

WORKERS' fight



No 127 - Oct 2021

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)

AGAINST JOHNSON'S "LITTLE ISLAND" AUSTERITY!

It was symbolic that on the day the prime minister gave his florid and mendacious (i.e., lying!) show-biz speech to an (apparently) adoring Conservative Party conference, his government cut the £20 per week uplift in Universal Credit - hitting the poorest households in the country.

Yes, this extra £20 - only given because so many from the middle class suddenly needed welfare benefits during the lockdown - is indispensable to workers in temp jobs and on poverty pay. And anyway, it isn't enough. The "uplift" was in itself an admission that social benefits were too low - among the lowest in the developed world.

The same goes for the minimum wage, which the government euphemistically calls its "national living wage". This £8.91/hour for over 23s - i.e., poverty pay - is what has dragged wages down and nothing else!

But in Johnson's incredible "Alice through the looking-glass world", up becomes down, right becomes left and reality flies out of the window!

So according to Johnson, low pay is not due to his set-low minimum wage, but the fact that bosses actually pay it, no less! And, he says, this results in a distorted, low-pay, low productivity economy - which has nevertheless acted as a magnet, attracting "workers from abroad"!

And now, having "got Brexit done", Johnson has fixed this, by ending free movement of labour and preventing foreign workers from taking such outrageous advantage of these low wages!

Johnson's capitalism on one island

Yes, the world has turned completely upside down. The government, which froze railway workers' pay and which offers NHS staff a pay cut, is calling for higher pay! British bosses are told to overcome their "addiction to cheap labour from abroad" and pay and train



local workers to do the jobs which used to be done by EU workers... like HGV truck driving...

Conspicuous by its absence is any mention of the critical shortage of 200,000 NHS and social care workers! This, in the context of 5.7m people waiting for urgent hospital treatment and the collapse of the NHS.

Many sectors, including health and social care, have been relying heavily on immigration from the EU for years. And it's obvious why. The British workforce has contracted, declined and aged. There was no other way to make up numbers, let alone supply new blood, skills and energy, other than through immigration!

So where are the necessary workers going to come from? Prisoners have already been mobilised by the meat industry! What's next? Compulsory conscription of labour?

But Johnson has spelled it out: "levelling up" means replacing the free movement of labour across the whole of Europe, with free movement of workers on one small island... How "free" would that be?

Brexit will continue to haunt them

The government also keeps totally dumb over the ongoing Brexit hit to the economy. Like, for instance, the relegation of London's City, which has already lost its role in world finance. London's 2006 share listings represented 10.6% of global shares; today it's 3.6%.

What's more, the attraction of Britain for companies to invest was precisely the low wage, low tech environment, allowing them to squeeze out higher profits - but on the basis of EU access, which they no longer have.

Indeed, Johnson's "new model, high tech economy" is pure hot air. It can no more be taken seriously than the pledges he makes that his backward-looking, reactionary and anti-immigrant party will oppose misogyny.

For now the working class, faced with the looming crisis, exacerbated by Brexit, the pandemic and Johnson's "little island" austerity, can only rely on its own collective forces to ensure it wins the pay it needs. □

Covid-19 crisis

At the time of writing, Covid infection levels remain among the highest in the world (still at 35,000 per day) - even if fewer people, according to official statistics, are dying. In fact Britain should probably be on every other country's "Red List"...

As for the numbers game, the government and the media only give the figure for those who die within 28 days of a positive test. But the number of actual Covid deaths is at least 20% higher. It's obvious why Johnson wants to play this down. After all, he said vaccination is the way out of the pandemic and he bet all his chips on it: on 19 July, Freedom Day, all restrictions went. The public was told everything could now return to normal. But it's not the case, of course. Yes, the vaccine gives protection but it's not 100%: vaccinated people can get the virus and pass it on. So mask wearing and restrictions are still needed. But the government prefers to play up to the Covid- and mask-weariness of the public: popularity (and profit) come before health.

School kids targeted by anti-vaxxers

And so the virus is circulating more than ever - particularly among high school children: 1 in 20 has it, and attendance is worse than this time last year. Only 60% of parents are consenting to their kids being vaccinated (fewer than agree to flu vaccination). The publicised death of an otherwise healthy 15-year old from Covid hasn't undermined anti-vaxxers, who're still demonstrating outside schools...

Javid adds to the anti-vax-mix

New Health Secretary, Sajid Javid, has added to anti-vax feeling by going on air to tell social care workers that *"if you work in a care home ... and if you cannot*

• Trying to mask incompetence?

