

WORKERS' fight

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

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE FIGHT BACK

By now, no-one can deny that the economic and social situation is deteriorating. The empty talk about a "recovery" and the private sector making up for Cameron's cuts, has been forgotten.

This summer's riots came as a stark reminder of what was going on in the real world. This was an explosion waiting to happen, but no-one in the politicians' world wanted to see it coming. And when it came, their only response was to blame "criminals", to divert attention from what it revealed.

Because it was a symptom of the deteriorating situation, but by no means the only one. The impact of the benefit and job cuts announced by the Con-Dems had already been feeding higher joblessness and rising poverty.

A matter of urgency

In the background, the capitalist bingo was taking its toll. In August, stock markets nosedived, threatening more job cuts. Meanwhile, speculators were betting on rising financial difficulties for governments, this time in some of the world's richest countries, like France and even the US - thereby prompting every government to announce even more austerity measures against its working population, including here.

Over the past 4 years, the capitalist parasites have fed the crisis of their own system, because in an economy which is wholly dominated by the financial sphere, speculation is a necessary condition for capitalist profit.

During these years, the offensive of the capitalists and their politicians against the working class has been gathering pace. But while the mechanisms of the crisis are built into the capitalist system, this does not mean that the working class is defenceless.

Even in this world dominated by a few large banks and financial institutions, the working class still produces



all the wealth, its labour still makes everything work and it still represents the majority of the population.

Armed with this collective strength, and provided it learns how to use it, the working class remains the only force capable of offering a way out of this crisis, by challenging at every level the greed of the profiteers and the attacks of their politicians.

Today, the necessity of this collective fight back, using all our forces, is raised by the very depth of the capitalist crisis. It is a necessity and a matter of urgency, that no-one can ignore without taking the risk of an even greater social catastrophe.

Raising our own "alternative"

Given this, the need for a fight back should have been at the forefront of this year's TUC - but it showed no sense of urgency whatsoever.

Last year, the TUC had announced a national day of action and "co-ordinated strikes". The day of action took place on 26th March, with a huge mobilisation.

But not the "co-ordinated" strikes, except for the 1-day strike called on 30 June in part of the public sector.

This year, the TUC has announced "an ambitious 2-year plan" to build a "movement for the Alternative". What this will involve, what forms of action, how this will help to fight the rise in unemployment or the fall in workers' living standards - the TUC didn't say.

But workers know that taking blow after blow for another 2 years is not an option. Nor can they expect anything from the TUC's "Alternative" - a vaguely toned down version of capitalism, designed to promote Labour. As if this crisis-ridden capitalism or Labour, with its support for big business, had anything to offer the working class!

The future will tell what union leaders really plan. In the meantime we can prepare ourselves to seize any opportunity of collective action they might offer, but with the aim of raising our own "alternative" - the urgent, vital necessity of a general fight back of the working class. □

Savings on women's rights

Nadine Dorries, Conservative MP, has just put forward an amendment to the abortion law which will prevent charities providing abortions from also providing counselling. In England, the law that allows abortion forces women to seek the "counselling" of 2 doctors. Obviously, having at least one lot of counselling and abortion under one roof can cut unnecessary delays.

But as Ms Dorries has conveniently suggested, since these clinics

receive funding from the state, cutting their counselling role could allow the government to reduce their funding... and the service they provide.

Ms Dorries is well known for her regular attempts against abortion rights (by trying to reduce the time limit for abortions, for instance). She expects her amendment to prevent 60,000 abortions out of the 200,000 carried out each year. She knows that making the already long process

even longer and more complicated by forcing women to go to different places (first for "counselling" and then for the abortion itself) would not only reduce the time available but also the possibility of getting an abortion for those who find the system hard to negotiate as it is.

This is a direct attack on the rights of working class women, who cannot afford the smooth access of private treatment. □

• Home-ownership, always a con!

