

WORKERS' fight



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

Let's be provoked... and co-ordinate our strikes!

While holding out on offering adequate pay rises, and thus de facto keeping the strikes going, the government decided to introduce its so-called "Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill" - already promised in the 2019 manifesto. Grant Shapps, now Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, told MPs that the new law would ensure that "vital public services" like the NHS and transport would "have to maintain a basic function by delivering minimum safety levels, ensuring that lives and livelihoods are not lost" during strikes.

In the context of lives being lost in significant numbers thanks to the government's NHS/Social Care "policies" and livelihoods being lost thanks to the austerity and the low wage economy the Tories have been presiding over since 2010, this statement could only be met with painful guffaws. Nevertheless, Shapps kept repeating that it was all about the "safety" of the general public, as if it was strikes, rather than the inability of the emergency services to function any more, which were putting the public at risk!

This is either (very) ill-timed anti-strike propaganda... or a blatant provocation!

If only there was minimal NHS service!

In actual fact there have already been de facto "minimum service levels" during most of the stoppages, with managers driving trains, resulting in up to 20% of trains running from King's Cross to Edinburgh, for instance. On the other hand, nurses and ambulance workers have organised their own effective emergency cover. This has always been the case during past strikes in the NHS, and so too, today!

So Shapps is just trying an old anti-working class ploy; attempting to generate public hostility to strikes, which sadly for him, the public is largely in sympathy with. Why else would ambulance strikers hold up



placards that say "strike to save the NHS", unless the majority of the public knows exactly where they stand - with patients, with health workers, for a rescued NHS!

But given that so far, the government's strategy has been to delay any concrete talks, in the hope the strikers will give up, there surely has to be a change in the strikers' strategy. It's not a question of maintaining public sympathy, after all, but winning the fight; and that can only be ensured if yes, there is a "general strike" - the co-ordination which the union leaders are so anxious to deny! The "national day of protest" in different towns and cities around the country announced for 1 February by the TUC, even alongside a strike by civil servants, cannot allow the strikers to feel, let alone use, their full collective strength - which potentially comprises several million workers!

Overcoming narrow sectional interests

On the nurses' side another problem looms however, although among union

leaders this is an old affliction: Pat Cullen - the general secretary of the Royal College of Nursing - almost boasted of her sectionalist attitude "I just want fairness for my nurses", said she. And when asked about co-ordinated action with other unions in order to be more effective, she was quoted by the Guardian newspaper as saying, "Our dispute is about the nursing profession and doing a deal for nursing is my only priority. My members spoke very clearly to give the RCN a unique mandate for strike action. Our days of action and future planning is based only on what is best for nursing..."

The leaders of the other unions are hardly any better, using the excuse that the public support for the strikers might be lost if they co-ordinate strike action, "causing disruption to a range of key public services". It seems not to occur to them that a large show of strength - for once - might just frighten the government and employers into backing down - and coughing up! ☐

Their society

On Wednesday 7 December, the Chinese government announced a U-turn on its zero-Covid policy. Mass testing, lockdowns, travel restrictions between regions, and quarantine in state facilities is now over; asymptomatic and mild cases can self-isolate at home. This was seemingly the result of a wave of protests against the severity of the lockdowns which were still in place in case of an outbreak. Although of course the detrimental effect on the Chinese economy in the context of a worsening global crisis was undoubtedly a factor.

The number of Covid cases in China is now rising fast. This is the

Sunak's hypocritical anti-Chinese rhetoric

pretext which Sunak's government used to implement a policy of border checks on 5 January, consisting of random tests on (just!) 8 arriving Chinese passengers... So, nothing to do with preventing incoming Covid cases! This is all about playing to anti-Chinese prejudice and xenophobia, not least in his own party. But it also potentially provides the government with another scapegoat for the health crisis, as this winter, the NHS reveals itself to be in ruins and Sunak is himself faced with a wave of discontent.

"Sadly" for Sunak, he can't engage in any flamboyant gestures a la Johnson, like the "freedom

day" - which took away masks as Covid cases were soaring! Nor can he even measure accurately the number of Covid cases still occurring in Britain, since mass testing was never in place, testing stations have been closed down, and tests have to be paid for... In fact, China's current outbreak is highly likely to be due to imported cases from the West's Covid breeding grounds! As for comparing the relative success rates of anti-Covid strategies, the proof of the pudding is that China has so far limited deaths to 3 per million, compared to Britain's 2,400 per million. ☐

• China: a poor country

Despite the distorted narrative of western governments, which claim China's economy will outstrip those of the rich West, the repeated warnings of a "Chinese threat", or the ongoing US-China trade war and US military provocations, it's worth remembering that China's capitalists were born in a poor country.

