

WORKERS' fight



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

CORRUPTION, BUILT INTO THE PROFIT SYSTEM

The resignation of MP Patrick Mercer from the Tory party, following a sting operation by Daily Telegraph journalists, has opened a Pandora's box. Within days, the Sunday Times produced another sting operation, leading to another resignation and two suspensions in the House of Lords.

So, cash was paid for questions to be asked in Parliament. Ironically, these Tory mouthpieces are putting Cameron in a difficult position. Didn't Cameron posture as "Mr Clean" by promising to "fix broken politics" in 2010? And, being himself a former lobbyist before going into politics, he should know what this requires. But did he do anything about it? No, of course not.

Recurring scandals

The fact that MPs make money on the side, under all sorts of pretexts, is nothing new, of course. Back in 1923, Winston Churchill himself took £5,000 (a huge sum at the time) from the forerunner of BP, to lobby the government on its behalf - and got away with it.

Every government has had its own share of parliamentary scandals. Just to mention the more recent ones: in 1994, there was the first "cash-for-questions" affair under John Major's Tory government. In 2006, under Blair, came the "cash-for-honours" scandal. Then, in 2009, under Brown, there was the expenses saga, and the "cash-for-influence" affair, in 2010. The attraction of money seems irresistible to many Mps - and their impunity a permanent feature of British politics!

So why should it come as a surprise? Sleaze is built into the parliamentary system. In fact, there's nothing illegal in MPs receiving money from outside "interests" (meaning mostly businesses) as long as they declare it. The rules say so. The only reason why Mercer and the three Lords who were exposed by the Sunday Times are in trouble today, is their failure to declare the



cash they had received.

But there are much more sleazy goings-on in Parliament. For instance 600 so-called "all-party parliamentary groups" receive sponsorship cash from private companies. These groups use their sponsors' money to wine and dine their members, organise trips for them, and offer them all sorts of perks. And if MPs belonging to these groups happen to intervene in support of their sponsors' interests, it's perfectly legal - although it's clearly a form of corruption!

Big business and its state

If there's no red line between what's legal and illegal when it comes to corruption in state institutions, it's because their function is to protect capitalist interests. And how do the wealthy secure the loyalty of their servants? By "tipping" them - which is what these bribes are really about.

Much greater corruption lies in the foundations of the state - due to its role in protecting the interests of the few against those of the many. Hence the revolving door between its institutions and big business, ensuring that the former operate in

the interest of the latter.

Blair is a glaring example, with the £2m/yr he gets from JP Morgan Chase. But over a dozen former senior government officials have moved into jobs with the "big four" accountancy firms over the past decade. Conversely, these firms have permanent representatives at the Treasury to "help" in designing tax laws - and tax loopholes!

The list is endless. Hector Sants and Jon Pain, formerly at the head of the FSA, the banks' watchdog, have joined the boards of RBS and Barclays - which must rely on their connections at the FSA to by-pass regulations. Meanwhile HSBC hired a former head of MI5, no doubt to avoid a repetition of the £1.3bn fine HSBC had to pay for laundering drug money in America.

Of course, there's a way around this corruption - the direct control of the working class over every institution, from local level to the very top. Imposing this workers' control isn't just the only way to stop this ongoing corruption, it would also be a powerful lever against the capitalists' greed - that is, until the working class rises to get rid, once and for all, of this corrupt profit system! □

crisis watch

On May 22nd, the FTSE 100 - the index which measures the share prices of Britain's 100 largest companies - almost reached its highest point in 13 years, having gone up by 15% since the beginning of the year. Yes, in this time of austerity, there is no shortage of money for shares - thanks to all the money printed by the government. This was supposed

• *The rise and rise of the banks*

The size and profitability of the financial sector grew enormously from the 1970s onwards - to just before the financial crisis in 2008. The banks were making profits hand-over-fist - returns of 25% were routine. Of course, to achieve this, they indulged in some very sharp and risky practices indeed, which paved the way for the crisis. In its wake, returns have been reduced, of course. But has the sector as a whole had its wings clipped by the crisis and the regulatory "clamp-down"? Not a bit of it.

