

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

THE WORKING CLASS NEEDS TO MAKE ITS OWN RULES

Yes, of course there's "one rule for them and another for us". This is no revelation. But apparently Angela Rayner and her Labour "colleagues" have only just discovered that we live in a class society...

So, the "Bring Your Own Booze" party at Downing Street on 20 May 2020, may get self-righteous opposition MPs, or Johnson's rivals in the ever-fractious Tory Party, to get on their high horses. But this is just "par for the course"! Why would any "normal" person be surprised? Not at this party, nor at any of the other dodgy things that go on inside or outside their "corridors of power"!

The hypocritical tears being shed by these characters over the rest of us, since we may have been unable to attend funerals, see sick and dying relatives or friends, are just that: hypocritical. As was the "clapping for the NHS" hypocritical clap-trap.

Workers - and profits - exempt

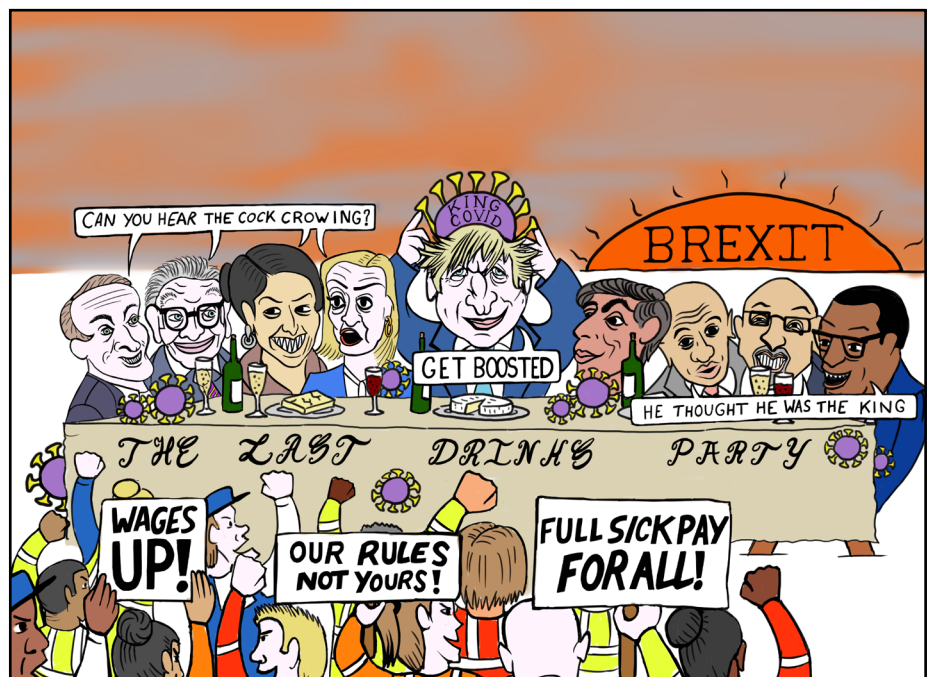
From day one of the Covid "rules", exceptions to these rules were made which placed workers in harm's way. Surrounded by experts, ministers knew exactly what they were doing.

Exemptions were made beyond essential NHS staff, applying to an ever-expanding category of "key" workers: in supermarkets, transport and postal services, food factories, warehouses... it's a long list.

Many were told to "mass gather" at work every day, regardless. By the end of May, even construction workers and car workers were told to return to work. Hardly essential for humanity, but certainly essential for profits.

And who can forget the 29 London bus drivers who died of Covid, one by one, in the space of just a few weeks between March and May 2020? At the time, masks were not mandatory and vaccines were not even considered a viable possibility.

Today the hypocrisy of the bosses and



politicians has reached a new level. Wessex Water and IKEA are cutting the wages of unvaccinated workers if they need to self-isolate: instead of full basic pay they'll get Statutory Sick Pay of £96.35/w. The excuse is that Omicron has caused record absenteeism - which already prompted Johnson to exempt the vaccinated from self-isolating if they'd been in contact with Covid. Never mind that they can still catch and pass it on! This just adds further illogic to their unsafe "rules"!

Utterly "sick" rules

Morrisons had already begun penalising unvaccinated workers last September. It never even pretended this was to persuade them to get jabbed. It was trying to "claw back biblical pandemic costs". Yes, on the backs of workers who'd been on the job throughout the pandemic - and despite the fact that "it was on track to make profits of more

than £431m for the full year"!

If anything condemns the rule-makers in this context, it's the absence of any rules to force bosses to pay full sick pay to all. This latest penalty is another incentive for workers to risk attending work while sick. But no more so, of course, than the widespread non-payment of full sick pay, which always had this risk attached.

And by the way, Sunak is currently paying part of the bosses' SSP bills! What a good trick by IKEA, Wessex Water, et al! They plan not only to save on paying normal sick pay, but to get SSP refunded!

