

WORKERS' fight



No 131 - March 2022

price 30p

<http://www.w-fight.org>

contact@w-fight.org

ISSN 2040-400X

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

PUTIN'S WAR: BUT JOHNSON CANNOT CLAIM THE HIGH MORAL GROUND

The great generosity of the British (government!) is, according to Johnson, proven by the fact that the "UK is the largest bilateral humanitarian donor to Ukraine in the world". And never mind that the Home Office - of Windrush and Hostile Environment fame - which is so efficient when it comes to imprisoning black- and brown-skinned refugees and then promptly deporting them, can't get its act together to process even the few sponsored white Ukrainians, which it has decided to allow into the country!

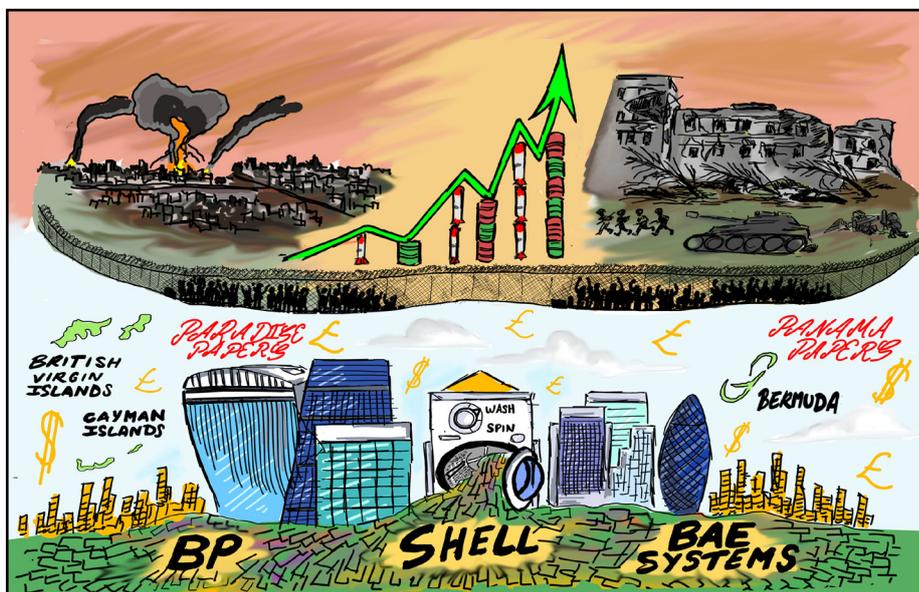
Out of 17,700 visa applications, by 9 March, only 640 were confirmed and just 300 issued. Exhausted Ukrainians were sent back from Calais to Paris and Brussels to submit paperwork before being allowed to enter Britain!

British/US wars continue

Yes, this is the true face of generous Britain. However, one cannot help but compare the great outpouring of sympathy from politicians, reporters and the public for Ukrainian refugees - albeit diluted by the Home Office's abject performance - with the near-total amnesia over what happened just 8 months ago in Afghanistan.

There, would-be refugees are still in hiding, unable to get here. An estimated 400 have been murdered in retribution for helping the former British and US occupiers. Half of all Afghans face starvation today: fathers are selling their kidneys so as to buy food for their kids. And in Yemen, where another war sponsored by the British and Americans - via the Saudis - has caused untold death and destruction, another 16m face starvation. Where are the damning media reports describing these catastrophes?

Yes, the "generous" hands of British/US governments are tainted with the blood of innocent Afghans and Yemenis. And while Putin's hands may today



be literally dripping with the blood of Ukrainians (and the blood of his own Russian conscripts) one can only ask: is there really that much of a difference?

A "lovely war" for oil kings

Then there is the Economic Crime Bill rushed through the Commons to ban Russian oligarchs. Not one word said about British oligarchs. They're just called "billionaires". And didn't BP and Shell's oil oligarchs announce a combined (pandemic!) profit of £40bn, only a few weeks ago?

Yes, just when oil and gas prices reached all-time highs and we were told that this will cause the biggest hit to workers' living standards since the 1970s! And worse, the estimated £1,700 rise in energy bills could turn into a £3-5,000 increase due to war sanctions!

It's not a shortage of oil or gas which pushed the price up, however. During the pandemic there was a glut, and the price of a barrel of oil fell so far, it went negative! In fact oil and gas companies

artificially restricted supply, to push prices up, ostensibly to recoup Covid losses - and speculators did the rest. BP and Shell's record profits say it all!

