

WORKERS'



fight

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

MAKE BIG BUSINESS AND THE WEALTHY PAY FOR THEIR CRISIS!

Unemployment is rising and it is rising fast. After the industries directly hit by the crisis, the disease has spread to the most profitable of all companies, the pharmaceutical and oil giants, which are announcing thousands of job cuts, even though their profits are still running in the tens of billions.

Even the companies that Brown invited to make profits from the dole, are finding it impossible. There are just too many jobless and too few job vacancies to fit them into. These would-be parasites of the crisis are now complaining bitterly that they simply cannot make a "living" on the agreed basis of being paid in proportion to the number of jobless they remove from the unemployment count.

Bail out - for the rich only

Meanwhile Brown and his ministers are parading on TV screens, boasting about the "success" of their banking bailout. "Success"? But who benefited from the hundreds of billions lavished on the banks?

Not their employees, contrary to the demagogic nonsense peddled by the tabloids. Of course, bank directors are still feathering their nests, using the many perks of the job. But how many bank employees have lost their jobs over the past few months? The tabloids will not say.

As to mortgage holders, and more specifically the many working class households having difficulty in meeting their repayments, they have gained nothing either. Not only is mortgage interest still high, despite the five successive cuts in the Bank of England's rate, but with soaring bills on all sides and the brutal rise in unemployment, the number of those in arrears is also rising fast.

As the increasing number of repossessions shows, the banks are just as ruthless as ever, towards

these embattled households - and this, regardless of how much they have benefited from Darling's largesse, that is from workers' taxes.

The majority control acquired by the state in 3 of the country's largest six banks, plus a few others, did not change their behaviour towards working class households, nor their profiteering, one iota. Far from using its control over these banks to reduce hardship among the poorest, Labour went out of its way to convince big business that, under Brown, state control really means "profiteering as usual", with the reassuring support of public funds!

Resistance must be on workers' agenda

Brown and Darling do not even still bother to try and cover up their real agenda anymore. Darling may still be making some noise about directors' greed - but without doing anything about it!

Mandelson has extended Labour's bailout to the car bosses, under the pretext of "protecting" jobs. But he does not even hint at the fact that it could be wrong for job-cutting car companies, to benefit from state funding supposedly designed to "protect" jobs.

The reality, of course, is that Labour's agenda is neither to curb the greed of bank directors nor to stop the car companies' attacks against jobs - it is simply what suits the capitalist class!

This is why, in the middle of this crisis, this same government is still pursuing projects like the part-privatisation of Royal Mail. The run-up to this privatisation, already underway, will involve further job cuts in their tens of thousands. There is a cynical madness in pursuing such a plan at a time when unemployment

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is soaring so fast. But never mind, since this is what the profiteers want.

Common sense would dictate that public funds be used to serve the public and, in particular, the working class majority of society. Instead they are used to salvage the gambling machine of the ultra-rich. Meanwhile the profits accumulated in the past by the capitalists are stashed safely away, instead of being invested where they could be useful.

But it does not need to be this way. Today, politicians and bosses may feel confident enough to attack the working class from all sides, but this is only because they have not met much resistance so far from workers. Whether this changes will be decided in the weeks and months to come. □

Bail out the poor? That's not in Darling's book!

Now that the Bank of England's interest rates have been cut for the 5th time, to an all-time low of 1%, 3.6 million people who have tracker mortgages have become the target of great envy in the press, which has identified a number of mortgagees who will now "pay no interest".

By all accounts however, the only group of mortgagees to which this 0% interest seems to apply is 1,500 customers of the Cheltenham and Gloucester, owned by Lloyds. In fact most of those on tracker mortgages will never pay less than a set minimum, usually 3%. As for the rest, over 8 million people who pay much higher rates (only 1m are on a standard variable rate), their mortgages are unlikely to get much cheaper. Besides, the more you get into arrears, the higher the rate charged.

So it is no wonder that repossession reached 45,000 in 2008 - one every 10 minutes in the last 3 months. The Council of Mortgage Lenders says the figure for 2009 may be 75,000 - about as many as in the worst year of the housing crisis of 1991. But, given the chaotic nature of the crisis, the actual figure for 2009 may well prove far higher.

When it came to light last year that the bank which had the highest repossession rate was Northern Rock, already 100% state owned, the government was obliged to respond. So it made excuses for Northern Rock,

saying that it was more exposed than others to Britain's "sub-prime" market. In other words, Northern Rock's policy was fine, what was wrong was to be too poor to afford a house! Perhaps the government then realised how bad this looked. Because soon after it announced that £200m had been earmarked to help avoid repossessions - which would stretch, possibly, to 6,000 households!

