

WORKERS' fight

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contact@w-fight.org

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

Against the coming offensive, WE NEED TO PREPARE OUR RESPONSE!

The privatised train companies and big utilities couldn't wait. They had to spoil our summer (to the great pleasure of their delighted shareholders, of course) with another round of fare and price increases. And they are massive, this time, especially for energy bills. Coming on top of general inflation, which has been rising since the beginning of the year, while wages remained stagnant, the burden on working class households is increasing.

Brexit as a money-spinner

By now, the big utilities have all announced price hikes ranging from 5 to 12.5% for this year, blaming the fall of the pound - i.e. Brexit - which, they say, increases the cost of producing electricity.

Maybe so. But what about the record £2.2bn in dividends they're dishing out to shareholders? They're so "hard up", that, for instance, National Grid - which operates Britain's core electricity distribution network - gave its shareholders a special dividend worth over £3.2bn in the 2nd quarter, or around 20% of its annual revenue!

As to train companies, they are just opportunistically using (or, rather, abusing) their legal right to increase regulated fares in line with the Retail Price Index - by 3.6%. But they certainly can't claim to be "suffering" from the Brexit-induced inflation, especially as they keep reducing their costs by cutting jobs. In their case as well, Brexit is merely a convenient pretext to boost revenue, knowing that most train passengers have no option but to pay.

A foretaste of what's coming

The past decade of on-going financial crisis should be a warning of what's in store. For ten years, the bosses and their politicians have been crying poverty. Not only



have workers been made to pay - with cuts in wages, jobs, conditions, services and benefits - for the fat cats' reckless profiteering, but also for yet another turn of the screw, to boost their profits.

What the working class is facing now is nothing but a re-enactment of the very same process: the Brexit mayhem is coming to us, on top of the capitalist crisis. It may have been caused, this time, by the politicians' recklessness rather than by the recklessness of their capitalist masters, but the bosses will seek, just as they did over the past decade, to pull their chestnuts out of the fire. In fact, they've already started. Wages are already being cut by monetary inflation and record price hikes and, using the pretext of the predictable fall in consumption, thousands of jobs are now threatened by chains like Sainsbury, Asda and Wilco.

Preparing the necessary response

Meanwhile, capitalist shareholders are looking forward to cashing in an all-time

record of £90 billion in dividends this year! But they still want workers to pay even more and they are already going on the offensive against them.

Whether they succeed depends entirely on the working class' response. It is vital that, this time, the response is massive and determined. While the bosses' offensive is in its early days, while they are still testing the water before pushing their luck, the working class still has some time to prepare its counter-offensive, build up its numbers and cohesion, by joining ranks across sections, industries and nationalities.

The bosses rely on the fact that, just as after the 2007 crisis, workers will be disorientated. It doesn't have to be that way. Workers still have their collective strength. They still produce all the wealth in this society. By mobilising their ranks and refusing to be used as pawns by the bosses and their politicians, they can stop the coming offensive. In fact, there is no other way forward for the working class! ☐

Housing

Grenfell inquiry - a whitewash in the making

It's always been obvious that the issues raised by the Grenfell fire concern the whole social housing sector. Yet the terms of reference for the official inquiry read like a purely technical investigation of one isolated case. There is only a single vague point about the adequacy and scope of safety regulations for high rises. But already 228 buildings round the country have been identified as "at risk".

The decision to exclude more general questions was taken by the chair of the inquiry, Justice Martin Moore-Bick. This is hardly surprising from a judge who has endorsed, for instance, a decision by Westminster Council to rehouse a tenant in Milton Keynes! But May has gratefully gone along with Moore-Bick, even if, under pressure, she has now broadened the enquiry to examine such issues as "the response of central and local government in the days immediately following the fire". But as the Justice4Grenfell campaign points out, Kensington and Chelsea Council are not specifically named, when they



are clearly culpable.

It should be recalled that after the Lakanal House fire, which killed 6 people in 2009 due to Grenfell-like cladding, the recommendations of a coroner's jury were not only ignored by the government, but it even "simplified" building regulations in the

immediate aftermath. This meant that 4,000 tower blocks across the country were not retro-fitted with sprinkler systems and lax fire safety remained in place!

Maybe after the horror of Grenfell the government will be obliged to do more. But nobody should count on it. □

• A general inquiry into social housing - too hot to handle?

May has now explained that the "wider questions" related to social housing should be "taken forward elsewhere". So she's asked Housing Minister Alok Sharma to "hold conversations" with social tenants across the country. But what can the huge number of working class people in need of affordable, decent, safe, housing actually expect from this "conversation"?

