

# WORKERS' fight



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

# UNITY IN ACTION OUR BEST WEAPON!

Before the election, Cameron's main headache was Ukip. Now that it's out of his way, Cameron has another headache with Ukip's twins - his right-wing backbenchers. And this time round he won't be able to turn to Lib-Dem MPs for support against a rebellion within the ranks of his own party, which may threaten his tiny Commons majority.

This was highlighted within days of the May election, with a Tory press-driven media campaign, urging Cameron to throw his spanner in the works of the European Union. Cameron, who probably expected this, promptly responded by announcing a tour of European capitals in which he pledged to canvass support for a "better deal for Britain".

But this is largely window dressing. The EU leaders are unlikely to be very impressed by his posturing, knowing that the big City firms are breathing down his neck and won't allow him to put Britain's membership of the EU at risk. And this leaves Cameron with no leg to stand on.

## **An attack against all workers**

The less Cameron can satisfy his backbenchers' anti-EU obsessions, the more he will concede to their anti-working class prejudices.

Having pledged, before the election, to ban EU workers from claiming benefits until they had worked for four years in Britain, Cameron now claims a mandate to go ahead!

All this is justified by the tired old myth that EU citizens are flocking to Britain in order to lead a "comfortable life" on its benefit system.

But, of course, this "benefit tourism" myth is deliberately circulated, idiotic though it is. All statistics, including the government's own figures, show that compared to local workers, EU migrants are far less likely to "live on benefits" and far more likely to be in low-paid,



casual jobs. In other words this new 4-year rule would be devastating for a large number among them.

But it should be clear that behind Cameron's scape-goating of migrant workers there is a more general attack against all poor workers in this country. Indeed, the roll-out of "universal credit" includes a new system of sanctions whereby a 2-adult household earning less than the equivalent of 51 hours a week on the minimum wage, would lose its benefit entitlement!

Behind a transparent attempt at splitting the ranks of the working class, it is really all workers who are being targeted, regardless of nationality.

## **If we don't have it, we'll take it!**

Another of Cameron's concessions to his right-wing is his plan ban strikes when the turnout in a ballot is below 50%, with fewer than 25% of entitled voters supporting strike action. Isn't this ironical, coming from a party which did not even get the support of 25% of the electorate!

This would not stop all strikes, however, as is shown by the case of Network Rail, the rail maintenance company, where a strike ballot against a 0% "pay offer" was won by 4 to 1 on a 60% turnout.

But no-one can be sure that the RMT, which organised this ballot will use it, despite its call for a 24-hour strike for May 25th - because of union leaders' habit of using strike ballots as bargaining chips, rather than fighting weapons. This is where our real problem lies, not in any legislation - which can always be made unworkable with the right relationship of forces.

If today's working class movement was worth its salt, it would be organising against all these attacks, regardless of the origin of those who are affected. But we cannot expect this from union leaders who have been sitting on their hands since the beginning of the crisis. We can defend our class interests, but only if we find within our ranks the energy and the resources to mobilise all our forces - because this is our best weapon.

## Their economy

The last quarter's growth rate, despite being inflated by real estate speculation, had to be revised down to 0.3%, the lowest rate for 2 years! So, even this measure, which has little to do with the real health of the economy, but might allow the Tories to present a rosy picture of the economy, has let them down!

In fact, in the first quarter of 2015, industrial production stagnated, construction fell by 1.6%

### • *The fat cats grow fatter*

The Sunday Times Rich List reports that the rich have made a lot of money out of the economic crisis. The richest 1,000 people in Britain have increased their wealth by 112% over the period of the crisis, to £574bn - and this does not even include their bank accounts! Meanwhile the income of the poorest 10% of the population has dropped 14% below its pre-crisis level. According to the Equality Trust, these fat cats now have more money than the poorest 40% of British households combined. In the past year they saw their wealth increase by £28bn, enough to provide nearly 2m living-wage jobs for a year or 1m jobs paid on the average full-time wage of £27,195.

The state has helped them. The Bank of

## Hot air bubble

and agricultural output went down by 0.2%. What's more, one of the main indicators of economic health - business investment - has been the lowest among the G20 countries in 2014, at just 14.5% of GDP, well below its pre-crisis level.

As for jobs, the Office of National Statistics admits that 1.8m are working on contracts which do not guarantee a minimum number of hours. These must be added to 4.9m

"self-employed", who are not classified as workers but whose income is no less precarious! No wonder real household income is still 14% lower than before the crisis for the bottom 20% of the population, while household indebtedness is at a staggering £1,474 billion!

