

WORKERS' fight

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

BANKING CHAOS: AN UNAFFORDABLE THREAT

Cameron's call, at the Tory party conference, for households to "pay off credit cards and store card bills", was just another way of blaming the crisis on the working class.

As if workers' indebtedness wasn't due to inadequate wages, in the first place! As if wages hadn't shrunk with the crisis, or even disappeared for those made redundant! How are working class households supposed to pay?

Predictably, this arrogant mouth-piece of big business didn't say. Isn't his government robbing workers, by cutting welfare, public jobs and services, with one hand, while handing out tens of billions of public funds to the banks, with the other?

The banks' limitless black hole

At least Bank of England governor Mervyn King was more upfront when, two days later, he admitted that this may prove to be "the worst financial crisis ever" - while announcing another £75 billion of so-called "quantitative easing" for the bankers.

In the same speech, King went further than Cameron would probably have liked him to, adding that this may not be enough to resolve the banks' on-going crisis. But what else could he say, short of a lie, given that he is navigating in the dark in the unpredictable chaos of the capitalist system?

In fact, despite this £75bn handout, within 24h, the credit rating of 12 of Britain's 14 largest banks was downgraded. Clearly, for the credit agencies, it will take far more to restore the banks' health. They may or may not be right. After all, they're not any more clairvoyant than King. Nevertheless, rumours are already rife about the need for more "quantitative easing".

There is some logic in this madness, however. The real economy has been shrinking worldwide over the past years, and more so in Britain than in



most industrialised countries. It's no longer just housing which is in trouble, not even just the construction industry as a whole, but retail, manufacturing, etc... Lower household consumption and cuts in government expenditure have made many loans to businesses unrecoverable. So the banks are more loaded with bad debts than ever and they keep their cash for the most profitable speculative operations instead of lending it to the economy.

We can't afford such a system

While the government's "quantitative easing" provides the banks with more cash to play with, why should it make them more healthy?

After all, the £200bn of "quantitative easing" splashed out by Labour in 2009 didn't. The banks took the money and ran. Their profits just went up, while they made a killing out of the public debt caused by their own bailout!

Moreover, as a remedy, "quantitative easing" may be as bad, if not worse, than the disease it is meant to cure, due to some perverse side-effects. For

instance, it reduces temporarily the yield of government bonds. So, most new pensioners, whose payments are linked to this yield (except in final salary schemes) get a pension cut!

But in the longer term, the effects of "quantitative easing" may be even more wide-ranging. Because, this is just printing money, even if it is "electronic money". And printing money can only add to today's 5.2% inflation rate, already the highest in Europe. This is just another way for the capitalists to get us to pay for their crisis, by cutting our living standards!

Mervyn King argued: "we're creating money because there's not enough money in the economy". But banks and companies have never had such huge cash reserves. It is for fear of denting their profits, that capitalists are not putting their cash into the economy. They'd much rather hoard it, or gamble with it, even if this strangles the economy and boosts poverty.

This is why this capitalist system is neither affordable nor reformable. It must be replaced! ☐

The boomerang of the crisis strikes back

On October 8th, international agencies downgraded the credit rating of 12 of Britain's largest banks, including the government-controlled RBS and Lloyds. Only Barclays and HSBC were spared the humiliation. But, of course, having no crystal ball, these agencies can't tell the future. In fact, the ratings merely reflect what they manage to read into the impenetrable fog of a totally unpredictable system.

Hidden losses

This was what happened in the days of the housing bubble. The same agencies gave top-notch ratings to property-based bonds just because it seemed as if their market prices would never stop rising. Except that they eventually turned into worthless junk - paving the way for the crisis.

Likewise today. The banks are hoarding liquidities instead of lending. But their reasons are not clear. So, the rating agencies are assuming that they must know something we don't - like, for instance, that they hold massive amounts of "toxic" assets hidden in their vaults - hence the downgrading.

For once, the rating agencies may

well be right, as was shown by the bankruptcy of the Franco-Belgium bank, Dexia. It revealed that this bank had kept "toxic" assets from the 2007-8 crash. But it also revealed another pile of loans which had become unrecoverable due to the crisis itself - like loans to abandoned infrastructure projects, or to cash-strapped local authorities, which are unlikely to be able to meet even their interest payments.

