

WORKERS' fight

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

COLLECTIVE ACTION, THE ONLY WAY TO HAVE A SAY!

After the frivolous pageant of the Royal wedding, the media were seized by the furor surrounding the AV referendum. As if there was any stake in choosing between two systems designed to protect the main parties' monopoly and to ensure that politicians serve big business while being unaccountable to working people!

No wonder the referendum did not stir much passion among voters! Ironically, this did not stop politicians from hailing a "high turnout" - which is rather bizarre, since 58% of registered voters did not see the point of voting across Britain and 65% in London!

No voice in the ballot box

By definition, the referendum could not allow voters to express an opinion about the ConDems' policies. But nor could the local or regional elections.

In Scotland, the SNP came a clear first. But its nationalism, promoting a "more humane" brand of capitalism, is deceptive: "humane" or not, someone has to pay for the system's crisis and the SNP, like the other main parties, won't ever consider getting the capitalists to pay their own bills.

In England, the local elections involved only a section of the electorate (not even London) and could not be used as a national test for the ConDems' policies. The biggest losers were the Liberal Democrats, who paid the price for jumping into bed with the Tories and underwriting their austerity. No-one will shed tears over the Lib-Dems' fate: they only got what was coming to them!

More significant, however, was Labour's failure to regain the ground it had lost in the last comparable elections, in 2007. Labour managed to gain 857 additional council seats, but mostly at the expense of the Lib-Dems. Not only did Labour fail to regain a significant number of the seats it had lost



to the Tories in 2007, but the Tories even managed to gain an additional 86 councillors! In short, the Tories seem to have been more effective, once again, at mobilising their own traditional electorate than Labour.

But is this any surprise when, after the 13 years of anti-working class policies carried out by Labour in government, the same party fails to show any political will to resist the ConDems' cuts in the councils where it would be in a position to do so?

For a collective response

The ballot box has never allowed the working population to have a real say in this society. Whereas it needs to deal with the many urgent issues it is facing today.

While politicians are keeping us busy with bogus issues like AV, behind the scenes, they are sharpening their knives against jobs, conditions and services.

Already, tens of thousands of jobs

have gone or are about to go in local government and other public services, such as Royal Mail. At the same time, attacks on welfare provisions are finalised: housing benefit, allowances for the disabled and long-term sick, care for the elderly, are all threatened, together with pensions, in both the public and private sector. Meanwhile, the so-called NHS "reform" is paving the way for a major downgrading of health provisions.

These attacks, which are designed to meet the bill of the bankers' bailout, make up a comprehensive offensive against the whole working class. It can and should be met with a collective response uniting all our forces.

The huge mobilisation on March 26th was a step in that direction. More steps need to be taken as a follow up, to build up our collective strength and at last have our say - in order to stop the job-slashers and service-axers in their tracks. □

Cuts watch

In April, the phasing in of Housing Benefit cuts began. The first target is 1.6m private tenants, whose rents will only be covered in full if they are among the bottom 30% of all similar rentals in the area (instead of 50%) - but capped at between £250/w for a 1-bedroom home and £400/w for 4 bedrooms (over 4 will be ignored!). No-one knows how this will all work out, let alone how affected households will manage!

Another plan on the Commons' agenda extends to 25-34 years olds

• **Requisition empty properties!**

Housing queues keep getting longer. Yet, according to official figures, there are over 700,000 empty properties across the country, which could be refurbished to provide housing. Instead, their owners do not even have to pay council tax. In addition, there are an estimated 252,000 second homes lying empty most of the year, whose owners are entitled to a 10-50% council tax rebate. This is putting the world on its head: if anyone should be taxed, it should be those who are preventing buildings from being used to provide a roof for those who need one!

Councils have the power to issue orders aimed at turning empty properties into homes, for a few months or a few years. But this power is just not used. During the 4 years following its introduction, in 2006, only 27 such orders were

The great Housing Benefit robbery

what already applies to under-25s: their HB would be set to the shared accommodation rate even if they are in their own 1-bedroom flat. Many would have their benefit halved. What's the next step? Forcing them to share space under a bridge?

