

# WORKERS' fight



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

## TO DEFEND THEIR INTERESTS, WORKERS NEED THEIR OWN POLITICAL PARTY!

The anti-EU, anti-immigrant, anti-working class UKIP shot up from 8 seats to 165 in this year's local elections. Of course, 165 out of 2,362 seats isn't much. But that's only due to the voting system. According to BBC figures, had this been a national ballot, UKIP would have scored 23% - against 29% for Labour, 25% for the Tories and 14% for the Lib-Dems.

All three main parties reacted to UKIP's rise with the same hypocritical dismay. While dismissing it as a mere protest vote, they all fell over themselves to promise that they would listen to the fears expressed by UKIP's voters - over Europe, immigration and the welfare system.

### **Who sows the wind...**

But who created these fears and fuelled the prejudices expressed by UKIP's crass demagoguery? Who, if not the main three parties, by looking for scape-goats to cover the responsibility of their capitalist paymasters for the crisis?

Who pointed to Britain's membership of the EU as being the cause of every ill and accused Brussels of "strangling" Britain? Who, if not the present ConDem and the previous Labour governments, which blamed the economic slump here on the Eurozone crisis, when both are due to the same world capitalist crisis?

Haven't these governments also pointed to migrant workers as being a "burden" for public services and the welfare system, despite the fact that these workers contribute their due share to the economy? And this, only to conceal these governments' looting of public funds to rescue the profit system - the only real "burden" on society.

And who pointed to all the poor as being "cheaters and skivers"? Who lied cynically, by accusing them of "abusing" the system, when most don't have enough to live on? Who called the jobless "lazy",



**Time for the working class to say 'NO', like these Spanish workers in Madrid**

when hundreds are chasing after each real job? Again, Labour started the ball rolling, by blaming the poor for their poverty and the ConDems followed suit.

Having paved the way for UKIP's rise, the main parties will use it as a pretext for further attacks against workers. As so often in the past, Cameron will yield to the pressure of a Tory right which revels in UKIP's gutter rhetoric. As to Ed Milliband, he has already embarked on a "political realignment" by endorsing in all but words, much of the ConDems' line against welfare claimants and migrant workers.

### **A threat for the working class**

For the working class, the fact that a section of the electorate has come to endorse, even in a protest vote, the stench of UKIP's xenophobic, anti-working class rhetoric, is a major threat.

History tells us that, in the 1930s, the rise of fascism fed on such prejudices among irate petty-bourgeois, who were driven to despair by the crisis and led to think that the Jews, the poor and workers' organisations had caused their

misery. UKIP and its look-alike in the Tory party are not Hitler's thugs - not yet, but it wouldn't necessarily take long for such a movement to emerge, should the crisis deepen.

In the 1930s, the German working class was defeated by Hitler because its organisations refused to unite its ranks in a common fight to challenge the rule of the capitalist class.

Today, in Britain, the working class has still to use its enormous potential against the attacks of the bosses and their politicians. By joining ranks in an effective fight against these attacks, by demonstrating that it has the strength to fight off the capitalists' greed, not just in its own name, but in the interest of society as a whole, it could pull the carpet from under the feet of the likes of UKIP.

But in order to go on the offensive, the working class will need a party of its own, a party which takes the lead of its struggles and resolutely expresses the need to get rid of the profit system - a revolutionary, communist workers' party that needs to be built as a matter of urgency! □

## Isn't it the cuts that caused the measles?

By the end of April, 1,011 cases of measles had been recorded in the Swansea area with - luckily - only one death, a man of 25 years who certainly had measles but may have died of something else. This outbreak - or rather, epidemic - has (fortunately) hit mainly older children between 10 and 18 years. If it was affecting babies it would be lethal - especially under the immunisation age of 12 months.

The main reason given for the epidemic is that parents reacted to scare stories - first in the local press in Swansea in 1997 and then to Dr Andrew Wakefield's research, published in the Lancet medical journal a year later, which claimed that the

MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine could cause autism.

