

# WORKERS' fight



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

# ENOUGH OF THEIR BREXIT CHAOS!

If the local election results show anything, it's that the last 3 years of on-going Brexit saga have taken their toll: the Tories lost a quarter of their seats.

May immediately came out with a statement claiming that this was because a majority of voters want Brexit to be implemented as soon as possible. For sure, she wanted to divert attention away from her party's electoral disaster and to push Labour into helping to get her withdrawal deal passed as soon as possible - to avoid having to hold European elections, which are likely to be an even worse calamity.

But what seems much more likely is that voters are indicating that they want an end to Brexit and its chaos; for Brexit to stop being the focus of all attention, as if nothing else mattered! And for urgent issues to be addressed, instead of being ignored in the name of Brexit - like the rising cost of living, poor wages, job cuts, casualisation, the housing crisis and the collapse of the NHS.

## **The voice that workers do not have**

But which party raised these issues over the past 3 years, while, at the same time, exposing Brexit for what it really is: not just a diversion from the problems faced by working people as a result of the capitalist crisis, but also a springboard for self-serving politicians to promote their careers?

In fact no party has ever expressed the interests of the working class regarding Brexit. Neither the various factions of the Tory party, (of course not!), nor its old or new clones, from UKIP and the Brexit Party, to Change UK.

As to Labour, it claims it's a uniting force, "the only party which represents both people who supported Leave and Remain". Except that this ambiguous



position is dictated purely by vote-mongering - and certainly not by a resolve to unite working people on the basis of their common interests.

In fact Labour is so willing to go along with Brexit, that it finds nothing wrong in negotiating with May with a view to forming a "partnership" to implement it!

Above all, Labour claims that a "good" Brexit would benefit workers. This is a lie - just as it is a lie to claim that, in itself, Britain's EU membership benefits workers. Either way, capitalism remains. And under capitalism, the only benefits that workers gain are those which the capitalists are forced to concede, whether under direct pressure from our collective fights, or for fear that fighting might break out.

## **Uniting around our class interests**

McDonnell proudly states that Labour has taken over from the Tories as the "party of business". He and Corbyn intend to do the bosses' bidding, just as Blair did during his 13 years in office!

However, from the point of view of working class interests, the case against Brexit is clear.

It weakens the working class: in addition to causing economic havoc, it can only divide workers' ranks. By imposing second-rate status on foreign workers and reinforcing borders, it isolates British workers from their class brothers and sisters.

What the working class needs is a party, which unlike Labour, strengthens its ranks across borders, on the basis of class interests!

It needs a party which tells the truth about the threat that Brexit represents for workers. A party which, unlike Labour and its TUC friends, is fit to build the collective struggle of the working class against capitalist attacks.

In fact, it needs a party to challenge the rule of capital itself, not to help manage its profits by running its rotten political institutions: in short, a workers' party, which aims to free society of all its existing fetters - from profit, to national borders! ☐

## Ireland

The defeated 1916 Easter Rising against British rule in Ireland was commemorated in Dublin this year, in the wake of the shooting on 18 April of Lyra McKee in Derry, by the New IRA. Lyra's killing led many to warn ominously that "extreme" Irish nationalism is being re-awakened by Brexit's threat to install a hard border between North and South, thus undermining the 1998 Peace Agreement.

Of course, this Agreement ended a previously "reawakened" nationalist threat - the "Troubles", which lasted 30 years, during which Republicans resorted to terrorism in an attempt to re-unify Ireland, sparked after the Wilson Labour government sent troops to quell "civil unrest" in Derry and Belfast. Behind this unrest was the same root cause as in 1916: British rule, exercised through a system of sectarian privilege, which placed the old "Orange Order" in positions of power even though, after bitter civil war ended in partition of Ireland in 1921, this "order" was confined to the 6 counties of the North. It meant the denial of civil rights to those without property - mainly, but not only, Irish Catholics. The consequent

### • Northern Ireland Assembly resurrected

Talks begin on 7th May to re-start the currently suspended devolved Stormont government in Northern Ireland, in which the DUP and Sinn Fein shared office. It collapsed in January 2017, after DUP first minister Arlene Foster refused to allow an inquiry into a dubious green "Renewable Heat Incentive" scheme and Sinn Fein walked out. Nearly £500m had been paid to subsidise business heating costs with no checks on what this money

## Health

### • Measles: a backward step

Incredibly, the unfounded prejudice against vaccination, largely promoted on social media, has now resulted in as many as 112,163 cases of measles - with 1,200 deaths worldwide in the first 3 months of 2019.

From 2018 onwards, there have been 1260 laboratory-confirmed measles cases in Britain, with actual numbers possibly higher. According to UNICEF, over the past 7 years, more than 500,000 British children have missed out on measles vaccination. This means that Britain has already a large enough number of non-immunised individuals for the active disease to spread (the number required is estimated to be between 250,000 and 500,000). Babies under 12 months, who cannot yet be immunised, are therefore no longer protected from measles by an immune population.

Despite this, the government has so far chosen only to "recommend" vaccination. It is neither compulsory nor

## "Ireland un-united shall never be at peace"?

occupation by the British army of the 6 counties of the North and the sectarian ghettoisation of the working class population meant constant fuel thrown onto the flames of nationalism.

