

WORKERS' fight



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

WHY SHOULD WORKERS FEED THE RICH?

The tanker drivers' vote to strike threw the government into such confusion that it didn't just threaten to bring in the troops, but caused public panic. So petrol stations ran dry, prices rose and several accidents with petrol occurred.

It seemed as if ministers were so ignorant that they knew nothing about the hoops workers have to jump through before taking action, or the union leaders' propensity to make a deal rather than endorse a strike.

But this was just politicking - an attempt by the ConDems to pull a "Thatcher", by flexing their flabby muscles against the working class. It was an act of political bravado that public school duo Cameron-Osborne probably thought particularly suitable on the eve of the 30th anniversary of the Falklands war!

Yes, they should worry!

But the government's hysteria, coming after similar outbreaks before every major strike, also reflects how edgy it is whenever there is any hint of workers' militancy, and with good reason.

The case of the tanker drivers is a typical case of workers' mounting frustration. Most of these drivers no longer work directly for the super-rich major oil companies, which have subcontracted deliveries to boost their profits. So drivers are often shifted from one contractor to another, meaning that their wages, conditions, etc.. keep changing.

But, since the oil majors only award contracts to the lowest bidders, contractors keep cutting health and safety corners to reduce costs. They expect drivers to "beat the clock" and induce a "turn and burn" culture to meet ever-shorter deadlines. And this, in an industry which is well-known for its hazards, as was shown by the inferno at the Buncefield storage depot, which caused large scale damage and left 60



injured, in 2005.

So now the drivers have had enough of paying with their health for the frantic competition between contractors. They want industry-wide standards of safety, pay and conditions for all drivers regardless of which contractor they are working for. And who could argue with that?

Certainly not the many sections of workers facing exactly the same kind of predicament, because they work for contractors of big organisations, private or public, which are pushing their wages and conditions down to the floor!

He who sows the wind...

So, this government should indeed fear that a determined strike - whether by the tanker drivers or any other important section of workers - might set alight the powder keg stoked by years of attacks.

Workers have much ground to regain - thanks to the low wages economy introduced under Labour. But, above all, because of the cuts in jobs, wages and conditions, and in public

services, caused by the capitalist crisis.

And more blows are dealt to workers daily. We now hear that the already inadequate adult minimum wage will rise by only 1.8% - under half the level of inflation - and not at all for the under-21s! This amounts to a blanket cut in real wages for millions of low-paid. This government may have backed down, for the time being, over free labour, but not over scrooge wages!

Its budget has just introduced a raft of measures which are cynically designed to make millions of working class households, mostly among the poorest, foot the bill for the billions it lavishes on companies, shareholders and the wealthy.

Osborne parades in front of his electorate boasting that his budget is "unashamedly pro-rich and pro-business", thinking it's a good political trick. But this will only add to the explosive power of the frustration building up in the ranks of the working class. Everything has to be paid for, sooner or later - and with interest. This will also apply to the ConDems and their masters in the City. ☐

Asbestos - the cancer of capitalist profit

Asbestos has been a known killer since the 1930s. Among other things, it causes a lethal form of chest cancer, called mesothelioma. But insurance companies have refused to pay compensation to workers who developed the disease after having left the job where their exposure to asbestos occurred. This March, however, after long years of legal battle, the Supreme Court ordered insurers to pay up. So some compensation may finally be paid - although this won't give dead victims their lives back.

But what about the bosses who

knowingly exposed workers to asbestos? They've caused 59,000 registered deaths from mesothelioma since records started, in 1968 - and according to Unite, 5,000 new cases are still diagnosed each year. These bosses should be put in the dock for profit-driven homicide.

But they won't be, not by the present judicial system, anyway. This March, a construction engineer called Dave Smith, sacked and blacklisted for exposing hazards, including asbestos on sites, was refused compensation for lost



wages by a tribunal. The courts cannot be relied upon to protect workers' health against voracious bosses. As always, only workers' own "law" can have any effect - the collective struggle "law". □

Hands off women's rights!

Secretary of State for Health, Andrew Lansley has ordered a large number of spot checks on abortion clinics, obviously looking for faults to justify reforms aimed at tightening abortion law.

This is of course reinforcing those fundamentalist religious groups whose picketing of referral clinics has again been increasing. One of them, Abort67, was behind a "name and shame" campaign in the USA,

against doctors providing terminations, some of whom were subsequently murdered. In Britain, it has been harassing women in the biggest centre in Brighton for weeks, to the extent that one of the group has just been arrested. Another Christian campaign called "40 days for life" has started a 40-day picket in several towns, including London, filming workers and patients and insulting them.

