

WORKERS' fight



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contact@w-fight.org

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

AFGHANISTAN: THE WARMONGERS HAVE COME FULL CIRCLE

Whether a real "defeat" for the USA, or a boost for so-called "jihadis" everywhere, the exit of all western forces from Afghanistan, was long-overdue. They should never have been there.

For sure, the US has been trying to disentangle itself from this, its longest and costliest war, for the last 10 years. Trump had already signed an agreement with the Taliban in February 2020, pledging final withdrawal by 1 May 2021. As for Biden, in 2010, when vice president, he'd said the US would be out by 2014!

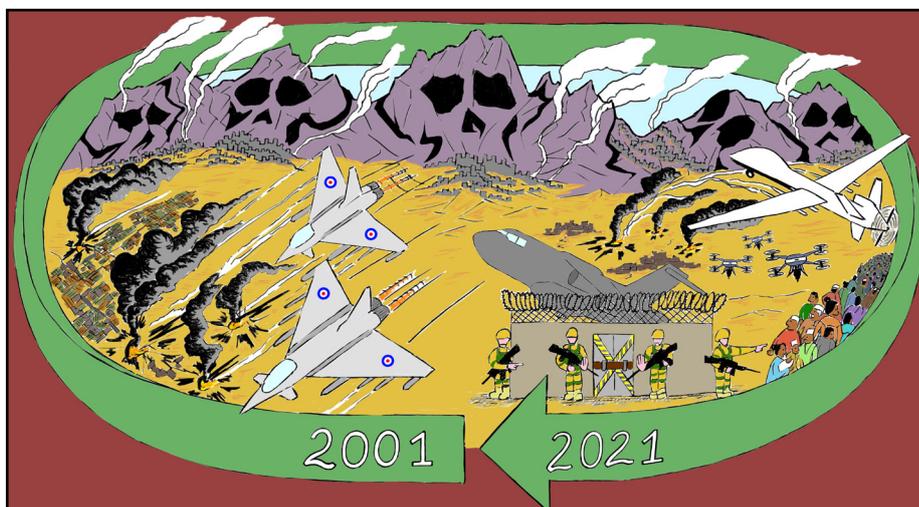
So the Taliban takeover was expected, if not planned, by the Western politicians regardless of the possible fate awaiting those whom the Taliban does not tolerate.

Their real objectives

Ever since their invasion in 2001, western imperialists have failed abjectly to provide a puppet Afghan regime that was up to the job of ruling the country. It has long been obvious that the Taliban were the only possible force able to provide any kind of order in the ruins and chaos which is a legacy of not just 20, but 42 years, of war.

What's more, the Taliban are pleased to "do business" with the West. They even tried to do a deal back in 2001, offering to hand over Osama bin Laden, which the US refused...

So today imperialism is gambling on the fact that Taliban leaders will succeed in keeping what is a hardly homogeneous (and often fractious) coalition of mainly Pashtun militias, together and disciplined. If they succeed, whether they keep their promise to allow girls to go to school this time round, or women to work, it's neither here nor there, to Biden or Johnson - despite their declared



dedication to women's rights!

Their objective now, is for western companies to be able to start the "peaceful" exploitation of this rich, but still relatively unexplored terrain, which contains diverse minerals, including, much-in-demand lithium. And perhaps they'll also relaunch the "TAPI" project - the gas pipeline from Turkmenistan, across Afghanistan and Pakistan, to India...

Contempt for the population

As for the excuse that the Taliban's 10-day race to Kabul was much faster than expected, and therefore western powers were unable to prepare an orderly retreat, this is a plain lie. If US "intelligence" is good enough to find and kill an obscure Islamic State Khorasan operative just hours after an attack he had "planned", how come it could not track the Taliban army's progress to the capital?

No, the lack of preparedness which left would-be evacuees clinging to the fuselage of aeroplanes, falling off and dying, and which has meant that the British government stranded at least 5,000 vulnerable Afghans

in Kabul, was the result of careless contempt. Johnson and his MPs, who, during Parliament's special sitting on 18 August, cried crocodile tears for the 457 military personnel killed in Afghanistan over 20 years - but none for the over 111,000 Afghan civilians - just did not give enough of a damn. Neither did foreign secretary Dominic Raab, when he remained on holiday, despite the evacuation crisis.

Former army head, Richard Dannatt, said the government was "asleep on watch. ... This issue has been on politicians' desks for two to three years ... Back in July, 45 senior officers wrote to the government ... saying there are people we are concerned about and if we don't do the right thing, their blood will be on our hands. It is unfathomable..."

