

WORKERS' fight

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

NORTHERN IRELAND: ONLY ONE WAY TO END THE DIVISIONS

So, "too bad" that most of the public is totally uninterested in the parasitic life, leisure and death of the 99 year-old Duke of Edinburgh. It's been forced down everyone's throats anyway, in a huge festival of sycophantic and obsequious fawning by media and politicians alike.

No wonder. There is really bad news to cover up - and not just because of the much more tragic deaths of 150,000 (the *real* figure) ordinary people so needlessly killed by Covid. But Johnson's "irreversible roadmap" to end his ham-fisted lockdowns, is likely to spark another wave of infection from virulent variants.

Most of all, however, the drummed-up drama around the Duke's demise has very conveniently pushed the rioting by unionist youth in Northern Ireland out of the headlines.

Yes, best to bury the fact that it's Johnson's Brexit lie to his Northern Irish "loyalist" supporters which fuelled these flames.

Never too young to riot

As it happened, the royal death made little difference to the deprived and alienated "unionist" working class youth for whom an excuse to throw rocks and petrol bombs at the police was a welcome release.

So, despite the notice posted last Friday in Lanark Way, the scene of the initial unrest, which read: "*We would ask all PUL [Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist] protests are postponed as a mark of respect to the Queen and the Royal Family*", they carried on rioting regardless.

Because yes, for them, the murals of the Queen and her prince consort on Belfast's Shankill Road, the patriotic trappings around the Union Jacks which fly in every unionist area, and the diminishing historic privileges of the loyalists, today mean less and less. Except, perhaps, in the bigoted longings of some of their fathers, mothers and grandparents.

Just like their counterparts in the



nationalist ghettos on the other side of Belfast's "peace walls", these working class youngsters suffer from chronic poverty. And this makes the horrified reactions of political commentators over their young age ("*some of them were only 11 or 12!*") all the more hypocritical. Their youth hasn't prevented the adult establishment from exposing them to brutal material deprivation, brain-washing, sectarian education (schools, like housing in Northern Ireland are still segregated along religious lines) - and a jobless, hopeless future.

The answer is a united Ireland!

There is little doubt that unionist politicians and paramilitaries helped fan the flames of unrest, claiming it was the last straw that nobody from their "enemy", republican, pro-united Ireland, anti-Brexit, Sinn Féin, would be prosecuted over a funeral (back in June!), which broke Covid rules.

But they'd already written a collective letter to Boris Johnson to say they no

longer considered themselves party to the Good Friday Agreement, which ended the worst of the "Troubles" in 1998. Johnson broke his pledge to them when he said there'd never be a border in the Irish Sea, nor any other measure which threatened to bring a united Ireland - their biggest fear - any closer. But a customs border in the sea is exactly what Johnson put in place. Indeed, he decided to throw his loyal unionist supporters to the wolves.

The sorry truth is that there's no way to resolve the catch 22 over the border. Except, precisely, by undoing 100 years of history; by undoing the 1921 partition of Ireland. Northern Ireland was an artificial creation based on loyalist privilege, which the British state long ago lost any interest in maintaining. And unlike their elders, today's "unionist" rebels without a cause might well be reconciled to being "Irish" rather than "British" - in a united Ireland and as part of one reunited working class. This would not only, finally, resolve the Irish national question, and the Brexit catch 22, but provide a real fighting force for the future. □

Covid-19 crisis

According to the Office of National Statistics, by 19 March, 150,116 people had died from Covid. The government persists in reporting the death toll as lower, at 127,000, counting deaths only from 29 March last year. But this still places Britain's death rate of 1,875 per million, above that of Brazil, which is second only to the US in terms of total deaths and whose hospitals are now in a desperate crisis. Tentative figures also show that as many as 20% of those who have had symptomatic infection have developed "long Covid": almost 1m out of 4.5m, many of whom continue to require still barely-coping NHS support.

Meanwhile, Johnson's "irreversible roadmap" goes ahead - with gyms, pubs and restaurants reopened on 12 April, and "non-essential travel" allowed from 17 May... This, after schools restarted on 8 March in

Preparing the ground for yet another death wave?



Open-air surge-testing in South London

England and the number of cases in schools is already slowly going up! So forget any promise of "*following data not dates*".

