

WORKERS' fight



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

THE WORKING CLASS NEEDS TO GO ON THE OFFENSIVE!

In the US, 263,000 jobs disappeared in August. This was far more than predicted. It sent the City of London share index down, well below its past 5,000-plus level. Casino players have no taste for betting on a loser!

Here, not only are companies still slashing jobs, but their investments are falling - meaning more job cuts to come. And the fairy tale that the housing market is back to 2008 levels is exposed as nonsense by falling orders in construction.

So much for the "recovery" hailed so loudly by the media. Politicians themselves do not seem to believe in it, otherwise why would the bailout of the financial sector be extended for the foreseeable future, despite its exorbitant cost?

Politicking and guaranteed cuts

Against this backdrop, the September conference season was both an anti-climax and a telling illustration of the irrelevance of the political system.

The TUC conference should have focused on the bosses' offensive and how to stop it. It certainly showed that all workers face the same attacks and have plenty of reasons to fight back together, but offered no means for them to join ranks in a common protest, let alone in a fight back.

Instead, the TUC turned itself into a platform for Brown's first election speech. And what a speech! It was an exercise in self-satisfaction, justifying every bit of his pro-business policy and, above all, announcing that workers would have to pay for the billions squandered on the finance sharks. Only, said Brown, Labour's cuts would be "humane" unlike those planned by the Tories, and that, alone, should justify a vote for Labour!

Brown's next speech, at the Labour party conference, was no less edifying, explaining, among other things that "the markets need morals". As if this was not a contradiction in terms!

What sort of "morals" can there be in a system based on the ruthless competition between very rich capitalists who



control everything and have no objective other than to maximise their profits at the expense of the working class majority of the population? The only "moral" this system goes by is the law of the jungle - the survival of the strongest.

Towards a workers' offensive

Quite evidently, no answer to the problems of the working class will come out of the ballot box.

But in this capitalist jungle, where everything is a matter of relationship of forces, the working class has better weapons. Due to the union leaders' failure to organise any serious fight back, workers have not made their voice heard yet, but this can change.

Today, significant sections of the working class are already fighting over jobs and conditions - postal workers, firefighters, manual council workers, etc. Other sections face similar threats - the civil service, engineering (Rolls-Royce), the car industry (Vauxhall). However,

those trying to fight back, are doing so in isolation, while the others think they cannot fight, for fear of remaining isolated.

Yet, faced with a co-ordinated offensive of the capitalists and their state, shouldn't workers respond with a co-ordinated counter-offensive? Every opportunity should be used to break the sectional barriers which divide workers' ranks, to build up a collective fight back, stop the bosses in their tracks and start regaining the ground lost.

By joining ranks across company and industrial boundaries, workers would be able to make it far too costly, both politically and economically, for the bosses to carry on with their attacks. They would be able to force employers to share out the work available between all, without loss of pay. The capitalists are wealthy enough to foot the bill of their crisis. But they will only do it if they have no other choice. Whether this happens will depend on our coming battles. □

Global hot air at the G20

The G20 summit of the rich countries, which took place in Pittsburgh-USA, on 24 September, was supposed to be another step towards making world finance "moral". It was meant to curb, once and for all, the exorbitant pay packages in finance which are supposed to have caused the crisis. It did not. The "golden boys" will retain their 7 or 8 figure pay packets, only they will have to be "performance-related". So, instead of curbing financial speculation, this will give them an incentive to be even more reckless!

But then, the whole idea that the crisis was caused by reckless traders alone, is a red herring. Traders are just the instruments, albeit far too well paid, of finance

companies, whose gigantic speculative profiteering pushed the world into today's crisis.

The likes of Obama and Brown would never dare to take on the finance sharks. On the contrary, the main, and virtually only decision of this summit, was that the state bailout of the finance system will carry on! So, for all the good words about a recovery being round the corner, the finance sharks will go on lining their pockets out of public funds, while workers are told that their only future is to foot the bill with public expenditure cuts. Yes, there is something rotten in the kingdom of Capital! ☐

Recession over? Maybe, maybe not

On the 15 September 2009, the bosses organisation, the CBI, was announcing that the economy would carry on shrinking "for the rest of the year". Eight days later, on the 23rd, they predicted that the recession would be over by Christmas (thanks to father Christmas, maybe?).

So, the CBI's mystic Meg has problems reading its crystal ball? And how could it be otherwise, since it is too short-sighted to see the unsustainable speculative bubble that was developing in society in the past years, let alone predict ensuing crisis!