It is not unfathomable. Rotten politicians cannot but be the product of this degenerate, imperialist capitalist system. However, no matter how degenerate, the system won't disappear by itself. In this respect, the working class here and in Afghanistan, have the self-same objective: to overthrow it. □

Covid-19 crisis

In early August attention focused on the Covid outbreak in China. The arrival of the Delta variant through Jiangsu's airport spread cases around many cities, including Wuhan. The number of cases was small - 471 in 25 cities - and the situation was quickly controlled thanks to mass and regular testing, close quarantine monitoring and travel requiring vaccination and negative PCR tests. This, despite the fact that only 40% of the population had been vaccinated. China is hardly one of the wealthy 7!

While vaccination everywhere

• "Freedom of choice"... and vaccine privilege!

In the US, from August 25, there will be mandatory vaccination for soldiers. Heath, social care and other sectors have different approaches to compulsory jabs, ranging from sacking those who refuse, allowing working from home, or demanding regular tests instead. In France, from 25 July, workers in health care and in other sectors where there is close human contact, have to have regular tests if they refuse vaccination, and from September onwards may be "suspended" (i.e., sent home deprived from pay, likely sacked in the long run).

In Britain, legally enforced vaccination is so far, not implemented. Some care homes/companies (like Pimlico Plumbers)

Nowhere near "out" of the pandemic!

remains key in reducing Covid spread and while it practically eliminates deaths, the vaccinated can still be infected and the danger of resistant variants remains. Which means that vaccination cannot be the only solution, even if it remains the most effective defence we have against Covid's worst effects. But for this effectiveness to be maximised, a centralised *international* vaccination programme is needed - which under this nationalist capitalist system, (as seen all too well over the past 18 months!), is an impossibility! So other measures

like re-implementing restrictions (yes, workers not going to work, nor kids to school) are needed if there are virus flare-ups!

So it's no surprise that "opened up" Britain, the US and France are still the main epicentres of the pandemic in the West and that deaths persist. Nor that Britain has become a Covid breeding ground, with more than 30,000 new cases/day, since Boris Johnson's 19 July Freedom day... And there's no hint of further preventive measures nor enforcement! □

announced a "no jab no job" policy. But Johnson refused a mandatory vaccination policy back in November 2020, saying: "that is not the way we do things in this country!". Nevertheless, there's been talk of mandatory vaccination for all care home workers from November, and for students from September, but with no plan to enforce it - same as for masks, distancing, or self-isolation! The odd exception is that proof of vaccination will be needed in September to enter nightclubs... While low vaccine hesitancy is supposedly the main reason why Johnson doesn't enforce vaccination (compared to France, as often said), in France 57% of the (whole) population is

fully vaccinated, which is almost as many as in Britain (62%)!

Workers who refuse vaccination should be kept safely at home on a living income. But when it comes to exercising "individual freedom of choice" as some would have it, it's worth noting that just 2% of the African population is vaccinated today. Indeed, the majority of poor people have no "freedom of choice": many would love to have the *freedom to be vaccinated!* But that would require ramping up vaccine production and its worldwide equal distribution, free from patents and profits.

Refugees

So far, in 2021, more than 12,000 migrants have reached Britain in small boats and dinghies, crossing the Channel from France. The total for last year was 8,400. In 2019, there were fewer than 2000. So this August set new all-time daily records for the number of people arriving: 482 on 4 August, 592 on the 12th, and 828 on the 21st.

Home Secretary Priti Patel's response, the Nationality and Borders Bill, is currently going through parliament. Under her bill, the government will seek to deport all refugees and asylum-seekers who arrive in the country without already having a place on a British "resettlement" scheme. In fact, these schemes have, since 2014, assisted fewer than 4,000 people per year. If you are one of the 82 million displaced people in the world, you have a one in 20,000 chance of being

• Britain ignores the struggle of Afghan refugees

In the light of the new Afghan crisis the issue of refugees is even more critical. This 20-year war has produced more than 6 million refugees, both internally displaced and in other countries. And at the end of 2020 - before the Taliban's arrival - there were already 2.5m more.

Yet the government's response was to offer just 5,000 Afghan refugees asylum in the course of the next year and 20,000 "over the long term". The government claims this will be "one of the most generous resettlement schemes in our

Patel's policy against refugees



"resettled" in Britain. These are bad odds. Far better to try to take the risk of a deadly journey and try to bypass the immigration police and Patel's law. In other words, far from being the deterrent

against resorting to "people smugglers", which Patel perversely claims, it's an incentive to use them! The only answer of course, is to open all borders to those who need (or wish) to cross them! □

country's history"! True, it is offering more places than the government's scheme for Syrian refugees, which took in just 20,000 over seven years. But Germany took 532,000, Sweden 109,000, and Austria 39,000. Netherlands, a country 6 times smaller than Britain, has 32,000 Syrian refugees! So, "best" in which "world" is that?

