

WORKERS' fight



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

LET'S FLY THE WORKERS' FLAG!

Waving the British flag and claiming that "we're alright, Jack..." thanks to his vaccine "grab" is Johnson's only defence against his poor ratings. This seems to work, for now. So Labour's Keir Starmer has decided to join him under the Union Jack, in this patriotic, "Britain first" bluster and vaccine triumphalism.

But "we" are not alright. One year after the first Covid cases were discovered, the British death count has reached 114,851.

There can be no such thing as "health in one country" thanks to vaccination, which Johnson claims to be his "route out of the pandemic". In this interconnected, inter-dependent world, nobody will be safe from this fast-mutating virus, until everybody is safe.

An effective vaccine roll-out would have had to be rapid and global. But under this capitalist system, based on selfish competition between companies and selfish competition between the nation states which back them, such a roll-out just can't happen.

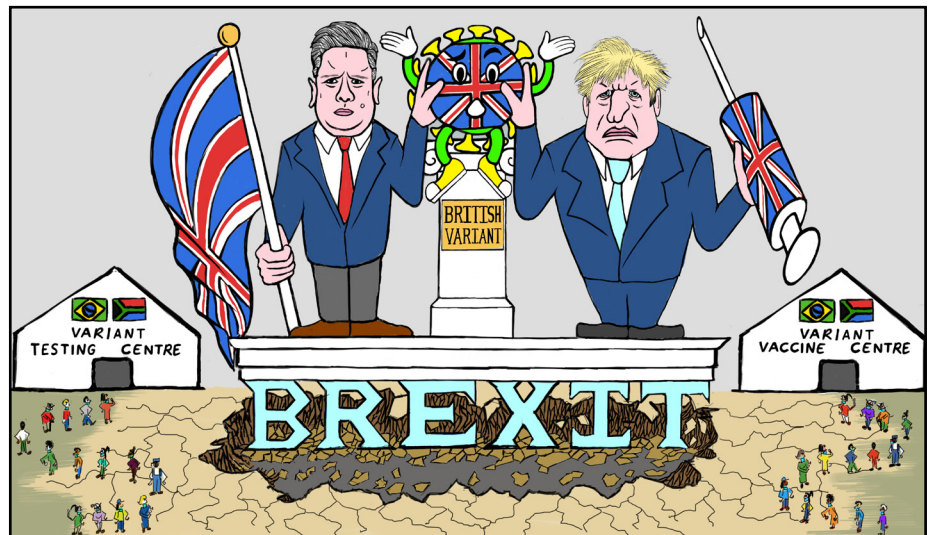
Deprivation nation

Instead, each country resorts to "national solutions". Here, from under the folds of the Union Jack, we are invited to celebrate charitable efforts for an NHS which would never have needed them, if not for deliberate government cuts. Yes, by the very same hypocrites who supported those cuts.

When 18th century writer, Samuel Johnson, said "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel", he was talking about those who pretended to be patriotic, but were not.

But in the face of this Covid crisis, how can there be a place for celebrating any kind of patriotism, real, or fake?

This narrow nationalist nonsense promoted by scoundrel Johnson is designed to distract us from the criminal policies he promoted, implemented and



then defended as doing "everything we could".

And this is also the case for Brexit. Its consequences are not the so-called "victory" in the vaccine race, nor "happy British fish", as Rees-Mogg fatuously quipped. No, they are empty supermarket shelves in Northern Ireland and Scottish shell-fishers losing livelihoods.

As for the "world-beating" vaccine roll-out, it is based on inadequate supply. But nevertheless, politicians and scientists alike, defend the 12-week gap between jabs - an oh-so-clever "made in Britain innovation"... Never mind that it's still not known if eking out too-few vaccine shots in this way will still give (anti-variant!) protection!

Squeezing the bosses

And now, ministers pretend that the latest (partial!) quarantine measures will keep a mutant virus out, which is already "in"! As usual, they're closing the stable door after the horse has bolted. However, the hotel industry will get a guaranteed bonanza from quarantine stays. And private labs stand to gain juicy profits thanks to

the 4 tests which the government has made mandatory.

Johnson told parliament yet again that his arms are around everyone. Certainly, there is a big "hug" for the bosses who got £47bn "free and for nothing" under the furlough scheme. And there's more to come in Sunak's budget on 3 March.

For the rest of us it's a painful squeeze, as bosses use the pandemic as a pretext to turn their profit screw up a notch. So workers are deciding it's time to squeeze back.

Rolls Royce workers in Lancashire, bus drivers in London and Manchester, Heathrow airport workers, British Gas engineers, construction workers, cleaning workers - and many others - are going on strike. Whether it's against job cuts, wage cuts, or "fire and rehire", workers are saying no! And they are winning these fights!

