

WORKERS' fight



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<http://www.w-fight.org>
contact@w-fight.org

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

Welfare cuts, NHS collapse, handouts to the bosses, ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

"We need to maintain our commitment to fiscal discipline... as we forge our vision of Britain's future", said Hammond shortly before his pre-Brexit Budget.

But his "fiscal discipline" is just another turn of the screw: benefit cuts for the disabled and poor, tax credits for only 2 children, housing benefit withdrawn for the under-22s, cuts in local services. And this, when the pound's Brexit slump is catching the working class in an inflationary spiral!

As to Hammond's "vision", it's only to serve the capitalists: another cut in corporation tax will increase profits and dividends and a big cut in inheritance tax will provide a tiny minority of very rich with a big bounty!

Clearly, Hammond's "fiscal discipline" isn't for his capitalist masters, who are awarded £9bn in tax cuts - but only for the working class, which is facing £13bn worth of welfare cuts!

The bosses' Brexit cake

But these cuts and handouts are just a foretaste of what the Tories have in store to tidy up their Brexit mess.

Hammond's experts let the cat out of the bag, when they said that the Brexit turmoil would result in £122bn more borrowing. On the eve of his budget, Hammond was already said to have a £60bn "contingency fund".

With a conjurer's trick Hammond has suddenly produced a kitty amounting to over 40% of the entire NHS budget! But hasn't he been invoking "deficit reduction" and "fiscal discipline" to justify his latest round of cuts? And, above all, what are these billions actually meant to be used for?

May's famous "secret letter" to car giant Nissan-Renault is part of the answer. It has convinced the company to produce a new model at its Sunderland plant, despite Brexit. She refused to reveal its content, claiming it was too



"sensitive" (did she mean too costly??). However, Nissan has been less discreet, publicly reminding May that Sunderland's future could be at risk unless she puts £100m on the table for a network of British car part suppliers.

Other companies are angling for a share of the Brexit cake too - like Ford, by threatening job cuts at Bridgend. Undoubtedly Peugeot did too before buying Opel-Vauxhall and there must have been many other "secret" talks between ministers and big companies.

Behind their heaps of lies

Of course, Hammond's "contingency fund" may well have to be used to pay the government's debts to the EU - regardless of Tory politicians' posturing about not paying a penny. But, given what we already know and May's pledge to help companies to meet increased costs due to Brexit, this fund is just as likely to be used to feed the bosses' parasitism.

No wonder May is keeping everything under wraps, away from public scrutiny. Otherwise she might have to shed light on very unpalatable realities.

Indeed, whatever official statistics may claim about the "resilience" of the economy, the reality is somewhat different. Their "higher-than-expected growth" only conceals the fact that much of this "growth" is due to inflation, both in retail and in real estate.

And what should we care, anyway, about their "growth", if it only manages to produce more poverty and inequality across society, more and more bogus casual jobs and the collapse of vital public services, whether it be the NHS, social care or social housing?

Over the past 7 years we've been told that cuts were the way of reducing the public debt and deficit. Yet, last year, Britain still had the 4th highest deficit and 6th highest debt as a proportion of total production, among the world's 28 largest economies! Why? Simply because of the capitalists' parasitism. And we can be sure that they'll make the best of Brexit to suck even more profits out of society at the expense of the working class.

So, yes, enough is enough! It's high time these parasites and their politicians were stopped! ☐

Cuts Watch

The Office of Rail Regulation is to investigate the death of a young man, Bernard Ovu. It is believed he mistakenly went through a "staff only" door, late on a Sunday, in January, in Canning Town station. The door then slammed shut behind him. After wandering for over an hour, looking for a way out, he fell down a stairway, hit his head on a concrete step and died. His body was only found hours later.

That night, there was only one lone supervisor on duty. The newspaper which reported Ovu's death, didn't mention the fact that Canning Town station no longer has to ensure a minimum staffing level at all times. This was scrapped by TfL, when they cut 838 station jobs across the

• **Prison crisis: official bribes are no solution**

Last month, the government announced unusual pay rises (a bribe, really!) for prison officers, as an "incentive" to stay at their increasingly difficult and dangerous jobs. New recruits (2,500 posts) will receive higher starting salaries of up to £29,500 - a rise of £5,000. Pay increases for existing officers will vary from between £3,000 and £5,000/yr, depending on how acute local recruitment



• **Pricing the poor out of education**

Over a period of 19 years, university education has gone from being free for all, to £1,000/year fees under Blair in 2009 and now, as much as £9,000/year. This is outrageous. Knowledge has become a commodity to be bought and sold. And like all private companies, university managements are trying to cut costs and raise prices on "their commodity".

