

WORKERS' fight



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

ONLY WORKERS' COLLECTIVE ACTION WILL FORCE THE CHANGES WE NEED!

So Johnson is gone, even if he S - controversially - remains "caretaker" PM for now.

What the unseemly political saga behind the closed doors of Downing street exposes, above all, is the complete farce which so-called democracy in this country amounts to.

The "people" had no say whatsoever in the events which have unseated Boris Johnson. No matter that the majority of the electorate, when asked by pollsters, has been saying ever since Partygate, if not well before, that he should go.

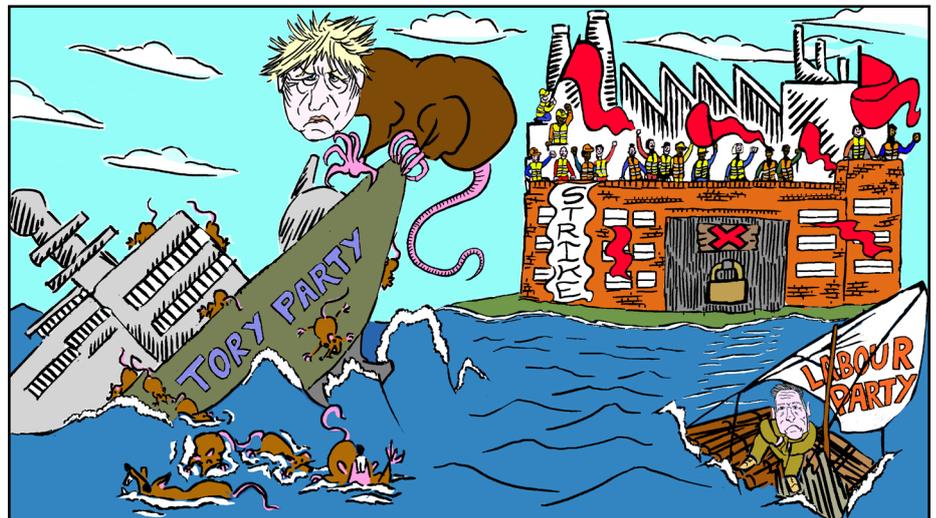
An arcane system

As one commentator put it, the electorate, is at the mercy of the centuries-old "arcane" procedures of the Tory Party. Senior politicians appear on TV to explain very gravely that since this country has no written constitution, everything depends on "honour" and "integrity" and the assumption that people like Boris Johnson "will do the right thing"!

And what is still being repeated, over and over, even by Johnson's opponents, is that after all, he "had a historic mandate from 14m who voted for him in the general election in 2019". From what he said in his deluded and megalomaniacal "resignation" speech, he's still convinced the 14m support him!

Yet that election wasn't called the "Brexit" election for nothing. Johnson's "historic victory" had nothing to do with his "charisma", and everything to do with his pledge to break the deadlock caused by the 50-50 split over Brexit which had paralysed May's minority Tory government for 3 years.

In other words, his majority was a transitory electoral phenomenon. He got Red Wall Labour votes from de-industrialised working class constituencies, by playing on fear of the EU - xenophobia with a small



"x" - scapegoating "Europe" for the troubles of this alienated electorate which quite rightly, had lost faith in Labour.

But by now, nobody can be under any illusion as to Brexit's harm: a 6% (so far) rise in prices on top of inflation and bosses expecting those of us who're left after the exodus of our fellow-EU workers, to cover for a severe shortage of labour - and without a pay rise!

What is to be done?

Two weeks ago, when railway workers went on strike for just 3 days over pay, something happened which hadn't been seen for decades. The working class and its role in society became the order of the day. The new RMT leader, presiding over the strike, was suddenly in demand on every media show, with reactionaries up and down the country queuing up to try to shoot him down!

This proves that it takes real, old-fashioned strike action - and by many workers together - for the working class majority to be heard, for its strength to be felt, and ultimately, for concrete change

to be possible!

In other words, it has nothing to do with buying in to the corrupt political system, but honest class struggle in the workplaces and on the streets.

Now that born-again Brexiteer Keir Starmer is exonerated over his lockdown boozing, the Labour Party will be asking workers for their votes. In fact the RMT's Mick Lynch even said, when asked, that he wanted to see Starmer as the next PM. He argued that after the "shower" currently in power, anything would be better.

The sad fact is, however, that the working class has been voting for the "lesser evil", ever since the birth of the Labour Party. Since then, it's had the chance to see Labour in power 6 times. One of those times, Blair&Brown helped to establish the travesty of casualisation...

So yes, the strike movement now - which Starmer opposes - is going to be the best and only lever against the attacks on living standards we now face. But the working class also needs to prepare ASAP to build its own political party! □

Ukraine

After the G7 and NATO summit: further fuelling of the Ukraine war

The G7 leaders have pledged to "stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes"... They also reassured the magnates of the arms industry, of continued "subsidisation", announcing that the flow of weapons into the region will even increase - although it remains a "drip feed" so that the fighting is as drawn out as possible; the objective being to weaken Putin's army, at the least possible cost to the West. And no matter the huge and devastating losses to the Ukrainians, who continue to be used as NATO's cannon fodder.

Already the construction industry is readying itself for a bonanza, rebuilding Ukraine's bombed infrastructure and its cities which have been reduced to rubble. The G7 has pledged an "international reconstruction conference and plan" to exploit this project for all it is worth. The ravages of war will make a fortune for the international (and Ukrainian!) capitalist class.

NATO expands

But the summit went much further than this. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, with 30 member states and whose main spending contributor is the US by very far (£670bn for 2021 alone), announced the largest scaling-up of its defence since the Cold War. It's not just the war in Ukraine which has prompted this. This is a classical imperialist response to economic recession: increasing defence spending is



always the main fiscal measure to rescue the capitalists at such times...

