

WORKERS' fight



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

20th October: OUR VOICE MUST BE HEARD!

If this year's conference season showed anything, it was, once again, that the working class cannot expect anything from the main parties.

What is there to choose between Cameron's "we're all in it together", and the "One Nation" slogan borrowed by Milliband from 19th century Toryism?

Aren't these two slogans both based on the same fallacy - that in this society there are no classes with conflicting interests and no class struggle? Aren't they both designed to hoodwink us into believing that our well-being must depend on the profits of the capitalist parasites who caused the crisis?

In fact, what was striking, once again, was to what extent Labour and Tory policies are interchangeable. And to what extent both parties agree that workers should pay for the crisis, rather than the capitalists.

Trustees of British capital

Since the ConDems came into office, we've had plenty of time to see how we, workers, were meant to be "all in it together" by agreeing to have our jobs, wages, benefits, etc.. cut, to boost company profits and shareholder dividends.

But is Labour actually proposing anything different? Hasn't Ed Balls, repeated that a Labour government would NOT reverse the ConDems' cuts? Hasn't Milliband supported the coalition's public sector wage freeze, without objecting to Osborne's massive job cuts?

When Milliband champions a "break-up" of the big banks, does he ever propose to recoup some of the fantastic profits made by these banks in the run-up to the crisis? No, Milliband won't harm the interests of British capital any more than Cameron. Instead, he bends over backwards to show what a better manager of the City's interests he would be compared to Osborne!



30th November 2011 - far too long ago!

And is it any wonder, given Labour's record? Let's not forget how Blair and Brown presided over the casualisation of labour by the bosses and strong-armed the jobless into taking non-jobs. Nor how they encouraged bankers and speculators to suck the economy dry, before awarding them tens of billions to cover their losses, when the crisis broke out. Let's not forget either, that it was Labour which initiated the austerity drive paving the way for the CnDems' own version of it.

Relying on our own forces

Today, there is a class struggle - in fact, a class war waged by the bosses against the working class.

No ballot paper will help us to fight back in this war, let alone regain the ground lost. Only our collective strength will, provided we use it without falling for the illusions peddled by those who claim to speak on our behalf.

The TUC, for instance, has at last called another national protest, 11 whole months after the success of last

year's November 30th mobilisation. This, after a year in which, in many industries, union leaders have been signing up to all sorts of cuts behind workers' backs.

The TUC slogan for this day of protest is not "let the capitalists pay for their crisis", as it should be, but "for a future that works" - another way of saying that we should wait until Labour returns into office.

But why wait for another austerity drive under Labour wrappings? What is needed today is a general mobilisation of our ranks - a rising wave of strikes and protests strong enough to stop the attacks of the capitalist class and tilt the balance of forces in our favour.

We cannot expect the TUC to organise such a mobilisation. But we can use October 20th to say loud and clear that this is what we need and what we want. The more of us who turn up on the day, with our own slogans and placards, the better we will be able to prepare for the necessary fightback. □

NHS

The NHS is to undergo another "re-organisation" - the politicians' word for "radical cut". Today's ConDem executioners claim that their guillotine will improve health and lives! Plans mention closing 1 out of every 5 (some say 1 in 3) hospitals, merging departments from outlying hospitals (no matter the distance for emergencies) because, we are told,

• Surplus? No, underspend!

NHS staff and patients must have been amazed to hear that the NHS had a £2bn financial surplus for 2011-12. Yes, while cuts in jobs and rationing in treatment are the name of the game to "achieve" 4% more "efficiencies"!

In fact each of the previous 3 years saw a £1.3bn surplus, due mainly to underspending by foundation trusts, to show their "virtue" - i.e. they haven't

• Hunt for profit

Jeremy Hunt, who has only just been anointed health secretary, has done it again: after helping Murdoch to try to secure the BskyB deal, he's been accused of aiding Richard Branson's bid for a 5-year contract to run 7 hospitals and health centres via "Virgin Care". Maybe Hunt just liked the sound of it. After all, he's hardly in favour of women's sexuality. Hasn't he just called for the legal

• Less is less!!

when it comes to the NHS, "less is more"! It's obvious, they say. If you have 100 hospitals and you cut them to 66 you can "put more doctors in fewer places".