China is rated by the world bank as an "upper-middle-income" country. Its GDP was \$17.73 trillion in 2021. The bank duly notes that this is the second largest GDP in the world, after the US (\$23.32 trillion). But China's GDP per capita - that is, per head of population - is just \$12,556, which puts it at the same level as Russia (\$12,194) and not so far from Mexico (\$10,045). Compare this to the US whose GDP per head is \$70,248 or Britain's, which is \$46,510.

In 2022, the extreme poverty rate in China was of 10.8%, which represents over 151 million Chinese, living on less than £4.50 per day, which is roughly half of the British minimum wage. This is similar to the rate of poverty in Iran or Paraguay.

In China's rural areas like Xinjiang, Tibet or Yunnan, but also some regions of the deindustrialised North, the poverty rate increases to 30% and above. But



even in the "wealthy" South-Eastern cities like Shanghai and Shenzhen, where the main financial centres are based, extreme poverty still affects 4.2 million people! Some studies which use a £18/day cut-off for their "poverty line" thus estimate that 80-90% of Chinese people live in poverty.

Despite this, the vice president of the World Bank claims: "*China's poverty reduction story is a story of persistent growth through economic transformation*" and it considers that extreme poverty was already eradicated

by 2020!

However today, in the context of the evolving global recession (plus US trade sanctions) China's economy is predicted to grow by only 3.2% in 2023 - far less than its 8.1% growth in 2022. And since most of its growth has depended on foreign investment, as this is cut, China's growth will slow even further and poverty will grow. Size might matter, but form doesn't change content: China is no superpower, it remains dependent western capitalism... like Iran and Paraguay.

Weapons still flood into Ukraine

Back in November, the US Chief of Staff, Mark Milley, encouraged Ukrainian president Zelensky to negotiate with Putin, arguing that "*the probability of a Ukrainian military victory is not high*". This could have been the reason behind Zelensky's visit to the US last month. There is obvious disagreement over the preconditions for "peace" negotiations with Russia. While Zelensky wants to recapture all of Ukraine, including the

Crimea which was annexed by Russia in 2014, the US appears to disagree. A total defeat like this for Putin could create a regional power vacuum that the US really does not want to see.

So, weapons are still being provided to Ukraine - the US offering \$45bn-worth more - but not those long range missile systems which could hit targets in Russia and only a limited number of tanks. For the US, it doesn't matter how long the war drags on for, nor how many people on both sides die. It wants

to ensure that nothing happens which destabilises the status quo.

As for Britain, Rishi Sunak follows Biden. After the USA, Britain has the largest NATO military budget, which will be increased to £50bn this year. That includes at least £2.3bn of military spending in support for Ukraine in 2023, also the second largest after the US. And in the context of the economic crisis, this huge boost for the merchants of death only makes them want to expand their gruesome trade even further.

Crisis in the NHS more deadly than Covid...

NHS

Already in December, The Royal College of Emergency Medicine said that 300 to 500 people a week were dying as a result of delays to emergency care. At the time, 30% of all ambulances were waiting more than 1 hour to hand over patients to hospital emergency departments, double the maximum recommend time, with some waiting 5 or more hours. Meanwhile, people with suspected heart attacks or strokes have been waiting, on average, an hour and a half for an ambulance to arrive, instead of the 18 minute target.

New Office for National Statistics figures confirm that the number of "excess deaths" is the highest since worst week of the pandemic in February 2021, and has been above average for the past 6 months. Less than 20% of these were a result of Covid. It is the collapsed state of the NHS which is killing patients.

This situation is comparable to the the worst days of the pandemic. Yet there has not been one Cobra meeting, no Prime



Minister's press conference, not even an attempt to put up "Nightingale Hospitals" to provide extra beds, if only for the 14,000 so-called bed-blockers who are being blamed for occupying acute hospital beds and thus exacerbating A&E queues...

Of course the NHS crisis is the result of years of neglect. Since 2010, health spending has lagged by 20% behind other rich countries, yet nevertheless, Tory backbenchers are still calling for the inadequate NHS budget to be cut. □

...exacerbated by the crisis in social care

There are 10% fewer beds in the NHS now, than there were in 2019, when Britain already had the fewest beds per person of all rich countries. Today, there are just over 2 beds per 1,000 people, compared to 8 per 1,000 in Germany and 6 per 1,000 in France.

