

# WORKERS' fight

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

# THE ONLY SCROUNGERS ARE THE PROFITEERS!

Week after week, yet more so-called "radical reforms" wrapped up in provocative language are being produced. The Con-Dems are clearly pandering to the prejudices of their electorate. But above all, they are helping the capitalist class to take advantage of the crisis, turn the screw on workers and increase their parasitism on public funds.

Whether the Con-Dems implement their many proposals, however, is quite another question. This will depend on how much they think they can get away with, far more than on their present provocative rhetoric.

## ***The real criminals are the exploiters***

Duncan-Smith's scathing attack on what he dares to call the "dependency culture" of the poorest is hypocritical and insulting. As if anyone chooses to be poor - and to barely survive on benefits!

If there is a "dependency culture" in this society, it is that of the wealthy who live in luxury thanks to their parasitism on workers' labour and state handouts!

The jobless and low-paid workers, pensioners, the disabled and the sick, are forced into poverty by this profit-driven system. A majority of benefit claimants are actually workers who were either made redundant or are on miserly wages, pushed into poverty by the bosses' greed.

Duncan-Smith doesn't care about poverty. His aim is to help the bosses turn the screw even further on the working class. Hence his plan to impose unpaid "community service" on the jobless, just as the courts do, on petty criminals.

Calling the unemployed "scroungers" or "criminals" is an old ploy, that Labour used as well. Such demagoguery is music to the ears of the rich, who are furious that billions of pounds should be "wasted" on the unemployed and the poor.



But who are the criminals, if not the capitalists who caused the crisis and who have been (and are still) shedding so many jobs? And what about this government which is preparing to savage a million jobs with its cuts? More generally, isn't this bankrupt profit system responsible for the rise of joblessness and poverty?

## ***All together, workers and jobless!***

Ultimately, however, these attacks against the jobless are designed to force them into the worst casual jobs, for the benefit of bosses who are crying for labour costs to be slashed.

In these days of crisis, however, all workers are the "unemployed in waiting". It is in their interests to stand as one, alongside the jobless and the poor. All the more so, as, behind the attacks aimed at the poorest, others are coming, which are targeted at workers in employment as well.

For instance, there is the government's latest brainwave, the so-called

"slivers of time working". This is inspired by a Tesco scheme - a "market" of working hours, for which employees can apply, supposedly to help them to increase their (inadequate) wages by working the odd extra hours in other shops. In reality, this is aimed at cutting full-time jobs, thereby boosting unemployment.

Accordingly, the government wants to "incite" - meaning, compel - the jobless to take "jobs" involving as little as 2 hours a week. No doubt, bosses would seize on this bonanza to fill the gaps left by their job-slashing on the cheap, leading to another rise in casualisation, at the expense of both temporary and permanent workers.

So, enough is enough. These attacks must be stopped. The first protests called by the unions at the end of October, and the successful students demo on 10 November, must be followed by many others. If we are to stop the bosses' offensive, the anger of the working class and jobless will have to be felt. □

## No more deportations!

Who is responsible for the death of Jimmy Mubenga, the Angolan refugee who died on board BA flight 77, while the government was trying to deport him to Luanda?

Was it the thugs employed by the government's £110m contractor, G4S, whose forcible "restraint" meant three of them literally sat on him, causing his asphyxiation and then his death?

Was it BA, which along with other commercial airlines, made £8.2m on chartered flights and £18.2m on scheduled flights carrying deportees over the past year?

Or is it British ministers, Labour and Con-Dem, whose policy has turned the idea of asylum on its head, by intern-ing children and adults alike, deporting refugees without essential medication and immunisation to countries where they could face fatal illnesses, not to mention torture or death? And who ignore their own appeals system when it comes to immigrants from the 3rd World, particularly Africa.

As to the lethal "forcible restraint" - despite previous deaths - it was made lawful by none other than former Labour minister Phil Woolas. □

## Stop forced removals to Iraq!

The UK Borders Agency has been systematically and forcibly deporting Iraqis. 50-60 "failed asylum seekers" are sent in chartered flights every month and the last batch to be issued tickets were meant to leave on 11 November.

Officially this is justified on the grounds that Iraq is now "safe". Yet just in the first 2 days of November, a string of explosions killed 128 people in Baghdad!

The European Court Of Human Rights has now called on governments in Europe to halt deportations until 24 November "pending further legal considerations".

As if it was a "legal" issue! Having brought hell into Iraq, it is only right that the British state should take responsibility for providing a safe haven for Iraqi refugees - as many as require it, and for as long as they need it! □

## MP Woolas kicked out: liars defend their own

Labour MP Phil Woolas was kicked out of parliament by the High Court, for "lying" - the first time this has happened to an MP in 99 years. Of course, if all liars were kicked out of parliament there'd be no MPs left! But Woolas won his Oldham East seat by just 103 votes, and did so, by smearing the reputation of his Lib-Dem opponent.

Indeed, his campaign team's strategy was to "make the white folk angry", in a constituency known for its inter-racial tensions, due to the increasing poverty, poor housing and joblessness presided over by Labour.

Never mind. Woolas and his team fanned these flames, accusing the Lib-Dems of teaming

up with "Muslim extremists" to "take Phil out". So it is well and good for him to have been indicted. But it is his "legitimate" conduct as the previous government's Immigration Minister which really stinks! It was he who granted companies like G4S the licence to kill - using "forcible restraint" against prisoners. It was he who allowed the imprisonment of immigrant children in deportation centres, now curtailed after public protest.