Johnson's warning on 22 March, that new variant Covid strains, currently contributing to a huge rise in infections across the Channel, would "*wash up on our shores*" is

forgotten. European truck drivers who spend less than 48 hours in Britain don't even need a Covid test. But of course, with as many as 2,500 new cases still occurring every day (even if they've decreased since March) a new wave is also likely to come from within. □

• Johnson's vaccine poll-booster

Of course, the government relies on its much-vaunted vaccine "success" to inject confidence in its roadmap out of the lockdown. And it's apparently added points to Johnson's opinion poll ratings. But among the 32.2m people vaccinated (at the time of writing), only 7.4m have

received two doses - that is, 9% of the population. Which puts a dampener on Johnson's claim to be the best "vaccinator" in the world. Hungary has fully vaccinated 3.8m (11% of the population), Morocco 4m (11.2%), the US 66.2m (20%), Chile 29m (22%) and Israel 4.9m (54%)! As

for relying on the vaccination programme to reopen the economy, after Chile started lifting restrictions - at about the same point Britain's roll-out is now - it was engulfed in another wave of infection, probably also from variant strains, which overwhelmed its health service.

• Unwarranted vaccine hysteria

The reports of fatal episodes of cerebral thrombosis (blood clots in the brain) in patients who had previously received an AstraZeneca vaccination have caused hysterical reactions, assisted by an ever-willing media. And this has had the effect of increasing vaccine phobia.

Yes, in the name of being "open" the medical establishment, on government "advice" - and this applies not only in Britain but across the world - has caused a completely over-the-top reaction to these rare events. Balancing risk and benefit has always been the basis for all medical therapies. The WHO, the British and EU medicines agencies all agree that the AZ vaccine is still safe - for all ages - and should be administered. Their available data after 19m doses of AZ vaccine administered in the world, showed that there was a 0.0004% chance (or 4.1 per million) that a vaccinated individual would have such a clot. For the Pfizer vaccine the figure is just under 3 per million. Going just by general statistics in fact, the likelihood of anyone who is unvaccinated getting a blood clot is even greater! And of course, vaccination certainly protects against the severe clotting caused by Covid itself.

• Who benefits?

Many countries in the EU - and even countries within COVAX (an initiative distributing vaccines to poor countries) - stopped the rollout of the AstraZeneca vaccine (and now also the Janssen vaccine), despite the crying need to vaccinate as many people as possible to curtail the pandemic. On 9 April, Britain's JCVI, the advisory body on vaccination, said the AZ vaccine should not be given to under 30s, themselves adapting to the hysteria.

So the question has to be asked: who benefits from this discredit of the AZ vaccine, which started before this data on thrombotic episodes had even surfaced? Is the real problem for competing vaccine producers and therefore competing profiteers, that the AZ vaccine has been offered at cost price - and has thus swamped the "market", ahead of them?

• Johnson+Macron: Tweedle-Dum+Tweedle-Dee

We all remember Tweedle-Johnson's "*laissez-faire*" at the beginning of the pandemic. Followed by no effective testing, tracing, nor quarantining, let alone support for those who have to self-isolate. In comparison, France seemed to

have reacted swiftly and effectively.

A year later, Tweedle-Macron has taken from the worst of Johnson. Last November he replaced lockdowns with curfews. The virus was instructed not to circulate between 6pm (or 8pm) and 6am (or 8am). It could however, go about its business infecting workers who were to attend work (public transport OK!) and pupils at schools with ridiculously inadequate preventive measures.

On top of this, due to the EU's refusal to pay a higher price for vaccines or waive liability clauses, France, among others, has had a vaccine undersupply. So Macron tried to cover his back. First he said the AstraZeneca vaccine was "quasi-ineffective"; then that it was unsafe for over 55s. Now the line is that it's safe for over 50s! Of course, this only increases vaccine hesitancy among a population where up to 30% already refuse it outright.

Keeping the economy open was priority no.1 for Macron, like for Johnson. The dubious curfew, plus new virulent strains caused daily cases to rise from 12,000 in December, to 43,000 today. Deaths have reached 97,957. Now Macron has U-turned. A lockdown is hurriedly announced. But the C-19-genie is already out of the bottle. And will no doubt find its way back to Britain, too.

Kill the Bill!

There have been ongoing protests since the beginning of April against the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. They have the neat slogan: "Kill the Bill" ("bill" being slang for police)! If passed, it'll give police new powers to break up demonstrations and even stop protestors making a noise. It will increase custodial sentences, and add new ones, e.g., for defacing statues! Patel claims it reforms the law to protect women, but the word "statue" appears 8 times in this Bill, and the word

"woman" not once! Evidently this Bill is Patel's "revenge" against Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion protestors, who were able to outwit her "men in blue" last year! It even creates a new offence of "residing on land without consent in or with a vehicle", specifically targeted against Travellers... and pensioners in camper vans?

