

WORKERS' fight

No 92 - April 2018

price 30p

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ISSN 2040-400X

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

NHS, social care, pensions, benefits, THE CAPITALIST CLASS MUST PAY!

Winter may be over by now, but the NHS "winter crisis" isn't: the NHS is in *chronic* crisis.

No-one knows the real cost in lives of this "winter crisis". But damning figures are emerging concerning the thousands of procedures cancelled by hospitals because they couldn't cope.

Ministers had pledged that cancer operations and time-critical procedures would be protected. But they were not: hundreds of cancer-related procedures have been cancelled.

Now the government is boasting that *"the proportion of cancer patients fast-tracked for treatment within 62 days was the highest this January than for the past three years."* 62 days? How dare they? As if this wasn't long enough for many patients to become incurable - or to die! But what do these politicians care?

May's "long-term" NHS fudge

This time, May can't really blame the NHS crisis on Russia, the EU or any other of her usual scapegoats! She had to be seen to do something, rather than remaining in complete denial of the NHS predicament. Hence her pledge to deliver *"the first ever long-term funding plan for the NHS"*.

But will there be an immediate stop to her government's harassment policy against EU and other foreign workers, which is pushing so many of them to leave an already understaffed NHS? Will there be a massive recruitment programme of doctors and nurses - to end the crazy conditions in which NHS staff have to operate? Will the countless number of wards - and hospitals - which have been closed over the past years be re-opened?

Above all, will the massive diversion of NHS funding into the coffers of



private sharks be ended? Because this is the real gangrene which is eating up NHS resources today. The parasitic existence of the pharmaceutical giants on the NHS was already bad enough. But now, every possible source of profits is being hacked out of the NHS by a growing maze of private companies - whether it be scans, tests or common surgical procedures - to line shareholders' pockets at an exorbitant price.

But May did not mention any of this. It was just an electoral fudge, designed to soften the likely rout of her party in the coming local elections!

Capitalism is unaffordable

Social provision is in crisis. Social care has collapsed: having milked the system dry, private providers no longer think it's profitable enough and they're dumping patients. Instead of helping the poorest, the benefit system is a channel for massive subsidies to greedy landlords, while Universal Credit will force more into poverty - including the growing millions of low-paid being

forced into irregular self-employment.

As to pensions, they are cut as companies cut contributions with the government's help. So, from April 6, workers' contributions to self-enrolment pensions will increase 3-fold, but their employers' share will only double!

Social provisions allow the capitalists to pay low wages. But this is no longer enough for them. They want to profit from social budgets, while cutting their contributions. This is why social provision is in crisis.

May's Health Secretary dared to claim that a long-term NHS plan will be "unaffordable" unless it is paid by the working class, through a special tax.

But May didn't find it "unaffordable" to cut corporation tax by another 1% last year and 2% in 2020!

Yet, it is the parasitism of the capitalist class which is "unaffordable". Because it is destroying all the social provisions on which the working class majority depends. And this is why the working class needs to destroy capitalism before it gets destroyed by it! ☐

Brexit watch

It's just 12 months to Brexit - well, plus or minus! Because at least 21 months of "transition" can be added after break-up day, 29 March 2019, and maybe more! May has conceded this herself, even if some Brexiters don't like it, since for them, Brexit won't yet mean Brexit as a result. But in fact all this transitional period does is move the "cliff edge" further away and give business more time to pack their backs before leaving Britain...

So what is "The Deal", as May calls it, so far? The draft withdrawal treaty outlined last December is elaborated over 120 pages, of which three-quarters are now agreed. These cover a financial settlement of £40bn, citizens' rights and the terms of the 21-month transition. But lots of issues remain and some are

- **More jobs at risk...**

Despite reports that after all, the forecast of City jobs lost due to Brexit was a gross over-estimation, some are already gone: Swiss bank, UBS, relocated to Frankfurt, Euroclear to Brussels and Unilever is moving its HQ to Holland. It's reported that 1 in 7 EU companies with British suppliers have already moved part or all of their supply chain out of Britain to avoid future tariffs.

Car bosses are all rethinking investment plans (PSA is already cutting 650 Astra jobs at Ellesmere Port). BMW's electric Mini and an electric Jaguar are unlikely to be built in Britain: *"Uncertainty is really challenging us very much and not only us, it's for the complete industry. You hardly see inward investment any more."* said a spokesperson for Tata, Jaguar's owner.

