

# WORKERS' fight



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

# AGAINST THE BOSSES' BREXIT OFFENSIVE!

Are the rats beginning to leave May's sinking ship? One can only wonder after the resignation of her three most vocal hard-Brexiters.

But why? Because of the Chequers' statement, on July 6th? Unlikely, since it's just a rehashed version of May's old "have my cake and eat it" line.

Or, more likely, is it because their hard-Brexit stance was just electoral posturing? And that, with things now getting serious, they feel it's high time for them to abandon ship, before having to share the inevitable discredit which will hit May, once the real consequences of Brexit become clear?

## **Big business weighs in**

Indeed, the days when ministers could get away with sniping at each other, are gone. The way in which big business has been weighing in, reading May the riot act and dictating which direction she should take, leaves no doubt in this respect.

Over the past two years, the City heavyweights have allowed their politicians to posture to their heart's content. But now, with just over a year to go before Brexit, they want their trustees in government to take care of their interests.

So, after the big financial firms, it's now the turn of the big car manufacturers. One after the other, they all have issued warnings, threatening thousands of job cuts, should May fail to deliver the kind of trade deal they need with the EU.

After all, 40% of the 1.8m vehicles produced in Britain are exported to the EU and 2/3 of the parts used in their production are imported from the EU. The last thing the car giants want is customs barriers interfering with their production and sales.



And it's not just the car manufacturers. Big engineering and electronics groups have now all joined in, with similar warnings. Others, like Tata Steel, have formed alliances with continental rivals, threatening yet more job cuts.

But then, of course, the fact that big business would have the last word in dictating May's policy, was never a matter of if, only a matter of when.

## **Facing our class enemies**

For the working class, Brexit was a non-choice between two sides of the same capitalist coin. The Remain camp portrayed the EU as a protection when it is just a trade war device for the richest European capitalists against their US rivals. The Leave camp was peddling deluded mirages, as if British capital could "rule the waves" again. And both sides were whipping up nationalist, xenophobic prejudices, claiming that "British" workers have the same interests as their exploiters against those of their fellow workers from the EU.

Except that no, we don't have the

same interests as our exploiters - but we do have the same interests as our foreign workmates.

Today, as the Brexit process is beginning to unravel, it is proving to be the con that it always was: the bosses' interests were always bound to come first.

While their politicians were bickering, the big companies made plans to ensure that the £100bn/year dividends of their shareholders would be protected. And now, their politicians are gearing up to implement these plans, come what may.

For us, workers, this means that we're facing yet another offensive against our jobs, wages and conditions - just as we did after the banking crisis. But why should we foot the bill, once again, for their Brexit madness? By using our collective strength, uniting our ranks across all nationalities, we have the means to stop these attacks if we choose to - and this is the only way forward! ☐

**Social**

**Rents more expensive than mortgages**

New analysis by Santander found that in every part of the country it is more expensive to rent privately than to pay a mortgage. A first-time buyer could save an average of more than £2,000 per year compared to renting, and nearly £3,500 in London. The catch, of course, is that the average deposit required to get a mortgage is nearly £52,000, or £135,000 in London, which most

private renters can't afford!

The money paid in private rents in England grew from 30% of the amount spent on mortgage repayments to more than 75%, or £41.3bn, over the ten years to 2016, while mortgage spending increased only marginally, from £52.1bn to £54.9bn. The size of the private rented sector had doubled over

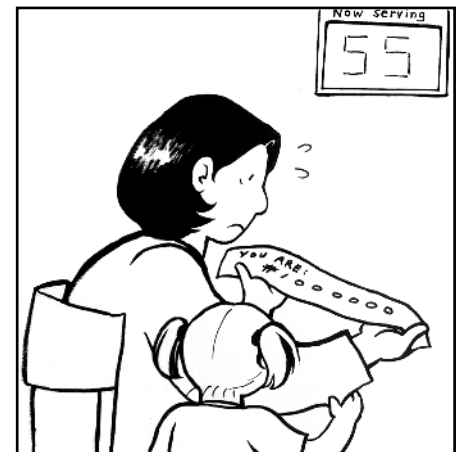
roughly the same period, but there is also plenty of evidence of landlords raising rents opportunistically. The government has promised it will consult on options to "support landlords" to offer long-term, more secure tenancies. So, raking in over £41bn a year, these sharks will get taxpayers' handouts just to treat tenants like human beings? ☐

**• Squeeze on social housing and its results**

Shelter calculates that 1.15m households were on council waiting lists for social housing in 2016-17. Almost two thirds of these families had been waiting for more than a year and more than 100,000 for over ten years. Only 290,060 homes were made available that year, down from 366,820 in 2007-8. Shelter blames reduced new building and failure to replace council homes sold under "right-to-buy". Councils say they only have the money to replace a third of the homes sold in the last six years, despite the government promising to

fund replacement in full!

The government committed £9bn by 2022 to "affordable" housing, which at 80% of market prices or rents is unaffordable for most workers! Only £1.67bn of this is allocated to fund 12,500 new social homes for rent, in the most expensive areas: a drop in the ocean. Meanwhile £18.3bn has been put aside since 2013 for "Help to Buy" loans, whose recipients now have an average annual income of nearly £50,000 (£72,000 in London), £10,000 more than when the scheme started!



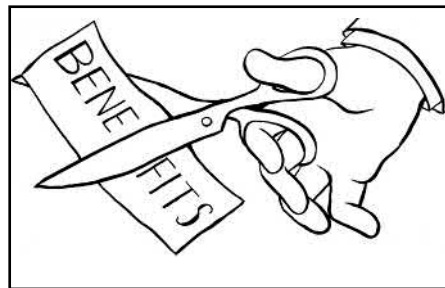
**• Rob workers to pay fat cats**

Eight years after the government's "corporate tax roadmap", corporation tax has been cut down to 19% - the lowest rate among the richest

countries - and a further reduction to 17% is planned during this parliament. Over the past 8 years, this handout to big companies is estimated so far to be worth a total of £47bn!

child benefit has been tightened up to save £0.6bn and the roll-out of universal credit is expected to save £0.2m.

Yes, the handouts to big business had to be paid for by someone! So while the government has been complaining about its "deficit" all along, the poorest sections of the working class have been pushed further into poverty in order for the Treasury to increase its largesse to the capitalist class.



