



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

ENOUGH OF BIG BUSINESS PARASITISM!

This year's Tory party conference was in election mode. On the one hand, well-off voters were promised billions of pounds of state funding to buy expensive homes. And, on the other, they were reassured that their taxes would not be "wasted" on "undeserving" claimants.

Hence the calls made by Tory grandees, for an end to what they describe as the "something for nothing culture" - thereby announcing another turn of the screw against the poorest.

Beyond its electoral purposes, this sloganising is a threat for the working class as a whole. For all of Osborne's boasting about turning round the economy, the Tories are nonetheless announcing an escalation of the bosses' offensive against workers' conditions.

They rob the poor...

Despite rising evictions and rent arrears for the poorest, the benefit cap and "bedroom tax" are here to stay. For the Camerons and Osbornes of this world, receiving welfare benefits is being guilty of the "crime" of getting "something for nothing".

Never mind that claimants have paid in advance for these benefits through their National Insurance contributions - and that many still do, since most claimants are in work!

As to the new "Help to Work" scheme announced by Osborne, it won't help the long-term jobless to find a decent job. Nor is it meant to.

Under this scheme, one third will "pay for their benefits" by doing community work for free; another third will spend 35 hours per week filling in CVs at JobCentres; and the last third will face a "mandatory intervention regime" - a reinforced version of the "Work Programme", designed to force



claimants into lousy, paid or unpaid, private sector non-jobs.

More importantly, JobCentre contractors will have more powers to stop benefits and to do it quicker, if claimants object to this harassment! The government clearly hopes that many claimants will stop claiming to avoid this punitive treatment, while many others will have their benefits cut. Thus Osborne will kill two birds with one stone - cutting the jobless count and the benefits bill, to fund more subsidies to companies and the wealthy.

.. to fund the bosses' "something for nothing"

It's not the jobless and low-paid who are getting "something for nothing", it's the bosses who underpay workers and use "zero-hours" contracts, to avoid shouldering the risks of *their* market or, even, to avoid paying NI contributions and sick pay. And it's the companies which make the best of the gaping tax loopholes created by their politicians.

Yes, the "something for nothing culture" is the way capitalism loots and cripples the economy to pay fat dividends to the rich. The capitalists take everything from society but give back very little in return. Their parasitism can cause havoc to the economy and throw millions out of work, as it did in 2008, or cause a deep slump, as it does today. And what do they care? As long as they and their politicians rule the roost, they'll always find ways of sweating the working class, using the pretext of the crisis if need be, as they've done of late.

The working class cannot allow its living standards to go down the drain. It cannot allow the jobless and low-paid workers to be treated like criminals, when the only real criminals are the capitalists who deprive the economy of jobs and productive investment. It's the "something for nothing culture" of British capital which should be ended, once and for all! ☐

Freedom, yes, but from prejudice as well!

The ban preventing Birmingham Metropolitan College students from wearing the "burka" was finally overturned by the courts after extended polemics. But the real issues were never really raised on this occasion.

In the name of "religious freedom", a judge decided that, instead of providing youth with a framework in which they can really learn and choose a future for themselves, this

school would have to allow religious prejudices to prevail within its walls. Of course, the blanket ban which had been decided by the College's board could not have stopped women from being oppressed by religion, let alone by society in general - nor was this its purpose. But this ban could at least have been useful for women who wanted to escape from the religious oppression of their milieu, at least during school hours,

since they would have been complying with a rule which their parents could not dispute.

Unfortunately, there were few voices making such an argument. And the most shocking aspect, maybe, of this whole affair was that it was left to people like Cameron to back the ban - for reasons of his own, which obviously had nothing to do with the oppression of women in society! ☐

• Who profits?

Osborne claimed to have made a £61m "profit for taxpayers" by selling 6% of the government's shares in Lloyds, at a price marginally above what the previous Labour government paid for them in 2008, when the bank was bailed out.

It doesn't look like such a great deal, when the cost of borrowing the money for the last five years is included, since this is around ten times more than this "profit". And if inflation is taken into account, the money raised is worth about 13% less, in real terms, than it was five years ago.

But the big institutional investors, who snapped up the shares they were offered, clearly expect to cash in, thanks to the government underwriting lending. And that's what's really behind this. It's just another way of handing yet more money to the capitalist class.

• Is the Church resurrecting the banks?

A Church of England-backed consortium led by Corsair Capital has bought 314 branches of RBS. RBS had been forced to offer some of its branches for sale, in return for the EU's endorsement of the bank's bailout, using taxpayers' money, by the last Labour government.

The church claims to be backing a banking operation which will have the "highest ethical standards". Like Barclays, of which it is also a shareholder, perhaps? Or the payday loan shark Wonga, in which it has also invested? These days, it would seem that the money lenders get invited into the temple...