If there is any "recovery" at all, it is in the Tories' production of hot air! ☐

England admitted in a report that 40% of the economic benefits of its financial bailout went to the richest 5% of the population. If anyone wondered where the money "saved" by the government by cutting social budgets and services, and by the bosses by cutting jobs and wages, went - that's where.

### • *Big Oil gets slicker*

In this year's budget Osborne shed tears over the hardships which big oil companies were facing, because of falling oil prices. He took "bold and immediate" measures to rescue them from their plight, by cutting the taxes they normally pay on their large profits.

But the fall in oil prices never affected Big Oil at all. In fact they're awash with cash. So much so that Shell is in the process of buying the BG group, another oil

and gas giant, for £45bn, while Exxon Mobil is looking to grow even bigger by buying out other companies.

It turns out that these companies owe their fat profits to their refinery business. And this is ironical since, not so long ago, they used to cry poverty because of the low profit margin of their refining businesses. So much so, that they sold off many of them, sacking thousands of workers in the process, or subcontracting production to anti-union cowboy giants such as Ineos.

The Big Oil "Super majors" - Shell, Exxon, BP, Total and Chevron - have a monopoly on the transport and processing of oil and its derivatives, allowing them to control the market. These companies are not just "too big to fail", but too big to feel the crisis.

## Housing

### • *Making a killing from the housing crisis*

Buy-to-let landlords have made an average return of nearly 1,400% on investment in property since 1996, making buy-to-let the most lucrative investment by far. Every £1,000 spent on property to rent out was worth nearly £15,000 eighteen years later. Since this was an average, landlords who bought in places like London and the south-east have made even bigger returns.

No wonder. As rising house prices have put buying a home beyond reach for more and more working people and social housing has barely grown despite rising need, private landlords have got away with charging ever more extortionate rents and deposits. All this attracts more buyers with cash to spare into the market, while those already established have found it easy to borrow to buy more properties.

What's more, private landlords get generous state subsidies which campaign group "Generation Rent" estimated to be nearly £26.7bn annually - £9.3bn in housing benefit paid directly to them and £17.4bn in various kinds of tax relief. So private tenants keep landlords in clover - both through their rents and their taxes!

### • *"Social cleansing" of social housing*

For London's poor, including low-paid workers in their hundreds of thousands, social housing provided by councils and housing associations has been the only way they can afford to live in the capital. But government-backed schemes to sell council estates to developers, under the pretext of renovating them, mean that thousands of council tenants are facing eviction. They neither know whether they'll be rehoused in rebuilt flats, nor what their rents might be. And anyway, the flats for private sale are being built first, leaving tenants with the nightmare of years in temporary accommodation.

In Southwark, for instance, the Heygate estate of 1,200 council flats has already been demolished as part of the "regeneration" of Elephant and Castle. The redevelopment will include more than twice as many flats, but only 79 for social rent! A similar fate still threatens West Kensington and Gibbs Green estates in Hammersmith and Fulham with 760 council homes lined up to be redeveloped, along with Charing Cross Hospital nearby, although the Tories who set up the deal lost control of the council last year. Labour, which won, promised to review the deal; but now, more ambiguously, they pledge not to remove council tenants against

their will. Clearly, council housing won't be saved without a fight!

### • *Robbing Peter to win votes*

On 7 May there was little to choose between the two main parties on housing. Miliband proposed to peg private rents to inflation, but his main focus was in favour of home ownership. He pledged to get lenders to invest the funds put into the home buyers' ISA introduced by Osborne, into housing - claiming that this would deliver 125,000 more homes by 2020, although he didn't say what kind of homes.

Cameron, on the other hand, played a Thatcher, promising to extend the tenants' right to buy council homes to housing association tenants, at a discount of 35%. Of course, the housing associations are opposed, even though Cameron offered to pay them the full market value of the sold properties in order to build new ones. The funding for this would come from forcing councils to sell their most valuable homes on the open market as they become vacant. Apart from its electoral purpose, the aim of this con trick is a bit obvious: by cutting social rented homes, it can only benefit private landlords.

**5 more years of attacks? Only if we let them!**

Only 3 years into Cameron's last term, the Centre for Welfare Reform (CWR) showed that people in poverty - 1 in 5 among the population - bore 39% of all cuts, including cuts to social care and community services. And disabled people - 1 in 13 among the population - bore 29% of the burden, making them nine times more likely than the average person to have been affected. People in poverty were losing £2,195 a year, while for disabled people the

figure was £4,410. For those with a disability who also used social care services, the impact had doubled to £8,832.