They are showing that by uniting around the workers' flag - which has no white stripes on it - they can stop the bosses in their tracks. And that they have nothing to lose but their chains, and a world - not a mere nation - to win! ☐

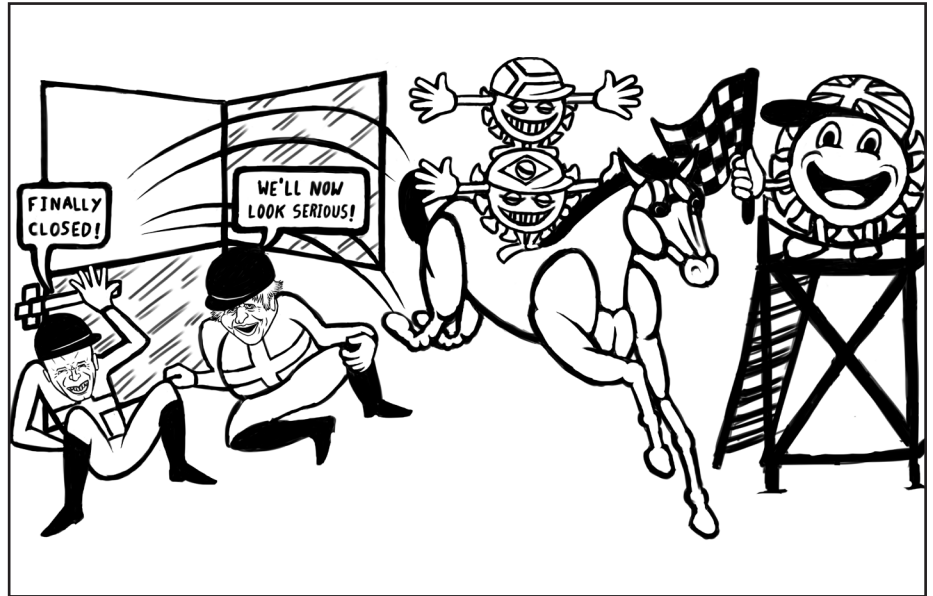
Covid-19 crisis

Britain's first Covid-19 cases were diagnosed almost exactly a year ago. Since then, nearly 115,000 people have died from the virus. This is the worst death toll in Europe and the 5th worst in the world. And now Britain is in the middle of its 3rd wave of infections, with a hospitalisation rate almost twice as high as in the first wave.

True, this can be put down partly to the more infectious "Kent/UK" variant (it easily replicates in the cells lining the nose), which also causes more severe disease. But there's no doubt that the biggest contributing factor is Johnson's policy to use preventive health measures as a last and very late, resort - and to have given Covid a free ticket to Xmas.

It was only luck and Johnson's gamble on the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine (certainly not foresight) which placed Britain ahead in the unseemly vaccine race. If this plays as he hopes, it might save his skin: his vaccination programme is the only route which remains out of this health crisis, aggravated by his

Johnson's vaccine cover



catastrophic approach.

In the meantime, besides starting to implement stricter quarantine rules to prevent new variant viruses from entering the country (they are mutating just as fast within Britain's borders!), Health Secretary Hancock is "surge testing" to identify cases of the already-present South

African variant. The trouble is that it turns out not to be very sensitive to the AZ vaccine. And this is bad news. Because the more there are vaccinated individuals, the more the virus will try to mutate... and the less the vaccines will have the desired effect. It could lead back to square one. □

• Leading the vaccine race... on horseback?

The government's face of the Covid-19 vaccination programme is Nadhim Zahawi, junior minister for business and industry. He is said to be the second highest-earning MP. A few years ago, he was more likely to be in the news for his property investments, or links to offshore companies.

Zahawi's favourite business, as a

horse showjumper, seems to be his riding stables at home in his true-blue Stratford-upon-Avon constituency. Yes, he's another horsey one... Now he's hoping to prance over fences to get the "nine most vulnerable groups", including everybody over 50, vaccinated by May. He's already prepared for a possible fall, warning that the timetable depends on a sustained

supply of the vaccine. The existing supply is already being stretched further by offering a 2nd dose of vaccine after 12 weeks, instead of the recommended 3 weeks, for the Pfizer jab. And he has now let it be known that trials are underway to see whether the vaccines might still be effective if a different vaccine is used for the second dose...

• Behind vaccine "success"

By 10 February, the number of adults vaccinated in Britain already passed the 14m mark. But as everyone keeps pointing out, the smooth operation of the roll-out is thanks to the NHS and its expertise in delivering the annual flu jab. Indeed, it seems that somebody in government had the good sense, just this once, to convince Hancock and Johnson that "public" was better than "private"...

However, this also means that the NHS "postcode lottery", which appeared after the destructive Health and Social Care Act of 2012 fragmented the system, has come back into play. So over-70s and over-80s in some areas, as well as poorer (thus more at risk) ethnic minority groups have been left waiting for the vaccine, while under 70s are being vaccinated in more affluent parts. You wouldn't know it, if you watch the self-congratulatory government press conferences, though. In fact Johnson

has taken to appearing on TV in a white coat with a syringe in his hand, just so we don't forget who has put Britain "first" in this grossly inequitable "vaccine race".

