

# WORKERS' fight



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

## Tunisia, Algeria, WORKING CLASS ANGER EXPLODES

On 15 January, the month-long protests in Tunisia won a victory when the country's dictator, Ben Ali, fled to Saudi Arabia. Algeria was also hit by an explosion of anger, while protests against poverty have been taking place in Libya and Jordan.

British and western politicians and businessmen are beginning to worry: could this be the start of a much wider explosion, threatening the overthrow of the region's many western-friendly dictators, who have been so useful in helping to fill City coffers?

### **Rising against poverty**

The spark that triggered the protests in Tunisia, on 17 December, was the despair of a street peddler, who set himself on fire when his license was taken away by the police.

After this, popular anger boiled over. Day after day, youth and jobless, workers and housewives, took to streets to protest against unemployment, poverty and soaring prices. Political and trade-union activists, many of whom had been driven underground by Ben Ali's 23-year long rule, raised their banners again.

Having measured their strength, the protesters' confidence increased. They turned against the regime itself, chanting "Ben Ali, liar, thief, f\*\*k off!" The police used live bullets against them - claiming dozens of victims. But, once the flood of anger had been unleashed, Ben Ali was unable to contain it and was forced to go.

In Algeria, the spark was a rumour that police were about to demolish shanties and arrest street peddlers in a poor district of Algiers. This, coming after huge price increases, triggered an explosion of anger among the youth - which spread to the main cities. Protesters were killed, hundreds were



injured and arrested, without stopping the rising tide. Barricades were built, police stations attacked, government buildings and shops looted.

This anger expresses the frustration of the poor and hungry. 60% of the under-30s are unemployed in Algeria and the regime's attempt at driving informal street-peddlers off the streets was depriving them of their only way of surviving. These youth are settling accounts with a tiny corrupted minority living a life of luxury out of the country's oil and gas resources while the population rots in poverty.

### **Their struggle is ours too**

The events in Tunisia and Algeria certainly reflect the population's hatred of dictatorial regimes. But they also reflect the attempts of the working class and poor to oppose the devastation of the crisis.

Because the crisis is taking its toll in these poor countries, particularly in the form of huge price hikes caused by rich countries' speculators making a quick buck on commodity markets. When this

happens, hunger becomes a real threat for large sections of the population. Hence the many slogans against price increases in the protests, both in North Africa and the Middle East.

Those taking to the streets in these countries are our brothers and sisters, part of our class - the working class. In addition, they are confronted with the same crisis as us, the crisis of a system which, across the world, is ruled by the diktats, greed and corruption of tiny minorities of capitalist privileged.

Whether the capitalists rule directly, by dictatorial means as in Tunisia and Algeria, or whether they rule behind the cover of "democratic" politicians, as they do here, they live off the exploitation of the working class, while supporting one another to impose their looting on the world. This is why our solidarity must go to these workers and youth who are rising today against their exploiters. Because it is in our common interest, in the interest of the international working class, to free society of this parasitic profit system. □

## Crisis? What crisis?

The FTSE 100 share index of the one hundred largest companies quoted on the London stock market, started off 2011 a hair's breadth above the 6000 mark. For the working people, this doesn't mean much. But for City speculators, it means big money.

Because, not only have share prices regained their pre-crisis level and increased by almost 10% over the past year alone (compare this with your pay slip!), but the City bingo players who were astute (or obscenely rich) enough to buy shares in March 2009, when they were at their lowest, have now earned a neat

70% profit on their investment!

Having netted billions from public funds, thanks to the "nationalisation" of their losses by politicians, and used the crisis as a pretext to cut jobs, wages and conditions, the bosses have managed to increase their profits on the back of reduced production. This is what's driving the stock market's return to affluence and could, possibly, produce another financial speculative bubble. Will the working class be asked to foot the bill for this renewed profiteering as well? ☐

### • Osborne to be tough on tax evasion??

Heard of "double-dipping", "Dutch sandwich" or the "double Luxembourg"? No, these are not new baguette fillings but "legitimate" tax "avoidance" schemes used by many, if not all, big High Street names like Barclays, Boots, Topshop and Vodaphone. They describe the dodges whereby money that would otherwise go to the tax man is disguised or funnelled into overseas tax havens.