Some investment banks, like Lehman Brothers, went to the wall. But this merely left the field to the remaining two - Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley - which are now more dominant in the US

No shortage of cash for shares

to give a boost to the economy but instead of being usefully invested, it is just feeding the stock markets, chasing after speculative profits.

The last time the markets were riding this high was in December 1999 - just before the DotCom bubble burst. And there is now the risk of another stock market crash, just around the corner. In fact, the next

day after reaching its recent peak, the FTSE had its biggest one-day fall for a year, and prices continue to yo-yo. Investors have got the jitters - understandably, since the underlying economy is very sick indeed. But until the music stops they'll continue to gamble frantically. How much more is the working class going to pay the price for this crazy system?

than ever. And while smaller, regional banks may have been largely pushed out of the picture as far as investment banking is concerned, huge multinational banks, including HSBC, have come to the fore as the dominant players on the market. Overall, the power of the banks, far from being reduced by the crisis, has actually increased.

• *Starving the world*

Speculation in commodities - food, fuel, raw materials, etc. - has increased exponentially over the past decade. And it's highly lucrative - the *Financial Times* estimates that the top 20 commodity traders have made £165bn in profits between them in this period!

Goldman Sachs is one of the big players. They increased their investment in this market from £2bn in 1996 to £170bn

in 2012. Speculation in commodity markets has ballooned: speculators made up 12% of the Chicago wheat market in 1996, but 61% by 2011. This means speculation is now the major factor in the prices of commodities, pushing them up and causing huge price spikes. For instance, commodity prices rose by 71% between 2006 and 2008.

Goldman Sachs made £263 million last year from speculation on food alone. The fact that this is putting the price of staples out of reach for hundreds of millions of people around the world, means nothing to the profiteers. The commodity traders are still resisting with all their might any attempt to curb their deadly activity - with the British government as their main cheerleader in Europe.

ConDems have blood on their hands

On May 4th, Stephanie Bottrill threw herself in front of a lorry, on the M6 motorway near Solihull. She left a note at her home, blaming the government's "bedroom tax" for giving her no option but to take her life.

The 53-year old, who couldn't work due to a serious chronic illness, had no other income than the £70/week she got in benefits. According to the government's tests, she was

"under-occupying" the 3-bedroom council home in which she had lived for 18 years and brought up her children. As a result, she was given two "options": either she paid an additional £20/week - as a tax on her "unused" rooms - which she obviously couldn't afford; or else she could move out. And since Solihull council had no smaller alternative accommodation to offer her, this

meant becoming homeless.

In the end, Stephanie Bottrill saw no way out of this government's vicious turn of the screw on the poorest than to pay - with her own life! And this is only one case that has been disclosed by the media. But 660,000 households are targeted by the ConDems' "bedroom tax". How many more Stephanie Bottrill's will be caught in their trap?

• *Madness of the housing crisis*

Councils in 12 cities have spent £1.88bn on temporary emergency accommodation over the last four years, rising year-on-year. In December 2012 there were 53,150 households accommodated temporarily, up 9% on a year earlier. With the "benefits cap", more than 7,000 households in London alone will have to pay at least £100 more a week, so the bill can only grow faster.

Councils are paying through the nose for bed and breakfast and for renting from private landlords. More than 32,000 households have been put in accommodation outside London altogether. Newham alone has spent £185m on temporary housing, sending some homeless families as far as Birmingham. At the

extreme of homelessness, night shelters are starved of the increased funding they should be receiving.

Meanwhile, a report for the London Assembly found that 150,000 skilled construction workers are claiming Jobseekers' Allowance in the capital - at a cost of £2.1bn. Building social housing could not only get them working, but house the increasing number of homeless, at far less cost in the long run. The government knows this, but prefers to penalise the poorest and play to its reactionary gallery by subsidising mortgages.

• *New speculation, not new homes*

Osborne's "Help to Buy" and "Funding for Lending" - i.e., cheap Bank of England loans to banks to subsidise not-so-cheap mortgages - are already fuelling

a bubble in house prices. The surveyors' institute, the RICS, reported a surge in buyers, leading to a rise in prices. Meanwhile, the Rightmove website reported a £20,000 increase in the average asking price for homes nationally, to £249,000. In London, the average price is nearly £510,000, and Camden has just joined the boroughs of Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea, in having an average house price of a million.