Woolas is seeking judicial review over his expulsion and has the support of many of his Labour colleagues - and this says it all about them. □

### Class Struggle n°89 is out!

*In the October-December issue of our quarterly journal:*

- TUC leaders' determination.. not to rock the boat
- South Africa - the working class strikes back
- USA - from the 2009 anti-concession vote at Ford to the 2010 UAW convention
- Iraq - the making of a dysfunctional pawn in the imperialist game

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### • Letter from Sussex

In the last general election, Eastbourne's Tory MP, Nigel Waterson lost his seat to the Lib Dem, Stephen Lloyd. The enraged Waterson announced that he would be taking Lloyd to court for "lying" about Waterson's involvement in the expenses scandal. But we've heard no more about that.

Since then, however, Lloyd has been busy playing down the local impact of his party's policies. He recently hailed the fact that 250 jobs were to be created in Eastbourne, in retail and for next year's census. The following week, he was quoted by the local paper, saying that redundancies resulting from his government's "necessary" public sector cuts would be "negligible" - despite the fact that 38% of the workforce in Eastbourne is in public sector jobs.

Unfortunately for him, the same article which included this quote also mentioned an estimate by the South East England Development Board, predicting 2,000 job losses in Eastbourne, over the next 4 years.

Negligible? Lloyd may well find that the impact on his popularity is not so "negligible"!

## ***Energetic racketeering***

How are people supposed to afford their heating this winter? Just as it gets cold, British Gas announced a 7% price increase for its 8m customers on 10 December. Last month Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE) said it was raising its gas price by 9.4% from December - and while EDF said it'd freeze some prices till March 2011 (but then what?), other energy companies will most likely

follow, as they always do, no matter that "price fixing" is supposed to be illegal!

These cynical companies claim it's because oil and gas wholesale prices are going up again. But when prices fell by 50% between the peak price in 2008, and today, they only cut bills by 10%!

British Gas makes out it has a social conscience, saying it'll only

implement pensioners' increase "after the winter". If it snows next Easter, too bad. In July, it British Gas posted operating profits of £585m, up by 98%. They "need" to raise prices? Well, only in the sense that under this capitalist system, they'll squeeze us as long as we don't burn their fingers. ☐

## ***Hard work does kill, only too often...***

The Health and Safety Executive, which at present has only 1,342 front line inspectors to cover the whole country, faces a 35% cut in its funding. Already the HSE is unable to keep the bosses on their toes, even though their inspections have often proved to be the only real way to make sure bosses comply with the law. Indeed, the TUC just reported that 49% of British workplaces have never ever had a health and safety inspection!

Small wonder then that 1.3 million people were suffering from an illness they believed was caused or made worse by their current or past work during the past year. 555,000 of these were new cases. 152 workers were killed at work which may be down from last year, but 233,000 reportable injuries occurred, according to the Labour Force Survey, a rate of 840 per 100 000 workers.

That the HSE prosecuted only



1,033 offences though, can only be put down to its scant resources.

Which this government is determined to make even more scant. ☐

## ***Profiteering fuels deadly poverty***

Tuberculosis (TB) is on the rise in Britain. Last year, there were 9,000 cases, the highest in 30 years.

In 19th century Europe, TB was widespread due to poverty,

poor diet and overcrowding. It accounted for 40% of working-class deaths in cities. In the poor countries it is still endemic and accounts for 2m deaths annually, but by the 1960s, it had almost

disappeared in the rich countries due to better social conditions and effective treatment.

This crisis-ridden profit system is dragging us back to Victorian times! ☐

## ***We'll have to fire them before they fire us!***

David "Lord" Young, a former minister under Thatcher, who is now Cameron's adviser on small businesses, was asked to propose changes that would help these small businesses cut costs, by cutting "red tape". His latest idea is aimed at curbing workers' rights to claim for unfair dismissal. According to his proposal, you would need to have worked at least

2 years for the same employer in order to lodge such a claim, as opposed to 1 year at present. Young justifies this change by claiming that the last time workers' rights were curbed in this way, in the 1980s, employment increased.

However, Young is quite simply rewriting history. In fact, throughout the 1980s, unemployment remained high, while the only form

of employment which really increased was that of casual workers. But then, this is exactly what the bosses and their politicians are dreaming about: a workforce that they can fire at will, without having to worry about industrial tribunals. So much for Osborne's claim that the private sector will soon replace the million of jobs that he is about to cut! ☐

**Cuts watch**

The government spin on school funding is that, despite the spending squeeze, schools are to get an increase in funding, in real terms. But while the promised increase is just 0.1% above inflation per year, the number of pupils is expected to rise by 2.7% over the next 4 years. The government gave the game away in the spending review, which said that the spending per pupil will remain the same "in cash terms" – an admission, in other words, that

**School funding spinning down**

when inflation is taken into account, spending per child will be cut.

The "pupil premium" – a Lib Dem policy, which gives schools extra funding for pupils from poor families – was billed as an "extra" £2.5 billion for schools. But it turns out that it is actually part of the overall budget announced. So, if some schools get this extra funding, others will have their funding cut. It has been estimated that this robbing-Peter-to-pay-Paul

probably means that two-thirds of pupils will be in schools with reduced funding.

In fact, the government's own figures expose its hypocrisy. Privately, they are projecting that the consequence of their spending plans will be 40,000 job cuts in schools. That, from the horse's mouth, is a measure of the scale of their cynical plans to downgrade state education. □

**Jobs for the Tory boys**

A large chunk of the "savings" from cuts elsewhere in the education budget will be eaten up by the Tories' pet project – state-funded "free" schools.

This was presented as an opportunity for groups of parents to set up their own schools if they were dissatisfied with the state provision. But which group of parents is equipped to run a school, from setting the curriculum to managing the budget and employing staff?

