

# WORKERS' fight

No 118 - Nov-Dec 2020  
price 30p

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ISSN 2040-400X

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

## WE NEED TO CHANGE THIS SYSTEM!

With each passing day, the disastrous incapacity of governments to act in the interests of their populations' health and well-being - not just in Britain or the USA - but everywhere in the world, becomes more glaring.

Whether it is the Covid crisis, the plight of refugees, the situation in the still war-torn Middle East and North Africa, the barbaric attacks by crazed religious fanatics which they spawned, or the growing destitution of the poor - the politicians' response inevitably aggravates the problem. And they fail to learn from their mistakes.

So here in Britain, where coronavirus cases are again rising rapidly, Johnson's lock-down for England (only!) came 6 weeks late and even then, is only partial, leaving schools, construction sites, manufacturing workplaces and public transport all still "open" to the virus.

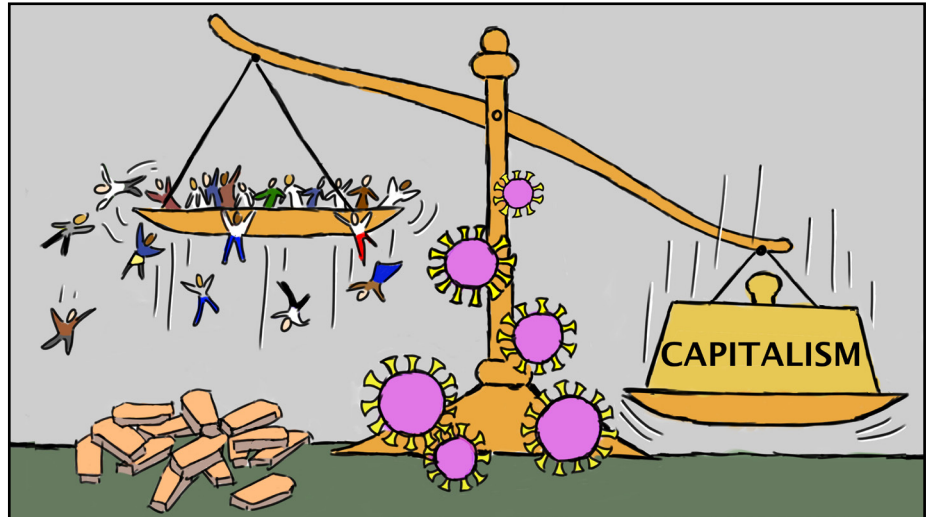
### **Choosing profits over lives**

But Johnson is not the only political leader to mess up. What's common to all western leaders is their argument that their Covid policy is a matter of balancing the "health of the economy" against "the health of the population"; lives against livelihoods. When what they really mean is that lives will have to be lost, if profits are to be saved.

And it was with such "savings" in mind, that Johnson has decided that being seen as "saviour of Christmas" could help his battered image.

So we are told that this new lockdown is designed to get the rate of infection down sufficiently by early December, to allow "families" to spend the Christmas holiday together.

Never mind that in the 3 weeks after the 2nd December, when lockdown is meant to end, anything could happen. In reality, by ending the restrictions that week, it is the massive retail, restaurant



& bar profits usually made during this period which will be "saved", even if a family Christmas isn't.

### **Workers' aid, not bosses' aid?**

Which brings us to the question of state aid, one of the main sticking points in the Brexit talks, currently "on the wire".

A whole section of the capitalist class is horrified by the scale of state intervention to help companies, which Covid has unleashed. What they point to, above all, is the furlough scheme. To quote their favourite "Economist" journal: this is leading to the "zombification of Britain", by keeping "useless" jobs alive in parts of the economy which should be relegated.

They propose that furlough-wages should be paid directly to workers rather than be paid as aid to the bosses, as happens in the US. The *Economist* calls this "protecting workers" rather than protecting "obsolete" jobs, allowing the economy, post-Covid, to re-adjust to a new, happy, reality, with workers using their cash to start their own 21st

Century businesses!

One can only laugh. It's ironic how often bosses' mouthpieces accuse their opponents of being "Utopian", given this fantastical picture they've painted. But they have a point. The furlough scheme and almost all other measures are yet more handouts to the bosses, who just pocket the difference. But where the *Economist* is wrong (or deliberately naive!) is to claim bosses are "protecting" jobs, when they are stripping out as many as they can. Already 750,000 are cut and another 1m are earmarked to go. The furlough extension is a mere stay of execution, if that.

Indeed, the inability of politicians and their erratic "measures" to alleviate any aspects of the crisis, exposes them and their system as utterly bankrupt. The working class already has an alternative: a communist system based on planned production for need, not profit, which would allow humankind to preserve itself and the planet: it is our only viable future. ☐

## Covid-19 crisis

Johnson's announcement at the end of October, of a 4-week lockdown - just for England - was a surprise U-turn, even if his plans were already leaked. After expending all that energy defending a 3-tier "local approach" to control Covid, he was now obliged to make a convincing case for lockdown.2 - albeit late and a lot more partial than he admits. "Alas", he began, "as across much of Europe, the virus is spreading even faster than the reasonable worst case scenario of our scientific advisers... a peak of mortality alas far bigger than the one we saw in April..."

He added that hospital capacity would run out "in a matter of weeks", that this would be a "moral and medical disaster" and that "the risk is that for the first time in our lives, the NHS will not be there for us and for our families". No doubt Johnson reckons that pulling the NHS heart-string might persuade the covid-weary to comply.

Of course, the worsening Covid crisis caused by this second wave, warrants drastic measures. By the weekend of 31st October, cases in Britain passed the million mark, deaths are approaching 60,000 and the death rate remains among the highest alongside that of the USA. During the week of 17-23 October, there were 600,400 people in England with the virus, i.e., 1 in 100 people. By the 31st, daily cases had increased to 23,257, with 10,918 hospitalised and 978 were already in Intensive Care.

### ... but all of you mustn't stay home

So now it's back to the 1st wave slogan of "stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives"... Except that schools, colleges and universities remain open and so do workplaces "where work cannot be done from home". Essential or not, doesn't come into it. Construction and manufacturing will "help keep the economy going".

Labour's Keir Starmer self-righteously claims his demand for a 2-week "circuit-breaker" 3 weeks ago is vindicated, and that if it had been followed, a 4-week lockdown wouldn't have been needed. But in reality he has no disagreement with Johnson. His policy throughout the pandemic has been fully bipartisan. Because what counts here, is that schools and workplaces stay open. And this is the issue which blows a hole in any strategy to "contain the virus" or even reduce "R". To quote the Office for

## Worse than the first wave



National Statistics: "older teenagers and young adults continue to have the highest current rates while rates appear to be steeply increasing among secondary school children".

But never mind "science". Schools can't close if workers are to go to work. So both will stay open and the virus will pass around freely.

