

WORKERS' fight

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

GENERAL ELECTION? NO, WE NEED A GENERAL STRIKE!

Top bosses have awarded themselves average pay rises of 23% this year! Yes, this is the same class of super-rich who today offer striking workers 5-6% at most!

Railway and postal workers who've been on strike for pay rises in line with inflation since the summer, have so far been offered piecemeal rises, including small one-off, non-pensionable bonuses. In the case of the posties, it amounts to just 3.5%-4% for this year, when RPI for September was already 12.6% and while the cost of groceries, including milk, is up by 14.3%.

Gas and oil companies are laughing

The worst aspect of this skyrocketing inflation is that its fundamental cause is pure racketeering by the oil and gas companies and the energy giants. The surge in demand once the Covid pandemic ended, was a signal for these chancers to push up their prices. They even artificially cut production and then kept it low, to maximise the effect!

As for the war in Ukraine being responsible - it's true that the cut in supply by Russia initially pushed up prices, but as has been subsequently shown, it has been possible for Russia's competitors to ramp up their production. So supply is hardly a problem any more. Production of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (from Qatar, Algeria, the US etc..) more than fills the gap - in fact LPG suppliers are experiencing a bonanza!

Another point worth making is that these producers would want, above all, to retain their new market share. And they thus have an interest in the Ukraine war carrying on as long as possible - until Russia's oil and gas production is cut off for good. As if that is not bad enough, they'd also benefit from a delay in tackling the climate



crisis - setting humanity even more firmly on "the highway to hell", as the UN Secretary General described it.

In the meantime the working classes and poor pay for all of this. Profits, like the £169bn which oil companies have made since the invasion of Ukraine, do not fall from the sky. They come out of the labour and the hard-earned cash of working people who're paying more and more, for less and less! If the government confiscated these companies' super-profits (just for one year!) it could, in one fell swoop, end its current debt crisis!

It's only by fighting that we gain ground

Faced with rising inflation and interest rates, plus a government which is still playing musical chairs with itself inside Number 10 Downing Street, the working class would have everything to gain by upping the ante and generalising the fight back which started in the summer. And as more and more public sector

workers become involved in strikes, this not only becomes more possible, but also more necessary: nurses, for instance, given the nature of their work, need the explicit backing of other workers!

But what do we see and hear instead? First of all, a de-escalation by rail and postal union leaders so that they can take part in "intensive talks" thus removing their battalions from the frontline. And second, the demand being raised by the TUC for a "general election"! When the only result can be a Labour government already committed to being a better party of business than the Tories.

History tells us that any gains made for the working class, are always made by the working class, on the picket lines and in the streets, using its collective force against the bosses and their politicians. This is the only effective protection against the crisis, indeed, the only way to force the bosses to pay for the recession of their own making, instead of the rest of us. ☐

Their society

60 years after the US-Cuban missile crisis: will Putin take a leaf from Khrushchev's book?

In the context of the Ukraine invasion by Russia and the raising of the question of nuclear weapon deployment - even though this was never explicit on the part of Putin - there are inevitable parallels being made with the so-called Cuban Missile Crisis, which occurred at the height of the Cold War just over 60 years ago.

At the time, the USA and Russia confronted each other over Russia's positioning of Medium Range Ballistic Missiles armed with nuclear warheads, on Cuban soil, within easy striking range of the US. But the USA had already situated its own Jupiter Medium Range Ballistic Missiles right on the border of the Soviet Union, in Turkey, as well as in Italy, which were both NATO members, as part of its then strategy of "containment" via military threat. There is an obvious analogy.

A US invasion

What's more, in 1962 it was the US which had just staged an invasion, threatening to depose the Cuban revolutionary nationalist regime under Castro, which in 1959 had overthrown US puppet, the notoriously corrupt military dictator, General Batista. In April 1961, exiled Batista supporters directed by the CIA and backed by the US navy and air force attempted to stage a coup, landing their forces in the Bay of Pigs. But Castro's revolutionary forces defeated them and the invasion was over in a matter of days - although there were heavy losses on both sides.

By this time, Castro's Cuban nationalists had already discovered that the US, which now implemented an economic embargo against them, was determined to reassert its domination over the island. In the context of the Cold War, which ranged the US and its allies against the "communist threat" represented, above all by the USSR, but also China, and their associates, Cuba was consigned (in fact unwillingly) to the Soviet bloc.

US president Kennedy and the USSR's Nikita Khrushchev



Khrushchev sends missiles

Ever fearful of a full-blown US invasion, Castro was in favour of Russia siting nuclear missiles in Cuba, which it began to do secretly, in early 1962. But after the CIA discovered the missile sites, President Kennedy authorised the US navy to prevent the delivery of further missiles and demanded the Soviets remove those already there. However, the then Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev had in mind a trade-off: in return, the US should undertake to leave Cuba alone in future and remove its missiles from Turkey and Italy. However there were complications. A US reconnaissance plane was shot down over Cuba. As it happened, this was not ordered by the USSR, but nevertheless the media made much of the imminent threat of an escalation to a full-blown nuclear war. In fact this was pure melodrama. Neither Kennedy nor Khrushchev had any intention of firing a nuclear missile.

After several days of negotiations, an agreement was reached: publicly, Khrushchev agreed to dismantle the Cuban missiles in exchange for a US public declaration and agreement to not invade Cuba again. Secretly,

the US agreed to dismantle all of its Jupiter missiles in Italy and Turkey. This allowed Kennedy to appear as the hero of the hour, having "narrowly" averted nuclear war..

So what will Putin do?

It's likely that both sides played up the threat of a potential nuclear war for their own purposes. Of course, war-like rhetoric raises tensions and there certainly was a danger that one side might unintentionally set off an irreversible chain of events. But the fact of the matter is that the "Cold War" stand-off between the USA and the USSR was maintained precisely because of their mutual nuclear arsenals.

