

WORKERS' fight



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

Against capitalist parasitism, EXPROPRIATE THE PROFIT SHARKS!

Who will be next, after the collapse of outsourcing giant Carillion, in January? Capita, Interserve or Serco? Kier, Balfour Beatty or Mitie? Or G4S, the largest of them all?

And how many more workers will be left high and dry? What will happen to the jobs and pensions of the over 300,000 workers employed in Britain by these 8 companies - or to the even larger number of their subcontractors?

What will this mean for the 700 outsourced public sector contracts run by these companies? What about the thousands of schools, housing estates, hospitals, care homes and other public facilities, where they provide meals, maintenance and other services?

It seems that the outsourcing of public services to private companies which was built over nearly four decades by every government, Tory and Labour, is finally collapsing onto itself, like the illusory - but exorbitantly expensive - house of cards it always was.

Capitalist leeches

By now, all these giant service companies are in some sort of financial trouble. And yet, during all these years, how many hundreds of billions did they manage to syphon off from public funds?

From Thatcher to Blair and May, every government sought to provide a capitalist class which had long run out of steam, with new profits, claiming that public services needed the "skills and competence of the private sector".

But, if they had any "skills" or "competence", it was only to fleece public budgets to maximise their profits. Today's giant service companies sprang out of nowhere, building up empires on borrowed money which the banks were happy to lend them, because of



the flow of public money they expected for decades to come. And they made huge profits by running down services to the bare bone and cutting workers' wages and conditions.

But then came the crisis and austerity. There were fewer contracts and less funding to share out. The giant contractors' profits were eroded. As long as they could borrow money, they were able to conceal their problems. But it could not last. Now the chickens are coming home to roost, starting with Carillion.

Unaffordable parasitism

None of this came out of the blue, though: under capitalism the increasing wealth of the capitalist minority can only feed on the increasing poverty of the working class majority - and even more so in a period of crisis.

The objective of the politicians' privatisation project was always to allow the capitalists to increase their parasitism on the state. But, with the crisis

and the decade-long bailout, they have been trying to squeeze more out of their state than it could deliver and, eventually, something had to give.

For months, the share prices of the outsourcing giants had been falling. And this is why, today, the banks are no longer willing to lend them the funds they would need to continue their parasitic existence on public contracts.

These companies are victims of their own greed and deserve their fate. But the working class cannot afford to pay the cost for their demise, especially when the crisis threatens to get worse.

The politicians may enjoy aggravating the present chaos with their grandiose Brexit delusions. But the working class cannot allow the capitalist parasites to push society into an even greater mess. Private profiteering is a plague that society cannot afford. The working class, will have to bring it to an end. This is what it needs to prepare for! □

Crisis watch

In the first week of February, stock markets went into a tailspin. Worldwide, the total value of company shares was suddenly cut by over £3,600 billion. This is an absurdly huge figure: to put it into perspective, it is equivalent to over 4 years of British government spending or 2 years of Britain's overall production - all wiped out in just a single week!

But for the bosses' economic experts, this was just a mere "correction". Since this new financial hiccup started in Wall Street, they rushed to hail America's "healthy fundamentals", rising wages and high employment level. Never mind that, in the US just as in Britain, rising employment only conceals the meteoric rise of non-jobs, while wages are lagging behind inflation - none of which are symptoms of "good health"!

In fact, if during this crazy week, speculators have been frantically off-loading billions of shares, isn't it precisely because they, themselves, do not believe in these "healthy fundamentals"? As if they didn't know that since the beginning of the financial crisis, they've been living on borrowed time, thanks to the central banks' massive printing of new money.

But the profit sharks know that their

• Pumping up a colossal debt bubble

One of the main factors which is feeding the fears of speculators, has been the colossal increase in indebtedness since 2007. In January, the world's debt mountain reached £169,000 billion - or more than 3 times the value produced across the whole planet in a year. This is significantly more than the level of indebtedness which preceded - and caused - the 2007-8 banking crash. Ironically, though, one of the main reasons behind this colossal debt bubble has been the rich countries' policy of reducing interest rates by means of massive injections of cash into the collapsed banking system.

Overall, private companies account for 54% of this total debt - an all-time record as well. For over a decade, the capitalists

• Parasites are growing fast!

