

WORKERS' fight



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

BREXIT QUAGMIRE, A POISONOUS CLIMATE

The more May gets bogged down in her Brexit quagmire, the more it exposes the absurdity of the national borders she wants to resurrect.

For months, now, she's been staring clueless at the question of Northern Ireland's border. Convoluted schemes have been produced to turn this artificial border line into a hard border with the EU, while keeping it, somehow, "immaterial". But one after the other, these schemes have fallen apart - too impractical, too expensive, or both.

Meanwhile, the so-called "benefits" of this border for the Northern population were crudely exposed, when voters in the Republic decided to recognise a woman's right to decide whether or not she wants to have a child. By contrast, the women of Northern Ireland never had the limited rights introduced in Britain in 1967, nor will they benefit either from the progress now made in the Republic. May's bigoted ally, Arlene Foster, will make sure of that! In fact, May's Brexit politicking has already turned the "immaterial" border between the North and the Republic into a hard border for women!

Feeding racism of all kinds

Another illustration of the criminal absurdity of the politicians' obsession with borders, nationalities and "Navy blue" passports, was the Windrush scandal - and the vicious policy which was behind it.

Decades of blaming "foreigners" for the dire state of Britain's underfunded public services and social housing, allowed May to introduce her "hostile environment" policy against migrants and the Westminster Brexiteers to launch their vicious campaign against EU workers.

In the name of defending so-called



"Britishness" and protecting what they call "our borders", these politicians created a poisonous atmosphere within state institutions and across society.

As a result, foreigners - or anyone who doesn't "look" British - have become a legitimate target for bureaucrats who abuse their powers, knowing that they'll always be covered by officialdom - and not just bureaucrats, but also employers and landlords.

For the likes of May, Johnson, Gove and Co, all this nationalist demagoguery is just a political game - a means to win votes and advance their careers. But for those at the receiving end of their "hostile environment", no matter their origin or nationality, this is a constant threat which has already destroyed the lives of thousands and cannot be tolerated!

Nationalism, weapon for capital

The Brexit saga was built around the idea that what defines people is nationality, not class: British workers are supposed to have the same interests as

their bosses and to believe that they'll be safer once locked up behind the Brexit borders.

This is a lie, of course. May's Brexit fortress will be a prison, in which an isolated "British" working class will be made to slave away to fatten British capitalists. The way the bosses are gearing up for Brexit, cutting costs and jobs, speaks for itself: this is what's in store for after Brexit. "Shut up and work harder", we've heard it all before!

So, no! Workers, have no interest in common with their exploiters. The more bosses earn, the less workers do. This is what defines the position of workers here and in every country: they produce all the value in society for the benefit of capitalist parasites who own everything.

It is this indissoluble link that ties workers here to the international working class, that May and her Brexit politicians would want to bury under her nationalist nonsense, flag waving and xenophobic "hostile environment". But she won't succeed! ☐

Women's rights

The yes vote in the Irish referendum on abortion won by a large majority - 66.4% in favour, on a 64.1% turnout. So now the 8th constitutional amendment which gave the unborn foetus a "right to life" above that of the pregnant woman, will be repealed. And if the draft legislation goes through, women will be able to obtain abortions up to 12 weeks - although they will need a 72-hour "cooling off period". Between 12 and 24 weeks, a woman's "right" would however depend on risk to her health and require specialist consent.

But this is a huge step forward for women, given that some who were denied abortions died, as Savita Halappanavar did as recently as 2012, and that those who could afford it (over 3,000 last year) had to travel to Britain, with all that this involved.

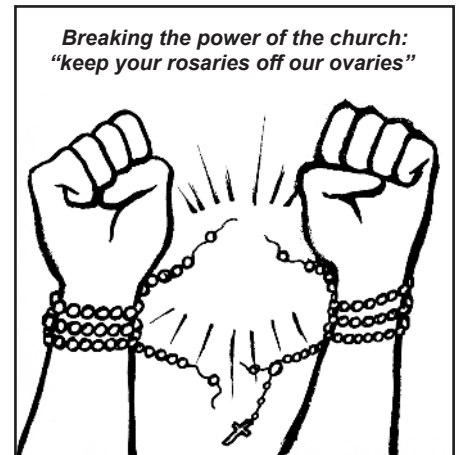
The gay Irish PM, and former doctor, Leo Varadkar, who'd promised this vote

Irish women take a small leap forward!

when he came into office in 2017, called it a "quiet revolution". Not that he's in any way "revolutionary". He leads conservative Fine Gael and as a cabinet minister made severe cuts to mental health services and welfare. But Ireland certainly had some catching up to do. Even obtaining basic contraception, like condoms, was illegal 40 years ago.

