

WORKERS' fight



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

IN THE US AND IN BRITAIN, WE MUST FIGHT THIS SYSTEM!

The video showing George Floyd being deliberately choked to death by a white police officer in Minneapolis, on 25 May, has set alight a powder keg across the USA.

For once, Trump has been forced to tone down his racist, anti-working class ranting and withdraw his threats of further violence against those demonstrating their solidarity with George Floyd and every other victim of racism.

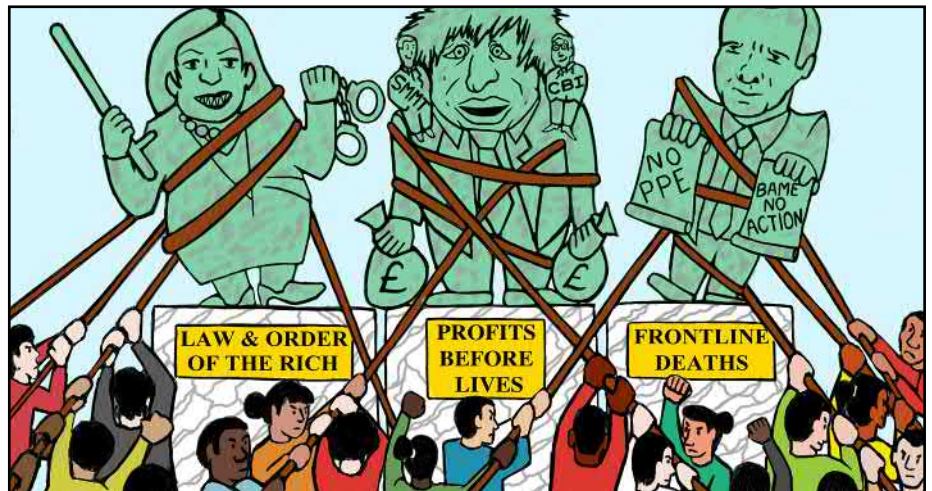
George Floyd's killer has now been charged with murder - this, when only 1% of US cops who kill their "suspects" are ever charged. Trump has been forced to revoke his call for the army to intervene and has had to withdraw the National Guards from the streets of Washington: they'd been showing too much sympathy with protesters!

Faced with two weeks of protests in which hundreds of thousands have flooded the streets of over 350 cities and towns, Trump took refuge behind yet another empty electoral slogan on Twitter. His "LAW AND ORDER" plea is the last fig-leaf of a megalomaniacal, criminal fool, trying to rally his most bigoted voters.

Collective anger on the streets

What we are witnessing in the US is the re-emergence of long-repressed anger. It is the voice of the oppressed who've had enough; the voice of those who refuse any longer to tolerate the racism of this system's state thugs.

But their collective rage is even more powerful, because it encompasses the anger of the very poorest layers of the population. If George Floyd was murdered so brutally, it was because he was black, of course. But it was also because, as a poor unemployed worker, he was part of the growing majority from every possible background, including



white, whose deprivation feeds the greed - and the fears - of US capital.

This is why black protesters have been joined by every section of the USA's growing army of working class poor, young, not-so-young, unemployed and under-employed. Yes, those suffering most from Trump's mishandling of the Covid-19 crisis - which has already killed over 100,000 and has doubled unemployment to 40m. And that is why, behind the fury sparked by this racist murder, this even more powerful anger looms - of a large mass of workers at the receiving end of the vicious class war declared by the capitalists to try to recoup their profits on the back of the working class.

Social change will have to follow

That is also why these protests have reverberated across the world. The same anger is fed by the same vicious, divisive class war initiated by the capitalist class and their politicians worldwide.

If the statues of slave owners are

pulled down - at last! - in Bristol and Mississippi, it is significant, not just because they are symbols of slavery's violent oppression, but because the capitalist system was built on the backs of millions of slaves. And still today, capitalism's "high-tech" profits are extracted only thanks to the enslavement of the whole working class through the wages system. That is why capitalism itself has to be targeted. Why should we allow a system which sustained racism across centuries and now proves incapable of dealing with this pandemic and its consequences - to survive?

Despite the repressive forces ranked against them, US protesters have shown they can fight. And yes, whether in the US or Britain, we MUST fight. Not just to get rid of the plague of racism, but to get rid of the class-based system which spawns it. History proves that this system cannot be "democratically" reformed. If we want social change, capitalism must be overthrown and replaced with a new social organisation, free of exploitation and free from profiteering. □

Going back to work *Business unlocked*

So it's OK to go to work, but not to go and protest! Johnson had already announced his new "COVID Alert Level System" by 11 May. He explained that "R" was now between 0.7 and 1.0, "Thanks to the hard work and sacrifices (!) of the British People" and so social distancing could thus be eased. We no longer had to "stay home, protect the NHS and save lives", but instead, "stay alert, control the virus and save lives"... Even if he struggled to say what "staying alert" meant.

