



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

TAKING OUR INTERESTS INTO OUR OWN HANDS

This year's conference season started with the usual trail of bickering and politicking - among politicians with no sense of the real world.

While Osborne celebrates what he calls a "recovery", using suspicious figures which prove nothing, workers' conditions keep sliding downward.

Labour, for its part, whether by choice or under Tory pressure, seems only concerned with demonstrating its "independence from the unions" - showing, once again, that nothing matters more for Miliband than to chase the votes of wavering better-off voters.

Posturing over low wages

Of course, there is the growing scandal of "low-wage Britain", where workers' earnings have shrunk faster than in comparable industrialised countries. This is something that neither the coalition nor Labour can deny any longer.

So the government promised to "investigate" the abuse of "zero-hours" contracts, while Miliband pledged that Labour will end this abuse - but not ban these slave contracts!

Hypocrites! Hasn't the Coalition promoted casual employment as a means of reducing the jobless headcount, through its Workfare Programme and other schemes? And isn't it planning now, as part of its new Universal Credit, to penalise workers whose earnings are below £950/month, to force them to work multiple part-time non-jobs? Who do they think they can fool with their "investigation"?

And didn't the previous Labour governments boast endlessly of having created a "flexible labour market", by encouraging all kinds of precarious forms of employment, including "zero-hours" contracts? In this respect, the fact that Miliband entrusted a former director of



human resources at Morrisons supermarket with the task of formulating his policy on "zero-hours" contracts, speaks for itself!

And these politicians want us to believe that they'll do something against the casualisation that they have promoted? Or that they'll do something against the shrinking standards of living of the working class? Of course they won't. They're far too bent on backing the bosses' drive to use the crisis as a pretext to boost their profits.

Mobilising our ranks

As to the TUC, despite its noises last year about "coordinated strikes", they never materialised. And this year's conference won't be different, judging from the self-satisfaction of new general secretary Frances O'Grady, when she hails "the real ballots we have got going, which do have a just cause".

But what about all the issues that union leaders have chosen not to act upon, for fear of upsetting their cosy relations with the bosses: the rise of

casualisation, the transfer of so much work to low-paying contractors, the increasing erosion of wages by inflation, or the on-going privatisation of public services - whether in the NHS or at Royal Mail?

However, for the union leaders just as for Thatcher, it seems that "small is beautiful". O'Grady's "real ballots" may be for "a just cause" but they only concern isolated sections of workers.

But how can the working class defend its collective interests if it doesn't use its collective strength? Do the bosses who attack us stop at using their state and justice systems? And we should allow our hands to be tied behind our backs, by failing to use the full might of our class?

This may make sense for union leaders who only want to brush shoulders with bosses and politicians, but not for us, workers. Collective action, on the largest possible scale and under our own control, will be the only way to start regaining some of the ground lost over the past years. □

Gibraltar - Cameron's "Trafalgar"?

In July, yet another territorial dispute broke out between the British and Spanish governments over Gibraltar, dragging on for over two months. It all started with the construction of an underwater concrete wall, off the coast of Gibraltar. The Rock's authorities claimed its purpose was purely ecological. But the Spanish fishermen saw it as yet

another infringement on their freedom to fish off the coasts of their own country. In retaliation, the Spanish authorities tightened border controls on motorists driving in and out of Gibraltar.

Finally, on 18th August, admiral Nelson Cameron presided over his own "battle of Trafalgar", repelling a large Spanish "Armada" with just a few

vessels. True to British imperial tradition, he'd stood up to a Spanish challenge, no doubt hoping to have his statue erected in some London square, one day, like the real Nelson. Alas, his name will probably be forgotten: after all, this "Armada" was only a flotilla of 38 fishing boats...

• *An imperial crumb, but it's all about money*

But what's Britain still doing in Gibraltar and why are its 2.6 sq miles so important to Cameron?

Gibraltar became a British colony as long as 3 centuries ago, as part of an uneasy settlement between the two main European powers of the time - Britain and France. In the process, Britain took Gibraltar and Minorca (one of the Balearic islands) from Spain, together with a very profitable contract to supply

Spain's colonies with African slaves.

Ever since, Gibraltar has been "British" - due to its strategic military position. But today, this is no longer an issue: Gibraltar hosts a NATO base and Spain is a NATO member.