This sudden social leap forward may well be because the influence of the Catholic Church - which used to be all-pervasive - has been badly eroded by the scandal of child sex abuse and abuse of single mothers by its priests and nuns. In fact in 2015, already, Ireland was quite evidently "modernising" when the legalisation of gay marriage followed a referendum which saw 62.5% vote for it, on a 60.5% turnout.

So now Irish women will at last be able to access abortion pills (rather than face a jail sentence of up to 14 years for ordering them online) or undergo a simple surgical procedure



if need be. They will have a qualified "right to choose" not to have a baby. But there is some way to go in this backward world, before they, and indeed all women, are able to have free abortion on demand - let alone have the possibility to raise children in decent conditions if they so wish. ☐

• What about women in the North?

Thanks to Britain's occupation of Northern Ireland, the rights of the people there are utterly distorted and not even in line with the rights of people on the British mainland. So the anachronism of abortion legislation dating back to 1861, which made it a criminal offence at the time, is still the only abortion law in the North. Northern Ireland was specifically excluded from Britain's 1967 Act, which allows abortion on mental or

physical health grounds up to 24 weeks, if two doctors consent. And unlike in the South, in the North, gay marriage is still not legally recognised.

Of course the reason always was and is political, despite the so-called Peace Agreement and devolution in 1998. In fact all the more so, because now Theresa May is in thrall to Arlene Foster of the bigoted DUP, to keep May's party in power in Westminster - and since the

DUP is vehemently against abortion, the women in Northern Ireland will have to carry on seeking their abortions elsewhere for the time being. At least they won't have to come to Britain in early pregnancy - apparently special provisions are being made in the Republic to receive them. All the more reason for "no border" and in fact for the 6 counties to join the 26 and, as the song goes, "bring back our teddy's head"!

• Still not "on demand"

In fact for pregnancies up to 12 weeks, which can be aborted with a few pills, it looks as if it might now become easier in Ireland to end a pregnancy than in England, Scotland and Wales - where two doctors still need to sign their consent. But getting consent is not the end of the story on Britain's mainland. It was always difficult to obtain an abortion without all kinds of hurdles along the way, because of prejudice and so-called "conscience clauses" allowing staff to opt-out. Not to mention the worsening state

of the NHS, where 2/3 of procedures are now contracted out.

Significantly, there is a rising background noise emanating from the religious right against abortion - to the point where a group recently had to be served an injunction to stop it from harassing women outside an abortion clinic in West London. But even if the state intervenes occasionally against so-called "pro-lifers" in this way, it is at the very same time helping them get their message across, by integrating their "advice" services into

the system! For instance in Newham, the poorest borough in London, the list of on-line sexual health services providing abortion advice includes some which do not provide abortion referrals and in fact counsel against it.

So, given the ongoing attack against abortion rights by the political right and far-right, Ireland's vote is even more welcome, since it reinforces those in favour of abortion and may at least quieten down the bigots.

First homeless and then displaced!

Birmingham City Council has moved nearly 2,000 households into accommodation outside the city. Most are in neighbouring areas, but some are as far away as Manchester (87 miles away), Milton Keynes (70), Stoke-on-Trent (47), etc. Out of 1,972 households rehoused outside the city, many of whom are fleeing domestic violence, all but 77 are in bed and breakfast or budget hotels. In

fact, while facing a huge rise in rough sleeping, the city has just 3,000 homes to let and three times as many households on the waiting list!

Birmingham is not an isolated case, though. London councils have also been systematically relocating council tenants to distant locations. Likewise, the country's largest new town, Milton Keynes, bought a block of flats in Luton in 2016 to house 96 families on its waiting list, and sent others to Bedford and

Northampton.

These figures can't give an accurate measure of the unnecessary suffering caused by this bureaucratic dislocation inflicted on working-class people. But those who are responsible for it are well-known - the governments of all shades which, over the past 4 decades, have chosen to waste public funds on lavish subsidies and tax breaks for companies and the wealthy, while starving social housing of any kind of funding.

Cosmetic revamping of the Home Office

Immigration

Following the Windrush scandal, Sajid Javid was appointed Home Secretary to carry out a damage limitation exercise. But 2 months later, the Home Office has only contacted 3 Windrush workers wrongly deported out of 63 cases it has found so far - and this, despite Javid having admitted that the number of deportations was bound to be much higher! As to the 13,000 who called the Windrush helpline, of which 5,000 could be at risk of deportation, only 850 have been contacted so far!