It's obvious that this is simply a cover for giving business the green light to resume as soon as possible. And resumption is exactly what's happening (73% of construction companies never shut anyway). Of course this isn't "following science",

• "R" they taking advice?

The number of C-19 deaths verified by testing, by 9 June, was 41,128. But excess deaths across the country had, already by 29 May, reached 63,629. Which reflects a higher proportional death rate linked to C-19, than anywhere else in the world, including the USA.

What's contested right now, is the "R number", since the government is

• Fool who can't get a grip

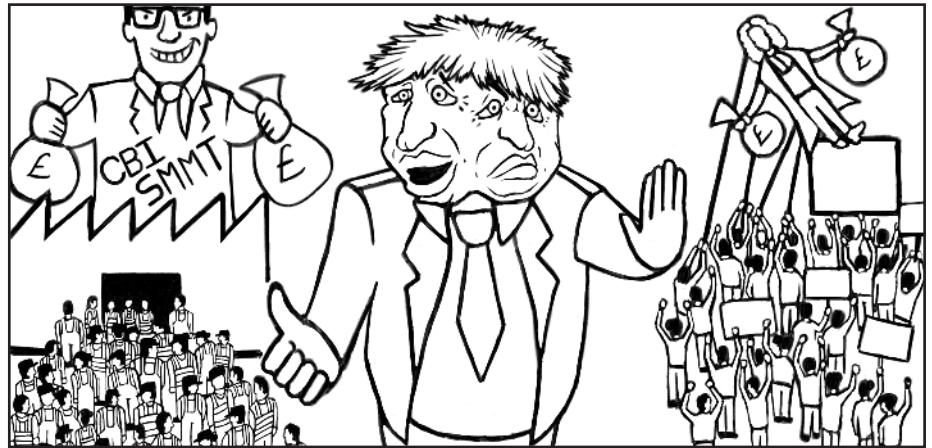
It's no surprise Johnson's poll ratings are falling. At the beginning of June, 44% "disapproved" of the government's record, against 35% who "approved". And over the last 2 months Johnson's lead over his rivals has fallen from 20 points to just 3.

During PMQs on 3 June, in total denial of the shambles he helped create, Johnson said he was "very proud of how the government had handled the coronavirus pandemic"... and then announced that he would now take "direct control" of the crisis. Which begged the question as to who or what was in control before? Health Secretary Hancock? Well at least he and Matt share joint "pride" in having taken all the very best world-beating decisions - in the best of all possible worlds.

• Cummings not going

Dominic Cummings has survived the "Cumgate" saga for now. But not because of the "reasonable" explanation of his actions during lockdown. Who'd find it reasonable that he drove 273 miles, with Covid symptoms, when the rule (his) was to "stay at home"? As for the explanation that his jaunt to Barnard Castle and walk in the woods was just to "test his eyesight" well, the laughs are still Cumming.

So if he's not going, maybe it's something to do with his being Johnson's Brexit architect and that Brexit is actually



it's following the City. And given the obvious consequences when even more workers travel around and mix at work - closer together, since 2m distancing is also in question, it's also about preparing a scapegoat.

The same "great British public" (and now all the protesters on the streets) will be blamed for any second wave of infection, because, unlike chief aide Dominic Cummings, they didn't use "common sense". □

desperate to show that the number of infections is coming down. It said "R" is less than 1.0 everywhere, at the time when it was over 1.0 in the North - and South-West of England - which is why more restrictive local lockdowns might have been proposed.

And since the government is bent on relaxing restrictions against scientific

not yet "done". If and when it is, Johnson might have to find a bigger bus to throw him under than the one with "£350m a week for the NHS" written on it.

• A "world-beating" app?

It's been almost 3 months since the lockdown began and the government's "NHSX" contact tracing app (preferred to the more privacy-respecting Apple app), has only just been piloted on the Isle of Wight.

Johnson promised this "world beating" app would be ready by 1 June. It isn't. So far, 50% of the island population has downloaded it. But it can't be rolled out for the rest of the country, due to countless glitches. It only works on newer android phones, and since it relies on bluetooth to work, phones must be permanently switched on and kept well-charged. And it may not work on i-phones, after the dispute with Apple. So whether it'll ever be of any use, is anyone's guess.

• Track and trace the profits

Few among Hancock's army of 25,000 contract tracers engaged by Serco and Sitel, are doing more than play computer games, while waiting for someone to contact and trace on the phone. In the meantime they've had their personal details shared, after an official e-mailer forgot to use the BCC (hide contact details!) setting...

But if the tracers were actually enabled to do their jobs (and adequately trained!),

advice, some advisors are breaking ranks. Professor John Edmonds told the Andrew Marr programme that lives could have been saved had the lockdown been instigated earlier. When asked sticky questions, advisors are now explaining that they just "give advice"; it's up to the government to make "political decisions"...

there'd still not be enough of them. Where human-based contact tracing has been successful, as in Wuhan for instance, double this number were needed.

