

WORKERS' fight



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contact@w-fight.org

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

WORKERS CANNOT AFFORD THIS DYSFUNCTIONAL SYSTEM!

Just over a week ago, a "return to growth" in the economy was announced with great fanfare. But does this herald the much trumpeted "recovery", that politicians and the media have been talking so much about? Or is it a mere blip in the downward slide of an economy, squeezed dry by financial speculation and capitalist greed?

The reality is that the working class has not seen the smallest hint of recovery - quite the opposite. And, in fact, it turns out that the financial "experts" of big business are not too sure about it themselves.

Speculative quicksands

One of their problems is that things seem to be going wrong again on the stock market.

Last March, the government's launch of its £200bn injection of fresh cash kick-started a new wave of speculation, propping share prices up. In the 8 months up to last October, these increased by almost 2/3 in the rich countries.

Of course the government had nothing to say about these rising speculative profits. Especially as this speculation, mostly financed with public money, accounted for a proportion of the large profits announced by the big banks in late 2009.

However, in January, what the "experts" had described so far as an inexorable rise, began to falter. In just 3 weeks, share prices went down again, wiping out more or less all the gains made over the previous 3 months. In short, by now, the finance sharks may well be using the government's £200bn cash injection to gamble on a fall in the stock market - either way, they could not care less about the consequences of their bets, as long as the profits are fat!

Time-bombs left by the crisis

The stock market is not the main worry of the "experts", though. After Iceland and Ireland, Greece is now threatened with bankruptcy. Portugal and Spain are



dangerously close behind.

Financial difficulties in these countries all have the same cause - the colossal cost of bailing out their capitalists.

The scent of blood attracts sharks. Speculators are now betting on Greece going bust, which is causing financial havoc in Greece itself, but also threatening chaos on the world's currency markets, where they are betting on a fall in the euro. Meanwhile, Greece's creditors are increasing interest rates on their loans, thereby strangling the country even more.

The scale of this new development in the crisis is such that more and more "experts" are beginning to talk about a possible "double dip" - or replication - of the credit crunch. Others are even more pessimistic (or lucid?), saying that what is now happening in Greece may well be the beginning of the "real crisis".

The real problem is the system

The politicians' so-called "medicine" against the crisis is now threatening to

compound it.

This should come as no surprise. After all, isn't this "medicine" already showing that it does not work, by threatening the livelihood of the working class here?

Britain has not become bankrupt - though this may happen. But already, politicians of all stripes insist that the only option for the working class is to agree to more "sacrifices" at work and more austerity measures - to boost the bosses' profits and fill the black hole created by the bankers! This is what workers protested against in Ireland last year and it is what they are striking against today in Greece.

The simple fact that the system's "medicine" to cure its own crisis should push a whole section of the working class into poverty is, in and of itself, a condemnation. But, in fact, this "medicine" only perpetuates and even amplifies the crisis. This system cannot be mended, it must be replaced! □

Scrap Labour's "sus law"!

The EU Court of Human Rights has ruled that section 44 of the anti-terrorism act permitting arbitrary stop and search of people was illegal, because it "lacked... legal safeguards against abuse". But it would take more than that for Home Secretary, Alan Johnson, to hold back his hounds. Instead, the police was told to ignore this ruling while the government was appealing against it.

Since the act came into force, in 2000, searches have escalated: 10,200 in 2001, 36,000 in 2005, 177,000 in 2008 and 250,000 last year! Those stopped range from anti-war protesters to trainspotters

and tourists, but also people going about their daily lives - with black and Asian people at least four times more likely than white people to be stopped.

Both Labour and the Tories see saw nothing wrong in this kind of harassment. They seem to have forgotten the lessons that Thatcher learnt the hard way in the early 1980s, when the stepping up of the so-called "sus law", sparked off the inner-city riots of 1980-81. Eventually, Thatcher had to scrap the "sus law" in 1984. Is that the kind of lesson that today's politicians need to learn all over again? ☐

Time for the church to leave its pedestal!

