

# WORKERS' fight



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

# ONLY OUR STRUGGLES CAN BRING ANY CHANGE

The past year has been a year of crisis in which the working class was confronted with relentless attacks from the capitalist class, while politicians indulged in in-fighting and posturing, leading to the Brexit vote.

2017 is likely to be rather worse than better. At some point, the Brexit process will be triggered, and no-one can predict what will be its impact, let alone its outcome.

Judging from what we've seen so far, this process won't be plain sailing. After all, it took only a rather vague speech by Theresa May, on January 8th, for the pound to plunge again, with the prospect of more price increases for workers.

## **The wealthy's Brexit bonanza**

Of course, prospects are different for the wealthy: they just have to shift their wealth into assets which benefit from the fall of the pound. This is why the index of the 100 largest companies has reached an all-time high. This meteoric rise merely reflects the scramble of "investors" to buy the shares of these 100 companies, which earn most of their income in dollars and euros - and whose profits are, therefore, boosted by the fall of the pound.

As to the growth that this fall is supposed to generate, it is an illusion. The sales of luxury yachts may have increased by 50%, while expensive stores like Harrods are making a killing and this month's London Fashion Show has a record number of visitors. But supermarkets and low-cost stores are cutting jobs or going to the wall, because their working-class customers are increasingly hard up!

If Brexit "means" anything so far, it is a bonanza for the wealthy and a tightening of the screw for the working class!



## **"Humane" politicking?**

But, Theresa May is still trying to put on a "humane" face, by posturing as a champion of mental health and social care. Except that she refuses to provide the necessary funding! Just as she refuses to disown her Health Minister, Jeremy Hunt, whose savage cost-cutting is threatening the NHS with total collapse. As if mental and social care could be separated from general healthcare!

In fact, this thin veil of benevolence is only designed to conceal the very same politicking that Cameron used. Just as he did, May is once again using immigration and the EU as scapegoats, in order to divert the discontent of the electorate away from her anti-working class policies.

Indeed, if prices are too high and wages too low, if homes are too expensive and scarce, neither migrant workers nor the EU are to blame: the cause is the parasitism of British capitalists who suck the blood out of society!

## **This society needs changing**

In all the rich countries, like in Britain, the capitalists used their crisis to attack the working class. Everywhere, demagogues tried to capitalise on the resulting frustration, by whipping up prejudices and hatred. This is what produced the anti-migrant frenzy of the Brexit campaign and the election of a racist like Trump in the US.

The same capitalists also bear a heavy responsibility for the wars which are raging in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa - and for forcing millions of refugees to flee for their lives.

This society is terminally sick, because of the parasitism of this tiny capitalist minority which owns everything and does anything to boost its profits. Freeing the planet from their parasitism is a vital necessity and a historical task that only the international working class can carry out - because it is this class which produces all the wealth and has no interest in preserving this criminal social order! ☐

**Brexit watch**

The FTSE 100 began 2017 by setting a new record: in the first week of January, it shot through the 7200 mark, adding hundreds of billions to the value of the 100 biggest companies. But is this really a sign that the Brexiteers' dream of an affluent Britain outside the EU has come true? Not really. In fact, 77% of the income of the FTSE 100 companies comes from abroad, mainly in dollars and euros. With the fall in the pound, their income in pounds has increased, together with their profits and dividends, causing a scramble for their shares. At the same time, however, the shares of companies operating mainly within Britain have dropped!

The City bosses have, therefore, some cause for celebration despite the

### • **Brexit inequalities**

British households' total wealth was cut by an estimated £1.2 trillion after the referendum, but of course, some households are more affected than others. The Resolution Foundation estimates that, over the coming 5 years, the rate of growth of real earnings will be halved by inflation for the vast majority of the population, while the

### • **"Clean Brexit", a new joke?**

"Change Britain", a group formed by former Vote Leave campaigners - from the Tory Michael Gove to Labour's Gisela Stuart - are now claiming that exiting the EU with a 'Clean Brexit' could save the country £450m a week. These are the same politicians who, before the referendum, had pledged an extra £350m for the NHS should Britain leave the EU - only to renege on their pledge immediately after!

### • **The NHS needs its EU workers**

There are other costs to Brexit which may not be immediately obvious: a significant proportion of NHS medical staff, including doctors, GPs and nurses, come from the EU. In some trusts, like the Royal Brompton and Harefield specialist heart and lung trust in London, the proportion of EU nurses is as high as 20%, more in some cases.