For now, Johnson's decision to outsource this essential tool in the fight against Covid-19 to privateers, means it's in danger of turning into another expensive white elephant - just like the Nightingale Hospitals.

• When quarantine isn't quarantine!

As from 8 June, anyone arriving in Britain (except lorry drivers) must self-isolate for 14 days to prevent "reinfection from abroad". Yet most come from countries with lower infection rates. What's more, no-one will be tested on arrival. Their details and whereabouts during self-imposed isolation, have to be provided, but how they get to their destinations and who they potentially infect on the way isn't an issue - although there is a £1,000 fine for anyone (identified by "spot checks") who doesn't stick to the rules...

This "quarantine" has caused a furore among airline and travel companies. Ryanair's boss rightly asks why there was no quarantine in the most critical period for infection, when 1.8m arrived from abroad. But that doesn't mean the current measure is wrong. However, its weak non-enforcement probably means it was only ever intended as a bargaining chip in the Brexit negotiations.

Universal Credit cracking under strain

The number of new claims for Universal Credit between the start of the lockdown and 26 May was 2.9m - and 3m since the beginning of March. This is unprecedented for recent times: "official" unemployment (always a downwardly-massaged figure, anyway) has not been over 2 million since 1996.

• From JAMs to CAMs

Remember that category - the JAMs - "Just About Managing" that then Prime Minister Theresa May referred to, back in 2016? Well, today there are CAMs - Cannot Manage at all - thanks to the way that those already on the breadline, the so-called "working poor", are left totally high and dry.

So for instance, in Stoke-on-Trent, a charity supplying products for babies has reported that whole families are having to eat baby food to supplement their meagre meals. Since the lockdown started, 1.5m people or 3% of the British population have gone at least one whole day without food. Some charities have found families who have not eaten anything for 3 days.

The government's food voucher, worth £15 per week per child, makes little

Faced with this wave of new claimants, many of them formerly self-employed, the government has hastily raised the "standard allowance" (basic minimum Universal Credit), by £1,000/year.

But there aren't enough DWP workers to process all the claims. So only 960,000 advance payments (50% of the first payment as a

repayable loan), have been sent out, leaving 2m still waiting for a single penny. In addition, the reviews of existing claimants on disability benefits are delayed indefinitely. It begs the question: if workers are so short of jobs and the DWP has too few workers, why don't they just take on some of these unemployed, to help the unemployed? ☐



Greenhouse Sports centre in Marylebone converted into a foodbank

difference. And Universal Credit benefits, when they finally reach the purse of claimants after a 5-week waiting period, do not make the ends meet. So in the fifth

richest country of the world, thousands of poor households are still totally reliant on charities to feed themselves and their kids!

• Care workers: exposed to Covid and poverty

HC-One is one of the country's largest care home providers, with 329 homes. But it has only just agreed to pay full sick pay to those care workers with Covid-19. Others still won't get it. And this final caving-in took a sustained public campaign supported by the GMB union. Normally workers are only eligible



for statutory sick pay of £95.80 per week.

Despite all the hype over "clapping for carers", wages in this sector are among the lowest, hovering around a measly £8.72/hr - with some care homes finding ways round paying even that. The Welsh government's £500 one-off bonus, (before tax!) meant as thank-you, is derisory.

Official numbers of care home residents dying from Covid-19 are reported late and underestimate the real number of deaths. But who is even estimating the deaths of care workers, largely caused by lack of PPE and the NHS discharging infected cases into homes? Public Health England's overdue BAME report, still a "work in progress" (they tell us!) has no recommendation that the many vulnerable black and ethnic minority workers in this sector are protected from this frontline work! When that should be a priority.

• Scrap the surcharge!

The Home secretary Priti Patel caused some outrage when she refused to exempt foreign healthcare staff from the annual £400 NHS

surcharge. Johnson then claimed he couldn't waive it because it brought in as much as £900m to the Treasury. In fact, the real figure is under £200m - less than 0.15% of the NHS budget! In the end, both Patel and Johnson had to eat their words and cancel it.

But any other migrant worker applying for a visa - together with each visa dependent - still has to pay it! For a family of 4 applying for a 3-year visa, the cost is £4,800! In fact the Treasury hits them twice, since they already pay once through their national insurance and tax.

Of course, retaining this surcharge allows the government to keep alive its abject anti-immigrant propaganda which accuses migrants of abusing the NHS, while at the same time pretending the surcharge supplements running costs of the NHS. When what actually supplements the running of the NHS is the skill and dedication of its many immigrant staff members. Never mind that, though. Patel plans to extend the surcharge to all EU citizens after Brexit, and increase it to £625!

Teachers or baby-sitters?

The government reopened schools to children aged 4-6 and 10-11 at the beginning of June. But out of 2 million students, only about half actually turned up! Parents obviously didn't think it was such a good idea. Meanwhile, there are still undefined plans to open secondary schools later this month, for 15-18 year-olds who have exams next year.

