

WORKERS' fight

No 22 - 15 Mar 2011

price 30p

<http://www.w-fight.org>
contact@w-fight.org

ISSN 2040-400X

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

MAKE MARCH 26th A SUCCESS AND A FIRST STEP!

The march called in London by the TUC, on March 26th, will be the first national protest against the policy of the bosses and their politicians since the crisis broke out. It will be the first opportunity for the working class to voice its anger against those who have been turning the screw against jobs, living and working conditions - and are hell-bent on doing more of the same.

For this reason alone, it is vital that we should make the best of this opportunity, to make our voice heard, as loud and clear as we possibly can.

Say "no" to the bosses!

After nearly 3 years of this crisis, hundreds of thousands of jobs have disappeared as bosses have used it as a pretext to reduce their costs.

Those made redundant who found another job, had to take a pay cut and, more often than not, to hop from one casual job to another. Many of those lucky enough to keep their jobs, were blackmailed by the bosses into having their wages frozen or cut and/or their working conditions worsened.

This has allowed the profits of non-financial companies to soar. By now they are sitting on a stockpile of cash worth over £650bn. But they are not investing this cash in the socially useful, job-creating, activities which are so badly needed.

In turn, this stockpiling of cash is feeding the rising profits of the banks and the scandalous bonuses and salaries of the bankers, whose greed caused the crisis in the first place. And none of this would have been possible without the previous Labour government's policy of laying open the state coffers to the bankers, with the backing of all other politicians.

... and "no" to their politicians!

But never mind, as far as these politicians are concerned, there is no



question of making the capitalists in general, and the bankers in particular, pay for the budget "deficit" created by their largesse. On the contrary, it is the working class and, more specifically, the poorest, who are supposed to foot the bill.

Just as unemployment is becoming unbearable, especially among the youth, the Con-Dems want to cut over a hundred thousand jobs in public services, most of which are vital for the working class. For good measure, the ever more numerous jobless will be made to pay a second time, by having their benefits reduced.

As to the rest of the working class, it is facing the prospect of paying higher pension contributions, working into old age and retiring on lower pensions.

March 26th must be a beginning

So, yes, all workers, in the private as well as the public sector, have a common interest in voicing their opposition

to these attacks, and demanding that the capitalists pay for their own crisis, to the very last penny.

Of course, on its own, the March 26th protest will not achieve this objective. But it will be an opportunity for the working class as a whole to display and measure its own collective strength.

Above all, if the bosses and their politicians are to be stopped in their tracks, if the ground already lost is to be regained, this protest will have to be followed by a much wider working-class mobilisation across the country, in as many towns and workplaces as possible.

March 26th will be an important step for all of us and it must be a success. But let's make sure as well that it is the beginning of a rising tide of protests, strong enough to make the capitalist class fear for its profits - because fear is the only language they ever understand! ☐

Pensions

Pensions represent a huge chunk of the collective income of the working class - more than £100bn each year. No wonder they attract the capitalists' greed! Already the finance industry gets its cut, thanks to using the cash of "funded" pension schemes. However, the capitalists want an even larger cut, while paying less towards pensions - i.e. cutting "employers' contributions", which are really just deferred wages.

Hence the attacks on pensions,

An attack on all workers

initiated under Labour, which are now unfolding. After most private final salary occupational schemes were closed, the Hutton report is now threatening to end the still existing schemes in the public sector. In addition, the value of public and private pensions will be cut by changing the way they are indexed against inflation. And finally, the soon-to-be-released Turner report will reduce all pension schemes to a minimum standard and cut the contributions required from employers.

While the government and its media are trying to divide the ranks of the working class on this issue - private sector versus public sector - these "reforms" amount to a wage cut for the entire working class. Whether employed in the public or the private sector, workers' labour generates all the profits "earned" by the capitalist class. Once in retirement, workers must be paid a decent pension out of these profits, period! □

• Public sector scapegoats

The final version of the Hutton report on public pensions has been released and, as expected, it calls for a wholesale attack on millions of low-paid public sector workers.

Nor is this much of a surprise. Before joining Labour and Blair's government, Hutton had been a Tory and a legal adviser with the bosses' CBI - which probably explains why Blair chose him to "reform" public sector pensions. Hutton was expected to represent bosses' interests and this is just what he did, as his "findings" show: he argues for lower pensions, calculated on a "career average" instead of final salary, and increased workers' contributions.