In addition, NATO has increased sevenfold (to 300,000 troops) its forces in its so-called buffer states on Russia's and Ukraine's borders. Biden announced the first permanent US base in Poland and he is sending 5,000 additional troops to Romania. Johnson - who promoted himself as Zelenskyy's best ally - said 1,000 more British troops would be sent to Estonia. Finland and Sweden were officially invited to join NATO and a new 10-year "guiding strategy" has been adopted, which ensures no possible

partnership with Moscow within this period.

They call it a new Cold War

A defence think-tank in London commented that NATO was "back on a cold war mission"... That is certainly what this recalls, except that the Cold War never actually turned into a hot war.

That said, the leaders of Western powers were very careful to emphasise, yet again, that NATO is *not* at war with Russia. When everyone knows that they are carrying out a proxy war in Ukraine. And the fact that this utterly cynical and indefensible manoeuvre has created a river of blood between the Russian and Ukrainian populations means that they have killed two birds with one stone: it's the tried and tested formula of dividing to weaken.

Let us hope that at some point soon, despite the egging on of NATO, Ukraine's largely civilian army decides to put aside its understandable nationalist fervour to defend hearth and home, and cuts its losses by declaring a permanent cease-fire. That may be the only way to put a stop to the carnage being perpetrated by Putin's unwilling but huge army, as it continues to shell and bomb its way across the Donbas. □



Our society**A general strike is what we need!**

By the end of June, it seemed as if there might be the beginning of a strike "movement" fighting for wage rises that can beat inflation. First off the mark were railworkers, with the RMT's new general secretary Mick Lynch, for once, having called a strike rather than going straight to the negotiating table. And what's more, he stood up for workers' interests when grilled by the media and impressed everyone when he just looked amused when confronted with the childish stupidity of Transport Secretary Grant Shapps.

Of course, the government has not only said that pay rises are inflationary and are out of the question, but Shapps even says

that strikers will be the cause of a rise in fares! And then there is the threatened legislation allowing bosses to use temporary workers to break strikes, and the minimum service requirement for rail services which would mean that total stoppages would be illegal...

A promising start

Just after the 3 days of strike on the railways - on 21st, 23rd, 25th June, which were co-ordinated with a one-day strike on London Underground on 21 June, there was the wholly unexpected action by barristers from the Criminal Bar Association, protesting their low pay - of just £12-13,000 pa!

But many other sections are also either balloting, expecting to ballot, or already taking strike action: Royal Mail postal workers, BT engineers, train drivers organised in ASLEF, white collar railway staff in TSSA, teaching staff, National Health Service workers... For now, Unite union leaders representing British Airways ground and check-in staff have suspended their planned strike action to consider a new pay offer. But train drivers for Greater Anglia, Hull Trains and Croydon's Tramlink (London Trams network) have already been on strike and the result of the re-ballot of railway workers in the largest train company, GTR has just come out, at the time of writing.

But will it escalate, as it needs to?

Whether all of these strikes will come together to make one big unstoppable wave, is another question. For the time being the union leaderships are in control - and can therefore start and stop strikes at will. So the strikers remain in their hands, unless they decide that it is up to them to control their own action: when, where, and how to strike. Anyway, with inflation almost 12% and rising, winning the fight for a wage rise for the whole of the working class is crucial. □

**Strike picket at King's Cross station****Anti-strike laws won't stop workers' struggles!**

In response to the railway strike in June and the looming strikes in public and private sectors this summer, the government has threatened to introduce a new string of attacks against workers' right to strike. This would add to the many laws imposed by successive governments to curb workers' rights.

After the financial crisis of 2007-8 and the austerity measures imposed by Cameron's government, the Trade Union Act of 2016 made strikes illegal unless 50% of those being asked to strike, had actually voted in the ballot. In the vital public services, like the NHS, 40% of those eligible to vote have to support a strike for it to be legal. Illegal picketing was made a criminal offence and the law also

made it easier for the police to arrest strikers. Unions were obliged to give a fortnight's, instead of one week's notice, before any strike action.

Transport secretary Grant Shapps, faced with a possible summer of discontent, has now decided to implement Cameron's 2015 proposal - so far never imposed - which would allow employers to hire temps as strike-breakers. He has, of course, also said that transport strikes would be illegal, unless a certain number of workers ensure a minimum service - something proposed in the 2019 Johnson manifesto. There's also the proposal to increase the damages threshold for illegal strikes to £1m for unions with over 100,000 members!

Whether these laws materialise or not, is still not certain. But by their sheer numbers and position in

society, workers will always be able to break them with impunity!

**Shapps and his Great British anti-strike law**

Their society

The economic recession has already begun for working people. June's RPI measure - reflecting price rises in April - was 11.1%. At the same time wages rose an average of just 4.2%. Then there was the 54% rise in energy bills and petrol and diesel going up to almost £2/litre.

Never mind though, Bank of England governor Andrew Bailey told workers that they should refrain from demanding wage rises, or prices will rise even higher! And never mind either, that price rises are precisely what make wage rises absolutely mandatory!

In fact today's crisis recalls the crisis of the late 1970s, when there was a series of strikes - the so-called "Winter of Discontent" - over the fall in real wages compared to soaring inflation - which had already peaked at 26.9% by 1975.

In 1978, with inflation remaining high, the then Labour government decided to impose a policy of pay restraint and got the union leaders to sign a social contract. They agreed to comply. In the final phase of its so-called incomes policy, the government capped wage rises

They fear a "summer of discontent"



at 5%, which at the time was half the rate of inflation. The resulting strikes, unofficial, given the signed contract, started with Ford workers who smashed PM Callaghan's policy by winning an 18% rise. Strikes then continued, involving public sector workers, who struck through the freezing winter of 1978/79. Union officials finally got workers to go back to work by the end of the February. In fact wage rises won

in those two months averaged 7% - with inflation at 8%. Labour's incomes policy was broken and the party badly discredited among its working class base. Thatcher's Tories won the election in May 1979.

