

WORKERS' fight



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

FROM EBOLA TO IRAQ, A CRIMINAL WORLD ORDER

In the second week of November, the MoD announced the first bombing by a British drone over Iraq - supposedly against "ISIS targets". But who knows how many civilians were caught under these bombs?

On the very same day, in Sierra Leone, where the British Navy has a high-profile rescue mission against the Ebola epidemic, 111 new cases of this lethal disease were diagnosed, the highest number in a single day since August. And this in just one of the countries hit by the epidemic so far.

There are striking similarities in these two events.

The western Frankensteins

In the Middle East, decades of western intervention have stoked up so much despair and frustration, that the whole region has become a time bomb. The rich countries could have used their economic resources to help the population. Instead, they shored up dictatorships which repressed these population on behalf of the western multinationals plundering the region's natural resources. When these dictatorships proved unable to contain the despair of their own peoples or not pliable enough, the rich countries used their military machine to crush any unrest and prop up even more reactionary forces.

In their blind and frantic profiteering, the western capitalist classes have turned into real-life Dr Frankensteins, creating, in Iraq, the likes of the Sunni ISIS militia but also a host of Shiite militias, which are just as much a threat to the population.

Africa's plague

Likewise with Ebola. Why did most - although not all - of the major epidemics of the past decades start in Africa? If not because Africa is the



Ebola-stricken slum in Liberia

world's poorest continent? And isn't this a bitter irony given that Africa is the cradle of mankind?

So what happened? First the decimation of Africa's population by European slave traders and then the plunder of its natural resources by European capital. And while, today, western governments pay lip service to celebrating the end of slavery, it never stopped in Africa. It just took a different form, with western companies exploiting its workers in rich mines and industrial plantations.

In Africa too, the rich countries shored up dictators. They were all the more vicious as the crumbs left to them by western companies were smaller and had no more concern for the populations than their western masters. Basic amenities - sanitation, health care, electricity and water, education - were not developed.

These are the conditions feeding the spread of epidemics, which could otherwise have been nipped in the bud.

Capitalism is the problem

Whether in the Middle East or in Africa, British capital bears a heavy responsibility - as the beneficiary of yesterday's largest colonial empire and, today, as one of the richest economic powers.

Cameron's claim to the high moral ground is just cynical - whether in dealing with the "evil" ISIS militia in Iraq or with the Ebola epidemic, with the Navy's very symbolic presence off Sierra Leone, which is so close to the hearts of Britain's diamond traders.

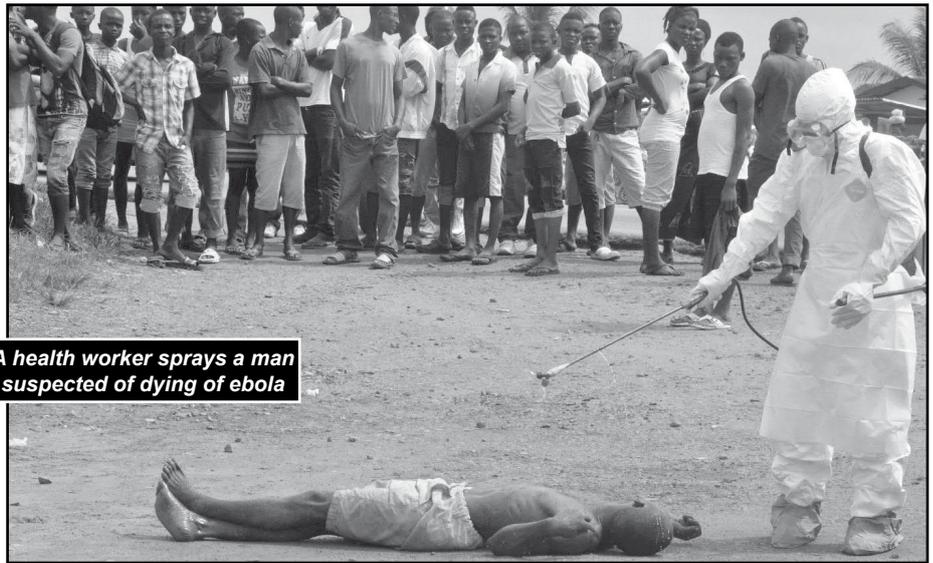
But beyond Cameron's hypocrisy, these events expose the criminal oppression that the capitalist system imposes on the world population, especially its poorest sections. That this system of oppression inevitably backfires - whether in the form of ISIS or an Ebola epidemic - is built into its criminal nature. This is why it is in the interest of mankind as a whole to get rid of capitalism. This, will be the task of the international working class. □

Ebola could have been stopped

The Ebola epidemic is still raging in West Africa at the time of writing, although the number of new infections isn't rising as fast as before. To date (8 November) the World Health Organisation (WHO) says the number of confirmed, probable and suspected Ebola cases stood at 13,042, with 4,818 deaths.

The scandal of this particular epidemic was the slow response by all authorities - but especially the WHO. Of course, stopping this highly contagious virus spreading is a challenge in any country - let alone a poor one. Because of the lack of basic items like running water, soap, disinfectants and basins - not to mention the absence of sophisticated equipment, needed for safely barrier-nursing and treating the sick, and the shortage of trained medical staff.

When the first cases were reported in West Africa's Guinea last December, nothing was done for 3 months. The WHO's position was that this was a virus confined to Central Africa and since it had not previously occurred in West Africa, it wasn't a threat. Then in March, as a result of further infectious cases in Guinea, "Doctors Without Borders" (MSF in French) warned of "an epidemic of a magnitude never before seen in terms of the distribution of cases in the country". One day later,



A health worker sprays a man suspected of dying of ebola

the WHO spokesperson suggested that MSF was just scaremongering and stuck to this position for another 3 months, until July. By that time, the epidemic was already out of control because it was spreading - and this was unprecedented - to urban areas, in the neighbouring countries of Sierra Leone and Liberia.