It is now predicted that the number of people owning their own homes will fall to 63.8% in 10 years' time, and 44% for London. That would be the lowest level of owner-occupation since the mid-1980s. No wonder, given that the average low-to-middle income household would now take 31 years to save enough for a deposit on a house. That's an average house, too – for a house in London it would take 54 years!

And even once you've got onto the "housing ladder", there's nothing to stop you falling off again, as many thousands have, losing their

homes when they could no longer afford to pay.

Fans of Thatcher may mourn that her dream of a home-owning nation (which Labour endorsed) is heading back to square one. But for the working class, home-ownership always amounted to having a building society or bank as a landlord until the mortgage loan was paid off, plus interest – or until they evicted us. The problem is not that there aren't enough privately-owned houses, but that in this profit-driven society, housing isn't designed to meet the needs of all!

• Rent explosion

Rents increased for the 6th month in a row in July, to £705/month in England and Wales, while, in London, deposits crashed through the £1,000 barrier. Thousands of tenants are running into debt and many have no option but to turn to flatshare. So much so, that four tenants are competing for each room and room rents are increasing even faster – up 1.4% over the past month alone.

Housing shortage on such a scale calls for emergency measures, especially the requisition of all empty houses suitable to provide a home. But when a judge ruled that Camden

council should release a list of its empty houses, housing minister Grant Shapps accused him of demanding the publication of "a squatter's road map". As if squatting was not caused by homelessness in the first place!

Ultimately, of course, the only real solution to the housing crisis lies with a programme to build millions of social homes on public funds – a programme which, in addition, would create hundred of thousands of jobs and go some way towards resolving unemployment.

• Warming shareholders' pockets

In August, British Gas pushed up its prices for gas and electricity by 18% and 16% respectively, which came on top of a 7% rise last December.

According to the company, rising wholesale gas prices are to blame – so much so that it claims to have been selling energy at a loss for the past few months. In

return for this crippling rise, however, it proclaims its determination to "invest in the future energy supply of the UK".

True, parent company Centrica's half-yearly profits have fallen... to a "mere" £1.3bn. But its "investment" is mainly in the pockets of the shareholders. Despite the difficult situation, over which it is

• A & E cuts can kill

According to official guidelines, patients re-attending A & E (accident and emergency) departments within one week should average no more than 1 in 20 cases. This would allow for unhealed wounds to be re-dressed and so on. But rates of 1 in 13 are typical in many inner-city hospitals, and even 1 in 9 in some London and Manchester hospitals. While some of this can be accounted for by the chronic needs of some patients, this does not explain away nearly 35,000 "unnecessary" re-visits every month according to the Dept of Health. Thus blame is laid on either the patient or A & E.

What the current statistics do not show is the effect of the rationing of resources in the NHS. On the one hand A & E becomes first and last resort for patients in areas with a GP shortage. On the other, there is pressure on hospitals to discharge patients too early – which may lead to patients having to come back and may even cost lives. No surprise that patient visits to A & E are increasing by 7% each year – a direct result of the government's cutting of corners.

shedding so many tears, it has somehow managed to increase dividends by 12%.

So this is the real reason that consumers will have to find an extra £190 per year, on average, to pay their energy bills – or freeze this winter.

Expropriate the banks!

"Bank worries bring echoes of 2008", "New debt crisis looms", "The system is ready to blow" - were some of the headings in this August's papers. A magic wand had swept away Osborne's talk of a "recovery" - the havoc that wrecked stock markets during that month, with the London FTSE 100 index falling by 12% and shares losing over £3 trillion in value worldwide.

There was no shortage of "explanations" for this abrupt fall: rising governments' indebtedness; "disappointing" figures for American jobs or for British manufacturing; a speech by some central bank director; etc... The truth is that the financial system has become so unstable that anything

can trigger buying and selling movements on a colossal scale by the big banks and investment funds which rule over the financial sphere.