Coca Cola just announced it was closing its Northampton factory with 300 job losses. And now the EU Galileo GPS system, where 3 British subsidiaries (QinetiQ, CGI, SSTL) participate is threatened by Brexit, and Airbus may shift its

New "deal": Brexit will just take longer...

impossible to settle. For instance: how can Britain have a closed border with Europe and an open one with Ireland? And what will a "free trade deal" with the EU entail? These are the "big questions". Which is why negotiations have been given

another two years to grind on. But one question can be settled right away and that is the question of who is to pay the huge bill for all of this bureaucratic politicking? Because the working class certainly will not pick up the tab! □

part in this work to France threatening 3,600 jobs.

All these companies may well be rats leaving a sinking ship, but it's workers who will be left high and dry.

- **Lack of shoppers made them drop**

The pound's fall against the euro and the dollar have made all imports expensive. And workers - with no proper pay rises - cannot shop like they used to. So retailers are going bust. The list gets longer every day. Already in administration are furniture retailer MultiYork, bedmaker Warren Evans, Toys R US, and Maplin. There are multiple store closures at Carpetright, New Look, B&Q and Moss Bros. House of Fraser is looking for a buyer. John Lewis has seen a 15% fall in sales.

Of course the switch to online buying is blamed for this, rather than a looming Brexit. But nobody can argue that the cost of sourcing goods hasn't gone up - especially since so little is actually "made in Britain". Rather than investing in long-term projects that would take

time to yield a profit, British capitalists prefer to use their ill-gotten gains to play Bingo on the financial markets. Fuelled by the on-going economic crisis and the implications of Brexit, this situation is unlikely to improve. The list of closures can only get longer.

- **The air turned blue!**

It's a "national humiliation"! The contract for the printing of the post-Brexit blue British passport has been awarded to a French-Dutch firm, Gemalto, based in France, to the tune of £490m... But Home Secretary Amber Rudd has reassured those who are turning the air blue in indignation that it will ultimately save the government £120m and that is, surely, what counts! According to MP John Spellar, who railed against this in the Commons, it was just such outsourcing which drove the Brexit vote in the first place! But at least now the government can go back to the blue and gold "true blue British colour" after all these years of having the humiliation of a burgundy EU passport forced upon it, even if the passport will now really be French...

20 years since the Good Friday Agreement: Irish reunification is overdue!

The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 did not solve the "Irish Question" for the people of Northern Ireland, even if it laid the Troubles to rest. Twenty years later, the devolved government of Stormont, meant to allow power-sharing between the main protagonists, Republicans and Unionists, has been suspended for over a year: there is no "government". Meanwhile, society in the North remains segregated along political and religious lines: just 5.8% of primary school children go to integrated schools. This is

hardly a resolved situation. But never mind, the Tories under May decided, in order to retain power in Westminster and negotiate Brexit, to pay the far-right, corrupt, Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party £1bn to support them with their votes in the Commons, thus stoking even greater tension.

So the "vexed" issue of the Irish border after Brexit is much more vexed. After all, since 1998, this border had to all intents and purposes, vanished, so that the Good Friday provisions which also allowed all Northern Irish to become Irish/EU dual nationals and promised a referendum on reunification in the future, became virtually irrelevant. But

not any more.

Retaining the free movement of goods and people between North and South means staying in the EU single market and customs union. If that is not on the Brexit table, and so far it isn't, then surely the only option has to be that Northern Ireland leaves the "United Kingdom", once and for all? And since hard-line Unionists are probably already a minority in the North, a referendum for a united Ireland could well win. But with or without a referendum, a united Ireland is the only solution to this "vexed Brexit question".

May's Cold War

Given May's troubles over Brexit, she is pleased to have found a diversion: the big bad Russian wolf, against which she can rally her squabbling MPs. At least they can all agree that Putin is a bad guy.

Indeed, her conciliatory attitude over trade during recent Brexit negotiations upset Tory hardliners. So, nothing like a bit of old-style Cold War rhetoric to re-unite the Tory ranks behind her. A "strong" Mrs May is now pulling not only her party's dissenters behind her, but has picked up a few of Labour's as well. What's more, a host of EU leaders are

• But it's phony...

May's re-heated Cold War against Russia, is based on the accusation that Putin's state poisoned a former spy and his daughter in Salisbury. But there is no evidence for this whatsoever. We are told the nerve-agent used was 'Novichok', and thus comes from Russia. Never mind that the British state has samples of all kinds of chemical weapons including all known nerve agents (which could be produced in any decent laboratory), in its Porton Down facility just 8 miles down the road from Salisbury.