• Vaccine nationalism, Brexit hype

When AstraZeneca (AZ) announced it was "unable" to supply 300m doses of its vaccine to the EU-27, despite having agreed to do so, it sparked a nasty nationalist spat between EU and British politicians. And almost ended up with the reinstatement of a "hard" border between Northern Ireland and the 26-counties, under the infamous "Article 16" of the Brexit deal, in an (ill-conceived) attempt at retaliation!

And all because AZ's CEO refused to offer some of the vaccine being produced at its British sites to the EU - apparently in the light of production problems at its Belgian factory. He claims he had to do that, because the deal for 100m doses,

which he signed with Britain 3 months earlier, comes first! And that he didn't actually guarantee the EU supply, but only promised to make "best efforts" to provide it. Of course, it's likely too, that the EU is paying a lot less...

But did Johnson step in to offer the EU half of the British order (after all, 140m doses of the Pfizer and AZ vaccines is more than enough). Not at all. "Sharing" is not on his agenda!

And even though the "Article 16 threat" was withdrawn within minutes, the Brexiteers were already making anti-EU capital out of it. They claimed that if Britain had a vaccine "advantage", it was "Brexit wot done it". But of course any of the EU 27 could have made their own arrangements - and indeed Hungary has done so, approving Russia's Sputnik V vaccine.

Anyway, the story isn't over. The viruses can mutate and outwit vaccines. The tale of the hare and the tortoise could still apply.

NHS: Critical staff shortages

The NHS hasn't been coping well. There are still just under 30,000 Covid patients in hospital and over 3,000 on ventilators. Each intensive care nurse has been taking care of up to 6 patients, instead of one. Personal Protective Equipment, one year on, is still inadequate: with staff facing more infectious viruses,

the Royal College of Nursing has had to demand higher-grade FFP2 masks to be issued on the wards.

So it is no surprise that NHS England reported a 22% increase in the number of Covid-infected healthcare workers in the first week of January, compared with the last week of December. As many as

Covid-19 crisis

52,000 are off sick with Covid. The Office for National Statistics reported that 883 health and social care workers died of Covid between March and December 2020. The only good news is that at least these workers were front of the queue for the vaccine - and most have now received their jabs. ☐

• Reform, or legalising "chumocracy"?

Various newspapers have reported on a leaked government document which proposes NHS reform. Apparently the government is considering revoking parts of the 2012 Health and Social Care Act. They say that the process of competitive tendering might be halted - and that this

will mean no more privatisations!

However, it's also possible that such reform could just eliminate the NHS's obligation to advertise for private bidders when it is outsourcing, thus giving ministers the right to select their own favourites... In other words, this

reform would just provide retrospective permission for what's already been happening during the pandemic: contracts bestowed on friends and family (Harding, Bingham, Deloitte, Serco, Capita, G4S, etc...) under the pretext of Covid's "exceptional circumstances".

• No PPE tracking on the horizon?

Fujitsu and North West SME Appligo are now responsible for creating "management software" that will allow the NHS to track PPE stocks across different teams and hospitals. In and of itself, this isn't a bad idea. But Fujitsu has already been implicated in a couple of IT scandals in Britain. For example, Fujitsu/ICL designed the infamous

Horizon computer system for the Post Office in 1995 which caused multiple accounting errors. Postmasters lost livelihoods, and were even sent to prison on false charges.

Fujitsu was nevertheless handed an £896 million contract to digitalise patient records in the south west of England in 2002. Within six years, it had only

managed to install the IT system in nine acute hospital trusts in the region. The contract was finally terminated in 2008, but there followed a 10-year legal battle with the company.

It seems safe to assume that it's unlikely that a PPE tracking system will be delivered on time, if at all.

• The lowest sick pay in the OECD

The Covid pandemic in Britain has exposed the lack of support for those who fall sick or need to self-isolate as a result of the virus. The current weekly rate of statutory sick pay (SSP) is just £95.85 (£96.35 from April 2021). This is around 1/5 of average weekly earnings, meaning that a worker loses around 80% of his or her usual income. And they are only eligible for this pittance if they earn above £120 per week. This excludes 1.8 million workers!

Indeed, among the rich countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Britain's sick pay is the lowest. On average, across all the 34 OECD