Today the USSR is no more, and Putin's Russian forces are clearly struggling in Ukraine. So the question is posed: will Putin, if backed into a corner, decide to use nuclear weapons? Or will he adopt the stance of his forebears and use the potential for unleashing "Armageddon" as US President Biden called it, as a bargaining chip in negotiations, to try to save his face (and his job) in order to extricate Russia from the disastrous war which he instigated? □

• The NHS needs emergency treatment

The NHS is in the worst state it has ever been in, in its whole 74-year history. Waiting lists for elective hospital treatment have passed the 7 million mark, up from 4.4 million before the pandemic. "Emergency" departments have a minimum 4 hour waiting time. Doctors say that patients are dying avoidably as record numbers of sick patients spend at least 12 hours stuck on a trolley in hospital corridors waiting for a bed to become available. Heart

attack and stroke victims wait more than an hour on average for an ambulance, against a target of 18 minutes.

For cancer patients the situation is untenable: a quarter of patients with suspected cancer wait more than 2 weeks before being seen by a specialist; this September, more than 5,000 were waiting more than 2 months to start their first treatment. And each month the situation deteriorates further...

The reason is simple. There is

• Will nurses strike? But they must!

The Royal College of Nursing has not made the full results of the nurses' strike ballot public, but has said the voting threshold had been reached in most Trusts. Which means that the strike can go ahead. But will it? When RCN nurses went on strike in Northern Ireland 3 years ago they had almost 100% public support. And they made it clear that their fight was first and foremost about the dangerously low staffing levels. And that this was a fight for nurses and patients alike. So too, today.

Having worked to the point of exhaustion during the pandemic, and watched one in five of their colleagues leave the profession in utter despair, now nurses are told they must accept a 4.5% pay offer, when inflation is over twice that. In fact the Royal College of Nursing is demanding inflation plus 5% which means a 17.6% pay rise.

Steve Barclay, the new health secretary has already said it's impossible for the government to find the £9bn that this would cost... But it's worth remembering that in autumn 2021, Sunak, while still Chancellor, planned to raise a Health and

Social Care Levy of £12.4bn a year for 3 years, by increasing National Insurance Contributions by 1.25%. This policy was reversed by Liz Truss and Labour supported her. But after all, NICs were always meant to be the means of funding the welfare state, and for that matter, since they are paid out of workers' wages and matched by the employer, the levy

Our society

a critical shortage of staff. Today in England alone there are 132,000 NHS vacancies, including 45,000 vacancies for registered nurses. And then there is the ever-worsening social care crisis which means tens of thousands of hospital beds are occupied needlessly by elderly patients waiting for a care home place. This is not a health service any more, it's a health lottery. If a patient gets treatment and recovers these days, it is down to pure luck.

could easily be charged exclusively to the employer! Anyway £9bn is peanuts in the government's scheme of things...

It remains to be seen if the nurses walk off the job. But they should be in no doubt: the rest of the working class, strikers and non-strikers, will want to stand alongside them.



• Why not free food for all children?

According to the Food Foundation, more than 25% of families with children struggled to get enough food last month, meaning 10 million adults and 4 million children did not have regular meals.

Jamie Oliver, the well-known TV chef and restaurant owner popped up again to push for more children to get fed at school, pointing out that children could only get free meals if the family's income was less than £7,400 (not including benefits) - which means only 1.9 million pupils qualify. All infant school kids can, however, get free food at school, but only up to the age of 7.

Even subsidised school meals can cost families more than £12 a week for one hot meal a day. So a new campaign is calling for all children who live in a family claiming Universal Credit to get a free school meal. This would add nearly a million more children. But that would

still leave out one million children whose parents don't qualify for Universal Credit even though they are on poverty pay. The only answer is to offer all children free school meals.

• Britain's careless childcare

More than 10,000 people demonstrated at the "March of the Mummies" protest on Saturday 29th October, demanding better, affordable childcare and an end to discrimination against working parents. This event had been organised by the charity "Pregnant Then Screwed" founded by Joeli Brearley in 2015, who knows first-hand the discrimination that mothers face, having started the charity after being sacked by voicemail, 4 days after telling her employer that she was 4 months pregnant.

According to the OECD, childcare costs in Britain come to 40.9% of the average wage compared to 16% for France! In many cases this is more than

a parent's rent or mortgage. Even with help - 3 and 4 year olds can get up to 30 hours subsidised care - costs still swallow 26.6% of families' net incomes. In France, this figure is 10.4%.

It's predicted that the government needs to reduce childcare subsidies by at least 8%; so the situation is set to get even worse. In the meantime, ministers have decided that staff-to-child ratios in nurseries can be reduced so that more kids can be looked after by each staff member, thus cutting costs, and never mind the consequences. Their other daft idea is to give parents their subsidy as a lump sum to spend how they wish, thus potentially depriving nurseries of funding and causing even more to close. Already the number of local authority-maintained nurseries has fallen by a third, with only 400 left in the whole of England...

The only answer has to be to de-privatise nurseries and provide state-funded, free care. If poor countries like Estonia can do it, so can this rich one.

Our society

• University staff on strike!

Over 70,000 university staff, members of the University and College Union (UCU), have overwhelmingly voted for strike action on two separate ballots: 81.1% for a strike over working conditions and pay (after a 3% offer!) and 84.9% for a strike against pension cuts (on a turnout of 57.6% and 60.2%, respectively). This is not the first time that university staff have voted for a strike. In fact, UCU members have been taking action against the erosion of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) year after year, since... 2015!

A 35% pension cut!

But why are pensions being threatened again? Especially when a research paper published in October last year by learned professors - David Miles and James Sefton from Imperial College Business School, no less, found the USS current assets were quite enough to meet the fund's obligations - i.e., pay all pensioners. The problem is that these same "experts", added a proviso, saying that there was a "significant probability (albeit less than 50%) that the funds could be exhausted before all the accrued pensions are paid", while at the same time admitting that it was really impossible to know for sure what was going to happen: "In reality, it will be many decades before we know whether or not the scheme has enough assets", said Professor Miles! But this



was at a time when interest rates were on the floor and seemed likely to stay there. Which is not the case today... Nevertheless the executives who run the fund, proceeded to introduce changes this April, that will result in a 35% cut in pension benefits!

• High time to "unite and fight"...

The UCU is demanding that pension benefits be restored and "a new evidence-based and moderately prudent valuation of the scheme" is undertaken, since this will show that there is no risk of a deficit and that the scheme is healthy!