• Fracking the Tory heartlands

Cameron and Osborne are cheerleaders for Britain's future shale gas industry. Not only have they been talking up its potential benefits (cheaper energy for all, they claim), but they've announced large tax breaks for shale gas production.

They brush aside concerns about the method of extracting shale gas, known as fracking. This involves pumping liquid, including toxic chemicals, at high pressure through the rock bed, to fracture the shale and release tiny

pockets of gas. The long-term risks of this process are totally unknown. But short term, there's the possibility of contamination of water tables. And fracking has already been blamed for two earthquakes near Blackpool.

The latest bit of exploratory drilling - met by 2000-strong protests - was not in Lancashire, but near Balcombe in West Sussex, a Tory stronghold. Next in line is Fernhurst, on the South Downs. Even Osborne's father-in-law, Lord Howell of Guildford, is off-message. Unhappy with fracking in his back yard, he's declared that it should be restricted to "desolate" areas of the north! Cameron may find he has a big problem on his hands...

• Thieves in charge of the prisons

Serco and G4S are bidding for a huge contract to produce the new plastic banknotes, as well as for the £800m privatisation of probation services. This, in addition to the billions they are already raking in from running prisons, the nuclear weapons facility at Aldermaston and so many other public facilities.

Yet both companies have been caught with their hands in the till - fraudulently charging for monitoring non-existent electronic tags, supposedly attached to people who had actually left the country, returned to prison, or died! This scam would have netted the two firms tens of millions.

Serco is also under investigation for cooking the books on a £285m contract to deliver prisoners to courts. As for G4S, it has many misdeeds to answer for, like the killing of deportee Jimmy Mubenga while in its custody, the Olympics fiasco and mislaying the keys to Birmingham prison.

No problem for the ConDems apparently, to extend the profit-out-of-prisoners contracts of these companies, whose bosses should themselves be behind bars. As for printing money, it seems they've already been given a licence to do that!

• GCH-al-Q, cyber terrorists?

NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed some time ago that GCHQ had infiltrated the computer systems of Belgacom, Belgium's main telephone company, as part of so-called "Operation

Socialist", presumably to catch those dangerous things called "socialists". Of course, GCHQ denied any wrongdoing. But what made its director's denial far less credible was his refusal to appear in front of an EU parliament civil liberties committee, summoned to discuss the threat of state-sponsored cyber attacks. The British Foreign Office claimed this was because security issues weren't part of the EU's remit.

But hasn't this refusal more to do with the massive cyber attack against Belgacom, last June, which, according to experts, could only have been carried out using the resources of a state? Who needs "rogue states" and al-Qaeda to threaten the world with cyberterrorism, when Britain and GCHQ can do it so well?

Letter from Sussex

In October 2012, Kier Environmental signed a waste collection contract covering almost all East Sussex. There would, we were told, be £30 million in savings over 10 years. Kier's boasted that "this was an innovative project; the largest in the UK". Too good to be true? Yes, of course!

The takeover came on All Fool's Day 2013 and it was no joke. A demoted manager threw himself in front of a train. There was an explosion of complaints about uncollected waste and stinking, maggot-infested bins. Many residents began taking their own waste to local tips. Kier, of course, didn't have enough workers on the ground. One of their "innovations", for instance, was to have all recycling waste go into the same bin and (they told us) sorted by hand. By whom, though? Perhaps by the benefit claimants that the Tory conference has just promised to crack down on?

One council, Wealden, is talking about taking Kier to court and a councillor has paraphrased Churchill: "Never has so much damage been done to the reputation of this council, by so few, that has affected so many". For sure. And particularly if the court case reveals that the contract was suspicious in the first place.

Hovis workers defeat zero-hours contracts

Workers at a Hovis (Premier Foods) factory in Wigan ended a dispute after two 7-day strikes, over the use of agency workers on



zero-hours contracts. Following the first 7-day strike, the company had already given permanent status to 24 workers on such contracts. The use of temps under the Swedish derogation was the main remaining bone of contention. According to the plant's union, BFAWU, this was resolved after the second 7-day strike, when the company agreed to reduce the use of temps to a minimum and pay them permanent's wages after 12 weeks.

There are caveats, however. First, agency workers will still be hired (rather than permanent workers) unless existing workers meet

production spikes through overtime. Second, the agreement on wages for temps only applies to those on 39 hours/week - nothing stops the company from hiring agency part-timers on lower wages.