This figure should be compared to the total £62bn cuts in welfare benefit imposed on the poorest and most vulnerable over the same period! And this trend is set to continue under May: working-age benefits have remained frozen for the third year in a row to "save" £1.9bn,

**• Universal disaster**

Universal Credit, the flagship benefit reform combining six benefits into one, is under fire again, even though its much delayed roll-out has only reached 10% of claimants. A National Audit office report has condemned its impact on claimants, especially the most vulnerable. It endorses the criticism that it pushes the unemployed and disabled into rent arrears, evictions and dependence on food banks. It does this by paying arrears with a six-week wait for the first payment and enforcing

sanctions at a rate which is more than ten times higher than for Jobseeker's Allowance. Ironically, the NAO also found that the system is unlikely ever to achieve its stated aim of saving administration costs.

Universal Credit was the top cause of a sharp rise in destitution identified by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. One-and-a-half million people were destitute last year and 4 million have used food banks; the districts where Universal credit has been rolled out so far have seen a

30% increase in food bank referrals. Yes, the government has spent billions on making life even worse for the poorest in society!

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## Scarcity in the midst of abundance

In the aftermath of the Grenfell fire, Housing Minister Alok Sharma promised the 138 families who lost their homes that they would be re-housed within a year, and in the local area.

A year later, more than half the families are still waiting. Sixty-eight families are still living in emergency accommodation. Many have had to stay in hotel rooms and temporary flats. Others may have been offered permanent re-housing options, but these were in distant areas, and they were offered cramped conditions or houses with no living room!

This, in one of the richest boroughs in London which also has more

### • Criminal conspiracy of silence

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry commission finally began its "evidence gathering" in May. But it has so far failed to inquire into the real culprits responsible for this horrendous inferno. Criminal subcontractors like Rydon, the company



than a 1,000 perfectly adequate homes lying empty! Of course, the politicians are far too respectful of

private property to do the obvious: re-house the still homeless Grenfell victims in these empty homes! □

### • Why are Grenfell firefighters in the dock?

On the 27th June the Grenfell Tower Inquiry put firefighters in the dock. Its initial line of questioning was obviously aimed at blaming firefighters themselves for sticking to protocol, which for residents in such blocks of flats is usually to "stay put" - since flats should be fire-proof - if, of course, they meet regulatory standards. It also implied that it would've been possible to stage an evacuation early on, saving many of those who died.

However, the "Watch Manager" responsible that night, made it quite clear that the spread of the fire was unprecedentedly fast and given there was only one stairwell which rapidly filled with



which won an £8.7m contract from the council to "refurbish" the flats in 2013, is just one among many other witnesses testifying. What's more, an army of lawyers has been stonewalling the inquiry by refusing to provide any information.

smoke, that it was an impossible task, with the minimal resources at his disposal, to evacuate residents. And of course, resources were minimal, because of massive cuts to the fire service.

As the Fire Brigades' Union explains: "*Cameron's 'red tape challenge' ran down the importance of [buildings] regulation and public safety. Chief fire officers accepted 'safe enough', instead of proper compliance with the law. Together they cut one-in-five firefighter jobs, including control staff and fire safety inspectors. No credible inquiry can ignore these long-term pressures that preceded the Grenfell Tower fire.*" And they add: "*If the 'Stay put' approach failed, it failed as soon as flammable cladding was installed on the building.*"

But neither Cameron, nor the host of ministers that preceded him - let alone the CEOs of those cladding companies implicated in the fire, are called to the GTI dock. Why not?

### • A disaster in the making

Last month, the Grenfell Tower inquiry published several reports covering the tower's safety measures, how the fire spread and the evacuation of its residents. The new facts that have surfaced so far, show that even more regulations were broken, than anyone had suspected.

So for instance, the fire-stopping barriers on the surface of the building, which are designed to prevent fire from spreading, were not properly installed, making them useless. The smoke ventilation, meant to extract toxic gases from the lobbies outside flats, was broken - this

Grenfell victims require answers. A further inquiry would be needed in order to uncover what these cowboys (and their accomplices) have perpetrated in the other blocks which they have refurbished!

had been reported to the tower's private management company, KCTMO, 8 days before the fire, but the report was completely ignored. It was also found that the fire lift, which fire fighters rely upon to transport equipment and personnel during a fire, was out of order. And when KCTMO decided to replace 106 out of the 120 flat doors in 2011, none of them was up to the required standard of being able to resist fire for at least 60 minutes!

The list of regulation breaches, which finally cost 71 lives, is getting ever-longer. And why? Because enforcing these regulations would have dented the profits of KCTMO and its subcontractors! But profiteering is not even on trial here!

### • No more Grenfells!

A year after the Grenfell fire, at least 470 high-rise tower blocks are still clad in combustible material, and this is not counting the 170 private sector residential buildings which also have similar cladding. In the past year, only 19 buildings higher than 18 metres - including affordable and private blocks - have so far had their cladding replaced, leaving thousands living in homes wrapped in flammable material!

These are yet more disasters waiting to happen. Already on 21 June, there was a fire in a Manchester block right next to a block clad in combustible material. Another Grenfell can be prevented. But if it is not, the power-hungry politicians and their profit-hungry subcontractor friends will have more blood on their hands.



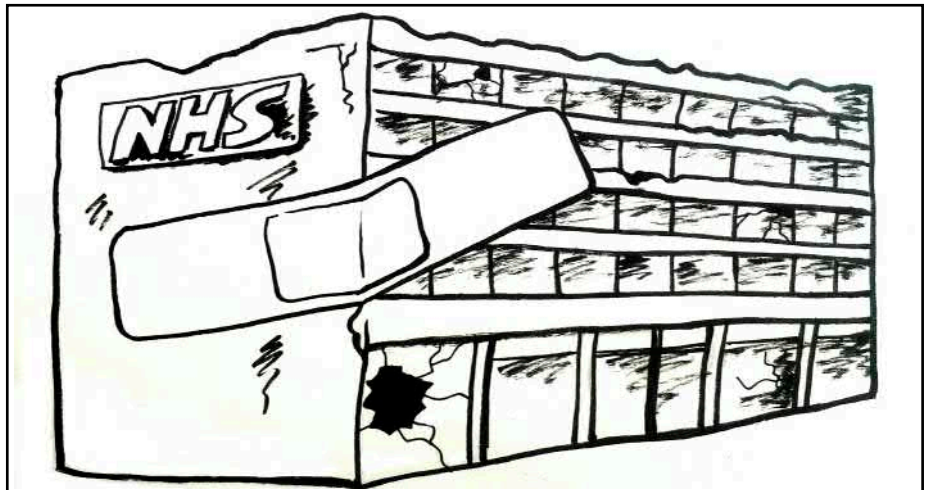
## NHS

***Crippled by capitalism***

So, what is the state of the NHS? Over the past 8 years, the number of patients waiting for 4 hours or more in A&E departments has increased 5-fold. Over the past year alone, the numbers of those waiting for more than 18 weeks before starting treatment has increased by 35%, while more and more operations were cancelled at the last minute. Meanwhile, the collapse of social care is filling hospitals with ageing, sick, patients who have nowhere else to go.

