

WORKERS' fight



No 149 - 13 Jan 2024

price 50p

<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)

OUT WITH THIS WHOLE SORRY SYSTEM - AND ITS APOLOGISTS!

The prime minister claims to be "sorry" about the Horizon scandal - *"the greatest miscarriage of justice in British history"*. Unprecedented legislation will now exonerate and compensate (not by enough) all postmaster/mistress victims of the *"institutionally corrupt"* Post Office Limited.

Government ministers say they're shocked. Sure, this scandal is shocking. But it's been continuing, shockingly, for 25 very long years, while they paid it little attention! It took the screening of the ITV drama *"Mr Bates versus the Post Office"*, to wake them up.

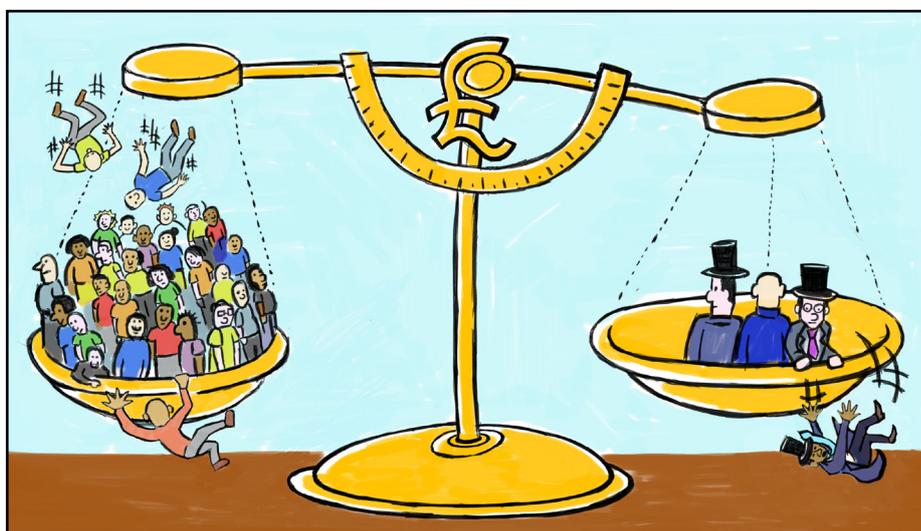
"British justice, no justice!"

The thousands of fraud accusations, prosecutions, jailing - and theft of the life-savings - of innocent postmasters by the Post Office had been taking place under the watch of every single government since the Fujitsu-designed Horizon accounting system was installed in Post Offices in 1999.

But never mind. Sunak's ministers at first even argued that Parliament shouldn't interfere, by passing a law to collectively clear all the postmasters' names. They said the cases - mostly the result of private prosecutions under POLs special powers - should rather be submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service.

As if the Crown hasn't miscarried justice itself, time and again! As if the law can ever be independent of "who rules" and who, therefore, benefits!

One only has to recall the convictions by the Crown in the late 1970s of the Guildford 4, Maguire Family and the Birmingham Six, all falsely accused of IRA terrorism (confessions extracted under torture!) during the so-called Irish Troubles, purely for political expediency. These innocent victims of "independent" British justice spent between 14 and 16 years in prison...



As for "inquiries" to get "justice" for victims - those into the contaminated blood scandal (1980s), Hillsborough disaster (1989), Bloody Sunday massacre (1972), haven't yet concluded 30, 40, 50 years later!

Blaming the real perpetrators

So today, will any of those responsible for the Horizon scandal face retribution? Will the officials who negotiated the IT contracts for this dodgy system with Fujitsu (it had already proved a failure at the then DSS), or will Fujitsu itself, be made to pay? And what about Paula Vennells, CEO of POL from 2012-2019, a former retail boss (Argos, Dixons) and ordained Anglican priest (!), who got a £717,500 salary from the PO and bonuses of up to £2m? Quite knowingly, she allowed postmasters to be blackmailed into paying (back) to POL, tens, if not hundreds of thousands, over false discrepancies - it was blatant theft, helping the PO bank balance remain healthy enough to keep paying her bonuses.

Nor must it be forgotten that the PO's acquisition of Horizon for

"modernisation" was entirely down to Labour PM Tony Blair - and against PO experts' advice. Yes, all in the name of his slavish Thatcherite adherence to contracting out key operations to the private sector - in the interests of "business"... But since he knew Horizon was dangerously faulty, Blair made sure that running the PO would no longer be a direct government responsibility. He granted it arm's-length autonomy and its unaccountable bosses full control!

When asked what she wanted to happen now, one of the sub-postmistresses answered that she wanted the Post Office to be "gone". She is right. A real postal service under public control needs to be rebuilt. But of course that can't happen under this class-led capitalist system where the state rules to the benefit of the capitalists and to the detriment of the rest of us. So yes, the Post Office needs to be abolished - but so does the system which created it. Then we can start again, on a different basis: a socialist basis - and it's never been more urgent. ☐

International

HANDS OFF YEMEN!