No bailouts for the parasites!

Despite all the past hot air about "we're alright, it's the eurozone's problem", British banks are now shown to be in a mess too, and for the same reason as their eurozone rivals: the fact that the contraction of the economy makes many loans unrecoverable.

Ironically, though, just 24hrs before their downgrading, the banks had received another £75 billion of "quantitative easing" from the Bank of England. But what for? After all, the £200 billion injected by the previous Labour government didn't get the banks to resume lending, did it? Nor did it get them to come clean about their hidden "toxic" assets.

No wonder the rating agencies were not impressed by this waste of public money.

And why should the working class bear the cost of yet another bailout of the banking parasites? The banking system is not just paralysed. Its parasitism is a threat to the whole economy. The only way to end this threat would be to expropriate the banks, without compensation for their shareholders and bondholders. Then the banking system could be merged into one single bank, with the task of providing for the needs of socially useful projects, under the control of its employees and of the population as a whole. □

The milch cow of the public debt

Wherever governments introduce austerity plans these days - which is more or less everywhere - their main justification is a ballooning public debt and the rising share of their annual budget used to repay this debt and the interest attached to it. But what the same governments forget to say is who their creditors are - i.e. mostly the biggest financial institutions and, in particular, the big banks.

So, in Britain, where the public debt and government deficit have reached record levels because of the banking bailout, the very same banks which received hundreds of billions of public funds have recycled back some of this cash in government loans. And now, these banks are netting record interest payments from the government, paid for by the rest of us, with cuts in our benefits, pensions, jobs and services.

The parasitism of the financial system is causing this unending vicious circle. Expropriating the banks and cancelling the public debt is the only way out of it.

• Vickers report: profiteering is safe!

The Vickers commission was meant to come up with proposals to prevent a repetition of the banking collapse in 2007-8. But it obviously doesn't see any urgency in sorting out the banking mess, since it doesn't suggest doing anything before... 2019.

Anyway, how could its proposed "ring-fencing" of deposits and loans (as opposed to risky investment) do the trick? As if bankers didn't fund their risky operations (which are how they make their huge profits) with the huge stock of customers' deposits! Won't they get their legal advisers to make loopholes in the

"fence" - especially as the profits of the banks, shareholders' dividends and their own fat bonuses depend on it? Besides, who would enforce this "ring-fencing", if not so-called "independent" watchdogs - i.e. ex-bankers who would be unlikely to oppose what they consider as "normal" banking?

Yet, that's precisely where the problem is. "Normal" banking is profiteering - no more, no less. The recklessness of the banking system and its parasitism on society is not due to a lack of regulation, but to the fact that it's driven, like the rest of the capitalist system, by private profiteering.

• Playing with currency fire

In mid-September, when stock markets were up and down like a yo-yo, central banks intervened to calm things down (temporarily, at least) by announcing that they would pump dollars into the markets. This will be done by allowing banks to bid for large amounts of dollars at three auctions, the first of which is on October 12th. The aim is to provide

the banks (the biggest market speculators) with huge liquidity out of state currency reserves, to prevent them from launching a fire-sale of shares in order to raise cash.

Unlike the latest bout of "quantitative easing", this move did not make the headlines. But, discreet as it is, it involved, along with the Bank of England, the central banks of the

US, eurozone, Japan and Switzerland - and amounts to yet another huge helping hand to shareholders. The catch is that this may have unpredictable consequences for the monetary system, since central banks' reserves are there to shore up national currencies. But who said this irrational profit system ever planned ahead?

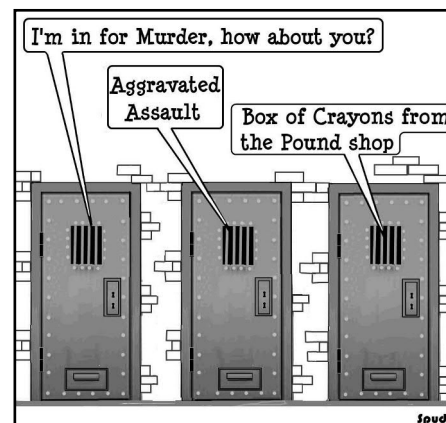
The collective "crime" of rioting

Over-the-top sentences for many of the "rioters" have even been criticised by a senior judge. But they haven't been quashed, so far.