There is no question that today what's needed is a "summer of discontent" - that is, strikes! And just like in 1978, it will require the initiative of workers on the ground to succeed. □

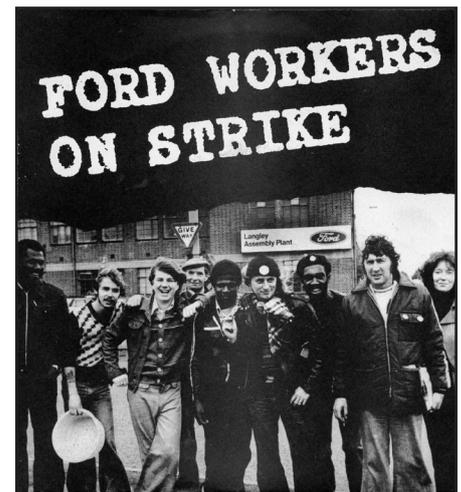
• The strike that beat wage restraint

The first breach of the Labour government's "third phase" wage restraint in 1978, came from the Ford workers, who demanded a £20/week rise (a 30% rise for line workers). That September, when Ford offered 5% in line with government policy, workers at Dagenham, Halewood and Southampton walked out immediately. Within a few days, all of Ford's British plants were at a standstill and 60,000 workers were on strike. By 5 October, union machineries had to make the strike "official". The workers stayed out for 9 weeks, having rejected a new offer at the end of October because of its strings. They finally accepted an 18% pay rise in November.

The strike had been initiated by an unofficial shop stewards' committee, known as the "Ford Workers Combine", which organised across all of Ford's British plants. It made sure that strikers themselves remained in control of their strike. They also organised a national march through London complete with a Highland bagpipe band. They even produced a record, sold for the strike fund and featuring their own strike songs.

While the national union bureaucrats handled the company negotiators, the Combine's involvement of rank-and-file workers in the strike made it much harder for them to "sell" Ford's offers to the workforce. A leaf from the Ford

workers' book would not go amiss today!



NHS: a state of collapse

According to the latest figures available, 6.48 million people were on the NHS waiting lists for non-urgent(!) treatment. And 35% of patients in need of urgent cancer care were waiting for more than 2 months for their treatment to commence. The government has allocated an additional £10.6 billion to tackle the current crisis. But it's

obvious that care can't be provided if there aren't enough staff to provide it, no matter how many millions are thrown into the system!

As of March 2022, over 100,000 hospital posts remained unfilled - including 8,000 vacancies for doctors. But the greatest proportion of these vacancies is in nursing, with 39,000 posts vacant.

And as if this was not enough, the

NHS has a huge infrastructure and maintenance backlog. So there is little new space to add the necessary beds, new scanners, or other equipment. And buildings are crumbling. In fact, "our great British NHS", with just 250 hospital beds per 100,000 inhabitants, lags behind Spain, Romania, Poland and Turkey, let alone its peers among the rich countries. The situation could not be worse.

Labour acts like a Tory clone (or clown?)

Labour's leader Keir Starmer has been calling for an "emergency budget". Yes, the cost of living crisis is an emergency. And the workers who know this are taking strike action over their falling real wages. But no surprise - the same Starmer refuses to back their action.

So what would a Labour emergency budget do? Starmer has repeatedly criticised "Tory tax rises", yet has cannot bring himself to say he would reverse the Tories' National Insurance Contribution increase. As for the "windfall tax" on energy companies, Sunak stole this policy from Labour with his extra 25% levy on their profits and said he'd also be considering stealing another Labour policy: cutting VAT on fuel. But the rest? Labour proposes a mass programme of government-sponsored home insulation! Which is all very well, but not something

• **Not "striking" at all!**

Starmer, along with his shadow foreign secretary David Lammy, had no problem whatsoever opposing the railway strikes. He even banned his frontbenchers from joining the pickets - which some had already dared to do!

Most of the MPs who joined strikers on picket lines were members of Labour's so-called Campaign Group, on the "socialist" left of the party. Amongst them was Diane Abbott, still an ally of Jeremy Corbyn. Others,

that could make a difference by this winter. There are other suggestions, however: to cut the rates for small businesses, and "*buy, make and sell more in Britain to create well-paid, secure jobs in every community*" - yes, a "buy British" campaign!



such as Angela Rayner, or Scotland's Labour leader, proclaimed their sympathy with the strikes. But we hear that Rayner preferred the opera house to the picket line...

That said, even the supportive MPs were hardly whole-heartedly with the strike. They made timid excuses for the action, for instance saying that workers had been "*left with no choice*", etc...

Of course, the fact that Starmer

It's no surprise at all that Starmer has now followed up with a firm commitment to Brexit! Except given that Johnson - Brexit's architect and protagonist - is departing in disgrace, he probably needn't have bothered! □

turned his back on the workers was no real surprise and never mind the historic Labour-union link or financial dependence the party has on the trade unions! In fact, Lammy even criticised Heathrow check-in workers striking for a 10% pay rise.

What is certain is that neither he nor Starmer will defend the interests of the working class; it's up to the working class to defend itself. Most workers already know this!

• **Another Grenfell fire just a matter of time**

This June 14th was the 5th anniversary of the fire that engulfed Grenfell Tower in west London, killing 72 residents. And while the conclusions of the still ongoing inquiry into this fire confirmed that the scale of devastation was due to the cheap combustible aluminium composite (ACM) cladding on the building, there are still over 100 buildings around the country clad with panels made of it! In a few cases the cladding was taken off, but not

replaced, leaving flats uninsulated and freezing in winter.

While survivors of the fire are determined that this preventable disaster is not repeated, a repeat disaster remains very likely. The government has rejected key recommendations of the inquiry's first phase. One of these, for instance, obliges the owners of all tall buildings to prepare evacuation plans for disabled residents. This rejection is

incomprehensible. But of course, it involves expenditure for owners and landlords... The closing statements of "module 4" of the inquiry, concluded that most of the deaths were caused by inhalation of poisonous smoke from the burning cladding. Thousands living behind such panels remain at risk. Grenfell United, the survivors' group founded in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, is still waiting "for justice and peace".

