

WORKERS' fight



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

WHAT ABOUT A WORKING CLASS REBELLION?

No-one knows what exactly Boris Johnson is cooking up. But it's a definitely a dish full of electioneering spices.

He still says he'll get Brexit "over the line" on 31st October, deal or no deal. But he also says that he'll abide by the law and request an extension if he hasn't got a deal! An obvious contradiction.

At the same time, he claims that he's offered the EU a "compromise" on the Irish backstop. Except that it means fresh concessions from the EU and that the EU takes responsibility for its practical operation! It's as if Johnson's "compromise" had been deliberately designed to give the EU no option but to turn it down.

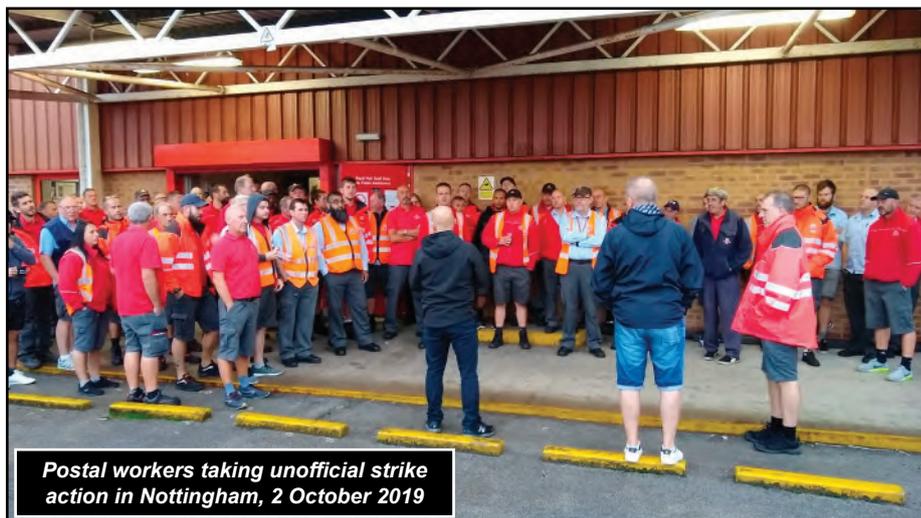
Brexit? It's just about votes, stupid!

There's method in Johnson's madness, though. Anyone who is not with him, is against 17m people who voted Leave in the 2016 referendum. Never mind the 29m who didn't vote Leave. What matters to Johnson is to win votes in the coming general election, because he not only needs a parliamentary majority, but also the legitimacy of a clear victory.

Likewise, anyone who isn't with him, is preventing Brexit from being over and done with by 31st October and should therefore be blamed for dragging out this absurd 3-year pantomime even more - and preventing Johnson from dealing with the "real problems" that people face - as if this arrogant, upper-class twit had the faintest idea of what these "real problems" are!

It's the same when it comes to the Brexit negotiations themselves: Johnson wants to make sure that whatever happens, he'll be the main beneficiary of the situation.

So if he manages to cobble up an unlikely deal for October 31st, he'll boast of having ended the Brexit saga, while



Postal workers taking unofficial strike action in Nottingham, 2 October 2019

blaming both the EU and Labour for its length and the damage caused. But if, in the absence of a deal, an extension is needed on October 31st - or if he stumbles inadvertently out of the EU without a deal - he'll blame the EU for turning down his "compromise" and Labour for having weakened his negotiating position. Whichever way it goes, Johnson aims to be hero of the day!

The working class can change all this!

None of this is inevitable, though. There is an alternative. Take the climate change protesters, Extinction Rebellion. They've identified a danger facing mankind and have been staging effective protests in cities around the world.

But while they're right to take action, they suffer from a weakness: they believe that by merely exposing government inaction they'll get politicians to change tack. As if these politicians were not first and foremost trustees of the interests of multinational companies whose

profits depend on polluting the world! Calling on the capitalist system's politicians to tackle climate change, is like begging sharks to turn vegan!

In fact the planet's protection depends entirely on the way society is organised and who controls it: whether the economy is geared to produce for the needs of the population, in the population's hands, or if it's owned and controlled by a handful of capitalists whose only aim is to make as much profit as possible, despite the consequences.

In all of this, the working class could have a decisive role to play. Thanks to its unique role in production, transport, etc., it has the means to challenge the capitalist stranglehold. In a society like ours, crippled by on-going economic crises, environmental disasters, recurring wars, and run by the capitalists' totally irresponsible politicians - as illustrated by the Brexit saga - the working class has the capacity and the right - no, the duty - to stage its own Rebellion, in order to overthrow this destructive capitalist order. ☐

Social

Grenfell - Firemen expose profiteering and deregulation

Two years after the Grenfell fire which killed 72 people, the report of the public inquiry which was investigating the causes of the disaster has yet to be published. In the meantime, the Fire Brigades Union has published its own report.