For far too long the Church of England has had a disproportionate role in society, inherited from an ancient and obsolete past. Today, it is the only quango to have, by right, 26 unelected representatives in Parliament! And the only one also to be allowed to control more than 4,500 state-funded schools and to impose its teachings on nearly 20% of all primary school pupils and

almost 6% of those at secondary school. Yet politicians, both Labour and Tory, still think that this is not enough!

Despite these extraordinary privileges, figures recently published by the Church of England show that in 2008, attendance at its services shrunk for the fifth year in a row, down to an average of 1.145 million each week - or around 2% of the

Class Struggle n°86

In the January-March issue of our quarterly journal:

- Britain - the crisis, poverty and austerity-electioneering
- Iraq - the imperialist occupation may end in its present form, the damage it caused will not
- Russia - the world crisis and the permanent crisis in post-Soviet society
- USA - health care for sale - if you can pay

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population of England. So, after all, younger generations want nothing to do with the CoE's religious Dark Ages - and they are right! It is high time that churches of all descriptions were deprived of any role in politics and education. ☐

Oxford Bus: union officials running late



As we go to press, 400 Oxford Bus workers are still waiting for the results of a postal ballot for industrial action - including all-out strike - which were due to be announced more than a week ago (26th January).

The dispute goes back to last autumn, when Unite members voted overwhelmingly to reject a 1.6% pay offer involving a loss

of guaranteed working hours and lower wages for new drivers. Subsequently, a revised pay offer, also rejected, restored the working hours, but cut the wage increase down to 1.4%. Hence the new postal ballot, the results of which Unite officials are suspiciously slow to announce.

As if Oxford Bus, which carries 46,000 passengers a day and is part of the giant Go-Ahead group, one of Britain's biggest rail and bus operators, was short of cash! They are only crying poverty to line shareholders' pockets. Isn't that a good enough reason to make them pay? Apparently not for the Unite officials who seem to be ignoring the ballot timetable! ☐

• Ballooning soccer debt

The crisis is hitting football too. More and more English Premier League (EPL) clubs are in debt up to their eyeballs. Portsmouth, for example, owes £75m - including to its own players! David Sullivan, Britain's biggest porn-king and the new owner of West Ham, said he had "inherited a house of cards" on discovering total debts of £110m. Even Manchester United is saddled with debts of £716m.

What set the ball rolling for this was the takeover of football by big business through the EPL. The likes of Rupert Murdoch of Sky TV and former ManU owner, Martin Edwards, have made fortunes out of it. So too have players like David Beckham of Armani underwear fame. Meanwhile, rich pickings for the few have impoverished the rest of the game. Lucrative TV deals benefiting EPL clubs have starved lower divisions of funding.

Football will be 150 years old in three years time. Kicking profiteering out of the game is the only way to secure its future - like for the rest of society!

Chilcot enquiry on Iraq:**The mother of all white washes**

Blair's evidence to the Chilcot enquiry was a combination of arrogance and denial. By the end of his 6-hour show, the anger of the soldiers' families broke out - and understandably so. But since the role of this enquiry is merely to put the Iraq war "behind us", ahead of the coming election, there was really nothing more to expect from it.

Blair, who is lined up for lucrative jobs in finance and does not fear the voters' wrath, has chosen to attract all the blame. Hence his claim that going to war was necessary for the sake of the "Anglo-US special relationship" - i.e. the huge profits made by the City thanks to US banks - and his defiant defence of the lies over

Saddam Hussein's WMDs. This allows those who still have a political career ahead of them, like ex-Foreign Minister Jack Straw, to placate the electorate with a hypocritical display of belated doubts about Blair's policy.

This enquiry was never set up to expose the crimes committed in Iraq, let alone the criminals responsible for these crimes. Nor will it put the Iraq war "behind us", not to mention the Afghan quagmire, which is firmly "with us". No, the criminal policies of these politicians will never be behind us, not as long as the world system of oppression and exploitation of their capitalist masters remains in place! □

The long-term cost of the Iraq war

In the middle of the political chaos created in Iraq by 7 years of occupation, Iraqi scientists are beginning to uncover yet more catastrophic damage due to the war.