Not surprisingly, most of the 21 applications to set up free schools approved so far, come from companies which already run Academies, or they're from religious organisations.

Education Secretary, Michael Gove, has handed over half-a-million pounds to a body called New Schools Network, for advising would-be applicants. New Schools Network, which just happens to be headed by an ex-advisor of Gove's, didn't

even have to compete for this lucrative work. Its trustees and advisors include many representatives of companies which have their fingers in the Academies pie – in particular, ARK, an American "charity" run by financial high-flyers, which has applied to set up three free schools. No danger, then, of these schools being "free" of the influence of the ConDems and their business cronies. □

**• Free lunch for business**

Going a step further than Thatcher, this government is snatching not just milk, but whole meals from the poorest school children. It plans to scrap the extension of free school meals to all primary school pupils who live below the poverty line (currently, only those whose parents receive certain benefits are entitled to them). They intend to use the £110 million saved to establish an endowment fund which they say will be used to "raise standards in underperforming schools".

But for them, "raising standards" is an excuse for bringing in the private sector. The management of the fund, including the awarding of grants, will be outsourced. The bodies invited to submit "innovative proposals" for grants include not just schools and local authorities,

but, explicitly, academy sponsors, charities and "other groups". The companies in this game are sure to have plenty of "innovative proposals": When it comes to gobbling up public cash, they're never short of ideas!

**• Public money for public schools**

Over 62,000 teachers at independent schools are part of the state pension scheme for teachers. The employers' contribution for this scheme is 14.1% of the teacher's salary – a significant saving on what they would have to pay if they had to provide an equivalent pension in the private sector, which would be at least 20%. Since any shortfall in the scheme is made up from state funds, this amounts to a state subsidy of over £131m/yr to private schools, including the likes of Eton and Harrow.

Why should a penny of public



*Why should the state subsidise Eton to produce the likes of Cameron?*

money go to these schools, which are reserved for a tiny wealthy layer of the population? So will Gove cut this totally unjustifiable subsidy? Don't hold your breath...

## Passing the buck to local councils

Osborne's spending review includes the devolution of as many "tough decisions" as possible to local government, in the hope that councils will share the blame. Faced with plans to cut 27% of their grant aid, councils run by all the main parties are sharpening their knives. To "help" them, as he put it, Osborne has ended all "ring-fencing" of the central grants which make up most of their income - leaving them free

to cut more or less what they like. Already a provisional list of job cuts established by the GMB indicates plans to cut over 30,000 council jobs nationally.

What follows below is a sample of the consequences of the Con-Dems' cuts on the ground. Similar developments can be expected more or less everywhere.

By their very nature, these planned cuts are localised and may trigger local resistance

## Cuts watch

from workers and service users. But irrespective of the specific situation of each council, they all result from the same general offensive designed to make the working class foot the bill for the crisis. It is this general offensive that the working class will need to face up to, by unifying all its forces and these local movements of resistance, into a general counter-offensive. □

### • Rhondda Cynon Taff

Rhondda Cynon Taff council, the second largest in Wales, has sent "section 188" redundancy notices to all its 10,000 employees. This blackmail is meant to force them to sign new contracts with lower wages and worse terms and conditions, including reduced sick pay. The council claims this is to preserve jobs and services in the face of a £60m shortfall.

The GMB union walked out of talks attacking the move as amounting to a lockout, but still seeks a "negotiated" solution, once this Labour council has seen the error of its ways!

Ironically, this same council has just set up a website to commemorate the centenary of the Autumn 1910 miners' fight against a lockout imposed by the local coal cartel which resulted in the "Tonypanydri riots"...

### • Barking & Dagenham

The council in Barking and Dagenham announced a plan to cut £48m of spending over the next 3 years, resulting in at least 125 direct job cuts next year (many jobs being done by hire-and-fire agency temps, so they don't come into the figures) and a pay freeze for remaining workers.

The biggest cuts are planned in the adult and community services (which the council's website identifies itself as supporting the most vulnerable people), children's services and environment departments. Skills training, apprenticeship, school buses and libraries budgets are all expected to be cut by between £500,000 and £800,000.

## Dignity under the axe

Social care provided to elderly and disabled people in their own homes is under threat from the cuts to council funding.

The Local Government Association has warned that councils may decide to provide care only to those whose needs are classed as "critical" - excluding most people who live at home. Age UK estimates that a predicted 7% cut in the social care budget would exclude 250,000 people who receive it now.

Paul Burstow, minister for care services, claimed that

extra funding for social care over the next 4 years means that "no councils need to reduce access to social care... if they improve efficiency and drive forward with reform". No doubt the sort of efficiency he has in mind is Kensington & Chelsea council's withdrawal of sleep-in care for a 67-year old woman with severe mobility and bladder problems. The council's decision to supply incontinence pads instead has just been declared legal by the Court of Appeal!

Council leader Liam Smith called on residents to join him in protests in central London against Osborne's spending review. Hypocritical, to say the least, considering what he's busy doing in his own backyard!

### • Havering

In nearby Havering, councillors had already planned a £19m budget cut over 4 years even before the government's announcement - thereby anticipating the coming cuts.

Since the spending review, they are looking for another £15.6m of cuts. 300 jobs are at risk, in addition to agency workers who will be the first targets and on whom many social services depend. Administrative staff are particularly under threat - and the professionals they support would be expected to "absorb" their work.

### • Windsor & Maidenhead

Windsor and Maidenhead council has come up with a wheeze to plug the gaps caused by cuts in council spending.

It wants to join forces with a loyalty card scheme like Nectar, to encourage people to volunteer for "good deeds". So helping clear up rubbish in public places, or organising tea parties for pensioners, would count towards discounts in supermarkets or restaurants.

