



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

Against the nationalist threat **THE NEED FOR A CLASS POLICY**

The rich countries' leaders marked the centenary of the end of WWI with great pomp and hypocritical tears over the fate of the 11 million soldiers who died on the killing fields of this war.

But not a word was said about the real cause of this butchery - the ruthless competition for markets and colonies between the richest rival capitalist classes. In 1914, protectionism, trade war, colonial expeditions and nationalist sabre rattling finally came to a head.

The world's working classes were ordered to forget about their class interests, in the name of "national unity", and to rally behind the national flag of their exploiters. They were thrown at each others throats and told to "give their lives for the fatherland". But as the French anti-war socialist Anatole France wrote, "they say we die for our fatherland, when in fact, we die for its industrialists and bankers"! This was what WWI was really about!

From WWI to... Brexit

Today, once again, in the midst of a deepening capitalist crisis, the bosses' politicians are striving to boost profits by means of an aggressive trade war - whether it is Trump's "America first" or May's Brexit - in which the working class has no stake whatsoever.

Once again, they use the worn out slogan of "national unity" to suppress the class struggle and rally the working class behind its exploiters and their profiteering.

Once again, they try to whip up fears, to pit worker against worker along national lines, in an attempt to undermine any resistance against the bosses' ruthless exploitation.

Such policies always come at a price. In a growing number of countries - from Hungary to Italy and



Brazil - they helped raving, anti-working class, far-right parties to come into office, permeating society with their sickening, xenophobic demagoguery which is used to justify a vicious turn of the screw against the working class.

In Britain, these far-right forces are the "hard-Brexiteers". They want Brexit to turn Britain into a tax haven and a pool of cheap labour for British capital. This is what their "national interest" means: the best possible environment for capitalist profits and, therefore, the most hostile environment for all workers, regardless of nationality.

For a clear class policy!

The "national interest" demagogues are enemies of the working class. Their nationalism and scape-goating of "foreigners" are a lethal poison for society.

Not only do they threaten workers' conditions, but they are also a potential threat for mankind. By exacerbating capitalist competition in today's crisis, they are bound to reproduce

the situation which already led to two world wars. The working class cannot allow this!

These nationalist bigots must be stopped. But they won't be stopped by politicians who have no other objective than to win a general election or a new referendum. As if voting could do anything to stop, let alone reverse, the degeneration of this capitalist system!

In 1917, the Russian workers chose another road. They overthrew the Czarist regime, but they also ensured that capitalist profiteering would no longer wreck society: their Soviets, directly elected in factories and working class districts, took over control of society at every level.

Today, against the poison of nationalism, but also against the dead ends championed by the likes of Corbyn, the working class needs a class policy - one aimed at taking over control of society, in order to bring capitalism and its lethal recklessness to an end, once and for all. □

Brexit budget

What was the point of Hammond drafting a Budget, while stating at the same time that he didn't know whether Brexit would allow him to implement it? Predictably, this was immediately denied by Downing Street. Of course, May won't ever admit to the fact that she's completely clueless as to the consequences of her Brexit saga! One thing this Budget was at least useful for, however, was to

• Universal attack on the poor

Even ministers have started to admit that Universal Credit has created hardship for thousands. With the roll-out still covering little more than 10% of the country, this hardship can only spread. True, it took a leak to the press to expose the fact that half of single parents and two thirds of couples with children would lose up to £2,400 a year. But the effects of delaying the first payment of the benefit by five weeks are well-known. When out-of-work claimants are transferred from other benefits onto UC, they are left with no money to start with. Hence Hammond's pledge to cut the delays to three weeks, by extending their entitlement to these benefits by another two weeks after they've submitted their claims.

Of course, the whole purpose of this bureaucratic nightmare for claimants was

• Schools: Hammond's extra bit of b...

The only mention of education in Hammond's pre-Brexit, Autumn Budget was an announcement of a one-off payment to schools totalling £400m: £10,000 per primary school "for the odd bits and pieces" and £50,000 per secondary school.

Given the £2bn cut in the education budget in the last three years alone, this

• Tax capital, not wages!

After the government's budget was revealed, the shadow chancellor John McDonnell created a fuss in the ranks of the Labour party by supporting the Tories' tax cuts. That said, 20 Labour MPs defied the party whips and voted against the tax cut package, rightly arguing that there was nothing in the budget for the poorest households. But of course, McDonnell's problem was to attract the votes of middle and higher earners, nothing else!

Despite the "rebellion" of these 20

• Universal Credit: Labour's U-turns

After the shambolic roll-out of Universal Credit exposed the extent of the cuts in benefits, Labour's shadow Chancellor John McDonnell said at the beginning of October, that UC was a "shambles" and that "it will have to go."

But what would the Labour party and McDonnell propose instead? That was anyone's guess... until the end of October, when the Labour party suddenly backtracked on its

show what May's recently heralded "end of austerity" really means - nothing but more of the same!

So, most of Hammond's much-vaunted £9.5bn headline cut in income tax over the next 5 years, will line the pockets of the better-offs. The 4 million taxpayers earning £50,000/yr and over, will gain six times as much on average than 22 million basic rate taxpayers, while the

remaining 4 million who earn too little to pay any tax will gain nothing at all! If this is not welfare for the rich, what is?

As to the poorest, they're supposed to be grateful to Hammond for allocating an additional £1bn towards Universal Credit over the next 5 years - which certainly won't make up for Osborne's criminal £12bn welfare cuts. Another £1bn-worth of cynicism! □



always to drive more of them into any non-job or out of the welfare system altogether, with or without a job. But rollout areas so far have seen sharp rises in destitution, indebtedness, rent arrears, evictions and referrals to food banks,

while the reasons for benefit sanctions get ever more petty. No wonder even the Tory ex-Prime Minister John Major warned that Universal Credit could be the new Poll Tax, a trigger for riots and an electoral backlash!

tiny amount can only be seen as an insult. Nevertheless, Hammond had the cheek to imply that the only problem facing schools was that "school budgets often do not stretch to that extra bit of kit...". Totally ignoring, therefore, that budgets do not stretch to such indispensable "things" as teachers, teaching assistants,

school nurses, or school meals for poor students... .

