should the courts try to enforce it when thousands more are likely to be made homeless due to benefit cuts. But maybe they think that overcrowded jails can replace social housing?



Initial victory in construction

Electricians in the construction industry are celebrating the scuppering of a proposed new collective contract, so-called BESNA, which all of the main construction companies were trying to force down their throats. It would have cut wages by up to 35% and introduced a lesser-skilled grade.

Last December electricians from Balfour Beatty (only) voted to strike against BESNA - but the company threatened legal action. A new ballot in January faced new legal threats - this time implemented, but thrown out by the judge. After this, Balfour

Beatty decided to withdraw from BESNA and then all the others followed one by one. In fact sparks and others had waged weekly pickets to protest against BESNA for months, but it seems the judge's decision was the last straw for Balfour Beatty. Now comes the sting in the victory's tail. Unite officials will negotiate an alternative to BESNA. And although a representative of the "rank and file" will be invited along, this does not substitute for workers taking negotiations into their own hands - to avoid a stitch-up.

Council workers under attack

Council workers are now facing a 3rd year of wage freeze. But that's only the most visible of the employers' attacks. A growing number of councils have been forcing actual wage cuts on part or all of their workforces, by imposing new contracts, using one pretext or another. A recent survey by UNISON shows that over just the past 2 years, average wages have gone down by 13% as a result! In addition, council services are increasingly being privatised again - or outsourced to cow-boy contractors employing workers on even worse terms. So jobs and conditions are not just frozen, but actually deteriorating.

Of course, all of this should be blamed on the fact that, due to the ConDem austerity drive, local government expenditure is to be cut by 7% every year until 2015. And councils, therefore, cannot be blamed entirely for these attacks on workers. But they do have their share of responsibility. After all, we still have to see even one whole council choosing to make a stand against the ConDems, by refusing to implement the cuts they are expected to make!

It works for business

Under the ConDem "work experience" scheme, the young unemployed are meant to work for up to 8 weeks for their JSA. The government claims this is entirely voluntary. But that is not the experience of those at the receiving end, who're told they'll lose benefits if they opt out.

A string of retail giants has been benefiting from this supply of free

labour coming to perform menial tasks for a few weeks, until the next batch comes along. Their "experience" is of being exploited to the hilt.

Yet there is a lot of socially useful work needing to be done urgently, which could provide both satisfying jobs and good experience - from building the housing which is so

Workfare

desperately needed, improving the crumbling infrastructure, to providing vital services, which instead, are being cut. But that wouldn't serve the purpose of providing the free labour - and therefore another hand-out - to the politicians' friends in the high street! □

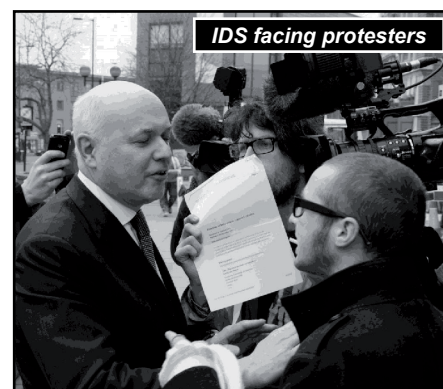
IDS's defence doesn't stack up

Critics of the government's so-called "work experience programme" were accused of "intellectual snobbery" by Iain Duncan Smith when he wrote to defend the scheme in the Daily Mail, explaining how successful it was! He just couldn't understand how anyone could call it "21st century slavery", which was misleading and malicious in his opinion.

He tells us that the former Tesco boss himself, Terry Leahy, had a holiday job cleaning floors at Tesco when he was a schoolboy! Except that to start with, Leahy was paid, and in fact

he never worked his way up from the shopfloor, but rather got a degree in management from a prestigious university. A "route to employment" that this government is making unaffordable for many!

IDS claims that 300 of those who have so far done "work experience" at Tesco got permanent jobs. But that is out of 1400 initially placed there, under the scheme. In other words, only a quarter of those whose free labour was given to Tesco for 2 months - while their living expenses got, just about, covered by the government's



IDS facing protesters

dole (isn't that just like slavery?). Pretty clear, isn't it, who benefits!



Tesco, ultra-cautious

• Rats leave the sinking ship

As the spotlight was thrown on the companies which had jumped at the opportunity of the ConDem free labour scheme, they've been distancing themselves from it, one after the other! After all, they wouldn't want any other skeletons to come out of their cupboards - like their normal, day-to-day use and abuse of casual labour on rock-bottom pay.

First, Waterstone's withdrew, saying it didn't want to "encourage work for no pay", followed by Sainsbury's, Burger King and Maplin. Tesco said it would no longer take anyone "forced" to do work experience - and would now offer volunteers a job at the end of 4 weeks. Argos, Matalan and Superdrug suspended their involvement over the claims that participation wasn't truly voluntary. Poundland and Greggs said

"volunteers" shouldn't lose benefits for dropping out early.