Just nine of the world's richest men have more combined wealth than the poorest 4 billion people. And never mind the ongoing world financial crisis, the richest of the rich (the top 500) managed to increase their wealth by a trillion dollars in the last year. These richest 500 together owned \$5 trillion, which amounts to over a quarter of the US GDP! And, with an estimated wealth of £76bn, Amazon's George Bezos, the richest of these sods, owns three times more than the total value produced by Bolivia's 11 million inhabitants in a year! This simple arithmetic shows how much wealth could potentially

The crisis boomerang



good days on state welfare are coming to an end. By now, the rich countries' central banks are de facto broke and money printing is no longer an option. This also means that the days when companies could borrow on the cheap will soon be over, as interest rates are bound to rise sooner rather than later.

Now that the means which were used to bail out capitalist profits after 2007 are no longer available, the crisis is coming back to hit the world economy like a boomerang. The capitalists' massive

share selling is an attempt to anticipate future losses by getting rid of their most risky assets - be it shares or government bonds. Was this just a "correction" or the beginning of a crash? No-one can be sure in this chaotic system. But whether it will generate shock waves in the real economy, is not a matter of "if", but a matter of "when". And this is how an increasingly rotten capitalist system carries on limping from one crisis to the next, regardless of the untold damage it generates for mankind. □

have taken advantage of record-low interest rates. Not to invest into useful production, though, but mostly to buy smaller rivals or to create what they call "shareholders' value" - i.e. to increase dividends and buy back large numbers of their shares, so as to boost their market prices. In other words, companies have been getting more and more in hock to line their shareholders' pockets.

But now, with interest rates rising, the servicing of their debt is going to reduce their profits - and, by the same token, their handouts to shareholders. For speculators, this means that the days of ever-rising dividends and share prices are coming to an end. And, in Britain, this means that the all-time record of £94.4 billion paid in dividends

last year, probably won't be repeated.

This also means that an increasing part of this debt mountain is more than likely to prove toxic - debts that can't be recovered because the borrowers are, to all intents and purposes, bust. How long will it take then, for speculators to lose faith in their own bingo machine and embark on panic selling?

This is a bubble waiting to burst. The question is when and how. Will there be a soft or a hard landing and what damage will it cause to the real economy? The only certainty for the working class, here as in every country across the world, is that this implies new battles ahead, in order to get the capitalists to pick up the bill for their unviable system.

be redistributed if these super-fat cats had their bank balances cut down to size.

• A good year for the death merchants

Arms companies made a killing (literally!) in 2017. In July, the annual revenues of the 100 largest among them amounted to \$364bn (£266bn).

Predictably, American companies are leading the pack. To this end, Trump has been staffing his administration with heavyweights from the arms industry: the head of the Pentagon comes from General Dynamics, his deputy from Boeing, the two Defence Under-Secretaries come from

Lockheed-Martin and Textron Systems and the head of Homeland Security is a former advisor with Dyncorp! Trump has already secured orders worth \$110bn (£80bn) from Saudi Arabia (to support its bombing of Yemen), \$2.4 billion (£1.7bn) from austerity-ravaged Greece, and \$1.4 billion (£1bn) from Taiwan (as a gesture of defiance towards China).

Closer to home, in Britain, the DIT, which licences Britain's arms exports, has overseen a sharp spike in sales to repressive regimes - especially to Saudi Arabia. This is one of the ways the Westminster Brexiteers are hoping to solve some of their future trade problems - and their hands are already dripping with blood!

The need to prepare for Brexit attacks

The leaked government document on the cost of Brexit for the British economy discredits the Brexiters' fairy tales about Britain's vibrant future after Brexit. It argues that the economy will slow down by anything between 2% and 8% depending on whether there is a hard, soft or "no deal" Brexit. As to the additional cost of customs and border checks, which would result from Britain leaving the single market and customs union, it will cause prices to rise by up to 18%. The hardest hit sectors, says this document, will be the chemicals, clothing, manufacturing,

car, retail and food and drink industries.

Of course, this is hardly breaking news - but just common sense, given that the EU is Britain's largest market. But, what is new, is the suggestion made by this document that some of these losses could be "offset" by watering down existing environmental, consumer protection and.. employment regulations! And this is a warning for the working class: it will have to make the politicians and their City masters pay for the mess they are making! ☐

• Job cuts: a sign of what's to come

The retail giants are using the pretext of falling high-street sales to cut jobs. M&S plans to cut 500 jobs, Morrisons 1500, Tesco 1700. Sainsbury and Asda plan to make "sweeping" changes, but figures have not been released yet. And all have plans to close more branches. There is nothing new about this: Sainsbury had already announced late last year that it was cutting 2000 jobs and Asda cut 800 jobs in December.

