

WORKERS' fight



No 42 - March 2013

price 30p

<http://www.w-fight.org>
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ISSN 2040-400X

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

DIVIDENDS, BONUSES UP, WAGES DOWN - ENOUGH!

Just as Osborne was replying to the downgrading of his government's credit rating, with a promise to tighten up his austerity policy, the bank bonus issue flared up again - and of all places, at the government-controlled banks, RBS and Lloyds.

It turned out that the two banks would be paying £1bn worth of bonuses, including a £1.5m bonus to Lloyds' boss. Yet these were the banks bailed out by Labour, with Tory and Lib-dem support, using £66bn of public funds, thus generating the "deficit" used to justify the ConDems' austerity against the working class!

So, yes, the tens of millions of workers who are at the receiving end of Osborne's austerity, whether as consumers, pensioners, welfare recipients or NHS patients, are certainly entitled to call this government to account! And it's not just this government, but the whole capitalist class that the working class needs to call to account.

Behind the bonus tree

Huge as these bonuses may seem, compared to workers' wages, they are only the tip of a far bigger iceberg of growing affluence among the tiny capitalist minority.

Last month the share prices of Britain's 100 largest companies regained their pre-crisis level - meaning that wealthy shareholders have now more than recovered from the paper losses which they registered back in 2008.

This means that, regardless of the recession, market operators are betting on the fact that company profits are going to increase. In short, they expect that the bosses' drive against workers' jobs, wages and conditions, will more than make up for shrinking sales.

But there are other factors which are boosting share prices. In 2011, the dividends paid by these 100 largest companies reached an all-time record - more than in the peak year before the crisis.



A symbol of capital's splendid parasitism

And last year, these companies increased their dividend payments by 18%, up to a combined £72bn. Taking all British companies together, shareholders will have received a total of £80.4bn in dividends in 2012 - almost the exact equivalent, in just one year, of the amount which the ConDems want to steal from the working class population over their 5-year tenure!

So, no wonder speculators are rushing to buy shares, thereby boosting their prices - they are looking forward to rising dividends flowing into their pockets without having to do anything for it!

Growing cash piles and parasitism

But dividends are only one aspect of the capitalists' growing parasitism. Over the past months, large British companies said they would buy back shares from their shareholders - including BAE Systems, with a £1bn buyback, and British Gas parent group, Centrica, with £500m.

For companies and shareholders, buybacks are win-win operations. Companies pay less corporation tax. By reducing the

number of their shares, they increase share prices and can pay higher dividends - giving the share price another boost. As to shareholders, those who take the buy-back offer cash in on years of price rises, while those who don't end up owning more valuable shares, tax free!

But how do companies, most of which are crying poverty and cutting jobs and wages in one way or another, manage to find billions in order to increase dividends and buy shares back? And this, despite the recession?

In fact, the question contains the answer. Centrica has just increased energy bills by 6%, which is another way of cutting workers' real disposable incomes. By the end of 2013, BAE will have cut 25% of its British workforce over just 3 years. And real wages across the country are now down to their 2003 level! Meanwhile, companies are piling up mountains of cash and literally starving society of the socially useful investment it needs. The cost of this increasing capitalist parasitism is far too high to be tolerated! □

Horse, beef, a meaty issue...

In early February, the papers carried hysterical headlines on the horsemeat found in beefburgers. Fingers were pointed at anywhere in Europe but Britain. This was a perfect excuse for Eurosceptic politicians and their friends in the media - not forgetting the powerful cattle farmers' lobby - to wave the flag and the "buy British beef" slogan.

However, it soon emerged that British abattoirs and processing factories were implicated and then, that the whole issue was not so bad after all - horsemeat

• Horsing around with regulations

The Con-Dems' idea on how to prevent this kind of scandal is self-regulation by the food industry and supermarkets. But this was, de facto, what was actually happening already, since the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has so few inspectors that it cannot possibly keep an eye on what companies are doing. If the horsemeat issue shows anything, it is precisely that asking the profit sharks to regulate themselves is like urging real sharks to fast!

As to the regulation advocated by Labour, one which would see a beefing

• More than one beef

The horsemeat "fraud" is supposedly an aberration. But the operation of big money behind what appears on the supermarket shelves has much wider consequences.