UCU General Secretary, Jo Grady,

has already proposed 2 days of strike at the end of November and proposes to escalate action from next February, the point being to disrupt lectures and marking. But other than annoying students, what's the impact of university staff taking strike action?

In fact, the only way staff can win this fight decisively, is by joining ranks with public and private sector workers facing the same cuts in order to have the collective strength to make a difference. In that respect, at least the UCU leadership has proposed to coordinate action with postal workers for 2 days at the end of November... And nurses, civil servants, train drivers, tube workers?

The battle of Saltley Gate: how to win a pay rise...

This year marks 50 years since the so-called "battle of Saltley Gate" at Birmingham's Nechells coke fuel depot, which was decisive in assuring a victory for the miners who were staging their first national strike over wages since the General Strike of 1926.

By February 1972, after 7 weeks on strike, the miners had successfully closed down all Britain's collieries. They

sent "flying pickets" to spread action to other industries. Railway workers, truck drivers, and workers at power stations refused to transport or handle coal. By 9 February, Heath's Tory government declared a state of emergency. However, the bosses still managed to get stockpiles of solid fuel. One of the last reserves of coke was at West Midlands Gas Board (WMGB) plant in Birmingham, where hundreds of trucks were collecting coke each day to distribute where needed. To protect this operation, hundreds of West Midlands police were sent against the

small group of miners from Staffordshire who'd set up a picket there. They were unable to close down the depot.

Solidarity forever!

On the morning of the 10 February, while they waited for 400 miners from South Yorkshire to shore up their barricade, Birmingham's industrial workforce - thousands of engineering workers and car workers - walked out on strike and joined them. As one miner recollects: "It was a make or break day I think. At 9am a cheer went up - we went to see what was happening. Coming down the road were factory workers, their banners and placards flying. This is the most satisfying sight any trade unionist could wish to see, and a sight I will always remember. Marching down to Saltley works, from three directions it is estimated that there were 15,000 at Saltley that day".

The cops had no choice but to retreat, ordering the depot to close its gates "in the interests of public safety". The Battle of Saltley Gate was the turning point of the strike. Faced with a spectre of such contagious workers' solidarity and its threatened spread to other sectors, the government instructed the National Coal Board to agree a 27% pay increase against its initial offer of 7-8%. That's a lesson for today.



Our society

On and off strikes while public sector workers prepare to join in

On Friday 4 November, both the Communication Workers' and the Rail, Maritime and Transport unions cancelled strikes which were due to take place later in the month, and at the time of writing, they are respectively engaged in "intensive negotiations" with the bosses. In fact the CWU had already cancelled a number of strike days in response to a threat of legal action by lawyers representing Royal Mail.

For the moment, talks are due to conclude later in November, but these strikes were cancelled without any promises of a new offer by the bosses. Both Dave Ward of the CWU and Mick Lynch of the RMT, only wanted to get management to

agree to negotiate with them. For them strikes are a bargaining tool, pure and simple. But for workers in Royal Mail and on the railways, it has become obvious that their strikes are much more than that. Not only because their withdrawal of labour means they stop the flow of profits to the bosses and shareholders, proving they are indispensable, but because a real strike gives workers themselves a measure of their own collective strength.

The cancellation of postal and railway strikes has come just as a "yes for strike" has been announced by the Royal College of Nursing which balloted 300,000 nurses and the 150,000-strong civil service union,

the PCS. Which is a shame, since all together, these sections of workers could be unstoppable... Even so, if the Unison strike ballot goes ahead (it is apparently postponed) 600,000 healthcare workers could be on strike together... Add to that teachers, whose ballot ends in January and this is potentially a huge strike movement. But of course, co-ordination of action and mutual solidarity is entirely in the hands of union leaders and the last thing they want is a general strike, even though it's a sure-fire way - and probably the only way - for workers to win their demands. □

• The railway strikes: shunted up a siding?

While the RMT was in the middle of re-balloting railway workers to renew its 6-month strike mandate, it cancelled, at the very last minute, the 3 days of strike action already announced for 5, 7 and 9 November. To everyone's surprise, union leaders said they were now entering "a period of intensive negotiations with Network Rail and the train operating companies" - for how long, nobody knows... Leader Mick Lynch added that "Our re-ballot remains live and if we have to take strike action during the next 6 months to secure a deal, we will". But of course now everything takes place behind closed doors. Workers are left in the dark until negotiators decide to speak to them...

The situation had already descended into farce. The strike scheduled for 3 November was cancelled due to the annual "Poppy Day" event when the Royal British Legion sells paper flowers in aid of army veterans (yes, they rely on charity!) in station forecourts. Just as with the cancelling of strikes when the queen died, RMT bureaucrats wanted to demonstrate their patriotic spirit...

The strike cancellations were made in such quick succession, nobody knew what was going on; workers tried to call their reps to find out, but reps didn't know either. In the meantime,

• Cleaners are ready to fight

Back in December 2021, the RMT organised a strike among Churchill workers from 3 different train companies, all located at King's Cross-St Pancras, i.e., Govia Thameslink Railways (GTR), HS1, Southeastern Railways and Eurostar "to win pay justice" - a wage of £15/hr. After the previous sectional strikes, one company at a time, this seemed to be an improvement. But then a deal was made with Eurostar, so

management, who thought the strikes were still going ahead, made interesting slips of the keyboard: one LNER boss sent workers an email meant only for managers, showing the rates which different grades would be paid for strike-breaking - causing loud (virtual) uproar! What's more, since bosses had already laid on only a minimal service for the whole weekend, the strike might not

have gone ahead, but the disruption did!

So now the question is what next? And what about the ASLEF drivers and TSSA white collar workers? Only one day of strike has been announced by ASLEF so far. Can a strike which began so well, now end so badly? Well, not if rail workers decide to take matters into their own hands. So, where did they say their "intensive talks" are taking place?



that in the end, GTR's Churchill cleaners were left to strike alone. Over the next six months they held 22 stoppages, but Churchill refused to budge, importing cleaners from other stations to do their work. And then their strike mandate expired.

