

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

CODE RED FOR THE PLANET? CODE RED FOR CAPITALISM!

Nobody needed the melodramatic and hypocritical COP26 speechifying to be convinced that planet earth is in big trouble. The wildfires, floods, hurricanes, droughts - and the threat that islands in the Caribbean, Indian and Pacific oceans might soon disappear under water - all these are ascribed to the warming up of the planet due to high concentrations of CO2 in the atmosphere.

Even former climate change deniers like Boris Johnson admit that this is indisputable.

They need to look in the mirror

The first COP summit was in 1995. World leaders have met on 25 previous occasions to discuss how to tackle global warming. But little or nothing transpired. COP26 has been no different. Delegations came from around the world to strut their wares, indulge in political rhetoric, but above all to schmooze for new, lucrative "green" investment opportunities, devise ways "offset" their emissions and profit out of swapping carbon credits... After all, this is capitalism!

According to US President Biden - and everyone else agreed - China is the "world's worst climate offender". Except that per capita, China produces less CO2 than the US, while doing much of the world's dirty production. And unlike Britain or the US which have been making industrial smoke for over 200 years, it has only done so for the past 5 decades... China also has credible plans to radically cut its fossil-fuel reliance, unlike the USA - and indeed has already cut emissions by 20%.

And by the way, Liz Truss, Britain's Foreign Secretary, was delighted to join in the China-bashing even if this means refusing China's help to build new nuclear power stations - the cleanest way to produce energy into the future - thus delaying these projects!



After making some minimal pledges - to reduce methane and cut down fewer trees - the world's leaders packed their bags and left, to resume business as usual.

In the meanwhile, the rest of us are told to replace gas boilers, "drive electric" and eat less meat, because "every little bit helps". Never mind that over 50% of greenhouse gases (CO2, methane, ozone) come from industry, 25% from large-scale agriculture and felling trees and 15% from road, air and sea transport...

The bits which help

It's not enough to condemn the politicians for their "blah-blah". Of course they don't act: they represent the interests of their profiteering corporate friends from the oil, gas, mining, chemicals, shipping, trucking, etc... industries.

Neither is it enough to call for "system change" without any idea of how to achieve it. There could be a thousand Greta Thunbergs, and millions of Extinction Rebellion demonstrators in the streets. But what muscle do they have?

If COP measures won't make somebody lots of money, then the bosses and their governments simply won't take them. Capitalism is by definition, based on short-term greed. Quick bucks are what make this world go round - and that's what has to be changed.

It's true that "communism" is a dirty word today, misused to describe a capitalist China or the former totalitarian USSR and its satellites. But putting a world-wide communist system in place, based on planned production for need, not profit - this is the only alternative, if humanity is to survive for another 50-100 years, let alone for millennia.

And there's only one force which does have the muscle as well as the vested interest to achieve this: the exploited working classes of this world. They weren't part of COP26. But some of our class were on strike outside of it. In fact the stand taken by a number of Glasgow's workers is one of the "every little bits" which *could* help! ☐

Covid update

If one reads the minutes of the government's "Sage" advisory committees it's obvious that the government has given up on any kind of preventive strategy to contain C-19. It's a free-for-all out there. They want everyone back at work. And never mind the side-effects!

The rate of daily recorded infections peaked on 18 October, we are told, at 58,000. Now it has come down to 30,305 (7 November) and government spokespersons claim that are we over the worst, although death rates are likely to go up for the next two weeks, due to the usual delays between catching the virus and getting sick from it. And then there is always the unknown variable - mutation - which could throw a spanner in the works.

Cure is better than prevention?

Drug companies Merck and Pfizer have come up with what they claim are effective treatments for C-19. And Johnson has already bought 480,000 courses of Merck's Molnupiravir, which has conveniently been given approval for use by the drugs regulatory body...

Yup, since the government has been

• *Bolsonaro's indictment - or indictment of the system?*

After 6 months of hearings and testimonies, the Brazilian senate committee produced a report on the government's handling of the pandemic. It calls for president Bolsonaro to be charged with nine criminal offences, including crimes against humanity. Indeed, over 600,000 people have died of Covid-19 in Brazil, the second highest number of deaths in any one country, after the US. But of course, that didn't prevent Bolsonaro from peddling the same ignorant lies he's been peddling all along - recently claiming that the vaccine was linked to AIDS!

Bolsonaro is preparing for the October 2022 elections and is trying to mobilise the most reactionary sections of his electorate. During Independence Day, on 7 September, he gave his speeches in front of tens of thousands of supporters - evangelical fanatics, pandemic deniers, nostalgics for the military dictatorship, etc. Nevertheless his current popularity remains low, with only 20 to 30% expressing the intention of voting for him.

A Tory teacup storm?

After Johnson's mishandling of the "sleaze" scandal surrounding Tory MP Owen Patterson caused a rapid government U-turn, Labour leader Keir Starmer got really fired up! He told Andrew Marr on Sunday "the prime minister is trashing the reputation of our democracy and our country"! Should he resign, asked Marr? Starmer immediately slipped straight back into his insipid blandness: Labour in

Johnson has thrown Covid to the wind...



incapable of preventing anything, better try the cure, instead. Because the vaccines - for which Johnson claimed and took personal credit to try to save his own political bacon, are found to stop working so well after 6 months. So much for his "way out of the pandemic"! Turns out they are just a temporary solution.

The other option is to give everyone a booster jab. However, getting the NHS to mount the necessary campaign, when it is already in crisis, even before the winter

flu has begun, is obviously not an option. So this is not going so well. And it means that even double vaccinated people are at risk of severe illness or dying. The statistics already show this.

That said, the protection these vaccines give is undeniable. So the 50,000 care workers who still haven't had their compulsory jabs have just a few days before the 11th of this month to go for it. And they definitely should. □

And of course, this is not just because of his criminal mishandling of the pandemic. It is also because living conditions have dramatically worsened for ordinary working people. Official unemployment at 13.7% is a gross underestimate - and inflation is currently at 10.25%.

In the meantime, the opposition parties are using the Covid inquiry to position themselves as the only "reasonable" alternative for next year's elections. Not that different from what is happening here in Britain! For workers in Brazil, in Britain and elsewhere in the world, the fights against the ongoing attacks will have to be led by workers themselves and nobody else!

• *Russia's high Covid death rate*

At the time of writing Russia is seeing the steepest rise in Covid cases in Europe - and deaths. So even if the infection rate is similar to the rate here in Britain at 39,617/day (4/11/21) there are currently 1,160 deaths registered per day. That is 10x as many as in Britain. And the reason is the very low rate of vaccination. Today only 36% of the population is fully vaccinated.

Back in June it was announced that all service-sector workers in shops, post offices, banks and educational institutions had to get both vaccine shots by August 15 - or lose their jobs. For three-fifths of civil-service workers, vaccinations were also made compulsory, while restaurants only let in customers with vaccination certificates. Those that refused to follow the rules are fined. But these measures have had little effect in averting the current Covid wave.

