

# WORKERS' fight



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

## FARE AND PRICE HIKES, TIME TO PUT WAGES ON THE AGENDA!

The year 2012 came to a close with Osborne's carefully packaged poison "Xmas gifts". Put in a nutshell, shareholders were awarded a £2bn a year hand-out - all paid for by shrinking the benefits of the low-paid and jobless over the next three years!

The year 2013 has now begun - this time, with more poisoned gifts prepared by the ConDems' City sponsors. It all started on January 1st, with yet another transport fare hike, and others are due to follow - from gas and electricity, to telephones and insurance.

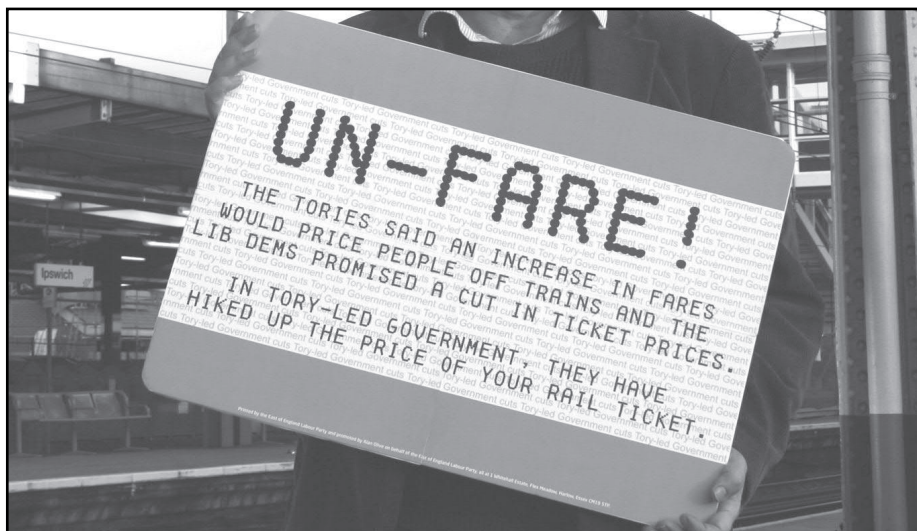
### ***Their profiteering is just too costly!***

Transport is an important budget item for many working class households, especially in the big cities, where those who are forced to move out in search of cheap housing are also forced to commute into work.

Yet, while this January's fare increase is 3.9% for daily tickets (half as much as inflation), it is 4.3% for commuter season tickets. But these are only averages. On some commuter routes, fares have risen by up to 12%! Ironically, though, some of the most expensive season tickets are on the most congested routes!

This has been the standard pattern over the past decade. Governments have allowed it year after year - so much so that, today, Britain's trains are the most expensive in Europe, by very far, while being among the least comfortable and reliable!

There is, however, logic in this madness - the logic of the market. The private train operating companies simply bank on the fact that many many workers can't afford to drive to work. Just as they bank on the fact that if a route is congested, there will always be enough passengers to keep profits



rolling, even if they are forced to pay through the nose! And, since privatisation, the companies have been able to get away with this crude profiteering thanks to the complicity of every government.

Never mind if, as a result, some workers may lose 10, 15, or even 25% of their wages, just for the sake of commuting into work!

### ***We won't pay for their profits!***

What is true for transport is just as valid for all the main bills which eat up workers' budgets.

The price cuts for consumers promised at the time of privatisation didn't happen. In the privatised services, a few giant companies built up a dominant position, allowing them to increase prices, while starving the infrastructure of investment and maintenance.

Such is the state of play today. Obviously, the way forward would be to bring back under public ownership

all the services that are socially useful. Except that, in this society, "public ownership" does not mean "run in the interest of the public". Instead, like the NHS, services are milch-cows for a galaxy of profit sharks which drain their budgets without delivering very much in return.

No, it is another kind of "public ownership" that will be needed, exercised under the direct control of the working class, at every level of society, to counter the capitalist sharks who cause the chaos and injustices in this society.

But, in the meantime, the working class has to defend itself against the attacks it is facing - including against these price increases. After the years of crisis-led wage cuts and casualisation, we must hope that 2013 will be the year when the struggle for decent, inflation-proofed wages will resume with a vengeance, across all sections of the working class. That is the way forward today! □

## No cap for London homelessness

The number of homeless households with children and/or pregnant women dumped in London's B&Bs, is rising, according to official figures. After doubling to 2,640 between 2010 and 2011, it doubled again in the first 6 months of 2012 (and this doesn't take into account the many "concealed" homeless

households forced to live with relatives). Over the same 6 months, 820 London homeless households were stuck in B&Bs for over six weeks before alternative accommodation was found for them - more than for the whole of 2011!