Although "Help to Buy" was supposed to stimulate new housebuilding, so far, only prices have reacted! A range of experts - and even the bosses' *Financial Times* - warn that Osborne's large new subsidy has created exactly the conditions for another crash. And this would hit the poorest of the new buyers - who entered the housing market with the smallest deposits - the hardest.

Profits too bad for health...

Last year as much as £8.7bn was spent by the NHS on private services which it could not or would not provide. This is £3bn more than in 2006. Almost 20% of all hip and knee replacements are now carried out by private health companies. In some parts of England 10% of NHS funds go towards paying private "providers" for routine patient diagnosis and treatment.

Back to the 8hr-plus wait in A&E

Why are A&E departments in crisis? The GP contract which was negotiated by the previous Labour government and allowed them to opt out of out-of-hours care is to blame - says Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt. He would say that. What he won't say is that the out-patient clinics and referral system has broken down, that there are not enough GPs and that they have had to take on an increasing load of work which used to be done precisely by the shrinking out-patient clinics and by other primary care providers. Which all means that the possibility of seeing your GP on the day of your injury or illness is becoming smaller and smaller. So where do you go, except to A&E?

And this then causes another

And while the private health companies are seeing their revenues increase - receiving a guaranteed protection against the crisis, unlike the rest of us - spending on health in real terms has fallen by almost 2% since 2010. Cuts in public provision are paying for this ongoing private bonanza. This is an inevitable consequence of government policy - be it

crisis watch

Tory, Labour or Con-Dem - to develop a private health market at public expense. The problem is that they are still getting away with it. They needn't: not if health workers can mobilise a large enough contingent from the working class to threaten the capitalist class where it hurts - and then offer them a cure... ☐



crisis - because A&E departments are being shut, up and down the country. Maybe so-called general practice needs to be overhauled and

modernised. But the first priority is to stop the closures and reverse the cuts in primary care!

• From the donkey's mouth

"Lord" Young, a cabinet minister under Thatcher and the only government aide to have his own office in Downing Street, has put his foot in his mouth once again. The first time, in 2010, he had declared that voters had never had it so good, given the low interest rates: he obviously meant the banks and the wealthy. Still, it did not look too good, and he had to resign. Mind you, not for long - 11 months later, he was back.

Now he's made headlines with another crass statement: recession is great for business, he said. Why? Because higher unemployment gave them a free ride, allowing them to squeeze more profit out of workers, through longer hours, poorer wages and benefits and generally worse working conditions.

That is, until workers teach these parasites some respect and turn the tables on them. The sooner, the better..

• Official: we're getting poorer

According to recent which rank the 15th richest countries, Britain has fallen in the league table of household disposable income (i.e. income after tax), from 5th place to 12th - i.e. people have less money available to live on.

The Office of National Statistics said

this was due to price increases linked to the low value of the pound. But they had to admit the role of austerity and tax cuts: the average income of the richest 10% in 2010 was 10 times higher than that of the poorest 10% - way above most developed countries. Meanwhile the top rate of income tax has dropped from 60% in the 80s to 40% now. No wonder the level of inequality in Britain is, according to some measures, second only to the worst - the US.

• Robbed from cradle to grave

An estimated one in five people retiring from work this year will fall below the poverty line. One in seven will depend entirely on the state pension, which pays a maximum £110/week. Even for those with private pensions, the amount of saving needed has risen so fast, that unless they were high earners, their pension is unlikely to provide a living income. A pension pot of £152,800 is now needed just to generate £5,000 a year!

Governments have sold the idea that workers must save for retirement, aiding companies to rob their workers by closing defined benefit schemes, and fobbing them off with (government-supported) schemes, far more at the mercy of the financial markets. Set

against declining wages and rising living costs, this is a more obvious fraud than ever. Providing a decent retirement for workers can only be achieved when society as a whole takes responsibility for it. And since, today, the capitalist class monopolises all wealth, it should be their responsibility to pick up the bill!

• Profits bonanza - we pay!