### As for viral transportation...

And of course there's never been any question of preventing the transport and transmission of the virus in the small, closed spaces of tubes, trains, and buses. What did Mayor Sadiq Khan, responsible for London's public transport have to say to the new lockdown? "I am furious that the Government has dithered and delayed yet again. Their indecision will have unimaginable consequences - both lives and livelihoods will be lost as a result". This from the same Mayor who presided over the serial deaths of 29 London bus drivers during the first Covid wave, without lifting a finger.

### Still failing the test

The contracted-out £12bn Test, Trace, & Isolate system has never been truly up and running. And now its phone app has failed again! The government can boast that over 300,000 tests are done in a week, but not even a third of those tested get a result within 48 hours. As for contacts actually traced, this at best is just about half of those identified.

There is no way of knowing exactly how many self-isolate, but it's thought it's as low as 20%. And since the £500 one-off payment for those deprived of income by so doing, means showing your Test and Trace unique ID number, a bank statement, proof of employment and confirmation from your employer that you're unable to work from home,

how many even qualify? There are no social networks to support those stuck in their bedrooms. So if they don't stay there, who can really blame them?

As for relying on this system to allow students to return "safely" to school or university - even if T,T&I was "fixed", a negative test wouldn't mean "covid-free" in a population group where infection rates are consistently high.

Sure, tests should be at least weekly in exposed groups like health workers and maybe students too. But "Covid free" will only be a reality when treatment and vaccines are available. In the meantime, yes, lockdown with social support is needed... which is down to the rest of us, because the government certainly isn't providing it.

### King of the North - no more tears

Probably no-one was more surprised than the mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham and his unexpected allies, like Tory MP Graham Brady (who is also Chair of the 1922 Committee of backbench Tory MPs), by Johnson's decision to lock down.

They'd been resisting Johnson's 3-tier system of "regional" restrictions for different reasons of course. Burnham was arguing that workers needed a higher proportion of their wages paid and went out of his way to show his support for businesses facing closure. But the loud hullabaloo over this, was all for nothing in the end, since now these tiers are out (for now) and indeed the 80% furlough scheme which they'd all been begging Rishi Sunak to extend, is reinstated. No doubt other grants for small businesses and the self-employed will follow. □

## NHS: still needs intensive "care"

The primary cause of the NHS collapse which Johnson threatens, won't be lack of beds or ventilators, but lack of staff - and the total exhaustion of those who've worked through the pandemic, covering for 80,000 unfilled vacancies and thousands more workers off sick. In the week ending 31 October 76,200 NHS England staff were off due to illness, with 27,136 absent due to Covid.

True, Britain went into this pandemic with the fewest intensive care beds out of all rich countries. But

emergency Nightingale hospitals were erected and ventilators manufactured to make up for this - even if they stood unused because of lack of staff. And now, as the second wave grows, an NHS director has warned that *"there are significantly less beds open at the moment from when we went into the pandemic..."* Two thousand less, in fact, apparently due to the need to space the beds apart.

So what happens now? Last winter, patients were left on stretchers

## Covid-19 crisis

in corridors and store-rooms due to bed-shortages, and 9,000 more beds were called for. That already makes a shortage of 11,000 beds - without a 2nd Covid surge!

So yes, there does seem to be no choice but to *"protect the NHS"*. But it is hard to swallow coming out of the mouths of those who promote Brexit and its hostile immigration policy, given that the one thing the NHS needs above all others, is more workers - and the main source of these workers is the EU and beyond. □

### • Virus knows no borders

What's been so conspicuous in this pandemic is the way that the 4 so-called nations of Britain have appeared to "manage" their own Covid backyards. But of course this is the "beauty" of devolution.

As a result, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland could have their own policies different from that of Johnson's England. And they've had their own restrictions, even though, in reality, this has not had many consequences. However now, with the more controversial second lockdown, absurd situations are resulting. For instance Wales ends its "circuit-breaker" just as England starts its quasi-lockdown. And so people from Wales are told not to cross over into England. Yet trains and transport continue, just as they have throughout this pandemic, connecting every part of Britain with every other, in fact, thus giving a free ride to coronaviruses, despite the restrictions, whether by local tiers or lockdowns!

### • Human challenge trials: another "world beating" strategy for the record...

On 20 October the government handed over £10m to the drug testing company, Open Orphan to carry out Covid-19 "human challenge" trials, in partnership with Imperial College London and the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust. This was surprising, to say the least. As the name implies, "human challenge" trials are aimed at testing the efficacy of a vaccine by infecting ("challenging") young, healthy, human volunteers after they've been vaccinated.

Such trials are only considered safe if the disease concerned isn't fatal and if a treatment is available. But there is no effective treatment for Covid-19 and a number of healthy young people have died from it, or suffered long-term ill-effects.

Open Orphan expects to use the anti-viral drug Remdesivir, which only

shortens symptom duration, on infected subjects. Worse, the trial would first involve the inoculation of unvaccinated subjects, with increasing doses of virus, to find a "minimum dose" which causes symptoms - even though the danger is that those not showing symptoms would be exposed to higher and higher doses, and thus potentially to serious harm.

Never mind though! That well-known government quack, Business Secretary Alok Sharma, points out that Human Challenge trials will: *"accelerate the development of our most promising vaccines which will ultimately help in beginning our return to normal life"*. One wonders which distant planet (other than Brexit-Britain) he lives on? Because the first Open Orphan virus dose trial (if it happens) will only yield results by mid-2021! By which time, 10 "most promising vaccines", already being tested on hundreds of thousands of volunteers against natural exposure to the virus, at no extra risk, will already have been available for several months!

## Poland

### Standing up to attacks against women's rights

On the 22 October, the Polish Constitutional Court ruled a near-total ban on abortions. It made abortion illegal even if a foetus has severe abnormalities and is unlikely

to survive. This has sparked huge protests throughout the country, with over 100,000 flooding the streets of Warsaw, but also mass protests in Gdansk, Cracow, Lodz, and a dozen other cities.

Abortions, according to this ruling, are now allowed only if the mother's life is in danger or in cases of rape or incest

- making Poland's abortion law one of the most restrictive in Europe.

But even before this new law came into force, 200,000 women in Poland were forced into having "illegal" abortions because of denial of access. Only a minority could afford to leave the country and find clinics in other European countries. The less wealthy, in fact the majority of working class women, were forced to seek illegal abortions inside Poland, often in unsafe conditions. This new attack on women's rights will, of course, will hit them harder.

Ever since the far-right nationalist, pro-Catholic Law and Justice Party (PiS) came to power, in 2015, it has targeted women's rights. However in 2016 and 2018, it had to abandon its attempt to restrict abortions in the face of mass demonstrations. Let's hope that this time again, the demonstrators will force the religious bigots in power to back-pedal. Women must have the right of sovereignty over their bodies - and free abortion on demand!