So what about the other 39,000 repossessed in the last year? Or the 210,000 already in arrears? This is even more ludicrously pathetic, given that not only does the government own Northern Rock but it owns 43% of Lloyds-HBOS and nearly 70% of RBS, not to mention the mortgage portfolio of Bradford & Bingley - meaning that more than half of all mortgages are now under public control. The government could wipe out the debt of all embattled mortgagees, while at the same time providing a job to tens of thousands of unemployed construction workers by launching a public-funded affordable homes (for rent) programme. For a change, this would be using public funds in the interest of the working-class majority of the population, instead of throwing billions at the insatiable greed of the profit sharks! But then, the Brown's and Darling's of this world will not upset their pals in the City - that is as long as they are allowed to get away with it! □

Barclays - scavenger capitalism?

After a month of chaotic ups and downs in its share price (at one point it was nearly down by 90% on its 2008 peak), Barclays simultaneously announced 6,000 job cuts and profits of "at least £5.3bn". Only people living among profit charts and for whom workers are infinitely expendable and dispensable, could display such cynicism.

Among the big British banks, Barclays has been the most vocal in proclaiming its "independence", ostensibly refusing state support both last October and in January this year. Ironically, however, Barclays is said to have been the first of the "big Six" to go to the Bank of England for help in the summer of 2007. Thereafter, like every other bank, it benefited from the liquidity facility set up by the Bank of England, meaning that it would probably no longer exist were

it not for public funds!

Behind this apparent contradiction, there is a certain logic. As a true scavenger, Barclays was already looking for opportunities. However, taking public funds to buy less fortunate rivals, would have been, at best, problematic, both with respect to public opinion and foreign shareholders. So, Barclays turned to the royal family of Qatar for funds and was able, subsequently, to take advantage of the collapse of the Lehman Brothers bank by buying its investment arm for what amounted to a pittance.

Whether this strategy will benefit Barclays, remains an open question in view of its recent share meltdown. But it certainly provides a graphic example of the parasitism and cold-blooded greed of capitalism. □

Attacks on directors' bonuses - a smokescreen

Brown made a big thing of "reading the riot act" to the banks benefiting from his bailouts: their directors are no longer supposed to award themselves outrageous bonuses. That this "tough" language is but a sop to the anger caused by the bank bailouts, is shown by Mandelson, who is begging RBS directors to behave themselves. As if, with the 68% of RBS owned by the state, Mandelson could not just discipline unruly directors!

But this is precisely what Labour will not do. For Darling, state-controlled banks should be run "commercially", with "minimum state interference". So much so that, even where the state is the largest shareholder, its 2 or 3 representatives on the board are bankers, who won't police their peers.

Brown's "tough" language was further exposed by the "ultimatum" issued by his "City minister", "Lord" Myners, who stated that bank directors should "*decide ..whether they pay back their bonuses or lose their [promised] knighthoods.*" Such pathetic posturing must have caused roars of laughter in the City. As if the profit sharks would give up their golden pay for the fool's gold of a title!

This bonus saga is even more farcical because of the many ways in which the fat cats increase their share of profits. For instance, pension contributions paid by big companies for their directors increase their salaries by as much as 60%! Many directors are able to retire on a full pension worth 2/3 of their final fat salary, after only 20 years! And these are the same directors who have excluded so many workers from final salary schemes! But this is a scandal that no politician, Labour or Tory, dares to mention.

Yet, in the emergency situation of today's economic crisis, it would be necessary to get rid of this costly parasitism, in order to devote all available resources to bail out, not the rich and the wealthy, but the working population whose livelihoods are under attack. And this can only mean the full nationalisation, without compensation, of the entire banking system, and its operation on a non-profit basis. □

Postal workers are still resisting the cuts

After having cut 50,000 jobs since 2002 and having closed 2,500 Post Offices in the last year alone, Royal Mail is now embarking on plans to cut 1/3 of delivery offices and close around half of the country's 71 sorting offices and an unknown number of delivery offices and depots.

There was a strike ballot in December against the latest closure programme, but the CWU (postal union) decided that only workers in 7 out of the first 13 offices which are earmarked for closure should be allowed to vote. Having voted for strike, these 7 offices were due to take 24-hour action in the run-up to Xmas. But two days beforehand, union leaders cancelled the strike, claiming progress had been made in negotiations - but so far nobody knows what progress this is. Has Royal Mail agreed not to close these offices? Not at all.

In fact that same week the review into the future of Royal Mail and plans for possible part-privatisation were published, diverting attention away from the dire and ever-worsening situation faced by workers

whose workloads are doubling and trebling due to the cuts.