The Bill also gives police more immunity, as if they need it! In fact as the Independent Office for Police Conduct figures show, the "bill" routinely gets away with killing: last

• Patel's criminal plan for migrants

Home Secretary Patel claims her "New Plan for Immigration" published on 24 March, will offer migrants "protection from dying at sea". Of course, most of the 300 refugees who've died trying to get into Britain (including 36 children) since 1999, did not drown, but got killed trying to board trucks or trains. Under Patel's plan, only asylum seekers who reach here by "legal" means would be able to apply for permanent leave to remain and family reunion rights. Never mind that legal routes are available only to those already recognised as refugees. This places those escaping from repression,

war, or famine, in a catch 22. If you have to leave as a matter of urgency, you've no option *but* to use "illegal" routes.

But "illegal" escapees would only get "temporary protection status": permission to remain in Britain for just 30 months, no recourse to public funds, restricted family reunion rights and regular reassessments for deportation. There would be longer prison sentences for illegal immigration. Migrants would be housed in "the government's asylum estate" - prison-like camps like the notorious Napier barracks in Kent. In fact Patel's policy paper tears up the (albeit) minimal protection provided under the 1951 UN refugee convention. Yes, under the guise of protecting asylum seekers, it criminalises them!

• Another whitewash

The government's 264-page Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities which was asked to report on racism after the Black Lives Matter protests, concluded that Britain is now free of institutional racism!

The commission of mostly black and Asian academics was chaired by Tony Sewell, a former teacher who ran an education charity focused on exam grades. He has denied the existence of institutional racism for more than a decade, arguing that social class trumps race discrimination in determining poor educational attainment, unemployment and low pay. Never mind the fact that racism also relegates black people into the lowest social class, so for them it's a



Bad education? Yes, for decades!

The government boasts of its success delivering laptops to disadvantaged children, so that they could complete their school work during lockdown.

According to Department for Education figures, 876,000 were handed out by the end of January this year - not nearly enough, almost one year later, to meet the needs of the 1.8 million

children who had no access to any device at home...

Moreover, just over half-a-million devices only arrived just before the Christmas holiday... by which time schools had already been open again for three months! In fact, two-thirds of schools already had to use their own resources to buy IT equipment for pupils, because of the delays in government provision.

In the end, around 20% of all children

Their society

year there were 18 deaths in police custody, 3 suspects shot and killed, 24 deaths due to police chases and 54 "apparent suicides" following police custody. Plus another 107 "other" deaths after contact with the police. Yes, the role of the police and the law in this society has always been to protect the propertied rich from the poor and propertyless, while they bully, beat up, and even murder the poor - and particularly black poor - with impunity. □

double whammy!

Not only is this report an insult to all those who experience racial discrimination, whether at the hands of the police, the employers or educational authorities, not to mention every-day racism in daily life, but it's obvious to everyone on the receiving end (ask any black football player or young black man targeted by "stop and search") that racism is getting worse.

It was the last straw for Johnson's own special advisor on race, who promptly resigned!

• Police posing with their "trophies"

In stark contrast to the recent case of the kidnapped and murdered Sarah Everard - who was white and whose killer was found within a week of her disappearance - is the case of the murdered black sisters, Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman. The police didn't even bother to search for them when they were reported missing. Their bodies were found by Nicole's boyfriend. Their killer has not been found. But two cops took selfies with their dead bodies and another six shared these on social media.

Their mother, Mina Smallman, compared the way photos were taken to the USA's "Deep South, when they used to lynch people and you would see smiling faces around a hanging dead body". Such depravity goes way beyond "institutional racism".

- about 2 million - did little or no school work during lockdown. Of course it could be said that they didn't miss much, given the "learning by rote" for exams, rather than for knowledge, which is demanded by today's curriculum. Coursework for the vast majority of GCSE subjects was got rid of by Michael Gove. So perhaps 2m children (and many more who did only a few hours of "online schooling" a week!) found something better to do when free from school.

Their society

For many years, farms and market gardens in Britain have relied on pickers recruited seasonally from in and outside the EU, to harvest their produce. Because of Brexit, the government has had to issue 30,000 visas this year specifically for harvest workers, up from 10,000 last year. The workers had to pay £244 for them, on the promise they'd be well-paid for the job. Only to find themselves on piece rates or zero-hours contracts even if the latter are banned under the scheme. Workers at Castleton Fruits in Scotland for instance, were thrown off the job if they missed targets for picking raspberries and strawberries, but still had to pay for the caravan they were staying in. It left them stranded without even the means to

Fruit-pickers: back to the 1930s?



pay the fare home!