The frantic search for profits of the big banks provided both the trigger and the spreading mechanism for the present crisis. Their crazy speculation on housing led to the credit crunch and a first stock market crash. After the bailouts covered their debts out of public funds, the banks went on to bet on a sharp rise in commodity prices and a sharp fall in the prices of bonds issued by now over-indebted governments. Having brought the bond market to its knees and driven oil prices skyward, they went back to the stock market. Except that by

Capitalist looters

then, the unemployment and cut in living standards caused by the crisis were choking the real economy and putting in doubt the likelihood of an increase in company profits - hence the convulsions of the stock market.

For the working population, as for the economy as a whole, the bailout and subsequent austerity measures have just compounded the problems created by the banks' greed, instead of resolving them. If there was, and still is, a way out of this crisis, it must start with the nationalisation of all banks, without compensation, and their merging into one single bank to serve the interests of all, under the control of the population. □

• Bankers in the dock?

Some big British banks may be prosecuted (at last!) for their past reckless profiteering. Not in Britain, though, but in the US!

In the lead up to the 2008 financial crash, British banks' US subsidiaries sold £25bn worth of mortgages to US companies, knowing that many were unrecoverable. Some of these loans proved to be fraudulent.

One of them, for instance, was supposed to be secured on a housing estate whose address turned out to be that of a cornfield in Indiana! But then, there were huge profits to be made in selling "subprime" loans.

Once the bubble burst, these loans proved to be worth one quarter of what these British banks had sold them for. Which is why the directors of their US subsidiaries are now facing charges in the US.

Here, however, while the same banks indulged in the same sort of fraudulent speculation, there is no question of prosecution. Having bailed out the fraudsters, politicians are now bending over backwards to find a way of "reforming" their corrupt system, without upsetting their profits!

• PFI, where looting is legal

For years, the state's coffers have been looted by companies in all sorts of perfectly legal ways, thanks to the politicians' benevolence. Among them are companies with contracts under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI).

According to a report issued by the Treasury select committee, these contracts actually cost 1.7 times more than just paying for schools or

hospitals direct from public funds - with the difference going into profits, of course.

No wonder these contracts have been selling like hot cakes, with companies like HSBC Infrastructure - a spin-off of the "world's local bank" - acquiring 33 such contracts after construction was finished.

Some of these companies even manage to avoid paying any tax on their state-guaranteed profits. HSBC Infrastructure, which is based in Guernsey, is one of them. And who knows how much they've stolen from public funds through this double-barrelled scam? "Commercial confidentiality" ensures that we don't!

• Soft on tax cheats

Swiss banks are notorious for providing a safe haven for those who want to hide their wealth, whether from the police or from the taxman. Now HMRC (revenue and customs) has done a deal with Swiss banks, which is billed as a clampdown on tax-dodgers.

In fact, this deal lets the wealthy off the hook for all their past unpaid tax on assets stashed away in Switzerland - in return for a one-off payment of between 19% and 34% of the assets they held in their accounts on 31/12/10. From then on, they're supposed to pay up to 48% on any income on their assets. But since they get to retain their anonymity, HMRC will have very little control and money-laundering will carry on as merrily as before.

The deal also absolves the Swiss banks of any responsibility for aiding and abetting tax evasion. This is handy for the soon-to-become Lord,

• Where the money goes

A think tank called the Resolution Foundation has just published a report on how the distribution of national income has changed over the past decades. It shows the extent of the transfer of wealth from the working population to the capitalist class. For instance, 39% of the wealth created each year is now grabbed as profits, compared to 37% in 1977. Not much of an increase by the sound of it? Except that these 2% actually amount to over £30 billion/yr - or an additional £1,250/yr stolen by the bosses from each worker!

Likewise, the highest-paid employees (directors and the like) are also getting a bigger slice of the cake. The pay of the top 1% of wage-earners now accounts for 4.7% of the total wealth created - compared with just 0.4% for the bottom 10%.

As to the bottom 50% of wage workers, they used to get a 16% share of the wealth created in their pay packets. Today, this has shrunk to only 10%. Yet it is the working class which creates all the wealth in this society - and every penny of that wealth is its due.

Stephen Green. This former head of HSBC's Swiss banking operations is about to become a trade minister in the ConDem government.