But one thing they have no doubt about is that even if there

is a recovery sometime soon, job cuts will carry on and unemployment will keep increasing. And they should know, since the bosses are responsible for these cuts! Of course, what they do not know is whether workers will resist their attacks - which could just shatter their crystal ball into tiny pieces! ☐

• **Fat cats still getting the cream**

Top bosses of the 100 richest companies listed on the London stock exchange got an average increase of 10% in their basic pay last year. Bonuses may have been cut (temporarily) but these bosses have made up for it.

Not bad - especially on a 7-figure salary. For the quarter of them earning over £5million, a 10% rise would be worth at least half a million. So at a time when workers are being told they must tighten their belts to pay for the mayhem caused by the excesses of the City, the fat cats are loosening theirs - something worth bearing in mind when they preach "pay freeze" to the rest of us.

• **Another rule for them**

Companies underestimated the costs of their directors' huge pensions. Fred Goodwin's "early retirement" on £703,000 a year is likely to cost Royal Bank of Scotland (i.e. the taxpayer) £30m, rather than the £16m pencilled into their accounts. Other big companies are also likely to end up paying double what they have estimated for the inflated pensions of their top management.

So are these companies' rushing to slash their directors' final salary schemes and downgrade their future benefits, as they did so ruthlessly with their workers' schemes? On the contrary - a TUC survey of 300 companies found that they had increased their top bosses' pensions by an average of 23% last year. Are they

expecting to be kicked out soon.

• **The Great Bailout cheat**

After Brown launched his "crusade" against tax havens, earlier this year, one would have expected that, at least, the state-owned banks would stop having any dealings with them.

Wrong! As a Panorama programme showed on 21st September, Lloyds-HBOS has no fewer than 130 subsidiaries operating in tax havens across the world. Panorama also showed the Lloyds TSB Offshore branch in Jersey offering rich customers the means to avoiding paying tax, by channelling their money through China.

Filling banks' coffers with taxpayers' money so as to help the wealthy avoid paying taxes? It's Brown's bailout in a nutshell!

Class Struggle n°85

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- South Korea - The capitalists on the offensive against the working class
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Cameron's true-blue colours

Cameron may prefer to remain vague on his plans for cuts, but the Institute of Directors (a bosses' organisation with Tory links) and the right-wing Taxpayers' Alliance have no need to be so cautious as was shown by their proposed £50bn package of cuts.

In keeping with the Tory campaign against public sector pensions, they want to increase workers' contributions to unfunded schemes by a third. Along with a two-year freeze in public sector pay, this would add up to a big pay cut for public sector workers, nearly 1.5 million of whom earn less than £7/hr as it is. In addition, they want to cut jobs in the civil service and 10% of "non-frontline" staff in the NHS and schools.

The IoD also wants to freeze the

state pension and the minimum income guarantee, which means increasing pensioners' poverty. And pensioners' (not bankers') "bonuses" bother them - they would curtail free bus passes for the elderly and disabled and they wouldn't "squander" any more money on free TV licences for the over-74s either.

They would also scrap child benefit, Sure Start schemes for pre-school children and government support for interest-free student loans. The list goes on - exposing the fact that the same old service-cutting, job-slashing Tories are preparing to carry on where Labour leaves off. Proof, if any was needed, that Cameron has got Scrooge wrinkles beneath his baby-face mask! □

Labour begs the City to behave itself

In front of a bewildered business audience, Lord Myners, Brown's "City minister", launched a stinging attack against the high-pay culture in finance: "It is time for banks to explain to the public what contributions justify the ever-growing rewards of derivatives traders, speculators and other inhabitants of the so-called casino end of the industry."

Too true! But what do Myners and the government plan to do about it? On the eve of the G20 summit, Myners explained that City firms would "have" to disclose the pay and

identity of up to 20 of their highest-paid employees. Except that they won't. Because the government's plan is to include this in yet another toothless "voluntary" code of conduct.

Similar "voluntary" codes included the many regulations against excessive banking greed before the crisis. The banks just ignored them, a speculative bubble developed and the crisis broke out. The only "voluntary" code that the City is ever likely to stick to is the unwritten code of capitalism - the right of capitalists to indulge in unlimited profiteering. □

A bit of good old British flag-waving

Every time a crisis hits, economic nationalism raises its head. So when the US company Kraft tried to take over the beloved British chocolate brand, Cadbury, two of Brown's favourite "Lords" raised the Union Jack. Mandelson expressed his worry that "over a lengthy period of time. UK manufacturing could be a loser". City minister, Lord Myners added that it was too easy for international funds "with no regard for the heritage of British companies to seize control of them."