It's not just hospitals which will close, but specialist centres within them, which have already been shown to be effective in reducing death rates. The present 28 cancer networks and 28 stroke and heart networks could be cut to 12 each, with

provided the level of care they were meant to. No wonder health spending in proportion to GDP is still 13% lower here than in France or Germany!

Anyway, the government says the savings made in the NHS will go back into it - to provide for the changing needs of the population, particularly the elderly. To date, we have £5.1bn in official cuts plus a total £5.1bn unspent surplus

abortion limit to be cut to 12 weeks? Yes, at a time when the NHS fails to provide young women with the sexual health and contraception service they need!

In this case Hunt's anti-abortion views are likely to be ignored. But his pro-privatisation views on the NHS are another matter: Cameron put him in the health ministry because of them. Now that the controversial Health and Social

staff cut from 700 to 100! Government mouthpieces explain that since there aren't enough specialists/resources to improve care - they'll just concentrate the "too few" resources in fewer places. And too bad if you live too far away from one of the "better centres", and don't reach the "better treatment" in time!

- meaning over £10bn has been "saved". So where is the "investment"? Indeed there are only cuts - and more huge ones looming! In his last budget Osborne took £0.5bn from the NHS "reserves" - money now gone from the NHS. Is that the plan for the £10bn in surplus and reserves, and NHS "be damned"?

Care Act, which places the whole £60bn health service budget in the hands of GPs, is in place, nobody with any conscience or integrity can be allowed to get in the way of the private health sector's latest - and what, so far, looks to be the biggest - bonanza. Dangerous and despicable as it may be.

Free Sarah Catt!

On September 12, a judge in Leeds sentenced 35-year-old Sarah Catt to 8 years in prison for the "intent to procure her own miscarriage" by administering "any poison or other noxious thing", using a Victorian law dating back to 1861. She had induced her own labour at 38 weeks, and had a stillbirth. In fact the judge wanted to convict her of murder, but couldn't, on the facts of the case. One has to wonder why or how he was allowed to judge the case in the first place - given his well-known reactionary stance against abortion and his vice presidency of the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship.

He called this obviously disturbed woman, "cold and calculating". Yet her history indicates that she was not only let down by those she asked for help, but that she clearly needs care and support now. Instead, she's being put in jail by a cold and calculating justice system!

The establishment, via this case, is again trying to put into question the right of a woman to choose what happens to her body - since a baby is part of her body until it is born. They must not get away with it.

Letter from Sussex

Recent press revelations highlighted the fact that the proposed mergers of NHS departments between hospitals are a vehicle for cutbacks. In Eastbourne and Hastings, people were invited to demonstrate against proposed mergers between local hospitals in the two towns and they came out in substantial numbers.

What was really striking, though, was the total absence of trade union banners. A letter to the local paper stung the trade council into sending in an "assurance" that the unions were fully behind the campaign to save

hospital services. It claimed that people were "encouraged to march under the Save the District General Hospital banner", to "show unity".

The organisers of the campaign in Eastbourne have worked hard, but their obsession with making the campaign non-political is self-defeating. It is also nonsensical, since it allowed local Tory and Lib-Dem politicians to take a hypocritical posture by speaking out against the mergers at the "save the DGH" rallies - as if it wasn't their own Con-Dem government which was responsible for this mess in the first place!



80 years ago, the united fight of working class Belfast

In October 1932, Belfast workers united across the sectarian divide against the exploitation of unemployed workers in public works schemes by the Northern Irish authorities.

Since Partition, in 1921, the six counties' overall unemployment rate had never fallen below 15% and, by 1932, at the lowest point of the Great Depression, it was 37%. In Belfast the situation was worse, with 73% of shipyard workers out of work. Nearly 14,000 workers registered with labour exchanges received no benefit, and up to 30,000 others, mainly young, were not even registered.

Those who were denied benefits could only claim "outdoor relief" through the old Poor Law system, administered by a Protestant Unionist establishment determined to defend its stranglehold over local politics - by blatantly discriminating against Catholics and union activists. The "relief" consisted of part-time, casual employment for miserly benefits, doing public works such as road mending. The rates of pay were barely a third of those in Britain: a man with one child received 12 shillings/wk in Belfast, compared to 35s in Glasgow.