London mayor, Sadiq Khan has demanded that ministers make masks compulsory again, "to keep Covid under control". He is right. Vaccination, while reducing deaths and hospitalisation, doesn't prevent the virus from hopping in and out of tube-travellers' noses...

Indeed, he should know the risks. It's on his watch that at least 42 TFL workers, including 34 bus drivers died from Covid in May 2020. And it was only the following month that face coverings became mandatory on public transport and in the NHS. It took yet another month, until 24 July, before shops had to follow suit after the government conceded at last, that face masks *did* protect the wearer, as well as others, and helped reduce infection; though too late for the workers who died.

So, Sadiq Khan announced, in September this year, that masks should still be worn on TFL transport. But nothing

Britain still holds the record



be bothered to go and get vaccinated then get out and go and get another job". This, in the context of the 11 November deadline for all care home staff to be fully vaccinated. Care home bosses protest that there's a national shortage of 100,000 care workers, saying they don't want to have to sack people for not getting the vaccine...

But why is there a shortage? Not because of vaccination: 92% of care workers have already had one jab and 86% have had 2. No, there's a shortage because these workers are among the very lowest paid in society - often not getting the full minimum wage; forced to remain on agency or zero-hours contracts etc., etc... And contrary to the hypocritical praise showered on them during "clap for care", they don't feel like "heroes" and are not even professionals, even if they'd like to be - there's little or no training nor qualification offered; the job is undervalued, thankless and difficult. Doing it is not even a matter of choice, most of the time, but because of the need to earn a wage.

So the thuggish bully Javid should be threatening care home bosses, who're

making profits of £1.5bn/year out of the care for the elderly/disabled by super-exploiting care workers and bleeding residents dry with exorbitant fees. If there are a few staff who don't want the vaccine and cannot be convinced to take it, they should be put on paid leave until the end of the pandemic. Because the responsibility for their mistrust and Covid ignorance is Covid-irresponsible Johnson and the empty vessels which surround him.

Scrapping the passport in England

While Johnson scrapped the unpopular "vaccine passport" in England, in Scotland it was brought in at the end of September and seems to have helped to boost vaccinations and bring down infection rates - which had shot up at the return to school two weeks before England and Wales. By the end of September, 70.02% of Scotland's total population and 84.1% of those over-16 were fully vaccinated compared to 66.29%/82% in England... And the R number is now below 1.1 - having been up to 1.4 two weeks ago. □

was done to enforce or even encourage it. Not even the basics like having masks available at the entrance of stations or on platforms, as happened when masks were made compulsory first time round (but only on some stations).

Of course, mask-wearing, even when mandatory, with all the exemptions available, was always left to individual choice. So, whether mandatory mask-wearing can be successfully reintroduced today, against the government's messaging that everything's "back to normal" - is very much in question. The genie is already out of the bottle.

• Vaccinate the world against Covid?

After the government's regulatory Agency gave the green light to use both the Pfizer and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines as boosters, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation recommended offering them to *"over-50s, younger adults with health conditions and health and care workers"*.

But these booster jabs which extend protection against Covid-19, are a luxury that only rich countries can afford. Fewer than 3% of people in poor countries have been vaccinated (1.6% in Afghanistan; 0.9% in Nigeria)! Sarah Gilbert, leading scientist behind the development of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine has argued that low-income countries must now get priority. The virus and its potentially dangerous variants will be stopped only when as many people as possible are vaccinated around the world!

But the big pharmaceutical companies don't consider the vaccine market in poor countries profitable enough. Instead, companies like Pfizer have increased the price of their vaccine, betting on another year of super-profits thanks to the booster jabs! The only way the vaccine will find its way into poor countries is when the vaccine production and know-how is extended all over the world - by taking it out of the hands of "Big Pharma" - and that means getting rid of "big" capital...

It has to be part of the NHS!

The government's plan for elderly social care was announced in September. The "headline" measure is the new £86,000 cap on individual social care bills (not to come in until October 2023). So most elderly people will still have to use up all their savings and possibly sell their homes, to fund residential care if they come to need it. Only when they have savings of less than £20,000 are councils obliged to step in. And if they want better care than the basic level which the council assesses as "necessary", they'll have to pay the difference, too.

Beyond that, the government says it will "better" integrate social care (mainly in the private sector), with the NHS. While no details are available, there's certainly no plan whatsoever to take it into public hands again. Individual local authorities will continue to manage it, completely separately from the NHS as before - and most provision will remain

in the "for profit" private sector.

