

WORKERS' fight



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

Brexit, tariffs, austerity, WE WON'T PAY FOR THEIR TRADE WAR!

There is one major difference between Donald Trump and his "alt-right" administration, on the one hand, and Theresa May and her Westminster Brexiteers, on the other: Trump wields the power of an economic giant; whereas May only represents an ageing economic dwarf, crippled by the parasitism of its financial sphere.

But other than that, their rhetoric and aims are similar. Trump wants to "keep America great", while May wants to "make Britain great again". One brags about standing for "national security", the other about her defence of the "national interest" and the only interests they both defend are those of big business.

Trade: the law of the jungle

But doesn't Trump argue for protective tariffs, as opposed to May's "Free Trade"? True, but they are just two sides of the same coin.

"Free Trade" was invented by British capital, in the 19th century, as a fig-leaf for its ruthless domination of the world. But it was just the law of the jungle. The strongest powers demanded the "freedom" to impose their goods on weaker countries and to loot their resources. Conversely they retained the "freedom" to impose tariffs on imports, to protect their capitalists' share of the domestic market. And since it was just a question of balance of forces, the richest powers decided what "freedoms" would be allowed to whom.

Today, only the packaging has changed. "Free Trade" is no longer imposed by the Royal Navy. It is now encapsulated into the kind of post-Brexit "trade deals" that David Davis is so strenuously trying to cobble up. But, these deals merely reflect the same relationship of forces.



As to tariffs, on paper they no longer exist - or hardly. But, in fact they do. For instance, most of the so-called consumer protection regulations are nothing but disguised tariffs, designed to make imported goods more expensive to produce for foreign competitors.

In a nutshell, beneath today's diplomatic language, the trade war goes on, as ruthless and brutal as ever.

Trade war and class war

In fact, as Trump's steel tariffs show, the capitalists' trade war is never far away. Even if Trump's real aim is to win votes by claiming that threatening tariffs is a way to create jobs in the US.

The same can be said of the Tory right-wing's messy attempt to lure voters into thinking that boosting company profits by means of post-Brexit trade deals, will somehow improve living conditions.

These are just cheap tricks. The capitalists may well increase their profits at the expense of their foreign

competitors. But when has there ever been a "trickle down" effect for the working class? Never - and especially not in this period of crisis, in which the bosses have got used to turning the screw of exploitation, by reducing real wages and increasing casualisation.

In fact, the other face of the capitalists' trade war is their class war - against the working class. Boosting profits by "increasing productivity to boost competitiveness", as they say, necessarily means increasing the exploitation of labour.

With Brexit, this is what the working class faces: a trade war in which the bosses and their politicians plan to use workers as cannon fodder, squeezing wages and conditions in the name of competitiveness.

No-one wants to be used as cannon fodder by British capital in its war for profits! But if the working class wants to refuse to play along with the capitalists' mad logic, it has to prepare itself to fight a class war against them! □

Social

Falling life expectancy: capitalism is killing us

Life expectancy in Britain was increasing until 2010, when it started to stagnate. The 2017 statistics show it is now falling. In fact these latest figures indicate that the trend of rising life expectancy since the turn of the century has reversed. Projections by the Office for National Statistics show that by 2041, women will live to 86.2 years and men 83.4 years - a decrease of almost a whole year, compared to previous figures released in 2015.

Analysis of the data, conducted by Public Health England, found alarming disparities in longevity by local authority. Residents in former mining towns and isolated rural areas are expected to have the shortest lives. A special survey



The former mining town of Easington, County Durham

accounting for low pay, zero-hour contracts and working night-shifts would

probably show even worse disparities. Society is literally going backwards. □

• Workers' rights - a question of balance of forces

Gary Smith, a plumber working for Pimlico Plumbers took the company to tribunal in 2011, arguing that he was a "worker" employed by the company and not "self-employed". The tribunal found that, according to the law, he was a "worker" in some respects because he was required to work a certain number of hours per week and to drive a van with the company's logo. The company then lodged an appeal which has now reached the Supreme Court. And its verdict will

set a legal precedent that could allow other bogus "self-employed" workers to take companies like Uber and Deliveroo to court.

But for how long? The Taylor report on the gig economy shows how politicians can easily tweak the law to suit the bosses' needs. What's more, why should the Supreme Court's public school, Oxbridge educated judges, be able to decide what rights workers have? Rights have been won in the past by the working class

thanks to their fights, by tilting the relationship of forces to their advantage in the class struggle. What was true yesterday remains just as valid today. To protect its rights, the working class can only rely on uniting its collective strength across all the artificial divisions created by its exploiters. The old slogan of the working-class movement, "an injury to one is an injury to all" has to be revived - urgently!