The Houthis - who control of most of Yemen today - are the only Arab force which has "put its money where its mouth is" for Gaza and the Palestinians. First, they launched cruise missiles into Israel; more recently, they began boarding ships entering the Red Sea with the aim of disrupting Israel's trade; "forced sanctions", in other words. However, over the 2-3 months of their activity in the Red Sea they have only stopped 27 ships - and killed nobody.

Nevertheless, in the early morning of the 12 January, British and US jets launched surprise air strikes on Yemen. According to the US, more than 60 targets at 16 sites in Yemen were hit in the capital Sanaa as well as 4 other towns, killing at least 5 people and injuring others. Justifying this, US Major General Patrick Ryder explained that the Houthis had, very urgently, to be made to stop their action given the danger it poses for international shipping.

Contrast this with the lack of any such words aimed at the Israelis to "stop" - when they have already laid waste to so much of Gaza and killed over 24,000 civilians!

Why accuse them of lying?

Ryder dismissed as a lie the Houthis' given reason for their actions - i.e., to get the Israelis to stop their war on Gaza. According to him (and of course, Sunak, who just parrots whatever US spokespersons say) the Houthis are doing this for their own interests as part of the Iranian-led "axis of resistance"...

Quite what those particular interests may be, is impossible to know, but what everyone does know is that the focus of the whole "Arab and Middle Eastern world" is on Gaza, and nowhere else - even to the point of turning former enemies (like the Saudis and Iranians) into friends.

**Spreading the horror of this war**

This US/British intervention has had one sure effect: it brought back the horror of exploding bombs to the Yemeni people, who hope for nothing but peace (and bread), after 9 years of a war which has killed at least 377,000. The population is still in the middle of the worst humanitarian crisis in the world: 75% live in severe poverty, bordering on starvation and are wholly dependent on foreign aid to survive.

Of course, the dismissive and contemptuous language used against the Houthis is no surprise. The US and Britain armed the Saudis and UAE in order to crush them and did not succeed.

If there is another agenda being followed it is not by the Houthis, but by the US and Yemen's former colonial ruler, Britain. And it has little to do with "defending international shipping". It is reminder to the so-called "axis of resistance" - and the Iranian regime in particular - that the US is present in the region, with all its potential super-firepower. Ryder said as much, in fact. He explained that the US wants

the conflict contained inside Gaza, and needs to be certain that this boundary is also respected by Iran, Hezbollah and the Houthis. Bombing the latter was to reinforce the message - and a calculated risk, of course, since none of these protagonists wishes for a spreading Middle Eastern conflict.

The class war to come

Fortunately, the population of this world is not as stupid as world leaders think (or hope!). The working classes know very well who the real perpetrators and protagonists are - whether in Ukraine or in Israel-Palestine. They know who has bloody hands and whose blood they are shedding and can factor in their parochial interests (Sunak and Biden both face elections this year). Workers also know that this increasingly oppressive "world order" which today walks roughshod over the poor everywhere, can and will be challenged on the streets and in the workplaces, "at home", in the imperialist heartlands of London and Washington, where these leaders have no proxies to hide behind. □

• The long and short of international shipping

Since as much as 15% of the world's diverse commercial shipping takes this shortcut through the Suez Canal, the idea of being taken hostage (one ship was) or even as the US (acting) Defence Secretary warned, getting sunk by a missile, has meant that companies took fright after the Houthis actions and ships started to re-route around the Cape of Good Hope...

As it is though, the Suez canal has a capacity for only 68 ships/day. And in passing, it's worth remembering that the last and worst re-routing wasn't caused by war or conflict but by the giant Ever Given container ship which got stuck across the canal for over a week until it was freed.

Of course re-routing around the Cape is longer by 4-7,000 km (depending on the starting point) and takes another 10 days. But it's not all "bad" for the companies involved... When the Ever Given blocked the Canal, the Global Maritime Hub pointed out that "Despite the longer distance via the Cape of Good Hope the cheaper bunker fuel prices makes it more economical to take this route compared to using the Suez Canal that could cost around \$700,000 for a fully laden 20,000 TEU container ship. The diversion will cost the Suez Canal Authority (SCA) over \$10M in lost charges. SCA reacted to this major loss of traffic by announcing a new

rebate scheme to incite container ships to transit through the Suez Canal again". Today, the containers are not, apparently keen to try their luck. In other words the bombing of Yemen hasn't made the Red Sea route safe again.

However, few commentators are mentioning how the re-routing is boosting the share prices of the shipping and fuel companies! When some lose out in this capitalist world, one can bet one's bottom dollar that others will win! In fact so much so, it's said that this could even drive inflation - which was falling - all the way back up!