Nevertheless, the Wigan workers can be proud of having forced Premier Foods to cave in and their example should be followed. But this is a company which is notorious for having cut jobs and wages over the years. And it won't waste an opportunity to regain some of the ground lost. Let's hope the Wigan workers don't let them get away with it! □

• Blacklist the blacklisters

There's to be a national day of protest over blacklisting on 20 November - with lobbies and protests. The latest blacklist compiler is the so-called "Consulting Association" - raided in 2009 by government officers and found to have thousands of construction workers' names on record. Crossrail contractors, BFK and JV used this blacklist and have subsequently been taken to court by Unite - which means now that at least one worker will be re-employed.

This type of blacklist used to be compiled by the "Economic League" - an organisation which had many previous incarnations, and which listed known militant workers and trade unionists for employers - ensuring they never worked, devastating theirs' and their families' lives and depriving the workforce of activists. Closing them down is no answer, as another soon pops up. Workers' only sure and ultimate defence against this, is to blacklist the employers... Yes, all of them, and, why not, for good!?

• Fighting together

On 25th September, firefighters in England and Wales held a 4-hour strike against plans to downgrade their pension. They face paying over 13% of their pay towards their pensions and having to work until 60 to receive their full entitlement. Even though most firefighters don't have the choice of working until 60, because of the stringent fitness requirements.

On October 1st, teachers in the Midlands, the east of England, Yorkshire and Humberside also held a strike over government attacks on pensions, pay and conditions. This followed a teachers' strike in north-west England on 27th June. On 17th October, it will be the turn of teachers in the north-east and south of England (including London) to walk out. A further day's strike across the whole of England is threatened.

The issues are the same, but the strikes are separate. Why? The teaching

unions, the NUT and NASUWT, even decided to divide the strikes of their own members. Surely joining forces, and aiming to spread the strike to the millions of other workers facing the same attacks, would be the most effective way to fight?

• Directly Sporting big profits

Sports Direct, which only 6 years ago was doing pretty badly on the stock market, is now ready to join the FTSE 100, i.e., the top 100 companies in the stock market.



So how did it improve its fortunes so quickly? Well, for a start they don't like to comment on their employment practices and no wonder... With a workforce of more than 20,000, they manage to employ 90% of their workers on the infamous zero-hours contract.

Say no more. Sports may be big business, but if the value of Sports Direct is today estimated at £4bn, with a profit last year of £268m (up 22%), it is obviously as a direct result of the super-exploitation of their workers.

• Woolworths workers' struggle

When Woolworths went bust on November 2008, some 27,000 workers lost their jobs. At the time, Woolworths used a legal clause to exclude 3,233 workers in stores

employing less than 20 workers, from the collective consultation process. It argued, unbelievably, that each of these stores was a separate establishment - so, Woolworths didn't have to pay the obligatory 90 days wages in lieu of consultation. Anything, to avoid facing up to its responsibilities!

The Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT) has just, 5 years later, found in favour of these workers - whose case was taken up by the union, Usdaw. However, since Woolworths went insolvent, the government is now responsible for paying the workers. And it is refusing to do it! What's more, it's been given permission by the EAT to appeal against its ruling in favour of the workers.

So these workers' legal battle is not yet over. Their story is a good example of how the law is never neutral. And if, exceptionally, it finds for the workers, the bosses and their government will do everything they can to overturn the judgement.

• North pole at Dagenham

Tesco proudly announced the recent opening of a distribution centre in Dagenham (east London), boasting to have "worked incredibly hard to recruit people from the local area". But the number of "new" jobs actually "created" tells another story. The vast majority of the Dagenham workers actually came from... Harlow, where a distribution centre was closed earlier this year! Not only were many workers forced to move from one area to the other, but in addition, some had their wages cut.

On top of that, the centre's main subcontractor, Staffline Group, employs as many as 400 workers under "zero-hours" contracts! Staffline temps start at £6.19/hour but, lucky them, they can increase their pay if they work faster. This means unloading crates at impossible speeds, in warehouses where the temperature can be as low as 2°C! And all this, with just one 30-minute rest period which isn't even paid! If anyone ever wondered how Tesco made its billions, here's the answer - by sweating its workforce!

Welfare

• **Class justice**

From now on, claimants prosecuted for benefit fraud could face up to 10 years in jail - instead of the 7 so far. And the 12-month maximum for fraud under £20,000 will be scrapped. So, will a bit of moonlighting become enough for the jobless to serve time? Probably not, in most cases. But by raising this threat the government shows its determination to treat claimants - and, potentially, all workers - as criminals.

What makes this even more cynical is that benefit fraud (officially £1.3bn/yr) is tiny, compared to the capitalists' £70bn (illegal) tax evasion and £25bn

(legal) tax avoidance. Yet virtually no company director gets jailed. Most cases are settled out of court and even when the fine sounds steep, it's petty cash for the fraudsters.

However, Labour went even further, demanding "tougher sentences for all types of fraud, from benefit fraud to banking fraud", with penalties up to 14 years!

