

WORKERS' fight

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

A CRISIS WHICH ONLY THE WORKING CLASS CAN RESOLVE!

As this year's "non"-holiday season comes to an end, Boris Johnson is exhorting everyone to get back to work as soon as possible... and never mind the virus.

But as of mid-August, only around 16% of workers were still officially on furlough. Most are already back, that is, those who still have work. Because an estimated 750,000 jobs have been cut since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis. And as we all know, the economy is officially in "recession" with a huge, 20% drop in GDP registered in June.

Without doubt, worse is to come, as many more companies decide to cut jobs and force fewer workers to take on more tasks, under the pretext of this Covid-crisis.

However, unlike workers, the bosses have been well-compensated throughout. Every government among the rich countries stepped in quickly to offer hand-outs and loans - and in the case of Johnson's government, not only did it do the same, but it created a whole new raft of private contracts, awarded to companies to "consult over" and "manage" the pandemic!

Money for old rope

So, out of the government's £220bn of public spending so far, much of which was handed to the bosses as subsidies and furlough payments, additional millions have been lavished on familiar favourites like PwC, Deloitte and McKinsey.

The amount - £109m for 106 contracts - has only just come to light, having been kept secret, against transparency rules, for the past 3 months. And no wonder, given the ineptitude shown by these "experts" when it came to managing PPE, testing, contact tracing and all the other vital provision handed over to them!

Yes, these "intermediaries" are employed solely to provide lucrative profits, courtesy of the government, to



shareholders. They have little or no expertise to offer - especially not when it comes to controlling a lethal pandemic. In fact it might well be a matter of public safety, let alone saving money, to dispense with them!

Their uselessness was proven during the latest local outbreaks of Covid-19 in Leicester and Blackburn, when Serco contractors (engaged by Deloitte) proved incapable of finding infected contacts. And where effective tracing was achieved, through the footwork of experienced local public health workers, bypassing "track and trace" completely...

So one can only wonder what a company like "Consulting", owned by private equity group Carlyle, did in practice to justify four contracts worth £18.3m given to it, to "advise" on the Ventilator Challenge project?

More tax, maybe, but from whom?

Yes, the government has splashed out money amongst its City friends and

without providing the least justification. And yet now the message it is promoting is that all of this outlay will have to be paid for through raising tax rates. But for whom? According to the Financial Times, Sunak is planning "a £30bn hit on the wealthy, pensions and companies"

The rumour causing Tory MPs to tear their hair out, is that Sunak might raise corporation tax from 19% to 24% and increase capital gains tax. In answer to those who accuse him of following Labour's 2019 manifesto pledges, he says this would be "temporary". Maybe so. But the shrinkage of the British economy and the financial black hole caused by the joint efforts of Sars-CoV-2 and capitalism, will be permanent. And Brexit won't help. In fact this isn't a problem which any government under this system can fix. It's something only the working class, organised in its own revolutionary party, will have the means to resolve. The task of building such a party has seldom been so urgent! ☐

Covid-19 crisis

Matt Hancock's decision to replace Public Health England (PHE) with a new "National Institute for Health Protection" (NIHP) - conveniently announced in the middle of the holiday recess on 18 August - puts an end to the body which the Covid crisis exposed as wholly inadequate.

Created out of the Health Protection Agency in 2013 under the provisions of the 2011/12 Health and Social Care Act, it allowed then PM Cameron to get rid of 70 specialised local bodies which had, among other things, the task of organising responses to pandemics. And it was to be entirely answerable to, and under the direct control of, the Health Secretary.

Of course, while reasons for its failure were inbuilt (it was created as a cost-saving exercise in the first place and was subject to a 15% budget cut in 2015, while local public health was cut by 44%!), Health Secretary Hancock certainly hopes

"Public Health England" succumbs to the virus



PHE will be blamed - instead of him - for the mishandling of the C-19 crisis, including the testing fiasco and the under-counting of deaths.

The new NIHP brings together Test-and-Trace and a Joint Biosecurity Centre, to be run by none other than the ex-head of TalkTalk and director of the failed Test-and-Trace, Baroness Dido Harding! Her role at this "bigger and better" organisation will no doubt be to ensure

"bigger and better" contracts for private companies... and a bigger and better failure?

As for other PHE functions, like the unprofitable but necessary research on health inequalities, no plan has been put forward by the Department for Health. With the second wave of coronavirus coming soon, it's unlikely that NIHP will be ready for it. □

• COVID-19's "second wave"

Towards the end of July, the number of new daily C-19 cases started increasing in Spain, but also in France, due to local outbreaks - mostly in workplaces and crowded tourist areas. It was under this pretext that Britain introduced quarantines against Spain, Belgium and France - and now others like Switzerland and Croatia. This might make sense, except that most of these countries have stricter preventive measures than Britain and their case-counting isn't comparable (it's more accurate!).

