

# WORKERS' fight



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

## THE COST OF LIVING UNDER THIS SYSTEM IS ALWAYS TOO HIGH!

The enquiry into the government's handling of the Covid pandemic will go on for years. Yet the answers to the three questions "Baroness" Hallett is asking, are already known: yes, the preparation was inadequate, yes, the response was too little, too late - and no, the lessons will not be learnt.

While it's evident that this government did a worse job than some others, thanks to the buffoon at its helm, the virus caused havoc around the whole world, not just in Britain. In fact the pandemic was only declared by the World Health Organisation on 11 March 2020, a good 2 months after Chinese authorities reported a cluster of cases in Wuhan. And Johnson only declared a lockdown on 23 March. By this time the virus was already spreading.

Why did they delay? Simply for fear of damage to the world capitalist economy, which depends on the flow of people and goods - and thus profits - without hindrance. WHO "experts" had no power to recommend (nor impose) anything without the say-so of western political leaders - the real arbiters of the fate of the rest of us.

And for them, profits will always trump health. The "West" and its populations - us in Britain included - suffered lethal detriment because of western leaders' priorities.

### **Self-inflicted anti-China handicap**

It went further. Since it was the Chinese medical establishment which first identified the virus, the response of the WHO was consciously distorted by the Trump/Johnson anti-China campaign. This undoubtedly contributed to the failure to jump into immediate action. And this politicking - which today goes so far as to raise the threat of a war against China - is again being summoned with the return to the "Chinese lab leak theory" of the origin of the pandemic.



It's no coincidence. The blame game is a well-worn political device to divert attention away from real causes and real culprits. Digging into these can only reveal the lethal, aggravating and ultimately terminal fault which exists and threatens all of us - their failing capitalist economic system and its degenerate, political superstructure. Today it covers up its decline by conjuring up enemies, by warmongering and by actual combat, like the proxy war against Russia being waged "with the skins of the Ukrainian people".

### **The strike is a means to an end**

Even a supposed attempt "to get to the truth" about Covid becomes a convenient diversion from reality! Not that it's easy for Sunak to cover up. The cost of living crisis is worse here in Britain, for good reason.

Not only is this the world's oldest capitalist country and the most decrepit. But the one thing that helped

their economy limp along in slightly better shape, was its membership of the EU - and this was junked by the Brexiteers, who, in their contest with far-right UKIP, stirred up to new levels, anti-migrant and xenophobic prejudice. And that prejudice is now served up daily by the government in its campaign against "small boats".

Sunak may dismiss the questions which the Covid Enquiry throws up. He may also dismiss the effect of Brexit. But what he cannot dismiss are the strikes which the working class - including doctors who worked throughout the Covid pandemic - has mounted against cuts in real wages for which his government and the capitalists behind it are responsible.

Striking today remains the only means available to call them to account. It remains the only way to make them - instead of us - pay for the crisis. And it's also the first step towards building a different system which has as its goal not profit, but the fulfilling of human need. □

## WARS BEYOND UKRAINE: SUDAN AND THE HORN OF AFRICA

While the war in Ukraine has continued to occupy news headlines for over a year now, it is not the only war being conducted today nor the one with the worst consequences for the populations. What's more, the intervention of the western powers in these other wars, which may be more covert, is just as much the cause of ongoing conflict and devastation.

### Is Yemen's war ending?

Today the war in Yemen could well be ending after 7 years of utter devastation. But only because, we are told, of "detente between Iran and Saudi Arabia". That says it all. Neither of these two lesser powers, Iran and Saudi Arabia, act on their own. The Saudi intervention over all these years only took place with the permission of the US. As for Iran, it got involved precisely because of this, having been under US embargo for years, as part of its "axis of evil".

In the end, the US/Saudi (and British) attempt to prevent a force which was not pliable and subject to western aims has failed. The so-called "Houthi rebels" have held out and now control all the major centres and 80% of the country, despite sustained and brutal shelling by the Saudi and UAE military over so



Neighbourhood in Sanaa, Yemen

many years - with British, French and US bombs and missiles.

### US and the wars of the clans

And now, regional upheaval in the north and north-east of Africa has been reignited due to the war between two generals in Sudan. It is likely to exacerbate the current conflicts taking place in the Horn of Africa, including Ethiopia and Tigray - regions already grappling with famine.

Washington has become directly involved in the war against Al-Shabaab in Somalia. And since Sudan sits at a strategic crossroads between Africa and the Middle East, and between the ungoverned deserts of the Sahel and the vital oil and trade artery of the Red Sea, it is next on the list for imperialist intervention. There will be yet more blood on the already-dripping-red hands of US, British and French leaders and their regional allies. □

## SUDANESE REFUGEES FROM WAR UNWELCOME

The war in Sudan continues to devastate the capital and wide areas of the country, especially Darfur. On 1 June, shelling killed 27 people and wounded more than 100, in a city where hospitals can hardly function. Food is scarce. In one Khartoum orphanage at least 60 children had died by 31 May, from starvation and fever.