And now the war in Ukraine and the embargo against Russian oil will give these companies an additional windfall, thanks to a complicit government, which would never dare to intervene, via a takeover for instance, nor even by imposing price controls, to save working class households from hardship!

Indeed, for the West's oil and weapons' oligarchs, this is a "lovely" war. They're delighted to displace rival Russian oil magnates - and even to swallow the "dirty money" of Russian Robber Barons, who're now to be sent packing under Parliament's new law. Of course Ukrainian oligarchs - of which there are also plenty, including the lesser oligarch President Zelenskyy - will, just like the giant British/EU and US corporate "kings," and unlike ordinary refugees, remain under generous British government protection. □

NHS/Covid

• NHS: the workers are burnt out

Four hundred health workers are leaving the NHS every week, citing personal crises in mental health and an impossible "work-life balance". But this is just jargon for going crazy with overwork. It's a vicious circle. Everyone has to cover the gaps. But there are just so many back-to-back shifts a human can work, before collapsing.

So it's no surprise that in early March the NHS said its staffing crisis was "deepening", with the number of unfilled posts across health services in England rising to 110,192. There is a shortage of 39,652 nurses and 8,158 doctors. Across England, one in 10 (10.3%) nursing posts are lying empty, and one in 17 (5.8%) doctors' posts.

And of course, as a result there will be longer delays for treatment and the



6.1m waiting list will grow further. In the meantime recruiters have been sent to all kinds of exotic destinations, offering a Health and Care Visa for anyone agreeing

to come and work in the NHS. An indirect admission that it has always been EU and overseas workers who were the NHS backbone, and that Brexit crushed it.

• Pay under attack... again!



Propaganda against a real terms pay rise for NHS workers - whose 3% rise last year was a real terms pay cut - has appeared (surprise, surprise) in the Tory mouthpiece, the Daily Telegraph. It quoted an NHS boss warning that "every 1% extra on pay means half a million fewer operations for patients"! As if! There'd be no operations at all if there were no staff, so why not mention that crucial fact?! But this is codswallop anyway. How can the cost of a staff pay increase (whose pay would be included?) be measured (with all the variables involved!) against the number of patient operations (of what kind?) etc... No wonder the Torygraph regurgitated it!

Last year's pay "rise" of 3%, as recommended by the Pay Review Body (after an offer of 1%!!), still left an NHS starting salary in Wales exactly at the minimum wage level. How can that be acceptable? Just like the rest of the workforce, NHS workers need proper pay, which increases as the cost of living increases and then stays in pace with it. And just like the rest, they will have to join in the fight to get it. Because as the bosses bemoan the recession, not only will they withhold rises in pay, they will try to find ways to cut pay further... A collective and determined fightback is the only way forward.

• Overpriced and unusable PPE

The procurement of personal protective equipment - PPE - has been an ongoing problem throughout the pandemic. Two years after its start, audits have shown that the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) in England paid 31.6% more for gowns, masks, gloves and other safety kit than the Scottish NHS. For instance, disposable

aprons cost 67% more on the English side of the border!

And that is not all. PPE equipment worth £1.4 billion was unusable. In fact, a staggering £8.7 billion or more than two thirds of the Health Department's total spending on PPE got written off as losses during the procurement process.

Of course, this waste of money was not only due to incompetence. Ministers in Johnson's government decided to award and reward business associates using the friends and family "VIP-lane". Their objective was not delivery of goods, but delivery of profits. And that went perfectly smoothly.

• Where has £600 million gone?

One of the most clear-cut examples of dubious PPE procurement resulted in the disappearance of £600 million. Unispace Global Ltd was apparently paid this money by the DHSC. But it has not been recorded in the company's accounts. So

where did it go? DHSC officials say that if this money cannot be 'found' then it is the company which is at fault.

Unispace was one of the biggest beneficiaries of the government's emergency Covid scheme. It was paid

to deliver PPE using the 'VIP-lane' that awarded contracts to businesses without any scrutiny or questions asked. In other words, forget the missing millions, nobody has to answer as to their whereabouts.

• Serco profits from the Covid crisis

Last month Serco announced £192.2 million worth of profits. This is a 25% jump in full-year, pre-tax profit. The company's CEO, Rupert Soames admitted that the jump was purely thanks to Covid contracts: "Serco's support to governments following the spread of Covid provided a short-term uplift to revenues and profits".

