

WORKERS' fight



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

2014, PAY BACK YEAR?

The share price index of the 100 largest companies listed in the City, the so-called FTSE 100, ended 2013 just a fraction of a percentage point under its highest point ever and it started 2014 with a new increase.

The FTSE 100 last reached such a level on 30th December 1999, when the "New Technology" craze was going full-steam ahead - and it all ended in tears. Share prices halved over the next three years, then increased again until November 2007, before nosediving as a result of the present crisis.

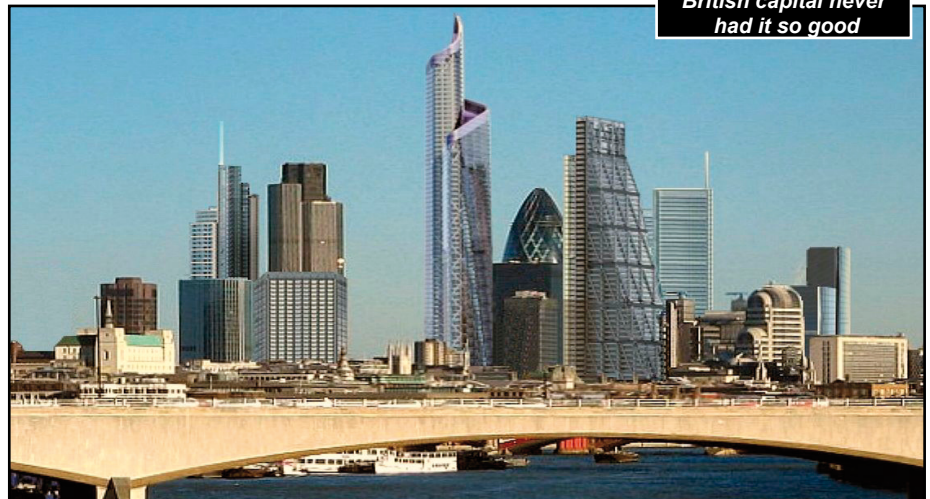
Today, the banking system is still on a public-funded lifeline and investments are at a record low. Yet, the capitalists' gambling machine is running wild again, as if it was business as usual, threatening the economy with yet another crisis within the crisis. So what is really going on?

Record capitalist looting

Speculation is not the only factor in this frenzy. Since 2009, the total amount of dividends paid by companies to shareholders has increased by over 10% a year, on average. In 2014, it is predicted to increase by 28%, to an all-time high of £102bn! So, this capitalist class which never looks beyond its own short-term profits, feels really optimistic about its future!

So, despite the crisis - or rather, thanks to it - capitalist profit-making has been steaming ahead. The bosses have been able to use this crisis as an effective weapon in their class war against workers, stepping up their looting of the economy, as never before.

They've used the rise in unemployment to blackmail workers and squeeze their standards of living and conditions. At the same time, their politicians - both ConDem and Labour - have



British capital never had it so good

been diverting a growing share of public funds towards the coffers of their capitalist masters - with the on-going rolling back of the welfare system and cuts in services funding more state handouts and tax breaks to the bosses.

It is this increasing parasitism of the capitalists on the economy - and on the working class - which feeds the growth of their profits in the middle of the present economic crisis.

Defending working class interests

But if the capitalists were so successful in using the crisis to their advantage, it's because the parties and leaders who claimed to represent workers have abdicated their responsibilities.

Despite calling itself "Labour" to capture workers' votes, Miliband's party has long been an instrument of the capitalist class, which promoted casualisation under Blair and then bailed out the bankers under Brown.

As to the union leaders, the lessons

drawn by TUC leader, Frances O'Grady, after the capitulation of the Unite leadership in the Grangemouth dispute, last October, speaks volumes. In an interview with the Guardian, she stated: "We cannot organise company by company and ... we cannot fight alone. We need a much bigger campaign that is supported by civic society and a government that recognises that the balance of power has gone too far against workers." In other words, her only proposal is for workers to keep their heads down for now and vote Labour in 2015, as if a Labour government had ever supported workers striking to defend their interests against the bosses!

O'Grady only got one thing right, although that's not really what she meant - that the working class cannot just organise company by company, because in the face of the capitalists' all-out offensive, it will need all its collective strength to stop them and to start regaining the ground lost. And that is the only possible way of turning the tide. ☐

Housing *Nothing to boast about*

The ConDems are hailing the increase in mortgage approvals - 30% over the past year. They claim this is evidence that their austerity policy is working and that the economy is recovering. Of course, what they forget to say is that, while the total money lent is getting close to its pre-crisis level, the number of mortgages is still 40% below - meaning

that the proportion of very expensive mortgages is much higher than it was before the crisis.