As to the 3.4m social tenants on HB, there are plans to cut their HB if they are "under-occupying" their homes. Except that there are all sorts of reasons for "under-occupation". Children grow up and leave. Some households, like in Edinburgh

and Manchester, were allocated larger flats due to stock shortages. Besides, an estimated 400,000 "under-occupiers" are disabled, many of whom have specially adapted flats. Will they also have to move - and then get their new homes adapted, again?

A system which is only capable of robbing millions among the poorest in order to line the pockets of the wealthy few, does not deserve to survive! □

issued for the whole of Britain!

If anything, the on-going housing crisis should warrant the immediate requisition and refurbishment of all empty properties available, without compensation to their owners!

• **What housing crisis?**

A flat in the new "One Hyde Park" development located in London's Knightsbridge was sold for £136m last month to a Russian billionaire. The papers reported that in addition to 2 wine cellars, the owner will have at his disposal the facilities of a nearby luxury hotel. As to the flat's size, it is a mere 25,000 square feet, which would be more than enough to build 25 decent 2-bedroom flats. But what can a billionaire do with such a huge flat? Use it for skateboarding maybe? Or bathe in his billions, like Walt Disney's Scrooge?

Class Struggle n°91 is out!

In the April-June issue of our journal:

- After the 26th March, what next?
- Pension cuts are wage cuts!
- The wave of protests in North Africa and the Middle East.
- Hands off Libya!
- Italy - Behind FIAT'S attacks, an offensive against the working class.
- USA - The banks' repossession feast

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price: £1.50

Royal wedding

London has the Notting Hill carnival every year and it's great fun. But who needed this year's grotesque Buckingham pageant, with its horse-driven gold-plated carriages, 1,900 VIP guests, 5,000 police, and display of RAF fighters and helicopters?

The sight of these smug faces parading for hours in central London, not to mention for days on TV screens, was just too much. Why can't these people keep their family events private, instead of this insulting publicly-funded luxury, at a time when working people are told that "we're all in it together" while losing their livelihoods?

As to the politicians' claim that this event would "reunite the British nation", what a farce! As if this monarchy which claims to rule over 16 independent states - all remnants of

Their world and ours

the bloody past of the British empire - was anything but an antiquated cover for the rule and looting of British capital, here and across the world.

As Marx wrote in the "*Communist Manifesto*", "*workers have no country, but they have a world to win*". And this world will be free of all parasites - royals, capitalists and otherwise.

• **Royal Con Day**

Everyone was told to be merry and enjoy themselves for the royal wedding. Were we not all to be given a day off work? An additional Bank holiday? No, that was too good to be true and there was no plan to enforce it anyway! If some companies granted their workers a paid leave, a lot did not. The government itself did not take its own little carrot seriously

though. Among other examples, the PCS union mentions the case of workers employed by Kelly agency on contracts for the DWP and MoD, who were told to take the day off without pay! So much for the "public" holiday!

• **Let them eat cake!**

Cleaners for the royal household, including Buckingham Palace, St James' Palace and Clarence House are employed by 2 subcontractors - KGB holdings and Greenzone - and are paid £6.45/hr, less than the London living wage of £7.85/hr paid to the Parliament's cleaners!

In the sea of millions splashed out for the royal wedding, one would think an additional drop of £1.40 an hour would be a trifle. Not for Her Royal Stinginess, though!

NHS amputating its staff

NHS cuts are hurting. These are entirely due to the former Labour government's efficiency programme, to save £20bn by April 2015 and cut "non-frontline" administrative costs by 33%. And with inflation, the NHS budget will pay for even less.

Already, 25% of nurses regularly work over their shift hours. They routinely miss meals, breaks and even drinks of water. Nevertheless, 40,000 more jobs are threatened. 54% of them are clinical, front-line posts - doctors, nurses, therapists.