If these EU nurses and doctors lost their right to work in Britain, as the most extreme Brexiteers seem to wish, replacing them would be an impossible task. It takes years to train new medical staff. In short, the NHS would collapse.

So, Brexit or not, in this, as in every other respect, it is in the interests of the working class to defend the free movement of labour between Britain and the EU and the right for all EU workers to gain permanent resident status in Britain, if they wish to do so!

**The City's bonanza**

The FTSE 100 just after the referendum

post-referendum turmoil. Even if faced with a 'Hard Brexit', they'll find ways to make their billions: they could relocate or get the government compensate them

poorest sections will suffer even more as a result of the planned welfare cuts.

But all of this has no impact on the richest. Britain is already home to over 10,000 individuals who qualify as 'Ultra-High-Net-Worth' (UHNW) - meaning that they own assets worth at least £20m each. Altogether, they own around 38% of the

country's total wealth and, in 2016, Britain retained its number 3 rank in the world's UHNW league.

Clearly, Brexit hasn't made society fairer, as its proponents claimed (and continue to claim) that it would. It is just another one of those cynical lies that politicians are so adept at making.

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to the EU at any cost - and, like it or not, the government will have to pay for their access to the Single Market. As for saving on "burdensome regulations", it's not hard to see what this means - that workers should make themselves "more competitive" by agreeing to worse conditions, in terms of working hours or paid holidays, for instance! The working class has every reason to oppose such a "Change"!

### • **An illiterate future outside the EU?**

With the increasing school hours, class sizes and bureaucratic workload for state school teachers, the past year saw almost 50,000 teachers leaving the profession before retirement, a quarter of them within their first three years of teaching.

Predictably, given this situation, the government has failed to recruit the necessary numbers of teachers for the fifth year in a row, leaving pupils high and dry. The gap was partially plugged by recruiting trained teachers from the EU - 5,000 were recruited last year alone.

But now, the Tories' politicking is jeopardising even their presence, with Theresa May refusing to guarantee EU nationals their continued right to reside, after Brexit. So if "Brexit means Brexit", what will this mean for these teachers' 125,000 pupils (Britain's average class size is 25) - and for those taught by previous years' EU recruits? They could lose their teachers overnight and many more won't have teachers at all, if recruitment from the EU stopped altogether!

### **Another lean year on the High Street**

The Centre for Retail Research estimates that collapses of large and medium-sized retailers cut, or threatened to cut, 26,000 jobs in 2016. More than a third of these were the 11,000 jobs at BHS, followed by 1,100 at Staples (sold to an asset-stripper in November) and nearly 1,000 at Austin Reed. The figure was nearly four times the 6,845 jobs affected in 2015 and included an unusual number in autumn - when retailers are usually hanging on to see if they will do better at Christmas.

This 26,000 figure doesn't include hundreds of job cuts by the likes of Tesco and Marks & Spencer which have continued to trade, nor even businesses that have gone bust, but were taken over by new owners. So it includes the 2,000 working for "My Local" convenience stores, which went into administration in June, but not the 1,658 made redundant just before that date. The truth, in any case, is that even retailers that survived the worst of the recession are unlikely to survive into the future, thanks to their customers' chronic low wages - which force them to seek the lowest prices elsewhere.

## Casual work - a growth sector

More than 7m workers are now in casual employment - an increase of nearly 2m since 2006. Some 2m are now earning less than £8/hr in so-called self-employment which is likely to have been imposed on them. This is how the worst crisis in workers' living standards since WWII goes together with the highest ever recorded levels of employment!

There are also 750,000 more workers on zero-hours contracts than 10 years ago - especially in social care, where the proportion of workers on zero-hours has risen from one in 10 to one in 7 in just one year. Many mobile care workers are already often paid below the minimum wage because employers pre-time home visits at

### • **Work is no way out of poverty**

Out of the 20% of the population which is officially in poverty, just over half is now in working households, according to a report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The report emphasises spiralling housing bills, but just as clearly wages which don't come close to matching the cost of living. The study calculates that 1.1m more working people are in poverty than in 2010-11, when the recession - allegedly - started to end. Some "recovery"!