Studies have shown that abnormally high rates of cancer and birth defects have been found in the areas of towns where there are high levels of radiation. These are also the areas most affected by the fighting and where depleted uranium-containing munitions had been fired. Falluja, which was the scene of some of the war's worst battles, has the highest

level of birth defects.

Another study found that a key factor in the deterioration in health in southern Iraq was the high level of dioxins in the soil in agricultural land. These highly toxic dioxins were in the smoke produced by industrial facilities set ablaze by bombs and by exploding bombs themselves.

Not only have hundreds of thousands of Iraqis been killed and maimed by the invasion and occupation, but future generations will go on to foot the bill of this criminal war for the decades to come. □

Afghan conference**Karzai-Brown-Corleone & co**

Last month's London conference on Afghanistan was supposed to come up with some sort of "exit timetable". It only managed to produce a vague statement saying that "a number of provinces" were "expected" to be handed over to Afghan forces, by late 2010, early 2011. Brown and Obama know they are just sinking ever deeper into a quagmire.

However, they did announce a "new strategy" (actually older than the Afghan hills), to "divide the Taliban". Millions are to be provided by Western governments to be used as bribes to get the "good" insurgents (those who accept the money!) to side with

Karzai's corrupt regime.

Not that this hasn't been done before. On this basis, warlords backed the invasion and joined Karzai's government - and then fell in and out with him ever since. These unstable "alliances" have never provided any kind of "peace". But they did "justify" the reinforcement of the regime's reactionary features, especially the tightening of Sharia law! Never mind about women's rights! No wonder several Afghan women attending the London Conference found it hard to conceal their anger and disgust at this latest sick twist to the West's bloody imperialist games. □

• Blair: from riches to ... super riches

Since leaving government, Blair's hot air has literally turned into gold (even if it's fool's gold in terms of content). He is said to have received 6-figure fees for some of his speeches at international gatherings. But such occasions are not all that frequent, which may be why he agreed last month to be paid "only" £2,000 a minute for regular speeches at meetings organised by Lansdowne Partners - a speculative fund which made big profits from betting on the fall of Barclays' and Northern Rock's shares at the peak of the credit crunch. All in all, the media estimate that he has made more than £10m since 2007, from books, advisory roles and public events.

Obviously, Blair does not need a state pension. Nevertheless, he will get one - worth £63,000/yr at taxpayers' expense! Something which public sector workers who are so often accused of having too generous a pension will appreciate! Especially as Blair still has a few tricks in his money-making sack - the latest being a contract with Louis Vuitton luxury handbags. He certainly knows how to bag it all!

• Deceptive detective device

By now, the issue of Saddam Hussein's WMDs has been settled: it was all lies, there weren't any. The only WMDs in Iraq were US and British-made, used to slaughter the Iraqis.

But it turns out Britain had another kind of deception waiting in the wings. The director of a British company was arrested in January for selling a hand-held device allegedly capable of detecting explosives. It was even said to be powered "by the user's static electricity". Except that, according to the BBC Newsnight programme, the device has now been proven to contain just an electronic tag used in shops to protect goods against theft!

The Iraqi government spent £52m on over 2,000 such devices, which have been used, in particular, by all Baghdad checkpoints. Since imports of security devices into Iraq were organised by the Anglo-American occupation forces, there can only be one of two possible explanations: abysmal stupidity or lucrative backhanders - or is it both?

Recovery? Not for the working class!

At long last, after months during which we heard that a recovery was "just round the corner", Gross Domestic Product finally showed an increase, in the last quarter of 2009. What a relief for Brown and his ministers! At last they could boast that their policies were "working", without looking as stupid as before.

Except that at a miserly 0.1%, this increase doesn't look very credible. Anyway, GDP "initial figures" are regularly revised upwards or downwards, a month or two after first release, often by 0.2 to 0.4%. So this increase may still turn into another drop - which would be a minor disaster for Brown. But even if it doesn't, who can expect workers to believe in a "recovery" which contradicts their experience of on-going job cuts, let

alone the fact that they haven't benefited in any way from the government's policies?