This is reminiscent of the so-called "truck system" of the 1920s, where workers in the US were placed in accommodation on mines for instance and spent their whole

wage on rent paid to the company and on food bought in the "company store". Except on these Scottish farms workers are charged £244 up front by the Home Office, for the "right" to be exploited like this! ☐

• Uber and Deliveroo: still jumping all over workers' rights

After February's Supreme Court ruling, Uber will provide 70,000 drivers with workers' basic entitlements: minimum wage, holiday pay and pensions. But the new contracts are already being challenged. The court stated that the rights should apply as soon as drivers log on to the app, but Uber wants to pay only for the time spent driving a customer. Of course! They try to pay the absolute

minimum they think they can get away with!

Deliveroo, another gig-economy employer delivering food via phone app and valued at £7bn(!) decided to float itself on the stock market shortly after the Uber ruling. It became "Flopperoo" overnight: its shares dropped 30% within the first few minutes of trading. Several buyers said they wouldn't buy shares on

moral grounds, due to Deliveroo's poor treatment of its workers (some on just £2/hour)! More likely, however, that the Uber judgement put the wind up them, since all gig bosses face having to provide workers with basic employment rights!

The day of the flotation, and for several days afterwards, Deliveroo riders came out on strike, demanding their rights. Their "Roovolt" is the best way to get them!

• Will Asda workers get equal pay?

Mostly female Asda retail workers, who receive up to £3 less per hour than the mostly-male warehouse workers, have also gone to court over their unequal pay. They've been told they can now proceed to the next stage, which entails proving that they're "equally valuable" to the company! They'll then have to prove that they're equally skilled, to achieve their equal pay.

The case has been called "Made in Dagenham for the 21st century", after the 1968 strike by female Ford machinists that led to the Equal Pay Act's introduction in 1970. But at the time, unlike in the film's fictionalised story, the courts, using the new act, still ruled against the female Ford workers. They only achieved equal pay after a second strike, in 1984, forced Ford to accept that their work was equally skilled as male machinists.

Even if the Asda case is successful, it won't help the hundreds of thousands of workers, of any gender, who're employed as temps and contractors on lower pay and worse terms and conditions while working on the same job as permanent workers. Winning equal pay for equal work is going to take a collective fight on the ground, by all workers and the sooner the better.

• Bosses fear that unions are making a come-back

Last year 91,000 workers joined a trade union. It may be that a long period of decline in union membership has been reversed during the pandemic. A worker told the Financial Times (the bosses worry about these trends!) *"Thanks to the pandemic I think there's going to be a massive resurgence in the idea of unions because so many people, especially young people, have realised how vulnerable they are to the whim of their employer"*.

The proportion of all workers who're union members is still just 23.5%. Membership of TUC-affiliated "old" unions has declined by half since 1985. But "new" independent unions, not affiliated to the TUC, like the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (founded in 2012) or United Voices of the World (founded in 2014) which mainly represent workers in the gig economy, are apparently attracting 200 new members every month.

The "old" unions are seen as being stuck in the past, dominated by rigid bureaucratic structures which are unfit and unwilling to challenge today's hire and fire, gig bosses.

In some ways this recalls the way "new model unions" at the end of the 19th century enrolled unskilled workers,

culminating in the victorious dock strike in 1889, which ended the "call-on" casual labour system. That militancy would definitely be worth reviving.

• ... but not at Amazon Alabama, USA!

It seems that it came as a surprise to the media that Amazon delivery drivers had "pee bottles" under their van seats, given the huge "thing" that's been made of it. It's been normal practice for years. And not just at Amazon. It's true of almost all delivery drivers across the board and even minicab drivers - due to the pressure of the job and the lack of toilet facilities en route...

All this came to light because of the much-publicised Amazon workers' fight for a union in Alabama, USA, as it pitted union organisers against billionaire boss Jeff Bezos, and subjected workers to the worst, most underhand, tactics to prevent unionisation. It even led US president Biden to intervene, never mind the hypocrisy of that! Amazon bosses won this round. Only 22.9% of "valid" votes were cast for the union, after many were disqualified. However it was the very first formal vote on organising a union at a US Amazon plant in the company's 26-year history. It won't be the last.

They need kicking out - not with ballots, but boots!