As for the 1998 Peace Agreement, it reproduced the very same sectarian social divisions in its provisions for a national assembly, serving the entrenched interests of a Northern Irish capitalist class whose unionist section was now led by the ultra-right DUP, while Sinn Fein (the political wing of the disarmed IRA) aspired to lead its more Irish-minded section.

The constant failure to agree and the suspensions of the assembly on and off, ever since, is just more evidence of a divided Ireland's unfinished political business.

In this respect, the last word should go to James Connolly, the socialist rebel leader of the workers' militia, the Irish Citizens' Army, who was executed by the British army for his role in the 1916 Easter Rising. Warning of the consequences, if Ireland was partitioned and Britain kept its grip on the province of Ulster, he said: "Such a scheme .... the betrayal of the

was used for.

Of course, when May needed the DUP's support in Westminster after her 2017 "snap election" resulted in a hung parliament, the DUP's dodgy dealings were forgotten. As for Northern Ireland's Assembly - it was left suspended in mid-air. But when May lost the support of the DUP over her withdrawal deal, one of the gimmicks she produced to regain it, was the so-called "Stormont lock", giving the

effectively performed by an overburdened NHS. What is required urgently, is a well-funded and robust vaccination programme extended to pre-school children - and with appropriate education for parents!

Only 10 EU countries have actually actively faced up to the risks involved, by making vaccinations mandatory and free. This means that parents with objections on grounds of ignorance, prejudice or religion, cannot prevent their children from being protected from this potentially fatal disease.

### • NHS fees: putting a price on lives

Since last year, many foreigners requiring healthcare, including pregnant mothers, cancer patients, or even those with infectious diseases, have been denied treatment from the NHS unless they pay an upfront fee. Moreover, the Home Office has turned doctors into border inspectors, who now also have to report



*national democracy of industrial Ulster, would mean a carnival of reaction both North and South, would set back the wheels of progress, would destroy the oncoming unity of the Irish Labour movement and paralyse all advanced movements whilst it endured."*

This carnival of reaction, so well epitomised today by Arlene Foster's DUP, will only be over when Ireland is reunified and that border - hard or soft - is rubbed out for good. □

Northern Ireland Assembly a veto on the backstop arrangement for keeping the Irish border open.

Except that this could only work provided the Northern Ireland Assembly got back up and running. Hence this month's negotiations to try and revive it, as fast as possible. What remains to be seen is whether May will be prepared to offer the DUP a whitewash over the green heating scandal, to get what she wants.

suspected illegal migrants.

The Home Office is well aware of the harm caused to patients by this policy. It even asks Medical Bodies to provide evidence to this effect. But as Yusef Azad, the director of the National Aids Trust, explains, "the government is always asking health professionals to provide evidence... when we do - and there is a lot of evidence - the findings are buried".

The consequences are serious. One patient with advanced cancer died after she went a year without treatment, because an NHS hospital demanded £30,000 upfront to provide chemotherapy. Another was discharged after being unable to pay £5,000 for stent surgery to avert the risk of a stroke or heart attack.

The government's "impact assessment" of this policy predicted that upfront charging would save the NHS £20m - a mere drop in the ocean of NHS underfunding! And what a lethal way to fund the NHS! This is the price Theresa May is putting on people's lives.

## Dividends rising in the middle of the crisis?

Shareholders' dividends have hit a record high - the highest since March 2009! We're told they were just a "whisker" under £100 billion for 2018!

The *UK Dividend Monitor* says that the annual "yield" on UK shares - at 5% for the top 100 companies - is "exceptional" and the highest in 30 years. So what is behind this ridiculous increase in pay-outs for shareholders?

We know that while the prices paid by workers for many products went up due to Brexit inflation, many bosses experienced a bonanza. And this was partly because many companies (eg., BP, Royal Dutch Shell, the big mining companies, British American Tobacco, etc.) make most of their profits abroad, in dollars and euros. So they were able to cash in on the fall in the value of sterling.

### • **Rising debt: how the ends don't meet**

In April, more than 8 million people were struggling with some degree of debt. What's particularly significant is that although that debt is still largely owed in the form of mortgages, unsecured debt like payday loans, instalment payments for household goods, bank overdrafts, and personal loans have been on the rise. In a report published by the TUC, the average unsecured debt per household rose

But more importantly, there was a huge increase in the exploitation of the workforce - not just here in Britain, but worldwide - implemented through increasing work intensity, cutting wages directly, or via casualisation, using dodgy zero-hours contracts, subcontracting, or multi-tiering.

Since the financial crash 10 years ago, dividends paid to shareholders have increased by a massive 85%! By contrast, wages are at a record low, still below their 2008 level. On average workers are £12/week worse off than before 2016's Brexit referendum.

So who are the big winners? Among those dishing out the most lavish dividends are GlaxoSmithKline and AstraZeneca, both giant pharmaceutical companies. And both are leeching most

to a new peak of £15,385, eating up a third of the average income - a record high.

In short, more and more people are taking loans, not just to cover the occasional gap, but on a regular basis, to obtain day-to-day basics they need.

But as much as household debt is reaching new heights, credit card defaults, bank overdrafts, and council tax

killing out of retail companies, retail workers and the rest of us taxpayers are asked to foot the bill!