What really makes Gibraltar important to Cameron, is that it's now a tax haven. It has no capital gains tax, no VAT and no inheritance tax and only introduced a corporation tax (10%, but not

even for all companies) and a low income tax, in 2011. It's host to many tax-dodging gambling websites, but its top politicians, who all seem to be linked to one big law firm specialising in financial services, now hope attract international hedge funds. And this is the only real stake in Cameron's posturing to "defend the interests" of Gibraltar's 30,000 inhabitants!

• *Inflation cut wages*

Another cause for self-congratulation among ministers this summer, was the "fall" in annual inflation - by 0.1% for the Consumer Price Index (to 2.8%) and by 0.2% for the Retail Price Index (to 3.1%).

Meanwhile, however, prices have increased by 4.4% for food, 6% for housing and close to double digits for energy, while wages only increased by 1.7% - and even that is an average, which conceals the large numbers who got a pay cut or no pay rise at all. So much so, that now, after five years of wages lagging far behind inflation, more than half of the households living below the poverty line include a working adult!

The truth is, that whatever ministers claim to be doing to reduce inflation, it is a convenient way for the capitalists to cut workers' wages. And the only protection against it would be a system of automatic indexation of all wages to prices - an objective well worth fighting for, which, for once, could bring together all sections of workers and allow them to use the full measure of their considerable collective strength!

• *It makes us hit the roof*

The various schemes launched by the government to "stimulate" house building were supposed to ease the housing shortage. But these schemes only managed to push house prices and rents up. Ultimately they only helped those who could already afford to buy.

And the biggest winners by a long chalk have been the buy-to-let cow-boys whose investments are in part subsidised by public funds and who have, at the same time, benefited from soaring private sector rents. Alongside them at the winning tape are the shareholders of the largest housebuilding firms, whose dividends are expected to increase by 260%, to £540m a year, by

the end of 2014!

Meanwhile Osborne's "bedroom tax" will be cutting the benefits of tens of thousands of households, which are among the poorest, to "save" £500m a year - and fill the pockets of these shareholders! Sickening!

• *Robbing Peter and Paul*

According to the RAC Foundation, councils all over England are ripping off motorists using council car parks to try and offset the cuts being imposed by the government on local council spending. In 2011-12 combined council "profits" on car-parking charges jumped to £565m from £511m the previous year. By the end of the current financial year this surplus is expected to have jumped to £635m. The biggest earner is Westminster which had a surplus of £41.6m two years ago - and that comes on top of congestion charges. No wonder many motorists say they are being fleeced!

Councils say that they are using the surplus to fill in potholes etc. The state of inner city roads tells another story! With the rainy season really getting under way, regular drenchings are on the agenda, if not worse. True, councils are at the receiving end of government funding cuts which they haven't chosen. But then what they do choose is to racketeer motorists and pedestrians alike, rather than resisting these cuts.

• *Firefighters in the line of fire*

Firefighters across the country have voted for strike action by 78%. After 2 years of negotiations, the government is still trying to cut their pensions, especially for those who will be forced to retire before 60 if they cannot maintain standards of fitness.

Firefighters, who up to now, have to retire before 60 on ill-health grounds can get their pensions. This is what the

government wants to change - and ensure that they only get a part of their pensions instead. Due to the nature of their job, this could affect 2/3 of them!

At the same time, there is also a plan to close 10 fire stations with a loss of 552 firefighters jobs. Full-timers would be replaced by on-call firefighters called retainers (part-time fire fighters), no doubt endangering even more, their chances of ever getting a pension!

But this is exactly the aim of the exercise: to save money at the expense of everyone: firefighters and public alike. Firefighters deserve everyone's support in their fight.

• *We ain't seen nothing yet*

British banks have paid out billions of pounds in fines in recent months, after being caught red-handed indulging in all sorts of fraudulent activity. For instance, HSBC got a £1.2bn penalty for money-laundering. Barclays and RBS have been fined £290m and £390m respectively, so far, for rigging the Libor rate, in an investigation which is still going on, and could also pull in Lloyds and HSBC.