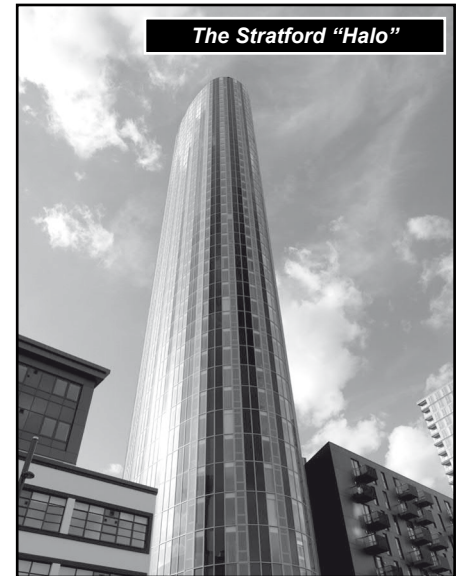
Despite Cameron's denial, these figures are the sign of yet another speculative real estate bubble developing, this time, under the ConDems' watch. Not only are housing prices going through the roof again, far beyond the means of most households,

but purely speculative real estate investment is soaring: in London alone, £20bn worth of commercial properties were bought last year, just 3% less than the pre-crisis peak reached in 2007. So, whatever they may say, only the profits of real estate speculators and lenders are really recovering so far!

Public funds for yuppie flats!

At the end of last year, several tenants' rights organisations staged a symbolic occupation of a brand new tower block of flats to rent - the "Stratford Halo", in London. They were not just protesting against the extortionate rents, starting from £1,800 per month for a two-bedroom flat. They were also exposing the fact that, at a time when social housing is drastically deprived of vital funding, these expensive flats had been built using a government loan, under the £1bn "Build to Rent" scheme, which was introduced by Osborne at the same time as "Help to Buy".

This government scheme might have helped housing associations to build more affordable homes. Except that Osborne attached to his scheme the requirement of an annual 4% return on investment, which no social housing project will ever be able to provide. As a result two Yorkshire housing associations which were planning to use the scheme for social housing, have had to pull out - and others will probably follow. Meanwhile, public funds are being wasted on yuppie flats, which can only contribute to the on-going urban private rent inflation, while housing queues keep getting longer.



The Stratford "Halo"

Transport *Railway workers and passengers shopped?*

The commuters who've just joined the £5,000 club did it reluctantly. They're the passengers whose season tickets have increased in January to that high level - like those travelling between London and Dover, whose season tickets increased by 3.4%! And these are supposed to be "regulated" fares!

According to a recently changed formula, train companies can raise their prices by 3.1% and - predictably - most companies are doing so this January. In fact, they are allowed to increase individual fares

even more, up to maximum of 5.1%, provided their average fare increase is not more than 3.1%. So how tempting for them to increase fares more on busier commuter lines...

According to the unions, the average British employee spends 14% of his/her wage on travel - and for the low-paid, it's certainly more. In other wealthy European countries, the proportion ranges between 1% (Italy) and 4% (Germany and France), for comparable journeys. Time to say: "can't pay, won't pay"?

More Tube workers, not fewer!

Transport For London has been cutting tube staff with no consideration for the workers, the service, let alone the supposed "bottom line", that is, safety. Last month, to crown it all, TFL announced a plan to close its 260 ticket offices with a possible 1,000 more job losses, while at the same time it proposed 24-hour trains to run at weekends!

Now we're told they're in talks with retailers like M&S, Amazon and Asda to use the empty office space.

So people will be able to buy anything (but tube tickets!) at "station shops", and maybe even collect parcels on their way home - though they might have to walk if the tube isn't running... due to "staff illness"...

Of course, the tube bosses are counting their chickens before they're hatched. Tube workers have just voted against these cuts and for strike action by a majority of 77%. So TFL and Boris might well end up with eggs all over their faces...

MPs "regulated" by their peers

After the MPs' expenses scandal, in 2009, an Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) was set up as a watchdog for parliamentary pay and expenses. Last December, IPSA proposed to raise MPs' salaries to £74,000 a year in 2015 - an increase of £7,600 or 11.4%. It said this would be a "one-off", to reflect the fact that "MPs' pay has slipped below the pay of a selection of other public sector professionals".