To promote these attacks, the gutter press revived its worn out campaign against "gold-plated public pensions". If this was true, gold would be very cheap, since, according to the government's own figures, the average public sector pension is just £6,500/yr! As to the net cost of public sector pensions to the state, it is £4bn, or less than half the cost of the tax relief on the really "gold-plated" pensions of the 1% richest of the population! But when it comes to hyping up anti-working class attacks, anything goes for the media barons!

• RPI to CPI - music to ears of CBI...

Some bosses want to use the government's policy as an excuse to cut pensions (see the case of Ford, on page 6). In the same way as the government does with benefits, they want to increase pensions according to the lower Consumer Price Index (CPI - 2.6% today) instead of the higher Retail Price Index (RPI, which includes housing costs - 3.4% today).

For companies, using a lower

inflation index reduces the long-term liabilities of their schemes (by as much as £100bn for all companies) and, therefore, the need to put money into them. With a few accounting tweaks, they may even be able to produce a "surplus" and raid their funds, or reduce their contributions. For workers, however, this means lower pensions. The government itself estimates that the shift from RPI to CPI would cut pensions by up to



Already, in 2008 Labour was targeting public sector pensions

12% for workers retiring in 15 years and by 20% in 40 years' time.

Needless to say, the CBI loves it! Trouble, though, is that no legislation can impose this cut on workers - since the choice of index is part of collective agreements. That is, provided workers keep a watchful eye on their employers and make sure that union leaders don't fall for their lies.

• Work till you drop...

The number of over-65s still working doubled between 2009 and 2010, reaching 870,000 at the end of last year, according to the Office for National Statistics. But, while it might be ok for a top executive on a cushy job to carry on working most of his life, the majority of low-paid workers in demanding jobs would rather not. However, given

the shrinking level of pensions and the rise in the cost of living, many among the most worn out workers have no choice but to carry on working in order to survive.

Of course, if the enormous increase in labour productivity achieved over the past decades was used not to boost the already huge profits of a minority of capitalists, but to

improve working conditions and reduce working hours for the working class majority, the situation would be entirely different. Then, everyone would be able to have a much longer working life, even if working only a few hours a week, while enjoying a richer and healthier social life. But for this to happen, we will have to get rid of capitalist profiteering first!

Local councils

• *Islington*

"Resist the cuts or resign" was the call from anti-cuts demonstrators in February, as councillors started voting on service- and job-slashing budgets for next year. In Labour-run Islington, the few demonstrators who were allowed into the public gallery during the council's budget meeting were forcibly removed by police, just for voicing their anger. The councillors evidently did not want to hear the opinions of their electorate and were escorted elsewhere to do their dirty work away from the prying eyes of the public.

• *Lewisham*

Even before the Con-Dem's plans were announced, the Labour council of this South East London borough was planning a package of £88m cuts over 3 years. It's closing 5 libraries and care and support centres for families and children; weekly nursery charges are up by 43% with 40% fewer subsidised places; adult social care charges are up by over £100/w; council house rents up by 5%; school meal prices up by 25%. The council is one of the area's largest employers, yet it is chopping hundreds of jobs. And how does it respond to the fact that it has Britain's highest rate of unemployment among the 16 to 24-year olds (at 35% according to official figures)? By challenging the figures... and closing two youth advice centres!

When the council pushed its cut packages through on March 1st, it tried to exclude the public by holding an early morning meeting. The elected mayor, "Sir" Steve Bullock, advised his Labour councillors not to laugh and cheer when the vote went in their favour, as it might not look good. But local people have started a fight back.

When the cup gets too full!

Last November, riot police were called against protesters who wanted to attend to a council meeting. Since then there have been well-attended protests. The anger that's growing will show Bullock that he and his cronies may soon be laughing on the other side of their face.

• *Haringey*

In Haringey, protesters managed to force their way into the council chamber, even though the councillors had taken the precaution of hiding behind a line of cops. Someone rattled a few gold chains by sitting in the mayor's chair. Then, the councillors beat a hasty retreat but still passed their budget, in private. The Labour leader of Haringey called the demonstration an "utter disgrace", adding, "this is not my idea of democracy". But this is precisely how democracy should work. If people aren't happy about what their representatives do, the representatives should hear about it - and do what they're told!