But this is just the tip of the iceberg. The banks have made provision for a string of other misdemeanors which are likely to get them into hot water here, in Europe or in the US. While they haven't attempted to estimate how much it might cost them in total, HSBC has set aside £2.24bn for just one of its potential problems, Barclays has set aside £300m and Lloyds £500m - but they all say that the final cost could be far higher. As for RBS, it has set aside £358m just for the legal costs it might incur, never mind the fines. For sure, there are many more scandals lurking in the wings.

Legalising racism!

At the end of July, for 2 weeks, white vans were seen touring 6 boroughs of London with big signs saying "Go home or face arrest" - ostensibly targeting people who may be in Britain "illegally".

If you thought it was a campaign by a racist outfit, you would not be too far from the truth. In fact it was the Home Office itself, under instruction from the government! It was coupled with constant harassment of people at tube stations based purely on their looks: anybody not white enough was stopped and questioned almost on a daily basis. At the same time, they boasted online about the



number of arrests of "illegal immigrants". But the campaign attracted so many complaints from ordinary people that eventually the

white vans were suspended as well as the online lies. The government was shown that it cannot get away with this kind of racism. ☐

• Broadwater Farm: the cops' revenge

Unbelievable: once more, the Crown Prosecution Service has decided to charge someone with the murder of PC Blakelock - who was stabbed to death (at least 42 wounds) during the Broadwater Farm Riots in 1985. When it's one of their own, the police just don't give up - even if it has so far proven impossible to get a safe conviction for an act committed by many individuals, in the middle

of a riot.

At the time, the police arrested 360 youths, including small children, and charged 6 youngsters - all of whom were cleared. Then, in 1987, they pinned the killing on Winston Silcott, Mark Braithwaite and Engin Raghip, who were all cleared 4 years later - on appeal - because there wasn't a shred of evidence against them. Silcott, for instance, was

convicted on the basis of an unsigned statement police "got" out of him without a lawyer present. In 2010 the case was revived and 14 men arrested - 9 of whom were soon released and the other 4 only recently. But now the CPS has come up with a new suspect - Nicholas Jacobs. This time they say they have "sufficient evidence". 28 years later? It is doubtful.

• But who pays for Mark Duggan's murder?

On the other hand, when it is one of Broadwater Farm's own, who has died at the hands of the police, it is entirely another story. Mark Duggan who was shot execution-style by a special police detective - having been told to lie on the pavement (in other words they can't even claim that he was a possible

threat) and whose killing sparked the London riots two years ago - well, his killer has not been charged, nor even identified! The squad of police who were responsible for stopping the car he was in have refused even to be interviewed by the Independent Police Complaints Commission. Apparently they are

allowed to refuse!

So Mark Duggan now joins a long list of black people who have in effect been killed by the police with impunity - including Cynthia Jarrett and Roger Sylvester, from Tottenham, and Joy Gardner from nearby Crouch End. These are not exceptions.

• Jimmy Mubenga's brutal killing

Last month, almost 3 years after Jimmy Mubenga suffocated while being deported, an inquest jury brought a verdict of unlawful killing against the three G4S guards who had handcuffed and belted him before pushing his plane seat forward, thereby muffling his screams while he died. There followed a massive cover up as the guards were quickly released from Heathrow police station and taken to a hotel, where senior management, including a retired police superintendent,

forced them to write their accounts, according to which Mubenga had wilfully caused his own death.

Passengers later came forward and their accounts provided the basis for a police investigation. However after two years the Crown Prosecution Service decided not to prosecute even though investigating pathologists said « you can't restrain yourself to death ». The fact that the Home Office had

approved restraint and knew that guards would not get paid unless Mubenga was successfully deported clearly influenced the CPS decision. Only following a public campaign by family and friends was the inquest held. A bigger campaign will be necessary to end these barbaric deportations and bring all the culprits - including G4S management, government officials and politicians - to book.

• Trains overflowing with gravy

Rail fares are set to rise by an average of 4% in January and some will rise by more than 9%. This will mean adding about £200 onto the cost of many commuter season tickets.

In fact, rail fares have been constantly increasing over the past decade. Some have almost doubled - like the annual London-Sevenoaks season ticket

which has gone from £1,660 in 2003 to £3,112 today! Yet except for some top directors, nobody's wage has doubled over the past 10 years! Most workers had their wages frozen or cut.

