

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

## NHS AT 73: HIGH TIME FOR A COLLECTIVE "CLAP-BACK"!

It's almost laughable. On the 73rd birthday of the NHS, exhausted, understaffed, underpaid, health workers were invited to a church service at Westminster, to be awarded the George Cross medal - collectively - for "bravery" during the pandemic!

What a cynical ploy by Johnson, using the 95-year-old queen and her (useless) medal as a buffer against health workers' anger! So, out of respect for her, NHS "heroes" must now shut their mouths and cease their protests and strike threats?

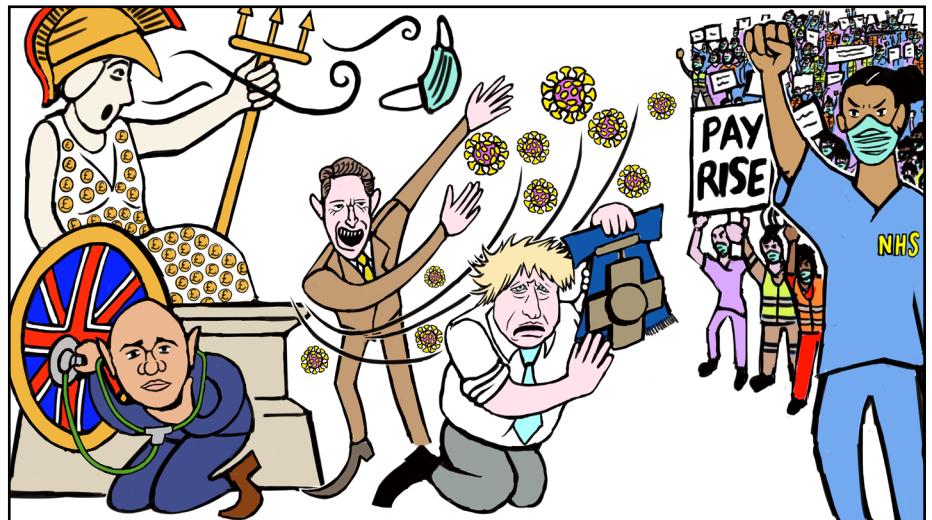
Johnson and Health Secretary Sajid Javid have certainly made it clear that they won't budge on that other "award" - the 1% NHS pay "rise", i.e., the 2% pay cut!

### **Blame it all on the pandemic**

It's no great revelation that Johnson&Co don't give a damn about NHS staff - or any other workers. Their culpability for the huge Covid death toll is beyond doubt. From day 1, they've lied about the virus, the risks, the data and everything else concerning the pandemic. With the end of lock-down on 19 July (but wasn't it over already... Euro-2020, Wimbledon...?), this lying continues.

The latest deception is over mask-wearing. Incredibly, not one of Johnson's hand-picked medical "experts" admits that a proper mask is protective of the wearer (not just "others") and can be 100% effective in preventing transmission - as Chinese/Far Eastern governments always knew... But though home-grown Cambridge University now agrees, SAGE keeps mum.

No wonder: wearing a mask isn't "popular". So they all repeat like parrots that it's "a matter of personal choice", or "courtesy"! Never mind the very rapidly rising 3rd wave. And never mind that the delta variant is highly contagious, affects



younger people (could kill them) and can mutate into vaccine-dodging super-strains. Or that a third of adults (plus all under 18s) remain unvaccinated.

We are told that "Freedom Day" is "irreversible". It's not just about the economy, says Javid. No, he says lifting lock-down will make the country "healthier"!

Apparently it was the "rules that we have had to put in place" which "caused a shocking rise in domestic violence and a terrible impact on so many people's mental health". Really? So nothing to do with the social conditions arising out of post-2008-austerity, the lack of social housing, job cuts, benefit cuts, low pay/ precarious jobs - before any pandemic arrived...?

### **Protecting jobs and conditions**

The whole of the health service was already in a state of near-collapse before Covid struck. So instead of the NHS protecting the population the slogan of the first lock-down was "protect the NHS".

As for the 5.1m on hospital waiting lists it's a travesty to blame it on the lock-down. Waiting lists may, yes, be even longer now, but the NHS stopped coping several decades ago. How many were already dying prematurely because their cancer was diagnosed too late?

Even before the privatisations of the 1980s and 1990s, cuts in funding, cuts in beds and cuts in staff pay and conditions, had begun. The first ever doctors' strike was in November 1975!

Hospital doctors, who struck in 2016, are now threatening to strike again. And it should be recalled that the main reason they lost in 2016 was because they tried to fight on their own. Today, not just NHS staff, but all workers have reason to take on the bosses and their politicians. After furlough ends more job cuts and pay cuts are coming. But the working class, if it uses its full collective strength across all industries and sectors, has the potential to turn things around - and win the battle for decent pay, shorter hours and healthy, safe, permanent jobs - once, and for all! ☐

## Covid-19 crisis

New Health Secretary, Sajid Javid, stated that: "there is no reason for England's final Covid restrictions to last beyond 19 July"! This step on the "roadmap out of lockdown" is meant to get rid of social distancing and masks completely - which are anyway only compulsory in closed spaces provided you are not self-exempt... In other words masks have never really been obligatory anywhere.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak and George Eustice, Environment secretary, who have never liked restrictions anyway, are "planning to stop wearing face coverings as soon as rules are relaxed"... Whether ALL restrictions or only some of them will be lifted on the delayed Freedom Day of 19 July or not, is still not sure at the time of writing... However some scientific advisors are saying maybe masks should be retained... indoors (whereas the highly infectious delta variant is being transmitted outdoors too, as the many cases among football fans prove).

What's more, a study has just been published by Cambridge University which proves what most of the rest of the world knew already: that masks effectively protect the wearer from catching Covid - FFP3 masks

### • Innova's dodgy tests

Now the US Food and Drug regulator, the FDA, has added its voice to the critics of the British government's Innova lateral flow tests (LFTs), agreeing that they are so inaccurate that they should be thrown in the bin. Voices had already been raised in the scientific community against these tests, which have been in general and wide use - first in "mass testing" last year (Johnson's "Moonshot") - and now pupils are using them at least twice a week before going to school.

In fact, these LFTs were approved back in September 2020, before they'd been properly evaluated. Subsequent independent testing showed them to be only 57.5% accurate self-administered, while in a field test in Liverpool, as many as 60% of infections were missed.

At first it seemed the issue around their continued use was that the government

## Johnson's super-spreader policies



prevented 100% of hospital-acquired infections. No doubt the only reason why the government still contests this is because it does not and did not wish to issue them to all households.