What's pushing the NHS over the cliff today is partly lack of funding. But it's not just a lack of funds. For decades, the NHS budget has been milked by private "health providers". The fewer scanners in NHS hospitals, the more surgical operations have to be cancelled by the NHS, the more profits these sharks can make out of its budget, by "offering" their own equipment and facilities. Their parasitism feeds on the collapse of the NHS, while accelerating it!

Then, there are the 100,000 unfilled vacancies in the NHS, mainly for lack of local skills. To do its



job, the NHS needs a high proportion of foreign-born workers. This could work, if it was not for May's bloody-minded anti-migrant policy. So, thousands of non-EU doctors are threatened with deportation or refused a visa. And Brexit promises to bring this witch-hunt to a climax, this time against EU workers.

The results are damning: Britain ranks in the bottom six among the 21 richest countries in terms of its number of GPs, hospital doctors,

nurses and hospital beds per inhabitant. And the consequences are even more damning: in 2015, there were 30% more avoidable deaths in NHS hospitals than in France - with no visible improvement since!

70 years on, what is the lesson of all this? That there can be no real public health - or public services for that matter - as long as private profit cripples society. And it is this disease - capitalism itself - which needs to be cured, once and for all! □

### • ***May's "Brexit dividend" - yet another lie!***

May thought it would be politically smart to use the 70th anniversary of the NHS - and its on-going collapse - to smuggle in yet another Boris Johnson-type lie: that, as a "Brexit dividend for the NHS", she would inject £20bn/year into the health service - or £600m/week as opposed to Johnson's £350m/week pledge!

But then, faced with roars of laughter, May had to bite her tongue. Her

own statisticians had just worked out that Brexit will cut government income by an estimated £15bn/year! So, she finally admitted that it wasn't Brexit, but taxes that would mostly pay for her "dividend" - and, of course, not the taxes of the City, but those of the working class!

However, will this fake "dividend" be even nearly enough to "save the NHS" as May claims? No, it won't and

it can't. Just to make up for the past 8 years of starving the NHS of the funding it needed, its budget would have to be increased immediately by 25% in cash terms - or £37bn/year!

Yes, immediately! But that's not what May has in mind. Her £20bn/year "dividend" for the NHS will only happen by... 2023! In the meantime, patients will just have to take care of themselves... or die!

### • ***The only "dividend" for the NHS: staff shortages!***

In fact, the only "Brexit dividend" for the NHS is the acute staff shortage. One in eight NHS employees (12.5%) are foreign nationals, of whom EU citizens make up 5.6%, the majority of the rest coming from

Asia and Africa. Among doctors, this figure was 30% in 2009, coming down to 26% due to tightening immigration rules.

With EU citizens now being made to fill out 85-page forms to remain

in Britain, many health professionals are now leaving the country and many others being put off coming. Yes, the Home Office's "hostile environment" is just making a bad situation much, much, worse.

### • ***Social care left to disintegrate***

During her "long-term plan for the NHS" speech last month, May announced that social care won't get any extra funding before the next government spending review, in 2020.

Since 2010, however, council budgets for social care have shrunk by 7% - despite the number of elderly people with unmet care needs rising

by 48% over the same period! And of course, the cuts in social care funding have been worst in deprived areas: the 30 poorest councils have had to cut social care 6 times as much as the 30 wealthiest.

Today, social care, which is virtually entirely in the hands of private providers, is on the brink of collapse.

Already private providers have handed back their contracts with 50 councils, while going belly-up in 64 others! So much for May's "long term-plan" - which is, in fact, not a plan, but just a consultation paper. In the meantime, her only plan is to leave the elderly to rot, for the foreseeable future!

## Was it ever "our" NHS?

On the 30th of June, thousands of people joined a national march organised to celebrate the 70th Birthday of "our" NHS, while calling for better funding.. But after decades of cuts and backdoor privatisation, what was there to celebrate? So the main aim of this march should really have been an opportunity for the participants to express their anger against the politicians who are responsible for the on-going collapse of the NHS.

Anyway, the NHS was never "our" NHS, not for the working class in any case. Rather, it was the by-product of a period when the capitalists were so terrified of a possible social explosion after the devastation of the war that they got their politicians to organise state-run, national, public services and in the case of the NHS, free at the point of use - supposedly for the good of the working class.

The NHS blueprint had been presented in 1942, by the Liberal William Beveridge and a "free" NHS was launched in embryo during the war, under Conservative health minister, Henry Willink. But even later



under Labour, it was never fully adequate, quite simply because, under the control of the capitalist class, it was primarily designed to cost as little as possible to the state. And, of course, big business was not forgotten: right from its inception, the NHS provided the pharmaceutical giants with the colossal bounty they still enjoy. Thereafter, far from meeting the needs of all, the NHS was used to ration healthcare, to minimise costs and, later on, to provide an ever increasing flow of profits to the private sharks - which is, to a large extent, the reason why it

is collapsing today.

So, no, there was never such a thing as "our NHS" for the working class, not any more that there was such a thing as "our British Petroleum" or "our British Steel". All these services and industries were run by the state of the capitalist class, under its control and, primarily, for its benefit. Of course, things could have been different, had the working class imposed its own direct control at every level of society. But to do this it would have meant getting rid of capitalism first!

## • **Medical cannabis: profits are always legal!**

It's incredible how the use of medical cannabis for a critically ill epileptic boy had to be legitimised through "exceptional powers" by the Home Secretary, because it is illegal to possess the drug in any circumstances. And, how patients for whom it's essential for the control of their symptoms, have to obtain it illegally and are subject to raids by police or Home Office officials.

So now, what about the legalisation of its medical use for all? Even (now former) Health Secretary

Jeremy Hunt suggested this, but was overruled by Theresa May, who has bowed to her ignorant and reactionary back-benchers.

Belatedly, there's now to be a government "review" - never mind that British officials refused to allow scientists here to participate in an already-underway World Health Organisation study into medical cannabis. But that's the backward and arrogance stance of the British establishment in a nutshell! It won't recognise research which is done

elsewhere as valid! It has to be "British" to be acceptable!

