WORKERS' fight

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

The ballot box won't give us a voice, COLLECTIVE ACTION WILL!

"*If voting changed anything, they'd make it illegal*" - so the saying goes - and for us, workers, the June 8th election won't be any different.

Of course, it's quite another story for the Tories. In fact, this was May's only chance to win an election. Had she waited until 2020, her government would have been so totally discredited by the Brexit chaos that she would have lost it. But then, May cannot admit that the reason for this election is to allow her party to enjoy the perks of power for another 2 years, can she?

Their "national interest" isn't ours!

So, now comes May's blackmail: she says she needs our votes to "*strengthen her hand*" against the EU, "*in the national* interest", adding that if we don't back her up, "*we*" will get a bad "*deal for Britain*".

But should all this hot air make us forget May's record? What happened to her pledge to take care of the Jams (the "just about managing") last year? She cut the Jams' benefits, while their conditions were further degraded by the on-going rise of casual jobs.

And what about May's pledge to clamp down on the fat cats' extravagant salaries? By now, the big companies' CEOs get paid 132 times as much as the average wage earned by their employees - an all-time record!

This is what May's hot air about the "*national interest*" and a "*good deal for Britain*" are really about. The "hand" she intends to play in the Brexit process aims to protect the profits of British capital at all costs - just like the other EU leaders, who will aim to defend the interests of their own companies.

Today, the hand that May wants us to strengthen, is already slashing the benefits of the poorest. And tomorrow, it will be this same hand which will present us with the bill for protecting the profits of British bosses from the Brexit mess. For us, workers, to strengthen May's hand would be giving our vote to our class enemies!

Our strength is not in the ballot box

This coming election is rigged by the two main parties' hypocritical endorsement of what they call the "*will of the people*" - the vote of just 38% of all registered voters, for Brexit. But what about the 62% who didn't vote for Brexit?

Yet it is the chaos caused by Brexit, which threatens to isolate us from the rest of Europe, and to divide our ranks along national lines - as if workers of all nationalities didn't have the same exploiters and interests!

How relevant are Corbyn's promises in this context? If Labour won the election, Corbyn's "*Brexit for the many*" would still turn the clock back for the working class. As to his pledges - how would they be implemented, when he has no authority over Labour, with its long record of anti-working class policies?

In this election, workers won't be able to express their interests. Every vote for the main parties will be presented as a Brexit vote and used to justify making us pay for its huge bill.

However, we still have our collective strength. To counter the bosses' coming offensive we'll need to mobilise around common fighting objectives. We will find against us, Labour politicians, but also union leaders who fear for their partnership with the bosses. In this struggle, our only reliable allies will be those foreign workers who the pro-Brexit camp has been systematically scapegoating and blaming for the deterioration in our conditions. It is only by uniting our ranks, across all nationalities and industries, that we will be able to muster enough collective strength to fight off the bosses' attacks. The sooner we use it, the better! ❐

French elections

A collapsing political system

Demonstration in Lyon, against attacks on employment rights

Contrary to what the British media made out, the two front runners in the French presidential election - and the only contenders in the 2nd round due on May 7th - are not newcomers. Emmanuel Macron, who topped the poll with 24% and 8.7m votes, is a former banker and an ex-Socialist Party minister, who masterminded some of the anti-working class measures adopted under the incumbent president, Hollande. In preparation for this election, Macron engineered a split and launched his own party, called "Forward", which was propelled to the forefront of the political scene by the media - or rather, by the capitalists who control them. His rival, Marine Le Pen, who came second with 21.3% and 7.7m votes, represents the National Front, a party formed under her father, in 1972. After decades on the margins of far-right politics, the NF eventually managed to capitalise on the discontent generated by the main parties in office, by toning its rhetoric down in order to build up its electoral influence.

The making of a new political system

What's new in this election, however, is that, this time, the 2 main parties - the Socialist Party and the right-wing "Republicans" - were eliminated. This highlights the collapse of the bipolar, left-right, political system which has been operating in France since the 1950s. This system was somewhat comparable to Britain's two-party system: left-wing and right-wing governments alternated in office, each one replacing its predecessor when it got discredited, but always implementing the same policies. However, this could only work if a large section of voters remained under the illusion that these rotations could produce some kind of "change". This is clearly over. In fact, for quite a while already, the National Front's rising scores were reflecting the voters' disgust with the traditional parties, while the falling turnout showed their rejection of the electoral farce itself. In this last election, a new bipolar system has finally emerged, with Macron as one pole and the National Front as the other, largely due to its having been kept out of every government combination by the traditional parties, for such a long time.