What's more, the Home Office still uses section 322(5) of the Immigration Act to threaten hundreds of migrant workers with deportation - despite this section referring only to cases involving "criminality, a threat to national security, war crimes or travel bans." So now there are another 1,000 known cases of migrants who have been treated like terrorists under the most ridiculous pretexts - like making minor



mistakes in their tax returns. Some were given 14 days to leave and others have been allowed to stay to fight their cases, but not to work!

In other words, Javid was only brought in to revamp the image of the Home Office, after the scandal

caused by May's "hostile environment" against foreign workers. But so far, nothing has really changed. And how could it be otherwise, when successive governments have been whipping up anti-migrant prejudices for so long? □

• Hounded from cradle to grave!

Following the Windrush scandal, the government has now pledged to end another scandal - the powers which have allowed the Home Office to snoop into the records of 3,000 NHS patients, over the past year alone.

Predictably, this particularly nasty part of May's "hostile environment" against migrant workers was deterring people from seeking the medical help they needed. In fact, it was even killing people, like a migrant domestic worker who died after leaving a persistent

cough untreated for fear of reprisals.

But has this criminal policy been terminated then? Not at all! It is only "suspended" - as if it could ever become justifiable at some later point! Worse, there will be "exceptions": the Home Office will still have the same powers against patients whom it considers guilty of a "serious crime" or presenting "a risk to the public". And guess what? The same Home Office that was just caught red-handed hounding out and deporting people who had every right to

be in Britain, will decide who should be treated as an "exception"!

What's more, the NHS will still be used as a border policeman in another way - and against the poor - by demanding exorbitant sums for the most common procedures from patients who can't produce the right immigration credentials. This criminal, racist, anti-poor policy must be stopped. Healthcare should be a right for all, without any exception!

• Still a "hostile environment"

In May, the government ordered banks to stop performing a new kind of check on bank accounts which had been introduced in January. Not only had banks been required to check the immigration status of new customers, but they also had to check every bank account-holder's identity against a list of "unwanted" migrants provided by the anti-fraud organisation Cifas. Then, the bank had to send the details of the customers they had identified to the Home Office,

which in turn applied to the courts to close their accounts.

Given the Home Office's appalling record, this could only result in endless mistakes. But that is not the reason why the secondary checking has been stopped. The reason is that the banks have been complaining about the costs of these checks: they have to pay a fee to Cifas to access the list of "unwanted" migrants, carry out quarterly checks on 70m bank accounts, report what

they've found and close accounts - and risk losing money if these accounts are in debt.

Snooping into migrants' bank accounts may be temporarily halted therefore, but only to appease the bank bosses. As for the rest of the "hostile environment", which allows landlords and employers to check on migrants and blackmail them into poor housing or underpaid jobs, it remains in place!

Electronic justice?

The Courts and Tribunals Service for England and Wales has been extending the use of digital technology to cut 6,500 jobs. This 8-year programme, started in 2016, includes more use of video links in trials to cut transportation from prisons, with online submission of pleas and aims to remove 2.4m low-level victimless cases a year from physical courtrooms. Without

any evaluation of the replacement technology, let alone proof that it can work, already 90 buildings of the service's 460 have been sold off, raising £115m.

But the National Audit Office recently found the project running behind schedule and over-budget by £200m, a fifth of its original £1bn estimated cost. The NAO also made the obvious point that this project could undermine defendants (who, according to research, are more likely to

be found guilty when using video links) as well as public confidence in the justice system (by making it even more opaque). This is probably true, but why would ministers care? For a justice system which is primarily designed to defend the haves against the have-nots, fairness and transparency carry little weight against the fatal attraction of making massive savings on the wages of 6,500 workers!

Jobs watch

British bosses are calculating how much Brexit is going to cost them. A joint report by consultancy Oliver Wyman and law firm Clifford Chance estimates the cost of a no-deal Brexit to business at £58bn a year, with additional "red tape" costs of tariff barriers at £27bn. Of course, the bosses are preparing to make the working class foot this bill. Already, they are cutting jobs and freezing wages even as inflation rises thanks to a falling pound. Precarious jobs continue to increase with ever-growing numbers of workers on zero-hours, temp and self-employed contracts. To prevent strikes against these attacks, the bosses are already using the latest anti-Trade Union Act.