And why are retail sales falling, if not because of the inflation caused by Brexit? The politicians and the capitalists want workers to pay twice for it: once, through a cut in their living standards and a second time through a cut in their jobs. Let May, her Westminster Brexiters and their capitalist masters pay instead!



National borders? Not for the rich!

Christopher Chandler, a New Zealand billionaire, has bought himself a Maltese EU passport for £571,900. Of course, in this society, money can buy anything, from EU passports to the £2m-worth special "British citizenship for investors"!

• Britain's Scrooge welfare

In a study covering the period 2012-15, the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) found that in Britain "the minimum levels of short-term and long-term incapacity benefits, of state pension and of job seeker's allowance were manifestly inadequate." Indeed, by 2015 most sick and unemployed workers survived on less than the poverty threshold of £190/wk! And not much has changed today in this respect, with statutory sick pay at £89.35/wk and JSA at £73.10/wk (for over-25s)!

But for the 4.8m self-employed workers, things are even worse. Not only are they not entitled to statutory sick pay, but they are not covered by Health and Safety regulations. The ECSR rightly found that this exclusion was discriminatory and in breach of the European Social Charter. But aren't discriminatory practices in breach of British law as well?

Ironically, this European Social Charter is the social counterpart of the European Convention on Human Rights that May's Brexiters hate so much. If Britain is already in breach of this Charter before Brexit, guess what will happen after, if they have their way?

• May's politicking over EU workers

May's poisonous appeasement of the Tory right continues. After leaving the status of EU citizens deliberately vague in the last round of negotiations, May now insists that EU citizens entering Britain during the transitional period will not have the same rights as those who were already in Britain before - such as visa-free entry, having the right to settle, access to benefits or services, etc.

Why this sudden change? Quite simply

But the irony in this case is that Chandler's Dubai-based hedge fund Legatum Group is also behind a prominent London-based Tory think-tank, the Legatum Institute Foundation, which has been vocally promoting and supporting the pro-Leave camp.

Of course, for the wealthy, national

Brexit watch



because, after arguing for the transitional period that British business wants, May is now in trouble with her party's right-wingers. By turning the screw on EU workers, she hopes to get her Brexit bigots to keep quiet over the transitional arrangements. So, once again, workers should allow more divisions to be created within their ranks by the Tories' internal in-fighting? No, they have the strength and numbers to stop them!

• "Golden era" or sinking ship?

In January, Theresa May led the "largest ever British business delegation to China". Fifty companies and business organisations were part of the trip, including BP, Jaguar Land Rover, AstraZeneca and even the Queen's favourite tea supplier, Whittard's! When it comes to placating her party's right-wingers and their grandiose dreams of a post-Brexit "global Britain", no expenses are spared - especially when the taxpayer is footing the bill!!!

Of course, it wasn't really about a "free trade deal" with China. A Chinese deal could not begin to make up for the loss of a significant part of Britain's trade with the EU - which at current levels is 10 times the volume of trade with China. No, the aim of the exercise was to attract Chinese investment into Britain.

Because so far, this investment has been elusive, with a grand total of £13bn - just 1% of all foreign investment and, therefore, nothing to write home about! But why should this change? If some Chinese investors have been looking towards Britain, it was mostly because they wanted a gateway into the European market. And if Brexit means that Britain can't even give them that, they'll keep their dollars!

borders are no obstacle. As the Paradise Papers scandal has shown, they can easily manage to ignore them in order to hide their loot and avoid paying taxes. In fact, their only purpose is to imprison the populations in order to keep them under the thumbs of profit sharks like Chandler and Co!

Privatisation

How Carillion milked the government's PFI cow

The dust hasn't settled yet after Carillion's fall. Its CEO and directors sat virtually silent before the parliamentary committee which is meant to hold them to account on behalf of the public. Of course the committee comprises some of the very same MPs - both Tory and Labour - whose parties in government licensed Carillion and the rest to make a killing out of public funds.

And it was some killing: Carillion had £16bn-worth of public sector contracts in schools, hospitals,

prisons... and received £1.7bn worth of payments from them in 2016, equivalent to a third of its then total revenue of £5.2bn. Even after 2 profit warnings last year, the DfT under Grayling still awarded it contracts for HS2 worth £1.8bn - while Blackrock's "investors" were already betting on its collapse!

