

WORKERS' fight

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

WAGE CUTS, RISING PRICES, TIME TO ACT!

Britain's big companies ended the year 2011 having paid a record £67bn worth in dividends, while sitting on a cash pile worth over £240bn.

By contrast, working class households ended the year with record low savings and record high debts. Even those in work had their standards of living slashed, as wages rose by far less than the 5% plus inflation level - when they were not frozen or cut. And to make matters worse, the new year started with another raft of price and fare increases.

A general attack on wages

Over the past year, the capitalists have used inflation, together with job and pension cuts, to make us pay for their crisis. Inflation allows the bosses to protect (or even increase) their profit margins by increasing prices, while reducing their real wage costs. This leaves workers to foot the bill with a reduced purchasing power. And, despite the Bank of England's repeated pledge that inflation will "soon" be brought down to its 2% target, there is no sign of this happening.

Now, however, there are more and more attempts by employers to go further than that, by imposing outright wage cuts on workers.

The first attacks came in the public sector, especially in local government. In Birmingham, Southampton and Doncaster, among others, council workers were given the "choice" between signing up to new lower paid contracts, or facing the sack.

More attacks have emerged since, in the private sector. In construction, over 5,000 electricians are threatened with a wage cut which could reach up to 35% for some. Likewise, just as it was hailing rising sales and profits, car manufacturing giant Ford announced plans to introduce a 2-tier system within its workforce, with new starts



earning 25% less for the same job.

Other companies, including big ones - like some train operating companies and car manufacturers BMW and Jaguar-Land-Rover, among others - have taken advantage of a tailored-made "loophole" in the European Agency Workers directive, to create another form of 2-tier system in the shape of lower paid "permanent temps".

The class struggle is the answer

Whether we listen to the ConDems or to Labour, we hear the same tune: solving unemployment depends on boosting the bosses' profits by driving down labour costs. The only difference between them, is that, to "encourage" companies, the ConDems want to slash workers' rights, whereas Labour proposes an employers' National Insurance Contributions holiday.

As if the capitalists could be part of the solution for a problem which they, themselves, have created! Today, profits are comparable to pre-crisis levels. Has this led the bosses to re-hire the

hundreds of thousands they made redundant over the past three years? Of course not!

Far from investing, companies carry on closing facilities and extracting as much sweat as they possibly can, out of a much reduced workforce. This is how they restored their profits - thanks to increasing workers' exploitation.

What today's attacks against wages show, is that having boosted their profits by reducing the headcount as much as possible, the bosses are now aiming to boost them even more by screwing the wages of remaining workers.

Cameron made a point of telling us that the coming year will be "difficult". But we can make it "difficult" for the exploiters too. The capitalists can be forced to use their huge stockpile of wealth to create the jobs which are vitally needed and pay decent, inflation-proofed wages. 2012 could be the year when, by using the weapons of the class struggle, the working class stops the bosses' profit drive and starts regaining the ground lost. □ (10 Jan 2012)

What they mean by "job market stability"

"Official" unemployment in the three months to October reached 2.64m - its highest for 17 years - and youth unemployment reached a new record at over 1 million (nearly 22%).

Employment fell by 252,000, to 29.07m - the largest fall for more than two years. 67,000 more public sector jobs were cut during that period. Clearly the private sector is not absorbing those made unemployed

by Osborne's cuts, as he claimed it would.

Self-employment rose by 166,000, reaching its highest level since 1992. This probably represents more bosses telling workers to go self-employed or be sacked, as a means of cutting on labour costs and by-passing employment laws. This may also explain why the claimant count for November rose by 3,000,

instead of the 10,000 increase which had been predicted.

Employment minister Chris Grayling claimed the figures showed the job market was "stabilising". As if such a huge pool of jobless and casuals could somehow be a good thing - except for the bosses, of course, who try to use it to push workers' conditions down.

• Cameron clutches at economic froth

So desperate are the ConDems for "good news" on employment that Cameron made a point of welcoming the 5,000 new jobs to be created by Starbucks, in 100 new stores and 200 drive-throughs.