Did the hundreds of billions of pounds of Brown's bank bailout help stop job losses and wage cuts? Not in the least. And now, at a time when companies are announcing yet more job cuts, while profits and share prices are soaring again, we are being told that over the coming years, we'll have to pay back Brown's



largesse to the capitalist class! This is what workers should be thankful for? ☐

Jobless figures - statistical fool's gold

Ministers welcomed the December jobless figures with a big sigh of relief. Why? Because, they are said to "show" that unemployment is "going down" after 18 months of continuous rise.

But it all depends on who is looking at these figures. For instance, the 7,000 drop in the broader measure of unemployment is much smaller than the 15,000 drop in the claimants number. This means that there are 8,000 MORE jobless surviving on social security (or no income at all)! As to the number of inactive people of working age, it is now at an all-time high of 8.05 million - and this includes, in particular, the unregistered jobless who are trying to

escape from the JobCentres' pointless harassment.

Even more significant for workers: full-time jobs have gone down by another 113,000 to 21.2 million, while part-time jobs increased by 99,000 to 7.7 million. Not only does this mean fewer jobs, but also yet more non-jobs from which no-one can make a living - since official statistics consider just one paid-for hour over the previous week to be a part-time "job"!

In the politicians' world, where electioneering is the only craze, these figures may be comforting. For workers, who have to make a living, they are a condemnation of this system! ☐

Job cutting offensive goes on

January saw another wave of job cuts. The latest announcement, by Shell, involves 1,000 job cuts on top of 5,000 announced last year and the sale of its refinery at Stanlow in Cheshire, following a fall in last quarter profits - to "only" £1.6bn! Pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca (formerly ICI) has not yet finished implementing 15,000 job cuts announced in 2007. But it has now announced another 8,000 job cuts, despite a 20% increase in its 2009 operating profits, to over £7bn!

In the car industry, Toyota - the world's biggest car manufacturer

- says it will cut 750 workers' jobs at its factory near Derby in August, by combining two assembly lines into one. Giant parts manufacturer Bosch announced the closure of its plant near Cardiff, putting 900 out of work. Meanwhile Nissan boasts of 400 new jobs in its Sunderland plant. But that won't make up for the 900 redundancies at Shop Direct's Sunderland call centre, as part of a 1,500 job cutting plan.

Recovery or not, the bosses' offensive against workers won't stop - as long as they are allowed to get away with it. ☐

• The bosses need their come-uppance

In the 19 months up to November 2009, 1.3 million workers were made redundant. But, over the same period, there were 6.2 million fresh claims for JSA - almost 5 times more! This illustrates the struggle faced by many workers to keep their heads above the water and how many of those who lost permanent jobs were forced into casualisation.

These figures are part of a report published by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. This report also shows that, on average, the workers who found another job after being made redundant, had to take a 28% pay cut into the bargain! Not to mention the impact of short-time working, pay cuts and other cost cutting measures, on the pay packets of those who kept their jobs.

The truth is that the crisis has been used by the bosses as a convenient excuse to cut their costs and boost their profits on workers' backs, in many different ways. This general offensive against workers calls for a general counter-offensive by the entire working class, to regain the ground lost.

Alive and growing - Britain's wealth gap

British society is the 7th most unequal among the world's 30 richest countries, after Mexico, Turkey, Portugal, the US, Poland and Italy. Of course, most workers experience this firsthand.

But apparently, Brown's ministers needed confirmation of the obvious. They commissioned a group of experts to write a report on the causes and extent of this inequality. Surprise, surprise, after writing their 476-page report, they came to the conclusion that the main source of inequality was... class! Yes, these experts "discovered" that the poor tended to become poorer, whereas the rich tended to become richer! Had they not noticed that working class kids don't often get into Eton or Oxbridge, nor into company

boardrooms?

Some figures are striking, though. For instance, by the time the 10% richest retire, they have £853,000 (or more) total wealth, whereas the poorest 10% have £8,800 or less. As for the top 1%, their lower limit is £2.6m...