This fact obviously contributes to the delays patients are experiencing in A&E. But to make matters worse, about 1 in 7

of all beds (about 14,000) are actually occupied by patients who no longer need to be in hospital but who can't be discharged, for the simple reason that there is nowhere for them to go. This is a result of the even greater crisis in social care.

There are 165,000 job vacancies in the social care sector due to the low pay and poor conditions offered by private employers. This is the main reason why patients

become stuck in hospital. The government's solution? Buy a few beds in the private care homes as a temporary measure. But despite serial promises to "fix" social care - Johnson more or less staked his life on it - there is no plan emanating from Downing Street. And how could there be? The government is hardly likely to renationalise social care and centralise it under the NHS, which is what "fixing it" would require!

• NHS workers on strike; government in disarray

This December NHS workers had had enough of the government's refusal to negotiate a pay offer based on reality, rather than the recommendations of a hand-picked so-called Pay Review Body. The nurses demand a rise of 19% - 5% above inflation to make up for the fact that their real wages have been falling steadily for 3 years. So on the 15 and 20 December 320,000 nurses across the country gathered in large numbers on picket lines as the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) launched its first major strike. And on the 21 and 28 December emergency ambulance workers in the GMB, Unison and Unite unions followed suit.

Despite the NHS crisis and propaganda against the strikers, the public supports these strikes. But Sunak's government has refused to negotiate, repeating that: "the government has already agreed to a settlement for the next financial year". This "settlement" is just 4.75% for 2023-2024! At the same time, Health Secretary Steve Barclay claims he is "offering better working conditions in the future"... The only way to improve conditions would be to fill 133,000 NHS and 165,000 social care vacancies: impossible, even in the medium term! On the other hand Barclay could increase their pay, with immediate effect! But as the placard of one of the

pickets said: "the government doesn't seem to understand the laws of supply and demand!!" Yes, higher wages could certainly - at the very least - attract back to the NHS the many staff who have left!

After new strike dates were announced, Sunak decided to invite union leaders to a meeting. But Barclay already clarified what this was about: "making a pay settlement by April more affordable with efficiency and productivity opportunities"! Yes, ministers talked about nurses "improving their productivity"! It's hard to find words for such blind ignorance. So for now, the strikes are still on...

• Union leaders united? Forget it!

Ambulance workers in Unite are to join those in Unison on strike on 23 January. This may be seen as progress - yet neither union joined the GMB's ambulance strike on 11 January! Meanwhile the GMB itself promised to take any new offer back to its ambulance members, matching inflation or not, making any possible alliance between these competing union bureaucracies even more unlikely! Moreover, after splitting the ballot by region, Unite has split its own strike by only calling out workers in northern England, the Midlands and Wales, some for 12 hours and others for 24.

Junior doctors, meanwhile, who are expected to take a further real-terms pay cut (a "rise" of 2%), are belatedly being

balloted for strike action which is unlikely to take place before mid-March! So any hope of synchronising strikes with the rest of the NHS strikers is already more or less sunk.

The measly settlement that ended their dispute with the government in 2016-19, has already been wiped out by inflation, leaving them 26.1% worse off in real terms than in 2008-9. Nor did it end their excessive working weeks of up to 72 hours. No wonder one survey found 40% of junior doctors want to leave. They should not be left to fight alone, yet again!

Class Struggle n°117

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Our society

• *Civil Service strikers join the fray...*

On 1 February, 100,000 civil servants will be on strike on the same day the TUC has called protests against the government's proposed "Minimum Service" law. Up to now, these workers from the 214 different government departments where the strike vote was over 50%, have been striking department by department. In fact, since December, there have been strikes by workers from the DWP, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, the Rural Payment Agency and Border Force... not to mention 300 legal advisers, court associates, and workers in the Disclosure and Barring Services...

They all are demanding 10% pay rise and "hands off" their working conditions, jobs and pensions.

When the Border Force strike was taking place, hilarious comments were made about "security concerns". For example the Guardian newspaper wrote in panic: *"The number of passengers detained for further checks at the UK's busiest airport plummeted in the run-up to Christmas after the armed services were asked to cover for striking Border Force staff... Just nine people were stopped at passport control and held at Heathrow over three strike days from*

23 to 25 December, compared with 189 people over the same three days in 2021 - a 95% drop". Home Secretary Suella Braverman then had to defend the decision to train up soldiers at short notice to "protect" Britain's borders... which seems to have failed dismally! The Guardian journalists didn't mention what a pleasure the absence of Border Officials was for arriving passengers who passed through security in record time! Evidently the "strike-breaking" soldiers were not at all bothered...