So yes, one rule for them, another for us... All the more reason not to obey - and certainly not to obey without question. The question the working class must always ask is: do the rules serve its interests? Ultimately all the capitalists' rules will have to be abolished. When the working class builds a new society without classes, it will make its own rules, which will operate in the interests of all. □

Covid-19 crisis

On December 8, Boris Johnson introduced a "plan B" against Covid in England, in response to the massive surge in Omicron cases. This introduced compulsory mask-wearing indoors (except in hospitality...) and proof of vaccination for large events over 4,000 people, or for nightclub entry. Rapid-testing was to be done twice weekly in schools.

Now, 4 weeks later, there's every indication that restrictions will be relaxed. Omicron has caused the drastic depletion of the workforce and to mitigate this, "unnecessarily long" self isolation rules for the infected have been cut from 10 to 7 days. This may soon go down to 5 days. Largely in reaction to a shortage of tests in the face of so many infections, confirmatory PCR tests have been dumped. But so have all pre-flight Covid tests, at the request of the travel industry. Tory MPs, especially on the back benches are terrified they'll lose their seats if the current economic fallout continues. And of course, the fallout is nothing to do with Brexit..!

Johnson has always claimed in public

Johnson's electoral concerns and Omicron...



that his "great" booster campaign is the only way out of the pandemic. Thanks to the vaccine-dodging ability of the virus, obviously, it's not. But it certainly is a very big boost to the pharmaceutical and allied industries, contributing £740/sec to Pfizer's and Moderna's profits!

By 6 January, 1 in 15 people had Covid (1 in 10 in London); there had been 15,000 hospitalisations in England alone, and above 340 deaths in a day.

That is, we are right back to March 2021 attrition levels. For now, most of Johnson's "plan B" remains in place, but official messaging says *"we have to learn to live with the virus"*.

On 9 January, the symbolic 150,000 Covid deaths was reached. The way out of the pandemic remains elusive, if only for the simple reason that the priority of government is not the population's health, but capitalist wealth. □

• The sorry case of the unscientific Dr James

The video footage of an ICU doctor telling Sajid Javid he wouldn't have the vaccine because the *"science isn't strong enough"* went viral. Anti-vaxxers were delighted. But this only goes to show that even an ICU doctor treating Covid patients can be ignorant. The *"science"* is "strong enough": vaccination has prevented millions of infections and deaths. But of course, nothing is absolute in this world. To refuse vaccination on the grounds that it's not 100% effective is unscientific. It's like saying that if it's raining and your feet might get wet, it's not worth carrying an umbrella to protect your head.

• NHS collapsing

The number of health workers and medics off sick due to Omicron had reached 40,000 by 7 January, with 24 NHS trusts declaring "critical incidents". Patients suffering from heart attacks in northern England were asked to get lifts to hospitals. As many as one in 5 ambulance workers were out of action. All hospital staff were being moved around wards to fill the gaps. The army sent "reinforcements" of 200 soldier-paramedics to hospitals across London.

Yet what happens when NHS bosses are interviewed by the media? We're told that the NHS is "able to cope". Quite evidently, that's a lie.

• Emergency wards built again... to go unused again?

In December, the government announced plans to set up prefabricated Nightingale wards across the NHS again. Other sites were identified, which could provide additional capacity for 4,000 beds.

In 2020, Nightingale hospitals were erected in response to the first Covid wave, but even though they remained open for eleven months, they were practically unused because of the acute staff shortage. Before the pandemic, the NHS was already short of 100,000 workers. So one has to wonder: what is the difference between then and now? In fact today, there are even fewer available staff!

Poaching health care workers: Britain's colonial parasitism goes on...

As the Omicron surge continues to overwhelm the NHS, the government last month invited foreign workers to apply for the Health and Care Visa, which offers opportunities for medical professionals *"to come to or stay in the UK to work with the NHS, an NHS supplier or in adult social care"*.

Fully qualified nurses and care workers are offered wages way below "British" staff: as low as £20,480 per annum, and their visas do not come with indefinite leave to remain. But of course, for workers from poor countries the incentive is still huge.

And this is what Johnson's government relies upon - poaching cheap, but well-trained labour from poor countries, thus depriving them of their own qualified health personnel.

The plunder of India continues...

India happens to be one of the largest exporters of health care workers to the rich countries and is the biggest source of nurses in the world, after the Philippines. Yet its own health infrastructure is one of the worst in the world. The active public health workforce in India is a little over one-fourth of the WHO recommended threshold. Rural India mostly relies on "Accredited Social Health Activist Scheme" workers, paid as little as £80-£100/m, on a "piece rate" system, to provide minimum health care facilities, in the absence of anything else.

Two years into the Covid-19 pandemic, the Indian government still does not know even how many healthcare workers have died in the line of duty.

More than he bargained for?