In fact, schools are returning to the Victorian model of children 'being seen and not heard': teaching purely for exam results. In such a system, a proper education is the 'extra' for the majority of children.

Labour MPs, it should be pointed out that all of them have in fact endorsed the Labour Manifesto, which pledges to keep income tax rates at the level set by an exiting Tory regime, if Labour comes to power. They would only increase taxes for the top 5% of earners. So McDonnell is just following the income tax policy outlined in the party's manifesto, nothing more!

However, if Labour's electoral slogan "for the many, not the few", were to be

given real substance, this would mean the taxation of profits stolen by the idle "few" from the value produced by the work of the "many". It would also mean that the income of the "many" shouldn't be taxed at all, since they produce all the wealth in society! But to implement this, it would require that the working class takes over control of society - which is hardly McDonnell's objective. In fact, it's probably one of his worst fears!

plan to abolish UC. Instead, it suggested that UC, in itself, was not a bad idea, it was just not being implemented in a fair way. So all that would be needed was to delay its roll-out, iron out some problems, tweak benefits here and there and somehow it would then be fit for purpose! Same basic system, different name!

In other words, the Labour Party now proposes a "responsible" policy that aims

at keeping the door open for future benefit cuts! No doubt McDonnell hopes big business is watching and will see how "responsible" the Labour Party is and thus how fit it is to be the next party of government. Not in the interests of the poor, but in the interests of the fat cats, who require cuts in the public purse to fund their own "welfare" of subsidies and tax relief.

A recycled "boost" for the NHS

In his budget speech, Hammond made a big thing of what he called the government's "extraordinary commitment" to "boost" the NHS budget. Except, of course, that this so-called "boost" had already been announced by May, for the 70th anniversary of the NHS. And at the time, what May presented as a "Brexit dividend" was exposed as a fraud: her £20.5bn increase in the NHS budget by 2023 was not nearly enough to stop the on-going

collapse of the health service.

But, in fact, Hammond's "boost" is even less than May had promised. For example, it includes £6bn worth of pension costs which had not been provided for in previous budgets. Not only that, but it is also meant to pay for the ballooning debt of NHS hospitals. And finally, Hammond has managed to cut the budget for investment in infrastructure and the training of nurses and doctors by £1bn - at a time

NHS

when Brexit and the government's anti-migrant policies are threatening the NHS with a drastic shortage of trained staff!

In other words, this NHS "boost" is nothing more than an inadequate stop-gap which will not make up for the growing deficit left by years of underfunding: a net cut, which has been the deliberate aim of every budget since 2010. Austerity in health continues - worse than ever. □

• They may be timing themselves out of a job

Yes, the doctor can see you now... But only for 10 minutes! Never mind that this 10-minute allocation of GP time could not only be dangerous for patients, given the need for a thorough consultation to properly diagnose health problems, but unduly stressful for GPs, who may frequently misdiagnose.

It's almost farcical. Patients report that the GP will tell them that since he/she only has 10 minutes they must restrict themselves to only one or two of their health complaints at a time! Of course, it may be possible to book a "double appointment". But woe betide you if your medical history is long and your complaint complicated! You'll probably not even have time to get up on the couch for an examination.

Yet today, around 63% of the health budget is in the hands of GPs, who're

responsible for referrals to diagnostic centres and specialist hospital care. If they get it wrong (and how can they always get it right in 10 minutes?) the consequences can be lethal. So no, consultations should

take as long as is needed. But that would mean trebling (at least) the number of GPs. Or eliminating them altogether and allowing patients to self-refer to free, well-funded specialist polyclinics?



• GPs to offer "group consultation"?

GPs in England and Wales are overworked. No question there. And patients need help to manage their chronic illnesses, nutrition and general health. But giving them group appointments? This latest gimmick, to appear to be doing something to tackle the drastic shortage of GPs is, precisely, a gimmick!

In fact, patients already get collective sessions in some practices, led by health educators or nurse specialists, on common problems like heart disease, or type 2 diabetes, but certainly not "instead of" individual consultations. One of the pitfalls always stressed to trainee doctors is that no two patients are alike and treating them

as such will mean missing vital diagnoses!

But the new Health Minister apparently thinks that consultations can be done in groups. When even an MP's "surgery" for constituents needs to be done on an individual basis. By the way, it'd also be useful to know how many minutes Matt Hancock allows to each one?

• Infected blood transfusions: another belated inquiry

In the 1970s and 1980s, before the identification of the HIV and hepatitis C viruses, 4,689 haemophiliacs who received contaminated blood products, contracted HIV and/or hepatitis C. More than half have since died. Thousands were infected, but survived.

Due to shortages, the NHS had bought blood products from the US, where prisoners/drug addicts were paid for providing blood. In the US itself, companies that supplied infected products paid out

millions in settlements. In France where such products were also used, politicians and drug company bosses were convicted of negligence and manslaughter. In Ireland victims got generous compensation.

But not so in "Great" Britain. Here, to date, victims got no state help whatsoever and nor was the NHS held responsible. In 1996 then prime minister John Major refused compensation, saying victims had been given "the best possible

treatment available at the time", suggesting they "might be able to benefit from lottery grants". But now, almost 50 years after the event, a 3-day public inquiry, starting on 24th September has taken place. Many are sceptical about the outcome after 2 previous inquiries turned into whitewashes. Survivors can only hope that they'll finally receive the compensation they need. Perhaps, after all, it is third time lucky? Even if it is too late for so many.

• British life expectancy "rises" to... rank 23rd...

Despite the fact that Britain is the 6th richest country in the world, a study on longevity published in the Lancet medical journal, has life-expectancy here rising from 26th in world ranking by 2040, to 23rd. Currently average life expectancy here is 80.6 years. By 2040 it should rise to 83.2 years... And while less wealthy countries like Spain are predicted to have a higher life expectancy of 85.8 years by 2040, the world's richest

economy, the USA, will see life expectancy rise by just 1.1 years to 79.8 under these predictions! As for the poorest countries, like Lesotho, Somalia and Congo, gross health inequalities are expected to keep their life expectancy at least 30 years lower.