The collapse of the left-right bipolar system also results in the collapse of parties which came out of the working class movement, many years ago, and which have been serving the institutions of the capitalist class ever since. Such is the case of the Communist party, which chose to disappear behind the candidate, Mélenchon, a demagogue and former Socialist party minister who, despite being classified as "far-left" by ignorant British commentators, never had any links with the working class movement. But it is also the case for the Socialist party itself, which has almost fallen back to the scores it had 48 years ago, with just 6.4% of the votes!

An unstable outcome

Macron's first round win triggered a sharp rise on the Paris stock exchange. Not that the capitalist class had any major reason to fear the outcome of this election. But it was relieved that the prospect of a government bent on Frexit - which would have been bad for business - appeared to be off the agenda. However, while Macron's election seems likely, his success may well be short-lived. His first challenge will come with the June general elections, in which 4 blocks of comparable strength will be fighting for 577 parliamentary seats. This will inevitably cause recurring conflict between the new president and the new Parliament. Ultimately, however, whether the resulting political instability leads to a political crisis, will depend mainly on the evolution of the social and economic situation.

Indeed, whatever the outcome of these elections, the bosses' offensive against the working class will carry on. If Macron is elected he will serve the interests of big business and the odds are, that he will be promptly discredited. It would therefore be total nonsense to consider Macron as a bulwark against the National Front - for which he is most likely to serve, on the contrary, as a springboard.

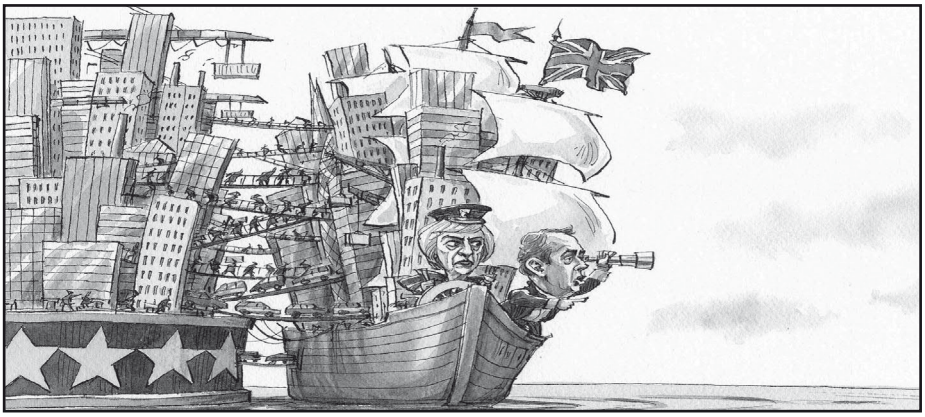
The battles to come

To conclude, we will quote the paper of our French sister organisation, Lutte Ouvrière, whose candidate, Nathalie Arthaud, won 232,000 votes in this election, where she was standing as a "communist candidate" under the label "Le Camp des Travailleurs" ("the side of the workers"):

"Of course, there will be social explosions. The problem for the working class will be to equip itself to face social crises which are likely to cause various social layers to react, each raising its own particular demands in response to the crisis. For the time being, the working class is ill-prepared for such a period. The parties which in the past, used to speak on its behalf - especially the Communist Party - only managed, over time, to totally destroy its class consciousness. They reduced the very idea of fighting for social change to an electoral perspective within the framework of capitalism itself, while fuelling nationalist and protectionist prejudices. The issue of building a party which represents the material interests of the working class, but also its political interests, is the fundamental issue of our epoch(...) The revolutionary communist party that the working class needs can only emerge if a significant section of our class starts moving, rebuilds its class consciousness and produces out of its ranks a layer of activists capable of representing this consciousness in their workplaces and neighbourhoods. Such a party will have to be built on the basis of clear ideas and objectives - that is, on the basis of the ideas of Marxism, Leninism and Trotskyism". ❐

A "yes only" referendum

June election



The political manoeuvring behind May's snap election couldn't be more obvious. She wants to put some order into her own party, by pushing forward pliable Tory candidates, to get rid of the embarrassment caused by the overbidding of her warring factions. At the same time, she is seizing on Labour's record low ratings - due to its on-going internal strife and to Corbyn's ambiguous support for Brexit - in the hope of increasing her slim majority.

However, May knows - but won't admit - that it would have been political suicide for her to wait until the planned 2020 elections. Because, if working class households are already beginning to feel the rising cost of Brexit today, this is nothing compared to what they will feel by 2020 - when inflation, job cuts and austerity measures designed to pay for the bosses' lost profits, will have taken their toll. By then, blaming the EU (as May has already begun to do) will be unlikely to cut much ice with voters! So, no wonder May is in such a rush to have an early election!