One reason that the WHO may have been stuck in this 6-month state of inertia is simple: its own financial cutbacks. It finally declared Ebola to be a health emergency in August. In the meantime, other agencies had been motivated

and mobilised to try to step in and help. And while it is unlikely that the doomsday scenario that some at the WHO predict - of hundreds of thousands of infected and dying (they are now bending the stick the other way) - will occur, this epidemic will still have caused thousands of needless deaths. Because it could have been contained from the outset, with outside help of course, but also if the populations had access to simple hygiene measures, basic medical facilities and unbiased information and health education from people they could trust... □

• NHS going one way: backwards

The NHS review by former Blair adviser, Simon Stevens, is meant, above all, to provide a blueprint for finding the £30bn shortfall to fund the NHS over the next 5 years - via yet more cuts and efficiencies...

The difference, we are told, between this and other past reviews is that it is "politically neutral". As if that were possible! And the joke is, that its main recommendations - put forward as "new models of care" - aren't new at all. For instance, its "Multispeciality Community Providers" meant to eventually replace GP practices, are just a revamp of the

"independent treatment centres" (or ISTCs) proposed in Lord Darzi's Blair-commissioned review in 2003/4. ISTCs were meant to bring together GPs, nurses, physios, specialist and diagnostic services - to save both time and money and allow hospitals to be cut some more... But not many of them saw the light of day, because of lack of funds.

In fact the ISTC idea - if correctly resourced - would be an improvement on today's GP commissioning, which is increasingly unable to cope with everything GPs are meant to do (literally, everything!). But only if it was fully in the

public sector. And that's not Stevens' idea. Not only are his "Multispeciality Community Providers" likely to be contracted out (the only way they can "save money", they say) but more A&E departments and whole hospitals are likely to close to make the efficiencies. Oh, and by the way, Stevens is also an advocate of DIY medicine under the guise of prevention. But again, this can only be any good if all of the support services are in place - including those to educate all of us, because reading the 39 pages of Stevens' plan won't help.

• Capitalism, a permanent threat

On October 20th, a computerised system known as the Clearing House Automated Payment system (or Chaps) went AWOL between 6am and 3.30pm, when its technical problems were apparently fixed and it was able to restart.

So what? Surely it's not the only IT system that breaks down? Well no,

except that this one takes care of all large transfers of funds in pounds between banks. And the sums it handles are bewildering: an average of £1.385 trillion every five days, equivalent to Britain's entire annual GDP!

The problem here is not technology, it is the fact that under this capitalist system, any mechanical failure can be

amplified out of all proportion by speculative panic. In this case, the value of the pound could have fallen drastically, causing unforeseeable damage to the world monetary and financial system. It didn't happen this time, but there's always the risk! This world will be a safer place once capitalism is ended, once and for all!

WWI Remembrance? They couldn't give a damn!

The official "show business" around Remembrance Day this year is unprecedented. Of course, the pretext is the centenary of the "War to end all wars" which began on 4th August 1914. And every year, the 11th November - when the armistice was signed in 1918 - is meant to be a day to remember the 17 million slaughtered in this war. But it did not "end" war. It led to the even greater butchery of WW2, in which over 85 million were killed.

Of course, the dead should be remembered - if only as a reminder of the urgency to end a world order which has never stopped shedding the blood of the many for the interests of the few. The working class never had any stake in this order, nor had those who were killed or injured in its wars.

And of course, the wounded should be taken care of. But does the state take responsibility for this? No, it relies on charities for that and this is precisely what the poppy was always about - because the British state

was never prepared to pay for the victims of its own wars, let alone take the necessary funding out of the profits of the big companies which made a killing out of every war.

In London, the centenary "celebration" was crowned by the spectacle, "Blood swept lands and seas of red",

consisting of 888,246 ceramic poppies planted in the moat of the Tower of London, each representing one of the "British" dead WW1. But what about the 16 million "others" who died in WW1? And what if poppies representing all the victims of British bullets, shells and bombs, during the two world

wars and all the wars waged by the British Empire, had been added to this moat-full of poppies? How big would this sea of poppies be?

As to today's politicians who are shedding tears over those who died in Britain's past wars, haven't they just decided to embark on another one, in the Middle East - a war with no end in sight? The truth is that the British state, its capitalists and its politicians have centuries worth of blood on their hands. And no amount of red poppies can make up for that. Nor can these pretty flowers make us believe that they have even the slightest concern for the casualties of their wars, whoever and wherever they may be. They do not give a damn.



• The forgotten working-class heroes

Besides, there is something which is particularly disgusting about the way WW1 is portrayed today - as if there had been a public consensus for a "just" war. When in fact, a large section of the British working class - its best activists in the trade unions and in the Labour Party(!) resisted this war. They saw it clearly as a war for the bankers and

the bosses, against the interests of the populations and in particular, against the interests of the working class.

However, the Labour Party and TUC leaderships then perpetrated their first great betrayal - by joining the War Cabinet and supporting this bosses' war. In 1916, faced with the lack of enthusiasm to enrol in the army, the

government brought in conscription. So men were forced onto the killing fields - or they faced jail. And indeed many were incarcerated, not just for refusing to go to war, but also for their political activity aimed at fighting against the war mobilisation and its consequences. That is what is worth "remembering" and "honouring"!

Afghanistan

Last month, the last British troops began the process of evacuating camp Bastion, once Britain's largest air and army base in Afghanistan.

The story of this camp, at the heart of the south-eastern Helmand province, puts in a nutshell the war and occupation of Afghanistan. It was first set up in 2006 as a base for British forces which were allegedly meant to "protect the reconstruction effort" of the country, after western forces bombed its infrastructure into the ground. But almost immediately, British forces came under attack, targeted by a growing insurgency which spread across Helmand province and

After 14 years of occupation

many other parts of the country.

Over the following 8 years, camp Bastion developed into a sprawling compound, with a 22-mile perimeter and up to 10,000 troops. However, despite a series of massive operations conducted jointly with 20,000 US Marines, the British forces were unable to contain the insurgency. In the end, all they managed to achieve was to allow the corrupt, pro-western regime of President Hamid Karzai, which had no real authority outside the capital, to survive against the hatred of the Afghan population - thereby providing the insurgency with a continuous flow of new recruits.