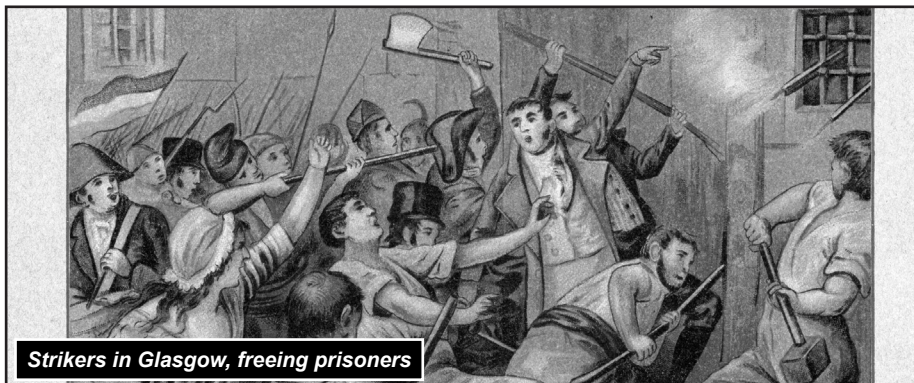
## Our history

One of the great struggles of the British working class took place 200 years ago, when 60,000 weavers led a political strike involving workers in every other trade across Western-Central Scotland. It was a strike for radical political reform following a call made throughout Britain, yet only in Scotland did the strikers seriously confront the state. And it is almost forgotten about.

Weavers' incomes had halved during the Napoleonic wars and did not recover afterwards. However this was a skilled and literate section of workers with a tradition of meeting to discuss political ideas, including those of Tom Paine and the French Materialists, inspired by the French and American revolutions.

It was these same workers who responded in solidarity after the Peterloo massacre in Manchester in August 1819, when armed cavalry killed 18 protesters at a 60,000-strong open-air meeting to demand the franchise. An attempt to break up a huge demonstration in Paisley, near to Glasgow, met resistance that lasted a week, even though this was eventually crushed. Those who campaigned for political rights faced hanging and beheading or, in the best case, transportation to Australia. But given the rottenness of the British monarchy and parliament, many were prepared to take the risk. And one tactic the government used in this period was to send "agent provocateurs" into any movement - small or large - which threatened their status quo.

## Two centuries ago, a general strike in Scotland



Strikers in Glasgow, freeing prisoners

### They demand their own government

On 1 April 1820 a notice was widely posted in the Glasgow area "by order of the committee of organisation for forming a provisional government". Addressed to the population of Britain and Ireland, it urged soldiers to stand with the population and concluded with an appeal for an indefinite strike until all men were: "In possession of those rights which distinguishes the FREEMAN from the SLAVE; viz: That of giving consent to the laws by which he is governed."

Whether a provocation or not, workers everywhere in the region heeded the call. Armed pickets ensured that the strike was solid within two days, and it lasted until 9 April despite the arrest of their leaders. On 8 April, when five arrested strikers were brought from Glasgow to Greenock, angry crowds in the streets pelted the soldiers escorting them with stones. Soldiers fired, killing eight people. The

crowd, undeterred, forced the soldiers back and stormed the jail, forcing the magistrate to release all the prisoners.

### Their fight is not in vain

Several attempts at armed uprising had already failed by this time, including marches towards Glasgow and one aiming to seize weapons, including cannons, from an ironworks near Falkirk. Three leaders of these marches, all weavers, were convicted of treason, publicly hanged and then beheaded. Yet the resistance was not broken. One company which tried to cut weavers' wages by 8% after the strike, was forced to back down after they struck for another seven weeks.

Within the next decade, trade unions were legalised and the central demands of the movement - universal suffrage and annual parliamentary elections - were later taken up by the first national political movement of the working class, the Chartists. □

## British Rail: back to the future?

As of the 21st of September, the Secretary of State for Transport, Grant Shapps announced the end of the rail franchising system. However, the normal operation of the franchised Train Operating Companies (TOCs) had already been suspended. The Covid pandemic had meant a big fall in these privateers' main source of revenue - their exorbitant fares - so the Department for Transport (DfT) stepped in to fully fund the service out of taxpayers' pockets. From March to June 2020, it paid 14 TOCs almost £2.3 billion in an effort to save them from bankruptcy!

### Bailing out the train-robbers

The Emergency Recovery Management Agreements, ERMA's which have now come in, are an interim measure which will

continue to keep TOCs afloat for the next 18 months. The idea is then to replace most franchising with management or "direct award" contracts under which TOCs will be expected deliver services at a fixed fee - a system which already operates on Govia-Thameslink/Southern.

In other words this is not by any measure a "renationalisation". And that is no surprise. Keith Williams, the businessman asked to chair the Railway Review into the franchise system wrote that "the infrastructure and organisational systems (...) are no longer coping with the unprecedented demands placed on them. And those left paying the price are the passengers and taxpayers who fund it all...", but he then added that it was not in his remit to suggest how the system was funded, since that was a political decision.

### Private profit is here to stay!

Shapps has already explained that "the best elements of the private sector, including competition and investment" will be maintained. "Competition" is of course a bit of a blue Tory herring when it comes to one existing railway line between A and B...

If, in the end there is more centralisation of services to allow the government to take advantage of economies of scale, even under private management, at least this might have one positive effect: that the workforce will be able to start to rebuild the links between different sections which were broken over the past 27 years of privatisation. But nothing happens by itself. That has to be railworkers' objective right from today.

## Increasing poverty, everywhere

The latest official figures (2018/19), which do not take into account the effect of the pandemic, showed that already 30% of under 18s, that is 4.2m children, were living in poverty across the country. The figure for "all people" in poverty, which includes adults with or without work and pensioners, is 22% - over one in five of the population!

Obviously, since the Covid pandemic, many more have been pushed down below the breadline. The Institute for Public Poverty Research reckons that the pandemic's fall-out has already added a further 1.1m to the numbers in poverty, including 200,000 children. Save the Children's survey of families living on Universal Credit



or working tax credits in September found nearly two-thirds had run up debts, 60% had cut down on food and other basics, and over a third relied

## Their society

on charities for food and clothes. It's obvious where the government's "help out" should have gone. But we all know where it did go. ☐

### • Johnson's "hunger games"

It seemed unbelievable to most commentators and even some of his own MPs, that Johnson's government could use its majority in the House of Commons to defeat a Labour motion asking for free school meal provision during the autumn and winter breaks.

And despite advice to U-turn because it looked so bad, Johnson just repeated the excuse that local councils had ample funds (£63m which had already been used up!) to provide food for poor families.

Back in the summer, Johnson happily shared the limelight with ManU footballer

Marcus Rashford, who forced the issue and got him to back down. But this time, charities, food banks, Marcus Rashford himself, and more well-to-do pubs and restaurants had to distribute food to families who otherwise would have had nothing to offer their kids.

To put this into perspective: there were 1.4m children claiming free school meals in England last year (17% of all children), but a million more applied this year, due to the pandemic. However, even this doesn't reveal the true extent of poverty and

hunger out there. To be eligible for school meals, families not only have to be claiming benefits, but also must have an annual household income of less than £7,400! So those children who qualify, are the poorest of the poor. There are many more households however, who struggle to afford food after bills and rent are paid, with an income much greater than this!