Building up to the strike

In the summer of 1932 about 2,000 workers in Belfast were "employed" in this way. Led by activists of the Revolutionary Workers' Group (who were to launch the Communist Party of Ireland later), an Outdoor Relief Workers' Committee was set up. By the end of September, this Committee called a meeting which was attended

by virtually all the relief workers. Dismissing the NI Labour Party's call to wait until the next June's election and vote for Labour candidates to the Poor Law board, relief workers voted to strike from 3 October, for a series of demands including a large rise in the rates paid, cash-only payments and continuous employment.

On the day set for the strike, a demonstration was called outside Belfast City Hall, which brought together 20,000 protesters - ten times more than the number of strikers, showing the support they enjoyed in the working class at large. The next day a march to the Belfast workhouse blocked the Lisburn Road for three hours. On the 5th, over 100 demonstrators got into the workhouse and were admitted as inmates, despite a police blockade with armoured cars. Inside, refusing to obey orders, they sang and danced and were eventually arrested. That night, rioting broke out and continued for a week.

Towards victory

Under pressure from local bosses, the Unionist establishment then proposed to increase the amount of work offered to each relief worker by 50%. This was turned down by the strikers' mass meeting and another big march was decided for 11 October. Despite a government ban and around 4,000 police armed with rifles, the marchers went ahead. When they came under attack, they fought the police, putting up barricades and digging trenches to stop armoured vehicles from entering

their streets. On the Catholic Falls Road workers from the textile mills joined in the fight. It took the whole day for the police to clear the streets. By the evening, two strikers had been shot dead and around a hundred wounded. Although orders had been given not to open fire in Protestant areas, one of the victims was a Protestant worker from Shankill. Tens of thousands were to attend the funerals of the two dead strikers a few days later.



After the 11 October riots

Finally, on 14 October, the Guardians offered a 20 to 50% rate increase and unlimited relief (instead of 6 month). This did not cover all the strikers' demands, but it was a significant victory, given the repression of the state and the depth of the economic crisis. On this basis the strikers voted to end their strike. They had won this victory thanks to relying on their own collective strength and class unity, rather than on the illusion of the ballot box promoted by Labour and the trade-union leaders - a lesson which remains just as relevant today! □

• Milliband's "One (bosses') Nation"

Ed Milliband's conference performance was hailed by the media and even by CBI director, John Cridland, while the Financial Times welcomed "a possible turning point in the party's relationship with business". Haven't Milliband and his shadow chancellor endorsed the ConDems' public sector wage freeze and said that they have no plans to restore

the jobs and services cut so far!

Stepping into Blair's and Cameron's shoes, Milliband sticks to "deficit reduction". Since, apart from the possible restoration of a 50% higher income tax rate (even under Thatcher it remained at 60% for 10 years!), Labour has no plans to make the capitalists and the wealthy pay for their crisis, the working class will

be expected to carry on footing the bill.

Milliband posed as a "One Nation" leader. But there's no such thing as "One Nation". There is a capitalist class and a working class, whose interests are diametrically opposed. Workers have nothing to expect from him and his party. They can only rely on their own strength!

• TUC leaders do the running for the City

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber called for an "Olympic-style national crusade" to boost the economy. Since the "market doesn't always deliver", he said, we need to "work out what we do best as a country, whether it's cars, pharmaceuticals, or the creative industries, and help them to do even better".

But hasn't the crisis shown that the market is a permanent threat hanging

over society? Yet Barber wants more of the same, with still more state subsidies for British profiteers! As if they hadn't had enough already! Since 2007, governments have been handing over tens of billions to big business, through the banks' bailouts, cheap loans, tax cuts, etc.. Did they stop cutting job and wages; did they invest in new jobs? No, they only "invested" in speculation!

Of course, the state should intervene, but not to shore up private profits, British or not. It would need to expropriate the banks, to make job cuts illegal under threat of nationalisation and fund large-scale public works, to provide both real jobs and decent housing, schools, hospitals, etc.. But don't expect such common sense from TUC leaders who won't rock the boat of their "business partners".