But wasn't it Barclays, a true blue British bank, that caused the collapse of US bank Lehman Brothers, by walking away from its original plan to take it over? And then didn't it fly in, vulture-like, to scoop out its core business for a song, after

Lehman's went bust? And hasn't British bank HSBC, just decided to transfer its chief executive to Hong Kong as most of its profits originate in the region?

As for Mandelson's "British manufacturing", where is it? He is currently berating Magna, a Canadian company for saving German jobs in Opel/Vauxhall rather than British ones, but Vauxhall was US-owned anyway. Of course, Mandelson could have decided that the state should take over "failing" Vauxhall, like it did with the failing banks. Wouldn't that be the best way to rebuild "British" industry? The problem is that going by the number of job cuts in these "state-owned" banks, the Vauxhall workers might not be better off! □

• Lib Dem's "mansion tax" - a pinprick for the rich

Lib Dem leader, Nick Clegg, must have been pleased with the headline response to his "mansion tax" proposal. It would levy 0.5 % on the part of a property's value over and above £1m. This would be a blow for middle income families, but a mere pinprick for the very rich! Along with other measures, this tax would be used to abolish income tax altogether for 4m workers earning less than £10,000.

Yes, it is a disgrace that the poorest have to pay tax and they should not. But since the issue is to fill the huge deficit of the financial bailout, why not target the very rich who benefited from it? Why not restore, for the very high earners, the 60% income tax rate that existed even under Thatcher, or the 83% top rate which she abolished in her first budget? And yes, why not tax their wealth - but including their financial assets, works of art and the monies they stash away in tax havens?

Of course, the Lib Dems would not dream of such measures, not even to try to gain a few votes. But such measures would be part of the programme of a genuine workers' party - which remains to be built.

• Trafigura: poisoning the world

On 19 August 2006 a Panamean ship unloaded 400 tonnes of highly toxic waste in Ivory Coast. It was dumped in and around the capital Abidjan, literally poisoning the town! The waste affected people's lungs causing respiratory illnesses, dizziness and vomiting. Nobody knows exactly how many people were affected. A UN enquiry estimated that 15 people had died, 69 had been treated in hospital and 108,000 people had to see a doctor.

This ship was chartered by London-based Trafigura, the world's 3rd largest metal and oil trader, which employed "respectable" individuals such as the Tory leader in the House of Lords, Lord Strathclyde (although he finally resigned, probably due to the coming election). This company denied any responsibility. But documents leaked to the Guardian show that they chose to dump the waste in Ivory Coast because it was cheaper than to have it cleaned up in Europe where it came from.

Trafigura finally chose to settle out of court, pledging to pay £1,000 compensation to every victim. Will its directors be prosecuted for their criminal activity? Not in London, in any case. Trafigura is big business and the justice system is there to protect the interests of big business, not to put its criminal owners in jail - no matter how many people they may kill in the poor countries.

NHS - Cutting ministers' crap

Following on from Brown's TUC speech, health secretary Andy Burnham went on to up the ante, by stating that the NHS would need to make £20bn worth of savings within the next four years. Brown must have realised that such enthusiasm for cuts would not go down too well, because the health department issued a statement saying that this amount will "not be cut from the NHS, it will be taken away from areas where it is not needed and reallocated into areas where it is more effective".

Savings could indeed be made without cutting healthcare: by getting rid of the over-paid "business

managers" head-hunted to run NHS Trusts, the expensive overheads of the NHS internal "market", the huge fees paid to private healthcare organisations - and by ending the waste caused by today's highly inefficient system of contracted GPs.

But ending backdoor privatisation in the NHS is not the agenda. This means that whatever "savings" are made, will cut right into essential staff and treatment - as has already been the case over the past years, despite the NHS budget increasing regularly in real terms. And in this respect, whatever they dare to admit in public, there is a consensus between the main parties. □

Private providers should come with a health warning

Independent Sector Treatment Centres (ISTCs) have been doing hip replacements, paid for by the NHS, since 2003. They were given these contracts supposedly to reduce waiting times. But if it wasn't profitable, they wouldn't have taken it on. And there's the rub, as they say!