Meanwhile, the 3rd delta wave is rising: 32,548 cases over the previous 24 hours on 7 July, the same amount as on 1 January, when Britain was about to face the highest death toll since the beginning of the pandemic. Mass gatherings, like the Euro football matches at Wembley stadium, added an extra 2,000 new cases (397 positive cases within the stadium)!

Luckily, the rapidly rising infection rate hasn't translated yet into

hospitalisations and deaths - even if there is a slight increase in both. But since delta is partially resistant to the vaccine, reducing symptoms only by 33% (1 jab) and 60% (fully-vaccinated) for AstraZeneca (the most widely-used vaccine in Britain), this may not be the end of the story.

What is certain, is that world-beating Britain is again the international hub for Covid. It has successfully exported delta to Europe and Africa - while refusing to share its vaccines with those who need them most. And this strain is taking over from alpha and beta, and spreading death in poor countries. ☐

had already paid more than £3 billion to manufacturer, Innova, for more than a billion tests. But on 22 June this year, despite the indisputable evidence that the tests are useless, if not dangerous, since they give subjects a false sense of security, the government's contract with Innova was extended further! There is no obvious explanation for such madness. Unless one can find out who benefits when Innova cashes the government's pay-cheque...?

### • Nissan Sunderland's outbreak: super-spreader bosses!

On 23 June, Nissan Sunderland - the car factory producing the Leaf, Juke and Qashqai - announced furlough for hundreds of workers due to an outbreak of Covid. Nissan's bosses may claim "workers' well-being is our number one priority" but they didn't implement

mass-testing of the 6,959-strong workforce. The 50 positive cases were the result of workers testing themselves, because they had symptoms, following repeated outbreaks in the plant. Nissan's measures after the first lockdown were limited to the essential (but not enough) PPE and one-way systems - on an assembly line where distancing is impossible. So it's no surprise that workers were transmitting the virus.

But only workers in direct contact with symptomatic cases, and workers in areas where production was impossible due to sick leave shortages, were furloughed. Meaning that many asymptomatic cases are in circulation within the plant. What's worse, is that some workers from the areas which were furloughed were told to work on other shifts thus spreading Covid-19 to the rest of the workforce!

### Israel's apartheid vaccination policies backfire

In the latest instance of Israel's vaccine apartheid, the 90,000 Pfizer doses received by the Palestinian Authority (PA) from the Israeli state in mid-June were found to be too close to expiry, possibly ineffective and had to be returned. This was part of a deal for Israel to immediately swap soon-to-expire vaccines, for fresh ones the PA is to receive in

October. This comes just days after the Israeli army raided the Palestinian Union of Health Workers Committee, which runs hospitals and clinics and has been at the forefront of the Covid response in the area, and ordered it to shut for six months. The result of policies such as these is plain to see: while 60% of the Israeli population is fully-vaccinated, only 7.5% of the Palestinian population is.

But it is precisely this vaccine apartheid which is now boomeranging on

the Israeli state. Cases of the Covid-19 delta variant are spreading in Israel - with half of those infected being fully-vaccinated. The mostly unvaccinated Palestinian workers are part of the Israeli workforce and society - and until they are vaccinated, Israeli citizens too, will contract potentially vaccine-dodging Covid variants. Proving once again that the Israeli state's apartheid policy is lethal for both the Israeli and Palestinian populations.



## Vaccine rollout: nothing to boast about

By 1 July, Britain's vaccination rollout was still not world-beating. With only 48% of the population fully vaccinated, the country lagged behind Hungary (51%), Chile (54%), Bahrain (58%) and Israel (60%).

And many countries in Europe, but also Singapore, Japan, UAE, Israel, US, China, Canada and the Philippines, have already begun

vaccinating 12-18 year-olds... while Britain's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, having not given any recommendation yet for children under 18, seems to be waiting for "scientific evidence" already in existence....

This, despite 75 in 100,000 hospitalisations being under 15 and when cases among children have

## Covid-19 crisis

been soaring since March when they were allowed to gather together in schools. On 20 June, the second highest infection rate for 10 to 19 year-olds since the beginning of the pandemic was recorded, and 5.1% of state-school pupils (about 340,000 children) were absent because they had come into contact with a student with Covid infection! ☐

## • They haven't learnt yet: mass gatherings spread Covid

As many as 60,000 fans are being allowed into Wembley for the European Championship semi-finals and final on the 6,7 and 11 July. Originally, the capacity of Wembley was only going to be 22,500, before it was upped to 45,000 and then 60,000, following threats from UEFA to move the final to Hungary, where there are no Covid restrictions.

There are also exemptions from quarantine measures for VIPs and foreign fans attending those matches, even if these will still apply to all other travellers. The government claims that VIPs have "promised to stay in their bubbles and just watch the matches and not go to any restaurants. We just have to hope they stick to that agreement".

Naturally, the big business of football comes first, even after 400

Scottish fans attending the Scotland vs England match at Wembley caught Covid, with a further 1000

in Scotland, linked to football fans watching the match in various outdoor "fan zones".



## • G7 leaders' gift to St Ives and Carbis Bay...

The 11-13 June G7 summit at Carbis Bay, next to St Ives in Cornwall, flooded this holiday resort with thousands of police officers, troops and security teams plus delegates and staff from all around the world! For instance US President Joe Biden alone brought along 400 personnel.

The 3,500 residents were literally engulfed. At least 2 police officers tested positive for Covid during the course of the 2-day meeting and more than 10 were asked to self-isolate. But as soon as the guests and their army of helpers and guards had left, Covid cases jumped from 4.9

per 100,000 on 3 June to 130.6 per 100,000 on 16 June! The government denies that the summit had anything to do with it, claiming the surge in cases is due to the 60% increased infectivity of the delta variant. But it doesn't say how this variant travelled to Cornwall in the first place.

## Batley and Spen: who or what won?

Does the victory, by a whisker of 323 votes, of Jo Cox's sister, Kim Leadbeater mean that Labour's electoral fortunes are looking up? It certainly wasn't the result pollsters had predicted. This seat was supposed to be a brick in the so-called Red Wall, which Johnson's Tories had laid claim to - those historic Labour seats, which, so the story goes, were lost due to Jeremy Corbyn's former mis-leadership, and which has caused Labour to turn a lot more blue in the face, and in

policy, under Starmer.

But this story is misleading. Batley and Spen wasn't always a Labour seat and the "winning by a whisker" was because populist George Galloway captured over 8,000 votes, most of which would probably have gone to Labour.

Indeed, Labour has lost votes "up North" precisely through its long-term blue-ness, but also because these northern towns were depopulated, as industry and jobs disappeared. Why and how

## By-election

would young people stay? These are modern versions of the 19th century's rotten boroughs! Johnson gained the Red Wall pensioner vote - as the Tories usually do - with a small boost from Brexit demagoguery.