Moreover, cuts in Universal Credit are expected to cost a working family of four at

### • **Homelessness and rough sleeping - the evil twins of the housing crisis**

Housing campaign Shelter estimates that 255,000 people are homeless, 170,000 of them in London - but this does not include those sleeping on friends' sofas. The only homeless who can be counted are in hostels or temporary accommodation provided or paid for by local authorities and charities - including thousands crowded into squalid B&Bs. Even in super-rich Westminster 4% of people are homeless and over 3% in Kensington and Chelsea. Everywhere evictions for rent arrears are said to be at record levels and the main cause of homelessness.

Rough sleeping has risen sharply in big provincial centres, particularly Birmingham

### • **The irresistible rise of plastic money**

In October last year, net credit card debt reached an all-time high of £66.2bn. In fact, a new record has been set every single month since July 2015! Mark Carney, governor of the Bank of England, has warned of "the vulnerabilities" due to "high and rising UK household indebtedness". He pointed to the fact that many households are now forced to use credit cards to pay their bills, having exhausted whatever savings they might have.

But what Carney failed to say, is that this is just a repetition of the situation which prevailed in the run-up to the 2008



15 minutes and do not pay more for those which take longer, while paying nothing for time travelling between appointments.

It's not that society can't afford decent wages. The truth is: we can't afford the bosses' profiteering! ☐

least £1,000 a year. Overall, welfare cuts now put Britain's social spending behind that of 14 other EU countries as a proportion of national income, including Greece. Britain was the only EU country to cut this between 2011 and 2014. The area where Britain's spending is proportionally highest in the EU - 7.7% of all welfare spending - is on subsidies to housing. But this is only due to the growing amounts of housing benefit going to private landlords, due to extortionate rents - and not to funding the low-cost social housing that's desperately needed!

and Manchester. Three cities taking part in an annual count of rough sleepers in November, reported a doubling of numbers compared to 2015. In Birmingham, hostel workers squarely blame austerity cuts: a council programme that had almost ended rough sleeping in the city centre has been cut, while benefit sanctions, the bedroom tax and the benefits cap have all driven people on to the streets.

Ultimately, however, it is the abandonment of social housing as a priority by successive governments which is depriving hundreds of thousands of a roof!

crash: net credit card debt reached a record £58.2bn in January 2006, at a time when households were increasingly using credit cards to pay their bills, while consumption was stagnating - which is exactly what's happening today!

Does this mean we're heading towards another crash? Only the future will tell. But, in the meantime, this certainly shows that the income of the working class still hasn't recovered from the crisis - and that the fight for decent wages for all should be top of the working class agenda!

## Social

### The Scrooge column

• Fortnum & Mason, the queen's grocer shop is showing a royal contempt for its workers. It thinks that they can live on tips and fresh air. Its 250 employees have been "offered" a share of the voluntary tips and service charges paid by customers on their bills. But there's a catch: although it is not clear what this share will actually amount to, workers are expected to take an 11% cut in basic pay in return, which would set them back to the £7.20/hr national "living" wage. The aim of the exercise is quite simply to allow Fortnum & Mason to reduce its National Insurance Contributions bill. This, from a company which charges up to £60 per person for an afternoon tea - more than a day's wage for its workers!

• Fortnum & Mason is not the only Scrooge employer to fiddle with service charges at workers' expense in this lucrative business. Harrods, the luxury retailer, also does so, in its 16 cafes and restaurants. And so did TV chef and former Masterchef judge, Michel Roux Junior, at his "Gavroche" restaurants, until a series of newspapers articles revealed that, in addition, his chefs were made to work up to 68 hours a week, while earning the equivalent of £5.50 an hour - far less than the legal minimum.

• Since then, feeling that he had to be seen to do something, Roux upgraded his chefs' wages and offered them some compensation. About time too: by calling his restaurants "Gavroche", Roux stole the name of a well-known character in French literature - that of a 12-year old streetwise kid who died defending a barricade in Paris during the 1832 insurrection for "La Sociale" (the social Republic). Isn't it ironical that with such a name, Roux' restaurant can propose meals costing £212 per head, while subjecting its workers to such exploitation?

**NHS**

The National Audit Office published its fifth report on NHS finances: it shows that in 2015-2016, 65% of NHS trusts were in deficit - up from 44% in the previous year - and that their overall deficit nearly trebled, to £2.45bn!