Says it all about how "tough" they're prepared to be on their filthy-rich friends, doesn't it?

August riots

The August 6-9th riots in London and other cities were the expression of an ever-deteriorating social situation. The spark was provided by the police cover-up of their execution of Mark Duggan in Tottenham. But the rapid spread of skirmishes, destruction and fire, smashing of shop windows and looting, in high streets all over London - and then Manchester, Salford, Birmingham, Nottingham, etc. - reflected long-repressed anger, fuelled by a deep sense of deprivation amongst a growing section of working class youth. Locals joined the rioters to "shop for free", piling up goods from big and small shops - because such

Symptom of a broken system

goods would normally be way out of their price range, whether from Debenhams, JD Sports, Footlocker, Carphone Warehouse, Curries or much more exclusive designer shops like "Aristos" in Chigwell.

Nobody wanted to listen to the youth who spoke up afterwards, saying how there aren't any jobs or opportunities out there (20.2% of 16-24 year olds are unemployed) and how they're without hope. Nobody wanted to hear either their frustration at the daylight robbery carried out with impunity in high spheres - whether by the banks or the MPs and their extravagant expenses. As many

people in the "riot localities" said: this has been brewing for a long time.

So yes, the wave of riots was a symptom of a broken system, a blind expression of frustration by those who are most affected by it. But because it was blind, it claimed victims who bore no responsibility for today's mess. Because it had no conscious perspective, let alone organisation, it could not change anything. The social injustices of this system are built into it - and can only be addressed by overthrowing it, prison lock, police stock and ruling class barrel. □

Taking revenge...

At the time of writing, 1,700 people have been charged (56% of around 3,000 arrested) as a result of the riots. Special magistrates courts were set up. Armed police commandos raided the homes of "suspects" in poor neighbourhoods.

66% of those arrested have been refused bail, compared to the usual figure of 15% in "normal circumstances"! 46% have been given jail sentences. In 2010, for similar offences, only 10% would have been charged and, of those, only 12.3% would have been given a jail sentence.

No wonder a senior prison official called this a "feeding frenzy" on the part of the police and the courts!

And jailed for what? One student got 6 months for stealing a £3.50 case of bottled water from Lidl. A woman was given 5 months for being found with stolen shorts - a sentence later quashed in Crown Court. And 18-



year old from Manchester, who "entered looted shops, picked up, but dropped trainers, drank stolen champagne" got 2 years 4 months in a youth offenders institution. Another man from Manchester, who "took doughnuts from looted Krispy Kreme" was given 16 months! Three 22-year olds from Croydon, with no previous convictions were given 6 months just for

"trying to enter a looted shop with intent to steal"!

This sentencing frenzy and Cameron's hysterical exposure of the rioters as mere "criminals" were primarily aimed at diverting attention from his responsibilities in today's rising deprivation.

But what has he really achieved, except stoking even more future fire? □

Labour's gone black and blue

Ed Miliband joined ranks with Cameron by reducing the riots to "disgraceful and criminal behaviour". The answer for Labour was "a strong policing response" and "immediate help for businesses", which, in fact, the Tories had already announced. Labour's main "opposition line" was that police cuts should be stopped and more cops brought onto the streets with

more powers. What, more armed police like those who shot Mark Duggan? More riot police like those who triggered the riots by attacking a peaceful protest against Duggan's execution?

As an afterthought, Miliband said councils should be given more financial support. Yes, there should be more adult presence in council estates, in the form of caretakers

and youth workers - but haven't their jobs been taken away both by Labour and the Con-Dems? Above all, there should be more jobs both for adults and the youth. But that would mean taking on the job slashers - in the public and private sector - and the capitalists whose profiteering and lack of investment cripples society. And who would expects Milliband to do that? □

It's happened before...

Riots aren't anything new. How could they be under this class system, especially during periods when there is such a growing and glaring gap between rich and poor? During the recession of the early 1980s, when unemployment became entrenched under the Thatcher government (1979-1991) very significant riots - at the time, considered the worst since the 1930s - took place on and off over some 5 years - from 1980 to 1985.