• Jobs, wages: the crisis goes on

After a series of falls over the past 12 months, official unemployment in the three months to December rose by 46,000, to 1.47 million. A big increase of 30,000 (to 547,000), among the under-25s, was the main factor. This was the fastest rise in unemployment for nearly five years. What's more, job cuts in retail chains and at Carillion and its subcontractors have yet to appear in these figures. Of course, the real jobless total, including all those whose benefits have been sanctioned, or who continue to get them while on government workfare schemes, remains far higher - not to mention the record level of casual jobs which conceals widespread under-employment, which is not reflected by these official figures.

We are told that meanwhile, workers' earnings have increased by a miserly

2.5% on average. But even this figure is a gross overestimate, since it only reflects the situation in workplaces employing at least 20 workers and does not take into account a whole range of casual jobs. In any case, this is way behind the 4% RPI inflation. In other words, if the crisis has long been over for shareholders, it's dragging on endlessly for the working class!

• Make the Carillion bosses pay!

Carillion's bankruptcy on 15 January, put into question the future of its 43,000 employees worldwide, 19,500 of them in Britain, not counting 30,000 workers employed by sub-contractors. Job losses are still mounting. A month and a half since Carillion's collapse, the count of jobs lost stands at 1,369. But there will be more to come.

While 6,000 jobs have been taken over by rival construction companies, the

future of the rest remains uncertain. The government's sole response is to repeat that "those who have lost their jobs will be able to find support through Jobcentre Plus' Rapid Response Service", and to say that they can claim statutory redundancy pay. But it turns out they could have to wait up to six weeks even to be paid this sum!

Outrageously, while Carillion claims bankruptcy and throws thousands of workers onto the street, it continues to pay its bosses - the very same ones who caused its bankruptcy in the first place! For instance, the company's former boss, Richard Howson, who left Carillion in 2016, will continue to be paid a £600,000 salary and £28,000 benefits until October 2018! Shouldn't this money - and Carillion's shareholders' past dividends - be used to pay the workers their wages until they can find equivalent employment?

Massaging figures to cut costs?

Bank of England governor Mark Carney has called for RPI (Retail Price Index) as a measure of inflation to be scrapped completely, supposedly because the maths behind it is inaccurate. But although RPI was already lower than the rises in the cost of living in the real world, Carney is not suggesting a measure of inflation that better reflects real inflation. On the contrary, he is hinting that the better measure would be CPI (Consumer Price Index), which runs 0.7%

lower than RPI on average, since the way it is calculated does not include increases in housing costs, whether in terms of rents or mortgages. The reason for his proposal is that it would allow the Bank to artificially reduce the rate of interest on government bonds and PFI contracts, some of which will run into the second half of the century! Yes, all that for the government to "reduce its deficit" - the one that was caused by bailing out the banks in the first place!

But for the working class, the shift from RPI to CPI would mask further the gap

between "official" and real inflation. State pensions and benefits, pegged to CPI, have long suffered from this disadvantage. But a total shift to CPI will allow companies whose pay offers are currently linked to RPI, to offer even lower than real-inflation (non) rises. In other words, another means to impose a wage cut! On the other hand, linking annual fare rises or student loans to CPI would help the population, but not the companies or banks... Maybe that's why the government is not in any rush to heed Carney.

Homeless people and cold-blooded politicians

Housing

At least 10 homeless people died during the coldest days of last month. This is probably an underestimate, since the figures rely on reports from local charities: the government doesn't bother to collate or centralise figures - it doesn't do "body counts"...

In fact there are no regulations in place to make sure that the people sleeping rough are taken care of, whatever the weather - extreme or not. There is only a vague "humanitarian obligation" on local authorities to do all they can to prevent deaths on the streets.

In London, even though emergency centres were opened by the Mayor, an abysmally small number - just 500 - beds were provided during the big freeze. A homeless man interviewed by the BBC shed some light on this reality at the centre in Westminster. The centre was



opened as late as 11 at night and then those waiting were asked "do you (really) want to go in"? Behind the "polite" question was the fact that there weren't enough places for everyone! So the centre operated on a first come, first serve, basis. Not enough places in Westminster? The

Houses of Parliament alone could provide a roof for hundreds, if not thousands, of people! Yet the reality in this society designed for, and run by the rich, is that the streets of Westminster are "home" to the largest number of rough sleepers in the country. □

• The "fake homeless" slander

The rising number of homeless is accompanied - and not for the first time in history - by their increasing criminalisation. They are being accused of not being "genuine" by people who want the rest of us to believe that homeless beggars are swindling the public... for a few coppers? Even worse, such prejudices are now being fuelled by those in positions of power.