Following the disclosure of the gigantic sums that big companies

manage to keep from the tax man (between £20bn and £120bn according to Tax Research UK), Osborne wants to head off the mutters of middle income Tories who resent having to pay taxes if the dodgers get off scot free.

So he has appointed tax barrister, Graham Aaronson, to look into introducing a General Anti-Avoidance Rule (GAAR) - designed to limit tax-haven based dodges.

Ironically, this same Aaronson is

### • World's local bank in a spot of global bother

Bernie Madoff hit the headlines two years ago, after his bogus investment scheme collapsed, leaving investors \$18 billion out of pocket. If he was able to sustain this gigantic scam for so long (17 years, at least), it was thanks to the credibility he was given by some of the world's biggest banks. HSBC, JP Morgan and UBS, among others, are now being

sued for billions for their part in the swindle.

The fraud could only continue as long as new money continued to flow in, from which Madoff paid "returns" to previous investors - and here the banks were only too eager to lend a helping hand. It is claimed that HSBC not only lent huge amounts to would-be Madoff investors, but

### • Send the Lords to Madame Tussauds!

So what is all the fuss about the government's plan to reform the House of Lords? As a remnant of a distant feudal past, it still includes unelected un-representatives of the church hierarchy and other government appointees, as well as "hereditary peers" born with an aristocratic spoon in their mouth.

The government claims that having elected Lords would make them more accountable and closer to the electorate. As if the existing (barely) elected MPs, with their irresistible attraction to fat expenses, were

accountable, or had any understanding of working people's lives - let alone the will to represent their interests, for that matter!

### • Enlisting Dracula & Co to promote transfusions?

This government has no shame at all and didn't we know it! For its anti-alcohol campaign (if it can be called that) it has got SAB Miller, the brewing giant, Bacardi Brown Foreman, spirits producer Diageo, Heineken, the Wine and Spirit Trade Association, among others, to "advise" it and then to sign a "responsibility deal"... which means

### Class Struggle n°90 is out!

*In the January-March issue of our quarterly journal:*

- The bosses' offensive and the necessary fight back
- Youth vs the Con-Dems: the "street" can undo what politicians have done...
- Ireland - the working class as "collateral damage" of the on-going tremors of the crisis
- Afghanistan - a bloody search for an elusive political settlement
- USA - school privatisation: an attack on the working class

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currently representing five UK firms in disputes against(!) the Treasury. An unlikely choice, if looking for effective means against tax dodges! But then, so is Osborne, whose plan is to phasing in corporation tax reductions from 28% to 24%!

they also helped to channel their clients' money into Madoff's scheme. The bank netted hundreds of millions in fees in the process, so it's no surprise if they turned a blind eye to what was going on. Madoff was jailed for 150 years - but it seems he was just the fall guy for some very "respectable" financial institutions.

they voluntarily stop pushing up alcohol sales? 'Course not. And the same approach applies to the supposed anti-obesity campaign: Mars, Nestle, PepsiCo, McDonalds etc., are all on board... to do what? Flog fresh and healthy veggies and fruit instead?

This is just like getting the drug dealers to run the rehab unit. But naturally it makes perfect sense to Con-(dem) artists who are thus seen to be helping promote these same companies as "health aware" and really quite good for us, after all! Too bad the "public" isn't as stupid as the government's pimps.

## Heinz Meanz Strikez

In December/January, 1,200 workers at the Heinz factory in Wigan staged four 24 hour strikes to protest against a pay "offer" of 3.3% increase this year and 3% for 2012. It amounted to a wage cut, of course given the rise in prices. And this, when managers received bonuses of 15%, and while the company achieved a 37% profit margin, awarding shareholders £150m in dividends between May and July 2010!