After all, it's the profit motive above all, which defines the "general" approach to housing. Will the government abolish the practice of employing private subcontractors,

who use the cheapest possible materials and pay peanuts to workers? Or stop the social cleansing and gentrification of formerly working class areas - pushing the poor into slum-buildings with litter-strewn stairs, broken lifts, and frankly a risk to live in at the best of times, let alone in the event of a fire?

What's more, for the "independent" review into building and fire regulations, where the national dimension is meant to be considered, May has appointed "Dame" Judith Hackett as its chair - when she is a just-resigned director of the Energy Savings

Trust, which promoted precisely the type of insulation responsible for the Grenfell disaster!

No-one should be surprised at this farce. Would the culpable politicians and their private sector beneficiaries really allow themselves to be declared guilty? A truthful enquiry would lay bare, only too plainly, the rottenness of the system which made such a fire possible in the 21st century, in the richest local borough of a country which is one of the world's richest. They can't and won't allow that!

• Obvious solutions ignored

At the time of writing, 180 families made homeless by the 14th June Grenfell fire are still living in temporary accommodation, in hotels and the like. They have been waiting for rehousing for 10 weeks, despite Theresa May's promise that homes would be found for them

within 3!

To date, 174 offers of rehousing have been made, 45 offers have been accepted, but just 12 households have actually been rehoused.

It is very hard to understand why everyone's needs have not been answered. After all,

there are as many as 1900 unoccupied houses in the same borough! And many of these have been empty for between 2 and 15 years! Of course it would mean expropriating them from their super-rich owners... An unlikely solution, from this government, to say the least!

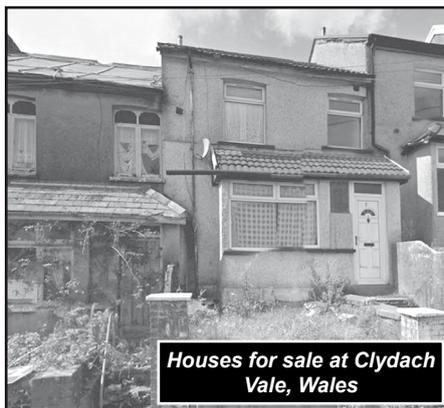
• Private sector housing: a right rip-off

Private rents continue to rise. In London these have gone up by 22% over the last six years. With cuts to housing benefit and wages, 1 in 7 tenants pay more than half their income on rent! Over 100 tenants across social and private sectors are evicted every day. The annual figure for evictions in 2015 (the last available) was 40,000!

As for the quality of housing, almost a third of homes fail to meet the government's Decent Homes Standard. This means they either contain safety hazards or don't have acceptable kitchens, bathrooms or adequate heating. "Category 1" hazards have been found in 17%, including dangerous boilers, exposed wiring, overloaded electricity sockets and vermin infestation.

Yet despite this, the government has repeatedly refused to make licensing of landlords compulsory. An amendment

tabled in Parliament last year to make it legally binding that private sector homes are "fit for human habitation" was voted down! Landlords are merely "recommended" to follow new fire safety tests published in the wake of Grenfell, but nothing is enforced! This system which protects profiteers is keeping the majority of the poor population in the most risky, Victorian, conditions!



Houses for sale at Clydach Vale, Wales

• Towards another housing market crash?

On the eve of the Brexit vote last June, the median house price in England was 7.7 times median annual earnings! This is one of the highest levels ever recorded and it hasn't dropped since. With inflation, cuts to wages and lay-offs, a shrinking section of the population can afford to pay a deposit on a home, and the rate of sales is slowing down. The mortgage lender Halifax reported in August that annual house price growth had already dropped to a four-year low. As the uncertainty of Brexit continues to make the situation worse, house prices may go into free fall.

And what then? The situation seems strikingly similar to what happened before the 2007 sub-prime mortgage-precipitated banking crash. Is that what's in store?

THE FINANCIAL CRISIS TEN YEARS ON

Millions of pages of reports and analysis have been produced to explain the present world crisis, the longest in the history of the capitalist system. However, most experts seem to agree on one thing at least: the tipping point was reached on 9th August 2007, when one of the world's largest investment banks, the French BNP-Paribas, suddenly froze three of its real estate funds, preventing speculators from cashing in their investments.

The collapse of their bingo machine

Although this event was relatively minor, the banking system went into a tail spin. Speculators - especially banks - started having second thoughts about lending their money. Financial institutions, which for years, had been building up gigantic Ponzi schemes by resorting to massive borrowing at low interest rates, were suddenly paralysed.