Maybe this kind of "do-gooding" can work in this rich "Royal Borough", assuming the scheme ever survives the likely bickering over what counts and what doesn't. Evidently what they had in mind was to implement a "Big Society" cover for their attacks on the poor, but instead it just looks like a "Big Scam"!

## Cuts watch

The planned housing cuts are a vicious attack on workers' conditions.

First targeted are the third of housing benefit claimants who rent privately for lack of social housing. By the end of next year, HB will be capped for them and the present maximum benefit paid in each area will be cut by 40%. Tens of thousands of households will have to move as a result, especially in the large towns. But never fear: welfare minister David Freud

## For the right to a decent home

claimed that tenants would "be able to negotiate their rents downwards." With the current shortage of rented accommodation? Fat chance!

As to the majority of HB claimants who live in council housing, they face another threat, which, although still shrouded in rhetoric, may be just as bad. Cameron has said that rents might be hiked up to 80% of "market rates" and secure tenancy brought to an end. If so, this would mean the

end of "public" housing for the low-income section of the population!

Having a decent home should be a right for all. Of course, ultimately, the real problem is low wages and under-employment - i.e. the profiteering of the bosses.

But until the capitalists can be sorted out once and for all, those who cannot afford to pay rent must have the right to free housing - period! □

### • A cheap backlash

In their cutting frenzy the Con-Dems failed to predict the reaction of their own troops to their housing benefit cuts. Coalition-controlled local councils threw up their arms in dismay at the prospect of vast numbers of poor households being made homeless, whom they would have the statutory duty to provide with a roof. Hence London's mayor Boris Johnson's deliberate provocation, by declaring his opposition to any "Kosovo-style ethnic cleansing" in London on his watch.

Not that these politicians object to working class households being thrown out of their homes - not even the likes of Johnson who just saw it as an opportunity for demagogic rhetoric. They just want to ensure that the government carries the can

for the cuts, and not them, both politically (the local elections are not that far away) and financially.

Eventually Osborne backpedalled, providing councils with £130m over four years for "discretionary housing payments." This miserly amount, compared to the 642,000 households facing an average £39/month loss, was enough to buy the silence of coalition politicians. That's how cheap they are!

### • Not a Freudian slip...

What is the best way to stop the rise in homelessness? Simple: change the criteria which define homelessness, so that fewer households qualify, for instance by disregarding overcrowding and ability to pay! This is the latest brainwave of welfare minister, David Freud, to reassure local councils terrified by the

consequences of the Con-Dem cuts.

Such nasty tricks can be expected from David Freud - aka "Baron Freud of Eastry". Back in 2006, this multimillionaire was hand-picked by Blair to serve as welfare adviser. It was a strange choice given Freud's career at the top of Swiss banking giant UBS, one of the worst culprits in the speculative wave which led to the crisis. But then, this was Blair's way of telling the City that he was out to cut welfare down to the size bankers wanted!

By 2009, as the rats were leaving Brown's sinking ship, Freud switched over to the Tory frontbench as welfare shadow minister. And there he is, now, out of the shadows, doing what he'd been hired to do by Blair in the first place - telling the homeless how they may lose even the right to be considered as such!

### • Social housing: swept under the budget

As a sweetener for its benefit cuts, the government came up with a headline pledge to build 150,000 social homes over 5 years. But will they?

In fact the annual funding allocated, represents just 30% of what was spent in each of Labour's last 3 years in office, and which provided 130,000 homes in total. So here comes the sleight of hand: the Con-Dems say they will fill the funding gap by "attracting private investment." To do this, they'll allow rents to be set at close-to-market level. In other words, these "social" homes will be unaffordable for those who really need them!

But what created today's ballooning housing benefit budget, if not an acute shortage of really affordable housing over the past decades, fuelling housing speculation and driving house prices and rents through the roof?

The problem goes back to Thatcher's move to reduce social housing investment in order to help private landlords get their hands on housing benefits - a policy which Labour subsequently continued.

By reducing investment in social housing even further, the Con-Dems are only paving the way for more of the same. □



Unaffordable homes built for rent in East London

## Yes, this statistic is shocking!

According to the Office of National Statistics, in 2009, there was no one working in almost one in five households in Britain. In Liverpool and Glasgow, as many as 1/3 of households were workless.

The employment minister Chris Grayling claims this is shocking evidence of "welfare

dependency" and people being "work-shy". More like shocking evidence of the hundreds of thousands of industrial jobs which the bosses cut even before the crisis and the many more they have cut since!

In their White Paper on Universal Credit, the Con-Dems actually blame this situation on

### • **IDS's bus to La-la-land**

Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith told the unemployed of Merthyr Tydfil to "get on the bus" to Cardiff, where 15,000 people are chasing after just 1,700 jobs. PCS union research showed that the majority of vacancies in Cardiff were temporary and part-time, mainly for unskilled labouring for just 1 to 3 weeks' duration.

Nationally, there are 5 applicants for every available job, but Wales has one of Britain's highest rates of unemployment with an extra 50,000 officially jobless since the recession began. A rate which should "improve" with... the planned closure of Newport passport office, for example, with 250 job cuts, pre-empting the 600,000 public sector job cuts to come. So where does he think unemployed people should travel to? Fairyland?

### • **They want to make work(ers) pay**

The Con-Dems' fantastical rhetoric is that everybody will be in work and that they will "make work pay". But they actually intend to make work pay... far less! Because the majority of the welfare cuts to be introduced will actually affect 6m low-paid working households, especially those with children!