• The Russian hackers were British Brexiteers...

For all the noise over Russian intrigues, it turned out that darker tales were to emerge, closer to home. The scandal around Cambridge Analytica shed light on how politicians attempt to shape "public opinion" in so-called democracies today.

This company is a subsidiary of the very British SCL Group, a self-professed specialist in electoral manipulation and psychological warfare, which boasts of having conducted "behaviour change programs" in as many as 60 countries.



Vietnam - this is what the real Cold War was about

also following her "lead". Even if it amounts to nothing significant,

May also boasts of having presented her "allies" with an "intelligence dossier" which is so "convincing" that they followed her example and rushed to expel Russian diplomats. Or did they? In fact, out of the 100 expulsions, 83 were carried out by Trump and May, while the remaining 21 "allies" in May's grand "coalition" only expelled 17 - meaning that quite a few nodded, but did nothing!

Significantly, while these symbolic expulsions are given such a

hot air is what the politicians care about the most. □

high profile in the media, there is no question of expelling the billions of pounds invested by Putin's oligarch friends in the City or in London's real estate, nor the huge profits that BP extracts from Russia's oil resources!

In the past month, everything from the hysteria of the anti-Russian headlines to May's and Johnson's denunciations of Putin's "sinister plot" against Britain, recalls the Cold War - but with a major difference: May's Cold War is just a pathetic fudge to cover her own back.

Cambridge Analytica itself was founded by a bunch of old Etonians and partly funded by Robert Mercer, a US hedge fund billionaire and notorious supporter of right-wing causes. And it is associated with Steve Bannon, a spokesman of the US alt-right and former Trump aid, who was, for a while, vice-president of its US subsidiary.

Through working with researchers and data scientists, Cambridge Analytica undertook large-scale manipulation of public opinion through social media

during the last US presidential election (in support of Trump), but also, apparently, during the Brexit referendum (for the Leave camp). So, as it turns out, the "Russian election hackers", were... British companies, after all!

In any case, this is how the world of politics looks, behind the scenes. The case of Cambridge Analytica, and we can bet it's not the only one, goes to show how dark the underbelly of political campaigning is - all in the name of "democracy", of course!

So, what was the Cold War?

The "real" Cold War began after WW2, when the United States took on the role "policeman of the world", in the words of President Truman. After the evident military strength demonstrated by the USSR during WWII, a "hot" war to save the world from the so-called "Communist threat" was out of the question. So all other means were deployed, in what became known as the "Cold War".

By the same token, the imperialist countries used this alleged threat to maintain a military mobilisation against any potential challenge to their domination, under the cover of NATO. Especially

as they were immediately confronted with a wave of nationalist uprisings in the colonised countries, which might have sought help from the Soviet Union - and indeed some did.

For four long decades, through full-scale wars in Korea and in Vietnam, and many direct or proxy military interventions in Latin America and Africa, the imperialist powers used the same pretext to subjugate and divide the former colonial peoples, in order to incorporate them into their world order.

The bogeyman of communism became a justification for supporting oppressive regimes in poor countries and repressing the working class movement

in many western countries. A notorious example was the McCarthyite purge in the US itself. The world was thus divided into the Soviet-dominated Eastern Bloc and the anti-communist West. And all kinds of methods from the most ludicrous propaganda, economic pressure, international sanctions, covert operations and assassinations, were used to re-enforce the so-called Iron Curtain drawn around a whole region. After all, the Soviet Union, despite its degeneracy, was a workers' state and up until its implosion in 1991, a reminder that there is an alternative to capitalism.

Trade war

On the one hand, the Westminster Brexiters brag about their future "free trade" deals, while, on the other, they insist on reinforcing Britain's borders as a "protection" against Europe. There is logic in this madness: "free trade" and "protectionism" are really the two faces of one world market dominated by cut-throat capitalist competition.

Indeed, the "free traders" represent the richest powers' "freedom" to impose their goods on everyone else, because they can afford to bribe - or force - their way into any market. While the same rich powers also exercise their "freedom" to impose "protectionist" barriers on foreign competitors who might upset their national companies.

Above all, however, what these

Behind their trade war, the class war!

"free-traders" and "protectionists" have in common, is their policy of squeezing as much value out of the working class as possible - because this is what capitalist competition requires.