### • **Hammond's hitting the poor**

On the 6th of April, the Chancellor introduced a total of 35 tax, benefit and pension changes, mostly to the detriment of the working class. The rolling out of Universal Credit, for instance, will leave 2m workers over £1,000 per year worse off. And combined with the benefit caps and freezes imposed by Osborne's and Hammond's austerity measures, workers relying on benefits will be forced to survive on £890-£1845 less, per year.

A family of four, with both parents working full-time on the so-called National Living Wage and needing UC as a result (!), would lose £800 a year! Yet the government has the cheek to claim that the "Universal Credit makes work pay"!

As for this "National Living Wage", it might have gone up to £8.21/hr for workers over 25 - but let any of these politicians try to live on that! Not to mention trying to live on the miserable wages paid to under 25s: between £4.45/hr and £7.70/hr depending on age, while apprentices are supposed to survive on just £3.90/hr! As for pensions, it is also mostly the low-paid who now have to pay higher contributions (5%, up from 3%) for their auto-enrolment pension.

But in this on-going economic crisis, exacerbated by politicians' Brexiteering, the Chancellor has spared a thought for the

## Crisis



of their profits out of the NHS - that same NHS which is falling to bits today!

Ultimately, all these dividends are made on the back of the working class and at our expense. □

arrears have also gone up sharply in the last few months.

This can only mean one thing: the incomes of millions are squeezed to the extent that they can barely get by. On the one hand, wages are worth a third less than in 2008, and on the other, household bills, council taxes, rents, have all gone up. Debt can only be expected to grow.

high earners. For those on over £50,000 a year, he has awarded £860+ of income tax cuts. And since somebody has to pay for his largesse towards the better-off, guess what? This "privilege" falls on the poorest section of the working class!

### • **20th year of minimum wage and nothing to celebrate**

It has been 20 years since the minimum wage was legislated in Britain. Legislated, but not enforced. As the Low Pay Commission reports, since 2014, around 1 in 5 minimum wage workers (580,000 people!) are paid less than they are legally entitled. This exposes the sanctimonious hypocrisy behind the minimum wage: governments constantly congratulate themselves over it, but neither provide the legal means, nor show any political will, to actually enforce it.

A rare example of a company being caught red-handed was that of Debenhams in 2017. It claimed that it had paid under the minimum wage due to a "payroll miscalculation". But though found guilty in the end, it was fined just £63,000 despite having made £95.2 million in profits that year.

If the working class cannot rely on the government to enforce the minimum wage, nor on the bosses to pay it, then it needs to organise collectively to get its wages up to standard - and above the current so-called "National Living Wage" rate which at £8.21/hr for over 25s, is not, as its name dishonestly implies, a "living" wage!

### • **Milking retail bankruptcies**

At the beginning of April, the department store Debenhams went into administration, joining a long list of retailers that have used special insolvency procedures, known as Company Voluntary Arrangements (CVAs), to avoid collapse. In the case of Debenhams, which employs more than 25,000 workers, this will involve shutting 22 stores in 2020, putting at risk 1,200 jobs - and threatening with closure another 30.

But while workers face losing their jobs, private equity firms CVC, TPG and Merrill Lynch, which owned Debenhams before it went into administration, made a killing out of it! To pay themselves dividends, they borrowed vast sums and left the store with a debt close to £2bn - 2,000% more than when they took control of the company! Debenhams was then offloaded to the likes of Sports Direct CEO Mike Ashley, for a pittance.

And now, the cost of "restructuring the business" - i.e., closing stores and cutting jobs - is passed on to Debenhams' workers and... taxpayers! Indeed, a CVA allows Debenhams bosses to offload the defined benefit pension scheme into the government's Pension Protection Fund. And thanks to the CVA, all costs related to redundancies, from unpaid wages and holidays to redundancy pay, will be handed to the government's Redundancy Payments Office!

So while private equity funds make a

**Brexit watch**

On the 12th of April, Theresa May claimed she'd broken the Brexit "log jam" by getting an extension of Article 50 until the 31st of October. She has, in fact, only managed to add 6 more months to the already 3-year-long Brexit mess, opening the way for yet more squabbles and infighting in her party.

So not only did May face a first leadership challenge - when the threshold of 48 letters of no confidence was reached in December - she's now facing another challenge triggered by Tories in local constituencies. This vote, which requires 10% of the party's local constituency chairmen to demand it (but is non-binding), is the first of its kind in the party's 185-years history. The Tory squabblers are breaking records!

But of course, despite the fuss around May's leadership, the reality is that none of

• **If her shoe doesn't fit..!**

Tory Brexiters, whose bid to unseat Theresa May failed last December, hatched another plot to get rid of her, as a poll ahead of the European elections placed support for the Tories on just 15% - while Farage's Brexit Party is on 27%! East London Tories were also demanding May's resignation, petitioning for an emergency general meeting. But the backbench 1922 Committee voted to keep the party rules as they are, so at least for the time being, it seems May has been saved from another leadership challenge.