A study by surgeons in Cardiff found that 2/3 of the hip ops done in such centres "showed evidence of poor technique" and within 3 years 18% needed to be redone. If you have your op in the NHS, the revision rate is only 0.9%! Privately, you have a 180X greater risk of failure!

Senior surgeon, Fares Haddad of London's University College Hospital

highlighted the "iniquitous" waste of money - ISTC hip replacements cost £6,000-£15,000 depending on the complexity of the operation. But revisions need twice the time at twice the cost. So now it turns out that not only are these ISTCs dangerous to patients, but they are "uneconomic". The Department of Health has denied they're unsafe. It is standing by its "profiteering before health" partners. A spokesperson said "The Care Quality Commission ... has not raised concerns." They just don't get it, do they? Yet it's obvious that the profit motive should never have been allowed within a million miles of the NHS! □

Working till 65+? Shouldn't be necessary!

The recent High Court ruling, which upheld the law allowing bosses to forcibly retire workers over 65, without any redundancy payment, could mean poverty for a substantial number of workers. 1.4m people work beyond state retirement age. It had been hoped that under the EU Equal Treatment at Work Directive, forcible retirement would be construed as age discrimination - and that the workers concerned would get compensation, to make up for the lack of redundancy payments. But High Court Judge Blake decided otherwise.

This is rather ironical in the light of the government's intention to increase the retirement age to 67 by 2010 and maybe up to 70 years! The government claims that the ageing population and imminently unbearable pressure on the Social Security system makes this measure indispensable. But what about the unbearable pressure of poverty in old age? If anything needs to be increased it is the state pension! Then maybe a lot of workers over 65 would not feel the need to work until they drop! □

• Who'd even want to impersonate a cop?

The anti-G20 demo outside the Bank of England on 1st April will be remembered for the death Ian Tomlinson, who collapsed after being beaten by a police officer. But it's recently been back in the news for reasons more farcical than tragic. 11 members of the group "Space Hijackers" have been charged with "impersonating police officers" on the day. They arrived in a mocked-up armoured car, blasting out Wagner's Ride of the Valkyries, wearing blue boiler suits and riot helmets. One woman wore a big black bra for good measure - and was also charged!

On that day, the police were out to cause trouble. It was not for nothing that their "kettling" was called "Operation Glencoe", after the notorious massacre of 1692! But, while one officer might be charged over Ian Tomlinson's death, there is no question of bringing to book the officials, in the police and in the Home Office, who were responsible for this reckless (and, as it turned out, lethal) operation!

Instead, the police would like to take revenge on the Space Hijackers for their street theatre. In their sanctimonious arrogance, the men in charge at the Met won't let anyone mock their aggressive policy. Pigs don't fly, but how mean can they get?

• The prison sharks have blood on their hands

A coroner verdict blaming "appalling and unacceptable conditions", has finally been passed over the death of Aleksey Baranovsky. In June 2006, this 33-year old Ukrainian had been left bleeding to death in his cell for 15 hours, at Rye Hill, a GSL-run private prison, while being supposedly under "suicide and self-harm watch"!

GSL, formerly owned by security Group 4, is one of the sharks benefitting from prison PFI contracts, as part of a systematic privatisation policy, going back to the 1990's. However, it seems that GSL's responsibility will not affect its chances of winning a contract for another 4,000 new prison places.

Yet, Baranovsky's death was the 3rd at Rye Hill in just 15 months - all of which were found to have been "avoidable". A 2007 Panorama investigation showed that this prison was plagued with shortage of staff, high turnover and lack of experience. There were 2 staff on duty in the worst wards, where 4 would be expected in a state prison, and they were paid 1/3 less. So, this is how private prison contractors make their profits - on the backs of overworked, underpaid staff and with the blood of their most vulnerable prisoners!

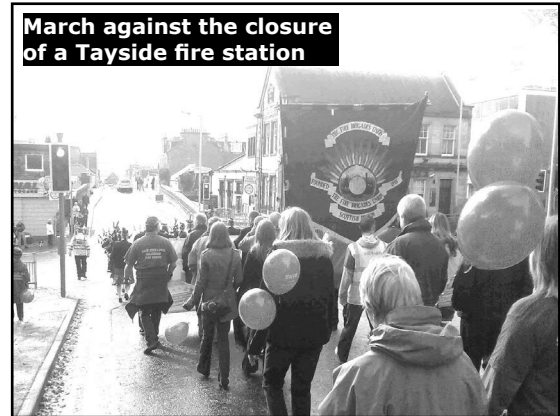
Fight fire with fire!

