

WORKERS' fight



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

THE WORKING CLASS WILL "OVERCOME SOME DAY" - THE SOONER, THE BETTER

On the morning after the local elections, which saw the Tories lose 479 council seats, PM Rishi Sunak tried to put a brave face on it and said that the result of the coming General Election "is not a foregone conclusion... it is closer than many people are predicting...".

He may have a point. The Labour Party was only 9 points ahead on the basis of the votes cast... As for the Blackpool South by-election, with its "record" 26% swing to Labour, "the third-largest Labour-to-Conservative swing since 1945", over which Starmer was so cock-a-hoop, this is hardly a great achievement.

After all, Blackpool South was a Labour seat from 1997 to 2019, when it was lost to the Tories in Boris Johnson's "Get Brexit done" election - along with 47 other Labour Red Wall seats.

Since then, nothing has changed in the Red Wall for the jobless and ageing working class of this decimated former industrial region - no "levelling up" as promised by Michael Gove. Why would voters turn out for the Tories today?

A vote against Labour...

However, if Labour got back some of its traditional voters it was by default... Between 1 in 3 and 1 in 4 people voted, in other words almost 3/4 of the electorate didn't even bother. That's how enthusiastic everyone was!

It's not just cynicism or "voter apathy". All three of the mainstream parties have lost support because of their policy on Gaza. In the West Midlands Mayoral election Labour's much-celebrated win was by just 1,508 votes, because "independent", Akhmed Yakoob, standing against Starmer's support for Netanyahu's Gaza slaughter, took 69,621 votes, coming in 3rd.

Jamie Driscoll came second in the contest for North East Mayor, taking an even bigger chunk out of Labour's vote.



He was the former Labour mayor, who Starmer threw out of the party for consorting with pro-Palestinian film director Ken Loach (who was thrown out for consorting with pro-Palestinian Jeremy Corbyn, who was thrown out for "anti-Semitism", of which he wasn't guilty!). As many as 126,652 people still voted for Driscoll.

Starmer boasts that he has "changed" Labour by travelling up the Tory road. But he's mistaken if he thinks working class voters will follow. Anyway, when (if) in government, Labour will serve the needs of the British capitalist class and implement imperialist policy, as dictated by the US, as it always has.

...and for the Palestinians

It's this imperialist policy which is tearing apart the Middle Eastern working class, and deceiving the people of Gaza. On the night of 6 May, they were cheering in the rubble-strewn streets, having heard that Hamas had accepted an Egyptian-Qatari mediated ceasefire.

But it wasn't true. Netanyahu

said that no way would he turn back from his invasion of Rafah, unless Hamas capitulated completely. So the exchange of prisoners - the 100 Israelis, hopefully still alive somewhere in Rafah - was left hanging on a knife edge. And one should remember that there are also 9,500 Palestinian "hostages" in Israeli jails also hoping for an exchange.

Netanyahu, who knows his political days are numbered, intends to cause as much carnage as possible before he goes. That carnage now includes suppressing press freedom; he has closed down Al Jazeera's East Jerusalem offices.

Inevitably this horrific war will come to an end. It has left the political system which props up the likes of Netanyahu discredited and its leaders soaked with blood. They will not live this down. The bell tolls for them. Its first sounds are the protests of youth around the world, which started at Columbia University, in the imperialist heartland. They're singing "we shall overcome"... ☐

Palestine

Israeli prisons: worse than Guantanamo Bay

In an anonymous letter written in early April, a doctor working at the Sde Teiman military detention camp, in Southern Israel, exposed the horrific conditions imposed on the estimated 600-800 Palestinian prisoners there.

Held in cages, 70 to 100 per cage, prisoners - teenagers and septuagenarians alike - are blindfolded, fed through straws and forced to defecate in diapers. They are shackled 24/7, which has led to prisoners having "their legs amputated due to handcuff injuries, which unfortunately is a routine event". One former prisoner reported 5 executions, while the Israeli newspaper Haaretz revealed that 27 prisoners have died at the Sde Teiman and the Anatot detention camps, or during interrogation in Israel, since the Hamas attacks of October 7.