Energy utilities have made huge profits on the back of price increases. With the current spring the coldest since 1962, these record profits are set to continue - with customers picking up the tab. Scottish and Southern Energy - supplying 9.6m households - raised prices by 9% last autumn and saw profits jump by 33%, to £410m. A £10.5m fine for mis-selling will hardly dent this. Power NI are planning an 18% increase in July blaming the fuel market and the province's reliance on fossil fuels. Meanwhile "npower" have the distinction, not only of a 9% price rise last autumn and record profits, but of tax evasion via Malta.

The government's advice to "shop around" falls flat in a market where price rises are synchronised. So much for privatisation providing cheaper prices. The only winners are the shareholders.

• *One international working class*

In the Queen's speech, the government emphasised its plans to restrict the rights of migrant workers to health care, benefits and housing. While the idea that doctors and landlords could or would act as immigration officers might not seem credible - what is signalled by this, is another attack against the whole of the working class.

In the past, under Labour, draconian measures against the

unemployed - accused of being "lazy" - downgraded conditions for large sections of the working class, employed and unemployed. In the same way, measures which are aimed at making the lives of migrant workers even harder, only pave the way for another turn of the screw against all workers. As always, by targeting one section of workers, the capitalists aim is to weaken the working class as a whole.

That's why an attack on one is an attack on all. And that's why this has always been the principle of the working class movement - even if the TUC has forgotten it. Countering these attacks would mean proposing a united fight of the entire working class against the capitalist exploiters. The TUC may not be prepared to rock their boat, but workers don't have any other choice.

• *Sowing prejudices to reap profits*

The xenophobic ranting reflected by the announcements made in the Queen's speech are not a Tory monopoly. They also come from Labour mouths, with, for instance, Labour MP John Mann calling for an end to the free movement of workers in the EU and for the institution of work permits for all EU migrants. Nor are they a monopoly of Eurosceptics:

some pro-European business leaders are proposing restrictions on EU migrants' entitlement to health-care, child benefit, Jobseekers' allowance, etc. If implemented, how long would it take before similar restrictions were imposed on all workers in Britain?

As if any migrant workers could previously register with a GP without

showing a passport. As to claiming benefits on arrival from abroad, assuming they master English and work their way through the maze of the benefits system, why would they leave family and friends to survive here on £71/wk? This is only a gutter press caricature!

• *Tory turmoil*

Following a Queen's Speech that he had drafted himself, Cameron faced a humiliating rebellion from his own party - in fact, the largest since coming into office - when 114 Tory MPs voted for a motion regretting the absence of an in-out referendum bill in this speech. So much so that a rumour began to circulate that Cameron had lost control of his own party.

Aspiring rivals

One of Cameron's problems is that the rebels are not just the usual suspects - unruly backbenchers who are easy to whip into line when necessary. They also include several senior cabinet ministers, including Theresa May, Michael Gove and Philip Hammond, together with Tory grandees such as Boris Johnson and Thatcher's former Chancellor Nigel Lawson, all of whom have publicly broken ranks with the government's line over the EU.

In reality, this phrase-mongering hasn't much to do with the EU. It's no coincidence if several of Cameron's prominent challengers for the leadership of his party - Theresa May, Boris Johnson and

possibly Michael Gove - are among the dissidents! For them the backbenchers' rebellion is just a golden opportunity to raise their profiles and position themselves for a future leadership contest.

EU or Ukip?

As to Tory backbenchers, their "rebellion" isn't really about the EU either. It has far more to do with Ukip's score in the recent local elections and the 18% this party gets in opinion polls. And Cameron is trying hard to appease the mob without this destabilising the profits British capital makes in Europe.

Hence all the noise surrounding, for instance, what Cameron's spin-doctors call "NHS tourism". Yet, despite all his efforts to magnify the issue, Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt only managed to produce an estimated £200m "lost" by the NHS from providing healthcare to foreigners - a grand 0.2% of the NHS' total £104bn budget!

However, this xenophobic over-bidding is more likely to boost Ukip's support rather than dent it, because it can only legitimise Ukip's poisonous rhetoric. But what does Cameron care?