• *Rich Homes Bonus*

A state subsidy to local authorities, the New Homes Bonus, will be introduced in April. Councils will get an annual payment given for each new home built or empty one re-occupied, whether it is owned privately or by the council. This is supposed to compensate councils for the cost of extra services for new households.

But there's a catch: as the subsidy for each property is based on the national average council tax levied for the band it is in, the more expensive it is, the bigger the "bonus". The payment for homes in the top band would be about double that in the bottom band.

This can only aim at getting councils to grant planning permission for expensive private homes rather than affordable ones. As if it was the rich who were suffering from a housing crisis! But then, of course, this will be a lot more profitable for the Con-Dems' friends among the construction sharks...

Letter from Sussex

People living in the urban developments surrounding Eastbourne on the south coast need a decent bus service to travel the 2-5 miles into town. We had one once, before Thatcher de-regulated the buses. One bus company was replaced by many, including Stagecoach, which sold its Eastbourne depot to Eastbourne Bus Company. However they were incompetent, hovered on the brink of liquidation and were taken over by...Stagecoach! We seriously fear for the future of the bus service now. A bus driver was saying that if fuel prices rise as high as some are predicting, he would have to work the equivalent of 2.5 hours extra, just to cover the cost of travelling to and from work.

As for the local NHS - a few years ago, plans to shut down either the Eastbourne or the Hastings maternity unit caused a huge outcry. Eastbourne had its biggest demonstration ever. The trust backed down, but protest organisers said we must stay on the alert and they were proved right. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) has just slammed the trust for its costly use of agency staff and the trust is now talking about closing one of the units again - no doubt, hoping to shift the blame onto the CQC!

NHS

While private companies are eagerly awaiting the potential bonanza of GP commissioning, health care trusts are facing a £20bn shortfall in their budgets.

A survey of NHS trusts has found that 50,000 jobs are likely to be cut over the next four years. In England alone, hospitals are anticipating 24,000 job cuts, mental health trusts expect to cut another 6,000 and 10,000 jobs will

be lost thanks to the abolition of the Primary Care Trusts.

Examples include East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust, which plans to cut over a thousand jobs by 2015, including 50 doctors and dental staff, and 270 nurses; University Hospital of North Staffordshire, which plans to cut over a fifth of its staff; and Kingston Hospital in London, championed by Nick Clegg for the

purposes of his election campaign, which has just announced 500 job cuts.

Cameron's claims about the NHS being "safe" in his hands, and frontline staff not being cut, were always blatant lies. But such a level of cuts imposed on an already struggling and under-staffed NHS can only threaten the health, and even the lives, of hundreds of thousands. □

ConDem-ing the Health Service

NORTH AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

The poor need more than new faces at the top

Since it started in Tunisia, the protest wave has spread to more or less every country in North Africa and the Middle East - including to those considered as the most stable. This is nothing to do with the internet, despite fashionable claims. In fact, it is not the first, but the fourth time over the past century, that more or less the same countries have been set alight simultaneously by a political crisis - quite simply because the majority of their population is confronted with the same poverty, the same small, but rapacious local capitalists, the same repressive rule of corrupt dictators and the same looting by the rich countries.

Eventually, the strong men of Tunisia and Egypt had to go - under Washington's pressure. Then their armies, both closely linked to the US, went on to organise a "peaceful transition" - that is, restore "order" in the streets and ensure that capitalist property remained untouched. In both countries protesters had to return to the streets to oust "interim" ministers linked to the previous regime - with only limited success.

The dictatorships' torture organisations were dismantled - but the torturers remained free, especially the most senior ones.

Over the coming months, elections may produce new faces in government. But behind these faces,

there will be the same capitalist interests (domestic and western) as well as the same generals and torturers to protect these interests. That is, unless the working class and poor masses get rid of these thugs as well. □



Army officers protecting the headquarters of the State Security against protesters in Egypt

The region under the armed watch of imperialism

Western leaders were unable to pre-empt the current wave of revolt. All they can do now is try to contain the fire and prevent it from damaging imperialist interests. This is why Obama and several others stressed that military action was not really an option - at least not as long as a section of the population remains mobilised in the streets, across the region. Given the US and British record in Iraq and Afghanistan, such action, even confined to Libya, would inevitably give

the protests a new, dangerous anti-imperialist edge.