For a few days, though, several Tory backbenchers and ministers could be seen dusting off their credentials for a leadership bid. Boris Johnson was leading the bunch, despite (or because of!) his open opportunism, not to mention his banana-skin-record

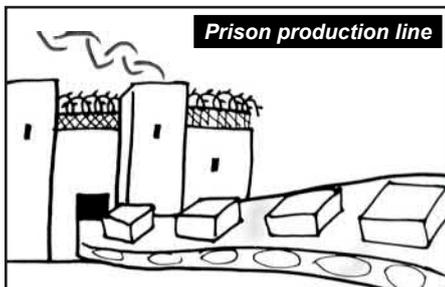
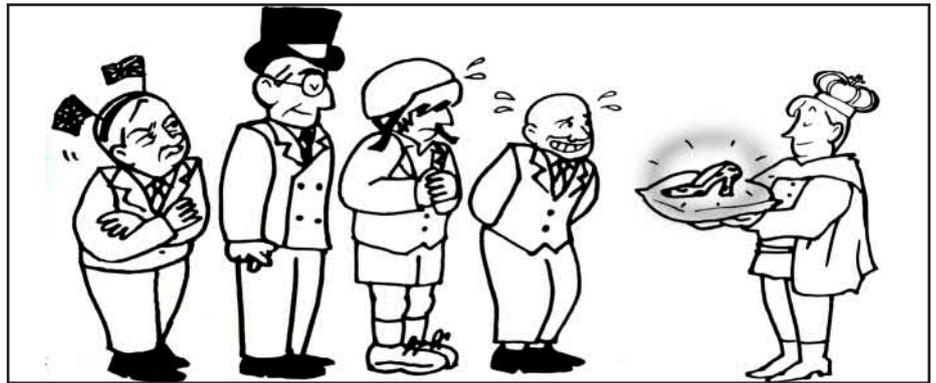
**Social**

'Windrush generation' migrants and their families have faced unemployment, homelessness and have been barred from medical treatment due to the removal of their British citizenship rights.

After the scandal this gross maltreatment generated, and under great pressure, the Home Office said compensation would be

• **Prison and wage slavery**

Regular prisoners have always been explicitly exempted from the 1998 Minimum Wage Act.

**The Tories are back to square one**

her rivals wants to be in her shoes - not until after she has taken the blame for the local and EU election disasters. Yes, these politicians are only concerned with their own careers; never mind what's happening in the real world, outside Westminster!

as foreign secretary! Dominic Raab, who only recently realised that Dover is an important shipping port, was next, with Michael Gove breathlessly running up. And ex-Remainers Javid and Hunt, now apparently born-again Brexiters, trailed behind. But the "Tories' got talent" contest will have to wait for another day - and just as well. No-one would want to be in May's kitten-heel shoes right now.

• **Funny Ken learns the alphabet**

The Tory "Father of the House" Ken Clarke definitely showed a sense of humour when he said: "Brexit is like a parody version of student politics". But isn't he an integral part of this parody? What is more, he is well-qualified for it! In his own student days, Clarke chaired the Cambridge University Conservative Association (CUCA), and was

So 3 years down the line, the process initiated by Cameron's Brexit referendum - which was meant to appease the party's warring factions - has brought the same squabblers back to square one. It's high time the whole process was dumped. □

president of the Cambridge Union debating society. Which might explain his more recent role as main architect of the cross-party votes on alternative Brexit deals with the different A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and H motions! His was C, a motion calling for a "permanent and comprehensive UK-wide customs union with the EU" - which was defeated. It must have felt like a cold shower for such a good student...

But it seems that he also learnt in the CUCA how to play hide and seek, given his current position on the EU elections. Apparently the erstwhile "Remainer" Mr Clarke, won't join "Change UK" as long as the Tory leadership has not been taken over by hard-Brexiters. He may see the risk of a second referendum backfiring, but he cannot undo the mess created by generations of bosses' pupils - like himself.

**Windrush: contempt, not compensation**

paid to those affected. Home Secretary Sajid Javid claimed there'd be "no cap" on the total money set aside, which he estimated would be around £200m. But this is intentionally misleading. The Home Office has set a maximum limit for each compensation claim. So for example, those who were blocked from medical treatment will receive just £500 and

those who had their bank accounts frozen will be paid as little as £200! Some were refused treatment for cancer. Others lost their homes and jobs. How can this compensate them? As for those who suffered deportation, they are to get just £10,000, in many cases to rebuild a life from scratch! In fact, to all intents and purposes, the 'hostile environment' continues. □

Minimum wages are set by the Prison Service - currently at an abysmal £4 per week (!) - and wages are rarely more than £20. On top of that, prisoners' pay can be reduced as a punishment for "poor performance".

Prisoners, however, have no choice. This insulting "wage" is often vital for them to buy extra food and hygiene products. This, in addition to the fact that refusing to work can result in losing "privileges" (such as visiting rights), means that work is de facto compulsory.

The most common type of prison work has to do with daily life, whether it be cooking for

inmates, helping to run a library, etc. However, a special structure (the "New Futures Network") set up by the Ministry of Justice in 2012, exists to help private companies use prison labour. Today, 17% of prisoners work for private industries, or in manufacturing for the government. For them, piecework is allowed and can result in wages which are even below the minimum set by the Prison Service.

Officially, "rehabilitation" is supposed to be the key objective of the Prison Service. Does this mean getting prisoners used to being over-exploited?