On one hand, the price of farming land reached record levels in 2012, partly thanks to the fact that speculators have been grabbing land as a safe investment and partly driven by commercial food producers, looking to cash in on high agricultural commodity prices - which went through the roof when speculators shifted their activity from the crisis-hit stock markets into foodstuffs, in 2009.

On the other hand, the big supermarkets together dominate the domestic

could even be healthier than beef.

Nevertheless, one likes to know what one's eating. And meat not meant for human consumption shouldn't really enter the food chain.

So is food safe? Nobody knows, least of all big British firms and supermarkets which buy the cheapest products they can find, in Britain or elsewhere, imposing on their suppliers that they cut their costs to the bare bone - necessarily at the expense of safety. And what do they all care - since they feed on profits! □

up of the FSA, would it make food safer? After all, it was under such a regulatory regime that BSE ("mad cow disease") originated in Britain and spread to neighbouring countries. And it was also under such a regime - and under Labour's watch - that the foot-and-mouth crisis broke out later. Both diseases originated in cost-cutting - by animal feed manufacturers for the first and abattoirs for the second. This points to the real problem, and to its solution - removing the profit sharks from the food chain!

market and their drive for ever-bigger profits means they are ruthless in cutting what they pay suppliers - when they're not moving into production themselves, to further increase their return on investment. Many smaller producers have been driven out of business as a result.

As to consumers, they have no choice but to buy food at the price and in the form imposed by supermarkets. The substitution of horsemeat for beef is just one symptom of the consequences of their monopoly. The food industry in general is an unpalatable racket which benefits a tiny minority, at the expense of the working class majority.

• Oxford's wealth test

Oxford student, Damien Shannon, has had to take his case to court in order to be able to study at Oxford University.

He had previously won a place at St Hugh's College to study for a master's degree. Despite having £10,000 to cover course and college fees with £2,000 towards his living expenses, university rules insisted he needed £21,032. College administrators claimed that to "prevent drop-outs" each student needed £1,075 a month just to live! For them, the fact that, like thousands of other students without well-heeled parents, Shannon planned to work part-time, was not good enough! His offer was withdrawn.

Shannon is suing St Hugh's, arguing that he is being discriminated against on the grounds of poverty. The college set aside £60,000 for its defence. How many students like Damien Shannon could be helped from that? And how many more could be funded if the fortune from all the college banquets, balls and vintage wines consumed were added!

• History draped in the Union Jack

An A-level history textbook covering the period from 1945 to 2007 has been criticised for devoting 5 lines to the advantage for Britain of joining the EU and 26 lines to its disadvantages. The publisher claimed that the book wasn't designed to cover all viewpoints and that "*History is full of opinion*".

In fact Euroscepticism is just another variation of the nationalistic way that history is taught in schools. Children are fed a diet based on England's (or Britain's) military victories over France, Spain and, latterly, Germany. The background is rarely explained so that schoolchildren remain ignorant about the rape, pillage and murder encouraged by British rulers and generals - particularly while grabbing the British Empire. The role of Britain as the world's oldest capitalist power, with its trade and finance monopoly for over a century, which led to two world wars with Germany, is never satisfactorily explained. As for the class struggle, it hardly gets a mention!

Britain's death merchants

On his trade-promoting trip to India last month, Cameron was accompanied by a plane full of British businessmen, including a fair few big "defence" contractors. One of the main aims of the prime minister's trip was to flog the Typhoon fighter jet. First, though, he had to sidestep allegations of bribery in the previous sale of a dozen British-built helicopters to India...

Cameron's main job is salesman-in-chief for British capital, and the British arms industry in particular. This was his second visit to India and in the past two years, he's also managed to go on similar missions to Egypt, Kuwait, Indonesia, Japan, Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, Brazil, Saudi Arabia (twice),



Cameron's Typhoon

Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Now, a Navy warship is being sent to Libya, to act as a floating sales showroom for military products - this, in a country which is flooded with arms! Despite official claims to the contrary, human rights concerns have no place here - witness the weaponry, worth millions, licensed for export to Sri Lanka last year.

Britain was the world's second biggest exporter of arms last year. With government backing, the British arms trade is truly making a killing.

EU Budget - Cameron cracks a peanut!

Coming back from the EU budget summit, on February 8th, Cameron claimed "victory" on behalf of the "British public", for having "cut the credit-card limit for the EU".