Apparently, for IPSA, MPs are not in the same league as the millions of "public sector professionals" whose pay has been frozen for years, nor the 80% of civil servants whose salary is less than one third that of an MP! But is that any surprise, since this "independent" watchdog is made up of a barrister, a circuit judge, an ex-MP and two bankers, who get paid between £400 and £700 per day for their "work" at IPSA. Such people would take care of their own, wouldn't they?

Keep the xenophobes out!

Of course there's no such thing as "benefit tourism". Who'd travel here to claim a JSA worth £56.80/week? Or to claim housing benefit, with the impossible hoop-jumping this involves, which a new migrant is unlikely to negotiate.

Whether what Cameron says about Britain having experienced the biggest migration since war-time is true or not, this country is

rich enough to afford that. What it cannot afford is politicians who keep degrading and cutting public services to the point where they can no longer provide for the existing population. Then these politicians - and they all sing this very same xenophobic tune today - turn to us saying: "if public services, housing, etc.. are on the verge of collapse, it's the immigrant's fault". But it's a lie!

The problem is the capitalists and their politicians, who know only how to cut and destroy. They cannot be left in charge. That is the issue facing us all. And together with all workers - who have no country but a world to win, as Marx rightly said - it's going to be the task of the working class to build a society fit for all of us.

Why should these blue politicians get any benefits?

Incredible isn't it? Cameron and his 90 Tory MPs who whipped up hysteria over Bulgarians and Romanians pouring over British borders on January 1st, have nothing to say now that just one lonely Romanian arrived on a plane at Luton airport, that day, to herald the "deluge". In fact this has been such crude politicking, duly echoed by the Daily Excess and Wail (Express and Mail), that it's unlikely that anyone actually

swallowed it.

Cameron insisted he'd pass new laws so that new arrivals couldn't claim welfare benefits for the first 3 months of their stay - but this is already the case. He said they'd have to pay for NHS treatment - but in fact unless you're a resident you can already be asked for payment, even if most hospitals don't do it. His cherry on top was that he'd curtail the "free movement" of workers

from Europe... in the future. Never mind that he'd be sure to eat his words for fear that some EU country might curtail the inflow of British citizens too.

No. Cameron is just using this rhetorical scarecrow of the "foreign threat" to cover his own failures in front of the electorate. And in fact, he's exposing his own nakedness...

Labour joins the anti-immigration rant

Terrified of being seen as "soft" on immigration, Labour leader Ed Miliband rushed to add his own pennyworth to the scare-mongering.

Hypocritically, he pretended to be speaking on behalf of low-paid British workers when he blamed "low-skill immigration" for "making the cost-of-living crisis worse for those at the sharp end".

Given this, Miliband's demands for stricter enforcement of the minimum wage, equality of rights for agency workers and a crackdown on gangmasters, appear like a cynical cover. Even Tory immigration minister, Mark Harper, who cannot be suspected of sympathy for immigrants, managed to do better than Miliband when he bluntly told the boss of

Domino's Pizza to try paying more if he was having trouble recruiting workers!

Indeed, blaming the predicament of low-paid workers on "low-skill immigration" isn't just to pander to crass xenophobic prejudices peddled by some Tories or by UKIP. Just like all pro-business politicians, Miliband is trying hard to divert attention from the fact that the only real threat faced by workers today comes from British bosses who, over the past six years, have been relentlessly cutting their jobs and their wages by all means possible!

"Lawful" murder?

The inquest into the death of Mark Duggan, whose shooting by police in Tottenham sparked the August 2011 riots, found his murder "lawful".

To justify their actions, the police claimed that Duggan had a gun, but threw it away when the taxi in which he was travelling, was stopped. But the taxi driver - the only independent witness to these events - testified that he saw no gun at any stage and that Duggan was running away from the police with both hands in the air when he was shot dead. No-one disputed the fact that the only shots came from the police and the jury even ruled that Duggan was not in possession of a gun when he was shot. However, it accepted the police's defence claiming that the officer who killed Duggan "honestly" believed that he was threatened with a gun.

Of course, the killers were not in the dock - neither the senior officers who ordered this special armed unit to intercept Mark Duggan, nor those who control a system in which black working class men are routinely treated as potential criminals. But this isn't the end of the story.