A 17-year old just had his 8-month sentence halved. He'd followed a "shopping-for-free" bunch into Sainsbury's, had a bottle in his hand when the cops arrived, which he immediately put down - but still got nicked for "theft", having stolen nothing. He's already been in jail for 2 months. Which just goes to show that even being in the vicinity of a riot was enough to label you a rioter and give you a criminal record. As to the

two lads who invited people to meet by MacDonalds via Facebook for a "Smash Down in Norwich Town" and got a 4-year sentence even though no-one showed up, their appeal should be heard in mid-October.

The number arrested is over 3,000 by now, many waiting in jail, with 300 sentenced. It's crazy: a seasoned thief who planned an isolated robbery would get half the sentence applied to ordinary, mostly deprived youth, who had a spur-of-the-moment impulse in the context of a collective riot. But it is precisely this context, not the acts themselves,



that the government treats as a collective crime deserving "exemplary" sentences. □

Bloody Sunday - compensation is no justice

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has finally offered compensation to the families of the 14 people killed by British paratroopers in Derry at a protest march in 1972 as well as to the 15 who were wounded. This comes 15 months after the Saville report was published and accepted by the government, nearly seven years after it was originally

completed, and almost 40 years after Bloody Sunday!

Even though the army now acknowledges what was a murderous shooting spree against unarmed civilians, there are no plans to uncover the responsibility of the relevant politicians and high-ranking officers who ordered the occupation of the North and introduced internment of

Republicans without trial, the cause of the protest in the first place.

Some families may accept the compensation - likely to be £500,000. However others have refused to accept blood money from the MOD. For them there can be no settlement until justice is done. And they are right to demand this! □

Labour party conference

• New clothes, old rags

Last March Labour initiated a report to examine the causes of its general election defeat and find ways of ensuring that it doesn't happen again. The results were unveiled at the party conference.

A bit of a damp squib, to put it mildly. If the Tories previously nicked ideas from Blair and Brown, Labour is now doing the reverse. The section claiming Labour will "make communities stronger through collective action" sounds like Miliband's take on Cameron's Big Society. Whether it plays well to hard pressed workers in the inner city slums remains to be seen - all the more so, as the cuts and privatisation of the NHS and social welfare began under Labour.

As for allowing "supporters" to vote, it sounds more like another attempt by Labour to look like Obama's party, by adopting a gimmick inspired by the US primaries. Let's hope we'll be spared the razz-matazz that goes with it - but don't count your bets!

• The beast that squeaked

Shadow chancellor, Ed Balls, tried to use the Labour conference at

Liverpool to mend bridges with the "middle ground" that Labour believes deserted it at the last election. But he also sent signals to the capitalist class that they had nothing to fear from the "big (Labour) beast".

Apologies were given for the "light touch" regulation before the crisis, though not for the hundreds of billions wasted in the banks' bailout (rather than nationalisation that need not have cost a penny). He refused to commit himself to reversing the Con-Dem cuts and insisted he would be more "prudent" than the Con-Dems if the banks were sold back into private ownership: the profits would go to reducing the deficit rather than public spending.

As for his plans to kick-start the economy by repeating Osborne's windfall tax on the banks, on his own figures this would only reduce youth unemployment by 10% and build 25,000 houses whereas 4m people are on council waiting lists! Meanwhile those capitalists with the real resources would neither be penalised nor have their handouts removed. No wonder they must be thinking, more mouse than beast!

• E-con

It was an "e-petition" which led to the outrageous debate in the Commons over whether rioters should have their benefits cut.

This is another "big" Con-Dem idea: anybody can start a petition online and have the issue debated in Parliament by getting over 100,000 signatures. It's become a channel for unsavoury prejudices. In fact, one can't see any other purpose, since such debates never change anything. And behind this democratic pretence who knows what reactionary ideas the government tries to push - like, in this case, the "blame the poor for all ills" type. As for the e-petition on the Hillsborough disaster, asking for all documents to be made public, its outcome was to do nothing, as "families have to be informed first"!