The abuse against prisoners exposed by the Sde Teiman whistleblower isn't an isolated case. There are an estimated 9,500 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons and at least a third of them are being held without charge. And those who've been released have described being electrocuted, mauled by dogs, soaked with cold water, denied food and water or deprived of sleep. The Israeli government, which claims to be the only democracy in the Middle East, is



orchestrating a terror campaign against the entire Palestinian population and literally holding thousands "hostage". This "routine" oppression, harassment and murder by the Israeli state even

without its "exceptional" current campaign of slaughter in Gaza - ensures that the anger of Palestinian youth keeps growing along with their willingness to fight back. ☐

• Looking for the Palestinian Mandela

US Secretary of State, Blinken, is on his 7th visit to the Middle East since the Hamas attacks to meet leaders from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, Jordan, Turkey and, more discreetly, Iran - but also with Hamas and Fatah in exile in Doha and Beirut - in yet another attempt to bring about a resolution to the war which would be acceptable, above all, to Netanyahu's government...

The question is, however, what happens on "the day after"? The idea, apparently, is that a new version of the "Palestine National Authority" (PNA)

needs to be set up. But it will have to have support among the Palestinians to have any credibility - which is a problem, since one of its main functions would be to "keep order" on the ground. Today, 90% of the Palestinians have no confidence in the PNA nor Mahmoud Abbas, its leader since 2005, and who is also currently leader of the secular Fatah, the largest affiliate of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO).

The PNA, which came into being under the Oslo Accords was meant to be a transitional "government" for the

Palestinians as they "moved towards statehood" and never mind that a state of their own inside Israel (the 2-state solution) was always non-viable and that today the majority of Palestinians know that... But "2-states" is being revived, nevertheless, and the 62-year-old Fatah leader, Marwan Barghouti, who has been inside an Israeli jail for 23 years, is being tipped as a possible Nelson Mandela figure to preside over a post-Apartheid PNA! Whether Barghouti would agree to play ball (as Mandela did) is another question.

• The starvation of Gaza continues: hijacking the aid flotilla

On April 26, the humanitarian mission, the Gaza Freedom Flotilla, made of 3 aid ships launching from Turkey, was prevented from sailing. The Guinea-Bissau International Ships Registry (GBISR) removed its "flag", making an unusual recall for inspection - despite the ships having passed all the required checks.

It's not the first time an aid flotilla attempting to break the blockade of Gaza has been stopped. In 2015, 2011 and 2010 there were similar attempts. Each time the Israeli forces have boarded the boats, confiscated the aid, and arrested the activists on board. In 2010, 9 crew members were actually killed.

In fact, Gaza has been blockaded on and off since 1991 (during the Gulf War): the "current" absolute blockade was imposed in 2007 after Hamas came to power. So this open-air prison has always been dependent on aid brought in from the outside - and how much or how little is controlled by the Israeli state.

In the meantime the construction of an offshore pier (to avoid IDF strikes) by the US which was announced 5 weeks ago is still not complete. And British soldiers are meant to be driving the trucks loaded with aid into Gaza. All in order to bypass the unreliable land routes, since lorries providing aid are constantly held up at IDF checkpoints.



Their society

• Steel job cuts: when is the strike?

Port Talbot's 4,000 steelworkers are preparing to strike over Tata Steel's plan to cut 2,800 jobs. Its two blast furnaces using coking coal are meant to be replaced by September this year, with "green", less-polluting electric furnaces, which would need fewer workers to operate.

An alternative plan to save some of the jobs was presented to the company by Unite, GMB and Community unions,

but Tata turned this down. Instead, the company proposes "voluntary" redundancy packages and temporary working in the lead-up to the installation of the new furnaces on just 60% of pay. However it is threatening to withdraw even this miserable offer if workers strike.

While 1,500 Unite members at Port Talbot have already voted for action, at the time of writing, the other two unions

are still balloting. And although 2,000 British Steel jobs at Scunthorpe are also threatened and for the same reason, union officials haven't connected the dots in order to organise a joint fight. Vaughan Gething, leader of the Welsh Labour government, has said he'll visit Mumbai to ask Tata to "reconsider". Tata, however, has already said its offer is "final". Steelworkers know very well what to do...

• P&O Ferry bosses awarded new loopholes

Two years after 786 P&O ferry workers were sacked and replaced with low-paid agency workers, new French and British legislation which is meant to protect their jobs and conditions comes into force this summer. It will be up to port authorities on both sides of the Channel to ensure the implementation of these "protections", however...

Ferry operators between Britain and

France will now have to pay their crews the minimum wage and they will not be allowed to work for more than two weeks on-board at a stretch.