Yet in "world-beating" Britain, the doors have not been opened - as a matter of urgency - to refugees from this conflict, unlike for those who fled Ukraine.

Some asylum claims predate the latest conflict; ever since the overthrow of military dictator Omar Bashir in 2019, the political situation in Sudan has been dangerously unstable. By 31 March, over 5,000 Sudanese were waiting for asylum decisions; nearly 4,000, for over six months. Asylum would give families, still stuck in Sudan, the chance to join them in safety. It is an emergency.

But never mind that. The system to fast track refugees (and reduce the backlog of 132,000 claims!) involves

filling in an 11-page English language application form... which most applicants cannot do. Neither are there enough case workers to conduct face-to-face interviews. A decision to override this obstructive bureaucracy could, of course, be taken. But the very purpose of it is to obstruct. Not because the means don't exist to give refugees safe haven. They do. No, it's only because the government needs to play the anti-migrant card. These are its politics.

### It's workers on the ground who can stop the deportations...

In early June, Sunak boasted that "small boat crossings" had fallen by 20% between January and May this year, compared to 2022. And of course, he thinks this appeals to voters, who, according to his advisors, are apparently worried about immigration. He is certainly at a loss when it comes to addressing the electorate's real concerns, i.e., the cost of living crisis and the state of the NHS!

#### An absurd legality

Home Secretary Suella Braverman's aptly named "Illegal Migration Bill" (it flies in the face of the United Nations'

Convention on Human Rights) is meant to speed up deportations. Anyone arriving "irregularly" (in a small boat) would be considered permanently "inadmissible" to the asylum system. This Bill is currently at the committee stage in the House of Lords, where it's being scrutinised by peers. In case they reject it, Sunak plans to use the Parliament Act to allow the Commons to pass the Bill, to get it on the books ASAP.

#### Strikes against deportations?

However, the government may not have it that easy. The civil service union has already threatened to call strikes against

the implementation of this law. It participated in the campaign earlier this year to take Braverman to court over the Bill's legality. But in the end, the High Court ruled it lawful. This wasn't the first time the union has intervened either: last year, civil servants refused to cooperate with former Home Secretary Priti Patel - the architect of the Rwanda deportation plan.

Indeed, while politicians are stuck in legal disputes, it's the workers on the ground who can put a stop to these measures. After all, it isn't the Sunaks or the Bravermans who fly the planes or detain refugees on the beaches of Dover...

## THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE AT 75: STILL GOING, BUT ONLY JUST...

On 5 July, the NHS will be 75 years old. Founded in 1948 as a health service for all, "free at the point of use", under Clement Atlee's post-war Labour government, its universal health care was often called "the envy of the world". But not any more. The post-Brexit ongoing drastic shortage of staff (112,000 vacancies today) and crisis in every area, whether it be cancer care, or waiting lists for diagnostic tests and routine treatment, means that health outcomes for the British population are among the very worst out of 18 similar OECD countries.

The 2022 Civitas report on health outcomes says "UK life expectancy of 81.4 years in 2019 was the 17th lowest of 19 countries. (...) The UK breast cancer five-year survival rate ... was the 15th lowest of 18 countries. The UK colon cancer five-year survival ... was the lowest of 18 countries. The UK lung cancer five-year survival was the 17th lowest of 18 countries. Etc., etc..."

Figures published in June show 22,533 patients in England were waiting more than two months for either cancer diagnosis or treatment at the end of April, up from 19,023 at the end of March. The overall waiting list has increased to 7.4 million people, the highest number since records began in 2007.

### The NHS isn't "free"

"Free at the point of use" has been an NHS myth almost from day one: already by April 1951, Labour Chancellor Hugh Gaitskill introduced charges for dentures and for glasses, citing a shortage of funds in the wake of the Korean War. Two cabinet ministers resigned in protest - Aneurin Bevan, to whom the founding of the NHS is ascribed, and Harold Wilson.

Prescription charges were introduced in 1952, by the Conservative government of Winston Churchill (one shilling per prescription, with exemptions for those on war pensions, children, and anyone suffering from a sexually transmitted disease!). Today each single item costs £9.65, which for the low-paid majority in the working class can mean treating



or eating.

Dentistry was only fully integrated into the NHS for its first few years of existence. As the years have passed, more and more co-payments from patients have been demanded, so that today, dentistry is free only for children, the unemployed and during pregnancy. Many dentists have by now completely given up offering treatment under the NHS and provide private treatment only. Meaning whole swathes of the country are a dentistry desert.