Of course, kids from poorer families have not had the best time of it, stuck at home. So sure, they'd benefit from being back at school... but is this the government's reason for this early reopening? Or is it just another of the prerequisites for getting workers back to work?

Ministers say it's safe, because kids mostly don't get the virus, or get it mildly - but of course they can still transmit

it, to the army of adults required for schools to function. In fact, just prior to 1st June there was an outbreak of Covid-19 in a school which had remained open for the children of key-workers. Not that children are entirely safe, given the unexplained increase in cases of a Kawasaki-like disease affecting them, which causes multiple organ failure. Obviously, schools would best stay closed.

Crisis watch

The Covid-economy: helping the capitalists

When Johnson was told that 3.5m jobs were at risk if the hospitality sector wasn't allowed to open soon, he apparently exclaimed "Christ!", and promptly announced the opening of places of prayer (along with shops selling non-essential items and zoos!) on the 15 June. There are also very obvious plans afoot to cut social distancing from 2m to 1m so that even more businesses can start up again. Never mind the effect on "R", which can always be massaged down.

In April unemployment had already reached an estimated 3 million, but still the number of companies cutting jobs grows daily. The latest in the long list includes British Gas-Centrica, cutting 5,000 jobs, BP cutting 10,000 worldwide and around 2,000 in Britain and P&O Ferries which is cutting 1,100 - a quarter of its workforce. In the travel sector, 31,000 jobs cuts have already been announced by



BA, Easy Jet, Ryanair, Shearings and TUI. In retail, Debenhams, Oasis/Warehouse and Restaurant Group will cut 9,300 jobs between them. Rolls Royce, McLaren and JCB combined are cutting 8,700 jobs. In fact the manufacturers' lobby group, "Make UK", said that 70% of its 20,000 members are making plans to cut jobs.

And of course many of these companies, starting with BA and Rolls Royce, have used the furlough scheme as a "free bonus" while making their restructuring plans. In other words, the Job Retention Scheme was just a "Job Cuts Phasing-in Scheme". Not only is Britain "leading the world" in Covid-19 deaths. It is also trying to lead when it comes to killing jobs. □

• Their high hopes on show

In the name of a falling R and science (!), non-essential car showrooms were reopened on 1 June. The Society of Motor Manufacturers hopes this will boost sales. As they lamented, the closure of showrooms for the whole of April resulted in "the market's worst performance in living memory...". No doubt they hope that those discouraged by the government from taking public transport due to Covid-19, might now buy a car... if only they have the money!

The Confederation of British Industry has been "urging" the government since 17 May to "think very carefully" about the 14-day quarantine measures for people arriving in the country, implemented on 7 June. They probably need not bother, since it is unlikely this phony quarantine (voluntary self-isolation with no way of policing it) will last much beyond the first review, due 2 weeks after it came in. For the government, the economy will always "trump" the health of the population.

• Unite, with the bosses...

After British Airways said it was cutting 12,000 jobs and only rehiring furloughed workers, on far worse conditions, Unite the union accused the company of "betraying Britain"! Apparently "an iconic company like BA [should]...be working in the interests of the nation, not attacking its own loyal workforce during the worst health crisis in

a century"... As far as Unite is concerned BA is "not fit to fly the British flag"!

Coming from Unite, this outburst of nationalist hype and nonsense is nothing new. It was Unite which, in 2009, along with Labour's then Prime Minister Gordon Brown revived the "British jobs for British workers" slogan, coined by Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists in the 1950s against the Windrush generation - and adopted by Enoch Powell and the National Front in the 1970s.

This underlines how far the union leaderships have strayed away from defending the interests of workers on the basis of the internationalism and independence of the working class. Did they ever understand that the working man and woman "have no country"? So we can use Unite's own words to ask: shouldn't Unite be working in the interests of the working class, rather than the "nation"?

• Car bosses' drive against jobs and wages

Jaguar Land Rover is asking for a "more than £1bn" loan from the government, or even a takeover if it cannot repay this - even though it took full advantage of the government's furlough scheme.

JLR has more than £3bn in ready cash sitting in its bank account! Over the last three years, it made a total profit of £2.7bn, while simultaneously cutting 1,500 jobs. Now, having

increased dividend payouts to its owner Tata Motors, in each of the last two years, JLR runs to the obliging government for even more cash!

At the Nissan plant in Sunderland, the workforce is being told they will have to "improve efficiency", if their future is to be "assured". Bosses said the same thing in 2008, when workers were encouraged to accept wage cuts to "save jobs" - just before they cut jobs anyway...

Already car workers in Spain and France are reacting against Nissan-Renault's plans to close plants in Barcelona, Paris and Maubeuge. And while car bosses here haven't yet announced their cuts plans, they're playing the exact same game - using the opportunity of the C-19-crisis to secure their profitability for the future. It's time to get ready to fight them.