• *A sinking ship?*

Over the past few months 30 Tory rats (sorry, councillors) have jumped ship to UKIP while some Tory heavyweights hint at making a similar move. Apart from its recent score in the local elections, why would they want to joint UKIP, when they are certain to lose some of the advantages of being in a big party? Keeping their options open so as not to lose their seats at the next election? Having a means of pressure on Cameron, maybe?

An interesting example is Tory backbencher Nadine Dorries, who was recently allowed back into the Conservative Party after being suspended for taking part in a reality show - not too mention being so right-wing (anti-abortion bigot, among other things) that she was an embarrassment to Cameron. She's now worked out how to have her cake and eat it. Simple really: by getting the Tories to team up with UKIP on a joint ticket at the next election.

For working people, the politicians' musical chairs is of no interest, but it comes at a cost. Making UKIP more mainstream, has made its xenophobic ranting more acceptable, and that is a real danger for working people.

Woolwich - the unacceptable cost of state terrorism

The Woolwich attack came as a shock. Why should drummer Lee Rigby have to die in London, in such a brutal way? This was a senseless murder. But more than that, it was completely useless.

The two murderers explained their action by declaring that "Muslims are dying daily by British soldiers". And yes, British soldiers have been killing Afghan people for over twelve years, and still do. But these soldiers are just pawns in the hands of the real criminals - the politicians who ordered the occupation of Afghanistan, the generals who conducted the war, and British capital whose interests they all serve.

However, this unpalatable truth had to be concealed at all costs, together with the fact that the

attackers were ordinary black youth in casual clothes, born and bred in London - contrary to what the BBC originally said, on the basis of false information fed by Whitehall. Never mind that these lies have been encouraging racist thugs to attack individual Muslims and mosques ever since!

Knowing all too well that there aren't many people who still believe that British troops are in Afghanistan to "protect Britain", Cameron chose to raise the spectre of a terrorist conspiracy linked to "al-Qaeda", to the point of convening Cobra, a special committee originally designed to respond to a threat of war, and multiplying arrests across Britain. But Al-Qaeda is just a convenient scarecrow.

Those who are claiming the moral high ground by blaming the attackers - and only them - are hypocrites for whom human blood doesn't have the same value, depending on whose blood it is. But a terrorist is a terrorist, even when his name is Cameron and his authority is dressed up in the rags of the British state. The despair which feeds individual terrorism - including among black British youth who are often marginalised in this crisis-ridden society where racism is still rife - is, first and foremost, a by-product of the state terrorism exercised by the British capitalist class on the populations of the poor countries, to enforce its own domination. It is, above all, this enemy within - British capital - that needs to be eradicated. □

Afghanistan: troops out now!

The British government says it plans to exit from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. Already British bases in Helmand - the area it is policing - have been scaled down from 120 three years ago, to only 12 today. Many soldiers have been confined to base for months on end. So what's the point of keeping 8,000 troops there and only planning a reduction to 5,200 by the end of this year? Officially it's because British troops are on standby - ready to come to the assistance of the Afghan army in case of an emergency. But with the local commander saying that he neither needs help, nor has he asked for it, the presence of British troops is increasingly pointless.

The foreign occupation of



Afghanistan has continued for more than 12 years, claiming the lives of 440 British troops, thousands of US and other NATO troops and hundreds of thousands of Afghans.

Bringing this costly military fiasco to a rapid end is the best guarantee of preventing more senseless deaths - both in Afghanistan and over here.

Debts not honoured?

Although British governments have spent an estimated £37bn on their war in Afghanistan since 2001, Cameron was reluctant to spend anything on 1200 Afghan interpreters after the British leave next year. What a cynical way of treating interpreters who were used, and in some cases coerced, to help the British army! Especially as after its

departure, not only will they be jobless, but they will also be prime targets for their role as collaborators. But that's what imperialist powers do. They use governments as well as individuals in the poor countries, until they've served their purpose. And then they throw them away with contempt.

Under pressure from human

rights lawyers, the government has now agreed to allow 600 interpreters and their families to settle here. They will all have worked more than 12 months for the British. But what of the 600 who haven't worked so long? Are they to be sacrificed just so Cameron can appease xenophobic Tories?

