

WORKERS' fight



No 109 - 13 Jan 2020

price 30p

<http://www.w-fight.org>
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ISSN 2040-400X

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

MIDDLE EAST: AGAINST THIS CAPITALIST SYSTEM, ITS WARS AND ITS CRISES!

The assassination of Iranian general Soleimani by a US drone, in Iraq, on 3rd January, was not an act of "self-defence" - contrary to the lie told by political leaders in Britain and the US. This was an outright act of terrorism carried out by the world's richest and most powerful state.

Nor was the Iranian dictatorship the main target of this attack. It was aimed at the region's populations, as a demonstration of the western powers' superior military might and their ability to strike where and when they want.

Its only military purpose was to allow the US leaders to reassert their position as the region's overlords, against whom resistance is just not an option!

Politicking with people's blood

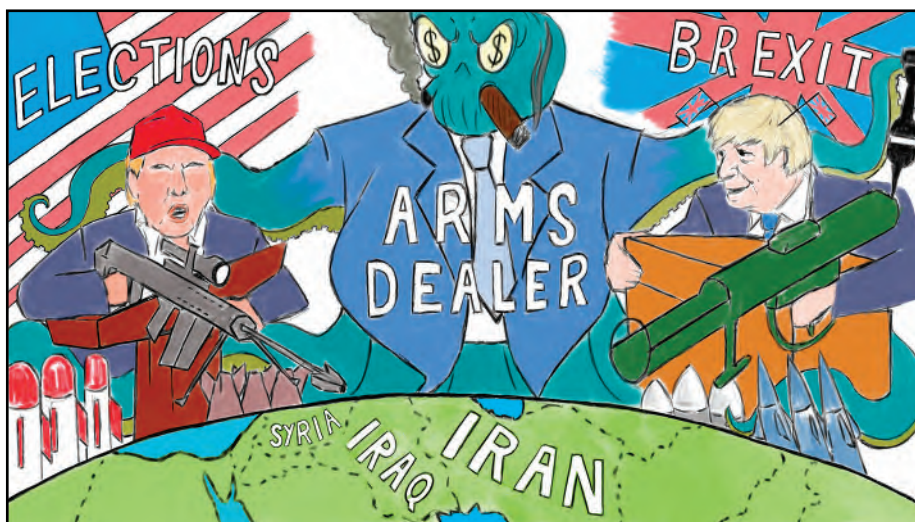
For Trump, of course, this assassination had another objective, which had nothing to do with the Middle East and everything to do with the coming US presidential election.

Indeed, Trump's opinion ratings are at a record low. He has failed to deliver the "American jobs" he had promised. As to his "radical" economic policies, they have only made the fat cats even fatter and the poor even poorer.

Having nothing to show for himself, Trump tries to give a new lease of life to the nationalist demagoguery which seemed to have worked for him in the previous election - his MAGA ("Make America Great Again") branding.

Hence his Rambo-style boasting of having "taken down" Soleimani. This is how he hopes to re-energise his core MAGA voters and reboot an election campaign, which has been hampered by impeachment proceedings.

And never mind the cost of rallying votes in the US with a "targeted killing" in the Middle East. It seems that the panic it generated in the Iranian



Air Force caused the downing of an Ukrainian passenger jet. But for Trump, the jet's 176 passengers who died were just "collateral damage"!

Predictably, Johnson endorsed Trump's crimes and fake justifications, even adding one of his own - that Soleimani had "*the blood of British soldiers on his hands*". Indeed, Johnson and Trump have a lot in common: when it comes to lying and politicking in order to shore up their own careers, no "collateral damage" will stop them!

The threat of a rotten system

From Trump's fake excuses to Johnson's poodle-like behaviour - this all looks very much like what we saw in the run up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Will today's build up of lies result in another war? The Iranian leaders certainly do not want a war, as their token "retaliation" showed. And the US leaders probably do not want one either - for the time being.

But Trump's policy towards Iran is based on bluff, overbidding, sanctions,

assassinations, etc. Mixed with Trump's political ambition, this combination can acquire a logic of its own, get out of control and lead to war. What more would it take for this to happen? And then for a local war to engulf a whole region - if not the whole planet?

Today, the economy is chronically unstable and plagued by ruthless competition. The capitalists have no trust in their system and panic in response to the smallest threat to their profits. This could trigger a crash.

The world's economic instability is compounded by growing political instability. The more rotten the capitalist system gets, the more it is littered with explosive material. The fact that Trump's personal ambitions raise the possibility of a US war against Iran shows how this decaying capitalist order could spawn more wars, while spawning more crises.

Allowing this system to keep limping on from crisis to crisis and from war to war is just unaffordable. It needs to be replaced! □

Social

The National Living Wage will get its biggest increase yet in 2020, rising 51p to a maximum £8.72 per hour, for over-25s. Johnson was keen to take the credit, declaring "for too long, people haven't seen the pay rises they deserve". Yet the new level will remain short of the £9/hour target set by George Osborne for this year, back in 2015!