Never mind that this EU budget is tiny (just 1% of the EU's GDP, compared to Cameron's budget, which represents over 60% of Britain's GDP!).

And never mind that this "cut" really amounts to less than 3% of this

budget (mostly by cancelling infrastructure projects which would have benefited Britain as much as the rest of Europe), or that Cameron's "victory" owed more to Angela Merkel pushing her own austerity agenda than to his own influence, and that the cut will only be effective once it is endorsed by an absolute majority in the European Parliament - which is not a foregone conclusion!

So, Cameron's "victory" is just hot

air, designed to placate the growing Tory eurosceptic mob which is threatening Cameron's leadership of the party and to win back the support of Tory voters attracted by UKIP's anti-EU hysteria.

In other words it is just another way to divert attention from Osborne's tax policy, which provides companies and the wealthy with a much higher "credit-card limit", all paid for by the rest of us! □

Anti-immigrant demagoguery and Eastleigh

As predicted, UKIP came second in the Eastleigh by-election, beating the Tories and increasing its vote from 4% to 27.8%, at the expense of both ConDem partners - even if the Lib-Dems held the seat. But the main feature of this election was the anti-EU and anti-immigrant rhetoric, which was duly relayed by the media - especially the desperate efforts by discredited Tory ministers to out-UKIP UKIP over immigration.

Among other things, candidates

• UKBA's criminal record

The government's anti-immigration hysteria is encouraging criminal brutality by enforcement agencies, making them a haven for racist bigots. Recently the spotlight has been on the UK Border Agency: it took the threat of a legal challenge by four asylum seekers to force it to reinstate its past ban on using force against children and pregnant women!

deliberately whipped up xenophobia, focusing on the imminent (2014) lifting of special restrictions against workers from Bulgaria and Romania, saying that a "tidal wave" of 29m immigrants "threatened" British shores - as if the whole populations of Romania (22m) and Bulgaria (7m) were intending to vacate their countries next year! And by the way, only 5m Romanians are of economically active age. But why bother with facts?

Their lame and worn out excuse for

Another recent example of UKBA's record was the case of Gloria Foster, who starved to death at home after the Agency closed the company that was providing her care, for employing illegal immigrants. Gloria Foster relied on four care worker visits a day, but no-one took responsibility for her.

Others have died being restrained

this hysterical nonsense is that they are only concerned to "protect our benefits, public services and labour market from misuse". When the abuse and misuse suffered by welfare, health and public services is at the hands of the very same politicians who spout this noxious poison! No, workers should be free to go anywhere - their country is the world, without borders!

for deportation, both by the police and UKBA's private sub-contractors, like Jimmy Mubenga, when being escorted on a plane by G4S guards.

Xenophobic policies always come at a deadly price. All workers, migrant or not, are bound to pay, one way or another - unless we stand up against them together.

Osborne's phony war

Osborne's "war" on tax fraud is supposed to target the so-called "tax havens" and the wealthy individuals and companies using them, to avoid paying their share. He's even given HMRC £77m to "hunt them down".

According to available estimates, the scale of the fraud is mind-boggling. Offshore Financial Centres (OFCs) provide a haven for up to £14,000bn worldwide (equivalent to the combined

• Netting small fry only

HM Revenue and Customs recently announced it was "naming and shaming" tax dodgers, and proudly unveiled the first list of those it has nailed. Some very big names have been hitting the headlines recently, for managing to pay barely any tax at all on the millions of pounds profit they make here. So is HMRC finally

• Tax is for the common people

Another name conspicuously absent from HMRC's list was Prince Charles. His Duchy of Cornwall estate, which owns 53,000 hectares of land across 23 counties, is not in the same league as the Googles, etc., but still, it managed to provide him with a tidy income of £18m last year.

yearly income of the USA, Japan and Germany...). On their own, Swiss banks squirrel away £1,400bn and those using the services of Switzerland, Lichtenstein and Luxembourg have been singled out angrily by Osborne. But with penalty rates of 5-10% being discussed for the culprits, his "anger" is more like a pat on the back.

More importantly, Osborne is silent about Britain's backyard. Doesn't

getting to grips with these blatant tax "avoiders"? No - the likes of Google, Starbucks, Boots, Amazon, etc. didn't feature.