Throughout the document, the FBU highlights how the causes of the fire can be traced back to decades of cuts, deregulation and privatisation. Over the years, under the excuse of "cutting red tape" and reducing costs, all national standards - from inspection, to enforcement of fire safety, to planning incidents and training - were eroded to the bare bone. The risks involved were obvious and yet numerous investigations and warnings about the consequences of each of these policies were ignored by ministers. Since the risks of fire in high-rise buildings were already known as far back as in the 1970s, Grenfell was a disaster waiting to happen. Numerous



fires occurred in Grenfell-like buildings in 1991, 1999, 2005, 2009, and 2010, but no government ever lifted a finger.

Today, despite the Grenfell catastrophe, no additional funding has been allocated to the fire and rescue service. Worse, further cuts of 15% are planned for 2020. As the report states: "the

Westminster government has carried on cutting as if nothing had happened". Yes, the same politicians who already have the blood of the Grenfell victims on their hands are now consciously preparing for more to die for the same reasons, again - showing their total contempt for the poor and for the working class! □

• The real scale of the housing crisis

The housing crisis now affects more than 8 million people in England according to a report by the National Housing Federation: far more than officially-defined "homelessness". This research was a first attempt to estimate how many are not only homeless, but in overcrowded housing (3.6m) or seriously in debt owing to high rents and mortgage payments (2.5m). Another 250,000 people are stuck

at home with their parents. The report found that social rented housing would be the best way of meeting the needs of 3.6m people, which is about twice what the government estimates! Last year, councils built the highest number of new social homes since 1992 - but this was a mere 2,500!

As for homelessness, there were 32,740 homeless households in the period of January

to March: 3,000 more than in the previous quarter; and 84,730 households in temporary accommodation. Homelessness among people aged over 60 has gone up nearly 40% over five years. The latest ONS figures showed 726 people died last year while sleeping rough on the streets or in night shelters - a 22% increase over the previous year. Yet who's making a scandal about this?

• Increased exploitation of teachers

A report by the Institute of Education released last month showed that one in four teachers in England works a 60-hour week. This in itself, can go a long way towards explaining the teacher retention crisis at the moment. But wider problems are highlighted by another finding in the report: the average working week for a teacher in England, at 49 hours, is already 8 hours more than the average teacher in the group of rich countries which make up the OECD.

This overtime is not just down to increases in the number of classes which teachers are teaching. Teachers in England spend more than 60% of their time on 'non-teaching tasks', as the report points out. Teachers are doing more and more, just to keep the school running!

For sure, due to cuts to schools over the past 8 years, thousands of teaching assistants, pastoral staff, and other workers in schools have been sacked, leaving teachers to do everything from teaching to administration, including increasing amounts of social work with vulnerable pupils.

The report criticises government policy for failing to reduce teachers' workloads. But isn't a workload best reduced by sharing it out among more workers - more teachers, teaching smaller classes, and more support workers?

• Outsourcing: the children pay for it!

Since 2010, local authorities have been forced by Tory-led governments to outsource almost all of their children's services. Since 2014, this has included child protection and the power to remove children from their families. Today many former local authority children's homes, foster care and protection services, are in the hands of private providers such as G4S, Serco, Virgin Care, Amey etc., and this has turned into a money-spinner for shareholders, generating profits to the tune of £220m a year.

By now, 39% of foster care in England and 75% of children's homes are provided by the for-profit sector and over a third of local authorities no longer provide residential care. It costs authorities approximately 30% more for each child placed, to allow for cash to be made by the "provider". This means councils cannot afford to look after as many children as before, despite the fact that there is a growing need. Worse, the "service" is provided on the cheap by these private contractors, to maximise their profits, to the detriment of the children concerned.

The introduction of the profit motive into any public service is unjustifiable. When it comes to the welfare of children one would have expected authorities to draw a line. The

fact that they didn't and that councils, regardless of which party was in control, allowed this to happen, says it all about this system and its politicians.

• Britain's child soldiers

Britain is the only member of NATO and the only EU member state which allows 16-year olds to enlist in the army; a practice it shares with much poorer countries like Iran, Zambia, El Salvador and Pakistan! In the year to April 2019, under-18s made up almost 30% of the army's total recruitment, the highest proportion since 2010-11. More than half of these were 16.

Most of these "child" soldiers come from deprived areas of the country, which army recruiters specifically target. Their 2017 recruitment campaign was consciously aimed at families with an income of less than £10,000 a year!

Ten years of austerity and cuts to education and youth services have left thousands of young people in Britain without a future. The same politicians responsible for these policies are then quick to blame children and their families when poverty and hopelessness ends in knife violence - and yet these politicians have no problem condoning youth killing when it is done in the interests of the state and the capitalist class.

A collapse for some more than for others

Thomas Cook

The Thomas Cook travel group, the oldest and one of the largest holiday package companies in the world, was taken into official receivership on 23 September, with (declared) debts of £1.6bn. Despite having secured a promise of a £900m loan (and an offer to buy part of its business) from Chinese conglomerate Fosun, its bosses failed to find the extra £200m they needed to keep it afloat. So that was that. Its workers, numbering 21,000 worldwide, with 9,500 in Britain, suddenly found themselves without a job. Over a million holidaymakers were affected - but at least they only lost a holiday. Hundreds of thousands of resort staff who provided every service under the sun for Thomas Cook in thousands of holiday places around the globe face devastation. This company's collapse is a huge deal.