This is all the more tragic, because Russia's Gamaleya Institute was one of the first research labs in the world to produce an effective mRNA vaccine (named Sputnik V), similar to the Oxford vaccine produced in conjunction with Astra-Zeneca. It was available for emergency mass distribution already in December 2020, with peer-reviewed studies finding it had a 91% protection rate. But the population showed its mistrust for Putin's establishment by mistrusting the vaccine which it was promoting. And now Putin is in turn, blaming the "irresponsible" Russian population for this latest Covid wave. Which can only make matters worse.

opposition always wants the government to stand down, said he. But..?

Of course to anyone who isn't a politician, the fact that Patterson accepted £100,000 in retainers to lobby for two Northern Irish companies, Randox and Lynn's Country Foods, is no surprise. Neither was Johnson's offer to him of a peerage if he resigned as MP!

So far, all Johnson's Brexiteer chums who lost seats in the Commons, or never had one, are sitting in the House of Lords.

But it brought back to mind all the old dramas - from "cash for questions", shady arms deals, insider trading, perjury (for which Jeffrey Archer even went to jail!), the expenses scandal - and most recently, former PM Cameron's Greensill lobbying.

So for the rest of us, corruption is the "normal" functioning of government! And unlike the sanctimonious and naive Keir Starmer, no sensible person would still imagine that there was any "democracy" or "reputation" for Johnson to "trash".

The NHS needs workers to clear the backlog

In the Autumn Budget, Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced a further £5.9bn in funding for the NHS, on top of the £12bn from the rise in National Insurance Contributions next April. However, no mention was made of the real issue: the lack of staff! This, despite health leaders calling for a specific plan and funding to address it. Indeed, the extra £5.9bn was explicitly ring-fenced for infrastructure spending, NOT to be used for staff!

To date, there are more than 5.7 million people on hospital waiting lists. But that does not count all those with conditions needing treatment, who haven't seen a GP since the start of the pandemic. And of course these GPs are the gatekeepers to all secondary care.

So A&E departments are being inundated and waiting times have hit historic highs. Patients have died in ambulances queuing outside hospitals. And this is likely to get worse this winter as Covid hospitalisations increase again. The Institute for Fiscal Studies says waiting lists could more than double by autumn next year, to 14m!

No more free movement

NHS staff are burnt out. There are 94,000 vacancies, a 13% increase this year. The Health Foundation says 4,000 more doctors and 17,000 more nurses are needed just to clear the backlog. But at the moment, there are 40,000 nurse

NHS/Social care

vacancies. Not only has Boris Johnson's election promise of 50,000 more nurses not been met, but it's not even enough.

Ex-Health Minister Jeremy Hunt (who provoked a junior doctors' strike in 2015/16) wrote, ahead of Sunak's budget, *"What's the one thing I wish I had known at the start of my tenure as health secretary? It is that money without a workforce plan often gets wasted"*. He doesn't mention that since 2007, the EU has been relied upon to provide the the NHS with a "workforce". But of course Tory MPs, no matter how much they might distance themselves from their leader Boris Johnson, don't like to mention "Brexit"... ☐

• Where are the social care workers?

Social care faces the same workforce shortages as the NHS, but to an even greater degree. Here, there are an estimated 105,000 vacancies. In this case, it's also due in large part to the tightening of immigration rules after Brexit. In 2019, 5.2% of care vacancies were filled by non-British workers, which this year has fallen to just 1.8%. And social care relies disproportionately on non-British workers, who account for 16% of the social care workforce, but for just 8% of the population of the country.

Bad pay, worse conditions

The main reason for the staff shortage is, without a doubt, bad pay and poor working conditions. Many workers are employed on temp contracts (often zero-hours) on

the minimum wage. In fact a quarter of all care workers (380,000!), are on these types of contracts!

In normal times, 30% of care staff leave their jobs. Today, with the huge labour shortage across the entire economy as it is opened again, even more former care workers are seeking better-paid jobs (and easier ones) elsewhere. So far, the government has put forward £500m for "workforce training". It claims that "professionalising" the social care workforce will improve wages and recruitment. As if that was the problem!

The Care Quality Commission says that vacancies could hit 170,000 by the end of the year. And this, in sector which is mostly "for profit" and owned by private-equity groups. Among providers

of children's social care homes, the profit margin is an average 23%!

Not due to mandatory vax...

As for the claims that mandatory vaccination (the deadline was 11 November) is a deterrent against working in the sector - this is not at all evident. By 16 September 90% of eligible staff in England had already had their first dose and 84% their second. In fact it's no surprise that it's the private care owners who blame this policy. It's a convenient distraction from the real cause, which is their attempted profiteering out of human need, by paying rock-bottom wages to too few staff who have to work too-long hours in a relentless job.

• ... and on the home front

Social care has always been the Cinderella service and privatising it made it even worse. As a result a large proportion of caring work is carried out by family members and volunteers at home. So, while there are about 1.6 million workers in the (low) paid care sector, there are 13.6 million carers who are unpaid!

The charity, "Carers UK" has estimated that this number has risen by 4.5 million since the pandemic began. Yet this major part of the social care system remains without any government funding. And there is a total lack of appropriate, competently staffed, residential facilities for the elderly and disabled who need them. These need to be built, but will only really provide adequately for need if they are in public hands.

• Scots care workers fight

In Scotland, social care workers are fighting for a minimum £15/hr wage. Humza Yousaf, Scotland's Health Secretary claimed the government had "previously provided funding to ensure that social care staff are provided with a

real living wage"... by raising their wages to just £10.02/hr! The workers went straight to Holyrood to protest! And they're in the strongest position they've been in for a long time, due to the dire shortage of workers.

NHS Scotland and the Scottish care sector are in the middle of a severe crisis caused by bed shortages, bed-blocking and lack of staff. It's led to long queues of ambulances waiting to unload patients. As a result they couldn't respond to

emergency calls and the army had to be called in to help.

Of course, even £15/hr won't keep up with the rising cost of living. And a mere pay rise doesn't address the other issues like shifts above 10 hours and casualisation. A call for strike across the whole of the NHS and Social Care might push the Scottish government to pay more. And given the general hit on living standards, this must surely involve workers across all other sectors too.



Our society

So now Johnson has given us his post-Brexit vision: a "high-wage, high-productivity" economy! Yes, this is the same Johnson who is presiding over a cut in real pay for NHS workers of 2%!

According to him, low wages, low productivity and lack of investment were all caused by the access British bosses have been enjoying to cheap labour from the EU and elsewhere - the old Brexit chant, of course! Now, after ending free movement and thus creating a desperate shortage of workers - from NHS staff to HGV lorry drivers - Johnson claims to be providing an environment for "British" talent to thrive, productivity to rise and what's more, for workers' pay to rise too!

Of course this caused the old bugbear that wage rises will "fuel" inflation (and higher interest rates) to come up - the question raised by Robert Peston in an interview with Johnson on ITV. Never mind that inflation (already over 3% by the under-estimated CPI measure) was and is already on the up, before real wage-rises have seen any light of day!

On inflation, Johnson told Peston that "one had to take the risk"! Of course this was in the week that the shortage of 100,000 HGV drivers had caused petrol pumps to run dry. So lorry drivers were



being offered the same salaries as high speed train drivers, and more... Indeed the sector is still sucking workers out from every other. The Sun newspaper reported that "lorry drivers were being offered up to £70,000-a-year and £2,000 joining bonuses in order to take up delivery roles for major UK supermarkets".