However, included in the "support" Serco provided to the British government, costing £12.2 billion, was a Test&Trace service which failed to test or trace. Indeed Serco "lost" 110,000 positive cases to follow up! Its ineptitude was further proven during the local outbreaks of Covid in Leicester and Blackburn in September 2020, when Serco contractors

(engaged by Deloitte) proved totally incapable of finding anybody who had been infected. That did not, however, prevent the government from awarding it a £57 million contract (without any competition) to run COVID testing centres across Britain!

One can only wonder at Serco's good luck. Or is it good friends?

A war which should never have started

Why did Putin invade Ukraine? What is his problem with NATO? These questions need answers, not in order to condone Putin's brutal and indefensible war, but to understand its context.

Putin's Russia is not "imperialist"

So firstly, it's necessary to be clear that Russia is not an imperialist country; so labelling this war "imperialist" is not correct. It is certainly expansionist, however...

The richest capitalist countries in the world (Britain, France, Germany, the US, Japan, as well as lesser powers, Italy, Spain, Belgium and Portugal) certainly underwent "imperialist" transformation at the end of the 19th century. In the face of growing competition for markets, this was the only way their capitalist classes could continue to increase their profits. They divided the world market between them - but unequally - which only served to fuel their rivalries and led to WW1. And at the time, Russia may have had a feudal "empire" under the Czar, but with its weak capitalist class, it was itself exploited by these new imperialists... until the 1917 revolution, that is...

Russia today

It's now 105 years since that revolution, which overthrew both feudalism and Russia's embryonic capitalist class in quick succession. But the revolutionaries were unable to achieve the socialism they set out to build. For that, they needed the help of fellow revolutionaries in the developed capitalist countries - like Germany - and that was not to be.

The underdevelopment and isolation of this Union of Soviet Republics - USSR - led instead, to the malignant growth of a vast bureaucracy, first substituting itself for the revolutionary working class, and then becoming progressively degenerate under the autocratic and murderous leadership of Stalin and his successors.

In fact the vestiges of this bureaucracy are still present in today's Russian state, despite the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin, in that order, all tried to construct a new capitalism in the West's image in Russia, on the ruins of the soviet state. But in this era of capitalist decline, they could only fail dismally.

Of course, size certainly matters (Russia is the largest country in the world) but its GDP per head is just over half of that of Greece and less than Bulgaria's. It's a poor country! However, thanks to history, and in particular the "Cold War", today's Russia has inherited a disproportionately large army, plus nuclear weapons. And there lies the West's problem.

NATO expanded...

So what about NATO? It is, in short, a military alliance built as a counterweight to the USSR, but which in reality has

provided the pretext for its member states to remain armed to the teeth, and for their military industrial complex to stay well-oiled and super-profitable. Its origin goes back to 1949, after a Second World War in which the USSR had proved its military strength, as the main cause of Germany's defeat on the Eastern Front. It thus had the potential, in the eyes of Churchill and Co., to become a formidable foe itself, even if that was never its intention.

Throughout the whole post-war period, NATO has claimed it was there as a deterrent, preventing the Cold War against the USSR from turning hot, given that both sides had nuclear weapons. So when the USSR collapsed in 1991, it was fully expected that NATO would disband. However, that's not what happened.

Quite the contrary. Since 1991, it has established a new military presence in 14 countries (out of a total of 30) which were either part of the former Eastern bloc under Soviet control, or former Soviet republics. And in April 2009, NATO heads of states agreed that Ukraine and Georgia should also become members of NATO.

Indeed, western leaders' big problem with Russia, and hence their problem with its autocratic leader Putin, is that even 30 years after the USSR's collapse, they

Ukraine

still have not been able to integrate this resource-rich territory into their capitalist club.

Their tinkering round the edges hasn't worked. US-backed "coups" in Georgia and Ukraine in 2014, which dispatched Russia-friendly oligarchs have made matters worse, not better. In fact they merely reinforced pro-and anti-Russian nationalisms in the region and fuelled civil war in east Ukraine's Donbas.

...and Putin at war

For Putin, therefore, NATO's persistent and growing military presence along Russia's borders represents a real threat. And the check-mate which arose last month over his demand that NATO withdraw was entirely predictable.