So, David Davis is lying through his teeth by claiming that Brexit won't mean a "Mad Max race to the bottom". Hasn't his party presided over a race to the bottom in jobs and conditions, over the past eight years of crisis? And why would anyone believe that, after Brexit, these champions of capitalist competition won't intensify this race to the bottom, in the name of British competitiveness?

Ultimately, behind the capitalist market jungle and its trade war, capitalism feeds on the exploitation of the working class - i.e. on the class war they permanently wage against workers. As



to the working class, it has no stake in their trade war - there's only one war it has to fight and that is its own class war, against the exploiters! ☐

• Steel war of words?

Last month, Trump introduced tariffs on steel and aluminium imported into the US. In response, the EU proposed to introduce tariffs on a host of American-made products and China also threatened retaliation.

Trump's announcement was hardly surprising, though. In the context of elections for a congressional district in Pennsylvania - home to many communities that relied on the steel industry - and in the run-up to the November mid-term elections, Trump is playing to his electorate, pretending to be delivering on his pledge to "put America first". But this was just showing off: later in the month, Trump quietly exempted Canada, Mexico and the EU, some of the country's largest steel importers.

Trump's tariffs may be just gesture politics for the time being. However, for China, a major exporter of steel which has not been exempted so far, this latest move is no joke. How long is it before a move like this could set-off a domino-effect like in the 1930s?

• Micro-chips and micro-nationalism

Trump's trade war rhetoric goes beyond steel - all the way to the microchip industry. Last month he intervened to block a takeover bid by Singapore-based company Broadcom for US microchip giant Qualcomm. The cross-party Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (Cfis) had already opposed the move, suggesting that Broadcom could harm Qualcomm's interests through "arrangements" with "foreign entities" - by which it was referring to Chinese investment in Broadcom. And this was probably what moved Trump to issue a presidential order against the takeover, under the pretext of protecting "national security".

This is not the first time this has happened. Both Trump and Obama have made presidential orders in the past, stopping Chinese takeovers of American semiconductor companies Aixtron and Lattice Semiconductors, just as Bush stopped the takeover of aeroplane parts company Mamco, but also of oil major Unocal. China may well be the world's largest economy in statistical terms, thanks to the size of its population, but it still carries little weight against the imperialist heavyweights!

• British or not, exploiters are just exploiters!

Much noise has been made about the attempt by Australian-based Melrose, an investment firm known for its predatory asset stripping practices, to buy ailing GKN, one of Britain's oldest defence and aerospace companies. Politicians of every stripe, from Tory Brexiters to many Labour MPs, lined up to oppose the threat that Melrose was meant to represent to Britain's "national interest".

In an atmosphere of growing Brexitmania, Unite leaders joined the anti-Melrose protest, arguing that stopping the takeover would protect "national security" as well as 6,000 GKN jobs from Melrose's asset-stripping. As if GKN's own "Project Boost" plan, which is aimed at increasing profit margins, wasn't threatening jobs and conditions too!

Eventually, GKN's shareholders had the final say and Melrose's takeover bid was agreed. As to the GKN workforce, no amount of flag waving could protect their jobs and conditions and they have nothing to regret. Ultimately, it's all a question of balance of forces: whether under Melrose or not, they will have to get GKN's owners to fear that cutting jobs will cost them more than keeping them - something that can only be achieved by collective action.

The cost of the Great Depression's trade war

Eight months after the 1929 Wall Street crash, the US government introduced the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, supposedly to protect US production and jobs. Import duties were increased on hundreds of goods, by an average 20%.

Canada retaliated by slapping tariffs on 30% of US imports. Britain revived its defunct "Imperial Preference", by imposing 20% to 33% import duties on most products imported from countries outside of its colonial sphere of influence. France followed in 1931, raising tariffs and introducing import quotas. The world became divided into five rival trade blocs, each led by one of the main imperialist powers - USA, Britain, France, Germany and Japan.

Of course, these protectionist measures were only designed to protect capitalist profits. But they also aggravated the world economic crisis. By increasing the price of goods, tariffs reduced consumption - thus creating a snowball effect which resulted in more plant closures and job cuts!

By the mid-1930s, the richest capitalist classes eventually got their respective states to bail them out, by means of massive publicly-funded rearmament programmes. The trade war mutated into an arms race and it was only a matter of time before it turned into outright warfare. In that sense, WW2 was the direct consequence of the 1929 crisis: ultimately, the capitalist system only managed to get out of the Great Depression and gain a new lease of life by paving the way for the most bloody, destructive world war in history. Today, when capitalism has reached an even more decrepit state, these are lessons that the working class can't afford to forget!