The businesses that are on the list are not exactly household names - they include a Liverpool hairdressers, a pipe-fitter, a Bolton coach operator,

But don't make the mistake of thinking that this brand, which appears on the shelves of supermarkets across the country, is a business. Oh no - the Duchy of Cornwall, so they argue, is indivisible from the Duke of Cornwall, i.e. Charles himself. So it's... a royal personage? And,

it sponsor a host of financial boltholes amongst its island dependencies - Jersey, Guernsey, Cayman, Virgin, Bermuda, among others - which are at the top of the tax haven world league? And what about the 98 companies among the 100 largest listed in the City, which bank with OFCs? Osborne doesn't seem to find any wrongdoing there! Behind his "war" on tax fraud, Osborne is really protecting the City's own tax haven status!

a wine retailers from Cheshire, and so on. Between them, they owed less than £1m in tax. So what's the message here? If you want to avoid paying tax, make sure you do it on a grand scale - and you won't be touched?

as such, it doesn't have to pay corporation tax or capital gains tax, of course - though Charles "voluntarily" paid £5m in income tax on the £18m. Quite a bargain - but then, the rules are different for the royals.

Mid-Staffs scandal - a decade of cost-cutting

Both Labour and the ConDems are under the spotlight for their role in the drastic degradation of the NHS. 14 NHS Trusts are now under investigation, following the disclosure of a possible 1,200 deaths at Stafford hospital, in 2006-09, attributable to poor care.

Problems linked to cost-cutting by Mid-Staffs Trust managers, to gain the Foundation Trust status introduced by Labour, had been

uncovered back in 2006 - but they were hushed up. Seven years on, a report has been published exposing the lack of doctors and nurses, the failure to train the low-paid health-care assistants and the fact that staff were overworked and overstretched. It also denounces so-called "watch-dogs" and "regulators", which are blind to patients' needs and only concerned with "savings".

While Labour hypocritically condemned the "drive to import a commercial mentality into the NHS" (as if they didn't promote it themselves!), Cameron blamed NHS staff and called for criminal charges against them.

But who are the criminals, if not ministers who starved the NHS of funds, and turned its facilities into quasi-commercial outfits run by fat-cat managers obsessed with cost-cutting? And what about Cameron's criminal policy, which is slashing 100 NHS jobs per week, forcing wards to close down and inviting more profit sharks to milk the NHS budget? ☐

Letter from Sussex

Even though public opinion has been ignored and the Eastbourne and Hastings hospitals are to "rationalise" - i.e. close departments - the East Sussex NHS Trust still finds it necessary to accuse protesters in general, and the "Save the DGH" (District General Hospital) in particular, of misleading a public, whose views apparently don't matter, anyway.

Recently, the Trust's Chief Executive wrote to the local newspaper about the future of the Eastbourne Cardiology unit. There was plenty of stuff about "excellence" and "vibrancy", but in classic bureaucrat style, no concrete assurances. What was more revealing, though, was this: "the days of hospitals providing everything are long gone and will not return". He then wound up, by saying that "the only thing the DGH needs saving from is the Save the DGH Campaign".

No, it's the likes of him that it and the rest of the NHS need saving from; he and the Private Finance Initiative, diverting taxpayers' money into the pockets of private contractors' shareholders, as well as the cancerous "market ethos" which all the main parties subscribe to!

Stafford hospital - another victim of cost-cutting



• More help for NHS profit sharks?

The government wants the NHS competition regulator, Monitor, to come up with ways to entice even more private companies to provide NHS services, especially in acute hospital care. Its review, due in March, will consider whether current "distortions" put private providers at a disadvantage. In January Monitor confirmed that one such "distortion" was that the NHS doesn't have to pay corporation tax and VAT, while private companies do!

Monitor then stated publicly that it will not recommend tax exemptions for NHS private contractors. But, under the pretext that acute care is more expensive

than the routine NHS operations and services already provided by private contractors, Monitor is likely to propose some sort of subsidy to guarantee profits for acute care contractors, even though they will be paid more by the NHS.

Ironically, the NHS was originally set up to subsidise the bosses - by ensuring that workers would get treatment regardless of their income, it provided companies with a cheap, but fit workforce, at no extra cost. By being subsidised for running NHS services the capitalist class will just have found yet another way of milking the NHS budget.