Crisis watch

The government's deficit has soared - to a record £59bn - 22% more than in the same period last year! Yet, cuts have been harsher than planned. Instead of the 66,000 public sector job cuts announced by the coalition for its first two years, 372,000 jobs have been cut! Likewise, targets for welfare cuts have been exceeded.

So, where does this ballooning deficit come from? Of course,

Deficit - let's see their books!

workers' falling standards of living result in falling receipts from income tax and VAT. But aren't the wealthy still getting wealthier? And what about big companies, whose overall profits have increased. Why did they pay 10% less in corporation tax? What handouts to big business and the wealthy - paid by the rest of us - are hidden in the government's accounts?

There is only one way to find out

- to get politicians to open the accounts of local and central government to the scrutiny of the working class. The thousands of low-paid public sector workers in accounting departments, could play a vital role in unravelling the financial web of the state for us. Then we would see how our taxes are actually used and in whose pockets they end up. □

• Pensions - why shouldn't the capitalists pay?

Workers spend their lifetimes creating all value in society and, by the same token, every penny of companies' profit. When these workers can't work any more, wouldn't it be legitimate to expect the capitalist class, which grew fat on their labour, to collectively provide them with a decent income out of their profits? Wouldn't that solve the "danger" of an ageing population that politicians keep raising like a scarecrow?

In this society, however, workers are not only supposed to exist on inadequate wages, they are supposed to use them to make provision for their future, too. But as wages have to stretch further and further, fewer workers can manage to put aside something for a pension. That's the reason behind the government's auto-enrolment scheme, billed as "the biggest shake-up in pensions in 100 years", which kicks in on October 1st. Their aim is to get the 11 million workers not already covered to join a workplace pension scheme - that is, to shift on to the individual workers, and away from the bosses and the state, the burden of paying for their retirement.

• NEST egg for the profiteers

From October 1st, the biggest employers will have to enrol every worker who is over 22, earns over £8,105/yr and has been at least 3 months in a job, into a pension scheme, without their say-so (although workers will be able to opt out). In 5 years, this will apply to all employers, even the smallest.

Bosses will have to contribute to their workers' pensions but, at 3%, it'll be very cheap for them, thanks to the state contributing 1% in tax relief. To make it even cheaper, the a new state pension scheme called NEST has been set up, which employers can choose to use. It's supposed to be "not-for-profit", with lower fees than other schemes.

But since these contributions are to be invested on the financial markets, they will provide a huge source of cash for fund managers (i.e. financial companies) to use in profitable speculation. With auto-enrolment, the government is strong-arming millions who can't really afford it, into putting something aside, in order to pool their small savings and offer them up to the financial sharks!

• Auto-robbed

The millions affected, many of whom will be low-paid, will suddenly get a pay cut, by an amount which will rise to at least 4%.

Government officials admit that it will make financial sense for many - e.g. those in debt - to opt out, but it will be left up to individuals to request it, which won't stop them from being auto-enrolled again after a few years.

Given the low level set for contributions, workers will come out with next to nothing - NEST estimates that a 22-year old earning £8,105 today will get, at 67, a lump sum of £4,500 and £14 per week pension.

Even worse, if the gambling with their pension savings goes wrong, the worker's final pension will take the hit, for lack of any guarantee. Either way, the resulting workplace pension will just replace some of the means-tested benefits currently paid to pensioners by the state.

So, in short, this has nothing to do with improving the lot of pensioners and everything to do with cutting the state welfare bill.

Profit sharks eye up more public contracts

The ConDems have staked their reputation on a private sector-led recovery, so what is the private sector's plan for this? Apart from cutting taxes and cutting the scanty protection available to workers from their profiteering, the biggest idea of the bosses' organisation, the CBI, is for the state to contract out yet more of its functions to

companies for profit!

A report for the CBI proposes privatising another third of public spending - £278bn worth of public services, starting with school meals, social housing and prisons, all areas in which some private companies already have their fingers. The CBI dubiously claims this will save the government enough money to

balance the budget by 2017.

As if privatising public services had ever been "cheaper" for society, or even for the state, for that matter! Part of the state funding is diverted into shareholders' pockets, while public access to services is reduced, by driving up prices, or cutting the services themselves to the bone - or both!