Almost 2m people applied for council funding to access social care last year, but less than half of them got anything. In fact the number of elderly/disabled receiving council-funded social care has fallen by a quarter since 2005. Government funding of local authorities was already slashed to the bare bone before Covid. When the pandemic exposed the poor conditions in care homes - with 20,000 deaths in the first wave, Johnson had to be seen to do something. Hence this half-baked Social Care Bill - to be paid for by... the working class...

Making the working class pay

National Insurance Contributions will go up by 1.25% from next April generating an extra £12bn/year. However from this, only an extra £1.8bn will actually go to social care! The rest is for the NHS to make up for the extra cost of the

• The profit motive has to go

Nursing and care homes are dominated by the private sector - less than 5% are run directly by local councils. The 10 biggest care companies - HC-One, the biggest, runs 326 homes - providing 20% of the total beds. Care homes are also becoming bigger: 30 beds in a care home used to be big in the 1980s; double that size is now the norm for new care homes, which minimise the number

of staff needed, maximising profits.

What helps make the profits is the low "labour costs" on the one hand and high fees for residents on the other: understaffing is the norm; care workers often work 12 hour shifts, are paid less than cleaners on average, and about 30% are on zero-hour contracts. And while specialist nursing homes can cost more than £1,500 a week, 41% of care

The NHS is broken down

The NHS wasn't "protected" by turning it into a "Covid-only" service last year. Today - while the pandemic continues - it's in a state of collapse. It's obvious that care can't be provided if there aren't enough staff to provide it. There are just 2.8 doctors per 1,000 people in England - compared with a EU average of 3.7. Like social care, the NHS has a shortfall of 100,000 staff! As for the staff who're employed - they're working 14-hour

days and seven-day weeks to cover for missing colleagues. This isn't heroic. It's dangerous. The WHO estimates that long working hours account for 750,000 deaths a year...

Waiting lists are ridiculously high - in England 5.6m. And the built-in faults in GP care mean they can't cope, having been left to deal with all the needs of people awaiting hospital treatment - when they just aren't able, nor equipped, to do

• Ambulance crisis in Scotland

On 16 September, at the height of Scotland's Delta variant surge, the Scottish government was forced to call in the army to support struggling ambulance staff. But the Royal College of Emergency Medicine (RCEM) warned that it wouldn't resolve the "ambulance crisis", since the shortage of paramedics and trained ambulance drivers was only part of the problem. A&E units couldn't cope with the rising number of patients - forcing ambulances to queue up for hours outside hospitals before offloading patients. As a result, patients were waiting an average of 6 hours from a 999 call to a hospital transfer and ambulances were stuck outside A&Es!

Although particularly severe in Scotland, the crisis has been hitting services everywhere else. Across Britain, half of all A&E units are often so crowded that they've had to hold

patients in ambulances or turn ambulances away altogether! The RCEM estimated that 1,000 more hospital beds in Scotland, and 15,000 more for the whole of Britain, would just be enough to ease the crisis.



Social care

pandemic.

So for now, most social care funding is still to come from Council Tax, local social care charges - but also "long-term efficiencies". Councils spend about £14bn a year on social care, with another £10bn paid out of individuals' pockets. That £1.8bn is a drop in the ocean.

What about home carers?

The plan also says nothing about the "informal" social care sector - the 6m unpaid carers who look after friends and family with almost no government or council support - 4 times the number of workers in the "formal" social care sector!

So of course, this "plan" will not solve any of the long-standing issues in social care. But how could any "plan", which doesn't immediately reintegrate the NHS and social care into one organisation, in public hands and under public sector workers' control? ☐

provision was found to be "inadequate" by the Care Quality Commission.

The result of these historic problems is being seen during the pandemic: 39,000 residents so far have died in care homes. And the government "plan" (if it can be called one) offers nothing to remedy this. No surprise there, of course.

NHS

it. And of course there aren't enough of them, either. Excess deaths in August were 14% above the norm, but one third of these deaths occurred at home from the complications of cancer, septicaemia, heart and liver disease.

Heath Secretary Javid has promised that waiting lists will be tackled. He doesn't say how. The harsh truth is that the lists will get smaller because many of those waiting will die before being seen. ☐

Indeed, Britain has one of the lowest hospital bed capacities among the rich countries of the world. With 250 hospital beds per 100,000 inhabitants, it even lags behind Spain, Romania, Poland and Turkey!