It is however Finland, which has shown the fastest health improvements recorded among 20 of the world's most affluent countries. On these measures, Britain

comes second from the bottom, just above the US. No surprise that Finland excels in preventive measures and has far better health services: for every 10,000 people, there are 32 doctors, compared to 28 over here. There are 40 hospital beds for every 10,000 Finns, compared to 26 in Britain... And of course as NHS funding falls, relative to need, the situation can only get worse.

Brexit watch

The "People's Vote" - another dead end for the working class!

The London "People's Vote" demonstration, on 20th October, was huge. Hundreds of thousands marched against the chaos caused by May's Brexit saga and her endless concessions to Tory hard-Brexiters. And, yes, it was right to march against all those things. But what were they marching for? Yet another referendum with a fake "choice" between two or three rotten options? And all this, only to allow the politicians and their capitalist masters to tell the working class that it will again have to bite the bullet once "the people have spoken"!

Predictably, workers' demands were completely swept under the carpet during this march: nothing against low wages, decreasing standards of living or casualisation; nor against the many job cuts in retail or the threats against jobs in the car industry; nothing either against the government's on-going cuts in social and public service budgets nor



against its hand-outs to the capitalists! The organisers made sure that workers' demands would not be allowed to tarnish the "People's" consensus they claim to represent!

So, despite this protest being the largest since the 2003 march against Blair's Iraq war, the working class majority of the "People" had no voice in it! This has got to change. In these days of worsening crisis, the capitalists will use any old

pretext to attack workers' standards of living and conditions, to protect their profits. Brexit is one of the main pretexts they are already using, the other being the crisis itself. And this is why the working class has to defend its own class interests, not in an alliance with Brexit-worried capitalists, like the "People's Vote" campaign, but against the whole capitalist class, their politicians and their profit system! □

• **A blow against one of us is a blow against all of us!**

Last September, the Migration Advisory Committee report managed to contradict its own evidence that EU migrants have a positive effect on the British economy and finally recommended to cut their numbers. Theresa May seized this opportunity to announce a plan for more stringent policies against EU migrants. But of course, these restrictions won't affect the rich, who will continue to enjoy the British "golden visas" in exchange for a mere £200,000!

So while her business friends will continue coming and going at will, May's "skills-based system" will allow the bosses to blackmail migrant workers: if EU workers dare to raise their voices against exploitation, they'll be deported! Not that British bosses don't need low-skilled workers. In fact entire sectors of the economy would collapse without them! But what they want is a pliable workforce reduced to semi-slavery!

If the bosses and the government are

allowed to employ a section of the working class under these conditions, it is the entire working class, regardless of nationality, which will be affected. It will undermine its capacity to resist the bosses' exploitation and for that reason, it is in the interests of the entire working class to support the right of all foreign workers to come to work and settle in Britain, with no restrictions on their rights!

• **The "backstop" show-stopper**

The "Irish backstop" was designed to be a temporary position of last resort, in case of a no-deal Brexit. But since it's meant to guarantee an open border between North and South in keeping with the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland would thus have to remain in the EU customs union after 29 March 2019. Otherwise how can the EU be sure, post-hard-Brexit, that standard British products are not shipped into Europe via Northern Ireland, by-passing

the EU checking system?

And for this not to mean what it sounds like - i.e. a re-united Ireland, 98 years after partition, with a hard border down the Irish sea - the rest of Britain would have to remain in the customs union as well. Which would mean not just "no deal" but also, no "real" Brexit!

This is why Brexiters are furious and say there has to be an absolute end-date to this backstop. But then, what should replace it? The EU wants to retain the

integrity of its regulatory system and the Brexiters want to exit the EU. There's no two ways about it. It would have to mean a permanent hard border in the Irish sea, so as to prevent the return of a hard border between Ireland's South and North. And what does that mean, except a de facto 32-county Ireland, outside an "exited" Britain? A step backward for the divided British, maybe, but a step forward for the re-united Irish!

• **Preparing for the trade war**

In his efforts to pacify big business, which fears it will lose out as a result of Brexit, the Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt has promised to build "an invisible chain linking the world's democracies" in order to boost British trade. And this invisible chain will be made of 1,000 new diplomats and personnel. Apparently he

thinks these are the missing links needed by big business, post-Brexit, in order to plunder the rest of the world!

Of course, big business already has its representatives in top positions in British ministries and other state institutions to take care of its interests. Indeed, a revolving door between big

business and the state has existed since the beginning of the modern, capitalist state. But while in the days of the British Empire, Britain's "ambassadors" to poor countries were either pirates or the captains of battleships, today under Brexit, Hunt wants them to be the overseas lieutenants of British capital's trade war!

A threat to jobs

Since 2016, Brexiteers have been talking up economic statistics as evidence of the "bright future" awaiting Britain. But October's manufacturing output was the lowest in two years. This always means a threat to jobs and indeed, in August and September the number of manufacturing jobs as a whole was down for the first time since just after the Brexit referendum.

In September nearly 80,000 fewer new cars were sold than in September 2017, continuing a long-term decline. Falling diesel sales have continued, but stagnating wages, job uncertainty, rising interest rates and fuel prices have all reduced demand too. Car manufacturers like Jaguar Land Rover have started cutting jobs already, while others, like Toyota and BMW

• Dyson Brexiting to Singapore?

James Dyson of bagless vacuum cleaner fame, is vocally pro-Brexit, to the point of allowing the Leave campaign to use him as their poster-"boy".. So now that he plans to jump on the electric car bandwagon, is he planning to build his electric car in Britain as a vote of confidence? No, it will be built Singapore! Not that this should surprise anyone: Dyson was already well known for moving his vacuum-cleaner

• Pacific island dreams



• A Fox doesn't have much weight in a jungle...

Hard-Brexiteers always claimed it would be a "breeze" for Britain to negotiate its own international trade deals, independently from the EU. Four months ahead of B-day, however, Trade Secretary Liam Fox had to admit that he had only secured a deal with 14 of the EU's 236 trading partners - a very slight "breeze" indeed!

Likewise with Britain's individual admission to the World Trade Organisation



Ford worker checks a Panther diesel engine in Dagenham

threaten to do so, if Brexit brings in border checks. The ongoing crisis and its social devastation are taking

production from its Wiltshire base to Malaysia in 2002-3, cutting 865 jobs.