So what's in store now? Osborne already announced a £12bn cut in welfare spending in his latest budget. And it's not difficult to imagine who is going to foot the bill, judging from his past record - the poorest, of course. For instance, according to what has been floated so

**• When even eating is too expensive!**

The latest retail figures from the ONS show that the volume of food sales has remained stagnant over the last year and is still below its pre-crisis level, even though the population has been growing by an average of 0.7% per year since 2008. In other words, since the rich are unlikely to be eating less, it's the poor who must be - because their purchasing power has fallen to a point where they are forced to cut consumption of necessities like food.

Further evidence of this is, for

instance, the £6.5bn losses of the supermarket chain, Tesco. People are shifting towards the cheaper alternatives, like Aldi and Lidl. But even these "discounters" are losing sales.

Never mind, though, politicians still tell us that we should celebrate an economic "recovery". They obviously live on a different planet!

**• NHS privatisation: lies and facts**

The government's claim that only 6% of NHS budget for clinical services goes to private companies is an outright lie. Private firms were awarded 36.8% of all NHS contracts last year, for a total £3.54bn, in addition to 40% of the GP-led Clinical Commissioning Group contracts, worth £2.3bn. At the same time, the portion of the NHS budget going straight to the private sector went up by more than £6bn!

However, this only the tip of the iceberg. In addition to this on-going flow of contracts going to the private sector, there is the backlog of PFI/PPI contracts for building and refurbishing hospitals - which will bring a total of over £70bn to private shareholders.

This drift of NHS funding towards the private sector is part of a long-term plan called "NHS Five Year Forward View". The author of this report, Simon Stevens, is the current head of the NHS. Before that, he had been Blair's health adviser for 7 years, instigating Labour's privatisation by stealth. And guess what? Stevens was also vice president of the UnitedHealth Group, a private American company employing 165,000 worldwide! No wonder he's so keen on lining shareholders' pockets!

**• NHS: fees which hurt us all**

Rules came in on 6 April, obliging the NHS to charge short-term (less than 6 months) visitors from outside Europe - in other words from the world's poorer regions, like Africa and India - as much as 150% of the cost of any treatment! Already non-EU students and long term residents must pay a one-off £150 and £200 annual surcharge for NHS use.

But now NHS staff are instructed to check prospective patients' IDs and documentation and must undergo appropriate training... never mind that they already made it known that they aren't prepared to act as immigration officers.

All this to "save" an estimated £388m - that is, out of the £141bn NHS budget, a mere 0.27%. This proves what a myth "health tourism" is! As for the charge, it's just a money-making operation as a 50% profit is added on top. And the sick joke is that British visitors abroad receive treatment costing 5 times more than the amount spent on visitors to Britain!

These new rules obviously target the poor - it is they who'll be deterred from seeking treatment when they need it, with consequences not only for themselves, but for everyone. The NHS should be free for all, regardless of nationality, status or duration of stay. Health is a collective state, after all. And not only can Britain afford such provision, but it owes it to those who suffer the legacy of its colonial oppression.

**Welfare**

far, households will now be treated as "benefit units", with the "choice" of either clocking 51 hours of work - regardless of whether work is to be found or not - or having their benefits cut off.

But there is only so much the Tories can squeeze out of the working class. How far they're able to push their luck will depend entirely on how much resistance they meet. □



**Letter from Sussex**

With housing estates springing up everywhere, South East England is becoming more and more densely populated. Naturally, since private profit rules, investment in infrastructure isn't keeping up and the water supply is under stress.

On 10th May, a major water main about 8 miles to the north of Eastbourne burst, leaving the whole area without water. Some places remained without a drop for almost 48 hours. A water company engineer said that it was the worst burst he had seen in 40 years and there are suspicions that the water company caused it by upping pressure in pipes, to meet increased demand. It being Sunday, it was ages before anything was actually done about the burst - except causing traffic chaos by closing the A22.

The company provided bottled water, but there was no sign of the local authorities and distribution was left entirely to volunteers. During the General Election, people were remarking on the absence of speaker vans and, now, they were remarking on the absence of council vans or any other kind of official help. Was this failure another product of the cuts imposed by the Tories, which should have cost them seats, but due to the absence of any real political alternative didn't?