With a turnout of 47.6%, the Batley and Spen ballot tells us very little. Despite all the fanfare, Galloway's battle bus and the dirty tricks - and even violence on the street - more than half the voters weren't even stirred up enough to cast a vote... ☐

## Brexit

## The only "union" needed in Ireland is between North and South

A subject which Joe Biden claims is close to his heart is "peace in Ireland" and so he had a chat with Johnson about the Northern Irish Brexit Protocol and the dog's dinner Johnson's made of it.

It was obvious that a "border in the Irish sea" was going to upset right-wing unionism and wake up the old (proscribed) "Queen, country and Union Jack" paramilitaries. Ultra-loyalist Brexiteers (part of a 37% NI minority who voted "leave" in 2016) feel "betrayed". But now the far-right Democratic Unionist Party which was in power in Stormont has imploded. One wing has declared war on the other. Arlene Foster (considered too moderate!) was kicked out after 6 years

as NI's 1st Minister, then the anti-gay marriage creationist Paul Givan replaced her, and now he is to be replaced in turn by Jeffrey Donaldson, the 2nd leader the party's elected in less than 2 months!

Donaldson, who opposed the Good Friday peace agreement in the first place, is unlikely to quell unionist unrest, all the more so, as the "marching season" opens this July. Also fanning the flames are the "legacy issues": unresolved cases of civilians killed during the British army occupation. And then there's a Belfast High Court ruling that *"Brexit implicitly repeals part of the Acts of Union, which legislated for the annexation of Ireland by Britain in 1800 following the defeat*



of the United Irishmen in 1798"! A get-out clause for Johnson - and Britain - maybe? ☐

### • Regretting Brexit?

Imports and exports collapsed in January this year, following Britain's departure from the EU. They fell more than at any point during the pandemic and its lockdowns. And six months later, the Institute of Directors (IoD) has found that a third of businesses are still suffering from "a negative impact on trade".

This will only get worse. Britain has yet to implement any border checks for imports, having postponed them for a second time, until January 2022. According to the IoD survey, about two-thirds of companies said these new customs controls would have a "negative effect".

As for financial services, Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced on 1 July that no agreement had yet been reached with the EU. But anyway, services operating from the City will not have the same freedom to sell their products in the EU as they did before Brexit. This means that the main pillar of the British economy, banking and finance, has been damaged - and a full recovery, with the added effects of the Covid-aggravated recession, is unlikely.

### • Windrush.2 in the making?

The European Union Settlement Scheme, which was first launched back in March 2019 by Theresa May, is meant to allow EU citizens living and working in Britain the right to stay

after Brexit. Provided immigrant workers can show evidence of continuous British residence for at least five years before the end of 2020, they should be granted settled status. Those resident fewer than 5 years, can qualify for "pre-settled status" and are also allowed to remain.

The problem, however, was the inflexibility in the Home Office's approach to the scheme's 30 June deadline. Those who failed to apply became "illegal immigrants" overnight. As a result they are unable to work legally, not eligible to receive benefits and would have to pay for NHS treatment - if indeed they manage not to be deported forthwith!

By the end of May 2021, as many as 330,000 applications remained in the system. By the end of June, more than 70,000 EU citizens claiming benefits of some description (like child allowance) had not yet even applied. It's still an open question whether they will be processed, and if they are, whether they will be processed correctly, and fairly. The Home Office has "previous", after all.

### • Giga-factory, not giga-jobs

On 1 July, Boris Johnson visited Nissan's Sunderland plant to demonstrate the benefits of Brexit and boast about British manufacturing. Japanese-French Nissan had just announced its decision to partner with a Chinese company to build a car battery

"gigafactory".

Nissan claims the new plant will add 1,600 jobs, but the workforce of 7,862 workers in early 2020 has already gone down to 6,959, after temporary contracts were terminated last June. Then 160 office jobs were cut in January 2021. That makes 1,063 jobs gone over 12 months. So the net gain is 537 jobs? This, when the arrival of the electric model, Leaf, in 2013, was meant to "safeguard jobs"!

But the key point for the bosses is the handout from the British government. Nissan has already received £600m via the Covid Corporate Financing Facility (CCFF), through which the government commits to buy company debt in the case of a fall in liquidity. And an extra £600m via a five-year "Export Financing Facility" loan! In addition, Nissan's partner, the Chinese company, Envision AESC which is manufacturing the batteries on site, has made a lucrative deal with the council, which "balances" network energy it uses with a battery power buy-back scheme.

Nissan is happy: "Together with the financing raised, the clarity brought with the conclusion of Brexit means the company is now able to plan for the future"! Of course before the car industry got its exceptional tariff-free supply chain guarantee, Nissan threatened to pull out of a brexited Britain - which would have been very bad for Boris. Thanks to government largesse, all is forgiven.

### Not a sausage for this system

In June, Brexit Minister David Frost wrote to the EU, asking it to delay the ban on chilled meats from Britain crossing into Northern Ireland. The NI Protocol, agreed by Boris Johnson in his "oven-ready" deal, has placed Northern Ireland in the EU single market. It is therefore subject to the rules of the single market, which place restrictions on the import of chilled meats. British

companies have had 6 months already to adapt to the rules, but have nevertheless been given a further 3 month extension until September. Frost said that this would give time for a "permanent solution" to be found... but if it hasn't been found after months of negotiations, why would that change now?

In fact the British government is clearly unhappy with its own protocol, but aligning its food standards with the EU, which would allow most checks to

be done away with, would amount to acknowledging that Brexit has failed. So Frost calls this an "abrogation of sovereignty" and will not do it. Which just shows yet again that nationalist flag-waving is more important than allowing the Northern Irish to have their sausages for breakfast. By the way, though, one person's loss can be another's gain: If you are a sausage-producer in NI, this protocol could be the making of you!



## Johnson and Sunak's "spat" - and the vortex under their feet!

While Boris Johnson keeps boasting about his "Build back better!" policy, claiming that Tory austerity policies belong to the past, Rishi Sunak seems to be less convinced. Particularly since he doesn't want to upset his rich friends in the City. So in his Mansion House speech on 1 July he committed himself to reining in government spending. But Tory commitments - whatever Johnson's (or Sunak's) choice of words - are clear about the "need" to increase taxes and cut public spending (including for

the NHS) whether confronted by a "recovery lower than expected" or not.

In fact this scenario is taking place under our noses, whatever the economists may say about a "super-recovery" based on £150bn-worth of "lockdown savings"... Inflation, which jumped from 0.7 to 1.5% during the month of April, has jumped again up to 2.1% in June! This is accounted for by the rise in energy bills and the price of petrol - a litre has gone up by 1.8p and the cost of gas has gone

up by 9%!