### Privatisation hits the elderly

As for social care, it was sectioned off from the NHS as early as 1974, to be placed under local authorities. Things went from bad to worse in the 1980s when government policy pushed much of social care into the private sector. Today - as the Covid pandemic exposed - elderly care has become a "cinderella service" dependent on the goodwill of low-paid agency workers employed either by under-regulated care homes or local councils.

Under the Thatcher government, hospitals were told to outsource first non-medical functions like laundry, cleaning and catering, followed by diagnostics. But successive governments, whether Labour or Tory, have continued further down this road, using the pretext of cost-efficiency, to the point where today, groups of hospitals within "trusts" contract out

diverse medical procedures to an ever-growing (and highly profitable) private health sector.

### Staff exodus... and strikes!

So, 75 years on and in the aftermath of Brexit and the Covid pandemic, the NHS is in a bad and worsening state. Over the past 6 months strikes by all staff, but also unprecedented junior doctors' strikes lasting 72 hours have been taking place, demanding that their pay keeps up with inflation. Undoubtedly the support for these strikes among doctors and nurses is due to the harsh conditions of work day to day, utter exhaustion and the fact that they see no end in sight.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is due to announce a "long term workforce plan" including £1 billion to train more doctors and nurses to address the staff shortage. But at the same time, nurses and doctors have been offered real terms pay cuts - which is what a 5% increase amounts to. So the vicious cycle of NHS overwork and underpay continues to cause staff to leave: according to the Royal College of Nursing, between 2018 and 2022, nearly 43,000 nurses left the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) register and another 3% have left since.

The fight for better wages and conditions would obviously have a better chance of winning if the whole of the working class took to the streets - on "general" strike for the interests of all... ☐

## While costs may be falling, prices are still rising!

While official food price inflation in Britain is still 19% this month, wholesale prices are actually falling! Not only has the price of oil - and therefore the cost of distribution - decreased, but so has the cost of food production. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation's food price index was 22% lower in May than a year ago - in fact, the lowest it's been in two years!

On the back of last year's oil and fertilizer "shortages" - artificially induced by a cut in production post-pandemic, and aggravated by sanctions against Russia - prices of food/essentials soared. And the big 4 supermarkets - Tesco, Asda, Morrisons and Sainsbury - were able to post a combined profit of £4 billion for the last 12 months, while three of the biggest food manufacturers

(Unilever, Mondelez and Nestle) made £31 billion!

So, are they now reducing prices? Not a bit of it. We're told it "takes time" for falling costs to "work through" the system. In fact supermarkets continue to charge the same - if not increased - prices. It's profiteering, of course, but then that's the name of their capitalist game... Which will only end when capitalism is ended.

## Strikes

### IT'S TIME TO PRESENT THEM WITH OUR (STRIKE) BILL!

The strikes are still on, despite the long haul that it's been for so many workers... since last summer, in fact. And that says it all about the level of sustained anger over low pay and attacks on jobs, in the face of this cost of living crisis. In the votes to renew strike mandates - since the law says this must be done every 6 months - the overwhelming majority still say "yes"!

Having confirmed their strike vote a third time, railway workers walked out on the eve of the FA Cup Final; train drivers on the Cup Final day itself. At the time of writing, junior doctors in the BMA have

just announced another 72-hour strike for 14-17 June. Many civil servants including library and museum workers, driving instructors and Home Office workers are still in dispute. Since the government has offered no more than 5% across the whole public sector, including teachers, the fight is certainly not over.

At the same time, the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill introduced on 10 January is in its final stages towards becoming law. However, since it demands that emergency services (and teachers!) provide cover during strikes,

but gives no details as to what exactly this means (and anyway, emergency cover already exists!) it amounts to little more than Tory politicking.

So far, union leaders don't dare call all workers out together - afraid of bad publicity and being accused of law-breaking, even if it's not the case! Indeed, despite the many laws which (already) exist to curtail strikes, there's no legal obstacle to calling a general strike. It's the union leaderships' own narrow aims, not to mention the Labour party's anti-strike stance which prevents it. □

#### • Will postal workers stop this sell-out?

Postal workers would have voted NO to the "BUSINESS RECOVERY, TRANSFORMATION & GROWTH agreement", despite the recommendation of union leaders - if they'd been given the chance. After 10 months of on-off strikes, the leadership of the Communication Workers' Union and Royal Mail bosses came up with this 3-year "deal", which includes a real terms pay cut and increased, "flexible", working. It would impose a 39-hour week during busy periods, and never mind that postal workers have fought for years to cut the working week!

To save face, CWU General Secretary Dave Ward has now postponed the ballot on the deal, indefinitely. Nevertheless, he continues to assert that "it is the right agreement for our members", claiming that workers' reactions against it are misplaced - and are really aimed against managers implementing "revisions" not covered by the agreement. What he doesn't explain is why 10,000 jobs have already disappeared over the last 12 months (5,000 more than RM targeted!) or why redundancy pay was suddenly cut from a package worth 2 years of wages to a package worth just 9 months of wages!

