

# WORKERS' fight

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

## NOW IS THE TIME TO FIGHT FOR CHANGE!

Chancellor Rishi Sunak boasts again and again about the special measures he has implemented to "protect" workers and businesses. In his conference speech, he even referred to Tory values as enabling the "gentlest kindness", claiming that the party is now fully "aligned with the British people"...

Of course, his measures are certainly "well-aligned"... but exclusively with the interests of the capitalists, big and small! By subsidising the bosses' wage bills yet again through his latest Job Support Scheme, he has incentivised the sacking of workers: definitely a "protective" helping hand for the rate of profit!

Apparently Sunak and the Prime Minister have designated themselves as the "soft cops" in the governmental farce. As if anyone is fooled. Of course, the Tories haven't undergone a miraculous transformation just because of the pandemic. Even if Johnson blazed the disease-trail on which Trump now finds himself! And even if he about-faced from a lethal "herd immunity" Covid policy to one which, with "world-beating" ineptitude, is meant to "contain" it.

Johnson's latest "stitch in time to save nine", to avert the 2nd wave, has turned into a "glitch" in time. Yes, when almost 16,000 positive cases went unreported, their contacts were untraced and "unsaved".

In fact Johnson's and Sunak's self-portrayal as affectionate carers, "putting their arms around" everyone, would be a joke, if we were not facing the worst public health and economic crisis in 100 years.

### **Criminals and hard cops**

The truth is that these politicians have been killing with all their alleged "kindness". Their policies, like the too-late lockdown in March, have been nothing short of criminal. As Amnesty International has just reported, over 28,186 elderly were



left to die in care homes (between March and June alone!), and now history is already repeating itself, as old people are again being discharged from hospitals into care homes without Covid tests!

And while Johnson and Sunak play soft cop, Johnson's side-kick from the Home Office, "hard cop" Piri Patel, has been ensuring that true-blue conservatism is alive and kicking!

She says she will overhaul the "broken" asylum system. Asylum-seekers will find British borders "firmly and fairly" closed to them. And if they dare to risk their lives by crossing the Channel in a small boat, they will be hunted down and met with the "full force of the National Crime Agency"! And woe betide any lefty lawyer or "do-gooder" who tries to help them find peace and asylum in the 6th wealthiest country in the world, which has more than enough space to spare!

### **Defending the indefensible**

Yes, Patel has called out "do-gooders" for "defending the indefensible", saying "I would never do it". So what does sending

refugees to camps on isolated islands, 4,000 miles away, hunting them down, etc., constitute?

Indeed, she has seriously considered placing asylum-seekers in holding pens on Ascension Island, or in Moldova - and using wave machines to propel small boats back to France!

It's ironic that she boasts of the Tories' "proud record" in providing safe havens, but only quotes the case of Ugandan Asians (her own family background) and the offer of (temporary!) residence to anti-Chinese campaigners from Hong Kong...

When of course, what stands out in the Tory record is the cruel and ongoing Windrush scandal and the hostile environment for migrants.

The working class has a special interest in the fate of refugees and immigrant workers. Their new blood, their youth and their courage are urgently needed here. Yes, to revitalise and strengthen our fighting ranks in the struggle against this rotten, criminal, capitalist system - in order to build a new society - and this time, one with a viable future. ☐

## Covid-19 crisis

After the government allowed universities and student halls to welcome students this year, Covid-19 outbreaks have been recorded in 65 universities (at time of writing, but rising!) with over 2,000 positive cases. And due to the lack of testing, this is a gross underestimation. At Glasgow University, for instance, 172 positive cases were recorded, but the real number is estimated at 600!

These outbreaks were entirely predictable. The government's own Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling had already warned, back in July, that outbreaks "would be concentrated in first-year undergraduates" and this, "due to the number of students in the same university halls".

But the government decided to ignore the scientific advice and for one good reason: university education has become a very profitable commodity! In England, home students pay up to £9,250/year in tuition fees - and non-EU students

## Universities: keep the cash flowing!



between £10,000 and £38,000! What's more, the government didn't want to deprive the student accommodation landlords (£4,500/yr per student), the utility companies (£1,000/yr per student), transport (£1,200/yr in London), equipment providers, food retailers, etc.

And since universities have

already lost foreign students due to Brexit and the pandemic, the government went the extra mile to ensure that as many students as possible would take up their accommodation in university halls. Keeping the education profiteers satisfied is a lot more important than containing the virus! □

## • 1918 to 2020: they will never learn

This pandemic is often compared to the 1918 flu pandemic, in the aftermath of WW1, which caused 50 million deaths in the space of 2 years, infecting 500 million. This huge death toll can be partly explained by the exhausted and malnourished state of the population - demobbed soldiers, impoverished civilians, with the added problem of endemic diseases like TB. But there were also no antibiotics to treat complications; public health was rudimentary and ventilators hadn't yet been invented. And of course, as yet there were no flu vaccines: the virus itself had yet to be identified! As a result, the measures taken during this so-called "Spanish Flu" consisted of attempts to prevent further spread: mask-wearing, banning public gatherings and quarantining.