However, these attacks are only

The working class must make its own preparations



TUC march against precarious jobs,
12 May 2018

a foretaste of what the bosses have in store for the working class. Once they can conveniently ignore even the little protection offered by EU regulations, they will try to turn the screw even further, under the pretext that

competitiveness needs to be increased. But if, in the war between the capitalists and the working class, the bosses are making their preparations, the working class needs to respond, by preparing itself to fight back and win. ☐

• A system designed for shareholders

In May, telecom company BT announced 13,000 job cuts over the next three years. This comes on top of 4,000 job cuts which were recently announced. Meanwhile, the energy company Centrica has also announced 1,000 job cuts this year as part of a long-term plan to cut 4,000 jobs over the coming years.

Why so many job cuts? Because both companies' share prices have recently been falling... and "cutting costs" is the surest way for these profit sharks to impress the stock market, boost their share prices and keep their shareholders happy.

These giant companies are not short of money, of course: for instance, two weeks after announcing BT's job cuts, its CEO, Gavin Patterson, got a pay package worth £2.3m! But these are not the sort of costs that these profit sharks would ever choose to cut. For them, only the workers who produce their profits are dispensable!



• Retail sector job cuts

In the first three months of the year, as many as 21,413 jobs were cut or put at risk in retail. In the same period, 650 stores have closed.

The year started off with the collapse of Toys R Us and Maplin. With stagnant wages and rising inflation, the consumption of non-essential goods has fallen, leading to high street retailers like New Look, Mothercare, Carpetright and Homebase announcing store closures and thousands of job cuts. High street food chains Prezzo, Byron and Jamie's Italian have all culled hundreds of jobs.

But even supermarkets selling essential commodities are affected, with Morrisons, Tesco and Sainsbury's together announcing 5,200 job cuts. This month, Marks and Spencer announced that it plans to close over 100 stores by 2022, threatening at least 1500 jobs. At Sainsbury's, the company has decided to cut paid breaks, annual bonuses and premium pay for Sundays. This would result in an average wage cut of £400/month. The bankruptcy of Bargain Booze and Conviviality is now threatening 2,600 jobs, as well as Coca Cola's decision to shut down facilities in Milton Keynes and Northampton.

This is the madness of capitalist society: while producing more than enough for society's needs, it at the same time drives so many workers into unemployment and poverty that they cannot afford to fulfill them.

• Carillion report: no mention of the real issues

Two committees of MPs grabbed headlines with strongly-worded criticisms of Carillion's bosses, its auditors and the government, in a joint report into its collapse. Carillion executives were reckless, greedy and treated suppliers with contempt; the pensions regulator was "feeble" against its underfunding of pensions and the Financial Reporting Council was "too passive" to challenge its accounts. Auditors which signed off all of Carillion's accounts for 19 years, were complicit in its dubious accounting and decision to pay shareholders' dividends, profits or no.

All true, yet beyond these angry words there is not much substance. Governments of all the main parties pursued outsourcing for decades, instead of funding public services to be delivered by public bodies. Services giants like Carillion sprang up like mushrooms as a result. MPs are furious with Carillion for exposing again the failure of a policy most of them remain committed to, and with the big accounting firms for helping Carillion to conceal its rotten foundations. They recommend more aggressive regulation and a review of the cosy auditing market, dominated by four large firms.

But they don't even mention the obvious - the need to take public services away from these private sharks, without compensation or delay!

Pensions back into the black: what a scam!

The pension schemes of Britain's top 100 listed companies have swung back into the black for the first time since the financial crash of 2007: these schemes had an overall accounting surplus of £4bn by the end of 2017, reversing a £31bn deficit a year earlier.

How did that happen after all those pension scandals at BHS, Carillion etc.? Simple: over the past few years, many of these companies have closed their Defined Benefit

schemes to new and sometimes, even current, employees. Tesco closed its DB scheme in 2016, and BP has reduced its pension contributions, followed by BAE Systems, and Royal Bank of Scotland. As of January 2018, only 19 companies in the FTSE100 still ran DB schemes. The new calculations done this year took all these changes into account, and surprise, surprise, they found that the deficit had been wiped out!

An added factor in the reduction of companies' pension deficits is the fact that

workers' estimated life expectancy is now lower! Yes, they're banking on workers dying sooner! But pension schemes in surplus is not good news either. It only means that the bosses have succeeded in stealing a greater share of wages for themselves. Last year, FTSE 100 companies spent £13bn on pension contributions, but they paid out £80bn in dividends! And in the future, we can be sure that they they will be looking forward to much, much, more, in this upside-down society.

The crude Brexit customs drama

Theresa May is allowing her less-hard Brexiters to wear themselves out coming up with ever more bizarre "solutions" to the problem of border trade with the EU.