Ward, just like his CWU predecessors, pretends that by protecting Royal Mail profits, the union protects postal workers' wages and conditions. Except that simple capitalist economics dictate an inverse relationship between wages and profits: wages up, profits down, and vice versa. After years of degraded conditions aggravated by postal privatisation, the workforce is saying enough is enough. Let us hope that having come this far, they stand firm, against management's "revisions", against the "Agreement" and against the union leaders who negotiated it.

#### • Entering the second year of the railway dispute

The Rail Delivery Group (RDG) of train company bosses threw a few crumbs at train drivers and their railway employees by offering below-inflation pay rises conditional on the acceptance of seriously detrimental changes in working conditions. To ASLEF drivers, the RDG had offered a 4% increase in 2022 followed by another 4% rise in 2023.

While the rest of railway workers were offered a 5% pay rise only payable if the RMT agreed that all strikes were called off (followed by a conditional 4% for the 2nd year).

At the time of writing, the dispute continues. Workers have been told that a meeting is to be convened between train drivers' union (Aslef) leaders and the

leaders of the general union of railway workers, the RMT. Of course, it's been blatantly obvious to all those involved on the ground, that not only rail workers, but all workers should be acting - and organised - together, for an effective fightback. It remains to be seen if this is what - at last - the rail unions have in mind. But it's not a foregone conclusion.

### France: a successful "Fête de Lutte Ouvrière" and another nationwide strike day

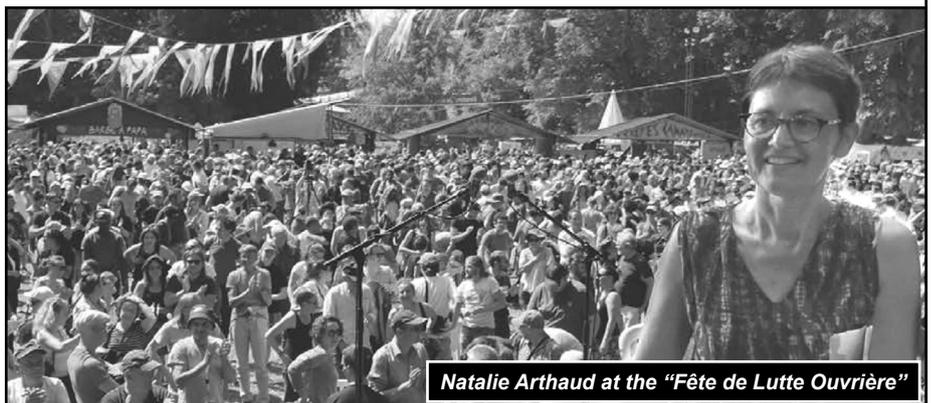
Since 19 January (the first day of nationwide strikes) there have been a total of 13 separate protest days against the increase in pension age from 62 to 64 years. On the 6 June, hundreds of thousands workers again marched in cities and towns across France to the chant of "64 years of age, we won't take it!" defying President Macron's imposition of this "reform", via extra-parliamentary means, and the brutality of the police sent in against the protesters.

It was in this atmosphere that "La Fête de Lutte Ouvrière", an Internationalist Communist festival organised by our sister organisation since 1971, took place near the village of Présles over the bank holiday weekend of the 27 May. This was the opportunity for thousands of workers and supporters - over 30,000 this time around! - to meet activists from all over the world, participate in political forums and

debates, while enjoying delicious food, great music, theatre, art, comedy, and historical and scientific displays and presentations!

On the main podium, and in the context of the Ukraine war and worsening capitalist crisis,

the main speaker for LO, Nathalie Arthaud, reiterated the need to fight for a future communist society, against imperialism's current war-mongering and the turning of the screw against workers of all countries.



Nathalie Arthaud at the "Fête de Lutte Ouvrière"

**Their society**

**Covid: sunak fails to hide from his own inquiry**

**B**oris Johnson's WhatsApp messages from his time as PM are big news. Not for their content - yet - but for the stand-off over the demand of "Baroness" Heather Hallett, leading the Covid-19 inquiry, for full access to them. The government itself, having commissioned the inquiry, tried to haggle over its terms, until Johnson himself handed over everything - he claims.

It can hardly be a coincidence that the rumour that Sars-CoV-2 leaked from a Chinese laboratory, has been aired yet again in the British press. No government wants its citizens to believe that it could not, or failed to, defend them from nature.

Pointing a finger of blame at China serves the imperialist politicians' hostile agenda anyway, but it is a convenient distraction, too.