Today, Afghanistan is not just a deeply scarred country, but a bloody mess. Terrorist attacks are daily occurrences and provinces considered "safe" not so long ago, like the central province of Uruzgan, north of Helmand, have fallen into the hands of local warlords and their militias.

A new president recently replaced Hamid Karzai, but one of his first measures was to renew a "security agreement" allowing the US to maintain a military presence for another decade. As to the British army, it will keep several hundred "advisers" in Kabul, on a "non-combat mission", says the MoD. The occupation goes on!

Their politics

Depending on which opinion poll one believes, Ukip could win anything between 25 and 128 seats in next year's general election! Which probably says something about the unreliability of these polls!

But Cameron knows better than to rely on opinion polls. The results of two October by-elections, Heywood and Clacton, are enough of a warning: they show that a lot of Tory voters may shift to Ukip, to vent their frustration after five years of coalition rule. And in a number of

• Osborne's fine and not-so-fine

Will Osborne pay or won't he? That is the question. Apparently the £1.7bn question in fact, over the surcharge owed by Britain to the EU, for services and investments which had been previously unaccounted for, over the past 12 years. And probably worth a lot more than what Osborne is being asked to pay! Indeed, Cameron's present political

• Overbidding Ukip

According to the latest opinion polls, Ukip has steadily gained ground against the main parties. While Labour is in the leading position, closely followed by the Tories, Ukip is not so far behind, with 13%. The Tories and Labour are seeing Ukip as an electoral threat, and rightly so.

This has prompted Cameron to revamp some of Ukip's reactionary ideas

• 'Swamped' with hypocrisy

Michael Fallon, the Tory defence secretary, admitted being "a bit careless" by stating that more controls were needed to prevent some towns becoming "swamped" by immigrants claiming benefits. But this was only a reference to his choice of word, the same used by Thatcher in 1978, before she became Prime Minister, but also former Labour minister David

• Uproot these big weeds

Two comments by Tory bigwigs made the headlines in October. First, Norman Tebbit, a former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under Thatcher and an ex-Chairman of the Conservative Party, declared in an interview that: "Landowners who wish to control ragwort face an impossible task... There would be

The vote market

Tory-held constituencies, this could allow Labour to slip in, by splitting the right-wing vote. So now the Tories are making all kinds of promises to win back their disgruntled voters.

They've announced £7bn worth of tax cuts over the next Parliament. But here's the snag: despite Cameron's claim that this will help people across the board, these cuts won't benefit the poorest households, which earn too little to pay taxes, anyway. However, these same

posturing in refusing to pay what is clearly owed, should probably be expected. He has a lot of anti-European mileage to run up in order to compete with his main right-wing political rivals, Ukip...

Yes, even if this loud protestation that the EU is lying about what Britain owes, is very "rich" coming from a government which has

and announce a new set of anti-immigrant measures. Among other things, he is planning to cap the number of national insurance numbers issued to low-skilled EU migrants. Labour is following suit. Ed Balls, shadow chancellor, says he is considering extending the qualification period for unemployment benefit beyond six months and stopping child benefit for those

Blunkett 12 years ago!

In fact, while Labour's Douglas Alexander condemned Fallon's language, he argued that the real problem was Cameron's failure to get "reform" in the EU, thus allowing more restrictions against immigration. As to Labour's ex-home secretary David Blunkett, he backed Fallon for recognising the "difficulties" of poor towns

little cost to bring that under control if Neets [not in employment, education or training] and low level criminals were required as part of their contribution to the society which finances them, or which they have abused ... to uproot this weed." Then came Tory Welfare Reform Minister David Freud - previously a welfare

adviser under Blair and Brown - who said that some disabled people are "not worth" the minimum wage and could be paid as little as £2/hr. Those like Tebbit and Freud blame the victims of poverty for their situation and advocate punishments as the remedy. If there's "uprooting" needed, we know where to start.

households will be expected to foot the bill, with yet another £3bn cut from annual welfare expenditure - a 2-year freeze of working-age benefits and a lower benefit cap. Only a small, better-off minority will benefit from Cameron's promise to raise the 40% tax threshold to £50,000: today, only 15% of taxpayers fall into the 40% tax bracket and only 10% earn £50,000 or more. Never mind though, Cameron still thinks he can buy votes with such a tax policy... and maybe he can. □

consistently cheated the EU. In fact the previous Labour government started it. Both governments under-reported Britain's Gross National Income, according to which its annual contribution to the fund is calculated. So Osborne is not due any discount. And don't look now, but he is paying up, with his tail between his legs...

migrant families who send it to their kids at home. Nigel Farage is right when he says that the political agenda of the main parties is set by Ukip, but that is only because both Labour and Tory have no problem playing with such reactionary ideas, as long as they get votes in the ballot box!

absorbing immigrants in the same way he had - as if these "difficulties" were not due to the lack of real jobs, the low wages and the on-going cuts in public services!

The politicians of the main parties may sometimes differ in form, but hardly ever in substance - they sing from the same anti-working class, anti-migrant hymnsheet.

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They'd rather let people drown!

The British government has refused to participate in EU search and rescue missions in the Mediterranean, with Tory Immigration Minister James Brokenshire making the outrageous remark that a greater risk of drowning would act as a deterrent for people trying reach Europe by crossing the Mediterranean on makeshift boats (3,000 of them drowned last year). Never mind that most often these people are seeking asylum from dictatorships (many Western-backed), repression, civil wars, or famine!

The British Navy has ships moored in its naval bases around the Mediterranean - in Cyprus, Malta and Gibraltar - which are doing nothing

all year round except the odd costly drills. It is utterly cynical - if not criminal - that when these ships could be



Boat people off the coasts of Italy

Their politics

of some real use for once, the government chooses to keep them idle and let people drown instead. □

• *Borders are unaffordable*

The British government - under both Labour and ConDems - has spent inordinate sums on policing Britain's borders. G4S, Capita, ATOS and Serco have got contracts worth £1.53bn. In August, an IT company dealing with

immigration had to be paid £224m of taxpayers' money after its contract was terminated before it had expired, because it wasn't delivering what it was meant to. And more recently, failed IT systems cost another £1bn.