The 24-hr strikes forced the bosses to up their offer to 3.9% each year - but that's still below inflation. At the time of writing, workers are voting on it, with Unite officials recommending a "yes" vote. Heinz workers may still disagree, however. And they would be right! ☐



## Union leaders meet Cameron: but what for?

15 union leaders turned up for talks with Cameron last month - and in so doing only managed to show their spinelessness. What did they have to talk about? The TUC's Brendan Barber asked for a "stimulus package to rebuild the economy. In other words, more subsidies for the bosses, as if they haven't had enough billions as it is!

The Civil Service union leader

was just as abject. He said that the meetings were pointless unless Cameron agreed to "negotiate". But what's to negotiate when the government itself is in the process of axing 700,000 civil service jobs and enforcing massive welfare cuts?

The choice is either to capitulate, or to force the government to back down, which means tipping the balance in workers'

favour by starting to build a real fight back.

But that's not what these union leaders have in mind. They're all calling for a "scrupulously organised and highly disciplined" demonstration "for an alternative" (in the words of that grand old Duke of York, Brendan Barber) ...on the 26th March! And workers are meant to do nothing until then? ☐

### • **Unite hiding under the flag - again**

Unite officials are up in arms, following the announcement that De La Rue, which prints mostly banknotes, passports, etc., might be taken over by a French company. If, as they say, this results in a threat to jobs, a fight back will be needed - whoever the boss may be.

But this is not what Unite seems worried about. Rather, it is the "security implications" of sterling notes being produced by a foreign power. And this is rather ironical, because, if the 150 countries for which De La Rue prints banknotes went along with that sort of nationalist bigotry, by now, there wouldn't be many jobs left in its factory, anyway!

This is not an isolated example

of the Unite leaders' sterile nationalism. For instance, faced with British Aerospace's threat to cut 1,400 jobs, their response was not to propose a fight against this threat, but to shed tears over the future of "Britain's national defence" - a display which was obviously aimed at Con-Dem politicians.

Yes, all this nationalist nonsense has a logic and a function - to conceal the reluctance of Unite leaders to risk rocking the boat of British capital, by organising any kind of fight back.

### • **Len battles for Labour**

"Unite the union"'s new leader, Len McCluskey, appeared to use a language different from his TUC colleagues, when he wrote in the Guardian newspaper that unions need to "get set for battle". He thinks "the students'

movement urgently needs to find a wider echo if the government is to be stopped", which is now possible, he says, because student protests "have refreshed the political parts a hundred debates, conferences and resolutions could not reach".

And he adds, quite rightly, that part of getting ready for battle is "a rejection of the need for cuts". So far, so good.

But this is as far as it goes. Because it turns out that McCluskey really only rejects the Con-Dem cuts! He says: "Any attempt to blame Labour local authorities for the problem is a shortcut to splitting our movement."

As though all cuts against the working class shouldn't be opposed!

## Cuts watch

As a New Year "gift", the government slapped another 2.5% onto VAT - bringing the current "normal" inflation rate up to well over the 6% mark. In the case of petrol, a new hike in duty coming on top of the VAT increase and the speculation of the oil barons, means that petrol now costs 19% more than it did a year ago, with taxes accounting for

### • Cameron's "concerned" about inflation?

On 13 January the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) kept its interest rate at 0.5% for the 22nd consecutive month. So, at a time when real inflation is bound to go above 6% due to the recent price increases, the MPC considered that the state of the economy was far too fragile to risk raising interest rates. So much for Cameron's recently expressed "concern" that domestic inflation was out of control and could jeopardise Britain's "recovery"!

For the time being it is the government's tax increases, not to mention the speculation in commodities - oil, copper and wheat in particular, that are fuelling inflation. But how long can workers make ends meet on a shrinking wage packet? Already there is a pay freeze in the public sector and sharp reductions in pensions. Sooner or later this will backfire on Cameron and the Con-Dems' slash and burn policies, that are dragging us deeper into the

### • Build more social housing - by changing the definition!

Grant Shapps, the housing minister, claims that the Con-Dems will get more social housing built than Labour did - despite the central funding for it being more than halved in the spending review! So how does he intend to pull off the trick? His bright idea is to allow housing associations to charge new tenants more - up to 80% of market rates - so that builders have more incentive to build. But at that sort of rent, it won't be "social" housing any more!