There must be plenty the government would still like to hide, even if its catastrophic failures are already well-known. For a start, there is the second-highest death toll from the pandemic in any of the rich countries, at 225,000; only the US has a worse record. Johnson's government repeatedly claimed to be "following the science". In fact, its reluctance to act even as people started to die in 2020, firmly seeded the virus. Planes continued to fly in millions of coronaviruses from around

the world without testing or quarantine for passengers. Events attracting people in their tens of thousands went ahead; the football season was only suspended on 13 March, days after 52,000 attended a Champions League match in Liverpool. Only three days after the Cheltenham Festival, attended by 251,684 racegoers on 10-13 March, did the government even advise against "large scale gatherings" - truly, after the horse had bolted.

All this is well-known, but Sunak must fear there is plenty more scandal to come out, over how these decisions were made. He should know. □

**Artificial yes. Intelligent, no!**

Since November, the media has been talking constantly about Artificial Intelligence (AI), in fact ever since the announcement by the high-tech start up, OpenAI, of the chatbot "ChatGPT". This program is able to produce a text on any topic, mimicking the writing of a human being, and has been able to pass the final exams of a few renowned universities, and even to write books which have been put on sale.

This "advent" of AI, triggered a few of the bosses in the domain, including Steve Wozniak (Apple's co-founder) and Elon Musk (a sponsor of Open AI), to call for a moratorium on AI development this last March - on the grounds of the "threat

AI represents for humanity"! Geoffrey Hinton, nicknamed the "godfather of AI" after his work on artificial neural networks - a set of computer instructions processing data organised in layers and connected cells, hence the parallel with a network of neurons - resigned from Google for similar reasons.

But this "threat" from "AI" is rightly contested by many other scientists and experts in the field. The comments from Ted Chiang, a scientist and sci-fi writer, who calls it "not intelligence but applied statistics..." are much closer to reality. Chiang attributes today's misunderstanding of the term "AI" to a "poor choice of words

in 1954". But the main factor in the overblowing of these developments has been the competition between IT giants, who introduced this moratorium to catch up with those ahead, slowing down the progress in the domain. A matter, simply, of who will profit most!

Despite their "non-intelligence", AI programs remain tools that could release human beings from redundant labour. But competition amongst capitalists and its hold over a vast majority of humanity as cheap wage labour, makes this impossible. For AI to serve us all, it would require a conscious revolution of truly intelligent human beings! □

**"Once upon a time in Northern Ireland": individualising the story and obscuring the truth!**

BBC 2's "Once upon a time in Northern Ireland" series is being screened 54 years after British troops were sent in to shore up Britain's 6-county "Orange State"... It pretends to reveal the "story" of this divided working class, through the eyes of individuals, but without providing real political context. The result may be moving at times, but it fails to reveal the criminal policy of

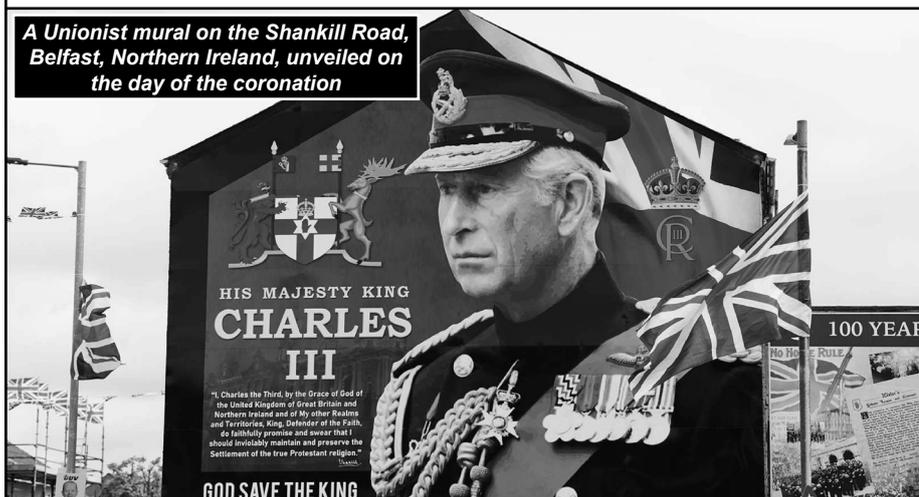
successive governments responsible for maintaining Unionist privilege and the sectarian divide which set Belfast alight in 1969.

So is there to be a series 2? And if so, what will it include? Will it speak of the travesties perpetrated by both Labour and Tory administrations, equally? Will it honour all those falsely accused of "terrorism" whose only "crime" was to

be Irish and living in Britain? Like Hugh Callaghan - one of the "Birmingham 6", implausibly found guilty of the 1974 pub bombings, who died last month? He spent 16 years in prison with 5 others, all incarcerated after they were tortured by British police into confessing to something they didn't do.

And just why is telling the truth about Northern Ireland so important? Precisely because "Unionist privilege" is not yet over - even if the unionist constituency is dwindling because of new generations born post "Troubles". Sectarian privilege was written into that much-hailed Good Friday Agreement. The Northern Ireland Protocol with added Windsor Framework, would never have been needed without it. And now it is this loyal to "King and Country" minority which maintains its veto, thanks to Westminster, over whether Stormont (the devolved NI government) sits or doesn't sit. No, the "once upon a time" Northern Irish "story" will not end with "...and they all lived happily ever after", until the hand of the British state is removed entirely.