For example, Durham and Darlington Trust will cut 300 nursing posts, Kingston 214. Others are starting with specialist services: Kent and Medway Trust will cut 264 visiting nurses;

Liverpool Women's Hospital will cut 65 neonatal specialists, replacing them with 48 less expensive, less trained, staff nurses; Coventry and Warwickshire is cutting trained learning disability nurses, replacing them with care assistants.

Whole special units are being shut: in Oldham, Shawcross Recovery Unit; in Lancashire, Harvey House for treating addiction; Birmingham and Solihull is shutting a "talking therapy" unit; Stockport is closing Community Nursing services.

If these cuts go through, it can only mean that the scandal of Staffordshire General Hospital, where 1,200 patients died from neglect, due to "efficiencies", will no longer be an exception. □

• "Go private" to be the watchword... again

The cuts in the NHS are likely - no, they are designed to! - provide a boom in the provision of treatment by private "providers" who'll make a killing out of it, probably literally, given their record.

This is because GPs are less and less able to secure out-patient appointments, due to recent budget cuts in areas like fertility investigation and

treatment, obesity treatment (yes, despite the government's anti-obesity campaign!), eye surgery, hip replacement, hernias - and also physiotherapy, speech therapy etc.

All these were, and are, already on offer in the private sector. Previously, NHS patients had easy access if their required treatment wasn't available within target waiting times in the NHS.

Cuts watch



Whipps Cross, one of the big London teaching hospitals under threat

But with the cuts, this "easy access" on the NHS is gone or going. So patients will be expected to opt to "go private" and pay for procedures themselves. Of course, that will only be possible for those with private health insurance or lots of money. But GPs will be expected to explain to patients that finding their own money to pay for a procedure will be their only option.

• Lansley's Bill taken ill

The Con-Dems' Health and Social Care Bill, is undergoing a 2-month "pause" due to criticism from all sides, not just doctors and nurses, but also the government's own Monitor, National Audit Office and parliamentary committee. Now Nick Clegg is trying to reassure GPs that, after all, they won't be forced into Lansley's "GP consortiums" by 2013 as set out in the Bill. These consortiums are groups of GPs which are meant to take over the management of local health care provision - up to now done by Strategic Health Authorities and Primary Care Trusts - both of which are to be abolished.

How can GPs be expected to organise the NHS at local level when they do not even have the time to see all their patients properly? But never mind, because this is part of an old Tory "big idea" - decentralise everything and too bad if, as a result, it all becomes disjointed and falls to bits, like the railways have. All that matters to them is ensuring that the process helps small fish entrepreneurs to turn into large shark millionaires!

• Fed on PFI, tax-free!

Labour's legacy for the NHS includes around 138 hospitals under the Private Finance Initiative, where profit-making consortiums build and/or manage health infrastructure. A recent example demonstrates the potential for shareholders to line their pockets almost tax-free.

HSBC "invested" in 33 PFI schemes via a subsidiary, HICL, based in the Guernsey tax haven. One such investment was an 89.9% stake in the Queen Alexandra Hospital in Portsmouth, to cash in on PFI payments from the NHS (£43m/yr for 30 years). Profits made by HICL after deducting maintenance and management costs are sent to Guernsey via Luxemburg. Yet over the past 18 months, this hospital has cut 700 staff to make "efficiencies"!

All in all, HICL's 33 PFI schemes made £38m in profit in just six months last year - of which only £100,000 was paid in tax, less than 0.3%! As a health union official said: "it's money coming from the taxpayer, so it's a safe profit".

• Letter from Sussex: inhospitable parking

People were already annoyed about the introduction of parking charges at Eastbourne's District General Hospital. They will be more annoyed now. The local NHS Trust had contracted County Parking to run its car parks, for 4 years, ending this February. It now emerges that each time someone made a successful appeal against a parking fine, this company was pocketing £10 of the Trust's funds in "administration fees". In other words, they were rewarding themselves, at the taxpayer's expense, for not doing their job properly! If this is typical of the sort of company the Trust has been dealing with and the sort of contract they've been signing with them, it's little wonder that the Trust is £4.7 million in the red!