So, while issuing symbolic calls for reforms, the imperialist leaders are putting pressure on their local thugs to either retire - like Ben Ali and Mubarak - or make token gestures of appeasement - like the hundreds of millions of pounds worth of social programmes promised by the Saudi royals after the first sign of unrest in the country.

But at the same time, the imperialist powers are raising their profile

thanks to their many military facilities dotted across the region - including US bases in Bahrain, Yemen and Turkey, and the British base in Cyprus. A US task force is patrolling off the coasts of Libya, supposedly to "put pressure" on Gaddafi. In reality, it is there as a warning, not to Gaddafi, but to the population of the region - that behind the west's "sympathetic" words lies the fire power of imperialism, should its interests come under threat. □

Gaddafi - from nationalism to cosy business partnership

Gaddafi came to power in 1969, without the western leaders' endorsement, in a coup against a decrepit monarchy, in the name of a radical, anti-imperialist programme. Foreign military bases were closed down, banks and oil companies were nationalised. Like many dictators in the poor countries, Gaddafi covered up his dictatorship under a confused so-called "Arab socialism".

He then proceeded to act as

a regional power. As a result, the West imposed a blockade on Libya in 1982, followed by air strikes ordered by US president Reagan, in 1986. Then came the 1988 bombing of a US plane over Lockerbie and of a French plane over Chad, in 1989. Both were blamed on Libya, which topped the West's list of "rogue states."

However, in 1999, after Gaddafi handed over two "suspect terrorists" and offered to compensate the

victims, UN sanctions were lifted and official relations restored. In 2004, Blair made a commercial visit to Tripoli and a few months later the US was again buying Libyan oil. Since then western oil majors and weapons manufacturers have been able to conduct their dirty, but profitable business in Libya quite openly - allowing Gaddafi to buy the helicopters and aircraft he is now using against the insurgents. □

Cameron's tin-pot imperialism

On 27 February, it seemed as if Cameron was borrowing Blair's bellicose rhetoric over Iraq. In a thundering speech to the Commons against Gaddafi's "illegitimate" regime, Cameron announced that he had ordered preparations for the setting up of a military no-fly zone over Libya and the delivery of weapons to Libyan insurgents. Under the pretext of "freeing" Libya, the Tories were back on the imperialist warpath.

The next day, however, Obama dismissed any idea of outside military intervention in Libya. Unlike Cameron, who was only trying to revamp his domestic image, Obama was worried about the wider impact that a western intervention might have in the region.

• British capital's trail of death

The "new" Egyptian government had hardly taken office, when David Cameron flew in to try to sell them more weapons. Visiting Egypt and then Kuwait, he took 20 representatives of British companies with him - 8 of them from the arms trade. According to Cameron, condemning Gaddafi's repression in Libya, "violence is never an answer to people's legitimate aspirations." But those aspirations certainly do not include being confronted by even more weapons in the hands of an already all-powerful, corrupt army, in countries like Egypt!

Recent British licences for military exports to the Middle East and North Africa were worth nearly £400m, including £270m to Algeria, and £33.9m to Libya.

Whatever the outcome of the protests in these countries - or Yemen, Bahrain, or wherever is next - Cameron's chief concern is to keep this deadly trade going. Whenever a protester gets killed in the region, one has to wonder how much of his blood stains the hand of British capital!

• Bahrain, "democratic" monarchy?

On March 14th, Cameron made another demagogic speech in the Commons, condemning Gaddafi's bombing of insurgents in Libya in the name of "democracy." But Cameron's concern with "democracy" did not extend to mentioning the invasion of the tiny state of Bahrain by thousands of troops, mostly from Saudi Arabia, in an obvious attempt to contain local protests

But then, who among British

Cameron backtracked with his tail between his legs and his attempt at pumping up Britain's imperialist profile deflated like a funfair balloon.

Then Cameron's claim to the moral high ground turned into farce, when armed SAS commandoes were caught and detained in territory controlled by anti-Gaddafi forces, after having been flown in secretly by helicopter. If the aim was to establish contact with the insurgents, why not arrive via the Navy's ship already moored in Benghazi? Could it be that London was not so keen on the insurgents' council and was seeking contact with other forces, more amenable to the interests of British capital? □

politicians, would ever dare to compare a "bad" dictator like Gaddafi to a "good" dictator like the unreformed monarch of Bahrain.