For a profit-seeker like Dyson, Britain just cannot compete with Singapore, in or out of the EU. This authoritarian city-state, governed by one party since 1959, has only one legal trade union, which is tightly linked to the ruling party. Of its 5.6m people, 39%, including the bulk of its manual workers, are migrants with no rights to

Liam Fox and his hard-Brexiteers have something to boast about, at last: hasn't Japan's prime minister Shinzō Abe invited Britain to join the "Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership" (CPTPP) after Brexit?

Of course, there's a small detail in Abe's invitation to consider: British-based Japanese manufacturers will have to completely rethink their strategy if Britain keeps messing about with its membership of the Single Market, because Japanese cars make up well over half of all "British-made" cars and rely upon this single market's tariff-free relationship with the EU!

In any case, it's hard to see any sense

(WTO), instead of being a beneficiary of the EU's collective WTO membership. This was also supposed to be a mere formality, but even the sheer physical weight of the 719-page draft application submitted by Fox's department to the WTO was not enough to impress its 164 member-states.

The point is that Britain has far less to offer to trading partners than the EU. So trying to just copy and paste agreements

Brexit watch

centre stage, pulling the rug from under the Brexiteers' feet. Who can still believe their fairy tales?! ☐

settle. They are mostly on fixed-term work permits for specific jobs, and can be deported if they are sacked. So bosses there get away with some of the longest working hours in the world. Brexiteers may want to turn Britain into the Singapore of Europe, but Dyson clearly doesn't think it will happen, and he's right. The working class won't allow it!

in Britain isolating itself from its 27 closest neighbours and then becoming all pally with the CPTPP's 11 member-states, which are spread out tens of thousands of miles away around the Pacific Ocean. Is Fox dreaming about digging a tunnel underneath Europe, all the way to Asia? Or, more likely, is he dreaming of floating Britain into the middle of the Pacific? In which case, Britain could take its cue from Hawaii, become USA's 51st state and still be allowed, as Hawaii was, to retain the Union Jack on a corner of its flag! But there's a snag: Trump withdrew the US from the CPTPP last year! Maybe Fox didn't notice?

with other countries isn't working. A number of them have made objections in order to get more favourable terms from Britain. These include the usual suspects - like Moldova, Russia and China - but also supposedly "close allies" - the US, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, among others. Yes, the world capitalist market is ruled by the law of the jungle and no matter how loud the hard-Brexiteers roar, they can't turn into lions!

International**Iran - population hit by Trump's trade war**

From November 5th, new economic sanctions have been applied against Iran. This follows Trump's unilateral decision to withdraw from the nuclear deal reached in 2015, under Obama. So now, not only are there these further sanctions, but the sanctions which were cancelled by the 2015 deal have been reinstated.

Any company which buys or sells any of the hundreds of Iranian products and services listed on the US sanctions list is liable to be prosecuted by the American justice system. Of course, Trump is able to impose and enforce these sanctions because of the dominant role played by the dollar on the world market. Indeed, a large part of world trade is carried out in dollars and most of the world's big companies need to have direct dealings with the US financial system - thereby allowing the US administration to blackmail them into abiding by its sanctions.

However, beyond Trump's usual posturing for the benefit of his own electorate, there are both political and economic reasons for his aggressive policy against Iran. On the political front, Trump seeks to punish the Iranian regime for pursuing



a policy which US imperialism has long considered far too independent and, therefore, potentially dangerous for its interests in the Middle East. And this is particularly true at a time when a political settlement of the Syrian civil war is on the agenda, in which Iran is in a position to have a say.

As for the economic reasons, they have a lot to do with the oil market. By allowing a small number of countries (including China, India and Japan) to carry on buying their oil from Iran, Trump can use these exemptions as a bargaining chip in his trade relations with these countries. But at the same time, by reducing

the worldwide supply of oil, he is offering a bounty to the western oil majors in general and, particularly, to the USA's own oil exporters.

Ultimately, however, it is the Iranian population - and not the regime itself - which is bound to pay for these sanctions. Already, seven months after the imposition of the first round of sanctions, Iran's stock of foreign currencies has been severely reduced, imported consumer products are becoming scarce, while inflation is rising rapidly. Once again, just as with Iraq two decades ago, the entire population of a country has been taken hostage by imperialism! □

• A lethal boost to the death merchants

In October, Trump announced his unilateral withdrawal from the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty (INF) with Russia, which banned ground-to-air nuclear missiles with ranges from 300 to 3,400 miles. But since he needed some sort of justification for this rather incomprehensible gesture, Trump claimed, among other things, that China was developing its own system of missiles and that Russia had broken its side of the deal anyway. Of course, this is probably true - just as it is probably true that the US didn't stick to it either.

But then arms treaties have never really stopped the arms race between the world's largest powers.

There is, however, an absurd cynicism on the part of a US government pointing the finger of blame at military deployments carried out by other countries. After all, thanks to Trump's own efforts, the US Defence budget is set to reach \$700 billion this year - that is more than the value of Switzerland's annual production, or nearly 3 times more than that of China and 10 times more than Russia's, according to the

US administration's own estimates!

Absurd cynicism, yes, but there is also method in this madness. Trump does need to justify this year's 10% increase in the US military budget - as well as future increases - by giving credit to the idea that the US is, somehow, under threat. How else would he be able to boost the profits of the US death merchants? And whether or not the resulting intensification of the world arms race may represent a lethal threat for mankind, is not his problem.

• Poverty and dictatorship in the US backyard

By early November, the caravan of refugees from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, who were trying to reach the US on foot, had swollen to more than 5,000. By that time, this caravan and the alleged "threat" it was supposed to represent, had become the main theme in Trump's campaign for the midterm elections. Long before the caravan was anywhere near the US, Trump had already sent 7,000 troops to stop the refugees at the US border, with the express order to use live bullets in response to any stone throwing, while ominously stating in his electoral meetings that "barbed wired used properly can be a beautiful sight"!

But Trump's sickening anti-migrant demagoguery cannot conceal the reasons why these refugees have undertaken such a dangerous, exhausting march in the first place - reasons which have everything to do with the century-old looting of Central America by US multinationals. If US agribusiness giants like the Dole Food Company and Chiquita brands International have built such colossal wealth, it was thanks to their monopoly over these countries' agricultural resources and to the role played by the US military and local military dictatorships in protecting their interests against the local population. And what these

thousands of refugees are fleeing today, is precisely the poverty and violence in their home countries from all these decades of ruthless domination and plunder by US capital.