Now, why should working people, whose real wages are going down year in, year out, subsidise the railways? Surely private train operators should

invest, rather than raking in huge profits and lining the pockets of their shareholders and all the other bosses in the city? After all, they need workers to travel to and from work, so they should pay towards what is a direct benefit to them - through subsidising their workers' season tickets, for instance...

low-wage Britain

This summer the media was full of pieces about low pay, falling living standards and precarious jobs such as "zero-hour" contracts. Suddenly journalists "discovered" what has been obvious to workers for years! Nevertheless, it's true that the situation is getting even worse. The Citizens Advice Bureau says working

families accounted for much of the 78% increase in applications to food banks from February to August. In Solihull, one emergency food parcel is claimed every other day, compared to one for the whole of 2010. Even official figures show that, by 2015, working people's average real earnings will be £6,600 less than in 2010.

The government's promise to "name and shame" employers not

complying with the minimum wage is a sham. It only managed to expose one hairdressing salon since 2011! And anyway, even if it did, those on the minimum wage with rent and rocketing bills to pay, would still be struggling. As for zero-hour contracts, which are one of the factors pushing wages down, how many jobs would the government's Work Programme be able to offer if they were excluded?

• Casualisation, a long history

The deterioration in workers' living conditions goes back a long way. Labour's early welfare "reforms" of the late 1990s gave job centres greater discretion to cut the benefits of those jobless accused of having turned down jobs. Blair's governments did far more than Thatcher's to force the unemployed into the worst jobs. Unsurprisingly, the bosses were quick to exploit this new climate, creating jobs that do

not provide a living. This is why, today, for instance, more than a quarter of all jobs are part-time, or not guaranteed full-time hours.

Companies and public sector organisations have developed two-tier or multiple-tier workforces, a permanent core supplemented by agency workers who can be sacked in thin times, while the core workforce is expected to do overtime.

The bosses and their politicians

have long claimed that without the possibility of using these extreme forms of "flexibility" the bosses wouldn't create jobs. Well if so, companies have to be forced to create the jobs that workers need - and not in isolation in each company, but on the scale of the whole economy, by sharing all available work between all available hands, without loss of pay and under the collective control of the working class!

NHS

Letter from Sussex

The "rationalisation" i.e. closing of departments at Eastbourne District General Hospital (DGH) and Hastings Conquest Hospital continues to hit the local headlines.

Recently, two Chinese language students were hit by a car, while crossing the road immediately outside the DGH. Due to the new rules on who gets treated where, the ambulance took them to the Conquest Hospital in Hastings, over 20 miles away. This, despite ambulance crews complaining that the service is now "ridiculously overstretched". The "rationalisation" has sharply increased the length of the journeys they must undertake and they are regularly overrunning their shifts, in order to cope.

Spare a thought for the 13 year-old students, too. They were taken 20 miles away from their host families and anyone else they knew, to a place that would have been completely unfamiliar and they were discharged on separate days. What a way to treat students from abroad! If this was the product of "rationalisation", we'd hate to see the NHS Trust show its irrational side!

• Emergency in emergency

What's the latest A&E "crisis" about? Given the closure of so many casualty departments and acute hospital wards up and down the country, you'd think that there'd be enough staff to go round. But 80% of casualty departments can't provide the required 16-hour-a-day cover by emergency doctors during weekdays - and during weekends it's a disaster. No surprise that training as an emergency doctor is at the bottom of medics' lists! Which just compounds the problem.

In fact we're told by the nurses' college that there are almost 5,000 fewer nurses in the NHS than in May 2010. By 2016, there'll be a shortfall

of 50,000. As for GPs, who "filter" emergencies, their college says that by 2021 there'll be 16,000 fewer! So, unless there's a successful fight for more resources, the consequences won't be bare thinking about.

And it's not just an A&E crisis: the decades-long policy to cut beds to a bare minimum means patients can't be admitted when they need it. So the predicted high demand this winter will cause chaos.

But never mind, the new NHS Act has created "Urgent Care Boards" to deal with such problems. If only patients could sleep on them...

• And so the profiteering grows

Commissioning groups of GPs (CCGs) - who are supposed now to procure all our healthcare with the bulk of the £100bn NHS budget in their hands - came officially into force on April Fools' Day this year.