Brown's vow not to cut frontline services is given the lie by what is happening to fire services. In Essex, for instance, the fire authority wants to close two fire stations, involving the jobs of 44 retained firefighters. Managers boast that they are buying new vehicles but, according to the union, after the cuts, they won't even have enough firefighters to man the existing specialist vehicles, should they all be needed at once. And in Warwickshire, there are plans to axe 7 fire stations, one-third of fire appliances and 100 retained firefighters - under what is called a "Service Improvement Plan".

In other places, including London, there are attacks on pay and conditions. In Lincolnshire, 112 firefighters

have been threatened with the sack unless they sign up to a new shift system. It's a similar story in South Yorkshire, where management have threatened to sack the whole workforce of 744 en masse and re-employ them only if they sign new contracts, involving longer shifts of 12 hours.

In Merseyside, management stepped up its offensive by sacking a union rep. As a result firefighters voted to strike. And they're right, it is time to fan the flames of industrial action - across the country! Let employers and the government feel the heat! ☐



March against the closure of a Tayside fire station

TUC members down: no wonder?

Total membership of TUC-affiliated unions fell by 336,000 over the past year, to 6,201,359, as unemployment rose by 600,000. 6.2m is still a hefty membership, but it is only just over half the TUC's membership peak in 1980 (12.2m). In fact union membership went up at the end of the 1970s, despite the crisis of those years, when unemployment almost hit 3m. But in 1978/9, the union leadership chose to lead a fight back, during the so-called "Winter of Discontent". That's the difference!

Deputy TUC leader, Frances O'Grady, said that unions were still

recruiting today, despite job losses, because "people feel pretty fed up with attacks on pensions, bonuses, pay", especially while the bosses continue to increase their incomes. All true, but many existing union members also feel "pretty fed up" about union officials failing to organise against these attacks - and above all, against attacks on jobs.

Some unions, such as USDAW, have apparently increased membership. O'Grady said that those joining unions were deciding that it was better to resist the bosses together. Brother O'Grady would do well to listen to his own words. ☐

Mandy's latest (s)crappy gesture

During Mandelson's love-in at the Labour Party conference he announced that he would "boost" the car industry by extending the car scrappage scheme from 300,000 to 400,000 cars. That this will "boost" anything, let alone the car industry, is a joke! In August, which was new registration month and therefore the peak for scrappage scheme buyers, sales were (only) 6% up over the previous year, after being 30.6% down in March. On the other hand, car production was down by 31.5% compared to last year! Some "boost"!

Why not ask if Mandy's piddling £1,000 per car, which goes straight into the pockets of car makers/dealers, has forced them to take back

the thousands of workers (mainly temps) who lost their jobs, or to restore the pay cuts they imposed? Production may have started again at Honda, for instance, where the new "Jazz" will be produced - but who paid for Honda's so-called "losses" if not the workforce who had their wages scrapped!

In fact the scrappage scheme did what it was intended to do. It mopped up unsold cars and subsidised the profits of the car capitalists. But for those who really need a boost to their finances, the workers who lost their jobs, or lost part of their wages, and who can't even afford to buy a car, there's nothing on offer. ☐

• Rolls-Royce's public-funded blackmail

The aircraft engine firm Rolls-Royce is the latest company to blackmail its workers over jobs. The 400 workers at its Sunderland Pallion parts plant have been "offered the choice" of working an extra 5 hours/week for no extra pay and accepting 50 job cuts. Rolls-Royce promised that if its blackmail was agreed, it would build a new plant on the same site to replace the existing one within the next 4 years. Otherwise, the site would be closed and all 400 jobs would be lost.

This did not stop Mandelson from announcing a £90m state subsidy for Rolls-Royce at the Labour party conference. In other words, the Sunderland workers are expected to pay for the new plant twice, through working for free and also through their taxes!

Union recommended acceptance of the blackmail, saying "It is hard to swallow, but we have to look at the big picture. It is the new facility or the dole queue." There was another choice, however - to share out the work between all workers by cutting working hours without loss of pay. But the workers were never offered this choice, neither by the company nor even by union officials!

• Corus workers put through the mill

Steelmaker Corus has just announced plans to restart production on a hot strip mill at its Llanwern plant, South Wales. This strip mill had been mothballed in January, while 528 jobs were cut in the plant.

Welsh secretary Peter Hain hailed this as a sign of "recovery": "There were workers doing maintenance to the equipment wondering if it would ever be used again and now they are back in their seats operating it. We have been on red, now we are on amber going for green."