But having produced these figures, it doesn't come to the NAO bureaucrats' minds that they've only proved that the NHS is too underfunded to do its job. Instead, their only answer is to propose another £14.9bn worth of cuts - sorry, "savings" as they say! - By 2020-2021! Of course, these "savings" only conceal yet more ward and hospital closures and staff cuts - in addition to the capping of wages and renegotiation of contracts planned by the government to "save" £6.7bn! And all

### • **More hospital beds to go...**

It's ironical: now we're told that the NHS is better centralised than cut into bits, as it was under the privatisation regime of every single "reforming" government since Thatcher! This turnaround is NHS CEO, Simon Steven's "Five Year Forward View" - to allow the NHS to save £22bn by 2020. Yup! When it is already in such an unprecedented crisis of under-funding that the Red Cross labels its plight a "humanitarian crisis"!

Steven calls this a Sustainability and

**Railways**

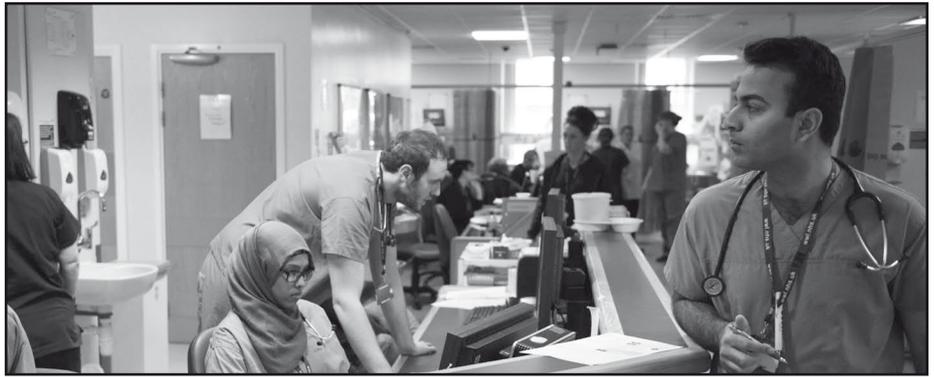
Rising house prices and rents are pushing people so far away from work that, according to the TUC, 3.7 million workers spent more than 2 hours daily, commuting to and from work in 2015. By increasing their working day, this adds over 10 unpaid(!) hours to a 5-day working week! So, over a 40-year working life, each worker gives

### • **Unfair fares**

Despite the government-announced rail fare increases of 1.9%, commuters have been hit by an average increase of 2.3%, thanks to much higher increases introduced by some companies like Virgin Trains East Coast - where the average increase is 4.6% and up to 7% for some off-peak singles! In fact, the government cap is rigged, in so far as it applies only to "regulated" fares

### • **Grayling's fatal attraction to profits**

Transport secretary Chris Grayling is launching a new Oxford-Cambridge rail line in which train and track will be owned by a single entity, instead of the current model in which the publicly-owned Network Rail operates track and private companies operate the trains. He said, "our railway is much better run by one joined-up team of people." Sure, that's what British Rail was! But of course, Grayling isn't advocating a

**Criminal underfunding**

this when the service is already in crisis: in October, for instance, 10% of patients had to wait more than 18 weeks for routine treatments!

In and of itself, the NAO report contains

Transformation Plan (STP!). But it sustains and transforms nothing. Further cuts will close yet more whole hospitals and units (what will be left?) to concentrate provision in just a few centres, where the depleted expertise of what remains of NHS staff will (one can only hope) provide some minimal treatment.

Some 24 NHS regions out of 44 have put forward tentative plans already. These imply that they'll cut thousands of beds and close cancer, stroke care, maternity and

nothing new, of course. It only highlights, once more, the past and present governments' criminal underfunding of the NHS, to the detriment of both patients and NHS workers. ☐

other specialist units. They're not "advertising" their intentions for obvious reasons. But all acute services are to go in at least 4 hospitals in South-west London, for instance. Patients will have to travel further - even for A&E - which denies the fact of an "emergency"! Already activists and local people are beginning to organise to oppose these latest cuts. In fact not only must the cuts be opposed, but it's also time to fight for a refounding of the NHS itself, given its rapid degeneration.

**Robbing us of time and wages!**

away more than 2 whole years of his life (24/7) to the capitalist class!

To add to the scandal, workers also have to pay in order to come and make profits for their employers. A worker on the average British wage of £26,000/yr spends up to 13% of this on commuting fares. This goes up to 32% for those on

(like season tickets and off-peak returns), which make up less than half of the total. So companies are free to increase other fares as they please. Over the last decade, this has meant that fares have increased at double the rate of average wages and nearly 20 times faster than the minimum wage!

None of this increase is going to go into improving the railways, despite what

the minimum wage!