Except this doesn't really fit. Actually measles rates have gone up elsewhere - even in France, where no-one campaigned against MMR. What does fit, is the increasing poverty in parts of Wales and the concomitant difficulties parents have in taking their children for their regular jabs: fewer clinics, fewer staff to run them and the withdrawal of school nurses, whose primary job was checking immunisations. Of course it is convenient for government officials to blame the already struck-off Dr Wakefield and the media. But it's government cuts which are killing.

## Private patients to block the beds?

The NHS is struggling to provide adequate care - this is well known and obvious to all.

But never mind. One bit of the new health legislation will allow foundation trusts to earn 49% (compared to a previous 2%) from private patients. So out of 146 trusts, 40 now plan to open private patient units.

And of course facilities which "happen" to be there - like Intensive Care Units and operating theatres - will be available for these private patients too, pushing NHS patients even further back in the queue...

Ministers claim that the extra revenue thus earned will go back into patient care. After all concerned have taken their cut, of course...

## • The richer they are...

The latest rich list shows that the world's 59 richest individual own a combined wealth of £1,145bn or the equivalent of 3/4 of all value produced in Britain in a year. And no-one should worry about their fate in the crisis. Far from being dented by it, their wealth has increased by between 5.4% and 11% over the past year.

Britain's "Richest 1,000" don't fare too badly themselves, although with a more modest £450m average each. Their combined wealth went up £35bn over the past year. Still a mind-boggling figure! Even more so, as this £35bn is significantly more than what the government intends to take away from the benefits paid annually to the 20 million or so poorest families, by 2015!

Still wonder how the rich get richer and the poor poorer?....

## • Tax fraudsters reassured...

This time round again, Osborne was vocal about his plans to clamp down on tax evasion and avoidance. But just as in the past, this year's announcement is unlikely to yield any results.

In and of itself, what tells the real story is the derisory level of Osborne's supposedly virtuous commitment to recoup £3bn from fraudsters, compared to the scale of the fraud. After all, hasn't an official report into Barclays' operations just showed that, on its own, its tax avoiding unit had earned the bank £1bn/yr? Is there any plan to clamp down on Barclays? No!

And what about the over 170,000 British companies which, according to recent media reports, have directors operating from tax havens, including the Channel Islands (on the Isle of Sark, there are 24 British companies registered for every islander!), the Isle of Man (one company for every 2 islanders), the British Virgin Islands (3 British companies for every four islanders), Cyprus, Dubai, the Seychelles, etc..?

Don't count on Osborne to read them the riot act, either.

## • Perks of the job

The Big 4 accountancy firms (PwC, KPMG, Ernst and Young, Deloitte) recently came under attack from MPs for passing on insider knowledge to their clients on how to evade taxes.

## Letter from Sussex

### • Eastbourne maternity saga

Thanks to local protests, Eastbourne Lib-Dem MP, Stephen Lloyd was recently forced into initiating a Parliamentary debate over the downgrading of Eastbourne District General Hospital's maternity unit to a midwife-led clinic.

Surprise, surprise, though. He was fobbed off with a claim that no-one here believes: that it's only a "temporary measure". The local NHS trust has just tried to justify the downgrading by saying that the maternity unit is too small to attract the right medical staff, as they wouldn't get the "experience" they need to advance their careers. Given that pregnant women have been turned away from Eastbourne DGH for lack of space, isn't there an obvious solution - enlargement?

### • Unpalatable candidates

Desperate to be "respectable", UKIP has moved against several election candidates who indulge in right-wing extremism. Not to be left out, "silly Sussex" has produced Anna-Marie Crampton. She's been dropped as UKIP candidate for Crowborough, East Sussex, because she's stated on a conspiracy theory website, that World War 2 and the Holocaust were engineered by Zionists. She now claims that she's been "trolled". Like David Irving and Nick Griffin, no doubt.

They second senior staff to work in the Treasury (at taxpayers' expense, of course!) - ostensibly to plug gaps in the tax laws, while at the same time finding other loopholes or maybe creating new ones.

Margaret Hodge, Labour MP, accused them of being poachers-turned gamekeepers-turned poachers again - and rightly so, but why then did the last Labour governments also allow such practices?

Osborne response was to say that it was "totally absurd" that government should not work with business. In fact what this spat reveals is the extensive, hidden web of links between big business and ministerial departments which exist under all governments.