This society

NHS doctors on strike: the missing (active!) solidarity

"Junior" hospital doctors in England walked out for 3 days last December and 6 days in early January. This has never happened before in the history of the NHS.

The doctors are still demanding a 35% pay increase to restore their pay levels to what they should have been: they've had no real terms pay increase since 2008. They are, however prepared to concede that the increase doesn't have to be paid all in one go, but could be paid back over several years... But new health

secretary Victoria Atkins - just like the old - refuses to meet union officials until they give up their strike mandate. Doctors' union reps say they first need a new offer on the table. So it's a stalemate.

Consultants and nurses got a pay cut

Where next then? Consultants, who struck briefly last month have been offered a 4.95% average "rise" for 2024, which ministers claim is "on top" of a 6% pay increase for last year. But RPI

inflation averaged 7.9% over the 12 months to November. So they're offered a real terms pay cut.

And speaking of real terms pay cuts, nurses got a rise of just 5% in 2023, plus a lump sum for 2024... No wonder the Royal College of Nursing has threatened further ballots, for further strikes.

We will have to break the law

Doctors have been taking strike action for over a year with no results. And today it's in the context of an NHS in near collapse. So a victory ASAP is vital. Since all workers need the NHS, it's self-evident that "secondary" action, that is other workers striking "for" and alongside NHS workers would be far more effective in winning their demands than leaving them standing all alone on their picket lines. Of course, it's illegal. So it will have to come from workers on the ground; union leaders are far too frightened to take a risk, even for the NHS they profess to "love". Indeed what we really need to sort out the bosses, the government and the NHS, is our own "Strikes Maximum Support Act"!



• The worst NHS crisis - but there are funds to fix it!

The NHS entered this winter in its worst state ever. There are 7.7 million patients still on waiting lists. In November, 42,000 people waited in A&E for more than 12 hours to be seen.

The Telegraph worked out that in 2023 there were 53,000 "excess" deaths. More people than expected died last year than in any year in the whole history of the NHS, outside of the Covid years 2020-21. In fact, Britain had the worst rate of unexpected deaths out of all the rich countries. It also has among the worst cancer survival rates for all the common cancers, ranking 28th out of 33 countries. Only 16% of cancer patients live for 5 years. This is mainly because as many as 40% don't start treatment inside of the 62-day target after diagnosis. Cancer specialists say that they're losing 10% of patients who should be saved, entirely due to these long waits.

Of course too-long waiting lists are

directly attributable to staff shortages. This December according to "Statista", there were 126,000 unfilled NHS vacancies, 43,000 of them for nurses. It's an overall NHS vacancy rate of just under 9%. Finding the workers, whether from here or from abroad and giving them crash-training courses is one way to address this. But raising pay across the whole NHS board would definitely help to sort this out! Sunak has promised tax cuts to the rich and just this January handed over £2.5bn to Zelensky for Ukraine's war... So the money for it is certainly there.

• More care with their pay might help!

The vacancy rate in the social care sector stands at 10%, up from 7% in the four years before the pandemic. Again it's pay and working conditions which are the main, if not the only, cause. Most care workers are employed by the hour (22% - 340,000 workers - are on zero-hours contracts!). Their average pay (figures

from March 2023) is as low as £10.11/hr, just above the minimum wage. In real terms (i.e. compared to inflation) this was 51p lower than in 2021! Surveys found that 20% of workers in social care have incomes below the poverty line.

The recruitment of immigrant workers is the one thing keeping the social care system from collapsing entirely: 70,000 new staff arrived in Britain last year to work in this sector, compared to 20,000 the year before. In the year to March 2023, non-British workers made up 21% of the total workforce, but among qualified social care nurses, the proportion is 41% non-British.

Despite promises from every government in the last decades, to fix social care, nothing has been done. And nothing will be done, because this "fix" requires renationalising social care and bringing it entirely within the NHS. But there are too many conflicting interests at stake - of the worst kind, i.e., profiteering at the expense of the health and well-being of our oldest and most needy citizens.

It's best not to Grant him access to any weapons

Grant Shapps - now Britain's Minister of Defence - is flexing his thumb muscles, as the British military takes over from Germany to lead NATO's "rapid response force" this year. This "responsibility" rotates, and according to the government's website it will place "thousands of soldiers on standby and ready to deploy within days". For exactly what sort of operation, is of course another question. But it's a "threat in waiting", apparently.

However Shapps has already shown his willingness to be a "defence bully". On 29 December he sent a British navy vessel, HMS Trent, to the ex-British colony of Guyana after it was rumoured that President Maduro's Venezuelan regime might claim sovereignty over the oil- and mineral-rich Essequibo region, currently controlled by Guyana.

But Shapps' action proved to be a total non-starter, although it could have,

(but luckily did not) provoked Maduro into "action of a defensive nature in response to the provocation and threat of the UK against peace and the sovereignty of our country" (to quote Maduro himself).