Of course, she has offered a different justification: this election, she said, is supposed to "*strengthen her hand*" in the Brexit negotiations. But which hand is that? As if May wasn't defending the interests of her party with one hand and those of the British fat cats with the other, while trampling with both feet on workers' interests!

In short, this snap election is just a re-run of last June's referendum. Except that, this time, May is only offering one single choice on the ballot paper - a "yes" for Brexit. It should find its way straight into the dustbin! ❐

• May's election lies

After announcing the snap election, May began her electioneering by painting today's grim reality in rosy colours. She speechified: "*we have seen consumer confidence remain high, record numbers of jobs, and economic growth that has exceeded all expectations*."

But as people living in the real world know, these are lies. In fact, the very next day, retail figures were published showing that high street consumption had fallen, due to higher prices and low wages. What spending there is, relies increasingly on consumer credit: the Bank of England governor has already warned that household indebtedness is "*high by historical standards*", having reached an annual growth rate of 10.9% in November 2016, prompting comparisons with the run-up to the 2008 financial crash.

No, the only "record numbers" today, concern zero-hour contracts - of which there are almost a million officially and 3m unofficially - and (mainly bogus) low-paid self-employment, which is close to 5 million! As to May's "economic growth", it conceals another drop in industrial production and investment! Who does she think she's fooling?

• Keeping warm with May's hot air?

Inflation reached a 4-year high in March - an annual 2.3% for the Consumer Price Index and 3.1% for the Retail Price Index, which takes housing costs into account. So in the run-up to June 8th, May wants to be seen to be doing something: apparently, she intends to cap the energy bills of the 17m or so households which are on standard variable tariffs, potentially allowing them to save £100/yr. However, since the small print hasn't been revealed, the whole plan remains shrouded in secrecy.

Soaring energy bills, however, are not a new issue: over the past 15 years, they've increased by 158%! And since January, five of the Big Six energy companies - 85% of the retail market between them - have already hiked their prices by anything between 1 and 10%!

Although the energy market is regulated, successive government policy has always shored up shareholders' dividends rather than claming down on the Big Six's racketeering of consumers - which would really require the renationalisation of the energy utilities without compensation. And, of course, this won't be part of May's election manifesto!

• Xenophobia - a dangerous and self-defeating logic

In the run up to the general election, politicking over immigration is back on the agenda. Last week, May pledged to reduce immigration to "*tens of thousands*". Meanwhile, a hardline Pro-Brexit group of at least 30 Tory MPs, demanded a 5-year freeze on "unskilled" immigration. They also argued that new immigrants shouldn't have access to any state benefits or even to the NHS (without private insurance). In fact, new immigrants from outside Europe already pay £150 (students) to £200 (all the rest) per year as an NHS healthcare surcharge.

It's the same old nasty argument (without any basis in fact) which has landed the country in the present chaos of Brexit. Politicians have no other policy than to keep stoking up prejudices against immigrants in order to draw attention away from the real issues and those responsible for them - politicians themselves and the bosses they represent.

However, their overbidding has consequences on the street. The attack on a teenage Iranian-Kurdish refugee in Croydon was not an isolated incident: according to police reports, hate crimes have risen by up to 100% since Brexit. That they do not care about the lives of the immigrants or refugees is clear enough. But their policies are creating an atmosphere of hatred and divisions. And this is what is dangerous for the working class as a whole.

• Asylum seekers targetted again

Justice secretary Liz Truss has come up with a new system designed to fast-track appeal claims by detained asylum seekers against being deported from Britain. The new scheme would cap the number of days from an initial decision to the verdict on an appeal to a maximum of 28, replacing another, very similar scheme, which was first introduced under Blair, but eventually declared illegal by the Appeal Court.

But why should there be a "fast-track appeal system" for asylum seekers in the first place? Contrary to its name, this system is not designed to provide asylum seekers with a more effective way of defending themselves against a deportation order. Instead, it is designed to limit asylum seekers' access to redress against the Home Office's arbitrary decisions! But why should they not have the same rights as everybody else? Why should they be punished for claiming asylum - as if this was a crime! The real criminals here, are the politicians who, like Truss, are using asylum seekers as political footballs, in order to be seen as "tough" on immigration.

Brexit

"Special relationship"... at the back of the queue!

Neither May's heart-felt references to the US and Britain's "special relationship", nor her dash to shake Trump's hand after his election, seem to have paid off, after all.

Having met German chancellor Angela Merkel, Trump suddenly changed tack, announcing that he would prioritise signing a trade agreement with the EU, before considering one with Britain.