While the Bank of England doesn't want to sound the alarm bell yet and raise interest rates, thus making a bad situation worse, the increasing cost of raw materials is likely to result in an additional increase in the price of manufactured goods. Unless the bosses cut their costs... by lowering wages. But guess what? Then consumer spending goes down and unsold goods pile up. This is the "beauty" of their capitalist system. It's a vicious circle. □

### • They hit our wages? We have to hit back!

According to the Office for National Statistics, pay rose 5.6% in the year to April. This would fit with the story that the apparent shortage of workers is putting pressure on the bosses to increase wages. However the ONS admits that this increase is because job losses due to the pandemic have been mostly concentrated among the low-paid. And in fact low wages are being reduced even further!

The Resolution Foundation reports that the rate of job losses among the lowest-paid was triple the rate of the highest-paid. With the reduction of furlough payments in July from 80% to 70% of wages, and the termination of furlough in September, even more low-paid workers are likely to lose their jobs.

This, when 30% of workers are already on "low weekly pay", defined

as earning less than 2/3 of the median wage. The main cause of this is of course "underemployment" - meaning too few hours of work on zero-hours or similar dodgy, casual contracts. In fact 37% of workers are given less than a week's notice of their shifts, with many called in one day, only to be told to go home a few hours later or even when they arrive, with no pay. How can any worker live like this?

### • 5th richest country in the world and mould-infested council flats

In April this year, ITV journalist Daniel Hewitt conducted an investigation that uncovered terrible council housing conditions in Croydon, South London. Since 2019, residents of a tower block in South Norwood have been complaining to their landlord, Croydon Council, about leaks in their flats. These leaks have led to damp and black mould covering walls and ceilings, which have made these homes real death traps. An independent surveyor even found that there was danger of electrocution and probable exposure to asbestos! But the council ignored the residents' complaints and they were forced to spend months of lockdown in these dangerous living conditions.

Since the documentary went online, ITV has received hundreds of testimonies from council residents living in similar conditions right across Britain. Most of the time, councils don't even respond

to the residents' complaints. This cannot but remind us of Grenfell Tower's residents, who complained about the lack of fire safety for years before the fire, repeatedly challenging the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation which was running social housing stock on the cheap, years before the fire which burnt 72 tenants to death.

The "Social Housing" white paper published in November last year, commissioned after the Grenfell fire, was meant to give social tenants "a much stronger voice" against social landlords. But of course, nothing has changed, as the Grenfell inquiry drags on with little consequence and indeed, as the images of this ITV investigation show!



### Nimby by-election and the housing crisis

On 17 June, the Liberal Democrats won the Chesham and Amersham by-election, triggered by the death of the conservative MP Cheryl Gillan, with a swing vote of over 25%. And this, despite the fact that this constituency had been in the hands of the Conservative Party since its creation, back in 1974.

The issues that appear to have driven this swing vote are both the

HS2 high-speed rail link through this area and the government's Planning Bill, which builds on the "Planning For The Future" white paper published last summer. Indeed, the new Planning Bill, which should go through parliament next autumn, will simplify even more planning permissions. In Chesham and Amersham, this means that it will put at risk the conservation of the Chilterns, as developers could seize on the opportunity to build luxury resorts and

sell luxury homes there.

But above all, the Bill simplifies planning permissions for homes... for sale. Yet, over 8m people are affected by the housing crisis in this country - and the end of the eviction ban, which had been implemented due to the pandemic, will make things even worse. The charity Shelter estimates that 150,000 new socially-rented homes need to be built per year. There were fewer than 6,500 built in 2019/20!

**King's Cross railway station (London)****• Covid loves a drunk crowd**

We all knew what was going to happen with football fans - let alone drunk football fans - travelling to UEFA matches and overcrowding LNER trains. No way were they going to follow any Covid rules and they didn't. Social distancing and masks were right out the window. Yes, entirely predictable. [Workers' Platform King's X 30/06/21]

**• Covid con**

So we know that at least one of our workmates got sick with Covid as a direct result, and many LNER on-board workmates are now in self-isolation.

It's proof - if we needed it - that the closed carriages, despite management's claims about the virus-cleaning properties of air con, are in fact virus incubators and spreaders! Made worse when the trains are so full. And this dangerous overcrowding was purely down to LNER's greed. [Workers' Platform King's X 30/06/21]

**• Not on board with it**

We think the only solution (Scotland's football defeat isn't the end of all sporting events!) is that catering staff are off the train whenever such events are scheduled.

In fact if the rail bosses want to run trains for sports fans, they should lay on special services with no on-board service - and the guard can stay well away in his cab, like the driver. [Workers' Platform King's X 30/06/21]

**• The case of the disappearing staff**

We see that the LNER trains are getting busier, but managers haven't increased our numbers on board. We need at least 3 (g)hosts(!) in 1st class and 3 in Standard on the busy trains. Because, after all, ghost staff can only mean ghost service... [Workers' Platform King's X 30/06/21]

**• ...And more**

Talking about staff shortages, LNER takes the biscuit: we didn't know whether to laugh or cry when we saw managers working on trains and despatching last week! Yep, they haven't recruited either, despite knowing there was dire need! [Workers' Platform King's X 30/06/21]

**• The cracks still worry us**

Are the engineer director's explanations on the Azuma cracks supposed to reassure us? We're told there are different types of cracks: the dangerous ones and the less dangerous ones. The bolster cracks



underneath the trains' doors are why the trains were out of service in the first place. But now it's judged fine to run with them, with some regular maintenance checks. But how often is "regular"? And how long does it take for cracks to develop, etc? All this is still pretty vague. It might be OK, but how can we be sure? [Workers' Platform King's X 16/06/21]

**• These bosses never think**

We've all noticed the "lovely" new inside seating areas with integrated mini tables, popping up all over the station... But neither Network Rail nor Mitie (ex Interserve) bosses have thought about the rubbish which will be generated by people eating at them! No bins have been installed and they've allocated only one of us to clean the whole of the inside concourse! We just can't manage. Simple as that. [Workers' Platform King's X 16/06/21]

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)****• Sweet talk, lots of hot air**

So what was the purpose of those meetings with management last week... for the new upstart HMP manager to introduce himself? To tell us about the results of the survey? Or to reassure us that the attacks coming aren't going to hurt? All three at the same time, apparently. Sorry, but we weren't born yesterday...

**PS:** BTW - why were cleaners not even included in these briefings and given the chance to ask questions as to how this will affect us? Because it will. Obviously! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 30/06/21]

**• So that's realignment...**

We hear that management is planning redundancies because the Parcel Sorting Machine is meant to replace human hands... Rumour has it, it can do the job of up to 80 of us.