The only "fight" which the CWU now proposes is to steer an early day motion through parliament against postal privatisation, and that, while the ground goes on being cut from under postal worker's feet! As if MPs will stand up in defence of postal workers' jobs! That would be a first!

Despite this, however, in a number of offices, workers have been trying to resist cuts - Lymm sorting office near Warrington went on strike in January over threatened closure. Other struggles are happening across the country from Wotton Under Edge (Gloucestershire) sorting office to the Merkinch post office in Inverness. North London delivery workers are to be balloted for action to stop new jobs being downgraded to part-time.

So there's no shortage of potential for a fightback. Given postal workers' tradition of spreading their fights across the network this is the only way forward. □

Stop Royal Mail privatisation!

When he takes office this March, Royal Mail's new chairman, Donald Brydon, will be paid £200,000 a year (in addition to his fat earnings from numerous other directorships) to carry out Mandelson's plan to privatise 1/3 of Royal Mail - in other words, to hand out postal profits currently reaching £900,000 per day, to private profiteers.

Seven years ago, Royal Mail was said to be losing £1m per day. The "return" to profitability was paid for mostly by the workforce, with thousands of job cuts and relentless squeezing of conditions, while the service was reduced for the population as a whole. What will come next, if Mandelson gets his way, is clearly more of the same. The records of CVC Capital Partners and TNT, which have been invited to buy into Royal Mail, speak volumes in this respect. For instance, since CVC took over the AA, 3,000 jobs have gone down the drain!

Although the CWU leadership acknowledges that workers are now

"in a much wider fight", its response so far has been rather muted. True, it is calling an anti-privatisation national march and rally for Saturday 14 March. But why so late and why, of all places, in Wolverhampton? As if the CWU leaders were worried that organising simultaneous marches in the big cities might be too conspicuous! Apart from that, they only managed to come up with a "high-tech" brain wave - an "internet petition" to Number 10. No doubt Brown and Mandelson will be "terrified" - in a virtual sense, that is.

But then, the CWU leadership's record in fighting the government's attacks is notoriously bad, whether over jobs, conditions or privatisation. This means postal workers will have to return to their good old "low tech" traditions - like during the 2007 wildcats. Only, this time, they will need to ensure that they are not taken down the garden path again by the CWU leaders - meaning they will have to organise and control their fight back themselves. □

Contract workers: the union leaders' waving of the flag can only squander workers' struggles

The week-long walkouts by thousands of contract workers across the country, which ended on February 5th, was the first significant fight since large-scale job cuts began. As such, it had the potential to be the first militant response of the working class to the bosses' crisis.

But this was not what the Unite and GMB leaders had in mind in the campaign leading to these walkouts. Instead of seeking to unite contract workers of all nationalities and skills, with the aim of organising a common fight back against the big companies' attacks, they chose to go along with Brown's demagogic slogan at the last TUC conference, "British jobs for British workers". As a result, they turned the contractors' militancy into an instrument of division, setting one section of workers against another.

Union leaders lied to contract workers when they claimed that taking a few thousand jobs away from foreign workers (if even that!) could help them against unemployment. Their flag waving only played into the hands of bosses who thrive on workers' divisions. Such a policy is dangerous and should have no place within the ranks of the working class!

Of course, such nationalist demagoguery is no coincidence on the part of union leaders who have been conspicuous for their astounding passivity in front of the massive job cuts of the past period! What a convenient cover with which to conceal their refusal to organise any fight against the big companies' attacks on jobs!

What these walkouts do show, though, is that, contrary to union leaders' reiterated claims, workers do not need to be paralysed by the anti-strike laws. With enough determination, they can stage fight backs which spread like wildfire across companies and industries, up and down the country, thereby making it hard for the bosses and their government to do anything to keep them in check. Given the bosses' attacks, this is the kind of fight back that is needed, but one which will have to bring all sections of workers together against their real enemies, the bosses, and under their own control, rather than under the control of flag waving union leaders. □

The most dangerous job is about to get more lethal

Six building workers die on the job every month in Britain. This is still the most dangerous industry, with 31% of the total 229 workplace deaths in 2007/8. And it is set to get a lot more dangerous with the recession. As the leader of construction union UCATT, Alan Ritchie, wrote last month, any reduction in fatalities this year will not be due to improved safety, but to the shutting down of projects. Due to the crisis tens of thousands of building workers have lost jobs. Those still employed are more exposed to risk, especially as they are less likely to refuse dangerous jobs, for fear of being sacked.