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• Do we support ourselves?**

So we've had the meetings over the consultative ballot which has been organised by the CWU - result due 19 June. It asks 4 questions: do we support the pay claim - but doesn't say how much, just "above inflation" and 2 years (not one!); are we against privatisation; do we want to boycott competitors' mail; and do we agree with not co-operating with management? But Deputy Secretary Ward's address starts by asking if

we "support the union"! This is what the union machinery always asks us, every time there's a dispute, as if the meaning of "union" shouldn't be us, collectively supporting each other, against the Royal Mail Board and the government behind!

Or is it that we're being asked to give a free hand to the union officials to negotiate a deal without telling us, because it's secret and "confidential"? Let's learn from the past and

• We can stop privatisation

As for the questions on the ballot paper, of course we're against privatisation, but we cannot see how a boycott of downstream access mail is going to make one iota of difference. And shouldn't non-co-operation with the bosses go without saying when you're in dispute? This is all a far shot from

what's needed right now to stop privatisation. It's firing at the wrong targets and goodness only knows how the union will interpret the results of 4 different questions!

On the other hand, we should make no mistake: privatisation can be stopped - even if the ball has



demand full transparency: we want to know every dot and comma that passes between union officials and management and when we do, it is up to the whole workforce to decide what's to be done!

already started rolling. We're strong enough to fight this - provided we're determined to go all out, while asking other sections of workers to join in, when and if they can. And provided we don't allow stitch-ups behind our backs. It's that simple... and that difficult! But perfectly possible.

• The highest paid civil servant?

We see RM made all these profits, with Moya Greene being congratulated on nearly trebling turnover to £403m over the year. She's been sorting and delivering letters and packets like mad and straining her back mopping up? Yes sure. That's why it's all down to her and why she deserves a bonus of £500,000 over and above her salary of £498,000... and we deserve nothing.

And poor old thing. She can't understand why we think the Postal SERVICE should remain under state ownership!!

Yes, she points to Germany and Austria which privatised, but in fact forgets to mention that the states there still own large stakes in the post - a majority share in Austria and 29% in Germany. [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 28/5/13]

• No decline

What we also noticed was that the

so-called decline in letter post was somehow a rise of 4%! which confirms what we've said all along - we see no decline at all! It's just that the machines are processing the stuff instead of us - we see them going "all-out". And when the cost paid for these machines is no longer appearing in the balance sheet - no wonder they register profits - all thanks to cuts in human labour cost. But at what great cost to our health and safety...? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 28/5/13]

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Vote with our feet?**

Rumour has it that the ASLEF executive has accepted FCC's 3.2% pay offer on behalf of drivers - without giving us a vote. Apparently, there are strings attached but no one knows what they are. It's all hush-hush, which only makes us more suspicious. Why should we make any concessions? FCC's miserly offer only matches inflation - that is, it's not a real rise at all. It's not like they're doing us any favours. But if we want to have our opinion heard, it seems we'll have to find our own way. [Workers' Platform Kings' Cross 28/5/13]

• Who are they trying to kid?

East Coast workers are entitled to 33 or 34 days' holiday a year - so that's what we expect, irrespective of our shift pattern. But the Travel Centre wants to start calculating our leave in hours instead. Initially, they offered 231 hours leave a year - 7 hours for each annual leave day. But who works a 7-hour

shift? They're all longer! So they upped it to 245 hours. But shifts can be 8 or 10 hours, so it still means that we could lose lots of days' leave. No way is this "fair" - or acceptable! [Workers' Platform Kings' Cross 28/5/13]

• We stand together on this!