London 2012

Rigged seat lottery

The London 2012 Olympic seat lottery ended last month, with officials boasting about the huge rush to buy at the last minute and how they were oversubscribed. But for a lot of Londoners, who have already paid for the games through increased council tax bills and construction traffic disruption, the tickets were unaffordable, the costing from £20, all the way to £2,012!

Those who did apply, mostly plumped for the minimum-price seats. But they could end up paying much more by being allocated pricier places, as the least expensive tickets are used up. And many hedged their bets by applying for more tickets than they really wanted, assuming that they wouldn't get them all.

No such problems for corporate buyers, though. They are able to get

the lion's share of the best tickets without having to enter any lottery. So for those who have the money, there are luxury "packages" on offer, costing, for example, £3,399 per person for three nights in a hotel combined with tickets for an athletics final. Never mind the "Olympic ideal" - business is business! □

• Olympic sized profits

The race to put together the Olympic "village" is obviously rigged in favour of the rich. The builder of the main Olympic stadium, McAlpine, announced profits of £27m in May and paid its top director £1.7m (up 73%) while cutting its workforce by a third in the same year.

Construction firms have had a bonanza, not only benefiting from

the £9.3bn games' budget, but also from improvements required for Stratford's transport infrastructure. And better transport links are essential for the success of the new "Westfield Stratford City". Costing £1.45bn, it will be the largest shopping centre in Europe. When it opens this September, it will include 300 shops, 50 restaurants and the UK's

largest casino. John Lewis, which will have one of the biggest stores, has already sold a few of its £2,300 "limited edition" Olympic gold coins. It anticipates "a higher-spending demographic" and will have a "customer consultation room" where customers will be able to order Loewe televisions at £5,000 each - not for local East-Enders, of course!

• All at sea...

The cost of the Navy's two new aircraft carriers may rise to £7bn, up from the original £3.7bn estimate. Ironically, following the Defence Spending Review, Osborne explained last year that it would be more expensive to cancel the construction of the two carriers, than to go ahead with it! One can only wonder what would have been the cost of cancelling the project in that case! In the meantime, the MoD has revised the original design of the carriers so as to accommodate US and French planes - which may well have something to do with the cost overrun.

Osborne did make provisions for "savings" though. These included the decommissioning of the old carriers, the mothballing of the first new carrier in 2019 (after three years of operating with helicopters only), by which time the second new carrier would come into operation. In other words, no-one saw anything wrong with having no aircraft carrier at all for the next decade. So much for the carriers' vital "necessity"! But then, of course, austerity or not, isn't there another vital "necessity" - like boosting the profits of BAE Systems and other Navy contractors?

• Honey, I shrank the economy

George Osborne touted his March budget as a "budget for growth". And when the GDP figures were published at the end of April, it turned out that the economy did indeed grow in the first quarter of this

year, by a whopping...0.5%. However, due to the contraction registered at the end of 2010, this still means that the ConDems are presiding over a shrinking, as well as inflationary, economy. With plenty more spending cuts in the pipeline, this can only mean a relapse, not a recovery.

But the ConDems were desperate for some "good news" on the economy, because it's the only thing they might have had to show for their austerity policies (not that "growth" equates to good times for workers, of course). So Osborne put a brave face on it and pointed to the tiny growth figure like it was something to be proud of. He can talk it up for all he's worth - the fact remains that all that's growing is his nose.

• Only for the wealthy?

According to the Office for Fair Access (Offa) - which regulates university tuition

fees - nowhere will fees for 2012 be less than £6,000 except on work-based, part-time courses. 75% of universities will charge the maximum £9,000 fee!

They justify this by saying that the higher fees will only be paid by wealthier students to balance the much lower fees for students from poorer backgrounds. But judging from the record of Cambridge University when fees were initially introduced in 1999 and later increased in 2004, the odds are, that the numbers of working-class applicants will drop - if only because, at this rate, debt levels for graduates could quickly rise to £50,000 or more. Not that universities have anything to fear from such social discrimination: in recent years many universities have failed to meet their targets for the inclusion of working class students and were never fined a penny.