Ironically, the government is now dutifully picking up some of the pieces and in so doing is forking out almost as much as it might have cost to keep



Thomas Cook workers' protest

the company afloat! Its Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is refunding travellers - but that's paid via the travel industry's own insurance scheme, ATOL. However "Operation Matterhorn" by which the CAA airlifted travellers home to Britain cost an estimated £100m. Add to this the cost of the 8 week's statutory redundancy pay, plus unpaid wages and holidays to the 9,000 British workers, and the cost goes up to at least £180m.

The rest of Thomas Cook's hard-hit

creditors, like hoteliers, are queuing up with their bills, but the pecking order ensures that speculators who bought Thomas Cook's debts get paid first. In the meanwhile, Thomas Cook's former top bosses walk away with millions in their pockets: the CEO has taken £8.3m for himself over the past 15 years, while in the last 5, executives took £20m. An illustration of how the capitalists and their creditors never loose: no matter what, the state has their back. □

• They went to the wire...

It was at 2am on the 23rd of September, that chief executive Peter Fankhauser announced the collapse of the company. But its fate was sealed much earlier, at around 5.10pm, which was the moment that the government refused a £200 million bailout. And yet at 11.14pm, the Thomas Cook website was still selling packages and flights meant to depart the next day - and as far ahead as Christmas!

In fact planes at the airport began to be impounded and the website was only closed, shortly after midnight. Of course, all those who bought these mis-sold holidays will be refunded in full. And anyone who paid by direct debit has probably already got his or her money back. But the 21,000 Thomas Cook employees who lost their livelihoods will get no such full "refund". Not even for the month's pay they lost this September.

• ...and hung the workers up to dry

Indeed, while the media spoke of "stranded passengers" and lost holidays, not a lot was said about the workforce. It's true that there were stories about passengers collecting money for workers who'd carried on working without pay. And there were TV interviews along the lines of 'how does it make you feel?' But there has been

no focus on the 21,000 workers who literally lost their jobs overnight.

The measly £525/week "redundancy" payment from the government will stop after 8 weeks. According to the British Airline Pilots Association (BALPA), most workers missed out on the pay they were due on 30 September. Claims for this "lost" pay will be paid at the same maximum of £525/week. Additional compensation payments can apparently be claimed for having had no notice of redundancy, but this may only apply to larger sections of over 30 employees. What about the workers in the 500+ high street agencies whose "workforce" consists of just a handful of tour advisors? And to add insult to injury, these workers are amongst the lowest paid of all, and thus need "compensation" the most.



• Make the capitalists pay for their mess

It was Transport Secretary Grant Shapps who announced that the government's Civil Aviation Authority, not the company, would take responsibility for "the biggest peacetime repatriation in UK history", which involved 150,000 British citizens. His estimate of the cost of the operation, that is, £100m, was based on what the CAA paid for repatriation of stranded holidaymakers after Monarch Airline's collapse 2 years ago.

But what Shapps and the government failed to mention, was that Thomas Cook still had valuable assets at the time of its collapse: 34 aircraft in Britain, hotels around the world and high-street real estate. Only last year, it launched a joint real-estate venture worth £150m! So why were these assets not confiscated to pay for the mess?

These assets could have funded repatriation costs for the 450,000 stranded non-British passengers, whom Shapps also failed to mention. After all, their fares also contributed to Thomas Cook's turnover! But instead, non-British citizens stranded abroad had to turn to their respective governments for help against the collapse of this very British company. As to customers from countries that had no repatriation funds in place, they were left to their own devices!

"Fair deal", but only for... the big banks

In September, the average interest rate on credit card purchases reached 24.7% - the highest level since records began, back in 2006. In fact, these rates have been increasing year after year together with household credit card debt. So much so, that last year, the government's Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), which regulates financial

services "so that consumers get a fair deal", introduced new rules allowing the cancellation of interest payments and card fees for households which can't pay back their debt.

But of course, the result of these new rules has been that credit card providers, which include all major banks, are now increasing their credit card interest rates according to the perceived "risk" of their customers. In other words, the poorest households, which have no choice but to

borrow to make ends meet, are the ones who will pay the highest interest rates!

So while household credit card debt in Britain keeps increasing, reaching £72.4bn in September, the FCA and big banks have no better solution than to strangle even further those households which can't make ends meet. And contrary to what it did with payday lenders, the FCA won't consider capping credit card interest rates for fear of upsetting the bankers!

Ditch watch

A slap on the wrist for breaking his own law!

On the 24th of September, the Supreme Court ruled that Johnson had lied when he claimed that his plan to suspend Parliament for 5 weeks had nothing to do with protecting his Brexit policies. But while the ruling exposed another of Johnson's lies, it was certainly not the "victory for democracy" hailed by so many.