In addition to cuts in housing benefit, new rules would reduce Working Tax Credit (WTC), depriving low-income families of £1.4bn worth of benefit. For instance, WTC would only be paid to those working 24hrs or more per week rather than the present 16hrs. To compensate,

those working less than 24hrs per week would retain some out-of-work benefits - but at a much lower rate, of course. On planet Con-Dem, whether you work or not you are condemned to live on thin air.

### • **Lies, lies and more lies**

That politicians lie is nothing new. But George Osborne was caught at it not once, but twice, while presenting his spending review.

First he claimed that £5bn was lost every year to benefit fraud - when, in fact, the government's own figures show that 70% of this loss was due to "administrative errors"!

Then he claimed that many households received £104,000/

## Cuts watch

the welfare state, as "a vast, sprawling bureaucracy that maintains rather than really challenges, poverty"!

Of course, we wouldn't expect them to blame the real culprits: their job-slashing sponsors in the City and themselves, since they are about to slash half-a-million government jobs. □

yr in housing benefit. Of all papers, it was the arch-Tory Daily Telegraph which gave Osborne this lie, using a survey of all London boroughs - the only local authorities in which existing rules could potentially allow such big payments. All in all, this paper found that just three families were receiving such an amount - all in Westminster - out of the total 4.5 million households on housing benefit!

However, neither Osborne nor the Daily Telegraph cared to mention that £104,000 is just about what Bart Becht, the CEO of Cillit Bang manufacturer Reckitt Benckiser, makes for every 2½hrs he spends on his "job". Yet that would have been the truth!

## Underground but not ground under!

On the 28 November, another strike is due in the London Underground - against plans to cut 800 station staff. Tube bosses have already cut staff using the excuse of the oyster card (prepayment travelcard), but now intend to squeeze costs even more, although passenger numbers keep increasing and more workers are needed.

At King's Cross, the largest underground station, managers are prepared to leave just 8 workers to man 3 ticket offices, 3 sets of gates and 8 platforms - and that's before the cuts!

All over the network, safety critical positions are left unmanned and ticket

offices closed, while workers are moved from one station to another to try to cover for unfilled vacancies or absence. Never mind that the Oyster card has many unresolvable glitches leaving passengers out of pocket and/or stuck on the wrong side of the barrier.

Even more seriously, safety critical cuts have been made in fleet maintenance, with trains being run with worn out brakes and wheels in danger of collapsing.

So yes, tube workers have every reason to strike for as long as is needed (and not just 1 day a month) and we have every reason to support them.

## Crisis? Not for the FTSE 100 bosses...

These leeches are really raking it in. All the explanations of the bosses' Institute of Directors (IoD) about "high-performing" companies cannot hide the fact that the directors of Britain's biggest 100 companies awarded themselves an average 55% pay rise last year. Top of the list came Bart

Becht of Reckitt Benckiser who grabbed £92.6m.

According to the IoD, these directors' average basic pay rose by "only" 3.6%, but their long-term incentive options rose 73%, their share options rose by 90% and their bonuses by 34%.

And these are the fat cats

who have been - and are still - using the situation created by their crisis to blackmail workers into agreeing to wage and job cuts and worsening conditions! In fact, this is precisely why they are getting so fat despite the crisis. ☐



### • **Banks' double subsidy**

A report by the TUC called the Corporate Tax Gap shows how the big banks are now benefiting from a double subsidy from tax payers. During the height of the crisis hundreds of billions of taxpayers' money were thrown at banks, in the form of printed money to boost their cash reserves. All of them benefited from this bonanza - the now state-controlled banks like RBS and Lloyds, just as much as those which remained independent, like Barclays and HSBC. This alone should give taxpayers first claim on all banking profits for years to come!

Instead, however, not only are the banks using their rising profits to boost shareholders' dividends as well as senior bosses' pay and bonuses, but they will manage to reduce the taxes they're meant to pay on their profits by £19bn - to "compensate" themselves for the losses they incurred as a result of the crisis.

Sounds like an outright fraud? Yes, it does. But in the case of the banks, this is what experts call "legitimate tax avoidance" and it's perfectly legal!

### • **Not so 'tough' on bankers**

The annual tax levy on big banks (those

with liabilities over £20bn) proposed in George Osborne's "emergency budget" was supposed to ensure that bankers paid something towards the potential risk that their sheer size and reckless profiteering poses for the economy. Its total proceeds were estimated to be £2.5bn/yr and were therefore hardly going to dent the banks' profits. But even that was apparently too much!

But now the Treasury is back-pedalling again. Instead of having to pay an anticipated 0.07% (0.04% in the first year) on their entire balance sheets, they will only pay the levy on the liabilities over and above £20bn! As for the other financial companies, such as those dealing with insurance or financial investment, when they complained that they were not really banks, they were told that they would be exempt from the tax...

### • **Anglo-Swiss Connection**

At the height of the crisis, war on tax evaders and their tax havens was announced. Switzerland announced that it was prepared to cooperate in disclosing details of accounts of suspected tax evaders to respective authorities.

However, the deal which has just been reached between the Con-Dems and Swiss governments marks a complete reversal. The British wealthy will be able to keep their bank accounts

secret - including details of fortunes salted away over the years. In return for a derisory sum - collectively expected to yield a mere £1bn - assets worth approximately £100bn-£125bn will be held quite "legitimately" in Swiss banks. This makes a mockery of existing law that British residents should always declare any offshore income and pay full tax or face possible 100% penalties and interest from concealing it.

In short, the Con-Dems have legalized tax fraud worth around £25bn/yr, for the benefit of a few thousand very rich individuals and companies. And the same Con-Dems now want us to swallow their claim that the £21bn/yr housing benefit budget, which helps to provide 5 million low-income households with a roof over their heads, is so "unaffordable" that they "need" to cut the housing benefit budget by 12%?