Brexit knock-out

Within days of Brexit talks resuming at the beginning of June, they stalled. It's the same old story: Brexiteer ministers want to have their fish, and sell them to the EU, want to dispense with previously binding standards on workers' rights/the environment and want the state to be free to dish out as much state aid as it

likes to private companies. All of which would remove much of the so-called "level playing field" which the EU would prefer to keep intact, if a "mutually beneficial" free trade deal is to be negotiated, before Britain finally exits.

Agreement over these sticking points is needed by 30 June, otherwise an extension to the transition period, beyond 31 December, would be needed.

That is, if indeed ministers want a deal to be struck. But Johnson has already said there will be no extensions. So if the current stalemate isn't broken, which looks likely, a "no deal" Brexit is again on the cards. None of this bodes too well for the future health of British business, after a left in the jaw from Covid-19 and a right from Brexit - deal, or no deal. Even if "no deal" will hurt a lot more.

The HSE still exists? Only just!

What a surprise it was to see the head of the Health and Safety Executive - a body which had almost disappeared from public life - suddenly appear at government press briefings! The reason was soon clear enough. Sarah Albon, the HSE boss, has been wheeled in to provide Business Secretary Alok Sharma with a "reassuring" cover for his assertion that workplaces

which were closed down during the lockdown can now resume healthy and safe operations.

But the HSE's involvement is hardly any kind of guarantee. It has been subject to serial cuts: over the past decade alone, it lost 46% of its government funding - a reduction of £108m. This meant that 517 of its workplace inspectors out of just 1,500 were also cut - responsible

Their society

for safety in 5.2m workplaces throughout the country..!

In fact the HSE has long since been little more than a toothless "guidance-provider" with no ability to enforce anything. And Sunak's £14m of new funding "for spot checks" won't change that. As always, workers will need to take care of their own health and safety, by taking decisive action. □

• Live sports: closed too late, now re-opening too soon

From 1st June onwards, live sports will be re-opened, but without spectators. Apparently events will take place in "safe and carefully controlled environments". Although it's hard to take the government's word on that. Didn't we see, just before the lockdown started, what Johnson considered was safe: his public school peers along with the horse-racing fraternity attending the Cheltenham festival with 200,000 other spectators at a critical phase of the pandemic?

It's no coincidence that the first "sport" to make its comeback is horse-racing! All the more so, when Health Minister Matt Hancock fancies himself as an amateur jockey! (See his website). Indeed, the profits of the gambling industry (£53bn combined/year!) need to be restored ASAP, given that the lost bets on live horse racing,



Cheltenham festival in March

football and tennis - which all disappeared during lockdown - could hardly be made up via online table tennis, marbles... and

Swedish trotting... whatever that may be! No, the government's been told by BetFred to get his profit ball rolling again, or else!

• The 30-day claim

Transport for London, GTR and LNER train operators have all announced that they will be using a new 30-day cleaner which will render the interior of their trains virus-free 30 days.

The regular daily cleaning is still meant to be done, but they say they will now be able to "focus on out of reach places". They explain that they also have virus-killing chemicals which last for 24 hours and even an electrostatic "wand" that allows disinfectant to wrap around surfaces! The mind boggles. Reassurance is the name of the game!

Yet it was only on the 5 June that transport secretary Grant Shapps said masks would be compulsory on public transport. Something quite simple, which would have protected transport

workers and passengers alike. And maybe if masks had been worn from the word go, this virus wouldn't have disproportionately claimed the lives of so many transport workers, many from BAME backgrounds and thus so much more vulnerable to the virus.

• Wriggle room we don't have

The government published a document called "Working safely during coronavirus", which is supposed to prevent a new wave of infections while the lockdown is eased. But not a single one of the rules outlined will be enforced on the bosses - precisely to give them all the wriggle room they need to re-open their businesses! At a time when the government's own deputy chief medical officer Van-Tam has admitted that "we

haven't much headroom"!

So for instance, the document states that employers have to implement measures to maintain 2-metres social distancing... "where possible". Workers travelling to work should avoid public transport... "where possible". To avoid overcrowded canteens, employers should provide take-away meals... "where possible", etc. And workers who are clinically vulnerable are simply advised to work from home or take care to keep the 2-metres social distancing at work... Face coverings are now mandatory on public transport only!

But never mind, the government and the bosses they represent will be able to point to this useless document claiming they've done their bit - and blame their workforces and the population in general if new infections arise!

Rich list billionaires on furlough!

The government boasts about the amount - £54 billion so far - it's spending on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, which is paying 8.7 million workers 80% of their pay, at the time of writing. In Boris Johnson's own words "we have looked after the lower-paid people in our society, and the hardest-working" - and "put our arms around them"!