This makes the cost-cutting review undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), aimed apparently at cutting its few remaining workplace inspectors, all the more scandalous. Already past serial budget cuts have reduced workplace inspections. Over the past 6 years, the number of enforcement notices issued in construction (threatening penalties unless improvements are made) went down by nearly half (42%) and the number of prohibition notices by 30%. This was not because the sites were safer. To quote Alan Ritchie, *"When the HSE scrapes together the resources for a targeted blitz of construction sites, at least 75% of those visited are found to be breaking health and safety laws. Many are so unsafe they are*

shut down immediately. Yet so slim are the HSE's resources that these blitzes, which cover only a tiny fraction of the industry, are becoming more infrequent and they are visiting a smaller number of sites."

While the HSE admits that *"management failure"* is responsible in 70% of workers' deaths, the conviction rate has fallen to 30%. Yet despite this, the HSE intends to sack its inspectors and become a kind of advertising agency which will "promote" safe practices - producing glossy leaflets, and probably some education packages. Says Ritchie again: *"The HSE is under the misapprehension that safety will not improve through an increase in inspectors, inspections and prosecutions. Instead it is the responsibility of industries to regulate themselves. This dangerous nonsense would be funny if it was not so serious."*

Of course it is no "misapprehension". Neither is the aim of downgrading the role of the HSE merely a cost-cutting exercise. It has a political aim. Now that bosses can theoretically be sent to jail for their responsibility in the death of workers, thanks to a change in the law which Labour had prevaricated over as long as it could - the government is simply trying to make it harder to convict the bosses by getting rid of the people who have the expertise to do so! ☐

The scam of "self-employment"

As if working in construction was not precarious enough, the way workers are employed has scarcely changed since Victorian times. The construction giants like Woodrow-Taylor-Wimpey, use contractors and never employ workers directly. By the same token, they avoid a possible conviction for manslaughter when workers get killed or maimed on the job. The contractors in turn hire subcontractors so the buck is passed all the way down a long chain - ending very often with what amounts to a gangmaster. But in construction these gangmasters are neither subject to inspection nor licensing. This is casualisation at its most dangerous.

On top of this kind of casualisation there is what can be called bogus "self-employment". Officially there were still around 400,000 "self-employed" workers on construction

sites in January 2009. But though they do the same work as directly employed workers, the contractor who takes them on does not have to pay any national insurance contributions for them, he can fire them at a moment's notice, and he does not have to pay them for holidays or sickness absence.

It just so happens that because Romanians and Bulgarians are only allowed to work in Britain on a self-employed basis, many are working precariously for cowboy contractors and gangmasters on much lower pay than the industry norm for the job. Yet despite consistent lobbying and campaigning by the building union UCATT, the government decided this December that Romanian and Bulgarian migrant workers would continue to be barred from direct employment. Obviously, campaigning and lobbying aren't enough. ☐

British Gas' profitable hot air

British Gas has been patting itself on the back for being the first energy supplier to cut the price of gas, by 10%. As if there was anything impressive about this, after the 55% increase they imposed last year! Besides, while this cut will benefit standard tariff customers and those who pay by direct debit, British Gas has been suspiciously silent about those using pre-pay meters. So, are the poorest customers, who already pay proportionately more for their gas than others, not included?

Last year, the energy companies blamed their huge price hikes on the steep rise in the price of oil, which reached around \$150 a barrel in July 2008.

But since then, it has been falling just as fast, to under \$50 a barrel now. When they are asked why, in that case, domestic energy prices have not gone down earlier (before the winter cold started, for instance), or by as much as oil, British Gas bosses earnestly explain that the price they pay for gas on the wholesale market is not immediately affected by its ups and downs. So how come they did not mention this fact when they were using rising oil prices as an excuse for fleecing households, last year?

What British Gas bosses fail to say, though, is that, like all the biggest suppliers, they are part of a bigger concern (Centrica) which produces gas in Britain, Norway, Nigeria, Egypt, Trinidad, etc... So what they lost on the swings, when gas prices were going up, they regained twice over on the roundabouts.

No wonder, Centrica managed to earn £992m profit for its shareholders, in the first 6 months of 2008 (the last figures available). And the odds are that the 10% price cut by British Gas is not going to reduce this figure by much, if it even does at all! ☐

Car companies cut jobs but tread carefully

Car manufacturers in Britain began making workers pay for the crisis even before sales and profit figures started to fall, using all sorts of methods to cut costs. So, all companies have resorted to some form of short-time working. Xmas shut-downs were extended everywhere. Many introduced down-days and/or cut shifts. At the Ford-Dagenham engine plant, for instance, only one line is still working a 3-shift system 5 days/week. The others are either operating a 4-day week or are on a single shift.