### • **Vodafone's phony deal**

Recent protests in cities in England and Scotland have highlighted Vodafone's tax evasion over the last decade - since it bought Germany's Mannesmann engineering and mobile phones for a record-breaking £180bn. The purchase was routed through its Luxemburg subsidiary, even though the tax man had said it broke anti-tax avoidance laws. This allowed the company to stash away profits worth around £15.65bn, which were taxed at only 1% - thereby defrauding the taxman of about £6bn.

This led to protracted negotiations between Vodafone and the Inland Revenue. Eventually a deal was made which amounted to a complete capitulation on the government's part: Vodafone's bill was reduced to £1.25bn, to be paid over 5 years. Yet, in the first half of this year alone, Vodafone's profits were £7.5bn after tax, thereby showing that it could have easily paid its £6bn tax bill in full. Could the fact that Vodafone's head of tax, John Connors, was until 2007 a senior official for the tax authorities have something to do with this scam?



## Workers need to show their strength

On 20 October, the day of the spending review announcement, demonstrators marched to Whitehall, in London, in order to protest against the government's plans. The on the 23rd, another march was called by Camden Trades Council and several London union branches. Although many workers hadn't heard about the event due to the failure to publicise it well enough, several thousand turned up with their union banners - RMT, UNISON, CWU, UNITE, GMB, FBU, were all there. Firefighters

taking strike that Saturday, occupied the traffic island in Euston Road as the march went by.

The march certainly gave those involved the chance to demonstrate their anger, reinforcing the opposition to the government's attacks. But if this protest is to serve a purpose, we just cannot wait for the next one planned by the TUC... for next March! On the contrary, it should be promptly followed by other initiatives, designed to build up the momentum against the bosses'

and Con-Dem attacks and to bolster the confidence of millions who, for years, have been confined by the union machineries to isolated struggles which, more often than not, were lost.

Yes, it's possible to stop the job-slashers and cost-cutters in their tracks. But for this to happen the working class will have to make a demonstration of its collective strength, massive enough for the capitalists to start worrying about their profits. □

### • Firefighters' anger still simmering

London firefighters held two 8-hour strikes on 23 and 31 October, against an attempt to cut jobs, particularly on nights, to make them work longer and more flexible shifts, and include bank holidays in normal work rotas. The London Fire Brigade (LFB) bosses had chosen to play tough, threatening firemen with the sack if they refused new contracts and hiring a private contractor in an attempt to break the strike. This provocative attitude led to incidents on the picket lines in which three strikers were injured.

Another 47-hour strike, which was planned to start on Bonfire night, November 5, was finally called off after LFB bosses withdrew their sacking threats and agreed to new negotiations. In return, the Firefighters' union agreed to a compromise involving a pay rise and the inclusion of bank holidays into normal rota, but on double pay and with a day off in lieu.

However, while the strike is suspended, the dispute isn't over. The LFB bosses are out to enforce the government's cuts by cutting the jobs and



conditions of the firefighters. Their resistance deserves the support of every worker.

## Students show their anger - it's a start!



50,000 or so students and lecturers attended the central London demonstration against the cuts in education

funding on 10 November, a lot more than had been expected! And it was a lively and angry demo, with plenty of appropriate insults aimed at the politicians - especially the Lib-Dem's lies about tuition fees - culminating in an invasion and occupation of Tory HQ on Millbank!

Predicably the media were full of horror stories about the students' "violence." As if the perpetrators of the real violence were not the Con-Dems with their cuts against the majority of the population, including the students, their teachers and their learning - with

this plan to shred higher education, cut jobs, and privatise/commercialise knowledge!

Yes, the students have begun to protest, after years of allowing their own union leaders and conservative university establishment to push through attacks on education. This time these same bodies have disowned their protest. But let's hope that they won't be deterred and that they will join the working class and jobless and bring their dynamism and youth to the necessary struggle against this government's attacks! □

### • University fees: keeping the rich on top

University funding is being chopped. Lord Browne's (former CEO of BP) proposals which the Con-Dems want to follow, would remove the present cap on tuition fees of £3,290/year from 2012, doubling, or even tripling fees to £9,000/yr if universities make a case for it and offer a few bursaries here and there!

Maintenance grants (needed for accommodation, books, food etc.) would still only allow students around £300

per month (but only if parents earn less than £25,000). Partial grants would be cut and harder to get. All students who don't have rich parents would have to take larger bank loans, therefore, just to survive. This means that most of them would be starting their working life with debts close to £40,000, and sometimes much more.

The vast majority of working class youth will not see much difference, of course. The organisation of society is

already so biased against them - due to poor housing, poor school environment and the need to earn a wage early - that most do not even see higher education as an option. This is why the students who seriously want to fight this threat of increased social discrimination in higher education, should also join in the fight to free society of the social injustices created by the profit system!

**King's Cross railway station (London)****• Culprits have left the scene**

The outcome of the inquiry into the train crash at Potters Bar was fines for both Railtrack and Jarvis, the companies held responsible for the failure of the set of points which caused the accident. But since the inquiry was held 8 years after the event, neither company now exists – Railtrack has been

superseded by Network Rail, so its fine will be picked up by the taxpayer, and Jarvis went bust earlier this year. It's a green light for companies to carry on cutting corners and costs, whatever the risk, confident that they will never be held to account.

**• Unfair fares**

From January 2012, train operating companies are invited to boost their profits by increasing peak-time fares by up to 3% above inflation. Commuters are sitting ducks (or standing ducks, more like) for these rises, not having a lot of choice about how they get to work.

They have already seen their fares rise 1% more than inflation – now they'll see them galloping ahead even faster.