Anticipating a reaction against her anti-working class policies, Thatcher gave a blank cheque to police to pre-empt "trouble" in the poorest inner city areas of the country - which by definition also meant the areas with more black people, who made up a large section of the lower-paid ranks of the working class.

Five years of inner-city unrest

The first significant reaction against the stop and search ("sus" laws) of the 1980s and the saturation policing (Operation "Swamp") was in Brixton in April 1981 when the main thrust of the rioters was against the police, their racism and their endorsement of the racist thugs who went on the rampage in some of the inner cities. The official Scarman enquiry into the events had to admit that one reason for the riots was "racial disadvantage that is a fact of British life".

That same summer, racist attacks and arson killed several people including a mother and her 3 children in Walthamstow. Rioting broke out in Toxteth, Liverpool, parts of London, Manchester's Moss Side and then again in Brixton and towns throughout the Midlands, plus Bristol's St Pauls area. It started



During the 1981 Brixton riot

again the following year in January and again in the summer. In 1983 there were riots in Bristol and in 1985, in Birmingham's Handsworth and once more in Brixton, when a young woman was shot and injured by police in a house search. Then came the Broadwater Farm riots of October 1985, after local woman, Cynthia Jarrett, died of a heart attack when police raided her home and then failed to respond to protesters demanding answers over their conduct.

30 years on, the crisis

After five years of riots, Thatcher drafted in so-called "community leaders" (similar to those produced today on TV screens as "community entrepreneurs") to stave off social unrest in the inner-cities. Some council estates were refurbished, damning reports were published (but not acted upon) and rising employment did the rest - until the next crisis came.

Today, recalling the Broadwater Farm riots, local Tottenham activist Stafford Scott says: "Those people who tell you it's not the same

as 1985 were not here in 1985. It's exactly the same as 1985. 1985 was sparked by the death of a black woman and police trying to cover up that death. (...). Today they are trying to cover up Mark's killing (...). If you look at all the stats, they're all the same as 1985. Nothing has improved for the livelihoods of young black people who happen to find themselves growing up on estates like Broadwater Farm."

Yes, in reality, not much has changed since 1985. But, while racist harassment was a decisive factor then, it is compounded today by universal social harassment against the poorest. Rising unemployment, social deprivation and, above all, the crisis, have destroyed, to a large extent, the racial divisions inherited from the past in the poor areas. Whatever the colour of their skins, large sections of the working class youth are now confronted with the same choice: either waste your energy by fighting cops, smashing windows and burning buildings, or get politicised, get organised, and get rid of this rotten system! □

• Olympic-size white elephant

The new Westfield centre in Stratford, (next to the Olympics site) which has just opened, is, we are told, "the biggest shopping centre in Europe" and the media hailed the creation of 10,000 jobs, among them 2,000 jobs reserved for local long-term unemployed.

But the number of applicants per vacancy is telling: for a large M&S store, 10,000 people applied for 550 vacancies, while 12,000 people applied for 800 jobs at John Lewis, and the list goes on, with an average of 20 people applying for each job, so 19 of them remain on the dole queue. And will this over-the-top shopping mall set in the

middle of impoverished east London make it past the 2012 Olympics?

• The "apprenticeship" scam

The government is boasting about the success of its apprenticeship programme in fighting unemployment. A closer examination tells another story.

In theory, apprentices get a training and employers a subsidy for providing it. But what training? The number of placements lasting less than a year increased 15 times faster than those lasting more than a year - meaning less training. Moreover, industries such as cleaning are providing an increasing number of "apprenticeships",

if that's what one can call them!

Ultimately, if employers take on apprentices, it's because they can pay a minimum wage of only £2.50/hr. Which must explain the huge increase in apprenticeships among the over 25s over the past year (300%), whereas it was 21% among the 19-24s and only 10% among the 16-18s - even though the latter are worse hit by joblessness and traditionally candidates for apprenticeship. In other words, bosses are now using "apprentices" instead of agency, temps or permanent workers, to by-pass the standard minimum wage and the Con-Dems are merely helping them to drive wages down!