Then there are cases of long layoffs, including 3 additional shutdown weeks already planned for 2009 at BMW-Oxford. But the most spectacular is the 4-month shut-down at Honda's Swindon plant, from February to May. The 2,500 laid-off workers' pay will be reduced to basic during the first two months, before taking an additional 40% cut during the last two months. Toyota is still considering layoff plans for its Derby plant.

Some big job cuts announcements were made, with Nissan's (1,200 jobs to go at its Sunderland factory) and Jaguar-Land-Rover's (850 IT and engineering workers last November and a further 450 workers

in January) being followed by Ford's, in early February (up to 500 jobs at the Southampton van plant and 350 others across 7 other sites).

However, these "official" job cuts do not tell the whole story, by far. Companies which have now announced large job cuts, claimed they had no such plan before - like Ford, for instance. So that, no-one can be sure that Toyota, for instance, which says it has no plans for redundancies, will not change its mind at some point. Besides, there are many "unofficial" ways of cutting jobs. For instance, Honda, which says it has no plans for redundancies after its 4-month layoff, got rid of around 1,000 of its workers by means of a so-called "associate release programme" operating since last year. Above all, many casual workers were sacked without compensation or even warning, sometimes, without being registered among the "official" job cuts, neither by the companies nor even, sometimes, by the union machineries. So, BMW-Oxford sacked about 500 agency workers last year and another 50 since. Meanwhile, at Ford-Dagenham, the 250 directly employed temporary workers were all sacked by the end of last year, despite an earlier promise to make

them permanent after 12 months!

In addition to jobs, the companies target the conditions of the remaining workers. So the laid-off Honda-Swindon workers already know that they will be expected to "pay back" their wages of the layoff period, by working overtime for free when they restart work in June. This would be a major change in conditions forced on workers through the back door - something similar to what BMW already imposed on its workforce years ago, in the form of a "working time account" system, which, for instance, allowed BMW-Oxford to produce almost as many cars in 2008 as in 2007, despite an exceptional 4-week shutdown at Xmas.

So far, the car bosses have been relatively cautious when announcing job cuts, usually seeking to get the union machineries on their side. Obviously they still fear a possible backlash from the workforce and quite rightly so! After all, their crisis is actually providing even more common ground for workers across the industry to join ranks together to stop these wealthy companies in their tracks. □

Car industry bailout - nothing in it for workers!

On 27 January, after much horse-trading behind the scenes, Brown's "business" secretary, Peter Mandelson, finally announced a £2.3bn package of loan guarantees for the car companies. Mandelson insisted that the industry was "not a lame duck", that there was "no blank cheque on offer" and that the money would make cars "cleaner and greener". As if hot air could cut CO2 emissions! Of course, the long and short of it is that, car companies are now able to borrow huge sums at low cost, thanks to the government's commitment to foot the bill out of public funds, should they fail to meet part or all of their repayments.

This announcement followed intense lobbying by car bosses, especially after Bush's massive bailout for the US car industry, last year. This lobbying's official justification was to "save the car industry". Although union leaders, such as Unite's Derek Simpson, took the argument one step further, by arguing

that a bailout would "save jobs" for car workers in Britain - in fact, that it was the only way for car workers to save their jobs. On the strength of this "argument", union leaders added their begging bowl to the manufacturers' lobby.

As if public subsidies could ever stop the car manufacturers from shedding jobs and screwing conditions even more for the remaining workers! After all, when sales and profits were high, weren't the same manufacturers already trying to cut jobs to the bare bone? Did their high profit growth rate ever result in improving workers' conditions? Quite the reverse, in fact, because the rise of profits mainly reflected the fact that the bosses were squeezing more out of workers' labour.

So, for instance, the fact that Nissan has now access to public funds both in Britain and in France (via its parent company, Renault) did not stop its job-cutting programme in Sunderland. Likewise

for Tata - the £35bn multi-national and new Ferrari F1 sponsor - which bought Jaguar-Land-Rover (JLR) from Ford for only £1bn last March. After denying that it had requested up to £1bn to secure the jobs of its 16,000 workers, Tata is expected to be awarded nearly half of the bailout package! But there is no question of restoring the 1,300 jobs already cut!

Whatever union leaders may claim, it would be a dangerous illusion to believe that this bailout, or any other, can reduce the car bosses' appetite for cost saving and job cuts. Their aim is to boost profits, not to ensure that workers keep getting their wages and since Brown leaves them free to make whatever "business decisions" they like, regardless of the sums they get from public funds, nothing will stop them - that is, nothing, except an all-out mobilisation of workers across the car and parts industry, against their attacks on jobs and conditions. □

Only one remedy to railway parasitism: re-nationalisation!