The good news is that a whole range of health workers in India have been at the forefront of protests and strikes in the last two years demanding better conditions: 70,000 ASHA workers went on a week-long strike in Maharashtra in June; thousands of doctors in Delhi and Maharashtra were on strike in December 2021, over delays in placing new doctors at government hospitals; over 16,000 health workers, including nurses and paramedics, are on an indefinite strike in Punjab.

So, the "cheap labour" that Johnson hopes to import, prepared in the tough healthcare environment of a poor country, is not as pliable as this government might hope! A "booster" that we can very well do with over here!

Elderly social care: yet another dire scandal

The severe "crisis" in social care is again being swept under the carpet. There are no front page headlines expressing shock that the elderly and disabled are again being treated like unwanted objects which can just be discarded, unnoticed by anyone. In 2020, that utter carelessness resulted in 30,000 of the country's elderly dying from Covid, mainly because they'd been discharged into care homes when already infected with the virus - which they'd caught in hospital. But they were not even tested beforehand to check if their discharges

would be "safe".

Today the bed shortage in the NHS and "bed blocking" by the elderly and disabled is being handled differently... In fact that's because this time round, the beds aren't even available in care homes. Staff have left for better-paid jobs elsewhere. Almost all private care homes are critically short of workers and "homecare providers" are handing back contracts to councils because they also can't find staff. Many are closing because they can no longer squeeze out the kind of profits they made before since this

Their society

depended on underpaying workers and depriving their residents of decent care, something which Covid at least brought to light.

So NHS chief, Amanda Pritchard has told hospitals to requisition hotel beds. A four-star hotel in Bristol has already been acquired. Three other hotels in the south of England, are also going to be used. And (of course!) a private "provider" has been found, called "Abicare", which is currently recruiting live-in workers from Spain, Greece and African countries to come and look after them... □

• Social care needs socialising

So what about the chronic rock-bottom pay and temporary - even zero-hours - contracts which are the (outrageous!) norm in the social care sector? Unions like the GMB are campaigning for £15/ hour minimum pay. But so far, no progress! Obviously, getting decent pay takes more than just asking politely. In mid-December ministers announced an additional £300m to fund so-called "retention bonuses" for care staff. But these actually amount to one-off bonuses of just £60 to £150 a worker! Which is

hardly likely to persuade staff to stay in this difficult, tiring and emotionally-draining job!

Now the providers of care, most of them private, are demanding that the government earmarks more of the "health and social care tax" which is due to be deducted from everyone's wages starting this April, for their sector. Governments have cut £8bn from social care budgets since 2010. Only £1.7bn out of the £12bn collected from the new tax will go to social care. But it's

calculated that by 2025, £9.5bn a year more will be needed. So where will that come from? What about "calculating" what shareholders have sucked out of this privatised sector over the past 30-40 years since they were allowed to parasitise what should have been a public service, free at the point of use? In fact that's the only answer: putting every aspect of social care back into public hands, with the full public finance it needs.

• Prosecuted for being too poor

A shocking report has been published by the GMB which exposes the consequence of the lousy social care system, which asks the elderly and vulnerable to meet payments for home helps, meals on wheels and vital help with basic needs. "Of the total of at least 166,835 people who are in arrears on their social care payments, more than 78,000 have debt management procedures started against them by their authority for non-payment of social care charges" and what is more, 1,178 people have been taken to court by local authorities because they're unable to pay for their own care - or that of family members. The GMB says this shows that the "system isn't working". A bit of an understatement. This care used to be provided according to need, free of charge until Thatcher's 1990 Community Care Act which allowed a "private industry" to develop and make money out of

this provision. It was so obviously unjust and unsustainable that Scotland partly reversed this in 2002 and made personal care free

for people aged 65 and over. Extending free provision everywhere is going to take a fight, and it's overdue.



Social housing whether in London or New York: inadequate and unsafe!

The fire in the apartment block in New York, which provided social housing for the poor, has reminded everyone of Grenfell. So far 19 people in this building are known to have been killed, most of them from immigrant families from Gambia. According to the New York Post, there had been "more than two dozen violations and complaints since 2013... including for vermin infestation and faulty elevators". There had been state-funded repairs, but then the building was sold to an "investment group" two years ago. Over the last year, because fire

alarms kept going off without any fire, the residents no longer took notice of them.