Did May really think that wooing Trump would make the tiny British island as economically significant as a European continent comprising 27 countries, a population with is almost 7 times larger than Britain's and which buys 5 times more goods in value from the US than Britain?

No, however much May might sweet-talk or bluster, economic realities will not change! ❐

• Car industry: lies vs reality

The Jaguar-Land-Rover (JLR) boss has warned that post-Brexit import and export tariffs could add millions to their costs. If Britain goes back to trading on the basis of World Trade Organisation rules after exiting the single market, this would involve a 10% export and 4% import tariff on cars and components. Moreover, the EU is a large market for British-made vehicles - one quarter of JLRs cars were sold there in 2016.

These bosses will keep making their profits: either by getting the British government to compensate them for their losses out of the public pocket (e.g. Nissan), by attacking workers' hard-won conditions, or simply moving to where conditions are more favourable.

But for workers it will mean fewer - and worse - jobs and public services, contrary to the lies that Brexit would deliver better jobs, wages and NHS services.

All this - and more - could be won, of course, but not by referendums or by voting. It would take collective fights like those in the past, which forced the bosses into accepting permanent jobs, pensions, the 8-hour day, equal pay for equal work, etc.

Without such fights today, the bosses will carry on trying to push working conditions back to what they were in Victorian times.

British-made cars at the Paris motor show, 2016

British capital and its Rock

After an EU document said that Spain should have a say over all decisions concerning Gibraltar, former Tory leader Michael Howard suggested that May would be prepared to go to war with Spain over Gibraltar's Rock, just as Thatcher had done with Argentina over the Falklands! Whatever next!

What is true, however, is that Britain's 3-century long colonial occupation of Gibraltar, a tiny peninsula located at the southern tip of Spain, from where more than half of the workforce commutes daily, is just as unjustifiable as its occupation of the Falkland islands, off the distant coast of Argentina!

May made a point of promising that she would never allow the Rock to come under Spanish rule against the "*freely and democratically expressed wishes*" of its residents. But what about the "*wishes*" of 96% among them to remain in the EU? Not to mention those of the peninsula's Spanish workers who were not even consulted! But, of course, the only "*wishes*" that May is really concerned about are those of the British companies for which the Rock is a very valuable tax haven, thanks to its 10% corporation rate!

• Corbyn's contradiction over workers' rights

Corbyn says that a Brexit deal must "prioritise" workers' rights. As if it would. Whatever "rights" workers have gained in the past were either won from their own battles (and never enshrined in British law, only in collective agreements with the bosses), or, ironically, brought in by EU legislation - even if they were copiously diluted by British bosses with the help of ministers! - like, for instance the 3 directives on limiting working time, on equalising rights for temporary contract workers and later, for agency workers.

When Britain leaves the EU, May has given her government the power to get rid of these few protective laws, should the bosses demand it, without the need to seek parliamentary approval. But Corbyn's "Brexit secretary", Kier Starmer, promises that a Corbyn government would replace the Tory "Great Repeal Bill" which comes at the end of the deal, with a new "EU Rights and Protections Bill". Of course, everyone knows that a "Corbyn government" is as likely as pigs growing wings. And in the meantime, Starmer and Corbyn go along with Brexit, vaguely hoping that a final vote over the deal, at the last minute, might count! In fact there's only ever been one way to ensure workers' rights: win them, by fighting for them.

• Labour's Barry cares better... for British bosses

Never let it be said that the Labour party does not stand up for British business "First"! Its shadow international trade spokesman, Barry Gardiner has found it an "appalling revelation", apparently overlooked by Theresa May, that EU officials have been sent an internal memo, which offers "informal guidance" for businesses, on preparatory measures to take in the context of Britain leaving the EU. He claims it shows blatant discrimination against British business, since Britain is still in the EU and should be treated as such, till the final day of Brexit.

Leaked to the Financial Times, this memo simply suggests to all involved that they prepare for the (inevitable!) repercussions of Britain's exit, (whether it be orderly, or disorderly) to avoid unnecessary complications down the road - which from their point of view, would obviously make sense. Never mind though, Gardiner has lodged a formal "*maladministration*" complaint with the EU Ombudsman saying it is unfair and "*against EU rules*" since, for example, it would mean "*multi-billion*" contracts (!) won't be offered to British companies, etc. Thus trying to show how Labour is taking even better care of the bosses' and yes, the so-called "national interest" than Mrs May's Tories...

• O' Grady's fairy tale

TUC general secretary, Francis O'Grady has set out her own agenda for a Brexit deal. She has called upon May to use the opportunity to negotiate a trade deal that will be governed by a "fairer" court system - fairer towards workers and consumers, that is.