Except that things are not so "amber" for workers, because Corus has no plans to reverse any of January's 528 job cuts. The hot strip mill will be manned by workers redeployed from other parts of the plant, while the workload will increase for the rest of the workforce. While there may well be a "recovery" for Corus' profits, workers' jobs remain in crisis!

Royal mail: the need to take to the offensive

The postal dispute in London, Scotland and several other regions has gone into its 4th month. The strike is due to go national by mid-October if the ballot wins - which is very likely, since Royal Mail continues its slashing of jobs and severe cutbacks in the service, regardless.

RM boss Crozier's accusations of "Spanish practices" are both ignorant and cynical: mail volumes may have dropped by 10%, but the workforce has been cut by 40%! Workers are so overburdened that casuals are brought in to cover not only routine work, but also the routine overtime

which was always necessary to get the work done! Permanent workers, on the other hand, are no longer given the overtime which they relied on to top up their inadequate under £300/week basic wage.

RM is advising the public to send their Xmas mail now. Is this a statement of RM's intent, ie., to hold out against strike action until Christmas? Workers who have already taken the equivalent of 2 weeks out on strike - one day at a time - certainly want the strike resolved as soon as possible. But that means winning back all the jobs and conditions which have

been cut, both before and during the 4-month strike.

The only way to achieve this is to go on the offensive - using the full might of the whole workforce - and beyond, if possible - indefinitely. To achieve this, however, postal workers will have to take their fight into their own hands. They cannot rely on a union leadership which has not only delayed the national strike ballot for far too long, but which has never shown the will to organise an effective fightback. □

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

• Glasgow on the wild side!

For sure, RM bosses are in turmoil - but it's thanks much more to wildcat strikes, like Glasgow MC and 15 DOs in West Scotland on Friday/Sat - plus their own confusion over what's going on! That's probably the only thing to be said for the "rolling" strikes: the bosses can't keep up! But then they never, ever, could! [Mount Pleasant 21.09.09]

• They'll roll right over him!

Glasgow walked out last Friday over the suspension of drivers who'd refused to cross a picket line in Ayrshire. DOs were out Sat as well. Maybe more wildcat action is on the cards (out all week?) - after the conciliatory Glasgow

MC boss said they "could stay out and starve"... His way of inviting mates to extend the strike indefinitely, everywhere! [Mount Pleasant 21/09/09]

• Job descriptions out the window!

Another 30 job cuts (who'll be left?) were announced for EC nights! EC earlyies are going to be expected to take on all the sorting previously done on nights, before their rounds. As if that's possible! If we're sorting most of the shift, rounds won't be finished! In fact drivers on earlyies have already been sent to deliver letters! Just as unbelievable is the fact that late shift MP drivers have been asked to do 1½ hours on cutting, tipping and facing! How can we accept any of this? [Mount Pleasant 21/09/09]



• Water-back-logged

Last Monday the place was flooded - and we don't mean the huge mail backlog downstairs! Water pooled over 1st floor/ground floor/basement. Amazing to see the parquet floor blocks popping up all over the place! Just how much floor can be declared hazardous before it's impossible to go from A to B? We think the whole building should be declared out of bounds, indefinitely! [21/09/09]

King's Cross railway station (London)

• NX Quacks

National Express have sacked one of our On Board workmates, on ill-health grounds, when she's been sick for only 6 months! Are they suffering from the delusion they're qualified doctors, if they think they can tell staff they are too ill to ever return to work? Perhaps no one told them it takes many years of study - and some brains. They seem to have difficulty telling the difference between maternity and sick leave...[Workers' Platform King's Cross 22/09/09]

• You have 'bin' warned

The handheld till (EPOS) used on NX catering is unreliable and awkward to use (plus customers are always changing their minds). So we have a 'bin' button to cancel mistakes. But management suddenly decided this button was not to be used - and

sacked 2 workers for using it 'too much'! They had to climb down on the appeal. But they are still threatening to use this against any of us, with a '3-bins-and-you're-in-trouble' rule. What trash! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 8/9/09]

• Slow on the uptake

London Midland stopped double-time for Sundays and, lo and behold, the following Sunday (last Sunday), found they had no one to drive their trains! Govia management had to hastily backtrack on their decision. It's the same company which had to back down just a few months ago when guards took strike action over attacks on their Sunday working conditions. They obviously hadn't learned their lesson! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 8/9/09]