The biggest irony is that Britain is the world's greatest producer/exporter of cannabis - 70% of the world's total! So never mind its illegality for those suffering chronic pain or uncontrollable seizures, if you own a cannabis farm or processing factory, there won't be any raids or arrests: big business is always welcome, if not actually encouraged, to find its way around any law!

## • **Saving money, not lives**



NHS England has recently announced plans to scrap 4 surgical procedures, with a further 13 to be strictly rationed. Thus surgical procedures to relieve osteoarthritis and heavy menstrual bleeding, will cease to be offered on the NHS as well as tonsillectomies, surgery for varicose veins and carpal tunnel release. This rationing is part of an attempt to make budget cuts, the aim being to "save" £200m a year - just 0.17% of the

whole NHS budget!

But none of these are "unnecessary" or "futile" procedures. They treat extremely common conditions! Indeed, it seems that the real agenda is to force patients to turn to the private sector, thus turning these 17 procedures no longer freely available on the NHS, into money-spinners for private profiteers. And those who can't cough up huge hospital fees will simply have to continue to suffer.

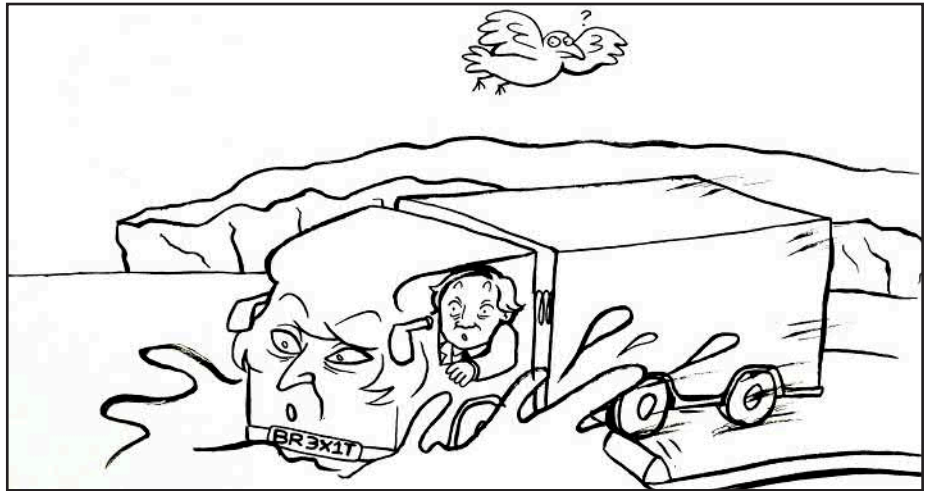
## NHS

**Brexit watch****The stalemate goes on in the Tory party**

At her second Chequers government "summit", on July 6th, May claimed victory, announcing that she had finally reached a "collective position" with her ministers - in effect, the collective "negotiating position" that her government had never managed to agree on since it was formed, almost 2 years ago.

Of course, all sorts of other options were suggested during that time. There was the idea of a free trade "Canada-type deal", which was rejected because it didn't give British finance access to the EU. Then a "Norway-type deal" was rejected because it wouldn't have ended the free movement of EU citizens. Finally, a "Ukrainian-type deal" was thrown out because it would reinstate the border checks on goods that no-one wanted to have!

So, is this latest "negotiating position" a real breakthrough? Although it was immediately presented by most of the media as a "soft-Brexit", it still retains all the same red lines that the EU is bound to object to: on



the one hand, a complicated system of dual tariffs, supposedly designed to allow goods to cross the EU-British border without checks, and, on the other, no free circulation for EU citizens across the same border.

So, to all intents and purposes, this "negotiating position" is a "hard-soft Brexit" - soft on goods, but hard on human beings! As to being "collective", it is not - as was shown

by the walk-out staged by three leading figures of the Tory hard-Brexit faction - David Davis, Boris Johnson and Steve Baker. So, not only is the hard-Brexiters' guerilla war bound to heat up on this side of the channel, but there absolutely no guarantee that the EU will even look at this position, most of which it has already rejected in the past. Politicking again, this is all it is! □

### • **What now for EU workers?**

The so-called soft Brexit deal made at Chequers adds nothing any softer for workers from Europe. Theresa May has repeated, once more, that the free movement of people will end on Brexit Day next year. However, she has now said that those with new jobs, positions in universities or research institutions, as well as tourists, will still be allowed to cross

the border after Brexit if they prove their intentions. How this will be done is not specified.

For the time being, therefore, the default position of the Home Office is that all EU citizens living and working here will, from the 29 March 2019, have to prove their ID, say if they have any criminal convictions and say if they are resident

- via a smartphone app or online. This would be checked by the Home Office - a new (giant!) EU registration data base has already been launched for the purpose. Not that anyone has any confidence in its ability not to crash or even explode, given the monumental task! But it will be a nice money-spinner for the IT industry...

### • **Settling for more**

In fact all EU citizens and family members who've been in the UK for 5 years minimum - or will have been, by June 2021 - are meant to apply for "settled status", in order to remain and work here in Britain indefinitely, at the apparently "reasonable" cost of £65 (£32.50 for children). Yes, a money-spinner for the Home Office, in this case, given the number of people (over 3m!) this could involve.

Of course, with its "hostile to migrants" culture, the government could decide to change the goal posts for EU workers before the end of EU negotiations. Tory and Labour politicians alike, keep playing to what they consider a "popular" gallery, which blames migrant workers rather than the real culprits - in other words, the politicians themselves and the bosses they defend - for the increasingly precarious conditions of the

working class. As a result, uncertainty and anxiety prevail and the working class over here is already losing the dynamic boost to its ranks which EU workers have been bringing to it, over all these years.

### • **A new Bank of England?**

The Home Office has become a "money-making machine", pure and simple! Even before the "hostile environment" policy, fees for nationality, residence and registration costs were already high, but since 2010 they've been rising exponentially and were increased again this April. So for instance, today it costs £1,330 for an adult naturalisation application, when it cost £700 (already a lot) 7 years ago. In 2011, Damien Green, then immigration minister, announced increases in all fees, saying this was to "offset cuts" in the Home Office budget.