## Their politics

The May 7th election wasn't the "sweet victory" hailed by the Tory papers. Cameron just increased his score by 0.8% and while he won an arithmetic majority in the Commons, it's the smallest in history! Above all, with less than 2 in 3 voters turning up, Cameron was elected by less than one fourth of the electorate. If this is not a vote of no-confidence against his policies, what is? In any case, it's certainly not a popular mandate!

The Labour party increased its score by twice as much as the Tories. But even without its losses in Scotland, it would still have lagged behind. Labour is paying for its double-talk - its posturing as a party for the working man and its spineless wooing of big business.

As to working class voters, they had no way of making their voice heard with their ballot paper, because no-one in this election was clearly defending the need for the working class to make the bosses pay for their crisis - which is really the only issue of the day.

However, there were two other significant developments in this election. The SNP swept the ballot in Scotland by capitalising on the electorate's defiance and discontent against the main parties. But just because they drape themselves in

## After the May 7th election

the Scottish flag, the SNP is no less pro-business than its Westminster rivals. As to Ukip's 3.9m voters, a majority were just maverick Tories. But a significant number of working class voters also fell for Farage's anti-establishment posturing and his scapegoating of migrant workers. As if Ukip wasn't trying to divert attention from the bosses' role in the crisis by blaming it on a section of the working class!

While Sturgeon's narrow nationalism may seem more lenient than

Farage's strident xenophobic rants, for workers to vote for either was to vote for an enemy whose policy is to split workers' ranks by lining them up behind their own exploiters.

The rise of the SNP, just as much as the rise of Ukip, reflects the disorientation of a section of the working class in the crisis. This disorientation began with the disillusion created by the past Labour governments' anti-working class policies and then, when the crisis broke out, by Brown's bailout of the bankers on the back of the working class. After that, it was further compounded by the union leaders' failure to offer any perspective other than to submit to the bosses' attacks, without putting up any resistance.

This disorientation represents a danger for the working class movement, which will only be dealt with by a revival of the class struggle, allowing workers to test their collective strength and rediscover the vital importance of working class unity. But in reviving the class struggle, whether it is against the attacks of the bosses or to regain the ground lost, the working class can expect nothing from the union leaders. It can only rely on its own resources - its numbers and determination to defend its class interests. □



### • A parody of democracy

The undemocratic nature of the "first-past-the-post" system was graphically highlighted in this election. And revolting as Ukip's politics may be, the fact that it won only one MP, despite its 3.8m votes illustrates the point. In fact, the Reform Society estimates that less than 1 in 4 registered voters cast their ballots for a winning candidate - meaning that 75.5% aren't represented in the Commons!

But this grotesque system has a function - it guarantees political stability for the capitalist class. By giving the two main parties a political monopoly, it allows them to alternate in government, ensuring a seamless transmission of power whenever there is a change in parliamentary majority.

Supposedly, voters' interests are represented by their constituency MPs - but they're not. These MPs belong to parties bent on serving the profit system, not their constituents - let alone the working class majority.

Proportional representation would at least allow voters to vote for a political programme with the guarantee that its representation in Parliament would

reflect its real support. But even then, whatever the outcome, an unelected state machinery would still be doing the day-to-day dirty work of protecting the capitalists' interests.

Of course, a genuine democracy is possible, one in which the whole population would have the means to control every decision at every level of society and in which all those entrusted with public responsibilities would be accountable to the population, and revocable if they failed in their duty. But such control by the population is the last thing that the capitalists can afford - in particular, because it would make it impossible for them to live as parasites on the labour of the majority of the population. So, yes, genuine democracy can only exist once the profit system is overthrown.

### • Electoral con-mission

At least a million potential voters may have disappeared from the register prior to the election simply because the rules were changed - ostensibly to prevent voter fraud. Instead of being able to register as members of households,

each voter had to register individually. But it may be that even more voters have gone missing. The Electoral Commission estimated last year that 7.5m eligible voters were not registered.

The BBC works out the turnout as 66.1% on the basis of a total 46,424,006 potential voters. But where does this figure come from? The Electoral Commission is still unable to tell us how many people were registered or unregistered! Certainly it was nothing like the 97% registration for the Scottish independence referendum last year - 4.3m - including 109,593 sixteen and seventeen-year olds and, of course, there was that record turnout of 84.6%.