### • Back to soup kitchens?

Iain Duncan Smith, the Coalition's social welfare ideas man, last month gave the go-ahead for job centre

## Prices soar

63% of the price of a litre!

Contrary to ministers' hypocritical claims, those who will be most affected by these increases are households which, due to inadequate income, have to spend most of their earnings on their daily needs - that is, working class people.

As if the £12bn extra income that Osborne expects from this VAT

mire, with the sole aim of boosting the profits of the rich.

### • Wheat turned into gold

With wheat prices doubling over the last year to over £200 per tonne, bakers are wringing their hands in horror and blaming crop failures for the massive hike in bread prices. Something is not quite right, though.

Even at record price levels, the cost of the wheat in a 800gm loaf only amounts to 16p. A year ago it was 8p. But the cost of a loaf of bread has gone up by at least 30% in most cases - from under a pound to £1.30 or more. Increasing transportation costs cannot be blamed for more than a tiny fraction of the increase, as British farmers grow more than enough wheat for domestic consumption.

Wait a minute, though! Haven't wheat traders sold the entire British surplus on the overseas market for record prices? Or more than the surplus, so now they're importing wheat and we're paying the difference

staff to hand out vouchers for charity food packages, in emergencies due to debt or late benefit payments - up to three times a year per family. So now the return to Victorian values in state welfare is official!

The charity concerned, Trussell Trust, aims to provide packages for 140,000 people a year, from 200 food banks, by 2013. No doubt Cameron will be very pleased at this partnership of job centres with the "Big Society". But who else might want to get in on the act? Stand by for "JobCentre Plus McDonalds"?

### • Benefit cut threatens to make thousands homeless

At a stroke, the benefit paid to the jobless to help meet mortgage

increase could not be paid out of the fat cats' huge salaries, bonuses and dividends (aren't banks planning to dish out £8bn in bonuses alone?! Not to mention the hundreds of billions or so of taxes that large companies manage to "avoid" paying every year by using the legal loopholes created for them by complicit politicians! □

perhaps? Either way someone's making a bomb out of bread and we can be sure that it isn't the baker or the sales person!

### • Under Boris, the poor pay for rich

The congestion charge Western Extension Zone was abolished on Christmas Eve. Naturally, London mayor, Boris Johnson, didn't miss the opportunity to congratulate himself publicly for keeping his manifesto promise. It was, he said, his "Christmas present to the people who live, work and shop in west London". No surprise there, since his policy was designed to court popularity in affluent west London.

The change will reduce Transport for London's income by an estimated £55m-£70m. By a cynical twist, the increase in bus fares which came in this New Year is expected to raise an extra £60m! So the wealthy can drive to Harrods for free but it's poorer Londoners, who take the bus because it's cheaper, who will pay for this "gift"!

interest payments has been cut by 40%, on the assumption that everyone is on a lower rate now. But what about those who are still on a higher rate and won't be able to switch to a better deal because they don't have a job? All of a sudden, people who just managed to keep their heads above water find themselves with a shortfall of hundreds of pounds a month. How are they supposed to cope? Apparently, the government hoped that mortgage lenders would just lower interest rates for people in this situation. But the lenders are in it for the money, not out of the goodness of their heart. Thousands of homeowners are threatened with repossession as a result of this cut. But what would millionaire ministers care?

## Health "reform": privatisation goes local?

At the time of writing, Health Secretary Andrew Lansley's big "reform" of the NHS is expected to be introduced in the Commons. This would scrap the Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), in theory getting GPs to take over the PCTs' job of ensuring the provision of all aspects of local healthcare, as well as caring for their patients. To this end, GPs are meant to form "consortia", i.e. group

together to buy in all this care. But behind this, Lansley's real aim is to open up local healthcare to private companies.