Mask-wearing in the street was already compulsory in Spain from the beginning of the lock-down and it's now the being brought in in France. As for the sudden large rise in French cases, this is added to by a new testing campaign open to all. Which leaves one wondering what's happening here, where only those with symptoms are tested, but where the number of cases is now also increasing...

Returning British tourists still get no temperature checks, no testing and no tracing. This was meant to be reviewed, but nothing's happened.

When the travel corridor was established on July 10 (allowing holiday-makers to avoid quarantine) British cases were still 600-800/day. This possibly allowed British tourists to spread the virus all over Europe, rather than the other way around - there were as many as 300,000 tourists in France during July-August!

In fact this latest quarantine looks more like politics: just like the quarantine against France on 3 June, which was

related to Brexit negotiations. After all, there were no quarantines during the peak of the pandemic in Britain in mid-April, when it was certainly medically indicated!

• NHS: the coming storm

Writing on 27 July, NHS CEO Sir Simon Stevens instructed all NHS services to return to "near-normal levels" before the 1st of October... while "making full use of the capacity available in the 'window of opportunity' between now and winter". NHS hospitals were asked to reach a 90% "back to normal" activity or face fines!

But even if near-normal activity is possible, will NHS staff be able to handle the abnormal waiting lists which have grown during the pandemic? In London alone, almost 50,000 patients have been on a waiting list for more than 52 weeks - 20 times more than in February last year. In fact the national waiting list includes 3.9million patients. This, in a context where Britain is already near the bottom of the OECD cancer outcomes table. Staff will have to try to clear waiting lists within the next 2 months, before a second wave of Covid infections collides with the winter flu outbreak.

The NHS has been near to collapse every Winter, at the best of times. But this is the worst of times. There are still more than 100,000 staff vacancies and staff who've worked through the pandemic are exhausted. In fact the most that can be hoped for is that anti-Covid measures (like testing and PPE) will be more effective second time round.

• T&T failed the test

By the beginning of September, "Test-and-Trace" had failed to reach its target for the 9th week in a row. In fact 6,000 of the 18,000 "phone" contact tracers taken on by the private contractors Sitel and Serco, were sacked on the 24th August. There'd been reports of them sitting around watching Netflix with nothing to do. And given the growing number of local outbreaks which this "world beating" track and trace system was meant to prevent, the remaining 12,000 tracers will now be told to target specific local areas and work with local authorities to "provide a more tailored service"... Of course, the privateers will nevertheless retain their £720m contracts!

The government claims that 80% of close contacts of those infected are reached, but that means 20% - 1 in 5 - are not. That's a lot! In Blackburn, where a local lock-down had to be implemented, tracing reached only 52% of close contacts. Among the reasons given for delay in tracing is late test results, or even no results at all: 18,000 home kits were sent out but weren't returned. And when the testing system was hit by exceptional demand (returning holiday-makers, school and workplace opening) many were directed to test centres which were up to 170 miles away! With another wave of infection on the way, and testing being taken over by the new public health body that Hancock has pulled out of his pocket, under the same Dido Harding who heads the current fiasco, T&T is heading for a crash.

The vaccine (cold) war

In mid July, the media claimed that Russian hackers tried to "steal" research data on the COVID-19 vaccine being developed by AstraZeneca/University of Oxford. Yes, in this mad world, a vaccine which could save millions of lives is not meant to be shared, but to be sold on a competitive market for profit, and thus must remain "secret"! In fact as it turns out, a Russian lab was already ahead of the game.

But when on 11 August the Russian government gave it the go-ahead to produce its vaccine, it was again the

target of all kinds of accusations. The lab said that it was just finishing phase II of clinical trials (usually based on 20-40 people). But in emergency situations (like the one we're in!) if phase II shows good results, the vaccine can be directly tested on a population suffering from the virus. This happened with Ebola vaccine, which the same lab developed successfully. Anyway, it then announced on 20 August that it would begin phase III testing of the vaccine on 40,000 people in Moscow - which should conclude by December

• Big pharma and the C-19 money-spinner

AstraZeneca is one of the 5 big pharmaceutical companies along with Pfizer, Sanofi, GlaxoSmithKline, and Roche (all above £10bn/yr profits) controlling, on their own, 80% of the world vaccine market. And GlaxoSmithKline and Sanofi have already entered into an alliance to share the profits from any vaccine they develop!

The COVID-19 pandemic fuelled speculation on the vaccine market, which is expected to reach total revenues of £40.6 billion in 2020 (an increase of 100% compared to 2014!). This, despite poor countries having to cancel their current vaccination programmes due to lack of resources, to cope

with the COVID-19 emergency. More than 80m children missed out on measles, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, and polio vaccination. But in the eyes of these companies these are just insignificant "markets".