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Thieves!**

Initial (cleaning) management has a nasty habit of not paying new workers for weeks or months after they start. So if we get fed up and leave, they got free labour for a while. When we complain, they're expert at passing the buck - instead of passing the bucks to us!

Our bills are mounting up - we'll make sure they pay them, with interest. [King'X Workers' Platform - 7/09/11]

• What's going on?

The First Capital Connect manager told us quite bluntly at a safety brief that they intend to close their Ticket Office in October. We knew that we would have to move (again) because of the building works but why is that an excuse to get rid of the Ticket Office altogether, when it's busy all day long? Apparently, we're going to be working as Customer Service Assistants - but if all the FCC passengers will have to buy their tickets at the East Coast Travel Centre, why not just move us

there? We need answers! [King'X Workers' Platform - 7/09/11]

• All in different boats

On the East Coast barriers, agency workers are employed via different agencies, which pay different rates. It's not a small difference either - it's 50p per hour. And of course, permanent workers are treated differently again. Simple solution - make everyone permanent now, with the same pay and conditions for the same job. [King'X Workers' Platform - 7/09/11]

• They need their heads testing

The Network Rail manager wants Initial station cleaners to act as sniffer dogs for bombs (the only difference is that the dogs get paid in biscuits and we get paid in peanuts...). After watching a short video on how to spot suspect packages, we had a written test - and one question wrong was enough to get you chucked off the station! But we refused to go quietly and eventually most of us have been taken back - but not without being re-tested. If this is so important, why didn't they use the months we were suspended to



give us proper training? Not one worker should be forced off the station because of this. [King'X Workers' Platform - 7/09/11]

• First class mis-selling

East Coast passengers seem to be under the impression that after 17.00, they will get a meal that has been cooked by an on-board chef. Unfortunately, on the TV advert, there was no small print telling them that this does not apply to about 85% of the trains - i.e. not to or from Leeds or from Edinburgh. And guess who is left to break the bad news to the passengers - the team leaders and customer service assistants on board the train, of course. [King'X Workers' Platform - 7/09/11]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• 100 exploitative years**

Ford has splashed out lavishly this year to celebrate the 100th year since it first set up in Trafford Park, Manchester. It organised events up and down the country for customers and dealers, etc. Ford wouldn't miss such an opportunity to advertise itself.

Workers from Dagenham were recently invited to Dunton for part of this jamboree. The grand finale of the tour round

the country is due 16 to 18 September at the Goodwood race circuit, when 100 cars will be paraded. The Anglia which starred in "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets" will be there and another will be driven by Ford of Britain boss, Joe Greenwell. Let's hope he blows a gasket.

Ford's splashing out hasn't extended to its workers (does it ever?) - quite the contrary, with its attempt to rob workers



of part of their pensions by switching indexing from RPI to CPI. We intend to "celebrate" 100 years of Ford theft from workers by fighting this.

• Our first claim: back to RPI!

So the pay claim, pending the new collective agreement with Ford, (which governs wages and conditions for all Ford Britain workers) is now submitted and Ford's meant to respond by 29/9.

It's supposed to be based on the priorities we wrote down on a slip of paper we got several months ago now. At the time many of us simply wrote "pensions, pensions, pensions", due to the Ford's totally unnecessary switch from RPI linked increases to CPI linked rises, meaning Ford steals around 1% of our pensions every year.

And when unelected Unite union full-timer Maddison came to the S&TO in July, to try to persuade us to "let it go", we said we weren't going to talk about anything at all until RPI was back

on the table. We're waiting. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 13/9/11]

• We need our own voice in any talks

Once the pension matter is "settled" (which, quite frankly, depends entirely on us joining ranks across all the plants and organising a strike), then "we" can talk about the rest.