NHS - a potentially lethal policy

Since last October, NHS hospitals have been expected to first check patients' nationality before giving them free treatment. And if they can't prove entitlement they are either refused, or presented with a bill. This is what happened to a 63-year old man who had lived and worked in Britain for 44 years, paying his NI contributions his whole working life, but had never gotten round to applying for a British passport. After receiving treatment for prostate cancer at the Royal Marsden Hospital, he was presented with a bill for £54,000!

When his case was raised in parliament by Jeremy Corbyn, May promised to "look into" it, but then backtracked and refused to intervene, on the pretext it could mean that thousands of others, who have been forced to pay (despite paying National Insurance contributions) would have to be refunded. As a matter of fact, 57,000 people who have lived



and worked in this country for decades without taking British nationality (it costs over £1,000 to obtain!) while helping to fund the NHS or even while working for it themselves, could potentially find

themselves in the same position. The only answer is for free NHS treatment to continue to be available according to need, not ability to pay. No more passport checks! ☐

In our letter box

"This year is the 70th anniversary of the NHS which was supposed to ensure a 'cradle to grave' protection for workers. The children of the 1950's baby boomers grew up with the expectation that they would be free from the fear that their parents experienced during the 1930's, of not being able to afford medical care when needed. This expectation became a right and not a privilege. But no longer.

Significant cuts already began under Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan in 1978 - who told us that 'the party was over'. Then, Thatcher began dismantling the welfare state. As each brick was removed and another group made vulnerable, no resistance came from the Labour Party nor the trade unions.

This dismantling of the welfare state has terrible consequences. My wife was diagnosed with dementia three years ago and since then it has been a constant battle to access ever-shrinking resources. The local authority abandoned any pretence of providing quality social care. Now we are reliant upon private agencies who either charge exorbitant rates of up to £19.80/hour(!) or provide cheaper cover, but often by inadequately trained staff.

Thousands if not millions of people are in similar circumstances, enduring and feeling as if they are failing when it is not their failure but the failure of the system. In a world that is so wealthy, we should all have a right to be cared for "from cradle to grave". What I want is for all those like my wife to be cared for with dignity and for real support to be given to carers, so that they do not crack up themselves. But it seems that for this to happen it will take a revolution by us workers!"

• Pensions - a general fight back is needed

Last August, members of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) were told that all future pensions would be transferred to a defined contribution scheme. This comes after a 7-year process in which, from 2011, all active USS members were transferred in stages from a final salary scheme to a lesser CARE scheme (career average revalued salary scheme). And, now, it is this CARE scheme which is under threat - meaning that the pensions of all 190,000 active USS members will become entirely dependent on the stock market.

In response, this time, the University and College Union (UCU) called a strike ballot of its 40,000 members. Following an 88% vote for strike action, on a 58% turnout, the UCU embarked on a programme of 14 days of strike, spread out over 3 weeks. Eventually, on 12 March, the union and the bosses came up with a 3-year "transitional agreement". This proposal, however, only delayed the pension cut, stating that both parties would "explore risk sharing alternatives for the future from 2020". This was rejected by union members, and rightly so!

Since then, the UCU has announced another 5 strike days in April. But its leaders are still making no attempt to join ranks with other university employees, let alone the many more public and private sector workers who are facing similar cuts. And yet, if there is an issue which deserves to be raised - and fought for - on the scale of the whole of society, across sectional boundaries, it is that of decent pensions. After all, if there is (still) a universal welfare system paid by taxation, why shouldn't workers' pensions be a universal benefit - paid by the profits of companies which are the first beneficiaries of an educated workforce?

• Not a living wage!

Hammond's Spring Statement just continues to impose austerity. Despite the Tories' 2015 election promise that the so-called National Living Wage (NLW) would replace the then minimum wage of £6.50 and rise to £9 by 2020 for the over-25s, the NLW is only increasing by a few pence every year. This year, the current minimum of £7.50 is set to rise to a paltry £7.83. There's less than 2 years left to make this up to their £9 target, but already £9/hr isn't enough to live on!