But now that Carillion's greed has choked it, who is left to pick up the tab except "the public"? When asked if they'd pay back their massive awards like the £1.5m taken by

the rat who left the sinking Carillion ship last October, they just said no, these were their "entitlement". An "entitlement" for paying massive dividends to shareholders and huge bonuses and salaries, out of borrowed money, while workers' pension funds were left to dry up!

To date, 829 directly employed Carillion workers have lost their jobs and an unknown, far greater, number employed by subcontractors. As to the many contracts Carillion had - no doubt they are up for grabs by other sharks. □

• Private profit, public loss

Of course, for well over two decades, every government has been piling up PPP and PFI contracts in the full knowledge that it was storing up problems for the future. That was, after all, the main idea behind them. Buy now, pay later and keep it off the Treasury's balance sheet, so that nobody knows the scale of government debt and, more importantly, nobody knows how much filthy lucre is "awarded" to "friends and family" in the private sector...

The fact is that the whole privatisation affair, which began with selling off utilities at bargain basement prices to the private sector in the 1980s, was aimed at rescuing a decrepit British capitalist class, in a period when it was less and less up to competing with its overseas rivals. And it did rescue them. A company like Capita which specialises in IT and admin services, owes its very existence to the privatisation policies of successive governments, in whichever form these took - whether Compulsory Competitive Tendering under Thatcher, or PFI, which really took off under Blair. It was precisely these policies which allowed small subcontractors of whatever type, first to come into existence, and then to merge with and gobble up others, so as to form the massive conglomerates which we see today.

So we read in last month's report from the National Audit Office that "there are currently 716 operational private finance deals with a capital value of around £60bn... Annual charges for these deals amounted to £10.3bn in 2016-17. Even if no new deals are entered into, future charges that continue until the 2040s amount to £199bn

- money that could finance the entire NHS for 20 months". Is there anything more to add?

• The shameful saga of private probation services

No matter that this is patent nonsense, the idea that "private is good" and "public is bad" when it comes to provision of services was apparently the justification for privatising probation in 2014. This was when that irrationally obsessive privateer, Chris Grayling, then in the Ministry of Justice, handed over the supervision of released prisoners to 21 private regional "rehabilitation companies". Of course most prisons are already run by private contractors, like Serco and G4s...

And unsurprisingly, it now transpires that this is another sorry deal. At least 14 of the Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) will make losses ranging from £2.3m to £43m by 2021-22 even after a £342m government bailout. This is partly because fewer offenders are getting community sentences, but also because these companies seem incapable of preventing re-offending by doing proper rehabilitation work. In fact in this regard, only Merseyside and Northumbria's CRCs met their targets. A report by the Chief Inspector of Probation exposes the fact that "only a handful of individuals had received any real help with housing, jobs, or an addiction, let alone managing debt or getting back into education or training. What is more, about one in 10 people were released without a roof over their heads"! She found that these CRCs did little more than fill in forms and tick boxes. So now what?

• Terra Firma's shaky ground

A National Audit Office report, published in January, pinned down another outsourcing shark - Guernsey-based private equity fund Terra Firma - for making between £2 and £4 billion of undue profits out of the MoD's housing stock.

Back in 1996, the MoD sold 57,000 servicemen's homes as part of a "sale and lease-back" deal, which was eventually acquired by Terra Firma. This kind of arrangement is yet another way that governments, starting with Thatcher's in the 1980s, handed valuable public assets to private firms and then leased them back (in this case over a 200-year period!) - in what was obviously a win-win deal for the sharks and a lose-lose deal for the taxpayer...

It has taken 22 years for this deal to be officially exposed. One wonders what the MoD's accountants were doing for all this time? Surely they must have noticed that something dodgy was going on? But if they did, they apparently did not bother to tell the Department which was in charge of overseeing the operation of private care homes.

Indeed, in 2012, the same Terra Firma fund was allowed to acquire Four Seasons, then Britain's largest care home operator, for £825m. After just 3 years, Four Seasons had accumulated debt worth over £500m: in order to fund its acquisition, Terra Firma had borrowed heavily, dumping its debt on Four Seasons! By November 2017, Four Seasons was bust, while Terra Firma's investors had managed to pocket a total of over £1bn! Except that, this time, there was no equivalent of the MoD behind the scenes, to take care of Four Seasons' 17,000 elderly residents - who are still threatened with eviction to date!

Expropriate the expropriators!