Already women don't have automatic rights to abortion in Britain. They require the permission of 2 doctors and must prove they have physical and/or mental grounds for a termination. But even this restricted right is too much for the bigots, who despise women's rights, especially the rights of working class women who are always the most affected. We cannot let them impose their bigotry on the rest of society. □

• Wonga not com!

Payday loan company Wonga, launched in 2007 has, to date, made 3.5m "small" online loans (£260-£1,000). It trebled turnover between 2009 and 2010 to £75m, winning a "fastest growth" award. But how does a company offering small loans, manage to make so much profit - and annoy us with so many TV ads?

They don't hide their extortionate rates: 4214%APR! Although they do explain that it "doesn't cost that much really", since APR is calculated annually. Their loans are short term - usually 30 days at 1% a day. Say you borrow £400 for 35 days. You accrue £145.48 in interest and fees, and £545.48 is taken out of your account automatically the next month. If you can't pay on time the debt just keeps mounting, starting with a £20

late payment fee. So indeed, it "does not cost that much": it costs much, much more! In fact Wonga preys on people who can't get bank loans and are likely struggle to repay at the given date.

Loan sharks have always grown fat on poverty, the only difference today is that they can do it much faster!

• It's not "our" industry

By calling for "Made in Britain" labels to be more prominent on British products, Labour leader Ed Milliband is backing the labelling campaign of Stoves, the last British manufacturer of cookers, arguing that "we need more pride and patriotism in our industry". One may wonder whether Milliband is trying to copy Thatcher's "Buy British" campaign of the 1980s or the "I'm backing Britain" campaign launched in 1968, by then Labour

Prime Minister, Harold Wilson?

Either way, workers have nothing to gain from such economic patriotism. Because it has a logic of its own, which was illustrated in 1968 when five secretaries volunteered to work 30 minutes unpaid overtime each day in order to boost productivity. Ultimately "pride and patriotism in our industry" means submitting to the bosses' attempts at cutting wages and conditions under the pretext of making "our" industry more competitive.

The point, however, is that it's not "our" industry - but the bosses' industry. What's more, if the working class owned the economy, not only would today's antiquated national borders have been long dismantled, but there would be no economic crisis, since there would be no capitalism!

Letter from Sussex

Local government cuts can take many forms. So, East Sussex County Council has now deemed Countryside and Rights of Way "non-essential" - i.e. it has no statutory funding responsibility for that.

The Ramblers warned against the loss of public access to rights of way, if their budgets were slashed, which would be a bad thing. But there's something more damaging in the offing. Much of what the now "non-essential" Countryside Rangers do, is aimed at

boosting bio-diversity, at a time when it is under serious threat. For instance, in two of the County's sites, these "non-essential" rangers strive to restore the rare habitat known as lowland heath, on which several endangered species rely.

If you hear that the marsh gentian, the smooth snake, the silver studded blue butterfly or the sundew have become extinct, think of Old Etonian Dave and his austerity!

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NHS bill

• *The long goodbye...*

Already before the NHS Bill passed on 20 March, there were dire problems - not just due to the latest £20bn cuts, but accumulated since the first contracting out of services in the 1980s, under Thatcher, and carried on under Labour.

Not that the NHS "before Thatcher" was that great. GPs have been private contractors since its inception, in 1947 - having refused to be "mere civil servants". As the NHS was always underfunded, GPs and local authorities, and much later, specialised health authorities, were left to administer occupational and preventive health, even if they didn't have the skills nor capacity to do so, while state-run hospitals operated separately, receiving all GP referrals for diagnostics and in-patient care.

The ConDem's "reform" doesn't change that separation, which is the real problem with the NHS. It makes it worse. Having abolished the specialised health authorities, handing their job to GPs on top of everything else, it allows

the private sector to sneak in where it was not allowed before. GPs can commission "Any Qualified Provider" to diagnose or treat patients. It may boost the private health sector. But it means worse healthcare for patients and worse terms and conditions for health workers!

• *...which nobody wants*

All of the health workers' organisations were opposed to the NHS Bill, including even the Royal College of General Practitioners - and mounted protests against it. But this is how "democracy" works in this country: the bill passed, albeit with 1,000 amendments, which made it more complex, but hardly less potentially damaging! Now an army of consultants can be employed to help implement it - a lot more jobs for the private City parasites!