But who'll be doing the talking? The same convenors who were prepared to accept Ford's pension theft? The same double-dealing brown-noses who think everything, including the workers, can be bought and sold? When it's obvious that they don't speak for us? Those of us who want to change this set-up have our work cut out!! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 13/9/11]

• New contract with Ford

All temps must be made permanent and we must start the process to bring contractors back in-house. Of course we need to make up for the fall in our standards of living with a "substantial pay rise" but why not put a figure on it like £50 a week for all, regardless? Because that would be a way of reducing the inequalities in wages of all of the different grades and shifts. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 13/9/11]

• So "discreet" we didn't notice it

What was that first in 6 years "discretionary" rise in pensions for retirees? We heard that it amounted to as little as £6/yr, or 16p/w, on average. It's contemptible! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 13/9/11]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• Cameron's photo-opportunity**

David Cameron was recently photographed visiting BMW's Mini plant in Oxford to celebrate the building of the two-millionth Mini. In his speech he identified himself with this "British" success and its "guarantee" of jobs for the future. The irony that only managers and apprentices were invited to hear him wasn't lost on workers, who booed his arrival.

The fact is that, today, Cowley produces around 20% of BMW's output with less than 5% of its total workforce. This reflects the winding down of research and

testing, but mainly a systematic increase in the level of exploitation. Constant de-manning makes it virtually impossible for older workers to keep up with line speeds. Due to outsourcing of most off-line jobs, many workers have found themselves consigned to the scrapheap.

And this is not to mention the 700 agency workers who comprise around 80% in some production areas. Most have been there for years, have no job security, pension or sick pay and earn nearly 20% less than their permanent



workmates.

In short, there was certainly nothing for us, workers, to celebrate!

• Our cooperation? At a price!

Will senior management be planning Caribbean holidays, if not round-the-world trips next year? They are talking about closing the plant for 4 weeks next summer and 8 weeks next winter (by way of preparation for the new Mini)! All right for the bosses with

their "gold-plated" salaries. As for us? Well, we can only assume there will be a cap on WTA as we certainly don't intend camping out in the car park in 2013! [BMW Cowley - 12/07/11]

• Hairy moments

So Cameron visited Cowley to pat BMW on the back for "investing in Britain's future".

But it seems BMW weren't prepared to let him meet anyone but managers and apprentices - wisely, as the boos that rang out in Assembly showed. Perhaps if BMW knew that he hadn't driven a car for a year, they wouldn't have let him take the 2 millionth Mini off the line either. By all accounts he overshot the one turn in the 20 yard drive and narrowly missed a pillar! [BMW Cowley - 7/09/11]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• As good as their masters**

Apparently the shiny new ground floor iLSM machines are meant to be very fast. Whether they'll speed up the sorting process as much as managers expect, is quite another question. Not with some of the likes of them in charge, anyway! [Workers' Fight, Mount Pleasant 6/9/11]

• ... and we aren't robots

We can't possibly match the speed of the machines, and we certainly can't make up for hitches or breakdowns, after the way the bosses have cut our numbers. We've no problem with "intelligent" and labour-saving technology - if that's what it is and that's what it does. But RM's crude aim is only to save money at our expense - not

to mention at the expense of the public postal service. Any "intelligence" these machines bring to the process is likely to be squandered by management's ignorance and RM's general policies. [Workers' Fight, Mount Pleasant 6/9/11]

• Delaying tactic?

The 5-month reprieve for the Mount Pleasant Creche gives us more time to make the campaign stronger - so we don't just manage to keep the creche here, but so that it can expand properly - after all, there's lots of space in this huge building. However, we suspect that the reprieve is to lull us into a sense of false security, while the closure plan goes ahead, only 5 months later. So let's ensure we pre-empt this. [Workers' Fight, Mount Pleasant 6/9/11]

**• Working conditions not so new**

Now we're allowed back in the rebuilt groundfloor space, we see that the floor looks very clean, bright and shiny. Of course this shine didn't happen by magic - contractors were brought in to polish it - on their hands and knees! Where were their labour-saving machines? Too expensive, perhaps? [Workers' Fight, Mount Pleasant 6/9/11]

• Con-Dem bosses' agency

The Agency Workers' Regulations are supposed to come into force on 1 October, promising "equal treatment". After a 12-week qualifying period, an agency worker should have the right to equal pay (basic pay as well as shift allowances) together with equal entitlement to rest between shifts, breaks and annual leave. From day one, agency workers should get the right to

equal access to facilities like toilets and staff common rooms, and to information about vacancies. However, vital issues, like job security or an occupational pension, are not even covered.