On 14 September 2007, Britain's Northern Rock bank became the world's first victim of the so-called "credit crunch". It was only small fry, but much bigger sharks were to follow. More financial institutions went belly-up, including US giant mortgage lenders Bear Stearns, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Finally, on 15 September 2008, the first banking heavy weight was hit: US bank Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy. Within the following two months, governments all over the world stepped in to rescue the banks which were "too big to fail", as they said at the time.

In Britain, RBS, HBOS and Lloyds-TSB were de facto nationalised, in order to bail out their wealthiest shareholders on the back of public funds. And ever since then, not only the banks but also the capitalists of the rich countries, have been in receipt of the most colossal flow of state subsidies ever seen in peacetime.

Capital's "austerity" drip-feed and the bosses' offensive

This worldwide bailout of the capitalist system opened what was to be the "era of austerity". "Deficit reduction" became governments' watchword all over the world. Workers were told that social expenditure had become unaffordable, that governments could no longer live "above their means" and that welfare provisions and public services had to be drastically cut.

Of course, this "austerity" mantra concealed a colossal diversion of public funds towards companies and shareholders. Not only had the working class to foot the bill of the banking bailout, but the crisis became a pretext for governments to subsidise the profits of their capitalist masters.

At the same time, the working class was everywhere confronted with a vicious offensive against their jobs, wages and conditions. Factories were closed

down, vital housing projects were moth-balled. In the midst of this colossal wastage, tens of millions of workers lost their livelihoods across the world and many more found themselves trapped in a hidden form of unemployment - or "under-employment" - with an explosion of casual jobs which no longer guaranteed any regular, decent, income.

Capitalism's accelerating decay

Today, the crisis is blamed on inadequately regulated banks which were operating in a hugely over-inflated housing market. Real estate speculation, aggressive sales of deceptive "sub-prime" mortgages and the mountain of debt built up to pay for these mortgages, have, indeed, all played a role in triggering the crisis.

However, this is only part of the story. It does not explain the development of huge real estate speculative bubbles, in the first place, nor why they contami-



nated the financial system to such an extent, that when they burst, it came close to a complete freeze - and threatened the whole economy.

Yet the writing had been on the wall since the early 1970s. Following the first major post-war economic crisis, the capitalists no longer trusted their own system. They wanted "safe ways" to make a quick buck. This prompted governments to introduce financial deregulation from the early 1980s, to facilitate every conceivable form of financial speculation, thereby making it possible for companies and rich individuals to gamble on financial markets, while taking as little risk as possible with their cherished cash.

Huge flows of money started roaming the planet, moving always faster, from one country or industry to another, for the sole purpose of maximising profits - and regardless of the instability they created. As a result, the world economy went on limping from one financial crisis to the next: 1987 (on most stock markets), 1990 (Japan), 1997 (in South-East Asia), 1998 (in Russia and the US), 2001

Crisis

(the US "dotcom" crisis) and, finally... the 2007 "credit crunch" - which is not over yet!

This wasteful chaos will only end when capitalism does

In all these major crises, the erratic movements of huge flows of floating capital in search of a quick buck have been both the trigger and the mechanism through which the contagion has spread worldwide. Each one of them involved, one way or another, a bout of mad speculation on so-called "financial products" which, according to the top financial pundits themselves, have become far too complex for their ups and downs to be predictable. Worse, even, the level of complexity and opacity of these financial "golden eggs" increased from one crisis to the next - and still does - making it ever more impossible to figure out how and where the next economic imbalance will emerge and how much it will affect

the economy as a whole.

Today, nothing has changed. The complexity and opacity of the financial sphere keeps increasing year after year. And so does the volume of capital gambled every day. Ironically, while every government and every employer keeps repeating that there is no money to meet the most urgent needs of the working class majority, the financial sector is more awash with cash than it ever has been. Instead of being used to improve and create vital infrastructure and socially useful production, an increasing share of the value created by the working class is constantly ploughed into the capitalist financial bingo machine - thereby stoking more explosive power for the next crisis.

Whether this next crisis happens - on top of the present one - is not a question of if, but a question of when. And there will be only one way to prevent this new round of devastation, which would be even worse than anything we've already seen - by getting rid of this decaying capitalist system, which has long passed its sell-by date. □

Brexit watch

When dealing with the issue of free movement, the Brexit negotiations again show Theresa May trying to do a balancing act. She has to keep her party's bickering factions happy to avoid disrupting negotiations too much. And it doesn't work very well. So the anti-immigrant rhetoric continues from hard Brexiters, never mind that they have to concede that workers from across the Channel are essential when it comes to keeping public services working and private profits flowing.