Police in Cambridgeshire claimed last month that every single "homeless" beggar in Ely was making "substantial amounts of money" and that the city had no "genuine" rough sleepers. A businessman in Torquay, Devon, launched a campaign in which volunteers photographed people and put up posters warning "fake homeless" people that they would be "cross-referenced". The leader of Windsor council called for rough sleepers to be cleared from the town before

the royal wedding in May and even demanded that vagrancy laws of 19th century be brought back, when homeless were legally known as "mobile anomalies"!

Yes, after 200 years of capitalism, the poor - many of them "working poor" - are still not guaranteed a roof over their heads! The problem has got much worse since the 2007 crisis. The numbers of homeless doubled between 2010 and 2017. Peddling myths that such people are "faking" it, might help soothe the consciences of the rich, who are irritated by the sight of the homeless on the streets. And it certainly helps the government to deny the problem. But for the rest of us, surely, breaking the stranglehold of the rich property owners is the most urgent and pressing problem.

• Clutching at private housebuilding straws

On 5 March Theresa May promised again to get more homes built - reiterating her 2016 pledge of 300,000 new homes a year. Looking for reasons why housebuilding last year fell short of that target by about half, she could not ignore the recent revelation that developers are just speculating on land values by sitting on planning permissions for 420,000 homes. However, while threatening to force them to "do their duty for Britain", she also announced more deregulation in council planning policies - as if these policies were the main cause for the shortage of homes!

This speech signalled no real change from May. Building more

unaffordable private housing for sale is still the government's only answer to the housing crisis. So May plugged again the increased budget for Help to Buy, which has actually pushed housing prices up, while effectively providing the big construction companies with tens of billions of pounds in subsidies.

And, of course, her government has no plan to launch the massive programme of building social homes for really affordable rents, that is so urgently needed. Yet it was only by implementing such programmes, led and funded by central government, that large numbers of new homes were ever able to be built in any year since World War Two!

They sacrifice lives for profit

The media have gone silent over Grenfell, never mind the fact that 100 families are still awaiting rehousing. But thanks to Stormzy, the south London grime artist, the fire at Grenfell was placed right back under the spotlight during the Brit Awards on 21 February. He rapped:

"Yo Theresa May, where's the money for Grenfell? What, you thought we just forgot about Grenfell? You criminals and you got the cheek to call us savages. You should do some jail time, you should pay some damages. We should burn your house down and see if you can manage this."

Yes, too right. Grenfell was no accident. It was a crime perpetrated by successive Labour and Tory governments, with the help of a greedy Tory council. But even after this most shocking of disasters, many high-rises continue to be fire traps today. Nearly 100 blocks in England and Wales that were checked after Grenfell failed a fire safety test - 74 of them in London, the others in greater Manchester, Yorkshire and West Sussex. Some had never even had a mandatory fire risk assessment: there were inadequate fire escape routes and poorly-maintained safety equipment, among many other issues. It seems as if what happened after the Lakanal House fire in 2009, is happening all over again. After Lakanal, the lessons were never learnt, or rather, they were deliberately ignored so that local council budgets could be cut. Stormzy said it: their profit system needs burning down.

Crisis watch**They get fat on workers' sweat - time for change!**

2017 was another fat year for shareholders the world over. A total £940bn in dividends fell into their pockets without them having to lift a finger - a 7.7% increase over the previous year!

The shareholders of British companies did even better, with an all-time record of £94.4bn - up 10.5%! That the companies of a country which comprises less than 1% of the world population should dish out more than 10% of the world's dividends is a measure of the parasitism of British capital on the entire planet!

But the fact that its dividends should reach a record level in the middle of an economic crisis, also says a lot about its parasitism on workers' labour here. After all, haven't we heard all these companies complaining bitterly that retirement schemes were "unaffordable" - in



order to cut their contributions as well as workers' pensions? And while their shareholders were awarding themselves a 10.5% increase in dividends, weren't these companies whining that they could only "afford" miserly wage increases for

workers, far below the official 4% RPI inflation?

But then, if they're getting so rich, it's precisely because the working class is getting poorer - and it's high time this vicious trend was reversed! □

• Bank profits recover, not the economy!