Priti Patel said Britain "cannot accommodate 20,000 people all in one go". However, Tajikistan, a country with a GDP per capita 47 times smaller than

Britain's, said it was ready to take in 100,000 Afghan refugees immediately.

Obviously there is plenty of room in the British "inn". But it would have to be requisitioned and equipped. And while this could be done easily by taking money out of companies' profits and wealth chests, it's not something which this hypocritical government of shysters, sharks and opportunists would even begin to contemplate.

British troops in Afghanistan: what legacy?

Whether critical of the hasty withdrawal or defending it, most of the comment in the mainstream media defended the British military presence in Afghanistan for the previous 20 years. British troops, we were told, had not just held off and killed Taliban insurgents after 2001, though they did a great deal of that. They had built schools, hospitals and other infrastructure, trained the new regime's army and police, and were guardians of the new "civil society" and especially the rights of its women.

• Have the "Taliban" changed?

It's being said that the Taliban of today are now "more moderate" and "reformed". Of course, this is the narrative which US/British/Nato allies need to present today, given the fact that they're now relying on the Taliban to protect private property, and prevent disorder, after their own hasty, "final" departure...

However, there's no "one" Taliban. And there lies the problem: whatever its leadership might say, it cannot guarantee to control its own ranks. Its coalition of mainly Pashtun militias bound together by nationalism and

Nearly all the 457 British soldiers killed, were part of Operation Herrick, the occupation of the south-western Helmand province by combat troops from 2006 to 2014. The MoD claims credit for training 350,000 members of the now collapsed Afghan National Security Force and 5,000 officer cadets, 8,000km of roads and railways and having placed 100,000 more children in school. According to one Royal Engineers officer, the construction industry in Helmand had grown from two or three

its own brand of fundamentalist Sunni Islam has up to now faced the common "foreign enemy" of NATO forces. But now that NATO has left, this can unravel. Indeed, within days of entering Kabul, a spokesman admitted that "our foremost priority is discipline in our own ranks ... and imposing laws on ourselves first!"

The bomb attack at Kabul airport by IS-K, the Afghan branch of IS who've in the past bombed girls' schools, maternity wards and assassinated women journalists, is composed partly of ex-Taliban members.

• Pakistan: another fallout of imperialist policies

As the Taliban took over Kabul, Pakistan's Prime Minister said: "Just now they have broken the chains of slavery in Afghanistan". The irony of this is that Pakistan has just completed a high security border fence along the 1640 mile-long Durand Line, the artificial border drawn by the British that separates Afghanistan from Pakistan, in fear of a "refugee influx". Officially, Pakistan is not accepting any refugees, but hundreds of thousands have managed to cross over in recent days, nevertheless.

The current cheerleading by Pakistan's politicians has nothing to do with solidarity with the Afghan population. It panders to ever-growing Islamist sympathies as well as deep anti-American sentiment within the country. However, beyond that, the situation in Afghanistan threatens further destabilisation.

It was in the 1980s, that the US decided to wage a proxy war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, with Pakistan as its rear base. It was in the refugee camps in the mountainous and sparsely populated border regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan, that Islamist groups were trained in madrassas, funded by Saudi Arabia, Gulf Emirates, and of course, the US. Pakistani generals saw their opportunity in all this for deepening their central authority over the Pashtun region. Some even dreamt that

a "greater Pashtunistan" could be separated from Afghanistan. They bet on one of the leading Pashtun factions, which later emerged as the Taliban.

Even after the reversal of US policy towards the Taliban, the regime continued to reinforce them in Afghanistan, while remaining, at the same time, imperialism's closest ally in the region. In fact, the use of Pakistan as a US base in the "war on terror" has further fuelled the growth of radical Islamist groups across the country, which now regularly orchestrate terrorist attacks, including in the big cities. The most important of them today

capable contractors in 2006 to about 50 in 2014. The projects he listed were a new road linking two towns, one school of midwifery and three... "judiciary centres" - i.e., prisons! Punishment, courtesy of Britain, for a population which did practically all the dying (241,000 Afghans of whom almost half were civilians, against 4,438 foreign military personnel in total) in a war which never should have been waged. Let alone dragged on for 20 years... □

Moreover, just weeks before arriving in Kabul, the Taliban itself was accused of targeted killings of journalists as well as the murder of 390 women in the first months of this year. Many women armed themselves and fought back - but now are leaving the country. The Afghan population has a further struggle ahead against this reactionary force, which barbaric imperialism helped create and has now placed "in charge". We can hope that they will soon find the necessary means!

is Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP), with the same origins as the Afghan Taliban. Not only that, but radical Islam has now become a legitimate political instrument for wider sections of the political and military establishment, to impose their dictat over the impoverished masses. The takeover by the Taliban today, reinforces radical Islamists within Pakistan and beyond not least thanks to the release from prison of several TTP, Al-Qaeda and IS leaders in Afghanistan in the past weeks. The longest imperialist war is over, but its consequences will continue to threaten blowback in South and Central Asia.