One has to wonder who Johnson's

arms are really around. It turns out that, according to the Sunday Times Rich List, at least 20 British billionaires have also benefited from the government's furlough scheme! They include Sri and Gopi Hinduja, who topped last year's Rich List with £22bn; property moguls, the Reuben brothers, joint second on the list at £16bn, owners of Newcastle Racecourse, property developments in the city and who have furloughed around 750 staff; Sports Direct tycoon Mike

Ashley (£1.95bn), 75th on the list and who has put the majority of his 18,000 Frasers Group employees on furlough, and Jim Ratcliffe (£12.15bn), co-owner of The Pig hotel chain. Among others!

The combined wealth of Britain's richest, while a little less than last year, comes to £743 billion. So here's an idea: what not expropriate them and use this cash to fund a real job retention scheme for the next 6 years?

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**Preparing for yet more cuts**

In a letter addressed to staff, Royal Mail bosses complained that C-19 had created huge problems for their business: "addressed letter" volumes had fallen by 33% in April, so revenue was down by £22m!

This is very hard to believe! In fact we've seen parcels traffic skyrocketing, thanks to the increase in online shopping during lockdown! It's like a second Christmas! And they don't mention how they're profiting from the pandemic. Yes, thanks to the juicy test-collection contracts they've

accepted - despite the potential risk of cross-contamination for those workmates doing the collections.

If anything, RM is making a killing - and not only in the sense of increased revenue. Thanks to a "business as usual" policy in the first critical weeks of the pandemic, we were expected to come to work without proper protection. Many of our workmates fell sick with Covid-19 - and we don't know how many may have died! And now we're told we should prepare for a "package of potential measures"



in order, apparently, to address the falling revenue. They say this will be explained when the company announces its financial results, later in June. But we can guess what's in store: a "package" of yet more job cuts! So in the meantime, we'll need to prepare our own "package of counter-measures"... ☐

- **The mind boggles**

Apparently we're meant to be reassured that the bosses have "worked with the Chief Medical Officer" to keep us safe while collecting these tests... when this Officer has already shown how trustworthy he is! But management is reorganising our work for this new service. And we also see that if there isn't as much demand as they think, they intend to keep us busy delivering "other premium products"! Like D2D, maybe...? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 3/6/20]

- **COVID-insecure certificate**

So we're supposed to be a "Covid-secure" workplace now? Despite the fact that there are areas where we still can't keep the 2 meters social distancing! Management has done nothing about it. Better still, but

managers and CWU union officials have sent a joint letter patting themselves on the back, telling us they've implemented "appropriate controls" to keep us safe... Thanks for that. We feel so reassured! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 3/6/20]

- **Where do they shop?**

Saying that, we don't understand why it took management so long to introduce PPE and why the quality of it is so poor. We can guess that the later and the cheaper, the better? But then RM issued a statement saying they've spent £40m on PPE... So what happened? Are they buying masks at £4 each on ebay? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 3/6/20]

- **Against common sense?**

And what we've noticed is this: that some managers don't even wear masks. Do they think they're immune to Covid-19? Sure,

they don't get their hands dirty but they do release a fair amount of hot air... So please, for the sake of the rest of us, keep your masks on! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 3/6/20]

- **Our health first**

Thank goodness managers are not following the Public Health England guidelines for cleaners to the letter - which says we should clean work areas using warm soapy water first. When it makes more sense to use the anti-viral product first and then wash later! But then, managers are not recommending masks and eye protection as well as gloves and aprons to be worn at all times. And given that we're to assume there will always be asymptomatic shedders of the virus around, we should err on the side of caution - and wear good protection at all times. [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 3/6/20]

King's Cross railway station (London)

- **Atalian: utterly irresponsible**

Yes, Atalian-Servest which cleans LNER's trains, has already proved its irresponsibility time and again during the C-19 crisis. But it just gets worse and worse! Managers just laughed off our demands for proper protection and disinfection measures at first, but now, after several of us on nights have actually caught the virus, their only concern is for us to get back to work!

So they told us to get tested, and return immediately if negative! Never mind the 14-day incubation period of C-19 and the (already weak!) "official" instructions which would require not just this shift, but the other shifts who came into contact with them, to remain "self-isolated"! [King's X Workers' Platform 03/06/20]

- **They can't get away with this!**

And it's not just this incident! After making us all share one room in close quarters for breaks, eating and changing; overlapping our shifts, refusing to cut numbers on duty, or hours of work, despite the fewer trains, they're going

ahead with this insane accusation of "gross misconduct" against workmates who left early, but only once their work was all done. Actually the right words to describe such "bosses" are unprintable. [King's X Workers' Platform 03/06/20]

- **BAME lives mean nothing?**

We were shocked to hear about GTR worker at Victoria Station who died from C-19. At first it was said she got the virus from someone who spat at her, but now British Transport Police say there's no evidence. But at the time, bosses weren't even making masks and other protective gear compulsory, let alone ensuring that anyone in a high risk category stayed home! Instead, black or other ethnic minority (BAME) workers like her, were (and still are!) at double risk of catching this killer virus! They should all be home on full pay. [King's X Workers' Platform 03/06/20]