But May's proposals for the future of EU citizens in Britain are hardly reassuring. Not only will they have to apply afresh for the right to remain after Brexit and carry a special ID card, but they will not have the automatic right to return if they leave for more than two years. On entering Britain they'll have to register with the Home Office, and undergo all kinds of checks, including police records, etc. In addition, the government's announced it will end the right of EU workers to send child benefits abroad, if their children are born after March 2019. No matter that the amounts currently sent total, on

• "Mistaken" deportation threat

It transpires now that the Home Office made a "mistake" when it sent letters threatening deportation, to EU citizens who had been settled in Britain for years. Mostly this was just because they had drawn attention to themselves by applying for a "qualified

• No choice but to delay it!

The government has now conceded that a 3-year "transition period" will be needed after the Brexit deadline in March 2019. This "implementation period", as hard Brexit ministers prefer to call it, is a long-standing demand from British businesses to prevent themselves from falling over a cliff-edge to their death...

So the government is now also considering staying in the EU Customs Union for at least

• Brexit bill overbidding

Over the summer, there has been much politicking over the bill for Brexit - i.e. the cost of settling Britain's debt for renegeing on past financial commitments, which, for over 40 years, have allowed British businesses to benefit from the EU's joint funding arrangements.

Boris Johnson got the ball rolling by stating that Brussels could "go whistle", winning the vocal support of other Tory Brexiters. As

• Development funding exit?

Since the financial crisis, Britain's poorer regions have come to rely upon EU funding for "development". Not only did Cameron cut local government funding by 27%, but he abolished the English regional development agencies and whatever regional planning existed. The £8.4bn allocated through the European structural and investment funds for 2014-2020, provided funding to local councils, subsidised start-up businesses, but also paid for infrastructure improvements, from broadband to bridges.

But now, more than a year after the EU referendum, councils have had no indication that the government will replace this funding. Without it, the regions they cover can

Free movement: workers are pawns in their negotiation game



average, a paltry £17/week per child!

But EU negotiators have retaliated. They threaten that British workers living in the EU could lose their automatic right to move to another EU member state after Brexit. And holiday-makers could be refused use of the European Health Insurance Card to access free

treatment.

None of this is in the interests of the populations on either side of the Channel. But just as it began with the referendum, it continues with the negotiations: the working class is just a pawn to be used and abused for the sake of the politicians' dangerous games. □

person certificate" to confirm their right to remain in the wake of the triggering of Article 50, which initiated the Brexit process and the uncertainty this brought with it.

May had swiftly to make a public statement reassuring them that "their

status has not changed". That is, of course, for now. But just how and why do such errors happen? Isn't it because May and her former department are, and always have been, "erring" on the side of anti-immigrant measures?

as long, so as to make the transition easier for cross-Channel trade. Apparently there could be as many as 300 million customs declarations a year to cope with, once outside of the Union!

Another urgent issue is the 310-mile long Irish border, where free movement of everything has been taken for granted for so long. In a position paper on the Irish border published in August, the government announced

that crossings could take place without visas and no infrastructure would be introduced to check passports. Which, obviously, makes a lot of sense and stands in sharp contrast with May's pig-headed position in favour of cross Channel visas. Unless, of course, free movement continues across the Channel too. Which seems more and more likely... despite the anti-immigrant hysteria of May's Brexiters!

if May had a leg to stand on regarding this issue: in a capitalist world ruled by the law of the jungle, tiny Britain is in no position to impose the terms of its divorce on the EU's 27 member states!

But then politicians can change their stand as easily as they change their ties - as was shown by Boris Johnson himself, when he finally admitted on Radio 4's Today programme,

at the end of August, that "we will certainly have to meet our obligations". And if, in the meantime, Jacob Rees-Mogg, another leading Brexiteer, insisted on sticking to his guns, claiming that "legally we owe nothing", it was primarily due to his overt ambition to stand against May in case of a leadership challenge. Nothing to do with Brexit, but everything to do with political careerism!

only fall further behind the rest of the country. Ironically, for decades, Cornwall, where 56.5% voted Leave, received the highest level of EU investment, at £729m. Is the Treasury going to tell those regions presently dependent on EU funding that "you voted" for drastic cuts?

• Landowners are waiting for their Brexit bribe too

EU funding through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has sustained British farmers for decades. So much so that that the total value of farmland and woodland has increased by 149% over the past decade alone.

So how is that to be replaced? Environment and Food Secretary Michael Gove announced in

July that the support would continue, but farmers would have to satisfy a wider range of criteria, including how well they protect the environment and "support rural life". Certainly there is no end in sight to the archaic division of the countryside into a patchwork of private holdings, which have relied on subsidies for so long.

Of course, public subsidies to agriculture go well beyond the £3bn/year from the CAP. For instance, farmers get exemptions from fuel duty on diesel, business rates and inheritance tax. This combined subsidy package has always benefited the biggest landowners, while smaller farms were struggling. And it will be the richer farmers again, who will be better placed to tick any new boxes Gove adds to make what he calls a "green Brexit". But so far, it looks pretty blue!

