

# WORKERS' fight



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<http://www.w-fight.org>  
[contact@w-fight.org](mailto:contact@w-fight.org)

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

# A VOICE AGAINST CAPITALISM!

Despite the imminent local and European elections politicians seem strangely reluctant to use the "v" word - that is, to tell voters how they should cast their votes. They must think that their credit has reached such a low point, that any reference to these elections could lose them votes! In that, at least, they may be right!

Besides, this is not be the best time for them to raise their profile. After all, the new expenses scandal caused by culture minister Maria Miller, with her dubious mortgage repayments, isn't likely to die down anytime soon! And haven't all the main parties had their share of such scandals in the past? The last thing they want is to remind voters of that.

## ***Electioneering for the better-offs***

This doesn't mean that there's no electioneering going on. In fact, this has been politicians' main activity ever since the Con Dems came into office. All along, their eyes have been set on the 2015 general election horizon.

Osborne's latest budget, for instance, had "vote Tory" written all over it. It was aimed at better-off voters and once again, Osborne's message to them was: "look how good we are for you".

His headline measure was pension reform, supposedly meant to give "choice" to retirees. In fact, it will be a money-spinner - and a state subsidy - to those who are well-off and who can afford to pay into several pension schemes at once. But he has done nothing to improve the miserly pensions on which most retired workers have to survive.

Indeed Osborne has nothing to offer to the vast majority. Nevertheless, he did have a go at portraying his party as a "working class party", claiming that his aim is "full-employment"! But who will buy this? Does he really expect anyone

to believe that his millionaires' government has anything to do with the working class? Or that it will provide real jobs to those who need one, when it considers that working a few hours a week on the minimum wage or on "zero-hours" contracts is "being in employment"?

## ***Against big business***

In fact, all this government offers up is a series of scapegoats. Its so-called "welfare cap" is meant to blame benefit claimants for the public debt - when it was caused by the banking bailout, while the banks are earning billions from the money they loaned back to the state!

Cameron and Osborne blame EU workers for the state of the health service - as if they haven't run down the NHS and handed its budget to profit sharks! Theresa May and Iain Duncan-Smith blame unemployment on migrants who are supposedly taking jobs from British workers. As if unemployment wasn't due to jobs being slashed by the government itself and by British bosses who, despite sitting on piles of cash, refuse to invest in useful production!

Let's make no mistake. The real target of this scapegoating of migrant workers, the poor, the jobless, the disabled, etc., is the working class as a whole. When one section of workers is under attack, it's the entire working class which is targeted.

But who's standing up against big business and its mouthpiece in



government? Labour? Of course not! Like Blair and Brown before him, Miliband is a loyal servant of the City. He's already proved it by supporting some of the government's most anti-working class demagogy. As to Ukip, it's just the ugly face of Toryism.

This is why there's no stake and no future for the working class in the ballot box. What it needs, is a voice and a party representing its interests against those of the capitalist class - a party whose priority is to prepare the necessary fight back against the bosses' attacks and to start reclaiming the ground lost over the past years of crisis. ☐

## British lies for British voters

Iain Duncan Smith has called on the bosses to hire British workers rather than foreigners, blaming migrants for depressing wages. As if this government had ever shown any concern over workers' incomes! Haven't public sector wages been frozen for 4 years?

Behind IDS' call was the government's claim that migrants were "displacing" British workers. But as a leak to the press revealed, this was a lie. An official report showed that the 2012 figures, used to back up the government's claim, were at best unreliable and, in some cases,

completely wrong. But since this report did not fit in with the official anti-immigration rant, it was suppressed - until its existence was leaked to the press.

This hypocritical demagoguery has a purpose, of course. It is meant to whip up xenophobic prejudices and rally voters behind the Union Jack in the run-up to the May elections - something that the Tories' main rivals, Ukip, are busy doing too. Who will win this very nasty contest remains to be seen. One thing is certain though - it has nothing to do with workers' interests! □

## Fuelling a climate of insecurity

Last month, the case of Yashika Bageerathi, a 19-year old school student from Mauritius made the headlines. Having escaped the danger of a violent relative by coming to Britain, she was threatened with deportation. Despite a 177,000-strong petition and schoolmates taking to the streets in support, she was deported on April 2nd. Her family will probably follow. But how many of these arbitrary deportations, tearing people's lives apart, occur daily without anyone knowing?

This institutional bloody-mindedness can only have one consequence - to encourage the prejudices and brutality of immigration officers who are given more and more powers. This

was what the Vine report found, noting that in two-thirds of the cases it investigated, immigration officials abused their powers and locked up migrants without legal protection. Since then, some of these abuses have been legalised by the ConDems' immigration bill, which restricts migrants' right to appeal against deportation.