In January, the "big 5" privatised Train Operating Companies (TOCs) went to the government with their begging bowls, asking for a "train bailout" - which is ironical, coming from companies whose profits are already financed by state subsidies! But what is even more ironical is their pledge to create 1,000 "customer-facing" jobs in return for increased state aid - this, when the same "big five" have already cut nearly 1,700 jobs between them over the past few months!

Take the case of National Express. Less than a year after it took over the East Coast Line (London to northern Scotland via Edinburgh), clerical jobs went for the axe. Then, last December, another 100 jobs went among train catering crews, with most agency workers being sacked and permanent workers being offered lousy "voluntary" redundancy packages. And more job cuts are to hit ticket and station staff. That this results in a more haphazard service

for passengers, worse conditions for the remaining workers and degraded safety for all, is obviously none of National Express' concern! And much the same can be said of National Express' other two train franchises, since overall it has cut, or announced plans to cut, 750 jobs!

In other words, the "train bailout" demanded by the railway sharks would create no jobs. At the very most, it would offset some of the redundancies already made - that is, assuming the sharks deliver on their pledge, which is all but certain.

The obvious alternative, of course, would be to bring back the entire railway network under public ownership straightaway.

After all, since the sharks fail to keep the service at a proper level (as the recent snowy days showed) and to keep workers in their jobs, why should their profits keep being paid out of public funds? ☐

Mount Pleasant mail center (London)

• Declaration of war

On EC (deliveries to the City) the bosses' proposals are turning lunatic, after being merely over-the-top-crazy: 20 more of us cut from nights and 30-35 from days. We're also told that the "teams" who do walks in different areas will be cut from 5 down to 3 and from 3 to 2, for instance. This hasn't been agreed by the union. So the bosses are using blackmail. They say that if we don't agree, they'll cut the jobs anyway and instead of offering early retirement, they'll transfer workers to other offices. Does that mean war? In our book, it does! [Mount Pleasant Workers' Fight, 12/01/09]

• So where's our 10% rise?

In mid-December Romec cleaners got an official letter about our pay rise: 3% plus 1% "for achievement of £190m turnover" OR 2% for £200m turnover. The letter expressed its "delight" that Romec was forecast to turn over £190m - growth of more than 10%! We're sure they were delighted that they didn't have to pay us more than 3%+1%, of course. But why is our pay tied to their (reported) profits in the first place? The bonus of £160 (or so) was a desperately needed boost for Xmas. But that only exposes our need for a living wage every week. [Mount Pleasant Workers' Fight, 13/01/09]

• One for all and all for one!

In EC, we're supposed to face a resign in March which will seek to double our workloads (drivers and foot soldiers) - when each of us is already doing the work of 2 - on the pay of one, of course! It's not inevitable that this comes to pass. We can prevent the bosses from getting what they want. But we have to stick together - all of us - and not break ranks! [Mount Pleasant Workers' Fight, 27/1/09]

King's Cross railway station (London)

• Not even doing the minimum [King's Cross - Workers' Platform, 12/01/09]

At Haringay Station, monitors were put out of action a fortnight before Xmas - and still haven't been fixed by New Year. Since the platform is curved, this meant that drivers couldn't safely see themselves away - so what was First Capital Connect's excuse for not manning the station until the fault was fixed, as they're supposed to? Is there any safety rule they won't break, just to save a few quid?

• First class logic [King's Cross - Workers' Platform, 27/01/09]

Since First Capital Connect now restricts the number of timetables they can hand out to the public (they say they're being "green"...), passengers are more in need of information than ever. But if First get their way over the proposed ticket office closures, they'll be more likely to find a dumb machine than a human worker. At the same time, First is employing more Revenue Protection Inspectors. Message to the "customer": Don't worry if you can't find someone to help you buy the right ticket, someone will find you - and fine you!

• Sorry - no fried brekky! [King's Cross - Workers' Platform, 27/01/09]

All National Express East Coast morning trains have had the restaurants removed. A much smaller catering team, with no chef, is supposed to cope with the same number of hungry - and angry - passengers. It's no good them complaining to us - we can only do what we can do. But we can direct them to management's door...