• **When there's a housing crisis, make it worse!**

The government's latest idea to resolve the housing crisis is... to extend "the right to buy" to housing association tenants. Of course, Thatcher's policy of selling off council houses to their tenants is said to have won the Tories votes. But her (apparent) aim of establishing a "property-owning democracy" led to the growth of

many little landlords, who bought up cheap ex-council homes and rented them out for a profit. Properties bought from councils now make up 40% of all private rented homes in England!

At the time, money from sales went to the Treasury, not to councils, which were not allowed to replace sold homes. They

also had to transfer remaining housing estates to housing associations. Since then there has been no building of social housing on any scale and right-to-buy and a string of subsidies to private home-buyers have only exacerbated the housing shortage. And, moreover, they have fuelled not only house prices but private rents!

Their politics

When Patel's plans to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda was stymied by the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), that was not the end of her anti-migrant crusade. The Home Office is "preparing for the next flight"; and has launched a scheme to closely monitor every move asylum seekers make. Some of those arriving in boats or on the back of lorries will be fitted with electronic tags, which will tell authorities their whereabouts. They could be banned from some locations, or might have to be under home curfew, risking being sent to detention centres or being prosecuted if they don't "comply".

Britain isn't the first country to use this GPS "technology" on migrants. In the US, Obama and Trump initiated electronic monitoring of thousands of migrants when they were released from detention centres.

Of course, when it comes to Ukrainian

refugees the treatment could not be more different. Tory and Labour MPs - like former housing secretary Robert Jenrick or environment minister Victoria Prentis - personally host Ukrainians in their homes. They haven't offered to host Iraqis or Afghans - not even after the Afghan earthquake left hundreds of thousands homeless last month.

Embarrassed by this overtly racist

policy when he was in Rwanda for the Commonwealth meeting, Johnson felt obliged to say that Ukrainians arriving in Britain "illegally" might also be deported there. But the fact is that most poor migrants don't come from Europe and are not "white". And since they are our fellow workers, we have an obligation to defend their right to stay here. Nobody else will. ☐



• Rwanda's Kigali hosts them all...

In very bad taste, only to be expected from Johnson's now ex-government, Rwanda's capital Kigali was chosen to host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting at the end of June. This also marked the start of President Kagame's two-year Commonwealth chairmanship. And no surprise there, given the Home Office's policy to establish a deportation camp for would-be asylum-seekers in Kigali and Patel's friendly links with this notorious assassin.

In fact the Home Office itself ranked Rwanda 45th (out of 49 in Africa) when it comes to allowing freedom

of political expression, and 47th for "freedom from political killings and torture by the government" - no doubt a recommendation, since the idea is to use the threat of a one-way ticket to Rwanda as a deterrent!

In fact Rwanda has long been used as a place to send "unwanted" refugees. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) itself evacuated refugees there from (albeit) horrendous conditions in Libya, in 2019. Since then, 900 refugees from Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan have been sent to Kigali - 67% of whom have apparently since resettled in third countries. And

despite its admission that "asylum-seekers [in Rwanda] may not be treated in accordance with accepted international standards. For example, in the context of protests by refugees in Rwanda against food ration cuts in 2018, 12 individuals were killed, 66 were arrested and some remain detained..." the UNHCR carries on despatching refugees there.

Today, it objects to Patel's refugee policy. But not because of *where* she wants to send them, but because a legal nicety is missing from the London-Kigali agreement... So much for that.

• The Commonwealth: rename it "common poverty"?

Rwanda only joined the Commonwealth in 2009. This Commonwealth, which is today a "community" of 54 mainly ex-British colonies helping British capital to maintain its commercial interest in their bounty, has recently admitted a few new member countries like Mozambique, an ex-Portuguese colony and Rwanda, which was under French, Belgian and German rule before its independence in 1961. So at the end of this year's meeting Togo and Gabon were admitted to the club. These are tiny fiefdoms

belonging respectively to two families which have "run" them for over 50 years; the Bongo family in Gabon, and General Gnassingbe, followed by his son, in Togo.

Half of the club's members are so-called "Small Island Developing States", i.e., very poor countries which rely on support from rich countries like Britain... which by the way has just cut its aid budget... But never mind that; the "theme" of this year's meeting was "Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating, Transforming",

"post-covid recovery" and food shortages.

In fact, many of these poverty-stricken countries in the so-called "Global South", have been devastated by floods and droughts, due to climate change - for which the "Global North" has no remedy! Indeed, if any help is at hand, today it mostly comes from China - and historically, it came from the former Soviet Union. Which may explain why (to Johnson's dismay), most members refused to openly condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

New bill of (limited) human rights

Just after the intervention of the ECHR over Rwandan deportations, Dominic Raab, Johnson's former deputy announced that a British "bill of rights" would be expedited in its passage through parliament.

The new bill would replace the 1998

Human Rights Act which requires British courts, including the Supreme Court, to "take account" of decisions of the ECHR. Never mind the fact that British courts are not even required to follow the decisions of ECHR. Indeed, they can decline to do so...

Raab has deliberately played on the confusion over the roles of the ECHR, formed in the aftermath of

WW2 at Britain's initiative - in fact by the bulldog-hero, Winston Churchill - and the European Court of Justice in Brussels, which is the appeal court for the EU. It's a great irony that this government should talk about upholding the "British people's" rights at the same time as it introduces anti-strike laws and laws prohibiting public protests...

40 years after the Falklands war

On 14 June 1982, the Falklands war ended with the surrender of Argentina to Britain. This conflict for the conquest of a practically uninhabited archipelago, began on the 2nd April and lasted nine weeks, costing the lives of 904 soldiers - 649 Argentines and 255 British.