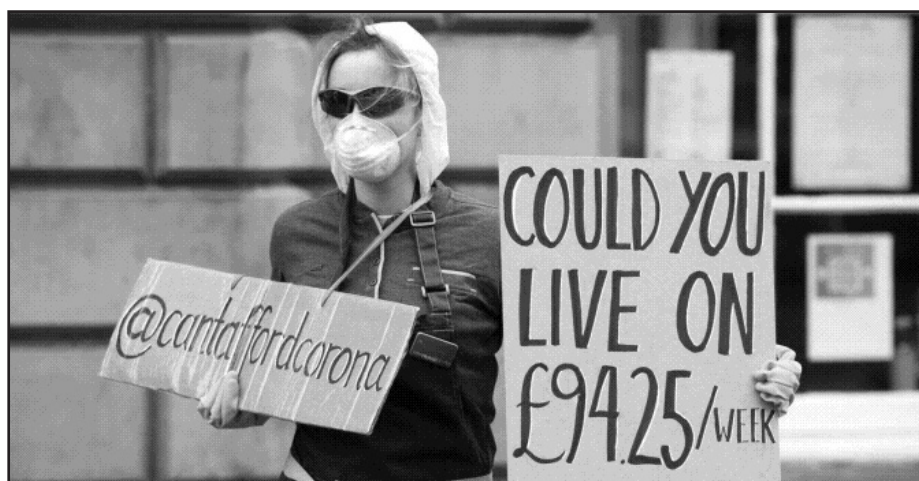
countries, workers receive around 70% of their last wage as SSP. In fact, it is as high as 100% in a number of countries - like Norway, Luxembourg and Iceland.

Individuals and organisations have on-going campaigns for full occupational sick pay and adequate financial support for any worker - employed for how ever many hours, or unemployed - when they are sick. Even the bosses' favourite Financial Times newspaper has run several articles about this. But so far, beyond the hard-to-access £500 one off payment for Covid isolation, the government and the employers have remained unmoved. It's obvious that they need to be shoved - and hard.

Students starving during lockdown

As many as 1,700 international students, mostly from India, have been relying on foodbanks to survive during lockdown in East London. If it wasn't for local charities and East London Abdullah Aid, they'd be starving. Having lost the part-time jobs they relied on to pay their living expenses, they've had no other means of support. Most of them have had Covid: they live in cramped, rented accommodation, sharing beds, 3-4 to a room. Their conditions are dire.

When all this was put to their universities - which get up to £38,000/year from them in tuition fees, a spokesperson claimed that they were providing "millions" in support for students from "hardship funds". And that if they weren't getting this help, it was their fault for not applying... But it turns out that these students, here on Tier 4 visas, are not even eligible. It's assumed that they're able to finance themselves! Never mind that because of the pandemic, many were cut off completely from families and funds, stranded, and unable to fly home. The universities couldn't care less about their survival. In fact, they sent them threatening letters when they were late with fees, implying they'd be deported. Yes, because they're no longer the "cash machines", which, for the past decade have kept British universities alive!



Imperialism

On 17 January 1991, the US-led "Operation Desert Storm" - backed by a coalition of 30 countries with Britain at the forefront - bombarded Iraq and entered the neighbouring micro-state of Kuwait. The aim was to drive out the occupying Iraqi forces.

Iraq's military offensive into Kuwait was dictator Saddam Hussein's response to a demand from the Kuwaiti autocracy for immediate repayment of a \$9bn "loan" for Iraq's 8-year war against Iran, given at US behest.

The final straw for Saddam, was Kuwait's upping of oil production (partly from wells under Iraqi soil), driving down the oil price and further undermining his war-ruined economy. He'd been assured by the US ambassador that the US had no opinion on this "dispute". However, US president George Bush (Senior), immediately condemned the occupation and launched "Operation Desert Shield", building up troops on the Saudi-Iraq border, in preparation for the coalition's attack.

Baghdad and other Iraqi cities were heavily bombed. The imperialist leaders compared Saddam Hussein to Hitler, asserting that his downfall was the objective of the war. Yet by early March, when Saddam's military defeat was followed by uprisings of Marsh Arabs in the south and Kurds in the north, the US coalition stood aside, allowing Saddam's forces to crush them. In the end, the imperialist powers opted for the "stability" offered by Saddam's repressive regime, rather than risk a new and untried force and the inevitable disruption this might bring to their oil revenues.

Thirty years since Gulf War .1



US fighter jets: their bombs set the oil wells alight

They spent the next 12 years weakening the regime with economic sanctions. Iraq's food imports were controlled under a UN scheme that allowed Iraq to "pay" for vital supplies with oil exports. The malicious conduct by the West of this "oil for food" programme led to over a million ordinary Iraqis dying of malnutrition and lack of essential medical supplies. Iraq's refusal to fully cooperate with repeated weapons inspections, looking for a non-existent nuclear and biological arsenal, was used to justify regular US and British bombings - and eventually, the Bush and Blair second Gulf War which finally deposed Saddam Hussein in 2003.

In the succeeding thirty years, Iraq has never been out of crisis. The targeting of the Sunni population during the war and occupation led to the creation of ISIS, the setting alight of Syria and the resurgence

of Iran-Iraq tensions, with the US playing its usual nefarious role, whether under Obama or Trump - and now it is Biden's turn. The current unworkable Iraqi constitution is the legacy of the US administration, which ran the country from 2003 to 2011. In a country whose population is around 38% Shia, 23% Sunni and 12% Kurdish (diverse others make up the rest), this constitution (despite various "reforms") still allocates parliamentary seats on ethnic and religious grounds, perpetuating these sectarian divisions.