Indeed, unbeknown to Britain's genius defence secretary, the Guyanans and Venezuelans had already signed an agreement not to use any force against each other - and to continue their peaceful dialogue over who could claim the region!

Their politics

Staking the election on not-so-Cleverly... and Rwanda?

No-one was surprised that the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the government's plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda was illegal, on the grounds that Rwanda wasn't "safe". The plan apparently violated not only the UN and European Conventions on Human Rights, but also 3 other British laws!

In order to get round this, Sunak immediately announced an emergency "Safety of Rwanda" bill which would decree Rwanda a safe place in British law, and prepared a brand new treaty. This, even while the Home Office was granting asylum in Britain to refugees from the Kigali regime! One could not make this up!

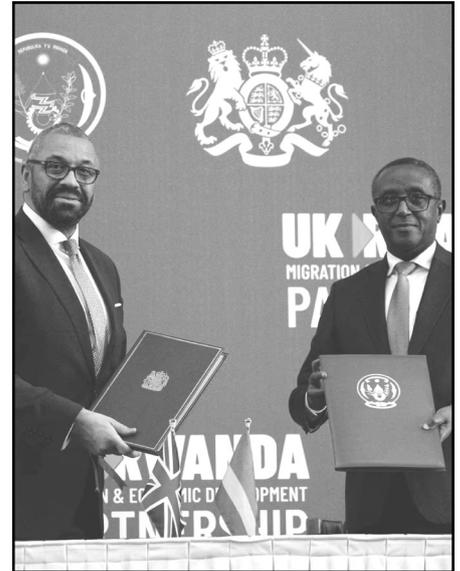
New Home Secretary James Cleverly now has to make the scheme work, despite a declaration of no-confidence by at least 5 different right-wing groups of Tory MPs. In fact 30 of them abstained when the first

vote on the new bill was held in December.

Along with Robert Jenrick, a former immigration minister who resigned over this, these MPs argue that the bill doesn't "go far enough". In their view, it should cut out ALL interference from international courts of law, like the ECHR and UN... (after all, didn't Brexit mean Brexit?)!

This was too much even for the Rwandans to stomach. They quickly told Sunak that if his government flouted international humanitarian law, they were not prepared to risk damaging their own "good" reputation by association.

Even if the bill's latest version gets through parliament (by April at the earliest), any attempted deportations will still be challenged in court. Sadly for Sunak, and despite his promises, planes won't be taking off for Rwanda any time soon. ☐



Macron's anti-migrant law: in the footsteps of the French far-right... and British Tories

After months of xenophobic overbidding, on 19 December, the French National Assembly passed a new, restrictive, immigration law. President Macron is trying very hard to catch up with the Tories when it comes to playing to a far-right racist gallery. Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National, the descendent of the National Front, voted for it, claiming that for them, it was an "ideological victory"!

So what are the main points of this law and how does it compare with British anti-immigrant measures? Firstly, the Interior Ministry has reneged on a promise to allow "illegal" migrants working in jobs where labour shortages exist "the right to remain". Of course in Britain if they're illegal (aka asylum seekers) they're not allowed to work at all, with rare exceptions.

You must pay to stay...

When it comes to medical care, refugees in France without papers, have always been able to access State Medical Aid. But now, as a concession to the far-right, the French government has promised to revise this rule, despite the fact that it's in nobody's interests if sick (or contagious)

people can't get treatment! In Britain, in practice all migrants, regardless of status, get treated by the NHS, although students and workers on visas must pay an annual health "surcharge", which Cleverly has just increased from £624 to £1,035.

The new French law now also restricts the right of immigrant workers to benefits: depending on employment status, this entitlement will only apply after 5 years. In fact here in Britain only those with "settled status" - granted after 5 years of proven residency - have full access to social benefits.

...and stay alone

Then there's the issue of dependent relatives... In France you must have lived and worked there for 24 months (increased from 18 months) to have a relative or partner join you - and now, as long as they are over 21! In Britain restrictions on dependents are a hot political potato. Cleverly says too many dependents came in last year. So as of January 1, foreign students are totally banned from bringing family members into the country.

You are born stateless...

Macron is also restricting access to French citizenship: children born in France were automatically considered French. No more. They will have to apply for citizenship when they reach adulthood and "good behaviour" - that is no previous law-breaking - will be taken into account!

Actually this was always the case in Britain. And its corollary has led to notorious cases of deportation of youngsters, who'd committed very minor offences, to the country where their parents were born, but where they'd never set foot. Today this deportation law is "tightened up" post-Brexit... In Britain, "deportation is considered to be in the 'public interest' if the person in question has been sentenced to a prison sentence of more than 12 months"!

Finally, the new French law will create a cap (set by parliament) on the number of migrants admitted to the country every year.