• *Train drivers still on strike?*

Train drivers who are ASLEF members - the majority - have (only!) had 6 odd strike days over pay so far since the summer. It works out at around one strike-day per month: on 30 July; 13 August; 1 October, 5 October; 26 November - and again on 5 January. An extra strike date announced on 15 September was cancelled by the ASLEF leadership, due to the queen's death...

That said, the ASLEF leadership has already sealed several deals over pay: they accepted a 6.6% pay rise from Transport for Wales, an 8.2% rise for Eurostar drivers and a 5.1% pay rise from Scotrail. At the time of writing, the 8% pay offer (4% for 2022 + 4% for 2023) reported in the newspapers just before the 5 January strike seemed to be something that they had made up, since ASLEF's officials say that no formal offer has been made. At the Transport



Committee on Wednesday 11th January, Mick Whelan told MPs that negotiations had made "zero" progress. So for the time being drivers from at least 15 Train Operating Companies are still waiting for

their pay rise; they are still in dispute and expect to be going on strike again... Perhaps next time round Mick Whelan will manage to synchronise the strike-days he chooses, with other workers on strike?

• *Elizabeth line halted*

Over 90% of members of the Transport Salaried Staff Association and the Prospect union who work for the Rail for London Infrastructure (RfLI, owned by TfL) on the brand new Elizabeth line voted for strike action over pay and pensions.

Both TSSA members, who include signalling staff, traffic and incident response managers, as well as service and infrastructure staff, together with Prospect union members, who are mainly

maintenance workers, went on strike 12 January, after RfLI management announced a miserable 4% pay increase for 2022, a 4.4% increase for 2023 and pension cuts. Bizarrely, they are paid far less than workers in equivalent roles across the TfL network, including MTR staff working on the Elizabeth Line itself. In some grades, the differential is as much as £30,000! This year, MTR staff got an 8.2% increase (on already higher salaries), and DLR staff received a 9.25%

increase. In other words the "public" TfL pays less than the private MTR and DLR!

Of course, while the few dozen of TSSA and Prospect members on strike may be sufficient to significantly disrupt the Elizabeth line service, their fight would carry much more weight if they joined forces with other public and private sector workers. They all face the same cuts and, what's more, tens of thousands of public and private sector workers are also on strike this month!

Brexit: they want us to pay

The effects of Brexit have certainly made the economic crisis deeper for a section of the British capitalist class. A survey of members of the British Chamber of Commerce shows that 77% of firms for whom the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (Brexit trade deal) is already applicable find it almost impossible to expand their businesses. Half of them have difficulties complying with new rules for trading goods or services and have problems obtaining visas for workers. It is estimated that the British

economy will lose 6 to 11% of its output due to Brexit alone. And all this, while the Northern Ireland protocol and most border checks aren't even implemented yet!

In order to appease businesses, the government promised a bonfire of employment laws inherited from the EU. Of course, British bosses always had loopholes through which they could by-pass these laws. But the Retained EU Law Bill, which soon enters its 3rd reading, will give the government the power to revise or repeal all EU-derived laws, including the few concerning

employment. These include protections for fixed-term, part-time and agency workers, information and consultation rights, occupational health and safety and work time regulations (limiting the working week to 48 hours, conferring minimum rest periods and rights to annual paid leave). If there isn't time to do all this before the end of 2023, those EU laws still unrevised, will just be scrapped. One way or another, the intention is to allow bosses to cut their Brexit losses by making workers help pay for them.

The worst crisis in 45 years

The economy

One of PM Sunak's 5 "New Year pledges" is to "grow the economy to create better paid jobs and opportunities". In 2023, the government will be "providing relief and peace of mind" to all - and never mind rising inflation, a shrinking GDP, cuts in real wages and interest rate hikes! Sunak is certainly turning a deaf ear to the words of reputable economists who forecast that Britain will face one of the worst recessions and weakest recoveries in the G7 in the coming year!

Soaring inflation

CPI inflation (the government's official measure) hit a record 41-year high of 11.1% in October and stood at 10.7% in November (the next release of data is 18 January). But the more accurate measure of increased costs for ordinary people, the retail price index, currently stands at 14% and in fact the price of food and non-alcoholic drinks rose by 16.5% in the 12 months to November 2022, the largest increase in 45 years.

Although the latest forecasts suggest that CPI inflation in the last quarter of 2023 is set to fall to 3.8%, high inflation is expected to persist for longer in Britain than in other countries. Rising inflation is almost all caused by skyrocketing energy costs. The government allowed the energy price cap to go up by 80% - to £3,549 per year - rather than curtailing the energy giants' racketeering price increases, as other countries like France have done, where these were set at a maximum of 4% last year and 15% this year...