WORKERS' FIGHT PUBLIC MEETING

From Bhopal to Fukushima, capitalism is the real killer

Saturday 21st May 2011 - 1.45pm
Wesley's Chapel - upper meeting room
49, City Road, London EC1Y 1AU
(tube: Old Street)

30th June - a chance to fight over pensions

The success of the March 26th protest called for a follow-up, to step up the mobilisation against the attacks of the capitalists and their government. Instead, union leaders have been postponing any further action to 30th June - but in the form of a one-day strike over pensions, this time.

However, to date, only the university lecturers (UCU) have a strike mandate. The civil servants (PCS) and two of the teaching unions (NUT and ATL) are

balloting members, while members of Unite's Health sector have expressed strong support.

But isn't the government targeting everyone's pension in the public sector? Don't Unison's 1.3m members in the NHS and local government face the same threats? Moreover, aren't most private sector workers also facing wide-ranging attacks against their pensions?

Having accumulated profits from workers' labour for decades,

the capitalists should provide decent pensions for all out of their collective wealth and end pension poverty for good. June 30th could be a step towards building a fight over pensions and against the bosses' general offensive. ☐

• The fight should be everywhere

Attacks by local councils against jobs, pay and conditions are meeting some resistance. For instance, in Birmingham, workers at Connexions (a council-run advice service for young people) held their second one-day strike on 4th May, against job cuts. At Nottingham county council, 2000 GMB members voted by a majority of 6 to 1 in favour of being balloted for strike action, over the 3 year pay freeze and threat

to increase pension contributions. And in Barnet, recycling workers want to be balloted for strike action against the contractor who hasn't given them a pay rise for 4 years.

These workers are right about the need to fight against the austerity measures being forced down their throats.

But why are the union leaderships treating these disputes as isolated cases, when the issues of



job cuts, pay freezes and attacks on pensions are affecting workers everywhere?

• Anti-strike rabble

A bill tabled in April by Tory MP, Dominic Raab aims at restricting even further the right to strike in public transport and essential services: a strike would only be legal if supported by a majority of those eligible to vote (instead of a simple majority of voters, as the law stands so far). In other words, non-voters would be counted as voting against strike action.

Raab is not in the best position to support this argument: on this basis, since he was elected by less than 42% of his constituency's registered voters, he shouldn't be an MP! And the same would apply to most MPs.

Raab claims that strike ballots are "coercive" - but political ballots are not. But how about the thousands of soldiers forced to go to war in Afghanistan, thanks to a "political ballot"? And what about the cuts in jobs and services forced down workers' throats by the same badly-elected politicians?

Fortunately, the day millions of workers choose to take action, the Raabs of this world won't have any

choice but to shove their anti-strike legislation where it belongs!

• Cutting lifelines

In response to funding cuts, more and more councils are slashing free social care for adults.

Five years ago, half of all councils funded social care for people with "moderate" needs. Now it's down to a fifth - and falling. Yet "moderate" needs, by their book, include essential help like for bathing or eating a meal!

ConDem-run Birmingham council tried to go a step further and restrict services to those in "critical" need. 10,000 people would have had their social care packages reduced and 4,100 would have lost them altogether, saving the council £17.5m. But the decision was challenged in the High Court, which ruled the move "unlawful", according to the Disability Discrimination Act.

So they've been prevented from making this cut - for the time being. But as council funding is squeezed even further, the elderly and disabled are still at risk of losing the services on which they depend.

• Profit-driven crisis

Southern Cross Healthcare, which runs more than 750 residential care homes, has been fighting off bankruptcy for months. Yet it was one of the biggest beneficiaries of the Community Care Act 1990, which allowed private companies to run care homes and charge local authorities for it. Subsequently, it was taken over by Blackstone, a private equity firm - which specialises in buying other companies to squeeze what it can from their cash reserves, assets and borrowing capacity.