In contrast, the British government has struck deals for 190 million doses of different future vaccines for which it has already paid! Same goes for the US (£400m) and an alliance between France, Germany, Italy and Netherlands (£300 million). Competition between governments for the biggest share of the vaccine stock is another factor restricting vaccine affordability.

The political friction between US and

Covid-19 crisis

2020. But this caused another ruckus.

The problem for the competing labs is that the new vaccine could take 25% of the C-19 vaccine market. Moderna, Pfizer and Novavax, three other pharmaceutical companies which were ahead in the development of the vaccine, have now seen their vaccine-related stocks fall by 2.5%, 0.8% and 7.7% respectively, after the Russian announcement. This is what's really behind this Russophobia - it's all about who benefits in hard cash. Never mind about saving lives. □

French governments over the allocation of the Sanofi-GlaxoSmithKline vaccine orders has exposed this. Paul Hudson (Sanofi's CEO) announced, after receiving £1.6bn in subsidies from the US government in addition to the orders: "The US government has the right to the largest pre-order because it's invested in taking the risk". To which France's prime minister replied: "access is non-negotiable" reminding Sanofi of their £133m in subsidies (the EU having also provided £6.5bn for C-19 research). Sanofi finally rowed back on their comment, but certainly not out of a humanitarian compulsion to share the stock!

Refugees

At the end of July, the number of migrants crossing the Channel on tiny boats rose to 5,000. Despite this being double the number of migrant crossings last year, this number is small and below the number of crossings in 2015. The increase is due to the ramp-up in Franco-British security measures last October. After 39 Vietnamese migrant workers were found in back of a freezer container in Essex, the Home Office responded with its anti-migrant "strong borders save lives" campaign. Of course all the blame fell on Ronan Hughes, the lorry driver, who has just pleaded guilty to manslaughter...

In fact, the stronger border has pushed migrants to take even higher risks, but it hasn't stopped their arrival, since in this system, war, unemployment and the health crisis don't go away! So as a result, on 19 August, the

• Patel's deportations thwarted

Priti Patel may have announced that 166 migrants who crossed the Channel were "ready to be returned" via deportation flights. But on 27 August, the deportation of 23 asylum-seekers to Spain - which Madrid authorities agreed to take back - was cancelled, then rescheduled.

In fact these migrants, having been detained at Brook House, near Gatwick

Anti-migrant poison



body of a 16-year-old boy was found on the French beach of Sangatte, just days after Home Secretary Priti Patel announced the deployment of military aircraft for surveillance of migrant crossings.

For sure, these aircraft didn't save the life of the 16 year-old, nor were

they meant to. But Patel dared to declare that this was "a brutal reminder of the abhorrent criminal gangs and people smugglers who exploit vulnerable people"! It was in fact the result of a criminal gang, not of petty smugglers, but a British government gang with a fully equipped border arsenal! □

Airport, carried out a hunger strike, while also resorting to legal action, since they hadn't received the Home Office's response to their asylum applications. Patel was said to be "furious", with the Home Office, blaming "EU regulations" (!) for determining where an asylum claim is meant to be heard and thus forcing the government to take responsibility for these refugees. And never mind that

Patel used EU regulations, known as "Dublin III" herself, in order to try to deport them back to the first country they arrived in!

Of course with Brexit, even worse anti-migrant laws will find their way back onto the books. But it works both ways and for all of us: Brexit ends freedom of movement across borders, for British workers and for migrant workers.

Transport

Rail and private profit - crunch time!

At the start of lock-down, private rail passenger franchises in England were suspended for 6 months and replaced by Emergency Measures Agreements (EMAs), turning them into management contracts presided over by the Department for Transport. With passenger numbers down by up to 90%, all the train operating companies (TOCs) were in the red, so the government stepped in.

However, in normal times most TOCs struggle to make profits. They only do so because taxpayers provide the money for track/network maintenance and improvement. And if franchise contracts have been rewritten over the years so that TOCs pay a bit more to the government, it's been entirely at the expense of railworkers' wages and conditions and exorbitant fares.

By July, TOCs had already been handed loans and fees totalling £2.3bn. But thanks to what amounts to an emergency quasi-nationalisation, the ONS has already reclassified them as "public sector bodies"! Unsurprisingly the bosses of the TOCs don't agree! Matthew Gregory, chief executive of FirstGroup, has warned that if the current level of support isn't extended until passenger numbers return to near pre-Covid levels, "you are going to have the rail industry effectively going bust and handed back". In fact the TOC bosses want to have their cake and eat it: as the service resumes, they refuse to resume full financial responsibility for running the services. But the government is in no hurry to force them either, even if, in the final analysis, it is precisely a full government takeover which looms.

It was the Tories who privatised the railways in 1996, after decades of under-investment had undermined the nationalised British Rail. Never mind that it had already been clearly demonstrated prior to WW2 that the 4 privately-run railways couldn't turn a profit on their own. At the time, nationalisation was the only viable option.