HIV, Africa and the pharmaceutical giants

An estimated 2 million deaths from Aids in Africa can be attributed to the actions of the big pharmaceutical companies ("Pharma"), which forced health workers to supply their patented brands - instead of cheap generic drugs. For many, the cheaper drugs, which are now supplied free in some countries, have come too late. The documentary film, "Fire in the Blood", which has just been screened at the 2013 Sundance Film festival in the US, tells the story of the struggle for treatment against HIV, and accuses the drug companies of genocide.

It is right. To protect profits, the £400bn/year industry (Pfizer, Roche, GlaxosmithKline etc.) use patents which can last for an extensible 20 years. So many of their new drugs remain unaffordable for those who need them most. And whoever breaks patents to make or

use cheap alternatives, risks being taken to court.

Pharma blames its patents and exorbitant pricing on the high cost of research and development. But they pay on average only 12% of R&D cost. 84% actually comes from public funds. In fact "marketing" is their big cost: they spend 19 times more on this than on R&D! Obviously, profit is the aim, not new drug

discovery, let alone patients' interests. Pharma's cynical profiteering is a lethal danger for all!

Capetown: protest against drug patents



High Street slump, Bond Street boom

January was the fourth consecutive month to see a fall in retail spending. Economists blamed freezing weather and lack of confidence even among those with cash to spare. But official statistics published in February reveal that the real value of workers' wages in 2012 was no higher than it was in 2003! This is not stagnation. Wages in real terms

over this period peaked in 2009, and have been outstripped by rising inflation ever since. The wage freeze in the public sector has cut real hourly rates by 2.1%, but the fall in the private sector is even greater, at 3.1%. How can anyone be surprised that working people spend less in the shops?

Meanwhile, the market for luxury

goods remains as buoyant as ever. Fashion house Yves Saint Laurent reported a 59% increase of sales and the company behind Louis Vuitton handbags made an annual profit of 6bn euros. While workers have to decide what they can no longer afford, the rich have even more to spend on frivolities. □

• **Bitter coffee**

Whatever prompted 1,701 jobless in Nottingham to apply for 3 full-time and 5 part-time jobs at a Costa coffee shop, wasn't the wages. Paid between £6.10 and £10/hr, the "successful" candidates will struggle to keep their heads above water. It shows just how desperate the situation is out there for the unemployed.

More generally, who can believe the government's boast that a record 30m are in work is anything but a sleight of hand? 8m jobs are part-time, 4.2m are self-employed and unemployment for 16-24-year-olds has risen to nearly 1m. With real wages going down, more workers are falling into debt - particularly if they're under 25 or self-employed. Isn't it a fight back well overdue, against a system that is boosting the wealth of a handful on the backs of the majority?

• **The courts won't dismantle workfare**

Two unemployed people who had challenged the right of the DWP to force them to work for their benefits won a partial victory at the appeal court last month.

• **Protecting the better off**

The government announced its response to the 2011 Dilnot report on paying for social care: whereas today, those with assets of more than £23,250 can be made to pay an unlimited amount for social care, their payments will now be capped at £75,000. The cap, which will apply from 2017, is more than twice the £35,000 limit Dilnot recommended - meaning many elderly people will still have to sell their houses to pay for residential care.

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt says the government does not want anyone to have to sell a house for that reason. But he does want people to insure themselves for the cost of care in old age - putting even more cash in the clutches of the insurance companies. So much for the promise of being looked after "from cradle to grave" for which generations of workers since WWII paid their National Insurance contributions. This promise was already broken two decades ago, by a sleight of hand, which differentiated social care from healthcare, allowing the mushrooming of care homes run

Although the judges agreed with an earlier ruling that the schemes involved were not forced labour, they said the threats made to cut benefits exceeded the government's powers.

This judgement may entitle thousands to try to file claims. But it also rules out any future legal protection for the unemployed against the Work Programme's attempts to strong-arm them into poorly-paid, dead-end non-jobs. The government will only need to tweak the law to make workfare stay. Unless, of course, it has to face an organised opposition from the unemployed and those in work, determined to really sink its slave charter.