As if that's what May is interested in negotiating! May will be trying desperately to get an acceptable deal for the bosses. And there is no doubt at all that workers will pay the price. Does O'Grady really not know that?

Of course the likes of O'Grady have long accepted that the only hope for the working class is to leave its fate in the hands of the British Parliament and as a consequence, the only perspective they have on offer is illusions in the establishments' politicians.

Pharmaceutical company blackmail

NHS

Behind the huge costs of drugs is the monstrous greed of the pharmaceutical industry, which holds the NHS to ransom, thanks to patenting laws, attaching astronomical prices to all new drugs. And this, even though the NHS has the power, both as a huge customer and in UK law, to control these prices. However, it chooses not to do so.

So Aspen Pharmaceuticals, based in South Africa (but tied to German pharma giant, Bayer), has found a way to capitalise from drugs which are "off patent". It bought five "older" generic cancer drugs from British firm GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and then tried to sell these in Europe, for up to 4,000 times their previous prices, since nobody else was making them. It also "discussed" destroying all existing supplies.

The NHS, which originally paid £5.20 a pack for the leukemia drug, busulfan, was charged £65.22 by Aspen. The price of leukeran, also for leukaemia and melphalan for skin and ovarian cancers, went up 4 times. It's estimated that this has already added £380m to the NHS drugs bill. The Times newspaper, which uncovered this massive heist, suggests that one way to prevent this would be for the NHS to produce these drugs itself. Yes. But why not go further - and expropriate the entire drugs industry and centralise research and the production of medicines under the ownership and control of those who do the work? ❐

Aspen workers on strike over working conditions, South Africa

• The Home Office's homicidal policy

The NHS is being forced another step closer to becoming a policing body against migrants: this January, NHS Digital, the body that stores patient information, became liable to hand over non-clinical patient details, including addresses and dates of birth, to the Home Office. Already, the use of NHS data has allowed immigration officials to locate, arrest and deport, visa over-stayers and undocumented migrants: there were 8,127 requests for patient details in the first 11 months of 2016, leading to 5,854 people being traced by immigration enforcement.

But health workers don't have to accept to act as police. "*Docs not Cops*" has been holding protests and "*Doctors of the World*" has produced a "*safe surgeries*" toolkit, explaining how to keep patients' addresses off NHS records, circumventing the Home Office memorandum. They say patients can legitimately register as "*no fixed abode*" or use the address of a local GP. Neither do medical staff have to ask for a passport/proof of identity when registering patients - who aren't legally required to provide them. This message however, doesn't reach many of those who're afraid to expose themselves to arrest even if they are in urgent need of healthcare. Which is why "data sharing" is a potentially murderous policy.

• Mental health: May's rhetoric and reality

Mental illness is "*shrouded in a completely unacceptable stigma and dangerously disregarded as a secondary issue to physical health*", said Theresa May in her first big speech on health, and she promised to "*transform attitudes*" to mental health. So far, though, when it comes to the benefits paid to mental patients it's business as usual - cuts and prejudices! In February, the DWP quietly adjusted the criteria for assessing Personal Independence Payment (PIP) to reduce payouts to a whole section of patients with severe clinical anxiety against a tribunal recommendation.

These changes deprived 160,000 disabled claimants of £3.7bn from PIP or its mobility component at a stroke. Predictably, May did nothing to stop them.

Poverty in the midst of plenty

Social

While for many, a home satisfies the real need for shelter, for some it is just an abstract investment, like buying shares on the stock exchange.

Homelessness has doubled in the last 7 years. Yet as many as 200,000 homes lie empty. This number has been steadily increasing since 2015, as the world's super-rich invest in prime real-estate to safeguard their wealth, without even needing to rent it out. The number of empty homes in Kensington and Chelsea rose 22.7% and 8.5% respectively since 2015, and also shot up in Birmingham, Bradford and Liverpool.

Meanwhile, according to homelessness charity Crisis, just in the last year 57,740 households were registered as homeless in England. In Scotland, 28,226 applications were assessed as homeless and in Wales 7,128 households were threatened with homelessness. This is a total of 93,094 homeless households across Britain. All the houses lying empty could easily accommodate them! ❐

• Jailed for being poor

A homeless woman has been jailed for 6 months for begging in Worcester City centre. She had received just 50p!

Everything about this case is shocking. The woman, Marie Baker, was described by the judge as "*fragile and vulnerable*" and in no way "*aggressive*" while begging. She had difficulty expressing herself and could barely read and write. So why was she treated like a criminal?

In 2013, begging was made a recordable offence, coming under criminal law. This made it harder for the accused to get legal aid, given the specialisation of lawyers. But anyway, since 2010 legal aid has been slashed to the point where many defendants (1 in 5) cannot afford the additional cost and thus have to represent themselves.