Since the start of the crisis, hundreds of thousands of jobs providing necessary goods and services, have disappeared, many as a direct result of government decisions. Yet here was Cameron making a big deal out of a prospect - vanilla latte at every big road junction - that addresses no real social need. Yet that would be

the first criterion for economic decisions, if private profit were out of the way.

• Apprenticeships scam

The government provided £1.4bn to fund apprenticeships to help reduce unemployment among the young. Predictably, apprenticeship programmes mushroomed as a result. Last autumn a variety of "fast-track" apprenticeship schemes, some lasting as little as 12 weeks, were criticised as inadequate. In December the government announced a minimum period of one year for apprenticeships taking on 16-18 year-olds, and told the National Apprenticeship Service to look

into extending this to other age groups - although duration is no guarantee of quality either.

Not only can employers get subsidies. They can also use these schemes to pay for the training they need and, above all, to cut the wages of existing workers, by taking advantage of the derisory minimum wage for apprentices. They can be paid as little as £2.60/hr for the first year (or for an entire apprenticeship for under 19s) - which is probably why in 2010-11, the bosses took on 174,900 people aged over 25 as apprentices, including 3,510 who were over 60!

• Stephen Lawrence verdict: no victory

A guilty verdict after 18 years, against only 2 of the white gang members who slew Stephen Lawrence while he was waiting at a bus stop in South London? No, that is no triumph for justice, British or otherwise!

Of course for Mrs Lawrence, who so long campaigned against the police's deliberate mishandling of the investigation, and managed to get the MacPherson inquiry to come out against "police institutional racism", this verdict must be a relief, even though the case is by no means resolved. But as she said herself, and

contrary to police chiefs' claims, this does not mean things have changed. Ask the family of Mark Duggan, the 29-year old black man who was summarily executed by cops last August, whose family was refused any answers by the police, resulting in the protest which prefaced the summer riots. Or ask black teenagers in London who are stopped and searched 9 times more frequently than whites. Racism is part of this unequal society - it is a function of capitalism and won't disappear until this system does.

• Oxford: racial discrimination and social injustice

An intake of 32 students in 2012 is the highest number of African/Caribbean applicants admitted to Oxford University for 10 years. Those admitted amounted to 14% of all black applications (compared to 8.8% the previous year), while 24.1% of white applicants were admitted. Being African/Caribbean is clearly not an advantage in this elitist institution.

Not only is it more difficult for black students applying to Oxford to be admitted, but there are also proportionally fewer of them: while

2.9% of the population is of African/Caribbean origin, they make up only 1.8% of Oxford applicants. Of course, over 50% of Oxford students come from private schools which are the preserve of the better-offs - and unaffordable for most black families.

The dismal number of black students at Oxford is yet another reflection of the combination of racial and social discrimination which permeates this society, whatever the champions of political correctness may claim.

• Honours for the stinking rich boys

The annual "honours list" is supposed to recognize achievement and services rendered. Paul Ruddock, co-founder and chief exec of Lansdowne Partners Limited has just been knighted. Indeed, his hedge fund "rendered the service" of betting against Northern Rock and helping to bankrupt it. Another "savory" character is Gerald Ronson, a property tycoon who went to jail for the Guinness insider trading scandal.

In that list, we also find Peter Bazalgette, the TV producer responsible for the showing of Big Brother, together with former boss of Tesco, David Reid and current boss of GlaxoSmithKline, the pharmaceutical company, Andrew Witty.

And the list goes on, including many more who've rendered great "services" to their own very well-lined pockets! The ConDem government probably imagines its honour awards will cover the stench with a whiff of respectability. But we know rot when we smell it.

NHS

While the Coalition's 2010 NHS reform Bill has still to be passed, ministers are nevertheless trying to push forward its main aims - i.e., expansion of the private health sector.

An amendment is thus tabled to allow NHS hospital trusts to raise 49% of their funding via provision of facilities to private patients. Of course, the private healthcare sector is mostly unable to provide its patients with necessary specialist/intensive care all in one place: the scale of investment required would cut into their profits too much! So, if they can get it on the cheap from the NHS (and then charge the earth!), all the better.