Indeed, what can be expected from a restored Parliament, anyway? Who can forget that it was Tory MPs' fears that they might lose their seats to UKIP which mobilised the Tory right wing and paved the way for the Brexit referendum and its result? Or that it was the constant over-bidding between rival factions of Tory MPs which has dominated the three years of the Brexit pantomime?

Likewise, what can be expected from the Supreme Court, which is itself an integral part of the state institutions - except



that it will serve the interests of these institutions? In fact, the judges merely warned Johnson that he could not have his cake and eat it - i.e., rely on the law to protect the authority of his government, while, at the same time, proclaiming that

he was prepared to break the same law in order to force his policies through. But having issued their warning, they've also proved that in this system, ruling politicians can do just that - and get away with a mild slap on the wrist. □

• Bridge over troubled water

In what may seem like a sudden fit of megalomania, Johnson's latest brilliant idea is to build a bridge over the North Channel between Scotland and Northern Ireland. Aside from the technical challenge of designing a 26-mile crossing from Portpatrick to Larne over a seabed which is at places 525 ft deep, that bridge will also have to cross a trench, called Beaufort's Dyke, where millions of tons of WWII munitions and radioactive material have been dumped. Johnson claimed that it "would only cost around £15 billion". To which, engineers replied with one word: "bonkers".

But maybe Johnson was just trying to make sure, in his counter-backstop proposal, that whatever happened to the Irish border after Brexit, whether it was hard, high-tech, remote or whatever else, Northern Ireland would remain attached to the "mainland" in such a way as to retain its present colonial status - from which it should have been freed long ago!

• Friends with benefits

A scandal involving government funding allocated to Hacker House, a tech start-up run by Johnson's friend Jennifer Arcuri, once again put the prime minister on the tabloid front pages. With Johnson's help, she was able to attend overseas trade missions, obtain

a special 2-year visa, and secure £126,000 worth of public subsidies for her business. And although the £126,000 was meant to be given to British-based cyber security start-ups, it turned out that Hacker House's address was a virtual office in central London with an American answering machine...

So, Johnson has been given 14 days to explain his links with the businesswoman. "Everything was done in the proper way", he says. Perhaps Johnson, not unlike other politicians of his sort, got too used to giving his friends special treatment and forgot that he needed a respectable fig leaf to conceal his favours to Jennifer. And it now seems as if lying his way out of this particular ditch won't be as easy as he might have hoped.

• Cameron's "sorry", but only that he lost

David Cameron came back out of the woodwork - literally, to promote the memoirs he wrote in a garden hut. The expected hatchet job on Boris Johnson is there, but it was already obvious that Johnson picked the Leave side in the Brexit referendum to further his political career, and not because he believed in Brexit. Likewise it was already clear that Johnson had expected Leave to lose.

Yet although Cameron admits he is haunted by his failure to win the referendum and desperately worried by the consequences, he

claims to have no regrets about calling it. He dares to say the referendum was "inevitable" and "necessary". Necessary, to put so much at stake to secure his control of the Tory party? Cameron blames himself only for a weak campaign (and blames Corbyn more), but (of course) he says nothing about his own anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies which imitated UKIP's bigoted agenda. Nor does he have a word of regret regarding the brutality of his austerity cuts. On the contrary, he has the nerve to say that they should have been done "faster and deeper"! Above all, according to him, the whole Brexit mess he walked away from three years ago is other people's fault!

• Rats leaving a sinking ship?

Boris Johnson's Department for Exiting the EU (DexEU) has been decimated by the flight of its officials. Two director-generals and five directors have recently resigned. As many as 142 senior staff have left since 2016. And now, Matthew Coats, the most senior official - director-general for EU Exit Implementation - has quit his job just 3 weeks before the Brexit date!

A senior Whitehall figure commented "this really is a puzzling and alarming development, coming so close to the October 31 deadline... for this to happen at such a moment is extraordinary". Maybe Coats doesn't want to be found dead in a ditch beside Boris Johnson?

The Home Office's lethal policy

Last month the Home Office's "hostile environment" claimed another victim. Ethiopian asylum seeker, Kelemua Mulat died from advanced breast cancer having been refused timely treatment on the NHS. Kelemua fled Ethiopia in fear of her own life 5 years ago, after her husband was killed by security forces for participating in anti-government protests. The Home Office

decided her asylum claim did not meet its criteria and she was not given asylum. So she had to engage in a new battle for legal status and then, having been diagnosed with breast cancer last July, had also to battle with NHS officials, who claimed she did not qualify for NHS treatment. Eventually the Christie hospital in Manchester agreed to give her chemotherapy - but only on compassionate grounds, because by then it was too late to save her life.

Mulat is not the first person to die or

suffer permanent avoidable injury because of being denied NHS treatment. Out of the 2,279 patients who were asked for an upfront fee (of up to 150% of the NHS tariff) during 2017-2018, 341 went untreated.

Since 2015 the Home Office has been refusing right-to-stay applications, while cutting staff numbers and subcontracting tasks. This culminated in the Windrush scandal in 2018. But as Kelemua Mulat's case shows, despite this, the lethal "hostile environment" continues.