**A Unionist mural on the Shankill Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland, unveiled on the day of the coronation**



**Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)****Unite's LLL strike fiasco**

Unite the union's bluff of calling 9 days of strike action against Lineside (LLL) - Ford's logistics subcontractor - is now exposed for what it was. There wasn't even one day of strike. Union officials got us to vote for a 4th time on an almost identical pay offer of 7.5% for 2022/23 - which we'd rejected 3 times since February. They even recommended it, having "negotiated" a 2nd year to the deal, tacking on another 5% for 2023/24. They also added a vague offer of talks in the unspecified future to discuss sick pay.

Unite officials then copy/pasted the 18 May letter from LLL bosses which

formally made the offer and put it to vote - daring to call it a 12.5% pay rise! They now claim it was accepted by a majority. But so far, these results haven't been published!

Some of us, fed up with never-ending ballots, may have accepted the offer with the (still unclear) prospect of receiving a lump sum of backdated wages in June - since negotiations first started almost a year ago. But most of us are still fuming. We made clear that 7.5% wasn't enough, but also that the strike wasn't just over pay but also for sick pay and lay-off pay, let alone our dignity!



The same contemptuous deception was used against BMW Cowley R&H logistics in May 2022. It seems to be the way the Unite machinery operates. As for us, we've learnt a lesson. Next time, we'll keep the control of our dispute - and every decision involved - in the hands of the shop floor. □

- **What we need!**

We were glad to see new mates on Panther assembly this Tuesday, when 30 temps joined us on the line. But at risk of sounding like a broken record, we're fed up of welcoming new workers on temporary contracts - what everybody needs right now are decent permanent jobs! Instead, we hear even more temps are starting on the 5th! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 07/06/23]

- **We give them the intro!**

We can't help remembering that when some of us started here, we sat for 2 (or even 3) days in a room to be given an introduction to Ford's lalaland. These temps were given a half-a-second introduction on Monday and were thrown onto the lines on Tuesday... straight into the Lion's Den, Darkside, or the Chicken Farm's mayhen... Sure, we can step in to help - but Ford better beware. Our advice won't be along their lines... [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 07/06/23]

- **Missing in in-action**

Tiger machining is going from bad to worse if that's possible. Running 12 hours and scores getting lower! They try drafting us in from everywhere at all different times, under-lap, over-lap, to hit scores, but still don't! No wonder the clueless managers are hiding away in the office! One good thing tho': we're forgetting what they look like!

What-the-dev-il? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 07/06/23]

**King's Cross railway station (London)****What's next for railway cleaners?**

Atalian, Churchill and Mitie workers are being re-balloted by the RMT over pay, sick pay and travel allowances. For Churchill workers (we've been taking action since Feb last year!), this isn't just "deja vu", but many of us have the feeling that our 20 strike days so far, have been squandered. Because while all railway cleaners (be they Mitie, Atalian or Churchill) have the exact same problems, each time Churchill workers struck, we did so completely on our own.

Finally, last October, the RMT balloted workers in Atalian and Mitie for strike as well, claiming it was launching a united

campaign for £15/hour. However, since then, the RMT has only called 3 strike days - and still not for everyone! King's X Atalian workers were out for just one day. And when Atalian bosses decided to cut all our tanking jobs 2 months ago, we waited in vain for RMT officials to discuss with us about striking against this.

Gate Gourmet workers (we load food and drinks onto trains) have also now been balloted for strike and 92% voted "YES" - although with a 55% turnout. There's been no announcement of strike days.

Surely the lesson of this past year for



all of us, is that we need to strike together - not just with each other, but with the main railway workforce (not to mention the NHS, civil service, teachers, etc!)... To do so we're going to have to override the leadership at Unity house and find a way to organise this ourselves. □

- **Now we need to coordinate...**

Next week (21 June) will mark 1 year since the RMT launched our fight for a pay rise. Now, more than ever, we need to stick together and coordinate our fight with the rest of the railway workers, i.e., train drivers and cleaners. So what's happening?