So what to do about the chaos and misery caused to the working class by decades of privatisation in the public sector? It seems fairly obvious. Take all services and utilities back into public hands - under the control of the workers and the users - without compensation. Not only that, but the profits which have been piled up in the past (and hidden offshore) should be taken back from the privateers. Expropriation and then taxation of all wealth could more than fund and

restore the NHS, social services, education, transport and all the other necessary utilities.

So, that said, what has Corbyn and McDonnell's Labour Party proposed? "Now we must go further. We are developing policies to make public delivery of public services the preferred option. We will put an end to the dogma of privatisation, which has hollowed out the public realm and held back our economy and services."

"Preferred option", however, is not the same as "ban all private ownership of public

facilities". Nor does "ending dogma" over privatisation, mean ending privatisation itself. McDonnell clearly says that if "better value" was offered in the private sector, that would be OK... As for renationalising the railways and other privatised utilities (like Royal Mail) there is no mention of doing so without compensating the shareholders. And yet this is the only way it would be fair and viable. Quite evidently the working class is going to have to formulate and implement its own policies through its own political party in order to take back control!

A predatory policy against the disabled

More than 180,000 people have lost disability payments since 2013, because of the transition from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to Personal Independence Payments (PIPs). Both were supposed to support disabled people with the extra living costs related to their disabilities. Except that, of course, the whole point behind this change was to cut the benefit bill. And the private outsourcing companies contracted to assess claimants' needs proved willing to oblige. Atos rejected 19% of claims, while Capita rejected 24%! By contrast, the success rate of appeals against these rejections has risen steadily to over 60%!

In mid-January, the High Court finally ruled that recent changes to PIP rules were actually discriminatory against some categories of disabled. The government decided not to appeal this judgment,

• Education Ltd: charging (even) more for less?

With increasingly exorbitant university student fees, currently at £9,250 per year, the government is trying to introduce the option of squeezing a three year undergraduate degree into two years. But since universities were unwilling to lose an



maybe because it feared further investigation into its cost-cutting scheme. Instead, 1.6 million PIP cases are to be reviewed - which will take years and, undoubtedly,

involve more injustices. This drive to cut the benefits of vulnerable and often isolated people has already cost lives! The whole assessment process must be scrapped! ☐

• A text-book case of cost-cutting backfiring

When they were first set up, under Blair, the pretext for academy schools was that they would raise declining standards in state education. However, in reality, this was just another cost-cutting exercise in a chronically underfunded education system. So academies were "freed" from local authority control in order to use "private sector management skills". By the same

token, they were granted the "freedom" to cut the number of subjects they taught and the wages, terms and conditions of their staff. Before long, "education trusts" - effectively outsourcing companies - sprang up to take over the management of dozens of academies each.

Except that, now, having thrived on education funding for years, some of these

selling education as a commodity becomes glaringly obvious when it leads to a "speed-up" on the assembly line of education! Soon they'll be selling "instant" degrees, ready-to-use - but beware of the price!

trusts are dumping those academies which they consider just too expensive. These "orphan" schools are now waiting for the government to find another management trust to take them over. And, in the meantime, having no-one with the powers to make any managerial decisions, they are just left to rot. Some improvement in standards!

• Absurd luxury for some, worsening shortage for most

The extremes of the housing crisis get crazier and more unjust all the time. At one end, over half of the 1,900 highest-priced apartments built in London in the last year

have failed to sell. As to the ten flats at the top of the Shard, they've been lying empty for six years - and is it any wonder, at prices of up to £50m each?

In contrast with this glut of luxury, the chronic shortage of affordable rented housing is getting worse, with landlords imposing exorbitant rents and, in some cases, intolerable conditions on tenants. In one recent case, for instance, a West London landlord was taken to court for letting a four-bedroom house to as many as 40 tenants at a time. They were crammed into bunk beds and shared a kitchen and just two bathrooms!

Some of the responsibility for this catastrophic housing situation lies with the government's policy of promoting a revamped "Right-To-Buy" policy for council houses: in just one year, it has resulted in an 11% fall in the number of social rented homes! In May's Brexit-bound Britain, the absurd luxury of the ever-richer wealthy, feeds on ever greater overcrowding and increasing homelessness for the working class majority!



Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**A "mutual" agreement? No, nothing's settled!**

After last October's 89% vote in favour of strike against radical attacks on pensions and working conditions, was stymied by "compulsory" mediation, the Communication Workers' Union and Royal Mail have just produced a 39-page "negotiators' settlement". And they recommend that the workforce votes for it.