However, many NHS hospitals can't even meet the needs of NHS

Even more privatisation?



And they want to add private patients to NHS queues??

patients, due to funding deficits caused, in particular, by the £20bn of cuts imposed on them. So how

could these hospitals be expected to meet the needs of private patients in addition? □

Letter from Sussex

In the last General Election, The Tories lost Eastbourne Constituency to the Lib-Dems, after Lib-Dem candidate Stephen Lloyd accused sitting MP, Nigel Waterson of being an "expenses scandal MP", despite his having been exonerated by the enquiry. Waterson has finally carried out his threat to sue Lloyd and he won his case in December, leaving Lloyd facing costs of £60,000, plus damages.

There have since been calls for Lloyd's resignation, while Waterson insists that he doesn't want to overturn the results of the election (would he refrain from standing if Lloyd did resign, though?). The two seem intent on demonstrating that there is no difference between them. Why bother? This was obvious, even before their two parties got into bed together!

Meanwhile, there may be another "expenses" scandal in the tube. The East Sussex NHS Trust is required to make savings of £30 million, this year, so what does it do? Spend £4.1 million on outside consultants, to help them make the savings, so that they now claim they will "have" to cut £34.1 million in services!

• It's bad already, what if it gets worse?

It's the health and social care of older people, shoved into private nursing homes or NHS wards where they are neglected, which is suffering the most due to NHS decline. We have repeated scandals of unfed patients, left to lie in their excrement, due to lack of staff. Homes and hospitals (private and NHS) aren't inspected by the bodies meant to act as a smokescreen for government policy. This was exposed when the Quality Care Commission itself failed to inspect even half the institutions in its remit. Even the chief of the NHS Confederation, criticises the Coalition. He

points to the 25% of elderly patients occupying hospital beds, blaming an "outdated hospital model of care", and claims they'd be "better cared for in the community" - the old bugbear of "bed blocking"! But why not suggest remodelling hospital care, so it's up-to-date? Chronic underfunding and privatisation - deliberate policies ever since the 1980s, exacerbated by the austerity cuts undermine all care. At this rate, one has to wonder what'll be left, in the hospitals or the community, if the government gets its way, which is why it must not.

• Helping the health profiteers

The Office for Fair Trading is referring the private health sector to the Competition Commission, as it is not transparent enough! It wants all the privateers to compete openly. "Patient demand and choice" should rule, which apparently would keep the £s rolling into the private companies' coffers. The stakes are high: the sector is worth £5bn/yr already.

Of course the issue is not patient's "choice", whether private or public. This referral is purely for the benefit of the "Big 5": General Healthcare, Spire Healthcare, Nuffield Health, HCA International and Ramsay Healthcare UK. If they're to profit

from the Con-Dems' new framework, they'll need to have all their wares on display for GP commissioners, which the NHS would then pay for.

Circle Health, run by former Goldman Sachs banker Ali Parsa and the first private operator to take over an NHS district hospital campaigned for this OFT initiative. The 2,500 hospital staff who have shares in this Virgin Island-registered, currently loss-making "venture" may well live to regret their "investment". But patients will always be the losers in the private healthcare world: profiteering is dangerous to health.

• Playing fast and loose with safety

In April 2011 the government launched a "Red Tape Challenge" for examples of "unnecessary and burdensome" regulation - especially regarding health and safety - to be highlighted on the web. Then last November a Professor Lofstedt published a commissioned report recommending the abolition of at least 200 health and safety rules. It suggests the

exclusion of the self-employed from H&S regulation if their activities don't endanger anyone else (presumably if they endanger themselves it's OK).

Among other "simplifications", the reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations of 1995 (RIDDOR) is to be clarified, reviewed and amended. And although falling from heights today accounts for the greatest number of workplace injuries and deaths in the construction industry,

the regulations for "Work at Height" are also to be "simplified".

Of course all of this has nothing to do with improving health and safety. It is all about reducing cost to business and thus taking us back to the days when there were hundreds of workplace injuries and deaths every year - 651 fatalities in 1974 before the Health and Safety at Work Act first came in, compared to 171 last year - which is still too many.