Whether it is a customs partnership, maximum facilitation, where electronic devices calculate tariffs and share out proceeds or variations on the theme of "frictionless trade", all of them hit the buffers when it comes to the Northern Irish border. And anyway, the head of HMRC claims that the extra cost of all the paperwork etc., will cost £17-20bn which is twice the size of Britain's net annual contribution to the EU budget - a slap in the face for Boris.

Which probably explains why Minister for Exiting Europe, David Davis, who has to have something ready for the EU summit on 28 June,



came up with the idea of a 10 mile wide "buffer zone" along the border, where Northern Irish businesses could be in a "special economic zone" which conformed to EU rules... Why not go the whole hog and just give the whole of the 6 counties back to Ireland?

Of course, that won't happen. In the end, May will have to stay in a customs union "by any other name" or leave with a hard bump which will certainly also bump her out of power, given the consequences for the City and British businesses... □

• The future of wages under Brexit

In his "Education and Employment Strategy" for prisoners, published in May, justice secretary David Gauke claimed he was going to "boost the prisoners' employment prospects" and called for a "cultural change" in society.

So now, the government is going to expand a scheme that offers 12-month apprenticeships to prisoners on release, paid at £3.70/hr. It also plans to increase the number of prisoners on temporary release

to supply companies with cheap labour. And cheap means cheap. Last year such prisoners were paid an average of £690/month. But to top it all, the government proposes to reward companies employing ex-prisoners on such rock-bottom wages, with a 1-year NI Contribution holiday!

Of course, Gauke's plans have nothing to do with prisoners' rehabilitation! In fact, he said it all when he admitted that "leaving the EU is also going to have an impact

on the workforce" and added that with his reforms, "employers will be better able to fill the short-term skills gaps".

In other words, Gauke, a notorious Brexiteer, wants to reassure employers who complain that Brexit will cause a shortage of labour, by offering them a much, much cheaper (British) workforce. Didn't the Leave camp claim that EU workers were pushing wages down? But who is really pushing them down?

• Free healthcare for all!

According to the Home Office, EU workers could be made to pay a health surcharge for using the NHS after Brexit. No figure has been mentioned so far, but migrants from outside the EU already pay a £200 health surcharge per person per year - which is set to soon rise to £400. In other words, these workers are already made to pay twice for using the NHS - since, like all British citizens, they pay for it with their taxes anyway!

Ironically, by doing this, the government is putting British ex-pats' European Health Insurance Cards at risk. As long as Britain is part of the EU, reciprocal agreements allow EU citizens in Britain and British citizens in the rest of the EU to get treatment under

the same conditions as their home country. However, if the Home Office's announcement is implemented, these agreements will automatically be cancelled!

But why should migrant workers have to pay for healthcare, just because of their nationality? Why, if not because it allows the government to blame them for the state of the NHS, when in fact it is the underfunding of the NHS and the parasitism of the private healthcare sharks on its budget which is the problem!

• Trade deals or fantasies?

Tory Brexiteers keep going on about wondrous trade deals with Commonwealth countries, like Australia and New Zealand as potential benefits of Brexit. Theresa May even claimed that Brexit "was the moment we chose to build a truly global Britain". But the EU will now have a year's head-start over Britain in finalising a deal with these two countries. In fact the EU is Australia's largest export market for services and also its largest source of foreign investment. So it's no surprise that it prioritises negotiating with the EU - the largest trading bloc in the world - rather than a little island called Britain.

The same holds true for the US, the world's largest economy. Whatever the likes of Boris Johnson may say about the "massive opportunities" of independent trade deals with the US, Britain, on its own, has no bargaining power against the US, given its

comparatively tiny economy. In any case, the US will continue to prefer trade deals with far larger blocs of trading partners, like the EU.

These Tory Brexiteers seem to be living in a time warp - imagining this is the 19th century when Britain could impose "free trade" because it was the leading industrial nation! But these days are long gone... Too bad.

• Brexit derails the economy

According to Bank of England governor, Mark Carney, the mere prospect of Brexit has already shrunk the British economy by 2%, or around £40bn. And the cost of this for each British household is apparently around £900, so far.

The point is that company investment, which was already at a record low due to the financial crisis, has ground to a halt for fear of a cliff-hedge Brexit which would jeopardize both exports and imports. So, now, Carney is trying to put on a brave face by claiming that the Bank is making plans to avoid a disaster.

But how? Since interest rates can't go any lower, its only option will be to inject even more cash into the pockets of British capital - as it did after the 2007 financial crisis. And if so, this will have the same consequences: the capitalists will have plenty of cash to play bingo on financial markets, while the working class will be expected to foot the bill for this largesse, through a new round of austerity, wage freezes and job cuts. No way!



Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• The elephant in the Transit**

It sounds like an ad for a big van! But it's not. Now we learn that 'Ford are committed to ending the silence on Mental Health'. Is this the same Ford which pushes us to speed up, do shift-work and OT, while cutting pay, and multi-tiering us, entrenching inequality? As if that's not a sure recipe for mental and physical health problems! And then they want to give us free mugs advertising "Time to Change"? [Workers' fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 30/05/18]

• Healthy profits are all they care about

We know that shift-work/sleep deprivation increases mental illness, cancer, diabetes, etc., especially among women. If Ford was serious about our

health, it'd stop building engines at night (which is lunatic, after all) and give us all decent, secure, working conditions. But, we bet, that'd give Ford bosses "mental health issues"! [Workers' fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 30/05/18]

• It was about time we had fire drill!

When the fire alert sounded on Puma (but not the alarm proper) group leaders said everyone out! Canteen, Medical, Puma, some of Panther, all went out thinking it was a fire drill. We were only told later that there was real smoke and fire... [Workers' fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 30/05/18]

• It lit up the darkside

Yes indeed, there were some fireworks on Panther Assy. A fire started in one of the (new!) overhead LED strip-lights. The lights kept burning; glass pieces fell



on the ground. Yet, the circuit didn't break (it should have) and the fire could have spread! [Workers' fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 30/05/18]

• Failure after failure

Not only did the lights fail, but so did the management. They came, one after the other, and they looked and looked again... But they didn't know what to do. Or they pretended ignorance, since they didn't want to evacuate the plant for something 'so small'. Burger was the worst of all - she asked why isn't the line working?! [Workers' fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 30/05/18]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• The mini... elec-trick**

Ah! The electric mini... All these rumours about the UK, Germany, Poland, or China, while saying that production is already going to be starting in 2019. In other words BMW must know exactly what it is going to do. And if the bosses are allowing all these contradictory rumours to float around it's only in order to play their usual game of blackmail. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford 23/05/18]

• Man-a-jerks' dance...

We see the mana-jerks in Underbody running around like headless chickens trying to fix the mess they've made in this plant. But the only way it could be fixed is by us forcing them to put back the hands they have cut off. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford 23/05/18]

• ...and man-a-jerks' pride

Yes! And after these cuts someone said that in one car there were as many as 70 faults. No wonder! But why should we care about THEIR mess? Wasn't all this the managers' fault in the first place?? It's their reputations which are at stake - certainly not ours! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford 23/05/18]

• Call a lie a lie

And so they said : 'The line has to run faster because there is production backlog of 2,000 cars'... But when we've caught up, and made an even higher score, guess what? They're still running the line just as fast! So what's the latest excuse for their speed-up? It's not like we expect the truth from these bosses, of course. Maybe stopping the line is what they expect from us?? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford 23/05/18]

**• It's a strike!!**

How many logos can you get on one guy and one truck? All this subcontracting to subcontractors who subcontract to other subcontractors is getting more and more ridiculous!

And they all employ agency and they love zero-hours contracts. But they wouldn't like it if they got zero hours of work. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford 23/05/18]

• Job slashing and hypocrisy

At Jaguar Land Rover's Solihull plant, the records of 647 workers were anonymously leaked to the workforce this month. These workers are temps employed by DHL, which does logistics in the plant, via an agency called Staffline. When they looked at these records, they found that

hundreds of them were to lose their jobs, some as early as that same week!

JLR initially dismissed the leaked records as "fake news". But now JLR, DHL and Staffline have all admitted they are real. However, none of them has had anything to say about the job cuts

themselves! They have only apologised about the leak of their employees' data! As if this was the issue and not the fact that hundreds of workers will soon be put out of their jobs! Especially after JLR announced 1000 job cuts at the plant only last month!

• Every little fight helps!

Workers at one of Tesco's largest distribution centres, in Dagenham, went on strike on 17 May against a below-inflation pay offer of 3%, which amounted to a mere 2.7p per hour increase. The workers demanded at least £1.39/hr more. Although Dagenham workers were the only ones to strike against this pay offer,

size obviously matters, and reports suggest that this strike affected 80% of Tesco shops in London. 525 workers struck and 80 manned the picket lines. On the independent Tesco staff forum "Very Little Helps" (!), supportive messages appeared from all over the Tesco network. Now the dispute has been

handed over to arbitration and conciliation service ACAS, to avert further strike action, with the agreement of Usdaw union officials - who didn't want the strike in the first place. The Dagenham workers will have to watch these officials like hawks if they want to win what they were fighting for!

King's Cross railway station (London)

East Coast mainline: more private sharks!