Blaming their mess on the victims

Economists have been scratching their heads over what they call Britain's "productivity puzzle". Despite the fact that the economy's been shrinking and unemployment rising, the number of people in jobs is apparently at its highest since May 2008. On this basis, they blame the recession on workers' "low productivity". How convenient!

But look at who counts as

"employed". There has been a sharp increase in people taking part-time jobs because they can't find full-time work - but they still count just the same (or if they are doing two part-time jobs, they are counted twice). Similarly, people who are "self-employed", because they can't find anything else, count as well, even if they aren't actually getting much work. And the tens of thousands of

Crisis watch

people in very temporary jobs for the Olympics skewed the figures so much that it covered up a drop in employment outside London.

If these "experts" were working on the shopfloor rather than sitting in offices doing the bosses' bidding, they'd know what any worker knows - that every company has been using the crisis to screw even more value out of each hour worked, not less!

Foodbanks - a shocking indictment

Food banks, which are run mainly by religious charities, are increasingly being used by families on low incomes, as well as the unemployed, and their number is soaring. The Trussell Trust, which has one of the biggest networks, has doubled the number of food parcels it issues in the last year! A town like Coventry which did not have one food bank 18 months ago, now has 11.

Job centre workers offer food vouchers (exchangeable at food banks) to unemployed who have been temporarily struck off benefits, to allow them to survive. But free food is rationed. You're entitled to only 3 parcels a year, and it's hit or miss whether you get one, since everything is donated. After walking miles to a bank you can find the food has run out.

The likes of Cameron "welcome" the rising number of foodbanks. Of



course, their idea is to cut all state expenditure that benefits working people in general, and the poor in particular, and replace it with

inadequate charity - so that the resulting "savings" can be used to line the pockets of the very rich. This is their "big" society.

• The rising cost of benefit caps

Figures from the first quarter of 2012 confirmed that the government's cap on housing benefit (without capping rent) is having the predicted impact. The number of homeless families in bed and breakfast accommodation at the expense of local councils was up compared to 2011 by 44%, standing at nearly 4,000.

Not surprisingly, the problem is most acute in inner London where rents are highest, with Westminster council reporting a rise in the number of households seeking "advice or assistance" as a direct result of the cap.

Next April, Osborne's cap limiting the total benefit paid to any one household to £500 per week is due to come into force, potentially forcing thousands more out of temporary accommodation and into more B&Bs.

This is hardly a cost saving, since it can only increase the burden on local government finance. It's as if the only reason for these caps was to "punish" claimants for being poor, much in the tradition of Victorian Britain!

• Only ultra-wealthy need apply

The sale of a mansion overlooking Hyde Park for an asking price of £300m (more than double the previous house-price record) provides a glimpse into the lives of the very rich, who use London's luxury property market as a lucrative investment. Previously owned by a prime minister of Lebanon, this modern castle is as well defended as any medieval fortress. Boasting bullet-proof windows, an industrial-sized kitchen, several lifts and an underground car park, it is virtually impregnable.

The mansion will not be advertised. Instead a consultant from the commissioned estate agency will scan his list of "global wealthy" for possible candidates. As one consultant said, "security may be vital". By keeping everything secret, "pictures (Picasso's etc) and floor plans can be kept out of the public domain".

So there we have it: a virtually anonymous existence in a gilded and well-fortified palace; a tax and legal system designed to protect their profits; last but not least, Scotland Yard is just round the corner. What more could a rich parasite want?

• Wonga, the crisis lice

The online "legal loan shark" Wonga announced a four-fold increase in the number of loans it made in 2011 - to £45.8m. And a 269% increase in net income to 2.5m. This may not sound like a huge figure compared to the billions in profits that big City companies make. Except that every single penny of this £45.8m comes straight out of the pockets of those who are so hard up, that they see no option other than to pay as much as £12.78, for instance, for the privilege of borrowing £100 from Wonga for a week!

Wonga bosses make no secret of their Annual Percentage Rate of charge (APR) of 4,214% which is clearly shown on the home page of their website. Of course, they are legally obliged to do so. But they also know that the crisis is bound to bring them a flow of cash-strapped people who can't afford to turn an emergency loan down, even if it's an obvious rip off.