As if the looting of the economy by big business could be equated to the DIY attempts that some claimants may be forced to make, to keep their heads above water! But then, isn't this class justice a cornerstone of the capitalist system all these politicians support?

• **If you try to sit, he'll tax your seat!**

According to figures recently published, one out of two households hit by the "bedroom tax" is now in rent arrears. This was predicted long ago, especially because many of those deemed to "under-occupy" their homes are disabled, who need more space while having very low incomes. By a cynical twist, the responsibility for delivering a large chunk of the £548m "savings" that Osborne boasted would come from the "bedroom tax", is therefore being shifted onto cash-strapped local councils, which can't afford any additional burdens. But then, as the song goes, Osborne would probably say: "Cause I'm the Taxman"!

• **Pumping up the housing bubble**

The 2nd strand of the "Help to Buy" scheme was launched 3 months earlier than planned. The first one offered cheap rates for 20% of the loan on new homes. This one provides 95% mortgages for any home, with the state guaranteeing 15% of the loan.

This strand's estimated cost of £12bn, is 24 times the sum "saved" by the "bedroom tax" on the backs of the poorest. But that's the point. Cameron's scheme is only for people with a good income and credit record who can afford a house worth up to £600,000 (i.e. an around £700/week mortgage bill!). Only the banks and potential middle class Tory voters will benefit!

Ironically, average house prices have just got back to their pre-crisis level, with

a 10% annual increase in London. The number of estate agents is at a 35-year high. Real estate is booming. 125% mortgages are not back (yet) but 40-year mortgages are. Every symptom of a growing speculative bubble is there, meaning huge bucks for the banks. Cameron is laying the ground for them to line their pockets. Never mind if it ends up in tears for the rest of us, as it did in 2008!

• **Social housing - a system failure**

A recent investigation reveals that 60% of the biggest housing developments fail to comply with local social housing targets. Developers demand a reduction in the number of social homes in developments under the pretext that they wouldn't be profitable otherwise. And since their profitability assessments are confidential, they cannot be challenged

Housing

in public. As a result, thousands of social homes have been cut from planned developments over the past five years.

In London, the 1/3 fall in "social housing starts" under the ConDems, shows no sign of slowing. One of the largest developments, in Vauxhall, will have fewer than 2,500 social units out of 15,000 homes - although Lambeth council told tenants it was aiming at having 5,250 (35%) two years ago! Birmingham council has a 35% target, but its largest current developments, mostly for luxury flats near the centre, will provide only 103 affordable homes out of more than 2,500 (4%!).

Such is the price for tinkering with the market - as governments have been doing under both Labour and the ConDems - instead of investing in council housing. A worsening housing crisis!

NHS

• **Mammograms: get one, and don't let them confuse you!**

The new 16-page "NHS Breast Screening - Helping you decide" leaflet caused controversy. For good reason. Its section on "risks and benefits" says screening is "your choice", and then argues that you might get diagnosed and treated for a cancer that would not otherwise have been diagnosed and would not have killed you.

To quote: "for every woman who has her life saved from breast cancer, about 3 women are diagnosed with a cancer which would never have become life threatening". So we should think there's quite a high chance of wrong diagnosis and unnecessary surgery - even though nobody knows which cancers will be life threatening. The explanation may lead you to think you've a higher chance of losing a breast due to a wrong diagnosis than of finding a cancer in time to treat it! Never mind that a reputable 2010 study of 55,000 women showed that, for every "over diagnosed" case, two lives were saved as a result of screening! So what's the point of presenting such poor explanations? Is it to discourage women from screening - to cut costs?

• **Hard cost of private software**

The computerised NHS patient records system - a project launched during Blair's term in 2002 - has now been officially abandoned. It has already cost £9.8bn - for zilch.

The "Lorenzo" software system - meant to be used in 220 hospital trusts is being used in just 3. In fact, little can be salvaged from the vast number of contracts and 12 years "work" done by dozens of private companies - from Japan's Fujitsu, still in dispute after its contact was terminated in 2008, to the US Computer Science Corporation which partnered British iSoft (recently prosecuted for accounting fraud) to develop Lorenzo.

"This saga is one of the worst and most expensive contracting fiascos in the history of the public sector" says Public Accounts committee member, Richard Bacon. But no-one admits it was avoidable. In-house public sector computer teams could have designed all these systems at no extra cost. Only they were sacked in the late 1980s/early 1990s in order to contract everything out to the private sector, which today is still "quids in", despite the gigantic disaster it has caused for the NHS.