It's no surprise then, that rail privatisation has been such a costly fiasco for all concerned. But the TOCs are running on borrowed time: already in 2001/2 Railtrack (which operated track and signals) had to be "renationalised" - creating Network Rail - after financial failure and its catastrophic neglect of infrastructure, which resulted in several fatal crashes. Twenty years on, the logic would be to renationalise the rest. Under public control, of course. □

• Another avoidable disaster

The derailment of the Aberdeen to Glasgow train on 12 August, killed the driver, conductor and one passenger; the first passenger death since 2007. The train was returning to Aberdeen after Network Rail warned of a landslide ahead of it near Stonehaven, and reports suggest that another landslide took place in the meantime. The crash site is known for a track fault - which trains always pass slowly. Track inspection locomotives which check the route daily ahead of scheduled trains had already, that morning, issued a warning.

This crash has once more raised the lethal inadequacy of Network Rail's maintenance and renewal, especially in the context of extreme weather. The fatal

incident last year when two track workers died because they had no on-duty lookout, exposed NR's policy of corner-and-cost-cutting, where cheapness is the deciding factor.

But there is another question which should be asked concerning the Stonehaven crash: since Aberdeen had just been placed under Scotland's first local lock-down, why didn't that include stopping the trains in and out? As with the first national lock-down, exempting public transport increased the risks of spreading the virus further, including among transport workers. In this case, if proper public health prevention had been followed, 3 lives wouldn't have been lost.



It's not "Just Williamson"

The last minute coronavirus advice given to schools just one working day before they were due to return, was yet more proof, if anyone needed it, that the Department for Education (DfE) under Gavin Williamson hasn't got a clue.

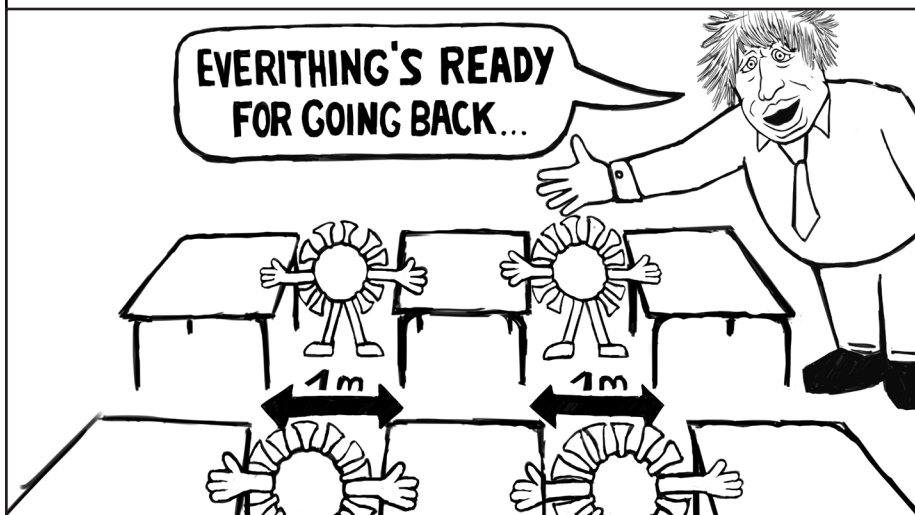
Earlier in August, public outcry and angry protests by A-level students over their "fixed" final exam results, forced Williamson into a U-turn: he had to go with the results given by teacher-assessments, rather than the so-called "algorithm" which had been invented by

the so-called "Ofqual" education "regulator"...

Ofqual and the DfE had aimed to prevent "grade inflation", i.e., giving students marks which were too high, with this "algorithm". However, it turned out that private school pupils increased their grades by almost 5% compared with last year, while public sector sixth form college pupils managed only 0.3%.

Almost 40% of A-level students got much lower grades than those given by their teachers, before the U-turn restored the teacher-awarded grades. But it took several more days for this about-turn to also be applied to BTec students...

Like others in the Cabinet, Gavin Williamson just blames others for his mess. Despite the fact that he'd defended the process as "robust" and "dependable" just a few days before the scandal, when it broke, he said it was down to Ofqual. Unfortunately, the ability to mess up seems to be a required qualification for Johnson's government.