After removing the annual £9,000 cap on university fees, the government is allowing increases in line with inflation. So fees have already jumped to £9,250, and will soon cross the £10,000 mark. For a three-year undergraduate degree, this will

London Underground: job cuts kill



Tube network under their "Fit For the Future" restructuring programme.

TfL's policy of job cuts is, of course, utterly "unfit for the future". Tube

workers know it and have organised strikes against it. Reversing these job cuts is the only way to prevent more tragedies like Ovu's death. □

difficulties are.

But, of course, that's not a solution. Particularly so, since these changes will be implemented in a limited number of state prisons (31 out of over 100, mainly in the South-East). The government knows the situation in prisons has reached crisis point (especially in the 18 private prisons), due to chronic underfunding including inadequate spending on training and wages. According to the Prison Officers' Association, over 10,000 posts have disappeared since 2010, and many long-serving prison officers have been replaced by (cheaper) younger recruits with little or no training. On the other hand, the prison population is rising rapidly (it has doubled in the last 20 years), mainly due to longer sentences and the extremely high rate of incarceration - the highest in western Europe.

What a system! People who need help are locked up in the worst circumstances, without the resources which would allow them to successfully re-integrate into society. This is a "fool-proof" way to produce more "criminals" and more "dangerous" prisons - and continue a vicious cycle!

come to £30,000! Universities fear that this could put off potential "customers", for whom it would be unaffordable to spend these amounts (plus housing and living costs for 3 years!) while being unable to enter employment during a full-time course. Their solution? To offer an assembly-line style "fast-track" 2-year degree - but for the same price as a 3-year course!

Education for profit is leading to crazy scenarios. How can knowledge, which is our inheritance from the whole of mankind's history, be "monopolised" by a handful of private companies? No, it needs to be freed from their stranglehold.

Letter from Durham

On 24th February, some 250 people joined a demonstration in support of the teaching assistants' long running dispute with the Labour-run Durham County Council.

This dispute centres around the council's attempt to pay teaching assistants just for the work they do during term time, rather than on an annual basis. This would result in cutting their wages by £1,400 to £5,000 per year.

The lively demonstration, widely reported by the local TV, began outside Durham County Hall before marching into the city centre where demonstrators held a rally, while handing out leaflets. The support for the strike has been encouraging for these workers who do a good job supporting full time teachers.

The council leaders' response to the strike was to promise that all views will be taken into consideration. However the Labour party leadership has instructed all Labour-run councils to implement austerity cuts. And, given the estimated £32m cuts in 2017, the odds are that the council will go on trying to target teaching assistants.

All along, the resistance has come from the determination of the teaching assistants themselves. Their union, Unison, had no choice but to give them its formal support. But it has done nothing to help the strikers to defeat these cowardly cuts. In fact, Unison is discussing with the council leaders and will more than likely accept some cosmetic packaging around the cuts. As to the teaching assistants, they have every reason to keep on fighting!

To make it truly "ours", it needs a revolution!

NHS

The "It's Our NHS" (#ourNHS) national demonstration in London on 4th March was big - although not in the hundreds of thousands which some organisers claimed. But unions did mobilise, alongside "save the NHS" campaigns and the People's Assembly, bringing 150 coach-loads of protesters from up and down the country.

And of course they are right to protest: the crisis in the NHS is worse than ever. But what is to be done about it? The solution from the platform of speakers was that the government and PM Theresa May should be "called upon" to give the NHS the funding it needs. Which is precisely what they don't intend to do, as they press ahead with their cuts and closures including shutting two major London hospitals (Ealing and Charing Cross) to save £22bn by 2020.

So what can be done? The NHS was



conceived in the middle of WW2 - when an improvised, highly centralised service was set up to deal with an emergency situation - providing the basis for the nationalised health system which was to follow in 1947. If a solution could be

found in those dire circumstances, then it is possible now. But the "dire circumstances" this time will need to be supplied by the combined force of NHS workers and the rest of the working class movement, not just protesting, but fighting. □

• A&E: lethal closure plan

In England alone, 24 A&E units face closure. Unbelievable. So when A&Es are in meltdown, with patients waiting up to 30 hours on trolleys and dying on them, for lack of staff and beds, the answer is to shut even more of them? Some 780 people last month waited more than 12 hours for a bed while in A&E - compared to 158 in January 2015. But cuts and closures which

seem utterly insane, are becoming "normal practice".

This is all part of the so-called STPs - "Sustainability and Transformation Plans", drawn up by each of England's 44 health regions, to close or downgrade A&Es to Urgent Care Centres or Minor Injury Units - or even get patients to "fix themselves" rather than ask for specialist attention!