After all this, we're told that it is immigration that is burdening the country's resources? But isn't it the checks on immigration that are the real financial burden?

• *The profits behind the xenophobia*

The present overbidding between all parties over the "cost" of foreign-born patients to the NHS is just aimed at whipping up prejudice. Even the figures produced by the NHS, which has every reason to exaggerate this alleged "burden", show that it is derisory - just under £2bn in 2012-13, or 1.8% of the NHS budget.

If the NHS is "overburdened" - and it is - it is not by migrant patients. In

2010 the Commons' Health Select Committee found that the administrative cost of running the NHS as a "market" consumed 14% of its budget - and this was even before the ConDems introduced new "reforms" which made this "market" even more pervasive. This is something that the ConDems don't care to mention. Nor do they mention the huge proportion of the NHS budget which makes up the

bulk of the profits of companies like the pharmaceutical giants or health equipment manufacturers - not to mention the many companies involved in Public Private Partnership to run hospitals. The parasitism of private profiteers comes at an enormous cost to the NHS budget. But such politicians would rather whip up xenophobia than expose this parasitism: after all, they're only there to do the bosses' bidding.

• *Farage and his George-Bush-isms*

It's getting to the point that one can believe anything of Nigel Farage. Now he wants to ban immigrants with TB or HIV from getting NHS treatment! He said, of course, he would prefer it, if they were

banned from entering the country in the first place. And it doesn't seem to occur to him that such a policy would mean spreading diseases! Well, never let him be accused of straining his brain... While

asserting that Ukip isn't anti-immigration, just anti-immigration of "low quality" people, he elaborated: a "quality person" is an engineer, for instance, who doesn't have HIV! Well, now we know...

• *Boom times for luxury*

Cameron may act as if the government and country were skint, but there is plenty of money somewhere. Superyacht UK, the trade association of British luxury boat builders, estimates that its members took nearly £500m in orders in 2013-14. That was 7% up on the previous year, and continues a long-term growth that has only slowed down, but not reversed, since the crisis. Meanwhile, over the past 5 years, Britain has been

Europe's leading market for new private jet aircraft, with 64 delivered since 2009, bringing the total to 376. Whatever these figures really mean, it is certainly not the fact that we are "all in it together"!

• *Beautiful (billion) game?*

Football seems unaffected by austerity. Ticket prices have risen more than 13% since 2011, nearly twice as fast as the cost of living, at a time when real wages are going down. The average price of the cheapest ticket across all four

leagues is now £21.49. Arsenal has the highest-price match tickets at £97. Its cheapest season ticket costs £1014, compared to Manchester City's £299 - which is bad enough! And yet ticket revenues account for less than a quarter of turnover. Half of premier league clubs' income comes from TV rights. So couldn't clubs afford to charge less for the sake of allowing more fans to enjoy the game? Of course they could, but their shareholders wouldn't enjoy it so much, would they?

Strikes ...

What is the balance sheet after the 18th October London march under the banner "Britain needs a pay rise"? In fact the turnout was probably not as large as the 80,000 announced and while the marchers may have been lively, the rally speeches were a bit like lead balloons. Union leaders made vain pleas to lame duck Labour - whose own leaders did not dare appear on the platform - to come up with some pro-working class policies. When all Miliband and Co are concerned with is to please the bosses enough to get into power again. And TUC leaders know this better than everyone else...

This march was, of course, meant to be the culmination of a week of action over pay by public sector workers, who have seen pay frozen for several years, meaning real pay cuts of up to

• Quiet! Sell-out in progress!

What's happening now in local government? It turns out that there was such a counter-reaction by the workforce against the strike cancellation, that the union leaders are now forced to admit that the bosses' proposal is far too little! Interestingly enough though, this is what they said: "The committee believes it is the best achievable outcome by negotiation - and that only

• NHS: 4-hour protests not enough either...

NHS workers whose action was just a "protest" rather than a strike - they stopped for 4 hours on the 13th and worked to rule for a few days, by just taking their breaks - are meant to be taking further action along the same lines. And while it shakes up the government a bit to see nurses - who are supposed to be "good boys and girls" - act defiantly, it is unlikely to shift its policies as a result of such a minor irritation.

One section which has even more reason to fight is radiographers - who lost job security as a consequence of the privatised out-sourcing of this specialist service. They never know

• Firefighters' fire still burning strong!

As for the firefighters, they're struggling on in their battle against drastic pension cuts! They have been forced to escalate the fight and took 4 days all-out action from 31st October to 4th November - and plan further strikes. Firefighters already contributed one of the highest proportions

So where's our pay rise?

14%. But the biggest battalion - local government workers - had their strike called off by the leadership, in order to "consult the membership" on a

sustained, all out strike action could achieve an improved pay offer"! Of course, "the union committee" believes that the workers would not want to, or dare to, strike "all-out" and for a long period. That's why they say this. So let us hope they are proved wrong.

The big issue for the leader of the civil service union, the PCS, was the necessary co-ordination of strikes

where they are working and are shifted around willy-nilly between departments and workplaces on a daily basis. But their pay has also been declining. Initially their action wasn't even co-ordinated with the 4-hour strike of other NHS workers on 13th October. They took action on the 20th and then worked to rule (took breaks!) from the 21st to 24th October. Unsurprisingly this has been to no avail.

The government is not budging on the NHS workers' modest demand - which is merely for an inflation-linked rise in 2015! So there is now to be "co-ordinated" action and this time it apparently does mean that it

of their salary towards their pensions (11%), but this was increased for the 3rd year running this April, to more than £4,000/year from a salary of around £29,000. They'll be expected to work until 60, when previously retirement was 50-55 years, despite the fact that the government's own report

new proposal, which apparently offers 2.2% on pay over two years, which is hardly different than offering 1% this year and could mean less. ☐

between different unions and sections - and this week in October was meant to be a "brilliant" example of it. Predictably however, that was exactly what it was not: as each union and section chose a different day of action! Now civil servants await news about their pay rise, but haven't heard a dicky bird since the 15th October!

will happen all on the same day - on 24th November. But again, just for 4 hours. And also co-ordinated, will be a "work to rule" (taking breaks...) for 6 days from Tuesday 25th November to Sunday 30 November, throughout the NHS.