It's not obvious why Johnson made this choice. The sums involved (£20m per week) are hardly extraordinary. But the need certainly is.

### • From "hidden homeless" to rough sleepers

The government promised to "end rough sleeping" during the pandemic. Not because it cared that people were sleeping in the streets, of course, but because of a perceived public health problem. However, despite the "Everyone In" initiative, funded by the government, which placed 15,000 rough sleepers in accommodation, rough sleeping actually increased during the pandemic!

According to recent figures from the Combined Homelessness and Information Network, there were 4,277 rough sleepers in Greater London between April

and June - a 33% increase compared to the same period last year. This means that the number of "hidden homeless" - people who have been staying with friends or "sofa surfing" - and who found themselves on the street, increased due to the pandemic. These new figures show that the true extent of the housing crisis is far greater than the government admits.

### • Patel targeting the most vulnerable

In the "Statement of changes to immigration rules" published in October, Home secretary Patel let it be known that her intention is now to deport foreign

rough sleepers. In fact, the policy paper states that rough sleeping, in and of itself, is enough grounds for deportation!

This isn't the first time that the government's anti-migrant policy has attacked the most vulnerable. In 2017, the Home Office detained and deported rough sleepers from countries of the European Economic Area - which was finally ruled unlawful by the High Court after a challenge brought on behalf of a Latvian rough sleeper.

But of course, for bigots like Patel, these anti-migrant rules allow her to play to the arch-reactionary Tory electorate. She has learnt absolutely nothing from the Windrush deportation scandal.

### The next Grenfell, a matter of "when?"

On the 19 October, nearly 900 students and private tenants of the Paragon Estate in West London were asked to evacuate the development due to fire safety concerns. In fact, these 6 towers managed by the housing association, Notting Hill Genesis (NHG), though occupied for 15 years, never met the required safety standards. There had been known fire safety concerns surrounding the development as far back as December 2017!

After the horrific Grenfell tower

fire, which killed 72 residents, NHG, like many other companies (and local authorities) was compelled to review its buildings. It undertook a £8m program to remove dangerous cladding from all blocks. But an ongoing safety inspection revealed a "multitude" of structural and fire safety issues, which led to the evacuation.

So why were these safety concerns seemingly ignored until now? The answer is that fire regulations have been deliberately "relaxed" over the years in order to cheapen developers' construction costs. In 2005, for instance, the Fire Service ceased to be

the only judge of fire safety. Instead, landlords were given this responsibility - and the right to subcontract safety assessment companies for the job. And these companies, in order to keep their contracts, have deliberately refrained from finding faults!

In fact, there are still 300 buildings waiting for their Grenfell-type cladding to be removed - and an estimated 1,700 buildings have no less dangerously-flammable timber, high-pressure laminate or polystyrene cladding and insulation systems. Yes, it's not a question of if, but when, the next Grenfell disaster happens!



## Their economy

It wasn't long before Chancellor Rishi Sunak followed Johnson's U-turn and extended the 80% furlough scheme until March next year. What's more he said the scheme is applicable throughout the "United Kingdom", after bitter complaints were voiced by the devolved governments, which have nevertheless kept to their own versions of lockdown-light.

So the bosses once more can apply for direct payments from the government to cover their wage costs. And as has already happened up to now, they are taking the money while cutting jobs, so Sunak's assertion that this is to "protect jobs and livelihoods" is patent nonsense. "Jobs and livelihoods" were being lost as he spoke: 9,500 cuts in total were announced that morning

## Courtesy of Sunak, the bosses' payment holiday



at Sainsburys/Argos, John Lewis, Clarks shoes, Lloyds and Do&Co the City airport caterers...

Of course, Sunak's furlough is a direct subsidy to companies, pure and simple, few questions asked. Indeed, there would be nobody to

track and trace what the bosses do with their free money even if this was suggested as a policy (which it isn't), since the government itself has cut so many civil servant jobs. Yes that is what it calls "putting its arms around" the workforce. □

## • Double-dip in our pockets

In the meantime the Bank of England has announced that the bosses face a double-dip recession after all, and that the situation was "*unusually uncertain, due to the second wave of Covid-19 and the still unresolved Brexit negotiations*". So, as the Financial Times put it, "*the BoE's latest forecasts contained a wide margin of error*"!

Anyway, to bolster the economy it is doing some more "quantitative easing", that is, printing money to boost spending. So it will buy more government bonds

worth £150bn, to a total of £895bn, over the next year. At the same time, the BoE has left interest rates unchanged. This is just as well, because any lower, and it would mean so-called "negative interest rates", in other words charging savers for saving... something which has never been done before. The other thing they haven't done, however, is explain how their money-printing will actually increase spending. And despite all their attempts to help things along, they still predict the economy will continue to

shrink.

It's kind of stating the obvious, really. Their economy is in recession because capitalism can only lurch from one crisis to next at this stage of its history, without ever being able to "fully recover". And when something like Covid comes along, it hits it when it's down. The problem for the working class is that it is going to be asked to pay for this. It has to prepare its refusal.

## • TFL underfunded; under attack

Back in May, the government and Mayor Sadiq Khan agreed a £1.6bn package to provide funding for 6 months to Transport for London (TfL), to make up for revenue lost during the Covid crisis. It wasn't enough, of course. But what was totally absent both then and now, was any suggestion that the Underground/Overground/bus system should ever be closed down completely, to avoid spreading Covid. Anyway, the issue of funding is now totally overshadowed (and distorted), by the blame game,

entirely fuelled by the coming Mayoral elections, next May.

So, Shaun Bailey, the Conservative candidate, has blamed Khan's "mismanagement", while Khan has said £4.9bn will be needed for the service over the next 18 months. As conditions for extra money, the government has now demanded a supplement to London council tax to pay for transport, and another fare increase (in addition to one already agreed in May), among other things, including ending free travel for

children and pensioners.

But the government's covert agenda is to cut conditions and numbers of TfL workers. They also aim to bring in driverless trains, costing as much as £7bn. Whether they succeed with that remains to be seen, as safety would be a real issue on London's Underground. But this government would very much like to eliminate human drivers - since up to now, they've been able to protect themselves against attempts to cut their numbers and conditions.

### Artemis Accords – The capitalist virus infecting the moon?

When on 26 October, NASA announced the existence of diffuse water molecules on the sunlit surface of the Moon, nobody spoke about the Artemis Accords signed just 3 days before, on 23 October. These will allow governments and companies to exploit space resources. These were signed by the US, Australia, Canada, Italy and Britain of

course(!) and would formalise governments' and companies' claims to mineral rights on the Moon. It should come as no surprise that this signing took place at the initiative of new NASA director, Jim Bridenstine, a vocal commercial space advocate, former Republican politician and Trump appointee.

This sharing out of the moon's resources goes totally against the spirit of the UN's 1979 Moon Treaty, which defines the Moon and its resources as the "*common heritage of mankind*", i.e., ineligible for extraction

by any nation, corporation or individual. However, this treaty was only signed by France, Guatemala, India, and Romania...