So the government now has a lot of egg on its face. Following a stirring call to arms by Cameron in the Commons, to stand up for "work experience" against the "Trotskyites", his government glumly stood down instead, announcing that it was dropping all "sanctions" (i.e. loss of benefits) in connection with the scheme!

• All4Emma!

A4e, one of the companies contracted to deliver the government's Work Programme, hit the headlines recently after it was revealed that four (now ex-) employees were being investigated for fraud. It also emerged that A4e had sometimes not looked very far for the work placements they offered - getting the jobless on their books to clean the A4e offices for free.

All this unwelcome publicity prompted A4e's founder, Emma Harrison, to resign from her position as Cameron's "Families Champion" - but not before the extent to which she has milked £180m of government contracts for her own gain was exposed.

Recently, A4e paid out £11m in dividends - £8.6m of this to Harrison herself, on top of her £365,000 annual salary. It's also claimed she and her husband made an additional £1.7m from renting out their various

properties to A4e. And although she's resigned as chairman, she still holds 87% of the company's shares.

No wonder so many companies are eager to get their fingers in this pie. It's a lucrative business, living off the backs of the unemployed.

• Plugging the bosses' gaps

The government's Work Programme to "help" the long-term unemployed into work, is run by companies who are paid by results. At a recent induction in Oxford by one such company, Maximus, new recruits were promised a "tailored" service. Yet in the one-to-one interviews that followed, there was little evidence of that.

Almost immediately "clients" were invited in for a series of recruitments. Most involve signing up with agencies for warehouse or driving work for long shifts on the minimum wage - the unemployed aren't allowed to be choosers. Other suggestions included going "self-employed" for a courier firm, paying for the petrol and if necessary, hiring the van from the boss - £90-£150 a week to be deducted from earnings! Following some of these jobs up is no guarantee of getting regular work either, so some new starts have signed back on the dole after working one or two shifts in a week. Maximus says it aims to get people into "sustained employment". A work in progress, then!

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Failure is rewarding**

Network Rail directors were finally shamed into giving up their bonuses (for this year, that is...) They "donated" the money to Network Rail's pot for improving safety at level crossings - as though this was some kind of charity, or optional extra.

But another ex-boss of Network Rail didn't turn down his reward. John Armitt was the chief executive of Network Rail at the time of the Grayrigg crash. But on the day when

Network Rail admitted responsibility in court for the first time, he was elsewhere - at Buckingham Palace, receiving a knighthood from the queen.

Not that Armitt can be held solely responsible for the situation which led to Grayrigg. Ever since Network Rail was created, under Labour, its remit was to cut back on maintenance costs. It's no surprise, then, that Labour has just



endorsed over £500m of "efficiency cuts" for Network Rail, proposed by the ConDems. All of these politicians will share the blame for future Grayriggs.

• We want to join in

Initial cleaners at St Pancras took strike action last Thursday and made a big noise on their picket lines. But King's X cleaners were not included. We've all got the same low-wages, no matter where and for whom we work, and ISS cleaners have been waiting longer than anyone for a pay rise. Wouldn't we be stronger if we fought the bosses together across stations and companies? [King's X Workers' Platform - 21/02/12]

• No smoke without fire

First Capital Connect's 313 units have been in service for 30 years. One caught fire a few weeks ago - there were flames leaping up the side of the train. It's at least the 3rd time a 313 catches fire in a year. Coincidence? FCC said nothing to drivers about the cause of these incidents. Is there a common fault on 313s or are they simply so old, they're difficult to maintain? We do know that FCC won't spend much on them, as they'll be retired

at some point. But they're playing with fire! [King's X Workers' Platform - 7/02/12]

• Everyone should keep their job

FCC is using the opportunity of the new Farringdon ticket office to make our jobs multi-functional. They also insisted on re-interviewing us, claiming no one else would be interviewed. This proved to be a lie, as they took other applicants. We expect they're up to no good and we're preparing to defend our jobs. [King's X Workers' Platform - 21/02/12]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• The postal policy of fools**

On April Fool's Day, 1 April, the Post Office is meant to separate off from Royal Mail in line with the Postal Services Bill passed by the ConDems (inspired by the Lib Dems!). Thus Post Office Ltd (already a separate, curtailed and degenerate shadow of its former self), will either remain as a state-owned entity - or, and this is the government's preferred option - become a "mutual", meaning it will be "owned by its members", the consumers and the postmasters...

Strange, though, since the Post Office is supposed to be kept afloat by a large public subsidy. That is, unless the name of the game is precisely to cut this subsidy drastically in the long run!