Johnson will no doubt try to claim credit if workers' pay goes up and say it's thanks to his "new economic model"! But the "incentives" to lorry drivers are the exception: he'll be keeping his mouth tight-shut if and when workers win pay rises by going on strike... ☐

• Railworkers' COP26 pay strikes: betrayed by the RMT leadership

Two rail strikes were meant to go ahead over pay during COP26 - one by ScotRail workers and the other by workers on the Caledonian Sleeper - the overnight service from Euston to Scotland. The strike by ScotRail workers would have had a severely disruptive effect on proceedings; the Caledonian Sleeper strike less so.

Serco, which holds the franchise for the Sleeper service initially refused point blank to offer a pay rise, citing the "government's" pay freeze. Eventually it agreed, but only in exchange for job cuts

and "efficiencies". The workers refused. Ever since Serco took over it's attacked conditions. And this dispute has already been running for 4 months.

So it was hard to understand what the RMT leadership of these two strikes was thinking when it suddenly called off the Scotrail strike, leaving the Caledonian Sleeper workers on their own.

And for what? In fact they submitted a counter-claim to ScotRail for a 2.5% rise over one year, having turned down ScotRail's two-year, 4.7% rise! In addition they "accepted" a £300 one-off

"COP26" payment... literally a bribe for not going on strike!

Caledonian Sleeper workers are still planning further strikes during November. But the kind of help they really don't need is what RMT leaders are offering. They propose that Sleeper workers accept the same 2.5% (in fact a 2.5% cut in real pay!) deal as their Scotrail counterparts. Mick Lynch, RMT leader, smugly claims this is "exactly what they deserve"! One can only wonder what these workers have done to "deserve" such abject union leaders.

• COP 20-stink

Some of the activists who converged on the COP26 conference went to the picket lines of striking waste collectors and other public service workers in Glasgow. The GMB union had initially suspended this strike for a decent pay rise, just before the conference after agreeing an offer by Scottish local government organisation COSLA to raise the lowest-paid council workers' wages by over £1,000. But after meeting bosses at Glasgow city

council, who've been cutting jobs for years, the leadership put the strike back on. By 4 November there was enough rubbish piled up for Glasgow's chief fire officer to warn the public not to dispose of it in bonfires!

Tories have made political capital for decades out of the 1978-9 "Winter of Discontent" and "unions which were too strong" when council workers struck against the Labour government's

wage freeze and rubbish piled high in the streets. Now the same scenes are repeated in Glasgow under a Tory government and a Scottish Nationalist council, for the world's media to see. Whether the GMB leadership which has already suspended the strike once (and kept a similar action suspended in Sheffield!), will stay solid "behind its members" when the cameras have gone, remains to be seen.

• An "autumn of discontent" - and piled rubbish?

A strike by dustcart drivers in Brighton and Hove stopped waste collections for 13 days. Workers were fed up with daily changes to schedules and drivers being taken off their regular rounds "by management whim". The real issue behind this, however, is the sudden shortage of drivers. Council drivers

have been resigning this low-paid (often subcontracted) job with its poor conditions, to take much better-paid jobs in food distribution and elsewhere. Ribbles Valley council in Lancashire said nearly half of its 13 drivers had left and most councils have vacancies right now. As a result many have suspended

some collections, usually of garden waste.

The government says it is encouraging councils "to adapt with training and higher wages". For sure they need to match the pay of the best. And for once, the drivers are in a position to demand this!

• Off the buses!

Stagecoach bus workers have had enough of low pay and long hours of work, and so strikes have been organised over the past weeks, up and down the country. Stagecoach bosses were claiming they were out of pocket due to the pandemic. But in fact they have just pocketed £58.4 million in profit!

Stagecoach North East cleaners, bus drivers, engineers, supervisors and managers - over 800 workers - have overwhelmingly voted to go on strike

over their pay, in sites across Newcastle, South Shields, Sunderland and Teesside; industrial action will be on twelve days across November and early December. However these are only 24-hour strikes, spread out across these 2 months ensuring that the company does not lose too much of its profits in the meantime!

On the other hand, some bus strikes have been called off by union officials after "constructive discussions": Stagecoach workers in Manchester will receive a 3.7% pay increase (below

• How not to break the pay freeze...

Many workers are currently planning strikes. Like Goodfish workers at ST, which produces plastic mouldings, who have had their pay frozen for the last two years, despite working all through the pandemic. Mitsubishi workers in Teesside have called strike days across November and December. Their painters, scaffolders, and insulators who, despite working at dangerous heights, receive just £12.36/h, are demanding an increase to at least £17.45/h - the benchmark set by the national regulator NAECl.

Similarly, warehouse workers at the chemical site of Evonik, in Manchester, voted for industrial action over 6 days in October and December after the company offered a 1.5% pay "rise". Sharon Graham, Unite the union's general secretary, rightly condemned this "real term pay cut"; however, the union apparently overlooked the same "real term cut" when it accepted it and called off industrial action at other sites!

So for instance Unite postponed industrial action at Alpla's Golborne

factory "to allow workers to vote on an improved offer tabled by the company"; more like they didn't want to bother the bosses too much, as around 150 workers were ready to take strike action. The deal, now agreed, gives workers on under £25,000/year a 4% rise backdated to January and those on more than £25,000, 3%. From 2022, all staff will receive a pay rise of 3.25%. Yes, with inflation due to go above 5% in the coming year, Graham has "leveraged" them "a real term pay cut".

inflation!) and a £150 one-off payment. Industrial action planned by the RMT on Stagecoach buses for the 18 October across different sites including the East Midlands, Yorkshire, and South Western Regions was also called off. Officials agreed to a 4.4% pay rise - a real pay cut of 0.3% almost immediately. Once again, artificial divisions created by the bosses are respected by the union leaderships to workers' detriment. When equal work should receive equal pay! □

• Bill against "fire and rehire" scuppered

All MPs claim to be against the practice of "fire and rehire" - that is, when a company sacks workers and re-employs them on new contracts with worse conditions. So when the Labour MP, Barry Gardiner submitted a Private Member's Bill to the House of Commons, not even to ban it, but to discourage its use and give extra protection to workers, it should not have been a problem to get MPs to support this, right across the House.

But this was not to be. The

government used delaying tactics to prevent the vote from even happening. Barry Gardiner accused the government of cowardice and not wanting to appear as rejecting it directly. Yes, this indirect sabotage hardly fits with Boris Johnson's "levelling up" talk.

In the meantime, the practice is spreading. Using the excuse of "Covid difficulties", up to 9% of employers have tried to fire workers and rehire them on worse contracts, including the likes of

Tesco, who are doing better than most, thank you!

This is already illegal in other countries, like France or Spain. But here the government prefers to leave it to... the bosses' good judgement! No surprise there. But even if Gardiner's bill had gone through, workers know very well that legislation supposedly designed to protect them, has to be imposed by them in order for it to be respected.