Eurozone crisis - a capitalist quagmire

So far, the eurozone governments have been unable to agree on measures allowing them to contain the on-going speculation threatening weaker members like Greece with bankruptcy.

However, contrary to what the Eurosceptics of every shade, with their narrow nationalist prejudices, would have us believe, this paralysis is not due to the common currency itself. After all, following the euro's

launch, ten years ago, these same Eurosceptics had predicted its imminent collapse. They were proved wrong. Not only did the euro live on, but the eurozone has grown from 12 to 17 countries since.

For the Eurosceptics, the eurozone crisis is due to "not enough nationalism". The truth, rather, is the exact opposite. The eurozone is paralysed by national rivalries between governments which are bent

on defending the profits of their respective big companies - and especially, their big banks. Ultimately, by generating such artificial national rivalries, even in the context of the relatively more rational economic framework created by the euro, capitalist profit is the real problem - in the eurozone, just as much as it is in Britain! ☐

• Euro posturing

"Bulldog" Cameron's walk-out at Brussels made the headlines in Britain - which was obviously what his spin-doctors wanted. It was even described by the usual suspects in the media as some sort of "victory" - over whom, they didn't say, though!

But doesn't Cameron's posturing seem rather paradoxical? On the one hand, he keeps repeating that the only real threat to the British economy (which would be fine otherwise) is a eurozone meltdown. But when attending a summit in which remedies aimed at preventing such a meltdown are being discussed, he chooses to walk out, as if the issue was of no concern to him.

So either Cameron considers that playing up to the Eurosceptics' tune is more important than the fate of the British economy, or he's been lying to us about the danger that the eurozone crisis really represents. More likely, it's a combination of both.

• It's not the foreigners wot done it!

In fact even the ConDems' economic expert fan club is having a hard time backing up Osborne's claim that Britain's only problem is the eurozone crisis.

Of course, the figures produced by the Office of National Statistics show that Britain's public debt is currently equivalent to 62% of its GDP - compared to slightly over 70% for France, for instance. But when adding the cost of the bank bailout, the same ONS comes to a very different figure - 150% of GDP, equivalent to that of Greece! Yet, as far as we know, it wasn't the eurozone crisis which caused the bank collapse and bailout, was it?

Ultimately, the only argument that the so-called "experts" can find to paint Osborne's policy in rosier colours is that the ConDems are more "committed to deficit reduction" than their eurozone counterparts. Meaning that they are even more pliable to the interests of big

business? That, we knew already!

• As if they had any credit!

Listening to the battle of figures between Cameron's ministers and their French counterparts over which of the two countries has the most brownie points with speculators, one can only wonder on which planet these people live!

Who cares about whether Britain or France has an AAA rating with financial credit agencies, or a triple zero for that matter? Certainly not the working populations of either country, who are confronted with the same austerity measures, the same attacks on jobs and wages and the same greed on the part of their respective capitalists.

As far as the working classes are concerned - whether French or British - capitalism has lost all credit, assuming it ever had any. This exploitative system is bankrupt and needs to be replaced, period!

• Petrol racket

Osborne made a big show of the ConDems' "generosity" to motorists by scrapping the 3p fuel duty increase announced for January and reducing the 5p increase planned for August to 3p. As if this changed the fact that, over the past year, petrol price has gone up by over 10%!

The first culprit in this astronomical rise remains the government itself, with fuel duty and VAT adding up to 80p per litre (60% of the pump price).

Then come the oil giants which net 37% of the price of each litre (45p) - which goes a long way to

explaining how BP managed to make £5.6bn profits in just 3 months last year, despite the cost of its massive oil spill in Florida.

Rather than all that hot air about "helping motorists", what about a major cut in fuel duty funded by a tax on the oil majors' profits?

• Profit drives fuel poverty

Last year average fuel bills rose by 21% and Scottish and Southern Energy rose gas bills by over a third. And now that company is going to increase the bills further by ending the discount which it used to lure customers into joining online

schemes.

Due to soaring fuel bills, 25% of households are now in fuel poverty - spending over 10% of their income on fuel. 2.5 million are in arrears, the average owed being £320. Many are forced to turn off their heating altogether, contributing to the increasing "excess" in winter deaths, now at 27,000 a year.