SARS-CoV-2, on the other hand, has occurred under vastly different circumstances. The 1 million deaths, with 34m infected (as of late September) over the 9 months since the pandemic began, seems next to nothing compared to the devastation caused by the 1918 flu virus.

However, in the over 100 years since the 1918 pandemic there've been extraordinary advances in medical knowledge. Not only in medical technology, but the giant steps in genetics, molecular and cellular biology during the second half of the 20th century have allowed scientists to understand the mechanisms of viral replication - and

to make vaccines. In other words, when Covid struck, all the necessary tools were there - at least potentially - to control this virus, whether "novel", or not.

But control is not what happened. When the outbreak started in China, a country with much fewer resources than rich countries in the West, western governments just watched the virus spread - even helping it on its way by repatriating their nationals, first from China and then from Italy, the next hotspot.

Though left on its own, the Chinese government managed better than most others. It provided and imposed the use of masks, temperature checks, quarantines, and testing. It produced some of the best studies on the disease, from the first sequencing of the viral genome in December 2019 to precious, extensive, clinical data - which it shared with the rest of the world. Its economy was shut down; borders were closed to contain the virus.

Not so in rich Britain. Everything was done too late, too early, or not enough. In fact Johnson's government couldn't even utilise Britain's much-guarded borders as quarantine boundaries! No, these are only meant to serve to keep out refugees - who're still drowning in unknown numbers trying to find asylum, but for whom neither Johns Hopkins nor Public Health England keeps a daily "death dashboard".

### Covid and the case of Kerala

During the first wave of Covid-19, the Indian state of Kerala managed to reduce the number of cases much faster than any other state and eventually to have none. In fact, Kerala had one of the lowest case fatality rates in India: 0.38%, compared to the national average of 1.58%.

Its first case of Covid-19 was confirmed as early as 30 January 2020. The state government intervened fast, to ensure screening of all arrivals from other countries and provinces. Positive cases were isolated away from anyone they could infect - containment measures which had been used very effectively during the lethal Nipah virus epidemic in 2018, which successfully limited deaths to just 16.

Testing for SARS-CoV-2 was performed on all symptomatic individuals, air passengers, as well as priority groups like highly exposed workers and healthcare staff. This allowed Kerala's health authorities to identify the positive cases, but also to implement surveillance among at-risk populations. There was effective contact-tracing on the ground which stretched to the villages with the tracing app "GoK Direct" launched just 6 weeks after the first case. Compare this to the 6th richest country in the world where 6 months after the first case was diagnosed, a contact tracing app has only just been launched - and where testing has virtually collapsed...



## Evictions on the rise

In March, the government announced a temporary ban on evictions, to protect households unable to pay rent during the pandemic. As many as 227,000 private tenants fell into arrears, which prompted the government to extend the eviction ban in August.

But on September 20th, this emergency legislation came to an end. And landlords, some of whom had already made threats against some 170,000 tenants while the ban was still in place, will now start eviction procedures in earnest. The National Residential Landlords' Association has already threatened to *"tackle the most serious cases"*,

including tenants with rent arrears which *"have nothing to do with covid-19"*.

In fact, 216,000 private tenants were already in arrears at the beginning of March, before the pandemic broke out. This is no surprise. Rents have soared, especially in the South-East, while wages have fallen. Between January and March, 5,900 private landlords had served eviction orders, 4% more compared to the same quarter a year earlier, which is why, when the pandemic broke out, the government also announced an increase in the Local Housing Allowance to help

## Housing crisis

private tenants pay their rent. Of course, this subsidy went directly into the pockets of private landlords.

Most tenants are given 6 months' notice, if served a so-called section 21 eviction order - and in areas under lock-down, bailiffs are being told to hold off. However the "avalanche" of homelessness among private tenants, predicted by the homeless charity Shelter, is delayed, not prevented. The only way out of the ongoing housing crisis is the speed-building of social housing (there is a shortfall of 4m homes!) in order to end private landlord parasitism for good. □

## • The sharks behind student accommodation

In 2018/19, more than half the student population was in private rented accommodation paying on average £540/month (£700/month in London). With only 6% of students staying with their parents, universities and private companies have specialised in providing student accommodation to get a piece of this lucrative pie.