The motive force for all of this, is cuts in spending, full stop. Never mind that the NHS already under-spends on health compared to other OECD countries and has some of the worst cancer cure rates and longest waiting times. The question now is, when NHS workers' collective boiling point will be reached. Because this serial murder of vital NHS resources has to be stopped!

• At breaking point

In 2006-07, Britain was already ranking low in the number of hospital beds it provides for patients: it had only 3.5 beds per 1,000 inhabitants, far behind Poland, and less than half as many as France or Germany. But in the past 10 years, the number of beds has fallen even more. In 2015, there were only 2.4 beds per 1,000 inhabitants, and today, Britain is second from the bottom for the number of hospital beds per head, in the whole of Europe!

This has had obvious consequences. During the first week of January 2017, in 75% of NHS trusts, bed occupancy went over 95% on at least one day, while at the peak of

hospital admissions this winter, hospitals were operating at over 100% of bed capacity! Last November, 15% of patients were left waiting on a trolley for a hospital bed for over 4 hours, but many waited more than 12 hours!

What was the government's response? To blame patients for going to A&Es rather than to their GPs - when the wait for an appointment for a local practice can be several weeks! Worse, even, the frail elderly were labelled "bed blockers", because the social care system which should provide them with somewhere to go after discharge, has all but collapsed.

• What makes hospitals unsafe

According to "NHS Improvement", a government body that looks into NHS standards, there were 365 dangerous incidents recorded between April 2016 and January 2017, i.e., incidents that can result in death and which should never happen in a hospital.

These incidents include, for instance: surgery performed on the wrong organ or an object which is left inside a patient after a procedure. But they are not just caused by medical mistakes. They can also be due to the poor state of the hospitals. So for instance, one incident involved two patients "falling from poorly restricted windows".

The highest rate of such incidents was recorded at Barts NHS Trust - which has 270,000 in-patients and 1.4m out-patients

per year. Next came Newcastle upon Tyne NHS Foundation Trust - which performs 80,000 surgical procedures annually. With so many patients and procedures, one wonders that there aren't even more such incidents - and if not, it's thanks to the vigilance of over-worked NHS staff!

The government quite obviously couldn't care less about patients' safety, not to mention NHS workers' conditions. Despite the hypocritical admission by the Health Secretary that the NHS is going down the drain, the government has already announced that the NHS budget will be cut in real terms next year. That is where the biggest danger lies for the NHS: continued under-funding!

Letter from Sussex

It's not just London's Green Belt that's at risk, as profiteers seek more profit and authorities seek to offset government cutbacks. Schools have been selling off playing fields, hospitals and councils have been selling off green spaces, etc.

About 10 miles north of Eastbourne, at Amberstone Hospital, psychiatric, physiotherapy and catering units face privatisation and closure. Union membership has shot up, but a manager felt sure enough of himself to declare that the NHS trust will make a "killing" by selling hospital land for development. For sure, being on the edge of the High Weald, with a view towards the South Downs (the country's newest national park), it's a prime site for luxury housing!

In the 1920s, horrified by uncontrolled development in places like Peacehaven, the Eastbourne Corporation (the predecessor of today's Borough Council) bought up over 4,000 acres of coastal downland. At the time, the Mayor promised a parliamentary committee that the land would be kept for the people of Eastbourne "in perpetuity" and Parliament felt obliged to authorise the move.. But, now, the council wants to sell the land off to the highest bidder in order to fund "capital projects". Watch this space: there's not been so much public anger here in ages!

Social

May's raid on the "Not Managing at All"

Forget about May's alleged "concern" for the "Just About Managing" (JAMs). Without waiting for Hammond to outline his first budget, she's already gone on rampage against the "Not Managing at All" - the poorest and most vulnerable.

At the end of February, she rushed legislation through Parliament to annul several court rulings requiring that existing benefits for the disabled should be extended to people suffering from heart and mental conditions. And she's got no intention of cancelling Osborne's long-planned £29/week cut in benefits for half a million disabled claimants, which is due to come into force in April.

Meanwhile, the catastrophic saga of rolling out Universal Credit carries on. After nine changes since it was first announced by Iain Duncan Smith in 2013, each resulting in a benefit cut for one kind of claimant or another, yet another



cut will come into force in April. It will restrict child tax credit to 2 children per family. Under May's "benevolent" Brexit, the poor are no longer supposed to have more than 2 children! In a different

time, this would have been exposed as a "totalitarian" policy by the entire media. But, in May's world, this is just par for the course: the poor are just not supposed to have a life of their own! ☐

• Millions more stuck in poverty



Rising food and fuel prices have put over 4 million more people below a nationally recognised poverty line called the "minimum income standard". This is supposed to define the income necessary for an acceptable standard of living, rather than the bare minimum required for food, clothing and shelter.