Many people can't use the internet and petitions they might support may be filtered out - like "increase the minimum wage", "renationalise the railways", etc! The petition against the downgrading of pensions from RPI to CPI, which is there, would probably have already collected millions of signatures if more had internet access! Yup, it's just another way of trying to e-con people into believing they have a say.

November 30th and the necessary fight back

Unions are planning a strike day on 30 November in protest against the planned cuts in public sector pensions. Almost 3 million workers are to be balloted in schools, colleges, offices and hospitals.

Coming after the success of the days of action on 26 March and 30 June, November 30th could be another step towards a fight back which is long overdue. The GMB union's Brian Strutton, said this *"is going to require days of action running through the winter, through into next year,... right into the summer"*. If only! Because nothing short of a real threat to the bosses' profits will begin to tilt the balance of forces in the working class' favour!

But for this to happen, we need

• **There's nothing to negotiate about!**

TUC leader Brendan Barber has been in "private" talks with ministers over public pension cuts, going to the cabinet office and to the Tory conference in Manchester. These are behind-the-door negotiations in which the workers concerned are last informed, as usual. Apparently what is being floated now, is the idea of a "funding limit" for each public sector pension scheme. This means union leaders would agree in advance that if the cost of a particular scheme to the government goes beyond a certain limit, scheme members would have to foot the extra cost!

• **Real pay rises needed**

August's RPI (the inflation measure including housing costs) was 5.2%. So far this year, inflation has been running at 5% or above. So how dare the papers call the 5% pay offer to London Tube workers *"inflation-busting"*, when it means their real wages would still go down? Probably, they'd rather see no pay rise at all in the Tube, like for millions of workers, in both private and public sectors.

Predictably, inflation has an impact

• **BAe workers should not pay for cut backs**

Last month BAe announced 3,000 job losses mainly at its military aircraft plants in Warton and Brough, with a knock-on effect of at least 6,000 jobs lost in areas already been hit by previous job cuts. Although Typhoon jets have been bombing Libya in recent months, BAe says the demand for new military hardware has dropped significantly since the height of the Iraq War.



to mobilise all our strength - and not just in the public sector. All workers are faced with the same job and pension cuts, and the same attacks

on services. If we are to make the capitalists pay for their crisis, it is the entire working class that needs to stand up together. ☐

Whatever next! But this is just the sort of con that such negotiations are bound to produce. The bottom line is that it should be the duty of society to provide workers with a decent income after a life at work - whether they are in the public or private sector. What is there to negotiate about with a government which claims that decent pensions are "unaffordable" for society and, at the same time, pours tens of billions in the banks' coffers? Nothing! There's only one answer to such arrogance - in the streets!

on people's spending power. Asda's monthly survey of the money households have left, after paying for tax and essentials, shows they had £14 per week less than a year ago.

And Cameron has the nerve to speak about households *"living within their means"*? If workers are to have the "means" to live in a decent way, there is only one place they can get the money - from the bosses' bulging pockets.

BAe also blames the MoD's cutbacks and "sluggish" sales overseas.

However this company is hugely profitable, with many projects in various fields and more than 100,000 workers worldwide. So why can't these 3,000 workers share existing work with the rest of the workforce, without loss of pay? And why can't BAe develop new, more socially useful, projects - like more

Sparks threaten a conflagration

Electricians from all around the country - employed on prestigious sites like the Olympics, London's "Shard", Crossrail etc., under the Joint Industry Board contract, have been demonstrating and blocking site entrances for almost 2 months now! The big 8 in construction (Balfour-Beatty, Laing O'Rourke, Baileys, TClarques, Spie Matthew Hall, etc.,) want to cut their pay by 35%! Their current rate is £16.25/hr across the board, which is also the benchmark for subcontracted workers. The bosses want 3 new grades for sparks, with £10.50/hr for metalwork, £12 for wiring, £14 for terminating - to come in by March 2012. Other benefits would go, like travel time, right to claim unfair dismissal from day 1. De-skilling is also on the agenda and the downgrading of apprentices.