Kick it out: racism and football

The explosion of abuse against 3 black England players, Marcus Rashford, Bukayo Saka and Jadon Sancho on social media after their penalty kicks were saved in the Euro '21 final in July, highlighted how much racism is still a part of football. This incident came after other games in which England fans booed players for taking the knee against racism. Racial abuse is rife at all levels of the domestic league - most notoriously in clubs like Millwall and Chelsea, but in others too.

Professional football has long offered a tiny minority of black working-class men a well-paid career and perhaps even the chance of stardom. However, they've also faced racial abuse; insults that stem from British imperialism's slave-trading and colonial past. But recently some players, black and white, have started responding - by taking the knee or walking off the pitch, by speaking out and making documentaries about the racial abuse black players have faced over the years.

Boris Johnson is always quick to condemn racism in football, despite all he has done, both as journalist and politician, to stoke these same prejudices in wider society. And as former footballer Jermaine Jenas observed in a recent documentary, the Brexit campaign made the atmosphere more toxic, giving the green light to the expression of all kinds of nationalist, xenophobic and racist prejudices.

In fact the "Kick it Out" campaign dates back decades. Yet here we are again. As is often pointed out, racism is one of the means by which the ruling class divides and rules the rest of us - and it will not finally be eradicated until the class system itself is eradicated. That said, wherever and whenever it lifts its ugly head, it must be reminded that it is liable to get it kicked off.



Their society

Sunak and the bosses: get off our backs!

In advance of his budget on the 27 October, Chancellor Rishi Sunak addressed himself to working class readers of the Sun newspaper, writing, *"families are feeling the pinch right now... but I've got your back"*.

Far from having workers backs, Sunak is on them. There's that 1.25% rise in National Insurance Contributions from next April - and that's before all the rest of the price hikes kick in!

Nevertheless, his message is that he has done an "excellent" job! He has borrowed huge amounts (the most since WW2) to shower grants and loans on the bosses and pay part (or all) of their pandemic wage bills, thus single-handedly keeping the economy afloat! Never mind that it only stayed afloat because workers went to work, risking catching Covid - and many did catch it and some died!

No, Sunak poses as hero of the hour, having avoided the mass unrest which might have followed mass unemployment! And now he claims he'll conjure up thousands of jobs into which newly skilled and highly productive workers will be slotted, thanks to a "*£3 billion*

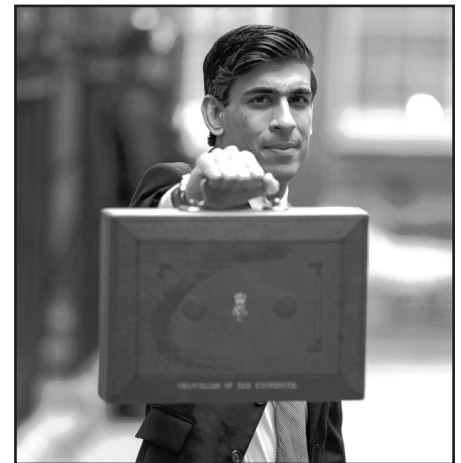
skills revolution" - the path to the (eventual) higher wage..? Never mind that creating jobs is down to the capitalists - and right now, they're cutting them and cutting wages too, by offering below-inflation rises, if they offer any at all...

What's evident is that wage rises are not going to "*ease the pressure on the cost of living*", as Sunak claims.

Official inflation is expected to increase to 5% plus. And anyway, this never reflects the real increase in living costs. The "living" wage will go up by 6.6%, but at £9.50/hour in April, it will still be £5.50 less than the £15/hour which the Living Wage Foundation estimates is the minimum needed to stay above the breadline.

So then, how to pay 30% more for energy, £15 more per tank of fuel, 8.6% more for rent, 9% more for food, 5% more for council tax... etc., etc...?

Reformists accuse the Tories of not knowing the reality of working class life. But whether they do or not, isn't the issue: their job is to help the bosses increase profits. And that profit has to be screwed out of the only



producers of real value in this society: the working class. This is Sunak's "levelling up" - and it's for the bosses and bankers! The only way to stop the real fall in living standards - by levelling up pay - is for public and private sector workers to unite and fight... in full force. There's no other choice. □

• Universal Credit "uplift" cut, for those most in need

Despite the hopes of many that Chancellor Rishi Sunak would change his mind about cutting the extra £20/week Universal Credit which had been provided during the pandemic, this was not to be. This extra benefit had taken the basic benefit level for over-25s to just over £400 a month - which was not enough to live on anyway. But in fact many workers on low pay also qualified

for the uplift, as did single parents doing part-time work. And that extra £20 made all the difference.

Instead of postponing the cut as many campaigners anticipated, Sunak adjusted the Universal Credit "taper" - that is, the rate at which benefit is cut when claimants get paid work. At the moment, they lose 63 pence of UC for each £1 they earn. But

by December, this is to be reduced to 55 pence, *"to ensure that work pays"* - that old Tory hymn which portrays all those in need of benefit as lazy layabouts! Of course it goes without saying that the poorest will be hit hardest once more; and depend even more on charity and food banks. That's the "society of today" in the world's 6th richest country.

• Relaunching Blairism?

According to the latest opinion polls, while Johnson's personal approval rating continues to look rather bad - 53% of punters disapprove of him - the Conservatives are still maintaining their lead over Labour: 39% say they'd vote Tory if there was an election tomorrow, compared with 34% who'd vote Labour.

So despite what many commentators would describe as the most corrupt, irresponsible and ignorant government ever, Labour's leader, Keir Starmer hasn't managed to revive Labour's standing...

And this might explain the sudden nostalgia for the "old days" of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. BBC 2 has been showing an affectionate documentary entitled *"Blair and Brown*

- the New Labour Revolution". And besides the recent habit of giving Blair-Bliar a chance to voice his opinion on all and sundry on TV and radio, there has been the reappearance of Peter Mandelson - holding forth at Labour conference. He was a cabinet minister and main party "spin doctor" under both Blair and Brown, with a spell in Brussels and then a seat in the Lords since 2008. And then, he seemed to disappear... But now he's back.

So, all forgotten and forgiven then? Including the Iraq war? The phantom "weapons of mass destruction" used as an excuse to depose Iraq's already-ailing leader Saddam Hussein and plunge the whole of the Middle East population into turmoil?

Things could only get better..?

There was absolutely nothing revolutionary about Tony Blair's New Labour. Blair managed a totally smooth transition from Conservative John Major's policies - maintaining the content, but changing the form... Even the privatisation of the NHS was maintained and built on.

True, New Labour was credited with the first minimum wage, but it was set at such a low level that it helped bring average wages down, rather than up. From the point of view of working people, therefore, there is nothing good to expect from this attempt to "re-vampire" the Labour Party. Whatever new clothes it might decide to put on today, the naked interests of the capitalist class will show through.

The police: anti-working class, racist and misogynist.

On 4 October, the Met police launched a "standards and culture" review to "*rebuild trust*" - following the murder of Sarah Everard by an on duty policeman. Polls have found that 54% of men and 64% of women in Britain now believe that the police have a problem with sexism.