The only response of housing minister, Mark Prisk, to this dire

situation, was to blame it on councils, accusing them of "unlawful and unacceptable" practices. Pretty rich coming from the government that has capped housing benefits, despite the 33% rent increase in London since 2010, and which has allowed landlords to increase evictions by 70% in the past year! ☐

### • Internal deportees

The capping of housing benefit means that in many London boroughs, private rented housing is increasingly unaffordable for low-income households. Councils are looking as far away as Cornwall and Newcastle for alternatives. Officially, new homes are supposed to match households' wishes - as if they "wished" to lose proximity to family and friends! But if the alternative is a longer spell in a cramped B&B, do they have any choice?

Housing officials are meant to find the cheapest housing. But low rents are usually in employment black spots. Middlesbrough, for instance, the only place where rents are officially low enough for claimants to have sufficient money left to survive, has a 29% jobless rate! So moving out of London becomes a recipe for joblessness.

Ministers had the nerve to condemn the rush to farm out claimants. As if they weren't responsible for the whole

shambles in the first place. What hypocrisy!

### • Locked up without a view?

Hackney Council's disused lock-up garages could soon be converted into bedsits (with loo and shower). With every fifth garage converted into a laundry, kitchen and dining area, up to 8 people could be accommodated for just £65,000! Other "solutions" could include building on flat-roofed buildings.

No doubt all of these could provide temporary relief - although not enough room to swing a cat. But what an indictment of this decaying capitalism that one of the world's richest cities can only offer shanty-town solutions, while so many offices lie empty and thousands of building workers, who could convert them into quality social housing, are jobless!

### • Squashed-up like sardines

The on-going shortage of housing together with undersized new homes, have

caused a 40% increase in overcrowding over the last 3 years, according to housing charity Shelter. Today families in 1.06m households (5% of the total) are living "cramped" lives. Worst affected are Newham (East London) and parts of Birmingham where one-in-four homes are overcrowded. One of the factors in this situation is the multiplication of "sleep-merchant" landlords who charge exorbitant rents to as many sharing tenants as they can fit in their properties.

As a result, millions of people lack privacy and are more exposed to infections - children, in particular. Almost alone in Western Europe, Britain has no statutory minimum room sizes. No surprise that the average-sized British house has smaller rooms and less space than on the Continent. Even if the government achieves its "170,000 affordable new homes by 2015" - which is doubtful, both in terms of numbers and in terms of "affordability" - it will still fall far short of the population's needs.

## Rent sharks' bonanza

In the 20 months since the ConDems took office in May 2010, the number of households claiming housing benefit increased as much as 50% in the London borough of Bexley, 38% in Enfield and 35% in Newham. Indeed, the combined effect of soaring rents - even in the supposedly "cheaper" outer London Boroughs - and falling wages, underemployment and unemployment,

means that the housing benefits bill, instead of falling, is also soaring despite all attempts to curb it by caps, etc. It rose above £9bn for the first time ever in 2010/11 and is expected to be £9.4bn in 2011/12. And all that it means is that Londoners - who are in work but not earning enough to live, are being forced in ever-increasing numbers to claim

welfare support.

So, far from reducing public spending, the ongoing failure to provide enough low-cost social housing pushed spending on housing benefit up more than ever. But then, doing nothing to resolve the housing shortage also pumps ever more money into the pockets of wealthy private landlords, doesn't it? ☐

### • Computer glitch or cold feet?

The government's plan to cap benefits at £500/week per household from next April, has been postponed for 6 months to October, except in 4 London boroughs. The DWP says the phasing would ensure a "smooth transition", amid speculation that there is a problem getting the computer software ready in time.

Concerns have been raised about the effects of the cap, even by government supporters. The minister for local government, Eric Pickles, along with several of the Tories "pet" councils raised fears that up to 40,000 people could be made homeless. Providing emergency

accommodation could cost as much as the cap is supposed to save! As more details emerge of other consequences - like the kinds of claimants who will lose money, including carers for people with complex needs, the government may well be trying to find a good excuse not to go ahead.

### • How they see it

"Lord" David Freud, advisor to the ConDems on welfare reform, accused the benefits system of allowing people to "have a lifestyle" at state expense. According to Freud, this discourages the poor from "taking risks" - as if "risk" was the issue when living hand-to-mouth!