The new ConDem postal minister to preside over this split and planned privatisation - even if it is a damp squib for them in this current economic climate - is Norman Lamb. Business Secretary Vince Cable said he was "delighted" at this



appointment, as "Norman pioneered our policy to privatise Royal Mail and establish employee share ownership in the business". Just as well. Who else could make head or tail of it?

• Re-sign? Or resign ourselves to RM's agenda?

So this "Processing, Collection and Network revision/resign" is what's finally come out of the "London restructuring"/"2010 Beyond Belief" Agreement. And as we see, it isn't a "re-sign" at all. The new agreement states, it's a "complete overhaul of the MP duty set". What's more, a lot of the dirty work of job cutting (and outsourcing?) has already been done, even if there's a lot more to come. We really didn't expect to be presented with something like this, which we'd also each be expected to endorse, vote and sign for - and

in such a rush! [Royal Mail Mount Pleasant 21/2/12]

• A belated vote, then?

Indeed, it now seems ages ago (but it was only last June!) that we made a strike threat over "London restructuring" - against the closure of 3 mail centres, the huge upheaval and job slaughter. In the end there was no ballot. An interim agreement was made behind closed doors by union officials and RM, and voted for, not by the shopfloor, but by the branch executives on our behalf. So, this new vote is apparently *our* chance to rubber-stamp its final form... We're told it was the best which could be got, but we had

no time to study it before being asked to vote! [Royal Mail Mount Pleasant 21/2/12]

• "Excellent" job losses?

We see there'll only be 1,232 duties, 400 of which are part-time, which leaves, on paper at least, 301 of us as "surplus" - a hell of a lot of us all to get our "first choice" for transfer! The iLSMs (automatic sorting machines) and Heathrow Worldwide Distribution Centre have taken at least 500 processing duties since last resign. Hard to believe that there were 4,000 duties just a decade ago! [Royal Mail Mount Pleasant 21/2/12]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• If you haven't fought you aren't beaten**

The national ballot went against strike. A total of 5,599 votes were cast. 1667 voted for action - 28.9%. So, almost 30% turned down the bribes, the attack on workers represented by the new, lower waged, 2nd tier Ford wishes to introduce, and the closure of the occupational pension scheme to new recruits in 2013. Already the number of "active" workers in the hourly-paid pension scheme (in 2010) was just 7,225, compared to 30,199 pensioners (+

12,994 deferred pensioners). Which could spell doom if nothing's done to reverse this.

In the last week of February, Ford suddenly terminated the contracts of 51 of the engine plant's 118 temps. Of course, production is slow for now - but new engines will soon be introduced requiring new recruits - maybe the self-same mates just chucked out - but on 2nd tier wages!

Of course many of us were suspicious of the ballot result and we have



protested to the powers-that-be. It seems at least 10% of the workforce didn't receive ballot papers. Nevertheless, we live to fight another day - and that fight is already on our agenda: for the reinstatement of the sacked 51 and against the sacking of the 67 temps still in our ranks.

• Share the work! No job cuts!

Some temps in Dagenham Engine Plant expected Ford's termination this week. But why should it be like this? 2 full Tiger shifts are still doing high scores and the half shift is doing more than half. If 3 FULL shifts shared the (marginally) reduced schedule between them *and we slowed down to a reasonable pace with plenty of sit-downs*, nobody would be "surplus to requirements"! Or are humane conditions also banned from the Chicken Farm? What's Ford's score for butchering us reached by now? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 29/2/12]

• Robbed again!

So what's this? The ink's barely dry on the dirty pay deal and already Ford

is trying to get mates to take early retirement - anyone over 58yrs in DEP is encouraged to leave - thanks to the "enhanced lump sum". But unless you've got a lot of years under your belt, that pension isn't enough to provide what we're used to, let alone the comfort we need after wearing out our bodies in this place! And especially not with the reduced CPI linked increases in future. Nothing compensates for that. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 29/2/12]

• This is Ford's gratitude

It's out of order that our mate whose hand was crushed on Tiger machining (we all heard about it in the "after the event safety meetings") was threatened with the sack and then given a 5-day suspension. As if the injury itself wasn't

"punishment" for feeling rushed enough to allegedly cut a corner. Mates who're over-helpful to Fords, take note: if something goes wrong, this is how Ford will thank you! This would never have been accepted in the past. Should it now? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 29/2/12]

• All down to "efficiencies"

Another thing: due to DEP boss Nosey's cost-cutting exercise, poor quality drill bits are bought and are breaking at an alarming rate. This gives the operator more work changing bits all the time and there's more risk of bypassing precautions to catch up with the timings... The answer isn't safety meetings *after* the event, but an end to these so-called efficiencies. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 14/2/12]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• A worker's lifetime earnings in 2 hours!**

What is delaying our pay deal? Certainly not a lack of the readies! We already learnt from pay claim documents that BMW earned a whopping £2.375bn from its UK plants in 2010. Information in the 2011 German Rich List discloses that our labour helped provide the Quandt family, BMW's biggest shareholders, with an income of £450,000 per hour (based on an 8-hour day) from their holdings... [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 21/2/12]

• Neither Saturdays nor killer shifts

Ever since 2008 BMW has been pleading poverty to justify hundreds of sackings and two shifts doing the same amount of work previously done by three, or near as damn it. With what result? We're working 30% harder and now we're losing every other Saturday - while BMW boasts record profits.