So, the big banks are back in profit. Despite the billions in fines they had to pay (for fraud like the PPI scam, market fixing or money laundering) and, above all, despite

the crisis for which the working class is still paying an exorbitant price, their eye-watering profits have been hailed as if this was some sort of good news for the economy.

Predictably, HSBC, the largest of them all, topped the league, with over £15 billion, up 11% over the previous year. Barclays was up by 10% too and Standard Chartered by 500% - no less! But the other two banking giants, RBS and Lloyds, deserve special mention. RBS made its first profits in years, at a "modest" £572m. But this result was mostly due to its massive fines being offset by even more massive job cuts and branch closures. As to Lloyds, just as it was announcing a 24% increase in profit - to £5.3bn - together with a £3bn handout to its shareholders, it also disclosed another redundancy plan involving a thousand job cuts!

Ironically, both RBS and Lloyds would have disappeared in the dustbin of the

crisis, had it not been for the massive bailout they received from the then Labour government, in 2008. So public funds have been used to pay for job cuts and fines, in order to bring these banks back into profit for the sole benefit of their shareholders! But much the same can be said of the other banks which managed to avoid being taken over by the government. Indeed, since 2008, all of them have been drip-fed by the Bank of England, in the form of an on-going injection of fresh cash, known as "quantitative easing", worth a mind-boggling £400bn-plus over the years!

Of course, the fact that the banks are back in profit does not mean that the crisis is over - except for their shareholders. So how about making them pay out of their huge profits the cost of reversing all the austerity measures which successive governments have imposed on the working class, in the name of "deficit reduction"?

• Centrica's dividends: more job cuts!

The energy and services giant Centrica, which owns British Gas, has announced it will cut 4,000 jobs by 2020, mostly in Britain. And this, despite being a very profitable company, thanks to its racketeering of British Gas customers - among other things. Only last September, it increased electricity prices by 12.5% for 3.1m customers.

But of course, these sharks always want more. Centrica's well-named CEO Iain Conn, blamed the job cuts on the government's very timid threat to implement a tariff cap on energy and gas by the end of the year. But the real aim of the exercise is to cut labour costs, in order to "enhance" what Conn has the nerve to call a "very poor shareholders' experience"!

In fact, Centrica has a long record of "enhancing" shareholders' experience. In 2015, 6,000 jobs were cut and in 2016, another 3,000. Yet over these two years, the company dished out £1.25bn in dividends to its shareholders - for which the working class paid twice: first with its jobs and then with soaring energy bills!

• The Bahamas in Canary Wharf?

Charles Randell, a wealthy corporate lawyer, is to become the Chairman of the Financial Conduct Authority, in Canary Wharf. Significantly, though, the Treasury Committee responsible for his appointment seems to have no problem with the fact that Randell has been exposed by the media as a tax dodger himself - in particular for having invested in the so-called "Ingenious Film Partners 2 scheme", which allowed investors to make money out of

the tax breaks offered by the government for films produced in Britain. This scheme was nothing more than a way to milk the state.

The Treasury committee was nonetheless satisfied with Randell's "professional competence". And after all, why not? Randell already sits on the boards of bodies set up by the Bank of England and by the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Besides, haven't the

Treasury and HMRC a long tradition of employing consultants seconded by the big accountancy firms (which specialise in helping companies to reduce their tax bills) to draft tax legislation - and add all the necessary loopholes? Yes, in government and finance, crookedness is a virtue. Who better to "watch over" the stock market gamblers than a tax-dodger who knows how to look the other way when there's money to be made?

Come what May, Brexit means losses

Theresa May's 2nd March Mansion House speech on Brexit, was really aimed at her own party, given the ongoing feuds and infighting between hard and soft remainers and leavers. And particularly in the light of former PM, John Major's speech a few days before, which ridiculed her government, questioned her choices and called for a re-ballot.

But at least she admitted this time that the situation wasn't hunky-dory, that British finance and business would actually end up losing out due to Brexit and that the negotiating process was going to take an extended period, far beyond 2019.

To make up for "losses" May is again asking for a special kind of trade deal, which would still allow tariff-free access in certain areas, plus membership of some vital EU institutions like those regulating aviation, data transfer and atomic energy. On this, unsurprisingly, she has already received a rebuff. Chief EU negotiator, Michel Barnier has said no way can May "pick and mix", choosing what she

• The Boris "indigestion" charge

According to Boris Johnson, the problems posed by Brexit when it comes to the Irish border can be simply resolved - it's a purely technical matter. So just in the same way that the London Congestion Charge operates between Westminster and parts of Camden, so all human and goods' traffic between the two Irish states and Britain could pass freely

• Liam Fox's "free movement"

It seems Liam Fox, Theresa May's Trade Secretary, will very soon be adding a lot more air miles to the 290,000 he has already clocked up in his pursuit of "free trade" deals to "save" the British economy after Brexit! No matter that the kind of free trade he imagines was relegated to history books by the end of the 19th century... Yes, by which time the world was carved up into competitive

• These job cuts are a warning!