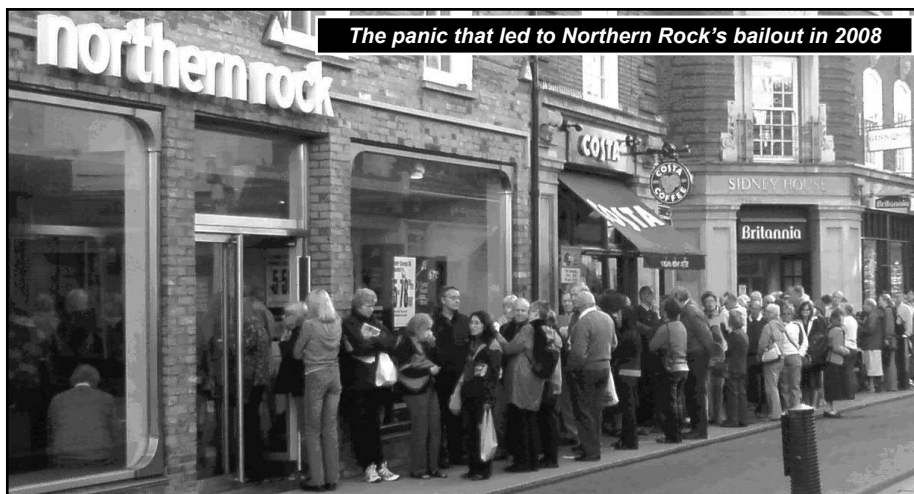
On paper, the government has a legal duty to end fuel poverty by 2016. However, it won't force companies like British Gas (£1.9bn profits last year!) to lower their bills. Instead, it is considering changing the definition of fuel poverty!

The banks' welfare state

Virgin Money will only pay £747m for Northern Rock (bought for £1.4bn by the taxpayer), of which £250m will come from a loan by Northern Rock, meaning that Branson will only fork out £500m in the deal! The cost of the bail-out of the bank will have been, therefore, over 3,500 job cuts for the workforce and almost £700m for the taxpayer.

Likewise, for the state-controlled Lloyds and RBS. At today's share prices, the cost of their bailouts is £40bn. As to the cost to the banks' workers, it reaches 43,000 jobs cut at Lloyds and 40,000 at RBS.

In a nutshell, this is how, over the past three years, Labour, Tories and Lib-Dems have presided over the most extensive programme



of welfare for the banks ever seen in this country, all paid for by the

working class with its jobs, welfare provisions and public services. □

• Banking "reform" comes with loopholes

No sooner had the Vickers Report about banking reforms been published - with a view to ring-fencing the low-risk retail sector from the high-risk investment sector - than Chancellor Osborne was offering the banks (HSBC, Barclays and Standard Chartered in particular) a concession.

In order to strengthen the banks' finances, Vickers proposed that 17-20% of all "assets" (i.e. mostly loans in one form or another) should appear in the balance sheets (but still leaving 80-83% unaccounted for!). Not so, says Osborne. Because of their vast holdings abroad, banks should only have to figure their UK

operations in the balance sheets - thus giving them huge additional scope for moving money around for tax and other dodges.

Not that the banks feel under any immediate pressure: the legislation only has to be passed by May 2015, while the date for implementation is undecided!

• Beware, shark-infested waters

The Financial Ombudsman has reported a 400% increase in complaints against so-called payday loan companies. These companies target the "working poor" (and even the unemployed) who are refused loans from banks.

But payday loan companies are very nasty loan sharks who charge ridiculously high interest: from 1990% to 2689% annually - and

quite legally! It may not seem so bad if you're borrowing for a week or two, just until payday. But if you can't pay on time, interests sky rocket - and no state bailout is available for you! This "loan market" is estimated to be "worth" £2bn.

Of course, high street banks also charge high interest for credit card debt, or even for withdrawing cash from an ATM machine - from 23.48%

to as much as 46.19%!