However, while knowing Putin's crazy intentions and seeing the "troop exercises" on Ukraine's border, Biden and Co., still refused to humour him, even if this would have been the only way to prevent a war. By refusing a last-minute dialogue, Biden in effect gave Putin a green light to invade. The Ukrainian people have thus been turned into the proxy cannon fodder of both sides. It's a filthy and despicable outcome for which both Putin and NATO leaders are fully responsible. □



Their society

According to government statistics, 3.16m households were already in "fuel poverty" (13.2%) in 2020 - before any increase in the cost of energy. So when the energy price cap rises to almost £2,000 in April, pushing household costs up by 54%, the number of homes in "official" fuel poverty is likely to double, to well over 6m.

However, the government definition of "fuel poverty" is based on banding homes according to their "energy efficiency", i.e., whether they're well-insulated or not, as well as the amount households spend on heating. So if they're in a low band of efficiency (e.g., "D") the amount they spend on heating will push them under the fuel poverty line. But if they're rated on a higher band, even if they spend half their incomes heating their homes (because they're already in "pay poverty"!), they'll stay above it. As a result, many who are really fuel poor are not even counted in the

• **We need to beat the hit!**

The government's measure of inflation - the CPI - rose to 5.5% in January, which we're told was "a 30 year high". Yet this measure, which is always 1-2% lower than the old RPI measure, is predicted to go up to 8% in April! That means, by the RPI measure which most workers are used to, inflation could hit 10% next month!

In fact we keep being told that the

• **Vacancies everywhere, but not a decent job in sight**

The most recent figures from the Office for National Statistics show that there were 1.3 million unfilled vacancies at the beginning of 2022, a record high. There are 200,000 vacancies in health and social care, 180,000 in hospitality, 60,000 in transport and 42,000 in construction.

We're also told there are 600,000 fewer people in work than before the pandemic. So where have all the

Government fuel poverty statistics hide real poverty



official statistics and thus may not qualify for extra support.

In other words, the real issue here is not just the soaring cost of energy bills, but low incomes.

cost of living crisis, inflation increases, debt levels, etc., are all the very worst since... the Depression of the 1930s, since 1956, since 1972, since 2008 etc., you name it. And now we're told it's all going to get even worse, because of the war in Ukraine.

Yet not one section of workers has had a decent wage rise in the face of these "worst" scenarios. In fact last year

Because whether one's home is well insulated or not, wages are at such an abysmal level that many working class families are already choosing between eating or heating. ☐

average wages fell by 1%. Certainly, not one section is being offered 10% in current pay rounds! And that's the real issue: that nobody's wages are rising with price rises - let alone keeping ahead of them! So there's really no choice: workers need to go "all out" for wages that beat this record rise in living costs!

workers gone? Apparently 150,000 of the missing workers are accounted for by the loss of EU workers. Another 350,000 workers over 50 have left the workforce altogether. But this isn't always out of choice: a million older workers want a job. And available "jobs" offer only long hours, low pay, and physical exhaustion!

What's more, there is another missing statistic in all of this: the

number of "self-employed" (a bogus category hiding zero-hours and piece working) has fallen by almost a million since the beginning of 2020!

What's the result? Those workers who *are* on the job - especially in the NHS and social care, where the hands' shortage is critical - are covering the work of two or three others. It's high time to call a halt!

It's Keir Starmer, not Keir Hardy...

Bin-lorry drivers in Coventry have been almost constantly on strike for a pay rise since the end of January. They want pay parity with other drivers, who had a much-needed wage boost as a result of the heavy-duty drivers' shortage. But their employer, Coventry Council, led by Labour, refuses to cough up and has even resorted to publishing lies about their pay to try to get public opinion against them. It claimed they earn £52,000/year. In fact their pay is

low by skilled standards, at £11.49 to £14.37 per hour!

However, what's made real waves is the rumpus between the leader of their union, Unite, Sharon Graham and Keir Starmer, who refused to give his support to the strikers. Graham already cut funding to the Labour Party by £150,000 after her election, but now she says Starmer should "act like Labour, the party of workers" and is threatening that all funding to Labour will be "reviewed"... Starmer says he

doesn't respond to threats. However Unite, with 1.3m members, is one of Labour's main sources of funding... So this time, he might?

It is necessary to add that what is conspicuous by its absence in this strike is any attempt to involve the other bin workers or council workers in a fight for the pay rise that everyone needs. So much for Unite's "new radicalism". It's more of the old sectionalism, which can only sabotage workers' fights.