So Southern Cross was bled dry. Most if its homes were sold to new private landlords and leased back at extortionate rents, usually with annual "upward only" rent reviews built into the contracts. Not surprisingly Southern Cross cannot pay its rent bills, just as local authorities are cutting back spending on adult care. As a result, the company's 45,000 employees and 31,000 residents look set to foot the bill. But shouldn't care of the elderly and disabled be a social undertaking? Profiteers should never be allowed near it!

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Permanent temps**

After railway privatisation, the practice of recruiting non-skilled workers via an agency, instead of directly employing them from day one, crept in.

On the east coast line, management began to take on agency workers for 6 months before considering them for a permanent job. Since this was followed by 6 months probation, it meant new workers had to wait for a minimum of a year, before getting the same pay and conditions as their fellow workers.

That was bad enough. But then management started stretching the six months of agency work and

picking and choosing who would be made permanent and when. It's reached the point where some workers have been working for up to 5 years as agency workers, being paid a lower rate for the job.

East Coast is not the only culprit. Network Rail has used the same agency workers for years to patrol the station, while denying them a permanent job. The fact that East Coast is state-run and Network Rail is "not-for-profit" makes no difference. It's railway workers themselves who will have to find a way to stop the bosses creating these divisions.

**• Welcome to East chaos**

Over the last two weeks, disruption on East Coast has been high.

Workers from the Travel Centre were asked to help out on the Customer Information Point and platform. They were even sent to St Pancras, though managers belatedly realised that they shouldn't have done this.

So the company is desperately short of workers all over the place. Yet, the number of trains is going to increase when "Welcome to East Coast" starts in May - and they want to CUT workers in the Travel Centre?

They should be increasing our numbers - urgently! [Workers' Platform - King's X - 19/04/2011]

• Mind the snap!

In the new roster, guards on East Coast have got a two-week stretch where we're supposed to work 95 hours! Is this management's idea of a "work-life balance"? And the last train now finishes at 1am, but nobody's asked us if we can get back home after that time. There are also some turns with only a

half hour turnaround, so no chance for a decent break (and it's going to be interesting, given East Coast's current punctuality record...)

Since management hasn't recruited any extra guards in London for the extra trains in May, they are obviously trying to stretch us all to the limit - and we all know what happens then. [Workers' Platform - King's X - 19/04/2011]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• Ford's greed knows no bounds**

Ford has had its most profitable quarter in 13 years with a 22% increase in earnings to £1.5bn! Little wonder, after it used the 2008 crisis to slash tens of thousands of jobs, close plants and raid the pensions and healthcare of Ford-US workers. In Europe pre-tax profits have more than doubled to £178m in the first 3 months of this year, which, according to Ford Europe boss, Lewis Booth, is due to the high sales of small cars like the Fiesta. So Ford workers in Britain have even more reason to challenge the company's intention to scavenge their pensions.

By adopting the government's newly-chosen CPI measure for calculating pension rates, rather than the higher RPI measure, Ford apparently aims to save up to £400m. After the workers' union committee announced a strike ballot against Ford, the company decided to try bribing the present 11,000-strong "active" workforce with several lump sum payments of £600-£800 over the next few years - playing them off against the 30,000-plus retirees. Let us hope that the workforce stands firm with pensioners and tells Ford to get lost.

**• Life-raft heading for Puma**

We think Ford should put up a sign over the Tiger assembly which reads "Titanic".

Because over the last couple of weeks everyone who possibly could, has been jumping ship! And the reason is obvious. Staying is a risk to health, if not lives! Help!! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 12/4/11]

• When do we get our elastic stockings?

For example, last week (but it could be any week!) on the Chicken Farm, when there were several gaps because of breakdowns, we just had to stand there and wait for something to be done. There is nowhere to sit and rest, even for a moment.

Mad! And bad! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 12/4/11]

• Don't stop at banning overtime...

The work-to-rules and overtime bans which had been agreed before, are still in place in the Dagenham S&TO. (There's one on the Jetty but that's about Ford withdrawing some allowances). Daventry went back to make their overtime ban official; Bridgend also put up an OT ban. In both these cases Ford said it wasn't "legal"! But since when did Ford bother with niceties? So why should any of us? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 26/4/11]

• Seize the time!