Alternative calculations by the Living Wage Foundation, showing that a "living wage" for London should be £10.75/hour, £9.30 elsewhere, are ignored. Nor do this year's changes address the low minimum rates for apprentices (rising to a measly £4.15/hour) or for young workers (£6.45 at 18-20, £4.55 for under-18-year-olds), which the drive to increase the top rate was meant to obscure!

Analysis for the TUC shows that

• Beware, wage thieves in operation!

Another thing that has been rising about the National Living Wage (NLW) is the number of bosses who dodge paying it! According to estimates by the Resolution Foundation, using employment tribunal data, about 11,000 companies failed to pay some workers their due rate, eight times the 1,456 officially caught cheating in this way last year by HMRC. Among workers over 25 earning close to the

Low wages: behind the headline handout



those earning between what is defined as low pay (up to £9.60/hour) and the median wage of £12.70/hour, have seen real wages stagnate since 2010. Their average pay, according to the TUC study published

last August, was actually down 14p per hour. At this rate, a growing section of the workforce looks set to come within the scope of the National Living Wage. That won't be progress, but a scandal! ☐

• Newham: skyscrapers and slums

The 2012 London Olympics was a money spinner which, very early on, attracted real estate sharks to the mostly working class London borough of Newham, where they built many new, mostly upmarket, residential towerblocks. One of the consequences is that parts of Newham have had Britain's steepest house price inflation - with prices increasing more than 5-fold in just 20 years. A two-bedroom flat near Stratford tube now sells for £750,000 and professional landlords can let these flats for more than £6,000 per month! Predictably, working class families have been priced out of entire areas of Newham.

Ironically, Newham also has some of the poorest neighbourhoods in England: 22% of children and 37% of older people live in deprived households. One in five households can't even afford to pay for enough fuel to heat their homes. And it is estimated that landlords break overcrowding regulations in half the borough's privately-rented homes. But while the poorest households have at least some

NLW, an estimated 1 in 4 is being cheated, up from 1 in 5 in 2016.

When companies do get caught, the "penalty" is usually no more than being forced to pay the arrears they owe, and this can be deducted against any fine, if imposed! While workers who embezzle from their employers rarely escape jail, only 14 employers have faced criminal prosecution for underpayment of the NLW

in the last 20 years and the average fine imposed was less than £3,000. The Resolution Foundation says that what is missing is a high enough rate of detection to worry companies, despite funding for the monitoring of minimum wage compliance at HMRC more than trebling between 2014 and 2018. As the NLW brings more workers within its scope, more bosses look certain to try to evade it.

sort of roof above their heads, 14,611 people in Newham have none. With 1 in 24 people homeless, Newham has the highest rate of homelessness in England!

Successive governments proved capable of organising the construction of a whole new town for the Olympics... and for the wealthy. However, when it comes to dealing with the housing crisis that hits the working class majority, they "can't" do anything - quite simply because there's no profit in it for the capitalist class!

• Deep coal mines: back to the 19th century

Five years after the last coal mine closed in Britain and 30 years after the last deep coal mine was decommissioned, West Cumbria Mining has obtained the government's green light to dig a new deep coal mine in Whitehaven, near the former Haig Colliery. It is meant to be operational by 2022. This particular mine, the Woodhouse Colliery, will be producing coking coal - used for steel making.

Some politicians and green groups point out that this is a disaster for the environment. But not to worry, West

Cumbria Mining's owners have agreed to provide a third of the energy needed with solar farms! How they expect that gesture to offset the air and water pollution, toxic waste, land erosion etc., they will cause, is anybody's guess.

On the other hand, this mining company and various government councillors of all parties like to stress how many jobs the new mine would bring. Yes, jobs which send miners deep into the bowels of the earth with all the dangers and health risks that this involves!

In the same way that Brexit and self-sufficiency on one island are absurd ideas in this global economy, digging a deep coal mine is a retrograde step in every sense, both for workers and the environment.

ICF forum pamphlet n°101

• Capitalism is a threat to society and to the planet - we need a social revolution! [price: £1.00]

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Collapsing funding for a collapsing NHS

NHS

Is Johnson taking the risk of being thrown in jail for breaking his promises, now that his NHS funding plan is going to be "enshrined" in law? No, this is just posturing!

Indeed, Johnson's plan already includes the pledge for the NHS made by Theresa May last year. Moreover, when taking inflation into account, it turns out that his £33.9bn NHS budget increase by 2023-4 is not worth more than May's promised £20.5bn. Yet May's pledge was known to be a fraud: a big part was meant to cover hospital deficits and £6bn was earmarked for pensions! So, despite Johnson's claim that his NHS cash injection is "the largest in modern history", it will only increase the NHS budget by 3.3% a year over 5 years - i.e. less than the average 3.7% annual increase since the NHS was established!