So yes, just like the Tories, who have reason to fear losing votes to the likes of Farage's Reform Party, French president Macron hopes that by following the far-right into the racist swamp, he can steal some of its thunder.

The General Election "unpopularity" contest

The next general election might not be until the autumn this year. But whenever it eventually happens, we can expect months of claim and counter-claim, as Sunak and Starmer, and their respective parties, try to outdo each other to win votes. The joke doing the rounds is that by this time next year, there will definitely be a Tory PM... he just won't necessarily

be a member of the Conservative Party!

Yes, Labour are playing their usual role of the conservative "alternative" to the Tories. According to the various polling companies, Starmer is favoured as prime minister by 32% of voters, compared to Sunak's 22%. And Labour is leading on all the "issues" - including on the economy.

But of course, despite Starmer's relative popularity, 50% of voters who

were asked prefer neither leader. In 238 (of 650) constituencies "don't know", was the most popular choice for PM. At the same time, the polls say that far more voters are "undecided" on which party to vote for this election, than in previous ones.

In putting off the general election for as long as he can, Sunak no doubt hopes for a miracle to come to his party's rescue. Or maybe a war?

Their society

• Start of another recession? But not for all...

The governor of the Bank of England said that Britain's economic growth is the "worst I've ever seen". Overall, Britain had one of the smallest domestic outputs (GDP) in the G7 for 2023. It contracted by -0.1% in the third quarter, after zero growth in the previous three-month period. To make matters worse, the BoE has said it expects zero growth next year. The IMF estimated that Britain will be the slowest-growing developed country in 2024...

Rishi Sunak, who made economic growth one of his five pledges for 2023, must be worried that the signals are flashing red for the year to come. How will he show growth, a drop in inflation and a cut in state borrowing, as promised?

However, the full figures for the economy's performance during the last quarter of 2023, from October to December, won't be released until February. So until then nobody will

be able to say for sure whether the British economy has entered or avoided recession - at least according to official figures, of course...

Despite the receding economy, the capitalists' money machine never stops its "kerching-ing"! In the second quarter of 2023, corporate profits reached over £156 billion which was the highest on record since 1955. Yes it is definitely alright for some!

• The profitable housing crisis business

During the past decade, the average monthly rent in Britain has almost doubled, from £692 to £1279. Last year, rents increased by 6.1%, so for example someone renting a two-bedroomed flat in London would have had to pay around £120 more per month. These increases mean that households spend on average 42% of their wages on rent - and in London as much as 72%!

Unaffordable rents have meant that one in four young workers are forced to live with their parents. And about half of

those who could previously afford to rent in London last year were forced out of the capital. But then they have greater travel costs to add to their outgoings, unless they can also find a new job near their new residence... As for the poorest workers, who simply can't pay a higher rent, they are faced with evictions. These increased by 31% (to 9,000!) last year.

So now in England alone, 271,000 people are homeless, i.e., sleeping on streets or "sofa-surfing". And all this, when there are 1.5m vacant properties

in the country! Never mind though, this housing crisis is big business for the corporate landlords, like Grainger Plc the "leader in the build to rent" sector with a portfolio of 10,208 private rental homes and "a £1.6bn 5,634 build to rent pipeline". Its earnings rose by 41% in 2023 allowing it to pay dividends of 11%. Its profits before tax were up by 91% to £27.4m! Grainger's slogan is "renting homes and enriching lives". Indeed, we see exactly what they mean.

The Horizon scandal - compensation complications add insult to injury

More than 4,000 sub-postmasters and mistresses who were affected by the Horizon scandal have been told they are eligible for compensation. These are only those who have come forward. But it's almost half of the total number of sub-postmasters working for the Post Office at any one moment! This - if confirmation were needed - proves that the bugs in Fujitsu's accounting system were everywhere; exposing that damaging lie that "you are the only one", which drove some sub-postmasters to suicide.

They should submit their claims

But what about compensation? After the scandal came to a head with the parliamentary debate on 8 January (thanks largely to the ITV drama "Mr Bates vs the Post Office"), the government admitted that this was urgent. And there's the rub.

The government has introduced all kinds of conditions for eligibility based on individual circumstances. So take the case of Alan Bates and the 555 sub-postmasters who took out a group litigation order against POL. While they won a £42.5m settlement in 2019, most of it went to pay their legal costs. Now they're eligible for £75,000 "up front" from the government. But most lost far more - all their savings, their homes and possessions and on top they may

owe huge debts. So they need further compensation.

The 983 known to have been convicted of fraud (700 by the PO and 200 via the CPS) are entitled to a fast-tracked £600,000 settlement (a down payment of £163,000 can be made while they wait to negotiate a higher sum). But what about everybody else?

Add "tax thief" to POL's title!

While Fujitsu hasn't been taken to the cleaners (yet?) for colluding in the cover-up, nor had its current billion-pound contracts cancelled, the government has

already been giving funds to the Post Office to pay out compensation.