Since our need to borrow is a direct result of the austerity (job cuts, wage cuts, inflated gas, food and transport costs) caused by the bailouts, isn't it high time the sharks were brought to book and made to give us back all the money loaned to them from the public purse? We'd be very reasonable and charge the same interest rates they do...

• House building slows to a crawl

From April to September, work started on only 454 affordable homes - a 97% decrease on the same period last year. Just 56 of these were in London, 22 in north east England and none at all in the north west.

This, despite the fact that the shortage of low-cost housing is causing a growing crisis. Together with high housing prices, this shortage drives more and more

people into private renting, pushing up rents.

As a result, the government's caps on housing benefit, due to kick in this year - without caps on rents - are a social disaster in the making.

It's not that there's a real shortage of houses to use. To deal with the most urgent needs 930,000 empty homes, most which just require some repairs, could be

used.

But instead of the state directly taking take over and organising the refurbishment of these homes, the only measure Osborne has managed to come up with is a £150m budget for others to do the work - which, at just £161 per property, is unlikely to achieve very much!

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Rail fares rising at full speed**

Rail fares are going up by an average 5.9% - or 1% above the Retail Price Index. We're told we shouldn't complain since rail companies were planning an RPI+3% rise before the government stepped in. But when the majority of working people got rises of less than 3% or more often a wage freeze (if not a wage cut) - this fare rise is still a step too far.

The claim that it's for investment is a joke. Investment is heavily government-subsidised including via

Network Rail which is responsible for infrastructure. Most Train Operating Companies don't even invest in more trains, despite the cattle-like conditions at peak hours. They stick to cosmetics - like a lick of paint for trains, or gimmicks to lure more well off passengers to travel in 1st class, like free food on East Coast main-line.

Of course, regulated fares may be capped, but all the others (advance tickets, etc.) can still be increased



by another 5%! In the rest of Europe fares can be as much as 10 times cheaper - but then most European countries (so far, at least) have a non-privatised railways and do not have to feed greedy private shareholders.

• Just a taster

East Coast catering managers had to back down and admit they'd made a mess with the new 1st Class menu, which gave CSAs (stewards) the impossible task of cooking meals on top of serving them. After getting a piece of our mind on it, they hastily agreed to put extra workers on the worst trains for now, pending a permanent solution. If that's what happens when we

say 'boo' to them, what would happen if they got more of a taste of our anger? Because we need even more workers On Board (including chefs) - not to mention everywhere else on the station. [King's X Workers' Platform - 13/12/11]

• No tickets here

The closure of the FCC ticket office causes constant problems for barrier workers on platforms 9-11. When passengers

have problems with the ticket machines or have to be sent to St Pancras to buy a ticket, they take out their aggro on us. Management say they won't have anyone selling tickets here even when the office on the new concourse opens. So the nice new facilities will make no difference for FCC passengers - or us. Perhaps we should put up a big sign directing disgruntled passengers to management's offices? [King's X Workers' Platform - 29/11/11]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• Angered casuals fight for pay**

This year for the 1st time Royal Mail employed its Xmas casuals through its own "Angard" agency, which then, in turn, subcontracted some of its services to Reed Employment.

The shambles started straight away with 110,000 applications for 18,000 jobs - paying a rate which was £1 to £3/hour lower than the previous year.

Then it went from bad to worse. First, many workers who were invited for inductions were sent home

as they weren't "on the list". By the end of the second week fly-by-night Angard/Reed didn't even have the necessary structures in place to pay people.

By the end of week 3, very angry casuals at Mount Pleasant and other offices around the country staged stoppages. This forced RM bosses to jump and they made an interim payment of a £350 voucher, cashable straight away in a Post Office.

Now they promise that everyone's



pay will be sorted by 11 January, but it looks as though Angard/Reed doesn't know who worked where, or when, and this sorry saga is far from over.

• All out?!