## EU elections: more nationalist demagogy

EU elections, which may well take place on 23 May, despite Brexit and because of it, could confirm the worst fears of the Westminster politicians. Because voters are likely to grab the opportunity once more, of voting against the two main parties, which have shown themselves to be so incapable.

However, besides the Greens and LibDems, the only other choices on

### • **Brexit Party: rotten heap**

Since the launching of the Brexit party in February, already its leader Catherine Blaiklock and treasurer Michael McGough have had to stand down due to their overtly racist, anti-Semitic and homophobic comments on social media.

So in March, ex-UKIP leader Farage took over the leadership from Blaiklock and tried to clean up the new party's image, claiming it would be "deeply intolerant of all forms of intolerance" (!) - when in fact his entire political career has been built by carefully playing the racist, xenophobic, anti-immigrant card.

So now, amongst the party's EU candidates one can find, for instance, Annunziata Rees-Mogg, former (unsuccessful) Tory parliamentary candidate and sister of

## Homelessness Increase Act

The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) was implemented last year in April, but the government gave so little to councils that the £72.7m which was meant to last 3 years is already about to run out. Local councils have been given a series of guidelines to tackle homelessness, without the financial backup to actually implement anything. As a result, two-thirds of councils have announced that they cannot meet their statutory duty to house the homeless in their boroughs.

### • **Screwing asylum seekers**

Asylum seekers who've had applications refused, may submit further evidence in support of their claims. But since 2015 they've been required to present this evidence in person, in Liverpool, even though there's no reason why any further evidence could not be handed over at a police station, anywhere in the country. So, for instance, one young mother who had fled torture, had to undertake a 12-hour return trip from Southampton to Liverpool, for a meeting that took less than five minutes!

Asylum seekers don't get their travel paid for such journeys either, despite only receiving £5 a day from the state! Unsurprisingly, the number of further evidence submissions has more than halved, from 162 in 2014 to 70 in 2017, even though there were 6% more asylum claims. Clearly this was the government's intention.

offer are either anti-immigrant, far-right parties like UKIP, Farage's new Brexit Party, or disgruntled groupings within the Tory and Labour parties (like Change UK), which have recycled themselves into new spin-offs, hoping to attract similarly disgruntled voters.

Not only that, but both Tory and Labour will probably respond by stepping up their own nationalist overbidding. Let's not forget that the

arch-Tory-Brexitteer, Jacob Rees-Mogg. Or Ann Widdecombe, former minister of state under Major, known for her Christian fundamentalism, homophobic views and opposition to abortion rights.

By distancing himself from UKIP's unsavoury far-right characters like Tommy Robinson, Farage is offering worn-out Tory right-wingers a chance to recycle themselves - in an equally anti-migrant, anti-European and now anti-abortion party!

### • **Change UK: recycling them**

The deepening of the Brexit crisis before the EU elections has led a few more Conservative MPs to leave the Tory party for the recently-created "Change UK" - which started as the tiny Independent Group in February, with a motley mix of anti-Corbyn Labour MPs like

An additional £100m was pledged over the next two years, but the real problem is the depth of cuts councils have been facing over the past decade. Compared to 2008-9, local authorities today have £750m less to tackle homelessness. Over the years, funds have largely been used to provide temporary accommodation (such as B&Bs, hotels and short-term housing) - which only reduced homelessness on paper.

But today, budget cuts mean that

The Home Office is blatantly making the process as hard as possible, which amounts to adding yet another penalty for daring to claim asylum in Britain - unless of course you are lucky enough to have a healthy bank balance.

### • **Bosses' contract tricks**

The European Parliament just passed a law to set minimum legal requirements for casual and agency workers, including those working in the 'gig economy'. It includes implementing a maximum six-month probation period, working set hours and days, and banning bosses from restricting workers' right to work for other companies outside of their contract.

As Britain still remains within the EU, this ruling also applies here. In fact the European Commission said that as a condition for signing a trade deal with Europe,

## Brexit watch

Brexit referendum and its poisonous atmosphere was also a product of Farage's Ukip 2014 EU election success, when the Tories stole his thunder, by launching Brexit and playing the racist, xenophobic, anti-immigrant card themselves.

The long and short of it is, that yet again, in these elections the working class will thus not be able to express its own distinct interests. □

former Blairite, Chuka Umunna, joined by "Remain" Tories like Anna Soubry and others.

This new party (if it can be called one) claims to bring something "new" to the current electoral system. Stephen Dorrell, (a health minister under John Major in the 1990s) explained that a new model is needed because "The current two-party system no longer serves the interest of the electorate".

Indeed. The 2-party system has long passed its sell-by date as far as most voters are concerned: whichever party gets into power, the result is the same old rotten policies - and all the more so with the Brexit log-jam. But voters are hardly likely to be fooled into voting for the same repackaged politicians in a party with a different name - even if the electoral system changes!

## Social

Councils cannot even offer temporary shelter. Which explains, at least in part, why since 2008 the official count of rough sleepers has more than doubled. The other reason is of course, soaring private rents, their unaffordability being exacerbated by the freeze on local housing allowances since 2016. In the meantime homelessness just gets worse and worse. □

the British government must sign "non-regression clauses" to prevent the repealing of EU workers' rights legislation. Not because the EU is nicer to workers, but to prevent Britain "undercutting" Europe, as a source of cheap and flexible labour!