ICF forum pamphlet n°100

• Trade war, Brexit: the convulsions of a capitalist world in crisis. [price: £1.00]

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"Blasphemy" ousted in Ireland

Ireland's voters did it again on October 26th! After voting overwhelmingly in favour of gay marriage in 2015 and in favour of abortion rights in May this year, they've now voted by 64.8% to get rid of their obsolete and ridiculous blasphemy law.

This law had made it a criminal offence, subject to a £20,000 fine or imprisonment, to publish or utter "matter that is grossly abusive or insulting in relation to matters held sacred by any religion" and which was "likely to cause outrage". Nobody had ever been prosecuted for this. There had just been the odd investigation. Like in 2017, when

writer/comic actor (and atheist!) Stephen Fry was "investigated" after he told an Irish radio presenter that he didn't respect "a *mean-minded, stupid God who creates a world that is so full of injustice and pain.*" However, when they were "unable to find a substantial number of outraged people" cops quickly dropped the matter!

Unlike the abortion referendum, which had a record turnout of 64%, the blasphemy referendum saw only 43.79% turn out to vote - in this case probably a positive sign showing that few people saw a stake in retaining such an absurd vestige of the past. ☐

• But in Pakistan, Asia Bibi is still under threat

While working in a field, Asia Bibi was asked to fetch water by her fellow women-workers. They then accused her of defiling the water after



she dipped her own cup into it. That evening a mob came to her house and threatened to kill her. Police took her to jail. She was eventually charged with blasphemy and became the first woman in Pakistan to be sentenced to death for "insulting the prophet Mohammed". In 2011, minorities minister Shahbaz Bhatti and Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer were both assassinated for trying to get her released. Her family had to go into hiding due to death threats. A Muslim cleric offered a £5,000 bounty for anyone who would kill her.

This October, after 8 years in prison, the Pakistani Supreme Court finally ruled that Asia should be released, citing too many inconsistencies in the Prosecution case. This sparked demonstrations by far-right Islamic fundamentalist groups led by, among

International



others, the Tehreek-e-Labbaik political party (TLP). Then to make matters even worse, Imran Khan's new government signed an agreement with the TLP on 2 November, barring Asia from leaving the country. At the time of writing she is still apparently in state "custody" after being released from the Women's Jail in Multan on 7 November. Whether she will even survive to take up invitations of asylum outside Pakistan remains uncertain.

It must be added that Theresa May, whose only response to the release of Asia was to say "we are against the death penalty" adding nothing about Pakistan's blasphemy law, has refused Asia's family asylum in Britain, stating (on 9 November) that "her arrival in the country may stir civil unrest"!

• British Law still "rules" in Pakistan

Pakistan's blasphemy law dates to Britain's "Indian Penal Code of 1860", as written by Lord Macaulay. After partition in 1947, Pakistan inherited this same code, albeit now amended with some added Islamic Law, which allows for execution of "blasphemers".

In fact, ever since the Afghan war this law has been used by successive regimes to suppress political opponents and boost the

religious far-right. Thus national minorities like the Baluchis and religious minorities like the Christians have come under attack.

So it is not coincidental that sections of the population now express "religious outrage" and call for those who insult Islam to be hanged. Pakistani society today is a lethal cocktail of severe impoverishment and anti-western feeling, finding expression in reactionary medievalism in all its forms.

• Britain's religious backwardness remains

While today six countries still impose a death penalty for blasphemy (Afghanistan, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Somalia), there are 71 in which it is still a criminal offence. These include Poland and Italy... but also two integral parts of Britain - i.e., Scotland and Northern Ireland. In fact Britain's blasphemy law was only abolished in England and Wales as recently as 2008.

Little wonder: Britain is not a secular country. For just a few brief years between 1649 and 1660 under the revolutionary Oliver Cromwell, England, precariously united with Scotland and at war with Ireland, was a secular Republic. But this required the execution of King Charles I, the abolition of the House of Lords and all the bishops and the institution of a Barebones Parliament of radical "amateurs" against the

Newly inaugurated populist PM of Pakistan, Imran Khan, has fuelled this cocktail. Playing to the religious right, he even promised this August, that he would ask the UN to impose global blasphemy laws. Such posturing and fanning of the flames of fundamentalist "outrage" is why Asia Bibi, even though freed by the Supreme Court, must remain in hiding in order to stay alive.

interests of landed gentry. Sadly, it was too weak to last. By 1688 the House of Lords, with its reactionary bishops, had returned with the help of the Dutch army of William of Orange - who was given the throne as his reward, on the basis of the denial of religious freedoms for Catholics and the rule of the Anglican church... And this Church, whose titular head is the Queen, still exerts its influence today.

Their society**Glasgow council workers fight for equal pay**

On 23 October 8,000 Glasgow council workers, most of them women in cleaning and caring jobs, started a 48-hour strike for equal pay. They were joined by street sweepers, road workers, refuse workers and parking attendants, many of them men, who refused to cross picket lines in solidarity, despite the fact that such action is classed as "secondary action" and is illegal.

Primary schools, nurseries and many council facilities across the city were all shut for two days. This may well have been the largest fight over unequal pay which has ever been organised here. And it was certainly overdue. The strike follows years of legal disputes and industrial action against Glasgow city council over the underpayment of more than



12,000 staff in jobs mainly done by women, dating back more than 10 years - and which up until today, got workers nowhere. In fact this strike was a huge boost to morale, because at last the workforce was able

to feel and use its own strength out in the streets, supported by other workers right across the board, and ensure that the bosses of Glasgow City could no longer sweep their demands under the carpet! □

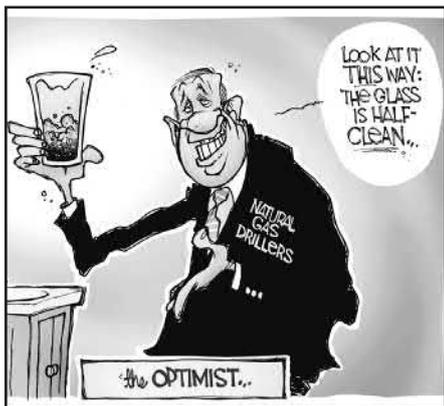
• Mouth-watering debt to please shareholders

Since they were privatised in 1989, England's nine big regional water companies have borrowed nearly £51bn. Over the same period they paid out £56bn in dividends to shareholders. In other words, these companies have been borrowing exclusively to line shareholders' pockets.