The judge hearing Marie's case was "appalled" that legal aid had not been available to her and admitted that he was not happy about having to jail her.

When a system is responsible for putting in jail poor and vulnerable people, rather than helping them, it is yet further proof that it needs to be overthrown. And the sooner, the better...

King's Cross railway station (London)

No to job cuts!

Last year, Virgin Trains East Coast (VTEC), already understaffed, announced a restructuring, involving 200 station and on-train job cuts. First for the knife were catering crew leaders, whose roles were to be taken over by the guards, cutting a whole tier of on-train workers and clearing the ground for drivers to take over door operation. The RMT union called an immediate strike - but cancelled it when VT agreed to talk. When talks yielded nothing, VTEC workers took their first ever strike action on 3 October.

During the next 6 months of "negotiations" the workforce was kept in the dark. VTEC proceeded to cut guard and catering jobs via voluntary redundancy, "trial" new roles and rosters and appoint the merged guard-crew-leader "train managers". Having initially delayed implementation of what were clearly unworkable changes, finally a date for the change - 31 March - was set. Union leaders, having remained silent until then, suddenly woke up on the 30th March, asking for "clarification". After getting none, they demanded a postponement. But they were still ignored. The implementation went ahead, regardless, causing chaos.

The RMT then announced a 2-day strike. This time VTEC responded, inviting yet more talks. To workers' dismay, the RMT cancelled the strike. Now rosters are being "*reviewed*" to "*smooth over*" problems… but union leaders aren't even demanding the reversal of the cuts which caused them! The only way forward at this point, would be for workers to take the fight against VTEC into their own hands…

• *The new RPIs*

We couldn't believe our eyes when we saw new Revenue Protection Officers checking tickets (already!) on Virgin trains. It's an admission by management that the new version of merged guard-crew leader (TM), who're expected to be jacks-of-all-trades, just can't do everything. However the RPOs who're meant to jump on and off trains, aren't being managed very well so far; 2 or 3 might appear on one train and none on another... [Workers' Platform King's X 26/4/17]

• *Dispatch these blood-suckers!*

What a parasite! News is out that GTR big-boss Charles Horton paid himself £500,000 last year… that's £9615.38 a week! And this, when we're running the railways, while he's in a boardroom deciding how to cut guard (Southern) and ticket office (GN) jobs? That's upside down! We need to "dispatch", "drive" away and "close the gates" on all these bloodsucking bosses. [Workers' Platform King's X 26/4/17]

• *Playing with fire*

What a nightmare last Wed when Euston had to be closed down because of a fire on the line and all their passengers sent down here to VTEC. Punters had to make journeys three times as long. As for us, we were so understaffed that we were struggling to cope with the numbers. We really can't afford to let Virgin get away with its plans to cut our numbers even further! [Workers' Platform King's X 26/4/17]

• *R.I.P. VTEC?*

Not only are VTEC fares a rip-off, but the tickets are literally ripped when our Ticket Vending (Rending?) Machines print them! The ticket-cutters inside the machine don't actually cut, they tear. Passengers keep saying the new machines are c**p. We agree. It's one more in a long list. [Workers' Platform King's X 26/4/17]

• *No pay, no work!*

Cleaners and Tankers hardly got a chance to enjoy our pay rise, than ISS is already up to its old tricks. So now, instead of underpaying individuals, they've moved on to underpaying entire shifts! These professional tea leaves are good at one thing and one thing only: swiping our hard earned cash, by any means... [Workers' Platform King's X 26/4/17]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

• *They're killing us*

This oil mist problem on Puma machining is a very OLD one. Years ago already, Ford suppressed a report which found the mist concentration to be dangerous.

So yes, we demand compensation for potential damage to our lungs and systemic toxicity - but should we be working here at all, right now? [Workers' Fight bulletin, Ford Dagenham 19/4/17]

• *Proper cleaning would provide more jobs*

As for decent extractor fans - and not only on Puma machining - they get clogged up and Ford neglects their cleaning.

Shouldn't a special cleaning and maintenance team be dedicated to such health & safety critical work? [Workers' Fight bulletin, Ford Dagenham 19/4/17]

• *A petition for permanent jobs, too!*

If it's true that only 56 temps on Panther will be made permanent, then we should also be signing a petition for every single temp to be made permanent (and on equal pay)!? We know "friends and family" always get kept on, which would be fine with us, but only as long as everyone counts as "friends and family"! Because yes, the working class is one big very ANGRY 'family'! [Workers' Fight bulletin, Ford Dagenham 19/4/17]

• *A perverse system*

So the electric car company Tesla, which is less than 15 years old and hasn't ever made a profit, is now valued on the stock market at £38bn compared with Fords, at £35bn (113 years old, profits £3.6bn)! Tesla plans to produce 500,000 cars by 2018 - while Fords makes 6.6m cars a year. That's the sheer perverse blindness of the capitalist system for you - and its share-market hype-sters!