So will agency temps gain out of this? In fact the new laws don't prevent bosses from employing workers on dodgy contracts in the first place. And anyway, bosses always find ways to ignore rules, for example the old trick of registering workers as "self-employed", particularly in this "gig" economy. According to the Office of National Statistics, 15.1% of the workforce is "self-employed", on an average wage of £240 per week, compared to the average "employee" wage of £400 per week. Deliveroo and Uber Eats bikers went on strike against the problems linked to "self-employed" status earlier this year - and for them these legal add-ons won't make a difference.

**Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)****More Ford cuts = more Ford dividends**

After Ford announced its better-than-expected quarterly earnings of \$2.4bn (£1.82bn), up from \$2.2bn (£1.67bn) last month, its stocks jumped by more than 8% (a rise of 23%) and they are expected to cross the \$10 mark after plunging last year. Ford's North American profit margin was as high as 8.7% and full company margin was 6.1%. Never mind the economic crisis, Ford is paying its shareholders dividends of 6.7%, leaving financial

commentators amazed.

So, how did Ford manage this apparent turnaround? CEO Hackitt says it's the strong US F-series truck and Ranger pick-up sales. But that's not the full story. Here at Dagenham, we are well aware of the impact of their \$11bn (£8.3bn!) restructuring plans - with the refusal to recruit, constant merry-go-round between engine lines and 150 Transport Operation jobs earmarked for cutting. Let's remind ourselves of the rest: 5,000 jobs slashed in Germany; 2



Russian plants and Bordeaux transmission shut, 1000 jobs to go at Bridgend, the end of Warley, plus all the one-way-ticket white collar redundancies... In this perverse, upside-down world, as soon as they kill our jobs, their super-dividends hit the roof! ☐

**• Ford's got a new sales team**

So, the National Joint Negotiating Committee (NJNC), in the light of the coming pay deal, put out a "Statement of intent and Solidarity", speaking about "collective togetherness" - a new language coming from these full-time union officials! But what on earth do they mean? They start by saying they want to ask what Ford "intends", and end by telling us to go to Ford dealers to buy cars with British-made transmissions and engines! Our eyes nearly popped out! Do they mean to offer "solidarity" to Ford? Or fly the union jack? What next? And this, when they themselves go on about the lousy Privilege scheme! (While accepting temps and 2nd tier...) [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 17/04/19]

**• No "solidarity"?**

In the middle paragraph, the NJNC makes a threat "if any location was faced with compulsory redundancies, plant closure, then each location would be balloted for industrial action. It was confirmed

... that every location was ballot ready." Meaning that each location, if faced with closure/compulsory redundancies (job cuts by VR are OK then?) will be balloted ON ITS OWN and there'll be no "solidarity" whatsoever - not "an injury to one is an injury to all" but "it's your injury, deal with it yourself!"

PS: Warley's closure date's already set for Sept 2019. Staff are already displaced. But where was the ballot? Bridgend, TOPs, Ecotech, ditto... [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 17/04/19]

**• Our response**

Quick, we need to find our own "collective togetherness" - and not leave it to these numpties! It's easy to start - right here on the shopfloor. But we'd just have to stop work first and "gather and gather" everyone... Of course. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 17/04/19]

**• Make them 1st-tier now!**

So, we hear rumours that 50 of the 'oldest' temps will get contracts. Good, but not

good - since it's 2nd tier... However we'll still only believe it when we see it. After all, we hear Ford will try to blackmail us into accepting a 3rd tier of workers as part of the 2019 pay deal. We wouldn't put it past them to wait till then before they give out any permanent contracts. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 17/04/19]

**• De-Manning?**

Preventive Maintenance boss Manning's so very proud of his drone gantry checks on Panther... He even admitted that before he came up with the idea of using 3 flying spider toys (+ 6 operators), Ford never bothered to do all-year-round inspection - of course not: it would've meant halting production... (a team of 12 maintenance guys would come in only during shutdown - not preventing the odd near-miss from falling objects)! The "beauty" of the drones is that they can inspect while the line's working... [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 02/05/19]

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)****• They're at it again**

We couldn't believe what we saw on the CWU website about our petty 2% pay 'rise' this month... According to DGS Terry Pullinger's own special version of maths, we've had a "7.3 per cent pay rise in the last 12 months" (quoted verbatim!)... How he gets that number, is anyone's guess! The 5% pay increase we had in October 2017 was backdated to April 2017 - over 2018, we got no increase, and then just 2% this month. Meaning the average pay rise is barely 2% per year! Very far from TP's magic numbers! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 10/04/19]

**• On our guard**

Our next pay review may be one year down the line, but let's not forget what happened last time! CWU officials and RM were at it for months, behind closed doors! After our strike was cancelled and much mediation drama, they finally presented us with their

"CWU/RM joint-this-and-that" agreement that left us high and dry. The 2% "increase" on our pay slip this month is a reminder of that. So, this time round, we want to know what's being discussed at the negotiation table - and we want to have a say over it! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 24/04/19]

**• When a pay rise isn't one**

Here in Quadrant, we're meant to consider ourselves 'lucky' to be offered a 2.6% pay increase from April, and a further 1% increase from October. But why split our pay rise like this? Well, the union tells us we should consider this a 3.6% increase for the year - but this is playing with numbers yet again! In fact, the average over 12 months would be 3%...