• **Sacrificing pensions to profit**

Because of the financial crisis, companies with final salary schemes have to comply with their statutory obligation to top up their pension funds, to ensure they will be able to pay out future pensions. But, according to Chancellor George Osborne, pension regulation must not be allowed to "act as a brake on investment and growth" - translation: act as a brake on

for profit. Today's proposed changes are of little help: they will only benefit the better-offs.

• **Buy-to-let rears its ugly head again**

Buy-to-let mortgages reached their highest level for 4 years in 2012, accounting for 13% of the mortgage market. The credit crunch put a damper on this phenomenon but didn't kill it off. Though it's still much lower than in pre-crisis days, it's coming back with a vengeance.

The benefits for the financial institutions and so-called "investors" is obvious. Housing is still in short supply and rents are sky-high. So those who can afford it can make a killing, at the expense of their tenants. And the state, too, is very often subsidising these get-rich-quick schemes, since tenants need housing benefit to afford the extortionate rents.

But buy-to-let contributes to keeping house prices at a level which is out of reach for more and more people who need a home. And so the vicious circle continues. Housing needs can't be met in a system which allows property owners to profiteer on the essentials.

profits! So the government is proposing to relax the rules on how the future liabilities of these schemes are worked out, to reduce employers' liabilities.

But what happens if these schemes are underfunded as a result, and members don't get the pensions they've paid in for? A Pension Protection Fund was set up under Labour, but it relies on contributions from companies. It wouldn't be large enough if it had to bail out many failing schemes. But why should the ConDems care? The security in old age of the several million workers and pensioners who still belong to final salary schemes counts for nothing, compared with the capitalists' thirst for profits!

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King's Cross railway station (London)**• What the fly didn't see**

The "fly on the wall" documentary "The Railway: Keeping Britain on Track" is currently showing on the BBC. The first episode featured King's Cross station but, unfortunately, the focus was on the new concourse and what an improvement it is for passengers. This is a bit of an exaggeration - the new concourse is cold, the roof still leaks and there is no public lounge for those with Standard Class tickets to wait in comfort and warmth.

While it was definitely nice to hear workers, for once, talking on TV about their jobs and the human side of it, this didn't go very far. No mention of their conditions on this "marvellous" new concourse, with no protection from the wind that whistles through and heaters (where they exist) which break down continually. And, apart from a passing comment about the fact that there's no job security on the railway any more, there was no mention either of the growth



of sub-contracting, and agency and low-paid short term contracts, which has meant a drastic degradation in wages and conditions. But when has the media ever really reflected a working class point of view, after all?

• Leave it out

Companies like Railgourmet and ISS give us the legal minimum annual leave, so you'd expect that at least we'd be able to choose when we go on holiday and for how long. But no! Both ISS Where's our strike?

ISS managers don't seem to last very long around here. But what is definitely lasting too long is the uncertainty about our pay rise. Rumours are circulating about the ISS contract with East Coast being signed and ISS preparing to talk to the union. But why haven't we heard directly? Cleaners working for Churchill on Tyne and Wear Metro had another strike last week. Where's ours? [Workers' Platform - King's X - 05/02/13]

• Time for action

Cleaners on the Tyne and Wear Metro, employed by Churchill's, are now having a 7-day strike. On Arriva Trains Wales, cleaners, also employed by Churchill's, are being balloted for strike action.

But our action against ISS seems to have been kicked into the long grass. We can't let them off the hook now! [Workers' Platform - King's X - 19/02/13]

• Bring them back!

The agency Trainpeople employed workers on London Underground, as well as some of our workmates here on the King's X CIP, giving information for Grand Central and Hull Trains.

LU just ended the contract with Trainpeople, with no warning, and the

workers were dumped along with the agency - after doing the jobs for as long as 5 years. The workers are fighting to be taken on permanently - we're right behind them. [Workers' Platform - King's X - 19/02/13]

• Over the top

The East Coast top boss is paid over £160,000 and 8 EC directors are paid over £100,000. We're short-handed everywhere but now we know what to do.

We could get 10 useful workers for the equivalent of each of their salaries. And all that would be lost is a waste of space. [Workers' Platform - King's X - 19/02/13]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• All of us need a pay rise**

The union is balloting 4,000 CWU members who work in post offices as they've had, in effect, a pay freeze (ie cut) over the past year. What's more, the government now wants to franchise out 70 Crown Post Offices (threatening 700 jobs). The ballot result is due on 8 March.