But there's a purpose for all of this - to create a climate of insecurity among migrants, making sure that they keep their heads down in front of the exploiters, and thereby undermining the capacity of the entire working class to resist the bosses' attacks. This is why any attack against migrants is an attack against the working class.

### • Who's to blame?

The case of Jimmy Mubenga, the Angolan refugee who was killed at the hands of the company G4S, 3 years ago, while being restrained prior to deportation, is now to be reopened. The Crown Prosecution Service initially said it had insufficient evidence to prosecute G4S. Indeed, last year the inquest into his death returned a verdict of "unlawful killing" and the CPS decided to take no action. But it has now, "after a fresh review", decided to charge the 3 G4S officers, not the company, with "gross negligence manslaughter".

These officers were seen to sit on Jimmy while he was bent over in his plane seat. Despite his struggling, shouts and eventual silence, because he had been suffocated to death, the officers did not relent, as was described graphically by fellow passengers.

But it was not these officers who decided to deport Jimmy Mubenga by force. They were merely implementing instructions issued by the Home Office - devised under the Labour and Condemn home secretaries. So while they and government contractor, G4S, may have blood on their hands, the prime responsibility lies with

government ministers and ex-ministers. But we can be sure that the CPS will not put them in the dock.

### • Brixton: too little, too late

After almost 30 years, the metropolitan police has apologised for the killing of a black woman, Dorothy "Cherry" Groce, whose alleged "accidental" shooting, sparked off the 1985 race riots in Brixton.

Just a week after this shooting, however, another black woman, Cynthia Jarret, died of heart failure when four policemen burst into her home, causing another riot in Tottenham. These events highlighted the institutional racism of the police in this society. But this was denied and nothing was done. Eight years later, the police's failure to bring to justice the white thugs who had murdered Stephen Lawrence raised the problem again. But it took another six years before the MacPherson enquiry formally acknowledged institutional racism.

Has anything changed, though? No. The endless list of black people who died in police custody and the disproportionate numbers of black youth stopped by police, are there to show it. The reality

## Class Struggle n°101 is out!

*In the Spring issue of our journal:*

- Britain - the 1984-85 miners' strike and today's need for a fight-back
- Britain - the politics of prejudice
- Ukraine - petty-bourgeoisie, bureaucracy and western power games
- South Africa - the pre-election balance-sheet
- USA - Ford, "people's tycoon" and vicious exploiter

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### • Feudalism isn't dead

Oxfam has released another report about inequalities: "The tale of two Britains", this time, exposes the fact that just 5 families own more wealth than 12.6 million people put together. The family of the Duke of Westminster (the Grosvenors), the Reuben brothers, the Hinduja brothers, the Cadogan family, and Sports Direct boss Mike Ashley between them own assets worth £28.2bn. While the other three are capitalists who made their fortune out of workers' sweat, the Grosvenors and Cadogans are remnants of feudal days, owning swathes of real estate in places like Belgravia. Of course, in most of Europe, the feudal aristocracy had their land confiscated (and lost their heads), during the bourgeois revolutions, but not here in good old Britain!

This report tells us that since 2003, the wealthiest 5% saw incomes increase, while incomes fell 12% for the rest of us. For the first time ever, the working poor now outnumber the unemployed poor. To relieve poverty, Oxfam suggests taxing the wealthy a bit more. But the real problem is the class system. Isn't it time to "relieve" the rich, of all of their wealth, placing it at the disposal of the whole of society?

is that the police reflect the nature of a system which is geared against the poor - and since black people are disproportionately represented among them, they get the worst deal from the cops. This is why there's probably no end in sight to the institutional racism of the police - that is, as long as social inequalities remain institutionally entrenched by the profit system.

## Osborne's labours for the rich

The Eton boys at the top of the Tory party may have thought that a cut in the tax on beer and bingo in last month's budget would allow them to posture as a "working class" party. But even a quick glance at this budget puts paid to that idea!

Chancellor Osborne increased personal allowance (the amount one can earn before being taxed) to £10,500. But obviously this

benefits all earners, not just those on low incomes. As for the 2.2 million whose earnings are already too low to pay tax, i.e. those who are most in need of some kind of help, there was nothing in the budget for them!

All other "give aways" were reserved for business. The annual investment which can be offset against tax was doubled to

£500,000. The total export credit which government offers to business was also doubled and interest rates on this were lowered. Of course, corporation tax continues to be cut, down to 21% this financial year and 20% next year!