Sunak's new plan: cut taxes, and cross fingers

Their politics

Chancellor Rishi Sunak has let it be known that he wants a "new culture of enterprise". Very novel! In fact the pundits all say that his ideas: lowering taxes "sustainably" (after coming under attack for raising them, even if it was only for working people!) and "creating the conditions for the private sector to drive economic growth" just echo Thatcherism, tried and tested and with all the accompanying social detriment. New Tory MPs in the north and Midlands might be wondering how that fits with Johnson's promise to spend billions on infrastructure to "level up" their constituencies.

Sunak went on to say that "free markets" go hand-in-hand with "almost everything we imagine is desirable for humanity: higher living standards, greater well-being, longer lives lived in greater leisure, freedom and peace". Yes, all those things which have only ever been possible for the upper classes under



this system! As for "free markets", these were a reality at capitalism's height and only then: after 1846, when Peel's government abolished the protectionist Corn Laws! But that era ended in 1900!

Back to the future, and Sunak says

he'll cut taxes on capital spending, to encourage bosses to spend their savings on raising productivity, for instance, investing in automation... The only problem is that they prefer to spend their millions speculating on the financial markets. □

• Running to catch up with the EU

A hilarious government report listed four "Benefits of Brexit". Hilarious, because none of them - blue passports, crown stamps on pint glasses (!), 8 new freeports, or single-use carrier bag charges - was actually prevented under EU membership! Indeed, bag charges were introduced in 2015. But Johnson never lets the facts get in the way of a good Brexit story!

No wonder Jacob Rees-Mogg opened his new job as minister for "Brexit

Opportunities" by appealing to readers of the Sun newspaper to suggest opportunities he hasn't spotted yet. Now this arch-Brexitteer says he has found one at last. He wants to relax the rules "inherited from the EU" on investment by insurance companies, which, he claims, could release £10bn for infrastructure projects...

Where did Rees-Mogg get this bright idea? Very likely from the EU itself, which started a review of its rules,

known as Solvency II, last September. The Brussels' objective is almost exactly the same, it seems: making around 90bn euros from the insurance industry available for development projects across the EU, to help the Covid recovery! So now Rees-Mogg is in a race to seize this "opportunity" before the EU does. That is, before anyone realises that it would have happened anyway, without Brexit!

• Useless but profitable

In its full-year financial report, published in February, Amazon announced, for the first time, the size of its advertisement revenue - and it's huge. It was more than £23bn in 2021, compared with £16bn in 2020, making this one of Amazon's fastest growing sectors and sending Amazon to the top of the world league of digital advertising - just behind Google and Facebook.

In fact it's no wonder that Amazon decided to grab a piece of the advertisement business cake - in 2022, the world's ad market was estimated to be worth over £520bn!

This bounty can only get bigger (or so they hope!). Since commodity sales are likely to shrink due to inflation, companies are increasingly turning towards advertisements to bolster

their chances to grab a share of the market against rivals. In fact, while world manufacturing output stagnates, the advertisement market is expected to soar to £654bn by 2024 - a 25% increase in only two years. So Amazon expects to make even greater profits out of advertising, despite the fact that it has no useful social value whatsoever!

• Mitie, mightily well-connected?

Mitie seems to be mightily "blessed" with government contracts these days. "Bidstats" website shows 57 of them registered in the last year: in facilities management, security, cleaning, Covid quarantine follow-up, you name it, provided to the Home Office, DEFRA, NHS England, Greater Manchester and North Tyneside Councils, the National Nuclear Laboratory, police constabularies, hospital trusts, universities... etc., etc.

And the company certainly wasn't selected because of good worker-relations. Quite the contrary! In 2019, it hit the headlines for refusing workers at Sellafield Nuclear Plant the right to go to the toilet! It's also been fined for not paying the statutory minimum wage. And in January it was forced to pay £38,000 compensation to a cleaning worker it sacked for trying to organise a union.

Of course proven screw-turning against workers is a recommendation when it comes to awarding government contracts and Mitie obviously fits this bill. But it's worth noting in connection with Mitie's mighty good fortune, that when its former CEO, Ruby McGregor-Smith was made a Conservative peer in 2015, that same year Mitie was awarded 400 public sector contracts, worth £2.55bn...

King's Cross railway station (London)

Cleaning bosses need to pay

Churchill and Atalian-Servest rail cleaners are striking for better pay. Churchill cleaners from Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern, Southeastern, Eurostar and HS1 services who're on the Minimum Wage of £8.91/hour, took action together on 24 February and will be out again on 12 March for 48 hours. The RMT union is asking for £15/hour, the right to company sick pay, and for them to be made direct employees of the railway. Which would be a very good start, of course.