- **We have waited enough**

It's been more than 2 months now that us cleaners at Hornsey have been waiting to get masks - or face coverings (+goggles,



visors) of any sort, for that matter! What needs to happen for us to get some? Must we "down tools"? [King's X Workers' Platform 03/06/20]

- **Just for show?...**

Us Atalian workers couldn't believe our eyes and ears when we saw that video on cleaning trains and the station! What is that special cleaning system called "fogging" with a hand machine to spray disinfectant? We've only seen one of these, once before - and that was a while ago. Mind you, we've been told this is a "very expensive piece of equipment"! So was it taken out of its box just once, for the video?... [King's X Workers' Platform 03/06/20]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

New and old threats

The return to work on 18th May was meant to be staggered: 1 shift the first 2 weeks, then the other crews coming back the 3rd and 4th weeks. A slow start back then? That's what should have happened. But within the first week, lines were running full speed. The last crew called back, originally due on 8 June, was given a week's notice to start early, on Wednesday 3 June, on nights!

BMW did try to convince us they'd made the factory "Covid-secure", by sending us photos of the plastic

curtains hanging by the lines, plastic partitions dividing canteen seats and (clear!!) plastic between the men's urinals. But they've done nothing to change radically the way cars are built, to eliminate the overcrowded areas on assembly! Instead we're issued with visors (1 per week) to wear when we get too close to each other - but these leave big gaps either side of our faces.

And now they're sowing rumours that they might cut a shift, meaning two shifts of ten hours, in place of 3



shifts of 7½ hours. Are they mad? Working in a mask and/or visor is hot and sweaty. So we need frequent breaks and shorter shifts - and therefore more hands (and shifts), not fewer! ☐

• **Poorly planned h&s**

How on earth are those who have been given a full face-shield supposed to work with them on? It doesn't take long for them to get so dusty and steamed up that we can't see. We struggle to keep them clean and they're only changed once a week. If we can't work properly, we'll take our time. [Workers' Fight BMW Mini Oxford 3/6/20]

• **Our health comes first**

BMW's "safety measures" never filled us with confidence any more than the government's. Since they've called us back to work during a deadly pandemic and without any breakthroughs in treatment, they should test everyone before we come to work. And to keep

us virus-free, if anyone needs transport to the plant, that should be provided too. Ford did this to re-open Valencia in Spain, on workers' insistence, and provided testing at special bus stops. It is possible! [Workers' Fight BMW Mini Oxford 3/6/20]

• **Mitie's idea of distancing**

It's disgusting that some of our workmates in MITIE are told to work in confined spaces with no more than flimsy cotton masks! It would be quite possible to organise work differently to comply with social distancing. But since these cowboys don't care if they risk our lives, it's up to us to impose our safety on them! [Workers' Fight BMW Mini Oxford 3/6/20]

• **It's not our job!**

Cleaning work areas is a serious business,

and asking us to do it shows that management don't take our health seriously. It needs specialist cleaners to do a deep clean between every shift, for as long as it takes - half an hour is not enough! And by the way, overtime (for cleaning tasks or not) is as out of order in a pandemic as it is at any other time! [Workers' Fight BMW Mini Oxford 3/6/20]

• **As messy as before**

You'd think that, since Covid 19 can collect and survive for hours on surfaces, keeping working areas clear of clutter would be a priority. But no, parts are piling up around us as before, to keep up with a line speed which is now a double threat to our health. [Workers' Fight BMW Mini Oxford 3/6/20]

Ford Dagenham Engine Plant

• **Page missing?**

So we looked through that 64-page(!!) "Playbook", which is all about returning to work and the complicated procedures for cleaning, distancing, what to do if you have symptoms, daily self-cert, etc., but where was the page which explained that workers at high risk from the virus should stay home?

PS: can someone explain why Ford calls this a "PLAYbook"? [Workers' fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 27/05/20]

• **Quite right to leave!**

We heard that some Panther cranks workers walked out last week after they got sent to Tiger assembly... They just didn't feel safe. We should all have walked with them, really! At least machining has staggered breaks and 2m distancing. Not that the 2-metre rule is based on science. A good old coughing fit or big sneeze can project virus droplets over 3 metres and more... [Workers' fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 27/05/20]

• **Too close for comfort**

Who says 10 or 15 minutes is a big enough

interval between shifts? In some companies it's over an hour, so there's no risk of bumping into mates arriving or leaving. What's more it would allow thorough cleaning by real cleaning teams instead of us amateurs! [Workers' fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 27/05/20]

• **Seats at last**

We're delighted that at last there are chairs along the line for us to sit on - something we've asked for, for years! Tho' they could be a bit less flimsy! Now all we have to do is make sure they stay when C-19's left.