• Solidarity with St Pancras

Last Friday and Saturday, Eurostar



cleaners were on strike, after the suspension of one of their reps for over 16 weeks. The other issues were pay and the use of fingerprint recognition machines for signing on and off. The strike was rock solid against this management bullying - especially when they came up with the extra provocation of offering £8 p/h to anyone who would break the strike. Carlisle, the employer, obviously has the money. Should cleaners threaten a strike every day, then, to get it? [Workers' Platform King's Cross 22/09/09]

Phoenix Four: crooks and scapegoats

The report into the collapse of MG Rover was finally published last month. It duly nailed the directors - the so-called Phoenix Four who took over Longbridge after BMW jumped ship - who secretly formed holding companies to maximise gains that would be beyond the reach of administrators if and when MG Rover went bust. As capital and car sales dwindled, the amounts they paid themselves rocketed. By the end (April 2005) each had over £12m

(including pension). 6,500 workers at Longbridge on the other hand left with statutory minimum redundancy.

But what of BMW and the government - completely left off the hook by this report? It does mention that BMW did not expect MG Rover to survive beyond 2002 despite its £500m sweetener to the Phoenix Four. BMW were just paying Phoenix to take Longbridge off their hands. Having milked Rover's assets, they wanted

a quick exit. As to the government, it ignored the fact that the Phoenix Four were asset strippers looking for a nice earner. This arrangement was convenient in the short term, as it avoided the possible backlash of sacking the, then, 9,000 Longbridge workers. That 4 years and £16m should be spent writing a report that whitewashes both the government and BMW should not pull the wool over anyone's eyes. □

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

• **If we're injured on the job...**

The site ambulance stretcher has been out of service for a year now with a faulty support. BMW won't spend the measly amount it would cost to fix it, preferring to rely on the local ambulance station. Less than the price of one Mini for something that might save vital minutes for any of us! That's BMW's priorities in action. [BMW Cowley 22/09/09]

• **Undermanned, overworked...**

In the Paint Shop discontent is growing thanks to recent speed-ups. And following a VPS, mark 2-style, reorganisation, chaos has been the order

of the day. Of course the faster line speed hasn't been maintained as the rejects have piled up. But with all of us facing impossible assignments, it's only a matter of time before our patience snaps. [BMW Cowley 22/9/09]

• **Let's strike while the iron is hot**

With demand up and the plant again working 7 days a week, the scandal of agency workers pay and conditions has risen to the top of the agenda. Not only has BMW refused to give us a payrise, now they are even renegeing on their miserly undertaking to offer a contract every time 4 permanents leave. As most of us have years of experience under our



belts (including having to survive for 3 months or so when BMW sacked us), why should only a favoured few receive contracts? Devising a strategy to force BMW to give us all contracts shouldn't be beyond us when BMW needs every car it can produce. [BMW Cowley 22/09/09]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

• **What's going on?**

Are we in the North Estate the very last ones to hear about Ford's plans to screw with our futures? The rumour that 150 of us in the Press shop and Subassembly are "surplus to requirements" we already heard. And that Ford won't offer any special EVR packages to get rid of us. But we didn't know we're about to be sent "in batches" to DEP/DDC [Engine plant] - as fodder for the Chicken Farm or Line From Hell? When's Dullins planning to tell us? [Ford Dagenham 29/09/09]

• **Night shifts out, without loss of pay!**

Rumours of the death of the Press shop/Subs, are premature. Even if Dullins would like to hang this (tired old) threat over our heads yet again. The basement is getting another new conveyor for scrap; J-LR orders last till

the 2nd quarter of next year. It's the high capacity dies which are "freeing up" die setters. But if 150 of us are surplus why not share the work and cut the hours? Workers over 50yrs could work 4 hours and no longer work nights. Even better, nights could be abolished. But without any loss of pay (and not just for 13 weeks!). Isn't that worth fighting for? [Ford Dagenham 29/09/09]

• **Legal or not, it's lethal**

They run the Farm [Tiger engine line] 7-days/week - night and day. No time for training, nor maintenance. Obviously health (!) and safety's out the window. In a way we're surprised there aren't more injuries! And then the Big Cock (up)s expect that we'll work OT shifts without the statutory 11 hrs rest in between. They used to say it was 'legal' because the shifts change over from Fri to Sat. So now there's another shift change Sunday to Monday? [Ford Dagenham 29/09/09]



• **It don't add up - so just subtract it!**

Another rumour really made us fall about laughing: that Tiger machining would go onto 168 (hrs per week) and assembly onto the 144 (which machining now does)! If there's any truth in that, it's proof that Barker's barking! Who'd survive 12hr shifts in this fowl run? [Ford Dagenham 29/09/09]

Iran - A convenient scarecrow

The row caused by the alleged "discovery" of a new uranium enrichment plant in Iran just seems too convenient. At a time when anyone can scan the planet's surface with "Google Maps", who would believe that the high-resolution cameras carried by western spy satellites did not spot the construction of such a big plant long ago?