Currently, P&O Ferries imposes 12-hour shifts, seven days a week, for up to 17 weeks at a time! The new laws should, in theory, put a stop to such super-exploitation. However there's a large loophole: these laws will only apply

to ships which make at least 120 calls a year to a single port. Initially the proposal was for 52, but this was changed after discussions between the government and the shipping bosses! Which means that with only slight adjustments to their timetables, they can "port-hop", using different ports to dock over the year and thus totally escape compliance!

• Post Office Inquiry: lies upon lies

The public inquiry into the Horizon Post Office scandal reached the stage of interviewing ex-bosses of the Post Office in April. Adam Crozier, CEO of Royal Mail and the Post Office from 2003 to 2010 (before Royal Mail's privatisation) claimed that he couldn't "recall any involvement in or knowledge of the oversight of the investigations and prosecutions". Never mind that while he was in charge, 400 sub-postmasters were convicted - falsely - of theft and had their lives ruined! He didn't even notice the exorbitant sums paid in legal costs for their private prosecution! Or at least, he could not remember...

Angela van den Bogerd, employed for 35 years by the Post Office and Director of Partnerships before she left in 2020, had claimed in the 2018 High Court trial that Horizon couldn't be accessed remotely by Fujitsu. She was presented with evidence by the Inquiry's barrister that

she was told at least 3 times (in 2010, 2011 and 2014), that it could. If she'd admitted this she would have been guilty of perjury. So she claimed she didn't read the 2010 email, and had completely failed to grasp the meaning of the 2011 and 2014 emails. The barrister said well, she was either lying, or totally incompetent. She unashamedly said no, neither, "I did not knowingly do anything wrong"...

Post Office executives are relying on bad memory and/or ignorance to avoid jail. The scale of their convoluted cover-ups over the course of 23 years and the layers of lies they manufactured to keep their positions - and hide their de facto theft from sub-postmasters - is finally exposed. But it won't undo the damage done to 4,000 sub-postmasters, 900 of whom were prosecuted, 236 of whom were sent to jail and 4 of whom were driven to kill themselves.



Degenerate capitalist production manufactures crashes... !

Two whistleblowers, who warned about serious manufacturing defects and safety in Boeing's 737 MAX line of planes have recently died in suspicious circumstances: John Dean, a 45-year old mechanical engineer and former quality auditor at Spirit Aero Systems, (which makes the 737 MAX fuselage) and John Barrett, a 62-year old quality control manager who died of a "self-inflicted gunshot wound". Both were filing lawsuits against the company for serious manufacturing malpractice and its absence of quality control and safety checks.

For good reason: this January, an Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 MAX aircraft lost a panel during a flight due to 4

missing bolts. In 2018, it was the faulty design of flight control software, that repeatedly pushed the jet's nose down, which caused a Lion Air 737 MAX to crash killing 189 people and also caused the Ethiopian Airline crash in 2019 in which 157 people died.

Dean said planes left the factory where he'd worked with undetected defects, "owing to a culture in which workers were constantly rushed to meet unrealistic deadlines - and where finding flaws was either discouraged or worse" (meaning workers were fired for speaking out).

Many others at Boeing's US plants have complained about its "bad practices", which led to such deadly failures: running without quality control checks

and speed-ups which meant skipping of workstations, to meet production targets. And this, in the context of a deficit of 16,000 highly skilled workers, who Boeing had sacked during the pandemic and not re-employed...

Workers in every industry will recognise these bad practices as normal. In the car industry, recalls due to faults have increased from 20 million a year in the 1990s to nearly 40 million today. Profit has always come before safety under the capitalist system. Boeing, which already has so many deaths on its hands, now may also have silenced two whistleblowers.

Their society

• Labour's rail renationalisation plan 2.0

Shadow transport secretary, Louise Haigh, has announced that Labour will fully nationalise the train network within five years of coming to power. Except it won't. Passenger rail (but not freight!) will be taken into public ownership under "Great British Railways", but only when current franchises held by private train operating companies expire. And some won't expire until 2030, 2031 or 2032... All operations are then meant to be transferred to the Department of Transport's Operator of Last Resort (DfTOLR Holdings Ltd).

Private companies currently running

trains on the rail network, including First Group, Transport UK, (formerly known as Abellio) and Go-Ahead, would eventually exit the rail industry. However, a small-scale "open access", "for private profit" model will remain under which companies - such as Heathrow Express, Lumo, or Hull trains - pay a fee to access the rail network. The private, for profit, rolling-stock leasing companies will also remain.