This goes to show, yet again, that this system of profits before safety, whether here or anywhere else in this capitalist world, cares nothing for the lives of the poor. Five years after the Grenfell fire killed 78 men, women and children, the same cladding which was the cause of the rapid spread of that fire has still not been removed from hundreds of buildings around the country. At huge cost to residents, "fire watches" had to be put in place and paid

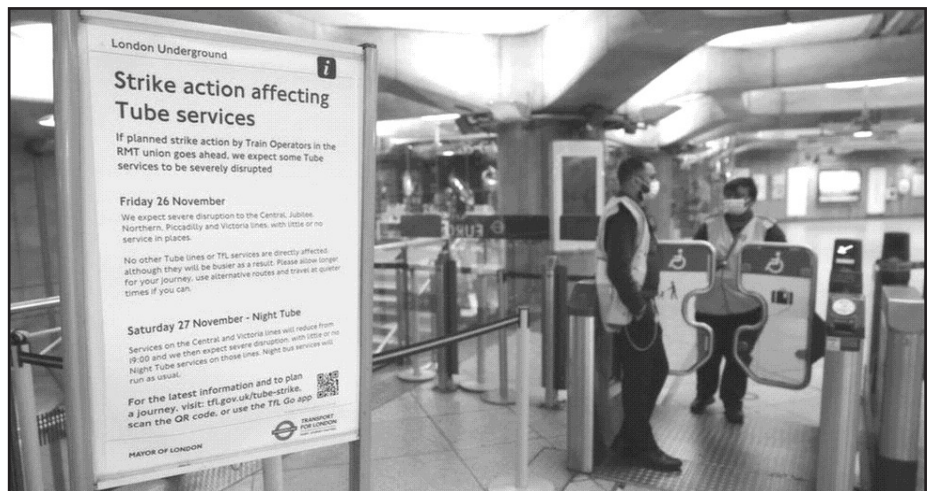
for by residents while they waited for the government to rule on who had to pay for these buildings to be made safe. This was because despite the obvious responsibility of the developers and construction companies for choosing cheap and illegal materials, they have so far refused to bear the costs. Only now has Michael Gove finally agreed to hold them responsible. But how many more months and years will it take to do the required work? While this gets sorted out - if indeed it does - the risk of another Grenfell remains.

Strikes

London's tube strike escalates

The night tube service at weekends in London was restored on 24 November last year. But to save money out of the Transport for London budget, after funding was cut by government ministers, mayor Sadiq Khan has in turn cut the equivalent of 200 drivers' jobs. Driving night shifts is now to be compulsory for *all* drivers, rather than a voluntary option for those who can easily do it - and with special enhanced conditions (as there should be!) for taking it on. Of course, this fact isn't mentioned when the media goes on about the disruption the weekend strikes on the Victoria and Central lines are causing.

And it gets worse: Khan is now coming for the rest of the tube workers. Another 600 jobs are to be cut! And what's more, their pensions are to be degraded. So now a strike ballot of all workers in the Underground - to be completed on 10 January - is taking place, so that tube workers can fight



TfL's attacks collectively... And it's high time. Because it makes no sense that the drivers of just two lines should "walk out" every weekend on their own. They are steadfast and have pledged to carry on with this action every weekend until

June, if the tube bosses refuse to back down and restore their pre-pandemic agreement. But the matter could be sorted out straight away if the bosses were subject to a determined "all out" strike, with everyone involved. ☐

• Supermarket workers fighting for higher pay

Just before Christmas, 94% of ASDA warehouse and clerical workers as well as LGV drivers voted in favour of strike action during a consultative ballot organised by the GMB union. This was their answer to the insulting "offer" of a 0% pay-increase from ASDA bosses during negotiations with GMB union officials.

According to these bosses, no new pay deal can be negotiated before May

2022, which is the start of the new financial year... Never mind that the past few months the cost of living has already increased. The Retail Price Index (RPI) of inflation was already 7.1% in November. And never mind either that many ASDA warehouse workers are paid the current minimum wage of £8.91 (£9.50 from this April). It's not enough to live on. Yet these workers are regarded as "key"!

Other supermarket workers are in just the same boat. Tesco and Morrisons workers were also ready to strike before Christmas over pay. But that was before their union officials announced that they are going back to the negotiating table with the bosses. Whereas combined strike action across all supermarket workers would resolve this problem in no time at all...

• HGV refuse collection strike

The drivers of refuse collection trucks in Eastbourne have been taking strike action over pay since New Year's eve. These workers, despite the well-documented shortage of HGV drivers are being paid well below the so-called "industry

standard", just above the minimum wage, in fact! The council has now offered them a rise to £12.50 an hour. But this is £1 below the modest £13.50/hour which GMB union officials are asking for. So the strike is set to continue. And

given that there are only 20 or so drivers involved it is good news that the action is spreading to other drivers along the south coast. Worthing refuse workers are now set to join them. This can only help, of course!

Letter from Greece: the attacks on public and private sector workers

Working and living conditions in Greece have been under sustained attack ever since the 2008 financial crisis. Over the past dozen years, workers have seen their wages slashed by 40% to 50%. Unemployment has reached 27%; the welfare state has been dismantled.

The pandemic has only made matters worse. The vaccine pass has been used as an excuse to suspend indefinitely and without pay 6,400 health workers. In the most recent budget, health expenditure was cut by a further £500m! Full-time, and permanent jobs have become harder to find; overtime is becoming a norm and collective bargaining is de facto abolished, along with most other regulations, even in big workplaces.