Never mind that the Bahrain monarchy shoots protesters and deprives the non-citizen-57% of its population of any rights, while forcing many of them into obscene poverty!

What only matters is that this monarchy hosts both the region's largest financial hub and also the gigantic naval base of the US Vth fleet.

issue #89 of the Internationalist Communist Forum series is out

INTERNATIONALIST COMMUNIST FORUM - 89
February 2011

**Revolt in North Africa
and the Middle East**
**EGYPT - THE BANNER OF
THE WORKING CLASS
STILL HAS TO BE RAISED**

Published by: **WORKERS' fight** (Internationalist Communist Union)

Get your copy from the Workers' Fight activists you know or drop us a note with the payment at our mail box (see at the back of this paper) - price: £1.00

• The spectre of communism

Former Labour minister Denis MacShane has condemned the Con-Dems' withdrawal of funding to the UN's International Labour Organisation (ILO), saying that this "will horrify every trade union worker". He reminded the government that the ILO had been "central to getting rid of Soviet communism"!

This cut certainly is mean. But it also exposes the ignorance of the Con-Dems, who probably wanted to display their contempt for the working class movement. They should have known that the ILO was launched, in 1919, to promote a tame trade unionism which would not threaten big business, and in particular against the influence of the 1917 Russian revolution.

Obviously, unlike MacShane, Cameron does not see communism as a threat. But the odds are that MacShane will be proved right in the end, when the working class finds the way to revolutionary communism again!

• The police boils the kettle for the TUC

The police wants to look better organised for the 26th March protest (as opposed to other recent protests, maybe?). They've invented the fancy new job title of "kettle manager" - as if they wanted to brew up trouble for themselves! Not only that, but they've also enlisted the help of the TUC.

So, the police will train TUC stewards and have radio contact with them during the march. Does it mean that if stewards get hit by the police, they will be advised on how to play dead? Or will the newly-appointed police "kettle manager" give them a few tips on how to organise the kettling of demonstrators themselves? The police even agreed with the TUC on whom to choose as "independent" observers - not that "independent", after all!

No matter. Ultimately, it's turning up in large enough numbers that will ensure we make our voices heard!

• Bosses get derailed at their own game

The reasons given by bosses to get injunctions against strikes have got more and more ridiculous. Lately, they've been arguing that not only union membership lists, but details of job title and place of work have to be 100% accurate. And the courts continued to award injunctions against strikes - as they did for Serco, to prevent a 48h strike on the Docklands Light Railway (DLR) in January, and for train operator London Midland in December.

Railworkers' union RMT and train drivers' union ASLEF appealed against these decisions and, for once, a judge decided in their favour. The RMT's Bob Crow hailed it as a "landmark" victory and ASLEF leader Keith Norman claimed this means that "trade unionists once again have the same human rights as any other citizen". So, now that the anti-union laws are no longer an obstacle, will they start organising the effective strike action which is so long overdue?

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• Strike ballot over pensions**

Ford is among many private companies who've decided to take advantage of the government's swop-over to using the usually lower Consumer Price Index (CPI) rather than the Retail Price Index (RPI) as the minimum statutory benchmark to protect pensions against inflation.

At the start of pay talks this year, Ford told the national negotiating body (FNJNC) that it intended to save £400m a year at pensioners' expense this way! Which means, for instance, that after 5 years a pensioner could

lose nearly £3,000 - and the loss increases as time passes!

Uncharacteristically, the FNJNC answered by suspending all talks with the company and two weeks later, on 23 February, announced a strike ballot. It should be said, that on top of this year's pay negotiations, there are many issues over which workers are angry at Dagenham (and it's very likely to be the same in all Ford plants). This ballot is the first chance they've had in a long time to say "enough!". And while many have little



confidence in the unions' intentions, let us hope nevertheless that they use it to mark the beginning of their collective resistance.

• What deal on permanent contracts?

The good news is that there are new recruits at last coming to DEP - including the ex-temps who were sacked in November 2008, who've been told they should come for interviews and medicals this week already.

We hear they'll be coming in batches, first to Lion - and the figures of 100 to 200 have been mentioned. By rights they should be coming back on permanent contracts. That's what we expect! We want no divisions in our ranks and certainly not between temps and permanents! [Workers' Fight - Ford-Dagenham - 01/03/2011]

• Got a spare muzzle?