Since September 2019, demonstrations in Baghdad by thousands of young unemployed demanding jobs, have grown into a mass movement. Despite being shot at by government troops, demonstrators continue to protest against a corrupt political regime based on religious sectarianism. □

US: "storming" Wall Street

When 3.1m users of an investment forum on internet message board, Reddit, called r/wallstreetbets, "swarm traded" on the New York stock exchange, by bidding up the price of Gamestop shares, they caused huge losses to hedge fund investors, who'd bet on GameStop's price falling. As a result, they managed to subvert - or put a "squeeze", as they say - on this so-called "shorting" by the big guys. One fund, Melvin Capital, lost as much as \$2bn (£1.5bn). Having caused chaos for the financial sphere, these "WallStreetBettors" were likened to the "anti-establishment" mob who stormed the US Capitol on 6 January, causing political chaos.

Small fish and wannabe sharks

But that's not the real story. Not at all.

These "little guys" are hardly a "guerilla army" against Wall Street. Nor were they in any way helping to save the struggling computer games chain, Gamestop, from callous big speculators.

No, these "little guys" are "retail investors", many of them working from home during the pandemic and able to take advantage of commission-free platforms like Robinhood to buy options and trade shares on the stock market - something which used to be the privilege of corporate investors like BlackRock, hedge funds and of course, the very rich...

All that's happened is that a new generation of "small guys" has joined the "big guys" in the speculation game. They even self-consciously call themselves the "degenerates". Because, yes, this is the "degenerate" face of capitalism today!

Blowing up new bubbles

And by the way, big players also made money on the day and had a far larger part in causing GameStop's stock to soar. Said one commentator, "The Senvest Management hedge fund made some \$700 million off the situation. So where the little guy got the ball rolling, institutional investors quickly took over and soon accounted for most of the trading".

However, what this millions-strong collective intervention shows, is how easy it is to cause sudden shifts, if not panic, on the stock exchange. Some said it recalled 2008 and other pre-crash stock market "bubbles". And of course the danger is that bubbles burst, with repercussions for the wider capitalist economy. This Reddit flashmob was no revolution. But a revolution is needed, not just to stop Wall Street, but to overthrow the system which sustains it.

Scotland: another independence ballot?

Their Society

Scottish Parliamentary elections are due to be held on 6 May 2021. And the Scottish National Party (SNP) has let it be known that if it wins the ballot, it will hold a referendum on independence. That is no surprise. According to the polls, more Scottish voters say they are in favour, than was the case in 2014, when 44.7% voted for it. Johnson, Brexit and Covid, have seen to that.

In fact SNP First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, who has personally given press conferences every day during the pandemic, is generally perceived to have conducted Scotland's Covid policy with "diligence and concern", and has been far quicker off the mark than her English and Welsh counterparts when it comes to preventive measures. In April last

year she trail-blazed compulsory mask-wearing on public transport. And when one of her MSPs decided to travel by train to London pending a Covid test, which then came back positive, she suspended her, in contrast to Johnson's accommodating attitude to the lockdown transgressions of Dominic Cummings...

Brexit, which 62% of Scots opposed, has already proved disastrous for the Scottish langoustine, crab and salmon fishermen, who are confronted with new regulations under which they require plant and machinery to clean their shellfish. Already some have gone out of business.

Of course, independence from the rest of Britain cannot fix any of this.

A referendum at this point is likely to be less about an independent Scotland than a verdict on Johnson's government and the expression of anger and exasperation over the fall in living standards, joblessness and poverty.

Scotland cannot either re-enter the EU without countless problems arising, the least of which would be a "hard border" between Scotland and England. Obviously, from a practical point of view this is a non-starter. It would just add needless complications to cross-border relations and would be a headache for the population on both sides. So yes, a referendum might allow voters to blow off some steam, but independence? No, it would be a big, indeed reactionary, step backwards. □

• The Home Office's concentration camps

On 29 January, a fire broke out at the Napier barracks in Kent, an ex-military site which has been hastily repurposed to detain refugees. Maybe it was started as a protest, but before it could be put out, it had damaged a whole block of dormitories, leaving inmates with no electricity or heating.

These dormitories are overcrowded. As many as 28 men are squashed into rooms meant for half that number. For months, they've had no access to legal advice nor health services. This January, Covid started to spread amongst them. Some decided to sleep outdoors, despite the freezing weather. To reduce the crowding, officials began to move some residents away from the barracks. In fact the fire broke out shortly after Clearsprings (the housing contractor managing the site for the Home Office),

told remaining residents that because there were still men on the site with Covid-19, they'd no longer be allowed to leave.

Home Secretary Patel immediately condemned the damage at Napier as "deeply offensive to the taxpayers of this country, who pay for this accommodation". She said it was "an insult to say [the barracks] is not good enough", since it had previously housed "our brave soldiers and army personnel"! In fact the Home Office's own "equality impact assessment" suggests that better conditions in detention centres would "undermine public confidence in the asylum system" - in other words, the worse the living conditions for refugees, the better. Yes, this is blatant, xenophobic repression.