However, since the Atalian cleaners for Avanti West Coast trains - and other

Atalian workers like those at King's Cross working for LNER - have exactly the same needs, one has to wonder why on earth it is impossible for the RMT union organisers to co-ordinate strikes for everyone on the same day(s) - and for the same pay and conditions?! In fact not only is this not the case, but the RMT, appears to be asking for just £9.90/hr for Avanti Atalian workers and a "pathway" to £15/hr!

So when Churchill cleaners strike again this month, it would be a good idea for all cleaners - from the whole myriad of cleaning contractors employed



at Kings Cross/St Pancras - to come and meet each other, compare notes and to make a start towards collective - and effective - strike action for the future... all together and for equal (maximum!) pay! ☐

- **Ready to go**

At last!! We've heard that RMT is going to ballot on-board and station staff across the national railway network over pay. Let's use this chance to gather "all together" with other workers like cleaners, engineers, signallers and prepare a collective fight for better pay. And it won't be for just one day! [Workers' Platform King's X, 09/03/22]

- **Maximum effect**

In King's Cross alone, we must be over 1,000 workers across all companies: Gate Gourmet, LNER, Network Rail, Atalian, Mitie, GTR - not to mention agency workers and other smaller companies. We'd definitely make a big splash if we were all outside at the same time. And we should be - after all, everyone needs a pay-rise! Time to start our "preparations"... [Workers' Platform King's X, 09/03/22]

- **Free covid test kits!**

Johnson's policy of ending free Covid testing from April will mean we can't simply test ourselves as we do now, if we have symptoms. Who knows how much it'll cost to buy a lateral flow test? So GN, LNER, Gate Gourmet etc., should supply us with free test kits that we can use at home. That way we can avoid passing the virus on to others... Because the C-19 virus is still spreading. [Workers' Platform King's X, 09/03/22]

- **Get ready!**

Churchill managers tried to cover for us strikers by getting on the trains and trying to clean them last week. We heard that most of the trains left the station half-cleaned! Well, they better get ready for next time, unless they're "ready" to give in to our demands! [Workers' Platform King's X, 09/03/22]

- **Making a 1st class cock-up**

We used to be 4 or 5 working on-board in LNER First Class.... How times have changed! These days, we're just 2 (or even just one!). And now we hear LNER wants to cut even more staff, and just when trains are getting busier? There's nothing left to cut except the service itself. Is that next? [Workers' Platform King's X, 09/03/22]

- **Urgent pit stop**

Freight train drivers have no access to a toilet for long stretches at a time. Yet nothing is done to sort this out - even though the problem has been raised time and again. What if they just stopped, unscheduled, at a station to use their facilities? Is that what it would take to get this issue taken seriously? [Workers' Platform King's X, 09/03/22]

Ford Dagenham Engine Plant

- **Let's cut our losses...**

Again, more down days on top of the extra ones last week, with no notice. At best we lose allowances and premiums (if we've any left!!) and at worst (for LLL and any other subcontracted workers), it means no pay or taking annual leave days (if you have any left!)... This has gone on for far too long. The only way to put a stop to it, is to get together and demand full pay for all of us, every time the company decides to cut its losses at our expense. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 02/03/22]

- **What are we doing about it?**

We hear that Panther Block B and Head B are both meant to be going at Easter, which is just a few weeks away. But nothing has been said to us about how (if?) it will be organised. Surely we need to know? Apparently the union officials are refusing to discuss it with Ford, to avoid taking a position, or maybe to avoid taking the blame... Well, at least they keep busy in the JWC office, drinking tea, and

eating doughnuts. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 02/03/22]

- **No, there was no "ballot"**

In DDC we're still waiting to go back to our old shift times. Because let's be clear: we did not sign our "rights" away. And BTW, we did not have what we would consider to be "a shop steward's ballot"! But if that's what's needed to sort this out, once and for all, let's have one! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 02/03/22]

- **... Until we grind to a halt**

Of course it takes longer these days to unload ships on the Jetty - we've been short of hands for yonks! And when ships are late, the slow unloading just adds further to delays. All this is obvious, but apparently not to management, because they still deny we need more hands on deck. What will it take for them to admit it? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 02/03/22]

- **When the music stops...**

By the way, why should we wait for



management to "release" workmates from other TOPs areas (which they said they would do...), when we know there are so many of our workmates in DEP/DDC who're eager to get a Jetty job? This policy of recruiting from TOPs first is just a game of musical chairs, shuffling us around... till our legs break off? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 02/03/22]

- **No overtime!**

Managers from LLL keep giving the too-few logistics workers, overtime... Yes, they want us to help them out of the hole they dug out of pure greed - by giving them more of our precious time... [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 02/03/22]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

Tim Parker PO chair and chief "miscarrier" of justice!