Pay and conditions

Boris Johnson boasted that wages are going up and that "he was pleased" about it. But is that even true - and compared to what? Workers who were furloughed on 80% or less of their wages, (if they haven't lost their jobs), by just going back to their previous salary will have a de facto "increase" compared to 2020. Indeed, according to the Office of National Statistics more than 2 million workers were paid less than the minimum wage in 2020! And that's not counting the 5 million plus public sector workers, as well as 240,000 rail workers, who've had a pay freeze imposed since last year. Even the NHS "hero" workers have only been offered a below inflation "payrise" (an actual pay cut).

Under capitalism, the shortage of workers - which we are told prevails today, should increase the price of our labour... But so far it's not the case. So there is a (not new) shortage of HGV drivers, made worse by Covid and Brexit, as well as a demand for



hospitality and delivery workers. But the likes of Uber and other Deliveroo-like outfits - or Pret-a-Manger - are paying the minimum wage... Is capitalism so rotten that its law of supply and demand no longer applies?!

And when looking at the 10 countries with the biggest increase in minimum wages since 2010, Britain is at the bottom, trailing behind Russia,

Poland and Spain.

So, no wonder the 10s of thousands of HGV licence holders are not rushing to fill the current 100,000 vacancies!

And no wonder European drivers aren't keen to come back, citing low wages and poor working conditions. The government's fast tracked, short term visas might not be the best incentive... ☐

• A new name for the same old union tactic

Sharon Graham, the new general secretary of Unite the Union, did not attend this year's Labour Conference, although she did apparently tell Labour leader Keir Starmer beforehand, in order not to offend him!

According to her, she had other priorities: the pickets of her striking members that week. As Graham wrote in the bosses' favourite Financial Times(!), her members were "fed up with the political tail wagging the industrial dog". She means to show solidarity with workers in her union who feel that Unite hasn't done enough to defend their interests at work. She implicitly blames that on Unite being overly focused on the Labour Party - when in fact it is due to a very long-standing policy to pursue partnership deals with the bosses rather than use weapons of the class struggle, i.e. the strike!

And it is in fact this partnership and negotiation tactic that she is not going to change! She just has a new word for it - "leverage". For her, this means negotiating not just with bosses in one

company, but bosses in a number of companies at the same time, and with shareholders if possible! The higher up the hierarchy the better in fact! It remains to be seen therefore, how the picket lines she claims to favour, come into it...

There are indeed a number of small strikes breaking out at the moment, as Graham says. But what she will not say, is that the only real chance of success for the working class, is by bringing all these strikes together across sections and industries, to fight for common interests.

• Workers' rights: Labour can't even agree over which empty promise to back...

Some of Labour's annual party conference announcements were obviously aimed at regaining its lost credit among workers. So deputy leader Angela Rayner opened the proceedings by launching Labour's Green Paper on Employment Rights, with a long list of promises for better working conditions, but no good answers for the real issues facing workers today!

So for instance, the official Labour pledge was a minimum wage of £10

per hour for all workers - obviously not enough to live on decently today, let alone in the future, with inflation skyrocketing! In fact this was the cause of shadow employment secretary Andy MacDonald's resignation and a major row in conference - which eventually voted for a minimum of £15/hour - and which was immediately labelled cloud-cuckoo-land by the media.

Labour promises to create a single "worker" status for all but the "genuinely" self-employed, so that all workers get the same rights as permanent employees from day one. It promised to ban zero-hours contracts. Which should really go without saying... but then again, maybe not!

Labour also promised to introduce "Fair Pay Agreements", bringing workers and bosses representatives together to discuss how to improve wages and working conditions. As if profits and wages are not inversely proportional - a fact of economics... As for the political "fact" that these "bargaining committees" always turn into sell-out committees, by now, workers know it very well. And they know that the only way to get improvements which last, is to fight for them - with numbers and with force.

COP-OUT26 and Insulate Britain: where are the adults in the room?

So Johnson got to address the United Nations as a warm-up for the "COP26" climate conference he'll host in Glasgow in November! Even he must have seen the irony in an overgrown Eton schoolboy telling the assembly to "grow up" and

quoting Kermit the Frog to underline his point.

As he spoke, a group called "Insulate Britain" was blocking London's M25 junctions and other busy roads at rush hour in the morning, sticking themselves with superglue to the tarmac... causing extra congestion and extra greenhouse pollution... Not to mention chaos and even medical emergencies.

They claim that insulating all homes will stop greenhouse gases and thus stop climate change... and that the government hasn't kept its promise to do the job. BP, Shell, BG, Centrica, car companies, and their products, none of these emit CO2? The serious problems they've caused for traffic and emergency services aside, they're almost too batty to argue with. A bit like Boris Johnson.