Secondment allows big companies to develop relationships with senior civil servants that they can use subsequently for their own benefit. Conversely, it should come as no surprise that examiners and retired civil servants frequently slip into highly-paid "jobs" with private companies as a reward for knowing how to play the system!

## Thatcher: the death of a class enemy

It's a pity that the obituaries to Thatcher, this so-called "witch" - whose death set off musical "ding-dongs" for youth, weren't also obituaries to all the pro-capitalist policies she stood for. Hopefully that'll come - sooner rather than later!

But of course, her salvation for Capital wasn't her invention: many others had already been arguing for privatising public industries, rolling back the state and turning it into Capital's dumb waiter - and for deregulating financial markets.

In the uncertain conditions of the world market, following the crisis of the 1970s, the capitalists wished for "quick bucks" without the time lag or risk involved in long-term manufacturing investment. Delivering this, as Thatcher did, laid the basis for the City's Big Bang, inflating the bubble of speculative capital into a top-heavy balloon, resting on an inadequate base of productive capital. This contributed to triggering successive crises - and eventually, the present one.

On the other hand, she flattered some top union leaders into agreeing to cut their members'



1984 - the miners were left to fight Thatcher on their own by the TUC

throats - signing them up to mandatory postal balloting, a ban on solidarity action and the limiting of pickets to 6. Capital thus got a free hand while union leaders tied their own behind their backs. In the context of no political alternative being forthcoming - not from Labour, but neither from anywhere else (Thatcher became famous for saying TINA - "there is no alternative"), workers felt at a loss. The confidence of our

class has yet to be rebuilt.

As for "Thatcherism" - sure, it was emulated by Major, Blair and now the ConDems, not to mention by other politicians around the world - but only because it was a way of saving the capitalists' bacon. Hopefully the pigs and all their political servants are now seen for what they are. We should look forward to the day when we fry their bacon. □

## We cannot forget Stephen Lawrence

It is 20 years since the 18 year-old school student Stephen

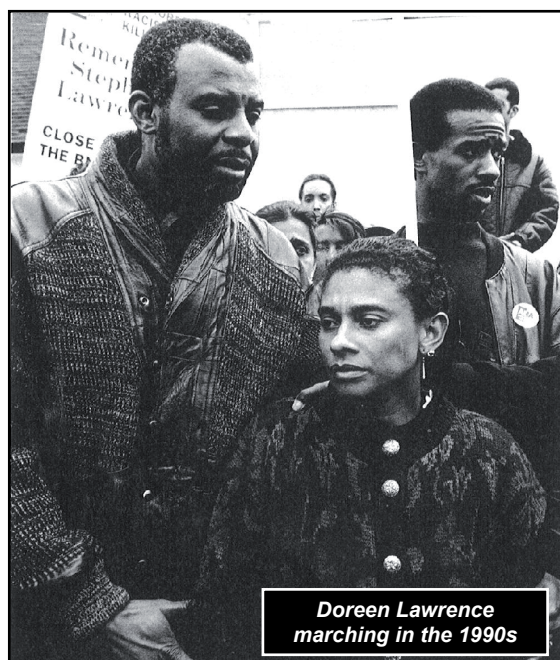
Lawrence was murdered by a gang of young white racist thugs at an Eltham bus stop.

Today two of those thugs are serving life sentences for their crime - but they were only convicted in 2012 - last year. The other three perpetrators have still to be convicted, 2 decades later.

Of course, Stephen's murder, unlike many other deliberate racist killings, did at least have some social and legal repercussions - thanks largely to a determined fight led by his mother Doreen, to expose the police, who protected the racist killers. From day one it would have been possible to arrest

and charge all 5 of them, from the testimonies of several witnesses as well as corroboration by local people who knew them. However, a trial two years later collapsed due to "lack of evidence".