Welcome to the new arrivals in the Engine Plant. And those who were here before, it's good to see you again! At least you know Ford's tricks, especially the way they try to divide temps from the rest.

If we want to do something about it - like get permanent status for all new starts from day 1, now's the time to fight for it! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 12/4/11]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• It can't be left to the union leaders!**

It is possible that the postal union (CWU) may ballot for strike against Royal Mail's latest plans to shut yet more offices - among them, Derby, Leicester, Worcester and the London offices at Nine Elms, Bromley-by-Bow and Rathbone Place. The London closures alone would result in at least 1,500 job cuts and a redistribution of mail processing between Mount Pleasant, Greenford, Romford and Croydon.

At first the CWU said the reason to strike was that Royal Mail had

broken the agreement on "Business Transformation" signed in 2010, since in their view, these latest job cuts could only be made via compulsory redundancy, rather than through voluntary redundancies. Now, however, some union officials are talking about opposing the London closures and, perhaps, a national ballot. Of course a fight is needed - and not just over closures, but against the privatisation drive affecting everyone over the past years. But this will only happen if ordinary



postal workers utilise their past experiences, like in 2007 and 2009 when their militancy was squandered. That would mean breaking new ground, by preparing and determining the methods for organising this fight themselves.

• Yes, we need to fight...

In the "rolling" meeting last Thurs, London CWU officials seemed serious about opposing the closures, and not just "compulsory" redundancies. They're clear we must build up to a strike ballot - not just for London, but for the whole country, and quick! They're right. What else but a collective, all-out, fight against privatisation, cuts, closures, de facto wage cuts, transfers..? [Workers' Fight, Mount Pleasant 3/5/11]

• ...and let's have a good plan!

But we don't want a repeat performance of 2009's fiasco, when London, parts of Scotland, plus isolated offices, struck section by section, (24hr rolling strikes!), and the national strike was called off at the last minute. We need to figure out the best way to avoid such mistakes. So let's discuss the issues thoroughly and prepare our plan. During "working" time, of course! [Workers' Fight, Mount Pleasant 3/5/11]

• Slimy b***d!**

The Regional Operations Director's letter of 28th April is a provocation!! He says we'll get a personal interview to "discuss our futures" if we haven't "yet" applied for Voluntary Redundancy (VR) or for Heathrow Worldwide Distribution Centre (HWDC)! We'll be offered another chance, to apply for VR, or a chance "to understand... the range of job opportunities in Royal Mail"... ie., in HWDC?!

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• Working time account con**

Workers returned to work on 3 May from their second week-long shut-down this year.

Each worker is expected to "pay" for this "extra" holiday - by taking annual paid leave, by working back the hours at a later point, under the "working time account" (or WTA) system, by a combination of both, or even by taking unpaid leave!

WTA allows BMW to adjust production to market fluctuations in order to save on its wage bill - in particular on overtime. A worker's "time account" is in debit to the company when he

has not worked paid hours, for whatever reason. It's in credit when he has worked hours and not been paid - for which he is then, in theory, entitled to equal time off.

To make up for lost production of cover for labour shortages, BMW can call in workers and pay them with WTA "credit". Agency temps are especially liable to be phoned by desperate managers asking them to come in "straight away" because someone is off sick!

So on the first night back, 3 May, a breakdown resulted in 600 lost cars



and cancellation of the following night shift. For BMW it was no problem. Workers were called in and compelled to make up the production score using WTA, like it or not.

• Making us pay for their problems?

BMW claims that its late cancellation of the Wednesday night shift and its stated intention to debit our working time accounts to pay for it, is covered by the rulebook. But not by the most recent printed one which states on page 27 that the notice period for WTA stand-down on Lates is: "two days prior to required stand-down by 18.00". Instead BMW rang round with 3 hours or less to go. But why should we work this time back? It's not our fault their

overworked, second-hand equipment in Body-in-White keeps breaking down! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 4/5/11]

• "Caller unavailable"

With only a 2hr break for maintenance each night, we can expect more breakdowns like Tuesday's with BMW trying to get away with last minute cancellation of shifts. But BMW can't complain if we don't answer the phone. In Assembly, the barrage of management calls pestering us to work extra shifts has already

taught us to ignore them! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 4/5/11]

• What prospects?