Haigh's plan merely copies Jeremy Corbyn's 2015 renationalisation policy, which was popular at the time, despite its limitations. The underlying cost of

running a railway system - which requires the kind of long-term investment which capitalist companies are either unwilling or unable to provide - means that the burden de facto falls on the public purse. Renationalisation was not a matter of "if" but always a matter of when. The Shapps-Williams plan for Great British Railways, which would have centralised timetables and ticketing and kept the train operators on hybrid franchises - or on management contracts - was a reluctant admission of this.

• Scotrail, already "public"?

Scotrail has already been "renationalised". When the franchise of private train operator, Abellio, ran out in 2022, the Scottish government stepped in as "operator of last resort" and took over. In fact already by December 2019, Abellio had been unable to meet the agreed performance criteria to have its franchise extended. So in 2021, instead of putting the franchise out to tender, the Scottish Department of Transport decided to keep the company in house.

Is this why the railway strikes over the past 2 years over pay and

conditions, were resolved much faster in Scotland, compared to the on-going fiasco in England and Wales? Was the SNP-Green alliance government of Nicola Sturgeon (at the time) more sensitive to workers' demands and more prepared to negotiate than Sunak and Shapps or Harper? Or is it that Scotrail has a virtual monopoly of transport routes in Scotland, and therefore its members in ASLEF and the RMT had better bargaining power?

Whatever the case, this nationalisation by one small aspiring

"nation" did nothing to resolve the underlying capitalist basis of transport provision which results in poor services, nor the isolation of the workforce from the rail workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. So yes, while the working class has to be in favour of nationalisation (but not nationalism!), it will be up to railway workers themselves to overcome the divisions in the ranks caused by the cutting up of the old British Rail into today's 25 or so passenger and freight companies.

Scotland's nationalists are in a mess

The Scottish National Party - founded in 1934 - has always been a contradictory fusion between right and left wing nationalism. The left nationalists imagine that an island of socialism could exist independently north of Hadrian's Wall, built by the Romans in the 4th Century to keep out the war-painted barbarian Picts.

Scottish devolution in 1999, a "gift" from Blair's Labour government, allowed the Scots to have their own mini-government. But only in order to devolve political responsibility, given his government's inability to meet social need in Britain's poorest regions. After Labour's austerity, Tory austerity followed and the SNP, which won enough seats to form governments from 2007 onwards, could pretend that an independent Scotland was soon on the cards.

Although these utopian aspirations



Humza Yousaf waves goodbye

haven't yet ended in tears, the reputation of Nicola Sturgeon who led the SNP from 2014 onwards, is in the mud, and she and her husband may end up in jail,

charged with the embezzlement of party funds. She resigned last year, leaving her deputy, Humza Yousaf to step into her shoes. But not for very long...

• The SNP on the way out?

The SNP has only once won a clear majority of seats in Edinburgh's Holyrood Assembly. This was in 2014, when a referendum on independence was demanded, but lost by 46% to 55%. Today it has 63 seats out of 129 and has been relying on an agreement with the Greens to govern.

This March, when Scotland's carbon emissions reduction was found to be behind target, the Greens threatened

to break the pact. Humza Yousaf preempted this and broke it himself, under pressure from his conservative backbenchers who disapproved of being beholden to the Greens, and disagreed with their liberal policy on trans-gender rights.

Yousaf then lost a no-confidence vote and resigned. But when Labour instigated a second no-confidence vote, which if lost would have meant

an Assembly election (due in 2025) the Greens supported the SNP! So for now, an SNP minority government retains power, but only just. And Yousaf has in the meantime being replaced by a "safe pair of hands", John Swinney, who led the SNP from 2000 to 2004.

For now, it would seem that the SNP's strategy of carving out a "progressive" Scotland to make the case for independence, has reached a dead end.

Their society

Sunak's NATO posturing and his cuts "at home"

In a speech aimed entirely at the British electorate, Sunak used the platform of April's NATO summit in Poland to boast of his government's "defence spending plan that makes the United Kingdom by far the largest defence power in Europe - and second largest in NATO..." Never mind that this was exactly the same increase in spending (2.5% of GDP by 2030) already announced by his defence secretary Grant Shapps in January, who then added, helpfully, that 72,000 civil service job cuts "will pay for a large chunk of this"! That, of course, remains to be seen!