Well and good. But we've all got issues over our low pay! The RPI inflation is up 3.3% this month, but food prices are up 7.4% (and don't mention energy bills, transport, rent, etc!) So what about co-ordination of action? Do union leaders not understand that "c" word? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 20/02/13]

• When do we walk?

The 3-year 2010 Beyond Belief Agreement is ending. One delivery postman outside London worked out that his pay is literally the same as in 2009 - the "integrated" supplement

paid for door-to-dustbin works out as less than what he got as d2d allowance before, and of course, without London weighting it's even worse: £372.10 / week. Add inflation and he's losing a lot. We all are.

Even the official statistics office says "real" pay has declined to 2002 levels - a pay CUT of 3% per year over the last 3 years - making us 12% poorer. That's what we have to put right! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 20/02/13]

• Moya's "more"

There's been a minor fuss over managers' bonuses: an average £1,674 each in 2010/11 but £2,717 in 2012 - a 62% increase. Small change, tho, (even if unearned) when you consider that Moya (who the CWU saw fit to invite to the union conference!!) awarded herself £371,000 bonus - bringing her annual salary to £1.1m... That's what we'd call obscene. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 20/02/13]

**• Sweeping the problem under the carpet**

So we're told the Bristol dispute is sorted? Workmates in BS4 and BS14 have been holding strikes since last November over too few workers being expected to do too much work - like in almost every other bullying DO these days! Now they're to have a "full revision" and an intervention by ACAS (supposedly independent arbitrators). But is the office recruiting and training a dozen more postmen and women? And if not, why does the CWU announce the "resolution of the dispute"? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 20/02/13]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• There's loads of money in their coffers**

Ford keeps pointing to European "losses", the contraction of the Euro car market, etc., etc., as the reason for deciding to destroy thousands of workers' livelihoods. True, while sales in the US are up, the latest in Europe is that Ford, Peugeot Citroen

• One for free

Apparently Ford US is giving away (only!!) 100 Fiestas to young "bloggers" in the US to boost advertising - expecting them to go on the "social media", and write about their cars... It's meant to make US customers

and Toyota registered the biggest fall in sales in January - down 8.5% - the lowest since records began, in 1990. But BMW's sales rose by 9.4% and Daimler's Mercedes-Benz by 4.7%. The rich clearly have money in their pockets. And that certainly

buy this small car in big numbers like they did in 2009 during Ford's "Fiesta Movement".

100 little giveaway cars to start a "movement"? That's the cheap Ford approach for you! We'd say their



includes the shareholders of "ONE FORD"

former success wasn't thanks to Facebook, but fuel economy, stupid!

That said, they could always try giving 100 of us Mustangs to twitter about, just to make sure...

• We can only aspire to keep them open

Here in S&TO the managers are clearly scared of any collective resistance expressing itself. No mass meetings: they've had us meet them in small groups. And now, like when the PTA/Body closed, we're getting one-to-one "aspiration" meetings. Not that they have our correct EVR figures at hand! That's too much to aspire to! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 26/02/13]

• What jobs, exactly??

S&TO, Southampton and Genk are still in the same closure-threat boat together. In meetings with management, we were again told that we'd

all have a job at Fords if we wanted it. But what jobs, and where are the tooling jobs? We don't have answers. Maybe this is a way to encourage us to give up and leave. What are workers in the other threatened plants told? We'd like to know. And why shouldn't a ballot across the whole Ford Europe group be a reasonable aim? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 26/02/13]

• Ta Ta Turnip

No more Turnip on Tiger! This legend in his own lunchtime decided to threaten Fords that if he wasn't promoted he'd quit! And Fords responded by marching him to the gate and throwing him out to get the bus home, obviously not sharing his high opinion of his talents. [Workers'

Fight Ford Dagenham 26/02/13]

• ...and hello Tata

Sympathies to JLR workers since, unfortunately for them, Turnip jumped into their soup! Tata also head-hunted around 6 engineers from Dagenham for its engine plant - who're hopefully a lot less neep-like...