Come this November, RMT officials have now decided to organise a ballot across 5 cleaning companies: Atalian Servest, Bidvest Noonan, Carlisle, Mitie,

as well as Churchill. So at last it seems that the KX-St Pancras workers will not be striking alone. But so far there is no mention of linking cleaners' strikes with the still active Network Rail and TOC workers' strikes - if indeed these continue. Whatever happens next, it's clear that the workers will have to prepare to coordinate their action on the ground themselves.

Their society

Give the refugees safe passage, then!

Sunak, who has come to some kind of new deal with France's Macron, to stop "illegal migration" said there was "not one simple solution to the small boats problem". But there is! One big boat, to bring anyone waiting on French beaches safely over the Channel, passage prepaid...

This would certainly put the £4,000/per trip dinghy-ticket-sellers out of business - the so-called "people smugglers" who politicians always claim are their real target, while trying to disguise their xenophobic and/or racist opposition to immigration.

As for "processing" each refugee, the use of the word "process" says it all - as if they were parts on an assembly line... When the very fact of their attempt to get to Britain, come what may, is proof in itself of their need for asylum - wherever they may come from! Assessing refugees' needs, intentions and talents straight away should be easily within the capabilities of the civil service or perhaps more appropriately, the Department of Education and Department of Health...

Yet successive British Home

• Manston: migrant centre or prison?

The Manston migrant centre is located at a former Ministry of Defence fire training centre, opened in January 2022 and was meant to hold up to 1,600 refugees for no more than 24 hours. When independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, David Neal, visited the camp on 24 October he found that there were 2,800 migrants there on that day. On Monday 31 October, that number had gone up by 250%! And many of the refugees had been held there for over a month. Unsurprisingly, the overcrowded conditions and the lack of proper sanitation facilities have caused



Secretaries, after removing the legal right to enter Britain from potential migrants, have done nothing but play to a gallery of anti-immigrant little Englanders and bigots to secure their votes. And Labour, with the same vote-catching aim, claims that it is only concerned to catch "criminals who prey on immigrants", while it too, proposes to impose strict border controls.

It was noticeable that when the Manston scandal hit the headlines with its inhuman conditions and overcrowding, Labour's shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper was

only interested in calling out her Tory counterpart Suella Braverman for the security breaches which got her sacked by Liz Truss. This allowed Cooper to avoid condemning the policy of the Tories towards refugees: as she says, "Labour is not in favour of open borders". No surprise there!

Open borders are, however, the only way to go, in this ever-shrinking world where the poorest regions not only cannot sustain life because of poverty, but are subject to climate extremes which are wreaking irreversible destruction. □

outbreaks of scabies, MRSA and even diphtheria.

It took the Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, and the government more than 3 weeks to take any action when this scandal was exposed. Hundreds of refugees were eventually moved from the centre in the first week of November after hotel rooms were found for them. It transpired that, while the Tory Party had been electing and re-electing leaders and swapping round Home Secretaries, finding accommodation for refugees had somehow ceased; although it was denied that this was because the latest

Home Secretary, Suella Braverman had decided that the cost of £7m a day paid by the government to the hotel industry was far too much...

In the meantime the anti-migrant rhetoric was ramped up, and in this context a firebombing occurred at a reception centre in Dover. The police have identified this as a terrorist attack, and most reports put it down to the whipping up of xenophobia. What really was behind it would probably never be known, since shortly afterwards the perpetrator was found dead in his car with a ligature around his neck.

Housing crisis bites!

New figures released by the "Combined Homelessness and Information Network" have shown a sharp increase in the number of rough sleepers in London: between July and September this year, 3,628 people slept in the streets at least once - an increase of 24% compared to last year. And of these, more than half have slept in the streets for the first time in their lives, which represents a 35% increase of "new rough sleepers"!

Landlords are forcing tenants to pay for the enormous increase in energy bills: between July and September, rents in London increased by a record 16% compared to the same period last year. And if tenants can't pay their rent, landlords simply kick them out: the number of evictions in London have quadrupled compared to last year!

MPs will start holding debates in November on the White Paper entitled "A fairer private rented sector" which is supposed to ban "no fault" evictions and

allow tenants to take their landlords to court if their homes are an "unacceptable standard". Never mind that landlords can always find an excuse to kick tenants out and that most tenants can't afford a court case.

Of course, freezing rents and increasing the Local Housing Allowance rates in line with inflation won't even be discussed. As for building the urgently needed social housing, these "right honourable" people don't consider it a profitable enough business anyway!

Their society

Sunak the "competent" cutter

Let's just recap, given the pace of events in Clowning... oops... Downing Street, in the past few months: on 7 July Boris Johnson resigns; on 6 September Liz Truss is elected. Her chancellor presents her tax-cutting mini-budget on 23 September. The pound falls to a record low and the markets go doolally. On 12 October Truss resigns, becoming the shortest serving leader "in modern British history". On 25 October Rishi Sunak becomes the 3rd PM in the space of 4 months, and one of the youngest at 42. He is literally shoved in, ASAP. And declared the only "competent" choice. His election duly boosts the fallen pound and brings confidence back to the market after he admits that the economy is in "profound crisis": that mistakes were made (by Truss) and that he is going to fix them!

• Hunt's turn of the screw

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt will present his "Medium Term Fiscal Statement" on 17 November, after this newspaper goes to press. But the context - Britain already in recession according to Bank of England governor Andrew Bailey, the shrinkage of the economy by 0.2% this last quarter, the crash-effects of the mini-budget in September, the voluntary stoppage of the economy during obligatory Royal mourning... and the energy crisis... all this is enough for us to know that Hunt will be turning the fiscal screw.

Hunt says he is committed to "sound public finance, with tax cuts withdrawn and spending commitments reduced". This means means tax increases all round (corporation tax is already set to go up from 19% to 25%) and maybe the reinstatement of the National Insurance rise. But if so, with an extra £12bn "for the NHS and social care" he can easily

• Taxing the rich? Of course not!