A British military scandal, closer to home

When parliament was recalled on 18 August, the most praised speeches came from MPs who are army veterans, who talked of the bravery of the fallen. Yet nobody mentioned the army veterans who were demonstrating outside Downing Street at the same time! Two

Nepalese Gurkhas and one widow, protesting their inadequate army pensions, had been on hunger strike for 11 days. The Labour government conceded them rights of settlement in 2009, but left those who served before 1997 with monthly pensions of £20 - one twentieth the size of the British equivalent!

First recruited by the British East India Company after 1816, Gurkhas from Nepal

have long played a key role in the British army. Eight of them died in Afghanistan and another 15 veterans who'd been co-opted by a private security contractor to guard the Canadian embassy in Kabul were killed in a suicide bombing. The hundred who were on duty up to last week weren't evacuated to Canada, however. They've been returned to Nepal, as Canada offered asylum to "Afghans only"!

Their society

Work doesn't "buy" shelter

Homelessness among people in work has grown in the pandemic. About 75,000, or a quarter of the households registered as homeless or at risk of losing their homes in England, include at least one person in work. This is no longer confined to London and other expensive cities: in Hartlepool last year, 22% of those qualifying for council homeless support included someone in work.

This is the reality of the "record employment" the government has boasted of for years: work which is too low-paid even to provide a roof over your head. Zero-hours jobs have increased tenfold since 2007, to nearly 2 million, while other casual contracts masquerade as "self-employment". No-one in these jobs can save for the exorbitant deposits required for private renting. That's if they



can afford the rent itself: the national monthly average rent keeps rising. In May it was £997 (£854 outside London). And while a growing minority of low-paid

workers sleep rough on doorways or in tents, the millions of social rented homes which are urgently needed, are not even on the government's agenda. □

• Higher wages to undo the pension triple lock?

Rishi Sunak hinted that he is considering suspending the "triple lock" when the next increase in the state old age pension is due. At the moment State Pensions still rise each financial year in line with the triple lock scheme, which means they will go up either by the same amount that average earnings have increased, by the annual inflation rate, or by 2.5% (the set minimum) - whichever is the greater. In fact the Tories promised to maintain

the triple lock in their 2019 election manifesto.

But there is a hitch... Now that the lockdown has ended and the dust has settled after Brexit (but only its first stage), there is a relative shortage of labour - and given the law of supply and demand, wages ought to be set to rise... In fact some have predicted a rise of 8% in average earnings for July - which would commit the chancellor to a pension

increase which would add £900m to his budget. So of course, Sunak wants to make an exception this year, saying the coming pension increase has to be "fair to taxpayers". For now, he is testing the water: opinion polls suggest that playing generations off against each other over pension levels will not work. Even younger respondents are in favour of keeping the triple lock in place.

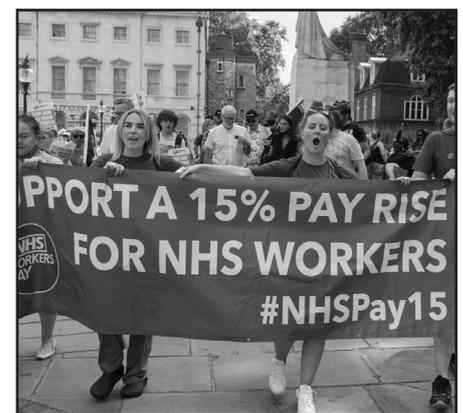
• A general fight-back is needed...

After getting it in the neck from health staff and the public, for offering a de facto pay cut (the 1% pay "rise" announced in March) the government has now come up with an offer of... 3%! Trouble is, it's nowhere near what staff are demanding (15% for instance) and inflation is climbing - the latest RPI being 3.8%. So a smaller cut in real wages than before, but still a cut! And many low-paid NHS staff are in desperate need of higher pay.

UNISON, GMB and the Royal College of Nurses (RCN) are "threatening" that there may be a strike ballot. But at this stage all they are offering their members is this

"summer of demonstrations", no doubt in the vain hope that their moral arguments will somehow win the day. In Scotland and Wales, where the devolved governments made a more or less identical offer, NHS unions have already rejected it.