No wonder there were many complaints on May 7th. For instance, Hackney council said its online voter registration system "had been overwhelmed by a surge in people trying to apply at the last minute" - at least 100 people had been stopped from voting. Overseas voters including hundreds of serving soldiers also did not receive their postal ballots in time. So the story is not yet over. The Electoral Commission says it will give its full figures..."by July"! We can't wait...

## The SNP's not so "left" face

While trying to outflank Labour to its left, the SNP took great care to remain "respectable". Its manifesto included a £24bn increase in the NHS budget by 2020, as opposed to Labour's £22.5bn. It proposed an £8.70/hr minimum wage by 2020 against Labour's "more than £8.00/hr by October 2019". It argued for a yearly "100,000 new affordable homes" vs Labour's "200,000 new homes by 2020". And while backing Labour's stance on the 50p tax rate, mansion tax, bankers' bonus tax and "bedroom tax", the only social issue on which the SNP went a bit further was by opposing the roll out of universal credit and promoting the reversal of some (but not all) benefit cuts for the disabled. And that was it.

But then, austerity has also been part of SNP policy since it's been in office in Scotland. Tuition fees may



have been repealed, but the budget allocated to maintenance grants for students from poor backgrounds has been halved. Care for the elderly may be free, but Scotland spends a smaller proportion of its budget

## Their politics

on health than England - just as it spends a smaller proportion in education.

In short, the SNP may "feel and taste" like Labour, but it's not a "left" alternative to Labour! □

## • Cameron's "Brexit" dilemma

So the Tory win sent the stock market and blue chips soaring, with shares in energy companies, real estate, banks and bookies, all jumping up - happy to see Miliband's very mild threat to their profiteering off the agenda.

But then, those who claim to know it all about economics are worried that what they call "Brexit" - meaning Britain's exit from the EU - might spoil this rosy picture.

It need not. No way will Cameron betray City interests, which are overwhelmingly in favour of the EU. "Business for New Europe" (BNE), including BT, Royal Bank of Scotland and the London Stock Exchange chairmen, all echoed Tony Blair's warning that Britain leaving the EU would "cast a pall of unpredictability" over the economy - causing the

worst instability since WW2! Tesco boss says big companies would move out if Britain quits.

So Cameron is under pressure to bring forward his referendum and to ensure that the result is in favour of EU membership. His problem is now to dress up his "renegotiation" of the EU operations as if it somehow changes the game in Britain's favour. Which is why he is upping the anti-immigration rhetoric and going on about the Human Rights Act. Of course for workers here, there is nothing to gain from

EU exit - it helps our free movement and unity as a class, and much of the employment laws which protect us (few though they are) come from Europe. We're stronger together, as they say.



## • Blue-collar Con?

Ironically, Cameron's new absolute majority puts him in a far worse position than he was before the election. Indeed, with just 6 seats over and above half of the Commons' 650 seats, it would not take that many of his right-wing backbenchers to block a government bill by abstaining from the vote - since Cameron would no longer be able to rely of the support of Lib-Dem MPs.

He has now to deal with the trickiest issue for Conservatives (with a big "C") - so-called "sovereignty" and the EU. So how will he appease his right-wing narrow little-Englander

backbench and the more outward-looking, profit-seeking business class at the same time?

What proves he's unconfident, is his tinkering with ministerial appointments to upstage Ukip as "the party of the working man". But what the papers call a "blue collar cabinet" is "blue" only in its politics... Priti Patel the anti-Europe, anti-worker, "bring back hanging" former press officer for the party is now Employment Minister. Sajid Javid, who has taken over Vince Cable's job as business secretary, may be the son of a bus driver who came from Pakistan, but

he is himself a banker. And his first announcement was that he'd make it harder for essential public service workers to strike!

Out on a limb, is new deputy party chair and minister without portfolio, Harlow MP, Robert Halfon, a supporter of the minimum wage, member of the Prospect technicians' and engineers' trade union, who published a pamphlet in 2012, called "Stop the Union Bashing: Why Conservatives Should Embrace the Trade Union Movement". No doubt he will live to regret it! Because these blue collars definitely have no red in them.

**BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)****BMW's flexible exploitation**

Since 2000, the Cowley BMW factory has operated a "working time account" (WTA) flexible hours system. Workers are contracted for a 37-hour week, but according to how many cars it needs, the company can lengthen, shorten, add or cancel shifts. The workers then have hours credited to, or debited from, their accounts, up to a maximum of 300 either way - and debits or credits are carried over from year to year.