Bad luck to them all..! [Workers' Fight bulletin, Ford Dagenham 19/4/17]

• *Fake meeting*

Friday 31 March's meeting with Jim Farley, CEO Ford-Europe was a farce. We were given cards with green/red ("yes"/"no") to hold up for the cameras, like kids in nursery school. And when someone asked if there was still "One Ford" and if so, why US workers got "30 years and out", bonuses, etc., while we didn't - the plug was pulled on his mike! Farley had fumbled, saying, well he was the European, not the US boss! So "One Ford" doesn't apply to management either...? Shame! [Workers' Fight bulletin, Ford Dagenham 19/4/17]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

BMW and Unite digging in for a phoney war

BMW workers at the Cowley, Hams Hall (Warwickshire) and Swindon factories held a 24-hour strike on 19 April, the first of eight called by Unite to defend what remains of the company's final salary pension scheme, after an overwhelming vote for strike.

At Cowley, members of the threatened pension scheme are a minority, owing to agency working, outsourcing and the scheme's closure to new members. However BMW made no attempt to run the lines and sent hundreds home early, while some workers who hadn't been called to strike, joined their striking workmates on the pickets. A further strike followed, on Sunday 23 April, but involving only small weekend maintenance crews at Cowley and Swindon.

However, nothing has been planned to keep the momentum, since the next strikes announced for Cowley and Swindon will be on 16 and 18 May, while Hams Hall and Rolls Royce cars in Sussex, will strike on 3 and 5 May respectively. Then it will be another two weeks before more strikes are due at all four sites.

Unite's leaders may be showing that they can mobilise workers and could potentially be a nuisance to BMW. But they have definitely planned these strikes in the "safest" possible way, by ensuring that we will never get to feel our strength. This means that if we want to protect our pension rights from BMW's greed, we will have to retire Unite's strike plan - which is just a bargaining ploy - and take matters into our own hands to coordinate a real fightback involving every plant together!

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

Workers' pensions under attack

Royal Mail wants to end what's left of workers' defined benefit pensions, claiming that, after 2018, they would cost RM and "unaffordable" additional £1bn/yr.

In 2008, new recruits were made to join a Defined Contribution (DC) scheme paying lower pensions while Final Salary scheme members were transferred over to a new career average (CARE) scheme in 2010. Then this April, RM announced the end of the CARE scheme. All workers were to be transferred to the DC scheme, meaning that future pensioners would get totally inadequate pensions, while the pensions of CARE retirees would be fast eroded by inflation.

The Communication Workers' Union's response to this attack was to propose its own pension "solution" - an alternative "*Wage in Retirement Scheme*" (WinRS), which all workers (including current DC members) could be moved into.

This WinRS seems similar to CARE, but there are major differences. Retirement age would rise to match state pension age (from 65 to 67). The scheme would be invested in assets, like stocks and shares, which could (?!) be more profitable than the safer gilts and bonds in which Care was invested. Its operation would be reviewed each year (instead of every 3 years), with pensions being uprated or not, depending on the level of inflation and the return on investment. But, above all, RM would apparently never need to increase its contribution, regardless of the ups and downs of the markets. In other words, contrary to the CWU's claim that financial risks would be shared between RM and workers, they would actually fall entirely on workers!

Of course, union leaders choose not only to believe RM's cry of poverty over pensions, but they have also decided (unilaterally) that workers should bear the "cost" of RM's obligation to them! This, when RM paid out £2.3bn in dividends over 3 years to its shareholders!

- ***We have to fight them!***

It's obvious Royal Mail bosses want to go for our jugular - this attack was just delayed by that so-called "groundbreaking"(!!) agreement after privatisation - which we could and should have fought, but didn't... Anyway, too late to cry about it. Now we see the inevitable consequences in that CWU handout. This time, the whole bang shoot of it has to be chucked back in RMs faces. CWU conference just said that "if RM tries to impose anything" they'll call a strike immediately. But they've given RM until August to withdraw their plan. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 26/4/17]

- ***Pay cut? counter-attack now!***

The attack on pensions is full-on. But in addition they're destroying hard-won Ts&Cs. And not only do we get no pay rise - we actually get a PAY CUT! They offer a £250 lump sum, but only after cutting RRIS, TPM, Reserved rights, Legacy payments...! This, when inflation is hitting 3.1% and rising!