According to the Rowntree Foundation, 19 million people live below this income standard - or almost 30% of the population - including three quarters of children with lone parents and 45% of all children. The poorest 11 million

people live on less than 75% of this minimum, up 2 million since 2008. The Foundation reckons that the other 8 million are making ends meet, but with no cash to spare for domestic emergencies or family outings - meaning that they are part of May's "Just About Managing".

But May has no policies which will even start to turn back the rising tide of poverty since the crisis began. Moreover, the rising inflation which her reckless charge towards isolation from Europe is already fuelling, can only make it worse.

• Energy bills: the chaos of the market

Three of the big 6 energy companies - EDF, Npower and Scottish Power - have announced tariff increases of up to 15%. Their customers' average energy bills are set to rise by between £200 and £1,100/yr. People with fixed tariffs (usually lower than the standard tariffs), face a higher rise, of 28%.

The energy companies argue that they 'have to' increase prices since they face higher world market prices. But of course,

when the same prices went down in 2013 and in 2015, these companies did not cut their tariffs. In any case, the real profit margins of these companies are kept secret, precisely so that they can fool the public about the extent of their profits. But Centrica (British Gas's parent company) for example, posted profits of £1.5 billion for 2016 - up 4% on the previous year - despite losing 400,000 customers in the first half of the year, due to its high tariffs!

And what does the government offer to the exploited public, in response? The official "regulator" Ofgem has published a "price list"! Its league tables display the various tariff deals, so that consumers can make an "informed choice". And they are talking about extending the price cap on tariffs for people with pre-payment meters. But one can bet that the politicians won't restrict the profiteering of the big energy companies!

• John Lewis - a "partner" to avoid

In February, the John Lewis Partnership (JLP) announced a series of job cuts in its two retail businesses: 773 jobs to go at John Lewis department store and up to 700 at Waitrose. Last year already, JLP had cut canteen staff jobs and introduced longer shifts for delivery drivers.

JLP management describes workers as "Partners", because they receive a yearly bonus that the company claims is "shared profits". But when it comes to driving up these profits for the sake

of the real beneficiaries - the big shareholders, it expects its "partners" to foot the bill!

And to justify depriving hundreds of workers of their livelihoods, JLP bosses blame shoppers - these job cuts are merely the result of "adapting to the changing needs of customers". As if their main concern wasn't to rip customers off, on the one hand, and turn the screw on workers, on the other! Isn't that precisely how JLP makes its profits in the first place?



Ford's gambit

The whole issue of job cuts at Ford's Bridgend plant is back on the agenda, raised by Welsh ministers and union officials in the context of Brexit. But the company already announced last September that there might be future job cuts a result of reduced investment in the new Dragon engine, and the "normal" end of life of its current engines. So the unprecedented "plant union meetings" to announce a "fight", are probably at least partly due to the Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey's politicking: elections for the new Unite GS start on the 27th of March and he's standing for re-election...

It goes without saying that workers must fight against any and all job cuts. However, Ford has nothing to fear from McCluskey - he has called on May to guarantee tariff-free access to all car-makers after Brexit!

Of course, Ford bosses want

• Ford knows how to exploit us

Ford Motor Company is held up as a shining example in the industry, following GM's decision to sell Vauxhall in order to cut its losses. Ford just posted its 2nd best annual pre-tax profit, ever: £8.26bn (£1.2bn from Europe!).

Pundits are praising Ford's CEOs for their clever strategy in "restructuring" the company early in the day, closing huge plants like Genk (Belgium) in 2012 and, of course,

• Vauxhall: whether under PSA or GM, it's all the same profiteering

French car giant PSA will soon complete its acquisition of General Motors' European operations - that is, Opel, with over 35,000 workers across Europe, and the much smaller Vauxhall, with just over 4,000 workers in Britain.

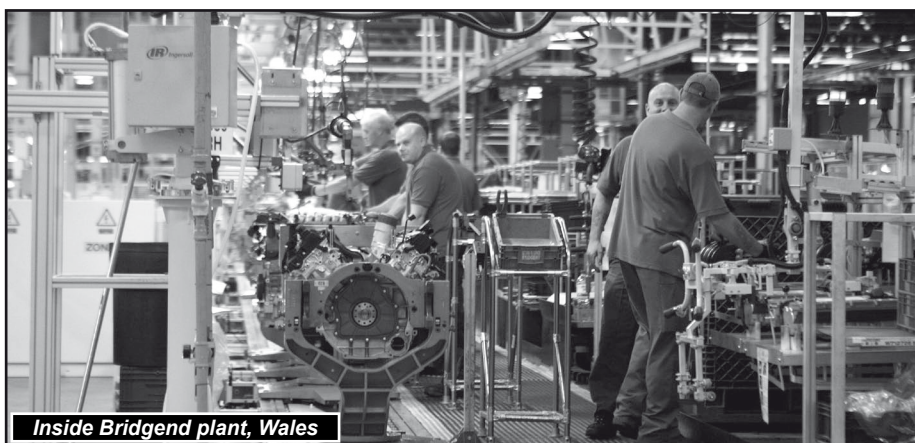
Since the plan was revealed, there has been a lot of speculation about Vauxhall workers' jobs being under threat. And