The exposure of the police's inaction led eventually to the MacPherson enquiry - which brought the racist nature of police culture into the open. It also allowed the retrial of the original suspects, because it led to the abolition of the "double jeopardy" law. But the lack of resolution of the Lawrence case itself, has in the end, revealed how ineffectual legal "solutions" are in dealing decisively with the social sickness of racism. As one of the dangerous consequences of the gross inequalities emanating from the class system we all live under - it will not disappear until this system is ended. □



Doreen Lawrence marching in the 1990s

## crisis watch

The ConDems got another rebuke when credit-rating agency Fitch followed Moody's in downgrading Britain. Shortly afterwards, Osborne's austerity got a ticking off from the International Monetary Fund for threatening the economy with recession. A little humiliating for a government so determined to "restore market confidence" - no matter the cost to the majority of the population!

### "Funding for profiteering"

Shortly after his budget, Osborne made a little-noticed announcement: the "Funding for Lending" scheme was to be extended until January 2015 and the original £80bn limit on the total amount of loans made by the Bank of England to the banking system was to be removed.

Yup, a steroid injection! Another huge wad of state money into banks'

### • Help to fuel another crash?

Osborne's "Help to Buy" scheme to lend 20% of the value of mortgages on new houses worth up to £600,000, is yet another subsidy to the banks, aimed at raising their earnings from the still stagnant housing market. Mortgage approvals hit a record low in February. This new scheme could also help them offset some of their bad loans. As a further encouragement to lend,

### • Right to buy-to-let

In the London Borough of Wandsworth, more than a third of the former council homes bought by their tenants since Thatcher's right-to-buy policy are now owned by private landlords who rent them out. At the end of December, 16 of these landlords each owned at least 10 of the 6,180 properties, and one owned 93. So much for Thatcher's

## "Recession" or not, it's a mess!

Hence the redoubled efforts to paint the state of the economy in rosy colours. By late April, government statisticians managed to claim that the economy had expanded in the first quarter of the year, but by only 0.3%. Osborne immediately declared victory against the threat of recession! Except that since the economy had shrunk by 0.3% during the previous quarter, this still meant that it had been stagnating

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coffers, providing them with unlimited cash at a rock-bottom 0.75% interest rate. And all this, under the pretext of providing money "to the economy"! But why would this scheme work better than the previous ones? Why would the banks, which are already overloaded with bad loans, want to lend more, except maybe to riskless

government will guarantee a proportion of each mortgage, protecting banks from risk.

This will probably push house prices up, putting them further beyond reach for millions. Osborne doesn't even pretend otherwise, nor that helping 74,000 buyers who can afford 5% of the price as a deposit, is an answer to the housing crisis. Rather,

he hopes this cheap finance will boost housing speculation, thus increasing the wealth of the Tories' middle class electorate by pushing more business in the way of the financial institutions which will charge greater fees as prices go up. So billions of public funds go towards fuelling another housing bubble, much like that which led to the crisis in the first place!

the same right-to-buy scheme, both absolutely and as a proportion of the property's market value. Again, there is no guarantee that it will not ultimately transfer yet more council housing into the hands of private landlords. But what does Osborne care, so long as it generates more business for the banks?

downwards over these six months!

Anyway, at this level, small variations in the economy are meaningless, as the margin of error in calculating GDP figures is so much larger. And whether the politicians and their experts call this a recession or not, it definitely is one, judging by what the working class is going through. And that's the only thing that really counts. □

borrowers? And conversely, why would small companies want to borrow more in order to expand, when they would rather make the same profits out of reduced activity? This is merely the logic of the profit system and no amount of public money thrown at the system will change this logic - it will only line the pockets of the bankers! □

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## Miliband's prospective handouts to the bosses

Ed Miliband said he wants a Labour government to offer tax breaks to companies who pay the "living wage" (£7.45/hour, or £8.55 in London). Sure, wages are far too low. But it is a pretty tired old fallacy that capitalists will treat workers better if governments bribe them to do it. Osborne's cuts to corporation tax have not resulted in even

the "growth" he wanted, let alone the jobs workers need - and in this, Osborne only followed Gordon Brown who cut the rate of corporation tax to one of the lowest in Europe, without any conditions.

With Miliband desperate to be seen as a "responsible" would-be manager of big business interests, what's the bet that it's the offer

of tax breaks to business that will stick? And if the "living wage" is now official Labour policy, what are the odds that it will have been so pegged back by the time Labour takes office, that it is uncontroversial for the bosses - and useless for workers - much like the minimum wage was when Blair introduced it?!