The reason for this rush to commercialise the Moon, is its rich resources: platinum, rare earth metals, gold, and titanium among others. The metallic asteroid "16 Psyche" was recently valued by a NASA scientist at £7725 quadrillion... However, given the inestimable cost of mining in space, well, the fortunes to be made are, for the time being, mostly wishful thinking.

## No deal: now you see it, now you don't...

Those "are you ready?" Brexit ads are on TV again - and at the time of writing, talks are literally on the wire.

For a deal to happen, Britain will need to give up some of the fish in its territorial waters, agree not to subsidise British companies or undercut EU social/environmental rules and withdraw the threats to override international law on the Northern Ireland protocol of the Brexit withdrawal agreement. Simple!

However Johnson's Brexiteers don't see it that way and he himself is still playing the no-deal game, (err... sorry, "Australia terms"! ). But even a deal will come at a cost to the bosses. And since the politicians refuse to "own up" to being responsible for these losses, they'd rather have a "no-deal", which they can blame on the EU.

So what's going to happen? Even

### • Another shot in the foot?

Johnson's Internal Market Bill, currently on its way through Parliament's two Houses, doesn't just break the 1998 Irish Peace Agreement which is enshrined in International Law, but also has implications for Britain's devolved governments.

These have, up to now, been able to choose how to spend EU grants. But Johnson's bill will give central government control over any replacement grants it



a free trade agreement at this stage, meaning no tariffs or quotas on goods, would still involve many new border checks and restrictions on the trade in services. And there will be checks too, on humans passing over the border, new hurdles to negotiate in order to study, work, drive, holiday, or live in Europe. Given

the Society of Motor Manufacturers' constant lobbying, it's unlikely their supply chains will be affected in the end, either way. But the freedom of movement and reciprocal rights of workers will not be as sacrosanct. So for all workers, on both sides of the Channel, whichever way it goes, it's a big step backward. □

### • Business as usual for the capitalist class

The future role of the City's financial sector has not featured much in the Brexit negotiations. As one banker pointed out: "Never underestimate the financial sector's ability to do the business it wants, where it wants, despite regulators putting lines on maps." In fact the City has been left to make deals for itself.



It's true that the financial districts of Paris and Frankfurt would love to take some of the lucrative financial business from London for themselves. But Britain still hosts over 30% of the EU's capital transactions, more than France and Germany combined. This gives the British bourgeoisie significant weight when it comes to sorting out post-Brexit arrangements.

A section of the capitalist class even sees a benefit to a City of London free from EU regulation. They hope that new rules can be made, which will help them make even more super-profits.

So, while Brexit means huge border queues, tariffs for business and few rights for migrant workers, for the City bourgeoisie, it means business (almost) as usual - at least that's what they say.

### • Brexit politicians creating chaos

As the government is always so keen to point out, Brexit was "done" back in January last year. And even if no deal has been agreed, so far, for when the transition period ends on December 31, politicians here have already begun to sail this country further and further away from the real world.

Despite their anti-EU prejudices, however,

is leader of a party that prides itself on being "unionist" and is steadfastly against any breakaways. Indeed, the new bill was partly an attempt to make up for the Withdrawal Agreement's commitment to a border down the Irish sea, opposed vehemently by his Unionist allies in the North. But now he is beset on all sides. What a twisted mess he has got himself into!

they don't hesitate to summon EU countries as examples when they need them, as Sunak did, to boast about his "highly competitive" Job Support Scheme, which pays the "the same" percentage of wages as "other EU countries". Except that the minimum wage in Britain is 40p lower per hour than France, and more than 60p lower than Germany! And of course, he didn't mention the fact that Britain has the lowest statutory sick pay among the rich countries!

At the same time, the government has no problem with the chaos they are preparing at the border; 7,000 trucks could be held in 100km queues in Kent, and the estimated 215m extra customs declarations per year will create a whole new layer of bureaucracy.

EU immigrants face even more chaos. Earlier in October, the government rejected an amendment to its Immigration Bill requiring the Home Office to provide EU citizens with physical evidence of their legal right to remain in Britain - like an ID card or permit, for instance. As it stands, EU immigrants who are given the right to remain through the settlement scheme, have to rely for proof on an app on their phone! Without EU workers being given this hard evidence, another Windrush-type scandal is waiting in the wings.



## Their society

A year ago this month, 39 men, women and children from Vietnam suffocated in the back of a refrigerated lorry. This lorry had made a 12-hour trip from Zeebrugge, Belgium, to Purfleet in Essex before its sealed doors were finally opened by the driver, who found their dead bodies. During the trip, the refrigerated unit had not been switched on and temperature had reached 38.5C. By the time the doors were opened, all of the people inside had died from lack of oxygen and overheating. Evidence showed that some of them had tried desperately to break through the roof of the lorry by using metal rods. The trial is currently taking place of those accused of their manslaughter.

Blaming lorry drivers and people-smuggling gangs may be all very well.

### • Let them go!

According to a recent Channel 4 documentary, 3,429 prisoners in England and Wales are being still being held under "Imprisonment for Public Protection" (IPP) sentences. An IPP sets a minimum term in jail, but no "get out" date. These were introduced in 2003 when David Blunkett was Home Secretary as part of the Blair government's "penal reforms", supposedly to rebalance the system "in favour of victims" and at the time Blunkett said it would apply in few cases, maybe 90 or so! But by 2010, 9,000 IPP prisoners were in jail with no end in sight to their terms and mostly for minor offences.

This led to IPPs being ruled a violation of human rights by the European Court in 2010, and by 2012 they were abolished, but not retroactively. Parole Boards could release prisoners, but on licence, which meant they could be re-imprisoned for the slightest misdemeanour for 10 years. But even so, many have struggled even to

## The deadly consequence of border control



But they do not set out to kill people. In fact the responsibility for this situation lies with the British government. It has made it virtually impossible for poor migrants and refugees to travel from places like Vietnam legitimately. Home Secretary, Priti Patel, has said on more than one occasion that she

wants to make all routes across the English channel "unviable" for migrants. This leaves them no option but to put their lives into the hands of gangs of traffickers. And therefore to risk death. There is only one verdict possible. These deaths are on Patel's hands. She should be in the dock. □

get a Parole hearing after all the cuts. So these prisoners are left high and dry and without hope: many self harm, and 287 have died in prison; 76 from suicide. A high proportion have mental disorders or conditions which should have meant they were never imprisoned in the first place. Labour's (now "Lord") Blunkett has let it be known that he regrets imposing IPPs - for what that's worth!

Prison is no place for anyone. Yet these prisoners, who should all have been released 8 years ago after the ECHR ruling, are being kept in an unbearable limbo! They must be released now!

### • No escape from Covid

Prisons are closed environments and overcrowded, which makes them very risky places to be during a pandemic. One solution was to release as many prisoners as possible from jail by tagging them, and many countries have done so - even places like Iran. After promising in April to let out 4,000 low-risk prisoners with

electronic tags, the government released a few hundred. Home Secretary Priti Patel preferred to risk their safety rather than her own "hard-line" image!