As one real estate investment company explained, it offers *"a robust investment*

*opportunity, providing secure returns while remaining one of the most attractive and in-demand asset classes of recent years"*. In fact, purpose-built student accommodation increased by 5.3% in 2019, i.e. 34,000 new beds were created. And there are another 120,000 approved, or awaiting approval!

The market is so profitable that it has attracted giants such as Goldman Sachs and even "charities" like the Wellcome Trust. In

fact both are shareholders of the IQ Student Accommodation company. IQ, which owns 66 halls of residence with 28,000 beds, had a takeover bid from Blackstone earlier this year for £4.66bn!

Student accommodation is regarded an attractive asset, because its yield is guaranteed: if students or parents can't pay, there is always the government's student loan scheme or bursaries to foot the bill!

## • Grenfell cladding: corruption and corner-cutting

The latest phase of the Grenfell Inquiry has been hearing evidence on how the lethal combustible cladding system used on the building was chosen and why, since this was the reason the blaze rapidly engulfed the 24-storey tower in June 2017, killing 72 people.

Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO), which had responsibility for choosing the cladding admitted that their main

motivation was to save money, even at the cost of choosing unsafe materials. Rydon, the supplier, was also hoping to benefit, giving KCTMO altered figures for costs, seeking to take *"some of the savings for themselves"*. But while Rydon had been keen to persuade KCTMO to use cheaper materials, KCTMO hardly needed convincing, given it planned to make a total of £800,000 in savings across the whole Grenfell project.

Even if the inquiry is not over, it is clear that KCTMO and the companies supplying inflammable cladding are culpable for the deaths of the Grenfell victims. And even more shocking at this late stage, over 3 years since the fire, is the fact that 300 buildings - including social housing blocks and student accommodation - have still not had their flammable aluminium composite cladding removed! This is criminal negligence.

### Victims of criminal policies

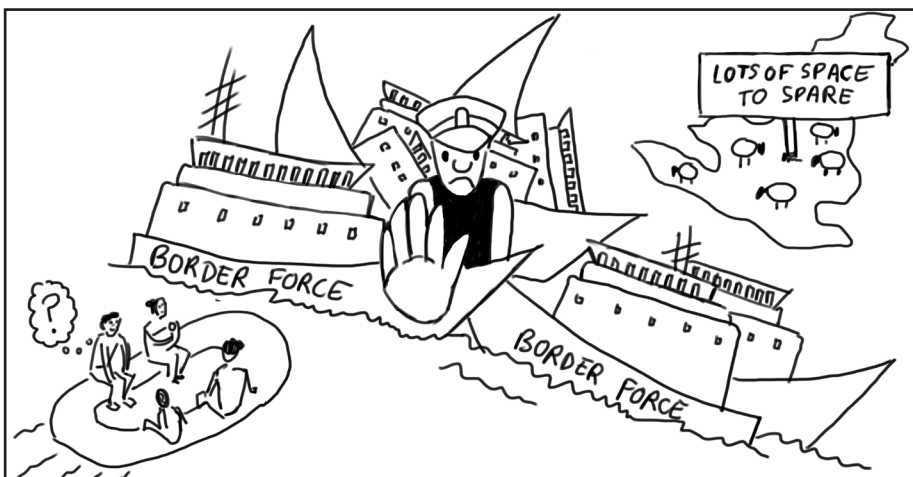
This year so far, 7,000 asylum-seekers have reached Britain by crossing the Channel in small boats, dinghies, or even kayaks. Priti Patel's response to this in August, was to appoint an ex-Royal Marine commando as "clandestine Channel threat commander", whatever that means!

Since then, her anti-migrant rhetoric has become even more surreal. At the end of September, it was reported that she had considered sending asylum seekers to a "holding centre" on Ascension island, 4,000 miles away, in the middle of the Atlantic ocean, or to Moldova, Morocco, or Papua New Guinea! Other "ideas" which the Home Office apparently came up with included constructing floating walls in the Channel, or using wave machines to wash refugees back towards France.

Patel is quite willing to go overboard in her frankly racist gestures for the benefit of the right-wing of her Party. She has already tried to remove recent boat-people,

many from Syria or Yemen, where British policy has fuelled catastrophic and ongoing civil wars, before their appeals against deportation could be submitted. How does that tally with her claim that her measures are to "protect" refugees and are aimed

against "people-smugglers"? And never mind that there are only "openings" for people-smugglers, because of the closed-border policy of this and previous governments, which prevents those who need refuge from finding it.



## Their economy

## A "holy trinity": government, bosses and TUC!

On 24 September Rishi Sunak announced his "Job Support Scheme" (JSS) - replacing the reduced furlough, which ends on 31 October. It will top up wages of employees working at least 33% of their usual hours (for a minimum of 7 days), so they'll get at least 77% of their usual full-time wage: the boss pays for the hours actually worked; and then both government and boss pays an additional 22%.