The container port of Piraeus in Athens - where workers went on strike during

November/December last year - is a good example of the degradation of working conditions. This port was first acquired by Shanghai-based Shipping company Cosco in 2009 and has since become one of the busiest ports in Europe.

On 25 October, a worker had just finished his shift and returned to pick up some personal belongings when he was fatally hit by a container crane. The previous day, he'd worked a 12-hour shift, 7pm to 7am and the following day, both he and the crane operator involved in the accident, were working back-to-back shifts, with less than 8 hours of rest in between. Never mind that this is against EU Working Time Regulations.

The response of his workmates was to go on immediate 24-hour strike, demanding the abolition of 12-hour

and back-to-back shifts, the increase of working groups to share the workload, the signing of a collective bargaining agreement including everyone and all part-time and temporary contracts to be made into full-time permanent contracts.

The strike continued for 7 days. A long queue of cargo ships formed in Saronikos bay, waiting to dock at the port. The company was forced to accept, at least on paper, most of the dockworkers' demands and enter negotiations for a collective agreement. The outcome of these negotiations, as well as the extent of the actual implementation of the agreement, remains to be seen. Of course, it shouldn't have taken a death of a workmate to achieve any of this. But if the strikers achieve their aims, he will not have died in vain.

2021 over; what has 2022 in store for workers?

Their policies

In his New Year speech, Johnson claimed that Britain "has the fastest economic growth in the G7" and that there were "more people in work now than there were before the pandemic began". Yes, for Johnson, just like the character of Professor Pangloss in the 18th century satire *Candide*, "everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds". Even if there is no evidence to support this fantasy, whatsoever!

Indeed, if Britain is forecast to have slightly higher economic growth rates in 2021 and 2022 than other G7 countries, it is simply because, thanks to the pandemic combined with Brexit, it had the biggest economic contraction in 2020! As for the claim that more people are in work now than before the pandemic, that's simply a lie: there are still 500,000 fewer people in work compared to pre-Covid figures.

And while it's getting harder to find a decent job (petty, low-paid, temp jobs can, of course be found!), inflation is skyrocketing. The Retail Price Index has hit 7.1%, the highest level in 30 years. Energy bills are set to increase by 45% to 50% in April. Already petrol and diesel costs have gone up by 25 and



15%, respectively. Food prices have so far gone up by a bit less, on average - around 10% - but the price of all-important teabags has gone up by 12%!

The Resolution Foundations says that 2022 will be "the year of the squeeze" for working class families. Not only are wage packets to be hit by an average £750 cut because of the 1.25% increase in National

Insurance Contributions, but energy bills will push this "hit" up to at least £1,200. Yes, the "rosy" picture Johnson paints is in reality, a fall in incomes and a fall therefore, in workers' living standards, to come: predictable, but certainly not inevitable. Not if workers get together to fight back and force the capitalist class to bear the burden instead. □

• And further attacks on workers' rights?

Foreign Secretary and now also the new Brexit Negotiator, Liz Truss, is reviewing the so-called "retained EU law" (REUL). These are the pieces of EU legislation which were brought over into the British legal system in anticipation of Brexit. The review process, which was launched back in September by former Brexit minister, David Frost, aims to "amend, replace, or repeal all the REUL that is not right for the UK". In fact business secretary

Kwasi Kwarteng has already initiated the removal of workers' rights inherited from EU law.

Truss and Kwarteng were two of the five authors (along with Dominic Raab, Priti Patel and Chris Skidmore) of the book "Britannia Unchained" (!!) which argues that Britain can lead the world again as in old "empire free-trade days"... but only if something is done about the fact that "the British are among the worst

idlers in the world"!

They have been itching for some time to scrap the (minimal!) protection still provided by the EU Working Time Directive (WTD), which, at least in theory, limits the working week to 48-hours and sets out breaks between shifts, etc... And they are also targeting all the other, (again, limited) protections provided by directives adopted from EU law, especially those regarding equal rights for agency workers.

The TUC general secretary, Frances O'Grady, let it be known that she is not having any of it, "the government is flirting with a review which endangers important workers' rights and legal principles". But of course workers have never been able to rely on laws made by the bosses and their governments for their protection. It's action by workers collectively and in force, which has always won workers their rights. And if that's to be organised, it's not O'Grady's TUC which will propose it. It will have to come from the ground up.

12 Tips for Night Shift Workers !!



• Rishi's dishes

Rishi Sunak made a show of cutting short a trip to California to address "hospitality" bosses' complaints over the government's Plan B response to Omicron. In mid-December, 3.2 million bookings to eat or drink out were apparently cancelled in a single week.