So redundancies i.e., job cuts are on the agenda. Of course we already know this machine is not up to the job of neat parcel-sorting. When trialled, it made a big mess of things. As usual RM bosses are choosing rubbish technology (like the notorious Horizon system!). So come next April they are going to land themselves in the s\*\*t. [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 30/06/21]

**• Comes with OPG wages?**

If there was any proof needed that there aren't enough hands on deck: managers are working side-by-side with us, doing our jobs - and that's been going for some time now! Sorry, but no thanks. Why should we put up with managers getting in our way, only because they don't want to accept that they need more workers? Or are they going to "realign" themselves onto OPG grades now? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 30/06/21]

**• Born yesterday?**

Another thing we heard from the Upstart was that clock-in/out is coming our way. Of course, we were also told not to worry - that if we clock-in late we won't be penalised, that we'll only lose out if we are late for overtime, etc., etc., etc. But we suspect this is Upstart's way of "easing" the system in. And down the road from here the managers will start counting our late minutes and deducting money from our wages... [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 30/06/21]

**• Yes, but they're spy-ders**

What worries us even more is the surveillance aspect of this system - it literally allows the management to spy on us through the whole of our working



day. Should we accept this? Surely there's no question about it: we can't. [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 30/06/21]

**• Extra work for free?**

There's a crazy rise in the number of test kits passing through processing here now. Far too many compared to the number of us! It's certainly a fat contract for RM. And it's a fat lot of work too! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 16/06/21]

**• No to their job cut!**

Something that should be on canteen managers' "menu" for their next resign is the number of canteen staff... which is totally inadequate. On Nights, the single worker left the job and was replaced by... another single worker, who in fact used to cover for absences. In other words they've got away with cutting a job! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 16/06/21]



**Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**
**• No Covid, no flu, no colds!**

So what is Ford's Covid-security plan for after 19 July if the government foolishly drops all restrictions? Will we be able to share tables in rest areas? Should masks come off? Of course, this "personal choice" crap is a recipe for disaster, even if everyone's vaccinated - and they aren't. So do we get a say in this? To us it makes no sense to scrap anything for now. Let's leave well alone. Better still, improve it! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 07/07/21]

**• Why can't they say?**

And what's the decision on summer shutdown? With just a couple of weeks to go, managers can't even tell Tiger workers whether we have 1 extra week or 2 (and who gets what) and if we do, whether it's lay-off, furlough or actual "holiday"! And what about Lion and Panther? Is this really about supplier "constraint" or the anti-worker prejudice "constraining" managers from treating us as equals and showing us the most basic consideration? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 07/07/21]

**• Chaotic management**

We at least we aren't doing OT on Panther machining now and Panther Assy has some long weekends - but overlaps are being worked on Tiger! And then you had Lion mates left twiddling their thumbs after being told to come in, only to find

that just 4 out of 13 areas were running! The new boss doesn't seem to have worked out what's what. So in the meantime can we just go home? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 07/07/21]

**• Rich and getting richer**

We see Ford's made lots of announcements lately regarding electrification around the world - boasting how well it's doing! In Europe alone, revenue has gone up 13% to £5.15bn, earning them £247m, in their own words "more than reversing a year-ago loss"... We'll keep those numbers in mind when it comes to our pay claim! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 07/07/21]

**• Bread, cake, or guillotine!**

We hear LLL is preparing a new pay offer. But (Marie-)Antoinette Carter - as stated in the company's financial reports - is set against a wage rise, citing low profits, the pandemic, the economic crisis, etc., etc... She even claims that "the cost of living hasn't gone up"... Then again, why would a little inflation - at its highest since 2008 - bother a nouveau-riche like her? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 07/07/21]

**• Magnifying glass needed**

Yes, so no surprise that us cleaners couldn't notice any change when we looked at our payslips after the so-called pay rise! It's less than 20p/hr! Not even enough for a tea at Greggs! We still don't get the £10.85/hr London Living Wage! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 07/07/21]


**• Not at all the business**

While Nissan's announced a new gigafactory to make batteries and Vauxhall Ellesmere Port is switching to electric cars, we found out last week that Ford's only plan for Dagenham (so far?) is the simple refurbishment of a few Transits into (electric only?) ambulances - in partnership with contractor Venari.

Useful, yes, but like for the ventilator project in J building, it's contracted out and will probably only involve 100 non-permanent workers... [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 07/07/21]

**• He got a job at Nissan?**

We were surprised to see Johnson was at Nissan Sunderland last Thursday, when hundreds of Nissan mates had been sent off work due to a serious Covid outbreak! There he was, driving a car off the line, wearing a personalised "Prime Minister" embroidered overall - and no mask. We noted that Nissan workers wore the highly effective FFP3 masks however, no doubt aware of the hazards of having super-spreader Johnson around. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 07/07/21]

**BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**
**• It's not just up to them**

It's no surprise that some managers are already saying BMW won't require us to wear masks and visors in here, come 19 July. With Covid cases rising again? Working through one peak already, we had outbreaks here and one death! Nissan Sunderland furloughed most of the workforce recently, the delta variant was spreading so fast. We'll decide how to keep ourselves safe, thanks very much! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini 06/07/21]

**• Safety... and comfort**

Sure, it shouldn't be so hard to work in this PPE. And if it were up to us, it would be easier. Valve masks, slower line speeds, and longer breaks in the open air, would all help! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini 06/07/21]

**• Call that a plan?**

So managers don't care how stupid they look? After all these lay-off days, they now want us to work extra WTA Friday night shifts on 16 and 23 July! But when they can't even tell us a week in advance what days we're working the following week, what are the odds

these shifts will be called off? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini 06/07/21]

**• Couldn't organise a p-up...**

All the while we've been laid off, management has been asking us to do overtime at the beginning or end of our shifts. Why should we end up working 10-hour or longer shifts, when there are other mates low on hours? This doesn't make any sense to us. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini 06/07/21]

**• Rotten & Hollow**

We can't help notice that lots of mates are leaving R&H. At the moment with all the short weeks, it's basically a part-time job, so it's not surprising they're leaving for other warehouses. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini 06/07/21]

**• The only reason we're here**

And it doesn't help that R&H and its agencies often get our pay wrong. We regularly have hours missing. They'd better sort that out! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini 06/07/21]

**• Bloodsuckers**

What on earth happened to Rudolph & Hellmann pay last month? Some of



our workmates had over £1000 missing from their wage! And guess what was management's answer when they asked to be paid: "You will probably receive it next month"... So are these bloodsuckers going to pay our rent - what is this supposed to mean? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 21/06/21]

**• Sorry hypocrites!**

Management was worried enough by our reaction to offer an "olive branch" a few days later. They announced that they were "sorry" and that they would patch up this "error" by offering us... an Amazon voucher! They bloody well have to pay for this, not just by paying everyone their hours but also by giving £1000 to everyone as compensation! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 21/06/21]

## Their economy

## A Prime target for workers' collective action

Amazon workers around the world have been taking action to demand better conditions. Their level of unionisation varies, partly depending on local labour laws in the dozens of countries housing the company's 1500+ worksites. In Germany, where unionisation is high, workers at seven facilities struck for three days during 'Prime Day', taking advantage of one of Amazon's biggest sales times to demand increased wages. In both Germany and France, strikes forced the company to include unions in decisions affecting workers' safety. In Italy, workers used absenteeism to force bosses to prioritise workers' health during the pandemic, and also recently struck to improve conditions for subcontracted workers who are excluded from collective bargaining.