So now, adding to the scandal, it transpires that POL accountants deducted these amounts from POL's tax submissions - which means it paid less tax than it should have. This is cheating. It shows the corrupt mentality of these top institutional bosses. But as it happens, if they are fined by the government for this, it amounts to the government fining itself!

The sub-postmasters and mistresses have an opinion on what should happen to the Post Office bosses - but it's unprintable. We can only agree.



King's Cross railway station (London)**Fast track for fares, slow track for wages**

As if rail fares were not already exorbitant, they're going up by 4.9% in March! Of course, every year fares go up at a rate linked to the previous July's retail price index (RPI). But this year that was 9% - and the Department for Transport knew it wouldn't get away with such a huge hike.

Nevertheless, March's increase means that the cost of season tickets has increased by an average of £300 per year. So for instance, a season ticket from Reading to London, will go up to £553/month from £512.70. Annually the cost of this season ticket will be

£6,646!. For a worker earning what is considered an average wage these days, i.e., £28,000 pa, rail fares will amount to 20% of his or her salary. What would be left after housing costs? And workers aren't offered wages increases to match. Almost every category of worker has had a real terms pay cut this year.

Transport Secretary Mark Harper said that fare increases are needed (of course he said that!) "to ensure the financial sustainability of our rail network"... He still claims there are reduced passenger numbers since the pandemic - even



though railway workers' experience totally belies that. That said, if fares go up in this way, many workers will no longer be able to travel by rail - so Harper's claim will be a self-fulfilling prophecy. ☐

• The RMT leaders' bluff

At the last minute the RMT called off the "5-day" London Tube strike, which had caused general media hysteria. Never mind that ASLEF drivers weren't striking, or that the RMT had planned a rolling strike with only part of the station/operating RMT workforce out, 2

days at a time! In other words it wasn't even "all out!"

In the face of the predicted mayhem, TfL miraculously found an extra £30m to increase its 5% offer and avoid the strike! But now ASLEF drivers want 12% (their original demand), after their leaders already accepted 5%! Will they now strike, alongside ASLEF's TOC drivers,

who're still (meant to be) in dispute over pay?

PS: the "Strikes" Minimum Service law - we hear, couldn't have been used this time, because apparently it doesn't apply to LUL station workers?! Seems the Tories can't even get their anti-worker laws right... [Workers' Fight bulletin Kings' X 10/01/24]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**Royal Mail bosses caused Christmas chaos**

The full extent of the Christmas chaos at Royal Mail is yet to be fully revealed. Many people have stories of lost cards and presents. A December poll in the Daily Torygraph found that 49% had experienced delays with their post. That can only have gone up over Christmas 2023.

This is because Royal Mail doesn't

actually have enough workers. It boasts that it cut 10,000 jobs last year - and we feel it every day! Over Xmas it reduced the number of temps it usually hires by 4,000 - to 16,000 country-wide. This was half as many as 2020, when 33,000 "Xmas casuals" were taken on. Even now, it's currently in the process of cutting more jobs, disgustingly labelling workers



at some Mail Centres "supernumerary", as if they were discard-able flotsam and jetsam! ☐

• What a privatised postal service looks like

Royal Mail's Christmas delivery mess has reached new depths: the most recent delivery target data shows that in the 6 months to September, only 74.4% of first class letters were delivered next day (the target is 93%). But in places like north-west London, Oxford or Watford, the number is less than one in three letters! In fact, in parts of Kent, residents get post only once a week - and in parts of Sussex, there's been only one delivery every fortnight! This has

meant people missed NHS appointments and cancer results - a matter of life and death!

Of course, under the Universal Service Obligation (USO), Royal Mail is meant to deliver letters to every address in Britain six days a week. But Royal Mail bosses, today oriented exclusively to maximising profits, want none of it. So for starters, they want regulator Ofcom to agree to cut the USO to 5 days/week. Of course in many postal

areas this is already the case: local delivery offices have been shut and jobs have already gone out of the window. Anyway and despite the £5.6m fine imposed by Parliament last November for not meeting USO targets, bosses continue to prioritise parcel deliveries over letters. Evidently the profits from a combination of cutting and screwing workers and delivering parcels, more than make up for the cost of Ofcom's fines.

• "Super-needed"!

"Supernumeraries" ("spare" workers) literally don't know if we're coming or going. And what's the reason? Managers don't say. They'd never admit that it's because they actually need us to keep doing the work here! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 10/01/24]

• They're at it again

In fact, managers are going around,

asking us full-timers on Days if we'd like to move to Nights. They're also proposing that some of us cut our hours, as if there was not enough work in here! But what we want is the reverse: those of us who've had our hours cut should get them back... and as for nights, our position is that ALL nightwork here needs abolishing... [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 10/01/24]

• Down with the tier 2!