The Tories back to square one

When Boris Johnson found himself hauled back to the Commons at the end of last month after his parliamentary prorogation was un-prorogued by the Supreme Court, he blustered with all his might against the institutions of the British state. His game: to portray himself as a champion of the people against parliament. This parliament, he said, "is refusing to deliver on the priorities of the people... [but the Tory Party] will not betray the people who sent us here."

Of course, it has been the Conservative Party which has been unable to sort out Brexit over the past 3 years. And it paid, by losing votes to Nigel Farage's Brexit Party in the European Elections back in May. So what Johnson and his MPs now fear is that the Brexit Party might deal a similar blow to them in a general election.

Indeed, Johnson's insistence that he'd rather be "dead in a ditch than delay Brexit", his sneering at MPs who blame Brexiteering for rising threats of violence against them,

• Who pays for Brexit?

In July, it was already forecast that leaving the EU without a deal would cost the Treasury £22bn a year, just to compensate businesses, based on promises made by May's government. Days later the Office for Budget Responsibility estimated that a no-deal Brexit would reduce Treasury revenues by £30bn a year in the best case, assuming no disruption at British ports. Both of these sums are a lot larger than the £18bn annual "saving" (Johnson's "£350m/week for the NHS!") that the Leave campaign claimed, which in fact was nearly three times Britain's actual net contribution! But this gives some idea of the size of the Brexit bailout which the bosses expect.

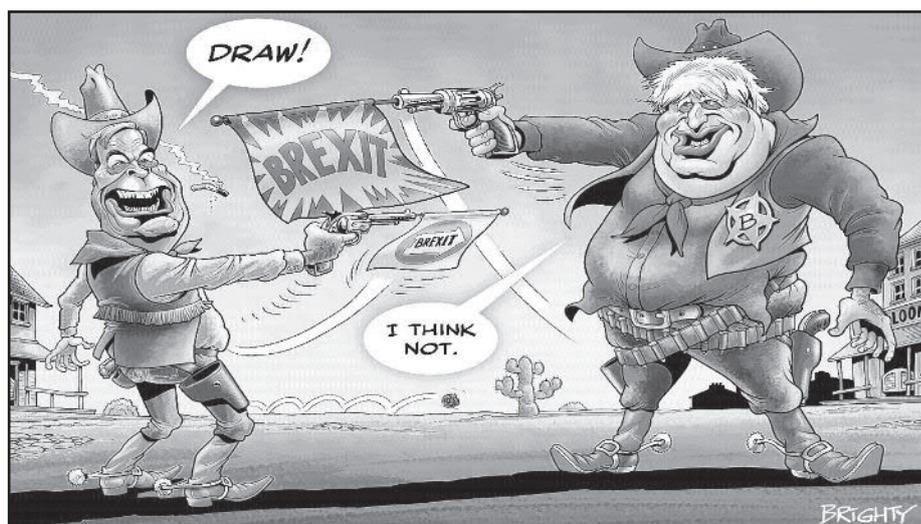
However, focusing on the impact of no-deal obscures the financial costs of any kind of Brexit, including the £39bn settlement May's Divorce Bill already proposed

Behind Labour's left turn

What was behind Jeremy Corbyn's "turn to the left", announced amid gasps of incredulity from his opponents and the media, during last month's Labour Party conference? It certainly handed ammunition to his opponents who never hesitate to shout "communist" at him, at every opportunity! Never mind that he "is not and never has been a communist"!

Radical words...ok!

So, in advance of an inevitable general election (when, not if) several seemingly radical measures were outlined during the conference. Like a 32-hour week, to be introduced over 10 years; a £10



and Priti Patel's conference vow to end all free movement, are all meant to help his government 'out-Farage' Farage. Behind this nationalist rhetoric, the objective is to keep Conservative MPs in their seats; exactly the same aim which Cameron had in

as a "final settlement" of Britain's debt to the EU. And Hammond's £27bn "war chest" fund was meant for the first year after a no-deal Brexit, but in fact the cost to the economy would be on-going. With drastically lower revenues, not least because of further promised tax cuts, how much money would be left to repair the damage of ten years of cuts in public services?

• Deeper into the chaos of capitalism!

In its annual forecast, the OECD grouping of the world's 36 richest countries, says that in the coming years, economic activity will grow at the lowest rate since the 2008 financial crash! What this will imply for the working class, in terms of jobs and standards of living remains to be seen, however.

Since growth is the capitalists' preferred measure of economic health, this forecast

minimum wage; restoring union rights, more annual leave, flexible working for women during the menopause, ending universal credit, scrapping prescription charges, creating a state-owned drug company to make generic medicines, offering free personal social care to the over 65s and abolishing private schools! However, the many Eton-boys in Britain's hallowed institutions can save their protestations: no expropriation of land and assets is actually planned, unfortunately.

Remembering Clause 4

And then there's the ongoing consultation among branches on the reintroduction of clause 4 - symbolically removed by Tony Blair back in 1995. Yet, this clause 4, which dated back to 1918, was

Brexit watch

2016 when he called the EU referendum!