Blunkett fans the flames

Sheffield MP and former Labour Home Secretary, David Blunkett, recently saw fit to voice his concerns on local radio about the effects of the 3000-strong Roma population which has settled in the city, claiming that this had led to an "explosive" situation. Blunkett blamed these immigrants and their alleged behaviour, which, according to him, is due to the fact that they come from "down-trodden villages and woodlands" and areas with no "toilets or refuse collections". This is the same kind of drivel as that touted by a Tory Westminster councillor, who recently accused Roma of "defecating on

doorsteps".

The reality is that what little social funding there was to support new arrivals in a town - be they from outside or inside the country, has now disappeared - something which Blunkett himself is forced to acknowledge. But instead of blaming this situation on the government and its anti-working class policies, Blunkett chooses to pander to prejudice. He fears there will be explosions? He's actually inciting anger against the Roma by his intervention. It's outrageous.

crisis watch**The banks take the money and.. run**

When it was introduced, in July 2012, the coalition's "Funding for Lending" scheme was meant to get the Bank of England to provide loans at a rock-bottom interest rate - as low as 0.75% - to the banks, to encourage them to increase lending to the real economy, in order to "create jobs". Or so went the official script.

Predictably, the banks did take the state's cheap money (nearly £20bn of it!) and they did lend it back - but not for "job creation". Instead, lending to the real economy fell by nearly 4%! Meanwhile,

They play, we pay...

Over the last year, while real wages were cut, the shareholders of FTSE 100 companies (London's 100 largest) saw their wealth jump by 14%! Among the CEOs of these 100 companies, average earnings stood at £3.3m - meaning a 243% increase over the last ten years! And we thought there was a recession!

There is a recession, of course

mortgage loans went through the roof. And since, after a short period on low rates, mortgage interest rates now usually hover around 4 to 6%, this means that the banks will pocket a neat packet out of "Funding for Lending"!

So much so, that even Osborne has read the riot act to the banks: from now on, they will have to prove that they use the money to lend to the real economy in order to benefit from the scheme. But who's to check? The same "regulators" from the Bank of England who allowed

- but not for these companies. In fact, the same companies whose shares and profits are going through the roof have been cutting jobs claiming that they're on the verge of 'bankruptcy', attacking working conditions and closing down factories - in order to use their money to speculate.

The capitalists get rewarded for



this to happen in the first place? The banking parasites really have nothing to fear!

throwing a ball onto a roulette wheel. Except that the balls are workers' pensions, people's mortgages, etc. When these gamblers get lucky, workers never get a penny from their gains. But when their bets go ugly, the working class is meant to foot the bill. And that's why this system cannot be allowed to carry on. It's rotting on its feet.

• A very British tax haven

Britain still provides businessmen's favourite tax regime according to a Financial Times survey. Only 5% of the British-based companies surveyed - with turnovers of at least £100m - were considering relocating, the lowest level since 2007. A further 15% had decided not to, despite complaining about Britain's scrutiny of tax avoidance. Of course, since Osborne reduced corporation tax to 21% and promised to reduce it to 20% in 2015!

Osborne made headlines with speeches promising to close tax loopholes. But whenever he talks tough, he makes another loophole, reiterating that Britain is "open for business". Last month, for instance, Vodafone revealed that in Britain it paid "little or no corporation tax": its £300m profits were offset by tax relief on capital spending and interest to British banks. Likewise, an agreement with Switzerland that HMRC hoped would raise an extra £3.1bn this year from British tax exiles is now expected to raise less than £1bn. For all the tough talk, the bosses know they're still in clover.

• Advertising thrives

Expenditure in British advertising is estimated to have reached a record £13.9bn in 2013. This is equivalent to 10% of the annual budget of an NHS which is supposed to provide healthcare to over 60 million!

And yet, what are these billions used for? For instance, for TV spots extolling products which are often almost identical, but sold under rival brands. In most cases, there is not one shred of real information in these ads - they're not about telling you what the product really is, but merely that you "need" it.

And isn't ironic that such a socially useless activity should reach a peak precisely in the middle of a crisis, at a time when all these billions could be put to much better use for society? Ironic and mad, yes. But there is logic in this madness: advertising as we know it directly reflects the rivalries between private companies. Get rid of the private ownership of the means of production and you get rid of all the parasitic and socially useless advertising. And instead we can then have the dissemination of useful information...

• Profiteering on poverty

A document from accountancy firm Deloitte reveals how companies can avoid paying tax on their African concerns, thanks to the small island of Mauritius off the coast of Africa.