All this was before the crisis began to bite. Does it take an expert to guess that the gap is even wider today? ☐



Unemployment, "race" and class...

Last month the government came out saying that class rather than "race" was holding people back on the social ladder - thus making out that they were "beating" racism. If so, why would the Labour Force Survey (LFS) show that compared to the 20% of white 16-24 year-olds out of work, more than double the number - 48% - of black youth are jobless? Indeed, since the start of recession the number of black unemployed youth shot up much faster - 13% since March 2008 compared to an 8% increase among whites. Since manual and non-skilled workers are most affected by very far, it seems like class AND "race" is a combination which forces young adults into a

worse position!

Should that surprise us? As if racism (and other kinds of discrimination) were not by-products of this class society, as the exploiters strive to divide and rule over the exploited, by whipping up prejudices! This is what the LFS shows: as the bosses increase their attacks against jobs, discrimination on all kinds of grounds gets worse. Isn't it about time the rubbish Labour ministers spout was dumped where it belongs? As long as this exploitative profit system exists, racism, sexism, xenophobia, etc., will remain. Get rid of the one, and then, and only then, will you get rid of all the others. ☐

End ALL prescription charges!

In 2008, Brown promised that England's NHS prescription charges for those with long-term conditions like asthma and heart disease would be abolished. These patients are still waiting. Now it's rumoured that this failed promise (among others) will figure in the coming Labour manifesto, however meaningless this is!

Last year, after a long delay, cancer patients were able to apply for a scheme whereby their prescriptions were supplied free. But the "fully employed" in England still have to pay £7.20 per item. (Those with chronic conditions can apply for a pre-payment scheme which can cut costs to

around £2/week). In fact at the beginning of the recession the Citizen's Advice Bureau found that 2% of people in England weren't collecting their medicines because of the cost. It's probably a lot more now.

Prescription charges disappeared in Wales in 2007. In Scotland, where they are now £4/item, they should be scrapped by 2011. The only reason they stay in England, and might even go up, is because the income from the charge is more than the cost of administering it (unlike in less populous Wales and Scotland). And it's just too bad if you can't afford it! ☐

• Letter from a jobless worker: "Flexible" New Deal scam

The New Deal for the long-term unemployed has now spawned a successor, the so-called "Flexible" New Deal, supposedly, tailored to the "customer".

The old New Deal was provided over much of the south east by one of the outfits living off joblessness - a "charity" called Careers Development Group. Its new version is provided by another, a private US company called Maximus. The style appears different - e.g. so far, no idle sitting around in a big room with other "customers". On my first interview, I was told that Maximus doesn't get paid until the "customer" has been in employment for at least 6 months - hard to believe, though.

Eventually, they summoned me on my mobile to a "job interview" with an employer, insisting I cancel voluntary work in order to attend. They said 14 of their "customers" were to be interviewed and someone from Maximus would oversee the interviews. Yet the employer's website read: "Sorry, there are no vacancies currently available". In fact, the interview turned out to be, in the employer's own words, an "informal chat", which might possibly lead to a formal interview later! It would seem they were simply scanning through Maximus' books. When I showed the "no vacancies" printout to my Maximus adviser, he said that the company might have wanted to know who might be suitable for what and that they'd then decide on further action, which might involve sending me on courses, to "correct any deficiencies"! What a Maximus waste of time...

King's Cross railway station (London)**• FCC does not connect**

First Capital Connect passengers are up in arms. 5,500 of them have signed an online petition to No 10, calling for FCC to be stripped of its franchise. Short trains at rush hour, an eccentric "information" system and poor punctuality – these are part of their day-to-day misery.

But the last straw came when, for over two months, FCC ran an "emergency" timetable on the Bedford to Brighton route, with only half the normal number of trains. What justified this "emergency" was the drivers'

refusal to work overtime in protest against a 0% pay increase. But what it really exposed was FCC's profiteering: it has cut so many drivers' jobs that it can only run a full service by resorting to massive, probably unsafe, overtime.