In the meantime, the whole of the civil service and even teachers are to get a pay freeze over the coming year. Not to mention that 62,000 railway workers will have their pay frozen for two years! Unsurprisingly, top civil servants and managers were excluded from this "freeze" and have already received bonuses...



• ...and it's a good time to push

Britain is facing the worst worker-shortages since 1997 due to Brexit and the pandemic. According to the Recruitment and Employment Confederation, the number available to work had fallen by 25% by June. The transport and hospitality sectors are hardest hit. It's serious! There are over 100,000 HGV lorry drivers needed and the backlog for HGV licence processing is miles long! Supermarket shelves are emptying. Apparently hospitality lacks as many as 188,000 workers.

Unable to run their businesses, bosses are discussing all sorts of alternatives. For instance, the CEO of the coffee shop

Pret, unable to find enough baristas, is now purchasing coffee vending machines.

Despite the obvious risk and against what used to be the EU working time directive(!), in this post-Brexit world, the government has allowed rules regulating drivers' hours to be relaxed. This means that bosses can ask lorry drivers to increase their daily driving limit from 9 hours to 11 hours, twice a week. Longer vehicles ("truck trains" - but why not more *actual trains*??) are being considered again, after being rejected on safety grounds a decade ago. To top it all, the Association of Meat Suppliers is asking the government to send more

prisoners(!) to work in their factories!

Apparently the law of supply and demand is also suspended, when it comes to labour shortages! Because so far, very few of these companies intend to increase wages. And if they do, the pay-rise is pitiful. For example, pub and restaurant wages, often below the London Living Wage of £10.85 per hour, have now risen by just 2.7% on average to £9.50 per hour in July. But if the bosses won't acknowledge that they are in no position to "bargain", it would certainly "help" if the workforce got together and gave them a hefty push...

Handouts to the bosses, attacks against workers

According to the National Audit Office, by May 2021, the government's pandemic spending had reached £372bn. During the financial year 2020/21, the government borrowed a peacetime record of £303bn - double what had been borrowed the year following the financial crisis of 2007 - pushing the national debt to an all-time record £2.218 trillion!

The Public Accounts Committee has pointed out that out of these large sums spent by the government, £92bn were lent to businesses through the British Business Bank, "£26bn of which ... are

now expected to be lost as a result of bad loans"! But the government subsidies to big businesses also took the form of the furlough scheme, tax rebates, etc...

To pay the debt, in July Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced that there would have to be cuts in public spending. He has already implemented a £4bn cut in the overseas aid budget. He rejected a proposed £15bn post-Covid "catch up plan" for school children, agreeing just £1.4bn instead. He has also decided to end the £20-a-week "uplift" to Universal

• Prices up? Wages up!

The Consumer Prices Index - including housing costs - (CPIH) rose to 2.4% in June and then fell to 2.1% in July. Still, this is a 1.7% rise from February this year. CPIH is calculated by measuring the cost of energy, transport and rents. So the bus, rail and tube fare increases introduced at the beginning of this year boosted inflation. And so did the average 5% council tax increase.

Many economists are now predicting that the CPIH will rise above 4% by November. If this is true, it will be the most since December 2011. At the same time, the pay of public sector workers will be frozen, while NHS workers are due to get only 3%. In real terms, inflation will act as an extra wage cut leaving workers to wonder whether they can afford to pay the mortgage or next

Their policies

Credit, which will throw unemployed workers into poverty. And then of course, there is the plan to end the pension triple-lock.... Since the furlough scheme ends at the end of September, over 1m furlough workers will be at risk of losing their jobs and reduced to relying on his UC pittance.

Sunak claims that in his next spending review, no "austerity measures" will be announced. But austerity against workers has already started, while his largesse to big business continues. □

fuel bill. There are no two ways about it, workers in all sectors - not just public, but private too - need to get together to fight for the wage rises they need. And that won't be the end of it. We need a system where wages go up, every time that prices increase. It used to be called a "sliding scale of wages and prices". Definitely worth striking for..

• Labour: avoiding the real issue

In July, Labour's Angela Rayner announced that "Labour will make flexible working a force for good so that everyone is able to enjoy the benefits...".

Of course "flexible" working already exists: that's what bosses call the zero-hours "contract"! But to be fair, Labour is talking about something else, i.e., the right for workers to go part time if they have childcare problems etc...

Its "new" idea is to give access to flexible working "from day one of employment", instead of the current 26 weeks to be eligible. Nothing else changes, however. "The employer can

refuse an application if they have a good business reason for doing so". And they can always find "good reasons"!

The real issue, however, is that bosses impose "flexible working" on an ever-greater number of workers to suit their needs! The Living Wage Foundation estimates that 3.7m workers are in precarious, casual (i.e., flexible for the bosses) work. Of these, 68% get less than 4 weeks notice of changed shifts or work schedules, a whole 12% don't even get a full day's notice! And almost half have shifts cancelled without any notice!