Workers in Britain might have the "right" to join a union, but Amazon tried to prevent them from organising. In Alabama USA, the company went on the offensive against union organisers, publishing



anti-union propaganda, paid union busters, and even interfered with the ballot. It hasn't deterred organisers though. From New York to Chicago to California, shop floor action has forced Amazon to provide paid sick leave - close up shop if workers tested positive for Covid - and limit productivity targets.

It hasn't been easy for these worker-organisers: for example, during a 2013 German strike,

Amazon opened three new facilities across the border in Poland. But workers already know the answer to this: fight together - and even across borders, like the 2020 "Make Amazon Pay" campaign, which brought together workers from Bangladesh, Cambodia, the US, Australia and Italy and elsewhere to demand the right to organise, better working conditions, and higher wages. □

## • Driving Covid case numbers up

Workers at the DVLA office in Swansea struck in July for the fourth time since April, over Covid insecurity. More than 2000 of the 6000 staff have been forced to work on site, which has had one of Britain's worst workplace case-rates: 600 between September and December 2020 alone.

It has been impossible for workers to social distance, both on the work-provided buses and at their shared desks a problem exacerbated after the number of desks was reduced to meet distancing requirements! They were also instructed by managers to turn off Test & Trace notifications, so they wouldn't be sent

home. Bosses argued that, because DVLA workers handle sensitive information, they can't work from home - yet other parts of the civil service, including HMRC, managed to arrange this.

The DVLA is continuing to increase numbers working on-site, including people who had been working from home, even as cases have spiked in Swansea in the last few months. They have also hired contractors to deal with the backlog of 1.4 million documents that has resulted from the strike. A provisional deal between the DVLA and PCS union recently fell through. Rumour has it that it was Transport Secretary Grant Shapps who blew it up. The union's general secretary, Mark Serwotka, said: "Targeted action will continue at the DVLA unless the original deal, which both parties had agreed in principle, is back on the table." So the fight goes on.



## • Kangaroo Court? Deliveroo Court...

Deliveroo workers have just lost their appeal against Deliveroo bosses who claim they are self-employed and thus not eligible for the range of rights most employees can claim.

The Court has denied that Deliveroo riders are "workers". This means they not only don't get sick pay and holiday pay, but also do not have the right to carry out collective bargaining via a trade union. The court's judgement

that Deliveroo riders are self-employed focused on a very specific part of their contracts. It turns out that the company allowing you to get a substitute to cover your shift is the difference between having basic workers' rights including the minimum wage, or having the "flexibility" to earn just £2 per hour!

The "underperformance" of Deliveroo's shares when they first went on sale on March was thought to result

from concerns that cases like this might force them to treat their workers better. But investing a few million in legal fees is a great way for bosses to profit from the court system. And the court's judgement rewarded Deliveroo bosses and shareholders with a 9% spike in share prices. Proving that the courts only exist to enforce the bosses' laws: workers cannot rely on them.



## G7 beach party

For the political leaders of the G7 richest countries, "important" international affairs are amazingly simple. They can be covered in just one evening and part of a day! This elaborate and costly jamboree put on for them in Carbis Bay, Cornwall, by Boris Johnson, his wife and their dog, was mainly taken up by photo-opportunities on the beach and a barbecue during which social distancing precautions were thrown to the sea breeze. Never mind the bill for the world's taxpayers, (an estimated £92m) or how it turned into a super-spreader event. And then all the same leaders popped over to Brussels for a Nato shindig lasting just an hour or so.

While the official G7 statements made the claim that all attendees agreed on taxing multinationals at the same rate, educating girls(?),

decarbonising the world and even vaccinating the poor countries' populations, this was just more hot CO2 which committed them to nothing.

In fact the gathering's real



## International

political aim, dictated by American president Joe Biden, now defender-in-chief of the world order, can be summed up in just four words: "we don't like China". He wanted Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Canada to line up behind his current anti-China trade war. At least in words. No doubt this was part of the reason for the careful selection of just 3 special guests: South Africa, South Korea and Australia - all dependent on Chinese "exchange".

Maybe Biden didn't talk about a "China virus" like Trump. But he made sure everyone heard him say he hasn't ruled out a lab leak in Wuhan. And after Nato he had a Trump-like chat with Vladimir Putin just to show he really is "continuity Joe". But his neo-Cold War is just as phony as Donald's. □

## • China still shakes the world

China is celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of its Communist Party (nothing communist about it, of course!). And it's more than ever in the West's bad books. Nevertheless, Western commentators can't help but admire this "economic superpower", the world's 2nd largest economy by GDP, which has handled the Covid pandemic better than anyone else. Of course the reality of China's economy is quite different: in the league table of GDP per head by "purchasing power parity", China comes

only 100th out of 225 countries: income per person is well below the world average.

Anyway, the relative "success" of China's economy is largely thanks to its huge, super-cheap labour force which was put at the disposal of western companies from the end of the 1970s. They use China as their manufacturing power house (Nike, Apple, Hitachi, etc.), but repatriate most of their profits. State-owned enterprises generated 40% of China's GDP (\$15.66 trillion in 2020!), with domestic and foreign private businesses contributing as

much as 60%. So the West's anti-Chinese rhetoric is just that: rhetoric.

More hypocritical though, are the British government's references to the ruthlessness of the regime "against its own people": like the massacre of unarmed protesters in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Something the British government should know all about: it's just been trying to close down the unresolved investigation into the mowing down of 14 unarmed protesters in Northern Ireland's Derry in 1972.

## • Gibraltar: abortion rights, one step forward...

Women in Gibraltar have only just won the right to abortion. In a referendum on 24 June, 62% of the 23,343 electorate voted to make this legal: terminations up to the 12th week of pregnancy will now be allowed - not on demand however, but only if a doctor says so.