Over the last (Tory) decade, the

• Nurse numbers: more smoke and mirrors

The Tory manifesto promised "50,000 more nurses" for the NHS, an eye-catching pledge that turns out to be a fraud. The Tories expect maintenance grants for student nurses during their training to attract 14,000 into nursing - a backhanded admission that their own scrapping of the nursing bursary in 2017 led to a recruitment crisis! In addition, they plan to recruit another 12,000 nurses from overseas and bring in 5,000 through a new nursing apprenticeship.

And the remaining 19,000 "more" nurses, the biggest single component of the promise? They are already working as nurses in the NHS! They would have been expected to leave, we are told, but will now stay because of improvements in childcare and ongoing training. There is no way Johnson



Waiting to see the GP...

NHS budget increased by a miserly 1.5%/year. During that period, A&E waiting times reached their worst level on record, with 1 in 5 patients waiting more than 4 hours to be seen. The number of urgent operations cancelled once, jumped by 11.9% and those cancelled twice or more, by 129%. One in three cancer

patients with urgent referrals waits more than 2 months for treatment. Even "Victorian diseases" are making a come back: admissions for gout rose by 200%, for malnutrition by 210%, for scarlet fever by 177% and for scurvy by 262%! Did Johnson mean that his plan was "the largest con in modern history"? ☐

can guarantee this. NHS nurses have been forced for years to work too many hours in crumbling hospitals, constantly covering for budget cuts and unfilled vacancies. As if that were not ample reason for them to get out, with relief, as soon as they can!

• No longer free at the point of use for doctors and nurses

Johnson's new government has just announced a 56% increase in the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS). The IHS was first introduced by the Tories in 2015 as part of their "hostile environment" for migrants policy. It is a mandatory annual fee to use the NHS, payable by all foreign workers, students and their relatives from outside the EU. Initially set at £200, it was doubled last year to £400. The latest increase will bring it to £625. And perversely, it's also meant to be

paid by NHS workers from abroad!

So, for instance, a nurse from India, with a partner and 2 children would pay £2,500 a year to use a service she was helping to provide! Never mind that she also pays tax and national insurance and is thus paying for the NHS twice over!

The government claims it costs £470 a year to treat "a surcharge payer who needs care" (How do they work that out?). And despite a huge outcry from every health organisation in the country, it is adamant that this surcharge is justified, since "the vast majority of income collected by the Immigration Health Surcharge goes back into frontline services across the UK".

So, given this hostile disincentive for foreign health workers to come to work in the NHS, we can probably expect the 100,000 vacancies across the service to remain vacant and the NHS crisis to get even worse.

Rail

• Fast track for fares, slow track for wages

Rail fares have increased yet again by an average of 2.7% - based on last July's RPI measure of inflation. Never mind that RPI was replaced long ago by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and, more recently, by a revamped version called CPIH. If the RPI is retained for calculating fare rises, it is precisely because it is usually at least 1% higher... In fact fares have risen twice as much as wages in the last 10 years.

January's increase means that the cost of season tickets, whose users are the most hard hit, has increased by an average £100. According to the TUC, British rail commuters would have to spend 16% of their wages for a season ticket from Chelmsford to London (£511 a month), yet similar commutes would cost just 2% of an average salary in France,

and 4% in Germany or Belgium! In fact fares in Germany have just been reduced by 10%!

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps, himself a commuter from his Welwyn constituency (where the season tickets went up by "only" £83 to £3,097/year), expressed sympathy for fellow passengers, saying he "was not delighted with the increase". Yes, as if it had nothing to do with him, the minister in charge of setting the price of 40% of all rail fares - including his own!

• Northern: no escape from the private sharks!

After Northern rail, the largest train franchise in Britain, ran barely half of its trains on time last year and cancelled 1 train in 12 during the November/December period, transport secretary Shapps announced he would end its franchise 5 years early. So is Northern to be renationalised? Of course not!

Shapps is considering two options: either just reducing the length of the franchise or getting the Department for Transport's "Operator of Last Resort Holdings Limited" (OLR), to take it over. But, contrary to what it may seem, this OLR is not a public body. It is just another consortium of private companies which makes a profit from taking over failed franchises on a temporary basis, until a new private operator can be found. So, for instance, this OLR has been running the London North Eastern Railway since Virgin Trains East Coast was stripped of its franchise in 2018. And so far, although it hasn't managed to improve reliability (less than 1 in 4 trains is on time), it has continued the job cuts started by Virgin!

In other words, either way, Shapps is just offering more of the same: more profiteering and more chaos at the expense of workers and passengers!