They will offer tenders for health services which the NHS, voluntary and private sectors will compete for - but of course the Con-Dem idea is that the private sector will be able to grasp a greater chunk of the NHS - and turn a profit on its back.

This year the estimated value of such contracts is over £8bn - and the biggest of these (so far) is the £1.2bn contract for providing care

for the elderly in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Serco, which already has proved itself fatally unfit to provide out-of-hours GP services in Cornwall, is one potential bidder, as are Virgin and Circle - the latter already runs the formerly failing Hitchingbrooke Hospital.

The competition for this and many other contracts is being described as an "arms race" or a "land grab" because of the huge number of private companies expressing interest.

But whatever it's called, it's obscene: it's either patients first, or profits first. It cannot be both!

So-called "zero-hours" contracts, where workers are not guaranteed a minimum amount of paid hours (nor, therefore, a minimum level of earnings) have been around for a long time in various shapes and forms. Beyond their justification (to provide employers with more flexibility to cope with ups and downs in production), their main purpose is to by-pass existing employment regulations and reduce labour costs to the bare bone.

Workers on such contracts who

are on call, may not get any work for weeks, but must get permission to take other temporary work. Those who don't have to accept work offered, forfeit statutory rights such as sick and holiday pay. In practice they have no greater freedom either - managers can starve them of work if they turn a shift down. Many of them work between 10 and 30 hours a week, but they can be sent home unpaid at a moment's notice. In mobile jobs such as home care visiting, they are often paid only for timed

zero-hours jobs

home appointments and not for travel between them. Some companies publish periodic rotas, but give them to workers so late, that planning their lives is impossible, while the unreliable hours make it impossible to manage finances too.

And such are the "new jobs" ministers boast of! □

• From McJobs to royal retail

The Office for National Statistics estimates that 250,000 workers are on zero-hour contracts. But this was shown to be a gross underestimate just by one minister's statement that 305,000 workers in social care alone are on "zero-hours"! A survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development of 1,000 employers suggested the total is more likely to be about a million!

McDonalds has 82,800 "zero-hours" workers - nearly 90% of its workforce. Sports Direct uses "zero-hours" in the same proportion, with 20,000 workers. Other big users of zero-hours, some of which apply it

to all part-timers, include pub chains Greene King and J. D. Wetherspoon, Cineworld multiplexes, Dominos Pizza, Boots, Subway, Burger King and Amazon. In the CIPD survey, 35% of employers in education said they used "zero-hours" workers and 48% in hotel and catering.

NHS trusts have imposed "zero-hours" pool systems on skilled groups such as radiologists, so that it is estimated the NHS now employs 100,000 on this basis. Even the Queen is on the bandwagon - all 350 shop workers hired by Buckingham Palace for the summer, are on zero-hours.



• Bakers challenge casualisation

Workers at the Hovis bakery in Wigan went on strike for a week, on 28 August, the first of three planned, in a long-running dispute over the use of agency workers on zero-hours contracts to cover absences. More than 100 pickets on the first day (out of a workforce of about 300) showed the strength of feeling on the issue - especially as the company, Premier

Foods, had cut 98 permanent jobs at the bakery in 2010.

The Hovis strikers are right. Had the union leaderships organised systematic opposition to the casualisation of labour right from the time when it really started to develop, under the previous Labour governments, the relationship of forces would be quite different for the

working class today. Instead, union leaders chose to take care of their own cherished "partnership" with companies and went along with this casualisation. But it's not too late. The more workers fight back against every attempt to divide their ranks, the harder it will be for the bosses to resort to such attacks.

• If it's not discrimination...

Campaigners who went to the courts arguing that the "bedroom tax" discriminates against the disabled lost their case. The court decided it was OK for the disabled to have their benefits cut for having a "spare" room, or otherwise for them to move house. Never mind that many with disabilities need extra space and cannot move out because of necessary adaptations to their homes.

Of course it's hardly better for other victims of this cut, who are told that if they can't meet the shortfall in their rent, they can simply move to a smaller property. But there aren't any. In Oldham, for instance, there are 91 one-bedroom properties available in the social housing sector - but 2417 households who are expected to downsize. It's estimated that as many as 96% of

tenants affected are in this situation - stuck between deciding whether to risk eviction or cut back on essentials.