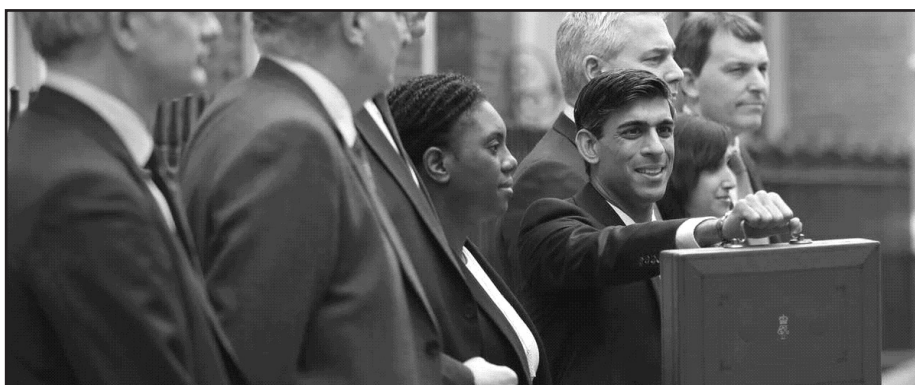
Subsidies to the bosses, unemployment for workers

Crisis watch

When the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ends on 31 October, unemployment is again expected to rise sharply. Already almost three-quarters of a million jobs have been lost since the start of the lock-down. And now the Bank of England predicts an increase in official unemployment of up to 7.5%, by the end of the year.

This is no surprise: two thirds of British businesses, employing 9.6m workers, have been benefiting from the government's furlough scheme, which picked up 80% of their wage costs. And now that this handout is being curtailed, the bosses are cutting jobs. Because of course, the government never made its furlough payments conditional on bosses retaining workers.

With the push back to work, bosses already had to restart paying pension and National Insurance contributions from August. And now, as furlough tapers down to 70% in September and 60% in October, they'll have the option - or not - to pay the difference. And this has



already been enough to spark another wave of job cuts. So for instance, in the wholesale/retail sector where 1.9m workers have been furloughed, companies like M&S and Pret-a-Manger are making 10,000 workers redundant. And this, despite Chancellor Sunak's promise of a £1,000 bonus to companies for every worker they keep in their job!

Out of the fear that many more employers will resort to mass redundancies, some politicians are asking

the government to extend the furlough scheme - like in Germany and France, where it will last at least one more year. Of course, these politicians only care about workers being paid a wage because they want them to have at least some "buying power" - otherwise consumption will fall off further, making the recession far worse. But if there are to be jobs on decent pay, it's obviously not the politicians who'll compel the bosses to retain them, but only our fights. □

• Tax the rich to care for the aged!

Local authority spending on social care is still 2% below the 2010-11 level - and this despite an increase in the elderly population over this period. But poorer councils are worse hit: the 30 most deprived councils have cut 17% of their social care services! Of course, since most of the country's 18,500 social care establishments are in the hands of private providers, they won't keep providing services where it is not profitable to do so!

No wonder then, that the Covid-19 crisis has exposed the lethal inadequacy of social care funding. Even the chair of parliament's Public Accounts Committee admitted that "care homes were effectively thrown to the wolves", after at least 20,000 elderly died in care homes during the pandemic. But so far, nothing has been said of the consequences of the privatisation of social care, which is the root cause of today's social care collapse. In fact Health Secretary Hancock's "solution" is to call for a new tax, to be paid by those over the age of 40, to "fix the social care system"!!

Of course, everyone is now talking about tax rises - due in the Autumn budget - to refund the hundreds of billions of pounds which the government poured into the pockets of businesses

during the pandemic. The government is even proposing to tax the wealthy: Chancellor Sunak has asked for a review on taxation of capital gains, suggesting this might rise. And corporation tax, which is at an abysmal level of 19% (it was over 40% under Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s!) might also be increased. But whatever the plans for the Autumn budget (which may be delayed to next Spring) tax rises for the rich will be temporary. When of course, they should be permanent! There is plenty of money in this society, in the form of decades of accumulated profits - which is more than enough to fund collapsing public services and to prioritise publicly-funded high quality elderly care!

• The class struggle continues

In response to escalating attacks on jobs and conditions - under the pretext of Covid - many workers are resisting. On 8 August, thousands of NHS workers joined demonstrations for a 15% pay rise in 40 towns around Britain, with more protests planned for 12 September. Many had been left out of a pay rise for "key workers" at the end of July - despite the government hypocritically applauding NHS "heroes".

As for Tower Hamlets council workers, they've already been on one-day strike 3 times, after 4,000 workers were sacked and re-employed on worse conditions in July. The

imposed new contracts cut travel allowances, anti-social hours pay and starting pay. And this fight is not over. But neither is the fight against British Airways' threat to fire and re-hire 42,000 workers on worse conditions. Just 3 years ago, BA staff struck for 85 days to win better pay, which BA now aims to reduce to the level of 2012!

On 27 August, workers from the National Theatre and London's South Bank organised a large protest against 1,100 redundancies targeting long-term temps, none of whom qualify for any redundancy pay.

Other sections of workers have balloted for strikes: 24,000 Department for Work and Pensions workers are opposing an increase in their working hours; 10,000 British Gas workers intend to strike against 5,000 redundancies and new contracts which cut take-home pay. In fact the owner, Centrica, threatened to fire and rehire the entire workforce of 20,000 if the contracts weren't accepted!