Brexit watch**More to come of Johnson's Brexit bluster**

Johnson's election campaign revolved around the slogan "Get Brexit Done". And the Withdrawal Bill has now, finally, been passed by parliament. But still, Brexit is far from "Done". Because what follows is a whole new stage of negotiations between the EU and Britain, to agree a trade deal to replace almost 50 years of the single market. In these negotiations, Johnson and his government will claim to be defending the "national interest", that is, the interest of big business. In fact, Johnson has already raised the stakes with the EU, by limiting the time for the negotiations to the end of 2020, and by refusing to rule out the possibility of a hard Brexit, should no deal be reached by then. And this hard-line, chauvinistic posturing will result in any difficulties during the negotiations being blamed on the EU, inevitably accompanied by a general increase in anti-foreign, anti-migrant propaganda.



But this is not all that Johnson adds to the Brexit equation. He has already removed the guarantee that Britain will continue with the same minimum labour standards and environmental protections as the EU. And he deleted a previous commitment to allow child refugees to join their families in Britain. Furthermore,

Johnson's Withdrawal Bill has removed both the requirement for parliament to agree to the government's negotiating aims, and parliamentary approval for the final deal. If Brexit was ever about winning back "sovereignty" for Parliament, Johnson's Withdrawal Bill is showing how much of a lie that was. □

- **Johnson shakes hands with the frackers**

During the election campaign, the Tory party promised to respect the moratorium banning fracking - in an attempt to appeal to the anti-fracking electorate in the North of England and the Midlands. The moratorium itself had been introduced in November by the government's Oil and Gas Authority (OGA) after a 2.9 magnitude earthquake had occurred at a fracking site in Lancashire.

Of course, fracking is a risky business, since it involves pumping high pressured water, sand and chemicals into gas-containing shale rocks. Apart from earthquakes, the "wells" thus created release explosive methane gas, with all the risks this involves to workers. What's more, methane has a warming greenhouse effect 34 times greater than CO2!

Despite this - and pending a report on its impact - the government is nevertheless allowing companies like Ineos and Cuadrilla to lobby the OGA.

Of course this fits with Johnson's "self-sufficiency" mantra: "reducing Britain's reliance" on gas imports, while making a gesture to climate change, since shale gas is marginally "cleaner" than coal. But his real objective is to help the Ineos's and Cuadrilla's of this world to release as much profit out of these rocks, before the whole operation explodes in their faces.

- **The government's oily pals**

Royal Dutch Shell's tax report for 2018 revealed that it did not pay a single penny into the government's coffers. But unlike last year, when it got caught red-handed in the Netherlands, this time Shell wasn't tax-dodging. In fact, the British government had itself given Shell a large tax refund for decommissioning some of its North Sea oil platforms.

So while Shell paid £99 million in taxes on its 2017 profits, it got refunded £87.7 million the following year by the government, on top of making £557 million in profits. As for the rest of its profits, these no doubt ended up in Shell's offshore accounts.

Shell's Chief Financial Officer said, "We hope that this report will help to create a better understanding of our business and the taxes we pay". Yes, it certainly provides one with a better understanding of the relationship between big business and government! In fact, the National Audit Office estimates that out of the total £56bn cost of decommissioning North-Sea oil rigs, £24bn will fall to the taxpayer to pay. Yet, given the huge profits that these now defunct oil fields have produced for the oil majors, why shouldn't the oil majors use their profits to clean up their own mess?

- **No borders for shareholders**

Just weeks before the general election, Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE), and the National Grid, which supply electricity and gas, moved large parts of their finances to holding companies in Switzerland, Hong Kong and Luxembourg. They were reacting to a perceived threat to shareholders, should Labour win the election and nationalise their assets. This move would allow them to make use of international treaties to ensure shareholders were compensated "fairly" and at market value...

Of course, this assumed a lot of things. First, that Labour would win the election. And second, that it'd act on its word. Certainly there'd been plenty of demagogic speeches against asset-stripping utility crooks who were "overcharging customers to the order of billions of pounds". However, in its manifesto, Labour was already quite measured: "energy networks would be nationalised via an act of parliament and current owners would be compensated through government bonds" although it added that "compensation could be subject to deductions". "Could", not "would"...

SSE and National Grid bosses must be kicking themselves today, for having gone to all the trouble of re-locating their assets for nothing. But even if Labour had won, it's highly unlikely Chancellor McDonnell would have dared to under-compensate anybody. After all, the 1945-7 nationalisations under Labour, which he held up as his model, compensated the capitalists in full.

- **For what it's worth**

Millions of 50p Brexit coins are to finally enter circulation on 31 January 2020, with Johnson's "glorious and momentous" exit date stamped on them! But what a waste of time and effort: this coin was meant to be launched three times already, for each failed

Brexit date! Last October it was even minted, ready for the 31st October 2019, which was Boris Johnson's "Do or Die in a ditch" deadline. Unfortunately the only object to suffer death in a ditch was this poor 50p coin. It was not just killed, but melted down...