## Employment down the drain

After months of rising employment, mostly thanks to part-time jobs that nobody could make a living from, the figures published in April were down by 2,000. Other figures were even worse. Unemployment rose 70,000 over the quarter from December to February, and there were 20,000 more youth out of work despite being targeted for "special treatment" by jobcentres. The number of long-term unemployed (for

more than a year) was also up 8,000 over the 3 months to November, since in many areas there are nothing like as many jobs as people looking for them.

Yet these uniformly bad figures conceal an even worse situation: the huge number of under-employed who disappear from the jobless count because they have a semblance of a job. At least 200,000 workers are

## Low pay, no way!

The minimum wage is to rise, from October, by 12p (to £6.31) - an increase of only 1.9% when official inflation is at 2.8% and predicted to reach 3.3% by this summer. So, once again, this means a wage cut in real terms for the low-paid!

Younger workers (under 21), will get an even worse deal - with just 1%, after two years in which they

got no increase at all. Ministers dare to pretend that, given the high level of unemployment among young workers, this lower increase is necessary to get bosses to employ more of them. As if the past freeze in the under-21 minimum wage had prevented youth unemployment from increasing over the past year!

But even this paltry wage is not

### • CABs and the crisis

According to Oxford's Citizens Advice Centre (the free advice network staffed mainly by volunteers), more and more people locally are swamped by debts. Last year 6,835 people visited their offices - 900 more than in the previous year, with total debts up 21%. The main problems were mortgage and council tax arrears, credit card and overdraft charges, together with "priority" debts like rent and heating. All this before the latest round of savage cuts begins to bite!

Ironically this is happening when CABs all over the country are themselves under attack, as Osborne's cuts slash their income as part of his "bonfire of quangos". So far Oxford has escaped the fate of Nottinghamshire's CABs (74% drop in funding) where numbers seen have dropped, not to mention Birmingham, Britain's second city, where the CAB virtually disappeared when the council withdrew its £600,000 funding, leaving just a telephone advice service. Not only are the poor being victimised for being poor, but this vindictive government is also ensuring that they will find neither help nor redress.

### • Forcing the sick back to work?

The government wants to "deal with" sickness at work, claiming it can save employers £160m in Statutory Sick Pay and boost the economy by £900m with a new set of procedures.

GPs will write "fit notes", only banning patients from doing the hardest tasks. Sick workers will face the prospect of being sent to (employer-friendly) occupational health, supposedly to "support

their recovery". A further option will be to call in free "independent" advisers, if an employee is off for more than 4 weeks - to be paid for by the tax payer.

Remember how Atos charged £400m to assess the fitness of disabled workers. To date, over 1,300 of those forced back to work died soon afterwards. The contract for the long-term sick will be put out to tender and the successful bidder will "train" assessors. As assessors will only keep their jobs if they "meet targets", similar catastrophes are bound to occur.

### • Lawyers looking after their own

The bill designed to entice workers into giving up rights at work in return for shares, faced unexpected opposition from the House of Lords. Not because the Lords felt any concern for workers, of course. They were just defending the interests of the legal profession - which is over-represented in their ranks. At present, industrial law and employment tribunals or in the law courts, provides a good living for many lawyers. Had this bill been implemented as it was, many lawyers might have felt the pinch.

Eventually, the government had to provide lawyers with some lucrative alternative opportunities - for instance drawing up "opt-out" contracts and providing employees with legal advice, paid for by the employer. The legal professional probably considered this was a good enough "compensation" since the amended bill was passed by the Lords.

As to workers, they can now either give up their rights for a few shares, entrust them to a legal system which is willing to be bribed - or use their collective strength to fight for them...

## crisis watch

on zero-hours contracts that do not guarantee any regular work nor minimum income, and the proportion of employers who use them has more than doubled since before the crisis - to almost 1 in 4. As for workers earning a regular wage, they saw an average rise in pay of just 0.8%. The employment figures are not the half of it! ☐

even paid to all workers. Bosses are very inventive when it comes to finding ways around it - by deducting tips, uniform payments, etc., off their workers' wages.