So far, weekly demos - usually several hundred strong - are making a point. On 5th October, 300 workers blocked Oxford Street and marched on TClarques' HQ, despite a police ban. However, the unions involved, like Unite, are holding back official action - so workers are having to take direct action off their own bat. And why not involve all site workers and what's more, the "subbies", too? The time is ripe - the bosses' deadlines are everything to them!

modern forms of public transport, for instance. And why shouldn't BAe help build up the countries abroad instead of exporting its lethal mixture of planes and missiles to destroy them? The possibilities could be endless.

NHS workers are the solution, not the problem

NHS bosses complain that the wage bill is too high and must be cut - despite the fact that they are already imposing a two-year pay freeze on health workers, which they want to extend, and have slashed thousands of jobs.

It's scandalous enough that health workers' real wages are being cut but, in addition, cutting staff to the bone is causing huge problems.

• NHS in a spin

In Gloucestershire, protesters have mounted a legal challenge to plans to transform a Primary Care Trust, including 9 community hospitals, into a "Community Interest Company", outside the NHS. The 3,000 workers involved - supposed co-owners of the new "social enterprise" - have no choice in the matter.

For this backdoor privatisation, it was not necessary to wait for the Con-Dem's reforms - Labour's own "reforms" made it possible. The first NHS "spin out", Central Surrey Health, was formed in 2006 to run therapy and community nursing services in central Surrey.

Nominally "owned" by its 700 employees, it received a "Big Society" award from Cameron last year. But its first competitive bid, for a 5-year, £500m contract to run community services elsewhere in Surrey, has failed. It lost out to Assura Medical, a private company majority-owned by... Virgin Healthcare.

Next year, Central Surrey Health will be obliged to put its own core services in central Surrey out to tender. If it loses that bid as well, the "social enterprise" model may well turn out to be just a Trojan horse for the private sector.

Protesters are right to oppose this con, wherever it is tried.

• Planning for growth... of profits

Osborne recently claimed that planning delays "cost" the economy £3bn a year and are a "deterrent to international investment". So, the government wants to "reform" the planning system so that it grants more planning permissions for construction, faster.

Yet, more than 60% of major planning applications are decided within 13 weeks and 90% of them get permission.

At a time when occupancy of commercial premises is at its lowest for 14 years and 17% of business park space

For instance, the past few weeks have seen reports of cuts to physiotherapy services and increased waiting times for people with suspected cancer.

And what about the management of Whipps Cross hospital in London, which is asking workers to give up some of their annual leave or to work shifts for nothing, to compensate for

a chronic shortage of staff and to help with the hospital's ballooning budget deficit?

The truth is that managing hospitals as "businesses", rather than as part of an integrated public service, can only be done at the expense of both workers and patients - and it's totally unacceptable. □



• Health entrepreneurs

Despite the fact that many doctors are generally opposed to the government's NHS reforms, one GP practice, at least, is eagerly embracing them. The Haxby Group Practice, in Yorkshire, wrote to patients explaining that certain minor surgical procedures would no longer be funded by the local health trust, but that they could elect to pay to have them done instead. The list of suggested private providers just happened to include one owned by the practice itself. That's the spirit!

is vacant, it is not as if there was an urgent need for commercial building!

Nor is the planning system as regards housing an urgent matter, contrary to what ministers claim. Developers have piled up planning permissions for 330,000 houses which they aren't building. Besides, 750,000 existing houses lie empty, mostly owned by the rich. So the urgent priority is making sure the permitted homes get built and the empty homes get used.

What is urgent for this government, however, is to oblige big business and especially property companies which resent any form of control over their reckless profiteering.

Letter from Sussex Who cares about people's needs?

Some years ago, the local NHS Trust announced that it intended to close the maternity unit, either in Eastbourne or Hastings. There was uproar and Eastbourne saw its biggest ever demonstration. The Trust backed down, but it hadn't given up. It now plans to close Eastbourne's maternity unit - and the cardiac unit along with it! It's still early days, but, hopefully the protests will be bigger this time.

Such arrogance goes beyond NHS trusts. In neighbouring Hailsham, a pension fund, which is the main investor in a declining shopping centre wants, instead of reviving it, to build another one, on the car park next door. The town is full of empty shops and it's hard to see the point. The town council held a public meeting, where the pension fund's claim that this was not profit-driven was met with well-deserved scorn! A second "public" meeting has been held since, but not advertised, so there was no more public opposition!