We're told discussions between RMT and ASLEF union officials will take place. Better late than never? [King's X Workers' Platform 13/06/23]

- **...With ASLEF**

Over 90% of Aslef train drivers in 14 of the companies (and 100% in one of them!) voted "yes!" to renew the strike mandate! Just as we expected! The next step is more strikes - and this time together with everyone else - till we win! [King's X Workers' Platform 13/06/23]

- **Come rain or shine...**

Because of the on-going heatwave, the Azuma trains aren't allowed to go full speed and in some places can't go over 20mph... Perhaps LNER managers should change their motto from "we make it happen" to

"we make it happen weather permitted"... [King's X Workers' Platform 13/06/23]

- **...Azumas can't burn up the tracks**

Jokes aside, Network Rail already cut 1,000 maintenance jobs and plan to cut even more. So who'll fix and maintain the tracks used by high-speed trains (and all others)? Especially now climate change is here for good? All the sacked workers must be brought back (and more workers recruited) so that we can have safe and well-maintained tracks, signals and overheads... [King's X Workers' Platform 13/06/23]

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)****Letter from the North West**

Does anyone know what's going on as regards our dispute? The silence is deafening. Broadband speed may not be the best up here, but it appears the slick communications department has lost its internet. The same has happened to our payslips, which are going online. Many of us don't have the app so we have no idea how we are going to see if we've been paid properly. Of course we all know what's coming - no app, no work. Just like the "other" couriers.

We're all still voting NO when it comes to that so-called "Agreement" recommended by the union leaders.

Regardless of how long the vote is delayed. General Secretary Ward keeps postponing it. The offer will simply green light the next round of cuts if we accept it. Our mates are still leaving in droves. We may not be able to exercise our vote on paper, so we're voting with our feet instead. The job is relentless and no one can see it getting any better. Our workload should be lighter but not this year. Many of us are dreading summer lapsing.

Just as the heatwaves start we're being thrown out onto the street later in the day, into the hottest parts of the day.



Even later starts (which is in the new "Agreement") will make this worse and everyone fears for their safety. There will be no slowing down, taking extra breaks or walking in the shade. We don't have the time. Maybe our comrades down south can pop into the CWU headquarters and let them know its going to be a hot summer for us... and them too! ☐

**• Someone needs a job... and it's not us!**

The processing shift manager tried to force those of us designated "supernumerary" into signing up for new duties, saying if we don't, we'll be sent to a "Redeployment Centre"... What on earth is that? A "job centre for Royal Mail" he calls it. So that's new. It's yet another thing that management seem to have come up with out of the blue. But we're going nowhere. Not to this so-called "Redeployment Centre" nor anywhere else. [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 13/06/23]

**• Weekends are not for working**

New duty lists were put up in the book-room for part-timers, despite the fact that all of this was meant to be paused and none of us agreed to any such thing. These duties even include regular Saturday and Sunday shifts. Who would want to give up every single weekend? [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 13/06/23]

**• Management is supernumerary, not us!**

It's bad enough that many of us have been branded "supernumerary" - in fact, we've been "under-numerary" for far too long.

But to make things worse, managers want to move us to whatever duties they see fit. And even regardless of seniority! No way! [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 13/06/23]

**• No to these 1-to-1 meetings!**

Managers already spilled the beans about what sort of processing duties they want those of us they've called "supernumerary" to do. What does "supernumerary" even mean? One-to-one meetings with managers are postponed for the time-being. But they, and this supernumerary nonsense need to be scrapped altogether! [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 13/06/23]

**BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)****No more of BMW's screwing us down!**

When BMW cut the third shift back in November, our working day increased by 1 hour and 45 minutes. But that wasn't enough. Managers then got on our backs to make a "Working Time Account Plan", i.e. to work overtime on our rest days, increasing our working week to 46 hours!

And now they're trying to add another 30 minutes at the start of the day shift alongside the 30 minutes overtime ("Volume Protection Overtime"!)

they already add to the end of the night shift whenever they like! That extra 2 hours a week, plus all the overtime, would take our average working week up to 48 hours - which is in fact, the upper limit set by the EU working time directive (which for now, still applies).

This is too much! It's high time we protect ourselves rather than BMW's "volumes", and cut our working hours! So, next on our agenda: 6-hour shifts



max, plus an hour's break, and no loss of pay, of course! ☐

**• We need a third, fourth and fifth shift!**

And we hear more Saturday shifts are "expected" next month, yet again. The only solution is to divide the work between many, many more of us! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 06/06/23]

**• Too much work! no to unpaid work!**

The "additional WTA" BMW wants amounts to making around 1,400-1,800 extra cars per month, i.e., working a whole 1.5 days for free each month! This is why we overwhelmingly refused these way too long 10hr15min shifts! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 06/06/23]

**• We need to set our own pace**

The speed of the line is mad! If 50 cars per hour used to be full blast, now BMW's trying to squeeze 60 cars per hour with half a crew fewer workers... Our workload has increased by almost 40%! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 06/06/23]

**• Abolition!**

At BMW/Staffline but also in Rudolph, we've been asked to work WTA on Saturdays again... This, after a 5-day week on almost 10hr shifts and many also expected to work their rest days and VPO! We've had enough of this "modern slavery". [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 06/06/23]

**• No to overtime**

We agency workers at Rudolph are still waiting to be paid the hours we worked on Sundays or bank holidays! No chance we'll do that again - it's a full-time job just getting them to cough up! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 06/06/23]