No, the only sure way to earn enough to make a living is to force the bosses' hands... as many-low paid workers are learning through their struggles. ☐

## Oxford on the dole

Work Programme contractor Maximus in Oxford is so fearful of missing ministers' targets for getting jobseekers off the dole, it wants them to run after everything and nothing. One single placement last year led to a mere 40 shifts as a spare dustman over 5 months and several re-claims of JSA when work dried up. Another this year, in a warehouse, was more regular, but finished in 4 weeks, partly because the hirer had taken a larger contingent from Maximus' rival A4E in Abingdon. Moreover, the agency failed to provide any wage slips, which screwed up candidates' housing benefit payments for months afterwards.

Even some of those starting a 3-week in-house course at Maximus had details of the latest dubious-sounding recruitment thrust on them - for a new warehouse nearly 30 miles away. Nor is being a month away from claiming old age pension any protection from the pressure. To follow all of Maximus' scattergun leads would actually be a hindrance to looking and applying for real jobs!

**King's Cross railway station (London)****• Gravy train: only sharks welcome**

At the end of 2009, National Express gave up the East Coast line, claiming that it could not afford to make the payments required by its franchising contract (what with the crisis and all). East Coast was then taken back by the government and run by Directly Operated Railways on its behalf.

Since then, predictably, DRO has managed to return £640m to the Treasury (including £177m last

year alone), which is more than any of the 15 other rail companies - which are all private.

What's more, because all the rail companies are subsidised by the state which pays for infrastructure, maintenance and any long term investment, the privatised railways as a whole are now costing £3.5bn, as opposed to £1.6bn before privatisation.

The case for renationalisation



couldn't be more obvious! But don't expect this to stop Osborne from looting public funds in order to line the pockets of the rail fat cats!

**• Cowboys, rogues and fools institute?**

East Coast is patting itself on the back for being certified as one of Britain's "Top Employers", for the second year running, by something called the CRF Institute.

Well, someone ought to be certified for giving EC's employment practices the thumbs up! What about the way they've cut wages on the station by creating down-graded barrier jobs? Or their refusal to take workers on permanently straight away, keeping them on insecure agency or fixed-term contracts instead? Or the fact that they're happy to contract out train cleaning to ISS, with pay and conditions right at the bottom of the heap?

The list goes on... [Workers' Platform King's Cross 16/04/13]

**• Jam tomorrow? no - in 2015!**

Initial has written to workers on main-line London stations saying that they'll increase our wages to the London Living Wage (currently £8.55 ph) - by 2015, in stages. Why not straight away? For a company which made £191m profits last year, it would be no hardship. But they'd rather leave us in hardship for another 2 years! Perhaps Initial made the offer because they heard we were ready to follow the example of ISS workers and walk out. But this isn't enough to satisfy us. [Workers' Platform King's Cross 16/04/13]

**• Worst of all scrooges**

Railgourmet, too, has been making noises about the London Living Wage (at least, there are lots of rumours flying around) - and not before time. So ISS is left out on a limb as the Scrooge of all Scrooges... [Workers' Platform King's Cross 16/04/13]

**• ISS is taking the 2p**

ISS said they were going to give us a tiny pay increase (hoping to stop our dispute). But when it actually appeared in our pay, it turned out they'd underpaid us (according to their earlier figure) by 2p! That is, for those of us who did get paid what we were owed. Most of us were paid short in any case - as usual. [Workers' Platform King's Cross 30/04/13]

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)****• Our debts can't wait**

So by now the pay rise, due 1 April, is almost a month late... Never mind tho', because our brave union leaders are on the case... They are "seeking... a straightforward above inflation pay rise for at least 2 years..." Why for 2 years, not 1? And why not spell out exactly how much we need?