• **The social cost of private care**

While NHS hospitals are struggling to maintain decent standards of care because of the on-going pressure to cut 20% out of their budgets and while waiting times increase, the private hospital sector continues to grow. It's obvious why, of course. The new Health Act has ensured that GP consortia commission their patients' care from any provider - and since the NHS is being cut to ribbons, private companies have stepped forward.

The number of NHS patients being seen in their facilities has increased tenfold in 6 years! Today, one in three of the 276,000 patients treated annually by the largest of these companies, BMI Healthcare, is paid for by the NHS - as opposed to just 1 in 10 six years ago. That said, BMI is being threatened by the competition regulator - as it is taking too much of a chunk of this "market" compared to its rivals and supposedly therefore, taking advantage, by charging too much. As if allowing more such companies in, will reduce NHS costs! The more private companies enter the scene, the less the NHS will offer. That is the logic of current policy, whether ConDem or Labour... the erosion of national health.

The art of dodging the real issues

Labour party conference headline announcements were clearly aimed at regaining credit among workers. In form, they were designed to sound attractive - although Miliband was careful to avoid offending middle-class voters. But in substance, they were just fool's gold (see the other articles in this page) which left out the real issues.

Miliband's response to unemployment was Blair's "flexible labour market", which did so much to pave

the way for today's casualised economy. Against the crippling parasitism of the City, Miliband could only offer a bit of "regulation" here and there - the same kind of "regulation" which allowed Blair and Brown to turn Britain into a tax-haven for multinationals! As to reversing the ConDems' attacks (let alone those of past Labour governments), Miliband kept a deafening silence.

No matter how much it woos

Labour party

workers' votes, Labour has long been a party which defends the capitalist system - an exploitative, criminal, bankrupt system. The working class needs another voice - a workers' party that doesn't shy away from saying clearly that its aim is to transform society in order to get rid of this profit system, once and for all! □

• The union machineries prop up Miliband

The media have been full of references to so-called "tensions" between Miliband and the unions. This followed the Falkirk saga, in which police were called in against Unite over its role in the local Labour candidate reselection process.

Then the GMB's Paul Kenny announced a cut in the number of the GMB's Labour-affiliated members, from 420,000 to 50,000 - and a £1.1m cut in the GMB's party contribution. Commentators saw this as

further evidence of "tense" relations between Miliband and the unions. But was it?

As it happened, Kenny's announcement fitted in with Miliband's plans to tweak Labour's image. Miliband had said that the members of Labour-affiliated unions should join the party as individuals, not automatically. And this was what Kenny was delivering.

But then, wasn't John Edmonds, another GMB general secretary, one

of Blair's main backers, when he got Labour to drop public ownership from its constitution? The union machineries act as a conservative force. They won't rock the capitalist boat. And, in so far as they can help it, they will do whatever they can, to ensure that their party is seen as a "normal" bourgeois party willing and able to look after the interests of British capital.

• No zeroing-in on zero-hours

More than 1 million workers are estimated to be on zero-hours contracts, with an average wage 40% lower than other workers. These workers are on-call and have no guaranteed hours, meaning no guaranteed income. And at the same time, they have no right to unemployment benefits, since they are technically "employed". Now new pink-sounding-Labour is pledging to act by... getting "representatives" of both workers and bosses to sit together nicely to discuss how to improve the practice and reduce the abuse of such contracts. When the only way to improve these contracts would be to ban them. Just like Miliband to invite wolves and sharks to his dinner table. When the only way to get them to behave is to fight them.. and that's going to be up to workers themselves.

• Promises, promises...

Ed Milliband promised to take inflation into account and increase the minimum wage of £6.19/hour to the grandiose amount of £6.64/ hr. And scary Ed is promising higher fines for bosses who don't pay the minimum wage. Sure, since not one company got fined under Labour between 1998 and 2008!

He also talked of tax breaks to encourage companies bosses to pay their lower-paid workers more. As if bosses don't always enjoy all sorts of government gifts, without having any real demands put on them.

• ...but don't hold your breath

So the unfair tax on the spare room for people who have to rely on benefits, would be scrapped under Miliband.

But Labour isn't really against this "bedroom tax". It is just a question of making sure that only people who refuse an alternative offered to them, are then taxed. At the moment, you get taxed even if there is no alternative accommodation available for you to move to!

But the benefit cap, which has already affected 67,000 people is not put into question by Labour who actually supported it in the Commons. Yet how many people find themselves in arrears as a result of this benefit cap? Worse, since it also affects people in private accommodation, it could also mean more homelessness as a result. A conspicuous cap on Labour's "left leanings"...