The Tories, a "working class party"? No, of course not, but certainly a party that's working for the rich! ☐

### • Cap for the poor, top-hat for the wealthy

The new "welfare cap", which sets a legal limit on government spending on most welfare benefits over the next three years, is nothing but political posturing. It's not as if they were able of knowing in advance how many people will need benefits nor how much they will need, since they're totally incapable of predicting the future of their chaotic economy!

The only purpose of this "cap" is to show the government's determination to be tough on the poorest sections of the working class. And this is precisely why Labour made a point of backing its introduction as well, so that MPs voted overwhelmingly for a £119.5 billion "welfare cap" next year, rising to £127 billion in 2018-19.

Meaningless though the legislation may be, there can be no mistaking the intentions of the government: to blame the poor for being the problem - as if they, and not the financial bail-outs, were the cause of the budget deficit! Meanwhile, there's no "cap" to the government's on-going welfare to the bosses!

### • Pension reform - a bounty for high earners

Osborne says that his pension reform, allowing people to take their pension pot as a lump sum on retirement rather than using it to buy an annuity, is all about "choice". But "choice" for whom?

Of course, it gives "choice" to high earners who already have a decent pension lined up: they'll be able to pay into additional personal pension schemes and retrieve their investment on retirement with a fat state-subsidised, tax-free profit! For them, it's a massive giveaway!

But for the majority of workers, what would be the point of cashing in their pension pots as a lump sum? It would be too small to last very long, anyway. Worse, by a perverse effect, they could lose their entitlement to state help with their care costs should they become incapacitated - as this sum will be counted

as part of their means-tested "assets"!

Most workers reach retirement with no savings, when they're not deep into debt, due to underemployment and falling real wages. The average household owes more than twice its annual income and one in five has to borrow just to pay rent or a mortgage! The



real issue is that their only "choice" is to

try to survive on a derisory pension!

### • Inflating lies!

In February, inflation officially fell to 1.7% - its lowest level since 2009. But over the last year alone, housing prices have increased by 8% on average - and by as much as 18% in London, where housing prices are now higher than before the crisis. And private rents have followed the same upward curve. So, how do these two facts, "low" inflation and sky-rocketing housing prices and rents, square up?

The answer is quite simple: to get a low inflation, just leave fast rising prices out of the inflation index! This is precisely what the government does, by using the so-called "Consumer Price Index" (or CPI) as its only measure of inflation. The point is that the calculation of this CPI does not take housing costs into account.

By contrast, the only price index

that includes housing costs - RPI (Retail Price Index) - which used to be, not so long ago, the main official measure of inflation, stands at 2.7%. But this government has quietly decided to sweep RPI under the carpet! Massaging inflation figures is an old trick in the politicians' hat.

### • Poverty kills younger

The Office For National Statistics recently published a study comparing the "healthy life expectancy" (HLE) of people living in areas where social deprivation is high and the HLE of people in areas where people are well-off. As one might expect, the poor have shorter lives. But this difference, based on figures collected between 2009 and 2011, is much larger than previously, and it is growing. In the 10% poorest localities, the HLE of men is on average as much

as 18.4 years less and for women 19 years less, than men and women living in the 10% richest localities! More specifically, people in affluent East Dorset can expect to live 8.9 years longer on average than in derelict Blackpool, but in London, the difference in life expectancy between the most affluent wards and the most deprived is now nearly 25 years!

Why such a huge gap? It's obvious. Unemployment and underemployment, homelessness, unsafe jobs and night shifts, pension poverty, the high cost of healthy food, cramped living conditions, etc. Yes, poverty and deprivation kill, while the wealthy build up vast fortunes out of the exploitation of workers' labour and live always longer to enjoy their luxurious lives. Something has to change!

## 30 years ago - The miners' strike, betrayed by union leaders

In response to the announcement of yet another round of job cuts, on 6 March 1984, miners walked out in a number of coal mines without waiting for a call from their union, the NUM. They organised flying pickets and the strike spread like wildfire. Within a week, 80% of the 180,000 miners were on strike.

Since 1983 and Thatcher's return into office riding the jingoistic wave of the Falklands war, a wholesale offensive of the capitalist class had been underway, with massive job cuts in the public sector. This was an open class war against the working class as a whole.

To fight this war, the miners had their "forces" spread across the whole country and their credit was high among large numbers of workers who followed the strike daily, as if it was their own. But their best weapon was the explosive character of their movement. It was precisely this character that the government feared most - so much so, that it chose to temporarily shelve planned public sector job cuts.