The Department of Transport, which is planning to make cuts of 15% overall, is looking for "efficiencies" – i.e. cost-cutting on the backs of railway workers.



Where the axe will fall hasn't yet been spelt out but one thing's for sure – the pain will be shared by workers and passengers alike, through job cuts and fare rises. And this gives both every reason to join forces to fight this turn of the screw.

**• Freshly made up**

New posters on the station, entitled "Fresh as a daisy", boast that East Coast is improving the cleanliness of trains and stations. Supposedly, they've employed more cleaners (where?), are doing more detailed inspections of on-board toilets and have introduced "fragrances"! Not so long ago, ISS was trying to get one travelling cleaner to cover 2 trains instead of one, and we aren't covered when we're on holiday or off sick. So how are all these detailed inspections happening? By magic? Smells not

fragrant, but fishy! [Workers' Platform - King's X - 02/11/2010]

**• Out in the cold**

When the temporary roof was extended by platforms 9-11, Railgourmet drivers thought that, at last, we'd be able to wait for the delivery vans, if not in comfort, away from the elements, at least. But no – this bit of shelter is for the passengers, not us. We're supposed to wait right by our trucks, as if they're going to run away or something. If management think we're going to do this for the second winter running, they're out of their minds. [Workers'

Platform - King's X - 02/11/2010]

**• Too loud? move away**

The building of the new concourse has reached a very noisy stage. When the rat-a-tat-tat starts, you can't hear yourself talk or think on the gateline on platforms 9-11 or in the FCC ticket office. There's a way to stop it giving us a headache. No, not by providing aspirins (we wouldn't put it past this management!) - we can close the windows and open the barriers and take a break somewhere nice and quiet. [Workers' Platform - King's X - 02/11/2010]

**Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)****• Not enough chicken for the farm**

"Do 800 engines and get a free meal"!! (Worth all of £3.50!) Gee, how "rewarding" can Ford get? C and B shifts on the Tiger engine line hit Big Mac's magic number and we all got these free meal vouchers... but it seems nobody told DDC canteen - which promptly ran out of most items on the menu - as well as knives and forks!

So we had a "finger" lunch in a seriously overcrowded space, followed by free acid indigestion. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham, 9/11/10]

**• In-house contracts now!!**

The service provided by dedicated nurses here is being decimated by Ford's long-standing attempts to drive down costs.

After (at least) 3 moves to different agencies, wages have fallen compared to any other nursing job demanding this level of skill. If Ford is

serious about providing a medical service and wants to keep staff, it had better place them back on the Ford payroll, with improved terms and conditions! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham, 9/11/10]

**• How to get (too) hot**

When it was too cold to work in the Puma area we went to the Rest area until the heating was turned on. Since then, management hasn't dared turn it off! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham, 9/11/10]

**• Stop-go**

In the Den (lion engine), it's hectic enough without finding yourself caught short! Group leaders, like the rest of us are doing the job of 2 or 3! So who can provide toilet relief? Why not introduce a system of "tag relief" with someone doing each job in turn - but not as a substitute for tea breaks - it would create several jobs! In the meantime, the line will just have to "stop" every time we want to "go". [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham, 9/11/10]

**• Hardly the "Rolls Royce" problem!**

3 Engine Plant forklifts have now caught fire, one after the other, on 3 consecutive days. Lucky it was only the motors that burnt! Promises to replace the whole fleet for years were unkept - instead, notices went up to tell us to "beware"! Yes, drivers' visibility is zero and brakes and steering utterly dodgy! These 3 dumb machines probably thought it was the only way to get themselves scrapped - as all of this decrepit, old, unsafe, fleet should be! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham, 9/11/10]

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)****• No to privatisation!**

The Bill to privatise Royal Mail went through its 2nd reading in the Commons on 27 October. 321 MPs voted in favour, 238 against. It would allow the sale of 90% of RM to a private company - with a grand total of 10% "given" in share options to the workforce. This doesn't sound very much like the "co-operative" previously proposed by both Labour and Tories.

In fact they now want the already separate Post Office network to become a mutualised John Lewis-style "co-operative" instead, under government ownership, since it requires

a £150m annual subsidy (just doubled by Vince Cable!) to keep going. Quite how they intend to implement this is a mystery, since POLtd is currently already "privatised", in the sense that all but 400 of its 12,000 offices operate under franchises awarded to individual subpostmasters, or businesses like WH Smith, Rymans, etc!

And though the estimated £8.4bn pension deficit was used at the initial excuse to privatise the whole shebang, the government intends (as Labour did) to transfer the pension fund to itself. On the one hand



this will help its balance sheet as the pension fund will become a government asset and on the other, it could make RM saleable. However, it's one thing to pass a law, and quite another to implement it against resistance. And privatisation of this vital public service will be resisted!