Brexit - politics

This month Corbyn imposed a three-line whip on his MPs, to get them to vote against an amendment to May's Brexit Bill. This amendment would have allowed for the future Brexit deal with the European Union to be put to a referendum and for the freedom of movement for EU citizens

• Stoke and Copeland - no wins for the government

The political establishment and the media were quick to blame Corbyn's leadership for Labour's defeat in the Copeland by-election. But a closer look at the results shows a different picture. The Conservatives only got 44.2% of the vote - up 9% from their 2015 score - while UKIP was down by 8.5%. It was largely thanks to UKIP voters that the Tories won in Copeland - after all why shouldn't pro-Brexit voters switch to the real Brexiters?



Inside Bridgend plant, Wales

concessions from the government, but also from the workforce. They envy Nissan's deal with Theresa May, amounting to a cushion against losses caused by Brexit. So they must have been delighted when Ken Skates, Business Secretary for the Welsh government, said, "What's

ending British Transit assembly in 2013 - the very last Ford vehicle to be built here. So now Ford Britain only makes engines and transmissions and does a bit of R&D. But what these clever experts don't mention is the huge wage cuts made in all Ford's global operations - with the introduction of a two-tier workforce, temporary workers and outsourcing.

In the US this was the main factor in

profit sharks being what they are, this may well be true. But is this anything new? Did GM represent less of a threat, just a few years back, when it launched a major global offensive against workers' wages and benefits, under the pretext of facing bankruptcy in the US?

Whether a car company is based in the US or in France - or in Britain for that

Corbyn's Brexit whip

to be decided by a vote in Parliament. Yet, when not so long ago, Parliament had to vote over whether arms sales to Saudi Arabia should be stopped because of its human rights violations in Yemen, Corbyn didn't consider that the issue was worth his reading the riot act to his MPs!

As to Labour, they failed to mobilise their own electorate, maybe partly, as the media pointed out, due to Corbyn's opposition to Trident and Sellafield, which are both sources of jobs locally, but probably also because he has consistently failed to stand up against the government over any important issue. After all, trying to woo voters by going along with May's Brexit agenda may not be paying off!

The real losers, however, were UKIP in

Brexit - car industry

good for Nissan, is surely good for Ford"! As for playing up uncertainties over Bridgend: this year Ford is to renegotiate its contract with the whole of its British workforce under the collective bargaining procedure, so having threats to hang over workers' heads is just part of its game. □

their increase in profits - even if 2nd tier was meant to be phased out under the Big 3's 2015 contract with the union. At that time, Ford had about 30% of its workforce on 2nd tier, Chrysler 40% and GM only 10%. But to compensate, they brought in more temps and increased the exploitation of existing workers, so the "savings" - and profits - continue to rise!

matter, if there was still one left - makes no difference. They all prey on workers' jobs and conditions, especially in a period of crisis like the present one. So, whoever their employer is and wherever their headquarters may be, the Vauxhall workers' best protection will remain, as always, their determination to use their muscle to defend their collective interests.

But of course this time, Corbyn was quick to justify his tactic by the need to respect "the will of the people". Never mind that 62% of all registered voters did not actually vote for Brexit! No, Corbyn's whip has nothing to do with "respecting democracy", but everything to do with fishing for votes!

Copeland but, even more so, in the Stoke by-election - which in the aftermath, was not as widely covered as Copeland. Stoke was won by Labour by a comfortable margin. The nutty campaign of new UKIP leader Paul Nuttall seems to have opened the eyes of a number of his party's supporters. In any case, this by-election showed that, even in a "pro-Brexit" constituency, being hysterically anti-EU is not quite enough get elected...

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**A strike Unite leaders don't want**

In September 2016 BMW announced a plan to close its British final salary pension by 31st May this year and transfer active members into a defined contribution (DC) scheme. This DC scheme started in 2014 when BMW closed the final salary scheme to new entrants.

Workers could now lose over £100,000 in retirement pay. In a Unite consultative ballot, 96% of final salary scheme members voted for industrial action. But then we heard nothing until late January, when Unite announced a strike ballot, now meant to begin on 10 March. Stewards gave out leaflets against the "pensions robbery" on the gates. However Unite

leader Len McCluskey and senior stewards are now having what they call "crunch" talks this week (6th & 7th March) hoping to prevent a strike.