Such crass nonsense is no surprise coming from Freud, a former high-flying investment banker at Swiss banking giant UBS, who was first brought into government by Blair to advise Labour on welfare. Forcing single mothers into employment and giving private companies a role in welfare administration, were his ideas. More than most ministers he represents the utter parasitism of capital - including on the most vulnerable.

But Freud has not been slapped down by his colleagues. His comments echo Osborne's - claiming that the jobless sleep in while the neighbours go to work. Freud was merely articulating the government's total contempt for the poorest.

## "Triple-dip recession"? No, on-going crisis!

One of the main "announcements" in Osborne's Autumn Statement was his admission that, despite £59bn worth of cuts over two years, partly through tax rises but mostly through expenditure and welfare cuts, the government's "structural deficit" actually increased, instead of the 2/3 reduction he had promised!

Politicians never admit they're groping in the dark when it comes to

a capitalist economy driven by chaotic profiteering. But one didn't need to be a rocket scientist to predict that cutting the income of the working class while reducing corporation tax, would reduce the tax intake of the state. Nor that companies and banks would use the cash they got from the government to line shareholders' pockets rather than to invest or lend to the economy.

So, now, experts are rushing to Osborne's rescue. Apparently we've entered a "triple-dip recession" - so there must have been a rise in the economy (thanks to Osborne!) to dip from! What a load of cobblers! There never was a recovery for the working class over all these years - just one long crisis! But if profits recover, nothing else matters for these politicians and their "experts"! ☐

### • Means-tested cuts... in reverse

The TUC has worked out that by April 2017, the ConDems' austerity measures will have cut the income of the poorest 10% of households by almost a third - whereas the income of the richest 10% will have been cut by just 2.5%.

The reason is obvious. Together with welfare - which affects only the poorest - the other largest area of cuts is local services, which are mainly used by working

### • A tax net to trap the poorest

In his Autumn Statement, George Osborne increased, once again, the squeeze on the poorest. He announced a 3-year restriction of annual welfare benefit increases to 1%, instead of pegging it to inflation. Only pensions and disability benefits are exempt, so this will affect not just the unemployed, but anyone receiving in-work tax credits.

This didn't stop Osborne from claiming that his tax measures were "fair" and the pain would be shared. More

class households. On average, by April 2015, council funding will already have been cut by 28%. But these cuts are very uneven. According to a survey of 330 councils carried out by Newcastle city council, the 50 most affected councils include some of the most deprived (like Hackney, Liverpool and South Tyneside) with an average £160/yr worth of cuts per head. Whereas the 50 councils least

affected (with cuts averaging £16/yr per head) included well-off towns such as Wokingham, Richmond and Elmbridge.

That the ConDems' motto - "we're all in it together" - was a con, is nothing new. But to what extent has never been so clear. The truth is that only the capitalists are "all in it together" - to rip us off!

specifically, he pointed to the increase in personal tax allowance, to £9,440 - £235 more than previously announced.

Ignoring the fact that this won't help those who earn too little to pay tax (but will, in many cases, be hit by the planned cuts in welfare benefits), Osborne boasted that it was "a direct boost to the incomes of people working hard".

Really? When, in the best of cases, this amounts to a "hand-out" worth just £5.34 per week - as if this was worth

writing home about!

But for many low-income households claiming means-tested benefits, this "hand-out" will be reduced to pennies. Because their entitlement is based on their wages after tax, their benefits will be cut and, for them, Osborne's "hand-out" could come down to as little as 80p per week!

So much for the politicians' "fairness". They obviously don't use the same language as the rest of us!

### • Carrot for the wealthy but no stick...

Osborne made no bones about it. This December, he gave business the biggest handout ever. He cut corporation tax another 1%, on top of the 2% in April - so it's now just 21% - in line with Luxembourg. As he boasted, it's lower than just about everywhere else (except Ireland which is 12%)! It's 40% in the US, 33% in France, 29% in Germany!

So, on the one hand the government "has to" cut services and jobs to shreds to "save" money, and on the other it can splash out generous handouts to the already rich. Oh, there's meant to be method in this apparent madness: this will stimulate the rich businessmen to invest in the economy, create jobs and we will all be happy. Except they don't invest. They pocket the difference. They give shareholders

bonanzas, or they put it all on the stockmarket roulette wheel. As for the tax evaders, they're being offered an amnesty if they make a one-off rock-bottom payment - and anonymity to boot! Just as well, because it may just turn out that most of the tax crooks are not "foreigners" like Starbucks and Google - but true blue Brits.

### • Small change

Osborne made much of cracking down on tax evasion to help plug the budget deficit, claiming that it would raise £7.5bn. Not only is this peanuts, compared with the gifts he gave to the rich with the other hand, but it isn't even a serious attempt to close the tax loopholes.