FCC was in no hurry to remedy this situation, even though it sparked two parliamentary debates. But why would First care about the politicians' hot air when the main parties all support profiteering in the railway? Although the government wagged a finger at



FCC and threatened First with the loss of the franchise, with the other hand it was still feeding them with state subsidies - worth £140m last year. While the public petition may have been a start, it'll take a lot more than that to sink the privateers. ☐

• Push me-pull you

It seems its not only East Coast trains which have been affected by the snow but communications too. As trains are cancelled and re-timed, the info is not always passed down - like a few weeks ago, when a driver was preparing to take a train to the depot, not knowing that another driver had been told

to bring it into service. So the train had a driver at each end, trying to go in opposite directions! [Workers Platform King's Cross 12/01/10]

• To beer or not to beer

In a scene straight out of a Carry On film, certain East Coast trains were designated "dry" a couple of weeks ago, because of the football. But no briefs were provided,

so some people heard, others didn't. When no lager turned up on board, crews ordered it and depending who answered (the informed or the not informed), in some cases managed to get beers. East Coast couldn't organise a p**s up in a brewery - but they can organise one on a dry train. [Workers Platform King's Cross 26/01/10]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• Royal Mail boss to go stamp on ITV**

Adam Crozier, at present Royal Mail's CEO and the 2nd highest paid public servant (taxpayers forked out £6.4m for him in 5 years) has been head-hunted by ITV. Why would they want him? Well, ITV chairman, Archie Norman is an old crony of Crozier's former boss at Royal Mail, Alan Leighton. And in the late 1980s they became Thatcher's prototype "entrepreneurs", making their names and a fortune out of the Asda supermarket chain, before it was sold off to Walmart. In other words, in this world of boardrooms, it's not what you know, but who you know...

Certainly, postal workers who have

been subjected to the cuts and running down of the service over the past 5 years, (at least 60,000 jobs gone, 2nd delivery gone, 2,500 post offices gone, postmen's walks doubled and mail deliveries now in the afternoon or evening... etc.) are in no doubt about Crozier's "competence". There was always something very distasteful in the hugely inflated salaries paid to some selected public sector bosses, but in Crozier's case this was both shocking and incomprehensible, especially since RM has been making such huge cuts, and claiming that privatisation was needed to fund a huge pension deficit it had caused itself,



by not paying employers' contributions for 13 years. And Crozier may even get a £2m golden handshake!

It therefore certainly is good riddance, but postal workers wouldn't wish such a boss on ITV workers nor anyone else! ☐

• No news ain't good news

Another delay in the "final agreement" - for a week... or more... The last excuse was the cold snap - and there we were, thinking that the mail was meant to "get through" come what may! Anyway, the secret "down the frozen river" sale goes on, therefore. But of course, bitter experience, leaks and rumours, plus that "PEC report" on the royalmailchat inform as to what's going on. For eg., it said the CWU would accept "no more than" 25% of the workforce being part time. Yet it's a FACT

that casuals (no permanent rights!) already make up 25% or more in some offices, on top of part-timers - and are covering for job cuts which were made in the past 2 months - i.e., outside this unmade agreement! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 26/1/10]

• Is this the tip of the iceberg for EC?

What is more, 20 more jobs could be cut from EC nights if we allow it. 11 mates literally face having their jobs ripped off: the jobs remain, but will be taken over by

Processing, as they're part of preparing the Dumbo-Jumbo machine's work. But instead allowing our mates to go with their jobs, it seems EC and Processing bosses can't "manage" a seamless transfer of our mates between them! What's their case? Why should these mates have to apply to Processing with the possibility of being turned down? And why should they face the possibility (and this is what they've been told!!) of having to change to early shift and do deliveries? It's ludicrous, unfair and plain stupid. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 26/1/10]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

• Ford's "recovery" is just crude screw-turning

Ford is boasting a profit - £1.7 billion - for 2009 and claims it will remain in the black for the next 2 years - after 4 years of "losses". Ford also boasts that, unlike GM and Chrysler, it didn't take a government bail-out to turn itself around.