Shrinking economy

Britain had the worst growth in the G7 in the last quarter - the economy is smaller today than it was before Covid. In fact, Office for National Statistics said that GDP was now estimated to be 0.8% below where it was before the pandemic struck. In the last quarter, the economy shrank by 0.3%, as companies put investment on hold. The Confederation of British Industry predicts a further



1.4% contraction, compared to just 0.1% for the eurozone as a whole and growth of +0.25 % in the US.

Rising interest rates

By increasing interest rates, central banks, like the Bank of England try to "control" inflation. So on 15 December, the BOE raised its base rate to 3.5%, the highest level for 14 years. All banks and mortgage lenders followed suit - passing on huge hikes in mortgage repayments of double the base rate, for instance - to mortgagees.

We're told that interest rates will probably need to rise again in 2023 to return inflation to the 2% target, but who knows by how much, or for how long... The next rate announcement will be on 2 February. But even when interest rates peak, they're unlikely to fall quickly, as lenders are reluctant to pass on the full cut.

Falling wages

Wages are up, says the ONS, with workers in the private sector seeing their average pay rise by 6.9% and in the public sector by (only!) 2.7% between August and October 2022. Which means that with respect to inflation, real wages are actually down - in the same period they fell by 2.6% for full-time employees.

In fact, wage rates in Britain are below where they were 18 years ago and are among the lowest in the G20. According to the Royal College of Nursing, the salary of a qualified nurse working a five-day week has fallen by 20% since 2010.

Yet below-inflation pay offers remain the order of the day - despite the wave of pay strikes. And although pay cuts haven't been imposed, below-inflation wage rises and pay freezes amount to the very same thing!

A fight against the profiteers...

All this, while the price of everything is increasing: gas, electricity, rents, food... Already many of those in work - in what were always considered well-paying jobs, like nurses - are resorting to food banks because their incomes do not stretch far enough to afford food by the end of the month. And pundits tell us that the cost of living crisis is expected to be even worse in 2023...

But price increases do not fall from the sky. They are decided by living human beings - and they can be controlled; what's more, they can be pushed the other way. That is the direction that the current fight for wage rises could and should take: an offensive against profiteering and ultimately a fight to end the profit system itself. ☐

Energy giants: profits protected by friends in parliament

In the midst of the escalating world economic crisis, the profits of energy giants for 2022 broke a record! Shell and BP made respectively £24.6bn and £21bn, more than doubling what they'd made in the same period in 2021. Exxon Mobil is expecting its best profits ever, with a total of £48bn.

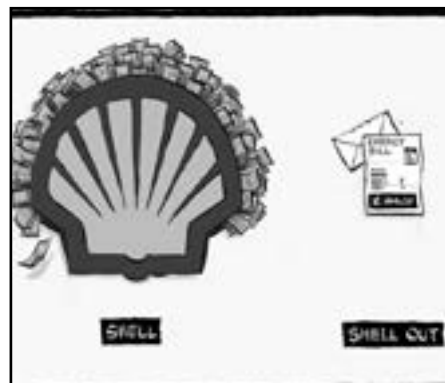
So what happened with the government's windfall tax, first introduced by Sunak when he was chancellor? Did it yield record funds for public services, accordingly? Well no...

Sunak's 25% "temporary profit levy" announced in May 2022 was not obligatory. Companies could claim an 80% tax

discount if their investments in the North Sea were shown to be higher than their profits. However, last November under pressure of the huge hikes in oil and gas prices, Chancellor Jeremy Hunt reduced this discount to 29%, and raised the windfall tax from 25% to 35%.

So for example, Shell will now have to pay out £1.7bn (shared between British and EU tax regimes). BP will have to pay £800m. But they will not mind too much, since the tax only applies to profits made in the North Sea - which is just one of the places from which these companies extract their oil and gas. What is certain, is that ministers are reluctant to touch these giants' giant profits - even though they awarded them subsidies

during the pandemic, which they aren't even expected to pay back!



King's Cross railway station (London)

Rail union leaders splitting our ranks

At the time of writing, the media claims a "deal" is being cooked up between the railway union leaders and the train operating companies to end the strikes.

But some deals are already done - including with Network Rail. After an online referendum among NR workers which ended on 12 December, leaders of Unite the union, representing several hundred Electrical Control Room Operators and TSSA leaders representing 2,500 general grades, broke ranks with the RMT and accepted the offer made by NR bosses.