HM Revenue and Customs has announced it will be offering

favourable settlement terms to some of the wealthiest who hide their money from the taxman in various "tax avoidance" schemes. In other words, instead of being chased for the full amount, these tax cheats will be let off the hook for a fraction of what they owe.

The big accountancy firms, who aid and abet this large-scale tax-dodging, will not be penalised either. The likes of PWC, Deloitte and KPMG still get plenty of government contracts. And the ex-chairman of KPMG's UK division, who retired in August with a £3m golden handshake, is to lead the new Financial Conduct Authority, which is supposed to regulate the behaviour of the financial giants. With this poacher turned gamekeeper in charge, the tax-avoidance merry-go-round is certain to carry on!

## "Record employment"? Record under-employment, more like!

November's employment figures showed growing contradictions. While the government boasted that 100,000 more people were "in work" and the rate of unemployment fell during July-September (the period of the Olympics and Paralympics), the numbers of long-term unemployed also increased by 33,000. The more up-to-date claimant count, for October, was also up by 10,100.

Indeed, nearly half of the record increase in employment was in part-time jobs, and more than a fifth of it was owing to government so-called "work experience schemes". The total number of hours worked increased, but lagged far behind the rise in numbers of jobs. In other words, while this "rise in employment" may reflect that there may be a few more "jobs being worked", it

also indicates firstly, that the same people may be counted over and over again because they have to work more than one job to make a living - and secondly, that they probably cannot find jobs which provide them with enough working hours to make ends meet.

This is the real story and the real contradiction hidden in the government's statistics. □



### "Dirt cheap Britain"

Over the past months many more "real" jobs have gone. UBS, the Swiss bank, is cutting 3,000 in London. In retail, the latest casualty is Comet - 6,600 jobs at risk. JJB Sports cut 2,000 jobs in October - following the bankruptcy of Clintons Cards, Peacocks, Game, and Blacks Leisure.

As for manufacturing, yet another closure is looming - Portsmouth's BAE shipyard, with 1,500 jobs. Ford already announced the closure of two plants - at Dagenham and in Southampton - plus other white collar redundancies, with a total 2,600 job cuts. The monthly average of jobs lost? Probably around 12-15,000, at least! So over the year, 180,000?

Permanent jobs are disappearing fast and they're only replaced with jobs which place workers in the rut of temping, or agency work (or as self-contractors!) from which they can't afford to emerge - because they may not get re-employed and half-a-job is better than no job at all! As they say, "labour is dirt cheap in Britain" - or so it has become - and, crisis or not, the capitalists enjoy rising profits. Something needs to be done about this!

### • Self-employment: the construction scam

Since 2008 the proportion of self-employed workers in Britain has grown to a record 14%. The bulk of the increase is among people over 50, who find it hardest to get new jobs and/or cannot afford to retire. But further fuelling the trend are companies dodging tax and National Insurance by forcing their workers to go self-employed - which means, among other things, they lose their pension and Health & Safety protection.

Posing as a building company, researchers for construction union UCATT contacted several payroll companies asking for help saving labour costs. Most of the replies offered to help make workers self-employed while still working

exclusively for the firm, under a HMRC scheme specific to construction. Workers register their status and sign a contract with the payroll company which then "engages" them. In some cases the payroll company's fees can even be deducted from the workers' wages.

UCATT estimates that fake self-employment costs the exchequer £2bn a year. HMRC states that working for the same company continuously and exclusively is not genuine self-employment. But it has more than halved the number of compliance reviews of employment status since 2009 - obviously the government doesn't really want to know!

### • Workfare: not dead, just hidden

After several companies walked away from government employment schemes (like the Work Programme, which compels the unemployed to do 30hrs unpaid labour/week to retain their benefits), the ConDems want to stop the same thing happening again. So the DWP is resisting a Freedom of Information ruling that the names of companies still using the programme should be made public.

According to the government's own figures, between 1 June 2011 and the end of July this year 877,800 people were referred to the Work Programme and only 31,240 people (or 3.4%!) got jobs. If they'd done this evaluation June

to May, rather than June to July, the figure would drop even lower - to 2.5%!

What's at stake for government and bosses? First, those forced onto schemes aren't counted as unemployed in the first 4 weeks. Second, there's lots of filthy lucre for the welfare-to-work "industry": yes, there is one (with its own trade body, the Employment Related Services Association) and it managed to earn between £3,700 and £13,700 a piece, for "providing employment" to more than 200,000 jobseekers! Significantly, the notorious G4S is among these "dole sharks", with 3 DWP contracts, worth £200m!!