Managers still have the cheek to threaten temps who refuse to work Friday nights that they'll be "damaging their prospects of getting a contract". That crap wears thin when you've been working here 4 or 5 years, as most of us have. Clearly we are undermanned and a trip by HR to the Job Centre could quickly remedy that. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 19/4/11]

Libya - dividing the country and the spoils

Obama and Cameron swore that there would be no "foreign boots" in Libya. But last month they sent military "advisers" to Benghazi. And with their feet in the door, who knows how far they will go?

In fact, Western powers are upping the ante. On 30 April, Gadaffi's Tripoli compound was hit, killing one of his sons together with his 3 small children. This act - which Nato claims was not an attempt to assassinate Gadaffi (but what else was it?) - caused another escalation. Embassies in Tripoli were set alight (European countries deported Libyan dignitaries in retaliation) and there was renewed shelling of Misrata, where for some time, African migrant workers have been sitting ducks - ostracised by all sides and desperately waiting for ships to take them to the relative safety of Benghazi.

The West is certainly trying to force regime change - and it doesn't matter



that the anti-Gadaffi Transitional National Council (TNC) is headed by Gadaffi's former justice minister, or other self-appointed former Gadaffi officials. Representatives from 22 countries met the TNC in Rome to set out a post-Gadaffi "road map" with all due assistance pledged. Britain

already handed £13m to the rebels, with Hague promising it wouldn't be spent on weapons! But how would he know and why would he care? All he and the other political leaders want to ensure is that "post Gadaffi" Libya will be wide open for plunder. □

• The "ethics" of mass murder

In Pakistan, Afghanistan and now, in Libya, the British and US Air Force are increasingly using unmanned "killer drone" Reaper aircraft, to bomb supposedly "targeted" areas, based on so-called "intelligence".

Over 100 raids by drones were carried out in Pakistan last year and the consequences are often disastrous.

On 6 May, 8 people were killed in an attack. On 17 March, 40 were killed during a wedding. The US doesn't supply statistics, but since Obama took over from Bush, drone raids have increased. The RAF has 4 drones costing £135m each and Cameron plans to buy another 5. They fly for 18 hours, to a range of 3,600 miles,

at 50,000 feet, and are operated by RAF staff based in Nevada who control them via satellite.

One protagonist argues that since the drone "robot" can't hate nor be driven by anger, it is more ethical! But its operators can do all of those things...

• Bin Laden executed by his former masters

The claims and counter-claims surrounding Osama bin Laden's execution by a US commando in Pakistan, only obscured the fact that he was first and foremost the offspring of the US and its regional power games.

After the invasion of Afghanistan by Moscow, the CIA recruited wealthy youths like bin Laden, who were driven by religious fanaticism and raving anti-communism, to help build up anti-Soviet resistance - with US funds and weapons. When the Soviet Union was finally forced to withdraw, the country was riddled with rival Islamic warlords,

while bin Laden and a number of ex-CIA "assets", who felt short-changed in the regional settlement turned against their former US masters.

Once again, the Western powers' policy of imposing their regional order by manipulating reactionary forces, backfired. And once again, the Afghan population was made to pay for this policy, first by being subjected to the brutal Taliban rule and then to a decade-long Western occupation.

The West's leaders may celebrate bin Laden's execution. But no matter how repulsive his ideas and methods

may be, his execution should be no cause for rejoicing - not even for the relatives of the 9/11 victims. Because the ultimate responsibility for their deaths lies not with a few terrorists, but with the imperialist system of oppression, which keeps leading more fighters down bin Laden's road. Of course, these fighters are mistaken. Reactionary ideas and blind terrorism cannot lead to the emancipation of the oppressed. Only their conscious collective action against the exploiters can - in the poor countries, just as here!

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

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

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