Of course this is not militant, nor even probably very effective action. But the very fact it is happening at all in today's climate, where union leaders would rather "partner" the bosses and compromise - says a lot. What is more it is bringing it home, not only to first-time strikers, but to the public at large, that a fight back is both necessary and possible, across the board.

recognises that 66% will not meet the current fitness standard. Worse still, firefighters will only receive a full pension if they work for 40 years in the service! This battle is not over by a long shot. But like with local government workers - it needs sustained all-out action...

But what about the minimum wage? ... and wages

The TUC says that the minimum wage must be raised. Their own research shows that poverty pay has never been worse (5.2m workers don't earn enough to live on). But despite this, they refuse to put a figure on what the minimum wage should be. Of course the current £6.50 per hour is too little. But they

point to the £7 spoken about last year by the Low Pay Commission, which sets the minimum wage, and imply that maybe this would have been OK. Yet even the so-called "Living Wage" campaign, led by a few do-gooder bosses and people like Ed Miliband and Boris Johnson, the insufferable London Tory Mayor, has

just announced an increase to £9.15 per hour in London. It seems that the TUC is so afraid of upsetting the bosses in general, that when it's in front of them it keeps its mouth tightly. This leaves one wondering what on earth the TUC is for, if it cannot even recommend a decency threshold for our wages! □

• Tube workers: an opportunity wasted

On October 7th, the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union RMT had announced that another 48-hour strike would take place in the London Underground, against ticket office closures which threaten nearly 900 jobs.

The strike was meant to take place on 14-15 October, thereby coinciding with planned public sector workers' strikes. For once, this could have been an opportunity for Tube workers to join ranks with other sections of workers in the fight against the attacks faced by the working class as a whole: cuts in jobs, pay and pensions. After all, the workers' strength lies in their numbers!

Instead, this opportunity was squandered when the RMT "suspended" the strike, only 2 days after it was called, claiming that some "concessions" had been made. As it turned out, there was no new offer regarding the 900 job cuts. The only "concessions" made by London Underground were: a minuscule



reduction in job cuts plus some guarantees for staff with medical restrictions and... more "talks"! Hardly anything to write home about and definitely not a justification

for cancelling the strike - meaning that, to retain these 900 jobs, Tube workers cannot rely on these union leaders who only seem interested in "talking"!

• Police staff on strike?

After 2 years of pay freeze, police staff, including community support officers (PCSOs), 999 call-takers and dispatchers, fingerprint experts, criminal justice unit clerks, custody and detention officers, and a wide range of operational and organisational support roles. have been offered (like a lot of other public sector workers) a miserly 1% pay increase.

Since 2010, these workers have

had a pay freeze as well as 19% of their jobs cut, meaning 15,000 jobs have been lost - although some of these jobs have been replaced by free labour (by "volunteers")!

Yet there is talk of more cuts in conditions as well as reducing premiums for unsocial hours, apparently to be facilitated by ending national pay bargaining.

So yes, they are right to have

refused this offer - a big majority of 90.4% voted against. A strike ballot was meant to take place (announced 16 October) but so far no result has been announced. Obviously if these workers want to co-ordinate action with other public sector workers on strike at the end of November, they may well have to do it unofficially...

Stopping the bosses' free-for-all

Figures for October 2013-March 2014 show a 73% drop in the number of cases brought to employment tribunals, after charges of up to £1,200 were introduced. An analysis published by Citizens Advice in June-July 2014 suggested that a similar percentage of claims which would have had a reasonable chance of success were not getting to tribunal because of the fees. Some claimants have accepted

inadequate settlement offers from employers; others who should have been able to claim a fee waiver have missed the deadlines because of onerous form-filling, and withdrawn cases rather than pay the full fee.

No doubt this reduction was exactly what the government expected and hoped for, when it introduced the charges. Employment tribunals were only ever

a last resort for workers, and often not a very effective one. But charging workers hefty fees they can't afford, for the already minimal legal protection they're entitled to, allows even more employers to get away with murder. However, this may have an unintended consequence - by leaving workers with no option, but to use direct action to defend their rights!

Employment

Recently the ONS reported that the number of households in which there were no working adults fell by 1.4% over the past year. This was the biggest fall since records began, 18 years ago. Work and Pensions secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, took the opportunity to pat himself on the back: *"These record figures show that not only are we successfully helping people to escape worklessness and turn their lives around, but we are also giving hope to the next*

• **The rise of jobless jobs**

According to figures released in October, the year to last August saw yet another "record" fall in unemployment - by 538,000. So why is it that those looking for a job still can't find one?

Electronics specialist John McArthur found out. After his temporary contract ended with LAMH Recycle, a so-called local "social enterprise" in Motherwell, he

• **Literally 'sanctioning' people to death**

A growing number of people on benefits are losing them as a result of sanctions, often for ludicrous reasons like missing a jobcentre appointment because you were at a job interview!

Behind this is the pressure on Jobcentres to meet monthly targets for the number of claimants they "sanction". Thus, sanctions on Employment and Support Allowance went up 700% over the year up to March 2014! Over the same period, Job Seekers Allowance claimants were sanctioned 920,000 times! The worst affected are the disabled: in 2013, the government introduced a sanction system against "Personal Independence Payment" claimants,

• **Profits banking on job cuts**

Royal Bank of Scotland, which owns Natwest, is planning to cut 30,000 jobs in the next 3 to 5 years, i.e., one quarter of its 120,000 workforce! And this is on top of 40,000 job cuts since 2008! As soon as this announcement was made in February, its shares went up. RBS is still owned 80% by the government.

Lloyds (which owns Halifax and Bank of Scotland) has just confirmed 9,000 job losses and 200 branch closures. It will introduce "digital

"Record" employment level?

generation."