We hear from other Delivery Offices that

RM is recruiting - but not here, so far. These new starters are on lower wages (part of the new agreement!): £12.29/hr, about £2 less than us. And we hear, (no surprise), they don't stay very long on the job!

PS: Here at the Mount, we'd love to see new starters - but on the same Ts&Cs as us! When was the last time they recruited? 10-12 years ago? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 10/01/24]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

Unite's fake fight against R&H

In November, as many as 97% of Rudolph & Hellmann's workers voted to strike for a pay rise. Turnout was 69.7%. Shift changes have totally wiped out the increase we got in 2022. Late shift workers lost 20% of our wage. So we expected to strike.

Instead, within days of announcing strike days Unite leaders had called them off, asking us to vote on a new "offer". We were told to choose from two "Options" and union officials and the company both urged us to vote Option A, a so-called RPI rise (but when RPI had already fallen). In

return for this, R&H promised that our jobs and income would be maintained while the factory goes on half-time working for 17 weeks from March. But we'd still be expected to work unpaid overtime in the future to "pay back" every minute we're laid off!

R&H's CEO joined Unite officials in person, to try sell this lousy deal to us. They all told us that choosing Option B, (£14/hour on earlies and £15/hour on lates), put our lay-off pay and even our jobs at risk (so



why offer it?)! And never mind that they're constantly short-handed. Nobody took the bosses or the union's advice. 73% voted for Option B on a turnout of 92%. ☐

• Electric technology and feudal practice!

BMW aims to continue its transition to electric vehicle production by making 500,000 electric vehicles in 2024, says its CEO Oliver Zipse. Cue some hype on BMW's website about the Mini plant in Cowley, Oxford, which last year "celebrated" (if that's the word!) 110 years since car production began in 1913.

A new battery installation area is one of the major scheduled works for which the plant will go onto half-time from March to July, working only the early shift.

What the hype on BMW's website leaves out, is how the workforce is meant to pay for being laid off on alternate weeks. To get paid as normal, everyone is

expected to use a combination of annual leave and "working-time account" credit - covering as many hours as possible with unpaid extra hours worked on top of the 37½ hour week, both in advance and afterwards, like a feudal tithe "tribute" to the lord of the manor!

• One international working class

Many of our workmates from East Timor and elsewhere are having problems bringing their families over here, as migration laws tighten... But how on

earth would this place run (particularly R&H!) without them? Aren't the shortages bad enough already?! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 19/12/23]

• We want permanent jobs!

Again and again, R&H is short of workers,

yet still they tell some of us we're not wanted any more. So when they're really desperate to fill the gaps, they rush to call everyone back into the plant! Yes, some of us have been called back 4 times in the last few months! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 19/12/23]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

The management needs us...

During a big car industry conference at the end of November 2023, Ford's Chief Financial Officer John Lawler was asked, regarding Ford's 3rd Quarter financial results, what he would give to shareholders, since he was "sitting with \$30bn [£23.8bn] of cash on [his] balance sheet". Given that net cash in hand was as much as \$10bn (£7.9bn) the questioner added "even after you clear out the dividend, there's still more left over"!

Yes, Ford is actually swimming in cash. Which didn't stop Lawler from

moaning, during the same interview, about the 6-week long US auto workers strike which he said "cost Ford \$1.7bn [£1.3bn]". Which just goes to show how much wealth us workers produce!

In fact, on this side of the Atlantic, we rejected super-profitable-Ford's 2.5% wage "increase" and its miserable 2.5% non-consolidated lump sum bribe. We are soon to have a strike ballot. But in the meantime, Ford's shown us again how much they need us: after we were laid off on Panther engine assembly before the Christmas shutdown, which



would have meant an extra week's holiday, management had the cheek to call us back! Proving - as always - that they really can't do without us... while we can perfectly well do without them! ☐

• Stop talking and bite the bullet!

We heard that union officials asked Ford bosses to meet them last Thursday. The convenor did say at the mass meeting that the union would get back to us in 2 weeks... Maybe he assumed Ford might make a new, final, final offer - as it often does - with more money on the table. So what happened at that meeting? Are they planning to tell us?

[Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 06/12/23]

• Voting "no" means strike!

First we heard that the union was refusing to send a strike ballot by post on grounds that they don't have the money... And now we hear that the strike ballot - or a new offer (?)... - won't be sorted out until next year?! Obviously Ford doesn't want a strike. But it seems union officials don't either? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 06/12/23]

• Their performance sucks!

Last week Friday, management escorted several temps off the premises (maybe as many as 6 on Panther - and 2 on

Lion). Some were also written to. They were told that managers were not happy with their performance. So, going by this criterion we'd need to escort all managers off the premises - ASAP! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 06/12/23]

• Living in the fifth dimension

About 4 weeks ago, after we were laid off on Panther assembly, management offered morning overtime on Tiger and... Panther overtime in the afternoon! Yes, overtime on a lay-off day on a non-existent Panther shift?! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 06/12/23]

THE CASE AGAINST ISRAEL - FORMER VICTIMS OF APARTHEID "SHOULD KNOW"...