That's the theory. In practice, WTA means that workers bear the labour costs of breakdowns, long shutdowns for line improvements, etc. And now the large minority of

agency workers were also furnished with Working Time Accounts and are expected to work extra hours to maintain regular pay during shut-downs. Although compulsory paid overtime is still an option (30 minutes after breakdowns to recover production), BMW increasingly prefers getting workers to use WTA hours for this as well, at no extra cost in wages.

So, for instance, a breakdown of equipment on an early shift can result in cancellations of the two following shifts. These workers will then owe a shifts-worth of hours to be worked when BMW wishes. And by the way, those who come



in because they didn't get notification of a cancellation don't get paid automatically - they have to prove they were there by getting management verification, and then can wait months for their wage.

It's quite obvious that this "hours bank" operated by BMW needs to undergo a gigantic crash. ☐

**• BMW's big cover up**

From October 2011 the agency workers regulations required equal pay, holidays and conditions at work for all agency workers working for an employer for at least 12 weeks. This was strongly opposed by BMW among others. But in the end they all had to comply. The first equal pay packets were finally paid out in January 2012 (as even veteran agency workers were forced to work a further 12 weeks qualifying period).

A mere six months later BMW's chosen agency (which is responsible for employing the huge number of temps who assemble BMW minis) announced

it would pay a lower wage for new temps for 2 years - calling this "probation"! How could they do this? Well, under the guise of contracting these workers as "permanent workers", but on fully flexible terms and conditions.

Despite claiming that these new starts' pay would be "only" 15% less, it turned out to be much more (over 30%). And so it has remained ever since with rises roughly every 3 months until full parity after 24 months. With 700 new starts taken on over the last year or so, and up to 40% of the assembly workers employed on this basis, BMW's labour costs must be among the lowest among all the car companies... Yes, while their

cars are the among the dearest! [BMW Oxford Cowley 22/04/15]

**• As if!**

After threatening to remove bikes locked to railings and destroy the locks in the process, BMW have provided some new cycle racks. But even this is only replacing old racks now reserved for motorbikes. Worse, the new racks are open to the elements. Asked to put shelters up over the racks, BMW refused on the grounds that it would cost... £4,000! They can't afford that? They're having a laugh - at the expense of our rusting bikes. [BMW Oxford Cowley 05/05/15]

**Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)****• How much Ford cares**

How does Ford dare to pretend it gives a monkey's for safety, let alone for the health of any of us? Here we have a workmate collapsing on night-shift, hitting his head, unconscious and bleeding (Puma Assembly, 30th April) and the only nurse on duty can't get there before 15 minutes, the ambulance takes 45 minutes, and on top of this, the foreman pulls him out of the way and tells us to restart production with him lying there! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 13/05/15]

**• Their "respect"**

You could say it's just Ford's normal behaviour. Some of us remember when a workmate died on the job and the foreman put his body to one side, didn't even cover him, and told everyone to carry on. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 13/05/15]

**• We expect our share!**

Ford has made record profits this quarter - already close to a billion dollars and that's just 3-month's worth... The big

shareholders' meeting is this week (14th) so the very good fortune of these blood-suckers will be in the news - and we will have plenty more ammunition to fire at them after... [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 13/05/15]

**• Essay writing competition?**

Since most of us are unenthusiastic about going to the new Panther engine assembly line, the foreman was sent to convince us (or threaten us) with the idea that there's no future where we are. But there's nothing or no-one on Panther to entice us over there. Quite the opposite. So is he offering to fill in that ridiculous joke application form for us? And write those "model" answers? We bet he can't do it either. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 29/04/15]

**• Unmerry-go-round**

As for all this grade nonsense - we all do all the jobs and move from Lion, to Tiger to Puma and back again, regardless. This make a nonsense of these different grades and a case for complete harmonisation. All on the same highest grade (4?). So we have grade parity - and that demand should be



on our pay claim right behind 30 years and out on full pension. PS: why should working nights every 2nd week pay less than nights every 3rd? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 29/04/15]

**• Damaged our lungs already**

Last Tuesday managers eventually opened the skylights above Puma machining - we could see the oil and metal mist pollution in the air and it was really bad! Of course the concentration of chemicals/oil droplets is too high and the extractors too dirty and inefficient to clean the air. But it wasn't our lungs Ford was worried about, but a fine from Environmental Health. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 29/04/15]

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)****Sadly, Whistl's for it**

On 11 May, Whistl, the only mail company competing with Royal Mail in "final mile" delivery to residential addresses suspended these operations, informing 2,000 of its delivery posties by sms and e-mail that they no longer had a job.