Davos: Summit of hypocrisy

This year's World Economic Forum for the world's rich and powerful, which usually takes place at the Swiss luxury winter resort of Davos, was held online, due to the pandemic. It was meant to focus on the rising inequalities due to climate change and the pandemic, which is hardly a topic of much concern to them. But no doubt they need to keep up a pretence of humanity...

For the occasion, the charity, Oxfam, published a useful report, entitled "The Inequality Virus" in a probably futile attempt to prick their consciences. The press release put today's situation in a nutshell: "the rigged economic system is enabling a super-rich elite to amass wealth in the middle of the worst recession since the Great Depression while billions of people are struggling to make ends meet".

It continued: "The recession is over for the richest. The world's ten richest men have seen their combined wealth increase by half a trillion dollars since the pandemic began - more than enough to pay for a Covid-19 vaccine for everyone and to ensure no one is pushed into poverty by the pandemic. At the same time, the pandemic has ushered in the worst job crisis in over 90 years with hundreds of millions of people now underemployed or out of work."

In fact, the capitalists' speedy recovery was largely thanks to government bailouts, which mainly fed financial speculation. Since last March, the wealth of the world's billionaires increased by £2.84bn, almost exactly the same amount workers worldwide have lost in earnings! As for the total wealth of these billionaires - £8.7bn - this equals the amount spent by all G20 countries in response to the pandemic!

Of course, the Summit's participants are likely to get even wealthier, by profiting further out of the pandemic, which has opened the doors to mega-riches to be made from vaccines, to PPE, to online learning.

Putting an end to this festival of greed is long overdue.



Refugees' protest, Napier barracks

Ford Dagenham Engine Plant

Another refusal needed...

On Tiger assembly our petition successfully forced managers to stop moving us between plants to make up for their ongoing shortage of labour. It simply pointed out the obvious: that the more we mix with each other, the more the virus will spread.

However, now managers have decided to introduce lay-offs in both plants - Thursdays and Fridays on Tiger and Mondays on Panther. And we wonder if this really is all about "supplier constraint" (the global

semiconductor shortage), as they claim, or because so many of us are off work due to Covid - and they can't move us around at will anymore?

True, Ford Saarlouis in Germany, which makes the Focus, has closed for a month. But during the week starting 1 February, there were around 40 workers from Panther assembly off sick with Covid, or self-isolating! Nothing to do with being at work, as "Covid-secure" Ford claims? That's hard to believe, especially when we're even told



to come to work while awaiting Covid test results "if we have no symptoms". Never mind the now well-known 1 in 3 asymptomatic spreading! But guess what, the lay-offs don't include Panther night shift, which is to carry on "as normal", 5 nights a week. Incredible. ☐

- **No to these LFTs**

What a damn cheek to ask us to go and get tests at the local authority facility! And then to come to work while waiting for the (up to 60% inaccurate) Lateral Flow Test (if we have no symptoms).

But what if we already have the virus? This'll have no effect on its spread here in the plant. It could even make it worse! And given there's "no time off for testing" why on earth would we go, if we feel fine and have no known contacts? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 04/02/21]

- **Test us twice a week**

In fact, the army deployed PCR-test

booths (much better than lateral flow tests), so why can't Ford do that here? It still boasts of its role in building ventilators, but apparently having a simple testing facility for us is impossible? Yes, we know, it's all about the \$\$\$££s... [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 04/02/21]

- **And what about us?!**

On our side at Hamton, we've not even received a letter to "encourage" us to get tested. When we're obviously at higher risk since we clean areas where positive cases have been identified.

We just get the temperature checks at the entrance, which is not enough! One more reason to have test facilities

on-site, in order for all of us (Hamton, LLL, canteen workers, etc.) to get tested! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 04/02/21]

- **Worth coming in??**

Are some of us - apparently mostly LLL team leaders - really going to be called in during the lay off days just to clean the dust off the robots inside the cages in DDC?

If there was so little work to do, why do this - or is it meant to be a "privilege" in order to get full pay..? We don't think so! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 04/02/21]

King's Cross railway station (London)

- **Lots to fight for...**

On 2 February, Atalian Servest workers voted for strike action. An overwhelming 106 were in favour with just 7 against. And no wonder. Ever since Atalian took over the LNER cleaning contract, it's proved incapable of getting our pay right or keeping an accurate record of our hours of work.

But it took Covid to expose them at their worst: they refused to cut or stagger shifts, they never provided safe/socially distanced facilities and we still have a daily fight for the right PPE/cleaning equipment. If we get sick, there is no occupational sick pay - only SSP. And now they're demanding that if we have Covid symptoms, we book a test within 4 hours and provide a result within 24 hours, to be paid at all! As if Test&Trace guarantee that!

Of course, getting this ballot result is one thing, but ensuring the RMT union full timers don't just use it to "strike" a deal behind our backs - is another. It's *our* fight and since we refuse to accept any compromises, we'll have to take over control of it ourselves. We've done it before and we can do it again.