HGV driver shortage: Brexit and BS

As a result of the fuel and supermarket shortages, the Road Haulage Association let it be known that Britain was short of 100,000 heavy goods vehicle (HGV) drivers. Although this shortage is in fact chronic, it was without any doubt, exacerbated by Brexit. As a result of new visa requirements, 26,000 EU drivers decided to leave the job and go back home. The relatively low wages and poor conditions in Britain were hardly an incentive to stay - and certainly not in the hostile environment for immigrants under Brexit, maintained by Johnson & Patel and first created by Theresa May, when she was Home Secretary under Cameron in 2012.

Crisis? What crisis?

When fuel service stations ran dry, the government did nothing at first - except blame it on the public's "panic buying". But eventually, when the shortage got critical, 200 army tanker drivers were brought in to move fuel. In the meantime the

Department of Transport issued a letter to all HGV licence holders, past and present, to please return to the job! Test requirements were simplified to try to cut the backlog in licensing and mandatory retraining for hazardous-goods-trained drivers was postponed. Worse, the hours which drivers are allowed to drive were extended... never mind the dangers.

The government also announced those 5,000 3-month temporary visas (originally only to last till Xmas eve) will last until next February - to "lure" EU drivers back... no matter how implausible! In addition, 5,500 temporary poultry workers are invited to help dress British turkeys for Xmas... One really could not make this up! At the time of writing 127 drivers' applications had been received...

An obvious cause

Of course the "panicked" response of Transport Secretary Grant Shapps came too late. And no wonder, since his boss, Johnson, says he's not at all

Pay and conditions



bothered about "supply chain shortages". He also maintains that they have nothing whatsoever to do with Brexit, of course.

Shapps once said of Brexit: "we do have to stand on our own two feet as the United Kingdom". He has just proved conclusively that without the feet of workers from abroad helping out, the "United Kingdom" cannot stand. ☐

• High inflation is back

Even according to the government's underestimated Consumer Prices Index (CPI), inflation rose by 3.2% in the 12 months to August, "the largest ever increase" in 12 months. But taking the slightly less biased Retail Price Index, which takes into account certain housing costs like social rent, inflation is 4.8%! And this trend is worldwide. Germany recorded 3.9% in August, while it was 5.3% in the US and 19.25% in Turkey!

According to economists writing for the Financial Times, one of the main reasons for price rises is the chaotic reopening of the economy, which has

disrupted supply chains. Raw materials are suddenly in high demand, after months of lockdown, pushing prices up. Those industries using raw materials have transferred higher costs to consumers, pushing up commodity prices.

But this is only part of the picture. A number of industries, including oil companies, are artificially restricting their production - they might sell less, but they can sell at much higher prices. As a result, the price of oil, for instance, rose from £45 to £60 a barrel in the past month alone, when in fact there is enough production capability in the

world to more than meet demand! And of course, there is the increase in the price of basic food. Grain prices have almost doubled in the past 5 years, threatening starvation in the poorest regions of the world and squeezing the shrinking purchasing power of working class households everywhere.

So while the reopening of the economy has caused complete chaos in trade, it's given speculators a golden opportunity to make a quick buck out of raw materials and food, driving up prices even more, no matter the consequences. This is a system that humanity can't afford!

• Energy prices: if this isn't profiteering, what is?

Energy bills will rise by £139 in October and a further increase of 14% is expected in 2022 following the government's two-phased increase in the energy price cap.

The increase in demand with the opening up of economies worldwide means that producers can increase their prices (claiming a shortage) and thus make more profits. That's the way the system works. Nevertheless they protest that they are not "profiteering"! But what else is this?

We are told that many factors have affected supply and demand: some have called it "a perfect storm": a cold winter last year means gas stores were used up; hot weather in Asia saw more gas used for air-conditioning, while gas exports from Russia to north-west

Europe were cut; there was a fire at a key electricity import cable between France and Britain...

This has helped push up gas prices in the UK, Europe and Asia - since January, they've risen 250%! For many, energy bills were already unaffordable - even though capped. Last year 10,000 people died because they could not afford to heat their homes properly.

The chaotic energy market and yes, the profiteering and racketeering of the multiple energy supply companies (now down to 38 or so, after the latest crisis sent at least 10 to the wall) is a threat hanging over everyone's heads. Vital utilities should be in public hands and under workers' control. They need to be renationalised.

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BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**Workers are saying "No"!**

Chaos is mounting in the Mini plant. BMW boasted in June that it was well-placed to avoid a shortage of semiconductors. Yet every day a new part seems to run short, with deliveries affected by the driver shortage. At the end of September the assembly line ran out of seats.