On the eve of local and London mayoral elections, opinion polls place Johnson's approval rating at 54%, up 6 points, due, we're told, to the vaccine roll-out. Polls are fickle, though. One shows that as many people (41%) now approve of his handling of Covid, as disapprove. And that Brexit approval went up from 38% to 46%. But that was before riots broke out in Northern Ireland, linked precisely, to Brexit! Whether this is a bang or whimper, remains to be seen. But the province has always relied entirely on life support from Westminster. And that "oxygen" is running out. As for Scotland, where elections will also take place, it's an independence referendum which will be the ruling SNP's real test - which may well

come sooner rather than later, if it wins a big majority.

In the meantime the economy remains in the throws of its deepest recession ever. Domestic output is 7.8% less than the pre-pandemic level, growing just 0.4% in February. But in the topsy-turvy world of politics, where a criminal Covid policy is held up as success, this too, is hailed as a sign of "upturn"!

The working class, on the receiving end of ongoing job cuts (360,000 lost in 2020) and unprecedented deprivation and death, while it nevertheless is manning the front-line against Covid, isn't buying this political fantasy. Gas engineers, NHS workers, bus drivers, railworkers, even nuclear power workers at

Their Society



Hinkley Point, are taking strike action. It's called voting with your feet. And it needs to spread. □

• Brexit biting harder than coronavirus

Official figures showed a 41% fall in exports from Britain to the EU in January, the first month of the new Brexit deal. This collapse is bigger than any fall seen during 2020 - the largest being a 20% drop last April during the pandemic's first peak.

The question for the bosses is how much of this is the result of "teething problems" and how much will be here to stay?

• Westminster's well-worn revolving door

The collapse of Greensill Capital in March found former prime minister David Cameron using his influence to help his mate Lex Greensill (and himself!) make money.

The "supply-chain finance" in which Greensill Capital specialised, placed it as middleman between big companies and their smaller suppliers. Instead of suppliers waiting up to 180 days for payment, Greensill paid them immediately (for a fee, of course), and then reclaimed the money from the big company later. However, Greensill paid suppliers with money it had borrowed from other hedge funds and banks - and even from its own bank.

Lex Greensill, the founder of this "nifty" enterprise, was taken on as an advisor to the Cameron government from 2010-16, where he promoted his idea (and himself). In fact,

A survey carried out by manufacturing lobby group Make UK, found that trade problems persisted through February and into March. Half of businesses said that border disruption had increased costs, due to delays (often due to incorrect paperwork), extra courier and handling fees, duties on parts originating outside Britain, etc. In fact, many container ships now refuse to stop in British

it was this kind of supply-chain finance which Carillion, the building and services company which collapsed in 2018, used to prop itself up, since it was able to hide a lot of its debt.

After leaving office, Cameron, in turn, became an advisor for (and shareholder in) Greensill Capital. Indeed, he was texting Sunak during the pandemic to try to get Greensill a role in the profitable coronavirus loans! Now Cameron faces investigation and politicians of all stripe are cluck-clucking over his "unethical lobbying" of government. As if the "revolving door" between parliament and big business isn't constantly in use by all of them.

• Legalised money-laundering

Thanks to its links to the personnel of the state (both ministers and permanent civil servants), Greensill was accredited as a provider of government-backed Covid business loans

ports, in order to avoid the inevitable delays!

This extra paperwork won't go away, even if thousands of government-promised customs agents materialise in the future... In fact, this is just the beginning: Johnson's government has unilaterally decided not to apply customs checks on imports until 2022, knowing that when these are applied the system might seize up completely...

which lent tens of millions to the Gupta Family Group Alliance (GFG). But Greensill was its main lender and GFG now apparently owes Greensill over £3.5 billion.

One of Gupta's companies, Liberty Steel, boasted of heroically "saving" a number of steelworks in Britain from closure a few years ago, and around 5,000 jobs. However, as Greensill's collapse has now exposed, this was with borrowed money. In fact, Gupta's defaulted loans could end up costing British taxpayers £1bn!

Gupta isn't bankrupt. He is the fifth largest private landowner in Britain, owning a 114,000 acre estate in Scotland, in addition to property in Wales. He recently bought himself a £42m house in London's Belgrave Square.

While these companies remain in debt to the taxpayer, their suppliers, and their employees, there is absolutely no question of Gupta's wealth being seized! Such is the protection racket for the rich!

Suez crisis 2021: crews stuck at sea

The giant "Ever Given", which ran aground and blocked the Suez canal last month, is operated by a tiny crew of just 25 Indian seafarers. In fact this is the norm in container shipping. They typically work shifts lasting 12-16 hours, stuck on board for months, with little or

no shore leave and their employers hold their passports hostage!