After the government's recent u-turns over the rate of Corporation Tax, it seems that new Chancellor Jeremy Hunt will increase it from the all-time low of 19% up to 25% in April 2023 - which is still a low rate! But companies making profits below £50,000 will still pay the 19% rate and those making profits between £50,000 to £250,000 will be able to claim "marginal relief" to avoid paying the full rate. This means that only 10% of companies will actually pay 25%! No wonder the government hopes to raise only £18bn with these new measures - in other words, peanuts! Indeed, Corporation Tax is so low, it currently only contributes to 9% of the HMRC's tax

receipts. It's amazing what mere words can do when it comes to this failing, but still utterly anarchical capitalist system! First, Kwarteng's words crashed the pound and now Sunak's have instantly revived it!

Confidence trick

Of course Sunak isn't actually any more competent in managing the economy than any of those around him; before becoming an MP he worked as a lowly analyst for Goldman Sachs investment bank for 3 years, before getting into managing hedge funds... much like Kwarsi Kwarteng, in fact!

As for his much-feted introduction of the Furlough scheme and his free handouts to business which kept the economy more or less afloat during the pandemic, it's neither a sign of genius nor compassion; France, Germany, Spain and all the richer

afford the £9bn that a 17.6% pay rise for 300,000 nurses would cost! Of course he will have to be dragged kicking and screaming to do it...

The Financial Times says that the public spending cuts he is looking for could be as much as £45-£55bn a year. To give an idea of comparative size - the defence budget was £48.5bn in 2022 and the NHS budget £136.1bn so the question is, from where?

Paul Johnson - director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies - says what is needed is a 5% rise in income tax, lifting tax rates to 25%, 45% and 50%. Then freezes or cuts to benefits, and local council funding - as if this is not already cut to the bone! The Resolution Foundation warns of a "colossal fall in incomes next year", by £1,450, or 3.3% on average by 2025.

In other words, if Sunak and Hunt have their way, the working class is

are supposed to pay 30% on profits,

with a supplementary "adjusted" tax of 10%. They are also supposed to pay a temporary "Energy Profits Levy" of 25% on profits, introduced in May 2022. Yet Shell paid... zero tax this year, thanks to huge rebates offered by the government to energy companies which engage in field decommissioning and which invest in new oil and gas fields!

Of course, Corporation Tax could be the government's biggest source of tax revenue. Instead, it contributes less than a tenth of this, by offering the lowest rate amongst rich countries and thanks to the loopholes the government offers to businesses!

OECD countries implemented almost identical schemes. In fact the French chancellor was even more generous.

Who needs to fix whom?

Anyway, Sunak's economic judgement, as far as serving the best interests of British capitalism is concerned, is immediately put into question by his dogged support for Brexit and the fact that he belongs to the class of millionaires, thanks to his wife's £730m fortune. He hasn't a clue how the "other half" - the rest of us - lives.

That said, he is sure about one thing: ensuring that we, the "other half", pay for the crisis. He has just over 2 years before the next general election (no later than January 2025) to provide the capitalists with his promised "fix". The working class has just over 2 years to provide the capitalist class with theirs... □

facing "Austerity Mark 2", but it's not a forgone conclusion. We have the collective strength to resist and we must.



Food distribution in London

Energy crisis

Europe's energy crisis: market madness!

The ever-rising price of energy on the market continues to drive inflation up and throw millions into poverty, particularly in Britain, but also right across Europe and the rest of the world. And this is all the fault of "Putin's war in Ukraine", or so the media argues. But in fact the energy crisis only exposes the madness of capitalism's "free market" and the rule of profit.

Governments in western Europe have apparently been able to ward off a crisis this winter, by hogging gas supplies from rest of the world. They now have at least two months of reserve supplies! LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) tankers have been a cause of traffic jams outside European terminals. So much so, that at one point, gas prices dropped to negative as there was no more storage available!

This blip reflected the madness of markets, where the price of "futures" nevertheless remained extremely high. In fact, oil and energy contracts for early 2024 are currently trading above \$200 a barrel. So never mind the price woes of the population, speculators remain free to profit from the future prices of oil and gas. They are betting on a simple fact: that lack of supplies from Russia will hit

Europe even harder next year. And as for the politicians, while fully capable of imposing controls, they just leave them to it!

Passing on their losses to us

Meanwhile, price increases are also threatening to send European industry into crisis when it has barely recovered from the pandemic. Peter Adrian, president of the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK), says that the country faces several years of economic crisis, including "prosperity losses of an extent not previously imagined".

Of course, when their "prosperity" is threatened, the bosses will threaten workers with the loss of their livelihoods! And there are already factory closures and relocations happening. BASF, the German chemicals maker is downsizing "permanently" in Europe after opening a new plant in China. Ford is downsizing and closing large plants in Europe and in Britain. Packaging groups Smurfit Kappa and DS Smith are importing (cheaper) paper from North America. The fertiliser industry has recently clawed its way back to half-capacity; groups such as Norway's Yara have slashed production.

They cannot get past their narrow nationalism

"Experts" suggest that the only way to tackle Europe's energy crisis is to create a real "energy union", whereby reliance on gas is reduced and renewable sources are utilised by building efficient and comprehensive energy grids across the continent. Especially since, even though the continent produces only 0.5% of the world's oil and 1% of its gas, two thirds of energy is consumed from these sources. But while renewables have been available for a long time, development of Spain's solar energy power has been repeatedly blocked by the French government, in the name of protecting its "own" electricity generation. Denmark is a large supplier of wind energy, but Germany has not tapped into this, simply because Russian gas supplies provide a profitable business for its major capitalists like BASF.

Maybe it will not be the impending climate catastrophe, but the war in Ukraine which will usher in the green transition in energy. But even optimists argue that these are measures that will take almost a decade to be put in place. The problem is that the working class cannot wait that long... ☐

• Nuclear fusion: super-cheap, clean energy is possible!

Nuclear fusion - that is the fusing of two or more small atoms into one bigger one, which produces a huge amount of heat (and occurs naturally on the surface of the sun), has been known for almost 100 years to be a possibly revolutionary (and clean) answer to energy production. But nobody has yet managed to find a practical way to harness this energy. Not because it isn't possible. It is. But achieving successful fusion would put far too many conventional energy generators out of business. So funding has never been forthcoming for the various projects out there...