It was, therefore, vital that the strike should retain its momentum - by spreading further, or at least

threatening to spread further, causing the capitalists to fear for their profits. But this would have required a policy designed to help the miners to convince other sections of workers to join their fight back, on the basis of common demands.

There were plenty of opportunities to do just that - among them, the June 1984 railway strike, the council workers' strikes which took place in many big cities like Liverpool and, above all, the two dockers' strikes in July and August 1984. But neither the NUM nor its leader, Arthur Scargill, ever sought to propose such a policy. Of course, this would have meant by-passing the TUC leaders, with their sectionalism and fear of rocking the boat, by directly addressing their members - something that Scargill always refused to do.

Instead of proposing to fight for demands aimed at getting the capitalist class as a whole to pay for the miners' job cuts, the only objective he offered to the miners was to cling on desperately to their pits and their unenviable living conditions. The NUM's motto became "stop coal", "defend British coal", "coal not dole" and, above all, stop the "scabs". As a

result, for months, the most militant strikers were stuck outside their own pits in an on-going, but totally pointless standoff against a massive police mobilisation.

Finally, on 3rd March 1985, after nearly a year on strike, a special NUM delegate conference voted to return to work without having made any gains. 110,000 miners had held out until the end and thousands had taken other jobs rather than scab on their comrades. Not only had the NUM and TUC leaders totally wasted the miners' militancy and determination, but they had deprived the entire working class of an opportunity to respond in kind to the capitalist offensive.

Today, the real question for the working class is: how far will it allow the capitalist class to get away with its attacks? At some point, workers will have to take to the offensive to start regaining the ground lost. When this happens - and the sooner it does, the better - they'll have to use the experience of the striking miners by spreading the fight back and organising it themselves, across all sections of workers, without allowing union leaders to tie their hands.

### • **Wages: catch-up needed!**

Now that the economy is growing (!), apparently wages are starting to catch up too! We're told that full time workers on permanent contracts saw wages rise, except in 2011... But for the rest of the workforce, wages have fallen by as much as 12% up to 2013. Add 2.7% for today's RPI and it means bosses must offer a 14.7% pay rise!

But, say the pundits, wages in "key industries" (manufacturing, retail, hospitality and construction), aren't expected to recover until 2025, since they're £2,000 less, on average, than 4 years ago! No wonder, since this is where zero-hour contracts are most common - which apparently affect between 1m and 3m workers!

The government's own figures show that under the ConDems, wages fell on average, by £1,600 a year. No surprise then, that today, 20% of the population (13m) lives in poverty - even though 7m of those under the poverty line are actually in work!!

### • **NHS: unhealthy work**

NHS staff are among those whose fall in real wages has left them with an 8-12% pay cut since 2010. Never mind though. They're being told that they'll have a real pay cut yet again this year - in the form of a 1% pay rise! This "increase", however, applies only to those on less than £21,000. Higher pay bands will not even have the rise consolidated into their pay, receiving it as a cash bonus - and only if they agree to certain changes in terms and conditions, like performance related pay, will they get the 1% added to hourly rates.

The main union representing NHS workers, Unison, is "consulting" members, and talking about "bullying by ministers", but given Unison's record it doesn't look as if it's likely to lead any fight back on this issue. Health workers are so fed up with poor pay - but even worse, long hours, amounting to unpaid overtime, thanks to under-staffing, that they may well lead the way to the picket lines themselves!

### • **Lesson needed for the ConDems**

Teachers are in a long-running dispute over pay, pensions and conditions, and NUT members in England and Wales took more strike action on 26th March.

Real pay has fallen 15% over the last four years, and is continuing to fall behind inflation, with pay rises capped at 1%. Besides, the government wants to introduce performance-related pay - a well-known trick for curbing pay increases. Teachers can also expect to receive a smaller pension, despite paying more for it, and they will have to work until 68 to receive a full pension. With an average working week approaching 60 hours, most teachers cannot contemplate being in the classroom until that age.

These issues could be the focus for a common fight back across the public sector. But that's not what union leaders have in mind. On March 26th, NASUWT, the other big teachers' union, refused to join the strike, for instance. Well this just means that if workers, in the public just as in the private sector, want to regain some of the ground lost, they'll have to do it despite, and possibly against, the spinelessness of their union leaders.