On the Engine Plant's Puma assembly line, we wish that we could have some help right away. Even if it's not a moving line like Tiger and we can sit when we need to, the foremen are acting like nippy little dogs all day long. But at least we did get one of those lunch vouchers for all this flat-out production. [Workers' Fight - Ford-Dagenham - 01/03/2011]

• This is no free lunch

Talking of lunch voucher "rewards": on Puma B shift, the score was 640 engines in 8 hours! No one could have blinked on the buy-off! Yup, the only way we can get a score like that is by working 8 full hours, non-stop: no lunch break, no tea break, no toilet break. and

what does that break? [Workers' Fight - Ford-Dagenham - 01/03/2011]

• Let's get them ready for our pay claim too!

Press Shop mates were asked to do jobs in Sub Assembly on lates and nights, because management suddenly found there were not enough of us to do their work. Yes, they cut a whole shift leaving everyone in Subs on single shift pay on earlies, having sent almost a whole shift to the Engine Plant and then try to make up for it in this way! But why should they get away with that? If they want a flexible workforce they can move willy-nilly, we should all get the same maximum semi-skilled rate! And even that's not enough to pay the bills these days! [Workers' Fight - Ford-Dagenham - 01/03/2011]

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Eureka - no job cuts!**

East Coast's "Eureka" plans mean no freshly prepared food on most trains, so they want to get rid of most of the chefs and get us to work as on board catering assistants. We heard our pay would be frozen - ie it's a gradual pay cut. Alternatively, we could take redundancy - but the amount they're offering is so little, we thought it was a misprint! Some choice! We don't want pay or job cuts. Time to rock their bath. [Workers' Platform - King's X - 22/02/2011]

• Off to a crawling start

The trains are getting new kitchens for the new food offer and already the makeovers are delayed by 2 weeks. The first refurbished train to go into service appeared last Sunday and though it was a bit shy getting out of the depot (a few "teething" problems), it did eventually set off - and promptly broke down.

Then on Tuesday, the same train arrived from the depot not set up, with no hot water from the boiler and a defective microwave. We discovered that the new ovens take ages to heat

up. And staff shortages in Railgourmet meant that not all the food arrived on board. Otherwise, it was another smooth-running day in the chaos that is Eureka. [Workers' Platform - King's X - 08/03/2011]

• Cut too deep

FCC cut the number of station workers up and down the lines to the bone. Now there aren't enough of us to provide even the minimum cover required. For instance, there was no one to cover a Welwyn Garden City night shift recently, so they got someone from the Thameslink side, who was unfamiliar with the station - and left her on her own to do it! [Workers' Platform - King's X - 22/02/2011]

• Blinded by the money

Union reps spent a week talking to management but had no joy trying to change their minds on the staff cuts in Travel Centres. Anyone could see with their own eyes that we need more workers, not fewer - just come in here and look at the queues. But management only has eyes for their figures on the number of tickets sold. What about all the help and advice we have to give to passengers - usually to sort out their problems with tickets purchased on the internet, which



management loves so much. [Workers' Platform - King's X - 08/03/2011]

• Living her airline dream?

East Coast's boss of bosses was profiled in the Daily Mail recently. We learnt that she used to work for British Airways - does that explain why she's trying to turn East Coast into an airline on wheels? Then, of course, she was at FCC, where she honed her skills at claiming everything was rosy in the midst of disaster. Now, according to her, she's fixing all East Coast's problems, in order to return it to the private sector, its "natural home". Not in our book - this public service belongs in the public sector and private sector bosses like her are the problem, not the solution! [Workers' Platform - King's X - 08/03/2011]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• Post Office pay freeze countered**

4,000 counter staff from the 373 Crown Post Offices which survived the governments cuts and franchising-out, have just voted for strike by 93% on a turnout of 66%. Never mind that Post Office Limited (POL) "posted" a £72m profit last year, workers were "offered" a pay freeze for the 3rd year running, even though managers got 2.5% and directors 21%!

There is also a threat of more Crown Office closures, after the past 5 years saw 70% shut or handed over to private companies like WH Smith or Rymans. But

of course even sub-post offices, always run under franchise to small businessmen (usually paying little more than the minimum wage), have been decimated by cuts, largely because of their dependency on government subsidies - which is why POL isn't up for privatisation!