From trusts to fund managers, from local councils to Whitehall, there is only contempt for the needs and wishes of working people. It's high time that we wrung a bit of respect out of them!

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Railway without workers**

The McNulty report on railway cost-cutting recommended the closure of all ticket offices at stations classified as Category E, which in most cases would mean the stations would be completely unmanned. The smallest stations (nearly half the total) were already mostly unstaffed. The 675 station ticket offices McNulty has earmarked for closure are at busier stations, like those serving medium-sized towns and suburbs.

This would allow train operating companies to close offices wherever they can get away with it. First Capital Connect, for instance, has just closed its ticket office at King's Cross. It reckons it has no obligation to have a separate office there. Though FCC tickets can be bought at the main Travel Centre, run by East Coast, the queues there are already lengthy and are going to get much worse. But what does FCC care, as long as it still gets its



revenue? King's Cross was one of FCC's busiest ticket offices, taking £100,000/week in cash alone. If they can close that one, which ticket office is safe?

• Burning issue

There has been an increase in catering workers getting burn injuries on East Coast trains. Not surprising, since management got rid of most chefs and now CSAs are expected to prepare lots of oven-baked freebies for 1st Class - pastries, tarts, bacon, even breakfasts. And because of the extra workload we have with all this free stuff, we're always in a rush. So, to avoid accidents, first we need to slow down - and if management don't want passengers to go hungry, they'd better put more hands on board. And second, we need trained chefs back on all trains. Since East Coast is constantly boasting about what a success their new 1st Class deal is, they can certainly afford it. [King'X Workers' Platform - 04/10/11]

• Wearing a bit thin

What's happened to the supply of East Coast uniforms? It was never very plentiful, but now it seems to have dried up completely. At this rate, shirts, trousers, etc, will be falling into rags and we'll have nothing decent to wear into work. So we'll be forced to stay at home - unless managers want the public to see rather more of us than they bargained for! [King'X Workers' Platform - 04/10/11]

• There's an idea...

Predictably, the Press was "outraged" at the "£1800 bribe" to Tube drivers for the Olympics. Of course, it isn't true. In fact, the deal was £500 for changed working patterns, plus enhanced overtime rates. But what is true is that all workers could do with an extra £1800 to meet our

rocketing expenses - and not just for the Olympics, but every year. So instead of one-off deals, how about a combined effort to get the pay increase we all need? [King'X Workers' Platform - 20/09/11]

• Yellow peril

ISS has just provided train cleaners with bright new yellow hi-vi vests. If they really want us to wear them, they can expect us to take 3 times as long to get between trains, as we'll be stopping all the time to answer questions from passengers. More importantly, they aren't the kind with poppers up the sides, which will come off if they get caught on a moving train. So they're unsafe as well as unwise. We do have some space in our bins... [King'X Workers' Platform - 04/10/11]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• No to job cuts, vr, evr, whatever!**

There are calls for overtime every day - so how can management claim that there are too many bodies at MP? What's more, this need for OT is arising while Clear Choice continues to ask more of us to leave!! [Workers' Fight - Mount Pleasant 20/9/11]

• Here to stay, full-time!

Yet again the issue of part-time drivers comes up! Some were driving for 3 years fulltime, but never got the full-time contract they deserved!

Now with the cuts, bosses want to dispense with them. But how can you suddenly be reduced back to part-time status on a part-time wage? It's just not on.

Bosses recognise it's a grave injustice - but will only offer these mates full-time... at Langley!!

As if there aren't enough fulltime jobs to be done here at MP. We can show them where! [Workers' Fight - Mount Pleasant 20/9/11]

• Third class

World Class Mail is coming!! It hasn't happened yet, since (apparently) the full ground floor reconstruction isn't complete and neither is "WC training"! (Do they mean Potty training?)

Since the union is now officially hand-in-hand with management over WCM, perhaps they can explain to all of us what it actually is? And if everything will soon be called "World Class", what class is it that we have already? [Workers' Fight - Mount Pleasant 3/10/11]

• Nothing to suit us

Romec cleaners had a union meeting to discuss "current events" and how they affect us - and we were told we at MP are "ok"! Are we?