But Johnson as not managed to steer the Tory ship clear of the rocks; he's already done damage by expelling 21 MPs in his first few days as PM and has lost another 4, so far, who've left of their own accord. □

means that they consider their own system seriously sick! But, of course, one shouldn't expect a capitalist outfit like the OECD to blame this sickness on its root cause - the capitalists' own frantic competition and greed!

Instead, the OECD identifies two main factors which are aggravating the chaotic operation of the world economy: one is the trade war "game" played out by Trump, especially against China and the EU, and the other is... Brexit, of course.

None of this is very new. The politicians' fairy tales about Britain sailing on its own towards an "affluent future" outside the EU, were always just that - fairy tales! Now that hard economic facts are exposing their lies, this raises the need for the working class to get them and their capitalist masters to foot the bill for the mess they've created!

just promoting an illusion - the idea that social change for the working class could be introduced through Parliament. But even this was too much for Blair's New Labour which was determined, on the contrary, to proclaim its loyalty to the capitalist order.

It's claimed that Corbyn doesn't want Clause 4 back, but is in favour of rewording Blair's version of it. No doubt to remind his electorate that, love him, or hate him, at least he isn't Tony Blair - useful at a time when Labour is doing poorly in the polls. But with Austerity 2.0 lurking behind Johnson's bombast, the working class would do well to remember something else: that to make the capitalist class pay for the social transformation it needs, it's not votes, but collective fightback which counts.

King's Cross railway station (London)**Azuma trains: not fit for purpose**

The first testing of LNER's new high speed Azuma trains took place last December. The then rail minister, Paul Maynard, hailed the government's £5.7bn investment, claiming it would provide "state-of-the-art Intercity trains" with "more space, more comfort and more reliability for passengers up and down the country". So, almost 2 years later what's the reality?

Well, the December 2018 launch was postponed to May 2019, due to interference with trackside signalling equipment. Today, trains which are meant to be serving the Highlands by December, still go no further than Newcastle. And "state-of-the-art" for passengers and catering staff

actually means less space in every respect: narrower aisles, a tiny kitchen, no luggage room or storage space, etc., etc.

The computerised driver's cab means drivers are now responsible for what used to be the remit of guards. But there are no more guards, only "train managers", who're also in charge of catering! So drivers must reset smoke alarms and air con if, for instance, bacon burns in the kitchen - and even reset the disabled toilet alarm which is set off in the driver's cab and can potentially stop the train if the driver does not answer the call quick enough.

Worse, LNER improvised to provide more seats and more power



by linking two 5-car trains together which have no access between them. This has created serious safety problems.

Bosses are now so worried about all of this that they've asked for the disabled toilets and some seats in Standard to be removed. But it's obvious that these trains are not fit for purpose and need to be returned to sender for redesign. □

- **"Our" LNER? Time to stop it**

For those of us who've just started on these 10-car LNER trains (made up of two separate 5-car units), it's a nightmare. Even the simplest things haven't been organised. It starts with not knowing which end of the train we're meant to board. Then of course there aren't enough of us. And how can the driver be the only safety-critical staff member for the front end of the train? We cannot be expected to carry on like this. [Workers' Platform King's X 25/09/19]

- **No guard, no service...**

So what happens if something goes seriously wrong in the front half where there's no Guard(TM)? Will the driver stop the train in the middle of nowhere to help? Or do LNER managers think the TM will just

fly to the front? They're playing fast and loose with safety. They think everybody's like them: surplus to requirements. But we intend to have a guard in each half of the train, whether they like it or not. [Workers' Platform King's X 25/09/19]

- **No to DOO**

So we see guards at West Midlands Trains are now in "dispute" with the company over DOO. What about LNER's "hybrid DOO" on the Azumas? No to DOO and no to hybrid DOO - or to any DOO, whatever the brand! [Workers' Platform King's X 25/09/19]

- **Better outside**

We were definitely not surprised at the latest report on station air quality. We who work on the platforms and gates are finding it difficult

to breathe every day! Apparently the acceptable level for nitrogen dioxide has been exceeded on many occasions-and on platforms 9-11, where ceilings are lower, it's bound to be worse... Managers suggest we go out for a fresh air "break"... At this rate we're going to have to stay out. [Workers' Platform King's X 25/09/19]

- **Deeds not words**

We guess that ISS doesn't want to fix the trolleys because its contract expires in November? And talking about the new contract, a few managers from Atalian Servest came to visit us, to announce a presentation of the new company in October. We're looking forward to hearing about all the improvements they intend to offer... [Workers' Platform King's X 25/09/19]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

- **Counting our numbers**

So most of the CWU officials' gate meetings are postponed to Friday, due to the pouring rain... Still some of us did turn up to the one on Tuesday morning where we were told (in short) that Royal Mail's "strategy" is to screw us! We already know that. But we also know that we can't "engage" with their "strategy"... we need our own. [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 25/09/19]

- **What we need to discuss**

Indeed, if our strike is led by people who only want to discuss with RM in order to keep their own feet under the table, our votes will turn out to be no more than a bargaining chip... So what we need to be discussing is, how to lead our own strike! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 25/09/19]