The South African government's case against Israel for violating the 1948 Convention on genocide was heard at the UN's International Court of Justice at the Hague on 11 January. Their application to the Court was apparently a "surprise" to the rest of the so-called international community... But Pretoria's legal team was in turn, surprised at their surprise: the Convention stipulates a duty for all countries to prevent future genocidal acts. They said they felt they were seeing genocide unfolding in Gaza, just like everyone else, so were only doing what was right - as all others should do...

Nobody missed the painful irony that the Israeli regime stands accused today of the same "crime against humanity" which caused the Convention to be adopted in the first place, after at least 6m of its forebears died at the hands of the Nazis during WW2. And not least the Israeli legal team who argued that since that was the case, they could not possibly be guilty.

The world upside down

Of course, Israeli PM Netanyahu dismissed what South African lawyers said as "lies and hypocrisy". He said they are turning the world upside down - it is "Israel" which is the victim, not the Palestinians of Gaza. Sunak, Biden and the German Vice Chancellor Olaf Scholz (and probably all the other rich powers' leaders) agreed: as far as they are concerned, Israel has no case to answer. Israeli spokesperson Eylon Levy, commenting on Scholz's stance in Israel's favour said "and he should know"... which might not have gone down too well with Scholz.

Levy added that on the contrary, it was Israel that had experienced a genocidal attack on 7 October at the hands of Hamas... Everything Israel has done since then is "justified"! Whether the "cleansing" of Gaza - at the time of writing 1.8m out of a population of 2.3m have been rendered homeless, or the killing. By now 1% of the population has been "eradicated". The number confirmed dead by 11 January was 23,357, with another 7,000 missing and nearly 60,000 injured. But genocidal intent is not even about numbers...

Knowing apartheid

So, this is the level of argument against a case which, at the very least, can be said to have been meticulously prepared by South Africa's legal team. And anyway, South Africans, if they know about anything, it is about apartheid. But as usual, dubious



far-right Zionists such as Levy were given ample British air- and screen-time across all channels and radio stations to make their reactionary comments.

This (Oxbridge-educated!) liar even stated as fact that "right now" hostages were being "held in rape dungeons" by Hamas and that if Israel stopped its war it would be abandoning them to certain torture, sexual abuse and death. When it is obvious to anyone who is not blinded by racism and prejudice that it is the Israeli offensive which further endangers hostages; indeed Hamas itself has asked for a ceasefire in order to exchange them. Moreover, according to all evidence from already-freed hostages, they were treated as well as possible, and certainly not raped. As is well known too, the Israeli army actually killed 3 Israeli hostages ("by mistake?") who had escaped and were waving a white flag.

Turning it into class warfare

So what can come of this case, even if it is "successful"? South African lawyers call this a "stress test" for the UN - a test to see if there can be consequences from their rulings. But these are a foregone conclusion. There will be none. Like all legal judgements framed by so-called "international law", they are meaningless in the real world.

The second part of the case, to impose provisions which make Israel stop its war on Gaza immediately - is just as unlikely to succeed. Even while the learned judges sat at the bench in the Hague, the killings continued. As long as the world's biggest power - the USA - goes along with this catastrophic barbarism against the Palestinians, it will not stop.

This is why we say that the only answer which history has shown us, is for those on the ground, who're asked (or forced) to fight, to join forces with their fellow workers on the opposite side - yes, the "enemy" - and collectively turn their guns against their generals...

In the meantime, the working class has no choice but to fall back on its resources and fight the enemy on its own ground at home. Even small victories - whether against attacks on living standards or trade union rights - can help build a fighting force capable of taking on the bosses and their governments effectively, but only if workers come together across all of today's sectional divides. □

Class Struggle n° 120

Winter 2023-24

- Editorial 1: Gaza - their so-called "sustainable" ceasefire
- Editorial 2: Britain-Rwanda - Rishi Sunak's last dance?
- To end capitalist chaos, we need a revolution!
- US: the deepening economic and social crisis confronting the working class
- South Africa: Election 2024 - no stake for the working class
- The two apartheid: a comparison with Israel

price: £1.50

Get your copies from the Workers' Fight activists you know or send us your order by mail.

In addition to this monthly paper, we publish fortnightly bulletins in several large workplaces in the South East, a quarterly journal, "Class Struggle" and the "Internationalist Communist Forums" - a series of pamphlets on topical issues.

If you wish to find out more about our ideas, activities and publications, contact the Workers' Fight activist who sold you this issue of our paper, or write to us either by e-mail, at contact@w-fight.org, or by postal mail at:

BM Workers' Fight - LONDON WC1N 3XX.