They are offering a Unite "rescue plan" (which they did not put before the workforce first), which would peg pensions to CPI rather than RPI and change pensions' basis from final salary to career average. In other words, Unite is now itself proposing pension cuts, in our name! As if BMW could not easily plug any funding gaps out of its spare cash!

What's neither on BMW's agenda - nor on Unite's - is to re-open the fund to new contributors and increase their number by ending BMW's extensive use



of agency workers. Indeed, at Cowley, all new production recruits have worked for agencies since 2001. At times over a thousand workers have been in this position, some waiting 12 years before being made permanent. This gave BMW an extra lever to exploit them - and, by the same token, it starved the pension fund too!

- **Waiting for what?**

Another meeting, another leaflet about pensions... Now we hear that BMW must "respond satisfactorily" and "speedily" to the points Unite officials, like leader Len McCluskey have raised, or else the ballot promised already on 24 January (!) and now scheduled for

10 March, will actually happen! Is it just us, or is the saga starting to look a bit stage-managed? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 02/03/17]

- **A pensions' policy for all of us**

Some of us are trying to make the case for action more widely than just those of

us in the defined benefit scheme and to include all the newer workers in the lousy defined contribution scheme. Every one of us has an interest in a victory against BMW's attack on our pensions. And everyone should want to keep the final salary scheme open - to force BMW to re-open it to the new contributors! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 02/03/17]

King's Cross railway station (London)**Southern: the next step**

Drivers and guards on Southern have been fighting against "Driver Only Operation" (DOO), which would remove 400 guards and turn them into "On Board Supervisors" (OBS) with no responsibility for train safety. The guards have had strike days since April 2016, and drivers since November, but each on separate days. Southern's parent company Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) refused to discuss jointly with the drivers' union Aslef and guards' union RMT, seeking to divide and rule.

On 2 February Aslef signed a deal with GTR, which would allow DOO in "exceptional circumstances"

(absenteeism, lateness or illness, or if a guard has to leave a train to handle an emergency). But when the deal was put to the vote of Aslef members, they rejected it by 54.1% to 45.9% - on a 72.7% turnout!

Of course, had the guards' and drivers' strikes been coordinated, thus not allowing GTR to sow division, the question of allowing DOO - in any shape or form - would not have arisen. In fact, coordination of drivers' and guards' action against DOO is needed across all rail companies which are trying to dispense with guards. In this respect, the guards' strike announced for 13 March



by the RMT - which includes guards, not only on Southern, but also on Northern and Merseyrail - could be a step in this direction. It remains to be seen what Aslef drivers will do, however. Jobs are on the line, requiring a collective fight-back across all companies and sections to defend them.

- **Somebody up there is insane**

Are Virgin East Coast managers seriously proposing these new on-board, job-cutting, rosters? Because they look to us like an extremely bad joke! They're a hectic and higgledy-piggledy mess: some days the starts are so early or the finishes so late that there's no way we'd get to work or home on public transport. (Where are the guaranteed taxis or dedicated minibuses?).

But no - they want to screw up our

family/social lives, offering only more work with fewer of us! If they're trying to provoke us, they've succeeded! We won't accept this. Let's kill it, before it kills us. [Workers Platform King's X 02/03/17]

- **Wots-app?**

This is really "smart": having cut the Crew Leaders' jobs, Virgin is replacing them with a phone app! But the thing is, that this app is meant to be used by the CSAs, to do handover sheet, reporting incidents/accidents, ordering, etc. So, which app will do the CSAs'

jobs? [Workers Platform King's X 02/03/17]

- **Trial this: "no cuts"!**

What's this we hear? Some GTR stations like New Barnet and Ally Pally have got agency dispatchers now?? So this whole GN Station Hosts "trial" has just opened the door to bringing in agency temps to replace permanent staff! Well we weren't happy about our strike ballot being replaced by this "trial" in the first place. So is now the time to go back to Plan A...?

[Workers Platform King's X 02/03/17]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

The pensions' attack by Royal Mail

• We cannot allow this!

We see in the Members' Bulletin Number 3, from CWU activists, how this attack on our pensions by rich Moya Greede, CEO and her wealthy dividend-paying RM must be fought - and we might add - "with tooth and nail"! Having already placed final salary pension members into a CARE (career average) scheme from 2008, and new recruits into a defined contribution scheme, now RM intends to close the DB scheme altogether from 2018 and shift *everyone* into the pension poverty of the DC scheme!