We won't be getting more workers. We won't be offered EVR (or not till 2013, but no-one seems to know, exactly). And we won't get more pay. The "rise" is only 2%, which was voted for (why and how?!), which amounts to a 3% pay cut, against the 5% price inflation rate! [Workers' Fight - Mount Pleasant 3/10/11]

**• Agency temps still unequal**

We see the CWU leader Billy Hayes is at it again: patting himself on the back for the Agency Workers Directive.

But since it only kicks in with "equal rights for agency temps" after 12 weeks, RM's huge intake of Xmas casuals will all be excluded from this - so should he really be acting so pleased?

And, as he admits, Cameron is busy trying to find all sorts of loopholes to help the bosses jump through, so they can avoid complying. [Workers' Fight - Mount Pleasant 3/10/11]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

• **We're "staggered" by Ford's cheek**

Ford's 2011/12 pay offer is 2%+2%. It'd mean pay would fall behind inflation by 3% this year and who knows by what, next year. On pensions, there's no question of Ford reversing its switch from the RPI link to the lower, CPI link. Its excuse is the £3.5bn which it owes(!) over 10 years to the pension fund: "a staggering financial challenge", apparently. But it's nothing. Ford has cash reserves of \$20bn. We are the ones staggering home at night or in the early morning, because Ford pushes production beyond

endurance to avoid recruiting new starts - until next April, when it plans to pay them 20% less.

Indeed, that's the big shocker in this offer: Ford wants to put all new recruits from April 2012 on a new "distict", cheaper, wage scale. A new start would get £12.99/hr for a job which pays "old start" around £15.79 Ford asserts that its pay is still "amongst the best" and warns workers that in the US, pay for new hires was cut last year to half that of existing workers. It also dumped workers'

• **The limits of legislation**

Ford already has a multi-tier workforce. For over 20 years it's been subcontracting jobs which used to be done by Ford employees. Of course, contracted workers are on different contracts and lower pay. What's more, cowboy contractors like Hamtons-LineSide, cover their sickness absentees and workers' holidays by bringing in agency temps, which

Ford couldn't do, thanks to long-standing agreements with the unions. The Agency Workers directive, from 1 October, which should have benefited subcontracted agency temps will hardly help. All bosses have to do is to contract workers for less than 13 weeks.

But even equalising wages/conditions among subcontractors won't address the



healthcare packages on the UAW union (unfortunately with the UAW leaders' agreement). This helped Ford make its \$14bn pre-tax profit in the first half of 2011. Now it wants even more. The only possible answer is "no".

lousy conditions imposed on them - like no sick pay for cleaners or forklift drivers. Getting everyone brought back in-house would be the only solution - but that would involve a very big fight, with everyone, especially "Ford" workers using their muscle!

• **"Modern times"?**

Day shift production is suspended for 3 weeks on the Chicken Farm (aka Tiger engine assembly). Will the Boot Camp regime stop? No, we'll be expected to clean up, stand in line for inspection, polish brass and attend brainwashing sessions. (Or hop to do some pecking on the Lynx). Will line speed be cut on Lates and Nights? Oh no, because then we might get used to it and refuse to speed up when

they want to fill up the shelves again. So we're to keep up the live impersonations of Charlie Chaplin - 100 years later... [Workers' Fight - Ford Dagenham 27/9/11]

• **When is the sit down strike?**

Yes indeedy. We're even now expected to hit the 800+/shift mark on 2 shifts, despite over-producing Ford's golden eggs! Last week bosses gave out meal vouchers (on Machining too). Just why Ford thinks a free meal in the ever-depleted

canteen (or a donut!) is a "reward" we'd strive for, beats us! [Workers' Fight - Ford Dagenham 27/9/11]

• **Known fraudsters**

The ex-Ford/Visteon workers who greeted us as we arrived at Dunton for Ford's centenary had placards reading "Ford=pension cheats". They're right. And Ford is liable, but will have to be forced, to pay them - and us. [Workers' Fight - Ford Dagenham 27/9/11]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