While the scheme might encourage bosses to put more workers on reduced hours, perversely, it means their wage costs would increase by 22% - the cost of the top-up. This could be an incentive to cut jobs, or to avoid the scheme altogether. And just as with furlough, there's no ban against sacking workers. On the other hand, JSS participation means bosses can claim Sunak's £1,000/

worker bonus! So again, plenty of "job" protection for bosses, but not for workers...

This minor detail didn't bother TUC leader, Frances O'Grady. After posing outside 11 Downing Street with the Chancellor, she obsequiously announced: *"We are pleased the Chancellor has listened and done the right thing" [...] This scheme will provide a lifeline for many firms with a viable future...* Yes, after all the attacks against the working class over the past months and those to come, she expressed her concern for "viable firms"!

O'Grady has also called for a *"National Recovery Council, bringing together government, business and unions"* - hoping for a comfy seat at their table. Tripartite bodies like this have existed before, at times of crisis, but only when the working



class posed a threat which a TUC leader could credibly defuse. But why would the bosses need to pull up a chair for her today, when she's already in bed with them? ☐

## • The "second wave" of unemployment

Just a day after Sunak announced his Job Support Scheme (JSS), the Financial Times, speaking for the bosses, said that the scheme would make *"no material difference to... the likely surge in unemployment"*. Instead, it says, bosses could sack 1m workers before the end of the year.

But their "likely surge" is already a fact! Between March and August, nearly 700,000 workers lost their jobs. And job cuts continued throughout September - 9,000 at Shell, 900 at bank TSB, and 6,000 at Whitbread, the owner of Premier

Inn and Beefeater.

And yet, the "official" unemployment figure is still 1.4m (4.1%). This is because many of those who have lost their jobs, mainly the under-24s and over-65s, aren't counted as "unemployed", but "economically inactive"!

In the coming months, how many workers will be classed as "economically inactive" simply because there are no jobs to actually "look" for? And how many workers working an hour or two a week on a zero-hour contract will in fact be counted

as "employed"? The number of workers on a zero-hour contract has already reached a new high, by the way!

So, the Bank of England might be predicting 7.5% unemployment by December, while other estimates range to over 14%. But as these "official" predictions certainly don't include everyone and actually deliberately exclude the most destitute, the real number can probably be doubled at least... and that would likely be higher than the 20% rate seen in the 1930s!

## • Their turn to bail out society: pay up!

Back in March, companies on the London Stock Exchange saw £800bn wiped off their value. 80% of that was accounted for by the 100 biggest FTSE companies. Since

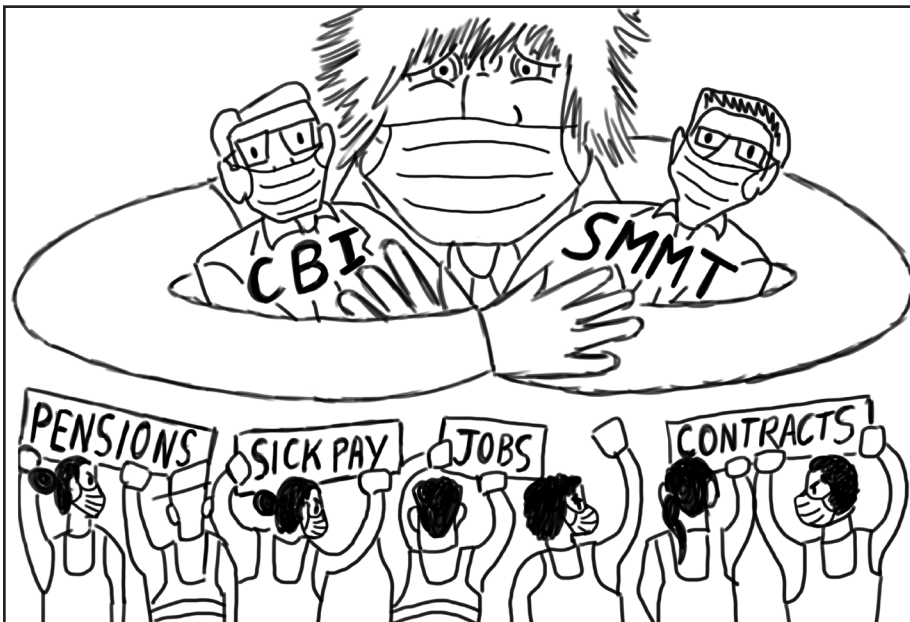
then, their value has barely recovered, leaving share prices 20% lower than at the start of the year. This fall and non-recovery, we are told, reflects increased "uncertainty"

over who will be the winners and losers in the current crisis.