So how will the NHS cope? When ambulances are already sitting outside Accident and Emergency departments in London for more than an hour at a time because they cannot hand over patients due to bed shortages. There were 673 of these so-called "black breaches" in the first 7 weeks of 2012. That notorious PFI

disaster, Queen's Hospital in Romford, had 186 of such breaches up to 19 February, Northwick Park had 105 and Lewisham 84! And now the plan is to actually cut A&E provision in London! This adds up to a potential killer. We guess, however, the government will wait till after the Olympics... But even that can't be guaranteed!

• *Even "savings" get cut*

Over the past year, the NHS spent £900m less than planned, thanks partly to cutting back the disastrous National Care Record computer project. Given the on-going programme of cuts, the least the government could have been expected to do would have been to plough these savings back into the NHS budget this year. But no way. The Treasury's penny-pinching bureaucrats have managed to steal £500m of these savings in this year's budget. Never mind that this money could have helped to avert some of today's threatening disasters - like the closure of the A&E departments at the Central Middlesex and Park Royal hospitals, for instance!

Welfare "reform"

• *Who benefits?*

The government has just forced through its welfare reform bill - to the "delight" of Iain Duncan Smith, who claimed that "work will pay for the first time, helping to lift people out of worklessness and the endless cycle of benefits".

But is he going to force employers to offer stable jobs on decent wages? Not a bit of it. When the new "Universal Credit", which replaces six current benefits, comes in next year, millions of workers will still be in such badly paid, casual jobs that they will still be dependent on benefits to make ends meet. Nor will it do anything to reduce the extortionate rents charged by private landlords. Instead, some tenants will struggle even more to keep a roof over their heads, when their

benefits are cut by the £26,000 annual cap or by the so-called "bedroom tax", which cuts housing benefit for social housing tenants with a "spare" room, whether or not they can move.

It is those landlords, and the other capitalist "welfare dependants" - i.e., the employers who get away with paying less than a living wage - who should be "reformed". Out of existence.

• *Consensus behind the squabbles*

The welfare bill has nothing to do with getting people out of the benefits trap, but everything to do with the billions which the government wants to cut from the welfare bill over the next 3 years. Among its targets are the sick and the disabled. Most parents of disabled children will lose £1,400 a year, when the extra benefit they get is halved. And

Employment Support Allowance (ESA), paid to those recovering from serious illness who are still unable to work, will be limited to one year.

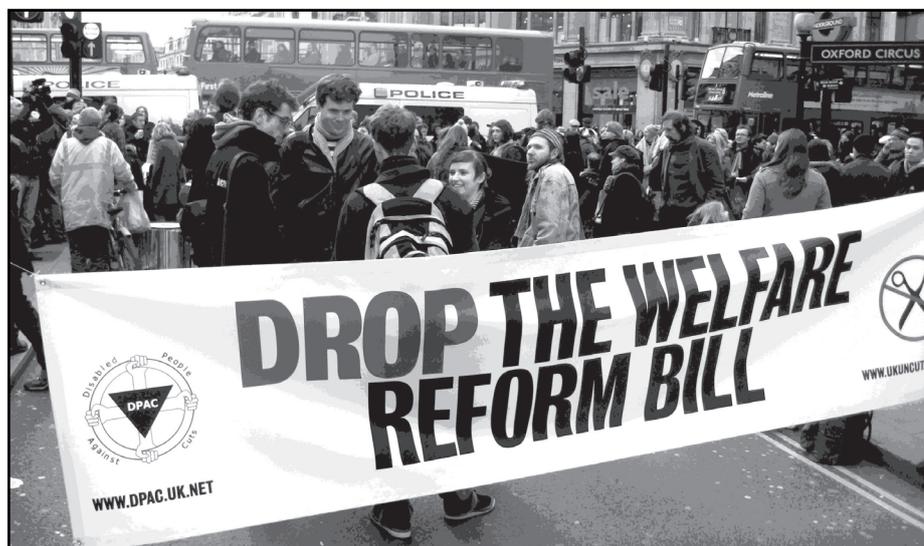
Labour argued against the one-year limit on ESA - but instead of saying that people should get it for as long as they need it (and more of it!), they just wanted the limit to be set at 2 years. Their "alternative" to the cap on benefits was just another cap, only set on a regional basis. But then it shouldn't come as a surprise if there is cross-party agreement on the drive against benefit claimants - after all, many of these measures were first proposed by Labour!