After the government decided to end the Virgin Trains East Coast franchise 5 years early, even papers like the bosses Financial Times spoke about "renationalisation". And for East Coast workers it seemed like really good news after 3 years of cuts and Virgin's extremely crass management. But this was not to be.

The re-named London and North Eastern Railway (LNER) will be run by a so-called "Operator of Last Resort", a structure already set up under Cameron in 2015, to take over the management of failed private rail operators. In fact it was pre-privatised

too, so that it would be nothing like the Directly Operated Railway model which had managed East Coast after National Express also failed to meet its franchise commitment in 2009. Indeed this Operator of Last Resort is a private consortium of 3 companies - engineering company Arup, accountancy firm Ernst & Young and transport consultant, SNC Lavalin.

Never mind that Ernst&Young supervised Carillion's dodgy financial dealings before its collapse. Or that the executives of SNC-Lavalin have been at the centre of fraud and corruption cases. They will be



allowed to temporarily operate the franchise from behind the scenes until Grayling finds a way to execute his masterplan of uniting train and track companies, by breaking up the publicly-owned Network Rail. □

• More trains, fewer drivers?

The new rail timetable that came into force on 20 May has led to complete chaos on the Great Northern, Thameslink and Southern rail franchises (run by Govia Thameslink Railway - GTR) and the Northern franchise (run by Arriva). Cancellations and delays stranded thousands of commuters. Until 4:30pm of the first day, there were 160 cancellations and 213 delays on Great Northern. One in 7 Northern trains were cancelled (and this doubled to 300 a week later!). Between them, GTR and Arriva managed to have a

thousand cancelled trains in just one day! On 1 June, every single Northern train running through the Lake District was cancelled. So disorganised was the whole timetable, and so irate were GTR passengers, that when GTR managers arranged their routine "#MeettheManager" at London's Kings Cross station, they called in police as back-up!

The biggest reason for this mess emerged early on, as railway workers themselves knew all too well: there were not enough drivers

trained on the new routes. This fact, which the companies admitted when the timetable "meltdown" occurred, was quickly buried by Transport Minister Grayling, who blamed publicly-owned Network Rail, as he would, given he has an agenda to re-privatise it. In turn, Network Rail pointed to the collapse of its biggest contractor, Carillion. However hard Grayling tries to "spin" this mess, it only exposes how the piecemeal and chaotic "planning" in a privatised railway simply cannot work!

• The June party!

There were smiles a-plenty last week when we heard on the media that Virgin is leaving on the 24th June... Not one day too soon! We're ready to pop the champagne! We have the banners and the flags ready: "Good bye, you won't be missed and... don't come back"... But of course we don't know what the new lot will have in store. And we need to be prepared for whatever they've got up their sleeves! [Workers' Platform King's X 23/05/18]

• Pay up before you go!!

What's happening in the meantime to VTEC workers who've still not received the pay they are owed after that opt-out fiasco? These lousy, dishonest bosses cannot be allowed to leave with this outstanding debt unpaid! Because there's no doubt they will try to do just that! [Workers' Platform King's X 23/05/18]

• New boss just like old boss?

The media and the RMT are talking about "renationalisation" of VTEC. In fact, it'll be a consortium of private sharks running the franchise hiding behind the government's skirts.

In short, private hands using public funds. [Workers' Platform King's X 23/05/18]

• We weren't born yesterday

Many of us remember the last time EC was in "public" hands. Directly Operated Railways - ECML carried on job cuts started by previous franchisees, esp through the use of agency workers on board. They didn't restore the diner car. They didn't improve our lousy conditions. It wasn't even anything like the old days under BR, despite what the RMT bigwigs would have us believe. [Workers' Platform King's X 23/05/18]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

• Union "bosses"?

Thanks so much to the CWU for sending us "their" annual financial results in the latest "letter to branches" - and even thanking us for our hard work!! However, it's a bit confusing. Are they now taking responsibility for RM's operating profits (up 1% to £674m)? Perhaps they need reminding that they aren't actually the company bosses, even if they really wish they were. But that makes their complaints of "Obscene!" against Rico Back's golden handshake of £6m (for all his past profiteering at GLS) sound more like envy than disgust. [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 23/05/18]

• Looking for excuses?

Dear, oh dear, Moya Greede announced that RM missed both 1st and 2nd class

mail targets this year... And the reasons she's given are surreal! She blames the "challenging industrial relations" - when in fact "Terry and Sue" even recorded a video last month to tell us how great their relationship was! And then, short of excuses, Greede ends up blaming... the weather and the Australian flu! [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 23/05/18]

• What's behind numbers?