But it turns out that it's really a non-agreement, fobbing us off and trying to trick us with smoke and mirrors - with union negotiators fully on board! So for instance a 5% pay increase from October 2017 to April 2019 (when another 2% rise is meant to kick in) isn't backdated to April 2017 and is really only 5% stretched over 18 months (to April

2019) - therefore a cut in "real" pay! The much-vaunted "shorter working week" is meant to start in October 2018, with a 1-hour reduction, but this is subject to all sorts of conditions and there is actually no mention of "no loss of pay"! As for the new "collective wage in retirement pension scheme" for all, which is meant to replace the defined benefit as well as the poorer defined contribution scheme, it clearly says "*the benefits represent targets, not hard promises*" i.e., the "wage in retirement" isn't actually guaranteed! Anyway, since it depends on the government introducing new regulations, who knows when it will happen? In the meantime RM



is closing (read: "stealing") workers' defined benefit pensions.

The rest of the profound changes in shift patterns and ways of working which were overwhelmingly rejected last October will now be subject to "joint" working parties and "joint" reviews with union officials who will be collaborating (colluding!) to bring these in by the end of the year. In other words, RM is having its cake and eating it and the CWU officials are holding the plate. Should we accept this? Our answer can only be no.

• Let's call time on them!

Of course we do agree that all the guys on Defined Contribution pensions need Defined Benefit pensions, but they don't need to join us in a risky collective "pool" either! Isn't it time all workers called time on companies like RM who tell us they can't "afford" proper pensions for all workers, but can "afford" dividends for their shareholders? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 31/01/18]

• What the...?

What's more, this is all part of the "divide and rule" - which is the one thing that we need to stop! Taking on workers on lesser Ts&Cs and lesser pensions, part-time, casual, whatever

- how did we ever let this happen?

So let us be clear: any element of "risk", shared or otherwise, that is, forced gambling with any part of pensions should be absolutely out of the question! What we, all of us, want and need, are the straight, defined benefit schemes many of us paid into for years. [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 31/01/18]

• Opposing interests

And by the way, we don't need to be told by Terry Pullinger (the union's deputy leader), to take into account "the future challenges and changes and the evolution that we face"... We know all about this "evolution" already, because the future is already here. And the changes are against our interests! But of course,

TP loves to talk about RM as "our business". As if our interests and the RM bosses' interests were one and the same! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 31/01/18]

• They need a brain test

Managers seem to be looking for a fight! Our mates with health problems are being put on stages and "hounded" out of pure bloody-mindedness! How dare they put pressure on us to come back to work when we're not fit - or do they think they know better than our doctors? Well yes, apparently they do think so. Which is ample reason to send *them* off to a doctor, to get their heads examined... Or to a vet? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 31/01/18]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• And when we stood up...**

After cutting the shifts on 20 Dec and two out of three on 2 January, BMW slapped VPO (catch-back overtime if production is lost) on the last two shifts before shutdown (18th and 19th). Stand down, stand up... we feel like the Grand Old Duke of York's ten thousand men! [Workers' Fight Bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 17/01/18]

• Surreptitious Scrooges

Does BMW think none of us ever looks at a pay slip? Or wants an explanation for missing pay? Like that second VPO in the small hours of the 20th. Bosses seem to have decided not to pay it, without offering any reason. Why should any of us work another minute of VPO until they do? [Workers' Fight Bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 17/01/18]

• Happy new year BMW style

Like last year, management ran the early shift (C-crew this time) in on the first day back, on the pretext of "ramp-up". Ease back into production with 150 cars, they said. Yeah, and the rest! Like A-crew last year, we found ourselves knocking out the normal 300 at "normal" breakneck speed! [Workers' Fight Bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 17/01/18]

• As we'd like to go on?

Such was the overbuild that the night shift breakdown on the 5th had no effect at all on the target. We got over an hour's respite with no VPO as a consequence, at least. Targets obviously mean nothing.... [Workers' Fight Bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 17/01/18]

**• A year of "just about managing"?**

We came back to a 3% pay rise - a reminder to avoid agreeing to 3-year pay deals in future. It's a real pay cut: RPI inflation has been above 4%! This is the last year of the current deal, and who knows what the cost of living will be 12 months along the Brexit rollercoaster? Let's make sure the first year of the next deal, is also the last... [Workers' Fight Bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 17/01/18]

King's Cross railway station (London)**Fighting Virgin's divide and rule**

Virgin Trains East Coast certainly deserves to face a strike! What better parting gift to a company which cut jobs and real pay, increased fares and is now walking away, scot-free, from its franchise commitment!