The number of big retailers announcing job cuts is growing. After M&S, Morrisons, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, B&Q, and some others, Homebase announced the closure of 40 out of its 250 stores - threatening 2,000 jobs. Toys R Us and Maplin have already fallen into administration, threatening another 5,500 jobs. As to clothing chain, New Look, it has announced that to avoid falling into administration, it will close 70 out of its 600 stores - meaning a further 1,000 jobs at risk!

Retail bosses blame "poor sales performance" and increasing indebtedness. But how could it be otherwise, when the build-up to Brexit has resulted in increasing inflation and decreasing real wages?



likes and dislikes.

But behind all this melodrama, the London City and big business have already started finding ways to mitigate their losses. This is the "mad Max" race to the bottom which David Davis said he wasn't engaging in. May began her speech with an address to the poor and disadvantaged in society - precisely because, no thanks to her, the zero-hours

- having pre-paid, under the watchful eye of CCTV!

What a relief for the politicians if, after all, the Irish border, hard or soft, visible or invisible, is no longer a "catch 22"! But of course it is. The right-wing Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party, which has Theresa May's Tories over a barrel, refuses utterly any "hard border"

trade blocks between 7 imperialist powers, until the tensions created by their national protectionism precipitated two world wars - on whose battlefields over 100 million human beings lost their lives.

Fox's latest time-travelling at taxpayer's expense is to the USA, to try to gain British exemption from Trump's 25% tariff on steel imports. So much for the "special relationship"! Anyway,

However, the retail giants have accumulated massive profits over the years - in fact, some of them even manage to continue paying dividends to shareholders while depriving workers of their livelihoods! This is a foretaste of what the bosses are cooking up for workers even before Brexit happens. Worse will come when it does happen - that is, unless the working class stands up and refuses to foot the Brexit bill for the bosses!

• Where is the working class' voice on Brexit?

In recent speeches, both May and Corbyn have said they put "people's jobs and living standards first" when it comes to Brexit. But when they talk about the car

Brexit watch

casual contract is alive and well and the number of unemployed and homeless and those denied benefits, is mounting every day!

Yes, May tried to look tough, but instead just appeared callous and hypocritical. Her final words - "let's get on with it" - even implied that it was the EU which had been slowing the proceedings! As if! ☐

between Britain and Northern Ireland. Yet retaining the no-border situation with the Republic - the EU, in other words - would mean that part of Britain remains in the EU, and is thus a free conduit into the rest of Britain and thus hasn't "left". Which is not acceptable to the Brexiteers. Or maybe it is now acceptable, at least to Boris?

Trump probably thinks that the 7% of the British steel industry's exports (worth £360m) which go to the US, are insignificant anyway. As for Fox, he still clings to the idea that Britain could join the Trans-Pacific Partnership. All that travelling around the world and he still doesn't know that the island of Britain is situated in the Atlantic...

industry, for instance, they only seem to worry about possible disruptions to the industry's supply chains after Brexit! Similarly, Unite has supported a report by a parliamentary select committee on the impact of Brexit on the car industry that argued that any tariff barriers would be "disastrous" for the industry's supply chains! But what about the jobs that companies like Vauxhall and Ford have already cut, or their attacks against workers' conditions, long before Brexit happens? No-one is talking about these issues. And since neither in the car industry, nor in any other industry, are workers allowed a say in the current Brexit saga, they will have to make their own voices heard!

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**The bosses' big pension scam**

A growing number of employers claim that their workers' pension funds are "unaffordable". And they base their claim on the large deficits that these funds are supposed to have built up, according to "independent" actuarial valuations. But then, what are these valuations really worth? In fact, they are totally opaque and impossible for anyone to control for the very simple reason that they are based on predicting the future ups and downs of the financial market - which, by definition, are totally unpredictable!

But never mind. The main "value" of these valuations for the bosses is that they can be adjusted to

fit their agenda. So for instance, in the past, Royal Mail, like many other companies, took a 13-year pension contributions holiday under the pretext that its workers' pension fund had a "surplus". Today, however, the same Royal Mail is brandishing another valuation which supposedly shows that the same pension fund will soon have a deficit, thereby backing up RM's claim that it is "unaffordable". Ironically, whatever a valuation says, the result is always the same: one way or another, the bosses try to cut their contributions and, when possible, the pensions themselves, which, for workers, amounts to a wage cut!