This offer, of a 5% pay rise back-dated to 1 January 2022 and 4% from 1 January

2023, no "compulsory" redundancies until 31 January 2025, plus changes to working practices, was rejected by 63.6% of the RMT's 21,000 NR members. For them NR's threat of thousands of "voluntary" redundancies, a 50% cut in scheduled maintenance tasks and a 30% increase in unsocial hours on top of the well-below-inflation pay rise was unacceptable.

In fact the referendum results, counted separately for each section, could only have reflected narrow sectional interests, which the union leaderships appear not only unable to overcome, but even to emphasise. Indeed, this is how "clever" the laws which regulate union ballots



are; they divide the ranks and "enhance" all differences in wages and conditions. Which is another good reason to organise co-ordinated strikes - giving workers from all unions and sections the chance to take action together and start to break down these artificial boundaries. □

• Our strike? Our decisions!

This December, cleaners and tankers from Churchill, Atalian Servest and Mitie were getting ready to strike together for the first time, on the 22nd, 23rd and 31st December. But on the 20th, the RMT suddenly cancelled the first two strike-days. The next day, union officials held a zoom meeting to answer our (very) angry questions. There, they told us that since trains wouldn't have been busy around Xmas, a strike "wouldn't have been effective"... Not true: trains were and are busy in the run-up to Xmas

- but that wasn't even the problem. The fact is that we should have been on strike with everyone else in the railways since day one, but union leaders ensured that Churchill cleaners struck totally on their own for months - and not even all Churchill cleaners! This time round, we at last had the chance of a joint strike with cleaners from the other companies. And then leaders cancelled 2 of the 3 days!

In the end, we had a good joint picket on the 31st. But though union officials

promised more strike dates for January, we still haven't heard anything. In the meantime, they suggest we create "committees" across stations - not so that we can control our own strikes, but for them to get a "feeling" of our mood! Members of these committees are not even to be elected; they can appoint themselves. Clearly if we want to win, or even have a say, we are going to have to take over organising our strikes ourselves, and through our own "committees"!

• Keep up the fight

Those of us in the RMT (except cleaners!) were on strike on our own 4 days last week, while train drivers were out alone on 5 January. No more strike days so far. So we end up being on strike for a few days at a time - and the bosses can recover in between. Surely it makes much more sense to stand up fully armed - that is, using our full collective strength, with as many of us out together for as long as it takes?

PS. We need to keep up our fight - regardless of meetings with rail ministers! [Workers' platform bulletin King's X, 11/01/23]

• That's what a picket is!

During our drivers' picket at Hornsey, a driver manager came out to tell us we were picketing on railway property... But isn't that the whole point? A line of strikers at

the gate? Managers make up rules as they go along. As for us, at the moment, we rule... [Workers' platform bulletin King's X, 11/01/23]

• Irrational

Btw, why were drivers asked by managers to stay until the end of our shift during the RMT strike when there were no trains to drive. Yes, and then they still paid for our taxis to get home at midnight! They've obviously got money to spare. So where is our pay rise? [Workers' platform bulletin King's X, 11/01/23]

• Dodgy logic

LNER bosses once more told us to take annual leave days during the drivers' strike. Why should we? They can't force us to take leave which we do not want. We're told by RMT lawyers that there's "nothing in the law that

prevents them from doing this". That dodgy logic implies they can impose anything they like, as long as there's no specific law against it! It's absurd! [Workers' platform bulletin King's X, 11/01/23]

• What about the real history?

Network Rail has put up a small exhibition on the main concourse about the history of King's Cross Station, which was built in 1852. Conspicuous by its absence is any mention of the workers who built it or the workers who manned the London to Edinburgh railway. But maybe we should not be too surprised given the contempt with which NR bosses regard the workforce - they have refused to offer more than 5+4% pay rise and insist on cutting safety critical jobs. [Workers' platform bulletin King's X, 11/01/23]

Ford Dagenham Engine Plant

• Only when we're warm!

On Panther, we've noticed that the heating has been going on and off, again and again, throughout the shift. As if this building wasn't cold enough! But since we can't make engines if we're cold, Ford can choose: save on its energy bill or warm us up and get some engines... [Workers' fight Ford Dagenham, 13/01/23]

• 40% rise and we're even!