However, some keep trying. On 21 December 2021, the Joint European Torus (JET) fusion research facility based in Culham (Oxfordshire), achieved nuclear fusion for 5 seconds - a record compared to a 1-second reaction back in 1997. The heat produced was enough to bring 60 kettles to boil with a clean, potentially unlimited and cheap form of energy.

Due to the cost and technical challenges, JET was developed by the EU body, Euratom and inaugurated as long ago as 1984! However, due to

Brexit, after a 4-year extension it will be decommissioned in 2023.

Russian scientists were pioneers

That's not the end of this experiment though. The International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) in Cadarache, France, should be ready to take over in 2025 - if it is completed in time.

The pandemic seems to have caused delays and there are cost overruns of up to £14bn! However, further delays have been caused by the ban on Russian ships docking in Europe due to the war in Ukraine, since the giant magnet which is needed to control the reaction was being shipped from St Petersburg. This device was built under Rosatom's supervision (Russia's nuclear agency) which has insisted on fulfilling its obligations. Leonid Khimchenko (senior scientist at ITER) explained that without it, the tokamak (fusion reactor) will not work. Tokamaks (Russian acronym for "toroidal chamber with magnetic coils") were created by Soviet physicists in the 1950s and the first one used in the West belatedly,

was a gift from Russian scientists, at the height of the Cold War, and despite it!

It is hoped that ITER will be operational by 2050, that is, if protectionism, war and vested interests allow it. However what says it all about the 100-year delay in solving fusion for peaceful energy production is the fact that a bomb based on fusion - the hydrogen bomb - had already been invented in 1951.



International

COP-OUT 27: whitewashing the Egyptian regime

The 27th United Nation's climate change "Conference Of Parties" (COP) began in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, on 6 November. This is the 27th climate conference. In other words, ever since 1995, world leaders have been talking about global warming: 27 years during which they have done next to nothing against this threat to the whole of humanity. Which is no real surprise since the threat is fuelled by the drive for profit., i.e., the capitalist economy. The fact that new Prime Minister Rishi Sunak didn't think that it was worth showing his face, until his last-minute u-turn - says it all: this is just political show-business, "green-washing", as they call it.

Handshakes with a dictator

Egyptian President and former army general, Abdel el-Sisi, described by the media as "authoritarian", which is putting it mildly, is no doubt delighted with the opportunity of COP to try to "normalise" his highly repressive regime. It is almost 12 years since the so-called "Arab Spring" uprisings against the corrupt Hosni Mubarak, on the back of which General el-Sisi eventually took over power, after dispensing with the regime of Mubarak's replacement, Mohamed Morsi, by way of a military coup in 2013.

Today, thousands of political prisoners - journalists, human rights activists, or simply those who answer back to a policeman, languish in appalling conditions in jail. Some are there for criticising the regime on social media, others for seemingly innocuous offences such as filming



a music video. Many remain under house-arrest. Alaa Abdel Fattah, a British-Egyptian activist and blogger, who is serving a jail sentence of 5 years for spreading "false news" has been on hunger strike for 200 days in the lead-up to COP27 hoping that an intervention from Sunak might get him released.

Ironically, environmental activists are also targeted: according to Human Rights Watch, "*The Egyptian government has imposed arbitrary funding, research, and registration obstacles that have debilitated local environmental groups, forcing some activists into exile...*". Yes, this is the regime with whom world leaders will shake hands and discuss environmental issues!

The poor at the receiving end

Like the world crisis, which has hit poor countries like Egypt hard, the climate crisis will hit the poorest the hardest. The rising temperature and droughts in Egypt are reducing the water of the Nile delta available to farmers. Sand storms are becoming

more frequent throughout the Middle East. And of course, there have been the disastrous floods in Pakistan and Bangladesh this year.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 300 million people have been forcibly displaced by weather-related events since 2008. By 2050 this number might reach 1.2bn. The working people of these countries face a double whammy - the oppressive regimes which make living their lives hell and the rapidly deteriorating physical environment threatening catastrophe, famine and death.

COP 27 like all previous COPs, with its green-washing and empty commitments is however at the very least a reminder to the working classes and poor of this world that they cannot leave it to hypocritical self-promoters like Johnson, who also popped up in Egypt, nor any other promoters of capitalism to "save humanity". They are, de facto, enemies of the environment. It will be up to the rest of us. □

• Qatar's FIFA world cup: a very un-beautiful game

When Qatar controversially won the right to host the World Cup in 2010, frantic construction began. Roads, a metro system, the port, were all redeveloped. Seven of the eight stadiums to be used for the tournament were built from scratch.

And predictably, the (almost exclusively) migrant workers building all this infrastructure were subject to the so-called Kafala ("sponsorship") system, which operates throughout the region as well as in Lebanon and Kuwait, and has been exposed time and again for its super-exploitation of workers.

This system legally binds foreign workers - mostly from South Asia

and East Africa - to their employers; they cannot change jobs nor leave the country without their employer's permission, must hand over their passports, and face huge debts after they're forced to pay "recruitment fees" to work in these countries. This was already well-documented when the United Arab Emirates hosted the Under 17s Football World Cup in 2013, when luxurious buildings and infrastructure were built by migrants under extreme conditions. Wages averaged £1/h and their pay arrived months later than due, if at all. Workers normally worked 10-12 hours in the blazing sun, and then had to eat and sleep in cramped and

crowded rooms.

While the Qatari authorities claim that they have reformed Kafala, workers on the ground report that it continues in practice and confiscation of passports is "routine". Since building work started it's estimated that an incredible 7,000 deaths have occurred among migrant workers - whether from workplace injury or illness.

FIFA organisers are aware of all this, just as they were always aware that in most Gulf States, being gay or "other" is illegal. But as long as host countries put billions on the table to run their show, that's all that matters.

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**Gloves back on, while officials talk...**

At the time of writing, strikes are on hold, while union officials and Royal Mail engage in 7 days of "intensive negotiations" until 15th November. What will come out of this is anybody's guess. The last pay offer was pathetic - 3.5% (plus 2% imposed this summer), effective "from the date the deal is agreed"; 1.5% from April 2023; a lump-sum of 2% (~£500), "upon successful implementation of local revisions".