• *Labour talks tougher...*

As the ConDems backed down on threats to withdraw benefits from anyone leaving unpaid work experience placements, Labour's employment team lost no time trying to make political capital. But not because the government had overreached itself. No, Liam Byrne and Stephen Timms think the ConDems aren't being tough enough!

Byrne said those who can work should and that Labour, unlike the ConDems, would enforce the "obligation to work". Timms, in a pamphlet for the Smith Institute, set out proposals to guarantee six-month jobs to claimants completing the work programme - and to stop their benefits if they refuse.

The only "detail" that Timms forgets to mention is where he will find these "guaranteed jobs", even for six months at a time. But that's not Labour's problem. All Timms and Byrne are interested in is wooing a capitalist class which calls those unemployed workers forced to sign on in JobCentres because of its failure to create jobs, "scroungers". But we all know who the real scroungers are.



The budget for the rich

• Supporting parasitism

Corporation tax - the tax on company profits - is to be cut by 2% to 24%, instead 1% as previously planned. It will be further reduced over the next 2 years, down to 22%. Many now say that the ultimate aim, although Osborne doesn't yet dare to admit it, is to bring it to the level of the main income tax rate - i.e. 20%.

For now, this is yet another gift to the bosses, equivalent to about £2bn for the coming financial year. Of course, the government is quick to argue that this extra money will result in companies making additional investments and creating additional jobs. As if the rise in unemployment was due to a shortage of cash in companies' coffers! In fact it is estimated that British companies are sitting on a cash pile worth close to £80bn. Have they created any jobs with these billions? No, they "invest" in financial speculation and hand back an increasing part of their profits to shareholders in the form of dividends and share buy-backs.

Osborne said his budget "*unashamedly backs business*". He should have added that it unashamedly backs business parasitism!

• Business digs its own tax holes

Despite the ConDems' noises about "*clamping down on tax avoidance*", the budget creates more loopholes. Up to now, thanks to past Labour policy, profits made and kept abroad by British companies were only taxed if they were hoarded in a tax haven-based. In this case, the total tax paid on these profits was equivalent to corporation tax payable in Britain. But since this was based on "self-assessment", companies "assessed" as little as possible. Which explains why Britain's 30 largest companies

have a total of over 3,000 tax haven subsidiaries - and why Barclays pays 10% tax on its worldwide profits!

But now, big business have got their ConDem lieutenants to ensure that profits stored in tax haven subsidiaries will attract no tax at all, or at most, a 5.75% rate. No wonder. The "working groups" previously set up under Labour, which proposed this new regime, included Britain's largest multinationals - like Barclays, Vodafone, Shell, etc., plus the giant tax specialist accounting firm, KPMG, invited along by the ConDems. Hence the result. When the sharks decide on the menu, they're not likely to choose vegetarian dishes, are they?

• Another subsidy for the banks

After "quantitative easing", the ConDems's new buzzword is "credit easing". This new injection of public funds - up to £20bn - is supposed to help small and medium companies to create jobs. But is its aim?

Already "Operation Merlin" was supposedly aimed at getting these companies to increase borrowing. But their reluctance to invest and the banks' high lending rates killed off the operation. So, this time, Osborne is placing a cherry on top of the banks' cake, by pledging to guarantee these loans - hoping that the banks will cut their lending rates enough for businesses to borrow.

Except that, as usual, there's nothing that forces the banks to reduce interest rates, even if they, themselves, are able to borrow money on the cheap. As to whether businesses will create jobs if they are able to increase their borrowing, this is another story. These days, when bosses do invest, it is usually to save on their wage bills, not increase them!

Here's a few billion and please don't mention it...

Osborne may be "unashamed" that his budget was good for the rich and for business. But he went to great lengths to deny that his 5% tax cut on £150,000+ a year earnings, would cost that much.

Yet, according to Treasury figures, it's a gift worth an average £100,000 each to the 14,000 taxpayers whose taxable income is £1m+ a year! Overall, it means a £3.3bn handout to the 308,000 taxpayers with a taxable income of £150,000+ - an average of £10,000 per head! And to line the pockets of these 308,000 who already have more than enough, Osborne is squeezing the poorest, who are desperate for cash!