As for the under-25s, they were never included in the NLW and remained under the old minimum wage, which is set to rise by infinitesimal amounts: from £7.05 to £7.38 for 21-24 year olds, from £5.60 to £5.90 for 18-21 year olds, £4.05 to £4.20 for under-18s and £3.50 to £3.70 for apprentices (of any age!) Altogether, since 2007, average real wages will have fallen by 5% for all workers and by 16% for the under-25s! Just goes to show what the promises of politicians are worth!



Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• A waste of time**

So, Panther guys were taken on a "trip" by Fords to the Dunton R&D plant last week. And what happened there? A talk by the EU boss about Ford's profit and losses! As if that changes anything for us. As far as we're concerned us workers have been losing out for years now. In any case, the trip for the sake of a 1-hour talk and a rush back to lunch with no real questions answered, just shows how lacking in imagination Ford is. The rest of the plant missed nothing except being annoyed by the sheep-herding treatment and being bored by Armstrong's hoo-hah..! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 21/3/18]

• Suggestion box?

It would seem as if Ford bosses are really "suffering" (from record profits?! They just keep talking to us about their market and Brexit uncertainties. Some foremen even asked our opinion on how to save £29 million! Haven't they learnt by now that their profits are our losses? Do they really expect us to tell them how to cut our own throats? Or are they trying to "prepare" us for another round of cuts? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 21/3/18]

• Missing workers

So, let's talk about "suffering"! There's an acute shortage of workers all over this plant. So much so that in some areas, we can't even take proper breaks! On Tiger, 16-hour shifts are again being worked. And for what "great purpose"? Just to produce those engines. On top of it all, the foremen dare to tell us that we're not producing fast enough. They'd do better to ask their bosses, "where are the missing workers?!" [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 21/3/18]

• Beast from the west!

Yes, and behind all the b-s about new models and diesel versus petrol (electric? Forget about it!) Ford is cutting jobs, despite the critical shortage of labour here in Dagenham! Dunton's VR programme is aiming to get rid of 250 jobs, including 170 hourly paid! But if it's all ONE FORD, this should mean taking on replacements for all 250 workers - if not in Dunton, in Dagenham? Surely! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 21/3/18]

• From Peter to Paul!

Yes "Nay-bore" could make all the current temps and some new ones,



permanent now. This was the deal when Puma mates left, so it should be now, if Dunton mates leave: one new permanent worker for every one who takes VR or EVR... Plus some! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 21/3/18]

• Enough is enough!

While G4S is in the news over the way it runs its government contracts and ends up mistreating asylum seekers, ordinary prisoners, etc., we see the way this company misbehaves right here in Dagenham! G4S bosses treat workers like slave labour! They expect them to work 60hr/week (without OT premiums), deny them clean water to drink, neglect maintenance of toilets and huts, send them to work at other offices without notice, etc... But no media scandal over that, of course! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 21/3/18]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• Gone already!**

To get us working faster BMW obviously speeds up the track. But by recent calculations it's going 4.5% faster than it's meant to. Jobs are routinely run at up to 104% of process, and more. Which means that BMW has already more than clawed back this year's 3.9% rise - not to mention what inflation's doing to it... [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini 14/3/18]

• No thanks!

BMW is imposing eight Saturday 7½ hr shifts per crew over the coming months. After these, we will be "invited" to stay on for another voluntary 3 hours or so for "housekeeping". On Saturday! Has management gone completely mad? Or do they think we have? [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini 14/3/18]

• Laughing all the way...

It's as obvious as it ever was, that working time account is a system that only works for BMW's bank balance. But with the speed-up that's now become routine across the plant, they're gaining extra work (and therefore profits) out of us, regardless of Saturday WTA. About 30 cars extra per shift, or 4 per hour, is equivalent to working more than 90 minutes extra every day.

Or more than an entire extra shift, with no breaks, every week! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini 28/3/18]

• Make your mind up!