Due to the pandemic's ever-changing immigration rules, port and border restrictions, their normal release at the end of a contract has been totally disrupted. Today, an estimated 400,000 seafarers remain stranded at sea, many on board for over 11 months!

Such conditions can only increase the

likelihood of things going wrong - like what happened to the Ever Given. The companies inevitably blame the crew. French insurer, Allianz, estimates that three-quarters of shipping accidents/fatalities are attributed to "human error". Now that the Ever Given is refloated, its Indian crew remains fearful that they may be stranded in Egypt and even face criminal charges.

King's Cross railway station (London)

Nationalised and controlled by the workers

One after the other, railway franchises are being taken over by the government via an "Operator of Last Resort". Only last month, it was announced that the operator ScotRail was to be nationalised in a year's time.

This announcement comes only months after KeolisAmey, which runs

the Welsh railway franchise, was taken over by the DfT. But of course, workers on LNER (London North Eastern Railway), which has been under government management since 2018 know very well that nothing changes for the better for the workers. It is just "exploitation



as usual" and job cuts... So if we want improvements, we know we are going to have to fight for them! ☐

• "Welcome" competition?

First Group, which already runs Hull trains on the East Coast line, is planning to run a high speed service all the way to Edinburgh, from May. So LNER, which, up to now is the only company on the East Coast going all the way from London to Scotland, would be facing competition for the first time from an open access company.

First Group plans to offer cheaper tickets at around £25 one-way. We all know how overpriced tickets are, even with the family and friends discounts.

LNER charges anything from £51.50 to £259.50 for a single journey! So the question is, will this get LNER to lower its prices? [Workers' Platform bulletin King's X 14/4/21]

• ... but welcome to new mates!

In any case, we'll be happy to welcome new fellow workers here at King's Cross, whichever company they work for. And since we know what the bosses are like, we'll be ready to compare, take notes and act accordingly. [Workers' Platform bulletin King's X 14/4/21]

• No way can they do this!

We hear that from June, LNER chefs will be asked to prepare hot food for breakfast, lunch and evening meals on weekends. We've not done a full catering service since last March. And we've not worked on weekends the past 10 years.

Does management really think it can get away with this major disruption to our lives? As for the implications of encouraging "mass" eating and drinking in a totally enclosed space while we are not yet through the pandemic, quite frankly, this should be unthinkable! [Workers' Platform bulletin King's X 14/4/21]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

• Managers try sabotage

Guess what: as soon as managers here at MP heard that 100 mates in Greenford had been made to self-isolate by the NHS Track and Trace app, the QR codes mysteriously disappeared from the walls... It seems managers didn't want us "checking in"... Yup, they fear a "domino effect": one zap by the app could cause a total shutdown! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 24/3/21]

• You couldn't swing a coronavirus

The corner where primary letters and flats have ended up, is becoming even "cosier". Yes, it might be on a temporary basis while the roof lights are being taken care of, but we do mind being crammed into a corner! Isn't the slogan hands, face, SPACE...? [Workers' Fight Bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 24/3/21]

• Once more...

We're seeing more and more casals on Mondays, Tuesdays and Saturdays... 35 came in on Lates and 20 on Nights last Monday! We thought managers brought them in to help with Mother's Day, but it seems they're here for Father's Day as well... Of course, we welcome the helping hands, but they need contracts, with equal Ts&Cs! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 24/3/21]

• Modern day call system

And the worst of it is, we see them waiting in the lobby, treated as if they are "second-class" workers! It reminds one of the "call system" that sparked the 1889 dock strike against casual labour! At the time, workers were collected in a cage like cattle, and bosses came and selected them for a few hours' work and sent the others home. Our casual workmates today may be a little better off, but not much... [Workers' Fight Bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 24/3/21]

• We didn't agree to this!

According to that LTB sent to all of us on Distribution, in order to compensate for the shorter working week, there'll be a "review of service numbers and capacity based on utilisation data"! Yeah, what they mean is job cuts! As usual, they give a little and try to take a lot more. As far as we're concerned, even one cut is unacceptable! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 24/3/21]

• The "spiders"

And how are they going to acquire that "utilisation data" from Distribution workers? Well, by following our every move! We heard managers want to copy what's been done at Greenford, where scanners that look like spiders have been placed on the ceiling. They can read our cards wherever we may be, in order to trap us in their web. [Workers' Fight Bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 24/3/21]