In any case, the "bedroom tax" is discriminatory against the poor. Social housing tenants are penalised for having a "spare" room, but the rich are not taxed on their bedrooms, no matter how many their mansions contain.

• The cap doesn't fit

After piloting its benefit cap, which restricts out-of-work households' benefits to £26,000 per year (£500 per week) in four London boroughs, the government is rolling it out to the rest of the country.

In the four pilot areas (Croydon, Bromley, Haringey and Enfield), a higher proportion of claimants were expected to be affected, thanks to the extortionate rents in the capital. And in

fact, 2658 households lost money. 74% of these were single parent households - yet the government still insists that "only" half of those affected nationwide will be single parents. Be that as it may, it illustrates that this policy hits the most vulnerable hardest - so much for "creating fairness", as the cappers claim.

As for "strengthening work incentives", the government's alleged aim, an employment minister did concede that it would not be a "realistic option" for all those affected by the cap to find work. But in that case, he added airily, claimants could try "renegotiating rent" (good luck...) or moving to "affordable accommodation" - though where they are supposed to find that is anyone's guess.

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• Royal Mail: stop the sale!**

The postal workers' union (CWU) may have just threatened a ballot for strike - but it turns out this isn't actually over the impending privatisation of Royal Mail! No. It's about a 3-year pay and conditions deal which RM bosses want to impose - which of course, also includes the 10% share of the privatised business, to be issued to workers after the share flotation - meant to be

complete by March 2014... And despite this, CWU leaders still insist they are open to meaningful negotiations on the pay offer! If none are forthcoming, only then will the ballot begin on 20th September.

Of course the CWU leaders oppose postal privatisation. Their campaign bus says "You own it already, don't buy it". But they are nevertheless prepared to envisage an agreement on pay and



conditions with the same bosses who intend to carry through the public share offer/privatisation. This makes no sense. There's every reason to refuse any and all "negotiation" - and pull out all the stops (i.e., stop all work) - until privatisation is off the table.

• We can help!!

Strikes are already going on. Not least, the one-day series which is meant to defend 74 Crown Post Offices from closure and prevent 1,500 job cuts - and/or franchising: 11 strike days so far. The union congratulates customers, staff and communities for "standing up for their local Crown PO" but what about the whole of the postal workforce, which, if it stood up too, might actually manage to win this fight?? [Updated from Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 9/7/13]

• We can't handle striking offices' mail

As for the other strikes everywhere - there 40 offices which asked for official ballots, and others, mainly delivery offices, which are subject to total de facto scrapping of any work standards or defined length of walks or weight/volume to deliver. Any rep worth his or her salt is getting suspended and walkouts have or are happening unofficially and officially to get them reinstated - like at Peterborough and Plymouth, Bridgwater and Ipswich. Coventry is another office we'll probably have to support soon... So

we need to keep tuned in - best probably, to ask those mates who "log in" to Royalmailchat. [Updated from Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 9/7/13]

• Romec: round 2

One dispute we don't have to look far to find out about - is the one involving our Romec cleaning mates here and at Rathbone place, who're standing up against compulsory weekend working and flat-rate Sundays. With the CWU's 2nd hand car salesman Bob Gibson deciding to get involved, we guess we'd better watch out for each other, more than ever! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 9/7/13]

King's Cross railway station (London)**• United we stand**

Workers know full well that to impose a real living wage on the bosses they have to organise and fight. Like the ISS workers in King's Cross station who have had several strikes since last year to try and force multinational, big profit-making ISS from paying them a decent wage, as well as sick pay and other improvements in conditions and pay.

They have marched off to their company's plush headquarters on several

occasions to expose its bad working practices (with the lack of even the bare legal minimum in terms of mess-room and changing facilities) as well as their poor pay conditions: they have had a 30p increase from the minimum wage of £6.18/hour. Which is far short of the £10/hour that they need, and even shorter, when it comes to the amount needed to make up for 12 years without a payrise!

Now ISS is trying to push its luck further by introducing the infamous zero-hour contract for new recruits and



offering a different pay offer depending on locations.

But they were not calculating on having to confront the fighting spirit of the ISS workers - who are standing together and will not give up their fight!