Car industry: on the make or running away?

The uncertainty of life after Brexit continues to dog car manufacturing in Britain, where parts are imported from all over Europe for assembly. After £1.66bn was invested in car plants last year, the figure dropped dramatically to £322m in the first half of 2017. Most of that came from Toyota, which installed £240m worth of new tooling in its plant near Derby. But of course that was after private "assurances" from the government. The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders reported a 13% fall in production in the year to June and new car registrations fell for the fourth month running in July.

Car bosses are also experiencing the loss of skilled workers back to Europe, with countries such as Poland and Romania, on the other hand, registering record low unemployment.

As for BMW's recent decision to make the electric Mini at Oxford from 2019, it's hardly



Toyota's assembly line, near Derby

an endorsement of Brexit. What nobody's revealing is how BMW has just successfully cheapened its British workforce by ending

their final salary pension scheme or how it routinely uses agency workers on assembly lines, to cut its wage bill! ☐

• A cause for even more economic chaos

As Brexit talks remain shrouded in mystery, one thing is clear: the British economy is being hit hard. The Bank of England has downgraded its production growth forecasts in the run-up to March 2019.

Since the crisis, business investment in productive activity has been stagnant and it will most likely remain so, if it doesn't actually

contract. Investors are less and less sure of the profitability of their investments. The falling pound and its consequence, rising inflation, are driving consumer spending further down.

Low spending and low investment cause a vicious cycle: if businesses do not invest, they cut jobs and wages. Consumer spending is thus reduced further. In turn, businesses cut down

investments further, since they claim there is no demand for their products. In fact, such a situation can seriously destabilise the economy - and, all the more so as the world financial crisis remains as threatening as ever. Far from offering the bright future promised by its supporters, Brexit can only aggravate the chronic chaos of the profit system.

Energy bills bite

Energy costs, among others, are going up. We already "lost control" of these basic utilities long ago when Thatcher privatised them in the 1980s.

So now a few big companies have the monopoly on fleecing us, in the name of "competition", but this fleece doesn't keep us warm. And British Gas just announced it is raising electricity prices by 12.5%, from 15 September. The rise will affect as many as

3.1m households.

So what happened to the capping of energy bills promised by Theresa May in her election manifesto? Well, it was one of the first promises to be broken! Centrica, British Gas owner, obviously can't be allowed to lose out on its rip-off profiteering! Yes, not only are profits huge (£639m for 6 months to June), but the Centrica boss, aptly-named Mr Conn, gets £4.15m, after a 40% rise last year!

We, consumers are told to "switch" suppliers, to keep our bills down. Except that all the energy giants play the same game. We would just be switching from the frying pan into the fire. Or more accurately, from the fridge to the freezer... ☐

Class Struggle n°109

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- Britain - Grenfell Tower: murder by neglect and profiteering
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• Rashan Charles: killed by the cops

Twenty-year old Rashan Charles died on 22 July after being chased by the police. He ran into a shop in Hackney - and a cop wrestled him to the floor. The police say they were trying to "remove" something from his mouth when he passed out; he died immediately afterwards in hospital. This "something" turned out to be the common pain relief medicine, paracetamol and caffeine. Which obviously didn't kill him. But we are told by the so-called "independent" police complaints body that no cause of death has been ascertained.

Obviously Rashan's death has sparked popular protests. It bears remarkable similarity to the death of 25-year old Edson Da Costa, who died just a few weeks before in Beckton, east London, as he was restrained by police. After his death, they said they found "drugs" in his throat which they claimed he was trying to swallow. But it's these stories told by the police which are hard to swallow. For them, young black men have always been a target. Not likely to change until this divided, racist, society is changed!

• Rubbing out Dubs

Since the Dubs amendment was passed last year in April, committing Britain to bring over (just!) some of the estimated 3,000 lone, stranded refugee children from Syria, only 200 have so far arrived. In fact there are 280 places in local authorities still vacant, but nothing has been done to fill them. This, while thousands of children wait in camps in Greece and elsewhere, getting into the hands of unscrupulous and even homicidal so-called "people traffickers".

Immigration minister, Brandon Lewis, is certainly dragging his feet. But when criticised for this, he explained he was soon off to Greece to offer "invitations" to the children - and after all, said he, wasn't the British government already ever-so-generously offering to take "20,000 refugees from outside Europe... by 2020"! So let's just recall: Turkey has 2.9m refugees, Lebanon 1m, Iraq 241,000, Egypt 122,000, Jordan 660,000... and Greece, Europe's poorest nation, in the middle of a deep crisis, has 63,000. But the 5th richest country in the world can't even hurry up and help a few hundred.