As to the very wealthy, since their incomes are shielded from tax by a variety of tax-avoidance devices like shelf companies and offshore trusts, this 5% tax cut is irrelevant to them. The main reason for it, is political. It is designed to get middle-earners to believe they can also look forward to tax breaks in the future - that is, provided the ConDems remain in office. In short, it's a way of preparing for the next general election at the expense of the rest of us!

The wealthy aren't quaking in their mansions!

Since 2010, the sale of properties worth £1m or more has attracted a 5% stamp duty. Now, this will rise to 7% for those worth £2m or more. But this is hardly the "mansion tax" hailed by some. First, because it is only charged once in a while, when the property is sold. And second, because this 2% increase remains negligible compared to the increase in property prices. For instance, a property bought 10 years ago which is sold today for £2m, would still give a net profit of £463,000 to its owner, despite the additional £40,000 increase in stamp duty!

What's more, not many wealthy were paying the 5% rate anyway. Instead, their properties are registered as owned by a company, since companies are only charged a mere 0.5% stamp duty and none at all, if they are registered off-shore! That's the dodge Bob Geldof, Mick Jagger and 95,000 others use. Osborne said he'll come down "*like a ton of bricks*" on these tax avoiders. But will he? It's true that a 15% stamp duty for properties sold by companies has been mentioned. But why wasn't it included in this budget, if Osborne meant it?



The budget for workers

• Double blow for the low paid

The ConDems boasted that the rise in the tax threshold to £9,205 next year will benefit many low-earners who will no longer have to pay tax.

However, many households on such low incomes qualify for housing benefit and for council tax benefit, whose value is reduced as income rises. So the more they save in tax, the more they lose in benefit. Instead of gaining £220 per year, like higher earners will, their net gain may be as low as £33 per year. And this comes on top of the tightening of the conditions required to qualify for Working Family Tax Credit. So that many low-income households may, in fact, find themselves a lot worse off as a result of these tax changes.

We are told that when Universal Credit is introduced, in October 2013, the existing "taper" which reduces benefits will be less drastic, so that Working Family Tax Credit will no longer be needed. But what are those "hard-working" families whose benefits are reduced right now, meant to live on until then? "Making work pay", they call it! More like making the poorest workers pay!

• Time-tested tax credit

Working family tax credit (WFTC) was conceived as a plank of Labour's "flexible labour market". Under the cover of helping out the low-paid, it was a subsidy to companies, allowing them to pay low wages or offer non-jobs - a few hours to plug gaps. The "beauty" of WFTC was that it helped the bosses to avoid creating real jobs, boosted the numbers "employed" and concealed the rise of under-employment.

With this budget, however,

• No split in our ranks!

Claiming that "public sector pay should mimic the private sector and be more reflective of local economies", Osborne announced that, starting in April, public sector bosses could start phasing in lower pay in the poorer regions and even introducing different pay scales in different zones of the same regions.

As with pensions, Osborne wants to fan prejudices against allegedly "high" public sector pay to drive a wedge between public and private sector workers. By the same token, he hopes that breaking down the existing national wage pattern among public sector workers, will make it easier to split their ranks.

In other words, just as with pensions,



Osborne is taking WFTC away from around 200,000 families. Couples with children will now have to work an aggregate of 24hrs a week - instead of 16hrs - in order to qualify, or lose up to £80 a week.. And just at a time when finding work is nigh impossible! But of course for Osborne it adds substantially to the £2bn he intends to snatch from low earners. And unlike the adjusted changes to child benefit for high-earning couples, to be phased in very slowly, after protests from the "squeezed middle", this attack on the very lowest earners comes into force immediately, on 6 April!

• Stealing from the elderly

When Osborne decided to phase out pensioners' higher personal allowances (the portion of income on which no tax is paid), he must have hoped this would go unnoticed. But

since almost every other detail of his Budget had been leaked beforehand, this too was seized upon, and dubbed the "granny tax".

It didn't look good, no matter how much the government tried to divert attention to the £5.30 per week rise in the state pension - which, come May, won't even cover the cost of a dozen 2nd class stamps. They claimed that no existing pensioner would lose out in cash terms, because their allowance was frozen, but not reduced. But it's not the case for future pensioners. Those turning 65 in 2013-14 with an income between £10,820 and £26,200 will be £285-£323 worse off in that year - which, contrary to what some papers tried to make out, is hardly being "well off", even at the top end of this scale. But that doesn't deter this government from picking these pensioners' pockets to line those of the rich.

the ConDems are preparing for a drive to the bottom, targeting public sector wages. Against this, a drive towards decent standards of living for all is needed, using the combined collective strength of public and private sector workers.