Carter dares to offer LLL (logistics) workers a pay rise of just 7.5%! This is just £35 per

week more, when we lost £90 per week when we were moved onto a single shift on Tiger Engine Assembly. And to this we've got to add another £90 per week cut for all of us due to inflation! It adds up to minus £165 per week! [Workers' fight Ford Dagenham, 13/01/23]

• A huge debt to pay

The principle should be that no worker should be allowed to have his or her pay cut. After all, we don't shrink in size along with shrinking pay packets; our bellies need the same amount of food... So now we hear that Tiger



might go up to 2 or 3 shifts - with pay going back up, too, presumably. But why should we agree to go back to shift-work unless we get back the money they took off us - it's money they owe. [Workers' fight Ford Dagenham, 13/01/23]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

Royal Mail strikes: what next?

Two weeks after our last strikes on 23 and 24 December, Royal Mail CEO Thompson sent a letter to the CWU leaders (addressed to "Dear Dave and Andy"!) announcing that he was ready to enter into yet more talks, between 9 and 20 January, but that "within this period, there will be no further strike action called by the CWU and RMG will not issue any notifications on change initiatives". But while the union leaders complied and no more strikes have been announced, "change initiatives", i.e., new attacks against our working conditions have continued!

At Mount Pleasant, for instance, a new sort of re-sign, was announced, which assigns us to an area of work, but not a specific duty. This proposed re-sign

also would also entail hundreds of job cuts (around 150 in processing alone!). The biggest job cuts, in relative terms, target primary letters, where managers are already talking of bringing in casuals whenever there is extra pressure.

Thompson claims to have made concessions: there won't be "compulsory" redundancies - but of course, "voluntary" redundancies without replacement, are still job cuts we can't afford. But worse, hundreds of union activists up and down the country, remain suspended pending discipline or dismissal for activity during the strike. We fail to understand how any talks can go ahead before these workmates are fully reinstated!

The Thompsons letter ends with the following: "revisions [read cuts] will be



undertaken ... by the start of the new financial year [April]", but: "if agreement on the guidelines cannot be reached this cannot prevent the revisions program proceeding". In other words, agree or not, the changes will be imposed.

The union leadership has answered by saying it "welcomed much of your letter of 6 January" and they've gone into talks. When this contemptuous, threatening letter should have been met with only one response: all out!

• Our say and our pay!

Management in deliveries are in discussions with our union reps about the job revisions (expected in March now?). So why don't we have our say about this? We don't want job cuts, that's one thing. But if some of our workmates want to leave, we want a full restoration of the redundancy packages which were previously on offer! And anyone who leaves must be replaced, of course. [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 11/01/23]

• Heads in the clouds

On primary letters, we see on the resign that managers want to cut us down to as few as two people! Obviously, we're already not enough, so how on earth do they think this will work? [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 11/01/23]

• No to this casualisation!

One "idea" we heard from King Etcetera (shop floor manager) was that they'd fill "gaps" on primary letters with "outside people" - i.e. temps. And there'll certainly be permanent "gaps", so temps

will be here on a "permanent" basis?! So give them contracts! [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 11/01/23]

• Consolidated into our pay!

So DUMs (aka Delivery Office Managers) want to cut our driving allowance on deliveries? And that's not all. They also want to cut our Door-2-Dustbin allowance, which was given to us to carry trash on our rounds. If the performance based allowance is also cut (another of their plans), we'll end up 100s of pounds short every month! [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 11/01/23]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

• Still far from what's needed!

It seems that BMW decided to stick to the pay deal - and give the RPI inflation pay rise of 14.2% for 2023 as was agreed last year. But it's hardly generous, given what the bosses have just saved by cutting a shift - they cut our pay by over £200/month! And they are threatening yet another shift change, eliminating nights... which would be fine, except they'd cut night shift allowance! So if we do the maths, BMW owes us another 7%! [Workers' fight BMW Oxford Mini, 13/01/23]

• We're left with the short straw

As for us R&H, G&P and their sub-agencies, the hit has been even harder - we've lost about 15-20% of our pay after the shift change, and been left completely unpaid during the lay-offs. We had no pay rise unlike our BMW counterparts, so we face the 14% inflation in prices as well! Last year's pay increase has been totally wiped out, and since a new tier was introduced, most of us didn't even get it. So when

are we hearing about this year's pay rise?? [Workers' fight BMW Oxford Mini, 13/01/23]

• Lay-off pay for all

Last Friday production stopped an hour earlier, so we gladly went home! We didn't have to use WTA this time... since BMW had not given us 24hrs notice.

However we still don't get paid when we get laid off, something which happens more and more these days... And it's even worse for G&P and R&H agency workmates whenever there's a change of plans! [Workers' fight BMW Oxford Mini, 13/01/23]

• Enough rush!