He didn't say anything about the quality of these jobs. According to the Resolution Foundation's 2014 report, the number of people earning less than the low pay threshold of £7.69, was 22% in 2013 and has risen by 250,000 people, or 0.8%, compared to 2012. Youth (16-30yrs) are the worst affected by this trend. As many as 39% of youth were on low pay in 2013.

The reality that the likes of found himself unemployed again. Eventually, his JobCentre "offered" him a 26-week Community Work Placement at... LAMH Recycle, the very same company which had pushed him onto the dole in the first place!

Except, that instead of being paid the minimum wage as before, he was now meant to be working for free for the said company! So

in order to cut the cost of this benefit by 20% by 2016.

Never mind the drastic situation of some sanctioned claimants! One recent case was that of a diabetic, unemployed ex-soldier who was found dead three weeks after his £71.70 weekly allowance was stopped. His electricity was cut off because he couldn't afford the bills, and the fridge, in which he kept his insulin, had stopped working.

A panel of MPs has now been formed to look into benefit sanctions. But this is unlikely to change anything. After all, were not these sanctions voted in by the very same MPs?

banking" without the possibility of talking face-to-face with a human being - already implemented in other banks. Here again, the government is responsible. It owns 25% of Lloyds after bailing it out during the banking crisis.

The government wants these banks to be as profitable as possible before being handed back fully to the private sector so their rich financial friends can benefit. As if it was not enough that the banks were bailed

Duncan Smith would like to hide, is that hundreds of thousands of real jobs that were lost during the first period of the crisis have been replaced by temporary, low-paid jobs. Such an increase does not resolve anything for the working class. It only helps to run the economy cheaply for the benefit of blood-sucking bosses, while allowing politicians to claim that they are not useless, after all! □

McArthur refused and lost his unemployment benefit for six months as a punishment. And, for the past 3 months, he has been manning a one-man picket outside LAMH with a placard "Say no to slave labour". The point, however, is that regardless of whether he took this "job" or not, he was no longer counted as jobless...



out at a huge cost to the working population (through drastic cuts in social benefits, health service, etc.), we now have to pay for the profits of the next lot of banking sharks with job cuts!

And after privatisation, the government will say, "What a good deal we have got"! Never mind that it will benefit only the non-working population, i.e., the shareholders...

Millionaire landlords' and the rest

Millionaire landlords, Fergus and Judith Wilson, are preparing their property portfolio of 1000 (just a few!) homes in Kent for a "trade sale". Using a legal social provision to prevent overcrowding, they've started trying to evict tenants with large families, but also low wage-earners

and those on zero-hours contracts! Wilson justifies the move by saying, "I do not make the rules, but I do play by them." In this case, though, the rules are ambiguous, even if obtaining a possession order on a family home is, in most cases, perfectly

• Mansion tax? Which mansion tax?



45 bedroom mansion in Knightsbridge

At Labour conference this September, Ed Miliband announced a mansion tax to bring in £1.2bn per year to "help fund the NHS" - and has come under flack ever since. The tax is payable

on all houses worth over £2m. Naturally it caused outrage among the Tories, but even more so, among some Labourites! Former fundraiser to Blair, Michael Levy, said, "I think [the mansion tax] is a policy that is totally inappropriate" and added "Do I believe that the party needs to be more close and friendly to business? Yes, I do."

All this noise didn't fall on deaf ears. Ed Balls, shadow chancellor, reassured home owners, with several "add-ons".

• Wealthy 1% squeezing the rest

According to a Credit Suisse global wealth report: despite these "challenging times", overall world wealth has increased to £16.1 trillion (or 16 thousand billions) - bringing it to £162.19 trillion in a year! Of course, if you don't feel any richer you might wonder where these extra trillions have gone. In fact, this "good news" concerns only a small fraction of the world population.

But what is more shocking? That the wealthiest 1% owns 48% of world wealth, i.e., almost half? That

half of the world population owns less than 1% of the global wealth? Or perhaps that 70 % of the world population are supposed to live on an income below £6,304.57 a year?

Thanks to the City, Britain is one of the most unequal of the G7 countries, and the only one in which inequality has grown throughout the whole period 2000-2014. Today the richest 10% control 54.1% of Britain's wealth... Time to squeeze them?

• Capitalist logic

Those fortunate enough to have up to £1m in their bank accounts have no longer any reason to fear another banking crash: whatever happens, the Bank of England will now guarantee all bank deposits up to that limit, instead of the previous £85,000 maximum.

So, now, in addition to being

able to rock the economy with their financial speculation, the wealthy will also be able to get a lot more of their money back, in case their gambling goes wrong. And guess who'll be expected to pay for this largesse? Those who have no savings, of course, through welfare and other social spending cuts!

Social

legal for landlords. And by playing with such rules, the Wilsons are predicted to make a net profit of £100m out of their sale. Yes, the property sharks will once more make a killing - by rendering how many more families homeless? ☐

Houses worth £2m to £5m would pay only £3,000 a year (£250/month). If property prices continue to soar, and there's no reason to think otherwise, the threshold will be increased. And for those who don't earn more than £42,000 a year, the charge will be deferred until the property changes hands.

Yes, as soon as Labour leaders proclaim pseudo-radical policies to attract voters, they immediately backtrack in utter panic at their own posturing!

Letter from Sussex

Having "turned around" failing schools in London, the Lavender Hill Mob, otherwise known as Lilac Skies, have turned their attentions to sleepy Sussex. The "failing school" they descended on in Hailsham, near Eastbourne had, by the efforts of its existing staff, already been on the mend and had already been taken out of "special measures". So, what does the End of Term report look like, for Lilac Skies?

1) Driven out existing senior and experienced staff. Brought in "special needs" staff on a short term basis only, despite the ongoing special needs of pupils... Attempts to recruit less costly newly-qualified staff from abroad so far failing...

2) Educational visits cancelled - funds ran out.

3) Imposed "one size fits all" procedures and made the bursar, the special needs coordinator and the caretaker part time, despite school having one of the most "deprived" catchments in the country.