Gi is giving a formal warning to anyone who takes two days off sick in the space of a year with a 13-week recovery period. But hang on, aren't they also saying we're on zero-hours contracts? They (and behind them, BMW) can't have it both ways! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini 28/3/18]

• Indulged too long

In some areas management is telling us we mustn't press the alarm button to request relief between breaks. Four cars over-schedule every hour and the bloodsuckers still want more! If we need relief, we can't wait for it! And if it doesn't come quick enough, we will just have to press the button which stops the line. End of story! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini 28/3/18]

• The Brexit game

Some say that the current £25m BMW investment in refurbishment at Swindon means that BMW is "blowing cold" on expanding Cowley and perhaps on the whole British operation. But why would BMW make any big decisions on its British operations until it has guarantees



over its Brexit demands? It's the same with all the car bosses. They want their cars, engines, etc., which rely for up to 60% of content on parts from abroad, to remain tariff-free. In other words they want to be a special case, on top of getting the sweeteners they have already been promised by Mrs May... [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini 28/3/18]

• Levelling it up

Autoscan has even lower minimum pay rates than Rudolph and Hellmann logistics! And pay has hardly risen for years, despite jobs like bodywrapping being as strenuous as any in the factory. How can mates be expected to afford to live on those wages, let alone pay rent in Oxford or commute? It is in all our interests, whichever cowboy or shark employs us, to fight for a proper wage rise - and in fact equal pay for all! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford Mini 28/3/18]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

A union-sponsored dirty deal

After almost 2 years of horse-trading, on 1 February, Royal Mail and the CWU announced a "landmark agreement" covering pensions, pay, working conditions and the union-company legal framework. The union leadership then proceeded to sell this deal to workers via a campaign of meetings, Facebook, Twitter, the lot! They said voting "yes" was "choosing the right side". A "no" vote was not an option. They claimed this was the best and only deal and that was that. They didn't just want a "yes" vote, they wanted a huge turnout to prove they really represented (and thus controlled) us. But though they got a

90.1% vote for the deal, the turnout was only 55.1% - and a good 6,167 of us said no.

So what's this "fantastic" deal then? Well, RM is replacing the current part defined benefit, part career average pension, with a cheaper "Collective Defined Contribution" scheme in which the whole workforce will be enrolled, provided necessary changes to pension legislation can be made. While this could improve pensions for newer workers currently in a simple DC scheme, the rest of us will have an up to 22% pension cut!

As for the rest, suffice it to say that there's a cut in real wages,



since the raise offered is 7% over 3 years, backdated only 6 months and radical changes in working practices, for the worse, will be made, many not yet spelt out as they'll be decided by joint union-management "collusion" at a later date. Then maybe a cut in the working week could be implemented. But first the bosses get a blank cheque. In other words this deal is a shameless con. But unfortunately, the fight against it will have to wait for another day.

• Cheers for the wage cut?

So much for the union officials' porkies: we repeat, the actual wage rise "agreed" is not 5%+2% + another several % from an eventual cut in hours. We had a "real" pay cut in 2016 (1.6%, RPI=2.61%!), so the 5% could be said to be stretched over 3 years! But even if it was 5% over 18 months, it still works out at below inflation (~3.2%?). RPI is 3.6% now and prices are unlikely to be falling in the near future! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 28/3/18]

• Scared to lose "partners"

For BT workers the CWU has agreed a hybrid pension scheme which preserves an element of defined benefits

(DB) (only 1/105th of up to £17,500 for each year's service), a lump sum, with the rest made up by a DC pot. So they also accepted BT's claim (like RM's) that it could no longer "afford" a DB scheme!

Yet BT's profits are £1.9bn and rising! RM's £272m! Are these companies which "can't afford" decent wages and pensions? Of course not. But they'd have had to be forced to pay up, and that's the fight that the CWU leaders were and are afraid of facing... claiming, on the contrary, that it's us workers who aren't prepared to "lose a penny"... [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 28/3/18]

• "Preserving" protections?!

Another thing to remember: these new pension schemes are no longer part of

the government's Pension Protection Fund, saving RM money in contributions, and leaving us high and dry if RM decides to go into liquidation one day...

Is that what they mean by securing the "Four Pillars of Security"? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 28/3/18]

• Big Brother's watching!

One future RM/CWU "joint sign-off" as part of this Agreement is the roll-out of a system to track... us, not to track mail! RM's already run a trial in Greenford, PRDC and a couple of DOs using PDAs to record every minute worked by our mates. To make sure we work our hours and go home on time? Of course not! The bosses are after "work efficiencies" and we all know what that means! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 28/3/18]

King's Cross railway station (London)

• Make the thieves pay!

We're almost in April and there's still no sign of the back pay owed to those of us who got robbed by VTEC last year, through their opt-out trick. Like the old Stagecoach highway robbers, they said: choose between having your sick pay cut or having your wages cut. As if this was a choice! But they wanted to divert our attention away from the strike ballot which was going on at the time! This money has been in VTEC's pockets for far too long already. They must pay up and then ensure we are all on the same rate for the same job going forward! [Workers' Platform King's X 28/3/18]

• We want a real rise!