This is the "flexibility" that urgently

needs addressing... but that's not what Rayner dares to address: her only aim is to keep things sweet with the bosses...

POSTSCRIPT: The party is now faced with a strike by its own workers. It decided to cut 90 jobs at its HQ and then recruit "flexible" temps to take their places! Labour leader Starmer said earlier this year that "after a decade of pay restraint", fire-and-rehire is "the last thing working people need". A few months later, Labour has invented its own brand of fire-and-rehire! It fully deserves the kicking (and worse) which its workers plan to give it.

10th anniversary of the summer riots - yesterday, as today!

On 6 August 2011 rioting broke out in Tottenham in North London. The spark that lit the flame was the point blank execution by police of 29-year-old black father-of-3, Mark Duggan. Having had no explanation, Mark's family and friends held a protest outside Tottenham Police Station. That evening, the police tried to move all those who'd gathered outside (many more people joined them by then) and soon there was a physical stand-off and a full scale street battle. The police were beaten back. Riots then spread rapidly around the country. Over the next 3 days they hit Leicester, Salford, Manchester, Nottingham, Liverpool, and Bristol.

In fact the action of the police lit a powder keg which had been building up for a long time, aggravated by unemployment and austerity policies,

including the vacuum created by the closure of youth centres and the dereliction in working class



neighbourhoods. Working class youth saw no possibility of improving their lot. Job Centres were among the rioters' first targets.

Most of the rioters were very young. Among the 4,000 arrested (3,000 in London alone) 52% were under 17. Yet despite their youth and the pettiness of the "crimes" they were accused of (like stealing a single tee-shirt from a looted shop), 66% were refused bail and 46% ended up with jail terms. One 18 year-old who'd attempted to help himself to cigarettes got a 2-year sentence! It's worth mentioning that at the time the Public Prosecutor was none other than today's Labour leader, Keir Starmer.

Politicians, like Tory grandee Kenneth Clarke and Prime Minister Cameron reacted with predictable contempt, blaming the riots on the parents' "lack of responsibility"... yes, nothing to do with them or their rotten system!

Ford Dagenham Engine Plant

- **They couldn't care less**

Well, from 1 September, we're told that temperature checks at the gates will be over. Managers want to save the (petty) amount that it cost, but anyway we all know it was just a box-ticking exercise. Because the real checks that would keep the virus out of the plant, would be proper on-site testing!

- **Visiting the little green men**

So Ford is offering us £1,000 if we come up with a "green space project". It sounds good, but we aren't sure that £1,000 is going to get us very far. Branson, Musk and Bezos spent

millions (even billions?) getting just beyond the earth's atmosphere. Getting into space, using wind or solar power will not be that cheap...

- **What they did to deserve it...**

We heard that managers in something called the "team building and inclusion committee" asked why it was that us workers seldom participate in the events they organise. We guess they must be wondering whether it was something they said or did? Well, yes, it was.

- **Long live the Queen?**

We were a little surprised to get a letter from "Employee Affairs" headlined



"Queen's 70th Anniversary 2022". Was Ford suddenly getting a fit of royalism? Reading further, we saw it was in fact to tell us we'd get an extra bank holiday "in accordance with the UK government proposal". Well, we should hope so! But what unusual efficiency, them giving us 12 months' advance warning when they struggle to give us even a week's notice of lay-offs from one month to the next...

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

- **Sorry, gone fishing!**

Last day before shutdown we finished some minutes early. The cars were covered, the line was stopped, the tools were collected - all ready to go! And so we left. And then, would you believe it, but a red-in-the-face manager appeared, asking where everyone had gone! Yes, "par for the course" in this place, as they say...

- **No overtime, no more...**

BMW decided to call people in as early as the 24 August (and on the 25, 26, and 27...) to get things going - turn on the paint shop oven, filling up the BPS (parts buffers) in

the assembly line, etc. But most of us refused! No way will we come back early for overtime. Even worse than that - unpaid! - to fill up the "Working Time Account" balance...

- **...and certainly not at weekends!**

BMW even started "normal" production on Saturday 28th, with a new shift pattern which reintroduces Friday night shift work. When we were previously off or we came to do overtime to reduce the WTA deficit. So they've also restored compulsory overtime on Saturday mornings... We saw this coming and now we should see that it goes...!



- **Keep to the bargain!**

Our workmates who came in early told us that with the new robots in the paintshop some of us would be moved to assembly. Managers have been trying to push us to go for years, saying we might be considered for permanent contracts if we agreed... So now they're going to moving us, where are our contracts?

Car industry logistics workers have had enough!