## The untold story

We publish here the second (and last) part of our series on the myths about WWI peddled today, on the occasion of its centenary. As the first part showed, this war wasn't about "democracy", but about greed. It allowed the richest capitalist classes to increase their looting of the planet's resources at each other's expense. The 17m who died, paid for these rivalries with their blood. Nor was the war effort riding a wave of "patriotism". In Britain, in fact, conscription was introduced in 1916 because of a shortage of volunteers. There were many episodes of fraternisation and mutinies in the armies of both sides, while workers started to raise their heads again, as early as 1915, by resuming the class struggle at home, against the opposition of their trade-union leaders, who supported the war, and in defiance against the capitalists' "national interest". And too right they were, to do so!

### The working class disarmed by its leaders

Since the 1910 socialist conference, in Basle, the European socialist and trade-union movement - which included the British Labour and union leaders - was supposedly committed "in case war should break out... to utilize the economic and political crisis created by the war to arouse the people and thereby to hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule". But when it came to the crunch, the participants of the Basle conference closed ranks almost to a man, behind

their capitalist classes.

On 24th August 1914, British trade-union leaders resolved "that an immediate effort be made to terminate all existing [industrial] disputes". Arthur Henderson, a former leader of the Iron Founders' Union, was appointed the first Labour minister in British history and was brought into the war cabinet in 1916.

Throughout the war, the Labour and union machineries acted as auxiliaries of the state, trying to prevent industrial

action and enjoining workers to enlist. Without their betrayal, the government might have found it difficult to push workers onto the killing fields on such a scale, while workers' passive resistance could have been turned into militant opposition - which might have brought the war to an early end, who knows? In any case, the Labour and trade-union leaders' support for British capital disarmed the working class in the face of war, and yes, they thus also had blood on their hands.

### Class war during and against the war

Under the pretext of the war effort, the bosses introduced long working hours and "dilution" - i.e. getting non-skilled workers to do skilled jobs on non-skilled wages. But workers didn't take this lying down and unofficial industrial strikes multiplied.

In February 1915, 10,000 engineers went on strike in war factories on the Clyde. Faced with their union's opposition, shop stewards formed an unofficial

leadership - later known as the Clydeside Workers' Committee (CWC) - and the strike won a partial victory. Following this, the government and all the main unions, except that of the miners, agreed on a form of industrial conscription which was enshrined in the 1915 Munitions Act: strikes were banned in "vital" industries, "leaving certificates" would tie workers to their jobs, overtime would be paid at flat rate and night and

Sunday work would be compulsory. In return, the government promised a minimum wage in the war industries, that "diluted" work would be paid at skilled rates and that no undue profits would be made out of these concessions. But this never happened and workers constantly had to resist the bosses' profiteering.

In July 1915, the miners struck in South Wales. In less than a week, the 200,000 strikers won their demands. Thereafter, the Clyde once more became the centre of workers' resistance, with on-going strikes against the victimisation of activists and against dilution. They were led by the CWC, which comprised 250-300 delegates directly elected by workers for a maximum of 6 months, outside the unions' official structures. Similar committees were formed in Sheffield, the Midlands, Barrow, Tyneside, London, etc.. Some committees even had their own papers - like "The Worker" in Glasgow and "Solidarity" in London.

In 1916, these committees led the opposition to conscription. For instance, in November 1916, in Sheffield, 12,000 engineers struck work after a fitter was conscripted - forcing the government to back down. But the peak of the industrial unrest was reached in 1917, in response to the Russian revolution. Two and a half million days were "lost" during that year, with the largest movement taking place in May, involving 200,000 engineering workers across the country, against compulsory conscription.

Whatever politicians may claim today, the working class was never conned by their patriotism. It never ceased to defend its class interests, against the capitalists and their war!

### • Soldiers, from reluctance to mutiny

In the trenches, there was little "fighting spirit". The winter of 1914 saw large-scale fraternisation. The so-called "1914 Xmas truce" involved up to 100,000 German, French and British soldiers. It spread like wildfire along the western front and, in some areas, went on well into February 1915. The furious threats from commanding officers proved useless. Only the systematic shelling and gassing of the no man's land between the lines managed to drown this fraternal spirit.

Mutinies against the war's appalling conditions started early, in January 1915, when the Indian 5th Light Infantry Regiment mutinied in Singapore. In 1916, Australian recruits mutinied in Casula Camp, near Sydney, against being sent to Europe. But the really big wave of mutinies started in 1917, in all the armies involved in the war, after the overthrow of the tsarist regime in Russia. During that year, there were stoppages and strikes in British engineering regiments, often led by ex-trade union activists. By September, British soldiers in the Etaples "rest camp", on France's western coast, staged a collective desertion,

before being rounded up after a few days. Next door, in Boulogne, unarmed labour units of colonial recruits mutinied repeatedly.