However, GPs obviously don't have time to be doctors and administrators all at once. They can scarcely manage to look after all their patients these days. And it's not as if the government doesn't know this! So these "reforms" herald a double

## Cuts watch

bonanza for the private sector: private intermediaries, taking on the role of the PCTs, will then hand over yet more contracts for X-rays, scans, blood tests and minor surgery, etc., to their mates in private health-care companies. Assuming doctors, health workers and the rest of us go along with it, of course! ☐

### • A gaping hole in the "ring-fence"

The NHS (like Education) was supposed to be "ring-fenced" and not subject to the government's austerity drive. But reports in the media, quoting a "secret Whitehall report", say that there will be an annual shortfall of an estimated £10bn (and maybe a lot more). So the NHS, like

all other "non ring-fenced" public services is looking for so-called efficiencies, i.e., cuts in care and cuts in jobs.

The example of Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust is typical. To avoid a budget deficit of £60m by 2015, it plans to cut 200 posts this

year and a further 400 over the next 4 years. Already many staff on temporary contracts have been shown the door - and they are not even counted in Trusts' official figures. But their absence is certainly felt by patients in hospital...

### • NHS workers refuse DoH blackmail

In December, the Department of Health tried to blackmail NHS workers earning up to £34,189/yr - including those on pay as low as £13,653 - into accepting a pay freeze for the 3rd year running.

NHS bosses aim to save £1.9bn (2.1% of the pay bill) and claimed this "saving" would "guarantee" 80% of NHS jobs. If staff refused, they threatened that 35,000 workers would face compulsory redundancy!

But NHS staff didn't fall for this trick. On 13 January all unions concerned refused the "offer". Unison did so on the grounds the job guarantee wouldn't be binding on individual Trusts. The doctors' union said that if NHS bosses wanted to make savings they could take money back from the "private partners" who swallow such a huge chunk of funds via PFI.

But the unions don't have to try to take over the DoH's job, nor to try to find "alternative savings". If money can be found for bankers and their bonuses, it can be found to pay decent wages to health workers.

### Let's remember Poplar

In the 1920s, councillors in Poplar, East London, became known for the stand they made against the dictates of a government which wanted to impose higher taxes on poorer boroughs, under the pretext that they required more funds to pay for services. They organised popular resistance against these high taxes. Subsequently, the government sent the Poplar councillors to jail for refusing to collect them. But faced with the popular unrest this provoked, the government backed down and introduced a system of taxation which was less unfair to poorer boroughs.

Today, councils are ordered to make huge savings and are quite happily going along with this. According to the GMB union, the job cuts planned so far in just 145 councils, total 113,765! Some councils are resorting to all sorts of tricks against workers' conditions. For example, in the London borough of Waltham Forest, which is planning to save £65m over 5 years and cut 652 jobs, one council worker was told that his job had been subcontracted, his hours reduced from 27.5 hrs/week to just 10, and his hourly rate cut. So yes, it is high time to revive "poplarism"!

### • Islington - Lab = Con-Dem?

Islington council is preparing to make £40 million of cuts this year. Plans to share a chief executive with Camden council, to save a six-figure salary, have been abandoned, but they're pressing ahead with 282 job cuts for the workers who provide the actual services. This figure isn't even the full picture, since it doesn't include housing or the education authority, or the hidden job cuts made by ending the contracts of temps, who make up a big proportion of the workforce.

Half of the 282 job cuts fall on

Children's Services, where 15% of the workforce will go. Hardest hit is "Connexions", which gives advice to young people. It is set to lose 44 workers out of 56 and will no longer be able to offer any advice to unemployed youth - a scandal in the current climate. So much for this Labour council's claims to be protecting the most vulnerable and especially the young. They complain about the Con-Dems slash-and-burn policies but they're not prepared to fight them. That will be up to Islington workers and residents.

**King's Cross railway station (London)****• Passengers squeezed both ways**

Train fares went up by an average of 6.2% in January. Some unlucky season ticket holders were hit by rises of nearly 13%, since the train companies chose to impose the steepest hikes on over-crowded commuter routes - that is, those where passengers have little choice about how or when to travel.