VTEC's latest manoeuvre against its workforce says everything about its "ethics". First it offered (8 months late!) a below-inflation 3.2% pay "rise", conditional on a cut in sick pay. In a referendum organised by the RMT union, over 90% voted to reject. So the RMT called a strike ballot.

In the meantime however, VTEC decided to impose the deal, claiming that all of the unions had accepted

its offer, even though the RMT hadn't formally agreed and they knew it. So as a provocation against the RMT, which was still proceeding with the ballot, VTEC told workers they could choose to individually "opt out" of the pay deal. Some union officials encouraged this as a way to "support the union", while VTEC promoted the opt-out as an alternative to striking. In the midst of such confusion, the ballot went in favour of strike action but was invalidated because the turnout had been too low!

Those who opted out of the deal are now deprived of a pay rise and back-pay. So in an attempt to correct



its error of judgement, the RMT is encouraging everyone to submit tribunal applications, with the aim of an eventual collective challenge against this divisive outcome, in court. But instead of this paper tiger, wouldn't the most effective challenge be the muscle of railworkers, united, on the ground?

• Time's up at the box

You couldn't make it up! Not that long ago a 12-hr roster request by signallers to combat fatigue and improve work/life balance was rejected by management. Yet now, with staff shortages which they created, managers expect signallers to work extra overtime hours in order to cover! How safe is that? Their latest tactic is not just mad, it's dangerous. Signallers are being coerced into working 16-hour shifts!! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 31/01/18]

• Remember Clapham!

But look at this: the ORR states that "being awake for around 17 hours has been found to produce impairment on a range of tasks equivalent

to that associated with a blood alcohol concentration above the drink driving limit." We can't kill ourselves - nor others - by working like this. Remember Clapham! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 31/01/18]

• Until next time!

Well, after just striking for one day, Virgin West Coast workmates got a better offer. Just think what we could have achieved if East and West had gone on strike together? But the final strike ballot on East Coast was neither co-ordinated nor even pushed for, due to the opt-in, opt-out confusion created by VTEC bosses! But now, don't we have even more reason to fight them? [Workers' Platform King's Cross 31/01/18]

• United we stand

Yes - this is what makes us furious: after all that, VT has just implemented its pay deal divide, by paying some of us and not others! And not only that, they've cut sickness payment for some and not others. Well, they will see. No matter what tricks they use, its not going to work. We will not accept it. And on that, we're united! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 31/01/18]

• To strike or not to strike?

So are we going to have a strike against ISS or not? Seems managers have forgotten 2012 and 2016 already and need a reminder. Because there's no way we can carry on this way. The sackings, suspensions, cutting of jobs, the nasty, petty bullying - no, enough is enough! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 31/01/18]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• Welcome...**

We're very happy to see 40 new temps; some are back after having worked here before. But isn't it high time that all get permanent contracts from day one?

Of course, we'd like to see a lot more recruits - and in all colours of the rainbow... It maybe fair enough that friends, family, or former Ford workers get jobs here. But what's not fair is that it seems that it's only them and they're mostly if not all, rather pale. [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 24/01/18]

• Back to the cold war?

Incredibly, the company has built a wall between the loading Bay and the Panther line - to separate Lineside from Ford workers?? What's this? On one side, it's Siberia and on the other side Britain? Lineside mates have to work in scarves, mufflers, mittens as they are cut off from the (already) very poor heating! Yeah,

and on Puma, when assy goes home Ford turns off the heating so the wind has been whistling down the machine aisles! Brrrr... far too cold to work! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 24/01/18]

• Yes, we need to build cleaner engines!

What about Dagenham's "diesel future", then? This Monday, a lot of rumours were swirling around! Some people claimed that Dagenham has got a new two cylinder engine for a hybrid car - which will go in where Puma assembly is now... So because Ford apparently needs to get the area cleared on time, the Puma schedule has suddenly gone up by 30 a day! Talk about chop and change! Only last week we were told on Puma assy we had down days coming this month. Then we get in Monday morning and 23 workers from Panther have arrived to help push up the score! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 07/02/18]

**• Stop outsourcing!**

How can it be that G4S workers on security are working 70-hour weeks? Of course, due to low pay, there's no other way. But this has to stop! It's unsafe and a hazard to health! G4S workers should be entitled to equal pay and conditions with their Ford counterparts.