### • "The Apprentice": soon at a company near you...

The government has decided to fund 30 companies to the tune of £25m - to subsidise apprenticeships. Or so it says. It suggests that like in the old days, lawyers and accountants shouldn't get university degrees. Instead they should just "learn on the job". So bosses would get "tailor-made" workers. And how much cheaper that would be, with a statutory minimum rate for an apprentice in his or her first year - or if under 19 - at just £2.65/hour!!

This latest apprenticeship scheme sounds so interesting to the bosses, that an accountancy giant like

PriceWaterhouseCoopers, which specialises in helping bosses to cut costs, is planning to cut its own, by developing a "master's level" apprenticeship, lasting up to 8 years!

Of course bosses don't want to pay for even the most basic investment in training - and the government has always stepped in to "help". But this subsidised cheap labour, which they can use and abuse for years, instead of the already qualified and experienced (but so much more "expensive") workers which companies had to rely upon up to now - well, what an answer to the bosses' prayers!

## Thalidomide's makers get away with murder

Fifty-one years after the drug Thalidomide, taken for "morning sickness" in the 1950s, was withdrawn for causing birth defects, an additional £80m funding was announced by the government this December, for 325 survivors (now entering their sixties) in England. This is meant to cover their needs for the next 10 years - fulfilling "society's responsibility" to them, according to Health minister Norman Lamb. So that's it? But how about the responsibility of the wealthy drug companies who make these killer-drugs? Are they not part of Lamb's "society"?

In fact the distributor of Thalidomide - now Diageo - paid compensation during the 1970s and again after court battles in 2005. But Germany's Grunenthal, which made it, never took responsibility for its 20,000 victims worldwide - born with deformed/absent limbs; sight and



hearing loss. In September 2012, finally, its CEO unveiled a memorial statue to victims while making this incredible statement: "We ask that you regard our long [50-year!] silence as a sign of the silent shock that your fate has caused us." So silent and so

shocking that Grunenthal's shareholders - today benefiting from annual profits of around £800m - never noticed even a hiccup after its lethally flawed research caused one of the worst medical disasters in history!

### • House of privilege

The House of Lords is about to get bigger, as the main parties prepare to create dozens more peers. With the additional appointees, it will reach 900 - larger than the combined houses of India's parliament, which are supposed to represent more than twenty times as many people. This actually makes it the biggest governmental assembly in the world!

It's not long since the government dropped its promise to reduce the chamber to 300 elected members, due to opposition from Tory backbenchers. Despite all the talk about reform over the years, the Lords just keeps growing and growing, as the parties in power try to get more of their own into it. And what for? Already an elected body like the Commons stands out for its failure to represent the interests of the working class majority of the population. Why should there be any place for another body, which is not even elected? There's a simple solution - scrap it!

### • All in the same crooked gang

Peter Mandelson, Labour peer and ex-business secretary, has been appointed chairman of investment bank Lazard. And ("Lord") Myners, ex-Labour minister, is back to his original career - joining the board of Megafon, the Russian mobile phone operator. Well, almost: he used to be a director of O2 and Orange.

Of course they are just following in the footsteps of Blair who, since he left as Prime Minister, has had fingers in various rich business pies. Last year his consultancy for US investment bank Morgan JP was worth £2m, he is also an advisor

for an insurance group Zurich, as well as advising the Kuwaiti government for a £27m deal. And it's probably worth noting that as former war-monger, he acted as an advisor on deals in Iraq!

Yes, Labour ministers, just like their Lib-Dem and Conservative counterparts, have plenty of lucrative business interests. No wonder they are always so busy looking after the interests of business shareholders - they are all in well-heeled clubs (and bed) together. And no wonder they are so interchangeable in power, whatever their label.

### • Universities leaner but classier

The number of British students applying to universities fell by almost 9% between 2011 and 2012. Worst affected was crisis-hit North Tyneside, with a 23% drop, showing that more young people have to immediately earn some money, even though they might have been awarded one of the few full grants available.

At the same time, however, affluent areas, such as Cameron's and Osborne's constituencies also show higher-than-average drops - by 18 and 16%. With highly-paid jobs increasingly difficult to find for graduates, those whose parents can't foot their university bills in full, can only expect more trouble when their earnings go over £21,000/yr and the repayment of their loans kicks in.

But let's not worry too much about the fate of the better-off. A recent survey showed that with the same level of school achievements, private school students are 140% more likely to be accepted by university than state school students. Yes, Britain's university class bias is alive and kicking!