Africa has become a magnet for investment. Companies can dodge paying tax in most African countries by channelling their investment through front companies in Mauritius. This is because Mauritius has a "business-friendly" - i.e. low - tax regime, meaning that, for instance, a company operating in Mozambique can use this trick to reduce a large part of its tax bill by anywhere between 60 and 100%.

Of course, money "saved" this way by these ultra-rich companies is money which does not go to the governments of some of the poorest countries in the world. The charity ActionAid, which is campaigning against tax avoidance, reckons that the tax avoided by just one British company in Zambia would be enough to put 48,000 children through primary school there each year. But what does that matter, when profits are at stake?

• **Wage emergency!**

In his Autumn statement, Osborne hailed the increased 2014 growth forecasts produced by the "Office for Budget Responsibility" (OBS), from 1.8 to 2.4%, adding that the economy is "growing faster than any other major economy". True, company profits have been back to pre-crisis level for some time and the Bank of England is even discussing increasing interest rates in response to this "recovery".

But there are alarming clouds on the horizon. Household indebtedness is at a massive £1.5 trillion - i.e. close to pre-crisis levels. Millions of households are struggling to pay their bills. And that will only get worse if the Bank

• **Let's take them at their word!**

We're told the economic recovery is progressing very well indeed, thanks to the Con-Dems' austerity measures! Yes, everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds...

But if that's the case, why the need for more austerity? The government tells us it is planning to cut central

of England finally decides to increase its interest rate. These are the ingredients which produced the financial crisis in 2008. As if the working class hasn't been through enough!

At the same time, the head of the same OBS warned that real annual wage increases could not be expected to reach even 2% for another two years. Wages might be stagnant for now, but in fact household real disposable income is still falling: the GMB union calculated that, overall, since 2008, it had fallen by 13.8% on average across Britain and by 20.4% in London.

And with stagnant wages, the rise

government spending by another £1bn a year over the next 3 years. And while it may claim that health, schools and so on are "ring-fenced", how can they be trusted? What's more, they are obviously not planning to cut their handouts to the bosses, which means that someone will have to pay for them

shouldn't it benefit the working class as a whole? Why shouldn't fewer workers produce what's needed for society as well as for more pensioners, thereby allowing more workers to enjoy some freedom after a life of hard work? Of course, it would be possible. But that would mean that the capitalists take responsibility collectively, for paying for the keep of their former workers, out of the profits they've accumulated. But this is precisely what they won't do - that is, unless the working class gives them no other choice.

• **More dirty schemes**

Osborne has devised new measures against Britain's scandalous 1m youth unemployment. These include tax breaks for hiring under-21s, creating 20,000 more state-funded apprenticeships, providing more training for 16-17 year-olds and a new "Earn or Learn" scheme to prevent 18 year-olds going on to the dole.

Whether these policies work any better than the existing "Youth Contract", which offers £2,275 to every employer taking on a young unemployed for more than 6 months, remains to be seen. However it only got 4,700 youngsters into jobs last year, instead of the anticipated 50,000. Being exempt of National Insurance for hiring under-21s will mean bosses

austerity watch

of household indebtedness and the low winter sales registered by big retailers like Tesco, Morrisons and M&S, even big business is becoming restless. Thus the same CBI director who opposed a significant increase in the minimum wage just a few months ago, used his new year message to call for higher wages from companies that are doing well.

But of course, as far as workers are concerned, experience shows that the mere "goodwill" of the bosses and their politicians produces nothing - only the collective action of the working class will force companies to pay the decent wages that all workers need.

- that is, the working class, with more cuts in pensions, benefits, etc.

Unless of course we take their word for it and decide that it's pay-back time for us at long last - time to reclaim what they've swindled out of us over the past years!

can employ two youngsters for the price of a 50-year-old! Job "creation" at the expense of older workers - sounds familiar!

As for the "Earn or Learn" scheme, which would force jobless youth without GCSEs to take maths and English lessons or risk losing their benefits, it still won't provide any guarantee of work. Looks like just another trick to temporarily reduce the youth jobless count!

• **George Balls v. Ed Osborne**

Shadow chancellor Ed Balls issued his own "shadow" Autumn statement, like an echo of Osborne's. For instance, he announced a "zero-based spending review", which involves further cuts (including in the NHS) and tax rises ("unavoidable"). This is how hard Labour tries to reassure the City, by showing that if it gets into office in 2015, it will retain the ConDems' policies.