East Coast has been trying to change the way holidays are worked out for On Board catering workers and guards, as well as the Travel Centre. But they've come up with a different method and a separate deal for each section. And the RMT is going along with this by arranging three separate votes on it. The guards are going to be balloted. In the Travel Centre, we're having a referendum, with the RMT recommending rejection of the deal, but TSSA recommending acceptance. On Board catering workers will also have a referendum, but the RMT is recommending acceptance, in this case. Why should we agree to be divided, instead of saying "no", loudly and together? [Workers' Platform Kings' Cross 28/5/13]

**• Trying to hide their dirty linen**

The latest trick from ISS is to try to get Cleaners to sign a statement saying that we won't tell anyone what happens at work or what's in our contracts. We didn't realise we were bound by the Official Secrets Act in this top-secret job! What have they got to hide? We know very well the answer to that - they don't want anyone to know about their atrocious pay, lousy conditions and dirty tricks. Which is exactly why we'll carry on shouting it from the rooftops! [Workers' Platform Kings' Cross 28/5/13]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• Ford says down, down under**

In the last week of May, Ford announced yet more factory closures. By 2016, production in Australia would cease, with the loss of 1,200 jobs. Ford says it is losing money. In fact it produces only 40,000 cars a year there - in two plants in Victoria.

Ford is in profit. It's paying shareholders big dividends and has been since the middle of the crisis. This is mainly because it has reduced labour costs in capitalism's heartland,

the USA. In fact it has introduced 2nd and 3rd tier wages and cut these costs by 50%! Which might be a way to understand the ruthless cuts it has made in Europe (the huge Genk factory in Belgium, and in Britain, the Southampton Transit plant and Dagenham's Press shop and Tooling operations) and now these cuts in Australia. Ford Australia can keep its options open by such an announcement: it can either use it to drive



wages down in Victoria - or it can transfer production to one of the cheap-labour sites in east Asia. But the fact that the closure is in 2 years time also gives the workforce the chance to prepare to fight it. Let's hope they do!

• Get ye to the Midlands!?

So - Ford bosses in soon-to-close Stamping and Tooling plant, invited their rivals Jag-Land Rover as well as UK Power Networks to come see us about possible transfers... to the Midlands! Not that it was about offering actual jobs, of course! Over and above special relocation deals the pay rates are lower by around £4,000, for skilled maintenance. Rather being a real help for us, this "workshop", looked more like another attempt to get us to leave, as Ford can't or won't place us in jobs in Essex. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 21/5/13]

• Share all available work!

In fact we've little info on available jobs - and only a few vacancies can be applied for at Dunton R&D centre. But then you read Fraud News featuring Dagenham Diesel Centre's "wonderful engine R&D", and realise there'd be plenty of scope for expanding it - with dozens of toolmakers/mec-elecs, who'd bring their talents! The work could be shared out and developed in new directions! Yes, like improving the lousily designed, un-ergonomic Chicken Farm and Den (known as Tiger and Lion engine lines) by adding chairs, lifts and finding ways to make space on it so we can work without harm or swollen feet!!

[Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 21/5/13]

• Trying to push us out, in the dark

More specifically there's not a dicky on the 25 Toolmaking jobs in Dagenham Engine Plant. Ford wants to know the leavers' headcount, and probably hasn't used up all the cards in their "piss us off as much as possible" pack yet. But some of us are still waiting for our final figures! And in DEP, surprise, surprise, we're just as much in the dark over the shape of things to come - especially on the winding down Lynx engine line. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 21/5/13]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• The weasel worders**

In Building 50 Gi have been hiring agency workers and promising them BMW contracts within 9 months. Since so many agency workers have been here for up to 9 years (if not more), how can this be justified? It seems that the jobs on offer are for machine technicians who, BMW say, need an NVQ 3 qualification. But this is clearly weasel-wording as the people doing these jobs at the moment (who face the prospect of losing them) only have NVQ 2 qualifications and in some cases, not even that... [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 15/5/13]

• So what's behind this?

BMW has a long track record of telling out-and-out lies. Even now agency workers when starting are told that, if they work hard etc, they will be eligible for a BMW contract after 6 months. So unless a Gi worker doing a technician's job has the promise of a BMW contract "after 9 months" written into his Gi contract, he's unlikely to receive one. Meanwhile BMW will feel free to "de-assign" any such worker who does not take their fancy. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 15/5/13]

• Back of an envelope...

When it comes to pay, Gi are downright devious about the weird 2-year route to equal pay for new starters. Asked for written confirmation of the lower rate between 12 weeks and 2 years' service (a basic entitlement), they produced a handwritten lined sheet, unsigned - and then refused to let us take a copy of it! This "derogation" of the agency workers regs will rip off every worker who stays for 2 years to the tune of £11,400. They've never explained how it's legal, and this response is a good clue as to why they won't - it's dodgy as hell! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 15/5/13]

• Thieves' kitchen?