Despite this, a succession of bosses and Tory politicians has been whingeing for months that these paltry concessions would be too much for British companies to bear. Now

Cameron himself has joined in and let it be known that he was seeking legal advice, leading to speculation that the government might water down or shelve the regulations.

As if there could be any argument that it's high time the bosses' use and abuse of agency workers (in some cases for many years) should be brought to an end!

Libya

The intervention in Libya was no more about "protecting civilians" than the invasion of Iraq had been about WMDs. In both cases Western powers were seeking "regime change" against one of their regional thugs. Just as Saddam Hussein had been a western stooge in the Middle East before the first Gulf war, so had Gaddafi over the past decade. Files discovered in Tripoli shed new light on this point. Since the launch of the "war on terror", Libya had been used by the CIA and MI6 for the "rendition" of so-called "terror suspects" who were "handled" by Gaddafi's torturers.

However, thugs can get greedy. When Saddam Hussein turned against his masters in 1990 to claim his reward by invading Kuwait, his fate was sealed. In Libya, the Western powers seized the opportunity of the anti-Gaddafi protests to kill two birds with one stone: to get rid of a thug considered too greedy by the oil majors and reassert their authority in a region shaken by protests against pro-western dictators.

Things didn't go quite as planned, though. Gaddafi's regular forces may seem to have been confined to a few areas, thanks to NATO's bombs and to the covert presence of

"Regime change" in all but name



Rival factions hide behind the royalist flag held by demonstrators in Benghazi

British and other Western "boots" on the ground. But the authority of the National Transitional Council (NTC) is far from being recognised across the country and its power relies on rival armed militias. So much so that, since "rebel" forces entered Tripoli, all Western governments have been warning against the "danger of a power vacuum" and trying to get the NTC to co-opt as many elements of the old regime as possible.

By now, the blood of the Libyan population has already been shed

by all sides - NATO, Gaddafi and the NTC. Even if the intervention does not lead to a civil war, the "best" it will deliver for the poor masses is a reactionary regime - led by Islamic fundamentalists, royalists and former Gaddafi grandees - which has already chosen to base its legal system on the "sharia" and will use large numbers of Gaddafi's henchmen to police the country. This "regime change" will only mean more of the same for the exploited classes of Libya! ☐

The scramble for oil has begun

With just under 2% of the world's oil production, Libya was never a major producer. Nevertheless the scramble for Libya's oil spoils has been going on for some time already.

This was clearly part of the hidden agenda behind the conference held in Paris, on September 1st, under the pretext of "helping with the political transition in Libya". The main NATO leaders have all stated that it would be "fair and logical" for their respective oil companies to benefit from future contracts as "payment" for (and maybe in

proportion to?) their bombs and missiles.

Ironically, though, the Transitional Council seems to have made contradictory promises. On the one hand the NTC insists that it will respect all existing contracts. On the other hand, for instance, a French daily revealed that it had promised French companies a 35% share of Libya's crude oil (far more than Total had) in return for France's unwavering support - which might explain Sarkozy's rush to recognise the NTC before everyone else.

Meanwhile, Britain has brought in Vitol, the world's largest trader of oil and refined products, to meet the trading needs of the NTC. As it turned out, however, Vitol's managing director "happens" to have been a Tory donor and Tory minister Alan Duncan "happens" to be a former executive director in one of Vitol's subsidiaries. Thus Cameron's government will have added its own particular stink of corruption to the already heavy stench of oil! ☐

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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