It was always in question whether Whistl (formerly TNT) would succeed. It previously limited its operations to mail collection, sorting and parcel delivery, relying (like other private mail operators) on Royal Mail's long-established network to

deliver the final mile. But over the last 2 years TNT-Whistl expanded to 1.2m addresses in west London, Manchester and Liverpool. To do so, it employed over half its posties on zero-hours contracts. Ironically, the Community union representing these workers had just announced that it had negotiated an end to zero-hours contracts on deliveries and guaranteed hours for all those employed over 6 months.

The immediate reason given for Whistl's suspension was the



withdrawal of potential funding. In truth, however, there is no space for profiteering newcomers in an albeit shrinking, privatised, network which still functions well, precisely due to its "public" past. As to the sacked workers, they join the casualties of this privatisation mess. Royal Mail's shares immediately went up 3.9%. □

- **ROME C in-house!**

Tho' there's meant to be an answer re the sell-off or in-housing of Romec, at the end of May, we've been told here that the "deal" with RM runs another 6 years... so our Ts&Cs can't be changed? We don't trust the company. We think the best solution is strike! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 05/05/15]

- **It's a zero sum trick**

We've been wondering about this "PSE" - Pension Salary Exchange, formerly known as Salary Sacrifice, because you volunteer to take a wage cut (your contract is changed), so the employer uses the difference to pay into the pension fund, and you both no longer pay pension contributions. (The pension becomes non-contributory). And then, because tax and NICs are less,

you may get a slightly higher wage. It's a (legal) tax avoidance trick which can be used to plug a pension deficit and cut employers' NI payments. Some bosses have even used it to substitute for increasing workers' pay! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 05/05/15]

- **Government avoiding tax?**

But who's the loser? Has to be someone! In fact in the short term it's the tax-man - and since it was the government which took over the pension fund deficit, it's ensuring it loses tax and NI! And wasn't this tax avoidance loophole meant to be closed? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 05/05/15]

- **Where's the catch?**

Oh and one small point to add: the CWU said it's ensured that wage-linked

benefits wouldn't be affected by "PSE"... Nevertheless, they say it won't suit some of us. So we're waiting to hear (they promised to tell us) what the catches are? Because if we don't opt out, we'll be signed up for it automatically. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 05/05/15]

- **No-view**

So what's the big deal over this "Clear View" for processing? When Moya visited HMP she said "what a good thing!" - but it's just writing wishful thoughts on a white board - when and how much mail's coming, how many must be there to process it and when it'll be finished! While managers'll have to learn to count, we still see no need for it. We don't need a screen or white board to tell us we've a huge pile of letters in front of us and that we won't clear on time. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 05/05/15]

**King's Cross railway station (London)**

- **ISS road to nowhere**

Are these stingy ISS bosses trying to unite us in anger? Train cleaners were supposed to get our 2nd pay rise instalment, last Friday, as part of the company's long, long, road map to their so-called "living wage". But on the grounds of the current low inflation (?), they've stolen at least 20p/hr from us this time, i.e., more than £32 a month! [Workers' Platform King's X 22/04/15]

- **What we're really owed**

Of course, the ISS pay rise was pathetic in the first place. But now this theft, from a company which didn't give us a rise for 12 years? If they want to play the inflation card, fine, let's do it: if we add up 12 years RPI inflation they owe us, that makes a 50% rise due right now - not counting interest. Some of us knew their "road map" was a con, now we all do - and we won't make the same mistake twice. [Workers' Platform King's X 22/04/15]

- **Sounds like a pay cut!**

Are we supposed to be impressed with VTEC's grand upping of its offer from 1.4% to 1.8%? They've also refused to look at full reciprocal agreement on travel facilities even if it costs them next to nothing. Anyway, we don't want a % pay rise - but a flat sum to reduce the difference between grades - and enough to pull everyone up to a decent wage: that would mean another £6-8,000 a year - as some station staff are only on £14,759 p.a! [Workers' Platform King's X 05/05/15]

- **Great expectations at GTR**

While workers of all the other companies are in discussions over pay, at GTR we're still playing a guessing game over what our pay rise is going to be. So far we've guessed at least 100%. But seriously, we guess we better get ready to join everyone else in the fight against these parasite bosses! [Workers' Platform King's X 05/05/15]