The capitalist class already pays workers far less than the value they produce, since this is how it makes its huge profits. At the very least, they should be made to pay the cost of workers' commuting to and from work to make their profits for them! ☐

ministers claim. No, Britain's creaking railways have seen no significant investment in the 20 years of privatisation - quite simply because the rail profiteers have been pocketing every fare increase, instead of putting the money back into badly-needed improvements in infrastructure, while cutting thousands of safety-critical jobs on the tracks and trains.

because Network Rail's private predecessor, Railtrack, presided over two tragic train crashes (Hatfield, 2000 and Potters Bar, 2002) - due to stretching the infrastructure literally to breaking point. But this doesn't stop Grayling from also floating the idea of reprivatising Network Rail. After all, what are a few lives lost, when there are millions to be made in profits?

**Judge a society by how it treats its elderly**

**Social care**

There's an acute crisis in adult social care. Just not enough capacity. It prevents hospitals from discharging patients and exacerbates the NHS crisis - where there's also far too little capacity. Would there be bed-blocking if there were enough beds?

And it is going to get much worse. Despite an ageing population (those over 65 increasing by 3% a year) since 2009-10, council spending on adult social care reduced by 10%. The cross-party Local Government Association warned last October, in a pamphlet ominously entitled "Left in the Dark", that elderly care faced a £2.6bn shortfall, even after a theoretical extra £1.8bn raised by a 2% council tax increase, dedicated to social care. Councils don't see where more savings can be made: between 2011 and 2016



they paid for a £5bn social care deficit by making drastic cuts in every single local service - including social care itself!

So now what? Already some councils can't fund care packages, so care homes

close (37,000 places could be lost over the next 4 years) and many only take in those who can pay the full cost. Those who can't indeed face the prospect of being "left in the dark". □

**• Carelessness over social care**

Adult social care's a bit like the railways. If you run it properly, there's no way you should make a profit. And like the railways, Care homes in England are privately owned and run, including by companies like Virgin. But it's local councils who fund care, based on a means test: you pay if you have savings over £23,500 and when this is all spent, the council will pay.

Care home providers claim they're squeezed to the point of non-viability, by reduced council funding: their excuse for poor

provision and appalling terms and conditions for care workers! Today, 1 in 4 homes face bankruptcy. They bemoan low average pre-tax profits - on average, £11,000 per home. Big operator, Four Seasons, thus closed 51 homes over the past 18 months and plans to close another 50. Yet it was Four Seasons who "rescued" 250 of Southern Cross care homes after it (scandalously) collapsed in 2011!

In fact we're told that 50% of care homes are 'non-viable' from a "business"

point of view. Even Care UK says it's pulling out of the "market" - the same Care UK which caused outrage by paying workers below the minimum wage. Today these "providers" claim that being forced to pay £7.20/hour (the so-called "national living wage") from next April, will finally push them over the edge! So yes, they are non-viable. They only existed in the first place thanks to their government-sanctioned parasitism. They need to be taken over and put into public control. Like the railways.

**The writing was on the wall**

Over the past months, riots caused by overcrowding and degrading conditions have broken out in at least 8 different prisons - the most important, at the G4S-run Birmingham's Winson Green jail.

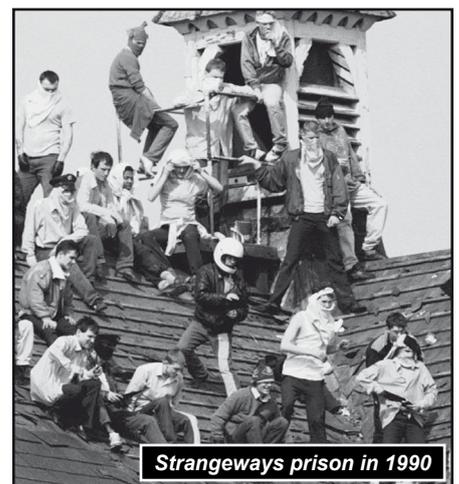
Prison riots are nothing new, of course. Back in 1990, a 25-day long rooftop protest at Manchester's Strangeways prison was followed by riots in two dozen other prisons. The subsequent Woolf inquiry concluded that prison conditions were "intolerable", blaming governments for failing to provide adequate resources.

27 years on, however, things have gone from bad to worse. Over the past

decade alone, while the prison population increased by 15%, the number of prison officers went down by 22%! What's more, a 15% budget cut has resulted in increasingly poor maintenance since 2010.