**• Our pay is still in arrears**

Last week Romec cleaners received £215 (under £150 after tax) labelled "arrears" in our pay packets. Also, basic pay, before tax, went up £6, from £258 to £264/week. There was no explanation for the lump sum or the rise. Surely it can't be the rise agreed by the union on our behalf, as it's not nearly enough! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 15/11/10]

**• Discrimination... again!**

Are part-timers offered a full-time job? Anywhere? The 60 jobs at Langley aren't offered to us, so what about positions here? Or is management's idea (as we suspect) to turn this into a part-time workplace with a view to

having a more "compliant" workforce, because they think part-timers have less of a stake in the job? Well that could backfire. You could look at it the other way round: that we have less to lose if we fight and we'll fight a lot harder!! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 15/11/10]

**• They do it time and again...**

Last week some of the bosses started another crack-down on lateness, trying to discipline mates for being as little as 2 minutes late! We haven't noticed them looking at their watches when we stay 2 (or more) minutes over our time though... Of course, they have such silliness sprees every now and again. This time maybe they think we'll take it more seriously because all of us (including them) are told RM wants to cut more jobs. But no, we

don't. They're out of order. That's that. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 15/11/10]

**• Where's the "surplus" now?**

After making so many job cuts here on Processing's night shift, what's just happened? Bosses asked the mainly part-timers on Lates to do overtime for 8 hours on nights! These same bosses also told us, when cutting jobs over the last months, that there are too many workers and not enough work! So this is their proof of it? Having to ask workers from other shifts to fill in due to too much work and not enough workers? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 1/11/10]

**BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)****• Messing us around: a way of life for BMW**

After weeks, nay months, of messing agency workers around, reversing earlier sackings, only in some cases to reverse the reversals, management created a complete balls-up in Assembly on Monday. With extra workmates around and a "slow" starting speed of 40 cars ph, we were told to build up a rhythm slowly. Within 90 minutes, the line was racing at 53 and rejects were pouring off the line. [Workers' Fight, BMW Oxford 10/11/10]

**• Chaos to trim the wage bill by peanuts**

The unpalatable fact remains that despite "stays of execution" over recent weeks and hopes being raised that no long-term agency workers would go, some of us are now waiting for

marching orders. The fact that we are told to be ready to come back in March or April when BMW rehires just shows management's cynicism. By contrast, the 3.34% increase in BMW share price last Friday alone would pay the wages of all Cowley workers for 30 years and all BMW workers for over a year! [Workers' Fight, BMW Oxford 2/11/10]

**• Bring back the human eye!**

BMW has spent millions in Body-in-White automating Track 3 - and sacked 39 workmates in the process. And got its just deserts for this, judging by the number of rejects and breakdowns. One problem is that robots can't think for themselves. So until technology can produce absolutely identical panels, the robots will continue to drill holes in the wrong places and provide for the scrap merchant. [Workers' Fight, BMW Oxford 2/11/10]

**• Injuries waiting to happen**

The convertible hood "assistor" has been responsible for a string of sickness absences, including three accidents that hospitalised our workmates. The most serious, a snapped cable that caused it to fall, has been fixed only with a botch job. The blocks the assistor rests on are worn down, so we have a struggle to get it into the right position - a recipe for back injuries! Yet inspections pass the machine as fit for purpose. Yes, it puts the hoods on, but it's not safe. We can't and won't work with it! [Workers' Fight, BMW Oxford 19/10/10]

## Ireland

For the third time in 3 years, Irish workers are faced with savage cuts. Having just mortgaged public finance even further by bailing out Allied Irish, the country's largest bank, the Irish government is now presenting the bill to the working class.

Its plan is to cut public expenditure by £6bn in just one year - which, given the size of the Irish economy, is almost equivalent to the cuts that Osborne wants to achieve in Britain over 5 years! 5,000 jobs are to go before the end of this year in the Irish NHS, as part of a much larger programme of public sector cuts, affecting both jobs and pensions.

Taking their cue from government, private bosses are also pushing

## Protesters soon back in the streets

their luck: in the electrical industry, for instance, they have just demanded a 10% wage cut for the industry's 10,000 workers.

On 27 November, the Irish union confederation, the ICTU is calling for a national protest in Dublin. This will be an opportunity for Irish workers, public and private, for the jobless and the youth, to voice their anger and, hopefully, the starting



point of the fight back which, like here, is needed to make the capitalists pay for their crisis. Let's hope it will soon cross the Channel! ☐

## Iraq

After the Baha Mousa Enquiry Approved that British soldiers had been responsible for torturing and beating to death this Iraqi clerk, lawyers are seeking a judicial review and public enquiry on behalf of 140 other cases, all of which have well-documented evidence of torture at the hands of British interrogators and soldiers. Iraqi prisoners were beaten, deprived of food, water and

## Torture is war by other means

sleep, held naked, sexually abused, and subjected to mock executions.

Lawyers say that at the current rate of investigation into the abuse of Iraqi prisoners, one at a time and one a year, it would take 142 years to hear them all. So they want a single inquiry into detention policy in south-east Iraq which will once and for all, hold the British government and its enforcers in the army responsible for

what they did. Of course, in the light of George Bush reiterating his support for "water-boarding" torture in his memoirs, published this month, the government is reasserting that it is against all torture. But would a closer look at British practice in Afghanistan confirm such a virtuous claim? ☐

## USA

In the November US "mid-term" elections, Obama's Democrats lost control of the main house, the House of Representatives, and narrowly retained control of the Senate. On the Republican side, so-called "Tea Party" candidates representing a reactionary mix of anti-immigrant prejudice and hostility to state intervention made significant inroads. However, the "Tea Party" populist demagoguery failed to mobilise the electorate. The turnout was comparable to the previous 2006 mid-term election, with

## The price of deception

only 42% voting. The Republican candidates owed their success mainly to disillusionment and abstention among the voters who had brought Obama into office.

Obama proved to be just as much in the service of big business as his predecessor, Bush. His much-acclaimed health reform turned out to be primarily a profit-spinner for the insurance industry and a device to force workers to pay even more for the most minimal health care. His handling of the crisis was, likewise,

a long list of handouts to big companies and attacks against workers. Under his watch, the capitalist class has got richer while unemployment and repossessions were soaring to record levels.

That Obama has lost votes will make no difference for the American working class, but it does make a difference that his servility to big business has provided a platform for poisonous ideas like those of the Tea Party. ☐

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](mailto:contact@w-fight.org), or by postal mail at:

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