The head of ATOC (the Association of Train Operating Companies) justified the rises by saying that the government wanted the cost of running

the railway to fall more on the passengers and less on the taxpayer - as if the commuters who are being stung are not taxpayers as well.

He claimed the rises were needed for continued "investment" in the railway. But state subsidies, i.e. public funds - and over-inflated fares - are actually paying for the profits made by all these companies. That's why there's no improvement in the service, for all the money which is poured in.



Meanwhile, the bosses make a mint out of a necessary public service. When they should be paying whatever it costs to allow workers to travel to work in safety and comfort, for free.

**• Earth to FCC bosses...**

Two FCC trains, one for Cambridge, the other for Peterborough, leave King's X at exactly the same time. It's obvious that this is going to confuse passengers - obvious to everyone except FCC management, that is. When we suggested that one of these services could be retimed by one minute, they refused on the grounds that extending the journey time (by one minute!) might be unacceptable to "customers". Perhaps they'd like to come down to earth, ie platform level, to find out what real-life customers think of that.

A delay of only one minute might make a nice change for them! [Workers' Platform - King's X - 12/01/2011]

**• One step away from the steam train**

East Coast still uses some diesel HSTs, which are long past their sell-by date. They are the only trains they can rely on when snow damages the overhead wires. But, with the ill-fitting windows on the old slam doors, they are freezing inside, even when the heating works. When are we moving to the 21st century? [Workers' Platform - King's X - 12/01/2011]

**• They think we travel by magic carpet?**

If East Coast management roster us for an early shift on a bank holiday, knowing that public transport doesn't start early enough for us to get there, and don't offer a taxi, then they shouldn't be surprised if we get there when we can. But when this happened to a worker in the 1st Class Lounge, the small boy manager decided to jump up and down about it and mark her late. How small-minded! [Workers' Platform - King's X - 12/01/2011]

**Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)****• One lot of bull(ion)**

Ford is now among the most profitable car makers in the world.

In 2010, 3rd quarter profits were £4bn (VW made £4.26bn, but predicted a fall in Q4, whereas Ford predicted a boost!). Doolally's been boasting far and wide about "One Ford" and how us workers are so proud of the "value" we produce!

What, proud that Ford cut jobs, pay, benefits, while increasing car prices? 2011's goal for us is clear: reduce OUR deficit! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 6/1/11]

**• There's a shortage right now!!**

When will the temps we heard about be arriving? How many will come? We even hear there's been a block put on recruitment by Doolally - after all his talk about job creation when he was here!

On Puma engine line, since shut-down, 10 mates retired without being replaced. Now we're to go back on double day shift for 6 weeks (HR "willing") only because managers want us in on weekend overtime!

They think it's fine to backfill a Sat shift with mates who've only had 8 hrs off after finishing late shift! But it's NOT! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 6/1/11]

**• Safety unconscious**

During the big freeze, a stairway by the Press Shop was iced up and so was taped off. But this stairway is also a fire escape. So a worker cleared off the ice on his own initiative, thus avoiding the big fuss which there should have been!

Yes, where was the safety team designated to go round clearing ice, etc..? Unless we make a big fuss over everything, management just carries on letting everything go to pot. You'd think they were smoking it. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 6/1/11]

**• Up to us**

By now LineSide (contract drivers) may or may not have an elected rep. We lost the last rep - and when a notice went up for nominations to replace him, the list consisted mainly of Donald Ducks!

Sure, the union probably deserves to be taken as a joke given how often it's let us down, but if we take its control out of the hands of the jokers and self-servers,



it could be turned into what a real union is meant to be...

After all, there are plenty of us who can quack loud enough to get management's attention! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 6/1/11]

**• Far too many engines**

We got another meal voucher for scoring 800 engines in the Chicken Farm. So is Ford actually admitting this is an exceptional feat, meriting a "reward"?