Worse, they're also asking for a share in the company profits. Hardly in the spirit of a policy calling for a publicly-owned, not-for-profit postal service - which we thought the CWU stood for!! What's more they're going along with the ConDem scenario for privatisation - flotation with "employee shares"... So no, how can we agree? Maybe that's why they didn't ask us. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 22/4/13]

**• RM privatisation due this autumn**

The government has appointed a former KPMG financier, Mark Russell, to "manage" the sell-off of the remaining 21 companies in which it is chief (or only) shareholder. Of course, £3bn-worth RM is the biggest cherry. (Others

include the Met Office, Ordnance Survey and the estimated £900m-worth student loan portfolio!). The favoured plan is a public share flotation ("Tell Sid") after 10% is deducted for "employee ownership"... Sure. How many "Sids" were left standing after the British Gas sell-off by Thatcher in the 1980s? And, moreover, how many of us can afford to pay our gas bills today...? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 30/4/13]

**• Enough of this!**

The CWU leaders still say they're mounting campaigns against privatisation (and still insist upon talking about "fair" competition being ok!!). They've written and spoken too many words about this. And most of us normal postal workers know there's nothing for us to expect from them. Absolutely nothing.

Without their de facto sabotage, however, we could stop privatisation and reverse the rot which is already in the system. Can we mount the necessary solid, indefinite, all-out strike across the whole country and ask workers from other sections to join us? If we are determined and stick together, yes, it's possible [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 30/4/13].

**• Mops down, pens out the window!**

What's this about "making" us cleaners work a 7-days-a-week rota? ROMECE seems to think they'll then be able to refuse paying weekend overtime rates. Honestly! On the one hand the bosses abolish SA/Sunday working, cut Saturdays for processing and then they want Romec workers to come in and work... so they can save money?! Most of us, including those who transferred here from 9 Elms or Bow Locks work Mon-Fri. And the few already doing the 7-day rota were told it was just a "trial" - but the trial is not ending!

Well it will now! All the more so, since ROMECE's been putting pressure on us to sign new contracts! That's the best way to strengthen our resolve! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 30/4/13]

**Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**

**• A predictable result**

The Dagenham Stamping and Tooling plant (S&TO) strike ballot over the redundancy offer went against - by 396 votes to 118. Organising this ballot so very late in the day (the closure is due 26 July) was a feeble fob-off by the Unite senior officials. We'd just had angry meetings about the redundancy "agreement" Ford

wanted to foist on us - with far less generous terms than had been offered to Belgian and Southampton Ford workers (also facing closure). We voted by 81% against accepting the deal. However at this point, with the fight at an end in the other plants, it was hard to for us to see how we could conduct a strike



**A Unite lobby at Ford HQ on April 17th**

on our own. Although there is and was always the possibility of spreading action to other workers with common interests and thus strengthening our position.

Our anger against Ford was aggravated by the threat to pay less if we resisted the closure in



any way. Ford justified its poorer offer by claiming there would be jobs in the Engine plant for all who wanted them. But this was a lie. Skilled maintenance jobs in DEP are already filled. Over 300 of us are specialised toolmakers for whom only assembly line work is on offer - maybe! There's talk of just 25 toolmaking jobs in a new tool-shop.

So what next? This vote may not have helped much, but it was predictable and can't make matters worse. Let us ensure that Ford now gives us every bit of information we need - what jobs, where, how long, what guarantees etc. Because up to now managers have been dishonest and evasive. When we know where we stand, we will know what to do.

**BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**

**• With mortgages and families to feed...**

When the new Body-in-White building was opened last year, BMW corrected Minister Vince Cable. Investment would only guarantee existing jobs, not create new ones.

At the recent centenary bash, the Plant Director remarked that 1,000 new robots were being installed at Cowley "to save time and money" and "bring reliable quality".

So what about our job security, particularly if we're agency? With its new conveyor belts and robots, BiW is already looking like a no-go area for most of us. We need job guarantees and we need them now! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 17/04/13]

**• Money no object**

With currency fluctuation widespread, this could cause problems for car exporters.

But not if they place "hedgies" with the banks - as BMW has done to the tune of £30.6bn.

Well, if they've got enough money to do that, they've certainly got more than enough to pay us all decent wage increases, not to mention giving

every agency worker a proper contract. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 17/04/13]

**• Roller coaster**

With the new model Mini making its appearance on the line and increasing the number of unexpected stoppages, we might have expected a jolly, spring-like atmosphere in the air.

If only! Not only is the line running full-speed, when it hasn't stopped, but we don't have a clue how long the stoppages are going to be.