In fact this crisis is already deeper than that of 2008 - from which the economy hadn't yet recovered: today, it's a crisis upon a crisis. While companies usually refuse to cut the shareholder dividends, this time they've had to. So in April, for example, Shell cut its dividend for the first time since World War II, while BP, the largest dividend payer in the FTSE 100, halved its payout in June.

Overall, British companies reduced dividends by £22bn, or 57%, between April and June. In fact, almost twice as many companies have cut dividends this year than in the year after the 2008 crash.

Of course, however deep these falls may be, shareholders took hundreds of billions in dividends over the years, while speculators feasted: in 2019 the market hit an all-time high. And however inflated financial profits may be, in the end, they come off the back of the "real" economy - off workers' backs! So now it's time for these capitalist parasites to hand over their accumulated winnings, in order to bail out the whole of society, starting with the working class who produced this value in the first place!





## Johnson's Brexit bluster.2 and Britain's "rule of law"

Controversial or not, on 30 September, Johnson's "Internal Market Bill", which allows ministers to breach aspects of the Northern Ireland protocol - part of the EU Withdrawal Agreement - on state aid, customs duties and other provisions, passed its first reading in the Commons. Johnson's large Tory majority ensured this, despite the fact that some Tory MPs - including former PM, Theresa May - voted against it, appalled that it blatantly "broke international law".

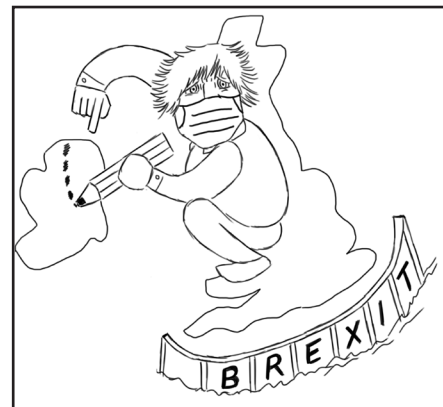
Having previously agreed to the "virtual border in the Irish Sea", proposed in his "oven-ready" Withdrawal Agreement last year, which thus kept the North-South border open as per the 1998 Good Friday peace deal, Johnson decided this was no longer acceptable. Of course, it was never acceptable to the Unionists, who saw it as a slippery slope to a united Ireland.

Unsurprisingly, the European Commission, has decided to start legal proceedings against Britain for "an extremely serious violation of the withdrawal agreement and of international law". It wrote that it "does not accept the argument that the aim of the draft bill is to protect the Good Friday (Belfast) agreement. In fact, it is of the view that it does the opposite". Which is obviously quite true!

Of course Johnson's "violation of international law" was a quite deliberate provocation. On the one hand, he is raising the stakes as trade deal negotiations reach crunch point, but he also wants to distract from his gross mishandling of the pandemic. Brexit is the one issue which keeps the right of his party (and the Northern Irish Unionists) on board and happy.

That said, the European Commission is also playing politics

## Their Brexit



over the "rule of law" for its domestic audiences. The action it is taking over this "illegal" bill will involve to-and-fro proceedings which would take a minimum of 18 months, well beyond the deadline for a trade deal... So the actual consequences of his bill, and Johnson knows this very well, are likely to be... inconsequential. At least in the short term. □

## • Brexit and their love of borders...

A huge lorry park is being built near Ashford in Kent in preparation for Brexit... In fact an "internal border" around Kent is to be created, for after Britain leaves the EU. Truck drivers will need a special "passport" to enter the county, supposedly to allow traffic to be regulated and prevent massive tailbacks along the M2 from the Dover ferry terminal (10,000 trucks pass through British ports every day). Trucks 3-abreast, backed up all the

way to Cambridge have been predicted. If truckers don't have the right paperwork they'll be turned back "through policing, Automatic Numberplate Recognition cameras and other means".

In fact 29 "holding pens" are planned on motorways and the approaches to ports. Michael Gove, responsible for no-deal planning, says these "Farage's Garages" as they've been nicknamed, are likely to be needed, deal or no deal,

because whatever happens, paperwork will be required... And since nobody knows yet what exactly is going to be agreed (or not!) this can't be prepared in advance. Needless to say the Road Haulage Association, among others, is demanding urgent meetings with ministers over the "blizzard of new IT systems" which are needed. Sigh, if only Britain could be part of a single market...