If so, they shouldn't be asking us to do this every day, now, should they! And it's proof, if we needed it, that the whole shop should slow down! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 7/12/10]

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**

**• The fight against privatisation needs to be seen and heard!**

The Commons passed the bill to privatise 90% of Royal Mail on 12 January. It is due to start its passage through the Lords on the 22nd.

Royal Mail is the last public "industry" still in state hands and it is not too late to keep it there! After all, postal workers have a long record of resisting attack. And despite the recent cuts, they've continued to fight local closures. But one could be forgiven for thinking that the union leadership is doing its best to atomise all these efforts.

Their latest anti-privatisation "campaign" is aiming to "embarrass" government ministers by

**• They're not "preserving" post offices!**

The Post Office network is excluded from the privatisation of Royal Mail, supposedly to preserve it. However, after the 3,500 office closures under Labour from 1999 to 2007, in the last year another 160 closed, while 900 mainly sub-post offices were put up for sale, closing "temporarily".

In fact the network doesn't just need preserving, it needs rebuilding! Almost all post offices are run as private franchises and are meant to turn a profit. Few do, however. Most rely on government subsidies to keep going. So as sub-postmasters retire, offices are more likely to close than to find a new buyer. And, as the postal workers' union points

holding protests in their constituencies. So on 9 January they held a demo in Cameron's seat of Whitney, Oxfordshire - more or less unseen and unheard - even if several hundred activists and supporters turned up! On the 22nd there is another planned - in Kingston, the constituency of Ed Davey, postal minister.

Yet if the same efforts were spent bringing everyone together for a large demonstration in London, for starters, it would be heard, workers would feel their strength, and it help build the collective fight which the whole working class needs. Or is that not what union leaders want?

out, it doesn't help if there's no guarantee that a privatised Royal Mail would use the post office network as its preferred partner - something they say has been "left out" of the current Postal Services Bill.

So it appears as if Cameron's undertaking to keep the post office "public" was just a sop to those amongst his electorate who campaigned to keep their local post office open. Because to get what it wants, this government doesn't have to privatise nor even cut the post office network. It's already semi-privatised and is shrinking fast. And this is what should be not only stopped, but reversed.



**• Snow surprises at Xmas**

The volume of foreign inward packets took bosses by surprise and we ran out of Yorks, labels, etc. It was no surprise to us tho! But every new packet seemed to give them a little shock! Did they go to the same school as Heathrow Airport bosses? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 10/1/11]

**• Try a bit of obsequious royalism**

By the way, Billy Hayes (dear leader) was one of the 15 Trade Union chiefs who had coffee and mince pies with Cameron. He said Cameron was "polished". He raised privatisation with him and how bad it'd be if the Queen's head on RM's stamps was threatened. That'll cut it. [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 10/1/11]

**• Hip, hip hooray!?**

Cleaners won the £1,000 prize for the "best cleaning team" (Romec forgot to add: the best team under the worst management and without enough hands). The £30 each will go in a couple of days. We sure won't be taking a world cruise! And the framed certificate will remind us of what a bad joke this little sop really was. [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 14/12/10]

**BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**

**• Six-month deal, anyone?**

With the pay rises of the 2-year deal due this month, all we know is that they won't be enough. Not only is 2.2% (only 1.2% for agency workers!) well below inflation, it's 2.2% of 2009 rates. For much of 2009, to take just one example, petrol was below £1 a litre. This deal looked lousy enough in April; now it stands as a warning only to accept adequate, inflation-proof offers in future! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford 11/1/11]

**• They expect us to run on empty**

Many Body-in-White workers started back on 5th January, if not 4th, when it should have been the 6th according to the lay-off notification. But BMW didn't inform the caterers. On

5th when there was full production, there were no canteens open in BiW and the Paint Shop. How are we supposed to do a full 11.5 hour shift on empty stomachs? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford 11/1/11]

**• Longer shifts, more break-downs**

With B-i-W running almost 24-7, the old track breaks down more and more often. Most of the robots, after all, came from Longbridge when the Mini was transferred over 10 years ago. The front end equipment may be state-of-the-art, but the old stuff can't keep up. So what's BMW doing, trying to push it even harder? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford 30/11/10]