Sunak's "Britain is best" bragging raised some eyebrows in Poland. Their eyebrows may have gone up even higher if they had heard how, when asked about the low electoral ratings of his party, he told Sky TV's Trevor Phillips that the proof that he was doing a really great job, was that NATO leaders had "praised his leadership"! They should know.

At what cost, this war foot?

Sunak explained in Warsaw that the increased investment - an extra £70bn



Sunak posing at the NATO summit

in core defence spending over 6 years - placed Britain's defence industry on a "war footing".

The issue, according to Sunak, is that the arms industry has been unable to meet demand: "One of the central lessons of the war in Ukraine is that we need deeper stockpiles of munitions and for industry to be able to replenish them more quickly". The public expenditure involved will, said Sunak, "make Britain

more secure". But the arms companies' shareholders will be even more secure. This provides a bonanza for the capitalist sharks who trade killing machines for a living. And naturally their profits come first. The public services - including the civil service which Shapps says will "pay" for this through job cuts, but also the NHS, which unlike weapons factories, promotes life rather than death, will be going without...

• Rwanda's "paradise" for migrants...

During Question Time on BBC1 on 25 April, a member of the audience asked if his relatives escaping Rwandan-backed militias in Congo would be deported to Rwanda if they were caught crossing the Channel as refugees. Trying to answer, Chris Philp (Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire) wondered: "Ahh, Rwanda is a different country from Congo, isn't it?"...

In fact, what his questioner was referring to, was today's still-ongoing civil war between the M23 militia (sponsored by Rwanda's Kagame regime) and Congolese troops in the North Kivu province, a consequence of the 1990s Rwandan civil war, which displaced over 2.1m refugees.

If "hard" evidence is needed of the unsavoury nature of the Rwandan

regime, one just has to listen to BBC's own "Hardtalk", which interviewed Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza, opposition politician and author of "Between 4 walls of the 1930 prison: Memoirs of a Rwandan Prisoner of Conscience". She spent 5 years in solitary confinement in the notorious Mageragere Prison. She explained how President Paul Kagame routinely assassinated political opponents. But she also talked about the dire poverty levels and lack of jobs affecting the majority of the population, and the utter absurdity of offering "opportunities" to deported refugees in this, one of the world's poorest countries.

• Labour's efficient alternative

Sunak said the Safety of Rwanda Act was passed "despite enormous opposition from Labour". But where exactly is that Labour opposition?

The Labour Party agrees that

migrants crossing the Channel should be "returned" somewhere, but it just prefers France. Starmer says he would - at some point, not immediately on being elected - ditch the Rwanda policy. But the only real criticism he has of the plan is its expense, which should "rather be spent on catching the evil people smugglers". And when Wes Streeting, Labour shadow health secretary, was asked if Labour would bring back asylum seekers deported by the Tories to Rwanda, he said, "no".

Yvette Cooper, shadow Home Secretary, wants to "intensify" border security and process asylum seekers' applications quicker. In fact, Labour agrees on all the Tories' main points, it just claims it would do things more "efficiently". Which is a million miles away from the "open borders" policy which the Tory front bench says is Labour's hidden agenda. No such luck.

• Pension poverty

While Sunak boasts about protecting pensioners' incomes, since it was his party which introduced the so-called "Pension Triple Lock" (which involves increasing pensions by September's inflation figure every year), today in Britain one million pensioners are living in poverty. But it's much, much, worse than that, because between 2010 and 2022, the number of people living in poverty who are over 60 but not yet entitled to a state pension (now only paid at age 66) increased by

800,000 to 1.2 million. So there are as many as 2.2m over 60s in poverty. And what will happen when the state pension age is increased to 67?

It's true that over 60s can work and many do. But even then, poverty bites. Out of 977,386 over-66s who were experiencing "deprivation" in 2022-23, 100,000 had a job! And by "deprivation" the Department of Work and Pensions means lacking access to basic goods and services, including substantial meals,

heating and electricity, a home in a good state of repair, and contact with friends and family at least once a month.

The "European Pension Break-even Index" measuring pensions against the cost of living, placed British pensioners at number 15 out of 30, below Spain, Bulgaria, Bosnia, Cyprus and even Ukraine! State pensioners on the maximum £958.53 get "just £148.13 over the average cost of living"... and that's without taking housing costs into account!