Of course, when it comes to RM's targets, why should we give a monkey's? While Greede over-exercises her imagination trying to find excuses, we know that the work isn't flowing only because RM is cutting jobs. Quite simple. And those managers who think they can use missed targets to put pressure on us had better think again. [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 23/05/18]



• Cash flow

And yes, workflow isn't flowing, but profits certainly still are - mainly from the EU! Revenue at the European parcels delivery business, GLS, passed the £10bn mark, up 2%, pushing RM's overall pre-tax profit to £212m. And the cuts in our jobs and conditions here in Britain, offset any reduction in letters revenue, allowing RM to break even and shareholders to get 4% more in dividends over the year! [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 23/05/18]

Middle East

Donald Trump has finally withdrawn from the so-called "nuclear deal", which the US, Russia, China, Germany, France and Britain had reached with Iran in 2015. In practice, this means that a whole range of drastic economic sanctions have now been unilaterally reinstated by the US against Iran.

However, the forces at work behind these developments are far more powerful than Trump's bombastic posturing. The endgame in the war in Syria raises the possibility of a political settlement across the Middle East which could - or, at least, this is what the imperialist leaders hope - bring to an end the chronic political instability which has plagued the region for decades. If this settlement is to take place, the US, as the dominant imperialist power, wants it to be shaped according to its own interests - to allow its big

Preparations for a political settlement?

companies to maximise their looting of the local resources. But in order to achieve this objective, the US has to force the region's strong men - at least those who have displayed any kind of independence towards imperialism in the past - into a position of weakness.

This was already the reason for the air strikes carried out by the US, together with Britain and France, against Assad's regime, in April. The real aim wasn't to "punish" Assad for having used chemical weapons - assuming that he had, which remains to be proven - but to remind him that the imperialist powers were prepared to use their military might against his regime. Likewise today with Iran. This country, whose population and economy are the largest in the Middle East, is a thorn in the side for the US - especially since its military assistance, first to the Iraqi

regime and then to the Syrian regime, has played a decisive role in the defeat of ISIL. Now that ISIL has been defeated in the Middle East, the US leaders have decided that the Iranian regime has acquired too much influence and complain that "*Iran's bloody ambitions have grown only more brazen*", to quote one of Trump's statements.

Hence Trump's withdrawal from the "nuclear deal" with Iran, in order to provide the US administration with a means to blackmail the Iranian regime into toeing the US line in the future negotiations. And never mind if US sanctions result in shortages, higher prices and massive job cuts for the Iranian population. The fate of the region's population has never been of any concern to the imperialist powers! ☐

Palestine

On May 27th, the Israeli authorities started completing the total encirclement of the Gaza Strip. A 37 mile-long marine barrier is being built to completely block the Gaza Strip's 25 miles of coast. Once finished, by the end of this year, Gaza will truly be no more than an open-air prison camp, with no free access to or from the outside world, whether by land, air or sea.

Already the 10-year long blockade imposed on Gaza by Israel has reduced most of its 1.85 million Palestinian population to barely surviving on humanitarian aid. Half of this population has no source of regular income. Public infrastructure keeps falling to pieces, since most construction materials, parts and machines are prevented from entering Gaza, under the pretext that they "might be used for terrorist activities". In short, as things stand, the population of Gaza has neither hope nor future.

This is why, since March 30th, tens of thousands of protesters have been coming back day after day to the fence which separates Gaza from Israel, to express their anger at being treated as prisoners on their own land. And this, in spite of the live bullets of Israeli army snipers, which have claimed a total of 119 lives so far among the unarmed protesters.

This was the time chosen by Trump and Israeli prime minister Netanyahu, to stage a deliberate provocation, on

Another time bomb in the making



Sunday 13th May, for the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Israeli state.

For the Palestinians, this day is a reminder of how 750,000 of their forebears were expelled at gunpoint from their land, in order to allow the new Israeli state to carve out a territory for itself and assert its authority.

So, the fact that this very day was chosen for the inauguration of the first ever US embassy in Jerusalem - a town which has been under Israeli occupation since 1967 despite countless condemnations by the UN - was no accident.

For the sake of preserving Netanyahu's

hardline, right-wing regime as a valued ally in the region, the US administration underwrites its on-going hijacking of the Palestinians' towns and land - and now, of their sea coast! But the imperialist leaders never seem to learn from history. In the past, this same policy led to many explosions of anger among the Palestinians. The more that hardship and humiliation is inflicted on the Palestinians with the support of imperialism, the more explosive power this will stoke up in Palestine - and the more likely it is that this powder keg will explode yet again!

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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