• ISS workers still fighting on

During the latest ISS strike at the end of July, we brought our grievances directly to the big bosses in their (very) nice head offices, in Surrey Quays, giving a chance to all the other companies' workers to see how ISS treats their workers on the ground.

And we shocked a few, with the pictures of Bounds Green depot and KX mess-room. To keep us quiet, ISS bosses promised to come to a local meeting to hear all our grievances... [Workers' Platform King's Cross 11/09/13]

• Bring the top bosses down!

...And the few ISS bosses who came to the local meeting got an earful from us. Since the facilities they provide are so inadequate, it was held in our inadequate messroom and they had to answer our grievances in front of most of us. Funny, some of them were a bit pale, even arguing among themselves. And they were quick to answer us (by management's standards) within a week. Next time you need an answer to your grievances, why not follow ISS workers' example... ? [Workers' Platform King's X - 11/09/13]

• Partners in crime

East Coast is boasting in their latest newsletter of their new 3 year contract with ISS. They are not boasting though of the appalling conditions International Slavery Services (ISS) imposes on their workers - including zero-hour contracts and poverty pay. Keeping quiet about it is aiding and abetting, but us workers certainly won't keep quiet! As far as we're concerned, East Coast is as guilty as ISS. [Workers' Platform King's Cross 11/09/13]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• The music was fine**

The farewell barbecue for ST&O may have been very moving - which it was - and there was a good atmosphere among us. Ford wasn't good to us though. We were good to each other. That's what made the place OK to work in all these years. And that is what will continue to make it possible for us to fight this company (and others!) together to make our working lives decent, in the future, wherever we may be. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 4/9/13]

• Line from hell gone back there

Of course there was also the "end of the Lynx" engine line - with the buffet on 5th of July. A lot of mates retired and we had a chance to say goodbye and good luck. But the pen was a bit of a sad joke. A Parker from a noisy and nosy Parker... not even. Ford bosses probably realised we'd dismiss any

serious attempt of theirs to say "thanks" at the end of the very long-standing Lynx debacle as a cynical fraud. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 4/9/13]

• We are in the dark

Now we hear we can only leave in a "grade for grade" swop. So service and age no longer counts!!? You can't go even if you've done 37 or 38 or 39 years service?!

What's more, the next set is to go in October and will get a letter in the post who knows when - - and not a dicky will be said beforehand. And how many days notice will that be? The ones who got letters on Saturday are meant to be ready to leave on the 13th! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 4/9/13]

• Rules for the rulers

Yes, Ford keeps changing its "rules". In fact this means in reality, it has no rules!! Which makes the process impossible to



see or understand - and for good reason: Ford's special favourites can be well catered for... and they hope no-one will notice. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 4/9/13]

• Ford's white-wash

Ford may be trying to white-wash (err... brain-wash) us into the ways of the DEP, but they know just as well that we are old hands from S&TO - not born yesterday - and that this is the curse of the closure of Southampton and our plant - which is going to come back and haunt them. We'll make sure of it! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 4/9/13]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• There must be a reason**

At the beginning of July the in-house employment agency, Gi, sent out a communication brief.

It said that "during the launch period" agency workers "will be allowed to bank up to 200 hours working time account (overtime)". It adds that this additional WTA will be voluntary, but concludes that it is "a temporary agreement".

What really lies behind this? Are BMW in a bit of a fix and do they - once again - expect that we'll bail them out? [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 10/07/13]

• This one figures...

Whether BMW will try to man up entire voluntary Saturday crews "paid" in WTA to meet continuing high demand seems unlikely.

But the pressure to work days off will no doubt be intense, regardless of

the damage to our health - by the company that has sold us a "healthy" new system!

What this probably does suggest is that BMW may be planning a long Xmas shut-out under the pretext of making final preparations for the new model. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 10/07/13]

• Not all it seems

So if you do "bank" 200 hours over the next period, you can forget about having a long holiday in the sun at a time of your own choosing.

Many agency workers think that this is a price worth paying to guarantee ourselves a job to come back to in 2014. But is it a guarantee?