The Falkland Islands, located in the South Atlantic, 400 kilometres from the Argentine coast and 12,000 kilometres from Britain have always been claimed by Argentina. However their 2,000 inhabitants - mainly sheep farmers - are English-speaking descendants of British settlers. Britain's economic interest in the islands had always been so negligible that the British government had considered sharing their management with Argentina, or even handing them over.

Malvinas Argentinas

However Argentine general Galtieri, at the head of an unpopular and repressive military dictatorship since 1981, decided to make the nationalistic gesture of occupying the islands on 2 April 1982. While he had effectively repressed Argentine's working class including by making 300,000 workers "disappear", popular protest against his regime was now threatening to return. The "retaking" of the islands for Argentina would, he hoped, establish his popularity. And given the past history of the relationship with Britain over the islands, he reckoned that Britain would have no interest in intervening.

However, he miscalculated badly. British Prime Minister, Margaret

Thatcher wasted no time in declaring war on Argentina and launching a crusade to "save" the Falkland islanders. On 5 April, she sent a hundred warships, plus a nuclear submarine, to the archipelago - the existence of which few among the British population were even aware.

Merciless aggression

While Argentine soldiers had taken possession of the islands with instructions not to cause a single casualty, on 2 May, Thatcher ordered the torpedoing of the Argentine cruiser General Belgrano, killing 323 sailors, most of them young conscripts. Galtieri retaliated by blowing up HMS Sheffield on 4 May, but was unable to to turn the tide in his favour. On 21 May, British troops landed on the islands, and within 3 weeks they forced an Argentine surrender. During this "reconquest" British paratroopers killed three civilians, used chemical weapons and executed Argentine soldiers who were about to surrender.

Blood for her votes

The decision to mobilise such a spectacular arsenal in order to regain control of these desolate lands, may have seemed surprising, but Thatcher had good reason. In office since 1979, she was presiding over a potentially explosive social situation: the unemployment rate had just passed the 3 million mark. Her attacks against the steelworkers had caused other workers to go on the offensive. Riots had broken out in 1981 in the black working

Anniversary

class areas of Brixton and Toxteth. Galtieri's invasion gave her the opportunity to show that she should not be messed with; after all, wasn't she the "the Iron Lady"?

Moreover, British imperialism - which had given up almost all its colonies - was not going to let itself be dispossessed of the few which remained. Their importance was not merely symbolic. In the West Indies, the Cayman, Bermuda and Virgin Islands were (and are) valuable tax havens; in the Indian Ocean, the Chagos Archipelago is an ideally located military base for their American ally; and Gibraltar, at the southern tip of Western Europe, and also a military base, is strategically located. Anyway for Thatcher, to be humiliated by Argentina would have been a sign of weakness. What's more, didn't British multinationals rely on a state capable of guaranteeing their interests around the world?

Labour's warmonger and union opposition

As soon as the war started, the Labour Party, led by Michael Foot, proclaimed its support. Never mind that Foot was supposed to represent the left wing of Labour, or that he posed as a pacifist. He now demanded that the government "*act, not talk*", in the name of the Falklanders' "right to self-determination"!

On the other hand Jim Slater, leader of the National Union of Seamen, appealed to his men from the decks of the QE2 as it left for the war, not to volunteer. He was shouted down. He told them: "*Some of you won't come back and those who do, will soon be forgotten after you get the sack*". And he was proved right.

Having lost the war, Galtieri resigned and a year later the military junta fell apart, challenged by protests in the streets. In Britain, however, Thatcher used "her" Falklands victory to win the 1983 general election.

Today, since oil has been discovered around the archipelago, the British military presence on the islands has become permanent. And so, the Argentine Malvinas for the time being remain "British"... □

[partly based on an article published in the newspaper of *Lutte Ouvrière* on 02/04/2022]



King's Cross railway station (London)**View from the KX picket line**

For the first time in 30 years, Network Rail workers together with rail workers from 13 Train Operating Companies across England went on strike for 3 days in June, stopping most train services, and partially closing London underground. They demanded a pay rise, no job cuts nor cuts in conditions.

On the picket line at KX, we had an enthusiastic reception from almost everyone who came by. Doctors, teachers, students and so many workers from all walks of life came to support us, bringing home-made cookies, tea and coffee and a market trader even

brought artisan bread and cheese. And other rail workers who are still waiting for their ballot papers like train drivers and cleaners came to encourage us!

So no matter how much Transport Secretary Shapps slaps us off, claiming we plan to "punish millions of innocent people" or calling our strike an "outdated practice" we will not accept their insulting offer of 2% with a further 1% tied to job cuts!

But it is not just the below inflation pay offer and the thousands of maintenance and ticket office positions to be cut. We



are so short staffed already that we're not only having to carry out our own maintenance duties, but also doing the work of other depots that are short-staffed. So, there's only one option for us - and that is to win this fight!

• Striking together

We had lively pickets up and down the country during our strike days. And despite Shapps and Co calling us all sort of names, to turn "the public" against us it didn't work. Because "the travelling public" includes workers just like us, with exactly the same problems. We saw the support here at KX where workers from other unions or jobs came to show their support bringing us donations, food, drink or simply words of encouragement! They said they can't wait to join us! [Workers' Platform King's X 29/06/22]

• Rail workers together

We were also happy to attend that surprise rally on Saturday where pickets from Liverpool street, Paddington, St Pancras, Euston, Victoria, and more...came to join us. We must have been 700 to 800. And it was not only railway workers who came! At KX, we're looking forward to all other workers joining us in the near future. [Workers' Platform King's X 29/06/22]

• Our next strike...

So where are we at now? We hear there's a meeting this week of the union officials, in

order to decide on further strike days. We'd say there's no time to be lost, but of course we want as many other workers as possible to be fighting for decent pay and conditions and against job cuts alongside us as possible! [Workers' Platform King's X 29/06/22]

• Losing his identity?