Well, this time, no doubt the coin will "live", since Johnson has got the revised Withdrawal

Bill through the House of Commons and Britain really will leave the EU on the 31st of January. Even if it's only a symbolic departure, since Brexit won't really mean Brexit till the end of the year and even then... maybe there will be another extension... But at least there'll be a half-sovereign's proof of Britain's new sovereignty - whatever that may mean...

A liar propped up by a corrupt electoral system

After the election

To claim that December 12th was a "landslide victory" for Johnson, as the media did, was a barefaced lie. What with just 330,000 more votes than in the 2017 election, the Tories only increased their score by 1.2%, up to 43.6%! Hardly something to boast about!

But, above all, if it was not for Britain's grotesque "first-past-the-post" system, this 1.2% gain would never have given Johnson an additional 47 MPs - equivalent to over 7% of the Commons' 650 seats - and a large majority. Indeed, while the Tories only needed 38,264 votes in order to get one MP elected, Labour needed 50,717 votes, the Lib-Dems 336,038 and the Greens, 865,697! To put it another way, this means that, under this system, 4 Tory voters have more influence in the selection of MPs than 5 Labour voters, 34 Lib-Dem voters and 86 Green voters! How "fair" is that?

Of course, this is nothing new. Over the past century, this institutional electoral fraud has worked well for the capitalist class, by ensuring that the levers of government remained in the hands of the two biggest parties of its choice, Tory



and Labour, while feeding the illusion that voters have a say in their policies.

In any case, Johnson's insistence on presenting his government as the "People's Government" after the election, was nothing short of a farce. Which "People" is it supposed to represent? Given the 67.3% turnout, just over 29% of the whole electorate actually voted for a Tory candidate this time! And now, Johnson's so-called "People's Government" will claim to be implementing what he calls the "Will of

the People" - i.e. the Leave vote by 37% of the electorate in 2016!

What really lies behind this bizarre populist rhetoric may well be Johnson's fear that the attacks he has in store against workers' jobs and conditions, as part of his grand plan for Britain's post-Brexit "affluent" future, might face resistance. Indeed, he should be worried! The voice of the working class hasn't been heard in this election, but it will be heard in the streets and the workplaces, when it starts fighting back! ☐

• Labour's loss: no, workers haven't turned Tory...

How many times is it (still) repeated that "Labour got the worst result in a general election since 1935". And what are the commentators talking about? Not that the Labour vote was the worst since 1935, but that it won the fewest seats since then - 154 in 1935, 203 in 2019...

Never mind that the number of

seats a party wins bears little relation to the number of votes cast for it. In this so-called "Mother of all democracies", the media doesn't give a damn about the support a party has among real people. For them and indeed for Labour's own MPs, currently mourning their defeat, it's only parliamentary arithmetic that counts.

But looking at the proportion of votes Labour got, there's no evidence it's lost its working class base. This December Labour didn't do badly with 32.2%. It's fared far worse: in 1983, it got 27.6%; in 1987, 30.8%, in 2010, 29%, and in 2015, 30.4%... And no-one said the working class had abandoned it then!

• The Red Wall broke?

So what about the other favourite post-election fallacy - the breaching of Labour's so-called "red wall" across the Midlands/North of England, where a vast section of the working class apparently "switched allegiance to the Tories"?

Sure, the Conservatives took 33 out of 63 former Labour constituencies. Including Bolsover, veteran former miner Dennis Skinner's seat, held since 1950; Bishop Auckland (Labour since 1918) and Bassetlaw (Labour since 1935). These places haven't only lost their mines and industry, but also their young working class constituents, who've had to migrate south for jobs. The Labour vote (and turnout) in these de-industrialised areas has been declining - and ageing - over the past two decades.

In 2016 these constituencies

voted heavily for Brexit. And so, thanks to Labour's ambivalent position on Brexit, the Brexit Party was able to take pro-Brexit Labour votes in these seats. In fact it stood aside wherever it might cut into the Tory vote, acting as a de facto faction of Johnson's party in these marginalised Labour seats, splitting the Labour vote, and allowing the Tories in. The Lib-Dems on the other hand, were able to take anti-Brexit votes, leaving Labour sitting in the middle, literally at a loss.

• Don gone: it wasn't Corbyn "what lost it"

A typical example of Labour's "misfortune" is the seat of Don Valley, an ex-mining constituency held by Labour since 1922. The Conservatives got 19,609 votes and Labour only 15,979.

So the Tories won by a margin of 3,630. However, the Brexit Party got 6,247 votes and the Lib Dems 1,907. Compare this with 2017: the Tories got 19,182 votes (only 429 fewer than in 2019) but lost to Labour's 24,351 votes - a margin almost exactly equal to the votes Labour lost this time round to the Lib-Dems and Brexit Party...