200 hours WTA surplus only means we won't freeze over Xmas. But whether we get back in the gate in January may depend on quite a few other factors. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 10/07/13]

**• Another hoop**

Yes, BMW and Gi have pencilled in what amounts to being re-interviewed for our old jobs. In HR's language the aim will be to "get rid of dead wood". This is rubbish, of course. The only dead wood in the plant is management pretending to work! The bosses will want to use the opportunity to get rid of "trouble makers". And why would they want to do that, unless they plan to introduce policies that they fear could make trouble? [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 10/07/13]

• Bosses' charter

From 29 July this year - and for the first time ever - workers taking a case to an Employment Tribunal will have to pay submission fees - of £160 to £250. If the claim goes ahead, there is a further charge: a claim for unpaid wages, holiday pay, etc., costs £390. Claims against unfair dismissal, discrimination, or equal pay claims, etc., cost

£1200. An appeal costs another £1600. There's no guarantee these fees will be reimbursed if the case is won: the government is threatening to restrict the means-tested refund (remission) of fees which those on low incomes currently qualify for.

At the same time, the maximum compensation has been reduced to £74,200 or a year's wages, whichever is the lower. And new rules allow the Tribunal to

turn down even more cases before they get to a hearing. The qualifying period for unfair dismissal claims was increased from one year to two years in April.

Before these restrictions, bringing a case to tribunal - let alone winning it - was already very difficult. For instance, only 8% of unfair dismissal cases were successful. The latest changes mean bosses are even less likely to be held to account by this court.

Hands off Syria!

Whatever happens over a military intervention in Syria, one thing is certain. The objectives of western leaders would have nothing to do with alleviating the hardships of the Syrian population.

Their concern - in Syria, as before in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya - is merely to police their regional order, so as to protect the western multi-nationals' looting of the region's natural resources. They will let nothing stand in the way of their profiteering - neither dictators who have become too big for their boots (like Saddam Hussein or Gaddafi), nor dictators who seem unable to maintain political stability (like Assad). The rich countries' leaders have no objection to dictatorships, but they want them to be both stable and pliable.

In the case of Syria, there is a sinister irony in the fact that western leaders shed tears over the use of chemical weapons. Whether "Agent Orange" (used by the US in Vietnam) or depleted uranium (used by all western troops in Iraq) are officially classified as chemical weapons or not, they left a trail of short-and long-term deaths, including countless babies deformed at birth, among the populations affected. Britain itself, under the auspices of Winston Churchill, used mustard gas (officially banned today) against the Russian workers who dared to threaten the rule of capital, back in 1919!

The Commons' ambiguous vote

Cameron badly misjudged the Commons' mood over Syria. Despite having gone out of his way to make his motion more palatable - in particular, by promising a second vote authorising actual air strikes! - 39 coalition MPs voted against it.

Most of the "rebels" had given their backing to the air strikes against Libya, and many to the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. But this time, they didn't want to carry



Before the civil war, in 2011, when the youth were fighting Assad in the streets

And these are the same western powers which, today, claim the high moral ground against Assad's dictatorship over the use of chemical weapons (assuming that it wasn't some jihadist group among the anti-Assad rebels which used them, as a number of witnesses claim)?

Just as there is a sinister irony in the pretence by western leaders to seek a "democratic" mandate for their air strikes. Hasn't the anti-Assad rebellion been armed by Gulf dictators, all close associates of the US, ever since the beginning of the insurgency? And didn't the US and the EU,

including Britain, decide to support the Syrian opposition and supply weapons to the rebels months ago? Had these governments won, or even sought a "democratic" mandate for pouring oil on the flames of the Syrian civil war? Of course not!

Whatever the pretexts invoked, any intervention, military or otherwise - in fact, any interference at all - by the western powers in Syria will be - and is already - paid for by the Syrian population. It is in the interest of the working class of this country to oppose this by all means necessary. □

the can for yet another military venture in the Middle-East, not out of concern for the cost to the population, but out of electoral fear. The memory of Labour's drastic losses due to the Iraqi disaster is still vivid and the Tory right-wing may be especially worried by the "anti-war" posturing of its rival, UKIP.

However, whether this "defeat" means that Cameron will keep his hands off Syria is another matter.

Some Tory heavyweights are already talking about another vote, in case of "new developments". And as Blair showed with Iraq, "new developments" can easily be fabricated. After all, assuming that no government minister "forgets" to vote as two of them did this time, Cameron would only need to regain the support of 6 of last Thursday's 30 Tory "rebels" to win the vote! □

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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