• Safety is not their priority

Thanks to National Express's catering job cuts, the guard is left alone for part of some trips, late at night. There's no back-up if we're threatened with assault. And what about emergency situations, major delays, etc? When it comes to safety - ours and the passengers - National Express doesn't give a damn, unless we force them to! [King's Cross - Workers' Platform, 27/01/09]

Ford attempts blackmail over pay

On Wednesday 5 February, Ford's British and European bosses met with the joint union negotiating committee to sign the latest pay deal for Ford of Britain's workforce - or that is what the union negotiators expected. But John Fleming, the Ford Europe CEO instead announced that the company wanted to "re-evaluate" the 3-year pay deal [5.25% on year 1; 2% or 0.25% above retail price inflation, whichever is greater, on year 2; 0.25% above inflation on year 3]. Not that it was such a great deal - it represents a pay cut compared to actual inflation (rather than the lower RPI). This backtracking on the pay deal was on top of the 850 job cuts Fleming announced - to be executed by 5 May.

This was a snub to union leaders after their 3 months of painstaking negotiations. This, no doubt, accounts for their threat to organise a strike ballot if Ford did not "think again". Tony Woodley, Unite joint secretary, pointed out that Ford is asking workers to take a cut in pay to "preserve jobs". Ironically, however, this was precisely the opening that had been made by Unite's negotiator,

Dave Osborne, by proposing a wage freeze in return for a guarantee on jobs in the Southampton plant.

Except that, in fact, not only is Ford not offering any guarantee, but it is actually announcing yet more job cuts into the bargain - and who knows how many more are to come? At the Dagenham plant, workers are not fooled by that kind of blackmail - they know that the money Ford saves from freezing pay will be used to pay for more redundancies.

There is only one possible response to Ford's arrogance - all-out action across all Ford's plants for a start, without waiting for union leaders to launch a fight they never wanted.

It is high time the bosses' attacks were met with real resistance. It is also time to remember the days of the 1970s, when a strike at Dagenham broke the wage freeze imposed by the then Labour government. This time again, the Dagenham workers could take upon themselves to initiate the fight back that the entire working class needs. ☐

BMW Mini centre (Oxford)

• Pay deal "string" is more like a noose

If BMW wanted to make their "with strings" pay offer more attractive, they certainly chose a funny way of going about it! Already our health and/or our pockets suffer from the last pay deal's string: removal of the first day's sickness pay. Now they want to suspend us wif we take more than 8 days off (the national average) over a 12-month period. BMW must be off their heads! If one of us has a stroke or an accident at work or a car crash, the bosses want to punish us for recovering and coming back to work! [BMW - Workers' Fight, 16/01/09]

• Bonded labour

Right4Staff Agency warned sacked BMW temps that if they demanded their P45s, they would be "intentionally unemployed" and unable to claim benefit for 6 months! That, apparently, is regardless of whether the agency actually has any work to offer them. And R4S say it's their workers' responsibility to phone them up and confirm their availability for work. Agents? Gaolers, more like! [BMW - Workers' Fight, 16/01/09]

• What they couldn't organise

With 4 weeks to prepare (the plant was laid off for a month), BMW still couldn't get its plans right for the resumption of production. Not only was downtime on late shift in Rework cancelled from Wednesday 7th Jan and all this week, they even had overtime last weekend, having previously cancelled the weekend shift! [BMW - Workers' Fight, 16/01/09]

• The fight we must prepare for

Although BMW has allowed months of speculation about the future of the weekend shift, there's still no announcement. The latest suggestion is that Sunday nights will be scrapped. BMW's hesitation may be partly because they can't predict the market, but they will certainly be wary of a reaction from us. The best thing we can do is prepare one. [BMW, Workers' Fight, 27/01/09]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

• No, no, and no!

This week we're to go through the motions of meetings on the pay deal (recommended by the "partners"). But we won't be encouraged to have our say. Nor to ask how we're meant to manage over the coming period on short-time, with a pay "rise" less than real cost-of-living inflation... Ford CEO Alan Mu-lots-of-lolly got a £1m base salary and £2m bonus last April plus £5.5m stock options. We're meant to share the pain felt by Ford bosses and shareholders? Sure. Some of their kind of "pain" wouldn't be half bad... [Ford Dagenham - Workers' Fight, 20/01/09]

• Even a threat makes 'em sweat!

Last Tues, Tiger machining had a near-stoppage. Inhuman Resources got our Xmas pay wrong: we'd have lost 26 hrs (or so) pay! They claimed this was agreed with the Joint Works Committee and there was nothing to be done. They were wrong there too! As Cap'n Black found out when he arrived on the scene of an impending strike. So his false propaganda was suspended for 10 mins while he had something real to sort out. He couldn't move fast enough! We're promised the missing pay this week. If we don't get it, he knows what'll happen. [Ford Dagenham - Workers' Fight, 20/01/09]

• A collective "no" to these wage cuts!