With such wafer-thin political differences, the coalition and Labour can't go much beyond petty nit-picking. So, for instance, after Balls's "shadow" statement, Cameron pointed at Miliband with this subtle comment: "you don't need it to be Christmas to know when you are sitting next to a turkey" - whatever this meant. But then, isn't the Commons just a battery farm producing golden eggs for the City?

• **Osborne's drive into the past**

By 2018, on the basis of Osborne's new cuts, central government expenditure will have dropped to the level of 1948, as a share of national income - meaning, claim the ConDems, that the government's budget will soon be balanced.

But, isn't ironical that they should take pride in cutting spending back to what it was 55 years ago, in post-war, bankrupt Britain? After all, wasn't it a time when everything was in short supply? Wasn't food rationed, social housing in ruins, public services unavailable? Wasn't there a drastic shortage of hospitals in the newly-formed NHS together with school overcrowding?

But, never mind. Apparently, turning the clock back in time is what the ConDems call "progress". And this is precisely why their capitalist system is doomed!

• **A decent retirement? Yes!**

Osborne has come up with another trick. The pension age will go up to 68 by the 2030s and 70 by the 2060s. His argument is that with the rise in life expectancy, the proportion of people who are in work is bound to go down, well under the numbers of those living on pensions.

But what about the rise in productivity which has been feeding capitalist profits for decades? Why

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• Their "timely" deal**

So the CWU leaders finally produced an "agreement", but in due respect for RM's systematic B&H, B-S., etc., and respect to rich shareholders, they want to allow all the Xmas post to be delivered before asking us to pass sentence on it. So the ballot only starts on 21st January..

• And no 5-year guarantees

In fact this "agreement's" not even clear about 5 years "guaranteed" protection for Ts&Cs, for which, in exchange, the CWU officials have offered a virtual "no strike deal"! (All "legally binding" of course!!) A review in 2019 will take place, which can change Ts&Cs - but there's a list of things which can allow changes before then. This isn't

mentioned in that yellow-page summary we got.

• 3% isn't a real rise

And the pay rise is dressed up as a big deal, 9.06% over 3 years. When in fact all they've budgeted since our strike vote is 0.4%... (cf. 8.6% over 3 years before) Oh, but don't forget the £200 Xmas bonus! As for the other changes to conditions - more of the WC-toilet-worthy rubbish on protections and "guarantees" - indeed, the fight is not over.

• Hopeless and confused

That CWU leaders put their names to this isn't surprising, given what's they've signed up to before (Way Backward, BS2010 etc.). But this latest "partnership with the bosses" almost merges them into one! Yes, helping cuts - sorry, efficiencies



- in order to make lots more profits ("growing the business"). Funny tho', the words "profit" and "share price" are (deliberately?) missing from the 36 pages of sweetness and light... Yup, they wouldn't want us to get the wrong idea...

• Voting no to the deal and yes to strike

But never mind, despite the bad timing of the ballot we can still make a "no" vote count. There are many ways of scaring the bosses and scaring share prices - in addition to stopping the mail...

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• Sharing, caring**

At the time of writing we're still waiting to hear what's happening with our strike vote - after we rejected the final 3.75% pay offer and 2-year deal with 94% against - in consultative ballot.

And after the "extra" pay talks in December, even tho' Ford didn't budge, we're told there's going to be more "sharing" of information between Ford and the union officials. Now all we need is for the union officials to agree to "share" with us!! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 9/12/13]

• Strike ballot confirmed

Apparently a National Pensions Forum was "clarified". Cheers a lot - even if it's clear as mud. And apparently too, the NJNC union side did "share" with Ford the intention to organise a strike ballot. However, we now have a union leaflet explaining that such things are "very difficult". Which is union-officials-speak for "we are going to take our time by ticking off names and addresses". At least they recommend a strike vote! Even if it's in... February? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 9/12/13]

• However long it takes...