• Legal aid not for the poorest

Justice secretary Kenneth Clarke's plans to cut £350m from his legal aid budget has come up against some resistance in the Lords. To date they have rejected the cuts nine times and added more amendments than for either the NHS or the Welfare Reform bill. The Lords clearly do not want to be seen endorsing the most unsavoury consequences of the planned cuts, namely, the fact that those who are meant to be the prime beneficiaries of

legal aid will now struggle it at all.

In particular, Clarke wants to slash the budget of advice centres, make all legal aid subject to application via the phone or internet and deprive an estimated 650,000 among the poorest of any expert legal advice regarding unfair dismissal, eviction, or loss of benefit. In an economic climate when employers, landlords and benefit managers are already going on the rampage, such cuts, if enacted, will deny some of the most vulnerable any redress against social injustices and protect a host of greedy profiteers against any challenge to their diktats.

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Back to Victorian times**

On the 19th March, the station's new western concourse was unveiled to the public. There was praise for the "stunning glass and steel structure" and the fact that it was 3 times larger than the old one. Truly, it does look impressive, but for £550m, shouldn't it?

While the volunteers engaged to welcome the public struggled to cope, the awkward system of one way entry and exit also meant headaches for passengers and East Coast gate line

staff. And the open design means that it is constantly cold, especially for all those working on platforms, at the information point and in the ticket office.

In fact, station conditions remain anything but modern. Gate line staff are still on temporary contracts, paid much less than the rest of the EC workers, and expected to work shifts of up to 12 hours - on their feet! Most cleaners on the station are still on the minimum wage! Yep, for many of us,



the so-called "London Living Wage" of £8.30/hr has yet to reach this state-of-the-art station... Some stunning modernisation of workers' conditions is needed urgently!

• Doesn't make us feel safer!

Armed police have been patrolling the station for the last couple of weeks. Posters went up telling us not to be alarmed - they are just trying to get the public used to the presence of gun-toting cops, as they'll be around all the time during the Olympics. Nice welcoming party for all the foreign visitors! And why shouldn't we be alarmed? The last time the anti-terrorist squad was deployed, an innocent worker, Jean

Charles de Menezes, ended up dead. [King's X Workers' Platform - 6/03/12]

• CCTV safety concern

At St Albans, lots of CCTVs cover the main barriers - but when revenue workers were threatened by someone wielding a traffic cone, the crucial one was broken, and still is more than a month later, showing how unconcerned management is about our safety. In any case, even when they work, cameras are never

a substitute for having workers around. [King's X Workers' Platform - 6/03/12]

• Machine go slow

The brand spanking new Travel Centre has shiny new self-service machines. But these babies had a few teeth to cut. Customers thought they'd be Fast ticket machines - but, instead, got a "slow, slow, stop" machine, which spat out credit cards but refused to spit out tickets. [King's X Workers' Platform - 21/03/12]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• Osborne's tricks with postal pensions**

The government's takeover of the postal workers' pension fund will turn a funded scheme into an unfunded scheme. That is, make a scheme which we and the government contributed to, in order to build up enough assets to pay future pensioners a half-decent pension, into a scheme where the Treasury forks out pensions on a day to day basis. Ironically, this opens postal workers to the accusation by the anti-public sector lobby, of "bleeding the tax payer"!

The excuse for this move is the large £6-9bn deficit created by the government itself when it took a 13-year pensions' contribution holiday. Moreover, it closed the final salary scheme in 2008 - turning it into a career average scheme, so it can pay out less - after tricking the union into removing pensions from other strike demands in 2007.

Now the way is open for privatisation - a potential buyer won't have to take on a pensions' deficit. And the



Treasury can use the £28bn fund assets, to make the national debt look £28bn less! As for the deficit, it can "disappear" if measured over 20-30yrs! MPs are already calling for the use of this trick-money on infrastructure projects! Boggles the mind.

• Do they represent our views?

CWU leaders say they're OK with this version of a pension fund takeover. They say it was the only way to guarantee our pensions! But was it? If it makes RM more "saleable", then surely it's not OK? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 20/03/12]

• No to privatisation - and no again!