• **Beware the dirty tricks**

All agency workers have been sent a letter from Gi Group (R4S) about the Agency Workers' Regulations (AWR) that came into effect on October 1st. The attached FAQs summarise the regulations, but don't spell out how Gi and BMW are going to implement them. For instance, why do R4S write that it will "only affect those workers that do comparable roles to those employed by BMW" when we - agency and permanent - all work alongside each other? Why write this crap unless they're planning dirty tricks? [Workers' Fight - BMW Oxford 4/10/11]

• **And the rest!**

Another thing the AWR provide for is equal holiday entitlement, so agency workers will be due 5 days more next year. But if Gi thinks the ex-Manpower

workers will drop the demand to be compensated for the two days of annual leave lost when we were transferred over, they can think again! [Workers' Fight - BMW Oxford 4/10/11]

• **Weekend work - no thanks**

It's a long way off, but we hear that BMW has been preparing a new shift pattern for 2013. The details are vague, but by all accounts they seem to include shorter shifts but more weekend working. If this is true, let's be clear. We need shorter shifts for our health, not because we're an emergency service. As BMW have ruled out ever having a weekend crew again, they needn't expect us to fill the gap. [Workers' Fight - BMW Oxford 4/10/11]

• **What's the point?**

In Logistics, where permanent workers have been moving in, the agency



workers they are displacing to the lines are not necessarily younger or fitter for line work. So even if Logistics jobs are easier (which isn't guaranteed), this way of using the movement of labour agreement may have the exact opposite effect to what it was meant for. It's the kind of craziness that follows from BMW's long-term abuse of agency labour - and only putting an end to that will sort it out! [Workers' Fight - BMW Oxford 4/10/11]

Greece

Greek public sector workers paralysed the country with another strike, on 5th October, against the latest package of austerity measures. This includes a 20% wage cut in the public sector (in addition to the 15-25% already cut), additional cuts in pensions (on top of a previous 10% cut). Income tax will now be paid even by those on very low incomes and 30,000 public sector workers will be transferred to a "reserve pool" with a 40% wage cut, probably before being sacked altogether. With unemployment already at 23% of the population and the standard of living reduced to what it was 10 years ago, the situation is becoming unbearable.

So, anger breaks out in the streets as can be seen in the TV footage of the protests taking place,

Anger in the streets

Clashes between students and police during a recent protest

more or less every day in the main towns. And yes, the Greek workers

are right to refuse to pay for their bosses' crisis! ☐

• **A "bailout"... for the banks only**

Even if it is being used to impose yet another set of austerity measures on the population, the so-called "bailout" of Greece by the European Union - which has now been delayed - is a relatively small loan (£7bn) compared to the £96bn bailout package cobbled together by the IMF and EU, in May 2010. Above all, this loan is primarily designed to ensure that Greece meets its huge interest payments to international banks.

Here, the media and Con-Dems have urged the EU to "deal with the problems of the eurozone" as a matter of urgency, for fear that these problems might "contaminate" the British economy. But their main concern is that British banks, which are up to their necks in making fat profits out of the debt of small countries like Greece, should not loose out - like RBS which is earning an exorbitant 20% interest on its nearly £1bn of loans to the Greek government!

The crass nationalism of those who blame the eurozone for Britain's economic mess is merely a thin cover for the British banks' parasitism on the rest of the world. ☐

• **Property tax may be unplugged**

The Greek government has announced a new property tax. Yet another blow for a working population already reeling from the consequences of 2 rounds of austerity cuts. This tax has been compared to Thatcher's poll tax and will be levied through electricity bills. It will cost the average household an extra €1,000, a 320% increase! But it may not be so easy for the government to implement it. The Communist Party and the militant electricity workers'

union have mounted a "can't pay, won't pay" campaign and say they would stop people's electricity from being cut off, if this "barbaric new tax" is implemented.

So those rich Brits with 2nd or 3rd holiday homes on a Greek island, who are outraged at the idea of being hit by this tax (designed to catch them) may well have to thank "the working class enemy" i.e., unions and "communists" in Greece if the tax collection system is sabotaged!

WORKERS' FIGHT PUBLIC MEETING

THE "EMERGING" ECONOMIES myths and realities in the capitalist crisis

**Saturday 22nd October
1.45pm**

**lower meeting room
Wesley's Chapel
49, City Road, London
EC1Y 1AU
(tube: Old Street)**

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.