4) Failed policy commitment to a "new language every term" as no staff to teach it...

A turnaround is needed, all right: turning around and giving a resounding "no" to unaccountable profiteering parasites in education!

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• Cameron visits Ford**

Ford's announcement of the second-phase investment (£190 million) in the new "Panther" engine was the occasion for a visit by David Cameron and Vince Cable to the plant on 20th October. Said Cameron: "I welcome Ford's commitment to Dagenham and the UK, which is a vote of confidence in our long-term economic plan to back business..." No doubt he also hoped it would be a pre-election boost for his party!

But Ford's "commitment" doesn't come cheap, at least not for the

government (and taxpayer!) who paid £8.9 million in subsidies, but not either, for Ford workers. There are two aspects to this. First, the "Panther Agreement", signed by union officials above workers' heads, falling for Ford's usual blackmail for any new project, which erodes working conditions and further degrades and outsources jobs. And second, the 300 new jobs "created" - only 1/3 as many as the number lost from the closure of Dagenham Stamping and Tooling and Southampton Transit last year - will be



temporary, on 23-month contracts and on much lower wages. Not something Cameron, Cable or the Ford bosses thought to mention.

So what was this ceremony all about? Just an opportunity for Ford and the government to congratulate each other their mutually beneficial deal...!

• No-viz

So Cable and Cameron's visit only covered the Panther part of the Dark Side. We didn't see them, despite their hi-viz jackets. Ford fenced off a "cordon sanitaire" washed down the area, painted, swept (the skips with the canteen rubbish plus rats and all, were cleared) and finally all the Romanian lads were taken out of the plant! Why was that? Are they "not good enough" to be seen by these political toffs? Or is it just that the company has something to hide? Because it sure has. A lot. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 30/10/14]

• They are petty...

There's one similarity between Ford and its favourite subcontractor, LineSide:

They're both as mean-minded - and money-minded of course! If we're late for Ford by 5 mins they cut our money by 15 mins and at LineSide, if we're late by 8 min, they cut our money by 16 mins.

At LineSide there's an additional penalty. We get called into the office even if we're one minute late. Well, next time they do that to any of our mates, we could stop the whole line for five minutes (or more?) and let their profit calculations go haywire! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 15/10/14]

• Safety: here we go again

Another day, another accident. Last week we got the report of our mate from Puma block line who got a metal "particule" in his eye. The QPS (?) and risk assessment hadn't taken into account that pneumatic tools would be "out of service"

and didn't include the use of a good old-fashioned hammer, which would, apparently, have needed safety glasses and a sleeve, says, Ford, now, after the event. Is our mate OK? They don't say. Nor do they say anything about hammer training... PS: "Joint Venture Inonu" - anyone know what that is? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 30/10/14]

• No Ford ambulance...

Shame. The Ford ambulance is still plugged in but looks abandoned. Why? (It's some time now that the London Ambulance is always called instead). We're told by Ford that there's no-one qualified to drive it! That's one of the lamest excuses for a cutback we ever heard in this place! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 30/10/14]

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Scape-gating**

It was waiting to happen. After EC had refused for months to put in the required £s to fix the faulty gates, they finally closed on a passenger, injuring him. But when he decided to take the company to court, EC turned round and asked us to sign reports saying gate staff deliberately shut the gates on him! We refused, naturally. We won't stand for this scape-goating! [Workers'Platform King's X 4/11/14]

• Too many chiefs

With the dodgy gates, we're having to do manual ticket checks. Even with the gates working, we're short of staff, so obviously we need more hands now. And since there's more managers than ever, and fewer of us, one might expect them to come help... Well no. Instead, while we're doing disaster management at the (non)gates, they're having tea in their offices and spying on us on CCTV! [Workers'Platform King's X 4/11/14]

• ISS crooks

It's really getting too much, hearing the same old song from ISS every day. The swipe card system is broken, or something else is - anything so they don't have to pay us in full! And when they pay us later, there's another scam to steal our money!

The latest crookery is an "advance tax" deducted by the Taxman: of course, not ISS's fault! So they don't pay us till the next week, when we should be getting our pay, plus back-pay, plus interest!

If they forgot the number 1 rule, we'll remind them: no pay, no work! [Workers'Platform King's X 4/11/14]

• Of mice and men

Don't the mice in the GN messroom have a good deal! While we spend 8 hours on our feet, with no heating (the overhead heaters don't work!), the mice have sofas, heating, drinking water - and who knows, maybe even the occasional snack when they're feeling



nibbly?

Maybe next time, they'll be coming down and bossing us around! [Workers'Platform King's X 4/11/14]

• More costly than you think

Did anyone see that little kiosk on the concourse, promoting the "Olympic village" in Stratford to commuters and staff? It said: "Athlete's village - it's closer than you think".

Yes, closer, at £395/wk for a 1-bedroom apartment... No surprise, next day they were packed up and gone. [Workers'Platform King's X 4/11/14]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• Royal Mail estate agent**

One of Royal Mail's most important assets is its land and buildings. Before the 2013 privatisation, it said it held freehold properties worth £787m and leasehold properties worth £318m, not including its Mount Pleasant, Nine Elms and Paddington sites, which it listed as "being surplus to requirements". These sites alone, however, were estimated to be worth £1.5bn, if not more!

The profitability of such assets was already demonstrated in 2011, when the

2.3 acres at Rathbone Place was sold to Great Portland Estates for £120m. Investor analysts predicted a £100m net profit for the developers. Then, in October this year, the privatised Royal Mail sold its former mail centre at Paddington, to Great Western Developments, with one acre worth £111m! This business is so profitable that Royal Mail Group has now put forward its own development scheme for the 700 flats to be built on a part of the Mount Pleasant mail centre site.

• Regulating the impossible

The French competition authority is investigating most of the parcel delivery companies operating in France, including FedEx, TNT express and GLS (General Logistic Systems, subsidiary of Royal Mail). The investigation was launched in 2010 over unlawful agreements between these companies, which had aimed at setting delivery prices and thus

breaching anti-trust laws over the previous six years. No doubt for the sake of its share price, Royal Mail "came clean" over its GLS liability and announced that it is setting aside £18m to cover legal costs and a possible fine.