Post Office chairman and government appointee, Tim Parker, who was (according to the Daily Mail!) "known as the 'Prince of Darkness' due to his alleged zeal for embarking on job cuts" has left the job, just as the enquiry into the Horizon IT scandal is beginning.

No surprise there. It was he, along with then chief executive Paula Vennells who "aggressively pursued" hundreds of innocent postmasters through the courts, and who can be said to be personally responsible for what is now known to be the "worst miscarriage of

justice in recent British legal history".

As a result 736 sub-postmasters were falsely accused of theft and false accounting over the course of 14 years. They were sacked, fined, jailed, and their lives and reputations were wrecked. Some even committed suicide.

Eventually in December 2019 the Post Office was forced to exonerate 555 postmasters and pay £58m in damages. In fact it was guilty of a huge cover-up of millions misspent on IT, after a bug in the computerised Fujitsu accounting system (called "Horizon") was identified. Parker



- net worth £247m - was not only chief "miscarrier" of justice in this drawn-out case, but he without doubt knows where all the bodies are buried. However, unlike the 3,000 postmasters being called to give evidence to the enquiry, he is allowed to slip away, untouched by his own appalling travesty. ☐

• The new BB

We had round-the-clock meetings with "The (new) Boss Baby" last week, who wanted to "personally" tell us about the big changes coming to HMP... So they finally decided to take on new recruits and end overtime? To raise wages? Bring in the 35-hour shorter working week without loss of pay?? Nope... the "big changes" were about the Parcel Sorting Machines coming in June/July, and he only told us what we already knew... [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 09/03/22]

• Questions unanswered

We didn't get a chance to get the answers we were looking for. He just

went on and on about new duties coming up in the next fit-up for the PSMs... But we've heard only bad things about these monstrous machines. There might not even be a machine allowance, as there should be. So tell us (again!) why we should "choose" to work on them! [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 09/03/22]

• What a cheek

But then Boss Baby came up with this gem: apparently, we didn't perform well during Xmas and we need to improve! Easy to say for someone who sits in his high chair babbling all day. But he has nothing to say about the most obvious problem here, which is the worker-shortage.

PS: And by the way, there were lower packet volumes this year compared to last year, but that's probably because people couldn't afford to go wild this Xmas! Something that could be improved by everyone getting a pay rise! [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 09/03/22]

• Against overtime!

Some workmates at HMP are doing over 50 hours in a 6-day working week. It's not so much why we've got to this, but how we get out of it. Because one of our demands was the 35-hour working week, and we're far from it! [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 09/03/22]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

Turning the screw at Cowley!

After managers announced that the supply of parts coming from Ukraine was disrupted due to the war, we've been laid off (so far!) for a whole 3 weeks, from 21 February through to the 18th March!

This means everyone is subject to a pay cut, or even in some cases, the total loss of their pay! BMW/Gi agency workers are meant to use borrowed hours to be paid back with overtime or take a pay cut to cover the layoff. If they have run out of hours, they would have a 40% pay cut.

Rudolph & Hellmann logistics workers were told they'd have to use up their holidays or borrow hours and that they were eligible for statutory lay-off pay of "£30 a day to a maximum of 5 days" - i.e., £150. Agency workers in this company and quality control workers in G&P on zero-hours contracts will be left completely unpaid!

This is what triggered a walkout on Friday 4 March by workers from the AC warehouse supplying parts to the assembly lines. Managers raced after



them in a panic, offering a "deal" for them to return. But in fact the de facto pay cut is everyone's problem. We all need full pay when laid off, no strings attached! ☐

• Caught unprepared - really?