Today it's estimated that the Home Office makes profits of as much as 800%

on immigration applications! In fact legitimising the "right to stay" for a whole family from an overseas country, no matter that they have leave to remain, could cost well over £10,000. "Registration", whereby someone (including from the so-called "Windrush generation") with an existing right to British citizenship needs the citizenship formalised, costs £1,206 for an adult and £1,012 per child. In 2014, discounts for a 2nd, or additional child were scrapped.

And this is not even to mention the revenue accrued to government by charges for visas for everyone from students (£255) to workers or academics (from £610-£1,314) from all countries outside the EU - and the now obligatory so-called NHS "surcharge" of £150-£1,000! Yes, immigrants are now meant to fund both the provision and the removal of their own rights - and, of course, add millions to the profits of the Home Office's private subcontractors!



## Preparing for disaster?

Philip Hammond, Chancellor of the Exchequer, told bankers attending his Mansion House speech last month, that the Bank of England will be able to extend credit of more than £500bn, without asking the Treasury for authorisation, making the process quicker in the event of an emergency. Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank, wrote to Hammond that the move "ensures the credibility of the Bank's policy actions even in the most stressed environment".

Hammond's move is designed to reassure the financial system that, just as during the 2007-2008 crisis or the aftermath of the Brexit vote, cash will be made available to those big banks and companies that may need it. He is reassuring speculators that the government will be at hand



even before there is any apparent danger. Which only goes to show that the government is incapable of measuring the risks involved for

the economy, while still insisting on playing with fire - which is the sorry story of the Brexit saga, but also the story of capitalism's recklessness. □

## Brexit watch

### • The Brexit poker game

A number of manufacturing companies have threatened to stop or move production out of Britain if they do not retain tariff and customs-free access between Britain and the EU after Brexit. The Society for Motor Manufacturers and Traders said that this may put 860,000 jobs in the car industry at risk. Airbus warned that

it may have to close its production facilities, with the loss of 14,000 jobs. BMW's threat puts 7,000 jobs at risk. Jaguar Land Rover has decided to move production of its Land Rover Discovery model from Britain to Slovakia which could affect hundreds of jobs. Rolls Royce has announced 3,000 job cuts. Honda,

Nissan and Toyota have added to the calls and made similar threats.

Quite obviously, the big companies are now doing their best to pressurise May into getting the best Brexit deal possible for themselves. But, of course, this doesn't mean that, even if they do get that "dream" deal, they won't cut jobs, anyway!

### • The bosses' plan to have their cake and eat it

Behind the job cuts now threatened by so many giant manufacturing companies in the event of a hard Brexit, there is another, more hidden threat looming. Indeed, beyond the clamour of Brexit, the capitalist economy remains in the midst of a deep crisis. More than ever, the bosses are on the lookout for any pretext to justify screwing more profits out of the working class.

Let's not forget that, back in 2007-2008, most companies were not directly affected by the banking

crisis. In fact, thanks to the Bank of England's bailout, they sat for years on a mountain of cash which they never invested. But this did not stop them from crying poverty and using the banking crash as a pretext to go on the rampage against workers.

For the exploiters, any pretext will do - and, tomorrow, Brexit (whether hard or soft) will do just as well. Their mouthpieces in the media already complain about what they call the "low productivity" of the working class here. It's not hard to fill in

the blanks. Once Brexit gets underway for good, they'll claim that the "productivity gap" between British companies and their foreign rivals is "unsustainable" and that workers must agree to another turn of the screw to boost Britain's competitiveness.

And this is what the working class needs to prepare for, now: the capitalist class must not be allowed, once again, to get away with this, without having to face a powerful fight back!

### • Ratcliffe's "Brexit dividend"

Jim Ratcliffe, owner of petrochemical giant Ineos and now, Britain's top sponger, according to the latest Sunday Times Rich list, has always been a vocal Brexiteer. As it turns out, though, his British flag-waving does not extend to offering his estimated £21bn wealth to what he calls "the nation" - quite the opposite, in fact, since he seems to think that he has a license to parasitise public funds.

So, lately, Ratcliffe has been

blackmailing the government over a new £100m-plus Ineos production facility. If he's granted a large enough subsidy, Ratcliffe may consider building this plant in Hull. Otherwise the plant will be built in Belgium, in the middle of the much larger EU market - so much for Ratcliffe's Brexiteering!

At the same time, Ineos is also aiming to become one of the main players in the fracking industry, with two of Britain's nine largest

exploration licenses. Predictably, however, Ratcliffe isn't talking about moving his fracking business to the continent, quite simply because fracking remains heavily regulated, or even banned, in most of the EU, for obvious environmental reasons. So Ratcliffe's flag-waving does not go so far as caring about Britain's environment either!

But then, of course, whether pro or anti-Brexit, the capitalists know only one "nation" - their own wallets!

**Brexit watch****High-street jobs on the firing line**

Another month, another series of closures and job cuts in retail. After announcements threatening over 35,000 jobs since the beginning of the year, the casualty list is getting longer.

Some of these casualties are up-market chains, like House of Fraser (31 stores to be closed, involving 6,000 jobs) and John Lewis (5 Waitrose supermarkets). But most are primarily working class household names. So, after announcing the closure of 40 stores out of 250, Homebase has now said that it would be closing another 80 stores over the summer. Carpetright followed with plans to close 92 stores out of 205. Then it was Poundworld's turn, where over 5,000 jobs are under threat in 355 stores.

Economic commentators claim this is due to soaring internet sales and rents - and maybe this is part of the explanation. But whatever they



may say, the fact is that consumption, especially among the working class, has been edging down ever since the Brexit referendum, due to rising prices and falling real wages. Whether they are actually already in

financial trouble or simply anticipating that consumption will fall even further in the future, the big retailers are not taking any risks. And workers are made to foot the bill, with their jobs. □

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**• Putting his money where his (big) mouth isn't!**

Jacob Rees-Mogg used to be known as a posh Tory backbench MP. Now he has set himself up as May's hard Brexit conscience, promising to hold her to the letter of her stated policy of leaving the single market and customs union. A leading voice for a "no deal" Brexit and the "bright future" that beckons after it, he has manoeuvred himself into a position

that forces May, and any other hard-Brexit challenger for her job, to deal with him.

But, in fact, this is all posturing, as is shown by Rees-Mogg's business dealings, as a partner at the investment fund he co-founded. This fund, Somerset Capital Management, has joined the migration across the Irish Sea, setting up an operation

in Dublin in time to avoid being cut off from the EU's vast stock of investment capital, post-Brexit. Hard Brexit or no, Rees-Mogg will retain the benefits of the single market that remain available to the very few with enough millions, who certainly do not include the vast majority of his North-east Somerset constituents!