We heard that the head of LNER catering tried to do the on-board hosts' job during the strike... He put in a catering order to Gate Gourmet. And then was upset he didn't receive it. Yup, he'd got the train ID wrong... Of course! [Workers' Platform King's X 29/06/22]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**Cooling-off until it's too hot?!**

At the time of writing, we are being balloted for strike action over pay. We've been offered a 2% pay rise, tied to attacks on hard-won allowances, among other cuts to conditions. However, we only received our ballot papers on 28 June, i.e. two full months after RM bosses had announced their attack and pay insult. The reason for this is a so-called "Dispute Resolution Procedure", which the Communication Workers Union leadership signed up to as part of a deal done with the bosses several years ago, designed to avert strike action. And the problem is that it seems to be kicking in yet again!

This procedure stipulates "a time-bound one-month process for resolution of national issues after a dispute has been raised". It also says that "if resolution hasn't been achieved, there will be an opportunity for referral to the national parties for a time-bound one week review" - in other words, referral to external arbitration. The union leadership in fact agreed to 5-week long cooling-off period! So whether today's pay strike will actually mean strike, even when we've voted for it, still remains to be seen! The result is due on the 19 July.

In the meantime, Unite/CMA, which represents 2,400 RM managers, has



announced that there will be a work to rule between 15 and 19 July, followed by strike action between 20 and 22 July over plans to cut 700 of their jobs, and slash their pay by up to £7,000!

So what about us? It would certainly be in our interests to walk out with them, if we are still being kept waiting, no matter what our feelings may be towards them!

• Our revisions to come

There were meant to be revisions in Deliveries next month... and that would have meant things getting worse for us. But thanks to this dispute, these revisions are not just being accepted as they usually are.

And let's hope that this time we'll get the revisions that we want and not the ones that management wants, when it does happen. [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 29/06/22]

• We want to be in this fight

RM-PFS bosses promised to pay us the Living Wage Foundation rate of £11.05/hr (£9.90/hr outside London) in May, back-dated to April. But guess what? Our May payslip was still showing the same old wage rate! In fact £11.05/hr is already too little to live on in London, particularly with inflation at 11.7%! So not only do we want the new rate on our pay slip this Thursday (plus what's owed to us), but we want to fight together with our sorting, delivery and distribution workmates for decent wages

- and conditions! [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 29/06/22]

• Sharing notes

We feel totally in solidarity with railway workers, who were on strike 3 days last week. Hopefully we'll join soon! And on another positive note, we were pleased to welcome some new faces temporarily transferred here because of the strikes. Especially as it gave us a chance to discuss our own upcoming one! [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 29/06/22]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**Ford's contractor Lineside: they've crossed our red line!**

At Ford Dagenham, contractor Lineside logistics (LLL), is currently experiencing a severe shortage of workers. Since 2020, many agency and permanent workers have been leaving for other companies in Essex, like the steel distributor Rainham Steel, and more recently, the electric truck manufacturer TEEVA.

LLL workers are paid a lot less than Ford workers. They get only £360/w compared to £600/w for Ford employees. They do not get paid Occupational Sick

Pay. Same goes for lay-off pay. LLL gets away with an arrangement covering only 60% of basic pay - from which agency workers are excluded.

The agency Axiom - run by the same owner as LLL - provides agency workers on 3-month rolling contracts, for periods of 1 to 2 years. Despite this, the job was considered more stable and better-paid than other workplaces in East London and Essex, like Amazon warehouses for instance. However with the increase in frequency of lay-offs, the permanent



threat of sackings linked to down-scaling in production with single shift running - permanent workers have had a large pay cut, which is why they've left.

Agency workers, brought in to make up for the exodus, are faced with doing 2-3 workers' jobs, and so they also leave! Lineside bosses are going to have to pay up, literally, if they want to keep their workers - and their Ford contract... ☐

• We want inflation plus

No surprise that Ford wants to wriggle out of the deal it signed over pay, last year! They've not got a shred of integrity! They never knew inflation was going to be so much? Too bad. A deal is a deal. This is the 4th richest car company in the world... so now they want us to accept a £5,000 lump sum and 6% in October? No way! We want what was agreed - it is our due. Inflation is ever-rising, so we really need inflation PLUS, right now. As for the £5,000, that we'll accept, but only

in addition and only if its made into an annual, pensionable bonus. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 6/7/22]

• ...And all on 3-shift money!

Yes this is the least we can expect after the wage cuts Ford's imposed here; from 3-shift to one-shift money on Tiger for instance! And then Panther workers (assembling Panther engines) on their 3-shift money (for now!!) are sent to work with us on the Chicken Farm (where the Tiger engine is produced) - and how fair is that? This really makes us angry. We demand equal pay for equal work - at

the higher rate - same for all! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 6/7/22]

• Damn confused.com

Well we all wanted clocking to go in DEP (Diesel Engine Plant). So finally Ford says it's going to "modernise" and get rid of it. But the bosses are so scared of change that they gave us a long confusing set of instructions which they fearfully hope will prevent us from being "undisciplined"... i.e., coming late and leaving early! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 6/7/22]

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

Rudolph & Hellmann (R&H) BMW's logistics contractor also can't find enough workers. Agency workers try out the job, and then don't turn up next day. And permanent workers are leaving for better-paid and less physical jobs elsewhere, like in the Siemens factory, Amazon, Tesco and ASDA Warehouses, in the surrounding towns. Or the Oxford bus company, which advertises jobs at £14.60/hr on a big board near BMW's main entrance. Ironically, it was the Oxford bus company which had to increase its wages to prevent its drivers from leaving the job for BMW. As for BMW itself, it has waived the 9 month

period it used to impose on R&H workers before allowing them to apply for a job in BMW.

To tackle the labour shortage, R&H has come up with a new arsenal of recruitment agencies - PMP, New Recruits, Planet Recruitment, Selective, etc. all of which employ temps on zero-hour contracts, often on the minimum wage. Shifts last 10-12hrs, and while there are still regular COVID outbreaks these workers receive no sick pay.