Another week's "stand down" was announced when we hadn't even returned from the last one. We're told it's due to supply problems due to the war. The last week of lay-off was due to semiconductor shortages and we already heard the rumour that it might be extended... For us that's not really a problem. What we need, however, is FULL PAY! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini

Oxford 01/03/22]

• We are also international

The parts (like the electric cable harness) sourced from Ukraine are made by Kromberg and Schubert, which has sites in Volyn and Zhytomyr regions near the Polish and Belarus borders. The question for us, is what's happening to our workmates there? In any case we stand in solidarity with them. None of us workers - Ukrainian, Russian or wherever we are from - has

any stake in this war. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 01/03/22]

• BMW's "review"

BMW is "currently reviewing how this will impact our associates". As far as we're concerned, there's no need for a review - it must not "impact" our pay, our working time accounts or our annual leave. High time it impacted BMW's bank balance! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 01/03/22]

Chagos Islands

As Johnson's and Biden's pretence to save the Ukrainians continues to stoke an ever-more dangerous situation in Europe, it's worth recalling their governments' doings in the far-off Indian Ocean.

Britain still claims as its own territory, the Chagos archipelago, known as the "British Indian Ocean Territory" (BIOT). And never mind that the Chagossians have now won their long fought case against the seizure of their islands. In 2019, the International Court of Justice ruled that Britain had "unlawfully and deliberately separated the Chagos Islands from Mauritius" just before Mauritius gained its independence in 1968.

The story of these islands goes back to the 1960s, when the American military chose Diego Garcia, one of the larger islands in the archipelago, for a naval and air force base. "Camp Justice", as its called (!) is one of their largest bases, with more than 2,000 troops, air field, anchorage for 30 warships, a nuclear dump, a satellite spy station, shopping malls, bars and a golf course. It was crucial for launching attacks against Afghanistan and Iraq.

But the US could not have occupied these islands if it were not for the "hospitality" of their British friends, who obliged them by expelling the whole population of the islands, transporting them to the Seychelles and then

Letter from India

Since Russia is a major supplier of India's military weaponry among other things, unsurprisingly Modi's government has abstained from four UN votes condemning Putin's invasion of Ukraine. But it also left thousands of Indian students in stranded there for days, unable to contact anyone in the Indian Embassy - whose phones were



Indian students at Polish border

Defending "British Sovereignty"... in the Indian Ocean!



Chagossians return to the archipelago

Mauritius, with hardly any provisions - and then denying that the islands were ever inhabited!

This was revealed in the British government's own declassified Foreign Office records. One file, for instance, was entitled "Maintaining the Fiction" and instructed British officials to lie that the islanders were itinerant workers, and not a stable, indigenous population.

On the 14th of February, a group of islanders visited the Chagos atoll of Peros Banhos, celebrating their victory over

British claims. But the wife of their ocean cruiser was cut-off and the Royal Navy kept them under observation! Indeed, the British government continues to act as if it is sovereign over these islands! So while the Chagossians might now be "permitted" to visit their long-lost home at last, they are still not allowed to return to live there. And of course, there's no question whatsoever of the US military base in Diego Garcia being removed. □

Rising anger against Modi's government

dead...

As many as 20,000 Indian students were present in Ukraine (out of a total of 76,000 foreign students) when war broke out, many in Kharkiv in the east, which has been subject to severe bombing and where at least one Indian student is known to have been killed in an attack. Once students managed to get to the Polish border, (after being made to wait in segregated queues) they were eventually able to board flights home, belatedly organised by the Indian government. But not before having dutifully sung Modi's praises with a "Victory to Mother India!" and "Long Live Modi!" for news cameras!

In the meantime, anger at the government has been tangible in the 5 states where regional elections have just taken place. However despite this, in Uttar Pradesh (UP), the largest and one of the poorest states in India, with 30% of its 243m residents below the poverty line, the BJP was able to hold on to its position, even increasing its share of the popular vote marginally, to 41%.

In this poor state, the distribution of free "rations" (rice, sugar, salt and cooking oil) since November, no doubt swung the vote in the ruling party's favour (but now that the election is over, these rations will be stopped!). That said, 11 ministers of the previous government lost their seats and the Samajwadi Party (Socialist Party), which based its campaign solely on criticising the state's BJP government, increased its share of the popular vote by 10% to 32%.

In Punjab, the most important agricultural state in the country, the Aam Admi Party (Everyman's Party) swept the polls, winning 42% of the popular vote. While this was a rejection of Congress and Akali Dal who traditionally ran the state, in the centre of the farmers' movement, the BJP only managed to get 6% of the vote! So yes, five years later, voters' anger at the BJP is clear to see. One UP worker, interviewed by the press, summed it up when he said "If I fall ill, there's no hospital I can go to - Modi has only built temples". □

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.