So, why come up with this pretext now, threaten increased sanctions and, in the case of Brown,

even refuse to rule out military action? The answer probably lies in Afghanistan and in the fact that, despite the huge damage caused to this country, western troops are increasingly bogged down in a war that they cannot win. Now that the official justification for this war, the alleged Al-Qaeda threat, is no longer credible, Obama and Brown need a more credible "enemy" to justify the exorbitant cost of their weapons arsenal and aggressive policies.

Let us not forget that, dictatorial as the Iranian regime maybe, it is not more reactionary than the corrupted puppet regime maintained by western troops in Afghanistan. Nor, that whether Iran is building atomic weapons or not, the only wars of the past two decades have been caused by the imperialist powers, in Iraq and Afghanistan, and their Israeli ally in Palestine. Imperialism is the real threat! □

Afghanistan

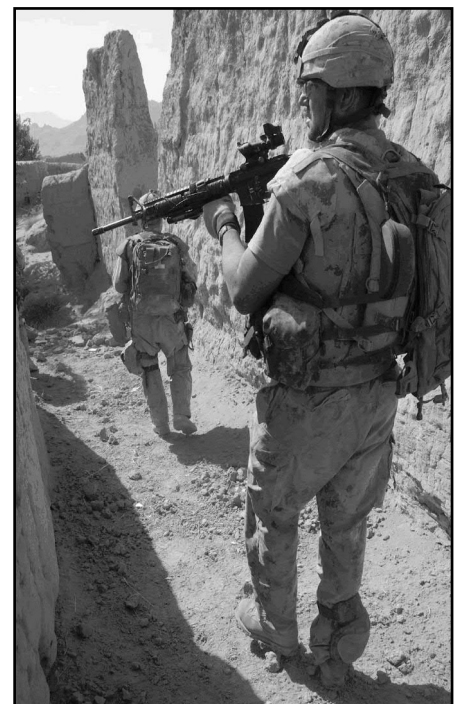
• A hidden army in Britain's prisons

The numbers of servicemen killed and wounded in Blair's and Brown's wars tells only half the story. A probation officers' report reveals that in addition to 12,000 former servicemen on probation or parole, 8,500 are in prison. This is almost equal to the number of troops currently in Afghanistan and accounts for nearly one in 10 of the prison population. In fact the numbers of jailed ex-servicemen has increased by 30% over the past 5 years, as the Afghan war intensified.

Nearly half suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or depression, often coupled with chronic alcohol and drug abuse. A former head of traumatic stress services in London said: "If we ask people to do

appalling things, regular firefights and hand-to-hand combat, you get to the point where it de-sensitises them to violence".

Yes, wars can damage soldiers for life in more than one way. Young men are not born to be killing machines nor living targets. And when they are used and abused in this way by governments, to serve their great power games, when they lose their mates in the fighting and come back with images of civilians killed and maimed gratuitously under their eyes, it can be hard for them to find a place in "normal" life. In that sense, these wars have been wars against all populations, Iraqi and Afghan, but also British. □



• General resignation?

According to the media, the resignation of brigadier Andrew Mackay, former British commanding officer in southern Afghanistan in 2007-8, was a gesture of protest against soldiers' defective equipment on the ground. Last year, Ed Butler, who had held the same post in 2006, was said to have resigned on similar grounds.

That the government, the army top brass and the . equipment

manufacturers do not give a toss about soldiers' gear in Afghanistan, is no big surprise. What counts for them is the "bigger picture". For the politicians and army top brass it's their power games; for the manufacturers, it's their profits. The surprise is that this should come as such a "shock" to seasoned commanding officers!

The odds are that the resignations of these high-ranking officers

had more to do with their resentment at being made to fight an unwinnable war - which was not the career they were hoping for! As to the soldiers, they are caught in a deadly trap, far more serious than the defects in their gear - fighting the Afghan population in a bloody war which has no purpose other than to assert the grip of the rich countries over the world. □

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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