The head of the Met police, Cressida Dick, has denied claims of institutional misogyny. This, despite the fact that there were 750 allegations of sexual misconduct by police officers involving harassment and rape, over

the past 5 years alone. But this is no surprise, the function of the police is hardly to protect women. And women are not the only ones to mistrust the police. Ask any black youth how many times he has been stopped and searched, just because of the colour of his skin...

As for paying special attention to attacks on women, just because she is a woman, Dick made it very clear as far back as November 2018, that she'd do no such thing. She explained: "*officers should not have to deal with reports of misogyny and it should not be a criminal offence; instead we should focus on 'core policing'*".

Out of a total of 55,696 cases of rape reported to the police in 2020-2021 only 3,539 were passed on to the Crown Prosecution Service. And only 1,109 convictions resulted. This is the stark reality of misogyny. It's not merely a "prejudice" but a deep distortion in society which has its roots in the evolution of private property 40,000 years ago, when it fell into the hands of men. Women can continue to try to have recourse to a biased police and judicial system. But their equality will only really be achieved once private property becomes collective property, in the hands of all: system change, to communism.

Jersey boat seizure: not really about the scallops **Brexit**

The seized Scots fishing boat, the Cornelis Gert Jan which was held at Le Havre and accused by French officials of ignoring the rules for controlling scallop-fishing (it "obstructed control") was eventually released after 6 days with a fine. But everyone knew the Gert Jan was really being held hostage. And that this was really about the refusal of British authorities on Jersey to grant licences to around 200 (?) or 75 (?) - nobody seems to know - small fishing boats. The small boats who'd always fished these same waters, couldn't prove it, since they did not have the sophisticated instruments on board which are needed to do so.

Nationalist overbidding x 2

This sounds very petty, of course. It should have been possible to just grant the licences on the basis of trust. But no. What started as an easily resolvable issue (at least potentially!) escalated into really absurd threats - with both sides saying that they'd disrupt cross-Channel trade, or worse.

Of course with empty supermarket shelves in Britain, cutting off trade with France would be cutting off your nose to spite your face. So Foreign secretary Truss huffed and puffed blaming "the French", while President Macron of France blamed Brexit. As Britain's nodding journalists smugly observed - he was putting on his tricolour cockade, ready for next year's presidential election!

And all the more so, given the current nervousness in the EU over new threats of "Exit" from far-right Poland, which has said its own constitutional court trumps the EU court, even in matters of trade. Or far-right Hungary, of course, which is less and less inclined to play EU-ball. Macron wanted to rub in the evident disadvantages of Britain's Brexit divorce - and especially in the context of a fishing treaty which is a dog's breakfast anyway!

Triggering new Troubles?

However, looming over all of this is the



unresolved "border in the Irish Sea" created by the Northern Ireland Brexit Protocol. Johnson's chief negotiator, "Lord" Frost is threatening to trigger Article 16 - which will mean a hard border being drawn between North and South in Ireland - against the 1998 Good Friday Peace Agreement.

Whether this will actually be done is another question. By all accounts it would upset US President Joe Biden and endanger a future US-UK trade deal. Nevertheless, it seems as if the next phase of talks over the border are going to be drawn out as long as possible, despite the fact that this proves how uncooked Johnson's "baked Brexit" really was. Moreover, it raises the question as to whether Brexit ever will be baked.

In the meantime Loyalist gangs in the North seem to be trying to do a replay of this April's riots - a copycat high-jacking and burning of a bus took place in Newtownards on 1 November and on the 3rd, Loyalist kids threw fireworks and lit fires at the bottom of the Shankill road in Belfast...

Behind them stands Jeffrey Donaldson, the new leader of the DUP and British MP, who might distance himself from bus-burning (he has to), but says it's his "duty" to be a "guardian of the union" and oppose the Protocol - in other words he's all for pulling the trigger. ☐

Class Struggle n°113

Autumn 2021

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Cryptocurrency craze

Since March 2020, the trading value of cryptocurrencies has gone through the roof. The star of all cryptocurrencies, Bitcoin, which on its own, accounts for more than 40% of the total value of all cryptocurrencies, has gone up 10-fold. One Bitcoin now sells for more than £40,000! No wonder even the most vocal anti-cryptocurrency financial traders want a piece of the cake, with one of them saying: "if it goes up, I'll make a little bit of money. If it goes to zero, I'll be so happy, I will gladly lose the money!"

And this is exactly why

cryptocurrencies have seen their trading value increase so much - because more of the bigger investors are happy to buy! Among them are the investment giant BlackRock, banks like BNY Mellon and Goldman Sachs, Elon Musk's Tesla company, etc... Indeed, these companies, instead of investing in real production, prefer to make a quick buck by buying cryptocurrencies... until the speculative bubble explodes of course. No doubt they expect to have jumped off the bandwagon beforehand!

Already in May this year, Bitcoin lost half of its value, with all other cryptocurrencies following suit. At the time, £875bn was wiped out in just 11

days - i.e., the equivalent of the yearly government spending budget! And more recently, on 26 and 27 October, Bitcoin's value dropped by 5.5%, wiping out £5bn in just 12 hours!

Nobody can predict when the next cryptocurrency crash will happen, which is one of the reasons why their value is volatile. But what is certain, is that more hundreds of billions will be wiped out. The fact that this virtual currency is now linked to real currencies however, means that this volatility will inevitably contaminate the "real" financial economy. Unless the craze ends beforehand...

Their society

Supply chain delays could continue for two more years, said one of the world's largest shipping companies this October. And of course these problems have little to do with the Covid pandemic - as some government ministers claim. Covid merely exposed the chronic under-investment in the productive economy, which had been cut back to the barebone, and is therefore unable to cope with this surge in demand after the "artificial" pause in the global economy. And particularly so, because, since the 2008 financial crisis, the majority of profit-seeking capital has been "invested" in speculation, to make a quick buck, rather than in infrastructure and production.

The shortages in raw materials are particularly severe. Copper, aluminium and magnesium are in short supply, and energy production cannot keep up with demand. *Make UK*, representing manufacturers, highlighted average price rises of 30-40% for raw materials. In China, "the workshop of the world", the high cost of energy has led to electricity rationing, causing a number of factory closures, and further delays to supplies to the rest of the world.

The car industry is lacking everything from seats to semiconductors while the latter were diverted to IT goods. But now even Apple is short of microchips for its phones. Amazon profits were cut in half this year (though still making more than

Supply chain crisis is just the "normal" operation of a chaotic system!



£2 billion!), partly due to global shipping costs. Compared to pre-pandemic levels, the price to ship a container from Asia to Europe has increased more than 1000%, and delivery times have doubled to 10 weeks!

In Britain, the lack of lorry drivers, which is currently still 100,000, means even goods that do make it to ports, are stuck there for up to 6 weeks. Some logistics companies, such as DFDS, are resorting to what they call "innovative" solutions, such as using railways to move goods! Amazing... In turn, due to these delays, the ports themselves are running out of space to accept new deliveries. In fact, ports all over the world are

facing backlogs, having adapted to manufacturing companies' "just-in-time" systems. And of course factories all over the world are having to stockpile if they do get their parts orders, or lay off workers if they don't.