• **Breathing space**

There are no two ways about it - since we need to wear masks for hours on end (thanks to Ford's having us back on full shifts!), we need real breaks of fresh air. And with this hot weather, even more so! So yes, instead of the "3-too-short breaks-a-day" we're taking as many breaks as required... [Workers' fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 27/05/20]

• **Not in our Playbook!**

What's this "Covid Security"...? If social distancing is a rule it's out the window as soon as we're all rushing together to get to



DDC canteen! Where, once we get there, we must stand 2m apart!? Plain stupid. So shorten the shifts, stagger the breaks and keep the canteen open as long as needed! QED. [Workers' fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 27/05/20]

• **Heat relief comes first**

In the meantime we'll just have to implement our own timings... For safety's sake, of course. Just like the heat reliefs we used to take in the "old days" of the PTA.

And in fact, given that the fans are disconnected in the name of not blowing viruses about in the Darkside, we'll definitely need to take at least 10 minutes off to de-mask, in every hour...

PS: Actually we heard they might connect the fans up now. But why not hire mobile air-con units instead? ...£££s, of course... [Workers' fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 27/05/20]

USA

The brutal, deliberate, killing of George Floyd on 25 May by a white cop, who stuck a knee into his neck until he could no longer breathe, sparked a firestorm. Right across the US, in all 50 states, and in over 350 towns and cities, hundreds of thousands of people marched in the streets to express their anger. "Say his name. George Floyd", protesters chanted, "I can't breathe": they repeated his last words. The scale of these protests has been unprecedented.

In down-town Minneapolis, angry demonstrators filled the streets. They set the third precinct of the Police Department ablaze. Police had to be evacuated from the building. The protesters shouted: "We're sick and tired of being sick and tired!" Minnesota's Governor responded by calling in the National Guard and declaring a state of emergency. 20,000 National Guardsmen were deployed in 29 states, including California, Michigan, and Pennsylvania.

In Washington DC, Trump, who had threatened "when the looting starts, the shooting starts", called in military police and put 1,600 US Army soldiers on standby. But huge protests outside the White House forced him to take refuge in his emergency bunker!

Over 200 curfews were imposed. Protesters were still undeterred. Ever larger protests took place in Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia and Washington DC, despite being met with tear gas, rubber bullets and sometimes live rounds. A black man

George Floyd: the spark that ignited a movement



was shot dead in Kentucky. Protestors fired back. Two police were shot. In Atlanta, Georgia, 6 officers were charged with aggravated assault after tazing a young black couple and dragging them from their car.

However, many local sheriffs and national guardsmen joined the protests, "taking the knee" to show their solidarity. US Army officials began to criticise Trump for involving the military, saying that it risked further politicising the situation...

Facing rising popular mobilisation and the growing sympathy among state forces, Trump pulled back the army, and by 7 June, National Guards were stood down in Washington DC and California and then in most other states.

Meanwhile, federal and state institutions have acted to appease the anger. The police officer who murdered George Floyd had his charge changed from 3rd to 2nd

degree murder on 3 June. And now Minneapolis city councillors have voted to disband their police.

Here in Britain, thousands have marched almost daily since the protests began in the US, in London, Manchester, Sheffield, Glasgow, Cardiff, Leicester and Milton Keynes defying the C-19 lockdown. Yes, there are accounts to settle against the police here, who also must answer for their record of racist violence and murder. And there are accounts to settle with a government which defends this racist record and which has now shown its incompetent disdain for the whole of the working class by allowing the coronavirus to sweep uncontrolled through the most vulnerable sections of the population. But the fight cannot stop there. Because racism will only be eradicated once capitalism itself is eradicated. □

Letter from India

The Modi government's mismanagement of the Covid-19 crisis continues, leading to a heavy toll of deaths among workers. The gradual lifting of the lockdown led to a massive increase in cases - from 25,000 on 1 May to as many as 286,857 by 10 June, with 8,102 "official" deaths.

One reason for this was the exodus of 20m migrant workers from urban industrial and commercial centres who, without jobs and unable to afford rent and food, left to return to their villages. Workers said that they preferred the

War against Covid ... or war against workers?

"security" even of possible semi-starvation in the village, where they'd at least be with their families, to facing starvation in the cities!

Special "labour trains" were eventually laid on by the government but these have turned into death traps. Workers had to wait hours in overcrowded train stations, while receiving little food or water, while temperatures soared to over 45 degrees in parts of the country: in the space of just 19 days last month, 80 workers died on these trains.

However, the majority of returning

workers are still going on foot - and many walk along the rail-tracks. But this is just as dangerous. Sixteen migrant steel workers in Maharashtra state, exhausted from walking over 25km in the heat, fell asleep on the tracks and were hit by a goods train on 8 May. This is on top of the 383 workers who've died during the lockdown due to suicide, police brutality and starvation. The working class is already paying an intolerable price for this crisis, even before the coming economic crisis has begun to hit. □

In addition to this paper, we publish bulletins in several large workplaces in the South East, a journal, "Class Struggle" and a series of pamphlets on topical issues. If you wish to know more, contact Workers' Fight by e-mail, at contact@w-fight.org, or by postal mail at:

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