The more years you have till retirement, the worse it is, of course - you could lose over £4,000 *per year* (23%!). RM's justifications are unbelievable - as is the booklet they've produced. How can we let this outrage carry on even one more minute? [Workers' Fight Bulletin Mount Pleasant 01/03/17]

• ...and there is surely no time to lose?

In fact, the CWU "committee to save pensions", admit that RM only "listens" when we strike. (Well, they wrote: "mobilise for a fight", so we'll take it that they mean *actually fighting...*) And since consultations close on 10 March 2017, even if the "changes" wouldn't be due until April 2018, isn't the time to fight now, before RM starts doing things behind our backs? [Workers' Fight Bulletin Mount Pleasant 01/03/17]

• Where's the union booklet?

We see that an alternative "United Defined Benefit Scheme" setting RM's contributions at the same 17.1% as now, and bringing everyone under the DC into the DB scheme, is proposed by the CWU. Actually, it's very hard to understand why they haven't

distributed the full details of this UDBS to all of us yet! They must have submitted it to RM, given consultations close in 10 days time. Yet we're the ones who're concerned by it! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Mount Pleasant 01/03/17]

• Glossy disguise

Some of us who did read RM's glossy booklet - a 42-page pension "proposal" felt sick! The current pension plan is "unaffordable", say RM, because of "market conditions"? What a joke! The income of the small club of the richest 100 companies on the London Stock Exchange, which RM is part of, is at a record high! Dividends went up to £220 last year! Market conditions for these sharks are so favourable, they could afford to increase our pensions, and our wages, and pay our transport, food, tea, you name it! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Mount Pleasant 01/03/17]

• Edifying examples

Yes, the pensions brochure is full of tables and numbers of "before" and "after" pension cuts. One eg., among many: a 39-yr-old with 15yrs service on £25,000/yr who retires at 60, will see his pension cut from £12,463 to £7,865! Who can live on that?! It's incredible they even dare propose it! PS: what we don't see inside is projections for Ms Greede's pension. Too many zeros to fit on the page? [Workers' Fight Bulletin Mount Pleasant 01/03/17]

• And finally, the insult!

And finally the last straw: RM wants to try to bribe us with a "lump sum" of... £750, to be paid in 2018, if there are CWU union officials somewhere on planet Britain, who dare to agree with the cuts! The very idea that somehow we might be "enticed" by a "carrot" in the first place, is highly insulting. They really are mad. [Workers' Fight Bulletin Mount Pleasant 01/03/17]



Clearing a path for pension thieves?

A DWP consultation paper has outlined how employers can go about making further attacks on defined benefit occupational pension schemes, given that 11 million current and future pensioners rely on them - and moreover that they hold £1.5 trillion of assets "under management". So it puts forward various measures enabling employers to cut pension benefits which would still allow schemes to stay in existence, instead of their being forced to join the statutory Pension Protection Fund, which has already taken over 700 "underfunded" pension funds since 2005.

Of course quite a few occupational funds have already implemented such measures, or are in the process of doing so. For instance, switching from the RPI inflation index, on which many pensions are pegged, to the almost invariably lower CPI index (which doesn't take housing costs into account). Another measure is to suspend indexing and to pay no increase to pensioners while the crisis lasts. They could also renegotiate benefits permanently.

The DWP stresses that everything still has to be approved by the government pensions regulator. But how likely is the regulator to stop companies doing what the government itself already did with public sector occupational pensions, in 2011, in the case of the index switching? The message is clear: the government wants to make it much easier for companies to cut their pension liabilities. And that means cutting workers' wages, since pensions are nothing but deferred wages!

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

• Victory for huffing and puffing

So Ford's backed down and we should get £120 Attendance Allowance this week. Yeah, we didn't accept their fake absenteeism stats and "alternative facts". For Ford to cough up, all it took this time, was for us to huff and puff. But just think what we'd get if we blew their house down... [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 22/0217]

• Is it still "One Ford"?

We see Ford-US honoured its contract this year to "profit share", paying \$9,000 (£7,199) to its workers. Last pay deal over here, we only got a one-off 2% "profit

share". Is "One Ford" now "Many Fords"? If not, where's our Equal Bonus? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 22/0217]

• Ford penalises long service workers

Now that Puma mates have their leaving figures (for retirement/redundancy pay) they're counting the days... But wasn't it a disgrace how older/restricted workers (thanks to overwork for Ford) were first shunted to Puma single shift and a paycut and are now shunted out on minimum E/VR?! These mates deserve proper compensation! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 22/0217]



• Grade 5 will do me fine!