But why should workers' pensions be dependent on the ups and downs of the capitalist market - or on the bosses' greed and dirty tricks, for that matter? The capitalists may prefer to depend on speculation for their profits - but that's their choice. However it's a choice workers cannot afford. Having fattened up the bosses all their working lives, the very least workers should be able to expect is a decent pension, paid out of the profit mountain accumulated by the capitalist class as a whole!

• Do the maths

How can union officials have the cheek to claim the pay deal is "fantastic"?! With 5% backdated to October (already 6 months short!) and 2% for April 2019, what we'll really end up getting is an average pay rise of... 1.5% per year! So for instance, if a worker is on £350/week as of April 2017, he/she would be just £15 a week "better off" three years down the line! With inflation alive and kicking, how can this even be considered, let alone promoted as if it was "huge"! They are trying to play with smoke and mirrors to trick us - and they're meant to be on our side!! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 28/02/18]

• Back in the real world

Yes, real wages will be cut, and by how much depends on how high inflation is: at the moment, with RPI at 4% in January and likely to fall only to 3% by the end of the year, the cut in real wages we'd experience is 2-3%! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 28/02/18]

• Their magic versus our wallets

But of course, in order to sell us this crap, the union does its own maths, which seems to come straight out of another dimension! How the hell they claim the pay rise will be "12.33%", is anybody's guess! Even by squeezing the shortened working week, into the equation, which supposedly will leave us with a better hourly rate, we can't imagine how they reach their figure!

But if we took them at their word,

12.33% would give someone on £350/week now, just £50 more in their weekly pay by March 2020. So even their dreamt-up figures can't stand up to scrutiny! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 28/02/18]

• We're ashamed

A word of caution: if you've just eaten your lunch don't go look at the CWU Facebook videos of the reps' meetings! After spinning his yarn to those attending at Westminster, you hear Moya-Puppet say "are you proud of your union?" Then he asks the audience to shout "yes" louder, to be the loudest of all - and to outdo the guys Up North... Did we land up in a Pantomime by mistake? Local reps: please, tell us you didn't join in? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 28/02/18]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• Operation puma rescue**

After being called to an 'emergency summit meeting', we're told Puma machining will go back up to 3 shifts (eventually...). Apparently South Africa can't cope and Dagenham is ordered to pick up the shortfall. In fact, a global shortage of Puma parts has been declared and Ford has called on us to provide an "emergency response": by going on 12-hour-days and nights until a 3rd shift can be made up.

This w/end it was already 12-hrs Sat, Sun and Sun night... Which says it all about Fords: it screws up the running of its empire and expects us to pick up the pieces. Why should we? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 21/02/18]

• Puma crisis shakes the world?

Yup, you'd think a major earthquake had happened somewhere and that we weren't car workers, but paramedics needed to save people's lives. But no, they want us to sacrifice our lives, our health and well-being, for the sake of an obsolete engine. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 21/02/18]

• It's not funny, tho'

While overtime-lovers might rub their hands in glee, those of us who don't work much overtime are being pressurised to stay on! Last week some mates were working 14-hr shifts and the foreman even asked them to stay on for another 2 - making it 16 hours! And what if we had an accident driving home and killed someone? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 21/02/18]

**• Lower pay, no way**

We've been waiting for Fords to tell us when we are going 2 shifts on Tiger. Now they have: it's supposed to happen from after Easter Monday. And yes, it's good that we won't work nights any more - there should be no night production at Fords!

But it's definitely NOT good that they're cutting our pay by £70-£100 a week. We can't accept that. It's high time Ford was prevented from cutting pay/pushing us around whenever it decides it wants fewer engines...

King's Cross railway station (London)**VTEC is not running**

On Monday 26th February, the CEO and MD of Virgin Trains East Coast had to go and explain themselves to the Transport Select Committee after claiming they won't be able to meet the payments to the government promised in their franchise contract, namely £3.3bn by 2023.

This was "*honest and healthy discussion*", they said, but what was their excuse for being in the red? Not their poor management, their

• Snow and profits don't mix

You couldn't make it up. The Met Office forecast was heavy snow for Tuesday 27 February, so Network Rail (NR) announced train cancellations in advance. But come Tuesday, there was no snow. They were so worried about having to pay train operating companies for lost revenues that they hastily announced a

overpriced tickets, their trains falling apart due to lack of repair - no, of course not! They claimed they faced "economic challenges"; that the new Azuma trains (paid for by the DfT!) had been delayed... they even blamed "terrorism"!