So, for a Quadrant worker on £350/week, he/she would be only £10.50 better off per week - not enough to cover our weekly bus fare! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 10/04/19]

**• Who needs "changing"?**

We've heard the new RM chairman Keith Williams telling us that in order to face the "significant challenges" of the business, "we need to keep changing"... Like him?? This fat cat has been the CEO and Chairman of British Airways, Non-Executive Deputy Chairman of John Lewis, Non-Executive Chairman of Halfords and is currently reviewing the state of the railways for transport secretary Chris Grayling! Apparently, top shareholders are worried he'll be "overworked"... [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 10/04/19]

**King's Cross railway station (London)****Pensions: the bosses must pay!**

**M**artin Griffiths and Richard Branson of Virgin-Stagecoach, complained bitterly after their bids for the West Coast franchise extension and two other franchises were rejected. But they had refused to fully guarantee rail workers' pensions for the life of the franchises, citing the "high risk" of funding pensions and how companies could not be expected to accept it.

Now after all this hoo-ha, the Rail Delivery Group, representing Train Operating Companies (TOCs) wants the Department for Transport (i.e.,

the state) to shoulder half of the cost of the rail pension scheme, quoting the over-the-top warning from the Pension Regulator, that the scheme "might" be underfunded by £6-7bn, based on estimates of a worst case scenario...

But why should there be such a deficit in the first place? After all, workers contribute all their lives towards their pensions and in effect, sacrifice part of their wages towards them. The bosses should be obliged to "shoulder" their share. Branson and Griffiths were not complaining



when, at the beginning of the year, they gave their shareholders the highest pay-out of any rail franchise - on top of the £600million they made for themselves... Yet the workers who made those profits should lose out in retirement, on the wages these bosses owe them?

**• £1000 now!**

Why should ISS workers accept the new (cheaper) payroll system which the company wants to roll out for its whole UK workforce? We've already objected. Other ISS workers like at the Dept of Business went on strike. And they're right.

It'll mean up to 3-weeks delay before we get our next pay. And in addition we'll get one day less of pay. But that 1 day's pay (say £100) of their 40,000 UK employees, gives them £4 million to play with! So the very least ISS can do is compensate us for this total rip-off. [Workers' Platform King's X 24/04/19]

**• We're brassed off!**

Workers who've been shifted over to Hitachi have been told that they cannot continue as members of the railway pension scheme. This means if you had BRASS (enhancing your pension) it's now frozen and you can't carry it over. This should never have happened. We were promised our pensions would

be protected. And we are just one case among many in the former British Rail workforce who're being screwed over the pensions issue. So we've every reason to do something about it. [Workers' Platform King's X 24/04/19]

**• Drivers aren't "flexible"!**

How come drivers are being given driving jobs which could take us over the maximum driving time of 3 hours and 30 minutes? And why should it be up to us to have to explain that another driver needs to be found to take over, once we've driven our max? Managers know very well where the red line is drawn. But they are chancing it, and that's a dangerous game... [Workers' Platform King's X 24/04/19]

**• Out with these phonies**

Did we really see LNER managers working a full shift dispatching? So why did they say that dispatchers were not needed any more, and cut the jobs? In our view, whether we have new signalling systems, new trains, mirrors, lights, radars, satellites, drones, what have you, we'll

still need dispatchers! So bring back the real ones! [Workers' Platform King's X 24/04/19]

**• Railway to hell**

We have so many delays in LNER that it wasn't even "news" that 10 Mark IVs were taken out of service all at once - as they were last Tuesday - due to defective pantographs. That's 30% of their electric trains! So passengers were left to transfer to TransPennine Express, Virgin Trains, East Midlands, you name it. They must have been 'delightfully surprised', as David Horne would say. [Workers' Platform King's X 24/04/19]

**• Their choice**

What are the GN managers thinking (if they do...)? The last shift of our new roster is meant to finish at 11pm. For a lot of us who live outside London that leaves us barely enough time to catch the last train... So will managers pay our taxis back home? Either this or we finish early! [Workers' Platform King's X 24/04/19]

**BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)****Conditions attacked under cover of Brexit**

**I**n September 2018, BMW announced that it was moving the usual summer shutdown from August to April, to, as they put it, "minimise the risk of any possible short-term parts-supply disruption in the event of no-deal Brexit."

What they did not mind disrupting, however, was workers' holidays. Some who had already booked holidays for the summer had to cancel them, as BMW forced annual leave to be taken in April. Those who wanted to still have holidays in the

summer, have had to work overtime between last September and this August, to "save up" and bank hours, in order to take holidays later, when they wanted. Many are doing just that, regularly working 50 hour, 6 day weeks.

In this way, of course, BMW created a situation where they were able to be even more flexible with their production, increasing it as and when they liked.

Whether BMW really would have been caught short at the end of



March due to Brexit is debatable, but what is for sure, is that the company have been stockpiling parts anyway. So was this shutdown really for the reason they claimed? Or was it just a way of taking advantage of Brexit, one way, or another?