King's Cross railway station (London)**Train robbers**

The biggest rail fare rise in 5 years has just been announced! This will kick in from next January. The reason for this is that these yearly fare increases are linked by the government to the July Retail Price Inflation (RPI) measure, which was up by 3.6%! (Yes, when we pay an increase they use RPI - when they pay it, they use the 1% lower CPI!).

Of course the government could and should cut rail fares. Fares have risen by 32% in eight years! How can they justify fares which are among the highest in the

• Trains steaming into the future?

The government has just announced the scrapping of rail electrification projects. So much for its modern railway!

Today, less than half of the British rail network is electrified and the last big project (before the current one on Southern) was the electrification of the East Coast mainline in the 1980s. It never went further than Glasgow. And even today, East Coast trains

world?

And of course while the government piously claims it is reducing subsidies to the train companies, which the public pay for, it refuses to stop the companies from forcing us to make up for this loss, through their fare increases.

On top of this, trains are crowded and unreliable. By cutting guards' jobs and skimping on maintenance and renewals the profiteering train operators are setting the scene for future train disasters. In other words, the cost is not only to

which go to Inverness or Aberdeen are the old diesel, slam-door trains!

A Department of Transport document published way back in 2009, talked of bringing "the railway network into the 21st Century". And it talked of projects meant to cover the South West, Wales and the North for electrification. The list of arguments in favour of electrification, in the government's



rail users' and railworkers' pockets, but potentially to our lives. Isn't it time to stop private sharks from riding the gravy train? We need a safe and efficient transport system, owned and controlled by those who use it.

own words, spoke for itself: less pollution, more reliability, faster trains, easier to maintain and cheaper in the long term to run, etc.

But not any more. The Victorian railway will remain in all its "glory"! After all, it's profits first, and since we have no choice but to take these ancient trains at extortionate fares, we can't even vote with our feet.

• We blame them and their po-lie-ticians

Imagine! The government (via its delayed and "rewritten" Gibb Report), says Southern Rail's cancellations, staff shortages, lack of drivers, management failure, planning failure, etc., for the past 700+ days (ever since GTR got the franchise!) are all due to a mere 55 days of strike action by a small and shrinking number of guards and an overtime ban plus 3 strike days by drivers in December - the only time the whole service was successfully

halted! BTW, guards were no longer even safety critical for the last 8 months, because their contract was forcibly changed last October... [Workers' Platform King's Cross 19/07/17]

• Off to the knackers' yard, with them!

Well, maybe we should be pleased that we workers are blamed? If it were true, it'd mean isolated strikes limited to just 1 section of the workforce are much more effective than we thought! But of course this transparent blame game is just the best that a degenerate, lying bunch of

politicians can come up with! They and their system really need to be replaced urgently. [Workers' Platform King's Cross 19/07/17]

• By the many not the few!

So the strikes and OT bans on Southern continue. And yes, the struggle against DOO must be won! But when are we all going to be out fighting it alongside our fellow workers? Come on! The collective action of the many is long overdue! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 19/07/17]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• We're confused**

We're not sure what the union officials are doing re RM's pension proposal. They say they reject it and seem to say we should prepare for a strike ballot, but at the same time we read on the other side of their Bulletin#7 that they are "urging RM to reconvene meaningful talks on pensions"! So what is it? Talks or strike? We know what it should be! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 19/07/17]

• What "mutual" interest?

The CWU also speaks of these talks taking place in "keeping with our mutual interest agreement" as they call it, as if the bosses who exploit us for the sake of making profit for their big company shareholders could ever have the same interests as we have! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 19/07/17]

• It's called "Unite"- where's the unity?

Besides, we hear that CMA-Unite is actually balloting its 6,000 managers over this pension offer. While we don't feel in solidarity with managers over anything else, the blatant theft of our pensions by RM does bring us together and surely we should actually be organising our strategy to fight the robbers, together? How come this separate ballot is even happening? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 19/07/17]

• Re-sign resigned

It was so predictable that something would snap after all the Distribution driving job cuts. And it did after the re-sign... because all the cut SA had just been incorporated into the new runs, which made them nigh impossible to do in the time! Managers had to try to undo their



cock-up. But things can only improve if they reverse ALL their cuts. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 19/07/17]

• MP processing to go

The selling off of HGV/van stopping space, coming with the London Mayor's "crack down" on pollution and a new "London lorry standard" looks ominous, making the downgrading of MP to a DO a real possibility. That said, very little RM decides ever actually happens... International sorting was supposed to disappear 15 years ago! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 19/07/17]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

• Ford's permanent mess for temps!