In the meantime RM has escalated its attacks, while the union back-peddles and cancels action. CEO, Simon Thompson let it be known that there'd be as many as 10,000 job cuts, (up from

6,000) and reiterated that RM wants a 2nd tier workforce on lower pay and worse Ts & Cs. If that's not a version of "fire and rehire", what is? On top of it all it threatened the union with an injunction if we continued our rolling strikes.

In fact, local revisions and changes are already taking place. In deliveries, they've now introduced clock-in/clock-out. They're trying to get us to cover areas as far out as N5 and N8. In processing, jobs are already cut, with nobody replaced if they retire. There's a skeleton staff for cleaning so the job gets done on overtime... etc...

So yes, this strike has to win. Official



strikes are still scheduled for 24, 25, 30 November and 1 December. But it seems to us that we need to go out and stay out until Thompson&Co back down fully. And that will not happen unless we take the control of our strike out of the hands of the union leaders, who are currently trying to patch up a compromise at our expense. ☐

• Got to be all out!

RM's lawyers have found a "legal" excuse to stop the "functional strikes": "numerous material concerns with the formal notification of planned rolling strike action", whatever that may mean! And yes, the law is on the side of the bosses... but who says that we have to abide by this? [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 02/11/22]

• And again: got to be all out!

Why on earth has the union leadership

cancelled our strikes on the 12 and 14 November? Apparently they want to take more "proportionate action"? When the bosses escalate, surely the only "proportionate" action is for us to escalate as well? [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 02/11/22]

• Where are we at?

On RM-PFS side (cleaners and engineers), we're still waiting to know when our next strike is... Of course, we want to be part of the next national strikes, which are now scheduled for Black Friday and Cyber Monday - but that's too far away

for everybody! Our bills are skyrocketing by the day, we can't wait! [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 02/11/22]

• Present and incorrect!

Since Monday, Delivery Office Managers have asked us to scan in/out by the Bookroom. Yes, it's as if we're back at school, having a roll-call... But no problem, we'll do our hours and at the right pace. And they can forget about us doing overtime to clear-up what's come back from the walks! [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 02/11/22]

King's Cross railway station (London)**He flew in the face of racism**

On 15 October, the Flying Scotsman arrived at King's Cross station. This was just one of several events taking place celebrating its 100 years of service. And to mark this anniversary, the family of Britain's first black train driver - Wilston Samuel Jackson - was invited. Wilston became a train driver in 1962, 10 years after he arrived to Britain from Jamaica. At the time, driver and guard roles were reserved for white men only. Colour bars throughout the British railway industry in the 1950s and 1960s

denied "British Colonials" employment.

However, more than 50 years after racial discrimination was made unlawful, workers of black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds make up only 9.38% of the overall railway workforce. According to figures from ASLEF - the train driver's union - just 10% of train drivers' positions in England, Scotland and Wales are from BAME backgrounds. If black workers were being employed in proportion to their number in the general



population, the figure should be at least 15%. It seems racial discrimination on the railways may still be alive and (un) well. ☐

• We want coordination

Whenever there have been strike actions planned on the same day by ASLEF, TSSA and RMT it's been accident rather than conscious plan. We're at a loss as to why rail unions aren't co-ordinating action.

They talk about it but don't organise it. If ever there was an argument for "one big union" in the railways it is now!

PS: Given the leaderships' lack of backbone, we on the ground probably have to take the initiative... [Workers' Platform King's X 02/11/22]

• Unplanned mess or messy plan?

TSSA announced strikes at NR and at some TOCs and then promptly cancelled the strikes against NR, claiming they have something to talk with these bosses about. For now the strikes at the TOCs are still on, but who knows if these will go ahead.

As for the RMT, it's called TOCs and NR workers out on the 5th and 9th. But NR only on 7 Nov. And London Underground workers only on the 10th... Actually this is a real mess! And how are we supposed to organise our collective pickets? [Workers' Platform King's X

02/11/22]

• Give us our leave or else...

LNER drivers just got allocated extra leave day slots through a "lottery draw"! Yet even if we win this game-show, we're still told the leave is "pending"... It's ridiculous. Are managers so afraid they won't have enough drivers during the busy Xmas period that they're holding our leave hostage?! Of course, if they keep messing with us, we could decide to take a week-long collective Xmas rest. [Workers' Platform King's X 02/11/22]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

BMW Cowley: back to the Victorian era!

Working conditions have been so degraded in recent years that a whole range of work-induced injuries are now becoming commonplace, especially among assembly-line workers.

For instance in the harness area in assembly, we're expected to unravel a bundle of wires tied together by a hard plastic clip and plug these cables into different parts of the car. As a result, despite the factory-issue gloves we get, we inevitably cut our fingers on the sharp plastic - and the cuts tend to get infected. What's more, crawling in and out of the car is damaging our knees causing pain and swelling and predisposing us to early

arthritis...

In assembly's engine area, parts weighting 7Kg are lifted by hand. Not that heavy, maybe, but constant, repeated fast lifting over whole shifts, without job rotations, can damage joints and tendons. Mates are being diagnosed repetitive strain injuries and "tennis elbow" .

In underbody, where the job involves working underneath the car, we're straining our necks and shoulders - which again mightn't be so bad if we didn't have to do it - under foreman's pressure - for a whole shift! And of course this means for 9-12 hours, depending on where you



work...

These are just a few examples amongst many others. But they go some way towards explaining why so many "fit and healthy" workers have to go "off sick" or leave the factory, unable to continue to work in these 19th century conditions. □

• More mates, not more cuts

Are managers really planning to cut more agency workers in December, after they have trained others to take over their jobs? There are always too few hands on the line, and we don't want to see more of our mates go, while managers want us to do their work! It's not like BMW can't afford to keep us all and share out the work. [BMW Mini plant Oxford 08/11/22]

• BMW shot itself in the foot

The week before the shift cut, many Staffline workers who were given the

sack had already left for other jobs. And predictably, we were asked to work overtime to cover for them, but why should we?! We are totally opposed to the dismissal of these workmates! [BMW Mini plant Oxford 08/11/22]

• We are done with overtime

In fact, most of us flatly refused the overtime! Even more of us decided we're not doing any overtime in the future. So BMW was left with no other choice than to search high and low for extra hands... [BMW Mini plant Oxford 08/11/22]

• If only bosses had walked the plank

Instead of slowing down production, the bosses went round the offices shouting "all hands on deck" and dragging workers in to fill the gaps on the line! Some of them had worked on the line before, but others had no training at all! We even spotted the odd senior manager among these new "temps". Some of us remember "Back to the Track", when managers and others with office jobs would spend a day in a line job. That was window-dressing; what's been going on recently is sheer panic! [BMW Mini plant Oxford 08/11/22]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

• Who's costly?