Concentrated demand following Covid lockdowns has overwhelmed sections of the global production system, which had been run for so long on a bare minimum to make maximum profits! This chaos both at the point of production and all the way round the distribution chain is thanks to the way the capitalists run their system. Everything is geared for short-term gain. There is no medium nor long-term plan... □

• Evergrande too big to fail?

In the past few months, one of the biggest property developers in China, the giant Evergrande, has been on the brink of collapse. Its debts amount to an incredible \$300bn. If it defaults, it would send a mini tsunami round the financial world. This company, which is not just in real estate, but makes electric cars and food and drink, even owns one of country's biggest football teams - Guangzhou FC.

Evergrande directly employs 200,000 people (and 3m people indirectly!), and has grown enormously since its creation, in 1996, thanks to China's ongoing speculative property bubble. Like many developers, Evergrande uses the deposits and pre-sales of unfinished projects to complete old ones, supplemented by loans guaranteed by these funds. In other words, it works like a Ponzi scheme: new buyers' money is used to pay liabilities and borrow more money... until there are no more new buyers and the entire pyramid collapses!

While the economy was expanding and while real estate prices increased, Evergrande made a killing - it has more than 1,000 property developments in 234 different cities in China. But at the same time, its liabilities skyrocketed to reach £217bn - the equivalent of the debt of an entire country like Portugal! It is the risks

linked to this ever-growing real estate debt that led the Chinese government last year to crack down on borrowing from real estate developers. More recently, it restricted sales of non-finished flats, which threw a spanner in Evergrande's works! Now the company has failed to pay £107m of its debts; the third time that it has missed repayments in less than a month.

In case of Evergrande's collapse, Chinese and Western investors which have made a killing from the real estate bubble in China, expect the Chinese state to step in. It already has to some extent, and will continue to help. Because the collapse of this giant, which could trigger the collapse of other property developers, would affect millions of people in China and across the world - workers and investors alike. When the reports call it "too big to fail" they are right.

• Pandora papers: new leak, old scandal

The publication of the Pandora papers follows a long series of similar leaks of offshore data, revealing the secret financial dealings of the super-rich, world political leaders, their friends and families... This time there is more information than ever, much more than the previous two "big leaks", known as the Panama and Paradise

papers which in 2016 and 2017, revealed offshore fortunes hidden from the taxman and assets involving money laundering and other dubious operations.

The Pandora papers which were given to International Consortium of Investigative Journalists expose the private property purchases of more than 335 public officials from all over the world - carried out in such a way as to evade tax - from Cherie Blair, the wife of former PM Tony Blair, to King Abdullah II of Jordan, Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis and Dominique Strauss-Kahn, ex-director of the IMF. The Blairs used a shell company in the British Virgin Islands to buy a property in London, saving £312,000 in taxes. The property now hosts the headquarters of Cherie's law firm...

Surprisingly perhaps, many of these arrangements are not actually illegal. And for the financial journalists, who get so excited about these revelations, this where the "real" scandal lies. But of course capitalists are thieves and tax evaders and so are the politicians who are both literally and figuratively in their pay. What these latest "revelations" perhaps help to explain however, is why no government ever gets around to clamping down on these practices. They are up to their necks in it themselves.

COP26: adding hot air!

The 26th United Nations climate change "Conference of Parties", or COP26, began in Glasgow on 31 October. Yes, this is the 26th annual conference! It means that ever since the first one in 1995, world leaders have been talking and doing next to nothing about the threat to the environment that capitalism's short-term greed for profit poses.

This time they were supposed to make actual commitments. But since they are mere national politicians whose tenure is mostly temporary and depends on their defence of the vested interests of their corporate friends, their word is never their deed.

And the protesters outside, including the young "star", Greta (blah-blah) Thunberg are quite right to get angry. All the more so when hot-air politicians like Boris Johnson adopted her taunt while at the same time excluding her from addressing the delegates, something she was "allowed" to do at Davos.

Irreversible change

By now, the environmental deterioration of the planet has possibly gone too far to be fully reversed. This year's scientific report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is clear that the natural disasters of this summer - flooding in Germany, Belgium, China or New York, wildfires in California, etc., were climate-change-related. What is more, disasters like this were predicted. They have already led to the displacement of millions of people across the world. In 2019, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre had already recorded 5m people displaced in India alone, 4m

in China and nearly 1m in a rich country like the US.

China-bashing

What had already set the tone for COP26 were the obvious "COP-out" headlines and political cartoons in all the media. And the long list of "world leaders" who did not even attend, including from major fossil fuel using and producing countries, like Russia, China, Brazil, Mexico, Japan, Turkey, Iran and South Africa. Which allowed the conference to become yet another platform for finger-pointing and in particular, China-bashing, starting with (sleepy) US president Joe Biden and ending with Johnson's foreign secretary Liz Truss.

Johnson had already announced that nuclear power would be central to the government's plan to reach zero-emissions by 2050, and that Sizewell C nuclear station in Suffolk would receive a £1.7bn investment package to be

COP26

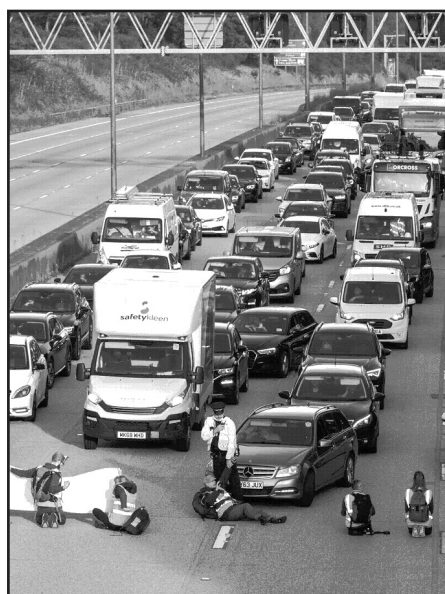
upgraded with part of the work done by the Chinese state's General Nuclear Power Group. However in the meantime Liz Truss, his new Foreign Secretary, suggested that China must play no future role at all in key infrastructure in Britain, reminiscent of the same sort of anti-Chinese rhetoric peddled at the time of the deal for the construction of the Hinkley Point nuclear power station in Somerset. Or indeed against its role in building 5G mobile phone networks. It was banned and the networks are thus delayed.

So this year again, there were fine speeches about limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees by 2030 i.e., in 9 year's time - even Boris Johnson himself said "we are one minute to midnight". Commitments of any significance were absent. So other than its politicking and socialising, the COP26 this year produced a lot of CO2 and gave a mini-boost to Glasgow's tour-guides. ☐



• Insulate "little Britain" even more?

"Insulate Britain" (a splinter from the better-known Extinction Rebellion)



started doing road blocks this October, in the weeks leading up to COP 26. Their aim is to get all social housing insulated by 2025, and all private houses in Britain insulated by 2030. They consider these demands are key to stopping climate change. In fact widespread insulation of all housing - assuming this was to take place under capitalism - *would* probably reduce the overall amount of CO2 emissions somewhat. But is it the next main thing to do?

Indeed, their approach to climate change through narrow "civil disobedience" - which only causes frustration to those in their path, and no increase in consciousness - also reflects their unwillingness to relate to the workers who are held up by their superglue stunts.