King's Cross railway station (London)

ASLEF: I spy with my little eye... the driver's cab

In 2016, a Croydon Sandilands tram driver was accused of "micro-sleep" after an accident that killed 7 people. The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) reacted by introducing the so-called "Guardian" device, meant to detect tiredness and prevent distraction, produced by Australian company, Seeing Machines. It's a camera which uses infra-red beams to constantly scan drivers' eyes for signs of fatigue. But the beams give drivers dry eyes, blurred vision and headaches. In 2017, tram drivers voted unanimously to strike against the use of these cameras, but ASLEF officials called off the planned

action at the last minute.

Then in 2018, the ORR also asked c2c, DB Cargo and LNER to trial "Guardian". At the time, ASLEF's leader, Mick Whelan was against it, calling it "...spying on people... without dealing with the core problem... If we've got a problem with fatigue in the industry, deal with the shift processes, deal with the health regimes, deal with the five-and-a-half hours in the seat". He was right... but fast forward 5 years, and ASLEF officials have once again caved in, just like they did with the tram drivers.

A trial of "Guardian" is now meant to



go ahead in LNER's Class 91 locomotives, despite our opposition. We argue that by the time a driver is detected as being "fatigued", it's already too late and safety is already compromised. And in the meantime, what's been done to shorten driving times, change shift patterns or combat fatigue, since that tragic Croydon incident? The answer is: "nothing"! ☐

- **When is the strike?**

We hear that the RMT is organising a meeting on 15 May for senior reps and officials (they've excluded local reps!) to discuss the progress (or not) of individual TOC negotiations... The pay offer (a cut in real pay) remains 4% and then only on condition all the changes are agreed... So what's changed since Nov/Dec last year?

We already knew then that the changes to Ts&Cs weren't acceptable and the pay offer for 2023-4 was/is

rubbish. So when Mick Lynch says he's "preparing for all eventualities" there's only one he needs to prepare for, and that's a national all-out strike. [*Workers' Platform bulletin Kings' X 01/05/24*]

- **We don't trust them**

So if this latest proposal by Lynch puts a stop to the company-by-company talks behind everyone's backs, all the better. It's divide and rule, designed to allow the bosses to get away with murdering our conditions. [*Workers' Platform bulletin Kings' X 01/05/24*]

- **A "sprinkling" of strike days**

Once more, ASLEF drivers will be on one-day strikes on 7, 8 and 9 May. And we'll also refuse to work any overtime from 6 to 11 May. It seems that the top union officials are waiting for the general election in order to be "heard" by the new (Labour) government - and so in the meantime we're doing these token strikes here and there... But will Starmer's ears really be any different? [*Workers' Platform bulletin Kings' X 01/05/24*]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

Letter from the North West

Health, Safety and Welfare of postal workers, you say? Our job is not safe, it ain't healthy and we're the only ones who care about our welfare. Many of us are knackered worse than horses heading to the glue factory. And then we see some full-time union bloke at the union's annual conference going on about the great job he's done looking after us! Just like the rest of these do-nothings, he needs a week on our duties to sample his great contribution to our daily misery...

Who the heck is this Dave Joyce

anyway? At the union's conference on 21-25 April, we saw (on video!) that this annual skive gave him a standing ovation, because he's retiring... We'd never heard him speak until then and he's not from round our way. Does anyone South of Watford know this bloke? And who said he could carry on doing nothing past his retirement date?

And now here come the later start times for the shop floor. No one can work out why. The work is turning up at the same time and will just be sitting



there, waiting for us to arrive. What happened to the days where we negotiated our duty times? It's been our right since the 1950's. Yet no one has asked us to negotiate nor vote on the new times. Nor even asked who'd get to kick off on match days. ☐

- **An offer we can only refuse**

It's obvious that Distribution managers knew perfectly well that under their new shift proposals, the night shift will arrive back late - they even offered 2 hours overtime pay. In other words, they're knowingly creating a 10-hour shift, but they don't want to say it because they know we'd refuse it... [*Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 01/05/24*]

- **Their deception**

But even now when we're stuck in traffic and back late, it's almost impossible to get them to pay for our extra hours

of driving time. Which makes it hard to believe that they will cough up for another two hours if we allow this new shift to be implemented in June. What they really want is to pay for 8 hours when we work 10! [*Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 01/05/24*]

- **No mushroom treatment!**

As for shift changes in Processing, we are still in the dark about what national Union officials are discussing with management. What we do know is that they are "negotiating" about huge changes to our lives, which none of us want, and not asking us! We need to find out where

these talks are taking place... [*Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 01/05/24*]