As for the rest: no sick pay for first 3 days, full and half sick pay reduced, redundancy pay cut, going onto monthly pay, seasonal variation of working day, start and finish times later; "Kaizen" team-working on deliveries; PDA used to pay only for hours worked; new starters paid 20% less, and for them, no sick pay, 4 years' probation, worse conditions, etc., etc., etc...

We have to attack back, without delay. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 26/4/17]

General strike in French Guiana

The one-month general strike, which brought the French colony of Guiana to a standstill, has forced the French government to make concessions that it had always refused so far. So, for instance, it has now committed £1bn to be spent on essential services and vital infrastructure, while 1,500,000 acres of land will be were handed over to local communities.

With 250,000 inhabitants, French Guiana is the last European colony in South America, due to the fact that its position close to the Equator provided France with an ideallocation from which to launch its satellite-launching rockets. Ever since the 1960s, Guiana's Kourou Space Centre has been a major money-spinner for European companies. But the population never shared in the spoils. So much so that, today, the high-tech Space Centre remains surrounded by shanty-towns, while Guiana's jobless rate is twice higher than in France, at over 20%.

The anger of the Guianese workers first broke out in Kourou, where workers at the rocket transport company Endel went on strike over working conditions. The strike spread like wildfire across the country, but also beyond, sparking off protest marches in neighbouring Suriname (the former Dutch Guiana) and Guyana (a former British colony).

By taking direct action and throwing all their weight into the struggle, the Guianese workers and poor got the whole population behind them and forced the French government to concede. And even if the general strike was called off on April 21st, before all the workers' demands were met, a new generation of class fighters may emerge, having learnt that the all-powerful colonisers are not invincible, after all! ❐

Turkey - Erdogan's maybe not-so-long-lasting victory

Turkish president Erdogan finally won his constitutional referendum. This will allow him to remain in office for the foreseeable future, while appointing his government without being in any way accountable to elected bodies.

Nevertheless, Erdogan didn't achieve what he really wanted - i.e. a large enough victory to shore up his increasingly discredited regime. Instead, the "Yes" vote only won by just 51.43% - or less than 1.4m more votes than the "No". Yet not only did the regime enjoy a quasi-monopoly over the media during the referendum campaign, while using the state of emergency to silence the opposition, but the voting was marred by fraud. The most blatant case was the inclusion in the final count of 2.5m "Yes" ballot papers which had not been stamped by any polling station - but, without which Erdogan would have faced a humiliating defeat!

The new constitution, however, merely provides a legal foundation to a regime which was already barely concealing its corrupt and repressive methods behind a pseudo-democratic facade. But whether this constitution will allow Erdogan to hold onto power for as long as he hopes, is another question. Despite the regime's ballot-rigging, the final count is already highlighting its discredit. And the economic crisis is becoming increasingly intolerable for the population. As a result, just as in the car industry in March 2016, the next challenge to Erdogan's rule may well take place on the class struggle front - and this time, fraud won't be enough to save his neck!

Letter from the North-East

Just after losing a council seat to the Tories in the Coulby Newham ward of Middlesbrough, the sitting Labour MP for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland Tom Blenkinsop, announced that he would not be standing in the election, joining the war of attrition against Jeremy Corbyn. Almost on cue, Blair's former election agent for the Sedgefield constituency, John Burton, was interviewed on local ITV news, where he argued that with its present leadership, Labour would be out of office for thirty years! Then, to add further injury, the Bishop Auckland MP, Helen Goodman told ITV that Labour's objective in the general election wasn't so much to win as to minimise the Tory gains.

In fact it is expected that Labour will do poorly in the local elections too. In the Labour heartlands of the North-East many workers will simply stay away from the polls.

Durham Labour council is refusing to back down in the face of the ongoing and long-running fight of Durham teaching assistants, in the hope that this will force them to capitulate. But this will not stand Labour in good stead at the polls! Disillusioned council workers are likely to stay away or vote Green. Disillusion is also tangible in the Hartlepool constituency, where the xenophobic, reactionary, UKIP hopes to do well in both local and general elections.

While these parliamentary shenanigans carry on, the lives of workers are being further devastated by job cuts. In the small Northumbrian town of Seaton Delaval where the main employer, Coty, produces cosmetics for Rimmel, the factory is closing with the loss of 450 jobs. Apart from saying how bad this is, the unions are doing nothing to try to fight the closure.

And of course, this is the real key to change, as elections will change nothing for us. We can do something now - following the lead of the Arriva Rail North workers - and strike, but all of us together. Because whatever happens after 8th June, it is certain that the attacks by the capitalist class will carry on and only our own collective strength can protect us.

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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