Yes, the bosses are all trying to turn the screw as hard as they can, to make up for profits lost during the lock-downs. But there is no way they should be allowed to get away with it. And the best way to fight back would be to unite across all these sections - and strike together!

The house of cards

On 31 July, 36 new peers were added by Boris Johnson to the already over-crowded House of Lords - it now has 836 members! Never mind that he promised to cut the Lords down to 600! It was obvious he wouldn't be able to resist awarding privileges to friends and family, with his brother top of the list!

In fact Johnson's honours list was a real circus parade. Animals such as Tory

MP like James Wharton, who instigated the EU referendum and helped Johnson during his 2019 election campaign were included. And for good "media" measure, Johnson brought in the Russian oligarch's son, Evgeny Lebedev, owner of London's Evening Standard and Charles Moore former editor of the Torygraph.

But there were some rarer species, like former Unite deputy, Union-Jack-waving Tony Woodley of Longbridge fame, and

Labour Brexiteers, like Kate Hoey, who didn't stand for re-election in 2019 and publicly supported Johnson and the DUP. Or Brexit Party members, like a verbose media "personality", Claire Fox, apparently delighted to be in a House of Lords she'd wanted to abolish.

Yes, not only is this feudal house of horrors not yet in a museum (or the bin), but it's proliferating - with King Johnson the 1st even reviving hereditary seats!

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**Union joins management... yet again**

After publishing their financial results in June, and despite having made profits of £180m before tax, Royal Mail announced the need for "operational change", i.e. further cuts in our working conditions. In other words, we're confronted with the exact same cuts plus a few more, after we'd voted overwhelmingly (97.1%) to strike against them, in September last year - and then again in February (94.5%).

So far, CWU leaders used these votes merely as bargaining chips - in fact, they wanted to make a deal with RM and implement quite a few of the

cuts! But in order to get back to the negotiating table, they needed to appear as if they had the credit to speak for us. But then came the Covid-19 crisis. And they had "good" excuse to get back round the table, in an "anti-Covid united front" with the bosses.

So now, these same union leaders are proposing to betray our interests again - this time, quite blatantly, by agreeing to the cuts and "efficiencies" we all refused last year! In a video put out this August, union leader Terry Pullinger said that "revisions" in our working conditions are "required" and that "efficiencies" will



be implemented in order to "help the company's finances". Do our needs change with the Covid-19 crisis? No, they even increase. But instead of standing with us, the union leadership has chosen to stand with the bosses and become their adjunct. This isn't new, of course, but it means that fighting this will be down to all of us on the ground: we'll have to lead the struggle ourselves. □

- **Where are the new hands?**

Are we supposed to be satisfied with "no compulsory redundancies" yet again? We keep seeing workmates leaving on EVR every day. So the bosses are getting away with cutting jobs... We'll keep repeating this: more duties on our shoulders = piling up workload. More workers makes "light work" and a shorter working day. We want all "leavers" replaced! Simple really!

PS: And not on a lousy, worse contract! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 15/07/20]

- **Shouldn't we be fighting?**

Talking about new mates, there's a rumour that Romford workers will be joining us soon. It'll be good to see them and it will help fill some of the gaps here! But why is Romford's workforce not being rehoused? We've heard that lease cock-up excuse already, but this amounts to a closure being sneaked in - and it's one which we need to fight! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 15/07/20]

- **Dangerously ineffective**

So much for the self-satisfied refrain that

RM takes "the health and safety of its colleagues, its customers and the local communities very seriously". A couple of weeks ago, 7 workmates tested positive for Covid-19 in Chester DO.

A week before, 6 tested positive in Barnsley DO! And in Barnsley, it took 2 days before management finally decided to close the premises for a deep clean. We don't trust these managers as far as we can spit (and we're not doing any spitting right now due to the virus). [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 15/07/20]

King's Cross railway station (London)**LNER's recipe for Covid-transmission**

LNER bosses really take the biscuit when it comes to "getting round" Covid-secure measures which might impinge on their revenue. They've now launched an "exemption badge" trial! It means that passengers who don't want to wear a mask can now go to their nearest ticket office and request this badge - with no questions asked!

Of course this is certainly in line with this government's libertarianism and cavalier attitude to Covid-19. But it means that in the closed environment

of train carriages, catering staff and guards, who're now meant to be back at work, are potentially exposed to the virus if an asymptomatic (or even symptomatic) unmasked passenger is on board: they will exhale virus particles into the air we all breathe. Masks are our only protection and we need them more than ever (and they'll help against flu, too!).