- **One striking force**

Yes, it's the same old stuff from Dave Ward... He says he wants to join RM in "strategic engagement". We know that external mediators are already involved, for both disputes, i.e. over ParcelForce being spun off and RM's latest jobs & conditions slaughter. But from our point of view, these two disputes can only be fought effectively as one, and by all of us together! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 25/09/19]

- **That's democracy**

Look, the 4 Pillars agreement was not the best thing since sliced bread. There was a lot wrong with it and if we're going to strike, maybe we need to go back to basics and discuss new demands. Like 10 hrs(!) off the week with no loss of pay, no overtime, no temps, back to a final salary pension for all, etc., etc. But let us decide! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 25/09/19]



- **Whenever pigs fly**

So we hear that the 6,000 RM managers have rejected their 2.6% pay offer... Have they found the courage to disagree with RM after seeing it's in a pickle with the 110,000 of us? We can't wait to see a managers' picket-line... [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 25/09/19]

- **Taking the bull by the horns**

Of course, after cutting jobs in the bullring on lates, managers now tell us they have no choice but to bring in casuals to sort alongside us. No other choice?! And what about recruiting them as permanents once and for all? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 25/09/19]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

Car manufacturers make their plans

Toyota, BMW and JLR have all announced shutdowns, ranging from one day to one week, at British factories to coincide with a possible no-deal Brexit on the 31st of October.

While BMW and Toyota claim that the lockouts will protect against supply chain disruption, JLR says the shutdown "reflects the need to adjust production in the face of ongoing uncertainty caused by global external headwinds, including Brexit." But explicitly or implicitly, Brexit is being used to put pressure on workers, laying the ground for 'restructuring'

and above all, reducing labour costs.

At the BMW plant in Oxford, for example, the extra lockouts enforced by the bosses this year have meant workers were forced to work overtime (which no longer commands a premium and is cancelled off against lay-offs) just to retain their annual wage level!

The mess around Brexit also provides another chance for car companies to bag subsidies from the government. The SMMT, which speaks for car manufacturers in Britain, warned that "the end of barrier-free trade could bring harmful disruption



to the industry". "Harmful disruption" which the government will need to compensate them for...

The truth is that manufacturers are ensuring that they don't lose a penny due to Brexit, and if possible make a few extra pounds, all at the expense of the workforce and ultimately, the whole working class. □

• Strike!

As usual BMW keeps its plans from us until the last minute, then we find out from the media! Whatever their plans are after these 2 days closure in Oct/Nov, BMW is explicit on one thing: "we are not capable of having a second holiday period in 2019, so [no-deal Brexit] could have a financial impact on our colleagues working in Oxford". If they intend to lock us out with no pay, why not shut them down first, until they pay us? [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini plant 11/09/19]

• Full contracts and paid leave for all!

Just like everywhere else in the car industry, temp/agency contracts are really messing with our lives. The fact

that we're all on different terms and conditions, in different companies, only cuts BMW's costs. But, whether permanent or agency, the bosses are now threatening us with going unpaid altogether "on account of Brexit". Yet another reason to put an end to all this mess by showing our collective strength! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini plant 25/09/19]

• Family? no way!

What a joke! The boss of R&H (BMW's big logistics subcontractor) called us part of his "family" (!), and asked us to take responsibility for their "difficult financial position" before the Working Time Account (unpaid overtime) re-ballot. We couldn't care less about their financial position - it's ours that's really at risk! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini plant 25/09/19]

• Regular hours, regular pay

These "manajerks" pressurising us to do overtime can take a hike! Whether we work for BMW, R&H, G&P or Gi, we're all facing the same thing. We all share an interest in saying no and putting a stop to overtime altogether, whether paid in money or time! Instead we need enough mates, permanently employed, so that all the work can be shared out! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini plant 25/09/19]

• 10 Hours off the week...

Shift change rumours abound. Sure, we'll take one less night shift a week, but only with no loss of pay! Why stop there - how about a 3-day week for the same wage and shorter shifts? While BMW keeps its plans under wraps, the more we shout about our needs, the better! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini plant 25/09/19]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

• We know what's needed

Yes, it's a long time since we actually tried to fight the bosses "full on" like GM workers are doing on the other side of the Atlantic, given our reliance here on the donkey-leaders in the unions. So our remedy is equally simple. We stop relying on them. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 4/10/19]

• What about the pay deal?

As for our this year's pay deal, is it postponed or not? We haven't even seen the union-side pay claim yet! But we're already getting "leaks"... and we don't mean raindrops through the leaky roof... For instance we hear that Ford isn't going to offer a weekly increase this year, but instead, a £2,000 non-pensionable lump sum... And that they'll still want to bring in 3rd tier workers... (Actually that would be a 5th tier...) They'd really better not try! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 4/10/19]

• 60 years before out?

Oh and on the subject of our pay claim - when and if - we guess there'll be another demand for "30 years and out on full pension" as there has been for the past 90 years :)... And we'll have to wait for the next 30 years to get it? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 4/10/19]

• No to pay cuts!