Had the water companies stayed in public hands they would have had no

reason to borrow. Their £123bn capital spending on fixed assets since privatisation was more than covered by their revenues from consumers. But instead, not only did they increase consumers' bills to pay out £5bn in dividends, but to pay the £1.2bn cost of servicing their debt! And, of course, Ofwat's "light touch" regulation found nothing wrong in saddling households with this burden!

Against this backdrop, Labour's plan to renationalise water utilities should be a no-brainer. But not by buying out shareholders as Labour plans to do. Having milked their regional monopolies for 29 years, water companies should be paying off their debt out of their accumulated dividends, not getting another bonanza from Labour's compensation!

• Fracking: dangerous and dirty

Fracking, or hydraulic fracturing of rock to release natural gas, started again in Lancashire, on 6 October, after a 7-year moratorium. The oil and gas company Cuadrilla had halted its operation after a small earthquake that affected nearby Blackpool. Fracking injects water and chemicals at high pressure into shale rock to dislodge gas from underground fissures and earthquakes are one potential side-effect. Groundwater pollution is another, and the extent of both cannot be predicted reliably. So fracking proposals quite rightly provoke big local protests.

This time, operations at the site

near Preston only resumed after a legal challenge. Three protesters were jailed for terms of more than a year for climbing on lorries. While the judge took a dim view of any disruption to profiteering, they were released on appeal and their sentences overturned as excessive. By the end of this October, Cuadrilla had stopped operations three times as new quakes were recorded, increasing in magnitude each time. The industry is now lobbying for lighter regulation. Energy Secretary Claire Perry favours raising the quake magnitude thresholds allowed. But fracking ought to be stopped, for good!

• Britain's plastic recycling fraud

Everybody knows by now that plastic waste has become one of the main causes of an impending environmental catastrophe. It is clogging up our oceans, killing the creatures that live in them and has entered the human food chain, with who knows what consequences to our health. So what is being done about it? The answer is a big fat nothing! Because the only systems which are in place are meant to comply with the profit system - a system which is degenerate and corrupt to its roots.

But how do capitalism's albeit crooked

recycling systems manage to make such a terrible mess? After all, we all collect our plastic and put it in a recycling bin. Then it goes to council waste tips. Contaminated or unsuitable plastic is meant to be separated and sent to land fill sites. But most of this stuff is just bundled up by companies which get paid £60-70 a ton by the local authorities (out of our council tax) to ensure it goes for recycling - not here, but overseas, of course! And mainly to the poor countries. Over 100 containers of plastic waste are shipped out from ports like Felixstowe to

Europe and the Far East per day.

In January, however, China refused to accept any more British plastic waste. And when exporters shifted to Malaysia, Vietnam and Poland, these countries imposed bans too. So where does the plastic which has been rejected end up? In the sea? Nobody can say - neither the government agency which isn't prepared to take responsibility, nor indeed the many crooks who "clean up" from this dirty and increasingly life-threatening "business"...

King's Cross railway station (London)

Double DOO!

Great Northern (GN) and Thameslink have just introduced new class 387 and class 700 trains, allowing them to get rid of dispatchers on platforms. These trains have "In-Cab" monitors, designed for "Driver-Only-Dispatch".

In other words, not only are drivers on these trains responsible for the duties of absent guards (who were dispensed with years ago), but now they'll be responsible for all safe departures, formerly ensured by dispatchers.

Of course, dispatchers may still

be needed for now, because Class 313, 365 and the East Coast and Hull high speed trains still need manual dispatch. But station staff are supposed to be ready to take over if in-cab monitors fail. This means that at stations where the older trains don't stop, dispatchers will soon be eliminated.

What shocked many of us was that both ASLEF and RMT officials agreed the changes without consulting local reps, nor even the workers involved - neither drivers nor dispatchers. Of course, for now, there



may be no imminent job cuts, while the "old" trains remain. But this is only temporary.

Can anything be done to reverse this change, in the name of protecting jobs and safety? For sure. Provided we fight it together. ☐

• Modern trains meet underfunded railways

The high tech "Azuma" (which means "East" in Japanese) trains destined for LNER's King's Cross to Scotland service, are meant to reach 140mph, as opposed to the current 125mph and will reduce journey times by 20 minutes.

Being "bimodal" (operating as diesel or electric as needed) they

seemed to be an answer on the northern sections of the East Coast line, where electrification of lines (due to budget cuts) has never been completed. For now the old slam-door HSTs are still the only trains which can run all the way to Inverness or Aberdeen and remain the only backup when there are malfunctions with

electric overhead wires.

But after a year of testing, LNER discovered only this August that the new trains cause electromagnetic interference, affecting signals and line-side equipment, including CCTV, north of York. Since then, the trains have been unable to operate on electric mode and therefore not at full speed. And since out of the 65 new LNER trains, only 23 will be bimodal, this problem has to be sorted. It seems they won't be launched this December as planned.

Could these problems have been anticipated? Well, according to Network Rail, "This is the same issue encountered 15 years ago when the Pendolino was introduced on the West Coast Main Line". Thanks, no doubt, to the fragmented, decentralised privatised system, this "encounter" apparently bypassed the bright sparks at LNER.



• Solidarity with the tube drivers!

How dare Tube bosses tell Tube workers what's safe and what isn't? They hypocritically sacked a driver for opening the doors of a defective train, when he was in full control and didn't risk anyone's life. These bosses are the ones who impose unsafe conditions, putting savings and profits first, every time! Years ago, they took guards off the trains just like the Rail bosses are doing today. Recently they closed ticket offices. How can any of that be "safe"? We should all be on strike over it! [King's X Workers' Platform bulletin 7/11/18]

• All of us out?

In fact ARRIVA Rail North (who run Grand Central) guards were on strike on

the 3rd of November over DOO. 8 more strike days are planned in November and December by the RMT. Will that be enough!? We sure know what is most effective. Do we even need to spell it out? [King's X Workers' Platform bulletin 7/11/18]

• Same bosses same fight!