Some Casuals went on-line at the special Angard chat forum www.royalmail-chat.co.uk, to expose RM's ignorant and cheap treatment. Given that Xmas mail would be screwed up completely without "Xmas casuals", it's worth us talking to each other face to face, permanent and casual, about getting the wages paid pronto - and what's more, at an equal rate for the job - or else. Something drastic needs doing, and quick. With all of us (or as many as possible) acting together. [Workers' Fight

Mount Pleasant 12/12/11]

• Their interests=our interests

Union leader, Dave Ward told the media that casuals should join the CWU to get protection for their wages. And if they can't or don't manage to, in the 3w they're here, then what? He must have been misquoted... CWU reps at MP always represented casuals without expecting them to join the union. In fact casuals were often told they shouldn't (or crazily, "couldn't") join, but would still get union

support. Obviously, unionised or not, it's in everyone's interests that casuals can rely on the rest of us - and our muscle! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 12/12/11]

• Recruit some more!

There's a real shortage of drivers! In order to collect work in time, all the mail's being combined. It's impossible to segregate after tipping. We get a domino-effect all the way through the process... and all because of a driver shortage which actually dates to way before Xmas! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 12/12/11]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• High time there was a dramatic workers' "turnaround"!**

After making record profits of £4.2bn in the first 9 months of 2011, Ford announced in December that it would pay a dividend to shareholders for the first time in 5 years, at a yearly cost of £520m.

This "dramatic turnaround", resulted in Ford's credit rating going up 2 notches, just below so-called "investment grade", which in layman's language, would mean a guaranteed money-spinner for speculators.

In fact, Ford decided to pay

dividends after it got the US car workers' union to sign up to its latest contract! Because this contract radically cuts workers' conditions and makes what were meant to be temporary concessions permanent - like the 2-tier workforce created in 2007. 2nd tier workers will now stay on 65% of 1st tier wages, flexibility is imposed for skilled workers and inflation-linked rises and bonuses abolished.

Since 2001, the 3 big Detroit car makers have cut jobs from 227,000



to 112,000. While the recession continues, even with somewhat lower car sales, they are screwing so much more out of workers, for so much less, using the excuse of the crisis and playing on the duplicity of the union, that their profits are booming like never before!

• Waiting to vote for strike

Ballot papers for the strike vote against Ford's final "offer" should arrive soon. Anyway that's what we expect... So never mind that the union officials have pissed around and kept us in the dark so far, we won't allow it to effect our determination to stop Ford getting away with this killer deal! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 3/1/12]

• Blowing smoke in our eyes

The Xmas break's too short, but a long

time in politics, so in the unlikely case anyone's forgotten, we're 100% for strike - going all-out and staying out until we've forced Ford to back down completely over pensions and 2nd tier. Behind a 6% pay carrot (only 0.8% above RPI) and 20% on retirement lump sum, Ford is hiding an attack which could change everything we've relied on for decades! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 3/1/12]

• Murdering our pensions

Ford plans to kill our final salary pension scheme stone dead in the long term,

starting by closing it to new hires on 1 Jan 2013. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 3/1/12]

• Butchering wages & conditions

Ford also plans to push down all our wage rates and conditions by bringing in a lower-paid second tier of workers - all new hires from 1 April 2012, will be on a "distinct standard grade rate" of around £2/hr less. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 3/1/12]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• No, to a two-tier workforce!**

BMW is using the current round of pay talks for a twin-assault on 7,000 workers at its British plants.

Just as existing agency workers (over a third in production) are looking forward to an extra £4000/yr due to the long-delayed implementation of the Agency Workers' Directive, BMW wants to use the so-called Swedish derogation to cut the wages of future agency workers! They would be employed permanently by the agency, paid lower wages and

have minimal protection.

BMW also wants to close the pension scheme to new starters. The fund would be kept open for existing workers, but its value would fall as payments dwindle. Clearly it would only be a matter of time before it was shut down altogether.

Unusually, Unite, the plant's main union, has been distributing leaflets indicating its intention to oppose the company on both accounts. Whether it actually proposes any form of



action remains to be seen. But one thing is certain: BMW made record profits last autumn. There is no reason it should be allowed to get away with these attacks.

• Where did that come from?