• Iceland offers better deals

Miliband did however make a few ripples - by his pledge to freeze energy prices for households and businesses, for the first 18 months after he is elected, if he is elected. The reaction of the energy companies and the CBI to this very limited and timid gesture was probably highly gratifying to him, because their huge fuss has led to him being labelled as "red" again! Share prices fell temporarily and he was accused of endangering the whole industry and setting the stage for future power failures. And he is not even offering a price reduction,

just a freezing. Like the gesture against Royal Mail privatisation, which has also ended up in a mere pledge to "freeze" stamp prices. Red, or "dEd"?

• Same unhealthy track!

Labour's health spokesman Andy Burnham promised to end the ConDems' "fast-track privatisation" of the NHS by repealing the coalition's NHS Act in the first year of a new Labour government. Everyone remarked that Miliband was not so sanguine about the idea and failed to clearly endorse it.

But even if Burnham really has his way, what's his own record when he was in office? A more discreet, "slow track" NHS privatisation. Does he think that we've already forgotten?

• Take the money from them

Miliband pledged to repeal the ConDems' 1% cut in corporation tax, down to 20%, planned for 2015. This, he said, will be used to fund tax cuts for small businesses, not more social expenditure. In any case, Labour has no plan to use the obvious means to raise more funds for public expenditure - taking the money from where it's hiding, i.e., in the deep pockets of British capital.

Has Miliband forgotten that before Blair came to power, corporation tax was 33% - without the economy going bust as a result? Returning corporation tax to that level would put around £22bn more into state coffers and would merely entail getting the capitalist class, finally, to pay a part of the bill for their crisis!

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Workers' control needed!**

The Rail workers' union (RMT) is campaigning for the East Coast line to be kept in public hands, instead of being re-privatised. It holds it up as a model for a so-called "renationalisation" of the railways. And now Labour has taken up a similar theme.

But in 2009, when National Express gave up the East Coast franchise, and Labour set up the present "not-for-profit" company under the same management, to run operations, this was purely to prepare the way for a new private operator. Thus, the service was cut to the bone,

and even the historic dining car, with its silver service, was terminated, in the name of maximising profit and enticing private operators.

So maybe the RMT should ask its East Coast members, working short-handed, and short-paid, what they think of this "model"? Or passengers paying extortionate fares? Or cleaners contracted by East Coast, paid the minimum wage with some on zero-hours contracts?!

Indeed, save us all from such a "model" of "public ownership"! "Publicly-run" certainly doesn't mean "run in the



public interest" - which would require that workers are in control, fending off capitalist sharks and their government counterparts, throughout the whole system...

• We won't give up

Monday before last, ISS workers were on strike yet again to try to force ISS to pay up. Management certainly tried everything to get us to postpone the strike - except the one thing which would have worked, i.e. meeting our demands.

Their "last and final" offer is a "roadmap" - so-called!! which means placing us on a dubious journey, lasting 3½ years... to reach the measly sum of £8.55/hr! We've waited 12 years. We cannot wait any longer for a wage which meets our needs.

No "maps", no excuses, we want

it right now! [Workers' Platform, King's Cross 27/09/13]

• ISS talks rubbish

After all our strikes against ISS (8 days) for decent wages and conditions, over the past year, the bosses have finally come to sit round the table with our reps. But that's about as far as it went!

Did they come here only to plead poverty? This company has handed an average of more than £5 million to shareholders each year over the past 5 years. Yet they're "too poor" to pay the workers, who make every penny of these profits, enough to live on?

We don't buy it. The fight goes

on! [Workers' Platform, King's Cross 27/09/13]

• Not managing

Not content with trying to reduce our holiday entitlement in the travel centre, East Coast also wants to replace team leaders with managers. Where have we heard that one before? Trouble is that the team leaders also work on the counters but we doubt very much we'll see any of these new managers getting their hands dirty. So it amounts to a cut in front line workers, when we're understaffed as it is. They need to increase our numbers, not create yet more useless chiefs. [Workers' Platform, King's Cross 27/09/13]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• Breakdowns galore**

The first week's production after the holidays, was hit by repeated long breakdowns in assembly. The problems came in APU 4 where new machinery needed constant recalibration and BMW had no machine controllers on the line with sufficient engineering expertise to do the job. In the end they were forced to call in maintenance. BMW had only themselves to blame.

All because they refused to let machine controllers do the NVQ 3 which would have given them the expertise to fix the problem. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Cowley 11/09/13]

• Still recovering from the holidays?