Managers at Rudolph & Hellmann, BMW's lineside logistics contractor have been trying for months to stretch a dwindling workforce to keep supplying the lines at BMW's crazy speed of working. Last year, it cut the number of shifts from three to two, and lengthened them,

in preparation for BMW doing the same - which still has not happened.

Workers have had enough. Some new agency recruits refused to even start when their lousy terms and conditions were explained! Others continue to down tools, often permanently, sometimes mid-shift. And those who remain are gaining confidence to refuse to cover the gaps any more. About twenty walked out recently when told that compulsory Saturday overtime would be paid at basic rate. R&H managers ran after them, reversing that



decision on the spot and offering £20/hour! BMW has steadily expanded its outsourced operations over 20 years to get away with lower wages. Right now, it's backfiring. Yes, what goes around, comes around! ☐

- **They come running every time**

When R&H Logistics bosses announced they were paying Saturday working at basic rates, some of us immediately walked off the job in protest. Managers then came running after us, offering £20/hr to go back to work! Yup, they need us more than we need them...

- **Still not enough...**

No matter the wage these bosses offer, we're already doing too much. Many of us still refused to turn up at all on Saturday, even with the £20 rate...

- **For the real deal**

But money isn't the only important thing! R&H expects us to work 12 hour shifts on nights - standing most of the time with few breaks to sit and rest - on days it's 10 hours! So shorter hours and longer breaks are our most basic demands. And how could R&H refuse this - when we can stop the line any time?

- **Shorter shifts, higher pay!**

BMW proposes shorter shifts? We don't mind shifts ending early! It's nice to finish earlier on afternoons and nights - the problem is BMW then doesn't want to pay

for a full shift. As usual they want us to use WTA or holidays instead! Yet another account we have to settle with them.

- **Their problem - our fight!**

The shortages seem never to end - but BMW and R&H can blame themselves! How long have they been screwing more work out of fewer of us? And even the new starters are fed up with the intensity of the job after a day! Agencies can advertise as much as they want, but why would people stay, unless things change? Up to us to discuss how to do that...

[Workers' fight bulletin BMW Oxford Mini 28/09/21]

Ford Dagenham Engine Plant**Ford's India exit and workers' protests**

Last month, Ford suddenly announced its exit from India, within a year. This would mean the closure of two plants: one near Chennai, Tamil Nadu, employing 2,600 workers, the other, the recently-built plant in Sanand, Gujarat, employing 3,000 workers. The closures will affect dealers and parts suppliers across the country, so thousands more jobs are threatened.

This is the fifth year running in which multinational vehicle manufacturers have closed manufacturing facilities in "emerging" India: Ford's decision follows that of General Motors and Harley Davidson. Indian prime minister Modi's

boast that India would be a favoured destination for international investment has fallen flat, as companies restructure in the face of the recession.

Workers have responded collectively to the closures at both the sites. They've made the retention of their jobs their key issue and reject any negotiations over "severance pay". In Chennai, workers went on a hunger strike on 20 September. The company then posted 50 guards in front of the factory; workers had their photographs taken, to identify "troublemakers"!

In Sanand, on September 21, demonstrations involving hundreds of



workers took place. Their key demand is that they be given jobs at same pay at whatever facility emerges on the site, or they be given jobs by the Government. On September 22, workers in Chennai stopped production for part of the day. We hope that these protests are the beginning of a determined fightback, for as we all know, there is no other way. ☐

- **Conspiracy?**

We heard that some mates phoned in on Monday to say they couldn't get in because they had no petrol. If this shortage goes on, there'll be a lot more of us running dry. Electric Vehicle sellers must be rubbing their hands in glee. Makes one wonder whether this isn't really a "manufactured crisis"... Elon Musk (and Ford!) up to some trix? (joke)

- **Overtime is overwork**

Do managers really need all these

engines? Mates are doing 8 hours on Panther and then coming over to Tiger to do overlaps. So 12-hour shifts are being worked! And why? Because managers are "short of labour"? Yes, maybe - but they choose to be!

- **Keeping thumbs sweet?**

Sad story is that in this place, overtime - while definitely dangerous to health - is regarded by some as worth the pain. So apparently to pacify envious feelings, managers are letting Tiger main shift GLs come in an hour early, to twiddle their

thumbs for extra pay...

- **Get a job in the Cabinet!**

We're really flummoxed: so we get pushed to build, overtime is asked for, and then... lay-offs! Who can understand management's mentality? They're even worse than the government: it's a mixture of not giving a monkey's about messing with us and being illiterate when it comes to making a plan.

[Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 29/09/21]

King's Cross railway station (London)



Industrial action: ScotRail workers strike together!