Surely, if a passenger has such a severe problem as to require exemption from mask-wearing, they should also be "exempt" from travel on a



train? In fact they should probably be shielding at home! This exemption nonsense is in fact a green light for the gradual dropping of mask-wearing altogether. We cannot allow it. □

- **How many Covid deaths?**

So the Office of National Statistics has published some figures for the number of railway workers who have died from C-19: including all jobs (drivers, maintenance, on-board staff, tankers, cleaners etc.), 45 died of Covid between the 9th of March and 25th May. For comparison, 70 nurses died of Covid in the same period. There's no question that pushing us back to work and the lack of PPE during the peak of the virus would have contributed to this death toll. [Workers'

Platform bulletin KX 15/07/20]

- **Mask on, no excuses!**

We think that managers (or somebody!) should be enforcing the wearing of masks on the station and also inside the trains, since some passengers just take them off after they've boarded! Threatening that "offenders may be fined" is a bit stupid since fining someone doesn't undo damage already done! We already know that some of our workmates have become ill or even died during the pandemic. No mask,

no travel! [Workers' Platform bulletin KX 15/07/20]

- **More of us needed now!**

Why are security guards aka customer service assistants, still working 12-hour shifts?! Evidently, more of us are needed with shorter shifts to make sure everything and everyone is safe - but our safety means NOT working exhausting long shifts. And let's be clear, by more workers, we mean more than just filling current vacancies! [Workers' Platform bulletin KX 15/07/20]

Ford Dagenham Engine Plant**We need to throw a spanner in Ford's works**

At the end of August, management sent a letter to all of us on Tiger and Panther assembly offering voluntary redundancies to 140 semi-skilled and 28 skilled workers. Back in July, they had already announced that Tier 1 workers would be offered VR packages and that temporary workers would be offered permanent jobs. But of course the VR packages, as well as the permanent contracts conditions, had not been specified.

Now we're told that the VR packages are on "BLUE BOOK terms",

meaning not much! One week of pay for every year of work until age 40 and then 1.5 weeks - plus 3 months. In other words, for a 50 year-old worker with 30 years seniority, Ford's come up with a package worth 48 weeks of pay. Not even worth the trouble of applying for it!

As for the recruitment on a permanent basis of around 100 temporary workers in September, it won't fill the gap left by 168 redundancies (if anyone takes up the EVR, of course!) - at a time when we



all know we need more hands, not fewer! But of course, Ford's plan is to replace as many 1st tier workers with a 2nd tier, 3rd tier or 4th tier (a 5th, too?) as possible - and to dump more work on fewer of us! Nothing new. Nor is the remedy: fight back! ☐

• We want starters, mains and desert!

Where is our pay claim, by now, we wonder? We have to rely on rumours, like the one that's going around saying that Ford's planning to introduce a 3rd permanent tier. No doubt as usual, we'll be presented with a deal done over fish&chips... where we'll have had our chips and they'll have the fish! They wish... [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 22/07/20]

• To those who have...

So all that cleaning up on Monday 19th July in DEP was to welcome a government minister. Yup, International Trade Secretary Liz Truss came to announce a £500m government credit guarantee and loan facility of £625m from the banks. Truss said: "This deal firmly puts the UK at the heart of Ford's plans to grow its export business, reduce emissions and support skilled manufacturing jobs"... What ever that may mean? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 22/07/20]

• Who will be "up-skilled"?

They say the loan is for investment into electrification, digital manufacturing, and to "up-skill" us workers to "safeguard thousands of highly skilled jobs at... Duntun... and Dagenham". We'd like to know exactly how many jobs are to be safeguarded and what this "up-skilling" involves, since, of course, we're mostly semi-skilled. We also note there was no mention whatsoever of the engine plant jobs being thrown down the drain at Bridgend in Wales. [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 22/07/20]

• Was it avoidable?

We heard there was a serious crash between a TOPs minibuss and car from Vehicle Holding Centre: apparently a mate suffered a punctured lung and 3 others were injured. We hope they are all going to be okay!

But the big worry is that recent job cuts contribute to the pressure under which we have to operate, making for unsafe conditions. We used to be 20 in VHC and now we're barely 10 - makes you wonder if managers

think these cars are already driverless. [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 22/07/20]

• Not their fault!

Ford managers have no shame. After 7 Raptors were stolen a couple of weeks ago, they dare to blame G4S guards for it? But we've seen how, over the years, they cut down security to the bare bone and then subcontracted it... So if they want to find the culprit, they can look in the mirror! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 22/07/20]

• When pigs fly

We've seen @Ford special Covid-19 issue (careful not to get sick when you read it!) and we loved boss Rowley's stand against discrimination. We particularly like the bit where he tells us that "discrimination takes so many forms"... So surely Ford won't be discriminating against temps and subcontracted workmates? Is Rowley taking the lead in the fight to end discrimination and inequality - and at last, to implement "equal pay for equal work"? [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 22/07/20]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**BMW must pay!**

BMW wants to cut 520 jobs in Britain in September, including 400 from Cowley, which is about 10% of the workforce! Managers complained that "only" 109 cars were sold in July/August, as justification.