**• Stopping work did the trick**

Engine dressers stopped work in the



last cold snap, as temperatures inside languished at around 13°. Management tried everything except sorting the heating out, including emergency issue jumpers! But faced with an actual stoppage spreading throughout A Building, they had to get some warm air blowing round. As they should have, in the first place! This is a factory, not a castle! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford 14/12/10]

## Student protests

The student protests are restarting with demonstrations planned in central London on 26th and 29th January and in Manchester (with the TUC) on the 29th as well. Of course, the frightened cops and government are out to try to scare students, in advance, by announcing arrests and publishing photos of "suspects" and justifying the brutal policing that took place. But this is unlikely to put off those who withstood subzero temperatures and police "kettles" last month, and who're determined

## All out, January 26th and 29th!

to stop these education cuts.

That said, it will take more than student demos, no matter how large, angry and inventive, to achieve a halt to these cuts. They are part of the huge austerity raft aimed at youth and at the working class. Which is why, if this raft is to be well and truly sunk, the whole working class will need to add its strength to the ranks of those youth who've had the enthusiasm and the guts to make the first move in this necessary fight back. Our side is "in it together"! ☐



### • Release Edward Woollard!

After the protests against the abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance for 16-18 year-olds and the trebling of university tuition fees, the cops have arrested over 200 students. But only one has been charged, convicted and sentenced, so far: 18-year old 6th former, Edward Woollard, who thoughtlessly (he admits) threw a small, empty, fire extinguisher off the roof of the Tory Millbank HQ, which he and dozens of other students had occupied to the cheers of a few thousand protesters below on the 10th November.

Edward was given a 32-month jail term. The police and government have decided to "make an example" even if he had no intention of hurting anyone and didn't. But what about the police who manhandled a student with cerebral palsy out of his wheelchair, twice, or those who smashed the skull of Alfie Meadows as he was pushed against police lines by their "kettling" - and who suffered a brain haemorrhage. Will an "example" be made of the police who engaged in this deliberate brutality?

### • Class divide alive and keeping... the poor out

Pupils from private schools are 55 times more likely to get a place at Oxford or Cambridge university than state school pupils who receive free school meals. Overall, pupils who've had free meals at school made up 5.5% of the total student intake, but only 1% of the Oxbridge intake. But, surprise, surprise, already at GCSE level, these poorer pupils (from households where the adults receive benefits, or tax credits due to low pay or no pay), are 3-and-a-half times less likely to get 5 A\*-C GCSEs, including maths. Indeed, what really is surprising, is that year after year,

such facts keep being reported as if they were somehow new!

Isn't it blatantly obvious that if you are poor in this class-ridden society you start with a disadvantage and will have to fight like hell to even get a decent "education"? And the "big society" hypocrisy of a government which wants to price working class youth not only out of university, but out of 6th form too, by stopping the only little incentive which helped them stay there - the £10-30/w EMA - can only aggravate the class divide even further.

### • So who's the bosses' doggie now?

The Lib Dems always had the advantage of being able to promise all things to all men (and women) without ever having to deliver. Accordingly, the party opposed the Iraq war (although not the Afghan war), Trident missiles and... university tuition fees. Its manifesto last May took a clear position in favour of free education, while the "youthful" Nick Clegg targeted youth voting for the first time, on this very issue.

So no wonder students burnt effigies of Clegg, since he, as the coalition's deputy PM now justifies the trebling of tuition fees and boasts that

the new system is even fairer than before!

Of course, many workers will remember how in the 1980s the Liberals/Lib Dems, supported Thatcher's attack on the steelworkers and miners - and supported her anti-trade union laws. Today, students may chant their disillusionment: "Nick Clegg, we know you, you're a f\*\*\*g Tory too!" But the "Whigs", as the Liberals used to be known, were the original capitalist party and no-one should be surprised that they're proving so very true to type.

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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