What's more, turnout this time was just 60.3% - down almost 2% on 2017, meaning perhaps, that a substantial number of former Labour voters who supported Brexit abstained, unable to bring themselves to vote Tory, or for Farage's Brexit Party, no matter what. But anyway, the decisive factor in this typical "red wall" constituency, decimated by capitalist decline, turns out not to be "Jeremy Corbyn" nor an "overloaded" manifesto (who ever reads them, anyway?), but Brexit.

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• Perpetual motion?**

We keep hearing rumours which contradict each other... (So what's new?!). But the shortage of hands is fact, even if there appears to be a temporary "surplus" here or there. And of course it's far worse after Ford sacked all those temps!

So what now? Will management rehire some of the temps who they told to go? Or will they just keep playing musical chairs with the rest of us? [Workers' Fight bulletin, Ford Dagenham 8/1/20]

• Yo-yo schedules

Yes, Panther engine schedule may have gone down a bit, (like the Lion), allowing 30+ Panther assembly mates to be sent to the Chicken Farm (Tiger engine lines) for 3 months (?), along with a whole Lion's Den shift.

But we know that these engine schedules continue to go up and down like a yo-yo - and that Ford seems totally unable to adapt to this in any rational way! [Workers' Fight, Ford Dagenham 8/1/20]

• We want 'healthy' pay!

We're still waiting to get proper occupational sick pay on Lineside Logistics! Because we can't live on peanuts, every time the job injures us, or makes us sick! But we know OSP is not gonna just fall from the sky, and even less likely fall out of the pockets of LL and Ford... In fact it's high time we prepared for a strike - because it's obvious that we're going to have to take it by force! [Workers' Fight, Ford Dagenham 8/1/20]

• Be on your guard

What's being discussed behind closed doors, regarding our Ford pensions? Before shutdown we heard ominous rumours. Those officials involved in these talks have a duty to tell us what Ford has up its sleeve - and in real time, not after they've already signed on Ford's dotted line!! [Workers' Fight, Ford Dagenham 8/1/20]

• Holiday theft

Xmas shutdown was ridiculously short! We should only have come back this Monday. And why aren't bank holidays considered "extra", on top of leave allocation? It's a cheat!



But of course we never have enough holidays, and again, it's "exploitees" of Ford's beloved crooked cowboy contractor, LLL/Hamton, who get the worst deal - they refuse us leave when we ask for it, complaining that they have no cover! But whose fault is that? [Workers' Fight, Ford Dagenham 8/1/20]

• Their love for filth

Yes indeed. We must assume management wants the premises to be dirty, since we're so short of cleaners everywhere? We might sound like a broken record, but we will keep repeating this: we can't and won't make up for the shortage of hands! So if managers want a pigsty in order to feel more at home, who are we to say no? We apologise to the production workforce but let them blame the swines who are responsible... [Workers' Fight, Ford Dagenham 8/1/20]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**Shift-change pantomime**

With Brexit and the continuous talk of "volatile" market conditions over the last year, it was clear that BMW was preparing another attack. And at the end of November, they "asked" us to vote for a change in shifts and a cut in hours, from 37.5 to 35 a week. This meant a loss of pay of about £4,000 a year for most assembly workers. If it wasn't accepted, the company threatened to cut one of the three shifts. Those who would have been sacked in this case are agency workers, some of whom have been working in the plant for 8 or more years, yet on a contract which can be terminated at any time!

Only the minority of permanent workers had a vote (despite the fact

that everyone was affected). But even for those who did, this vote was a con. In fact, this blackmail designed to get us to "agree" to a pay cut fooled no one, and if the change was voted for, it was simply because no one wanted to see anyone lose their jobs. But at the same time, it was very well known that this vote by itself would not protect jobs - even in the near future.

The change of shifts won't be implemented immediately, but BMW might think they now have an even more flexible workforce, whose wages they can cut when needed. However, this pantomime of a vote can be revoked at any time by the workers, if and when they decide to say "NO" to



BMW's attacks.

Because, whatever the realities of the global car market for BMW, why should workers pay the cost? How many years of fat profits have the bosses extracted from workers in Cowley, and across other plants? Not only should all available work be shared out among all available hands without loss of pay, but everyone should be made permanent! ☐

• Equal pay and conditions!

Agency work has got to go! Those of us who started most recently are getting laid off for weeks at a time. What happened to Gi taking us off zero-hour contracts, as they said they would... How are we meant to sort our lives out, or even pay our rent, when we can lose 2 or more weeks' pay at any time? And what excuse do they give for laying us off? There is "not enough work". Don't make us laugh - there is TOO MUCH work here for the number of

us! [Workers' Fight bulletin, BMW Oxford Mini 20/11/19]

• We need proper Xmas pay!