On his return, Sunak immediately rushed out a quick and unconditional handout - £1 billion for a series of grants

(not loans!), plus the return to reimbursing small companies for up to two weeks statutory sick pay for their workers, reduced VAT and a 75% reduction in business rates, all to remain in place until March. Not that they felt it was enough. Many wanted a return to furlough, since their punters had been encouraged to work from home.

While hospitality suffered, however, supermarket bosses raked it in... It's estimated that £11.7 billion was spent

in supermarkets in the run-up to Christmas, as millions apparently stayed away from pubs and restaurants. This is close to the record amount they made in 2020, when hospitality was partly closed by "tier" restrictions, followed by a full lockdown. So who knows, maybe Sunak will have to cough up some more for the pubs and restaurants who feel so hard done by. Especially if he wants to keep his place as Johnson's replacement in waiting.

King's Cross railway station (London)**A gathering strike "storm" or isolated showers?**

Cross Country train managers - in other words, guards - and senior conductors, were on strike on New Year's Eve alongside Edinburgh's Gate Gourmet (GG) workers... Yes, for once there was some co-ordination of action!

Cross Country bosses are trying to train managers to take over guards' jobs, i.e., to be ready to break strikes in future because they have managers with "safety clearance"... As for the Gate Gourmet strike, this is a long-running dispute over management's bullying and harassment.

While it is a good thing that the union organised the strike days to coincide,

there was no attempt to use the existing potential strength of the workforce for a decisive victory, once and for all. And there could have been: GG workers and guards all over the network have similar problems. So why do RMT officials fail to organise "proper" strikes involving as many as possible of us? Are they afraid to rock the bosses' boat, in case they fall out?

We see however, that the RMT is warning of a "storm to come" - by which they mean a national strike ballot over the general pay freeze imposed on all of us.



So is this to be isolated thunder showers around the country or a co-ordinated all-out deluge against the government and their private rail bosses? And might we ask what the other unions - Aslef, TSSA and Unite - will be doing? ☐

• Are new hosts joining us?

LNER Chefs who are currently working as hosts might be asked after New Year to prepare and cook food for the first time in nearly 18 months. But who will replace them as hosts? [Workers' Platform King's X 15/12/21]

• Waiting for Xmas

Indeed, LNER roster clerks have an impossible task, trying to spread too few of us over too many jobs. So e.g., only 2 people can be allocated to serve 1st class on board (without a chef!). And this, while managers want us to serve more

options (bacon rolls, ciabattas, waffles, etc.) and plate them! How's this suppose to work? Well the answer is: it doesn't. Let's all sit down and await the extra staff. [Workers' Platform King's X 15/12/21]

• Back in 1821...?

Atalian bosses are always looking for extra jobs for us to do. Now they expect night shift cleaners/tankers to clean the pockets on the side of the trains - with cold water, which we have to fetch from the depot room on platform 8, if we can't get it from platform taps. We're meant to put our hands in freezing water and scrub! You'd think this was 1821 and not 2021...

Actually there is hot water on the trains - and if they weren't locked we could access it. [Workers' Platform King's X 15/12/21]

• Still no news?

We've been asking GN managers for a while now what we're meant to be doing from March onwards after the franchise ends... As usual, they leave everything to the last minute, but we need to plan our lives. So until they decide to provide us with a decent period of notice of any changes we give notice that we'll be staying put. [Workers' Platform King's X 15/12/21]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**Let's make BMW shed tears over its "tiers"...**

Casual employment has mushroomed under BMW and is still mushrooming! It started in 2001 - with 3 agencies hired to recruit new production workers on lower pay. Mates were told they'd be eligible for permanent direct contracts after 6 months, but few got them. Some waited over ten years; the official minimum is now 5 years, but in practice, it's 7. And never mind that the 2011 agency workers' regulations required equal pay after 12 weeks, BMW used a "derogation" to extend this to two years

with staggered, 4x6-monthly rises!

As for subcontracting, Rudolph & Hellmann serially took over BMW logistics, giving our workmates the "option" (!) of transferring to them on much lower wages, or onto the hardest jobs in Assembly to keep BMW Ts&Cs. In quality control, subcontractors Autoscan and now G&P keep some mates "on call" on zero-hours contracts and thus without guaranteed wage rates.

So "pay-back" from us is overdue. And in fact it's a very good time for it,



because BMW and its sub-cowboys are short of hands. Their attempt to bring agency workers in on higher pay rates (yup, £16/hr, for instance) says it all. All out? ☐

• The fight is our collective fight, regardless of the badge we wear...

Rudolph & Hellmann workmates have been approached to join Unite the union at the gate. We're told by them that we have to do this in order to get a pay rise. What's more, a Unite leaflet which was handed to us, says we can't strike if we aren't in the union: it says that we'd automatically be "scabs" if we don't join!

This leaflet really is an insult. In fact it's a bit hard to believe that Unite issued it. Those of us who brought production

lines to a stop in December 2020, by walking out for several hours, were not all union members. The fact is that enough of us acted to scare the company into backing down, but also to ensure there wasn't any come-back against any of us.