So for many, Covid restrictions in their prisons have meant that they are kept in effective solitary confinement for 23 hours a day! Those unlucky enough to catch the virus may not even get a shower for weeks. About 25 prisoners were reported to have died of Covid by August, but cases among inmates and staff were already approaching 1,000 by May.

Immigration detention centres are even more notoriously overcrowded than prisons. Around 300 people were released from them in March, after a report suggested the virus would rapidly infect 60% of inmates. But a bid to free all the others was lost in the High Court. Detained migrants have reported that none had been given soap, sanitiser nor masks, despite the impossibility of physical distancing. Once again, the system displays its contempt.

## France

### Against the virus and against racism

Lockdown restrictions started in France just a week ahead of England. President Macron implemented the same "lockdown-light" as Johnson: go to work and school; it's "business (almost) as usual". However if Johnson's lockdown.2 was late, Macron's was also late. The number of cases is now the 5th highest in the world. Hospitals are reaching crisis point already. Staff feel this is worse than the first wave. They're already exhausted and know they won't get the same back-up as before from elsewhere, as the virus has spread throughout the territory.

In this context the terrorist knife attacks by Islamists have given Macron

an opportunity to (try to!) appear in control, even if he is not. He's come out with stupid patriotic, racist, anti-Islam and anti-Muslim rhetoric - under the pretext of defending, "French values" and secularism. And this has opened the way for the far-right like Le Pen to go even further in their disgusting racist hate-speech.

Countering this divisive poison in the ranks of the working class, which includes so many workers from the Maghreb and from Muslim backgrounds is of course vital. But this is not the first time this has happened and most workers know very well that their interests lie together with all other members of their class, regardless of race, religion or nationality - and against their exploiters: the capitalists and their politicians!





## Chile: the lessons of the past must be learnt

## Their world

On 25 October, 79% of the Chilean electorate voted for a special body of citizens to draft a new constitution for the country. Despite the fact that turnout was only 51%, the international press hailed this as a great day for "democracy"!

It is the hope of the ruling class that this new constitution will be enough to put an end to the violent unrest which has de-stabilised the regime for over 12 months. Chile is the twelfth most unequal country in the world. Fifty percent of the working population earns less than £425/month, and the average pension is £220/month. There is no welfare net. Unemployment or illness can bring one to the brink of starvation.

In October 2019, the anger of the population against the government exploded. Thousands of people refused to pay the recently increased fares on the Santiago metro. Eight hours later, the centre-right President Sebastián Piñera declared a constitutional emergency and the army was on the streets for the first time since the end of Pinochet's dictatorship in 1990. Two days later, the unions called a two-day general strike, during which more than a million people marched in Santiago



and the National Congress had to be evacuated! On 12 November 2019, the country saw the largest general strike in 40 years with the participation of a tenth of the population!

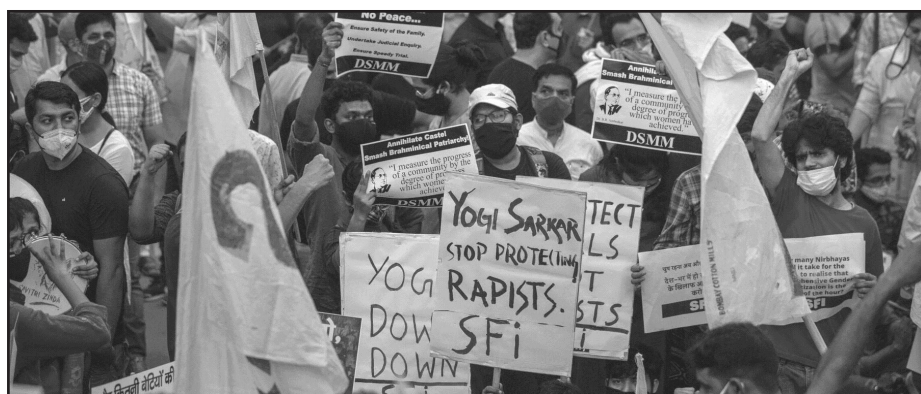
To deal with this rising tide of anger, on 15 November 2019, the government and opposition parties signed a deal for "social peace" and an end to the military dictatorship-era constitution. Despite this, over the past year the protests have continued. Over this period the army has killed 31 people, and blinded, wounded and imprisoned thousands.

Trusting the "democratic process" has proved deadly for the Chilean population before. They paid for this lesson in blood when

the "democratically elected", left-wing Popular Unity government of Allende was overturned by Pinochet's army (with the help of the USA) in 1973. Chile was ruled by a military dictatorship for the next 16 years.

Indeed, the overthrow of Allende's government by the army is one of the most telling proofs of the shallowness of the capitalists' belief in democracy when it no longer serves their interests. Any constitution under this system will only paper over its cracks. While the low turnout this October may have been due to Covid, it could also reflect the mistrust of voters for this sham democratic process. Let's hope it's the latter, but that they have also learnt the lessons of the past. □

## • Letter from India – deepening unemployment, worsening barbarity



Overshadowed by the pandemic, Modi and his ruling BJP are presiding over a growing unemployment crisis and increasing barbarism.

Already in 2017-18, four years into Modi's first-term, unemployment reached its highest level in 45 years! His promises of "development" and job creation have come to nothing. And the situation is getting worse. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) stated that in September 2020, if the long-term unemployed are counted, only 38% of the population was actually employed! This growth in unemployment is the result, in

part, of Modi's privatisation drive, which has already started to dismantle the Indian Railway.

An estimated 700,000 railway jobs (out of a workforce of 1.9m) have already been cut. Any jobs which need to be filled, including the jobs of retirees are being given to temporary/contract workers, mainly in cabin services, catering, cleaning, etc...

In the meantime Modi's far-right base has carried on fanning the flames of hatred against Muslims and reinforcing the caste system. Dalits (the lower caste of so-called "untouchables") and

particularly Dalit women, have been subject to the most horrific attacks. In the village of Hathras in the state of Uttar Pradesh, a Dalit woman was gang-raped by a group of upper-caste men and died soon afterwards of her injuries. The regional BJP administration tried to cover up the incident and her body was cremated by police at night to destroy any evidence. Local BJP councillors appeared on the scene in the days after the incident, defending the accused. This horrific incident which adds one more rape to a long and growing list, sparked large protests, not just by women's organisations, but by all the main parties and unions.

In the background, however, Covid-19 continues to spread unchecked. By 1 November, there were close to 50,000 new cases and 500 deaths daily, although the real numbers are undoubtedly much higher. Nevertheless in the poor region of Bihar, local politicians are organising mass rallies of thousands of people in anticipation of regional elections! The BJP's manifesto for this election promises free Covid-19 vaccination... However what is really needed is a vaccine against this government, its politicians and its barbaric acts.

**King's Cross railway station (London)****RMT, or "Grand old Duke of York"?**

This October, a strike at Hitachi's train depots along LNER's East Coast line, was announced by the RMT union after all sections of workers, from cleaners to skilled maintenance, voted overwhelmingly to down tools.