As to the privatisation, Cameron's little (Norman) Lamb - says RM will be ready by 2013. But guess what the bosses'

Financial Times is saying "with few other postal operators showing interest in buying RM, one potential route may be a partial sale to a private equity company followed by a stock market flotation at a later date"! Private equity? A bunch of crooked, but rich, asset strippers to be entrusted with a vital public utility? And there we were thinking that the idea of a "John Lewis" type model was bad! Says it all, doesn't it? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 20/03/12]

• More accountrix

They keep saying RM's letters' business made a loss last year - and talking about

the declining letter mail (never mind the soaring packet mail), but how much of that "loss" is accounted for by the purchase of all the iLSMs and CCS machines? (We won't mention the £15m+ spent here on cowboy builders...) [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 20/03/12]

• We need hard hats...

Just luck that bit of ceiling insulation which fell down 2 weeks ago, above one of the iLSMs, didn't hit anyone. We'd noticed the job hadn't been done properly in the first place. Is that £15m going to fall on our heads, penny by penny? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 20/03/12]

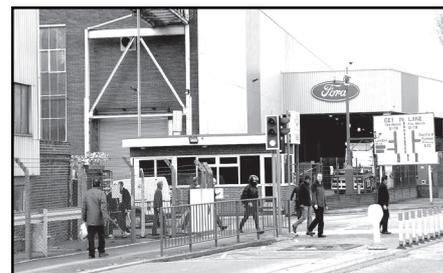
Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

• PSA-GM tie-up and Ford's wind-up

The tie-up between French PSA (Peugeot-Citroen) and General Motors will allow the 2 companies to exploit each other's markets. In this recession, sales are better in some countries than others - so GM gets access to PSA's strongholds and vice versa. But most importantly, it allows them to cut their wage bills. PSA was trying to close down the historically militant plant at Aulnay near Paris even before this tie-up (which workers there are still resisting). 3

PSA plants are earmarked for closure - and GM has plans to close or severely cut production here at Ellesmere Port and maybe 3 other sites in Europe.

A change in PSA's sourcing of engines could mean the winding down of the Ford-PSA agreement, which co-produced 1.4 and 1.6l Tiger engines. That said, since Tiger engine production will carry on - and apparently a new 1.5l version is due to replace the 2 engines made



at present, there may be no wind-down of any agreement at all. Ford wouldn't miss a chance to use this excuse as a wind-up. Yes, and to terminate the temps, as it did, before taking them back as lower-paid 2nd tier workers!

• Pull out the big cocks!

Chicken Farm B shift has been ravaged and pillaged. On Mon, supposedly to respect 1 week's notice before going to a mico-mini shift, we were asked to "volunteer" to go to C (or A?) shifts. There weren't enough (after all the temps said OK in the vain hope of being kept on) so permanents were selected by "last in first out", not according to company service, but "area" service, and never mind turning your life upside down!! B shift will soon be a lot less than half the size of A&C shift. But

we're to make 400 engines to the 800 on full shifts. Not 1 worker, 2 jobs, but 1 worker, 3 jobs! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 13/03/12]

• Doolally counts our lolly

Mulally, the Ford CEO, was "rewarded" £ 22.1m(!) for his "stellar performance, leading Ford in these times of crisis" (said the Wall street Journal!). Leading our wage cuts and pension cuts, they mean? If so, yes! The CEOs seem to be getting better and better at that - the ratio of executive pay to average workers' pay has increased from 30:1 in the

1970s to 263:1 today!! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 13/03/12]

• Egg-cellent idea

Ford is the forward-planning champion who wouldn't know a plan if it fell over one. Us Chickens (Tiger assembly) got told we're getting 2 extra days at Easter. Then we weren't, then we were again.. Puma "may, or, may not" get Thurs. (They won't lay Lynx off, since they're on basic!) Let's simplify it: let's all, including Stamping and Tooling, take the 6 days off.[Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 27/03/12]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

• A pay offer with whips

BMW Paint and Assembly workers at the Oxford Mini factory were balloted on a new shift pattern in mid-March. The two shift options both lengthened the shifts from the current 9.25 hours to 10.5, but workers voted overwhelmingly against BMW's stated preference - despite the company's bribes, worth nearly £3,000 - in favour of a 3-day week on earlies and fewer working Saturdays. The chosen pattern will force BMW to take on 150 more workers - at least

for as long as it lasts.

The company was so upset, that it withdrew a 3.2% no-strings offer for the delayed pay settlement (due on 1 January) and replaced it with an offer of 2%, plus a 2% productivity bonus, plus another 2% conditional on a wholesale bulldozing of conditions: breaks would be cut by 11%, management could dictate when leave is taken, add extra working on shifts without notice and move workers from job to job at



will, scrapping long standing seniority agreements. For the first time in most of our memories, union officials recommended rejection. And of course this is the only way to respond.