But will counters workers be given a chance to strike - since the union uses the "yes" vote as a bargaining chip with management? It seems to be proposing 1-day rolling strikes, office by office. That's a loser. So let's hope POL workers



see the point of a real, all-out-together strike, appealing to their sub-post office counterparts and, moreover, all postal and other public sector workers to join them. There's no other way to win.

• Post Offices are vital

From next year Post Offices will no longer be able to cash benefit and pension cheques. The contract has been given to the PayPoint terminal network!

PayPoint terminals in newsagents and corner shops started off being used for paying energy meter bills and mobile pre-pays. They even took on the role of offering a parcel collection and drop off service, competing with Royal Mail and the Post Office - which is a joke, as they don't have the national infrastructure required. And now they would handle the extra (specialised) workload of benefit and pension cheques on top of all this?

A publicly-owned, reliable, safe and sufficiently funded network is needed for such vital services to the working class, the elderly and the poorest. But it's already there, in the Post Offices, provided, of course that we stop the government from cutting them!

• March Xmas wishes from RM

Royal Mail had to apologise after 2/3 of last Xmas's post got delivered late - with some extreme cases, like Oxford, where a card turned up almost 3 months late! Like the fall in GDP, a few weeks before, this was blamed on the bad weather.

But the truth is that, even in bright sunlight, no postman can do 3 people's jobs! Because this is the real situation: RM is responsible for tens of thousands of postal job cuts over the past few years, while countless permanent, full time workers have been replaced with fewer temporary, part-timers.

If anything, the Xmas post disaster only illustrates the extent of Royal Mail's savaging of the postal service, in the run-up to privatisation. And as is so often the case in privatised public services (like the railways, for one), "apologies" are a cheap way of covering up increasing failures.

• No job cuts! Divide it between all of us!

What's this about only 20 jobs on offer in the April EC nights resign? We can't believe it! They want to force most of the 42 of us now on shift onto days (or out the door)! The minimum seniority for a nights job would amount to 25 yrs service!

Of course working nights isn't wonderful for one's health. But it's the long term pay cut we can't afford, not to mention changing how we organise our lives. 42 into 20 won't go, so we insist the bosses go back and do their sums again, until they get it right. [Workers' Fight - RM-Mount-Pleasant - 07/03/2011]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• Holiday, pure and simple?**

BMW is shutting the plant for the week of the royal wedding (on Friday, 29th April). Hardly early warning for those of us who want to escape the outbreak of royal fever! Also why should we have to contribute any leave or WTA to pay for it? When they took away Good Friday, they gave us 2 days in lieu. Somewhere along the line that extra day disappeared. Here's a right royal opportunity to reinstate it! [Workers' Fight - BMW Cowley - 08/03/2011]

• We pay BMW for working here!?

Looked at your pay slip recently? You'll see that your pension contributions have gone up again. In fact they've gone up by 2.25% since the beginning of 2009. And that's during a period when our salaries have only gone up by 2.2% - as there was a pay freeze in 2010. In fact if the company is deducting more for their pension pot than the increase they've paid us,

it helps explain BMW's record profits last year. What a rip-off! [Workers' Fight - BMW Cowley - 08/03/2011]

• At night, still no medical cover

A cost cutting measure that bordered on the criminal was the plan to close down the medical centre and rely on the John Radcliffe Hospital (which has a few problems of its own in A & E!). BMW has now bowed to union pressure and reprieved it. Though as it will only be open on days for the time being, the job is only half done. [Workers' Fight - BMW Cowley - 08/03/2011]

• Technology is beyond them

Mass failures of gate passes may be rare, but there's nearly always someone whose card doesn't get them in - and reactivating them has to be done via Munich. And at Gate 22 coming out, the inside swiping post often doesn't work, forcing us to swipe on the outside point from the inside. Our journeys home become the Great Escape! [Workers' Fight - BMW Cowley



- 08/03/2011]

• Fake results (as expected)

When several of us refused to fill in the Employee Survey, it sent one TC into a real tiz. But after chatting with the manager he was quite relaxed. "It doesn't matter if you don't fill them in as BMW shaves off the 10% most positive and 30% least, so that the answers are more uniform". So much for letting people know what we really think about BMW! [Workers' Fight - BMW Cowley - 08/03/2011]

Japan

The earthquake in Japan, with its subsequent tsunami, is said to be one of the biggest in its history. On top of the devastation of homes and infrastructure, several explosions in a nuclear power station add the risk of radiation contamination, which might have regional implications. And the quake itself could give rise, not just to large aftershocks, but also new big earthquakes along the fault line.