- **Out of order, out of place**

Nothing is in place on Deliveries to deal with these 30kg parcels we're expected to deliver. Of course not; this used to be the job of Parcelforce, and it should remain the job of Parcelforce. Health and Safety hasn't had a look in, there's no lifting equipment, no procedures in place, and the DO vans aren't even big enough to fit everything in. So we can only refuse, absolutely, to touch them. [*Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 01/05/24*]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**Their "democratic" screw...**

Six months after removing Fridays from the normal working week and cutting hundreds of agency workers' jobs, BMW held a ballot in April, asking the (minority) permanent workforce to agree to work double the number of Fridays as compulsory extra (overtime) shifts! Previously the company could call us in for 12; now it will be 24/year. These Friday shifts can also now be reduced from 9¼ to 5 hours.

They've also changed the rule on Volume Protection Overtime - the 30 minutes added to shifts in case of

breakdowns. It used to require 24 hours notice and could only be added on a day by day basis. Now it's to be week by week. BMW threatened that unless the workforce agreed to these changes it would impose so-called "Gear 2", which would mean a speed-up of production and possible lay-offs. And laid-off workers might then lose pay...

So they blackmailed us into voting for screw 1 instead of screw 2. But if they can impose screws without a vote, as they threatened, why have any ballots at all? Does any of this make any sense?



What it does do, however, is make a case for us to get together and collectively screw BMW back. ☐

• Mirages on the horizon...

BMW keeps raising already impossible production targets. No doubt this is supposed to keep us "on our toes". But mainly, it has us scratching our heads! Last week we were told the target per shift would go up to 400 from 340. That will be an extra 60 cars into rework then... [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 07/05/24]

• Bigger fish to fry

There's no "winning" deal for any of us

when it comes to overtime, except it's total abolition! We're sick of management messing with our hours, and the endless layers of "terms and conditions" it keeps adding... [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 07/05/24]

• Not on us!

Managers have still not fixed the various problems with pretty much every car coming off the line. No, instead they'd apparently rather find someone else to blame. So now they're saying it's our

fault if we don't spot errors. Wouldn't it be quicker for us to tell them what's NOT broken? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 07/05/24]

• When pigs will fly!

In the Paint Shop, us agency Staffline, have again been "offered" jobs in Assembly, supposedly to "get" a contract... We don't believe it! How long will we be stuck on an unbearable job while they tell us we'll get a contract "soon"? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 07/05/24]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**Billions up, despite EVs down!**

Ford's profits were a cool £3.12bn in the year to March 2024 - a 35.9% increase! Shareholders made a total £4bn in dividends last year and top boss Jim Farley gave himself a package worth £21.1m, equivalent to a 26% pay rise! That's roughly 700 years-worth of wages for an assembly worker!

Ford says it's the sales of vehicles with internal-combustion engines which provided most of these profits. And that its Electric Vehicle operations are in the red, with £1bn losses at the start of 2024... Yes, despite the multiple US (and

British, and other!) "green" subsidies the company has been receiving!

Since all of the car companies went hell-for-leather to outdo each other in the "EV gold rush", there's already a huge glut in the market, with Chinese car companies like BYD (which has also overproduced) able to steal a march on the others, because it sells its cars at least £10,000 cheaper!

So now Ford has cut the price of its EVs. In the US the \$40,000 Mustang Mach-E now sells at \$32,000. What hasn't been cut, of course, are the dividends paid to



big shareholders. Ford's Chief Financial Officer promised that "whenever regular dividend doesn't reach 40-50%, we will provide a supplemental dividend"! He didn't add that it will be coming straight out of Ford workers' pockets! ☐

• What we want

The ink on the 2023 agreement isn't dry yet, but we hear that union officials and management are already in negotiations over the next pay offer. We've handed in our demands... It goes without saying that we want a pay rise that catches up with real inflation... including what we lost in 2023 - and what we've lost with the cuts in our shift premiums! And NB: hands off our pensions!

[Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 08/05/24]

• Sacked with no warning

Two Fridays ago 25 temps were "released" from DDC: managers' "nice"

word for "terminated". They'd arrived at their work stations at the beginning of their shift as per usual... And then they were suddenly approached and told to go to the glass table. They had no notice of this. As if they were just objects to be used and discarded at will. That's abuse. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 08/05/24]

• It's a skeleton workforce

And yet these temps are actually needed - that is, if the bosses want to run production smoothly (but do they really give a monkey's?). If one of us has to go off sick or take leave for any reason, they are short of two hands straight away. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 08/05/24]

• Robots - man's best friend!