• Never seen even on grainy film footage...

The union explanation when confronted about unequal treatment by agency workers is that we're not covered by the BMW agreement. No, they say, you have your own agreement. But strangely, we're "not allowed" to see it! That, we assume, is because it doesn't exist. But you never know - maybe a monster will come lumbering out of Loch Ness tomorrow... [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 07/03/12]

• Gi: whose "agents"?

When Gi (the temps agency) and BMW actually have the same grade structure, equal pay might be more than a work in progress.

Some BMW managers do try to get upgrades for agency workers, only for Gi to tell them that it will get refused, so why bother? One Gi manager was heard advising a BMW manager on how to fob off workers - "tell them we're working on it, so keep up the good work"! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 07/03/12]

• Not what BMW intended?

BMW's outsourcing site maintenance to Cofely cost many workmates their jobs a couple of years ago. Many of us have seen how Cofely struggles to keep up. Now, it seems, they've had enough. They thought they would be maintaining a site, not spending a fortune (they say) on repairing heaters, drains etc that should have been replaced years ago. So they're pulling out. One cowboy employer swindled by an even bigger cowboy! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 07/03/12]

30 years ago

Britain's control of the rocky and desolate Falkland Islands or Islas Malvinas, 8,000 miles away off the coast of Argentina, which 2,500 people share with half a million sheep, is an absurd anachronism. Since 1833, it has been a symbol of Britain's historical piracy over the rest of the world.

Yet 30 years ago, the British government fought a war to retake the islands after an invasion by Argentina, at the cost of nearly 900 lives and more than 1,800 wounded. Of the 635 Argentinians who died, many of them conscripted by the military dictatorship, nearly half were killed in one infamous attack - the sinking of the troop ship Belgrano. Thatcher herself authorised and justified this on the grounds that the Belgrano was within an "exclusion zone" unilaterally declared by the British navy - albeit sailing away from it at the time.

Argentina's government hoped the invasion would stave off its own collapse (which it did, but only for a year) by rallying the population behind a legitimate grievance against British imperialism. For Thatcher, this was an opportunity to divert attention from record unemployment in Britain and workers' resistance to attacks in nationalised industry and the NHS, while re-mobilising the Tory electorate behind her. This helped to turn around her popularity

The Falklands war: the bloody cost of British imperialism

ratings, while Labour's backing for the war dented its own electoral support - thereby allowing Thatcher to secure a much-increased majority in the 1983 general election, the biggest since Labour's in 1945.

But behind Thatcher's politicking, what was really at stake in this war was the authority of the imperialist powers. It made it clear not just to Argentina, but to all Third World governments which might be tempted to challenge the encroachments of imperialist powers on their territory or economies, that any such challenge would be met immediately with force. That was why Thatcher committed such disproportionate military forces allegedly to "defend the islanders", but in reality to protect the imperialist world order, and why she got the political and military support of the USA to do it.

Neither at the time, nor today, does the British working class have any interest in

helping the British state to police a world order which only benefits capitalist exploiters - let alone in condoning the British occupation of the Falklands which perpetuates an act of piracy against the populations of South America. □



Afghanistan

The fact that two British soldiers were shot dead, on 25 March, by a member of one of the British-trained Afghan army units inside Helmand province's NATO headquarters, only puts the lie, once again, to Cameron's boasting about the "success" of the occupation. Especially as, over the past four years, one in every 16 NATO casualties was killed by the Afghan forces they "trained".

By forcing the population to live

Neither bullets nor dollars will do!

under the threat of foreign guns and bombs for eleven years, in utter destitution due to economic collapse and under a corrupt puppet regime, the occupation has probably provided the Afghan warlords with more recruits than they ever had before!

Following the shooting of 16 Afghan civilians in Kandahar, allegedly by an isolated American soldier driven mad by the war, compensation of \$50,000 was offered for those

killed and \$11,000 to the wounded. Elsewhere, a man who lost his leg in a NATO raid was offered \$1,000. It really takes the most unbelievable arrogance, to think, as western leaders obviously do - that they can buy their way out quietly within the coming two years, after shooting their way in! All foreign troops should get out of Afghanistan right now! □

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: BM Workers' Fight - LONDON WC1N 3XX.