In mid August, 2,000 DHL logistics workers at Jaguar Land Rover plants in Halewood, Castle Bromwich, Solihull, Tyrefort, Midpoint and Hams Hall began a strike ballot over wage arrears and DHL's refusal to offer them a pay rise.

DHL is the largest logistics outfit in the world. It has capitalised on the Covid deliveries' boom and

made record-breaking profits of £1.1 billion for the first half of 2021! Yet some workers (who worked all through the pandemic!) are owed nearly £1,000 due to mistakes on their payslips. It's a problem which is widespread among subcontracted logistics workers, including R&H workers at BMW Cowley and LLL at Ford.

JLR's DHL workers are routinely subjected to bullying, refused

toilet breaks and timed if they do take them. As one worker put it "they treat us like scum". All this will be familiar to logistics workers in the other British car plants who experience the self-same treatment by managers who constantly push ever-fewer workers to carry out ever-more work.

It is this turn of the screw, likely to get worse post-Covid, that all workers need to face together if they want to win against these contractors and the car companies which employ them. If an effective fight is to be had, it will need to spread like wild fire across all the plants from JLR to BMW to Toyota, to Nissan to Ford and PSA... But unions like Unite would never even consider this. It is only the workers' own initiatives which can propose and implement such a strategy. High time to get talking with each other..



Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• Good, but not so good**

True, having an hour cut from our working week is an improvement... On Lates, it means we can start one hour later, which is a good thing. But what on earth were managers thinking when "re-aligning" Nights? How can we remember 3 different starting times per week? Well, they've asked for it... nights turning into "lates"...

• Forward to the past

So this is it, on 13 September we are back to the "by-gone days" of a clock-in/clock-out system... sorry, scan-in/scan-out! Managers keep telling us

that this won't be used against us, as if we were born yesterday. And what about the union officials who agreed to this up in HQ? Should we pay them a visit to tell them what we think about it?

• We know the "right" answer

Yes, managers must think we were indeed born yesterday, or very recently, judging from the posters they've put up explaining the scan-in/out system. Everything is depicted in kiddies' cartoons just in case we don't get it!! We particularly like the character asking "will you deduct my pay based on these scans?"

**• RM's low-tech**

Can anyone tell us who designed the scanning booth? We will have to press an option on the screen so that it can understand if we're going in or out, then scan our pass and then wait for the screen to tell us that we're good to go! If we're late, due to queues at the door as a result, will the scanning be thrown in the recycling bin?

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Serious health threat**

We're shocked to hear that legionella bacteria have been found on Thameslink trains. The company won't confirm whether any workers (or passengers) have been taken ill as a result. But they haven't even removed the trains from service; merely closed off those toilets where the infection was found. The RMT is threatening strike action. Obviously nobody should be working or travelling on these trains until there has been a proper public health assessment.

• Redundancies? No!

A "voluntary severance scheme" has started this August across the whole rail network. LNER is telling us that

they have no plans to cut jobs at the moment. And how can they, if they actually want to run their service? We were even struggling on board when there were hardly any passengers, at the height of the pandemic, let alone now, when trains are filling up again.

• More of us? Yes!

In fact we're short of (permanent!) hands across all sections here at KX: working on the station for GN and LNER, for Network Rail, Atalian, Interserve, or RailGourmet... So Grant Shapps had better shove his job cut plans where they rightly belong...

• For this, it's zero-tolerance!

It's no surprise therefore, that Atalian has to recruit more cleaners in the



last 2 months. The cleaning regimes have been increased on trains, platforms and offices and now trains are more frequent. But guess what? They've dared to employ our new mates on zero hours contracts! When bosses tried this in the past we taught them a lesson and we forced them to back down. We will have to do so again.

Sectional strikes all over...

Despite or because of Covid, there is anger and militancy on the railways, with several on-going disputes: against East Midlands Railway, Caledonian Sleepers, Rail Gourmet Edinburgh, Scotrail and Mitie. The problem is that these are being conducted separately leaving each section of workers isolated from the other.

Workers have every reason to be angry. At the height of the pandemic, East Midlands Railway had not even implemented the basic precautions like social distancing, and mandatory seat reservations to avoid overcrowding; their new trains didn't have a guard/safety competent person on the half of the train that the guard cannot reach. So guards, otherwise known as "train managers" have gone on strike.

In the case of Caledonian Sleepers, many new trains have

defective equipment; some were even brought into service with fire alarms not working! Eight strike days are planned in August and September.

And what to say of Mitie-Merseyrail, which tried to renege on a pay deal, (they don't even pay a living wage!) using Covid as an excuse? When it comes to strikes by RailGourmet Edinburgh workers (supplying LNER), the issue is harassment, bullying, and lack

of Covid precautions, which led to several cases of infection.