Why are Grade 2 mates on Darkside doing G3 or G4 jobs paid at G2? No excuse that it's become "normal practice". Actually, given the super-profitable mobility merry-go-round that making engines with a too-small workforce requires, it's time we all got the same grade and same pay. At the max rate. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 22/0217]

British banking vultures in Greece

Greece's creditors are back to claim their pound of flesh. The new bailout talks will make the state pay interest on its loans by screwing it out of the population. This, after no less than 13 austerity "packages" in 6 years, which have already driven the country to social catastrophe with drastic cuts to jobs, pay, pensions and public spending, and higher taxes. As of late 2016, the unemployment rate stood at 23.3%, the highest in Europe. The poorest 20% of Greece's 11 million people have suffered a 42% drop in disposable income since 2009, forcing many to rely on soup kitchens. 30% of the population now lives below the poverty line. The suicide rate has increased 40% over its pre-crisis levels. Thanks to public spending cuts, the medical system and public infrastructure are collapsing. Among other things, the new "package" will attack pensions again, which many families of unemployed depend on.

British banks have a hand in this catastrophe. They are among Greece's largest



creditors, although far behind Germany and France. They gambled £10bn on Greek debt in 2008. In 2010, after the crisis, they sold on their "bad" debt, reducing it to £3.5bn by December 2012. Of this, £2.1bn was held by the big banks: RBS £1bn, HSBC £880m, Barclays £388m and Santander £300m. What they sold was snapped up at bargain-basement prices by

so-called "vulture funds", lured by interest rates as high as 30%. One of these, Atlas Merchant Capital, is owned by Barclays' ex-boss Bob Diamond (ousted over the Libor rate-rigging scandal in 2012). Behind the "faceless troika" (the EU, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank) sit the real banking parasites, including the "great" British banks! ☐

• **Aid to the poor countries or profit-spinner?**

The Tory press and right-wing backbenchers have long been ranting against the government's £12bn/yr Development Aid budget, calling it a waste of public funds, no doubt because, in their view, it didn't "put Britain first".

One of these right-wingers, Priti Patel, even argued that this budget should just be abolished. But this was before last July, when May appointed her to run the Department for International Development. Since then, Patel has changed her mind. But she's also pushed a new bill through Parliament, which highlights what this "aid" really is and explains her "memory loss".

On the face of it, this bill seems purely technical: it increases the proportion of the aid budget which is channelled through the CDC,

the investment arm of Patel's department, from just over 10% to 50%. Except that the CDC - formerly known as the Commonwealth Development Corporation - has nothing to do with "aid". Its role is to invest public funds in the poor countries for a profit. And it does this by awarding contracts to private companies and investment funds, including some which are based in tax havens!

As to the CDC's "investments", they can't possibly help to alleviate poverty. For instance, one of its projects was to help the Nigerian government to privatise electricity. In this and other African countries, such as Kenya, the CDC has invested in luxury hotels and shopping malls, etc. No wonder, it prides itself in a 40% return on investment. No wonder too, that this kind of "aid" is quite OK with the likes of Patel!

• **Barclays cutting jobs, making profits**

Barclays has just announced that its profits tripled last year, from £1.1bn to £3.2bn, despite a £23.5m fine for rigging Libor-rates - and this, despite the fact that the bank's top-earning 364 managers were paid more than £1m last year, including 11 who received more than £5m.

This huge profit increase didn't come out of nowhere, though: the bank's workforce paid for it, with 18,100 jobs slashed over the past 8 years. Bob Diamond, then CEO of Barclays Capital (annual earnings: £20m) oversaw the first job cuts: 3,000 in 2008 and 2,100 in 2009. After Diamond was ousted in 2012, another 12,000 jobs were cut, 7,000 of these in the UK, when a quarter of its high street branches were shut down. Last year, a further 1,200 Barclays employees lost their jobs. But for the bank's top bosses, the champagne continues to flow...

Dubs amendment scrapped

May's government has scrapped the Dubs scheme that was intended to support child refugees coming from Syria and other war-ravaged countries. When the scheme was adopted, it was estimated that it would allow 3,000 children who had reached Europe unaccompanied, to be relocated to Britain. Up until today, however, only 350 children have been allowed into the country.

To justify this, Home Secretary Amber Rudd came up with all sorts of spurious arguments. She said that the scheme was "a magnet for people traffickers", and warned it was "incentivising"

migration. As if the existence of "people traffickers" wasn't due, in the first place, to countries putting up all sorts of barriers to keep out people desperately searching for a safe place to live! Isn't it clear that creating more obstacles will only multiply "people traffickers" and make migration even riskier? As for "incentivising migration", the British government with its endless warfare in the Middle East is one of migration's biggest "incentivisers".

But of course, under today's imperialist order, the British government can create millions of refugees while at the same time, justifying its refusal to take responsibility for even a few hundred!

ICF forum pamphlet n°96

• Syria at war - between the militias, the imperialist powers and their regional stoges.

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