**• Whose genius idea was this?**

At Rudolph, not many of us opted for the "payment protection scheme" - the company's "offer" to bank hours for next year's shutdown - paid for now with our wages. At best, the banked hours would cover a maximum of 2 weeks; so what about the other 7 weeks we'd be laid off? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 06/06/23]

## INDIA-ODISHA: A TRAIN CRASH WAITING TO HAPPEN

The Indian Railways is the largest railway system under single ownership in the world. It transports 8 billion passengers a year over almost 70,000 kms of track and 700 stations. Many of its 1.75 million railway workers live in special railway settlements and neighbourhoods. Large parts of railway infrastructure, constructed in the colonial period, remains archaic. Since the 1990s, parts of this nationalised system have been sold off to private companies - including stations, carriage construction and maintenance, signalling, track maintenance, warehousing, catering, hospitality... And other parts, such as railway engineering workshops, are being prepared for privatisation. About 59% of the track is electrified, many trains still run on diesel.

On 2 June, three trains crashed into one another in the eastern Indian state of Odisha. According to initial media reports the Coromandel Express passenger train travelling at 120km/hour, was wrongly diverted off the main line to a loop line, hitting a stationary goods train. The crash resulted in 21 coaches derailling and hitting another passenger train which was travelling on a parallel line. An estimated 275 people were killed and 1,100 injured. Over 100 bodies remain unidentifiable, they are so badly mangled and burnt.

This is the worst train disaster in India in nearly 30 years. The Modi government immediately began pointing a finger at "criminals" and "saboteurs". But the real culprit lurking in the background is the project to privatise this vast rail system, which dates back to the 1990s and for which both Congress and BJP-led governments alike, are responsible.

### Privatisation and cuts

So, while the precise cause of this particular crash remains "under investigation" - it is unclear whether signalling or track maintenance, or both, were at fault - it is a fact that such a disaster was just waiting to happen, in a railway system which has been run down and ripped apart for private profit over the last 3 decades.

During this period, essential train maintenance depots were shut down and lucrative contracts handed to companies like Alstom, Hitachi, Siemens, Adani, Tata and Jindal, which have run roughshod over railway safety rules, regulations regarding signal placement, maximum limits on freight loads, etc.



For instance, while signals are supposed always to be at drivers' eye-level to the left of the track, sub-contractors have placed them randomly, rendering them invisible. Freight trains are routinely loaded beyond capacity, increasing their chance of derailling or capsizing.

Since Modi first came to power in 2014, the situation has only got worse. Instead of basic renewal, funds have been diverted to buy flashy "Vande Bharat" ("Hail India") trains. Never mind that given the poor quality of the tracks, these 160km/hour "bullet" trains can only travel at half that speed!

Despite a government audit of railway accidents which showed that derailments due to delayed or inadequate track renewal were the leading cause of accidents in the previous 5 years, today, almost 10,000 kms of railway track is past its due date for replacement. The capacity utilisation of about 8,000 kms of track, including the section where the Odisha crash happened, is above 100%. The budget for railway safety has been cut by 79%; hundred-year-old railway bridges have not been rebuilt, machinery which should have been replaced 50 years ago is still in use. Third-class compartments, used by workers and the poor, are ever more crowded.

### Attacks on railway workers

There has been a sustained attack on railway workers' jobs. At least 80,000

have been cut since 2010. Every department is severely understaffed and posts are left vacant. In Odisha's South-Central Railway Division, 16,000 of 93,000 posts are unfilled, 11,012 of them in the safety department.

Signalling and track diversion systems often have to be manually overridden by station staff. In the recent past, major accidents have been prevented only because train drivers noticed in time that they had been wrongly switched to a line allocated to another train.

To cover vacancies, drivers, who are legally supposed to work not more than 9 hours, are forced to work 11-13 hours and 5-6 consecutive night shifts, sometimes on trains they are not qualified to drive. Permanent maintenance workers have been replaced by unqualified local sub-contractors. Gangmen, who maintain the tracks, have had their patrol areas extended to over 20 kms/day - an almost impossible distance to cover.

### Set-up for disaster

So yes, the Odisha railway crash was an accident waiting to happen and all the warning signs were there.

President Modi has charged his Central Bureau of Investigation with finding the "culprits" behind the accident. But it is successive governments and the bosses of the companies which have parasitised the railways who have blood on their hands. □

In addition to this monthly paper, we publish fortnightly bulletins in several large workplaces in the South East, a quarterly journal, "Class Struggle" and the "Internationalist Communist Forums" - a series of pamphlets on topical issues.

If you wish to find out more about our ideas, activities and publications, contact the Workers' Fight activist who sold you this issue of our paper, or write to us either by e-mail, at [contact@w-fight.org](mailto:contact@w-fight.org), or by postal mail at:

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