For sure, being in an active, fully accountable union is a good thing. But Unite union organisers only came to the factory gates after we'd "organised"

ourselves. And anyway, their officials have already been negotiating on our behalf here, above our heads - and that's half the problem. They don't have meetings with us first, nor do they ask us what to say. So, given that we already know we can rely on *each other*, our next step has to be that we meet together, union and non-union, agency and permanent and collectively decide our next move, ourselves.

Ford Dagenham Engine Plant

Using our bargaining power

Ford shares are now worth more than £16, the highest level for 20 years. In fact, share prices have tripled in just 14 months, which shows how confident investors are that Ford will do even better in the future! *Forbes Wheels* already awarded the company the "Automaker of the Year for 2022", claiming that it might become "the industry's No. 2 or 3 electric car maker". And *MotorTrend* awarded its CEO Jim Farley the "2022 Person of the Year", thanks to his "visionary" transition to the EV market.

In Dagenham - devoted entirely

to diesel engine manufacture - there's no celebration. With petrol and diesel vehicle sales ending in 2030, production here is apparently meant to just wither away, gradually. A couple of temporary projects have been proposed to give union officials something to chew on, like the repainting of rusted rangers, or doing minimal adaptations to a few ambulances. But already, mates who've retired aren't replaced and since Ford refuses to recruit, thanks to its long-term plan, we're short of hands and overtime is asked for!



For now and, who knows, for some years to come, the company certainly wants and needs the diesel engines we make. So that 2030 deadline could well be a moving target... In other words, we've just as much "bargaining power" as we've always had. It's up to us to decide to use it. □

• Full ford protection - ffp or protection from ford - pff?

If Ford wants us working in the middle of this "record" wave of Omicron, then we surely need to be issued with FFP2 masks? These blue ones offer little protection... Of course, we'd then need breaks every 90 minutes to wipe our faces dry, and some hot towels.

• Yeah, since we're so "key"

Then there's the need for testing every day, to make sure we aren't passing the infection on... So will they now test us at the gate, let us wait 15 minutes for the

result (deducted from our working day) - and if we're +ve, send us home?

• Let's have a real break!

In fact Covid is already spreading rapidly among us. Some are getting it for a 2nd time. And this can only get worse. So far, most lines might be OK, tho' Panther head and block are already short. What about a circuit-breaker fortnight off for everyone - on full pay of course...

• We're frozen stiff

Why is it that after so many years we still have to freeze in winter and boil in summer on what is now "Darkside"? How can Panther

night-shift mates even move their fingers with these ZERO temperatures INSIDE the plant?

We thought there was a budget for everything? So where did it go? Has someone had their fingers in the cookie jar all this time?

• Inflation wipes it out

As to pay, well, the "rise" hasn't hit our pay-packets yet. Not that it's going to be that visible - it's already a 2% cut in real wages, since RPI is already 7.1%! Anyway, we usually only notice this so-called rise just the once - when it's slightly larger and includes the back-pay to last November... [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 06/01/22]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

Happy New Mayhem!

We were a little surprised that this year the "Christmas casuals", usually so super-exploited, were paid a higher rate than usual. Here at Mount Pleasant, for instance, the pay rate was £13.45/hr on early and late shifts and £15.75/hr on nights. No doubt this was an anticipation of a labour shortage, relative to this year's "Christmas Pressure".

But despite the extra 24,000 workers taken on across the country, there were delays in deliveries and pile-ups in sorting centres

nearly everywhere. Indeed, to the point where the regulator Ofcom had, by 1 January, to grant an "exception to the universal service throughout the country". Normal deliveries and collections only resumed on 4 January.

Management unsurprisingly blamed the chaos on the high rate of sick-leave due to Covid-19. This is partly true, since the clever bosses here ended workplace Covid restrictions at the exact same moment that Omicron arrived on the scene! But the



underlying problem is that they've retired so many workers without replacing them. There's an easy answer, of course: those casuals who'd like to stay on could be given the option of a permanent job. The rest of us will have to ensure that "needs must"... □

• Santa's late?

N1 managers must be deep in a mess! They've asked W1 drivers to volunteer to help them and a few of us from EC (3, 4, more?) have already been sent there (involuntarily) to do deliveries! But this is a cock-up of managers' own making, so why should we help them to get out of it? Nope, we'll be taking our breaks and we refuse the overtime. N1 workmates could do the same? [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 15/12/21]

• Get real!

We see that RM has owned up to major delays in 21 delivery offices, including Finsbury

Park (N4 and N15) and Hornsey (N8), but delays are obviously happening all over... including, of course, us in Islington (N1)! Bosses still claim the problems are mainly caused by "sickness absence"... But behind that is the lack of workers - something which has been raised by constituency MPs in recent weeks. And then the "revisions" pushed through by management in an attempt to make up for this, have just caused more of a mess! [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 15/12/21]

• Better late than never?