The issues are many, but most date back to when we were transferred over to Hitachi from other companies. There was a total failure to harmonise terms and conditions so that workers on the same job, were on the same Ts&Cs. Hitachi even attempted to downgrade these Ts&Cs. Two years later, (for ex LNER

workers, longer for others), Hitachi wants to use a new pay agreement to try and "simplify" it all. And for "simplify", read "cut it all"! It wants a 3-year deal on pay, equal to inflation (i.e., a pay cut), a cut in annual leave entitlements and it refuses to sort out unpaid overtime, among other strings.

After the strike was postponed on 19th October, to coordinate with Unite's Hitachi West Country workers, an overtime ban was instituted and a new strike was meant to be called. But it seems all the RMT leaders have done is co-ordinate a sell-out



with Unite leaders, behind closed doors, instead of the joint strike we expected! Even the OT ban has been called off. Well, the best way to get them out of that room and listening to what WE want, is to walk out ourselves. They'll come running. ☐

- **Strike down the thieves!**

Atalan Servest has been stealing train cleaners' pay since the day it took over from ISS. But enough is enough. Some of us have more than 25 hours pay missing on our pay packets - equivalent to our wage for an entire week! It's bad enough to try and survive on this pay without being paid short. Striking against these thieves is well overdue. Now, after weeks of "talking" with them, the RMT has, at last, announced it is "in dispute". But let's not waste any more

time... [King's X Workers' Platform 4/11/20]

- **Hit them where it hurts**

We know that strike ballots can take ages, but there is no reason why we can't start acting now against these Atalan crooks. For a start, we can put into practice "no pay no work". As we know the best place to hurt them is in their pockets. [King's X Workers' Platform 4/11/20]

- **Only safe when no one travels**

If only we had some medical specialists around to explain the Covid ABC to LNER bosses.

Management doesn't seem to understand that air circulates and therefore "social distancing" in a closed space like a train is not enough.

They even say, with a straight face (or a straight email?): "rail remains one of the safest ways to travel from a coronavirus and wider safety perspective". So how exactly did the virus spread from London and the South East to the North, while hardly anyone was flying? As if there was a safe public way to travel during Covid!... [King's X Workers' Platform 4/11/20]

**BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)****Indebted and unpaid: what winter should not hold for us**

BMW announced that this year's Xmas shutdown is going to be from 4 December to 18 January, i.e., 6 weeks long! That could be a good thing, if we were getting paid during this leave. But we aren't. The company expects us to work overtime on week-ends (or to work extended shifts lasting 10-12hrs), in return for being paid during their shutdown. This is meant to fill up our Working Time Accounts (WTA) with credit, which is then used up during the holiday.

But what if we don't gain enough WTA

hours to cover the extra shutdown? In fact this applies to most of us, since we are still weighted down by the accumulated debt from the summer shutdown, from the lockdown, even from last winter! And that's not the end of the story, since half the shutdown falls on next year, the bosses think they can already take for granted that all our holiday days for 2021 will be filling that gap - which they are treating as "unpaid leave"?

And BMW says now they may give us a bigger extension of the WTA limit in



return? What for? To leave us forever in this overtime loop?? Thanks, but no thanks! The debt has to be written off altogether - and in fact the WTA system itself should be abolished, with compensation paid for all the compulsory overtime and shutdowns which are fully paid! This is what we actually need. ☐

- **Time to stay home**

Why didn't Johnson furlough non-essential manufacturing? From Thursday, we're not allowed to go to each other's houses or meet in pubs and cafes. But we're still expected to come here, queue through turnstiles, mix and rub shoulders in our dozens and hundreds? [BMW Oxford Mmini Workers' Fight bulletin 4/11/20]

- **Follow the robots**

We've had enough of weekend overtime! How can a breakdown ever justify this?! When the line stopped for 3 hours, losing BMW 170 cars, we didn't mind, we had a

break, for once! But the managers just put on 7.5 hours overtime on Saturday and 5 hours on Sunday to "catch-up". If BMW wasn't running the line this fast, this wouldn't happen. So next time the robots say "enough!", we should join them! [BMW Oxford Mini Workers' Fight bulletin 20/10/20]

- **No shift cut!**

As for BMW's expectations to cut a shift as soon as it runs out of orders, (cutting 3 x 7.5hr for 5 days to 2 x 9.5hr shifts for 4 days), we're not having it! We heard that stupid nonsense about using the extra free day per week to catch up with the overtime we 'owe'... But if

there's something impossible to do, it's surely filling the WTA black hole! So we'll stick to what we know: slowing down the line and preventing BMW from imposing its plans! [BMW Oxford Mini Workers' Fight bulletin 4/11/20]

- **Make it hard for them!**

Enough of moving our Gi mates around at managers' whim! We've sussed BMW's trick of putting some of us in the worst jobs to try to make us leave. This is not "postponing" job cuts, it's cutting one shift by the back door! No way. We'll decide among ourselves when we move! [BMW Oxford Mini Workers' Fight bulletin 4/11/20]



**Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)****Pay deal: it's still "no"**

We weren't too surprised when Ford's 1st offer in the pay round this year was a 0% increase, i.e., a pay cut! It's not the first time they've done this. It's an old trick to bring down expectations and they should know by now that it won't work. So now Round 2 has opened with a "final" offer of 1.6% on pay, a 1-year deal and... wait for it... a "cycle to work" scheme!

On pay, this adds a mere £14.80/week for a Tier 1 grade 3 job on 3-shifts. But for Tier 2, it adds only £12.56: a rise of 37p and 31p per

hour respectively! Yup, that's what they think we're worth, respectively!

What's also significant, however, is the "Joint Study Group" the company wants to set up to discuss pensions - including the defined benefit pension. Ford can only have one thing in mind, and that is to end it. This is the most worrying "string" of all.

Of course, if they take on 90 apprentices, enhance EDAP (grants for educational courses) and increase long service awards that's well and good. But where is the equal pay for



equal work (abolition of 2-Tier system) and the taking back in-house of LLL/Hampton which we demand? The second thing we aren't surprised about is the recommendation from the union officials to accept this "offer". It's only to be expected from these toadies. Sorry, Toads, but it's a "no" from us. ☐

**• PRO-VAX!**

We're told that if there's another lockdown, there'll be no furlough: we'll be considered key workers and have to carry on slaving. To that end they're going to vaccinate us all against flu. But why not against Covid as well? Several vaccines are already at this stage of trial - and we wouldn't mind being guinea pigs, if it could protect us even by 40-50%. Because working here every day in a "mass gathering" certainly puts us at high risk of contagion, especially in the middle of a second wave! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 28/10/20]

**• How many are C-19 positive?**

We're still hearing zero, zilch, nada, about the outcomes after workmates disappear home because they feel unwell. Hampton is called in to do a wipe-down with bleach and that's that. There's still no feedback whatsoever! And Ford claims it has an "exemplary" Covid policy!?? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 28/10/20]