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• Voluntary redundancies for whom?**

So now the Ford Europe boss wants "voluntary redundancies" across the European plants to pay for the slump in the car market they keep telling us about - while Ford keeps making profits, of course! They say the VRs will be only amongst the salaried staff. Is that because they know that if they opened the opportunity to hourly paid, they'd be so flooded with applications to get off their hellish shopfloor, that they'd be left without anyone to make their engines and panels? [Workers' Fight - Ford Dagenham 9/10/12]

• Southampton will remain?

It seems a lot of the rumours floating around are put out to confuse us about

our jobs. So what's the truth? Last week Southampton papers said Ford "denied as speculation, reports that its Southampton plant would be at risk from any restructuring". Ford said that Southampton would become the lead European plant for the chassis cab variants of the next Transit model. So S&TO-SubAssembly's work is also safe? Surely. [Workers' Fight - Ford Dagenham 25/9/12]

• We must be told!

Yes, we've been feeling uncertain about our jobs in SubAssembly, and Press shop mates were led to believe that only very few of us would be retained before the final closure. So what is the plan? If we don't know, how on earth can we judge whether we should take vital decisions - like EVR, if Ford offers it? [Workers' Fight - Ford Dagenham 25/9/12]

**• Genk ok?**

As to rumours of Genk being under threat, union officials in Belgium were assured (by e-mail!!) last week, that the new Mondeo would be built there, starting mid-October 2013. Of course, Ford bosses play their cards close to their chests. But given they've been meeting with union officials in DEP, we know they must be discussing something. What about the union's promise to "keep everyone informed"? [Workers' Fight - Ford Dagenham 25/9/12]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• Weekend unwilling workers**

The weekend working may have been a bit of a doddle in some areas ("Sunday is funday") and the decision to work the hours as overtime (if we're in credit) means money for old rope at times! But for those of us on permanent days, working every Saturday, let alone coming in on Sunday, too, has been no joke. Not to mention those of us commuting who do enough driving during the week. [Workers' Fight - BMW - Cowley - 18/09/2012]

• Our breaks are not for sale

Hardly have we settled back after the enforced month-long break and BMW want to shorten our tea breaks. Most of us reject it out of hand: it's the only thing keeping us sane during insanely long shifts. But for those feeling attracted by the £2500 bribe, remember:

for BMW this is a profit-making deal. After a couple of years BMW would have recouped the one-off pay out. From then on their gain from the extra minutes we'd be working each and every day would be extra profit. [Workers' Fight - BMW - Cowley - 18/09/2012]

• BMW blowing bubbles

Whether it's 15 or 30 new BMW contracts being negotiated for agency workers, this figure, if true, is an insult. That's barely 1 or 2 per technology per shift, after a 4yr freeze! Not worth busting a gut to please management, if that's what BMW was hoping. With 100s of us having more than 5 years employment here and 100s more who can reckon in years not months on the payroll, isn't it time to knock some sense into the bosses? And since we all do the same backbreaking shifts, shouldn't we all get contracts? [Workers' Fight - BMW - Cowley - 2/10/2012]

**• Feeling pressure for a change?**

Maybe it's the fear of the new boss walking in unannounced that has given some of us our first ever face-to-face encounters with German managers. They seem terrified that we might be standing round during the many breakdowns or bunking off early. And the further behind in target output we fall, the more nervous they become! [Workers' Fight - BMW - Cowley - 18/09/2012]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• Constant reshuffle**

The re-sign in EC was a bit of a joke - for some of us, anyway... You sign for a job, and then the manager removes it, and you're right back where you started! This isn't just a problem in Deliveries, of course. Moving the goalposts every 5 minutes has become a management habit, throughout the building. [Workers' Fight - Mount Pleasant - 1/10/12]

• Sawing off the branch they sit on

In WorkTimeSleeping, after being told how the profits in RM are all being generated by packets, we were told how

they plan to cut costs: by cutting jobs in packets! So, in true RM fashion, they plan to sabotage themselves, us, and the "business"! Yet again. [Workers' Fight - Mount Pleasant - 1/10/12]

• More Peters and more Pauls

Yes, the Processing fit-up's gone ahead, but it still seems like we're understaffed. The only way bosses manage is by robbing Peter to replace Paul and vice versa - ie., sharing the shortage around rather than solving it! [Workers' Fight - Mount Pleasant - 1/10/12]

• Stop the job cuts!