Abellio ScotRail train conductors, ticket examiners, team managers, cleaners and gate-line workers have been taking industrial action on and off for the last 3 months, in the form of one-day strikes, overtime and rest-day working bans. They demand a pay rise, an increase in overtime pay, no job cuts and restoration of a rest-day working agreement. Even team managers are taking "action short of strike" - against being used as strike-breakers! And now engineers organised by Unite are set to join them. This could mean that almost all sections of the workforce, except train drivers, would be out on strike together. And indeed,

so should all rail workers: everyone is affected by the pay freeze.

According to Unite, Abellio's turnover for 2020 at £917m (!) was down from 2019, due to passenger income falling from £445.3m to £360.4m. However, the franchise subsidy from Transport Scotland rose over the same period from £482.8m to £526.3m, more than making up for it! And it got an additional £8.9m under the Covid Emergency Measures Agreement. Yet the company claims it's "not allowed" to break the government-imposed railway-worker pay freeze and is refusing workers' demands. In fact the Scottish government is due to take

over this service in April next year, when Abellio's franchise ends - and MSPs are already getting involved, accusing the rail unions of threatening to disrupt COP26...

So yes, it's a good time to strike - and all together! Let's hope the union leaders don't play their usual trick and call it off at the last minute. ☐

• Vote for strike

We've heard that ScotRail management dared to imply that the closure of ticket offices will help them to fund a pay rise for its 5,300 staff... And they even suggested a 2.2% (2% below inflation) rise! Do we need to remind them that a pay rise is to be paid out of their pockets, not the pockets of our mates...? At last the RMT is balloting drivers, conductors and ticket inspectors together, to vote for strike action. We just hope they go ahead with it!

• All in it together

All of us, across all companies, have noticed that the cost of food, petrol and energy bills is going up, but our wages are not...! Thanks to the shortage of HGV drivers and agricultural

workers, bosses are discovering that without workers, nothing moves. Isn't this a good time to remind them that our pay needs to be unfrozen (for us all)?

• Masks must be mandatory

We're all fed up at the GN gates with facing passengers who aren't wearing masks. Hundreds of them go past us every day in close contact, as we have to open the gates for them or check their tickets. Why can't masks be made mandatory on the trains and in stations, just like in Scotland?

• Hello oscar...

We've been bumping into OSCAR on some LNER trains for a while now. OSCAR is the name of their new electronic till system (EPOS). LNER

always comes up with friendly names for unfriendly devices... We had no basic training on how to use it and it came unannounced. What did they expect? That we'll try to figure out how to use it, while serving passengers at the same time, just because it has a cute name...?

• ... goodbye oscar

Btw, OSCAR is clearly not in working order (and we don't know how to "fix" him). No top off orders can be placed, leaving us short of supplies. So, we end up having to call Gate Gourmet and waiting on the line for ages. And when we get hold of someone we're told to use... OSCAR! We're told they can't take orders by phone. Going round in circles like this is making us dizzy...

[Workers' Platform King's X 06/10/21]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)



• We call it a stitch-up

So the fit-up (re-allocation of jobs) did go ahead in the end, starting this Monday - although we are told that it'll be temporary... But of course, what isn't temporary are the jobs that have been cut for good! Those of us who were on jobs that disappeared are still waiting to see what managers will try to impose on us with these new duties - but we already know that the fit-up won't fit unless they recruit new workers!

• Their tactics...

Yes, because we all know it's part of the job reduction they've been talking about for when the Parcel Sorting Machine comes in next year! First we're offered VRs, then jobs disappear. Next, they'll try their re-sign. We know how badly the last re-sign went, a couple of years ago... At this rate, the Mount will become a Mount of unsorted parcels!

• Where's the accountability!

So is this latest fit-up, which affected many of us on Nights, the reason why

we saw top managers and the union having a big meeting at night last week? We wonder why we weren't told about it and why we haven't had a report back either... Maybe union officials in here need a reminder that they first need to ask us what we want before they meet managers and then report back after!

• "The voice", but not ours!

We can't say we've seen any change for the better in "workplace culture and environment", as TeePee (union leader) was writing about in the CWU magazine this month... And we're not sure how exactly he planned to bring it about, since he confirmed yet again that the "adversarial days" of the CWU are over. Yes, this "culture" needs changing, and there's only ever been one way of doing that...

• And in the real world...