The armistice, on 11 November 1918, sparked off another, much wider wave of mutinies with soldiers demanding their repatriation and protesting against plans for an offensive against the workers' revolution in Russia. There were mutinies in eight Australian battalions which had to be dissolved, among Canadian troops stationed in North Wales and among the eight British West Indian Regiments, based in Taranto, in Italy. By 1919, protests, riots and mutinies spread to British demob centres and navy bases, in France and Britain.

According to official figures (a vast understatement, which doesn't take into account colonial troops), 2,600 death sentences were passed during the war, of which 306 were actually carried out, while the others were commuted to varying terms of penal servitude. But don't expect the memory of those who risked their lives to oppose this capitalist butchery, to be even mentioned in this year's ceremonies.

**BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)****• No fight on offer**

At the end of March, Unite officials at BMW's Mini assembly plant suddenly revealed a 2-year pay offer. At 3.7% this year and RPI inflation plus 0.3% for 2014, it was sold as above inflation and above the local average. The previous deal expired on 1 January but, since the autumn, BMW had been refusing to discuss a deal "with no strings". However, the offer did include strings: a tightening of existing rules on leave to maintain 85% cover in all teams - as opposed to 75% beforehand, meaning more leave requests can be refused.

As far as the offer on pay was concerned, BMW's luxury cars are selling

well in the crisis and BMW's 2013 profits broke previous records, at £6.64bn. Nevertheless, the derisory 3.7% offer was recommended by Unite officials as a reward for workers' "hard work and flexibility"! And, the next week, in an in-plant ballot, 77% of the 1,700 permanent workers voted for the offer, with only 365 against. Hundreds more agency workers, who get the same deal, did not get a vote on it, though!

This time only a minority stuck by the old principle of never accepting the bosses' first offer. After years of poor Mini pay offers being first rejected and then put back to the workforce with



very minor changes, it was clear that the officials had no intention of organising the fight that would be needed for wages to catch up. That the majority saw no point in expecting better from these officials, given their record, is not the endorsement they claim, but rather, an indictment!

**• The BMW context**

How typical of BMW to pretend that the local job market, skewed towards low pay as it is, is somehow more relevant to our pay award than the billions it continues to put away thanks to our work. Last year group profits were a record £6.64bn. 8 board members shared £28m; even that was crumbs beside the £622m BMW added to the Quandt family fortune (£22.5bn at the last count). And we're supposed to be satisfied with something that won't even pay the bills? [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 24/03/14]

**• How much?**

The 0.2% Team bonus supplement offered, is a good example of the smoke and mirrors of percentage increases. The way living costs keep climbing makes a mockery of the official inflation figures and demands a response expressed in hard cash. That way the lowest-paid, who need it most, get the biggest percentage increase and differentials are reduced. Whereas, every percentage rise agreed before meant that management's bigger salaries jumped further ahead than ours. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 24/03/14]

**• Our money back now!**

Gi have still not paid agency workers their full holiday pay entitlement stretching back several years even though they were taken to an Employment Tribunal by one worker last year and lost.

One calculation indicates that Gi have nicked £1.25m of our money - probably several hundred pounds for each of us. Hands up those of us who think it's time for Gi to pay up?

Then what are we waiting for? [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 24/03/14]

**Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)****• Visteon pensioners ok?**

Ford just agreed a settlement for (only?) 1,200 Visteon pensioners. The government is claiming it's all thanks to the parliamentary committee - but there wouldn't have been one if not for the tireless fight of the pensioners themselves. Ford has argued for the past 5 years that it wasn't liable, after its parts-maker, Visteon closed down, claiming bankruptcy, in 2009. (Ford had "spun" it off in 2000). We're told that "details of the settlement are confidential and a private matter for those directly involved"... and still to be "signed off". No surprise it's a secret. But what about the other 2,300 sacked Visteon workers? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 3/4/14]

**• No sell-out, no sell-off**

So MP&L (in-house plant line-supply, driving and logistics) has now officially been given its death sentence. It is to be outsourced. Sure, we knew this was on Ford's agenda. But it was never on our agenda. Does anyone remember how even the convenor said in 2004 that it would only happen over his dead

body? (Should he now be checked for vital signs?) And when a steward accused him of selling out MP&L, he accused him, in turn, of being a liar and suspended him from the shop stewards' committee?! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 3/4/14]

**• A fait accompli**

But the 90 or so MP&L mates have now all had meetings, co-presented (!) by the manager and the stewards, to tell us it was already "agreed" by the Joint Works Committee - as part of the new Panther Engine Phase 2 so-called "efficiencies" - that the remainder of this already cut-up department will be outsourced by 25 May 2015 - maybe even before. And we're told it's union officials who suggested these (and other) "efficiencies"!! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 3/4/14]