Of course, the so-called-pay rise, due now, is pathetic and doesn't even keep up with inflation!! So not only do we need to

fight all together to get the money back for those deprived of it, but also to get a real pay rise... with interest.[Workers' Platform King's X 28/3/18]

• Drivers +++?

What's this? GN drivers are being told that if the cameras on the new self-despatch trains are too fogged up, we should get out of the cabs and go and wipe them?? So now we have to be train drivers, despatchers, guards and cleaners all in one?! No. We need to keep the despatchers... and get guards back on our trains... and what about more cleaners, too?! [Workers' Platform King's X 28/3/18]

• This has got to be sorted!

Does anyone know the H&S recommendations for night work? Apparently not the VTEC bosses. It's supposed to be



limited to 2 or 3 consecutive days and no longer than 8 hrs, among other things. But us KX drivers have to work up to 5 consecutive nights with shifts of almost 10hrs! No wonder there are problems with fatigue! In fact, most drivers' incidents happen on nights. Recently, there have been 2 SPADs (signals passed at danger) within 9 months, both on nights! We need more of us, shorter nights and longer rest. Full stop. [Workers' Platform King's X 28/3/18]

France

Strikes and protests against the government's offensive

On Thursday 22nd March, nearly half-a-million public sector workers took to the streets across the country, against president Macron's latest threats. There were strikes in many public sector organisations, including in the state railway company, SNCF.

Everyone knew that Macron was planning an offensive, but its scale took many by surprise. The first stage, in early February, targeted 5.7m state employees in central and local government, social care, hospitals and education. It involved 150,000 "voluntary" job cuts, a sharp increase in the use of casual workers and drastic cuts in conditions (e.g. performance-related pay and provisions for compulsory "economic" redundancies).

The second stage of this offensive, on 26th February, was aimed at the 150,000 railway workers. In addition to 5,000 job cuts, new recruits would no longer be covered by present collective agreements. They would work longer hours and retire later on reduced pensions, thereby creating a two-tier workforce. From 2019, private shareholders would be offered a stake



in SNCF, private train operators would be invited to "compete" for the most profitable sections of SNCF's state-funded network and thousands of miles of rural lines would be replaced with coaches travelling by road.

This is a calculated provocation. Macron remembers 1995, when a right-wing government failed to cow public sector workers - thanks to powerful strikes and street protests, led by railway workers. This time, Macron is hoping to break the resistance of railway workers and then

go for the rest of the working class.

However, the 22nd March mobilisation showed that many workers were ready for a fight. In the railways, the size of the strike meetings on that day were unprecedented. Among the angry strikers, many had never taken action before and there were numerous calls for "another 1995". In short, workers were up in arms and wanted to respond in kind.

That's not what union leaders want, though. In the railways, they've come up with the most bizarre "battle plan": during the 3 months starting on April 3rd, they want workers to strike for the first two days in every 5-day period and then to resume work for three days. As if they wanted to show to Macron that they can switch militancy on and off at will, in the hope of being invited to some sort of negotiation.

But it may turn out that railway workers see things differently. Already, in some depots, mass meetings have voted to go on indefinite strike from April 3rd until the complete withdrawal of Macron's plans. The memory of 1995 together with the idea that all workers have a common stake in defeating Macron's offensive, may still prove stronger than the bureaucratic manoeuvres of the union leadership. □



Paris railway strikers' march
(photo S. D'Ignazio)

• Time to reverse years of austerity!

After 8 years of a public sector pay cap, NHS staff are being offered a 6.5% increase over three years. The unions have rightly pointed out that this below-inflation offer is a cut in real terms... but have gone on to recommend the deal! According to some estimates, nurses' pay has fallen 14% in real terms since 2010 (midwives are £6,000 worse off). Any pay rise should

at the very least compensate for this fall. What's worse, the current offer involves strings, such as giving up a day's holiday. Never mind that medical professionals regularly put in unpaid overtime to care for patients in an understaffed system.

Meanwhile, the teachers' unions are demanding an immediate 5% pay rise funded by the government, rather than

by resource-strapped schools and local councils. They are right. The government can find the money from the big companies and banks, which have been paying low taxes (if any) and getting state handouts for years. It's about time the last years of austerity were reversed and those who got richer off the back of the working class were made to pay back what they've stolen!

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

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

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