And speaking of strikes, Rail Gourmet workers in Edinburgh were on strike on 30th Oct over "bullying and harassment of staff, abuse of the disciplinary procedures, and non payment of additional duties"! But why did RG KX workers have to find that out from the RMT website? Why weren't we told and what's more, why weren't we invited to strike alongside them? Isn't their fight our fight too? This is really outrageous separatism on the part of the RMT leaders! [King's X Workers' Platform bulletin 7/11/18]

• Living on another planet!

Honestly these LNER managers should come back to earth! How can on-board staff "meet and greet" passengers like we used to, when they've cut our preparation time and our numbers? It's a bloody miracle we manage to provide a catering service at all! [King's X Workers' Platform bulletin 7/11/18]

• GN strikes.02

We heard GN's "May" timetable is coming back this December. Surely it won't be the same kind of mess? No, of course not! We know how good they are at learning from their mistakes... No, we're expecting a much "bigger and better" mess this time round! [King's X Workers' Platform bulletin 7/11/18]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**Christmas sorted... For the bosses**

Greenford mail centre is one of six temporary parcel sorting centres for the Christmas rush. Around 1,200 casuals are expected to be working there, out of a total of 23,000 casuals nationally, this year. And as always, they'll be employed on lower pay and worse conditions than permanent workers. To entrench divisions further, RM will even recruit some permanent sorting workers to act as temporary managers of the "Xmas casuals".

Unfortunately, the presence of casual workers is nothing out of the ordinary at Greenford. In fact, the in-house staffing agency, Angard, employs a significant number of temps all year round - and on zero-hour contracts! So what does the postal workers' union say about this, since it ostensibly has a policy against the exploitation of casuals? In fact in its so-called "Four Pillars" agreement on pay and conditions, signed this year with Royal Mail, the union stated that it would work with management to "reduce the number

of agency/casual workers within [Royal Mail's] facilities". "Reduce"? So whatever happened to the CWU's former refusal to allow any casuals in RM outside of Xmas? And what about the insistence that all existing agency staff are given permanent contracts if they want them? This is not mentioned anywhere in the agreement!

It's obvious that RM bosses have an interest in further casualisation:



to have as expendable and cheap a workforce as possible - all the better to feed the shareholders! And their manoeuvring only reflects their fears of a collective fight, in which permanent and casual workers join ranks - which is what's needed! ☐



- **Trying to do it on the cheap...**

We now hear that Xmas casuals will only be joining us on Nights, and very few this year - only 130. Of course, there's the issue of not enough space, but how will this be enough, even if 2nd class parcels go to Greenford?

Of course, for RM, it's a case of having super-cheap night workers - because as usual Xmas casuals will be on a pittance and won't get the full Night Premium! But worse, it seems this year all of the rest of us - whether on Earlies, Lates or Nights - will be expected to make up for the absolute shortage of workers! Managers definitely have another "think" coming! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 7/11/18]

- **And they'll also need more hands!**

And what about the cleaning and canteen staff? Especially on nights? PFS cleaners already have to cope with keeping the reduced number of over-used toilets clean! As for the Quadrant staff, we've all noticed how they're rushed off their feet while we wait in the queue... and that's without them having 130 extra hungry mouths to feed! Surely it's urgent that additional cleaning and canteen workers

are recruited now, on all shifts? And not just for Xmas! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 7/11/18]

- **Huge scope for improvement!**

Yes the construction work continues and will continue for years to come, apparently! But this means that there's also a permanent need for more cleaners (toilets being closed and flooded periodically!) And more (and better!) canteen facilities for all - including the additional building workers on the site! And why can't we use the 185 entrance to get to our locker-room instead of having to walk down a long "black tunnel"? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 7/11/18]

- **Adopting RM's business-speak**

We see that the CWU had its so-called "Redesign Conference" in Bournemouth, to which some ordinary reps were invited. We understand the idea is to adapt the union for this "tech" age, and "invest" its "assets" better...!?? We think they mean save money, actually. In fact it sounds like the officials have turned into businessmen/women, with their "14 measures of success", when their "4 pillars" was already bad enough. Well, they spend more time with the RM

bosses than with us. It had to rub off on them eventually... [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 7/11/18]

- **Democratic... without us?**

OK, we admit it's true that the union leaders also said something about making the union "more democratic"... But how can they do that over our heads and behind our backs? Or have we misunderstood the meaning of the word, "democracy"? How many of us "ordinary" members on the ground even knew about this conference? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 7/11/18]

- **The very OTT TP**

Oh, and for whoever wants to know what's going on with our pensions: DGS Terry Pullinger has just announced that the government's given the CDC pension the "green light" - but actually, it's a green light for another consultation! We didn't accept their non-defined, reduced pension in the first place - and now it's delayed further. But never mind, TP tells us that it's a "very important development in social history"!! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 7/11/18]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

More attacks are coming: let's prepare!

Union officials at Dagenham have now confirmed a radical cuts agenda is on the cards. Steve Armstrong, Ford Europe boss, claims he is under pressure from US bosses to ensure Ford Europe turns a profit in 2019, after supposed losses of £1.8bn this year. Until earnings increase by 6-8% before tax/interest he has been told by Ford US that there will be no new investment.

So now Armstrong wants to follow the example of PSA after it took over Vauxhall and cut its wage bill by over 2.5%. A 90-day "consultation period" has started and it sounds as if Ford is planning compulsory

redundancies. In the meantime there's talk of a wage freeze and cuts in holiday pay. Lay-offs and extended shutdowns have been announced in Bridgend, Dagenham, Cologne, Saarlouis, Valencia, Kocaeli, Yenikov and Craiova.

On-going Brexit "uncertainty", of which Armstrong complains bitterly, has led Ford to shrink its British "footprint". The huge, iconic 1960s Warley Headquarters building is being sold off for housing development. Staff (numbering 1,700) are moving over to Dunton and Dagenham.