**• All part of the act...**

Were we given a say over this? Of course not! Should we have a say of it? Of course yes! And not just MP&L, but everybody. Because we're just not prepared to swallow this B-S "Beauty Contest" - which says if we don't accept to have our



Terms&Conditions cut to shreds, and lose what few semi-skilled off-line jobs still exist, then the sky will fall in, Dagenham will "lose" the Panther phase 2, 3, etc... We know it's all just part of their pantomime! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 3/4/14]

**• Collective fightback!**

It's not just MP&L! The Truckfleet has also been told to make a whole new raft of efficiencies in order for Dagenham to be awarded Panther 2, (when we already see new contract drivers here on different, lesser, conditions). Plus other small departments like - electricians, cutters and grinders etc., are targeted for outsourcing. Just like before, Ford divides us to try to pick us off area by area, one by one. They can't and won't, if we stand together. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 3/4/14]

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)****• Royal Mail's job cuts**

Royal Mail announced its first job cuts since its privatisation in October last year. But it was careful: it said there'd be 1,600 *managerial* redundancies, mainly from non-operational positions... And that 300 "new or expanded" jobs would be created - so "only" 1,300 would have to leave. Nevertheless, so far, the plan RM has presented to the managers' union (CMA, part of Unite) for its new management structures

is unacceptable to the union reps - even if the union full-timers are still busy negotiating with RM bosses.

The CMA's bottom line is drawn pretty low down: that redundancies shouldn't be compulsory and should be well-compensated. Whether the strike ballot which they've threatened goes ahead, depends on this. Managers obviously aren't popular among postal workers, given that they've always had a remit to bully,

**• Yes, we need a public post!**

The main debate over Royal Mail has been its share price: how its doubling since the flotation - from £3.30, to a year-high of £6.18 (currently £5.52) - shows that the government grossly "undersold" it, to please their mates in the City. This has been a "big issue" for the public schoolboy debating club aka House of Commons. So Labour's Ed Miliband calls Cameron to task

- no doubt (as Cameron pointed out) because Labour would still have sold RM, but at a higher price, perhaps...? Or maybe not!?

Because of course, by the time the current Labour gang led by Ed stood - and lost - in the last election, they had realised that calling for privatisation publicly, as Blair and Brown had done, may not be



harass and use favouritism to divide and rule - without having learnt the jobs they're meant to manage, either! But no hard feelings, if they do decide to strike against the job cuts, we'll be delighted to join them on the picket line.

too popular amongst Labour's electorate. Anyway, the future of RM still hangs in the balance - given that its profitability now relies on screwing the workforce and competing in the market - and it is far too late for any of these protagonists to talk about a "public service" being lost, given that they never defended it, when they could have. But it's not too late for the rest of us...

**• No pay cuts**

We wonder if it's part of these latest job cuts that some of the acting managers (JV6.5s) have been put back in uniform and on the shopfloor?

May be a good thing that we don't have to bump into them at every step, but we don't agree that anyone should get a pay cut - not even these guys, and that's what this demotion means... [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 25/03/14]

**• Greedy**

There's a problem looming for Moya's pay apparently.

The Chairman, Brydon, wants her to get a "substantial" rise to prevent her from leaving! Vince Cable says she shouldn't get more than 3%...

But why does she need any rise at all when her total package is already £1.5m, including bonus and pension payments? So what if she leaves. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 25/03/14]

**• It's not enough**

The majority (98%) of Quadrant mates voted to accept the meagre 2.6% on pay. But turnout was just 51.6%. This below-inflation-rise (RPI=2.8%) was recommended by the CWU, so probably most felt it wasn't worth voting "no". Sure, CWU leaders aren't to blame for Quadrant's miserliness. But why do they boast that our mean wages are "above industry average", when all this means is that "industry average" is far too low. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 25/03/14]

**King's Cross railway station (London)****• Bob Crow: the real tribute**

The news that 52-year old Bob Crow, leader of the RMT, had died on 11th March, came as a shock to many RMT members. But immediately tributes poured in from the same transport bosses and politicians who'd only had insults for him while he was alive, and even from London Mayor, Boris Johnson, responsible for the plan to cut 900 ticket office jobs on the Underground and the cause of a recent one-day strike during which he taunted the RMT leader publicly.