### Letter from Sussex

East Sussex Hospitals Trust tried and failed to win the public over to "rationalisation" of the Eastbourne and Hastings hospitals, with their spurious claims about "improved services". They've now resorted to simply ignoring public opinion and smearing their critics.

At the end of last year, the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee rubber-stamped the proposals, so now, stroke services will be "concentrated" in Eastbourne and Surgery, including emergency surgery, in Hastings. Never mind the rotten road links between the two towns and never mind the last-minute protest petition, which quickly gained 37,000 names.

Trust spokesmen told the Committee that petition organisers had misled the public, by making them think that Eastbourne District General hospital was about to close. The Committee appears to have accepted this and would not even allow the petition coordinator to answer the transparently false accusation. What campaigners have actually been pointing out is that, once one department closes, you tend to be on a slippery slope to general downgrading.

So there you have it: if you want to be heard by such people, you have to do more than just sign petitions and engage in polite discourse!

**King's Cross railway station (London)****• Sorry, but your train will be delayed... and delayed...**

Delays on East coast trains have been many: thanks to flooding, over headwires being blown away, signal and track problems, etc., etc. In fact the latest floods created delays for more than a week.

But some delays don't have "natural causes". One morning recently, both East Coast and FCC trains out of King's Cross were delayed after

a train broke down and despite the fact that another route was available for a replacement to be run. Why? Because most of the early-shift drivers and guards on that day were stuck on that broken train... and there were no "spare" workers to cover, because train companies (whether private or run by the state, temporarily, like East Coast is) refuse



to build into their staffing levels the extra workers required for these frequent and inevitable "emergencies".

**• Low pay, no way**

ISS workers had another lively 2-day strike on 30th Nov and 1st Dec. We even paid top management a visit, in their plush offices near Canary Wharf. So it wasn't just the local management who got an earful. And they'll get more of the same, if they don't cough up for decent pay and conditions. [Workers' Platform - King's X - 11/12/12]

**• To work or not to work**

Rumour has it that one local ISS manager wasn't too keen to cover for us during the strike, and had to be "persuaded" by higher management. So if he's not prepared to do the job even on his higher wage, will he be joining us on our next picket line, then? [Workers' Platform - King's X - 11/12/12]

**• ISS still cheating**

After the staff meeting where we raised our complaints with ISS management about being paid short, there seemed to be some improvement. But now ISS has got up to other tricks - like not paying us for rest days or leave days falling on the strike days. Did they really think we wouldn't notice? This is theft - full stop! [Workers' Platform - King's X - 11/12/12]

**BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)****• The missing third option**

Shortly before the shut down, workers at Cowley voted on new shift patterns, not officially due to begin until November 2013 when the new-generation Mini is launched.

Two options were on offer. One option, hotly recommended by BMW (and supported by Unite officials) involved 7½-hour shifts, 5 days a week, with no lunch break but also no Saturdays (or so the company implied). The other option continued the existing 11-hour shifts, but guaranteed even more of the unpopular, compulsory Saturday shifts.

The shorter shift of the first option would seem the obvious choice, rather than the exhausting long shifts of the second one. Except that

switching to the first option would be totally at odds with the way workers have adapted their lives to long shifts over the past decade. Instead of fewer shifts with time off mid-week, we'd all be working 5 days, meaning more travelling and higher costs - especially when commuting long distances, as many do. Even those living nearby resented no lunch break. As for not working Saturdays, few believed BMW's assurances!

In the end BMW's preferred short shift option won by a couple of percentage points. Significantly though, a quarter (400) did not vote, not to mention 800 agency workers who didn't have a vote anyway. This



was a classic example of the "heads they win, tails we lose" game. What was missing in this vote, as is so often the case when bosses pretend to give workers a "choice", was a third option - respecting our health, protecting our wages and giving us time for leisure. But we don't expect BMW to offer such an option. We'll have to fight for it!

**Employment law: trying to sack us double-fast?**

Not only are the bosses sacking more permanent full time workers every day that goes by, but now they are going to have it made easier for them by a change in employment law to be enacted in April this year. LibDem "employment relations minister", Jo Swinson, announced that the 90-day consultation period over redundancies would be cut to 45 days. She said: *"The process is usually completed*

*well within the existing 90-day minimum period, which can cause unnecessary delays for restructuring and make it difficult for those affected to get new jobs quickly."*

Which planet is she on? Which "new jobs"? Certainly none of the kind this law-change aims to help abolish!! Isn't the government ensuring that the stock of jobs protected by a proper permanent contract is not

only cut faster, but that the protection offered by such jobs is whittled away? And on top of it all, the right to collective consultation over redundancies is being removed completely for workers on fixed term contracts. The bosses and their stooges on planet Mars would like us all to be on precarious hire-and-fire terms - and preferably on no contract at all!

**Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)****• Santa's sack for contractors**

Just a week before Xmas, Hamton Environmental Services, which has the cleaning contract, sacked 40 workers. Never mind that cleanliness - especially of workers' rest areas and toilets is already substandard - entirely down to the lack of cleaners! So what effect will cutting them further have?

It's obvious, of course, that the idea is for Hamton to cut its bill and thus for Ford - which is ultimately

behind all these moves - to save too.

The plot thickens, however. Ford recently gave a logistics contract to LineSide - which has the same executive director as Hamton. And just when LineSide was maybe going to face a real challenge to its dirty practices (which include replacing permanent workers with lower-paid agency employees on the so-called "Swedish Derogation") Unite union officials quickly came to the rescue.



Despite a 92% vote for strike over pay, they recommended workers accept a 4% increase and forget about any kind of fight. When of course it's only by fighting that any of us will get anywhere at all.

**• How to make Ford jump**

S&TO tooling officials will by now have reported back on their meeting in Cologne last week with the Ford Europe Works Council. The EWC chief union official says he'll carry their message to Ford top bosses. He's heard what we think. But of course, we know that Ford will only pay attention if their profit tap (which isn't dry, as they lie) is switched off.. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 17/12/12]

**• For annual elections and instant recall**

Next year, there'd have been shop steward elections in DEP. Apparently

the GMB now proposes 3-yearly elections! Sure, it's not by electing a few good stewards into a system that's so heavily weighted against them, that we'll change much. But this means union reps have even less reason to do their jobs well and be accountable to us. Elections should be every year. But we can always "recall" a steward and call a new election. Or is that "right" to be fiddled away too?? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 17/12/12]

**• We'd like to disown this part of the family**

On Tiger machining we're disgusted that we were presented with a decision to go down to 2 shifts+mini, at a joint

management-union meeting, without the union even bothering to come to us first! The mini shift would be a de facto labour pool. 6 people are already targeted for Puma which has that order from Thailand or wherever. Nice work, "brothers"...[Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 17/12/12]

**• Where could he be of use?**

The "Peeping Tom" Lion Snr foreman wants promotion. So, given all the many complaints over his conduct which we've put in via the union, we are wondering: will he get it? We're not entirely against his promotion. But we think he'd be better suited to a job in the loo. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 17/12/12]

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)****• One 24-hour strike is not enough**

Bristol south east DO struck on Monday - against revision methods. What was the bottom line? "There are simply not enough people here to get the deliveries done in the time given". But it's reckoned over 120 DOs are in a critical condition (Xmas=meltdown!). So isn't this enough for the CWU to organise national action? Apparently not. This is why some spoke of spreading the action in the "old way", i.e., "unofficially", not waiting for the union. Because one thing that hasn't been "transformed" by the CWU's latest partnership with the RM bosses is - the RM bosses. Nor their screwdrivers. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 11/12/12]

**• Beyond belief agreement ending soon**

Yes, this is what the cuts have led to - we also feel it here at MP. And these cuts have been agreed by the union under BT2010 "agreement"! But this 3-year agreement will soon end... and then comes privatisation! TNT already wants to do (limited) final mile

deliveries. It's challenging RM's universal service VAT exemption in court.

Of course, RM's (fiddled?) grand profits announcement last month is all part of this same privatisation march. Plymouth mates are taking protest action already. They're right. Postcards to MPs are pissing in the wind. Only postal workers can stop the sell-off. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 11/12/12]

**• Even greater extortion on the way**

Like when BR was totally run down in the run-up to privatisation - RM's service will be made to come across as so bad that people will say "it can't be worse under privatisation". But it sure will be - just like the extortionate railways. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 11/12/12]

**• Yes we're under pressure**

Yes, we're under pressure. So we were surprised to see an article called "delivery under pressure, bullying and harassment survey" in Voice, by the very same CWU official who forced door-to-dustbin and other commercial mail into our processing centres and mailbags - because he saw all of this as "inevitable". He'd



given up the fight to keep the mail as a non-profit, public service, long ago.