What a system this is, where a few of us writing our little comments online can knock 8% off RM's share price! Yep, that's what CEO Simon Thompson claimed in his recent company Q&A: investment

bankers are worried that RM won't save £100m this year, and apparently it's because they read Royalmailchat! On the other hand, it does show how much they worry about what we might do... But if RM doesn't meet its "productivity" goals, it won't be because of our fingers typing online, but our feet walking off work!

• This is a reminder

Covid is still among us, alive and kicking hard. We have heard of several of our workmates sick at home with it - and of one mate who is in hospital. This pandemic is far from over, it is in fact getting pretty bad. So we all have to take extra-precautions, since managers keep closing their eyes and hoping for the best...

[Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 06/10/21]

Refugee crisis

In September, the New York Times released a video showing Texan Border Patrol Agents on horseback brutally charging at Haitian refugees and forcing them back into a river they were trying to cross into the US. Given the shock this caused, Biden and Kamala Harris quickly distanced themselves, saying it was "inhumane".

But away from the cameras their inhumane policy continues - and it's no different from Trump's, maybe even worse. In fact, since Biden became president, a record 1.3m Mexicans, Haitians, Guatemalans, Venezuelans and others, have been arrested at the Mexican border. Many have been put straight onto planes and dumped - regardless of their circumstances - over the border in Guatemala.

Kicking Haitians when they're already down

Haiti, however, is the USA's direct responsibility. Since 1915, US imperialism has maintained its successive dictatorships, keeping Haiti as its backyard, dependent and in poverty, all the better to exploit its population. So when President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated on 7 July there was already chaos on the streets. Armed gangs held sway, extorting the population. Then came the 21 August earthquake, killing 2,284 people, injuring 12,763 and destroying 130,000 houses, as well as roads, hospitals and public buildings. Still reeling from this shock, Haitians faced Hurricane Grace. Today, a third of the population can't access clean water and two thirds don't have access to sanitation; 4.1m don't have enough food to eat.

Yet, in September, Biden, who called the US "a close and enduring friend to the people of Haiti" started further deportation flights from the US, returning Haitians who tried to escape these

Their world

All the grandiose talk of "strategic partnership" and shared values really gives away what the AUKUS (Australia, UK and the US) pact is about - posturing. Biden's nod means that Scott Morrison, much-hated in Australia, can boast of being acknowledged as a partner in the Pacific region. Johnson gets to look like he's promoting post-Brexit "global Britain". And for Biden, (and Johnson to some extent), the deal is supposed to shake off the humiliation - and divert

Trump, Biden - or Priti Patel - what's the difference for refugees?



nightmarish conditions. Some of those Haitians at the US border this month had been working in Brazil and Chile after fleeing the devastating 2010 earthquake from which the population still hasn't recovered - but these South American countries now have their own economic crises... and their own refugees.

And here in Britain, Patel also kicks

In Britain, Priti Patel is not allowing herself to be outdone. She comes up with a new anti-refugee (she calls them "migrants") policy every week. The latest is "pushback", meaning border patrols push small migrant boats back across the Channel. In the meantime French patrols have caused the refugees to move further down the French coast - which means they have even longer journeys in their unseaworthy rubber dinghies.

Patel's Nationality and Borders Bill currently in the Commons aims to criminalise asylum-seekers who enter

the country illegally. Only those who enter through "legal channels" will be given consideration. This isn't only against the Geneva convention, but it's a nonsense. Anyone who has fled persecution is unlikely to have the required documentation to enter Britain. And as asylum can't be claimed from outside the country, the only viable option is "illegal entry".

The Bill has also upset the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, because it potentially makes rescuing migrants at sea a criminal offence. What's sure though, is that Patel's policies have already added more deaths to the over a dozen asylum seekers who have died in the past 2 years trying to cross the Channel.

The only answer is an open door for all and safe transport. Then there'd be no more people smugglers, "Calais jungles" nor children's bodies washing up on beaches. What's more, integrating these asylum seekers over here, would inject much-needed new and dynamic blood into the working population... ☐

What's behind AUKUS?

attention from - the disorderly exit from Afghanistan. It is obviously also meant to look like a challenge to China, even if all three leaders made a point of denying this.

Concretely, the deal means that Australia agrees to build and run eight nuclear-powered submarines, to be built in Australia with input from the US and Britain, cancelling a multi-billion dollar contract with France to build them. Never mind that the project to build these

submarines will probably take decades and is bound to outlast all the current leaders. If it indeed comes to fruition at all. Regardless of that, Emmanuel Macron's very melodramatic retaliation against this "stab in the back" almost overshadowed the deal itself: recalling as he did, his ambassadors from Canberra and Washington "for consultation"... Big-power posturing is infectious! ☐

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

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