Only if we all fight for that, will companies like Ford be forced to stop outsourcing to cheaper and yet cheaper and dodgier cowboys... [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 07/02/18]

Women's rights

The granting of women's suffrage 100 years ago is being trumpeted as a virtue of British democracy! In a speech in Manchester, Theresa May hailed the "heroism" of the suffragettes who fought for the vote. Yet, she still refuses to pardon those who were criminalised for using violence in their fight. Indeed, the vote wasn't achieved by a benevolent reforming government. It was the outcome of years of systematic campaigning and agitation, protests and

100 years since women got the vote: the fight for social change still goes on!

demonstrations. When peaceful protests still didn't win them the vote, women chained themselves to railings, smashed shop windows and committed arson. Suffragettes were brutally manhandled by police and prison guards, who force-fed those who went on hunger strike for their freedom.

The vote may finally have been granted in 1918 - but only to women over the age of 30 who met a property qualification. In 1928, it was extended to working class

women and the age bar was reduced to 21. Despite having won the vote, however, they had no more say over the running of society than the working class men who got the vote in 1918. They all just "won" the right to put a ballot paper in a box once every 5 years to decide who should run government in the interest of their exploiting bosses. No, for real democracy we need real social change - and for that, we need to wipe out the class system of capitalism. ☐

• Poland: the Church vs women's rights

Demonstrations have broken out in Poland after parliament rejected a bill that would increase women's access to abortion, provide free contraception and incorporate sex education in schools. Instead, legislation was passed which further restricts abortion rights, banning the procedure if a woman is carrying a foetus with a congenital abnormality. One anti-abortion politician said: "We will strive to ensure that even in pregnancies which are very difficult, when a child is sure to die, severely deformed, women end up giving birth so that the child can be baptised, buried, and have a name."

This is the second time protestors have taken to the streets. Last October, 116,000 marchers across 50 cities forced the government to drop a bill which would have banned abortion in all cases except when the mother's life is threatened. It included prison terms for women seeking abortions and



doctors performing them. Behind the anti-abortion lobby is the Polish Catholic Church, with which the reactionary ruling Law and Justice party is linked. They both attempt to

assert their right to control women's bodies in order to reinforce their control over society as a whole. And in so doing, they drag society back into the middle ages!

• Ireland's referendum on abortion rights

The announcement of a referendum on whether or not to repeal its anti-abortion laws, will bring a glimmer of hope to a generation of Irish women who have had to come to England to get abortions. These laws, dating back to the 1983 amendment to the Irish constitution

made abortion virtually illegal, recognising the "equal right to life" of a woman and a fertilised egg implanted in her uterus!

Although an all-party committee has already recommended that the 1983 amendment be repealed, Ireland's constitution

requires every change in the constitution to be put to a referendum. So instead of scrapping this outdated law outright, the whole population is to "decide" for women whether they will have the right to control their own bodies!

• Shackles of debt

One would have thought that debtors' prisons were a thing of the past - like London's Marshalsea prison which infamously incarcerated debtors until they paid up, back in Victorian times. But no: as many as 95 people were sent to jail for not paying their council tax last year - in 2017!

Worse still, the High Court admitted that "individual errors" by magistrates who had not fully assessed the circumstances of those charged, accounted for at least 17 of these sentences! But the court said that 17 cases out of 95 was a "small" proportion and failed to even question the principle of imprisonment for debt! Indeed it was only after a single mother successfully challenged

a court's decision to imprison her over her unpaid council tax last January, that the High Court was forced to even consider the issue!

In the 19th century, the Debtors act of 1869 and Bankruptcy act of 1883 significantly reduced the number of people imprisoned for debt. But sections of the law still allow imprisonment - and are today again being used to victimise the poor. As Marx said "the law can never be higher than the economic structure of society". This society cannot sink much lower.

• The poverty of tourism

After the movie Slumdog Millionaire spurred a perverse mini-industry of "slum tours", one "entrepreneur" is going a step further,

by offering a night's stay in a slum in India's Mumbai.

This "entrepreneur", says other tours are "superficial" because "visitors come in, take a few snapshots for their Facebook page and go off without really understanding anything." Instead, he offers tourists a "new loft" in a slum dwelling. These privileged customers will enjoy a flatscreen television, an air conditioner and a brand new mattress - the kind of luxuries which are beyond the wildest dreams of the real slum dwellers - but, according to the organiser, they will get to "experience" life in a slum. In this sick society for the rich, poverty is exotic?!

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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