### Moria refugees destitute and abandoned

On 8 September, Greece's largest refugee camp on Lesbos island, was completely destroyed by fire. Moria, originally meant to accommodate 3,000 refugees, had 13,000 crammed into it. Enclosed with barbed wire and a chain-link fence, it amounted to an open-air prison. Conditions were appalling. Water had been limited to 1.5 litres/day; queues for food lasted 4hrs. In fact there had been many organised protests, but these fell on deaf ears.

How the fire started is unknown, even if why it started is fairly obvious. Some blame the presence of officials who came to do Covid-19 tests, for fuelling people's anger. Others blame far-right groups. Now 4 Afghan refugees from the camp itself, are charged with arson.

After the fire, the refugees were left without food or water for days, and had to sleep out in the open. They were not allowed to leave the island. Now a "Moria.2" tent city has been set up close to the sea, with conditions which are hardly better

than those in Moria.1. Families must share tents, ablution facilities are minimal, and never mind the need for general hygiene: another Covid outbreak is inevitable.

While a few EU countries are taking in some of the children, everyone else is left in this island prison, with nowhere to

go. The rich EU countries which created the "refugee problem" in the first place by impoverishing their former colonies, and fuelling deadly conflicts for their own ends, may wash their hands of any responsibility, but they are 100% culpable.



Refugees sleeping out in the open

## King's Cross railway station (London)

## Wilfully exposing us to the virus

We were surprised when LNER announced it would reinstate at-seat food service in First Class, just when the government was tightening restrictions against Covid as a result of the 2nd wave... How could bringing hot bacon sandwiches to passengers (thus also inviting them to remove their masks!) be appropriate at this point in the pandemic?

And then came SNP MP, Margaret Ferrier's return trip on West Coast mainline, despite being infectious with the virus! As the *Scotsman* put it, thus "making sure the crew and fellow passengers of a London-Glasgow train... had a fair chance of a four-hour dousing of the Covid-19

virus she knew was coursing through her respiratory system..." It rightly accused her of "a flagrant disregard for the welfare and lives of others."

As on-board workers, we know that this "flagrant disregard" for us as crew and fellow passengers isn't confined to MPs travelling on trains. And how this risk has increased with exempt-from-wearing-masks-passengers. Like its boss the government, LNER repeats the same mixed message: "you must wear a face mask...unless you are exempt". Public Health England's category of those who are "exempt", is so broad that basically anyone can exempt him- or herself by just claiming



"psychological distress" and anyway, no proof is required.

LNER is so desperate to increase its profits again, that it wants no barriers - even masks - which might discourage passengers to buy tickets. But as far as we're concerned, it's still "no masks, no travel" and definitely "no" to First Class food-at-seat service! □

### • Spreading the virus

Did anybody see LNER's latest ads on social media? It says "we'll get you there, with care - Covid aware". With so many Covid cases and the trains running as normal, maybe it should be more like "we'll get Covid there, with care..." [Workers Platform King's X 23/09/20]

### • Stopping the risk

Us Interserve cleaners are fed up walking around KX cleaning and having so many passengers without their masks on, coming up close to us!! We're

already at risk of getting infected, just thanks to our normal job. Shouldn't it be the managers' job to go round and ensure that mask-wearing is strictly adhered to - at least it would mean they're doing something for a change! [Workers Platform King's X 23/09/20]

### • Ticket-free?

Are managers planning to ask guards and ticket inspectors to start checking all tickets again? If so, we have a problem - because it's another close contact situation which would be better avoided. What's more, the ticket machines are not exactly

working well anyway. So much better if the service was permanently ticket-free - or even better, travel-for-free! (And we can always do with more hands to help with all the other tasks, so no need to get rid of inspectors, either!). [Workers Platform King's X 23/09/20]

### • Pay up!

What's happened to Churchill cleaners' pay rise? April is long gone, but our bills haven't. In fact, they have a nasty habit of multiplying. So, we need - and expect - that pay rise asap! [Workers Platform King's X 23/09/20]

## Ford Dagenham Engine Plant

### • Welcome to the Darkside!

We've just been joined by some workers from Bridgend Engine Plant in Wales, which was finally shut on 24 September - and of course they're very welcome! It's only a few though, which is wholly understandable, considering what uprooting yourself in order to come to Dagenham involves. As to the help from Ford - it doesn't sound like much, if it's only 50% of rent (£860/month?) or £40,000 towards a mortgage... But that's Ford for you. Never mind the government handout of £500m it got in July... [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 30/09/20]

### • ...and then there was one

We all have something to regret, though. If there was one plant that we could and should have fought together to keep open for production of some kind or another (electric engines, ventilators?), it was Bridgend! What's more, Unite's McCluskey even pledged himself to lead such a fight. We knew better than to believe him, but that only meant we needed to organise the fight ourselves. So if we're to prevent any

further job-destruction by Ford bosses we need to think about preparing for that - sooner rather than later. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 30/09/20]