And when they are long, we're told to keep busy, by doing "housekeeping" by managers who spend their lives doing nothing! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 17/04/13]

**• Better health - but not yet**

Maybe BMW is not wrong to say that shorter shifts are better for our health. (It depends...). But clearly that's not why they wanted them.

In the meantime they continue to run the plant on 11 hour shifts - plus! Those working on WTA (the banked overtime system) this coming Saturday and then going on nights, will have half an hour's volume protection overtime (to make up for breakdowns) on top, next week.

The effects of long shifts are



cumulative - nothing undoes them. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 17/04/13]

**• Aftertaste of b\*\*\*s\*\*t**

Last Saturday WTA was worked from 6am-2pm. This was 2 hours longer working time than on recent Saturdays. Naturally many of us were expecting a lunchbreak at 12.

So we were definitely not amused to be told that "according to the agreement", we were "not entitled to a lunchbreak". In fact the collective agreement says "All associates will receive a daily, unpaid meal break of 30 minutes". So those people who persuaded us to work on were telling porky pies.

And where does this leave BMW's claim that we "don't need" a lunchbreak during a 7½hr shift? [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 1/5/13]

## Bangladesh

With over 600 bodies recovered so far, the collapse of the 8-storey, illegally-built Savar Plaza garment factory near the capital Dhaka, is Bangladesh's worst industrial catastrophe. Demonstrations by thousands of workers forced the government to close down the city's factories and declare a public holiday while rescue attempts continued.

This is Bangladesh's third deadly industrial accident in 6 months. Only last November 114 garment workers died following a fire at a factory with no proper exits. When cracks appeared at Savar Plaza, the building's in-house bank closed. But 3,200 workers were threatened with sanctions if they didn't carry on working. The building finally collapsed on April 27th, just 45 minutes after its owner claimed it would "stand for 100 years".

Some of the businessmen operating in the building may have been arrested and may face severe penalties. But there will be no sanction

## The West's blood-stained clothes



The Savar Plaza building after it collapsed

for the shareholders of Primark, Matalan, Benetton, Wal-Mart and other western companies which imported clothes made in this building and will carry on making billions out of the exploitation of Bangladeshi workers whose monthly wages are

as low as £24.

For the hundreds of millions of workers, in Asia and elsewhere, who struggle daily in such conditions, there won't be any real compensation as long as this exploitative capitalist system remains standing! ☐

## Afghanistan

The British and American forces have been using drones - unmanned aircraft - in Afghanistan for years, but they have been operated from a base in the US. Last October, however, the British military bought 5 new drones to use in Afghanistan, at £8m each (apparently, austerity doesn't apply to the generals' lethal toys!) and has now built the capacity to control them from RAF Waddington, in Lincolnshire, rather than from the US desert.

## Remote control terror

These drones are being used for what the military calls "armed intelligence and surveillance missions". But the very name of the aircraft gives the game away - they are called Reapers, as in "Grim". Each can carry 4 missiles, as well as a 500lb bomb. These are heavily-armed killing machines.

Use of these drones could potentially be a way to wage war by remote control, without soldiers or bases on the ground - as the US is

already doing in Pakistan and Yemen. But for the moment, the drones are doing what manned RAF planes have been doing all along and continue to do. As such, this latest development just serves as a reminder that, although Britain is supposed to be withdrawing from this war, there are still thousands of British troops in Afghanistan, bombing and terrorising the population. ☐

### • Rotten Apple

Apple made a whopping £6.1 billion profit in just the first quarter of this year. In the previous quarter, although only 10% of all mobile phone sold worldwide were its products, Apple got a 65% share of the profit on these sales, thanks to its high prices and super-exploitation of low-paid Chinese labour. And what is it

doing with all these super-profits? It is sitting on them: a pile of cash worth £93 billion! Well, it did spend £64bn - but this was to buy back its own shares to boost their price!

What a good illustration of the rottenness of the system. There you have one of the world's largest "high-tech"

companies, supposedly at the forefront of the development of the economy, but it is not actually investing its money in new production. So, although Apple is often presented as a "model" company for innovation and success, it turns out to be just as parasitical as the rest of its capitalist peers!

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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