In fact the new law, in line with Britain's 1967 Abortion Act, could be interpreted as allowing abortion up to 24 weeks. In other words, "British" women in Gibraltar have waited 35 years to gain the same right

as their mainland counterparts! A right which anyway, is partial and conditional, requiring 2 doctors' signatures. That said, Gibraltarian women will no longer have to travel to Spain (where abortion "on request" is legal up to 14 weeks) or to Britain, with all the difficulties that involves.

Despite the British government's continued claim over this tiny enclave on the tip of Spain (it's a "British Overseas Territory"), historically, most

of its laws have been a matter for its own autonomous mini-parliament of 18 members. This has, for instance, allowed Gibraltar to remain an "offshore tax haven" for "non-resident companies". But it's also meant that up to now, abortion was a criminal offence, with a penalty of life imprisonment. Which, by the way, is still the case in Malta, Andorra, San Marino, Monaco, Liechtenstein and Poland! Indeed, when it comes to women's rights, "la lucha continua"!

### A little poke at the Russian hornets' nest

On 23 June, the BBC reported that "more than 20 Russian aircraft and two coast-guard ships have shadowed a British warship sailing near Crimea... Weapons systems on board the Royal Navy destroyer had already been loaded". Russia's defence ministry then confirmed that "a [Russian] patrol ship fired warning shots and a jet dropped bombs in the path of HMS Defender", since as far as it was concerned, the British ship was in Russian waters without permission.

Having played up the incident, Britain's defence ministry promptly played it down so as not to lose face, claiming no shots had been fired. But of course the whole incident was deliberately staged. BBC reporter Jonathan Beale (and others) had been invited onboard to report how "Britain" was demonstrating its refusal to recognise Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine and exercising its "right" to sail anywhere in the Black Sea it liked.

This incident allowed Johnson to boast that he had poked the Russian "bear". But as one commentator remarked, "In a

reversal of President Theodore Roosevelt's formula for successful imperialist intervention, Boris Johnson's approach is 'to speak loudly and carry a small stick'". Adding that this gunboat diplomacy did however, carry the risk of "an accidental clash or a military overreaction".

It's true that a buffoon like Johnson could mistakenly overplay his weak hand - as with Brexit - but for the time being this anti-Russian Cold War "revival" is merely aimed at pleasing - and appeasing - his own old-school electorate and backbenchers in the Commons.

## France

**French regional elections: a shock for the politicians**

The two rounds of elections for the 13 French regional elections, postponed due to the pandemic, were held in June. The results were a big shock to the main political parties and in particular the ruling party of President Macron, La République en Marche (LREM) and Marine Le Pen's far-right Rassemblement National (RN).

Le Pen expected to capture at least three or even five regions. Pre-vote polls gave her party a first-round lead in six. In the end she got not one! But then neither did Macron, whose party gained barely 7% of the vote.

The reason is not just the super-low 35% turnout, the lowest since 1958. The electorate is fed up with the politicians and their system, as the 2017/18 yellow-vest mass



protests showed, even if these ended up degenerating into marginal outbreaks of rioting and looting. But of course the ineptitude of the government in the face of Covid made this disillusionment even worse.

As a result the French version of the Labour Party, the Socialist Party (and no more socialist, despite its name) capitalised a little but the main winners were the traditional right wing. □

## • **Lutte Ouvrière, a conscious choice for more than 300,000 working-class voters**

Below we publish extracts from the newspaper of Lutte Ouvrière (*Workers' Struggle*) our sister organisation, which stood in this election.

The record abstention in the regional elections (67% nationally, but higher in working-class areas) is an indication of the depth of disinterest and even disgust for these electoral contests, whose objective is merely to decide which particular political clique will take over managing public affairs on behalf of the capitalist class.

This competition for seats at the table is all the more obscene, because, after several months of a pandemic which has weighed most heavily on the working class, workers are increasingly

confronted with a brutal offensive: lay-offs, company closures, wage and unemployment benefit cuts, worsening working conditions. The capitalist class is getting richer than ever. Shareholders are amassing fortunes, from state hand-outs as much as speculation. While those who've kept society going during this pandemic are being pushed further into misery.

Yet false promises and populist slogans were all that the bourgeoisie's politicians offered. Which are obviously no solution to the growing social crisis facing workers. So it is vital that the inevitable explosion of workers' anger, when it comes, is not deflected down a dead end, by the false friends of the working class - nor of course, its enemies.

Because this anger needs to be directed against those who hold the real power: the owners of capital, of companies, of factories and of the banks.

To maintain decent jobs and enforce the sharing out of work with no loss of pay, it will be necessary to take over control of the finances of this parasitic, super-rich class. It is from "big capital", from the dividends of the shareholders, from the money squandered in financial speculation, that the increases in wages, pensions and benefits will have to come, in order to reflect the rising cost of living.

This was the programme that Lutte Ouvrière presented in these elections. The number of votes it got are admittedly small: 319,909, or 2.23%, but compared with the regional elections in 2015 (320,054 votes, or 1.50%) LO has actually maintained its vote, while most parties saw their collapse.

It is not a question of exaggerating the significance of these results, in a context which is primarily that of a high level of abstention, particularly among workers. But they at least show that the ideas of class struggle, defended in a resolute and militant way, can find an echo among a section of the working-class electorate.





## Colombia: protests against austerity

## International

On 15 April, right-wing Colombian President Iván Duque Márquez announced a 10-year plan to save £4.55bn (2% of GDP) on the backs of the population. This sparked off the largest popular protests seen in Colombia in recent decades. Workers' unions, indigenous organisations and parties on the left, organised nationwide days of action. Despite brutal repression of demonstrators - according to local NGOs, 75 people have been killed to date - the fight continues.

Duque's "fiscal reforms" aimed at extending VAT (19% in Colombia) to utility services such as water, electricity and gas, but also to some essential food items. Under the pretext of "fighting climate change", the government proposed to increase the price of petrol and diesel and to tax single-use plastic products. One million public sector workers were to accept a 5-year wage freeze, while those among the rich with annual earnings above £940,000 were expected to pay only an extra 1% in income tax - and those earning above £2.9m just 2% more!

After 3m protesters took to the streets, the government was forced to backpedal. On 2 May, it announced the reforms were abandoned. The finance minister resigned. In fact the government also had to abandon plans to further privatise the health system, which would have denied



access to an even greater section of the population.