So the "good" news is that Ford will pay us the agreed pay rise of 12.6% (RPI) on 25 Nov. But they think we're "paid too much to attract new work" (new work from whom, except the same Ford that sets our wages?! It's more than a bloody cheek - it's a lie - and they know it. What we know is that the bosses and big shareholder bloodsuckers are far too costly for us! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 09/11/22]

• Blackmailing Valencia

Yes and then we're told managers "are confident" that new work will be secured for D'ham... So which is it? We see they've forced union officials at Valencia to accept a wage cut on the "strength" of their weak promises; that's definitely not going to happen here - and we'd support a fight to reverse this! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 09/11/22]

• They can cut their profits!

We're also told Ford plans (we'll see about that!) to cut D'ham's headcount to 780 (~420 job cuts) by 2025, with the end of Tiger - and cut Dunton and

Merkenich by 50%, to 3,000 workers! Yes Ford's trying to make the workforce bear the cost of its "EV transition" - instead of its shareholders. We say NO. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 09/11/22]

• More work: more of us

As for Transport Ops, along with Daventry, it's supposed to get more work... but, with the same number of workers! Well, we don't like that sort of managerial maths. If the workload increases (we already need more hands), recruitment must follow suit - simple. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 09/11/22]

• Yes, a golden handshake, but now!

And what's this about putting VR packages on hold, AGAIN? We heard temps (180 already invited for an interview; applications extended till 1 Dec) may not be taken on? So are those who need to go, meant to stay and fill in, till April or beyond?

This, when what we demand is a much enhanced VR, to leave ASAP, and to be replaced with new workers on identical Ts&Cs! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 09/11/22]



• When is the strike ballot?

At LLL, we definitely feel a strike coming on! We've been waiting far too long for sick pay and an equal pay rate with Ford. We know Tony Carter will never give it to us on a plate, so there's only one option. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 09/11/22]

• Too much supply!

We heard there could be 21 more lay-off days on Darkside from now till Dec! Ford says it's due to a lack of rough stock. WE say we've been making way too many engines/day! Not just here, but in DDC too. Proof of pudding: last Fri Tiger broke down at 9am and so did Lion... A well-coordinated crash, due to overproduction/under-maintenance!!

PS: just announced lay-offs 21, 25, 28, 29 Nov... we'd rather have them just before Xmas. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 09/11/22]

Myanmar

A population caught in the crossfire

A brutal civil war continues in Myanmar - but if you read the British media, you'd never know it. On 23 October, the military regime bombed Hpakant town in the Kachin region, during a concert celebrating the 61st anniversary of the struggle for Kachin independence - killing 80 people. This was just the latest incident in a war which has claimed more than 2,400 lives and displaced 1.3m people since the military coup of February 2021.

At the time, popular resistance took the form of huge street protests and strikes by bank workers, rail workers, and shipyard workers, among many others. But after repression forced the resistance underground, many activists joined the armed groups which have been fighting the regime for decades, like the Kachin Independence Organisation, Karen National Army and Arakan Army. Others joined local militias nominally under the command of the "National Unity Government (NUG)" in exile, of deposed MPs belonging to Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy - whose victory in last February's election triggered the coup. One year later,



Jade mining in Hpakant province

however, the hold of the generals over the country is increasingly in question; recently, there have been rebellions in Rakhine and Magway.

Suu Kyi herself remains in prison, sentenced to 26 years for election fraud and corruption, despite having dutifully defended the regime during the 5 years she headed a "civilian" government. But as in all of the world's dependent economies - Myanmar's army is the real ruler, whatever the democratic smoke-screen, thus ensuring its own continued

exploitation of the country's resources, but above all, the continued profitability of western corporations which have invested in Myanmar's oil, its rare earth elements and its gem stones...

Today, the US and European powers are waiting to see which internal force will gain the upper hand, while - unlike in Ukraine - they continue to turn a blind eye to the thousands dying under the regime's bombs and refugees forced to flee to camps in Bangladesh, India, Thailand and China. □

Bangladesh

Cyclone Sitarang pushes the country further into crisis

Cyclone Sitarang made landfall in Bangladesh on 24 October. Within 2 days, a million people had been forced to evacuate; 10,000 homes were destroyed and over 10m were without power. In the aftermath mosquitoes have multiplied, leading to a dengue fever epidemic which has spread to 50 districts.

This is not even Bangladesh's most devastating cyclone. But coming on top of a severe economic crisis, it has done disproportionate damage. The cost of basic commodities has risen by 30-50% in recent months. The price of Liquefied Petroleum Gas cylinders, which most use for cooking, is up 50% from last year, forcing many to use primitive wood stoves. Power outages are becoming more frequent after the national power grid failed earlier this month when energy costs rose sky-high. Meanwhile, the IMF is demanding the government turn the screw further by cutting fertiliser, fuel, electricity and gas subsidies before they approve a £4bn loan.

The Awami League regime has now introduced laws making it easier for employers to sack workers and cut maternity benefits. Another law currently

going through parliament will make calling or supporting strikes in "essential services" punishable by a year's imprisonment! This is in direct response to the rising militancy among workers who are refusing to pay for the crisis: after last month's textile and tea plantation strikes, 4,000 temporary railway workers

organised under the Railway Temporary Labour Council have started an indefinite sit-down outside Dhaka's Kamalapur Railway Station, demanding they be made permanent. Not only do these workers refuse to foot the bill for the crisis, but they are directly challenging the attacks on their right to strike. □



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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