The delay in telling us anything more about what's been cooked up over pensions is as ominous as the soothing language of Unite's letter on the subject weeks back. When Unite wants BMW to back off, as in November 2011, it shows us with strongly-worded leaflets, even mobilising stewards to give them out at the gates. So why now do they say nothing about what's actually proposed - unless top officials are in the kitchen with BMW? [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 29/5/13]

**• What cobblers!**

According to Lady Greengrass, CEO of the International Longevity Centre-UK, as reported in the Daily Express, BMW is one of a handful of companies to accommodate older workers. She claims BMW reorganised a production line to help them. Well that would be good news if it were true! Perhaps BMW would like to tell us older workers where this line is?

But maybe Lady G thinks Rover's Panel Room still exists? There, up to 180 workers/day returned to work gradually, with light tasks for the disabled. In its own way it was a solution for the medically restricted and an alternative to the dole. Smacks of a fairy tale today, doesn't it? It was scrapped by BMW and many of the workers affected were unceremoniously bundled out of the gate! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 29/5/13]

Sweden

Why did youth in a number of city suburbs in Sweden go on the rampage, burning cars, and attacking police and police stations? "There is no answer" said Stockholm's police spokesperson! Of course he wouldn't admit that the rioting, mainly by youth from an immigrant background, was fuelled by police racism - and that "project REVA", which has been stepped up of late, to stop and question anyone "non-Swedish" in appearance in public places, is overtly anti-immigrant and racist, targeting black youth.

Nor would he admit that another spark to the rioting was the killing by police, without cause, of a 69-year old immigrant man - and the fact that his body lay for days in his apartment - causing consternation among his neighbours. But most of all, he would not speak about the disproportionate rise in unemployment among immigrant youth. Youth unemployment is 25% overall, but immigrant youth are

Anger in the streets



After a day of rioting

3 times more likely to be out of a job, so are effectively ghettoised..

This sudden flare-up of youth anger is reminiscent of the Brixton riots of 1981 in Britain, with its context of racist police intimidation and rising unemployment. However, the decade-long privatisation of the Swedish welfare state means that the social fabric is deteriorating so much that Sweden

and Britain look remarkably similar when it comes to falling living standards and lack of social provision. The danger is that, like in Britain and elsewhere in Europe, against this background, Sweden's racist and nationalist far-right is able to grow. But that is also up to working class organisation - which can stop it. □

Pakistan

If the media is to be believed, the general election held in Pakistan on May 11, was a "victory for democracy". According to them, "for the first time in Pakistan's history, one fairly elected civilian government has served a full term and, in the course of a fair election been replaced by another."

It is true - and unusually - that the change in government wasn't due to a military coup. And although this year's

Another parody of "democracy"

turnout was officially 60% - high by Pakistan's standards - there was the same ballot-rigging and vote-buying as in every past election. Moreover, the election campaign was marked by a resurgence of terrorist attacks, which left 150 dead and many more injured. Anyone making a clear stand against fundamentalism was targeted. So much so, that outside the religious parties, only two others were able to hold election rallies - Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League(N) and the "Movement for Justice" led by former cricketer Imran Khan. And there was the usual intimidation to stop women from voting. "Democracy"

was definitely not part of this election!

Nor had voters any choice, since all the main parties were proposing variations on the same pro-privatisation, anti-working class policies, at a time when standards of living are at a record low. In the end, Sharif's party won an overall majority of seats, followed by Khan's party and the PPP. But there's nothing "new" in this new government. Sharif owes his political career to the dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq who appointed him governor of Punjab, in 1985. Subsequently, he went on to become prime minister twice, and each time, was personally embroiled in corruption scandals which never reached the courts. Today, as he begins his third term, Sharif is one of the country's wealthiest man, as the head of the Ittefaq conglomerate - which, from steel, has expanded to anything from textiles to sugar. No wonder the Karachi share market was boosted by the news! □



"Democracy" in action

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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