We're told that the 400 sackings will be Gi agency workers, who're not even entitled to redundancy pay, but there is also the intention to cut permanent jobs. This de facto means the cutting of a whole shift. And this is precisely what we voted against last year when the "choice" was to

either take a pay cut, or watch BMW cut out a whole shift's worth of jobs. The vote went for the pay cut of £100/m, as the lesser evil.

Management now says that production will be organised across only 2 shifts, which will be lengthened by 2 hours to to 9hrs 25min, while the pay cut stands! There is also to be compulsory overtime on Saturdays, whenever the company demands. This means they intend production scores to be more or less the same as before, about 1000 cars a day,



but with 10% fewer workers! We cannot accept that. Not only do we refuse the jobs cuts and lengthening of the working day, but we want all temps to be made permanent - and the agencies in the plant abolished for good! ☐

Lebanon

The explosion of 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate at Beirut port on 4 August, which killed 180 people, injured 6,000 and left 300,000 homeless, exposed the criminal incompetence of a Lebanese government already discredited in the eyes of the population. It reignited the anti-government protests which have been going on in the country intermittently for years. When protesters came out on the streets, they chanted: "Hang them all!", referring to the government ministers. Within days the government resigned. Parliament voted emergency powers for the army, which immediately proceeded to attack the protesters. But the protests haven't stopped. Looking on from Britain, MPs have warned of a developing "power vacuum" in the country. For this reason, Lebanon has become the focus for the imperialist powers - and especially France, which regards Lebanon as its Middle-Eastern backyard.

France's colonial rule began in 1860 and gave way in 1946 to a corrupt and divisive political system. Since then, imperialist powers have used Lebanon's Western-friendly rulers to help police the region. The Lebanese ports, rife with smuggling, have been a convenient conduit for their goods. The Lebanese banking system is used by western capital seeking to profit from the region's resources and by Arab companies seeking to invest in the West.

For these reasons, the imperialist powers have always stepped in to secure the power of the local bourgeoisie. This was demonstrated during the Lebanese Civil War of the

Still caught in the imperialist stranglehold



1970s. After 1946, the country's rich religious sect-based rival clans and their private militias ruled over the poor majority, including many Palestinian refugees. In 1973, protests started when the local and Palestinian poor, led by Arab and Palestinian nationalist organisations protested against the army's repression and massacres carried out by the far-right Christian Phalangist militia. They set up armed blockades in Beirut, threatening to become an inspiration to the poor right across the Middle-East. In response, the US and France together with Israel, armed the Phalangists to the teeth. It was only after the direct military intervention of Syria and Israel with the imperialism's blessing - and the Israeli-aided Phalangist massacre in the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Shatila killing over 3,000 - that this mobilisation came to an end in 1982.

Little wonder that today, the

imperialist powers are rushing in to shore up their Lebanese political clients! Macron wants to maintain the status of France as the main imperialist in the country, by stitching together a "stable government". Trump has sent the FBI, ostensibly to help the inquiry into the port explosion and protect the US's local "friends" in government. Boris Johnson has sent monetary aid and... promised to send Royal Navy ships - just in case! After all, all three want a seat at the table where Lebanon's future and the billions in contracts for rebuilding Beirut are decided!

It's unclear whether the Lebanese workers and poor masses have joined the protests. But one thing is clear: they are the only force which can put an end to the bloody stranglehold of imperialism and the local bourgeoisie on the country - and once more, inspire the poor across the region! □

South Africa

South Africa has recorded over 600,000 confirmed infections, the fifth highest in the world, even though Cyril Ramaphosa's regime declared an early and tough lock-down, when deaths were fewer than 20. But then, in a cruel attack on the poor, he banned alcohol and cigarettes, the escapes of an impoverished population, overnight. This was presented as a way to free-up beds in hospitals, given the high rate of 'alcohol-trauma' patients. How it would impact those addicted to alcohol or nicotine was hardly Ramaphosa's concern. In any case, the ban didn't make the hospitals any more capable of dealing with

Covid-19: the government creates chaos

Covid-19. The height of the pandemic revealed an already catastrophically broken healthcare system.

A nightmare scenario unfolded in the Eastern Cape, with shortages of PPE, oxygen, ambulances, no ventilators and patients sleeping "under newspapers". In fact the state's main concern in poor neighbourhoods was to enforce the lock-down through the police and the army. The independent police watchdog is investigating hundreds of cases of injury related to this, including 10 alleged deaths. Even worse, local governments together with security forces have continued their 'regular' evictions of the

poor from their shacks. Today many are starving to death.

The population has responded to this violent situation: in poor neighbourhoods, residents barricade roads, burn tyres, loot shops and clash with police in protest over the failure to distribute food parcels. Health workers have organised pickets outside hospitals and strikes at clinics and hospitals, demanding proper equipment to confront the pandemic. And yes, they have only their own forces to rely upon, faced with a corrupt government that is mired in yet another scandal - the large-scale looting of a £20 billion social relief package. □

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, or by postal mail at:

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