Enough is enough. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 9/2/12]

• Reduce RA? No way!

The only development on pay sounds like a typical BMW diversion tactic - a proposed ballot on reducing our paid breaks (relaxation allowance), for a one-off bribe of a few grand. It's not an option. As long as they keep turning the screw on us, we'll at least need our breaks to stay exactly as they are. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 21/2/12]

• Screw won't turn any more

Only weeks ago BMW told the union it was happy with the current shift system plus Saturdays because it would deliver the build programme. Now it seems it won't because they've got 3,000 more orders than expected. They want to extend shifts, but leave all the Saturdays in place too. All because they're too tight to take on extra hands. But if they want 3,000 more cars, they'll have to! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 21/2/12]

**• Slow start on equal pay**

Thanks to Employment Agency Gi's irregular payment system, temps had to wait till last week to check the "equal pay" on our pay slips. It was there, but for many of us, only since January 1st.

So how can Gi explain why we're not all paid since 25 December, since we all accrue holidays at the same rate, presumably? And while we're at it, what's the obstacle to a regular, mid-monthly payment of one-twelfth of annual pay like our BMW workmates? [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 9/2/12]

Syria

According to UN sources, close to 8,000 people may have died in the 12-month old uprising against the dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad. Despite this and the systematic shelling of the rebellion, in towns like Homs, the protesters seem more determined than ever to see the end of the regime.

By now, with the exception of Russia and China, the so-called "international community" has lined up behind the US and EU condemnation of the regime. But what hypocrites! After all, ever since 1976, when its army marched into Lebanon in order to protect its government against Lebanese and Palestinian progressives, the Syrian regime has helped to maintain the status quo in the Middle East, against the Palestinians and for the benefit of the West's regional stooge - the state of Israel. Nor should it be forgotten how, shortly after Blair's friendly visit to Damascus, in 2001, the US and Britain readily welcomed Bashar al-Assad's support for their invasion of Iraq.

Like with so many dictators, the western powers were willing to turn a blind eye to his brutal repression as long as the iron fist of his regime kept the lid on the region's poor masses. But now that the Syrian dictatorship seems unfit for this dirty work, the western rats have left al-Assad's ship, so as to be in a better

The population caught between brutal enemies and bogus friends



position to shape, according to their own interests, the future regime that will come out of the uprising.

As to the opposition, it is divided into rival factions, all bidding for foreign support, without showing much concern for the poor masses of Syria. The Free Syrian Army, which is given much importance by the media, is a self-proclaimed leadership set up by retired officers and headquartered in the Turkish capital, Ankara. But, on the ground, the armed groups of army deserters, which, it is claimed, constitute this rebel army, appear to operate more like independent, rival

militias than like an instrument of the uprising.

The Syrian masses have nothing to expect from the western powers which have been plundering the whole region for so long. Nor should they have any illusions in the self-appointed leaders who are trying to propel themselves into the leadership of their uprising. It is only within their own ranks that they will find the leaders they can trust and the means to overthrow the dictatorship in order to introduce the changes which meet their aspirations. □

Greece

For the banks' misdemeanours, the Greek population is the first among Europe's populations to be forced to pay en masse for 2 international "bail-outs" so far.

A third one, worth 130bn euros, which will be - again - entirely devoted to paying back international banks, has not yet gone through. European governments want more austerity measures first. Among other things, they demand a 50% cut in

"Bailout" or baleful penalisation?

unemployment benefits (unemployment stands at 21%!), a 35% cut in public sector wages and a 15% cut in public sector pensions. So far, to show its goodwill, the Greek government, has already cut the minimum wage of 751 euros/month (equivalent to around £4.70/hour) by 22% (32% for youth).

Those who "advise" Greece to default and leave the euro in order to resolve this catastrophic situation,

simply haven't got their feet on this earth. For an economy which has long been integrated into the world market, raising protectionist borders would merely result in an even sharper blow to the population's living conditions - then the Greek working class truly would "starve". There is another alternative. A workers' takeover. Right across Europe, all the way to our door! □

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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