The European Works Council has demanded that Ford opens its books



so that it can "judge whether our incomes are part of the problem". We would agree that Ford has to show us its accounts. Not so that we can agree to sacrifice our incomes, but to see how we can get Ford to pay us all a lot more, without making any cuts at all. We know the money is there. It's just in the wrong pockets. And today, if indeed the situation is dire, let's remember the old saying, that attack is the best defence. □

• Another accident

Another serious accident involving logistics Monday morning... This time one of our Ford workmates driving a forklift on Panther was injured on the job. We're waiting to hear what exactly happened but we are so used to management - Ford and LLL - just wanting

to point fingers of blame at workers and even covering up the real extent of their injuries that we'll have to hear it from the worker himself, that he's OK. But we think he is! Thankfully! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 31/10/18]

• We know the outcome...

Well, apparently a full investigation has

been carried out; police there, etc... And production was stopped for over 2 hours, with instructions issued for the remaining gates in the area to be removed. As for blame, whatever the outcome, we know that ultimately, Ford should point its finger at itself. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 31/10/18]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

The outsourcing scam

When it comes to outsourcing, BMW is rather unique among car-makers in Britain, in that it doesn't only subcontract line-side ops, parts, cleaning, canteen, maintenance, etc., but it subcontracts part of its labour supply for car assembly to an on-site agency. Their current choice is GI Group, which employs workers on its own temp contracts under precarious conditions and on lower wages, of course!

GI Group is owned by SCL Holdings, an Italian company. However, its accounts state that it's exempt from disclosing transactions with other companies in its Group. So while its stated profits after tax were only £114,000 in 2017, the accounts don't explain where its £14 million in gross profit ended up! All we know is almost all

of it was spent on 'administrative expenses', which can include the pay of senior executives...

On the other hand, one of BMW's main line-side contractors, Rudolph and Hellmann (R&H) had a turnover last year of £44 million, most of which (£43.5 mil) was made in Britain. They are joint-owned by Rudolph Holdings GmbH (a German company) and Hellmann Worldwide Logistics, UK-registered and a subsidiary of HIF Holdings Ltd, which is in turn owned by Hellmann Worldwide Logistics SE&Co, also a German company whose accounts aren't publicly available...

Nevertheless, HIF Holdings made over £5 million in profits last year after tax. They share a director, Andrew Connor, with R&H and with Hellmann



Worldwide Logistics Limited. The accounts do not make it clear, but it seems that this director is paid a basic salary of over £250,000 by each of these companies, and a bit less by R&H - making a total of £750,000, but that's not counting shares distributed, nor any other package he receives! And then they claim they can't "afford" to pay workers here at Cowley the rate for the job? □

• Permanent and equal!

We are really fed up with the GI wage system where you have to wait 2 years to get paid what they call the "full rate". It's not the full rate for the job, is it? Indeed, the principle of "equal pay for equal work" went out of the window with the advent of agency working in

this factory. It is about time we threw BMW's casualised system out of the window! We should all be on the same, decent wages and conditions! [Worker's Fight bulletin Oxford BMW Mini 7/11/18]

• A 12 hour shift? No way!

The rumours about the 12 hour shifts keep coming. In fact R&H workers used

to work 12 hour shifts in order to feed the line. And that was a killer. We don't know yet what BMW has in mind but we do know they want fewer of us to work longer hours... But we can tell them right now that even 7½ hours of putting up with their s**t is more than enough! [Worker's Fight bulletin Oxford BMW Mini 7/11/18]

Crisis watch

According to a report on wealth accumulated by the world's richest in 2017, in no other year in recorded history "including the industrial revolution" has there been such a massive increase in the wealth of the global elite! Indeed, the Swiss bank UBS and PriceWaterhouseCoopers report that over 2,000 billionaires increased their wealth by 20% "pushing their collective fortunes to historic levels". Together they are worth £6.9 trillion, which is 3 and-a-half times the GDP of Britain. And it also seems that there is a concentration of new billionaires - apparently "entrepreneurs" - in China, where the number has grown from 16 in 2006, to a grand 373 in 2017.

But what is so incredible about all of this is the context. After all, the world financial crisis still continues to undermine the real economy, with ever greater speculative bubbles developing all over, and there is still minimal investment going into production. Yet, nevertheless, such super-wealth accumulates and grows in the pockets of this elite. So

The fat cats never had it so good!

Sao Paulo, Brazil: shanties for the poor, swimming pools and tennis courts for the rich

where does it all come from? The report explains that over 2,000 simply inherited it or got it from "asset transfers". But that cannot be the whole story. In fact behind this all-time historical record is the real "record" - the gross increase in the exploitation of the world's working class. But this is hard to measure.

We do know, however, that the share of wealth of the world's poorest 50% shrank by £0.8 trillion over the past 7 years despite the growth in population. It is the impoverishment at one pole of society that sustains the ever-growing wealth of capitalist parasites at the other! ☐

• October's ugly warning...

According to the financial press, wealthy speculators had an ugly time in October: company shares traded on the world's 47 largest stock markets fell by 9.5% over the month - one of the sharpest monthly falls since 2008. To put it another way, the total value of these shares was cut by over six trillion pounds - equivalent to three years of Britain's entire production!

Should this matter to working class people, since they don't

gamble on these markets anyway? It shouldn't, in the sense that, in a rational society, gambling addiction would be treated as the disease it really is and society would be protected from its impact. However, not only is this capitalist society not rational, but the operation of its economy depends entirely on the capitalists' addiction to profit and, therefore, speculation.

Both the International Monetary Fund and the Bank of England have

warned that speculators are increasingly jittery and react even to the most insignificant negative news by shifting massive amounts of money away from companies which are feared to be in trouble. This is what triggers brutal ups and downs such as the latest one in October. It is also a measure of how little the capitalists trust their own system. And they should know!

• ... and worse to come

Another warning issued both by the International Monetary Fund and the Bank of England concerns company indebtedness which has been growing to record levels. What makes matters worse is that the banks are increasingly making loans to companies which are already heavily in debt, without ensuring that they have solid

guarantees that they will be repaid, in case these companies get into trouble. According to the BoE, 80% of all bank loans to companies are made without such guarantees, as opposed to virtually none after 2008.

This means that the mountain of company debt has developed into something quite similar to the US

subprime mortgage mountain, on the eve of 2008, and is just as risky. But, in addition, it is also much bigger in size than the total value of these subprime mortgages was at the time and, therefore, even more likely to cause devastation when it finally implodes - which it will, one day or another!

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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