They were asked about the general



shortage of staff. And what did they say? That reducing our headcount is their principle aim. So, their principle aim is to keep failing, day after day, night after night? Of course it is. And to keep lying about it. [Workers' Fight - Mount Pleasant - 1/10/12]

King's Cross railway station (London)**Covering their tracks**

Virgin's Richard Branson has got his own way over who runs trains on the West Coast line. When the government awarded the new franchise to First Group, rather than Virgin, Branson jumped up and down and went to court over the matter. The government soon caved in, scrapped their decision and went back to the drawing board - at a cost of £40m. They blamed some civil servants for "getting their sums wrong" (the

transport ministers in charge at the time having been "reshuffled" in time to avoid any responsibility).

But, of course, there is no question of ending the scandal of train franchising, which has long been a vehicle for channelling hundreds of millions of pounds of public subsidy into the pockets of the train operators and their shareholders.

Nor is there ever any mention at all of the workers at the receiving



end of this merry-go-round, who, each time they are shunted to a different operator, find their new boss wants to trim jobs and squeeze wages and conditions even more.

• The heat is on

We're waiting for ISS's response (after the first strike on the 10 September) to our demands. But in the meantime, there are plenty of local issues which need sorting out. Like the fact that, not only do they pay us peanuts, but they can't even pay us all the peanuts we're owed. Short pay is the top of our list of grievances, but there are plenty more - and we're not ready to cool down. [Workers' Platform - King's X - 18/09/12]

• Spread the strike

It's a long time since something like this happened on the stations - it was such an event, it soon reached Twitter and Youtube. But it shouldn't be too long before it happens again. Bad management and bad pay are common on the station. So how long before the station

is empty and we're all out? [Workers' Platform - King's X - 18/09/12]

• Making us even angrier

ISS is doing its best to annoy us. Our pay is constantly messed up, even worse than before, now that it's worked out in York. And, locally, management is being petty about granting our leave requests. In short, they're doing their level best to give us even more reasons to fight the company! [Workers' Platform - King's X - 2/10/12]

• How are we supposed to live?

Initial have stopped paying us the enhanced hourly rate we got for the Olympics period. As if they couldn't afford to carry on - and give us much more besides! Paying us a living wage (only just) shouldn't be regarded as a bonus but as a necessity.

They tell us we are going to get a pay rise, but how much and when is anybody's guess. It had better not turn out to be just the few pence of the minimum wage increase, which they are forced to give us! [Workers' Platform - King's X - 2/10/12]

• Uniformly bad

FCC and East Coast are as bad as each other when it comes to supplying uniforms. We wait months to get what we've ordered - if we get it at all. East Coast even asked us to bring back the items they'd given us which didn't fit, so they could pass them on to someone else - whom they may or may not fit, who knows?

Have they both decided that they won't be around for much longer, so won't bother providing kit? [Workers' Platform - King's X - 2/10/12]

• Hands off employment rights!

The future Enterprise Bill includes more attacks on workers' protection against unfair dismissal. Already, since April you couldn't seek redress from a tribunal unless you'd been in a job for 2 years (instead of 1 before) and tribunals could charge higher deposits and "fine" you more heavily (under the guise of legal costs) if you lost your case.

• Workers' lives must come before profit

To "cut red tape, the ConDems are targeting health and safety. Hundreds of thousands of small businesses are to be exempted from H&S inspection from next April. For the bosses and ConDems, the scant legal protection against being put in a dangerous and even life-threatening situation is just a nuisance.

Already, the number of official

This new bill introduces hefty charges just to file a claim and get a hearing - a deterrent for the low-paid! It reduces the cap on unfair dismissal awards, from £72,300 to £26,000, or a year's net salary, whichever is lower. It would allow bosses to use "off-the-record" conversations to intimidate workers, and to blackmail them into agreeing

inspectors working for the H&S Executive is woefully inadequate. They inspect just 2.2% of workplaces per year - so it would take them 45 years to get round them all. And the number of prosecutions they brought dropped by half between 2008 and 2011.

Obviously, if the threat of being inspected is removed altogether, small businesses will just cut more

to their own sacking in return for a bit of money and a reference.