In fact, CEO Simon Thompson did admit last week in a company-wide video that RM doesn't have enough vans for Xmas deliveries! He told Delivery office managers to find the extra

vans they needed themselves. This is the postal service's 505th Xmas, so how many more Christmases do these bosses need to learn how to manage?! [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 15/12/21]

• Read the rules?

So we might sound like a broken record, but the Elephant (cleaners' manager) is getting on our nerves yet again, with his divide and rule. As usual, he's now using the little power he has to distribute favours to try to please F&F (friends and family)... But as a result, people are overworking. Someone should send him a copy of the Working Time regulations. [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 15/12/21]

Kazakhstan

Unprecedented protests erupted on 2 January in Kazakhstan, against a 250% hike in the price of liquid petroleum gas. President Tokayev immediately made concessions: he dismissed his cabinet; removed 81-year old former dictator of 30 years, Nursultan Nazarbayev from government and reversed the gas price increase. But the protests did not stop.

On 5 January, demonstrators who were now armed, stormed the presidential palace in Almaty (Alma-Ata) and set fire to the mayor's office. They took control of the airport. Statues of Nazarbayev were torn down, shops looted and weapons taken from police. On 6 January, Tokayev declared a state of emergency, accusing protestors of being "foreign-trained terrorists"; he told the army to shoot without warning. It seems that the widespread unrest outside the palace had led to a power struggle inside...

Led by 75 plane loads of Russian special forces, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO: Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Armenia) sent soldiers to "restore order". By 10 January, it was reported that 164 people had been killed and 5,000 arrested.

Western politicians condemn "Putin's"

Behind the protests and the repression



intervention. They warn of his aspiration to rebuild a "Greater Russia" (if not a "USSR")! But just like him, they want, above all, for the region to remain as stable as possible; too much of their investment - "filthy lucre" - is at stake... Kazakhstan, formerly one of the largest republics of the Soviet Union, is, after

all, oil- and uranium-rich. And yes, the politically suppressed and over-exploited workers of the region, should they continue to push for their rights, pose a threat to *all* of the "great oppressors", the US, EU, Britain, et al. And so they wear their two faces - and quietly leave the dirty work to Putin. □

USA

American President Joe Biden is carrying on Trump's trade war against China. And it's useful domestically. In mid-December, the US Congress passed a record \$780bn (£576bn) defence budget which the Biden administration justified by invoking the "China threat". That's higher than the Republican Trump's defence budgets... and more than double what Russia and China combined, spend on defence! And of course everyone knows just how much US companies are going to benefit from that...

Biden's sabre-rattling against China

The hypocrisy of this does however, get a little hard to swallow: like Biden's "summit for democracy" which left out China on the grounds that it is "dictatorial", while including Brazilian president Bolsonaro and Philippine president Duterte - known for massacring their poor in the name of a "war on drugs". A week later, Congress banned imports from the Chinese region of Xinjiang through the passage of the Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act, but has never objected to Indian ally

Modi, whose party regularly stirs up pogroms against Muslims...

Biden's antics are accompanied by shows of strength by US imperialism (and its British allies) in the South China Sea and South-East Asia. But whether this is about reasserting the US as the world's first and only superpower, or about the need to ensure the free flow of semiconductors from Taiwan, is another question. □

FGM: a killer of girls

On 31 December 2021, Maseray Sei, a 21 year-old woman from Sierra Leone, bled to death after undergoing female genital mutilation (FGM). She was found in a "Bondo bush" enclosure belonging to the secret society which carries out this barbaric practice. But bleeding to death is by no means a rare occurrence after this "procedure". It's estimated 2 in every 100 girls die as a result.

FGM involves the total or part-excision of the clitoris and sometimes the labia of a girl's vulva and the partial sewing up of the genital opening. This

is done as a "rites of passage" initiation - usually performed on pre-pubertal girls by female elders. The girls are subjected to excruciating pain and blood loss. They are left with problems passing urine, infections and chronic menstrual difficulties. What's more - and this is indeed the main objective - it turns sexual intercourse for women into torture. All in the name of male domination and cultural patriarchy, even if it has often been justified by religion: it is meant to enhance the sexual pleasure of men and prevent "their" women from leaving them. But it also makes the process of birth potentially life-threatening.

Four million girls are subjected to this mutilation every year and the number is growing. Its resurgence is linked to increasing urban deprivation and a return to rural villages where "old" tribal life still prevails. What is astounding however, is that FGM remains legal in Libya, Sudan, Chad, Mali, Somalia, Sierra Leone and Liberia. This practice must be banned. Even if ultimately FGM won't be stamped out until poverty is stamped out - in a socialist world! - everything possible has to be done in the here and now to protect young women.

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.