**• May's new allies, in her own image**

May's Tory MEPs lined up with Ukip, French and Austrian far-right parties and Swedish white supremacists in a European parliament committee, to oppose a vote of censure against the government of Hungary for its right-wing nationalist rhetoric and anti-refugee policies.

Viktor Orban and his Fidesz party came to power in 2010 by

whipping up hatred against the country's Roma and Romanian minorities, thereby giving far-right militias an opportunity to go on the rampage against them. Since then, Orban has created his own hostile environment for refugees fleeing Syria, branding them "Muslim invaders" and "terrorists".

While the vote of censure against Orban was nevertheless

carried by more than two to one, that wasn't the point for May. So isolated is her government that any support within Europe is welcome, no matter how revolting: following the vote, Orban's foreign minister duly broke ranks with other EU countries, warning that failure to agree a Brexit deal with May would be "devastating".

**• Beauty contest for big bucks**

With Brexit on the horizon, banks and investment firms are scrambling to set up operations in Dublin or on the continent, while various governments scramble to entice them! Hedging their Brexit bets, some of the biggest banks in the world such as Wells Fargo, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, Standard Chartered, UBS, HSBC and Barclays, plus a large

number of asset managers such as Ferroviale (which owns Heathrow) have moved some of their operations outside Britain. After all, they wouldn't want to miss out on their share of speculative capital in the EU, post-Brexit?

These moves have generated a beauty contest among the main EU governments. The European Banking Authority has warned that

banks should make their post-Brexit preparations soon, while the Bank of England has been trying to reassure them that everything will be OK after Brexit. Polish, French, Dutch and German officials have declared that they are meeting banks and trying to attract them to their countries. Their "Union" is obviously not rivalry-free!



**King's Cross railway station (London)****LNER: No to business as usual**

On June 24th, the government-appointed London and North Eastern Railway (LNER) took over the running of East Coast from the Virgin/Stagecoach (VTEC) franchise. But this is hardly the "re-nationalisation" announced in the media! LNER is a consortium of 3 separate private companies, Arup, Ernst & Young and SNC Lavallin, subcontracted by the Department for Transport, as "Operator of Last Resort", already created by the government back in 2015, to take over failed franchises. It's an "interim arrangement", until another private bidder is found - but former

disgraced operators, Virgin and Stagecoach, will even be allowed to re-bid!

The managers, right up to the top, are all keeping their jobs. As for the workers, we've been told that "nothing changes". But this is precisely our problem! We want changes!

All the job cuts on platforms and on-board need urgent reversing. Guards should become guards again and catering teams restored. Ticket offices need re-opening. What's more, the pay cut implemented against workers who "opted out" of a below-inflation pay deal

**• DOO by another name... still DOO**

The latest 24-hour strikes by guards against "Driver Only Operation" (of carriage doors) on Northern and Greater Anglia are part of the RMT's long-standing "keep a guard on every train" campaign. This started when train operators (backed by

government) tried to make savings by removing guards' jobs, claiming their role wasn't "safety critical". The RMT rightly opposed this, but said its campaign was "nothing to do with wages or conditions", but was purely to "keep passengers safe".

Thus began the drawn-out series of mainly 24-hour, uncoordinated strikes on Scotrail, Southern, First Great Western, Greater Anglia, Southwestern, Northern and Merseyrail, mostly organised separately on each line, involving guards alone and not even succeeding in pulling in drivers, no matter that they were expected to take over the guards' role and didn't wish to.

Unsurprisingly, the RMT has been forced into compromises and defeats:



last year, which cut sick pay (which was a provocation on the part of VTEC against the RMT), has to be reversed immediately as well!

Yes, it is up to us, the workforce, across the board, to take opportunity of this so-called "interim arrangement" to fight for what we need. ☐

on Southern, despite an (on-going!) 26-month dispute, guards' jobs were cut, they're no longer safety-critical and are rebranded as On-board Supervisors. On Scotrail, drivers open doors and guards close them: probably something which is planned for East Coast, where new Azuma trains will allow drivers to operate doors.

Of course the RMT is right to oppose DOO. But pushing "safety" to get public sympathy, while abrogating the fight for jobs, and organising token, sectional, top-down action, means that the all-out, coordinated, fight across companies involving all rail-workers including drivers - the only way to win this fight - has never been on the cards. Maybe it's not too late?

**• Hands off our mates!**

We just can't believe what we hear! ISS bosses are blaming us for their faults. There are serious safety breaches on platform "0" - and what they do is to blame us tankers! Those managers who think they can put pressure on us to work in unsafe conditions had better think again. They might just end up with nobody working at all... [Workers' Platform King's Cross 04/07/18]

**• Safe haven**

Thanks so much to GTR for sending out instructions on how we can deal with "unhappy" customers due to the timetable disruptions they(!) caused! They even sent extra security personnel to protect us. In fact these are excellent suggestions, specially the one about moving "to a place of safety" ... And this is exactly what we intend to do! Move permanently outside the station till they fix this chaos! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 04/07/18]

**• Slow working for quick relief?**

In the signalbox, we've obviously been having to deal with the timetable chaos. But we're the last to be told about the stopping patterns of trains, if we're ever told! Things are so hectic, we don't even have meal reliefs, let alone headache reliefs! Will the new, new, timetable on 15th July be any better? We don't think so! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 04/07/18]

**• "Flied" eggs**

How can chefs on East Coast manage to fry eggs in hot oil when the train is shuddering because of the state of the tracks? They go flying out of the pan! The bacon is already on the floor and we're roller-skating on sausages because the oven doors and racks have fallen off. Need we go on? Nothing here is fit for use, and it's hardly safe, either. [Workers' Platform King's Cross 04/07/18]

**• Under-serve**

Whoever heard of a cleaning company which didn't have enough bins? Meet Interserve! For as long as we can remember, workers have been short of bins to empty the trash. The only thing that seems to be in oversupply here are the rats...! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 04/07/18]

**• Get rid of them all!**

The CEO of GTR, Charles Horton has finally walked the plank! And now there are calls for Grayling's head, because of the giant timetable c\*\*\*-up! Of course, there are (unfortunately) plenty more of these nasty hatchet-wielding incompetents where these two came from. Is there a state-sponsored production line somewhere, which makes them? [Workers' Platform King's Cross 20/06/18]

## Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

**The Royal Mail Pensions sell-out**

On March 31st, Royal Mail closed what was left of its Defined Benefit scheme claiming it was unaffordable. The 142,000-strong workforce was transferred to an "interim" Defined Contribution scheme while RM and the Communication Workers' Union officials promised to "work towards" a "Collective Defined Contribution" (CDC) scheme. But this would still at best result in pensions worth 22% less than before - and that's assuming the CDC scheme even comes into existence. Because it requires a new regulatory framework - and so far the

government is not putting it in place.