What they do not explain was how Ford workers were made to foot the bill for this "recovery". The hourly paid workforce has been cut by more than half in 5 years. In 2009 Ford cut costs by £3.2bn, including by dumping responsibility for health coverage for its retired workers and cutting health and pension benefits for all workers.

Here, in one part of Ford's British "backyard" - the Dagenham plant - workers can vouch for Ford's methods. Having sacked over 200 temps in 2008 and got rid of just as many permanents through early retirement (over 20% of the workforce), local bosses imposed vastly increased production targets on the remaining workers - especially for new diesel engines, supposedly because of demand generated by the scrappage schemes. And since there's a real shortage of hands and local bosses say that "Detroit HQ" won't allow recruitment, workers are asked to work overtime at weekends,



including Sunday nights - and are being endlessly harassed to speed up. Never mind the break-downs this causes, of both man and machine!

And as everyone knows, when exploitation of labour increases, profits increase! ☐

• Bring back our mates now!!!

It's one rule for one and another rule for the other. The Tiger machining mates who were wrongly accused of sleeping during a 12-hr shift are still on suspension after 3 months! But: the green shift foreman is still here, after he was caught sleeping...on camera. We have the pics and video along with time of incident and it wasn't dinner break! Watch this space for

the YouTube link and see for yourself... [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 2/2/10]

• Let them eat cake!

There was a "celebration" for the 6-millionth Lynx engine on Tues, and management had a big cake made for the occasion. Their "thanks" to us consisted of a 2-inch square piece taken round to us on the line... Obviously these ignoramuses don't know their history. What was it that sparked off the French Revolution? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 2/2/10]

• Below standard

Since last summer Hamtons has halved the number of cleaners, so our work has doubled! They sometimes call in temp agency cleaners. But unless they (at least) double up our numbers, permanently, we certainly can't vouch for the standard of cleaning on the estate. And while they're about it, they can bring our pay up to standard as well. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 2/2/10]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

• Agency workers pay: a bogus ballot

Agency workers at BMW Cowley have not had a pay rise since March 2008. In January 2009, a pay deal including a 4.2% increase was agreed for permanents. But there was nothing for agency workers.

Following the mass agency sackings of last February, BMW conveniently "forgot" about their overdue pay rise. Only after many temps were re-employed during the summer did it again become an issue. But what came out of long-winded negotiations with the union, Unite, was a miserly non-choice: either

a one-off £300 or a 1% increase. BMW had the nerve to plead poverty when its sales are only marginally lower than last year and its costs much lower due to a much reduced workforce!

In the first week of February a ballot was being held over this "choice" with Unite's backing. Except that there was nowhere to put a cross in order to reject outright both these derisory options - which would have been the only way to treat such an insulting offer! With BMW now refusing to give permanents a pay rise for 2010, there would be every



reason to make this latest farce backfire in BMW's face - by uniting the ranks of permanent and agency workers into a common fight for a decent wage increase for all! ☐

• To avoid history repeating itself?

BMW has already been cutting agency jobs in the run up to February's shut-out, managers refuse to reassure others about the future, and C shift may get cut altogether. Meanwhile, the lines go hell for leather, but BMW "cuts production" here and there with one or

two hour stand-downs! Yes, we've been here before. Except that we know the story this time, which gives us a chance to organise a different outcome! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 26/1/10]

• More haste, less speed

In the Paint Shop last Thursday line 2 broke down and everyone was shoved on

to line 1, the speed of which was then doubled! The result was complete chaos with sealer guns flying out of holders and cars left half-finished. To cap it all, BMW was meant to be running trials and teaching new jobs! We had a good laugh as the rejects flew past. JD Power would have a field day! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 26/1/10]