The same problems are prevalent across the entire network in one way or another. And now, thanks to Shapps' cuts, everyone is threatened with a pay freeze and job losses.

So yes, tomorrow *all* railworkers will have to join to resist these attacks together - and against the unions' sectional approach - because that's the only way effective way to win.



Mitie-Merseyrail workers' protest against low pay

Haiti

On 14 August, a magnitude 7.2 earthquake hit Haiti, one of the poorest places in the world. So far, the death toll stands at 2,200. Over 10,000 were injured. Nearly 40,000 homes were destroyed, leaving thousands homeless. Their ordeal was made even worse by the heavy rains and high winds brought by Tropical Storm Grace just 4 days later.

Disaster foretold

While the death toll is much lower than in 2010, when an earthquake of similar magnitude hit the capital Port-au-Prince, killing between 220,000 and 316,000, this time the epicentre was in a less urbanised area, but still reduced the city of Les Cayes to rubble.

Haiti sits on a geological fault line in the earth's crust, which crosses the entire east-west length of the country, making earthquakes very likely. But unlike rich countries like Japan, which was hit by a magnitude 7.3 earthquake earlier this year killing only one person, Haiti is too poor to afford anti-seismic infrastructure. In fact, its population lacks everything, including the most basic medical facilities. In the affected area, a makeshift operating room was setup at Les Cayes airport, manned by only one surgeon and without supplies nor equipment.

The population is, above all, victim to poverty thanks to centuries of imperialist domination. Haitians may have staged the first revolution against slavery for their own independent republic in 1791, but thereafter the island reverted to French plunder and then US imperialist

USA

For over a decade the western United States has seen worsening wildfires. Last year California experienced 5 of its worst ever fires, scorching more than 4m acres (double the previous record). And 2021 is even worse. And this, in one of the richest parts of the planet - this single US state has a GDP greater than the whole of India!

By now, increasing wildfires in summer are to be expected. So preventive measures can be taken. For instance, small trees, bushes and other kindling which collects on the forest floor could be pre-emptively burnt. Yet, in 2020, the state of California and the US Forest Department only burned 10% of what the California Forest Plan claims would be needed to "make an ecologically-meaningful difference" to the 33m acres of forest in the state!

Haiti's earthquake: poverty kills again



A man digs with a stone through the rubble of a house destroyed by the earthquake in Les Cayes, 15 August 2021

exploitation. When US troops finally left, in 1934, the US sponsored successive dictatorships to keep the population under its domination.

"Aid" that's no help

After the assassination of Haitian president Jovenel Moise this July, government has all but broken down, leaving the streets of the main cities in the hands of ruthless armed gangs who kill and kidnap for ransom without scruple. Even doctors treating earthquake victims in Port-au-Prince have been targeted.

As for the international aid announced

by rich countries, it has mostly generated hypocritical hot air. The British government announced a "support package" of just £1m, 0.01% of the already drastically cut international aid budget. And it sent a single Royal Navy ship which happened to be on exercises in the Caribbean already.

In other words, the Haitian poor, just like in 2010, can count only on their own initiative and resolve. It is they who have found the resources to save lives and organise the urgently needed relief for those injured and those who have lost everything! ☐

California wildfires: a deadly consequence of capitalism

By far the biggest cause of fires are the poorly-maintained lines and equipment of power utility companies. The Pacific Gas & Electric Company admits that its equipment causes one fire a day - including big fires such as the 2018 Camp Fire which was the deadliest in the state's history. Instead of spending money on maintenance, profits are funnelled to shareholders. What's more, workers and poor who've had to move out of expensive urban centres to trailer parks and cabins cannot afford the \$14,000 (£10,200) it takes to fireproof a home - so they become the first victims when fires get out of hand.

The California budget for firefighting has ballooned from \$100m to \$2bn in the twenty years to 2020. But roughly 2/3 of this goes to private contractors for often useless equipment, such as

converted military aircraft which can't fly in heavy winds and fog and can't drop fire retardants accurately!

Some 30% of frontline crews are understaffed. Entry-level firefighters in parts of the state earn less than the minimum wage of \$14 (£10.20), work 16-hour shifts, 12 days at a time sleeping in their cars and relying on overtime and hazard pay to make ends meet. Not only this, but half the firefighting crews in California are made of... inexperienced prisoners who are paid a few dollars a day!

The wildfires may have got worse due to climate change, but their drastic consequences are exacerbated thanks to the profit-first motives of the class which controls society. For a safe future for humanity, it is the deadly grip of this class which must be ended. ☐

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:

BM Workers' Fight - LONDON WC1N 3XX.