Of course, we're already in "negative equity" from the pay talks... And the amount owed to us gets higher week by week. It's the same

every time. Ford hopes that when it comes to the vote, Christmas will already have bitten us, the bills will be mounting and with another CPI bribe instalment perhaps delayed, we'll be persuaded not to vote for a strike. That's how little these bosses know about us. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 9/12/13]

• Tomorrow is another day

It seems Lineside (logistics contract) mates decided to postpone the fight with boss Cowgirl for another day. But just threatening to strike did do part of the trick: it got the 3% instead of 2% on pay, an extra day holiday (albeit only if you've 10 years service?!), overtime paid with shift money, back pay - and Lineside wasn't able to put back our anniversary date to November! Not enough - but enough to build on... [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 9/12/13]

• Let's fetch back equality

Of course "equal pay for equal work" was chucked out long ago - and we haven't fetched it back since! In Ford we've many tiers more than the 2 in LineSide, via the grade system - even if this should no longer apply, since grade 2s (why are there still grade 2s???) and 3s do grade 4 work and vice versa. But just because this bad, divisive, situation exists, why should we tolerate it - nor either the "official" 2-tier wage system for new recruits brought in by crooked voting, bribery and corruption, 2 years



ago..? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 25/11/13]

• One working class

As for that sanctimonious refrain of "Ford is good to us, our wages are better than the starvation rates down the road at Tesco"... etc., : if we fight and win better pay and conditions they'll have more confidence to do the same - more so, if we show true solidarity - like: all together now... LineSide & Ford (and Hamton) united, would be a good start. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 25/11/13]

• Green means turning blue?

What's the excuse for the chilly plant? Never mind Ford's boast about its 3 wind turbines saving energy, mean and miserable management still set the heating too low. It's bad enough on Monday, but it doesn't improve much through the week - despite being on all night - not even in DDC! Well, we'll just have to bring our gauges in to check: if it isn't 16°, it'll be hot cocoa for all, and a fire to warm our tootsies... in a barrel at the gate. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 25/11/13]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• Mini launch - the inside story**

The latest generation Mini range was launched in November in the Cowley plant, with the promise that it would secure our jobs till after 2020 - something which was hailed by Unite officials.

In preparation for this, much of the Body-in-White and Paint Shop operations were automated, with many older agency workers shifted into tougher assembly jobs. Then, when production started, there were huge teething problems. The new robots needed fine tuning. With more processes, more of us crowded together and parts accumulating by

the lines, it was chaos. Production almost collapsed resulting in downtime to fix problems.

Instead of taking responsibility for its mess by bringing forward the Christmas break, BMW cut shifts from mid-November, with the short-fall of hours deducted from our "working time accounts" - meaning we'll have to work extra unpaid hours later. Some agency workers even had a pay cut, because they're only allowed a maximum 37-hour deficit on their "account".

As to "securing jobs", we got a foretaste of what it means when



newly-recruited agency workers were sent home, unpaid, even before shutdown and told they would be contacted, perhaps as late as February, without even knowing for how long they would retain their jobs. Never mind that, in order to come to BMW, some had given up other permanent jobs!

• Striking for jobs?

BMW has threatened to outsource security, fire and ambulance since September. Now, they've given us a date (1 Jan 2014) with 3 options: join Securitas (losing pension and sick pay), go on the assembly line, or leave after 3 months, having trained up your replacement. When these mates proposed a strike, they were told they'd be sacked instantly. But if these workmates strike, and we all support them, the bosses sacking threat will be exposed for what it

really is. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford 2/12/13]

• Crazy logic of BMW's tight fist

Assembly Rework saw 12 young agency workers start work and then get turned away after 3 weeks. Some had left jobs to come here and some have young families. BMW has said they might be able to start again in January. Yet Rework has the highest concentration of old hands in the factory, many of whom would have liked to step aside - but cannot afford to. But BMW would rather let them go for

free - and screw the new recruits into the bargain. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford 2/12/13]

• Open door for the dust

The "longer, wider, taller" Mini has caused unanticipated chaos. For instance in the Paint Shop cars had to go through a "silhouette" which is cut out of huge, thick fibre-glass doors and designed to let through the car but keep out dust. Unfortunately it wasn't big enough, so the only solution was to remove the entire doors! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford 2/12/13]

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Bring him back now!**

ISS suspended our rep in Leeds in the middle of pay negotiations, banning him from travelling to any stations where ISS operates - a convenient way of making him miss the talks. Now they have sacked him on the most spurious of pretexts. The manager decided he wasn't "polite" enough in the hearing! His job is not to be "polite" to managers, but to speak for all of us. If ISS needs to resort to this just to shut him up, he must have been doing something right. We need him back now! [Workers' Platform King's X 2/12/13]

• Management manipulation

East Coast managers are building the guards' anger over the holiday arrangements, by constantly trying to make our conditions worse in exchange for getting the holidays to which we are already entitled.