So far just over 2,800 deaths are officially confirmed, but 20-30,000 are predicted, mostly as a result of the tsunami. And of course, this is

Seismic faults and systemic faults

far too many already. But what is remarkable, given the sheer scale of the forces involved, is that there were not far more casualties. The 2010 earthquake in Haiti, which was only one tenth of the force of this one, and without a tsunami, resulted in up to 300,000 deaths.

The reasons are obvious. In Haiti, the impoverished population, mostly living in shanties, was left to fend for itself in the rubble, with its bare hands. Whereas in Japan, the preparation of the population and the hundreds of thousands of emergency service personnel, plus

the massive supply of rescue equipment, shows just how impressively a disaster, even on such a catastrophic scale, can be dealt with in one of the world's richest countries.

Yes, progress in today's society can allow mankind to overcome many of the consequences of the worst "natural" disasters. The only limitations are those imposed by a capitalist system which deprives the majority of the planet's population of the benefit of such progress and maintains it, like in Haiti, in abject poverty. □

• Profit boom

Every employer - and not just in the public sector - is cutting jobs on the grounds that there is "no money left in the kitty". Yet major oil companies and several banks announced huge profits over the last couple of months!

In the case of Standard Chartered, its £2.8bn profit marks the seventh successive annual increase. Barclays announced a £6bn profit which may have "disappointed the market", but is equivalent to 20 times the cost-cutting exercise imposed on the population of Birmingham, Britain's 2nd largest local council, which will result in 7,000 job cuts over four years! As for HSBC, its profits have doubled to a massive £12bn!

One thing's for sure - the "kitty" of big business is more than full. Adding together the profits of Britain's largest companies, would be more than enough to fill Osborne's "budget deficit" several times over and cancel all past and planned cuts.

• Free ride for the banks

The latest scandal to hit British banks came when Barclays and HSBC revealed how little they paid in corporation tax in 2009. Barclays got away

Con-Dem "welfare" - bad and unfair!

In 2013, when - and if - the Welfare Bill and "universal credit" kick in, 2.7m households should be "better off", claim ministers. But who do they think they are fooling, when the whole point of the exercise is to cut the state funds going to the poorest?

True, the Con-Dems shelved their plan to punish the long-term jobless by depriving them of housing benefit. But this is only because this would have caused havoc in housing associations' and local authorities' finances.

Ministers admit that 1.7m households will lose out. For instance, lone parents in low-

paid work will lose some of their benefits.

But the most affected will be those least able to find an alternative income. Already, thanks to Labour, the disabled are subjected to computer-driven "work capability" tests, which are notorious for declaring anyone "fit for work". But, from 2013, those affected by long-term illness (cancer, strokes, etc..) will have to wait for 6 months instead of 3, before getting the new Personal Independence Payment. Are the Con-Dems betting on the long-term sick dying before they can make a claim?

with £113 million, which is less than 1% of its 2009 profits. HSBC paid just £236m, while recording profits of £2.96bn. This didn't stop it threatening to move its headquarters from London to Hong Kong, if any more taxes were imposed on banks.

All this, because companies are allowed the incredible privilege of offsetting their losses in the financial crisis against their tax liabilities. If this applied to the rest of us, anyone

made redundant in this crisis would have his lost wages refunded by the taxman!

The banks' defence is to point out that their total tax bills in Britain are bigger. Barclays thief executive Bob Diamond had the nerve to tell MPs that the bank paid £2bn to the Treasury in 2009 - including all the taxes paid out of its employees' wages! And why not the banks' entire wage bill, while he's at it?

In addition to this monthly paper, we publish fortnightly bulletins in several large workplaces in the South East, a quarterly journal, "Class Struggle" and the "Internationalist Communist Forums" - a series of pamphlets on topical issues.

If you wish to find out more about our ideas, activities and publications, contact the Workers' Fight activist who sold you this issue of our paper, or write to us either by e-mail, at contact@w-fight.org, or by postal mail at:

BM Workers' Fight - LONDON WC1N 3XX.