## Sudan

In Sudan, the huge wave of protest continues, weeks after a popular mobilisation forced the military to remove the brutal Omar al-Bashir from power, after 30 years of dictatorship. As protesters chant "Revolution" on the capital's streets, they are demanding the military hand over power to a secular, civilian, interim government so that elections can be held. However, the military "transitional council" is only offering a "transition to democracy" in 2 years time.

The protests were sparked last December after the sudden tripling of bread prices. They immediately turned into anti-government demonstrations calling for Al-Bashir's resignation. The murderous regime responsible for the genocide in Darfur, has become increasingly intolerable since 2011, when the secession of South Sudan along with its oil wells, left the country with a chronic shortage of hard currency and led to spiralling inflation and frequent shortages of imports.

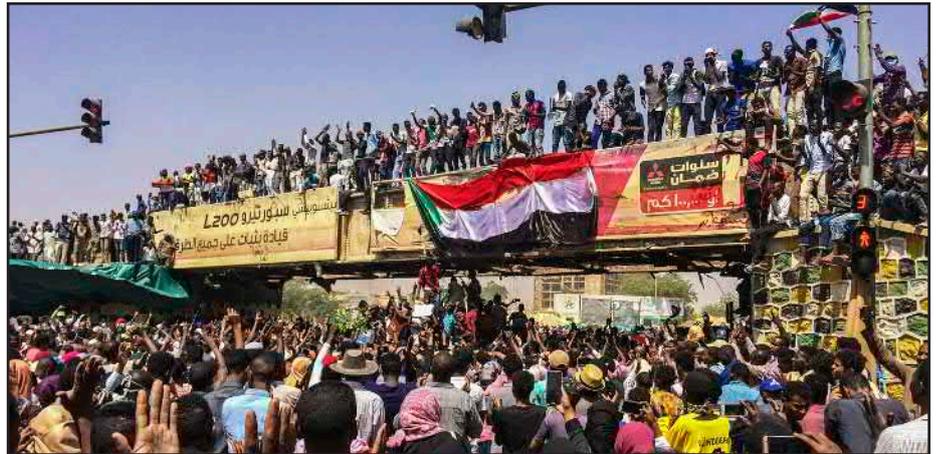
Tens of thousands have been camping outside the army headquarters in the capital Khartoum, barricading the main roads that lead there. Relieved from Al-Bashir's repressive Shariah law, women and men now mix freely in the demonstrations,

## International

Extinction Rebellion's 10 days of protest over the "Climate Emergency" culminated in... a meeting with Environment Secretary Michael Gove! Which must be alright with them, as their aim is precisely to ask government, to "tell the truth about the climate and wider ecological emergency,



## Sudan: popular mobilisation continues



which have a carnival-like atmosphere. The imposition of a State of Emergency in February did not deter them. For now, the spokespersons for the population under the "The Declaration of Freedom and Change Forces (DFCF) umbrella (steered by the Sudanese Professional Association) is demanding that the military - led by the butcher of Darfur - offer immediate transition to civilian rule. As a result, talks are deadlocked.

Regional powers have been quick to intervene, with the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, among others, offering backing to the military and £2.28bn in aid. If Sudan is not to

become another battleground for regional and imperial powers, the protestors will have to stay mobilised. But they may have learnt at least one lesson from the Arab Spring, as one protestor explained: "Don't congratulate us yet. This military will do all it can to hang on to power like the military in Egypt, the regime has not fallen yet". What remains to be seen is whether they have learnt the other lesson of the Arab Spring: that in order to shake the stranglehold of the propertied classes once and for all, the poor majority of the population needs to rally around its best organised section, the working class. □

## Extinction Rebellion won't stick

*reverse inconsistent policies and work alongside the media to communicate with citizens. (...) enact legally binding policy measures to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2025 and to reduce consumption levels."* So, ask they did.

They also want "A national Citizens' assembly to oversee the changes, as part of creating a democracy fit for purpose." But bizarrely, this disparate, mainly middle class, group plans to "mobilise 3.5% of the population to achieve system change". Which 3.5%, and decided by whom? Certainly for them it's not the working class which they envisage as playing any role. Indeed they are vague about which system they want to change... even if some say they are against capitalism... Which yes, is certainly the root cause of the environmental emergency!

As they say themselves, they are not radical. Even if their peaceful, non-violent disruption did block a part of Oxford Street

(with a pink boat!), Marble Arch, Waterloo Bridge and Parliament Square - during the Easter holidays - and even though, among other things, their supergluing themselves to buses, trains, walls and pavements resulted in 1,000 arrests.

So was their protest a success? Well, quite predictably, the government offered no promises. The Labour Party agreed to declare a climate emergency, though.

Of course, XR is 100% right about the ongoing destruction of planet earth. System change is urgent, but the only force which can enact that is not government, nor the democratic assemblies advising governments which XR proposes. Fighting capitalism - the cause of the problem - will not be a garden party on Waterloo Bridge, but will take a class confrontation, the massive ranks of workers united across industries and across borders, using all means necessary. Which is certainly not the means that XR envisages. □

In addition to this paper, we publish bulletins in several large workplaces in the South East, a journal, "Class Struggle" and a series of pamphlets on topical issues. If you wish to know more, contact Workers' Fight by e-mail, at [contact@w-fight.org](mailto:contact@w-fight.org), or by postal mail at:

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