Now, we are told, the government is considering two options: having the same culprits run the franchise but on a not-for-profit basis (with a reward at the end for achieving targets?)...or having the

full service for the next day... but then the network was almost snowed to a standstill, so NR was liable to pay train operators, anyway! And then it just got worse. By Friday NR was unable to de-ice the tracks. So, for instance, a London to Bournemouth train got stuck overnight for 9 hours before passengers and crews



DfT run it, through a body named the "Operator of Last Resort".

Of course, the 3rd option, is not even under discussion - i.e., renationalise, but under the control of rail-workers and rail-users.

were rescued. And passengers in a train held up just outside Lewisham station for 3 hours ended up forcing open the doors and walking to the station along the tracks, despite the live wire - which had to be switched off, delaying all other trains on connecting branches... Chaos.

• French rail workers' strike

The odds are that there will be an indefinite strike on the French railways very soon. Workers are outraged by President Macron's announcement that there will be 5,000 redundancies, new starts will no longer have SNCF status (they'll be 2nd tier!), whole chunks of the railways will be "sold" to private operators with workers compulsorily transferred

and that SNCF could be floated for shareholders! The unions are up in arms; they say it's like Thatcher and the miners: but this time rail workers must not be left to fight on their own!! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 28/02/18]

• We're sick of these strings!

So VTEC expect RMT officials to agree to discuss changes to sickness policy "jointly" or

else they won't pay everybody the pay "rise" or backpay we're entitled to? In other words, they still want to cut our sick pay and are still imposing conditions: they're just trying to skin us all in a different way! Let's hope the union leadership don't go along with it - and this time, unlike last time, they remain clear-headed! No more muddles! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 28/02/18]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**Double game with electric Mini**

BMW announced its plans to build electric Minis in China with the assurance that the venture would not affect its plans to build them at Cowley from next year. Back in February 2017, when strikes were being planned in the plant against the closure of our final salary pension schemes, BMW had already used this future electric model to blackmail the workforce, saying it was considering making this model in Germany. Only after the dispute (and the scheme) were ended, did

the company give the green light to production at Oxford. But nothing has yet been done to prepare the existing lines for electric production. So we'll only believe it when we see it!

All the more so, as the British car market is already shrinking and Brexit looks likely to isolate Britain from European markets, thereby undermining exports and production. But whichever way BMW organises its production, why should the Cowley workforce have to foot the



bill for its plans? Since we have every reason to be suspicious of BMW's intentions, the safest way forward is to prepare ourselves to make sure that this super-rich car company bears the full cost of any changes!

• The trick might go wrong

Some BMW managers now seem to fancy themselves as magicians. Yes, whatever they call it now, they cut bits off some jobs until they can get rid of them and load them on to others. When a reconfigured job is, say, 10% over cycle, they just make the 10% "disappear"! Except, of course,

that it doesn't. No "magic", just smoke and mirrors meant to disguise more work in the same time. If we suddenly disappear off the tracks it won't be magic either! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini 28/02/18]

• Flogging harder

Monday night last week (19 Feb), C shift made 396 cars in 429 minutes of

production. Another record? It certainly means the tracks were running faster than the 66 seconds per car on which all process times are supposedly based. Short-cuts in calculating the jobs and then speed-up on top - it's OTT, even by BMW's standards! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini 28/02/18]

Saudi Arabia

The visit of Saudi ruler Crown prince Mohammad bin Salman to London, has sparked off many protests - and for good reason. The Saudi regime stinks. This bigoted religious monarchy is one of the world's most repressive. Its misogynist society is one of the most backward and should have disappeared long ago.

But never mind, the Saudi regime is considered as a valued "asset" by the world's richest countries - an asset in many different ways, in fact. Not only is it a pillar of the imperialist order in the region - albeit an unreliable one, at times - but, more materialistically, it is also one of the main sources of the giant profits of the imperialist oil majors.

Of course, this is not the sort of argument that May would dare to invoke. Forced to justify this visit in front of the Commons, she even claimed that the Saudi regime "had saved hundreds of British lives". Really! If so, it would be the only known instance of this notoriously murderous regime actually "saving" people's lives!