- **Equal pay for equal work**

Speaking of pay rises, what about the GN "apprentices" on just £2.73/hr! This is just pocket-money, not a wage! Yet they do they same work as us! So: same work, same pay. Full stop. [Workers' Platform King's X 22/04/15]

- **Zero tolerance**

And why are EC agency staff on the gates still on zero-hours contracts? Let's decide what we're going to do about this, once and for all, so these mates are taken on as permanent, on the same Ts&Cs as the rest of us asap... [Workers' Platform King's X 22/04/15]

## Refugee crisis

A total 3,419 people fleeing from the Middle East and North Africa drowned in the Mediterranean in 2014. Nearly half as many have already drowned this year. This shows the level of despair of people, who continue to risk their lives at sea in order to escape situations of war, or hunger, or both.

Federica Mogherini, EU foreign policy chief, blamed "criminal organisations that are exploiting people's desperation". But what caused this desperation? And who are the real criminals in this case - if not the governments, which turn the poor countries into battlefields and the multinational companies, which plunder their resources?

Didn't the governments of the rich countries preside over the invasion of Iraq, the bombing of Libya and the build up to the civil war in Syria, thereby creating hell for the population in all three countries and turning millions into refugees with nowhere

### • Enough for everyone

We're constantly told there's "not enough space" for more people in Britain. But it's high time this xenophobic fear whipped up by politicians was buried. Britain has only too much space - ask someone living in Eden, Cumbria, where there are only 25 people per square km in England's eighth largest district.

We're also told that there are "not enough resources" (homes, hospitals, transport, etc.) for everyone. But over

## Nepal

The recent earthquakes in Nepal took the lives of more than 8,000 people and injured tens of thousands, while rendering millions homeless. According to UN estimates, 3.5 million people are in need of food. The country's health and sanitation systems have fallen apart and cholera is threatening.

Nevertheless, the rich countries have sent a derisory amount of aid. The British state, in particular, which still today maintains a contingent of Nepalese soldiers (the Gurkhas) in its

## The rich countries' leaders have blood on their hands



to go? And once the damage had been done, didn't the EU governments fence these refugees off, by building wire fences along the Greek and Bulgarian borders with Turkey, leaving the dangerous water route as the only channel for them to get away? Then, didn't politicians like Theresa May consciously turn that channel into a death trap by cutting

search-and-rescue missions in the Mediterranean, under the cynical pretext these were an "encouragement" for people to make these journeys?

Yes, the politicians of the rich countries, like May and Cameron, have blood on their hands. And it is the duty of the working class movement to stand by the side of the victims of their criminal policies. □

the last financial year, a miserly £1.2bn was spent on social housing. Over the same period, Britain's 1,000 richest individuals increased their wealth by £28bn - over 20 times more! Many more new, really affordable homes - together with the necessary schools, hospitals, transport, etc., could be built by the state with that sort of money, every year. And by the same token, how many permanent, decently-paid jobs could be created,

thereby dealing with the "not enough jobs" issue as well?

Of course, this would mean depriving the wealthiest people of some of their accumulated bounty and taking part of the profits of their companies. But after all, their wealth was produced by working people, irrespective of colour or nationality. And it could - and should - benefit all of us, workers, wherever we happen to be born.

### Lives in poor countries come cheap

army, and has sent them to spill their blood in every one of its wars, seemed to think a miserly contribution of £23 million was enough.

But it wasn't just money that was required. The majority of Nepal's population lives in small villages dotted around the Himalayas. Helicopters and engineers were needed to reach them as quickly as possible. And while poor Nepal doesn't have such resources, the British army does.

Yet the first RAF aircraft only arrived

5 days after the earthquake, bringing just 18 engineers, 1100 shelter kits and one Land-Rover! It took another week for 92 more engineers to be sent. As for helicopters, the 3 RAF Chinooks that were sent, are still at New Delhi airport - being far too big to be of any use in Himalayan terrain!

For once, the British military which swallows so many billions year in and year out, could have served a useful purpose. But the lives of the Nepalese were not considered worth it! □

In addition to this monthly paper, we publish fortnightly bulletins in several large workplaces in the South East, a quarterly journal, "Class Struggle" and the "Internationalist Communist Forums" - a series of pamphlets on topical issues.

If you wish to find out more about our ideas, activities and publications, contact the Workers' Fight activist who sold you this issue of our paper, or write to us either by e-mail, at [contact@w-fight.org](mailto:contact@w-fight.org), or by postal mail at:

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