**• Dangerous dilution**

Well, if anyone thinks that us cleaners are using effective cleaning products in these times... think again! Yep, the Elephant's had the great idea of diluting the cleaning products to save some pennies! So much so, that we end up with stuff that's almost entirely water... but will it kill the virus? [Workers' Fight Bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 24/3/21]

• Good, but can be better

Finally, we cleaners have some good news: we've understood that our wages will be raised to the "Living Wage Foundation" rate - that is, £10.85/hr in London. But we've not heard when the increase is meant to be in our pay packets, and we need it from yesterday. [Workers' Fight Bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 24/3/21]

• Quarantine on full pay

Ok, so we got this letter from the union and top management telling us that when we come back from foreign countries, we have to self-isolate. But what's still completely unclear, is whether RM will pay us our normal wages, in full, for the time we're forced into isolation. When of course, there should be no question about it! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 24/3/21]

Ford Dagenham Engine Plant

• **A microchip on their shoulder?**

Ford managers are really upset about the global shortage of semiconductors... and especially worried that their competitors are not doing as badly as they are. Like Jaguar Land Rover (oh dear, wasn't that a Ford-owned company not so long ago?) [Workers Fight bulletin, Ford Dagenham 13/4/21]

• **Take a chill pill!**

Apparently JLR has managed to figure out which part has what chip from which chipmaker and gone to lobby them, so it is not in as much trouble as the others.

The auto press says that maybe there will be a shortage of nearly 700,000 cars and "Ford has warned its profits could be hit by between \$1 billion and \$2.5bn (£723m-£1.8bn) in the first half of this year as a result." Shame for them. But we suggest the bosses here stop taking this so personally... [Workers Fight bulletin, Ford Dagenham 13/4/21]

• **Can't afford a tesla?**

Isn't it amazing how progressive and edgy Ford has become! So now half

the staff car park consists of electric bays! But sadly, not one electric vehicle yet... [Workers Fight bulletin, Ford Dagenham 13/4/21]

• **Can a leopard change its spots?**

We see that Tiger's 5-day break (with lay-offs) coincides with the Spring bank holiday and in fact with International Workers Day or Labour Day - 1 May - established as such in the fight for the 8-hour day. But of course this is just coincidence: Ford managers wouldn't give us time off out of respect for our traditions and history. Of course not. They only respect Ford's pocketbook...

PS: Re the 8-hour day - which is still not the absolute limit - the point is to get paid well enough for 8 hours so that nobody's ever persuaded (nor is persuadable) to do overtime..! [Workers Fight bulletin, Ford Dagenham 13/4/21]

• **When is a lay-off a lay-off?**

We also notice that the lay-offs are suitably staggered: Panther is off the previous week in fact. So maybe to make up their losses due to the microchip crisis, Ford will again



want to send us around, plant to plant, line to line and even cancel the down time. However, at this lovely, sunshiny, time of the year, there's every reason for our phones to give that "unobtainable" sound. [Workers Fight bulletin, Ford Dagenham 13/4/21]

• **LLL's anti-vax policy...**

How can we be threatened with disciplines for taking time off to get our Covid jab?! LLL tells us this with a straight face! You know what? We're tired of the whole thing: no sick pay, no means to self isolate and now they don't even facilitate us getting a vaccine?? We'll take the time we need - after all this has to take priority over non-essential work, right?! And if LLL tries any of their s**t, we know exactly what to do about it. [Workers Fight bulletin, Ford Dagenham 13/4/21]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

• **Not enough time to do anything**

What did management expect would happen after they showed us that video in 5comp, where they cried to us about "mistakes" in production? That little rubber seal they showed us, which apparently was meant to be removed, cost £50 to sort out!? Well, we're not surprised their cars are junk, the line is going too fast. Full stop. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford Mini 30/3/21]

• **Oh the irony**

Not only that - management cut the quality control Dynap jobs all over the line after Xmas. And now they try to

blame us when mistakes get through on their cars? Don't make us laugh. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford Mini 30/3/21]

PS: And by the way, mates who were doing those Dynap jobs are now doing physical jobs on the line, when many of them should be getting a good EVR instead! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford Mini 30/3/21]

• **Super-spreading policy**

Last week, we heard of more Covid cases on C shift. Not from BMW of course. And still managers ask us to swap shifts to cover for isolating mates... with overtime! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford Mini 30/3/21]



• **I'm not a robot**

Managers probably wish all of us here were just machines. The new agency workers they're hiring are now given just one day of assessment, rather than the 3 they had a few years ago. Then they are thrown on the line with next to no training and expected to keep up! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford Mini 30/3/21]

Semiconductors: a predictable shortage

Covid has apparently caused a worldwide shortage of semiconductors. These compact and cheap components are used in all sorts of electronic devices, from the 5G network, to computers, to car parts. And during the first lockdown, back in March last year, there was a sudden surge in semiconductor demand for computers and other high-tech products - partly due to millions of people switching to "remote working".