They direct all their demands to the government. Apparently, they imagine that after the mayhem caused as a result of gluing themselves to the tarmac on the M25, M4 and Old Street junctions, Johnson will have to concede. Naive, or just crazy?

• We can't insulate homes we haven't got!

While the middle class activists from Insulate Britain fret about warmth leaking from homes, the real problem in this society is that so many people don't have one. And of those who do, many can't afford to heat them given ever-rising energy costs. So heat leaking out of homes is hardly a pressing issue. What is pressing is the fact that 10,000 people in Britain die of hypothermia every year.

The London-only Combined Homelessness and Information Network found that 11,018 people were seen sleeping rough in London between April 2020 and March 2021, an increase on the 10,726 people counted by charities in the previous year. As for wider homelessness in England, 288,470 households were owed assistance from councils to prevent or relieve homelessness in 2019-20. And of course, the numbers increase further if those who are "sofa surfing" are counted.

So yes, this is 21st century Britain. And despite it being one of the richest countries in the world, its capitalist system is not even capable of providing a roof for everyone.

King's Cross railway station (London)**Corporate killing at Hatfield 21 years ago**

On 21 October 2021, LNER bosses held a memorial service and a minute's silence in memory of the 4 passengers killed and the many hurt - including 2 of our workmates - at Hatfield, when the GNER 225 to Leeds derailed. The train was travelling at 113mph. Following the impact, 35 metres of track disintegrated.

Railtrack, the privatised ancestor of Network Rail and its contractor Balfour Beatty, were both fully aware that the track was in bad condition. Replacement track had already been ordered and delivered, yet they repeatedly postponed emergency repairs.

In the aftermath of the derailment,

speed restrictions were imposed across the network; there were worn-out rails everywhere. Major track replacement had to be done throughout, disrupting the whole service for many months.

At the commemoration in Hatfield this October, LNER didn't say one word about why the accident happened: that after rail privatisation, there had been 6 years of utter neglect of rail maintenance by the publicly-floated Railtrack - while shareholders made a fortune. Or that the lethal corner-cracking of the rail wasn't noticed by incompetent subcontractor, Balfour Beatty. Despite the failures of Railtrack and Balfour Beatty, no one was



prosecuted. But by 2001, private Railtrack had already collapsed and had to be rescued by the state, becoming the renationalised "Network Rail" - which inherited the liability for Hatfield. So Railtrack's fines? They were paid by working people. □

• Southeastern: a fishy take-over

On 17 October, Southeastern train services were taken over by the Department for Transport after its private operator, Govia, failed to declare £25 of taxpayer funding paid to it between 2014 and 2019 - money which should have been returned to the government. So has it now been returned? After all, Govia also owns the second largest train operating company in the country - GTR or Govia Thameslink - which also

runs the Gatwick Express, Great Northern and Southern services.

What's more, during the pandemic, like all other private operators, GTR received millions in subsidies as part of the DfT's Covid emergency agreements, which paid franchisees a management fee and took over their costs. For the 2021-22 financial year, GTR has received another £280.5m and Southeastern got another £216.4m!

With all these huge sums flying about, one can only wonder why for the sake of a "mere" £25m, the government should decide in the words of Transport Secretary Shapps that *"this is a serious breach of faith by Southeastern"* and *"to protect taxpayers' interests and passengers [?] I have ordered the Operator of Last Resort to urgently [?] take over the running of rail services in the South East"*. Something isn't right...

• What really happened?

Re the Salisbury train collision on Sunday night: the full official report is awaited, but the cause is said to be leaves on the line, causing the South Western train to slip when the driver applied the brakes and hit the GW train broadside. They're being careful not to blame the drivers (so far), for once. It's clear that neither of

them has anything to answer for. But why is there no mention of the guards... were these trains both Driver Only Operation?

• 1 Train 2 Laws

It's a good thing that LNER bosses are reminding us about mask-wearing. Pity they don't do the same for passengers! In fact, they've put themselves in a stupid position:

masks are voluntary up to Berwick, then compulsory in Scotland. So passengers ask us why they must suddenly put on a mask after travelling 3 hours without one, as soon as we pass the border! Which is why LNER needs to make mask-wearing compulsory the minute anyone steps onto a train - and until they get off. [Workers' Platform King's X 03/11/21]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**End of C-19 restrictions when we most need them!**

On 11 October, Royal Mail management announced it had *"cautiously removed the remaining social distancing controls"* across Britain. Shared van duties were supposed to resume - when in fact, they already had in many Mail Centres, including at Mount Pleasant. Social distancing has also been *"formally"* removed in all processing areas - as if during the pandemic, management hadn't prioritised the processing of a record number of parcels all along, at the expense of effective measures!

And to make things even worse, RM announced that from 18 October onwards, the 130,000 Covid-19 test kits we collect and process every day don't need to be over-bagged - which was the one tiny protection we had against leaking test samples!

The week after this last announcement was made, between 19 and 25 October, over 315,000 people in the country tested positive to Covid-19 and 942 died. Yes, RM management announces the end of precautions just when the cases are



up again! But of course, with the festive period approaching, bosses don't want to miss the opportunity of another year of super-profits (£726m of profits last year!)! Being able to crowd in even more Christmas casuals without distancing rules (unlike last year) will certainly help! □

• No to their huddles!

As if we were born yesterday! Imagine, these managers telling us that there will be "job opportunities" when that Parcel Sorting Machine comes (early next year?). What's more, this is the hot air that comes out of a team huddle, along

with those little round things with spikes on...

• That's not what we want!

Oh yes, but everything should be okay, since managers said that the Parcel Sorting Machine will give us plenty of overtime to do.

Really? In the context of automation-related job cuts? That's probably what they mean by "job opportunities" then...? But what about starting by giving decent full-time jobs to part-timers (without Saturdays!)? And they'll need to get extra hands in here to share the rest of the work. [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 03/11/21]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

Against killer shifts!

At the end of October, Ford suddenly announced that it had decided to strip out Phase 2 block and heads machines from the Panther engine area and send them to Halewood. We were told it's part of their "equipment re-use plan - supporting E-drive localisation". In short, Dagenham, which is ending diesel engine production in 2024/5 (although nobody's sure about when, exactly) is already being stripped of its "assets". Because unlike Halewood in Liverpool,

it is not part of their "Build Electric" programme.

The consequence though is not to cut machine tool production! No, these super-exploiters want Phase 2 production to move onto the Phase 1 machines, which they now want to "sweat" round the clock - by introducing 144-hour/week working. That'd mean 12 hour shifts and no respect for "normal weekends": the return to the same health-damaging "killer" shift as some of us experienced

• For a REAL pay rise and equal Ts&Cs from day one!!

The final pay offer has now been circulated to us: 5.15% year one and RPI (with a 2% floor) in year 2. In other words just about keeping up with official inflation and therefore no rise in real pay at all. What's more they want to introduce a probation period for new recruits - during which they won't get occupational sick pay! Of course they

have to recruit, since hands are in such short supply, especially if some of us are released on early retirement.