Now Dudley DO is organising a ballot for strike against bullying and harassment - when again, this is a national issue - and one which was really inevitable, thanks to the above... So what about the rest of us? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 11/12/12]

**• Osborne butty, anyone?**

Good to hear that it was the Royal Mail pension fund which saved Osborne's bacon in the Autumn Statement. Now we just have to fry him up and retrieve everything else he took from us as well. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 11/12/12]

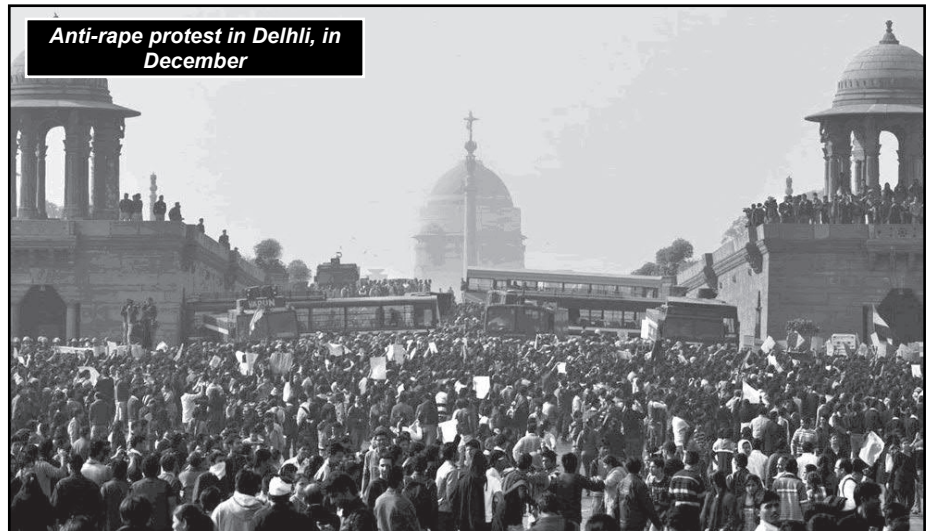
## India

To date, the protests sparked by the rape of an Indian medical student in Delhi, who died from her injuries, continue. Around 10,000 demonstrated in Delhi on Sunday 30th December. This case was especially shocking: she was gang-raped and brutally bludgeoned with an iron bar, by five men in a bus, before being thrown out of the moving bus. Now there are cries for obligatory castration or even execution of rapists.

The real issue, however, is not what to do with rapists, but what to do about a supposedly "modern" society where women are not just 2nd class (as is still the case in richest countries!), but are often treated as sub-human. Like many poor countries, India combines the class injustices of a "modern" capitalist society with semi-feudal remnants - the old caste system which is still rife in the impoverished rural areas from which most of the recently urbanised population hails. Women are caught in the middle of these two systems of oppression, with the complicity (if not active involvement) of the politicians, police and judiciary.

The figures speak for themselves. In Haryana (the state surrounding Delhi), which is both one of the

## Fighting the rapist system



Anti-rape protest in Delhi, in December

country's richest states and one of its most industrialised, 19 low-caste girls were gang-raped in September 2012 alone. The monthly average is around 20. A 16-year old was gang-raped by a dozen men on 9 September. They filmed the act - and circulated the video. The girl's father committed suicide. Connected to this, is the resurgence of the practice of killing female babies - evidenced by the worsening of the female to male sex ratio to as low as 774 per 1,000 in some districts of Haryana.

This is not an image which fits well with the modern, "emerging" economy which India's ruling classes promote. But this is the cost of class exploitation. Throughout history, the degree of women's oppression has reflected the degree of social oppression in the whole of society. It is the task of the Indian working class, together with the "western" working class, to end the system which keeps caste and gender oppression alive - the divisive, inequitable, capitalist, class system - in India and everywhere else. □

## Afghanistan

While in Afghanistan in December, Cameron restated his plan to withdraw 3,800 soldiers by the end of the year, in parallel with Obama's "complete withdrawal". Then, the Afghan troops, armed and trained by western powers, will take over from their imperialist mentors with Karzai's corrupt puppet regime at the helm.

Except that this is a farce. On the British side alone, 5,000 soldiers will remain after this "complete withdrawal", allegedly on a "non-combat" mission - whatever this means for a heavily armed force. And the British Camp Bastion base, which is the size of Reading, will stay as a western cancer

## Withdraw all troops now!



Camp Bastion

planted in the middle of Helmand province. The occupation will just carry on under another name.

For now, the MoD faces accusations after an "incident" in Helmand, in which four Afghan youth - including a 12-year old - were shot dead by British soldiers while drinking tea. So much for the politicians' lies, claiming

that the occupation is protecting us from "terrorism". Apart from risking their lives uselessly, British soldiers are only stoking up more despair and anger among Afghans and pushing more of them into the arms of fundamentalist groups. So, yes, all western forces should be withdrawn, but to the very last man and now! □

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](mailto:contact@w-fight.org), or by postal mail at:

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