- **No pay-rise? Not an option!**

Transport Minister, Chris Heaton-Harris (no, we hadn't heard of him either!) has written to 22 rail companies saying that wage increases for 62,000 railworkers are "unaffordable" due to the fall in passenger numbers because of Covid and is talking about a 2-year pay freeze.

Train operating companies (TOCs), on the other hand, have already been bailed out by the government twice since the start of the pandemic - a total of over £10bn to April 2021. Not to mention the fixed fees many of the TOCs still receive today, under the so-called quasi renationalisation, after franchises were suspended last March. Of course, rail bosses' haven't missed *their* pay-rise! This year for example, Manfred Rudhart, CEO of bus and rail giant Arriva gave himself an 18% increase and David Brown, CEO of the Go-Ahead Group, took 7.6%!

The rail union (RMT) said it had "*no hesitation in supporting national coordinated action*". Is that their way of announcing a national rail strike over pay? Because that's what's needed.

- **Nationalise Eurostar!**

Eurostar announced in January that it was on the brink of collapse. Despite being owned by the French and Belgian railways, together



with two international investment houses, apparently the French transport secretary has been talking to his British counterpart, Grant Shapps, about financial support from the British government to keep it going. For sure, it's the most important transport link between France and Britain. But it seems Shapps has not yet put his hand in his pocket. So now the RMT has started a "save Eurostar" petition pointing out that 3,000 "British" jobs (they don't care about the Belgian and French jobs?) rely on it and is asking the British government "*to engage in co-ordinated action*" with the company "*to protect this vital transport link*"!

The Brexiteer-led RMT has not called for nationalisation in this case. Maybe a tricky question though, because of course Britain has no financial stake in Eurostar anymore, so it would then be down to the French to do the necessary...

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• A sellout is a sell out**

So only 52.4% of us turned out to vote "for" or "against" the RM "Pathway down the drain" deal which CWU leaders recommended. Out of that low turnout, 53,998 voted to accept. That is, just under 50% of those eligible.

So no, this was not a good result for TeePee&Co and their RM bedfellows. Because if the 5,033 who voted against are added to those abstainers who're utterly fed up with CWU betrayals, no, the majority did not accept this agreement. [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 10/02/21]

• We could do with some changes...

Said TeePee about those of us who opposed the deal, "*some of those people are people who don't deal with change very well*" OK, maybe.

On the other hand, what he's signed up to is just the same old crap. That is, selling our Ts&Cs for another pat on the back.

In fact, we think it's time we did have some change around here. And we probably don't have to spell out where to start. [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 10/02/21]

• ...and the strike ballot?

The union leaders were pleased with this result, despite the turnout. It hardly reflects any endorsement though. They should remember that when 97% of us voted to strike in October 2019, the turnout was over 75%. That's our response to an invitation to FIGHT! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 10/02/21]

• When we need it the most

The Kiddycare nursery next to MP is being closed by RM next month. But it wasn't so long ago that Moya Greene was patting herself on the back for keeping it open. It doesn't just benefit us, but provides childcare for workers in the local area as well. Well, we kept it open last time and we can do it again. A online petition has gathered more than 1,119 signatures already! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 10/02/21]

• Wave after wave

We're very busy on Lates, with the daily tsunamis of packets - and the wave is always higher on Mondays... Of course, we know that some of our workmates are on sick leave or have taken well-deserved annual leave. But the fact that this creates such mayhem, just goes to



show that we aren't enough hands to share the work... And yes, we could find a way to have more hands in here, while keeping a safe distance - there's enough space in HMP!

PS: And by the way, can anyone tell us why Angard workers on Lates are not given permanent contracts? We've had enough of seeing precarious, low paid jobs spreading like a virus! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 10/02/21]

• Call 3-1-8!

So management think moving us all around HMP on Nights is okay? Yes, it might be okay for them to ask us to move from the basement and go upstairs, but have they even thought that this is the best way to help us catch Covid? Of course they haven't. All they have in their heads is how to fill the gaps left by such a shortage of hands! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 10/02/21]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• Furlough - on full pay**

We heard another shutdown might be on the cards, but only because shortages of parts like semiconductors are starting to cause delays on the line!

If it was our health they were concerned about, we wouldn't have been called back, during this so-called lockdown. We should be furloughed, of course, with everyone paid. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 03/02/21]

• Yet more H&S problems

We got a good break last week when a car fell off the line and ended up on its side... But how the hell can that happen?!

Luckily no one was injured, but this was a near miss. So the lines clearly have not been set up properly. The bosses' mad rush for production puts us at risk, so we should stop until we know it's safe! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 03/02/21]

• No clucking clue

Managers are running around like headless chickens at the moment, trying to sort out their production problems. They've created a real mess trying to run the lines without enough of us, with a shortage of parts, running cars close to each other, etc.

So managers can cluck all they like, we aren't going to help them deal with their own cluck-ups! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 03/02/21]

• Down with overtime!

We did so much overtime to fill our Working Time (Overtime!) Accounts before the Xmas shutdown and now we've all got to fill them up again?!