In fact for the time being management can't produce the three engines this plant is meant to be making! There aren't enough of us! So we're all treated as a full mobile and flexible body of workers, constantly shifted from one line



on Tiger machining several years ago! That's if we allow it. Ford obviously thinks it's an accomplished fact, just to be "signed off" by the full-time union committee. But there is no way us workers are signed up to it! ☐

and area to another - provided of course there are enough parts available and the chain of supply isn't blocked! So never mind that, as usual, the union full-timers "recommend the deal", because we have bargaining power and it would be a good idea to use it! And at the same time to kick that 144 shift into touch!

• T's not what he says it is!

Ever-rat calls the proposed stripping out of the most modern machinery in Dagenham Engine Plant (Block Mod C & Head Mod B) "supporting the launch of the e-Drive programme in Europe"!

Well that's not how we see it! And by the way, he might think that redeploying us onto a 144 Killer Shift so he can avoid employing a 3rd shift and cut out jobs is a foregone conclusion. But neither he nor his

"official-TU-partners" actually work on the shop floor, where these machines are currently located...

• Deception!

We think the least TFL and the London mayor should do is pull back on the ULEZ charge extension in these tough times! How many of us took Ford at its word and bought cars with diesel engines and are now meant to fork out.

• No, it's not the end of Dagenham!

So, no reason to be down-in-the-dumps. The Ford vultures might want to pick at our bones, but they had better not dare try it! Because lay-offs or not, they still want the engines we produce right now. In fact in between lay-offs they're pushing the numbers! Even if it makes no logical sense. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 27/10/21]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

A strike needed across all sections!

Imperial Logistics drivers, who deliver parts to the Cowley plant, have won a pay rise. Unite the union is boasting of its great "leverage" since it got what the union at least considers to be a "win" through negotiation - after 95% yes vote for strike.

There are however, only 25 drivers involved, despite the fact that Imperial employs, in addition, at least twice as many agency drivers. In fact they were the "cause" of the dispute. Not, as one might imagine, over a demand for permanent

contracts for temp drivers, but because Imperial was paying them over the odds - more than the permanent drivers - in order to retain them in the face of the HGV driver shortage.

Of course there should be "equal pay for equal work": all drivers should get the top whack, regardless. So if that's what Unite won, well and good. But what about, precisely, those permanent contracts? There should also be "equal conditions for equal work"!

As for fighting these battles one tiny



section at a time - it makes no sense whatsoever. All Cowley workers need a pay rise and many need a permanent contract - whether BMW, R&H, G&P, Gi, Unipart, etc., so shouldn't we all be fighting together? ☐

• Drivers on strike!

Imperial Logistics lorry drivers voted 94% to strike! The main fleet of lorry drivers of the BMW Cowley plant has been far too long underpaid and over-worked. Just 25 permanent drivers have been covering the work of 70 for months on end... plus very short-term agency drivers. The drivers are

demanding an increase of £2/hr on their wages - the difference between permanent and agency workers' rates. Equal pay for equal work is overdue!

• A rotten system!

Even faced with the worst labour shortage in years, it just doesn't occur to Imperial Logistics bosses to raise wages or give

permanent contracts... just like R&H, BMW and G&P! The agencies Imperial uses are struggling to find people and are giving job offers - which can last as little as just a few days - on slightly higher wages - £14/hr at the very most instead of nearly £12/hr for permanent workers - to cover for emergency shortages here! [Workers' Fight BMW Mini Oxford 26/10/21]

Sudan

At the time of writing, the population of Sudan is back on the streets, calling for General al-Burhan who reimposed military rule on 25 October, to reinstate civilian-led rule. Al-Burhan had placed the interim prime minister and civilian leaders of the transitional joint council, meant to be preparing "democratic" elections for late 2022, under house-arrest. So far his army has shot dead at least 15 demonstrators and has injured and jailed many more.

It is just 2 years since the brutal Islamist regime of General Omar al-Bashir was ousted from power, thanks to mass protest, after 30 years of repressive rule. However it was al-Bashir's own generals, anxious to calm protests before they challenged the army itself, who forced him finally to resign.

The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), a middle class-led organisation of 17 unions of engineers, lawyers, doctors etc., which adheres to "non-violence" acted as spokesperson for the movement. However it could not prepare the demonstrators for the bloody confrontation with the army which followed, as it turned on the masses. But such was the strength of

The population mobilises again



the demonstrations that the army had to agree to an interim government which included representatives from the SPA. Of course, it was a pseudo-alliance. Under it, the army controlled important economic assets like mines and retained full control of security and foreign affairs. Many saw it as "back to square one", with the same Islamist army (just minus Bashir) which had perpetrated the horrors of Darfur in 2002-8.

It's unclear how today's situation will

evolve. At the time of writing a two-day general strike has been called under the auspices of the SPA. Will the Sudanese masses, who remain mobilised and are building barricades in the streets, finally end the cycle of military coups? To achieve this, the working class will need to revive its own political organisations, using its substantial strength to challenge the army and its stranglehold on the economy. □

Barbados

The population of Barbados has decided to remove Queen Elizabeth as their head of state and become a republic. This Caribbean island was colonised in the early seventeenth century, as it became a centre for the transatlantic slave trade. Thousands of Africans were shipped to work in sugar plantations in atrocious conditions. Barbados attained independence after 200 years of colonial rule, in 1966. Even then, the Queen, living thousands of miles away, remained head of the state. In fact, this remains the case for 15 countries around the world until today!

The move is not just symbolic. It was in the heat of the Black Power movement

Questioning the colonial legacy

that other Caribbean countries like Dominica, Guyana and Trinidad & Tobago became republics in the 1970s. The decision to kick out Queen Elizabeth comes in the wake of Black Lives Matter movement, which has led to a rethinking of the legacies of empire, colonialism, and slavery worldwide. In Barbados, like in other former colonies, this legacy runs very deep. For instance, the constitution of independent Barbados contains a variety of colonial-era statutes - like penalizing the poor through vagrancy-laws, criminalisation of same-sex relationships, and the death penalty. One can hope that the removal of the queen is only a first step. □



Libya

On 8 October, 6 refugees were murdered by guards at the Ghot Shaal detention facility in Tripoli, Libya, as thousands were trying to escape its appalling conditions. Two days previously, guards had killed four refugees trying to escape from the Gheriyan "jail" in the city.

These killings come after Libyan security forces detained over 5,000 migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa during the first week of October. These refugees, fleeing poverty and war, were put in overcrowded

Death camps for refugees

concentration-camp like 'prisons'. They were beaten, abused and kept in unsanitary conditions. Some were sent back to the countries they had fled, the rest held under indefinite detention. After the murders, 3,000 refugees started a sit-in in front of the UN's offices, demanding emergency evacuation from Libya.

If refugees do escape the Libyan security forces and the armed thugs who patrol the streets - some aiming to sell them as slaves - they have to risk their lives again,

trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe.

Since 2015, the EU has been paying millions of euros to the Libyan government to keep refugees out of "fortress" Europe. It trains the Libyan coastguard to capture and turn back migrant ships. Just this month, at least 16 people drowned trying to make the crossing. Since 2017, 82,000 people have been returned to indefinite detention in Libya. This is how the imperialist West treats refugees fleeing the on-going wars and the poverty that their system fuels. □

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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