What were we meant to do without pay over Xmas? For us agency workers with logistics contractor, R&H, BMW's shutdowns meant that we had to leave to find work elsewhere - this is no different to being sacked! And since pretty much everyone lost some pay in December, the only solution for all of us, is BMW paying everyone FULLY for the Xmas shutdown! [Workers Fight bulletin, BMW Oxford Mini]

• The right to be lazy

Why are BMW shortening our shifts to 6 hours only for the first week of January? Why not shorten them for the whole year? We'd be fine with shorter shifts - less work for each of us, more work for more mates! But it makes no sense to get lower pay. If we work less, it's not like we suddenly, somehow, need less. We don't become smaller people, nor does our cost of living go down! If anything, we should get a pay increase, to help us enjoy our extra spare time! [Workers Fight bulletin, BMW Oxford Mini 4/12/19]

King's Cross railway station (London)

DOO: a general rail strike needed

The strike by South Western Railway (SWR) guards and drivers is likely to continue into February, after a rebalot. Their unprecedented 27 days of strike in December (suspended for the election) was aimed at preventing SWR from ending the guard's role in closing train doors and transferring the job to drivers.

SWR has been in dispute with the RMT since February 2019 over this watered-down version of "Driver Only Operation" (DOO). And just as happened with Southern, after years of on-off strikes by guards, these SWR bosses want to be able

to run trains without any guard at all, in "exceptional" circumstances - to start with... It's the thin end of the wedge. Since the signing of a similar agreement on Southern, up to 50% of trains now run without a guard.

In fact, since the 2011 "McNulty Report" claimed DOO was a safe method of operation and proposed all companies get rid of (costly) guards, 8 out of Britain's 12 rail franchises have introduced a version of DOO.

So far most of the strikes against DOO have involved guards only, plus the small minority of drivers in the



RMT. They've been called separately, company by company, leaving each section to fight alone. Yet the loss of guards on trains is a dangerous outcome for drivers, guards and passengers alike across the whole network. Isn't it high time a general rail strike was organised to stop DOO once and for all? ☐

• Don't get on board!

So we see that the new Network Rail timetable for LNER trains adds additional services between London and Harrogate/ Lincoln, and some London to Newcastle services will now continue all the way to Edinburgh.

We've been desperately short of hands and needing serious recruitment all along during the past year. So how on earth can LNER bosses imagine they can run these new services... unless they plan to run "ghost" trains with no staff on-board! [Workers' Platform King's X, 17/12/19]

• Can't replicate ourselves

On top of it all, when the Azuma trains

are swapped for longer ones i.e., a 5-car or 9-car for a 10-car, we're left with just 1 set of workers for 2 sets of trolleys, 2 bars, 2x1st class facilities. We certainly can't cut ourselves in 2, let alone 4. But we're left so short, that if anything goes wrong, there'll be nobody to intervene to put it right. [Workers' Platform King's X, 17/12/19]

• Potentially lethal anarchy

Mind you, when it's the opposite: a longer train replaced by a shorter one, we have other problems, like trying to fit in twice as many passengers plus their luggage! At this time of the year, when everyone is travelling with lots of bags, it's madness.

And what happens when someone is unwell (or stuck in the "intelligent" toilet)

and the guard can't reach them?! The dangerous overcrowding with standing passengers occupying all available space and blocking the narrow "aisles" is a recipe for disaster. [Workers' Platform King's X, 17/12/19]

• Trying our patience

How much worse can the delays and cancellations across the LNER route get? There is a constant backlog of passengers trying to take the next train... or any train, for that matter... And if this wasn't stressful enough for both us and passengers, there are all the problems with the on-board service to contend with, once we eventually get going! [Workers' Platform King's X, 4/12/19]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

• Strike on... when?

We know that the CWU machinery (meaning the Wards and Pullingers, etc..) by their very nature, aren't keen on going on the offensive, even when it's the only thing to do.

But now, they promise the government and employers they "won't give them a moment's rest." So does that mean that our strike is back on...? And when? [Workers' Fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant mail centre 17/12/19]

• We need our own road

While it's true, as they say, that "in the next 5 years trade unions will be more important than ever", we know that they'll only become the "first line of defence" for working people, if workers take control of organising their own fightback.

Leaving it to the likes of the union bureaucrats will be a road to nowhere. [Workers' Fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant mail centre 17/12/19]

• Back to the future

We also know that Johnson said that he'd like to ban strikes in public services - especially transport - in today's Queen's Speech. Which means that we're going to have to decide to break the law. And that'd take us back to when unions really were unions, with workers united against the bosses, doing whatever it takes to defend their jobs! [Workers' Fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant mail centre 17/12/19]

• We need an all out!