As a result, many prisoners remain locked up 22 hours a day in squalid cells, with nothing to do. All the talk about rehabilitation through education or training remains hot air, for lack of resources. This intolerable situation is a recipe for stoking up explosive frustration - especially when the government's only response to protesters is to send in its riot "Tornado" squads and their dogs! □

**Prison riots**



Strangeways prison in 1990

**• The ever-growing prison population**

The appalling conditions faced by prisoners are partly due to cuts. But, above all, they are due to their ever-growing numbers, the fact that prison sentences are more frequent and longer, while non-custodial community sentences have been cut by half since 2006.

Today, Britain's 95,000-strong prison population is the largest in Western Europe. As a proportion of the population,

it is 26% larger than in France and 83% larger than in Germany! It also has the highest proportion of prisoners serving life sentences - 10% of the total, against Europe's 3% average.

This has done nothing to reduce criminality. But never mind! Official policy continues to assert that social problems can be solved by locking up those who are considered as committing a "crime"

- no matter how petty - and regardless of whether or not this "crime" is linked to some mental disorder. Ultimately, the prison system only helps to conceal the failure of this society to deal with the endemic poverty and the lack of any prospects in life which prevail in the most deprived areas, and with the lack of adequate NHS mental health facilities!

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)****Crown Office strikers out in the cold**

Crown Post Office workers, who now number only 3,500, went on 5-day strike in the lead-up to Xmas, called out by the Communication Workers' Union (CWU) over the government's plan to close and outsource the 300 remaining offices, close final salary pensions and cut jobs. The plan was first announced in April last year and several 24-hour strikes took place thereafter.

These "Crown" offices are the only directly government-owned post offices which remain. The vast majority of post office workers are employed in

11,200 franchised offices, not unionised and open during this strike.

However, the context is a similar attack on pensions against 140,000 Royal Mail workers, mostly also in the CWU. And of course, PO and RM workers are together responsible for the circulation of mail. Wasn't this enough reason for Crown Office and Royal Mail workers to join ranks together in a common fight back, which would reinforce both sections?

However, this wasn't on the CWU



leadership's agenda. Instead it staged a ridiculous stunt, delivering to the Department for Business, "over 750,000 postcards... protesting at the closures" in a "special delivery conducted by Santa and his sleigh with the help of two live reindeer and a snow machine." The bosses must have been terrified.

- **We'd better get fighting asap...**

So the "unofficial" union officials have issued Members Bulletin No2 in the "fight to save our pension". Good to be informed, but from what they say (and don't say), we'd better not rely on them! It's not from anonymous officials above our heads that an effective fight will come! Anyway, they see no common cause with the Post Office workers (don't even mention them) - and explain, that since the pensions issue is bound up with the new RM agreement which will start being negotiated next year (behind closed doors) - we must wait before we fight! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 4/1/17]

- **Good leaders are made in the battle**

Oh and then they add that we will have to jump at the eventual "call to arms" from CWU HQ, when it comes, if it does, and "support our union". Well, we members are the union, so "supporting" it is hardly the point. It goes without saying. What they actually mean is "support your union leaders"... The same ones who always let us down? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 4/1/17]

- **RM wants to "amazonise" the service**

There was some worrying information added though, and that is the reminder that RM wants later starts, collections on delivery, clocking in and out, etc... Surely

all of this is serious enough for us to start preparing ourselves to oppose it - by organising meetings of ALL WORKERS in each office to discuss how? How else to have maximum understanding of the issues and thus maximum involvement? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 4/1/17]

- **Merry Xmas?**

Not only did RM/Angard trick Xmas casuals into expecting £9/hr on nights (2 hours were in fact paid at the normal rate, so it was down to an average of £8.20/hr) but to top it all, management announced that they'd terminate many casuals earlier, before the end of their short 3 weeks, cutting their already small income by 2-3 days! And then these same bosses wished us all a merry Xmas? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 4/1/17]

**BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**

- **A big pay rise needed**

For all of us, this was the shortest winter break here for years. Some of us who have got used to going home to family overseas, couldn't afford to this year. Peak period travel was the only option and that was just too expensive on our wages. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini 4/1/17]

- **BMW's tight arses**

A-shift had the shortest holiday - from the small hours on 23 December till 6am on the 3 January. On that last night shift, we had a target of 150 cars. No problems with that, and nothing else to do - so what on earth was the point of keeping us hanging around afterwards until 4.30am? [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini 4/1/17]