Fords must have so many spare managers hanging around S&TO and S'hampton who they've got to give a big pay-off to, they must have loved getting rid of Turnip for nothing. Benchpress must be feeling particularly happy after being promoted above his head. But we advise him not to start counting his chickens yet...! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 26/02/13]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• Another BMW screw-up**

Thanks to all the teething problems from the new robots and machinery installed over the shut down, we're now some 1700 cars behind schedule. Whose fault is that? Certainly not ours! Yet once the system is up and running at full stretch, who gets told to come in to work WTA (on lates all through March) and weekends in order to bale out the bosses? That said, let's be on our guard against any attempts to shove extra WTA on to us. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 20/02/13]

• Good luck with that!

Some of the technicians overseeing the installation predicted just such a cock-up. They knew how impossible the deadlines were and wanted us to return to work three weeks later. And since BMW requires 10 days full production without breakdowns before they can sign off the job, some, if not

all of them, could still be here at Easter! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 20/02/13]

• Check your pay slip closely!

Although we've entered year 2 of the pay deal, we've had no notification of any pay increase. We should've received 2.3% in January or inflation if higher. It was. The difference - 0.6% - should be included in our Team Bonus (due in March). How we can sort out what is bonus and what is increase remains to be seen. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 20/02/13]

• BMW's bonus fraud

Permanents are entitled to 3 bonuses each year and agency workers to 2. But no one can explain which is which. Or what the separate criteria are for each. What with part of our pay rise being added on to the Team Bonus, the whole system seems designed to be as opaque as possible. All the more reason to fight for a hefty pay rise this autumn for the



profits we've created over the past years. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 20/02/13]

• Gearing up

It would be nice to know that new starts arriving in Assembly this week will reduce the chronic undermanning. That would be crediting the bosses with too much intelligence, if not human concern. No, it's just that BMW hope to introduce the 3-shift system before November so as to get an extra 7½ hours/week without even a minute of overtime. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 20/02/13]

Iraq, 10 years on

The war and occupation of Iraq have long been forgotten by the media. But ten years after the invasion, on 20 March 2003, only oil production has returned to some "normality", making billions in profits for the western oil majors.

The regime left by the occupation is led by a corrupt political clique, which relies on religious sectarianism to prop up its brutal rule. When US troops formally left Iraq, on 18 December 2011, thousands of political opponents were already detained in secret locations. The US and British-trained army and police were already notorious for abducting "suspects" for ransom and using torture. Soon after, the US-backed prime minister summarily dismissed his own deputy and got one of the country's vice-presidents sentenced to death. Rather than the "democracy" hailed by the British and US governments, it is just another dictatorship.

Since then, there hasn't been a single week without dozens of people being killed by terrorist attacks. The bloody war waged by political factions from both sides of the

Ireland

The very belated report into the Magdalene Laundries exposes once more the long-standing, appalling treatment of Irish women by the state and the Church.

Up until 1996, the Magdalene Laundries (founded in 1922, but dating back to the 18th century as Catholic asylums for "fallen" women) undertook laundry contracts for state institutions - like the army - and major hotels. The 30,000 young women working there over all these years were literally slaves. Half had been involuntarily incarcerated, many were sent there for being single and pregnant (some were rape victims). They were unpaid,

The exorbitant cost of the imperialist invasion

Sunni-Shiite divide, which was sparked off by the invaders' game of divide-and-rule, is tearing the country apart, with the population caught in the crossfire, surviving in horrendous conditions, among the rubble left by the occupation.

But the Iraqi population is not taking this lying down. Over the past three months, demonstrations have been spreading across the country to protest against sectarianism and to demand better services, the release of prisoners, the repeal of the repressive laws introduced under and since the occupation, and the resignation of the government.

Back in 2003, the working class movement - in Britain and the other imperialist countries involved - failed to stop this invasion aimed



at tightening the control of western capital over the Middle East. Today, it is its responsibility to provide the Iraqi protesters with whatever help they might need against the rulers they inherited from the occupation. □

State-endorsed oppression of women

imprisoned and subject to harsh treatment and abuse by the Catholic nuns who ran the institution.

Today's exposure was prompted by a UN committee on torture. After at first refusing to apologise to the women who survive, the Irish PM finally did so. But the women are still waiting for compensation.

Besides, despite these apologies, recent cases like the death of Savita Halappanavar - who died as a result of septicæmia, directly

caused by the refusal of Irish doctors to perform a timely abortion - are there to show that the Irish state and Church are very far from changing their attitude to women! □

The Magdalene Laundries in Dublin

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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