At the same time, car companies like Ford and BMW stopped their production for weeks, reducing demand. But when production picked up, they and their subsidiaries scrambled to get their semiconductor orders filled, so demand very quickly outstripped supply.

The fire which broke out on 19 March in Renesas, the Japanese company supplying the car industry, certainly hasn't helped! Many car workers have now been put on short time, or are being laid off.

The fact is that there are only 3 giant producers capable of producing the most advanced semiconductors: TSMC (Taiwan), Samsung (South Korea) and Intel (USA). And these giants were incapable of dealing with the sudden increase of demand from the car industry. Of course, the mess in the semiconductor supply chain could have been avoided if it was based on a rational plan. But in this capitalist system, the only rationale is to make profit in a competitive market - where "planning" has no place!

Myanmar

In Myanmar, the military junta continues its violent crackdown against the protestors - shooting in the streets, ransacking homes, brutally beating up protestors. According to the latest figures, over 600 have been killed, an underestimate probably, and thousands put behind bars. Under the impact of repression, the demonstrations of millions in the large cities, that marked the first two months of the military coup, have quietened. And the number of refugees flowing into neighbouring Thailand and India has multiplied into thousands. Even so, opponents of the coup march every day in cities and towns across the country, often holding what they call "guerrilla rallies" - small, quick shows of defiance before security forces can respond.

Most significantly, the coup has now rekindled old wars with autonomy-seeking ethnic minority forces in the north and the east. Not surprisingly, given that the military emerged so powerfully, precisely in order to counter the claims of autonomy of the country's many ethnic groups. Over the years, they have seen some of the most brutal attacks from the junta and have many scores to settle. More than 70,000 have been displaced due to fighting between the Arakan Army and the military in the past 12 months, for

The deadly junta's many enemies



instance.

The oldest and one of the largest rebel groups, the Karen National Union (KNU), has seen the first military air raids on its fighters in more than 20 years, since announcing its support for the demonstrations. The KNU says it is responding to appeals for help from coup opponents by sending fighters to protect protestors. Its troops are attacking Myanmar army positions and cutting off supply routes. In the north, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) has launched similar attacks. Three

other guerrilla forces, including the Arakan Army in the western Rakhine state, have vowed to join what they called the "spring revolution".

The armed support of the ethnic minority forces can possibly change the balance of forces against the military. But the protestors would need a revolutionary leadership which aims at fighting for the interests of the working class as a whole - across the various ethnicities and for the overthrow of the junta, so that decades-old battles do not turn into a full-blown civil war. □

Letter from India

At present, four states - West Bengal, Assam, Kerala and Tamil Nadu - are having assembly elections. And local politicians are trying to whip up any and every division they can think of: Hindu against Muslim against Christian, "local" against "outsider", "Indian" against "foreigner", etc. Despite the worsening economic crisis, none of the parties standing for election focus on the problems of workers. This is while the possible reimposition of a lockdown in the western state of Maharashtra is raising fears of a repeat of last year's migrant worker crisis - when an estimated 10m workers walked from cities to their villages to ensure that they had work and food while the lockdown lasted.

Politicians divide, workers' struggles unite

Meanwhile, workers are finding ways to fight. In the public sector, trade unions in the railways, postal services, and electricity boards are contemplating strikes and bank workers have struck protesting privatisation. In the southern state of Andhra Pradesh this has developed into a significant struggle: the government's decision to privatise the Visakhapatnam steel plant, which provides employment to 100,000, has led to workers blocking national highways and organising rallies for over a month. In the private sector, after a year of the bosses taking advantage of the Covid crisis to extend working hours and intensify the speed of work, workers are no longer buying the bosses'

"Covid excuse" that they can't improve conditions until the crisis is over. They are demanding that their demands be met immediately. In the last month, workers from JNS Instruments (2200 workers), Satyam Auto (1900 workers) and Sunbeam Auto (3000 workers) in Manesar (an industrial centre near the national capital, Delhi), occupied their factories, demanding increases in wages, toilet breaks and holidays and an end to arbitrary disciplinary measures, dismissals and forced retirements. In stark contrast to the poisonous electioneering taking place, these workers are showing that the only way forward for workers is to fight together, and bridge all divisions! □

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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