But given that today, nearly half of Colombia's 49m inhabitants live in poverty, anger against the government goes way beyond its latest austerity measures. Due to a highly-policed Covid lockdown, casual jobs which allowed the poorest to survive, disappeared. The pandemic has pushed an additional 3.6m people below the breadline. The already inadequate social budget meant to help families in need, was used up elsewhere. The poorest youth, with no access to education and no prospects for future jobs, are demanding measures against the rising poverty and, above all, to be able to eat!

President Duque has referred to the protests as "extreme vandalism

and urban terrorism, financed by drug mafias". He is a well-known associate of former president Alvaro Uribe, whose family financed paramilitary groups with the help of drug-trafficking warlords. In fact Uribe called for all "citizens" to take up guns and fire at protesters. And while Duque pretends to open dialogue with workers' organisations, he has deployed the army: 1,000 soldiers were sent to Cali, the third city in Colombia.

However, despite this, resistance continues. Blockades in the poor districts, where the youth have created no-go areas against the police and army, continue to provide safe zones and vital communal soup-kitchens. The fight against this government is by no means over. □

## • Brazil: Bolsonaro's war against the working-class

By the beginning of July, the number of Covid-19 deaths in Brazil had surpassed 528,000 with 251 deaths per 100,000 of population (compared to Britain's official figure of 192/100,000). This death rate, among the highest in the world, is entirely down to President Bolsonaro's policies. He still calls Covid-19 "a little flu" and questions the efficacy of vaccines and mask-wearing. He continues to chant his catch-phrase: "Brazil must return to work!" through one catastrophe after another, as hospitals run out of oxygen and medicines, while many who can't get admitted die in the queues outside. And it is the working-class, labouring long hours in factories as Covid spreads and crammed into the favelas (ghettoes) and overcrowded public transport, which pays the highest price.

The brutal so-called "war on

drugs" continues in Rio, with the murder of 500 people since the beginning of 2021, by the military and police... only to replace drug gangs with cartels in the control of the authorities. Attempts to undermine the protected settlements system for indigenous people - declaring these illegal - and cuts to environmental law enforcement agencies, have led to a spike in illegal logging and gold mining in the Amazon. The pandemic swept through some of these settlements. Yet vaccines are not being distributed among them; 500,000 indigenous people have been excluded - the government has only sent vaccines to its own demarcated territories. Bolsonaro's Covid policy has provoked a rising tide of anger. Large protests have taken place, including against its attacks on the rights of indigenous people.

Then in March, the Supreme Court quashed former Workers' Party president Lula's conviction for corruption, which had prevented him from running in the 2018 election. Since then his popularity has revived, despite his party's 16-year long record in power, during which time public sector jobs and conditions were slashed and trade union "ministers" were co-opted in order to disarm the working class. It was this which helped pave the way for Bolsonaro's demagoguery. Indeed, today Lula openly says that it's business people who should "pray" that he returns to power - confirming in advance whose interests he will serve. Brazil's working class, allied with the poor population, will hopefully build their own, real, "workers' party" in order to overthrow those interests.

## Afghanistan

On the 4-5 July the last British troops followed the US army out of Afghanistan, ending 20 years of occupation.

Around 241,000 people have been killed in this war zone since 2001. More than 71,000 were civilians. The war has cost the US an estimated \$978bn, 2,300 dead soldiers and around 20,660 injured in action.

Former president Hamid Karzai drew the balance sheet: *"Look at the scene. We are in shambles. The country is in conflict. There is immense suffering... Those who came here 20 years ago in the name of fighting extremism and terrorism not only failed to end it but, under their watch, extremism has flourished. That is what I call failure"*.

The invasion of Afghanistan under US president George Bush and Britain's Tony Blair was the start of the "war on terror", after al Qaeda's audacious and deadly attack on the twin towers in New York and Washington's Pentagon. And the worst of it was that this extreme Islamist group owed its existence to the US: it was spawned and financed by the CIA in order to oust the USSR-backed regime in Kabul

## Leaving Afghanistan... in ruins



Taliban fighters on the march

- a plot thought up by the Cold War-infused minds of the US security services. They created a monster. And so it came back to bite the hand that fed it.

Today, more than half of Afghanistan is already back under control of the (al Qaeda-allied) religious fundamentalist Taliban. And its militias don't even need to revive their war. US-trained Afghan troops are moving over to them voluntarily. The Taliban meet little

resistance wherever they go. Of course, that's for the time being. History seems likely to repeat itself with Pashtun warlords in the north beginning to renew their long-abandoned anti-Taliban guerilla war. But the catastrophe wreaked in this devastated land thanks to western "interests" should be enough proof - if needed - of the disastrous role western imperialism still plays in this world. □

## Ethiopia

The bombing of a busy market in the town of Togoga on 24 June, killing 64 and wounding 180 civilians is only the latest incident in the war which broke out in November 2020, between the Ethiopian federal government and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). This conflict has already led to thousands of deaths, a regional migrant crisis with the displacement of 2m people and widespread famine. It threatens to further destabilise north-eastern Africa.

While the root cause is the struggle for a larger share of crumbs from the profits of multinationals, allocated to the tiny ruling classes of the main ethnic clans - the Tigrayans, Amharas, Oromos and Southern peoples, its immediate cause was the postponement of elections in Tigray province due to the pandemic.

The Ethiopian Federal State structure is based on the division of regions according to ethnic majorities.

## A population caught in the crossfire between ethnic warlords

Governments are formed through alliances between rival ethnic politicians. Since 1991, it has been the Tigrayan elite who were the main beneficiary of the opening of the country to the world market. Ethiopia became a destination for international textile and agriculture (e.g., flowers, in a country where the population starves!), all seeking to profit from the super-exploitation of local workers and peasants - Ethiopia "boasts" the lowest-paid working class in Africa.

Tigrayan political domination of the federal assembly ended with the election of the ethnic Oromo, Abiy Ahmed, in 2018, as Prime Minister. The current conflict is the continuation of Ahmed's attempt to side-line Tigrayan leaders, and the Tigrayan elite's resistance to this. The conflict now threatens to spread across the whole region, as various ethnic militias and the Eritrean army are directly involved in the fighting (although

the latter has withdrawn, for now). Neighbouring Sudan has also tried to take advantage of the conflict to reclaim the Al-Fashaga triangle.

Ahmed's Nobel Peace Prize in 2019 for ending the war with Eritrea and releasing political prisoners now seems like a cruel joke on the population, as the army bombs the region into further instability. Ethnic warlords continue to use the weapon of ethnicity, with the poor as cannon fodder in their struggles for power. But the Ethiopian working class is multi-ethnic. In the textile factories, workers who've been driven out of the countryside by poverty, work shoulder to shoulder. They have no interest in respecting the ethnic boundaries which the ruling class imposes - and every interest in a collective fight, uniting all of the poor regardless of their ethnicity, against the exploiters. □

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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