- **Big deal!**

When we came back for the early shift on Tuesday, we'd been told that as we were the only full crew in that day, it would be a warm-up exercise. Was it hell! 300-odd cars through Assembly

is hardly a dummy run. The end of shift buzzer sounded 5 minutes early - is that BMW's idea of a nice gesture? [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini 4/1/17]

- **No victimisation!**

The Tuesday start was a change of plan, and it was clear not everyone had got the message to come in. So BMW had better not pick on any of our mates who didn't make it in, agency or otherwise! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini 4/1/17]

- **The task is to beat BMW...**

Pension talks have been kept hush-hush but might be resuming early this week. However one or two little birds might have "tweeted" here and there that Unite has a counter plan to offer BMW concessions, including a rise in our own contributions and a reduction in BMW's! As if BMW couldn't easily afford higher contributions, to a BOPS scheme opened to the whole workforce! Didn't Murphy pledge to fight "tooth and claw"? This looks more like a very politely raised forefinger - and despite a clear mandate for strike



action! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini 4/1/17]

- **So how to do it?**

Pensions are our deferred wages. So if we don't accept our wages going up and down, why should we accept pensions whose level depends on the state of the financial markets when we happen to retire? Of course it would have been better to nip the two-tier pension system in the bud and stop BMW bringing it in. But it's not too late! Moreover, expanding the occupational pension scheme is the only way to strengthen it - and so the best way to save it. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini 4/1/17]

**King's Cross railway station (London)****Southern strike - mustn't be "driver only"!**

The Southern rail strike over Driver Only Operation (DOO) and the removal of guards, continues into the new year - and one has to wonder why? All Govia-Thameslink (GTR) needs to do is to back down, agree to keep guards on all trains and recruit the full complement of staff, including drivers - which it still doesn't have, and which prevents it from running a proper service!

But no. It's still waiting for the government to declare that all its delays and cancellations can be put down to "force majeure" (acts of God or unions!) and thus make it immune to fines and eligible to get the

full £1bn fee the government agreed to pay it to run this "unique" franchise, provided it kept to timetable.

GTR's latest stunt against the strikers is to wave the Office for Rail and Road report on DOO in the air, claiming it's proof that DOO is "safe". But that's not what the ORR report says. It says it "can" be safe provided nothing goes wrong - as the leader of the drivers' union, Aslef, points out.

And of course what's finally escalated the strike is the drivers' participation - starting in December and now for 6 days this January - on the



10-13th, and 24-27th. But the RMT union, representing guards, has still not co-ordinated any strikes with them! In fact the RMT union leader is waiting for transport Secretary Grayling to talk with him. So, leaving it to the drivers only, to finish the fight?

- **A guard on every train!**

It's the most important fight on the railways for decades. Finally drivers are striking against DOO on Southern. But why should even our own hopes be pinned on the Southern strikers, when we all need to put a stop to these vicious job cuts and DOO... to bring back guards on every train! How much quicker we'd we win, if we all went out together.

[Workers' Platform King's Cross 14/12/16]

- **DOO can kill!!!**

As for the bosses "assurances" that DOO is perfectly safe, the incident on

30 November, when a woman was caught between the train and track of a moving VTEC train was an urgent reminder of how badly the guard is needed.

If the guard hadn't spotted her and immediately stopped the train, she would have been killed, instead of losing part of a finger.

[Workers' Platform King's Cross 14/12/16]

- **Hypocrite with scissors in his hand!**

How ironic that VTEC boss, David Horne, wrote to the guard concerned to praise this life-saving action. Yes, he is commending the same guard whose job he is

about to cut. [Workers' Platform King's Cross 14/12/16]

- **Tube strike: re-open ticket offices!**

Good for tube workers who're to strike on the 8th & 9th over the chaos since last year's ticket office closures/800 job cuts - which turned workers' lives upside down, while temps were actually taken on to cover!! Sure, it's closing the stable door after the horse has bolted - but it's never too late to fight to reinstate jobs and re-open ticket offices! And if we don't act now ourselves we'll soon be in the same mess. [Workers' Platform King's Cross 04/01/17]

**Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**

- **They only fight for their profits...**

Who believes this guy? When Ford of Europe boss Jim Farley told the press last week he wants the same assurances that the government gave to Nissan - that Ford won't be adversely affected by Brexit - he said it was to "fight for our employees". Must have been slip of the tongue. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 7/12/16]