BMW/Gi and R&H have already asked us to do 2 hours WTA overtime before or after our shift, practically every day!

If BMW needs more hands they should be recruiting our unemployed mates to share the work with us.

[Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 03/02/21]

• No to unpaid work

Surprise, surprise! Two weeks ago management didn't manage to gather enough of us to do WTA on Friday night and ended up not running that WTA shift!

So together we can stop them messing around with our Friday nights and even get rid of WTA altogether: because what can BMW do if no one turns up? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 03/02/21]

• Occupational sick pay now!

After we've waited over 5 years for a contract, Gi threatened to give our contracts to "someone else", when we



asked for leave to get tested! Are they seriously trying to blacklist us for getting sick in this Covid-insecure workplace?!

To self-isolate we need occupational sick pay, i.e., permanent contracts for all! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 03/02/21]

• We do what we have to...

The Rudolph and Hellman (logistics sub-contractor) group leaders were instructed to hold meetings with us to tell us that our strike in December was "*against the rules*"! Well, cheers guys! If you hadn't told us we'd never have known!

They said we should have picked a delegation to go and talk to management. Not a bad idea in and of itself, but we happen to know these managers - and they only understand actions, not words... [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 03/02/21]

India

On 26 January, thousands of farmers stormed the Red Fort, in the heart of Delhi, to demand the repeal of three new farm laws imposed by the Modi government. The march began as a "tractor parade" starting from the outskirts of Delhi, where farmers have been camping for the last two months. They defied the designated routes to march to the centre of the capital, breaking barricades and overpowering the state police and paramilitary forces with their numbers, their tractors and courage, amidst high-security Republic Day celebrations. This was what was written on one of their banners: "We announce this is a war and it will go on until workers and peasants have won."

In fact, there were simultaneous protests in 20 other states. No wonder: half of the population is involved in agriculture, yet 1 in 5 in areas like Punjab is living in poverty. Ten thousand Indian farmers commit suicide every year. Modi's new laws are likely to destroy their already precarious livelihoods by allowing large multinational agribusiness to dominate the market. The serious unemployment crisis in the cities means that leaving the countryside is no option. So they said: "we will win or die".

Workers in the industrial belts surrounding the farmers' sit-ins had been watching the farmers' protests closely. On the day of the march, they came to join in individually and

Farmers put government on back foot



in groups. Some went to the sit-ins where farmers from their villages had assembled and marched with them. Some came the night before to help with preparations for the rally. In the days afterwards, workers were happy that the state paramilitary forces and police, which just last year had beat them when they walked home during the lockdown, were pushed back.

The government has now attempted to turn the sit-ins into prison camps, erecting barbed wire fences and walls around them, cemented nails to the road (to puncture the tyres of tractors), posted large numbers of police and paramilitary forces and blocked mobile and internet services for miles around. Recently one sit-in was attacked, by Delhi police and Hindu right-wing groups. In order to divert

attention from the protests and with Modi's implicit consent, the Hindu far-right is trying to reinvigorate its campaign around the Ram temple in Ayodhya. In recent weeks, it provoked riots in at least three cities in the state of Madhya Pradesh.

The farmers are not demoralised. In fact, tens of thousands more have joined the protests from Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. The newly announced budget, which makes clear the government's intention of pushing ahead with the privatisation of more public sector industries and the continuing effects of the economic crisis, give workers every reason to lend their weight to these protests. We can only hope that India's peasants and workers will now continue to push forward. □

Women's rights

Last month, the Polish government imposed the strictest anti-abortion laws in all of Europe. Abortion is now allowed only in cases of rape or incest or when the pregnancy threatens the life of the mother. Hundreds of thousands, both men and women, have been on the streets, braving sub-zero temperatures, to protest against this. The red lightning bolt has become their symbol, but many have added green scarves, inspired by the green bandanna worn by protestors in Argentina.

Indeed, it is not all bad news for women's rights! On December 30 2020, the Argentinian government

From Argentina to Poland... the fight for abortion rights continues!

legalised abortions up to the 14th week of pregnancy - and the state will pay for them. In a country that had among the world's most restrictive abortion laws, this was a great achievement for millions of women, even if a 14-week cut-off means their choices are still limited.

In fact the movement in Argentina led by the grassroots "Ni Una Menos", or "not one woman less", overturned a law that has been in place since 1921. Of course, first and foremost, this has implications for the whole of Latin America - where, due to the heavy influence of the Catholic Church (now resurgent in Poland) abortion is either banned or heavily

restricted. In Brazil for instance, it is punishable by imprisonment and only allowed if a woman's life is threatened, in the case of rape, or if a foetus has developed no head and is thus unviable. And this latter ruling was only made in 2004 after a huge legal battle.

History (and even the present day!) is full of examples of the clock being turned back by the ruling capitalist class, which thrives on perpetuating women's oppression as part of oppressing the whole of the working class. It is only with its final overthrow, that the fight for women's equality will truly be won. □

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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