The ConDems have the nerve to claim that these attacks on workers' rights would "encourage" small businesses to create jobs. As if the big employers (including government) who've massively cut jobs, weren't bound to try to use the new bill to cut many, many more!

corners and, possibly, get away with murder.

175 workers died as a result of an accident at work last year - the equivalent, almost, of one fatality every other day. Thousands more were injured or made ill by their working conditions. It's not "red tape" that kills, it's capitalist exploitation!

South Africa

The 34 mineworkers shot dead at the Lonmin Marikana platinum mine, on the 16 August, did not die in vain. Lonmin's rock drill operators won a rise to R11,000 (£776) per month, plus a back-to-work bonus of R2,000 (equal to around 50% of the wages they lost while striking). It falls short of the £881 they were demanding, but for the lowest paid it's still a 200% rise.

Unofficial strikes for a living wage have extended far beyond Marikana. First it was the other platinum mining companies which were faced with an explosion of militancy, which was certainly a factor in Lonmin's defeat. Rustenburg, where Anglo-American runs the biggest platinum mine in the world became a de facto war zone, with the army and police confronting a whole community behind burning barricades, blocking the way to mine shafts. After police killed at least one worker and caused multiple injuries to many others by firing a hail of plastic bullets, Anglo bosses raised the stakes: on Friday 5th October they sacked 12,000 striking workers. This was the same tactic that sparked a 3 month strike at nearby Implats in January, after which bosses had to reinstate the workers and increase their pay.

Hundreds of thousands of workers have been, or are on strike, as we write. On the gold fields the

The post-Marikana strike wave

Anglo Platinum strikers demonstrate in Rustenburg



bosses tried to stem the militancy by evicting strikers from their hostels - but just inflamed things. Workers gathered on a hilltop, just like in Marikana, to plan their next moves. The strikes have spread as far as the Northern Cape, where iron ore miners are now on strike and to Kwazulu-Natal, where workers in Toyota's Durban factory went on a wildcat strike for 4 days and won a wage rise. Meanwhile, on September 24th, tens of thousands of truck drivers began an official strike for wage rises, but their strike too, now threatens to cut off fuel supplies and looks as if it will spread

to ports and railways, halting all goods' movement.

South Africa's president Zuma lamely told business "leaders" that "We should not seek to portray ourselves as a nation that is perpetually fighting". But where is his "nation"? This is a battle waged by the working class against the capitalist class, for basic dignity against starvation wages, ill health and homelessness. Zuma is in the enemy camp, protecting the bosses with his bullets. And yes, workers will have to fight "perpetually", to the bitter end, if they want justice and freedom from wage slavery. Not just in South Africa... □

• **Trafigura - the criminal stench of profiteering**

A report accuses Trafigura, the notorious company, which in 2006 dumped tons of toxic waste in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, of escaping criminal prosecution in British courts. The dumping - all over the city, by night - caused death to some and permanent ill-health to 95,000 others, most of whom received no compensation.

Although Trafigura was forced to pay \$200m dollars after its representatives were locked up for 5 months in Abidjan, this was hush money, bringing immunity from local prosecution. The Dutch arm of Trafigura was prosecuted in Holland, but

was only convicted of exporting waste illegally, as decisions about the dumping were traced to emails written in London. In this clear case of official cover up, it is no surprise that influential Tories like Lord Strathclyde have been paid-up directors of a Trafigura subsidiary; nor that the company uses a Swiss connection, no doubt for tax purposes. There is no such thing as "clean" capitalist profits, but some stink even more than others.

• **Apple's hi-tech sweatshops**

On 22 September, an explosion of anger broke out at the Foxconn factory in Taiyuan, where 79,000 workers produce electronic parts, including for Apple's

iPhone5. 40 were injured, police cars overturned and a supermarket wrecked. Production was suspended. Workers blamed the company's failure to take any action after one of its security guards sexually abused a female worker.

In a factory run like a military camp, workers work exhaustingly long hours for less than £200/month. Fed in lousy canteens and sleeping in dormitories sharing beds, this is a living hell. Add to this a 4-week backlog of iPhone5 orders, heavy-handed management and a crack-down by security police - it was an explosion waiting to happen. In case anyone wondered, this is how Apple manages to make such huge profits...

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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