As Delivery Office strikes continue, this time workmates in Keynsham (BS31) are refusing to deliver mail on the 23rd and 24th of December because of the sacking of a workmate. The CWU is now balloting them (only) for strike... As if we're not all facing the same sort of attacks: managers breathing down our necks when there aren't enough hands anywhere! So why not ballot all of us? [Workers' Fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant mail centre 17/12/19]



• Passing the 2nd class buck

We all knew that it'd be busy over Xmas, obviously! All except management. Not that we're very surprised at their naivety. So now 2nd class is being sent to Greenford, as we don't have enough hands here to sort it! [Workers' Fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant mail centre 17/12/19]

• 19th century conditions

We couldn't believe our ears when Xmas casuals told us Angard offered them a choice between 10-hr and 12-hr shifts this year, 6 nights a week. Yes, casuals are meant to cover for the lack of hands in HMP (and elsewhere in Royal Amazon), at slave hourly rates! But with only 3 weeks of work and low wages, what kind of choice do they have?! [Workers' Fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant mail centre 17/12/19]

France

As we go to press, a wave of strikes and street protests is entering its sixth week across France. Since 5 December, the French railway network has been largely paralysed, together with the Paris Underground and the transport systems of many large towns.

This wave of unrest was triggered by a so-called "reform" of the workers' pension system announced by president Macron's pro-business administration. Its aim, of course, is to cut the cost of pensions to the state and to the bosses, under the pretext of "rationalisation".

This is the latest in a long series of attacks by the French state against pensions. However, pensions still remain based on the solidarity between generations: the pensions of today's pensioners are paid by the contributions of those who are still in work. And so far, the government had mostly tried to increase retirement age and reduce pensions.

This time, however, in addition to the usual attacks, Macron also wants to pave the way for the future introduction

Six weeks of strikes and protests



of individual pension plans (i.e. based on financial investment, like in Britain) which could eventually be handed over to private insurance companies. He also wants to end the many special pension arrangements which exist for the most

taxing jobs (railway workers, pilots, firemen, teachers, etc.).

In any case, Macron has sparked off the longest wave of unrest since the 1986 railway strike. What's more, while public transport workers were initially the vanguard of the strikes, others have joined in. Hundreds of thousands of workers have taken strike action, on and off - including workers from the energy utilities, refineries, hospitals, schools, some engineering firms and even the dancers and musicians of the Paris Opera! Many more have taken part in the national days of protests called almost every week by the unions. In the most recent, for instance, on Thursday January 9th, 450,000 workers marched in the main towns (according to the police who are unlikely to inflate these figures!). This is to say that, even 6 weeks into their fight back, the workers are still determined to force Macron to back down. And they are right, for this is the only language that the bosses and their politicians ever understand! ☐

India

Ever since the ruling Hindu nationalist party, the BJP, got itself re-elected for a second term last year, prime minister Narendra Modi has been trying to boost his electoral support in preparation for future state elections, by whipping up anti-Muslim prejudices. Such was the purpose of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) which was passed by the Indian parliament, on 12 December. This law is supposed to allow refugees who have fled religious persecution in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, before 2015, to apply for Indian citizenship. But it excludes Muslims! In fact Modi boasted about the fact that, without this law, "the world would not have known how minorities in Pakistan are getting tortured and their human rights being trampled". In other words, the CAA is just another weapon for Modi's nationalist demagoguery against Pakistan, thereby causing much anger, primarily among the Muslim population, which forms India's largest minority.

The first major protests against the CAA started in universities with a significant proportion of Muslim students, like Jamia Millia Islamia, in New Delhi and Aligarh Muslim University, in Uttar Pradesh (UP). The violent police repression triggered a wave of protests across the country, involving predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods in several big towns. In one such area - Delhi's Seelampur-Jaffrabad - protests were joined by students, unemployed, shopkeepers, casual workers,

Anger on the streets



Anti-CAA protest in Dharavi, Mumbai

from Muslim but also Hindu backgrounds. Such demonstrations in the poor suburbs were most brutally suppressed, especially in UP state which is governed by Modi's BJP. To date, at least 27 protesters have been killed by the police and thousands have been arrested.

Many protests link the CAA to a National Registration of Citizens Bill which BJP leaders have been promising to introduce for some months now. Its stated aim is to identify so-called "illegal infiltrators". It would require documented proof of Indian citizenship to be produced by everyone. Though the details so far remain vague, many Muslims fear this too, will target them. And in a country

where the vast majority of the poor rarely have any documentation, this spells a bureaucratic nightmare and the threat of being stripped of voting rights, rights to social services, or being sent to any of the newly-built detention centres. This has already happened in Assam, where a similar law is already implemented.

So far, the BJP has managed to confine the protests mostly to the Muslim poor. But the CAA is only a prelude to the NRC, which will spell chaos for the poor masses, across communal boundaries. This is why the CAA-NRC is a severe threat for the whole working class and will need to be opposed as such. ☐

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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