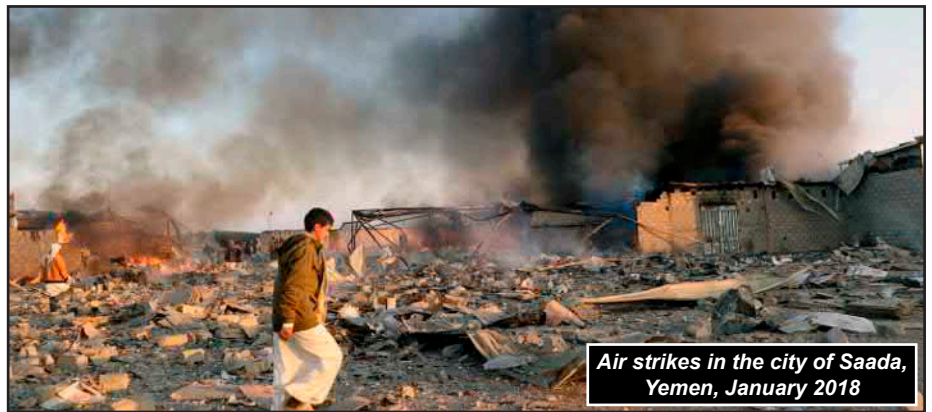
Murder as a method of government

Saudi Arabia is well-known for having armed and funded countless fundamentalist guerilla groups across the Middle East - including prominent Al-Qaeda affiliates such as the Syrian Al-Nusrah and its offshoot, Daesh, both of which were the main factors behind the catastrophic civil war in Syria! And all this, for the sole purpose of advancing the Saudi regime's regional ambitions in the Middle East.

For the very same reason, the Saudi regime has been waging a vicious 3-year bombing campaign against Yemen, one of the world's poorest countries, so as to prop up a puppet regime which had been rejected by the majority of the country's population. Over 10,000 Yemenis are estimated to have been directly killed by the Saudis' carpet bombing of their towns. And the lives of many more are now under threat, due to the destruction of vital infrastructure by the Saudi Air Force and to the Saudi-enforced blockade of the country which is preventing basic medicines and food stuffs from reaching the most affected areas.

What is more, the Saudi regime is also

British capital has blood on its hands



among the world's leading executioners of its own people: in the 6 years up to 2016, at least 628 Saudis are known to have been "legally" murdered by the regime - many of them because they had dared to protest against its brutality. If this is not a crime against humanity, what is? A few years ago, another Middle-Eastern dictator, Libya's colonel Gadaffi, was targeted for "regime change" for "murdering his own people", just as the Saudi regime does. However, unlike Gadaffi, who was executed under the auspices of the "international community", the Saudi chief executioner is wined and dined by Trump in the US and by May in Britain.

So where lies the difference? In any case, certainly not in the fact that Mohammad bin Salman has ever "saved" any life, British or otherwise - except maybe his own, since he recently presided over a major purge at the top of the Saudi regime, which cost many former dignitaries their lives.

Big business' favourite dictator

For May and her government, if there is a difference between the Saudi Crown prince and colonel Gadaffi, it has nothing to do with anyone's lives and everything to do with the greed of British capital.

British death merchants have made £3.6bn from selling weapons to the Saudi regime since it launched its aggression against in Yemen! And these weapons have been used. So much so, that Amnesty International has found numerous fragments of British-made cluster bombs in North Yemeni villages. Never mind that Britain is a signatory to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which

has banned the use of such munitions anywhere in the world since 2010! But then, of course, the Saudi royals didn't sign this Convention. Therefore, it's ok for British companies to sell them cluster bombs! For the profit sharks and their politicians, hypocrisy is the name of this bloody game!

However, there's more at stake for British capital than just these few billions. The Saudi regime's state oil company, Aramco, is due to be listed as a limited private company on western stock markets. And its market value is expected to reach a mind-boggling £1,440 billion - almost half as much as the total value of all the shares quoted in the City! Needless to say, British banks and financial institutions are salivating at this prospect.

So, the richest countries' leaders are bending over backwards to lure the Saudi royals into choosing their respective stock markets for the Aramco listing - which would mean billions in fees for their respective finance sharks. And bin Salman is having a lovely time dangling the Aramco carrot under their noses - especially with May, who is so desperate to have something to offer to the City in the run-up to a potentially devastating Brexit!

Meanwhile, from Saudi Arabia and Yemen to Syria and the Lebanon, thousands are being killed and maimed by the bloody policies of the Saudi regime. And if this regime has managed to survive to this day, it is largely thanks to being propped up by "champions of democracy" like Trump and May. The point is that it is worth hundreds of billions for the imperialist multinationals - and, for them, human lives do not carry any weight against such a colossal bounty! ☐

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, or by postal mail at:

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