So here we are, back from the Xmas shutdown and the line is going even faster than before! We never agreed to make 420 cars per shift! So, we're going to have to get hold of the stop button! [Workers' fight BMW Oxford Mini, 13/01/23]

• Ryan Parkinson's "win"

We were happy to hear that our workmate finally got something out of his 4 year long Employment Tribunal case against



BMW! A win against company lawyers in such a tribunal is very rare, but he didn't get much - £17K isn't even a year's wage. And he didn't get his job back. We know from experience that what really works when a mate is sacked is an immediate walk-out - and stay-out until our mate is back! [Workers' fight BMW Oxford Mini, 13/01/23]

• This must stop

Today, we're still told that we can't leave the plant premises during the 20 min breaks without giving notice to a manager... But we should be free to do what we want during our breaks. If BMW's scared of us getting back to work late, they're welcome to give us a longer break! [Workers' fight BMW Oxford Mini, 13/01/23]

Brazil

On Sunday 8 January, the 8th day of the new presidency of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, known as "Lula", several thousand supporters of defeated ex-president Bolsonaro stormed and ransacked the headquarters of the country's federal institutions (Congress, the Presidential Palace and the Supreme Court) in Three-Powers Square, in the capital, Brasilia. This was almost a copy-and-paste of the 6 January 2021 storming of the US Capitol in Washington by Trump supporters, even though in this case, unlike President Biden, Lula had already been officially sworn-in and what's more, these rioters apparently expected the intervention of the army to reinstate Bolsonaro.

Complicit "armed bodies of men"

Since the day after the presidential elections, on 31 October 2022, hundreds of Bolsonaro supporters had set up camp in front of army headquarters in Brasilia, refusing to accept Bolsonaro's defeat. And clearly the authorities were in no hurry to evict them. On 7 January, thousands more, from all over the country, came in buses to join them; they had prepared their riot in advance on social networks. On the day, the usually restricted access to the centre of the capital proved little obstacle. The "Bolsonaristas" were able to occupy it easily and then head towards the seats of power.

The complicit local police leadership, local State Governor and the Federal District's head of public security (Bolsonaro's former justice minister!), are now suspended from their duties. But many of their friends and accomplices remain in their positions in the administration, the army, the police and customs. Even within the new government appointed by Lula, several ministers come from Bolsonaro's side. As for Jair Bolsonaro himself, to appear totally innocent, he had left two weeks earlier for Florida. He claims he knew nothing about the rioters' plans. In fact he officially disowned them - but then accused "the left" of being just as guilty.

The mobilisation of the far-right



Harking back to 1964

It appears that Bolsonaro's supporters wanted to create a situation where the military would have to act, in the hope that its general staff would then go so far as to overthrow Lula and take power by a *coup d'état*. Their leaders evidently hark back to the 1964 army coup which overthrew an elected Labour Party government under President João Goulart and which placed Brazil under military dictatorship for 21 years, until 1985.

It's worth mentioning that at the time, the US (under the Democratic presidency of Lyndon Johnson) and British Conservative government under Alec Douglas-Home backed the coup - recognising this dictatorship as legitimate. In 1964, like today, the demonstrators in the street espoused an ultra-nationalist fundamentalist religiosity - "*Marches of the Family with God for Freedom*" (*Marchas da Família com Deus pela Liberdade*). And they accused Goulart of "communism" (he had announced the nationalisation of the country's oil refineries) - just as Bolsonaro supporters today claim that Lula is a "communist". Which of course he is very far from being, neither in the sense they mean it, nor in the true sense!

The army ready and waiting

So this time round, there was no coup. Today's generals, ultimately, as always, under order of Brazil's

capitalist class, have been put on hold. For now, the capitalists trust Lula to defend their interests, just as he did when he was president from 2003 to 2010. And anyway, a good number of the politicians who backed Bolsonaro during his 3 years in office supported Lula during his previous presidential terms - and are apparently prepared to collaborate with him once more.

But Lula is under notice. The capitalists expect him to manage the current economic crisis and use his "labour" credentials to make the working class accept a policy of austerity. They know very well that this will provoke discontent among the working class electorate. And as the events of 8 January confirmed, Bolsonaro retains a substantial base of support, ready to act, if need be. This remains a political card in the hands of the Brazilian capitalists, not only to put pressure on Lula, but to bring him down if necessary.

In any case, the Brazilian working class will need to rely on itself to impose its interests. Relying on one or other politician to act as a "supreme saviour", whether it is Lula or anyone else, is to allow oneself to be disarmed. The only way for the working masses to protect themselves from the coming capitalist onslaught, let alone the complicit violence of the far-right, is to maintain their own, conscious, mobilisation. □

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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