So this is the riddle: how come, in the face of such a labour shortage, are these cowboy companies getting away



with paying such low wages? When the logic of supply and demand dictates that they would have to pay more? Since our recent strike over pay yielded only a tiny rise and the Unite officials allowed R&H to get away with introducing a tier-system, it's obvious what has to be done next..! ☐

• BMW is breaking its own pay deal

We hear that BMW has gone to Unite looking to wriggle out of the years 2 and 3 RPI commitments in the 3-year deal agreed this January.

RPI inflation is already over twice the 5.5% which is 2022's so-called pay rise.

But with inflation spiralling, well of course our pay needs to spiral! [BMW Mini plant Oxford 4/7/22]

• Our timing isn't negotiable!

It feels as if timings of processes are constantly getting shorter! It's no longer a matter of Stabeltakt messing around in our area twice per year or so. Every morning there's a PL with some "process optimisation specialist" coming down from the offices, looking for seconds to cut. But as it turns out, we haven't got any seconds to give them! And if they insist, it's likely that what they'll speed up is "the walk-out process"... [BMW Mini plant Oxford 4/7/22]

• We breathe better outside!

We're being asked to stay and cover for other shifts again, because many workmates are off with Covid! Some shifts (and areas like harnesses and doors) seem to have it worse than others for the moment...

But what changes are going to be put in place for protection? Or will we need to protect ourselves by making sure we get lots of virus-free air outside? [BMW Mini plant Oxford 4/7/22]

International

Letter from India: the unemployed take to the streets once again

In June, aspiring Indian army recruits organised angry demonstrations against Modi's army recruitment reforms. They targeted government symbols - from trains to his party's offices. Coming after protests by prospective railway employees, it seems Modi's cuts in government jobs are now provoking an explosive backlash from the unemployed.

On 14 June, the Defence Ministry had introduced the "Agnipath" (Path of Fire) scheme, under which army recruits would only be hired for a 4-year "tour of duty". Millions of working-class youth try for years to pass the physical and written exams for these jobs, which were guaranteed for 15 years, with life-long pension and medical benefits. But now, they will be paid only ₹21-35,000 (£219-364) monthly and not be eligible for benefits or pensions. After four years, 75% of them will be retrenched and the remaining re-enrolled - their first years not counting toward gratuities or pensions. In fact Agnipath significantly cuts military jobs: the army used to recruit 60,000 soldiers yearly - now



only 46,000 will be recruited into all branches of the military, of which only 11,500 will be permanent. The government claimed that retrenched soldiers will get priority in public-sector jobs, but this sector has been slashing positions for years!

Two days after the announcement of Agnipath, the anger of the unemployed youth exploded. For five days across 12 regions they blocked highways, and burnt trains and government offices. They attacked the police, burning police stations and cars. These youth

- many of whom were yesterday ardent Modi supporters - attacked Modi's party offices. On 19 June, they called for a "Shut Down India" protest, organising demonstrations and blocking roads. The railways had to cancel 500 trains ... for fear of them being torched.

Coming four months after protests on the railways, this may signal the beginning of more mobilisations of the unemployed against the government. Their natural ally, the working class, has every reason to join them. □

• **Ford Chennai workers occupy!**

In September 2021, Ford announced that it would stop production at its Indian plants. However, it also announced that electric vehicles would be built in India from 2022! So on 30 May 2022, Ford's 2600 Chennai Assembly workers whose plant had been earmarked for closure, asked management for clarification... and were told that the plant will close in just one month's time, on 30 June!

Workers did not take this lying down. They demanded 300 days' severance pay for every year of completed service (against Ford's offer of 80 days!). Ford managers tried to force them to sign a no-strike undertaking, which they refused. The next day, the A-shift demonstrated inside the plant. When B-shift workers were not allowed to enter without signing the undertaking,

A-shift workers occupied the plant and the B-shift the surrounding lawns, taking the last 1,500 Ford EcoSport cars "hostage"! At the time of writing, Ford has increased its offer to 115 days pay/year of service and medical insurance coverage till 2024 - but the strike continues. The Ford Chennai workers are determined to make Ford pay.

Roe v Wade repealed: the fight for abortion rights begins again

The US Supreme Court's repeal of the 1973 Roe v Wade judgement means that states are now free to implement their own laws to restrict, ban, or allow abortions. And given the current reactionary (mostly religious-led) backlash against women's rights, it seems there'll be even fewer places where women can access an abortion - and it had already become very difficult.

Arkansas was the first state to

enact a "trigger law" anticipating the judgement, banning abortions from conception(!) and unless the mother's life is in danger. Five more trigger laws have been put on hold by the courts; 17 states have also legislated bans from conception, 3 have banned abortions after 6 weeks and 3 after 13 weeks. The response from Biden has been predictably weak: "protection" for women seeking abortions outside their home states, but no financial support for travel.

This reactionary victory will encourage opponents of abortion

in Britain, where the 1967 Abortion Act, unlike Roe vs Wade, didn't even grant abortion as a right. This Act decriminalised abortions, but two doctors still have to certify that continuing the pregnancy risks serious physical, social or psychological harm to the woman concerned. And the law is subject to challenge by parliament: already in 1990 the time limit was cut from 28 weeks to 24. So here in Britain it's not just a question of defending the 1967 Act, but extending women's right to abortion, which should be free, and without time limits.

Colombia's election: disrupting the status quo?

International

On 19 June, the 62-year old Gustavo Petro, was elected president of Colombia. Bucking the trend of all previous elections, Petro is a "left" populist, described by the British Financial Times as "a radical leftwing president who wants to upend [Colombia's] economic model"! He won despite the fact that the media was determined to discredit him, pointing to his association with the so-called M19 terrorist group in his youth... This group having been named for the idealistic, pro-democracy, nationalist April 19 Movement, formed after the fraudulent presidential elections of 19 April 1970 - 52 years ago!