- **No use getting a brown tongue**

But it was nice to see Ford Bigshot Ms Cash visiting Darkside (the new Panther Engine Assembly) last Thurs - with all of the creepy ones lined up behind her. Now we know why our Lion (engine) friends were brought over here for mopping for those 2 days. Not so the floor would look spic and span, but so the creepies wouldn't get too much dirt on their tongues as they followed her around like puppies! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 7/12/16]

- **Reasons to be cheerful**

Very good to hear: some Lion's Den mates sent to Panther refused to clean up for Cash's visit and said that there would be a walkout if they were asked to do that. Too right! So Panther's Bully Boy called the foreman on the radio and asked him to come over - but the foreman didn't bother! Maybe he agreed that Bully-Boy is taking his job too seriously, and needs to be sitting down himself! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 7/12/16]

- **Unprecedented mobility**

We heard that the Bigshot was 'pleased with us' and congratulated the managers for not letting the workers stay idle for even one moment (!) and moving them around as and when needed! This apparently doesn't happen in other Ford plants, she said. We doubt it. We're ALL super-exploited. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 7/12/16]

- **Qualified to identify scrap**

Of course one good thing has to be said for her. That being an engineer, she



probably knew what she was looking at, when she was taken to see the strip-back area on Panther. Unlike the Panther management. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 7/12/16]

- **They've got their priorities..!**

How good to see a new covered walkway and paths. A lovely entry to the plant. But whilst laying tarmac, couldn't they have spared some for the massive pot-holes everywhere? Or are they waiting until one of us trips and breaks an ankle? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 7/12/16]

## Yemen

The Foreign Office recently announced that there is no "clear evidence" of any breach of human rights in Saudi Arabia's 20-month old bombing campaign of Yemen.

But isn't this brutal bombing campaign against the Yemeni population, in and of itself, a violation of human rights and a very bloody one at that, which has already claimed thousands of lives and is claiming more, every day? Anyone can see that - except politicians serving the interests of British arms manufacturers, who would love this war to carry on forever.

In the first year of the war, 30% of all British arms exports went to Saudi Arabia, for a total worth of £3.3bn. These exports included cluster bombs which have been used in Yemen. On impact, these bombs release another 147 submunitions each producing around 1,400 anti-personnel fragments, designed to kill the

## Selling weapons, spilling blood



largest possible number of people in crowded areas!

It's not just the breaching of

human rights which is at issue. This government and its capitalist masters also have blood on their hands. ☐

## Azerbaijan

The Azerbaijani government is another brutal dictatorship. When protests broke out last year, activists were either tortured or simply murdered. But of course, these petty considerations cannot be allowed to stand in the way of the interests of big oil companies. Both the Azeri government and BP want to build the Trans-Adriatic gas pipeline between Europe and BP's Shah Deniz

## Shady dealings for big oil

fields in the country - a deal which will be extremely lucrative for both of them. So they hired the services of Tony Blair Associates to 'advise' them on the matter.

A stumbling block, however, was the EU's accusation that the dictatorship was violating human rights. So the Azeri government used four British companies to offer a leading Italian MEP, Luca Volonte, a £2m

bribe in return for helping to push an EU report into human rights abuses in the country under the carpet - which he did.

What is surprising is not that such shady dealings should take place, but that, for once, they should have come under the spotlight. Could it be the reason why, in anticipation of such revelations, Blair decided to fold his company last September?

## Refugee crisis

After much fanfare over the first child refugee coming to Britain from the Calais Jungle last October, the British government has now stopped taking more child refugees. After the camp's destruction, the Home Office promised to process their applications - but gave no date for its decisions. Halfway through the process, it arbitrarily decided that those to be taken in would only be under-15s from Sudan and Syria. After taking 750 children, the process of

## The Calais children are fighting back

taking children was suddenly ended in December, with over 1,000 registered to get asylum in the UK left stranded in France.

These children are angry and some are showing it. Twelve Afghan children went on hunger strike over the delay in processing their applications. Sudanese children in Biscarrosse, in south-west France, demonstrated outside their accommodation centre when their applications were rejected without any

explanation. Thirty-six refugees from the Calais Camp have filed a legal case against Amber Rudd. But others, desperate to come to Britain, have escaped their accommodation in France and are trying to find other ways of making it across this channel. Meanwhile RAF bombs are turning more people into refugees in Syria - but the Home Office washes its hands of any responsibility!

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:

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