Meanwhile, in the Travel Centre, management has told us they intend to implement the change in holidays (to make us take it in hours, instead of days) that was refused by the majority of us when we voted on it back in the summer, claiming it has been agreed by the union. Sounds like they are trying to unite us in anger... [Workers' Platform King's X 16/12/13]

• Picking our brains

It seems that East Coast management lacks ideas, especially when it comes to improving performance. So they've decided to try to get us to do their job for them, under the "Right Time" campaign, started in June. When Xmas was around the corner and the usual delays were bound to pile up like snowdrifts, they again asked us to come up with solutions to help them out. Start investing in the railway rather than lining the pockets of shareholders is our number one suggestion. [Workers'



Platform King's X 2/12/13]

• Time initial was taught a lesson

Cleaners on Southern used to work for a sub-contractor called Epsilon. This company was taken over by Initial - who promptly told the cleaners that their hours would be cut from 42 to 35. How are workers on minimum pay supposed to suddenly take a cut of one-sixth of their wages? There are plenty of us with good reason to fight Initial - why can't we do it together? [Workers' Platform King's X 2/12/13]

South Africa

It was no surprise that 50 heads of state from round the world, plus capitalist magnates like Bill Gates and Richard Branson attended the Mandela memorial service held at Soweto's Soccer City. World capitalism has a lot to thank "Tata Madiba" for - not least that he saved their bacon and their corporate profits from the anger of the population in immediate post-apartheid South Africa and set the scene for their money-making to continue under successive "democratic" regimes. What was surprising (to some) however, was that the black mourners gave their current president, the blatantly corrupt Jacob Zuma, a resounding "boo" when he got up to praise his late mentor.

Mandela and his successors have, of course, thus far managed to prevent the expropriation of the South

Mandela the icon: judge him by his friends

African and multinational rich - but it will happen. There is an ever-growing anger over the lack of delivery of all the promised basic necessities - housing, toilets, schooling, medicines... and over the "eating" of public funds by the politicians and their cronies. It is expressed through ongoing protests and strikes - despite the lethal violence these are met with. The biggest trade union (of metalworkers) has already said it will not be supporting Mandela's party, the ANC, in the coming election and that a new workers' revolutionary party is needed. Too true. If South Africa's generation of class fighters whose tenacity brought down the system of apartheid deserve a tribute - that would be it. □



Symbolically, a giant Mandela watches over one of the richest shopping malls in Johannesburg

Time to end social apartheid

This year South Africa will hold its 5th "democratic" election - 20 years after the ending of white political domination under the apartheid system. It is also the anniversary of South Africa's first non-racial constitution, drafted during the 4 years of talks between the white nationalist apartheid leaders and the representatives of the African National Congress (ANC) and South African Communist Party (SACP) among others, led by the then only recently-freed Nelson Mandela - the CODESA (Convention for a Democratic South Africa) which took place between 1990 and 1994.

When these talks suddenly ground to a halt in 1992, over the question of who was to draft the new constitution, it was the former leader of the armed wing of the ANC and leading South African Communist, Joe Slovo, who proposed the deal-making compromise: that an

elected constituent assembly would draft a constitution in which there would be a "sunset clause" stipulating that for a period of 5 years after the first democratic election, the ANC would share power with the former white oppressor National Party in a so-called government of national unity, ensuring "continuity of government" and a "smooth transition". Thus, this interim constitution also, de facto, enshrined the continuation of social and economic apartheid. And it meant that FW De Klerk - the apartheid president would rule alongside Mandela as his deputy for five years. This interim constitution was adopted on 22 December 1993 by the "old" Apartheid parliament - which thereby agreed to abolish itself - heralding the first multiracial election on 27 April 1994, and black majority rule.

The final form of the constitution - which has been called one of the

world's most progressive, enforcing race equality, women's equality, the full rights of gays, and abolishing the death penalty, was signed into law on 10 December 1996, at a formal ceremony held at the site of the Sharpeville massacre - where 69 unarmed black protesters were shot dead by apartheid police. It was meant to symbolise the turning of the page on racism and apartheid's gross violation of human rights. Sixteen years later, at Marikana platinum mine, 34 mineworkers were shot dead by the police of the "new non-racial South Africa", recalling in everyone's minds the Sharpeville massacre. It exposed once more the fact that no constitution under this capitalist economic system can ever represent workers' interests, since it rests on the continuation of the class system of exploitation of the many by the few - whether white or black - for the sake of profit. □

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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