Candidacy is a lethal risk

It was the third time Petro had stood for election. And after his victory, he promptly appointed Francia Márquez as his deputy (they had campaigned together and the turnout among the black population in Petro's favour was largely thanks to her). She is the very first black woman to hold this post. Of course this victory of the "left" is also a first: left-wing candidates have never managed to reach the last round of elections before. In fact holding any kind of public office which might be seen as a potential threat by the Colombian bourgeoisie - and its US sponsors - has meant taking the risk of assassination. Last year, 145 community leaders, trade unionists, human rights activists and environmentalists were murdered by paramilitary gangs - the usual way the right and far-right, which has so far dominated Colombian politics, carries out its "business".

Petro received over 50.8% of

votes, with 11.2m people voting for him, the highest number ever cast for a presidential candidate. His rival, the Trump-like Hernandez trailed by 797,973 votes, getting 46.9%. But 20 million people cast ballots nationwide - a record turnout. Many of Petro's votes came from regions dominated up to now by far-right paramilitary groups which habitually terrorise the population. In the Northwest, for instance, an armed gang recently enforced a 4-day "strike" blocking businesses and transport, to protest the extradition of their leader Otoñiel, but also to show who is in control.

Unprecedented turnout

In other words, a section of the electorate, which does not vote in normal circumstances, this time decided to voice its opposition to the political clique in power around the far-right Alvaro Uribe Vélez,

which has clung to power for over two decades. In fact Uribe's candidate, Federico Gutiérrez, didn't even make it to the second round. So he then called for a vote for billionaire Hernández, who stood on an anti-corruption ticket, and never mind that he himself was being investigated for corruption!

Petro's success has undoubtedly created illusions in the possibility for change and for peace in a country which for many years has been ravaged by civil war and seen the state ransacked by the political thugs in power.

Only a workers' and peasants' mobilisation can force change

Petro has promised the youth of the shanty towns, who led the protests against tax and price rises last year, free education and decent jobs, the reinstatement of taxes on rich capitalist families - cancelled in 2019, which was a factor in the popular unrest last year. He has also promised the poor peasants agrarian reform and said he'll force the big landlords to produce food on their under-used estates, to alleviate growing hunger in the country.

However, left-reformist Petro is obliged to sit down at the parliamentary "negotiating table" with Hernández and even ex-president Uribe. It's a foregone conclusion that his promised reforms will be stymied, unless those on the ground mobilise and are able to hold out against the landlords, capitalist families and their armed paramilitary gangs! ☐



Celebration in the poor town of Timbiquí after the victory of Petro and Márquez

Sri Lanka

After the general strikes of April and May, this month Sri Lankan workers protested against IMF-dictated government attacks on wages and conditions. While the media has focused on the 'GoGotaGo' protests calling only for President Gotabaya Rajapaksha's resignation, the working-class is resisting attempts to make the population pay for the country's bankruptcy.

This month Prime Minister Wickremasinghe declared that the government will meet IMF conditions for a bailout, by attacking workers. He announced plans to cut 800,000 public-sector jobs and slash pensions, and "dictated" that public-sector employees should find jobs abroad and send back foreign currency to the country! This, while Sri Lanka already faces labour shortages - for instance, a shortfall of 30,000 nurses in public hospitals. In order to save fuel, the government has cut the working week to 4 days, and declared a two-week "lockdown" till 10 July, drastically reducing workers' incomes.

Workers, who tested their strength in the 28 April and 6 May general strikes which forced Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksha to resign, responded to these new attacks. Textile workers at Colombo's

The working class on the move



giant Katunayake Free Trade Zone clashed with the police over the militarisation of these zones, where no labour laws apply, the arrest of protesting workers and cuts to pensions. The protest left one dead and 200 injured. Ceylon Electricity Board workers struck against the proposed sale of the nationalised company to the Indian Adani Group and health workers struck over reductions to overtime payments. The President banned strikes in these sectors, which the health workers defied by striking again for free fuel and higher

wages! At the end of the month, Ceylon Petroleum Corporation workers encircled the car of a senior bureaucrat charged with selling the company's depots to oil giants Caltex, Shell and Esso.

Through these movements, the Sri Lankan working class has the chance to lead the popular mobilisation against the government. And in contrast to the middle-class Galle Face protests, they represent the interests of the majority of the population. We can only hope that they will take it. □

Bangladesh

The worst flooding in Bangladesh in more than 100 years, has exposed cruel realities in a country held up as a "development-miracle", and an economic success story. More than 4.5 million people remain stranded, hundreds have died, 75,000 hectares (185,000 acres) of paddy and 300,000 hectares (741,000 acres) of other crops have been damaged, including maize, jute and vegetables. For weeks now, millions have been without drinking water

and basic supplies of food and medicine. Thousands are at risk of waterborne diseases in this "middle-income" country!

The catastrophic impact of climate change because of rising rainfall during the Monsoon in Bangladesh, which is situated in the floodplains of two great rivers in South Asia, has been known for a long time now. The International Displacement Monitoring Centre says nearly five million Bangladeshis were displaced internally between 2008 and

2014, mostly leaving for the shanty towns of Dhaka and Chittagong. According to the World Bank, another 13.3 million people could follow them by 2050. Even so, this is hardly a priority for Sheikh Hasina, the country's president. He has been boasting of the country's longest bridge over the turbulent river Padma as a "symbol of national pride", while no preparations whatsoever were made for the millions being displaced. This is one of the most densely populated and poorest regions in the world, with half of the population living in slums and 1,100 people packed into every square kilometre...

While Hasina makes empty gestures like everyone else in global climate conferences, these "climate refugees" provide a reserve army of cheap labour for the world's second largest ready-made garment industry worth billions of pounds. No wonder neither the regime nor the "international community" of companies who benefit, have an interest in taking measures to prevent these regular disasters affecting the population. Their only interest is in extracting profits out of it. □



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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