We think the way Ford treats temps is disgusting! What's more HR has made a complete mess. They were supposed to be hiring after the holiday shutdown, but now they haven't even extended the current contracts on time so some people were told they may get less shutdown pay or none at all! And Ford had the cheek to suggest they work a week during shutdown, so that they have "some" money! What a farce! NO, Ford should pay everyone their full shutdown money and if Ford finds itself short (ha ha) - then Ford, not us, can go borrow! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 17/07/17]

• Enough is enough

Yeah we guess it would be too much to expect the JWC union officials to

intervene or even show some interest. They probably just don't care. Take the crap going down on Panther engine line: we very nearly had another steward resign due to complete lack of support from full-time union guys. (Not to mention the bad vibes from the Vice Squad). It seems the Convenor/JWC officials don't give a monkeys; they haven't bothered to set foot down here even once. Yet serious issues need dealing with. Well maybe we should go see them if they won't come and see us. All together. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 17/07/17]

• What's the plan?

So what are we planning to do in order to fight Ford to get rid of the 2 tier pay system? (We guess it's useless to ask the "Con-Venor"). But it's absolutely ridiculous that you have to be a Grade 4 Group Leader on tier 2 to earn the same as a Grade 2 Operator on tier 1! (And



hasn't Ford US scrapped 2 tier?). Surely equal pay for equal work is part of any Trade Union's core principles? Ironically, it's the introduction of a 2 tier workforce that's the core reason for Unite's dispute with British Airways? But not at Ford? Hypocrites.

PS: BA's mixed fleet cabin crew are on strike for 16 days (from 1 July) because of their poverty pay (£16,000pa) but why has Unite not organised for all other - higher paid - cabin crew to strike too? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 17/07/17]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

• The question of leadership... again...

A substantial majority voted to accept BMW's "reshaped" closure proposal for the final salary pension scheme. There were 2,851 in favour, 511 against and a further 385 abstained or spoilt their ballot.

We are a bit surprised at the result, given how angry we felt about this theft of our pensions by the richest car company in Europe. But of course, after the way the union leaders behaved, it wasn't possible to trust them to lead a proper fight back. After cancelling the 18 May strike day they didn't call any others. And then when BMW said it'd impose the abolition of our scheme ,without even the miserly compensation it had previously offered, if we had

another strike, the union leaders just lost their tongues and their bottle. So this result was also a vote of no confidence in their leadership. [BMW Oxford mini plant 19/07/17]

• Making the best of a bad deal

Now pension scheme members are meant to choose between a complicated range of choices (high, medium, low risk etc) for the defined contribution scheme we are being put into. BMW has had the cheek to come up with "financial advice"... at a fee of £150! It's incredible. This time we really do expect Unite to come forward with the union's financial experts - we'd trust them a bit more (in this case!) than BMW's! No way should we have this insult from BMW, added to injury!



• It's all about exploitation

In May we heard that the new E-Mini would be built at Born, Holland. Now BMW has decided to build it in Cowley, above Born, Regensburg and Leipzig. Initially, Brexit was given as the main reason why Oxford bosses couldn't expect the investment. But it's clear why they now want to go ahead here: it's all about relative labour costs... And it's nothing to be pleased about.

• The Taylor Review – another turn of the screw

Last year, Theresa May announced a review of the rights of workers who are employed in the so-called "gig economy". This sector comprises around 5 million workers on self-employed and part-time contracts, working for companies like Uber and Deliveroo. As such they've been denied basic rights like paid holidays, sick leave and pensions - or any form of guaranteed income, for that matter. May claimed that her aim was to ensure that employment regulation and practices keep pace with the "changing world of work."

So what has the Taylor review recommended? After calling for "dignity at work", it proposes a new category of workers called "dependent contractors." They will receive paid leave and sick pay, but

nowhere does the report even suggest that they should be entitled to regular workers' rights, nor even the minimum wage! Instead, the review states that businesses must prove that this new category of workers should, theoretically, be able to earn the national minimum wage or even a little more. Never mind that this "theory" could only become a practical reality if these workers work themselves to the bone! Far from restoring dignity and rights, this review is just an instruction manual for how the bosses can turn the screw even further on these workers - within the "law"!

• A fair dismissal, for once!

The Supreme Court has made a surprise ruling - that it was unlawful for the government to bring in fees for Employment Tribunals! The court ruled that the imposition of such fees had "prevented access to

justice". In fact workers had been expected to pay up to £1,200 to take their employers to Tribunal and another extortionate £1,600 to appeal against a decision. So the Court has judged these fees to be illegal and has ordered the government to refund workers who paid them. But what about all the workers who were discouraged from filing cases at all, because of the cost? The introduction of these fees in July 2013, resulted in an overall 79% drop in cases against employers, including a 73% drop in claims for unfair dismissal!