### • What's the point?

We've had the craziest reactions by management when anyone's suspected of having Covid. They're totally unable to respond promptly and never tell us any facts. So, for instance on Wednesday morning on the Chicken Farm, 8 hours after the late shift had left, they decided to do a deep clean because a worker had reported symptoms. Never mind that early shift workmates already had contact with the "contaminated" area. If this mate tests +ve, we've already been exposed to infection... Talk about trying to close the stable door after the virus has replicated! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 30/09/20]

### • Engines first

Yes... if someone has a fever and then goes to get a test - all of us who were less than 2m away from them for more than 15mins surely need to self-isolate until we hear the test result? But nothing like this happens. Obviously! It could mean even



a whole shift laid off work for at least 48 hours. And if the test is positive? All of us quarantined for 14 days? No wonder management keeps mum. (Even if it might mean losing her...) [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 30/09/20]

### • Timings are out

Why wasn't the 27 sec/job on Chicken Farm increased to at least(!) 54 seconds, when all these Covid special measures were imposed? The computer programme for red lights to flash if there's "slowing down", was never changed. Never mind that the work's unbearable with the steamy and hot air in our masks! How are we meant to breathe or take a drink to hydrate ourselves "safely" unless timings are significantly changed and breaks significantly increased, to allow this? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 30/09/20]



**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**

## A "smoking joint" agreement

At the start of July, Royal Mail and Communication Workers Union leaders signed a "joint statement", updating current negotiations. Indeed, it has been more than a year since RM announced its attacks against our working conditions and started implementing some of them - and we've already voted twice to strike against them!

But now, union leaders have written to branches announcing they're ready to implement some of the cuts. They've agreed, for instance, to "light touch revisions" to "improve operational arrangements"

during the pandemic - i.e., to allow RM to change working conditions as it sees fit. They acknowledge that RM's Automated Hours Data Capture would allow managers to track us down and discipline us, but they're still ready to sign. We're also told, that to address the decline in letters, they've agreed to increase the volume of junk mail, adding even more Door-2-Dustbin to our work! In fact, since the surge in parcels and in the context of so many job cuts, the working day has got longer and longer: so much for the 35-hour week promised back in



2018!

And now, instead of a pay increase - overdue since April this year - a 3-year pay deal is on the table. Which is, of course, a way to cut wages in advance. Union leaders say they won't agree, but can we trust them, when they've caved in to so much already? Yet another reason to take this fight into our own hands! ☐

### • With the second wave...

It's no real surprise that we're into the second wave of Covid-19. And as the Health&Safety reps here say, there's no room in here for managers who take a "blasé attitude towards the virus", and go around without masks themselves. Seems they need "educating" - and why not, we can always organise a Work Time Learning session just for them... [Workers' Fight Bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 23/09/20]

### • Give us the bloody masks!

We shouldn't have to "ask" for masks or gloves. It's simple! Managers should be issuing them to everyone, every day. Because we all need to wear them to protect ourselves and others. And by the way, of course masks also protect us, as long as they are clean and fresh - so they need to be re-issued after 4 hours! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 23/09/20]

### • Struggling with workload?

These management targets should be thrown into the bin! Not only do we need to take all necessary (time-consuming) precautions, but working with masks means that we need more breather-breaks. And since we're also fewer and fewer, thanks to their job cuts, it has to be up to us to decide how fast we go... or how slowly! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 23/09/20]

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

## Cut the temporary contracts, not the temporary workers!

BMW has postponed its job cuts targeting 400 agency workers' jobs and one shift at the Mini Assembly plant from mid-October. It claims that sales this summer were better than projected. Production will now be reviewed "month-by-month". That is much the way BMW prefers it. The company officially refers to agency workers as "temporary agency resource", and boasts of the precious "flexibility" it gains by leaving them in a precarious state.

Since we returned in August,

production has been full-speed ahead. It's as if BMW can't get enough cars! Lines continue to run at unprecedented speeds, playing havoc with "Covid-secure" measures. Saturday working is back, with overtime added until 4pm. So is the compulsory half-hour of overtime added on the night shift to compensate for breakdowns.