For now, it's pay cuts all round! So this year it started with the Chicken Farm losing our 2-shift allowance (even if that's back on from next week, but for how long?).

And this week Den mates from the 2nd shift were laid off [that planned 3rd shift for the F150's died a death!] and will come in for "training" this week for the 2nd Tiger shift... Yes, leaving single-shift mates in the Den without their shift pay... And now Panther's laid off for 4 days!

Top-Rat expects we'll jump from one



line/shift to another, losing part of our wages on the way. Until we say no. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 4/10/19]

• Pushing everything too fast and too loose

Of course there's also the threat that Panther is losing its 3rd shift. So much for this wonderful EcoBlue engine: 19,400 UK vehicles with 2 litre diesels are affected by the faulty fuel injectors fitted between 25 Feb and 13 Sept...

Ford blames the supplier. But we all know where the real fault lies. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 4/10/19]

Iraq

As this issue of our paper goes to press, the wave of protests which started in Baghdad on October 1st, had already spread to most of the country's other large cities. Tens of thousands of mostly young men have taken to the streets to express their anger against the chronic corruption and criminal neglect of the Iraqi regime.

Today, the government and its parliamentary institutions remain dominated by the very same religious political parties which were propelled into office by the US and British armies after their first few years of occupation of Iraq. Over the past decade and a half, these parties have taken part in two full-scale civil wars and many smaller ones, through their armed militias. In that process, they have become increasingly atomised.

By now, the Iraqi political scene is divided into a galaxy of rival factions which have retained the habit of settling their political differences at gunpoint. Most of their leaders live a parasitic existence on the state machinery and on the perks they can generate for themselves and for their factions from the official positions they are able to occupy - whether in Baghdad's

The youth are back on the streets



Protests in Tayaran square in Baghdad, 2 October 2019

ministries, in provincial and city governments, in the army, or in the oil-producing machinery. And what this all means for the Iraqi population is chronic poverty, no jobs, no infrastructure and constant power cuts, while the country's oil revenue disappears into a black hole, because of the oil majors' looting and the Iraqi politicians' greed.

It is not the first time that the Iraqi population's anger has exploded. But this time, it seems that the regime has decided

to terrorise the population into obedience: after only five days of unrest, 100 protesters had already been shot dead by the police and over 4,000 had been injured. But not only have the protesters kept returning to the streets the next day, but their anger has now spread across the whole country. The question now is whether the regime's bullets will be enough to contain their growing anger. □

USA



General Motors: when a strike is a strike

Almost 50,000 GM workers in the USA went out on strike on the 18 September, against job cuts, plant closures and the use of temps! Their union, the UAW, had finally decided to call workers to show their muscle after 12 years of signing sell-out deals. With Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers waiting for their contracts to be renegotiated as well, who knows - maybe at last US workers could tip the balance of forces in their own favour...? And why not here in Britain too? We're just as opposed to the abuse of temps and plant closures throughout the car industry and after all, this is Ford Britain's "contract" year too!

The GM strike is now entering its 4th

week and remains solid, with all out! And strikers are joined by Ford and Chrysler workers on the picket lines. Of course, if all the other car workers just went out with GM workers, this would sort things out a lot more swiftly and effectively... and for all of them (and other workers too!). Instead, GM bosses are playing the "slightly improved offer game" and union leaders from the UAW are playing along, putting "counter-proposals", behind closed doors... The remedy to such games? Strikers invading the boardroom and putting their demands on the table directly! [extracts from the *Workers' Fight - Ford Dagenham bulletin*] □

Letter from Delhi

In the last month, Modi and his Hindu nationalist government have been "doing a Trump" - implementing those election promises aimed at the most reactionary section of their electorate.

After clamping down on Jammu & Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, Modi has moved against Assam, a north-eastern state with a large Muslim minority. Under the pretext of protecting "legitimate" Indian citizens of every religion (i.e. other than Muslims!), Modi ordered the state's old National Register of Citizens to be updated. When the results were finally announced, in

September, 1.9m mostly Muslim inhabitants, many of whom had lived in Assam for decades, were told that they had been turned down for citizenship, leaving them stateless! Apparently, though, most of these "new refugees" will be given work permits, at least for the time being, thereby providing Assam's tea plantation bosses with a cheap workforce (and sometimes, even a free one) which will be deprived of any rights! But this may be only the beginning: now ministers have announced that they are considering doing similar "citizenship checks" in other parts of India!

Domestically, Modi is trying to shield the bosses from the effects of the crisis. No

less than seven stimulus packages for industry have been introduced over the past two months - including a cut in the rate of corporation tax from 30% to 22% and a reversal of income tax increases for the wealthiest. The privatisation of national companies like the railways, the national airline and the shipping corporation is meant to progress. These policies are giving the bosses the confidence to implement hundreds of thousands of job cuts - in the car, textile, electronics, construction and leather industries, among others.

Modi and his government are trying to get away with as much as they can, but they are playing with fire.

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, or by postal mail at:

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