Not that we were too bothered by the breakdowns. Nor it seems were managers either. Perhaps in their minds they were still basking on the beach somewhere a bit nicer than this dump. Whatever the reason, they didn't seem to have the energy needed to make us rush around pretending to clean up in case a big boss appeared... [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Cowley 11/09/13]

• Time to call their bluff

Not only are BMW still keeping us in the dark about their future plans for the pension fund, they've apparently refused to give an undertaking to the unions that those of us already in the pension fund will be properly provided for. Not that there aren't ways for us to put BMW on the back foot. For instance if enough of us make it clear that the fight to preserve the pension fund and the fight to give BMW contracts to agency workers go hand in hand. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Cowley 11/09/13]

• BMW loves this secrecy

So last Monday's meeting about BMW's plans for a 3-day working week never happened. It seems that some managers were as surprised as the rest of us about the delay. Since then the whole plant has been awash with rumours. Stewards and managers have been walking around - looking smug in some cases - denying they know anything. Yet we know that BMW has its master plan. If they're delaying the announcement, it suits them to do so. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Cowley 25/09/13]

**• Losing sight of how we've lost ground?**

In fact the confusion is fairly typical for a model change.

What's different, compared with pre-Mini days, is that BMW has managed to off-load all the costs of the model change onto us!

Instead of BMW having to pay for us to sit at home while track adjustments etc are made and tested, we are expected to pay back the company (via "banked" downtime - Working Time Account). This is an indication of ground lost and how much we need to regain - sooner rather than later! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Cowley 25/09/13]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

• Mail sale is on...

Royal Mail finally presented its prospectus for the sale of shares, closing date 8 October, sending out e-mails to almost anyone with one. So far, the minimum any one person can buy is £750 worth - and in fact this probably means that the preferred investor is large, and corporate. That said, what a lot of the bumph omits to emphasise is that the government is retaining 41% of the shares for

the time being. That means that, for the time being at least, 51% remains "public" in a sense - if the 10% handed to workers (frozen for 3 years) is added - with no corporate investor able to match that.

As to the shape of postal services to come, there are no guarantees. The Universal Service Obligation (delivering letters to all UK addresses 6 days a week) may be law - and maybe a parliamentary



majority will never agree to its abolition. But it could just slowly fritter away in private hands. And that is more than likely if the flotation goes ahead.

• ...but flotation could still be sunk

The Communication Workers' Union has only just begun to ballot over the 3-year pay deal offered by Royal Mail. What's more, it's sticking to its legal excuse that it can't ballot for a strike against privatisation.

But Royal Mail bosses are a step ahead. While the CWU ballot will only be complete by 13 October, the sale of shares will be over by 8th October - in

other words, almost a week beforehand. You have to wonder, is this inadvertent bad timing by the union officials, or is it deliberate?

Certainly their main concern is to retain their position as "respected" arbitrators of postal workers' fate after privatisation. They thus don't dare rock the privatisation boat, fearing that if they do, they'll lose much more than they would if

they instead encouraged a fight against privatisation.

Of course, postal workers could walk out and declare their intention to fight privatisation itself, without the sanction of their union leaders. They have acted independently before - even if it was along time ago. Despite the bad timing, it's never too late to build independent action. Besides, it's the only way forward.

• We'll vote yes, of course!!

Sure, we must vote yes for strike!! And not allow the performance of the union leaders to deter us. Because this is a near life-and-death struggle for postal workers' futures now! We need to secure jobs, terms and conditions and reverse cuts, whatever happens to the share flotation, and how else can we do that, except by fighting and showing our united strength?

We can be sure of one thing: that if we do take action, and if we make sure this action is felt, then we still could stand the chance of disrupting

this share flotation - even if it's after the event! And that would be a very good thing!! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 23/09/13]

• Save us from their "concern"

Once we vote yes for strike, it should be up to the strikers to decide how we strike and not up to the full-time bureaucrats like Big Billy and Dave, in their union committee room at CWU HQ. One ineffective day strike here and there, using the excuse that they are "concerned" about us "losing money" is really not OK. In the long run, we'd lose less if we went all out from day one! And we'd stand a

real chance of winning! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 23/09/13]

• Let's all be involved

And what's more shouldn't this be a strike where all of us organise - and are organised - to participate in the strike's "work"? Picketing, going round other workplaces, having a public presence, meeting daily to decide what to do next, etc... instead of sitting at home? That way, it may even become a spark to set the rest of the workers' movement alight, to start fighting back, to regain all the ground that's been cut under us! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 23/09/13]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

• One Ford, one big fat joke

It's a pathetic pay offer. Ford wants us to join in sobbing over its sorry situation in Europe. But, the business papers tell a different story: 'One Ford' is making one big record profit across the globe. Over the year, these are projected to exceed last year's £5 billion! And we're all part of this 'One Ford', whose workers make these billions, so we demand our share and we are entitled to it, just like our fellow workers in Ford everywhere else. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 01/10/13]

• 2%? Ford trying to be funny?