Bob's tough talk certainly earned him

a reputation. But as Underground bosses found out, his bark was worse than his bite. Strike ballots were used as a bargaining tool rather than an obligatory prelude to actual strikes. This meant that jobs and conditions were ultimately negotiated away when they might have been fought for and won.

That said, it was the fact that Bob was seen as a fighter that accounts for his popularity among so many workers. Thousands lined the streets for his funeral. Proof if it was needed, of the desire



for a real challenge against the bosses on-going offensive, instead of the whim-pish compromises coming from union leaderships.

**• Reinstate our mates!**

In the past couple of weeks, two On Board catering workers have been sacked by East Coast for so-called "harassment". In one case, it's a manager who claims to have been harassed, by words allegedly said during a phone call, would you believe! If any trivial incident can be built up into an

excuse to get rid of someone, then we're all at risk. And management should feel our collective pressure to back down. We want them back, pronto! [Workers' Platform, King's Cross 24/03/14]

**• No more harassment**

In fact, this charge of "harassment" is a great catch-all for managers who want to

come up with an excuse to give someone the push. Another of our East Coast workmates is threatened with the sack over a cooked-up case. It's clear there is harassment going on - coming from the management. After all, they specialise in it. We have to put a stop to this before it goes any further. [Workers' Platform, King's Cross 24/03/14]

## France

**F**rench president François Hollande and his Socialist party experienced a resounding defeat in the local elections held at the end of March. Among the towns with a population of 9,000 or more, the ruling party lost 155 councils - 142 to the right-wing opposition with most of the rest taken over by the far-right "Front National". The following article is an extract from the editorial published by our French sister organisation just after the second round of these elections, in its weekly paper (*Lutte Ouvrière* n°2383, 4th April 2014).

(..) The local elections results express a deep rejection of Hollande's policies by the working class. Even in councils which have been held by left-wing parties for decades - like Nevers, Roubaix, not to mention Limoges, a Socialist party-led council since 1912 - many left-wing voters didn't turn up to vote, allowing the right-wing to win.

The Socialist party hoped that their voters would rally to them [in

## The Socialist party reaps what it's sown

the second round]. Alas! If there is something which is unmistakable, it is the level of abstention. At 38% - rising to 50 to 60% in working class districts - this level gives a measure of the socialist government's discredit and confirms the outcome of the first round of these elections.

In less than two years in office, the Socialist party government has disappointed and disgusted even its most loyal working class voters.

On top of the crisis and the bosses' attacks, this government added its own anti-working class policies. It compounded unemployment by using competitiveness as a means of blackmail, increasing labour flexibility, while encouraging and institutionalising the rolling back of employment rights. It aggravated the fall in wages and purchasing power with tax increases.

The right-wing claims victory. But it owes this victory to the massive rejection of the SP by working class voters who abstained in order not to give their support to the representatives

of a government which has been trampling over them, while right-wing voters turned up to vote.

As to the rise of the Front National in some working class districts and towns, it also reflects the disgust and feeling of betrayal generated by the left in government.

(..) This right-wing shift in the political scene expresses a step backward for the working class, which will have immediate consequences for those who live in towns which have been taken over by the Front National.

This shift will not be reversed through the ballot box, nor by clinging to the old reformist paraphernalia - even in a refurbished form - nor by remaining passive in front of these electoral forces.

The future of the working class will depend on its own mobilisation - aimed at reversing the balance of forces - in short, on its conscious involvement in the class struggle. □

## Iraq

**A**head of elections in Iraq scheduled for 30 April, a draft law attacking women's rights has been put before parliament by the reactionary Shiite religious right-wing. Women's status in Iraq is still probably the most "equal" in the Arab world,

based on a long-entrenched tradition dating back to secular reforms passed in 1959. Even the constitution agreed by the US/British-backed post-Saddam, Shia-dominated religious regime, has so far failed to eliminate this.

marital rape; ban marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims; prevent wives leaving the home without permission; remove a husband's obligation of financial support; give custody of children over 2 years to the father, etc. While a husband could divorce his wife for suffering from a skin condition, she would have virtually no right to divorce.

If the backward religious sects today have the possibility of imposing their will today, it is entirely due to the utter destruction of Iraqi society brought about by the US/British "war for oil" in 2003. So much for the "civilization" they have brought to Iraq, or indeed to anywhere in the Middle East. □

## An attack on women's rights



**Iraqi civil servants protest against new dress code at work**

But now women's rights are under attack. The so-called Jaafari law would lower the age of marriage to 9 years for girls; legalise polygamy and

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](mailto:contact@w-fight.org), or by postal mail at:

BM Workers' Fight - LONDON WC1N 3XX.