Looks like we might have only 3 days work this month on Sub-assembly (in Stamping & Tooling). Next week we're laid off for 2 whole weeks, like Southampton (and Land Rover) whose parts we make. We may get 100% of basic, (Honda will only get 80% for 2 months then 60% for 2 mths), but it still doesn't pay our bills! On the other hand, car bosses are saving a fortune on wage costs, to add to the record profits they'll announce in a few years (or less). If we want to fight to get back what we're owed, we'd better not wait! [Ford Dagenham - Workers' Fight, 02/02/09]

British troops out of Afghanistan!

Defence Secretary John Hutton made a flying visit to Afghanistan, at the end of January, only to announce that Britain would be beefing up its involvement in the war. As well as a possible increase in troops, more helicopters will be sent. This is presented as a way of improving security for soldiers - although, of course, there would be no need for that if the occupation was brought to an end in the first place! As to the security of the population, it does not even get a mention, despite the large numbers of Afghan civilians who have been killed and maimed already, by Western airborne death machines like these ones.

Hutton's announcement is part of the "surge" promised by US president, Barack Obama. Having followed Bush in every one of his military ventures, Labour now intends to do the same with Obama. In fact Hutton is so enthused by the prospect

of escalating the war in Afghanistan, that he explained in the "News of the World" that "2009 is a very big year for Afghanistan". "Big" in what way? In terms of civilian casualties, bombings, destruction, expansion? After all, Obama made no secret of his plan to expand the war to the north-western provinces of Pakistan, where US drones are already dropping bombs against alleged "Taliban" targets. And the 30,000 troops reinforcement announced by Washington are certainly not going there to play American football!

There is an obscene cynicism in Hutton's claim that, seven years after the invasion, British troops "are fighting for freedom and democracy in the towns and villages of Afghanistan to prevent the export of hatred and terrorism back to the UK". As if the West's bloody aggression was not the surest way to generate despair and breed terrorism!

As to "freedom and democracy", they have been brought by the West only in the form of cluster bombs and shrapnel. Yet, at a time when the crisis of the capitalist world is affecting even more drastically the world's poor countries, what the Afghan people need even more urgently than ever, is food, equipment and peace to clear away the rubble left by decades of war - not more destruction and casualties.

This war and occupation has never had any purpose other than to allow the world's richest powers to assert their domination over this part of the world. The fact that British troops are still involved in this dirty war is a stain on the record of the British working class movement. It is in the interest of the working class of this country to refuse to be accomplice to this criminal occupation and to demand the withdrawal of the troops, now! □

A letter from Sussex: the unreal world of the "New Deal"

At the time when yet another scheme is about to be introduced for the long-term unemployment, what is the record of its predecessor, the current New Deal?

Among other things, New Deal "trainees" are given "job placements", which are supposed to slot them into real, paid jobs. However, the aim of the game was highlighted in a letter sent out by Brighton and Hove Federation of Small Businesses, saying: "Have you ever thought how profitable your business would be if you didn't have to pay out any wages?" Anglo-Dutch meats, a company based in Eastbourne which has now gone into liquidation, took this message very much to heart: they sacked some paid employees and replaced them with New Deal "trainees".

As usual, Labour ministers made the New Deal an opportunity for the

private sector to get its snout into the public purse. So, one of the main providers of New Deal courses is a so-called "charity" called the Careers Development Group (CDG). Whether last year's £28m plus turnover was all that "charitable" is an open question, though.

If do not attend these courses while claiming benefits, they can be stopped. But if, for whatever reason, you are not claiming (eg. due to still having "savings" in excess of £16,000 after 6 months on JobSeekers' Allowance), your New Deal "adviser" will induce you to stop signing on. If you do this, you simply "vanish" from the unemployment figures. Some truly farcical things can be heard from these advisers, like (this is a real life quote): "I know you're not claiming any benefits, but I'm required to point out to you

that, if you don't attend or complete the course, your benefits may be stopped".

The courses themselves are also a means to cut the unemployment count, since the unemployed are classified as "in training" as long as they are on a course. First, there is a two-week course, called "Gateway to Work", then a laughably misnamed "Intensive Activity Period", which lasts for 13 or 26 weeks, and largely consists of sitting in a room, with nothing to do. Many "clients" find that they have never been so inactive for so long in their lives. Others realise that the course is designed to drive people mad, so that they will be willing to take any job at all, in order to get out.

If the New Deal is any indication of what Brown's new "training scheme" is likely to involve, forget it! □

In addition to this monthly paper, we publish a quarterly journal, "Class Struggle", the "internationalist communist forums", a series of pamphlets as well as fortnightly bulletins based on several large workplaces in the South East.

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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