Ok, 2% per year pay rise is just Ford's "first" offer. Usually they test the water with the minimum they expect to get away with. But this time they didn't even bother to offer the (low) CPI inflation rate of 2.7% (for August). Let alone RPI inflation, which shows prices up 3.3% since a year ago, and which

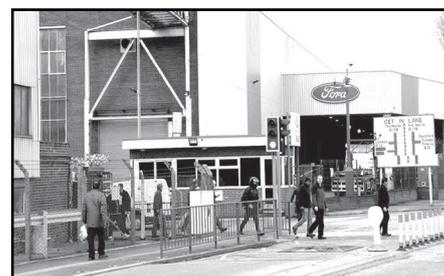
is still a lot less than the real price increases which affect us. Officially, living costs are up by 8-12% in the last 2 years. Ford, as usual, is taking the total mick. This "offer" was a waste of paper. Straight in the bin with it! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 01/10/13]

• A list of "can't do's"

As for the rest, after the b-s about "losses", all we get is a list of what Ford can't do. It can't increase pensions, or holidays, or car discounts, or jobs. It does however apologise for not meeting "the union claim". Who saw it? But then, we never do. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 01/10/13]

• A little chip for them to play

The last clause of this 1st "offer" says Ford "new starts" won't have to accrue annual holidays for the first year, so wouldn't have to take an unpaid shutdown, or work it, or take a loan. That



may seem good. But we suspect Ford'll use this small chip to bargain with.

Anyway, what's a "new start"? Does this include temps? Because we heard Ford contacted "old" temps asking if they'd like to come back after Christmas. As second tier, or what? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 01/10/13]

• Our own scorpion waiting

And let's remember it's this last clause which contained the sting in the tail of the last agreement: that's where they hid the introduction of the two-tier workforce. It should never have been allowed. We should aim to reverse it. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 01/10/13]

Syria

The UN security council eventually adopted a resolution providing for the destruction of Assad's chemical arsenal - or else - although what this "else" would entail remains an open question. Thus the western governments' hysterical campaign has finally died down - for now.

Significantly, the most hysterical warmongers had been minor characters like Cameron. The US leaders - the real masters of the imperialist game - were far more cautious. The

After the chemical weapons hysteria

last thing they wanted was to destabilise the region even more, let alone risk another Iraq-style quagmire.

No-one can be sure as to which side used chemical weapons in Syria - even the UN experts admit that much. For all we know, they could have been supplied by US allies, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which have been arming the anti-Assad Islamic militias. Besides, whether chemical or "conventional", all the weapons used in Syria are lethal.

But then the only objective of the West's hypocritical "outrage" was to justify a show of strength, in order to remind both sides in the conflict that any settlement will require its endorsement. So, the civil war goes on, with the Syrian population now caught in the crossfire between three sides - the Assad regime, the Islamic militias and imperialist powers, which are determined to ensure that their regional interests are preserved at all costs. □

Bangladesh

In the last week of September, a wave of workers' demonstrations hit the streets of Gazipur and Narayanganj, two industrial suburbs of the capital, Dhaka. The textile factories concentrated there provide 80% of the country's foreign currency income. Among other things, the demonstrators were demanding a minimum wage of £62/month (the current rate is £24). As tens of thousands of workers took to street for several days, fighting with the police, hundreds of factories closed. The government responded by sending paramilitary troops, resulting in more street battles.

These demonstrations

Workers are back in the streets

are the latest in a series of protests that have rocked the textile industry since the 2008 crisis. Only 3 months ago, the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory, in

which around 1,000 died, was followed by massive protests for better safety conditions and compensatory pay. At that time as well, workers had to face the bullets of the army. But this hasn't deterred them from taking action again.

Behind all this, of course, is the profiteering of major western household names, such as Walmart, H&M, Benetton, Primark, etc., which have built their prestige and profits on the over-exploitation of Bengali workers. But the resilience of the Bengali working class may well turn out to be their undoing. □



Qatar

It was revealed recently that one Nepalese worker was dying every day on the 2022 World Cup's construction sites, in Qatar, while many more were left with severe injuries.

Workers from poor countries are lured to "take their share" in Qatar's construction boom. Once there, they are virtually imprisoned and robbed of their passports, while their pay is held up. They are provided with hardly any safety

Laying Astroturf over bloody soil

equipment, often do 15-hour shifts, and are made to live in filthy conditions, leaving many severely sick in one of the hottest places on earth. These horrendous conditions only came to light because of the publicity surrounding the World Cup. But they only expose the grim reality that beneath the wealth of this oil-rich micro-state, there has always been an over-exploited, mostly immigrant, working class, whose sweat

was feeding the local capitalists.

But the 2.7 million workers in Qatar are not taking this situation lying down. There have been reports of strikes on the Cup's building sites and, who knows, the Qatari ruling class and international construction companies may well find out one of these days, that by turning the screw too far, they have scored an own goal! □

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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