How can BMW claim the right to run the plant every Saturday next month (Jan) and up to 41 Saturdays in the year? This time it would be compulsory, whatever the state of our "Working Time Accounts"! The Unite brief for December raises more questions than it answers. For instance: BMW "do not have to renegotiate a shift

that has already been agreed, voted on and as such, entered into a collective agreement". Agreed and voted on when? If we ever voted to let BMW drag us in nearly every Saturday, if they wished, we never knew it! [BMW Mini Oxford 13/12/11]

• What the Agency Workers' Directive doesn't include

As February agency workers will get a

pay "rise" worth a couple of quid per hour on Earlies and the shift premium on Lates adds another pound. No doubt this will help pay the bills, but let's not forget what it doesn't include: pension, sick pay, security of contract and what amounts to tens of thousands owing for the years we've worked after BMW rattled on its original promises to give us contracts. [BMW Mini Oxford 13/12/11]

Pensions

Two million public sector workers went on strike on November 30th. If David Cameron dismissed this as a "damp squib", he was just politicking - even schools attended by cabinet ministers' children, like Education Secretary Michael Gove and Chancellor George Osborne, were among the 90% of schools in London hit by the action. Cameron can't have failed to notice, either, the 20,000 strikers who marched through central London, in just one of hundreds of marches and rallies held around the country.

Overall, about 75% of schools were affected. At least one-third of local government workers joined the strike. In the civil service, up to 90% walked out in some departments. And if it was such an anti-climax, why did the government ban the NHS from releasing

November 30th: a successful strike which needs a follow-up



figures on the impact of the strike on the health service?

Unite general secretary Len McCluskey declared that the strike

should be "a beginning, not an end". Too true. So when is he, along with the other union leaders, going to translate these words into action? ☐

• Sell-out in the frame?

After the strike, having made some concessions, the government tried to get union leaders to accept a new "framework" for an agreement on pensions. Minor details would be "negotiable" but the government would still not budge on the main issues - workers having to pay more and work longer for a smaller pension.

Unite and the civil service union, PCS, rejected this - for the time being. The two largest teaching unions, NUT and NASUWT, and UCU, the lecturers' union, are considering it. The main public sector union, Unison, agreed to discuss within the framework, and has now accepted to put new proposals for the local government

pension scheme to a "summit" of union executives on 10 January. Similarly, the 16 health union executives will be considering final proposals for the NHS scheme - where several points of agreement have been reached by negotiators.

Public sector schemes were downgraded a few years ago for new entrants, due to concessions made by union leaders. Agreement on the government's terms would be a further sell-out. This could still be stopped however, should workers take matters into their own hands.

• Class war not jaw-jaw

Pensions are not the only issues, as was shown by the new attacks announced by Osborne on the day before the strike.

An extra 310,000 jobs are now to go by 2017, on top of the 400,000 job losses already announced by 2016. When the present 2-year pay freeze ends, there will be a 1% average limit on pay rises for two years. And Osborne wants to replace national pay bargaining with local pay bargaining - to push wages down by means of divide and rule. Finally, the increase in pension age to 67 is to be brought forward to 2026, affecting 8m more people.

This provocation shows that the government didn't get the message. More, but even greater demonstrations of strength than that of November 30th are needed, taking the fight-back much further than pensions alone.

Pensions fight at Unilever

On 9 December, 2,500 Unilever workers staged a 24hr walkout for the first time ever, over the company's plans to end their final salary pension scheme, and replace it with a lower-paying "career average" scheme, after closing it to new entrants in 2008. Three years on, Unilever's promise to protect the pensions of existing members turned out to be a lie.

Unilever is a huge multinational, with over 500 brands, including household names like Wall's, PG Tips, Flora, Pot Noodle, Knorr, Marmite, Bovril, Colman's, Hellman's, Brylcreem, Dove, Lynx, Vaseline, Persil, Surf, Comfort, Domestos and Cif - to name quite a few! Last year, it increased profits by over 20%, to £6.1bn! The top boss got a package

worth £3.6m! Never mind, though, after the strike, management cancelled workers' Christmas parties, hampers and vouchers - which only made them even more determined to fight these Scrooges.

The officials of the 3 unions involved have now threatened 12 more strike days starting on 17 January. Workers have every reason to hold a Magnum (another Unilever product!) to the heads of these bosses.

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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