Haiti - A whole population fighting for survival

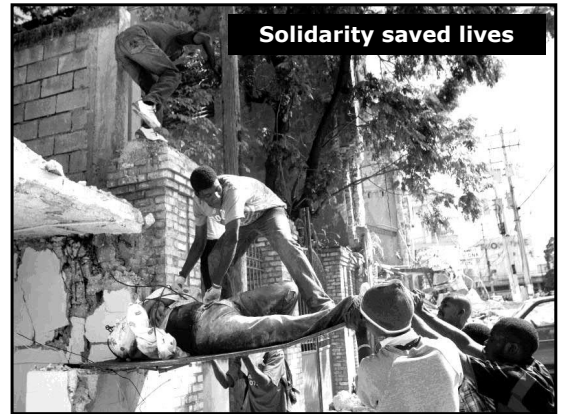
No-one will ever know the precise death toll of the 12th January earthquake in Haiti. At least 250,000 may have been killed by the first "shocks", but how many more have died since, for lack of clean water, food, proper sanitation and medical treatment?

The scale of this catastrophe has everything to do with poverty. Haiti's capital is on a seismic fault - just like San Francisco, in the US, where an earthquake of the exact same magnitude 7, claimed just 63 victims in 1989. Except that, unlike San Francisco, Haiti was too poor to afford earthquake resistant buildings.

But it was not just the buildings that collapsed. So did the Haitian

state, leaving the poor to their own devices. The international "rescue" stampede generated more hot air than actual help. As to the UN's 9,000 personnel and Obama's 10,000 marines, their main role is to protect the clique of corrupted politicians serving the interests of rich, foreign companies, against the population's anger.

Nevertheless, the Haitian poor rose to the occasion. Women and men came out of their ranks, whose initiative, solidarity and unbending resolve saved the lives of tens of thousands. They used their bare hands, day and night, to pull the survivors out of the



rubble. There may have been no TV cameras to record their struggle, no fund-raising campaign to encourage their efforts, but they were the real heroes - the only ones into whose hands the Haitian poor can trust their future. □

• Ravaged by imperialist looting

In 1804, Haiti became the first independent black state in history, after two decades of struggle in which its slave majority overthrew the rule of the French-backed white plantation owners and ended slavery.

The rich powers never forgave Haiti for this audacity. Having to sell its natural products, it soon became dependent on French traders and bankers. A century later, 80% of the country's revenue was going towards paying the interest on its debt to France.

In 1915, the US took over from France as Haiti's imperialist master. For the next 19 years, the country was occupied by US troops, while US companies took over control of its finances and lands. When these troops finally left, in 1934, Haiti remained in the US backyard. So that in 1986, when the Haitian poor rose again, to end Duvalier's 29-year bloody dictatorship, the US intervened, first with their own troops and then, in 2004, through a 9,000-strong UN contingent.

By then, Haiti was an important subcontractor for US companies, thanks to its very low wages, but it was also the world's poorest country. Even before the latest earthquake struck, the overwhelming majority of its population lived on less than £1.25 a day, had no access to clean water and had to resort to eating "mud pies" to stop hunger pangs. Such is the cost of centuries of colonial and imperialist plunder. □



Forty-eight years after Kenya's independence from British colonial rule, Brown's government has just refused to hear the claims of victims of British atrocities perpetrated during the anti-colonial struggle, including from veterans who were tortured and castrated.

Foreign secretary David Milliband

Kenya - the British Empire lives on

may be an ambitious upstart who was not even born at the time. But his response was in keeping with the cynical arrogance of his colonial predecessors: in his view, Britain's liability for the torture committed by the colonial regime was passed on to the Kenyan government at independence!!

During the "Kenyan Emergency" between 1952 and 1960, Churchill's Tory government gave the colonial authority carte blanche to subject the whole population to a brutal reign of terror, in an attempt to crush the "Mau Mau" nationalist rebellion. British troops murdered an estimated 30,000

guerillas and civilians, imprisoned 150,000 in all, of which several thousand were hanged, and 71,000 were placed in concentration camps where they were systematically beaten and tortured - especially if they refused hard labour.

For thousands of Mau Mau veterans and their families the war will never be over until Britain admits its responsibility. But even that will not give resolution, because while colonial rule may have gone, imperialist exploitation of Africa continues to push the vast majority of the poor into the daily torture of desperate poverty. □

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:

BM Workers' Fight - LONDON WC1N 3XX.