But most of the tricks these companies use to build their profits are absolutely legal, or protected by the sacrosanct rule



Private investors can rejoice at such profitable real estate business, while postal workers, on the other hand, are asked to pay the high price of the resulting relocations, poor early retirement deals and yet more job cuts!

of business confidentiality, which allows them to hide their accounts from any regulator. In other words, the French competition authority's investigation will at best expose the tip of the iceberg. In fact, in RM's case, the £18m put aside for legal "issues" for GLS - a subsidiary with a turnover of over £1.5bn - is peanuts!

• We're not doves, Dave

Dave's written a letter to us on an interesting issue: our holiday pay. Apparently, it should be based on the average of the 12 weeks worked previous to taking A/L, BUT including OT and unsocial hours... and not just RM's petty flat rate! It's always cheering to hear RM owes us, but worrying when we read Dave's "we have now arranged a meeting with the company's senior management team to discuss the basis of our claim and try to reach a settlement." Let's make sure Dave knows what type of settlement WE want! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 5/11/14]

• Instant response is best!

We've heard about several unofficial walkouts in Portsmouth, Plymouth and Bridgewater DOs, against the sackings of individual workers: in Bridgewater for sickness, in Portsmouth for refusal to work over normal hours (and "threatening" the Dum!!) and in Plymouth, after a worker was threatened with discipline for returning late, with undelivered mail. In the latter case, 30 of her workmates downed pouches straightaway! Yes, this is the only effective way to defend ourselves! And it turns any "no-strike agreement" with RM bosses (as apparently exists now) on its head! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 5/11/14]

• Holding heads high

"We walked out with pride, supporting our workmate and walked back in holding our heads high." This was the answer of one of the Portsmouth workers (on RMC) in response to an accusation that the walkout was a "waste of time" and the union "a spent force". Which of course is rubbish.

When we show our solidarity in action, it changes the atmosphere at work completely. And tips the balance of forces in our favour. Which means everything!! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 5/11/14]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• They never learn**

Last year BMW already had problems with the "longer, wider, taller" Mini because it could not get through the "silhouette" in the paintshop. Designed to keep out the dust, the silhouette had to be entirely dismantled! Now they've repeated the mistake - this time with the larger 6-door model which scraped through a silhouette in BiW causing mayhem as it crunched its way along the line. Whatever you were told, that's the real reason why they had to shut down the plant last month. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 8/10/14]

• Accident hushed up

Two weeks ago there was a serious accident in ILC Building involving a

forklift truck which could have killed an R&H (logistics subcontractor) manager who was standing near pallets that had been stacked too high. A truck driving down the central aisle clipped the pallets causing them to topple onto him.

He had to be airlifted to the John Radcliffe Hospital because his legs had been crushed and one of his lungs punctured. Although there were brief local news reports at the time, there has been a news blackout since. Clearly BMW is determined that nothing should be allowed to dent next week's launch of the F55. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 21/10/14]

• Profits before safety

Not only have we been kept in the dark, but where the news has leaked out,



we've been encouraged to disregard it because "it was in Logistics" and "nothing to do with us".

Yet the evidence is all around us that large parts of the factory are also potential death traps - particularly since the launch of the more complex, mark 3 Mini. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 21/10/14]

Iraq

At the time of writing, Obama has just sent another 1,500 troops to Iraq, doubling the number there to 3,000 - none of them officially in a combat capacity, for now. But how long will that last? Meanwhile western bombings of the ISIS militia have been unable to prevent its advance. The only forces which have had any success in this respect so far, are the militias formed by Iraqi and Syrian Kurds.

In Iraq itself, another threat is

Sliding into bloody chaos

Top: the Shiite "Peace Brigades"
Bottom: the Sunni ISIS militia



raising its head - that of sectarian divisions. The Shiite militias which had more or less been absorbed into Baghdad's Shiite-dominated, pro-western regime, have now re-emerged on the streets, fully armed, thanks to their connections in high places. This recalls the days of the bloody, sectarian civil war under the western

occupation, when the population was caught between the rivalries of Sunni and Shiite militias, vying for their share of political power.

Already, this sectarianism is re-emerging. In the areas now controlled by the Shiite militias, their members are imposing their brutal rule, singling out those from a Sunni background.

The more this goes on, the more ISIS is likely to gain, if not the active support of the Sunni section of the population, at least its passive support, due to the fear these militias are generating.

Meanwhile, despite the atrocities committed by ISIS, the only achievement of the western bombings is to push even more fighters into the ranks of this brutal militia, by making it appear as the only force fighting the greed of the rich countries for the region's natural resources. This is why this new western intervention, which threatens another full-scale war across the Middle East, must be opposed and stopped - now! ☐

Class Struggle n°103

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- Scotland - fake choice between two reactionary nationalisms
- Middle East - the making of a catastrophe
- Middle East - the Kurds used as a pawn by the Western powers
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Irish Water: damned by protesters

On 1st of November, tens of thousands of people staged demonstrations across Ireland against the newly-introduced water charges; this was the second large mobilisation in a series of protests which have been held over the past months. A significant number of people are refusing to allow meters to be installed and very few of the required forms, which would allow Irish Water to collect its charges, are being returned.

Water has always been free in Ireland. The government has tried to bring in water charges many times in the past, but failed to do so, thanks to popular pressure. The EU-IMF bailout provided the government with a good pretext to set

up this semi-state company called "Irish Water", which is taking over all the water provision in the country.

Protestors rightly argue that they should not pay more for something that is already paid out of general taxation. The Irish TDs' only argument is that the government cannot afford the maintenance and pipe replacement required as a result of faulty pipelines which have not been replaced for years, leaking out as much as 40% of the supply! Well, then the right response would be to fix those pipelines, but of course, that would mean choosing between paying subsidies to the rich or providing services for the population, and on that, they are already decided! ☐

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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