**• Danger money diddle**

We hear that Hampton bosses pocket £60/hr per cleaner every time we're called in to do a deep clean. Hazard for the worker, bonus for the boss... as usual! Yet it's not like the bosses were taking any risks when counting Ford's money in their offices! So

next deep clean, let's hand the spray bottle, the wipes and the fake PPE space suit over to them. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 28/10/20]

**• Time to go slow... and stop**

We see managers have scheduled OT for the next 3 months to December - i.e. to Brexit day proper! They tell us they only build to orders, but when it looks like stockpiling, it probably is stockpiling... Especially when the parts they keep running out of are surely also made to "order"! But what good reason is there for us to help them rush like this - with overlaps and weekends - so that it's all "done", and they can then tell us that we are done, too? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 28/10/20]

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)****• Slap on the wrist**

Oh dear! Apparently Deeside ParcelForce depot boss got a little slap on the wrist from an HSE inspector last week... In one of the union's "Letter to Branches", we read that an inspection resulted in him getting a fine... And why? Because drivers were not allowed enough time to clean their vehicles and cleaners didn't have adequate products. Sound familiar? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 4/11/20]

**• We'll take our time**

So, in the midst of a second C-19 peak, RM had nothing better to do than reintroduce voluntary van-sharing on deliveries, collections and distribution (good luck with finding anyone who wants to share a van at the moment!). And now, we're told we've not been cleaning our vans properly? Fine! Since the virus is airborne, sanitising "touch points" will mean sanitising the whole van. And that would take our whole shift! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 4/11/20]

**• Time to go slow**

This is RM in all its splendour... It proposes services to customers and hopes that the

work will just get done by magic! So now everyone wants tracked-24 and -48 packets, when there aren't enough of us to do this work - so who's going to deal with the backlog? Because we can't! Managers might want to change the service to "tracked 72"! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 4/11/20]

**• HMP cells are full up**

Ok, we've nothing against the new bulling layout - at least we can keep a safe distance between us. But since we've been allocated our own "cells", us inmates have noticed (especially on Lates, of course) that we each get a lot more packets to sort. Obviously: there are fewer cells per square metre... So when are managers going to create new cells, complete with prisoners, somewhere else, in order to deal with the flow? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 4/11/20]

**• Enough of their miserliness**

How petty of the shift manager on Lates to try to control the number of masks we use by asking us to sign for each one! It's not just petty, in fact it's mad! And we're not going to do it. We need masks when we decide we need them. It's a Covid-security issue, after all! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 4/11/20]

**• Prisons overcrowded..?**

We hear that our reps here are very worried about how safe social-distancing can be maintained if that "record number" of Christmas casuals (which we read about in the press) is hired. Because presumably it'd mean a lot more coming here to MP, as well. It seems the union is implying that they might try to oppose casuals coming here at all? We hope not... [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 4/11/20]

**• ... always space to be found!**

... yes, while of course, we'd prefer permanent recruitment, there are lot of casuals who we see year after year and we've come to know some of them quite well. So it'd be a great pity if they were prevented from coming back - and of course, they need the work. Surely there is space, with adequate distancing, that could be found in the basement - and even on Lates, in the delivery areas? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 4/11/20]

## USA

As this article goes to press, the final results (predictably contested by Trump!) of the US elections are awaited. Campaigners for the Democrats and the Republicans, and a range of commentators called this one of the most important elections since the election of Lincoln in 1859, after which a deadly civil war ensued..! But regardless of the objectives set by the protagonists, there is nothing to suggest that this election will change anything. Behind all the hype and rhetoric (a record amount!) it's business as usual! Both parties were simply trying to get elected. The real winner - Wall Street - is already decided.

Yet this election has been taking place amidst an unprecedented economic and social crisis, severely exacerbated by the Covid pandemic. The world's richest country has seen the largest number of Covid cases (approaching 10m) and the largest number of deaths - 235,159, according to the latest figures. "Official" unemployment stands at 8%, though the Federal Bank says it's 11%, the highest in the post-war period. And this doesn't take into account the fact that a lot of "employment" consists of precarious jobs and waged poverty. A tenth of the population - 38 million people - are now dependent on food aid.

And of course, none of this affects the wealthy. Airlines, cruise lines and leisure parks may have lost business, and SMEs may have gone bust, but the big capitalists and financial speculators are minting

## US election: does it matter?



money, having shifted investment to "Big Tech" (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft), PayPal, Netflix, virtual healthcare like Teladoc, as well as the giant pharmaceuticals and vaccine industry, which are cashing in on the pandemic. Yes, share prices have more than regained their health!

Meanwhile, \$11bn (£8.4bn), an all-time record amount, has been poured into this presidential campaign. The big donors know that the winner will oblige them with ever-greater subsidies and tax-breaks. It's worth noting that since the pandemic began, the US bourgeoisie has received a total of at least 2000 billion dollars in state aid. And they want more!

So it is for the capitalist classes that the election matters. The candidates and their parties have nothing tangible to offer, and they hardly pretend to have! If Trump

is a racist demagogue, Biden as a senator (1973-2009) was complicit in all the racist policies of the US state for decades, including the tightening of the penal system which targeted young black men, sending them to prison. As vice-President under Obama, he also bears responsibility for hundreds of thousands of workers losing homes and jobs after the 2008 sub-prime mortgage crisis.

The potential of the US working class to mobilise itself - and bridge the artificial divisions in its ranks - was demonstrated during the uprisings of the 1960s. There was a glimpse of this potential, when hundreds of thousands took to the streets across the country, after the police murder of George Floyd. Let us hope that the workers and youth, of all backgrounds, can find this energy again - but this time, in order to fight for revolutionary change... ☐

## Nigeria

Across Nigeria, youth-led protests against police brutality erupted in early October after a video was shared online, showing the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) shooting a man in cold blood in the southern town of Ughelli. SARS has killed, tortured and harassed thousands of civilians since it was created in 1992.

After days of angry demonstrations President Muhammadu Buhari's government agreed to disband SARS - and replace it with a new repressive force, SWAT! So the protests erupted again, spreading all around the country, including to the capital Lagos, demanding

## Youth fight the other SARS

sweeping reforms of the police and action against corruption. By now at least 70 protestors have been killed.

It's worth recalling that President Buhari is another recycled former military dictator, who has reappeared as a "democratic" ruler, like so many before him - a conclusive sign, if one were needed, of the inherent corruption of governments which have been misruling the country since the British handed it back to a hand-picked domestic ruling class, in October 1960.

Today, exactly 70 years later, 70% of the population is living in poverty. During the October demonstrations,

thousands forced their way into hangars containing the food aid intended for families affected by Covid-19, which was being hoarded by the government. Other protests turned into food riots. And the protests continue, in the face of renewed repression: the youth are determined to fight for change, and they are right to do so. Nigeria is not only the most populous country in Africa, but it also has the largest economy, with crucial oil resources. If its working class and youth raise their voices together, they will have an impact which will resonate throughout the continent. ☐

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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