In other words, the employment tribunal - which was meant to provide recourse for workers against ill-treatment by bosses - itself became another barrier for them. At least now things are back to how they were before: a justice system weighted against workers, yes, but at least not closed to them.

NHS

How can this be? Apparently the NHS was judged the "best, safest and most affordable" healthcare system out of 11 countries, by the "Commonwealth Fund" - a "health thinktank" whatever that may be - and for the 2nd time running! The US came last, but Britain also beat Australia, Holland, Norway, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, Germany, Canada and France.

So obviously the score was heavily

• **Hunt refusing treatment**

As if all of the Home office's "mistakes" were not enough, people from abroad are going to be asked to pay "up front" for non-urgent NHS treatment "by the end of this year". This doesn't apply to EU workers nor students and workers on visas from outside the EU. The former have reciprocal rights under the EU Health Insurance Scheme and the latter already have to pay an "Immigration Health Surcharge" at the time of visa

• **Barts cleaners' strike: an issue for the whole NHS**

Up to 1,000 cleaners, porters, caterers and security guards at four of St Barts Trust hospitals have taken strike action on 3 occasions in the past two months. A first strike lasted 3 days, the second a week and the most recent lasted 14 days. These workers are employed by Serco, one of the world's biggest subcontractors, which specializes in cutting costs.

Rejecting the National Living Wage as inadequate, the workers demand a 30p/hr wage increase; an end to proposed job cuts at Whipps Cross hospital which target porters, and a cut in their workloads. They're also demanding that serious hygiene issues in hospitals are addressed.

These workers have shown that they won't tolerate poor conditions. And joining up with other ancillary workers across

How to make figures lie

weighted by one criterion - low expenditure per head - since the US and France have the highest and Britain spends the 4th smallest amount! It certainly couldn't have been quality of care! Britain apparently delivered the safest care, was best at "care processes", provided the most affordable care and offered the most "equity".

Yes, it all depends what you are looking at - and who looks. A stark

contrast is provided by the NHS itself which reports that 30% of its patients on oxygen die, compared with 18% in Spain and 10% in France - due directly to staff and equipment shortages. What is more, British A&E departments are short of 2,200 specialists in emergency medicine. And that's on top of the on-going haemorrhage of staff thanks to Brexit. ☐

application. Never fear though, this is going up too - from £150/yr for international students and £200/yr for workers, to an outrageous £450/yr and £600/yr respectively!

Health Secretary Hunt is boasting he'll "clamp down on health tourism", as if Britain's deteriorated NHS is a magnet for the world's sick! In fact the cost of caring for foreign visitors accounts for just 0.3% of the NHS budget. Hunt

claims he can get £500m by ensuring that no "foreigner" can use the NHS unless they pay. Already it's reported that patients have been refused treatment because they couldn't show a utility bill or passport - not something many British citizens can do! But never let it be said that this government missed a chance to fuel xenophobia.

hospitals strengthens their cause. But what about the nurses, doctors and other staff, who face similar conditions right

across the country? Surely, the Barts workers' cause is a cause that all workers across the NHS could fight for?



The fatal consequences of cuts

According to a study just published by Professor Michael Marmot, an epidemiologist attached to University College London, austerity has seriously damaged our health and cut our life expectancy.

Ever since 1919, life expectancy has been going up year on year. At that time, men lived for an average of 52.5 years and women for 56.1 years. By

2010 this had risen to 78.7 for women and 82.6 for men.

But, whereas, over the 5 years up to 2010, life expectancy had increased by 14 months for men and 19 months for women, over the 5 years after 2010, these figures dropped to a 6-month increase for women and 11 months for men - meaning that under Cameron's austerity policy, the rate of improvement was almost halved for men, and more than halved for women.

While the Department of Health played down these findings, it is clear to those living in the real world of British healthcare that this report reflects the true situation. And of course, it isn't equally bad for everyone: for the poor, worse jobs, later retirement, lower wages and poor diets are leading to a lower life expectancy than for the rich. But one factor above others, is the increasingly inadequate care available for the elderly.

In addition to this monthly paper, we publish fortnightly bulletins in several large workplaces in the South East, a quarterly journal, "Class Struggle" and the "Internationalist Communist Forums" - a series of pamphlets on topical issues.

If you wish to find out more about our ideas, activities and publications, contact the Workers' Fight activist who sold you this issue of our paper, or write to us either by e-mail, at contact@w-fight.org, or by postal mail at:

BM Workers' Fight - LONDON WC1N 3XX.