On Lion machining, Ford has us producing full on! Despite assembly going down to one shift, we're expected to produce 320 heads per shift... apparently for a contract in Argentina... But since the machines are unable to cope with the management schedule, we gladly take the breakdowns. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 08/05/24]

• Wage-slave overseers

We heard that the ISL boss said he wouldn't vote Labour because he is worried zero-hour contracts might be banned! He must have been born yesterday if he believes anything politicians say - especially in the run-up to elections. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 08/05/24]

International

Pro-Palestine student occupations in the US: recalling Vietnam anti-war protests

A wave of pro-Palestine student protests and occupations, on a scale not seen since the anti-Vietnam war protests of the 1960s, has shaken the US establishment. The movement started with a "Gaza solidarity encampment" on 17 April at Columbia University, with students demanding divestment by their university from Israeli companies and an end to the bombardment of Gaza. Similar protests spread to over 100 US universities - and to universities in Canada, Europe and Australia...

In fact US universities are financial giants; some of them invest, for instance, in Israeli arms supplier Elbit Systems (which has factories in Britain) and other companies with Israeli links, like Hikvision, manufacturer of CCTV systems and multinationals like Intel, Chevron and HD Hyundai, Volvo, CAT and JCB, which provide the heavy machinery used to bulldoze Palestinian settlements.

It was Columbia's newly-appointed president, British-Egyptian academic (and member of the House of Lords!), Minouche Shafik, who called in the police to forcibly clear students from their encampment and from Hamilton Hall, the site of the famous anti-Vietnam war protest in 1968, which they were



occupying. She'd already suspended two pro-Palestinian groups (including Jewish Voice for Peace) in November. At the University of California, Los Angeles, police stood by as far-right thugs joined pro-Israel groups to attack its student encampment. The cops have used rubber bullets, stun grenades and tear gas to break up protests and there have

been over 2,000 arrests so far.

For now, the term has ended, and administrations hope for a calm on the campuses, but if the war in Gaza goes on, the protests will too. As one student at Columbia argued: "People are fighting for an end to genocide, and I don't think that's something that's regulated by the beginning or end of the semester". □

Letter from India: a divisive, communal election begins...

Voting in India's general election began on 19 April and should be completed by 1 June. Prime Minister Narendra Modi claims that the National Democratic Alliance which includes his BJP, will win more than 400 out of 543 parliamentary seats.

Modi can't hide his bigotry

After voting started, however, there were signs that maybe this shouldn't be taken for granted. In large northern states like Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan where the BJP previously won 90% of seats, turnout was roughly 5% less this time. Voters (including those belonging to the BJP's traditional base of North Indian upper-castes) told reporters they were very unhappy with rising unemployment and price hikes.

Fearing potential losses, Modi reverted to tried and tested anti-Muslim mode, but rather than attack Muslims directly, he accused the Indian National Congress (the largest opposition party),

of a plan to introduce a 50% inheritance tax, snatch "mangalsutras" (gold jewellery given during marriage) away from Hindu women; confiscate property, government jobs and even buffaloes from families; and abolish job reservation for the lower castes and tribes. Modi said Congress would distribute all this wealth and these jobs to "those who have many children" and "infiltrators", which is Modi-speak for "Muslims".

Obviously this is nonsense, but it's this kind of poisonous rhetoric which emboldens BJP followers to organise communal pogroms and mob-lynchings of Muslims. Under pressure, Modi has nothing to offer the population except the old divisive (and lethal) politics, first imposed on the subcontinent's population by the British empire.

Still very poor

In making these claims however, Modi unintentionally acknowledges his constituency's fears over their jobs and

savings. They are certainly at risk: since 2014 Modi has allowed the capitalist class to loot the country's wealth and fleece the public.

Today, 1% of the population controls 23% of the national income and 40% of the total share of wealth - the highest concentration of wealth since 1922, i.e. since the colonial period! The official unemployment rate stands at 8%, but only 55% of the population is in work or looking for it - the rest have given up hope. Two-thirds of those employed are "self-employed" and 90% work in the "informal sector" where no labour laws apply. In 2023, the average salary for urban India was £207/month.

The only reason that people are not starving is because the government (still, for now) distributes the free rations introduced during the pandemic, to 80m people - a safety net without which Modi knows there would be a social explosion. □

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:

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