The problem is that nobody, in parliament or the bosses' world, is very interested in CDC schemes. On the one hand, companies have been cutting pensions by moving from DB schemes to DC schemes without any hindrance. On the other, the CDC scheme is so similar to DC schemes, that they do not feel it is worth the effort. But have no fear! RM and CWU officials have already pompously declared they'll "take a leadership position to influence the world of pensions"!

One expert witness told MPs on



the 20th June that given the "lack of private sector demand for them, and CDC schemes' similarities to with-profits funds" the best solution is to "improve with-profits funds" and "rebrand to assuage an unfortunate history"! In other words, keep the RM workforce on the DC scheme, but call it something else to pretend you've kept your promise! ☐

- **Doing anything for a bonus**

Managers came up with the results of the employee survey on Monday. They must be worried... because they told us they want to help improve things here in HMP. Of course, it's obvious we're short of hands everywhere and the only way they can make it better is to bring the workers back! We said so. But for them, "improvement" really means improving their bonuses! And they want them so badly that they've even been seen getting their lily-white hands dirty, on flats and letters... If they want to "help" they should get out of our way! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant mail centre 04/07/18]

- **Productivity my a\*\*e**

Yes, it did happen. At WTS managers said they're preparing to revert to the old frame on flats and they just did it this week. Now we're only one worker per frame... So why did managers bother to make this change? To improve the "productivity" of each one of us, or to measure it, and track our every move, every working hour? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant mail centre 04/07/18]

- **Don't mind us, we only work here...**

And if they reconfigure the frames, they don't bother to tell us first! It's like you're travelling on a familiar road and all the road signs are suddenly changed. But in this case, unfortunately, we aren't going anywhere - even if we're lost!

[Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant mail centre 04/07/18]

- **Selling snake-oil**

So, the "area manager" of the Post Office Insurance Society (POIS) was here last week... A fancy job-title for what's just an insurance salesman-come-storyteller trying to sell us financial products to allegedly complement our pensions.

Their website reads, "you may get back less than you have paid in" as indeed we might! The proceeds are just gambled away on the stock market...

No, there is no miracle cure to reverse the cuts in our pensions - other than our own medicine..!

[Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant mail centre 04/07/18]

- **What's going on with our pensions?**

And on the subject, why no news from the CWU's TeePee on the new CDC pension? Yes, that "fantastic" solution from the CWU which he told us we'd all be "delighted" with. Besides the fact it represents an undefined pension sum on retirement; isn't guaranteed by the government and will mean a loss of 20-30% for many of us compared to our DB pension - besides all that - it seems that now the needed regulation change is not happening any time soon, if at all! We have been sold a pup. What about returning it to sender...? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant mail centre 04/07/18]

- **Cool nights**

Now, since the last wave of redundancies, we reckon there are 28 jobs vacant on nights - although a conservative estimate makes it "just" 10! Yes, still a lot. In fact we've been struggling with a hands' shortage for over a year... But whatever the number of vacancies, we can't each grow an extra pair of hands. Work will have to go on at our very reduced pace, that's all. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant mail centre 04/07/18]

**The gig economy: a real fight needed!**

Hermes couriers are only the latest workers in the so-called "gig economy" to win a court case for recognition as regular employees of the company rather than self-employed "independent contractors". On 3 June, 65 couriers won entitlement to (at least) the minimum wage and holiday pay, and also the right to reclaim deductions from their wages. The ruling is likely to affect the wider network of 14,500 Hermes couriers employed under the same

contracts.

Also this June, an attempt by Pimlico Plumbers to overturn a court ruling stating that one of its "self-employed operatives" was entitled to "worker status", was thrown out by the Supreme Court. Meanwhile, although the High Court overturned an Employment Tribunal ruling that Deliveroo riders were also entitled to "worker status", the company opted for an out-of-court settlement, to compensate 50 couriers who had been paid below the minimum wage and deprived of paid holidays .

Of course, this alone cannot stop the growth of these "new-age" casual contracts: the bosses always find new loopholes, and the government will always turn a blind eye. But neither will symbolic one day marches against precarious jobs, like the one called in May by the TUC. If today the bosses feel confident enough to impose such conditions and erode the gains made by generations of working class fights, it's because they've never faced the collective strength of workers today. That is what is needed.

**Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**

**FAST tracked cost-cutting?**

VW and Ford have recently announced that they are in talks to develop an "alliance", with suggestions that they may jointly produce commercial vehicles. The tie-up is part of Ford's project of aggressive cost-cutting from 2019 to 2022 called "F.A.S.T." (Fitness, Acceleration, Skills, Transition), to increase its stock price and put more money into

the pockets of shareholders.

At Dagenham, as part of this same FAST, workers on the Panther engine line have already been sent to the R&D centre, Dunton, to suggest ways of cutting costs, and surveys have been done across the plant to see where cuts to the workforce can be made. While it is unclear what changes the VW-Ford alliance will



bring, the only thing we can be sure of is that it will be used by Ford to cut wages and conditions - and we should get prepared to oppose these new cuts, and... FAST! ☐

• **BBC standing on a ladder**

So, the BBC came down to Dagenham last week to film in the plant for the 50th anniversary of the sewing machinists' strike. But most of us only heard about it after the event! They brought in the wooden horse cart(!), with "Women's Suffrage" written on it, trying to link the 1918 woman's vote with the 1968 strike at Dagenham. But did they interview any women workers - or any workers at all? Not on your Nelly! No, they brought along their own 2 selected women to talk to - a senior lawyer and a business woman. And didn't even make sure they knew

anything about the strike... [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 13/06/18]

• **...talking about equality**

They said that the broadcast was a celebration of the Equal Pay Act. What a laugh! Ford tries to bask in this glow of "equality"? When conditions now have got so bad, with so many different tiers of temps and agency workers, that there are even so-called "bogus self employed" working on the line!