Yes all this, while BMW holds the threat of the sack over 400 of us, at some future date! Of course, it has always played its blackmail game to the maximum with agency workers,



keeping them on the job, but in a state of insecurity for years. Some of us who have been "temps" (work that out!) for as long as 7 years might therefore be told our jobs are cut. Fighting against this latest threat will have to mean fighting to end this situation for good. Permanent contracts for all! ☐

### • Breakdowns into breaks

Why on earth did our mates in R&H have to stay for 30 mins of VPO (compulsory "volume protection overtime") after working a 12-hour shift?! It's mad enough when it's done after 7½ hours in BMW & Gi! If VPO is due to breakdowns, and breakdowns are due to the line running at full blast - we may as well slow the line and take back the time stolen from us! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford Mini 22/09/20]

### • Turning on the paper-shredder

It's such a joke when any manager argues that we have to do VPO because "it's in the contract"! Do they think we were born yesterday?? Contracts are never written in stone. They're only what the bosses think they can get away with. There's nothing BMW can do if we all walk out when we reckon we've worked enough! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford Mini 22/09/20]

### • How dare they!

As if the speed were not bad enough, overtime is back. Even on compulsory Saturdays managers come round "offering" another couple of hours, to a 4pm finish! And they're constantly asking us to stay another two hours on weekdays too. How confused are they? Clearly they need elementary guidance. If demand is down, we go slower, and nobody works an extra second! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford Mini 22/09/20]

**USA**

The US election is taking place in a year of an unprecedented social, economic and health crisis in the world's richest country. And now even Trump has contracted the virus, despite being most protected man in the world - even if he chose to be seen dismissing the seriousness of the pandemic in public.

Of course, neither Democrats nor Republicans address with any credibility the huge problems facing the population: the 208,000 dead from Covid or the 12.6m still officially unemployed - not to mention the ongoing killings of black men and women by police. Patriot Trump promises to "make America Great Again" and Patriot Biden wants to "restore the Soul of America". The first presidential debate epitomised the disastrous state of US politics, as it spiralled downwards into mud-slinging.

As election day comes closer, Trump's reactionary tweets get worse. And he just appointed Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court - in a ceremony in the White House rose garden, helping Covid to spread liberally among his sycophants. This appointment is meant to guarantee that his brand of right-wing bigotry is defended at the top of the judiciary

**India**

In the last days of September, India's farmers blocked national highways and railway lines, burning effigies of government ministers, to protest against three new agricultural laws. Over 350 farmers' organisations and trade unions, mainly from Punjab and Haryana, staged mass demonstrations. As the agitation grew, a member party of Modi's ruling alliance from Punjab, the Shiromani Akali Dal, and their MP in Modi's cabinet withdrew from the government.

The new laws will remove state support for agricultural produce, the so-called "mandi" system, in place since 1966, whereby minimum prices for 23 types of crops were guaranteed. Cheap imports were restricted, farmers were prevented from selling produce outside their home regions, thus protecting local markets; and hoarding was forbidden.

**The farce of US democracy**

even if he loses the election. Barratt is a practising Catholic, known for ultra-reactionary ideas and was a member of People of Praise, a Christian group that opposes abortion and holds that men are divinely ordained as the "head" of family and faith. Since Supreme court judges are appointed for life and they have wide prerogatives, this does not augur well for women's rights.

Trump is already preparing the ground for an election which is not decided in his favour (he is trailing Biden in the polls) by preparing to create loopholes in the same voting system which put him into power.

It is highly likely, of course, that voters will judge him on his record, including the appalling mishandling of the pandemic over the last six months. But as the US Trotskyist newspaper, The Spark, reminds us: *"it's not a question of Trump or Obama, Bush or Clinton, Republican or Democrat. No matter who was running the government, public services were being defunded. Useful jobs were eliminated. The government of this country long ago outlived any usefulness"*. And it is this bankruptcy that is only too visible in this farcical election campaign. □

**Modi's "free market" reforms - against the peasantry**

This system, despite the fact that it did not cover all farmers in the country and prices were often low, has protected a significant section of farmers from price fluctuations on the world/national markets. And it has also helped to keep food affordable for the population.

Under Modi's new laws, this mandi system is to be abolished, allowing large private agribusiness to gain full control of the market. Private traders will be able to buy directly from farmers and sell products anywhere in the country at any price they negotiate. And this is happening in a context where an increasing number of agricultural products are being imported from the USA into India, after the trade deal concluded between Trump and Modi earlier this year. As a result, domestic market prices for certain foodstuffs have already slumped. Elsewhere in East Asia,

when, for instance, cheap US rice was able to flood the market, the ruination of a large section of the peasantry followed. It also meant, in time, much higher food prices for the population. This is why Indian farmers need to win this fight.

Given the strength of their protests, it's possible that this time Modi, who was re-elected in 2019 partly because he promised to double farmers' incomes by 2022, may have gone too far. Opposition political parties now see the chance to use the farmers' protests to improve their own electoral prospects. But they are hardly reliable allies. However, Modi's long list of "reforms" includes laws directly attacking labour rights, which could prompt workers to seek common cause with the farmers, joining a growing wave of opposition to Modi's reactionary regime. □

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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