Yes, this factory is a monument to inequality, if anything! If the BBC crew had asked us, we'd have made their show a lot more interesting... But Ford had

obviously told them not to let us talk - and they had very good reason to worry about what we might say! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 13/06/18]

• **State-of-the-art... fans?**

Good, at last fans are being put up here on Panther engine line. Probably it's because mates threatened a walk-out if Fords didn't provide them last summer. Ford made excuses that you can't have air blowing on engines, this is a clean area, etcetera... But of course, they backtracked. Threatening their profits tends to open their minds. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 27/06/18]

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

**Brexit: heads they win, tails we lose - or so they hope!**

BMW has been very vocal about the 'hardship' it may face with Brexit, while at the same time having meetings with May's government and other car company bosses, to ensure its interests will be looked after, whatever happens. But inside the Cowley Mini plant, the BMW factory boss held mass meetings last month, telling workers investment would be "on hold" until the Brexit "deal" became clear.

However, the attacks on us workers are not "on hold". BMW has been reducing the time we have for each process on the line, and has already

started on the latest round of job cuts.

The hypocrisy does not end there. Already for years BMW has been maintaining a temporary agency workforce and withholding investment in permanent employment. Which is, of course, so that it can have "flexible" and sackable workers. BMW also uses subcontractors - the largest of which, Rudolph and Hellman, had its own Brexit meeting, in which it told its workers that BMW was just using "scare tactics", and that their jobs were "safe"!



Obviously we do not trust any of these cowboys, whether big or small. Brexit or no Brexit they will try to squeeze as much as possible out of us for as little as possible. As always, whether they succeed or not, depends on our collective resistance - in other words, our fightback! ☐

• **BMW - blood money**

We are worried about one of our workmates on wheel assembly who was seriously injured and taken to hospital. So far BMW's told us nothing about his condition. After the accident the line was stopped for 2 hours. Guess how management responded? All they wanted was for us to make up for their 'losses'. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford Mini 04/07/18]



• **Snake in the grass**

The BMW boss's 'announcement' to explain his "uncertainty" over Brexit contained the usual hypocrisy. He particularly addressed the EU workers here, saying that, BMW would try to ensure that they could stay. Yes - the boss pretending to 'help us' while putting all the blame on the political establishment, as if they are not all in it together! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford Mini 04/07/18]



**Refugee crisis****The catastrophic state of the world refugee crisis**

The number of refugees in the world has reached a staggering level: one person is forcibly displaced every two seconds as a result of conflict or persecution. According to the latest report of the UNHCR, an unprecedented 68.5 million people around the world have been forced from their homes whether as a direct result of war (Syria, Yemen, Libya, Iraq, Sudan, Palestine), or due to famine, political oppression or economic devastation. Vast regions and whole cities have been destroyed, leaving populations without the means to live. Even then, 85% of refugees remain within or close to the place they fled from, since they don't have the means to do otherwise. But the affected countries do not have the resources to support them.

Yet today, here, in resource-rich Europe, and in particular in the countries

**• EU and refugees: united in hypocrisy**

Last month Italy's Interior Minister, the Northern League's, Matteo Salvini, blocked the Aquarius rescue ship from docking in Sicily, declaring that "Italy cannot become Europe's refugee camp". The ship was carrying 629 refugees, escaping torture, extortion and rape in Libya. This provoked a new EU "refugee crisis", since no country was willing to take the ship's vulnerable human "cargo". Eventually Spain agreed to do so. But not before Salvini had been criticised by other EU leaders, like the arch-hypocrite, Emmanuel Macron of France, who called him "cynical

**• May, the pot, calling the Trump kettle black**

May did make a point of condemning Trump's policy of placing immigrant children in cages and separating them from their parents: "this is not the United Kingdom's approach", said she. So what is the "United Kingdom's" approach to refugees, then? Britain takes fewer refugees than other EU countries, and when it does take them, it offers less financial support, provides substandard housing,



and irresponsible", while declining to offer the Aquarius a place to dock in France. But of course the context today is a Fortress Europe, now including Merkel's Germany, which is closing its doors more and more against migration. All these politicians are pandering to increasing right-wing, anti-immigrant feeling, fed by their own austerity measures against their populations, finding it convenient that migrants are blamed, instead of themselves.

Macron has now proposed a new EU

agreement over the handling of asylum seekers and "economic migrants", but since France isn't a "frontline state" he takes no responsibility for the refugees concerned. So EU leaders have just agreed to create new EU-funded "controlled centres" in the frontline states only, where migrants would be "processed", as if they were some kind of food. As for Britain? It isn't involved! Never mind that refugees are still fleeing in their thousands from the real "frontline", where Britain's proxy wars are being fought - whether it be Yemen, Congo, Sudan, or Syria.

and forces them into destitution. But above all, it places children in deportation centres which are nothing more than prisons and it has had to review its policy several times after it was denounced by MPs..

In fact it is May's government which ended the Dubs scheme, whereby 3,000 refugee children were supposed to be offered a home in Britain. Only 350 have actually been accepted. The hollow excuse was that this scheme was being used by "people traffickers"! So the government abandoned thousands of children to their fate in overcrowded and unsafe camps dotted around the frontline states of Europe, where they are the daily prey of real people traffickers.

**Rendition**

Two new reports by the parliamentary intelligence and security committee point to the criminal complicity of MI5 and MI6 in the kidnapping and torture of suspects. The process, euphemistically termed "rendition", whereby suspects are sent to secret detention centres out of the public eye and judicial oversight, was authorised by US president Bill Clinton in the mid-1990s and hugely expanded under George Bush. The use of

**"Great" at kidnapping and torture**

"rendition" increased after 9/11 - in the run-up to and during the Afghan and Iraq wars, in 2001-3 when Blair consummated British imperialism's "special relationship" with US imperialism.

This latest report exposes their collaboration: all through the wars in Iraq, Libya and Syria, British intelligence services have been involved in hundreds of torture cases and scores of rendition cases - and this is

probably only the tip of the iceberg. These crimes were no secret to the British state: the then foreign secretary Jack Straw knew about them, and today Theresa May continues to protect key figures in rendition cases from the inquiry committee. The fact that the ugly truth is now coming to light, however, will not mean that Britain and the US will stop this reprehensible practice, only that they will hide it more carefully.

the relatively few refugees who risk their lives to reach their shores, but they have turned them into pawns for use in their own rivalries and politicking in front of their discontented electorates. □

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In addition to this paper, we publish bulletins in several large workplaces in the South East, a journal, "Class Struggle" and a series of pamphlets on topical issues. If you wish to know more, contact Workers' Fight by e-mail, at [contact@w-fight.org](mailto:contact@w-fight.org), or by postal mail at:

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